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Latin American Research Review, Volume 39, Number 2, 2004, pp.  
66-88 (Article)

Published by Latin American Studies Association  
DOI: [10.1353/lar.2004.0022](https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2004.0022)



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## VOTE BUYING IN ARGENTINA \*

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*Abstract: We analyze vote buying in Argentina—the payment by political parties of minor benefits (food, clothing, cash) to citizens in exchange for their votes. How widespread is vote buying in Argentina, and what is the profile of the typical vote “seller”? Did the shift toward a neoliberal economic model in the 1990s increase or reduce vote buying? Why do parties attempt to buy votes when the ballot is secret and people could simply accept campaign handouts and then vote as they wish? We analyze responses to surveys we conducted in Argentina in 2002 and offer answers to these questions. Our findings suggest that vote buying is an effective strategy for mobilizing electoral support among low-income people when parties are able to monitor voters’ actions, make reasonably accurate inferences about how individuals voted, and credibly threaten to punish voters who defect from the implicit clientelist bargain. Our results point toward ballot reform as one way to reduce vote buying in Argentina.*

... la tragedia cívica del clientelismo político [es] consecuencia de un modelo económico.

Néstor Kirchner, President of Argentina,  
Inaugural Address, May 24, 2003

Clientelism has long been a concept that Latin Americanists have placed at the center of their political analyses.<sup>1</sup> But clientelism is not just an academic construct in Latin America today. As the epigraph above shows, it has also entered into the discourse of politicians. Nowhere is this more true than in Argentina, where politicians and citizens alike

\* For comments on earlier versions of this paper we thank John Brehm, Matt Cleary, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, Jim Fearon, Gretchen Helmke, Eungsoo Kim, Gary King, Matt Kocher, David Laitin, Steve Levitsky, Pierre Ostiguy, Beatriz Magaloni, Gabriela Pérez, Steve Pincus, and Armando Razo. Research supported by the Russell Sage Foundation, by National Science Foundation research grant SES-0241958, by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and by an American Political Science Association Research Grant.

1. The following is just a partial list of studies that have used the construct of clientelism centrally in their analyses. Argentina: Auyero (2000), Calvo and Murillo (2003), Gibson and Calvo (2000), Levitsky (2003); Brazil: Gay (1998), Hagopian (1996), Mainwaring (1999); Chile: Valenzuela (1977); Colombia: Dávila and Leal (1990), Martz (1997); Mexico: Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloni (2003), Fox (1994); Peru: Dietz (1980), Roberts (1996), Stokes (1995); Venezuela: Coppedge (1994).

identify it as one of the causes of recent economic and political crises.<sup>2</sup> The recent shift to pro-market policies and the downsizing of the state seem not to have eliminated political clientelism, contrary to some expectations (Haggard and Kaufman 1995). Kirchner's words hint at just the opposite: neoliberalism may have revived clientelism.

In this article we study one dimension of political clientelism in Argentina: vote buying. We define vote buying as the proffering to voters of cash or (more commonly) minor consumption goods by political parties, in office or in opposition, in exchange for the recipient's vote.<sup>3</sup> We analyze data from surveys that we recently conducted in Argentina in order to answer four questions. First, how widespread is vote buying in Argentina today? Second, how effective is it? Third, what kinds of voters are most likely to "sell" their votes? Do we see evidence from the profile of vote sellers to suggest that pro-market reforms have encouraged clientelism? And fourth, why does vote buying work, despite the secret ballot? After all, in the new democracies where clientelism is rife, voting is secret. What keeps a voter from accepting personalized handouts and then voting as he or she pleases, "taking with one hand," as an Argentine politician put it, "and voting with the other"? (quoted in Szwarcberg 2001, 4). If many followed this rule we would expect parties to anticipate that clientelist mobilization will be fruitless and to abandon it.

Argentina is a good country in which to study vote buying. Academics, politicians, and the public sense that clientelism is widespread and distorts Argentine democracy. Yet it is clearly not the only strategy that Argentine parties use. Some analysts point to media campaigns as an important way that Argentine parties drum up support (Palermo and Novaro 1996); others point to charismatic leadership (O'Donnell 1999); and others to the rousing of partisan identities (Novaro 1995; Ostiguy 1998). Some scholars also find that Argentine voters decide how to vote by assessing the quality of the incumbent's leadership (Landa 1991) or by assessing the performance of the economy during the incumbent party's term (Gervasoni 1995). Our research design, which relies heavily on sample

2. The national newspaper *La Nación* published 557 articles (1995 to 2003) and *Clarín* 108 articles (1996 to 2003) that contained the word "clientelism."

3. In this paper we ignore related phenomena, such as patronage, where political leaders distribute favors, most frequently public employment, to party activists in return for their efforts and loyalty. We also focus on personalized handouts rather than on the deployment of ostensibly public programs for the purpose of generating political support. This last item has been well documented in several Latin American countries, including Peru (Schady 2000), and Mexico (Pérez Yarahuán 2002; Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2003). We acknowledge that the manipulation of ostensibly public programs for electoral support is indeed a form of vote buying. We do not focus on it here for the purely practical reason that campaign handouts not related to programs were much more salient in the memories of our survey respondents, who had just lived through a campaign. Our on-going research also investigates this second form of vote buying.

surveys, augmented by qualitative research and in-depth interviews, allows us to identify factors explaining why, within a single national context, some individuals are more likely than others to be targeted by vote-buying parties and to be more responsive to individualized rewards.<sup>4</sup>

#### HOW EXTENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE IS VOTE BUYING IN CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINA?

