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Organizational and partisan brokerage of social benefits: Social policy linkages in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of large-scale non-discretionary social policy has been one of the most important policy innovations in Latin America in recent decades. While these benefits have reduced the political manipulation of low-income citizens, discretionary social programs—whose distribution follows opaque criteria and are often allocated according to political considerations—continue to exist. Employing an original survey in Mexico, we explore how citizens, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, experience and perceive access to discretionary social programs. While the literature on clientelism emphasizes the distribution of discretionary benefits by party agents in exchange for electoral support, a number of recent studies have found that access to discretionary social benefits can also operate through community associations or interest organizations. We conducted a list experiment in our survey to detect whether in the experience or perception of the respondent social benefits are allocated on the basis of partisan campaign support or organizational participation. Our findings reveal that organizational brokerage is at least as important as the much-studied role of party-mediated clientelism for access to discretionary benefits.
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1. Introduction

One of the most important social policy transformations in Latin America in recent decades has been the adoption of unprecedented, large-scale social programs for low-income populations in several countries of the region. Aside from reaching millions of recipients, a surprising aspect of new benefits is that they are largely nondiscretionary, which contrasts with a long tradition of clientelism in benefits for the poor (De la O, 2015; Garay, 2016). This is the case in Mexico, a young democracy in which initiatives such as the conditional cash-transfer program *Oportunidades-Prospera*,[2] which by 2018 reached roughly 6 million households[3] were established against a history of clientelism in social policy provisions for the poor (De la O, 2015; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, & Magaloni, 2016; Garay, 2016). These social policy innovations have helped reduce the political manipulation of low-income communities and, according to some studies, have increased the political participation of program beneficiaries (De la O, 2015).

However, alongside these social programs there is a broad universe of less far-reaching social benefits, many of which are discretionary in the sense that the actual allocation of benefits does not follow known formal rules. In Mexico, for instance, discretionary programs deliver a wide variety of benefits to citizens in rural and urban areas, spanning farm implements, small-business loans, and home building materials. While each of these discretionary programs is considerably smaller than the national, nondiscretionary and broad-reaching cash transfer programs, they are numerous and add up to an important welfare effort. Detailed information from 2014 reveals that there were close to 2,000

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[2] A small cash transfer program conditional on school attendance and health checkups was inaugurated in 1997 under the name PROGRESA. It was renamed Oportunidades in 2001; coverage was increased and broadened with more social interventions—e.g., an electricity subsidy and an allowance for seniors. In 2012, Oportunidades was marginally transformed again and renamed PROSPERA. We use *Prospera* to refer to this program throughout.

[3] About 25 million low-income people representing a fifth of the country's population resided in households receiving *Prospera*in 2018.

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smaller-scale social and development programs operating at the time across Mexico,[4] representing about one-third of federal social expenditures, or a budget comparable to that of *Prospera* in 2017.[5] The vast majority of these programs in turn were executed by subnational governments and covered a small fraction of those technically eligible.[6]

Recent scholarship has advanced our understanding of the politics of nondiscretionary benefits;[7] yet how do citizens access discretionary social programs? We draw on and contribute to two areas of research to address this question. First, scholarship on clientelism provides insights about the distribution of social benefits in connection to parties' electoral needs and campaign strategies. It highlights the role of parties selectively targeting core or swing voters (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, & Estévez, 2007) and of local party brokers dispensing government benefits in order to manufacture electoral support though *quid pro quo* exchanges (Stokes, 2013; Stokes, 2005; Szwarcberg, 2015).

Second, research in Latin America and elsewhere has shown that state benefits are sometimes also distributed through community associations or interest organizations (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015). Such organizational brokerage may either consist of exchanges guided by parties' electoral needs, what we call *partisan organizational brokerage*, or may entail social organizations helping individuals access selective benefits independent of electoral considerations or what we call *empowering organizational brokerage* (Garay, 2007; Palmer-Rubin, 2016).

The goal of this study is to systematically examine individual-level perceptions of how people access discretionary social provisions. Do citizens perceive that the distribution of these programs is politically conditioned? If so, what must citizens do to access these programs—participate in electoral campaigns or in interest organizations? To what degree does prior experience as a beneficiary of social programs—either non-discretionary cash transfers or other more discretionary programs—affect these expectations? Aside from drawing our attention to the less visible universe of fragmented social benefits, these questions are important because they point to diverse forms of *social policy linkages*—here understood as forms of state-society interaction and expectations about social programs—that differ across beneficiaries of discretionary and nondiscretionary programs.

Mexico provides an excellent case to study these questions. It is a young democracy with a history of party clientelism and cooptation of interest organizations during the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), between 1930 and 2000 (e.g., Collier & Collier 1991; Greene, 2007; Magaloni, 2006). During the democratic transition of the late 1990s and early 2000s, programmatic party-voter linkages and autonomous organizations emerged alongside entrenched patronage relationships. This case therefore allows us to examine citizens' expectations about accessing benefits in an environment where old traditions of patronage and new forms of programmatic politics coexist, as is likely the case in many young democracies.

We employ an original survey of 1,400 citizens conducted in Mexico City (CDMX) and Chiapas, two states that reflect variation across urban and rural Mexico, and draw on a list experiment embedded in the survey to test whether political parties or organizational brokerage condition access. The list experiment offers a non-intrusive way to measure behaviors or attitudes that may be susceptible to social desirability bias (Blair & Imai, 2012), which often occurs in studies of political exchange (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Jonge, Melendez, Osorio, & Nickerson, 2012; Green, 2015; Nichter & Palmer-Rubin, 2015). Specifically, we are interested in detecting whether—in the experience or perception of the respondents—housing benefits or subsidies for productive activities (*proyectos productivos*) are allocated on the basis of partisan campaign support or organizational participation. We focus on benefits for housing and productive activities for two reasons. First, they encompass the largest number of discretionary social benefits in Mexico, and are thus more likely to be known by respondents. Second, they are widely understood in the literature as discretionary, in the sense that access is not determined by formal eligibility criteria alone (e.g., Albertus et al., 2016; Hilgers, 2008; Rizzo, 2019).[8]

Despite program rules which typically stipulate no role for intermediaries, we find strong evidence of intermediation in access to these benefits. In respondents' views, support of an interest organization (e.g., neighborhood association, indigenous organization) is critical and at least as important as participation in campaign events organized by parties for accessing benefits. Aside from confirming the relevance of campaign participation, which has been the focus of the existing literature (e.g., Szwarcberg, 2015), our main contribution in this paper is to demonstrate the comparable relevance of interest organizations. This finding holds up for both members and non-members of such organizations as well as for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of social programs, suggesting that it reflects both the *experience* of those who access these benefits as well as the *perception* of those who do not.

