Hidden Networks of Global Influence: The Rise and Role of Political Party Internationals

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Abstract

Political party internationals (PPIs)–transnational membership-based organizations made up of ideologically-aligned political parties–constitute a critically understudied set of international institutions. Their ranks have swelled in recent decades, especially among parties from the Global South, and yet we know little about what drives parties to join them or what benefits they might provide. I argue that PPIs can serve as critical venues for networking and advocacy by opposition parties, who can use them to cultivate international allies and encourage foreign pressure on the incumbents they challenge. In this paper, I present original cross-national data on PPI membership over time, demonstrating the dramatic growth of PPIs since the late-1980s and their increasing regional diversity. I also show that opposition membership in a PPI is associated with a higher likelihood of regimes' democratic deficits being raised by allies in venues such as the European Parliament. I supplement this analysis with insights from qualitative interviews with politicians and PPI staff, demonstrating the extent to which these organizations can serve as useful venues for opposition networking and solidarity. In contrast to the limited previous work on these organizations, I demonstrate that PPIs have an important role in international politics with particular implications for domestic developments in autocracies.

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1 Introduction

Political party internationals (PPIs)—transnational membership-based organizations made up of political parties from different countries—have grown considerably since the end of the Cold War. Organizations such as Liberal International, Socialist International, and Centrist Democrat International, which were founded in the middle of the Twentieth Century as elite clubs of primarily Western European politicians, today count hundreds of parties from around the world among their membership. Often loosely coordinated around political ideologies, these organizations host conferences and workshops that bring together party leaders and members, organize capacity-building initiatives to discuss policymaking and share best practices, and provide a venue for engagement and networking between like-minded politicians. Their gatherings regularly draw major names, including sitting world leaders and rising political stars from both ruling and opposition parties. Yet, despite their dramatic growth over the past four decades, PPIs have received limited attention from political scientists and other outside observers. The scholarly work that has addressed their role has focused disproportionately on their influence on domestic party development, largely writing them off as glorified talk shops and imperfect agents for the ideological socialization of parties (Zyl and Vorster 1997; Tomsa 2017; Day 2006). The fact that their ranks have swelled, though, especially among parties from the Global South, suggests considerable interest from politicians themselves. What drives this interest? And what role have these organizations played, if any, in shaping foreign policy, democratic development, and international pressure for political reform?

Despite their relatively low profile and skepticism from scholars, I argue that PPIs have been uniquely positioned to serve as catalysts for democratization in certain cases, and, as such, have played an important and overlooked role in international politics in the post-Cold War era. This is chiefly due to the networks they facilitate, which can provide international support to pro-democratic parties, unencumbered by concerns about inappropriately choosing sides or appearing overtly "political." In particular, by openly partnering with specific parties and politicians, PPIs provide opportunities for opposition parties in non-democracies to accrue international allies and encourage foreign pressure on incumbents they challenge by facilitating advocacy and shaping perceptions among policymakers from powerful states.

Having been integrated into the wider international architecture for democracy promotion since the late-1980s, PPIs' success has often been measured in terms of their effectiveness as norm diffusers—that is, the extent to which they promote and strengthen democratic commitments among their membership via socialization and capacity-building. On this front, they have received mixed reviews, suggesting that the impact of their formal programming may be marginal (Day 2006; Grabendorff 2001; Tomsa 2017; Zyl and Vorster 1997). But PPIs' true contribution, I argue, exists outside of formal events and activities. Ultimately, the impact of the networks I describe is indirect and therefore often hidden from outside observers.

The lack of scholarly focus on PPIs, driven in part by this perception of their impotence, has contributed to a dearth of qualitative and quantitative data on these organizations. There is relatively little written about them, especially compared with analogous non-governmental organizations and activist networks, and almost no systematic, publicly available data exists describing their membership or activities over time. Meanwhile, theories of their role remain nascent.

Recognizing these gaps, this paper advances two contributions to the study of PPIs. First, I provide the first-ever systematic data on membership in party internationals over time, collected from archival records and other sources. These data reveal important descriptive trends that highlight the development of party internationals from relatively insular, elite ideological clubs, dominated by parties from Western Europe, into ostensible vehicles for democracy promotion, characterized by a regionally diverse set of parties with above-average commitment to democratic norms and pluralism.

Second, I suggest an alternative to the prevailing understanding of the contribution of party internationals to democracy promotion efforts and democratic change around the world. Rather than shaping political parties and the systems in which they compete directly through their programming, PPIs' main contribution lies in their formal and informal networks, which facilitate connections between parties of varying levels of power and influence. Particularly for opposition parties from non-democracies in the Global South, party internationals present important opportunities to build international allies and supporters that can help marshal pressure on autocratic incumbents to open space for democratic competition.

I use a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence to substantiate my argument. This

includes interviews with PPI leadership and staff, as well as politicians who have been engaged with party internationals over the years. I use information gleaned from these interviews, along with details from contemporary media reporting, to highlight the ways in which opposition politicians have sought to instrumentalize their membership in order to attract international attention to their causes. I also probe the broader generalizability of these anecdotal data through an analysis of formal questions asked by members in the European Parliament. I leverage links between certain PPIs and political groups in the European Parliament to highlight the potential cumulative effect of opposition membership in PPI networks. The analysis reveals a correlation between opposition party membership in a particular PPI and the propensity of associated European parliamentarians to raise concerns about political and human rights developments in a given country, lending support to my argument that PPIs constitute important avenues for high-level advocacy.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. First, I provide an overview of the history of modern party internationals and describe their activities and place in international politics, including a review of the limited literature on this question. I then discuss my cross-national data collection effort and provide a general descriptive overview of major trends in the data. Next, I lay out my theory of party internationals' contribution to democratization and pressure for democratic change in the post-Cold War context, providing qualitative evidence supporting the theory, with a focus on cases from Southeast Asia. Finally, I describe the results of my analysis of questions posed in the Eighth European Parliament (2014–2019), examining the relationship between opposition party membership in PPIs and the proportion of questions asked by parliamentarians from associated political groups. I conclude with the implications of my findings and a call for more research into the historical development and role of party internationals.

2 The Rise of PPIs

PPIs are transnational organizations made up of national-level political parties. Originating in Europe, they are often organized around particular ideologies (liberal, conservative, socialist/social

democrat, etc.) and exist at both the regional and global levels.[1] In the early decades of their existence, modern party internationals were seen primarily as vehicles to promote the particular ideologies they espoused and to strengthen networks between parties with similar ideological visions. For example, Liberal International—the oldest of the modern party internationals—was founded in 1947 by a group of liberal parties from 19 countries and focused primarily on highlighting and promoting a common vision of liberal democracy (Smith 1997; Bolkestein 1989). Likewise, the modern Socialist International, founded in 1951, served as a vehicle to promote social democracy in the Cold War context. These efforts hearkened back to previous, mostly Europe-focused transnational networks formed to help connect and organize ideological adherents of the socialist and communist left, as well as early proponents of modern liberalism (Bolkestein 1989).

Beginning in the 1980s, and particularly after the end of the Cold War, these organizations increasingly admitted members from the developing world, including from countries and regions much less democratic than where they had primarily worked previously. In this context, party internationals increasingly sought out a more explicit role in contributing to ongoing democratic diffusion globally. Today, the major party internationals view their mandate as broadly encompassing a commitment to supporting democratization and strengthening political parties around the world (Smith 2001; Hällhag 2008). In this context, their work with international organizations focused on democracy promotion also increased. Although many party internationals still charge their members dues—which constituted a main source of funding early on—most today are funded and sustained by governments or foundations.[2] The German political foundations have been particularly supportive, constituting the principal donors for the majority of regional and global ideologically oriented party internationals (Smith 2001). Other international NGOs, such as the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), have also worked closely with many PPIs (Day 2006, p. 72).[3]

1. I focus here primarily on ideologically organized party internationals, but there are a wider set of transnational networks specifically for political parties and politicians. These include venues restricted to parliamentarians, like the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (Costa, Dri, and Stavridis 2013), as well as non-ideological regional party networks, such as the Permanent Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Parties (COPPPAL) and the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) (Wood 2015).

2. Author interviews with party international secretariat staff and donors, February-April 2022

3. The recent moves by the Trump administration to dismantle the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and defund the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)—two organizations that provided

Party internationals vary in their degree of organization and activity. Most host regular conferences, and many organize workshops and capacity-building initiatives for member parties. But whether they remain in close contact with their members outside of regular events, and the degree to which their staff can support members directly with their own initiatives, varies. Even the largest PPIs generally maintain minimal full-time staff and operate on shoestring budgets (Sehm-Patomaki and Ulvila 2007, p. 32), limiting their capacity to provide members with personalized support. Compared with traditional democracy promotion NGOs, PPIs often struggle to secure funding or sustain robust formal programming at a regional or global scale.[4]

Nevertheless, PPI congresses—their flagship programs, which take place every one to three years—have historically drawn attendance in the hundreds and included high-profile politicians from around the world. Furthermore, as I demonstrate below, the popularity of PPIs has grown significantly since the late 1980s. Their capacity to attract members evinces considerable interest among political parties and suggests the existence of potential benefits associated with membership.