To study vote buying we carried out surveys in December 2001 and January 2002. We instructed the polling firm *Consultores en Políticas Públicas, S.A.*, to conduct face-to-face interviews with people aged 18 or older. The firm conducted 1,920 interviews. Because we were interested in regional differences (not discussed in this paper) we drew samples not from the country as a whole, but from three provinces: Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Misiones.<sup>5</sup> The province of Buenos Aires contains 38 percent of the country's population. Misiones is a poor province in the northeast, bordering Brazil and Paraguay; the secondary literature paints a picture of highly clientelistic politics there (see, e.g., Alvarez 1999). Córdoba contains Argentina's second largest city, as well as large rural areas. Although strictly speaking we can draw inferences from our samples only to the adult populations of these three provinces, we believe that the dynamics our work uncovers are relevant to the country as a whole (and that the research may suggest lines of inquiry for scholars working in other countries). We intended the timing of the survey to take advantage of national legislative elections, held in October 2001, which would give people a recent reference point for questions about their experiences with parties and voting. What we did not anticipate was a meltdown of the economy and the national government, simultaneous with our interviews. The crisis seemed to leave our respondents in the mood to talk about politics: our response rate was 97 percent.<sup>6</sup>

4. Of course our choice of research design involves trade-offs. Our single-country, individual level of analysis precludes our exploring other potentially important factors. For example, we are unable to systematically explore the impact of electoral rules on clientelism and vote buying. Although there are some interesting inter-provincial (and inter-temporal) differences in electoral rules in Argentina, the current research design does not take advantage of these differences.

5. The margin of error was plus or minus 4.5 percent. We used multistage cluster sampling procedures, based on census tracks. For analyses in this paper we pooled the surveys into a single dataset. To test the appropriateness of pooling, we included province dummy variables (corresponding to all but one province) in many models, as well as interaction terms between the province dummies and other explanatory variables. In some models the coefficients on province dummies were statistically significant, but the coefficients on the interaction terms basically never were, indicating that pooling was appropriate. See Greene (1997), chap. 14.

6. That is, 3 percent of individuals selected refused to be interviewed. Once commenced, all interviews were carried out in full.

The empirical study of vote buying presents some challenges. People who receive handouts and assistance from parties may be reluctant to acknowledge this and to acknowledge that the handout influenced their vote. In our survey research we therefore tried to get at this issue from several different directions and by asking questions of varying degrees of directness. And while the responses to no single question give an entirely accurate picture, taken together they do give a sense of how extensive vote buying is, and who is likely to be targeted.

We asked survey respondents whether parties had distributed goods in their neighborhoods, what they had distributed, and which party had distributed them. Eight hundred and thirty-nine respondents (44%) reported that parties gave things out to individuals in their neighborhoods during the campaign. The most common item respondents mentioned was food, but they also mentioned clothing, mattresses, medicine, milk, corrugated metal, construction materials, blankets, hangers, utility bill payments, money, eyeglasses, chickens, trees, and magnets. Of these 839 people who said goods were distributed in their neighborhood, 748 (39% of the full sample) could name exact items that were distributed, and 679 (35%) could name both the items and the political parties that gave them out. We would not want to infer that every person who knew that handouts were distributed, what was distributed, and which party had distributed them had themselves received a handout. Still, these figures suggest that party efforts at vote buying were not uncommon.

Table 1 reports responses to questions that shed light on clientelism and vote buying. Whether the number of people offering “clientelist” responses to these questions appears large or small depends on one’s prior expectations. A person who was accustomed to the relatively impersonal, media-driven politics of advanced industrial countries might be surprised to see that more than one third of our full sample (and 45% of low-income respondents) would turn to a party operative for help if the head of his or her household lost their job. This person might be surprised to see that more than one in five low-income voters had turned to a local political patron for help in the previous year, and that 12 percent of poor voters—18 percent of poor voters who sympathized with the Peronist party—acknowledged having received a handout from a party operative in the 2001 campaign. On the other hand, even among the poorest Peronists, only 5 percent both received goods and acknowledged that the handout influenced their vote. Yet among some subsets of our sample, efforts at vote buying were quite common, and they could be quite effective. We will see below that certain kinds of voters were more likely than not to have received a handout. And note, from table 1, that one in four poor Peronists who received a campaign handout said it influenced their vote.

Table 1 *Relative Frequency of Responses to Selected Questions (1,920 Respondents)*

Question	Variable name	% "yes" in total sample	% "yes" among low-income respondents	% "yes" among low-income Peronists
In the past year have you turned to (important person) for help?	<i>Patron</i>	12%	22%	22%
In the past year have you turned to a party operative for help?	<i>Puntero</i>	9%	12%	14%
If household head lost his/her job, would you turn to party operative?	<i>Job</i>	36%	45%	58%
In the campaign, did you receive something from a candidate or party?	<i>Gift</i>	7%	12%	18%
Did it influence your vote?*	<i>Influence</i>	1.5% (16%)	3% (19%)	5% (24%)

\*Numbers in parentheses are percentages of people who said that a handout influenced their vote, among those who reported having received a handout.

Just as we are reluctant to infer that the full 35 percent of our respondents who knew which party had given out goods in their neighborhoods and what goods were given out were themselves recipients, we also hesitate to infer that only 12 percent of low-income voters received goods and that these goods influenced the votes of only 5 percent of poor Peronist voters. These figures define a range, rather than a precise point-estimate, of the extent and effectiveness of vote buying. Another way to explore the effectiveness of vote buying, aside from simply asking people whether handouts influenced them, is to explore whether people who reported receiving a party handout were more likely to actually vote for that party. In the logit estimations in table 2 we study the effect of a person's receiving a Peronist handout on that person's vote choice in the 1999 presidential and gubernatorial elections.<sup>7</sup> In both

7. Ideally we would also have looked at the effect of their vote choice in the 2001 elections, but this question was inadvertently excluded from the survey.

