

Working for the Machine Patronage Jobs and Political Services in Argentina

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Abstract (149 words)

Conventional wisdom posits that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services. But why would public employees comply with the agreement and provide political services even after receiving the job? Departing from existing explanations that are based either on fear of punishment or feelings of reciprocity, I argue that patronage employees engage in political activities because their jobs are tied to the political survival of their patrons. Jobs held by supporters will be maintained by the incumbent but not by the opposition. Supporters, then, have incentives to provide political services to help the incumbent, which makes their original commitment to provide services a credible one. Using list and survey experiments embedded on an original survey of 1200 Argentine public employees, I show that patronage employees are indeed involved in political activities and that they believe their jobs are tied to the political success of the incumbent.

Why does the control of patronage increase an incumbent's chances of staying in power?¹ What do public employees do that might affect electoral competition? What motivates public employees to do it? This article describes *what* it is that public employees do that might affect electoral outcomes and provides a novel explanation of *why* they do it. In a wide number of cases, from the United States (Folke, Hirano, and Snyder 2011) to Italy (Chubb 1982), Mexico (Greene 2007), and Argentina (Calvo and Murillo 2004), scholars have argued that patronage jobs help keep machines in power. Patronage jobs are assumed to be distributed to the incumbent's supporters in exchange for political services—such as helping with campaign events and mobilizing voters—that are essential for attracting and maintaining electoral support.² Thus, conventional wisdom posits that controlling patronage significantly increases an incumbent's chances of winning elections and staying in power. However, we still have almost no systematic evidence about the political services that patronage employees provide in exchange for their jobs. We do not have any precise assessment of the *types* of services that are being provided, *which* employees provide these services, or the *extent* of this practice in public administration.

¹ I define “patronage” as the discretionary and personalized exchange of public sector jobs for political support. I use the term “patronage contract” to denote that patrons and clients engage in contract-like exchange relationships in which public jobs are exchanged for political support. Patronage contracts are implicit or explicit agreements between those who get (or expect to get) a job (the client) and those who get (or expect to get) political support in return (the patron). Patronage employees are those who get their jobs with the *expectation* of providing political support in return.

² I define a “supporter” simply as a public employee who supports the incumbent. At the very minimum, this support involves electoral support.

Moreover, we still do not have a sound explanation of *why* public employees provide these services.

Consistent with the general understanding in the literature, I argue that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services. Besides doing their regular jobs, these supporters are expected to provide political services for the incumbent who hired them. Patronage jobs then provide incumbents with a powerful tool—a “free” army of political workers. However, a citizen who receives a public sector job with the understanding that she will provide political support in return can easily renege on her side of the contract after getting the job. Why would public employees uphold their end of the contract and provide political services even after receiving the benefit of the job? How can the patron make sure not to “waste” jobs on citizens who will not fulfill their side of the patronage contract? Existing explanations are based either on reciprocity (clients comply with the agreement because they want to help the person who has helped them) or fear of punishment (clients comply because they are afraid the patron will cut off the benefit if they fail to do so).

Departing from these explanations, I argue that patronage contracts are self-sustaining without reciprocity or the threat of punishment because incumbents distribute patronage jobs to supporters whose fates are tied to that of the incumbent who hires them. Public sector jobs (and, importantly, working conditions) enjoyed by supporters will be maintained by the incumbent but not by the opposition. This is because supporters of the incumbent cannot credibly commit to provide political services for the opposition. Supporters, then, have strong incentives to provide political services to help the incumbent stay in power, which makes their original commitment to provide these services a credible one. This alignment of interests between patrons and clients (or

incumbents and patronage employees) makes patronage contracts incentive compatible, and therefore self-sustaining over time.

I test the empirical implications of my theory using an original face-to-face survey of about 1,200 local public sector employees fielded in three Argentine municipalities. Using list experiments, I show that a considerable proportion of employees—particularly supporters—provide political services. To establish why public employees provide these services, I use two survey experiments that allow me to identify employees' comprehension of the likely effect of a change in the administration. The results strongly support the empirical expectations—public employees believe that their jobs are tied to the political success of the incumbent.

Patronage Contracts and Commitment

In contexts of weak civil service rules, as is the case in most Latin American countries (Grindle 2012), the ability to discretionally appoint public sector workers provides incumbents with a powerful tool that can be used for political gain. Patronage employees are expected to vote for the patron who appointed them, but the type of support that is expected in exchange for a position in public administration goes far beyond electoral support. Based mainly on ethnographic work, existing studies suggest that political bias in hiring gets translated into political services (Auyero 2001; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014). Indeed, patronage employees in mid- and low-level positions—the focus of this article—are often involved in campaigning, organizing and attending rallies, mobilizing voters, organizing and/or attending political meetings, providing favors to citizens, and distributing material incentives, among other activities. However—probably because obtaining reliable data on these activities is extremely difficult—there is no systematic evidence of the provision of political services by public employees. Using innovative techniques that provide anonymity and thus generate more reliable

answers, this article focuses on three of these services: helping with the campaign, attending rallies, and monitoring elections.

Public employees under patronage contracts provide free and invaluable political services to their patrons. However, patronage contracts are not easy to sustain. First, since the law cannot be used to enforce the contracts, they must be self-enforcing (Piattoni 2001; Robinson and Verdier 2013). Second, since the exchange is non-simultaneous, a citizen who provides political services with the expectation of getting a public sector job is always at risk of facing a politician who can decide not to hire her *after* she has already provided the services. Alternatively, a citizen who receives a job with the implicit or explicit understanding that she will provide political services can easily decide not to comply with her side of the agreement *after* getting the job (Calvo and Ujhelyi 2012; James 2006; Robinson and Verdier 2013).

This article focuses on the second type of exchange—in which the political support is provided after the benefit is received. In this case, incumbents are at risk of “wasting” jobs on citizens who, once hired, will not comply with their side of the agreement. Why would they comply after receiving the benefit of the job? The literature so far has provided two main answers to this question: norms of reciprocity and fear of punishment. According to the first set of theories, clients fulfill their side of the agreement because they want to help those who have helped them. Receiving a benefit engenders feelings of obligation and gratitude, and clients help the patron because of these feelings (Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014; Scott 1972). From this perspective, public employees comply with the agreement and provide political services because they want to help the incumbent who hired them.

The logic of the second set of theories is very different. According to this line of argument, clients comply because they are afraid that the patron will cut off the benefits if they fail to do so.

