

# Vote-Selling and Vote-Buying: Does The House Always Win? Gambling Votes in the Lab

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## Abstract

The clientelism literature has advanced a number of important questions. Unfortunately, most of it addresses the issue from the party's side (vote-buying). In this paper we bridge this gap by bringing the voters back in, particularly by incorporating the vote-buying and vote-selling dynamics into the same framework. After formalizing a basic theory of vote-buying and vote-selling, we implemented an economic experiment to study different strategic behaviors. Our empirical results suggest that parties buy votes from their core constituencies, while voters sell their votes to the opponent winning party. Voters consistently derive more utility when parties take the initiative in the vote-buying game.

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## I. IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

Vote-buying has been typically defined as an exchange between parties and voters where the former provide particularistic benefits and the latter provide electoral support (Nichter 2008; Nichter 2014). While the literature has advanced a number of important questions (see Hicken 2011 for an excellent review), most of accounts of clientelism tackle the issue from the party’s side, thus addressing only vote-buying.

While it takes both parties *and* voters to produce a clientelist relationship (Auyero 2000), most scholars have overlooked the role of voters (vote-selling), often times focusing only on parties (vote-buying). For instance, Reynolds (1980) provides a historical account of different vote-buying dynamics in New Jersey during early 20th century, Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004) analyze vote-buying in Argentina, Nichter (2008) introduces several party targeting strategies, notably “turnout buying” which explains why parties target nonvoting supporters. Similarly, Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter (2013) expand on the same idea and introduce other ways in which parties employ diverse portfolios of strategies (i.e., vote buying, turnout buying, abstention buying, and double persuasion.). Moving forward, Albertus (2013) explains that parties may buy votes from both swing and core voters , Carreras and Irepoglu (2013) analyze the consequences of low trust in elections and exposure to vote buying, while Carlin and Moseley (2015) explain that parties also pay attention to individual democratic attitudinal profiles, suggesting that targets with higher levels of trust in democracy might condemn vote-buying (see also Weitz-Shapiro 2012).

Country-specific studies predominantly study vote-buying as well. For instance, Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni (2012) study different strategies of vote buying in Mexico, Finan and Schechter (2012) find that in Paraguay targeted individuals are not significantly closer to the middlemen. For

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the Brazilian case, Hidalgo and Nichter (2015) and Hidalgo and Nichter (2016) find that vote-buying shapes the composition of the electorate, while Bahamonde (2018) argues that economic inequality rather individual levels of income are associated with vote-buying. In turn, Rueda (2017) finds that in Colombia brokers buy more votes in districts where the size of the polling station is small, i.e. providing better monitoring capacities. When the literature turns to other developing contexts different than Latin America, the focus is still on vote-buying. For instance, Bratton (2008) and Rueda (2015) study vote-buying in Nigeria, Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) and Vicente (2014) implemented a field experiment in Benin and Sao Tome and Principe and found that an anti-vote-buying campaign had a negative effect on vote-buying. In turn, Sandholt Jensen and Justesen (2014) study the impact of poverty on vote-buying in sub-Saharan Africa, while Heath and Tillin (2018) study vote-buying in India. Similarly, Khemani (2015), Hicken, Leider, et al. (2015), and Hicken, Leider, et al. (2018) study vote-buying in the Philippines. Scholars focused on developed regions, such as Australia (Denemark 2021) and Russia (Saikkonen 2021) also focus on vote-buying exclusively.

Institutionalist accounts have usually focused on vote-buying also. For instance, Hicken (2007) explains that candidate-centered electoral systems, weak parties, and access to resources may facilitate vote-buying. In turn, Aidt and Jensen (2016) concentrate on the effects of the secret ballot reform in Western Europe, the United States and British elections (Kam 2016) during the 19th and 20th centuries. Others have studied vote-buying respect to the availability of state resources (Gherghina and Nemcok 2021), while Kitschelt (2000), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2006), and Kitschelt and Altamirano (2015) have focused on other important structural conditions that make vote-buying more prone.

In fact, except for a few ethnographic accounts, most researchers consider mostly party dynamics.

Notably (Auyero 2000, p. 55) analyzes the logic of clientelism in Argentina not only by looking at political brokers but also while paying particular attention to the “clients’ own views on the network.” In turn, Zarazaga (2016) interviews 120 brokers from Argentina, Szwarcberg (2012) explains that brokers are independent agents motivated by personal interests, while Szwarcberg (2013) argues that parties with access to resources is a necessary but insufficient condition to vote-buying. However, as Hagene (2015, p. 152) notes, many clientelist relationships are “client-initiated.” Notably Tosoni (2007, pp. 55–57) explores different instances where slum dwellers strategically approach brokers to solve their collective needs, while Gay (1999) describes how neighborhood associations successfully managed to attract resources to Brazilian *favelas* in exchange of electoral support (vote-selling).

In this paper we contend that omitting the voter’s side complicates our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. This issue is particularly problematic because there are just a few quantitative papers that address vote-selling. For instance, Hicken, Leider, et al. 2015; Hicken, Leider, et al. 2018 study vote-selling in the Philippines while Bahamonde (2020) studies vote-selling in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> One particular consequence of this important deficit in the literature is that we do not know

In this paper we recreate the market conditions that make vote-buying and vote-selling more likely The authors are not aware of any experimental design that considers both vote-buying and vote-selling.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>González-Ocantos, Jonge, et al. (2012), González-Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson (2014), and Kiewiet de Jonge (2015) note that voters systematically lie when asked directly about vote-buying.

<sup>2</sup>Leight et al. (2020) present an experimental design of vote-buying. They find that vote-buying reduces the voters-willingness to hold politicians accountable.

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## II. APPENDIX

Appendix