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# Clientelism and ideological competition: the impact on ideological overlapping

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## ABSTRACT

Clientelism is a widespread and persistent practice in Latin America with significant ramifications for political actors and systems. This paper analyses its impact upon ideological overlapping, which is one of the aspects of ideological competition that has received disparate levels of attention depending on the region of study. The hypothesis examined is that clientelism reduces the ideological differentiation of political parties because, firstly, a clientelist environment makes it difficult for political actors to use left/right categories, thereby contributing to a reduction in parties' ideological identities. Secondly, the use of clientelist practices by parties fosters ideological overlapping with other parties, given the lack of incentives for them to differentiate themselves ideologically from one another. To test this relationship, a multilevel regression analysis was performed of 86 Latin American parties since 2009.

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## Introduction

Clientelist exchanges are regarded as a core part of political relations in many countries in Latin America, and are the predominant form thereof in some (Nichter 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos and Oliveros 2019). We know that these types of exchanges have a large number of political effects in areas including elections and political parties (Stokes et al. 2013; Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015), the allocation of resources (Oliveros 2016) and the quality of democracy (Brun and Diamond 2014).

Turning to their impact upon Latin American party dynamics, clientelist practices tend to be associated with a weakness of ideological competition. Kitschelt et al. (2010) argue that the existence of clientelist linkages and

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personality-based links can potentially nullify ideological links in political parties and party systems. Another effect of clientelism on ideological competition is on the decrease of the utility of left/right categories for parties and voters (Ruth 2016; Colomer and Escatel 2005).

This article focuses on clientelism's impact upon one of the lesser-known features of ideological competition in Latin America: overlapping. Although there is still no specific research available on this topic, there is sufficient evidence that it is a significant variable for differentiating between the region's parties and party systems. There are expectations regarding the importance of overlapping arising from work on polarization (Singer 2016) and on the existence of parties with weak social roots and high volatility (Mainwaring 2018), as well as on party brand dilution processes (Lupu 2014). Together with this, the proliferation of personality-based parties and populism (Barr 2017; De la Torre and Arnson 2013) reinforces the importance of studying overlapping. Recently, Weyland (2021) has argued that populist leaderships place less emphasis on programmatic structuring.

The first aim of our work is to measure the level of overlapping in a large sample of Latin America parties. Differentiation between parties is crucial, as it allows voters to identify the positions these parties defend. If the ideological spaces overlap, however, voters will find a limited range of preferences represented. In this study, overlapping is measured on the basis of the ideological positions that parliamentarians ascribe to the parties in the left/right categories, which constitute the central theme summarizing the salient issues in each country.

The second objective is to assess the impact of clientelism on the variations in overlapping between the region's parties and party systems. Our expectation is that the personal and discretionary exchange of material resources for political support, typical of clientelist environments, encourages parties to occupy similar ideological positions. Two dynamics, which shall be explained in more detail in the following section, play a part in this process. The first is the difficulty, in clientelist environments, of using the left/right categories to measure parties' identities. This complicates the differentiation of the ideological positions of parties for both representatives and, especially, those they represent. The second is an adaptive party strategy of non-differentiation in terms of ideological spaces compared with other parties. It is to be expected that voters in a clientelist environment do not penalize parties that are ambiguous and similar to others in the ideological space they occupy, since other criteria prevail in the voting decision. As a reaction to this, parties could blur their ideological position, occupying large swathes of the ideological spectrum, in order to optimize their electoral performance (Somer-Topcu 2015).

The relationship between clientelism and ideological overlapping will be analysed from a systemic standpoint and a party standpoint. We shall see

whether parties operating in clientelist environments are more likely to overlap, ideologically, with other parties (systemic standpoint) and whether the overlapping is more common in parties that tend to establish clientelist linkages with their voters (party-related standpoint). To test this relationship, we shall perform a comparative analysis of the party systems and political parties of seventeen Latin American countries over the last ten years.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section examines the relationship between clientelism and ideological overlapping from a theoretical point of view. The second section introduces the analytical model developed, detailing the measurement of variables and the methodology employed. Section three lays out the results of our empirical analysis, and the fourth and final section sets forth our study's main conclusions and some of its implications.

### **Overlapping and clientelist practices**

Sani and Giovanni (1983) came up with the first empirical measurement of overlapping. They based their work on Downs' analysis of ideological spaces (1985). According to these authors, overlapping reflects the degree to which the ideological space occupied by each party is exclusive or, alternatively, shared with other parties. They quantified the overlapping of European parties along a left-right ideological axis as a way of tackling the nature of inter-party competition. If overlapping occurs between proximate political parties, it means that there are ideologically differentiable blocks, with inner overlapping among parties in each of these blocks. These blocks are normally far apart from each other and create centrifugal dynamics within the party system. On the other hand, if the overlapping occurs between the majorities of parties making up the system, it is likely that there will not be such a marked block dynamic, and that competition will be centripetal in nature.