Much of the contemporary literature has focused on the monitoring and commitment problems that are associated with this understanding of clientelism (e.g., Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Nichter 2008; Robinson and Verdier 2013; Stokes 2005; Weitz-Shapiro 2014). From this perspective, the defining feature of clientelistic exchanges is that they are contingent on the client's behavior. If the client does not behave according to her patron's wishes—which requires either the patron's ability to monitor or the client's belief that this is possible—the patron has the power to punish the client by withdrawing or withholding the benefit. For a patron to be able to ensure that the political support associated with the benefit is in fact provided, he should be able to credibly commit to punish non-compliers (and/or reward compliers). Thus, the commitment problem is solved on the basis of fear—employees provide services because they are afraid that the patron will cut off the benefit if they fail to do so.

This article presents a different solution to the commitment problem that arises in clientelistic agreements. I argue that it is neither reciprocity nor fear of punishment that ensures that public employees uphold their part of the deal; it is the fact that their fates are tied to the political fate of their patron. In this *self-enforcing theory of patronage*, clients' compliance with patronage agreements is ensured by the fact that their incentives are aligned with those of their patron—both the patron and the clients will benefit from the patron's success. Of course, this is not to say that fear of punishment or feelings of reciprocity are never present in clientelistic exchanges, or that they are not possible. Rather, I demonstrate here that neither of these two factors are *necessary* characteristics of these arrangements.³ The theory developed in this article provides a novel mechanism by which informal patron-client agreements can be sustainable.

³ The literature on clientelism has devoted considerable attention to the problem of monitoring voting behavior under the secret ballot (e.g., Brusco et al. 2004; Stokes 2005). The activities

A Self-Enforcing Theory of Patronage

What makes patronage contracts self-enforcing in the absence of fear of punishment or feelings of reciprocity is that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters whose fates are tied to the political survival of their patron.⁴ In the absence of robust civil service rules, the incentive structure of the patronage agreement is such that the job is contingent on the politician's reelection. Under patronage contracts, public employees believe that if the incumbent loses the election, their own jobs could be in jeopardy. This provides a major incentive to help the incumbent stay in power, thus making their original commitment to provide political services a credible one. Since the interests of patronage employees are aligned with those of the incumbent politician—they both want the politician to stay in office—the commitment problem associated with the non-simultaneity of the clientelistic exchange disappears and patronage contracts become self-enforcing.⁵

studied here are visible and thus potentially easy to monitor. But that does not mean that they are in fact being monitored. To the extent that the self-enforcing theory of patronage developed here is correct and patrons and clients share the same interests, *monitoring is not necessary*.

⁴ Note that the patron can be, depending on the context, an individual politician or a political party. For simplicity, in the following pages I refer to politicians but the theory can be generalized to parties. Similarly, opposition can refer to an opposition party or to an opposition faction within the same party.

⁵ As with other public goods (in this case, the incumbent's reelection) that depend on collective contributions (political services), there may be a temptation for free riding. However, at least three factors reduce the likelihood of widespread free riding in the case of patronage. First, the benefit at stake (a job) is important enough to provide a significant incentive for cooperation to

Politicians want to distribute jobs to those who are most likely to provide political services. Since an employee's willingness to provide political services in the future is private information, finding this type of employee is not an easy task. Potential patronage employees can promise future compliance. But absent the threat of punishment for non-compliers or feelings of reciprocity, the provision of political services has to be incentive compatible for this promise to be credible. Only when potential employees can credibly commit to providing support in the future are patronage contracts self-sustaining without punishment and reciprocity. It is the need to make patronage contracts incentive compatible that leads to the distribution of these jobs to supporters. All potential employees can promise to provide political services in the future, but only supporters can make these promises credible. Patronage jobs held by supporters will be maintained as they are by the incumbent, but not by a competing politician. Supporters then have strong incentives to help the incumbent stay in power, which makes their commitment credible.

If politicians could somehow know *ex ante* how potential employees would behave once hired, then the commitment problem associated with the non-simultaneity of the patronage agreement would of course disappear. Full information about the intentions of the client-citizens would prevent strategic defection and solve the commitment problem for politicians—they would just simply hire those citizens more willing to provide support. While the intention of potential employees to provide political services once hired is private information, their declared

ensure that the desirable outcome will actually happen. Second, since political services are often provided during working hours, the cost of cooperation is not necessarily high. Third, individual contributions are not necessarily individually irrelevant to the outcome. While, for instance, it may have little impact whether one particular individual attends a rally, the cooperation of an individual in charge of mobilizing many others to the rally may be quite important to its success.

political preferences regarding the politician at the time of hiring are not.⁶ When hiring is mainly conducted through informal channels—as is the case in countries with weak civil service systems—it is possible for politicians to access that information and use it for their own benefit.

Politicians then use referrals as well as personal and partisan connections to screen potential clients and to separate supporters from non-supporters.⁷ Supporters might like the politician or the politician's party for ideological or personal reasons, they might have connections with the party, or they might just be faking support to obtain benefits. Citizens can make efforts to be visible for the patron (i.e., help with the campaign or attend political rallies) and thus make sure they are identified as supporters (Auyero 2001; Nichter 2009; Szwarcberg 2015).⁸ Those who demonstrate support are more likely to comply with the agreement and provide the promised services. Note that whether those who demonstrate support are sincere supporters or strategic actors with pure materialistic goals faking the support does not affect the empirical implications of the theory. For reasons developed in the following paragraphs, being a “real” supporter or just pretending to be one creates the same incentive-compatible patronage

⁶ See Calvo and Ujhelyi (2012) on designing optimal patronage contracts with no information about individual political preferences.

⁷ Scholars who think about clientelism as a long-lasting relationship emphasize that patrons (or their brokers) know their clients well (Auyero 2001; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014).

Moreover, scholars who have focused on who gets targeted in clientelistic exchanges assume that core and swing voters can be identified (e.g., Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005).

⁸ Politicians take these efforts seriously, as described by an employee from Salta who works in close proximity to the mayor: “If a person has contributed to the mayor's victory, he has a right (*“tiene cierto derecho”*) [to get a job]” (Interview, Salta, August 10, 2011).

contracts. Politicians use *perceived* political preferences at the time of hiring as a proxy for citizens' future likelihood of providing political services. Empirically, then, we should observe public sector jobs disproportionately distributed to supporters.

