

# THE TURNS TO THE LEFT IN ARGENTINA AND URUGUAY: PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS SINCE 2003

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## Abstract

From the beginning of this century Argentina and Uruguay, as many Latin American countries, underwent a turn to the left. These turns to the left may be called “the Kirchner cycle” (or “K cycle”) in Argentina, after presidents Néstor Kirchner and his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and the “Frente Amplio cycle” (FA, Broad Front) in Uruguay, for its leading political party. Argentina’s turn to the left ended in the presidential election of 2015 in which the Kirchnerist candidate was defeated; Uruguay’s FA cycle will run at least until the 2019 presidential election.

Since Argentina and Uruguay’s turns are part of a simultaneous regional turn to the left, their respective national leaderships were not the absolute creators of each country’s “turn”. What they did was to give national shape to strong regional waves. These processes were conditioned by national circumstances, which in some respects were clearly different in each of them. Despite deep social similarities, Argentina and Uruguay have different political cultures and histories that shape their electoral campaigns. Thus, this paper probes into the similarities and differences between the two “turns” to the left focusing on their victorious presidential campaigns (2003, 2007 and 2011 in Argentina, and 2004, 2009 and 2014 in Uruguay).

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This analysis leads to (i) an assessment of the relative importance of historical accidents in the two cycles (high in Argentina, low in Uruguay) and of enduring and different political traditions (high in both countries); (ii) an exploration of the differing nature of the two cycles, and finally, (iii) to some implications regarding the broader, regional turn to the left. Do these stories suggest we should expect continuity or new cycles (e.g. to the right) in Latin America? Or should we rather expect the Latin American turn to the left to dissolve into diverging stories? The paper concludes that the most likely scenario is the latter, “diverging stories”.

**Keywords:** turn to the left - presidential campaign - civic culture - Argentina - Uruguay - storytelling

## Resumen

Desde el comienzo del presente siglo Argentina y Uruguay, como otros países de la región, experimentaron un giro hacia la izquierda. En la Argentina este giro tomó el nombre de “ciclo kirchnerista” (o “ciclo K”) por los presidentes Néstor Kirchner y Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, mientras que en Uruguay es “el ciclo del Frente Amplio”, por el partido político que todavía lo lidera. El ciclo K argentino terminó con la derrota de su candidato presidencial en la elección presidencial de 2015; el ciclo del FA uruguayo continuará al menos hasta la elección presidencial de 2019.

Los respectivos liderazgos nacionales no fueron los creadores de estos giros, pero le dieron forma propia a esa fuerte oleada regional según la idiosincrasia de cada país. A pesar de las profundas similitudes sociales entre Argentina y Uruguay, las diferentes historias y culturas políticas de estos países quedan de manifiesto en sus campañas electorales, escenarios privilegiados para observar las respectivas culturas políticas “en acción”. Este trabajo explora similitudes y diferencias entre los giros a la izquierda en el Río de la Plata a través del análisis de las campañas presidenciales victoriosas de los dos ciclos (2003, 2007 y 2011 en la Argentina y 2004, 2009 y 2014 en Uruguay).

Este análisis lleva a (i) una evaluación de la importancia relativa de los accidentes históricos en ambos ciclos (alta en la Argentina, baja en Uruguay) y del impacto de sus diferentes tradiciones políticas (alto en los dos países); (ii) una exploración del diferente destino y naturaleza de los dos ciclos y, finalmente, (iii) algunas implicaciones para el giro más amplio, regional, hacia la izquierda. ¿Estas experiencias sugieren que se deberían esperar continua-

des o nuevos ciclos (por ejemplo hacia la derecha) en América Latina? ¿O debemos esperar que el giro latinoamericano hacia la izquierda se disuelva en historias divergentes de cada país? Este artículo concluye que el escenario más probable es este último, el de las “historias divergentes”.

**Palabras clave:** giro a la izquierda - campaña presidencial - cultura política - Argentina - Uruguay - *storytelling*

## Introduction

In the abundant empirical literature on the left-right dimension many, perhaps most academic authors (and all the journalists) fail to provide an explicit definition of left and right. They probably assume those meanings can be taken for granted. Those who do use an explicit definition tend to take one of three paths: (i) some *formal, academic definition* of what is the political left and right; (ii) the predominant *use* of the terms left and right *by journalists, politicians and their advisors*, and (iii) the way *people use those terms* (according to public opinion polls): this is the least common procedure. The formal definitions of the first type (academic definitions) tend to converge because they are based on historical (mostly European) experience and traditions. Recent literature has shown that definitions of the second type (predominant use by journalists, politicians and advisors) tend to coincide with those of the first type, probably because they are ultimately based on the academic literature.<sup>3</sup>

Following established practice, then, we will assume that “political left” is what *most* academics, politicians, journalists and experts see as left, which means that in Latin

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Wiesehomeier (2010). The third type of definition will not be used here. That definition, based in voters’ use of the terms, coincides with the other two in most rich democracies. In developing countries and in Latin America in particular, however, sometimes it coincides and sometimes it does not (González and Queirolo 2013).

America there was a clear “turn to the left” since the beginning of the century. According to this simple but reasonable definition, by 2010 ten out of seventeen countries in continental Latin America were governed by the left (Queirolo, 2013). If six out of ten countries turned more or less simultaneously to the left, then leftist national leaderships were not the absolute “creators” of their respective turns; rather they gave national form and substance to a general, regional wave.

The national forms of those turns to the left are conditioned by their own political cultures.<sup>4</sup> That conditioning happens because most actors, including voters, think and behave according to the rules of their own culture. Candidates and the professional teams that advise them go a step further: they seek to use those rules to their advantage. As political or civic culture changes slowly (Almond, 1989), in a particular campaign it is rather a constant: a fixed trait that cannot be changed in the short run. That is, a conditioning factor which must be taken into account. Presidential candidates and their closest advisors know it. They tend to work in teams, combining their experiences to achieve common goals (maximizing their votes and, if possible, winning the election and the presidency). In a context of increasingly professionalized campaigns, a rational pursuit of these goals requires taking into close account national political identities, fears and expectations. That means shaping discourse and actions without contradicting them and, whenever possible, using them to strengthen the credibility and dependability of their message and narrative.

This does not assume that campaign advisors (or candidates) are academics well versed in the sociology of political cultures. As many successful advertising people, they may be practical persons, experienced and well informed,

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<sup>4</sup> About the relationship between campaigns and political or civic culture see, for example, Domínguez (1998); East Asia Institute, Seoul Broadcasting System, Joong Ang Ilbo, and Hankook Research Company (2013); Vonderschmitt (2012); Wang, Gabay and Shah (2012).

capable of applying their practical knowledge to attain their goals. As a minimum, they are competent interpreters of the political cultures within which they work; they do not go against its grain. Thus, at least implicitly their work exposes the central traits of their civic cultures. True, this does not mean that candidates and experts will not err (that is, in some instances their interpretations of their political culture may be wrong), in which case rules inferred from their work will also be wrong. In fact, it is certain that sometimes they will be wrong. However, the combination of powerful self-interest, accumulated experience and teamwork suggests that wrongs will be less frequent than rights. If so, it makes sense to see political cultures through their lenses.