Since then, ideological differentiation has been studied using alternative approaches. Works on convergence show the degree to which a given party varies from the average position of all parties in a system (Spoon and Klüver 2019). Studies of ambiguity analyse the clarity or vagueness with which candidates or parties present themselves before the electorate (Somer-Topcu 2015). At a systemic level, polarization contemplates the ideological distance between the parties in a single party system (Sartori 1976; Dalton 2008), while depolarization and repolarisation refer to the cycles of decreases or increases in this distance. For its part, though, overlapping is measured by party and deals with the degree of specificity of the ideological profile of each individual party compared with the remaining parties regardless its electoral support.

These complementary concepts tend to view party competition from a strategic perspective where parties adapt to the environment. Parties and

candidates are faced with the dilemma of opting for either the strategy of ideological (“product”) differentiation or a broad appeal strategy (Rovny 2012). There are a number of factors that will influence their decision in this regard. For Aragonès and Neeman (2000), candidates calculate the amount of overlapping they may achieve so as not to upset the balance with regard to their voters’ preferences. Spoon and Klüver (2019) show that, in multiparty environments, parties tend to converge around similar positions. In the case of Europe, this makes it difficult to differentiate between parties, helping to increase electoral volatility. Additionally, other parties’ decisions may affect the degree of overlap sought by a given party. De Vries and Hobolt (2012) stress the impact of challenger parties’ strategies upon mainstream parties’ tactics. Whereas other authors emphasize on the type of parties as a key variable to predict ideological differentiation. For instance, cartel parties contribute to the constriction of the policy-space over which parties compete (Blyth and Katz 2005). Generally speaking, these party strategies affect electoral performance. In ideological spaces with overlapping, it is likely to find swing voters (voters who change their vote) between parties that share spaces, whilst, in non-overlapping contexts, one expects to find core voters (those whose vote remains stable) (Luna 2010).

Almost all of these studies have looked at party dynamics in Europe. In the case of Latin America, overlapping has not yet been examined empirically. The work by Llamazares and Sandel (2003) on ideological specialization in a selection of party systems is the closest to the object of this study.<sup>1</sup> Also noteworthy is the work on niche parties in Latin America by Kernecker and Wagner (2019). According to this, some parties in the region specialize in certain issues with regard to which other parties have no clear position, as is the case with post-materialist and traditional issues. Together with these findings, studies on polarization offer insights into the determinants and consequences of having parties far apart from one another on the extremes of the spectrum (Singer 2016; Moraes and Béjar 2022).

All this leads us to expect to find variations that not all Latin American parties have ideological positions that overlap with those of other political parties. Some parties ascribe to the responsible party model, whilst others have little or nothing to do with this substantive representation model (Luna et al. 2021). According to said model, ideologies are very useful to both parties and voters, as they reduce political transaction costs. This means that, during elections, parties promote different public policies that

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<sup>1</sup>The degree of specialisation may give a clue as to the similarities between parties with regard to the demands they hope to represent, as well as to the type of segmentation of a political system’s electorate. If a political party belongs to a small ideological niche, it is likely that its survival will be dependent upon being successful with a well-defined electorate.

they intend to implement if they can form a government, and which serve to guide how citizens vote (Downs 1985; Adams 2001).

In Latin America, clientelism is seen as one of the reasons for which the region's parties have a less ideological essence. Clientelism consists in the personal and discretionary exchange of material resources for political support (Stokes et al. 2013; Gonzalez-Ocantos and Oliveros 2019). Unlike in Western Europe, clientelist practices are very widespread in Latin America and operate at different levels: societal, political, institutional, etc. (Coppedge et al. 2020).

The literature has provided insights into clientelism in political parties. There are works on clientelism and the type of party organized around a clientelist logic, known as a "political machine" (Banfield and Wilson 1965). This kind of party, which is a modern version of the parties of notables, involves an instrumental and self-serving distribution of public resources and assets, in contrast to the universalism of the responsible party model (Pantín and Máiz 2019). Other studies have tackled the type of political linkages of parties under clientelist contexts (Kitschelt et al. 2010; Stokes et al. 2013). These studies suggest a classification of the political linkages developed by parties to retain and broaden their electorate that distinguishes between clientelist and programmatic linkages. The former entails a direct and contingent political exchange (using selective incentives such as money or the promise of jobs), whilst the latter involves an indirect and non-contingent exchange (without selective incentives, on the basis of government program). The expected relationship between them is inverse, such that the greater the weight of the clientelist element in a party, the lesser the importance of the programmatic one, and vice versa.<sup>2</sup> A number of studies have reached similar conclusions. For example, Volintiru (2016) shows that clientelism fosters the cartelization of parties, thereby meaning, amongst other things, that many political parties occupy the same ideological space (the center). In this same area, the work by Ruth (2016) highlights how clientelism limits the development of consistent political orientations. More specifically, she shows that left/right categories are of less utility amongst clientelist party voters, who tend to be more indifferent to such categories and who use them less consistently with regard to their political attitudes.

