Introduction

“The study of Latin American populism is, almost, as long and as controversial as the phenomenon.” (de la Torre 1998: 86)

Populism in Latin America has a long history, many countries in this region experienced traditional forms of populism in the first half of the 20th century. After the Third Wave of democratic transition put an end to military rule, populism as well returned, although in different shapes (Weyland 2001: 4-11). Challenges of democratic transition and instable economic circumstances in the 1980s and 1990s offered favorable conditions for populist parties to emerge. Since then populism remains a common feature in the region, although the programs and styles of populists have changed, it still stays a promising strategy for political parties to mobilize support from mass constituencies. Some populists managed to remain in power over several electoral cycles and sustain the support of their voters over time (e.g.
Carlos Menem (Argentina), Evo Morales (Bolivia). Others were voted out of office after one term or replaced through other means (e.g. Alan García (Peru), Abdala Bucaram (Ecuador)).

The phenomenon of populism poses many challenges to comparativists around the world. Due to different perspectives on the topic researchers especially struggle with conceptional clarity. In general, the emergence of populist parties is paralleled with some sort of economic or political crisis which come along with the dealignment of partisan attachments. This allows populist contenders to attract discontent voters with an anti-establishment appeal (Barr 2009).

It is this kind of rhetoric that unites populist parties. For the purpose of this paper, populism will be defined as a “thin-centred ideology” (Freeden 1998: 750) based on the division of the society in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the people versus the elite. The exact content of this ideology depends on secondary elements that may be combined with such an appeal. From this perspective populism may be related to many contents, structures, and strategies. Thus, subtypes of populism should be distinguished according to the specific design of the populist ideology.

Until now, research mainly refers to populism as an entry strategy for new political parties. However, around the world they often even achieved government positions – either in coalition with established parties or through winning presidential elections (Decker 2006).

But remaining in power appears to be difficult for populist parties, as many of them faded away shortly after their initial success. This leads to the assumption that populism may be a viable electoral mobilization strategy, but difficult to combine with public office. The moment a political party reaches government for the first time is a crucial phase in its lifespan, especially in the case of a populist party. “If a party has built its place in the party system as a protest party, an anti-establishment party, a principled opposition party, then its joining the government is nothing less than a deep transformation” (Deschouwer 2008: 5). Although many populist parties in government appear to be a transitory phenomenon, some populists managed to survive in power.

Comparative research on populist parties in public office only recently arose. With focus on Latin America, only few attempts have been made to systematically compare the behavior of populist parties in office¹. Thus, the aim of my paper is to investigate populist party behavior in public office in this region, focussing in a first conceptional step on the systematization of theoretical arguments in the literature on the topic. My research question centers on the

¹ Burgess and Levitsky (2003) for example compared the success and failure of traditional mass based populist parties and their programmatic adaptation to the economic crisis in the 1990s in four Latin-American countries; Gibson (1997) analyzed the reconstruction of the electoral base of the PRI in Mexico and the PJ in Argentina in the 1990s.
strategies populist parties may pursue to survive in power. Do they have to adapt themselves to survive under the rules of democratic party competition, or are there other strategies available to them?

Based on the literature, I argue that populists may either pursue a strategy of moderation and adapt themselves to the democratic rules of the game, or radicalize and opt for regime change as to secure their survival in office. The paper focuses on *inter-* and *intra-party dynamics* as influencing factors on populist parties’ choice of adaptation strategies.

Especially in the context of new democracies like those in Latin America and against the background of the only partial democratic consolidation in this region, the potential threat of populism to democracy should not be underestimated.

The paper is organized as follows: In the next section the definition of populism adopted in this paper will be presented. To distinguish different forms of populism, populist party structures will be analyzed by means of their linkages with the electorate. The third chapter of this paper concentrates on the opportunity structure for populist party adaptation in public office. Although the main purpose of this paper lies on the systematic identification of theoretical arguments in relation to populist party behavior in public office, the forth section gives a short outlook on my future research design. In the last section I will summarize the theoretical arguments and conclude with suggestions for further research on the topic.

