What Wins Votes: Why Some Politicians Opt Out of Clientelism

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In a context where clientelism is widespread, why do some politicians choose not to condition the delivery of goods and services to citizens on individual political behavior? I argue that the answer to this question lies in the heretofore unexamined electoral costs of clientelism: clientelism decreases support from nonpoor constituents even while it generates votes from among the poor. Taking into account these costs and other factors that shape politician incentives, I posit that the interaction between political competition and poverty will explain variation in clientelism. I test this claim using an original measure of clientelism that assesses mayoral involvement in social policy implementation in Argentine municipalities. The results of statistical analysis suggest that high levels of political competition are compatible with clientelism when poverty is also high. Only when high competition is coupled with low rates of poverty does clientelism decline.

In a context where clientelism is widespread, why do some politicians opt not to rely on this method of distribution? Recent years have seen a resurgent interest in understanding political clientelism—the individualized exchange of goods or services for political support. This new wave of literature on the phenomenon has been wide-ranging, with research on what types of voters are targeted via clientelism (Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2009; Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005; Stokes and Dunning 2008), why politicians and voters comply with clientelist agreements (Auyero 2000; Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Lawson and Greene 2011; Stokes 2005), and the implications of clientelism for democratic accountability (Piattoni 2001; Stokes 2007). Almost universally, these authors assume that certain political parties use clientelism and then ask how these exchanges work. However, few scholars have asked why some individual politicians use clientelism while others opt not to. We actually know very little about how widespread the practice is or the correlates of variation in clientelism across or within countries. The frequently hidden nature of clientelist exchange inhibits the collection of reliable data on the phenomenon, further complicating attempts to answer questions of this type.

Focusing on subnational variation in clientelism in a young democracy, this article presents and tests a new theory of why some politicians choose not to use clientelism in their pursuit of votes. My answer to this question relies on the electoral *costs* of clientelism: although clientelism is a vote-getting tactic aimed at the poor, nonpoor voters are likely to punish politicians who engage in it. The salience of these costs should vary with the share of the population that is nonpoor and a politician's security in office. Empirically, then, I expect that the relationship between politician competition and clientelism will be contingent on voter poverty. In order to test this argument, I develop and collect an innovative measure of social policy implementation in a sample of over 120 Argentine municipalities. Statistical analysis supports the claim that neither poverty nor political competition alone explains why some politicians opt out of clientelism. Only when a large opposition presence is coupled with a sizable middle class does the use of clientelism decline.

Defining and Measuring Clientelism

As Laswell (1936) first noted, politics is all about "who gets what, when, and how," and democratic politicians engage in many types of distribution in pursuit of political support. It is the "how" of distribution that distinguishes clientelism from other forms. Politicians commonly direct benefits at groups of voters, whether large or small. These groups may be defined by income, ethnicity, or geographic location, and the distribution may take place through programmatic policies or so-called "pork." In contrast, in clientelist exchange, benefits are targeted at the individual and linked to individual political behavior. Clientelism relies on a voter's belief that her behavior at the ballot box may be monitored and her fear that her individual voting decision may result in material gains or losses. As such, it creates a type of "perverse accountability" (Stokes 2005) wherein politicians are able to hold voters to account for voters' behavior, rather than the reverse.

Given the potentially hidden nature of politician-voter exchanges, assessing whether or not clientelism takes place requires either a measure of how politicians implement policy or direct observation of the interactions between politicians (and their agents) and voters. Opting for the latter tactic, scholars working in the tradition of ethnographic research have demonstrated with great richness how clientelism and closely related phenomena operate in settings as diverse as Argentina (Auyero 2000; Szwarcberg 2007), Egypt (Singerman 1995), India (Krishna 2007), and Taiwan (Wang and Kurzman 2007), among others. Although this type of research illuminates the inner workings of clientelist exchange, the intense amount of fieldwork it requires makes replicating such studies for a large number of locations difficult. As a consequence, such work is rarely conducted in settings where linkages between voters and politicians are not characterized by clientelism. Research on clientelism that relies on the direct observation of the interactions between politicians and voters offers limited leverage for understanding what factors shape the incentives of politicians who can choose between clientelism and other strategies of distribution.

One strategy to circumvent the difficulty of measuring clientelism directly is to instead compare spending on different types of goods and services.[1] So, for example, Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estevez (2007) categorize spending data for a major Mexican antipoverty program implemented throughout the 1990s according to the nature of the goods provided. They consider any expenditures on excludable goods, such as individual scholarships, to be evidence of clientelism, which they contrast with expenditures on public goods, including wells and hospitals. Their approach is similar to related work that uses spending data to examine variation in government responsiveness and performance more generally: these studies generally treat data on spending on personnel as indicative of clientelism or poor government performance, while using spending on public goods or capital projects as evidence of good government performance.[2]

The ease of collection makes these attractive measures, but they are nonetheless problematic. Clientelism, as discussed here and elsewhere, is a *method* of distribution and does not map directly onto conventional distinctions between private and public goods. Consider government-funded food stamps as an example. Food stamps are clearly private goods by any definition of the term. Yet without knowing how a food stamp program is administered, it is impossible to say whether it should be classified as clientelism. Recipients may be chosen on the basis of need alone, or they may believe that their continued receipt of benefits is contingent on their political behavior. At the other extreme, devoting funds to a public good—like the construction of a road or a hospital—does not necessarily preclude clientelism. The process required to create almost any public good embeds many private goods within it, some of which may be distributed via the contingent direct exchange that is a hallmark of clientelism. Although using information on funding for different goods as a proxy for clientelism allows for the comparison of outcomes across space, we run the risk of drawing incorrect inferences by examining private goods rather than clientelism more directly.

In this article, I develop a measure of clientelism that treats it as a method of distribution. I aim to maintain the richness of qualitative work and its focus on how policy is implemented. At the same time, this measure is collected for a sufficiently large number of units such that I am able to document variation in the use of clientelism and to test hypotheses about the causes of that variation while controlling for possible confounding factors. In particular, I focus on whether or not local executives (mayors) are personally involved in the selection of beneficiaries for a large food distribution program across a sample of over 120 small and medium-sized Argentine municipalities. Before turning to the empirical data, I first turn in more depth to the question of why some politicians might opt out of clientelism.

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[1] Another model for the study of clientelism is the large citizen survey discussed in Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004) and Stokes (2005). The survey conducted by those authors documents the interactions between politicians and voters from the perspective of the latter. It does not examine variation in politician reliance on clientelism.

[2] See, for example, Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2005), Calvo and Murillo (2004), Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004), Gordin (2002), and Remmer (2007).

The Electoral Costs of Clientelism

What might explain variation in the use of clientelism between politicians within the same country, the same province, or even the same political party?

