6

Clientelism and Poverty

6.1 INTRODUCTION: POVERTY OF NATIONS AND OF VOTERS

Part II of this book constructs a model of clientelism that pivots around the behavior of types of individuals – party leaders, brokers, and voters. Part III examines macro-dynamics of clientelism: why it persists and what forces may undermine it, with an emphasis on historical developments at the national level.

The current chapter marks a transition between micro and macro concerns. Here we study the link between clientelism and poverty. The broker-mediated model in Chapter 3 included assumptions about how wealthy and poor voters differ in the utility they derive from expressions of political loyalties and from money. These assumptions, and what may lie behind them, are our focus here. The national experiences of shifts from clientelism to nonconditional distribution, to pork-barrel politics, and even to programmatic distribution, explored in Part III, have much to do with changes in income levels and in income distribution. Hence, before shifting to these accounts, it is helpful to pause and examine more closely the evidence about poverty and clientelism.

Imagine drawing a country at random from a list of all those in which competitive national elections are regularly held. If one had to guess whether clientelism was widely practiced in the country selected, one's guess would probably be improved by knowing how wealthy the country is – its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and income distribution. The poorer the country, the more likely that its politics would be clientelistic.

Imagine drawing a voter at random from the electoral list of a country where clientelism is widely practiced. If one had to guess whether the person selected had ever obtained access to social assistance in exchange for his or her vote, one's guess would certainly be improved by knowing the voter's income and where it placed him or her on the economic ladder. The poorer the voter, the more likely the voter would be to have "sold" his or her vote.

That clientelism is isomorphic with poverty seems self-evident. Indeed, in the theoretical treatments discussed in Chapter 2, the idea that benefits flow disproportionately to poor voters is more an assumption than a result. Many historical examples can be cited of political machines homing in on the poor. Blue-collar and immigrant neighborhoods were the places where the ward-healers of political machines in U.S. cities sought votes; it was the working-class "river wards," not the middle-class "newspaper wards," in the words of Wilson and Banfield, where machines operated.[1] The poor cities of Naples and Palermo in the Mezzogiorno, not the more prosperous cities of Milan or Bologna, were the ones where the Italian Christian Democratic party exchanged patronage for votes in the 1950s through the 1970s and where clientelism was still rife in the 1980s.[2] Other examples could be cited of political machines targeting the poor.

In this chapter we review evidence suggestive of a link at the level of countries – *suggestive*, only, because of the difficulties of devising national-level measures that are comparable across countries. (In Chapter 8, we offer over-time evidence from two countries that economic development encourages a shift from clientelist to programmatic strategies.) And we review evidence – much more readily gathered – of a link between poverty and clientelism among individuals within any given polity. A now-substantial body of research, like that reviewed in Chapter 2, consistently indicates an association between poverty and vote selling among individual citizens.

After reviewing the evidence, we delve more deeply into explanations for why party machines target poor voters.[3] This is a matter of debate among scholars. For some, the votes of poor people are simply cheaper than those of the wealthy: the poor value a given material reward more highly and hence are more responsive to machine largess. Others stress the uncertainty of programmatic promises that candidates make in campaigns and poor voters' acute sensitivity to risk. The latter view has found proponents among some World Bank researchers, among others. The differences between these two explanations are real and carry distinct practical implications. If the risk-reduction explanation is right, then imperative mandates and other institutions that force politicians' pronouncements into line with their actions would undermine clientelism.[4] But if machines simply target the poor because they are willing to sell their votes for a lower price, then such measures would be ineffective. There may also be normative implications, which we probe more deeply in Chapter 9. After all,

[1] Banfield and Wilson 1963.

[2] On clientelism in southern Italy, see Chubb 1981, 1982, Putnam 1993; on pork-barrel spending and patronage in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, see Golden and Picci 2011.

[3] We defer to the next part of the book an explanation of why poor *countries* are more likely than wealthy ones to feature vote buying.

[4] Assuming, of course, that such measures and institutions would be effective in increasing politicians' credibility.

if vote selling reflects a personal distaste for risk, then perhaps it should not be seen as compromising voter autonomy.

We turn to survey evidence from African and Latin American countries, as well as to a richer survey designed specifically to test these mechanisms, which we deployed in Argentina.

6.2 NATIONAL POVERTY AND NONPROGRAMMATIC DISTRIBUTION

Cross-national surveys are suggestive of substantially higher levels of vote buying in poor than in wealthy democracies. They point toward more vote buying in poorer than in wealthier world regions and to some extent to more vote buying in poorer than in wealthier countries within regions.

To study poverty and vote buying, we make use of surveys. Of course, self-reported vote selling raises concerns about social-desirability bias, with underestimation of the frequency of vote buying – as the list experiments reported by Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. suggest. Still, as long as the degree of social-desirability bias is fairly constant, or at least unrelated to covariates such as poverty whose descriptive relationship to vote buying we seek to uncover, survey evidence offers insights into cross-national variation in vote-buying. What's more, some survey questions attempt to reduce this bias by asking people about their observations of parties buying the votes of other people, or of parties' efforts to buy their votes, without having to relay whether this effort succeeded.

One source for cross-national comparisons are the regional Barometer surveys, especially in Africa and Latin America. In 2005, Afrobarometer asked survey respondents in 18 sub-Saharan African countries, "during the [most recent] election, how often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift, in return for your vote?" Possible answers were "never," "once or twice," "a few times," "often," or "don't know."[5] In 2002, Latinobarometer surveys posed the following question i 17 Latin American countries: "Have you known of someone in the last elections who was pressured or received something to change his vote in a certain way?" The subsequent question was, "And can you tell me if this has happened to you?"[6] Given the differences between the form of the question (if not, so much, the substance), one would not want to read too much into cross-regional differences in the responses. Still, it is noteworthy that on average 20 percent of African respondents said they had been offered an electoral bribe, whereas on average only about 7 percent of Latin American respondents said this.[7] There are, of course, many differences between Africa and Latin America, but prominent among them is the large gap in average incomes. The mean GDP

[5] From Harding 2008.

[6] Latinobarometer. Various years. Latinobarometer Corporation, www.latinobarometro.org.

[7] Surveys using unobtrusive measures of campaign gifts – see our discussion later in this chapter – suggest that actual levels are considerably higher.

