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Mobilizing Poor Voters

One week before the rally, Mario, the local party broker, stopped by Laura's house. Laura is a single mother with three children. After asking her about her children, Mario reminded Laura of the upcoming rally and noted that "a lot of people were waiting to get on a social welfare program like the one she was receiving thanks to him." The message was unmistakable. If Laura wanted to continue receiving benefits from the welfare program, she would have to attend the rally. She asked Paula, her young teenage neighbor, to look after her five-year-old son, her toddler daughter, and her infant Juancito. In exchange, Laura agreed to give Paula some money and whatever she received for attending the rally. When Laura returned home, she realized that Juancito was unusually quiet and unresponsive. Worried, she took him to Mario's house. Mario drove her to the hospital and waited until she spoke with the doctors. Laura's baby had serious brain damage. Years later, Laura would learn that Juancito fell from the bed where his siblings were playing. Scared or inattentive, Paula left him quietly in his cradle. Today, Juancito lives in a special state institution that is paid for by a pension that Mario "helped to get."

Laura's story illustrates the complex relationship between poor voters and party brokers. On the one hand, if Mario had not forced Laura to attend the rally, she would have stayed with her children and Juancito may have never been injured. On the other, if Mario had not taken her to the hospital and secured a pension for Juancito's care, Laura's situation would have been even worse.

This book explores the mechanisms that explain the simultaneous consolidation of clientelism and democracy by studying the relationships between brokers and voters and between brokers and bosses in Argentina. I argue that while democracy has created new spaces for representation and political accountability, it has also created incentives for cultivating clientelistic relationships. Using network analysis to study the nested

relationships between party bosses, brokers, and voters, this book reveals a logic of perverse incentives that induces brokers to employ clientelistic strategies to mobilize poor voters. When brokers solve voters' problems by providing them with material and nonmaterial benefits in exchange for participating at rallies and elections, they are using *clientelism* or *clientelistic strategies*. Clientelism is thus defined in this book as "a strategy of *political mobilization* in which politicians solve or promise to solve voters' problems in exchange for their political support."[1]

This book examines the incentives party brokers face in choosing how to mobilize voters to explain why some choose to use clientelism, and why some succeed and others fail in building a party network that uses clientelistic strategies. Studying the construction and maintenance of political, partisan, and social networks at the local level, this book describes and explains how clientelistic networks are built and sustained over time, as well as why some of them succeed in consolidating in new democracies while others fail and disappear.

A detailed description of these networks is an end in itself. As Jon Elster writes, "to explain is to provide a *mechanism*, to open up the black box and show the nuts and bolts, the cogs and wheels, the desires and beliefs that generate the aggregate outcomes" (1985: 5, emphasis in original). I use network analysis to describe the position and strategic decision making of each member within a clientelistic political machine. I study the relationships between and among political, partisan, and social networks, paying attention to the positions of party bosses, brokers, activists, and voters in each network.

In addition to its descriptive component, this book explains why some local politicians choose to use clientelistic strategies to mobilize poor voters and others do not, and why some who choose to utilize such strategies succeed in mobilizing poor voters while others fail. To explain variation in political actors' decisions on whether or not to use clientelism, I focus on the incentives that they face when making strategic choices about how to mobilize voters by considering their capacity to use clientelistic strategies and their individual preferences for or against such strategies within a given social context. I argue that a broker's capacity to build clientelistic linkages with voters is determined by his or her access to particularistic goods and ability to distribute these goods to voters who are likely to turn out and support the party.

I find that brokers who are able and prefer to use clientelistic strategies are more successful overall in mobilizing poor voters than those brokers who are incapable of employing these strategies and those brokers who, although capable of turning to these strategies, prefer not to. I find that the number of *pragmatist brokers* – those who are capable of using clientelism and choose to do so – almost equals the number of *idealist brokers* – those who, although capable, prefer not to use clientelism.