This expectation is consistent with studies on clientelism in Argentina as well as with my own research. Most recent studies argue that politicians allocate resources based on preexisting partisan linkages with the beneficiaries of those resources—especially in the case of patronage jobs, which are one of the most expensive resources that politicians distribute (Calvo and Murillo 2004; 2013; Kemahlioğlu 2012; Stokes et al. 2013). Indeed, using data from the survey of public employees described in the following section, I find evidence of considerable discretion and political bias in hiring decisions in Argentine public administration. For instance, around 64 percent of respondents reported having found their job through an acquaintance, a friend, or a relative, and the majority of respondents considered personal connections to be “important” (28%) or “very important” (29%) for getting the job.⁹

However, the fact that public jobs are disproportionately distributed to perceived supporters does not solve the commitment problem. Perceptions could be misleading. Once citizens expect the distribution of public jobs on the basis of perceived political preferences, citizens have an incentive to misrepresent their preferences.¹⁰ They could pretend to have certain political preferences to get the job, change their minds about their preferences, or simply reduce the effort

⁹ See Table C1 in the Appendix. Moreover, Table C2 shows that employees hired during the current administration are far more likely to report having voted for the current mayor and being supporters of his party than employees hired during previous administrations.

¹⁰ As an employee from Salta exemplifies: “I’ve told you that I got this job through politics, but the thing is that I was politically active *in order to* get a job” (Interview, Salta, June 8, 2011).

they are willing to devote to political work. Since the exchange is not simultaneous, patronage employees still have the possibility of not complying with their side of the agreement. Being a supporter—or, more accurately, being perceived as one—is not in itself enough to guarantee compliance with the patronage contract.

What makes patronage contracts self-enforcing is the belief on the part of employees that their jobs are tied to the political survival of their patron. But why do patronage employees believe that they could lose their jobs or suffer negative effects on their working conditions with a new administration? Perceived political preferences at the time of hiring have the same effect as the public pledges discussed by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 15): those whose support for the incumbent is publicly known “are effectively then cut off from any expectation of rewards if the opposition should win.”¹¹ Since the distribution of patronage jobs is based on perceived political preferences, once a citizen is hired as a supporter her genuine political preferences do not matter anymore. Her *perceived* political preferences will dictate the treatment she will get from the opposition. Whether a patronage worker is motivated by ideology, opportunism, or—more frequently—some combination of both, she will be perceived and treated as a true supporter by the opposition. Using the same logic that the incumbent applied to hire his supporters, a new incumbent will want patronage jobs to be distributed to those more likely to provide political services for him. Only *his* supporters can credibly commit to do that in the future, so current employees will be replaced, demoted, or sidestepped. Once perceived as incumbent’s supporters, patronage employees have low expectations of keeping their jobs and

¹¹ See Nichter (2009) for an interesting example of how clients in Brazil strategically decide to reveal or hide their political preferences according to their expectations of being rewarded or punished after the election.

working conditions if the opposition were to win. Supporters with patronage jobs understand that it is in their best interest to help the incumbent remain in power. It is this alignment of interests between patrons and clients (or politicians and patronage employees) that makes patronage contracts self-sustaining.

This self-enforcing theory of patronage has two main empirical implications that are tested in the following sections. First, if patronage jobs are in fact disproportionately distributed to supporters in exchange for political services, we should observe that supporters are more involved than non-supporters in the actual provision of these services. Second, if supporters are more involved in the provision of services, it is because they believe that their jobs are tied to the political success of the incumbent. Thus, I expect public sector employees who are supporters to be more afraid than non-supporters of a new politician replacing the incumbent. Importantly, and departing from existing accounts, it is not just the reversibility of public jobs that matters (Robinson and Verdier 2013); the possibility of changes in working conditions such as being demoted or sidestepped with a new administration also creates incentives for patronage employees to comply.

The Empirical Strategy

Despite patronage being a widespread phenomenon, the difficulty in collecting systematic data means that we actually know very little about what public employees do, and why they do it.¹²

The approach I take in this article allows me to elicit accurate information from the actors

¹² To deal with this issue, scholars have used different proxies for patronage, such as total number of public employees (e.g., Calvo and Murillo 2004; Grzymala-Busse 2003), number of temporary employees (e.g., Kemahlioğlu 2012), and spending on personnel (e.g., Remmer 2007).

involved while minimizing social response bias. I use an original survey of about 1,200 public sector employees that incorporates different strategies for encouraging truthful responses.

Case selection Survey data was gathered in face-to-face interviews of 1,184 low- and mid-level local public sector employees in three Argentinean municipalities. While the patterns described in this article are common to many countries without robust civil service systems, Argentina—infamous for its clientelistic politics—offers a particularly good setting in which to study patronage.¹³ First, it lacks stable civil service rules and has a large public sector with “well-developed patronage systems” (Calvo and Ujhelyi 2012). Moreover, its extensive decentralization results in significant variation in the size and characteristics of public employment across provinces and municipalities. Finally, while some provincial regulations apply, control over local personnel is the exclusive responsibility of local governments.

To conduct the survey, I selected three similarly sized but very distinct municipalities: Salta (Salta), Santa Fe (Santa Fe), and Tigre (*Conurbano Bonaerense*, Buenos Aires). Although the municipalities were not selected at random, they are illustrative of the diverse economic and political realities of the country, providing a good opportunity to study patronage across different environments.¹⁴ By including a municipality from the poorer north dominated by the Peronists (Salta), a municipality from the relatively richer and more competitive center (Santa Fe), and one

¹³ Note that despite all the attention received, Argentina is not an outlier among Latin American countries in regard to public employment. In an IDB evaluation of civil service systems in Latin America, Argentina is placed in the group of countries with intermediate development of the civil service, together with Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Echebarría 2006).

¹⁴ See Table A1 in the Online Appendix for more information on the municipalities.

from the *Conurbano Bonaerense* (Tigre), the area most infamous for its clientelistic politics, I intended to capture the regional diversity of Argentine politics.

The survey Together with a team of research assistants, we interviewed around 400 employees in each municipality.¹⁵ I generated a random sample based on the official list of public employees (excluding elected officials and high-level positions).¹⁶ The selected employees were then approached at public offices during working hours.

