

The Organizational Voter: Support for New Parties in Young Democracies

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Abstract: *How do voters come to support new political parties? This article contends that new types of locally organized, participant-based societal organizations—such as neighborhood associations, informal sector unions, and indigenous movements—can play a crucial mediating role in securing electoral support for new parties. Drawing on social identity and self-categorization theory, I argue that endorsements of new parties by such organizations sway the vote preferences of organization members and people in their larger social networks. A discrete choice experiment, presenting voters in Bolivia with campaign posters, demonstrates that organizational endorsements are highly effective in mobilizing voters, especially when voters face a new party. Endorsements can even counteract policy and ethnic differences between candidates and voters. The findings suggest an important, understudied route to partisan support in new democracies and have important implications for research on political accountability.*

Verification Materials: The materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures, and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/4RQWXW>.

Across much of the democratic world, party systems are experiencing a critical moment: Trust in established political parties has decreased in recent decades and new parties are emerging. Although new parties arise even in well-established, historic democracies with allegedly “frozen party systems” in Western Europe, this happens even more frequently in young democracies. While most of these new parties remain ephemeral and fall into oblivion quickly (Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck, 2016), some manage to secure substantial electoral support surprisingly quickly and to maintain support over repeated elections.

In order to understand the success and failure of new parties, we need to explore how voters come to support them and ask how effective different mobiliza-

tion strategies commonly available to new parties are to secure electoral support. Doing so is critical for understanding the quality and stability of democratic representation, especially in transitioning regimes. Yet, the literature on vote support tends to focus on well-established parties. Whereas the stability of electoral support and the de-alignment away from traditional parties have received substantial attention (e.g., Lupu 2014; Roberts 2014), the theoretical microfoundations behind the creation of support for new parties—both in young democracies today and historically in established democracies—are still little understood.

In this article, I assess the mechanisms through which support for new parties can emerge, comparing new parties’ mobilization of voters through *direct*

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For helpful discussions and comments on earlier versions of this article (and/or the research design), I would like to thank Leo Arriola, Pradeep Chhibber, Danny Choi, David Collier, Ruth Berins Collier, Thad Dunning, Gabriel Lenz, Noam Lupu, Ted Miguel, Cecilia Mo, Lucas Novaes, Brian Palmer-Rubin, Ken Roberts, Jason Seawright, Laura Stoker, Guadalupe Tuñón, Konstantin Vössing, Keith Weghorst, Bernhard Weßels, Moira Zuazo, and three anonymous referees as well as seminar participants at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, NYU Abu Dhabi, and UC Berkeley. Earlier versions of this article were also presented at the 2016 and 2017 APSA Annual Meetings and the 2017 EPSA Annual General Conference. I also thank Daniel Moreno, Vivian Schwarz, and Daniela Osorio at Ciudadanía and their excellent team of enumerators for their assistance in the implementation of the survey in Bolivia as well as the support received by numerous research assistants in Berkeley and La Paz. This material is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. SES-1560656 and the UC Berkeley Center on the Politics of Development. The research was reviewed and approved by UC Berkeley’s Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (IRB Protocol #2015-12-8202). A preanalysis plan was registered with EGAP (#20160224AB) and the AEA RCT Registry (#AEARCTR-0001079) prior to data collection.

[Correction Statement: Table 1 in the article and Table C5 in the Online Appendix were corrected as the analyses did not apply the survey weights correctly to all the models (e.g., the odds ratios in Table 1 did not take into account the survey weights). Tables C1 and C4 in the Online Appendix were edited to correct typos. Resolving these errors did not substantively change the results.]

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 65, No. 3, July 2021, Pp. 634–651

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DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12546

appeals to voters versus through *organizationally mediated appeals*, that is, appeals that build ties to voters through societal organizations.¹ Much of the recent literature has focused on direct appeals, made through speeches or advertisements spread through mass media, to attract voters through issue- or identity-based platforms, selective material promises, or personalistic appeals (Birnir 2007; Kitschelt 2000; Madrid 2005, 2012).

Yet, historically, societal organizations were deemed critical in party building. However, it is unclear whether newer types of societal organizations can play a similar role in creating mass support for new parties *today*. First, the importance of traditional societal organizations that played a role in earlier episodes of mass party formation (most importantly, labor unions) has declined in most parts of the world. Second, the new generation of societal organizations looks quite different from the traditional labor union model. Today, organizations exhibit a broader range of organizational forms and underlying issues and identities. In fact, purported organizational and structural differences between traditional and contemporary societal organizations have led many scholars to be rather pessimistic about the mobilizational and representational capacity of such organizations today.²

I argue that new types of *locally organized, participant-based societal associations*, such as indigenous organizations, neighborhood associations, and informal sector unions, can play a crucial mediating role in securing electoral support for new parties today. Such organizations formed around a broad range of political identities and interests are particularly widespread in the developing world: in most Latin American countries, for example, about one-third to one-half of citizens regularly attend meetings of such organizations (Latin American Public Opinion Project [LAPOP] 2016). Unlike professionalized, primarily nationally focused interest groups or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), these *societal organizations* are characterized by regular personal interactions between local leaders and their members. Such organizations can play a crucial role in connecting new parties to voters by expressing their support for these parties. Focusing on the role of such organizational endorsements, I argue they can secure voter support more

effectively than most types of direct appeals.³ Drawing on social identity and self-categorization theory, I contend that endorsements of new parties by such organizations, which serve as reference groups to their members, hold considerable sway over organization members' vote preferences. While such societal organizations may convey information about candidates' or parties' policy positions, similar to the role that interest groups can play in other contexts (Arceneaux, and Kolodny 2009; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994), their influence may go beyond instrumental information cues. Because such locally rooted organizations can tap into members' deep affective ties, they may induce members to support parties even when their endorsements provide no new information about the content of policies—or even when those policies actively conflict with voters' policy preferences.

This article tests this argument in the context of a nascent democracy that used to have one of the most unstable and least institutionalized party systems in Latin America (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 19): Bolivia. Here, a newly emerged party, the Movimiento al Socialismo-Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (MAS), has managed to establish steady electoral support within a surprisingly short period of time among large parts of the electorate in just a decade.

At first sight, the success of the MAS might appear to be such a case of party building based on direct appeals, in particular, those aimed at ethnic mobilization (Madrid 2008, 2012; Van Cott 2005). However, a closer look questions this account: at the macrolevel, whereas the MAS has enjoyed extraordinarily stable electoral support, ethnic identities have been less stable (Flesken 2014), raising doubts about the importance and extent of ethnic voting. Furthermore, as in most of the region, the ethnic cleavage largely overlaps with a class cleavage, and the MAS has appealed to voters based on both ethnic and class identities and interests. Existing observational studies are therefore hard-pressed to separate out whether voters are responding to ethnic or class-based appeals, much less to compare the effectiveness of direct appeals with other means through which they can generate mass support. My analysis in this article provides both types of comparisons.

In order to test whether organizationally mediated appeals can sway voters and how effective they are relative to different types of direct appeals, I conducted a discrete choice experiment in which I presented voters with campaign posters that closely resemble real-world posters in two large cities in Bolivia. Furthermore, I an-

¹While some of these organizations are also organized around class or ethnic identities, the main distinction between direct and organizationally mediated appeals consists in how a party activates those identities. In the results section, I also analyze the effectiveness of organizational endorsements by type of underlying identity.

