Do reductions in poverty lead to decreases in clientelist voting?

Rethinking the association of poverty with clientelism[1]

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Abstract: The extant literature about clientelism argues, either explicitly or implicitly, that voters sell their votes due to poverty. Given the association between poverty and clientelism, the literature assumes that increases in economic security will lead to decreases in clientelist voting. In this article, we further analyze data from extant studies to argue that the causal effect of poverty on clientelist voting has been overestimated. Micro-level data from different studies show that the link between poverty and vote buying disappears when using more precise indicators of vote buying or more complex models. We complement this finding with existing ethnographic data from urban machines and our own ethnographic research in Brazil to show that political machines do not necessarily always target poor voters. We further test the assumption that decreases in poverty will lead to a decline in clientelist voting with survey and ethnographic data from Brazil, which show that levels of vote buying have actually increased amid poverty reduction. By contesting the association of poverty with clientelism, this article provides further evidence to a growing literature that looks to explain the dynamics of vote buying beyond the material bases of these exchanges.

Introduction

The correlation between poverty and vote buying is one of the main theoretical assumptions underlying extant theories of clientelism. For Stokes et al., poor voters leave their programmatic preferences aside because the value of a cheap gift is likely to have a much bigger impact on their income than it has for wealthier voters (Stokes et al. 2013, 161). A corollary of this micro-correlation between poverty and vote selling is the assumption that with higher incomes, vote buying tends to diminish (Stokes et al., 2013), which we call the transitional hypothesis. Scholars expect that as voters' income rises, "the treat or bribe appears to be more and more trivial, we would expect the voter to be more willing to register support for the party whose program is most attractive" (Stokes et al. 2013, 185).

In this study, we reevaluate these two underlying assumptions with both qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of cases. We find that the causal association of poverty with clientelism has been overestimated and that existing evidence of this association is dependent on model specification. With better indicators and more precise models, the association of poverty with vote buying disappears. We also bring in evidence from the case of Brazil that contests the transitional hypothesis, which has paradoxically experienced a growth in vote buying despite significant reductions in poverty.

We start by presenting ethnographic data from existing studies from urban machines from Chicago and Rio de Janeiro and new evidence from the *Sertão* of Bahia, Brazil, that indicates that political machines do not necessarily target the poorest segments of a community. We further evaluate the association of poverty with clientelism by looking at existing studies from Nicaragua and Kenya to show that, when more precise indicators are used, vote buying can be associated with indicators of wealth rather than poverty. We also test the association between low levels of economic development and clientelism at the macro-level with data from the

Democratic Accountability Linkages Project (DALP), a cross-national dataset of expert surveys that include questions on clientelist voting. Here again, while low levels of economic development seem to be associated with clientelism in a simplistic model, this association loses its explanatory power in more precise models.

While some studies have tested the association with poverty and clientelism the transitional hypothesis has been less studied. To test the transitional hypothesis, we explore the case of Brazil, which had just gone through massive changes in social policy and seen major reductions in poverty over the past decade and a half (Barrientos 2013; Barrientos and Santibáñez 2009; Soares et al. 2006). To evaluate whether changes in income had effects on clientelist voting in Brazil, we compare the answers on clientelist attitudes and behavior on the 2014 Brazilian Electoral Panel Survey, with questions on clientelism in the 2002 *Estudo Eleitoral Brasileiro* (ESEB). Despite the reduction of poverty in Brazil during the 2000s, the comparison of these two surveys indicate that clientelist attitudes have actually increased while clientelist behavior seems not to have budged. Furthermore, income does not appear to be a significant predictor of clientelist attitudes or perceived clientelist behavior. We complement this finding with ethnographic data from the *Sertão* of Bahia, which also points to an increase in vote buying even when poor voters' living conditions have significantly improved.

This article has broad lessons for policy makers and scholars of the field. First, it shows that poverty reduction is necessary, but not sufficient, for reducing the incidence of vote-buying. Second, we establish the possibility of a new research agenda. Poverty has been seen by scholars as one of the fundamental assumptions under which clientelism exists. By problematizing this association, this article lends support to theories of clientelism that explain the dynamics of this phenomenon based not only on the material dimension of these exchanges.

Rethinking the Link between Poverty and Clientelism

One of the main underlying hypotheses of clientelism studies is that poor voters are more likely to be targets of vote buying. Surveys using direct measures of vote buying, for instance, have found that poor voters are more likely to report practicing it. The association between poverty and vote buying has been corroborated by the observation that poor voters in different places are more likely to report vote buying than wealthier voters (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012; Jensen and Justesen 2014; Nichter 2014; Stokes 2005). In Argentina (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004), Nigeria (Omobowale and Olutayo 2010), Italy (Chubb 1981), Mexico (Fox 1994), Latin America as a whole (Stokes et al. 2013), and the early-20th-century U.S. (Banfield and Wilson 1963), the poor and economically insecure seemed to be more likely to be part of a clientelist relationship. In summation, there does seem to be a correlation between poverty and clientelist voting: poor countries seem to have more clientelist voting than middle-income and rich countries, and within those countries, poor individuals seem to vote more clientelistically than the middle and upper classes.

Despite the number of different studies suggesting that poor voters are more likely to engage in vote buying, most of these studies suffer from a potential measurement bias as they rely on direct questions about sensitive behavior: individuals either admitting to having received goods from politicians in exchange for their vote or admitting to have voted for a candidate that buys votes. The problem with bias in survey responses is that it is not possible to identify the direction of the bias, that is, to know which group of individuals is more likely to underreport the sensitive behavior in question. We argue that this assumption still needs to be further tested with more precise indicators of vote buying and with ethnographic evidence that is able to directly observe how politicians target their vote-buying efforts.

The second assumption, which we call the transition hypothesis, it that higher income levels for voters will make vote buying less appealing to both voters and party leaders. The conventional wisdom argues that increases in economic security (or decreases in inequality—see Hicken 2007; Robinson and Verdier 2013) should explain decreases in clientelist voting.

Without sufficient economic security, so the argument goes, voters will feel more pressure to sell their votes. When they reach a sufficient level of economic security, however, they will begin to vote on the basis of their policy preferences. Yet the direct evidence for the central claim here—that increases in economic security lead to decreases in clientelist voting—remains thin.

Stokes et al. (2013) use historical sources to track the decline of clientelism in the U.S. and the U.K. and find that population growth and urbanization, combined with economic development, change relationships between party leaders and brokers. Brokers lose the ability to efficiently monitor voters' choices as electoral districts get larger. Meanwhile, the center of gravity shifts from the poor, who are less demanding of brokers, to the middle class, who want more. As a result, party leaders opt for more programmatic ways of winning votes, reasoning that they are more efficient at reaching a large number of middle-class voters at once, particularly as electoral brokers become less effective at supplying votes (Stokes et al. 2013).

The problem with this analysis is that it suffers from case selection bias in terms of electoral institutions. Both the U.S. and U.K. have, and historically have had, first-past-the-post electoral systems, with most elections involving only two viable candidates. This matters because party labels, if there are only two or three parties, can be very useful voting heuristics,

helping voters form attitudes and opinions about candidates (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993).

Bustikova and Corduneanu-Huci, however, find with World Values Survey data that, while personal income is relevant, it alone does not explain perceived clientelist behavior. Instead, they build on Keefer and Vlaicu (2007) and Robinson and Verdier (2013) to argue that trust in the state has a stronger (negative) relationship with the likelihood of engaging in clientelism (Bustikova and Corduneanu-Huci 2017). This work cast doubt on whether changes in income would really affect clientelist voting among individuals.