National political cultures and histories *condition* the turns to the left and frame electoral campaigns as well. Hence in competitive polities those campaigns (particularly presidential ones) can be used to probe the characteristics of national turns to the left. As argued below, the main traits of presidential campaigns and turns to the left should be *consistent*, since both are anchored in the same bedrock.

In Argentina and Uruguay the nature of presidential campaigns (and turns to the left) should differ because, in spite of social similarities, the two countries have different political cultures and histories. The campaigns of the turn to the left were those of 2003, 2007 and 2011 in Argentina, and 2004, 2009 and 2014 in Uruguay. The analysis that follows will center in on the essentials of those presidential campaigns, concentrating in the narrative (“el relato”) of the main candidates. From a Latin American perspective, powerful political storytelling tends to share several traits (D’Adamo and García Beaudoux 2013):

- Conflict and antagonism: narratives present conflicts between actors, use binary schema and a friend/foe logic;
- Values: narrative is built on general values which are used to frame specific issues;

- Staging of leadership: visual clues (e.g. colors, places, clothes) to orient viewers;
- Vision: capability to define, conceptualize, give meaning and direction to the political situation;
- Rhetoric and language: use of aspirational language and an epic rhetoric;
- Myths: use of exemplary stories illustrating central values;
- Symbols: convey messages, adorn narratives;
- Argument lines familiar in popular culture: narratives and plots rooted in popular culture, politically recycled;
- Activation of senses: simultaneous activation of sensorial channels (sight, sound);
- Activation of emotions: activation of feelings and affective identifications, and
- Morals: educative knowledge inferred from the stories.

This list is surely neither perfect nor exhaustive. Nevertheless, it covers ample ground, and provides an external, independent guide for the comparison between the Argentinian and Uruguayan cases.

The following section summarizes briefly the regional turn to the left. The third section examines Argentina's presidential campaigns during the Kirchner cycle from the perspective sketched above. The fourth section probes the Uruguayan case. The final, concluding section points out the implications of the analysis.

### **The turns to the left in Latin America since WWII**

According to the definitions discussed above, during the first decade of this century most continental Latin American countries were governed by left wing parties or movements; most of them are still governed by the left (in its wider sense, meaning "left wing": to the left of the center, including center-left and left). Thus, there was a politically significant and unexpected "turn to the left".

Although unexpected, it had precedents. Twenty-five years after the end of World War II the region had already experienced a relatively short turn to the left (though with some qualifications, because until the '80s many Latin American countries did not have competitive elections). In the electoral (or "minimalist") democracies of the region that did have competitive elections, this first turn to the left occurred during the years 1969–76 (Queirolo, 2013: 26–32). These were Cold War years, when Latin American elites and middle classes witnessed the climax of the influence of the Cuban revolution and feared radical forms of socialism.

The current turn to the left began in 2001 (loc. cit., pp. 28 and 33–34), when the third wave of democratizations was in full swing. Not all the national turns took place simultaneously: Nicaragua and Chile may be seen as the pioneers of the current tide. In Nicaragua Daniel Ortega (leader of the Sandinista left wing guerrilla) was president in the years 1985–90, and again as from 2006. Chile was governed by a leftist coalition in 1990–2010, and again since 2014. Venezuela has been Chavista (and left wing) since Chávez became president in 1999. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay and Uruguay are or have been part of this left turn as well.

There have been debates, however, concerning the kind of left that governed or is governing some of the countries (e.g., whether the turn is actually a red turn or rather a "pink" one), the causes of the turn to the left, and its likely future.<sup>5</sup> But the essential facts are undisputed, at least in the terms of the present definition of "left wing".

Argentina began its left turn in 2003, and Uruguay in 2005. The two countries are strongly linked by their colonial and post-colonial history and by the common border of the Río de la Plata. From the final years of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II both countries

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<sup>5</sup> For some of the relevant discussions and differing perspectives: Ardití (2008); Baker and Greene (2011); Cleary (2006); Levitsky and Roberts (2011); and Rodríguez Garavito et al. (2005).

received a large European immigration. Uruguayan society is the most similar to Argentina's in Latin America: relatively rich, less unequal than the region and homogeneous. Not so their polities, however. Democracy was born in the two countries during the first wave of democratizations (Huntington, 1991), but later their paths diverged. Uruguay is the Latin American country which has lived longest under democratic governments and is one of the three countries of the region normally seen as "consolidated democracies" (the other two are Chile and Costa Rica), Argentina not so much. Uruguay has one of the most institutionalized party systems of the region; Argentina does not (Mainwaring, 1995; Payne, 2006). These differences are clearly visible in the following discussion.

### The Kirchner ("K") cycle in Argentina

Since mid-twentieth century Argentina's politics has revolved around *Peronism*, the movement founded by former president Juan Domingo Perón and his wife Eva Duarte, "Evita." Though the formal name of that movement was *Justicialism*, the name everybody uses is *Peronism*. The two Peronist currents that governed Argentina after the military regime which ended in 1983, Menemism and Kirchnerism, are also named after their leaders, former presidents Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner. These labels suggest personalization: since the past century the most important political tides (and their leading parties) in Argentina have been dominated by their leaders.<sup>6</sup>

Néstor Kirchner became president in 2003 as leader of a new party, Frente para la Victoria (FPV), an offspring from

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<sup>6</sup> This includes Yrigoyenism (Hipólito Yrigoyen, at the beginning of the twentieth century), and Alfonsinism, named after the first (non-Peronist) president of Argentina's post military re-democratization, Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989). This is not a uniquely Argentinean trait. In Latin America's political history, with some exceptions, strong *caudillos* tend to be the rule. People identify themselves with their leaders, not so much with their parties, giving way to "-isms" related to the caudillos' names (e.g., *Sandinism*, *Varguism*, *Castrism*, *Chavism*).



the Peronist trunk, with only 22% of the votes. In a country where voting is compulsory, this shows very low public support. He was a former Governor of an outlying Patagonian province, sponsored to run for office by the incumbent Peronist president, Eduardo Duhalde (2002-2003). President Duhalde proposed a person he considered a soft candidate who would keep up with the policies he had enacted to deal with the economic and institutional crisis of 2001/2002. The other viable candidates got even fewer votes, with the exception of former president Carlos Menem, also an heir to Peronism, who got 25% but declined to compete in a second round because all the polls indicated that he would lose heavily to Kirchner.

