The Revival of Charisma: 
Experimental Evidence from Argentina and Venezuela

Forthcoming in *Comparative Political Studies* 
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Abstract:

Scholars have long claimed that political movements founded by charismatic leaders must undergo “routinization,” or depersonalization, to survive. Yet many such movements appear to have sustained their charismatic nature and have persisted or reemerged in cases as diverse as Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Turkey, and China. Focusing on Argentine Peronism and Venezuelan Chavismo, this article examines the potential of new leaders to revive their charismatic predecessors' legacies to perpetuate the movement and gain the followers’ support. Through face-to-face survey experiments conducted in both countries, the article shows that new leaders who 1) implement bold, initially impressive policies and 2) symbolically tie themselves to the charismatic founder cause citizens to express stronger emotional attachments to the movement and garner political support. The results challenge the notion that charismatic movements are short-lived and underscore the potential of these movements to impact democratic politics and party-system development long after their founders disappear.
1. Introduction

Charisma—“supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”—is widely considered ephemeral (Weber, 1922/1978, p.141). Indeed, conventional wisdom indicates that the magnetic appeal of charismatic leaders, as well as the direct, unmediated, and deeply emotional bonds they cultivate with their followers, fade away when the leader dies. For a charismatic movement to survive, then, some scholars claim that the followers’ profound attachments to the leader must be converted into indirect ties based on programmatic appeals or membership in affiliated social groups. This process of depersonalization, or “routinization,” replaces the leader’s personal authority with a party organization that coordinates voters’ and politicians’ complex preferences over the long term (Kitschelt, 2000, p.846; Madsen and Snow, 1991, p.24; Weber, 1922/1978, p.246). When scholars entertain the possibility that the followers’ charismatic attachments with the leader endure, they believe that charisma can persist only in attenuated and depersonalized forms—such as offices, institutions, and corporate bodies—rather than becoming reactivated by a new leader (Jowitt, 1992, p.91, p.107; Shils, 1965, p.205).¹ In short, the literature on charisma does not consider that new leaders can reinvigorate citizens’ charismatic bonds in their original, personalistic state.

Curiously, however, movements in countries as diverse as Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Turkey, and China have survived or reemerged following the death of their charismatic founder while sustaining their personalistic nature. For instance, Argentine Peronism—the movement founded over seventy years ago by Juan and Eva Perón—remains a dominant political force and has sustained a large base of fervently loyal supporters. The movement’s most successful leaders have tied themselves to the Peróns’ savior-like image and have governed based on an intense cult

¹ For example, when discussing the survival of charisma, which he refers to as the “institutionalization of charisma,” Shils states, “the charisma is not concentratively imputed to the person occupying the central role or to the role itself, but is dispersed in a diminished but unequal intensity throughout the hierarchy of roles and rules” (p.205).
of personality rather than on strong party institutions (Gervasoni, 2018; Levitsky, 2003). In Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro has similarly leaned on the charismatic figure of Hugo Chávez to sustain the movement he inherited upon Chávez’s death in March 2013. Perhaps as a result, about one third of Venezuelans have continued to express fervent attachments to Chavismo (Briceño, 2015; Morales, 2016). And in Peru, Alberto Fujimori’s personalistic, paradigm-shifting movement of the 1990s has sustained a larger support base than any other party (Tanaka, 2011, p. 80). Additionally, Fujimori’s daughter, Keiko, has tied herself to his charismatic image in recent years to garner support. Though she did not win the 2016 presidential elections, she received forty percent of the vote in the first round—over eighteen points more than the second-place candidate (Dargent & Muñoz, 2016, p.145).

These cases challenge the notion that charisma is short-lived in two ways. To begin, citizens’ deep, emotional attachments to charismatic leaders and movements may be more resilient than much of the current literature suggests. That is, these ties may survive in their original, affective state rather than becoming routinized into programmatic or organizational linkages. Additionally, political successors may be able to tap into citizens’ charismatic attachments to garner support rather than relying on party institutions. As a result, similar to the founder, new leaders could consolidate their own concentrated, personalistic authority. This article investigates these possibilities by developing and testing a theory on the revival of charisma by new leaders.

Drawing insights from scholarship on political psychology, sociology, leadership, and electoral campaigns, I argue that a new leader must fulfill two conditions to successfully

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2 Personalism is defined as a characteristic of leaders who seek legitimacy based on their own, personal authority rather than through institutions. Kostadinova and Levitt indicate that personalism need not apply exclusively to charismatic leaders; however, they note that all charismatic leaders are, by definition, personalistic (2016, p.494). Because I deal only with the subtype of charismatic personalism in this study, I will use the terms “personalism” and “charisma” interchangeably.
reactivate voters’ charismatic attachments and pick up the founder’s mantle. First, the successor must establish his/her own charisma as a heroic leader by proposing and implementing **bold policies** that translate into tangible benefits for the followers and alleviate their suffering. Second, the successor must cultivate **symbolic ties** to the founder to associate his/her charisma with the founder’s glorified legacy and convince the followers that he/she has taken up the founder’s transformative mission.

I analyze original, face-to-face survey experiments conducted with 999 movement followers in Argentina and Venezuela to determine whether and how new leaders can associate themselves with their charismatic predecessor’s legacy, revive citizens’ affective ties to the founder’s movement, and win political support. Specifically, I construct a 2x2 design in which a potential successor running for president implements (or does not implement) a set of cues related to bold policies and symbolic ties. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, which suggests that charismatic linkages do not survive beyond the founder’s death, the results indicate that citizens’ deep, emotional attachments to Peronism and Chavismo endure. Moreover, in the context of presidential campaigns, I show that a new leader’s bold, initially successful policies and symbolic ties to the founder can politically reactivate these attachments by intensifying followers’ positive feelings toward the movement, enhancing their perceptions of the new leader’s charisma, and boosting the leader’s support.

The article proceeds as follows. In section two, I briefly review the initial formation of charismatic attachments between leaders and followers. Next, I explain how new politicians can

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3 I refer to the transfer of citizens’ charismatic attachments from the founder to the successor as “revival” or “reactivation” regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the founder’s death. This is because, as I shall argue later in the article, new leaders must actively reinvigorate—rather than passively inherit—the founder’s mantle of authority to be considered true heirs by the followers. Thus, even though Chavismo has not lost power in Venezuela since Chávez’s death, a new leader’s ability to sustain the movement would require that he/she reactivate the followers’ attachments. Failure to do so might result in the temporary political deactivation of these attachments, but not necessarily their irreversible disintegration.
reactivate charismatic attachments and garner support. I then lay out the hypotheses, design, and results of the survey experiments in Argentina and Venezuela. Finally, I discuss the substantive implications of the findings and suggest avenues for future research on the revival of charismatic movements.

