

The Politics of Succession in Charismatic Movements

In previous chapters, I have argued that understanding the striking persistence of charismatic movements requires careful analysis from the perspectives of both the movement's followers and its leadership. In Part II, I focused on the demand side of charisma, identifying from the followers' point of view how their charismatic attachments to leaders form, survive, and become politically reactivated by new politicians. Chapter 3 analyzed public opinion data from Venezuela to demonstrate how followers' powerful, affective bonds to the charismatic founder emerge and overpower alternative (programmatic and organizational) types of linkages. Chapter 4 turned to focus groups conducted in Venezuela and Argentina to illustrate how the followers' ties cultivate a deeply personalistic identity that persists for years after the founder's disappearance. Chapter 5 provided additional evidence from survey experiments in both countries underscoring the resilience of the followers' personalistic identity. Moreover, the chapter showed that new leaders who signal their potential to fill the founder's shoes by enacting bold policies and symbolically associating themselves with the founder cause the followers to express their identity more strongly and have more support for the new leader. In short, my investigation from the demand side of charisma illustrated that citizens' profoundly emotional attachments to the founder and movement form, persist, and become politically reactivated through a *personalistic* mechanism.

Part III places this micro-level analysis in a historical context by turning to the supply side of charisma, incorporating the perspective of leaders who have

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attempted to tap into followers' bonds to revive charismatic movements and consolidate power. To that end, the present chapter analyzes how some leaders succeeded while others failed to reactivate citizens' attachments and become new standard-bearers of the movement. Whereas existing literature argues that such leaders must invest in building an institutionalized party, I argue that they are more successful when they leverage conditions and strategies that conform to the movement's preexisting, personalistic nature.

As indicated in the previous chapter, successors who enact two strategies can reactivate citizens' attachments and garner support: (1) achieving bold performance to "prove" their extraordinary abilities and (2) symbolically tying themselves to the charismatic founder to appear as heroic reincarnations. In reality, however, many leaders have attempted to implement these strategies and have failed. Under what conditions can successors effectively apply these tactics to revive the movement and consolidate their own personalistic authority?

This chapter demonstrates that three conditions shape successors' capacity to reactivate citizen's attachments. The first, crucial condition involves when and how the new leaders emerge. *Anointed successors*, who are often directly handpicked by the founder and immediately take over afterward, encounter formidable obstacles that almost always prevent them from becoming effective leaders of the movement. Conversely, *self-starters*, who rise on their own years after the founder's death, have greater latitude to convince the followers of their heroic powers and assume the founder's mantle. Thus, self-starter status greatly increases the successors' probability of success.

Yet, simply becoming a self-starter is insufficient to ensure successors' victory. In fact, many self-starters attempting to embody the movement founder's legacy have failed. Instead, two additional factors condition whether self-starters can return the movement to power. First, these leaders need a crisis that generates widespread suffering and makes citizens more likely to crave a new savior capable of rescuing them from their problems. Second, self-starters' willingness and ability to adopt a style that plays into the movement's personalistic nature, rather than focusing on party-building and programmatic development, are crucial for their capacity to access the followers' deep, emotional attachments and portray themselves as champions of the people.

To illustrate the importance of these conditions for successors to revive charismatic movements politically and consolidate power, I trace the process through which six successors across three charismatic movements – Peronism, Chavismo, and Peruvian Fujimorismo – attempted to reanimate their predecessors' legacies. Specifically, I rely on interviews with former leaders, analysts, and campaign strategists; focus groups with movement followers; and secondary literature to assess the experiences of two anointed successors (Isabel Perón in Argentina and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela), two failed self-starters (Keiko Fujimori in Peru and Antonio Cafiero in Argentina), and two successful self-starters (Carlos Menem and the Néstor and Cristina Kirchner couple in

Argentina).¹ In addition to cross-sectional variation provided by the three charismatic movements, this analysis incorporates an overtime component within a single movement by examining at least one successor from Argentina within each paired comparison. In light of this study from the perspective of the leaders, Chapter 7 examines the trajectories of charismatic movements focusing on Argentine Peronism. By investigating the rise and fall of successive charismatic leaders within a single movement over the course of several decades, the chapter reveals how charismatic movements hinder the development of institutionalized party systems over the long term.

6.1 A THEORY OF CHARISMATIC REVIVAL

As stated in Chapter 5, new leaders can politically regenerate a charismatic movement by achieving bold, impressive performance and symbolically associating themselves with the founder. In the following section, I analyze three conditions that impact successors' ability to enact these strategies and reanimate the movement's original, charismatic ethos: their mode of selection, the eruption of a crisis that makes citizens crave a savior, and the successors' adoption of the founder's personalistic style for claiming power.

6.1.1 Mode of Selection

The first condition that shapes successors' capacity to become new standard-bearers of the movement concerns their mode of selection. Some successors depend on the founder's direct anointment. These leaders, who appear to have no choice but to rise up as "chosen ones," typically take power in the immediate aftermath of the founder's disappearance. In contrast, other successors seek a more independent path to power, rising on their own accord when they feel the conditions are conducive to their success – often several years after the founder has gone. Unlike their anointed counterparts, self-starters do not enjoy the founder's explicit blessing. Instead, they must earn the followers' loyalty by using their own tools and strategies to portray themselves as genuine heirs.

On the surface, the founder's direct endorsement would seem to provide anointed successors with a formidable advantage over self-starters. This is because the followers trust the founder's judgment and therefore provide

¹ Néstor and Cristina are widely viewed as joint leaders of a single administration, much like Juan and Eva Perón from 1946 to 1952. Long before Néstor's presidential candidacy, both leaders held political offices in their own right and worked together to increase each other's influence. Moreover, Ollier (2015) indicates, "the Kirchner couple planned to alternate power between themselves – as [Cristina] affirmed – but [Néstor's] death [in 2010] made that plan impossible" (author translation). Finally, many Peronist followers compare Cristina to Eva Perón – whose charismatic appeal greatly strengthened and arguably prolonged Juan's position of power – rather than to Isabel, his uncharismatic third wife and anointed successor. For these reasons, I treat the Kirchners' joint presidencies as a single case.

anointed successors with an automatic base of support even before coming to power. In contrast, self-starters must independently gain national recognition and popular approval. Additionally, elites are more likely to back the founder's chosen successor to minimize costly uncertainty and avoid the instability of a power vacuum (Brownlee 2007, 597).² Conversely, self-starters usually have to compete against other candidates to earn these elites' support.

However, despite these apparent advantages, I argue that anointed successors rarely succeed. Instead, paradoxically, it is the self-starters – who must rely on their own resources rather than directly inheriting the founder's power – who are better equipped to pick up the founder's baton and rise to greatness.

6.1.1.1 *Anointed Successors*

The struggles of anointed successors stem from the inevitable reluctance of charismatic leaders to select a replacement. As Weber stresses, the charismatic founder considers himself an extraordinary individual with unmatched power (1922/1978, 241–46). For this reason, throughout his rule, the founder insists on his own superiority, concentrates rather than shares power, and demands unwavering loyalty from his staff. Moreover, when forced to face his own mortality, the founder often refuses to groom a successor to take his place. Although a talented successor could safeguard the survival of the founder's movement, training a worthy replacement would threaten the founder's superiority. Therefore, to shield his predominance from potential competitors, the founder prefers to designate a loyal and unthreatening successor rather than a skilled heir.³ As faithful disciples accustomed to pleasing the founder, anointed successors stand little chance of outshining him. At the same time, however, these handpicked replacements are typically weaklings who lack the independent ambition and authority necessary to lead the movement in the founder's wake. Thus, while the selection of an inadequate successor protects the founder's superior charismatic image, it also places the movement in a precarious position after his rule has ended by leaving it in the hands of a weakling successor who lacks the founder's skill, willpower, and magnetic appeal.

In addition to anointed successors' lack of skill, willpower, and appeal, the situation they inherit from the founder complicates their prospects for success. This is because, by the end of the founder's rule, his audacious policies are likely to be nearing exhaustion. Since these haphazard and personalistic programs are designed to prove the founder's heroic capacities, they tend to lack the infrastructure to endure. While the performance of the policies may begin to decline during the founder's tenure, he can stave off the negative consequences by

² Specifically, Brownlee argues that “elites will accede to the ruler's choice of heir apparent” in the context of authoritarian regimes where the leader predates the party – as is the case for charismatic founders, who predate their own movements.

