

Preferences for Redistribution of Legislators: Survey Evidence from Three Countries *

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February 23, 2026

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Word count: approximately 7,000

Abstract

We analyze original survey data from Colombia, Italy, and Pakistan to study determinants of legislator preferences for redistribution. Large majorities of legislators in all three express pro-redistributive preferences, closely tracking preferences of citizens. Legislators' preferences are no closer to those of affluent citizens than to the poor, and most legislators and citizens favor redistributive policies. Among legislators, partisan affiliation is the strongest predictor of redistributive preferences: legislators affiliated with leftwing or challenger parties are supportive of redistribution even in Colombia and Punjab, Pakistan — settings where party systems are considered weak and not organized on the traditional left-right economic dimension. Pro-social motivations for entering politics also independently predict support for redistribution, while material self-interest plays a limited role. These findings suggest that partisanship structures elite economic preferences even where conventional accounts would not predict it. [134 words]

Keywords: Parliamentary representatives, political elites, preferences, redistribution

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Although there is an extensive literature on the redistributive preferences of ordinary citizens (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011; Stantcheva, 2024), information about the beliefs of the persons that ordinary people elect into public office to enact their preferences remains scarce and geographically narrow, confined largely to European and other OECD settings (Bartels, 2008; Carnes, 2013; Gilens, 2012; Sheffer et al., 2018; Helfer et al., 2024; Olivera et al., 2025; Márquez Romo and Marne-Marcos, 2025). This is a significant gap: legislators shape tax and spending policy, and understanding the determinants of their preferences is a prerequisite for understanding redistributive outcomes. Yet surveying political elites is difficult (Maestas et al., 2003; Bailer, 2014; Walgrave and Joly, 2018; Vis and Stolwijk, 2021; Kertzer and Renshon, 2022), and doing so across countries at very different levels of development is a particularly fraught — and rare — enterprise.

We present data from original parallel surveys of national (and/or first-level subnational) legislators and citizens in Italy, Colombia, and two Pakistani provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab. Italy, Colombia, and Pakistan are all electoral democracies, and together they span a wide range of economic development, institutional strength, and party system structure. To our knowledge, no prior study of legislator redistributive preferences spans countries in both the advanced and developing world. The parallel citizen surveys allow us to assess directly whether a “representation gap” exists in the domain of redistribution; the legislator data allow us to examine individual-level correlates of preferences, organized around three sets of factors drawn from the literature: material self-interest, pro-social motivations for entering politics, and partisan affiliation.

Three main patterns emerge. First, closely tracking the preferences of citizens, large majorities of legislators in all three countries express pro-redistributive preferences. We find no representation gap between the views of the two groups, a result that extends recently-documented European findings to non-European settings (Guenther, 2025). Even when we stratify citizens by income, we find almost no evidence of a representation gap. In Italy and

Punjab, legislators' preferences are closer to those of below-average income citizens than to those of above-average income citizens; in Colombia, legislators are essentially equidistant from both groups. This contrasts with the literature reporting that the wealthy are better represented on economic policy. Second, partisan affiliation is the most consistent predictor of redistributive preferences across sites. This even includes Colombia and the province of Punjab in Pakistan, whose party systems are generally considered weak and which are not organized on the traditional left-right economic dimension. Third, legislators with stronger pro-social motivations for entering politics also tend to favor redistribution, while material self-interest plays a limited and geographically variable role. The one site that departs from these patterns is the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where political competition is organized along tribal and religious rather than economic lines; there, religious orientations rather than partisanship may dominate redistributive preferences. To establish our main claims, we show that the three sets of correlates we study — material self-interest, pro-sociality, and partisanship — are empirically independent of one another, supporting their treatment as distinct dimensions rather than redundant proxies for the same underlying trait.

The fundamental question that we ask in this paper — what do legislators in the developed and the developing world believe about redistribution, and how do those beliefs covary with observable characteristics? — has scarcely been asked, let alone answered. Strong evidence from the United States shows that the class and occupational backgrounds of national legislators are fundamental sources of redistributive preferences (Carnes, 2013; Kirkland, 2021); similar findings have emerged in the United Kingdom (O'Grady, 2019). But comparable evidence from other countries and regions does not exist. We address this gap. The importance of the question warrants investigation with the best available methods, even where credible causal identification remains out of reach.¹ The literature on citizen

¹Credible causal identification of preference formation is all but impossible for political elites, whose partisanship, motivations, and material circumstances cannot be experimentally manipulated (cf. Sheffer

redistributive preferences developed for more than a decade on the basis of descriptive cross-national work (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011), well before designs capable of isolating causal mechanisms became available. We see our contribution in a similar light: mapping an unmapped terrain. The breadth and novelty of the data, the inclusion of understudied political settings, and the finding that partisan affiliations structure elite redistributive preferences even in weak party systems provide foundations on which subsequent work can build.

Our approach is deliberately exploratory. The survey data that we analyze were collected as part of a larger study of legislator and citizen attitudes toward corruption (Ferroni et al., 2026); the redistribution questions that were included are substantively independent of that project and aimed at preliminary descriptive observation. As Tukey (1977) argued, systematic examination of data to identify patterns and generate hypotheses is a necessary stage of scientific inquiry, distinct from, prior to, and complementary to confirmatory analysis. Others have detailed the multiple valuable roles played by description in political science (Gerring, 2012; de Kadt and Grzymala-Busse, 2025). The patterns we document — particularly the finding that partisan affiliations predict redistributive preferences even in weak party systems — identify hypotheses that future work, with designs capable of isolating causal mechanisms, should test.

1 Expectations

We class theories of preferences over redistribution into three large buckets: characteristics that capture the material self-interest of the legislator; self-regarding versus pro-social motivations; and partisan affiliations. These categories are drawn from the main theoretical traditions in the literature; additionally, they are easily captured cross-nationally. Characteristics such as gender and race have also been studied but do not map naturally onto our data.²

et al. 2018, who experimentally study politician decision-making but not preference formation).

²There is no variation on gender in the representatives we survey in Pakistan, making it infeasible to include that variable. Racial hierarchies are not easily operationalized across countries, and for this reason

Interest-based theories of redistributive preferences predict that they depend on how redistribution affects the individual’s material interest (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Elected legislators typically come from the upper segment of the income distribution (Carnes and Lupu, 2015) and as a general rule, would oppose redistribution if their only consideration were policy effects on their immediate personal situation. But political elites enter the political realm precisely to represent the interests of others. Their expressed preferences are therefore likely to encompass factors other than their own material self-interest.

The second factor that we consider is the legislator’s degree of pro-sociality; that is, the degree to which the legislator weighs the interests of others against self-interest. We expect that legislators who are more pro-social will also express preferences that favor redistribution, since redistribution favors the median voter (cf. Fehr et al., 2022; Claessens et al., 2025).

