



Associative linkages of political parties in Latin America: the role of ideology

Patricia Otero-Felipe¹ · Leticia M. Ruiz Rodríguez² · Mikel Barreda³

Accepted: 4 July 2025

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Abstract

This article analyses the linkages between political parties and social organizations in Latin America, by highlighting the role of ideology in these relations. Using data from the *Political Representation, Executives, and Political Parties Survey (PREPS)*, it shows that, despite the discrediting and crisis of legitimacy of parties in the region, which suggests a distancing from society, linkages with social associations continue to be widespread. The findings also show that ideology significantly influences the direction and intensity of these linkages: left-wing parties privilege relations with trade unions and women's or ethnic organizations, while right-wing parties associate with business and religious groups. The analysis also stresses the importance of other partisan and contextual factors. Specifically, larger, clientelist and older parties are more likely to build stable relationships with social organizations. Moreover, factors such as electoral competition and volatility shape these dynamics.

Keywords Political parties · Social organizations · Linkages · Ideology · Latin America

Introduction

In recent years, Latin America has seen a number of citizen protests that have left political parties at the margins. During the social unrest in Chile in 2019, for example, demonstrators refused to recognize parties as legitimate participants. In Peru, at the end of the Vizcarra presidency (2018–2020) and, years later, during the Boluarte

✉ Patricia Otero-Felipe
potero@ubu.es

¹ Faculty of Law, University of Burgos, Hospital del Rey SN, 09001 Burgos, Spain

² Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, Complutense University of Madrid, Pozuelo de Alarcón, Campus de Somosaguas, 28223 Madrid, Spain

³ Open University of Catalunya, Rambla del Poblenou, 08018 Barcelona, Spain



presidency (from 2022 to date), the social expression of discontent could not be capitalized on by any party. In 2023, this trend was repeated with the mobilizations of Panamanians against the signing of the contract between the government and a Canadian mining company at the end of Cortizo's term (2019–2023).

This disengagement between political parties and society might suggest, in these cases, that the relationship between the two is broken. Part of the reason is that parties are seen as discredited institutions with low levels of trust: in 2023 only 21 per cent of the Latin American population believes that parties work well, while 44 per cent believe that without parties there can be no democracy (Corporación Latino-barómetro 2023). Volatility data also support the argument that parties find it difficult to connect to voters in situations where they are unable to build loyalty (Cohen et al. 2018).

Simultaneously, however, collaborations between political parties and social organizations are frequent, especially in election periods. The rapprochement between right-wing parties and Christian and family movements, as in the case of Chile, and between environmental movements and left-wing parties, as in Brazil, are recent examples of this type of interaction. Political parties offer social organizations a 'loudspeaker' to help defend their interests and perhaps, eventually, to pass laws in Parliament in line with their demands. Reciprocally, these organizations represent a voting niche that, in the medium term, can stabilize or improve political parties' electoral performance (Kerneck and Wagner 2018).

Recent studies have examined the linkages between parties and social organizations, as well as the terms in which these relations are produced in the region (Anria and Chambers-Ju 2019; Albalá 2020; Anria and Bogliaccini 2022; Roberts 2023). To date, these papers have identified a variety of explanatory variables in case-by-case approaches. Our study contributes two novelties to this literature. On the one hand, the analysis of party–social organization relations is carried out from a comparative approach. On the other, our analysis focuses on the contribution of ideology in the connections that Latin American parties establish with various social organizations. Ideology is a defining aspect of political parties that influences aspects of their behaviour, such as voting cohesion and party loyalty (Close 2018), and can be expected to have an impact on parties' strategies with respect to society's associative fabric. Various studies have highlighted the coexistence of ideological dynamics and clientelistic practices in helping understand the partisan reality in Latin America (Kitschelt et al. 2010; Ruth 2016; Barreda et al. 2023). They have also pointed to the relevance of ideology in other aspects, such as partisan construction (Levitsky et al. 2016). In this context, our paper measures the role of ideology in the relationship between parties and social entities. To do so, we have drawn on data from the *Political Representation, Executives, and Political Parties Survey (PREPS)* (2018–2019), which has allowed us to examine the relationships of 156 Latin American parties with different social organizations.

Two questions guide our research. The first revolves around the 'extent' of connections between parties and social associations: how relevant are linkages with interest groups in parties' representational strategies? Despite the conflictive relationship, we ask whether it is widespread practice for parties to establish linkages with social organizations. The second question focuses on the effect of ideology on



such relationships: what role does ideology play in parties' relations with interest groups? As a key explanatory variable in party life and in the dynamics of party systems in the region (Martínez-Gallardo et al. 2022), we enquire about its capacity to condition the relations that parties establish with interest groups.

Mapping the extent of parties' relations to groups of civil society provides a more precise picture about the situation of political parties in Latin America and, specifically, about parties' current abilities to connect with citizens. While it is true that parties have historically found it difficult to become institutionalized and that they may suffer disengagement from some kind of social base, they still display an array of connections to different groups that varies from party to party. In addition, these linkages can eventually affect party's performance, votes and policies.

The paper is structured in four sections, in addition to this introduction. First, a review of the literature on the associative linkages of parties is presented and the working hypotheses set out. This is followed by details of the data and methodological techniques applied. The results of the analysis are then put forward in two parts: one on the extent and diversity of Latin American parties' associative linkages; and the other on the impact of ideology, along with other partisan and contextual factors, on the connections between parties and social organizations. In the final section, the paper's general conclusions are presented.

Parties' linkages with social organizations

The relationship between political parties and related social organizations is a classic concern in party literature. Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage model, for example, explained the relevance of these organizations in defining the 'conflict lines' of European party systems. The connection with civil society organizations (CSOs) was also used to define the basic properties of one of the best-known party models: the mass party (Duverger 1954; Neumann 1956; Poguntke 2002). A well-known case is that of the socialist parties, which were founded to represent the interests of the working class and closely linked to the trade unions. In some socialist parties, such as the United Kingdom's Labour party, these linkages were formalized in the party statutes themselves (e.g., by requiring both party and trade union membership).

In Latin America, the relationship between political parties and civil society organizations is also long-standing, although it has taken diverse and sometimes informal forms. In some cases, parties emerged directly from social movements, as in the case of MAS in Bolivia (linked to coca growers) or Pachakutik in Ecuador (born from the indigenous movement). In others, the connection is more personalist and aimed at supporting a specific leader, as seen with evangelical organizations in Guatemala or Costa Rica. In recent years, a more flexible and issue-specific mode of linkage has become widespread, whereby parties interact simultaneously with multiple organizations, each specializing in a distinct policy area. These diversified links help parties broaden their social anchor, which can increase their electoral appeal.