³ Self-starters rarely compete for power under these circumstances, as they must face the candidate personally anointed by the beloved founder and are therefore unlikely to win.

draining available resources and using his charisma as a shield (Merolla and Zechmeister 2011, 30). Yet, neither of these tools is available to anointed successors. By the time the disciples take power, the country's resources are likely to be depleted; furthermore, anointed successors have no charisma of their own to protect their reputation. Consequently, these new leaders – rather than the adored founder – are likely to be blamed by followers for the policy failures.

Given the collapse of the founder's policies, anointed successors would do well to initiate drastic reforms. However, the extraordinary initial success of these policies, which remains fresh in the followers' minds, pressures the new leaders to become excessively risk averse. Indeed, the fearful prospect of disappointing the followers and sacrificing fragile legitimacy, which rests entirely on their connection to the founder, prompts handpicked successors to cling to the status quo rather than implementing drastic reforms. To make matters worse, these successors struggle to convincingly blame other actors for the policy failures and resultant crisis. To avoid blaming the beloved founder, even though the fault for these problems lies predominantly with him, they may attempt to place blame on classic enemies of the movement. However, this is unlikely to win much sympathy from the followers. From the followers' perspective, the founder successfully warded off threats from these malevolent opponents; anointed successors' inability to do so only further substantiates their weakness. In short, while the founder's endorsement may initially boost anointed successors' support, multiple obstacles related to skill, timing, and resources prevent these individuals from becoming successful new leaders of the movement.

Existing studies of charisma support the notion that anointed successors struggle to uphold their predecessors' movements. Yet in contrast to my theory, scholars tend to interpret this as evidence that the movements *must* routinize to survive. For example, Kostadinova and Levitt state, "When [the founder] withdraws from politics or dies, the organization faces an enormous challenge: it either replaces the leader with a functionary who is not remotely comparable with the predecessor, or else it splinters or simply dissolves. In either case, electoral loss is a more likely outcome than revival" (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 500–1). Similarly, Madsen and Snow claim, "the ability of any [anointed successor] to maintain a direct tie with his/her following is very much diminished." Thus, "charismatic movements, if they are to survive for an extended period, will *inevitably* develop structure and with that structure will come some decentralization of influence" (Madsen and Snow 1991, 25–28, emphasis added).

I argue that this logic of routinization underestimates the resilience of followers' affective attachments to the founder, which – as demonstrated in Chapter 4 – cultivate a remarkably stable identity (Huddy 2001, 127–56; Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019, 3). Even in the absence of the founder, cultural symbols – such as images of the founder and stories of his/her heroism – can help sustain the identity among the followers (Huddy 2001, 143–4). In fact,

these symbols may trigger especially intense feelings of sadness and yearning when the founder dies, making it very difficult for proponents of routinization to replace the followers' identity with depersonalized partisanship. As I will illustrate in subsequent sections, successors who adopt a strategy of routinization – including Antonio Cafiero in Argentina – overlook the intensity of the followers' enduring, charismatic attachments and therefore fail to tap into this reservoir of deep emotional support.

In sum, anointed successors face overwhelming obstacles that almost always preclude success. But, the resilience of citizens' affective attachments to the founder and movement signals the potential for self-starters to reactivate those bonds, revive the founder's transformative mission, and consolidate independent authority when conditions are more apt. Even so, success is anything but guaranteed. In fact, most self-starters who attempt to revive the movement in their own name fall short of establishing themselves as powerful heirs. The next section assesses the conditions under which self-starters can achieve this objective and carry the movement forward.

6.1.1.2 Self-Starters

Self-starters circumvent two obstacles faced by anointed successors and therefore have greater possibilities for successfully reviving charismatic movements and consolidating power. First, because they have greater freedom to seek power on their own timeline, self-starters can bypass the “status-quo bias” that encumbers handpicked successors; they can also avoid inheriting the crisis caused by the founder's collapsed programs. Thus, not only can self-starters seek power unencumbered by the burdens shouldered by anointed successors, but they can also convincingly blame the crisis on someone else – such as the unfortunate leader who immediately replaced the founder. Second, because these leaders choose when they seek power, they often rise years after the founder's rule, and can sidestep the founder's desire to appoint an underwhelming replacement. While this fact alone does not ensure self-starters' success, it encourages the emergence of more talented and promising candidates capable of exercising greater individual agency and appearing as strong leaders reminiscent of, rather than beholden to, the founder.

Scholars of routinization would claim that these two factors could not revive charismatic movements. Indeed, Weber, who perceives charisma to be fundamentally unstable, would argue that the movement could not live on without transforming into a more stable – traditional or bureaucratic – form of authority during the founder's rule or shortly after his death (1922/1978, 249–51). Shils, who contends that charisma can survive only through inanimate objects, would likewise doubt the possibility that an individual leader could reactivate the movement in personalistic fashion years after the founder's disappearance (1965, 205). Finally, Jowitt, who claims that the charisma of *programs* – but not of *leaders* – can persist, would find it unlikely that a self-starter could claim

the founder's mantle. In short, these scholars would contend that charismatic movements' lack of organizational structure would cause disintegration before self-starters could bring them back to life.

By contrast, I argue that charismatic movements can tolerate much more leadership volatility than institutionalized parties precisely *because* of their weak structure and their firm emotional foundation. As shown in Chapter 4, unlike conventional partisanship, the profoundly affective and personalistic nature of citizens' identification with the movement, which is rooted in the founder's legacy, can endure even if the movement suffers an organizational decline. While the intensity of charismatic attachments may fade during such periods, ambitious leaders who "embody the prototype" of the movement – that is, leaders who signal their likeness to the founder – can politically reactivate citizens' ties and earn their loyalty as new standard-bearers (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 137; Hogg and Reid 2006, 19; Huddy 2001; Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). Indeed, while it is difficult to change the personalistic nature of citizens' identity, the evidence in Chapter 5 suggests that, in some contexts, talented successors can strategically "shift the intensity" of the followers' identity to increase its political significance (Huddy 2001, 148).

6.1.2 Conditions for Self-Starters' Success

Many self-starters emerge, but few succeed in reviving the movement and becoming its preeminent leader. One reason for this failure is that success requires the emergence of a severe crisis, which is an exogenous condition over which self-starters have little control. Similar to the founder's initial rise to power, a crisis is important because it makes citizens hungry for a savior to rescue them. Not only does a crisis intensify *existing* followers' longing for such a leader, but it also makes citizens who were not previously followers of the movement – such as newly marginalized groups and younger generations who may not have directly experienced the founder's rule – look for an exceptional leader to provide them with relief (Madsen and Snow 1991; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009a; Weyland 2003). Just as with the initial rise of the charismatic founder, the eruption of a crisis provides a crucial opportunity for self-starters to prove their independent capacity to establish a heroic image and an impressive base of support.

However, the existence of a crisis does not guarantee the success of self-starters. To connect with and earn the devotion of the followers, these leaders must also adopt the founder's personalistic style. To do so, self-starters must *use* the crisis – they must "perform" and "mediate" it – to prove their heroic power and write themselves into the founder's symbolic narrative as true heirs who are destined to pick up the founder's baton (Moffitt 2015, 189). To achieve this, self-starters must exercise individual agency by relying on their own leadership skills and charisma. Rather than investing time and energy into

party-building, as the routinization thesis would suggest, self-starters must use superb communication skills and magnetic appeal to reignite followers' emotional attachments and claim those bonds for themselves.

Moreover, self-starters must use symbolic tactics to play up the crisis and increase the political relevance of the founder's narrative under new circumstances. Specifically, in addition to portraying themselves as heirs of the founder, self-starters must revive the personalistic cleavage and intensify the polarizing dynamic of the movement by blaming their opponents for the crisis and framing them as menacing enemies of the people. This enhances cohesion among the followers while alienating the self-starters' critics as evil adversaries. Additionally, self-starters must use speech, dress, gestures, and other symbols to restore the relevance of the founder's mission of salvation and frame their actions as necessary for fulfilling this noble promise.

To recapitulate, I claim that the revival of charismatic movements requires a combination of structural conditions and new leaders' agency. Structurally, successors must arise as self-starters to emerge from the founder's overbearing shadow. These leaders must also seek power after the eruption of an acute crisis in order to convincingly portray themselves as saviors capable of meeting the people's needs. Once these two structural conditions have been met, self-starters must then rely on their own skills and charisma to embody the founder's personalistic style. By fulfilling all three of these conditions, successors are much more likely to return the movement to power and declare themselves true heirs and heroes in their own right.