Findings on the impact of clientelism upon ideological competition do not specifically refer to the issue of overlapping. Nevertheless, they do make it reasonable to expect that its varying patterns across parties and countries in Latin America are influenced by the intensity of clientelist practices. Clientelism's effect upon overlapping follows two dynamics. The first arises from the clientelist environment, by virtue of which difficulties in using left/right

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<sup>2</sup>Nevertheless, with a view to optimising their electoral performance, parties often strategically combine different types of political linkages with voters (Luna 2010).

categories reduce the ideological differentiation between parties. This is an effect that is more mechanical than deliberate. When there is clientelism in a country, its political actors tend to attach less importance to left/right categories, which have less utility as cognitive shorthand in party political competition (Ruth 2016; Colomer and Escatel 2005). The use of left/right categories is problematic for voters in clientelist environments, but this can also spread to the parliamentary elite. Although more familiar with these categories (Zechmeister 2015), party members – in this case, parliamentarians – in clientelist environments have been socialized and co-opted by parties within a context that is indifferent to the left-right scale. What is more, this context tends to see little consistency in ideological and other political orientations. This dynamic creating clientelist mobilization permeates the responses of the parliamentarians upon whose basis overlapping is calculated.

The second dynamic is related with the strategy employed by parties with regard to overlapping. Parties can alter their ideological positions, but their room for manoeuvre here is limited by voter preferences (Miller 2019). The electorate in clientelist environments is more indifferent towards ideological positions, making it quite unlikely that they will penalize parties with ideological definitions similar to those of other parties (Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015). Short-term material benefit is the criterion used by a large number of voters in clientelist environments. As there is no risk of loss of voters due to their similarity to other parties in terms of ideological positioning, parties opt for a strategy of non-differentiation to secure the greatest possible number of votes (Somer-Topcu 2015). This strategy also contributes to confusing voters, strengthening the decision to vote on the basis of criteria other than ideological proximity. In non-clientelist environments, it is to be expected that political parties do not display such levels of manipulation with regard to their ideology and that overlap-based structures are affected by positions on cleavage structures (Roberts 2014), as well as the result of their own historical evolution as parties (Wills-Otero 2015).

With a diminished ability to use left and right categories that contributes to the blurring of identities and without incentives to create ideological identities differentiated from those of their rivals, it is highly likely that significant levels of ideological overlapping will develop between parties. This inverse relationship between clientelism and overlapping is also to be expected from a systemic standpoint: it is less likely that political competition will be based on ideological criteria in environments in which the predominant form of electoral mobilization is clientelist exchange. This theory can be broken down into the two hypotheses, which we will test in this study:

*Hypothesis 1. Party systems in which clientelism is common practice foster ideological overlapping between parties, due to the difficulties in using left/right categories to summarise parties' ideological identities.*

*Hypothesis 2. The use of clientelist practices by parties fosters ideological overlapping with other parties, given the lack of incentives for parties to ideologically differentiate themselves from one another.*

In both hypotheses we expect to find a positive relationship between the independent variables (clientelism at both the party and party system levels) and the dependent variable (ideological overlapping). We are aware of the fact that this causal relationship may also operate in the opposite direction: ideological overlapping could encourage parties to resort to clientelist practices to secure votes. Nevertheless, the direction of the relationship we are suggesting dates back further and is more deeply rooted in Latin America. Clientelism has a long history in the region, beginning well before the dawn of democracy (Hilgers 2012), and has significantly conditioned the decisions of political actors (O'Donnell 1996; Helmke and Levitsky 2006). As we have indicated, this affects their ideological competition strategies. In any case, we have adopted a number of methodological measures in order to mitigate any possible endogeneity.<sup>3</sup>

We already know that the exchange of material resources for political support affects the way in which parties and politicians are linked with voters, and the relations established between party leaders and their local representatives, the “brokers” (Gonzalez-Ocantos and Oliveros 2019). However, this study aims to show that clientelism also impacts relations between parties. In eroding parties' ideological identities, clientelism affects their ability to differentiate themselves from one another on an ideological level, thereby fostering overlapping.