2 Populism and the linkage concept

2.1 Defining a contested concept

As mentioned before, populism poses a conceptional challenge to comparative researchers. It has been defined along the lines of feature lists or narrow core characteristics (e.g. organizational structure, social base) which led to many versions of populism with adjectives or prefixes (Schedler 1996: 292) and finally to different case selections (see especially Weyland 2001). Instead of focusing on a narrow and exclusionary definition of populism, a broader conceptionalization will be deployed here. The different features mentioned in the literature will then be used to distinguish subtypes of the phenomenon. In line with the

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2 Taking a rational-choice based neo institutional perspective this article thereby assumes that political institutions shape the decisions of political actors. Political institutions are broadly defined as formal and informal “rules of the game” that structure political interaction. Political actors are assumed to be instrumentally rational, i.e. they have rank-ordered and transitive preferences and try to maximize their utility. But political institutions do not determine political actions. Political actors’ preferences make a difference. Even if they have to adapt to a given institutional context, in doing so they still have room to manoeuver (see for example March/ Olson 1984; Kaiser 1997).
common reference to an anti-elite, anti-party, or anti-establishment discourse of populist parties, populism will be defined as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004: 543, italics in the original).

The content of the rather vague ideology is not part of the concept but determined through other ideological, programmatic or personalistic elements (e.g. socialism, neo-liberalism, or charisma). Only the combination of the populist discourse with specific other contents determines the nature of the antagonism between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. Thus, the recurrence to an anti-elite rhetoric and the statement to be the true party or person to represent ‘the good people’ in terms of their general will unites all populist parties. Whereby, the other elements help to distinguish different forms of populism – such as left- or right-wing populism, neopopulism, or indigenous populism (Abts/Rummens 2007; Mudde 2004). The subtypes of populism, thus, depend on the kind of linkage or linkage mix a populist party pursues.

To distinguish the populist ideology from the different linkage strategies a populist party may pursue, a useful categorical distinction between general strategies, specific strategies and forms of actions according to Rucht’s (1990) study on social movements and their selection of strategies will be transfused. In this respect, the populist ideology may be referred to as the general strategy of a populist party, while the specific strategy and forms of actions depend on the kind of linkages populist parties maintain with their voters.

2.2 Linkage strategies of populist parties

The relationship between political parties and the electorate is usually illustrated through the linkage concept (see especially Poguntke 2000, 2002 and Kitschelt 2000). In general, this concept describes an interactive connection between the electorate and the state mediated by political elites.

A key feature of representative democracies is competition between political parties for public office and power. Political competition may be defined as “an institution in which parties strategically cooperate or contest as political actors to gain political power” (Franzmann 2009: 9). The importance of political parties and party competition for democracy has often been emphasized in the literature. Political parties channel and express interests and they are the

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3 This section draws on Ruth (2009).
main actors selecting political elites for elected positions in democratic states (Sartori 1976; Mainwaring/ Scully 1995).

Mostly, political competition is understood as programmatic party competition, i.e. political parties cooperate or contest with each other on the basis of policy programs, usually assumed to be located on a one dimensional left-to-right policy space. But the idealization of programmatic party competition hampers awareness of other modes of political competition for votes (Kitschelt 2000). Especially in Latin-American democracies political parties do not compete just in programmatic ways, they may pursue additional or completely different electoral mobilization strategies (e.g. clientelistic strategies).

Classically three forms of linkages between political parties and the electorate are mentioned in the literature: programmatic, clientelistic, and personalistic linkages (for an overview of their characteristics see table 1).

These Linkage forms are usually distinguished according to three factors: (1) *Electoral appeal*: To connect themselves with the electorate, parties may address voters either in a direct way (e.g. through the mass media) or in an indirect way (e.g. through policy pledges)^4^. (2) *Character of organizational relations*: Political elites may institutionalize their link to the voter through organizational structures (e.g. collateral organizations, social networks). Formal organizational ties are based on the integration of other actors into a party’s decision-making process, whereas informal ties are based on pressure or blackmailing (Poguntke 2002: 47). In this respect, informality should not be confounded with lack of organization or institutional weakness (Levitsky 2001). (3) *Kind of exchanged goods*: Political parties may offer either private, club, or public goods in exchange for the vote of their constituency^5^. Thus, different linkage strategies either foster public regarded policy pledges or private regarded selective incentives for individual voters (or small groups of voters) (Kitschelt/ Wilkinson 2007).

Roberts (2002) adds to the concept another factor to distinguish linkages: (4) *their degree of contingency*. This characteristic stands for the permanence of the party-society linkage deployed. “Linkages based on ... durable loyalties carry over from one electoral cycle to another ... and they are rarely severed in the absence of serious political trauma” (Roberts 2002: 15).

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^4 In a slightly different way Roberts (2002) distinguishes party-society linkages along their level of association, i.e. the individual or collective appeal of voters, which equals the electoral appeal characteristic here mentioned.

