

Electoral coalitions and new political parties in Argentina. The Republican Proposal Party case

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Abstract: Republican proposal (PRO) is a party founded in 2002 that reached the Presidency of Argentina in 2015. The fact that an extra-bipartisan organization won a national election is an unprecedented phenomenon, which contradicts the predictions of the literature, which focused on analyzing the federalization of party system exclusively in terms of the denationalization of the two Argentine main parties. Which nationalization strategies were followed by PRO? The article proposes that PRO developed what we have called “subnational strategy”, based on the opportunities offered by fragmentation and federalization of the Argentine party system. To identify such subnational strategy, the article reconstructs the electoral path of PRO in the 24 districts of the Argentine system for the national and subnational level, describing alliances and candidate nominations. Among key findings, the article identifies the characteristics of the “subnational strategy” and addresses the problems of the diagnoses on the territorial fragmentation of Argentine politics.

Key words: electoral coalitions, political parties, Argentina.

Original article language:
spanish

Translated by Fátima
Maris Hernández

Recepción: 20/02/19
Aprobación: 09/01/20

Resumen: Propuesta Republicana (PRO) fue fundado en 2002 y conquistó la presidencia de Argentina en 2015. El triunfo de una fuerza extrabipartidista (diferente de radicales y peronistas) es un fenómeno inédito, que contradice las predicciones de la literatura politológica. ¿Qué estrategias desarrolló PRO para nacionalizarse? El artículo propone que PRO desarrolló lo que hemos denominado “estrategia subnacional”, que aprovecha las oportunidades que ofrece la fragmentación y federalización del sistema partidario argentino. Para identificar dicha estrategia subnacional, el artículo reconstruye la trayectoria electoral de PRO en los 24 distritos del sistema electoral argentino, para los niveles de cargos nacional y provincial, atendiendo especialmente a la política de alianzas y a la nominación de candidatos. Entre los principales hallazgos, el artículo identifica las características de la mencionada “estrategia subnacional” y plantea la necesidad de revisar los diagnósticos sobre la fragmentación territorial de la política argentina.

Palabras clave: coaliciones electorales, partidos políticos, Argentina.



Introduction

The evolution of Propuesta Republicana (PRO), a recently created political party, is an unprecedented phenomenon in contemporary Argentine politics. For the first time since the democratic transition, an extra-bipartisan force¹ controlled, as of February 2019, the Presidency of the Republic (in coalition with the Unión Cívica Radical [UCR] and other parties), two subnational executives and legislative contingents at the national level, which never registered a party outside the Partido justicialista (PJ) and the UCR (21% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 13% of the seats in the Senate). Even before reaching the Presidency of the Republic in 2015, PRO had already achieved unprecedented electoral results for an extra-bipartisan force, winning the government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires in 2007 and a large legislative representation (between a third and half of the seats in the Buenos Aires Legislature, depending on the legislative period).

PRO is a network party (Scherlis, 2009), created as a reaction to the Argentine political crisis of 2001, when intense social protests forced the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa (UCR, allied to the Frente País Solidario [FREPASO]) and four subsequent interim presidents (both radical and Peronist). Like other previous extra-bipartisan² experiences, a personalist leadership (in this case, of businessman and soccer leader Mauricio Macri) built a radial and flexible web of political relations: that is, around the figure of the leader revolve his own political frames, allies from other parties, political consultants and extra-partisan figures according to the needs of the conjuncture (Mauro, 2011 and 2015; Vommaro *et al.*, 2015; Vommaro and Morresi, 2014; Mattina, 2015).

Also, like the previous extra-bipartisan experiences, PRO was born and developed during a decade as a party strongly localized in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and its surroundings. The CABA was historically the breeding ground for the growth of new political forces, especially since the electoral deterioration of the UCR in the 1990s (Torre,

1 That is to say, outside the two traditional parties: the Partido Justicialista (PJ, or Peronism) and the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR, or Radicalism).

2 For example, the FREPASO, founded in 1994 by dissident Peronist Carlos “Chacho” Álvarez, which reached the national government in 1999 together with the UCR (Alianza por la Educación y el Trabajo); or the party Afirmación por una República Igualitaria (ARI), founded by dissident radical Elisa Carrió in 2003, which, after changing its name to Coalición Cívica (CC), reached the national government together with the PRO and the UCR in 2015 (in the Cambiemos alianza).

2003), and especially after the collapse of the political system during the 2001 crisis (Bril Mascarenhas, 2007; Mauro, 2011). The CABA was historically the breeding ground for the growth of new political forces, especially since the electoral deterioration of the UCR in the 1990s (Torre, 2003), and especially after the collapse of the political system during the 2001 crisis (Bril Mascarenhas, 2007; Mauro, 2011).