2. The Initial Formation of Charismatic Attachments

To understand the reactivation of charismatic bonds, I begin by reviewing how they are initially formed. Studies of charisma generally indicate that the formation of these bonds rests on three factors. First, a leader who explicitly recognizes and incorporates historically marginalized people into the center of politics has the potential to form fervent ties with those citizens. These people, who often experience feelings of hopelessness and loss of control, are especially likely to seek out a leader who claims to resolve their problems and save them from their distress (Bandura, 1982; Madsen and Snow, 1991; Merolla and Zechmeister, 2011; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Weyland, 2003). Notably, citizens are not forced to support the leader; rather, they “feel moved by their...need to overcome their frustrations through projecting their fears, hopes, and aggressions onto heroes who can provide at least symbolic solutions; by their need for identification with the mighty and the awesome; by their need for esteem from performers who bestow recognition and flattery on them” (Burns, 1979, p.246). The top-down nature of this symbolic recognition establishes an asymmetrical relationship between leader and follower in which the latter feels indebted to, rather than empowered by, the former (Madsen and Snow, 1991, pp.14-15).

Second, to secure the people’s devotion, the leader demonstrates the capacity to single-handedly resolve their suffering. Weber states, “If proof and success elude the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to
benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear” (1922/1978, p.242). To provide evidence of charismatic power, the leader must achieve impressive performance by promising and implementing bold policies that showcase seemingly miraculous capacities (ibid; Pappas, 2011). From the followers’ perspective, the daring character and ability of these policies to confer tangible benefits—rather than their programmatic content and long-term sustainability—are essential for “proving” the leader’s extraordinary abilities. Once implemented, these policies confirm the leader’s superhuman image and can temporarily protect the leader from subsequent drops in performance (Merolla and Zechmeister, 2011).

Third, the leader constructs a symbolic narrative that glorifies his/her position as the people’s savior, stresses the movement’s transformative mission to deliver the followers a more prosperous future, and demonizes opposing groups as enemies blocking the people’s path to salvation. This narrative, which frames the leader’s political mission as an all-out battle against evil forces, infuses followers’ attachments with a profound moral intensity (Zúquete, 2008). Thus, the followers’ support for the leader rests not just on much-needed recognition and tangible goods, but also on a deep sense of righteousness that inspires religious devotion to the leader, whom the followers come to view as brave and selfless (ibid, 106). To ensure that the narrative forms an intrinsic part of followers’ identity, the leader disseminates it through discourse, constant contact with the followers, and infusion of public spaces with affiliated symbols that reinforce the leader’s power and spiritual superiority (Capriles, 2012; Plotkin, 2003; Zúquete, 2008).

3. The Revival of Charismatic Attachments

Scholars acknowledge the importance of the above-mentioned characteristics for the formation of charismatic linkages. I go a step further to argue that these bonds have the potential
to become *reactivated* in their original, charismatic state by new politicians after the founder disappears. Insights from social psychology suggest that the followers’ identification with the founder can shape their worldview and thus influence their political preferences and expectations. Specifically, this identity provides citizens with a “framework that allows [them]…to make sense of social, political, and economic conditions” that occurred in the past, are unfolding in the present, or are yet to occur (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2009, pp.24-25). It also gives individuals “ways of recognizing, identifying, and classifying other people, of constructing sameness and difference, and of ‘coding’ and making sense of their actions” (Brubaker, Loveman, & Stamatov, 2004, p.47 as cited in Abdelal et al., 2009, p.25). As a worldview, then, citizens’ identification with a charismatic leader can shape their perceptions and evaluations of future politicians.

Given that followers’ charismatic identity primes them to look for an inspiring successor, new leaders have an incentive to strategically associate themselves with the founder’s image to politically reactivate that identity and gain a loyal base of support. To do so, political psychologists suggest that a new leader should disseminate cues through speech, symbolic gestures, and policies that associate the core symbols and values of the identity with the current context and the new leader’s personal profile (Abdelal et al., 2009; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Klar, 2013; Vavreck, 2009). If successfully executed, these cues signal to the followers that the leader genuinely embodies the founder and will revive the founder’s mission to save them. Moreover, by appearing as the symbolic archetype with which the followers identify—the charismatic founder—successors who employ these cues are also likely to appear more charismatic in their own right (Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001).
To revive citizens’ charismatic attachments, I argue that successors 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 being directly reincarnated from the founder. First, in material terms, successors—like the founder—must demonstrate extraordinary abilities through impressive performance. They achieve this through promising and enacting audacious policies that demonstrate the capacity to “save” the historically marginalized followers from their misery. Specifically, the policies must favor grandeur and alacrity over ideological consistency (Weber, 1922/1978, p.242). Indeed, successors must embrace opportunism through initiating 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. Though successors must become chief executives before delivering goods at the national level, past records of bold, impressive performance as subnational executive officeholders—e.g., as governors—can provide followers with an initial cue regarding successors’ potential to fulfill their promises.

To be sure, this material cue should enhance voters’ evaluations of the successors’ performance. But more importantly for charismatic attachments, as Weber stresses, it should also suggest to the followers the new leaders’ extraordinary abilities to resolve their urgent problems (ibid). Thus, the material cue should reinvigorate followers’ enthusiasm for the movement and strengthen their *affective* attachments. Furthermore, it should cause the followers not only to

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4 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 pre-existing 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 reanimate this sentiment among the followers.
increase their positive assessments of successors’ performance, but also to view the successors as more charismatic—as noble, selfless heroes capable of transforming society and ensuring a more prosperous future for the followers (ibid; Pappas, 2011, p.3).

Second, in symbolic terms, new leaders must weave themselves into the founder’s narrative by depicting themselves as heirs who will resume the founder’s mission to rescue the people. 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 salvation (Abdelal et al., 2009; Klar, 2013; Vavreck, 2009). These verbal and nonverbal 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 (Spotts, 2002 as cited in Haslam et al., 2011, p.180). For example, successors can 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 cues, spread through the successor’s speech, gestures, and symbols, not only remind followers of their beloved founder, but also reenergize their zeal for his redemptive mission. The cues can therefore reanimate the followers’ identity as part of the founder’s “moral community” (Zúquete, 2008, p.104), distinguish them from their (real and imagined) enemies, and confirm the successor as the movement’s new champion (Abdelal et al., 2009; Tajfel, 1974).

In sum, I argue that citizens’ charismatic attachments need not transform into depersonalized linkages to survive and remain politically salient after the founder disappears. Rather, followers can sustain a deep, emotional identification with the movement that reinforces their commitment to the founder’s heroic mission to transform society, shapes their worldview,
and influences their expectations of future politicians. Subsequent leaders can therefore reactivate followers’ attachments and gain support by depicting themselves as charismatic revivers of the founder’s mission by 1) promising and implementing bold policies that deliver tangible benefits to the followers and 2) symbolically linking themselves to the charismatic founder and his transformative project.