^5 Private goods, for example, may be jobs or privileged access to public services. Club goods are less excludable than private goods, but still only benefit a clearly defined subgroup of society or region, like for example regionally limited infrastructure projects.
Table 1: Linkage strategies of political parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linkage Type</th>
<th>programmatic</th>
<th>clientelic</th>
<th>personalistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>indirect (via policy pledges)</td>
<td>direct (quasi-personal)</td>
<td>direct (personal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Appeal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure</td>
<td>primarily formal organization structures but also informal structures are possible</td>
<td>mostly informal organization structures (party machines, brokers, social networks)</td>
<td>normally uninstitutionalized (parties as electoral vehicles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanged Goods</td>
<td>public goods and club goods</td>
<td>individual goods and club goods</td>
<td>depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Contingency</td>
<td>long-term strategy</td>
<td>long-term strategy</td>
<td>short- and medium-term strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following, possible characteristics of populist parties will be analyzed alongside the dimensions that were used to distinguish linkage types from each other:

(1) Populist parties usually exhibit a direct, unmediated electoral appeal through personalistic leaders who “... constantly demonstrate their closeness to common people and stimulate popular identification with their leadership” (Weyland 2001: 14). Thus, populism has an affinity to the personalistic linkage type. But neither is populism the only form of personalistic authority nor is the personalistic linkage the only form of linkage populist parties may pursue (Barr 2009). Furthermore, a charismatic leadership is no necessary condition for a populist party, as the example of Alberto Fujimori in Peru shows. “Charisma ... is a useful resource for any politician, helping him gain support no matter the type of appeal” (Barr 2009: 41).

Regarding the organizational structure (2) populism is normally associated with an uninstitutionalized form of party organization. In the extreme populists use their parties as mere electoral vehicles (again in line with the personalistic linkage type). But there are also populist parties which invested in the institutionalization of their organizational structure (e.g. traditional populist parties). A populist appeal may be combined with many forms of party organizations, as long as they are hierarchically structured from above (see Roberts 2006; Barr 2009). But the institutionalization of the party organization always comes at the expense
of the party leader’s autonomy. In this respect clientelistic organization structures are more likely combineable with the personal authority of a populist party leader (see Pappas 2009).
The third dimension, the *kind of exchanged of goods* (3), mostly depends on whether a populist party integrates other ideological elements, pursues specific policy programs, or relies on the support of delimitable groups of voters. At this point it is also important to mention that populist facades and reality often diverge (i.e. sheep’s clothing versus wolves) (Schedler 1996: 304). According to Kitschelt personalistic leaders “promise all things to all people to maintain maximum personal discretion over the strategy of their party vehicle” (2000: 849). Also clientelistic ties may facilitate the electoral support of populist parties independent of the content of their policy program, as long as they deliver patronage and selective incentives through their clientelistic machine to satisfy (i.e. buy off) their voters. The divergence between promises and reality may also influence on the success of populist parties to maintain their popular support base or search new constituencies to back them. Edward Gibson (1997) showed that traditional populist parties in Mexico and Argentina in the 1990s promised specific policy programs to their electorates to win elections and afterwards forged policy coalitions with other actors (even those in opposition to their initial electoral base). Another example are populists that diverged from their promised policy programs once they got into office but maintained popular support afterwards because of the success of their new policy programs (e.g. Fujimori (Peru)).

With regard to the *degree of contingency* (4), populist appeals are often used by new political parties or new politicians within an existing political party. As such populism seems to be a viable electoral entry strategy to challenge established elites (either from inside or outside a party system). The reasons for populist parties formation and initial success are manifold: discontent with political and economic elites, erosion of traditional partisan ties, mediatization of politics, among other things (Barr 2009). But, populism is also often said to be a transitory phenomenon. Many populists face the problem to maintain the electoral support of the (heterogeneous) discontent mass they promised to represent as soon as they achieve government responsibility. And soon after those populist challengers emerged and took over government (or participated in it), they faded away (Weyland 2001, Taggart 2004).

### 2.3 Electoral mobilization versus populism in power

What reasons may be found for this affinity to instability of populist parties? On the one hand, as much as a populist party relies on the personalistic linkage type, it has to struggle with the time contingency problem, independent of the participation in public office. Decker (2006),
for example, argues that the inherent instability of populist parties is dependent on the preservation of the personal authority of the leadership. One possibility to stabilize charisma or personal authority is through introducing elements of party organization (Weyland 2001). In this respect, the combination with other linkage mechanisms may be a viable strategy of risk avoidance (see Magaloni/ Diaz-Cayeros/ Estévez 2007). However, the benefit of institutionalization – i.e. longer time contingency – for the populist party bears the cost of weakening the personal autonomy for the party leader. The party leader, thus, has an incentive to oppose organizational party change, especially if he has only a short or medium time horizon.

