Vote Selling in the United States: Introducing Machine Learning Methods to Analyzing Conjoint Experimental Data

Héctor Bahamonde [*1] and

Cristobal Quininao [†2]

[1]Assistant Professor, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales, O'Higgins University (Chile)

[2]Assistant Professor, Instituto de Ciencias de la Ingeniería O'Higgins University (Chile)

August 27, 2020

Abstract

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Keywords— conjoint; vector support machines; support for democracy; United States.

[*]hector.bahamonde@uoh.cl; www.HectorBahamonde.com.

[†]cristobal.quininao@uoh.cl; PAGINA AQUI.

We both thank.

I. Introduction

summarize the scope and findings

II. Multidimensional Approach Toward the Study of Vote-Selling

Democracy has been theorized as a multidimensional concept. Referring particularly to *polyarchies*, Dahl (1971, p. 3) explains that among some of the requirements for sustaining a democracy, there must be some institutional guarantees that create opportunities to (1) formulate preferences, (2) signify those preferences, and (3) have preferences weighted equally when conducting a government. Since cases where a country is "completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens" are rare, Dahl (1971, p. 8) prefers to use the multidimensional concept of *polyarchy*.

Yet, clientelism—as a democratic failure—has been studied almost exclusively from a unidimensional perspective. In fact, we believe that there exists a methodological and conceptual misalignment. On the one hand, qualitative, historical and/or ethnographically based contributions describe clientelist transactions as complex and multidimensional. In general, this body of research leveraging qualitative techniques are able to provide thick descriptions of the phenomena at hand (Posada-Carbó 1996; Sabato 2001; Auyero 2000; Szwarcberg 2013; Borges 2019). On the other hand, statistical, survey, and/or experimentally based work mostly explores singular issues related clientelism, such as the effect of a single variable (or treatment) on the probability of clientelism. For example, using a field experiment in Benin, Wantchekon (2003) stresses the role of incumbency on vote buying. Jensen and Justesen (2014, p. 227) focus on the impact of poverty on vote buying, while Khemani (2015, p. 84) shows that "vote buying in poor democracies is associated with lower [public] investments." While the literature on clientelism has advanced a number of important questions, most studies concentrate their efforts on a single factor, often times (when possible) manipulating just one variable (Corstange 2012; Imai, Park, and Greene 2015; Nichter and Peress 2017; Hicken et al. 2015; Hicken et al. 2018; Michael and Thachil 2018; Bratton 2008; Weitz-Shapiro 2012; González-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson 2014; Hector Bahamonde 2018; Héctor Bahamonde 2020; Oliveros 2016).

We argue that to better understand the motivations behind clientelism and the micro-dynamics that drive it, studies should situate both vote-buying and vote-selling within the multidimensionality of democracy as a concept. While qualitative researchers are better equipped to properly do so, the are some quantitative techniques that might provide broader explanations for the causes of

clientelism. We do not argue that these quantitative tools might give us the kind of rich explanations ethnographies provide. However, we hope this paper might provide multidimensional answers to a multidimensional concept. In particular, *Which of the democratic dimensions explained by Dahl (1971) should fail to produce clientelism?*

The next section gives a historical account of clientelism in the United States. The section also attempts to situate the phenomena within a historical context, at the same time that it justifies it as a case. It particularly shows how vote buying and vote selling transitioned from their status as an important institution in American elections to a scarcely practiced electoral method.

add remaining sections

III. The United States as a Case Study

This paper makes both methodological and substantive contributions to the literature by leveraging a conjoint experiment on hypothetical vote selling in a consolidated democracy. Most quantitative studies have been conducted primarily in developing countries, seriously narrowing the scope of our inferences. In part, this is because the clientelism literature usually focuses on realized behaviors only—that is, actual clientelist transactions. Unfortunately, by ignoring attitudes of potential vote sellers, particularly when it comes to the willingness to sell, selection bias seriously threatens causal inferences. Geddes (1990, p. 131) explains the well-known selection issues of studying "only cases that have achieved the outcome of interest." Thus, and following the lead of González-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson (2014), this paper presents experimental evidence of hypothetical vote selling in the United States.

The evidence that this paper presents may be associated with a probable erosion of American democracy.[1] Foa and Mounk (2016, p. 7) document a deep "crisis of democratic legitimacy [that] extends across a [...] wider set of indicators" in the United States. They find that 26% of millennials declare that it is "unimportant" in a democracy for people to "choose their leaders in free elections" (Foa and Mounk (2016, p. 10), and Foa and Mounk (2017)). And such, this study follows a "least-likely" design presenting the United States as a "crucial case." As Levy (2008, p. 12) explains, "[i]nferential leverage from a least likely case is enhanced if our theoretical priors for the leading alternative explanation make it a most likely case for that theory." Since the vote-buying literature mostly considers *developing* countries and describes vote sellers as poor (Weitz-Shapiro 2014, p. 12),

[1] Relatedly, see Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018).

uneducated (González-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson 2014), and undemocratic (Carlin and Moseley 2015), the willingness to sell votes in the United States should be low, making it a difficult case study on vote selling.

