WHEN DOES EVERY PENNY COUNT?

Intra-party Competition and Campaign Finance in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Scholars generally believe that as inter-party competition intensifies, candidates and parties will need to spend more money to win votes. Cox and Thies (1998) extended this claim and argued that in electoral systems that require intra- as well as inter-party competition we also ought to observe a positive relationship between the intensity of intra-party competition and the level of individual campaign spending. They demonstrated such an effect for pre-1993 Japan. However, the relationship between political competition and campaign spending may be a function of the size of the constituency. In larger districts, candidates face far more competitors – from within their party and from other parties – and thus receive poorer information about the quality of the competition. As a result they may lack a basis for deciding whether to spend more or less. In this paper I extend and re-test the Cox and Thies hypotheses using electoral and campaign spending data from Brazil, which has much larger district magnitudes than Japan. In contrast to Cox and Thies, I find no relationship between the *quantity* of either intra- or inter-party competition and spending, and no relationship between the *quality* of inter-party competition and spending in large constituencies. However, I do find that candidates continue to respond to the *quality* of *intra*-party competition. These results qualify Cox and Thies's findings: in larger-magnitude candidate-centric electoral systems, candidates respond less to the pressures of inter-party competition, but continue to react to the pressures of intra-party competition.

KEY WORDS ▪ Brazil ▪ campaign finance ▪ elections ▪ personal vote

1. Introduction

Several scholars have recently drawn attention to the conditions under which candidates for office pursue a 'personal vote'.[1] This question is

particularly interesting in electoral systems where many candidates from the same party compete in the same constituency. Given intra-party competition, candidates cannot rely solely on their party's label to win elections. Instead, they must attempt to differentiate themselves from their co-partisans as well as from other parties' candidates. One strategy to develop a 'personal vote' support base under SNTV, Open-List PR, or other 'candidate-centric' electoral systems, as Cox and Thies (1998) have recently argued, is to spend money.

Cox and Thies tested for the impact of both inter- and intra-party competition on candidate spending decisions. They focused particularly on the effect of intra-party competition, and tested their argument in Japan's pre-1993 Single Non-Transferable Vote system. They found that candidate spending increased as intra-party competition increased. In this paper, I extend their argument to make it more broadly generalizable, and test it for the case of Brazil.

Brazil is an important case for this claim. It employs a similarly 'candidate-centric' electoral system, open-list PR, but it differs from Japan on a crucial variable: district magnitude. In pre-1993 Japan, district magnitude ranged from 1 to 6 seats per district. In Brazil, district magnitudes range from 8 to 70 seats per district. This variation matters because in larger districts, with more competitors, candidates always face a good number of intra-party as well as inter-party competitors. In Japan, some LDP candidates faced no intra-party competitors, and most faced only one or two. Do increasingly larger numbers of intra- and inter-party competitors continue to drive candidates to spend more money? Does the intensity of the competition also matter in larger districts? As district magnitude increases, candidates are less able to obtain good information about when, where and how much money to spend. I thus extend the Cox–Thies claims into new territory by exploring the Brazilian case, testing whether increases in the quantity and quality of intra- and inter-party competition in very large districts continue to have the hypothesized positive impact on candidates' campaign spending.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section Two I extend the Cox–Thies argument regarding the relationship between intra-party competition and campaign finance and explain how this logic plays out in Brazilian elections. Subsequently, I test the relationship between intra-party competition and campaign finance in Brazil. Finally, I discuss my findings and their implications.