6.2 TESTING THE THEORY: CHARISMATIC SUCCESSORS IN LATIN AMERICA

To test my theory of charismatic revival against the routinization thesis, I focus on Peronism, Chavismo, and Fujimorismo, the three most prominent charismatic movements in recent Latin American history. Specifically, I examine three sets of successors from across these movements: two anointed successors, two failed self-starters, and two successful self-starters.⁴ To begin, I analyze Isabel Perón and Nicolás Maduro, the only two anointed successors from these movements. Subsequently, I explore the paths of two failed self-starters: Keiko Fujimori and Antonio Cafiero. While many self-starters have attempted and failed to revive charismatic movements, I analyze Fujimori and Cafiero because their candidacies were widely considered as viable and competitive. Finally, I analyze the complete set of successful self-starters from these cases: Carlos Menem and the Kirchners in Argentina.

Using interviews with former leaders and campaign experts, original campaign materials, newspaper articles, and secondary sources, I trace the process

⁴ By definition, successors who seek to revive the movement must openly identify with its label.

through which each set of leaders failed or succeeded to return the movement to power and assess the relevance of the three conditions outlined in my theory. Next, I return to the focus groups discussed in Chapter 4 to highlight followers' personal impressions of the founder and subsequent leaders.⁵ While the focus group participants do not constitute a representative sample of followers, their discussions provide multiple accounts that corroborate my leader-focused research regarding the strengths and weaknesses of different types of successors (Cyr 2016, 247).

As outlined in Chapter 2, I use three criteria to distinguish "success" from "failure." First, to embody the founder's legacy, I argue that successors must publicly associate themselves with the founder; otherwise, they may be perceived as independent leaders keen to start a new movement that threatens to overshadow the beloved founder. Second, like the founder, successors must rise to the chief executive office. Crucially, declaring themselves as heirs of the founder and becoming the nation's leader is insufficient; after all, most anointed successors achieve this without any real accomplishment of their own. To become true heirs of the founder, successors must also establish a strong popular mandate by drawing mass support in a sustained way once they are in office. To indicate the establishment of mass support, I turn to executive approval ratings.⁶ In particular, I argue that successful leaders must secure the approval of a majority of the population (at least 50 percent) for at least one year in executive office. Table 6.1 displays the six successors analyzed here with their scores for each of the three criteria.

6.2.1 Anointed Successors: Isabel Perón and Nicolás Maduro

I begin by assessing the trajectories of two anointed successors: Isabel Perón, who inherited the Argentine presidency in 1974 from her husband, Juan Perón; and Nicolás Maduro, whom moribund Hugo Chávez handpicked as president of Venezuela in 2013. While both Isabel and Maduro became chief executives of their respective countries, their support rapidly diminished shortly after they took office. After two disastrous years, Isabel was ousted by a military coup in 1976, while Maduro became an authoritarian leader who managed to cling to power using repression rather than charisma. While both leaders assumed the top office, they projected an uninspiring symbolic image and failed to reform their predecessors' collapsing policies. The weak leadership of these anointed successors led to the temporary deflation of the movement; however, citizens' charismatic attachments survived, setting up

⁵ Because focus groups were not conducted in Peru, this type of evidence is not used for the case of Keiko Fujimori.

⁶ Approval ratings are drawn from the Executive Approval Database, Carlin et al. 2016, available for download at www.executiveapproval.org.

TABLE 6.1. *Scoring of successors under analysis: Anointed successors, failed self-starters, and successful self-starters*

Successor Type	Leader Name (Country)	Public Tie to Founder	Chief Executive	Highest Annual Exec Approval
Anointed Successor	Isabel Perón (Argentina)*	Yes	Yes (1974–76)	–
	Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela)	Yes	Yes (2013–present)	37.91 (5/2013–4/2014)
Failed Self-Starter	Antonio Cafiero (Argentina)	Yes	No (1989 campaign)	–
	Keiko Fujimori (Peru)	Yes	No (2011, 2016 campaigns)	–
Successful Self-Starter	Carlos Menem (Argentina)	Yes	Yes (1989–99)	60.13 (8/1989–7/1990)
	Néstor Kirchner (Argentina)**	Yes	Yes (2003–7)	69.00 (6/2003–5/2004)
	Cristina Kirchner (Argentina)***	Yes	Yes (2007–15)	58.84 (1/2011–12/2011)

* As her husband's vice president, Isabel Perón became president upon his death rather than being elected. Her approval numbers are not listed due to the scarcity of public opinion data from this tumultuous period in Argentine history. Nevertheless, her broad unpopularity as president is widely documented (e.g., Madsen and Snow 1991, 134; McGuire 1997, 165–70), suggesting that her approval numbers would have fallen below the 50-percent threshold.

** Néstor Kirchner and Carlos Menem advanced to a second round of presidential elections in 2003. Due to Kirchner's overwhelmingly superior numbers, Menem dropped out of the race before elections were held.

*** Though Cristina immediately succeeded Néstor as president, I consider her as a self-starter rather than an anointed successor because, from their initial rise to national executive power in 2003, the two ambitious leaders planned a *joint project* to become Argentina's new saviors.

the future possibility of movement revival by self-starters – an outcome that routinization would not predict.

6.2.1.1 *Isabel Perón*

As will be described in further detail in Chapter 7, Juan Perón rose to the presidency in 1946 and consolidated a powerful charismatic movement alongside his second wife, Eva, by granting unprecedented benefits to millions of socioeconomically and politically excluded citizens. Though Eva died of cancer in 1952 and a military coup exiled Juan to Spain in 1955, outlawing Peronism for nearly two decades, Perón remained Argentina's most prominent political figure throughout his lifetime. Indeed, during his exile (1955–73), he influenced politics through proxy leaders and his unmatched support base.⁷

Perón frequently spoke of creating an “organized community” of followers, suggesting that his movement might one day routinize (Perón 1974). In practice, however, he undermined the organizational dimension of his movement by allowing the proliferation of ideological rifts within it and maintaining unchallenged personalistic control over it (McGuire 1997, 50; Page 1983, 161). These tactics deepened the “chameleonic” nature of his political brand and prevented the rise of powerful protégés while reinforcing his position as supreme leader (Ciria 1974, 30). Indeed, personal loyalty to Perón constituted the only thread uniting his otherwise bitterly divided followers. Upon returning to Argentina to serve a third presidential term in 1973, he displayed reluctance to share his power. Despite old age and a delicate political and economic context, he appointed his most faithful servant, Isabel, as his vice president and eventual successor (McGuire 1997, 164). By nominating a complete political novice rather than a more experienced leader, he showed his desire to dominate the movement.

As her husband's reluctant successor, Isabel lacked the political familiarity and skill to maneuver her government out of the crisis and claim her place as the new leader of Peronism. Instead of reaching out to console the devastated masses, she failed to take ownership of the deep bonds her husband had cultivated. Thus, while followers expressed euphoria upon Juan's return to Argentina in 1973, they viewed Isabel as weak and out of touch. In fact, her presidency was widely perceived as a “leaderless situation,” and voters “assumed that she would not be able to remain, even as a figurehead” for the movement (Di Tella 1983, 69).

Isabel's failure to inspire the followers was compounded by her inability to reform her husband's dysfunctional policies of economic nationalism. While these policies had once created impressive growth and delivered prosperity to millions of Argentine workers, they were already approaching exhaustion when

⁷ During this period, presidents owed their victories to Perón's endorsement or the abstention of his followers; military dictators seized power in response to elected presidents' inability to sustain a popular mandate and stable government in Perón's absence (Kirpatrick 1971, 49–78).

Perón was exiled in 1955. Because Perón had prioritized the short-term impact of the policies over their sustainability, the policies were inherently “self-limiting” (Waisman 1987, 256). Thus, as the economy began to stagnate in the early 1950s, the policies generated a distributional conflict between the productive agricultural sector and the unproductive industrial sector; this, in turn, created a crisis of “illegitimacy and political instability” (ibid.). Because subsequent regimes struggled to implement adequate reforms, they were held responsible for the declining trade, expanding debt, increasing inflation, low growth, and political volatility that resulted.

This inability of non-Peronist regimes to address the crisis in the 1955–73 period provided Perón with a second opportunity to prove his heroic power upon returning to Argentina in 1973. At the time, he proposed the “Social Pact,” a series of bold programs – enhancing Argentina’s economic independence from the United States, freezing inflationary prices, and increasing workers’ wages – to return the country to the prosperity of his prior rule (Pion-Berlin 1983, 59). As before, these policies *initially* delivered favorable results and sustained Perón’s superhuman reputation for the rest of his life, which lasted just nine months, until July 1, 1974. Shortly thereafter, the policies quickly imploded, causing a grave crisis that Isabel was forced to shoulder (ibid., 59–60).

