



A global perspective on party organizations. Validating the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization Dataset (V-Party)

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ABSTRACT

Party organization is a central concept in comparative politics. Yet, data on party organizational features is sparse, scattered and available for a limited set of countries and parties. To advance global research on party organizations, we present the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization Dataset (V-Party) – the most comprehensive dataset to date, including a wide range of information about organizational features and party stances of more than 1900 parties in 168 countries between 1970 and 2019. In this paper, we focus particular attention on new measures that relate to parties’ territorial reach, ties to social organizations, candidate nomination procedures, personalization, and internal cohesion. We validate these new measures using Adcock and Collier’s (2001) three-pronged validation approach, looking at content, criterion and construct validity, to showcase and emphasize the potential of V-Party.

1. Introduction

Party organization has crucial implications for some of the biggest questions in comparative politics. Research suggests that organizational characteristics are consequential for electoral success and the durability of political parties (Tavits, 2012) which is key to ensure the accountability of elected leaders essential for democratic survival (Bernhard et al., 2020). Furthermore, party organizational features help explain public spending (Rasmussen and Knutsen, 2019), political corruption (Schleiter and Voznaya, 2018), or economic growth (Bizzarro et al., 2018). In autocratic settings, ruling party organizational features are key predictors of regime change (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

Although party organizations feature prominently in explanations of substantive political outcomes, research is often hindered by a lack of (longitudinal) data on party organizational features. Despite some notable recent contributions (e.g. Kitschelt, 2013; Poguntke et al., 2016), existing datasets are limited to a small number of cases from specific geographical regions, and have limited time and geographic coverage. To advance comparative research on party organizations, we present the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization Dataset (V-Party) – the most

comprehensive publicly available dataset to date, including a wide range of information about organizational features and party stances of more than 1900 parties in 168 countries between 1970 and 2019. More specifically, here we introduce and validate V-Party’s organizational measures of parties’ territorial reach, ties to social organizations, candidate nomination procedures, personalization, and internal cohesion while we relegate the introduction of V-Party’s identity measures to a different place (Lührmann et al., 2021).¹ To show the usefulness and emphasize the potential of V-Party, we shortly introduce the data and then follow Adcock and Collier’s (2001) three-pronged strategy to showcase V-Party’s content, criterion and construct validity.

2. Measuring party organizational features – the V-Party survey

V-Party provides data on virtually all political parties that have sat in national parliaments for 168 countries during the period 1900–2019 (see Lührmann et al., 2020).² For the time period 1970–2019, V-Party additionally offers expert-coded assessments of party organization and identity for 1941 parties across 1755 elections. 665 experts rated the policy positions and organizational capacity of political parties for all

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¹ For a more thorough presentation of each validation chapter see also Düpont et al. (2021).

² To facilitate the cross-comparability of V-Party, party identifiers are harmonized based on Party Facts (Döring and Regel, 2019).

Table 1

V-party items capturing party organizational attributes.

Item	Question	Response categories
Local party offices (v2palocoff)	Does this party maintain permanent offices that operate outside of election campaigns at the local or municipal-level?	0: The party does not have permanent local offices. ... 4: The party has permanent local offices in all or almost all municipalities.
Active community presence (v2paactcom)	To what degree are party activists and personnel permanently active in local communities?	0: There is negligible permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities. ... 4: There is widespread permanent presence of party activists and personnel in local communities.
Affiliate organizations (v2pasocfie)	To what extent does this party maintain ties to prominent social organizations?	0: The party does not maintain ties to any prominent social organization. ... 4: The party controls prominent social organizations.
Candidate nomination (v2panom)	Which of the following options best describes the process by which the party decides on candidates for the national legislative elections?	0: The party leader unilaterally decides on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections. ... 4: All registered voters decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections in primaries/caucuses.
Elite cohesion (v2padisa)	To what extent do the elites in this party display disagreement over party strategies?	0: Party elites display almost complete disagreement over party strategies and many party elites have left the party. ... 4: Party elites display virtually no visible disagreement over party strategies.
Personalization of party (v2paind)	To what extent is this party a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader?	0: The party is not focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual leader. ... 4: The party is solely focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.

