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ARTICLE

Political Training in Four Generations of Activists in Argentina and Brazil*

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This paper, which is part of wider research on the transformation of political linkages in Argentina and Brazil, analyzes a specific dimension: political activist training. It seeks to understand how transformations such as weaker partisanship and intense political fluctuation manifest in the way activists have defined and experienced political training. I examine narratives in interviews held between 2007 and 2015 with four generational groups of activists, classified according to the historical period in which they engaged in youth activism. All of them were members of government-supporting organizations during the Kirchner (2003-2015) and Workers' Party administrations (2003-2016). The issue of activist training is relevant if we consider the paradoxical survival of political and partisan activism in a context of electoral volatility and leaders circumventing parties to establish a direct political bond with citizens. Also, while early political socialization has been given considerable attention in the literature, the issue of internal political training – once people have become members of an organization – has not. The findings show a reconfiguration of what activist training used to convey in the past, as well as impacts and challenges over training brought about by these organizations' access to government.

Keywords: Activism; political activist training; Argentina; Brazil; generations.

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This paper analyzes the issue of political training through the narratives of four different generational groups of activists who engaged in youth activism between the 1960s and the early years of the 21st century, and who participated in government-supporting political organizations between 2003 and 2015/2016, that is, during the administrations of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina and the Workers' Party (PT) administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil.

The findings converge in a wider study that delves into transformation in political linkage and how this is reflected in the narratives and practices of activists. In agreement with literature that has suggested such changes as low levels of partisan identification, growing electoral volatility and intense fluctuation in political identities (MANIN, 1992; MONTERO and GUNTHER, 2002) – particularly in Argentina and Brazil since their democratic transitions (BAKER et al., 2006; CARREIRÃO, 2008; HOCHSTETLER and FRIEDMAN, 2008; POUSADELA, 2007; POUSADELA and CHERESKY, 2004) – the wider research explores how these transformations have affected political activism.

In previous papers (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2017, 2015) I have presented a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, activists have experienced an adaptation to the fluctuating conditions of political life. This adaptation consists of a growing contingency, flexibility and informality vis-à-vis these activists' own political linkage, which becomes more partial, multiple and overlapped with other memberships and identities. On the other hand, parallel to this adaptation, the activists' narratives evince nostalgic elements, which often refer to a past of rooted political identities and of parties with an intense everyday internal life and a strong bond with voters.

Against such a background, this paper analyses a particular issue affected by the above-mentioned transformations: political activist training.

This paper's research question and hypotheses

This paper's approach to the issue of political activist training is situated thus: it is a case study of two Latin American countries, with a sample of interviewees who belonged to the government-supporting base during the

Kirchnerist (2003-2015) and PT administrations (2003-2016). The research question seeks to understand how transformations in political linkage and state cooptation manifest in the way these particular activists have defined and experienced training provided by their own organizations in recent decades. The analysis is structured in such a way as to address my two working hypotheses.

My first hypothesis is that there has been a reconfiguration of what activist training used to convey in the past coeval with transformations in political linkages in Argentina and Brazil. In other words, different generations of youth activists describe and define activist training differently. This paper's findings will analyze some of these contrasts.

My second hypothesis is that activists identify the institutional absorption of their organizations by the State (e.g., through jobs and resource management) as having caused impacts on and posed challenges to internal activist training, which will also be reconstructed through my respondents' accounts.

Conceptual framework

Before introducing the research field this paper is in dialogue with, two key terms should be defined: 01. generation and 02. political activist training.

As per the definition of P. Vommaro (2015), a generation cannot be considered a mere cohort. Or, in the terms set down by Mannheim (1993 [1928]), chronological contemporaneity is not enough to define a political generation[1]. Mannheim (1993) underlines the importance of historical factors in political mobilization and in shaping a generational consciousness. Rather than an age question or a coincidence in birth, the generational linkage is constituted by a subjectivation process associated with a shared social or historical experience (SVAMPA, 2009; VOMMARO, 2015). Activists' political socialization in a particular context or time might translate into certain common values and conceptions. For the Argentine case, for example, Blanco and Vommaro (2017) argue that the promise of democracy emerged, in the early 1980s, as a structuring cause in activist practices, and party affiliation then became one of the main forms of political commitment. Towards the end of that decade, party life started to be seen critically (associated

[1]For state-of-the-art comment on the notion of generation, see Kertzer (1983) and Longa (2017).

with the bureaucratic limits of political representation modelled during the democratic transition) and, in the 1990s youth activism experienced a certain distancing from traditional parties. These processes outline specific generational ways of active involvement in politics. In short, it is possible to consider a generation as relating to a period of time during which an identity is built on the basis of resources and meanings that are socially and historically available.

The use of the concept of generation, on the other hand, should not ignore the fact that, in the last few decades, universal, solid and homogeneous social identities have been replaced by more fragile and provisional ones (ELLIOTT, 2001; LONGA, 2017).

The generational classification proposed herein (see the methodology section) refers to some of the common characteristics of the chosen periods that mark the beginning of the interviewees' political involvement as youth activists. As Whittier (2013) shows in her review of generational analysis, some scholars of social movements have chosen a similar criterion to define political generations: a common time of entry into an organization or movement.

Political activist training has been defined by French researchers into the Sociology of Political Engagement (SAWICKI and SIMÉANT, 2009, and others) as a privileged moment for the reproduction of sociability (WILLEMEZ, 2013) but also for molding of a set of uniform practices and values within a political organization and therefore for the creation of a collective identity. Collective identity is understood hereinafter as per Mische's (1997) three dimensions, all of which are related to processes of activism and mobilization: identity as 'recognition' (as a construction within the networks individuals insert themselves in), as 'experience' (through the establishment of commitments, social linkages and collective meanings) and as 'orientation' (as a mechanism selectively used by actors to orient future action). This conceptualization of identity allows us to move within the paradox of political commitment in a context of contingent and volatile identities.

As we will see in the findings, political activist training was understood by the interviewees in two different ways: 01. as theoretical-ideological training (through courses, readings and theoretical discussions); and 02. as a collective

learning process produced by activist practices and experiences. At the start of my research, my notion of training was restricted to the first of these two definitions (i.e. theoretical-ideological training) but as the activists' narratives also revealed the pervasive presence of the latter (i.e. training as a collective process derived from activist experiences), not only did I duly include it, but I also made sure that the significant weighting given to it in the narratives of the younger generations became a finding on its own.

