

Still for Sale: The Micro-Dynamics of Vote Selling in the United States, Evidence From a List Experiment

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“Still for Sale: The Micro-Dynamics of Vote Selling in the United States, Evidence From a List Experiment”

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- About: clientelism; vote buying.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Still for sale: the micro-dynamics of vote selling in the United States, evidence from a list experiment

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Abstract

In nineteenth-century United States politics, vote buying was commonplace. Nowadays, vote buying seems to have declined. The quantitative empirical literature emphasizes vote buying, ignoring the micro-dynamics of vote selling. We seem to know that vote buyers can no longer afford this strategy; however, we do not know what American voters would do if offered the chance to sell their vote. Would they sell, and at what price, or would they consistently opt out of vote selling? A novel experimental dataset representative at the national level comprises 1479 US voters who participated in an online list experiment in 2016, and the results are striking: Approximately 25% would sell their vote for a minimum payment of \$418. Democrats and Liberals are more likely to sell, while education or income levels do not seem to impact the likelihood of vote selling.

Keywords Vote buying · Vote selling · Clientelism · List experiments · United States

Vote sellers and vote buyers

Prior research on clientelism usually focuses on whether parties have attempted to buy votes (Vicente and Wantchekon 2009; Vicente 2014; Rueda 2015, 2017; Reynolds 1980; Nichter 2014; de Jonge 2015; Fisman and Schleiter 2012; González-Ocasio et al. 2014; Díaz-Cayetano et al. 2012; Brasco et al. 2004). Unfortunately, while this is an important question, it overlooks the conditions under which citizens would sell their vote. In fact, Nichter and Peres (2017) explain that studies continue to view clientelism typically as a top-down process, generally overlooking citizens'

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Summary

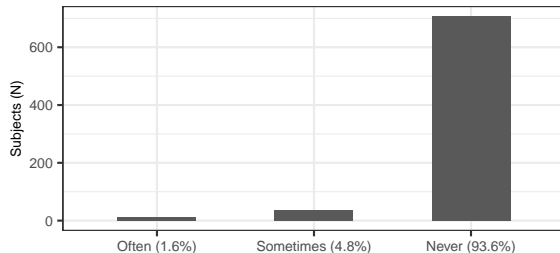
- Using a least-likely case design (U.S.), the paper studies voter's willingness to sell their vote in exchange for money.
- Data are novel and are representative at the country level ($N = 1,479$).
- Survey experiment (list experiment).

Summary

- Using a least-likely case design (U.S.), the paper studies voter's willingness to sell their vote in exchange for money.
- Data are novel and are representative at the country level ($N = 1,479$).
- Survey experiment (list experiment).
- Findings:
 1. Approximately 25% of voters in the U.S. would sell their vote.
 2. They would sell it for a minimum payment of \$418.
 3. Democrats and Liberals are more likely to sell.
 4. Education or income levels do not seem to impact the likelihood of vote selling.

False Impressions

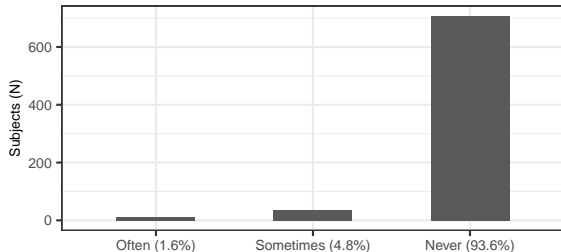
- Americans have rarely been offered the chance to sell their vote.
- However, the question stands: *Would they?*
- **Does this question matter?**



Source: LAPOP 2010.

False Impressions

- Americans have rarely been offered the chance to sell their vote.
- However, the question stands: *Would they?*
- **Does this question matter?** It does: it gives the falsely optimistic impression that US voters systematically “oppose” vote buying, “thus” rarely engaging in clientelism.



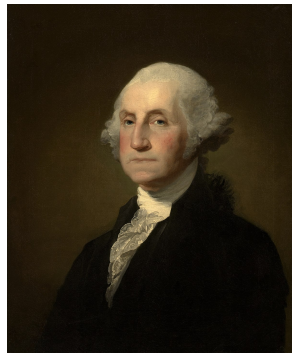
Source: LAPOP 2010.

Gaps in the Literature: A Story of Selection Bias

- Clientelism literature has focused on realized transactions only: developing countries.
- Unfortunately, studying only cases where the outcome of interest is produced, causes selection bias (Geddes, 1990).
 - Studying actual behaviors only limits both the questions and causal inferences.
- My paper fills these gaps by studying hypothetical behaviors (willingness to sell) in a developed country: U.S.
“Least-likely case design.”

