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Is there anything Left? The politics of social spending in new democracies

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Abstract

The evolution of public social expenditures displays divergent patterns across non-western countries. This exploratory article argues that in order to understand the domestic sources of this divergence, institutional and structural explanations should be complemented with an actor-oriented perspective. Analyses of the role of party politics in non-OECD democracies, through multivariate fixed-effect regressions using data from 46 countries between 1995 and 2015, reveals a robust positive association between shifts towards Left party government and increases in total public social expenditures, also when controlling for structural and institutional factors. This association however seems potentially conditional on sufficient levels of economic growth. While indicating an impact of partisanship, further research is arguably needed regarding the origins, organization and policy outputs of parties in more recently democratized countries, as well as regarding the conditions under which the ideological orientation of parties in government are actually consequential.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In academia and politics alike, there has been a growing emphasis on the role of social protection in combating poverty and inequality in developing countries (e.g., Ferrarini, Nelson, & Palme, 2016; Fiszbein, Kanbur, & Yemtsov, 2014; Gentilini & Omamo, 2011). Simultaneously,

governments across the Global South have introduced new anti-poverty policies (Barrientos, 2013; Leisering, 2018) and as a result "[t]he contours of the social protection landscape in the developing world have become far broader and more fluid than would have been expected even a decade ago" (Carnes & Mares, 2015, p. 526). However, countries across the developing world have been observed to develop along diverse trajectories, regarding the configuration of social protection systems (Schmitt, Lierse, Obinger, & Seelkopf, 2015; Wood & Gough, 2006) as well as regarding the rate of poverty reduction to economic growth (Fosu, 2017). Despite acknowledgements of these tendencies, the question of which factors has driven non-western governments to expand or retrench social protection during the last decades has not been thoroughly studied (Rudra, 2015).

An emerging literature in this field has convincingly emphasized how structures and institutions, primarily globalization, deindustrialization and democratization, contributed to processes of social and political change in developing countries, especially since the 1980s (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005; Boix, 2003; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Mares & Carnes, 2009; Rudra, 2008). However, important recent contributions have also highlighted that outcomes of these broad processes, with regard to impacts on public policy, have been markedly heterogeneous across countries (Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, & Robinson, 2015; Desai & Rudra, 2018; Rudra & Tobin, 2017), suggesting an important role of domestic politics in mediating the outcomes of structural pressures (Bastiaens & Rudra, 2018; Ha & Rogers, 2017; Rudra, 2015). Regime type has been highlighted as a central factor for explaining this diversity (Adserà & Boix, 2002; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Rudra & Haggard, 2005). But what actually motivates governments to expand or retrench social protection in a democratic developmental context is yet to be systematically examined.

While acknowledging the significant advancements made by recent research in the field, the purpose of this study is to complement existing explanations of variations in social spending across the developing world with an actor-oriented perspective, focusing on the role of political parties in determining the orientation of government action in this respect. As the availability of adequate data to test specific hypotheses is still scarce, and as the cases included in this study admittedly represent heterogeneous structural and political contexts, this study is by necessity of an explorative character. The findings presented below nevertheless indicate that the partisan composition government, with respect to ideological orientations along the left–right continuum, is a potential source of divergence regarding social expenditures across non-western democracies throughout the globe.

Only a few studies have previously explored the association between partisanship and social expenditures across a broader set of developing countries (see Ha, 2015 for an important contribution). The recent and still ongoing structural and institutional transformations across the developing world, moreover provide important reasons to revisit this topic with new empirical data, as the developments over the last decades has potentially shifted the context of the politics of social spending in at least three important ways. Firstly, electoral democracy is much more widespread, and countries have longer experience of multi-party competition, in the period since the 1990s, compared to the earlier periods covered in previous studies (e.g., Ha, 2015; Huber, Stephens, & Mustillo, 2008). This is potentially consequential, as research on party politics in new democracies has emphasized that the emergence of an independent civil society, including the formation of consolidated political parties, does not happen overnight, but requires a prolonged period of democratic governance (e.g., Van Biezen, 2003). This might even be particularly relevant for parties representing the less affluent classes (Huber & Stephens, 2012).

Secondly, improved rates of economic growth, in combination with high levels of inequality in many developing countries, arguably create space and potentially also demand for increased government intervention to secure a more equitable distribution of resources (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005). The increased salience of political parties with redistributive agendas (e.g., Levitsky & Roberts, 2011; Weyland, Madrid, & Hunter, 2010; Wong, 2004) can be seen as indicative of these tendencies. Thirdly, the increased emphasis on tax-financed social assistance programs and recurrent calls for "social security for all" (Leisering, 2018), suggests a stronger global commitment make social protection available to broader segments of the population, especially the most vulnerable.

Despite strong theoretical arguments for the pivotal role of distributional conflict (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005; Rudra & Tobin, 2017), and the fact that political parties are generally regarded the most important means by which different groups in society are able to make an impact on the workings of government (Hagopian, 2009), parties only rarely feature in comparative research on non-western countries (cf. Schmitt et al., 2015). By providing a first assessment of the relationship between partisanship and social expenditures in the transformative period from the mid-1990s until 2015, across a global sample of countries, this article makes a significant contribution to the empirical state-of-the-art. By emphasizing the role of political actors, the study moreover challenges functionalist explanations of politics in developing countries and transitional economies.