This doubt was heightened by close looks at ethnographies carried out on political machines. In 1970s Chicago, for instance, the political machine survived by offering services to white-collar workers, such as access to the city government, in order to resolve day-to-day problems (Guterbock 1980). Our own ethnographic work in the field speaks to this as well. With more reliable water and better standards of living, voters in the *sertão* of Bahia did not tend to stop voting clientelistically; they simply began to demand more in exchange for their political support. Given the institutional and cultural context, politicians deemed it worthwhile to pay this price.

Re-evaluating the Association between Poverty and Clientelism

Qualitative Evidence

Do political machines only target the poor? In this section, we look at evidence from existing ethnographic studies and our own original participant observation in the *Sertão* of Bahia to show that, contrary to conventional wisdom, clientelistic politicians do not target only the most disadvantaged voters in their communities. Evidence from Chicago and Rio de Janeiro indicates

that politicians actually can target their clientelistic services to better-off voters, and in the *Sertão* of Bahia, the habit of demanding favors and goods during elections was pervasive across social classes[2].

The first example comes from the study of the Regular Democratic Organization of Chicago during the 1970s, as described by Guterbock (1980). As the classic example of an urban political machine in American politics, the Chicago machine is particularly interesting for the purpose of this article because of the existence of studies describing it over different periods of time, from the Gosnell study in the 1930s to Guterbock's analysis in the 1970s (Gosnell 1935; Guterbock 1980). Guterbock finds that, although voters were not as poor as they were by the 1930s, requests for favors were still significant and the machine still invested a considerable amount of resources in solving voters' individual problems.

Guterbock worked for three years for the Regular Democratic Organization in one North Side Chicago ward. According to him, the amount of service requests received by the ward in his study was significant and comparable to the average number of requests received by city agencies (Guterbock 1980, 91). There was also a widespread use of party services. According to a survey conducted by the author, a third of the respondents requested a service from party agents at least once (Guterbock 1980, 97). Guterbock claims that sometimes the number of requests was actually more than what the alderman staff could handle (Guterbock 1980, 74). Nevertheless, during meetings with citizens or party members, the alderman would always remind citizens to tell him about their needs or problems: "If there's anything in your precinct that needs doing, or if one of your voters has a problem, just call me or my assistants" (Guterbock 1980, 74).

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[2] See Borges 2018a.

Contrary to his prior expectations, by analyzing the data of the services provided by the machine in the ward that he worked, Guterbock found that that the main users of party services were not poor voters with low levels of education but rather white-collar workers, homeowners, and people from high-status ethnic groups (Guterbock 1980, 143). While Democrat loyalists were drawn disproportionally from the ward's lowest strata, those were not the segments of the population to which the lion's share of party services was directed.

The case of Marta, a city councilwoman in Roseiral,[3] a suburban neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, is also illuminating in this regard. As in Chicago, the services offered by Marta in Roseiral were not used by the poorest segments of the population, but instead by those of relatively better socioeconomic status. Marta does not operate in a machine-dominated city like the aldermen of Chicago. Although one party, the PMDB, has controlled Rio de Janeiro's state government for a long period of time, their control over the local government is far from the monopoly that the Regular Democratic Organization still enjoys nowadays over Chicago's city hall. In practice, this means that Marta does not have, like Chicago's aldermen, institutionalized channels within city agencies for solving her constituents' problems. The less professionalized system within which Marta operates was not, however, an obstacle for her becoming a successful clientelistic politician. With the motto of "a problem has to be solved immediately," she become a top vote-getter in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Apart from the different levels of professionalization in the cities' clientelistic politics, there are also socioeconomic differences between Chicago and Rio de Janeiro. Roseiral is located in the northern area of the city of Rio de Janeiro, far away from the richest, better-served

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[3] Roseiral is a fictional name used by Kuschnir in her ethnography (Kuschnir 2000) to refer to a real lower-middle-class suburban neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro.

neighborhoods of the southern area. Even though it is common for Rio natives to divide the city into two contrasting areas, the rich southern area (*Zona Sul*) and the poor and suburban northern area (*Zona Norte*), the social composition of Roseiral is actually heterogeneous.

For Marta, this heterogeneity is crucial. Her core constituency comes from the residential complex and not from the slums (Kuschnir 2000, 109). She deliberately chooses to target the lower-middle-class areas of Roseiral. According to her, the slums "lack everything" and slum-dwellers are "extremely poor" (Kuschnir 2000, 109), which makes them susceptible to accept money from any candidate. Therefore, she does not expect them to be loyal supporters (Kuschnir 2000, 110).

Both in Chicago and Rio de Janeiro, clientelistic politicians do not focus their resources on serving the poorest segments of the community. Original ethnographic research in the *Sertão* of Bahia pointed to a similar dynamic. For some politicians in the *Sertão*, such as the chief of staff of the city of Salinas, who had to deal with the constant requests of voters, the practice of asking for something in exchange for their vote was more common among better-off voters:

> *"The majority of the demands do not come from the poorest, they come from the people who do not need this assistance. The campaigns have become more expensive exactly because the requests come from people who are not satisfied with a mattress, a water filter or fixing their door. They are people who would not need this but, because of social vices, they think they have the right to transform their house, to improve their lives through the election.*

A city councilor in the city of Pedrinhas expressed a similar opinion, just after having reflected on how the living standards of voters in the *Sertão* had improved over the last few years:

> *"On the other hand, we who are inside party politics and who participate in the electoral process--we observe that there was not a change of behavior concerning assistentialism. I believe that this is more than a social condition; it is related to a behavior, to a wrong concept of what politics is and what politics stands for. Because, during the campaign, it is not only the poor people or those in need who approach us asking for something in exchange for their vote; many people in good social conditions who are financially independent approach us in the same way. They also only agree to vote for a certain candidate on the condition of negotiating for an advantage or a good.*

These statements resonate with the observations of other brokers and politicians. They not only claim that voters who do not need assistance asked for something in exchange for their votes but also that such practices have become more widespread, and even more expansive, with the improvement of voters' living standards in the *Sertão* of Bahia.

Evidence from Current Studies using Better Indicators

Surveys using direct measures of vote buying have consistently found that poor voters are more likely to report vote buying, but this finding has not been corroborated by more recent surveys using more precise measures of vote buying. Despite the number of different studies suggesting that poor voters are indeed more likely to engage in vote buying, all these studies suffer from a potential measurement bias, relying, as they do, on direct questions about sensitive behavior: individuals either admitting to having received goods from politicians in exchange for their vote or admitting to have voted for a candidate that buys votes. The problem with bias in survey responses is that it is not possible to identify the direction of the bias, that is, to know which group of individuals are more likely to underreport the sensitive behavior in question.

In order to account for this potential bias, recent studies on clientelism have adopted the list experiment design, which grants greater anonymity for survey respondents. With the list experiment, respondents are offered a card with a list of different activities and are asked to tell interviewers the total number of activities in which they engaged, but not the specific activities. With the greater anonymity provided by this design, the rates of vote buying have been shown to be considerably higher in these studies when compared to the rates shown by direct questions (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012; Imai, Park, and Greene 2014; Kramon 2016b). In the study of González-Ocantos et al., the proportion of vote buying reported in the list experiment design was 24 percent, while the rate for the direct question was only 2 percent. In Kramon's study of the

influence of vote buying in Kenya, the list experiment estimate suggested that 23 percent of voters had their vote influenced by vote buying while this proportion dropped to 7 percent when asked directly. The greater anonymity of the list experiment design also provides, therefore, a more precise indicator of vote buying.

