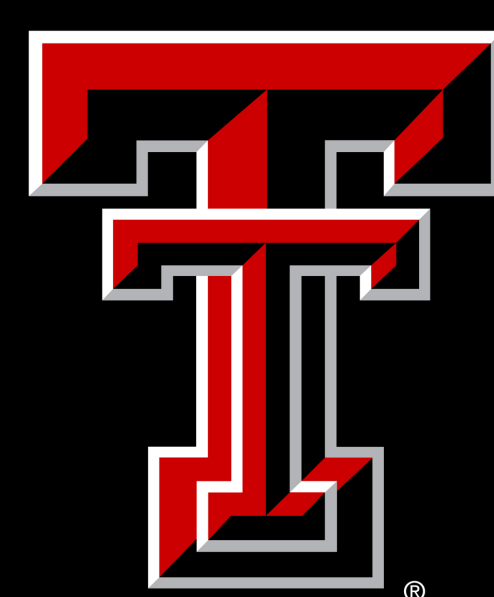


Show me the *Carnet de la Patria*!: A quasi-experiment on the effect of political communications on clientelistic control in Venezuela



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1. Introduction

How do the different messages sent by the government, the opposition and other relevant actors of the political system related to a social control mechanism such as the Fatherland Card affect voters' opinion? The premise here is to fully understand why the government under an authoritarian setting still engages in clientelistic practices.

This study has both normative and theoretical implications:

- Normatively: political debate signals to voters that issues are subject to capture and interpretation, facilitates the flow of information, and enhances the visibility of issues important to voters.
- Theoretically: prior research in clientelism (Table 1) has presented explanations on how and who engages in them.

Table 1. Theoretical Expectations of Clientelism		
Theory	Assumption	Motivation
Electoral Clientelism Stokes (2007)	Proffering of material goods in return for electoral support	Government needs <i>mobilization</i>
Effectiveness of Clientelism Calvo and Murillo (2004)	Clientelism depends on demographic characteristics and target population	Clientelistic parties need <i>mobilization</i>

2. Framing and Priming of Clientelistic Mechanisms

Let us begin with simple definitions of *framing* and *priming* and how they operate in the public:

- First, *framing* refers to the way an issue is discussed (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987).
- Second, *priming* relates how much attention an issue receives (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).
- Third, an issue receiving attention can be framed in the mind of some voters while at the same time be primed in others (Hart, 2013).
- Fourth, not everyone elaborates their opinion the same way, depending on their *level of conceptualization* (Converse, 1964).
- Finally, there are two ways of candidate evaluation: (i) *memory-based*; and (ii) *impression-driven* (Lodge, McGraw & Stroh, 1989).

This study focuses on how the clientelistic mechanism of the Fatherland Card is primed and framed by political actors and what variations of opinions this produces on voters. Effectively testing the competing claims of *electoral clientelism*, *effectiveness of clientelism*, *level of conceptualization* and *time of opinion formulation*.

3. Data

An independent survey was carried out in 2 waves on December of 2017. A total 1,200 Venezuelans (18 years or older) were interviewed face-to-face in a national representative sample carried out in urban areas (centers with more than 2,000 inhabitants) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of participants in the study by geographical region in Venezuela and by waves in the survey.

Region	Wave 1	Wave 2
Capital	133 (11.08%)	68 (5.67 %)
Central	98 (8.17 %)	116 (9.67 %)
Centro-occidental	0 (0%)	138 (11.5 %)
Zulia	180 (15.0 %)	0 (0 %)
Andes	55 (4.58 %)	55 (4.58 %)
Llanos	2 (0.17 %)	95 (7.92 %)
Oriental-Insular	116 (9.67 %)	63 (5.25 %)
Suroriental	48 (4%)	33 (2.75 %)
Total	632 (52.67 %)	568 (47.33 %)

Among other topics respondents were asked whether they had the Fatherland Card, motivation to vote in the 2017 Municipal Elections (Figure 1), and whether they believed that the card could be used to know what its holders were voting for.