In this fragmented scenario Néstor Kirchner started to build his own power structure, keeping Duhalde's economic team. His wife, Senator Cristina Fernández, and a few Patagonian officials were the core of his team. Kirchner needed recognition (and, if possible, long term support) from both his party and other parties, as well as from public opinion, the mass media and the diverse economic sectors. He was determined to show that he was not "soft" at all and that he would not allow any former president to dictate his government policies. Despite this, he kept Duhalde's economic team for two years, because its leader, economist Roberto Lavagna, was successfully fighting the crisis and was relatively trusted by national elites, a trust that Kirchner did not enjoy. At first Kirchner needed Lavagna's help.

The K cycle included three periods: Néstor Kirchner administration (2003-2007) and two of his wife's, Cristina Fernández (2008-2011 and 2012-2015); it ended in 2015, when the Kirchnerist candidate lost the presidential election. For the present purpose, it is revealing that the so-called "K cycle" had no Day 1. The official story claims that it began exactly on May 25, 2003 when Néstor Kirchner swore as president, but it did not feel that way at the time, not even for the few early K supporters. At the beginning of Kirchner's presidency, nobody thought it was the start of

a turn to the left. Many feared that it was going to be difficult for a president with so little popular support to have a moderately successful presidency, nobody thought that he would begin a political cycle of his own. Neither Duhalde nor anybody else in the opposition parties thought of him that way. As the images below indicate, he was mostly seen as Duhalde's creature. He posed as anti-Carlos Menem, and so did Duhalde; this intra-Peronism antagonism did not differentiate Kirchner from Duhalde. In his 2003 presidential campaign, Kirchner did not promise a "turn to the left."

In short, the K cycle was born within Peronism, as a consequence of President Duhalde's decision on who was going to compete in the 2003 presidential election to defeat former President Carlos Menem. Duhalde chose Kirchner among several potential candidates and his choice was not "necessary" or determined by previous political developments. Yet, once in office Kirchner knew how to make good use of this opportunity. He built the K cycle from within the government, but this was not easily perceived until the midterm elections of 2005.



The 2003 campaign: left, Clarín cover, echoing the idea of confrontation between Menem and Kirchner. Right, anonymous poster found in the streets during the 2003 campaign showing Kirchner as Duhalde's puppet.

President Kirchner developed a series of policies perceived as populist by the opposition. Helped by the economic reboot achieved thanks to Duhalde-Lavagna policies and a favorable international context, he was able to strengthen presidential powers. To further his authority and legitimacy he built a heroic myth: his own leadership story, which erased the role of Duhalde and Lavagna in fighting the crisis. This construction took shape with the help of publicists<sup>7</sup> and strong investment in advertising. Throughout the years, investment in government communication grew exponentially, strengthening Kirchner's version of recent history (the story, "el relato") in the public debate.

The Chief of Staff's office states that the yearly budget for press and communication grew from less than 80 million pesos in 2004 to almost one thousand million in 2014, that is, from US\$ 27 million to US\$ 142 million a decade later (Chart 1; Amado y Amadeo, 2014).<sup>8</sup> The government communication policy was aggressive, ubiquitous and professional. It contracted public relations resources from the corporate sector (Amadeo, Amado and Aruguete, 2013), using a complex system of communication channels articulated in a way that allowed the government to reach different targets in a permanent communication scheme (Amado y Amadeo, 2012). Broadcasting communication tools were and still are the priority; advertising on TV, newspapers and radio became a rule and a huge budget was assigned for this.

Casa Rosada (the presidential offices, [www.casarosada.gov.ar](http://www.casarosada.gov.ar)) became the main information agency in the country, with resources a TV channel would envy. Only official cameras, used to feed the rest of the media, broadcasting every event in which the President speaks. No other cameras

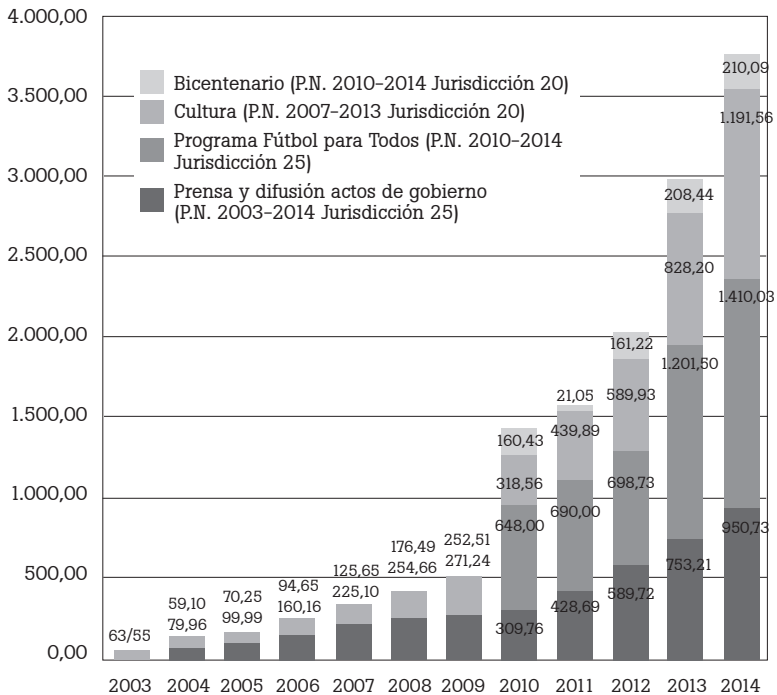
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<sup>7</sup> See "De cómo Arturo Jauretche se suma a la campaña K", interview to Fernando Braga Menéndez published in *Página 12* (newspaper close to Kirchner), March 14, 2006, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-64274-2006-03-14.html> [downloaded Oct.16, 2014].

<sup>8</sup> Using US dollar/peso conversion rates at the beginning of each year in the website of Central Bank of the Argentine Republic, <http://www.bcra.gov.ar/index.asp>

were allowed when the President was addressing the public. Official sponsoring of sports events or artistic shows became a rule. The government broadcasts all football matches on TV, and exhibits government advertisements before, during and after each match. To build the official story, the Kirchner administrations used diverse tactics: new technologies (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube channels), strong visual designs, renaming and rebranding policies, press officials with no access to the media and the journalists (the spokesman used to be called “the mute spokesman” by his colleagues from the media).

**Chart 1:**  
**Budget applied to communication of Presidency of the Nation**  
(in millions of pesos)



Source: Amado y Amadeo (2014); national budgets 2003-2014.