To answer this question, I first look to the literature on government performance more broadly, which has focused on political competition as a powerful inducement towards improved government functioning. Perhaps the most basic distinction can be drawn from the comparison of democratic systems with their nondemocratic counterparts, which by definition lack a political opposition that is able to compete on a level playing field with those in power. As Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) argue, the need to maintain the support of a larger portion of the population in a democracy creates more public-regarding policies. Even within democracies, scholars have argued that more intense political competition should curtail corruption (Rose-Ackerman 1978), patronage (Geddes 1994), fiscal irresponsibility (Wibbels 2005), and parties' abilities to exploit state resources for their political aims (Grzymala-Busse 2007).[3]

While intense political competition may improve government performance in general, there is no consensus about the relationship between high levels of political competition and the phenomenon of clientelism in particular. On the one hand, clientelism is frequently associated with low competition or monopolistic political regimes (Hale 2007; Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2003; Medina and Stokes 2002). This rationale suggests that increased competition will diminish clientelism. On the other hand, scholars have highlighted clientelism's usefulness in competitive electoral politics in settings as diverse as Southeast Asia (Scott 1972), Africa (van de Walle 2007), and the United States (Shefter 1977). In fact, clientelism's effectiveness as a vote-getting tool might make the practice especially attractive in the most competitive electoral environments.

In this article, I argue that the link between political competition and clientelism will vary with voter demographics. Almost universally, scholars of clientelism treat and analyze the practice as an exchange between politicians and their poor clients.[4] In both older and more recent works on clientelism, poverty, either directly or when manifest through income inequality, is cited as a

[3] See Cleary (2007) for an exception.

[4] Shefter (1977) is an exception. In his influential study, he points to the relative influence of two competing groups—a "constituency for bureaucratic autonomy" and a "constituency for patronage"—in explaining differences in the use of patronage across countries.

powerful predictor of clientelism.[5] Whether because of their posited shorter time horizons or the greater marginal utility they attach to small material payouts, the poor are overwhelmingly identified as the target of clientelist practices. I concur that the interaction between politicians and poor clients is at the core of clientelism. However, in order to fully understand politician incentives to use clientelism, we need to consider how the practice may affect the voting behavior of nonclients.[6]

Even when the nonpoor are not a party to clientelist exchange, clientelism is likely to create electoral costs in terms of political support from these constituents. I am not the first to highlight the possibility that clientelism imposes costs on politicians. Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez (2007) argue that, given a budget constraint, spending on clientelist "goods" necessarily decreases the pool of resources available for spending on public goods that might gain middle-class support. Similarly, most models of distributive politics assume that voters will reward politicians for targeting resources to their own group and (concomitantly, because of fixed budgets) punish redistribution to others (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996). However, these authors examine only the costs of the redistribution, rather than any possible costs of *how* that redistribution takes place. As noted above, the same benefits can be distributed to the poor via clientelism or not. In contrast to existing work, I argue that the use of clientelism in policies targeted at the poor imposes its own electoral costs.

The nonpoor might object to clientelism either due to self-interest or because of moral concern about the practice. Beginning with the former, voters might view clientelism as a negative signal of the quality of government performance more generally. Middle-class voters, even if not beneficiaries of the targeted social programs that may be distributed via clientelism, are consumers of government products and services of many types, ranging from road maintenance to local security.[7] They are deeply

[5] See, among many others, Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004), Huntington (1968), Scott (1969), and Robinson and Verdier (2002), although see Lyne (2007) for an exception.

[6] In this article, I refer interchangeably to the "poor" and "clients." Although obviously a simplification to assume that all clients are poor and all of the poor are clients, this is a fairly good approximation of reality in the Argentine case. Both Szwarcberg (2008) and Weitz-Shapiro (2011) detail the tactics clientelist Argentine politicians use to spread benefits widely among the poor. Even if not all of the poor are on the receiving end of concrete benefits, many will view themselves as *potential* clients. As Judith Chubb has argued, even nonrecipients can become part of clientelist networks through the "constant anticipation of possible future favors" (Chubb 1982, 167).

[7] Of course, not all of the nonpoor are middle class. Wealthy residents may be able to effectively buy private provision of many

affected by how well or poorly their government carries out its day-to-day tasks. To the extent clientelism serves as a signal of low-quality government performance, middle-class voters are unlikely to support a politician who relies on it.

Second, middle-class voters might reject clientelism on moral or normative grounds and fail to support a politician who uses it, regardless of whether or not clientelism has any direct effect on their material well-being. They may believe that it undermines democratic values by preventing clients from enjoying autonomy over their choices at the ballot box. Of course, poor voters might share this same objection. However, a poor voter faces countervailing pressure to vote for a clientelist politician when she believes that her future access to valuable goods depends on her behavior in the voting booth. It is precisely this conditionality that makes clientelism such an effective vote-getting tool among the poor. In contrast, the non-poor are unlikely to be eligible for or to value those small, material goods and are therefore unlikely to face such pressures. For these voters, the drawbacks of clientelism should create strong incentives to vote against politicians who rely on it. These two mechanisms—a moral and a self-interested one—of course need not be mutually exclusive. If either or both of these mechanisms hold, we should expect nonpoor voters to punish politicians who rely on clientelism.

This expectation is consistent with direct evidence of the effects of clientelism on middle-class voting behavior at the individual level in Argentina. In a project described in greater detail elsewhere (Weitz-Shapiro 2011), I use a survey experiment with random assignment to compare respondents' vote intention for hypothetical politicians with different characteristics. Among the nonpoor, those assigned to a treatment condition in which a mayor is described as distributing "food assistance programs to poor people in exchange for promises to vote for him" were far less likely to say they would vote for that mayor than those assigned to a control condition that provided no information about food assistance programs.[8] As displayed in Figure 1, the share of nonpoor respondents who claimed they were "not at all" likely to vote for the hypothetical mayor jumped from 36% in the control condition to 55% in the treatment condition, a difference that is substan-

tively and statistically significant.[9] Thus, at the individual level, it appears that middle-class voters, those who are not eligible for many of the small goods distributed via clientelism, nonetheless have preferences over *how* these goods are distributed.[10] A full accounting of the effects of clientelism should therefore consider how the practice affects the behavior of both poor and nonpoor voters.

Taking into account the costs of clientelism helps clarify the expected relationship between high levels of political competition and clientelism. Where political competition is high, each vote gained or lost from clientelism will be felt quite acutely. High competition should be compatible with clientelism when voters are mostly poor and the electoral benefits of clientelism outweigh the costs. When high levels of political competition are coupled with a large middle class, however, the electoral costs of clientelism should outweigh the benefits.

In contrast, this trade-off between the electoral costs and benefits of clientelism should be less relevant in contexts of limited political competition. Where a politician believes his security in office is assured, the votes lost and gained because of clientelism are unlikely to determine a politician's future in office. Under circumstances of limited political competition, then, the demographic makeup of his constituents should have a more muted effect on a politician's decision about whether or not to use clientelism.