To explain variation in individuals' decision making about using clientelism, it is necessary to investigate the incentives they face and goals they pursue at the time of choosing whether or not to use clientelistic strategies to mobilize voters. Assuming that party brokers seek to win and stay in office, I expect them to pursue political strategies that would enable them to achieve this goal. I find that when party bosses distribute promotions based only on voter turnout, they encourage the use of clientelism among brokers competing for the support of poor voters. This system of rewards and punishments explains the consolidation of clientelism in new democracies. Party brokers learn through experience that clientelistic strategies are effective in mobilizing poor voters, and that their political success hinges upon their capacity to mobilize a larger number of voters.

To shed light on the emergence and consolidation of political clientelism and democracy, I describe and explain the context and mechanisms through which party bosses and brokers decide how to mobilize poor voters. The theory proposed and tested in this book builds a logic of perverse incentives that encourages office-seeking party brokers competing to mobilize poor voters to employ clientelistic strategies. Observing that candidates who use clientelistic strategies to mobilize poor voters are more effective than candidates who reject the use of these strategies, brokers interested in a political career learn about the efficacy of clientelism. Knowing that they will be rewarded with political promotions based solely on the number of voters mobilized and that they are unlikely to be punished for using these strategies by either the courts or political parties, office-seeking brokers are perversely encouraged to use clientelism to mobilize poor voters. This logic of perverse incentives has significant implications for the quality of local democracy.

First, it implies that voters' income inequalities will translate to political representation. A direct consequence of clientelism is that although poor voters can participate in democracy, their preferences are not voiced. When politicians buy voters' participation at rallies and elections, they are muting voters and, thus, precluding themselves from gathering information about voters' policy preferences. As a result, clientelism succeeds in deepening exclusion in democratic practices by inhibiting the ability of the poor to voice their preferences in collective decision making, and political equality suffers.[2]

Second, when only those candidates willing to use clientelism get elected, over time the local party system becomes stable. The political opposition finds it difficult to run against political machines that have the majority of seats in city councils and hold the executive office. I show how low levels of electoral volatility result from the consolidation of machine politics, which induces actors to use clientelistic strategies. Even in such a system, some local politicians are unwilling to use clientelistic strategies, but they are systematically defeated by candidates who do so.

Whereas some scholars accurately point out that clientelism provides voters with solutions that otherwise would not be available to them (Kitschelt 2000; Gay 2006; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Hilgers 2012), and that it helps avoid party system breakdown and social crises (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Levitsky 2003), my research describes the costs that clientelism and informal rules have for poor voters. It is the logic of perverse incentives that explains why Mario forced Laura to attend the rally.[3]

Machine Politics, Clientelism, and Social Networks

The bulk of the existing literature on clientelism and clientelistic relationships recognizes the importance of networks in making clientelism work. Networks provide party leaders with information about voters' electoral preferences and likelihood to turn out to vote. Networks also enable party brokers to monitor voters in case they fail to participate and support the party by attending rallies or voting for the party's candidate. Political parties rely on networks of party activists to distribute goods to voters; parties that do not have partisan networks are not able to distribute goods. Networks also enable parties to identify and recruit new community organizers and party activists to work for a party's candidate.

In short, it is networks that make clientelism work. Yet, we do not know how political parties build networks of party activists and followers, nor do we fully understand why some parties are able to sustain and even enlarge the size of their networks over time while others fail. Using network analysis, I study the construction and maintenance of political, partisan, and social networks to explain the causes and consequences of the consolidation of clientelism in new democracies.

"Social network analysis is based on an assumption of the importance of relationships among interacting units ... that is, relations defined by linkages among units are a fundamental component of network theories" (Christakis and Fowler 2009: 4). Using rich ethnographic data, this book describes and explains the emergence, persistence, and decline of political networks by tracing the political careers of candidates at the local level since their origins as community organizers and party activists until their election and reelection – in cases in which they succeed in mobilizing voters.

Whereas most of the literature takes networks for granted without examining their creation and sustainability, this book studies them as theoretical and empirical phenomena. By describing, defining, and explaining their construction, this book advocates for the integration of ethnographic and quantitative approaches to the study of networks.