On the other hand, populism has a fierce relationship with liberal democracy itself, which poses pressures on populist parties as soon as they take over government responsibility. The antagonistic nature and the moralistic style of the populist discourse are directed against liberal democracy, where decision-making is constrained by liberal rights and the constitutional protection of minorities. Through the anchorage of populism in the imaginary concept of ‘the good people’, populism excludes those parts of society that do not fit into the (however defined) picture (de la Torre 1998, Abst/ Rummens 2007). Thus, the populist ideology resembles a similar logic with authoritarianism. Both root themselves in the representation of the people as a homogeneous group and negate the diversity of society inherent in the liberal principle of democracy. In line with this, the populist ideology fosters a kind of democratic practice based on plebiscitarian participation that runs counter to representative democratic institutions, especially parliaments (de la Torre 1998, Canovan 1999, Barr 2009).

This inherent tension between populism and liberalism is the reason why populist parties are perceived as a threat to democracy itself. As soon as populists gain government responsibility they face “problems of credibility” (Schedler 1996: 302), i.e. they risk to be perceived as unreliable if they behave in the same way as their opponents did. The transition from opposition to government evokes immense pressures on a populist party, especially if the content of the populist antagonism not only involved anti-elite appeals but is also directed against aspects of the political system as such. As Deschouwer circumscribes it:

“… being in government is a different role and position than being in opposition. A governing party needs to defend policies rather than criticize them. A governing party needs to defend compromises rather than criticizing

6 Plebiscitarian democracy focuses on direct participation of the citizens in the political arena opposed to the party mediated participation of citizens in representative democracies (Weber 1919). Instruments for the realization of this direct participation are referendums, public opinion polls, mass demonstrations, etc..
the concessions that were made to strike the agreement. Being in government creates a new relationship with the voters, with the different party organs and with the other parties” (2008: 10)

To adapt to this pressure populist parties may radicalize and turn themselves against the democratic rules of the game. In the extreme case populism may even lead to the abolition of democracy. This, however, does not mean that any populist party inevitably is inclined to authoritarian regime change. Populists may also abandon their antagonistic rhetoric once in office, “choose a path of moderation” (Abts/Rummens 2007: 421), and engage in ‘politics as usual’ (Schedler 1996: 304-305).

The underlying assumption of these observations is that different patterns determine the success of populist parties in and out of public office. A populist strategy may be perfectly fit to gain public office but not to maintain it over time. Therefore, Carlos de la Torre generally opts for the analytical distinction between “populism as regimes in power ... [and] populism as wider social and political movements seeking power” (2000: 10). The research interest of this paper lies in the realm of the first analytical perspective.

To sum up, the populist ideology is particularly associated to the personalistic linkage type, but may also be combined with the other forms of linkage strategies as means to overcome the contingency problem of personal authority. The populist ideology may serve as the basis of a viable electoral mobilization strategy for new political parties to enter into an existing party system, in times of social, economic, or political change or crisis. But once a populist party reaches government power it has to struggle with inherent pressures generated through the tensions between its populist ideology and liberal democratic institutions. Faced with this situation, populist parties may either adapt themselves to the institutional and socio-economic contexts they operate in and choose to moderate their populist rhetoric and accept the liberal democratic rules, to overcome its episodic fate. Or they may try to change the rules of the game to a more plebiscitarian model of democracy or in the extreme case to authoritarian rule.

3 Populist party adaptation in public office

Before I continue to analyze the likelihood of populist party adaptation, I will shortly comment on differences between the European and Latin-American region in relation to populism. Both regions differ along many dimensions from each other – e.g. historical and cultural background, economic systems, and institutional frameworks (see Weyland 1999). But in both regions populism is a persistent phenomenon. The emergence of populist parties in European parliamentary systems is favored through low thresholds to enter into parliament,
due to the widely spread use of proportional representation. But also in Latin-American presidential systems populist challengers managed to emerge. Although the thresholds of success to gain public office are higher, presidentialism provides favorable conditions for populist parties to emerge, due to the higher degree of personalization through the nationwide, direct election of the executive (especially in the case of majority run-off) (Linz 1994). In addition, many Latin-American presidential systems combine plurality or majority presidential elections with proportional representation formula for the election of their legislatures.