Research field and relevance

The issue of political activist training, once people have joined a political organization, has not been nearly as present in academic debate as the question of early political socialization and its influence on political behavior. The considerable attention paid to political socialization in school, at home, among social peers, etc – i.e., the transmission of political culture to new generations of citizens in a society (OWEN, 2008) – has been systematized by revisions of the debate, such as those of Neundorf and Smets (2017), Sigel (1995) and McLeod and Shah (2009)[2].

By contrast, the topic of political training processes within organizations has not received a comparable level of attention, with the possible exception of cadre formation in Marxist parties. Indeed, a considerable number of studies (among them, ÉTHUIN, 2003; DUCANGE, 2012; JEIFETS and JEIFETS, 2016) have analyzed political training within communist and socialist parties in Europe and Latin America.

Some of these studies have spotted a transformation in activist training echoed by this paper's own findings. For example, Ducange (2012) looks at activist training in the European left in the 19th and 20th centuries and describes the interaction between Marxist theoretical readings and the popularization of activist

[2]Revisiting the scholarly debate on early political socialization is beyond the scope of this article. Some examples in respect of Argentina and Brazil include: 01. Vázquez et al.'s (2019) findings from a survey of young Argentine political activists, which show the weight of politics in the family backgrounds of people who later engaged in politics; 02. Brenner's (2011) study on the experiences of young people participating in political parties, which delves into different spheres of political socialization that build 'dispositions' towards political commitment (family, school, peers, contact with organizations, etc), thus shaping 'layers' of experiences; and 03. Martins and Barros (2018), as well as Fuks (2015), who study the effects of parliamentary simulations for youth – respectively, the Brazilian Youth Congress (PBJ) and the Mineiro Youth Parliament (in its 2008 edition) – on civic and political socialization.

training through the circulation of brochures featuring discussions of current events. According to Ducange (2012), the 1980s saw the beginning of a decline in that type of activist pedagogical model. Éthuin (2003) observes a similar decline in his thesis on cadre formation in the French Communist Party, with the replacement, after 1995, of centralized partisan socialization and assimilation of the official political line by a diversified offer of training courses with an identity reconfiguration.

Beyond the particular emphasis on cadre formation in Marxist parties, political training in other kinds of parties and organizations has not garnered much interest in the academic literature, so there are few systematic studies on the subject. One such is Villalba (1996), who delves into activist training among the Greens, the French ecologist party. Another is Chabot (1993), who describes the mechanisms for facilitating training in Catholic women's professional unions in France. Yet another, Palumbo (2018) deals with the issue of skills, knowledge and militant resources in 'popular movements', considering those organizations as political-pedagogical experiences in the construction of activist paths in Argentina. Martins and Santos (2012) study activist training within Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (hereinafter 'MST', which stands for the Portuguese name *Movimento de Trabalhadores Sem Terra*) and outline a concept that has been particularly valuable (and to which I will return later): experience as a training mechanism.

Among the numerous studies concerned with the history of organizational and programmatic changes experienced by the PT – something that many of the narratives cited in this research also highlight – some include observations on activist training, although it is not their main focus (AMARAL, 2010; HUNTER, 2010; KECK, 1992; SECCO, 2011).

In Argentina, a few studies also make subsidiary references to internal political training in different organizations included in our sample, such as Levitsky's analysis (2003) on the transformations undergone by the Peronist Party (PJ) since the 1980s; or Campusano's thesis (2019), which compares the paths of young activists in three local political organizations, including their formal and informal training experiences.

Certain studies focused on youth political activism, especially in Brazil and Argentina, and specifically on organizations that are contemplated in this paper's research sample of interviewees, have also provided organizational and/or generational overviews that support this paper's analysis.

In Brazil, Mische's work (2008) on youth student, religious and party activism in the 1980s and 1990s, with its climax in the 'Fora Collor' demonstrations of 1992, offers a rich picture of young Brazilian activists during the period, their perspectives and their mobilization practices; it also shows how the role of political parties in Brazilian civic life has changed over time. Rocha (2009) analyses the diverse forms of youth political participation in the PT in Brasília and argues that the logics, recruitment and activism practices of young PT activists in the past contrast with those of the 2000s. Her findings, including diversification in terms of party membership and more individualist linkages, are suggestively similar to those of some of my interviewees' accounts. Also regarding the PT, two studies in particular find limitations in respect of its youth branch (MARQUES, 2016) and even a recent tendency towards the ageing or weakening of its active youth membership (LOCATELLI, 2017).

In two oral history studies of long-term activists, Ferreira and Fortes (2008) and the Anita Garibaldi and Maurício Grabois Foundations (CAMJ, 2013) collate accounts of the PT's foundational years and Communist Party of Brazil's (PCdoB) actions during the dictatorship, respectively. Both books make occasional references to the issue of activist training, and they also serve as portraits of generational approaches to youth activism from the 1960s to the 1980s. Also drawing on the accounts of its main actors, Lerrer (2009) studies the first generation of MST activists during the 1980s.

In Argentina, youth political activism in organizations that supported the Kirchnerist administrations has been the subject of numerous studies. Examples include the work of Vázquez and Vommaro (2012), Larrouqué (2017) and Rocca Rivarola (2019b, 2016) on '*La Cámpora*' – arguably the activist organization that grew the most during the period. The organization's historical references to 1970s Peronist youth activism, as depicted by Vázquez and Vommaro (2012), and its self-proclamation as the government's official youth during the two Cristina Fernández de Kirchner administrations (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2019b) highlight some of the key

features of one of this paper's generation groups, those who became young activists after 2003.

In terms of generational approaches to activism, Tomizaki and Rombaldi (2009) reflect on the characteristics of political commitment in different generations of union members in the State of São Paulo between the 1970s and the 1990s in Brazil. For Argentina, Svampa (2009) uses a similar approach to study different generations of metal workers and consider the issue of Peronist identity. She claims, in line with the transformations in political linkage mentioned above, that political traditions have weakened in the younger generations, leaving social, cultural and political references dislocated and fragmented, a process that has affected even such surviving identities as Peronist popular culture.