parties that reached more than 5% of the vote share at a given election.³ The questionnaire was developed in a series of consultative meetings between 2017 and 2019 and tested in a pilot study in summer 2019. The coding was conducted in early 2020. The data was then aggregated using V-Dem's Bayesian Item Response Theory measurement model (Pemstein et al., 2019). Typically, at least 4 coders provided their

³ While the data is provided with party-election-years as the unit of observation, the questionnaire explicitly asked experts to "consider the policy positions and capacity before the election in question" (Lührmann et al., 2020, p. 20). In rare cases where more than one election took place in a given year, experts rated the latest election. Few parties that oscillated around the threshold being in and out at times were still included and rated, even if below the threshold, after consulting country and regional experts regarding their relevance.

assessment per observation.

Beyond policy stances, V-Party has several items (cf. Table 1) capturing different aspects of party organizations (Lührmann et al., 2020). For one, it includes measures of organizational extensiveness, pertaining to a party's capacity to reach and mobilize supporters across local communities which is at the core of classical accounts of "party strength" (e.g. Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1988). The measures focus on three attributes related to party organizational extensiveness: (1) geographic breadth of organization, (2) the depth of grassroots organization at the local level, and (3) links to social organizations (cf. Kitschelt, 1994).

V-Party also includes measures that capture the distribution of decision-making authority within parties. The degree to which lower cadres and members are active in internal politics has important implications for organizational goals, party policies and campaigning (Panebianco, 1988; Schumacher et al., 2013). *Candidate nomination* refers to the internal balance of power between different organizational levels over the selection of a party's legislative candidates, recognizing the fact that in some parties leaders sidestep lower cadres and nominate their preferred candidates even where de jure rules dictate otherwise (Ichino and Nathan, 2012).

Finally, V-Party captures elite cohesion within parties reflecting what Janda (1980, p. 118) called "the degree of congruence in the attitudes and behavior" as parties vary in the extent to which they are able to quell internal conflict.

In order to facilitate validation against existing datasets, we exclude closed autocracies (Lührmann et al., 2018) where the executive branch is not subject to elections. The dynamics of party organization in single-party regimes – especially communist regimes – is quite different from those in electoral regimes. V-Party, of course, provides data for such parties just as well as it contains several variants of each item, e.g. model estimates, original scale, simple means and others (cf. Lührmann et al., 2020, pp. 8–9); to ease the presentation we, however, aggregate the items into three scales as an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed three distinct factors⁴:

- (1) Permanent local party offices (v2palocoff), active local community presence (v2paactcom), and ties to social organizations (v2pasocfie) load high on one factor. This dimension captures **organizational extensiveness**, with high levels indicating a party with extensive grassroots organization.
- (2) Personalization (v2paind) and candidate selection (v2panom) constitute a second factor. When switching the scale of v2paind both items pick up the **intra-party power concentration** between lower cadres and the leadership, with low levels indicating parties with a hierarchical structure where power rests in the hand of one leader or just few momentous party elites.
- (3) Finally, **elite cohesion** (v2padisa) embodies a third factor on its own supporting the notion that cohesion represents a distinct dimension of party organizations (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

Based on the EFA, we build additive indices applying no weights to allow for partial substitutability among the components. For this, we standardize the items at hand (z-scores) – a common step in index building (on the advantages and drawbacks of such a procedure see e.g. Levine, 1973; OECD, 2008). Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for each indicator and the three dimensions.

⁴ The three-factor solution is robust to changing the extraction and rotation method or analyzing subsamples of the data. A comprehensive discussion, alternative specifications and additional descriptive statistics can be found in the Online Supplement.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for V-Party's organizational items and dimensions.

