

# Choosing clientelism: political competition, poverty, and social welfare policy in Argentina

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## Abstract

Why do some politicians condition the delivery of goods and services to citizens on individual political behavior, while others do not? In this paper, I argue that differences in the incentives politicians face to use clientelism can be explained by the interaction between levels of political competition and voter poverty. I then test this theory using an original dataset on municipal-level clientelism in Argentina. I find substantial support for the hypothesis that the relationship between political competition and clientelism is contingent on levels of voter poverty. In particular, high levels of political opposition are compatible with clientelism when poverty is high, while the combination of substantial opposition and a large middle class generates incentives to eliminate clientelism.

Why do some local politicians condition the delivery of goods and services to citizens on political loyalty, while others distribute these same goods in a relatively fair, neutral fashion?

Recent years have seen a resurgent interest in understanding the first of these two modes of distribution—political clientelism.<sup>1</sup> Following much of this literature, I define clientelism as the *individualized exchange of goods and services for political support*.<sup>2</sup> Politicians do, of course, engage in many different types of exchanges in their pursuit of funds and votes as part of electoral contests. They may solicit legal or illegal donations from individuals or interest groups in exchange for future favorable treatment, or they may distribute targeted geographic benefits—“pork”—in the hopes of winning votes from certain constituencies. Although these exchanges suffer from varying degrees of public disapproval, clientelist exchange is unique—and uniquely troubling—in that it relies on undermining the secret ballot. For clientelism to “succeed,” a voter must believe that there is a

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<sup>1</sup>A search for “clientelism” in *International Political Science Abstracts*, for example, generates 113 articles published since 2000 where this term is listed in the title or abstract. These publications describe clientelist political practices in setting as diverse as South and East Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe.

<sup>2</sup>The definition of clientelism I use here is similar to those put forward by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007a), Stokes (2006), and Piattoni (2001a), among others, in its emphasis on the transactional nature of clientelism.

reasonable probability that her choice at the ballot box can be observed.<sup>3</sup> This belief that her vote may be observed—and her fear of the consequences if she makes the “wrong” choice—is what leads the voter to exchange her political support for some valuable good or service.

In recent years, concerns about democratic “consolidation” in many of the third-wave democracies have waned. Nonetheless, the persistence or reemergence of practices like clientelism in parts of these countries raises serious questions about the quality of democracy that citizens experience. Even where elections have become the “only game in town,” the interactions between politicians and voters that surround these elections may be quite different from what many observers expected during transitions to democracy (O’Donnell, 1996). These normative concerns motivate much of the literature on clientelism.

As Stokes (2006) highlights, the recent wave of literature on clientelism has been wide-ranging, with a particular focus on understanding who politicians target through clientelism (Stokes, 2005; Nichter, 2008; Stokes and Dunning, 2008; Gans-Morse et al., 2009), why politicians and voters comply with clientelist agreements (Auyero, 2000; Brusco et al., 2004; Stokes, 2005; Lawson, 2008), and the implications of clientelism for democracy (Piattoni, 2001b; Stokes, 2007). However, few scholars have asked why some politicians use clientelism while others opt not to. Furthermore, the difficulty of collecting data on clientelism on any large scale means that we actually know very little about how widespread the practice is or the correlates of variation in clientelism across or within countries.

In this paper, I develop a theory of variation in clientelism that posits that the interaction between voter poverty and politician competition shapes the incentives for a politician to rely on clientelism. I then test this theory using a unique measure of clientelism that seeks to faithfully capture how government policies are implemented across a substantial number of geographic units. The results of the statistical analysis support the claim that both constituent poverty and political opposition are necessary to explain the decision to use clientelism. In particular, I find that substantial political opposition is not inconsistent with clientelism. In fact, when intense competition is coupled with high poverty, clientelism is extremely likely. Only when a large opposition presence is coupled with a substantial middle class does the use of clientelism decline.

## 1 The electoral costs of clientelism

What explains why some politicians rely on clientelism while others do not? In this paper, I focus in particular on whether we should expect to see a monotonic relationship between political competition and incentives to use clientelism. In order to answer this question, I draw attention to what I call the *direct* electoral costs of clientelism among middle class voters. Once we take these

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<sup>3</sup>Even in a democracy where the ballot is officially secret, there are a number of ways that voter confidence in that secrecy can be undermined. See Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007a, 15-17) and the references therein for some examples.

costs into account, it follows that incentives to rely on clientelism within competitive environments should vary with voter poverty.

There are two approaches in the literature to the relationship between political competition (broadly construed) and clientelism. On the one hand, clientelism is frequently associated with low competition or even monopolistic political regimes (Magaloni et al., 2003; Medina and Stokes, 2002; Hale, 2007; Rodríguez and Ward, 1994; Ward, 1998).<sup>4</sup> Clientelism might both create and be a product of such regimes. When used effectively, clientelism delivers a reliable bloc of votes to a politician, and it therefore may decrease competition going forward.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, a lack of competition may mean that politicians face little pressure to abandon the practice. This rationale suggests that increased competition will be linked to improved government performance and decreased use of clientelism.