Empirical Setting: Food Provision in Argentina

In order to test the hypotheses developed here, I examine the implementation of a large social welfare program across a sample of Argentine municipalities. A focus on subnational politics has both substantive and

government services and thus will not be affected by the quality of those services. In most settings, this group will be numerically small and thus have limited electoral impact. In addition, they may still have moral objections to clientelism.

[8] See the supporting information for details on how respondents are classified by social class.

[9] The experiment was conducted via telephone and dialed landlines only, and so the sampled poor population is not representative. Results for this group were not statistically significant.

[10] The control condition did not include information about redistribution, leaving open the possibility that redistribution itself, rather than clientelism, explains the lower levels of support the politician enjoyed in the treatment condition. If this were the case, we would expect middle-class respondents who are especially averse (sympathetic) to redistribution to have an especially strong (weak) response to the clientelism treatment. Additional analysis of respondents who identified with either a clearly right-leaning party (the PRO) or a clearly leftist party (ARI) does not support this alternate explanation. Supporters of the PRO are not especially likely to punish clientelist incumbents, whereas ARI sympathizers are not particularly forgiving of clientelist incumbents. This suggests that attitudes towards clientelism, rather than towards redistribution, drive the results discussed here.

FIGURE 1   Clientelism and Middle-Class Vote Intention
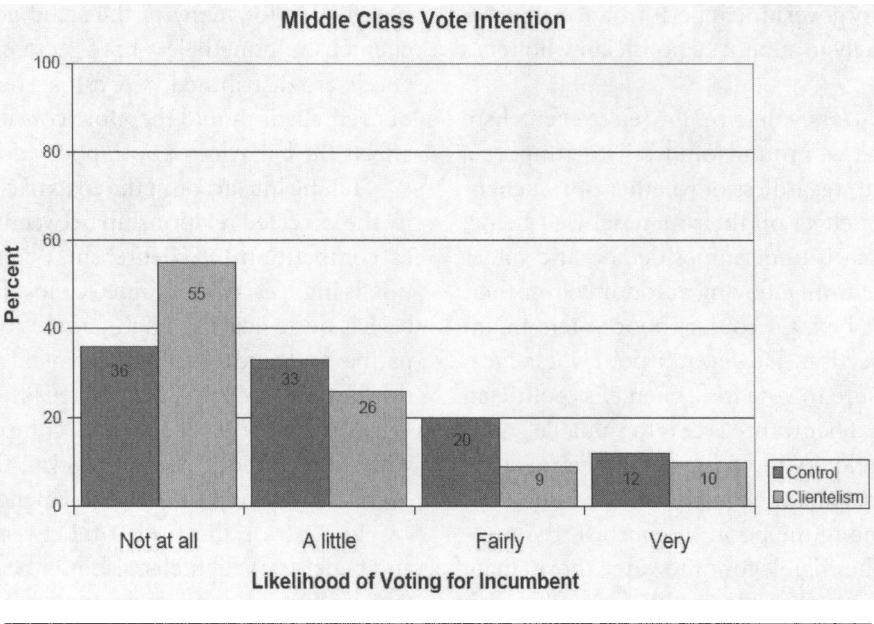
methodological appeal. Clientelist exchange requires that voters are in personal contact with those offering them goods or services in return for political support. Perhaps inevitably, such communication transpires at the local level. Thus, even when clientelism is part of a national-level electoral strategy, it is very likely that local elected officials and political brokers are those who are in direct contact with voters. This makes a focus on subnational politics particularly appropriate. Methodologically, comparing cases within a single country allows us to control for unobservable, but possibly confounding explanatory factors, like the nature of the party system or "tastes" for a certain style of government, that might vary substantially across countries (Snyder 2001).

Even within the sphere of subnational politics, many goods might be exchanged via clientelism. Recent work on clientelism in Latin America has examined the manipulation of public employment (Calvo and Murillo 2004; Gordin 2002), benefits from social welfare programs targeted at the poor (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estevez 2007; Szwarcberg 2007), the distribution of handouts immediately before elections (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Lawson and Greene 2011; Stokes 2005), and sometimes the combination of multiple strategies (Auyero 2000). I focus on clientelism in social welfare programs targeted at the poor. As Haggard and Kaufman (2008, 265) note, the new "modal" approach to social policy provision in the developing world includes an emphasis on social safety net programs (SSNs)—"non-contributory transfer programs targeted in some manner to the poor and those vulnerable to poverty and shocks" (Milazzo

and Grosh 2008, 1). These programs may distribute cash payments, temporary employment, or in-kind benefits like food or construction materials. The value of these benefits—compounded by the potentially ongoing nature of their distribution—means these programs provide powerful inducements to potential clients.

It also makes sense to examine such programs through the lens of local politics. Although not without exception, many social safety net programs are at least partially decentralized in structure (Grosh et al. 2008, chap. 3). Local politicians may maintain control of selecting projects or beneficiaries or monitoring participant compliance with conditionality. The decentralized nature of this new generation of social policies was envisioned by some as a tool to minimize practices like corruption and clientelism and improve accountability.[11] In fact, however, the decentralized structure of SSNs may make them particularly attractive to local clientelist politicians, because those charged with distributing benefits frequently do not carry the financial burden of funding those benefits. An in-depth examination of the local implementation of targeted social programs can shed light on the conditions under which decentralized administration of social policy achieves its stated aims.

Argentina is a particularly apt place to study the local dynamics of clientelism and social policy. It is among the most fiscally decentralized countries in Latin America (Stein 1999) and, importantly, municipal officials have

[11] For a summary of these arguments with respect to decentralization, see Selee (2004, 17–19).

been directly elected since the return of democracy in 1983. This means that the pressures of electoral incentives should be reflected in mayoral behavior. Since the mid-1990s, SSN's have become an increasingly important—and publicized—part of Argentine social welfare provision. Argentina's experience thus reflects broader trends towards decentralization and targeted social policy experienced by many countries in the developing world. Argentina is also the subject of numerous scholarly works that demonstrate the extensive reliance on clientelism in that country—setting a high bar for understanding the conditions under which some politicians will opt out of clientelism.

Within Argentina, I focus on the implementation of the *Programa Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria* (National Food Security Program), or PNSA. At the time of research, the PNSA's largest component funded the direct, regular distribution to families of large boxes or bags of foodstuffs (*módulos* or *bolsones alimentarios*) to households across the country.[12] Provincial guidelines for one of the provinces under study suggest that a package might include the following items: a kilogram each of flour, *yerba* (a local tea), sugar, and rice, half a kilogram of corn flour, tomato paste, and three different types of dried pasta, as well as a liter of oil and milk. Distributed approximately every 45 days, these packages have a potentially large impact on recipients' food security. According to its own estimates, the combined elements of the PNSA reached over 7 million individuals in 2006, or about 18% of the Argentine population (Argentina n.d.).