Item/Dimension	n	mean	sd	min	median	max
Local party offices (v2palocoff)	4250	0.48	1.38	-3.14	0.60	3.23
Active community presence (v2paactcom)	4225	0.42	1.34	-3.04	0.47	3.67
Affiliate organizations (v2pasocfie)	4147	0.03	1.28	-3.55	-0.02	3.93
Candidate nomination (v2panom)	4030	0.22	1.33	-3.32	0.23	4.66
Elite cohesion (v2padisa)	4218	0.07	1.22	-4.46	0.08	3.02
Personalization of party (v2paid)	4280	-0.17	1.40	-2.93	-0.23	3.92
Organizational extensiveness	4131	-0.05	2.55	-7.43	0.03	6.65
Intra-party power concentration	4015	0.03	1.77	-5.30	0.16	3.98
Elite cohesion	4218	-0.05	0.99	-3.72	-0.04	2.34

3. Validating V-Party data

To showcase V-Party's validity we now follow [Adcock and Collier's \(2001\)](#) three-pronged strategy by assessing the face or content validity (3.1), the criterion validity (3.2), and the construct validity (3.3),

because “[n]one of the specific types of validation alone establishes validity; rather, each provides one kind of evidence to be integrated” ([Adcock and Collier, 2001](#), p. 543).

3.1. Content validity: the evolution of Selected Party Organizations

We start by examining to what extent V-Party data successfully captures patterns of party organizations that have been observed in well-studied parties and thus accurately captures the concepts it intends to measure. We exemplify the content validity selecting six political parties from around the globe. [Fig. 1](#) plots the development of the German Greens (B90/Grue), the Hungarian Civic Alliance/Fidesz, the Justice and Development Party (AKP, Turkey), the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil, Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, Japan).

Regarding the German Greens, V-Party data aptly captures the time they entered government for the first time from 1998 to 2005. Much like other ecological parties (cf. [Schumacher et al., 2013](#), p. 470) they are strongly activist-dominated in general. Still, the drop in intra-party power concentration during that phase reflects a process [Müller \(1994, p. 73\)](#) termed “governmentalization”, i.e. “a shift of power [...] to the party's team in government”. At the same time, they faced some