When looking across beneficiaries, we find that those receiving *Prospera* report organization participation as a condition for access at a much lower rate than the general population. These beneficiaries, however, identify party activity as relevant to accessing housing and productive subsidies at the same rate as other respondents. We interpret this finding as suggesting that participation in the non-discretionary *Prospera* program does not disabuse citizens of the notion that other social programs are the currency of party clientelism, but rather *individualizes* citizens' experience of welfare politics. This effect may in fact result from the programs' explicit goal of circumventing interest organizations in order to avoid benefit manipulation. This finding further stands out because beneficiaries of *Prospera* are not less active politically but, according to our data, they vote, protest, and belong to organizations at higher rates that the rest of the respondents in our study.

How should we interpret the brokerage role of interest organizations? We conceptualize two types of brokerage: a) *empowering organizational brokerage*, by which organizations increase the chances of eligible citizens and communities to access otherwise hard-to-reach benefits by helping them apply for benefits and/or exert collective pressure to access, and b) *partisan organizational brokerage* by which organizations intermediate benefits in order to mobilize support for a party in exchange for such benefits. Acknowledging that further research will be needed to discriminate across these roles, we find some evidence suggesting that the role of organizations goes beyond providing information on

[4] Data corresponds to January 2014. https://www.programassociales.org.mx/descargas/informes/Informe-de-resultados-IPRO-2013.pdf p. 10.

[5] The large-scale non-discretionary programs, including *Prospera*, non-contributory pensions, and the health program for those outside the formal-sector, *Seguro Popular*, in turn represent 68 percent of federal social expenditure. Prospera represents 29.5 percent of overall federal spending followed by Seguro Popular (24.7) percent and non-contributory pensions (14.1 percent). State and municipal governments—which have ample autonomy in Mexico's federal system—also allocate substantial funds to such discretionary benefits. Calculated with data from www.programassociales.org.mx and CONEVAL. See also indep.gesos.org.mx.

[6] https://www.programassociales.org.mx/descargas/informes/Informe-de-resultados-IPRO-2013.pdf p. 10.

[7] See Diaz-Cayeros et al. (2016); Garay (2016); Huber and Stephens (2012).

[8] In 2017, federal housing programs represented close to 5.6 percent, and production-related support equaled 11.3 percent of total federal social spending. Together they received 16.9 percent of overall federal spending. Comparable data for Mexico City and Chiapas are not available.

how to access social programs and pointing to a more relevant presence of partisan organizational brokerage in Mexico.

2. Party-mediated access and organizational brokerage of social benefits

Social programs are a crucial way in which low-income citizens interact with the state. How people access social benefits and the interactions between benefit recipients and the state constitute a *social policy linkage*. These social policy linkages not only denote forms of state-beneficiary interaction, but they also involve expectations about their distribution, and may shape views of state responsiveness among both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of social programs.

In contexts of weak institutions, which are characterized by rule instability and/or weak or non-enforcement of the law (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009; Brinks et al., 2020), social benefits such as transfers, services, housing, or production-related subsidies follow one of two broad logics analyzed in the literature: they are *programmatic* and thus are guided by clear eligibility criteria that treat similarly situated individuals in identical terms (see Lieberman, 1998, 16), or they are *discretionary* in that they are distributed according to often political considerations or unclear, unknown rules (e.g., Shefter, 1993; Stokes, 2013). Programmatic or nondiscretionary benefits are extended either to the whole population or to specific individuals or groups according to transparent, institutionalized procedures. In order to ensure non-discretionary access, government agencies may even survey the population to identify those eligible and to close take-up gaps.

In contrast, discretionary programs are allocated according to unwritten criteria and often politically driven decisions. Even when these programs have explicit eligibility criteria, several factors may contribute to discretionary allocations. For example, rules may be not specific enough; the application for benefits may involve complex paperwork requirements, which facilitates their selective allocation; the very existence of these programs may be poorly publicized; and provisions may suffer from a short supply of benefits relative to demand, which allows state agents to employ ad-hoc rules to allocate benefits. Many discretionary programs are demand-based and are not accompanied by institutionalized efforts to reach out to all eligible communities to inform them about their existence. In contexts of weak institutions, these circumstances often make allocation selective and uncertain. Some of the individuals who qualify for benefits do not get them, and it is hard to predict whether they will ever receive them.[9]

Scholars have shown that the creation of programmatic and discretionary benefits is driven by different political dynamics (e.g., De la O, 2015; Garay, 2016) and that the effects of these two classes of benefits on welfare (e.g., Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016) and electoral behavior (e.g., De la O, 2015) also diverge. In terms of individual perceptions, programmatic benefits are expected to generate and strengthen views about self-worth, efficacy, and entitlement among recipients (Soss, 1999; Sugiyama & Hunter, 2013). Programmatic benefits should also create or reinforce trust in the state and increase support for redistribution (Rothstein, 2011).

Discretionary benefits in turn may be distributed according to idiosyncratic, ad hoc rules, or access may be mediated by party or organization leaders who influence their allocation in different ways. Existing literature has described such intermediaries as agents of political parties, who condition access to benefits on the electoral behavior of beneficiaries—such as participation in campaign rallies (Stokes, 2013). An often overlooked mode of access, and one that has been less studied systematically, is that which depends on the beneficiaries' involvement in a social organization (see Fig. 1). Below we develop a set of hypotheses related to party- and organization-mediated access to discretionary social programs.

2.1. Political-party mediated access

Our first set of hypotheses corresponds to party conditioning of discretionary benefits. The vast literature on clientelism presents discretionary benefits for low-income people as primarily party-mediated. Politicians may occupy positions in key agencies in charge of distributing benefits and subject the allocation of these benefits to political calculations by privileging certain areas or individuals over others depending on expected electoral payoffs (Larreguy, Marshall, & Querubin, 2016; Novaes, 2018). In doing so, party brokers or politicians may write up or modify lists of beneficiaries (Weitz-Shapiro, 2014) and allocate these resources disproportionally to core or swing constituencies (Dixit & John, 1996; Magaloni et al., 2007; Stokes, 2013; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, & Nichter, 2014). In such contexts, benefits are distributed with electoral messages or with explicit requests to support particular candidates, thus constituting a clientelist exchange or *quid pro quo*.

Social provisions that increase welfare are fundamental in clientelist relationships, as these improve—even if meagerly—low-income citizens' day-to-day lives marked by deprivation (see Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Ethnographic research in low-income communities also shows that clientelism is an important means for less-privileged citizens to access information about social benefits they are unable to obtain on their own even if they are eligible (Hagene, 2015).

Party agents or local brokers that mediate the relationship between party politicians and voters use several methods to enforce this exchange. They may employ coercion or instill fear of retaliation for non-compliance (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007), monitor voters to enforce deals or make voters believe that they can do so (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Stokes, 2013), or demand that citizens publicly "declare support" for the party patron in advance (Nichter & Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Nichter, 2018). Brokers may also rely on loyalty and reciprocity (e.g., Auyero, 2001; Lawson & Greene, 2014), reputation for delivering (Zarazaga, 2014), or expectations about their performance (Baldwin, 2013) as substitutes for monitoring.