However, the populist threat to democracy, i.e. the feasibility of the radical strategy of adaptation, is less severe in the established democracies in Western Europe. Especially in the context of Latin American political systems this threat should be taken seriously, as cases like Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela show. O’Donnell (1996) insightfully notes that some Latin-American presidential systems are delegative democracies. This means that although vertical accountability is normally implemented, they lack effective horizontal checks and balances necessary for liberal democracies to consolidate. Among other things delegative democracy “… consists in constituting, through clean elections, a majority that empowers someone to become, for a given number of years, the embodiment and interpreter of the high interests of the nation” (O’Donnell 1996: 99). Thus, delegative democracies resemble institutional characteristics favorable for populist parties.

As the potential threat of populist parties to democracy should not be underestimated it is important to systematically analyze the conditions of populist party behavior in public office. Thus, this paper addresses the question which factors influence populist parties to undertake a moderating strategy (i.e. party change) or to pursue a radicalizing strategy (i.e. regime change)? Populist parties, thus, have two possible adaptation strategies: party change or party induced regime change.

Concerning the strategy of moderation the populist party adapts itself to the democratic context in which it operates. In accordance with Harmel and Janda (1994) party change may be a change in structure, policy, strategy, and tactics that results from a combination of internal and external factors. In the second case, party adaptation may also take place through changing the rules of the game as to secure the survival in power (i.e. a radicalizing strategy). Regime change may be procured through institutional reforms, manipulation of the rules of the game (e.g. elections), or through a coup d’état.

In both cases the populist party responds to environmental pressures in order to secure its own ‘survival in power’. According to Panebianco (1988), political parties are conservative
organizations (*assumption 1*), i.e. they do not adapt unless there are internal and/ or external factors that induce them to do so. Inasmuch this paper focuses on environmentally induced party adaptation, only external stimuli will be considered. Following Harmel and Janda (1994), an external stimulus has to affect a party’s primary goal to induce party adaptation (*assumption 2*).

While party survival as minimal goal of a political party may be defined as electoral survival, I will assume that populist parties are primarily power seekers, since they aspire to replace the incumbent political elite (*assumption 3*). In the context of this paper ‘participation in public office’ constitutes the external stimuli that threatens future power seeking prospects of populist parties. Due to the focus on presidential systems in Latin America throughout this paper public office will be defined in a narrow, power related sense as ‘participation in government’. This means that a populist party has to win the presidency or at least partake in a governmental coalition to be considered as a case here. (*assumption 4*).

But the populist party leadership first has to perceive the external stimulus as a threat to their primary goal (Deschouwer 1992) (*assumption 3*). In this respect also the expectations of political actors about their future prospects of party adaptation in the context of party competition (i.e. the behavior of other parties) is important. In addition, the party leadership has to build a coalition of support for the adaptive behavior inside the political party (Harmel/Janda 1994) (*assumption 4*).

However, populist parties may also refuse to adapt in either way. Even when a party leader perceives environmental conditions as a threat to the survival of the party, he still may have the latitude to oppose any kind of adaptation. A populist party may continue to pursue its confrontational, anti-elite discourse while holding public office, thereby, undertaking the *paradoxical experiment* of non-adaptation (Schedler 1996: 305). In this respect, also the amount of pressure on a populist party to adapt plays a role. The pressure on populist parties’ behavior is higher the stronger the degree of the external stimulus on the party’s primary goal, i.e. the stronger the confrontational style and the more exclusionary the antagonism of their

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7 Although party change may be caused by internal factors alone, in the context of this paper party change is environmentally induced through the external stimulus “participation in government”.

8 Harmel and Janda (1994) in fact only examine party change. But the assumptions made may also be applied to party adaptation in general and thus also to the radical strategy of populist parties.

9 Strøm (1990) and Strøm and Müller (1999) identify three goals political parties may pursue: vote seeking, office seeking, and policy pursuing. Power seeking, as mentioned here, is a narrow form of office seeking.

10 This paper, thus, excludes those parties that are based on a protest appeal but do not seek power and instead are content to “stay outside, booing from the fences” (Schedler 1996: 299). In addition, for the specific purpose of this paper the power ascribed to parties through ‘blackmail potential’ (Sartori 1990) does not run counter to the populist ideology and may thus be ignored.
anti-elitist discourse is (*assumption 5*). As Schedler (1996) mentions, the quality of the populist discourse of a party may influence on their future political development.

### Table 2: Populist Party Behavior in Public Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Choices of Populist Parties</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Adaptation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodic lifespan (“death”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following Harmel and Janda (1994) intended party change may be defined as a change in a party’s structure, policy, strategy or tactics. Concerning populist parties that decide to moderate their behavior, party change concerns especially the general strategy, i.e. the populist ideology, of the party. In addition, the specific strategy and forms of actions, i.e. the linkage-mix a populist party pursues, may change as well. Thus moderate party adaptation may affect all dimensions of intended party change.