Finally, as one of my hypotheses refers to the impact of the organizations' political access to government on activist training, some studies on the relationship between activism and government insertion have been useful for interpreting our findings, and show numerous resulting transformations that are experienced by activists. Specific features of activism within the State, such as activist professionalization in public posts, particular conceptions of political commitment in public office and everyday intersections between both, have been examined by Ribeiro (2010), Silva and Oliveira (2011), Levy (2012), Vázquez (2014) and Rocca Rivarola (2019a). Activist professionalization has also been analyzed, although from a less specific approach, by some studies from outside Latin America (LAGROYE, 1994; OFFERLÉ, 2011).

In light of the research, why is it relevant to address the issue of political activist training through a generational approach?

Firstly, and as has already been argued above, although early political socialization has been given considerable attention in academic literature, the issue of internal training – that is, once people become active members of a political organization – has not.

Secondly, the paradoxical survival of political and partisan activism in a context of electoral volatility, political fluctuation and of leaders eluding parties in order to establish a direct political bond with citizens, merits investigation and makes an analysis of different aspects of political commitment,

such as internal training, relevant. Thus, organic political activism has not perished, but it has certainly changed in more than one way, and we need to consider these changes.

Thirdly, a generational but also a historically diachronic approach is a suitable lens to address the question of activist training if: 01. we aim for insights into youth political commitment as well as changes to it over time; and 02. we consider the definition of a generation as related to a particular historical socialization. And, even though scholarship on political generations is abundant, it has often focused on specific generations, such as the 1960s generation in the United States, as Whittier (2013) has argued, or the 1970s generation in Argentina (recently, studies there have also given some attention to youth activism in the 2000s).

This paper seeks to insert itself in the existing research field and contribute to it as an empirical, diachronic and comparative study (between countries and also between different generations of young activists) on a topic (political activist training) that has been so far addressed mostly as a subsidiary issue among studies with other research agendas. It also approaches training as one of the aspects of political activism that has been affected by broader transformations in political linkage

Methodological decisions

The paper analyses, from a qualitative methodological perspective, semi-structured interviews held with 43 activists between 2007 and 2015 in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil; and Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area (the so-called '*Conurbano Bonaerense'*) in Argentina[3]. In terms of representation, the findings of this research do not aim at a generalization or at building a general theory of political training. Instead, they aim at a situated interpretation of a specific issue within a scope of organizations and in two particular geographical contexts.

[3]These locations were chosen on the basis of their relevance for PT and Peronist histories and growth (São Paulo and Greater Buenos Aires) or else their historical weakness (Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro). In total, 129 interviews were carried out. Forty-three of them were selected for this paper, based on the richness of the accounts and on the purpose of setting up a sample of generational groups of similar dimensions.

The sample has been built considering four generational groups of activists from different organizations (see Annex, Table 01 and Table 02). The classification was organized according to the period in which they initiated their political commitment as youth activists.

First, there is, in the sample, a generational group of interviewees that became youth activists in the 1960s and 70s, i.e., during the height of the Brazilian dictatorship (following the 1964 coup) and the military dictatorships in Argentina (the so-called '*Revolución Argentina*', following the 1966 coup and the more repressive military '*Proceso'* that started in 1976). A second group of the sample was politically socialized in the 1980s, during the return to democracy (1983 in Argentina, and 1985 in Brazil), in a context of mass party affiliation and a proliferation of new activist organizations. A third generational group in the sample became involved in youth activism in the 1990s (years marked by the structural reforms of the Menem and Cardoso administrations) and up until the 2001 crisis in Argentina and Lula's victory in the 2002 election. And finally, the last generation grouped in the sample was of particular interest for this research, because it was composed of activists who had engaged in politics (and therefore were socialized as activists) after 2003, within the orbit of a government[4].

The interviews were held with activists from different kinds of political organizations. Political parties, such as the Peronist Party (PJ) and Workers' Party (PT), but also other organizations with a different format, such as '*La Cámpora*', in Argentina, or '*Consulta Popular*' in Brazil. In Argentina, the range of organizations in the sample is wider due to my decision to consider the

[4]Following Hammersley and Atkinson (1994, p. 211), the passing of time plays an important part in the interpretation of the information provided by the interviews: what is said there is necessarily conditioned by what has happened before and will happen after. But this potential problem in terms of memory, oblivion and re-signifying historical processes and personal experiences as time goes by does not invalidate the answers or deem them biased because qualitative research supposes situated interpretations (in time, in a certain context, etc). Also, the accounts are mediated by beliefs, attitudes and values, they are not a mere description of events, but rather a selection and evaluation of them (NAVARRO, 2007). Therefore, revisiting the past in an account means that memory will be conceived as a present construction that dives into the past recreating old and new meanings (GONZÁLEZ, 2015). This can also apply to the passing of time between interviews (2007-2015). Each account is situated in a particular political context, and affected by it. For example, kirchnerist grassroots' political identity and appeals were not identical in 2004 and in 2011; and Dilma's relationship with the PT and social movements was very different from Lula's.

proliferation of numerous Kirchnerist collectives beyond and outside the PJ. In Brazil, conversely, the presence of PT members in non-partisan organizations was so significant that the concern was, instead, to represent in the sample different PT factions and factional groupings[5] together with other allied parties and organizations. Two other criteria in sampling were: gathering a similar number of interviewees for both countries and also for each generational group, as well as reducing gender asymmetry as much as possible[6].

Beyond these decisions, the sampling process was aimed at building a purposeful sample (PATTON, 2002), that is, one with valuable cases, rich in information, in order to achieve a deep understanding rather than a general theory. This sort of sampling and selection (who, how many, etc) does not imply a decision made only before fieldwork, but a gradual and open definition during the course of research process (MEO and NAVARRO, 2009).

Finally, regarding case selection, Argentina and Brazil make two especially rich cases for a comparative study on activist training in government-supporting organizations. Both countries share some similarities in terms of their political history: long and repressive dictatorships, democratic transitions during the first half of the 1980s, and neoliberal structural reforms in the 1990s. And, finally, in the early 2000s, the arrival in power of leaders that presented themselves as post-neoliberal. The Kirchnerist and PT administrations also shared some common features: 01. an electoral scene characterized by volatile voter behavior; 02. considerable visibility and mobilization of the administration's activist grassroots, often fostered by the presidents themselves – in Argentina more than in Brazil (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2019b) – and 03. similar accusations leveled at them by the opposition according to which the State was being wrongly occupied by government-supporting activists on a massive scale. Comparative analysis of these two national cases portends access to a rich seam of data.

