

# The Other Coups: The 2018 Election, Between Legacy and Legitimacy

**Daniel Campos Ruíz Díaz**

Graduated Studies Department, Universidad Tecnológica Intercontinental, Asunción, Paraguay

**Email address:**

[danielcampos@ser.org.py](mailto:danielcampos@ser.org.py)

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**Abstract:** The theoretical and methodological perspective was the materialism historical dialectic with Gramscian categories, with concepts of the historical hegemonic block, counter hegemonic block, organicity, domination. The main sources of data used are primary and secondary, which include data collected by the author based on the technique of participant observation of the qualitative method. This social scientific essay analyzes political process of the others parliamentary coup carried out in Paraguay. These social events were done to promote the Constitutional Amendment for presidential re-election. However, they were aborted by the citizen pressure that culminated in the March 2017 crisis with the death of Rodrigo Quintana, a young leader of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party - PLRA. This sad social event was followed by a series of parliamentary blows in 2018 during the electoral campaign being defined only after the elections of 2018. In this context, the work aims to shed light on the events that preceded the results of the 2018 elections. For this purpose, it is analyzed the different blows that were given in different powers of the State preparing the continuity of the same regime, in the years 2017 and 2018. The conclusion is that a crisis of organization within the hegemonic block, first of all. Then, it was a crisis of domination between the hegemonic block and the counter hegemonic block with the final polarization of the 2018 election.

**Keywords:** Parliamentary Coup, Radical Democracy, Historical Hegemonic Block, Counter Hegemonic Block, Organicity, Hegemony, Domination

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## 1. Introduction and Research Questions

In the last months of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, the incipient and weak democracy of Paraguay experienced different political crises, in general very confused and very difficult to interpret if they were not raised within the framework of the Political Economy of Dialectical Historical Materialism. These crises were not of hegemony or domination because they did not question the domination or hegemony of the sectors that make up the Historical Hegemonic Block, nor was it questioned by the sectors of the Counter Historical Hegemonic Block. Fundamentally it was a crisis of state institution organicity to strengthen the governing party as political subject of the Hegemonic Historical Block [1]. In this way, it would be consolidated the same system, to develop and benefits the interests of the historical hegemonic block with the same economic accumulation model.

These crises were added to previous ones over the 29 years,

since the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship. This was characterized by 35 years of corrupt, repressive government and with persecution of social parties and movements. These years, however also meant, the beginning of the modernization of the economy based on agrarian modernization, through an authoritarian agrarian reform and the building of the Hydroelectric Plant of Itaipú. These authoritarian economic reforms generated prosperity for a new internationalized monopoly capitalist class with the agribusiness of soybean and livestock. On the one hand, narco-economy with contraband, money laundering and mafia was benefited. This model benefited Brazil with the subsidized sale of electricity from the Itaipú Hydroelectric Plant and to Argentina with the subsidized sale of energy from the Yacyretá Hydroelectric Power Plant.

The model of economic development "from outside" and "from above" brought disastrous consequence as the the gradual expulsion of peasant family agriculture from their territories and the process of social differentiation,

fragmentation and accelerated pauperization of the peasantry [2, 3]. This socioeconomic and political process at the same time generated a process of urbanization, without industrialization and, therefore, of massive marginalization with the countryside-city migration.

The different crises experienced in these three decades of transition and incipient democracy were always characterized by the attempt to rebuild the dictatorial structure of a strosnism without Stroessner. At the same time, to guarantee to the Colorado Party at the forefront, as the party that supported the dictatorship and as the party that led the slow process of transition to democracy and the weak democracy.

However, the 2017 crises, extended during and after the 2018 elections, were different from the previous ones. The difference occurred because the crises were manifested in the State organicity and not in the hegemony and domination. This difference allowed other parties and progressive fronts to join with the Colorado Party in its attempt to parliamentary coup. On the one hand, the dissident sector of the same Colorado Party with other opposition parties such as the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA) and others progressive ones resist to avoid the Amendment that supposed the violation of the National Constitution.

Given this situation, how can this confusing and at the same time contradictory process be explained in which antagonistic political groups were united to give a coup to the constitution? At the same time, another sector of the same conservative Colorado party was united with other block of parties to defend the constitution? What did these other blows mean for the process of rearrangement so that it could guarantee the continuity of the model of the hegemonic historical block? What role played the sectors that make up the Counter Historical Hegemonic Block in this series of political crisis complemented with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental crisis?