## Data and method

There have been innovations in the study of overlapping due, in particular, to two circumstances. Firstly, the diversification of empirical evidence due to the use of expert surveys and electoral manifestos, for example, has permitted significant advances (Mölder 2017). Secondly, there have been changes in the general approach of studies on ideological differentiation between parties from different countries which can also be examined (Camia and Caramani 2012).<sup>4</sup>

The main goal of our research is to provide evidence to ascertain whether clientelism affects the ideological overlapping of political parties.

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<sup>3</sup>We have tested for any possible endogeneity of this relationship with a simultaneous equation model (Baltagi 1981). Its results are consistent with multilevel model as presented, such that, even when corrected for potential endogeneity, the effect of clientelism at a party level on overlapping is sustained. This model is available in the Online Appendix. Also tested was a model with lagged independent variables, which does not alter the main findings. This test is available upon request.

<sup>4</sup>Overlapping can be studied for just one group of parties within a party system—between parties in a coalition, for example—to identify the similarities between their positions and predict the policies the coalition will promote.

The impact of clientelism will be tackled from two standpoints: as a feature of party systems and as an attribute of party organizations, taken individually.

### ***The dependent variable***

Ideological overlapping has been calculated with Sani and Giovanni's (1983) formula, using the PELA database of the attitudes and opinions of parliamentarians from seventeen countries in the region, encompassing legislatures spanning the years from 2009 to 2022.<sup>5</sup> In this survey, the ideological positioning of parties ranges from 1 (left) to 10 (right). Once these political parties' ideological positions (according to the parliamentarians themselves) were obtained, the ideological scale was divided into five segments<sup>6</sup> and the sum of the differences in absolute value between said segments calculated, taking into account different pairings of parties. Next, the overall sum of the differences between each of these segments was divided by the maximum value obtainable (200). Lastly, this result was subtracted from 1. So, the following formula was employed<sup>7</sup>:

Overlapping =

$$1 - (\sum \text{absolute differences between the five ideological segments} / 200)$$

With the resulting data on overlapping (for each party with each of the other parties), an average per party was calculated, measuring the general overlapping for each party. The average overlapping for each party can vary between 0 (a complete absence of overlapping with the other parties) and 1 (maximal overlapping with the remaining parties). Our sample comprises a total of 159 observations associated with 86 parties (some of which have two observations, and a few three).

### ***The independent variables***

To test the effect of clientelism on the degree of overlapping of parties, we used the V-Party datasets (Lührmann et al. 2020).<sup>8</sup> Each party's clientelism is measured on a scale from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 4 regarding different practices associated with clientelism, such as provide targeted

<sup>5</sup>The University of Salamanca's Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) project has been carrying out surveys of the region's parliamentarians since 1994 (<https://oir.org.es/pela/>). The Online Appendix provides details of the cases included.

<sup>6</sup>In the selection of parties, we have included those that have achieved at least four seats in the relevant election.

<sup>7</sup>See Online Appendix for an example of the calculations.

<sup>8</sup>This dataset contains the results of surveys of experts on the region's political parties between 1900 and 2019 (Lührmann et al. 2020). See <https://www.v-dem.net/vpartyds.html>.

and excludable goods and benefits (consumer goods, cash, or preferential access to government services) in order to keep and gain votes.<sup>9</sup>

To ascertain the impact of party system clientelism on overlapping, the indicator of linkages provided by the V-Dem project has been used. This variable establishes which kind of linkage between parties and voters is more common in the system, and ranges from 0, for cases in which voters are rewarded with material goods or jobs, to 4, in which the linkages are chiefly programmatic.

The limited number of observations available forces us to limit the number of control variables. Three of them refer to characteristics of political parties and three to the social and institutional environment where they operate. Starting with party-related variables, the first control variable is ideological radicalism. According to Downs (1985), the further towards the extremes of the ideological spectrum a party is, the more likely it is to convey clear messages to sympathetic voters and seek votes in these spaces. On the other hand, moderate parties tend to send out more nebulous messages and vie for the vote of the political center. From this standpoint, the existence of an inverse relationship between ideological radicalism and overlapping would appear to be plausible, and this needs to be reviewed. Our variable to this end is the absolute difference between the mean ideological position of a party (based on the DALP and PREPPS experts' surveys), and the average for the electorate (per the LAPOP public opinion surveys).<sup>10</sup>

Party size is another factor with a potential impact upon ideological overlapping. Recent studies argue that smaller parties (party size measured in votes or seats) are more prone to be ideologically specialized than large ones (Meyer and Miller 2015). The latter tend to occupy broader ideological spaces, making more likely overlapping with other parties. Therefore, we control what we expect is a positive relationship between party size and overlapping level. To control the effect of party size, we have obtained the percentage of votes obtained in legislative elections, based on each country's electoral courts. So, the degree of distance from the electorate's ideological average marks the degree of radicalism of a party.