If party-mediated access to these programs is the norm in Mexico, we would expect to find a high percentage of respondents mentioning participation in campaign events as a condition for receiving discretionary programs from the government. There are two plausible—and not mutually exclusive—mechanisms through which we may observe such an effect. This may occur because certain groups of citizens are informed that they will receive these benefits upon delivering electoral support (either at the ballot box or in easier-to-observe campaign events). Under this scenario, we would expect to find *beneficiaries* of discretionary programs reporting that campaign participation is a condition for access. Given the highly reported nature of partisan allocation of social benefits in Mexico, we certainly expect to find a significant report of such conditioning. This result would serve a benchmark as we gauge the less-studied organization-mediated access.

H1a (party-mediated access): *Beneficiaries of discretionary programs report that participation in campaign events is a condition for accessing such benefits.*

Alternatively, politicians may target citizens with benefits based on their partisanship. Studies have typically identified cases of core-voter targeting (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, & Magaloni, 2009; Stokes, 2013) in which voters may or may not be informed of

[9] In Mexico, for example, the Productive Supports for Agrarian Areas Program (FAPPA), a program to support microenterprise development in rural areas which was eventually discontinued, reached 12 percent of the target population in 2016 and 7 percent of the eligible population. Coverage data from 2012 to 2016 is similar.

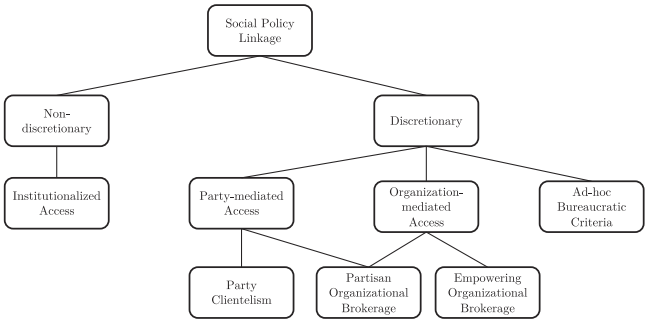

Fig. 1. Access to social programs according to social policy linkage.

why they are receiving benefits. These benefits in turn are often allocated through geographic targeting. In the latter scenario, we may expect to find a high percentage of *non-beneficiaries* (perhaps bitterly) reporting that electoral participation or partisanship is a condition to accessing benefits, but not necessarily a high percentage of beneficiaries, who could plausibly be unaware that they are receiving preferential treatment.

H1b (party-mediation perception): *Non-beneficiaries of discretionary programs report that participation in campaign events is a condition for accessing such benefits.*

A third theoretically relevant category of citizens are those who are beneficiaries of *non-discretionary* programs. As discussed above, these citizens' experiences with programmatic provisions, which are characterized by institutionalized access, may alter perceptions about government functioning more broadly, causing such beneficiaries to discount the probability of partisan bias in the distribution of other benefits. This latter finding would be evidence of a non-discretionary social policy linkage that informs how beneficiaries of such programs perceive access to benefits more generally.

H1c (programmatic empowerment): *Participation in non-discretionary programs (*e.g. *Prospera) is associated with lower expectation of partisan conditioning of discretionary benefits relative to non-beneficiaries of non-discretionary programs.*

2.2. Organization-mediated Access

Our second set of hypotheses correspond to organizational conditioning of discretionary programs. Interest organizations constitute an important—yet relatively understudied—set of actors mediating access to discretionary and scarce state resources. Studies have shown that organizations participate actively in the implementation of programs for low-income citizens and communities (e.g., Collier & Handlin, 2009). Social organizations may form part of larger clientelist networks, may be embedded within political parties or they may constitute important actors helping local communities obtain otherwise hard-to-access benefits. In all of these capacities, they constitute important and much less studied vehicles through which citizens may influence their chances of receiving individual or collective benefits (Palmer-Rubin et al., 2020).

Large social-movement organizations mobilizing for social change as well as community groups embedded in local associational networks stand to benefit from gaining access to state resources for their members (Garay, 2007; Eisenstadt, 2009; Palmer-Rubin, 2019). Aside from helping their members gain access to needed provisions, organization leaders can use state resources as selective benefits to sustain an active membership. Further, organizations may gain a percentage of funds for organizational expenses, allowing them to expand their reach. While organizational membership is rarely a formal requirement to access social benefits, it may informally facilitate access, owing to the information that the organization lends to members and/or the organization's capacity for pressuring public officials.

Politicians may also seek out organizations as intermediaries for clientelist benefits for several reasons. First, political parties may lack their own clientelist networks and look to organizations as "ready-made" networks for the distribution of benefits in exchange for voter support (Palmer-Rubin, 2016). Second, organizations are particularly well-suited to alleviating the commitment problem endemic to clientelism (Stokes, 2005), owing to internal bonds of solidarity and trust. Third, parties may be interested in sustaining linkages to organizations for reasons other than their role as clientelist intermediaries—such as their role in sustaining a party "brand" (Lupu, 2014). Research has shown that party appeals to social organizations for campaign support are pervasive in Latin America, especially in countries that have weaker party systems (Poertner, 2018, 2020); yet, while several organizations do succumb to clientelist appeals, others manage to sustain more distant or issue-based relations with political parties (Garay, 2009).

Thus, we posit two ways in which organizations mediate access, one that helps individuals obtain hard-to-access benefits without immersing beneficiaries into electoral exchanges, which we call *empowering organizational brokerage*, and another in which organizations operate in connection with parties seeking to mobilize votes. We call this latter type of brokerage *partisan organizational brokerage*. While in party-mediated access party agents interact directly with citizens, in partisan organizational brokerage organizations mediate the relationship between parties and citizens. The connections between organizations and parties may be more institutionalized along the corporatist structures of control and exchange established in Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century discussed below, or may take the form of fluid, strategic linkages between organizations and parties in the context of electoral campaigns (see Fig. 1).

We develop three hypotheses for organizational brokerage that are parallel to those laid out above for party brokerage. First, we hypothesize that beneficiaries of discretionary social programs cite organizational support as important to access benefits. This finding would support the basic intuition that organizations play an important role in mediating access to these programs, either through an"empowering" mechanism in which they provide information about programs and build members' capacity to apply, or through a more coercive "political exchange" mechanism in which organizations aid parties in clientelistic distribution.

H2a (organizational brokerage): *Beneficiaries of discretionary programs report that organizational membership is a condition for accessing such benefits.*

Second, if organizational brokerage is relevant, we may expect to find a high percentage of *non-beneficiaries* reporting that organizational membership is a condition to accessing benefits. This perception may reflect bitterness on the part of those who, excluded from these programs, observe that those who belong to organizations are able to access them.

