

# Does the Left Breed Economic Informality?

## Party Strategies and Selective Enforcement in Brazil

Germán Feierherd\*

October 27, 2017

**[Please download the latest version [here](#)]**

Given their links to organized labor and reliance on working-class voters, leftist governments are expected to increase the number of people protected by job security rules. But do they? The long period of rule by left-leaning governments in Latin America since the early 2000s offers opportunities to test this supposition. As part of a broader project, I explore whether the left in power at the local level in Brazil uses its influence over labor inspectors to crack down on enterprises that employ non-contract, informal-sector workers. With a close-election regression-discontinuity design, I show that mayors from the Workers' Party (PT), far from encouraging a shift from unprotected (informal) to protected (formal) jobs, in fact increase the size of the informal sector. The PT's labor-market policies reflect its need to build a broad lower-class electoral coalition, one that includes both informal and formal-sector workers, whose preferences are in some ways at odds. My analysis reveals that the PT pursues a strategy of keeping barriers-to-entry to the formal sector, slowing down labor enforcement within small firms, and at the same time improving working conditions for informal-sector workers by incorporating them into worker-run informal sector enterprises.

---

\*Yale University. Contact: [german.feierherd@yale.edu](mailto:german.feierherd@yale.edu). Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2017 annual meetings of the APSA and the LASA. Matthew Amengual, Alejandro Bonvecchi, Natalia Bueno, Sebastián Etchemendy, Alvaro Forteza, Evelyn Huber, Greg Huber, Mathew McCubbins, Victoria Murillo, Frances Rosenbluth, David Rueda, Andrew Schrank, Ken Scheve, and Jazmin Sierra offered helpful comments. I thank Thad Dunning and Susan Stokes for their generous advice during this project.

The left in Latin America came to office, in the early 2000s, at a time when state-led models of economic development were collapsing and when the working classes increasingly found themselves in informal-sector jobs: without contracts or access to social security or other regulations and protections. Leftist governments might be expected to try to reverse this trend and expand the size of the formal sector, extending contracts, regulations, and protection to larger numbers of workers. After all, these parties had historic ties to labor unions. Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, or Workers' Party), in particular, grew out of the labor movement; the first PT leader to become the country's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, had been president of the powerful Metalworkers' Union.

Yet, I show that the strategies and impact of the left confound this prediction. The informal sector has often grown, not shrunk, under leftist governments. To understand why, it is important to consider a dilemma that the Latin American left has faced, particularly in the region's more industrialized and urbanized countries. Like parties elsewhere, the left has had to mobilize support among multiple constituencies, some of whose interests are in conflict with one another. Electoral pressures mean that the left has to appeal both to a core constituency of unions and formal workers, and to a more marginalized constituency of unemployed and informal-sector workers. These lower-class citizens have distinct and in some ways competing interests. Formal workers want higher wages and improved job security. They have few incentives to extend benefits to other groups.<sup>1</sup> Informal workers might want to cross these barriers but relatively few transition from informal to formal work.<sup>2</sup>

How do left-leaning parties resolve this tension? If all the left had to worry about were increasing wages and improving conditions for an undifferentiated working class, we would expect it to use the monitoring power of the state to maximize the number of workers who gain labor protections. Or, if it were simply focused on minimizing unemployment, it would weaken job-security laws to lower firms' costs of hiring additional workers. But, given its electoral needs and the segmented nature of the working classes, it keeps in place steep hiring and firing costs for

---

<sup>1</sup> See Lindbeck and Snower (1988, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case for low-skilled workers and during recession times. See Perry et al. (2007), p. 7.

protected workers, uses its monitoring capacity selectively, and seeks to improve wages and work conditions for workers who remain in the informal sector. My analysis therefore provides a political explanation for the persistence of the informal sector – a major feature of contemporary developing countries.

To evaluate the left’s dilemma, I use data and insights from Brazil. This country provides an excellent setting to evaluate political incentives for enforcement: labor regulations are burdensome and the labor supply at low wages (i.e., below the cut of the proposed standards) is substantial. It is in such a setting that we can expect leftist parties to engage in selective enforcement. In the larger project of which this paper is a part, I test observable implications of my argument at the national level. My focus here is on the strategies of local governments. In Brazil, mayors control critical aspects of labor policy and enforcement. For instance, they are able to quicken, slow down, and redirect state efforts at monitoring the employment policies of firms, at a fine-grained level. A central element of my argument is that left-leaning parties rely heavily on local leaders to mediate enforcement, which allows them to adjust national laws to heterogeneous local circumstances. Among Brazil’s parties I focus on the PT – one of the largest leftist parties in the world, the party in Brazil with the strongest ties to organized labor, and the only Brazilian leftist party with massive presence at the local level.

To test the implication that leftist parties, when in government, *increase* the size of the informal sector, I use an original municipal-level dataset with information on the relative size of the informal sector over time, the pace and incidence of labor inspections, the extent of informal-sector organizations and cooperatives, among other variables.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is a challenge, empirically, to discern the impact of partisanship, since which party is elected will likely vary as a function of potentially confounding variables (e.g., poverty rates and the structure of the local industry). I overcome this difficulty, in part, by using a regression discontinuity (RD) design in “close” mayoral elections. This design rests on a simple assumption: in close elections, winners

---

<sup>3</sup> In other parts of my project, I analyze how the partisan identity of the government is a key factor influencing workplace fatality rates and responses to economic liberalization

and losers are determined essentially by chance.<sup>4</sup> Hence, we expect them to be on average similar to each other on dimensions such as their ability to solicit support or the needs of the communities they represent.

These techniques render several confirming results. Comparing municipalities in which PT mayors barely won to those in which they barely lost the election, by the end of a PT mayor's term, the share of informal workers increases sharply. Payroll taxes collected in the district – a measure of the size of the formal sector – drop sharply. PT mayors also slow the pace of labor inspections and redirect these inspections to firms in which formal-sector workers are more likely to be employed. They thus block enforcement among small firms and those more likely to employ workers off the books. My study also offers evidence that local PT governments improve conditions for the informal sector. They increase the number of “solidarity enterprises” – mainly workers' cooperatives and worker-self-managed factories, enterprises in which work remains informal and less regulated but in which laborers enjoy a range of improved benefits and conditions. I complement these findings with a semi-automated text analysis of policy documents signed between local governments and the federal Ministry of Labor and extensive interviews with labor inspectors and local politicians.

Scholars who study party strategies in the developing world have noted that they often have to appeal to heterogeneous constituencies.<sup>5</sup> For instance, they may vary their campaign appeals or add impoverished groups to their electoral coalitions through vote-buying (Levitsky 2003; Luna 2014; Thachil 2014). I show that in addition to these strategies, once in office they can use public policy and selective enforcement to reconcile conflicting demands of heterogeneous constituencies. My construct of selective enforcement is closer to Holland's (2016; 2017) concept of “forbearance” – i.e., the intentional and revocable non-enforcement of law. But whereas her work focuses on the (re)distributive effects of forbearance, I argue that forbearance also allows parties to rectify the competing interests of multiple constituencies.

---

<sup>4</sup> The assumption for causal identification is “continuity” in potential outcomes. See Imbens and Lemieux (2008).

<sup>5</sup> For a seminal treatment of this topic, see Przeworski and Sprague (1986).

## The left's dilemma

Left-leaning governments have been a driving force behind welfare state development in Latin America, investing in welfare programs, making social spending more redistributive, and passing laws that raise the costs of hiring and firing workers (Huber and Stephens 2012; Murillo, Ronconi and Schrank 2011; Pribble 2013). But strong labor and social security protections are rendered useless if employers ignore them by hiring workers informally. Therefore, we might expect left-leaning governments to use the power of the state to extend the reach of job security rules and to encourage a shift from informal- to formal-sector work.

This view, however, ignores that the target constituency of the left is not internally homogeneous. As the European experience suggests, there are real tensions between the interests of formal- and informal-sector workers (Rueda 2005, 2007). Labor markets in Latin America are heavily regulated, especially in the costs of lay-offs (e.g., Heckman and Pagés 2000). This means that formal-sector workers are relatively insulated from the risk of unemployment. Furthermore, social security systems are largely based on contributory principles: the government delivers social insurance to incumbent and past formal workers who contributed to the system through payroll taxes. Thus, formal workers favor spending in programs that benefit them and they oppose increases in payroll taxes that go to finance general spending. They are especially opposed to labor-market deregulation, which they see as a threat to their jobs.

Workers in the informal sector, in turn, are generally unskilled and employed in small and unproductive firms that stay afloat by failing to comply with taxes and regulations.<sup>6</sup> These include self-employed individuals, workers of small firms, and small employers of unregistered businesses.<sup>7</sup> Because unemployment insurance is nonexistent in most developing countries, informal and unemployed workers prefer policies that increase their chances of employment, either formal or informal. These workers do not benefit from Bismarckian social insurance

---

<sup>6</sup> For a summary, see Tokman (1992), Perry et al. (2007) and Lederman et al. (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Conventional wisdom associates these workers with self-employed street vendors, self-appointed parking attendants, and waste pickers. Most informal workers, however, are salaried workers. They are typically employed in small shops and firms but a non-negligible share of them work in larger enterprises (Perry et al. 2007).

programs. Thus, they favor spending on non-contributory programs, such as cash transfers and non-contributory health insurance programs.

It comes as little surprise, then, that formal and informal workers lack a coherent class identity and belong to different organizations (Haggard, Kaufman and Long 2013; Portes and Hoffman 2003; Roberts 2002; Weyland 1996). Existing labor-market institutions are presumed to allow formal workers to demand wage increases that keep unemployment above the “natural” rate.<sup>8</sup> Thus, formal-sector workers have fought hard to preserve existing labor regulations and social security arrangements (Carnes 2014; Murillo 2001). Unions sometimes support policies that benefit informal workers but only insofar as these policies do not entail a reduction of benefits for incumbent formal workers (e.g., Garay 2016, p. 334). Informal-sector workers might hope to transition from the informal to the formal sector. But for many of them the more realistic goal is to demand governments to increase the supply of jobs and improve working conditions for low-skilled workers *in* the informal sector. In this line, studies have found that informal workers do not fight flexibility at work; instead of demanding the enforcement of job-security rules, they demand welfare benefits, access to social services, and infrastructure investments (Agarwala 2013; Collier and Handlin 2009; Dix 1989).