The last control variable for parties is personalism. According to the literature, parties often resort to voter connection strategies based on the

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<sup>9</sup>Additionally, we have ascertained the impact of parties' clientelism on overlapping on the basis of another indicator sourced from the DALP (Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project) (2009) and Wiesehomeier, Singer, and Ruth (2019) Political Representation, Parties and Presidents Survey datasets. In these datasets, each party's clientelism is measured on a scale from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 20, arising from the sum of the scores associated with five questions on the frequency of clientelism-related practices. The correlation between V-Party clientelism and DALP/PREPPS party clientelism is 0.70 (sign. 0.001). The main results of this explanatory model stand.

<sup>10</sup>At origin, the ideological variable in the DALP dataset is measured on a scale from 1 to 10 and in PREPPS from 1 to 20. To make them comparable, the latter have been recoded from 1 to 10 (with 1 being left and 10 right). LAPOP data is available in LAPOP (2021).

personalities and charisma of their candidates, far removed from ideological and programmatic considerations (Kitschelt et al. 2010). It is, therefore, to be expected that parties with a greater emphasis on personalities would have less pronounced ideological identities and, accordingly, would be more likely to share the ideological spaces with other parties. In our analysis, we control this expected positive relationship. To measure each party's use of personality politics, we have chosen the question "To what extent is this party a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader?" from the V-Party project's dataset.<sup>11</sup> The responses range from 0 (an absence of personality politics) to 4 (the highest level thereof).

The three variables associated with the party system in which parties operate are fragmentation, social polarization and party system competitiveness. With regard to the first of these, some studies have shown that highly fragmented party systems make competitive interactions much more complex, making it difficult for candidates to place themselves in ideological spaces and take political decisions (Ruth 2016). In such a context, there are fewer incentives to organize inter-party competition around ideological criteria, thus fostering overlapping between parties. We control the expected positive relationship between the two variables. Party fragmentation has been operationalized by the Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP). Furthermore, recent literature on new forms of political polarization sheds light upon the explanatory potential of social polarization. A new type of political polarization has emerged, based not on ideological criteria, but rather on basic political identities, with simplistic and antagonistic visions of political adversaries, who are perceived of as enemies to be eliminated (Finkel et al. 2020). This scenario of conflict and polarization, in which political debate around programmatic and ideological matters is marginalized, does little to foster ideological overlapping. So we control for the possible inverse relationship between social polarization and the ideological overlapping of parties. The indicator we use for social polarization is a V-Dem question measuring the degree to which the plurality of opinions on political matters gives rise to severe clashes and polarization. The responses vary from 0 (severe polarization) to 4 (absence of polarization). Lastly, we have included as our third control variable the level of competitiveness of the party system. Based on the literature (Schleiter and Voznaya 2014), the expectation is to find an association between low levels of competitiveness and clientelist environments. This variable has been calculated as the difference in absolute value between the votes secured between the first- and second-most voted parties in the corresponding legislative elections.

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<sup>11</sup>This dataset contains the results of surveys of experts on the region's political parties (Lührmann et al. 2020).

## Results

Figure 1 shows the score for ideological overlapping in each political party (on the y-axis) and their level of clientelism (the x-axis). As can be seen, there is a slight relationship between the two variables (a correlation of 0.34 with a significance level of 0.05). Turning to party systems' overlapping, worthy of note is the great variation between and within them, although the great majority are found at an intermediary position, with the regional average being 0.48. The lowest value for overlapping is found in Chile's UDI (0.07), whilst Paraguay's ANR and PLRA parties show the highest levels, at 0.91, followed by the PRSC and PLD of the Dominican Republic and Panama's PA. For its part, the average level of clientelism in the region is high, at 3.75. According to the experts, the least clientelist party is the FA of Uruguay (0.5), which contrasts with the PNH (3.75), ANR (3.7), and PRI (3.64), which are the parties with the greatest degree of clientelism. As with overlapping, there is great variation within and between countries with regard to the impact of clientelism.

Our expectation for the question "To what extent does clientelism influence the levels of ideological overlapping between parties?" is that parties with clientelist linkages have less of an incentive to occupy a clearly defined space within the ideological spectrum, and therefore will show greater levels of overlapping with their competitors. This effect is also expected to be found at the party system level: where clientelism is a prevalent practice, ideological overlapping will be greater.