Scholars main reason for studying this issue is that political parties links with social groups are seen as an important asset that enhances the formers'



representational work. According to Scarrow and Webb (2017), connections with interest groups are part of political parties' representational strategies (relating to 'who' and 'how' they represent). This allows political parties, among other things, to: better understand citizens' preferences; have volunteers organize electoral campaigns; draw on expert knowledge; broaden their social anchoring and electoral support; and sometimes to attract financial contributions (Poguntke 2002; Allern and Verge 2017; Otjes and Rasmussen 2017; Czarnecki and Piotrowska 2021). Sometimes these connections can undermine the quality of representation, for example, when the preferences of the electorate on some issues do not coincide with those of the social organizations (Allern et al. 2024).

Other authors have highlighted the relevance of party–social group relations for understanding other political phenomena, such as decision-making and policy-making processes (Anria and Bogliaccini 2022) or party building (Levitsky et al. 2016).

Despite the importance of these issues, there is no academic consensus on what the term 'party–social group relations' means (Allern et al. 2021a, b). Some scholars interpret it in relation to the level of formal linkages between one organization and another. Poguntke (2002), for example, has coined the term 'collateral organizations' to refer to those social organizations that have a hierarchical structure, stable leadership and develop strong and lasting linkages with a particular political party. Other authors, on the other hand, interpret these relations in a much broader way. Thus, Schwartz (2005) has posited parties' connections to social organizations in terms of affiliation, alliances and co-optation. Allern et al (2021a, b) have identified three types of linkages between parties and associations: structured interactions (e.g. mutual representation on executive committees), provision or sharing resources (such as financial donations) and ideological affinity. Anria and Chambers-Ju (2019) have proposed the term 'associational linkages' to refer to all forms of relationship and exchange between a party and a CSO.¹ This concept of 'associational linkages', which we employ in this study, allows us to identify general patterns of connection between parties and CSOs regardless of their legal, organizational or strategic format. Considering these connections as resource exchanges allows us to understand that associational linkages are based on both ideological affinities and strategic calculations.

A repeated assertion in the literature is that party-interest group linkages began to weaken in the middle of the last century, mainly because of the erosion of class identity, the media's growing influence and the emergence of the 'catch-all' party model (Kirchheimer 1966; Allern and Bale 2011; Allern et al. 2021a, b).² This trend towards decreasingly close and lasting relations between parties and social

¹ The literature employs various terms to refer to associations that represent the interests of organized social groups, such as associations, interest groups, or interest organizations (Allern and Bale 2011; Anria and Chambers-Ju 2019; Fraussen and Halpin 2018; Berkhout et al. 2019; Allern et al. 2024), social groups (Allern and Verge 2017), or social and civil society organizations (Wiesehomeier et al. 2021; Martin et al. 2022a, 2022b).

² What is characteristic of 'catch all' parties is that they are geared towards achieving broad electoral support, rather than representing certain class interests.



associations is intensified by the emergence of the cartel party model (Katz and Mair 1995). As a result, politics has become a space of dispute and competition between professionalized party elites, rather than an arena for mobilization and integration of different social sectors (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014).³ Several studies have provided empirical evidence of these changes. Thus, in most European democracies in recent decades, there has been a sharp decline in the levels of membership in parties and collateral organizations (especially trade unions and religious organizations), with the latter having become more pluralistic (Poguntke 2002; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). Nevertheless, parties' social connections continue to exist, albeit with notable variations both between and within countries (Allern and Verge 2017; Martin et al. 2022b).

In Latin America, various case studies have highlighted the current connection between parties and a diverse constellation of groups, such as trade unions (Anria and Bogliaccini 2022), citizen and civic groups (Lazarte 2006; Collier and Handlin 2009), indigenous and peasant organizations (Van Cott 2005) and social movements of various kinds, to the point of speaking of 'movement-based parties' (Roberts 2023). Examination of these case studies highlights a particularity with respect to those in European democracies: the level of differentiation and distancing between political parties and CSOs is lower in Latin America (Anria and Chambers-Ju 2019). With this in mind, the first working hypothesis is concerned with capturing the extent of the phenomenon.

H1: The establishment of links with civil society organizations is a relevant practice for Latin American parties in their representation strategies. This varies from case to case, with some Latin American parties having a dense network of connections.

Another focus of research on the ties between parties and social organizations is explaining these linkages. The connections between parties and CSOs are usually understood via resource exchange theory: links are established if there are mutually beneficial exchanges of political resources (Allern et al. 2021a, b; 2024). Thus, parties are interested in having resources provided by social organizations such as electoral support, donations or expertise, while CSOs mainly expect decisions and legislation favourable to their interests from the parties.

Based on the resource-sharing model, some studies in European countries have examined the influence of specific factors, such as ideological proximity (Berkhout et al. 2019). It has been found that the ideological proximity of parties and CSOs facilitates the establishment of links between the two (Berkhout et al. 2019; Martin et al. 2022b). The main reason for this is that ideological proximity helps to reduce transaction costs between parties and CSOs (Allern et al. 2021a, b; 2024). For example, it facilitates coordination between parties and CSOs to discuss public policies and decreases uncertainty about the fulfilment of commitments reached.

It has also been found that party ideology affects the 'direction' of associative ties, i.e. the CSOs that are prioritized. Thus, in relation to 'traditional' axes of conflict, such as distributive and religious, European left-wing parties have tended to

³ These changes have also been seen in many interest groups, which have adopted more professional and centralized forms of organization (Fraussen and Halpin 2018).



establish close connections with trade unions, while right-wing parties have leaned towards building ties with business organizations and religious groups (Allern and Bale 2011; Allern and Verge 2017; Otjes and Rasmussen 2017; Martin et al. 2022a). As for “new” conflict axes, specific to advanced industrial societies (Inglehart 1990), left-wing parties tend to establish stronger linkages than right-wing parties with environmental and humanitarian associations (Rasmussen and Lindeboom 2013; Otjes and Rasmussen 2017), as well as with organizations of traditionally underrepresented social groups, such as ethnic minorities or women (Allern and Verge 2017). Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013) have shown that party–CSOs ties are stronger when the ideological affinities between the two revolve around ‘traditional’ issues than when they revolve around ‘new’ issues.

In Latin America, the explanatory power of ideology in party dynamics has been a particular focus of scholarly interest. Ideology affects the party’s vision of society and problems and solutions and, consequently, has an effect on party’s behaviour (Otero-Felipe and Ruiz Rodríguez 2024). Particularly, the traditional link between left-wing parties and trade unions has also been highlighted, although this weakened with the wave of neoliberal economic reforms in the 1970s and 1980s (Levitsky 2003). More recently, the well-known ‘left turn’ (with the extension, since the late 1990s, of various progressive governments) has contributed to the further erosion of the party–union relationship, although it remains relevant in some countries (Anria and Bogliaccini 2022), and has favoured the emergence of new social connections by left-wing parties, including with civic associations, indigenous organizations and various social movements (Collier and Handlin 2009; Anria and Chambers-Ju 2019; Roberts 2023). To this should be added the connection in recent years between some right-wing parties and business associations (Fairfield 2015) and religious organizations, especially evangelical ones (Boas 2020; Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2023). However, most of the existing work focuses on specific cases, which limits the possibility of understanding how ideology has shaped the linkages between parties and organizations in Latin America. This study aims to fill this gap, providing new empirical evidence on the role of ideology based on a comparative analysis. On the basis of the above, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Ideology is a key determinant of political parties’ associative linkages in Latin America orienting their strategies towards civil society organizations. Specifically, it is expected that leftist parties will more easily establish close linkages with trade unions, citizens’ associations and indigenous organizations, while right-wing parties will connect more closely with business and religious organizations.

