

## A Theory of Charismatic Movement Revival

The survival of charismatic movements beyond the lifetimes of their founders is puzzling. Indeed, these movements are considered to be fundamentally unstable because they hinge on the captivating and “strictly personal” authority of their founders. Extant literature, therefore, concludes that charismatic movements tend to disintegrate when their founders disappear (Weber 1968, 21–22; Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 500–1; Weber 1922/1978, 246).

What, then, explains the surprising resilience of Peronism and Chavismo? Two theories offer potential explanations: routinization and revival in personalistic form. Routinization constitutes the predominant view in the literature (Jowitt 1992; Loxton and Levitsky 2018; Madsen and Snow 1991; Shils 1965; Weber 1922/1978). Originally proposed by Weber, this theory states that the founder’s charismatic authority must be reshaped into an institutionalized party for the movement to survive. In contrast, my theory of charismatic movement revival contends that the founder’s deep, emotional bonds with the followers can be preserved and reactivated by future politicians to restore the movement to power. In other words, these movements can survive by perpetuating a cycle that reinforces citizens’ affective attachments and subordinates political institutions to the authority of personalistic leaders.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the logic of routinization and indicates why this theory falls short of explaining the survival of Peronism and Chavismo. Specifically, I argue that routinization overstates the ephemerality of citizens’ emotional ties to the charismatic founder while minimizing the immense difficulty of transforming the founder’s authority into a depersonalized party organization.

Next, I propose my alternative theory of charismatic movement revival. Drawing on insights from political and social psychology, I contend that followers’ charismatic bonds can turn into a resilient identity that remains personalistic in nature and shapes the followers’ perceptions, attitudes, and

behaviors after the founder's disappearance. Because these attachments survive in personalistic form, I explain that new leaders who portray themselves as the founder's heirs have the potential to reactivate followers' affective identity, restore its political significance, and garner support. Subsequently, I outline the conditions under which this process of charismatic reactivation is possible. Finally, I demonstrate that charismatic movements can survive in latent form during periods of poor leadership and reemerge when conditions are more favorable. Rather than establishing an institutionalized party, as routinization would predict, I argue that the revival of charismatic movements generates a cycle of political and economic volatility that perpetuates personalistic leadership and undermines party system institutionalization. In subsequent chapters, I substantiate my theory using a wide array of evidence that focuses primarily on the Peronist and Chavista movements.

## 2.1 CENTRAL TENETS OF THE ROUTINIZATION THESIS

Adherents of the routinization argument claim that the survival of charismatic movements in personalistic form is impossible. First, they stress that successors cannot take over the founder's direct, emotional bonds with the followers. Second, because they lack the founder's magnetic appeal, successors cannot exercise the concentrated authority of the charismatic predecessor. For these reasons, scholars conclude that the survival of charismatic movements depends on routinization. During this process, the followers' emotional bonds with the founder are said to transform into depersonalized partisan linkages. An organizational structure staffed with lower-level politicians and bureaucrats also develops to replace the concentrated authority of the charismatic founder. In short, routinization suggests that charismatic movements survive by shedding their true nature and becoming institutionalized parties. In the following two sections, I outline the process of routinization at the level of the followers and the leaders who emerge in the wake of the founder's death.

### 2.1.1 The Depersonalization of Followers' Charismatic Attachments

According to Weber, attachments between charismatic leaders and their followers are "strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of [the leader's] charismatic personal qualities," as those qualities are perceived by the followers (1922/1978, 246). Scholars identify two such qualities as especially important for shaping the "leader-to-mass flow of communications and benefits" (Madsen and Snow 1991, 25). First is the leader's seemingly miraculous performance, which provides the followers with tangible benefits and demonstrates his heroic capacity to resolve their suffering.<sup>1</sup> The second quality is the leader's frequent,

<sup>1</sup> Charismatic leaders can be female or male. For the sake of simplicity, and because the majority of charismatic founders under study are male, I use the pronoun "his" throughout this chapter.

direct communication with his followers, which gives the followers the illusion of an intimate relationship with their beloved savior.

Existing studies suggest that the survival of charismatic movements depends on routinization in part because new leaders cannot replicate the founder's charismatic qualities in the eyes of the followers. To begin, proving superhuman abilities would require "the constant achievement of 'miracles'" (Eatwell 2006, 141). The founder's chosen successor, typically "a functionary who is not remotely comparable with the predecessor" (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 500–1), is unlikely to achieve this ambitious feat. Compounding this issue of lackluster performance, especially in comparison to the almighty founder, the chosen successor struggles to sustain unmediated ties with the followers (Madsen and Snow 1991, 25). Unable to tap into these intimate connections, the successor cannot control the masses through "symbolic manipulation" in a manner reminiscent of the founder (Jowitt 1992, 107).

Because successors cannot perform miracles or captivate the masses using magnetic appeal, they cannot uphold the founder's deep, emotional attachments with the followers. This leads scholars of routinization to conclude that the nature of followers' attachments must undergo a fundamental change if an initially charismatic movement is to survive. In particular, the literature suggests that, because the emotional intensity of citizens' attachments to the founder irreversibly dissipates upon his disappearance, the agents of routinization must replace those attachments with alternative linkage types (Jowitt 1992, 107; Madsen and Snow 1991, 29; Shils 1965, 202; Weber 1922/1978, 246).

Studies of partisanship suggest two alternative party–voter linkages that could replace citizens' charismatic attachments to the movement. First, programmatic attachments could emerge based on the ambitious policies enacted by the founder. These policies, validated by their initially impressive success and their association with the founder's valiant promises to rescue society, could develop into a programmatic trademark for the movement (Lupu 2013, 51–52). To sustain followers' loyalty based on this mechanism, the movement's new leadership would need to preserve the substantive content and positive performance of the founder's policies. If successful, first-generation followers who recognized and supported this set of policies would reinforce their attachment to the movement; those who disagreed or were simply unaware of the policies would become less attached after the founder's disappearance (Key 1966, 7–8). Subsequent generations of citizens whose issue preferences coincided with the content of the movement's programmatic trademark – due to a combination of parental socialization, preference formation occurring during young adulthood, and retrospective evaluation of the movement's past performance – would be more likely to develop strong attachments to the movement in the future (Achen 2002; Fiorina 1981; Niemi and Kent Jennings 1991). However, if their issue preferences deviated over time or the movement's programmatic trademark became diluted, the basis for citizens'

programmatic attachments would break down, resulting in the erosion of the movement's core of supporters (Lupu 2013, 52; Roberts 2014, 26).

A second linkage that could routinize the followers' charismatic attachments rests on an organizational mechanism. Specifically, the followers could sustain their devotion to the movement based on their participation in the network of movement-affiliated organizations, social clubs, and neighborhood associations created under the charismatic founder (Campbell et al. 1960; Granovetter 1973; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992). Crucially, the persistence of followers' organizational ties to the movement would depend on the followers' ongoing (informal or formal) membership in these social groups (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, 4, 91; Roberts 2014, 27). Moreover, the movement's new leaders would have to actively mobilize the movement's organizational network to remain politically relevant and win follower support (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992, 70; Samuels and Zucco 2015, 758–59). Subsequent generations of followers would then be socialized into the network during childhood or through their social groups during young adulthood, perpetuating the strength of the movement over time (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 138–41; Niemi and Kent Jennings 1991, 979–81). In contrast, the disintegration of movement-affiliated groups would weaken followers' connections to the movement and would undermine their loyalty as a result.

In sum, the routinization thesis posits that successors to the charismatic founder cannot replicate the founder's seemingly miraculous performance; moreover, these successors struggle to maintain direct, intimate connections with the followers. Given these weaknesses, the survival of the movement requires that citizens' deep, emotional attachments to the founder transform into depersonalized linkages based on either a steady, substantively meaningful programmatic trademark or a strong network of movement-affiliated organizations that generate feelings of belonging among the followers.

### 2.1.2 The Replacement of the Leader's Charismatic Authority with a Party Organization

In addition to the transformation of the followers' profoundly affective attachments, routinization studies claim that the founder's concentrated, charismatic authority invariably dissipates. Thus, the founder's subordinates must work together to develop an organizational structure that can substitute for his authority (Madsen and Snow 1991, 29). Crucially, these intermediary agents do not *personally* inherit a dose of the founder's charismatic appeal. Rather, the founder's appeal becomes associated with the *offices* that the agents occupy and with the *rules* that govern the agents' behavior. Eventually, the institutional "roles and rules" acquire independent legitimacy rather than leaning on their (increasingly distant) association with the founder (Shils 1965, 205). In other words, a depersonalized type of authority that rests on institutions rather than on individuals stands in place of the founder's charismatic authority.

