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Article

# Where ideology matters: evidence from a global analysis of market intervention policies

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## Abstract

While many studies argue that the ideology of governments affects their policies, most research has focused on OECD countries. This narrow scope is because of a lack of data and common assumptions that political institutions in non-OECD countries extinguish the impact of government ideology. This article challenges these assumptions by analyzing a new dataset on the ideological orientation of governments in 182 countries since 1945. Focusing on market intervention policies, fixed-effects estimates show that government ideology influences certain market intervention tools worldwide, including in non-OECD countries. The analysis further suggests that ideology matters more in countries with fewer constraints on the executive. But counter to common expectations, ideology does not seem to matter more in countries with strong states, democratic institutions, and little clientelism. The findings have important implications for the study of partisan politics, political institutions, and politics in young and non-democracies.

*Key words:* comparative politics; economic reform; ideology; institutions; political economy.

**JEL classification:** H1 structure and scope of government, P5 comparative economic systems

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## 1. Introduction

A large body of research in the social sciences argues that the ideological orientation of governments affects policies and outcomes across a wide range of areas, including economic growth (e.g. [Alvarez, Garrett, and Lange 1991](#)), market intervention (e.g. [Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019](#)), social services (e.g. [Allan and Scruggs 2004](#)), defense (e.g. [Whitten and Williams 2011](#)), law and order (e.g. [Wenzelburger 2020](#)), foreign aid (e.g. [Thérien and Noël 2000](#)), and environmental policy (e.g. [Aklın and Urpelainen 2013](#)). Although recent studies suggest these effects may be more limited or conditional (e.g. [Potrafke 2017](#); [Zohlnhöfer, Engler, and Dümig 2018](#)), there is broad agreement that government ideology plays a significant role in policymaking.

However, much of this research has focused on a small number of countries, leaving most of the world's countries, regimes, and populations underexamined. Scholars have primarily studied the effects of government ideology in long-standing members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Potrafke 2017) and within specific OECD countries, such as the United States (e.g. Potrafke 2017; Dynes and Holbein 2020). There is also a sizable body of work on democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean (e.g. Murillo and Martínez-Gallardo 2007; Huber and Stephens 2012a) and Eastern Europe (e.g. Tavits and Letki 2009; Beazer and Woo 2016). Yet, broader studies that examine the effects of government ideologies in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East remain scarce. As a result, our understanding of *where* government ideology influences policy-making has been largely restricted to a limited set of countries.

This focus on a few countries is partly due to the limited availability of cross-national data on the ideological orientation of governments. Most datasets almost exclusively cover countries in Europe and the Americas (e.g. Huber and Stephens 2012b; Brambor, Lindvall, and Stjernquist 2017; Polk et al., 2017; Armingeon et al., 2019; Volkens et al., 2019). The few exceptions have limited coverage across countries (Manzano 2017), time (Norris 2020), or many missing values and coding procedures that limit their use (Lührmann et al., 2020b; Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini 2021). Our understanding of the ideological orientations of most governments worldwide has therefore remained similarly limited.

This article addresses the lack of research and data with a new dataset on the economic ideologies of chief executives, covering 182 countries from 1945 (or independence) through 2020, and a global analysis of market intervention policies. Specifically, I analyze the impact of government ideology on state ownership of the economy, market regulation, property rights protection, and taxation. Market intervention policies are central to the left-right cleavage, have been consistently linked to government ideology in OECD countries (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Alvarez, Garrett, and Lange 1991; Obinger, Schmitt, and Zohlnhöfer 2014; Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019), and have a significant effect on citizens' livelihoods worldwide.

In the most comprehensive analysis of where ideology matters to date, I find robust evidence that government ideology affects market intervention worldwide. Using a fixed-effects approach and many robustness checks, I show that leftist governments tend to own more of the economy, deregulate markets less, and protect property less than rightist governments, but do not impose higher taxes. These findings suggest that government ideology plays a role beyond the countries usually studied.

This article also challenges common assumptions that political institutions in non-OECD countries neutralize the effect of government ideology. Beyond the data constraints, scholars have often assumed that ideology only influences policymaking in countries with certain political institutions, typically found in long-term OECD members: strong states (e.g. Schmidt 1996; Dynes and Holbein 2020), democratic governments (e.g. Huber et al., 2006; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006), and programmatic electoral competition (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Alvarez, Garrett, and Lange 1991). However, these assumptions conflict with arguments that political institutions in non-OECD countries may amplify the impact of government ideology due to weaker electoral and institutional constraints (e.g. Dutt and Mitra 2005). They also contrast with recent work on OECD countries, which shows that political institutions can reduce partisan effects (e.g. Häusermann, Picot, and Geering 2013; Beramendi et al., 2015). And they diverge from earlier cross-national studies demonstrating that ideology influences policymaking in other parts of the world (Chwieroth 2007; Ha 2012; Roberts and Saeed 2012; Weymouth and Broz 2013; Ha and Kang 2015; Ha and Rogers 2017). I therefore also investigate *under which institutional conditions* ideology affects policymaking.

When empirically testing how political institutions condition the relationship between ideology and policymaking, I find little evidence that they do as often expected. The global results are driven by non-OECD countries, where leftist governments control more of the economy, deregulate markets less, and protect property less compared to rightist governments—though they do not impose higher taxes. In contrast, I find no robust ideological effects on these market intervention tools in long-standing members of the OECD. Additionally, government ideology does not appear to have a stronger effect in countries with strong states, democratic institutions, or little clientelism. However, I do find some support for the argument that ideology matters more in countries with fewer executive constraints.

These findings have important implications for the study of partisan politics, political institutions, and politics in young and non-democracies. They suggest that government ideology matters more for policymaking in non-OECD countries than previously recognized and that partisan theories are more widely applicable than often assumed. Moreover, prevailing assumptions about how political institutions limit or extinguish the effect of government ideology need to be reevaluated. Institutions matter, but they at least seem to condition the effect of ideology less than often assumed.

Understanding how government ideology shapes policies—and how political institutions keep this influence in check—is especially important today, as the wave of populism continues to rise. Populist leaders worldwide are increasingly questioning established economic policies and attacking traditional political institutions. My research suggests that these leaders' ideas should be taken seriously. Once populists come into office, they—and the public—may find that institutions offer fewer barriers to implementing their preferred policies than often expected.

## 2. Why ideology may matter worldwide

There are strong theoretical and empirical reasons to revisit the question of where ideology matters.

First, we should expect political leaders to hold policy preferences worldwide. Just as in OECD countries, leaders globally are drawn to politics because of their preferences for particular policies (e.g. [Thorsen 2025](#)). These preferences likely motivated them to pursue political careers over other occupations with power that are less risky (e.g. [Wenzelburger and Zohlnhöfer 2021](#)). Even leaders who entered politics primarily for power may have been socialized into adopting policy preferences through interactions with their party peers or have embraced these preferences to gain and maintain influence within their organizations. This aligns with governments around the world exhibiting diverse ideologies (e.g. [Linz 2000](#); [Levitsky and Way 2013](#); [Manzano 2017](#)) on which they spend significant resources (e.g. [Dinas and Northmore-Ball 2020](#)) and that often prompt them to take costly actions ([Thorsen 2025](#)).