2. The Relationship between Intra-Party Competition and Campaign Finance

'Candidate-centric' electoral systems force candidates to compete with their co-partisans as well as against candidates from other parties. In these

electoral systems parties do not set the list-order of candidates. Voters determine which candidates receive seats, although typically votes do pool to lists or parties first, which determines how many seats each list gains. More specifically, the following characteristics describe candidate-centric electoral systems: (a) voters cast one vote for either a candidate or a party; (b) each constituency returns more than one member to the legislature; and (c) candidates receive seats in order of their vote totals. The electoral systems that satisfy these criteria include Single-Transferable Vote (STV) systems, where M>1, Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) systems, where M>1, and Open-List Proportional Representation systems. In these systems, candidates must cultivate some degree of a 'personal vote' in order to differentiate themselves from their list-mates; they cannot seek votes on the basis of purely partisan appeals.

Personal-vote-seeking strategies are expensive, and in candidate-centric electoral systems we expect campaign expenditures to be much higher than they would be in party-centric electoral systems such as closed-list PR. Cox and Thies hypothesize that two factors condition the level of individual campaign spending in candidate-centric systems. First, spending ought to increase to the extent that candidates within a list[2] do *not* differentiate themselves on the basis of policy. If candidates differentiate themselves on policy bases, for example by building up a legislative 'niche', they may not have to spend much money – they can credibly claim credit through media exposure or special-interest group connections. On the other hand, if policy does not differentiate candidates, then candidates must rely upon provision of particularistic goods. This typically requires spending money. To the degree that candidates do not differentiate themselves based on policy appeals, intra-list spending ought to increase.

Second, spending ought to co-vary with the intensity of intra-party competition. For example, if three seats are at stake in a district, and at time '*t*' a party nominates only one candidate, then that candidate faces no intra-party competition and will spend only what it takes to compete against other parties' candidates and win. However, suppose that at time '*t+1*' this same party decides (for whatever reason) to nominate two people. If we further suppose that this party's appeal to the general electorate has an established upper bound, then these candidates will be forced to fight for every vote, and as a result will probably spend a good deal of money to come out on top *within the party list* – as well as beat other parties' candidates. Thus, we expect that as the intensity of intra-list competition increases, so would individual campaign spending within that list.

2.1 Intra-Party Competition in Brazil

As in Japan, elections in Brazil are candidate-centric. Brazil uses a version of open-list proportional representation electoral rules to elect members to its lower Chamber of Congress, the Chamber of Deputies. This system

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encourages intra-party competition, because parties do not rank-order candidates on the list. Instead, voters determine the final rank-ordering by their vote choices. If a party wins M seats, then those seats go to the M candidates on the list with the most votes. Thus, candidates must compete against their list-mates in order to win election.

Candidates' campaign strategies tend to conform to the incentives that the electoral rules generate. Outside of the leftist parties (which only obtain about 20 percent of the seats in Congress), candidates generally campaign individualistically and do not compete on partisan or policy-based appeals. They rely on extensive personally based clientelistic networks, and devote considerable resources to enhancing their name-recognition and differentiating themselves from both their co-partisans and other parties' candidates (Ames, 1995a, 1995b; Mainwaring, 1999; Samuels, 1999a).

Candidates' individualistic campaign strategies entail extensive financial outlays. As in Japan, legislative campaigns in Brazil are expensive; winning candidates spent an average of about US$ 120,000 in 1994 (Samuels, 1999b). Competition in Brazil thus resembles that seen in pre-1993 Japan in that co-partisans must compete against each other, and candidates in non-leftist parties typically compete on particularistic bases. However, the number of seats at stake in each district is much larger in Brazil than in Japan.

2.2 Extending the Argument

Does the quantity and quality of intra- and inter-party competition have similar effects in Japan and Brazil? Cox and Thies found that increases in the quantity and quality of *intra*-party competition are positively related to increases in candidate spending in Japan. They also found that the *quality* of *inter*-party competition affects candidate spending, but not the *quantity* of inter-party competition.