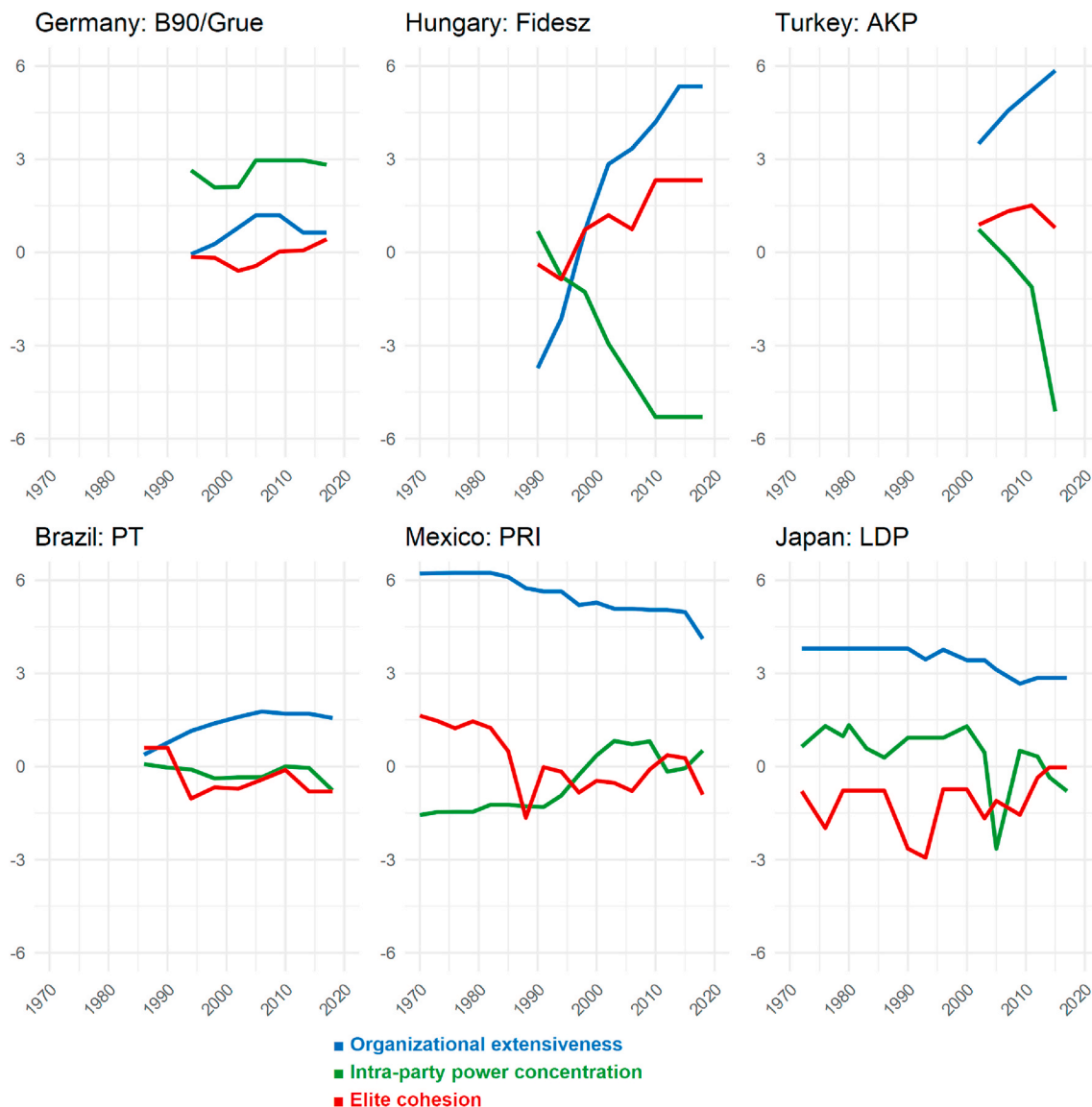
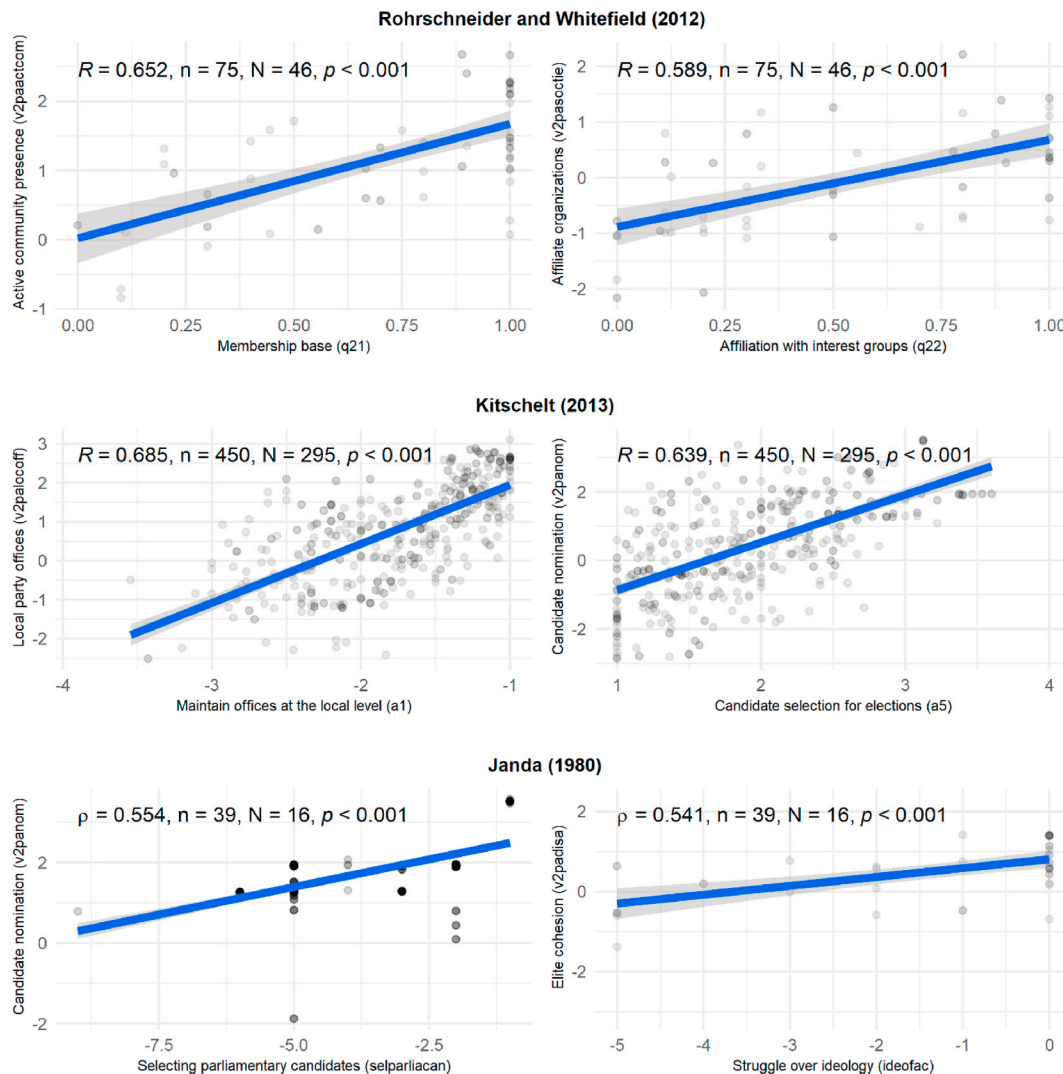


