

# Clientelism in Latin America

Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos  
University of Oxford

Virginia Oliveros  
Tulane University

## Introduction

Scholars of Latin America are at the forefront of research on clientelism in Comparative Politics. This chapter reviews the relevant literature, focusing on longstanding debates, as well as more recent theoretical and methodological innovations. The first section defines clientelism as the personalized and discretionary exchange of goods and services for political support. The second section discusses the advantages and shortcomings of different strategies used to measure clientelism in Latin America. We also report survey evidence that reveals significant variation in the pervasiveness of the practice across the region. The third section discusses studies that look at targeting dynamics. In particular, we focus on the debate between those who think party machines target swing voters for vote buying, and those who argue that clientelism is primarily about mobilizing and maintaining the base. The fourth section analyzes commitment problems between parties and clients, and presents an overview of different theories put forward to explain why parties engage in clientelism despite their inability to directly enforce contracts. Finally, we explore the role of brokers in machine politics, commitment problems between politicians and brokers, and how types of brokers vary across contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible avenues for future research.

## What is Clientelism?<sup>1</sup>

Clientelism is a type of linkage strategy that parties deploy to win elections (Kitschelt, 2000). We define it as the *personalized and discretionary exchange of goods or favors for political support*.<sup>2</sup> The characterization of the clientelistic exchange as personalized or individualized (and often face-to-face) helps distinguish clientelism from other forms of distributive politics in which the exchange involves groups of voters. In pork-barrel politics, for example, everyone who lives in a certain area receives a benefit. Politicians target these benefits with the hope that the group as a whole will be more likely to vote for them. In the case of clientelism, by contrast, individuals who are not part of the exchange are excluded from the

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<sup>1</sup> This section largely draws on Oliveros (2018, Chapter 1).

<sup>2</sup> This definition follows Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), Piattoni (2001), and Stokes (2007). For a distinction between clientelism and other forms of electoral strategies (including programmatic ones) see Stokes et al. (2013, 6-18).

benefit. This implies that clientelism is individually targeted, and patrons know who receives the benefit. Political brokers, or “middlemen,” are the ones who nurture and sustain the personal connections that underpin these transactions. They do so over long periods of time, during and between electoral campaigns, thus getting to know their clients (Auyero, 2000, 2001; Calvo & Murillo, 2013; Diaz-Cayeros, Estevez, & Magaloni, 2016; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013; Szwarcberg, 2015; Zarazaga, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Crucially, these intermediaries make sure to emphasize the *personal* nature of the connection, publicly boasting of their “service to the people” and highlighting “their particular efforts to obtain the goods [...] thus creating the appearance that were they not there, the benefits would not be delivered” (Auyero, Lapegna, & Poma, 2009, p. 5). The fact that the goods distributed through clientelism are often private goods makes credit-claiming comparatively easier (Desposato, 2007). Credit-claiming, however, might be harder in certain cases, such as in the discretionary distribution of targeted government programs (Weitz-Shapiro, 2014). In those cases, patrons and brokers have to make an additional effort to convince clients of the personalized and discretionary character of the benefit.<sup>4</sup>

In clientelistic transactions, patrons provide goods or favors, and clients are expected to reciprocate with political support. The existing literature provides a wide variety of examples of the types of goods and favors that are distributed through clientelistic exchanges in Latin America: clothing, mattresses, medicine, milk, corrugated metal, construction materials, blankets, hangers, utility bill payments, money, eyeglasses, chickens, trees, and magnets (Brusco, Nazareno, & Stokes, 2004), favors (Oliveros, 2016), and even alcohol and drugs (Szwarcberg, 2015) in Argentina; medicine, health exams, dentures, wheelchairs, orthopedic boots, and female sterilization in Brazil (Nichter, 2011); property titles, subsidized housing and food, work opportunities, licenses to sell merchandise in flea markets (Magaloni et al. 2007), supermarket gift cards (Cantú, forthcoming), and access to water (Herrera, 2017) in Mexico; and furniture, animals, food, tools, and construction materials in Nicaragua (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, Meléndez, Osorio, & Nickerson, 2012). The type of good or favor therefore does not determine the existence of a clientelistic exchange.

Although all of the above examples are private goods, it is of course possible to distribute private goods through programmatic politics rather than through clientelism.<sup>5</sup> In programmatic politics, a set of rules stipulates the conditions under which citizens should receive certain benefits, and all citizens who satisfy those requirements receive the benefit, without any bias or discretion. The group is defined in abstract terms—for instance, the poor, the unemployed—and all people thus defined receive the benefit. No member of the group can be excluded. More importantly, in programmatic politics there is no explicit expectation that recipients will

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<sup>3</sup> Nichter (2014) distinguishes “electoral clientelism,” in which the clientelistic exchange takes place around elections, from “relational clientelism,” in which the exchange is not restricted to the electoral period.

<sup>4</sup> For a description of the strategies that politicians can use to create or increase voters’ perception of discretion in the implementation of policy, see Weitz-Shapiro (2014, Chapter 2), and Oliveros (2018, Chapter 5).

<sup>5</sup> In fact, in advanced democracies most welfare-state policies are targeted yet programmatic (Stokes, 2009). See Weitz-Shapiro (2012, 2014) for an example of how the same program (a targeted food distribution program in Argentina) can be distributed in a clientelistic or non-clientelistic way. Recent studies of conditional cash transfer programs in Mexico (De La O, 2013, 2015; Diaz-Cayeros, Estevez, & Magaloni, 2016) and Brazil (Zucco, 2013), which show that distribution is in fact programmatic, provide further evidence that the type of good in itself does not necessarily imply clientelism.

reciprocate with political support. By contrast, patrons expect clients to engage in a number of activities, including turning out on Election Day, voting for a specific candidate, attending rallies, or helping out with the campaign. Moreover, the clientelistic exchange is discretionary because patrons (or brokers) enjoy considerable leeway in deciding who receives the benefit or can make clients believe they have such leeway. There are no formal rules governing the distribution of goods or favors. As we shall see throughout this chapter, brokers and politicians target benefits based on the perceived responsiveness of certain voters, the need to sway some voters in order to win, maintain the electoral base, or personal and career goals.