Some factors attenuate this divide. Formal workers sometimes face real chances of becoming unemployed and support policies that benefit informal-sector and unemployed workers (Mares and Carnes 2010; Carnes and Mares 2014).<sup>9</sup> Also, the informal sector is internally heterogeneous: some workers and small-firm owners are excluded from the formal sector by burdensome entry regulations, but others make a cost-benefit analysis about whether to take a formal-sector job, and decide against it. Some informal workers value the flexibility that comes with informal-sector jobs. Others receive social insurance from a family member who works in the formal sector and avoid double-paying for benefits. Still, a majority of workers in the informal

---

<sup>8</sup> See Lindbeck and Snower (1988) and Saint-Paul (1996). Economists working within multilateral organizations have advocated replacing job security rules with unemployment insurance programs. See, for instance, Holzmann, Vodopivec et al. (2011).

<sup>9</sup> But as long as they remain formally employed, these workers should not favor policies to lower firing and hiring costs.

sector are excluded, as indicated by the lower flows from informal to formal employment compared to those in the reverse direction (for a summary, see Perry et al. 2007).

Given these cross-pressures and the challenge of increasing net employment for low-income workers, left-leaning and populist parties face a dilemma, particularly in countries where a strong union movement coexists with a large informal sector. These parties could use the enforcement power of the state to crack down on firms that flaunt regulations. But in highly regulated labor markets, enforcing taxes and regulations on small firms would hurt many unskilled workers.<sup>10</sup> Another option, in theory, would be to weaken job-security laws and lower firms' costs of hiring additional workers – especially low-skilled individuals. But such labor-market liberalization would alienate the left's core working-class supporters. Conservative parties, not those of the left, are more likely to promote labor reforms to make formal employment less expensive and more flexible.

What can the left do in light of formal-informal conflicts? Scholars who have examined how parties appeal to socially fragmented constituencies primarily focus on the selective allocation of welfare benefits to capture the support of non-core impoverished groups (Levitsky 2003; Luna 2014; Thachil 2014). But the response to the left's dilemma goes deeper, influencing the very structure of labor markets. Here I consider two measures that governments use to appeal to informal workers: the strategic allocation of labor inspections and the implementation of policies that increase the attractiveness of informal-sector jobs, without turning them into formal-sector ones.

In most countries, labor inspectors oversee the whole of the labor code, including worker's formal registration with tax and social security agencies and the benefits attached to individual contracts.<sup>11</sup> For formal workers, low levels of enforcement of labor contracts increases competition from informal workers in industries where formal and informal laborers are

---

<sup>10</sup> To cite a few examples, Almeida and Carneiro (2012) find in Brazil that an increase in the rate of inspections reduces the number of workers informally employed and increases unemployment. For South Africa, Magruder (2012) finds that well-enforced collective bargaining agreements increase formal wages, lowers industry-level employment (by 8–13 percent) and reduces informal employment. For a review, see Betcherman (2012) and Freeman (2009).

<sup>11</sup> The exception are Anglo-Saxon countries, which divide labor enforcement into various agencies. See Piore and Schrank (2008).

substitutable, reducing the marginal product of labor and depressing formal-sector wages. Thus, they generally favor stricter enforcement of labor contracts and benefits.<sup>12</sup> Informal workers, in turn, are easily replaceable. They may fear that the enforcement of formal contracts will lower their chances of employment, particularly in industries and firms that compete on low wages.<sup>13</sup>

How can inspections be used as a strategy of the left? These governments can adjust the level of enforcement to local circumstances and firm-level exigencies. They can reduce the enforcement of labor contracts in places where the trade-off between compliance and employment is greatest, and increase enforcement in places where unions mobilize in favor of more state action or where forbearance is more likely to be regressive, benefiting large employers over workers.

In addition to lowering the cost of non-compliance, governments can increase incomes in the informal sector or ameliorate the effects of unemployment. They can promote non-contributory social policies targeted at informal-sector workers, subsidize the wages paid by informal enterprises, and create legal frameworks that allow informal-worker associations and cooperatives to gain access to public subsidies and credit lines. One example of these policies is the financial and legal support that governments give to informal-sector cooperatives and associations under the umbrella of what are termed *social and solidarity economy* (SSE) initiatives. These programs seek to organize workers marginalized from formal employment to strengthen labour standards *within* the informal economy. Solidarity organizations include small production units self-managed by workers and financed by small loans and credits. Organized labor has sometimes supported these initiatives, but not without reservations.

These two policy strategies are not the monopoly of the left. For instance, Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez and Magaloni (2016) and Garay (2016) argue that strong center-right parties played a crucial role in the expansion of non-contributory benefits to the informal poor. But the policy choices of left- and right-leaning governments are restricted by the electoral coalitions that

---

<sup>12</sup> Yet some formal workers may profit from firms having access to cheap and flexible labor: access to cheaper employment may increase firm productivity, which can potentially allow formal workers to extract higher wages.

<sup>13</sup> The elasticity of labor demand is greater in industries that rely mostly on unskilled workers because of scale effects (labor is a large share of the total cost of production) and substitution effects (unskilled workers are more easily replaceable with capital). See the Hicks-Marshall laws of derived demand.



support them. Conservative parties can respond to the challenge posed by a growing base of informal workers by promoting labor reforms to make employment less expensive and more flexible; they can also take a battery of measures to moderate unions' power. The left is less likely to take such measures. The left and the right also face different restrictions when it comes to enforcement. In countries with autonomous and capable labor inspectors and unions that pressure big firms into compliance, conservative governments may actually prefer an equal exposure to regulations over unevenly enforced regulations.<sup>14</sup>

What is the expected impact of the left's strategy on the size of the informal sector? If governments reduce the expected cost of employing workers informally by lowering the enforcement of labor contracts or improve the quality of informal-sector jobs, we would expect the informal sector to grow. Lax enforcement reduces the expected penalty of employing workers "off the books" and blurs the difference between the average formal and informal sector jobs, reinforcing the incentives of some workers to remain informal (e.g., Almeida and Carneiro 2012; Ronconi 2010; Magruder 2012). Similarly, policies supporting the informal sector, such as cash transfers and micro-credits for informal organizations, associations, and workers' cooperatives can make informal jobs more attractive, especially for workers whose prospects of being formally employed are small – thereby fomenting the informal sector (e.g., Frölich et al. 2014; Garganta and Gasparini 2015; Levy 2010).

## Hypotheses

In sum, I argue that workers are a heterogeneous target constituency for the left, which uses a mix of non-enforcement and public policies to ameliorate the conditions of informal-sector workers. I test the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** In localities in which the left accedes to public office, the size of the informal sector increases.

---

<sup>14</sup> Take, for instance, the case of the citrus industry in Argentina. Amengual (2016) writes that "the largest members [of the industry] were the ones that were most likely to comply... creating a competitive advantage for smaller firms that could dodge regulatory requirements" (p. 99).

**Hypothesis 2:** In localities in which the left accedes to public office, labor inspections aimed at detecting the presence of non-contract workers will be halted or slowed down.

**Hypothesis 3:** In localities in which the left accedes to public office, investments aimed at improving the conditions of informal-sector workers will grow.

The size of the informal sector depends on a broader range of factors and policies other than the pace of labor inspections or the implementation of social and solidarity initiatives but these two policies are important because they reflect whether governments seek to incorporate more workers into the formal sector or rely, instead, on a strategy that contributes to the growth of the informal sector.

## **Case selection: Brazil**

To evaluate the left's dilemma, I focus on the case of Brazil. This country has one of the most rigid labor codes in the world, dating to the 1940s. All employees must have a work permit (the *carteira de trabalho*), which entitles the worker to a number of benefits paid by the employer. Employers must pay eight percent of the worker's salary to a severance indemnity fund (the *Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço* or FGTS).<sup>15</sup> Workers cannot work more than 44 hours per week, overtime pay must be at least 1.5 times the normal hourly wage, paid leave is three fourths of a normal wage, and paid maternity leave is 120 days. Employers must also give prior notice of dismissal at least one month in advance; once the worker receives this notice she is granted two hours a day to look for a job. Workers with non-justified dismissals receive monetary compensation from the employer, on top of that accumulated in the worker's job security fund.<sup>16</sup>

Yet only a segment of the labor force enjoys these generous benefits. Half of workers in the country are either self-employed in the informal sector or employed in informal jobs – i.e., they work without a work permit or *carteira*. The mean share of informal workers in a municipality in 2010 was about 60%. These workers earn low wages and are not covered by social insurance –

---

<sup>15</sup> The employer deposits the funds in a government-owned bank in the name of each worker. The sum of all these accounts is held in a single account and used by the government to finance infrastructure projects.

<sup>16</sup> In July, 2017, the Brazilian Congress passed an overhaul of Brazil's labor laws easing employment protections.

although they have gained access to a range of transfers and programs, particularly after the PT won the presidency in 2002 (Garay 2016; Pribble 2013). The focus on Brazil also allows for a clear measurement of the informal sector, as the possession of a working card clearly determines whether an employment relationship is subject to standard labor legislation, taxation, and social protection (ILO 2002, p. 126).

Within Brazil, I focus on PT mayors because: (1) the PT stands out as a strong leftist party with links to both formal and informal workers; and (2) municipal governments have important policy tools that influence the work conditions of both formal and informal employees.