²See Collier and Handlin (2009) for a comprehensive overview of this literature.

³I explore the related question of why parties choose one strategy over another elsewhere (Poertner 2018).

alyzed original survey data and extensive qualitative data gathered over 15 months of fieldwork in Bolivia, combining insights from over 140 in-depth interviews with representatives of parties and organizations and ethnographic work within local organizations.

The results of the experiment show that endorsements by societal organizations are highly effective in mobilizing electoral support, especially when voters face a new party. In fact, organizationally mediated appeals are more effective than most types of direct appeals. They prove effective across many different types of organizations and can sway not only organization members, but also people in their immediate social networks. Furthermore, I show that endorsements sway voters even when they provide no direct information about policy platforms; unlike organizational members, sympathizing nonmembers do not follow endorsements; and endorsements can even overcome ethnic cleavages and foster electoral support when candidates' policy positions are at odds with voters' preferences. These findings are consistent with my argument that endorsements operate not merely by providing informational cues but also by tapping into members' affective ties. Finally, I find suggestive evidence that repeated endorsements for the same party have lasting effects and lead voters to become attached to the party itself, a theme I explore in greater depth in other work on the creation of partisanship in new party systems.

In exploring these issues, the article contributes to broader debates about the role of social groups and group loyalties in democratic politics. First, it expands on recent work on the role of intimate networks in mobilizing voters by providing experimental evidence showing how new types of locally based organizations—a type of intimate network widespread in many new democracies—can influence the voting behavior of network members.⁴

Second, the study shows that participation in societal organizations, or even just indirect association with them through others in their social network, might actually be more important than direct policy preferences or ideologies for many citizens. The finding that appeals that tap into such organizational identities are actually more effective in influencing vote choice than most forms of direct appeals and can sway voters to support candidates who propose policies discordant with their own policy preferences speaks to a growing body of new literature on representation. It is consistent with other recent work highlighting that “voters, even the most informed voters, typically make choices not on the basis of policy preferences or ideology” (Achen and Bartels 2016, 4). At the

same time, it expands on this work by illustrating how group identities influence vote choice outside the context of established democracies with stable party systems and by demonstrating how organized group identities can overcome diffuse group identities (e.g., ethnic identities).

Third, understanding the specific role that societal organizations can play in influencing the preferences of its members is relevant not only for contemporary organizations but also for older organizations in the context of earlier episodes of party formation. Even though the importance of organizations has been emphasized in this earlier context, the specific mechanism through which they advanced the success of earlier parties remains theoretically underspecified and has not been tested rigorously.

Finally, the article elucidates how marginalized populations, such as indigenous people or informal sector workers, previously largely excluded from organizations with traditional parties, can achieve representation in electoral politics. While existing scholarship has focused on the formation of organizations representing such groups (e.g., Garay 2007; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005) and on their role in politicizing ethnic or class cleavages that parties can appeal to through direct appeals (Madrid 2008, 2012; Van Cott 2005), little attention has been paid to how such organizations themselves might influence vote choice.

Creating Mass Support for New Parties

Even though scholars have long studied the “origins and the ‘freezing’ of different types of party systems” (Lipset, and Rokkan 1967, 3), we still know surprisingly little about the emergence of new parties and how voters actually come to support them. Most of the recent literature has explained new parties' success in securing electoral support in terms of different types of *direct appeals*. From this perspective, parties and candidates are understood to appeal directly to voters (e.g., through speeches or advertisements spread through mass media) and attract them through issue- or identity-based platforms or by making selective material promises. In this context, prior research has paid particular attention to *direct ethnic appeals* (e.g., by strategically running candidates of a certain ethnicity or making programmatic promises targeted a certain ethnic groups). Across new democracies, direct appeals based on ethnic identities and interests are viewed as highly salient and have been linked to the stability of electoral support (Birnie 2007; Chandra 2004; Madrid 2005, 2012; Van Cott 2000). Madrid's work is exemplary in this context when he argues that ethnic parties in Latin America have been successful in mobilizing

⁴See Foos and de Rooij (2019) for an excellent overview of this literature.

voters when they “have eschewed exclusionary *rhetoric*, developed broad-based *platforms*, and *recruited leaders and candidates* from a range of different ethnic groups” (Madrid 2008, 481); italics added). In his analysis of the electoral success of the MAS, “the MAS’s ethnopopulist rhetoric and platform” have been key because they allow the party to mobilize the “large proportion of the Bolivian population [that] is of indigenous ancestry” and also appeal to nonindigenous voters through programmatic and personalistic populist appeals (Madrid 2008, 484). However, while any new party will make at least some direct appeals (e.g., direct programmatic appeals or descriptive ethnic appeals), new parties can also mobilize voters through societal organizations.

Societal Organizations

This study builds on existing work by exploring how civil society support translates into vote support and by explaining why we observe variation across cases with similar levels of civil society density. Societal organizations rooted in, for example, ethnic, class, or religious identities or interests are ubiquitous in democratic societies (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), but the ways in which they can create support for new parties are still not fully understood. Recent scholarship has focused on the formation of organizations, the organizational resources they provide to parties (Zuazo 2009), their role in mobilizing protest and turnout (Boulding 2010, 2014; Boulding and Gibson 2009), and their role in politicizing ethnic or class cleavages (e.g., Garay 2007; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005) to which parties can then appeal directly (Madrid 2008, 2012; Van Cott 2005). However, much of this work assumes that voters make their vote decision primarily in response to such direct appeals and overlooks the crucial ways in which organizations themselves might influence *electoral support for new parties* among their members.

For the purposes of this study, societal organizations are understood to include all participant-based civic associations, interest groups, and social movement organizations that exhibit (latent or expressed) political group interests, are organized at least locally (potentially also regionally or nationally), and hold regular “in-person” meetings of participants. Depending on a specific society’s salient cleavages, these societal organizations can take various forms: whereas some of these organizations might be characterized as primarily classist (e.g., informal sector unions, employer associations, and labor unions), others are primarily ethnic (e.g., indigenous organizations). Yet others span across these divides (e.g., the *cocaleros* in Bolivia) or

take the form of “local programmatic associations” (e.g., neighborhood associations) (Davies and Falletti 2017, 1700–1701). Regardless of the interests at their core, such organizations can “provide a mechanism through which citizens who have a *shared attitude* or a *shared interest* can come together and channel their collective resources into political action” (Thomas 2001, 7).

Even though the importance of societal organizations, in the form of historic labor unions, has been emphasized in the context of earlier episodes of party formation, the specific mechanism through which they advanced the success of early parties remains theoretically underspecified and largely untested empirically. Specifically, it is not clear whether, for example, early labor-based parties succeeded because labor unions politicized their members and created a diffuse sense of class conscience that could then be appealed to by different parties based on parties’ policy proposals (e.g., by any given socialist, social democratic, or communist party) or because these organizations actually mobilized their members for a particular party.