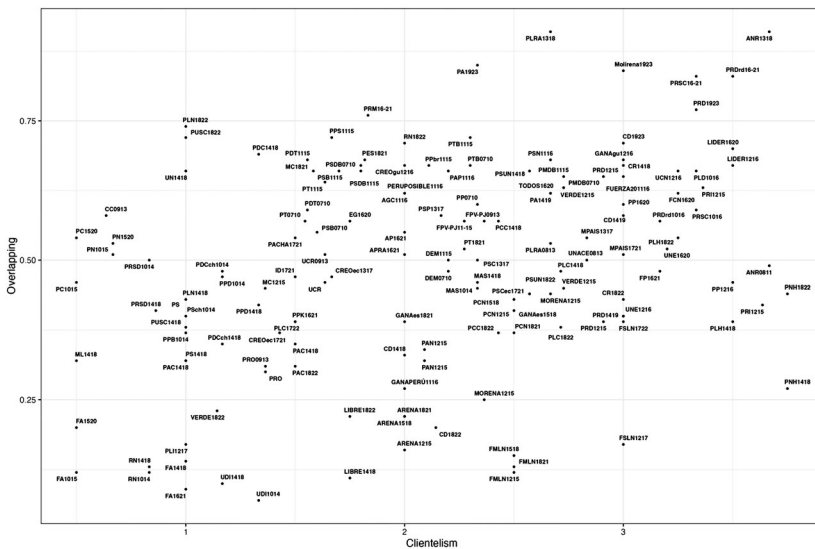


Figure 1. Ideological overlapping and clientelism in Latin America.

The explanatory model shows this impact. We estimated a multilevel regression model with two sets of independent variables. One set comprised partisan characteristics, where the main variable was the parties' level of clientelism, whilst the other set, of system-level predictors, consisted of party system attributes. In this latter group of predictors, the main covariate was the degree of systemic clientelism. The data structure for the specification of our model was that parties were nested within party systems. The data analysed consisted of 159 observations from 86 political parties belonging to 17 party systems (countries). We used a random-intercept hierarchical linear model to assess the effect of the partisan and systemic factors on levels of ideological overlapping.<sup>12</sup> The party-level predictors were centered at the cluster mean and the system-level variables at the grand mean, following the recommendations of Enders (2013). Because of the small sample size, we used bootstrapping estimation.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1 shows the results of the variance components model. The average overlapping of parties is 0.48. This model also indicates that a sizeable part of the variation in overlapping is at the political party level. The intraclass correlation coefficient tells us that 41% of the variability in overlapping is attributable to differences between parties, whilst the remaining 59% is attributable to characteristics of the party system. The empirical Bayes estimations of random effects indicate that there are party systems (9 out of 17) that deviate significantly from their group means (see the Online Appendix), which justifies the need for hierarchical analysis, to be able to understand the sources of variation (both intra- and inter-system) of ideological overlapping.

The full model supports our hypotheses. The two clientelism-related variables (at both party system and party level) have a statistically significant impact on ideological overlapping in the expected way. There is a positive relationship between a party's clientelism and its level of overlapping. When compared to other parties in a given country, a one-unit increment in a party's clientelism increases its degree of ideological overlapping by 0.087 points. Likewise, the clientelist linkages of a party system have a positive effect upon the dependent variable. The slope coefficient for this variable is negative, which indicates that ideological overlapping will be lower in those countries where programmatic linkages between parties and voters are more prevalent.<sup>14</sup> Concretely, among all the countries, a one-point increase towards more programmatic linkages decreases the level of

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<sup>12</sup>All the estimations were carried out with the STATA 15 program.

<sup>13</sup>Bootstrapping provides different ways of calculating the confidence intervals for the parameters obtained in estimated models (Huang 2018). It is recommended when the sample for carrying out multilevel regression is small, and the analysis focuses on the fixed part of the model, as is the case with this study.

<sup>14</sup>The scale runs from zero (clientelist linkages) to one (programmatic linkages).