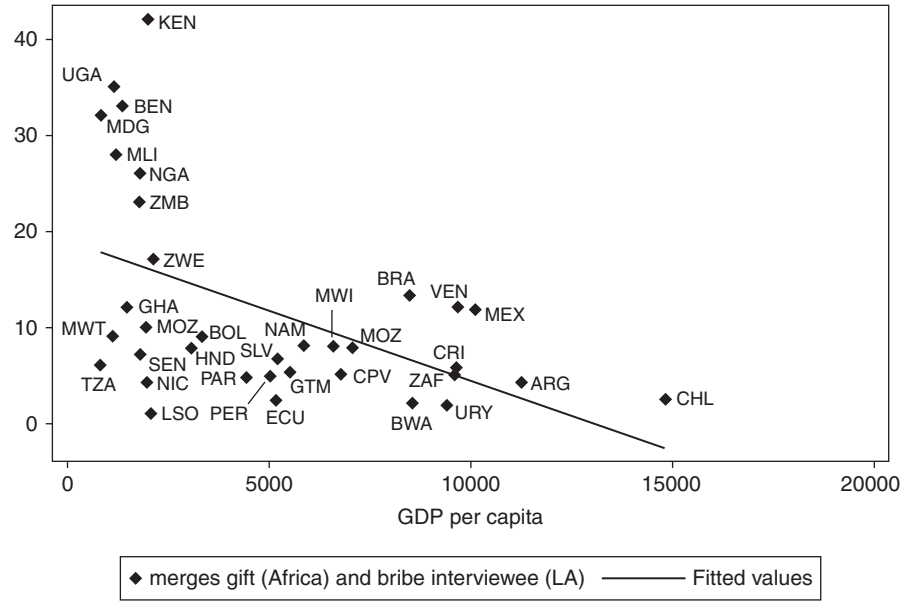

FIGURE 6.1. Africa and Latin America: Percent Received Gift by GDP per Capita.

per capita for African countries coded as democracies in 2005, at the time the surveys were conducted, was around $2,800; for Latin American countries in 2002, it was just over $7,000.

Figure 6.1 is a coordinate plane that locates each Latin American and African country by the percentages of people who said they had been the targets of vote buying (vertical axis) and by the country's per capita GDP (horizontal axis).[8] The fitted line shows that, on average among these countries, higher GDP per capita was associated with lower levels of clientelism. Yet if indeed higher average incomes discourage clientelism, the effect is far from inevitable. The figure reveals a number of countries with surprisingly widespread clientelism, given their level of development (e.g., Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela), and ones that are surprisingly free of it, despite low incomes (e.g., Lesotho and Tanzania).

The Eurobarometer surveys do not ask any equivalent question. Presumably, the numbers of people who would answer yes would be tiny, at least in the region's older democracies. One can perform the thought experiment of inserting these countries into Figure 6.1. Their annual GDP per capita is generally more than $30,000, and they would have near-zero positive "responses" to the vote-buying question. The conclusion would be a stronger negative correlation between national income and national rates of vote buying among the pooled democracies of Latin America, Africa, and Western Europe.

[8] Data on electoral bribes are from Afrobarometer country surveys in 2005 and Latinobarometer country surveys in 2002. GDP per capita from Penn World Tables 6.3.

That wealthy countries are on the whole less clientelistic than poor ones is borne out by the work of Kitschelt and his collaborators.[9] These researchers conducted expert surveys with more than 1,400 respondents in 88 countries. The experts were asked to score the political parties in their countries according to how clientelistic they perceived them to be.[10] Although precise scores are unavailable – and the authors recognize that there is undoubtedly a lot of measurement error – early results are highly suggestive of national-level associations between wealth and programmatic politics, and between poverty and clientelism. Experts in only 4 of 20 advanced democracies judged their parties to be more clientelistic than did experts from any other regions.[11] The four wealthy outliers, in declining order of clientelism, were Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Spain was more clientelistic than Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia; Italy more so than those countries and than Poland, Estonia, and Botswana. A few other outliers stand out: Japan is highly clientelistic though wealthy, and Israel and South Korea are not far behind. Still, basically, the wealthy, advanced democracies have little clientelism. African and Latin American countries, by contrast, are clustered at low-to-middle income levels and are viewed by their own political experts as practicing widespread clientelism. Post-communist countries are the least tightly clustered and include some of the most clientelistic party systems (Montenegro) but also moderately clientelistic ones (Latvia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia), at least in the views of their national experts.

The link between average income and clientelism, though still present, appears weaker when we focus within regions of the world. Regarding Latin American countries, Figure 6.2 draws on a different set of surveys, those conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Program (LAPOP). In 2010, interviewers asked samples in 16 Latin American countries, "In recent years and thinking about election campaigns, has a candidate or someone from a political party offered you something like a favor, food, or any other benefit or thing in return for your vote?"[12] Figure 6.2 locates these Latin American countries by the level of clientelism revealed in the LAPOP survey and by annual GDP per capita. Although (as we shall see) the LAPOP surveys reveal strong associations of poverty and clientelism at the level of individuals, the association between national-level underdevelopment and clientelism in this case is weak. Some poor countries had high levels of clientelism (Bolivia, Paraguay), and some wealthier ones had low levels (Chile, Uruguay). Others fall far from the regression line, with either "too little" (Ecuador, Nicaragua) or "too much" (Argentina, Mexico) effort at vote buying.

[9] See a series of papers including Kitschelt 2011.
[10] The precise measure is referred to by the authors as "clientelistic effort."
[11] See their Figure 3, pp. 20–21.
[12] Faughnan and Zechmeister 2011, p. 1. Data on GDP per capita come from Penn World Tables 7.1.