Network analysis also allows for a closer examination of the context in which actors make their everyday decisions about whom to help (core or swing voters) and whom to ask for help (party brokers affiliated with certain political parties). Networks also provide information about the incentives facing individuals in different structural positions and how these incentives have affected their decision making. Studying the networks in which individuals are embedded and participate daily can help explain party leaders' decisions to use clientelistic strategies and variation in their success and failure in mobilizing voters by employing the same strategies.

Using network analysis, this book focuses on the relationships between party brokers and voters, and party bosses and party brokers. Furthermore, the book also scales up these relationships beyond the local level. While the focus of this book is at the local level where political machines are anchored, network theory enables me to study networks at multiple levels. Indeed, in Chapter 7, I scale up the findings presented at the local level by examining clientelistic networks at the provincial and national level. Hence, whereas most of the book focuses on the relationships between party brokers and mayors, and party brokers and poor voters, Chapter 7 shows how the theory of perverse incentives posed in this book can be scaled up to explain the relationships between and among mayors and governors and presidents.

Without understanding the social context in which individuals build and sustain relationships, the literature fails to grasp the social context in which dyadic clientelistic relationships are cultivated and sustained over time. James Scott's classic study about corruption and machine politics already highlighted the importance of a social context that "encourages the growth of machine-like qualities in ruling parties" (1969: 1145). Indeed, in her own seminal article, Susan Stokes recovered this observation:

> Thirty-five years ago, James Scott (1969) observed that political life of contemporary new nations bore a strong resemblance to the machine politics of the United States in earlier eras. The patronage, particularism, and graft endemic to the Philippines or Malaysia in the postwar decades recalled, for Scott, the Tweed machine in nineteenth-century New York or the Dawson machine in twentieth-century Chicago. Much has happened in the third of a century since Scott outlined "the contours and dynamics of the 'machine model' in comparative perspective" (1143). Many of the new nations that occupied his analysis have undergone transitions to electoral democracy; yet politics in these systems often remains particularistic, clientelistic, and corrupt. We therefore have a larger sample of countries, and a

> richer experience on which to draw, to understand the contours and dynamics of the machine. The historiography of the U.S. political machine has also grown, as have historical studies of patronage and vote buying in the history of today's advanced European democracies (see, e.g., Piattoni 2001). Finally, a formal literature on redistributive politics has developed, one in which the political machine plays a central role.
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> (2005: 315)

Assuming a social context in which poor voters are likely to exchange their political support for goods, this book focuses on explaining variation in politicians' capacity to build a following by taking into account the context in which they build and sustain political networks. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, this book explains the "creation" of local candidates by tracing their political careers at the local level since their origins until their election and reelection (in cases in which they succeed in mobilizing voters and thus get promoted within the clientelistic party).

Beginning from the microfoundations that lead some individuals to build larger networks of followers than others, this book studies individual candidates' decision making by contextualizing their decisions and thus examining the effects that a structure of perverse incentives has on their individual choices. Moreover, beyond enabling the contextualization of the information, network analysis also allows for a focus on the relationships between and among individuals in different (positions within and in) networks. "The fundamental difference between a social network explanation and a non-network explanation of a process is the inclusion of concepts and information on relationships among units in a study" (Christakis and Fowler 2009: 8). Whereas "'standard' social science perspectives usually ignore the relational information" (Christakis and Fowler 2009: 9), this book takes them into account and makes them central in explaining variation among brokers' decision to use clientelism, and their success and failure in mobilizing poor voters by using clientelistic strategies.

Political, Partisan, and Social Networks

To explain the relationship between Laura and Mario, I study the political, partisan, and social networks in which they are embedded and participate daily. Poor voters such as Laura become connected to party brokers like Mario when they look for food to feed their children, construction materials to finish their precarious homes, scholarships to send their children to school, social welfare programs that can help them make

ends meet, and jobs. Party brokers such as Mario work to solve voters' everyday problems in exchange for political support to advance their political careers.

Problem-solving networks are anchored in political machines – informal organizations that link party members with voters. Machines consolidate several problem-solving networks in a hierarchical organization, with voters who ask party activists for solutions to their problems at the bottom and a party boss at the top.