### **The Workers' Party: Between the unions and the *Economia Solidária***

Brazil has a highly fragmented party system composed of weak and personalistic parties (Mainwaring 1999; Samuels 1999). The PT is, however, considered the strongest party in Brazil and an exception to the rule of highly personalistic and patronage-oriented parties (Samuels and Zucco 2013).<sup>17</sup> The party's strong organization and clear programmatic goals provide some level of uniformity in PT-held governments, despite the heterogeneity of Brazil's municipalities.

The tensions between different segments of the workforce have deeply shaped the trajectory of the PT. The party grew out of the industrial labor movement in the periphery of metropolitan São Paulo and the struggles against the military dictatorship in the late 1970s and 1980s. Following democratization in 1985, extensive poverty and inequality did not translate into massive electoral support for the PT or other leftist parties. Instead, the vote of the poor remained with conservative and populist parties, which attracted the poor using traditional clientelistic networks (Przeworski, Bresser-Pereira and Maravall 1993; Weyland 1996). In 1999, the president of the party, José Dirceu, argued that "the main problem [that the party faces] is to consolidate its alliances in society, because other parties do not represent some sectors, but also because we do not represent them," including "informal-sector workers and small businesses" (Barreto, Magalhães and Trevas 1999, p. 18).

---

<sup>17</sup> The other left-wing parties are either organizationally weak or have little presence at the municipal level.

Several victories at the local level led the PT to a period of ideological transformation that allowed it to enlarge its coalition – but not without conflict, especially between the party and its allied unions. PT mayors in cities such as Porto Alegre and São Paulo faced cross-cutting pressures “between pleasing the party’s traditional base (unions and social movements) and meeting the needs of those with less obvious means of voicing their demands” (Hunter 2010, p. 96).<sup>18</sup> For much of the 1980s, unions linked to the PT were more sympathetic to the interests of unorganized workers, building cross-cutting alliances with social movements and neighborhood associations (Keck 1989; Seidman 1994). However, during the market reforms of the 1990s, these unions became more pragmatic, self-oriented, and institutionalized (Antunes and Santana 2014; Sluyter-Beltrão 2010). At the same time the PT started to prioritize electoral victories, its allied unions became more focused on preserving jobs and wages for their members.

## **Brazilian mayors and local labor markets**

Municipal governments have important policy tools that influence the work conditions of both formal and informal employees. All businesses and firms must register with the local tax agency and obtain an operating permit from the local government. In the process, government officials monitor workplaces, issue permits to operate machinery, and ensure that construction projects conform to municipal legislation, zoning laws, and municipal building codes. Local governments also provide basic public goods and services: they oversee hospitals and public health facilities; design and implement employment programs; put in place cash transfers and other social welfare policies; fund credit lines and subsidies to small firms and solidarity enterprises; collect and share information on work-related accidents; and establish municipal councils where civil society organizations and public sector actors discuss these and other public policies.

Brazilian mayors also exert influence over labor markets through the Federal System of Labor Inspection (SFIT). SFIT is a federal government agency that enforces labor regulations. It does so through a decentralized network of headquarters, or *superintendências*, which are located in each

---

<sup>18</sup> See also Baiocchi (2003), pp. 4 and 23.

state capital.<sup>19</sup> These regional offices are subdivided into 114 regional offices (called *gerências*). These offices conduct on-site inspections in multiple municipalities.<sup>20</sup> Inspectors are selected through competitive public service exams and report to the *superintendente*, a politically-appointed individual who is not necessarily a career auditor.<sup>21</sup>

In interviews with inspectors, union leaders, and local officials, it became clear that local governments influence field operations of the SFIT. The SFIT is severely understaffed: about 2,800 inspectors are responsible for auditing firms that employ a workforce of 100 million, spread across 5,500 municipalities. SFIT inspectors therefore rely on local officials for resources and information. And, although SFIT local offices receive general guidelines from the agency's national headquarters, ground-level inspectors retain considerable discretion over which establishments they visit, which rules they oversee most aggressively, whether they consider an irregularity to be a constitute violation, and whether they deal with it informally or with a citation and adjudication process. Inspectors' discretionary power and reliance on local resources allows local officials to influence how inspectors interpret and enforce the law.

## Research design

I use a close-election RD design to estimate the effect of a mayor's partisanship on informality and enforcement. At the sub-state level, Brazil has 5,564 municipal governments headed by mayors, who are elected by popular vote for a four-year term. I study close races in the 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 municipal electoral contests, a period that encompasses five federal administrations: two PSDB governments from 1994 to 2002 and three PT governments from 2003 to 2012.

---

<sup>19</sup> Twenty-six plus one for the federal district.

<sup>20</sup> After their visits, inspectors notify the firm of any violation of the labor code. The size of the fines varies but experts believe they are "high enough to curtail breaches of the law, especially in small and medium enterprises" (Cardoso and Lage 2006, p. 6).

<sup>21</sup> Inspectors must report to the superintendent in two cases: to bring an injunction against a company or a worksite and to request a special funds for worksite visits to distant municipalities.

Close-election RD designs rest on a simple assumption: in close elections, winners and losers are determined essentially by chance.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, municipalities where a candidate from the PT barely wins should be, on average, indistinguishable from municipalities in which a PT candidate loses by a small margin. The only difference between them is that one set of municipalities is governed by PT mayors while the other set is governed by mayors from other parties. Therefore, I restrict the sample to municipalities in which one of the top two candidates belonged to the PT. To estimate the effect of PT incumbency, I use local-linear regression with triangular kernel weights around two bandwidths,  $h$  and  $2 \cdot h$ , estimated using the optimal function developed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012). The appendix shows analogous results using the bandwidth selected by the Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014) estimator and their bias-corrected confidence intervals.<sup>23</sup>

The identification assumption that in the absence of the treatment (having a PT mayor), municipalities on both sides of the cutoff should look on average alike is essentially unverifiable. But no statistically significant differences are discovered for units with and without a PT mayor for a number of relevant pre-treatment covariates.<sup>24</sup>

## Dependent variables

Below I describe the main variables I use in my analysis. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the main dependent variables. PT races only include municipalities in which one of the top two candidates belonged to the PT.

**Informal sector.** A key outcome variable I use in my analysis is the size of the informal sector. I investigate the effect of a PT victory on two measures of labor informality. The first is the share of informal workers in the economy as discerned in the Brazilian demographic censuses of 2000

---

<sup>22</sup> For a full derivation of the RD estimand see Imbens and Lemieux (2008).

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix, A.4.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix, A.1 and A.2, for more details.

| Variable                  | Overall Sample |          |        | PT Races |          |       | Period     |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------|--------|----------|----------|-------|------------|
|                           | Mean           | Std Dev. | N      | Mean     | Std Dev. | N     |            |
| % waged informal workers  | 36.48          | 17.31    | 11,067 | 32.88    | 18.85    | 1,222 | 2000, 2010 |
| % informal workers (all)  | 66.61          | 21.65    | 11,067 | 60.09    | 23.79    | 1,222 | 2000, 2010 |
| Social Security taxes p/c | 451.94         | 576.12   | 10,952 | 652.73   | 804.24   | 1,605 | 2000-2012  |
| Inspections p/1,000c      | 2.94           | 4.3      | 22,214 | 4.1      | 5.52     | 2,458 | 1996-2012  |
| Severance fund p/w        | 42             | 173.21   | 9,451  | 35.53    | 124.55   | 1,596 | 2004-2012  |
| % undeclared workers      | 9.65           | 16.55    | 18,178 | 7.85     | 14.68    | 2,213 | 1996-2012  |
| SSEs created p/1,000c     | 0.68           | 1.79     | 21,700 | 0.59     | 1.46     | 2,436 | 1996-2012  |
| Total SSEs p/1,000c       | 2.2            | 4.37     | 11,202 | 2.25     | 4.18     | 1,755 | 2005, 2012 |

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variables.

and 2010.<sup>25</sup> I operationalize this variable in two ways: as the share of *wage* workers who do not have a labor card, and as the share of non-card-holding workers, including both *waged* and *self-employed* workers. I study the effect of a PT victory in 1996 on the share of informal workers in 2000, and that of a PT victory in 2008 on the share of informal workers in 2010. Since we expect – other things being equal – that the larger the percentage of informal-sector workers, the smaller the revenues coming from social security taxes, I investigate the effect of a PT victory on the amount of Social Security taxes collected from the paychecks of formal workers. I consider the effect of PT victories on tax revenues for three mayoral cohorts: 2000, 2004, and 2008.<sup>26</sup> I consider the total number of taxes collected during a mayor’s term, divided by the number of people in the municipality and adjusted for inflation.

**Labor inspections.** My theory predicts a go-slow strategy by leftist mayors on labor inspections. As a measure of enforcement efforts, I use data on the number of labor inspections at the municipal level for the period 1996–2012, normalized by computing the 1,000 per capita number of inspections during a mayor’s term.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the number of inspections, I include the amount of unpaid taxes on the workers’ severance indemnity fund (per visited worker) collected by inspectors (available since 2004) and the share of workers “off the books” (i.e.,

<sup>25</sup> This data is made available by the Centro de Estudos da Metrópole. See <http://www.fflch.usp.br/centrodametropole/>.

<sup>26</sup> Data on social security taxes is available as of 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Results are robust to alternative ways of normalizing this variable; for instance, taking the logarithm.

without labor cards) found during inspections. The unpaid taxes on the workers' severance indemnity fund collected by inspectors serves as an indicator of the enforcement of working conditions in the formal sector; the share of unreported workers found during inspections indicates efforts toward enforcing labor contracts.<sup>28</sup> I also make use of the 2003 Enterprise Surveys (ES), which incorporates data on 1,642 registered firms in 419 municipalities and 13 (out of 27) states on aspects of business–state relations. Researchers asked firm managers about the number of labor and social security inspections they received during the previous year. With this data, I test whether the agency shifts enforcement toward larger or smaller firms and to firms with more or fewer informal workers in PT-held municipalities.