Finally, we consider the partisan affiliation of legislators. The left-right dimension in politics is traditionally organized around issues of redistribution (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). We expect that, all else equal, legislators affiliated with leftwing parties will be more pro-redistribution than those affiliated with center or rightwing parties. But in all three countries, challenger parties have recently arisen to contest established parties, often on anti-corruption platforms. These challenger parties have attracted substantial electoral support but do not exhibit any consistent economic ideology. This makes it difficult to place them on the traditional left-right spectrum. Their populist appeals and outsider status may attract legislators with a diversity of views on redistribution. For this reason, we treat challenger parties as a separate category and examine the preferences of their legislators empirically.

The three dimensions that we study capture theoretically distinct mechanisms. Pro-sociality is a dispositional trait — rooted in intrinsic motivation and what the public administration literature terms “public service motivation” (Perry and Wise, 1990; Besley and Ghatak, 2005) — that is conceptually independent of partisan affiliation. Individuals may

race was not included in the survey instrument.

enter politics out of a desire to help others regardless of the party they join. Partisan affiliation operates through a different channel: parties socialize members, impose discipline, and provide informational shortcuts that shape preferences beyond what individual dispositions predict. A legislator's views on redistribution may thus reflect party policy even after accounting for personal pro-sociality. Finally, material self-interest — the standard Meltzer-Richard channel — may be weaker for political elites than for ordinary citizens, precisely because legislators are drawn overwhelmingly from the upper end of the income distribution; with little variation in income among them, other factors have more room to matter.

The three countries in our study provide useful theoretical leverage: variation in party system strength and structure allows us to assess whether partisan effects on redistributive preferences persist even where parties are organizationally weak or not arrayed along the traditional left-right economic dimension. We study politicians from a variety of party systems and institutional contexts to assess whether the same individual-level relationships holds within them, very much along the lines of Przeworski and Teune's most-different systems logic (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). Fielding survey questions expressly designed to capture redistributive preferences in diverse political and economic contexts allows us to compare patterns of results across different institutional settings; variations in party systems provide scope conditions for our work.

These considerations lead us to investigate the following three hypotheses:

- H1: Legislators whose material interests will be helped/harmed by redistributive policies will favor/be opposed to redistribution;
- H2: Legislators who are less/more self-interested and more/less pro-social will be less/more opposed to redistribution;
- H3: Legislators affiliated with parties of the left will be less opposed to redistribution than those affiliated with parties of the center or the right. We do not specify a directional prediction for challenger parties.

While we believe these mechanisms to be independent, a potential concern is nonetheless that the three dimensions — self-interest, pro-sociality, and partisan affiliation — may not be distinct for the specific populations we study. Some argue that pro-social dispositions and material self-interest are systematically linked to political ideology, for instance (Jost et al., 2009). Individuals who are more pro-social might be more inclined to affiliate with leftwing political parties as might individuals with fewer material assets. We examine this problem empirically in Section 5, where we show that the three sets of factors operate independently in our data.

2 Sample, survey design, and data collection

From 2022 through 2024, we surveyed national and/or first-level subnational legislators in Colombia, Italy, and two Pakistani provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab.³ Because the two provinces differ markedly in ethnic composition, economic structure, and political dynamics, we present results for each separately throughout the analysis. Our choice of countries was driven by the priority research goal of including legislators from less developed countries, whose political elites have been much less studied than those in advanced democracies. Prior literature contends that political elites in the Global South have low levels of commitment to redistribution (see López et al., 2022; and more generally Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007) and we sought to assess this with original micro-level data. Country selection was additionally guided by linguistic convenience and access to politicians.

We used diverse methods to contact legislators, ranging from email and phone calls to in-person approaches, using undergraduate students (Colombia and Italy) or trained local enumerators (Pakistan). We targeted all national-level legislators in Colombia, all national- and regional-level legislators in Italy, all provincial-level legislators in KP, and a subsample of 200 provincial-level legislators (out of 371) from Punjab; the latter were stratified by party.

³It was not possible to field a nationally representative citizen survey in Pakistan, and we thus pivoted to the study of citizen and legislator attitudes in two provinces where we had on-the-ground operational experience.

We mixed national and first-level legislators in our samples due to access combined with deliberate effort to generate sample sizes large enough for statistical analysis. Election to the legislature at either the national level or, as in Italy and Pakistan, the first-level subnational level requires political experience, party backing, and a high level of professionalism, and in this sense, our samples are comparable. In all three countries, we successfully elicited legislator responses from across the political spectrum, dampening concerns that our results might be driven by any particular political ideology (see Table E.1 for details).

The final sample of legislator respondents consists of 46 Colombian, 117 Italian, and 291 Pakistani legislators, the latter divided into 116 from KP and 175 from Punjab. Response rates ranged from 5 percent in Italy to 84 percent in Pakistan. See Table 1 for details on the data collection and Table E.2 on the background characteristics of the sampled legislators. The survey instrument asked respondents to fill out the questionnaire personally and not to delegate to someone else. We cannot verify compliance with this request for the Italian sample, which was contacted by email, but we have no reason to believe that delegation was common, especially for regional legislators who are unlikely to have staff anyway. Where approaches were in-person, we have very high confidence that respondents personally filled in the survey.

The survey asks: (1) demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education completed, household income, and sources of income other than salary; and (2) partisanship, including partisan affiliation, length of political career, relatives in politics, political ambition, and the role of religion in political decisions. We also asked legislators for (3) stated motivations for entering politics. We used commercial vendors to field parallel representative surveys of citizens in the three countries; details appear in Table 1. For the full survey instrument, see Appendix G.

None of the material presented in what follows was pre-registered; all of it received Institutional Review Board exemption.

Table 1: Descriptive information about surveys of legislators and citizens

Country/province	Subjects	Mode(s)	Number in pool	Response number	Response rate	Collection date
Colombia	Senators	email, in person	108	11	10%	May 2023 - March 2024
Colombia	Representatives	email, in person	188	35	19%	May 2023 - March 2024
Italy	Senators	email	461	11	2%	Jun 2022–Apr 2023
Italy	Deputies	email	863	22	3%	Jun 2022–Apr 2023
Italy	Regional legislators	email, phone	895	84	9%	Jun 2022–Apr 2023
Pakistan	KP MPAs	in person	145	116	80%	Jun–Nov 2022
Pakistan	Punjab MPAs	in person	371(200)	175	47%(88%)	Jan–Feb 2023
Colombia	citizens	online	NA	1,000	NA	Mar 2023
Italy	citizens	online	NA	1,998	NA	Nov 2021
Pakistan, KP	citizens	online, in person	NA	1,484	NA	Nov–Dec 2021
Pakistan, Punjab	citizens	online, in person	NA	500	NA	Dec 2022

Notes: NA = not applicable. KP = Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. MPAs = Members of the Provincial Assembly. Vendors for citizen surveys: Colombia, Netquest; Italy, Lucid; Pakistan, Direct Focus Community Aid (DFCA). Surveys were circulated in Spanish in Colombia; in Italian in Italy; and in English and Urdu in Pakistan. Citizens were selected to be representative by age, gender, income, and macro-region in Colombia and Italy and by rural/urban in KP. The entire Punjab citizens’ sample was collected in the province’s capital, Lahore. The Punjab legislator sample was stratified by party; numbers in parentheses refer to the subsample invited. In Italy, we surveyed Senators and Deputies elected in 2018 (to the XVIII Legislature) and also in 2022 (to the XIX Legislature), because the latter elections occurred while our survey was underway. Except for in-person citizen surveys in KP, which were filled out on paper and subsequently input, all other in-person survey responses were collected electronically via Qualtrics on the enumerators’ tablets.