Methodology

This study addresses the impact of ideology on linkages with interest groups, taking into account the party-level and country-level characteristics. As said, we use the *Political Representation, Executives, and Political Parties Survey (PREPS)* party expert database (Wiesehomeier et al. 2021) to examine the intensity of Latin American parties’ connections with different social organizations and the role ideology plays in shaping these linkages. We treat the eight associational categories in the



PREPS dataset (business, unions, religious, rural, urban, ethnic, women's, and transnational organizations), as civil society organizations (CSOs).

Conducted between 2018 and 2019 in 18 Latin American countries, the PREPS survey is, to our knowledge, the only cross-national dataset that provides systematic information on party linkages with various types of civil society organizations in the region.⁴ This database collects information on party characteristics, ideological positioning, and strategies of societal engagement. Experts base their assessments on diverse sources, such as media, academic literature, direct observation, and professional experience, which enables them to evaluate complex or informal behaviours often absent from official records.

Expert surveys offer several advantages for this type of research. They provide standardized, comparable cross-country data, especially in regions like Latin America where official information about party–CSO relations is scarce. Experts are particularly well-positioned to assess informal or strategic relationships, which are not easily captured through official documents, due to their long-term observation of national politics and broad knowledge base (Benoit and Laver 2006; Marks et al. 2007; Hooghe et al. 2010; Martínez-Gallardo et al. 2022). This method is particularly well-suited to identifying forms of linkage that are not always visible in official documents but are central to how parties operate and represent interests.

However, like any source of evidence, their use is not without limitations, including biases in the expert pool, cross-national variation in knowledge, subjective interpretation of linkage strength, and sensitivity to recent events (Marks et al. 2007). To mitigate these concerns, the PREPS survey used a broad and diverse panel of experts, applied anchoring vignettes, and collected multiple assessments per party to ensure internal consistency and reduce individual bias.

The PREPS database provides information for a total of 156 political parties active in the region between 2018 and 2019.⁵ To test the first hypothesis on the presence of party ties with civil society associations, we employed the following question:

‘Political parties often have more or less routine and explicit linkages to civil society entities, such as unions, business and/or professional and cultural organizations, based on religion, language, or ethnicity. The linkages might include leadership and membership overlap, mutual financial support, reserved positions for representatives of these organizations at national conventions, etc. Do the following parties have strong linkages to one or more of the following civil society organizations?’ (Wiesehomeier et al. 2021).

Experts were instructed to consider multiple dimensions of linkage, such as leadership overlap, campaign collaboration, or shared resources, and to base their assessments on publicly available sources. While some subjectivity is inevitable, the use of specific examples in the question and multiple coders per party helps ensure consistency across cases. The strength of this item lies in its multidimensional design: rather than focusing solely on formal structures, it captures a variety

⁴ Experts were selected based on their knowledge of their national political systems. Further details on expert selection and country coverage are provided in Appendix Table 1.

⁵ See appendix for the parties included in the analysis.



of linkage types, organizational, financial, symbolic, and representational, offering a broader and more realistic view of party–CSO interactions in Latin America. By combining open wording with specific examples, the item captures both formal and informal practices while facilitating consistent interpretation across countries. Responses range from 0 (no ties) to 1 (very strong linkages). This question serves as the dependent variable in our analysis and allows us to assess both the relevance and diversity of parties’ associative linkages.

Independent variable and controls

The main explanatory variable of our research design is the ideological position of the party. To test its impact, we have taken the ideological position of the party on a scale from 1 (left) to 20 (right) included in the PREPS survey. As highlighted in the second hypothesis, we expect to find that parties located on the left of the ideological spectrum establish stronger associative linkages with trade unions and organizations representing traditionally underrepresented people or groups, such as women or ethnic minorities. On the other hand, parties on the right are expected to establish closer linkages with business and/or religious organizations.

To test our hypotheses, we estimate multilevel regression models with ideology as the main explanatory variable, alongside a set of control variables capturing party-level and contextual characteristics. These controls, drawn from prior literature, are treated as pre-treatment covariates, factors assumed to precede and be independent of a party’s current ideological orientation. Their inclusion allows us to isolate the specific association between ideology and the strength of linkages with CSOs.

To interpret the variation in linkages by CSO type, we adopt theoretically grounded assumptions about the likely ideological alignment of each associational category. While systematic cross-national data on the ideological preferences of CSOs in Latin America are scarce, these assumptions are supported by regional studies and case evidence. Trade unions, rural and indigenous organizations have traditionally aligned with leftist parties in countries like Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador (Anria and Bogliaccini 2022; Roberts 2023), whereas business (Fairfield 2015) and religious organizations, especially evangelical churches, have supported conservative actors in Brazil, Mexico, and Costa Rica (Boas 2020; Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2023).

Among the party-level controls, we have included four variables that capture organizational traits and political resources, all previously highlighted in the literature (Allern and Bale 2011; Allern and Verge 2017; Czarnecki and Piotrowska 2021).

First, party size is operationalized as the percentage of votes obtained in the national legislative election closest to 2018, which is the reference year for the PREPS data (Otjes and Rasmussen 2017; Chaqués-Bonafont et al. 2021). Second, government status is coded as 1 if the party was part of the national executive at that time, and 0 otherwise (Otero-Felipe 2014). Both reflect political power, which may increase a party’s capacity or incentive to forge linkages with CSOs. The expectation is that parties with greater power resources, reflected in their size or position



in government, are in a better position to establish closer linkages with CSOs. The third control is clientelism, a common representation strategy in the region, both in party–voter relationships (Luna 2010) and in party–CSO dynamics (Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015). Although the effects of clientelism on associative linkages have not yet been tested in comparative studies, some works suggest that it may alter the internal structure and autonomy of CSOs. To measure it, we use the party-level clientelism index from the V-Party dataset (Lührmann et al. 2020), ranging from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

Finally, we have also included the party age, calculated as the difference between the party's year of foundation and 2018. Older parties are expected to have more consolidated linkages with interest associations due to their historical trajectory, organizational experience and greater capacity to build long-lasting relationships with different social actors. While some studies have shown the explanatory capacity of party age (Allern and Verge 2017), in others it has not been confirmed (Martin et al. 2022b).