What kind of party behavior encompasses the radical strategy of populist party adaptation? As mentioned before, populist parties may try to change the political regime to their own benefit through institutional reforms, manipulation of democratic rules, and finally through the execution of a coup d’état. The degree of radicalization depends on the influence the populist party’s actions exert on the two dimensions of democratic accountability – horizontal and vertical accountability.

Regime change triggered by populist party’s strategic choices may pass through three phases\(^{11}\): In the first place a populist party will try to debilitate the horizontal axis of accountability (i.e. checks and balances), enforcing delegative democratic structures (O’Donnell 1996)\(^ {12}\). Instruments in this context are for example institutional reforms to

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\(^{11}\) The starting point of this process depends on the democratic quality of a political system. A yet delegative democracy may pass directly to an electoral authoritarian regime.

\(^{12}\) Delegative democracies open the way for a radicalizing strategy – “… because of their institutional weaknesses and erratic patterns of policy making, [they] are more prone to interruption and breakdown than representative democracies” (O’Donnell 1996: 106)
weaken the legislature\textsuperscript{13} or the co-optation of the judiciary. In a second step, radical populist party behavior will be directed against the vertical axis of accountability leading to types of political regimes labeled as \textit{electoral authoritarianism}\textsuperscript{14} (Schedler 2002, 2006). Typical forms of actions in this respect are the limitation of oppositional forces, manipulation of election results, and the excessive use of proactive referendums (Breuer 2007). The third and final step leads to the abolition of any kind of democratic facade, for example through a coup d’\textquoteright etat. But which factors influence populist parties’ decision to pursue a moderating or radicalizing strategy, and do populist parties always have a choice? The behavior of populist party leaders is necessarily interrelated with the structural context in which they act (van Biezen 2005). There are several factors that constrain the room to maneuver of a populist party, especially \textit{inter-party} and \textit{intra-party dynamics}.

3.1 \textbf{Inter-party dynamics}

Concerning \textit{inter-party dynamics} the following propositions can be made: In respect to the moderate adaptive strategy, and in line with arguments of the ‘contagion theory’ (Deschouwer 1992), dominant patterns of party competition and the behavior of other political parties exert some kind of appeal to new political parties to ‘fit’ themselves to the context. This means that new political parties are attracted by the type of competition structure that prevails in a party system (e.g. clientelistic or programmatic competition). To successfully compete or cooperate with traditional parties in a party system new political parties have to ‘fit’ their own appearance and actions to the ‘norm’ of the system. In a similar manner Colomer (2005) argues that especially clientelistic party competition resembles the logic of a ‘contagious game’, that induces political parties to develop the same exchange relations with their voters. Thus, adapting in line with the existing competition structure is easier than opposing to it, especially if a political party needs to cooperate with other parties in a governmental coalition.

\textit{Proposition 1a:} Moderate populist party adaptation is constrained by the prevailing patterns of party competition in a party system that comprises the more rewarding option for a populist party to adapt to.

\textsuperscript{13} “Authoritarian systems, the literature tends to assume, choose weak legislatures. The causal arrow, however, seems to go the other way round: weak legislatures produce authoritarian systems” (Schedler 2006: 20).

\textsuperscript{14} Other terms referring to the same phenomenon are \textit{competitive authoritarianism} (Levitsky/ Way 2002) and \textit{plebiscitarian authoritarianism} (Mayorga 2002).
The likelihood of radical populist party adaptation depends on the existence of a ‘power vacuum’ (Mayorga 2002) in the inter-party arena, that may be exploited by populist challengers. Mayorga (2002) identifies two reasons that create such a vacuum: the decay and breakdown of traditional party systems (or traditional political parties), and/or a crisis of governability manifested in executive-legislative deadlock situations and performance problems in reaction to economic crisis. Likewise, the ‘suicide thesis’ by Lynch (1999) refers to the fact that traditional political parties in Latin America became targets of discredit and distrust due to bad performance, inefficiency, non-adaptation, and corruption. In addition to this, low rates of trust in democratic institutions in Latin America may make a radicalizing strategy even more viable for populist leaders.\footnote{A process reflected in Latin American average measures of the Latinobarómetro on ‘trust in political parties’: 24.5\% (1996-1997), 18.7\% (1998-2000), 16.5\% (2001-2002), 14.2\% (2003-2004) (see Payne 2006: 178)}