**Solidarity Enterprises (SSEs).** In 2005–2007 and 2012–2013, the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy (SENAES) – created by President Lula da Silva in 2003 – conducted national censuses, which produced a comprehensive account of the number and operation of SSEs in Brazil.<sup>29</sup> These censuses counted 20,000 collective, permanent organizations engaged in the production of goods and services, including associations, cooperatives, and self-managed enterprises. I focus on two outcomes: the number of SSEs per 1,000 capita at the end of a mayor's term, for those mayors elected in 2000 and 2008, and the number of organizations created during a mayor's term since 1996 that were still in operation at the time of any of the censuses (excluding SSEs created after the end of the mayoral term).

## **PT mayors increase the size of the informal sector**

Do PT mayors increase the number of workers in their municipalities who are employed in the informal sector? The answer is, they do. The graphical analysis reveals that municipalities governed by the PT have, on average, a larger share of informal workers (Figure 1, panel a). This finding is confirmed by regression analysis, comparing treatment (PT-governed) and control (non-PT-governed) municipalities (Figure 1, panel b). The effect is not only statistically

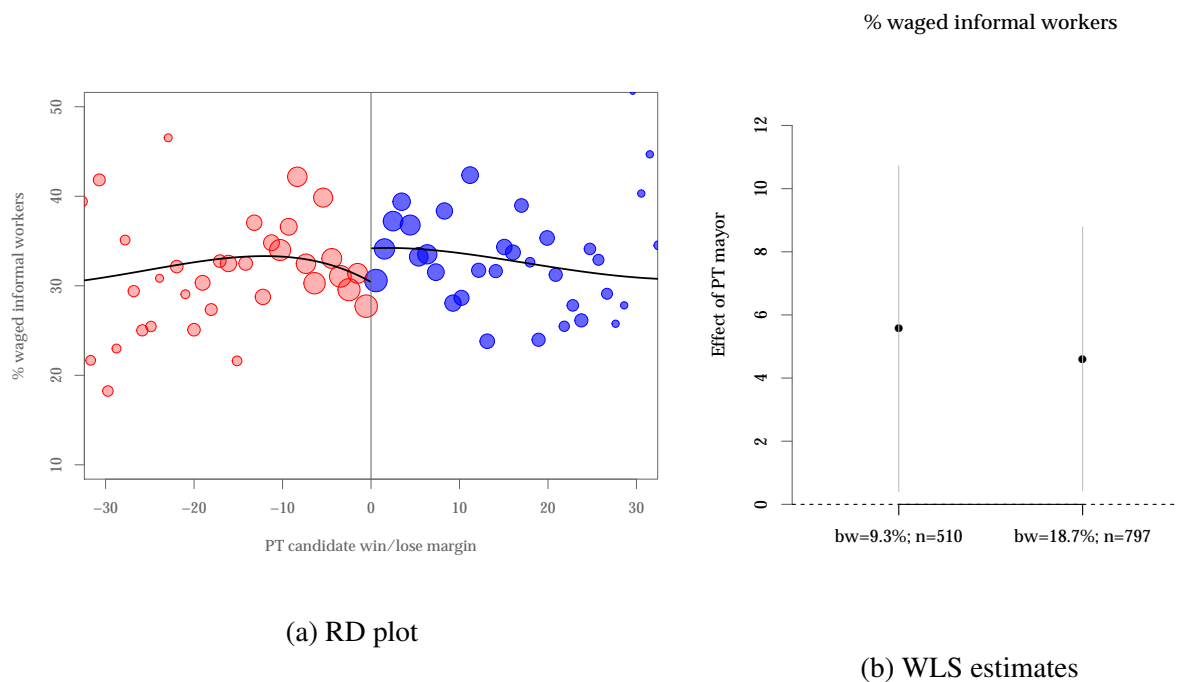
---

<sup>28</sup> Data was provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Labor.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://sies.ecosol.org.br/atlas>.



significant at conventional levels, but also large. A PT victory increases the number of informal workers by six percentage points on average.<sup>30</sup> These results are robust to controlling for past levels of informality.<sup>31</sup>

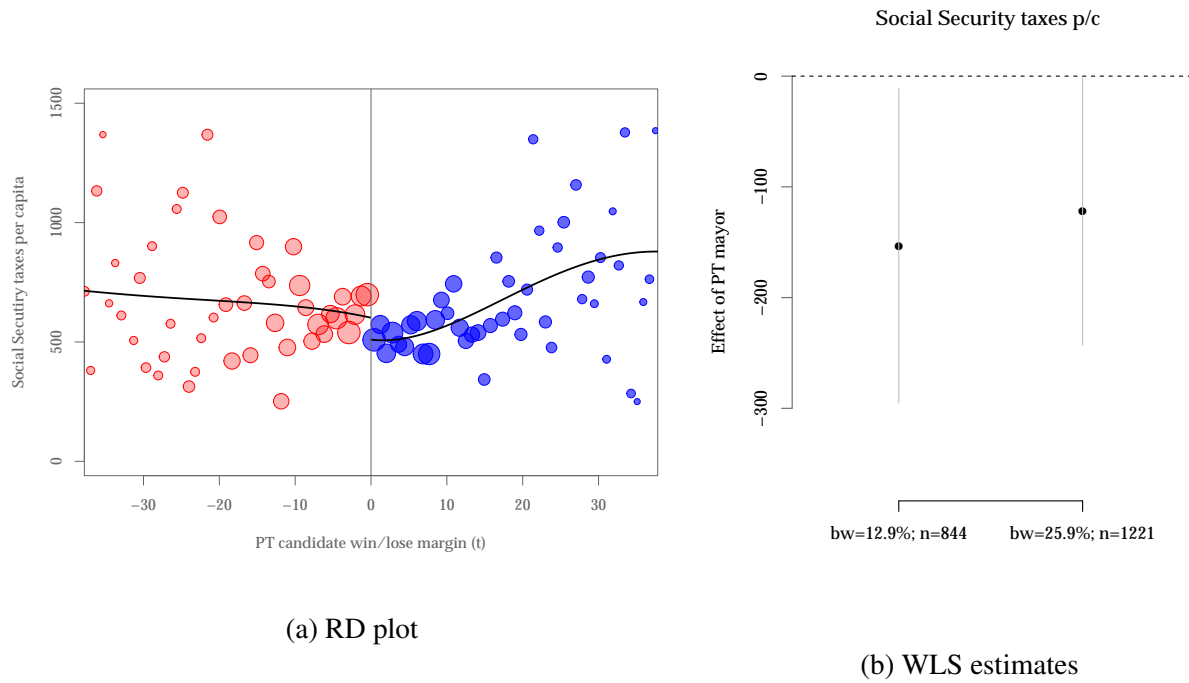


**Figure 1:** RD for the effect of a PT victory on the share of waged informal workers over the total number of salaried workers at the municipal level (2000, 2010). Panel (a) The circles depict bin averages of the share of informal workers at the municipal level in places where a PT candidate wins or loses. Panel (b) WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals.

Additional evidence on labor market segmentation comes from the social security taxes that the federal government collects from the paychecks of formal workers. These contributions, about 10% of a worker's salary (20% for a self-employed worker), guarantee that the contributor and his or her family receive payments in the event of illness, injury, accident, or pregnancy. They also cover death benefits for surviving family members. In municipalities controlled by the PT, tax collection drops by roughly 150 *reais* per capita for the whole mayoral term (Figure 2, panel b). The graphical analysis further confirms this finding (Figure 2, panel a).

<sup>30</sup> Results counting both salaried and self-employed informal workers are analogous – in size and statistical significance – to those presented here; see Appendix, A.3.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix, A.5.

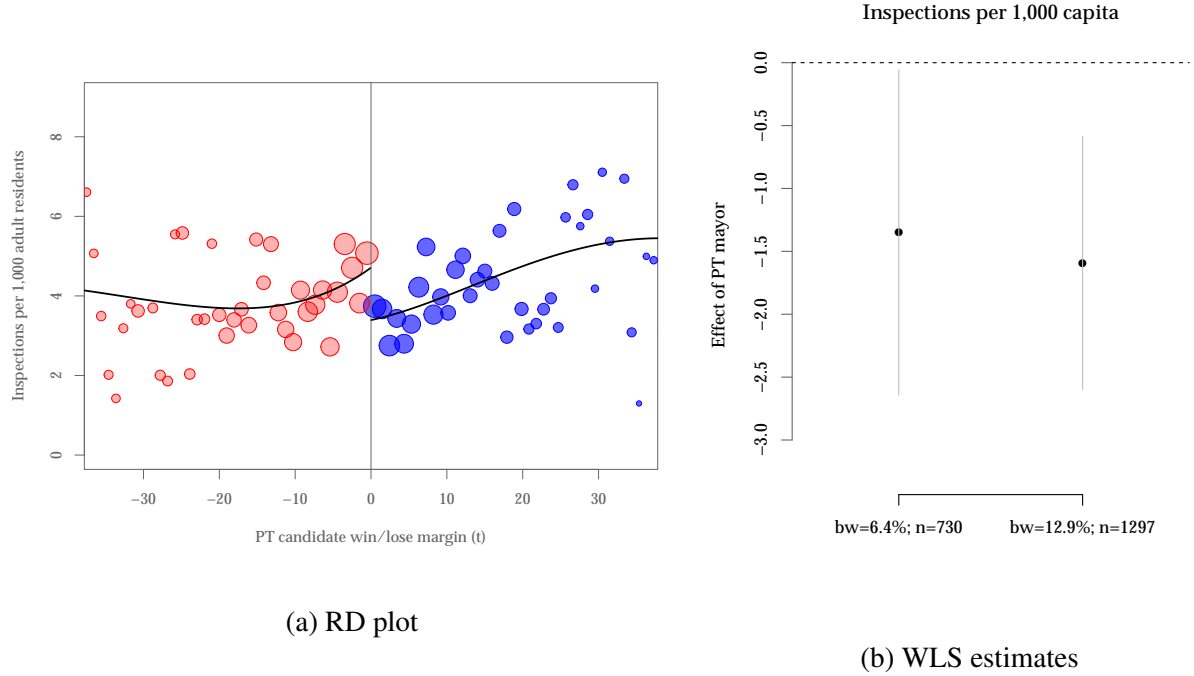


**Figure 2:** RD for the effect of a PT victory on the amount of social security taxes collected during a mayor's term, divided by population and adjusted for inflation (2000-2012). Panel (a) The circles depict bin averages of per capita social security taxes collected at the municipal level in places where a PT candidate wins or loses. The fitted lines were estimated using local-linear regression. Panel (b) WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals.