3 Measures

In this section, we provide details about how we measure redistributive preferences and then about the measures we use to operationalize the concepts of material self-interest, pro-sociality, and partisanship.

3.1 Redistributive preferences

The measures we use to capture redistributive preferences are whether the respondent: (1) agrees that the rich should pay a larger share than the poor of their income in taxes; (2) supports government intervention to reduce unequal opportunities; and (3) supports government intervention to reduce large income differences. These are relatively modest policy positions that many people may agree with.⁴ We designed our questions to travel seamlessly across countries at various levels of economic development, and so they are deliberately

⁴The first question is original to our survey; the second is taken from the General Social Survey; the third is from Alesina et al. (2018).

broad-gauged. In the results of the regression analysis that we report below, we use a single index of redistributive preferences that we created using principal component analysis (PCA) of answers to these three questions.⁵ As shown in Table 2, the first principal component explains between 61 and 73 percent of the total variance across the three underlying variables in each site. All three variables load substantially (0.50–0.64) and uniformly on this component, with similar patterns across settings, indicating the index captures a coherent and comparable dimension of redistributive preferences and is not driven by a single measure. Despite high average levels of agreement with the underlying questions, the index exhibits meaningful variation (standard deviations of approximately 1.4 in each country), providing sufficient dispersion for regression analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive details of PCA index construction

	Colombia (1)	Italy (2)	Pakistan - KP (3)	Pakistan - Punjab (4)
Eigenvalue (PC1)	1.98	1.84	1.92	2.19
Variance explained	0.66	0.61	0.64	0.73
Loading: Variable 1	0.50	0.54	0.58	0.50
Loading: Variable 2	0.64	0.61	0.62	0.60
Loading: Variable 3	0.59	0.58	0.53	0.62

Notes: The table reports the results of separate principal component analyses conducted for each country using the same three underlying variables. For each country, the table shows the first principal component’s eigenvalue, the proportion of total variance explained by the first component, and the corresponding component loadings for each variable. Variable 1: support progressive taxation; Variable 2: support reducing unequal opportunities; Variable 3: support reducing large income differences.

3.2 Material self-interest

Because legislators in all three countries enjoy incomes that put them squarely in the uppermost income brackets, income itself does not usefully proxy material self-interest.⁶ To

⁵The principal component analysis is a multivariate statistical method that extracts the information from several variables observed on the same subjects, in this case, the preferences for redistribution policies, into fewer variables called principal components. For this set of variables, we use as an index the first principal component, which is the linear combination of the original variables that maximally explains the variances of all the variables.

⁶We asked respondents for their total household income. However, income buckets were designed to cover differences for the population at large, so that anywhere from 80 to 100 percent of legislators fall

gain analytical leverage across legislators, we measure material self-interest using responses to a question that asked them if they had sources of income derived from ownership of productive assets — specifically, landholding (relevant in Pakistan), business ownership, or self-employment. Legislators whose income derives from capital rather than salary bear more of the cost of redistributive policies (Boix, 2003). We compare these legislators to those whose incomes come solely from salaried employment as professional politicians.

3.3 Pro-sociality

The survey provided six possible motivations for entering public office and asked politicians to report the importance of each; in principle, a respondent could report that all six were equally important (although no one did; for a visualization of the responses to all questions, see Figure F.1). We focus on a subset of possible motivations to distinguish between answers that reflect pro-sociality (“to help those in need or serve others in my community”) and those reflecting private self-interest (“the salary,” “career opportunities or pension after holding office,” and “less appealing opportunities in the private sector”).⁷ To construct the pro-sociality measure, we take the (normalized) difference between social motivations and measures of private interests. This construction accounts for the fact that almost all legislator respondents reported that they entered politics for pro-social reasons; we thus take this in relation to their declarations of self-interest.

into the highest category in each country (see Table E.3); thus, the measure is not useful for comparing legislators to each other. Another possible source of information about legislator assets and income is the financial disclosures that are required in all three countries. We deemed these too unreliable to use, however. In Pakistan, for instance, press investigations reveal substantial discrepancies between reported and actual assets and income. See F.M. Shakil, “Questions raised over Pakistani leaders’ asset declarations,” *Asia Times*, June 27, 2018 and “Pandora Papers expose wealth of Pakistan PM Imran Khan’s allies,” *Al Jazeera*, October 4, 2021.

⁷The distinction between pro-social and self-interested motivations for entering public service originates in a literature on corruption (Hanna and Wang, 2017; Ashraf et al., 2020); we adapt it here to study redistributive preferences.

3.4 Partisan affiliation

We measure partisan affiliation using respondents’ answer to the survey question: “Which party were you affiliated with when you ran for the office you now hold?” Response options were country-specific, listing the major parties in each setting (see Appendix G). To enable cross-national comparison, we classify parties into three large groupings: leftwing, center and rightwing, and challenger.⁸ Leftwing parties are defined as those classically committed to redistribution and whose voting base is historically lower-class (Kitschelt, 1994; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Challenger parties are defined as new parties or partisan movements that have arisen to challenge established parties, often specifically in response to issues related to corruption (Kriesi et al., 2006; Diamanti, 2014; Mufti et al., 2020).⁹ Remaining parties are folded into the center and rightwing category (see Appendix D for full classification). This classification reflects the expectation that legislators affiliated with leftwing parties will favor redistribution more than those affiliated with center and rightwing parties. Challenger parties do not exhibit a consistent economic ideology; what they share is their status as insurgent movements against established party systems. Exploring the redistributive preferences of their elected legislators is one goal of this study, since so little is known about them.

4 What are legislator and citizen preferences for redistribution?

We first present descriptive results that compare the preferences for redistribution of legislators to those expressed by samples of citizens in their countries. This provides baseline information against which to investigate more deeply the covariates of legislator preferences.

We first examine aggregate comparisons and then disaggregate by party family and by citizen

⁸Pakistani political parties cannot be easily arrayed on the left-right spectrum (Mufti et al., 2020; Waseem, 2022). We have used this classification nonetheless in order to include them in the analysis, and have made a rough approximation of where they belong.