The article is organized as follows. The next section introduces the reader to the organization of social protection in non-OECD countries, as well as to the role of social expenditures within these systems. The next section discusses the role of structural factors and regime type for the development of social expenditures, with a subsequent section highlighting the role of political actors, arguing particularly for the relevance of political parties. The dataset and analytical approach of the study is presented thereafter, followed by empirical results from pooled cross-section time-series analyses where Left parties are found to be particularly prone to increase social expenditures, at least during economic upturns. The article is concluded with a discussion of these results along with some implications for future research.

2 | THEORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 | Social expenditure and redistribution in a developmental context

In the rich literature from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, a stronger role of the state in distributive processes is commonly associated with a more egalitarian distribution of resources (Gough, 2008; Korpi, 1983). In the emerging welfare states of the 20th century, the state increasingly engaged in redistribution through the expansion of large-scale social protection schemes. In large-N comparative studies of OECD countries, the degree to which the state in this way intervenes in the economy is commonly assessed by measuring the levels of public social expenditures, as a share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP; Huber & Stephens, 2001). This approach has also been applied in comparative work on developing countries (Avelino, Brown, & Hunter, 2005; Ha, 2015; Huber et al., 2008; Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001; Rudra & Haggard, 2005).

Despite a relatively long history, social protection systems have historically had very limited coverage in developing countries, restricted to groups of formal sector workers in urban areas, often privileged by governments through networks of patronage and clientelism (Wood & Gough, 2006). Social assistance has, at least until recently, only played a marginal role, and

access of the poor to public services has been markedly restricted (Leisering, 2018). This configuration of social protection systems has led researchers to question whether social spending in many developing countries actually contribute to more redistribution, or rather the opposite (Goñi, Humberto López, & Servén, 2011; Lindert, Skoufias, & Shapiro, 2006). Scholars have therefore also come to question the link between preferences for redistribution on the one hand, and the expansion of social expenditures in non-western countries on the other (Huber et al., 2008; Ross, 2006; Rudra, 2008). Observed negligence of the interests of the poor, especially those living in rural areas, on the part of labor-related political parties, which often mainly represent urban formal sector workers, further exacerbates this view (McGuire, 1999).

However, also in non-western contexts, social spending in most cases displays a markedly more egalitarian distribution than the distribution of market income, and recent empirical research also provide evidence of important redistributive effects of social protection systems in low and middle-income countries (Lustig, 2017; Margitic & Ravallion, 2019). Recent scholarship has also underscored that the expansions of social protection in developing countries since the 1990s have concentrated on anti-poverty programs in the form of noncontributory and tax-financed social assistance schemes, often in combination with improved access of vulnerable groups to basic services, such as health care and education (Barrientos, 2013; Leisering, 2018). Accordingly, while the historical structure of social expenditures has been strongly marked by patronage and clientelism, recent trends in the politics of social expenditures potentially indicate that these patterns might not be immutable.

2.2 | Structural change, globalization, and policy diffusion

Much research about the expansion of social expenditures across early industrializers focused on the role of economic and demographic transformations, associated with the transition away from mainly agrarian and rural societies. The growth of social spending was in this vein traditionally seen as a functional response to the societal changes brought about by industrialization, including urbanization and the withering of family ties (Wilensky, 1975). More recent trends in industrializing economies as in East Asia, bear some resemblance to these accounts (Gough, 2008). With reference to the contemporary situation in Latin America however, studies have rather demonstrated how combined processes of deagrarianization and deindustrialization are associated with increased demands for tax-financed social protection (Carnes & Mares, 2014; Haggard, Kaufman, & Long, 2013; Mares & Carnes, 2009; Rodrik, 2016). Especially, increased risks faced by middle-income groups in contexts characterized by deindustrialization and labor market deregulation has been linked to the formation of strategic alliances between low- and middle-income groups promoting the expansion of noncontributory social protection, which mainly benefit the poor. This tendency has moreover been associated with the rise of labor-related and left parties across the region (Carnes & Mares, 2014). As another structural cause of cross-national divergence with regard to the expansion of government, some have moreover pointed to the encumbering influence of ethnic diversity, especially when such diversity is laden with historic antipathies (Easterly & Levine, 1997; Keefer & Khemani, 2003).

During the last decades, the external sources of structural pressures have figured prominently in studies of social protection systems, not least with regard to developing countries (Desai & Rudra, 2018; Ha, 2015; Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001; Nooruddin & Simmons, 2009; Rudra, 2008). This interest relates to the global tendency, observable roughly since the 1990s, towards the liberalization of domestic economic markets, and the removal of barriers to trade and foreign investments, often simply referred to as globalization (Rudra, 2008). Two rival hypotheses regarding the impacts of economic openness on social expenditures are often depicted against each other.