Activists begin their political careers when brokers recruit them to represent their candidates and parties in their neighborhoods. Some recruited activists become paid party activists or *brokers*; others who continue mobilizing voters for the party but do not receive a salary remain unpaid party activists. Brokers are paid for daily work in their neighborhoods solving voters' problems and mobilizing them to participate in rallies and elections.[4] Brokers' benefits range from municipal employment to access to welfare programs. Voters at the bottom of the pyramid receive goods of small value, such as construction materials, school supplies, and blankets, and are likely to support and remain in the broker's network as long as they receive something. Otherwise, they will switch their support to another broker who will give them similar goods.

Brokers are office-seeking party activists interested in becoming candidates; therefore, they are motivated to increase the size of their political network to eventually compete for an elected position. Those who succeed in mobilizing voters to turn out at rallies and elections are rewarded with party candidacies, and the most effective get elected as local representatives.

Elected representatives have access to resources and information and are expected to enlarge or at least maintain the size of their political networks. If brokers fail to turn out voters to rallies, they will lose their opportunity to become candidates. Brokers compete first to become candidates, second to get elected, and third to get reelected to the same office or to a higher one.

This book focuses on individuals interested in pursuing a political career within the machine and uses information about municipal candidates who succeeded and failed in getting elected and reelected in Argentina. I chose to focus on local candidates for three reasons. First, to explain why some brokers are able to mobilize more voters than others, I have to make comparisons among individuals who actually manage to turn out voters beyond their family and friends. By examining candidates who succeed in getting elected, I am able to differentiate between those activists who have a party network and those who do not.[5] Second, local candidates are elected representatives, and as such they are in charge of legislating based on the demands of their constituency. Candidates who

use clientelistic strategies to mobilize poor voters fail to represent the demands of their constituents. In this way, they seriously diminish the quality of democratic representation and increase the potential for social outbursts from those who feel excluded from the democratic process. Third, in studying elected local candidates, I am able to gather systematic data about their political careers and capacities and preferences to use clientelism.

Political, Partisan, and Social Networks in Argentina

This book takes advantage of the benefits that country studies provide for building and testing theories in comparative politics (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007) while enhancing unit homogeneity (Levitsky and Murillo 2005: 15) to study political, partisan, and social networks in Argentina. Since 1983, the country has seen the consolidation of clientelism in a competitive democratic process that has included the partisan alternation of presidential power and considerable competition at the subnational level where political machines are anchored. Recent scholarship that focus on the Argentine case have done so to build explanations about the pervasiveness and persistence of clientelism in new democracies (see, e.g., Auyero 2000; Brusco et al. 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008; Szwarcberg 2009; Weitz-Shapiro 2012; Stokes et al. 2013; Zarazaga 2014).

"Argentina, with its unstable and weakly enforced institutions, is representative of a much larger universe of cases than the handful of advanced industrialized democracies upon which most of the leading theories of democratic institutions are based" (Levitsky and Murillo 2005: 14). In studying politics on the ground in Argentina, I seek to build a theory and draw lessons about the consolidation of clientelism in a democracy that transcend Argentina, and could be applied to understand this phenomenon in other new democracies.

Studying political, partisan, and social networks in eight municipalities in two Argentine provinces – Buenos Aires and Córdoba – I am able to control for historical and cultural variables at the national level that may affect the explanatory variables (Snyder 2001). Focusing my analysis on eight cases has allowed me to carry out the extensive fieldwork necessary for gathering data on individual candidates' capacities and preferences to use clientelism and on the effects of those decisions on their political careers and the political careers of other candidates in their party and in opposition parties. It also enabled me to gather information about each selected municipality.

The selection of these provinces is justified by data availability and regional differences in levels of economic development, demographic

characteristics, and electoral patterns. The case selection is based on the differences in population, housing quality, income, partisanship, and incumbency that studies of vote buying and clientelism (e.g., Brusco et al. 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008; Weitz-Shapiro 2012) have used to explain variation in parties' selection of mobilization strategies.