How did the Kirchner governments use these unprecedented communicational resources? We will not analyze here the 2003 campaign because, as we have already shown, it is not part of the K cycle: it is the circumstance from which the cycle was born. The identification of the K cycle with the left, at most insinuated in 2003, began to take shape shortly before the midterm elections of 2005, but crystallized in Cristina Fernández's presidential campaigns of 2007 and 2011. Consequently, we will focus on these two campaigns and the Kirchnerist narrative in them.<sup>9</sup>

In 2007 Néstor Kirchner's wife ran for president establishing the idea of "continuity of change." The Kirchners formed short-term alliances that allowed them to win in different provinces. These alliances were shaped with the help of the most unexpected actors, including Peronist historical enemies and candidates of the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union, a liberal party that strongly confronted conservatives by the end of the XIX century, thus giving way to its assertive name). In this way, Kirchner defeated rivals within his own party and strengthened the idea of "transversalidad" (transversality), which meant that the Frente Para la Victoria (FPV) intersected the party system, reaching almost all its corners. Peronists were mostly FPV, as well as many from the supposedly opposition parties. In order to show commitment with this transversal spirit Néstor Kirchner chose a radical (Julio Cobos, a provincial leader of Unión Cívica Radical), to run for the Vicepresidency in Cristina Fernández's ticket.

The electoral campaign was an extension of government communication. During the campaign, Cristina Fernández gave very few speeches, while President Kirchner was extremely active showing his administration's successes. Fernández showed herself as Senator working for the "gov-

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<sup>9</sup> The 2015 presidential campaign was lost by the Kirchnerist candidate, Daniel Scioli, thus ending the K cycle. That campaign took place after the completion of this paper.

ernment's inclusive model" and the campaign was mainly advertising on television, graphic media and radio. The strongest message was that of "Dolores Argentina",<sup>10</sup> a girl who symbolized the country, born during the 2001 crisis, whose life endures all the evils the country suffered during the crisis, and finally names the different achievements of the Kirchner administration. Thanks to them, Dolores's family saw her become a strong girl despite her distressing birth. The girl (that is, the country) was now young, happy and normal, as a set of renowned actors, sports stars, scientists, teachers and citizens pointed out in the advertising piece. The whole of Fernández's campaign was based on the idea that Cristina would keep up with her husband's policies, which amounted to a government model, "el modelo K."



2007: "The change is only beginning"; "We know what's still needed. We know how to do it. Cristina, Cobos and you".

During Fernández's first administration more money went to public communication than ever before in Argentine history (Amadeo, Amado and Aruguete, 2013; Amado and Amadeo, 2014). All the messages reflected Jean-Marie Domenach's six rules of propaganda (Domenach, 1986, pp. 47-89): the rule of simplification and unique enemy, the rule of distortion and caricature, the rule of orchestrating, the rule of transfer, the rule of unanimity and contagion and the rule of counterpropaganda. All of them can be seen in the K government communication (Amadeo y Amado, 2013; Amado, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wQKk5amxFU>

Domenech's rule of transfer, in particular, states that "propaganda always operates on a preexistent base... [as a] national mythology" (1986:66), which may include the "re-animation of past myths and creation of the myths to come" (id., p.91). This was clearly seen throughout her first administration. She was portrayed with the late leader Juan Perón, his wife Eva Duarte ("Evita") and her own husband, Néstor Kirchner; the Kirchners were the natural heirs of Perón and Evita.



2007: In a deliberately retro format, from left to right: Evita, Perón, Néstor and Cristina K.

Néstor Kirchner died on October 27, 2010. From that day on and for three years, she dressed in black. When the official campaign for reelection started in 2011, she had been speaking of her life companion for months, usually referring to "him", without saying his name. She positioned herself again as the living heir, now of the K model, and reinforced the idea of "either with me or against the people" (Amado, 2014).



2011: The strength of history - CFK (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) 2011, Cristina (colors), Perón, Evita and Kirchner (grey shadows); The strength of Cristina, Cristina (colors) over a river of followers.

In the 2011 campaigns, the slogans said “Néstor with Perón, the people with Cristina”. Her strength came from her convictions and from the mythical civic heroes she directly represented, first and foremost her late husband Néstor. Fernández turned her husband into a founding father and herself into the natural heiress to the K model.

The complete 2011 campaign showed Fernández’s strength. All the television spots stressed the concept of Cristina being as strong as her ideas, her predecessors and her mission.<sup>11</sup> This very idea was proposed by D’Adamo and García Beaudoux when they stated that myths (using exemplary stories illustrating central values) and symbols that convey messages and adorn narratives are key elements to consolidate a story. Both elements combined exert strong cognitive and affective effects on the audience (D’Adamo and García Beaudoux 2013, pp. 62–63). Gabriel Slavinsky (2013) states that there were three main communication axes in the campaign: the people’s support for the late president Kirchner, the concept of “strength” and the deepening of the K model, of the K cycle.

The campaign was based on conventional TV and radio spots and on outdoor advertising. As a candidate, Fernández rarely addressed the voters in public rallies during the campaign: she spoke as President in office, which strengthened her position compared to the other candidates. Cristina Fernández is eloquent and feels comfortable speaking in public, so she delivered strong and long live speeches about public policies she launched during the electoral campaign.

This strategy positioned her as an effective leader, and the campaign spots repeated citizens’ success stories, which were possible thanks to the Kirchners’ economic socially inclusive model. These spots aimed at activating senses and emotions (D’Adamo and García Beaudoux 2013, pp. 64–65) by using and reinforcing the image of the candidate in a leadership position, on a stage, dressed in black,

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bn6dSnBhdtI>



under a generous rain of confetti with the national colors, cheered by an enthusiastic flag-waving crowd while a triumphal music was being played.

Cristina Fernández won her reelection by a landslide (she got 54%), and the FPV also defeated the opposition in Congress. The K model was a complete success. What started as a weak presidency in 2003 consolidated itself in 2011 as a powerful political cycle.

When looking at the 2007 and 2011 presidential campaigns from the perspective of D'Adamo and García Beaudoux (2013) categories summarizing "the typical structure of political storytelling," some of their characteristics stand out. The Kirchner's narrative expressed a stigmatizing Manichaeism, which grew between 2003 and 2015 in a constant crescendo. Néstor Kirchner used to point at different adversaries one at a time: "the anti-democratic military", "the farmers' lobby", "the greedy businessmen" (and "the corporations", or the "corpo"), "the obscure Catholic Church", "foreign oil companies", "powerful countries" (like the US). Public enemies were based on old ideas still alive in the popular imagery. Thus, Kirchner began a tradition of "you are either with me or against the Argentine people" dichotomy that held on under Cristina Fernández's presidency.<sup>12</sup> D'Adamo and García Beaudoux (2013, p. 57) underscored the idea of "conflict and antagonism" as an important characteristic of successful storytelling, since narratives present conflicts between actors, use binary schema and a friend/foe logic. It was easy for these binary illusions to permeate the public agenda: Argentine civic culture has a history of confrontations. Luis Alberto Romero says that these confrontations were already present at the beginning of the 20th century, when populist anti-imperi-