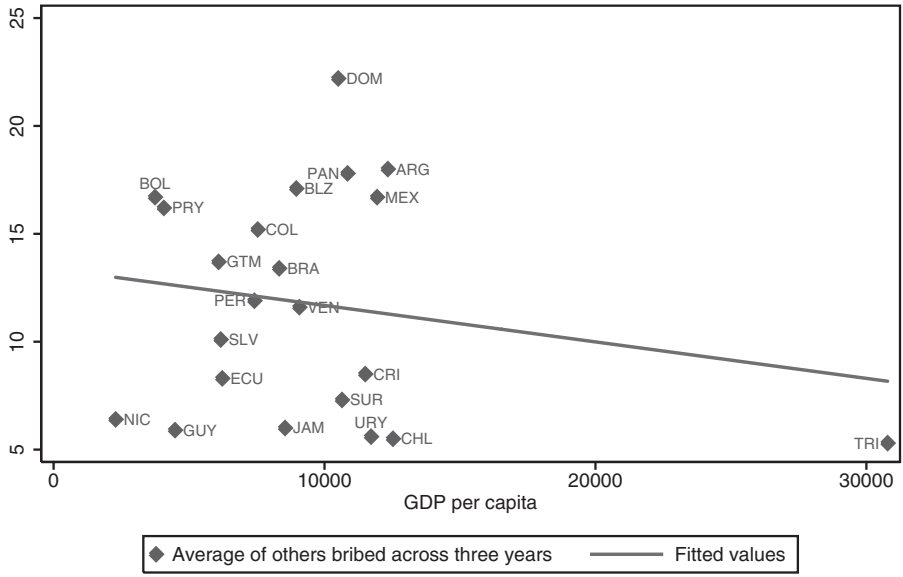

FIGURE 6.2. Latin America: 2010 Campaign Gifts by GDP per Capita.

Responses to a somewhat different question, posed four to eight years earlier, tell a similar story.[13] In 2002 (as mentioned), and in 2005 and 2006, the Latinobarometer asked, "Did you know of someone in the last elections who was pressured or received something to change his vote in a certain way?," with possible answers "yes," "no," or "don't know."[14] Figure 6.3 reports the average percentage answering yes across the three surveys, plotted against the average GDP per capita in each country during these three years.[15] Again the figure is suggestive of a quieting impact of national wealth on vote buying, though obviously other things are also going on. Again Mexico displays too much clientelism for its level of development. Chile, and to a slightly lesser degree Uruguay and Costa Rica, again appear as wealthier countries with correspondingly little vote buying.

We have offered some evidence of an association between regional and national wealth, on one side, and the prevalence of electoral clientelism on the other. Chapter 8 examines more deeply a transition away from clientelism during periods of national economic development in Britain and the United States – though this trajectory is far from inevitable. These historical experiences are suggestive of changes that economic development traces in electorates, changes that encourage programmatic strategies. At the most basic level,

[13] Latinobarometer again, as opposed to LAPOP.
[14] Latinobarometer. Various years. Latinobarometer Corporation, www.latinobarometro.org.
[15] GDP figures are from the Penn World Tables 6.3.

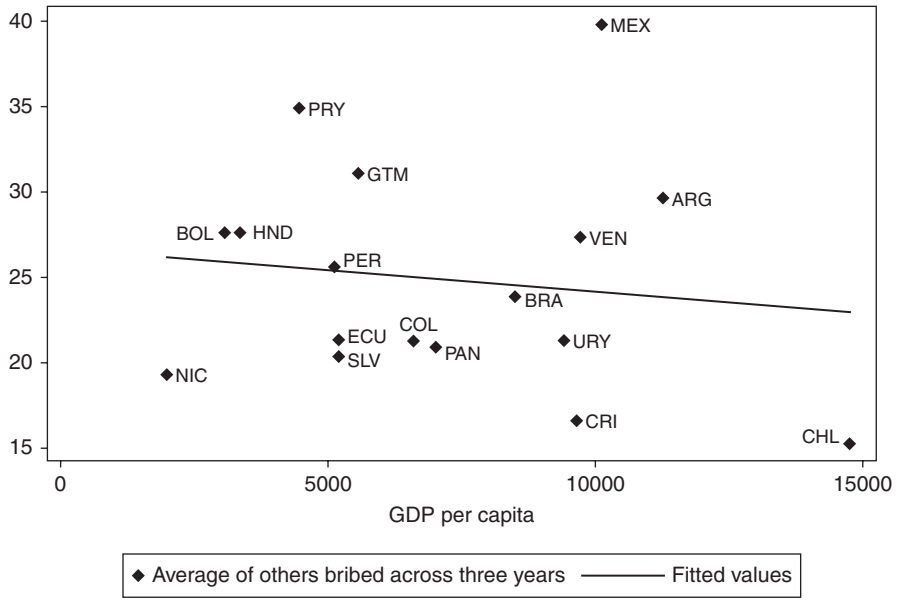

FIGURE 6.3. Latin America: Average Percentage of Respondents Observing Campaign Gifts by GDP per Capita.

industrialization and economic growth can shift the social structure of populations and, eventually, of electorates such that middle-income voters come to prevail numerically over the poor. If low-income voters are particularly responsive to material largess – as our analysis later in this chapter suggests – one can think of them as decreasingly motivated, as their income rises, by material offers, and increasingly motivated by the expressive value of supporting their preferred party or policy orientation in elections. At the same time, growth in the size of the electorate can make machines, densely networked as they are, less efficient than are parties that rely on broadcast appeals. Public debates about programs produce rules and criteria of distribution and pave the way for programmatic distribution. In addition, campaign appeals, which allow party leaders to side-step their brokers, can reach larger numbers of voters as literacy rates grow and as technological change lessens reliance on face-to-face communications between parties and brokers.

6.3 INDIVIDUAL POVERTY AND NONPROGRAMMATIC DISTRIBUTION

We have up until now simply assumed an association between clientelism and individual-level poverty that we have not yet demonstrated. A variety of evidence points toward poor people being preferentially targeted by party machines. Some of the same surveys that we have just been discussing provide evidence of this link. Drawing on the LAPOP surveys, Faughnan and