The favorable conditions offered by CABA, however, were not replicated in the rest of the districts (provinces), in which the literature (Calvo and Escolar, 2005; Leiras, 2007; De Luca and Malamud, 2005 and 2016; Malamud, 2011; Escolar and Castro, 2014; Suárez and Pegoraro, 2014) identifies stability in the electoral competition and even a tendency to reelection of provincial officialisms. This article is organized around this last point: *the political trajectory of the PRO contradicts the predictions of the political science literature about the stability of provincial party systems and the impossibility of the nationalization of newly created parties.*

The common hypothesis of the studies published in the last two decades (Calvo and Escolar, 2005; Leiras, 2007; De Luca and Malamud, 2005 and 2016; Malamud, 2011; Escolar and Castro, 2014; Suárez and Pegoraro, 2014), is that the federalization of the Argentine party system constitutes an obstacle for the nationalization of new parties, therefore an extra-bipartisan force could only nationalize as a minor ally of a traditional party, or it would be relegated to the metropolitan centers, which, in addition, are characterized by having a tendentially less loyal and more volatile electorate than in the peripheral provinces (which represent a low proportion of the national electorate).

However, Mauricio Macri achieved the presidency in 2015 and is the only leader of a coalition where a traditional party (the UCR) and other minor parties (the CC and other parties) occupied a subordinate place. The question then arises: was Mauricio Macri's triumph in the 2015 presidential election a conjunctural phenomenon or does it reveal the need to review the assumptions about the Argentine party system?

This paper argues that PRO has developed a two-step strategy to install itself and then expand territorially, based on capturing the available party fragments arising from the fragmentation of Argentine party organizations. Contrary to what has been postulated in the literature, such fragmentation extends to the interior of subnational units, facilitating the formation of incongruent and volatile electoral coalitions. The argument will be divided into two sections. In the first, I will present the main elements with which the literature characterizes the evolution of the Argentine party system

after 2001, and I will point out some of its obscure points. In the second section I will analyze PRO's strategy establishing two periods: the phase of development of a "sub-national strategy" and the stage of nationalization by dragging effect. Finally, I will present the conclusions.

Disalignment and federalization of the party system

The cycle initiated in 1983 has evolved from an integrated two-party system (De Riz, 1992) to a federalized multi-party system (Escolar and Castro, 2014). At the beginning of the cycle, almost all elective offices were distributed between the PJ and the UCR, with minority participation of provincial parties and national political forces but exclusively rooted in some of the large cities. Since the mid-1990s, the sum of votes gathered by the two main parties has tended to decrease at different times and magnitudes according to the type of office (Calvo and Escolar, 2005), territory (Scherlis, 2009) and party (Torre, 2003), as illustrated in Figure 1.³

The decline of bipartisanship awakened interest in third parties (Abal and Suárez, 2003), but after the 2001 crisis the literature focused on the denationalization of party organizations. According to this perspective, subnational party elites have deployed boundary control strategies⁴ to protect themselves from the impact of citizen misalignment in national elections, strategically using the institutional prerogatives that federalism enables them: modification of provincial electoral rules (Calvo and Escolar, 2005), partisan use of the electoral calendar (Oliveros and Scherlis, 2006), creation of local party labels (Galván, 2011), politics of incongruent alliances (Clerici, 2014), among others.

This line of reasoning led to the conclusion, made explicit by De Luca and Malamud (2005 and 2016) that the federalization of the party system constitutes an insurmountable obstacle for the expansion of new parties beyond the defrosted party subsystems (that is, those party subsystems where the misalignment of the non-Peronist electorate with respect to the UCR was registered, such as in the CABA). The third forces can circumstantially connect with a climate of opinion in the large urban centers, and from there gain prominence in the communicational and legislative arena, but

3 All figures can be found in the Annex at the end of this article (Editor's note).

4 I take the concept from the renowned work of Gibson (2005), extending the strategy beyond authoritarian subnational governments.

they could hardly overcome the territorial heterogeneity of the Argentine system and, especially, conquer the presidency of the Republic or the provincial executives.

With some corrections, studies on the evolution of the Argentine party system have tended to accept this characterization as valid, according to which the problem of the Argentine party system lies in the inability of traditional political parties to coordinate vertically (Leiras, 2007). In this regard, Suárez and Pegoraro (2014) claim that the federalization of the Argentine party system would be an almost exclusive consequence of the territorialization strategy of Peronism (observed by Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Levitsky, 2005), minimizing the influence of other actors.

This description –founded on a large volume of empirical evidence– suffers from a problem: *it shifts the assumptions of party cohesion and stability of electoral competition from the national scale to the provincial scale.* This led the aforementioned literature to downplay two phenomena that are relevant to analyze PRO's nationalization strategy: the multiplication of party labels and the expansion of the alliance logic in electoral processes.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the simultaneous growth of the number of party labels competing in national elections and of the proportion of alliance strategies in the total electoral offer. Figure 2 shows the growth in the number of nominal parties competing for the presidency between 1983 and 2015; while in 1983 only 3% of parties competed under electoral alliances, in 2015 99% of parties competed for the presidency under coalitions.