Regarding the country-level, we include three contextual variables that may condition party–CSOs relations: social polarization, electoral volatility and electoral competition.

First, social polarization is expected to intensify the role of CSOs as intermediaries and support structures. Drawing on Albalá (2020), we include a V-Dem indicator that captures the level of social polarization (0, no polarization; 4, high polarization). Second, in volatile party systems, parties may be more inclined to build alliances with organized groups as a stabilizing mechanism (Poguntke 2002; Martin et al. 2022a). We therefore calculate electoral volatility using the Pedersen Index, based on the two legislative elections closest to 2018. Finally, we consider electoral competitiveness, measured as the absolute difference in vote share between the first and second parties in the most recent legislative election. Following Anria and Chambers-Ju (2019), our expectation is that in more competitive systems, where the electoral margin is narrow, parties may rely more heavily on CSO support to secure electoral success.

Linkages between parties and social organizations in Latin America

Figure 1 provides a comparative overview of political parties' linkages with eight civil society entities in 18 Latin American countries during 2018 and 2019. The data correspond to the average linkage of parties in each country with each type of organization. As can be seen, although there are differences by country, in all cases one or more social organization(s) have close linkages with political parties (with values above 0.5, on a scale of 0 to 1). Thus, in general terms, the first hypothesis about the prominent place of associative linkages in parties' representation strategies is confirmed.

The figure also shows that Latin American parties establish linkages with a wide range of CSOs. However, there are notable differences in the intensity of these linkages, both in terms of the distribution by country and the type of organization with which the linkages are developed. Regarding the first aspect, with the



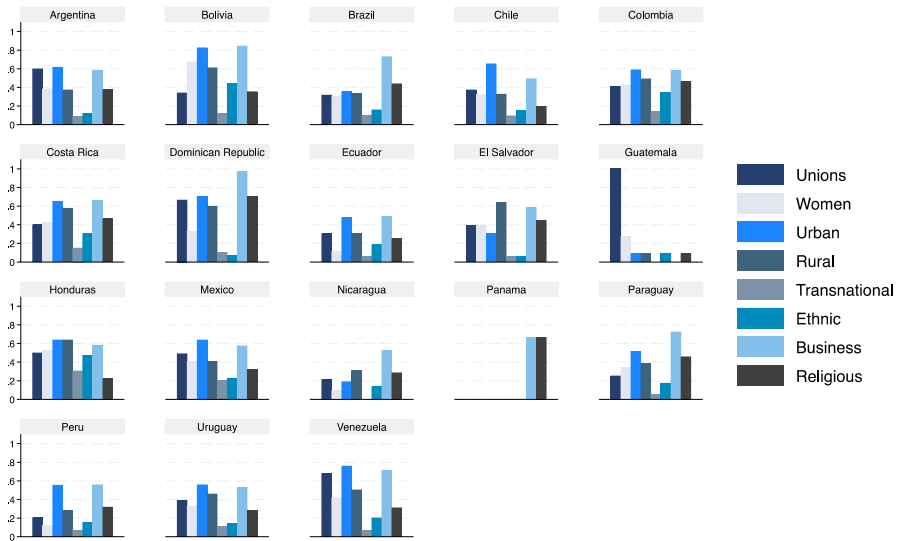


Fig. 1 Linkages between parties and social organizations in Latin America. Source: own elaboration, starting from Wieschomeier, Singer and Ruth-Lovell data (2021)

exception of Panama, where only two social organizations have significant connections with political parties, in all countries the parties establish linkages with a large number of social entities. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Mexico, political parties show a certain diversification in their ties with civil society, with medium-high levels of linkages with the eight types of associations analysed. In contrast, countries such as Nicaragua and Ecuador score low in almost all organizations, reflecting weaker associative linkages. In terms of the type of CSOs with which parties are connected, trade unions, business organizations and urban associations are, in absolute terms, those with the strongest connection to parties in the region, which shows their relevance in the articulation of social interests. This phenomenon can be clearly observed in Argentina, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Uruguay and Venezuela. Women's and rural organizations show moderate levels of linkages, although with a strong presence in Bolivia, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras. Linkages tend to be weaker, on average, with transnational, religious and ethnic organizations. However, there are exceptions. Thus, in Bolivia and Colombia, linkages with ethnic organizations are prominent, indicating the relevance of indigenous movements in national politics. Although overall connective density is low in Panama, linkages with religious organizations remain relatively strong, as is also the case in the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Costa Rica.

Before turning to our explanatory models, we present a descriptive measure of each party's 'average linkage intensity' across CSO types, which we refer to as



the left show a tendency to establish stronger linkages with organizations than their counterparts on the right or centre. However, not all of them exhibit high levels of linkages. Similarly, there are notable exceptions among right-wing parties, such as the Honduran PNH, the Paraguayan ANR and the Mexican PRI. This evidence points to considerable variation across parties and countries and suggests that ideology may play a role in shaping these relationships, but not in a uniform way. In the following section, we test the explanatory power of ideology while controlling for a set of party-level and contextual factors.

The influence of ideology on CSO linkages

The previous section has highlighted heterogeneity in the intensity of party linkages with social organizations. However, the evidence does not allow us to establish a clear relationship between the degree of linkages with organizations and their ideological profile.

To date, we have explored the relationship that exists with all organizations, so that a detailed analysis of each can reveal specific patterns and show the differentiated impact of ideology in connections with the various social organizations. We estimate separate multilevel models, one for each type of CSO to assess how the effect of ideology varies across different linkage domains. This approach allows us to examine the specific dynamics underlying each party–CSO connection and to identify whether party-level or contextual factors matter more in particular domains.⁷

This has been achieved by including explanatory factors corresponding to different levels of analysis in a hierarchical linear model. In these multilevel regression models, lower-level units, in this case political parties, are nested within higher-level units, such as political systems (Scott et al. 2013). Therefore, observations belonging to the same group are not statistically independent. In addition to the ideological position of the party, partisan variables and variables related to the environment have been included in the models. In the former case, the two variables on the level of political power (size and location in government or opposition), the degree of clientelism and the age of the party have been introduced. In the latter case, social polarization, electoral volatility and competitiveness have been incorporated.⁸ The following figures show the results of the analysis; they include the coefficient of the variable together with the confidence interval. So, if this coefficient is to the right of

⁷ The stacked model, presented as a robustness check, complements this approach by confirming that the differential impact of party ideology is not driven by model specification but reflects a consistent empirical pattern across the region.

⁸ Null models were previously run for the eight types of associations. These models revealed that a significant part of the variability in linkages is due to differences between hierarchical levels, reinforcing the need to use multilevel models. On average, intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) at the country level ranged from a low of 3.7% (religious associations) to a high of 36% (urban associations), suggesting that linkages are more conditioned by partisan factors.