On the one hand, governments are pressured to increase social spending in order to compensate citizens for increased risks and potential losses associated with greater exposure to external markets, or alternatively, to promote the productivity and competitiveness of the national economy by investing in human capital enhancing services (Rodrik, 1998; see also Adserà & Boix, 2002; Avelino et al., 2005). On the other hand, studies have commonly observed a negative association between openness and social expenditures, particularly regarding developing countries (Ha, 2015; Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001; Nooruddin & Simmons, 2009; Rudra, 2008). This effect is often attributed to a pressure on states to reduce taxes and regulations in order to minimize production costs and thus increase the competitiveness of domestic firms on global markets. Rudra (2008) argue convincingly that developing countries are particularly affected by these downward pressures due to collective-action problems faced by labor organizations in presence of weak and fragmented labor market institutions (cf. Garrett, 1998).

Another potential source of external influence is policy diffusion, or the transnational flow of ideas and policy scripts. On the one hand, powerful international organizations seek to promote certain policies that correspond to their own agendas, causing the adoption of similar reforms across countries. On the other hand, ideas might spread horizontally, as countries emulate policy models from their neighbors. Such tendencies might be of increasing importance as countries become more tightly integrated, and have been emphasized in several recent works on the global spread of new instruments in social protection (Brooks, 2015; Leisering, 2018; Schmitt et al., 2015).

2.3 | Democracy and social expenditures

Regime type is often highlighted as an important mediator of the influence of structural factors on social expenditures (Avelino et al., 2005; Boix, 2003; Ha, 2015; Huber & Stephens, 2012; for an overview, see Acemoglu et al., 2015). One central finding from previous research on the impact of globalization is, for example, that democracies tend to be more likely to meet the pressures from increased openness with higher social spending, compared to countries with authoritarian governments (Avelino et al., 2005; Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001; but see Bastiaens & Rudra, 2018).

Conventional theoretical models often embark from the assumption that social expenditures are essentially redistributive, and that democratization in unequal societies should be associated with an increased pressure for higher social expenditures from the enfranchised population with lower incomes (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). A critical review of existing evidence on this relationship however concedes that the policy outcomes of democracy seem to be more heterogeneous than what can be inferred from such general theoretical models. Several observers have noted the difficulties that the poor have in exercising influence over policymaking in democratic developing countries, and have accordingly sought the sources of divergent policy outcomes in the varying interests or ideological dispositions of economic elites and the middle classes (e.g., Acemoglu et al., 2015; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2008; Rudra & Tobin, 2017).

A complementary perspective on the heterogeneity of distributive outcomes of democracy asserts that equalizing the access to political institutions will not necessarily lead to more government intervention unless the exercise of public authority is regarded as trustworthy, predictable and impartial (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). The perceived impartiality of state institutions is generally assumed to generate higher levels of trust, both towards public institutions as well between among citizens. Both political and social trust may in turn facilitate government intervention, including higher taxes to fund social expenditures, by fostering large-scale contingent consent (Levi, 1998; Rothstein, 1998).

2.4 | Political parties—Bringing collective actors back in

The consequences of democratization and structural changes are arguably not automatic responses to the underlying social structure or institutional configuration at any given time, but depends also on the behavior of collective actors that aggregate interests and promote these in political decision making, as well as the relative power of these actors (Huber & Stephens, 2001; Korpi, 1983). In modern democracies, parties have been seen as the most important agents of political representation (Hagopian, 2009). Party competition in electoral democracies is commonly thought of as structured along a Left–Right continuum, ultimately defined by attitudes towards equality, with the Left seen as striving for greater equality, while the Right to a greater extent tends to legitimize inequalities (Bobbio, 1996). An extension of social citizenship, with an associated increase in the relative levels of social expenditures, can be regarded as a central means to this end for the Left. The literature has moreover emphasized that the less affluent classes tend to make up the main support base of left parties (Huber & Stephens, 2001; Korpi, 1983). While there are reasons to be careful about generalizing from the experiences of affluent countries to the contemporary tendencies in the developing world, the Left–Right dimension seems to be a reference point for political orientations across the globe (Noël & Thérien, 2008). Democratic politics in general, and the role of Left partisanship in particular, thus arguably deserves further empirical exploration with regard to non-western experiences (cf. Gough, 2008).

The differences in context should however receive serious attention in such inquiries. One frequently recognized source of divergence between old and new democracies is the characteristics of party systems. In emerging democracies, party systems are typically weakly institutionalized and party-voter linkages often unstable (Hagopian, 2009; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Randall, 2006). Relatedly, when democracy was introduced in the old democracies of Western Europe, this followed an earlier process of industrialization and national unification, whereas democratization in developing countries often took place in contexts of diverse livelihood strategies, limited state control and weak national cohesion (Wood & Gough, 2006). The transition to democracy during the third wave has moreover often been a relatively sudden event, with the consequence that parties in new democracies often lack close connections to specific social groups (Van Biezen, 2003). The stronger tendencies of poor voters to prioritize immediate material rewards, may also drive politicians in developing countries to adopt more clientelistic strategies, involving material incentives targeted directly to specific categories of voters, rather than more programmatic approaches (Kitschelt, 2000). While in this way an impediment to broad-based collective action, clientelism may also be abated by the emergence of democratic pressures from below, especially when voiced by ideologically driven political parties (Gough, 2008).