## PT mayors enforce labor law selectively

We have seen that the PT increases the size of the informal sector. Do they do so partly through lax enforcement, thus reducing pressure on firms to convert positions from informal- to formal-sector status? My analysis indicates that this is the case. In places where the PT wins by a small margin, firms are subject to fewer inspections than places where the PT loses by a small margin (Figure 3). And the effect is substantial. A PT victory reduces inspections by 50% percent relative to the average number of inspections at the local level: roughly 1.5 per 1,000 capita for the entire four-year period. This effect does not depend on the party controlling the federal government. The number of inspections drops (and the informal sector grows) under PT mayors,

both during periods in which the PT was out of office at the federal level (1997-2000) and during periods in which the PT controlled the presidency but not the Ministry of Labor (2009-2012).<sup>32</sup>

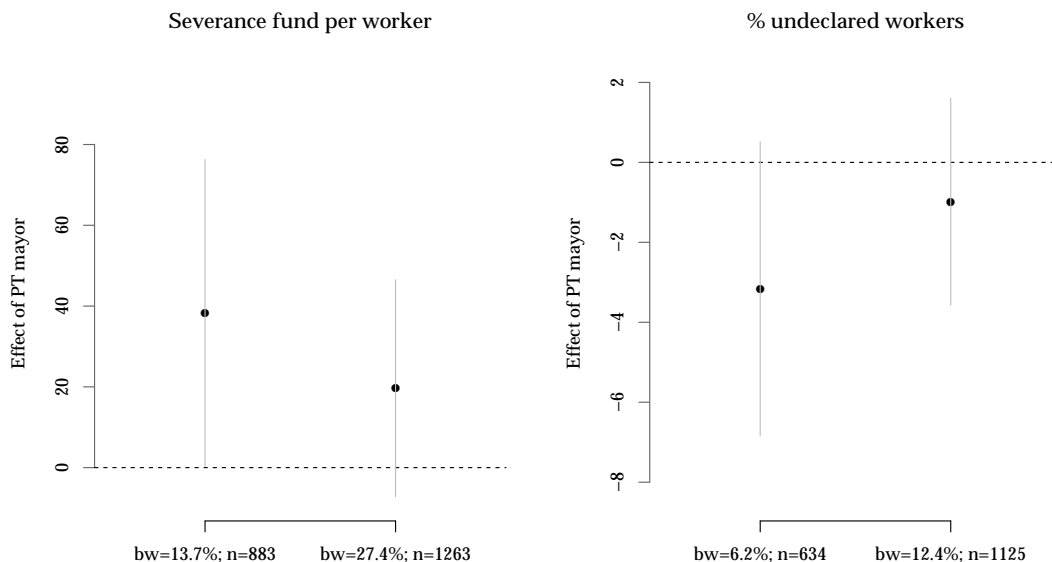


**Figure 3:** RD for the effect of a PT victory on the number of per capita inspections (1996–2012). Panel (a) The circles depict average number of inspections per 1,000 capita at the municipal level during a mayor’s term in places where a PT candidate wins or loses. The fitted lines were estimated using local-linear regression regression. Panel (b) WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals.

I suggested that leftist governments would move slowly on enforcing labor contracts and would focus, instead, on enforcing protections for incumbent formal workers. And indeed, although point estimates are substantially noisier, a victory by the PT also influences the type of labor violations that are most vigorously enforced. Figure 4 shows results for analogous local-linear regressions. In PT-controlled municipalities, inspectors focus on detecting labor violations that affect formal rather than informal workers: they focus on the collection of payments for the workers’ severance fund. They pay little attention to the presence of unreported workers.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix, A.4.

<sup>33</sup> This last effect is not statistically significant at conventional levels.



**Figure 4:** WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals for the effect of a PT victory on enforcement. *Severance fund per worker* is the amount of unpaid FGTS taxes collected by inspectors over the total number of workers covered. *% undeclared workers* is the number of undeclared workers found during an inspection over the total number of workers covered.

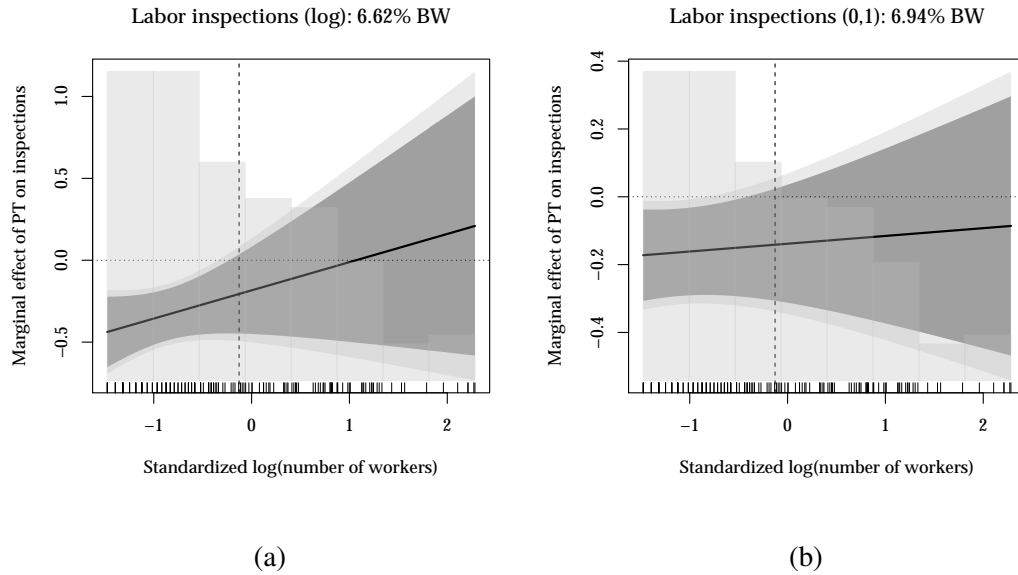
Similarly, I hypothesized that leftist incumbents would move slowly on the enforcement of labor protections in firms employing a larger share of informal workers. It is in these firms in which the trade-off between enforcement and employment is acute. To evaluate this claim, I use firm-level data from the Enterprise Surveys.<sup>34</sup> I code the dependent variable as one if a firm received at least one inspection and zero otherwise. I also show results for the logged number of times each firm was visited by a labor inspector. I consider two proxies for the share of workers that a given firm employs without offering them a contract: the size of the firm, measured by the standardized number of workers employed by the firm; and the share of workers without a written contract “in a typical firm your size in your industry,” as reported by firm managers. As before, I use local-linear regression at the optimal IK bandwidths.<sup>35</sup> To evaluate interaction effects, I add

<sup>34</sup> The World Bank’s Enterprise Analysis Unit selected firms from a sample stratified by size, industry, and region. The sampled industries are auto parts, chemicals, electronics, food, garments, machinery, textile, and wood manufacturing.

<sup>35</sup> The appendix shows analogous results at  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$ .

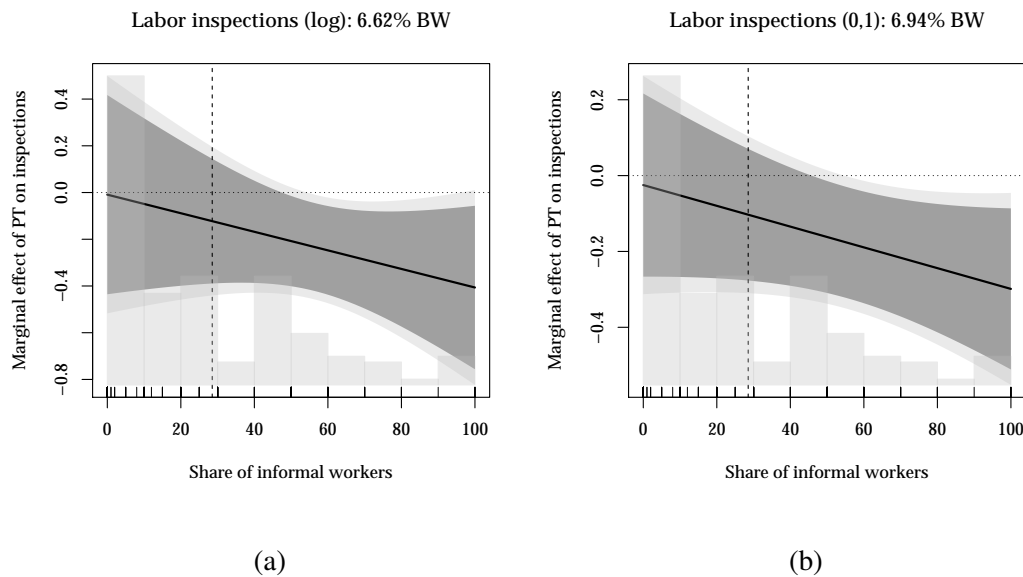
an interaction term between PT incumbency and the moderator variable; I cluster standard errors at the city level.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 5 shows that partisanship effects are moderated by the size of the firm, for both the number of labor inspections and probability of receiving an inspection. Small firms located in places governed by the PT receive fewer inspections than the average. Moving one standard deviation down from the average firm (54 employees) reduces labor inspections at the firm level by almost 30%. Similarly, the negative effect of PT mayors on the likelihood of receiving an inspection only reaches statistical significance for firms below the average size. Firms employing large numbers of informal workers also receive fewer visits from inspectors and are less likely to be inspected at least once in PT-held municipalities, consistent with the hypothesis that the PT blocks inspections to protect job sources for informal workers.



