

Book Review

– *Creating Partisans. The Organizational Roots of New Parties in Latin America*, by Mathias Poertner. Cambridge University Press, 2024

Exploring the intersection of party politics and social identities, Poertner engages two primary scholarly debates: the challenges of party building in Latin America, as discussed by Levitsky et al. (2016) and the role of social organisations in political incorporation, as theorised by Collier and Collier (1991). He revisits the puzzle of unlikely cases of successful new political parties during the third wave of democratisation in Latin America, aiming to explain their strategic choices in establishing a foothold in the existing social structure. The book compares three left-wing parties that emerged and evolved in the twenty-first century: Morena in Mexico, MAS in Bolivia, and Alianza PAIS in Ecuador. Through a mixed-methods research design combining extensive fieldwork with experimental tools, Poertner examines the conditions under which these parties built durable popular legitimacy and lasting mass partisan support.

In the first part of the book, Poertner focuses on the founding moments of each party, emphasising how decisions made before the first major election shape long-term party development. In Bolivia, the MAS emerged from elites with deep roots in indigenous movements, possessing a strong organisational capacity, which resulted in higher levels of routinization in candidate selection and conflict resolution. This institutionalisation fostered enduring ties between the party and its base, mediated through organisational appeals, particularly ethnic organisations acting as political intermediaries. In contrast, Alianza PAIS in Ecuador opted for a personalistic model centred on the charisma of Rafael Correa, foregoing institutionalised ties with social organisations in favour of direct appeals between the leader and voters. Mexico represents an intermediate case, where Morena built linkages through the co-optation of neighbourhood leaders, drawing on precedents set by parties like the PRI and PRD.

The second part of the book advances Poertner's core theoretical contribution: a bottom-up perspective on partisan attachments. Recognising the foundational role of labour and union organisations in Latin America's contentious political history, Poertner investigates how organisational social enclaves convert into electoral support for emerging candidates. A significant innovation lies in

rescaling the analysis to locally anchored organisational units, such as indigenous movement branches in Bolivia or neighbourhood networks in Mexico. Instead of focusing on national-level social divides, this attention to local social closure allows the author to recognise middle-level grounds of partisanship, and it represents one of the book's most significant strengths.

Poertner complements his qualitative approach with quantitative and experimental methods. The first experiment, conducted in La Paz and El Alto, Bolivia, examined the impact of endorsements from the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB) within simulated electoral scenarios. A second experiment, conducted in Quito, Ecuador, followed a similar design, this time using the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE). In both cases, the author created a field-based scenario in which new candidates with different attributes were presented to the public. The core difference between the two experiments was the presence or absence of organisational endorsements for these new candidates. When the organisational endorsement was present, it significantly increased support for the new candidates, even when controlling for variables such as ideology, ethnicity, and income. In Mexico, the author analysed a natural experiment in which MORENA used public lotteries to select candidates for national office. This study demonstrates how access to the office strengthens candidates' capacity to cultivate partisan support within their communities. Taken together, these findings underscore the critical role of societal organisations in fostering enduring political identities and channelling electoral support to emerging parties.

The book makes at least three significant contributions. First, it highlights the importance of the parties' founding moments as a form of internal critical juncture for their development - moments in which elite decisions lock in long-term patterns of appeal and identification. Second, it highlights the role of locally anchored, organizationally rooted social identities in securing electoral support for new parties. By shifting the analytical scale to context-dependent local units, it uncovers new citizen-party linkages. Third, the book exemplifies methodological pluralism, skilfully integrating qualitative fieldwork with experimental techniques. These contributions open space for productive dialogue with other literatures, while also inviting reflection on the book's limits.

The concept of an organisational voter helps us refine applications of cleavage theory in Latin America, which often overemphasise national-level patterns and territorially aggregated effects. These large scales may obscure the explanatory power of social characteristics in determining vote choice. In this sense, Poertner's attention to the organisational scale greatly enhances our understanding of how mechanisms of social closure operate in heterogeneous societies. The book also complements emerging literature on clientelism outsourcing, which analyses the strategic delegation of resource distribution to local associations. Associative forms of local organisation are increasingly recognised as central actors in bottom-up clientelist strategies. A deeper exploration of the incentives

and variation among organisational voters could further illuminate their interaction with both national and local clientelist networks.

One limitation lies in the treatment of the Ecuadorian case. Poertner argues that Alianza PAIS's lack of organic ties to societal organisations limits its long-term survival capacity – a conclusion rooted in routinization theory. Nonetheless, this claim seems to contradict the continued presence of Correa's political movement. Although the party label Alianza País effectively disappeared, the leader's loyal allies founded a new party, Revolución Ciudadana, which has sustained its role as a major player in presidential, legislative, and local elections. In Ecuador, personalistic appeals may create durable social closure that transcends contextual evaluations of performance. Poertner's design does not consider this possibility, nor does it include personalistic emotional attachment as a critical control variable. Therefore, new research avenues are possible at the intersection of literature on personalism and Poertner's academic contributions. All in all, Poertner's theoretical and methodological contributions lay a solid foundation for future research on the political economy of parties and the study of social identities in Latin America.

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References

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