[5]The PT is a party with internal factional groupings that are formally recognized and coexist through time. For an analysis on the issue of party unity within the PT that is organized in this way, see Lacerda (2002).

[6]It should be noted that there were some limitations in accessing female activists in both countries. In some cases, men were more willing to be interviewed, and in others, approaching a woman to set an interview date in the future resulted in her referring us to a male activist she knew (generally, with a higher responsibility in the organization).

The activists' accounts: two notions of political activist training and the impact of access to government

Even though the term activist training usually refers to courses, workshops, reading resources and other mechanisms related to theoretical, ideological or doctrinarian training[7], another complementary notion emerged in the narratives, one that conceived of training as the result of collective experiences that activists go through in their own political activity.

Theoretical or doctrinarian training

Regarding the first of the above two ways of understanding training, while the image of the cadre ('*cuadro*' in Spanish; '*quadro*' in Portuguese) made frequent appearances in the accounts, the uses of the term were diverse, with different emphases in respect of its theoretical content and the type of skills or knowledge associated with it (i.e. being able to handle 'contact with people', to 'defend the national project' or 'the administration', or even being prepared to take on an administrative position in the State). My findings vis-à-vis activist training as theoretical training can be grouped into four observations.

The role of theoretical training and reading in older generations of activists

The two older generations of the Brazilian sample (activists who engaged in politics as youths in the 1960s/70s and 80s) and the older Argentine ones (1960s/70s)[8] spontaneously cited memories of the training, authors, theories and books that they had been required to read in order to become political activists, memories that were absent from the accounts of younger activists. They also portrayed such training processes (comprising courses, debates, film viewings and other activities) as part of the early stage of engagement in their organizations, sometimes even as a pre-requisite to join. Wilhelmina (Annex 980), a member of the PCdoB since the early 1980s, mentioned theoretical readings and participation in seminars, and described going to the streets to sell (and promote discussions on) the PCdoB newspaper '*Tribuna Operária*' (Workers' Tribune) as 'a great school for

[7]The term 'doctrinarian activities' appeared mostly in interviews with activists from local PJ networks, such as Gonzalo or Maxi.

[8]Participants in the survey, whose names presented here are fictitious, are referred at Table 01.

me and my generation'. Fabiano, a member of the PT's '*Democracia Socialista*' (DS) (Socialist Democracy) faction since the 1980s, reminisced thus: 'I had to read. I spent five years in a PT study group[9], studying, participating in group discussions on Marxism […] we read Lenin, Trotsky. […] I had to prove that I understood politics, that I knew the DS's positions and that I had studied. Today there is none of that'[10].

Indeed, among activists from the two younger generations, the ones whose youth activism had begun in the 1990s or after 2003, i.e., after Néstor Kirchner and Lula had taken office, such training was identified neither as a pre-requisite for membership nor as a regular rite of passage for new members. This was illustrated in Caique's narrative. A member of the PCdoB since 2008, he said that 'some parties require that you engage in discussions, participate in activities and read some books in order to be allowed to enlist. That is not the case with the PCdoB'. Ezequiel, a youth leader who joined his party in the 1990s, did not remember having received any formal training at the 'Partido *Democrático Trabalhista*' (PDT) (Democratic Labor Party). The only training mechanism he recalled (although it was not conceived intentionally as such) were the meetings of the party's regional authorities, where he could sit and listen to Brizola, the party's long-term leader. In Argentina, another respondent, Rufino, highlighted the importance that cadre formation and activist training had gained in his organization, '*Peronismo Militante*' (Militant Peronism), in the last few years – through such activities as mandatory reading of its periodical journal. At the same time, when asked if he had had to take any training courses when becoming a member in late 2003, he replied that he had not and added that entry was 'not restrictive'.

The idea that activist training has deteriorated

A second pattern among the 1980s generation of the sample that was also present, in some cases, in the 1970s generation was the diagnosis of a deterioration of the levels of political activist training over time. This interpretation was much

[9]Party groups, known in Portuguese as 'núcleos' are ground-level organizations within the PT. For an analysis of how they became dispersed and lost their weight, see Secco (2011).

[10]The reading requirements that Fabiano, Wilhelmina and others described were different in each organization. The interviewees did not mention mechanisms with which the organizations guaranteed compliance or how they punished deviation. But the narratives implicitly suggest that the activists themselves shared the importance of these readings, 'morally' and also bearing in mind eventual political growth within the organization.

more noticeable in the narratives of Brazilian activists – in consonance with internal transformations in parties since the mid-1990s analyzed by the literature – although it could also be heard in the Argentine narratives. For instance, in Argentina, Octavio, a member of the '*Movimiento Evita*' (Evita Movement) and a former PJ activist (of the 1980s generation) explained that, among 'the kids' (young activists nowadays), the levels of commitment and internal discipline had dropped along with the levels of training and political instruction.

In Brazil, a perceived loss of quality in activist training emerged quite frequently in interviewees' narratives, especially among PT members[11]. Fabiano, already mentioned above, had left politics for family reasons, returning to it in the 1990s. He remembered having participated in a party debate and participating in internal elections (*Processo de Eleições Diretas* or PED) in 2005. There, he claimed, some candidates standing for the PT leadership in Rio de Janeiro 'could not put two ideas together' or even 'synthesize what socialism meant to them'. For him, 'in the 1980s […] a guy like that would not have even become an activist'. Enrique, a local party leader in a district of São Paulo, detailed matters in a similar vein:

> The Training Secretariat was always very lively in São Paulo State. In the late 1990s, I participated in two groups […] and the difference between the profiles of the activists from the 1980s and the 90s was already very clear. In the 80s, it was activists who mostly came from a social movement, a union, the CEBs [*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* – "Base Ecclesial Communities"] or the student movement. So before joining the PT, they had had left-wing political training. In the 90s, what interested new members – and you could easily see this when you were politically training them – was a purely electoral path. They joined the party with the intention of running for city councilor, or at least considering that possibility. So much so that there were things that had worked very well in the political training for [1980s] activists with a prior background in political participation that no longer worked with these new activists.