Table 2 Model Estimations of the Probability of a Peronist Vote in Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	President 1999	Governor 1999
<i>Models Estimated</i>	<i>Logit</i>	<i>Logit</i>
<i>Peronist handout</i>	<b>0.592</b> (0.297)	<b>0.855</b> (0.309)
<i>Peronist sympathizer</i>	<b>2.275</b> (0.147)	<b>2.155</b> (0.133)
<i>Radical sympathizer</i>	<b>-1.167</b> (0.332)	<b>-1.295</b> (0.241)
<i>Income</i>	0.014 (0.063)	-0.011 (0.040)
<i>Education</i>	-0.072 (0.052)	-0.024 (0.037)
<i>Housing</i>	-0.120 (0.096)	0.073 (0.082)
<i>Gender</i>	-0.026 (0.145)	0.027 (0.127)
<i>Age</i>	0.006 (0.004)	0.004 (0.004)
Log population	0.069 (0.038)	<b>-0.066</b> (0.033)
Constant	<b>-2.553</b> (0.550)	-0.517 (0.459)
Chi-square	445 ( $p=0.000$ )	496 ( $p=0.000$ )
N observations	1920	1920

NOTE: Cell entries are coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Boldface indicates significance at the  $p=0.05$  level or smaller. Both models draw on five datasets with imputed values for missing data. The *Amelia* program, described in King et al. (2001) and implemented in Honaker et al. (2001), generated the imputed datasets. Chi-square statistics associated with non-imputed model.

Explanation of variables: *President 1999*: dummy variable for people who reported having voted for Eduardo Duhalde, the Peronist candidate for president in 1999. *Governor 1999*: dummy for people who reported having voted for the Peronist candidate for the governor of their province in 1999. *Peronist handout*: dummy for people who reported that they received a handout from a Peronist. *Peronist sympathizer*: coded 1 for respondents who said they liked the Peronist Party more than others, 0 otherwise. *Radical sympathizer*: coded 1 for respondents who said they liked the Radical Party more than others, 0 otherwise. *Income*: self-reported by respondent, collapsed to 9-level scale. *Education*: 9-level scale, from no formal education to post-secondary. *Housing*: assessed by interviewer, 5-level scale (1=poorest quality, 5=highest quality). *Gender*: female=1, male=0. *Log population*: natural log of population of respondent's municipality (2001 census).

elections Peronist handouts significantly boosted the probability of a Peronist vote; this is shown by the positive and significant coefficient relating the variable *Peronist handout* to the Peronist vote. (Radical-party handouts gave a weaker boost to support for Radical-party candidates.)

A simulation gives a sense of the importance of vote buying for electoral choices.<sup>8</sup> Assume a hypothetical woman with the average income

8. To simulate we used the *Clarify* program. *Clarify* draws simulations of parameters of statistical models (e.g., logit regressions) from their sampling distribution and then converts these simulated parameters into expected values, such as expected probabilities of an answer to a survey question, given values of explanatory variables which the analyst specifies (see Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003; King, Tomz, and Wittenberg

in our sample, average education, and housing levels, and who lives in an average-sized municipality. She identifies herself as a Peronist supporter, and she reports that parties gave out goods in her neighborhood in the prior campaign. If we assume first that she either didn't receive a handout herself, or she received one but from a party other than the Peronists (most commonly from the Radicals), then we would expect her to be sitting on the fence in the 1999 presidential race: the probability that she would vote for Eduardo Duhalde was 49 percent. But if we assume that she did receive a handout, and it came from the Peronists, the handout tips her decisively toward Duhalde: the probability that she would vote for him rises to 66 percent.

We answered our first question, "how widespread is vote buying in contemporary Argentina?" not with an exact number but with a range. We inferred that at most 35 percent of all respondents received goods, and at least 12 percent of the low-income respondents received them. We saw that handouts can be a crucial factor influencing how poor people vote. We were able to detect this influence through a direct question, but also by observing the actual difference that handouts made in the vote choice of many voters.

#### WHAT KINDS OF VOTERS ARE THE TARGETS OF CLIENTELIST MOBILIZATION?

A message from table 1 is that poor voters are more likely than the electorate as a whole to be targeted by clientelist appeals. This is not surprising. There are good theoretical reasons to expect targeted redistributive rewards to go preferentially to the poor. If people experience declining marginal utility in income—if a poor person benefits from a consumption good more than a wealthy person—then we would expect poor people to be more responsive to tactically targeted rewards (Dixit and Londregan 1996).

Observers familiar with Argentine politics would be likely to posit two facts about vote buying. First, that it is targeted at poor voters, and second, that the Peronist Party uses it more heavily than other parties. Yet these twin propositions raise the possibility of spuriousness. Poor people remain, despite the party's neoliberal turn, more likely than others to support the Peronists. This widely perceived fact is confirmed by our surveys. Low incomes and low-quality housing significantly predicted sympathy for the Peronists, controlling for other factors. Therefore perhaps not Peronism but poverty alone predicts vote buying. The

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2000). *Clarify* software and documentation are available from Gary King's website at <http://gking.harvard.edu>. The 95 percent confidence intervals for the predicted level of support for Duhalde without a handout (49%) is 40–59 percent, with the handout (66%) 51–79 percent.



Radical Party, Argentina's other long-standing party, could conceivably be just as likely to try to buy the votes of its low-income constituents but, because many more low-income voters support the Peronists, it appears as though the Peronists are the more clientelist party. To sort out these effects we use multivariate analysis.