In contrast to the numerous studies that have found a positive correlation between lower levels of income and vote buying by using direct questions, the two studies that have used the list experiment design have found the opposite. Contrary to his own hypothesis, Kramon found that vote buying in Kenya was more influential in areas where the population had higher levels of education and more access to electricity (Kramon 2016, 404). Likewise, the results from the list experiment from the Nicaraguan study conducted by González-Ocantos et al. are positively and significantly correlated with education whereas they have negative signs when the answers come from direct questions about vote buying (González-Ocantos et al. 2012, 213). And while low-income voters are significantly more likely to report vote buying when asked directly, this association become negative and insignificant when using the more precise indicator of the list experiment (González-Ocantos et al. 2012, 413).

Surprisingly, the discrepancy between the typical individual who engages in vote buying that arises from direct-questions surveys and the list experiments is not explored by the authors of the studies mentioned above. These findings, however, reveal that, with the use of more precise indicators, the widely-held association of poverty with vote buying disappears.

Evidence from the Democratic Accountability Linkages Project[4]

Data

To further test the association of poverty with clientelism, we used the Democratic Accountability Linkages Project (DALP) to see if other factors could have an effect on clientelist voting outcomes at the country level. The DALP is a cross-national survey that was administered in 2008 and 2009 to country experts about the degree to which democratic accountability and clientelist practices are prevalent in given countries. Eighty-eight countries from six continents are included in the dataset, with questions about specific clientelist practices, such as monitoring votes and offering consumer goods to voters in exchange for votes (Kitschelt 2013). Most questions are asked at both the country level—about countries as a whole—and about individual political parties within the country.

We however, wanted to see if certain institutional factors omitted by extant studies could have effects on clientelist voting--this could help resolve the case selection bias inherent even in cross-national historical studies such as those by Stokes et al. (2013). While the DALP does not have this type of data, we were able to combine data from the DALP with data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The CSES has had four waves since 1996, and includes a wide variety of micro-level and macro-level data that are collected after elections in a range of countries (CSES 2015, 2016). We used the third and fourth waves, ranging from 2006-2016, because they included variables on party and electoral systems, such as the number of effective parties and voters who identified with political parties per country.

Measures for the effective number of parties were taken from the CSES. Partisan identification was measured by aggregating the number of CSES respondents in an individual

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[4] Parts of this section are adapted from Lloyd 2016.

country who answered that they felt close to a particular party. An individual's response of 1 indicated that they did feel close to a party, while 5 indicated that they did not—these figures are country averages of these responses. Income data were measured with natural logarithms of the World Bank's GDP/capita data.

As for clientelist voting, the dependent variable, we measured it with a vote buying statistic: experts' judgments on whether individual parties look to win votes by distributing in-kind benefits. Experts were asked to determine how much effort candidates and parties expended to attract voters by providing consumer goods, ranging from 0 (a negligible effort or none at all) to 4 (a major effort). Likewise, the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the parties in a country was measured by experts' responses to whether parties could assess any consequences to individuals or groups of voters if they promised to vote for the parties but did not deliver on their promise. Answers ranged from 0 (no) to 1 (yes).

Descriptive Statistics

To get our vote buying statistic—the dependent variable for this analysis, we took the mean answer for each party, multiplied it by the average number of votes it had gotten in the last two lower-house legislative elections, and added it together. These figures ranged from a minimum of 97.4 (Switzerland) to a high of 381.42 (Jamaica), as seen below in Figure 1.
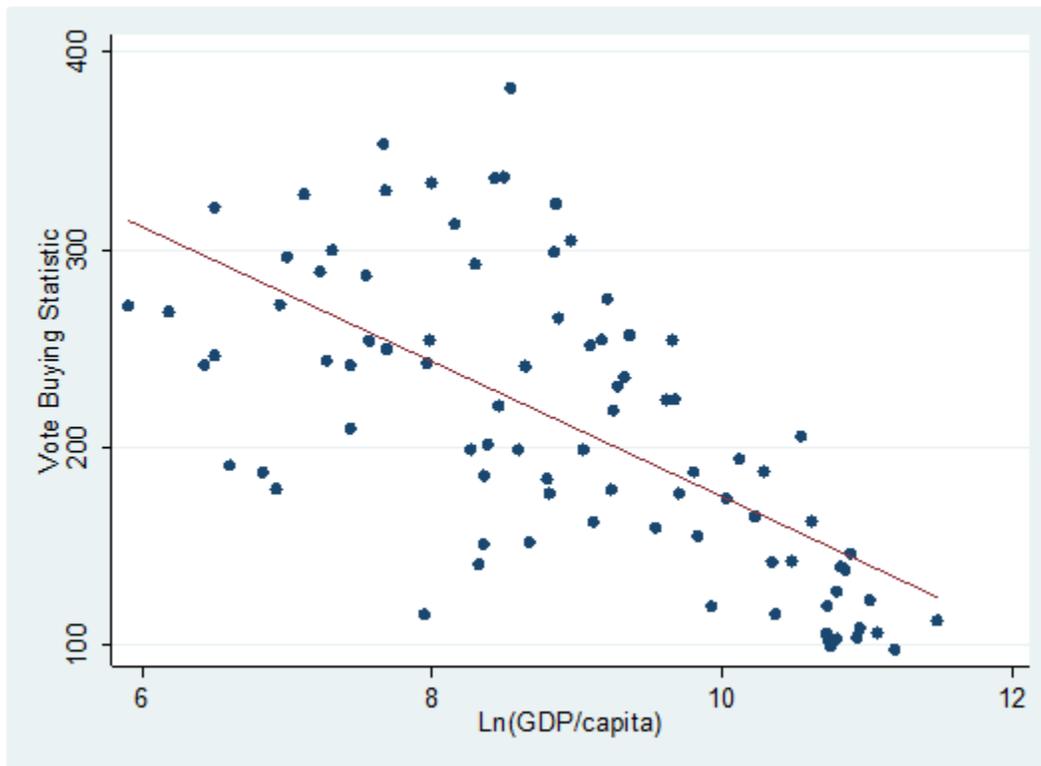
Figure 1: Vote Buying Statistic
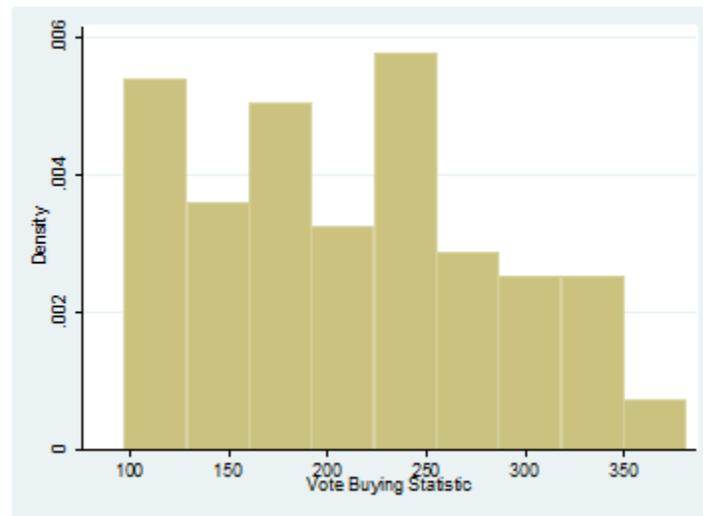
Source: Kitschelt 2013

Figure 2 shows the distribution of this vote buying statistic when mapped against our main independent variable of income. This first cut does indeed seem to show some sort of negative association at the country level between income and vote buying.