However, they left open the question of whether the relationship holds under different conditions than found in Japan, where candidates faced either two, three or four intra-party competitors. Several other electoral systems allow or have allowed dozens of candidates to compete in each district. For example, Chile's pre-1973 open-list PR system employed district magnitudes ranging from one to eighteen, and Finland's open-list PR system has district magnitudes that range from 1 to 30. District magnitudes in Brazil range from 8 to 70. Given this and given a law that allows multiparty alliances to nominate up to two candidates per seat in each district, the number of candidates on lists that won at least one seat ranged from a low of 10 to a high of 123. In these two districts, the total number of candidates competing was 70 and 532, respectively.

Clearly, there exists an enormous *quantitative* difference between both intra- and inter-party competition under candidate-centric rules in Japan and Brazil. The question is whether there is also a *qualitative* difference.

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Does the hypothesized relationship between competition and candidate spending hold when many more candidates compete? This argument supposes that *candidates* strategically respond to environmental conditions. Let us compare this hypothesis with what we expect regarding strategic voting, where *voters* respond to environmental conditions. Cox (1997), building on earlier collaborative work (Cox and Shugart, 1995) and upon Sartori (1968: 279), has argued that as district magnitude increases the quality of the information available to voters regarding candidates' chances of victory necessarily decreases. As district magnitude increases, and minute changes in vote percentages could determine the election's outcome, voters will be hard pressed to determine which candidate(s) will win and which will lose. In particular, they will lack good information about which candidate is likely to obtain the 'last' seat. Consequently, Cox argues that 'large-magnitude systems should in general depress the level of strategic voting, by destroying the primary informational prerequisite of such voting' (1997: 106). Cox showed for Colombia and Japan that as district magnitudes go above five, strategic voting does in fact decline.

While Cox does not make this point directly, one might suppose that the same logic about the availability of information applies to candidates as well as voters. As district magnitude or the number of competitors increases, the quality of the information candidates have about their own and their competitors' chances of victory declines. Candidates need good information in order to assess the likely consequences of their campaign tactics. If they cannot adequately assess the quality of the available information, they will remain highly uncertain about the probability of whether a change in strategy will increase future payoffs or not.

Given adequate data, this supposition could be tested in a number of ways. For example, following Cox (1997: chapters 8–9), scholars could ask whether large district magnitudes or large numbers of potential contenders affect candidates' decisions to enter a race. Or, as I do here, we could expand on Cox and Thies (1998) to investigate the impact of inter- and intra-party competition in large district magnitudes on candidates' decisions to increase campaign spending. Cox and Thies investigate the impact of increases in the number and quality of co-partisan and other competitors. I do the same, but I hypothesize that as district magnitude and the number of competitors gets increasingly larger, the incentives for candidates to increase their spending will decline.

Suppose that candidate spending increases linearly as the number or quality of co-partisans competing in the same constituency increases. This is essentially the Cox–Thies argument, represented in Figure 1.

Figure 2 represents my extension of the Cox–Thies hypothesis about the potential relationship between campaign spending and the number and quality of intra-party competitors in larger districts.

With larger district magnitudes, as the number or quality of co-competitors increases, candidates may be less able to obtain good information upon
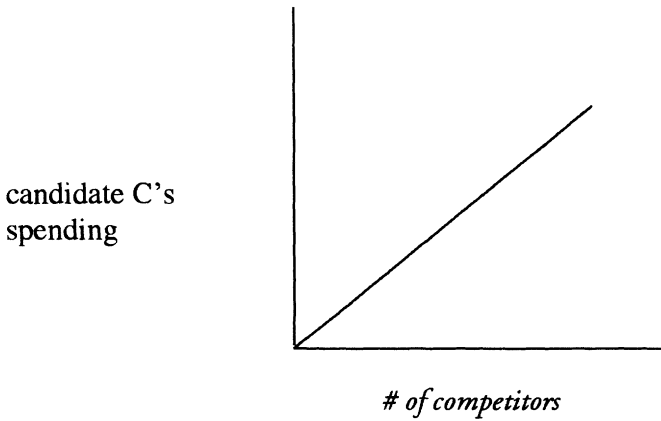
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# of competitors