Another aspect which is also brought into question regarding the situation in new democracies is the role of class in structuring the alignments of voters (Rudra, 2008). Here, the discussion has at times instead privileged the salience of ethnicity as the main source of political cleavages, especially in Africa and Asia (Easterly & Levine, 1997; Horowitz, 1985), but also in Latin America (Van Cott, 2007). The affinity between Left parties and relatively affluent groups of formal sector workers in a developmental context has moreover raised concerns regarding whether these parties actually represent the interests of the least privileged, especially the rural poor (McGuire, 1999; cf. Rudra & Tobin, 2017).

Despite the many challenges highlighted above, parties have proven pivotal to the transition to, and indeed the consolidation of, democracy throughout the developing world (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016; Hagopian, 2009). Several studies have also shown how leftist and labor-related parties have influenced government policy and development strategies across world regions

(Sandbrook, Edelman, Heller, & Teichman, 2007), including Latin America (Huber & Stephens, 2012; Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001; Pribble, 2013; Teichman, 2008), East Asia (Kim, 2010; Kwon, 2009; Wong, 2004) as well as Central and Eastern Europe (Careja & Emmenegger, 2009). Nor does the otherwise strong ethnic orientation of parties in the sub-Saharan context preclude programmatic stances on social policy altogether. Rather, some cases illustrate that ethnic and socio-economic positions might intersect and represent overlapping bases of support for political parties, also in the African context. Moreover, the multitude of social bases of political parties, and large cross-country variation across the continent, has been increasingly highlighted (Basedau, Erdmann, Lay, & Stroh, 2011; Elischer, 2013; cf. Bermeo & Yashar, 2016).

A few previous studies have sought to explore the impact of partisanship on social expenditure in non-western contexts using a quantitative comparative approach. Careja and Emmenegger (2009) find a robust association between Left party incumbency and social spending in a wide sample of post-communist countries, spanning the period 1993–2002. Ha (2015), studying a global sample of developing countries between 1975 and 2005, finds a positive impact of democracy, but no association between Left parties and overall levels of social spending, similar to the findings presented by Huber et al. (2008) for Latin America. Instead, these two studies find effects of partisanship on the allocation of expenditures, with Left parties favoring public services, rather than social security spending (in contrast to the findings by Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001). These findings are interpreted by the authors of both studies as indicative of an alternative strategy of left parties to increase redistribution, given the constraints governments faced in changing the size of the redistributive budget, in combination with the distributional profile of inherited social insurance schemes. However, the more recent trend towards improved public finances and growing global support on anti-poverty programs seem to indicate that governments could potentially be in a better position to influence the size as well as the distributive profile of social expenditures. This is also what results presented by Huber and Stephens (2012) indicate, with reference to the short period after 2000 included in their study.

Some differences between these studies and the one presented here deserves mentioning. The studies by Huber and colleagues (Huber et al., 2008; Huber & Stephens, 2012) focus the historical determinants of the *levels* of social expenditures and their variation across countries, up until 2005, and has, like Careja and Emmenegger (2009) a regional perspective. Ha (2015) on the other hand studies changes in social expenditures in a global sample. The context of her study however, is distinct from the one presented here, as it includes also non-democracies and covers a time-period characterized by the debt crisis in the Global South, high prevalence of authoritarian governments and a global trend towards market oriented structural reforms. In view of the global and domestic developments affecting non-western countries during the last decades, there are thus arguably important reasons to revisit and further explore the link between party politics and social spending.

3 | DATA AND ANALYTIC APPROACH

3.1 | The dependent variable and structure of the dataset

The empirical analyses presented below are based on a global sample of democracies, while excluding the longstanding members of the OECD. The analyses include only country-years coded as democratic according to the Boix–Miller–Rosato Dichotomous Coding of Democracy, version 3.0 (Boix, Miller, & Rosato, 2018). Using these basic criteria, and gathering observations with data on all relevant variables on least two occasion between 1995 and 2015, generates an

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	*SD*	Min	Max
Social expenditure (% of GDP)[a]	10.9	6.64	0.10	25.1
Left party government[b]	0.39	0.44	0.00	1.00
Centre party government[b]	0.14	0.30	0.00	1.0
GDP/capita (log)[c]	8.73	1.05	5.2	10.4
GDP per capita growth (annual %)[c]	2.4	3.7	−13.9	14.2
Industry, employment (% of total)[c]	22.5	6.0	2.9	42.7
Agriculture, employment (% of total)[c]	21.0	17.4	0.7	85.0
Urban population (% of total)[c]	64.3	18.3	15.1	94.9
Population ages 65 and above (% of total)[c]	8.5	4.4	2.6	19
Trade (exports + imports as % of GDP)[c]	86.5	49.8	19.3	326
FDI, net inflows (% of GDP)[c]	7.61	28.2	−43.5	370
Quality of Government[d]	0.56	0.15	0.25	0.9
Regional social expenditure (lagged mean)[a]	9.83	4.80	1.36	24.8

[a]ILO: Social Security Report/Social Security Inquiry.
[b]Scartascini et al (2018): Database of Political Institutions 2017.
[c]World Bank: World Development Indicators.
[d]PRS Group: International Country Risk Guide.

unbalanced panel of 301 observations nested within 46 countries (see Appendix for a detailed overview). The presentation below first focuses on those 33 countries that have an unbroken record of democracy as of 1990, and then extends the scope of the analyses to the full sample.[1]

The dependent variable is total public social expenditures (including health care), expressed as a percentage of GDP. Data are from the statistical annex of the World Social Protection Report (International Labour Office, 2017), published by the International Labour Office, and includes observations for 5-year intervals for the years up until 2005, and more frequently thereafter, although with highly uneven coverage across countries. Summary statistics regarding the dependent, as well as all independent variables, are presented in Table 1.

