
The Democratic Claims of Communist Regime Leaders

Cuba's Council of State in a Comparative Context

ABSTRACT Communist authoritarian regimes born of revolution claim that their rule is democratic, sponsoring elections that, even if uncompetitive, may supplement their claims to rule if the outcome rewards the most-voted with high posts and sidelines the lower-voted. In 2018, Cuba's new president argued that the 2018 election shaped the new National Assembly and Council of State democratically: garnering electoral support and better inclusiveness by gender, race, and age. Indeed, across the 2003, 2013, and 2018 elections, the Council became demographically inclusive, matching or exceeding its East Asian communist regime peers. However, in Cuba as in Vietnam, election vote shares had little effect on Council membership; the most-voted were not rewarded, the lower-voted were not sidelined.

KEYWORDS communist regimes, democratic claims, descriptive inclusion, Cuba, noncompetitive elections

Communist authoritarian regimes born of revolution claim that their rule is democratic and thus legitimate. This claim rests on their regimes' founding revolutionary triumph, which, ruling Communist Party leaders assert, constructed enduring majoritarian public support lasting ever since. The five extant communist regimes, which survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and European communist regimes, hold periodic elections, following the example that the Soviet Union first set to reaffirm the right to rule derived from the founding. Stalin explained this approach to the Extraordinary All-Union Congress of Soviets, convened to ratify the 1936 Soviet Constitution. Because the founding revolution had been consolidated and everyone supported the political regime, he averred, elections would henceforth be based on universal suffrage, the secret ballot, and the incorporation of non-Russian nationalities. "The Constitution of the U.S.S.R. is the only thoroughly democratic Constitution in the world." Its utility was also its "international significance," for all to know "that Socialism and democracy are invincible" (Stalin, cited in Fainsod, 1963, p. 372).

Decades after revolutionary triumph, however, this legitimating legacy rarely suffices. Four (China, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam) of the five (North Korea excepted) surviving communist regimes adopted supplementary procedures to buttress their claim to rule rightfully, in each case changing their electoral rules or practices.

In April 2018, the presidency of Cuba's Council of State and Council of Ministers passed from Raúl Castro to Miguel Díaz-Canel. A civilian born the year following revolutionary victory in 1959 and not a Castro family member, Díaz-Canel still invokes

the ongoing legacy of the Revolution—with capital R to signal its claimed ongoing significance. At his inaugural address, however, Díaz-Canel presented two supplementary claims to affirm the regime’s democratic credentials. He argued that the 2018 national election shaped the membership of the new National Assembly and Council of State in two respects: descriptive inclusion that approximates Cuba’s gender, age, and racial demographics, “almost in the same proportion as the statistics define the nation,” and significant electoral support (Díaz-Canel, 2018; see also Castro, 2018). This article assesses these new claims regarding the Council of State, the Cuban state’s top formal entity, in comparison with the five surviving communist regimes.

- Does demographic inclusion in the respective parliaments and Councils approximate each country’s demography?
- In Cuba, how do the votes reported for women and men Council members compare, how do the votes reported for Afro-descendants compare to those reported for others on the Council, and what is the age gap between Council members and the population?
- In Cuba, were Council of State members chosen in 2018 among the top vote getters in the 2018 election? How do Díaz-Canel’s 2018 Council members compare to those under the Fidel and Raúl Castro presidencies, demographically and electorally (2003, 2013 elections)?
- For Vietnam and Cuba, do top leaders harvest the information from the electoral outcomes to select and deselect Council of State members? Do election outcomes have this “upward-looking” informational utility?

There are four findings for the Cuban case:

- Cuba’s Council of State descriptive inclusion is impressive; it improved during this century. It matches or exceeds the outcomes in the East Asian communist regimes.
- The electoral performance of Council of State men and women, Afro-descendants, and others is approximately the same.
- The electoral claim adduced on behalf of the Council’s democratic legitimacy in 2018 is not credible, nor had it been for previous Councils.
- Cuban leaders, just as Vietnam’s leaders, make little use of the information from election results to select the most-voted and deselect the less-voted for Council membership. There is no evidence of upward-looking informational utility.

A disclaimer is pertinent. The process of Council of State member selection in Cuba is not public. Formally, a commission seeks out nominees, vets likely candidates, and recommends a single slate to the National Assembly for its vote: the number of nominees equals the number of seats to be filled. Informally, the presumption is that in his time Fidel Castro selected or approved all nominees; his successor, Raúl Castro, did the same albeit consulting more widely. The new presumption is that the selectorate to choose the 2018 Council became a collective, including Raúl Castro and his successor, Miguel

Díaz-Canel, and probably two elders from the 1950s revolution, José Ramón Machado, the communist party's second secretary, and Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés. The only criterion for selection ever revealed publicly is to be fervent loyal revolutionaries. Biographical information on Council members is abundant for some, meager for many, and generally noncomparable within and across Councils over the years. Therefore, this article does not pretend to explain why or how Council members are chosen; the evidence is lacking. Instead, it assesses two public claims—new criteria first formulated in 2018—affirming that the selection of Council members embodied democratic features: electoral support and descriptive inclusion. (Alas, there is no public opinion evidence on any views regarding the Council, including none to assess whether the public cares about these two criteria.)

COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL ISSUES

Durable communist regimes never relied just on making legitimacy claims. Upon first victory, ruling communist parties followed Lenin's party centralism, enhancing internal cohesion, expelling factional dissenters, and establishing single-party supremacy over other political and social forces. They also smashed independent power centers, established internal state security institutions and capacities, and seized the commanding heights of the economy. They subordinated the armed forces to the party through the party's incorporation of much of the senior officer corps and the party's penetration of the officer ranks (Huntington, 1957, ch. 4). Regimes governed by ruling communist parties have been among the most durable authoritarian regimes of the 20th and 21st centuries (Geddes, 1999; Levitsky & Way, 2013). Cuba's experience is similar.

Learning also from Lenin, communist parties have long been committed to political education, agitation, propaganda, mobilization, and other means to build support and make claims to legitimacy. As the moment of first victory recedes and founding cadres die, communist parties never forgo making legitimacy claims that rest on their revolutionary triumph. As the first study to survey a large number of Soviet citizens (all exiles by the time of the study) put it, "much effort is expended to rationalize" changes necessary to adjust to new circumstances "and preserve the appearance of continuity and consistency" (Bauer, Inkeles & Kluckhohn, 1956, p. 39). To secure that aim, communist parties deploy two tools that this article examines, namely, enhancing descriptive inclusion and drawing more popular politicians into high governing circles.

First, scholars have argued that descriptive inclusion, based on gender or race or ethnicity, improves a constituent's relationship with the state (Mansbridge, 1999). Scholars of the United States have shown that there is a positive relationship between Black descriptive inclusion and African American political efficacy (Banducci, Donovan & Karp, 2004), with weaker such effects in the case of women (Merolla, Sellers & Fowler, 2013). Cuba, alone among communist countries, has a large Afro-descendant population. Comparatively, the scholarship indicates that female parliamentarians strengthen the position of women's interests in general (West, 2017). And, taking Stalin seriously, the

inclusion of identitarian minorities in parliament might be an achievement of the founding revolution.

Improved descriptive inclusion of women responds to the logic of party competition; especially susceptible are parties that fear being outflanked (Wängnerud, 2009). Single-party regimes do not permit interparty competition, but they manage the competitive dynamics of a ruling authoritarian coalition (Catalano Weeks, 2018). Moreover, once political communication readily crosses borders, ruling communist parties may enhance some descriptive inclusion (gender, age, race) to anticipate and blunt opponents.

Descriptive inclusion need not imply effective representation, however; the title of Mala Htun's *Inclusion without Representation in Latin America* highlights the challenges (Htun, 2016). Across Latin America, in this century the political class now includes more women and members of racial or ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, many such new parliamentarians represent best the positions of their parties or the presidents and presidential candidates whom they support, not necessarily the preferences of those most demographically similar to them. It takes time, effort, and political work for the preferences of these newly included legislators to match those of citizens who share those same identities (Boas & Smith, 2019). Descriptive inclusion is the first step required for eventual descriptive representation; hence it is the focus of this article, albeit additional research would be required to ascertain whether effective representation then improves.

Second, since Stalin, communist parties affirmed that single-party elections validate their ongoing and sufficient legitimation born at the revolutionary origin. Thus, elections in communist regimes have been plebiscitary rededications to that origin. The comparative scholarship identifies additional reasons for communist (Manion, 2017; Shi, 1999; Malesky & Schuler, 2011) and noncommunist authoritarian regimes (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Blaydes, 2006) to hold elections. Elections may enable top leaders to ascertain the relative electoral popularity of local politicians—I label this concept downward-looking informational utility.

Elections may also contribute to the configuration of top state organs. To assert claims to democratic legitimacy, members of top state organs allegedly earn higher shares of the votes cast, thereby justifying why they hold high office. Thus, when choices for top leadership posts are made, the most-voted candidates would be picked over the lower-voted candidates. Such elections would have upward-looking informational utility, helping to identify those who rule the country. Malesky and Schuler (2013) test this hypothesis for Vietnam's National Assembly; this article assesses it regarding Cuba.

In order to assess who are Cuba's most-voted and lower-voted candidates, two general electoral system benchmarks will be employed counterfactually: single-member first-past-the-post district elections, or proportional representation elections. First, what might have been the outcome if Cuba were to employ competitive single-member-plurality district rules? In any given electoral unit, only one candidate is elected, who may win with a simple plurality, but at least two candidates run for the post. Are the candidates who win in their municipalities more likely to be chosen for Cuba's Council of State membership than those who come in second or lower in their municipality? Second, under proportional representation, in any given electoral unit such as a province, several

candidates with the highest shares of the votes cast are elected, but only they; the number of candidates exceeds the number of posts to be filled from this electoral unit. Are the candidates who win the higher shares of the votes in their provinces (e.g., top fifth or top half of the candidacies) more likely to be chosen for Cuba's Council membership than those whose shares of the votes are lower? Under both rules, electoral democracy claims would expect that lower-voted candidates lose. In a single-party regime, electoral democracy claims would expect that the most-voted candidates would be more likely than the lower-voted candidates to be chosen as Council members.

HYPOTHESES REGARDING COMMUNIST REGIMES

Hypothesis 1

- a. Parliaments in communist regimes feature better descriptive inclusion than post-communist parliaments.
- b. Parliaments in communist regimes include members from women and identitarian minorities, approximating their demographic shares of the population.
- c. The "Revolution" caused this inclusive democratic outcome (Stalin's hypothesis); hence, high early on, demographic inclusion remains approximately constant over time.
- d. Voters in communist elections vote consistently with a descriptive inclusion design, registering no demographically sensitive noteworthy differences between candidate types.