Asking directly about political services is problematic because respondents could refuse to answer or provide untruthful responses—especially if they think that their jobs could be jeopardized by their answers. To get around this problem of social desirability bias, increase the response rate, and produce more valid estimates, two distinct but complementary strategies were implemented. First, I use list experiments—a technique specially designed to study sensitive issues. Second, I follow Scacco's (2010) strategy and split the questionnaire into two parts. Part A of the survey instrument contained the less sensitive questions and the list experiments described in the next section. Part B had the sensitive questions about political preferences and behavior. Each part of the questionnaire was marked with a different identification number that could only be matched with a document not available to the enumerators. Apart from this number, the second part of the questionnaire had no information that could be used to identify the respondent. Enumerators administered Part A of the questionnaire, while Part B was read and filled out by the respondents themselves. In this way, the other employees in the office were not

¹⁵ See Online Appendix A for more information about the survey.

¹⁶ Information on public employment is not publicly available and Argentine politicians are usually reluctant to share it. Obtaining this data was particularly challenging and time consuming, illustrating the opacity of the Argentine civil service.

able to hear the questions or the answers. Finally, the respondents were asked to store the second part of the questionnaire in a sealed cardboard box similar to a ballot box.¹⁷

List experiment technique The logic of the list experiment technique is simple.¹⁸ First, the survey sample is split into random halves: a treatment and a control group. Each group is read the same question and shown a card with a number of response options. Cards for each group differ only in the number of response categories. List experiments work by aggregating the item we are interested in (the “treatment” item) with a list of other items. Respondents are asked to report the number of items on the list that applies to them, but not *which* ones. The question does not ask respondents to mention specific activities, only *how many* of those activities they did. Thus, as long as respondents understand that the anonymity of their responses is protected, list experiments generate more accurate responses and more valid estimates than direct questioning (Coutts and Jann 2011; De Jonge and Nickerson 2014).¹⁹ Since respondents were randomly

¹⁷ To test the strategy, I included an additional question in the Salta’s questionnaire asking about the upcoming presidential election. Half of the respondents were asked this question directly at the end of Part A; the other half found this question at the end of Part B to answer by themselves. The results of this experiment show that the technique was in fact successful and employees responded differently when asked under the protected form (results available upon request).

¹⁸ See Glynn (2013) on how to design list experiments.

¹⁹ To protect the anonymity in list experiments, it is crucial to avoid lists that would result in respondents choosing none or all of the items, generating “floor” or “ceiling” effects, respectively. If the sensitive item is undesirable, ceiling effects are more problematic. To minimize these effects, the three lists included rare activities or activities that were not possible to perform concurrently. The strategy was successful since only around 1 percent in both groups

assigned to the treatment and control groups, as long as the randomization was successful, the two groups would be identical, on average, on both observable and unobservable characteristics.²⁰ Therefore, an estimate of the proportion of respondents providing favors can be obtained by comparing the average responses across groups.

Patronage Contracts and Political Services: Evidence from List Experiments

According to the theory of patronage previously developed, patronage contracts are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services. Politicians choose to hire supporters because their commitment to provide political services in the future is credible. This section presents empirical evidence that public employees—particularly supporters—do in fact provide these services.

Using list experiments, I estimate the proportion of employees who (1) help with campaigns, (2) attend rallies, and (3) monitor elections.

Electoral campaigns Since local politicians in Argentina have limited resources to finance professional campaigns through extensive use of the media (Kemahlioğlu 2012), participation of supporters is crucial. At the local level, “human-intensive” activities such as painting graffiti, plastering posters, and door-to-door visits are still essential parts of campaigning. Moreover, the

indicated the maximum possible number of activities across the experiments. Note, however, that the presence of either ceiling or floor effects would lead to the underestimation of the sensitive activity (Blair and Imai 2012). See Online Appendix B for the wording of the experiments and Table C3 for the distribution of responses across groups.

²⁰ Table A5 in the Appendix reports the average age, gender, and education for both groups. The balanced distribution across conditions suggests that the randomization was successful.

availability of “real” volunteers has considerably decreased over the years, making the role of public employees even more important.

One common activity among parties, especially in poorer neighborhoods, involves door-to-door campaigning—an activity that is usually accompanied by the distribution of paper ballots, the same ones that voters will find at the voting booth. Argentina does not use the Australian ballot (i.e., there is no standard official ballot with all candidates). In contrast, and although the government is in charge of the distribution of the ballots on Election Day, each political party is responsible for producing its own ballots. The distribution of these ballots in the weeks before the election is crucial. It helps voters get to know the candidates and familiarize themselves with the ballot they intend to use on Election Day. This could be key to finding the preferred ballot at the voting booth, which often—especially with concurrent elections—contains an overwhelming number of ballots. In fact, many voters bring their ballots to the voting booth. Moreover, the distribution of paper ballots before the election has also been related to vote buying (Brusco et al. 2004). Other important campaign activities include painting graffiti, hanging banners, and plastering posters. These are an essential part of campaigning, especially for local politicians who cannot afford other, more expensive types of advertising on billboards (Zarazaga 2014). In addition, campaigning in Argentina usually involves organizing meetings with neighbors and other activities such as seminars, social gatherings, and cultural events.

Political rallies Argentine political parties invest a lot of time and effort in organizing rallies. A crucial part of the organization effort is making sure that enough people will show up; qualitative research has shown that public employees are expected to turn out to rallies (Auyero 2001; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014). Rallies continue to play a number of important roles in Argentine politics. First, they serve the straightforward purpose of advertising and allowing

candidates to display their power to voters and other politicians. Second, attendance at rallies is considered a way for potential clients to show loyalty to the party—an opportunity to publicly display support (Auyero 2001; Szwarcberg 2015). Finally, the number of followers whom each broker can mobilize to rallies provides party leaders with important information about the power of each broker (Stokes et al. 2013; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014).

Monitoring elections Parties in Argentina consider the presence of party representatives in polling stations (partisan monitors) on Election Day essential to guaranteeing fair elections. Each party has the right to assign a head of partisan monitors by school (where polling stations are located), plus a monitor by voting booth. The electoral law also requires three polling station officials by voting booth selected by the government to monitor the election and count the votes. Although these official monitors are the only ones with legal authority to decide on any electoral issue, parties consider it crucial to have their own monitors protecting their votes. Monitors are also in charge of ensuring that enough ballots from their party are in the booth throughout the day. Accusations of missing ballots are frequent in Argentinean elections, and the conventional wisdom posits that parties steal other parties' ballots from the voting booth. Official monitors are in charge of ensuring that this does not happen, but parties consider having their own monitors essential to prevent their ballots from being stolen. Finally, partisan monitors are also considered to be essential to monitor turnout and vote buying (Brusco et al. 2004; Szwarcberg 2015).