To successfully replace the founder's charismatic authority in this fashion, scholars stress that the movement must develop a party structure with at least a moderate degree of organizational capacity (Jowitt 1992, 107; Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 500–1; Madsen and Snow 1991, 25–29; Shils 1965, 202–5). In fact, the more extensive the organizational structure, the better the chances of movement survival. As Shils explains, “the more widely dispersed, unintensified operation of the charismatic element in corporate bodies governed by the rational-legal type of authority,” the greater the possibility of establishing a powerful, lasting, and firmly institutionalized party (1965, 202).

## 2.2 THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE ROUTINIZATION THESIS

While routinization studies attempt to theorize the evolution of charisma after the death of the founder, they underestimate the potential of the followers' charismatic attachments to endure. Moreover, they overlook the tremendous difficulties of constructing a party organization to replace the charismatic founder's deeply entrenched authority. Consequently, these studies fail to explain the trajectory of charismatic movements such as Peronism and Chavismo, which have persisted in a strikingly personalistic manner since the deaths of their founders.

### 2.2.1 Theoretical Limitations of the Routinization Thesis

To begin, scholars of routinization suggest that followers' charismatic attachments fade away upon the founder's disappearance. Yet it seems unlikely that citizens' fervent bonds would be so fragile. During the founder's rule, these bonds are so strong that they cause a “searing reorientation” in the lives and identities of the followers (Madsen and Snow 1991, 24). The founder's promise to provide the followers with salvation inspires a deep devotion that is missionary, even Christ-like (Zúquete 2008, 107). Indeed, charismatic attachments transcend the mundane world of self-interest, inspiring the followers to “rise above, and to go beyond, mercenary concerns of contractual obligation and exchange” (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 31). Given the deeply emotional and quasi-religious nature of these ties, it seems unreasonable to conclude that the founder's death would cause them to disappear. To the contrary, social psychology research on the “death positivity bias” and “postmortem charisma” suggests that the founder's death – an emotional and tragic event for the followers – could actually *intensify* their love for the founder and strengthen their loyalty to his movement (Allison et al. 2009, 116; Steffens et al. 2017, 532).

A second issue overlooked by routinization studies is the difficulty of developing an institutional structure that can supplant the founder's charismatic authority. Scholars describe the transfer of authority from the founder to his intermediaries as an inevitable, if gradual, process. For example, Madsen

and Snow explain, “The emergence of such intermediary roles...occurs gradually as the leader finds it more and more difficult to maintain frequent and direct ties with his or her following” (1991, 25). Similarly, Shils states that charisma “flows from the central authority ... [to] a multitude of others who live within a territory ruled by the central authority” (1965, 212, emphasis added).

Yet, charismatic founders prioritize concentrating authority above all else, casting doubt on the notion that their authority would transfer in such a smooth and inexorable fashion. In fact, these leaders take extraordinary measures to *undermine* the development of structure in their movements and ensure that their influence cannot be easily shared during or after their lifetimes. For example, they exercise authority on a whim, relying on spontaneity and capriciousness to prevent others from sharing or challenging their power (Carroll 2013, 135). Furthermore, rather than constructing a hierarchy of officials, charismatic leaders allow and even intentionally generate feelings of jealousy and competition among their inner circle of agents in order to keep the structure of their movements weak and reduce threats to their unmatched superiority (Burns 1978, 125; Roberts 2014, 37; Weber 1922/1978, 243). Finally, to keep their legacies from being overshadowed, charismatic leaders tend to anoint weak, inexperienced, and fervently loyal successors (Lasswell 1948, 101; Weber 1922/1978, 246).

Due to their extraordinary efforts to preserve their concentrated influence, the disappearance of charismatic founders results in a tumultuous and disorganized power vacuum in the movement’s leadership. It seems unlikely that routinization would take place under these circumstances. The movement’s intermediaries would struggle to develop party structures through which to disperse the founder’s authority. Moreover, these mid-level agents would likely be suspicious of and hostile toward one another – a result of the founder’s efforts to keep his underlings weak and divided. Thus, it would be unrealistic to expect these individuals to willingly and effectively share power among themselves. Indeed, the personalistic structure of the movement would incentivize new leaders to consolidate power for themselves in the style of their predecessors rather than behaving as disciplined bureaucrats committed to the task of institutionalization.

### 2.2.2 Empirical Limitations of the Routinization Thesis

The trajectories of Peronism and Chavismo reflect the shortcomings of the routinization thesis. In Argentina, the behaviors of both followers and leaders of Peronism call into question the viability of routinization. More than forty years after Perón’s death, many Peronists have continued to express direct, deeply emotional attachments to the founder and his wife, Eva, as well as to subsequent leaders, including Carlos Menem, Néstor Kirchner, and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. At the same time, followers have expressed little

understanding of the movement's programmatic principles and few have consistently participated in Peronist-affiliated organizations, suggesting that followers' affective attachments have not been replaced by more conventional partisan ties (Levitsky 2003, 84–90; McGuire 1995, 201–2).

In addition to citizens' persistent emotional bonds with the movement, prominent successors of Perón have tied themselves to his charismatic legacy and have deliberately weakened institutions in order to exercise power in a direct and personalistic manner. For instance, Menem relied heavily on personal appeal to rise to the presidency in 1989 (McGuire 1997, 208; Ostiguy 2009, 13–14). During his presidential campaign, he attracted the support of millions of Peronists and thus won the presidency by emphasizing his allegiance to the charismatic foundations of Peronism, explicitly invoking the names of Juan and Eva Perón, and demonizing establishment politicians. As president, Menem enacted bold reforms via emergency decree to combat hyperinflation and portray himself as the people's savior (Weyland 2002, 134–47). Notably, the neoliberal substance of these reforms contradicted Perón's original platform of economic nationalism! Yet Menem declared that Perón would have behaved identically if he had governed during the same period (Comas 1993). As this behavior demonstrates, Menem sought to embody Perón's charismatic appeal and had little interest in developing a programmatic trademark to carry the movement forward.

While Menem's brazen economic policies ended in collapse and unleashed a severe crisis in 2001, Peronism survived and was returned to power in 2003 with the election of Néstor Kirchner. As president, Kirchner secured overwhelming popular support by implementing unilateral decrees to address the crisis and attacking rapacious foreign bondholders and human rights abusers from the 1976–83 military dictatorship (Gantman 2012, 345; Gervasoni 2015). Furthermore, Kirchner and his wife, Cristina – who succeeded him as president in 2007 – explicitly evoked the legacies of Juan and Eva, portraying themselves as symbolic reincarnations of the charismatic couple. Moreover, to ensure their power went unquestioned, both Kirchners regularly intervened in political institutions ranging from the Supreme Court to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (Gervasoni and Peruzzotti 2015). In short, similar to Menem, the Kirchners used personalistic tactics to further concentrate their authority, declaring that they would save the Argentine people from misery and deliver their followers a better future (Ollier 2015; Wortman 2015).

In Venezuela, Chavismo has likewise endured in personalistic form, casting further doubt on the logic of routinization. Chavistas have sustained profoundly affective attachments to Chávez since his death in March 2013. Indeed, they have openly mourned their beloved founder, worshipping him at shrines constructed in homes and public spaces. Followers have also commemorated Chávez by sporting images of his face in the form of T-shirts and tattoos, listening to recordings of his speeches and television shows, and singing songs

about his heroic impact. However, while continuing to revere Chávez, these individuals have grown disillusioned with the movement's collapsing programs; furthermore, their participation in movement-affiliated organizations has remained low. These factors suggest that programmatic and social attachments to Chavismo are still underdeveloped, contrary to what routinization would predict (Aponte 2014; Machado 2009).

From the perspective of the leadership, Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, has made little effort to routinize the movement. Instead, he has focused relentlessly on Chávez's mission to transform society and vanquish the movement's enemies. He has also stressed his spiritual connection to the founder to keep citizens' affective attachments alive and vicariously garner support. For example, shortly after his election in 2013, he claimed that Chávez had returned to Earth reincarnated as a bird to offer a personal blessing to Maduro (Scharfenberg 2013). In 2016, he developed a hologram of Chávez that walked the streets of Caracas to celebrate the "Day of Loyalty and Love for our Commander Hugo Chávez Frías" (@VTVcanal8 2016). By symbolically reconstructing the founder's image, Maduro has attempted to leverage citizens' personalistic bonds to defend the contemporary regime and decry all who oppose it as traitors to Chávez's legacy. Consequently, he has sustained crucial support for a remarkably long time, given the deplorable performance of his regime (GBAO Strategies 2019).