**Figure 5:** Marginal effect of PT-incumbency on firms receiving a labor inspection conditional on firm size. 90% confidence intervals in dark grey and 95% confidence intervals in grey, calculated using clustered robust standard errors.

<sup>36</sup> Appendix B.1 shows balance and density tests, using the cohort of mayors elected in 2000.

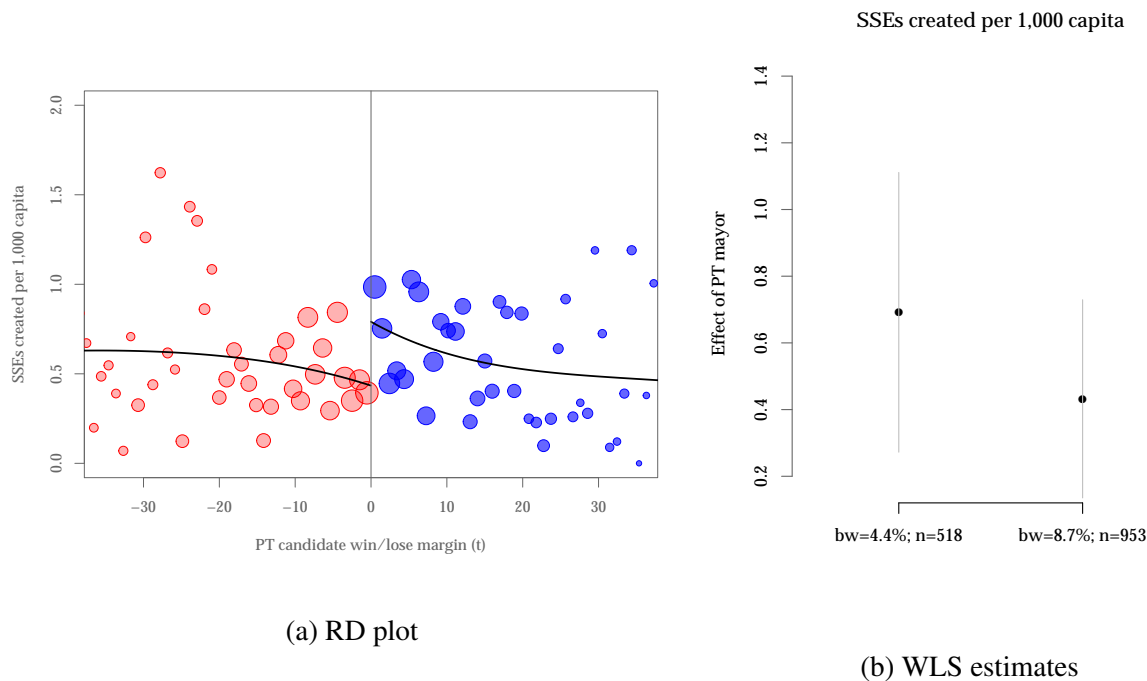


**Figure 6:** Marginal effect of PT-incumbency on firms receiving a labor inspection conditional on the share of informal workers. 90% confidence intervals in dark grey and 95% confidence intervals in grey, calculated using clustered robust standard errors.

## PT mayors improve conditions in the informal sector

In addition to lowering the rate of inspections strategically to maximize the employment opportunities of informal workers, mayors can ameliorate the conditions of informal-sector work by encouraging the creation of self-managed enterprises and associations. Indeed, my analyses show that PT-controlled municipalities drive up the number of SSEs. I estimate the effect of a PT victory on the number of SSEs created during a mayor's term that were still in operation by the time of a census. Of the SSEs that were still in operation at the time of the censuses, roughly 0.8 per 1,000 capita more were created during the tenure of a PT mayor (Figures 7). Municipalities governed by the PT home almost 2.5 per 1,000 capita more SSEs than municipalities where the PT barely lost (Figures 8).

The conventional wisdom is that poor and unskilled workers must fend for themselves in the informal sector. But in fact, leftist governments have improved standards in the informal economy by providing technical and financial services to cooperatives and associations of informal and

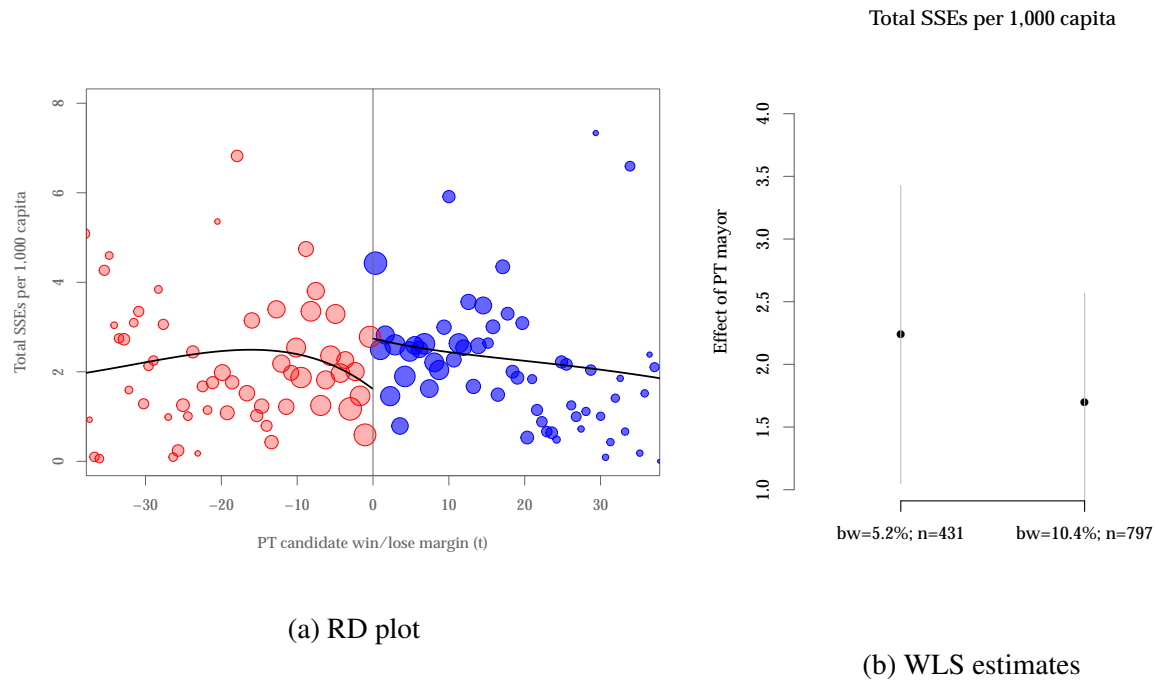


**Figure 7:** RD for the effect of a PT victory the number of SSEs (1996–2012). Panel (a) The circles depict number of SSEs (per 1,000 capita) created during a mayor’s term (1996–2012). The fitted lines were estimated using local-linear regression. Panel (b) WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals.

unemployed workers. They pursue this strategy, I suggest, as an alternative to one that might open formal-sector jobs to larger numbers of informal-sector workers.

## Additional evidence: mechanisms and heterogeneous effects

I have shown that a PT victory causes a sharp rise in the number of workers informally employed; a drop in the collection of payroll taxes; a decline in the number of labor inspections and a shift in the target of labor inspectors away from small firms, which have more employees who are “off the books,” and toward large firms; and a rise in the number of organizations that aid informal-sector workers. My theory links all of these effects with the left’s dilemma of needing to simultaneously court formal- and informal-sector workers. This section turns to additional evidence that illustrates mechanisms at play and evaluates additional theoretical expectations.



**Figure 8:** RD for the effect of a PT victory the number of SSEs (2000,2008). Panel (a) The circles depict the total number of SSEs (per 1,000 residents) in the municipality. The fitted lines were estimated using local-linear regression regression. Panel (b) WLS point estimates at  $\hat{h}$  and  $2 \cdot \hat{h}$  with 95% (gray) confidence intervals.

**Fieldwork interviews.** How do PT mayors influence field-level operations of SFIT? My interviews reveal two strategies that local politicians use to influence inspectors, one *ex ante*, the other *ex post*. The latter takes place after an inspector visits a worksite and issues a citation. Firm managers seek to reduce the cost of an inspection by asking local officials to intercede with the superintendent. Superintendents lack direct control over inspectors but they do act as brokers for stakeholders, including local governments.<sup>37</sup> One superintendent explained this process to me: “There is a lot of conflict between state and local governments and inspectors. . . When someone comes to me with a complaint or request, I participate informally in the negotiations. . . I do not tell inspectors what to do, but I call their supervisor and he comes to me. I have a political relationship with him.”<sup>38</sup> Along the same lines, one inspector explained that local governments often pressure inspectors and contact superintendents to slow down or redirect enforcement

<sup>37</sup> I interviewed the superintendents of four *superintendências* and they all suggested they behaved in this way.

<sup>38</sup> Interview SP10



efforts. He added: “The superintendent should not have a lot of influence over what we do, but he has.”<sup>39</sup>

Local governments also give access to information that allows labor inspectors to plan operations. They develop reports about regions and economic sectors, pinpointing locales where informal workers and child labor are concentrated.<sup>40</sup> Municipalities also sign cooperation agreements (*parcerias*) with the enforcement agency, which commit them to provide resources for enforcement.<sup>41</sup> And municipal governments sponsor public forums and councils that include SFIT officials, local business associations, and unions. The fact that local governments contribute resources for enforcement translates in local influence over SFIT operations. One inspector emphasized inspectors’ autonomy from political authorities; nonetheless, he noted that: “Having a good dialog with local governments and unions is important because they can tell us where to go, which sectors need to be inspected, whether the local government is already working to help firms that are struggling, and which sectors and employers are more troublesome”<sup>42</sup> Another inspector added: “Sometimes in search of [political] consensus, you end up not enforcing the law.”<sup>43</sup>

My interviews also help understand the motivations behind PT’s segmented enforcement strategy. PT officials justified their demand for “flexible” enforcement as a necessity in the context of poverty and inadequate social policies. For instance, one state legislator argued that the PT viewed the labor market through social, and not just economic, lenses: “The neoliberal parties do not care about social development; the PSDB, for example, they only care about productivity... They think that having more unemployment is good because it helps to lower wages. We want everyone to be able to work in decent conditions.”<sup>44</sup> When I asked him what “decent conditions” implied in terms of state action, he added that “smaller firms, including those in the solidarity economy, create lots of jobs and income. The state needs to support them. Inspections should focus on larger firms with more capacity to comply with the law.”