Fig. 1. Organizational evolution of selected party organizations.



Notes: R = Pearson's R, ρ = Spearman's Rho; n = number of "fuzzy matched" observations, N = number of unique, overlapping parties; gray area denotes 95 percent confidence interval.

Fig. 2. Validating V-Party data against extant surveys.

serious "ideological challenges" (e.g., the Kosovo war) which led to internal furor. Back in opposition they worked on being available for coalition government again by resolving internal frictions (Lees, 2018).

Turning to Fidesz, there is a steep increase in the party's organizational extensiveness during the 1990s when the party significantly expanded its activist base across the country, coupled with "a spectacular growth in the number of local organizations" (Enyedi and Linek, 2008, p. 465). Fidesz' activist base and local branches have been particularly active across the nation, organizing numerous mass rallies, town hall meetings, and demonstrations. V-Party not only captures the party's entrenched ties to social organizations (Greskovits, 2020) but also Fidesz' transformation from a youth movement to a highly centralized party increasingly being dominated by Victor Orban (Enyedi and Linek, 2008).

Regarding Turkey's AKP, which has been in power since 2002, V-Party data mirrors its expansion by investing in local branch structures through which the party maintains highly active community presence (Baykan, 2018), and by cultivating close ties to prominent civil society associations (Esen and Gumuscu, 2020). Furthermore, the data shows increasing concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of its leader, Tayyip Erdogan (Yardimci-Geyikçi and Yavuzylmaz, 2020). A

drop in internal party cohesion since 2010 reflects increasing internal discontent within the party ranks that led some prominent party members to defect to opposition.

Shifting our attention to Latin America, we focus on the Worker's party PT – one of the most influential actors in post-authoritarian Brazil. The PT combines some features of a typical mass party, among others entrenched ties to civil society, particularly to labor unions (see Hunter, 2010) which steadily grew until 2005 and remained relatively stable since then. The party is often characterized with inclusive decision-making procedures (Samuels, 2004). In recent years though, many observers noted that the former president and party leader, Lula da Silva, increased its grip over the party organization (Hunter and Power, 2007), which explains the drop in the intra-power concentration score.