2.1 Existing Research

Despite their significant growth and the relevance of their scope and activities, PPIs have been largely neglected in the political science literature. The work that has examined them, mostly from the late 1990s and early 2000s, has emphasized their role in democracy promotion and focused disproportionately on assessing their effectiveness in this arena, including their contribution to democratization and party development outside of Europe (Grabendorff 2001; Smith 2001; Zyl and Vorster 1997; Wood 2015). This work has conceived of PPIs as diffusers of democratic norms and venues for the ideological socialization of parties and politicians from the developing world (Hällhag 2008; Smith 2001). Smith, for example, argued that a key goal of party internationals is "to help foster civil society and strengthen the conditions for free and fair elections in newly emerging democracies" (Smith 2001, p. 60), and suggested that they "have helped directly in the consolidation of democracy in several countries" (p. 60). Their staff, donors, and other proponents

significant funding for NDI and IRI—have led to these U.S.-based democracy promotion organizations to shutter most of their programming, and the future of their collaboration with PPIs thus remains uncertain.

4. Author interviews with party international secretariat staff and donors, February-April 2022

have similarly articulated such goals and pointed to some tentative success in these domains.[5]

Others, however, have questioned party internationals' capacity to fulfill this role. In the context of their early expansion into Africa, Zyl and Vorster (1997) found that PPIs had "a relatively low impact on the development of domestic policy" (p. 37). In Asia, Tomsa (2017) has argued that, from a socialization perspective, internationals' "impact on party institutionalization and, more generally, democratization in the region has been limited" and that "norm diffusion through transnational party networks has significant limitations" (p. 139). Others have claimed that these organizations have failed to cultivate a transnational role for parties, arguing that internationals have struggled to identify their specific "value-added" in this context (Day 2006, p. 79), and that despite decades in existence, PPIs "have made only very modest impacts on global politics" (Sehm-Patomaki and Ulvila 2007, p.32).

Ultimately, the limited attention devoted to party internationals appears to stem, at least in part, from a perception that these organizations have little substantive impact on political developments either domestically or internationally. Furthermore, the lack of cross-national data on PPI membership also discourages the study of these organizations and their global role. In the next section, I outline my ongoing data collection effort, which seeks to remedy the latter problem and also demonstrates the strong growth of these organizations in recent decades, motivating an important puzzle: If PPIs have little practical impact, why are they so seemingly popular with parties around the world?

3 Cross-National Data

3.1 Data Collection

In order to get a better sense of the size and composition of party international membership over time, I am working to compile a dataset of PPI members from 1945 to the present. The organizations themselves do not maintain comprehensive in-house historical records, so my data collection effort

5. Author interviews with party international secretariat staff and donors, February-April 2022

has necessitated visits to archives in Europe,[6] support from partner organizations,[7] and extensive online research using archived organizational websites. By piecing together records from historical membership lists, along with meeting minutes, correspondences, and secondary sources, I aim to produce the first dataset of its kind focused specifically on PPIs.

There are five main party internationals organized around political ideologies that operate at the global level: Liberal International (LI), founded in 1947; Socialist International (SI), founded in 1951; Centrist Democrat International (CDI), founded in 1961 and formerly known as Christian Democrat International;[8] the International Democrat Union (IDU), founded in 1983 as a network of conservative parties, including those that did not identify as Christian Democrats; and the Progressive Alliance (PA), founded in 2013.[9] I am working to compile membership data from all five of these organizations, but I focus here on the two oldest organizations: LI and SI. These organizations have more comprehensive records available in archives and online (relative to the others, at least) and, given the lengthy duration of their existence, provide a useful starting point for assessing overtime trends. Based on qualitative evidence from archival records, they have also been relatively more committed to embracing the promotion of democracy as a core objective than have conservative internationals, like CDI and IDU, which makes them particularly important to study in this context.

In addition to these major organizations, there are a large number of regional party internationals, many of which are affiliated with the global PPIs. These include, for example, the African Liberal Network, affiliated with LI; SocDem Asia, affiliated with PA; and the Union of Latin American Parties, affiliated with IDU. These organizations remain outside the scope of the cross-national dataset for the time being, but the dynamics described in my theory below should still apply to

6. Special thanks to the Archive of Liberalism in Gummersbach, Germany, the Archive of Christian Democratic Policy in Sankt-Augustin, Germany, and the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

7. Special thanks to the National Democratic Institute, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

8. The Christian Democrat International was technically founded in 1982 as a successor to and extension of the existing Christian Democratic World Union, founded in 1961. The transition in 1982 to the CDI constituted a centralization of an organization that was previously a collection of regional Christian Democratic groupings, lacking a similar international organization or mandate of the contemporary LI and SI (Papini 1997).

9. PA was founded as an offshoot of SI, following disagreements within that organization and dissatisfaction with SI's leadership and what some members perceived as an overly permissive attitude toward anti-democratic ruling parties. It therefore saw a large initial membership of defectors from SI who were looking for an alternative venue to congregate and network. A number of parties maintain membership in both SI and PA.

these regional groupings.

With a focus on the five major global PPIs, my dataset records entry and exit dates of all member parties—that is, the year that a party joined a given PPI (i.e., entry year) and the year that it withdrew or that its membership lapsed, if applicable (i.e., exit year). Parties leave PPIs for various reasons. Sometimes they are expelled by the PPI for failing to pay dues or for a lack of sufficient adherence to the PPIs' core principles (for example, ideological adherence or commitment to democracy). Other times, a party may opt to withdraw from a PPI if and when they feel the organization no longer fits its ideology or goals. For example, a number of parties withdrew from SI in the 2010s due to complaints that SI leadership was overly permissive of left-wing authoritarian parties that remained members during this time.[10] In other cases, parties may "exit" the dataset when they are dissolved or merge into other parties, which may themselves remain members.

I also have collected data on changes in membership status over time. PPIs generally include levels of membership. LI, for example, distinguishes between "observer members" and "full members." SI has three membership tiers: observer, consultative, and full. Some parties join as full members, but many begin as observers and later earn promotions to higher membership tiers. In the analyses below, I do not distinguish between different membership levels and do not include data on member promotions or demotions, but the data provide an opportunity for future research to explore these distinctions and their potential implications.

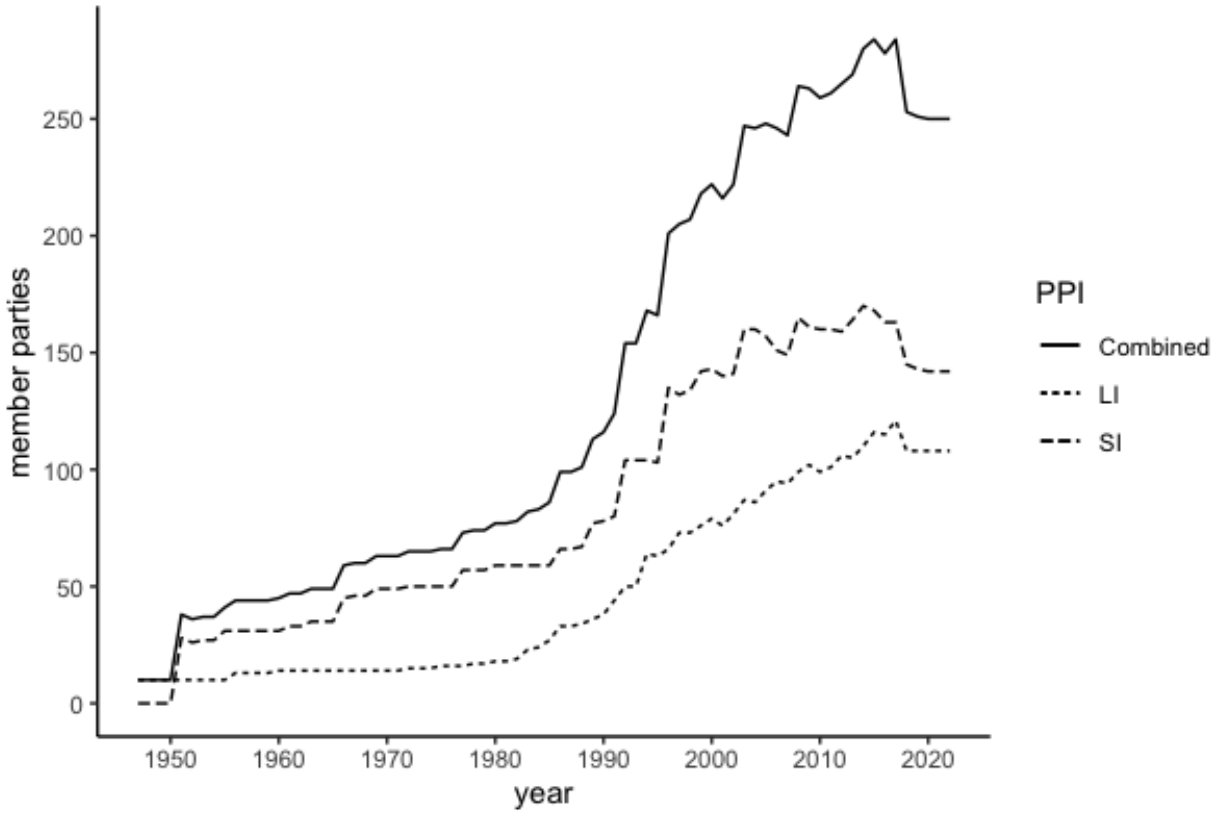
3.2 Global Trends

The data reveal a dramatic growth in PPI membership beginning in the mid-1980s and accelerating in the 1990s and 2000s (see Figure 1). The trend for Liberal International (LI) is particularly stark. In 1980, LI had fewer than 20 members worldwide. By 2010, that number had risen five-fold to over 100. Socialist International (SI) had a larger membership early on but still saw a dramatic rise after 1990, doubling its membership to over 160 parties by 2010. Collectively, membership between the two organizations more than tripled in the three decades beginning in 1980.