Hypothesis 2

- a. Members of Cuba's Council of State and its Communist Party Political Bureau receive the highest proportions of the reported votes cast in elections.
- b. Retained and new members of Cuba's Council of State receive a higher proportion of the reported votes cast in elections than Council members who are dropped.

COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE: DESCRIPTIVE INCLUSION AND ELECTIONS

Communist regimes have, on average, performed well in terms of descriptive inclusion. Regarding women's inclusion, communist parliaments outperform post-communist parliaments. The inclusion of women in Eastern European parliaments fell from about 33% at the end of the communist era in the late 1980s to below 15% in this same region in the post-communist 1990s (Stockemer, 2007).

Extant communist regimes vet candidacies for parliament to ensure their preferred descriptive inclusion outcomes. Communist regimes across East Asia register better descriptive inclusion in terms of gender than was the pattern in post-communist Europe but less good descriptive inclusion than had been the case in communist Europe. In 2017, women accounted for 24% of China's National People's Congress and 17% of its National Standing Committee (akin to Cuba's Council of State) (BBC News, 2017). In Laos' 2016 election, women won 27.5% of the National Assembly seats, up from 25% in

the 2011 election (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011, 2016). In North Korea, the proportion of women elected Supreme People's Assembly members was 16.3% in 2014 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014), down from 20% following the 1990 election (Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, 1992, p. 5). In Vietnam's National Assembly, the proportion of women elected in 2007 was 25.8%, while the share of women in its Standing Committee (akin to Cuba's Council of State) was 14% (Malesky & Schuler, 2011, p. 506). Therefore, the proportion of women in East Asian communist-regime parliaments is characteristically one-quarter, with North Korea at one-sixth, and variable between elections depending on the country. (Cuba's female inclusion outperforms these East Asian communist benchmarks by a wide margin for both its National Assembly and its Council of State.)

China, Laos, and Vietnam are ethno-linguistically heterogeneous. North Korea is ethnically and linguistically homogeneous; there is no statistical reporting of non-ethnic-Korean membership of its Supreme People's Assembly. Cuba is linguistically homogeneous.

China, Laos, and Vietnam have formal policies to ensure a fixed share of their parliaments for ethno-linguistic minorities; all three deliberately match their national demography to parliamentary seat shares. In China, ethnic minorities (about 9% of the population) are allocated approximately 12% of its parliamentary seats and 16% of its National Standing Committee (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). Laos' government estimates that nearly 34% of its people belong to minority ethno-linguistic groups (Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2006, p. 4); 38% of Laotian National Assembly members originated from these groups (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011). Vietnam's non-Kinh (Viet) population is approximately 14%; ethnic minorities account for 17.5% of Vietnam's National Assembly (Palmieri, 2010, p. 4). These are noteworthy achievements. (Cuba has also deliberately achieved the same goal of ethno-racial parliamentary descriptive inclusion.)

In elections, absent competition between parties, four of the five extant communist regimes (North Korea excepted) have adopted electoral practices to bolster the claim to democratic legitimation. At one end, for decades the Soviet Union held single-party elections in single-member districts: each district elected only one parliamentarian. The number of candidates to be elected equaled the number of seats to be filled. Voters could, however, vote against a candidate, vote blank, or nullify the ballot (Gilison, 1968). North Korea is heir to this approach, also with a single set of candidates equal to the number of seats to be filled, each chosen in single-member districts. The ruling Workers' Party of Korea formally leads a coalition with two smaller parties, allocating a prearranged number of assured seats to each. As in the old Soviet Union, voters may vote no, blank, or null; there is no interparty or intercandidature competition (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014; Cha & Hwang, p. 198). From such procedures, electoral performance matters little for the selection of top posts.

Members of China's National People's Congress are chosen indirectly, as at first in the Soviet Union until the Stalin constitution and in Cuba until the 1991 electoral law.

However, in 1987 China adopted provisions for direct elections of village committees. Within a few years, most villages held semicompetitive elections, featuring more candidates than the number of positions to be filled. Village elections have downward-looking informational utility for top national leaders, revealing the relative popularity of local politicians. Political efficacy also increases once villagers learn how to remove unpopular leaders from office; hundreds of thousands of candidates lose routinely (Landry, Davis & Wang, 2010; Manion, 1996, 2017). Village elections thus matter for voters, but this innovation sheds no light on national elections or on the selection of members for China's top state organs.

At the other end, Laos and Vietnam hold single-party albeit multicandidate elections for their respective National Assemblies. Voters thus chose between candidates although not between parties. In its 2016 single-party National Assembly elections, Laos fielded 211 candidates in 18 multimember constituencies to fill 149 seats. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party won 144 and pre-vetted independents won the other five seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Vietnam also holds single-party multicandidate elections. In its 2007 election, 875 candidates competed for 493 seats. All centrally nominated candidates from the Communist Party, the government, the judiciary, and the Office of the President were elected, while 48% of locally nominated candidates were elected (Malesky & Schuler, 2009; Malesky & Schuler, 2011, p. 506). This provided important downward-looking informational utility to top elites. However, Malesky and Schuler found no evidence that vote share is associated with promotion to Vietnam's parliamentary leadership positions and only limited evidence for vote share association with ministerial posts; instead, nonelectoral Communist Party considerations prevailed (Malesky & Schuler, 2013). (These findings are similar for Cuba, that is, no upward-looking informational utility.)