This work raises as a research hypothesis that the political processes of the conjuncture of 2017 and part of 2018 in Paraguay were successive blows that were given from the institutions of the different powers of the State beginning with the change of the constitutional regulation at the Senate. This constitutional violation opened possibilities for other blows like the control of the General Attorney's Office, control of the selection of members of the Council of Magistrates and the Magistrate's Jury, the legality of the process by the Superior Tribunal of Electoral Justice and the Supreme Court of Justice. All these were against the laws of the National Constitution, with the objective of continuing to strengthen the organicity of the hegemonic historical block with the continuity of the governing Colorado Party with Cartes in its role as political subject.

## 2. Methodological Strategy

The main sources of data used are primary and secondary, which include data collected by the author based on the

technique of participant observation of the qualitative method. At the conjuncture level, taking into account the correlation of forces of the sectors involved in the structural process, secondary data are used whose sources are journalistic articles of national newspapers, such as: "Abc Color", Última Hora, La Nación and Diario 5 Días. In addition journalistic interviews to main actors of the political events were analyzed; as well as statements, political pronouncements, archives and articles by specialized columnists, personal archives, notes and documents.

The analysis is carried out in the methodological framework of the analysis of structural and dialectical content of the reports, articles, texts and in-depth interviews with political and social leaders, as well as life stories collected by the author from the political and social actors themselves.

## 3. Theoretical Discussion

In the theoretical analysis, the Grancian concepts of hegemony, domination and organicity are recovered creatively [4, 5], as a category of dialectical historical materialism that allows, analyzing complex superstructures such as the State, politics, culture and ideologies. Grancs [1], considers ideology not as a system of ideas or the false consciousness of social actors but as an organic and relational whole, embodied in apparatuses and institutions that are molded around these basic articulating principles of the unity of a block hegemonic historical. In this way, the vision of the discursive reductionism of post-Marxists is surpassed [6].

The State represents the consecratory institutionalization of domination in a national territory. Thus, the State is the political and social instance from which the project of the historical hegemonic block is articulated and legitimated, supported and encouraged [1]. Access to control of the resources that support domination would not be random for all members of the concrete society. From this perspective, in the evolutionary process of the history of humanity, the State has always served a social sector or social sectors that constitute the historical hegemonic block. These sectors are gestated in the social space, in political and economic conditions and that allow relations of domination over the whole society.

This paper analyzes the State and Democracy by the demonstration of the effective relationship between, the economic interests of the dominant sectors and the structures that sustain their political power [7, 8]. Thus a dialectical unit is formed between economic and social political events. For this reason, it would be impossible to understand the political dimension without understanding the economic dimension and viceversa. In this theoretical perspective, democracy is a dialectical struggle between the two blocks to impose their hegemony, and counteract the hegemony of the opposing block. In this process, there is a contradictory coexistence of democracy with capitalism that would tend to generate, in turn, a limited and to some extent authoritarian democratic

process [9].

At this point it becomes necessary to clarify the conceptualization of capitalism, socialism and democracy. In this regard, Rosa Luxemburg affirmed that "we have always revealed the hard core of social inequality and the lack of freedoms that are hidden under the sweet envelope of equality and formal freedoms. But not to reject the latter, but to push the working class not to settle for envelope but to conquer political power; to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy, not to eliminate democracy" [10]. Moreover, the false opposition of capitalism equal to democracy and socialism equal to dictatorship, is overcome with the recovery of the concept of Laclau and Mouffe, [11] of Radical Democracy, which complements with its own, the thesis of the Socialist Democracy of Rosa Luxemburg.

The Paraguayan State was constituted on a liberal bourgeois-state model, republican-authoritarian and against insurgent from the stronist coup d'état of May 4, 1954. In this way, he replaced the Second Liberal Republic Dependent Colonialist by the Third Republic authoritarian, monopolistic dependent imperialist. General Stroessner was able to articulate a model of associated capitalist development, characterized by its structural dependence on the imperialist monopoly bourgeoisie and subordinated to the world capitalist system [12, 13].