The PNSA has a number of characteristics that make it a good testing ground for exploring variation in local incentives to rely on clientelism. First, it is a nationally funded program whose broad parameters are the same across all municipalities, thus ensuring that differences in implementation are not due to differences in program characteristics. At the same time, however, local politicians enjoy almost total discretion over program implementation. The law that established the PNSA granted cities a number of administrative responsibilities, including registering beneficiaries, administering funds, and establishing mechanisms for the distribution of the food within their municipalities (Argentine Congress 2002). The PNSA is thus an ideal vehicle through which to test the theory developed here, as municipalities cannot change the overall structure of the program, but the decisions made by local politicians have a profound impact on how food is distributed within their jurisdictions.

Data and Measurement

Even restricting the analysis to Argentina alone, the universe of possible cases is quite large. Argentina has over 2,000 local governments (including municipalities and their smaller counterparts, *comunas*) spread over 23 provinces and the city of Buenos Aires. The empirical test of the theory developed here relies on an original survey of a key informant in over 120 small- and medium-sized Argentine cities, as well as some secondary data. Interviews for the survey were carried out in 2006 in three provinces from the north, center, and south of the country: Salta, Córdoba, and Río Negro. In addition to their geographic diversity, these provinces ensure a sample that is quite diverse along the main variables of theoretical interest.[13]

Outcome Variable: Conceptualizing Clientelism in the PNSA

Although I cannot observe clientelism directly, I develop a proxy for clientelism that relies on evaluating whether the mayor is personally involved in the selection of program beneficiaries. Focusing on smaller municipalities (the mean population in the sample is 14,000) allows me to examine cases where clientelism will be manifest in the personal involvement of mayors in clientelist exchange, rather than by reliance on large networks of brokers, as documented in much larger Argentine municipalities by Auyero (2000) and Levitsky (2003). Mayoral involvement is an attractive proxy for clientelism because it indicates whether a mayor is in a position to personally reward or punish voters for their political behavior, one of the key requirements of clientelist exchange.

In municipalities where the mayor was personally involved in beneficiary selection for the PNSA, fieldwork indicated that these mayors become the public face of the PNSA and other social welfare benefits. It is not uncommon for mayors in such municipalities to devote significant time to receiving and acting on individual requests for social assistance. In the municipality of La Merced, in the province of Salta, a large sign in the main stairwell in the municipality building declares that the mayor holds "office hours" 24 hours a week. In this municipality and other similar locations observed during fieldwork, line

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[12] The program is currently in the process of transitioning from the direct distribution of food to the distribution of food stamps or electronic debit cards.

[13] The following criteria were used to select municipalities within each province: Río Negro and Salta: all municipalities with populations greater than 2,000 (27 and 50, respectively). Córdoba: all municipalities with populations greater than 20,000, and a random sample of those with populations between 2,000 and 20,000 (55 in total). Data were ultimately successfully collected for 126 of these municipalities, or 95% of the original sample.

bureaucrats and nonpolitical appointees played a more limited role in beneficiary selection. As these civil servants are likely to serve regardless of the administration in power, a prominent role for these actors might signal to voters the apolitical nature of benefits. Instead, in municipalities where mayors were involved in beneficiary selection, the crucial roles of receiving and deciding on requests for assistance were dominated by the mayor and his closest associates.

This personalization of decision making has a number of consequences for how voters understand the benefits that they receive. First, even though benefits are funded by the national government, the mayor's personal involvement in beneficiary selection allows him to claim credit for the benefits he distributes. As Chubb (1982, 75), Scott (1972, 95), and others have argued, credit claiming is a crucial component of clientelist exchange. It encourages voters to believe that their present receipt or future access to valuable goods depends on the whims of an individual politician and thus leads voters to behave in ways that maximize the probability of maintaining that politician's favor. Second, because mayoral involvement concentrates decision making in the hands of very few people, it also lends significant unpredictability to the process. Although clientelist mayors, as in the case of La Merced, spend significant time receiving requests from constituents, other duties and tasks frequently intrude. As a result, where mayors are personally involved in beneficiary lists, constituents typically spend a significant amount of time waiting to make their requests, usually in the company of many others with similar requests. In many cases, repeat visits are necessary before a request for assistance can even be made, let alone granted. Both credit claiming and the unpredictability of access further reinforce voters' belief in political discretion over program benefits.

Although there are alternative interpretations of the meaning of mayoral involvement in beneficiary selection, these are less plausible in the Argentine case. First, it might be the case that individual mayoral involvement in beneficiary lists simply reflects municipality size. Mayors may be more likely to be involved in any decision in smaller localities. To some extent, the empirical design controls for this possibility by limiting the study to municipalities with fewer than 100,000 residents. Most municipalities in the sample are far smaller than this, and thus of a size where individual mayoral involvement should be feasible—and yet it is not observed in one-third of the sample. In addition, I include municipality size in the regression analysis reported below and find that even when accounting for differences in population, mayoral intervention is associated with the theoretical variables of interest in the expected direction.

Second, it might be argued that politician involvement in decision making is an indicator of good governance and oversight, rather than clientelism. As described above, in-depth observation during fieldwork suggested that mayoral involvement in beneficiary selection for the PNSA was not used in order to ensure appropriate targeting of beneficiaries, but rather in order to claim personal and political credit for a nationally funded program. Other behaviors that are suggestive of politicization of program implementation are positively correlated with personalized mayoral decision making. So, for example, although cases where the official at the head of the municipal social welfare office was related to the mayor were rare, these were overwhelmingly concentrated in municipalities where the mayor was personally involved in the PNSA beneficiary list. In municipalities with mayoral intervention, the head of social welfare and the mayor are related in 17% of the cases, whereas the head of the social welfare office is related to the mayor in only 3% of other cases. A mayor's physical presence at the actual distribution of the boxes of food follows a similar pattern: where the mayor was involved in making the list, he was also present at food distribution 23% of the time, whereas the mayor personally attended food distribution in only 2% of those municipalities where he did not participate in list making. On the other hand, the involvement of social workers (presumably less likely to be political actors) in drawing up beneficiary lists, though relatively widespread, was concentrated in nonclientelist municipalities. Where mayors were not personally involved in list making, social workers were involved in developing and editing the list of beneficiaries in 79% of these cases, whereas this figure falls to only 43% in municipalities coded as clientelist. All of these patterns suggest that personal mayoral involvement in the PNSA is a reflection of the politicization of benefits more than anything else.[14]