Figure 2: LnGDP/capita vs. Vote Buying Statistic

Source: Kitschelt 2013, World Bank

We used the same method to measure the monitoring capacity of clientelist parties in a given country, taking the mean answer for each party to the monitoring question on the DALP, multiplying it by the average number of votes it had gotten in the last two lower-house legislative elections, and adding it together to get an index.

Model Specification

To measure the cross-national association between income and clientelist voting, we estimated the following model:

$$y_i = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 x_{i1} + \gamma_2 x_{i2} + \gamma_3 (x_{i1} * x_{i2}) + \gamma_4 x_{i3} + \gamma_5 x_{i4} + u_i$$

where:

y_i is the dependent variable, a measure of clientelist voting in a given country;

x_{i1} is an income variable;

x_{i2} is the number of parties in the country;

x_{i3} represents the monitoring capacity of parties in the country;

x_{i4} is the percentage of voters who identified with a political party;

and is an error term.

We used a linear regression and OLS estimation for our model. Our key hypothesis was that the inclusion of a product term multiplying x_{i1} by x_{i2} would change the relationship between income and clientelist voting, nullifying any negative effect of x_{i1} that might be predicted by the conventional wisdom. This would be because countries with high effective numbers of parties necessarily have complex, unstructured information contexts that make the effective adjudication of candidates very difficult, even with higher levels of economic security. Given this, γ_3, the coefficient for the product term, should be positive and its estimate significant.

We expected the total effects of the coefficient for the interaction term, accounting for both γ_1 and γ_3, to not be statistically significant. Meanwhile, the total effects of , which measures the effective number of parties of each country (the number of parties in a country, accounting for the concentration and fractionalization of votes--Laakso and Taagepera 1979), should be positive.

We also expected enforcement capacity to have a positive effect on clientelist voting, although we were not sure whether this would be limited by effective number of parties or other conditioning factors. Still, the possibility of retribution should increase clientelist voting, even in this revised model, so γ_4 should be positive and its estimate significant.

Finally, we believed that the degree to which voters identified with parties would also affect clientelist voting, decreasing it. Identifying with a party would make it more likely for

voters to have *a priori* preferences regarding candidates, avoiding the type of indifference that

we hypothesize leads to a resilience in clientelist voting. Consequently, γ_5 should be negative.

Results

With a model that did not include an interaction term, we found that both enforcement

capacity and income do indeed have statistically significant effects on the vote-buying variable.

The conventional wisdom does seem to be borne out here. This can be seen below in Table 1 and

Figure 3.

Yet when we included our product term, the effect of income was nullified when the

effective number of parties was greater than 5, as Figure 3 shows below.[5] The constitutive terms

of the interaction term (including income) might still be significant, but the key term is the

interaction and its effect on marginal values (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). In this case,

income only matters when the number of parties is sufficiently low.[6]

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[5] We also, in alternate specifications, used measures for electoral formulas (majoritarian vs. open-list PR vs. closed-list PR), urbanization rates, HDI, district magnitude, purchasing power parity, the Gini coefficient, compulsory voting, the age of the democracy in question, Freedom House and Polity ratings, and literacy rates, but found no significant effects for any of them. There were not sufficient data over the time period we were looking at in the CSES database to evaluate the effect of Internet and cell phone access on vote buying, or the effect of extreme poverty rates. We also created an index from political knowledge questions in the data, and this did indeed have a significant positive effect on the vote buying in some specifications.

[6] These results also held when using a more general clientelist summary statistic as the dependent variable. GDP/capita also became insignificant with the introduction of the interactive GDP/capita and ENP product term, although the coefficient for the product term itself was not significant. That said, this measure is less direct when it comes to measuring vote buying specifically; it includes other factors such whether the party in question manipulates regulatory mechanisms to benefit its supporters. While this is not unrelated to clientelism, not every scholar would include it as an essential component of clientelism, and it's not necessarily related directly to clientelist voting. As a result, it makes more sense to put more stock in the original vote-buying dependent variable.

Table 1: Vote Buying Statistic

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient (robust std. error)	P-value	Coefficient (robust std. error)	P-value
Enforcement Capacity	1.26(0.49)	0.01**	1.33(0.47)	<0.01***
LnGDP/capita	-20.87 (8.71)	0.02**	-46.87(13.11)	<0.01***
ENP	-0.68(3.3)	0.83	-49.92(16.21)	<0.01***
LnGDP/capita*ENP			5.53(1.71)	<0.01***
Aggregate Party ID	10.86(11.58)	0.36	10.29(11.81)	0.87
N	37		37	
F	<0.001***		<0.01***	
R^2	0.57		0.65	

*=p<.1, **=p<.05, ***=p<.01

Source: Kitschelt 2013, World Bank, CSES

Figure 3: Average Marginal Effects of Logged GDP/capita with 95% CIs
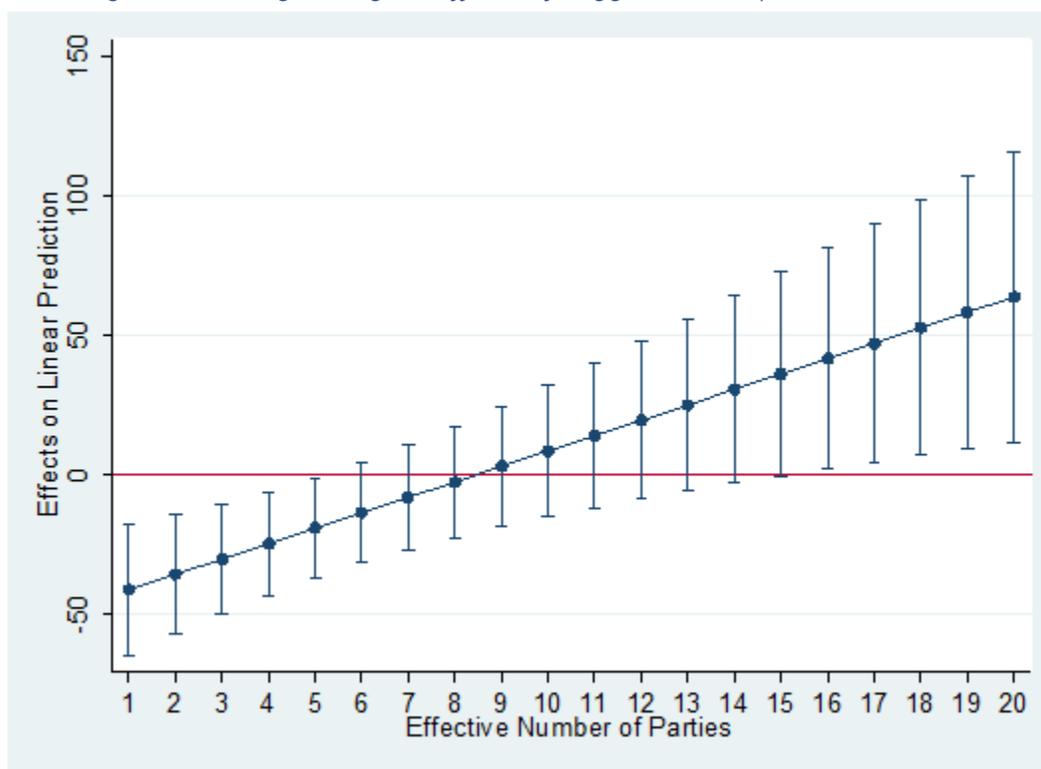
Source: Kitschelt 2013, World Bank, CSES

Another notable effect is how much of the dependent variable's variance was explained by the introduction of the interactive variable; the R-squared statistic increased considerably (to 0.65) with the product term in Table 3 as opposed to without it (0.57) in Table 4. A partial-f test indicated that the product term significantly affects the model ($p<0.01$).