Despite the urgent need for reform, Isabel feared that altering her husband’s policies would impose a painful cost on the followers and demonstrated little desire to undertake this challenge. Instead, in a half-hearted effort to maintain the support of her husband’s increasingly fractious rank and file, she promised to continue rather than reform his deeply problematic platform of economic nationalism through wage hikes and industrial expansion (Waisman 1987, 280). This strategy soon shattered the economy, forcing Isabel and her closest advisor, José López Rega, to enact a series of stabilization plans that substantially decreased workers’ real incomes (McGuire 1997, 167). Consequently, Lorenzo Miguel, the leader of the General Confederation of Labor (*Confederación General del Trabajo* – CGT), launched a crippling, two-day general strike against Isabel’s government. Unable to recover from this political and economic disaster, Isabel was ousted by a military coup on March 24, 1976 (ibid., 170).

Isabel’s weak image and utter lack of leadership led Peronist followers to view her as a tremendous disappointment rather than her husband’s genuine heir. Thus, while their loyalty to Perón and Eva survived, their attachments never transferred to Isabel. In fact, “Isabel is not Perón” and “there is only one Evita” became common refrains among the Peronist left during Isabel’s administration (Gillespie 1982, 164). Decades later, in 2016, followers in focus groups with the author emphasized their distaste for Isabel. They stated, “I am Peronist of [Juan] Perón”; “I am an *original* Peronist”; “I follow Eva and her masses, but Isabel was a disaster”; and “Isabel was chaos.” Crucially, while her rule gave way to a military dictatorship in March 1976, these

statements suggest that followers disassociated Isabel from Perón, thereby preserving their attachments to his heroic legacy.

6.2.1.2 *Nicolás Maduro*

As described in Chapter 3, Hugo Chávez took Venezuela by storm upon rising to the presidency in 1999. During his fourteen-year rule, he took drastic measures to destroy the unpopular, corrupt, and dysfunctional regime he replaced and establish his image as a true champion of the poor. Although the dramatic impact of his reforms depended on unsustainably high oil prices and drastic overspending, they provided unmatched benefits to millions of citizens and solidified Chávez's status as their everlasting savior. Correspondingly, when he revealed that he had cancer on July 1, 2011, he assured his followers that he would combat the illness; in the meantime, while undergoing treatment in Cuba, he promised he would continue to personally govern the country rather than appoint a successor, emphasizing his irreplaceability (Primera 2011). Thus, when he announced his cancer was terminal in December 2012, he appeared as surprised and devastated as his followers that he would not live on to serve as their immortal protector. As though resigned to the fact that any successor would be inadequate, Chávez anointed Nicolás Maduro, an obsequious follower with scant ambition or domestic political experience, as his heir. The choice surprised many within and outside of Chavismo. However, the anointed successor's lack of skill made Chávez appear even more impressive; furthermore, Maduro had devoted years of service to Chávez – a characteristic of paramount importance to the founder (Corrales and Penfold 2015, 160).

Since becoming president in 2013, Maduro has utterly failed to claim true leadership of Chavismo. His attempts to legitimate his authority have hinged exclusively on his appointment by Chávez rather than the establishment of an independent charismatic image. For instance, he has declared himself the “son of Chávez,” referenced the founder constantly in speeches, and covered public spaces with images of his predecessor. Perhaps as a result, support for Maduro remains at about 28 percent – a surprisingly high figure, considering his catastrophic mismanagement of the economy and society in general (GBAO Strategies 2019). Nevertheless, whereas Chávez relied on his captivating charisma to consolidate support, Maduro has used despotic tactics to remain in power, including jailing opposition politicians, outlawing (or holding fraudulent) elections, and repressing civilians (Freedom House 2018). Furthermore, his claims to have assumed the founder's mantle appear absurd to many followers, who have been forced to endure hyperinflation, extreme shortages of basic goods, and even starvation (Corrales and Penfold 2015, 171; Gill 2017).

Like Isabel Perón in Argentina, Nicolás Maduro has also proven unwilling and unable to transform his predecessor's foundering policies. To sustain the flow of benefits to his followers during his rule, Chávez squandered the state's

oil profits and recklessly interfered with the economy. Maduro therefore inherited an administration that severely undermined economic production and embraced drastic overspending, triggering inflation, shortages, corruption, and crime. Despite these problems, the successor's only political asset – Chávez's personal endorsement – made him unwilling and unable to introduce desperately needed reforms, which has caused a devastating crisis. Furthermore, Maduro's attempts to blame the domestic opposition politicians and foreign "imperial" powers, such as the United States and Europe, have appeared thoroughly unconvincing – even to followers, who have long distrusted these "enemy" groups. Consequently, many Chavistas view the new leader as responsible for their suffering. As several followers expressed in focus groups conducted in 2016, "Maduro is a bad Chavista"; "we are more Chavista than Maduro is"; and "what a shame that Maduro is the one representing Chavismo today." Because of Maduro's refusal to reverse policy failures, about half of Chávez's followers opposed Maduro in 2015, two years into the anointed successor's rule (Briceño 2015a).

Several scholars have taken Maduro's failure as evidence that Chavismo has died – a testament to the fleeting nature of charismatic movements (e.g., López Maya 2014, 68–87; Rondón 2017). Conversely, I argue that the stark contrast between Chávez and Maduro has caused many followers to *reinforce* their attachments to the former while distancing themselves from the latter. Indeed, half of Chávez's most devoted followers – about 16 percent of the electorate – identify as "Chavistas *no Maduristas*" (Briceño 2015a). Moreover, a 2020 poll by Venezuelan firm Datanálisis indicates that while Maduro's approval rating stands at a dismal 13 percent, fully 62 percent of voters maintain favorable views of Chávez (Datanálisis: Encuesta Nacional Ómnibus 2020). And in focus groups conducted with Chavista followers in 2016, participants expressed disdain for Maduro while declaring their love for Chávez and expressing faith that a more competent successor will appear someday: "I am with the future, and we are going to get it with Chavismo"; "one looks to the future and one sees Chávez." Others declared that their future leader should be "charismatic," "honorable," "capable of restoring order," and "100 percent Chavista." Contrary to the logic of routinization, wherein citizens' bonds must transform into depersonalized organizational linkages, the survival of citizens' affective ties to Chávez suggests the potential for his movement to one day reemerge in its original charismatic form under a more appealing successor.

6.2.2 Failed Self-Starters: Keiko Fujimori and Antonio Cafiero

Self-starters are more likely to restore charismatic movements to power because they control their own timeline and can therefore steer clear of the founder's desire to marginalize skilled leaders who might steal the limelight and escape blame for the collapse of his policies. But, being a self-starter alone does not guarantee success. These leaders must also rise during a crisis to appear as new

saviors and portray themselves symbolically as new standard-bearers devoted to reviving the founder's mission to transform society. I analyze two self-starters who failed to fulfill one of these two conditions: Keiko Fujimori in Peru, who tried to rise in the absence of crisis conditions, and Antonio Cafiero in Argentina, who chose a strategy of routinization rather than adopting a personalistic approach.

6.2.2.1 *Keiko Fujimori*

In June 1990, political outsider Alberto Fujimori was elected president of Peru during a period of hyperinflation and insurrection. He immediately implemented drastic policies of economic stabilization, bringing hyperinflation to a screeching halt, and soon launched a campaign to combat the insurgent groups (Weyland 2002, 150–58). Combined with his personal allure and his inspiring mission to “reengineer Peru,” these bold initiatives helped him consolidate impressive popular support (Carrión 2006, 126–49). Devotion to Fujimori proved especially strong among the poor, who had suffered the most from the economic crisis and political violence prior to his rule. Indeed, his popularity remained well above 50 percent in 2000, ten years after his rise to power, when he won a third (unconstitutional) term (Arce and Carrión 2010, 37–38).

While he retained a large and devoted following, Congress threatened to depose Fujimori following his electoral victory in 2000, citing accusations of corruption and misconduct. Reluctantly, he resigned that November while in Japan and remained in self-imposed exile until 2007, when he was imprisoned for human rights abuses committed during his rule (*ibid.*; Levitsky and Zavaleta 2016, 433). When he was forced to step down in 2000, Fujimori's personalistic legacy left the country in a leadership vacuum. In fact, in subsequent years, Peru endured a series of disliked presidents characterized by “broken promises” (Dargent and Muñoz 2016, 147).

Over time, however, Keiko Fujimori, Alberto's daughter, demonstrated her potential to return Fujimorismo to power and become its new champion.⁸ When she competed in presidential elections in 2011 and 2016, she built a larger and more consistent support base than any other political party. In fact, in 2016, she claimed 39.9 percent of the vote in the first round – nearly twice as much as the runner-up candidate (Dargent and Muñoz 2016, 145–47).

