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Vote Buying in the Americas

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Executive Summary. Vote buying practices have long attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners, but cross-national analyses of clientelism are rare. To facilitate research on vote buying in the Americas, the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey included two questions on this topic. In this *Insights* report, we present a preliminary look at the first of these questions, which provides perspective on where and among whom attempted vote buying is more common. Grounding our expectations in extant literature, we analyze predictors of vote buying practices across 22 countries. The results affirm the importance of individual level poverty and, as well, country level income inequality in predicting offers of vote buying. In addition, the politically and civically engaged are more frequently targeted by vote buying efforts. Overall, the propensity to be targeted by clientelistic offers is greater in unequal contexts and among individuals that provide greater marginal pay off to offers of material benefits in exchange for the vote.

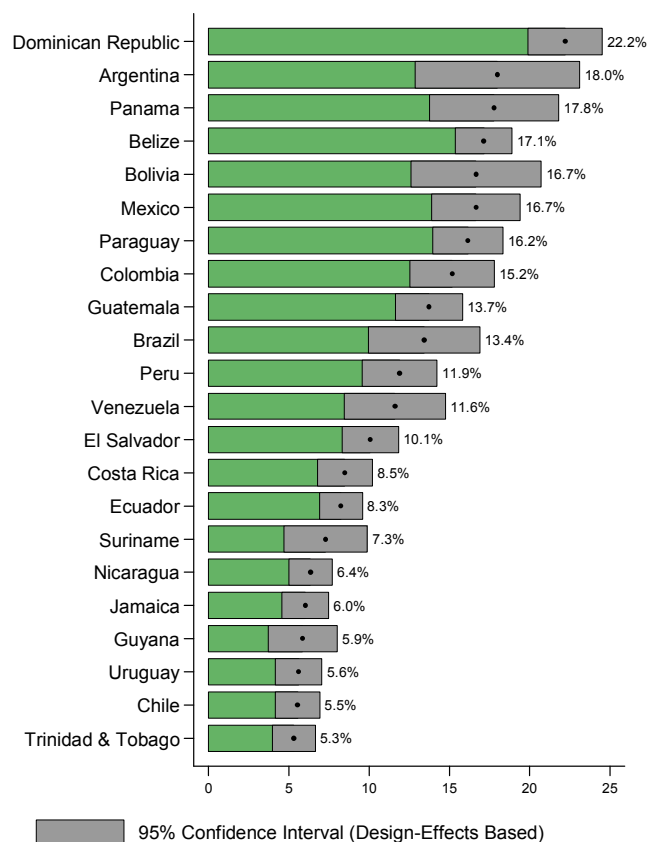
The exchange of private material goods for a vote, or clientelism, runs counter to basic democratic principles and has the potential to create economic inefficiencies (e.g., Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002). But, where in Latin America and the Caribbean is clientelism a more common political practice and which individuals are more likely to be targeted with offers of material benefits in exchange for their vote?

To examine vote buying behavior in the Americas, LAPOP introduced two new questions to the 2010 AmericasBarometer.¹ In this *Insights* report, we address the first of these questions, which provides perspective on where and among whom attempts at vote buying are more prevalent.² Specifically, the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey asked:

CLIEN1: In recent years and thinking about election campaigns, has a candidate or someone from a political party offered you something like a favor, food, or any other benefit or thing in return for your vote?³

Respondents could indicate that they “never,” “sometimes,” or “often” have been offered material benefits in exchange for their vote. For each of 22 countries⁴, Figure 1 displays the percentage of respondents who answered *either* “sometimes” or “often” regarding the frequency with which they were offered a good or favor in exchange for their vote.

Figure 1. Percentage reporting having been offered a material benefit in exchange for a vote



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

The figure shows important variation across the Latin American and Caribbean regions. The Dominican Republic falls at the top of the chart, with 22% of respondents reporting that they were offered a material benefit in exchange for their vote at least “sometimes” in recent elections. Following the Dominican Republic is Argentina with 18% of those surveyed saying either sometimes or often, and then Panama with 17.8%. At the other extreme we find Uruguay (5.6%), Chile (5.5%) and Trinidad & Tobago (5.3%) among those countries in which citizens are least likely to report recently having been exposed to attempts aimed at vote buying.⁵

¹ Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University.

² Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop>

³ Non-response was 1.8% for this question across the sample as a whole. Analysis conducted using STATA v10.