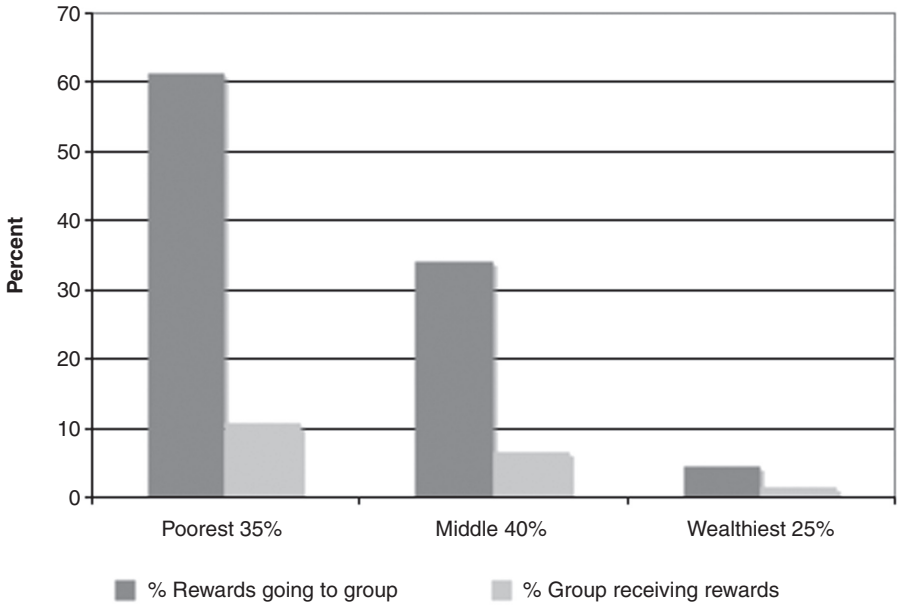

FIGURE 6.4. Argentina: Income and Targeted Rewards. *Source*: Authors' Survey Data, N = 1,750.

Zechmeister pooled 36,601 responses across 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and estimated a multivariate logistic regression model to predict "yes" answers to the question cited earlier: "... has a candidate or someone from a political party offered you something like a favor, food, or any other benefit or thing in return for your vote?" Income, grouped by quintiles, had a statistically significant negative effect on someone's answering yes, and one that was larger than other attributes – being a younger voter, being a man, or living in a rural area.[16] (Education, by contrast, has no independent association with vote selling in the LAPOP surveys.[17])

Our original surveys in Argentina and Venezuela suggest that income and receipt of campaign gifts are negatively related (see Figures 6.4 and 6.5, respectively). In Argentina, just under 60 percent of all rewards went to the poorest 35 percent of the sample, and around 11 percent of the respondents in this poorest group reported receiving gifts; around 35 percent of all rewards went to the middle 40 percent of the income distribution (and around 7 percent of this group received gifts), whereas under 5 percent of the rewards went to the richest 25 percent (and only a tiny fraction of this group received gifts). The

[16] They compare standardized coefficients; see their Figure 2 and the associated discussion, pp. 2–3. Note that the model includes country fixed effects, which have a large independent effect on vote buying.

[17] That is, education controlling for income.

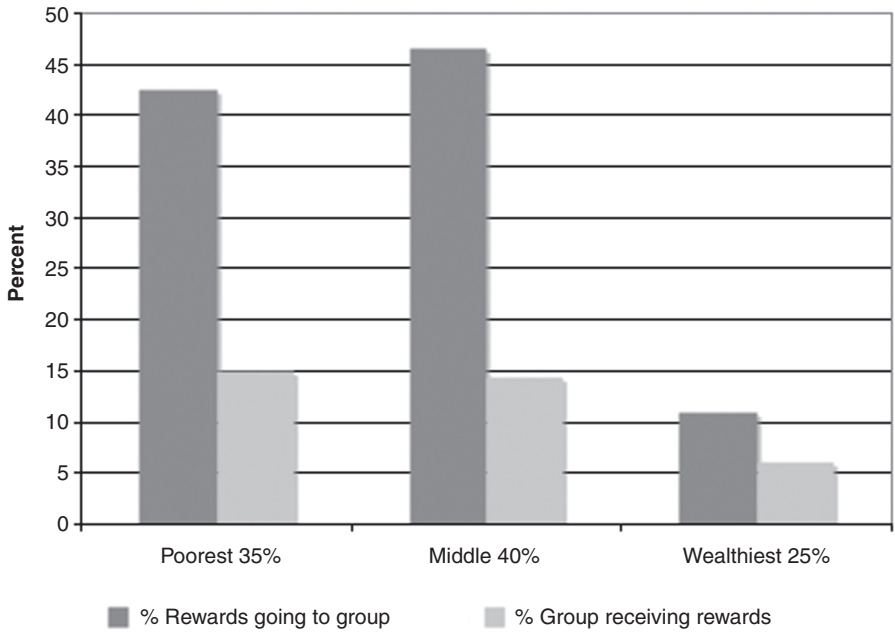

FIGURE 6.5. Venezuela: Income and Targeted Rewards. *Source*: Authors' Survey Data, N = 574.

Venezuelan results are not monotonic: a slightly larger percentage of middle- than lower-income respondents reported having been offered campaign gifts. But the data do reveal a sharp drop-off of offers of campaign gifts at upper-income levels.

Individual-level evidence from other countries suggests similar patterns. Breeding's survey in rural and urban wards near Bangalore in the Indian state of Karnataka found that nearly 90 percent of voters in the poorest group (incomes under 1,000 rupees per month) received campaign gifts, with the reported percentages decreasing to 53 percent, 40 percent, 23 percent, 31 percent, and 21 percent, in the subsequent income categories.[18] In this context – as in Argentina and Venezuela – discrete individual benefits of low monetary value prevailed, such as "private household consumer items (e.g., cycles, sewing machines, sarees, stainless steel *dabbas*), ration cards . . . and other private benefits such as money for school fees." Overall, 49 percent of 1,446 respondents reported receiving some kind of a private vote bank benefit – a material gift from a political party to the citizen – in Breeding's survey.

As in Latin America and India, poor voters in Africa also appear to be the most likely ones to be approached by parties to sell their votes. Drawing on

[18] Breeding 2011, Table 1. Monthly incomes corresponding with these income groups are 1,001–5,000 rupees, 5,001–10,000 rupees, 10,001–15,000 rupees, 15,001–20,000 rupees, and above 20,000 rupees, respectively; Breeding 2011, p. 73.

the same Afrobarometer survey question mentioned earlier – "during the [most recent] election, how often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift, in return for your vote?" – Harding estimated a multilevel model of vote buying, allowing him to take into account both individual- and country-level effects. He found that poverty has the largest impact on vote buying: "An individual with the highest possible level of poverty is 23% more likely to be offered something for his vote than an otherwise identical voter at the lowest level of poverty."[19] At the same time, "individuals in countries with a greater per capita GDP have a lower likelihood of being offered money or gifts in exchange for their votes."[20]

In sum, there is strong evidence across a range of countries and historical time periods that clientelist politics are "poor people's politics," to quote the title of Auyero's study of Argentina.[21] The evidence is consistent with the conventional wisdom among scholars and others: poor people are more likely than the wealthy to sell their votes. The next question is: why?