Figure 3 illustrates the same evolution in the competition for seats in the National Chamber of Deputies: in 1983, 13% of the parties competed in the framework of alliances, while in 2015 83% participated.

According to the aforementioned literature, both phenomena are explained exclusively by the low vertical integration of traditional parties. However, as Figure 4 illustrates, *the proportion of political parties competing in electoral alliances has also increased significantly at the sub-national level.*

The literature indicates that governors are undisputed party bosses (Calvo and Micozzi, 2005), that competitiveness has been reduced in most provincial arenas (Calvo and Escolar, 2005; Suárez and Pegoraro, 2014) and even that in many subnational districts deficiently democratic political regimes prevail (Gervasoni, 2011; Gibson, 2005). However, the proportion of alliances over the total political offer has increased in all districts, even in those where the competitiveness of the system has progressively decreased, as measured by the contraction of the Número Efectivo de Partidos (NEP) and by the widening of the margins by which the ruling parties are reelected.

Figure 5 illustrates this phenomenon, comparing the proportion of alliance strategies over the total political offer in two groups of subnational party systems (identified with the “most competitive” quartile and the “least competitive” quartile), during five subnational legislative elections.⁵ The subsystems with the highest NEP averages, the highest levels of alternation and the narrowest margins of electoral triumph follow the same pattern of alliance strategies as the six provinces with the lowest levels of competition and with little or no alternation in the Executive.

To summarize, the studies reviewed in this section detect a decline in bipartisanship and attribute it to the federalization of the party system, which they understand as a deficit of vertical integration of the subnational units of the political parties, which are supposedly homogeneous and integrated in each provincial arena. However, as we have pointed out, the multiplication of party labels and electoral alliances also predominates at the subnational level, and is even the rule in all districts, regardless of the level of competitiveness of the system.

Considering that the trend towards the multiplication of party labels and electoral alliances predominates in all subnational arenas, regardless of the level of competitiveness of each system, we must conclude that the decline of bipartisanship is not due to the lack of national integration of subnational party organizations, and that other explanatory variables must be involved. As some studies argue (Aboy Carlés, 2009; Cheresky, 2008; Mauro, 2011), the decline of bipartisanship and the federalization of the party system is due to a reconfiguration of political identities, according to which party labels do not produce identity in the electorate, rather than to problems of

5 The provinces were ordered according to three indicators measured between 1983 and 2015: i) average electoral NEP for governor, ii) number of parties in the Executive, and iii) average competitiveness index for executive elections. The six systems selected as least competitive are Formosa, La Rioja, Neuquén, San Luis, Santiago del Estero and Santa Cruz. In five of these provinces the governing party never changed. In four of these provinces, the ruling parties have won by an average difference of 30 percentage points during the entire period, and in five of these provinces the NEP according to votes for governor slightly exceeds the two effective parties. Other provinces with similar values in some of these criteria could be included in this sample, but these cases have been selected because they show values close to the extreme in the three criteria combined. On the opposite extreme, we have selected CABA, Tierra del Fuego, Córdoba, Mendoza, Río Negro and Santa Fe. In five of these cases, the average electoral NEP for governor is close to three parties. Four of these provinces show high competitiveness: in the nine gubernatorial elections, the average difference between the winning party and the main contender has been less than 10 percentage points; while in three of them the governing party has changed at least twice.

integration of organizations, then we should expect a different evolution from that expected by works such as those analyzed above. In particular, the thesis, mainly sustained by Malamud and de Luca (2005 and 2016), that a federalized party system prevents the nationalization of new political forces.

In contrast, if we are witnessing the federalization of the political system due to the inability of the traditional labels to produce identity, it is to be expected that the territorial fragmentation of the parties will create opportunities (and not obstacles) to the nationalization of new parties and leaders, given that the fragments of party structures available will multiply, susceptible to being incorporated into different electoral coalitions depending on the situation.

It was precisely from these phenomena that PRO was nourished to become a competitive political force at the national level, as we will analyze in the next section.

PRO and subnational strategy

The main argument of this article consists in pointing out that the PRO noticed the framework of opportunities of the Argentine party system resulting from the 2001 crisis and implemented a strategy of self-construction and territorial expansion accordingly. Its strategy would be based on: (a) playing the political capital of its main referent in executive elections, in order to (b) attract party fragments in availability and incorporate them into a flexible political structure (party coalitions that would successively replace the denomination of the party itself).⁶

This strategy would be developed in two stages: installation and consolidation at the local level (2003-2011), and then a rapid nationalization, driven by the presidential candidacy of Mauricio Macri (2013-2015). Postponing Macri's presidential candidacy and anchoring early on in a sub-national arena was a strategy unexplored by the previous third forces, and was even an option dismissed by other contemporary extra-bipartisan political referents.