Although Enrique was a member of the leading PT faction, '*Construindo um Novo Brasil*' (CNB) (Building a new Brazil) within the party's dominant factional grouping[12], his account represents an exception rather than the norm among fellow

[11]This was in reference to activists' political training, and not their levels of education or alphabetization, which, according to different accounts, such as Vítor's or Emanuel's were, on average, higher in current PT activists than in the past.

[12]The PT's internal factions are grouped, in some cases, in wider factional groupings known as *'campos'*. The CNB is part the *'Campo Majoritário'* grouping, where it is also the leading actor.

faction members. In other words, the perceived decline in political training was, for the most part, reinforced by interviewees from other PT factions opposed to the CNB, like the DS. Among these, the narrative of deterioration in the quality of activist training was an intergenerational mainstay: it was expressed by Fabiano (quoted above) and Diogo (a former youth leader from Rio de Janeiro, since the 1980s, and an influential university activist in the '*Fora Collor*' demonstrations of 1992), as well as younger activists, like Baltasar (also from Rio, engaged in activism since the 1990s), Thais and Luan (who both started out as activists in São Paulo after Lula became president).

The issue of activist training was not described as a problem in the narratives of CNB activists – such as Pedro; Marlene; and Geraldo. Thus, contrasting views vis-à-vis this issue were not a generational matter but a factional one. This reveals the probable existence of distinct activist socialization according to faction and of a mechanism employed by some of them to criticize the CNB, whom they accuse of having instituted reforms that have negatively affected the PT's identity, membership and public stances.

The coexistence of two opposing views among the younger generations

A third possible observation is that, while this sort of nostalgia regarding political activist training in the past frequently emerged among the 1980s generation, in the younger generations (1990s and post-2003), a single homogeneous pattern could not be traced regarding theoretical training and its evolution through the years. Some interviewees of these two generations agreed that political instruction had been weakened, whereas others chose to highlight different examples of current training mechanisms in their respective organizations.

The first narrative is neatly illustrated by the case of the Argentine activists who defined training as a pending or unmet goal of their organizations, such as Aldo ('*Corriente Nacional de la Militancia*' or National Activism Group, post 2003 generation) (Table 01), or those who tried but did not succeed in naming any training activity in which they had participated as activists since joining their respective organizations. In the second narrative, interviewees emphasized the existence of training initiatives within their organizations. For example, Camila, a young leader from the 1990s generation in the '*Movimiento de Unidad Popular*' (MUP) (Popular

Unity Movement) described the organization's two-month 'training schools', their emphasis on attendance, on being on time, and on committing entirely to that activity throughout the course.

Argentina: training in direct association with the administration's policies

In two other examples of the second type of narrative, i.e., interviewees in Argentina who highlighted their organizations' current internal training mechanisms, a fourth pattern emerged, especially in the post-2003 generation: political training was understood in direct association with these organizations' linkages to the administration and their resulting access to government. Repeated references were made to the inclusion, in courses and workshops, of reading material that explained the main public policies and other measures implemented by the president.

Training was conceived of in these accounts, above all, as a means for acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to be able to defend the administration and its policies in conversations with the population at large. For example, Ruth (*La Cámpora*), recalled how, toward the late 2000s, when her organization was still in its consolidation phase, one of its members, an economist, gave weekly lessons to the activists in order that they could 'understand government measures'. She added, 'I mean, we have lots of training books where you will find [the details of] government measures at the time and a general explanation so that we can explain it all to the public'. Rufino, from '*Peronismo Militante*' spoke about recently incorporated activists and their knowledge of government measures, claiming that, in their case, 'you have already saved so much in terms of training. Why? Because they already know it, they are familiar with it, they have lived it'.

This sort of articulation between activist training and government policies was rarely cited in the Brazilian interviews.

Political activist training through experience

Inspired by E. P. Thompson's 'The Making of the English Working Class' (1989 [1963]), Martins and Santos (2012) adapted Thompson's concept of

'experience' to MST training processes. According to them, experiences and everyday struggle consolidate the learning process and internalization of an organization's values.

This notion of 'experience' can be of great use for examining the understanding of political activist training that obliquely informed the responses of many interviewees. Often, training was referred to by the interviewees as the product of experience and everyday practices, both within the organization as well as in a wider political-electoral context.

How did the notion of political activist training as a product of experience emerge in the accounts of different generations of activists in the sample?

Formative contextual experience in the older generations

The conception of activist socialization through experience was outlined in the narratives of those older activists who remembered the 1960s and 70s – and in some cases, even the 1980s – as a moment in which a political commitment was made in adverse conditions, with few resources but much enthusiasm. They recalled developing personal (and political) moral codes related to creating popular awareness about civic and political rights (in the case of PT activists from the 1980s, for example) or following absolute discipline and revolutionary devotion (in the accounts of the 1960s and 70s generations in both countries). Here, a certain political context appears to be a formative experience in itself.

In the generation that became politically active as youths during the dictatorship (1960s and 70s), two experiences marked their paths as factors that had an impact on their socialization as activists: 01. involvement – as members or, at least, as peripheral supporters – in armed or revolutionary organizations, as with Justino and Penelope in Argentina (with the '*Montoneros*' organization) and Renata, Felipe and Breno in Brazil (with different armed militant groups); and 02. the strong influence of the Church –missionary activities, a relationship with Third World Movement priests and Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) – as part of their initial involvement. This last feature was not exclusive to that generation, but its weight in the careers of activists of later

generations faded[13]. Gutiérrez Crocco's research (2010) on union activism in Chile is particularly pertinent in this connection. Gutiérrez Crocco (2010) identified socialization in values like collectiveness and solidarity in the generation active during the dictatorship that had existed prior to union involvement, together with 'complementary' activism that naturally led from one form of participation to another.

Unlearning distrust of the State and of parties: training through experience in younger generations

The notion of collective experience as shaping activist training was also present in the accounts of the younger generation activists, so much so that it outweighed the notion of theoretical training. But how did it emerge?