6.4 WHY DO MACHINES TARGET THE POOR?

6.4.1 Diminishing Marginal Utility of Incomes

One common sense way to connect individuals' poverty with clientelism is through the diminishing marginal utility of income, and indeed this assumption is incorporated into many theories, including our own in Chapter 3. The connection can be traced through the following syllogism: people's propensity to vote for a party is a function of how much the party's largess has increased their utility of income; poor people's utility of income is increased more than rich people's by a gift of any given monetary value; therefore, parties focus their largess on the poor. The minor premise – that a gift boosts the utility income of poor people more than of rich people – follows directly from the assumption of diminishing marginal utility of income. The assumption is widespread among theorists. For instance, a basic assumption that Dixit and Londregan made is that "poor voters switch more readily in response to economic benefits because the incremental dollar matters more to them."[22]

The diminishing marginal utility explanation gains power when we consider two alternative decision rules that any voter might follow: (1) vote for the party with the most appealing program; or (2) vote for the party that offers the greatest material reward in return for one's vote. In the narrowest material

[19] Harding 2008, p. 15. To measure poverty he used factor analysis to construct an index, based on questions about a respondent's having gone without things such as food, water, and medical treatment in the past year.

[20] Harding 2008, p. 15.

[21] This is the title of Auyero's 2001 book.

[22] Dixit and Londregan 1996, pp. 1137, 1143. Dixit and Londregan adopted this assumption as a technical convenience. Empirical evidence of diminishing marginal utility from income can be found in Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002 and Inglehart 2000.

sense, only a party that offers a material benefit conditional on a vote is offering the second sort of reward. As appealing as a candidate's policies might be, nothing is at stake – in a narrowly material sense – for a voter unless that voter is trading his or her vote for a benefit. This is true for two reasons: his or her vote is unlikely to make the difference between a preferred platform's winning or losing, and he or she will receive a benefit that is programmatically offered and delivered, independent of his or her vote.

To make the point more clearly, we return to the mathematical representation of a voter's utility function presented in Chapter 2:

$$U_i(b_i, \sigma_i, \sigma_P) = -(\sigma_i - \sigma_P)^2 + b_i,$$

where σ_i is the location of individual i or party P on the ideological dimension and b_i the discrete material benefit that a party may give to a voter. The first expression on the right-hand side, the quadratic-loss function, can be interpreted as the disutility a person experiences when he or she votes for a party or candidate that is relatively distant from his or her policy bliss point. This is an expressive benefit. In turn, b_i is the utility the voter derives from a targeted benefit. This is a material benefit. We might think of voters as varying in how heavily they weigh expressive versus material benefits. If $\kappa \in (0, 1)$ is the weight they place on expressive benefits and $(1 - \kappa)$ the weight they place on material ones, then we can rewrite the utility function as

$$U_i(b_i, \sigma_i, \sigma_P, \theta_i) = -\kappa_i(\sigma_i - \sigma_P)^2 + (1 - \kappa_i)b_i.$$

One interpretation of the common finding that poor people are particularly inclined to sell their votes is that κ increases with income, so that poorer voters are less likely to pursue the expressive benefits than to accept material payoffs, even if these payoffs are paltry.

It will be relevant to the discussion in the next section that the preceding holds true even if (as we have assumed) there is *no uncertainty* attached to the delivery of programmatic benefits.

That poor people's votes are cheaper to buy is reflected in the low unit cost of the benefits that machines distribute – tin roofing materials and bags of food are more often the currency of clientelism than luxury cars or high-end televisions.[23] As a Peronist organizer in Córdoba, Argentina, told the authors:

> We work constantly, trying to get [the voters] minimal things, medications, medical devices, boxes of food, a subsidy, a bus fare, to get them things, get them what they really need. That's the way to keep their votes.[24]

[23] This does not imply that quite high-value items are never offered directly to voters. Two days before the Venezuelan legislative elections of 2010, one of the authors (Dunning) observed local activists from Chávez's coalition unloading refrigerators from a truck in the poor Caracas neighborhood of Petare. Opposition candidates, meanwhile, were literally distributing checks to voters at rallies throughout the area.

[24] Authors' interview, January 2003.

In India as well, as noted previously, discrete individual benefits such as "private household consumer item," of low monetary value are the most common rewards.[25] A straightforward interpretation is that these are gifts that match poor people's needs and that machines get a bigger "bang for their buck" giving gifts to the poor than they would to middle class or wealthy voters.[26]

6.4.2 Uncertainty and Risk

A different explanation for why it is the poor who sell their votes focuses on the uncertainty of campaign promises. Here the syllogism is: clientelist distribution appeals to people who are risk-averse; poor people are risk-averse; therefore, clientelist distribution goes to the poor. This explanation *also* builds on diminishing marginal utility of incomes, which implies that the poor are especially averse to risk. The asymmetry between a big reduction of utility that comes from a loss versus a smaller boost to utility that comes from a gain is implied by the concavity of the function relating income to utility.[27] What is distinctive about the risk explanation is the additional claim that benefits delivered programmatically are more riskier than those delivered by machines.

Kitschelt suggested the attractiveness of clientelist distribution to poor, risk-averse voters. For "poor and uneducated citizens," he wrote, the appeal of "clientelist exchanges always trumps that of indirect programmatic linkages promising uncertain and distant rewards to voters."[28] Similarly, Wantchekon contended that individualized rewards, wielded by incumbents, undercut the opposition by underscoring the lack of credibility of their offers: "Discretion over when and how to spend government resources allows the incumbent to undermine the credibility of opposition candidates by, for instance, making up-front payments to voters."[29] In turn, Keefer, and Keefer and Vlaicu, explained clientelism as a strategy that politicians turn to when their programmatic promises are not credible.[30] Keefer wrote that the "inability of political competitors to make credible promises to citizens leads [the competitors] to prefer clientelist policies."[31]

[25] Breeding 2011, p. 73.