⁶ Thus, *Compromiso para el Cambio* was the name of the party founded in 2002 by Macri and, at the same time, the name of the electoral alliance that nominated him for the CABA Chief of Government in 2003 (an alliance in which marginal parties of the Buenos Aires political system participated). In 2005, *Compromiso para el Cambio* allied with the RECREAR party to form the PRO alliance. In 2008, after the dissolution of RECREAR, PRO became the name of the party (and of the electoral alliance in CABA). In 2015, PRO allied with UCR and *Coalición Cívica* to form the alliance *Cambiemos*, which would progressively replace PRO as the name of *Macrismo*.

Installation and consolidation at the local level (2003-2011)

The beginnings of Mauricio Macri's political venture have been described in other works (Mauro, 2011; Vommaro *et al.*, 2015; Mattina, 2015). The businessman began his public career in 1995, when he was elected to the presidency of the popular Boca Juniors soccer club. During this period, he gathered technical staff and set up a foundation to prepare himself for an eventual leap into politics. The 2001 crisis accelerated the deadlines to take that step, and in 2003 he allied with Peronist leader Horacio Rodríguez Larreta to promote his candidacy as Head of Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Although he could aspire to a competitive candidacy in the presidential elections, Macri focused on CABA, perceiving that the district was going through a period of extreme political fragmentation (Bril-Mascarenhas, 2007; Mauro, 2011). Given that polls assigned him a competitive potential, referents from fragments of political parties associated themselves with his candidacy, especially leaders of local Peronism and others from the center-right minority parties in the district.

The party founded by Macri (Compromiso para el Cambio) won 37% of the votes in the district, without winning the local Executive.⁷ However, his coalition won five seats in the National Chamber of Deputies and 38% of the seats in the local Legislature (23 out of 60). Without facing the costs of building a presidential candidacy⁸ (which would have required adding support in the different sub-national territories), Macri established himself as a political referent with electoral support and a share of institutional power in CABA.

Mauricio Macri had to wait until the next round (2007) to reach the CABA government, after the incumbent head of government was removed by impeachment and the local ruling coalition fractured (Mauro, 2011).

The control of the porteño government guaranteed the internal cohesion of Macrismo. As Scherlis (2009) has pointed out, network parties,

7 Data from the Superior Court of Justice of CABA. The data referring to seats were extracted from the Honorable Chamber of Deputies of the Nation and the Legislature of CABA.

8 The ex radical leader Ricardo López Murphy, for example, had founded the RECREAR party and in 2003 obtained 16% of the votes in the presidential elections. Given the characteristics of the Argentine electoral system and the particularities of the 2003 electoral cycle (where the dates of the national executive and legislative elections were dissociated), he only won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, representing the CABA. A similar case was that of Congresswoman Elisa Carrió, who founded her own party (ARI).

unanchored from stable memberships in civil society, can only develop within the framework of the state sphere. Considering, moreover, that CABA is one of the richest districts in the country, PRO was in a position to distribute benefits to attract new circles of allies, and at the same time could exhibit management achievements attractive to the electorates of the other districts.⁹ The control of the government also guaranteed the permanence of the figure of Macri among the main referents of the country, without daily involvement in the inter-party debate.

It is clear, that the control of the Buenos Aires Executive was a fundamental political capital for PRO, but so was the relatively good image of Mauricio Macri. In this sense, PRO's expansion could follow two divergent courses. The first one, to play Macri's leadership in presidential elections (exploiting a vertical *nationalization* strategy, according to the model of Albala *et al.*, 2017), running the risk of losing the local Executive to an opponent or a potentially disloyal successor. The second, resigning territorial expansion by betting on reelection in local government.

Previous studies (Mauro, 2015; Mattina, 2012; Vommaro and Morresi, 2014) have reconstructed in detail the critical junctures in which Macrismo was forced to decide between these two alternatives. Mauricio Macri avoided running for the presidency, and only did so when he could no longer be reelected as Governor of Porteño, which accidentally coincided with a particular juncture, also produced by the impossibility of running Cristina Fernández for a third term (Mauro, 2017).

Until PRO did not nominate Mauricio Macri for the presidency, PRO chose to consolidate itself in the CABA arena and resorted to different mechanisms to penetrate other provincial arenas, or at least to establish a minimum formal structure that would serve Macri's future presidential candidacy. The main resource used by PRO for its territorial expansion was the celebration of electoral alliances with different parties opposed to Kirchnerism in the provinces. The alliances entered into by PRO during the period 2003-2011 were markedly incongruent¹⁰ (variable according to the district and the type of office in dispute) and volatile (variable over time).

Firstly, PRO –as a national party– did not run its own presidential candidate nor did it participate in national alliances for the presidency in

9 As Vommaro (2017) points out, PRO advertised the porteño lifestyle in the provinces, building its management into a true brand. Modest initiatives, such as the delimitation of exclusive road lanes for bus circulation, were elevated to the rank of a public management model.