Clientelist enforcement capability does have a significant effect with and without the interaction term despite the inclusion of other variables, with p holding a value lesser than 0.01. One unexpected result, however, was that partisan identification does not have a significant negative effect on vote buying. It is also worth noting that our full model did have some heteroskedasticity ($p=0.01$ on the Breusch-Godfrey test), so we used Huber-White robust standard errors (P. J. Huber 1967; White 1980, 1982). Residual diagnostics indicated that the heteroskedasticity did not seem to indicate an omitted variable or misspecification.

The Transitional Hypothesis – The Case of Brazil

Having re-examined the association of poverty with clientelism, we now turn to the transitional hypothesis. The recent transformations in Latin America make a good case to test the prediction that vote buying tends to decline with higher income levels. With high levels of poverty and income inequality, Latin America is traditionally perceived as a place in which political machines and vote buying have flourished.

In the past decade, however, Latin American and Caribbean Countries (LACC) have witnessed deep socioeconomic and political transformations. According to the World Bank, the size of the middle class[7] in LACC expanded by 50 percent between 2003 and 2009 (Ferreira et al. 2013). In absolute terms, this means more than 50 million people in LACC have entered the middle class. Almost half of LACC's population is now part of the middle class, whereas a decade ago, that number was just 20 percent (Tsounta and Osueke 2014). The development of the middle class in LACC was also followed by changes in the political landscape. Leftist governments came to power in many Latin America countries, replacing right-wing and traditional parties (Castaneda 2006; E. Huber and Stephens 2012; Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter 2010).[8] The rise to power of leftist governments in LACC brought with it not only growing social expenditure and pro-poor policies, but also the ascension to power of political groups that had historically denounced the machine style of politics practiced by traditional parties.

Brazil played a major role in developing the middle class in Latin America. Since re-democratization, extreme poverty in Brazil has decreased by 60.5 percent (Neri 2009). The

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[7] The World Bank uses an income-based measure to determine the size of the middle class. According to the World Bank, those whose income falls between US$10 to US$50 per day are regarded as middle class (Ferreira et al. 2013).

[8] In Bolivia and Venezuela, for example, existing party systems were completely dismantled.

decline of poverty was most pronounced in the Northeast where 8 million people left extreme poverty during the 2000s (Neri 2010).

The major reductions in poverty over the past decade and a half (Barrientos and Santibáñez 2009; Barrientos 2013; Soares et al. 2006) were followed by equally important political transformations. The "colonels"—the traditional conservative bosses—begant o fall in the Northeast; Antônio Carlos Magalhães' and Tasso Jereissati's machines lost elections in Bahia and Ceará (Borges 2007). The cherry on top was that, in 2014, José and Roseana Sarney retired after almost 50 years of dominating the politics of Maranhão (and Amapá).

Yet this does not necessarily imply that the level of clientelist voting actually decreased. Certain political machines might have had problems, but the same clientelist practices were still in use.

In the drought-ridden *sertão* (roughly translatable to the backwoods) of the northeastern state of Bahia, living conditions had improved significantly since the 1990s, with access to running water skyrocketing, infant mortality rates falling, and poverty rates dropping by more than half. Yet over six months of ethnographic fieldwork, it became clear that poor voters, despite not being as poor as they had been in the past, continued to vote for candidates who looked to buy their votes, even though they knew they were dishonest and often unreliable. [9]

It was not just rural areas either. Non-participant observation of campaigns over several months in more urban areas revealed that campaigns were still built around the necessity of illicitly supplying individual material benefits to voters. Candidates devoted great amounts of energy to establishing dense networks of campaign operatives in neighborhoods in order to distribute supplies and provide favors before the election. Furthermore, sophisticated operations

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[9] See Borges 2018b.

were conducted to buy votes on the eve of the election in many different places, with the

candidates who were unable or unwilling to do so often suffering for it on Election Day.[10]

In the next sections, we bring quantitative and qualitative evidence to bear on this

finding. Why have levels of vote buying in Brazil seemingly increased amid the profound

socioeconomic and political changes of the last decade and a half?

Quantitative Evidence from Brazil[11]

Data

To measure of the effects of changes in income in Brazil, we use two questions on

clientelist attitudes and behavior on the 2014 Brazilian Electoral Panel Survey, both of which

were drawn from a battery of questions on clientelism that was originally included on the 2002

Estudo Eleitoral Brasileiro (ESEB).

We use these questions in order to measure the perceived prevalence of clientelist

practices as well as the acceptability of them. In order to avoid a social desirability bias, we ask

indirect questions about these practices; since there is some stigma to selling one's vote,

respondents could be unwilling to disclose their own behavior. Respondents, however, can feel

more comfortable in disclosing socially undesirable behavior when evaluating the behavior of

others.

The quality of the responses should be further enhanced by the situations used in the

questions. Clientelism is an academic term that is not particularly well-known among the general

public, while vote buying can have many different connotations depending on context; many

Brazilians (including a Supreme Court Judge) see *Bolsa Família* itself as a way to buy votes

(Campos 2016), whereas others who accept cash from politicians and vote for them see

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[10] See Lloyd and Turgeon 2018.
[11] Parts of this section are adapted from Lloyd 2016.

themselves as providing a favor, not selling their votes. As a result, a concrete example that is common in Brazil can avoid problems with ambiguity and measurement equivalence.

The timing of these questions was very advantageous for our project. On the one hand, the 2002 questions were asked before the advent of *Bolsa Família* as a national program, while the 2014 questions were asked after the decrease in poverty that came about in the 2000s.[12] These were two separate studies, not one longitudinal study, but given the expected relationship between poverty and clientelism, the traditional argument of the literature would imply a conspicuous drop in clientelist voting to coincide with the drop in poverty, particularly considering that more than a decade had passed between the two surveys.

Descriptive Statistics

In 2014, we described for respondents the same situation as had been described in 2002: a candidate offering a truckload of bricks to families who were finishing building their houses in exchange for votes. We then asked respondents, first, if the hypothetical vote-buying target *should* sell their votes and, second, if they *would*. We gave the respondents three options: 1) accept the bricks and vote for the candidate; 2) accept the bricks but defect and vote or another candidate; and 3) refuse the bricks and vote for another candidate.

The first question measured attitudes about clientelist transactions, whereas the second measured the perceived frequency of them. If the literature's hypothesis about economic security changing cultural values is correct, the percentage of respondents saying that the family *should*

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[12] One should note, however, that the 2014 survey included three possible categories of answers (accept gift and vote for candidate, accept gift and do not vote for candidate, refuse gift) for added precision whereas the 2002 version only included two categories (accept gift and refuse gift). We conducted analyses with all three categories and combining the three categories into two—the latter in order to make a more direct comparison between the two years. There is, however, the possibility that the assumption of the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA) could have been violated, thereby making a direct comparison between the two years more difficult, particularly in regards to measuring whether respondents had refused to vote for the vote-buying candidate or not (because of the number of people opting to accept the gift and vote for another candidate, the number of people opting to refuse to vote for the candidate rose substantially). The two years did, however, obtain similar regression results when measured independently, which lowers the possibility that these comparisons would be affected by IIA.

accept the bricks will decrease between 2002 and 2014. If clientelist voting truly is decreasing, then the percentage of respondents saying that the family *would* accept the bricks should also decrease.