As the organizations grew during these decades, the composition of their membership also

10. Author interviews with democracy promotion practitioners, October-November 2022

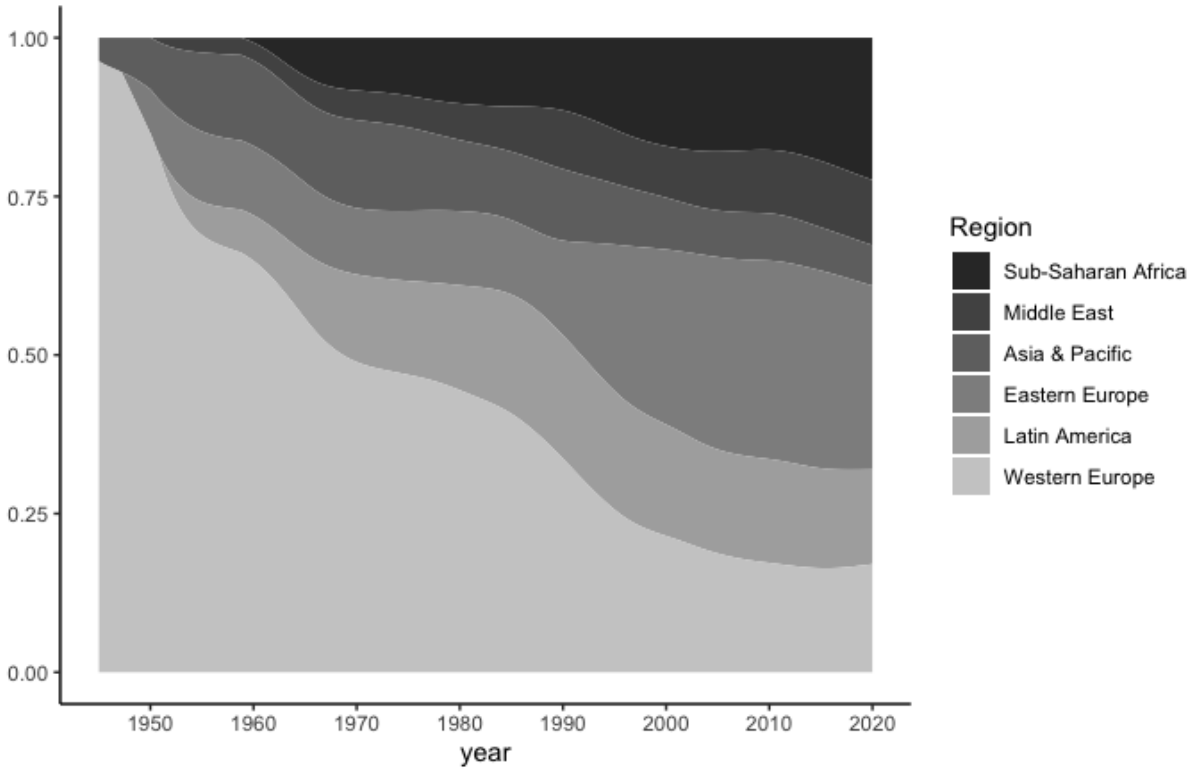
Figure 1: Political party membership over time: Number of parties affiliated with Liberal International (LI), Socialist International (SI), and both LI and SI combined between 1947 and 2022



changed considerably. In terms of geography, the early years were characterized by members drawn almost exclusively from Western Europe, although some representation from Eastern Europe and Asia existed as well, primarily within SI (see Figure 2). As new parties joined, however, the proportion of members from Western Europe steadily declined, while Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe all saw substantial increases. This trend accelerated after 1990, as a major influx of Eastern European and African parties changed the face of PPIs into the relatively diverse global organizations they are today.

The composition of members also changed in terms of the types of regimes from which member parties hailed (see Figure 3). The early years were dominated by parties from liberal democracies, along with a handful of exiled parties from closed autocracies behind the Iron Curtain. By the early 1980s, member parties were increasingly joining from contexts in between those two extremes.

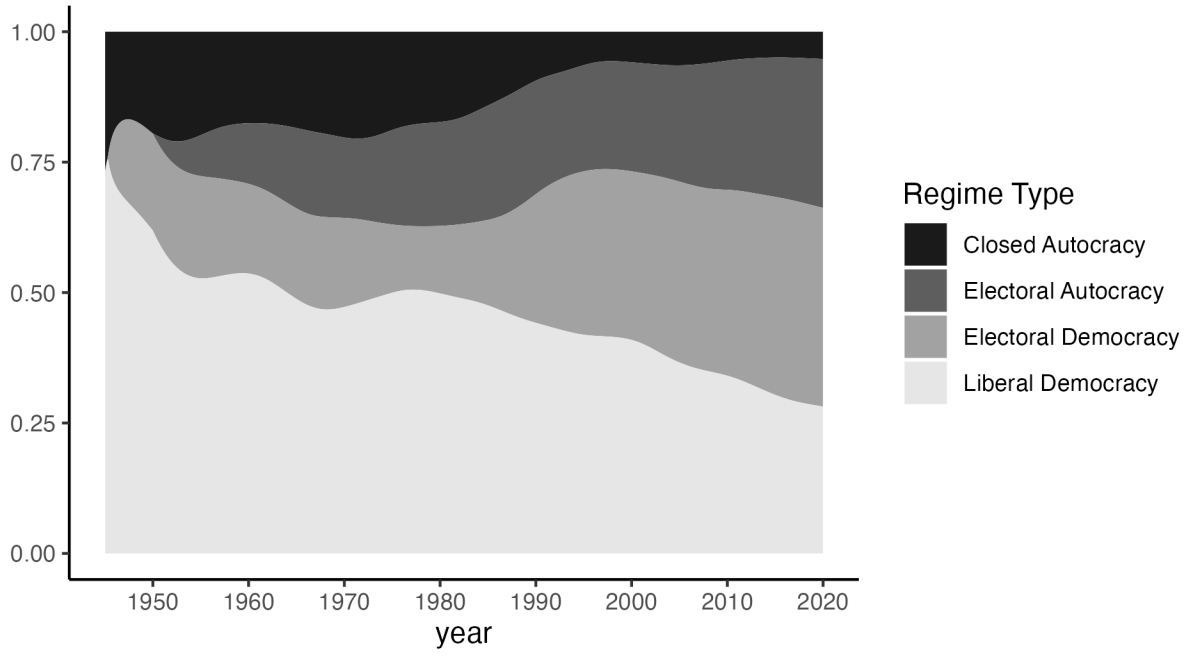
Figure 2: Changes in the composition of PPI membership (LI and SI combined) over time, by geographic region



A steady growth, in particular, from within electoral autocracies is evident since the early 1960s through to the present. Figure 4 displays the median democracy score for the countries from which PPI members have hailed over time. I use V-Dem's electoral democracy index score here. While the median PPI member remains democratic (above a 0.5 on this scale), the past 30 years have seen a precipitous decline in the median democracy index score of members, from around a 0.75 on the 0 to 1 scale to close to a 0.6. This demonstrates the extent to which LI and SI as organizations have been more open to embracing political parties from less democratic contexts on the whole. This does not mean, however, that the parties admitted are necessarily anti-democratic themselves. Many of these parties hail from the opposition in these countries, suggesting that they may constitute pro-democracy parties operating in relatively undemocratic contexts.