Most definitions of clientelism emphasize the *quid pro quo* nature of the exchange in a very specific way: the provision of the goods and services is *contingent* upon the actions of the client. For instance, for Stokes et al. (2013, p. 13), “the party offers material benefits only on the condition that the recipient returns the favor with a vote or other form of political support.” Similarly, Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, p. 9) consider a clientelistic exchange to be comprised of three components: “contingent direct exchange, predictability, and monitoring.”<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, two more conditions are necessary before an exchange can be classified as clientelistic. First, the patron must know, infer, or (at the very least) be able to make the client believe that it is possible to monitor political behavior. This might involve some mechanism that violates the secrecy of the ballot or that makes the client believe that this is a real possibility. In these cases, party machines with an army of politicians and brokers “deeply embedded in social networks” are required to select appropriate clients and monitor their behavior (Stokes, 2009, p. 14). Second, the client should believe that she could be punished if she reneges on her side of the agreement. In other words, for a clientelistic exchange to take place, the patron should be able to identify non-compliers and credibly commit to punish them.

Our understanding of clientelism is different. We do not assume that clientelistic exchanges require monitoring of specific voting decisions or political behavior, or that clients’ fear of punishment is their main reason for fulfilling their side of the agreement. Whether monitoring and punishment (or the threat of punishment) actually occur is variable, and is not a necessary feature of the phenomenon. Put simply, in a clientelistic exchange both sides expect to obtain something from the other, but *whether* and *why* the contract is respected, and patrons and clients actually obtain what they want, is highly contingent and ultimately an empirical question. As we shall see in the following pages, there are several explanations for why clients fulfill their side of the clientelistic agreement in addition to beliefs about patrons’ capacity to monitor. Indeed, clients can make an active and conscious decision to support their patron because they think it is in their best interest to do so (Baldwin, 2013; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Oliveros, 2016, 2018, Zarazaga, 2014, 2015), or because they feel morally compelled to return favors (Finan & Schechter, 2012; Lawson & Greene, 2014). It should be noted, however, that the fact that clientelism is not always sustained by fear or coercion does not mean it isn’t usually colored by acute power and status asymmetries (Auyero, 2001). The exchange may well be mutually beneficial, and clients may willingly enter into such transactions, but the relationship is deeply

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<sup>6</sup>For a similar perspective, see Grzymala-Busse (2007, 2008), Hicken (2011), Kitschelt and Altamirano (2015), Medina and Stokes (2007), Magaloni et al. (2007), Nichter (2008, 2014), Stokes (2007, 2009), and Weitz-Shapiro (2012, 2014).

unbalanced because the stakes for those on the receiving end, often found among the very poor, are much higher.

### **How pervasive is clientelism in Latin America?**

Observing clientelistic exchanges and measuring their prevalence across countries is crucial in order to describe the bond between patrons and clients, test propositions about who is targeted, when, and why, and understand the rise, reproduction, and collapse of machine politics. In this sense, one of most vexing questions in clientelism research is how to document the existence and pervasiveness of an electoral strategy that is often illegal and “generally associated with a negative social stigma due to its disjuncture with democratic norms and association with poverty” (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012, p. 203).

Latin Americanists have produced important innovations on this front. A few seminal studies deploy ethnographic methods to zoom in on the social relations that emerge around clientelistic transactions (e.g., Auyero, 2001; Gay, 1994; Szwarcberg, 2015). This approach allows scholars to build trust with informants. Brokers are thus willing to reveal stories that involve the illegal distribution of goods and services for political gain. By the same token, clients feel comfortable admitting their participation in these exchanges and their dependence on discretionary state largesse for survival. The result is usually a rich and diachronic account of clientelistic transactions as they unfold during and between electoral campaigns in specific locales. But ethnographies are not designed to generate precise estimates of the pervasiveness of clientelism and its variation across theoretically relevant portions of the electorate. Rich description of clientelistic transactions in a few communities comes at the expense of studying representative samples of clients and brokers.

To address this shortcoming, scholars of clientelism in Latin America have turned to surveys that ask a sample of respondents about their experiences with clientelism. Researchers are thus able to present a more systematic depiction of the reach and characteristics of the clientelistic exchange. In sharp contrast to ethnographers, however, enumerators are only able to establish limited rapport with their interviewees. This increases the risk of untruthful responses as a result of social desirability bias. Indeed, studies show that asking people about stigmatized or illegal practices produces this kind of bias due to individuals’ propensity to depict themselves in a positive light to avoid sanctions (Bradburn, Sudman, Blair, & Stocking, 1978; DeMaio, 1984; Nadeau & Niemi, 1995; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). In the case of clientelism, levels of social stigma attached to the practice are high, to the point that respondents tend to think it is unlikely that others will willingly admit to partaking in these exchanges (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, & Nickerson, 2014; Kiewiet de Jonge, 2015).

Brusco, Nazareno & Stokes (2004) and Stokes (2005) were among the first to recognize the problem of social desirability bias in this type of research. In a survey conducted in three Argentinean provinces in 2001-2002, they asked respondents whether they had received a gift or favor from a candidate or a party during the campaign. Only 7 percent of the sample provided a positive response. But they also asked whether parties had distributed goods to individuals in

their neighborhoods during the campaign. A question about the behavior of others is more likely to lead to honest answers. In their study, 44 percent reported that parties distributed handouts in their neighborhood, and 35 percent could name the items that were distributed and the parties that gave them out. For the authors, the individual and neighborhood estimates reflect the possible range of the extent of clientelism. While the self-reported measure likely underestimates clientelism, the neighborhood measure indicates an upper bound.

Due to the possibility of social desirability bias, surveys of clientelism in Latin America and beyond now tend to include these two measures. Scholars often find similar differences between them, and assume that the “true” level of clientelism lies somewhere in between. The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)’s AmericasBarometer, for instance, includes both types of questions allowing us to compare the extent of the phenomenon across countries.<sup>7</sup> The 2014 survey asked:

- Thinking of the last national elections, any candidate or political party offered a favor, gift, or other benefit to a person whom you know in exchange for that person’s support or vote?
- And thinking about the last presidential elections of [year varies by country], did someone offer you something, like a favor, gift or any other benefit in return for your vote or support?