The precise measure of mayoral decision making was gathered using an original survey conducted in person by researchers with a key informant (in most cases, the head of the municipal social welfare office). The questions I analyze here focus on the mayor's role in drawing up or altering the list of beneficiaries for the PNSA. The survey asked separately about the creation of the municipality's list of beneficiaries for the PNSA as well as additions to and subtractions from that list. In each case, the head was asked whether the mayor (along with a number of other actors) was "consulted" or otherwise "participated" in creating the list of beneficiaries, and then later whether the mayor definitively decided on the makeup of that

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[14] All three differences are statistically significant (p < .03 or better).

list.[15] Each set of questions (on the making of the list and on additions to/subtractions from the list) was posed separately, with a number of questions in between. Asking these questions repeatedly then serves to reduce the effects of any respondent attempt to hide this information from the interviewer.[16] With that in mind, I use a blanket measure that takes a value of 1 if the interviewee claimed that the mayor suggested names either in the making of the list or in making changes to the list—a variable I call *Mayor list*. Of the 126 cities for which I have data, the mayor was somehow involved in list making in 84 of these (67% of the sample). As noted above, in the absence of a direct measure of clientelism, I treat this measure of personalized decision making as a close proxy. The empirical results reported below use this outcome variable.

Explanatory Variables

The main predictor variables of theoretical interest are the measures of municipal poverty, the size of the legislative opposition, and the interaction between these two. Where the political opposition is extremely limited in size, we do not expect levels of voter poverty to enter into a mayor's calculus about whether to use clientelism. For this reason, the coefficient on the variable measuring poverty is expected to be at or near zero and is not expected to be statistically significant. Where poverty is limited and there is a large constituency against clientelism, increasing levels of opposition should decrease a mayor's incentives to rely on clientelism, and so the coefficient on the opposition variable should be negative and significant. As the size of the opposition increases, I predict that poverty is increasingly likely to be important in the mayor's decision making, with the incentives for clientelism increasing in the share of the population that is poor. So, the coefficient on the interaction term between these two key variables is expected to be positive and significant.

Poverty. I use the most widely available measure of poverty in Argentina, the proportion of households in each municipality with NBI ("necesidades básicas insat-

isfechas"), or unsatisfied basic needs. A household is considered to have unsatisfied basic needs if it meets at least one of five characteristics that are considered indicators of poverty in Argentina, such as lack of indoor plumbing or more than three people per room.[17]

Political competition. I am interested in measuring a politician's perceived (in)security in office, which will shape his responsiveness to the electoral gains and losses of clientelism. That security will depend on observable outputs of previous political competition, changes in the political situation since the last election, and variables idiosyncratic to each individual. In the absence of a direct measure of politician security in office, I measure the size of the opposition presence in the local town council. Opposition in a local council should be correlated with a politician's perceived security in office for two reasons. First, the size of the legislative opposition is likely to be negatively correlated with a politician's support in the population. Second, in addition to serving as a signal of levels of incumbent support in the previous election, a legislative opposition is likely to actively seek to undermine a mayor's hold on power. Opposition members of a legislature will seek to criticize the executive's decisions and present themselves as a viable governing alternative, and their ability to do so convincingly should be increasing in the size of the opposition. Though professionalization is obviously far lower than in national legislative bodies where this holds true (Grzymala-Busse 2007, 64), opposition members of Argentine town councils do have some tools available to them to complicate an executive politician's pursuit of his goals. In the words of a mayoral advisor in one of the municipalities in this study where the mayor faces a large opposition, "they [the opposition] put obstacles in the municipal regulations . . . you always have to be accountable (*rendir cuentas*)" (Author interview, August 2007). Furthermore, in the small and medium-size towns I examine here, local town councillors frequently devote part or all of their salaries to political activities. The larger the size of the opposition, the greater the resources it can devote to nonlegislative strategies to undermine the incumbent. A local council opposition, then, not only serves as a signal of a politician's past electoral support, but its behavior as an opposition is likely to affect a mayor's security in office. As such, the larger the opposition, the less secure an incumbent is likely to feel in his prospects for reelection and hence the more sensitive he should be to the relative costs and benefits of clientelism.

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[15] The exact question wording is reported in the supporting information.

[16] A potential concern is that respondents in predominantly middle-class areas will be more likely to hide information about mayoral involvement precisely because it is an indicator of clientelism. Though this concern cannot be entirely eliminated, it is attenuated by the setting of this study—the use of clientelism is likely to be public knowledge in the small and medium-sized cities examined here. The survey was supplemented with more in-depth fieldwork in a handful of cities, and in those locations, responses from the survey were consistent with observations from fieldwork.

[17] Precise details are included in the supporting information.

For the municipalities examined here, the relevant legislative body is the "Concejo Deliberante" (CD), which I refer to interchangeably as the local legislature or city/town council. All Argentine municipalities have these councils, which range in size depending on provincial regulations and population. In the sample of municipalities analyzed here, these councils range from three to twelve members, with the median council made up of seven members.

I measure the opposition's strength in the legislature by simply calculating the share of seats in the body held by members of any opposition party (individuals from all parties other than the mayor's party or parties explicitly allied with the mayor's party). The variable, *Total opposition*, ranges from 0 to 1, with both the mean and the median at about .43. I also consider the possibility that the size of the single largest opposition, rather than the total size of the opposition, is key to understanding mayoral incentives. It is possible that an incumbent might perceive a single, large, unified opposition as a greater threat to his security and reelection prospects than a larger but more fragmented opposition. The share of seats held by the single largest opposition in the local legislature ranges from 0 to .67 in the data, with a mean of about one-third. I present regression results using both measures of political competition.

Control variables.

Although the argument developed here focuses on the direct vote-related costs and benefits of clientelism, other factors may affect the appeal of using clientelism in the implementation of social welfare policy. In Argentina, partisanship is foremost among these factors. Both of Argentina's historically large parties, the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ) and the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), have clientelist roots and enjoy sizable clientelist networks (Calvo and Murillo 2004, 2013). However, since the 1983 transition to democracy, it is the Peronist (PJ) party that has been most strongly identified with patronage politics and clientelist distribution (Levitsky 2003), and it has the largest clientelist network (Calvo and Murillo 2013). I therefore include an indicator variable that takes on the value of 1 if the mayor is a member of the Peronist party (PJ), which is the case for 68 of the 126 municipalities included in the analysis.

Apart from partisanship, a mayor or a party with a long history of access to power might be expected to experience a lower cost to using clientelism. That history may provide a mayor with greater opportunity to cultivate the type of dense social networks and extensive ties to voters that facilitate voter contact and monitoring. I proxy for the strength of those ties with information on whether the mayor's party has held the mayor's seat continuously since Argentina's 1983 return to democracy (*Mayor party dominates*). This variable takes the value of 1 when this condition is met. Thus, a higher value indicates a lower cost to (and a higher likelihood of) clientelism, and the coefficient is expected to be positive and significant.