Table 3 reports regression models that explain the variation in responses to each question reported in table 1. The regressions allow us to assess, for example, the effect of party identification on the probability that someone would say that a party gave them something during the previous campaign (*Gift*, col. 4), even among working-class respondents. We include three measures of social class: respondents' self-reported household income, their self-reported attained level of education, and the quality of their housing, as assessed by the interviewer. Notice that the signs on the coefficients relating the class variables to "clientelist" answers are almost universally negative, and often they are significant. Never is it the case that being from a higher social class significantly predicts a clientelist answer. But even controlling for these class effects, a preference for the Peronist party *always* predicted a clientelist answer, and this effect was *always* significant.

Simulations allow us to illustrate the effect of party sympathies on vote buying, controlling for social class. Using *Clarify* (see n. 8), we assume two identical hypothetical women and set their incomes, education, housing quality, age, and the size of the municipality in which they live at the minimum levels for our sample. The only difference between them is that we assume one to be a Peronist sympathizer, the other a Radical-Party sympathizer. The probability that the Radical sympathizer receives a handout is 37 percent; the probability that the Peronist sympathizer receives a handout is 58 percent.<sup>9</sup> (The simulated expected probability of each woman acknowledging that the gift influenced her vote was 18 percent for the Radical, 28 percent for the Peronist.) The greater vote-buying effort by the Peronist Party, and the greater effectiveness of these efforts, reflect, we believe, the party's deeper penetration of lower-class social networks and hence its greater ability to monitor voters (see below). But the central point here is that not class alone but class *and* party (Peronism) predict vote buying in Argentina.

Leading analysts of Argentine politics contend that clientelism has become more prevalent since the turn to neoliberalism in that country. Carlos Menem in the 1990s reoriented Peronism away from the party's traditional economic program and toward pro-market economic policies, and loosened its ties to organized labor. These programmatic and

9. Ninety-five percent confidence interval: no handout, 20–58 percent, handout, 39–74 percent.

Table 3 Model Estimations of Vote Buying

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	Patron	Puntero	Job	Gift	Influence
<i>Model Estimated</i>	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit	Ordered Logit
<i>Income</i>	<b>-0.126</b> (0.058)	0.005 (0.055)	-0.054 (0.037)	<b>-0.174</b> (0.074)	<b>-0.207</b> (0.070)
<i>Education</i>	-0.005 (0.058)	-0.050 (0.039)	<b>-0.197</b> (0.035)	<b>-0.162</b> (0.071)	<b>-0.185</b> (0.066)
<i>Housing</i>	-0.215 (0.114)	<b>-0.219</b> (0.084)	<b>-0.133</b> (0.073)	<b>-0.254</b> (0.124)	<b>-0.294</b> (0.115)
<i>Gender</i>	-0.178 (0.166)	0.093 (0.118)	<b>0.208</b> (0.103)	-0.092 (0.181)	0.153 (0.171)
<i>Age</i>	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)	<b>-0.022</b> (0.003)	<b>-0.012</b> (0.006)	<b>-0.016</b> (0.006)
<i>Peronist sympathizer</i>	<b>0.594</b> (0.192)	<b>0.273</b> (0.187)	<b>0.735</b> (0.119)	<b>0.806</b> (0.202)	<b>0.807</b> (0.189)
<i>Radical sympathizer</i>	<b>0.357</b> (0.243)	0.041 (0.208)	0.146 (0.158)	-0.217 (0.346)	0.213 (0.278)
<i>Log population</i>	<b>-0.361</b> (0.044)	0.034 (0.042)	-0.035 (0.029)	<b>-0.108</b> (0.047)	<b>-0.107</b> (0.043)
<i>Constant</i>	<b>3.254</b> (0.643)	-0.437 (0.616)	1.879 (0.397)	0.911 (0.690)	
<i>N observations</i>	1114	1920	1920	1920	1920

NOTE: Cell entries are coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Boldface indicates significance at the  $p=0.05$  level or smaller. Models in columns 2 through 5 use five imputed datasets generated by *Amelia* program. (Responses to *Patron* depended on prior responses and reduced the relevant sample of respondents to 1,114; here we analyzed the original matrix and used listwise deletion.)

Explanation of variables. Refer to table 1 for question wording associated with these variables. *Patron*, *Puntero*, *Job*, *Gift*: coded yes=1. *Influence*: coded 1=did not receive goods; 2=received goods, no influence; 3=received goods, acknowledged influence. Based on responses to open-ended question. Other variables coded as explained in the note to table 2.

organizational shifts might have been expected to reduce the party's support among its traditional low-income constituents. But the party stanching this potential outflow by offering small, personalized material rewards to these constituents (Auyero 2000; Gibson and Calvo 2000; Levitsky 2003).

To perform an ideal test of the thesis that neoliberalism encouraged clientelism, we would look at survey responses from before and after the Peronist neoliberal turn and compare clientelistic response rates. Unfortunately, such data do not exist. But we can learn something about likely changes over time by inspecting differences in the kinds of

responses offered by different age cohorts. The key assumption here is that major shifts in a country's politics create generational effects, which "derive from age cohorts undergoing a shared community of experiences under roughly similar circumstances at pivotal, impressionable points (usually before adulthood)" (Jennings and Niemi 1975, 1317). Survey researchers have long used cross-sectional data to trace these effects. Butler and Stokes (1969), for example, found that British voters who first voted in the Labour landslide of 1945 were persistently more pro-Labour in later years than were older or younger generations.

In Argentina, we posit that if, to compensate for Menem's neoliberal shift, Peronism fell back on clientelism, then—via generational effects—low-income Peronists who entered the electorate in the 1990s should be less loyal to the party and more dependent on small material rewards to sustain their support. We should also find that older Peronists, in contrast, retain their habit of supporting the party because of a deeper identification with its traditions and (erstwhile) promotion of working-class interests. The estimations in table 3 lend some support to this proposition. Age is consistently negatively related to clientelist responses to our questions, meaning that the younger the respondent, the more likely she was to have the profile of a vote seller. Young people were significantly more likely to imagine turning to a party organizer in the case of unemployment, were more likely to have received campaign handouts, and were more likely to say that these handouts mattered in their vote choice.