The data, in fact, lend support to this theory when we examine the characteristics of member parties and how they differ from non-members. To conduct this analysis, I combine my data on

Figure 3: Changes in the composition of PPI membership (LI and SI combined) over time, by regime type

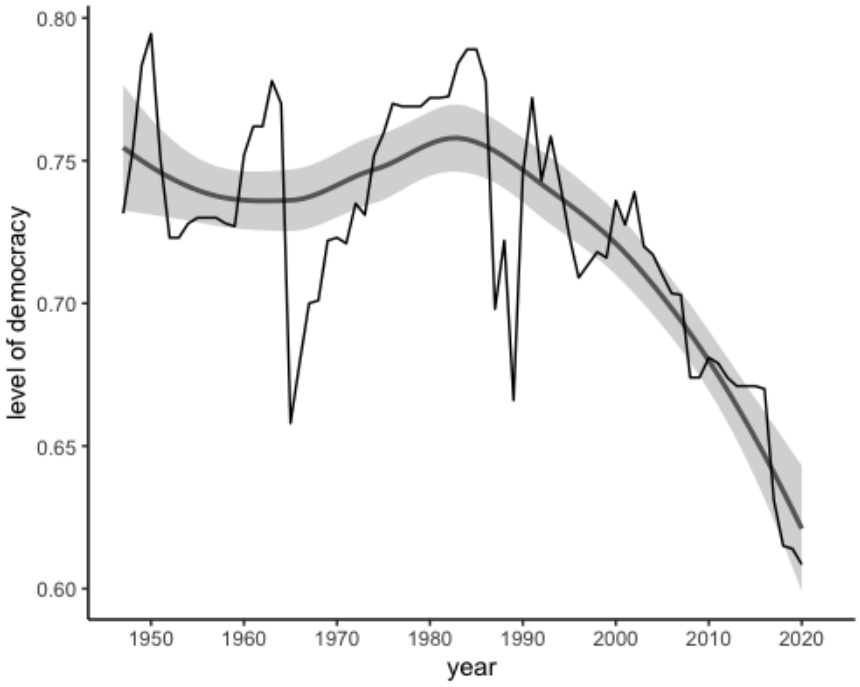


LI and SI membership with data from V-Dem's Varieties of Party Organization (V-Party) dataset (Lührmann et al. 2020). The V-Party data include expert-coded assessments of parties' policy preferences, commitment to democratic norms, and domestic organizational capacity. V-Party is structured around election-years and is limited to parties that receive at least 5 percent of the vote in a given election. It also does not include some microstates. The V-Party dataset therefore does not include all parties that have been members of LI and SI over time, as some failed to hit the 5 percent vote share threshold or hail from microstates. Nevertheless, even though not all PPI member parties are included in V-Party, it still provides an opportunity to compare between significant parties across the world who are and are not members of PPIs, providing a more-or-less apples-to-apples comparison based on party size and significance.[11]

The unit of analysis is the party, and I compare among distinct parties included in the V-Party

11. Note here also that some of the parties listed as "non-members" in this analysis may be members of one of the other three global PPIs (CDI, IDU, or PA) for some period. As a result, this analysis applies to LI and SI, specifically, comparing between members of either of these organizations on the one hand and parties that are not members of either on the other.

Figure 4: Median V-Dem democracy score of PPI members by year. Yearly averages plotted, along with a smoothed running average with 95 percent confidence intervals in grey.



dataset. I limit the analysis to 1990 and beyond to provide a more consistent comparison, and I compare between parties that have and have not been PPI members at any point during that period. Specifically, if a party was ever a member of LI or SI after 1990, regardless of entry and exit year, it is included here in the group of members. I then compare the average V-Party attribute scores among this group and the group of non-members. The attribute scores reflect the party's expert-coded characteristics corresponding to the first year they appear in the V-Party dataset, or 1990 if the first year is before 1990. As a result of this approach, the current analysis is relatively coarse, providing only a general assessment of the differences between parties that have been members of LI or SI and parties that have not, effectively flattening differences that may exist over time. Nevertheless it provides a useful starting point for assessing systematic differences.

Using these metrics and this approach, we can deduce that, in the post-Cold War context, members of LI and SI appear significantly more committed to democratic principles, better organized, and more policy oriented than non-members. Table 1 displays the results of a series of

bivariate regressions of PPI membership on three attributes from the V-Party dataset: 1) pluralism, which measures the extent to which party leadership is "clearly committed to free and fair elections with multiple parties, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association"; 2) local organizational strength, which measures the degree to which "party activists and personnel [are] permanently active in local communities" and represents a rough proxy for domestic capacity; and 3) party personalization, which represents the extent to which the party constitutes "a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader," as opposed to being more programmatic and policy-oriented. All models include region fixed effects and use robust standard errors clustered at the country level.[12]

On all three metrics, membership in a political party international is strongly and significantly associated with normatively positive outcomes: greater commitment to pluralism, better local organization, and lower levels of personalization. Each metric has a range of around 7 points, and the coefficients therefore suggest that PPI members are between 5 and 13 percent "better" on these three metrics than non-members (note that lower personalization here is construed as "better"). This is very likely the result of selection into these organizations on both ends, rather than evidence of the power of party internationals to shape their members' normative commitments or organizational capacity. Parties are more likely to join a PPI if they are already committed to democratic principles and organized enough to apply for membership. But PPIs also seek to ensure that the parties they admit adhere to basic democratic norms and represent organized, serious contenders for political power.

4 The Hidden Role of PPIs

What has driven the growth of these organizations? In part, their expansion was the natural outgrowth of a democratizing global environment—one in which multiparty elections, and by extension many new parties, became the norm in most countries. PPIs as organizations also engaged in active recruitment during this period. LI in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, made an explicit point of seeking out new members in regions beyond Western Europe, initially with the hope of expanding

12. I have also run models using country fixed effects, and the results look largely similar, both in terms of magnitude and statistical significance.

Table 1: OLS regressions comparing party attributes between members of LI and SI and non-members. Includes region fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the country level. 95 percent confidence intervals indicated in brackets.

	Pluralism	Local Organization	Personalization
PPI Member	0.62^{***}	0.83^{***}	-0.36^{***}
	$[0.45; 0.80]$	$[0.63; 1.02]$	$[-0.54; -0.18]$
Adj. R^2	0.19	0.09	0.08
RMSE	1.23	1.38	1.29
N Clusters	169	168	168

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

the reach of liberalism as an ideology and instilling a liberal ethos within emerging parties in newly democratizing states (Smith 1997). SI had more of a base outside Western Europe to begin with, so its need to aggressively recruit was more limited. But the organization still maintained an interest in cultivating new ties with socialists and social democrats around the world during the height of the Third Wave of democratization in order to foster a shared sense of struggle and broaden the global support base for social democratic values.[13]

In addition to ballooning membership, the evangelizing incentive within these organizations propelled PPIs into a new role as democracy promoters, seeking to socialize new members toward being "good democrats" and strong adherents to their preferred governing ideologies. As discussed earlier, though, these organizations' effectiveness at shaping the ideological commitments of new member parties—as well as their commitments to democratic norms more broadly—has been debated, and the majority of scholars have expressed considerable skepticism on this front (Zyl and Vorster 1997; Tomsa 2017; Day 2006). PPIs have simply never had the resources—financial or in terms of personnel—to reach deeply into party organizations or politics in the vast majority of countries from which members hail (Sehm-Patomaki and Ulvila 2007). Even compared with democracy promotion NGOs like NDI, IRI, and the German political party foundations, which have faced their own struggles influencing party organization and behavior (Carothers 2006), PPIs appear ineffectual as agents

13. Archival records of SI communication with the LI Secretariat.

of normative transformation (Tomsa 2017). As a result, even at the height of their expansion in the late 1990s and early 2000s, PPIs constituted a relatively marginal player in the post-Cold War landscape of formal NGO-led democracy promotion.

This does not mean, however, that PPIs have contributed nothing to the cause of international democratization. Indeed, these pessimistic assessments generally fail to sufficiently acknowledge PPIs' role as venues for networking, or the benefits that this can provide to member parties seeking to advance their own agendas.

Such benefits, in fact, likely contributed further to the growth of PPIs during this period. Patterns of growth over time, as well as internal records of membership applications and membership debates across all the major PPIs, suggest that many new political parties were eager to join these networks and, indeed, sought them out. Furthermore, the conservative party internationals, CDI and IDU, were more reluctant to actively recruit from the developing world, but nonetheless grew substantially in regions beyond Europe and Latin America through the late 1980s and beyond, much like their counterparts.[14] Membership expansion was clearly a two-way street, necessitating both the initiative of active PPI members and staff and the interest of politicians from prospective parties around the world. This process was not necessarily inevitable after the fall of Communism, nor did it constitute a natural evolution that would have progressed regardless of proactive decisions by stakeholders.[15]

This reality suggests that PPIs do, indeed, have something to offer, despite their apparent failure to achieve substantial results in the realm of socialization. Ultimately, I argue that the real value of PPIs has been somewhat obscured. It lies not in the organizations' abilities to shape their members, but in their members' capacities to instrumentalize the organizations. Specifically, I argue that member parties can seek out rhetorical and material support from global partners through the networks that PPIs provide. In some cases, such support can constitute crucial scaffolding for

14. In a 1993 letter to the President of the EPP/EUCD Wilfred Martens regarding concerns about the organization of the CDI, Gerard Deprez, president of Belgium's Walloon Christian Social Party (PSC), a CDI member, noted that "The growth of CDI in the past 10 years, and particularly during the last three years (Asia, former USSR, Africa) has been remarkable." Original text recovered from the CDI archives at the Archive of Christian Democratic Policy in Sankt-Augustin, Germany.