I. Brief Historical Section

At first, many advanced democracies were clientelist political systems. For instance, Stokes et al. (2013, p. 200) explain that in the nineteenth-century United States, "vote buying was commonplace" and "the major urban political institution in the late nineteenth century" (Erie 1990, p. 2). Weak institutions, poor bureaucracies, and bad-quality record-keeping helped to foster electoral malpractice.[2] First, most states did not have actual registration laws, making voter eligibility difficult to determine (Argersinger 1985, p. 672). Historians frequently report that judges at polling places had a hard time determining not only the age of the potential voter,[3] but also whether the prospective voter was a U.S. citizen, especially in cases that involved newly naturalized immigrants with strong foreign accents (Bensel 2004, p. 20). Consequently, it was often up to the judge's discretion whether to let prospective voters cast a ballot. Since judges were party appointees (Argersinger 1985, p. 672), their discretionary powers were systematically used to shape electoral outcomes.

The "party strip" or "unofficial" ballot system also permitted all sorts of fraudulent election practices. The parties themselves produced party tickets. Since tickets varied by size and color, it made "the voter's choice of party a public act and rendered voters susceptible to various forms of intimidation and influence while facilitating vote buying" (Argersinger 1985, p. 672). Similarly, Rusk (1970, p. 1221) explains that distinctive ticket colors and shapes "assured instant recognition of the ballot by the voters [and] party workers."

The ticket system required very strong party machines, which, in turn, required considerable economic resources to make the system work. However, political machines were oiled not only with money. On the one hand, many "ticket peddlers" (Argersinger 1985, p. 672) were volunteers (Bensel 2004, p. 17). Most of these volunteers "enjoyed the patronage of elected party officials by holding government jobs, drawing public pensions, servicing government contracts, or enjoying special licensing privileges" (Bensel 2004, p. 17). On the other hand, political appointees "from

[2]The U.S. Bureau of the Census did not exist. Consequently, it was relatively easy to invent names, "repeat," or use any other subterfuge to "stuff the ballot box." In fact, "a St. Louis politician admitted registry fraud but argued that there was no proof that the names he copied into the registry were of real people and, therefore, no crime had been committed" (Argersinger 1985, p. 680).

[3]Judges used as a rough proxy whether the prospective voter had the ability to grow a beard (Bensel 2004, p. 20).

janitor to secretary of state" and some corporations donated annually part of their salaries and revenues (Reynolds 1980, p. 197). Thus, parties amassed huge amounts of money.

With all these resources flooding the polls on election day, voting was truly an interesting spectacle. On that day, party agents would offer voters plenty of liquor as an incentive to vote the party ticket. Hence, "the street or square outside the voting window frequently became a kind of alcoholic festival in which many men were clearly and spectacularly drunk [to the point that] some could not remember whether or not they had voted" (Bensel 2004, p. 20).

Today, the *modus operandi* of clientelism has changed, and both the frequency of vote buying/selling and the importance of party machines have declined. Scholars have pointed out that "party machines are a thing of the past" (Stokes et al. 2013, p. 230). However, some contemporary accounts remain of vote buying and selling in American elections.[4] Similarly, non-academic sources find that during the 2010 elections, "selling votes [was a] common type of election fraud" (Fahrenthold 2012). Others find that "[v]ote-buying is extremely common in *developed* [...] countries" (Leight, Pande, and Ralston 2016, p. 1).

explain conjoint here

The next sections attempt to quantify in an unbiased way the willingness to sell votes among a representative sample of U.S. voters. In fact, Stokes et al. (2013, p. 201) show that industrialization drove up the electorate's median income, making vote buying more expensive for party machines.[5]

Dahl (1971, p. 3) conceptualizes polyarchy:

IV. Empirical Section

I. Classic Conjoint Analyses

HB

II. Leveraging Support Vector Machines with Conjoint Data

CQ

[4] For instance, Campbell (2005, pp. 243–244) explains how a Democratic leader in Logan County, West Virginia, accepted $35,000 in cash to support Senator Kennedy. As the Democratic leader explained, "this money was for one purpose: 'We bought votes with it [...] that's the way real politics works.' " Other examples are the famous primary election in March 1972 in Chicago (Campbell 2005, p. 262) and the elections in the coal-rich Appalachian Mountains during the 1980s (Campbell 2005, p. 275).

[5] However, Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2006, p. 320) disregard the industrialization hypothesis, focusing on the lower levels of "[s]tate involvement in the public sector."

Dalh's Polyarchy Dimension	Dalh's Polyarchy Component	Experimental Operationaliz
	Freedom to form and join organizations	Citizens can associate with othe
	Freedom of expression	Media can confront the governn
Formulate preferences	Right to vote	Citizens can vote in the next tw
	Right of political leaders to compete for support	President can rule without Con
	Alternative sources of information	Media can confront the governn
	Freedom to form and join organizations	Citizens can associate with othe
	Freedom of expression	Media can confront the governn
	Right to vote	Citizens can vote in the next tw
Signify preferences	Eligibility for public office	Citizens can run for office for th
	Right of political leaders to compete for support	President can rule without Con
	Alternative sources of information	Media can confront the Governn
	Free and fair elections	

Table 1: *My caption*

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V. Appendix

I. Appendix

First Appendix

Es nuestro approach causal inference? Al menos si cumple con 3 assumptions en Hainmueller2014a. Estas son dadas por el diseno del experimento.