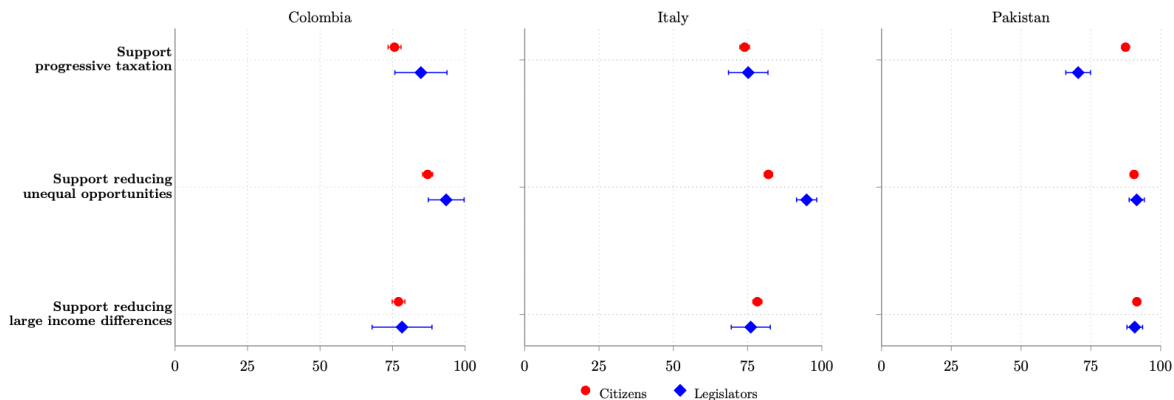
⁹We class Pacto Histórico (Colombia), the 5 Star Movement (Italy), and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as challenger parties because all share anti-establishment origins. Although the Pacto Histórico is ideologically leftwing, it is primarily an insurgent coalition assembled to challenge Colombia’s traditional party system (see the special issue of *Colombia Internacional* devoted to Pacto Histórico, including Escobar et al. 2023). The 5 Star Movement has explicitly rejected placement on the traditional left-right spectrum.

income group to assess whether representation gaps emerge at finer levels of analysis.

The data depicted in Figure 1 show that more than 70 percent of both citizens and legislators in the three countries support progressive taxation, favor government intervention to reduce unequal opportunities, and support government efforts to reduce large income differences. In most cases, no statistically significant differences exist between the preferences of citizens and those of legislators. In the few cases with significant differences — Italy, in response to the question about government intervention to reduce unequal opportunities and Pakistan, in response to the question about progressive taxation — they are substantively small. This pattern differs from studies reporting that elected officials in advanced countries hold different preferences than voters on social issues (Walgrave et al., 2023) and also from those showing misalignment between public opinion and redistributive policy outcomes (Gilens, 2012). Our finding is, however, in line with recent work that reports a broad alignment of economic preferences between voters and political elites in Europe (Guenther, 2025; Olivera et al., 2025).¹⁰ Perhaps because the specific policies that we asked about are all broadly conceptualized and politically relatively moderate, the data show overwhelming support for all of them among both legislators and citizens.

¹⁰We have been unable to locate survey data from Pakistan measuring citizen redistributive preferences against which to compare the distribution we find. For Colombia, the 2017 World Values Survey (WVS) reports that the average respondent scored 6 on a 1 to 10 scale in answer to a question about whether the government should take more responsibility to ensure everyone is provided for (World Values Survey, 2017, p. 36), where higher numbers indicate greater support for redistribution. This is slightly higher than we find. In 2016, average Italian responses to the same question we asked were distributed almost identically (an average of 5.92 compared to our average of 5.87, reported in Table OA-13 of the online appendix of Alesina et al., 2018); for response patterns across Europe, see Rueda and Stegmueller (2019, p. 25, fig. 1.3).

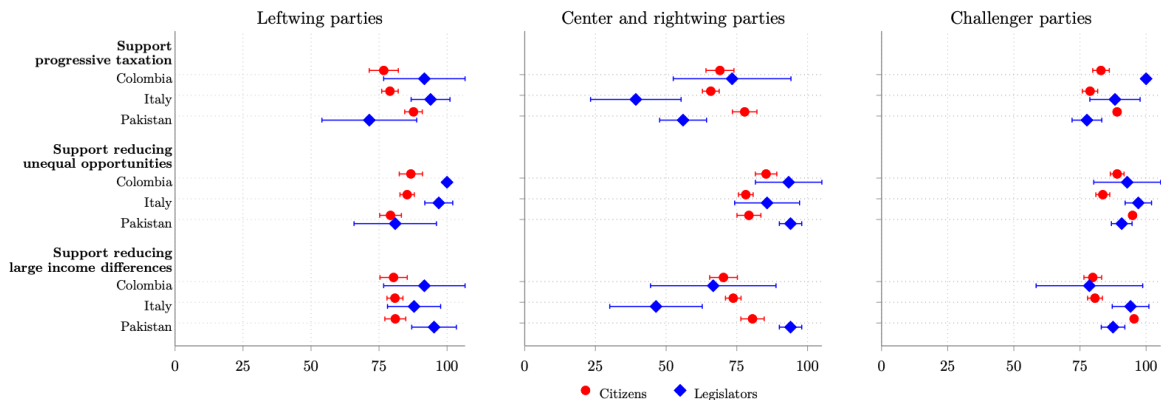
Figure 1: Shares of legislators and citizens favoring redistribution in three countries



Notes: The left subfigure shows the results for the Colombian sample; the central subfigure shows the results for the Italian sample; the right subfigure shows the results for the Pakistani sample. Each subfigure depicts the share of respondents in each group who favors the redistribution policy itemized on left vertical axis with its associated 90% confidence interval. For variable definitions, see Appendix D.

A natural question is whether citizens (and/or legislators) exhibit differences in their views about redistribution according to party family. We expect members of both groups who affiliate with leftwing parties to hold preferences that are more pro-redistributive than others. Figure 2 breaks down preferences by party family separately for citizens and legislators, using the leftwing, center and rightwing, and challenger classification described in Section 3. In addition, we split the Pakistani sample into its two provincial composite parts, Punjab and KP.

Figure 2: Shares of legislators and citizens favoring redistribution by party family



Notes: The left subfigure shows the results for the leftwing parties; the central subfigure shows the results for the center and rightwing parties; the right subfigure shows the results for the challenger parties. Each subfigure depicts the share of respondents in each group by country who favors the redistribution policy itemized on left vertical axis with its associated 90% confidence interval. For variable definitions, see Appendix D.

The figure reveals important party-family variations that were obscured in the aggregate analysis. In Colombia, Italy, and Punjab, center and rightwing legislators are notably less supportive of redistribution than leftwing legislators, particularly in Italy, where the gap is large. This is in line with what would commonly be expected. Partisan differentiation also obviates concern that legislators are simply giving socially desirable answers: if social desirability were driving responses, we would expect uniformly high support regardless of party, mirroring the preferences of voters. The fact that rightwing legislators report substantially lower support for redistribution than their leftwing counterparts suggests that responses reflect genuine ideological differences rather than attempts at mimicking the average voter.