Furthermore, since these earlier episodes of mass party formation, the importance of labor unions, as societal organizations representing and mobilizing large parts of the electorate,⁵ has declined in most parts of the world and new kinds of organizations have risen in importance. Yet it is unclear what role societal organizations can play in the founding of new parties *today*. At first sight, the new generation of societal organizations looks quite different from the traditional labor union model. Most of these “new” organizations either did not exist during earlier episodes of party formation (e.g., informal sector unions, neighborhood associations, environmental organizations, and the landless movement), or were only partially incorporated into the political arena (e.g., indigenous or peasant organizations). What is more, these organizations exhibit a broader range of organizational forms and underlying issues and identities. Whereas some of these organizations focus on classic materialist, class-based issues, others are formed around newer political identities. Purported organizational and structural differences between traditional and contemporary societal organizations have led many scholars to be rather pessimistic about the mobilizational and representational capacity of such organizations today (Collier and Handlin 2009).

Across Latin America, new societal organizations proliferated at extraordinary rates and gained increased

⁵Catholic mass organizations in nineteenth-century Europe present another important example of early societal organizations (Kalyvas 1996).

prominence as a result of their organizing efforts against the neoliberal reforms during the 1980s and 1990s (Collier and Handlin 2009, 54; Garay 2007; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005). These play crucial roles in the everyday lives of large segments of the population. Unlike primarily nationally focused interest groups in the United States, members of these organizations in Latin America usually have very immediate, regular face-to-face contact with these organizations and strong organizational identities. Furthermore, unlike in older democracies such as the United States,⁶ in most Latin American countries, about one-third to one-half of citizens regularly attend meetings of such organizations (LAPOP 2016). During the period of party system turmoil in the early 2000s, about 20–40% of the population in most Latin American countries reported attending such organization meetings at least “once or twice a month” (LAPOP 2016).

Mass Support through Organizational Endorsements

Through their local embeddedness, societal organizations can play a crucial role in connecting new parties to voters within the organizations’ distinct social milieus by expressing their support for these parties. Drawing on social identity and self-categorization theory, I argue that such endorsements by societal organizations hold considerable sway over their members’ vote preferences. Furthermore, such endorsements even influence other people in the immediate social network of members who do not belong to an organization themselves (e.g., other family members, neighbors, and close friends).

While endorsement effects have been well documented in the American politics literature (e.g., Arceaux and Kolodny 2009; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994), the role of endorsements in other systems, especially in new democracies, is hardly studied. At the same time, the Americanist literature primarily focuses on endorsements by professionalized, high-level interest groups. These groups are very different from the locally organized, participant-based societal organizations in many developing countries, which exhibit much more regular face-to-face interactions with local group leaders and have stronger local membership.⁷ Therefore, we might expect more cohesive local groups and stronger affective ties between locally based societal organizations and their members.

According to social identity and self-categorization theory (Cohen 2003; Tajfel 1981; Turner et al. 1987), in organizations that bring together people who share key attributes that are important to members, such as a shared ethnic or socioeconomic background, the prototypic group member’s and group leaderships’ personal values and doctrinal positions (e.g., support for a particular party), often become absorbed by other group members. Put differently, if I perceive “people like me,” with whom I interact regularly, to stand with a particular party or candidate, I might just start doing the same.

Societal organizations, by definition, bring together people who share key attributes that are important to members and serve as important reference groups for their members. If then, in turn, the “prototypic group member” or the “organization per se,” which organization leaders (correctly or not) often claim to embody, is perceived as supporting a particular party, this doctrinal position becomes absorbed by other group members.

For this mechanism to work, it is secondary what the specific shared characteristics within each organization are, as long as the characteristics are defining enough to make members perceive themselves as “one of them.” Whereas a book club might not provide an important enough shared characteristic, we would expect organizations expressing fundamental political group identities and interests to pass this threshold. In fact, while people might think of themselves as part of various broader, usually unorganized groups, I expect the very immediate, locally organized, socioeconomically homogeneous, and highly socially salient character of societal organizations to provide a more fundamental and important reference group to create support for a new party.

If the organization expresses support for a particular candidate or party, direct members should follow such endorsements (*peer mechanism*).

H1a (Co-Organizational Endorsements for Individual Members): Voters are more likely to support a candidate who has been endorsed by a societal organization that they belong to than a candidate who has been endorsed by a societal organization that they do not belong to or a candidate without organizational endorsement.⁸

⁶For a discussion of why such organizations rarely exist in the United States anymore, see Skocpol (2003).

⁷See note 6.

⁸These hypotheses (along with secondary hypotheses) were pre-registered prior to data collection. For presentational reasons, they have been renumbered here.

Furthermore, we might even expect some “spillovers” of organizational membership to other people in their immediate social network who are not members themselves. For example, if your spouse, neighbor, and/or close friends are active members of an organization, you might (a) also view other organization members as your peers and (b) hear from them about how the organization supports a particular party (*spillover mechanism*). Especially in cases where multiple people in your close social circle belong to the same organization (or similar organizations supporting the same party), such indirect endorsements would seem quite powerful. Given that membership in many of these organizations is determined by fixed criteria, such as occupation in a particular sector or property ownership in a particular neighborhood, this spillover mechanism could be crucial in reaching a broader group of people beyond direct members. However, we would expect such spillover effects to be smaller than the effects of direct co-organizational endorsements, that is, endorsements’ effects on direct organization members.

H1b (Co-Organizational Endorsements for Social Network Members): Voters are more likely to support a candidate who has been endorsed by a societal organization that family members, close friends, or neighbors belong to than a candidate who has been endorsed by a societal organization that none of these belong to or a candidate without organizational endorsement.

These spillovers of membership could take place informally through everyday conversations between organization members and the people in their close social network. Furthermore, they could even affect other people in their wider community: Since new parties usually lack base organizations capable of organizing campaigns and other outreach events, organizational linkages provide new parties with “ready-made” networks capable of organizing such events to reach not only organization members but also the broader communities within which they are embedded.

While organizational endorsements should be able to sway their members to support any given party, we would expect such endorsements to be particularly effective when voters face a genuinely new party, that is, a party toward which they do not have any previous affective or positional dispositions.

Also, in an effort to parse out to what extent organizational endorsements serve only as instrumental information shortcuts for voters or whether they also tap into deeper affective ties between members and their locally

organized groups, I propose to compare organizational members to nonmembers who strongly sympathize with the organization. If organizational endorsements only act as information shortcuts, we would expect these sympathizing nonmembers to also follow the endorsements. If organizational endorsements, however, also tap into deeper affective ties to an organization, as emphasized by the peer mechanism, actual organization members should be more likely to follow endorsements because they—unlike sympathizing nonmembers regularly experience face-to-face interactions with other group members and organization leaders and develop stronger affective ties.

Furthermore, if organizational endorsements tap into members’ deeper affective ties to their locally organized groups (based on an organizational identity) rather than just serving as instrumental information shortcuts about policy platforms, we might also expect to find that endorsements make members impervious to information about a candidate’s or a party’s policy platform. As recent work on the role of group identities points out, identities “are not primarily about adherence to a group ideology or creed ... (but they are) emotional attachments that transcend thinking” (Achen and Bartels 2016, 228). In the most extreme, this view would imply that members might follow their organization’s endorsements even when they know that a candidate or a new party proposes to advance policies that are discordant with their own policy preferences.