3.2 | Political parties

Lack of adequate data on ideological orientations of political parties has been a perennial problem in studies of the political economy of non-OECD countries. The analyses presented below employ indicators on the strength and ideological orientation of political parties in government based on information from the Database of Political Institutions (DPI) 2017 (Scartascini, Cruz, & Keefer, 2018). This database contains an indicator on the ideological orientation of government parties, labeling them as belonging to the Left, the Centre or the Right, based on the parties' preferences regarding the degree of state control of the overall economy. Parties that in the sources of DPI are defined as conservative, Christian democratic, or simply Right-wing are classified as Right-wing in the DPI, while parties that are defined as communist, socialist, social democratic, or left-wing are classified as Leftist. Those defined as centrist in the sources or

when party position can best be described as centrist, "e.g., party advocates strengthening private enterprise in a social-liberal context," are accordingly labeled as Center parties (Scartascini et al., 2018, p. 6). Parties which could not be classified are coded as missing in the analyses.

In order to account for the relative strength of parties in coalition governments, the party indicators are weighted according to that party group's representation in the legislature. This is done by dividing the number of parliamentary seats held by parties classified as Left, Center, and Right, respectively, by the total number of seats held by all government parties. The indicator for each party group thus take on values between 0 and 1, reflecting the range from no representation in government to full dominance by one party or a group of parties with the same orientation.

Some caveats associated with this data are however worth spelling out. The database lacks information on the number of cabinet portfolios held by different parties, nor does it contain information on minor parties in the legislature (cf. Huber et al., 2008). Also, only the three main parties in government are coded with regard to their ideological orientation, impeding any analyses of the impact of minor coalition partners. With regard to party classifications, the threefold left–center–right classification is admittedly rather coarse, but still provide a useful indication of the ideological orientation of parties on this central dimension. As the partisan indicators provided by DPI is the only source of such data covering a global sample of countries over a longer period of time, it has, despite its shortcomings, gained prominence as "the go-to source for cross-national ideological identification" (Rudra & Tobin, 2017, p. 296).

3.3 | Other independent variables

The analyses include a set of controls, originally from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, downloaded from the QoG Standard Dataset version Jan19 (Teorell et al., 2019). The level of economic development is measured by the log of GDP per capita, and the rate of economic growth as the annual change in the GDP per capita. Demographics are accounted for by the degree of urbanization, measured as the urban population as a share of the total population, and the share of the population aged 65 and above. The degree of (de)industrialization and deagrarianization is measured by the employment share of the industrial and agrarian sectors, respectively. The effect of globalization is considered through indicators on the net inflow of Foreign Direct Investments, and the total value of exports and imports, expressed as a share of GDP.

In order to account for the existence of trustworthy, impartial, and uncorrupted government institutions, the analyses include a measure of the Quality of Government (QoG), in the form of an index scaled 0–1, with higher values indicating higher rates of QoG (Rothstein, Samanni, & Teorell, 2012).[2] In order to test for the potential influence of policy diffusion across countries, the analyses also controls for the average of the lagged levels of social expenditures across the world region to which the observation belongs (using a similar logic as Brooks' (2015) measure of *regional diffusion*). Policy diffusion through the influence from international organizations is unfortunately difficult to account for within the current analytical framework. Similarly, ethnic fractionalization does not enter in the below analyses, as there are no comparative time-series data on this indicator, which is moreover characterized by "tremendous time persistence" (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003, p. 8), and is thus at least partly accounted for by the analytic technique presented in the next section.

3.4 | Analytic techniques

Relying on pooled time-series cross-sectional data means dealing with particular challenges associated with analyzing hierarchically structured data (Beck & Katz, 1995). Given that this study has a focus on changes during a defined temporal context, rather than explaining cross-country differences, the analyses will focus on the observable within-country changes using fixed effects models. This approach also limits the risk of biased estimates stemming from unobserved heterogeneity with regards to time invariant country-level contextual factors (Allison, 2009).

In order to deal with the potential clustering of the error terms arising from the nested character of the data, all analyses are performed using the robust-cluster estimator of the variance–covariance matrix, which is a variant of the Huber-White estimator that remains valid despite any potential pattern of correlations among errors within units of analysis (Rogers, 1993). In order to account for any underlying time trends in the data, year dummies are included in all models, but to save space, the coefficients of these are not presented in the result tables. Taking the nature of the political process into account, and in order to reduce problems related to reversed causality, all independent variables are lagged one year. The models were also run excluding one country at the time in order to verify that the results are not driven by any particularly influential cases.

4 | RESULTS

The results of regressions using a sample of 33 stable non-OECD democracies are displayed in Table 2. The first model includes only the partisan indicators, while the following three columns display the results of regressions where the control variables are added in a stepwise fashion; with Model 2 incorporating socio-demographic factors, Model 3 adding measures of globalization, and Model 5 adding the QoG indicator. Model 6 then adds the indicator of social expenditures at the level of each country's world region.