0 it will have a positive sign, while on the left side, it will have a negative effect on the dependent variable.⁹

The results provide strong support for our second hypothesis: ideology is a key determinant of party linkages with civil society. Its effect varies across organizational types, but the pattern is consistent with theoretical expectations (Otjes and Rasmussen 2017; Allern et al. 2021b). Specifically, as said, left-wing parties tend to establish stronger ties with unions, rural, women's, ethnic, urban and transnational organizations. In contrast, right-wing parties are more likely to prioritize linkages with business and religious groups.

In the case of trade unions, the analysis shows that moving to the right of the party on the ideological scale would reduce the probability of linkage by 5.4%. Similarly, rural and ethnic associations experience a decrease of 0.04 for each unit that the party moves to the right. The impact on linkage with urban associations is slightly smaller (with a decrease of 0.03). In turn, the analyses show that the probability of party linkage with women's associations decreases by 3.7% and with transnational associations by 1.2%, for each unit that the party moves to the right. The trend in the connection to religious and business associations is the opposite: the probability of linkage increases by 3% and 3.4% for each unit the party shifts to the right, respectively. This confirms the role of ideology as a filter for party–CSO collaboration, consistent with findings in other regional contexts (Statsch and Berkhout 2020).

While ideology is the strongest explanatory variable overall, several control variables also show significant effects. First, the analyses show that party size positively affects relations with business, religious, women's and urban organizations, indicating that larger parties are perceived as more valuable interlocutors with these types of entities. Likewise, being a governing party has a positive impact on the connection established with ethnic groups. Clientelism shows a strong association with unions, rural and ethnic groups: for example, the most clientelistic parties are 60.3% more likely to be linked to unions than their less clientelistic counterparts. A one-unit increase in the clientelism index raises the likelihood of linkage with ethnic and rural groups by 6.5% and 14%, respectively, confirming earlier findings that clientelist strategies often involve intermediaries like CSOs (Luna 2010; Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015). Party age also matters, but only for business associations: each additional year increases the likelihood of linkage by 0.15.

Finally, regarding contextual factors, the results suggest that the relationship between context and linkage depends on the CSO type. Electoral competitiveness (measured as the vote gap between the top two parties) has a significant and negative effect on women's, business and religious associations, indicating that parties form stronger alliances in more competitive settings (Statsch and Berkhout 2020). Electoral volatility, which reflects shifts in party support, increases party–union ties but decreases ties with transnational and rural groups. Social polarization, which reflects the existence of divisions within a society, has no impact on partisan alliances with social organizations in the contexts analysed.

⁹ Tables with the models including the coefficient, standard error and *p* value are available in appendix.



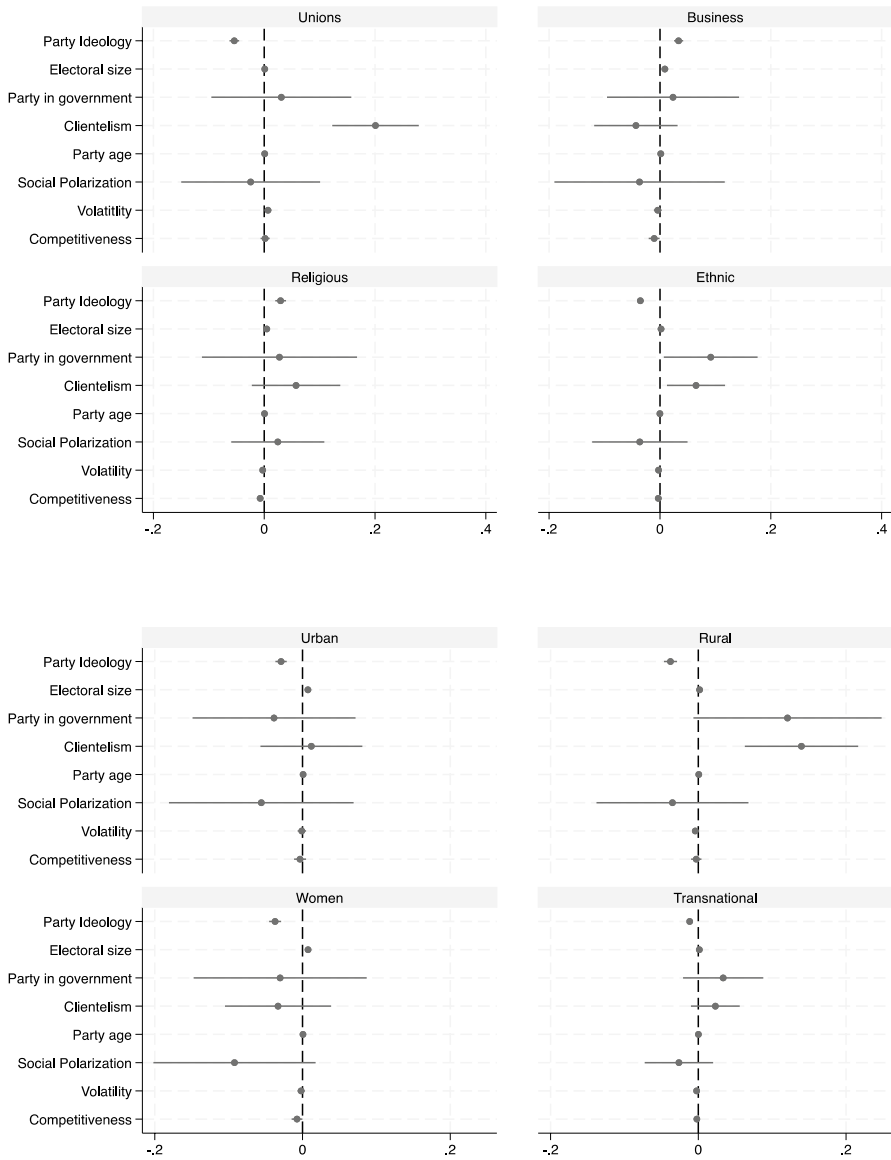


Fig. 3 Predictors of linkages between social organizations and political parties in Latin America. Source: own elaboration

In sum, these results underscore the central role of ideology in shaping party–CSO linkages but also reveal that this influence is mediated by organizational type and broader strategic considerations. To test the consistency of these findings, we now turn to a pooled model with interaction terms (Fig. 3).



Robustness checks

To test the robustness of our findings and to assess whether the effect of ideology systematically varies across CSO types, we estimate a mixed-effects model using a fully stacked dataset, following standard practice in dyadic studies (Berkhout et al. 2019). Each observation in the dataset represents a party–CSO dyad. The dependent variable is the degree of linkage, while independent variables include party ideology, CSO type, and their interaction, as well as all party-level and contextual controls. Country and party random intercepts account for clustering.

The results, presented in detail in appendix, confirm the theoretical expectation that the effect of party ideology is not homogeneous across CSOs. The interaction terms reveal significant variation: as parties move to the right on the ideological spectrum, the probability of establishing linkages with business groups increases, while the probability of linkages with unions, women’s organizations, and ethnic groups decreases.