Political Parties and Societal Organizations in Bolivia

Bolivia constitutes a particularly interesting case to study the rise and success of new parties. As in many young democracies, parties in Bolivia have traditionally been hardly rooted in society (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 20). Furthermore, as in many other countries in Latin America and beyond (Lupu 2014; Roberts 2014), beginning in the early 1990s, traditional parties were discredited, quickly lost electoral support, and virtually disappeared from the electoral landscape. The new parties that have emerged since this party system collapse vary greatly in terms of their ability to effectively mobilize voters.

Whereas most of the newly emerged parties have been characterized by high electoral volatility and an inability to create attachments to voters, the MAS could be characterized as a new mass party with enduring ties to voters, as indicated by stable rates of voter

identification and lower electoral volatility. Organized in 1995 and registered as a party in 2000, the MAS contested its first national election in 2002 and immediately came in a close second in the presidential and legislative election. In the general election 3 years later, the party received the strongest electoral support enjoyed by any party since the country's return to democracy in 1982. Since gaining the majority of the votes (for the legislature and president) in 2005, the party has received steady electoral support in the following elections and other popular votes. At the same time, rates of identification with the MAS have been consistently high (Poertner 2018).

While Bolivia shares many important party system characteristics with other post-transition democracies, it presents a hard case for the theory presented above. Recent politics in Bolivia and the electoral mobilization strategy of the MAS have been widely analyzed in terms of direct appeals to the large and traditionally marginalized indigenous population based on ethnicity and class (Birnie 2007; Madrid 2005, 2012). Therefore, Bolivia constitutes a least likely case that we might expect to support accounts that emphasize direct appeals based on ethnicity.

The Role of Societal Organizations in Bolivia

Similar in levels of organizational participation to the rest of the region, Bolivia exhibits a multitude of societal organizations that represent fundamental political group interests. According to nationally representative surveys, 35.5% of Bolivians attend meetings of societal organizations at least once or twice a month (LAPOP 2012), compared to 20–40% of the population in most other Latin American countries. Even though participation is somewhat lower in urban areas, about 28.9% of Bolivians in cities such as La Paz and El Alto are members of at least one societal organization, according to my original survey data.

While some of the organizations in Bolivia are classist (e.g., informal sector unions, peasant unions, and labor unions), others are ethnic (e.g., indigenous organizations) or are organized around other deep-seated group interests (e.g., neighborhood associations or the *cocaleros*). Irrespective of the underlying interests, these organizations are relatively long-lived and exhibit stable membership. Their existence predates the electoral success of the MAS and membership/participation in them, and the socioeconomic composition of their membership has been unaffected by the country's left turn (Davies and Falleti 2017).

Many of these organizations—especially informal sector unions, peasant unions, and many indigenous organizations—play a crucial role in mobilizing voters for new parties, in particular for the MAS. Drawing on interviews with local, regional, and national leaders and rank-and-file members of organizations as well as media coverage of organizational activities, I document elsewhere that these organizational allies repeatedly endorse the MAS and its candidates and logistically support the party organization (Poertner 2018). The local-level meetings of these organizations serve as fora in which organization members are encouraged to support the party and its candidates. The widespread practice of organizational endorsements is also reflected in surveys: about 25.0% of organization members (in original surveys conducted in La Paz and El Alto) reported having received electoral campaign information from societal organizations.

Moreover, across interviews with national and regional leaders of various organizational allies, leaders were quite forthcoming about their organizations' role in creating and securing mass support for the party. Organizations' leadership regularly issue endorsements for the party. Often, higher-level leadership attend local organization meetings in order to express their endorsements.⁹ As a leader of a powerful informal sector union explains, when asked about the activities of his organization during election times,

we have to go and visit the meetings of the assemblies and unions to make it known to the people who our candidates are. We, ... as leaders, direct people [in the meetings] that their vote in the polls should be for the MAS (Author interview, March 2, 2016).

Furthermore, campaign materials for the party or for specific candidates would often include organizational logos to express their endorsement. According to interviews with local-level organization members—across different organizations and different regions—such organizational endorsements are quite widespread and are thought of as being highly effective, especially in rural settings. In fact, it seems that organizations express confidence in their ability to influence members' preferences. One national peasant union leader, for example, when asked about the role of his organization in securing electoral support for the MAS in the area, explains:

⁹During interviews, organization leaders would usually use the term *un instructivo* to refer to an endorsement that they would issue; the term *endorsement* might not convey the full intensity of the Spanish term.

The organizations are the ones that convey the messages, channel, guide, disseminate, and inform.

For a peasant, what the press says might be listened to, but it must not be believed. Not even the official radio messages are heard. I believe that the presence of the official radio stations, [such as] Channel 7, are less credible for peasants than a leader. The word of a leader is more credible; it is very strong

(Author interview, November 19, 2014).

Research Design

In order to test how voters respond to organizational endorsements and different direct appeals (consisting of a candidate's personal ethnic and class background as well as the policy platform advocated by him or her), I conducted a discrete choice experiment in which I presented voters with campaign posters that closely resemble real-world posters. In this experiment, which was fielded in La Paz and El Alto (Bolivia) in February/March 2016, I presented a representative sample of voters with profiles of (fictitious) candidates for national legislature. The use of fictitious candidates instead of real politicians allows me to more effectively manipulate the dimensions of key theoretical interest and even include a new (fictitious) party toward which voters by definition do not have any previous affective or positional dispositions. Unlike in prior conjoint experiments, which presented survey respondents (mostly online) with tables presenting the specific values of profile attributes, I used campaign posters and short, two-sentence vignettes presenting the candidates (through door-to-door canvassing) in order to improve realism of the treatment and overcome potential concerns raised by illiteracy. The discrete choice outcome, that is, having to choose between two candidates, closely "resembles real-world voter decision making, in which respondents must cast a single ballot between competing candidates who vary on multiple dimensions" (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014, 4).

This design allows me to estimate the independent, marginal effect of organizational endorsements relative to different types of direct appeals on vote preferences. Unlike some other applications of conjoint analysis, this study is particularly interested in the preferences of organization members and people in their immediate social networks (rather than the whole electorate) and both the direction and the intensity of their individual preferences. Given the theory discussed above, the intensive

margins of this subset of the electorate (rather than the extensive margins of the median voter) play a pivotal role in understanding mobilization for new parties.

Attributes and Presentation

In order to manipulate the perception of a candidate's ethnic background and gender, I used photos of female and male individuals of different ethnic backgrounds (indigenous/mestizo(a)/white)¹⁰ and repeated the candidate's ethnic background (directly stated) and gender (through the gendered article and noun for candidate: *esta candidata/este candidato*) as part of the vignette.¹¹ The candidate's class background (popular class/middle class/upper class) was also briefly stated as part of the vignette (e.g., "Este candidato *de clase media...*"). Furthermore, the experiment manipulated whether a cue about the candidate's party was given and, if so, which party, by including the party logo/name in the poster and by repeating the party name in the vignette (see Figure 1 for an example of such a poster).¹²

¹⁰Since in Bolivia ethnicity is socially constructed in a way that cannot be reduced to physical characteristics, such as skin color, and is also routinely expressed through attire, the ethnic cues presented in the pictures rely on both skin color and attire; that is, indigenous actors were photographed wearing elements of traditional indigenous attire, whereas white and mestizo(a) actors were photographed wearing a white shirt/blouse. Although the ethnic cues provided by the profiles might thereby be stronger than the cues about a candidate's class background, which is only expressed through the vignette, this seemed to be the only culturally appropriate way to manipulate perceptions of ethnicity.