Table 3 quantifies party-specific representation gaps, conceptualized as the difference between legislator and citizen preferences within each party family. To make preferences directly comparable across party families, we compute the share of pro-redistribution responses for each citizen and legislator respondent (the average of three binary indicators, each coded

1 if the respondent gave a pro-redistribution answer), yielding a measure on a common 0–1 scale.¹¹

In Colombia, Italy, and Punjab, leftwing and/or challenger legislators are more pro-redistributive than the citizens who support those same parties, whereas center and rightwing legislators are close to their voters. In several instances, these within-party gaps are statistically significant, suggesting that legislators hold more extreme positions than their co-partisan voters. This is consistent with evidence that, notwithstanding broad aggregate alignment, politicians tend to be more ideologically polarized than co-partisan voters (Broockman and Skovon, 2018; Olivera et al., 2025). KP is a striking exception to this pattern: there, legislators across all party families express *lower* support for redistribution than their respective voters. As we show below, KP diverges from the other sites on other dimensions as well.

Table 3: Party-specific representation gaps: legislator vs. citizen pro-redistribution preferences

	Colombia			Italy			Pakistan - KP			Pakistan - Punjab		
	Legislators	Citizens	Diff.	Legislators	Citizens	Diff.	Legislators	Citizens	Diff.	Legislators	Citizens	Diff.
Leftwing												
Mean	0.889	0.715	0.174*	0.889	0.710	0.179***	0.353	0.665	-0.312***	0.667	0.582	0.084
<i>N</i>	12	172		33	491		17	209		4	75	
Center and rightwing												
Mean	0.600	0.646	-0.046	0.524	0.595	-0.071	0.471	0.641	-0.170**	0.434	0.516	-0.082
<i>N</i>	15	239		28	691		17	116		83	135	
Challenger												
Mean	0.905	0.764	0.141*	0.843	0.716	0.128**	0.421	0.858	-0.437***	0.678	0.481	0.197***
<i>N</i>	14	392		34	538		65	982		87	250	
All parties												
Mean	0.775	0.711	0.064	0.749	0.669	0.081**	0.428	0.814	-0.386***	0.564	0.508	0.056*
<i>N</i>	46	997		117	1994		116	1483		175	500	

Notes: Entries are mean pro-redistribution scores (share of pro-redistribution responses across three binary indicators; range 0–1). “Diff.” reports the legislator mean minus the citizen mean for each party family, with significance from a two-sided *t*-test. Sample sizes (*N*) are reported below each mean. Citizens are classified by party support; those not affiliated with any listed party are excluded. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

¹¹The PCA index used in the regression analysis below is estimated separately for the legislator and citizen samples and is therefore not suitable for direct cross-group comparison of means. The binary composite measure avoids this problem.

A growing literature reports that the affluent are systematically better represented than the poor on economic policy (Gilens and Page, 2014; Schakel and Hakhverdian, 2018; Lupu and Warner, 2022; Traber et al., 2022). Our parallel surveys allow a straightforward test of whether legislator redistributive preferences are closer to those of below-average or above-average income citizens. Following the logic of Meltzer and Richard (1981), we classify citizens as below- or above-average income using the bracket in each country that contains the sample mean household income. We again rely on the binary composite measure of pro-redistribution preferences introduced above to make preferences directly comparable across income groups.

The results reported in Table 4 show that in Italy and Punjab, legislators' mean pro-redistribution scores are closer to those of below-average income citizens than to those of above-average income citizens.¹² In Italy, the distance from legislators to above-average citizens (0.116, $p = 0.001$) is more than double the distance to below-average citizens (0.052, $p = 0.121$); in Punjab, legislators are virtually indistinguishable from below-average citizens (difference of 0.004, $p = 0.924$) but significantly more pro-redistribution than above-average citizens ($p = 0.009$). In Colombia, legislators are essentially equidistant from both income groups, with neither difference statistically significant. KP is the sole exception: there, legislators express markedly lower support for redistribution than citizens of any income level, a pattern consistent with the tribal and religious rather than economic organization of political conflict in the province (Barth, 1959; Ahmed, 2017; Lyon, 2019). Thus, in most sites that we study, legislators express preferences about redistribution that are not close to those of above-average income citizens. These results run counter to the finding of Lupu and Warner (2022), who report that legislators' preferences are significantly aligned with those of upper-income citizens.¹³

¹²Results remain identical if we classify citizens as above/below median instead of mean income.

¹³The Punjab citizen sample was collected entirely in the city of Lahore, limiting its representativeness for the province as a whole. Results for that site should be treated as preliminary because they draw exclusively on an urban population.

Table 4: Legislator and citizen pro-redistribution preferences by income group

	Colombia (1)	Italy (2)	Pakistan – KP (3)	Pakistan – Punjab (4)
Panel A: Mean pro-redistribution score				
Legislators	0.775	0.749	0.428	0.564
<i>N</i>	46	117	116	175
Below-average citizens	0.712	0.697	0.832	0.560
<i>N</i>	397	1,093	580	200
Above-average citizens	0.719	0.634	0.803	0.473
<i>N</i>	502	901	903	300
All citizens	0.711	0.669	0.814	0.508
<i>N</i>	997	1,994	1,483	500
Panel B: Legislator–citizen differences				
Leg. – below-average	0.063 (0.197)	0.052 (0.121)	−0.403*** (0.000)	0.004 (0.924)
Leg. – above-average	0.056 (0.249)	0.116*** (0.001)	−0.374*** (0.000)	0.090*** (0.009)
Closer to:	Above-avg	Below-avg	Above-avg	Below-avg

Notes: Panel A reports mean pro-redistribution scores (share of pro-redistribution responses across three binary indicators; range 0–1). Income groups are defined as below or above average income using country-specific thresholds: Colombia (\leq Col\$1M vs. $>$ Col\$1M); Italy ($<$ €30k vs. \geq €30k); Pakistan KP ($<$ 30k PKR vs. \geq 30k PKR); Pakistan Punjab ($<$ 40k PKR vs. \geq 40k PKR). The Punjab citizen sample was collected entirely in Lahore. Sample sizes (*N*) are reported below each mean. Panel B reports differences in means (legislator minus citizen group) with *p*-values from two-sided *t*-tests in parentheses. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

5 Independence of explanatory variables

Before turning to the main analysis, we examine whether our three sets of explanatory variables — material self-interest, pro-sociality, and partisanship — are empirically distinct or, as some literature suggests (e.g., Jost et al., 2009), substantially correlated with one another. If, for example, wealthier legislators systematically select into rightwing parties, then controlling for both material self-interest and partisanship could introduce collinearity. Similarly, if pro-social motivations predict partisan affiliation, the two variables may not operate independently. This could call into question the interpretation we give of the regression results reported below.

To probe whether the three sets of variables operate independently, we regress party affiliation on background characteristics for legislators in each country and report results in Table 5. Several patterns emerge. First, pro-sociality is largely uncorrelated with partisan affiliation: the coefficient on social versus private motivation is insignificant in eleven of twelve specifications, with only a marginally significant association with leftwing affiliation in Italy — and in the opposite direction from what one might expect, as more pro-social legislators are slightly less likely to affiliate with the left. This suggests that pro-sociality and partisanship capture distinct dimensions of legislator preferences, consistent with evidence that the association between leftwing orientation and pro-sociality is empirically weak (Schubach and Thielmann, 2025).