Table 1 presents the list experiments estimates where the treatment categories are “Work/help in the electoral campaign” (column 1), “Attend political rallies” (column 2), and “Be an election monitor” (column 3).²¹ Employees in the control group report their average number of activities as 1.19, 1.39, and 0.93, respectively; while the average in the treatment group is 1.41,

²¹ See Online Appendix B for the baseline categories and the question wording.

1.60, and 1.05, respectively. The use of list experiments generates an accurate estimate of the proportion of employees involved in each of these activities: 22 percent reported helping with the campaign, 21 percent reported attending political rallies, and 12 percent reported monitoring the election (all estimates are significant at the 99 percent level).²² Thus, this section provides the first systematic evidence that public employees do indeed provide political services, and it gives us an unbiased estimation of the rate at which they provide them in Argentina—one of the most studied cases in the clientelistic literature.

Table 1: Political Services: List Experiments Estimates

	Electoral Campaign	Rallies	Monitoring
Treatment	1.41 (0.04) N=587	1.60 (0.04) N=586	1.05 (0.03) N=585
Control	1.19 (0.03) N=582	1.39 (0.04) N=584	0.93 (0.02) N=587
Treatment effect	0.22*** (0.05) N=1169	0.21*** (0.06) N=1170	0.12*** (0.04) N=1172

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Two-sample t-test with unequal variance. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

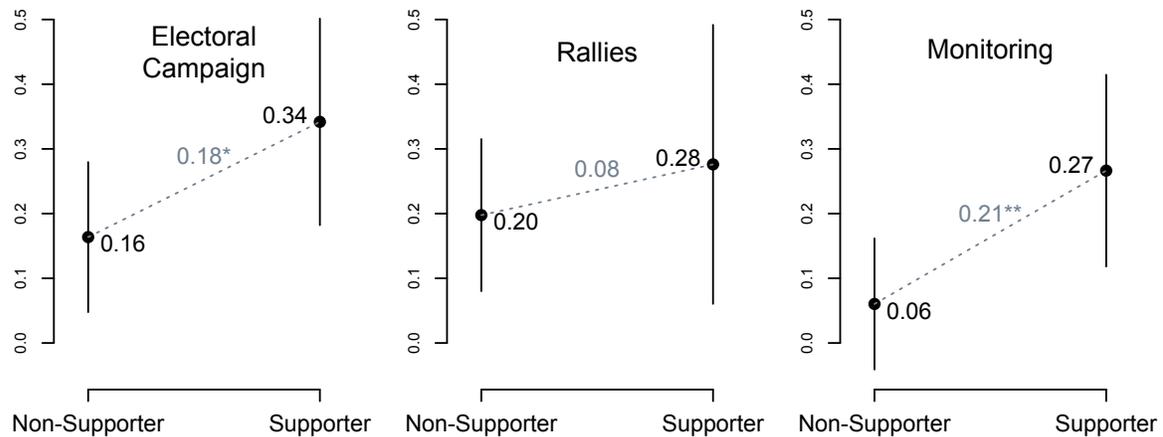
Heterogeneous treatment effects According to the self-enforcing theory of patronage, a higher proportion of supporters should be involved in the provision of political services. To

²² Assessing the magnitude of these estimates can be difficult without information about how many monitors, campaign workers, and rallies attendees are “needed” in an election. For the case of monitors, however, the data actually exist. In Tigre, for instance, 12 percent of public employees participating as monitors means that around half of all the monitors needed during the 2009 election were public employees. See Table C3 in the Online Appendix.

determine whether the provision of services differs across supporters and non-supporters, I estimate the difference-in-means across these subgroups. Support for the mayor is measured with a question that asked respondents whether they identified themselves with the mayor’s party.²³

Figure 1 displays the list experiment estimates of the three services by support for the mayor.²⁴

Figure 1: List Experiment Estimates of Political Services by Support for the Mayor



Note: Black circles indicate the proportion of employees in each subgroup who performed the service. Lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

In line with expectations, Figure 1 shows that supporters provide more political services than non-supporters. Among the subgroup who self-identified with the party of the mayor, 34 percent helped with campaigns, as did 16 percent of those who did not identify with the party of the mayor. The 18-point difference is significant at the 90 percent level. I find a similar pattern for the other services. Among supporters, 28 percent reported attending rallies, while among non-supporters the proportion drops to 20 (although the 8-point difference is not significant). Finally,

²³ See Appendix B for variable operationalization and descriptive statistics.

²⁴ Table C4 in the Appendix presents the numeric values display in the figure.

among supporters, 27 percent were election monitors in the last election, while among non-supporters the proportion was not significantly different from zero. The difference between the proportion of supporters and non-supporters who reported being monitors is a significant 21 percentage points (at the 95 percent level).

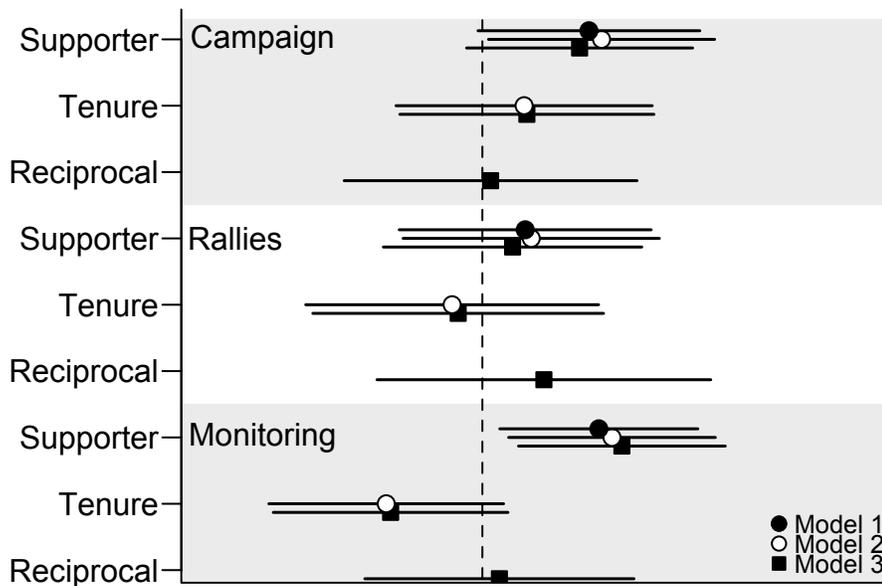
To evaluate these findings more rigorously and control for the main alternative explanations—reciprocity and fear of punishment—I conducted multivariate analysis. If reciprocity theories of clientelism were correct, respondents with more favorable attitudes toward reciprocity should be more involved in the provision of services (out of feelings of gratitude). If punishment theories were correct, respondents without tenure rights should be more involved in the provision of services (out of fear of being fired). To measure attitudes about reciprocity (*Reciprocal*), respondents were asked about their agreement with the following statement: “We always have to return the favors that others have done for us.” Those who strongly agreed or agreed more than disagreed were coded as reciprocal (1); those who strongly disagreed or disagreed more than agreed were coded as non-reciprocal (0). *Tenure* takes the value of one for those with a permanent contract, and zero otherwise. Control variables include *Female* (0-1), *College* (0-1), *Age* (1-5), and dummies for municipalities.²⁵ In all the models, the main variable of interest (*Supporter*) is measured as in the previous section with a question that asks about self-identification with the party of the mayor.