The link between neoliberalism and clientelism is further suggested when we inspect responses to these questions among low-income Peronist supporters alone. (We caution that the numbers in these subgroups become small, and therefore we regard the results here as suggestive rather than conclusive.) The younger cohorts among low-income Peronists tended to offer clientelist answers more frequently than did older cohorts. Seventy-two percent of the low-income Peronists aged 18–30—people who came of age politically during the Menem era—said that they would turn to a party operative for help if the head of their household lost his or her job. Among older cohorts of low-income Peronist respondents, the proportion is around one-half. The largest proportion of low-income Peronists who reported having received a campaign handout (23%) was in the 18–30 age group, and the proportions dropped off steadily among older voters. Of course these differences could also reflect life-cycle effects, a tendency for older voters to display more stable and intense party identification. Still, it is suggestive that we see no corresponding decline with age in the clientelist responses among low-income Radical-Party respondents. In sum, we find that poor people, Peronist sympathizers, and (perhaps) the cohort of young Peronists who entered the electorate in the Menem era were the most likely to be enmeshed in clientelist networks and to "sell" their votes for minor rewards.

In the following section we evaluate three hypotheses about why voters comply with the (implicit) vote-buying “contract,” given that their compliance cannot be observed. We show evidence in support of our favored hypothesis: that voters comply because they anticipate that, should they not comply, they would be cut off from the flow of minor payoffs in the future. We also evaluate two other propositions. One is that they comply because they feel a normative obligation to respond in kind to the campaign-handout-as-gift. The other is that they comply simply because, given the uncertainty of future-oriented programmatic promises, they value even minor handouts very highly.

### *How Does Vote Buying Survive the Secret Ballot?*

In countries that have the secret ballot, we might expect voters who are offered campaign handouts to accept them and then, in the privacy of the voting booth, ignore them and vote for the party whose program or candidate is most appealing. If so, the effort to buy votes would be in vain, and we wouldn’t expect parties even to try it. Yet in Argentina (and in many other new democracies) we find *both* the secret ballot *and* vote buying. How can we explain their coexistence?

One plausible explanation is that clientelist parties compensate for their inability to directly observe the vote by observing a range of other actions and behaviors that allow party operatives to make good guesses about the vote choices of individuals.<sup>10</sup> The local party operative observes whether a person votes, whether the voter uses party-provided transportation to the polls, and whether he or she attends a rally. The operative has some sense of whether the person was likely to have voted with a ballot that a party operative supplied her with before he or she went to the polls (more below). The operative can observe the voter make public pronouncements in favor of the party. And the operative knows even whether, as one told us, the voter is willing to look the operative—a neighbor—in the eye the day after an election. “Anyone who works militating in the streets,” a Peronist organizer told us, “you know who’s with you and who’s not with you” (authors’ interview, January 2003).

10. Theoretical treatments of redistributive politics show that a party that strategically directs material rewards preferentially to certain groups of voters (e.g., poor people, labor union members) can enhance the party’s electoral prospects. The controversy in this literature is whether parties target “core” supporters (Cox and McCubbins 1986), or “swing” voters (Lindbeck and Weibull 1987), or both (Dixit and Londregan 1996). The difference between the kinds of settings these theorists have in mind and ours is that vote-buying parties offer selective incentives to *individual* voters, not—or not only—to groups, relying on an extensive grass-roots presence in the electorate to gather information about individuals’ likely vote choices.

In addition, parties can also observe election results at very disaggregated levels. The astute and experienced party operative can not know with full certainty how people in his area of responsibility voted. But if his guesses are at least correlated with the voters' actual choices, and if he then conditions the future flow of goods on support, the voter who wants the goods should vote for the clientelist party.

The personalized payoffs typical of vote buying then function as *probabilistic selective incentives* (PSI): they are goods that a voter is more likely to continue to receive in the future if she supports the party. Probabilistic selective incentives can trump programmatic offers. Whether a program is a public good or a divisible benefit destined for voters who fall into generic categories, voters will benefit from it whether they voted for the party providing it or not.<sup>11</sup>

The PSI approach to clientelism suggests several test implications. First, we expect a political party's efforts to buy votes to be more effective the more deeply inserted the party is into social networks. Insertion into social networks allows parties to discern how people vote and to deliver or withhold rewards with some precision, depending on a person's inferred vote. Second, we expect parties to be able to enforce clientelism more effectively in smaller towns and cities, where social relations are multifaceted and where it is therefore easier for parties to monitor voters. Third, we expect voters who come closest to having their vote directly observed by party operatives to be most susceptible, all else equal, to clientelist influence. In the Argentine context, as explained below, this means that we expect voters who receive ballots from party workers to be more susceptible than those who do not.

A rival hypothesis is that not probabilistic selective incentives but *norms* enforce the clientelist bargain. If parties could rely on norms and customs dictating that a person who receives a gift owes the gift-giver something (e.g., a vote) in return, then the secret ballot would not deter political parties from using personalized payoffs to mobilize support. Auyero (2000) offers evidence that people in a working-class Buenos Aires district who received handouts from the Peronist Party expressed their gratitude by voting for the Peronists and attending its rallies. A woman whom he interviewed reported that she did not need to be told to attend the rallies of a party organizer who had given her "medicine, or some milk, or a packet of *yerba* or sugar." "I know that I have to go with her instead of with someone else. . . . I know that I have to go to her rally in order to fulfill my obligation to her, to show my gratitude" (2000, 160).