Moreover, political leaders in non-OECD countries also rely on social support and are influenced by the preferences of their supporters. While leaders in these countries may not depend heavily on electoral support and class cleavages may be less pronounced, key social groups—such as wage earners and business owners—exist across all countries (e.g. [Pepinsky 2009](#); [Slater 2010](#)). Leaders need the backing of these groups, whether for their numbers, money, or legitimacy (e.g. [Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003](#); [Slater 2010](#)). To maintain their support, leaders must implement policies that benefit these constituencies. And even if one were to argue that social support is unimportant in non-OECD countries, such as because their political systems primarily serve the interests of the wealthy (e.g. [Boix 2003](#); [Acemoglu and Robinson 2006](#)), or that other social groups based on language, religion, or race are more important (e.g. [Vogt et al., 2015](#)), this would only increase the significance of leaders' personal ideological preferences.

The few empirical studies that have examined whether ideology also matters beyond OECD countries support these arguments. Research shows that leftist governments across the world are associated with lower inequality (Ha 2012), more education (Manzano 2017), different trade policies (Dutt and Mitra 2005), less contractionary fiscal and monetary policies following financial crises (Ha and Kang 2015), and less trust by investors (Weymouth and Broz 2013; Brooks, Cunha, and Mosley 2022). Leftist governments also tend to privatize less (Roberts and Saeed 2012) and tax more (Ha and Rogers 2017) than rightist governments, which in turn deregulate capital accounts more (Chwieroth 2007).

The existing research on non-OECD countries therefore casts doubt on the common assumptions that ideology is irrelevant in these places and suggests that a more comprehensive analysis with more extensive data is worthwhile. However, there are further reasons to believe that ideology may matter worldwide, particularly in how it interacts with political institutions.

### 3. Why ideology may interact differently with institutions

Previous research often argues that the effect of government ideology on policymaking depends on the institutional environment, particularly that of long-standing OECD members: strong states, democratic governments, and programmatic electoral competition. However, other research suggests that these and other institutions, especially executive constraints, do not eliminate the effect of ideology in the rest of the world, and might even exacerbate it.

Specifically, state capacity is expected to condition the influence of government ideology. In strong states, governments have an easier time administering and enforcing their preferred policies (e.g. Dynes and Holbein 2020; Petrova 2021). In weaker states, however, the state is less autonomous and can be influenced more easily, which is why the preferences of political leaders and their supporters might in fact matter more there (Migdal 1988).

Second, democratic institutions are thought to shape the effect of government ideology. Democracy strengthens political parties and left-leaning social forces (e.g. Huber et al., 2006; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). Yet non-democratic countries still have politicians who support left-wing policies (e.g. Manzano 2017; Herre 2023), and without intense electoral competition, both leftist and rightist governments may worry less about voter backlash when pursuing their preferred policies (Dutt and Mitra 2005; Wenzelburger and Zohlnhöfer 2021).

Third, the extent of clientelism is also expected to affect the relationship between government ideology and policymaking. In programmatic electoral systems, politicians win votes with clear ideological platforms and policies (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Alvarez, Garrett, and Lange 1991). In clientelist systems, where politicians exchange patronage for votes, ideological appeals play a smaller role (e.g. Hicken 2011; Stokes et al., 2013). Even so, politicians in clientelist systems still pay attention to the broader preferences of their supporters, as clientelism acts as an alternative form of accountability rather than a lack of accountability altogether (Hicken 2011).

A final factor thought to shape the effect of government ideology on policymaking is executive constraints. Political institutions beyond the OECD tend to impose fewer checks and balances on governments. While OECD leaders may therefore find themselves constrained by legislatures, courts, and oversight agencies, leaders in non-OECD countries stand to have more power to enact policies that align with their own preferences or those of their supporters, and ideology may indeed exert a greater influence there (e.g. Jones and Olken 2005; Knutsen and Fjelde 2013; Wilson and Wright 2017).

In fact, arguments that the institutional environment of non-OECD countries might amplify the effect of ideology echo findings from research on OECD countries themselves. Studies have shown that within the OECD, a government's ideology matters less when constrained by strong labor movements (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990; Engler 2021), electoral competition (e.g. Häusermann, Picot, and Geering 2013; Beramendi et al., 2015; Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2019), and institutional checks and veto points (e.g. Immergut 1992; Steinmo 1993; Sattler 2013).

Importantly, I am not arguing that institutions do not matter. What I have in mind is more like how historical institutionalists conceive of the role of institutions. They see institutions not merely as a reflection of the preferences of powerful actors, but as having an independent effect on policymaking, including decisions about market intervention (e.g. Hall 1986; Steinmo 1993). Institutions also have a conditional effect, sometimes constraining leaders and their coalitions and keeping them from acting on their beliefs, while at other times actively empowering them (Immergut 1992; Pierson 2000). At the same time, institutions do not determine the behavior of actors either, and in some moments leave actors free to act on their ideas and beliefs (e.g. Steinmo 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2014). How institutions matter in a specific case will depend on the context and is difficult to tell in advance. This is why I consider different contexts—globally, within OECD and non-OECD countries, respectively, and under varying levels of state capacity, democracy, clientelism, and executive constraints—to better understand where and under which conditions ideology influences policy.

#### 4. Data on governments' economic ideologies

Data on the ideological orientation of governments in non-OECD countries is limited. Most existing datasets focus on parties in Europe and the Americas, and largely exclude leaders and parties in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East (e.g. Huber and Stephens 2012b; Polk et al., 2017; Armingeon et al., 2019; Volkens et al., 2019). The data by Brambor, Lindvall, and Stjernquist (2017) focuses on heads of government instead of parties, but likewise almost exclusively covers countries in Europe and the Americas. Other datasets extend to these regions but have narrower scopes, covering only dictatorships (Manzano 2017), recent cross-sections (Norris 2020), or election years (Lührmann et al., 2020b).

The dataset with the broadest geographic and temporal coverage to date—and the one used by almost all studies on the global effects of government ideology on policymaking—is the Database of Political Institutions (DPI; Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini 2021). DPI codes the economic ideology of chief executives as well as the largest government and opposition parties in 180 countries from 1975 to 2019. However, it has significant limitations: around 40% of observations on chief executives and the largest government parties are missing an ideology classification, and its coding rules allow a leader's ideology to be inferred from the policies they implemented. This approach risks circular reasoning in any analysis of ideology's impact on policymaking. Additionally, DPI's coding of party ideology is sometimes inconsistent with its primary source, the Political Handbook of the World (Lansford 2019).

To address these limitations, I constructed the Global Leader Ideology dataset, which expands the geographic and temporal scope of existing datasets while providing a more valid and reliable coding of government ideology (Herre 2023). The dataset covers the heads of government in 178 countries from 1945 (or independence) to 2020, with ideologies coded annually as of December 31. My research assistants and I identified heads of government using data from the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem; Coppedge et al., 2021), Cahoon (2021), Schemmel (2021), and additional sources.

The dataset also includes leaders identified by Archigos (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009 and Bell, Besaw, and Frank (2021)—in a similar set of 178 countries with the same time span.

Each head of government and leader is coded as having a leftist, centrist, rightist, or no economic ideology. We opted for these broad categories to ensure comparability across time and geographic regions (Brambor and Lindvall 2018). We generally assumed that a chief executive's ideological orientation would remain stable throughout their tenure, but we allowed for changes in cases with strong evidence of ideological shifts.