¹¹In order to mitigate race- and gender-independent actor "fixed effects" such as attractiveness and perceived competence, I took various pictures of numerous similarly aged actors from each ethnic group (based on actors' self-identification) and gender (a total of about 700 pictures across 76 actors) and pretested these pictures through focus groups and a pretest survey in La Paz. Only pictures that were scored very similarly with regard to perceived attractiveness and competence and that were consistently scored as belonging to the same ethnic category by at least two-thirds of respondents in the pretest (mean: 76.9%) (in 97% of the cases, this modal ethnicity rating was consistent with the actors' ethnic self-identification) were included in the actual poster experiment. In order to further mitigate other unobserved actor "fixed effects" and ensure that participants in the poster experiment would not see the same actor with different additional attributes across different evaluation rounds/candidate pairs, I included pictures of six to seven actors for each gender-ethnicity combination and randomly drew (without replacement "within" respondent) which one(s) of these picture(s) were included in any given respondent's posters for that gender-ethnicity combination.

¹²In addition to the parties that had contested the previous general election, I also included "the opposition" as category and a fictitious new party ("Movimiento Boliviano Social"). The name and logo of this fictitious party were chosen in such a way that it should have a realistic appearance and convey no information about the

FIGURE 1 Example of a Poster



Note: The corresponding vignette would translate to “This mestizo, middle-class candidate belongs to the Movimiento Boliviano Social and has the strong support of the CSUTCB La Paz, the Departmental Peasant Federation of La Paz. He wants to increase social spending, reduce income inequality, and strengthen indigenous rights.”

Similarly, for profiles, which contain an organizational endorsement, the poster includes the organization logo/name and the vignette will restate it (e.g., “This indigenous candidate of the MAS *has the strong support of the [respective organization]*”). Analogously, the policy platform advocated by the candidate, which varies along two dimensions (class and ethnicity), was included in the poster as a policy slogan (e.g., “To strengthen indigenous rights”) and restated in the vignette (e.g., “He wants to strengthen indigenous rights”).

Following common practice, each respondent was presented with multiple pairs of profiles that were generated following a completely independent randomization.¹³ All levels within the ethnicity, class, gender, orga-

party’s policy positions. Like most new parties in Bolivia, across the political spectrum, it is called *Movimiento*. The adjective *social* contained in the name, perhaps unlike in other countries, does not signal a left leaning of the party; conservative parties, such as the *Movimiento Demócrata Social*, as well as leftist parties, such as the *Alianza Social*, have used *social* as art of their name.

¹³A restricted randomization was not warranted because none of the potential attribute combinations were “deemed so unrealis-

nizational endorsement, and policy platform attributes were assigned with equal probability (within each respective attribute). Since I intended to pool across the various opposition parties for most of the analysis, the main levels for the party attribute (not stated/new fictitious party/MAS-IPSP/opposition parties) were assigned with equal probability. Within the main level of opposition parties, one out of the six secondary levels (UN/MSM/MDS/PDC/PVB-IEP/“the opposition”) was then randomly chosen.

The two profiles in each pair were presented side by side on a large tablet device. After each profile pair, respondents were asked to choose between the two candidates. Furthermore, respondents were asked some pre-treatment questions in order to be able to test for the heterogeneous treatment effects implied by some of the hypotheses as well as several post-treatment questions.¹⁴

Sample

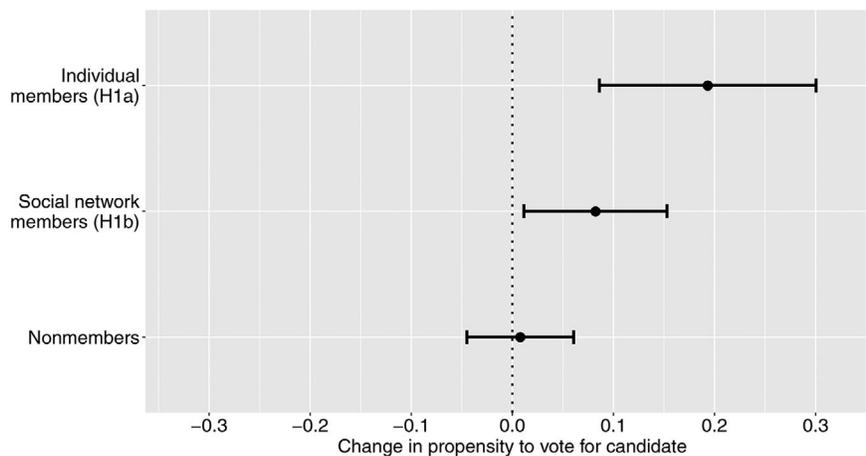
The experiment was conducted on a representative probability sample of voting-age Bolivians in the cities of La Paz and El Alto, which arguably constitute particularly hard cases within Bolivia for the theory presented here. First, the share of indigenous population in both cities (and in particular in El Alto) is larger than in other big Bolivian cities. Therefore, we would expect direct appeals based on ethnicity, which in Bolivia primarily take the form of indigenous appeals, to be particularly effective in these cities. Second, similarly to many other developing countries, in which participation in societal organizations is often higher in rural areas (Cleary and Stokes 2006, 130–38), in Bolivia societal organizations, such as peasant unions and indigenous organizations, have much lower membership rates and hold less sway over their members in urban settings than in rural parts of the country. Therefore, if it can be shown that organizationally mediated appeals affect vote preferences here, they should have an even larger effect in rural areas.

The sample includes a total of 599 respondents across the two cities (300 in La Paz; 299 in El Alto), recruited through door-to-door canvassing. Each

tic that a counterfactual would essentially be meaningless” (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014, 26). For example, even though the literature might have focused on indigenous candidates in one particular party in Bolivia (Madrid 2005, 2012), all parties included indigenous candidates in their party lists during the most recent general election in 2014.

¹⁴In order to avoid that pre-treatment questions might prime respondents to pay particular attention to some profile characteristics, I included numerous pre-treatment questions covering a broad range of social and political topics.

FIGURE 2 Average Marginal Effect of Co-Organizational Endorsements for New Party by Type of Membership (Hypotheses 1a and 1b)



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals. *Nonmember* refers to nonmembership in the endorsing organization.

respondent was presented with six profile pairs (yielding a total of 7,188 profiles across 3,594 pairs evaluated). In order to ensure that respondents of different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds were well represented in the sample, the randomization was stratified by census districts, zones, and blocks. In the absence of a sampling frame with information on ethnicity and class on an individual level, this stratification can serve as a proxy for these factors as there is a fair amount of geographic clustering based on these characteristics. Within each cluster, a random sample of households was selected using an interval sampling method.