V-Party also captures the organizational evolution of Mexico's PRI, extensively described in Langston (2017). Beginning from mid-1980s, there is a gradual decline in the party's organizational extensiveness. PRI had extensive networks of local branches and active communities, but the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s and subsequent market-oriented policy responses implemented by the leadership damaged the party's ties to allied labor unions. This culminated in

serious intra-party conflicts which eventually led to the defection of a major left-leaning faction led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. The drop in elite cohesion during the 1980s coincides with party ruptures. Relative to its peers, during the authoritarian era the PRI had collegial decision-making procedures and de jure rules such as term limits for party leadership. Accordingly, the internal balance of power increasingly shifted towards lower party cadres, especially since the early 1990s when a series of intra-party reforms were put into place (Langston, 2017).

Finally, we look at LDP, a party that has ruled Japan since its foundation in 1955 with very few exceptions. LDP is often described as having one of the most extensive organizations among its peers in liberal democracies – an observation supported by V-Party data. Yet, there is a decline in organizational extensiveness during the 2010s when the party's ties to prominent organizations such as farmers' and postmasters' associations weakened drastically (Krauss and Pekkanen, 2010). The notable drop in cohesion in the late 1980s and early 1990s corresponds to a period when a series of corruption scandals, internal disagreements about electoral reform proposals, and competition over party leadership exacerbated internal divisions (Pempel, 2008). The steep decrease in intra-party power concentration in the early 2000s mirrors Junichiro Koizumi's time as party leader who skillfully concentrated more power in his hands (Pempel, 2008).

3.2. Criterion validity: comparing measures of party organization

Although V-Party is unique in terms of scope and coverage, other expert surveys gathered data on organizational features of parties in particular regions or time periods as well. For assessing the criterion validity of V-Party, we match V-Party data with expert coded party surveys from Kitschelt's (2013) "Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project" dataset and Giger and Schumacher's (2015) compilation of surveys in their "Integrated Party Organization Dataset" (incl. among others Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012 and Janda, 1980). Fig. 2 plots V-Party's party-organizational features against extant data. In the Online Supplement we describe our matching procedure in detail given differences in the reference time of the surveys, and provide comprehensive checks for the three scales, more items and additional surveys.

To ease the presentation, we reversed the original ordering for some of the items to point in the same direction as the V-Party items. As Fig. 2 shows, there is a strong correlation between both *Active community presence* and *Affiliate organizations* and two items from Rohrschneider and Whitefield's (2012) survey asking for a "significant membership base" and (strong) ties to interest or civil society groups. Kitschelt (2013) in turn asked whether parties maintain offices and paid staff permanently at the municipal level with response categories ranging from not at all to permanent local offices in most districts. He also asked for the way candidates are selected for national legislative elections ranging from national party leaders to local/municipal actors. Expectedly, both items strongly correlate with *Local party offices* and *Candidate nomination*. V-Party data further matches with Janda's (1980) question capturing who is in charge of selecting parliamentary candidates with responses ranging from local supporters to the national committee. He also had three measures asking whether there is struggle over leadership, over party strategy or over ideological concerns ranging from little to no disagreement up to the point that larger factions have been established. For the former two we only find a weak to modest correlation with *Elite cohesion* ($\rho = 0.386$, $p = 0.007$ and $\rho = 0.079$, $p = 0.614$, respectively). However, Fig. 2 shows a quite strong correlation regarding ideological concerns again supporting the notion that cohesion is a distinct dimension of party organizations (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

Notes: R = Pearson's R, ρ = Spearman's Rho; n = number of "fuzzy matched" observations, N = number of unique, overlapping parties; gray area denotes 95 percent confidence interval.