To determine these ideological orientations, we used a wide range of sources on individual chief executives and their political parties. My research assistants and I made use of the partial coverage of existing datasets, especially drawing on Brambor, Lindvall, and Stjernquist (2017) for heads of government in Europe and the Americas, and on Manzano (2017) for leaders in dictatorships. We also relied on statements made by the chief executives themselves, their actions unrelated to policies (e.g. constitutional provisions for socialism or bans on leftist media), and, in some cases, their close ties to other leaders. Furthermore, we considered chief executives' party affiliations, drawing on data from Mattes, Leeds, and Matsumura (2016), Cahoon (2021), Schemmel (2021), and other sources. To establish each party's ideological position, we used datasets like those by Armingeon et al. (2019), Huber and Stephens (2012b) and Lührmann et al. (2020b), as well as Cahoon (2021), the *Perspective Monde* (2021) project, DPI's party coding (cross-referenced with the Political Handbook of the World), and many primary and secondary documents, including parties' memberships in international organizations such as the Socialist International. If sources indicated that a chief executive's personal ideology deviated from their party's, we coded their individual ideology.

To ensure the validity of our coding, we worked to avoid inferring a chief executive's ideology based on policies implemented during their time in office. We disregarded any descriptions of economic or social policies enacted while they were in power, such as nationalizations, and excluded sources that seemed to base their ideological assessment on these policies. Additionally, we disregarded sources that used terms like "rightist" or "centrist" to refer to non-economic issues, such as social matters, ethnicity, or religion.

To ensure that our coding is reliable and consistent across sources, countries, and years, we implemented several quality control measures. We used training vignettes to standardize coding criteria, and each chief executive was evaluated by two or more coders. We aimed to rely on at least two sources for each coding decision, often drew on additional sources for greater accuracy, and, when sources disagreed, further investigated to resolve discrepancies. We also prioritized sources that covered multiple countries, provided detailed descriptions of the chief executive's views, and favored academic and expert sources over newspaper reports.

To enhance transparency, we compiled several hundred pages of country profiles. These profiles document the head of government and leader for each year, their party affiliations, ideological orientations, and the sources used to make each decision. Where applicable, the profiles include direct quotes from the sources to clarify our assessments.

Examples of leftist chief executives include South African president Nelson Mandela and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, centrist leaders include US president Bill Clinton and South Korean president Kim Dae-jung, and rightist chief executives include Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė and Malaysian prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad.

To validate the dataset, I compared it with several existing datasets. As shown in the [Supplementary Material](#), our coding aligns closely with Brambor, Lindvall, and Stjernquist (2017) and Manzano (2017), with approximately 95% of overlapping observations matching. For the DPI (Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini 2021) and V-Party (Lührmann et al., 2020b) datasets—which do not

specifically identify the chief executive and are therefore less directly comparable—the coding still shows substantial similarity, with around 80% of observations matching.

In the following analysis, I use the ideology of the head of government as my main measure of government ideology. I focus on heads of government instead of heads of state because heads of government are generally responsible for domestic economic policymaking, while heads of state tend to focus on foreign policy and are less involved in day-to-day policymaking. Of course, the head of government is only one part of the government, which may include ministers and parties holding different views. However, their ideology remains a reliable indicator across many political systems. In autocracies, heads of government generally have few checks on their power and often lead a party that shares their views. In democracies, heads of government tend to face more constraints from within their own government. Still, in two-party systems, they often lead a government composed of only one party. And even in multi-party systems, governments usually include ideologically similar parties (Potrafke 2017), and the head of government, as the chief executive, remains the most powerful member of government and has the power to set its agenda.

The data reveal that most heads of government have either a leftist or rightist orientation. Specifically, out of 10,727 total country-year observations, approximately 45% (4,777) had leftist heads of government, while about 40% (4,206) had rightist heads of government. The remaining country-years were mostly led by centrist heads of government (984), with only a few cases without any ideology (38), and the rest (722) observations where we were unable to identify an ideology. The dataset thereby has far fewer uncoded chief executives than the DPI dataset: approximately 6% for heads of government and 5% for leaders.

To illustrate the geographic distribution of government ideologies, Fig. 1 shows the share of leftist and rightist heads of government for each country. The figure highlights that leftist heads of government have long been common in South and East Asia as well as East and Southern Africa, while rightist heads of government have been more prevalent in Western Europe and on the Arabian Peninsula. The prevalence of both leftist and rightist heads of government outside of Europe and the Americas challenges the assumption that governments in non-OECD regions are not ideological or predominantly rightist (e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Acemoglu et al., 2015). This instead aligns with research finding ideological diversity across countries worldwide (e.g. Manzano 2017; Thorsen 2025).

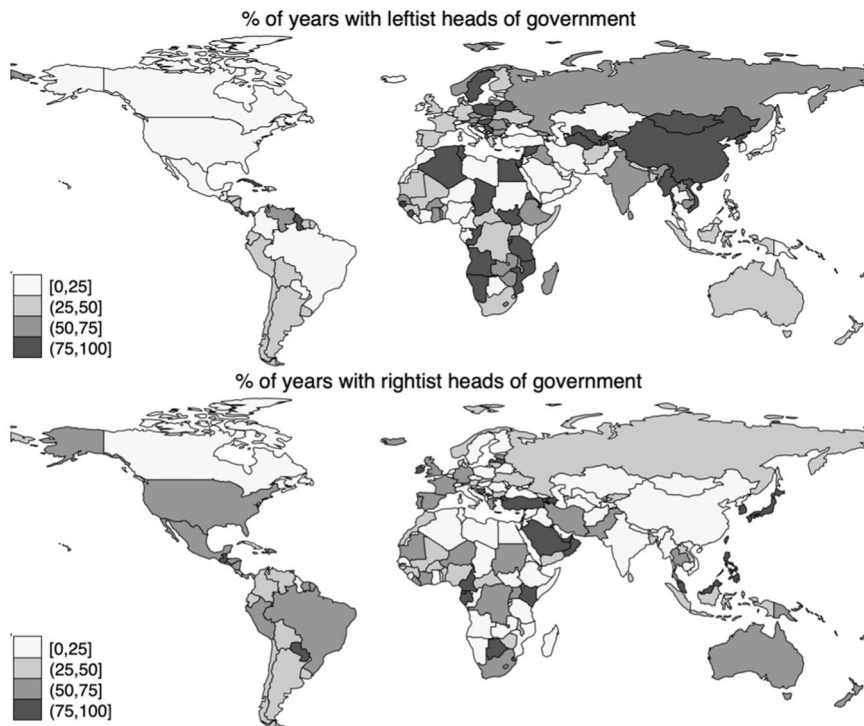
The figure further shows that many countries have experienced both leftist and rightist heads of government over time. In total, there were 468 ideological shifts between leftist and rightist heads of government across 121 countries, which will serve as the basis for the following fixed-effects analysis.

Figure 2 illustrates the trends in government ideologies over time, broken down by OECD and non-OECD countries (Bischof 2017). Rightist heads of government have generally been the most common in OECD countries, while leftist heads of government have dominated globally and in non-OECD countries since the 1970s. Centrist governments have been relatively widespread in the OECD but are rare outside of it. This pattern supports the idea that electoral competition in democracies may lead to policy convergence among parties.