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview SP8

<sup>40</sup> Interviews BH3, RGDS1, and SP1.

<sup>41</sup> PT-held governments signed 25% of all these agreements between 1996–2012. See Appendix, Section C.

<sup>42</sup> Interview BH3

<sup>43</sup> Interview RGDS12

<sup>44</sup> Interview BH4.

**Text analysis of policy agreements.** I showed that the number of SSEs increases during the government of PT mayors. But do local governments take explicit actions to foster the creation of SSEs? The text analysis of all the *parcerias* or cooperation agreements signed by PT mayors and the federal Ministry of Labor between 1996–2012 provides supportive evidence of PT mayors’ strategy vis-à-vis informal workers.<sup>45</sup> I analyze the content of these documents using the Structural Topic Model (STM) developed by Roberts et al. (2014). This model estimates both the content and prevalence of topics in the text as a function of covariates (in my case, simply state and year fixed effects). Of the topics identified by the model, many outline a regime of government support for SSEs and informal-sector workers, including terms such as *solidarity*, *inclusion*, *family*, and *allowance* (indicating support for workers enrolled in *Bolsa Familia*).<sup>46</sup>

**Trade liberalization.** Additional evidence supporting my argument comes from the evaluation of additional theoretical expectations about the left’s strategy under varying economic and political conditions. The left’s imperative to shield vulnerable workers will be especially urgent in settings that suffer upward shocks in unemployment. In Brazil, one such shock followed trade liberalization during the 1990s. According to Dix-Carneiro and Kovak (2017), regions facing larger tariff reductions experienced larger declines in both earnings and employment levels and an increase in informal employment. I follow these authors, who construct a measure of liberalization-induced price changes by taking into account regional differences in the size of industries with *exogenous* cross-industry variation in tariff cuts.<sup>47</sup> This measure captures how local labor markets were affected by the liberalization of trade: Local labor markets whose workers were concentrated in industries facing the largest tariff cuts should be more affected by tariff changes than those facing smaller cuts or with fewer workers employed in liberalizing industries. Using the same regression discontinuity design as before, I interact my variable of PT incumbency with the municipal-level change in tariff protections constructed by these authors. I

---

<sup>45</sup> This data was web scrapped from <http://www.portaldatransparencia.gov.br/convenios/>.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix C, Table A4.

<sup>47</sup> The authors show that tariff cuts were nearly perfectly correlated with pre-liberalization tariff levels. They also show that their results change little when including pre-trend controls.

show that PT local governments work harder to block enforcement precisely in municipalities that these authors identify as being more negatively affected by the liberalization of trade.<sup>48</sup>

**Coalition sizes.** The decision of the PT to pursue a selective enforcement strategy should also vary with political conditions. Because there are multiple parties in Brazil, parties gain access to office by obtaining hugely different levels of electoral support. If the strategy of the PT reflects electoral imperatives, as I contend, we would expect PT mayors to pursue selective enforcement more aggressively in cities and towns in which the left must assemble larger electoral coalitions that include both formal- and informal-sector workers. To evaluate this claim, I estimate the same RD models at two levels of the strongest opponent's vote share: below and above the median value. Indeed, the effect of PT mayors on enforcement and informality concentrates in municipalities where the strongest opposition party wins more than 45% of the votes.<sup>49</sup> This analysis shows that PT's labor-market strategy depends on the electoral environment, as reflected here by the number of votes obtained by the strongest opponent's vote share.<sup>50</sup>

This point raises questions about external validity. RD designs estimate a *local* average treatment effect for cities where a PT mayoral candidate wins or loses an election by essentially a margin of zero. We actually expect mayors who win a close election to behave differently from those who win by larger margins. In places where local competition is intense, leftist mayors have stronger incentives to appeal to a broad sector of society – e.g., poor and unskilled workers who are not unionized. We might not expect the findings reported here to generalize to municipalities that are either strongholds or lost causes for the left.

## Conclusion and future research

Over the past three decades, Latin American countries took steps to liberalize and privatize their economies while still retaining or even strengthening their labor laws and regulations. Yet, half of the workers work informally, with no protection for unemployment, accident, sickness, or

---

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix, Section D for the full analysis.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix, Section D.

<sup>50</sup> For a formal analysis of RD designs with multiple cutoffs, see Cattaneo et al. (2016).

old age. We would expect leftist governments – which rely on the electoral support of workers – to extend the reach of job security rules and other formal protections by shifting informal workers to the formal sector. But in the world’s second largest developing democracy, these expectations were not met. Far from reducing or simply tolerating informality, the PT in Brazil in fact fomented the informal sector. PT mayors increase the size of the informal sector, redirect inspections away from firms employing workers “off the books,” and encourage the creation of informal-sector enterprises. These policies – the forbearance of regulations and the promotion of autonomous work-organizations – make outsiders relatively better off but reinforce the divide between insiders and outsiders. In the words of Tandler (2002), they make “informality [. . .] *more* attractive, and formalization *less* attractive, than they otherwise might be” (p. 3). Awareness of the left’s dilemma helps explain these surprising choices.

This paper joins recent studies that acknowledge that non-enforcement or forbearance are powerful political tools, particularly for governments targeting poor constituencies in welfare states that fail to protect the poorest members of society. In line with Holland (2016, 2017), I show that politicians with working-class constituencies frequently ignore legal violations by the poor to alleviate their most immediate needs. And, in line with Hummel (2017), I show that local governments often improve labor standards *not* by forcefully enforcing regulations but, instead, by helping informal-sector workers organize in worker-run cooperatives and associations in the informal sector. Milner and Rudra (2015) also argue that governments have disincentives to reduce the informal sector, including that they are leery of reducing the employment opportunities of unskilled workers. But my work forges a link between enforcement and non-enforcement as political strategies, and the left’s need to build a broad working-class coalition in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, or Uruguay. Previous studies argued that left-leaning parties simply adapted to the rise of informal labor by relying more on clientelism and less on unions (e.g., Levitsky 2003). But my analysis shows that leftist parties in developing democracies build coalitions of formal and informal workers by selectively altering the benefits and costs of regulatory compliance.

Turning to the broader implications of this study, one may wonder whether the pressures for selective enforcement are greater at the local than at the national level. Presidential administrations have access to massive fiscal, legal, and technical resources that they can deploy to compensate informal workers and the unemployed. And local politicians are heavily constrained in their relationship with workers; the laws regulating individual and collective labor rights cannot be modified by local governments.

That said, Brazil's PT pursued a similar strategy after winning the presidency in 2002 (see, in particular, Luna 2014, pp. 310–315). The PT retained most protections for insiders: it restored collective bargaining and kept in place generous social security benefits for formal workers, while implementing policies that benefited informal-sector workers – conditional cash transfers like *Bolsa Familia* and the creation of the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy, among other initiatives. Informality receded during PT's administrations but enforcement efforts are an unlikely explanation for this retrenchment (see, e.g., Cardoso 2007). Informality began to recede in 1999, during the presidency of Cardoso, of the PSDB. Also, the number of labor inspectors decreased during the presidencies of the PT. In my fieldwork, many labor inspectors complained to me that the PT national administrations did not increase the operational capacity of the agency.<sup>51</sup> Instead of upping the institutional capacity for labor inspections, the PT under presidents Lula and Dilma encouraged tripartite councils such as the National Labor Forum to bring together unions and employers to govern the labor market.<sup>52</sup> These policies allowed the PT to retain a significant share of its core constituency while extending linkages to the poorest segments of the population (Samuels and Zucco 2014; Zucco 2013).

Are these lessons useful beyond Brazil? The split between formal- and informal-sector workers is a salient feature of Latin American countries. Roughly 50% of workers in the region work in the informal sector. At the same time, most countries retained labor regulations that are more protective of formal workers than those found in France, Spain, Sweden, or Norway

---

<sup>51</sup> The PT did continue with efforts to increase the operational capacity of a small team of elite labor inspectors in charge of rescuing “slave-like” workers. See Coslovsky (2014).

<sup>52</sup> These councils do not have enforcement capacity.

(Heckman and Pagés 2000). Thus, the need to collect votes from a heterogeneous labor base is widespread in the region. But the structural characteristics of the labor market are probably not the whole story. Not all leftist governments in Latin America followed the same course in their relations with formal- and informal-sector workers. In some countries, like Argentina and Brazil, the so-called “New Left” governments established strategic alliances with both unions and informal-sector organizations. But in Venezuela and Ecuador, for instance, leftist politicians clashed with organized labor (Handlin 2013; Silva 2017). Silva (2017), whose focus is on the Andean region, contends that left-leaning parties in the 2000s cemented their power by building alliances with informal-sector workers, not unions. But in other countries, such as Argentina, more traditional working class actors played a larger part in the left’s period in power (Etchemendy and Collier 2007). Explaining variation in the left’s strategy vis-à-vis the broader working class should be a focus of future research.

## References

- Agarwala, Rina. 2013. *Informal labor, formal politics, and dignified discontent in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Almeida, Rita and Pedro Carneiro. 2012. “Enforcement of labor regulation and informality.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4(3):64–89.
- Amengual, Matthew. 2016. *Politicized Enforcement in Argentina: Labor and Environmental Regulation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Antunes, Ricardo and Marco Aurélio Santana. 2014. “The Dilemmas of the New Unionism in Brazil Breaks and Continuities.” *Latin American Perspectives* 41(5):10–21.
- Baiocchi, Gianpaolo. 2003. *Radicals in Power: The Workers’ Party and Experiments in Urban Democracy in Brazil*. Zed Books.