Finally, as already noted, population size may also affect the costs of clientelism. The type of monitoring that clientelism requires may be easier in smaller towns and cities, where direct social ties between politicians and voters are more likely. In fact, Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004) do find that vote buying in Argentina was more commonly reported by individuals residing in smaller towns than in large cities. The population of the municipalities included in this study ranges from 2,026 to 93,101. The mean is about 14,000 inhabitants, while the median is 8,300. I use the log of population in the regression analysis to account for these differences, and I expect to find a negative coefficient on this variable.

Civic accountability.

Although the theory developed here focuses on the ways in which political competition and poverty shape the incentives politicians face to opt out of clientelism, others have argued that less institutionalized channels may be more important for explaining government performance. The existence of what Putnam (1994) calls a strong "civic community" and what Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) call "societal accountability" may lead to improved government performance, regardless of levels of political competition. Examining government performance in Mexican municipalities, for example, Cleary argues that where citizen participation is more frequent, politicians are more likely to get reliable information about what citizens want and feel more pressure to act as "faithful public servants" (2007, 285). Using data on water and electricity provision in Mexican municipalities, Cleary finds that, all else equal, municipalities with higher literacy rates and voter turnout enjoy higher rates of service provision in these two critical areas.

I consider two variables that might measure the strength of a municipality's civic community: the number of radio stations in the municipality, and the mean level of education among its residents. The latter runs on a scale from 0, indicating that all adult residents have an incomplete primary education or less, to 3, indicating that all adults have completed tertiary or university studies. As Cleary argues, more educated voters should be more likely to engage in a variety of forms of political participation that may pressure politicians to improve their performance. The number of radio stations registered in the municipalities included in the sample ranges from 0 to 14,

with a median value of 1 and a mean of almost 2. If the societal accountability hypothesis is correct, local radio stations should improve information provision to residents and may also serve as a direct source of pressure on politicians to improve their performance. In both cases, higher values indicate higher levels of civic engagement and hence are expected to be associated with a decreased likelihood that a politician will resort to clientelism.[18]

A table included in the supporting information file presents summary statistics for all the variables discussed above and notes the expected sign on the coefficients for all explanatory variables.

Explaining Personalized Decision Making in the PNSA

I turn now to a discussion of the correlates of mayoral involvement in creating and altering beneficiary lists. As detailed earlier, I expect that the interaction between political opposition and poverty will shape an incumbent politician's incentives to rely on personalized decision making. I run a series of logistic regressions where the outcome variable, *Mayor list*, takes on the value of 1 if the mayor is involved in drawing up or altering the beneficiary list for the PNSA.

Results

Table 1 presents the empirical results. Columns 1–3 present the test of the main argument developed in this article, while column 4 incorporates variables key to the civic accountability hypothesis. The regression results reported in column 1 measure the opposition using total opposition size, whereas column 2 relies on a measure of the size of the single largest opposition. The results from the two regressions are quite similar and are largely consistent with my expectations, as I discuss below. A more crucial comparison is with column 3, which highlights the importance of including the interaction term between opposition size and poverty for the results reported here. Column 3 shows the results of the same regression reported in column 1, with the sole difference that the interaction term between poverty and legislative opposition is omitted. This serves as a test of the dominant existing

explanations of clientelism, which expect a monotonic relationship between poverty or political competition on the one hand and clientelism on the other. As is clear, the results of this regression do not support these explanations. In the absence of any interaction term, we would conclude that neither poverty nor opposition presence is correlated with personalized mayoral decision making.

In contrast, the results reported in the first columns in Table 1 tell a very different story. They demonstrate that opposition size is indeed correlated with mayoral intervention into the PNSA beneficiary list, but that this correlation varies with municipal poverty rates. The interaction term is critical for recognizing the role that both political competition and poverty play in determining the incidence of personalized decision making in municipal policy in Argentina.

For the purpose of interpretation, I focus on the results presented in column 1. The coefficients on the main variables of interest are consistent with the theoretical expectations in both direction and statistical significance. The coefficient on the legislative opposition variable is negative, indicating that, where poverty is low, increasing levels of opposition presence decrease the probability of mayoral intervention. In contrast, the coefficient on the interaction term is positive, supporting the argument that, as poverty increases, increasing opposition size is associated with a higher probability of mayoral intervention. The results thus support the claim that high political competition does not have a uniform effect on clientelism. Instead, incentives to use clientelism as competition increases depend on voter poverty.

Given the nonlinearities in the predictions inherent in a logistic regression, the substantive significance of the interaction term is best illustrated with a graph. Figure 2 shows the predicted probability that a mayor will be involved in drawing up lists of beneficiaries in a typical municipality. Specifically, the graph shows the predicted probability that the mayor of a city of average size, affiliated with the Peronist party, but where the PJ has not continuously held the office of mayor since 1983, will intervene in the making or alteration of the beneficiary list for the PNSA as legislative opposition ranges from its minimum to its maximum.[19]

The three lines in the graph show how the link between legislative opposition and personalized decision making varies with constituency poverty. In the graph, the solid line represents the predicted probability of mayoral intervention for a municipality with the median

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[18] On the role of the media and information provision in improving government performance, see Adserá, Boix, and Payne (2003), Besley and Burgess (2002), and Ferraz and Finan (2008). On the other hand, local media may empower entrenched elites (Boas and Hidalgo 2011). In municipalities with only a single radio station, this may be organized by the city government. For this reason I also discuss alternate specifications of this variable below.

[19] The figure is drawn using coefficients taken from the regression results in column 1 of Table 1. The figure for a typical non-Peronist municipality is very similar and is included in the supporting information.

TABLE 1 Using Clientelism: Regression Results

	Total Opp (1)	Largest Opp (2)	No Interaction (3)	Civil Society (4)
Population (ln)	−.43*	−.49**	−.49**	−.49
	(.25)	(.24)	(.24)	(.39)
Poverty	−5.53	−1.84	5.33	−2.29
	(5.07)	(4.79)	(4.12)	(6.43)
Total opposition	−9.28**		1.03	−9.24**
	(3.67)		(1.49)	(3.72)
Largest opposition		−7.02*		
		(4.10)		
Poverty*Total opposition	37.89***			38.65***
	(11.88)			(12.16)
Poverty*Largest opposition		37.43**		
		(14.88)		
PJ	.55	.61	.55	.61
	(.46)	(.46)	(.44)	(.47)
Mayor party dominates	1.14	.99	.71	1.12
	(.72)	(.71)	(.63)	(.72)
Córdoba	1.92	1.91	.97	2.32*
	(1.29)	(1.14)		(1.40)
Rio Negro	.99	.83	.16	1.48
	(1.04)	(1.03)	(.92)	(1.21)
Mean education				1.72
				(2.14)
Radio stations				−.01
				(.12)
Percent correctly predicted	72	70	68	74
Percent reduction in error	17	10	5	21
Obs.	126	126	126	126