Heads of government with no ideology, or for whom no information was available, are nearly absent in the OECD and uncommon in non-OECD countries. This challenges the notion that weaker states, less democratic institutions, and clientelism preclude governments with identifiable ideologies.

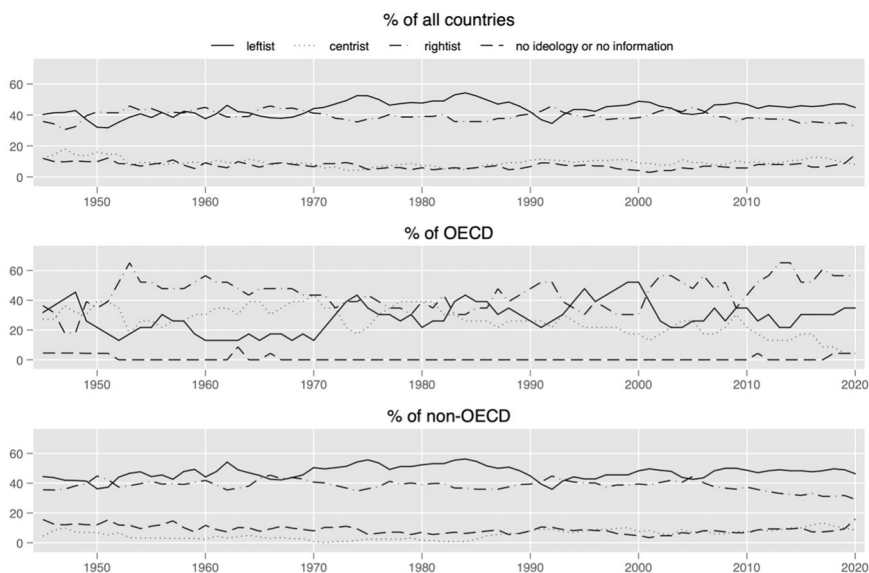
## 5. Data on market intervention policies and political institutions

I combine the global data on heads of government's ideologies with data on market intervention policies and political institutions. While market intervention data is often limited to OECD countries



**Figure 1.** Heads of government’s ideologies per country, 1945–2020.

Source: Own data.



**Figure 2.** Heads of government’s economic ideology per year, 1945–2020.

Source: Own data.

(Potrafke 2017), recent datasets offer broad geographic and temporal coverage on four key indicators of state intervention: state ownership of the economy, economic regulation, property rights protection, and taxation. I focus on market intervention policies because the degree of government involvement in the economy is central to the left-right cleavage, unlike other societal cleavages, such as language, religion, or race. Examining multiple dimensions of market intervention also helps capture the varied ways government intervention takes, and mitigates concerns about selective reporting and “file-drawer” bias (Franco, Malhotra, and Simonovits 2014).

To measure state ownership, I use data from V-Dem, which covers nearly all independent countries from 1945 to 2021. V-Dem’s coders assess the question, “Does the state own or directly control important sectors of the economy?” on an ordinal scale, which is then converted to an interval scale via their measurement model. I measure economic regulation with data from Giuliano, Mishra, and Spilimbergo (2013), which provides sector-specific information from the IMF on regulatory levels in the financial, capital, and banking sectors, as well as product markets, agriculture, and trade. This data covers an unbalanced panel of 150 industrialized and developing countries from 1960 to 2004. I capture property rights protection using data from the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG; PRS Group 2020) from 1984 to 2015, following Knutsen’s (2011) coding. The resulting index combines expert assessments of the country’s law and order enforcement and investment profile. Finally, I measure taxation using Hendrix’s (2010) data on tax revenues as a share of GDP, covering a wide cross-section of countries from 1960 to 2005. I standardize all variables to facilitate the interpretation in the subsequent analysis.

I rely on two different sources to measure the political institutions that may influence the relationship between government ideology and market intervention. I measure state capacity with Hanson and Sigman (2021) index, which focuses on extractive, coercive, and administrative capacities and uses a Bayesian latent variable analysis of 22 indicators to provide standardized data for most countries between 1960 and 2009.

For the other institutional variables, I rely on V-Dem data. I use its index of electoral democracy, which combines experts’ coding of the election of officials, suffrage, the freedom of association and expression, as well as free and fair elections. I rescale the variable’s range from 0-1 to 0-10 to facilitate the interpretation of the analysis. I measure clientelism with a variable denoting experts’ assessment of whether the ties between parties and constituents are clientelist or programmatic. I invert the variable’s values so that higher scores indicate more clientelism. Finally, I use V-Dem’s horizontal constraints index (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020a) to capture checks on the executive. This index aggregates expert assessments on the degree of oversight by the legislature, judiciary, and oversight agencies.

## 6. Research design

I use a fixed-effects approach to analyze this unbalanced panel dataset, covering government ideology, market intervention policies, and political institutions for up to 178 countries over more than seven decades, from 1945 to 2021. This approach allows me to test whether changes in government ideology are associated with changes in market intervention policies, and controls for all time-invariant differences between countries and all year-specific factors common across countries by including country and year fixed effects. This leaves the risk that changes in market intervention are driven by other factors that change at the same time. To address this, I control for several such time-varying confounders. The main regression model is as follows:

$$Y_{u,t} = \gamma Y_{u,t-2} + \beta_1 X_{u,t-1} + \beta_k Z_{u,t-2} + \alpha_u + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{u,t}$$

$Y_{u,t}$  is one of the market intervention indicators,  $Y_{u,t-2}$  denotes the previous level to capture path dependence (Pierson 2000), mean reversion, and previous policy changes that might affect the head of government's ideology (such as government turnover due to their policies; Pierson 1993; Campbell 2012).  $X_{u,t-1}$  is a categorical indicator for the head of government's ideology, distinguishing between rightist, leftist, and centrist heads of government, as well as cases with no or missing ideology. Rightist governments serve as the residual category, allowing a focus on the differences between them and leftist governments. I measure market intervention at time  $t$  and government ideology at time  $t-1$  to give ideology changes time to affect policies.

$Z_{u,t-2}$  includes several potential confounders: GDP per capita (from the Maddison Project Database; Bolt et al., 2018), urbanization levels (from Our World in Data 2019), and the level of electoral democracy (as discussed above). Similar to the previous level of market intervention  $Y_{u,t-2}$ , these variables are measured in the previous year so as not to include endogenous variables as covariates (Angrist and Pischke 2008).  $\alpha_u$  denotes unit fixed effects, which are country fixed effects for the measures of state ownership, property rights protection, and taxation, and country-sector fixed effects for economic regulation, to account for the sector-specific nature of that data. They account for time-invariant characteristics of countries and economic sectors, such as colonial pasts or long-standing norms around economic freedom and state intervention in the economy.  $\delta_t$  denotes time fixed effects, capturing shocks or trends that affect all countries the same, such as economic crises that prompt more government intervention across countries.  $\varepsilon_{u,t}$  is an error term, capturing all omitted factors. In all models, I cluster the standard errors by country or country sector.

I identify the causal effect of ideology on market intervention policies under two assumptions: first, I assume sequential exogeneity, that countries with an ideological change in their government have parallel trends in market intervention policies compared to countries without such a change, provided that they have similar prior policies, economic development, urbanization, electoral democracy, and long-term policy levels. Second, I assume that market intervention policies are stationary. I probe the plausibility of both assumptions in the analysis.