The present section uses survey experiments to test the individual and combined effects of successors’ bold policies and symbolic ties on followers’ expressions of emotional attachment to the movement and support for the heir. To implement this test, I draw on the priming, cue-taking and identity literatures from political psychology (Abdelal et al., 2009; Hogg, 2001; Klar, 2013; Tajfel, 1974; Van Vugt and Hart, 2004) to design two manipulations that represent strategic cues enacted by a hypothetical candidate seeking the presidency: **Bold policies** and **symbolic ties** to the charismatic founder. The first manipulation corresponds to the material cue: the promise and implementation of bold policies. Because it is ultimately the *fulfillment* of these policies that “proves” the successor’s charisma, I manipulate whether or not the candidate has fulfilled his bold, tangible promises to resolve citizens’ most pressing problems in the past. The second manipulation, which represents the symbolic cue, incorporates visual and auditory symbols that associate the candidate with the charismatic founder of the movement. I construct a 2x2 design with four conditions such that respondents are randomly assigned to receive both, one, or neither of the two cues. Next, I measure the respondents’ expressions of attachment to the movement and support for the successor (see Table 1).
Table 1. 2x2 Experimental Conditions and Summary of Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Presence of Symbolic Ties</th>
<th>Absence of Symbolic Ties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilled Bold Policies</td>
<td>Fulfilled / Symbol</td>
<td>Fulfilled / No Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Expect strong attachment and support for the successor)</td>
<td>(Expect middling attachment and support for the successor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfulfilled Bold Policies</td>
<td>Unfulfilled / Symbol</td>
<td>Unfulfilled / No Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Expect middling attachment and support for the successor)</td>
<td>(Expect low attachment and support for the successor)</td>
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</table>

**Hypotheses**

Based on my theory, I develop three sets of hypotheses about the combined and marginal effects of bold policies and symbolic ties on followers’ charismatic attachments to the movement and support for the successor.

**HI.** Candidates who combine the material and symbolic cues can revive citizens’ emotional attachments and garner support more effectively than candidates who implement only one or neither of the two cues. Thus:

A. Respondents in the fulfilled / symbol condition will express the strongest attachment to the movement. Specifically, they will identify most intensely with the movement and will express the strongest positive feelings and weakest negative feelings toward the movement.

B. Respondents in the fulfilled / symbol condition will express the strongest support for the candidate. Specifically, they will perceive the candidate as most charismatic and will express the strongest intentions to vote for the candidate in future elections.

**HII.** Both bold policies and symbolic ties to the founder are necessary for successors to fully reactivate citizens’ attachments and garner support. The bold policies demonstrate the successor’s charismatic power, while symbolic ties associate that heroic capacity with the
founder and his redemptive mission. Correspondingly, each of the two cues should not be as effective when applied in isolation. Nevertheless, candidates who implement only one of the two cues should elicit stronger attachment and support than candidates who use neither cue. In short:

A. Respondents in the fulfilled / no symbol condition and in the unfulfilled / symbol condition will express stronger attachment to the movement than respondents in the unfulfilled / no symbol condition.

B. Respondents in the fulfilled / no symbol condition and in the unfulfilled / symbol condition will express stronger support for the candidate than respondents in the unfulfilled / no symbol condition.

HIII. Finally, symbolic ties increase followers’ support for the candidate because they link the candidate directly to the movement’s charismatic founder and thus intensify the followers’ deep, emotional identification with the movement. Therefore:

A. Followers’ identification with the movement will mediate the effect of symbolic ties on support for the candidate.

Participants, Design, and Procedure

In partnership with two local public opinion firms—trespuntozero in Argentina and Consultores 21 in Venezuela—I conducted face-to-face survey experiments with a sample of each movement’s most important and consistent base of followers: self-identified Peronist and Chavista adults (18 and older) from the “popular” (lower- and lower-middle-class) sectors.

While it would be interesting to analyze the impact of successors’ material and symbolic cues on

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5 Trespuntozero—an elite, Buenos Aires-based public opinion and market research firm specializing in nationwide political analysis—conducted the survey in Argentina from October 21 to November 20, 2016. Consultores 21, an internationally renowned, Caracas-based firm, conducted the survey in Venezuela from February 1 to 18, 2017. The Institutional Review Board at the [author’s university] approved the study (2013-03-0046).

6 In Venezuela, participants were randomly selected from the population of interest in the designated regions of the design. In Argentina, convenience samples were drawn from each region at outdoor shopping malls and plazas due to resource limitations. For the Argentine sample, quotas were used for demographic characteristics including gender, age, and education based on 2010 census data.
non-followers as well as middle and upper class citizens, I limited the scope of the present study due to theoretical expectations and resource constraints. First, I focused on movement followers rather than all citizens because the experiment aims to test the potential reactivation of existing attachments rather than the formation of new attachments among previously unaffiliated individuals. Certainly, political candidates should also endeavor to expand their support base by incorporating new voters. Yet because the movement followers constitute a sizeable proportion of the population—about one-third of the electorate in both Argentina and Venezuela (Briceño, 2015; Calvo and Murillo, 2012)—earning their loyalty provides new leaders an enviable “electoral cushion” (Levitsky, 2003, pp.13-14). To narrow the sample in this way, respondents were asked a screening question in which they indicated which of several political traditions they felt closest to. Those who selected “Peronism” or “Chavismo” were included in the study.7

Second, I limited the sample to followers from the popular rather than the middle and upper classes because my theory suggests that socioeconomically marginalized citizens are more likely to experience seemingly unmanageable challenges, suffer disproportionately, and develop feelings of low self-efficacy. Popular-sector citizens are therefore more likely to look for and become emotionally attached to a leader whom they perceive as heroic (Burns, 1979; Madsen and Snow, 1991). Furthermore, in both Argentina and Venezuela, these low-income citizens make up the largest group of movement followers and a vital source of support for political candidates (Briceño, 2015; Calvo and Murillo, 2012). As suggested by public opinion specialists

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7 This question wording was developed based on extensive interviews, pre-tests, and consultation with public opinion specialists. It was chosen because it does not indicate the intensity of one’s attachments, nor does it imply identification or membership with a formal party. Because of the weakly institutionalized nature of Peronism and Chavismo, many popular-sector citizens identify with them as “movements” or “traditions,” but not as official “parties”. This and other screening questions were asked of all respondents well before exposure to the experimental manipulation (the material and symbolic cues) to avoid priming respondents to feel more or less identified with the movement. Specific question wording and closed-list response options can be found in the appendix.
in both countries, education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status; respondents with less than a college degree were included.\(^8\)

In sum, while the population of interest in this study—movement followers from the popular sectors—is limited, it provides a crucial foundation of support for aspiring political candidates. To approximate a nationally representative sample of this population, the experiment was fielded in three diverse regions of each country: the federal capital and its outskirts, an urban and traditionally anti-Peronist/anti-Chavista region, and a rural, traditionally pro-Peronist/pro-Chavista region (see Table 2). Many studies of Peronism and Chavismo focus exclusively on the federal capital, which, while populous and politically important, has distinct characteristics compared to the rest of the country. In contrast, this three-region design better captures followers’ attitudes and behaviors at the national level, accounting for demographic, cultural, and political variation.