In sum, extant communist regimes emphasize the enduring democratic claims from the founding revolution but, for parliament, they also attend to the descriptive inclusion of women and (North Korea excepted) to descriptive ethnic group inclusion, with more tenuous results for their State Councils. Once those in office look like us, the claim for democratic legitimacy strengthens. The evidence supports hypothesis 1a, and 1b regarding identitarian minorities, albeit less so regarding women. The evidence does not support hypothesis 1c; there is a lag in improving descriptive inclusion and variability by country and across time. (Because the election rules guarantee the inclusion of specified demographic categories, we cannot assess here hypothesis 1d, but we will for Cuba.)

China at the local level, and Vietnam and Laos nationally, feature single-party multicandidate elections, where some candidates must lose, enabling leaders to use the information from electoral results to assess the popularity of local politicians. However, Malesky and Schuler show for Vietnam that, while the support for local politicians is assessed, governing teams are not constructed taking electoral results into account: there is downward-looking but no upward-looking informational utility. Now we turn to Cuba's experience.

THREE CLAIMS TO GOVERN CUBA

Under Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro, National Assembly elections sought to reaffirm the regime's alleged enduring legitimacy. In his 2018 presidential inaugural speech, Díaz-Canel (born in 1960) highlighted the regime's continuity since the 1959 revolutionary victory. He affirmed, "I come to promise nothing"; rather, he would implement the Revolution's and the Party's programs—his main claim to govern. He closed his speech as Fidel Castro had done, shouting, "Fatherland or death! Socialism or death! We shall overcome!" (Díaz-Canel, 2018). (During his presidency, Raúl Castro had dropped such a peroration.)

Díaz-Canel also advanced two newer claims. He invoked the political significance of National Assembly elections referring to those deputies who were also historical elders, noting that Raúl Castro had been the deputy candidate with the highest proportion of valid votes cast in the March 2018 election, while the PCC (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*) second secretary (J. R. Machado) and Commanders of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés and Guillermo García were also among those with the highest proportion of votes. These electoral outcomes became a new legitimacy-bearing claim.

Díaz-Canel also called attention to the descriptive inclusiveness of the National Assembly and the Council of State, specifically the proportion of women and Afro-descendants. In his valedictory, outgoing President Raúl Castro did not refer much to electoral criteria; neither he nor his brother Fidel believed that they needed election endorsement. However, Raúl Castro (2018) dwelled extensively on descriptive inclusion by gender and race. In the weeks before the 2018 election, Cuba's official media emphasized the worth of Cuba's elections. Wealthy contributors could not buy the election; there could be no interparty negative advertising. Commissions staffed by regime-sponsored organization members vetted candidates to ensure descriptive inclusion. Cuba's elections, the official media trumpeted, were praiseworthy, free from the stains in elections elsewhere while generating a parliament that looked like the nation's people.

Cuba's 2018 official report to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review affirmed that "the results of the [2018] general elections made evident and demonstrated the functioning of democratic institutions" in Cuba (Gómez, 2018). Cuba's regime, in President Díaz-Canel's view, is revolutionary and democratic; that is, its governing team looks like, and won electoral support from, Cuba's people.

THE CASE, ELECTION RULES, DATA, AND APPROACH

Cuba stands between divergent electoral designs among extant communist systems. China and North Korea do not permit voters to cast differential votes for candidates in national parliamentary elections, while Laos and Vietnam authorize multicandidate competition within a single-party regime, permitting voters to choose between candidates. Cuba features so-called approval voting, that is, interparty and national intercandidate competitions are forbidden—everyone on the National Assembly ballot is elected—but voters may vote for some candidates while not for others within small districts.

Cuba's president is no longer called Castro. The 2018 presidential transition, albeit not a regime transition, was the first opportunity to analyze a modicum of political change at the top and claims to rule other than participation in the 1950s rebellion or family heritage.

The National Assembly is Cuba's parliament. The Council of State is its executive committee, Cuba's top formal state entity; its members must be chosen from the National Assembly. The Council issues decree-laws with the full force of law whenever the Assembly is not in session; the Assembly has been in session only a few days each year.

Cuba has held direct popular elections for National Assembly deputies since 1993. Deputy candidate vetting ensures regime loyalty and descriptive inclusiveness. Cuba's electoral law requires the number of candidates for the National Assembly election to equal the number of seats. Two to five candidates are clustered in election districts, but, in every district, the number of candidates equals the number of seats to be filled ("Sistema," 2017). Voters have four choices. They may vote for the united slate, that is, all the candidates on the ballot, which official organizations and media recommend; the ballot prominently features a large circle to make it easy to cast such a vote ("Estampas," 2018). The alternatives (2018 percentages of votes cast in parentheses) are to vote blank (4.32%), annul the ballot (1.26%), or vote selectively (18.46%).

Cuba's official definition of the selective vote is (votes cast) – (blank votes) – (annulled votes) – (votes for the united slate) = selective vote. Thus, a selective voter votes for one or more candidates on the ballot, but not for all, even though all candidates are elected.¹ No deputy candidate has ever been defeated. This procedure provides more national expressive range than in North Korea or China, but less than in Laos or Vietnam.