To recapitulate, citizens' deep, emotional ties to the charismatic founders of Peronism and Chavismo, respectively, have remained profoundly affective in nature. Moreover, subsequent leaders of these movements have governed using a direct, charismatic style rather than dispersing power and responsibility to intermediaries in their respective parties. These outcomes contradict the routinization thesis, which emphasizes the depersonalization of citizens' attachments and the dispersion of leaders' power as necessary conditions for the survival of charismatic movements. In light of this puzzle, I develop an alternative theory according to which these movements can survive by sustaining their original personalistic nature.

### 2.3 A NEW THEORY OF CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT REVIVAL

In light of the limitations of routinization studies, I theorize a different pathway through which charismatic movements can persist and reemerge as powerful political forces. To begin, I describe an important conjunctural condition that generates overwhelming popular demand for charisma and thus allows for the establishment of a charismatic movement: the presence of a crisis that places people in a position of suffering and compels them to look for a savior. Next, I explain how the founder emerges in this context and utilizes both contextual circumstances and personal resources to exercise charisma and form deeply affective bonds with the suffering citizens. I then indicate how these bonds tend to overpower alternative types of political attachments and lend coherence to the movement.

Subsequently, I illustrate the mechanism through which the followers' bonds can turn into an enduring identity that continues to shape their political perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors after the founder disappears. I also indicate how this identity leads to the formation of a resilient cleavage that polarizes both politics and society based on emotional allegiances and aversions to charismatic figures rather than substantive programs and left-right ideologies. While the political relevance of the identity and corresponding cleavage fluctuates over time, I underscore the resilience of their emotional and personalistic core. When adverse conditions cause intense suffering, it is the enduring charismatic nature of followers' attachments that causes these individuals to look for a new hero to rescue them. Politicians who understand this longing and rise under particular conditions have the potential to strategically exert their own charisma to reactivate the followers' attachments, reinvigorate the cleavage, and become the movement's new standard-bearer.

The second portion of my theory moves from demand to supply by focusing on the leaders who seek to revive the movement and consolidate power. In particular, I specify the conditions that facilitate or undermine successors' attempts to signal their charisma and reactivate the followers' emotional bonds to reclaim the founder's authority. As with my study of the followers, I examine the role of conjunctural conditions, including the presence of a crisis, as well the leader's traits, such as personal appeal and political skill. Finally, I weave together my analyses of demand and supply of charisma to shed light on the trajectories of charismatic movements and their detrimental impact on democratic party systems.

### **2.3.1 The Demand Side: Formation, Survival, and Reactivation of Followers' Charismatic Attachments to the Leader**

#### **2.3.1.1 *Formation***

To begin, the revival of charismatic movements depends on the initial formation of the unmediated emotional attachments between a leader and his followers. A crucial condition that enables this process is the presence of a crisis overseen by a low-performing government. The reason is that a widespread and severe crisis places many people in a difficult situation they cannot resolve by themselves, which makes many of them feel desperate for an outside source of relief. As the theory of "proxy control" developed in social psychology suggests, many people who experience crisis and corresponding feelings of exclusion, desperation, and hopelessness seek out a savior to recognize their suffering, take control of their seemingly unmanageable situation, and combat the "evil" forces blamed for their problems (Madsen and Snow 1991, 12–15). When political incumbents confront such crises using bold leadership, they can appear more charismatic to these people (Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007). Yet politicians who poorly manage the situation can cause desperate voters to look elsewhere for a hero to rescue them (Madsen and Snow 1991,

143; Weyland 2003, 843). These circumstances provide an important opportunity for ambitious new leaders to rise up and forge powerful attachments with the suffering people.

I argue that leaders who emerge under these conditions have the potential to cultivate direct and deeply affective bonds by exercising charisma. Importantly, crisis does not *produce* a charismatic leader; rather, it provides the *opportunity* for ambitious individuals who seek power to step forward, exert charisma, and form attachments with the suffering citizens. The process of cultivating charismatic attachments includes three components. First, the leader appeals to citizens by directly recognizing their genuine and unwarranted suffering. Crucially, this recognition results in an asymmetrical relationship: The leader *directly grants* recognition to the followers, such that the latter feel indebted to, rather than empowered by, the former. Using the crisis, the leader calls out the failures of the established regime, recognizes the people's suffering and perceived exclusion, and vows to personally resolve their misery.

Second, to prove his extraordinary ability to "save" the people, the leader aggressively attacks the "enemies" held responsible for their misery and implements bold, *initially* successful reforms to improve their condition (Pappas 2012, 4–5; Roberts 2014, 29; Weber 1922/1978, 242). This impressive performance confirms the followers' exalted perceptions of their leader but lacks programmatic coherence and sustainability. Instead, the leader's early success is greatly facilitated by his emergence following the eruption of the crisis, which helps make the leader's bold countermeasures appear particularly heroic (Weyland 2003, 825). Being at the cusp of favorable economic conditions, such as rising oil prices or a commodity boom, can further facilitate the leader's enactment of sensational, though short-lived, reforms. And while the audacious character of these policies eventually produces their own decline, the swift, tangible relief they initially provide causes many voters to perceive the leader as extraordinary, if not miraculous.

The third factor required for the cultivation of charismatic attachments is the construction of an emotional, symbol-laden narrative that glorifies the leader alongside other historical protagonists as a hero, vilifies opponents as enemies, and stresses the leader's mission to rescue and fundamentally transform society. Discourse that frames politics as an existential struggle between good and evil is essential to convert strong popular support into an intensely personal form of "political religion" (Zúquete 2008, 91). Indeed, the narrative unites the followers against the allegedly malevolent opposition and solidifies their identification with the leader's redemptive mission. To spin a compelling narrative, the leader draws on personal appeal; achieves constant, direct contact with voters; and ties himself to "sacred figures, divine beings, or heroes" that already form part of the voters' cultural identity (Willner and Willner 1965, 82). Additionally, the leader dominates public spaces with images, words, music, and other symbols to help reinforce the power and moral superiority of him and his movement (Plotkin 2002, 24; Zúquete 2008, 93–103).

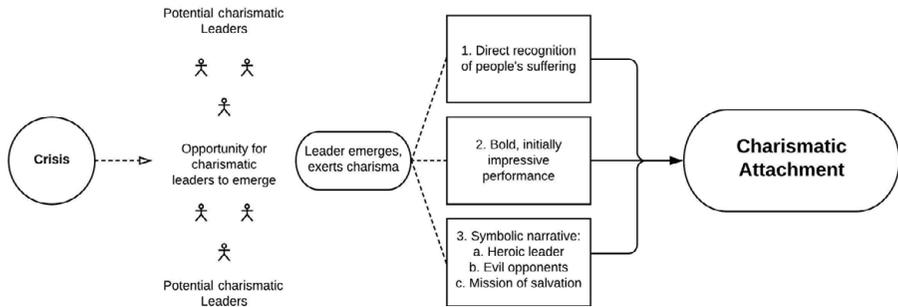


FIGURE 2.1. The initial formation of charismatic attachments

Together, these factors consolidate the suffering citizens' perceptions of the leader's charisma and foster powerful, unmediated bonds between the leader and his followers. Direct recognition of people's exclusion and suffering makes followers feel indebted to the leader; bold reforms deliver tangible improvements to the followers' lives and appear to substantiate the leader's exceptional capacities; and the symbolic narrative solidifies the leader's role as the ultimate savior. Figure 2.1 summarizes the factors involved in the initial formation of charismatic attachments. At the outset, a crisis creates favorable conditions for charismatic leaders to seek power. In turn, if one such leader comes forth and recognizes the people's crisis-induced misery, vows to resolve it through heroic performance, and cultivates a compelling symbolic narrative, the leader can form powerful, long-lasting charismatic attachments with the people.

Although various studies acknowledge the importance of one or more of the abovementioned characteristics for the initial formation of charismatic bonds, I go a step further to identify two ways in which these factors help perpetuate the bonds when the founder disappears. First, I argue that charismatic attachments do not merely establish an emotional connection between the founder and his followers, but that they also undermine the influence of alternative types of political linkages. For one, charismatic attachments provide the leader with a "Teflon shield" that weakens linkages rooted in the substantive coherence and steady performance of the programs and policies (Merolla and Zechmeister 2009a, 33). Indeed, the founder's early, seemingly heroic acts cause the followers to shower him with far more praise than would result from rational evaluations of his performance. Moreover, the followers' perceptions of his performance as miraculous prevents them from "updating" their beliefs and withdrawing their support when the leader's unsustainable initiatives begin their inevitable decline, as would occur with programmatic attachments (Achen 1992, 2002; Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981). Instead, the followers double down on their devotion to the founder, whom they believe will resolve their suffering once again with his superhuman power.