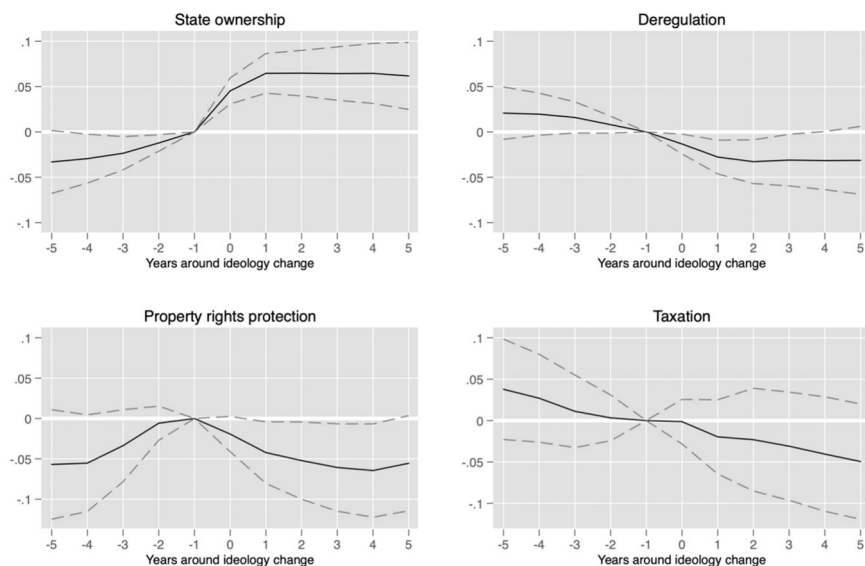
To examine how political institutions condition the relationship between government ideology and market intervention, I employ a two-way fixed-effects estimator with locally linear regressions based on Gaussian kernel reweighting (Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu 2019). This approach relaxes the assumption that the interaction effect is linear and protects from extrapolating beyond the common support of the independent variables.

## 7. Ideology and market intervention globally

Two-way fixed-effects estimates indicate that, on a global scale, government ideology generally affects market intervention policies in the expected ways. Figure 3 shows the main results for changes in market intervention policies one year after a change in government ideology, as in the baseline model in equation 1, as well as up to five years before and after the change.

As expected, leftist governments are associated with more state ownership than rightist governments. The regression coefficients are statistically significant at conventional levels and remain significant up to five years after the ideological change. Substantively, this effect translates to a difference of approximately 0.06 standard deviations in state ownership across countries and time.

Consistent with expectations, leftist governments also engage in less economic deregulation than rightist governments. The coefficients are statistically significant in the first few years following an ideology change, with an effect size of roughly 0.03 standard deviations in deregulation.



**Figure 3.** Effects of leftist government on market intervention over time.

OLS regression with unit and year fixed effects and standard errors clustered by unit. Unit of analysis is the country-sector-year for deregulation, country-year otherwise. Regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals graphed. Reference category is rightist governments. Covariates of lagged dependent variable, GDP per capita, level of urbanization, electoral democracy, and indicators for centrist governments and those with missing ideology included.

Leftist governments also provide less protection for property rights compared to rightist governments, with statistically significant coefficients across years. The effect size here is about 0.05 standard deviations.

Unexpectedly, I find that leftist governments raise less taxes than rightist governments. However, the regression coefficients are not statistically significant.

The causal interpretation of these findings depends on the assumption of stationarity, which I examine by testing whether the regression coefficients of the lagged dependent variables equal 1. For all outcomes, I can reject the null hypothesis of non-stationarity. I also conduct Fisher unit roots tests, which all reject the null hypothesis of the presence of a unit root in the unbalanced panels, further supporting the assumption of stationarity.

While I cannot directly test for sequential exogeneity, I probe this assumption by examining whether differences in the outcomes precede ideology changes, which would suggest that countries are not on parallel trends. Figure 3 indicates that sequential exogeneity is plausible: for most outcomes, the differences in outcomes before ideology changes are not statistically significant. The only exception is state ownership, where the coefficient is statistically significant but negative. This suggests that, if anything, state ownership was lower and not already higher in countries about to experience an ideology change relative to other countries.

I conduct several robustness checks (detailed in the [Supplementary Appendix](#)) and find similar results. Specifically, I probe the baseline model by using alternative lag structures, employing different measures of government ideology (such as the leader's ideology), removing outliers, and adding covariates for economic growth, globalization, and economic inequality. I also apply a novel difference-in-differences matching estimator designed for causal inference with time-series cross-sectional data ([Imai, Kim, and Wang 2023](#)), in response to recent critiques of the conventional two-way fixed-effects estimator (e.g. [Schmitt 2016](#); [Imai and Kim 2019](#); [Garritzmann and Seng 2020](#)).

Together, these results provide strong evidence that leftist governments worldwide influence several tools of market intervention: they own larger parts of the economy, deregulate markets less, and protect property rights less than rightist governments. However, I do not find a robust association between government ideology and taxation.

Given that existing research often suggests these results are driven by OECD countries, I next examine the effect of government ideology on market intervention policies separately for OECD and non-OECD countries.

## 8. Ideology and market intervention in the (non-)OECD

Contrary to common assumptions, the fixed-effects estimates demonstrate that the effects of government ideology on market intervention are primarily driven by countries beyond long-term OECD members. [Figure 4](#) repeats the two-way fixed-effects analysis from [Fig. 3](#), but separately for OECD and non-OECD countries.

In OECD countries, I find few statistically significant effects of government ideology on market intervention. Furthermore, the differences mostly run counter to expectations: if anything, leftist governments own less of the economy, deregulate markets more, and tax less than rightist governments. Only the medium-term effects of property rights protection go in the expected direction. But even then, they are smaller than those for the non-OECD countries. This suggests the results are not just because there are relatively few OECD countries and they are underpowered.