The results indicate that Left party government and GDP growth are consistently associated with the evolution of social expenditures across the models. The robust negative influence of economic growth could reflect government efforts to meet periods of economic recession by increased social expenditures, or represent automatic or discrete reactions to increased social needs. However, it is hard to disregard the potential effect of the inclusion of GDP as a denominator in the dependent variable, with economic growth leading to lower relative levels of social expenditure, all else being equal, especially when considering the stickiness of changes in social expenditures. The negative sign of the logged GDP indicator, although insignificant, could potentially be explained in similar ways. The other controls do not reach standard levels for statistical significance, but are largely signed according to expectations, with the industrialization indicator aligning with the deindustrialization hypothesis. Interestingly, urbanization changes sign from positive to negative as the impact of globalization is accounted for. The globalization indicators in turn, are signed in opposite directions.

The indicated association between Left partisanship and social expenditures is indeed sizeable, equivalent to a 1.3 percentage point increase in the share of GDP devoted to social expenditures, if the composition of government changes from one lacking leftist parties, to a government fully dominated by the Left. This effect should moreover be viewed in light of the low levels of social expenditures in many of the included countries. Taking the mean value of social expenditure in the dataset (11%) as a reference, this effect represents a relative increase of social spending of over 10%.

TABLE 2 Determinants of social expenditure (% of GDP) in 32 non-OECD countries with continuous democracy, 1995–2015

	1	2	3	4	5
Left party government	1.097	1.298*	1.333*	1.334*	1.322*
	(0.540)	(0.621)	(0.575)	(0.574)	(0.553)
Center party government	0.570	0.626	0.480	0.472	0.473
	(0.572)	(0.688)	(0.678)	(0.655)	(0.653)
GDP/capita (log)		−2.627	−2.315	−2.334	−2.301
		(1.341)	(1.505)	(1.517)	(1.539)
GDP per capita growth (annual %)		−0.122**	−0.102**	−0.102*	−0.102*
		(0.045)	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Industry, employment (% of total)		−0.120	−0.140	−0.135	−0.132
		(0.122)	(0.132)	(0.137)	(0.129)
Agriculture, employment (% of total)		−0.099	−0.088	−0.083	−0.083
		(0.094)	(0.095)	(0.097)	(0.097)
Urban population (% of total)		0.017	−0.024	−0.029	−0.028
		(0.116)	(0.123)	(0.126)	(0.124)
Population aged 65 and above (% of total)		0.264	0.543	0.549	0.548
		(0.436)	(0.410)	(0.412)	(0.415)
Trade (% of GDP)			−0.019	−0.020	−0.020
			(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)			0.004	0.004	0.004
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Quality of Government				−0.740	−0.742
				(4.403)	(4.416)
Regional social expenditure (mean)					0.019
					(0.167)
Constant	9.778**	34.780	34.197	34.887	34.346
	(0.679)	(20.495)	(19.936)	(20.522)	(19.723)
Observations	225	225	225	225	225
R^2	.297	.386	.410	.410	.410
Number of countries	32	32	32	32	32

Note: Estimates from fixed-effects models with cluster-robust variance estimates. Robust *SE*s in parentheses. Year dummies are included in all models (coefficients not shown).
*$p < .05$.; **$p < .01$.

As maturing democracy was hypothesized as another contextual factor fostering a strengthened salience of Left partisanship, the question is whether these results hold also when the same analyses are performed using an extended sample including country-years coded as democratic also from countries with a less stable democratic record during the period of analysis. As visible from Table 3, this exercise by and large reproduces the findings from the analyses of the

TABLE 3 Determinants of social expenditure (% of GDP) in 46 non-western democracies, 1995–2015

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Left party government	0.855*	1.073*	1.072**	1.047*	1.016*	0.996*
	(0.396)	(0.410)	(0.387)	(0.417)	(0.401)	(0.489)
Center party government	0.833	0.853	0.776	0.739	0.745	0.749
	(0.494)	(0.550)	(0.552)	(0.531)	(0.526)	(0.519)
GDP/capita (log)		−3.306**	−3.274*	−3.280*	−3.167*	−3.174*
		(1.195)	(1.292)	(1.288)	(1.355)	(1.365)
GDP per capita growth (annual %)		−0.113**	−0.101*	−0.102**	−0.102**	−0.104**
		(0.042)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.035)
Industry, employment (% of total)		−0.115	−0.121	−0.111	−0.102	−0.102
		(0.105)	(0.110)	(0.117)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Agriculture, employment (% of total)		−0.082	−0.074	−0.067	−0.065	−0.066
		(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.075)
Urban population (% of total)		0.012	−0.000	−0.005	−0.005	−0.006
		(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Population aged 65 and above (% of total)		0.088	0.256	0.273	0.273	0.273
		(0.355)	(0.376)	(0.379)	(0.382)	(0.381)
Trade (% of GDP)			−0.010	−0.011	−0.011	−0.011
			(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)			0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Quality of Government				−1.217	−1.237	−1.228
				(2.995)	(2.992)	(2.984)
Regional social expenditure (mean)					0.069	0.069
					(0.169)	(0.169)
Left party government × GDP per capita growth						0.008
						(0.065)
Constant	8.882**	40.618**	40.533**	41.091**	39.425**	39.525**
	(0.523)	(13.952)	(14.001)	(13.925)	(13.491)	(13.572)
Observations	301	301	301	301	301	301
R^2	.304	.388	.399	.400	.401	.401
Number of countries	46	46	46	46	46	46

Note: Estimates from fixed-effects models with cluster-robust variance estimates. Robust *SE*s in parentheses. Year dummies included in all models (coefficients not shown).