Figure 1 presents the responses to these questions in 19 Latin American countries, and shows that there is significant variation in the pervasiveness of clientelism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We thank the LAPOP and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

<sup>8</sup> Table A1 in the Appendix presents the numeric values.

## Percentage Reporting Clientelism in LA

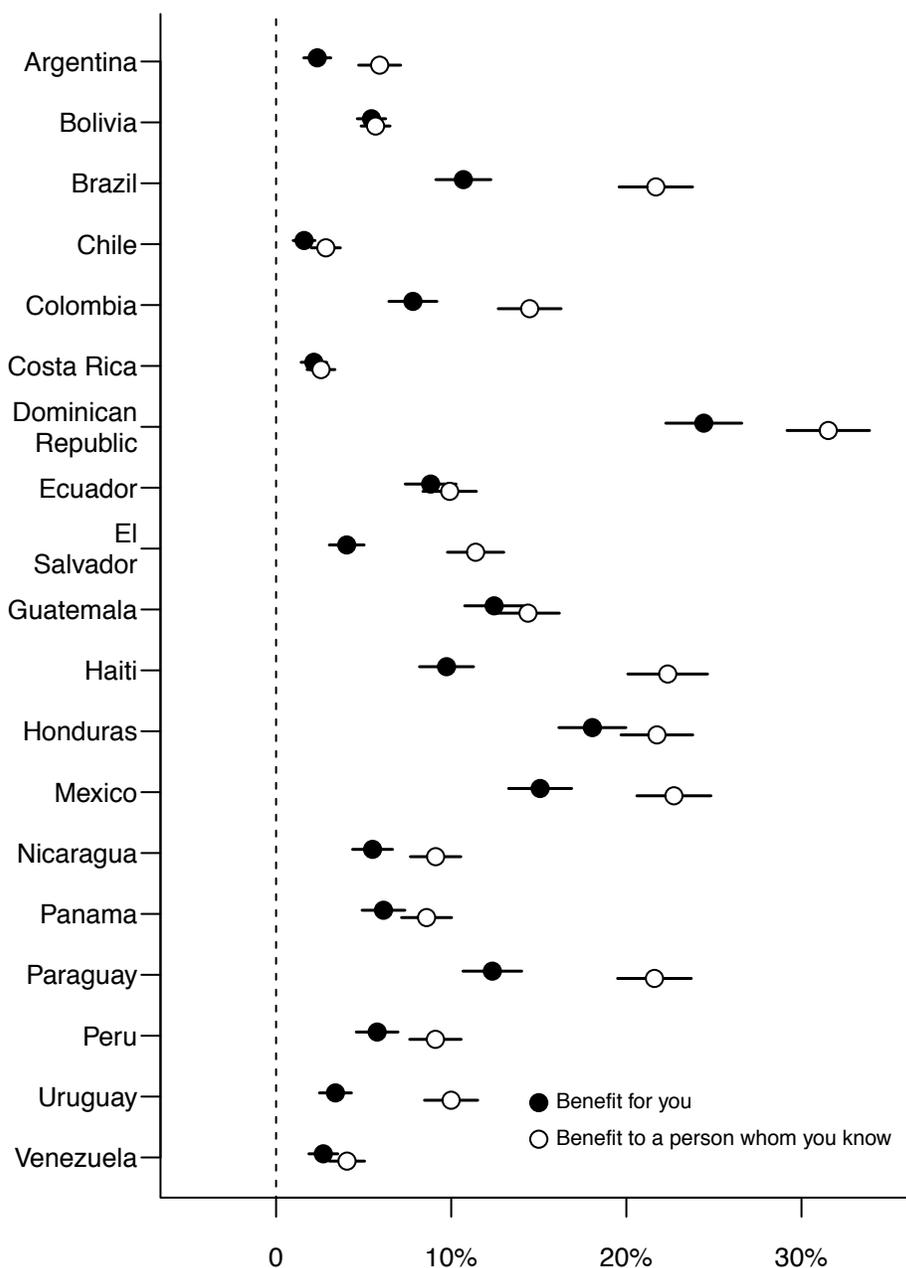


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents reporting clientelism across 19 Latin American Countries. Notes: DN/NA were coded as missing. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: The 2014 AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org).

According to the self-reported measure, the Dominican Republic is the country with the highest prevalence of clientelism (24.4%), followed by Honduras (18.1%), and Mexico (15.1%). According to the indirect measure, the Dominican Republic is also the most clientelistic country with 31.5 percent of positive responses, followed by Mexico (22.7%), Haiti (22.3%), Honduras (21.7%), Brazil (21.6%), and Paraguay (21.6%). Note that the difference between the direct and

indirect measures also varies across countries. For instance, in Uruguay 3.4 percent of respondents reported being personally targeted, while more than twice as many (10%) reported seeing others participate in these exchanges. Similarly, in El Salvador, 4 percent of respondents reported personal clientelism, but approximately three times more (11.4%) reported offers to others. In contrast, in Ecuador (8.8% personal, 9.9% others) and Bolivia (5.4% personal, 5.7% others) there are no significant differences between both measures.

While this empirical strategy is useful and has led to interesting national and cross-national research, it is not without problems. First, the direct and indirect estimates could be measuring different things. For example, when asked about clientelism in their neighborhood, respondents could weaponize their answers to sully the reputation of certain parties or voters. More importantly, however, is the fact that the indirect measure still remains the key instrument to test propositions about the impact of individual level characteristics (e.g. partisanship, income, voting behavior) on brokers' targeting decisions and the workings of clientelism more broadly. But since this measure is likely tainted by social desirability bias, and bias is likely to be non-random across theoretically relevant subgroups of voters, "empirical results about the dynamics of vote buying derived from surveys are on a shaky foundation" (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012, p. 202).