- Barreto, Luiz, Inês Magalhães and Vicente Trevas. 1999. *Governo e cidadania—Balanço e reflexões sobre o modo petista de governar*. Edição. São Paulo: Editora da Fundação Perseu Abramo.
- Betcherman, Gordon. 2012. “Labor market institutions: a review of the literature.” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* (6276).
- Calonico, Sebastian, Matias D Cattaneo and Rocio Titiunik. 2014. “Robust Nonparametric Confidence Intervals for Regression-Discontinuity Designs.” *Econometrica* 82(6):2295–2326.
- Cardoso, Adalberto and Telma Lage. 2006. “Labor inspection in Brazil.” *Dados* 2(SE):0–0.
- Cardoso, José Celso Jr. 2007. “De volta para o futuro?: as fontes de recuperação do emprego formal no Brasil e as condições para sua sustentabilidade temporal.” Instituto de Pesquisa Economica Aplicada (Ipea).
- Carnes, Matthew. 2014. *Continuity Despite Change: The Politics of Labor Regulation in Latin America*. Stanford University Press.
- Carnes, Matthew E and Isabela Mares. 2014. “Coalitional realignment and the adoption of non-contributory social insurance programmes in Latin America.” *Socio-Economic Review* 12(4):695–722.
- Cattaneo, Matias D, Rocío Titiunik, Gonzalo Vazquez-Bare and Luke Keele. 2016. “Interpreting regression discontinuity designs with multiple cutoffs.” *The Journal of Politics* 78(4):1229–1248.
- Collier, Ruth Berins and Samuel Handlin. 2009. *Reorganizing popular politics: participation and the new interest regime in Latin America*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Coslovsky, Salo. 2014. “Flying Under the Radar? The State and the Enforcement of Labour Laws in Brazil.” *Oxford Development Studies* (ahead-of-print):1–27.

- Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, Federico Estévez and Beatriz Magaloni. 2016. *The political logic of poverty relief: Electoral strategies and social policy in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dix-Carneiro, Rafael and Brian K Kovak. 2017. "Trade Liberalization and Regional Dynamics." *American Economic Review* 107(10):2908–2946.
- Dix, Robert H. 1989. "Cleavage structures and party systems in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 22(1):23–37.
- Etchemendy, Sebastián and Ruth Berins Collier. 2007. "Down but not out: Union resurgence and segmented neocorporatism in Argentina (2003–2007)." *Politics & Society* 35(3):363–401.
- Freeman, Richard B. 2009. "Labor regulations, unions, and social protection in developing countries: market distortions or efficient institutions?" NBER Working Paper 14789.
- Frölich, Markus, David Kaplan, Carmen Pagés, Jamele Rigolini and David Robalino. 2014. *Social insurance, informality, and labour markets: how to protect workers while creating good jobs*. Oxford University Press.
- Garay, Candelaria. 2016. *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Garganta, Santiago and Leonardo Gasparini. 2015. "The impact of a social program on labor informality: The case of AUH in Argentina." *Journal of Development Economics* 115:99–110.
- Haggard, Stephan, Robert R Kaufman and James D Long. 2013. "Income, occupation, and preferences for redistribution in the developing world." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 48(2):113–140.
- Handlin, Samuel. 2013. "Social protection and the politicization of class cleavages during Latin America's Left turn." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(12):1582–1609.
- Heckman, J and Carmen Pagés. 2000. "The cost of job security regulation: Evidence from Latin American countries." *NBER Working paper* 7773.



- Holland, Alisha. 2017. *Forbearance as Redistribution: The Politics of Informal Welfare in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Holland, Alisha C. 2016. "Forbearance." 110(2):232–246. Forthcoming at the American Political Science Review.
- Holzmann, Robert, Milan Vodopivec et al. 2011. *Reforming severance pay: an international perspective*. World Bank Publications.
- Huber, Evelynne and John D Stephens. 2012. *Democracy and the left: social policy and inequality in Latin America*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hummel, Calla. 2017. "Disobedient Markets: Street Vendors, Enforcement, and State Intervention in Collective Action." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(11):1524–1555.
- Hunter, Wendy. 2010. *The transformation of the Workers' Party in Brazil, 1989-2009*. Cambridge University Press.
- ILO. 2002. *Report VI: Decent work and the informal economy*. International Labour Conference, 90th Session.
- Imbens, Guido and Karthik Kalyanaraman. 2012. "Optimal bandwidth choice for the regression discontinuity estimator." *The Review of Economic Studies* 79(3):933–959.
- Imbens, Guido and Tomas Lemieux. 2008. "Regression discontinuity designs: A guide to practice." *Journal of Econometrics* 142(2):615–635.
- Keck, Margaret E. 1989. The New Unionism in the Brazilian Transition. In *Democratization Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation*, ed. Alfred Stepan. Oxford University Press pp. 252–296.
- Lederman, Daniel, Julián Messina, Samuel Pienknagura and Jamele Rigolini. 2013. *Latin American Entrepreneurs: Many Firms but Little Innovation*. World Bank Publications.

- Levitsky, Steven. 2003. *Transforming labor-based parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, Santiago. 2010. *Good intentions, bad outcomes: Social policy, informality, and economic growth in Mexico*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Lindbeck, Assar and Dennis J Snower. 1988. "Cooperation, harassment, and involuntary unemployment: an insider-outsider approach." *The American Economic Review* pp. 167–188.
- Lindbeck, Assar and Dennis J Snower. 2001. "Insiders versus outsiders." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* pp. 165–188.
- Luna, Juan Pablo. 2014. *Segmented Representation: Political Party Strategies in Unequal Democracies*. Oxford University Press.
- Magruder, Jeremy R. 2012. "High unemployment yet few small firms: The role of centralized bargaining in South Africa." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* pp. 138–166.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 1999. *Rethinking party systems in the third wave of democratization: the case of Brazil*. Stanford University Press.
- Mares, Isabela and Matthew Carnes. 2010. "Deindustrialization and the rise of non-contributory social programs in Latin America." *Yale CP Workshop* .
- Milner, Helen V and Nita Rudra. 2015. "Globalization and the Political Benefits of the Informal Economy." *International Studies Review* 17(4):664–669.
- Murillo, Maria Victoria. 2001. *Labor unions, partisan coalitions, and market reforms in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Murillo, Maria Victoria, Lucas Ronconi and Andrew Schrank. 2011. Latin American labor reforms: Evaluating Risk and Security. In *Oxford Handbook of Latin American Economics*, ed. José Antonio Ocampo and Jaime Ros. Oxford University Press.

- Perry, Guillermo, William Maloney, Omar Arias, Pablo Fajnzylber and Jaime Mason, Andrew; Saavedra-Chanduvi. 2007. *Informality: Exit and exclusion*. World Bank Publications.
- Piore, Michael J and Andrew Schrank. 2008. "Toward managed flexibility: The revival of labour inspection in the Latin world." *International Labour Review* 147(1):1–23.
- Portes, Alejandro and Kelly Hoffman. 2003. "Latin American class structures: Their composition and change during the neoliberal era." *Latin American Research Review* 38(1):41–82.
- Pribble, Jennifer. 2013. *Welfare and party politics in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam and John Sprague. 1986. *Paper stones*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Przeworski, Adam, Luis Carlos Bresser-Pereira and José María Maravall. 1993. *Economic Reforms in New Democracies: A Social-Democratic Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Kenneth. 2002. "Social inequalities without class cleavages in Latin America's neoliberal era." *Studies in Comparative international development* 36(4):3–33.
- Roberts, Margaret E, Brandon M Stewart, Dustin Tingley, Christopher Lucas, Jetson Leder-Luis, Shana Kushner Gadarian, Bethany Albertson and David G Rand. 2014. "Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4):1064–1082.
- Ronconi, Lucas. 2010. "Enforcement and compliance with labor regulations in Argentina." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* pp. 719–736.
- Rueda, David. 2005. "Insider–outsider politics in industrialized democracies: the challenge to social democratic parties." *American Political Science Review* 99(01):61–74.
- Rueda, David. 2007. *Social Democracy Inside Out: Partisanship and Labor Market Policy in Advanced Industrialized Democracies*. Oxford University Press.

- Saint-Paul, Gilles. 1996. "Exploring the political economy of labour markets institutions." *Economic Policy* 11(23):263–315.
- Samuels, David and Cesar Zucco. 2013. "The Power of Partisanship in Brazil: Evidence from Survey Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* .
- Samuels, David J. 1999. "Incentives to Cultivate a Party Vote in Candidate-centric Electoral Systems Evidence from Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies* 32(4):487–518.
- Samuels, David J and Cesar Zucco. 2014. "Lulismo, Petismo, and the Future of Brazilian Politics." *Available at SSRN 2310761* .
- Seidman, Gay W. 1994. *Manufacturing militance: workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*. Univesity of California Press.
- Silva, Eduardo. 2017. "Reorganizing Popular Sector Incorporation: Propositions from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela." *Politics & Society* 45(1):91–122.
- Sluyter-Beltrão, Jeffrey. 2010. *Rise and Decline of Brazil's New Unionism: The Politics of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores*. Peter Lang.
- Tendler, J. 2002. "Small Firms, the Informal Sector, and the Devil's Deal1." *IDS Bulletin* 33(3):1–15.
- Thachil, Tariq. 2014. *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tokman, Victor E. 1992. *Beyond Regulation: The Informal Economy in Latin America*. Lynne Rienner chapter The informal sector in Latin America: from underground to legality, pp. 3–20.
- Weyland, Kurt. 1996. *Democracy Without Equity: Failures of Reform in Brazil*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Zucco, Cesar. 2013. "When Payouts Pay Off: Conditional Cash Transfers and Voting Behavior in Brazil 2002–10." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4):810–822.