[26] We borrow the phrase from Calvo and Murillo 2004, who used it in a similar context.

[27] It is worth noting, however, that some economists question whether diminishing marginal utility of income is a plausible explanation for aversion to risk; see Rabin 2000.

[28] Kitschelt 2000, p. 857. See also Kitschelt 2007.

[29] Wantchekon 2003, p. 401.

[30] Keefer 2007, and Keefer and Vlaicu 2008.

[31] Keefer 2007, p. 804. As we saw in Chapter 2, an important body of work links clientelist mobilization to another kind of risk reduction, that of politicians or political parties. Cox and McCubbins 1986 contended that risk-averse politicians will distribute individualized goods to loyal supporters (rather than to swing voters); the responsiveness of loyalists is less variable and such investments less risky. Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007 also treated clientelist distributions as a low-risk investment and posited that just as investors diversify their investment portfolios, parties diversify their mobilization strategies.

Desposato noted the apparent paradox of a person's supporting a party that gives him or her small amounts of medicine rather than one that offers to build a hospital that would serve him or her.[32] He resolved the paradox by underscoring the uncertainty of programmatic offers. "Poor, risk-averse voters may well prefer private goods rather than policy promises . . ."[33]

Note that the concavity of the function relating income to utilities makes the poor both more risk-averse than the wealthy – more sensitive to small losses of income – but also responsive to machine largess than the wealthy – more sensitive to small increases in income. The concave functional form explains the empirical regularity of poor people being targeted by machines, with no theoretical need to assume that programmatic benefits are especially uncertain. Parsimony is on the side of the diminishing marginal income approach; it requires fewer assumptions. But parsimony is only one consideration; a more important one is realism.

The key empirical question thus becomes: are poor people, and in particular poor people who sell their votes, especially incredulous of politicians' pronouncements? Before turning to some empirical tests, we note that it is not inevitable that programmatic distribution is highly uncertain. Claims that it is call to mind unreliable politicians on the hustings, promising the moon. However, programmatic benefits also take the form, say, of cash deposited onto an ATM-style card, managed by a bureaucracy of civil servants – even in countries, like Mexico, where clientelism persists. Does the Mexican voter necessarily view cash benefits delivered through the *Progreso* or *Oportunidades* program as less certain than those offered by *La Efectiva*, to harken back to the examples that opened our book? Even when candidates or party manifestos offer programs that do not already exist, their words should not be automatically written off as cheap talk. If politicians are involved in repeated interactions with voters or if they will be punished electorally for making promises that they then break, they have incentives to make credible promises.[34] Keefer and Vlaicu are certainly right that institutional fragilities in new democracies can subvert the predictability of campaign statements and undermine their credibility. Yet if politicians have incentives to build reputations for reliability (in Downs's terms), they also have incentives to build credible institutions.

6.4.3 Risky Programs or Cheaper Votes? Empirical Evidence

Our empirical strategy is to treat the diminishing marginal utility of income (an assumption common to both explanations) as axiomatic and to bring data

[32] Desposato 2006, p. 59.
[33] Desposato 2006, p. 59.
[34] See, e.g., Downs 1957, p. 105; Harrington 1993, Alvarez 1997, and Stokes 2001. For the view that some voters embrace ambiguity in electoral appeals, see Tomz and Van Houweling 2009.

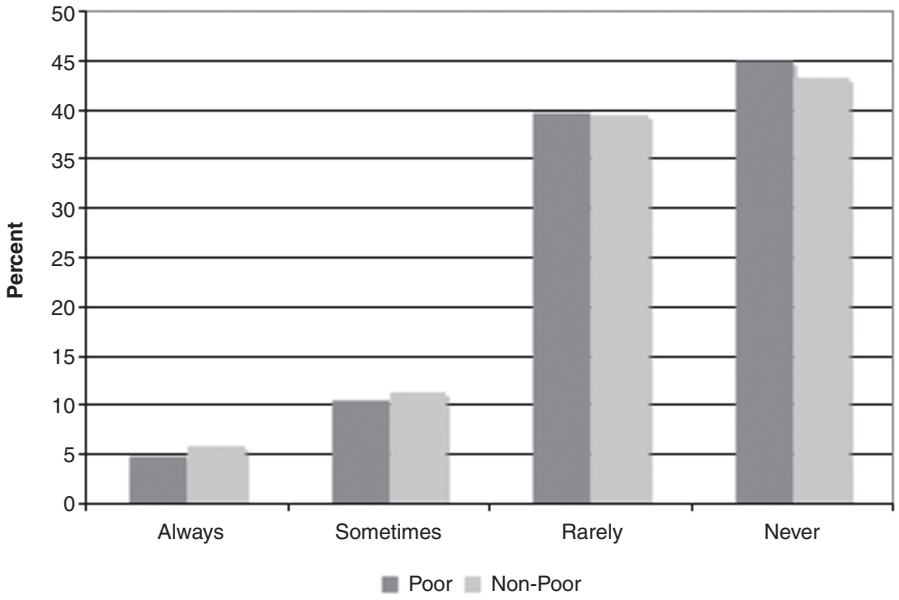

FIGURE 6.6. African Respondents Believing Politicians' Promises, by Poor and Non-Poor. *Source*: AfroBarometer Survey Data, N = 24,687.

to bear on the question of whether poor people who sell their votes perceive campaign promises as lacking credibility. We make use of survey data from Africa and Latin America. As noted, in 2005, the Afrobarometer surveys asked people in 18 African countries whether they had exchanged their votes for a gift and whether they viewed politicians' promises as credible. If the risk explanation is supported, we would expect poor people in general, and those who sold their votes in particular, to be especially incredulous of politicians' promises.

The relevant question is the following: "In your opinion, how often do politicians keep their campaign promises after elections?" Possible answers were "often," "always," "rarely," or "never." African politicians did not do very well on this question: a mere 15 percent of respondents answered "often" or "always," and the modal answer was "never" (43 percent). To measure poverty, the survey asked a number of questions that probed the material deprivations that respondents might endure, such as, "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat?" Figure 6.6 shows levels of credulity among poor and non-poor respondents. It reveals no strong or monotonic association.