Table 5: Determinants of legislator affiliation with party family

	Colombia			Italy			Pakistan - KP			Pakistan - Punjab		
	Leftwing party	Center and rightwing party	Challenger party	Leftwing party	Center and rightwing party	Challenger party	Leftwing party	Center and rightwing party	Challenger party	Leftwing party	Center and rightwing party	Challenger party
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Descriptive Statistics												
Mean	0.179	0.245	0.393	0.250	0.341	0.273	0.146	0.084	0.673	0.117	0.324	0.498
Regression Results												
Income: business/landholder	0.146 (0.238)	-0.061 (0.221)	-0.163 (0.213)	-0.161 (0.109)	0.316*** (0.095)	-0.033 (0.100)	-0.133*** (0.048)	-0.086 (0.052)	0.227 (0.153)	0.052 (0.051)	0.063 (0.140)	-0.084 (0.144)
Social vs private motivation	0.048 (0.070)	0.058 (0.074)	-0.053 (0.085)	-0.092* (0.054)	-0.020 (0.042)	0.044 (0.053)	0.011 (0.032)	0.006 (0.032)	0.022 (0.048)	0.019 (0.014)	-0.091 (0.058)	0.070 (0.059)
Male	-0.119 (0.174)	0.175 (0.170)	-0.052 (0.176)	0.113 (0.112)	0.040 (0.084)	-0.249** (0.124)	-0.043 (0.113)	-0.155 (0.112)	0.088 (0.138)	-0.029 (0.024)	-0.155 (0.114)	0.192* (0.113)
Aged 35-49	-0.040 (0.244)	-0.098 (0.183)	0.075 (0.211)	0.315*** (0.113)	-0.112 (0.185)	-0.034 (0.188)	-0.029 (0.127)	0.072 (0.048)	0.093 (0.206)	-0.274 (0.183)	0.259* (0.156)	0.005 (0.207)
Aged 50 or more	0.140 (0.263)	-0.031 (0.184)	0.012 (0.211)	0.434*** (0.121)	-0.133 (0.192)	-0.146 (0.194)	0.064 (0.135)	0.212*** (0.071)	0.086 (0.207)	-0.305* (0.183)	0.288* (0.156)	-0.010 (0.208)
More than college	-0.348** (0.159)	0.509*** (0.135)	0.021 (0.155)	-0.009 (0.112)	-0.184** (0.084)	0.084 (0.110)	0.093 (0.072)	-0.000 (0.067)	-0.041 (0.105)	-0.015 (0.022)	0.129 (0.090)	-0.120 (0.090)
Plan on running again	-0.084 (0.151)	0.008 (0.163)	-0.113 (0.187)	-0.050 (0.111)	0.054 (0.089)	-0.058 (0.111)	-0.002 (0.239)	-0.062 (0.236)	0.298 (0.244)	0.003 (0.014)	-0.026 (0.131)	0.000 (0.132)
Family member in politics	0.052 (0.183)	-0.167 (0.198)	0.027 (0.205)	0.136 (0.129)	-0.019 (0.098)	-0.174 (0.115)	-0.122* (0.067)	-0.073 (0.063)	-0.046 (0.211)	-0.011 (0.021)	0.061 (0.092)	-0.049 (0.094)
Observations	41	41	41	92	92	92	108	108	108	173	173	173
R^2	0.189	0.269	0.047	0.147	0.205	0.174	0.056	0.105	0.039	0.155	0.057	0.037

Notes: Each column reports OLS estimates where the dependent variable is a dummy for affiliation with the indicated party grouping. For variable definitions, see Appendix D. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Second, in some settings there are relatively high correlations between material self-interest and partisanship. This is especially true in Italy, where business owners/landholders are significantly more likely to affiliate with center and rightwing parties than other types of parties. This pattern is weaker or absent in Colombia and in Punjab, while in KP, business/landholders are significantly less likely to be leftwing. Overall, material self-interest and partisanship overlap in Italy but are largely independent elsewhere. In Italy, the correlation between the two means their separate effects on redistributive preferences should be interpreted with caution.

6 Correlates of legislator preferences

We now report our main results about the determinants of legislator preferences for redistribution. Table 6 shows regression results for the main theoretically-relevant variables as well as standard controls, using the PCA index of redistributive preferences described in Section 3. Thanks to the large number of respondents, we are able to present results separately for each of the two Pakistani provinces. (For parallel results for citizens, see Table E.4; for results disaggregated by each of the three redistribution questions, see Table E.5.)

We interpret results using the three theoretically-relevant categories of variables described above. We also perform a few auxiliary analyses (of legislator seniority and religiosity) to interpret some results more fully.

6.1 Material Self-Interest

The regression results reported in Table 6 show that in Italy, business owners and landholders are less likely to support redistribution than their parliamentary peers without income from productive assets, although the result is only marginally significant.¹⁴ In Punjab, business

¹⁴The survey also asked about self-employment, but too few legislators reported this category to include it in the analysis (see Table E.2). It is perhaps surprising that 34 percent of Italian legislators responding to our survey reported they had business or landholder income, since the country has seen considerable turnover of elected legislators in recent decades (Verzichelli et al., 2022). Turnover would normally be expected to usher in representatives who were less concentrated among such persons.

Table 6: Regression results for legislators' support for redistributive policies in three countries

	Colombia (1)	Italy (2)	Pakistan - KP (3)	Pakistan - Punjab (4)
Descriptive Statistics				
Sample mean	-0.02	0.07	0.05	-0.01
Sample SD	1.41	1.30	1.39	1.48
Regression Results				
Income: business/landholder	0.669 (0.695)	-0.590* (0.351)	0.840 (0.665)	-0.727** (0.305)
Social vs private motivation	0.102 (0.264)	0.218** (0.106)	0.478*** (0.138)	0.529*** (0.124)
Leftwing	1.032** (0.473)	1.388*** (0.410)	-0.425 (0.374)	1.141* (0.603)
Challenger	1.123*** (0.385)	1.594*** (0.405)	-0.221 (0.357)	0.760*** (0.192)
Male	-0.763* (0.433)	0.220 (0.319)	-0.247 (0.298)	0.425** (0.215)
Aged 35-49	0.970 (1.017)	1.526 (1.036)	-0.133 (0.329)	0.564 (0.452)
Aged 50 or more	0.953 (0.885)	2.018* (1.041)	0.242 (0.394)	0.153 (0.459)
More than college	-0.345 (0.406)	-0.311 (0.314)	0.119 (0.256)	0.563** (0.221)
Plan on running again	0.297 (0.454)	0.280 (0.229)	1.099* (0.595)	-0.426 (0.341)
Family member in politics	-0.091 (0.480)	0.026 (0.330)	0.365 (0.424)	-0.460** (0.188)
Observations	41	92	108	173
R^2	0.384	0.425	0.279	0.402

Notes: The dependent variable is an index formed using principal component analysis (see Table 2 for details). The omitted partisan category is center and rightwing parties. For variable definitions, see Appendix D. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

owners and landholders are significantly less likely to support redistribution, resonating with a sociological literature that depicts the province as home to large landlords wielding considerable economic and political power (Martin, 2016). In Colombia and KP, the coefficient on business/landholder income is not statistically significant, though the small number of legislators reporting income from productive assets in both samples (eight and nine, respectively) limits statistical power.