The selective vote permits an assessment of the impact of voting on the choice of Council of State members: Do top leaders use their own reported results to select Council members from among National Assembly deputies? (Sources for computations: "Nuestros Diputados," 2004, 2014, 2018). The National Assembly formally votes for a single slate of its members for the Council. Were the most-voted deputies those chosen for the Council's single slate? If so, then the election buttresses the electoral claim to rule. If Council members received the lower shares of the vote in their respective municipalities or provinces, then this electoral claim vanishes.

The accuracy, validity, or fairness of the voting process does not matter for this purpose; because candidates are vetted strictly before being listed on the ballot, and the number of candidates equals the number of seats, officialdom has no incentive to commit fraud in reporting votes cast.

There are published official results for the 2003, 2013, and 2018 National Assembly elections, and some for the 2008 election ("Resultados finales de las elecciones," 2004; "Resultados finales de las elecciones del Poder Popular," 2011; "Resultados finales oficiales," 2013; "Nuestros Diputados," 2018). Cuba's only available official data for the

1. The leadership says and the public sees the official definition. For another definition, see Fonseca Galvis and Superti (2019, pp. 1285–1286).

2008 Council has been purged of 4 of its 31 members, rendering that data set mostly unusable here. The count of Afro-descendants relies upon, and matches, the official count.

When National Assembly votes cast for Council of State selection have been published, as in 2008, the results varied only from 99.5% to 100% (“Resultados de la elección del Consejo de Estado,” 2008). In contrast, the voting variation between individual candidates for the National Assembly has been wider; in 2018, the average aggregated selective vote ranged from Havana province’s 25.8% to Granma province’s 12.8%.

Since 1993, when direct popular elections for National Assembly deputy were first authorized, official entities mobilized people to vote for the united slate. The 2013 election was the first for which this mobilization focused on ensuring voting turnout, not on voting for the united slate, although such a vote remained the official preference (August, 2014, p. 89). As a percentage of the votes cast, the officially reported national-average selective vote held at 8.3% in 2003 and 8.6% in 2008, doubling to 16.6% in 2013, and rising to 18.5% in 2018. The 2003 election was Fidel Castro’s last as president. Raúl Castro presided over the 2008, 2013, and 2018 elections. Díaz-Canel’s selection followed the 2018 election, though he was not yet out of Raúl Castro’s political shadow.

Because of the cross-election noncomparability obstacles created by changes in mobilization strategies, the differences between three presidents, and cautions about data validity, I employ the data ordinarily; given the small size of the Council, I calculate percentages for the universe of Council members. The Council has more power than the National Assembly, but much less than the PCC Political Bureau; the latter serves as a comparative benchmark for the 2018 election. The number of Council members remained at 31 through 2018.

DESCRIPTIVE INCLUSION IN CUBA

In 2018, Raúl Castro reported (computed from Castro [2018] and Consejo de Estado [2018]): National Assembly deputies were 53.2% women and 40.5% Afro-descendants (officially, *negros* and *mulatos*) (de la Fuente, 2001); Council of State members were 48.4% women and 45.2% Afro-descendants; and new Council of State members were 42%. In this century, the number of women members was 6 in 2003 and 8 in 2008, but under Raúl Castro it jumped to 13 in 2013 and 15 in 2018. The number of Afro-descendants was 10 in 2003 and 11 in 2008 and 2013, jumping to 14 in 2018. The 2012 Census indicates that 35.9% of Cubans were *negro*, *mulato*, or *mestizo* (ONEI, 2016, p. 20). Thus, the Council’s membership in 2003–13 approached or matched the Afro-descendant share of the Census, exceeding it in 2018.

The median age of the Council of State rose from 60 in 2003 to 64 in 2008, but it dropped to 52 in 2013 and 53 in 2018. The median age of the top eight officers in the Council of State (president, six vice presidents, and secretary) rose from 71 in 2003 to 74 in 2008, dropping to 67 in 2013 and to 57 in 2018. Cuba’s median population age rose from 34.3 in the 2002 Census to 39.5 in the 2012 Census (Benítez Pérez, 2014). Thus,

TABLE 1. Electoral Outcomes, All Members, Council of State, 2003–18
(Percentages, $N = 31$)

	2003	2013	2018
Topped municipality	26	42	26
Topped district	55	55	Not available
Last in municipality	16	16	23
Last in district	32	32	Not available
Top fifth in province	39	26	6
Top half in province	61	58	42
Bottom tenth in province	6	6	10

Note: Entries refer to National Assembly electoral outcomes in 2003, 2013, or 2018.

the gap between the Council of State’s median age and the population median age was cut from 26 to 13 years from 2003 to 2013. The descriptive inclusion of youth (defined as below the population’s median age) changed little and remained slight, however; the Council of State had none in 2003, one each in 2008 and 2013, and three in 2018.

In short, the Council meets well a standard of descriptive inclusion, improving over the years (computed from *Focus*, 2003; “Miembros del Consejo de Estado,” 2008; “Miembros del Consejo de Estado,” 2014; “Miembros,” 2018). With regard to gender and age, the principal change occurred in 2013; with regard to Afro-descendants, in 2018. In 2018, the Council’s gender and race composition matched Cuba’s demography; its median age became closer to the population’s, even though the number of those below the population’s median age remained small. Cuba’s descriptive inclusion in terms of gender is twice that in East Asian communist regimes, while its ethnic/racial descriptive inclusion matches that in East Asian communist regimes.

ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN CUBA

Do electoral outcomes warrant Council of State membership? No. Suppose Cuba were to have multicandidate elections under a single-member-plurality district (SMPD) rule, with the municipality as the electoral unit; every municipality would have at least two candidates but choose just one deputy who wins with a simple plurality. Under such counterfactual SMPD rules, Council members must come first in municipal elections. If so, then the majority of Council of State members would have been defeated in each of three elections reported in Table 1. In fact, National Assembly candidates run in districts, some of which are municipalities while others are smaller; data for districts are available only for 2003 and 2013. In each of those two elections, majorities of Council members would have won the district under SMPD rules but 45% would have been defeated, becoming ineligible for Council membership under such a counterfactual rule.

Alternatively, suppose ranking last in a district, or in a municipality, would prevent Council membership. If the rule were to apply to districts, one-third of the Council members would have been ineligible in 2003 and 2013. If the rule were to apply to municipalities, one-sixth of the members would have been ineligible in these three elections.

Suppose Cuba were to have competitive elections under proportional representation rules, with the province as the electoral unit; to be elected, a deputy candidate must place in the top fifth of vote receivers in a province. A majority of Council members never qualified for the top fifth of the vote getters in their respective provinces in each of these three elections (Table 1). Once the political mobilization seeking the united vote was relaxed, only a quarter of the members reached the top fifth in 2013 and only 6% did so in 2018. If the requirement for service on the Council were to have placed in the top half of the vote receivers in their respective provinces, majorities of Council members in 2003 and 2013 but only a minority in 2018 would have qualified.

In 2013, of the Council's six vice presidents, Salvador Valdés Mesa, former general secretary of the Cuban Workers' Confederation, and Mercedes López Acea, Havana Province PCC first secretary, came in last in their respective districts. He ranked 37th of 44 deputies in Camagüey province, and she 104th of 109 in Havana province. In 2018, Valdés Mesa became Cuba's first vice president notwithstanding ranking last in his municipality and 24th out of 25 in Mayabeque province. Also, in 2018 Beatriz Johnson became one of five vice presidents notwithstanding ranking 24th out of 26 in her municipality and 52nd out of 54 in Santiago province, whose provincial assembly president she also was. Notwithstanding Díaz-Canel's assertion that in 2018 the Commanders of the Revolution were among the top vote getters, Commander Guillermo García came in last in his municipality and 38th out of 42 candidates in Granma province.

The PCC Political Bureau (PB) has been more powerful than the Council of State. The mass public does not vote for PB members; its 17 members were chosen at the 2016 Party Congress, but all ran for National Assembly deputy in 2018. This comparison refers to votes reported for Council and PB members in the 2018 deputy election. Nearly half of the PB members but only a quarter of the Council members were the most-voted in their municipality. Almost one-sixth of the PB members but fewer than a tenth of the Council members ranked among the top fifth most-voted in their respective provinces. A majority of PB members ranked in the top half of their respective provinces, a higher proportion than for Council members, and only one PB member but three Council members ranked in the bottom tenth of their provinces. However, the PB was markedly less descriptively inclusive than the Council; the proportion of women and Afro-descendants on the 2016 PB was about half of the comparable proportions of the 2018 Council. The Council's descriptive inclusion was its key feature; hence the national leadership chose demographically inclusive Council members even if they underperformed the PB members electorally.

Higher name recognition for PB members, thanks to official media coverage, may explain why PB members outperform Council members, but there are no public opinion data to shed light on this difference. Three PB top vote getters were Raúl Castro, José

TABLE 2. Electoral Outcomes, Female and Male Council of State Members, 2003–18
(Percentages, $N = 31$)

	2003 F	2003 M	2013 F	2013 M	2018 F	2018 M
Topped municipality	17	28	31	50	20	31
Top fifth in province	50	32	15	33	0	13
Top half in province	67	60	62	56	47	38
Bottom tenth in province	0	8	15	0	7	13
<i>N</i>	6	25	13	18	15	16

Note: F indicates female; M, male. Entries refer to National Assembly electoral outcomes in 2003, 2013, or 2018.

Ramón Machado, and Ramiro Valdés; all had held top posts since the start of the 1960s. They and three other PB members—namely, National Assembly President Esteban Lazo, City of Havana First Party Secretary Mercedes López Acea, and First Vice President Miguel Díaz-Canel—received ample positive official media coverage. Yet only Díaz-Canel and Valdés joined the 2018 Council.

In this century, some members of the Council of State were among the top reported vote getters, Fidel and Raúl Castro among them. However, in general, electoral outcomes have had little impact on Council composition. A majority of Council members never topped their respective municipalities, and a majority never placed in the top fifth of candidates in their respective provinces. As constraints on voter choice relaxed a bit, in 2018 not even half of the Council members placed in the top half of their respective provinces while the Council’s first vice president was among the worst electoral performers. In short, the electoral claim adduced on behalf of the Council’s democratic legitimacy has not been credible under Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, or Miguel Díaz-Canel.

DESCRIPTIVE INCLUSION AND ELECTORAL OUTCOMES: VARIATIONS WITHIN CUBA

Do women and Afro-descendants perform less well electorally? No. Gender and race do not distinguish well between Council of State electoral performers (Tables 2 and 3). Women candidates have consistently placed at or above the top half of the province, outperforming male candidates; however, women candidates consistently underperformed in terms of topping the vote in a municipality and have had variable results in terms of ranking in the province’s top fifth or the lowest tenth. Afro-descendants underperformed at the municipal level in 2003, but the differences with the results of others wither by 2013 and 2018. Proportionately in the provinces, Afro-descendants outperformed in 2003, with the differences becoming smaller in 2013 and 2018. In terms of both gender and race, given these small numbers, the differences are modest. The electoral performance of Council of State members—men and women, Afro-descendants and others—is approximately the same.