15. In fact, several of these organizations were originally structured and pursued as initiatives to curtail the global spread of Communism, so the end of the Cold War forced them to reconsider and reinvent their role.

campaigns to promote pressure on autocratic incumbents to embrace freer and fairer elections.

4.1 The Benefits of Membership

PPIs provide a number of potential benefits to new parties and the individual politicians that comprise them, including raising their international profiles, which can bolster their domestic legitimacy. For individual politicians, membership provides opportunities to participate in international travel, and, for parties, membership awards a seal of international approval, which can benefit those in government and opposition alike. One of the most significant potential benefits of PPI membership, however, is access to foreign officials and policymakers, who might serve as advocates in the international arena. This is a particularly attractive proposition for opposition parties, especially those operating outside of established democracies. Such parties are generally under-resourced and outmatched by their ruling counterparts—an imbalance that can be particularly stark at the international level. While ruling party officials are able to use their positions in government to secure meetings with foreign dignitaries and policymakers, for example, members of the opposition may find these engagements more difficult to arrange. Whereas ruling parties send representatives to international fora like the United Nations General Assembly and associated institutional meetings, opposition representatives are largely shut out of these venues. Even foreign governments and officials that may be sympathetic to an opposition's cause might be hesitant to publicly associate themselves with the party or its representatives for fear of breaching diplomatic protocols or alienating ruling governments with which they still need to do business.

In this sense, opposition parties lack the inherent advantages and opportunities in the international arena afforded to their ruling counterparts, undermining their capacity to shape international public opinion and rally solidarity and diplomatic support from abroad. PPIs provide a potential way around this dilemma and an entry point for engagement with powerful and possibly helpful foreign actors.

Levitsky and Way (2006) suggest that an important mechanism through which "linkage"—that is, cross-border political, economic, and social connections—helps promote democratization lies in the capacity of transnational connections to raise the profile of issues in particular non-democratic

states. Bob (2005), likewise, argues that aggressive "marketing" and advocacy distinguishes political movements in the Global South that become international causes from those that do not. Drawing on these insights, I argue that PPIs provide opposition parties with tools to increase linkage and market their causes. PPI congresses and other events constitute opportunities to build and strengthen interpersonal connections that underlie linkage, and once those ties are forged, opposition politicians can use them to further their "marketing" efforts, highlighting repression and framing their challenges as fundamental struggles for democracy that demand international attention and involvement. In doing so, member parties can heighten, among Western policymakers and publics, the salience of their home countries' democratic deficits and increase the likelihood that democratic governments take action to punish autocratic abuses and pressure authoritarian incumbents to open up space for genuine political competition.

This solidarity-building aspect of PPIs' work was evident from the earliest years of their existence, even when these organizations were more Eurocentric and focused on ideological evangelism. Prominent exiled Spanish liberals in the 1940s through 1960s, for example, "saw in the transnational cooperation of Liberals a useful tool to maintain solidarity with the liberal forces in Spain, even during the darkest years of Franco's rule" (Bolkestein 1989, p. 104-5). Several founding members of SI were, likewise, exiled parties from Eastern European Communist states, who sought out solidarity from their social democratic sister parties on the other side of the Iron Curtain.[16].

PPIs also contributed to the development of international election monitoring, which originated, in part, as a way for them to lend solidarity and support to sister parties operating in fraught electoral contexts.[17] Observers from LI, for example, monitored elections in the Philippines, Paraguay, and elsewhere in the 1980s (Smith 1997, p. 58). The practice emerged as a global norm by the late-1990s (Hyde 2011b, 2011a), though it was increasingly taken up by international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, which sought to approach the practice from a more non-partisan standpoint.[18] But the efforts of PPI members to support one another rhetorically and through visits

16. For example, the Bulgarian Socialist Party in Exile, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in Exile, and the Polish Socialist Party in exile (see: "Parties represented at the founding Congress of the Socialist International" (n.d.)).

17. Author interviews with international democracy promotion and election observation practitioners, October-November 2022

18. Author interviews with international democracy promotion and election observation practitioners, October-

during election periods persisted. Demand for this type of solidarity broadened as PPI expansion accelerated, though the profile and influence of such visits and other solidarity actions varied by context.

A discussion of the role of PPIs as networks is not entirely absent from the existing literature. Zyl and Vorster, for example, highlight party internationals' "important solidarity fostering role [...] especially in the case of smaller opposition parties who would not have had a 'voice' in international politics" (Zyl and Vorster 1997, p. 23). They also note the "important networking opportunities" that party international conferences and events present to members (p. 36). But the lens through which they view these assets remains centered on the potential capacity of PPIs to shape their members. For example, they highlight and question the extent to which these networking opportunities expose parties to global policy debates and help them to define their ideological visions. Less attention is paid to the extent to which these interactions might help politicians forge more lasting relationships and secure international allies in their efforts to compete effectively at home.

Critically, these latter benefits exist outside of the formal events, structures, and components of these organizations. While many politicians involved speak highly of their experiences at events organized by PPIs,[19] others are more circumspect. One Malaysian politician, who has engaged with Socialist International, for example, expressed skepticism about the value of formal discussions and proceedings at the meetings he attended over the years, calling them a "talk shop" where not much happened.[20] But he, nonetheless, admitted that the network itself was a valuable asset in his own campaigns within Malaysia on a variety of issues. Ultimately, PPI gatherings are more than a series of panel discussions and formal workshop components. Informal networking constitutes the true bedrock of their contribution. If sustained and nurtured over time, relationships forged at these events can be leveraged to cultivate cross-border solidarity and, in some cases, increase international pressure on incumbent regimes.

Furthermore, unlike an ability to influence party ideology, norms, or organization domestically, the contribution I highlight does not require significant material resources on the part of PPIs

November 2022

19. Author interviews, 2021-2022

20. Author interview, May 2, 2022

as organizations. A robust, expansive membership *is* the resource, and even if the ties between organizations and their members are loose, enterprising member parties can still take steps to use them to their advantage. This is important given the aforementioned challenges PPIs have had in maintaining robust funding streams and institutional memory. This benefit also helps to explain the eagerness of some parties to join PPIs. Access to networks represented a tangible benefit and incentive for parties to to accept and even seek out membership.

4.2 A Unique Contribution

A number of international actors and institutions beyond PPIs afford advocates of democracy with opportunities to build linkages and "market" their causes. Indeed, a robust literature on transnational advocacy networks (TANs) argues that such international linkages are instrumental in global normative change, and PPIs can reasonably be understood as components within wider TANs on a number of issues, from democratization to climate change. But the scholarship on TANs has focused disproportionately on non-partisan, non-governmental actors, such as NGOs and social movement activists (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bloodgood 2011; Brown 2010; Carpenter 2007; Prakash and Gugerty 2010; Siméant and Taponier 2014).

What makes PPIs unique in the landscape of actors within TANs is the fact that they openly embrace partisan engagement. Most other individuals and organizations engaged in transnational advocacy, including human rights groups and issue-based activists, often resist engagement with political parties, generally preferring to pursue a "non-partisan" veneer to their campaigns (Hopgood 2006). Even many international democracy promotion NGOs, which do engage with parties, can be hesitant, for legal, bureaucratic, and normative reasons, to work directly with specific parties or appear to be picking favorites. Even though democracy promotion practitioners generally recognize that political parties constitute crucial components of democracy and that many opposition parties share their goals and commitment to more open, competitive political systems, they are nonetheless often nervous about direct coordination with partisan politicians (Bush 2015; Carothers and Gramont 2013; Gershman 2004). Legally, many democracy promotion organizations—particularly those that receive significant funding from state development agencies—are explicitly barred from direct

financial support to individual parties. Normatively, leaders of these organizations have tended to embrace a similar non-partisan self-image as human rights groups and activists and are therefore generally prefer to pursue more apolitical "capacity-building." And, as Bush (2015) highlights, bureaucratic incentives discourage activities that might be seen as confronting autocratic incumbents too directly.

PPIs lack these limitations. Their structure and *raison d'être* are fundamentally about enabling international cooperation between political parties. And the extent to which the organizations have grown to understand themselves as democracy promotion vehicles encourages their instrumentalization toward the domestic goals of opposition parties that seek freer and fairer competition. Given their relatively small international footprint, they remain unlikely to fundamentally reshape the broader trends and contours of global democratization. But, if used effectively by member parties, they possess the capacity to contribute on the margins to broader movements encouraging democratization. In the next section, I provide a series of practical examples of this phenomenon drawn from the past decade in Southeast Asia.

4.3 Case Studies: Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is a region that, based on the account of international dynamics proffered by Levitsky and Way (2006), should have relatively low Western linkage and therefore limited opportunities to encourage Western governments to pressure autocratic incumbents to reform. It is geographically distant from the West and has faced strong authoritarian headwinds, even during periods of relative democratic growth globally over the past half century. Despite these hurdles, however, active engagement by select opposition parties in PPIs, like LI, SI, and their regional counterparts, has strengthened linkages between Southeast Asia and the West and facilitated some relatively aggressive action by Western governments and institutions aimed at punishing autocratic abuses and furthering democratic development in the region.