Findings

Despite the nearly exclusive attention in the literature to direct appeals, the results of the experiment suggest that organizationally mediated appeals are highly effective in obtaining electoral support, especially when voters face a new party. Furthermore, while direct descriptive ethnic appeals have an effect on vote choice, other forms of direct appeals—especially direct programmatic appeals—are very ineffective (see Appendix A in the supporting information [SI]). At the same time, organizational endorsements are effective across different underlying identities and interests.

First of all, the experimental evidence provides strong support for the claim that organizationally mediated appeals have an additional effect on vote pref-

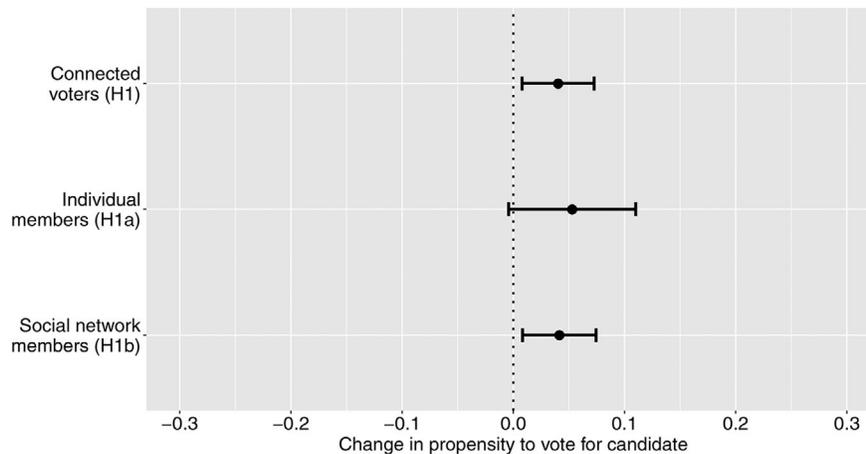
erences: voters are significantly more likely to support candidates who have been endorsed by a societal organization that they are connected to than candidates who have been endorsed by an organization that they are not connected to or candidates without organizational endorsements (Hypothesis 1a; henceforth, endorsements by an organization to which a voter belongs are referred to as *co-organizational endorsements*).

Organizational endorsements are particularly effective when respondents face a new party. When focusing on the scenario in which voters are presented with a new party, which arguably constitutes the most direct test to assess the effectiveness of organizational endorsements in getting voters to support new parties, the effect of co-organizational endorsements is particularly strong: Voters are about 19.3 percentage points more likely to support candidates who have been endorsed by an organization that they belong to (see Figure 2).¹⁵

These effects are not limited to one specific organization or type of organization (e.g., ethnic or class-based organization). For example, when analyzing the average marginal effect of co-organizational endorsements for new party profiles, the effect of endorsements by indigenous organizations, informal sector unions, and

¹⁵Even though this study is particularly interested in the the intensity of organization members' vote preferences, this effect might also represent a majority preference. Following Abramson, Koçak, and Magazinnik (2019), the sharp bounds on the fraction of the population with consistent preferences is [0.40, 1.00].

FIGURE 3 Average Marginal Effect of Co-Organizational Endorsements by Type of Membership (Hypotheses 1, 1a, and 1b) across All Parties



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

employer associations on their members is similar and statistically indistinguishable from endorsements by a formal labor union.¹⁶

Similarly, endorsements are effective for organization members of very different backgrounds. The effect of co-organizational endorsements is similar across members' genders, education levels, income levels, ethnic groups, and so on (see SI Figures, B3–B8).

Second, the spillover hypothesis (Hypothesis 1b) that even nonmembers would follow endorsements by organizations that people in their immediate social network belong to is supported by the data (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, voters only seem to respond to endorsements by organizations that they belong to (directly or indirectly through their immediate social networks). In fact, in the absence of membership in a given organization, endorsements by that organization do not sway voters. When looking at the effect of endorsements by an organization that voters are not a member of, they do not follow the organizational endorsement cue (see Figure 2).

Even when going beyond new parties and looking at all parties (i.e., including established parties that voters have strong priors about), organizational endorsements are effective in swaying their members' vote choice. Voters are also significantly more likely to support candidates who have been endorsed by an organization that they are connected to (see Figure 3).

Even though the design can only identify the effect of co-organizational endorsements for organization members and cannot randomly assign organizational membership to voters, the survey, interviews, and administrative data suggest that the effectiveness of organizational endorsements is driven by organizational membership rather than some other correlated but theoretically separate moderator. These organizations, which have existed much longer than the current parties in Bolivia, exhibit stable membership in composition and size over time and do not seem to recruit new members on a partisan basis. Instead, selection of new members into the organizations occurs primarily based on fixed criteria, such as occupation in a particular sector or place of residence.

Given the large number of hypotheses tested, I expected that some of these tests would yield false positives by chance. Even when adjusting for the multiple comparisons using the Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) false discovery rate correction at an alpha level of 0.05, the findings described above remain virtually unchanged.

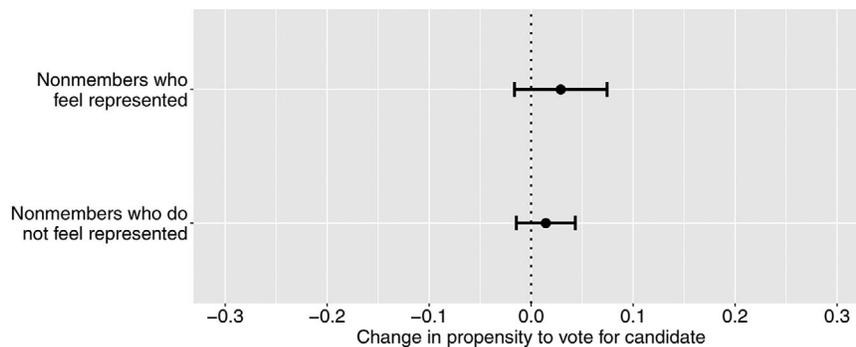
Following best practices for conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014, 22), I also examined the stability and no carryover effects assumption by estimating the effects for each of the six rounds of tasks separately and found that the estimates are similar across tasks.

Mechanisms

Having established that organizational endorsements can be very effective in obtaining electoral support,

¹⁶The findings are similar when analyzing profiles with existing parties' cues.

FIGURE 4 Average Marginal Effect of Co-Organizational Endorsements on Sympathizing/Nonsympathizing Nonmembers across All Parties



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

especially when voters face a new party, I will now explore the underlying mechanisms in more detail. If organizational endorsements only act as instrumental information shortcuts, we might expect sympathizing nonmembers to also follow the endorsements. If endorsements, however, also tap into deeper affective ties to an organization, as emphasized by the peer mechanism, actual organization members should be more likely to follow endorsements because they—unlike sympathizing nonmembers regularly experience face-to-face interactions with other group members and organization leaders and develop stronger affective ties.

The latter prediction is supported by the experimental findings: When looking at respondents who are not members of an organization but feel represented by that organization and sympathize with it, the estimate for the average marginal effect of an endorsement by that organization is rather small and not significantly different from 0 (see Figure 4).¹⁷

Last, I explore how organizational endorsements interact with direct information on candidates' policy platforms and ethnic identities. Here, voters follow organizational endorsements even for candidates whose policy preferences are not congruent with their own. Even when focusing on cases where voters have direct information on a candidate's policy platform and strongly disagree with it—for both redistributive or ethnic policies—endorsements are highly effective (see Figure 5).