The differences, however, were inconsistent, as one can see below through a series of t-tests. As Table 2 shows, attitudes hardly changed at all. More than 46% of respondents openly said that a family building a house should accept help from a candidate, only 1% less than in 2002.

Table 2: 2002 vs. 2014, Attitudes about Clientelism

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What SHOULD these families do?

Year	2002	2014
Reject	52.35% (1316)	53.6% (499)
Accept	47.65% (1198)	46.4% (432)
N		3445
p-value		0.51
*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01		

Source: ESEB (2002) and BEPS (2014)

When these same respondents were asked what the voters in question *would* do in those situations, the answers were even more interesting.[13] As Table 3 shows, significantly *more*

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[13] Questions were not directly about the respondents' actions in order to sidestep social desirability bias. While list experiments (González-Ocantos et al. 2012) have advantages over this course of action, a list experiment was not feasible given the fact that the survey was administered over telephone and would have been too complicated for respondents to follow over the phone.

people (9.31% more) thought that the hypothetical families actually *would* accept the bricks ($p <$

.01).

Table 3: 2002 vs. 2014, Clientelist Behavior

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What do you think these families WILL do?

Year	2002	2014
Reject	19.93% (501)	10.62% (94)
Accept	80.07% (2013)	89.38% (791)
N		3399
p-value		<0.01***
*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01		

Source: ESEB (2002) and BEPS (2014)

To further measure the change in clientelist attitudes and behavior in Brazil, we estimated

models to see if income or receiving money from government social assistance programs had

effects on either of our dependent variables.

Model Specification

For the 2014 BEPS data, we used the following multinomial logit model in order to

evaluate our hypotheses:

$$Prob(y_i = 1) = Prob(y_i = 0) * e^\wedge(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 x_{i1} + \gamma_2 x_{i2} + \gamma_3 x_{i3} + \gamma_4 x_{i4} + \gamma_5 x_{i5} + \gamma_6 x_{i6} + u_i)$$

$$Prob(y_i = 2) = Prob(y_i = 0) * e^\wedge(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 x_{i1} + \gamma_2 x_{i2} + \gamma_3 x_{i3} + \gamma_4 x_{i4} + \gamma_5 x_{i5} + \gamma_6 x_{i6} + u_i)$$

where:

y_i is the dependent variable, a measure of clientelist voting for the respondent, either attitudinally or behaviorally (with rejecting the offer equaling 0, accepting it and voting for another candidate equaling 1, and accepting the offer and voting for the candidate equaling 2);

x_{i1} is the income of the respondent;

x_{i2} is whether the respondent received funds from a government social program;

x_{i3} represents whether the respondent lived in an urban area;

x_{i4} is whether the respondent identified with a political party;

x_{i5} is the score the respondent received on an index measuring political interest;

x_{i6} is the percentage of political knowledge questions the respondent got correct

and is an error term.

We used a multinomial logit model because of the structure of the dependent variable, which had three different categories of responses. We opted not to use an ordinal logit model because we were not completely certain that the three categories followed a logical sequence—a Brant test confirmed this suspicion by rejecting the null hypothesis that the parallel regression assumption had not been violated.[14] For first difference analyses, we set all other variables at their means.

Because of the number of parties and the highly unstructured information environment in Brazil, we did not expect either income or social assistance to have any significant effect on any of the attitudinal or behavioral measures of clientelist voting.

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[14] These social programs of which there were questions in the BEPS were BF, *Benefício de Prestação Continuada*, and a subsidy for electricity bills.

The 2014 BEPS had data that allowed us to operationalize variables to take into account social assistance programs as well as income; we created a binary variable with a value of 1 if the respondent received some sort of aid from government social programs and 0 otherwise. Income was divided into seven categories, with 1 representing the lowest category and 7 the highest.

While our primary focus was on the effects of income and social programs, we also wanted to check to see if there were any consistent effects for other key variables in our model. Given the results of Tables 2-3, we did not expect any of them to have any consistent significant effects on the dependent variables.

We included a political knowledge index, a political interest index, and a binary party identification variable (measuring whether the respondent identified with a party or not). The political knowledge variable measured the proportion of factual knowledge questions from the survey that the respondent answered correctly. The interest index combined responses about political interest, frequency of discussing politics with others, frequency of having watched political advertising, and frequency of having watched debates before the elections. Our hypothesis was that the more someone knew about politics and was interested in politics, the likelier he or she would be to have a candidate and unlikelier he or she would be to accept a bribe. Identifying with a party should have the same effect.

In addition, we included a variable about urbanization—1 for urban locations and 0 for rural locations—to operationalize the monitoring hypothesis espoused by such scholars as Gingerich and Medina (2013) and Stokes et al. (2013). In that case, we had cautious expectations that rural residents—our imperfect analogue for monitoring and enforcement—would be less likely to vote for another candidate, regardless of whether they accepted the money or not. This

would be due to the increased fear of monitoring and enforcement that often is stronger in smaller, rural environments. With the absence of other information about monitoring in this survey, it was the best approximation of this variable available.

We also estimated a model pooling data from both datasets. Since the 2002 dataset only had two possible responses (accept or refuse the bribe), we estimated a binary logit model. The model was otherwise exactly the same, except for the fact that the ESEB dataset did not have information on social programs and urbanization--as a result, we had to leave those variables out. In both models, we included dummies to account for differences between each of Brazil's five regions, and in the pooled model, we also included a dummy to account for the difference in time. We excluded all non-significant dummy coefficients from our tables for ease of presentation.

Results

As one can see, income has no real effect on clientelist attitudes and behaviors according to our models. What seems to have the most consistent effect, in fact, are variables such as political knowledge and political interest. For the 2014 BEPS data, being more knowledgeable about politics makes one more likely to say that the family should refuse the bricks rather than accept them and vote for the candidate (Northeasterners are also more likely to say the opposite, however). Being more interested in politics, conversely, makes one more likely to say that the family should accept the bricks but vote for another candidate rather than simply reject the offer.

Table 4a: Effects of Key Variables on Attitudes about Clientelism

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What SHOULD these families do?

Base outcome: Reject	Variable	Coefficient (std. error)	p
Accept and vote for another candidate	Income	-0.02 (0.07)	0.82
	Social Programs	0.35 (0.19)	0.06*
	Political Knowledge	0.15 (0.35)	0.65
	Political Interest	1.42 (0.50)	0.05**
	Partisan Identification	0.05 (0.19)	0.79
	Urban	-0.09 (0.28)	0.74
Accept and vote for the offering candidate	Income	-0.05 (0.08)	0.57
	Social Programs	-0.02 (0.19)	0.91
	Political Knowledge	-1.01 (0.39)	0.01**
	Political Interest	-0.41 (0.54)	0.45
	Partisan Identification	0.23 (0.19)	0.23
	Urban	-0.39 (0.26)	0.12
	Northeast	0.94 (0.38)	0.01**
N		892	
Prob>chi2		<0.01***	
*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01*			

Source: BEPS (2014)

As Tables 4a and 4b show, income is not significant in determining whether respondents believe that the hypothetical families should accept the bricks. The coefficient for income is not significant, and even when income increases from the minimum value to its maximum in the sample, it makes a difference of at most 4%.