In addition to undermining programmatic attachments, charismatic bonds undercut linkages that develop based on citizens' participation in organizations

affiliated with the movement. In particular, the charismatic leader hinders “horizontal forms of association either in civic or partisan areas” for fear that these grassroots activities will distract from his personalistic authority (Roberts 2014, 27–28). Though the founder may create base-level organizations at the outset to mobilize supporters, these clubs actually serve as centers in which to worship the founder rather than vehicles for grassroots empowerment and citizen participation (Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson 2011, 186–87). Furthermore, these organizations serve to generate “a strong top-down quality in the relationship between citizens and politicians” (*ibid.*). This contrasts markedly with the notion of grassroots empowerment typically engendered by participatory associations (Ellner 2011, 430–31; Samuels and Zucco 2015, 758–59). The underdeveloped state of programmatic and organizational attachments significantly increases the difficulty of routinizing followers’ charismatic bonds upon the founder’s death.

Second, I claim that the symbolic narrative initially crafted by the founder plays a crucial role in establishing the followers’ attachments as a stable, enduring, and inherently personalistic identification with the movement. Each component of the narrative – the sanctification of the founder, the demonization of opponents, and the cultivation of a mission of salvation – solidifies the followers’ charismatic identity and shapes their worldview. The symbolic narrative’s quasi-deification of the founder after his death elevates the followers’ exalted perceptions of him and sustains their hope that a protégé will eventually pick up his mission to rescue them, thereby reinforcing their personalistic relationship with the movement (Steffens et al. 2017, 531). The demonization of the movement’s opponents also imbues the followers with the perception that their livelihood is perpetually under attack, “sharply cleaving the electorate along a personality-based axis of competition” (Roberts 2014, 29). In turn, this crystallization of “in” and “out” groups increases the movement’s cohesion and reinforces followers’ perceptions of the founder’s charismatic appeal (Huddy 2013, 44; Tajfel 1974, 66–67). Lastly, the promise of salvation outlined in the founder’s mission increases feelings of solidarity among the followers and provides their righteous community with a profound sense of purpose that goes beyond a superficial connection with a popular leader. In short, by glorifying the founder, demarcating the movement’s enemies, and emphasizing this mission to transform society, the symbolic narrative offers the followers “a comprehensive view of the world ... [that] aims to shape and purify the collective consciousness, thus bringing a new society and a new humanity here on earth” (Zúquete 2008, 96).

### 2.3.1.2 *Survival*

The personalistic worldview shaped by the founder’s symbolic narrative provides the foundation for the perpetuation of citizens’ charismatic attachments to the movement. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, the followers maintain the founder’s perception of reality after his disappearance by retelling cherished,

intimate accounts of their life-altering experiences during his rule and by preserving cultural symbols such as portraits of the founder and material objects that commemorate his largesse. Like a religious scripture, these stories and symbols uphold the central components of the overarching symbolic narrative: the heroic status of the founder, the cleavage between the followers and their enemies, and the promise of salvation. Through this mechanism, the narrative cultivates a “strong, internalized subjective identity” that transcends “simple group membership” and profoundly shapes citizens’ understanding of the world (Huddy 2001, 149).

In addition to solidifying the followers’ positive identification with the founder and his redemptive mission, the narrative demarcates these individuals from their out-group: all nonbelievers, who are framed by the narrative as enemies of the movement. The sharp delineation between followers and non-followers leads to the development of a strong “anti-identity” among the movement’s opponents (Cyr and Meléndez 2015). Often remarkably diverse in other respects (e.g., ideological preferences and social backgrounds), the members of this group share only their rejection of the movement, its leaders, and its overarching mission. The solidification of strong, opposing identities centered around allegiance or opposition to a charismatic movement further legitimates the movement’s presence and generates a strong, personalistic political cleavage that can overwhelm programmatic and social cleavages (Meléndez 2019; Ostiguy 2009, 4; Roberts 2014, 32). In short, the symbolic narrative, which prizes loyalty to the movement and demonizes opponents, deepens the affective polarization of society, driven by each group’s profound “animosity toward the other side” (Iyengar et al. 2019, 129).

Yet, while the preservation of the symbolic narrative helps sustain the charismatic nature of the followers’ identification with the movement and strengthens the personalistic cleavage, the prolonged absence of the founder can cause citizens’ attachments to become depoliticized over time. Indeed, without a hero to rescue them, the followers may grow disenchanted with politics. Existing studies interpret the waning political relevance of followers’ attachments as the first step toward the routinization into programmatic or organizational linkages. Conversely, I contend that the decline in acute intensity is temporary and that the personalistic cleavage endures. Consequently, the founder’s absence does not necessarily lead to the transformation of citizens’ emotional bonds.

Instead, subsequent politicians have the potential to reactivate the followers’ bonds in their original, deeply affective form and thus repoliticize the personalistic cleavage established by the charismatic founder. Precisely because it is difficult for leaders to change the fundamental *nature* of the followers’ attachments, “it is much easier to shift [the] salience” of those bonds (Huddy 2001, 49). In particular, the followers’ latent desire for a legitimate successor to replace the founder and pick up his mission to transform society remains intact even in the absence of strong leaders. This hope, combined with followers’ ongoing distrust of the movement’s opponents, creates the potential for their attachments to be

strategically reactivated by new leaders. Thus, politicians who convincingly portray themselves as genuine heirs of the founder can appeal to the followers and restore the movement to power by exercising their own personalistic authority.

### 2.3.1.3 *Reactivation*

Insights from political psychology support the notion that new leaders who appear as the symbolic archetype with which the followers identify – that is, with the charismatic founder – can resurrect the political significance of the followers' attachments and take ownership of those ties (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011; Hogg 2001; Huddy 2001, 2013; Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). Specifically, new leaders who “craft and shape” different components of the symbolic narrative can enhance its relevance under new circumstances and thus politically reanimate citizens' identification with the movement (Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019, 3). By signaling their likeness with the founder and promising to save the community of followers from new threats, new leaders can reactivate the followers' charismatic attachments and mobilize support.

To achieve this ambitious task, I argue that new leaders must communicate a specific set of material and symbolic cues to the followers. The material cue substantiates successors' charismatic authority, while the symbolic cue depicts that authority as though directly reincarnated from the founder. Materially, like the founder, successors must demonstrate extraordinary abilities through impressive performance.<sup>2</sup> They achieve this performance by promising and enacting audacious policies that demonstrate their capacity to rescue the historically marginalized followers. Crucially, the policies must favor grandeur and alacrity over ideological consistency (Weber 1922/1978, 242). Indeed, successors must embrace opportunism through enacting policies that prioritize swift relief rather than sustainability – even if those policies contradict the substance of the founder's original programs. In addition, the policies must deliver tangible benefits to the followers to prove successors' superhuman capacities.

More than cold, rational evaluations of the successors' performance, I argue that this material cue signals to movement followers the new leaders' capacity to fulfill the founder's mission by miraculously resolving the people's urgent problems. Thus, in addition to eliciting positive performance evaluations, the material cue should reinvigorate followers' enthusiasm for and *affective*

<sup>2</sup> I do not consider the first condition for the *formation* of personalistic attachments – the leader's direct recognition of a historically excluded group of citizens – to be a separate condition for the *reactivation* of those attachments. Whereas the founder must establish a group of followers from scratch, this group already has a preexisting identification with the movement when successors seek power. Additionally, the symbolic narrative incorporates the followers' sentiment of perpetual exclusion; successors' symbolic ties to the founder and associated narrative are therefore sufficient to reactivate this sentiment among the followers.

attachments to the movement. Furthermore, it should cause the followers to view the successors as more *charismatic* – as noble, selfless heroes capable of providing redemption and a more prosperous future (Pappas 2012, 3).