*$p < .05$.; **$p < .01$.

previous sample of more stable democracies. However, the estimate of the Left party indicator shrinks slightly. Another difference is that the GDP/capita indicator seems negatively associated with social expenditures.

As improved rates of economic growth could be one potential contextual factor which underpins the ability of Left parties to influence government priorities regarding public expenditures, Model 6 also include an interaction term between GDP growth and Left party government.[3] As such interactions are easily misinterpreted, the analyses proceed by calculating substantively meaningful marginal effects (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006). Figure 1 graphically presents the marginal effect of Left party government across values of economic growth observed in the data, with the solid line representing the spectrum where the marginal effect of Left party government is within the bounds of the 95% confidence interval. As visible from the black line in the figure, the association between economic growth and Left party government is actually only statistically significant for nonnegative levels of growth (at the very highest levels of growth however, standard errors are large due to a small number of observations). The coefficient of this interaction term is however heavily influenced by the inclusion of Cyprus in the sample. When this country is excluded (see the gray line in Figure 1), not only is the statistically significance of Left party government conditional on sufficient levels of economic growth; the size of this effect also seem to increase with levels of growth. However, in this sample the coefficient of Left party government is only statistically significant when levels of economic growth exceed approximately 2%. This finding might indicate more muted ideological differences in times of economic slowdowns but that left parties tend to prioritize social expenditures as the economy expands.

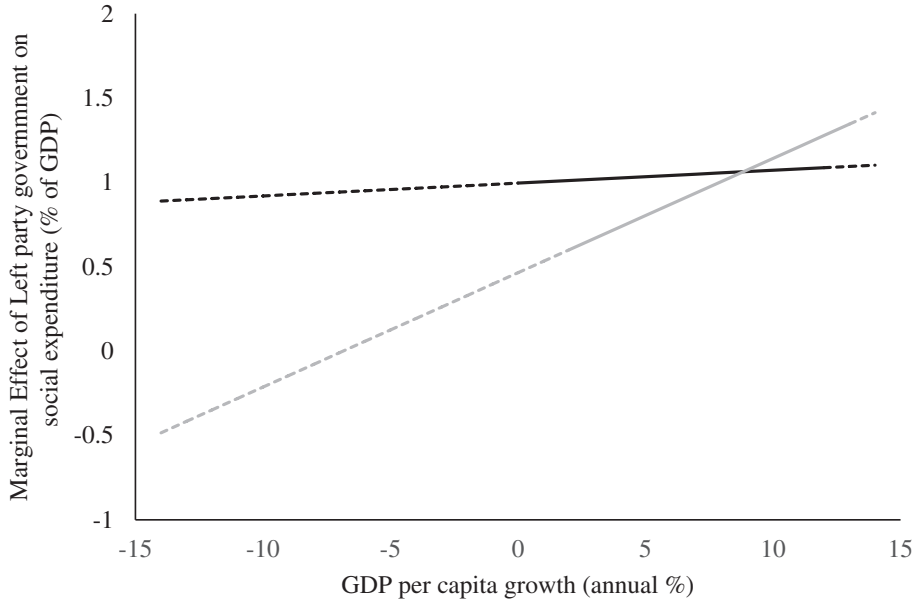

FIGURE 1 Average marginal effects of Left party government on social expenditure (in % of GDP) at different levels of GDP/capita growth. Solid line, significant association (95% interval); dashed line, nonsignificant association; black line, sample including 46 countries; gray line, sample including 45 countries (excluding Cyprus)

5 | DISCUSSION

Previous research on the driving forces of social expenditures in developing countries has tended to emphasize the role of economic structures and political institutions. As a compliment to these perspectives, this article has revisited the debate about partisanship and social expenditures in non-OECD countries, with new and more recent data. This has allowed for testing whether Left parties are particularly prone to promote higher spending levels when in government, during a period posterior to the austere years of the debt crisis in the 1980s, and subsequent to the "third wave" of democratization. The results show that the representation of Left parties in government since the mid-1990s is indeed associated with increases in social expenditures. This association remains also after accounting for country and time fixed-effects, as well as institutional and structural confounding factors, but seem conditional on sufficient levels of economic growth.

The results presented here paint a partly different picture compared to some earlier studies, which have sometimes downplayed the role of partisan politics in a developmental context. This study has sought to bring the context of distributional conflict into the fore, emphasizing how the economic situation, the quality and duration of democracy, as well as the global policy environment could potentially impact on the ability of parties on the Left to pursue their preferred policies. The results presented above should be seen in the light of more favorable conditions on all these dimensions in the period since 1990s, compared to previous decades. The analyses particularly point to the role of economic growth as an enabling factor for Left party governments to mobilize resources for social protection. This study however provides scant support for the hypothesis that economic development in itself would be beneficial for increased social spending, at least when measured as a fraction of GDP. During the period of analysis rather the opposite seem to have been the case. The interrelatedness of the dependent and independent variables in this case however calls for careful interpretation of the results. The result of the interaction between left party government and growth moreover suggests that further research is needed in order to explore the political dynamics behind the relationship between economic growth and social expenditure.