11. Of course, as mentioned in n. 3, ostensibly public programs are frequently manipulated for political ends, in which case they are no longer "programmatic" by our definition but an instrument of vote buying.

One might expect a *norm of reciprocity* to work more powerfully the more the recipient values the gift, and, given diminishing marginal utility of income, for a poor voter to value such gifts relatively highly. If so, we see the logic of parties distributing clientelist goods to poor people. The norm-of-reciprocity approach to vote buying suggests two test implications. First, if such a norm exists, we would expect many people to agree that those who receive handouts ought in return to vote for the patron. Second, we expect people who receive handouts to report that receiving them does induce a sense of obligation to reciprocate.

A second rival claim is that people who trade their votes for campaign handouts do so because they apply a heavy discount to the value of promised programs. They may simply have a strong time preference for current over future consumption. Or they may attribute a high level of uncertainty to programmatic appeals, believing that promised party programs are unlikely to take shape or to help them. This approach offers a theoretical link between poverty and vote buying that is different from the one we suggested above—that diminishing marginal utility of income explains why vote-buying parties target the poor. Instead the high-discount-rate approach relies on the idea that poor people are especially prone to discount heavily future consumption and that this propensity explains the link between clientelism and underdevelopment (see Scott 1969; Kitschelt 2000; Wantchekon 2003).

The *high-discount-rate* approach to clientelism generates some empirical expectations. People who “sell” their votes, or whom parties see as good prospects for doing so, are, according to this hypothesis, people who are particularly skeptical about future rewards. We would also expect such people to display a “retrospective” approach to voting: to pay more attention to a party or politician’s past performance than to the party platform or to a candidate’s promises. We can therefore use retrospective voting as a proxy for a heavy discounting of the future. If the high-discount-rate approach is the right one, then we should also find that poor voters are particularly retrospective in their approach to voting. If the high-discount-rate approach is right, furthermore, then vote “sellers” should be particularly retrospective in their approach to voting.

In sum, three theories seek to explain how personalized payoffs to voters might elicit electoral support, even despite the secret ballot. Payoffs may function as probabilistic selective incentives, inducing voters to view their future flow of valued goods as conditional on their support for the clientelist party. Or payoffs—“gifts” and “favors”—may entail a normative obligation for voters to return the favor by voting for the party that gave them. Or voters may simply value concrete payoffs more highly than programs, the expected value of which is reduced by a preference for current over future consumption or by the uncertainty that surrounds programs.

*Probabilistic Selective Incentives and party insertion into social networks.*

Argentine voters whose main sympathy is with the Peronist Party are, as we have seen, prone to be clients. Even among poor voters, Peronists are more likely than Radicals (or than people sympathizing with no party) to be the focus of vote-buying efforts and to respond to these efforts. The PSI approach helps make sense of this finding. A crucial difference between the Peronist party and its rivals is that it is much more intimately involved in the social networks of voters, and in particular of low-income voters. Much political and anthropological research points to the Peronists' bottom-heavy organizational structure, its reliance on local neighborhood operatives, the "owners" of *unidades básicas*, to link working-class constituents with the party (see, e.g., Alvarez 1999; Auyero 2000; Levitsky 2003; Waldman 1986). Parties that are closely intertwined with social networks are better able both to observe individual voters' actions and to condition the distribution of goods to voters on these actions.

*Probabilistic Selective Incentives and community size.* A consistent fact emerging from our data is that people who reside in smaller municipalities are more likely to be the targets of vote buying. The municipalities in which our respondents lived ranged in size from the village of Luca, in the province of Córdoba, with 388 residents, to Córdoba, the capital of the province of the same name, and to the municipality of La Matanza in Greater Buenos Aires, each with populations over 1.2 million. A second look at table 3 shows that the smaller the (logged) population size of the municipality in which the respondent lived, the more likely she was to have turned to a politically important person in the past year for help, the more likely she was to have received a handout in the previous campaign, and the more likely she was to say that the handout influenced her vote (all three effects are statistically significant). Our interpretation is that parties' efforts to monitor voters are more effective in small communities, because social relations are multifaceted in these communities, and parties simply have an easier time keeping track of people.

*Probabilistic Selective Incentives and voting technology.* The technology of voting in Argentina also helps instill in voters the sense that their votes are observed and their future welfare depends on them. Argentina introduced the secret ballot with the 1912 Sáenz Peña reforms. But it never introduced the "Australian ballot"—ballots produced by public entities at public expense, with careful controls over their distribution and with all candidates for an office listed simultaneously. Instead Argentines, like voters in Panama and Uruguay today, voters in Colombia until 1991, and voters in most U.S. states until the early decades of the twentieth century, vote with slips of paper that parties produce. They can acquire these party-produced ballots (*boletas*) from party organizers and

campaign workers in the weeks and days leading up to elections, or they can find them in the voting booth on election day. The circulation of ballots outside of the polling place and well before election day allows parties to try to win voters over not only by extolling their past performance or making promises for the future, but also by giving people, in a sense, the vote itself. In fact, many people we interviewed, referring to the slips of paper that party operatives handed out, called them not “ballots” but “votes” (*votos*).

Party organizers attest to the additional element of influence over voters that the Argentine ballot system provides. A party operative in Misiones described his strategy of giving voters food and drink, keeping them in his house overnight, and then slipping ballots “straight into their pockets” as they were taken off to the polls (Alvarez 1999, 8). A Peronist organizer whom we interviewed asserted that giving out ballots was the most effective means of producing extra votes for her party at election time.