Second, in symbolic terms, new leaders must depict themselves as reincarnations of the founder committed to resuming his mission of salvation. Specifically, successors must craft and disseminate verbal, auditory, and visual signals that associate themselves with the founder's heroic project and tap into the followers' quest for redemption (Abdelal et al. 2009; Klar 2013; Vavreck 2009). These cues serve as a form of "aesthetic politics" that revive the founder's mission in a contemporary light and mobilize followers to politically reengage with it (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 180). For example, successors might reference the founder's name, use a similar tone of voice, play music associated with the founder, adopt similar dress, make personal contact with the followers as the founder did, or incorporate colors associated with the founder's movement to demonstrate their likeness. These signals, spread through the successor's speech, gestures, and symbols, not only remind followers of their beloved founder, but also reenergize their enthusiasm for his transformative mission. Therefore, the cues can reactivate the followers' identity as part of the founder's "moral community" (Zúquete 2008, 104), distinguish them from the movement's out-group – their (real and imagined) enemies – and confirm the successor as the movement's new champion (Tajfel 1974, 66–67).

In sum, a theoretical examination of charismatic attachments from the perspective of the followers underscores the impressive power of these bonds as well as their potential to endure in personalistic form. The factors involved in the initial formation of these bonds – including the founder's direct recognition of the people's suffering and perceived exclusion, the achievement of bold and initially impressive performance, and the cultivation of a powerful symbolic narrative – overpower programmatic and organizational linkages and provide a firm foundation on which to perpetuate charismatic politics. In particular, the narrative, which celebrates the founder, demonizes opponents, and stresses the mission of redemption, transforms the followers' attachments into an enduring identity that shapes their worldview, informs their expectations of future politicians, and establishes a profound cleavage that divides followers from nonbelievers. In turn, successors who replicate the founder's heroic performance and symbolically associate themselves with the founder's mission to transform society can politically reactivate followers' ties and reclaim the founder's personalistic authority. The following section examines the conditions under which successors can fulfill these conditions to return the movement to power in their own name.

### 2.3.2 The Supply Side: Conditions for New Leaders' Revival of Charismatic Movements

How can new leaders successfully employ the material and symbolic strategies required to reactivate followers' emotional attachments, revive charismatic

movements, and establish independent authority? I argue that three conditions related to both structure and agency shape successors' ability to achieve this feat: their mode of selection, the presence of a crisis, and the style of leadership they adopt to consolidate power.

To begin, I clarify the theoretical criteria that constitute the "successful" revival of charismatic movements and outline the corresponding observable implications. Theoretically, success entails three factors: The new leader must openly identify himself as the heir of the charismatic founder, rise to the position of chief executive, and achieve widespread popularity. Three observable implications should follow the new leader's successful revival of the movement: he publicly associates himself with the movement and its founder, becomes the nation's chief executive through legitimate means, and achieves an approval rating that exceeds 50 percent for a period of at least one year. The third and final implication is important because it suggests that, like the founder, the successor has the capacity to establish and maintain impressive, widespread appeal that reaches beyond the movement's core base of supporters.

The first condition that facilitates the successful revival of charismatic movements concerns the way in which successors emerge. I distinguish between two types of successors based on this condition: anointed successors and self-starters. Anointed successors, who are often directly handpicked by the founder and immediately take over, seek legitimacy based on the founder's explicit endorsement. Rather than boasting independent skill and experience, these successors showcase their submissive loyalty to the founder as their most compelling attribute, openly embracing the position of second fiddle. By contrast, self-starters seek power on their own terms, whenever they feel conditions are favorable. Unlike anointed successors, these leaders do not seek the direct endorsement of the founder; instead, they rely on their own resources to leverage the founder's legacy, depict themselves as true heirs, and revive the movement in their own name.

While the direct endorsement of the beloved founder would appear to advantage anointed successors over self-starters, this bequest of charisma makes it exceedingly difficult for such handpicked disciples to successfully revive the movement. Conversely, self-starter status creates a much more favorable window of opportunity for new leaders to revive charismatic movements under their own authority.

Anointed successors' struggles to reactivate the followers' attachments begin with the reluctance of charismatic founders to share power. Because the founders perceive themselves as unparalleled heroes, they hesitate to groom strong deputies and prospective successors (Weber 1922/1978, 241–46). To guarantee their predominance and legacy of unmatched power, these leaders tend to treat everyone else in the movement as an underling and surround themselves with sycophants who pose little threat to their "divine" authority. Charismatic leaders also marginalize skilled politicians, who present potential threats to

their unmatched superiority (Lasswell 1948, 101–3). The refusal to nourish a worthy replacement, combined with the determination to eliminate skilled competitors, helps founders consolidate their status as supreme protectors. However, it also results in a scarcity of talented heirs. Indeed, when forced to face their mortality, these leaders are much more likely to select a replacement based on allegiance than skill. Having been followers for years, anointed successors face an uphill battle to become respected leaders in their own right. As fervent disciples, they are likely to demonstrate devout loyalty to the founder but are unlikely to possess the independent strength, self-confidence, and personal appeal to tap into the founder's deep bonds with the followers.

Compounding the problem of anointed successors' inadequacy is the time-bound nature of their bid for power. Because they are typically positioned to immediately replace their charismatic predecessors, these new leaders are forced to inherit the founders' bold policies. While the founder may have used such programs to prove his heroic capacities, the programs are likely to be on the verge of collapse by the time anointed successors take power. The reason is that, for these policies to make a truly remarkable impact, the founder uses resources unsustainably, often draining them. Such behavior makes the founder appear extraordinary (Merolla and Zechmeister 2011, 30). Yet, due to the rushed, haphazard, and weakly institutionalized nature of the founder's programs, they are prone to eventual failure. Crucially, the founder delays this outcome by seeking new ways to impress the followers rather than adapting the policies to achieve more sustainable, if modest, progress. This protects the founder's image, yet it leaves anointed successors – who must also demonstrate extraordinary performance to appear worthy of the founder's mantle – in a precarious position.

On the one hand, the initial benefits generated by the founder's actions profoundly shape the followers' loyalty to the movement in the first place. Thus, any attempt by anointed successors to change these revered policies would appear to betray the founder. Fearing reprisal from the followers, these new leaders therefore tend to be excessively risk-averse, strongly preferring to maintain the status quo rather than enacting a change that could frame them as traitors (Weyland 2002, 5). On the other hand, by the time these successors take power, the early success of the founder's programs has long waned. Because these leaders struggle to demonstrate their independent abilities, followers are likely to blame them, rather than the beloved founder, for these failures. Moreover, anointed successors typically have no scapegoat to target for the resulting problems (Loxton and Levitsky 2018, 120). They cannot blame the founder, who represents their sole source of legitimacy and the object of the followers' adoration. Yet, by directly succeeding the founder, there are few, if any, alternative targets to convincingly accuse. Consequently, anointed successors struggle to demonstrate promising potential. In fact, their loyalty to the founder typically constitutes their *only* redeeming quality in the eyes of the followers.

Scholars of routinization agree that anointed successors face an exceedingly high probability of failure (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 500–1; Madsen and Snow 1991, 25–28). However, this fact leads the scholars to conclude that the followers' charismatic attachments inevitably disintegrate. In contrast, I contend that the disappointing leadership of anointed successors has a minimal effect on the profound, affective nature of the followers' bonds with the founder – a point that I will highlight in the case of Venezuela in Chapter 4. Moreover, due to this resilience, I argue that it is possible for subsequent leaders to reactivate the followers' attachments, revive the founder's transformative mission, and consolidate independent authority.

Self-starters have greater potential to revive charismatic movements because they can avoid two key problems impeding anointed successors. Crucially, because self-starters seek power on their own terms rather than requiring the explicit endorsement of the founder, they need not rise immediately after the founder's disappearance. Instead, they often choose to bide their time and seek power several years later. This allows the implosion of the founder's policies and the associated image of inadequacy to fall on someone else, making it easier for self-starters to step out of the founder's overbearing shadow. Furthermore, the ambitious nature of self-starters makes them more likely to exercise the individual agency necessary to adopt a personalistic style reminiscent of the founder. By rising on their own and harnessing independent ambition, skill, and personal charisma, these successors have the capacity to emerge not as subservient followers, but as leaders in their own right who demonstrate their personal talents and attract the movement's supporters.

Even so, the success of self-starters is anything but guaranteed. In fact, most of these aspirational leaders fall short of establishing themselves as powerful heirs of the charismatic founder. Two additional conditions greatly facilitate self-starters' efforts to revive the movement and become its preeminent leader. First, as with the initial formation of charismatic attachments, an exogenous condition – the eruption of an acute crisis – provides an important opportunity for self-starters to reactivate these bonds. Under such circumstances, which are similar to those in which the founder sought power, many people lose their sense of self-efficacy: citizens feel they are unable to control their lives (Madsen and Snow 1991, 14–19; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009a, 27–28; Weyland 2003, 825–26). This is especially true of the followers who, as traditionally marginalized people, are likely to suffer disproportionately. A crisis places these individuals – who are adherents of the founder with great faith in his mission of salvation – in a desperate situation that, once again, causes them to look for a leader capable of rescuing them. It also produces excessive optimism in the followers, increasing their willingness to interpret any indication of positive material performance as evidence of the leader's miraculous powers (Weyland 2003, 825–26). Finally, because a crisis can threaten the livelihood of the followers, it can intensify their identification with the movement and their distrust of outsiders, fostering group cohesion (Huddy 2013, 761; Tajfel 1974, 66–67).