Turning now to beliefs in politicians' credibility among those who do and who do not report selling their votes, again the differences are slight and the

relationship between levels of incredulity and clientelism is non-monotonic.[35] And among the poor, the correlation between receiving a gift and doubting politicians' promises was actually negative, though not significantly different from zero. If anything, poor clients in Africa were slightly *more* credulous of campaign promises than were poor nonclients.

The African finding anticipates an even stronger one in a Latin American setting, again going against the risk explanation. Our 2003 survey of Argentine voters probed individuals' attitudes toward risk, their involvement in machine networks and receipt of benefits, and their views of the credibility of politicians' programmatic promises. These data allow us to investigate several questions: (1) Are poor people more risk-averse? (2) Are poor people more prone to perceive programmatic appeals as risky? (3) Does risk aversion make voters more likely to be clients (i.e., to have received clientelist transfers)? And (4) are people who are especially incredulous of politicians' programmatic offers and campaign platforms also especially prone to clientelism?

Following Buendía, we asked questions that probed people's attitudes toward three kinds of risk:[36]

1. **Generalized risk**: Which phrase do you agree with more: "Better a bird in hand than one hundred in flight," or "He who doesn't risk, doesn't gain"?
2. **Public-policy risk**: Which phrase do you agree with more: Implementing new and attractive but untested policies is necessary for progress," or "Implementing new and attractive but untested policies is dangerous"?
3. **Employment-related risk**: Which phrase do you agree with more: "A good job is one in which you don't earn much but it's certain and stable," or "A good job is one in which you earn a lot but it is unstable"?[37]

We also asked a series of questions (described in Chapter 2) about receipt of benefits and participation in clientelist networks:

(1) **Receipt of benefits**: During electoral campaigns, party operatives and neighborhood political leaders often give people things or assistance. In the last presidential campaign, did you receive any of the following? (The respondent was then given a list of items that might have been handed out and forms of assistance that might have been received).

[35] The correlation coefficient relating "yes" responses to the question "Did you receive a gift in exchange for your vote?" and "How often do politicians keep their campaign promises after election" (coded from always to never) was 0.01; with an N of 24,455, the significance level was 0.05. Among poor people, the correlation coefficient is −0.004; with an N of 8,983, the significance level was 0.73.

[36] Buendía 2000.

[37] Majorities of respondents chose the more risk-accepting response to the general question (60 percent) and to the policy question (61 percent); the employment question elicited overwhelming distaste for risk (91 percent). We found high correlations between responses to generalized and work-related risk questions and between generalized and policy-related risk questions; responses to work- and policy-related risk were negatively correlated.

(2) **Networks**: If you were facing a grave family problem, for example related to a job or health, would you turn to a party broker or operative [*puntero, referente*]?

Finally, we also asked about the credibility of campaign pronouncements:

How likely is it that a politician will fulfill his campaign promises if he wins the election?

We asked this question about politicians in general and then asked about politicians from specific parties. Our surveys also gathered data on individual covariates, such as age, gender, education, and party affiliation.

Majorities of our samples chose the more risk-accepting response to the general question (60 percent) and to the policy question (61 percent); the employment question elicited overwhelming distaste for risk (91 percent). We found significant correlations between responses to generalized and work-related risk questions and between generalized and policy-related risk questions; responses to work- and policy-related risk were negatively correlated.[38]

Poor People *Are* More Risk Averse. With our Argentine data, we first tested the proposition that poor voters are more risk-averse than are wealthier ones. We inspected correlations between income levels and answers to our risk questions and found positive correlations between income and generalized risk acceptance, income and risk acceptance, related to policies, and income and employment-related risk acceptance.[39] We also estimated probit models (not shown) of the probability of a person's choosing a risk-accepting or risk-averse response as a function of income, education, and a series of control variables. Again, income levels significantly influenced people's attitude toward risk, and in the expected direction: poor people were more risk-averse. In simulations, shifting from the minimum to the maximum income category (holding all other variables at their sample means) increased the probability of a risk-accepting response to the generalized risk question from 56 percent to 75 percent.[40]

Income was less clearly related to tastes for risky public policies or jobs. We found no effect of income on our sample's willingness to experiment with untried policies or distaste for risky employment, although those with more years of schooling were more accepting of experimentation.

In sum, the assumption that poor people are more risk-averse finds some support among our samples, particularly when we consider generalized risk.

The Poor Are *Not* More Prone to Perceive Programs as Risky. The next proposition to be tested is whether the poor are especially prone to see programmatic offers as high risk.

[38] Bivariate correlations are 0.12 (significant at the 99 percent level) between generalized and policy risk, 0.07 (significant at 99 percent) between generalized and work-related, and −0.05 (significant at 95 percent) between policy and work-related risk.

[39] Correlation coefficients were 0.12 ($p = 99$ percent), 0.08 ($p = 98$ percent), and 0.05 ($p = 97$ percent).

[40] Younger respondents, those with more schooling, and women were also more risk-accepting by this measure.

If (following Kitschelt, Wantchekon, Keefer and Vlaicu, and Desposato) people enter into clientelist relations because programmatic promises lack credibility, then we might expect poor people to be especially incredulous of politicians' campaign promises.[41] To gauge the credulity of the poor in our Argentine samples, we studied people's perceptions of the risk attached to campaign promises.

Politicians rarely fulfill all of their campaign pledges. This statement holds for all democracies, but Argentine voters at the time that we conducted the surveys had especially good reasons to doubt the credibility of politicians. Carlos Menem in his first administration (1989–1995) carried off a particularly spectacular bait-and-switch maneuver, running for office as a pro–big government Peronist and then quickly transforming into a devout neoliberal. Argentines had plenty of opportunities to witness policy switches at lower levels of government, as well as incompetence and corruption.

To assess the credibility of parties and the degree of risk that our samples attached to their promises, we asked, "*How likely is it that a politician will fulfill his campaign promises if he wins the election? Very likely, likely, not very likely, or unlikely*." We asked about politicians in general and then followed with questions about Peronist and Radical politicians. By asking about "politicians" and their promises, we steered respondents away from interpreting this question as referring to clientelist distributions, which as we have shown are carried out not by political leaders and office seekers but by local operatives (*punteros, referentes*). The responses revealed a good deal of incredulity regarding politicians: about three-quarters of our sample thought it "not very likely" or "unlikely" that politicians would fulfill their promises.