The most important thing is to go look for people and give them the ballot. You give them the ballot in the taxi [which the party has hired to transport them to the polls]. Then no one has time to change their ballots for them [i.e., give them a different ballot. After escorting voters into the polling place] you put them on line to vote. . . . Then they don't have a chance to change the ballot. Only if they're really sneaky and they change it inside the voting booth. (Author's interview, Córdoba, January 2003)

Some voters perceive the distribution of ballots as enforcing a clientelist exchange. One respondent in our survey was an unemployed man aged twenty-seven from Quilmes, an industrial district of Greater Buenos Aires, who reported receiving food from a Peronist operative during the campaign. When asked whether the handout influenced his vote, he answered that the vote “should be free, but they give you the ballot and then they don't give you the things until after you vote.”

We postulate that voters who receive ballots directly from party operatives also tend to receive other personalized handouts, and that receiving both the ballot and the handout reinforces the message that the party intends its handouts as a *quid pro quo* for votes. We asked our respondents whether they used ballots that they find in the polling place or bring ballots with them from outside. Three hundred respondents to our survey (15%) told us that they vote with ballots that they bring with them to the polling place. Regression estimations (not shown) indicate that people with low incomes and those supporting the Peronist and—less strongly—the Radical party were most likely to bring their ballots with them on election day.

People whom parties provide with ballots are not only poorer than those who vote with ballots they find in the polling place, they are also more susceptible to clientelist influence. We repeated the estimations in



columns 4 and 5 of table 3, but this time included dummy variables that were scored 1 for people who vote with a ballot given to them by a party operative, 0 for those who vote with a ballot they obtained in the voting booth. The coefficients on these dummy variables were positive and statistically significant. Thus, controlling for other factors, a person who votes with a ballot that a party operative gives her is more likely also to receive other items, such as food or articles of clothing. And a person who receives a handout and a ballot from a party operative is more likely than someone who just receives the handout but not the ballot to allow a handout to influence her vote. Again, a (*Clarify*) simulation makes this effect intuitive. A poor, young woman from a small town who identifies with the Peronists and who received a handout in the campaign has about a 25 percent chance of saying that the handout influenced her vote *if she voted with a ballot that she found in the voting booth*. An identical voter who also received a handout but who *votes with a ballot given to her by a party operative* has a 35 percent chance of saying that the handout influenced her vote. Argentine political parties, then, do not just entice people to take their ballots by giving out handouts; they also entice people to vote for them by sending the message that future handouts depend on votes.

In sum, when we look more closely at which kinds of voters were the targets of vote buying, we find that they are individuals with links to the Peronist party (the party in Argentina most deeply inserted into working-class social networks); from small towns and cities (whose votes can more easily be divined by party operatives); and who were given ballots as well as food or mattresses (and hence for whom the link between the vote and an on-going flow of goods was especially clear). These findings weigh in favor of our selective incentives approach to vote buying.

*Vote buying and norms of reciprocity.* If poverty turns some voters into clients, this may be because they feel a sense of obligation to give a party their vote in return for a bag of food or a sheet of corrugated metal. A norm of reciprocity might act as a (soft) instrument enforcing the clientelist bargain. Yet our data cast doubt on this explanation. We asked respondents, "If a party operative gives people goods in a campaign, do they feel obliged to vote for his party?" A slight majority of people answered 'yes'—these did not fit the profile of the vote seller. Regression estimations (not shown) reveal that people who answered 'yes' tended to have high incomes, to dislike the Peronists, and to come from big cities—a very different profile than the vote seller's. We also asked a normative question, "Should someone who receives a handout feel obliged to vote for the party that gave it?" Low-income Argentines answered 'yes' in no greater proportions than wealthier Argentines.

Crucially, in logit models estimating the probability that a person believes that taking a handout does create a sense of obligation, when we control for whether the respondent actually received a handout, those who received them were *less* likely to contend that they do create obligations.

Why do people who will probably never receive party handouts contend that they create obligations and those who quite possibly do receive them contend that they create no obligations? Our explanation is that those who actually receive campaign handouts know from experience that the power of handouts to create feelings of gratitude and a sense of obligation is limited, whereas those who just consider the transaction in the abstract do not know this. Being treated as a client powerfully eroded people's sense that clientelism creates obligations. Hence our data are more suggestive of people responding to clientelist inducements in anticipation of future clientelist inducements than out of a sense of gratitude or obligation to the giver.

*Vote buying and discounting the future.* People might condition their support for a party on personalized handouts because they think programmatic appeals are inherently uncertain. Using retrospective voting—a focus on the past performance of parties or candidates in voting decisions—as a proxy for people who apply a high discount rate to programmatic appeals, we examine whether clientelistic voters are also retrospective voters. We asked questions designed to shed light on whether people looked toward the past or the future when they cast their votes. One survey question asked the respondent about the time-orientation of voters in his or her neighborhood: “Do people sympathize with (the most important party in the locality) because they think the party has managed things well (*ha hecho las cosas bien*) or because it has a good proposal for governing (*una buena propuesta de gobierno*)?” Another question asked respondents about their own approach to voting: “When you decide which party to vote for in an election, do you think most about what that party did when it governed, or how it will resolve problems in the future?”

Because vote-buying parties concentrate their efforts on poor voters, it is notable that our data offer little evidence that poor Argentines are especially retrospective voters. They are no more likely to weigh past government behavior or to discount promises about future programs than are wealthier voters. In estimations not shown here, we find that income, education, and housing quality had little effect on retrospective stances; if anything, poor voters were more prospective than wealthier ones.

The critical question for evaluating the high-discount-rate approach is whether people's time-orientations were related systematically to their responsiveness to handouts. Our surveys suggest that the answer is ‘no’.