This bourgeois state could assume different styles of power, characterized by being authoritarian dictatorial (1954-1989), and becoming liberal with the same model of economic development (1989-2018). However, this model reformed with bourgeois liberal democracy more populist and market domination, with monopolistic capital and the mafia. In this last government with the business leadership of Horacio Cartes (2013-2018), and within the framework of the new conservative neoliberal model, there is an attempt of dictatorship of the international capital itself using the Colorado Party as political apparatus and political subject of the hegemonic historical bloc but with the protagonism of the market and international monopolistic entrepreneurship.

Consequently, the State is not the only actor in the confrontation of a situation that requires definition since its policies and can not be understood or explained without taking into account the own interests expressed by the social sectors involved. The organicity in this model of State assumes a conflictive character in the history of the relations between the sectors and the blocks in permanent negotiation and conflict. Its definitive expression is that of the hegemonic historical block.

#### 4. Analysis of the Conjuncture of the Other Coups

The final months of 2016 ended in a process of tension and crisis as a result of the campaign for the Amendment to reform the National Constitution and achieve the presidential re-election of Horacio Cartes. The Constitution of Paraguay of 1992 does not allow presidential re-election according to the Art. 229. According to the Art. 290 of Constitution to change this article can not be done by way of Constitutional Amendment, but only by the Constitutional Reform through a Constituent.

At the national level, two blocks were formed. In the first one participated parties of the right and progressive parties allied. In effect, the anti-constitutional pro-amendment block was made up of the ruling Colorado Party sector accompanied by a fraction of the (Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico - PLRA), collaborator of the ruling party, led by Senator Blas Llano. This sector was moved more by economic interests than by the defense of democracy and the constitution. Also to this first block a progressive fraction accompanied, the Frente Guazú, third political force of Paraguay, led by the ex-president Fernando Lugo.

This last group (Frente Guasu) supported the amendment with the political argument that it is the only way to prevent Cartes from imposing a new dictatorship. But at this time, it would be a dictatorship of the business and the market. It was as a strategy to allow the re-election of Cartes with the premise that Lugo (the candidate of the Frente Guasu) could compete as well. Therefore, Lugo was considered by the Frente Guasu as the only one with a chance to beat Cartes in the 2018 elections. Fernando Lugo, who at this time was Senator, had not finished his presidential administration due to a Parliamentary coup in June 2012, organized precisely by the Colorado Party in complicity with a conservative fraction of PLRA [14, 15].

The other block, in defense of the Constitution and Democracy, was constituted by the institutional fraction of PLRA, which is a majority sector with the leadership of Efraín Alegre, candidate for the Presidency for 2018. It was accompanied by an internal dissident fraction of the Colorado Party, led by the Marito, the elected President in the election of 2018. This fraction was called Colorado "Añeteté" (the true Colorado party). The other fractions that participated of this block were progressive parties and movements. This pro-defense block of the Constitution had a majority in the Senate, within which the Constitutional Amendment Bill should be approved as the first instance (Table 1).

*Table 1. Conformation of the blocks in struggle.*

Pro anticonstitutional Emendment Block	Pro-defense of Constitution and democracy Block
Colorado Party (Pro Cartes)	Authentic Radical Liberal – PLRA (Pro Efraín Alegre)
Fracción disident conservative fraction of the Authentic Radical Liberal - PLRA (Pro Llano)	Democratic Progressive Party (PDP) and other Progressive Political Movements

Source: Prepared by the author.

However, the formation of the pro-defense block of the Constitution did not mean a process of building the historical counter hegemonic block since it did not represent a crisis within the hegemonic historical block, nor of legitimacy, nor of domination [1]. On the contrary, he opposed to Pro Cartes dictatorship of the speculative business of the political mafia. Cartes wanted to replicate the dictatorship of Stroessner (1954-1989) but within the framework of a new dictatorship with new trilogy. Therefore, it would not be any more the stronist trilogy: State, Armed Forces and Colorado Party. This time, it would be a new trilogy: State, FFAA and multinational Entrepreneurship and speculative mafia. Precisely, the exclusion of the Colorado Party was attacked by the dissident group Colorado Añetete. This fraction of Colorado Party, during the election campaign, proclaimed that the party "had been rented" to Cartes, who used it as an instrument and basis for the Presidency in the 2013 elections.