Figure 1. The Relationship between Money and Political Competition
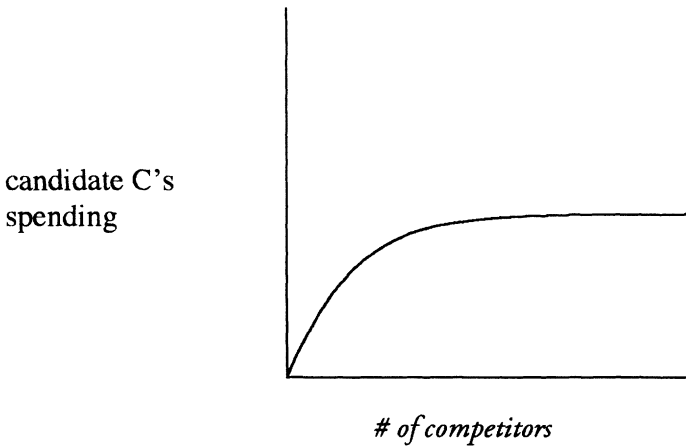

# of competitors

Figure 2. The Relationship between Money and Competition in Larger District Magnitudes

which to base spending decisions. For example, they may have a relatively harder time distinguishing between strong and weak candidates.

I have stronger expectations regarding the effect of the *quantity* of competition than the *quality* of competition in higher district magnitudes: in larger districts, increases in quantity are less likely to affect candidates' spending decisions than are increases in quality. That is, the difference

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between zero, one and two competitors may loom large in candidates' eyes, but the difference between 31, 32 and 33 candidates will matter less. However, quality may continue to matter: a candidate who faces 30 tough candidates will still be more likely to spend more than a candidate who faces 31 patsies. This issue is whether candidates can assess the quality of the competition. Below I test for the impact of increases in quantity and quality of intra- and inter-party competition on candidate spending in large districts.

3. Campaign Finance Data for Brazil

Before testing for any relationship between intra-party competition and campaign spending, let us first explore the data that provide the dependent variable, and discuss its validity. In Brazil, parties do not provide financing to individual candidates for legislative office, and no upper bound limits individual campaign spending. For the 1994 elections, candidates for legislative office were required to submit a *prestação de contas*, or registry of campaign contributions to their state's electoral court, which were subsequently sent to the national electoral court in Brasília (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 1997). These reports provide detailed information on every declared contribution to candidates' campaigns, including the name of the contributor, the recipient, the amount contributed and the date of the contribution. These data report campaign *contributions*, not campaign *expenditures*, but they serve as useful proxies of individual expenditures, and I have every reason to suspect that candidate spending correlates with contributions.

We do not have a way to verify the accuracy of candidates' contribution declarations. While I agree that candidates may under-report campaign contributions, based on interviews with electoral-court officials, I believe that any under-reporting ought to be randomly distributed across the sample of candidates.[3] Thus, while reported contributions may represent only a fraction of total campaign expenditures, we can test the data to discover whether any patterns that emerge conform to our expectations about a series of 'stylized facts' concerning the relationship between money and elections. If declared contributions were wholly false, we might expect no patterns at all to emerge. However, I have shown elsewhere (Samuels, 1999b) that the data conform to several conventional hypotheses about cross-office, cross-district and cross-candidate spending, demonstrating the data's reliability and validity. Campaign finance data are notoriously tricky, and we must make do with what is available.