In the past two decades, Argentina's historically dominant parties, the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and the Justicialist (Peronist) Party (PJ), achieved different levels of electoral support in Córdoba and Buenos Aires. Both are political parties with stable roots in society and solid party organizations that maintain territorial control over municipalities by combining a recollection of shared watershed historical events with clientelistic inducements (Auyero 2000; Levitsky 2003; Calvo and Murillo 2004, 2005; Torre 2005; Szwarcberg 2009), creating "communities of fate" (Welhofer 1979: 171) and "electorates of belonging" (Panebianco 1988: 267).

The Radical Party governed the province of Córdoba, together with the city of Córdoba and the majority of municipalities in the province since the return of democracy in 1983 until 1999, when the Peronists won the governorship, which they retain today. In contrast, Buenos Aires has been a Peronist stronghold. The predominance of the Peronist Party among the voters of the province of Buenos Aires has been widely documented (Mora y Araujo and Llorente 1980; Ostiguy 1998; Auyero 2000; Levitsky 2003).

Table 1.1 provides socio-demographic and electoral information about the selected cases. The eight cases include municipalities with competitive multiparty elections, competitive two-party elections featuring the Radical Party and the Peronist Party, and elections that are essentially noncompetitive in municipalities dominated by the Peronist Party. Map 1.1 shows the locations of the selected municipalities within the country of Argentina.

Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is the financial, industrial, and political center of Argentina. Given the size of the province's electorate, voters living in the twenty-four municipalities that border the capital city – collectively referred to as the Conurbano Bonaerense – have the voting power to determine the outcome of national elections. For instance, La Matanza is a municipality that has the same population as six other Argentine provinces combined; similarly, the municipality of José C. Paz contains the same number of voters as some Argentine provinces.

Sixty percent of Buenos Aires's registered voters live in the twenty-four Conurbano municipalities. The importance of the Conurbano for

Table 1.1. *Selected Municipalities in Argentina*

Province	Municipality	Population	Number of low-income households	Local political party system*
Córdoba	Córdoba Capital	1,329,604	369,793	Multiparty
	Río Cuarto	246,393	42,044	Bipartisan
	Villa María	72,162	1,114	Bipartisan
	Colonia Caroya	13,806	4,018	Bipartisan
Total Córdoba	*443 municipalities*	*3,308,876*	*97,405*	
Buenos Aires	José C. Paz	265,981	56,004	Single party
	San Miguel	276,190	65,689	Single party
	Bahía Blanca	301,572	88,260	Bipartisan
	Malvinas Argentinas	322,375		Single party
Total 24 municipalities of Buenos Aires (Conurbano)		9,916,715		
Total municipalities of Buenos Aires without Conurbano		5,708,369		
Total Buenos Aires	*136 municipalities*	*13,827,203*	*508,671*	
Total Argentina	*2,291 municipalities*	*36,260,130*	*1,442,934*	Bipartisan

Note: Population numbers are based on the 2010 national census (National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina, INDEC). The number of council members is legally stipulated and varies based on the population of each municipality. By combining educational, occupational, and construction characteristics, the INDEC measures the income levels of Argentine homes. A household that fulfills three of the following five characteristics is classified as low income: (1) a density per room that exceeds three inhabitants, (2) precarious physical conditions, (3) absence of indoor plumbing, (4) children between ages six and twelve who do not attend school, and (5) more than four members per one employed member and a head of household who has not finished primary school.

* *Local political party system* describes the local political administrations that the municipality experienced between 1995 and 2005. *Multiparty* refers to the governing of the municipality by three political parties: UCR, PJ, and New Party (only in the case of Córdoba). *Bipartisan* refers to having had Peronist (PJ) and Radical (UCR) administrations. *Single party* refers to having been governed only by one (Peronist) party.

Argentine politics lies in its combination of poverty levels and number of voters. The Conurbano contains 25 percent (7,173,173 inhabitants) of the country's total population in 1.2 percent of the territory and has the highest percentage of unemployed and illegally employed workers. The proximity between those living in the Conurbano and those living in the city of Buenos Aires constitutes a source of continual tension between citizens and the provincial and local governments of Buenos Aires.

I conducted extensive fieldwork for more than twenty-four months in three municipalities located in the northwest of the Conurbano that, until 1994, constituted the municipality of General Sarmiento. Before being