The renewed strength of this identity, combined with feelings of low self-efficacy, intensifies followers' hope for a new hero to save them in a manner reminiscent of the founder and renders it more likely that they see an appealing candidate as the savior they have been waiting for. This condition provides a crucial opportunity for successors to enact the *material* cue necessary for reactivating the followers' charismatic attachments: achieving bold performance to demonstrate heroic capacities.

By itself, however, the existence of a crisis is insufficient to reactivate citizens' charismatic attachments. Self-starters are much more likely to become the movement's new leader if they also fulfill a second, more subjective condition that depends on their individual agency: using their own skill, ambition, and charisma to "perform" as the people's savior by adopting and embodying the founder's personalistic leadership style (Moffitt 2015, 190). In contrast to organization-building and programmatic development – leadership tactics associated with routinization – this strategy better corresponds to the movement's preexisting nature and fulfills most followers' hopes for a new savior. Because it showcases self-starters' charismatic appeal, it resonates deeply with supporters, who desire a new leader to fill the void left by their beloved founder.

To foster their own affectionate bonds with the followers, self-starters draw on supreme communication skills to bypass intermediary institutions and establish frequent, direct contact with the followers (Burns 1978, 20). These politicians also incorporate symbols associated with the founder into their speech, dress, and gestures to appear as genuine heirs (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 137). Finally, they frame their actions as crucial steps for fulfilling the founder's mission of transformation and claim personal credit for any shred of success. By adopting a personalistic leadership style reminiscent of the founder, self-starters can effectively implement the second, *symbolic* cue required for reactivating followers' attachments.

In combination with the impressive impact of their heroic accomplishments amid crisis conditions, self-starters' symbolic gestures can persuade followers to view them as contemporary heroes of the movement. The material and symbolic accomplishments also attract new followers (e.g., from newly marginalized groups or younger generations), expanding self-starters' support base and consolidating their image as truly paradigm-shifting leaders – veritable reincarnations of the charismatic founder.

In sum, new leaders are most likely to successfully revive the movement in their own name by fulfilling three conditions: coming to power as self-starters rather than as anointed successors; taking advantage of a crisis, which primes citizens to look for a savior; and tapping into the followers' attachments by using their own skill and charisma to adopt the founder's personalistic leadership style. These conditions provide successors with the opportunity to enact daring policies to "prove" their superhuman potential while co-opting the founder's legacy to reinvigorate the movement and consolidate follower support. Figure 2.2 illustrates these three conditions.

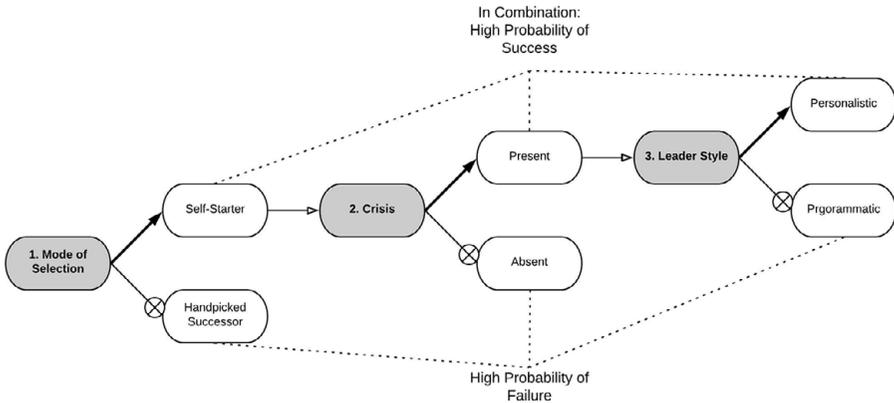


FIGURE 2.2. Flowchart: Conditions for the successful revival of charismatic movements

### 2.3.3 Integrating Perspectives: The Spasmodic Trajectories of Charismatic Movements

Existing studies suggest that the personalistic nature of charismatic movements has little enduring impact on political systems. In many cases, charismatic leaders arise during extraordinary crises, accumulate impressive but short-lived power, and disappear just as quickly, as society returns to its former routine (Weber 1968, 22). Even if a charismatic movement survives, the routinization thesis indicates that the original leader’s charisma has little influence on the movement’s subsequent trajectory, as his magnetic appeal transforms into a depersonalized form of authority. If anything, routinized movements are thought to have a *stabilizing* impact on political systems, as the movements discard their charismatic nature and become institutionalized parties, gradually accumulating programmatic strength over time (Converse 1969; Madsen and Snow 1991, 25–29). In this sense, while charisma acts as a “fulcrum” that facilitates the transition to a new institutionalized system, the system soon becomes autonomous (Tucker 1968, 734).

My theory challenges both of these arguments, contending instead that charismatic movements can dramatically shape the political system for decades after the founder disappears. Integrating the perspectives of followers and leaders, I demonstrate that these movements establish a tumultuous cycle of politics in which periods of intense personalistic leadership, when the movement is *revived*, alternate with periods of leaderless fragmentation, in which the movement is *latent*. Thus, unlike routinized parties, which strengthen party institutions over time, I show that charismatic movements repeatedly undermine those institutions.

On the demand side, followers’ affective attachments lay the foundation for the fitful trajectories of charismatic movements. Because these attachments develop into a resilient political identity that coincides with a prominent

personalistic cleavage, they provide subsequent leaders with the opportunity to win a stable base of support when conditions are ripe. This base may not constitute a majority of voters (often, it encompasses about one-third of the population), but it sustains the movement during latent periods in which the political environment is not receptive to strong, charismatic leadership and the movement is out of power (Taylor 1989, 761). During such periods, followers' attachments to the movement may be "dormant" and the corresponding cleavage depoliticized; in other words, the followers remain passionately devoted to the founder and his mission of salvation, but they feel that there is no current leader who embodies the founder and therefore feel unrepresented in the political arena. Then, when conditions become more conducive to charismatic revival, this reservoir of support provides an important "reserve army" waiting to be mobilized by self-starters who rise up and associate themselves with the founder and movement in their quest for power.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the resilience of charismatic attachments, their profoundly emotional nature – which remains intact over time, even when the attachments are dormant – entices self-starters to adopt personalistic, rather than programmatic or organizational strategies to secure the followers' loyalty. Thus, whereas extant studies argue that the "rootedness" of citizens' loyalty facilitates the development of an institutionalized party (Levitsky 2003; Loxton and Levitsky 2018; Madsen and Snow 1991, 24; Panebianco 1988), I argue precisely the opposite: paradoxically, citizens' resilient attachments can serve to perpetuate the charismatic and volatile character of the movement.

This is because, while citizens' attachments to the movement persevere, leaders who succeed the founder can only revive charismatic movements in an intermittent and temporary manner. Similar to the founder, successors seek power under conditions that occur sporadically. For example, they tend to emerge after the eruption of serious crises, when the followers feel desperate for a hero to pick up the founder's baton. These new leaders are also more likely to succeed when they can take advantage of favorable political and socioeconomic circumstances to enact bold, initially impressive reforms that "prove" their worthiness to the followers. Since such conditions do not occur regularly, charismatic movements cannot unfold in the stable, linear manner of routinized parties.

Furthermore, while the bold performance of self-starters helps secure their place as charismatic heirs of the founder, it also plants the seeds for the eventual decline of their leadership. Symbolically, while portraying themselves as saviors initially resonates with the followers, these leaders struggle to maintain their heroic image for long – especially as the crisis they valiantly promise to resolve begins to subside, along with the followers' acute desire to be rescued (Madsen and Snow 1991, 22–23; Weyland 2002, 44). More importantly, the successors'

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Kurt Weyland for suggesting this term.

seemingly extraordinary “reform packages,” though crucial for proving their charismatic power at the outset, undermine the institutions responsible for ensuring that the policies are enforced over time (Bersch 2016, 207; Levitsky and Murillo 2013, 100). In short, the same strategies that enable self-starters to revive the movement also bring about their political demise.