TABLE 3. Electoral Outcomes, Afro-Descendant and Other Council of State Members, 2003–18 (Percentages, $N = 31$)

	2003 A	2003 O	2013 A	2013 O	2018 A	2018 O
Topped municipality	10	33	40	33	21	24
Top fifth in province	50	29	20	29	7	6
Top half in province	70	57	60	57	57	41
Bottom tenth in province	0	10	20	0	14	6
<i>N</i>	10	21	10	21	14	17

Note: A indicates Afro-descendant; O, Others. Entries refer to National Assembly electoral outcomes in 2003, 2013, or 2018.

TABLE 4. Council of State Members Retained, Dropped, or New, 2013–18 (Percentages)

	Retained 2013	Dropped 2013	New 2013	Retained 2018	Dropped 2018	New 2018
Topped municipality	70	29	29	28	46	15
Top fifth in province	30	43	24	6	23	7
Top half in province	80	57	43	56	69	38
Bottom tenth in province	0	0	10	17	15	7
<i>N</i>	10	7	21	18	13	13

Note: Council members are always 31; in 2013, only 7 of the 21 dropped members of the 2008 Council ran for reelection. Entries refer to National Assembly electoral outcomes in 2013 or 2018.

INFORMATIONAL UTILITY IN CUBA

Authoritarian regime elections enable top leaders to monitor the relative popularity of local politicians, that is, downward-looking informational utility. However, upward-looking informational utility matters as well: Are incumbent Council of State members who perform well in a National Assembly election retained, are those who perform poorly dropped, and are others who have performed well selected as new members to replace those who are dropped? Not so in Cuba's two most recent national elections (Table 4). In 2013, the Council's retained members generally outperformed those members dropped, but the dropped members outperformed the new members selected that year. In 2018, the dropped members outperformed both the retained and the new members. In 2018, nearly half of the dropped members but only a sixth of the new members topped the ticket in their respective municipalities; two-thirds of the dropped members but only a third of the new members ranked in the top half of their respective provinces.

TABLE 5. Council of State President, Vice Presidents, and Secretary, Retained, Dropped, or New in 2018 (Percentages, $N = 8$)

	Retained 2018	Dropped 2018	New 2018
Topped municipality	60	100	33
Top fifth in province	20	67	0
Top half in province	40	100	33
Bottom tenth in province	20	0	33
N	5	3	3

Note: Entries refer to electoral outcomes in 2018 National Assembly elections.

Consider the top eight leaders (president, six vice presidents, and secretary) of the 2018 Council (Table 5). The dropped members outperformed those who had been retained and the new members, while the new members underperformed the retained members.

Cuba's top leaders made little use of the electoral outcomes to select the most popular cadres for the Council of State and to deselect the less popular. There is no upward-looking informational utility there, just as there is not in Vietnam. The choices for top Council leaders as well as for the whole Council underscore inattentiveness to electoral outcomes in making such choices.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Peeking into the future, are Council of State members below the Council's median age better electoral performers than those above its median age? The Council's median age dropped sharply between 2008 and 2013. Table 6 compares the 2013 and 2018 Councils for those above and below the Council's median ages who were dropped, retained, or new on two variables: ranking first in their municipality and in the top half of vote receivers in their province.

In 2013, members below the Council's median age outperformed those above the median age, on both variables, among those retained from the 2008 Council, among the new members, and in the total results. In 2018, the results were more mixed. The retained members, disproportionately older, divided between the better and the worse electoral performers, whereas the two retained younger members did poorly in their municipality but better in the provincial rankings. All but one of the new members in 2018 were below the median age; the 2018 new members performed less well than those dropped in 2018. Hence, the total outcome in 2018 shows those above the median age, compared to the younger members, performing nearly the same in the municipalities but underperforming in the provinces.

TABLE 6. Council of State Members, Retained, Dropped, or New, by Age Cohort, 2013–18 (Percentages)

	Top, municipality	Top half, province	N
2013>median, drop	40	60	5
2013<median, drop	0	0	0
2013>median, retain	57	71	7
2013<median, retain	100	100	3
2013>median, new	17	33	6
2013<median, new	30	50	10
2013>median, total	08	54	13
2013<median, total	46	62	13
2018>median, drop	40	40	5
2018<median, drop	50	67	6
2018>median, retain	42	42	12
2018<median, retain	0	100	2
2018>median, new	0	0	1
2018<median, new	25	50	12
2018>median, total	38	38	13
2018<median, total	21	57	14

Note: Council members are always 31; in 2013, only 7 of the 21 dropped members of the 2008 Council ran for reelection. Age data are missing for two 2013 members. Median age: 52 in 2013, 53 in 2018. All at median age excluded: three in 2013 (two scored high), four (all four scored low) in 2018. Entries refer to National Assembly electoral outcomes in 2013 or 2018.