Figure 4 displays the predicted probabilities of party–CSO linkages across the ideological scale for each type of organization. The results confirm that the effect of party ideology varies significantly depending on the CSO type. The probability of linkage with business organizations increases as parties become more right-leaning. In contrast, the probabilities of linkage with unions and women’s organizations decline sharply as parties shift to the right, indicating that these groups remain preferential partners of leftist parties. Linkages with ethnic organizations follow a similar, though slightly less pronounced, negative trend. By contrast, connections with urban, rural, and transnational organizations exhibit weaker ideological effects, suggesting that other factors may play a more prominent role in shaping these ties.

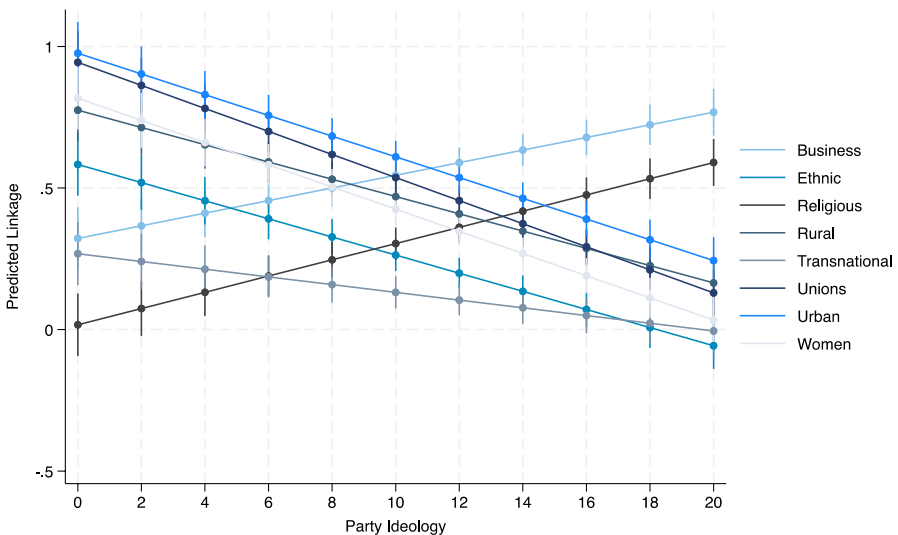


Fig. 4 Predicted probability of party–CSO linkages by party ideology and type of organization. Source: own elaboration



These findings confirm that party ideology is a key driver of party–CSO linkages in Latin America. The robustness checks with a pooled interaction model reinforce the validity of our results, showing that the ideological effect is consistent across specifications and varies systematically by type of organization.

Conclusions

In recent decades, there has been a weakening of parties' traditional linkages with civil society organizations. Although Latin America has not been immune to this tendency, this study strongly suggests that such collaboration continues to be common practice for many parties in the region. It has shown that linking with social organizations occupies a prominent place in the political representation strategies of most Latin American parties.

The work from which this conclusion derives presents two novelties with respect to previous research on party–social organization relations in Latin America. First, in contrast to the predominance of case studies, new empirical evidence has been provided from a comparative analysis. This has made it possible to measure with greater precision the extent of the links between parties and CSOs in the region, incorporating a much larger number of CSOs than is usual in previous works (specifically, eight types of CSOs). Second, the study takes a novel approach by exploring the role of ideology as an explanatory factor of these linkages. We show that ideology conditions the orientation of the links, configuring differentiated patterns of relationships between left and right parties with different CSOs.

This paper provides evidence that associative linkages are a prominent practice among Latin American political parties. Despite the differences between countries and organizations, the parties show significant levels of linkages, which highlights the role of social associations as key actors in the representation strategies developed by parties. In most cases examined, a highly diversified network of social connections has been found (including civic, religious, ethnic and/or women's associations, to name but a few). The context is therefore very different from that of the last century, when trade unions were the parties' main collateral organization and a model of corporate representation prevailed.

Similarly, this paper confirms that party ideology is an essential factor in explaining the intensity and direction of associative linkages. In particular, left-wing parties tend to establish closer relations with trade unions, rural, women's, ethnic and urban organizations, while right-wing parties have stronger linkages with business and religious entities. These findings are consistent with previous studies in European contexts (Otjes and Rasmussen 2017; Statsch and Berkhout 2020), where ideological proximity plays a key role in alliances between parties and associations. Our study contributes to this line of work. In the Latin American case, left-wing parties' connections with certain social organizations reflect



the historical tradition of these parties as defenders of traditionally neglected social sectors, while right-wing parties privilege their relationship with economic and religious actors, aligned with their conservative values.

The analysis has also highlighted the importance of partisan and contextual factors in explaining ties with social organizations. In relation to the former, it has been found that, in contexts of political mobilization based on the exchange of benefits, social groups act as key intermediaries for channelling resources to voters. Likewise, both greater access to quotas of political power (in seats or government positions) and greater age provide parties with favourable conditions for establishing stable and lasting linkages with civil society organizations.

In terms of contextual factors, it has been shown that competitive electoral environments favour the establishment of linkages with religious, business and women's associations. Something similar happens with electoral volatility with respect to trade union linkages (in contrast, with rural and transnational organizations it has an unfavourable effect), while social polarization does not seem to have an impact on the establishment of associative linkages with parties.

These findings contribute to the scarce literature that has addressed the relationship between parties and social organizations in the Latin American region from a comparative perspective. Nonetheless, the agenda for further study remains broad. One avenue of research that could be pursued, through case studies, is to examine the formal and informal mechanisms of this linkage. Similarly, future work might advance understanding of the dynamics of collaboration between parties and social organizations by showing, from a temporal perspective, whether these connections are maintained or transformed in different electoral cycles. Finally, given the current relevance of the phenomenon of populism in Latin America (Barr 2017), it would be interesting to check whether the populist ideology of parties does *not* favour the establishment of links with social organizations, as the study by Berkhout et al. (2019) in five European countries has shown, or, whether there is any different pattern in the region.

Appendix

See Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Table 8 reports the full results of the mixed-effects model, incorporating the interaction between party ideology and the type of civil society organization (CSO). This specification allows us to statistically assess whether the effect of party ideology on associative linkages varies significantly depending on the specific type of organization.