⁴ This represents a total of 37,642 individuals. The question was not asked in Haiti nor in Honduras. It was asked in surveys in the United States and Canada; however, given our focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, we omit these two countries from the analysis.

⁵ Some individuals may censor the degree to which they participate in clientelism, since the practice is stigmatized in

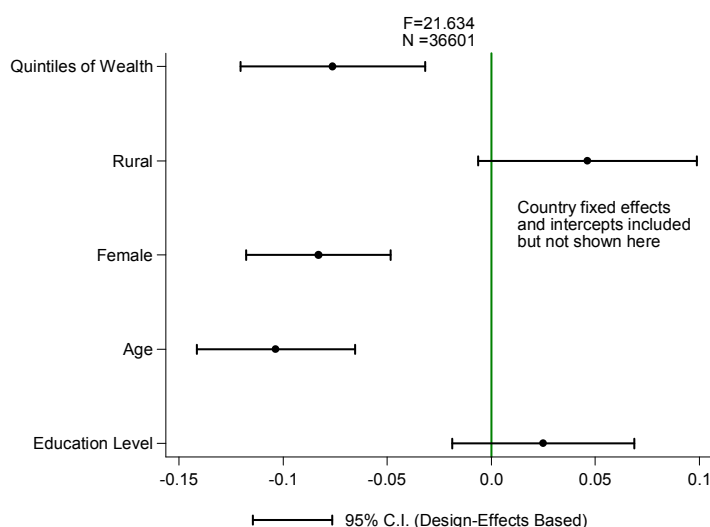
Who is more likely to report having been the target of vote buying practices?

What predicts the likelihood that an individual will report having been offered a favor or item in exchange for her vote? One prominent explanation for clientelism is poverty. Poorer individuals have a greater immediate need for the goods typically offered in a clientelistic exchange (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, p. 25), while the votes of wealthier individuals may only be influenced by prohibitively high priced material incentives (see the discussion in Dixit and Londregan 1996). Likewise, scholars have suggested that those with greater levels of education will be more likely to eschew vote buying practices in favor of competition over public goods (Kitschelt 2000, p. 857). In addition, if residents in large urban areas are more difficult to monitor effectively, a condition that makes vote buying less attractive for political candidates and parties (Stokes 2005, p. 322), then levels of clientelism should vary across urban and rural divides. In fact, wealth, education, and size of town have been found to be negatively correlated with clientelism in the case of Argentina (Brusco et al. 2004, Stokes 2005).

With these prior arguments and findings in mind, we created a model to predict the likelihood of a person reporting being offered a favor or item (either sometimes or frequently, in contrast to never) in exchange for their vote. As independent variables we include wealth, education, an indicator of rural versus urban residence, gender, and age. Figure 2 shows the

certain contexts. The question was explicitly designed to avoid asking whether the respondent took or rejected the gift; as a result, concerns about censoring should be minimized.

Figure 2. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics predicting the likelihood of being offered a material benefit in exchange for a vote, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

results of this individual level logistic regression analysis.⁶

In keeping with the LAPOP standard for presenting regression results, statistical significance is graphically represented by a confidence interval that does not overlap the vertical "0" line (at .05 or better). When the dot, which represents the predicted impact of that variable, falls to the right of the vertical "0" line, it implies a positive relationship; when it falls to the left it indicates a negative contribution. Given that the results displayed in Figure 2 were estimated using the logistic regression technique, the substantive effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable cannot be directly interpreted from the coefficients. However, because the coefficients are standardized (i.e., "beta weights"), we can get a sense of the magnitude of each effect relative to the others.

⁶ As noted on the figure itself, fixed country effects are modeled but the results are not reported in the figure here. Those results are available in the report appendix.

As Figure 2 shows, we find that those who are wealthier are less likely to be targeted by clientelistic offers. We also find that older individuals and females report less experience with vote buying practices. In addition, the analysis presented above reveals a marginally significant effect for rural residence, such that those living in rural areas are somewhat more likely to report having been offered a material benefit in exchange for their vote.⁷ Unexpectedly, we do not find that education is a significant predictor of our dependent variable.

Although much of the research on vote-buying focuses on socio-economic and demographic variables and relationships, extant literature also points to other individual level and contextual variables that may influence an individual's propensity to be associated with clientelism. The next section of this report examines the degree to which political participation and income inequality measures predict the likelihood of being offered a material benefit in exchange for the vote.