**Table 2. Characteristics of Selected Regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Argentina</th>
<th>Venezuela</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Capital and Outskirts</td>
<td>Lanús, La Matanza (Province of Buenos Aires)</td>
<td>Caracas (State of Miranda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban, anti-Peronist/anti-Chavista Region</td>
<td>Córdoba (Province of Córdoba)</td>
<td>Maracaibo (State of Zulia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, pro-Peronist/pro-Chavista region</td>
<td>La Rioja (Province of La Rioja)</td>
<td>Cumaná (State of Sucre)</td>
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The survey experiment was designed as follows. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, each of which provided information about a hypothetical governor running for president.\(^9\) After a set of filter questions intended to restrict

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\(^8\) Because more popular-sector citizens attend local colleges in both countries today than in the past, respondents aged 18 to 25 currently enrolled in college, but whose parents had completed nothing more than a high school degree, were also included in the study.

\(^9\) In Argentina, the survey was administered on digital tablets using Qualtrics, which was set to randomly assign respondents across the four conditions in a balanced fashion. In Venezuela, due to resource constraints and safety
the sample to individuals from the population of interest, enumerators carefully explained the scenario, verified respondents’ understanding, and proceeded to one of the four randomly assigned experimental manipulations, described below.

To maximize external validity, the two sets of manipulations—one for fulfillment/unfulfillment of bold policies and a second for the presence/absence of symbolic ties—imitated stimuli that voters would encounter in a real presidential campaign. I developed each manipulation with the assistance and feedback of local campaign strategists, in-depth interviews and pretests with individuals from the population of interest, and, in Argentina, a pilot survey distributed online via email and Facebook (N=239). To enhance internal validity, the survey was conducted in face-to-face format with local, trained enumerators to ensure that respondents understood the scenario and received the correct manipulations.10 Manipulation checks (described below) further verified that each stimulus achieved its intended purpose.

For the two conditions in which bold policies were enacted (fulfilled), the enumerator described to the respondent the candidate’s successful completion of bold policies as governor, emphasizing impressive, tangible benefits he provided to popular-sector citizens in his province/state. For the remaining two conditions (unfulfilled), the enumerator indicated the candidate’s failure to implement the same policies as governor. To stress the daring character of the candidate’s policies, exaggerated wording was used, such as the promise to “end” (rather

10 Enumerators in both countries were hired from each region where the survey was conducted. Supervisors from the contracted public opinion firms conducted half-day training sessions with the enumerators and continuously monitored their progress. To check validity of survey responses, supervisors called 10 percent of all respondents to ask about the content of the survey. Among this sub-sample, fewer than five percent were invalidated and were thus excluded from the analysis. All interviews produced by enumerators with invalidated responses were also excluded from the analysis.
than reduce) poverty, “eliminate” unemployment, and “combat” crime. The policies also addressed real citizens’ most pressing concerns, as indicated by surveys conducted no more than three months prior to fielding the study (economic crisis, unemployment, and poverty in Argentina; economic crisis, crime, and food shortages in Venezuela). Finally, to personalize and enhance the emotional persuasiveness of the scenario, I used an episodic frame (a personal anecdote) rather than a thematic frame (factual information) to depict the candidate’s successful/failed implementation bold policies (Iyengar, 1991; Klar, 2013). Prioritizing emotional responses to the candidate’s policies in this way corresponds to my theory that the implementation of bold, initially impressive policies strengthens followers’ charismatic—deeply emotional and personalistic—attachments to the movement.

Next, respondents were exposed to auditory and visual cues representing the presence/absence of the candidate’s symbolic ties to the founder. First, respondents listened to a 90-second speech by the candidate using headphones provided by the enumerator. The speech was recorded rather than printed because voters tend to listen to, rather than read, candidate speeches in the context of presidential campaigns. Each speech was developed based on several real speeches made by prominent movement leaders including Carlos Menem and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina and Nicolás Maduro and Henri Falcón in Venezuela. In each country, local campaign experts with public speaking experience recorded the speech.

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11 Leaders in both countries who attempt to reactivate citizens’ charismatic attachments use several overlapping cues—such as colors, dress, images, and rhetoric—to signal their symbolic connection to the movement founder. Thus, to enhance external validity, the design incorporated both auditory and visual components into the symbolic cue. To the author’s knowledge, this is the first experimental study to test the influence of these types of symbols on citizens’ charismatic—rather than programmatic or ideological—attachments. Future studies should separate and test the effects of different symbolic cues in isolation.

12 Henri Falcón is one of few opposition politicians in Venezuela who had defected from Chavismo since the time when the experiment was run. Falcón’s speeches reference Chávez’s symbolic narrative while separating himself from the current regime’s failures. For these reasons, I adapted excerpts of his speeches into the experiment.
In both versions of the speech, the candidate reflected on the country’s current state of affairs and expressed bold promises that he would fulfill if elected. Next, in the two conditions in which symbolic ties were present (*symbol*), the candidate mentioned the founder by name (Perón/Chávez), referred to the followers using a typical in-group label (comrades/the Bolivarian people), and stressed the transformational character of the movement.\(^{13}\) Conversely, in the two conditions where symbolic ties were absent (*no symbol*), the candidate did not mention the founder’s name, used a neutral label for the voters (compatriots/the Venezuelan people), and referred to progress in terms of realistic development rather than using the more grandiose and missionary language of transformation. The remaining content, tone, and length of the speech in each country were held constant across all four conditions.

While listening to the candidate’s speech, participants viewed a card with an image of the candidate’s campaign poster, which was also designed based on materials from recent presidential campaigns and feedback from local experts.\(^{14}\) Each version of the poster contained a generic campaign slogan (*Opportunity for All / Together with the People*), a solid-color background, an image of children, the candidate’s name, the title “President,” and a picture of the candidate from the chest up.\(^{15}\) In the version with symbolic ties, the background color corresponded to the movement (celeste/red) and the image featured the founder among the children. The version without symbolic ties had a generic background color unaffiliated with any major political party in the country, and the image of children did not include the founder.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{13}\) All comparisons listed in parentheses in this section are separated by country, not by experimental condition. The first term refers to Argentine version while the second term refers to the Venezuelan version.

\(^{14}\) Though the survey was delivered via digital tablet in Argentina, respondents also viewed a physical, color copy of the campaign poster corresponding to their randomly assigned treatment group. Respondents in Venezuela also viewed a physical, color copy of the campaign poster.

\(^{15}\) Stock photos for candidate images were purchased based on pre-tests and advice from local campaign experts.

\(^{16}\) Because only the symbolic condition featured the founder, distinct images were used for symbolic and control images. The different images were selected based on similar criteria, including general tone, apparent age and socioeconomic status of the subjects, and number of subjects.
Figure 1 illustrates the experimental manipulations for each country, including the candidate’s policy record as governor, transcriptions of the candidate’s speech, and campaign posters.\textsuperscript{17}

Figure 1. Experimental Manipulations in Argentina and Venezuela.