Figure 2 presents the results from the multivariate analysis. All the models are ordinary least squares regressions with the list experiment counts as dependent variables. Following Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012) and Gonzalez-Ocantos, de Jonge, and Nickerson (2015), the models include a dummy variable indicating the treatment assignment (i.e., the list experiment

²⁵ See Online Appendix B for variable operationalization and descriptive statistics.

condition), interactions between this variable and all the independent variables, as well as non-interacted versions of all the variables. The estimates for the political services are derived from the interacted coefficients, while the non-interacted coefficients (not reported here) provide estimates for the activities in the control lists. All models include controls for age, gender, and education (not shown). Model 2 adds dummy variables for municipality (not shown) and tenure. Model 3 adds a dummy for reciprocity.

Figure 2: Political Services; OLS Regressions



Note: Tables C5a and C5b in the Online Appendix report the coefficients for all the variables in these models and the non-interacted variables. Lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

The results from the different models show that, in general, being a supporter is positively associated with the provision of services, even when controlling for the two main alternative explanations. As in the previous analysis, in all models the sign of the coefficients for the *Supporter* variable is positive and statistically significant for helping with the campaign and monitoring elections, but not for attending rallies. Importantly, neither the *Reciprocal* variable

nor the *Tenure* variable is statistically distinguishable from zero in any of the models. In sum, even after controlling for the main alternative explanations, being a supporter seems to be the best predictor for the provision of services.

Indeed, the self-enforcing theory of patronage posits that the main explanatory variable for the provision of services is support for the mayor. Supporters are more involved in the provision of services because they have more to lose from a change in administration. Non-supporters, with or without tenure rights, more or less reciprocal, have nothing to fear from a new government. The reason why employees comply with their side of the agreement is not fear of losing their jobs or feelings of reciprocity, but fear of losing their jobs (or negative changes in working conditions) with a change in administration. The next section tests this claim.

Self-Enforcing Patronage Contracts

Why do public employees provide political services? This section tests the main empirical implication of the self-enforcing theory of patronage: patronage employees believe that their fates are tied to the electoral fate of their patron. To identify the potential effect of a change in the administration on different types of public employees, I use two survey experiments. A randomly selected subset of respondents was asked to estimate the likelihood of losing their jobs and suffering changes in working conditions if the opposition won the next election. The control group was asked the same questions but without providing any information about the hypothetical electoral outcome. I test the self-enforcing theory of patronage by estimating heterogeneous treatment effects across supporters and non-supporters. I expect that supporters will be more likely than non-supporters to fear losing their jobs or experiencing negative changes

in their working conditions if a politician from a different party were elected; the results of the survey experiments are consistent with this expectation.

One of the main advantages of experiments is that randomization ensures that the populations in the control and treatment groups are, on average, equivalent on both observable and unobservable characteristics.²⁶ This allows me to use difference of means (t-tests) to analyze the results. Because the individuals who received the treatment were randomly selected, differences in responses across groups can be attributed to the extra information received by the treatment group.²⁷ I have also corroborated the main results with regression analyses in which the treatment is included as an independent variable along with controls for tenure, age, gender, education, and municipality.²⁸ After analyzing the main treatment effects, the core of the argument is tested by examining how support for the incumbent conditions the size of the treatment effect.

Perception of job stability To measure perceptions of job stability, respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood of keeping their jobs after the next election as follows: “On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘Not at all likely,’ and 10 means ‘Very likely,’ how likely is it that you will continue working at the municipality next year, after the 2011 mayoral elections?” The treatment

²⁶ See Table A5 in the Online Appendix for randomization checks.

²⁷ Note that both experiments can only manipulate perceptions if respondents thought that there was some possibility of reelection. This seems likely considering the reelection rates in the provinces studied here range from 40 to 47 percent (Micozzi 2009, see Table A1 in the Appendix). Nevertheless, even if most employees thought that the mayor’s reelection or the opposition winning were unlikely events, I would be underestimating the treatment effect.

²⁸ See Tables C7 and C10 in the Online Appendix.

group was asked the same question with the addition of: “if the incumbent mayor is not reelected and the opposition wins?”²⁹ Respondents who were told this hypothetical about the incumbent losing the next election and the opposition winning responded differently from those who did not hear any information about the outcome of the election. Whereas the average response among the control group is 8.15, the figure drops to 7.75 among those who received the treatment. The average treatment effect is a significant 0.41 difference (at the 95 percent level).³⁰ Employees in general fear losing their jobs if the next election were to be won by the opposition.³¹

The main empirical implication of the theory developed here is that supporters of the incumbent have more to fear than non-supporters from a change in the administration. I expect, then, that supporters estimate a higher likelihood of losing their jobs if the incumbent were to lose the next election. Employees without tenure might also fear more with a new administration. Indeed, tenured employees—who cannot be legally fired—should not fear losing their jobs, regardless of the electoral outcome. An employee from the Tigre personnel office explained this clearly. When asked about the last change of administration, she replied: “After 20 years of the same administration things are complicated, people are afraid ... the tenured employees are not, but the ones on temporary contracts are afraid.” (Interview, Tigre, August 23, 2010).

²⁹ A slightly different question was used in Salta. See Online Appendix B.