*Proposition 1b: Radical populist party adaptation is more likely in the context of a ‘power vacuum’ in the inter-party arena.*

Second, besides the general patterns of party competition or the existence of a ‘power vacuum’, the position and behavior of other political parties in a party system are of significant importance. Concerning the positioning of other parties in the inter-party arena, Burgess and Levistky (2003) argue that successful party adaptation is more likely in the absence of a direct competitor. A new political party is more likely successful if it occupies a position in policy space where no traditional party is located or if it appeals to clients that are not addressed through other clientelistic parties. In this respect, populist parties that mobilize new voters and integrate new social groups into the party system, have a competitive advantage.\footnote{Díaz et. al. (2006) on the basis of data from the Latinobarómetro show that there is a relationship between the trust in representative democratic institutions and the tendency to support military governments in case of severe crisis.}

*Proposition 2: Populist party adaptation is more likely, if the party leader expects no direct competition by existing other parties.*

The third point addresses the behavior of established parties in reaction to the populist challengers. According to Schedler (1996) established parties have two possible strategies at their disposal vis-à-vis new populist contenders: Integration or confrontation. Either they may try to discredit the populist party (through weakening its bond with their voters or through...
responding to popular critique) or they may try to integrate them into the party system through recognition and/ or cooperation.

**Proposition 3:** Populist party adaptation is more likely, if the party leader does not expect confrontational behavior of existing other parties.\(^{18}\)

### 3.2 Intra-party dynamics

The second set of factors – *intra-party dynamics* – concern the organizational structure of a populist party: Panebianco (1988) and Harmel and Janda (1994) argue that less institutionalized party organizations allow for a greater likelihood of party adaptation than otherwise. The authors use the political party’s age as a measure of institutionalization, since building formal or informal organizational rules is a time demanding process.\(^{19}\)

According to Mainwaring and Scully (1995) party institutionalization also depends on a political party’s stable link with society, i.e. programmatic or clientelistic linkages. These organizational structures address the problem of time contingency of the linkage concept and play an important role in binding voters over time. But once a political party institutionalized its organizational structure, it may be difficult to abandon it, due to path dependency effects (Müller 2007). Furthermore, as organizational structures require heavy investments of political elites, changing established institutions is more costly (both in resources and time) than to experiment without such legacies (Kitschelt 2000; Stokes 2001).

In addition, programmatic or clientelistic ties may facilitate moderate populist party adaptation, if they ‘fit’ to the dominant patterns of competition in the party system. In such cases a populist party possibly only has to change its anti-elitist appeal (i.e. the *general strategy*) while maintaining the linkages traditionally deployed (i.e. the *specific strategy*). Thus, institutionalization generally affects the room to maneuver of a populist party leader – in specific case of the moderate strategy this effect interacts with the dominant patterns of competition in a party system.

**Proposition 4:** The higher the degree of institutionalization of a populist party’s organization the smaller the room to maneuver of the populist party leader.

\(^{18}\) This proposition covers also the case that other parties are unable to react to populist challengers, a situation very likely in case of a ‘power vacuum’.

\(^{19}\) In this respect it is necessary to mention that informal institutionalization of a party organization should not be confounded with lack of organization or institutional weakness (see Levistky 2001).
In line with Burgess and Levitsky (2003) another important intra-party related factor is the autonomy of the party leadership\(^{20}\):

“Parties whose leaders and elected officials can make decisions without extensive consultation with – or threats of a veto from – lower-level authorities, activists, or affiliated unions can be expected to be more flexible than those whose leaders are accountable to such groups” (2003: 888).

Latin-American political parties are often dominated by party presidents through highly personalized networks, centralized decision-making procedures and candidate selection rules. This personalized political style is supported through the personalizing effects of presidential systems and the predominant role of the media (van Biezen 2005).

**Proposition 5:** The stronger the autonomy of the leadership of a populist party, the higher the adaptive capacity of the party.

To sum up, the context of inter-party competition and the degree of party institutionalization constrains the room to maneuver and the expectations of successful party adaptation for populist party leaders. Whereas the party leaders’ autonomy influences on the party’s capacity to implement and enforce strategic decisions. Hence, in line with the arguments made, populists may also face the situation of disability to adapt to their own advantage. Unintended populist party non-adaptation occurs when the populist party leadership has either not enough room to maneuver to choose a rewarding adaptation strategy or lacks the means to gather support for a strategy inside the party’s organization. Thus, analyzing the opportunity structure for populist party adaptation may explain at least to some extent the failure or success of populist parties in public office.