Despite some affinity of these results with those of mainstream welfare state research on early industrializers, we should not take for granted that the mechanisms which underlie the observed association between Left government strength and social expenditure are necessarily the same in this sample as in the advanced political economies of the OECD. Developing countries today face an economic and institutional environment, characterized by global flows of capital, goods, labor and ideas, as well as persuasive structures of supranational governance, much different from the post-war welfare state expansion in Western Europe (cf. Gough, 2008). The heterogeneity of the countries under study here, with varying cultures and institutional legacies, further underscores the modesty needed when trying to generalize the results of a study like this one. Therefore, this article has argued extensively for the need to put the study of distributional politics into context.

Regarding the political left, rather than traditional social-democratic parties, non-western countries exhibit different kinds of both institutionalized and emerging political forces, that combine popular appeals with demands for public investments and redistribution through government intervention (see, e.g., Huber & Stephens, 2012; Sandbrook et al., 2007; Weyland et al., 2010; Wong, 2004). The heterogeneity of Left parties across third wave democracies underscores the need for further empirical research that seeks to clarify the social base of parties, their relationship to emerging social movements, and situate these within the context of broader

processes of social change. The specific policy instruments parties of different ideologies advocate and actually pursue when in power also needs further exploration. Relatedly, the distributive consequences of social expenditures need sustained attention, particularly as countries across the developing world are experimenting with novel instruments to tackle poverty and exclusion. Lastly, and more generally, as "collective action is an outcome to be explained rather than assumed" (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016, p. 25), more empirical work arguably is needed regarding which factors determine individuals' dispositions to engage with politics more broadly, also in varying developmental contexts.

Studying these and related topics will require richer and more comprehensive historical data, as well as historical comparative case studies exploring how the development of social protection systems unfolds over time. Given the limitations of social expenditure as an indicator of institutional variation across countries, future comparative studies would particularly benefit from indicators on more detailed aspects of social citizenship across non-western countries (for pioneering work in this respect see Leisering, 2018). While there are important lessons to be learned from the frameworks of previous comparative welfare state research, the concepts underpinning future studies needs to be crafted taking the realities of developing countries into account. Not least should future research be sensitive to the potentially varying origins, forms and consequences of collective organization across the world.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Malta and Israel meet the inclusion criteria, but has a partly different history than many other countries in the sample, including a longer experience with democracy. However, these countries also went through decolonization and subsequent democratization in the post-WWII era. Additional analyses, excluding the two countries have been performed, without any substantial implications for the overall results.

[2] Alternative analyses, controlling also for the quality of democracy, using a measure based on the combined score of the Polity and Freedom House, was also performed without any substantial changes of the main results.

[3] Interaction with globalization and QoG were performed as well, without finding any substantial effects.

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APPENDIX

Observations included in the dataset

Country	Frequency	Years	Country	Frequency	Years	Country	Frequency	Years
Albania	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2013, 2015	Estonia	2	2000, 2005	Mozambique	2	1995, 2000
Argentina	5	2000, 2005, 2007–2009	Ghana	4	2000, 2005, 2009–2010	Nicaragua	3	2000, 2008–2009
Bahamas	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2013, 2015	Guatemala	6	2000, 2005, 2008–2011	Pakistan	5	1995, 2010–2013
Bolivia	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2014	Guyana	6	1995, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2009–2010	Paraguay	4	2005, 2007, 2009–2010
Botswana	5	1995, 2000, 2005, 2009–2010	Honduras	5	1995, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010	Peru	8	2005, 2007, 2009–2013, 2015
Brazil	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2013, 2015	Hungary	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2013, 2015	Philippines	10	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2013, 2015
Bulgaria	5	1995, 2000, 2011–2013	India	10	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2012, 2014	Poland	4	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007
Chile	9	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2013	Israel	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2013, 2015	Slovakia	3	1995, 2010, 2015
Colombia	6	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2010	Jamaica	7	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2011	Slovenia	6	2000, 2005, 2010–2013
Costa Rica	10	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2013, 2015	South Korea	11	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007–2014, 2015	South Africa	8	1995, 2000, 2005, 2009–2010, 2012–2013, 2015
Croatia	6	2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2011	Latvia	5	2000, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2013	Sri Lanka	2	1995, 2000

(Continues)

Country	Frequency	Years	Country	Frequency	Years	Country	Frequency	Years
Cyprus	10	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2014	Lithuania	7	2000, 2007, 2010–2014	Thailand	2	1995, 2000
Czech Republic	4	1995, 2000, 2005, 2015	Malawi	2	2007, 2015	Uruguay	5	1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015
Dominican Republic	7	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2010, 2014	Malta	10	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2014	Zambia	2	2010–2011
Ecuador	7	1990, 1995, 2005, 2007, 2009–2010, 2013–2014	Mexico	9	2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2013, 2015	Mean	6.5	2007
El Salvador	9	2000, 2005, 2007, 2009–2013, 2015	Moldova	4	2000, 2005, 2007, 2009	Sum	301	