H2b (organizational-brokerage perception): *Non-beneficiaries of discretionary programs report organizational participation is a condition for accessing such benefits.*

Our expectations differ for the perception of beneficiaries of non-discretionary programs, such as *Prospera*. Access to these programs is formula-based and individualized, and thus it exposes citizens to institutionalized allocation procedures that are not conditional on organizational support. Therefore, such beneficiaries may expect the same processes to apply more broadly and report that organizational membership is not a condition for access to other programs. Designers of *Prospera* in fact cited the motivation to exclude clientelistic organizations as driving the non-participatory nature of this program upon its adoption in 1997

and when original *Progresa* was transformed into *Oportunidades* in 2001 (Garay, 2016, 234–235).

H2c (individualized empowerment): *Participation in non-discretionary programs (*e.g. *Prospera) is associated with lower expectation of organizational conditioning of discretionary benefits relative to non-beneficiaries of non-discretionary programs.*

3. Background: Social policy, clientelism, and interest organizations in Mexico

Mexico's democratic transition brought about changes in social programs directed to low-income citizens and in the modes of accessing these benefits. After seven decades of one-party dominance, expansion of large-scale nondiscretionary social policy was propelled by electoral competition for low-income voters in competitive elections that brought the National Action Party (PAN) to the presidency in 2000 (Garay, 2016). The inauguration of policies such as conditional cash transfers (in particular, *Prospera),* public health insurance, and non-contributory pensions marked a watershed in social provision as they came to be allocated according to clear eligibility criteria. Prior to this, social benefits and production oriented programs were highly discretionary, both in rural and urban areas (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016).

Alongside the new nondiscretionary social benefits, however, exists a wide spectrum of much more discretionary programs, some of which were launched by state and municipal governments as subnational authorities gained increasing power in Mexico's federal system when democratization moved forward starting in the late 1990s. These benefits range widely, including farm implements, small-business loans, and housing materials and subsidies. While ad-hoc bureaucratic decisions may guide access to these benefits (as depicted in Graph 1) studies have also shown that their access is mediated by party and organizational brokerage.

Intermediation is not new in Mexico. Under PRI rule, social provisions were offered in exchange for involvement in campaign activity or vote-buying, what we call *party-mediated access*, and through PRI-affiliated sectoral organizations, which performed *partisan organizational brokerage* roles (e.g., Cornelius, 1975; Fox, 1994; Grayson, 1998), contributing to the PRI's dominance (Greene, 2007; Magaloni, 2006). Twentieth-century rural development policy constitutes a notable example of discretionary provisions allocated through *partisan organizational brokerage*. In the 1930s, the Lázaro Cárdenas administration carried out a widespread agrarian reform, following through on a promise enshrined in the post-Revolutionary 1917 Constitution. The reform program established communal landholdings and the organization of peasants into the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), which operated as a channel for the representation of interests and the distribution of benefits to the rural sector. Affiliated with the PRI, the CNC over time became a source of patronage and manipulation of rural voters, playing a *partisan organizational brokerage* role, as the PRI developed into a dominant party within an increasingly authoritarian regime (see Collier, 1992; Collier & Collier, 1991; Grayson, 1998; Magaloni, 2006). Squatter organizations in urban slums followed a similar trajectory, mediating discretionary benefits for housing and services in exchange for quiescence and campaign mobilization for the PRI (Cornelius, 1975). These forms of access to social benefits by low-income people existed together with *party-mediated* distributions, without the intervention of organizations (e.g., Fox, 1994; Magaloni, 2006).

As the transition to democracy moved forward in the context of growing party competition, partisan machines ceased to dominate the allocation of social provisions (see Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016), but vote-buying and clientelism continued to be widespread. A key question thus concerns the extent to which this dynamic affects access to discretionary social benefits. For example, in a survey by *Alianza Cívica* on the day of Mexico's 2012 presidential election, 28 percent of respondents reported that they or someone they knew were exposed to vote buying or pressured to vote in a particular way.[10] The 2012 Mexico Panel Study in turn found that 7.7 percent of respondents reported receiving offers of gifts in exchange for electoral support, among other forms of voter manipulation (Nichter & Palmer-Rubin, 2015).[11]

New interest organizations and a broader gamut of party-organization linkages took shape in recent decades both in urban and rural areas. Some of these groups challenged the PRI's manipulation of state resources (Bruhn, 1997; De Grammont & Mackinlay, 2006) and some allied with new parties. While some of these organizations have brokered discretionary benefits and pressed for benefit expansion (e.g., Palmer-Rubin, 2019) playing *empowering brokerage roles* and maintaining more autonomy from the state, others have succumbed to clientelistic practices, offering benefits in exchange for votes. These practices have been documented among organizations engaged in housing and productive projects in the studied states of Mexico City and Chiapas.

In Mexico City, social organizations and tenants' and squatters' groups, which constitute the core of the city's Urban Popular Movement, have engaged in pressure politics and developed linkages with factions within the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which governed the city from 1997 to 2018, in order to gain policy responses (Bruhn, 1997). Existing research notes that many of these organizations play a *partisan brokerage* role, giving members better access to social housing credits in exchange for supporting their party ally (Hilgers, 2008). Others in turn developed community assistance networks and increased social and political participation among members as they pressed for benefits, in line with an *empowering organizational brokerage* role (see Hilgers, 2008, 146).

Similar dynamics of *partisan* and *empowering organizational brokerage* exist in Chiapas. In particular, organizations of small-scale producers and indigenous populations grew during the democratic transition (Delfín-Fuentes, Brunel-Manse, Bello-Baltazar, & Vandame, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Vargas, 2002). These organizations are generally viewed as key to accessing production subsidies and other state benefits (Costedoat, Koetse, Corbera, & Ezzine-de-Blas, 2016; Eisenstadt, 2009). With the Zapatista insurrection, which resulted in the formation of an indigenous movement out of peasant-led contention in the 1990s (Trejo, 2002), many of the movement's organizations came to administer social and production-oriented state programs (Eisenstadt, 2009).

The analysis presented next attempts to systematically assess whether access to discretionary resources followed the much studied partisan mediation, and/or whether organizations play some role in facilitating access. We focus on two sets of programs that exist for both urban and rural populations and that are subject to discretionary distributions: state-administered housing programs and *proyectos productivos*, which offer subsidies and support for farmers, small entrepreneurs, and small and medium-sized businesses, to understand what form of political conditioning, if any, is perceived relevant for accessing benefits.

Table 1 displays the portion of respondents to our survey in each state that reported receiving *Prospera* or other programs (including housing, *proyectos productivos*, agricultural support, and pensions). A much higher percentage of respondents from Chiapas report receiving *Prospera* than respondents from Mexico City, which is not surprising given that the vast majority of Mexico's

[10] http://www.alianzacivica.org.mx/archivos/pub/4434Informe%203%20de%20julio%202012.pdf

[11] Previous iterations of the Panel Study for the 2000 and 2006 elections found similar practices. See Cornelius (2004); Diaz-Cayeros & Magaloni (2009).

Table 1
Beneficiaries of social programs.