To address this issue, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012) introduced list experiments to the study of clientelism in Latin America. List experiments provide an unobtrusive alternative to direct questions, and produce more reliable estimates of the pervasiveness of the practice. The technique allows respondents to reveal that they took part in these exchanges without directly admitting to it. The survey sample is divided into control and treatment groups. All participants are asked to count how many of a series of campaign activities mentioned in a list they experienced during a recent election. Crucially, the list in the treatment condition has an additional item, usually phrased as follows: "A party offered you a gift or favor in exchange for your vote." Since respondents in both experimental groups are on average the same, any difference in the mean number of activities reported by each group has to be the result of including this additional item as part of the treatment list, with no difference indicating the absence of clientelism. While researchers cannot know which individuals were targeted, they can estimate the pervasiveness of clientelism across theoretically relevant subgroups.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is possible to use list experiments to investigate the strength of social desirability bias in different countries. In this sense, differences between the direct measure and the list experiment estimate reflect the presence of bias and show that previous research based on direct questions might be more or less reliable depending on the context. Figure 2 shows the result of a series of list experiments fielded in Latin America along with the estimates from direct questions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Although there have been some developments on the use of list experiments with multivariate regression analysis (see, for instance, Blair & Imai, 2012; Corstange, 2009; Glynn, 2013; Imai, 2011), difference-in-means estimators have the advantage that no functional form assumption is needed.

<sup>10</sup> Table A2 in the Appendix presents the numeric values.

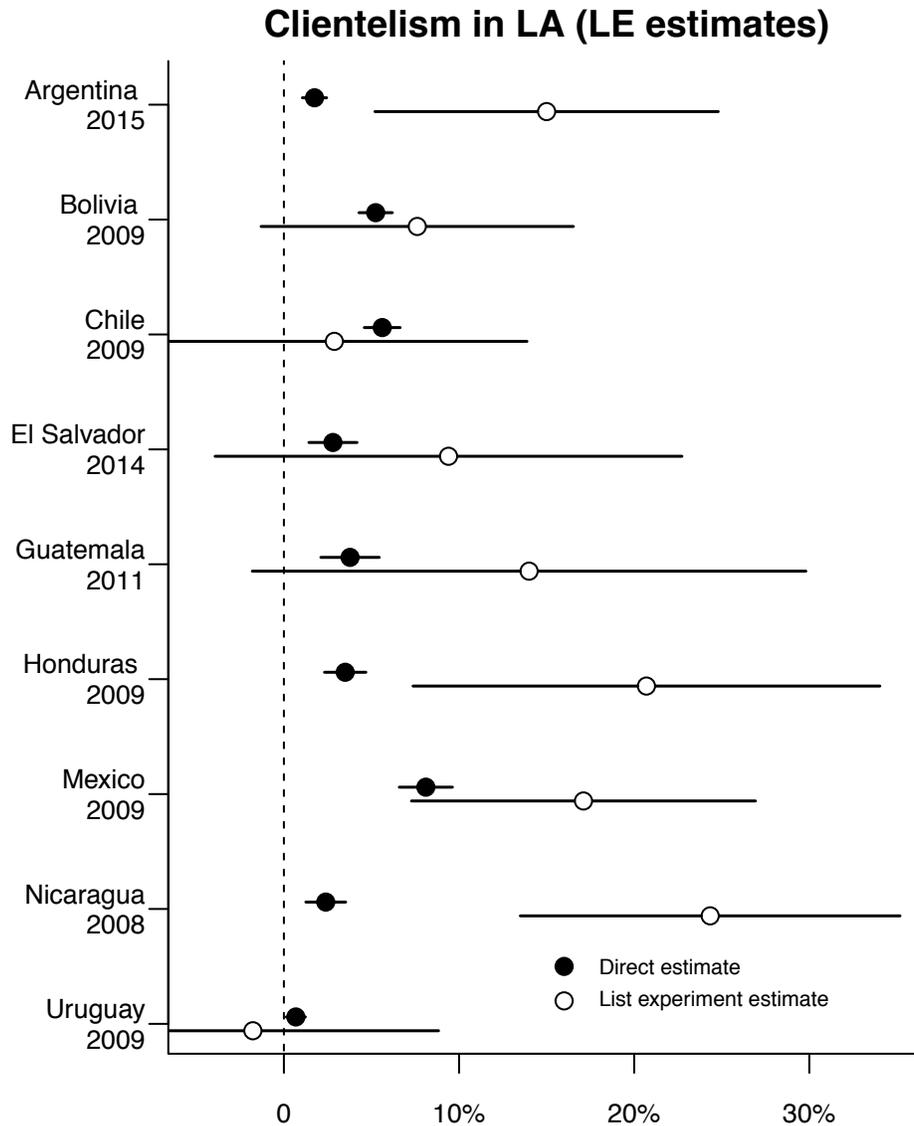


Figure 2: Comparison of percentage of respondents reporting clientelism with the direct estimate and the list experiment estimate across selected countries. Notes: DN/NA were coded as missing. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Sources: Argentina (Oliveros, 2019); Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, and Uruguay (Kiewiet de Jonge, 2015), El Salvador (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, & Meseguer, 2018), Honduras (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, & Nickerson, 2015), and Nicaragua (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012).

Figure 2 shows that the degree of clientelism and that social desirability bias vary significantly across countries. Indeed, in some cases the self-reported measure can be extremely misleading. Social desirability bias is greatest in the cases of Argentina, Honduras, and Nicaragua. For instance, in Nicaragua the direct estimate of clientelism is 2.4% while the estimate from the list experiment is 24.3%. Similarly, in Honduras the direct estimate is 3.5% while the list experiment estimate is 20.1%. In contrast, in the cases of Chile, Bolivia, and Uruguay, the list experiment estimates and the direct estimates are fairly similar, suggesting

lower levels of social desirability bias.<sup>11</sup>

Differences in measurement strategies aside, large survey projects that gauge the extent of clientelism across Latin America share two important shortcomings. First, the timing of surveys is far from systematic. The list experiments reported in Figure 2 were not conducted at the same stage of the electoral process (some were conducted before Election Day, others after the election, and yet others in between rounds). Similarly, the AmericasBarometer surveys are not scheduled to coincide with elections. In fact, they are often timed to avoid election cycles. Consequently, phenomena that are particularly salient around elections, such as clientelism, may be underestimated (Lupu, Oliveros & Schiumerini 2019). Academic surveys conducted around elections and applied regularly across cycles are still rare in Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