In Argentina, those 'Kirchneristas' who had engaged in political activism during the 1990s and who had never been members of the PJ (having been opposed to the party and the Menem administration) repeated a similar idea in their accounts. As they became part of the Kirchner government-supporting base after 2003, they had had to unlearn something that had been central in the experiences that had molded their political training in the 1990s: their antagonism against the State. Under Kirchnerism, they said, they had had to redefine their relationship with the State, from a position of contention to considering it as a space to participate in (and to transform). The accounts of Camila, from MUP (an organization founded by former anarchist militants); Santino, from a local organization in Quilmes and former communist youth leader; and Federico, currently from '*Movimiento Evita*' and an activist at a teachers' union in the 90s, illustrate this.

In the post-2003 generation of activists, on the other hand, a pattern emerged in terms of their previous socialization: shortly before joining their respective current organizations, most of them had not imagined themselves as future partisan or political activists, either because their participation took place in

[13]From the 1960s/70s generation, Justino, Penélope and Emilio, in Argentina, had started to participate, first, in the orbit of the Catholic Church, and then in politics. From the 1980s generation, Genaro also spent his early years in Catholic voluntary service. In Brazil, where religious grassroots activism was one of the founding environments of the PT, beyond the older generation (1960s/70s), only Pedro and Emanuel came from that background.

thematic NGOs – as in the case of Ruth, who would later join '*La Cámpora*' in its early stages, or Thais, who went on to become a member of the PT and '*Marcha Mundial de Mulheres*' (World March of Women) – or because they had a 'generic rejection' of political parties (like Luan), who later joined the PT, Caique, who joined the PCdoB and Julián, who became a member of '*Nuevo Encuentro*' (New Encounter).

For the generation that began its youth political activism after Lula and Kirchner had taken office, activist socialization – conceived as the result of experience – was molded in direct relation to the State. This was not necessarily an individual relationship, by means of employment in the civil service, but a collective one (the activists' organization having access to government). Thus, the State became a locus for activism, and actively defending the administration became one of the organizations' main purposes – an aspect even more recurrent in the Argentine narratives.

The arrival at the State and its impact on political activist training

Different patterns emerged in the interviews regarding the impact that the ties to a kindred administration (and ensuing access to the State) had had over the organizations' internal activist training. In several cases, these patterns went across generations, albeit with some distinctions that will be mentioned further below.

Cadre absorption by the State and repercussions for the organizations

First, in both countries – but even more so in Brazil than in Argentina – a commonly-expressed view regarding this this impact was that many cadres politically trained by their organizations ('the best ones') ended up being absorbed by the State (as public officials). This resulted in a contraction or weakening of party authorities ('fragilization') and an urgent need for renovation and training of new potential leaders. This was stressed, with some concern, by interviewees of different generations and organizations, such as Wilhelmina and Caique from the PCdoB and Vítor from the PT. A member of the party's national board, Vítor argued that the Lula administration had called on 'a large part of the PT elite' to take on government positions. Baltasar referred to the consequent 'absence of an oxygenated party life' and explained that 'Lula's victory led many experienced and qualified PT cadres to

become part of the government experience. The party's leadership changed, and this left it rather fragile'.

If we consider training to be a result of activist experience, the repercussions of this absorption of organizations' cadres by the State – in the president's staff, the public administration and among lawmakers and their advisors – were even more serious. Mostly in Brazil, but among some of the senior Argentine activists, interviewees stated that grassroots activism (in the students' movement, in unions and also in the neighborhoods) was being neglected as a result of those shifts. This was echoed by Luan (PT), who claimed that the 'PT youth' had been losing its presence in the university movement because many had left for government positions or for the party bureaucracy, resulting in a lack of political cadres with enough experience to re-establish those grassroots connections. In a similar vein, in Argentina, Emilio (local Peronist organization, 1970s) and Santino (another local organization, 1990s) both complained of a growing 'overly super-structural activism' among Kirchnerist organizations, i.e., that they had become overly concerned with government life and ill-prepared to face certain tasks or challenges outside the State. As Santino explained:

> Joining the formal State structure […] solved the financial issue. And, in a way, it conditioned us. […] We became State propaganda agents of a sort. […] Today our organizations are, on a massive scale, more concerned with being able to sustain a huge structure of propaganda agents from the State, who could hardly handle any other task with any haste at all. I mean, if we picked out ten neighborhood activists today […] and got them out of there and sent them to a factory that has been taken over by its workers, and they had to go there and support them, they would hardly be of any help at all […] Because they are not familiar with that experience, they have never done it.

Both Simone (PT) and Penélope (*Peronismo 26 de Julio* ('Peronism July 26th') from the 1970s generation worked for the government at the time – making them what we could call 'professionalized activists' – stressed how difficult it was for them to fulfill their duties as State officials and remain at the same time involved in the daily reality of grassroots activism. They acknowledged that they ended up devoting more energy to their jobs. That difficulty was not identified by the youngest Argentine generation.

Less time for training activities

The interviewees described another of the impacts that entry into government had on political activist training: the urgency of current affairs, electoral processes and the administration's own agenda left little time for organizations to carry out political training activities for their members. Javier (PJ), hinted at that when he said that '[local] administration takes over everything' and added that he aspired to return to having plenary meetings and 'ideological discussion' activities. Maxi (PJ) also referred to this when he pointed out that 'indoctrination' activities ended up being scarce for those same reasons. And Camila (MUP) did so as well when she admitted that the training courses she had described (see above) were, however, 'tied to vicissitudes, current events, political accumulation, territorial organization and elections'. Brazilian activist Wilhelmina (PCdoB) referred to the same phenomenon:

> I think that at that time [the 1980s] the willingness was there… because meetings were structured like this: we analyzed international current affairs; after that, we zoomed in on Latin America; then the nation and, after that, we would look at local stuff. This required activists to study and to be well informed about what was happening at the time. They couldn't go to a meeting with just a personal opinion. In order to understand street demonstrations, it was not enough to be in the streets. They had to be studying, reading, getting informed. […] Today we no longer experience that. We have very backwards meetings, with an urgency that doesn't allow for any planning or a general or analytical vision. That's a problem! Sometimes one vision comes up against another and, when that occurs, whoever has a bit more institutional power leads to an opinion that has not been grounded on other positions.

Massive growth and weaker internalization of organizations' values

Numerous interviews revealed a third pattern. The simultaneous growth in membership the organizations enjoyed as a result of their link to government had involved a relaxation of the conditions for admission of new members. The result was an increasing heterogeneity in terms of internal cohesion and levels of political training, with poorer activist socialization in terms of the organization's values.