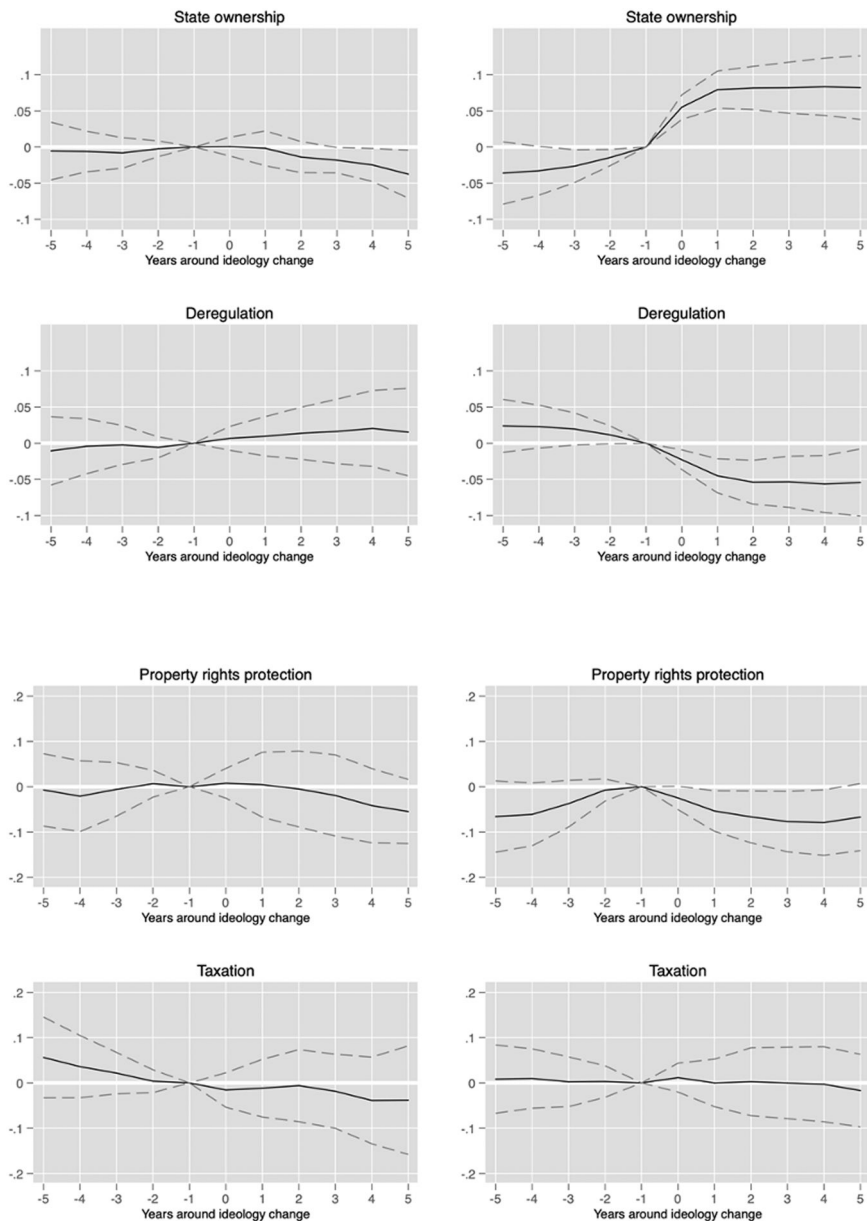
In non-OECD countries, however, the results are robust: leftist governments own more of the economy, deregulate markets less, and protect property rights less than rightist governments. Only the effect on taxation remains statistically insignificant. Importantly, these differences in market intervention do not precede the changes in the ideological orientation of governments.

As shown in the [Supplementary Appendix](#), the results are similar when using the matching estimator. I also pool the two samples to test whether the split-sample coefficients differ significantly from one another. I find statistically significant differences for state ownership and economic deregulation, suggesting that, if anything, government ideology matters less for these market-intervention policies in OECD countries.

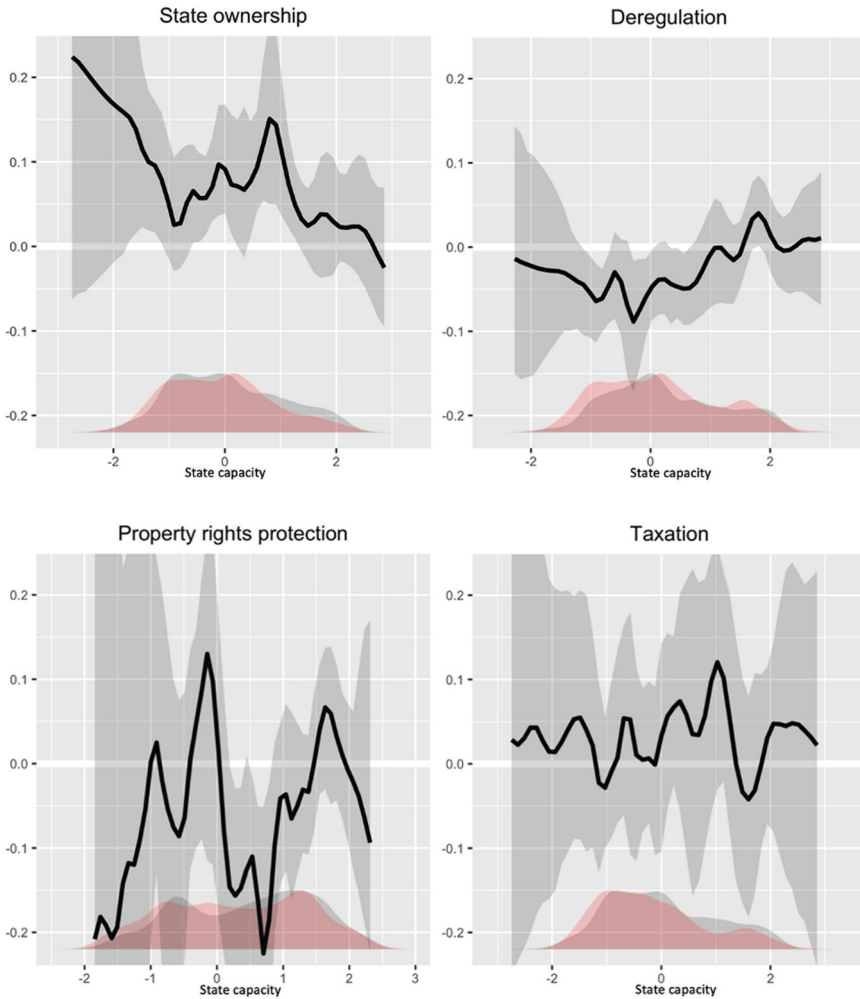
These findings challenge the widely held belief that government ideology is less relevant in non-OECD countries, instead suggesting that ideology influences market intervention globally. However, it is possible that the institutions thought to moderate the impact of ideology—state capacity, electoral democracy, clientelism, and executive constraints—are also present in some non-OECD countries, which the analysis does not account for. I therefore investigate these institutional moderators directly in the next section.

## 9. Ideology, market intervention, and political institutions

My empirical analysis shows that political institutions mostly do not condition the effect of government ideology on market intervention as expected by previous research. Specifically, ideology does



**Figure 4.** Effects of leftist government in OECD and non-OECD countries. Results for OECD countries on the left, for non-OECD countries on the right. Regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals graphed. Reference category is rightist governments.



**Figure 5.** Effects of leftist government depending on state capacity.

Locally linear regressions with Gaussian kernel reweighting by [Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu \(2019\)](#). Unit and year fixed effects included. Standard errors produced by non-parametric bootstrap. Unit of analysis is the country-sector-year for deregulation, country-year otherwise. Regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals graphed. Reference category is rightist governments. Distributions across moderators of leftist governments in red and of rightist governments in grey. Covariates of lagged dependent variable, GDP per capita, level of urbanization, electoral democracy, indicators for centrist governments and those with missing ideology, as well as interaction between moderator and all covariates included.

not appear to matter more in contexts with high state capacity, democracy, and weak clientelism. However, there is some evidence that ideology matters more when executive constraints are weak.

Using the locally linear-regressions approach, [Fig. 5](#) plots the marginal effects of leftist governments relative to rightist governments across different levels of state capacity.

I find no evidence that government ideology has a stronger impact in states with high capacity. The marginal effects are, for the most part, not statistically significant and non-monotonous, and, if anything, become smaller in size as state capacity increases.

Figure 6 shows the marginal effects of leftist governments across varying levels of electoral democracy. Contrary to most arguments, the effect of ideology on state ownership is larger and statistically significant at lower levels of electoral democracy. For deregulation, property rights protection, and taxation, the effects are highly non-monotonous and not consistently statistically significant.