Timing matters. When dealing with issues of electoral integrity, such as clientelism, there are good reasons to suspect that measures taken *before* the election capture expectations, while measures taken *after* the election capture both the experience of the election as well as voters' feelings of approval or disappointment with the outcome (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, & Listhaug, 2005; Cantú & García-Ponce, 2015). In Mexico, for instance, Cantú and García-Ponce (2015) draw on data collected over the course of the 2012 presidential campaign and find that confidence in the integrity of the electoral process varies over time and across partisan groups. In particular, they find that supporters of the incumbent party lose confidence in the electoral process only after their candidate is defeated. Similarly, using panel data from the 2015 Argentinean election, Oliveros (2019) finds that supporters of the incumbent party were more likely to believe that voting was secret before the election but not after their candidate lost.<sup>13</sup> These differences could affect voters' willingness to report vote buying. In this sense, recent panel studies fielded in Brazil (Ames et al., 2014, 2010), Mexico (Lawson, 2001, 2007), and Argentina (Lupu, Gervasoni, Oliveros, & Schiumerini, 2015), offer great opportunities to explore how reporting of clientelism, as well as targeting dynamics, vary during the electoral cycle.

The second shortcoming has to do with coverage. Little attention has been paid to where our measures of clientelism are taken. A lot of what we have learnt from survey research about clientelism in Latin America is based on surveys that are supposed to be representative at the national level, but often exclude slum dwellers (Murillo, Oliveros, & Zarazaga, 2018). Sampling procedures require information from census maps and census data, but slums are rarely mapped or surveyed by government agencies (Auerbach, LeBas, Post, & Weitz-Shapiro, 2018). Moreover, for security and logistical reasons, polling firms in developing countries often substitute some sampling units for others that are more accessible or less dangerous (Lupu & Michelitch, 2018). Of course, omitting slum dwellers in studies of clientelism is particularly problematic since we know from ethnographic studies that slums are often the main sites of clientelism. Indeed, in a recent paper, Murillo et al. (2018) call attention to this issue and show that, not only is there more clientelism among Argentine slums dwellers but also that their

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis of who lies about clientelism, see Kiewiet de Jonge (2015).

<sup>12</sup> In Latin America, regular election studies are available only for Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru (Lupu, Oliveros, & Schiumerini, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Note, however, that she does not find evidence of a winner-loser gap in the case of clientelism. Supporters of the incumbent party were not more likely to report clientelism after their candidate's defeat (Oliveros, 2019).

understanding of the mechanisms of the clientelistic exchange is different from (equally poor) non-slum dwellers.

### **Who are the clients?**

Scholars of clientelism in Latin America and beyond generally agree that poor voters are disproportionately targeted with clientelistic offers. For some scholars, poor voters are targeted by parties because of the higher marginal value of relatively inexpensive gifts for poorer voters; for others, this is because the poor are more likely to value immediate assistance rather than programmatic promises (e.g., Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Kitschelt, 2000; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Luna, 2014; Mares & Young, 2016; Stokes et al., 2013; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Beyond this general agreement, much of the debate around the dynamics of clientelism focuses on the types of clients favored by party machines. Do political parties target core supporters or swing voters? Relying on a formal model and survey data from Argentina, Stokes (2005) jump-started this debate in Latin America arguing that rational parties disproportionately target weak supporters and swing voters. Resources are wasted if parties invest in core supporters, who presumably will vote for the party regardless of whether or not they are rewarded with material incentives.<sup>15</sup> Using the same survey data, Nichter (2008) challenged this proposition. First, he is more skeptical of parties' ability to monitor the vote, which is needed when targeting non-partisans. Second, he introduces a second dimension in the targeting calculus: voter's turnout record. He concludes that rational political parties will use clientelism to buy turnout among voters whom they can trust to vote as expected, i.e. core supporters, but whose propensity to vote is low and therefore need additional incentives to mobilize.

Subsequent research is more supportive of the view that clientelism is mainly used to mobilize and maintain the base. Most notably, Stokes et al. (2013) analyze individual-level data from Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, and India, and find that swing voters are targeted at very low rates. To explain why, they develop a theory of distribution that takes into account the preferences of brokers, who mediate between party bosses and voters. Party bosses might prefer to target swing voters to increase the margin of victory, but brokers face incentives to design different distribution strategies that allow them to pocket some of the resources fed into the machine. The fact that party bosses can only imperfectly monitor broker behavior means that brokers can get away with not being perfect agents of their principals. As Szwarcberg (2015) study of Argentina shows, bosses are only able to evaluate brokers' performance by, for example, observing how many people they bring to rallies or mobilize to the polls, but cannot know with certainty whether these voters vote as instructed. As a result, brokers have an incentive to target core supporters, who are easier and cheaper to mobilize, thus signaling their effectiveness to the leader while saving resources for personal enrichment.

More generally, clientelistic exchanges are based on long-term interactions. Politicians therefore care about their reputation and keeping their supporters satisfied. Politicians who

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the link between poverty and clientelism, see Stokes et al. (2013, Chapter 6).

<sup>15</sup> For a review of the literature on swing voter targeting, see Stokes et al. (2013, pp. 32–36).

systematically break their promises to their loyal supporters will be unable to sustain their electoral base over time (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Zarazaga, 2014). Indeed, Diaz-Cayeros et al. (2016) find that Mexican parties target supporters in an effort to cement loyalties. Parties only use clientelism to attract other voters when their core base of support is not enough to win an election. Similarly, Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Meseguer (2018) argue that poor voters in El Salvador who receive remittances from family members living abroad experience an ideological shift to the right, which leads rightist parties to target them with vote buying to reinforce emerging loyalties. A study of Honduras's 2009 Presidential Election shows that when parties are worried about turnout levels, they target vote buying disproportionately at core supporters in order to ensure high participation rates and thus legitimize the election (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2015). Finally, Calvo and Murillo (2013) show that citizens' perception of the likelihood of being offered a handout increases among Argentines (but not Chileans) who are more connected to partisan networks (those more likely to be core supporters). These findings point to a different logic than the one of Stokes et al.'s (2013) theory of broker-mediated distribution. Far from being a distortion that brokers introduce to the distribution plan, targeting core supporters is often what party leaders want.