Table 4b: First differences, key independent variables, other variables at means

Variable	Avg Chg	Reject	Accept and vote	Accept and defect
Income				
Min->max	0.03	0.04	-0.04	-<0.01
+- sd/2	0.01	<0.01	-0.01	-<0.01
Marginal effect	0.01	<0.01	-0.01	-<0.01
Social Programs				
0->1	0.04	-0.04	-0.02	0.06

Source: BEPS (2014)

For predicting what will happen, political interest and knowledge again play large explanatory roles. Those who have more interest in politics are less likely to say that the family will refuse the bricks (as are Northeasterners and Southeasterners), while those with more knowledge are more likely to say they will in fact refuse them. Those receiving social assistance from the government are also less likely to say that the family will accept the vote and defect rather than refuse the gift (but Northerners are the opposite).

Table 5a: Effects of Key Variables on Clientelist Behavior

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What WILL these families do?

Base outcome: Reject	Variable	Coefficient (std. error)	P
Accept and vote for another candidate	Income	-0.13(0.11)	0.24
	Social Programs	-0.49 (0.28)	0.07*
	Political Knowledge	-1.58 (0.52)	<0.01***
	Political Interest	2.31(0.79)	<0.01***
	Partisan Identification	-0.23 (0.28)	0.41
	Urban	0.43 (0.41)	0.29
	Northeast	1.41 (0.43)	<0.01***
	Southeast	1.04 (0.40)	0.01**
Accept and vote for the offering candidate	Income	-0.02 (0.10)	0.81
	Social Programs	-0.78 (0.26)	<0.01***
	Political Knowledge	-0.94 (0.47)	0.05**
	Political Interest	2.24 (0.75)	<0.01***
	Partisan Identification	-0.11 (0.26)	0.67
	Urban	-0.02 (0.38)	0.97
	North	1.52 (0.55)	0.01***
	Northeast	1.29 (0.40)	<0.01***
	Southeast	1.28 (0.37)	<0.01***
N		849	
Prob>chi2		<0.001***	

*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01

Source: BEPS (2014)

Income again, however, has no significant effect. This time, however, its marginal effect is a bit higher, if still a bit ambiguous. A move from the minimum income to the maximum increasing one's likelihood of saying that the family will accept the gift and vote for the candidate by 10% and decreasing the chance of selecting the option of defection by 13%.

Table 5b: First differences, key independent variables, other variables at means

Variable	Avg Chg	Reject	Accept and vote	Accept and defect
Income				
Min->max	0.09	0.03	0.10	-0.13
+- sd/2	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.02
Marginal effect	0.01	<0.01	0.02	-0.02
Social Programs				
0->1	0.07	0.06	0.04	-0.10

Source: BEPS (2014)

For the binary logit model across both time periods, we again find that income does not have a consistent effect. On the one hand, the knowledgeable are less likely to believe that the family should accept the bricks, while the Northeastern regional dummy is positive and significant. On the other hand, no variable (including income) arrives at p=.05 for the question about what the family will do (except for the year dummy, which reinforces the results of the descriptive analysis above).

Table 6a: Effects of Key Variables on Attitudes about Clientelism

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What SHOULD these families do?

Dependent Variable: Accept Bribe		
Variable	Coefficient (std. error)	p-value
Income	-0.05 (0.04)	0.18
Political Knowledge	-0.72 (0.19)	<0.01***
Political Interest	-0.03 (0.23)	0.89
Partisan Identification	0.10 (0.10)	0.28
North	0.48 (0.25)	0.06*
Northeast	0.53 (0.19)	0.01***
N	1966	
Prob>chi2	<0.01***	
*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01		

Source: ESEB(2002)/BEPS (2014)

Regarding the first differences, income again has a small effect, only decreasing the likelihood of saying that a family should accept by 8% when increased from its minimum value to its maximum value. In fact, it actually increases the likelihood that the respondents will say the family will accept the bricks by 9%.

Table 6b: First differences, key independent variables, other variables at means

Variable	Change in Probability of Saying that Family SHOULD accept
Income	
Min->max	-0.08
+- sd/2	-0.01
Marginal effect	-0.01

Source: ESEB(2002)/BEPS (2014)

Table 7a: Effects of Key Variables on Attitudes about Clientelism

A candidate offers a truckload of bricks to several families that need to finish building their homes. What WILL these families do?

Dependent Variable: Accept Bribe		
Variable	Coefficient (std. error)	p-value
Income	0.12 (0.07)	0.08*
Political Knowledge	-0.41 (0.26)	0.12
Political Interest	0.54(0.32)	0.09*
Partisan Identification	0.17 (0.14)	0.22
Year	0.61 (0.15)	<0.01***
N	1923	
Prob>chi2	<0.01***	
*=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01		

Source: ESEB(2002)/BEPS (2014)

Table 7b: First differences, key independent variables, other variables at means

Variable	Change in Probability of Saying that Family WILL accept
Income	
Min->max	0.07
+- sd/2	0.02
Marginal effect	0.02

Source: ESEB(2002)/BEPS (2014)

As we expected, income played no important role in explaining respondents' answers about clientelist behavior or attitudes, even given the large changes in economic security over the dozen years between Lula's election and 2014. What did, however, seem to explain a bit were variables such as political knowledge and political interest. This might indicate that engagement with politics might actually play a bigger role in transitions away from clientelist voting than the literature anticipates.

The Case of the *Sertão* of Bahia

The comparison of the data about vote buying from the years 2002 and 2014 surprisingly indicates the increase of vote buying levels in Brazil even after Brazil has significantly reduced its poverty levels. This finding corroborates the results of original ethnographic research conducted by one of the authors in the *Sertão* of Bahia.

In the *Sertão*, one of the poorest areas of Brazil, the extreme material dependency of poor voters on local bosses' aid was traditionally perceived as the reason for the pervasiveness of clientelism. In less-urbanized regions of Brazil, such as the *Sertão*, clientelism is traditionally

known as *coronelismo* (Nunes Leal 1978). A high rate of poverty and a large rural population, combined with the semi-arid climate of the region and prolonged droughts, made voters of the region particularly vulnerable to and dependent on local political bosses. Votes were easily traded for temporary water supplies that were brought by water trucks sponsored by local bosses during elections. Politicians linked with the *carlista*[15] political machine, which controlled the government of Bahia for decades, controlled the region until the recent arrival of the left-wing Workers' Party to local power.

After the Workers' Party's victory in the 2002 presidential election and 2006 gubernatorial election in 2006, which put an end to the long reign of the *carlistas*, the *Sertão* of Bahia has witnessed an unprecedented flow of resources. Extreme poverty was considerably reduced with the universal social policies implemented by the federal government and a permanent water supply has also been expanded considerably. The goods historically used for political bosses to buy votes—water and food—became available to poor citizens regardless of their ties with local bosses. The room for political discretion in the distribution of resources was reduced considerably as the federal government's social policies, such as the conditional cash transfer program *Bolsa Família*, were implemented, along with objective pre-established criteria for selecting beneficiaries (Borges Sugiyama and Hunter 2013).

The rising income of voters and the loss of federal and state patronage was a heavy blow to the *carlista* machine. The 2014 elections were the third time they failed to regain the state government, which has now been controlled by the Workers' Party since 2006.