On the other hand, we might think that some degree of competition is a prerequisite for clientelism. Models of clientelism that rely on rational calculation (Stokes, 2005) as well as those that point to the role of feelings of obligation and gratitude (Auyero, 2000) both agree that clientelism is a particularly powerful vote-getting tool. As such, it seems reasonable to expect that it will be especially attractive in more competitive electoral environments. James Scott, in some of the earliest political science scholarship on clientelism, makes such a claim, saying that “[t]he pressure to enlist adherents is obviously greatest when the party faces a competitive electoral struggle” (Scott, 1969b, 1147). Looking historically, Shefter (1977, 1994) also highlights the value of patronage for vote-getting in competitive elections, while van de Walle (2007), looking forward, expects that increased competition in Africa will lead to a greater reliance on the direct exchange of goods for voter support.

Authors on both sides of this question share a similarity in their approach—they treat and analyze clientelism as an exchange between politicians and their (usually poor) clients.<sup>6</sup> In both older and more recent works on clientelism, poverty, either directly or when manifest through income inequality, is cited as a powerful predictor of clientelism.<sup>7</sup> Whether because of their posited shorter time horizons or the greater marginal utility of the small, targeted goods distributed via clientelism, the poor are overwhelmingly identified as the target of clientelist practices in both theoretical and empirical treatments of the subject.<sup>8</sup> Although I agree that the interaction between politicians and

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<sup>4</sup>Note that some of these authors define clientelism to include the targeted distribution of goods to groups of voters, which falls outside of the definition of clientelism offered here, which emphasizes individualized exchange.

<sup>5</sup>As Magaloni et al. (2007) describe it, investment in clientelism is a relatively low risk strategy through which to gain votes.

<sup>6</sup>Shefter (1977, 1994) is an exception. In his influential study of patronage, he points to the relative influence of two competing groups—a “constituency for bureaucratic autonomy” and a “constituency for patronage” in helping to explain differences in the use of patronage across countries. Although he focuses more on elites than on voters themselves, who are the main focus here, one of Shefter’s key insights is that the particularistic distribution of government jobs involves trade-offs in terms of political support. The argument I develop here has a similar intuition.

<sup>7</sup>See, among many others, Huntington (1968), Scott (1969a), Robinson and Verdier (2002), and Brusco et al. (2004).

<sup>8</sup>Though see Lyne (2007) for an exception.

poor clients is at the core of clientelism, I argue that in order to understand politician incentives to use clientelism, we need to consider how the practice may affect the voting behavior of non-clients. In particular, I argue that there are likely to be direct electoral costs to clientelism in terms of political support from the middle class. I am not the first to highlight the potential costs of clientelism. Magaloni et al. (2000) 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. However, these are indirect costs, and the authors do not suggest that middle class voting behavior is affected by the nature of politician interactions with the poor. In contrast, I argue that there are direct electoral costs to clientelism.

Clientelism does not take place in a vacuum, and there are a number of reasons to believe that non-clients may punish politicians who rely on clientelism. This should be especially true when clientelism is used to manipulate official government programs. In much of the developing world, the rapid increase of social programs targeted at the poor means that these programs provide an attractive pool of funds for those politicians who want to use clientelism. Middle class citizens are, by definition, not eligible for these benefits. Nonetheless, I argue that they are likely to withdraw political support from politicians who opt to use clientelism in the distribution of these benefits.

Why should middle class voters care about whether public programs targeted at the poor are administered via clientelism or not? Middle class voters might reject clientelism for reasons of two different types. First, these voters might view clientelism as a negative signal of the quality of government performance more generally and therefore withhold support for a clientelist politician for largely self-interested reasons. Middle class voters, even if not consumers 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.<sup>9</sup> They are deeply affected by how well or poorly their government carries out its day to day tasks. As such, to the extent clientelism serves as a signal of poor 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 therefore fail to support a politician who uses it, regardless of whether or not clientelism has any direct effects on their material well-being. They may believe that it undermines the value of democratic practice, exploits poor voters, and prevents the poor from enjoying autonomy over their choices at the ballot box.<sup>10</sup> These are powerful criticisms of clientelism, even for a middle class voter who believes that her own material interests are not directly affected by the practice.

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<sup>9</sup>There may be some portion of the non-poor population that is able to effectively buy its way out of access to many government services, sending their children to private schools, living in neighborhoods with privately-maintained streets and private security, and so on. These voters may in fact not care about the quality of government services. Nonetheless, in most settings, this group will be numerically small and electorally inconsequential, and so I do not consider them for the purposes of the theory developed here.