Furthermore, organizational endorsements are very effective in overcoming ethnic cleavages. For example, endorsements proved to be able to get voters to

support even candidates who are not their coethnics (see Figure 6).

It is also important to point out that the effectiveness of this type of cross-ethnic organizational endorsement is not limited to ethnic organizations. In fact, endorsements by nonethnic organizations, such as informal sector unions or neighborhood associations, are also highly effective in getting voters to support candidates who are not coethnics (see Figure 6).

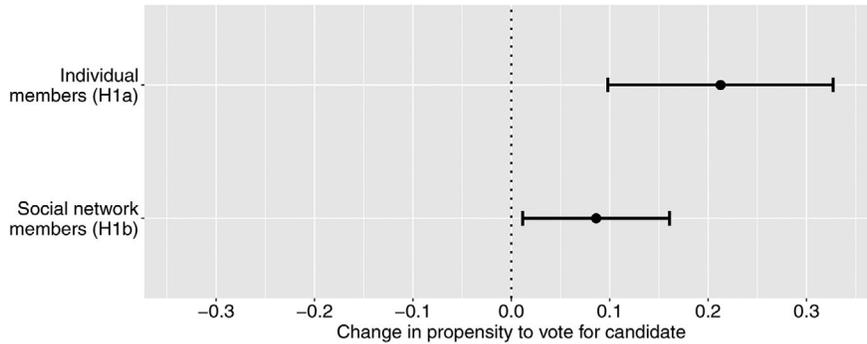
Long-Term Implications: Some Suggestive Evidence on Partisanship

Beyond the ability of organizational endorsements to sway vote preferences in the short term, there is good reason to believe that repeated endorsements for the same party might have lasting effects and lead voters to become attached to the party itself. Drawing on original and existing survey data, I show that membership in organizations that regularly endorse a new party is strongly associated with whether a voter develops an attachment to the party. Furthermore, additional analysis of the experimental data suggests that frequency of organization meeting attendance is connected to the robustness of that attachment.

First, membership in organizations that regularly endorse the MAS stands out as the strongest and most robust predictor for partisan attachments to the party. Analysis of original survey data that captures organizational membership and participation in more detail than previous surveys suggests that members of organizations that regularly endorse the MAS are about 11 times more likely to identify with the party than nonmembers (see

¹⁷This additional test was conceived after filing the preanalysis plan.

FIGURE 5 Average Marginal Effect of Co-Organizational Endorsements for New Party with Discordant Policy Platform



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1, Model 1), even after controlling for numerous individual-level predictors of organizational membership. In fact, membership in a societal organization is the strongest and most robust predictor for partisanship across model specifications (see SI Table C4). This positive, statistically significant association holds for individual members as well as people in their immediate social network (see Table 1, Model 2).

A similar picture emerges when analyzing other, nationally representative survey data, such as data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP): in the long term, citizens who are part of societal organizations are highly likely to identify with the party itself (see SI Table C5 for a replication of the analysis).

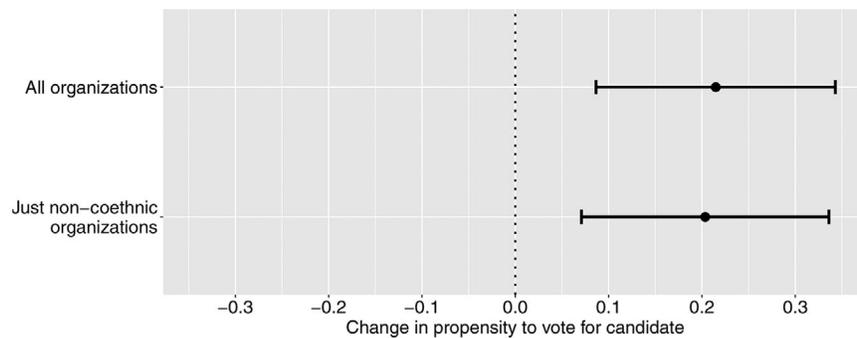
Second, if voters are not just loyal to societal organizations but also become socialized into identifying with a party itself through frequent exposure to endorsements

for the same party, we might expect to observe evidence of particularly strong or robust partisan attachments in these voters. In fact, the habitual use of organizationally mediated appeals by the MAS in recent years should have brought about rather robust or resilient partisan attachments, in particular for voters who have been more exposed to consistent and repeated appeals. Therefore, we might expect such partisan attachments to “raise ... a perceptual screen” and lead voters to discount information that is not consistent with their partisan identity (Campbell et al. 1960, 133).¹⁸

In fact, the results provide strong evidence of robust, resilient partisan attachments: Voters tend to be willing

¹⁸For details on this test for resilience of party identification (Hypothesis 2) see the preanalysis plan.

FIGURE 6 Average Marginal Effects of Co-Organizational Endorsements for New Party for Non-coethnic Candidates



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

TABLE 1 Determinants of MAS Party Identification (Population Estimates), Logit Models

	Model 1 (Base Model)	Model 2 (By Type of Membership)
Societal organizations		
Member (indiv. and social network members)	2.4168** (0.8862) [11.2100]	
Individual member		1.5325* (0.7561) [4.6299]
Social network member		2.0303* (0.8253) [7.6163]
Class		
Upper middle class	2.8214 (1.7534) [16.7999]	3.3426 (1.8751) [28.2925]
Middle class	-0.2173 (1.0649) [0.8047]	-0.4829 (1.0539) [0.6170]
Lower middle class	0.4584 (1.0165) [1.5815]	0.3926 (1.0035) [1.4808]
Income		
Household income (Q2)	-1.0590 (0.8987) [0.3468]	-0.9241 (0.8981) [0.3969]
Household income (Q3)	-0.3275 (0.9073) [0.7207]	-0.2384 (0.9168) [0.7879]
Household income (Q4)	3.0474 (1.5865) [21.0611]	2.8851 (1.6877) [17.9061]
Ethnicity		
White	0.6789 (1.8526) [1.9717]	0.8007 (1.8479) [2.2272]
Indigenous	0.3404 (0.6607) [1.4055]	0.0877 (0.6842) [1.0916]
Ideology		
Self-placement: strong leftist (1)	1.2906 (3.2147) [3.6350]	3.2177 (3.8792) [24.9707]
Self-placement: leftist (2)	2.1411 (3.0318) [8.5084]	3.8617 (3.6969) [47.5479]
Self-placement: weak leftist (3)	3.4281 (3.0796) [30.8178]	5.1620 (3.7360) [174.5112]
Self-placement: centrist (4)	-0.5505 (2.9924) [0.5767]	1.2966 (3.6292) [3.6566]
Self-placement: weak rightist (5)	-14.3628 (1414.0336) [0.000]	-11.7609 (1477.0451) [0.0000]
Self-placement: rightist (6)	1.5405 (2.947) [4.6671]	3.3114 (3.6127) [27.4222]
left-right positions score (1: far right - 7: far left)	1.3286** (0.4123) [3.7757]	1.3296** (0.4278) [3.7793]
indigenous positions score (1: against more ind. right - 7: for more ind. rights)	0.0820 (0.3893) [1.0854]	0.1135 (0.4039) [1.1202]

(Continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

	Model 1 (Base Model)	Model 2 (By Type of Membership)
Background controls		
Age (in years)	-0.0397 (0.0222) [0.9611]	-0.0456 (0.0238) [0.9554]
Female	-0.4452 (0.6925) [0.6407]	-0.5976 (0.7198) [0.5502]
Level of information (1-5)	0.7957 (0.4691) [2.2160]	0.8469 (0.4995) [2.3323]
Education (secondary education completed)	-1.4522 (0.9374) [0.2341]	-0.9927 (0.9125) [0.3706]
Education (post secondary education)	-0.2044 (0.9016) [0.8151]	-0.4905 (0.9619) [0.6123]
Constant	-9.7515* (4.1234)	-11.5701* (4.8052)
N	117	115
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	0.6651	0.6735

Note: Cell entries are the unstandardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses and odds ratios in square brackets. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; The reference categories (dropped from all models) are for ethnicity, class, household income, ideology are “mestizo,” “lower class,” “Household income (Q1),” and “Self-placement: strong leftist(7)” respectively. See SI, D2, for details on the sample.

to support candidates who deviate from their own policy ideal points on economic or indigenous issues if that person is “their party’s” candidate. When faced with a candidate whose policy platform deviates from their own, voters who are copartisans are about 22.3 percentage points more likely to support the candidate than voters who are not copartisan (see Figure 7).¹⁹

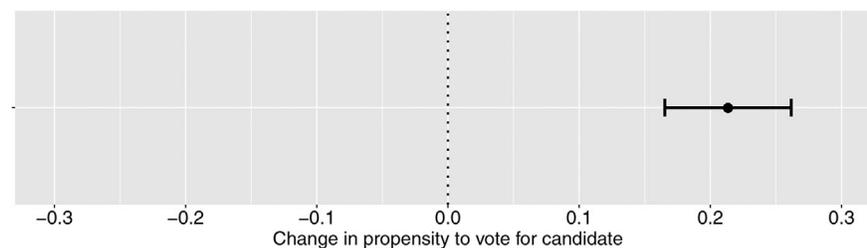
Furthermore, voters who attend meetings of endorsing organizations frequently exhibit much more robust,

resilient partisan attachments than those who do not attend organization meetings frequently.²⁰ When faced with a MAS candidate whose policy platform deviates from their own, the effect of facing “their party’s” candidate for frequent organization meeting attendees is an astounding 70.5 percentage point increase in propensity to support the candidate. This effect is almost three times as large as that for those who do not attend frequently (see Figure 8).

¹⁹The effect sizes and significance levels are similar when focusing just on economic or indigenous issues.

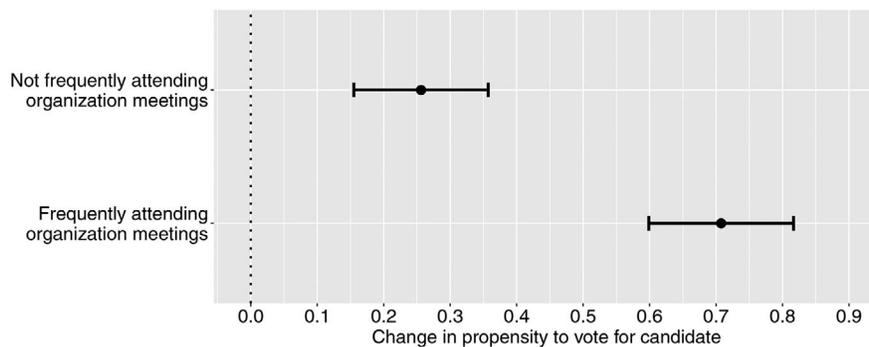
²⁰I define *frequently* as “once a week or more” or “once or twice a month” and *infrequently* as anything less than that.

FIGURE 7 Average Marginal Effect of Copartisan Appeals for Discordant Policy Platforms for MAS Partisans



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

FIGURE 8 Average Marginal Effect of Copartisan Appeals for Discordant Policy Platforms for MAS Profiles by Attendance of Organization Meetings



Note: Fully nonparametric linear regression estimates (without covariates) with clustered standard errors (at the respondent level); bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has far-reaching implications for how we understand the role of parties in democratic accountability and representation. Whether parties can serve as stable transmission belts between citizens and the states crucially depends on their ability to secure mass support and how they relate to societal organizations.

Even if we just focus on parties' role in holding elected officials accountable to the electorate, their capacity to fulfill this crucial task depends on their ability to attain at least some minimal degree of organizational and electoral stability. If parties fail and disappear regularly, party labels become uninformative and it becomes hard for voters to hold representatives accountable.

This necessity to attain at least some minimal degree of stability in support becomes particularly important in the context of democratic consolidation in new democracies. As Innes points out with reference to Eastern European party systems after the return to democracy, "where parties fail, it will hardly matter how efficient other institutions of [the] state may have become. The new system will lack legitimacy and be vulnerable to instability and takeover" (Innes, 2002, 85). In order for a party to fulfill their representative functions, it must endure electorally and organizationally over time. Yet, many new democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and beyond have been characterized by unstable parties and have experienced problems in democratic consolidation as a result.

The findings presented here provide new insights into mechanisms through which support for new parties can emerge in nascent democracies. Organizationally

mediated appeals are highly effective in obtaining electoral support, especially when voters face a new party. Furthermore, such endorsements can even foster electoral support when candidates' policy positions are at odds with voters' preferences and they can overcome ethnic cleavages. What is more, societal organizations are able to serve this function irrespective of the specific nature of their underlying identities and interests. In fact, class-based organizations, ethnic organizations, and groups organized around other fundamental identities and interests (e.g., neighborhood associations) are all able to sway their members.

It is important to emphasize that there is no reason to expect that organization–party linkages and corresponding organizational endorsements would necessarily be stable over time—the way they have been largely in this specific case. Although it is beyond scope of this article to explore how linkage switching affects party identification, we might expect that some degree of linkage consistency and stability are necessary for attachments to a party to develop.

Beyond the specific context of this study, there is good reason to believe that mediation through new types of societal organizations could also account for the establishment of partisan support during other instances of party formation. While organizationally mediated appeals obviously presuppose the existence of locally organized, participant-based organizations with a decent number of members, such organizations are widespread in many nascent democracies. Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that the specific interests and identities underlying the organizations are secondary, as long as they regularly bring together people who share key attributes that are important to the

members. In fact, given how ubiquitous such organizations are in many democratic societies—especially in nascent democracies—organizationally mediated strategies appear highly viable for new parties in many different settings. Future research will have to explore how endorsements that tap into different, conflicting organizational identities influence voters or how endorsements by participant-based organizations compare to alternative endorsements by individual politicians, other public figures, and non-participant-based organizations. However, we might expect that organizational endorsements are particularly effective in settings where many voters are without other strong, *organized* political identities. Therefore, organizational endorsements might be particularly effective after major party system disruptions leave many voters without partisan attachments and for traditionally unincorporated popular sectors (e.g., indigenous voters or informal sector workers).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Direct Appeals

Appendix B: Additional Analyses

Appendix C: Additional Information on the Results Presented in the Article

Appendix D: Additional Information on the Design