10 On the concept of allianceist congruence and ways to measure it, see Clerici (2015a).

2007 or 2011. District affiliates did compete for seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the framework of alliances with different parties, some of which, in several provinces, supported a presidential candidate. Arguably, PRO sought to maintain autonomy from other national parties, and even sought to erode the electoral opportunities of other opposition referents (Mauro, 2015). Arguably, PRO sought to maintain autonomy from other national parties, and even sought to erode the electoral opportunities of other opposition referents (Mauro, 2015). In this regard, the outstanding case was the candidacy of Ricardo López Murphy (RECREAR) in 2007, which the PRO porteño timidly supported and an alliance only materialized in five districts.¹¹ The presidential candidacy failed (it obtained less than 2% of the votes), and after the elections, Macrismo encouraged an internal faction of RECREAR (led by Esteban Bullrich) to dispute the leadership of the party. One year later, López Murphy was expelled from the party he founded, RECREAR was dissolved and Bullrich was appointed Minister of Education in the CABA. In 2011, it would relapse, alternatively supporting (depending on the province) the presidential candidacy of dissident Peronists Eduardo Duhalde or Alberto Rodríguez Saá (even in many provinces it presented candidates for national deputies without supporting any presidential candidate).

Secondly, as we have mentioned, the PRO tried electoral alliances to capture political structures available in the different provinces. It slowly constituted itself as a party in the subnational arenas and participated in national and provincial elections (see Figure 6), almost exclusively within the framework of alliances¹². The main partners in these alliances were the Peronist leaders opposed to the national party leadership, informally exercised by Cristina Fernández¹³.

11 The PRO coalition (CPC-RECREAR) ran in CABA, Córdoba, San Juan, Santa Fe and Santiago del Estero. The PRO list won only two seats in the city of Buenos Aires, while its electoral performance in the other three districts ranged between 0.96% and 1.42%. Macrismo faced RECREAR in Corrientes and in the Province of Buenos Aires, where it allied with dissident Peronism to dispute national seats and provincial positions, obtaining around 15% of the votes depending on the position. Macrismo also participated in electoral alliances with dissident Peronism in Misiones and Tierra del Fuego, with poor results.

12 For different reasons (sudden changes of alliances, local definitions, etc.), PRO competed without allies on ten occasions. In all of them it was completely marginal.

13 For a description of dissident Peronist factions during the period, see Galván (2011).

In almost all cases, the “coalitions” consisted of the PRO label participating in the lists nominated by dissident Peronist groups, without PRO actually imposing candidates at any level. Figure 7 illustrates this point: the alliances in which it participated obtained numerous seats, but only half of them (mainly candidates from CABA and some from Buenos Aires) joined the PRO bloc in the Chamber of Deputies, while the rest joined the blocs of the different strands of anti-Kirchnerist Peronism.

While Mauricio Macri remained in the Buenos Aires arena, PRO showed no interest in developing party structures rooted in the provinces. Only in situations where it could be foreseen that PRO’s leader was going to decide to fight the national battle (as in 2009 or 2013), the party tried to install competitive candidates in some provincial arenas. In these cases, it mainly resorted to extra-partisan figures, emerging from the cycle of social protests against the national government in 2008 for the modification of export taxes on agricultural¹⁴ products or belonging to the world of sports or entertainment. The use of non-party candidates solved the problem of organizational weakness and at the same time reinforced it, given that these individuals were not the bearers of internal party leadership.

In those cases where the provincial party authorities were able to effectively take root and intended to participate in the definition of alliance or candidacy policies, the national PRO decided to intervene in the party and replace its leaders (as it happened in eight districts). In almost all these cases it had not even consolidated as a competitive political force or had strong party leadership. PRO needed to build alliances to compensate for its weak organizational structure in the interior, but at the same time it needed to maintain that weak structure in order to be able to autonomously define alliance strategy. In this respect, PRO not only shifted its strategy from allying with Peronists to allying with Radicals. Even before turning to alliances with the UCR (in 2015), PRO had changed allies at least once in almost all the districts where it had participated (all except CABA, Mendoza, San Luis, Misiones and Tucumán).

Nationalization of PRO: Macri’s presidential candidacy

The strategy of building alliances with dissident Peronism sectors came to an end after the 2013 legislative elections, when the so-called “dissident

14 For a detailed account of the so-called “rural conflict” between the government of Cristina Fernández and the agricultural producers’ organizations, see Aronskind and Vommaro (2010).

Peronism” unified behind the figure of Sergio Massa, a political leader of the Province of Buenos Aires who would run for the presidency in 2015. With no possibility of allying with Peronism, PRO was forced to resort to another national party structure with territorial roots. With Mauricio Macri’s presidential candidacy already in place, it found that structure in the UCR.