<sup>10</sup>Of course, poor voters might find clientelism morally objectionable, as well. It can nonetheless be an effective vote-getting tactic among these voters if the goods distributed via clientelism are sufficiently valuable to them. As Stokes (2006) points out then, clientelism can make the poor vote against their “true” preferences.

These two mechanisms—a moral and a self-interested one—of course need not be mutually exclusive. If either of these reasons holds true, we should expect middle class voters to punish politicians who rely on clientelism in the administration of social programs. Although I do not review it here, separate work (Weitz-Shapiro, 2008b) uses an original survey experiment in Argentina to demonstrate that middle class voters are indeed likely to withhold support from clientelist politicians. A full accounting of the effects of clientelism should therefore consider how the practice affects the behavior of both poor and middle class voters.

Taking into account the direct costs of clientelism helps clarify the relationship between political competition and clientelism. Imagine a competitive electoral environment. As the share of the population that is non-poor increases, so will the direct costs of relying on clientelism as middle class voters withdraw support from a clientelist politician. At the same time, the number of votes potentially gained from the practice will decline along with the share of the population that is poor. High competition should be compatible with clientelism when voters are mostly poor and the electoral benefits of clientelism outweigh the costs. In contrast, clientelism should be far less attractive when high levels of political competition are coupled with a large middle class. Because this theory is built on the direct costs of clientelism, this should be true even when most goods distributed via clientelism are not funded from tax receipts, and hence impose no direct costs on non-recipients.

This trade-off between the electoral costs and benefits of clientelism should be less relevant in contexts of limited political competition. Where political competition is high and politician security in office is therefore low, each vote gained or lost from clientelism will be felt quite acutely. In contrast, where a politician feels his security in office is assured, the trade-off between the votes lost and gained via clientelism should be less relevant. Under circumstances of limited political competition, then, the demographic make up of his constituents should have a more muted effect on a politician's decision about whether or not to use clientelism. In sum, incorporating the costs of clientelism suggests that the interaction between competition and voter poverty, rather than either alone, should explain variation in politician incentives to rely on clientelism.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 The difficulty of measurement

Recall that clientelism entails the individualized exchange of goods for political support. As such, it requires that 1) valuable goods are distributed to individuals whose identity is known to politicians

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<sup>11</sup>Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007a, 28-32) similarly argue that the interaction between political competition and levels of development help explain the use of clientelism. It is somewhat difficult to compare their predictions with my own, because they are primarily interested in predicting the mix of clientelist and programmatic distribution rather than the presence or absence of clientelism. Note, however, that they treat both clientelism and programmatic distribution as vote getting tactics and do not consider the possible costs of the former. That leads them to make some predictions that are clearly at odds with those put forward here. They argue, for example, that under high levels of development, increased competition should be associated with increased spending on both clientelist and programmatic goods.

or brokers, 2) the behavior of those individuals is monitored (or they believe it may be monitored), and 3) voters who defect from clientelist agreements face some probability of being punished afterwards. Assessing whether or not clientelism is being used in a particular place is a difficult task and one that 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; Lázaro, 2003; Szwarcberg, 2007), Brazil (Gay, 1994), Egypt (Singerman, 1995), India (Krishna, 2007), and Taiwan (Wang and Kurzman, 2007), among others. Although this type of research illuminates *how* clientelism works, the intense amount of field work this type of research 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 (although see Gay (1994) for a partial exception). As such, 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, nor does it shed much light on why some politicians choose *not* to use clientelism.

Some researchers seeking to understand variation in the use of clientelism have sought to circumvent the difficulty of directly measuring clientelism by instead comparing spending on different types of goods and services.<sup>12</sup> So, for example, Magaloni et al. (2007) categorize spending data for a major Mexican anti-poverty program implemented throughout the 1990's 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, such as digging wells and building 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 behavior.<sup>13</sup>

The ease of collection makes these attractive measures, but they are nonetheless problematic. Esping-Anderson's critique of the use of spending data in studies of the welfare state— that “[e]xpenditures are epiphenomenal to the theoretical substance”— comes to mind here, as well

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<sup>12</sup>An exception to this focus on government spending as a proxy for clientelism or government performance is the large citizen survey discussed in Brusco et al. (2004) and Stokes (2005). More similar in spirit to the qualitative work described earlier, the survey conducted by those authors documents on a large scale, and from the perspective of voters, the interactions between politicians and the voters they hope to woo. My focus on the behavior of politicians in the administration of social policy complements their focus on the behavior of voters in the period immediately surrounding elections.

<sup>13</sup>See for example Gordin (2002), Fundación Grupo Innova (2003), Calvo and Murillo (2004), Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004), Faguet (2004), Brusco et al. (2005), and Remmer (2007). Other work on government performance has relied on outcome measures, such as the provision of water and electricity (Cleary, 2007; Chhibber and Nooruddin, 2004).