Given that the surveys differ regarding the wording of questions,

response categories, and time period covered, one would not expect too much of an overlap. While there is no easy way to "test" the validity of the time-series, the fact that V-Party data still aligns well with extant data on party organizational characteristics from very different time points gives a first impression. Furthermore, we inspect coder (dis-) agreement more closely over time in the Online Supplement. One may argue that a larger disagreement for earlier years suggests that coders had more difficulties in assessing parties' organizational capacities for those years than for recent elections. This, in turn, would mean that inferences based on the early elections should be treated with more caution. We do find that coder disagreement is slightly higher in earlier elections; looking at subgroups, however, reveals that there is no systematic bias – neither for certain items nor for time or countries – which would call the data for the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s into doubt. In any case, V-Party includes measures of uncertainty from the model output which makes it easy to account for uncertainty in inferential models in future research.⁵ Taken together, both aspects put confidence in utilizing the data for longitudinal and cross-country analyses on a much broader scale than before. Yet, Adcock and Collier (2001, p. 542) call for a third test – the "AHM validation; that is, 'Assume the Hypothesis, Evaluate the Measure'".

3.3. Construct validity: party organizations and persistence revisited

To evaluate the construct validity, we examine the association between party organizational features and the survival of political parties. The purpose of this section is not to provide a full-fledged analysis of party survival nor to break new methodological ground. Instead, the rationale is "to take as given a reasonably well-established causal hypothesis" and examine "the association of the proposed indicator [i.e. party organization] with indicators of the other concepts in the causal hypothesis [i.e. party survival]. If the assessment produces an association that the causal hypothesis leads us to expect, then this is positive evidence for validity" (Adcock and Collier, 2001, p. 542). Previous research indeed highlighted that parties with strong grassroots organizations and ties to social groups are more likely to survive – and thrive – than those without such organizations (Tavits, 2012; Samuels and Zucco, 2015; Beyens et al., 2016). Moreover, the literature makes clear that schisms and defections undermine party survival whereas internally cohesive parties tend to be more stable (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

There is less consensus on the relationship between internal power concentration and party survival, though. Some studies argue that centralized decision-making structures can boost parties' capacity to quickly respond to changing competitive dynamics (e.g. Schumacher and Giger, 2018) because the dispersion of decision-making power can induce strategic inertia (Kitschelt, 1994). Yet, the flexibility of centralized parties may also make them vulnerable to breakdown especially when they are excessively dominated by an individual party leader. In such cases, scandals, electoral defeats, or the death of a leader can imperil the entire party (Panebianco, 1988). Scholars of autocracy also argue that increasing power concentration in the hands of dictators undermine party durability. When parties are run capriciously by the dictator, party cadres have fewer reasons to believe that their loyalty will be rewarded with long-term career advancement. This increases party elites' incentives to defect and makes parties more unstable (e.g. Magaloni, 2008).

Resuming the "AHM validation", we assess the impact of party organizational extensiveness, cohesion, and intra-party power concentration on the likelihood of party breakdown. Our sample includes 1515 parties from 150 countries between 1970 and 2019. Employing a discreet event history modeling framework (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004), our *dependent variable* is party breakdown denoting

⁵ We thank the anonymous reviewers and editor for suggesting the idea of looking at coder (dis-) agreement.