	Beneficiary Status	
	Prospera Beneficiaries	Beneficiaries of Other Programs
Mexico City	3.8%	33.0%
Chiapas	41.5%	17.3%

Note: Share of the population (within each state) who are beneficiaries of Prospera or other programs.

extreme poor, who are the target population for this program, live in rural areas. In contrast, a substantial portion of respondents in both states report receiving other programs—33 percent in Mexico City and 17 percent in Chiapas.

4. Methods and data

To address the question of whether citizens perceive organizations and parties to play important roles in access to discretionary benefits, we conducted a list experiment in Mexico City and Chiapas. The list experiment was embedded in a survey that was administered through door-to-door canvassing on a representative probability sample of 1,400 voting-age Mexicans, drawn equally from each state.[12]

The goal of the list experiment is to detect whether—in the experience or perception of the respondent—housing benefits or support for productive projects are discretionarily allocated on the basis of campaign participation or organizational membership. Given that the conditioning of social benefits on political behavior is an illegal and socially undesirable behavior, we use a question design that allows respondents to disguise their personal behavior to the enumerator. In order to construct an unobtrusive measure of the proportion that believe that these factors condition access, we did not directly ask the respondent whether specific factors were needed, but rather *how many* of a list of items are true.

All participants were presented with the following question: *"In general, what do you think people have to do to get access to these benefits for productive and housing projects? I am going to read a list of three (four) things and want you to tell me how many of these a person has to do. Please do not tell me which options but how many. The three (four) activities are…"*

As shown in Table 2, participants in the control group were offered a list of only three non-intrusive items: submitting an application, being an elected politician, and not having a criminal record. Two separate treatment groups received lists with an additional item: one group with the sensitive item "participate in electoral campaign events" and another with the sensitive item "have the support of a social organization." The answer options were designed to be relevant for both program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. We then obtained an estimate of the portion of respondents that reported affirmatively for each of the sensitive items by calculating the difference between the average number of items reported for each treatment group and the average number reported for the control group.

[12] The only inclusion criteria are age and citizenship, i.e. only adults (18 years of age and older) who hold Mexican citizenship are eligible to participate. In order to ensure that respondents of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds were well represented in the sample, we stratified the randomization by census districts. In the absence of a sampling frame with information on age and class on an individual-level, this stratification serves 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. Within households, respondents were chosen by quota sampling to approximate population-level distributions of age and gender.

Table 2
Answer options for list experiment.

Control Group	Campaign Treatment	Organizational Treatment
1. Submit an application	1. Submit an application	1. Submit an application
2. Be an elected politician	2. Be an elected politician	2. Be an elected politician
3. Not have a criminal record	3. Not have a criminal record	3. Not have a criminal record
	4. Participate in electoral campaign events	4. Have the support of a social organization

While list experiments have been shown to suffer from smaller bias than direct questions and to yield significant lower non-response rates than other techniques, such as the randomized response method (Rosenfeld, Imai, & Shapiro, 2016), they also have well-documented limitations. First, by design, aggregation of responses can limit the efficiency of the statistical analyses (Blair, Imai, & Lyall, 2014, 1044). Second, list experiments may suffer from floor effects—if all of the non-sensitive items are quite rare, respondents may feel reticent to respond "one" in the treatment condition, instead responding "zero" and biasing the estimate downward (Blair & Imai, 2012). In order to avoid such floor effects, we included an item that we expected would have a high percentage of positive responses (submitting an application). Third, list experiments may suffer from ceiling effects. Since extreme value responses would reveal respondents' sensitive answer choice, they might disguise the truth in such scenarios (Blair, Chou, & Imai, 2019). In order to avoid such ceiling effects, we included an item that we expected would have a very low percentage of positive responses (be an elected politician). Last, like most measurement strategies, list experiments can suffer from "*nonstrategic* measurement error" (Blair et al., 2019) stemming from "the usual problems of miscoding by administrators or enumerators as well as respondents misunderstanding or rushing through surveys" (Ahlquist, 2018). In order to limit these concerns, we trained the enumerators at length and extensively pretested the phrasing of list experiment questions to maximize clarity for the survey takers.

5. Findings

5.1. Partisan-mediation and organizational brokerage

The list experiment and survey yield important insights into the partisan and electoral conditioning of benefits and, in particular, the underexplored relevance of interest organizations for access to social benefits. In both Chiapas and Mexico City, citizens are highly likely to believe that the support of an organization is a requirement to access discretionary social programs. This belief seems at least as important as the widespread belief that participation in campaign events organized by parties is required. This finding holds for both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of discretionary programs. However, beneficiaries of *non-discretionary* programs perceive a high degree of partisan conditioning, but not a high degree of organizational conditioning. This last finding suggests that exposure to non-discretionary benefits such as *Prospera* individualizes citizens' state ties by circumventing organizational brokerage, but does not disabuse citizens of the notion of partisan favoritism relative to non-beneficiaries. It should be noted, as presented ahead, that this is not attributable to lower rates of organizational membership or intensity of participation by these respondents who are in fact more prone to participate in organizations than the rest of the respondents.

Table 3
Raw values for list experiment.

	Control		Campaign Treatment		Org. Treatment	
Resp. Value	Freq.	Prop. %	Freq.	Prop. %	Freq.	Prop. %
0	11	2.2	12	2.6	10	2.2
1	365	74.6	274	59.8	275	59.5
2	83	17.0	124	27.1	119	25.8
3	30	6.1	31	6.8	41	8.9
4			17	3.7	17	3.4
Total	489		458		462	
Average	1.27		1.49		1.52	
Estimated Frequency			**22.1%**		**25.4%**	

Table 3 demonstrates the raw values of responses to each of the three versions of the list experiment. The average number reported by respondents in the control group was 1.27, while the averages for the campaign treatment and organization treatment conditions were 1.49 and 1.52, respectively. Therefore, an estimated share of 22.1 percent of respondents indicate that participating in campaigns is a requirement to access these social programs and 25.4 percent indicate that having the support of an organization is necessary to access these benefits.

These figures are encouraging regarding the success of the experimental design. List experiments may suffer from floor effects—if all of the non-sensitive items are quite rare, respondents may feel reticent to respond "one" in the treatment condition, instead responding "zero" and biasing the estimate downward (Blair & Imai, 2012). However, in the control condition, only 11 respondents (2.2 percent) reported zero, allaying such concerns. An even more frequent problem is the existence of ceiling effects, where all control options are quite common. Given that responding "four" in the treatment conditions is tantamount to revealing an affirmative response to the sensitive item, ceiling effects also tend to bias estimates downward. However, only 30 respondents (6.1 percent) in the control condition responded "four," alleviating concerns about such an effect. By far, the most common response in the control condition was "one," and the higher estimates for the two treatment conditions resulted in large part from a higher proportion of respondents reporting two items.