In sum, the dramatic but unsustainable rise of new leaders, made possible by the followers’ enduring affective loyalty, causes charismatic movements to develop spasmodic trajectories. Thus, whereas existing studies view charismatic leadership as a temporary disruption of “politics as usual,” I argue that the volatility caused by charismatic movements is self-reinforcing. Due to the founder’s charismatic prowess, the followers’ personalistic attachments solidify into a powerful and enduring political identity that divides society along a cleavage based on citizens’ allegiance to or rejection of the charismatic founder. While anointed successors who immediately replace the founder cannot fill his shoes, their poor leadership generates a crisis that causes the followers to search for another savior – a charismatic self-starter – to revive the founder’s mission of salvation and provide them with much-needed relief. Under these conditions, self-starters are well positioned to fulfill the followers’ expectations by embodying the founder’s charismatic authority and implementing audacious policies.

Initially, the policies proposed and implemented by self-starters appear to obliterate the crisis. This reinvigorates citizens’ profound reverence for the movement – deepening the stability of their attachments – reenergizes the personalistic cleavage, and bestows a charismatic sheen on the new leader. Yet, because these policies trade long-term sustainability for early success, they are eventually bound to fail and bring the self-starter down with them. Under these circumstances, many followers become disillusioned with the once-impressive self-starter, their attachments temporarily lose their political intensity, and the movement recedes again. The political system then experiences another power vacuum with no leader to guide the way. Nevertheless, citizens’ quasi-religious devotion to the charismatic founder and his transformative mission persists – as does the aversion of non-followers to the movement. Moreover, the crisis generated by each new successor’s decline generates suffering among the followers that, once again, compels them to look for a new and more convincing replacement to embody the founder’s heroic leadership. This process produces a cycle of deeply entrenched political and economic volatility.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the emergence and revival of charismatic movements. As demonstrated in the figure, the movement emerges after the eruption of a crisis with the ascension of the founder. In this context, the leader exerts charisma by recognizing the suffering of individuals who feel they have been marginalized, vowing to resolve their suffering through the enactment of bold and seemingly miraculous policies, and crafting a symbolic narrative that promotes a quasi-religious mission of salvation. The leader’s charismatic signals resonate deeply with the suffering people, who crave a savior to resolve

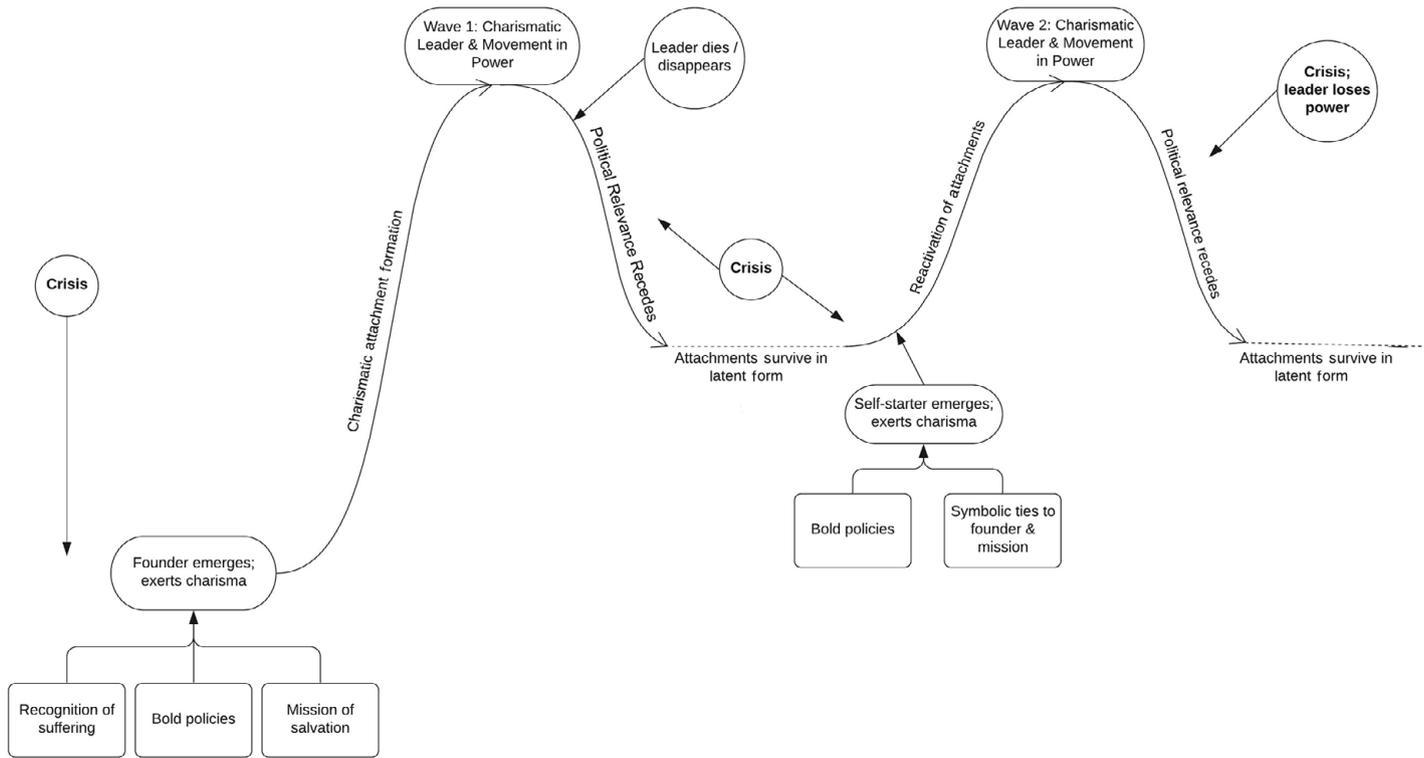


FIGURE 2.3. Illustration of the emergence and revival of charismatic movements

their distress. This results in the establishment of deep, charismatic bonds that catapult the founder and his movement into power. The founder enjoys highly concentrated and personalistic authority until he is unceremoniously removed – either by death (e.g., Juan Perón and Hugo Chávez), force (e.g., Thaksin Shinawatra), or strong pressure (e.g., Alberto Fujimori).

With the founder's disappearance, many followers feel "leaderless," and the political relevance of their attachments declines. Crucially, however, the followers' deeply emotional identification with the movement and founder does not disappear; instead, it persists while becoming politically dormant. During this leaderless period, the movement endures, sustained by followers' resilient identity.

Finally, in the midst of a crisis (whether it is the same crisis that erupted upon the founder's disappearance or a new crisis), an ambitious self-starter rises and depicts himself as a virtual reincarnation of the founder. The self-starter achieves this by expressing her own charisma through promising similarly daring policies and weaving herself into the movement's symbolic narrative as the founder's true heir. This reactivates citizens' charismatic attachments, which enables the self-starter to revive the movement and consolidate power as its new leader. Eventually, the daring yet unsustainable policies of the successor collapse, leading to her demise, and causing the cycle of charismatic movement recession and resurgence to repeat.

#### 2.4 THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT REVIVAL FOR DEMOCRACY

The resurrection of charismatic movements and their spasmodic trajectories have major repercussions for democratic regimes and the party systems that are supposed to sustain them. My emphasis on the persistence of citizens' deeply emotional attachments to these movements, the incentives of new politicians to exploit those bonds, and the dramatic ups and downs that result suggest that the consequences are mainly negative. Thus, the theory developed in this book yields implications and predictions that diverge starkly from the prevailing routinization arguments.

The logic of routinization suggests that the survival – and hence, the institutionalization – of charismatic movements can strengthen democracy in two ways. First, at the individual level, the transformation of charismatic attachments into programmatic or organizational linkages can improve citizens' political representation. Programmatic linkages induce politicians to respond to and advocate for citizens' substantive policy preferences; in turn, citizens hold their politicians accountable based on the leaders' performance with respect to those policies (Kitschelt 2000, 846). Organizational linkages also enhance citizens' representation by mobilizing voters to participate in the political process, become more politically informed, and feel empowered to defend their interests and preferences (Huckfeldt 2001, 425; López Maya and Lander 2011, 59–60).