Table 1 Countries and political parties

Country (avg. Experts per country/% response rate)	Political parties
Argentina (167/53.7%)	Coalición Cívica—Afirmación para un (CCARI), Evolución Radical (FCS), Frente Cívico por Santiago (FPV), Frente Renovador (FR), Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores (PF), Frente para la Victoria (PRO), Movimiento Evita (FIT), Peronismo Federal (UJ), Propuesta Republicana (UCR), Unidad Justicialista (Evolución), Unión Cívica Radical (MEvita)
Bolivia (33/54.1%)	Frente de Unidad Nacional (UN), Movimiento Demócrata Social (MAS-IPSP), Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MDS), Movimiento al Socialismo—Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (MNR), Movimiento para la Soberanía (MPS), Partido Democrático Cristiano (PDC), Soberanía y Libertad (SOL)
Brazil (410/41.6%)	Democratas (PDT), Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB), Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT), Partido Novo (NOVO), Partido Republicano Brasileiro (PRB), Partido Social Democrático (PSD), Partido Social Liberal (PSL), Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL), Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB), Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), Partido Verde (PV), Partido da República (PR), Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB), Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), Podemos (PODE), Progressistas (PP), Rede Sustentabilidade (REDE)
Chile (35/49.0%)	Evolución Política (Evopoli), Federación Regionalista Verde Social (FRVS), Movimiento Amplio Social (MAS), Movimiento Autonomista (MA), Partido Comunista de Chile (PCCh), Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), Partido Humanista de Chile (PH), Partido Radical Socialdemócrata (PRSD), Partido Socialista de Chile (PS), Partido por la Democracia (PPD), Renovación Nacional (RN), Revolución Democrática (RD), Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI)
Colombia (139/38.4%)	Alianza Verde (AV), Centro Democrático (Centro), Coalición Lista de la Decencia (Decencia), Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta (MIRA), Partido Cambio Radical (PCR), Partido Conservador Colombiano (PCC), Partido Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), Partido Liberal Colombiano (PLC), Partido Opción Ciudadana (POC), Partido Social de Unidad Nacional (PSUN), Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA)
Costa Rica (25/49%)	Acción Ciudadana (PAC), Frente Amplio (FA), Partido Integración Nacional (PIN), Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN), Partido Renovación Costarricense (PRC), Partido Republicano Social Cristiano (PRSC), Partido Restauración Nacional (PRN), Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC)
Dominican Republic (10/23.3%)	Partido Reformista Liberal (PRL), Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC), Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), Partido Revolucionario Moderno (PRM), Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD)
Ecuador (28/60.9%)	Creando Oportunidades (CREO), Fuerza Ecuador (FE), Izquierda Democrática (ID), Movimiento PAÍS—Patria Altiva i Soberana (PAIS), Movimiento Sociedad Unida Más Acción (SUMA), Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik (MUPP), Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (PSE), Partido Sociedad Patriótica 21 de Enero (PSP)
El Salvador (13/39.4%)	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), Cambio Democrático (CD), Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional (GANA), Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PCN)



Table 1 (continued)

Country (avg. Experts per country/% response rate)	Political parties
Guatemala (21/35%)	Alianza Ciudadana (AC), Compromiso, Renovación y Orden (CREO), Convergencia (EG), Encuentro por Guatemala (EG), Frente de Convergencia Nacional (FCN), Movimiento Reformador (MR), Partido de Avanzada Nacional (PAN), Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG-MAIZ), Unión del Cambio Nacional (UCN), Visión con Valores (VIVA), Partido de Avanzada Nacional (PAN)
Honduras (8/24.2%)	Partido Alianza Patriótica Hondureña (Alianza), Partido Anticorrupción (PAC), Partido Liberal de Honduras (PLH), Partido Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE), Partido Nacional de Honduras (PNH), Partido de Innovación y Unidad Social Demócrata (PINU-SD)
Mexico (51/49%)	Movimiento Ciudadano (MC), Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), Nueva Alianza (PNA), Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Partido Encuentro Social (PES), Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Partido Verde Ecológico de México (PVEM), Partido de Trabajo (PT), Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD)
Nicaragua (12/27.3%)	Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense (ALN), Alianza por la República (APRE), Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), Partido Conservador de Nicaragua (PC), Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), Partido Liberal Independiente (PLI), Yapti Tasba Masraka NanihAslatankanka (YATAMA)
Panama (9/40.9%)	Cambio Democrático (CD), Movimiento Liberal Republicano Nacionalista (MOLIRENA), Partido Panameñista (PAN), Partido Popular (PP), Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD)
Paraguay (19/65.5%)	Asociación Nacional Republicana—Partido Colorado (ANR-PC), Frente Guasú (FG), Movimiento Cruzada Nacional (MCN), Partido Democrático Progresista (PDP), Partido Encuentro Nacional (PEN), Partido Hagamos (HAGAMOS), Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA), Partido Patria Querida (PPQ), Unión Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos (UNACE)
Peru (27/50.0%)	Acción Popular (AP), Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), Alianza para el Progreso (APP), Frente Amplio por Justicia, Vida y Libertad (FA), Fuerza Popular (FP), Partido Democrático Somos Perú (PDS), Partido Nacionalista Peruano (PNP), Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), Peruanos por el Cambio (PPK)
Uruguay (172/43.1%)	Frente Amplio (FA), Partido Colorado (PC), Partido Ecológico Radical Intransigente (PERI), Partido Independiente (PI), Partido Nacional (PN), Unidad Popular (UP)
Venezuela (30/46.9%)	Acción Democrática (AD), Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI), La Causa Radical (LCR), Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), Partido Comunista Venezolano (PCV), Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), Primero Justicia (PJ), Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), Vente Venezuela (VENTE), Voluntad Popular (VP)

Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number of valid expert responses and the response rate based on the targeted expert population. Data compiled from PREPS documentation (2019–2020)



Table 2 Variables, operationalization, and source

Variable	Operationalization	Source
Associative linkages	Degree of connection between the party and types of social organizations, ranging from 0 (none) to 1 (maximum)	PREPS
Party ideology	Left–right position ranging from 1 to 20	PREPS
Electoral size	Percentage of votes obtained in the legislative election closest to 2018	Own elaboration based on electoral results
Party in government	1 if the party is in government, 0 if not	Own elaboration based on electoral results
Party clientelism	Scale from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates minimal clientelism and 4 indicates maximum clientelism	V-Party
Party Age	Calculated as the difference between the party's founding year and 2018	Own elaboration based on electoral results
Competitiveness	Difference in vote percentage between the first and second parties in the legislative elections closest to 2018	Own elaboration based on electoral results
Social polarization	Scale from 0 to 4, where 0 indicates no polarization and 4 indicates high polarization	V-Dem
Volatility	Calculated based on the legislative elections closest to 2018 in each country	Own elaboration based on electoral results



Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	<i>N</i>
Unions linkages	0.437	0.391	0.000	1.000	156
Business linkages	0.585	0.357	0.000	1.000	156
Religious linkages	0.351	0.340	0.000	1.000	156
Ethnic linkages	0.194	0.250	0.000	1.000	156
Urban linkages	0.515	0.315	0.000	1.000	156
Rural linkages	0.399	0.323	0.000	1.000	156
Women linkages	0.333	0.314	0.000	1.000	156
Transnational linkages	0.096	0.127	0.000	0.500	156
Party ideology	12.140	5.099	1.133	19.500	160
Party size	11.588	12.734	0.16	65.86	158
Party in government	0.163	0.370	0.000	1.000	160
Party clientelism	2.680	0.724	1.040	3.900	154
Party age	34.856	39.804	0.000	182.000	160
Competitiveness	13.198	10.912	0.380	50.800	160
Social polarization	0.729	0.702	0.060	2.320	160
Volatility	31.288	16.289	12.910	61.500	160