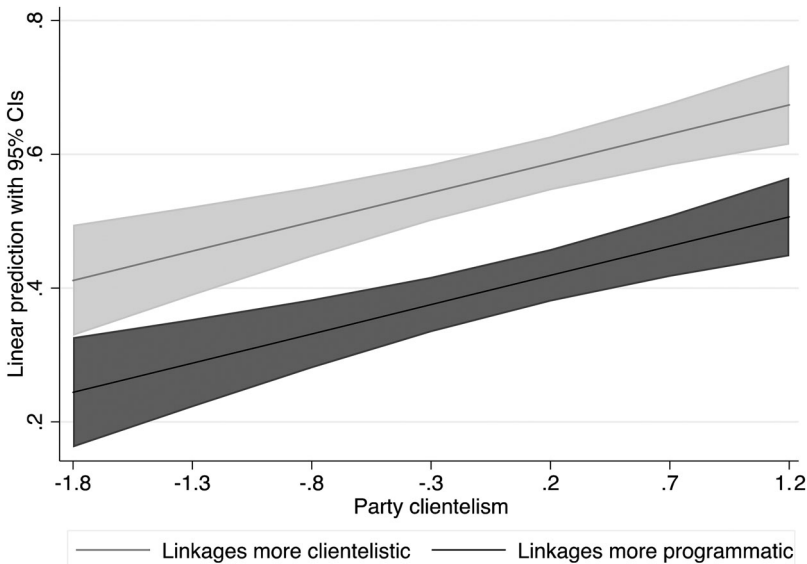
**Table 1.** Impact of clientelism on ideological overlapping.

	Null model Coefficient (Standard error)	Full model Coefficient (Standard error)
Constant	0.485*** (0.031)	0.487*** (0.011)
Party clientelism		0.087*** (0.020)
Party size		-0.005*** (0.001)
Ideological radicalism		-0.029** (0.010)
Personalism		0.012 (0.014)
Party system linkages		-0.056*** (0.011)
ENEP		0.025*** (0.005)
Social polarization		0.100*** (0.017)
Margin of votes (first/second party)		0.006*** (0.001)
Country-level variance	0.015 (0.006)	0.007 (0.002)
Party-level variance	0.021 (0.002)	0.016 (0.002)
AIC/BIC	-123.920/-114.713	-150.8045/-117.6144
<i>N</i> (parties-countries)	159/17	151/17

Standard error in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

overlapping by 0.056 points. These results suggest that clientelist practices, be they at the party or party system level, have an impact upon parties’ ideological differentiation strategies.

Using the results of the regression model, we can also assess the combined effect of party-level and contextual clientelism. Figure 2, below, shows the linear predictions of ideological overlapping for different combinations of party-level and system-level clientelism. It presents two scenarios, one where programmatic linkages are prevalent and the other corresponding



**Figure 2.** Linear predictions of ideological overlapping for different levels of party clientelism and party systems linkages.

to a country where the connection between parties and voters is based on clientelist exchanges. Overlapping is significantly higher in this latter type of country, for all levels of party-level clientelism. This evidence indicates that ideological overlapping is strengthened by clientelist practices when carried out in a favorable context.

Our results also show the explanatory capacity of the control variables, except for parties' proclivity for personalism, which does not have a significant effect on overlapping. Thus, with regard to party-level variables, more ideologically radical parties have lower levels of overlapping. The coefficient's negative sign represents a reduction in the dependent variable of 0.029 points in response to a one-unit increment in radicalism. In the case of party size, contrary to our expectations, the sign is negative: in other words, it is the larger parties that tend to have lower levels of ideological overlapping. Although the effect is small, the 0.005-point reduction means that the most voted-for parties in their respective systems show a lower degree of overlapping. The finding that the larger the party, the lower the level of overlapping, may be due to the fact that, when a party system features parties with a reputation for being electorally successful, smaller parties are discouraged from competing in the same ideological space as their more successful rivals. This is how large parties end up almost monopolizing a segment of the ideological spectrum. For their part, small parties tend to end up in ideological spaces that they share with other political parties of similar electoral size.

Turning to the contextual control variables, social polarization has the greatest impact, and in the expected direction. Given that this variable ranges between 0 (high polarization) and 4 (no polarization), reduction in polarization levels gives rise to a 0.1-point increase in the ideological overlapping of parties. In other words, party systems with low levels of polarization foster ideological overlapping. Additionally, confirming our expectations, there is a positive relationship between the fragmentation of party systems and overlapping. Keeping the remaining variables constant, a one-unit increase in party fragmentation causes an increase of 0.025 points in the level of parties' ideological overlapping. This result is in line with the association between ideological association and number of presidential candidates (Luján 2020). Lastly, party system competitiveness has the expected effect. A one-unit increment in the levels of this variable causes an increase of 0.006 points in party overlapping. This would imply that, when the electoral results of two parties are very close, they tend to overlap less.

To sum up, the findings of our empirical analysis back the great majority of our theoretical expectations. They have confirmed that, as our hypotheses proposed, clientelism creates a favorable environment for ideological overlapping between parties. These findings broaden our understanding of the effects of clientelism in the political systems. Until now, we have known

that the exchange of material resources for political support affects the way in which parties and politicians are linked with voters, and the relations established between party leaders and their local representatives, the “brokers” (Gonzalez-Ocantos and Oliveros 2019). Clientelism also affects political actors’ ideological orientations, making it difficult to place them on the left-right axis and to take decisions based on programmatic preferences. This study suggests that clientelist practices also influence ideological competition. In eroding parties’ ideological identities, clientelism affects their ability to differentiate themselves from one another on an ideological level, thereby fostering overlapping. What is more, clientelism contributes towards strategies of no ideological differentiation employed by parties in the case of electorates casting their vote based on non-ideological criteria.