6.2 Pro-Sociality

Results in Table 6 show that in three of the four sites, legislators who are more pro-social are also more supportive of redistributive policies; the coefficient is also positive but not statistically significant in Colombia, perhaps because of the small sample size. We interpret these results as capturing that elected officials who report entering politics to represent their communities are also more supportive of redistribution than others. However, we note that almost no respondents in Italy and very few in Colombia admitted to self-serving motivations for political entry, suggesting possible self-censorship in those sites (see Figure F.1).

6.3 Partisanship

Finally, we turn to the partisan determinants of redistributive preferences. Results in Table 6 confirm that leftwing and challenger party affiliation predict support for redistribution in Italy and in Colombia. In Punjab, legislators affiliated with the challenger PTI or with the two parties we coded as leftwing — the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Awami National Party (ANP) (see Mufti et al., 2020) — are more supportive of redistributive policies than center and rightwing legislators. Only in KP, where political conflict is traditionally organized along tribal lines, does no partisan variable reach statistical significance.

None of the control variables emerges as systematically relevant to redistributive preferences across the four sites, although we note that in Punjab, legislators with more than a college degree are significantly more supportive of redistribution. Higher education is not significant in the other three sites.

6.4 Additional explanations

Career length and partisan socialization. If partisan affiliation shapes redistributive preferences, does longer exposure to party politics strengthen the effect? Research on the US Congress finds that legislators' ideological positions are remarkably stable across their careers (Poole, 2007), but studies of European parliaments show that time in office can socialize members into party norms, with behavioral differences related to pre-parliamentary

experience diminishing with tenure (Mai and Wenzelburger, 2024). Table 7 reports results from a specification that adds a seniority indicator (ten or more years in politics) and its interactions with leftwing and challenger party affiliation. The seniority main effect is negative and significant in Colombia (-1.845 , $p < 0.01$) and Italy (-1.121 , $p < 0.1$), suggesting that more experienced legislators are, if anything, less in favor of redistributive policies. In Punjab, however, the interaction between seniority and leftwing affiliation is large and highly significant (2.706 , $p < 0.01$): there, senior leftwing legislators are substantially more pro-redistributive than their junior counterparts. No other interaction terms are significant. These patterns are suggestive of partisan socialization in some settings; more research would be required to understand these differences. The cross-sectional design we use cannot rule out differential selection or retention.

Religion and KP exceptionalism. KP stands out on multiple dimensions. There, legislators are less in favor of redistribution than voters, and it is the one site where neither partisanship nor most other variables predict redistributive preferences of its legislators. Scheve and Stasavage (2006) argue that religion and government welfare provisions represent substitute insurance mechanisms, so that individuals who are more religious prefer less government redistribution. Our survey asked legislators how much they believe religion should be taken into account in political decisions.¹⁵ When we add this variable to the full specification that includes partisan controls, as reported in Table 8, religion does not significantly predict redistributive preferences in KP (-0.306 , $p > 0.1$). This null result reflects a fundamental lack of variation: 81 percent of KP legislators report that religion should be taken into account in politics “to a large extent,” and fully 97 percent say “to a considerable extent” or more. With near-universal agreement that religion should guide political decisions, there is insufficient variation to estimate religion’s independent effect on policy preferences. The near-uniformity is itself informative, however: it reflects the perva-

¹⁵Possible responses were “not at all,” “to some extent,” “to a considerable extent,” “to a large extent,” and “to a very large extent.”

Table 7: Regression results for legislators’ support for redistributive policies with career length and partisan interactions controls

	Colombia (1)	Italy (2)	Pakistan - KP (3)	Pakistan - Punjab (4)
Descriptive Statistics				
Sample mean	-0.02	0.07	0.05	-0.01
Sample SD	1.41	1.30	1.39	1.48
Regression Results				
Leftwing	0.898 (0.842)	0.734 (0.753)	-0.106 (0.619)	-0.044 (0.595)
Challenger	0.791 (1.065)	0.440 (0.861)	-0.424 (0.554)	1.018** (0.422)
Senior (10+ years in politics)	-0.991 (1.051)	-1.319* (0.668)	-1.125** (0.466)	0.338 (0.325)
Senior × Leftwing	-0.292 (0.908)	0.737 (0.683)	-0.437 (0.693)	2.222*** (0.726)
Senior × Challenger	0.554 (1.456)	1.397* (0.831)	0.282 (0.627)	-0.268 (0.479)
Income: business/landholder	0.846 (0.839)	-0.544 (0.367)	0.700 (0.669)	-0.593* (0.325)
Social vs private motivation	0.037 (0.256)	0.272** (0.111)	0.424*** (0.129)	0.517*** (0.127)
Male	-0.896* (0.498)	0.214 (0.318)	-0.312 (0.287)	0.389* (0.216)
Aged 35-49	1.108 (1.197)	2.239* (1.199)	0.313 (0.380)	0.016 (0.491)
Aged 50 or more	1.411 (1.091)	2.724** (1.226)	0.921** (0.448)	-0.385 (0.499)
More than college	-0.416 (0.435)	-0.265 (0.295)	0.157 (0.251)	0.555** (0.221)
Plan on running again	-0.090 (0.600)	0.235 (0.230)	1.168** (0.554)	-0.462 (0.349)
Family member in politics	0.501 (0.604)	0.134 (0.345)	0.234 (0.384)	-0.469** (0.191)
Observations	40	92	108	173
R^2	0.482	0.481	0.331	0.416

Notes: The dependent variable is an index formed using principal component analysis (see Table 2 for details). The omitted partisan category is center and rightwing parties. For variable definitions, see Appendix D. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

sive fusion of religious and political authority in KP, where religiously conservative parties such as the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) have centered their platforms on governance according to religious principles rather than on economic redistribution (Hussain, 2024). KP’s exceptionalism in our data — the absence of partisan or other conventional predictors of redistributive preferences — may thus reflect a political environment in which religious orientation is so uniformly dominant that it structures preferences in ways that standard

covariates do not capture.

In Punjab, by contrast, religion operates very differently. There, legislators who believe religion should play a large role in politics are significantly *more* supportive of redistribution (1.733, $p < 0.01$), the opposite of the Scheve-Stasavage prediction. This may reflect the influence of religiously-motivated charitable traditions in Punjabi political culture, where appeals to religious duty and social justice can reinforce rather than substitute for demands for state-led redistribution. In Colombia and Italy, religion is not significantly associated with redistributive preferences once partisan affiliation is controlled for.