4. Hypotheses and Tests

Does the degree of intra- and inter-party competition affect campaign spending in Brazil, as Cox and Thies (1998) demonstrated that it did in Japan? I

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will first test for a relationship between the *quantity* of competition and candidate spending. I use OLS (corrected for heteroskedasticity) to test this proposition on all non-leftist candidates in Brazil (see Mainwaring, 1999).[4] The dependent variable is per-elector spending by each individual candidate. I include the following independent variables:

• Number of Candidates on List: this equals the number of co-partisan competitors each candidate faces.
• Number of Candidates in State: this equals the total number of candidates each candidate faces in the state (minus the others on the target candidate's own list).
• Candidate Quality: this is a ranking created by an independent Brasília think-tank. Candidates were rated on a scale of 0–3, with a higher ranking indicating better quality (INESC, 1994). INESC, based on their assessment on candidate's previous political experience, an informal poll of members of Congress and their advisors, and consultations with various media outlets. I expect better-quality candidates to receive more money and thus spend more money.[5]
• District Magnitude: I expect a negative relationship between magnitude and spending. In larger districts, candidates must obtain a smaller proportion of the total vote to win a seat, and thus tend to spend less per capita.
• Demographics: this set of variables includes measures of per capita income, urbanization and age in each candidate's district. These are used as control variables.

The key variables are 'Number of Candidates on List' and 'Number of Candidates in State'. Cox and Thies found only that the first variable affected candidate spending decisions; they found no relationship between the quantity of *inter*-party competition and candidate spending in Japan. As stated above, I expect no relationship between the quantity of competition and campaign spending under Brazil's larger district magnitudes. The regression results appear in Table 1.

The results on the key variables confirm my intuition. In contrast to the Cox–Thies findings for Japan, the number of candidates on one's list or in one's state does *not* affect candidate spending in Brazil. The results on the other variables can be interpreted in the following way: magnitude is significant and in the expected direction. Candidates tend to spend less money per elector in wealthier districts and districts with a larger elderly population, and more money in urban district. This is because wealthier and older voters are less susceptible to clientelistic appeals and more concerned about policy issues such as education, taxes, healthcare and pensions, and urban voters are more expensive to 'buy off' relative to rural voters.

Let us now turn to the *quality* of competition. Measuring candidate quality is notoriously difficult. In order to generate confidence in my conclusions I provide three different operationalizations of this concept. The first measure assesses quality using vote totals. Many scholars employ the

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Table 1. The number of competitors and campaign spending in Brazil

Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Constant	0.19*** (0.03)
#Candidates on list	0.00008 (0.00006)
#Candidates in state	0.0001 (0.0001)
Candidate quality	0.01*** (0.002)
District magnitude	−0.001** (0.0005)
% in capital	0.0007 (0.0004)
Income	−0.04*** (0.01)
% Elderly	−0.01*** (0.002)
N	1087
R-squared	0.19
F	30.9

'effective number' of candidates (or more typically, parties) instead of the raw number of candidates, arguing that this number provides a more accurate assessment of the 'true' level of competition (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989). This statistic indicates how 'tightly packed' the candidates are, informing us that as the effective number of candidates increases, so does the likelihood that a small shift of votes from one candidate to another would alter the outcome. Thus, as the effective number of candidates on a list increases, so does the degree of competition.[6]

However, the effective number of candidates has a drawback in that while it tells us how close the race is *within* lists, it tells us nothing about the relative chances that candidates from a given list have of winning. That is, suppose that candidates had perfect information in terms of the rank-ordering of candidates on their list, but no idea how many seats their list would win. A candidate might be on a very competitive list in one sense (if the candidates were tightly bunched), but on a non-competitive list in another sense (if none of the candidates had enough votes to actually win).

To better assess the quality of competition, we therefore need to divide the effective number of candidates on each list by the number of seats each list stands to win. This measure, which I call LISTCOMP, necessarily excludes lists that do not win any seats, but it gives us leverage on the question of the degree of *intra*-party competition. Table 2 provides an example of how this measure improves upon the effective number of candidates.

Competitiveness can increase or decrease independently of the effective number of candidates. For example, parties C and E have equal effective numbers of candidates, but competitiveness in party E exceeds that found in party C. To measure *inter*-party competition in each state, I employ the same technique (and call the variable STATECOMP).