To build this support, Keiko first established herself as a self-starter. As the daughter of the exiled founder, in some ways she appeared to be her father's handpicked heir. Indeed, she made her political debut as First Lady of Peru during her father's presidency, after her parents had separated. Years later in 2011 when she first sought the presidency, many speculated that Alberto had helped orchestrate her campaign from prison (Romero 2011). In turn, Keiko leaned heavily on her flesh-and-blood connection to Alberto throughout the

⁸ I am grateful to Carlos Meléndez for sharing his insights on the case of Keiko Fujimori.

2011 campaign to enhance her popularity among his followers, calling him “the best president in Peruvian history” (Loxton and Levitsky 2016, 127).

Despite her close relationship with her father, however, Keiko’s experience in the 2011 and 2016 presidential campaigns indicates that she earned her status as a self-starter. First, while she took advantage of her familial connection to boost her popularity, her father never explicitly designated her as his successor. Rather than leaning on his overt endorsement, she sought the presidency on her own, a full decade after his resignation. Moreover, Keiko ran under a party label of her own creation, Popular Force (*Fuerza Popular* – FP) (Levitsky 2011).⁹ In doing so, she injected fresh energy into the movement and added her own “personal stamp” to expand its political influence (Meléndez 2019; Vergara 2018, 67).

In contrast to anointed successors, Keiko also navigated an increasingly tense personal relationship with her father during her quest for power (Meléndez 2019). Indeed, unlike political advisers who had faithfully served Alberto and continued to display sycophantic tendencies throughout the 2000s – such as Martha Chávez, his handpicked candidate for the 2006 presidential election – Keiko exercised independent ambition that sometimes conflicted with and threatened to overshadow her father. For instance, whereas Chávez unabashedly praised even the most unsavory aspects of Alberto’s legacy, Keiko carefully tied herself to his most popular accomplishments – namely, stabilizing the economy, restoring law and order, and lifting up the poor – while distancing herself from his more violent and authoritarian tendencies (“Martha Chávez Aplauda Ataque a Monumento ‘Ojo que Lloro’” 2007; Meléndez 2019).

In the most overt demonstration of her independence, during her 2016 campaign, Keiko publicly vowed *not* to pardon her father for his past crimes and release him from prison if elected (Vergara 2018, 83). In contrast, Keiko’s brother, Kenji, remained faithful to his father, fiercely advocating for his release from prison – which finally occurred in December 2017 (*ibid.*).¹⁰ While this family drama added to the growing rift between Keiko and Alberto, it helped the former secure her hard-won position as the movement’s new leader. Indeed, the number of “Keikistas” within the movement – who support both her father’s legacy and her new leadership – continued to grow even as she distanced herself from him (Levitsky and Zavaleta 2016, 436–37).

While positioning herself as a self-starter, Keiko also fulfilled the second condition for successful movement revival by adopting key elements of her father’s personalistic style to win over traditional Fujimoristas. For example, rather than campaigning on a specific platform, she made sweeping promises to reverse economic stagnation and meet the needs of citizens “tired of waiting for

⁹ During her 2011 campaign, her party label took the name of *Fuerza 2011*, which was subsequently altered to become *Fuerza Popular*.

¹⁰ In January 2019, a Supreme Court judge overturned Fujimori’s pardon, returning the leader to prison (“Peru’s Fujimori, Pardon Annulled, Forced Back to Prison” 2019).

solutions to their pressing problems” (Dargent and Muñoz 2016, 152). She also donned her father’s approachable, “down-to-earth” style and traveled the country to forge direct ties with voters as Alberto had years earlier.

Importantly, even as she consolidated personalistic appeal, Keiko also tried to establish a party organization more than any other presidential candidate. Her new party, FP, organized local-level committees throughout Peru, and nominated candidates for subnational elections under its label (Meléndez 2019). Perhaps as a result, FP achieved some electoral successes, including an absolute majority in Congress in 2016 with 36 percent of the legislative vote (Birnbaum 2017; Tegel 2017).

Despite these efforts, Keiko prioritized her charismatic allure over her party-building efforts at crucial moments. During her presidential campaigns, she created a “personalistic vehicle” that overshadowed her nascent party (Dargent and Muñoz 2016, 152). Her supporters also came to call themselves “Keikistas” rather than FP partisans, indicating their loyalty to the individual over the party. In short, Keiko’s “success at party-building [was] far from guaranteed,” whereas her image as a fresh leader capable of delivering prosperity to the suffering masses – as her father did two decades earlier – played to the personalistic foundations of Fujimorismo (*ibid.*, 155).

Though Keiko achieved self-starter status and adopted an engaging personalistic style, she narrowly lost the elections in both 2011 and 2016, failing to secure the presidency. Contrary to the successful self-starters discussed subsequently, she did not manage to win an impressive, landslide victory over her opponents. Thus, she was unable to restore her father’s movement and exercise power as the people’s new savior.

I argue that Keiko failed due to the absence of a crisis – another crucial condition for self-starters’ success. An economic boom in the mid-2000s, driven by international demand for Peru’s copper, gold, and natural gas, generated substantial growth and acted as a “buffer against social malaise” (*ibid.*, 147). Indeed, this boom, combined with solid macroeconomic policies and structural stability, enabled the country to achieve high growth, low inflation, and substantial poverty reduction in the post-Fujimori period. Peru’s average GDP grew at an annual rate of 6.1 percent between 2002 and 2013, while poverty fell from 52.2 percent to 26.1 percent between 2005 and 2013, and extreme poverty fell from 30.9 percent to 11.4 percent during the same period (*The World Bank in Peru: Overview*, April 2019). Consequently, while Peruvians expressed disappointment in their political leaders, they did not desperately crave a hero as they did prior to Alberto’s rise in 1990. Keiko’s promises to once again “reengineer Peru” and restore prosperity did not resonate enough with the public to catapult her into power.

6.2.2.2 *Antonio Cafiero*

In Argentina, Antonio Cafiero, a talented and experienced leader, had the potential to become a successful self-starter when he competed in the presidential

primaries for the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ) in July 1988. By then, memories of Isabel's failures had been overshadowed by the even-worse performance of the military during the 1976–83 dictatorship. Moreover, seeking power fifteen years after Perón's death, Cafiero rose as an independent leader and not as a submissive protégé of the founder. Without the inherent weaknesses of anointed successors, Cafiero's path to power seemed more promising than that of his Peronist predecessor.

Additionally, Cafiero sought power amidst a terrible economic crisis, further enhancing his prospects for becoming the new leader of Peronism. The outgoing president from the (non-Peronist) Radical Civic Union (UCR) party, Raúl Alfonsín, had failed to stimulate growth, reduce inflation, or ameliorate the country's ballooning debt. Despite Alfonsín's attempts to stabilize the economy, unemployment worsened, wages stagnated, and prices soared, increasing social conflict while destroying his popularity (McGuire 1997, 185–86). This provided a unique opportunity for Peronist self-starters such as Cafiero to seek power: with Alfonsín delegitimized and the crisis worsening every day, citizens grew eager for a new leader to rise up and relieve their misery (Weyland 2002, 138). As Cafiero's grandson, Francisco Cafiero, stated, Argentines were desperate for “a leader to put an end to the economic cancer...to take action to confront the crisis.”¹¹

Despite these advantages, Cafiero failed to reactivate followers' attachments and secure the Peronist presidential nomination. I argue that this is because he did not play to the movement's charismatic foundations. Rather than promising to save his people through whatever means necessary, as Perón had done, Cafiero committed himself to the “Peronist Renovation,” an effort to transform Peronism into a strong, institutionalized party (Cafiero 2011).¹² He adopted this approach because, in line with scholars of routinization, he believed that “Peronism could only survive . . . to the extent that it clearly assumed the form of a *party*, detached itself from authoritarian traditions, and stopped trying to center itself around a plebiscitarian leadership that had not existed since Perón's death” (McGuire 1997, 167–68, emphasis added).

While Cafiero's attempt to transform the movement into an institutionalized party appealed to middle-class intellectuals, it distanced him from traditional, popular-sector (lower- and lower-middle-class) Peronists, who simply wanted a strong leader to resolve their pressing problems.¹³ Furthermore, Cafiero's lack of affinity with Perón's personalistic legacy caused the followers to perceive the

¹¹ Author interview with Francisco Cafiero, Secretary of International Affairs for Defense and grandson of Antonio Cafiero, April 5, 2016.

¹² Although the PJ was already technically a political party, it suffered tremendous institutional weakness and was historically subordinated to the power of the overarching movement and of Perón himself (see McGuire 1997, 1–3).