Yet, as in Africa, income was unrelated to people's views of the credibility of either party. Ordered probit estimations (not shown) revealed no association of income with the perception that politicians lacked credibility. Income was also unassociated with people's perceptions of the credibility of the Radical Party or the Peronist Party. What we did find were strong partisan effects: Peronist partisanship increased the credibility of the Peronists, and Radical partisanship of the Radicals. We also found that people who evinced risk acceptance with regard to public policy, saying that untested policies had to be implemented for progress to take place, were especially skeptical of the credibility of either party, a belief structure that must be fraught with frustration.

Clients Are *Not* More Risk Averse. By contrast, people who received campaign gifts or campaign-period access to social programs were no more risk-averse than others in our samples. Recall that we asked, "During electoral campaigns, party operatives and neighborhood political leaders often give people goods or assistance. In the last presidential campaign, did you receive any of the following?" The respondent was then given a card that listed items that might have been handed out and forms of assistance (*ayudas*) that they might

[41] Alteratively, the rich and poor might attribute the same level of risk to programmatic promises, but the poor are more allergic to that risk; see later.

have received. The items included food, mattresses, subsidies, clothing, money, medications, housing, and roofing materials; the assistance included help with legal paperwork, medical attention, obtaining student scholarships, payment or cancelation of bills for public services or taxes, and jobs.

There were no significant correlations between a person's reporting having received a gift and any of our measures or risk. In fact, the sign on the coefficient relating risk to clientelism was "wrong" from the perspective of the risk-aversion approach.

Because respondents might be wary of acknowledging to an interviewer that they had received a campaign handout, we used other questions to probe for clientelism. As noted earlier, we asked, "If you were facing a grave family problem, for example related to a job or health, would you turn to a party representative for help?" By this measure, the profile of the client emerges clearly. Multivariate models produce an image of the client as a low-income woman with little formal education. However, the client is *more* risk accepting, regardless of whether the measure is generalized risk or an index that sums risk-accepting postures across the three questions.[42]

It's worth dwelling on the risk result. Imagine that we drew two of the poorest people in our samples, two people who were also similar in terms of many other traits and attitudes that we measured. If one of them were risk-averse, her probability of turning to a local political actor for personal assistance would be 32 percent. If the other were risk accepting, this probability would be 39 percent.[43] The effect is not enormous, but it runs directly against the predictions of the risk-aversion approach.

Clients Are *Not* Prone to Perceive Programmatic Appeals as Risky. If clientelism were a refuge for voters with a distaste for risky programmatic promises, we would expect clients to be people who attribute a particularly high level of risk to programmatic offers. But the evidence weighed against this proposition. In our Argentine samples, people who attached more risk to politicians' campaign promises were *less* likely to be clients. People who found politicians' promises credible were more likely to report having received campaign handouts. And those who were relatively credulous of programmatic campaign promises were *more* likely to consider turning to a party operative to help in a crisis. The results do not change substantially whether we ask about the credibility of promises by Peronists or Radical candidates. Hence we find little support for the proposition that clientelist voters are ones who see programmatic offers as especially risky.

Should risk aversion be a better explanation than merely diminishing marginal utility of income for clientelist parties' targeting the poor, we would

[42] The estimated probit and ordered probit models (not shown) included other demographic controls and clustered standard errors by province.

[43] Simulated expected probabilities, calculated using *Clarify*, were 64 percent to 71 percent for the risk-averse case and 37 percent and 42 percent for the risk-accepting one.

expect any apparent income effect to disappear in the presence of controls for risk and uncertainty of campaign offers. But this is not the case. The income effect is not only robust but also strong. Assuming two risk-accepting people, one among the poorest in our sample and the other among the wealthiest, the poor one is more than twice as likely to receive a campaign gift than is the wealthy one. Between these two risk-accepting people, the poor one is more than three times as likely to turn to a party operative for help if her income is at the minimum for our sample than if it is at the maximum.[44]

In short, poor Argentines were much more likely to be clients, whatever their taste for risk.

We have contrasted two answers to the question, Why do clientelist parties target the poor? One answer emphasizes diminishing marginal utilities from income: a targeted benefit of a given nominal value increases the utility income of poor voters more than of wealthy ones. If a voter in systems in which clientelism is widespread face a choice between casting a ballot in exchange for a reward, even if a small one, or casting a vote that expresses partisanship or preference for certain policies, the lower his or her income, the more likely he or she is to choose the reward. We contrasted this approach with one that emphasizes the risk aversion of the poor. In this view, voters see themselves as choosing between a small reward delivered with certainty and a campaign promise that may or may not materialize. Risk-averse persons, the poor prominent among them, will be drawn toward clientelism.

Our empirical tests confirmed one assumption of the risk-aversion approach: poor people tended to be risk-averse. But in other ways, this approach failed to find support in African or Latin American settings. Although poor people did evince a greater aversion toward risk, more risk-averse individuals did *not* receive clientelist benefits, nor did they participate in clientelistic networks, at higher rates than risk seekers. Most damaging to the risk-aversion interpretation, people who attached more risk to politicians' campaign promises in our sample are actually *less* likely to be clients. If anything, risk *acceptance* is more associated with being targeted for clientelist benefits than risk aversion.

We suggested earlier that the diminishing marginal returns and risk-aversion explanations of the link between poverty and clientelism have distinct practical implications. If it had turned out that clientelism among the poor was driven by risk aversion, the most appropriate measures would have been ones that lowered the risk of politicians' failing to follow through on campaign promises. An array of institutional fixes to improve mandate responsiveness

[44] The first simulations drew from ordered probits of the gift variable. Holding all other variables at their sample means, the probability of the poorest person receiving a gift was 9 percent (95 percent confidence intervals: 6%–12%), the wealthiest person, 4 percent (3%–6%). The second simulations drew from probit models of the *puntero* variable. At the minimum income, the simulated estimated probability of turning to the operative was 50 percent (95 percent confidence interval, 42%–58%); at the maximum income it was 15 percent (11%–19%).

have been used or at least considered, such as written instructions from electors, referendums on initiatives that were not vetted during campaigns, and provisions for the recall of office holders who violate mandates.[45] Whatever the merits of these proposals, our analysis suggests that they will not reduce clientelism.

[45] This last provision exists for mayors in Colombia. For a skeptical view of imperative mandates, see Manin 1997.