The second measure of the quality of competition is more direct. I simply take the average of INESC's measure of candidate quality for each list and

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Table 2. Measures of intra-party competition under open-list PR

	Party A	Party B	Party C	Party D	Party E
Candidates	10	10	10	10	10
Effective no. candidates	1.4	6.8	10	1	10
Seats won	3	3	3	3	1
Competitiveness	0.47	2.27	3.33	0.33	10

for each state (LISTQUAL and STATEQUAL). For each candidate, following Cox and Thies, we hypothesize that as the average quality of the candidates on the list increases, candidates ought to react by spending more.

The final measure of the intensity of competition is the most direct – how much other candidates spend. Candidates may spend reactively, depending not on some vague notion of the quality of the competition, but more specifically on information they obtain about how much other candidates on their list or in their state are spending. Again following Cox and Thies I take the average per-capita spending of candidates on each list and in each state (LISTCASH and STATECASH) and hypothesize that as other candidates spend more, so should the focal candidate.

The results of regressions including the three measures of the intensity of competition are found in Table 3. All the other variables in the model are the same as above. Recall that the number of cases is lower in the first regression because it excludes lists that did not win at least one seat.

The results indicate that the intensity of *intra*-party competition may matter, depending on how it is operationalized. LISTCOMP is not significant, and is in the opposite direction as predicted. However, LISTQUAL does reach statistical significance, and LISTCASH nearly does. None of the variables that measure the intensity of competition at the state level approaches significance. The results for the other variables are consistent with the results from Table 1, although not always statistically significant: candidate quality is positive and strongly significant, district magnitude is significant in one equation and in the predicted direction in the other two, and candidates tend to spend more money in highly urbanized states and less money in wealthier states and states with a larger population of older people.

How do these results compare to the Cox and Thies findings? They found that the quality of *both* intra- and inter-party competition mattered in Japan's smaller districts. In Brazil's much larger district magnitudes, only intra-party competition has the predicted effect, and only weakly so.

5. Discussion

Scholars have concluded, with good reason, that the electoral environment in Brazil generally promotes personal vote-seeking. Comparative scholars of

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Table 3. The Intensity of Competition and Campaign Spending in Brazil

Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)		
Constant	0.13*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.06)	0.09* (0.04)
LISTCOMP	−.001 (0.001)	–	–
STATECOMP	0.01 (0.008)	–	–
LISTQUAL	–	0.015* (0.073)	–
STATEQUAL	–	−0.06 (0.04)	–
LISTCASH	–	–	0.35 (0.18)
STATECASH	–	–	0.28 (0.36)
Candidate quality	0.01*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.001)	0.01*** (0.002)
District magnitude	−0.0003* (0.0001)	−.00024 (0.00015)	−0.0001 (0.0001)
% in capital	0.002** (0.0006)	0.0007 (0.0004)	0.0005 (0.0003)
Income	−0.03** (0.01)	−0.05 (0.026)	−0.01 (0.007)
% elderly	−0.009*** (0.002)	−0.01*** (0.002)	−0.006** (0.002)
N	996	1087	1087
R-squared	0.22	0.20	0.21
F	28.33	30.01	28.37

electoral systems (e.g. Myerson, 1993; Carey and Shugart, 1995) have con-
cluded that open-list PR promotes intense intra-party as well as inter-party
competition, and Brazilianists (e.g. Ames, 1995a, 1995b) have argued that
Brazilian congressional deputies spend a great deal of time seeking access to
pork-barrel public works projects directed at their constituencies. Others
have commented on the link between personal vote-seeking and the high
levels of campaign spending in Brazilian elections (Aguiar, 1994), but no
study has empirically explored the effect of Brazil's electoral system on candi-
date spending, or compared campaign spending in Brazil to other countries.