A. Argentina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enumerator Reads to Respondent (All Conditions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let’s imagine that there are elections coming up, and there is a candidate running for president of the nation. The candidate’s name is Diego Canedo. Currently, Canedo is governor of an Argentine province. I am going to give you some information about Canedo. Then, you will listen to a speech from him and view a campaign poster. Afterward, I will ask you some questions about what you heard and saw about the candidate. Do you understand what we are going to do?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fulfilled Bold Policies</th>
<th>Unfulfilled Bold Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As governor, Canedo promised to develop the economy, eliminate unemployment, and end poverty in his province.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>So far, Canedo has kept his promises. For example, José, a resident of a local town, got a job in a factory and bought a new car. In addition, Romina, José’s neighbor, received social assistance from the government to send her children to school.</td>
<td>So far, Canedo has not kept his promises. For example, José, a resident of a local town, is still unemployed. He continues to search for a job in a factory and had to sell his car. In addition, Romina, José’s neighbor, asked for social assistance from the government to send her children to school, but she hasn’t received anything yet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Thanks to Canedo, many people like José y Romina are better off. | Despite Canedo’s promises, many people like José and Romina are struggling. |

\textsuperscript{17} All material was presented to respondents in Spanish and has been translated to English by the author.
Recorded Speech, Part 1 (All Conditions)

Really, when one looks back on the past year, when one looks back at Argentina and the things that we Argentines have had to live through, one feels that strength was found where it wasn’t thought to exist. Under these conditions, let it be absolutely clear that, to move forward, we need to fully take on the challenge of creating a new Argentina. I want to tell you all, with deepest sincerity, that you can count on me to accomplish what remains to be done in this country.

I will end inflation so that Argentines can save, they can buy their car, they can buy their house; I will start a fantastic program to generate employment; And I will expand social assistance so that the poorest people in our country can get ahead.

Recorded Speech, Part 2: Presence of Symbolic Ties

We can see the path of our country’s transformation, but the most important is what remains to be done. The General Perón left us many teachings, but the one that stuck most deeply with our comrades is that of building a government that transformed Argentina.

For that reason he said, “it is better to do than say, better to accomplish than promise.” We, the Argentine people, are part of a transformative project and I intend to work in accordance with the mandate of Evita and Perón.

Recorded Speech, Part 2: Absence of Symbolic Ties

We can see the path of our country’s development, but the most important is what remains to be done. History has left us many teachings, but the one that stuck most deeply with our compatriots is that of building a government that promotes the development of Argentina.

We, the Argentine people, are part of this country and I intend to work in accordance with the example left by many of our ancestors.*

Poster: Presence of Symbolic Ties

Oportunidades Para Todos

Diego Canedo
Presidente

Poster: Absence of Symbolic Ties

Oportunidades Para Todos

Diego Canedo
Presidente

*Note: Because many of Perón’s quotations are widely known by Argentines, the quotation was left out of the condition where symbolic ties were absent.
B. Venezuela

**Enumerator Reads to Respondent (All Conditions)**

Let’s imagine that there are elections coming up, and there is a candidate running for president of the nation. The candidate’s name is José González. Currently, González is governor of a Venezuelan state. I am going to give you some information about González. Then, you will listen to a speech from him and see a campaign poster. Afterward, I will ask you some questions about what you heard and saw about the candidate. Do you understand what we are going to do?

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**Fulfilled Bold Policies**

As governor, González promised to improve the economy, combat crime, and resolve the most urgent needs in his state.

So far, González has kept his promises. For example, Carlos, a resident of a local town, was given a credit to build a house for his family, and his father received his pension. In addition, Johana, Carlos’ neighbor, received bags of food to feed her children.

*Thanks to González, many people like Carlos and Johana are better off.*

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**Unfulfilled Bold Policies**

As governor, González promised to improve the economy, combat crime, and resolve the most urgent needs in his state.

So far, González has not kept his promises. For example, Carlos, a resident of a local town, applied for a credit to build a house for his family, but he hasn’t received anything yet, and his father has not received his pension. In addition, Johana, Carlos’ neighbor, has to wait in very long lines to get food to feed her children.

*Despite González’s promises, many people like Carlos and Johana are struggling.*

---

**Recorded Speech, Part 1 (All Conditions)**

Really, when one looks back on the past few years, when one looks back at Venezuela and the things that we Venezuelans have had to live through, one feels that strength was found where it wasn’t thought to exist. Under these conditions, let it be absolutely clear that, to move forward, we need to fully take on the challenge of creating the extraordinary Venezuela that we all want. I want to tell you all, with deepest sincerity, that you can count on me to accomplish what remains to be done in this country.

I will end shortages so that all Venezuelans can feed their families at a fair price, without having to wait in line; I will create a program to fight and conquer crime; and I will combat inflation so that the Venezuelan people can get ahead and continue to grow.

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**Recorded Speech, Part 2: Presence of Symbolic Ties**

We can see the path of our country’s transformation, but the most important is what remains to be done.

*And as our Eternal Commander Hugo Chávez Frias said, “I swear before God, I swear before the country, I swear before my people that I will enact the necessary transformations for our Bolivarian republic to move forward.”*

Live on, Venezuela! Thanks be to God and thanks to the people of Bolivar!

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**Recorded Speech, Part 2: Absence of Symbolic Ties**

We can see the path of our country’s development, but the most important is what remains to be done.

*I swear before God, I swear before the country, I swear before my people that I will enact the necessary development for our republic to move forward.*

Live on, Venezuela! Thanks be to God and thanks to the Venezuelan people!
Following exposure to one of the four randomly assigned conditions, respondents answered a range of survey questions regarding their emotional attachment to the movement and support for the candidate—the dependent variables of the study. To measure emotional attachment, respondents were asked how Peronist/Chavista they felt on a scale from 0 to 10. They were also asked to indicate the intensity of their positive and negative feelings toward the movement on four-point scales including pride, excitement, and hope; anger, disappointment, and fear. Due to the high inter-item correlation between the three survey items for positive and negative feelings, respectively, I collapsed each set into an additive index and rescaled it to range from 0 to 10.\textsuperscript{18} I interpreted statistically significant increases in the former two measures and a significant decrease in the latter as successful \textit{reactivation} of citizens’ emotional attachments to the movement.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} The order of these questions was randomized in Argentina, but not in Venezuela due to the use of paper surveys. Chronbach’s alpha scores were 0.83 for positive feelings and 0.66 for negative feelings in Argentina, and 0.83 for positive feelings and 0.79 for negative feelings in Venezuela.

\textsuperscript{19} I measured statistical significance at the \( p = .1 \) level due to the directional nature of my hypotheses.
To measure support for the candidate, respondents were first asked a series of questions regarding their perceptions of the candidate’s charisma. Based on my theory, a compelling leader who materially and symbolically embodies the founder’s heroic image should appear significantly more charismatic to the followers—especially if the candidate is to consolidate his own personalistic authority (Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001; Madsen and Snow, 1991).