For instance, members of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP)—Cambodia's largest opposition party from 2012 until its dissolution in 2017—have been particularly active in the international arena attracting attention to the political situation in Cambodia and encouraging action

to combat the tightening of authoritarian control there. CNRP politicians have used the party's membership in both LI and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), a regional PPI, as crucial building blocks of this international strategy. The party sought public statements of support from these networks and their individual members and, through them, cultivated political contacts in a number of countries to facilitate lobbying and advocacy efforts.

CNRP leader Sam Rainsy and several of his top deputies established close relationships with members of the European Parliament (MEPs), especially those from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), known as "Renew Europe" since 2019, and through these connections have been effective at lobbying the European Parliament to raise Cambodian issues and pass resolutions highlighting the persecution of opposition figures and other human rights violations there. ALDE/Renew Europe is closely associated with LI, and the CNRP's membership in LI therefore opened doors to accessing its European counterparts within ALDE and its associated national parties. The establishment of a "friends of Cambodia" group within the European Parliament was spearheaded by MEPs from ALDE,[21] and these MEPs were actively pushing other EU institutions to impose trade sanctions on Cambodia, which the European Commission and European Council eventually agreed to in 2020 (European Commission 2020). The CNRP's engagement with CALD and the regional connections forged through its membership in it, including with influential political figures in Thailand, were also critical in helping to ensure the safety of party members fleeing Cambodia in the late-2010s.[22]

PPI networks have also been exploited by politicians in the Philippines. Leila de Lima, a former senator and prominent opposition figure from the Liberal Party of the Philippines, has relied on her party's membership in both LI and CALD to engage the international community. Imprisoned for nearly six years between 2017 and 2023, de Lima cultivated support from these networks, urging them to highlight her case, as well as push for a stronger international response to human rights abuses and democratic backsliding in her country. LI leaders visited her in prison in 2017 (Buan 2017) and awarded her their "Prize for Freedom" in 2018 (Elemia 2018). De Lima's allies in the Akbayan Party, which is a member of the Progressive Alliance and its regional affiliate, SocDem

21. Author interviews with CNRP leaders, 2021-2022
22. Author interviews with current and former members of CALD Secretariat, February-March 2022

Asia, have also worked through those organizations in order to raise the profile of de Lima's case, as well as other instances of democratic backsliding under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte between 2016 and 2022.[23]

Southeast Asia also includes examples of parties and politicians that have sought entry into PPIs at particular moments when they were vulnerable and in need of international allies, highlighting the perceived value of membership and the incentives to join. Thailand's Future Forward Party, for example, which performed surprisingly well in 2019 elections in that country, sought out membership in the Progressive Alliance (PA) and its regional affiliate, SocDem Asia, while it was facing the prospect of dissolution by the establishment-aligned Thai courts following the election. Future Forward leaders confirmed that these efforts were part of the party's international strategy designed to focus global attention on the threats posed to the party at home.[24] Although Future Forward was not able to stave off dissolution, SocDem Asia and its members from around the Asian region did speak out on its behalf and encourage their own governments to focus on the situation, and its engagement with European parties through PA have enabled leaders and members to raise the profile of Thai human rights concerns and democratic deficits heading into subsequent electoral contests.

5 Solidarity in the European Parliament

Working through the networks that PPIs provide can therefore help encourage international pressure to promote political reform and curtail human rights violations. One prominent venue for this kind of international pressure is the European Parliament. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can help raise the profile of democratic challenges in particular countries and promote policies to address them. Their tools to do so include posing formal questions in the Parliament plenary, sponsoring parliamentary resolutions, and pushing other EU institutions to take specific actions. As such, the European Parliament constitutes an important advocacy target for many opposition politicians seeking international solidarity and action to increase foreign pressure on the incumbents

23. Author interviews, February-April 2022
24. Author interviews, February-December 2022

they challenge at home.

PPIs provide an avenue through which to access MEPs for advocacy purposes. Each of the major global PPIs maintains links with their respective ideological counterpart/s among political groups at the European level (also known as party families), which compete for seats in the European Parliament. Renew Europe, formerly the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) until 2019, is affiliated with Liberal International (LI). The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) is affiliated with both Socialist International (SI) and the international Progressive Alliance (PA). The European People's Party (EPP) is affiliated with both Centrist Democrat International (CDI) and the International Democrat Union (IDU), while the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) is also affiliated with IDU.[25] Each PPI's broader network therefore includes parties and politicians that sit in the European Parliament or work closely with MEPs—providing a ready-made link to the institution and a potential pathway for influencing it.

The Cambodia National Rescue Party's use of its contacts through LI to cultivate networks of support in the European Parliament (described in Section 4.3) is one prominent example of the type of activity that some opposition politicians pursue at the EU level. In the subsequent sections, I examine evidence of the cumulative effect of these activities. Specifically, I explore the relationship between opposition membership in a particular PPI and the prevalence of MEPs from the associated European political group raising concerns about democracy and human rights in particular contexts. To do so, I rely on data collected from official parliamentary questions posed by MEPs, which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

5.1 Parliamentary Questions

Questions posed by MEPs in plenary sessions and in writing provide an opportunity to test expectations regarding the relationship between PPI membership and actions to support the cause of free and fair elections in specific countries. Parliamentary questions are addressed to representatives

25. These affiliations are slightly imprecise, as they apply to the European political parties, rather than the political groups that sit in the European Parliament. Functionally, the EPP's connection with CDI is more significant than its links with IDU, for instance.

from other European Union institutions and bodies. They can cover a wide variety of topics, but many address issues and concerns related to foreign affairs, including specific countries outside the EU. Parliamentary questions are especially useful as a metric for interest because they are asked by individual MEPs or groups of MEPs, who correspond to particular political groups. This provides for significant variation, constituting a useful public signal of the relative focus on specific countries across political groups. By contrast, European Parliament resolutions—another potential metric of interest—generally only appear in the public record when they are sponsored by many political groups in tandem, thereby obscuring details of how they emerged and which political group or groups were the primary proposers behind the scenes. Meanwhile, other actions that MEPs can take behind the scenes to advance certain causes are not recorded in a systematic manner. Questions therefore represent the most appropriate metric available for testing expectations regarding MEP interest and focus.

I am in the process of cataloging all questions asked about specific non-EU countries during the Eighth European Parliament term, which ran from 2014 to 2019. With the support of research assistants, I have coded 2,308 questions pertaining to 109 countries.[26] For each question, I record basic metadata, including the date, the name(s) and party(ies) of the MEP(s) asking it, and the text of the question. I also score each question on a 0 to 3 scale in terms of how relevant it is to potential opposition concerns about free and fair elections. A coding of 3 represents the questions that are explicitly about opposition parties and politicians or other political actors that challenge the government in elections. It also includes questions highlighting concerns about elections or calls for the removal of barriers to free and fair elections. A coding of 2 pertains to questions that relate to issues that might have an effect on the environment surrounding elections, but are not directly related—things like violations of freedom of expression or freedom of the press or the arrest of anti-government activists from beyond the political opposition. A coding of 1 pertains to a wider swath of human rights issues, including violations of the rights of ethnic or religious minorities or other marginalized groups, social and economic rights concerns, and the death penalty. If a question does

26. Questions were coded in batches by country. The country coding order was randomized, though countries with over 100 questions (9 countries total) were excluded and will be coded at the end. 109 countries represents just over 72 percent of the total countries to be coded.

not have any relevance to democracy or human rights, it is coded as 0.