In this paper, I have begun to address this issue. Cox and Thies (1998)
showed that both quantity and the quality of intra-party competition affects
candidates' decisions to spend money in Japan, and that the quality of inter-
party competition also matters. The more intense the competition, the more
candidates tend to spend. In contrast, I showed that the raw numbers of
competitors – either on a candidate's list or on other lists – does not affect
candidates' spending decisions in Brazil. However, there is some evidence
that the *quality* of the competition does matter, but only for intra-party com-
petition. Candidates who face better-quality or wealthier candidates on their
own list tend themselves to spend more money.

I argued that Brazil's larger district magnitudes tend to attenuate but not
eliminate the effects of political competition. In such large magnitudes, the
simple number of competitors – either on a candidate's list or on other lists
– does not appear to influence how candidates strategically allocate cam-
paign resources. I conclude that at low district magnitudes, candidates may
strategically respond to increases in the number of competitors, but they do
not do so in larger district magnitudes.

In terms of the quality of the competition, I found that candidates do *not*

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respond to changes in the quality of the candidates on other parties' lists. However, candidates do tend to respond to increases or decreases in intra-party or intra-list competition. This raises the question of why we see this difference between Japan and Brazil. In Japan, Cox and Thies found that increases in intra-party competition mattered more than increases in inter-party competition, but that both mattered. In Brazil, the importance of inter-party competition to candidates' spending decisions fades from view. Again, this may be due to Brazil's extremely large district magnitudes. The electoral system generates incentives for Brazilian candidates to worry first and foremost about beating out their list-mates for a seat; obtaining more votes than other parties' candidates becomes a secondary concern.

This paper has only scratched the surface of the relationship between money and votes in Brazil. Politicians in candidate-centric multi-member district systems face informational problems that candidates in single-member district systems do not, and candidates in Brazil face more intense information-gathering problems than candidates in many other candidate-centric electoral systems. One of Brazil's medium-sized states, Minas Gerais, is the size of France. Given that Brazilian candidates compete in rather large geographic spaces, and may be one of several dozen candidates on a list, we need to know more about how they obtain good information about their co-competitors. How do candidates in large multi-member districts strategize how and where to spend time and money? Candidates in the US, Japan and Brazil (and most likely elsewhere) appear to have an insatiable desire for campaign finance, yet we expect candidates in different electoral systems to behave differently. This begs the question of how candidates know how much is enough, or too much, given my finding that there is no relationship between the intensity of intra-party competition and spending in larger districts. This question and others will have to remain for future research.

Future research on the 'personal vote' should also incorporate relative differences in candidates' ability to assess the information at their disposal, a question that is lacking from even the more formal-theoretic work on electoral systems (e.g. Cox, 1997; Myerson, 1993). In general terms, this study generates a number of questions about the consequences of variation in the quality of information that candidates can acquire under different electoral rules: different district magnitudes, variation in the number of competitors and other variables create different competitive environments for candidates. It is to this variation that scholars might turn in the continuing investigation of the sources and consequences of the quest for the 'personal vote'.

Notes

1 See Cain et al. (1987), Katz (1985), Myerson (1993), Carey and Shugart (1995), Cox (1997) and Samuels (1999a).

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2 I will use the term lists, as opposed to parties. A list can be composed of members of only one party, or of candidates from an alliance of more than one party.

3 Interview with Valéria Alves de Sousa, TRE director of internal affairs, São Paulo, 23 September 1996; interview with Salatiel Gomes dos Santos, TSE director of internal affairs, Brasília, 28 June 1997.

4 As per Cox and Thies, candidates in leftist parties tend to differentiate themselves less on particularistic grounds and more on the basis of policy. Thus, the pressures of intra- and inter-party competition are not likely to affect their decisions to spend more or less money.

5 INESC's rating most likely did not influence contributors' willingness to provide funds to candidates; the correlation between candidate quality and campaign contributions in the sample is 0.04.

6 I recognize this measure's shortcomings, as pointed out by Taagepera and Shugart (1989), but nevertheless electoral studies scholars generally accept its reliability.

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