Table 4 breaks down the overall treatment effects by state.[13] For the subsamples in both Mexico City and Chiapas, both treatment conditions yield significant results with slightly higher treatment effects for the organizational treatment than for the campaign treatment (although these differences are not statistically significant). In both states, at least as many respondents report that having the support of an organization is a requirement to access discretionary social programs as those who think that participating in campaign events is required.

Treatment effects are significantly higher in Mexico City compared with Chiapas for both treatment conditions. An estimated 32.6 percent of residents of the national capital report conditioning on campaign participation, compared with only 11.6 percent of Chiapas citizens. And a robust 34.9 percent of Mexico City residents report organizational mediation of benefits, compared with 15.9 percent in Chiapas. Perhaps party or organizational conditioning are less common in Mexico City than Chiapas or perhaps these different estimates result from distinct perceptions of non-beneficiaries. Subgroup analysis to follow allows us to discern between these two possibilities. (See Appendix C for disaggregated versions of the rest of the analysis between Mexico City and Chiapas.)

[13] Alternative specifications estimating the treatment effects using nonlinear least square (NLS in the *list* package) yield consistent results.

Table 4
Overall treatment effects.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
CDMX	0.326 (0.072)***	0.349 (0.073)***
Chiapas	0.116 (0.059)**	0.159 (0.060)**
Total	0.221 (0.047)***	0.254 (0.048)***
Difference between CDMX & Chiapas	0.210 (0.093)**	0.191 (0.094)**

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are estimated proportions of positive responses to sensitive item on subsets corresponding to Mexico City and Chiapas. Difference calculated using *t*-test.

Table 5
Differences in treatment effects by beneficiary status.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
All Beneficiaries	−0.108 (0.099)	−0.068 (0.103)
Prospera Beneficiaries	−0.078 (0.112)	−0.280 (0.094)***
Beneficiaries of Other Programs	−0.082 (0.120)	0.149 (0.133)

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are the regression coefficients estimating difference in treatment effects for each beneficiary group compared with non-beneficiaries of that program with standard errors in parentheses, generated using "ictreg" function from *list* package in R.

Table 5 reports differences in treatment effects between different classes of social program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.[14] The figures in this table can be interpreted as the difference in treatment effect from the overall findings. Thus, the "campaign treatment" estimate for the "All Beneficiaries" category is 11.3 percent (10.8 percentage points lower than the overall treatment effect of 22.1 percent). Similarly, the "organizational treatment" estimate for "All beneficiaries" is 18.6 percent (6.8 percentage points lower than the overall treatment effect of 25.4 percent). None of these differences are statistically significant, with the notable exception of *Prospera* beneficiaries' response to the organizational treatment. These respondents report organizational conditioning at a much lower rate than other subgroups.

While there is evidence for both perception and experience of partisan conditioning, results are slightly stronger for non-beneficiaries (H1b) than for beneficiaries of other programs (other than Prospera) (H1a). This could be explained by a "sour grapes" cynicism among non-beneficiaries, who believe that the system is rigged against them. Alternatively, beneficiaries who do in fact benefit from campaign participation or organizational membership

[14] Appendix D presents Tables 4–6 distinguishing between respondents who are organization members (including those that have an organization member in their immediate social circle) from non-members. When interpreting results for the organizational treatment, this distinction determines whether the respondent is speaking from their personal experience or simply from their perception.

are perhaps deluded into thinking that they may have accessed such benefits without such conditions.

In contrast, the estimated treatment effect for organizational conditioning was higher among beneficiaries of other programs than among non-beneficiaries. Thus, while there is sufficient support for both H2a and H2b, we can say with more confidence that organizations are perceived as important by the people that benefits from this class of programs more than those who do not.

Results vary markedly for beneficiaries of *Prospera*, a non-discretionary program, suggesting that participation in this program does produce a distinct outlook. As noted, those who receive Prospera benefits do not perceive that having the support of an organization is important to access the more discretionary programs that the question asked about (*proyectos productivos* and housing benefits). This finding supports the individualized empowerment hypothesis (H2c). Yet such beneficiaries *do* report partisan conditioning at a roughly similar rate to other respondents, refuting the programmatic empowerment hypothesis (H1c). One way to interpret this contrast is that the individualized nature of *Prospera* may lead beneficiaries to see that organizations are not relevant in access; however, respondents may hold the suspicion that voter manipulation during the campaign continues to be prominent and may condition access to more discretionary social benefits. It is important to keep in mind that over 90 percent of the Prospera beneficiaries in our sample reside in Chiapas, a state with high levels of poverty and a deep history of coercive clientelism at the hands of the PRI (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016).

Tables 6 and 7 report heterogeneous effects by income level of the respondent. This analysis serves two analytical purposes. First, we are interested in detecting heterogeneity across social groups in exposure to or perception of these two modes of social-benefit conditioning. Second, this analysis allows us detect whether differential effects for *Prospera* beneficiaries are confounded by income, a plausible threat to inference given that this program is means-tested.

Table 6 compares the main effects for lower- and higher-income respondents. The two income groups are distinguished on the basis of whether respondents reported income below or above the median in a categorical income question (Higher income respondents are those with incomes above 4,200 pesos per month, roughly $230 USD.)[15] Both treatment conditions yield positive results for both lower and higher income respondents. Estimates are higher for high-income respondents, although not significantly different from those for low-income respondents, suggesting that conditioning of social benefits on campaign participation or organizational support is not the exclusive purview of the poor.

Finally, Table 7 reports the same differences in treatment effects as in Table 5 but disaggregating the sample into lower- and higher-income groups—respondents who reported incomes below/above the median income in the sample. Notably, the divergence between *Prospera* beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in estimates for the organizational treatment condition are more pronounced for lower-income than for higher-income respondents. Given eligibility criteria for *Prospera* based on income, very few of our respondents reporting above-median incomes access this program. Low-income *Prospera* respondents report almost no conditioning of social programs on organizational membership. However, we also observe a large positive coefficient for low-income beneficiaries of other programs. Among the poor, those who access programs other than *Prospera* social programs are more than twice as likely to report that having the support of a social organization is necessary to access non-discretionary programs than non-beneficiaries.

[15] See Appendix E for replication of this analysis using alternate specifications of class, including an income measure relative to state-specific income medians, education, municipal poverty rate, and urban versus rural.

Table 6
Comparing low and high income respondents.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
Low Income	0.176 (0.072)**	0.273 (0.071)***
High Income	0.226 (0.078)***	0.339 (0.083)***
Difference between Low and High Income	0.051 (0.106)	0.066 (0.110)

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are estimated proportions of positive responses to sensitive item on subsets corresponding to low-income and high-income respondents. Difference calculated using *t*-test.