4 **Research design and case selection**

To probe the plausibility of the propositions made in chapter 3, a within case comparison of populist party adaptation seems advisable. With the focus on meso- and microstructural explanatory variables and the possible variances within them, macrostructural factors should be hold constant.

In this respect, the Republic of Bolivia provides favorable conditions to analyze adaptive behavior of populist parties in public office under different conditions. On the one hand,

\(^{20}\) Burgess and Levitsky (2003) also mention *leadership fluidity* as a factor in favor of party change: “… more open and loosely structured parties tend to facilitate the entry of fresh blood and the removal of old guard leaders …, which generally leaves them more open to strategic change” (2003: 888). As this relates to internally induced party change, I will ignore it here, unless it occurs in combination with the external stimulus “participation in government”.


between 1985 and 2001 the country experienced stable patterns of multi-party competition and cooperative interaction among the three main political parties. The MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario), the AND (Acción Democrática y Nacionalista), and the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario) engaged in successive governmental coalition building (party pacts) (Sanchez 2008). Due to consensual interparty bargaining, post-electoral coalition building, and the election of the president by Congress, Bolivia escaped the trend in other Latin-American countries to develop delegative democratic structures (Mayorga 2005: 150-151). In addition, besides the three main parties two populist parties entered the party system at the end of the 1980s. CONDEPA (Conciencia de Patria) and UCS (Unidad Cívica Solidaridad) mobilized poor urban voters, including indigenous mass constituencies in the region of La Paz. Both populist parties entered governmental coalitions in the mid 1990s (see for example Jost 2003). Thus, these parties constitute two possible cases for comparison in line with the arguments carried out in the previous sections.

On the other hand, at the end of the 1990s the party system – especially the three traditional main parties – entered into decay. State-society relations reached a bottom line – the traditional main parties experienced electoral losses, the two populist parties mentioned had to struggle with the deaths of their personalistic party leaders, and the streets became a place of politics. The 2002 national elections displayed the degree of crisis: new populist forces managed to receive a combined 41,8% of the votes compared to the 42,1% of the three traditional main parties (see Costa 2007; Mayorga 2005). The rise to power of the indigenous-populist party MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), winning presidential elections with its candidate Evo Morales in 2005, constitutes a third contrastive case for comparison.

5 Conclusion

There is a strong need for theoretical effort in creating categories and propositions in order to systematically compare the behavior of populist parties in government. In my paper I have mostly focused on theoretical arguments explaining different forms of populist party behavior in public office.

I started my argument by defining populism as a vague ideology that may be combined with many other ideological and programmatic elements. In addition to the flexible content of the populist ideology, forms of populism may be distinguished according to how the populist party links with its voters. Due to the conflict between the nature of the populist ideology and participation in government, populist parties in public office are induced to strategically adapt
to the conflictive situation. Two adaptation strategies are at their disposal: moderate party adaptation (i.e. party change) or radical party adaptation (regime change). Concentrating on inter- and intra-party dynamics, I have developed theoretical arguments concerning the opportunity structure for populist party adaptation. In line with these arguments, moderate populist party adaptation is more likely if the populist party fits into the dominant patterns of competition in a party system, is not confronted with a direct competitor, and faces other political parties that are inclined to integrate it into the existing party system, i.e. contest and cooperate with it under the rules of party competition. Radical populist party adaptation, on the other hand, is viable in the context of a ‘power vacuum’ in the inter-party arena, the absence of direct competitors and traditional political parties unable to mobilize support for a confrontational strategy. In either way the likelihood of adaptation is higher the lesser institutionalized a populist party is and the more extensive the autonomy of the party leader is.

Concluding, it is important to address the restricted focus of this paper on effects of inter- and intra-party dynamics on populist party behavior in public office. Other important exogeneous factors that may have an effect on populist party behavior are (without claiming to be exhaustive) popular mass support, globalization, or institutional differences. Levitsky and Way (2002) indicated that massive popular protest and international repudiation constitute possible dangers for competitive authoritarian challengers. “As long as incumbents avoid egregious (and well-publicized) rights abuses and do not cancel or openly steal elections, the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism may be manageable” (2002: 57-58). In a similar way, O'Donnell (1996) emphasizes the important role of presidential popularity swings in delegative democracies, who may start as ‘providential saviors’ and end as ‘fallen gods’. Another cluster of factors influencing on the prospects of populist parties in public office are differences in institutional design.

Future research may expand the theoretical arguments made in this paper and develop arguments on macrostructural factors. The complex combination of macro-, meso- and microstructural variables may in a next step possibly be tested cross-nationally applying the method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (see Ragin 1994).
References