Finally, the political crisis peaked on March 31 and April 1, 2017 when the pro-amendment block imposed unconstitutionally the change of the Senate Presidency to manipulate the approval of the new Regulation. This new Regulation would require a simple no qualified majority, in order to approve the Bill of Amendment, contrary to the current Regulation in which only the qualified majority was required for the approval of any type of bill to enable the Constitutional Amendment. In this way the presidential re-election would be insured and guaranteed.

This new Regulation would thus make it possible to legalize but not, legitimize the members of the Council for the Prosecution of Magistrates (Consejo de Persecución de Magistrados - CEM), the election in the General State Attorney (Fiscal General del Estado - FGE), in order to control the power of the Supreme Court of Justice - (Corte Suprema de Justicia CSJ). In addition, they already had the power of the Executive and the Superior Court of Electoral Justice (Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral - TSJE). This is how the execution of the different Parliamentary Coups and the Electoral Coup was prepared [16-21].

The situation of legal and political crisis in the parliament generated social and political crises through demonstrations of citizenship in the squares and streets of Asunción. This complex crisis reached extremes such as the burning of the Congress building and the assassination of Rodrigo Quintana, a young leader of the PLRA in an assault by the Police forces on the offices of the PLRA party in a full bourgeois democracy. This had never happened even in times of the Stroessnist dictatorship. Finally, the harsh criticism of the citizenship in mobilization forced the withdrawal of the Pro-

Law Bill to Cartes and its Pro Enmienda Block.

This legal and political crisis in the parliament was revived in a context of economic, social and environmental crisis. In effect, at the economic level, the unemployment rate had increased from 5.5% in 2015 to 7.4% in 2016 and to 8.9% in 2017 [22], extreme poverty and moderate poverty had also increased [23]. All this situation, despite the economic growth of the country, in terms of annual Gross Domestic Product - GDP of 4% with a flourishing macro economy, but without permeating at the microeconomic level. Likewise, the Paraguayan economy in the last 30 years has been characterized as an economy dependent on the monopoly capitalist agribusiness of soybean with its expansion into the territories of peasant and indigenous communities and the remaining forests of the Chaco and the Atlantic Coast.

At the same time, there was an economy dependent on the export of meat, also deforesting of forest and degrading nature. In addition, there was a speculative energy economy sold to Brazil and Argentina to finance the industrial development of these countries [24]. This was complemented by an underground and mafia economy. Indeed, analyzing the structural dynamics of the GDP of the Paraguayan economy in the period 2002 to 2015 shows a constant dynamism with tendencies to growth in its underground of speculative and mafia economy, based on laundering, smuggling and narco-economy with almost 40% of GDP [25].

At a social level, the peasantry, which represents 75% of the extreme poor, was in crisis and mostly in debt. According to the Permanent Household Survey of 2017, 37% of the inhabitants of Paraguay (6,709,730 inhabitants) live in rural areas. In one hand, this population was reduced since 1950 with 65.4% rural to 57.2% in 1992 and 43.3% in 2002. This percentage means a reduction of 28.1% due to peasant expulsion from peasant territories [22]. On the other hand, 2.6% of the productive units hold 85.5% of the available land, while 91.4% of the productive units of the peasant family agriculture have only 6.0% of the available land at the national level. [26].

In the environmental aspect, Paraguay was a green country of forests and water that suffered a process of environmental degradation with the advance of the production of the capitalist agribusiness of the soybean on the forests and the peasant territories. This massive expulsion of the peasantry generated a massive migration towards the marginal zones of Asunción, Ciudad del Este and Encarnación and the massive external flow to Buenos Aires, Spain and Brazil, especially of the rural youth (Figure 1 Map of soy expansion).