Thus, the general shake-up for the 2013 Council did tilt toward seeking candidates with better electoral appeal, whereas the 2018 Council did not accord priority to this concern. As shown in Table 1, the 2018 Council had fewer members in the top fifth and in the top half of the provinces than the 2003 and 2013 Councils and fewer topping their municipality than the 2003 Council. However, the numbers underlying the percentages in Table 6 are small, impeding sweeping conclusions, other than that the 2018 Council's democratic claims on electoral grounds are not in evidence.

CONCLUSION

In common with other communist regimes, in 2018 those who governed Cuba justified their rule in the name of the Revolution. As the revolutionary torch passes to new generations, however, the claim based just on historical origin strains credulity. Thus in 2018, incoming President Miguel Díaz-Canel invoked two supplementary criteria to

justify democratic claims: descriptive inclusion of top officials and their vote-getting performance in the National Assembly election. Cuba's official media presented the 2018 election as superior to those featuring interparty competition.

Cuba's Council of State and National Assembly are indeed descriptively inclusive, increasingly so across this century's elections. A highly controlled process of nomination and election ensures that outcome. Afro-descendant and women Council of State members perform neither better nor worse electorally than male members or non-Afro-descendants. (Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1d are valid in Cuba's case, but not hypothesis 1c because descriptive inclusion dates from the two most recent elections; that is, it was not an immediate outcome of the Revolution.) Cuba outperforms its East Asian comrades in terms of the descriptive inclusion of women in parliament and the Council. Cuba matches the East Asian performance in ethno-racial terms for parliament and the Council, but this is a noteworthy accomplishment, given the large share of Cuba's Afro-descendants in the national population. It requires further research to ascertain whether this rising descriptive inclusion will generate better effective representation for women and Afro-descendants.

However, electoral results have never explained why individuals are chosen for Council of State or PCC Political Bureau membership (contrary to hypothesis 2a). Only a few Council members performed well in the context of Cuba's national elections. Never in this century has a majority of Council members ranked among the top fifth of vote getters in their respective provinces, least so in 2018; if Cuba were to have competitive elections under proportional representation rules, most Council of State members might have been defeated. Never in this century has the Council's majority topped the election in their respective municipalities; if Cuba were to have competitive elections under single-member-plurality rules with municipalities as the electing unit, a majority of the Council might have been defeated. Several Council members, including its first vice president, other vice presidents, and some new members, were among Cuba's lower-voted politicians in their respective municipalities and provinces in the 2018 election. The claim to electoral democratic legitimacy for the Council was especially weak in 2018.

An authoritarian election may identify politicians who contribute popular support and spot those whose election results may detract support from the regime. Cuba's 2018 election had such informational potential, uncovering the relative levels of candidate support in its municipalities and provinces. Yet, national leaders did not use this information to constitute the new Council. These findings concur with Malesky and Schuler's for Vietnam (2013, p. 62): "Vote share is not a factor in leadership selection. The Vietnamese regime does not appear to take results of the election into account before promoting certain delegates to all-important leadership positions at the central level." In Cuba and Vietnam, election outcomes have yet to be used for their upward-looking informational utility (contrary to hypothesis 2b).

The imbalance of power between the Council and the National Assembly has persisted, however. The National Assembly still meets only a handful of days each year; in 2019, it approved seven laws. The Council, the key institution, meets more frequently and approves many more decree-laws with the full force of law.

Might generational transition bring more electorally appealing candidates into the Council of State? There was a hint of that in the Council's configuration in 2013 but not in 2018. The new Constitution and Electoral Law, which went into effect in 2019, do not set age or term limits for National Assembly or Council service. Hence, the inclusion of younger and electorally more popular members will require political decisions yet to be made.

The 2019 Constitution, Articles 126 and 127, sets age and term limits only for the president of the Republic: up to two five-year terms of service and not older than age 60 upon first election. This new Constitution has had one effect on membership, however. It prohibits members of the Council of Ministers from belonging to the Council of State (Article 121); until this time, the ministers of the Armed Forces and Interior, always generals, had typically belonged to both Councils. The number of active-duty military on the Council of State had been three in 2003, five in 2008, four in 2013, and two in 2018, henceforth dropping to zero.

There is insufficient evidence to assess why Council of State members are selected; thus, this is not this article's purpose. Technical or political skill or clientelism may matter more in Council membership selection than electoral appeal, but such nonelectoral explanations require further evidence and research. However, considering that Cuba's gross domestic product median annual growth rate 2013–18 was only 1.1%, technical economic-policy outperformance was not a likely reason for selection to the 2018 Council (Naciones Unidas, 2019, p. 108).

This article assesses whether two democratic claims explain membership in the Council of State. It finds that descriptive inclusion helps to explain the configuration of Council membership, but relative electoral outcomes play little role in the selection of Council members. President Díaz-Canel's asserted democratic claims are correct for the first but not the second criterion. The fate of the political regime may depend on how well Cuba's leaders build on descriptive inclusion while using electoral evidence more effectively to select leaders. Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) find that "authoritarian leaders who correctly institutionalize with a single party survive in power significantly" (p. 1292). The Cuban leadership's enhancement of the Council's descriptive inclusion has not come at the expense of better electoral outcomes; those from once underincluded descriptive categories perform as well as those long well-included. However, the top leaders have not used the information that these elections generate concerning relative electoral support as they construct the slate for the Council of State; discarding useful information may not institutionalize correctly. The leadership's legitimating challenges persist as the memories of the Revolution fade. ■

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Corresponding author email: dominguezjic1960@gmail.com

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