¹³ Author interview with Alberto Kohan, Menem's political adviser, former Cabinet Chief, and Minister of Health, November 4, 2016.

successor and his team as “a bunch of urbane intellectuals mesmerized by an exotic leftist ideology perhaps appropriate for Sweden or Germany but alien to Argentina’s nationalist tradition” (McGuire 1997, 211). Cafiero’s dry communication style also projected “formality, wordiness, and lukewarm progressivism,” further alienating him from traditional Peronist followers (*ibid.*). In fact, compared to his alluring competitor, Carlos Menem, Cafiero was so unpopular with the masses that, a week before the July 1988 primaries, pundits predicted that his victory over Menem would depend on *low* turnout among Peronist voters (“Evita votaría a Cristina, Perón votaría a Taiana, y los dos juntos a Unidad Ciudadana” 2017). In the end, Cafiero suffered a humiliating defeat: to the chagrin of PJ elites, he lost in 19 of 24 electoral districts, by a total margin of more than 100,000 votes (“Menem, Candidato Presidencial Del PJ” 1988).¹⁴ As the incumbent Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires – a traditional Peronist stronghold – Cafiero even lost his own province to Menem by over 23,000 votes! (“Replanteo en el Justicialismo tras el triunfo de Carlos Menem” 1988).

In brief, Cafiero’s failure to win the Peronist nomination for president demonstrates the unviability of routinization for reviving charismatic movements. His commitment to party institutionalization over the cultivation of an inspiring, charismatic image prevented him from appearing as Perón’s heroic descendant. Though he was a self-starter in a time of crisis, he attempted to create a programmatic organization rather than simply playing to Perón’s personalistic legacy. This strategy of routinization alienated followers and marked Cafiero as an elite politician rather than a hero capable of reviving Perón’s ambitious mission to transform society.

As the experiences of Keiko Fujimori and Antonio Cafiero illustrate, self-starters fall short of reanimating charismatic movements when they fail to meet both of the essential conditions. First, as Keiko’s unsuccessful quest for power shows, leaders who emerge in the absence of crisis cannot leverage citizens’ desperation for a new savior and thus struggle to establish a charismatic image reminiscent of the founder. Second, Cafiero demonstrates that self-starters who attempt to routinize the movement into a structured party rather than filling the absent founder’s shoes fail to tap into supporters’ profound, affective bonds and thus struggle to cultivate their own charismatic allure.

6.2.3 Successful Self-Starters: Carlos Menem and the Kirchners

I now turn to two sets of Argentine self-starters who successfully revived Peronism: Carlos Menem, who governed from 1989 to 1999, and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, who ruled from 2003 to 2015. Both Menem and the

¹⁴ The electoral districts include the country’s twenty-three provinces plus the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires.

Kirchners dominated the movement, kept its organization weak, and demonstrated through stark policy reversals that they had little interest in programmatic routinization. Instead, these self-starters focused on embodying the movement's preexisting, personalistic nature and linked themselves symbolically to the founder. Consequently, both sets of leaders convincingly portrayed themselves as genuine heirs of the founder, reinvigorated citizens' attachments, and restored the movement to power under their own charismatic authority.

6.2.3.1 *Carlos Menem*

Carlos Menem defied the expectations of party elites by securing the PJ presidential nomination in July 1988 against Cafiero, the favored candidate, and becoming president the following year. Subsequently, Menem established a new chapter of Peronism, giving the movement new life and becoming the most beloved leader of Argentina since Perón. Indeed, Menem swept the May 1989 elections by more than ten points; enjoyed approval ratings as high as 70 percent within two years of assuming office; successfully revised the constitution to allow for reelection; and won a second term in 1995 by a margin of more than twenty points (Carlin et al. 2016).

In addition to consolidating impressive popularity, Menem's charismatic leadership revitalized Peronism as the country's predominant political force. In fact, while deliberately undermining the efforts of Cafiero and the "Peronist Renovation" to institutionalize the movement – a process I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7 – he inspired followers to express their attachments with renewed strength. This is reflected by the dramatic increase in the proportion of citizens who expressed their identification with the movement after his rise to power. According to public opinion surveys from local firms, whereas about 16 percent of citizens openly identified with Peronism in 1985, more than 40 percent identified themselves with the movement in 1992, just three years into Menem's presidency. In contrast, over the same period of time, the proportion of citizens who identified with the UCR – the main opposition party and the party of Menem's predecessor, Alfonsín – declined precipitously, from about 32 percent in 1985 to 20 percent in 1992 (Consultoria Interdisciplinaria En Desarrollo 1985; Romer & Associates 1992).¹⁵

Like Cafiero, Menem's presidential candidacy was aided by his self-starter status and his rise during a severe crisis. The difference in the two leaders' fates, I contend, lies in their contrasting leadership styles. As described in the previous section, Cafiero's efforts to routinize the movement led to his downfall. He believed that working through the party's nascent institutional channels,

¹⁵ Both of these polls were accessed through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. The 1985 poll, conducted by Consultoria Interdisciplinaria en Desarrollo S.A. (CID), was a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of 1,504 young and mature adults (aged 16 and older). The 1992 poll, conducted by Romer y Asociados, was a sample of 1,229 adult residents from eight of Argentina's twenty-three provinces.

establishing a platform for effective programmatic governance, and accumulating the support of party elites would lead to victory. In reality, however, this approach alienated Cafiero from the Peronist rank and file, effectively cutting him off from the movement's most powerful asset.

In contrast, Menem's deliberate effort to revive Perón's personalistic approach and apply his own charisma resonated deeply with the followers. By portraying himself as a hero in times of dire crisis, he explicitly recognized and promised to address the hopes and fears of the people. As summarized by the major national newspaper, *La Nación*, in the aftermath of the 1988 primary election, "The Cafiero ... ticket represented rationality. It had a structure behind it and a more homogenous project. Menem worked principally on folklore and the emotional content of Peronism" ("Replanteo en el justicialismo tras el triunfo de Carlos Menem" 1988). For this reason, Menem was able to politically mobilize Peronist voters, vanquish his opponent, and restore the movement to power in his own name for a full decade.

Consistent with my theory laid out in Chapter 5, I argue that Menem's successful adoption of a personalistic approach depended on a combination of symbolic and material strategies. To begin, the leader established direct, affectionate communication with Peronist supporters, reinforcing his symbolic image as the founder's authentic and charismatic heir. In contrast to the elitist appearance of his opponents – including Cafiero in the 1988 primary election and the UCR's Eduardo Angeloz in the 1989 general election – Menem embraced a "swashbuckling personal style," donned casual clothing and sideburns that rivaled those of historic caudillo Facundo Quiroga, and traveled tirelessly to personally connect with ordinary people (McGuire 1997, 208). Alberto Kohan, a close advisor who would become Menem's chief of staff, recalled how massive crowds would greet Menem as his campaign bus pulled into each town. After years of suffering under disappointing leaders, Kohan stated, citizens felt inspired by Menem's charisma.¹⁶ Carlos Corach, who became Minister of the Interior, explained that, like Perón, Menem could "interpret the sentiments, both good and bad, of the people," and used this understanding to "tell the people what they wanted to hear."¹⁷

Additionally, during his 1989 presidential campaign, Menem promised citizens relief from the crisis and a return to the prosperity of Perón's rule, rather than articulating the programmatic details of his proposals. On the surface, the candidate's platform seemed consistent with Perón's policies of economic nationalism. For instance, he proclaimed he would increase workers' wages through his "*Salario*" and would reignite Perón's state-sponsored "productive revolution" (Arias 1995). Despite these vague programmatic references, however, Menem focused primarily on his promise to save the people

¹⁶ Author interview with Kohan, July 20, 2016.

¹⁷ Author interview with Carlos Corach, Menem's political adviser and former Minister of the Interior, July 14, 2016.

from their suffering – a duty he claimed that the outgoing radical administration had failed to uphold. For example, two weeks before the May 1989 elections, he stated, “The current government has been unable to resolve [the country’s] problems, and has made them even worse. There is even more hunger, and [the government] has failed to guarantee the right to health, to a dignified home, to social protection, and the rights of the elderly” (“Menem: ‘No ofrezco falsas promesas, sino trabajo y más trabajo,’” 1989).