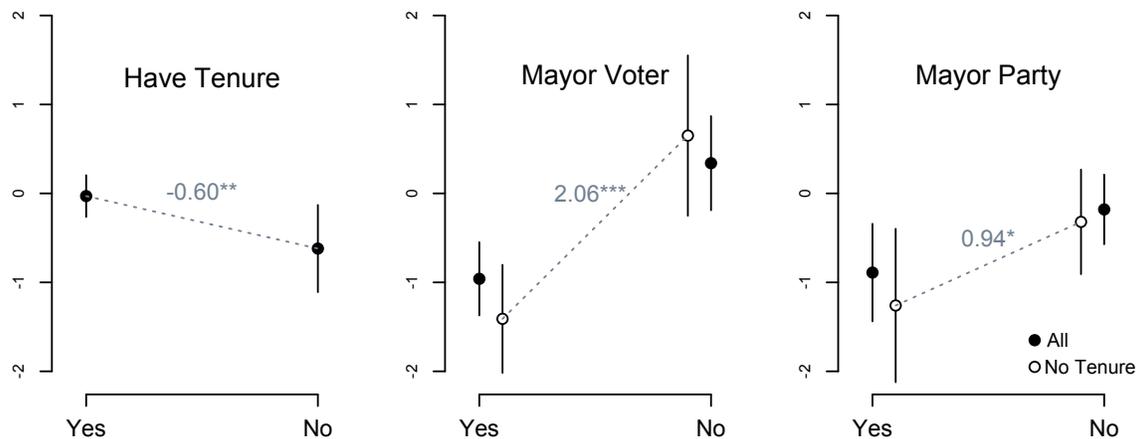
³⁰ See Tables C6 and C7 in the Online Appendix for the t-test and the regression analysis results.

³¹ It is possible that the question is also capturing cases of employees who would resign. Yet, the comparison of the conditional average treatment effect for tenured and non-tenured employees suggests that the question is more likely capturing the likelihood of being fired than resigning.

See Table C8 in the Online Appendix.

To estimate supporters' reaction to the hypothetical electoral outcome, I examine heterogeneity in the treatment group by estimating conditional average treatment effects (CATE). I do this simply by estimating causal effects separately for different subgroups of the population.³² To identify support for the mayor, two questions were used. First, respondents were asked about their identification with the mayor's party (*Mayor Party*). The second asked for whom they had voted in the last mayoral election (*Mayor Voter*). Figure 3 presents the results. Since tenured employees cannot be fired, I present the effect for the whole sample (black dots) and the effect without tenured employees (white dots) for each subgroup. In fact, excluding tenured employees makes all the effects stronger in the predicted directions.

Figure 3: Perception of Job Stability, Heterogeneous Treatment Effects



Note: Black circles indicate the treatment effect within each subgroup; white circles restrict the sample to non-tenured employees. Vertical lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

First, and in line with expectations, the treatment effect is much stronger for the non-tenured employees (Plot 1). Among employees without job security, the treatment effect is a significant

³² Table C8 in the Appendix shows the exact numeric effects within each subgroup.

0.62 (compared to a nonsignificant 0.03 for tenured employees). The difference between tenured and non-tenured employees is a significant 0.60 (at the 95 percent level). Second, as the figure shows clearly, supporters who receive the hypothetical about a candidate from the opposition winning the election respond quite differently from those who do not hear the hypothetical to the question about the likelihood of keeping their jobs. In fact, hearing the hypothetical about the opposition winning has no effect on the expectations of non-supporters.

The difference in effects between those non-tenured employees (white dots) who reported having voted for the incumbent and those who did not (Plot 2) is a significant 2.06 difference (at the 99 percent level). Recall that the scale is 0 to 10; this means that those who had voted for the current mayor feel, on average, 20 percent less confident about keeping their jobs if the opposition wins. Results are similar when using the alternative measure of support. The difference between non-tenured employees who identified themselves with the party of the mayor and those who did not (Plot 3) is a significant 0.94 (at the 90 percent level), indicating that supporters of the mayor's party feel on average around 10 percent less secure about keeping their jobs if the opposition wins.

Perception of change The fear of losing one's job if the opposition wins the next election is not the only mechanism that sustains patronage contracts. Especially for tenured employees, other incentives are in place. If a new politician wins the next election, "disloyal" employees—the ones perceived as supporters of the old administration—might be transferred, sidestepped, demoted, or assigned to different activities. A tenured employee who has been working at the municipality of Santa Fe since 1985 explained this clearly: "The fear [for a tenured employee] is about changing jobs, changing the place of work; it is about being sent somewhere else, somewhere one does not know how to do the job, or where one doesn't have much to do ... A lot

of things can be changed.” And, in fact, she continued, there were a few cases like this with the change of administration in 2007: “Old employees have been sidestepped a little, their participation has been restricted. I know of people that had to ask to be transferred to another area because there was no room for them anymore where they used to work.” And she finished her description by adding: “I am not saying this happens, all I am saying is that *you’re afraid of it; it is your salary, your livelihood*” (Interview, Santa Fe, August 16, 2011).

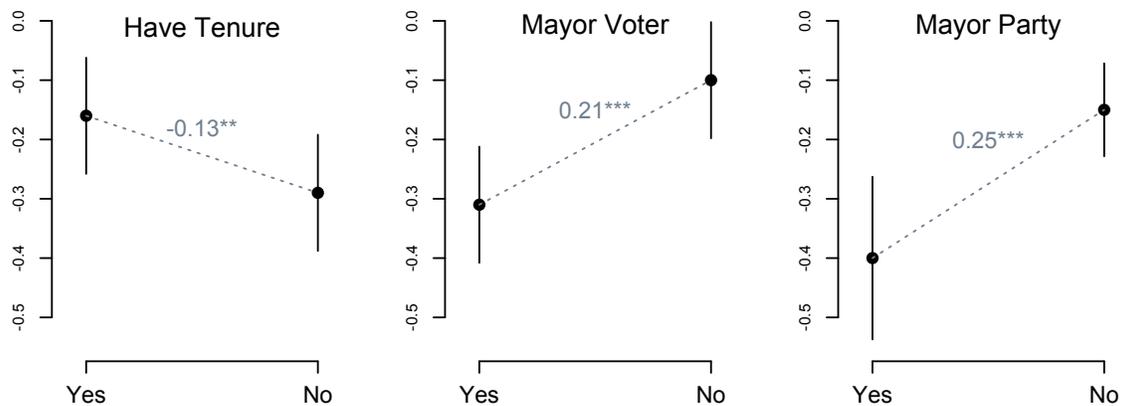
To determine whether employees are in fact afraid of these types of changes, I again use a hypothetical about the electoral outcome. All respondents were first asked how satisfied they were with their jobs and then to estimate the likelihood of a change after the election as follows: “On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘Not at all likely,’ and 10 means ‘Very likely,’ how likely do you think it is that that level of satisfaction with your job will change next year, after the 2011 mayoral elections?” Respondents selected into the treatment group received additional information about the outcome of the election: “if the incumbent mayor is not reelected and the opposition wins?” Immediately after this question, all respondents were asked: “Do you think that your situation will be better, the same, or worse?” Responses were coded 1 for better, 0 for no change expected, and -1 for worse.