(Esping-Anderson, 1990, 19). It is difficult to assert that government spending on a particular type of good or service is sufficient to create the “contingent direct exchange” (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007a) that separates clientelism from more programmatic policy implementation. Clientelism, as discussed here and elsewhere, is a *mode* of distribution and does not fit neatly into conventional distinctions between private and public goods.<sup>14</sup> As Kitschelt (2000, 850) argues, “[i]n operational terms, it is much easier to identify the procedural terms of exchange between voters and politicians than the teleological nature of parties’ policy programs. It is often impossible to determine whether a public policy is rent seeking or public goods oriented.”

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. As these examples highlight, the line dividing private from public goods is easily blurred and knowing the nature of a good (is it public or private) is not necessarily informative about the means through which it is administered (clientelism or not). 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.

Following the advice of Kitschelt (2000), cited above, in this paper I develop a measure of clientelism that focuses on the process of clientelism. 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 an important social welfare program, the *Programa Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria*, across a sample of over 120 Argentine municipalities. As noted above, a “successful” clientelist exchange relies on a politician’s knowledge and discretion: he must know who receives benefits and be in a position to plausibly threaten to withdraw benefits in the future from recipients who fail to give their political support as expected.<sup>15</sup> In the small and medium-sized

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<sup>14</sup>My argument here differs somewhat from that of Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007a). Although they define clientelism as a mode of exchange, a number of the chapters in their volume use information on spending as a proxy for information on clientelism, and they seem to suggest that one can identify clientelist and programmatic “goods,” rather than clientelist and programmatic methods of distribution of any goods (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007a, 11).

<sup>15</sup>Nationally or internationally funded social welfare programs pose some unique challenges to the successful implementation of clientelism. See Weitz-Shapiro (2008a, chapter 2) for more detail on these challenges and the strategies clientelist politicians use to circumvent them.

Argentine cities examined here, the most common technique through which politicians obtain this information and communicate this discretion is to personally receive and decide on requests for inclusion into valuable government programs, rather than allowing line bureaucrats or lower level officials to play this role. In municipalities where mayors take on this role, mayors are frequently—though unpredictably—available to the public, and the waiting areas outside of their offices tend to be full of poor residents waiting for the chance to make their case for inclusion in one social welfare program or another.<sup>16</sup> Mayors become the public face of these benefits and voters become well aware of their control over these benefits. By personalizing the distribution of government benefits, a politician can both claim credit for the benefits he distributes and make it clear to voters that he is in a position to withdraw such benefits as retaliation for noncompliance in the voting booth. I therefore treat a mayor’s personal involvement in beneficiary selection as an indicator of clientelism.

### 3 Empirical setting

The argument developed in section 1 suggests that the relationship between political competition and the incentives to rely on clientelism is conditional on levels of voter poverty. In order to test this theory, I examine the local-level implementation of a large social welfare program in Argentina.

This empirical focus deserves a bit of explanation. Recent work on clientelism in Latin America has examined the manipulation of benefits from established social welfare programs (Szwarcberg, 2007; Magaloni et al., 2007), the distribution of handouts immediately before elections (Brusco et al., 2005; Stokes, 2005; Lawson, 2008), and sometimes the combination of both strategies (Auyero, 2000). I focus on the former because of the ongoing nature and large scale of these programs and therefore the scope of their potential impact. Goods distributed in the period immediately surrounding elections are usually (though not exclusively) of fairly limited value and are typically distributed only once, immediately prior to an election.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, social welfare programs typically distribute goods of somewhat greater value, and, even more importantly, distribute these goods on an ongoing or even semi-permanent basis. The benefits distributed through such programs may include regular cash payments, work through a job program, or, in the case examined here, large boxes of foodstuffs distributed on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. In addition, these programs likely reach larger numbers of beneficiaries than those who receive small consumer goods immediately before elections. In the sample of municipalities examined here, an average of 29% of all households received benefits from the food program I examine here. Among the poor, a far greater proportion of households received benefits.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in Latin America and the developing world, some

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<sup>16</sup>See Weitz-Shapiro (2008a, chapter 2) for more detail on the tactics clientelist politicians use to claim credit personally for government-funded social welfare programs.

<sup>17</sup>Brusco et al. (2004, 69) and Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2010, footnote 24) detail the types of small consumer goods typically distributed immediately before elections in Argentina and Nicaragua, respectively.

<sup>18</sup>As explained below, the most widely available poverty figures available in Argentina likely underestimate its extent. Using these official figures on poverty, there is, on average, more than one beneficiary of the food program examined here per poor household in the municipalities in my sample.



targeted social programs have the explicit stated aim of reaching all poor families.<sup>19</sup>

I look at the implementation of a single social welfare program across municipalities within a single country—Argentina. There are both advantages and limitations to the focused subnational comparative approach adopted here. As Snyder (2001) has highlighted, comparing cases within a single country allows us to control for unobservable or difficult to measure, but possibly confounding explanatory factors, like the nature of the party system or “tastes” for a certain style of government, that might vary across countries.<sup>20</sup> Focusing on the implementation of a single program in one country allows me to collect data on clientelism that allows for quantitative analysis while being both reliable and close to the phenomenon of interest.