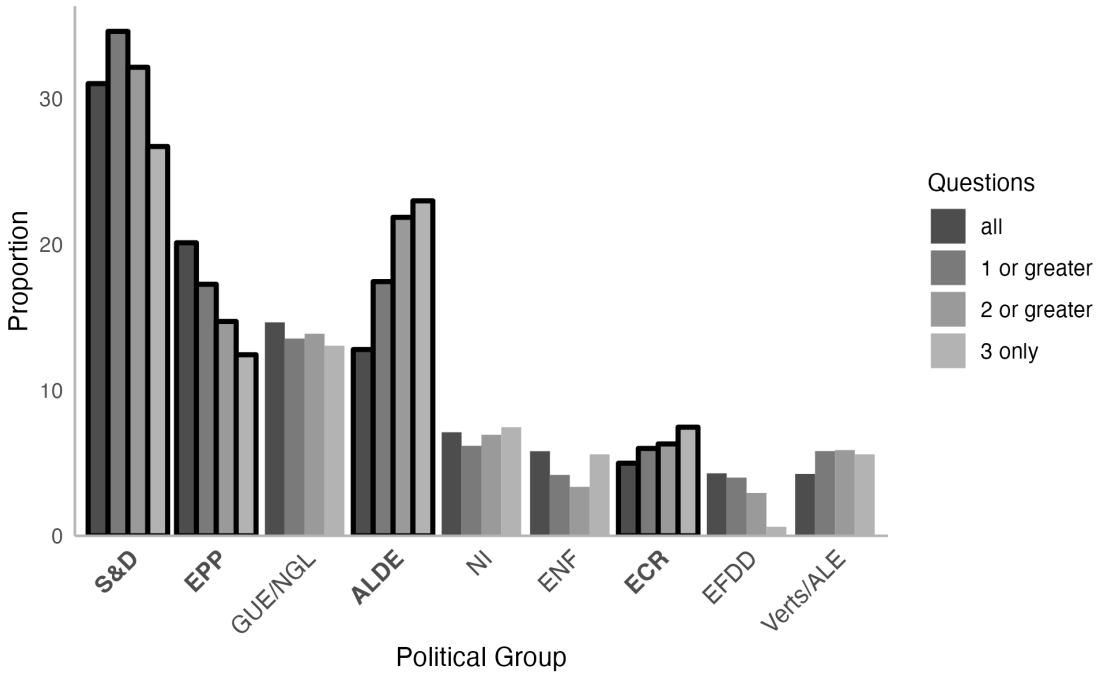
There is significant variation in the number of questions asked about non-EU countries by different political groups. Figure 5 displays the proportion of questions asked by each political group across four different samples of questions, defined by different restrictions on coded relevance scores (i.e., all questions, questions coded as 1 or above, etc.).[27] MEPs from the S&D group ask the most questions about other countries overall, accounting for about 31 percent of the total. By contrast, EPP MEPs account for approximately 20 percent of questions, while ALDE and ECR account for around 13 percent and 5 percent respectively. When it comes to questions that pertain specifically to opposition politicians and electoral fairness concerns (coded as 3), ALDE MEPs account for a substantially higher proportion, at 23 percent, rivaling the top-ranked S&D's 27 percent. Overall, S&D and ALDE represent the political groups that appear, based on their questioning, to be the most concerned with democracy and political rights outside the EU.

5.2 PPIs' Network Advantage

Among the questions that pertain to specific countries, the proportion of questions asked by each political group varies considerably. Some countries are the near-exclusive purview of one particular group, while others are more varied. Meanwhile, certain political groups occupy greater or lesser proportions of total questions asked about certain countries. This variation provides potential leverage for examining the relationship between PPI membership and MEP focus. Specifically, by examining the proportion of questions asked about each country by different political groups, I can ascertain the level of interest in particular countries and cross-reference that with the associated PPIs' membership. This allows me to see if membership from a given country in a particular PPI correlates with greater interest expressed by the associated political group in the European Parliament. I combine my original data on both PPI membership over time and on MEP questions in order to do so. In particular, my theory suggests that *opposition* party membership in a given PPI should be correlated with greater interest and attention.

27. Note that these calculations are preliminary as not all questions have been coded at this point.

Figure 5: Proportion of questions asked by each party/political group in the European Parliament



Reflect proportions for each sample of questions, based on relevance coding (indicated in the key). *all* refers to all questions that pertain to a specific non-EU country. The four major political groups associated with the five major PPIs are highlighted in bold.

5.2.1 Country Deviations

I look specifically at the deviation from the baseline proportion of questions asked by each political group across all countries sampled. This is important, as it controls, in effect, for the large differences between political groups in the overall number of questions asked (discussed above in Section 5.1). To calculate this deviation, I first define the baseline proportion as an unweighted average of the proportion of questions asked by each political group in the set of all political groups represented in the European Parliament, P (e.g., $P = \{\text{S\&D}, \text{ALDE}, \text{EPP}, \text{ECR}, \dots\}$), across each country in the set of all countries, C. $Q_{i,j}$ denotes the number of questions asked by political group $j \in P$ about

country $i \in C$. The total number of questions asked about country i is denoted by T_i, where

$$T_i = \sum_{j \in P} Q_{i,j}.$$

Therefore, the proportion of questions about country i asked by party j is:

$$p_{i,j} = \frac{Q_{i,j}}{T_i}, \quad \text{if } T_i > 0; \quad p_{i,j} = 0, \text{otherwise.}$$

The baseline proportion is computed as the unweighted average of the country-level proportions:

$$\bar{p}_j = \frac{1}{|C|} \sum_{i \in C} p_{i,j}.$$

By taking the average across country-specific percentages, I allow for each country to contribute equally to the baseline, regardless of the total number of questions asked about it.[28]

The deviation for party j regarding country i is then defined as the difference between the proportion of questions asked by party j about country i and the party's baseline proportion:

$$d_{i,j} = p_{i,j} - \bar{p}_j.$$

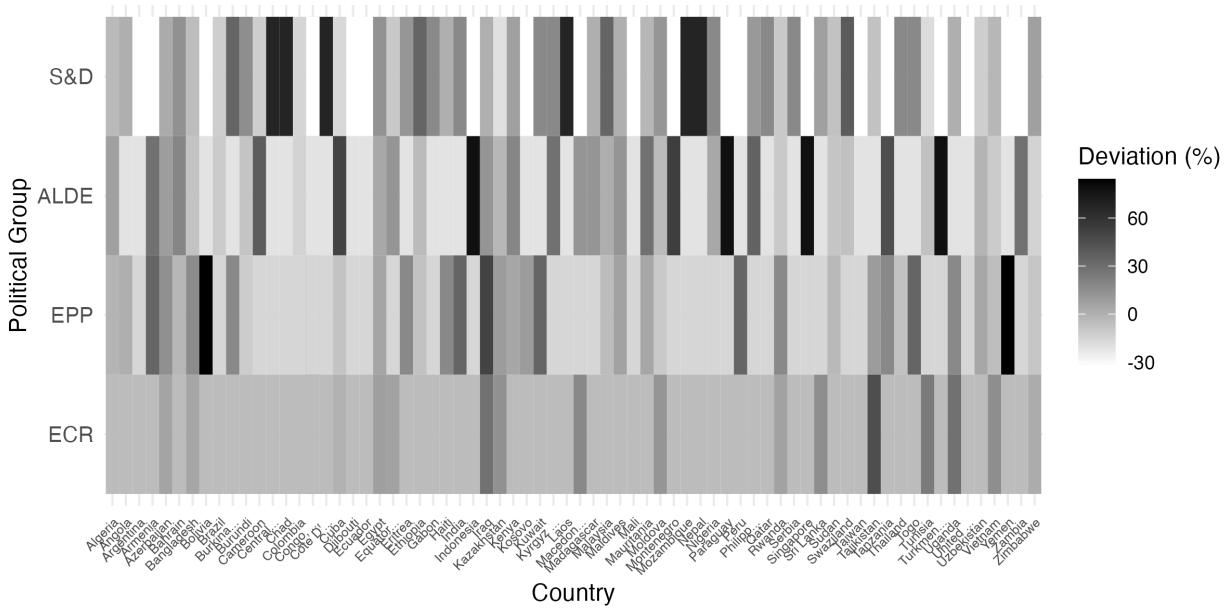
This deviation quantifies whether political group j is over-represented or under-represented in the questions asked about a particular country relative to its baseline level of attention across all countries. Positive values of $d_{i,j}$ indicate that party j places a disproportionately high focus on country i, while negative values indicate a disproportionately low focus.

Figure 6 displays a heat map of deviations by country for each of the four political groups, which correspond to the major PPIs. For this figure and the remainder of the analysis, I focus on questions that have a relevance score of at least 2, meaning that they are substantively about political rights and other issues with direct implications on the electoral environment. The four main political

28. In practice, these averages are roughly similar to averages computed by taking the overall proportion of questions asked by each party across all countries. But since there is wide variation in the number of questions asked about each country, the approach I use helps, in theory, to avoid certain countries swamping the baseline percentages. This will potentially become more important once I code the countries with a very large volume of questions.

groups are reflected across the y-axis, while the coded countries are included along the x-axis. Each cell reflects the country-deviation for the specific party group; darker shading indicates a greater positive deviation. For example, questions from S&D MEPs indicate large positive deviations with respect to Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mozambique, among others, and large negative deviations with respect to Argentina, Armenia, and Bolivia. Overall, S&D and ALDE display more variation in deviations than EPP and ECR, some of which has to do with the relatively low baseline percentages of the latter two political groups, particularly ECR.

Figure 6: Deviations by country and political group



Darker shading represents greater positive deviation; lighter shading represents smaller deviation or negative deviation.

5.2.2 Correlation with PPI Membership

Next I examine the relationship between these deviations by political group and opposition membership in the associated PPIs. To do so, I rely on preliminary lists of PPI members from the 2014–2019 period under examination. These lists draw from archived Wikipedia pages that record the party

members, along with their status as either members of the ruling coalition or in opposition.[29] I use lists of full members from LI in 2014, CDI in 2016, and PA in 2017.[30] Once again, LI corresponds to ALDE, CDI corresponds to EPP, and PA corresponds to S&D.[31] For each PPI, if its membership included at least one party from the opposition in a given country (including formal parliamentary opposition, extra-parliamentary opposition, and exiled parties), that country is considered to have opposition membership in the PPI.

