

Acknowledgments

I first encountered Peronism as an undergraduate study abroad student in 2007, during the election that would bring Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to power as Argentina's first democratically elected woman president. As I observed the presidential campaign, I marveled at the flexibility and resilience of Peronism. The political movement had endured for more than sixty years, despite the exile and subsequent death of its charismatic founder – not to mention several coups, a ruthless military dictatorship, tumultuous economic crises, and dramatic ideological swings. Through it all, Peronism had maintained its place as Argentina's predominant political force, a fact evidenced in part by Cristina's decisive electoral victory that year. What, I wondered, was the basis of so many citizens' ongoing attraction to this remarkably persistent yet notoriously chameleonic movement?

Four years later in 2013, I was attending Raúl Madrid's graduate seminar on democratic consolidation at the University of Texas at Austin when a fellow student exclaimed in class that Hugo Chávez's death had just been announced. In the years that followed, Venezuelans suffered a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions – a crisis that worsens today as a political stalemate, international sanctions, rock-bottom oil prices, and, most recently, the novel Coronavirus plague the country. That the devastating consequences of this complex humanitarian emergency have fallen on the shoulders of millions of innocent Venezuelans is an unspeakable tragedy.

While Chavismo emerged in a different temporal, geographical, and cultural context than Peronism, in graduate school I noted the striking resemblances between the two movements. Both were founded by a charismatic leader who vowed to rescue the country from a terrible crisis. Both movements underwent ideological transformations that made them difficult to define along programmatic lines. And perhaps most importantly, both movements attracted the fervent adoration of millions of citizens and dominated politics, not only during

the lifetimes of their founders but also in the years after the founders' deaths. This book seeks to explain the remarkable power and persistence of charismatic movements like Peronism and Chavismo and teases out the consequences of their resilience for democracy.

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