That being said, developing an in-depth measure of clientelism at the municipal level in a single country entails certain trade-offs. Although the Argentine experience examined here reflects a trend towards decentralization and the growth of targeted social welfare policies experienced in many parts of the developing world, it is impossible to say whether the empirical results discussed here would be replicated with comparable data from other country settings.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the lack of comparable direct measures of clientelism in previous time periods imposes some constraints on the research, making it difficult, for example, to examine a possibly dynamic process wherein the use of clientelism at one point in time may affect political competition in subsequent periods.

Though the limitations imposed by the reliance on observational data collected from a single country at a single point in time are real, the empirical approach taken here nonetheless allows for a uniquely direct measure of clientelism, one that is unmatched in existing large-n empirical analyses of the phenomenon. While the approach taken here limits our ability to confidently establish causality or to make comparisons with other countries, collecting a direct measure of clientelism allows us to be far more confident that any observed correlations with clientelist behavior are, in fact, correlations with clientelism and not with rather poor proxies of it.

### 3.1 Food provision in Argentina

The data analyzed in this paper focuses on the implementation of a large food distribution program in Argentina, the *Programa Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria* (National Food Security Program),

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<sup>19</sup>It is much more difficult to assess the extent of distribution of small goods immediately before elections because these goods do not typically form a part of any established social program and thus no official data on their distribution are available. A number of researchers have attempted to assess the extent of distribution of small goods immediately surrounding elections in Latin America using citizen surveys (Brusco et al., 2005; Abramo, 2004; Lawson, 2008) and find single-digit percentages of respondents admit to having received something from a party representative. However, social desirability bias in responses may mean that these figures underestimate the extent of distribution. In fact, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2010), using a list experiment technique in Nicaragua, find that the actual breadth of distribution may be much wider than direct survey questions are able to detect.

<sup>20</sup>Of course, there may be significant variation in such variables of interest within countries, as well, although we might reasonably expect these differences to be somewhat muted.

<sup>21</sup>See Burki et al. (1999) for a nice review of decentralization in Latin America, and Rodden (2004) and World Development Report (2000, chapter 5) for a review of global trends. As noted above, the food program studied here is an example of the social safety net programs that have proliferated in recent years. The World Bank alone spent about three billion dollars on 116 social safety net programs between 2002 and 2006 (Milazzo and Grosh, 2007).

or PNSA. The PNSA is a large umbrella program that includes a number of food-related sub-programs, including self-production of food (community farms) and *comedores* (soup kitchens). I focus on the component that funds the direct, regular distribution to families of large boxes or bags of food stuffs (*módulos* or *bolsones alimentarios*) to households across the country. The contents of these packages vary somewhat, but they generally contain about 30 Argentine pesos worth of dried goods and basic food staples, and they are distributed to poor residents approximately every 45 days. In one of the provinces under study, provincial guidelines 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. 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, making it an important part of the country's anti-poverty efforts (Argentina, n.d.).

The PNSA has a number of characteristics that make it a good testing ground for exploring variation in 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 significant discretion over program implementation. The program is decentralized in its structure: the federal government signs agreements with each of the provinces, in which the two levels of government detail how the program will be administered in that province. In the law that established the program, cities are specifically given a number of 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. These decisions are unlikely to be an artifact of variation in administrative capacity, as municipal responsibilities within the PNSA are largely logistic and therefore not technically demanding. At the same time, there is limited oversight of the program by central or provincial governments, and monitoring of how beneficiary lists are created or how food is distributed is far from rigorous.<sup>22</sup> Given this lax enforcement of formal program rules, politicians who seek to use clientelism in the administration of the PNSA are unlikely to be constrained from doing so.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the PNSA's beneficiary list is locally controlled and is "open" in the sense that families can be added and removed.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, evidence from the survey I conducted (discussed in

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<sup>22</sup>Most monitoring that I learned about seeks to ensure that the purchase of the food is done through competitive bidding rather than focusing on beneficiary selection or methods of distribution.

<sup>23</sup>By choosing a program where oversight is lax or absent, I am necessarily unable to understand the extent to which monitoring by higher levels of government might improve city service provision or prevent the use of clientelism. There is some evidence from Brazil (Tendler, 2000) and Indonesia (Olken, 2005) that such monitoring can effectively limit clientelism and corruption.