My expectation is that members of a given political group should be more likely to ask questions pertaining to countries from which opposition parties are members of the corresponding PPI. Therefore, we should expect to see greater positive deviations from the baseline proportion of questioning on average among this set of countries, compared with the set of countries from which no opposition parties are members of the associated PPI. In concrete terms, I expect MEPs from the S&D group to be relatively more interested in developments in countries from which opposition parties are members of PA, MEPs from the ALDE group to be relatively more interested in countries where opposition parties are members of LI, and the EPP group to be relatively more interested in countries where opposition parties are members of CDI. For example, given that the Cambodian opposition CNRP is a member of LI, this should translate to ALDE, the liberal group, asking more questions about Cambodia as a proportion of the total than its baseline proportion across all countries.

Figure 7 displays the results of the analysis. Here, I simply compare the median deviations between these two groups across three PPIs. The circular dots, denoting "w/Opp Member," reflect

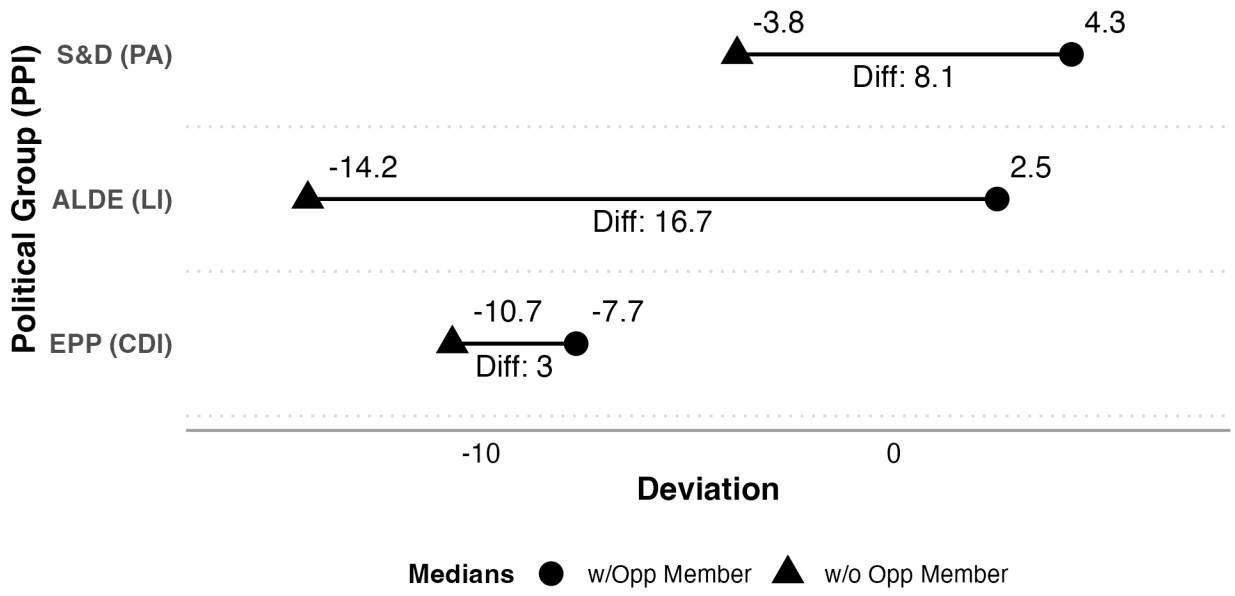
29. Wikipedia is a generally reliable resource for membership information, but I still need to verify the accuracy of the ruling/opposition designations. I also need to determine the appropriate approach for parties that moved between opposition and ruling status during the 2014–2019 period, potentially taking into account the specific dates of individual questions.

30. Note that I exclude ECR from this analysis for the time being. I am still working to compile information on IDU's membership during this period, which I plan to use for that analysis, along with the CDI data. In addition, ECR is the least engaged political group on questions of democracy and human rights abroad, and its relationship with the internationals is among the most tenuous of the political groups that technically maintain them. As of now, I use snapshots in time, but I hope to conduct a more detailed analysis, which takes into account variation in membership *and* opposition status over the course of the 5-year period in question. This analysis would also take into account the specific timing of parliamentary questions in order to further account for this variation.

31. Note that I do not use the SI membership for this analysis. By 2014, SI was in a period of terminal decline, having shed significant membership. Meanwhile, PA was becoming the primary international for social democratic parties, including in Europe, and S&D maintained much closer ties with PA. Likewise, given the EPP's much clearer ties to CDI, I focus only on CDI, rather than also including IDU.

the median country deviation among countries from which at least one opposition party is a member of the relevant PPI. The triangular dots, denoting "w/o Opp Member," reflect the median country deviation among countries from which no opposition party is a member of the relevant PPI. The difference between these two medians is shown as well.

Figure 7: Comparing median deviations among political groups, based on opposition party membership in PPI



Circular dots reflect the median country deviation among countries from which at least one opposition party is a member of the indicated PPI; triangular dots reflect the median country deviation among countries from which no opposition party is a member of the indicated PPI; the difference between these is indicated under each line.

These results support my argument, suggesting that PPI membership for opposition parties is associated with greater attention paid to local democracy and human rights concerns among ideological allies in the European Parliament. Across all three political groups-PPI pairings, the difference between the "w/Opp Member" median and the "w/o Opp Member" median is positive, indicating that there is a higher relative proportion of questions asked about countries from which the PPI had an opposition party member during the 2014–2019 period. The most pronounced difference

is associated with Liberal International (LI) and its associated European political group, ALDE. Here the median deviation is nearly 17 percentage points higher among the "w/ Opp Member" countries (a median deviation of +2.5 among the "Opp Member" group, compared with -14.2 among the "No Opp Member" group). By contrast CDI membership corresponds with only a 3 percentage point difference in questions asked by MEPs from the EPP group.

Based on qualitative evidence, this discrepancy makes some sense. LI has been one of the more organized PPIs in recent years, and its relationship with ALDE is comparatively strong. It has been particularly active in intervening on cases such as Cambodia and the Philippines, from which it counts opposition parties as its members, as previously discussed. CDI, on the other hand, has been relatively less coordinated and has been somewhat subsumed by the EPP group in practice.[32] CDI has also been relatively less consistently committed to democracy and rights concerns, in contrast with LI and PA.[33]

It is important to note that these results are relatively noisy and thus present some limitations for interpretation. Many countries feature only a handful of questions about them that scored a 2 or higher in my coding, so there is relatively high variance in the percentage deviations. I specifically use medians, rather than means, in order to mitigate the influence of major outliers. Nevertheless, these numbers provide rough approximations, rather than a precise measure of these relationships. Still, the degree to which the results conform directionally with my theory is striking and supports the broader suggestion that PPIs may serve as influential global networks for highlighting concerns about democracy and human rights in particular states.

6 Conclusion

The dramatic growth of party internationals in the post-Cold War period reflected a surge of interest and engagement in these organizations on the part of political parties from outside Western Europe. In that context, PPIs embraced a more conscious role as democracy promoters, but their success in that domain has remained relatively limited. Nevertheless, although PPIs have struggled to

32. Author interview with CDI Secretary-General, Brussels, December 2022.
33. Author interview with democracy promotion professional, Washington, DC, February 2025

shape their members, some of those members have managed to use PPIs to further their own goals. Party internationals function, in particular, as important venues and tools for opposition parties facing the challenges of authoritarianism and repression at home. Individual relationships can help facilitate meetings and solidarity actions from members in key positions, such as in Western governments and the European Parliament, which can spur action from those entities. Qualitative evidence corroborates this story in several key cases, and my quantitative analysis of behavior by members of the European Parliament further supports this notion. When utilized in this way, party internationals can provide opposition politicians with a foot in the door to access opportunities that they would otherwise lack, and they thus possess a hidden capacity to subtly aid processes of democratization around the world.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate their role. Party internationals remain under-resourced organizations that have generally failed to live up to the lofty expectations their early founders had for them. Furthermore, the effects are likely to be highly individualized and mediated by the level of involvement and agency of specific individuals within particular opposition parties. Indeed, accessing the benefits of PPIs is far from an automatic process. For most members, in fact, the organizations factor little into their calculations outside of regular conference attendance. Zyl and Vorster noted in the late 1990s that, "in the six to twelve months that lapse between [...] conferences, very little direct interaction and networking between member parties in Africa occur" (Zyl and Vorster 1997, p. 36). While this varies by region and has changed a bit since the 1990s, it remains the case that only members who actively seek to use their engagement with PPIs should expect to see dividends and be able to wield membership in service of their domestic goals.

Still, this latent capacity demonstrates why understanding the role that PPIs *can* play in the global struggle for democracy requires looking beyond their formal programming. On a practical level, PPIs are more akin to transnational advocacy networks than capacity-building organizations, and given the challenges that parties and politicians have in working with other transnational advocates, they constitute a uniquely suitable base from which these political actors can build out broader international efforts.

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