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<sup>12</sup> See President Fernández's inaugural speech of the 113rd period of ordinary sessions. National Congress, Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 1st, 2015. <http://www.casariosada.gob.ar/informacion/discursos/28418-discurso-de-la-presidenta-cristina-fernandez-en-la-inauguracion-del-133-periodo-de-sesiones-ordinarias-del-congreso-nacional>

alist nationalisms were born. These ideas were recovered and fostered by the first *peronismo* and during the K cycle (Mercado, 2013).<sup>13</sup>

In each of the two campaigns that took Cristina Fernández to the presidency (2007 and 2011), the narrative repeated itself, and the storytelling process was identical. While each campaign enhanced one resource over others, the full set of rules proposed by D'Adamo and García Beau-doux (2013) for efficient storytelling is present. Conflict and antagonism can be seen every time the K candidate speaks about the people and about those economic and political interests that try to damage the people. National Peronist values and traditions are held as exclusive K products (empowerment of the poor, social justice). The myths (Perón, Evita, Néstor, and Cristina as well) are shown as national heroes. The strong leader and president looks after the less fortunate, has a vision, gives meaning and direction to every political situation, possesses rhetorical abilities and uses aspirational language and an epic oratory. Symbols, such as Perón himself are still alive and are being used as a lighthouse in a storm, and now a new guide appears in the skyline: Néstor Kirchner. None of these tools would be useful if Argentinean civic culture was not permeable to them, but it is. The narratives and plots proposed are deeply rooted in popular culture and have been conveniently recycled. Every spot, every piece of advertisement activates senses and emotions and shows the citizens that voting to extend the K cycle is the morally correct thing to do.

### **The *Frente Amplio* (FA, Broad Front) cycle in Uruguay**

Uruguay has the region's oldest party system and one of the oldest in the world (Sotelo Rico, 1999). From the first half of the nineteenth century to the last years of the twentieth century Uruguayan politics was dominated by two par-

<sup>13</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, "En el país del complot permanente", *La Nación*, March 10, 2015. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1774781-en-el-pais-del-complot-permanente>

ties, the *Partido Colorado* (*Colorados*, “reds”, though not in its usual political meaning, but as a practical answer to the need of distinguishing friend from foe in the civil wars of the nineteenth century) and the *Partido Nacional* (*Nacionalistas* or *Blancos*, whites). The *Colorados* were akin to the liberal Latin American parties of the nineteenth century and the *Blancos*, to the conservative ones.

The FA cycle was built in a slow process throughout several generations. The FA was initially more a coalition than a party (now the opposite is true; it may be seen as a highly fractionalized party, as the *Colorado* and *Blanco* parties). Most of its founders felt themselves heirs to the early European socialist, communist and even anarchist left. The Socialist and Communist parties, born at the beginning of the twentieth century, were its core. Most FA militants and cadres still feel closer to the radical versions of this tradition than to their later social democratic incarnations. This “classical” left has always controlled unions. As in Europe, unions were its initial power base, strengthened by an alliance with small intellectual minorities of the Uruguayan middle classes (when the FA was founded; they are no longer minorities). The FA itself was born as a coalition-cum-movement in 1971, led by that classical left allied to splinter groups from the traditional parties and the Christian Democracy.

Two years after the birth of the FA, a military coup led to a long and harsh authoritarian government (1973–84). Except in its last year, public political life was frozen by the military. Electoral results were almost frozen as well. Those of the 1984 presidential election were similar to those of the preceding one, that of 1971. After this freezing, however, the electoral growth of the FA began. In 1994, ten years and two elections after the re-democratization election of 1984, the party system got into a triple draw: *Colorados*, *Blancos* and *Frentistas* (in that order) received about one third of the vote each. In 1999 the FA became the most voted party, and it has remained so. During the 1999 campaign

past electoral results were analyzed comparing the FA on the one hand with the sum of the votes of the old parties, *Colorados* and *Blancos*, on the other. That analysis, which led to a good forecast of the FA's vote in 1999, was based solely on historical trends (González, 1999). Since 1999 those two parts are approximately two halves; in 1999 the FA was the most voted party, although the smaller half.

In the following election, October 2004, the FA became the bigger half, getting an absolute majority. It won



Vázquez, 2004: let's change.

the presidency (without the need of a second round) and absolute majorities of its own in both legislative houses. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, Tabaré Vázquez was inaugurated as Uruguay's first president from the left. Exactly five years later FA's José Mujica succeeded him, and in March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, Vázquez became president for the second time.<sup>14</sup> In the three elections of this cycle (2004, 2009, 2014) the FA

has been the bigger half (though with a decreasing share of votes). After three presidential wins in a row with majorities of its own in the legislature, it was clear that the FA had opened a new political cycle, becoming what is usually called a predominant party (González, 2015).

This cycle may not be the first Uruguayan left wing government. At least the government of the *Colorado Batllista* fraction (named for José Batlle y Ordóñez, twice president), at the beginning of the twentieth century, may also be seen as such. But Batllism was part of the traditional *Colorado* Party, born in the first half of the nineteenth cen-

<sup>14</sup> Presidential reelection is allowed in Uruguay, but not in two consecutive terms (Argentina's legislation allows reelection, including two, but not three consecutive periods).

tury. The political roots, theory, language, practices and heroes of those Batllists were different from those of the heirs of the classical left which built the FA. To be more precise: the FA cycle marks the first time this classical left governed the country.

The 2004 electoral results were not “accidental” in any meaningful sense. First, Vázquez was the natural presidential candidate of the FA. He was the most popular Uruguayan politician of any party; he was a respected oncologist; in 1989 he had won for the left its first significant executive position, as *Intendente* of Montevideo,<sup>15</sup> the capital city and *departamento* (province), home of nearly half the country’s population. Second, electoral trends were unequivocal. Four years before the 2004 election González and Queirolo (2000) wrote that, according to existing trends, by 2004 the FA’s voters were expected to be somewhat more numerous than the sum of the voters of the traditional parties, as indeed happened.

Third, in the 2004 campaign the FA did its homework; it did not merely wait to see historical trends “happen”. In 1999 the left apparently thought that they were winning an ideological battle: voters would be deserting traditional parties because they were adopting the left’s ideas. So, the candidate said repeatedly “we are going to shake the roots of the trees.” This was a good motto for those who already voted the left wing, not for the voters that were ready to abandon traditional parties but did not want to rock the boat. As they were necessary to win an absolute majority, the FA became the most voted party, but lost the second round of the presidential election to the Colorado candidate, Jorge Batlle. Five years later, in 2004, the FA had learnt the lesson: their central theme was again the need to change, but a change “the Uruguayan way”.

Plainly speaking, “a change the Uruguayan way” means without rocking the boat: a change that would improve (al-

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<sup>15</sup> “Intendente” is a position somewhere between mayor and governor.

most) everybody's condition; very few had something to lose or fear from that kind of change.<sup>16</sup> A week before the Uruguayan election, one of the main newspapers of Buenos Aires, *La Nación*, carried its final, long report on the election titled precisely "Elections: a change the Uruguayan way"<sup>17</sup> (emphasis added). This "Uruguayan way" theme was appropriate to placate the doubts of those who wanted moderate, "controlled" change.