Participation, Inequality, and Vote Buying

Parties and politicians using vote buying methods face resource constraints and therefore ought to target individuals who are most likely to reciprocate by casting the agreed upon ballot. To achieve the maximum possible marginal payoff, it seems logical that political operatives seeking to buy votes will more often target those citizens who are civically and politically engaged (and thus more likely to vote in the first place).

In fact, one of the most significant behavioral characteristics scholars have linked to clientelism is civic and political engagement.

⁷ The variable, rural residence, is significant at the 0.1 level, and its substantive effect is close in magnitude to variables that reach the 0.05 significance cut-off; we therefore have some confidence that there is at least a modest relationship between it and the dependent variable.

Brusco, Nazareno and Stokes (2004), among others, suggest that, given the difficulty of monitoring secret ballot electoral processes, candidates and parties often have to make probabilistic calculations over whom to target for vote buying. This can make an active individual a more attractive target than an inactive citizen, and some evidence supports this logic. Using a list experiment, Gonzalez-Ocantos and his colleagues (n.d.) find that Nicaraguans who participate in local civil society meetings (*Consejos de Poder Ciudadanos*) are "far more likely to report vote buying than those who never attend" (21).

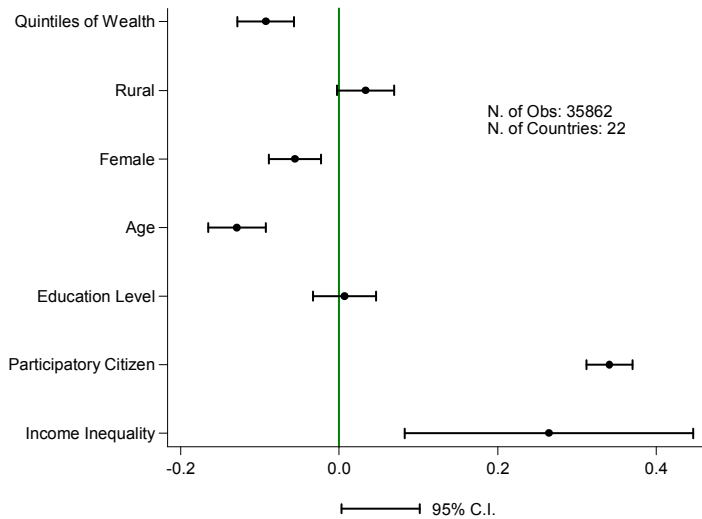
To assess the relationship between civic and political engagement and our dependent variable, we created an additive index, 'participatory citizen', based on responses to a battery of four questions that ask how often the respondent does the following: assists in community problem solving (cp5); attends community improvement committee meetings (cp8); attends professional association meetings (cp9); and attends political party meetings (cp13).⁸

Another factor that may affect clientelism is inequality (e.g., Hicken 2007 and Stokes 2007b). Stokes (2007b, p. 84) writes that "the degree of inequality is central to determining the relative effectiveness of vote buying versus programmatic appeals." Despite the theoretical strength of this argument, to our knowledge there exists no extensive cross-national test of the connection between income inequality and clientelistic practices (but see Debs and Helmke 2009). To this end, we assess the degree to which a country's income inequality, measured using the Gini coefficient,⁹ predicts the likelihood that

⁸ The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variables that make up the Participatory Citizen Index is 0.57. A principal components factor analysis of the four items yields just one factor with an eigenvalue over 1.0.

⁹ Gini coefficients for each of the 22 countries included in the analysis were obtained from the *Human Development Report 2009* (UNDP 2009).

Figure 3. Hierarchical logistic regression analysis of the determinants of being offered a material benefit in exchange for a vote, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP and UNDP (2009)

individuals in that context report being targeted by vote buying.

Since our expectations and measures involve individual and contextual (second-level) variables, we estimate a multi-level logistic regression model that allows us to assess the effects of individual characteristics while simultaneously examining the effects of the context (in this case, the country's income inequality) in which the individual resides. Figure 3 shows the relationships between the socio-economic, demographic, behavioral, and contextual variables and the likelihood of being offered a good or favor in exchange for a vote.

The relationships between the dependent variable and the socio-economic and demographic variables remain largely unchanged when comparing Figure 2 to Figure 3. However, it is the behavioral and contextual variables that show the strongest relationships with the dependent variable, reporting having been offered a material benefit in exchange for a vote.

