

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

HECTOR BAHAMONDE ^{*1} and

ANDREA CANALES ^{†2}

¹Senior Researcher, University of Turku, Finland

²Assistant Professor, O'Higgins University, Chile

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^{*}hibano@utu.fi; www.HectorBahamonde.com.

[†]andrea.canales@uoh.cl; <http://sites.google.com/view/andrea-canales-g>.

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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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Keywords— vote-buying; vote-selling; clientelism; experimental methods; prospect theory

I. VOTE-BUYING AS EXCHANGE, BUT WHERE ARE THE VOTERS? THE MISSING

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 (**Nichter2008**; **Nichter2014**). While the literature has advanced a number of important questions (**Hicken2011**), most of quantitative accounts tackle the issue from the party’s side, thus addressing only vote-buying. For instance, **Reynolds1980** provides a historical account of different vote-buying dynamics in New Jersey during early 20th century, **Brusco2004** analyze vote-buying in Argentina, **Nichter2008** introduces several party targeting strategies, notably “turnout buying” which explains why parties target nonvoting supporters. Similarly, **Gans-Morse2013** 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, **Albertus2012a** explains that parties may buy votes from both swing and core voters , **Carreras2013a** analyze the consequences of low trust in elections and exposure to vote buying, while **Carlin2015** 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**)

Country-specific studies predominantly also study vote-buying only. For instance, **Diaz-Cayeros2012** studies different strategies of vote buying in Mexico, **Inan2012a** finds that in Paraguay targeted individuals are not significantly closer to the middlemen. For the Brazilian case, **Hidalgo2012**; **Hidalgo2016** find that vote-buying shapes the composition of the electorate while **Bahamonde2018** argues that economic inequality rather individual levels of income are associated with vote-buying. In turn, **Rueda2016** 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, **Bratton2008a**; **Rueda2014a** study vote-buying in Nigeria, **Vicente2009**; **Vicente2014** 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, **Jensen2013a** study the impact of poverty on vote-buying in sub-Saharan Africa, while **Heath2018** studies vote-buying in India. Similarly, (**Khemani2015**; **Hicken2015**; **Hicken2018**) study vote-buying in the Philippines. And when studying vote-buying in developed regions such as Australia (**Denemark2021**) and Russia (**Saikkonen2021**), the focus is also on vote-buying.

Importantly, **Gonzalez-Ocantos2012**; **GonzalezOcantos2014**; **KiewietDeJonge2015**; **Bahamonde2020a** Institutional-centered accounts have usually focused on vote-buying only also. For instance, **Hicken2007** explain that candidate-centered electoral systems, weak parties, and access to resources may facilitate vote-buying. In turn, **Aidt2011**, concentrate on the effects of the secret ballot reform in Western Europe, the United States and British elections **Kam2016a** during the 19th and 20th centuries. Others have studied vote-buying respect to the availability of state resources **Gherghina2021a**, while **Kitschelt2000**; **Kitschelt2007**; **Kitschelt2015** have focused on other important structural conditions that make vote-buying more prone.

cite

Hagene2015 (voters go out to sell their votes) **Zarazaga2015a** interviews 120 brokers from Argentina

Keefer2017

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.¹

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Bahamonde2020a studies vote-selling in the US.

We contend in this paper that omitting the voter's side complicates our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

¹**Leight2020** 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