Moving the debate in a different direction, two recent papers have called attention to other characteristics of clients that matter beyond their poverty and their core or swing status. According to Holland and Palmer-Rubin (2015, p. 1187), "in many low- and middle-income democracies, organizational membership, not poverty or partisan activity, is the strongest predictor of exposure to vote buying." Using data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) AmericasBarometer, they show that participation in civic associations (such as religious meetings, school board meetings, and community improvement committee meetings, among others), is a more important predictor of clientelism than income. In their view, which they support with qualitative evidence from Colombia and Mexico, this association is explained by the "brokerage function" of some organization leaders. In an argument that also calls attention to the social networks of voters, Schaffer and Baker (2015) argue that parties target influential individuals that have access to large numbers of voters. Using the LAPOP data as well as panel data from Mexico, they show that voters who engage in "frequent political persuasion" and who are located in "large political discussion networks" are disproportionately targeted by clientelistic offers. Parties thus take advantage of the multiplier effect of "persuading" one well-connected individual.

### **Enforcing Clientelistic Deals**

Regardless of targeting strategies, clientelistic deals are in principle hard to enforce. First, they are sequenced. Parties distribute benefits during the campaign, or in between elections, and voters cast their ballot at a later date. Second, because these exchanges are illegal and clandestine, the party cannot rely on the law to punish the voter if she fails to comply. More fundamentally, where the ballot is secret, parties cannot know whether or not the voter complied with her end of the deal. Political scientists tend to assume that parties are rational actors that spend campaign resources strategically in an effort to maximize electoral gains. So a logical question follows: why do parties spend resources buying votes if these deals cannot be enforced?

In other words, given the commitment problems inherent to clientelism, why embrace such levels of uncertainty? Indeed, anti-vote buying campaigns often make voters aware of the unenforceable nature of the deal, calling on people to “receive with one hand and vote with the other” (Szwarcberg, 2001).

One possible answer put forward by scholars of Latin America is that clientelism works as a result of voters’ fear of getting cut off if they fail to comply (e.g., Brusco et al., 2004; Stokes, 2005; Stokes et al., 2013; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014). Avoiding defection in the polling booth therefore requires parties to either devise monitoring strategies or persuade voters that their private actions can be observed. To do so candidates recruit brokers who work hard to minimize commitment problems by getting to know their clients and issuing credible threats. This is why Stokes (2005) refers to vote buying as a “perverse” form of accountability: parties check on voters, not the other way around. Brokers are sometimes able to devise sophisticated techniques to monitor the vote. For instance, in Mexico, there is anecdotal evidence that some brokers force voters to use mobile phones to record their behavior inside the polling station. Alternatively, brokers can try to convince their clients that the ballot is not secret. For example, sustained interactions between voters and brokers in Argentine municipalities allow Peronist operatives to gather valuable information that helps enforce contracts. Intimacy and local knowledge makes it possible to punish non-compliers. As one broker told Stokes (2005, p. 317), “you know if a neighbor voted against your party if he can’t look you in the eye.” These might be empty threats, but voters, especially poor ones, may conclude that it is simply too risky to ignore them.<sup>16</sup> Brokers may also use activities they can readily observe, such as turnout (Nichter, 2008), attendance at rallies (Szwarcberg, 2015, pp. 63–70) or participation in local institutions (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012), to test their clients’ reliability and loyalty. Finally, some studies argue that clientelism is not based on monitoring, punishment, or fear at the individual level, but on the collective monitoring of small groups (Gingerich & Medina, 2013; Rueda, 2015, 2017).

For a second group of scholars, commitment problems are not that hard to solve. For some, this is because clientelism generates a sense of gratitude that makes the promise of compliance binding from the voter’s perspective (Graziano, 1976). In other words, these transactions are sustained by norms of reciprocity. While voters could in principle defect in the privacy of the polling station, they are compelled to comply by the moral underpinnings of gift giving and receiving. The repeated nature of the transactions leads to the emergence of shared cultural representations of vote buying, which obscure the inequalities inherent in such exchanges and reinforce recipients’ determination to preserve the culture of returning gifts and favors with votes. In his famous ethnography of an Argentine slum, Auyero (2001) depicts electoral machines as “problem solving networks,” and shows that poor voters appreciate the work they do. According to one client, brokers do not even have to ask for reciprocation: “Because she gave me medicine, or some milk, or a packet of yerba or sugar, I know that I have to go to her rally in order to fulfill my obligation to her, to show my gratitude” (Auyero 2001, p. 160). In a similar vein, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al.’s (2014) study of five Latin American countries shows that while at the aggregate level vote buying might distort electoral democracy, at the individual level it is a mutually beneficial act, such that poor voters and those with strong

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<sup>16</sup> See Chandra (2007, pp. 89–90), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, pp. 15–18), and Schaffer and Schendler (2007, pp. 22–24), for examples of different techniques to monitor electoral preferences (or making voters believe that is possible).

reciprocity values tend to see these exchanges in a more positive light. Parties seem to be aware of the power of these norms. Studies conducted in Paraguay (Finan & Schechter, 2012) and Mexico (Lawson & Greene, 2014) show that brokers target reciprocal individuals because they expect them to be more compliant.

For others, it is not reciprocity but self-interest what solves commitment problems. Clientelistic transactions give voters access to resources they need, so they vote as expected because they want to guarantee a continuous flow of resources and not because they are forced to do so (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Oliveros, 2016, 2018, Zarazaga, 2014, 2015). Importantly, due to their economic insecurity, resource poor constituencies are responsive to relatively inexpensive material rewards (Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Kitschelt, 2000; Stokes, 2007; Stokes et al., 2013). Their preferences for a given party or machine can therefore become endogenous to the exchange itself. In this sense, Diaz-Cayeros, Estevez, & Magaloni (2016, p. 10) argue that party loyalty is conditional: “partisan attachments are constructed through reciprocal material and symbolic exchanges, past, present, and future.” If the flow of resources stops, voters will explore other options. In many ways, this argument is diametrically opposed to explanations that emphasize monitoring: it highlights the agency of the voter rather than that of the machine.