The findings have also confirmed the explanatory potential of the control variables, except for the personally-based approach of parties. One of the control variables, party size, has a different relationship to the dependent variable than expected. An alternative explanation has been formulated for this but will require more in-depth analysis in future work.

The significance of these findings is not limited to Latin America. Given the study by Brun and Diamond (2014) on the importance of clientelism in numerous countries involved in the “third wave” of democratization, it is to be expected that our findings can be extended to encompass other cases with conditions similar to those of Latin America.

## Conclusions

Despite the abundant literature on clientelism produced in recent years, there are still matters about which our knowledge is very limited. In this paper, we have looked at its effect upon ideological overlapping, given the significant implications for other areas of interest, such as the type of vote and the quality of representation. Regarding overlapping, in Latin America, no in-depth studies of the subject have been carried out to date.

Literature on clientelism, parties and party systems provide enough evidence to suggest that clientelism fosters ideological overlapping. The impact is in two areas. Firstly, in environments with noteworthy clientelist linkages, overlapping is an adaptive party strategy aimed at securing the greatest possible number of votes. Clientelist contexts do not penalize parties for being ambiguous and ideologically similar to other parties. Additionally, when clientelism is significant, left/right categories become less useful as informational shorthand for political competition. For both voters and politicians, the use of these categories is difficult because they have been socialized in clientelist environments, which contributes to a reduction in the ideological differentiation between parties. In short, the influence of clientelism impacts upon two dimensions: (i) party-related: how parties’ strategies

lead to overlapping; (ii) systemic: how the institutional context affects overlapping.

Our analysis of 86 parties from 17 Latin American countries has sought to reveal the relationship between clientelism – at both individual party and party system levels – with overlapping. The findings confirm that the existence of parties that prioritize clientelist linkages with their voters, as well as of environments with a predominance of clientelist exchanges, make a positive contribution to overlapping. So, our work provides a new explanation for the impact of clientelism on the dynamics of party systems. The evidence suggests that parties find it difficult to stand out, ideologically, from their rivals, when this clientelist linkage predominates. These findings can be added to the other consequences of clientelist exchanges shown in previous articles: for example, their impact on the usefulness of ideological labels (Ruth 2016).

This finding is important for three reasons. Firstly, it has expanded our understanding of how clientelism affects relations between political actors. Until now, it was understood how clientelism affects parties' and politicians' links with voters, and relations between party leaders and brokers. Our study provides evidence of clientelism's influence on inter-party relations. More specifically, it shows how clientelism weakens parties' ideological identity, fostering the occupation of the same spaces along the ideological spectrum.

Secondly, it has been shown that overlapping is a variable with great discriminating power when it comes to characterizing and comparing parties, and one that complements other, better-known ideological competition variables, such as polarization. Thus, whilst polarization provides information on the ideological divisions within a party system, overlapping does so at both party system level (whether there is more or less overlapping in a system) and a party level (whether one party shares more or fewer ideological spaces with the remaining ones).

Lastly, the relationship between overlapping and clientelisms at a party level has implications with regard to a party's ability to secure its own, differentiated identity. Many organizations claim to have this aspiration, due to the disrepute of not having one. However, they will not achieve this goal if they continue with clientelist strategies in their campaigns and in the day-to-day relations between elected representatives and those they represent. Additionally, the existence of a relationship between overlapping and systemic clientelism affects the quality of representation. Should this clientelist pattern persist, party systems shall continue to limit voters' chances of having parties that occupy differentiated positions along the ideological spectrum.

This study paves the way for future research in at least three areas. Firstly, the number of countries with different variants of clientelism could be expanded, particularly to include Eastern European countries in which clientelism is associated with the relationship between parties and private donors,

resulting from privatization and state capture processes following the fall of communism (Gerghina and Volintiru 2017). This would allow us to gauge whether the influence of clientelism on overlapping remains in place or if there is a different pattern. Furthermore, our work has highlighted other aspects that merit analysis in Latin America due to their relationship with overlapping in party systems. These include the eroding of political parties as well as the high levels of volatility. Finally, one new avenue of research could be the study of overlapping in other dimensions (such as social and cultural ones). The importance of these topics to the politics of the region calls for continued analysis of overlapping and its determining factors.

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