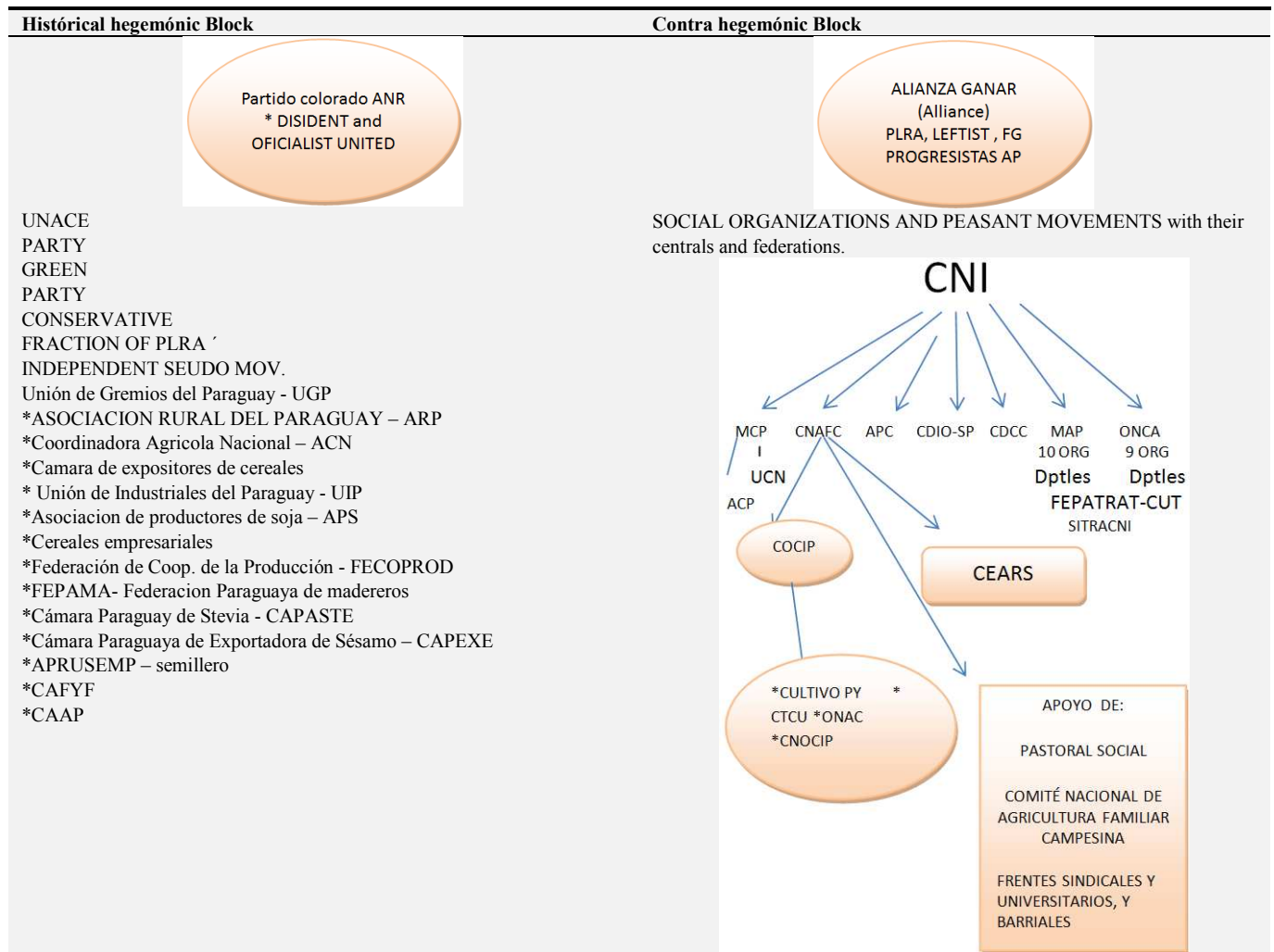
the candidate of the Colorado Party was trapped in its structure and discourse, not defending the principles which defined him in the Internal elections of the Colorado Party.

At the beginning of the struggle for the presidency of the country the polls were very favorable to the Colorado Party against the Alliance GANAR. Only one polling company presented consistent differences of 12 points and then 10 points in favor of the Colorado Party. These differences were due to error in the communication strategy of Colombian advisers. However, the strategies were corrected and the

differences were shortened and reducing every time.

The enthusiasm of the bases of the Alliance GANAR was growing. This forced the candidates to put more clearly the main contradiction of dictatorship-domination against democracy-liberation. In this way, a basic program of four points was proposed: 1) the recovery of energy sovereignty, with almost free cost for the popular sectors and middle classes and for the national industries. This raised the popular flags, to change the energy model that only generates the industrial development of Brazil and Argentina [24].

**Table 2.** Conformation of the hegemonic and counter hegemonic blocks in Paraguay.



Source: Own Elaboration.