<sup>24</sup>This is in sharp contrast to the more widely studied *Jefes de Hogar* program, an unemployment subsidy program

more detail below) demonstrates that beneficiary list revisions do occur frequently. Empirically, out of 125 cases for which I have information, 76 cities report revising the list once every 45 days (or more frequently—many claimed that the beneficiary list was being “permanently” or “constantly” revised), 41 report revising it more than once a year though less often than once every 45 days, and only 8 report revising once a year or less (and most of those in fact once a year).<sup>25</sup> In sum, focusing on the PNSA allows us to limit any potential variation in the defining characteristics of the policy, while the type of administration of the PNSA that we observe in a given city is likely to reflect the mayor’s preferences and hence the incentives created by the local political and social conditions that he faces.

## 4 Data

Even restricting the analysis to Argentina alone, the universe of possible cases is quite large. Argentina has over 2000 local governments (including municipalities and their smaller counterparts, *comunas*) spread over 23 provinces.<sup>26</sup> The empirical test of the theory developed here relies on a original survey of the head of the social welfare office in over 120 Argentine cities across three provinces: Córdoba, Río Negro, and Salta. These provinces are located in the central, southern, and northern parts of the country, respectively, and together represent a wide range of demographic and political conditions.<sup>27</sup> All three are outside of the major population center of Buenos Aires. Much of the existing literature on clientelism in Argentina has focused on this area, while only limited evidence exists about the quality of city government administration outside the capital region.<sup>28</sup>

### 4.1 Outcome variable: Conceptualizing clientelism in the PNSA

An original survey was used to collect much of the data of interest. The survey was conducted in person by researchers in each province. A key informant (in most cases the head of the municipal social welfare office) answered a series of questions about the implementation of the PNSA, as well as some more general questions about the head of the office’s background and contacts with the

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that also began in its present incarnation as a result of the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina. Beneficiary lists for that program were created between April and May 2002 and although beneficiaries have been dropped from the program, no additions have been permitted since that time.

<sup>25</sup>I coded the frequency of beneficiary list revision on the basis of questions in the survey about the most recent and next anticipated revision of the list. Where respondents replied that lists were revised at every distribution, I code this as being revised every 45 days, since distributions are scheduled to take place this frequently.

<sup>26</sup>I exclude the city of Buenos Aires because of its unique legal status.

<sup>27</sup>The following criteria were used to select municipalities within each province: Río Negro and Salta: all municipalities with population greater than 2000 (27 and 50, respectively). Córdoba: All municipalities with populations greater than 20,000, and a random sample of those with populations between 2000 and 20,000 (55 in total). Data was ultimately successfully collected for 126 of these municipalities, or 95% of the original sample.

<sup>28</sup>Examples of the former include Auyero (2000) and Levitsky (2003). Interest in the country’s interior provinces is increasing; see for example Brusco et al. (2005) and Szwarcberg (2007).

mayor. The survey included a number of measures of actual political intervention into the workings of the PNSA. The questions I analyze here focus on the mayor’s role in drawing up or altering the list of program beneficiaries. As described in section 2, personal involvement in drawing up the list of beneficiaries for a government program allows a politician to claim credit for such benefits and communicates to voters that these benefits can be withdrawn if they do not comply with the clientelist bargain. I therefore treat information about politician involvement in drawing up the list of program beneficiaries as the main indicator of clientelism in this analysis.

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 list.<sup>29</sup> 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. 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).<sup>30</sup> I treat this as the main indicator of clientelism in the survey and the empirical results reported below use this outcome variable.

## 4.2 Explanatory variables

**Poverty** I use the most widely available measure of poverty in Argentina, the proportion of households in each municipality with NBI (“necesidades básicas insatisfechas”), or unsatisfied basic needs.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>The exact question wording is reported in the appendix. In a few cases, the respondent did not mention the mayor when asked about who “participated” in making the list, but then responded that the mayor was responsible for making the final decision about who would be included. In all these cases, I code the mayor as having participated in list-making.

<sup>30</sup>This breaks down into the following groups: 27 cities where the respondent replied only that the mayor was involved in creating the list, 11 cases where she reported mayoral involvement only in making changes to the list, and 46 cases where the head responded that the mayor was involved in both making the list and in making changes to it.

<sup>31</sup>Note that the use of household, rather than population data, is appropriate, because the food program I look at is targeted at households rather than individuals. Also, individual-level data is unavailable for Córdoba.

<sup>32</sup>This data is collected by Argentina’s census agency, INDEC. A household is considered to have NBI if it has at least one of the following five characteristics: Density of more than three people per room, precarious physical condition of housing, lacks indoor plumbing, includes children between the ages of 6 and 12 who do not attend school, or has more than four members per employed member and where the head of the household has less than a third grade education. This is the most widely used measure of poverty in Argentina, and it is the only measure available for all three of the provinces included in this analysis. Nonetheless, it is somewhat problematic and likely underestimates

**Political competition** Political competition can be conceptualized in many different ways. Here, I am most interested in political competition defined as a politician's perceived (in)security in office. Differences in perceived security in office are responsible for divergent predictions of political behavior at different levels of political competition. Where a politician feels insecure in his prospects for reelection (political competition is high), each vote gained or lost is felt acutely. In this situation, incentives to rely on clientelism should diverge based on voter poverty, intensifying when poverty is high and decreasing as poverty decreases. In contrast, where an incumbent politician is confident of his prospects for reelection (competition is low), voter poverty should not be an important determinant of the incentives a politician faces to rely on clientelism.