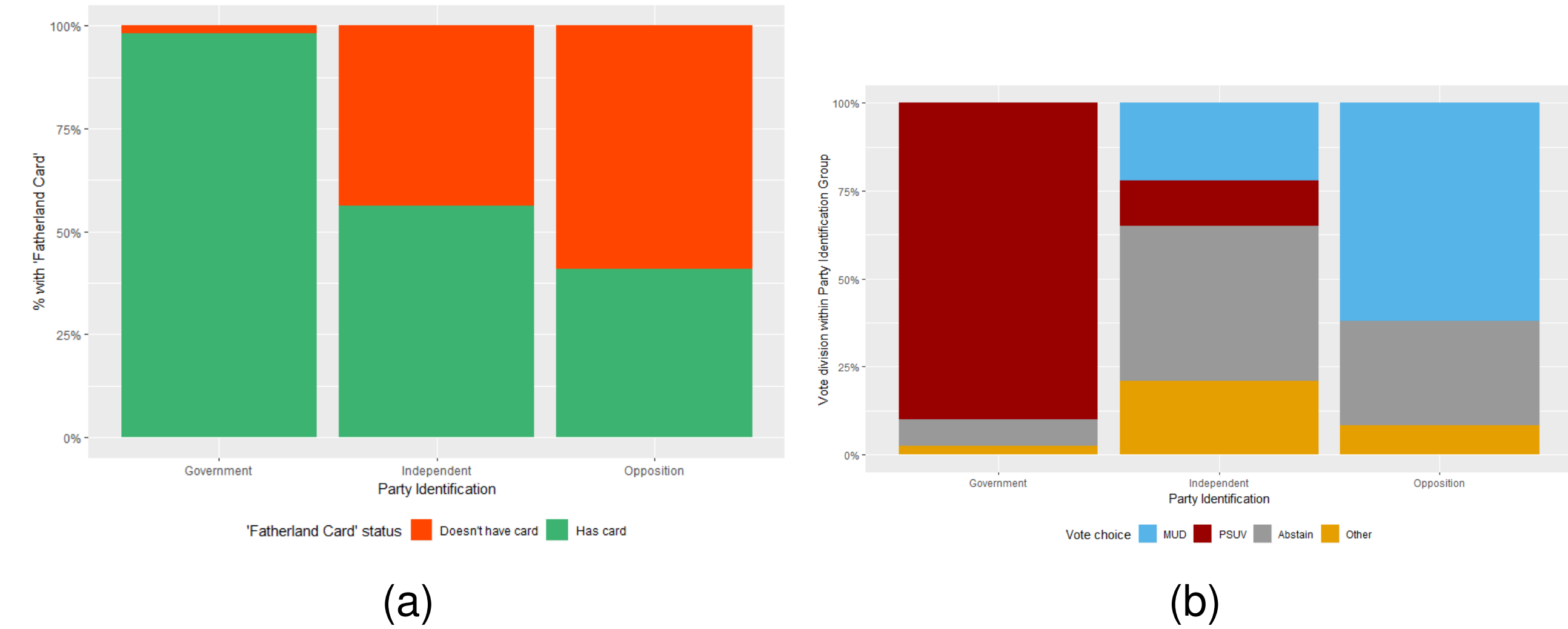


Figure 1. Characterization of Venezuelan voters during the 2017 Municipal Elections: (a) Fatherland card possession by party ID, (b) Vote choice by party ID.

4. Methods

The survey in itself became a quasi-experiment, where participants of the survey before the election were not exposed to the treatment of increased visibility of public discussions about the relationship between the Fatherland Card and the secrecy of the vote. Following a similar research design employed by (Barnes, 2017) the treatment in this case will be the priming effect of the messages sent through the traditional and social media.

By setting this treatment and thanks to the division of the sample in two moments in time (before and after the elections) we get our groups for the quasi-experiment:

1. The treatment group, those who received the priming effect and were surveyed after the election.
2. The control group, those who were not under the influence of the priming effect before the municipal election.

5. Results & Conclusions

Using a difference in differences design the results show that the messages around the election had a significant effect on the most vulnerable and volatile voting group in the electorate, the *independents*.