To operationalize the candidate’s charisma, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a four-point scale with three statements about his selflessness, vision of the future, and capacity to solve the country’s problems. While charisma is difficult to measure quantitatively, these items have been validated in previous studies of charisma in Latin America and represent key components of the concept as outlined in my theory. I drew the first two of these statements from a five-question charisma battery developed by Merolla and Zechmeister to assess citizens’ perceptions of leaders’ charisma in Mexico and Venezuela.20 I selected the following items: “[Leader’s name] articulates a compelling vision of the future,” and “[Leader’s name] goes beyond his own self-interest for the good of the group.”21 The first reflects the leader’s enactment of the founder’s mission to establish a more prosperous future for the followers; the second relates to the leader’s willingness to sacrifice personal goals to fulfill this righteous mission on behalf of the followers. I incorporated the third statement—“[the leader] is capable of resolving [Argentina’s / Venezuela’s] problems”—to capture respondents’

20 Merolla and Zechmeister (2011, pp.36-37) developed this five-question battery based on a larger set of questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire—5X Long Form, an index that has been widely used to measure charismatic leadership in the United States. The authors selected these questions from the larger survey due to higher loadings on factor analysis from a 2007 survey in the U.S. The battery has since been validated by multiple studies in Latin America, including a 2006 survey in Mexico by Beltrán y Asociados and a 2007 survey in Venezuela by the Latin American Public Opinion Project.

21 The remaining items in the Merolla and Zechmeister battery include the following: “the leader instills pride in being associated with him;” “the leader’s actions build my respect for him;” and “the leader considers the moral and ethical consequences of his decisions.” The former two were not included in the survey experiment because they could have generated confusion due to the hypothetical nature of the design (in other studies, the charisma battery has been used with existing leaders). The third question was not included because citizens found the question wording confusing in a pre-test that was conducted in partnership with the Argentine Panel Election Study in 2015.
perceptions of the leader’s heroic capacity to resolve their misery. Though this statement is not included in Merolla and Zechmeister’s battery, it comprises a central component of my definition of charisma that is also stressed by Weber: the leader’s extraordinary ability to solve the people’s problems. Unlike survey questions in which respondents are prompted to explicitly evaluate the candidate’s economic performance (which was also incorporated in the study as a manipulation check, described below), the broader and more prospective nature of this statement better (if imperfectly) captures whether the candidate inspires and convinces the followers of his/her heroic potential—a crucial component of charisma. I collapsed this three-item charisma battery into an additive index and rescaled to range from 0 to 10.22

In addition to the charisma battery, I included a survey question to measure respondents’ intention to vote for the candidate in future elections. Whereas charismatic perceptions indicate respondents’ potential to form emotional ties to the leader, this item provides a more concrete measure of support that is also necessary for the leader’s consolidation of power. This item was also rescaled to range from 0 to 10 in both countries. Further details regarding all survey questions, including wording and response options, can be found in the appendix.

**Manipulation Checks**

The survey included additional questions to verify that the experimental manipulations had their intended effects. For bold policies, respondents were asked to evaluate the candidate’s performance as governor on a four-point scale. As expected, respondents in the two conditions where the candidate fulfilled bold policies as governor rated his performance significantly higher than respondents in the two conditions where he failed to implement the policies (\(M_{policies} = 3.21\)

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22 As with positive and negative feelings, the order of the charisma battery items was randomized in Argentina, but not in Venezuela due to the use of paper surveys. Chronbach’s alpha scores for the charisma battery were 0.82 for Argentina and 0.89 for Venezuela.
vs. $M_{\text{No Policies}} = 2.19$, $p < .05$ in Argentina; $M_{\text{Policies}} = 3.11$ vs. $M_{\text{No Policies}} = 2.42$, $p < .05$ in Venezuela).

To verify the symbolic manipulation, respondents were asked to evaluate how Peronist/Chavista the candidate appeared on a scale from 0 to 10. On average, respondents in the two conditions with symbolic ties perceived the candidate as more Peronist/Chavista than in the two conditions without symbolic ties ($M_{\text{Symbol}} = 6.98$ vs. $M_{\text{No Symbol}} = 6.46$, $p < .05$ in Argentina; $M_{\text{Symbol}} = 7.56$ vs. $M_{\text{No Symbol}} = 5.63$, $p < .05$ in Venezuela). These data suggest that respondents in both countries received the correct cues for both sets of manipulations.

Results

HI: The combined effects of bold policies and symbolic ties cause followers to express the strongest A) attachment to the movement and B) support for the candidate.

For the most part, the results support HI, suggesting that the combined effect of bold policies and symbolic ties cause followers to express the most intense emotional attachment to the movement and the greatest support for the candidate. Specifically, in Argentina, respondents who received both cues (fulfilled / symbol) expressed the strongest identification with Peronism, the most intense positive feelings, and the weakest negative feelings toward the movement, providing strong support for HI. A. Pairwise difference-of-means tests demonstrate that, on average, the joint effects of fulfilled bold policies and symbolic ties had a significantly greater, positive impact on followers’ expressions of emotional attachment based on these three indicators. The differences were statistically significant ($p \leq .09$) in seven of nine pairwise comparisons between the fulfilled / symbol condition and each of the remaining conditions. The two differences that did not reach statistical significance—between fulfilled / symbol and unfulfilled / symbol for Peronist identification and for positive feelings toward Peronism—were in the hypothesized direction, with larger scores in the fulfilled / symbol condition.
Likewise, Argentine respondents exposed to both fulfilled bold policies and symbolic ties endorsed the candidate most enthusiastically, supporting HI.B. On average, respondents in the fulfilled / symbol condition perceived the candidate as more charismatic. These respondents also expressed greater willingness to vote for the candidate than respondents in the remaining conditions. All difference-of-means tests between this condition and each remaining condition were positive and significant (p \leq .076). Figure 2A presents a graphical illustration of the results and Figure 3A shows pairwise t-tests between the fulfilled / symbol condition and each of the three remaining conditions (full ANOVA results and p-values for all pairwise t-tests are presented in the appendix).

**Figure 2.** Mean levels of movement attachment and candidate support by experimental condition (90% confidence intervals shown).

**A. Argentina**

**B. Venezuela**
Figure 3. Difference of Means: Pairwise T-Tests (90% Confidence Intervals Shown).

A. Argentina: Hypothesis I

B. Argentina: Hypothesis II
C. Venezuela: Hypothesis I

![Graph showing pairwise t-tests between conditions](image)

D. Venezuela: Hypothesis II

![Graph showing pairwise t-tests between conditions](image)

Figures 3A and 3C display pairwise t-tests between the condition with combined cues (fulfilled / symbol) and each remaining condition, as described in Hypothesis I. Figures 3B and 3D display pairwise t-tests between the conditions with marginal cues (fulfilled / no symbol and unfulfilled / symbol) and the condition with no cues (unfulfilled / no symbol), as described in Hypothesis II.
In Venezuela, the results for HI are mixed. On the one hand, HI.A is not supported: In terms of movement attachment, respondents expressed equally strong identification with and feelings toward Chavismo across all four conditions, suggesting that neither bold policies nor symbolic ties had a noticeable effect. The reason is that respondents expressed much higher levels of attachment than their Argentine counterparts: in Argentina, across the four conditions, identification with Peronism ranged from 6.02 to 6.78 with a mean score of 6.45, positive feelings ranged from 6.15 to 7.07 with a mean score of 6.67, and negative feelings ranged from 3.98 to 4.94 with a mean score of 4.66. Conversely, in Venezuela, identification with Chavismo ranged from 8.48 to 8.56 with a mean score of 8.54, positive feelings ranged from 8.71 to 8.96 with a mean score of 8.87, and negative feelings ranged from 1.38 to 1.7 with a mean score of 1.56. In other words, whereas the lower overall intensity of attachments in Argentina allowed for differences to reveal themselves across the four conditions, the “ceiling effects” for attachment in Venezuela suppressed any potential differences.