Table 7
Differences in treatment effects by income and beneficiary status.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
Low-Income Beneficiaries		
All Beneficiaries	0.057 (0.145)	−0.070 (0.154)
Prospera Beneficiaries	0.003 (0.146)	−0.362 (0.132)***
Beneficiaries of Other Programs	0.103 (0.155)	0.375 (0.202)*
High-Income Beneficiaries		
All Beneficiaries	−0.108 (0.186)	0.037 (0.197)
Prospera Beneficiaries	−0.159 (0.248)	−0.298 (0.230)
Beneficiaries of Other Programs	−0.111 (0.209)	0.190 (0.233)

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are the linear regression coefficients estimating difference in treatment effects for each beneficiary group compared with non-beneficiaries of that program with standard errors in parentheses, generated using "ictreg" function from *list* package in R.

This contrast among low-income beneficiaries, the majority of *Prospera* beneficiaries, regarding organizational brokerage provides additional evidence in favor of the *individualized empowerment hypothesis*. It suggests that that the social policy arena in Mexico has bifurcated since the advent of programmatic and unmediated programs. In line with the purported objectives of *Prospera*, a subset of the poor have come to realize that they do not need to go through an interest organization to access state benefits. However, another segment of the population—those left off the *Prospera* roles—have received the opposite message, as organizations continue to play a powerful gatekeeping role for the *submerged* cornucopia of discretionary programs.

5.2. Types of organizational brokerage and social policy linkages

We have demonstrated that citizens perceive that interest organizations play an important role in accessing discretionary social programs, such as for housing and productive projects. In this section, we conduct additional analyses to explore the mechanisms behind the importance of organizations for accessing discretionary social programs. In doing so, we try to disentangle two potential ways in which organizations could play a role in accessing discretionary social programs. First, organizations could serve an *informational* role, making potential beneficiaries aware of programs for which they are eligible and/or helping them apply. Second, organizations could play a role in *allocation*, wherein organization leaders reward loyalty with benefits.

First, we probe for heterogeneous treatment effects across different beneficiary groups for which the provision of information about these programs might be of different relevance. More specifically, we explore whether the treatment effects hold for discretionary program beneficiaries of different educational and informational backgrounds. If organizations primarily help citizens obtain program information, we might expect to observe treatment effects primarily among less educated and less informed citizens. We might also expect to find particularly large treatment

effects among elderly beneficiaries, since older respondents may be less likely to have computer literacy to be able to find out about programs online.

However, we find little support for this informational mechanism. As Table 8 shows, we observe sizeable treatment effects for organizational conditioning among both highly educated and less educated respondents. Similarly, we can observe significant effects for the organizational treatment for both highly informed respondents (who regularly consume news from more than two different sources) and less informed ones (see Table 9). Last, we find no treatment effects for organizational conditioning among older respondents (above age 60) but significant effects among young (below age 30) and middle-aged (between age 30 and 60) respondents (see Table 10). For all three subgroup analyses (Tables 8–10), we observe similar patterns among the general population and actual beneficiaries of discretionary programs.

The fact that organizational conditioning is viewed as important by citizens with and without informational disadvantages might suggest that organizations are not so much empowering citizens to access these programs as they are acting as filters to selectively reward beneficiaries.

Second, to explore the role that organizations play in accessing discretionary benefits further, we analyze a series of behaviors related to organizational participation across different categories of beneficiary status. Table 11 provides additional evidence that suggests that beneficiaries of *Prospera* tend not to rely on organizations to access these benefits, whereas beneficiaries of more discretionary programs do rely to a greater extent on organizations to access such benefits.

First, the low level of organizational conditioning reported by *Prospera* beneficiaries is not attributable to lower rates of organizational membership or intensity of participation by these respondents. In contrast, as shown in the first two rows in Table 11, *Prospera* beneficiaries are actually organization members at higher rates than the other two beneficiary groups (non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries of other social programs), and these beneficiaries who are members attend organization activities at least a frequently as members in the other groups.

Second, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the types of activities that they engage in with the organization (respondents that belonged to multiple organizations were asked to respond in reference to the organization that is most important to them.). We identify different categories of activities. *Org. Services* includes social events and meetings with politicians, *Org. Gestión* refers to negotiating for benefits from the state, and *Org. Collective* refers to activities that generate collective benefits such as collective bargaining or claims-making and community improvement. The only one of these types of activities that reflected a difference across beneficiary groups was *Org. Gestión*, confirming our finding that organizational brokerage is a common phenomenon for beneficiaries of more discretionary other programs than for organization members in the other two beneficiary categories.

Finally, the *Linked Fate* variable refers to whether respondents report that what happens to the organization affects what happens in their own lives. Here, we find a notably high percentage of other beneficiaries of social programs responding in the affirmative—one-half of respondents in this group, compared with 39 percent of non-beneficiaries and only 31 percent of *Prospera* beneficiaries. This last finding confirms that beneficiaries of these discretionary programs rely on organizations to a greater degree, likely because these organizations intermediate benefits that are especially crucial to their well-being.

We further compare these three groups of respondents on a variety of other socio-demographic and political traits (Appendix A). These data reveal notable contrasts between the three categories. *Prospera* beneficiaries—in comparison to these other two groups—tend to be clustered among the rural poor in Chiapas, not surprising given the low income required to qualify for this program. Less predictably, however, we find higher rates of political participation for *Prospera* beneficiaries across several types of participation. In comparison to the other two groups, *Prospera*

Table 8
Treatment effects by education level.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
Full Sample		
Low Education	0.261 (0.051)***	0.225 (0.051)***
High Education	0.060 (0.107)	0.383 (0.119)***
Beneficiaries of Other Programs		
Low Education	0.127 (0.106)	0.284 (0.130)**
High Education	0.350 (0.325)	0.567 (0.276)**

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are regression coefficients estimating proportions of positive responses to sensitive item for respondent subgroups (with standard errors in parentheses), generated using "ictreg" function from *list* package in R. "High Education" indicates respondents who have received at least some university education; "Low Education" indicates respondents without any university education.

Table 9
Treatment effects by information level.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
Full Sample		
Low Information	0.175 (0.062)***	0.146 (0.062)***
High Information	0.289 (0.072)***	0.394 (0.074)***
Beneficiaries of Other Programs		
Low Information	0.142 (0.142)	0.327 (0.176)**
High Information	0.194 (0.172)	0.457 (0.171)***

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are regression coefficients estimating proportions of positive responses to sensitive item for respondent subgroups (with standard errors in parentheses), generated using "ictreg" function from *list* package in R. "High Information" indicates respondents who have consume news from more than two different sources; "Low Information" indicates respondents who consume news from less sources.

Table 10
Treatment effects by age.

	Campaign Treatment	Org. Treatment
Full Sample		
Below 30	0.283 (0.093)***	0.380 (0.090)***
Between 30 and 60	0.234 (0.060)***	0.252 (0.060)***
Above 60	0.024 (0.134)	−0.055 (0.147)
Beneficiaries of Other Programs		
Below 30	0.423 (0.256)**	0.742 (0.280)***
Between 30 and 60	0.296 (0.133)**	0.401 (0.149)***
Above 60	−0.500 (0.221)**	−0.020 (0.301)

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Cell entries are regression coefficients estimating proportions of positive responses to sensitive item for respondent subgroups (with standard errors in parentheses), generated using "ictreg" function from *list* package in R.