There are certainly still many problems related to poverty in the *Sertão*. Poor provision of health services, unemployment, illiteracy, drug abuse, and domestic violence are still part of the

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[15] *Carlista* is a reference to the Bahian political boss Antônio Carlos Magalhães, or ACM.

everyday reality of *sertanejos*.[16] The redistributive social policies from 2002 to 2016, however (which encompassed more than just *Bolsa Família*), have profoundly transformed the socioeconomic and political landscape of the *Sertão* of Bahia.

One of the most symbolic transformations that *sertanejos* often point out during fieldwork was how hard it is nowadays to find a mudbrick house, a common dwelling of the past. With the reduction of hunger, infant mortality as an everyday reality has become a thing of the past. With the increase in permanent water supply, residents no longer have to endure long walks of more than ten kilometers to get a bucket of untreated, muddy water.

Beyond the obvious improvement in living standards, the permanent water supply and food security through *Bolsa Família* broke down the main forms of poor voters' dependency on politicians. As a broker in the *Sertão* explained to me right after the elections:

> *"Voters are very different now. They know that it is the federal government that provides the* Bolsa Família *and they are grateful to Dilma and Lula* [the Workers' Party's presidential candidates from 2002-2014]. *They will vote for Dilma because of that. Now, they will not automatically vote for your candidates for the proportional elections.[17] In the past, they would support the whole ticket because they would follow the recommendation of the mayor. Now, the reference is not local anymore. In the past, poor voters would be in front of the house of the mayor every week asking for a basket* [of food and goods from the market] *but this does not exist anymore because of* Bolsa Família*. When you give voters durable goods, such as the water cisterns, this will not hold their votes. This is the reason why, in the past, politicians would distribute food stamps so that the voter would have to come and get them every week. Nowadays, it is much more difficult to get the votes; they become much more expensive."*

This broker's reflection testifies that the strong ties of dependency that once characterized the relationship between politicians and poor voters in the *Sertão* have significantly weakened. Although the channels and resources offered by politicians are still valuable goods for voters at

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[16] *Sertanejo* is a term for a resident of the *Sertão*.
[17] Brazil has both winner-takes-all elections (for president, governor, mayor, and senator) and proportional representation elections (for state deputy, federal deputy, and city council).

Sertão of Bahia, it is hard to question that voters are significantly less dependent on local bosses for fulfilling their basic needs.

The empowerment of poor voters, however, has not necessarily meant that vote buying has decreased. The complaint that "votes become more expensive" was something constantly heard from other politicians and brokers. Voters are significantly less dependent of local bosses, but the persistence of this complaint speaks to the fact that the distribution of material goods as a campaign strategy is still widespread, if not growing. As the chief of staff of the city of Salinas reflected, voters are now more empowered, but the demand for electoral goods has simply increased, becoming more expensive:

> *"During our first term (from 1996-2000), those who came to ask for something, they really needed it—those were poor people. We knew their stories and we knew that if we didn't help, they would die from hunger. Today, people don't come here to ask for food or medication; they come to ask for something much more valuable, not to assist with those basic needs any more. In terms of basic needs, I believe that this is a thing of the past. There are still some cases, but it is much more related to the social vice of wanting something in exchange for one's vote."*

The city council of Pedrinhas shared the same impression; instead of reducing vote buying, they thought that vote buying was actually becoming more endemic:

> *"Unfortunately, we observe that in the last elections, things are going much further in that direction (of demanding goods in exchange for votes). It is such an endemic situation that any person, when they listen a politician talking about his platform, automatically has a demand to make; whether a benefit or a promise, they always make the vote conditional on gaining something."*

By following two local candidates for the state legislature, one of the authors was able to witness how the distribution of material goods was expected by voters from candidates.[18] No politician was ever witnessed by either author offering a good or service; the expectation was that voters would always ask for something. Many brokers and politicians in the *Sertão* of Bahia have certainly built their career by helping voters get access to public services, such as providing

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[18] See Borges 2018a.

transportation for voters to health facilities or scheduling health exams in public hospitals. During the weeks preceding Election Day, however, even politicians with more programmatic profiles actively distributed material benefits to voters.

It is important to highlight that such practices are illegal in Brazil and that many traditional politicians in the *Sertão* have indeed been punished for vote-buying practices. In a way, the control of the Brazilian justice system over vote-buying practices has had the same effect as the improvement of poor voters' living standards; it has just made politicians adapt the goods they offer.

T-shirts with politicians' logos, for example, are the type of good that explicitly links politicians with their supporters, which makes it an easy proof of vote buying. As an example, one former mayor of the region was banned from politics just because of one T-shirt that he handed to a voter. Politicians would repeatedly mention this punishment to one of the authors, but with an ironic, mocking tone given the volume of goods they normally distributed. Consequently, T-shirts are no longer part of the toolkit of possible benefits; politicians instead prefer to hand out goods that leave no traces linking the good to them, such as paying for medical exams or simply giving out money. Likewise, with rising income levels, voters no longer depend on politicians for access to basic goods. The complaint that votes become costlier was partially because the goods demanded by voters become more expansive. Instead of a basket of goods from the market, voters would demand a thousand bricks, for example.

Along with the evidence from survey data, this points to a very different dynamic from the hypothesized decline of vote buying with the improvement of voters' living conditions. They indicate that the levels of vote buying have increased while levels of poverty have been reduced. These findings also reveal that instead of making voters more likely to cast their vote according to

programmatic preferences, the economic empowerment of voters might actually lead voters to demand better clientelistic goods from politicians.

Conclusion

This article has served as a summary and a re-evaluation of the current evidence linking clientelist voting to poverty. Our analysis shows that the relationship between economic security and poverty, which has been taken for granted for some time in the clientelist literature, is not as clear-cut as it might seem. The extant literature overestimates the causal effect of economic security at the individual level and scales it up to the country level without the support of any real systematic evidence. We have also provided new evidence that puts into question the assumption that higher income levels will lead to lower levels of vote buying.

This is not to argue that income has no effect on one's likelihood to engage in clientelist practices. In fact, it likely does. It is also not to say that clientelism and vote buying remain static; the old domination-based forms of clientelism in Brazil are likely gone for good. It is, however, to say that the relation of income to clientelism is strongly conditioned by context, particularly in relation to culture and electoral/political institutions. And what replaces it can still involve the individualized exchange of material benefits for votes, although perhaps with less emphasis on monitoring.[19]

In contexts such as the U.S. or U.K., where institutional configurations make voting on policy or party identification easier,[20] increases in the costs of buying votes eventually priced out clientelist politicians and led them to seek programmatic alternatives. In a country such as Brazil, with a far more complex voting system that makes it more difficult to actively choose candidates for proportional elections, however, an increase in the price of a vote might not necessarily deter

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[19] See, for instance, Kramon 2016a and Muñoz 2014.
[20] See Turgeon and Lloyd 2017.

politicians from trying to buy votes. If voters' preferences for tangible benefits do not change, there is no guarantee that programmatic voting patterns will emerge to replace the domination-based clientelism of the past. Because elections are such big prizes for both politicians and their sponsors, there will always be money to be found for vote-buying enterprises as long as there is demand for it.

By relativizing the power of income to explain clientelism, this article adds evidence to the studies that argue that vote buying exchanges might serve other uses for voters and politicians than literally converting every penny into votes; they also convey certain information that must be replaced by alternatives if one wants voters to not vote clientelistically.

In short, the economic empowerment of voters is simply not enough to overcome clientelist voting. One has to take into account cultural, informational, and institutional factors as well.

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