In Brazil, especially among PT activists, this manifested itself as an observation that was repeated over and over again in the interviews: excessive autonomy vis-à-vis the party on the part of PT lawmakers acting at different levels

(the National Congress, regions/states, and local districts). In other words, there was an increasing presence of a mass of popular personalities who were affiliated to the party but had a superficial relationship with it and who, in several cases, had joined with a merely electoral interest in mind (i.e. becoming candidates themselves in the near future)[14].

A similar interpretation could be found among some activists from the Argentine sample, but it was in Brazil where it had the most significant weight in the narratives, no matter which generation the speaker belonged to. In that sense, Luan, from the PT faction '*Democracia Vermelha*' (Red Democracy), claimed – possibly, as part of a collective factional narrative – that at present, many joined the party 'for work' and would migrate to other organizations if they thought they had prospective employment there. This idea was not an exclusive feature of PT narratives. It was also part of the accounts of activists from the PCdoB, such as Felipe, and of the PDT, such as Ezequiel.

If we link Mische's (1997) notion of collective identity within political commitment – which comprises three dimensions: recognition, experience and orientation – with the notion of activist training as a privileged moment in the molding of a set of values and practices, the heterogeneity and weaker internalization of values described in the narratives – especially regarding some popular and powerful new members – challenges the self-image, internal consistency and unity of action of the interviewees' various organizations.

Closing remarks

This paper has analyzed the narratives of four generational groups of activists in Argentina and Brazil, their recollections of their own training experiences as well as their perceptions of the current situation (up until 2015, when the fieldwork was concluded).

The aim was to understand how previously studied transformations in political linkage – transformations that have rendered them more fragile and

[14]This narrative bears a resemblance to a process already analysed by literature on the PT: the change in its membership and even in its authorities' composition. See, for example, Amaral (2010).

volatile and resulted in adaptation on the part of organized activists as well as appeals to nostalgia in their narratives (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2017, 2015) – manifested in the way activists defined and experienced training provided by their own organizations – now and in the past.

The first hypothesis or proposition structuring my analysis was that there had been a reconfiguration of what activist training conveyed in the past. Based on the findings, we can see that training defined as theoretical courses or readings tended to fade partially in the narratives of the younger generations, whereas the notion of training through experience (e.g., embracing the organization's values through everyday activist practices and actions) increased its presence among the younger interviewees. Although both ways of understanding activist training were present in each generation, their respective weights were different. Not only did different generations of youth activists express different notions of what political commitment involved, as well as different kinds of political linkages with their leaders and their organizations (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2017, 2015), but they also described and defined activist training differently. Therefore, activism, and specifically, political activist training, may well have undergone electoral volatility and intense political fluctuation, but it has also changed along the way.

A second proposition was that interviewees identified the institutional immersion of their organizations in government – a result of their political ties to the administration – as having brought on additional challenges over activist internal training. Here, findings show indeed numerous impacts and concerns in their accounts. These patterns in the narratives, however, often crossed different generations. As a result, a clearer contrast was manifested between organizations (or party factions, in the case of the PT) than between generational groups. For instance, members of different generations of the PT factional grouping called '*Mensagem ao Partido*' (that brings together factions including '*Democracia Socialista*') shared similar interpretations in this respect, while members of the '*Campo Majoritário*' grouping did not. In Argentina, a comparable contrast could be observed between, on one hand, members of organizations founded during the Kirchnerist administrations, government-supporting groups from birth – where such concerns were scarce if not absent, and where training was usually

defined in direct association with administration policies and with advocating them to the public – and, on the other, activists from organizations that had had previous experience as political opposition.

If we regard the literature on Argentina and Brazil that refers to activist professionalization within the State and during the Kirchnerist and PT administrations (LEVY, 2012; RIBEIRO, 2010; ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2019a), there appears to have been a widespread process in both cases. However, this paper's findings show a contrast between the ways activists from organizations linked to those governments experienced that process in each country.

Another contrast can be found in terms of the notion of deterioration of political activist training through the years, which was more intense in the Brazilian than in the Argentine narratives. The two extreme ends of that line of nostalgia, or the absence of it, could be, on one hand, older PT activists in Brazil (especially from internal factions opposed to the dominant group) and, on the other, younger activists from new Kirchnerist organizations in Argentina. This finding should be linked to previous observations (ROCCA RIVAROLA, 2017) regarding activism in general: in organizations born during the Kirchnerist cycle, there was a shared perception of this period as a resurgence of politics, a bloom in activism sparked by Kirchnerism. This enchantment with the present (2003-2015) left little room for the nostalgic appeals so abundant among PT activists, especially – but not only – among the older ones who recalled a past where their party had led a rich internal life, with committed grassroots and social capillarity.

It is always possible for nostalgia to involve a certain degree of idealization. As Boym suggests (2001), nostalgia can sometimes refer to unrealized dreams of the past, to a feeling of loss of a home that no longer exists and perhaps never did. Nevertheless, the nostalgic narratives behind the idea of deterioration of activist training could hardly be a mere idealization of the past. On the contrary, they bear similarities with actual transformations in the political linkage that have been noticed by different studies on the PT's programmatic, social and political changes (RIBEIRO, 2010; ROCHA, 2009; SECCO; 2011). There may also be a connection with a process that other studies have reported in Europe since the mid-1990s: the decline of a pedagogical model typical of different left-wing parties with

a history of strict theoretical training (ÉTHUIN, 2003; DUCANGE, 2012). In other words, many of the narratives were compatible with wider transformations that have affected activism in recent decades in different countries, such as the emergence of informal, flexible and part-time forms of political commitment (BRINGEL, 2018; NORRIS, 2007; PUDAL, 2011).

And, in terms of the notion of training through experience, the insertion of the organizations into the State surfaced as a decisive formative experience in terms of the numerous challenges for activist training in both countries. These included massive growth, cadre absorption by the State, and even neglect of other kinds of formative experience (such as the nurturing of grassroots activism and capillarity or active intervention in social conflicts) as well as weaker internalization of the organization's core values.

The findings do not enable us to enumerate the actual training mechanisms or activities held by the organizations – such was not the intention of this research. They do allow us, however, to draw some conclusions about the ways in which these subjects experienced and interpreted political activist training and its transformations.