Table 4 Multilevel Model: Unions and Business Organizations

Variable	Unions		Business	
	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value
Party ideology	-0.054 (0.004)	0.000	0.034 (0.004)	0.000
Party size	0.001 (0.002)	0.656	0.009 (0.002)	0.000
Party in government	0.031 (0.065)	0.631	0.024 (0.061)	0.699
Party clientelism	0.201 (0.040)	0.000	-0.043 (0.038)	0.259
Party age	0.001 (0.001)	0.102	0.001 (0.001)	0.003
Competitiveness	0.002 (0.004)	0.683	-0.010 (0.005)	0.038
Social polarization	-0.025 (0.064)	0.702	-0.037 (0.078)	0.638
Volatility	0.007 (0.003)	0.018	-0.004 (0.004)	0.270
Constant	0.305 (0.176)	0.084	0.408 (0.208)	0.049
Country: var(_cons)	0.022 (0.010)		0.038 (0.015)	
Party: var(_cons)	0.046 (1.790)		0.040 (0.997)	
Residual variance	0.007 (1.790)		0.007 (0.997)	
Total (groups)	Countries: 18, parties: 149		Countries: 18, parties: 149	



Table 5 Multilevel Model: Religious and Ethnic Organizations

Variable	Religious		Ethnic	
	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value
Party ideology	0.030 (0.005)	0.000	-0.035 (0.003)	0.000
Party size	0.005 (0.002)	0.040	0.002 (0.001)	0.187
Party in government	0.028 (0.071)	0.700	0.092 (0.043)	0.034
Party clientelism	0.057 (0.041)	0.158	0.065 (0.027)	0.015
Party age	0.001 (0.001)	0.349	-0.000 (0.000)	0.679
Competitiveness	-0.007 (0.003)	0.016	-0.003 (0.003)	0.304
Social polarization	0.025 (0.043)	0.567	-0.036 (0.044)	0.407
Volatility	-0.003 (0.002)	0.140	-0.003 (0.002)	0.194
Constant	-0.079 (0.133)	0.553	0.561 (0.121)	0.000
Country: var(_cons)			0.010 (0.005)	
Party: var(_cons)			0.021 (1.286)	
Residual variance			0.003 (1.286)	
Total (groups)	Countries: 18, parties: 149		Countries: 18, parties: 149	

Table 6 Multilevel Model: Urban and Rural Organizations

Variable	Urban		Rural	
	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value
Party ideology	-0.029 (0.004)	0.000	-0.038 (0.005)	0.000
Party size	0.007 (0.002)	0.000	0.002 (0.002)	0.415
Party in government	-0.039 (0.056)	0.493	0.121 (0.065)	0.063
Party clientelism	0.012 (0.035)	0.735	0.140 (0.039)	0.000
Party age	0.001 (0.000)	0.091	0.001 (0.001)	0.228
Competitiveness	-0.003 (0.004)	0.411	-0.003 (0.004)	0.444
Social polarization	-0.056 (0.064)	0.382	-0.035 (0.052)	0.505
Volatility	-0.001 (0.003)	0.740	-0.004 (0.002)	0.079
Constant	0.852 (0.172)	0.000	0.615 (0.151)	0.000
Country: var(_cons)	0.023 (0.011)		0.012 (0.007)	
Party: var(_cons)	0.035 (1.995)		0.048 (6.689)	
Residual Variance	0.006 (1.995)		0.007 (6.689)	
Total (groups)	Countries: 18, parties: 149		Countries: 18, parties: 149	



Table 7 Multilevel model: women's and transnational organizations

Variable	Women		Transnational	
	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value	Coef (SE)	<i>P</i> -value
Party ideology	-0.037 (0.004)	0.000	-0.012 (0.002)	0.000
Party size	0.007 (0.002)	0.000	0.001 (0.001)	0.135
Party in government	-0.030 (0.060)	0.612	0.034 (0.028)	0.224
Party clientelism	-0.033 (0.037)	0.366	0.023 (0.017)	0.169
Party age	0.001 (0.000)	0.226	0.000 (0.000)	0.383
Competitiveness	-0.007 (0.004)	0.045	-0.002 (0.002)	0.219
Social polarization	-0.092 (0.056)	0.100	-0.026 (0.024)	0.267
Volatility	-0.002 (0.003)	0.445	-0.002 (0.001)	0.032
Constant	1.000 (0.157)	0.000	0.262 (0.067)	0.000
Country: var(_cons)	0.016 (0.008)		0.003 (0.001)	
Party: var(_cons)	0.040 (0.006)		0.009 (0.476)	
Residual variance	0.006 (0.000)		0.001 (0.476)	
Total (groups)	Countries:18, parties: 149		Countries:18, parties: 149	



Table 8 Multilevel model—multilevel regression—interaction effects between party ideology and CSO type)

Variable	Coef (SE)	P value
Party Ideology	0.022 (0.004)	0.000
<i>CSO (reference: business)</i>		
Ethnic	0.261 (0.071)	0.000
Religious	-0.305 (0.071)	0.000
Rural	0.453 (0.071)	0.000
Transnational	-0.054 (0.071)	0.446
Unions	0.622 (0.071)	0.000
Urban	0.654 (0.071)	0.000
Women	0.495 (0.071)	0.000
<i>Interaction party ideology × CSO type</i>		
Ethnic × Ideology	-0.054 (0.005)	0.000
Religious × Ideology	0.006 (0.005)	0.239
Rural × Ideology	-0.053 (0.005)	0.000
Transnational × Ideology	-0.036 (0.005)	0.000
Unions × Ideology	-0.063 (0.005)	0.000
Urban × Ideology	-0.059 (0.005)	0.000
Women × Ideology	-0.061 (0.005)	0.000
Party Size	0.004 (0.001)	0.000
Party in Government	0.033 (0.027)	0.220
Party Clientelism	0.054 (0.017)	0.002
Party Age	0.001 (0.000)	0.007
Social Polarization	-0.037 (0.032)	0.250
Volatility	-0.001 (0.001)	0.308
Competitiveness	-0.004 (0.002)	0.030
Constant	0.228 (0.098)	0.020
<i>Random effects</i>		
Country: var(_cons)	0.006 (0.003)	
Party: var(_cons)	0.002 (0.001)	
Residual variance	0.057 (0.003)	
Total groups	Countries: 18, Parties: 149	
Observations (N)	1192	

Funding Funding was supported by Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (ES), PID 2019-104787RB-I00.

Declarations

Competing interests On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.



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