Finally, recent work that focuses on short term clientelism argues that under certain conditions parties do not care about commitment issues at all, and often distribute gifts knowing full well that their ability to enforce deals is non-existent. For example, Muñoz (2014) shows that this is the case in Peru, where parties are weak and do not have permanent or deeply embedded armies of brokers. The purpose in this case is not to buy votes directly, but to boost attendance at rallies. Well-attended rallies allow parties to engage voters and stage their mobilizing potential.

### **Principal- agent problems between party bosses and brokers**

Most of the literature on clientelism that deals with commitment issues focuses on the relationship between voters and patrons/brokers. Some scholars, however, now study the commitment problems that can arise in the relationship between patrons (or party leaders) and brokers. Until very recently, scholars depicted machines as unitary actors, assuming that the goal of brokers and patrons was one and the same—electoral success. Recent studies, however, tell a more complicated story.

First, the prospect of electoral success may not be enough for party bosses to extract effort from brokers. According to Camp (2017, p. 522), this is because of a collective action problem: “individual marginal efforts do not significantly impact electoral outcomes, and they [brokers] are inclined to free-ride on the efforts of other brokers.” Second, brokers tend to have more information about voters than their bosses. This informational asymmetry, coupled with party leaders’ imperfect ability to monitor broker behavior, incentivizes brokers to “misuse” resources by distributing gifts to core voters, rather than to swing voters, or to keep part of those resources to themselves (Stokes et al., 2013; Szwarcberg, 2015). “Disloyal” brokers in weak party systems can also switch parties (Novaes, 2018). Stokes et al. (2013) argue that these principal-agent problems, and the costs associated with them, can encourage political parties to abandon clientelistic practices altogether.

To solve these commitment problems and create incentives for brokers to deliver, political parties monitor brokers' performance and offer them different types of private rewards. For instance, relying on extensive fieldwork and a dataset tracing the political careers of local brokers in Argentina, Szwarcberg (2012, 2015) shows how bosses combine information from voter turnout at rallies and elections to reward and punish brokers' efforts. Similarly, taking advantage of variation in the number of polling stations in Mexican electoral precincts, Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016) show that bosses' greater monitoring capacity in smaller precincts increases turnout and votes for the PAN and the PRI.

Commitment problems, however, only arise when the electoral success of the patron is not enough to incentivize the broker to work for the machine. When their electoral interests are not aligned with those of the party that hires them, brokers might have incentives to shirk. But under certain conditions, incentives can be aligned, minimizing agency loss. This alignment might be ideological. For instance, Larreguy, Montiel Olea, and Querubin (2017) show that Mexican teachers affiliated with the Mexican National Educational Workers Union (*SNTE*) are effective brokers only when mobilizing voters in support of their preferred party. Another possibility for aligned incentives is when brokers are public employees. Oliveros (2018) finds that Argentine brokers with patronage jobs believe that their jobs might be in jeopardy if the opposition wins, which provides a strong incentive to work hard to keep the incumbent in office.

Most contemporary studies of clientelism recognize the importance of public sector jobs as a way of financing the work of political brokers (Mares & Young, 2016). For instance, in what is probably the biggest survey of brokers conducted to date (800 interviews in four Argentinean provinces), 30 percent of respondents (excluding those who held public office) reported being public sector employees. In fact, public employment was the largest single occupation in the sample (Stokes et al., 2013). Similarly, in a 2003 survey of 112 Peronist grassroots organizations in Greater Buenos Aires and the City of Buenos Aires in Argentina, Levitsky (2003, pp. 195–197) found that two-thirds were run by brokers who had a job in the public administration. In one-third of them, at least two other activists also held public sector jobs.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, public school teachers broker votes in Mexico (Larreguy et al., 2017) and Colombia (Eaton & Chambers-Ju, 2014).

Brokers with public sector jobs tend to be party brokers. They are committed to one party and have no ties to other interest groups. These are the types of brokers that have received most scholarly attention in Latin America. Recent research, however, shows that there are different types of brokers. Holland and Palmer-Rubin (2015) propose a typology of brokers based on their relationships to parties and interest groups. Party brokers are those who mobilize voters for a single party and are not embedded in any organization. An example of this type of brokers are most Peronist Party operatives in Argentina (e.g., Auyero, 2001; Levitsky, 2003; Stokes et al., 2013; Szwarcberg, 2015; Zarazaga, 2014). Organizational brokers, in turn, are those embedded in an organization and with weak (or no) party ties. Leaders of street vending associations in Colombia, who negotiate blocs of votes with multiple parties in each election, are a good example (Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015, pp. 1205–1208). The third category, hybrid brokers, consists of brokers who have ties both to a party and an organization. An example can be found in Oliveros's (2016, p. 385) study of Argentina. In addition to working for the local

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<sup>17</sup> On the use of public employment to finance the work of brokers and activists in Argentina, see also Auyero (2000, 2001), Oliveros (2016, 2018), Scherlis (2013), and Zarazaga (2014).

administration, a young broker described her activities as the head of a neighborhood association that organizes social and cultural events, runs a soup kitchen, and manages food assistance programs. The broker explained that she is very interested in politics because: “all the contacts [you need] to bring things to the neighborhood are political contacts.”. Mexican teachers affiliated with the Mexican National Educational Workers Union (*SNTE*), a longtime ally of the PRI, are another case of hybrid brokers (Larreguy et al., 2017). Finally, the fourth category, independent brokers, includes brokers who are not embedded in interest organizations and have weak party commitments. Such brokers tend to “sell” their mobilization capacities to different parties in each electoral cycle. They are common in Peru, a country characterized by weak parties and party fluidity (Muñoz, 2014).<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion we would like to point to a few areas where more research is needed. First, while most of the literature studies contexts where clientelism is an ongoing relationship, we still know little about how the practice varies over time. Specifically, there are reasons to suspect that the types of goods that brokers distribute, the prevalence of the practice, and the profile of the targets, vary across the duration of the electoral cycle. For example, the mix between core and swing targets might shift as Election Day approaches. Indeed, in a recent paper, Greene (2016) uses panel data from Mexico to show that effective campaigns can affect voters preferences, converting pre-campaign swing voters into post-campaign opposition or loyal voters. At the same time, there are good reasons to believe that the reporting of clientelism might also vary throughout the campaign (Cantú & García-Ponce, 2015; Oliveros, 2019). Ethnographies as well as panel surveys can contribute a great deal towards our understanding of these temporal dynamics. Importantly, longitudinal studies can shed light on the extent to which partisan preferences or turnout propensities, key determinants of brokers’ targeting choices in most models of gift distribution, can indeed be treated as exogenous, or are actually the product of sustained clientelistic interactions.