I suspect these ceiling effects emerged in Venezuela due to the recent nature of Chávez’s death, just four years before the survey was conducted. Because Chávez’s followers continue to mourn his passing, it is likely that their attachments to his legacy remain highly activated, resulting in the expression of particularly raw, powerful feelings toward Chavismo—regardless of the behavior of new leaders. Indeed, the survey experiment was administered during the rule of Chávez’s handpicked successor, Nicolás Maduro, further intensifying the emotional salience of Chávez’s legacy. Conversely, because Perón died over forty years ago, Argentines’ attachments to Peronism are likely to be more nuanced. Argentines who are not exposed to a new leader implementing Peronist cues may therefore be less likely to express their attachments as enthusiastically.
On the other hand, the results in Venezuela uphold HIB: the combined effects of bold policies and symbolic ties caused followers to express the strongest support for the candidate. On average, relative to all other conditions, respondents in the fulfilled / symbol condition perceived the candidate as significantly more charismatic \((p \approx 0\) across all pairwise difference-of-means tests) and were more likely to vote for the candidate in future elections \((p \leq .012\) across all pairwise difference-of-means tests). The significance of these findings is noteworthy: while attachments to Chavismo remain strong among all followers, charismatic attachment to and support for new leaders \textit{vary} based on the extent to which leaders can a) demonstrate their own heroic capacities by fulfilling bold policies and b) convincingly tie that heroism to Chávez’s legacy. Thus, to maximize their support, new candidates must behave similarly to and associate themselves with the charismatic founder to garner support—actions that perpetuate the founder’s legacy. Figure 2B presents a graphical illustration of the results and Figure 3C pairwise \(t\)-tests between the fulfilled / symbol condition and each of the three remaining conditions in Venezuela (full ANOVA results and \(p\)-values for all pairwise \(t\)-tests are presented in the appendix).

\textit{HII: The marginal effects of bold policies and symbolic ties on followers’ A) expression of attachment to the movement and B) support for the candidate are stronger than their combined absence.}

The results provide partial support for HII. In terms of movement attachment, respondents in Argentina exposed to \textit{either} bold policies \textit{or} symbolic ties generally expressed stronger attachment than respondents exposed to \textit{neither} of the two cues, supporting HII.A. The results were significant in three of four pairwise \(t\)-tests \((p \leq .075)\), and were in the correct direction in the fourth \(t\)-test. However, no significant differences were revealed across the three conditions in terms of negative feelings toward the movement, indicating that, unlike the \textit{combined} effect of the two cues, the \textit{marginal} effect of each is insufficient to attenuate
respondents’ negative sentiments toward the movement. As for HII.B, the results from Argentina suggest that bold policies by themselves caused respondents to express stronger support for the candidate, whereas symbolic ties had no significant marginal effect. On average, respondents in the fulfilled / no symbol condition perceived the candidate as more charismatic (p ≈ 0) and expressed greater intentions to vote for the candidate (p = .001) than in the unfulfilled / no symbol condition. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the unfulfilled / symbol condition and the unfulfilled / no symbol condition. These findings suggest that the impact of symbolic ties on voters’ support for the candidate is not as strong as the impact of bold policies. Figure 3B displays pairwise t-tests pertaining to Hypothesis II in Argentina.

In Venezuela, no significant differences emerged across the four conditions in terms of movement attachment due to the ceiling effects described above. However, the results indicate that the marginal effects of bold policies and symbolic ties significantly impacted respondents’ support for the candidate, providing partial support for HII.B. On average, respondents in the fulfilled / no symbol and unfulfilled / symbol conditions perceived the candidate as more charismatic than respondents in unfulfilled / no symbol condition (p ≈ 0 and p = .010, respectively). Furthermore, respondents in the unfulfilled / symbol condition expressed significantly greater willingness to vote for the candidate than respondents in the unfulfilled / no symbol condition (p = .054). Figure 3D displays pairwise t-tests pertaining to these results in Venezuela.

In short, the findings reveal that the marginal effects of bold policies and symbolic ties influence followers’ expressions of emotional attachment to the movement, their perceptions of the new leader’s charisma, and their likelihood to vote for the new leader in future elections—though these effects are weaker than the joint effect of the two cues. Interestingly, the marginal
effects of each cue vary according to the historical position of the charismatic movement: In Argentina, where the movement’s founder died decades ago, the impact of the symbolic cue is relatively weaker than in Venezuela, where the founder died very recently and the movement remains in power. Still, in both countries, the fulfillment of bold policies appears to have a stronger marginal effect on support for the candidate (with the exception of vote intention in Venezuela, perhaps due to the strength of symbolic ties in the current political climate). In contrast, symbolic ties are potentially more important than bold policies for reviving followers’ attachments to the movement. These results reinforce my theory that new leaders must fulfill material and symbolic cues to successfully revive the movement in their own name.

**HIII: Followers’ identification with the movement will mediate the effect of the symbolic cue on support for the candidate.**

To further examine whether symbolic ties increase followers’ support for the candidate by enhancing their identification with the movement, I turn to the third hypothesis. Following Imai, Keele, and Tingley (2010), I estimate the average causal mediation effect of movement identification on the relationship between symbolic ties and followers’ support for the candidate, measured as charismatic perceptions and vote intention (see appendix for equations and full output of the analysis). In Argentina, results uphold the hypothesis. The direct and total effects of symbolic ties on charismatic perceptions and vote intent are not significant. More importantly, however, movement attachment has a positive, significant effect (see Table 3).23 In other words, the symbolic cue has a significant but indirect effect on candidate support: Exposure to symbolic ties increases followers’ support for the candidate by intensifying their identification with the

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23 The mediation analysis includes an assumption that the observed mediator is statistically independent of the observed treatment and pre-treatment confounders. In other words, among respondents who share the same treatment status (such as exposure to the symbolic cue) and share the same pre-treatment characteristics, “the mediator can be regarded as if it were randomized” (Imai et al. 2010, p.313). To verify the validity of this assumption, I conducted a sensitivity analysis as suggested by Imai et al. (2010), which confirmed for both charisma (r=.0613) and vote intent (r=.0965) that the assumption was upheld.
movement. In Venezuela, due to the ceiling effects for movement identification across the four experimental conditions, the results were not significant. Nevertheless, the Argentine findings underscore that, in addition to proving their own impressive leadership by implementing bold policies, successors who want to maximize their support should link themselves to the founder and his heroic mission to reanimate followers’ attachments to the movement.