Results are from logistic regressions where the dependent variable equals one if the mayor is involved in drawing up the beneficiary list, and zero otherwise. *, **, and *** indicate significance at the .1, .05, and .01 levels.

level of poverty in the sample. The top and bottom dashed lines estimate that probability for a municipality with poverty set to its 75% value and 25% value in the sample.[20] Although the graph appears to suggest that mayoral intervention will be slightly less likely in poor municipalities at very low levels of opposition, simulations (discussed below) demonstrate that these differences are statistically insignificant. As opposition size increases from that point, the predicted probability of mayoral decision making increasingly diverges based on poverty rates. As the opposition's share of seats in the local council increases, so does the probability that

[20] The mean, 25%, and 75% rates of household poverty are 18%, 11%, and 32%, respectively. Some caution should be used in interpreting these figures, as they are not based on household income, and thus they likely underestimate poverty, especially during economic downturns (Gasparini 2004).

the mayor will intervene in the PNSA beneficiary list in the typical high-poverty city, whereas it declines quite sharply in the typical low-poverty municipality.[21]

In order to give a sense of the uncertainty surrounding these estimates, I conduct 1,000 simulations of the difference in the expected probability of mayoral intervention in a high- versus low-poverty municipality over the whole range of values of legislative opposition.[22]

[21] In only seven observations of the 126 included in the regression analysis does the opposition make up more than 70% of the legislature. If we exclude these extremely high opposition municipalities and repeat the analysis in Table 1, the coefficients are very similar to those reported there. These results are reported in the supporting information.

[22] The simulations were done using the sim function in the arm package, developed by Gelman and Hill (2007) for the statistical package R. For each of 100 values of legislative opposition, I simulate

FIGURE 2 Legislative Opposition and Mayoral Intervention
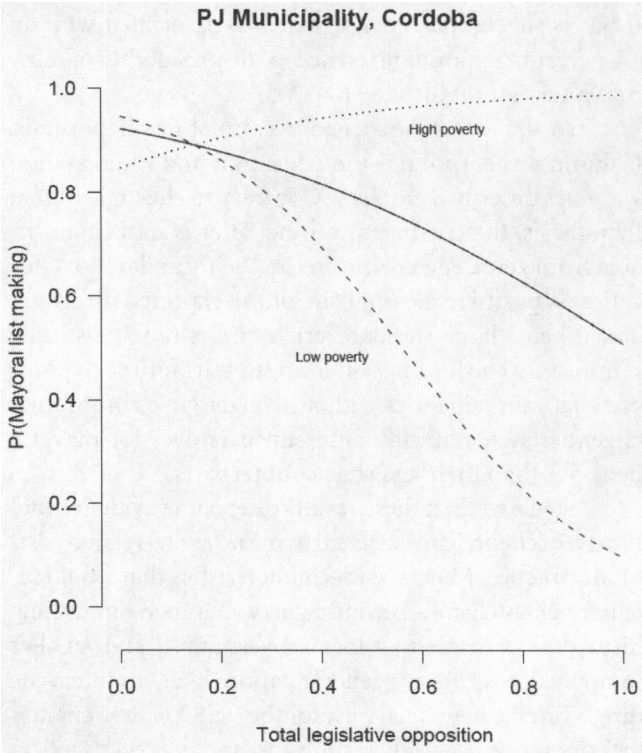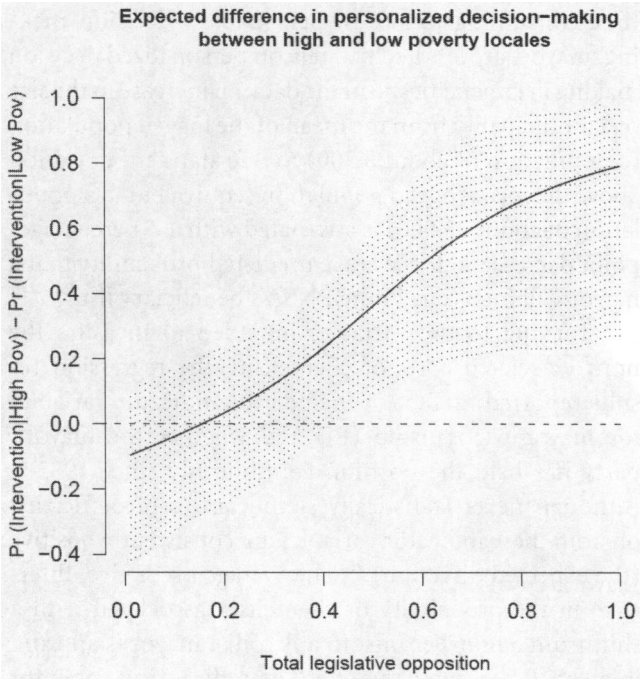

FIGURE 3 Simulations

Figure 3 presents the results. The horizontal axis measures the share of the town council held by the legislative opposition, while the vertical axis shows the estimated predicted difference in the probability of mayoral list making between a high- and low-poverty municipality. The solid line depicts the mean difference in these probabilities for each corresponding value of legislative opposition, while the dotted lines indicate 95% confidence intervals drawn from the simulations. The dashed line at zero indicates the baseline where there is no difference in the predicted probability of personalized decision making between cities with these different levels of poverty. Positive values indicate that the model predicts that we are more likely to observe mayoral intervention in a city where poverty is at its 75% value in the sample than in a city with a poverty level equal to its 25% value in the sample. Conversely, negative values indicate that the model predicts that personalized decision making is more likely in relatively better-off municipalities.

1,000 times the difference in the predicted probability of clientelism as poverty shifts between its 75% and 25% values in the sample. The mean difference and 95% confidence intervals are taken from these simulations.

As the figure makes clear, there is substantial uncertainty about the relationship between poverty and mayoral intervention where legislative opposition is minimal. The estimated difference of about zero and the confidence intervals that include zero suggest that, as hypothesized, poverty does not affect the incentives to use clientelism when opposition is low. Where competition is low, personalized decision making in the PNSA is predicted to be extremely likely, a result that is consistent with the literature's description of the pervasiveness of clientelism in Argentina as a whole. As the size of the legislative opposition increases, however, the picture changes. The predicted probability of personal intervention in the PNSA increasingly diverges between two otherwise similar cities with poverty at the 75% and 25% levels of our sample. Once the legislative opposition surpasses around 40%, a mayor in a high-poverty city is expected to be significantly more likely than his counterpart in a competitive but lower-poverty city to engage in this clientelist practice. The estimated size of this difference in the propensity to use clientelism continues to increase as the opposition increases. As levels of political opposition increase, knowing a city's poverty rate becomes an increasingly reliable tool to predict whether the mayor of that city will engage in personalized decision making.