The campaign did not limit itself to generic declarations; there were very concrete announcements as well. Vázquez declared (in Washington, from the IMF offices, a symbolic, meaningful place for everybody) that if he won, Danilo Astori would be his Finance minister. Astori was (and is) a respected economist with a reputation for moderation and common sense (say, a figure somewhat to the left from Argentina's Lavagna). Astori was indeed Vázquez's Finance minister during his full term, and he delivered what was expected of him. Vázquez's first presidency was later widely seen as a left wing government (mainly because of its social policies, including those regarding unions), but a social democratic one. It was a moderate left wing government. The World Bank, the IMF, the IADB and almost all local professional observers saw it in these terms.

Astori delivered on his basic responsibility as well. Vázquez's government was very successful on social and economic terms. It is possible to discuss to what extent those results were due to his and Astori's policies or to favorable "rear winds", but the results themselves are clear, and they happened under Vázquez's watch. Hence he left the presidency with popularity levels unheard of in Uruguay since the beginning of professional public opinion polls.

When the 2009 presidential campaign began, all observers, including the team in charge of the FA's campaign,

<sup>16</sup> Formally, it was a Paretian or quasi-Paretian change.

<sup>17</sup> "Elecciones: un cambio a la uruguayaya", *La Nación*, October 24, 2010. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/647643-elecciones-un-cambio-a-la-uruguayaya>

thought that the left's natural strategy was one of continuity with its successful first government. This was not easy, because the presidential candidate was José "Pepe" Mujica, a former Tupamaro guerrilla leader who had spent many years prisoner of the military in harsh, illegal conditions (he was one of the few so called "hostages"). Besides his guerrilla past, Mujica, unlike Vázquez, was not like any previous Uruguayan president, neither in his looks (unkempt, never wearing a suit or a tie) nor in his language (bad mouthed, speaking in a rough and somewhat "rural" way, mispronouncing lots of words). But Mujica is a practical man, and he wanted to win.<sup>18</sup> He personally chose his campaign's director, Francisco Vernazza, an advertising man from the commercial world but already experienced in political campaigns (for the opposition, though; he was probably decisive in President Sanguinetti's 1994 victory for his second term). This decision ruffled many feathers in the left, but it worked.

Mujica changed his looks halfway to that of a "normal" president (regular shave, neat hair; jacket or even suit, but no tie)<sup>19</sup> and, most importantly, the message of continuity and moderation was strongly reaffirmed. The campaign did not speak explicitly of "continuity," but that was its dominant idea. The moderation theme was as much or even more present than in 2004. Astori was now Mujica's vice-presidential candidate, expected to be an economics tsar in Mujica's government as well.

The moderation issue was so important that the campaign deliberately understated Mujica's role: "Danilo [Astori] is second to none...We want him first, going halves with me" (in Mujica's blog "El Pepe [Mujica] tal cual es," July 11, 2009). Astori "was a boon for the campaign...he

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<sup>18</sup> Some observers thought that at least part of his public image was a deliberate construction. If so, it was not difficult to adjust that image to the new situation.

<sup>19</sup> A careful equilibrium: change enough to be clearly visible as a genuine effort and a signal, but not as a barely credible "surrender" of his former self, or worse, as a lie, a hypocritical electoral trick.



2009 campaign: Left, An honest government, a first class country, Astori and Mujica (without tie). Right, For a first class country! / A productive, caring and educated country / Mujica - Astori.

[made] us less unpredictable...and less radical;" after the primaries ("internas"), since day one of the campaign, ads "never presented Mujica alone;"<sup>20</sup> his usual companion was precisely Astori. Moreover, the campaign "never used the phrase 'Mujica for president.'" (loc.cit.). On "radicalism", the campaign "signaled belonging to the global social democratic space, upholding the idea of democratic coexistence, and kept silent on third world socialism [socialismo tercermundista], Chávez and partners" (loc. cit.).

Five years later, in 2014, the FA campaign did not begin very well, but this was more because of tactical matters than strategic problems. Once the campaign adjusted course, things reverted to "normal," and the election results were very similar to those of 2009. The initial motto ("vamos bien", "we are doing well": not a literal translation, but close to its actual meaning) did not work because it did not take into account the fatigue of ten years of government by the same party. By 2014, the FA showed many aged, important political figures present in both administrations, and slowly diminishing returns due to failing rear winds and/or inadequate policies (the share of the two factors being difficult to disentangle for voters and experts alike). Nevertheless, most observers (and the FA campaign) thought that

<sup>20</sup> Francisco Vernazza, the campaign's director, interviewed by Victoria Contartese (Contartese, 2014).



the central theme for the FA had to be again that of continuity with its two previous governments, overall seen as successful or very successful by voters and elites. The main criticisms from intellectuals and the political opposition concerned not wrongdoings but inactions, what should had been done but was not. This, though, involving counterfactuals, was not a good starting point for a political offensive against the governing party.

Because of his political past Tabaré Vázquez himself personified the idea of continuity; this was not a problem (as it had been in Mujica's campaign). Just in case, and to reinforce the ideas of moderation and not rocking the boat, Astori was again on duty: Vázquez said that if he won, Astori would be his Finance minister (exactly as ten years before), as it was indeed the case. "Renewal" issues (not well served by the Vázquez/Astori tandem) were addressed with a vice presidential candidate a generation younger than Vázquez who was a popular, ascending politician by his own merits (Raúl Sendic).



2014: Danilo Astori, once more proclaimed as Finance sminister if the FA wins.

2014: Tabaré and Raúl Sendic.



The problematic motto “we are doing well” was finally substituted by the one that did the job: “Uruguay does not stop” (“Uruguay no se detiene”)<sup>21</sup>. It conveyed simultaneously two central ideas: there was significant progress, but not enough; the country had to go further (and the FA, responsible for that progress, was the appropriate leader for what still had to be done). This caught the voters’ mood.

The TV spots (and street posters) carrying this motto, “Uruguay does not stop”, focused on the successes of the FA governments: “Lowest poverty index of Latin America,” “Biggest middle class in Latin America,” and its implications: “Such a country should not stop”. The ads underscored the credibility of their messages (at least for educated people, opinion leaders) indicating the independent sources of its claims: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, CEPAL in Spanish); United Nations Development Program (UNDP, PNUD in Spanish).



2014 campaign: Left, The biggest middle class in LA, UNDP. Right, The lowest poverty index in LA, ECLAC.