Moreover, rather than focusing on the details of his own policies, Menem pledged to do whatever was necessary to reverse the failures of the outgoing regime and “pulverize the crisis” (“Hay que enfrentar la crisis y pulverizarla, dijo Menem” 1989). In doing so, he became the first leader to bring Perón’s mission of salvation back to life. As he stated on the campaign trail:

[I have no commitments] to unions or business people. The only [commitment] I have is to the people, and with your support, we are going to pick up the productive revolution. We are going to create the conditions and the infrastructure for development and growth. I’m not here to promise anything, I only pledge to work hard, which is the only thing that can lift Argentina out of stagnation and weakness. (“Menem: ‘No ofrezco falsas promesas, sino trabajo y más trabajo’” 1989)

In addition to assuring the people that he would resolve the crisis and deliver prosperity through whatever means necessary, Menem implored Peronists to have faith in his leadership, as demonstrated by his campaign slogan, “Follow me! I will not let you down.”¹⁸ Through these tactics, he shifted the public’s attention away from programmatic substance and successfully embodied the charismatic spirit of Perón.

Shortly after coming to power in July 1989, Menem performed a programmatic about-face by implementing stark free-market policies. The new president fearlessly launched unconventional alliances with private companies and business elites long demonized by Peronism, namely the multinational corporation Bunge y Born; enacted structural adjustment measures that were even more extreme than the recommendations of international financial institutions; and committed Argentina to a fundamentally liberal economic model. Then, in 1991, Menem followed these adjustment programs up with the Convertibility Plan, a “highly risky” policy that pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar (Weyland 2002, 112–15).

Predictably, most PJ elites criticized Menem’s bold gestures as brazenly anti-Peronist (Cafiero 2011, 464–65; Levitsky 2003, 148–49). Yet, while the substance of these policies contradicted those of Perón, they provided tangible evidence of Menem’s charismatic power by putting a swift and seemingly miraculous end to the hyperinflationary crisis that the new president had inherited from his predecessor, Alfonsín. Indeed, by straying from the substance of Perón’s original programs, Menem embodied the founder’s daring spirit and,

¹⁸ In Spanish, Menem’s campaign slogan read: “Siganme! no los voy a defraudar.”

in the short term, rescued the followers from their misery. For example, the Convertibility Plan reduced inflation from 1,344 percent in early 1990 to 17.5 percent in 1992 and to 3.9 percent in 1994 (Weyland 2002, 158). The plan also increased the purchasing power of poor Argentines – many of them Peronist followers – in an extraordinary fashion (Gantman 2012, 338). Menem's audacious structural adjustment policies also paved the way for impressive economic growth, achieving an annual rate of 7.5 percent between 1991 and 1994, as well as a substantial decline in poverty, from 21.6 percent in October 1991 to 16.1 percent in May 1994 (Weyland 2002, 158).

The impressive, stabilizing impact of his policies on inflation and prices granted Menem overwhelming popular support, even if the policies ultimately hurt poor Peronists by generating high unemployment, social spending cuts, and a devastating economic crash in 2001. Crucially, both Menem and his supporters interpreted the remarkable, though short-lived, success of his programs as evidence of his genuine Peronist roots. In fact, throughout his presidency, Menem skillfully invoked Perón to justify his actions in the name of protecting the people from harm. As he declared in 1993, "This country, this president, is doing exactly what Perón would have done if he had to govern Argentina today" (Comas 1993). Ten years later, during his third (and ultimately failed) campaign in 2003, he declared, "Carlos Menem is the best and most authentic disciple of Juan Perón and of Eva Perón" (Sued 2003). Even today, long after his fall from power, many Peronists personally attribute their 1990s prosperity to him. As followers reported in the focus groups, "thanks to Menem, I bought my first house, there was credit available, and there wasn't inflation"; "Menem was good to my dad"; "with Menem, we could eat well." While some leaders strongly opposed Menem, followers praised him for quickly resolving their problems and fulfilling Perón's mission to deliver prosperity.

By communicating in a direct and emotive fashion, tying himself to Perón, and rescuing citizens from hyperinflation-induced suffering, Menem embodied Perón's most alluring traits. His policies eventually collapsed and unleashed an even deeper crisis. Indeed, beginning with Menem's second presidential term in 1995, unemployment, inequality, and crime steadily increased (Gantman 2012, 338–44). Moreover, in the aftermath of his presidency, from 1999 to 2002, the economy sharply contracted, hitting rock bottom in December 2001. The dollar-to-peso convertibility came to a halt with a devaluation of the peso in January 2002, which led to an economic contraction of 11.74 percent that year (*ibid.*, 332, 339–44). In spite of this implosion, the impressive short-term effects of Menem's policies, combined with the leader's captivating appeal, had successfully reactivated citizens' charismatic attachments to Peronism for several years and had expanded his base to include the business-oriented middle class. Consequently, Menem achieved tremendous personalistic authority that endured for a decade. More importantly, by embodying the charismatic legacy of Perón, he successfully returned the Peronist movement to power and

demonstrated its capacity to reemerge as a predominant political force without shedding its deeply personalistic nature.

6.2.3.2 *Néstor and Cristina Kirchner*

As described earlier, Menem's unsustainable policies, especially the problematic Convertibility Plan, unleashed a terrible economic crisis in December 2001. In turn, this disaster delegitimized the political system: the government cycled through five presidents in eleven days, beginning with Fernando De La Rúa, Menem's non-Peronist successor who resigned on December 21, and ending with Eduardo Duhalde, a Peronist who served as interim president from January 2, 2002, to May 25, 2003 (Gantman 2012, 345). During this transition, Peronism fragmented and did not nominate an official presidential candidate for the 2003 elections. Instead, three Peronist politicians – Carlos Menem, Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, and Néstor Kirchner – ran on independent tickets. Menem won the first round of elections with just over 24 percent of the vote but dropped out of the race, fearing he could not win in a run-off against Néstor, who was overwhelmingly the favored candidate. Thus, Néstor, a governor from the far-flung, southern province of Santa Cruz, became president (Mora y Araujo 2011).

While the new leader owed his presidential victory in 2003 in large part to the weak profiles of the other candidates, he and his wife, Cristina, leveraged favorable conditions to redefine Peronism on their own terms and dominate politics for the next twelve years. First, like Menem in 1989, Néstor became president in 2003 as a self-starter rather than an anointed successor. He achieved this by waiting four years after Menem's fall to seek power and avoiding any association with his defamed Peronist predecessor. Moreover, he distanced himself by turning against Menem. This allowed the former president's economic policies to break down under De La Rúa, a non-Peronist; softened his once-powerful grip on Peronism; permitted Néstor to frame Menem as a neoliberal traitor; and created the opportunity to reconfigure the movement by promising a return to Perón's economic nationalism.

Second, Néstor's rise after the 2001 economic collapse was essential to his reactivation of Peronism. To address the crisis and alleviate citizens' extreme suffering, Duhalde, Néstor's immediate predecessor, implemented painful economic stabilization policies in 2002, including a massive devaluation of the peso. This, combined with rapid growth in global commodity prices, produced much-needed relief during Néstor's presidency. Indeed, between 2003 and 2007, Argentina's gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of about 9 percent, the value of the peso stabilized, unemployment declined from 21.7 to 8.5 percent, and wages increased by over 50 percent (Damill and Frenkel 2015, Table 1).

Crucially, the self-starter capitalized on this remarkable recovery to frame himself as the people's savior. To begin, he aggressively attacked others for causing the crisis, including Menem, the International Monetary Fund, and other

foreign creditors (Gantman 2012, 345). For instance, during his 2003 campaign, Néstor blamed Menem for intentionally undermining the well-being of the people and weakening Argentina's democracy, stating that the former president "robbed Argentines of their right to work, then their right to eat, to study, and to hope; then, he came after the last right they had, to vote" ("Kirchner acusó a Menem de dar un 'golpe a la democracia'" 2003). Subsequently, in December 2005, Néstor canceled Argentina's debt payments to the International Monetary Fund, blaming the international financial institution for inflicting "pain and injustice" on Argentina during the 2001 crisis through pressuring the country to enact "policies that undermined economic growth" ("Argentina cancela su deuda de 9.810 millones de dólares con el Fondo Monetario Internacional" 2006). This confrontational approach suited Néstor's "fighting" personality and accentuated his appeal as a strong, charismatic leader.¹⁹ Moreover, his aggressive style connected him to a key dimension of the Peronist legacy: the deep cleavage between the humble people and the selfish elites. Consequently, this strategy established emotional connections between Néstor and the movement's followers without explicitly tying the new president to the Peronist label, which would have risked associating him with Menem's disastrous failures.