Figure 7 shows the effects of ideology across levels of clientelism. Leftist governments increase state ownership at most levels of clientelism, with effect sizes that are unexpectedly larger and statistically significant at moderate and high levels of clientelism. For deregulation, property rights protection, and taxation, the effects are again highly non-monotonous and rarely statistically significant.

Finally, there is some evidence that government ideology matters more when executive constraints are weak. Figure 8 shows the marginal effects of leftist versus rightist governments across different levels of executive constraints. The impact of government ideology on state ownership is larger and mostly statistically significant when executive constraints are weak. For deregulation, the effects are also larger with fewer executive constraints, though are mostly not statistically significant. The effects on property rights protection and taxation are highly non-monotonous and generally statistically insignificant.

In sum, I find only sparse evidence that political institutions condition the effect of government ideology on market intervention in the ways often assumed. Contrary to expectations, ideology does not have a stronger impact in countries with strong states, democratic governments, or less clientelist practices. If anything, ideology appears more influential in countries with less democratic regimes and higher levels of clientelism. However, in line with expectations, I find some evidence that ideology matters more when executive constraints are weaker.

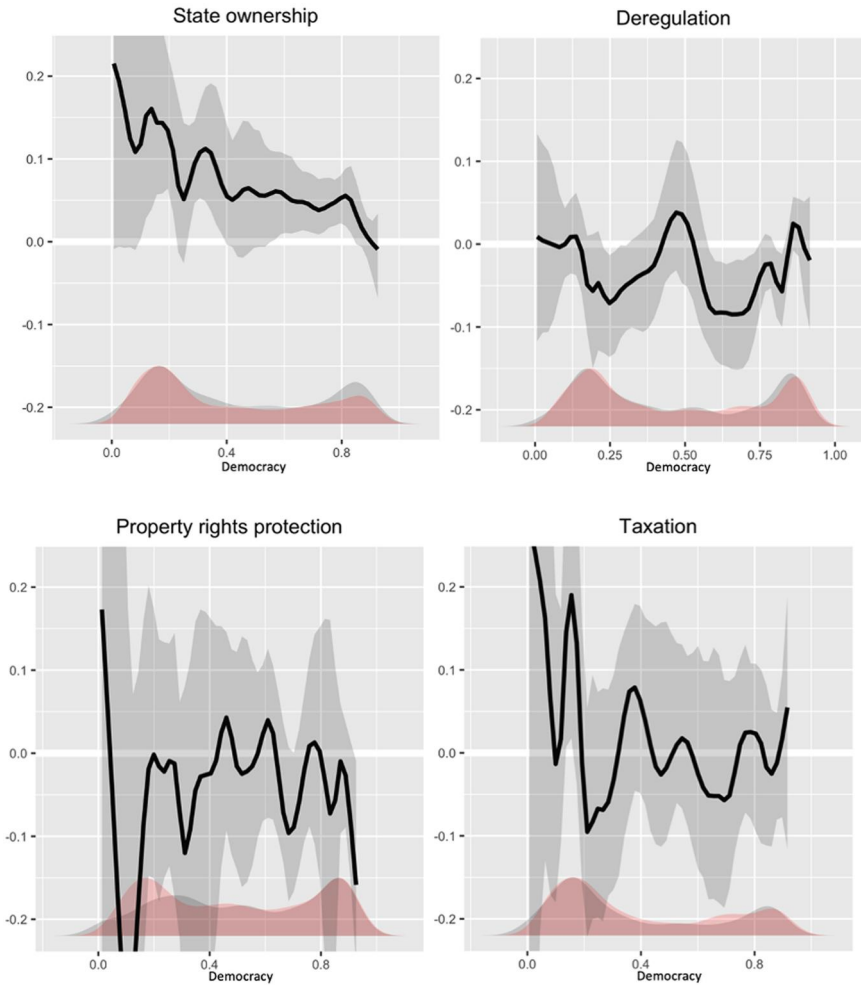
## 10. Discussion

Previous research helps contextualize my findings, and my results in turn clarify and extend existing work.

Existing research suggests an explanation for why I only find ideological differences outside the core OECD members. Much of the work on OECD countries has focused on more specific macroeconomic and social policies (e.g. Obinger, Schmitt, and Zohlnhöfer 2014; Potrafke 2017; Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019), for which there is limited global data. Moreover, on the broad market intervention policies studied here, OECD countries have largely converged toward middling positions, and built strong institutions and well-organized interests in support of them (e.g. Pierson 1993; Hacker and Pierson 2014). As a result, the remaining partisan conflict in these countries centers on narrower, more targeted policy issues. In contrast, non-OECD countries continue to grapple with broader questions of market intervention, and ideological questions remain more pronounced.

Prior studies can also explain the absence of significant differences in taxation levels between leftist and rightist governments. They suggest that partisan differences may manifest more in the *composition* of taxation rather than its overall level (e.g. Schmitt and Zohlnhöfer 2019): leftist governments may impose higher rates on wealth and corporations, whereas rightist governments tend to favor consumption taxes, broader tax bases, and lower rates.

My findings, in turn, shed more light on *how* ideology influences policymaking in non-OECD countries. My findings that ideology does not matter more in more democratic and less clientelist countries run counter to arguments that the ideological leanings of social supporters are decisive. Instead, the finding that ideological differences were larger in countries with less constrained



**Figure 6.** Effects of leftist government depending on democracy.

executives supports previous arguments that leadership preferences play a critical role in shaping policy.

Finally, my findings add to our understanding of how *institutions* matter for policymaking. They suggest that some institutions may matter less by conditioning the effect of ideology, as I don't find any differences across different levels of state capacity, democracy, and clientelism. Still, other institutions seem to have this conditioning role, as my finding about the role of executive constraints shows. More broadly, the different findings for OECD and non-OECD countries suggest that context does matter. And importantly, my analysis does not question the general importance of institutions. Institutions do matter in many ways, independent of ideology.