Second, routinization improves democracy by replacing the founder's concentrated authority with a depersonalized party organization. Scholars have long argued that institutionalized parties strengthen democracy (Aldrich 1995; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1969; Fiorina 1981; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Mainwaring 2018; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Roberts 2014; Schattschneider 1942; Ware 1996). Parties aggregate and represent voters' complex interests more effectively than a domineering leader (Aldrich 1995, 18; Kitschelt 2000, 847–48). Moreover, whereas charismatic leaders enact sweeping reforms that attack the status quo, parties tend to embrace a gradual style of reform that better copes with the complexity of social problems and works within the existing institutional framework (Aldrich 1995, 18–27; Bersch 2016, 209–11). This “problem-solving” approach results in more prudent, sustainable policies that reflect constituents' long-term interests (Bersch 2016, 207). Finally, unlike charismatic movements, programmatic parties' entrenched institutional roots and their incremental approach to policymaking enhance the stability of the political system, limit the outbreak of severe political and economic crises, and minimize the likelihood that a hegemonic leader will return to power (Levitsky and Murillo 2013, 99; Mainwaring 2018, 90).

In contrast to the routinization thesis, I argue that the fitful trajectories of charismatic movements infuse democracies with illiberal tendencies and expose them to serious authoritarian threats. At the individual level, the episodic appearance of strong, personalistic leaders reinforces, rather than weakens, the charismatic nature of followers' attachments. In particular, the impressive but short-lived and irresponsible policies of charismatic successors reinvigorate followers' emotional fervor for the movement and cause them to pledge unquestioning devotion to the successor, whom they view as the founder's true heir. Even though the successor's policies eventually collapse, this initial, seemingly miraculous impact lingers with the followers, confirms their perceptions of the successor as extraordinary, and reinforces their personalistic relationship with the movement. As a Peronist disciple explained to me, “I am Peronist because Perón gave my grandfather his first home, Menem gave my father his first car, and [Néstor] Kirchner gave me my first job.” Others claimed, “Cristina gave me everything”; “Cristina loved all of Argentina; like Eva, she gave to the poor.” Notably, these individuals said nothing of the crises that ultimately unfolded due to each of these Peronist leaders' actions. Instead, they stressed that the leaders single-handedly provided them and their loved ones – the virtuous “people” – with unprecedented benefits. This perception emphasizes the unmediated, asymmetrical, and emotional nature of the attachments between charismatic leaders and their followers.

The resilient charismatic nature of citizens' attachments to the movement erodes their democratic representation in several ways. The attachments urge followers to express loyalty to the leader in the form of unconditional love and compliance. Correspondingly, followers view the act of questioning the leader's

behaviors and performance – even when such actions are, in fact, questionable – as a form of betrayal (Fierman 2020, 106). Not only does this undermine these citizens' right to think critically and speak freely, but it also erodes vertical accountability by minimizing the capacity of the electorate to punish the leader for unfavorable policies and/or poor performance (Love and Windsor 2018, 532).

The reactivation of charismatic attachments by new leaders is also detrimental to citizens because it periodically inhibits the development of programmatic and organizational linkages. Programmatically, because successors are judged based on the immediate, tangible impact of their policies, they implement shortsighted reforms without concern for substantive consistency or sustainability. This opportunistic approach makes for an unstable and unpredictable programmatic trademark that further impedes citizens' capacity to hold their politicians accountable (Flores-Macías 2012, 5; Lupu 2014, 568). As I will detail in subsequent chapters, Carlos Menem's popularity among Peronist followers, despite extreme policy reversals, exemplifies this problem.

In addition to the slippery and unpredictable nature of the policies implemented by successors, their inevitable implosion unleashes frequent crises, driving followers to look for new saviors who can implement similarly audacious reforms to provide some relief. Not only does this recurrent suffering and desperation deepen the cycle of charismatic leadership by making citizens crave another redeemer, but it also undermines the potential for organizational ties to develop among the followers. Organizational ties are important because they make voters feel closer to their party and empowered to defend their interests by participating in the political process and/or electing public servants to represent them (Roberts 2014, 27; Samuels and Zucco 2015, 759). The regular collapse of leaders' bold policies in charismatic movements hinders this type of linkage and thus undercuts the quality of citizens' democratic representation. In sum, charismatic movements promote a "disfigured" form of democratic representation that rests on unfaltering devotion to beloved and overbearing leaders rather than the welfare and interests of the people (Urbinati 2019, 3).

At the system level, charismatic movements divide societies along a political cleavage that prioritizes personalism while undermining programmatic competition and democratic pluralism. In doing so, these movements promote authoritarian leader tendencies, perpetuate institutional weakness, and generate tremendous political and economic volatility. Much literature has identified these problems as common in developing democracies in Latin America and throughout the world (e.g., Bersch 2016; Levitsky and Murillo 2013; Mainwaring 2018; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; O'Donnell 1996; Riedl 2014; Roberts 2014). In countries where charismatic movements have emerged, scholars have even acknowledged the notable pattern of "hyperpresidentialism," institutional weakness, and volatility. For example, various authors refer to the "de facto weakness of institutional veto players" and "serial replacement" of institutions (Levitsky and Murillo 2013, 95, 100), the "bipolar" character of society (Mora y Araujo

2011), the “vicious cycle” of bold and irresponsible policymaking (Bersch 2016, 215), and the “ebb and flow” of populism (Roberts 2007, 3).

My theory of charismatic movement revival provides a novel explanation for the episodic cycle described by these authors. To begin, the recurrent emergence of personalistic successors also perpetuates the extreme concentration of executive authority. To establish a heroic image and ensure their personal grip on power, these leaders manipulate rules and procedures that threaten their almighty authority, declare states of emergency, and rule by decree whenever they can. Successors also strangle voices of dissent by appointing loyal family members and friends as key advisors, marginalizing experienced public servants who might question or usurp the leaders’ authority, and stacking courts and other political institutions with sycophants – a phenomenon I will reveal in detail in the Argentine case in Chapter 7. Finally, to revive the founder’s mission of profound transformation, successors antagonize actors who question their extreme policy agendas. In short, the periodic rise of charismatic successors establishes a political climate marked by hyperpresidentialism, corruption, scant horizontal accountability, extreme polarization, and low tolerance.

Because charismatic movements are revived in this irresponsible fashion, they also hinder institutional development in several ways. First, successive leaders wipe out organizational party structures to ensure programmatic flexibility and secure their personal predominance. Thus, while charismatic movements become all-powerful with the rise of each new leader, their fragile structures decay precipitously when the leader meets his inevitable downfall. Second, successors’ compulsion to declare states of emergency, rule by decree, overpower institutions, and eliminate opposing voices undermines crucial institutional checks on executive power by compromising the independence of the legislative and judicial branches of government. These actions, as well as the construction of loyal ruling coalitions, also cause corruption, inefficiency, and disorganization to proliferate across government agencies. Notably, important studies have highlighted that political outsiders have a similar, deleterious impact on party organization and democracy (e.g., Flores-Macías 2012, 5; Mainwaring 2018, 78; Roberts 2014, 37). My analysis extends these authors’ findings to argue that such organizationally destructive behaviors apply not only to political outsiders, but also to leaders who revive charismatic movements.

In addition to the extreme concentration of executive power and persistent institutional weakness, I contend that charismatic movements generate enduring political and economic volatility. Scholars of Latin America have long recognized the positive relationship between institutional weakness and this type of volatility (Bersch 2016; Flores-Macías 2012; Levitsky and Murillo 2013; Mainwaring 2018; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; O’Donnell 1996; Riedl 2014; Roberts 2014). I go a step further to argue that charismatic movements turn this relationship into a self-reinforcing cycle. During each wave of charismatic leadership, a successor rises and implements irresponsible

policies that are not designed to last. When these sweeping policies reach exhaustion, there is no infrastructure or institutional foundation on which to rebuild. In combination with disastrous policies, the absence of a strong institutional base unleashes political and economic collapse. The fragile structure propping up the leader's party deteriorates, the movement retreats into a state of leaderless fragmentation, and society is left to suffer the consequences. Crucially, while followers may become disenchanted with particular successors when these crises expose the unsustainability of the successors' actions, this disappointment targets the individual leader rather than the overarching movement. In fact, because conditions of crisis intensify the followers' thirst for a savior, the failures of one successor open up the possibility for future self-starters to rise. Over time, the recurrent pattern of personalism and crisis amplifies the damage to citizens' representation, democratic institutions, and societal stability. It is this self-reinforcing nature of charismatic movements that makes them so pernicious.

In conclusion, this book challenges the conventional wisdom that charismatic movements must routinize in order to survive. Instead, I argue that charismatic movements can persist by sustaining their original, personalistic core. However, they do so in a spasmodic fashion that damages the quality of citizens' substantive representation, undermines the development of strong and enduring democratic institutions, and exposes societies to frequent and serious crises. In the chapters that follow, I illustrate how the revival of charismatic movements unfolds by focusing on the prominent cases of Peronism and Chavismo.