It is my hope that this research makes a contribution to the study of the transformations of political linkage in Argentina and Brazil since their respective returns to democracy. Those changes have had diverse repercussions on activists' views, commitments and daily practices.

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Annex

Sample of interviews

Table 01. Names (fictional), organizations, generations, cities/districts and interview dates.

Period of initiation into youth activism	Brazil RJ= Rio de Janeiro SP= São Paulo	Argentina BA= City of Buenos Aires PBA= Buenos Aires Province/ Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area
1960s/70s	RENATA (formerly MR8, thereafter PT). RJ. 12/09/13 BRENO (CUT, CNB-PT). RJ. 03/09/13 SIMONE (DS-PT). RJ. 11/09/13 FELIPE (PCdoB). RJ. 26/06/09 and 23/08/13.	JUSTINO (formerly JTP/Montoneros, currently *Carta Abierta*). BA. 02/10/15 MARTIN (PJ). *Matanza*, PBA. 27/09/07 EMILIO (local organization). Quilmes, PBA. 13/11/13.Interviewed together with Santino (see 1990s). PENELOPE (formerly JUP, thereafter *Peronismo 26 de Julio*). Hurlingham, PBA. 05/10/15
1980s	PEDRO (CNB-PT). SP. 17/09/08 VÍTOR (AE-PT) SP. 19/09/08 WILHELMINA (PCdoB). RJ. 19/08/13 LEONELE and ENRIQUE (no factional affiliation and CNB-PT, respectively). SP. 20/12/13 FABIANO (DS-PT). RJ. 14/08/13 DIOGO (formerly PT and UNE, currently *Consulta Popular*). RJ. 16/09/13	HÉCTOR (formerly PJ, thereafter Kolina). San Martín, PBA. 14/11/13 VICENTE (CGT-PJ). BA. 05/04/10 GONZALO (PJ). *Matanza*, PBA. 27/09/07 JAVIER (PJ). *Matanza*, PBA. 03/08/07 and 07/03/08 OCTAVIO (PJ in the 1980s, thereafter *Movimiento Evita*). *Matanza*, PBA. 05/03/08 GENARO (Formerly PJ, thereafter Frente Grande, currently *La Cámpora*). BA. 06/05/14
1990s	BALTASAR (DS-PT) (two interviews). RJ. 18/06/09 and 23/06/09 MARLENE (CNB-PT). RJ. 26/09/13 EZEQUIEL (PDT). RJ. 20/08/13 MANUELA (MST). RJ. 18/06/09 GASPAR (PT) (two interviews). RJ. 15/06/09 and 24/06/09 EMANUEL (*Mensagem ao Partido*-PT and *União de Movimentos de Moradia*). SP. 17/12/13 ROSETE (CUT and PT). SP. 16/01/14	CAMILA (MUP). La Plata, PBA. 13/11/13. MAXI (PJ). *Matanza*, PBA. 29/11/07 SANDRA (*Libres del Sur*). BA. 20/06/08 JAIME (Formerly PJ, thereafter *Frente Grande*). BA. 06/08/09 SANTINO (Formerly *Partido Comunista Congreso Extraordinario*. Currently, local organization). Quilmes, PBA. 13/11/13 RAMIRO (Formerly PJ, currently *Libres del Sur).* Almirante Brown, PBA. 29/02/08 FEDERICO (Formerly UTE-CTA, currently *Movimiento Evita*). BA. 22/11/13.
Post-2003	THAIS (DS-PT and MMM). SP. 14/01/14 CAIQUE (UJS-PCDOB). RJ. 15/08/13 LUAN (*Mensagem ao Partido*-PT). SP. 11/12/13 GERALDO (PT de *Lutas and Massas*-PT). SP. 17/01/14	ALDO (formerly PJ, thereafter *Corriente Nacional de la Militancia*). BA. 13/11/13. RUFINO (*Peronismo Militante*). BA. 01/10/15. RUTH (*La Cámpora*). Junín and La Plata, PBA. 09/11/15. JULIÁN (*Nuevo Encuentro*). BA. 15/11/13

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Table 02. Some quantitative data regarding the sample

Number of interviewees	Interviewees' cities[15]	Gender	Members of a sole organization during entire activist career?	Members of PT/PJ (either currently[16] or previously)?	Current main political activism in PT/PJ?	Currently professionalized?[17]
1960s/70s: 08	BA: 01 PBA: 03 SP: 0 RJ: 04	Men: 05 Women: 03	Yes: 03 No: 05	Yes: 07 No: 01	Yes: 03 No: 05	Yes: 07 No: 01
1980s: 13	BA: 02 PBA: 04 SP: 04 RJ: 03	Men: 12 Women: 01	Yes: 9 No: 04	Yes: 12 No: 01	Yes: 7 No: 06	Yes: 9 No: 04
1990s: 14	BA: 03 PBA: 04 SP: 02 RJ: 05	Men: 09 Women: 05	Yes: 07 No: 07	Yes: 08 No: 06	Yes: 05 No: 09	Yes: 12 No: 02
Post-2003: 8	BA: 03 PBA: 01 SP: 03 RJ: 01	Men: 06 Women: 02	Yes: 05 No: 03	Yes: 04 No: 04	Yes: 03 No: 05	Yes:04 No: 04
Total sample: 43 AR: 21 BR: 22	BA: 09 PBA: 12 SP: 09 RJ: 13	Men: 32 BR: 15 AR: 17 Women: 11 BR: 07 AR: 04	Yes: 24 BR: 17 AR: 07 No: 19 BR: 05 AR: 14	Yes: 31 PT: 17 PJ:14 No: 12 BR: 05 AR: 07	Yes 18 PT: 13 PJ: 05 No: 25 BR: 09 AR: 16	Yes: 32 BR: 16 AR: 16 No: 11 BR:06 AR: 05

Source: Elaborated by the author.

[15]References: Buenos Aires (BA). Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area,/Province (PBA). São Paulo (SP). Rio de Janeiro (RJ). Brazil (BR). Argentina (AR)

[16]'Currently' refers to the time of the interviews.

[17]This includes working at a federal/national, provincial or municipal level, executive or legislative posts, whether elected or appointed (as advisors to lawmakers), and also professionalization by their organization (full-time activism with a salary provided by the organization).