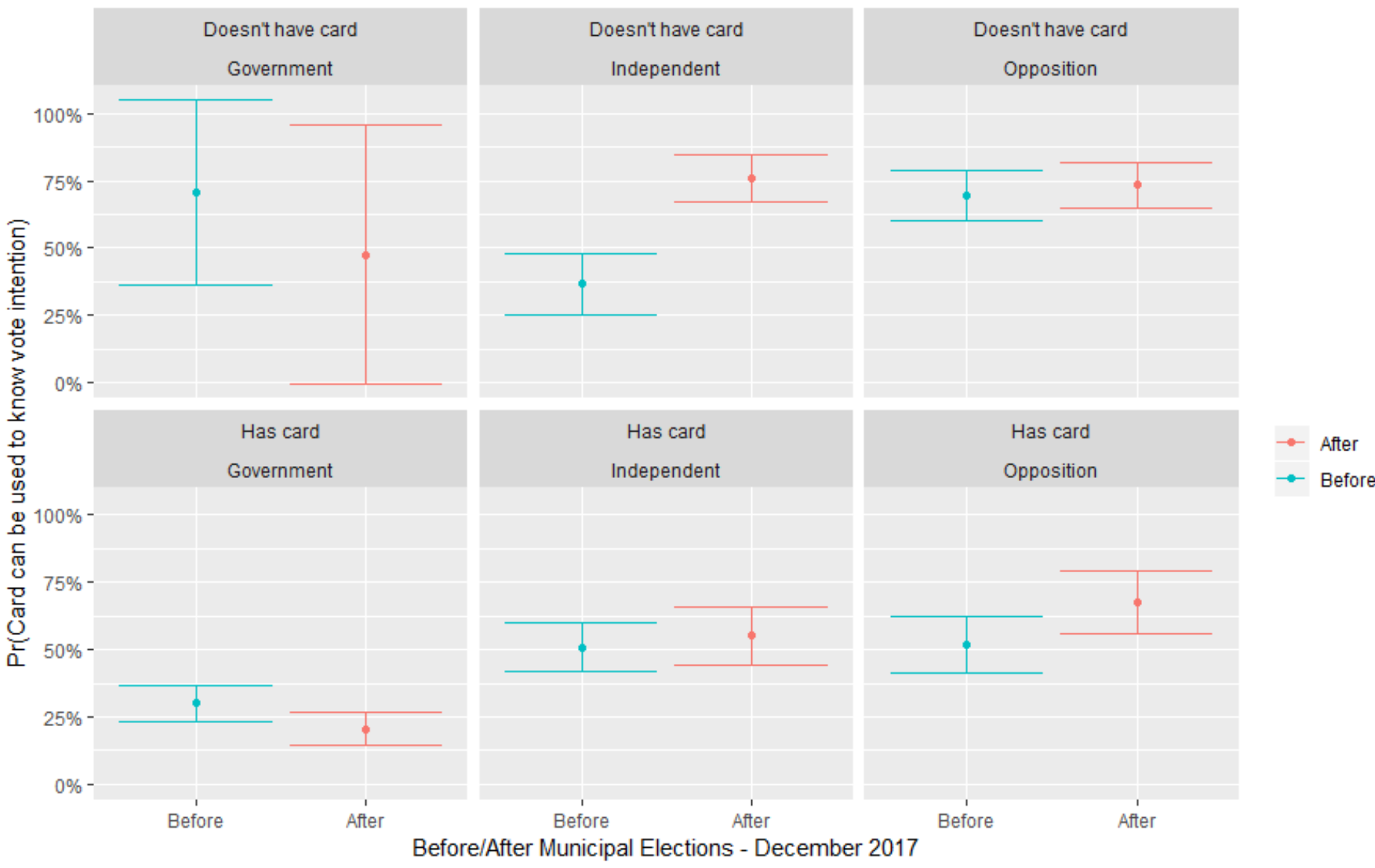


Figure 2. 95% confidence intervals of predicted percentage of an affirmative answer if the Fatherland Card can be used to know vote intention divided by party id, before and after the 2017 Municipal Elections in Venezuela and Card possession.

This research signals the degree to which a clientelistic mechanism can be used to enforce some behavior based on the political communications that surrounds it. On future iterations of this research program other aspects must be revised, like for instance the differences in opinion between socio-economic status. Also it is important to measure the priming and framing effect of the relevant political actors by introducing some sort of measurement that account for the media coverage relating to the Fatherland Card during the electoral campaign.

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