Three years after Cristina Fernández’s win in 2011, and perhaps inspired by that campaign, the 2014 FA’s campaign in Uruguay also appealed to the idea of strength in a spot signed by the most voted fraction of the FA, Mujica’s. It showed voters signaling “three” with their fingers, referring to the (expected) third consecutive FA electoral victory (and playing with its similarity to the traditional “V” sign). The

<sup>21</sup> Jingle: “Uruguay no se detiene,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHht\\_zt-Fzy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHht_zt-Fzy4); 2014 FA spots, [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP16VMmbHa2aDLrnT\\_YahuKp5s5n5jkNkX](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP16VMmbHa2aDLrnT_YahuKp5s5n5jkNkX)

text read: "People's strength / The strength of the people going forward / Together for the third time." Unlike what happened in Argentina, the spot did not show candidates or FA leaders, just common people, underscoring the idea that what mattered was their strength.<sup>22</sup>

Uruguayan observers tend to see their political campaigns as conflictive and polarized. Surveys suggest that voters tend to agree, particularly regarding the 2004 campaign, and they dislike those levels of conflict. On a comparative basis, however, observers who follow political campaigns in both Argentina and Uruguay see far higher levels of polarization in Argentina, at least since 2004.

Nevertheless, in the 2004 campaign the FA did criticize both traditional parties heavily. But this was not outlandish: people were unsatisfied, angry with *Blancos* and *Colorados*, and tempers were short because everybody realized that it was a critical moment. In 2009 the levels of partisan conflict were lower than in 2004. An analysis of the 2009 campaign concluded that the only confrontational advertising strategy was that of the *Blancos*, which used some negative ads; the strategies of both *Colorados* and *Frentistas* tended to avoid confrontation (Mancuello, 2010, p.15). In this regard the spots of the FA were not negative; they tended not to mention the opposition, focusing on the virtues of the FA's first government instead (loc.cit., p.13). In 2014, particularly in the last months of the campaign, the situation was similar or even less confrontational than in 2009. The main slogan of the *Blanco's* presidential candidate, Luis Lacalle Pou, was "Por la positiva" ("In a positive way"). In those final months of the campaign Vázquez maintained the non-confrontational approach of the 2009 campaign: not mentioning the opposition, concentrating on the virtues of ten years of FA government, and describing what he was going to do in case of victory. Consistent with

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<sup>22</sup> See [https://cablera.telam.com.ar/Multimedia/Fotos/Thumbs/201410/tn\\_13a0b9a5222b61f824b908f5ed458af2\\_653x530.jpg](https://cablera.telam.com.ar/Multimedia/Fotos/Thumbs/201410/tn_13a0b9a5222b61f824b908f5ed458af2_653x530.jpg)

all of the above, public opinion polls in early 2015 showed that the percentage of voters who said the campaign was “respectful” was significantly higher than in 2009. In short: the level of polarization in the last campaign of the cycle, that of 2014, was far lower than in the initial campaign, in 2004.

Thus, returning to D’Adamo and García Beaudoux’s categories to analyze political narratives, for the current purpose the main characteristics of the FA campaigns from 2004 to 2014 can be summed up as follows:

- the level of polarization, of stigmatizing Manichaeism decreased significantly;
- the ultimate values and goals present in the three FA campaigns have always involved social and economic issues. These are values of the classical left: for the lowly people, for social justice, for a strong state acting as a shield for the poor and the weak (an economically very active state);
- colors were important as symbols, as they have always been in Uruguayan campaigns (and in most competitive polities as well). With regard to colors, the relevant point is which colors, and how they related to their competitors’. As seen in the images above, the FA’s colors are red, blue and white. Red is the color of the *Colorados*; blue is the color of the *Blancos*;
- these, plus white, are the colors of Artigas’s flag, the historical federal caudillo of the early nineteenth century universally seen as Uruguay’s founding father.<sup>23</sup> These colors, added to the political discourse of the FA since its foundation, strongly underscore that the FA’s founding myths are truly national. They somehow include those of its rivals, *Blancos* and *Colorados*; they are older than them, older than the country’s party system;

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<sup>23</sup> Artigas and his ideas were the main theme of president Vázquez’s inaugural speech in April, 2015; see <http://www.22universal.com/oscars-2015/tabarez-vazquez-presidencia-discurso-inaugural-ideario-artiguista-referencia-guia.html>

- this national, inclusive character of the FA's discourse is clearly visible before its victory in 2004.

Explaining the strategy of former president Mujica's FA group for "reaching out to new voters in traditional party strongholds," Lucía Topolansky, now a FA senator, said in 2003: "We usually have someone [a traditional caudillo with a local political network] acting as a bridge, and then we go and try, very slowly, to talk to the people. We reach the Blancos with a 'ruralist' and 'Artiguist' discourse. And they also like our rebellious past as 'Tupamaros,' because that is the root of *Blanco* identity. Meanwhile, we reach the *Colorados* by talking about the old [former *Colorado* president] Batlle. However, if you tell them about Marx and Lenin, or about *Frenteampulismo*, forget it" (Luna 2014, p. 235).<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusions

Comparing the victorious campaigns of Argentina's and Uruguay's turns to the left, some similarities and some big differences stand out. The main similarity by far is the essential content of their political discourse, common to classical left and Latin American left wing populisms. From that point of view, these are indeed turns to the left. The particular style and wording of each discourse (more than the substance itself) flavors the Argentinean version as nearer to that of LA populisms, and the Uruguayan version to that of the traditional left. In Argentina that discourse is not specifically Kirchnerist; the ideas, the ways of presenting them and the words themselves are those of its Peronist roots. In Uruguay some of the ideas and words are shared with the *colorado's* first *Batllism*, one century ago, but the ways in which they are put forward and discussed are the FA's own, from the classical left.

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<sup>24</sup> Senator Topolansky, an ex-Tupamaro guerrilla now national FA leader, is former president Mujica's wife.

The first and foremost difference involves what we have called “stigmatizing Manichaeism”. That binary scheme and its companion friend/foe logic were high from the start in K campaigns (particularly from the 2005 mid-term elections onwards). Their polarizing accents increased steadily, as if it were necessary to add more fuel to the fire to obtain the same results. This progression suggests that those levels of conflict and antagonism, at least within certain limits, are somehow expected by Argentinean voters. These traits may be part of a successful political strategy only because they are part of the political culture of its audience.

This, in turn, is consistent with the views of analysts from very different intellectual traditions, from historic revisionists (some of them close to Kirchnerism) to liberals (closer to the opposition) and others, as Luis Alberto Romero, quoted above. They think that the confrontational attitudes of Argentineans were born in the nineteenth century and, according to L. A. Romero, they were reborn and strengthened once and again: with Yrigoyenism at the beginning of the twentieth century; with Peronism by mid-century, and with Kirchnerism since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These attitudes have long included mistrust and fear of antinational plots from foreign powers and actors that would cause all (or many) national problems.