Among the other variables of interest, only municipal population is statistically significant and in the expected

direction. Consistent with findings reported by Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004), and perhaps reflecting the time-consuming nature of personalized decision making, mayors are less likely to rely on personalized decision making in larger cities.[23] In the data, an increase in the size of a municipality from the mean of the logged population (a population of about 8,700) to one standard deviation above the mean logged population (equivalent to a population of about 23,000) is associated with a 7-percentage-point decrease in the average predicted probability that a mayor will intervene in the PNSA's beneficiary list.[24]

Turning to the variables intended to measure the nonvote-related costs of clientelism, the regression results reported in Table 1 include the indicator variables for mayor partisanship (PJ) and whether the mayor's party has held the position continuously since 1983.[25] Although never statistically significant, the coefficients on both these indicator variables are consistently positive (the expected direction).[26] The average predictive difference in the probability of clientelism associated with a shift from a non-Peronist to a Peronist mayor is approximately 10 percentage points. The indicator variable for mayor party dominance is similarly consistently positive, as we would expect, and its magnitude is even greater than that on the Peronist dummy variable. Once again, the coefficient is not statistically significant, although when the partisan indicator variable is dropped, the indicator variable for party dominance is significant at the .1 level. The

magnitude of the average predictive difference associated with a change from a situation where the mayor's party has not dominated the office since 1983 to one where it has is substantial: such a switch is associated with an 18-percentage-point difference in the probability of mayoral intervention into the PNSA.

In order to test the societal accountability hypothesis, Column 4 incorporates the education and radio station variables described earlier.[27] Contrary to the logic of that hypothesis, the coefficient on the latter is indistinguishable from zero. The coefficient on the mean level of education is positive, the opposite of the expected direction, and it has a large standard error and is not statistically significant. The findings offer no support for the hypothesis that municipalities with a stronger civic community engender systematically different incentives for mayoral behavior than their less civic counterparts.

Taken together, these results offer some evidence that the use of clientelism is related to the nonvote-related costs of the practice. Mayors with characteristics that would facilitate clientelism—Peronist party membership, a long history of control over local government, and smaller municipality size—are generally more likely to intervene directly in the beneficiary list for the PNSA. These characteristics move slowly over time and are unlikely to reflect the nature of political competition in any given administration. Nonetheless, even controlling for these factors, the likelihood of personalized decision making appears quite responsive to the interaction between voter poverty and competition.

[23] As noted earlier, it may be the case that some of the increase in mayoral intervention in the beneficiary list in smaller municipalities reflects greater mayoral involvement in all municipal decisions as population size decreases. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, even accounting for differences in municipal size, the interaction between poverty and political opposition remains a strong correlate of mayoral involvement in the PNSA. Furthermore, in a separate analysis limited to only the smallest municipalities in the data (population less than 8,700), the political variables continue to be important predictors of clientelism. Results available in the supporting information.

[24] I define the average predicted difference following Gelman and Hill (2007, 101–4).

[25] I also ran regressions including an indicator variable for whether the mayor shared a partisan affiliation with the governor, whether he was reelected, and whether his party had held office for all but one or all administrations since 1983. I do not include these in the results reported here because they were not consistently positive, were often small in magnitude, were not statistically significant, and their inclusion did not affect the coefficients on the main variables of theoretical interest.

[26] The Peronist party is more likely than other parties to have won all elections since 1983, and hence Peronist mayors are more likely to enjoy this dominance. The coefficients on the two variables are jointly significant at the .1 level. When each is included alone, the indicator variable for mayor party dominance is significant at the .08 level, but the indicator variable for PJ membership still does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Conclusions: The Costs of Clientelism

In this article, I ask why, in a context where it is commonplace, some politicians opt *not* to rely on clientelism. In order to answer this question, I shift the analysis of clientelism away from an exclusive focus on the poor recipients of government goods and consider clientelism's effects on the voting behavior of the nonpoor. While clientelism may gain votes from the poor, it is likely to cost a politician support from the middle class. Clientelism thus creates an electoral trade-off, a trade-off that should be especially relevant when political competition is high. In contrast, where competition is low, this trade-off is less likely to affect politician incentives. Incorporating

[27] We might believe that in cities with only a single radio station, this station is likely to be dominated by the government. In alternate specifications, I include an indicator variable for municipalities with two or more radio stations, which does not change the results reported here.

the reaction of the nonpoor to clientelism suggests the usefulness of examining the interaction between poverty and political competition in order to predict clientelism. High competition should be compatible with clientelism when poverty is high, but should decrease the incentives for clientelism where poverty is low. In contrast, where political competition is limited, we should not expect constituent poverty to shape politician incentives to use clientelism.

This article tests these predictions using original data on personalized mayoral decision making in the implementation of social policy in a sample of Argentine municipalities. It employs an innovative measure that treats clientelism as a method of distribution even while it allows for the collection of these data for a large number of municipalities. The results are consistent with the hypothesis that high competition decreases the incentives to use clientelism in predominantly middle-class settings while having little effect on the reliance on clientelism in settings with large poor populations.

Although the study of clientelism has a long history in political science, tests of possible explanations of variation in clientelism have been relatively few. The very nature of clientelism—an individualized exchange that is not readily measured or observed—complicates attempts to simultaneously document it carefully and explain variation in its use. Some recent efforts to address this question have moved in the direction of large, cross-national studies of the type analyzed by Keefer (2007) and developed by Kitschelt and his colleagues (Kitschelt et al. 2009). In order to achieve broad geographical coverage, these efforts measure clientelism using proxies (such as corruption or rule of law) or expert opinions on the behavior of national parties and politicians. This macrolevel approach to data collection, though it allows for cross-country comparison, makes it difficult to assess the nature of exchange relationships between voters and politicians. It also ignores the possibility of within-country variation in clientelism and, given data sources, likely reflects practices in capital cities and prominent regions.

This article puts forward a new approach to the study of clientelism. A focus on the subnational level allows me to collect a measure of clientelism across a large number of units that nonetheless stays true to our understanding of the phenomenon as a method of distribution. These data demonstrate that, even within a country setting widely identified as clientelist, a substantial minority of politicians choose not to rely on clientelism. The cost of clientelism hypothesis developed here has significant explanatory power, at least for the Argentine case. It suggests that while political competition alone is not sufficient to diminish incentives to rely on clientelism, the combination

of a growing middle class and growing competition may temper incentives for clientelism. Of course, the portability of this theory to other contexts remains an open question. The basic methodology employed here could be replicated elsewhere, in this way building a comprehensive test of this theory of clientelism from the subnational level upwards.

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Supporting Information

The following supporting information is available for this article:

Additional Supporting Information on Summary Statistics for All Variables and Expected Direction for All Explanatory Variables
Additional Figure

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