Second, most of the literature we discussed sees the prevalence and dynamics of clientelism as a function of the availability and types of brokers, and most crucially, of client characteristics, including level of material need, partisanship, and turnout propensities. But there are other factors that likely affect clientelism. In particular, clientelism is often just one element in the non-programmatic toolkit, and parties tend to diversify campaign portfolios (Calvo & Murillo, 2019; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). How do the prevalence and dynamics of clientelism change when we take into account the use of other strategies? For example, we know that electoral intimidation is an effective, and much cheaper, form of demobilization, which on Election Day might prove the mathematical equivalent of buying votes (Collier & Vicente, 2014; Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, Meléndez, Osorio, & Nickerson, 2018). In this sense, the availability of violence infrastructures may reduce brokers’ incentives to engage in clientelism because prioritizing violence can free resources for personal enrichment. But party bosses presumably want voters to like them and not to fear them, and prefer brokers to use carrots rather than sticks. An interesting question is therefore how bosses varying monitoring capacities affect

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<sup>18</sup> For a description of different types of brokers see also Mares and Young (2016).

the mix of clientelistic and intimidatory tactics that brokers choose in such environments. Exploring how clientelism works amid violence is particularly relevant given the worsening security situation in many Latin American countries, as well as processes of democratic erosion across the region that lead to a rise in repression.

Third, recent developments in the field take seriously the agency of clients vis-à-vis the machine. This is an especially promising area for future inquiry. Most of the literature on clientelism has focused on elite-level strategies and “usually portrays clients as passive, myopic, nonstrategic, or mainly driven by short-term reactions to the actions of politicians” (Oliveros, 2018, p. 254). Most recently, however, scholars have called attention to the fact that clients are often the ones that initiate the clientelistic exchange (e.g., Nichter & Peress, 2017; Oliveros, 2016) and that they change loyalties if the party fails to deliver as promised (e.g., Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Zarazaga, 2014). We still know very little about the incentive structure that clients face when making sophisticated, strategic choices. How do clients choose between brokers when there is more than one option? Under what conditions clients decide to renege on their side of the deal? Do clients “take with one hand and vote with the other”? Second, we still know little about how clients perceive clientelistic transactions. This is important to understand what clients think they are getting from the machine. Few studies systematically explore how clients and the broader public evaluate clientelism from a normative point of view (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge and Nickerson, 2014; Weitz-Shapiro 2014). This is important to understand, for example, whether anti-vote buying campaigns resonate with the public, and what can be done to curb clientelism. We know that mass tolerance for corruption helps lock-in corrupt equilibria. Is this also true for clientelism, or can clientelism persist amid high levels of negative stigma?

## Appendix

Table A1: Percentage of respondents reporting clientelism across 19 Latin American Countries

	Person know	you You	N
Argentina	5.91% (0.61)	2.35% (0.39)	1488/1488
Bolivia	5.68% (0.42)	5.45% (0.41)	3010 /3011
Brazil	21.68% (1.07)	10.69% (0.80)	1485/ 1487
Chile	2.84% (0.42)	1.6% (0.32)	1548/1562
Colombia	14.48% (0.92)	7.81% (0.70)	1478/ 1472
Costa Rica	2.57% (0.41)	2.16% (0.37)	1520/1528
Dominican Republic	31.53% (1.20)	24.42% (1.11)	1497/1507
Ecuador	9.91% (0.78)	8.83% (0.74)	1473/ 1473
El Salvador	11.39% (0.82)	4.03% (0.51)	1501/1512
Guatemala	14.38% (0.91)	12.45% (0.86)	1474 /1486
Haiti	22.36% (1.16)	9.73% (0.79)	1288/1418
Honduras	21.74% (1.05)	18.06% (0.98)	1559/ 1556
Mexico	22.72% (1.08)	15.08% (0.92)	1510 / 1519
Nicaragua	9.11% (0.73)	5.51% (0.58)	1537/ 1543
Panama	8.59% (0.73)	6.13% (0.62)	1478/ 1484
Paraguay	21.6% (1.07)	12.35% (0.85)	1472/1482
Peru	9.1% (0.75)	5.77% (0.61)	1473/1473
Uruguay	9.99% (0.77)	3.39% (0.47)	1501/1505
Venezuela	4.05% (0.51)	2.7% (0.42)	1482/1483

Notes: DN/NA were coded as missing; Standard errors in parentheses. Source: The 2014 AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org).

Table A2: Comparison of percentage of respondents reporting clientelism with the direct estimate and the list experiment estimate across selected countries

	Direct Estimate	List Experiment Estimate	N	Source
Argentina 2015	1.75% (0.35)	14.88% (5.27)	1381/1325	Oliveros (2019)
Bolivia 2009	5.24% (0.49)	7.61% (4.55)	2099/2063	Kiewiet de Jonge (2015)
Chile 2009	5.62% (0.52)	2.88% (5.61)	1941/1882	Kiewiet de Jonge (2015)
El Salvador 2014	2.80% (0.70)	9.40% (6.80)	994/992	Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2018)
Guatemala 2011	3.78% (0.85)	14% (8.06)	503/500	Kiewiet de Jonge (2015)
Honduras 2009	3.50% (0.60)	20.7% (6.80)	1005/993	Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2015)
Mexico 2009	8.11% (0.77)	17.11% (5.01)	1246/1183	Kiewiet de Jonge (2015)
Nicaragua 2008	2.39% (0.58)	24.34% (5.53)	1003/995	Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012)
Uruguay 2009	0.68% (0.28)	-1.77% (5.41)	880/857	Kiewiet de Jonge (2015)

Notes: DN/NA were coded as missing; Standard errors in parentheses. List experiments from Kiewiet de Jonge (2015) were calculated with the available data using two-sample *t*-test with unequal variance.

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