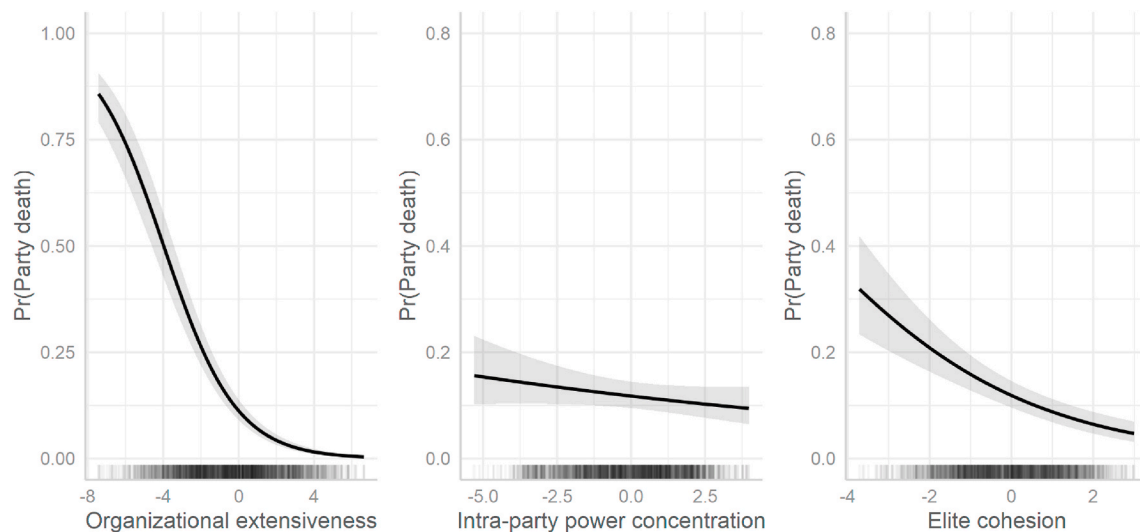


Fig. 3. Predicted probabilities of party breakdown (with 95 percent CIs).

whether a party's vote share falls below 5 percent in a given national legislative election.⁶ We fit random intercept logit models, allowing intercepts to vary by party and country. To account for duration dependence all models include the natural logarithm of duration. We control for several potential confounders that are likely to be related to party organizational features and party breakdown. Descriptive statistics, alternative model specifications, and regression tables can be found in the Online Supplement.

Fig. 3 plots the predicted probabilities from our main multivariate model. Our results suggest that party organizational extensiveness is negatively associated with the probability of party breakdown ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, devolution of decision-making authority from party leadership to lower cadres reduces the probability of party breakdown as indicated by a negative coefficient for the intra-party concentration index ($p < 0.05$). Elite cohesion expectedly plays an important role in party survival ($p < 0.001$) as well. The results remain robust when entering potential confounders which highlights the importance of party organizational aspects over contextual factors in shaping party durability. The coefficients for the number of consecutive elections, level of democracy (polyarchy), type of government (parliamentary versus presidential), and electoral system (proportional and mixed systems compared to majoritarian systems) are not statistically different from Zero. In short, strong grassroots organizations and elite cohesion are strongly associated with party survival. We also find that intra-party power concentration is negatively associated with party survival, though the substantive effect is much smaller than for elite cohesion or grassroots organization. These results accord with the findings from previous studies lending further support for V-Party's validity.

4. Conclusion

V-Party advances global research on party organizations as it includes new measures of parties' territorial reach, ties to social organizations, candidate nomination procedures, personalization, and internal cohesion. Providing comprehensive and longitudinal data for more than 1900 parties in 168 countries between 1970 and 2019, it paves the way for new analyses on party organizational features, its causes and its effects from a global perspective.

⁶ Applying more fine-grained operationalizations of "party death" (see e.g. Bolleyer et al., 2019) is unfeasible given the global scope of V-Party. We do, however, checked if a party just shortly falls below this threshold and re-appears again.

To show the usefulness and emphasize the potential of V-Party, we validated the data following Adcock and Collier's (2001) three-pronged strategy. First, we examined face or content validity by illustrating V-Party's ability to accurately capture the dynamics of party organizational features of well-studied parties. We further investigated the validity by comparing the new data to measures from other expert surveys. As V-Party aligns well with extant data on party organizational characteristics – both from more recent surveys (e.g. Kitschelt, 2013) as well as older ones reaching back to the 1980s (e.g. Janda, 1980) – we conclude that it provides sufficient criterion validity. Finally, in order to establish construct validity, we showed that V-Party measures of grassroots organization and elite cohesion expectedly correlate with party survival corroborating earlier findings.

In sum, V-Party provides a new and rich source of valid data to test old theories in new contexts, re-assess and expand existing knowledge on party organizations, and tackle pressing questions in a systematic and comparative manner – for the first time from a global perspective; and we hope that scholars will make extensive use of this new resource.

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Declaration of competing interest

We declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this articles.

Data availability

The V-Party dataset is available at <https://doi.org/10.23696/vpartydsv1>; the Online Supplement and additional material can also be found at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DQCDGP>.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102423>.

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