7 Interpretation and Conclusions

The most striking finding of our work is that partisan affiliation consistently predicts legislators' redistributive preferences, even in settings where party systems are conventionally described as weak or where they are not organized along the traditional left-right dimension. In Italy, it is not surprising that legislators affiliated with parties of the left and even challenger parties are more pro-redistribution than those of the center and right: Italian parties are programmatically differentiated and the left-right cleavage is historically well established, dominating the initial aspiration of the 5 Star Movement to represent a new political cleavage. What is surprising are the results for the less developed settings we study. In Colombia, where parties are often characterized as patronage-based vehicles with limited ideological coherence, and in Punjab, Pakistan, where parties are likewise described as personalistic and clientelistic, partisan affiliation nonetheless structures redistributive preferences in the predicted direction. Only in KP, where political competition is organized along tribal and religious rather than economic lines, does partisanship fail to predict redistributive preferences.¹⁶

These findings challenge the prevailing view that parties in the Global South are purely

¹⁶Although religion likely contributes to the exceptionalism of the province's politics, the near-universal view among KP legislators that religion should guide political decisions (97 percent agree at least "to a considerable extent") leaves insufficient variation to estimate its independent effect on redistributive preferences.

Table 8: Regression results for legislators' support for redistributive policies with religion control

	Colombia (1)	Italy (2)	Pakistan - KP (3)	Pakistan - Punjab (4)
Descriptive Statistics				
Sample mean	-0.02	0.07	0.05	-0.01
Sample SD	1.41	1.30	1.39	1.48
Regression Results				
Religion taken into account in politics	-0.047 (0.868)	0.429 (0.349)	-0.306 (0.278)	1.733*** (0.307)
Income: business/landholder	0.665 (0.712)	-0.582 (0.353)	0.764 (0.657)	-0.369 (0.289)
Social vs private motivation	0.103 (0.268)	0.202* (0.106)	0.443*** (0.138)	0.221* (0.132)
Leftwing	1.021* (0.500)	1.399*** (0.412)	-0.436 (0.381)	0.870** (0.415)
Challenger	1.111** (0.416)	1.588*** (0.404)	-0.227 (0.366)	0.551*** (0.174)
Male	-0.769 (0.467)	0.197 (0.323)	-0.231 (0.289)	0.125 (0.202)
Aged 35-49	0.974 (1.053)	1.633 (1.069)	-0.181 (0.340)	0.381 (0.324)
Aged 50 or more	0.960 (0.912)	2.112* (1.069)	0.205 (0.408)	0.078 (0.340)
More than college	-0.342 (0.407)	-0.352 (0.327)	0.129 (0.254)	-0.111 (0.226)
Plan on running again	0.297 (0.461)	0.247 (0.229)	1.084* (0.588)	-0.180 (0.321)
Family member in politics	-0.096 (0.492)	-0.007 (0.322)	0.250 (0.436)	-0.070 (0.161)
Observations	41	92	108	172
R^2	0.385	0.434	0.284	0.543

Notes: The dependent variable is an index formed using principal component analysis (see Table 2 for details). For variable definitions, see Appendix D. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

clientelistic organizations that lack programmatic content (Kitschelt et al., 2010). Even where parties are weakly institutionalized, they appear to perform ideological work. They appear to operate along the left-right dimension that historically emerged first in Europe; and where they do not, redistributive preferences may be dominated by religiosity. We have no way to sort out whether this is through selection, as legislators with redistributive preferences sort into parties whose platforms match their views, or through socialization, as party membership shapes policy preferences over time through elite networks, caucus discipline,

and campaign positioning. Our cross-sectional data cannot disentangle these channels, and partisanship and preferences are likely jointly determined. Career length interacts with partisanship in some settings — in Punjab, senior leftwing legislators are substantially more pro-redistribution than junior ones — but the cross-sectional design cannot distinguish socialization from differential retention. The regularity of the partisan pattern across three very different political systems nonetheless suggests that partisan affiliation carries economic policy content that the “weak party” label obscures, perhaps as political parties have acquired greater distinctiveness over recent decades. Overall, we suggest that scholars reconsider the abilities of political parties in the Global South to organize political conflict along programmatic dimensions, even ones that did not arise naturally in those contexts.

Two additional findings deserve emphasis. First, pro-sociality — measured as the relative weight legislators place on public-spirited versus self-interested motivations for entering politics — independently predicts support for redistribution in three of four sites. This suggests that dispositional orientations toward the public interest may shape policy preferences above and beyond partisan affiliation, and warrants further investigation using methods that can better establish the direction of causality. Our interpretation of these results remains cautious given that relatively few legislator respondents in Italy and Colombia admit to self-serving motivations for entering politics, but we suggest that these results be explored in other research. Second, material self-interest, when proxied by income from productive assets, plays a limited and geographically variable role. In Italy and Punjab, business owners and landholders are less supportive of redistribution but the same pattern does not hold in Colombia or KP. This raises new questions about the generalizability of the political importance of material self-interest for elected public officials. Our cautious interpretation is that individuals who enter the public realm typically do so because of their commitments to others, and that as a result we should not expect their own immediate self-interest to dominate their policy preferences.

Finally, we found a high degree of pro-redistributive preferences among legislators in all three countries, closely tracking the preferences of citizens. Prior work documenting elite-mass alignment on economic preferences has been confined to western Europe (Guenther, 2025; Olivera et al., 2025); our finding extends this pattern to Colombia and Pakistan, countries at very different levels of development and with very different institutional configurations. The breadth of pro-redistributive sentiment among legislators in these settings is itself noteworthy, given accounts that political elites in the Global South are indifferent or hostile to redistribution (López et al., 2022). When we stratify citizens by income, legislators in Italy and Punjab are closer to below-average income citizens than to the affluent, while in Colombia they are equidistant from both groups — a pattern that challenges the finding that the wealthy are systematically better represented in legislator preferences in this policy area (Lupu and Warner, 2022).

This aggregate alignment, however, masks important variation. Our partisanship results show that within legislatures, redistributive preferences differ systematically by party family. Legislators affiliated with leftwing and challenger parties are significantly more pro-redistribution than their center and rightwing colleagues. Representation gaps may therefore exist at the party level even when they do not appear in the aggregate: citizens who support rightwing parties may be represented by legislators who are less enthusiastic about redistribution than the median voter. The coexistence of aggregate alignment and partisan differentiation raises questions about whose preferences ultimately shape policy.

Indeed, the deeper question remains: if both citizens and legislators overwhelmingly favor redistribution, why is redistributive policy so limited, particularly in the developing world? Our data cannot answer this question, but they help to sharpen it. The bottleneck does not appear to lie in elite preferences themselves. Instead, the gap between stated preferences and policy outcomes likely reflects institutional constraints, especially weak state capacity, fragmented legislatures, coalition bargaining, and the influence of organized interests. And

there are many other possible explanations: perhaps parties disagree on the best specific policies to achieve redistributive goals. All of these prevent majoritarian preferences from being translated into law. Future work should investigate these mechanisms directly, and in particular whether the alignment we document in stated preferences holds for actual legislative behavior, or whether the imperatives of governing attenuate the pro-redistributive dispositions that legislators express in surveys. Citizens and legislators agree in abstract terms that there should be more redistribution and that redistribution is a responsibility of the state. The next big question is how to implement these shared policy views.

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