Table 3. Average causal mediated effect of movement identification on the relationship between the symbolic cue and candidate support (95% confidence intervals shown).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Effect</th>
<th>Argentina Charisma</th>
<th>Vote Intent</th>
<th>Venezuela Charisma</th>
<th>Vote Intent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediation (Indirect)</td>
<td>.138 (.014, .291)</td>
<td>.201 (.016, .413)</td>
<td>.000 (-.046, .048)</td>
<td>.071 (-.122, .275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>.206 (-.257, .662)</td>
<td>.123 (-.422, .660)</td>
<td>1.16 (.582, 1.72)</td>
<td>152 (.817, 2.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.344 (-.128, .825)</td>
<td>.323 (-.244, .900)</td>
<td>1.16 (.592, 1.73)</td>
<td>1.59 (.870, 2.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Mediated</td>
<td>.361 (-2.05, 3.04)</td>
<td>.490 (-6.51, 9.45)</td>
<td>.000 (.000, .000)</td>
<td>.045 (.030, .081)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and Conclusion

This article challenges the notion that charismatic movements must undergo “routinization” to survive. Instead, I show that new politicians can reanimate such movements in their original, charismatic form to influence politics years after the death of the founder. Rather than needing a strong, consistent programmatic platform or a well-developed party organization, I contend that new leaders can achieve this revival by reactivating the followers’ deep, affective bonds with the charismatic founder and movement to win political support. Specifically, I claim that new leaders must establish their own charisma first by promising and fulfilling bold policies that make them appear as saviors in their own right; second, they must symbolically link themselves to the founder to appear as true heirs committed to reviving the founder’s redemptive
mission. Doing so enhances followers’ emotional identification with the movement, which in turn increases their charismatic perceptions of and electoral support for the successor.

I demonstrate these mechanisms of charismatic revival through survey experiments conducted in Argentina and Venezuela with followers of Peronism and Chavismo, respectively. The results illustrate the enduring, deeply emotional nature of followers’ attachments. These bonds appeared especially strong in Venezuela, but also revealed themselves in Argentina. This is remarkable, given that Juan Perón died over forty years ago and many observers doubt the resilience of the Peronist identity. Moreover, the evidence suggests that new leaders—even ones with whom citizens are unfamiliar, such as a hypothetical presidential candidate—can strategically leverage the founder’s legacy to reactivate followers' charismatic attachments and increase their personal allure. In particular, successors who combine bold, initially successful policies and symbolic ties to the founder cause followers to express the strongest emotional attachment and elevate their own charismatic appeal.

The results also shed light on the marginal effects of material and symbolic cues. The material cue appears to have important, independent effects on support for the candidate, measured in terms of charismatic perceptions and vote intention. This implies that leaning on the symbolic legacy of a charismatic predecessor is, by itself, insufficient to consolidate power: New leaders seeking to inherit the founder’s mantle must also independently demonstrate their heroic potential. Yet the results also indicate that symbolic ties have a remarkably strong, marginal effect on citizens’ emotional attachments to the movement. Moreover, a causal mediation analysis with the Argentine data indicates the important, indirect effect of the symbolic cue on

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24 During personal interviews with the author conducted in Buenos Aires between March and July 2016, three public opinion specialists, three political scientists, and four political operatives from across the political spectrum (three Peronists and one non-Peronist) behavior expressed strong doubts that a strong Peronist identity persists among Argentine voters today.
followers’ support for the candidate. The strength of this cue and its positive impact on candidate support, which operates by increasing followers’ identification with the movement, underscores the enduring influence of charismatic leaders’ symbolic legacies on voters’ attitudes and behaviors and suggests that leaders seeking to inherit the founders’ power must also tie themselves to those legacies.

Importantly, it is possible that this strategy of charismatic reactivation extends only to the movement’s traditional followers—those who come from the popular sectors and claim an affinity, however faint, with the movement. Moreover, the overall size of the effects can vary: the symbolic cue may be more powerful at the outset, as indicated in Venezuela, whereas the material cue may prove more essential as time goes on, as suggested in Argentina. Implementation of the strategy therefore does not guarantee new leaders’ rise to power. Nevertheless, the importance of charismatic reactivation should not be underestimated. Indeed, followers need not be active, card-carrying members of the movement; they need only have a latent identification with the movement to be influenced by successors’ cues. Popular-sector voters who satisfy this condition constitute a sizeable proportion of the electorate in countries where charismatic movements take root, including Argentina and Venezuela. Politicians therefore have substantial incentives to enact a strategy of charismatic reactivation to enhance their personal appeal. In turn, as demonstrated in the survey experiment, this strategy can nudge up followers’ emotional attachment to the movement, thereby perpetuating its political relevance over time.

It is perhaps due to the enduring impact of symbolic ties on followers’ attachments and the resulting influence on political support that leaders in Argentina and Venezuela have continually linked themselves to their charismatic predecessors. In Argentina, for instance,
Carlos Menem justified his audacious free-market reforms in the early 1990s by claiming, “This government, this president, is doing what Perón would have done if he had to govern Argentina in this era” (Comas, 1993, author translation). Years later, when former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner sought to regain power as a senator in the 2017 elections, she claimed, “If Perón and Evita were alive, who would they vote for? Evita would vote for Cristina, Perón would vote for Taiana [Cristina’s fellow senatorial candidate], and both would vote for Citizen Unity [Cristina’s political movement]” (Infobae, 2017, author translation). In Venezuela, despite his government’s dismal performance, President Nicolás Maduro has also heavily relied on his connection to Chávez to sustain his legitimacy, declaring himself the “son of Chávez” and emphasizing his spiritual connection to the founder (e.g. Clarín, 2012; Scharfenberg, 2013). The results of my survey experiment suggest that these leaders’ references to the charismatic founders of Peronism and Chavismo could be strategic attempts to revive popular enthusiasm for the movement and establish a strong foundation for the leaders’ support.

In sum, this article makes an important contribution to the study of charisma and politics by demonstrating the micro-foundational process through which new leaders reactivate citizens’ emotional attachments to charismatic movements and increase personal appeal. Future research should investigate the macro-level conditions that influence under what conditions leaders can successfully implement these strategies to win elections and consolidate their own charismatic authority. For instance, the way in which successors rise to power—whether through handpicked selection by the founder or years later, on their own volition—may impact their ability to establish an independent, heroic image while sustaining symbolic ties to the founder. Second, the presence of a severe crisis would seem to intensify followers’ yearning for a new savior and could help successors demonstrate charisma through bold policies that relieve the people’s
suffering. Third, the extent of successors’ entrepreneurialism, including their political skills and ambition to consolidate personalistic (rather than institutionally-based) authority, may also impact their ability to convincingly implement material and symbolic cues to reactivate followers’ attachments. Further investigation of successful and failed heirs in Argentina, Venezuela, and other countries—such as Peru, Turkey, and China—is needed to assess the influence of these factors on new leaders’ ability to revive the movements of their charismatic predecessors.

Finally, given that new leaders can revive charismatic movements by reactivating citizens’ emotional attachments to them, future research should assess the potential trajectories these movements can take over the long term and examine their impact on democratic politics and party-system development. Indeed, it is likely that such movements produce different, more negative consequences than their institutionalized counterparts.
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