Radicalism had been unable to install a competitive presidential candidate for more than a decade, surviving on the basis of a horizontal nationalization strategy (Albala *et al.*, 2017), but suffering a constant process of fragmentation and erosion. The possibility of allying with a competitive presidential candidate but without a national political structure seemed a unique opportunity to recover political capital in the provincial arenas through the coattail effect.¹⁵ In this regard, the reading of radicalism was identical to the academic diagnosis outlined in the first section¹⁶: an opinion leadership rooted in urban centers can only subordinate itself to a national political structure if it wants to compete for the presidency.

What finally happened was very different: PRO added the UCR as one more ring in its flexible structure of alliances (which came to be called Cambiemos), and did not resign itself to cede to radicalism the dragging effect of the presidential candidacy, but rather, to the extent of its possibilities, nominated candidates for the different levels of office. As shown in Figure 7, most of the national deputy seats won by the Cambiemos alliance went to PRO candidates and not to UCR candidates (something that did not happen in the alliance scheme with Peronism).

The territorial roots of the UCR did not mean an obstacle for PRO to nominate candidates to governorships in the provinces where it was competitive. For example, in Misiones, Santa Fe and CABA both parties competed against each other, while in Buenos Aires, San Juan and Entre Ríos the coalition ran Macrista candidates for governor. In other districts, the candidacies had to be agreed upon, and Mauricio Macri had the final word on the inter-party agreements, without the UCR being able to effectively oppose its territorial weight at the negotiation table.

After winning the presidential election, the internal imbalance in the Cambiemos alliance became more evident. Macri, who had already

15 “The formula for 2015 seems clear: radicalism puts the structure and takes the legislative and provincial positions, Macri puts the voting intention and maybe takes the presidency. The difference is that, if it fails, in 2019 there will still be UCR but no PRO” (Malamud, 2015).

16 For example, this diagnosis can be found, with nuances, in Varetto and del Cogliano’s (2016) analysis of the 2015 electoral process.

autonomously defined another PRO referent as his running mate, defined almost without any limitation the officials of his cabinet¹⁷, and even favored the appointment of personal friends or strong businessmen rather than his allies. The same happened in the Chambers of Senators and Deputies, whose legislative authorities belong to PRO before the other allies of Cambiemos. In the 2017 elections, although a more equitable distribution of candidacies for national deputies can be observed (see Figure 7), the campaign was defined almost exclusively by the president and his circle of close collaborators, just as the definition in all critical junctures that the government went through.

Conclusions

In the preceding pages, the political and electoral trajectory of PRO has been described as the result of a deliberate strategy of installation and nationalization of an extra-bipartisan political force. This required reconstructing the decisions made by the party to face national and provincial electoral cycles, defining candidacies and alliance policies. Our approach consists in pointing out a two-step strategy, privileging first the installation in a subnational district, and then betting on vertical nationalization through the dragging effect of a competitive presidential candidate. In order to do so, PRO took advantage of the existence of party structures in place, both in the Peronist and non-Peronist poles of the political arc, and of the advantages offered by Argentine electoral institutions to enter into electoral alliances in the different provincial arenas, without the need to first build a competitive party organization in each district.

Despite the fact that Macrismo's success in his race to the presidency was due, in part, to contingent circumstances, focusing on reconstructing this strategy of self-construction forces us to review the assumptions with which the political science literature has analyzed the process of federalization during the last 15 years. In this sense, the article has pointed out that the federalization of the Argentine party system operates as a factor that widens the margins of uncertainty over political dynamics, rather than reducing them.

17 On this point it does not differ from the tradition of Latin American presidentialisms, as identified by Corrales (2010).

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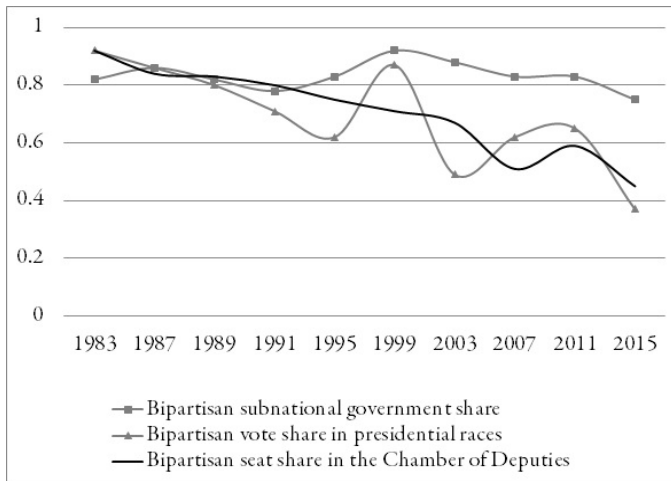
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Annex

Figure 1

Bipartisan concentration of votes and banking(1983-2015)



Source: Prepared by the authors with information from the National Electoral Office and Chamber of Deputies.