Ideally, we would have available a direct measure of each mayor's perceived security in office, which would likely depend on both observable outputs of previous political competition as well as less readily observed information about changes in the political situation since the last election and variables idiosyncratic to each individual. In the absence of such a direct measure, I instead capture politician security in office using the size of the opposition presence in the local elected legislature.<sup>33</sup> Opposition in a local council is likely to 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. This is obviously true if executive and legislative branch politicians are elected on the same list, as in a parliamentary system, but is also likely to be the case in any legislature where representatives are elected via party lists, as in the case in Argentina's municipalities.<sup>34</sup>

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 an opposition executive'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. Grzymala-Busse (2007, 64) highlights the types of behavior

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poverty (Gasparini, 2004). See Weitz-Shapiro (2008a, chapter 4) for a more detailed discussion of alternate measures.

<sup>33</sup>The most obvious alternative to relying on local council composition to assess a politician's security in office would be to use vote returns. Theoretically, this poses some difficulties, because vote returns capture only a mayor's popularity among voters and does not account for how votes are translated into seats. It thus may not reflect the ability of a large opposition to further threaten that security through its actions or to monitor an incumbent's behavior (as I discuss here). In this particular dataset, such a measure is problematic in other respects, as well. Election returns for mayoral contests are missing for about 25% of the sample and, even for those cities where data are available, do not always indicate when multiple party lists ran the same candidate for mayor. This is a fairly common phenomenon, so the results are best treated as estimates of mayoral support, rather than firm figures. Nonetheless, if we replicate the results from column 1 and 2 in table 5 using data on the total opposition vote share in the previous mayoral contest as a proxy for electoral competition for those areas in which data is available, the results are very similar to those displayed in that table. If instead we use a measure of the vote share received by the single largest opposition only, the coefficients on our variables of interest are much smaller and not statistically significant.

<sup>34</sup>Electoral systems at the municipal level in Argentina vary somewhat across provinces, as I discuss in more detail below, but in all the cases I examine here (and to my knowledge, in all Argentine provinces), the members of the local town and city councils are elected via closed lists. Of course, it is not always the case the executive and legislative popularity move together, but in general, a larger opposition presence in the legislature should indicate lower levels of incumbent popularity.

this entails in the national parliaments of Eastern Europe, including parliamentary questioning and investigative committees. Though professionalization is obviously far lower than in national legislative bodies, opposition members of Argentine town councils do have some tools available to them to complicate an executive politician's pursuit of his goals. The town of La Merced, in the province of Salta, is one of the municipalities in my sample where the mayor's party does not enjoy a majority in the legislature. The municipal Secretaria de Gobierno there complained about the difficulties this caused, lamenting that "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. In interviews with the author, town council members in a number of cities explained that they treated their compensation as a tool for political work; they use their salaries as councillors to give assistance to citizens on an individualized basis and/or to support organized partisan activities. The larger the size of the opposition, the greater the pressure it is likely able to exert in the legislature and the greater the resources it can devote to non-legislative strategies to undermine the incumbent. A local council opposition, then, not only serves as a signal of a politician's past electoral support (in the same way that vote returns do), but its behavior as an opposition is likely to affect a mayor's security in office.<sup>35</sup>

As such, the larger the opposition, the less secure an incumbent is likely to feel in his prospects for reelection. In contrast, where a political opposition is limited in size, an incumbent is much more likely to feel assured of victory in subsequent elections. A small opposition presence in an elected legislative body is likely to indicate that an incumbent enjoys a high "baseline" expected vote (apart from behavior while in office), perhaps due to his personal charisma, campaigning ability, or the partisan sympathies of his constituents. Furthermore, a small group of opposition legislators is far less likely to be able to undermine or limit an executive politician's agenda than a similarly inclined but larger group of legislators. Finally, the smaller the opposition, the fewer the resources at its disposal to campaign against an incumbent. All of these factors mean that the smaller the opposition, the greater security in office a politician is likely to perceive.

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.<sup>36</sup> I measure the opposition's strength in the legislature by simply calculating the share of seats in the body held by members of

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<sup>35</sup>The distinction between vote returns and opposition presence in the council is especially relevant here because the small number of seats in each council weakens the votes-seats correspondence. In a larger legislative body, vote share and opposition presence in the legislature have the potential to be more closely matched.

<sup>36</sup>Information on the composition of the bodies was collected through publicly available provincial documents, supplemented with direct communication with municipalities when that information was missing or ambiguous.

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.<sup>37</sup> 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, although, as I explain below, I focus on interpreting the results that use the total opposition size.