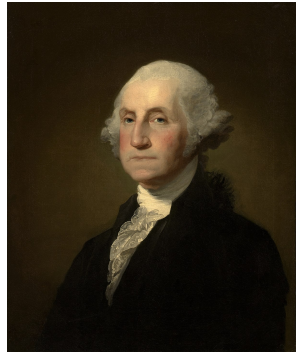
Vote Buying Was Very Common in the U.S.

- George Washington spent 40 pounds (a considerable sum for the day) on gallons of rum, wine, brandy, and beer; all used to buy votes.
- Party tickets, party peddlers and alcohol: ticket shapes and the “incentives” to vote.
- Institutions: the *viva voce* and *Australian ballot* methods.

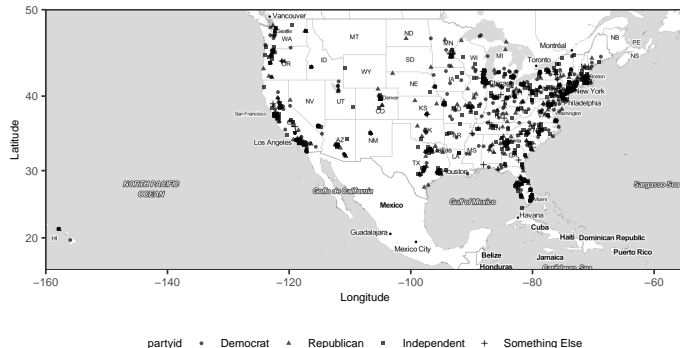


Now Vote Buying is Rare

- Two competing hypotheses:
 1. **Kitschelt**: shrinkage of the state.
 2. **Stokes**: industrialization drove up the electorate's median income, making vote buying more expensive for party machines.



- **Research Question:** *What is the willingness to sell of American voters when offered the chance to sell their votes?*
- **Data:** Online panel (N=1,479) representative at the country level. Re-sampling of gender and party ID.



Vote Selling: Social Desirability Bias

- Directly asking respondents whether they would sell their votes will cause **social desirability bias**.
- Respondents might feel ashamed/embarrassed when admitting doing something socially condemnable.
- **Source of bias:** in avoiding answering with the truth, liars' profiles are systematically different.

List Experiments: Overcoming Social Desirability Bias

- **List experiments** designed to study illegal/uncommon behaviors (drug consumption, corruption, sexual behaviors).
- **Mechanics:**
 - Two lists (control, treatment). Both are *exactly* the same.
 - The treatment has an extra item, the **sensitive** one.
- **Easy estimation:** since both lists are assigned at random, any difference in means should be attributed to the sensitive item *only*.

List Experiment: Endorsement Task

Control

- Non-sensitive item 1
- Non-sensitive item 2
- Non-sensitive item 3

Treatment

- Non-sensitive item 1
- Non-sensitive item 2
- Non-sensitive item 3
- Sensitive item

“How many items (NOT WHICH ONES), if any, would you endorse?”

List Experiment: Endorsement Task

Control

- Smoke a cigarette
- Drink a beer
- Dance

Treatment

- Smoke a cigarette
- Drink a beer
- Dance
- Inhale cocaine

“How many items (NOT WHICH ONES), if any, would you endorse?”

List Experiment: Endorsement Task

Control

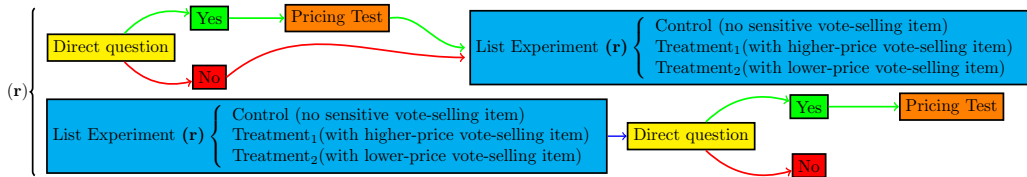
- Steal an iPod from a large department store
- Speed on the highway because you're late for work/school
- Download your favorite music from the Internet illegally

Treatment

- Steal an iPod from a large department store
- Speed on the highway because you're late for work/school
- Download your favorite music from the Internet illegally
- Sell your vote to a candidate for \$500

“How many things (NOT WHICH ONES), if any, would you do?”

My Experimental Design



Dependent Variable

- Sum of items each subject i declares.
- Two treatments were administered (“cheap”/“expensive”): account for possible elasticities.

Hard to price a vote.