In Uruguay just the opposite seems true. The Manichean tones were relatively high in 2004, but they eventually softened a lot. This suggests that the initial, relatively high levels of conflict in the FA’s discourse were due to the particular circumstance of a rattling change of the party system caused by deep popular dissatisfactions. This softening is instrumentally consistent with a political culture which today is relatively hostile to high levels of political conflict. Uruguayan nationalism is also less obsessed with the wrongdoings of foreign nations and actors as cause of national problems, following perhaps a long tradition. An often quoted passage of the Artigas’s Provisory Land Regulation of 1815 speaks of “bad Europeans and worse Amer-

icans [‘Americans’ in that context meaning what we call today Uruguayans]” as those whose lands would be expropriated, implying that the actions of some locals’ were considered by Artigas as more damaging (morally, substantively) than foreigners’.

Levels of polarization are directly related to the nature of founding myths. The most important myths of the political discourse of the FA are not “its own;” they are older than the Republic itself, tied to its birth in the Artiguist legacy. The FA considers itself superior to the older parties because it incarnates those foundational traditions better than they do, but all the parties share a common starting point. This was different in Argentina. The political myths of Kirchnerism which are most visible in the campaigns are mostly those of the first, mid-century Peronism, and partly of the second Peronism (when Perón returned to government) and some of its actors, as the Juventud Peronista (JP: Peronist Youth). These are not national myths; they belong to one of the country’s traditions, that of Peronism, and not to a single, encompassing national tradition. In this sense, between Kirchnerism and opposition there would be little or no shared ground.

The levels of personalization in the political discourses of the two cycles are also different. At first sight this is not the case. Whereas in Argentina Kirchnerism and Peronism are labels everybody uses, in Uruguay many terms, as Vazquism or Mujiquism, might play similar roles. In Uruguay, however, these terms are always understood as representing parts of a wider project. “The FA cycle” is not an optional name, but the only one that accurately describes the cycle for all actors involved. It is not a term derived from a person, but from an institution, the *Frente Amplio*. In Argentina, the only natural term for the K cycle is Kirchnerism, a strictly personal term. The formal equivalent of the Uruguayan FA (or “frentismo”, “frente amplismo”) in Argentina is almost certainly not so much Kirchnerism as Peronism itself. In either case this compares a personal image (Perón or Kirchner in

Argentina) to an institutional one (the FA in Uruguay), underscoring significant differences in the levels of political personality cult of both countries.

Neither cycle is entirely national. Both belong to a wider turn to the left, meaning that they respond to global forces common to many Latin American countries. Both cycles somehow translate these global causes into national consequences and each translation is shaped by local political cultures. Hence these processes took different forms since their beginnings. The K cycle originated in a concrete decision: President Duhalde's selection of Néstor Kirchner as his presidential candidate in 2003. The FA cycle looks rather as the natural arrival point for a process that evolved through almost half a century. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the FA was the only political force capable of capitalizing on popular dissatisfaction with traditional parties. Hence the FA policies were to a good extent conditioned by its institutional history, whereas K policies were highly dependent on Néstor Kirchner's personality. Political cultures also differentiated the paths went through by both cycles. Argentina's increasing polarization was allowed or even fostered by its civic culture; Uruguay's political culture discouraged further polarization.

The K cycle was heavily dependent on its leaders, first Néstor Kirchner and later his widow, Cristina Fernández. Kirchnerism was part of a bigger story that contained it, that of Peronism, and it had a complicated relationship with traditional Peronist political and social machines. After losing the presidency in 2015, its survival in the opposition will not be easy, and will depend on the strength of its parliamentary bench and on Fernández's skills to reinvent herself. It is at best unclear whether some truly Kirchnerist political force could return to government in 2019.

The FA's prospects are different. It may win or lose the 2019 presidential election; if it wins, the FA cycle will go on. If it loses, the FA has a long history of being in opposition, it is culturally and institutionally as strong as Peronism, clear-



ly stronger than Kirchnerism, and will wait for its likely return to government as one of the two political halves of the country.

Provisionally and pending further research, these stories may help to a better understanding of the regional turns to the left. Some of these left turns, of which Uruguay may be a good example, are deeply rooted in national pasts. In other countries those roots are not unequivocally anchored in the left, as in Argentina, where at the peak of their influence both “neoliberal” Menemism and left-wing Kirchnerism were seen as part of Peronism. In these cases, what we now see as turns to the left were “created from above,” after an opposition party or coalition which was not from the left won government. Short unsuccessful stories of this kind happened in Paraguay (with Fernando Lugo’s failed presidency) and Honduras (Manuel Zelaya’s). Others so far successful turns to the left may be seen as such “after the fact” as well. They show the building of left wing options from above, as in Venezuela. In Andean countries as Ecuador and perhaps Bolivia, the essence of those turns is rooted not so much in a deliberately ideological option for the left as in the coupling of growing dissatisfactions and deep inequalities associated with ethno-cultural identities. True left wing parties and coalitions may be in the process of being built from above “after the fact,” because in some of those countries there was no previous mass-based political left.

Whether “from above” or not, regional turns to the left have common starting points in people’s dissatisfactions with their respective status quo. According to Queirolo’s macro- and micro-level analyses of the determinants of the vote for left-oriented parties, electorates “are voting left simply because they want to try new alternatives that might improve their economic well-being. [...] the electoral possibilities of success that leftist parties have by capitalizing on social discontent depend on the number of ‘untainted opposition’ parties available in the political system” (Queirolo, 2013, pp. 150-151). This explains why in Brazil and Uruguay

(where strong untainted left wing parties already existed) there was a real turn to the left, whereas in Mexico the PRI was finally defeated by the center-right PAN: there was no Mexican turn to the left.<sup>25</sup> Seen from this perspective, the cases in which the left was built mostly from above are a different, alternative path. As in Mexico, at first there were no strong left wing parties available as 'untainted opposition,' but as in Argentina, a governing left was built from above.

Whether contemporary Latin American turns to the left were led by previously existing left wing parties or were built from governments, their prospects depend on their capacity to satisfy their people's expectations. If they fail, the turns themselves will fail, at least in truly competitive polities. Nevertheless, the nature of the left turns' political origins makes a difference. Where the governing left parties were already established before the turns (as in Uruguay), this makes them more resilient because party identities are stronger, and this resilience improves their medium and long term prospects. Conversely, newer, "after the fact" left wing parties and coalitions (as in Argentina) are weaker, which debilitates their prospects.

Latin American turns to the left will probably not follow the same path in the future. It is unlikely that all or most of the countries involved will experience an opposite turn, or that most of them will continue their present left cycle. The futures of the turns to the left will probably diverge because their central causal factor is to meet peoples' expectations, which are already going different paths in different countries. The political forms of those divergences will be conditioned by their political cultures and histories and by historical accidents such as the nature of political leaderships.

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<sup>25</sup> The Mexican left wing needed a few extra years for coming close to winning government with López Obrador as its presidential candidate.

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