The Department of Political Science and the PIRCAT Seminar Series present


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Many democratic electorates are unstable, marked by representational crises and party collapse. In some, new dominant parties espousing radical reforms have mobilized devoted followings (and oppositions); yet, few studies treat this dimension of stabilization within the larger context of change. This project theorizes two classes of electoral instability: ‘structural’ forms capture systematic dimensions of realignment and change, and ‘residual’ instability captures weakly aligned ‘floating voters.’ It analyzes district-level legislative election results in three Latin American countries with new dominant parties—Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela—to seek evidence of reduced residual instability, even as structural instability persists. Using growth curve models, it finds that residual instability increases before the entry of the dominant party. Upon entry, residual instability is reduced, though it rises through an interregnum of disorder within the opposition. Also, in Bolivia, where the new party and the population are strongly indigenous, residual instability declines more where indigenous populations are large.

Thomas Mustillo is an assistant professor of political science at Purdue University. He studies party and party system stability, and is interested in identifying and accounting for distinctive forms of electoral instability. His current research treats the nationalization of electoral support following democratic transitions, the influence of outsider presidential candidates on partisan identification, and the diversity of mobilization strategies that parties use to build support. His work has been published in the Journal of Politics, Political Analysis, Comparative Political Studies, Electoral Studies, and other journals.

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