Table 11
Organizational participation by beneficiary status.

	Non-Beneficiaries	Prospera Beneficiaries	Beneficiaries of Other Programs
Org. Member	0.404	0.621***	0.462*
Part. Frequency	1.450	1.656*	1.600
Org. Services	0.228	0.264	0.268
Org. Gestión	0.092	0.132	0.197*
Org. Collective	0.524	0.571	0.536
Linked Fate	0.391	0.314	0.500**

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Asterisks indicate significantly higher or lower mean values for beneficiaries of Prospera or other programs compared to non-beneficiaries, using t-tests.

beneficiaries are more likely to participate in protests, volunteer in political campaigns, vote, identify with a party, and to identify with the PRI in particular.

While these results are intriguing, and perhaps point to a political empowering effect of participating in *Prospera* (see De la O, 2015), they also raise a troubling specter of confounding. Beneficiary status was not randomly assigned in this study, and thus perhaps our comparisons above between different classes of beneficiaries reflects a selection effect. That is, perhaps it is not the experience of being a *Prospera* beneficiary that disabuses people of the notion of organizational conditioning, but rather that *Prospera* beneficiaries are essentially different from the other groups because of the other traits that qualify them for this program. In order to address this concern, we conduct several robustness checks presented in the appendix. Appendices C, D and E recreate the analyses of Tables 5–7 for subgroups of respondents (Chiapas vs. Mexico City, organization members vs. non-members, plus several demographic and socio-economic traits). These subgroup analyses consistently confirm our main findings indicating that *Prospera* beneficiaries are less likely to perceive organizational intermediation as relevant.

Second, we conduct multi-variate analysis using Blair and Imai (2012) *list* package in R. This method allows us to analyze the statistical relationship between beneficiary status and the predicted probability of an affirmative response to the sensitive question about organizational conditioning while controlling for other variables. In particular, we confirm that *Prospera* beneficiaries remain statistically less likely to report organizational conditioning than beneficiaries of other social programs, even while controlling for traits of the respondent, such as state, class, partisanship, and organizational participation. In contrast, multivariate analysis predicting positive responses to partisan conditioning do not reveal different predictions based on beneficiary status, in line with results presented above.

6. Conclusion

We have inquired into the ways in which citizens access discretionary social programs in Mexico, a consolidating democracy that has taken important steps to institutionalize non-discretionary social programs, but also where clientelist practices remain quite common. We employed a list experiment—a type of survey question designed to measure the incidence of socially sensitive actions—to ask respondents about the factors that condition access to housing benefits and funds for productive investments, two well-known types of discretionary programs operated by the federal and subnational governments in Mexico.

We believe that *access* to social benefits is a fundamental aspect of a social policy linkage. We found empirical support for two distinct modes of conditioning of discretionary benefits. First, in line with a large body of research on clientelism in Mexico and other young democracies, we found strong evidence for the presence of electoral conditioning of such benefits. Over 20 percent of respondents in the pooled sample—and almost one-third of respondents in Mexico City—reported that participating in electoral campaign events was necessary to access these programs. Given that both social program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reported partisan conditioning at high levels, we surmise that these reports reflect actual practice in clientelistic distribution as opposed to resentment by non-beneficiaries.

Second, we explored a less studied mode of conditioning: through support from social organizations. Organizations may facilitate access in at least two ways: by providing information for applying or mobilizing potential beneficiaries to demand access, what we called *empowering organizational brokerage*, or by mediating clientelist ties, what we termed *partisan organizational brokerage*. Over one-fourth of respondents—and over one-third of respondents in Mexico City—reported that organizational conditioning takes place. The fact that at least as many respondents report organizational conditioning as those that report partisan conditioning constitutes a novel discovery, as disproportionate attention has been paid to the latter. These results hold up across representative samples in both Mexico City and in the poor, rural state of Chiapas and were also reproduced across both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of social programs and across distinct class groups.

We found, however, a significant difference in treatment effects when it came to beneficiaries of *Prospera*, Mexico's flagship conditional cash transfer program. Such beneficiaries *did not* report organizational conditioning of social benefits but *did* report electoral conditioning. Perhaps these respondents' exposure to an individualized and formula-based social program persuaded them of the notion that organizational brokerage is not essential to gain access to state programs. However, such exposure appears not to have disabused citizens of the notion that there are benefits for which access is preferentially obtained according to partisan criteria.

These findings highlight the importance of focusing on the less visible mass of discretionary benefits that represent an important share of national spending on social programs for low-income individuals. Two types of social policy linkages are identified. On the one hand, we have evidence that the advent of *non-discretionary social policy linkages* has produced in beneficiaries the expectation that they can access government programs themselves, without the technical assistance or political connections of social organizations. On the other hand, perception of electoral conditioning of discretionary programs remains high, across all categories of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. A key question concerns how *discretionary social-policy linkages* shape individual perceptions about the state and politics more generally. For beneficiaries of more discretionary social programs, a salient feature in our data concerns the relevance that organizations play in their lives. As reported, a significant share of these individuals both perceive organizations as relevant to access discretionary benefits and also view themselves as sharing a *linked fate* with the organizations they belong to. While *Prospera* beneficiaries are actively participating in organizations, protest, and voting, these other beneficiaries are significantly less active but much more dependent on organizations for their well-being.

Future research should investigate how different *social policy linkages* affect citizen attitudes and expectations and their effects on democratic politics. In a democratic regime, it is expected that citizens participate in political parties and organizations to shape public policies, demand policy change, and hold governments accountable. These forms of political participation are signs of democratic strength. By contrast, the involvement of organizations and parties in *mediating access* to benefits speaks to a democratic deficit. These mediations operate as a result of either lack of state capacity to reach out to beneficiaries, or of outright politicized distribution, by which individual benefits are gained because of social pressure or some form of electoral exchange that determines allocation.

Considering whether these findings hold in other third-wave democracies, we expect that in countries where traditional structures of patronage politics have collapsed, such as Uruguay, we may find that the adoption of non-discretionary social programs removes the expectation of electoral conditioning. With regards to organizational mediation, Mexico's *Prospera* was adopted with the explicit objective of circumventing a party-dominated civil society. Other countries have followed a different trajectory. In Brazil, for instance, *Bolsa Familia* was designed to feature a more

active role of grassroots organizations, which were historically more excluded from clientelism than in Mexico. Unlike Mexico, where the incorporation of rural and lower class groups into politics under the wing of the PRI in the 1930s later evolved into machine politics, grassroots politics surged in Brazil during the democratic transition of the 1970s and 1980s, producing a more autonomous role for lower class collective action. Another avenue of future research concerns cross-country differences in how organizational brokerage works across cases with diverse histories of civil society-state linkages.

7. Credit author statement

All authors contributed equally to this work; the order of their names is on a rotating basis across multiple papers.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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