With this, it was proposed to use the surplus energy of Itaipú and Yacyretá to finance the industrialization of Paraguay and generate work for the youth taking advantage of our "demographic bonus". 2) The second strategic objective was the repositioning of peasant family agriculture, until now always marginalized. Thus, a sustainable productive model was established with guarantee of food security and sovereignty against a contaminating and degrading model of nature, which expelled peasant and indigenous communities and destroyed forest masses. 3) The third strategic objective was a free education up to the

university level and the massification of training, specialization and post-graduate scholarships accompanied by a radical educational reform to educate for production; 4) The four strategic objective was the constitutional reform for a judicial, tributary, electoral and agrarian reform, and the frontal fight against the contraband with zero tolerance to the corruption, to the narco-economy and to the laundering of money.

As a result of this radical change in discourses, the counter-hegemonic popular block became stronger around the Alliance GANAR. In this way, the presidential election

of 2018 was characterized by its polarization. This polarization was defined around the construction of the historical counter hegemonic block, with the Alliance GANAR as a political subject. However, this awakening was not solid enough for the counter-hegemonic popular block to grow and win elections.

Given this situation, the only alternative for the historical hegemonic block was to win by taking advantage of all the co-opted and manipulated powers taking advantage of a very weak and uncontrollable electoral system leaving many doubts about the legitimacy of the election results. From here, the opposition previously demands an electoral reform before developing any other reform.

This also contributed to several unclear situations that were reported by the press, which led to the Alliance GANAR and small political parties and movements did not accept the outcome of the elections to consider that there was a massive electoral fraud. Some of the citizens protested in the streets and a citizen platform was organized for the Day After the Elections – DDE social movement. But the corrupt system was able to do more and none of the protests to review the elections was accepted. Finally, the difference between the Colorado Party and the Aliance GANAR was only 3.69% in favor of the former, while the pollsters in electoral mouths of the urn distorted the electoral process with a difference of more than 30% through false information or fakes.

The crisis was finally resolved in July of 2018 with the non-convening of the new Senate to former presidents Cartes and Duarte Frutos to swear as active senators. In substitution their substitutes swore as active senators. In this way, the new Senate honored the citizens in mobilization to defend the National Constitution. On the other hand, the results of the election gave the opposition to recover again some key Departments such as Concepción and Caaguazú, although the Central Department that is Strategic was lost. The departmental governorates of Amambay and Cordillera were maintained.

## 5. Conclusions

The conjuncture of the Paraguayan political process 2017-2018 analyzed in this paper, shows that it was a crisis of organization, within the hegemonic historical block. In this way, the Colorado Party could recover its leading position as political subject of the block.

On the other hand, the defense of the draft bill of the unconstitutional Amendment was a parliamentary coup for the unconstitutional change of the Senate Regulation. This made it possible to approve the draft bill to manipulate the election of the General State Attorney and to confirm the members of the Magistrate Prosecution Board - CEM. In this way, the control of the Supreme Court of Justice and the Superior Court of Electoral Justice-TSJE was made possible. The popular mobilizations finally avoided the approval of the unconstitutional Amendment. All these unconstitutional blows made possible the electoral fraud and the lack of

legitimacy of the new President of Paraguay 2018-2023. For this reason the results show up the 2018 Elections between legacy and legitimacy.

Also, it was a serious historical political error of the leftist Party of Frente Guazu for this position of "pragmatism without principles, neither ethics nor theory for change". It was for a supposed progressiveness that tried to justify a historical political error by a deviated and distorted interpretation that everything is allowed, even the constitutional break in order to regain power. The power recovered in this way will never be popular and even less progressive. The only way to regain power is to radicalize democracy. These historical errors of pragmatism without principles, neither ethics nor theory for the change precisely corrupted the progressive governments of Latin America making possible again the return of the conservative cycle of the governments with attempts of dictatorships.

Finally, apparently the leftist party of Frente Guazu tried to overcome this serious theoretical and political error by strengthening the Alliance GANAR but with many problems, misgivings and confusion in the context of the construction of popular power and radical democracy with genuinely national and popular flags. It was a recovery of the aborted flags of Dr. France and the Lopez with the War of the Triple Alliance in the First Autonomous and Independent Peasant Republic.

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