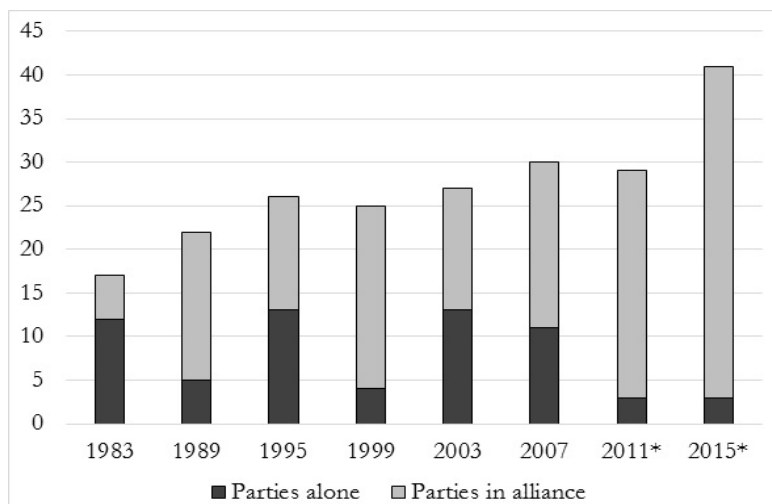
Black: Proportion of positive votes for the PJ and the UCR in presidential elections. In dark gray: average of the proportion of banking in the Chamber of Deputies occupied by the PJ blocs (the bloc that responds to the national leadership of the party, in case of internal division) and the UCR. In light gray: proportion of positive votes for the PJ and the UCR in subnational executive elections.

Note 1: For the 2003 presidential election, the sum of the proportion of votes obtained by the three Justicialist candidates, who ran under other electoral labels, according to the literature, is shown.

Note 2: For the 2015 presidential election, votes for the UCR are not computed. The UCR did not present its own candidates for the presidency in the general elections, since its pre-candidates lost the primaries of the Cambiemos alliance with 3% of the votes.

Figure 2

Number of parties competing in presidential elections, alone or in coalition (1983-2015)

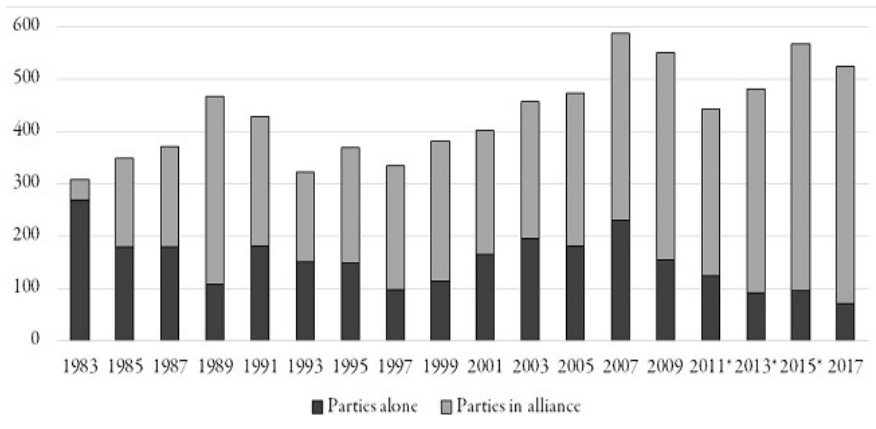


Source: Own elaboration with data from Clerici (2015a) and the National Electoral Chamber.

* Data from the open, simultaneous and mandatory primaries (PASO) are included.

Figure 3

Number of parties competing for national deputy banking, alone or in coalition

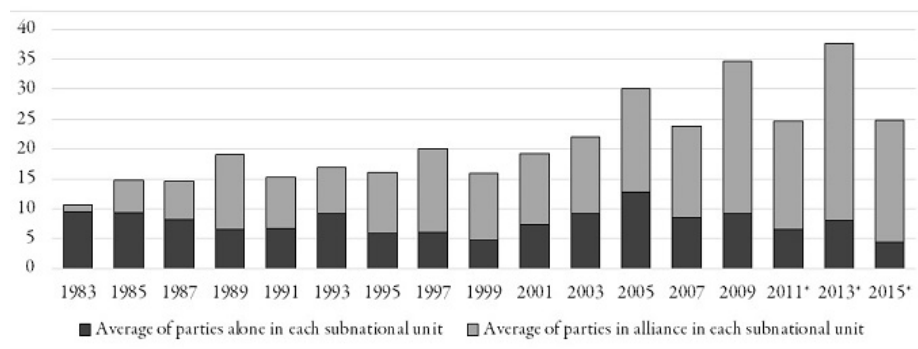


Source: Own elaboration with data from Clerici (2015a) and the National Electoral Chamber.

* Data taken from the PASO.