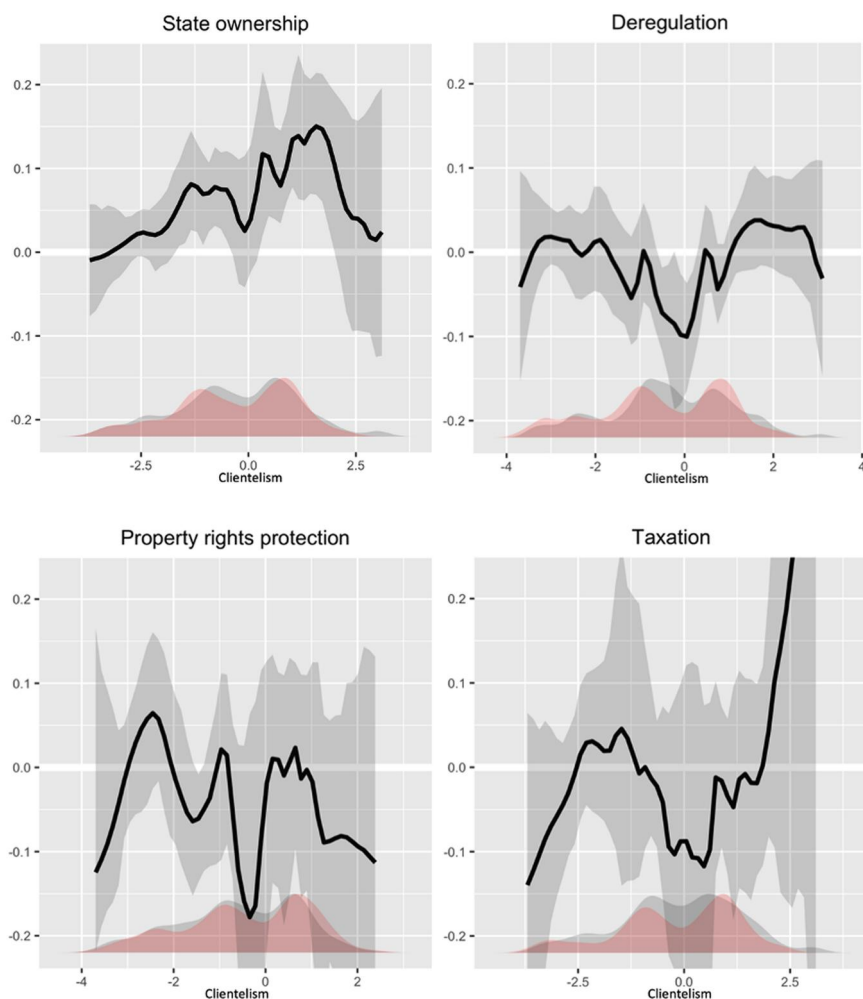
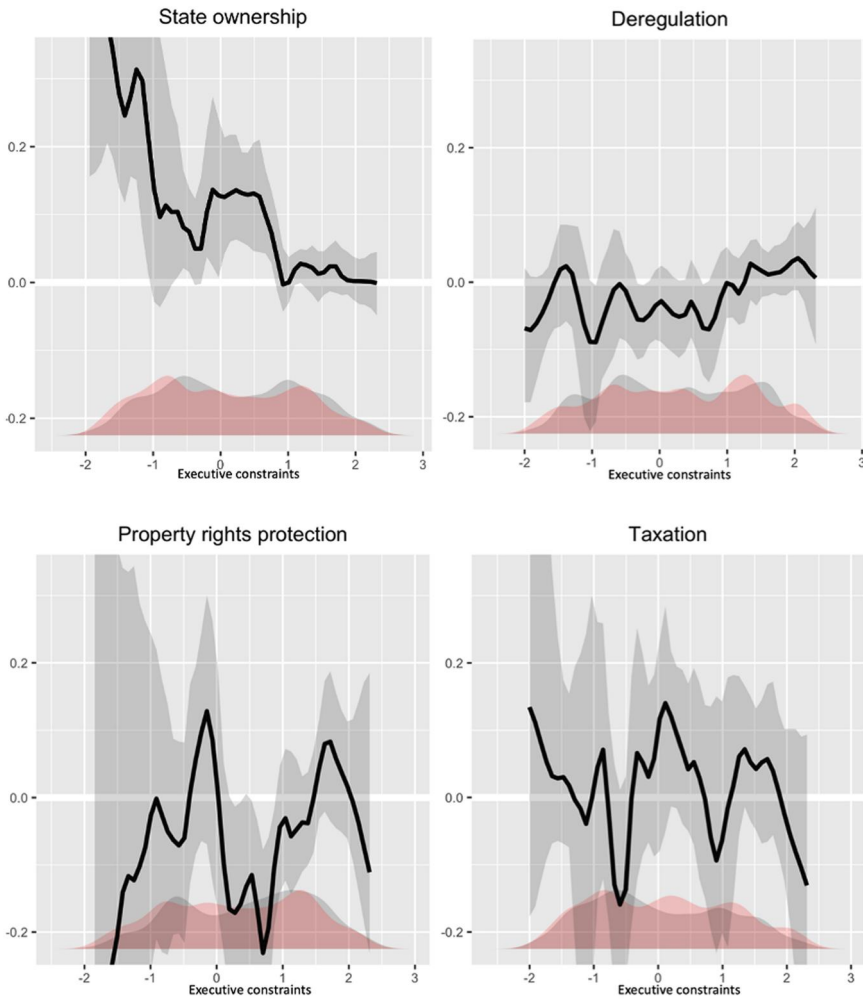


Figure 7. Effects of leftist government depending on clientelism.

## 11. Conclusion

This article broadens our understanding of where and how a government's ideological orientation influences policymaking. Using a new dataset of the ideology of chief executives in 182 countries from 1945 to 2020, and employing a fixed-effects approach, I find robust evidence that leftist governments own more of the economy, deregulate markets less, and protect property less than rightist governments, but do not impose higher taxes, in this global sample.

These findings challenge widely held assumptions about the conditions under which government ideology matters. Specifically, the global results are driven by non-OECD countries, with no robust effects on these tools of market intervention for long-standing OECD members. Contrary to



**Figure 8.** Effects of leftist government depending on executive constraints.

expectations, the ideological orientation of a government also does not have a stronger impact in countries with strong states, democratic institutions, or little clientelism. Instead, I find some evidence that government ideology has a greater effect in countries with fewer executive constraints. These results challenge the common assumption that government ideology only or mostly matters in OECD countries and suggest that political institutions do not condition the effect of ideology on market intervention as much as previously thought.

The analysis thereby offers important lessons about partisan politics and the politics in young and non-democracies. I find that the core argument of partisan theories—that who governs us makes a difference—also applies beyond OECD countries, at least for market-intervention policies. The distinction between OECD and non-OECD countries may not be whether ideology matters, but rather for

which policies it matters. In non-OECD countries, ideology seems to matter for policies on which OECD countries have largely converged.

My results also add to our understanding of political institutions. They indicate that institutions are often less effective than commonly believed at stopping governments from enacting policies aligned with their views. Because of this, scholars might need to reconsider the relationship between ideology, institutions, and policymaking. But this does not mean we should dismiss institutions. I still find evidence that executive constraints limit how much ideology influences policies. And institutions matter above and beyond how they shape the effect of ideology on policymaking.

My research also speaks to current concerns about the global rise of populism. Populist leaders often hold policy views very different from traditional politicians. My findings suggest that these leaders may frequently succeed in implementing their ideas once they are in power. As a result, they may push for increased deregulation, more economic intervention, or a unique mix of both. In countries outside the OECD, traditional institutions may especially struggle to limit their actions. But even within OECD countries, populist leaders might test or even depart from the broad consensus around economic policies there. Still, my analysis also highlights that populists' success will partly depend on existing political institutions—particularly executive constraints. Notably, these are exactly the institutions populists have been attacking.

Beyond its immediate implications, this study underscores the need for further research and suggests several avenues to deepen our understanding of policy differences in non-OECD countries. One avenue is to collect more detailed information on the ideologies of governments, distinguishing between center-left, center-right, far-left, and far-right leaders, and compile global data on the ideological composition of cabinets and parliaments. This could clarify which types of governments are driving differences in market intervention. Another avenue is to explore how exactly political institutions have influenced the relationship between government ideology and policymaking through qualitative research. Finally, future studies could examine the global effects of government ideology on other policies—such as spending on education, health, and welfare—on or broader outcomes like economic growth and inequality. Such research is essential to advancing our understanding of how leaders and governments matter around the world.

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## Supplementary data

[Supplementary data](#) are available at *Socio-Economic Review* online.

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