The results of the statistical analysis strongly support the notion that individuals who are more civically and politically engaged are more likely to report being offered a gift or favor for their vote. Indeed, of all variables included in the analysis, the 'participatory citizen' measure is the strongest predictor of the likelihood that an individual is offered a material benefit in exchange for his vote.

Also interesting in Figure 3 is the statistically significant, positive effect for the income inequality measure. Considering the Latin American and Caribbean regions and all else equal, the results suggest that as income inequality within a country increases (meaning distribution becomes *more* unequal), reported levels of vote buying will also increase.

Conclusions

In this report, we have examined an issue that strikes at the core of democratic accountability. While instances of vote buying have been documented and studied in individual Latin American countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and Nicaragua, this report shows that vote buying practices affect all countries within the Americas, though to different degrees. In analyzing the tendency for individuals to report having been targeted by vote buying efforts across 22 countries, this report heeds Stokes' (2007a) call for more cross-national research with respect to the study of clientelism.

For the most part, our results are consistent with some of the principal arguments and findings in the vote buying literature. For example, in accord with previous research (Brusco et al. 2004, Stokes 2005), our analyses suggest that the poor and young are more likely to be approached with vote buying offers than are

wealthier and older citizens. Furthermore, while the effect of rural residence failed to reach statistical significance in the strictest sense ($p < 0.05$), it does appear that this variable works in much the same way that some scholars have suggested, in that those living in rural areas are at least somewhat more likely to be targeted by offers of material benefits in exchange for their votes.

We further find strong evidence that, considering the Latin American and Caribbean regions as a whole, the more civically and politically engaged a person is, the more likely she is to report being offered a material benefit in exchange for her vote. Finally, the analyses presented here strongly support scholars' previously stated, but under-tested, expectation that income inequality is positively associated with the prevalence of vote buying practices.

This report has presented a very basic analysis of factors predicting vote buying behaviors in the Americas, and its implications can likewise be summarized in simple terms. First, individual factors that make vote buying practices a relatively low cost investment predict, and likely help to maintain, clientelism as a political practice in the Americas. Thus, those who are poorer and more engaged are more likely to be targeted with vote buying offers. Second, in addition to individual factors, context matters in predicting clientelism. Specifically, income inequality is positively related to the pervasiveness of vote buying efforts. Income inequality has been linked to a number of deleterious social and political outcomes,¹⁰ and our findings here raise one more reason to be concerned about the quality of democratic politics under conditions of income inequality.

¹⁰ For example, income inequality has been argued to have negative effects on social and interpersonal trust (Uslaner and Brown 2005, Córdova 2008) and democratic consolidation in fragile democracies (see Geddes 2007); likewise it is believed to make politics more susceptible to insurgency and political violence (Muller and Seligson 1987).

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Appendix 1. Logistic regression model of likelihood of being offered a material benefit in exchange for a vote (Design Effect Adjusted)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Education Level	0.025	0.022
Age	-0.103*	0.019
Female	-0.083*	0.018
Rural	0.046	0.027
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.076*	0.023
Mexico	0.232*	0.035
Guatemala	0.178*	0.033
El Salvador	0.112*	0.035
Nicaragua	0.005	0.037
Costa Rica	0.077*	0.035
Panama	0.239*	0.04
Colombia	0.198*	0.034
Ecuador	0.096*	0.045
Bolivia	0.315*	0.056
Peru	0.148*	0.035
Paraguay	0.213*	0.032
Chile	-0.006	0.043
Brazil	0.230*	0.052
Venezuela	0.148*	0.041
Argentina	0.236*	0.043
Dominican Republic	0.302*	0.031
Jamaica	0.001	0.037
Guyana	-0.008	0.049
Trinidad & Tobago	0.036	0.039
Belize	0.228*	0.031
Suriname	0.039	0.047
Constant	-2.116*	0.029
<i>Number of Observations</i>	36,601	
<i>F</i>	21.63	

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at * $p < .05$, two-tailed
Country of reference: Uruguay

Appendix 2. Hierarchical logistic regression model of
likelihood of being offered a material benefit in
exchange for a vote (Design Effect Adjusted)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Income Inequality	0.264*	0.093
Participatory Citizen	0.341*	0.01
Education Level	0.007	0.020
Age	-0.129*	0.019
Female	-0.056*	0.017
Rural	0.033	0.018
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.093*	0.018
Constant	-2.114*	0.092
<i>Number of Observations</i>	35,682	
<i>Number of Countries</i>	22	
<i>Wald Chi2</i>	637.11	

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at *p<0.05, two-tailed.