We found little evidence that those who took a retrospective approach to voting or saw those around them as doing so were prone to be influenced by clientelist handouts. The high-discount-rate approach to vote buying, like the norm-of-obligation approach, finds little support in our data.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have analyzed one dimension of political clientelism in contemporary Argentina, vote buying, and focused only on one aspect, the distribution by political parties of small personalized rewards during election campaigns. Because there are other important dimensions that we do not explore here (see n. 3), we cannot assess the full impact of clientelism on Argentine politics. With this specific form of clientelism in mind, a message emerging from our study is that it is possible to overstate the extent of vote buying in Argentina. Most people in the three provinces we studied did not experience elections as showers of petty gifts from political parties. Only 141 people, 7 percent of our sample, said they had received goods during the most recent campaign (but 12% of the poorest voters and nearly one in five of the poorest Peronist voters answered this way). As further indications of the relative limits of Argentine clientelism, a majority of our respondents said they focused on parties' programmatic appeals rather than on past performance in deciding how to vote, and most believed their neighbors paid more attention to programs and proposals than to the past. A large minority rejected the proposition that receiving a handout implies an obligation to vote for the patronizing party. And nine out of ten rejected the proposition that handouts *should* engender obligations. These are hardly the symptoms of a heavily clientelistic political culture.

Still, democracy does less in Argentina to create a political sphere of equality, set against a society of significant inequality, than one might hope. Low-income Argentines are in danger of being turned into political clients. They are more likely than their wealthier fellow citizens to receive handouts at election time and more likely to allow these handouts to influence their votes. Most prone to vote "selling" are young, low-income Peronists, people who entered the electorate during the Menem era. These were the kinds of people who were frequently hurt by the high unemployment and reduced services entailed in Menem's neoliberal reforms. Our study tends to confirm the view that, by redoubling its clientelist efforts, Peronism retained the support of many voters who were hurt by the neoliberal shift. And we showed that a handout could be crucial in people's electoral choices: receiving a handout from a Peronist pushed the likelihood that a fairly typical vote "seller" would vote for the Peronist presidential candidate in 1999 from just under to well over 50 percent.

Regarding the puzzle of how vote buying can be enforced despite the secret ballot, we offered evidence that even though parties do not observe individuals' votes directly, they can observe other actions and behaviors that allow them to make reasonably reliable inferences about how individuals voted. To the extent that parties can draw good inferences, and use clientelist inducements as rewards or punishments conditional on people's inferred votes, voters will view the future flow of personalized handouts to them and their families as conditional on their supporting the clientelist party. We indicated plausible alternative ways of resolving the puzzle: voters might feel obliged to vote for parties that gave them things, or they might simply value even minor payoffs more highly than uncertain programs. Although there is certainly room for more research on this important topic, our evidence points toward probabilistic selective incentives and away from the norms-of-reciprocity and the high-discount-rate approaches.

Studies that invoke the construct of political clientelism frequently adopt a reproachful tone toward the parties that deploy it. The common view is that clientelist parties in developing countries take advantage of the poverty and lack of autonomy of poor voters (see especially O'Donnell 1996 and Fox 1994). A minority view, however, is that clientelism and patronage are party-building strategies appropriate in places where political institutions are fledglings (see Kitschelt 2000; see also Scott 1969). Clientelist networks, in this view, are sort of a poor country's welfare state. Reform such systems too soon, the minority asserts, and you run the danger of depriving "clients" of the only organizations and networks capable of responding to their needs. The alternative to vote buying, this argument runs, is not programmatic democracy but mass neglect. And neglect would be worse: although mattresses, corrugated roofing, and bags of food might appear to middle-class analysts as the sordid detritus of a backward polity, those receiving these items are presumably better off getting them than nothing.

Two points weigh against the minority view. First, note that the cost to parties of vote buying rises as incomes rise—the same voter who before would trade his vote for a bag of rice now demands a public service job. It therefore follows that clientelist parties develop an interest in underdevelopment and maldistribution of income, and may in fact become obstacles to development (see Chubb 1981). Second, if we are right to characterize vote buying as involving selective incentives, the fact that people are swayed by these incentives is no proof that they would not be better off (and know they would be better off) if parties were forced to compete on the grounds of program and performance alone. A voter facing a choice between supporting a party that gave him a minor clientelist inducement (as a PSI) and another that offered a much more attractive program would, in a sense, be forced to support the clientelist

party. The goods provided by programmatic parties are either literally public goods, or they are public goods for the category of people who receive them. The party that offers clean air offers it to everyone; the party that offers old-age pensions offers them to all elderly retirees. The voter will receive the attractive program whether or not he or she votes for the party that offers it, but will continue to receive the clientelist inducements only for voting for the clientelist party.<sup>12</sup>

Our analysis points toward reforms that might reduce vote buying. One is the passage and enforcement of laws prohibiting the distribution of certain kinds of goods at election time. Some of these laws are already on the books in Argentina, but the courts have a mixed record of enforcing them. By showing that vote buying works best when parties are able to monitor voters, our analysis argues in favor of reforms that would reduce the parties' ability to monitor. Critical for Argentina is ballot reform. Other Latin American democracies under stress have shifted from party-produced ballots to the so-called Australian ballot; in 1991 Colombia made just this shift. In Argentina, such reforms would discourage parties from winning votes with minor inducements and pressure them instead to win votes with good programs and good performance.

12. If clientelism-as-selective-incentives trumps even attractive programmatic offers, why do not all parties offer selective incentives and abandon programmatic appeals? The answer, we believe, is that political parties are not all equally able to monitor voters. Bottom-heavy parties, and ones like the Argentine Peronists that are closely intertwined with the social networks of low-income voters, have a comparative advantage in vote buying. Parties that are more distant from the social networks of their constituents make better use of their organizational and monetary resources by developing and advertising programs.

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