In line with the results from the previous section, respondents who were told the hypothetical about the incumbent losing the election responded quite differently from those who did not hear this information. Whereas the average response among the control group was 0.36, the average for those who received the treatment was 0.13.³³ The average treatment effect is a

³³ Note that regardless of the treatment, few respondents were expecting that working conditions would get worse. Since all three municipalities have rules that tie salary increases, promotions,

significant 0.23 difference. On average, public employees think that their situation would be worse if the opposition were to win the following election.³⁴ Finally, Figure 4 presents the differences in the size of the treatment effect across different subsets of employees—*Tenure*, *Mayor Voter*, and *Mayor Party*. Again, I expect supporters of the incumbent to be more prone to think that the change would be for the worse.³⁵ Although the self-enforcing theory of patronage does not provide a clear prediction in this case, tenured employees—who have in general been in the job longer and possibly already experienced a change in administration—might be less afraid of suffering negative changes.

Figure 4: Likelihood of Change, Heterogeneous Treatment Effects



Note: Black circles indicate the treatment effect within each subgroup. Vertical lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

and tenure rights to years in the job, most employees think that, all else equal, working conditions will get better over time.

³⁴ Tables C9 and C10 in the Online Appendix show the t-test and the regression analysis results.

³⁵ Table C11 in the Online Appendix displays the exact numeric effects within each subgroup.

As the figure clearly shows, supporters who receive information about the electoral outcome respond quite differently to the question about changes in working conditions than those who do not. Hearing the hypothetical about the opposition winning has a considerably smaller effect on the future expectations of change among non-supporters. In other words, the strength of the main treatment effect is conditional on the characteristics of the respondents predicted by the self-enforcing theory of patronage—namely support for the mayor. The difference in effects between employees who reported having voted for the incumbent and those who did not (Plot 2) is a significant 0.21 (at the 99 percent level). Recall that the scale in this case is -1 to 1; so 0.21 indicates that incumbent voters are, on average, 10 percent more negative about potential changes in working conditions if the opposition wins. The difference in effects between those who identify with the party of the mayor and those who do not (Plot 3) is a significant 0.25 (at the 99 percent level). Tenured employees also feel less afraid than non-tenured employees of the opposition winning (Plot 1). The difference in effects across respondents with and without tenure is a significant 0.13 (at the 95 percent level).

In sum, the two survey experiments show that incumbent's supporters have strong incentives to try to keep things as they are. The results clearly indicate that those who could be perceived as supporters by the opposition are afraid of losing their jobs or work conditions changing for the worse with a new administration, which is a strong incentive for providing political services that could help keep the incumbent in office.

Conclusions

This article has set out to answer two questions: *what* do public sector employees do that affects electoral competition and *why* do they do it. Using an unobtrusive measurement technique that

generates unbiased estimates, I provide systematic evidence that public employees under patronage contracts do indeed provide political services to the patron who hires them. These political services—attending rallies, helping with campaigns, and monitoring elections, just to mention the ones studied here—are essential for obtaining and maintaining electoral support. The ability that some incumbents enjoy in contexts of weak civil service systems to distribute jobs to those who would provide these services gives incumbents a powerful electoral tool. Patronage contracts, however, are risky. Since the exchange of jobs for political support is not simultaneous and the law cannot be used to enforce such agreements, defection and betrayal are always a possibility. Here, I have focused on the commitment problems that arise when the job is distributed with the expectation of obtaining political support from the client in the future. A citizen who receives a job with the understanding that she will provide political services in return can easily renege on the agreement after getting the job.

This article suggests a novel explanation for why public employees (the clients) comply with their side of the patronage contract even after obtaining the job from the politician (the patron). Departing from existing explanations, the self-enforcing theory of patronage posits that public employees comply with the agreement because they believe that their fates are tied to that of their patron. Patrons do not need to monitor clients and threaten to punish non-compliers, nor do they have to encourage feelings of reciprocity among them. To make patronage contracts work, politicians need to be able to screen supporters from non-supporters and distribute patronage contracts only to the former. When patronage jobs are distributed to supporters, patronage contracts are self-sustaining. Only supporters can credibly commit to provide political support in the future. Patronage jobs and working conditions held by perceived supporters will be maintained by the incumbent (their patron) but not by the opposition (because supporters of

the incumbent cannot credibly commit to provide political services for the opposition). Once perceived as a supporter of the incumbent, patronage employees have low expectations of keeping their jobs and working conditions if the opposition were to win.

The actual firing or demotion of employees may happen only rarely. Nonetheless, the fact that employees believe in this possibility is enough of an incentive to support their patron. When something as valuable as one's livelihood is at stake, clients might be less willing to risk being wrong. Supporters understand that it is in their best interest to provide political services to help the incumbent remain in power, and this alignment of interests between patrons and clients makes patronage contracts self-sustaining. The empirical evidence provided in this article is consistent with this theory. The list and survey experiment results show that supporters are indeed more likely to be involved in the provision of political services and that they are more afraid than non-supporters of losing their jobs or suffering negative changes in working conditions with a change in administration.

The self-enforcing theory of patronage suggests that clients do not act qualitatively differently from other voters. Clients, as do other citizens, care about their own well-being. They are not necessarily more noble and altruistic than others, and they do not need to be "forced into" supporting a politician who makes them better off. As does any other voter, clients can choose to support the politician who guarantees the continuity of the benefit because they understand it is in their best interest to do so. To the extent that clients believe that the continuation of the benefit is conditional on the patron remaining in a position of power, clients have an incentive to help the patron achieve this goal. In the specific clientelistic case discussed here, public employees have such an incentive, which encourages them to comply with the patronage agreement and provide the services needed to ensure the incumbent's electoral success. When the clientelistic

exchange is incentive compatible, neither feelings of reciprocity nor monitoring and punishment are necessary to sustain the exchange. To the extent that patrons and clients share the same interests, there is no need for external enforcement mechanisms.

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