In addition to deepening the cleavage between "elites" and "the people," Néstor took personal credit for the economic recovery, even though it resulted largely from the stabilization measures imposed by Duhalde in 2002, prior to his rise to power (Damill and Frenkel 2015). Establishing this impression proved relatively easy for him, as his presidency coincided with notable improvements in employment, wages, salaries, and economic growth (Mora y Araujo 2011). In fact, thanks in large part to the concrete results of this recovery, Néstor's approval soared to 74 percent by July 2003, just two months into his presidency (Carlin et al. 2016), and Peronists seemed convinced that he would become a heroic reincarnation of the founder. Indeed, as evidenced in the focus groups conducted by the author in 2016, many followers went beyond positive evaluations of Néstor's performance to worship him as a savior. "The world was sunken, and he saved us," one participant declared; "the people began to believe in their president once again"; another stated, "Néstor brought love back to the people, he brought the return of Peronism," a third said, "I had purpose in my life again when Néstor came to power"; a fourth confessed; "Perón's legacy [was] alive in Néstor," fifth expressed. Yet another participant claimed, "My father said that, since Perón, nobody had been capable of filling his eyes with tears until Néstor. When I saw [Néstor] on television, I felt butterflies in my stomach, I wanted to hug him and thank him [for touching my father]." In short, because the new president depicted himself as responsible for the seemingly miraculous economic recovery, he consolidated

¹⁹ Mora y Araujo (2011); Author interviews with Kohan, Corach, and two anonymous advisers from the Kirchner administration (on April 6, 2016, and April 13, 2016, respectively).

impressive, personalistic power and revived Peronism on his own terms, as a separate chapter from that of Menem (*ibid.*; Ollier 2015).

Once Néstor proved himself worthy of the people's adoration, he and Cristina set about consolidating their symbolic image as charismatic heirs of Juan and Eva Perón. To do so, the leading couple behaved in a deeply personalistic fashion and resurrected components of the Peronist narrative that played to their strengths while further separating them from their Peronist predecessor. For example, as mentioned earlier, the Kirchners adopted a polarizing, openly confrontational attitude toward their opponents, including Menem, agro-industrial elites, figures associated with the 1976–83 military dictatorship, international financial institutions, and supporters of the neoliberal development model in general (Wortman 2015). This strategy recharged followers' enthusiasm for the movement by reminding them of Eva's defiant attitude toward anti-Peronist "oligarchs" and it differentiated the Kirchners from Menem, who had a much more conciliatory leadership style.²⁰

The Kirchner couple also portrayed themselves as unparalleled champions of human rights. This appealed to young, middle-class, and leftist Peronists whose relatives and friends had suffered persecution and repression during the 1976–83 military dictatorship (Wortman 2015). Interestingly, while President Alfonsín had courageously defended human rights and democracy in the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship, the Kirchners downplayed the contributions of this non-Peronist leader and instead "considered themselves to be the authors of human rights in Argentina."²¹ By consolidating an image as passionate defenders of victimized people, Néstor and Cristina boosted their charismatic appeal, especially among middle-class and leftist Peronists.

Finally, upon becoming president in 2007 in what was intended to be a strategy of alternation in power with Néstor, Cristina focused on rekindling direct, emotional ties with Peronists from the popular sectors. This strategy solidified the Kirchners' symbolic position as true Peronists and, in combination with the extraordinary economic recovery under Néstor, carried favor with the movement's traditional rank and file. Indeed, several Kirchner-affiliated political strategists stressed that, especially once the initial euphoria brought by the economic recovery began to fade, forging affective linkages with Peronist followers in this fashion was essential for the leading couple to "return Peronism to power," "interpret and refresh the identity," and consolidate their position as the undisputed heirs of Juan and Eva.²²

As president, Cristina reconnected with Peronist followers by portraying herself as "Evita reloaded," mirroring the founder's wife in speech, dress, and

²⁰ Mora y Araujo (2011); author interviews with Kohan, Corach, and two anonymous advisers from the Kirchner administration (April 6, 2016, and April 13, 2016, respectively).

²¹ Author interview with Kohan, July 20, 2016.

²² Author interviews with two anonymous political advisers from the Kirchner administration (April 6, 2016, and May 10, 2016, respectively).

interactions with voters (Wortman 2015). This activated followers' passionate, visceral connections to the movement and associated Cristina with Eva's saint-like image – "a combination of Christ, Che, and Robin Hood."²³ After Néstor's unexpected death from a heart attack in 2010, Cristina also portrayed him as a martyr alongside Juan and Eva, drawing explicit comparisons between the two leading couples. Consequently, Cristina won reelection in 2011 with an overwhelming 54 percent of the vote. Reflecting on this period, followers declared in the focus groups, "Perón is embodied by Néstor, and Eva by Cristina"; "for me, Cristina is a reflection of Eva"; "Perón and Eva, Néstor and Cristina, they are the most important leaders in Argentina."

During Cristina's second term, the Kirchners' policies of economic nationalism began to deteriorate, resulting in rising inflation, poverty, and crime (Salvia 2015). Correspondingly, similar to Menem at the end of his presidency, some followers came to view Cristina as a failed Peronist leader. As non-Kirchner Peronists in the focus groups stated in 2016, one year after her fall from power, "I didn't like Cristina at all, I hope she never returns, she makes me so mad because of the things she did"; "Cristina spoke about being 'national and popular,' but the government was a cash register for her"; "the era of Cristina was terrible, she disgusts me." Other followers expressed frustration with Cristina's attempts to portray herself as the contemporary Eva. For example, one participant stated, "Cristina wanted to be like Eva, but she didn't have a single hair in common." Another declared that Cristina's attempt to imitate Eva "was a costume she used to keep robbing the people." A third stated, "she tried [to be like Eva] but she didn't succeed by a long shot." A fourth said, "She tried to dress and speak like [Eva], but she didn't actually imitate her." A fifth stated, "she wanted to be like Eva but she didn't ever succeed." A sixth explained, "Evita was a common woman. Cristina wanted to be like that, but she fell victim to her own selfishness and ego." As reflected by these statements, Cristina's declining performance led Peronist followers to view her as a fraudulent Peronist, and symbolically excommunicated her from the movement while reaffirming their own attachments to its founders.

The Kirchner administration receded from power in 2015 with the presidential election of Mauricio Macri, a non-Peronist. Yet, while the leaders' government ultimately fell, I argue that Néstor's rise as a self-starter; his policies, which became associated with dramatic growth and economic prosperity; and both Néstor and Cristina's symbolic strategies to reignite the followers' emotional attachments to the movement enabled them to establish a formidable new episode of Peronism. In doing so, the Kirchners – like Menem before them – deepened the widespread perception in Argentina that Peronism is the only force capable of governing the country.

²³ Author interview with an anonymous communications strategist from the Kirchner administration, April 6, 2016.

6.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that charismatic movements persist to dominate politics long after their founders disappear. Contrary to existing studies, which suggest that survival depends on routinization, I claim that many such movements endure by retaining their personalistic core and welcoming new leaders who recharge their charismatic nature. Thus, rather than establishing stable development trajectories like more conventional parties, these movements unfold in a “spasmodic” pattern. After their founders disappear, charismatic movements become latent and the whole country seems adrift. Yet new crises enable subsequent leaders to emerge, reactivate citizens’ emotional attachments, and restore these movements to power. This process does not rely primarily on party organizations, as scholars of routinization would argue. Rather, it depends on successors’ ability to convincingly portray themselves to the followers as charismatic saviors who have come to revive the founder’s mission to rescue society.

As illustrated in this chapter, successors must fulfill three conditions to revive the movement in new contexts: achieve self-starter status; rise up amid a crisis; and play to the movement’s personalistic nature. While many politicians have attempted to restore charismatic movements to power in Latin America and beyond, it is the leaders who have leveraged these conditions, such as Carlos Menem and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, who have been able to consolidate independent authority as heirs of the founder.

Importantly, the power of successful self-starters is temporary. Like charismatic founders, their bold performance eventually collapses. Unless they leave power before this implosion, it dampens their heroic image and dilutes their connection to the founder. But these failures do not destroy the movement because citizens’ attachments remain rooted in charismatic founders, not in successors. Indeed, followers label disappointing successors as “traitors” to the founder. The movement then enters a period of leaderless fragmentation until conditions ripen once more for a new self-starter to rise and pick up the founder’s baton.

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, the next chapter investigates the long-term trajectories of charismatic movements and assesses their negative impact on democracy. The analysis focuses on the rise and fall of charismatic successors in the context of a single movement: Argentine Peronism. In contrast to the conventional wisdom, which suggests that surviving charismatic movements routinize and therefore have a stabilizing impact on democracy, the chapter demonstrates that enduring charismatic movements make for political systems characterized by pernicious personalism, perpetually weak institutions, and frequent crises.