Figure 4

Average number of parties competing in elections for provincial deputies, alone or in coalition (198-2015)

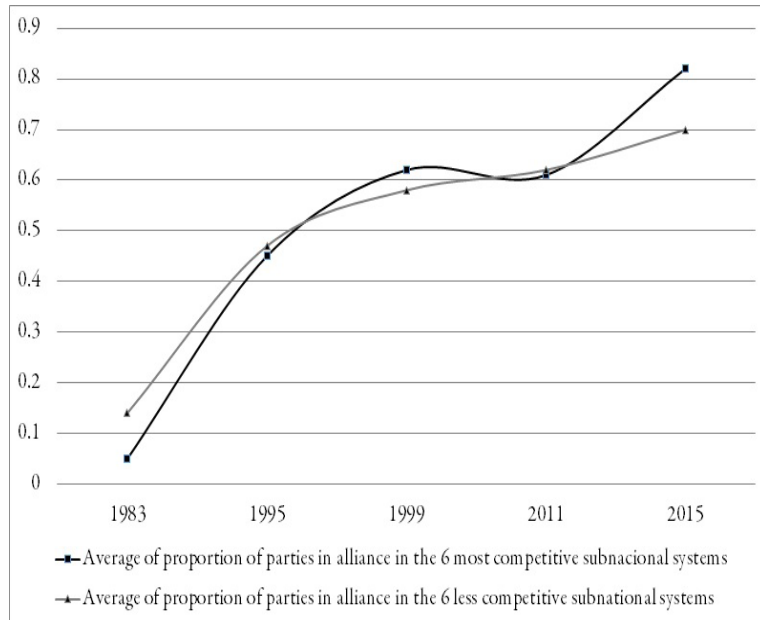


Source: Own elaboration with data from Clerici (2015a) and the National Electoral Chamber.

* Data taken from the PASO.

Figure 5

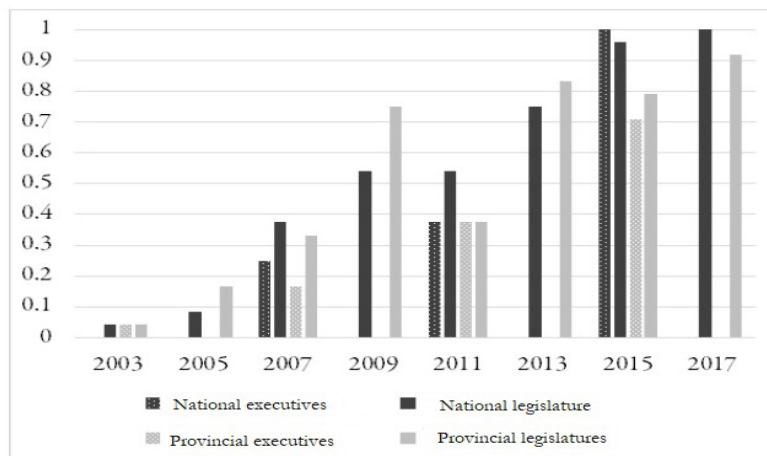
Average of the proportion of parties competing in the framework of alliances over the total political offer in subnational legislative elections, in two groups of districts



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the provincial electoral courts, the National Electoral Directorate, the Electoral Atlas of Andy Tow and the Argentine Electoral Observatory of the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC).

Figure 6

Proportion of districts in which the PRO competed for national and provincial positions



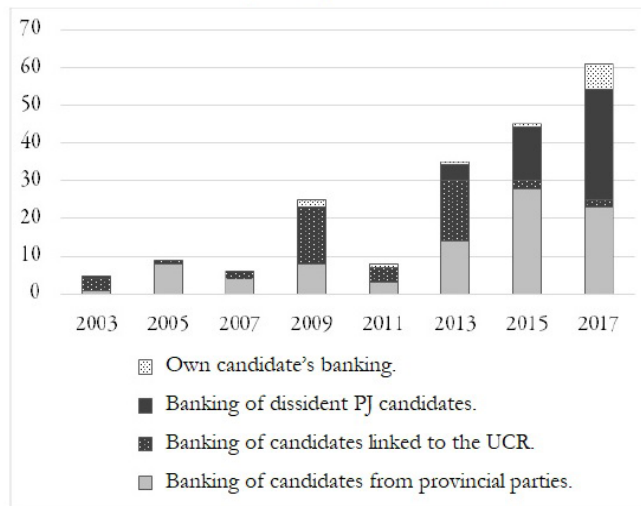
Source: National Electoral Chamber and Provincial Electoral Courts.

Note 1: Half of the districts elect provincial legislators every four years, so the N of the variable “provincial legislatures” is 24 or 12, depending on the case. This variation explains the strange behavior of the variable in 2011: the PRO actually competed in nine districts in both 2009 and 2011, but in the first case it represents a proportion of 0.75 and in the other 0.375.

Note 2: PRO, as a national party, only participated in presidential elections in 2015. However, the lists of candidates for national deputies where PRO participated were adhered to presidential candidacies in six districts in 2007 and in nine districts in 2011.

Figure 7

Distribution of the national deputy banking obtained by the alliances in which the PRO participated (2003-2017)



Source: National Electoral Chamber and chamber of deputies.

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