**The non-vote related costs of clientelism** Although the theory developed here focuses on the direct vote-related costs and benefits of clientelism, there are likely some non-vote related costs of using clientelism in the implementation of social welfare policy. These costs are likely to decrease the appeal of clientelism, and they may vary across individuals and municipalities. These costs might be very personal—while some politicians might find relying on clientelism distasteful, others may have no qualms about its use, and it is impossible to account for such differences in taste. Nonetheless, in addition to these unobservable differences, the cost of clientelism may also be affected by politicians’ access to resources, in the form of actual funds or in preexisting networks of supporters, organizers, and so on, that we may be able to observe.

In Argentina, foremost among these factors that may affect the non-vote related costs of clientelism is partisanship. 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, 2008). 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) describes in great detail how the party’s shift to the right on economic issues under the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) was accompanied by a shift in emphasis from social justice issues to the distribution of private benefits to maintain the support of poor voters, taking advantage of its dense social networks to do so. This is also supported in the individual-level

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<sup>37</sup>Differences in electoral systems across provinces in part explain this wide variation in opposition strength. In Córdoba, mayors and members of local legislatures are elected on the same list in elections held every four years, and the provincial constitution states that the mayor is elected via plurality rule, and the list of councilors that the mayor heads is required to receive at least a bare majority in the local council. In Río Negro, the vast majority of councils serve four year terms and are elected on a separate ballot from the mayor, who is elected via plurality rule, although a few cities follow Córdoba’s system. The data reflect the council’s composition as a result of the 2003 elections. In Salta, the mayor and council are elected on separate ballots, and although the mayor serves a four-year term, council members serve for two years only. The data on council composition for Salta reflects the results of the 2005 elections for local councils. Cities from Salta make up the majority of cases in the dataset where members of the opposition make up more than 50% of the council. Note, however, that the median and mean opposition size across the three provinces are very similar (all approximately 40%). If we replicate the analysis omitting those municipalities with an opposition greater than 50%, the results are very similar to those reported in table 5.

survey described in Brusco et al. (2004); the authors find that voters who self-identified as Peronist sympathizers were more likely to receive a handout immediately before an election than others.<sup>38</sup> I therefore include an indicator variable that takes on the value of one 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 the monitoring that forms an integral part of clientelism. The existence of such ties might be a product of an individual's personal history in office or that of his party. I consider three possible measures that might proxy for the strength of these ties: whether or not the sitting mayor was reelected (*reelected*), whether his party has held the mayor's seat continuously since Argentina's 1983 return to democracy (*mayor party dominates*), and, alternately, whether the mayor's party has held the mayor's seat for all or all but one of the administrations since the return to democracy (*mayor party dominates (2)*). On a related point, mayors who share the same partisanship with the governor might also experience reduced costs of clientelism, perhaps because the governor's control over party and/or public monies allows him to provide extra funds or staff to co-partisans, which might free more resources for the monitoring of clientelist agreements. I therefore also include an indicator variable that takes on the value of one for mayors who are of the same party as the governor (*governor party*).

Finally, 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 et al. (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.

**Additional variables** Although the theory tested here focuses on the ways in which political competition and poverty shape the incentives politicians face to use clientelism, others have argued that less institutionalized channels may be more important for explaining government performance more generally. 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, Cleary (2007) echoes this view and argues that high levels of citizen participation, rather than the nature of political competition, are likely to improve government performance. In particular, Cleary argues that where citizen participation is more frequent, politi-

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<sup>38</sup>Calvo and Murillo (2004) find that although governors of all parties rely on patronage employment, Peronist governors are far more likely to benefit from it electorally.



cians are more likely to get reliable information about what citizens want and feel more pressure to respond to those needs, and that residents are more able to enforce social norms that elected officials “should act as faithful public servants” (285). Using data on water and electricity provision in Mexican municipalities, Cleary finds support for this perspective that an organized and active citizenry can lead to more accountable governance. He finds that, all else equal, municipalities with higher literacy rates and voter turnout enjoy higher rates of service provision in these two critical areas.<sup>39</sup> The Mexican case might be somewhat unique—as Cleary point out, Mexican mayors (like the President) are banned from reelection and thus any electoral connection might be seriously attenuated, perhaps making social mechanisms of control relatively more important in this context as compared to elsewhere. Furthermore, there are important differences between clientelism—the object of study here—and corruption or government performance more broadly, on which Cleary’s work focuses. Whereas corruption or low levels of service provision are likely to be viewed in a negative light by all voters, clientelism enjoys a more ambiguous status, and in fact is rewarded at the voting booth by poor voters who benefit from these individualized exchanges. Thus, while being “responsive” to voters rarely if ever would mean providing less electricity, it may mean engaging in clientelism. In spite of the differences in the outcomes of interest, I test the civic participation hypothesis using data from the PNSA, and I to use some of the same measures of civic participation that Cleary uses in his analysis.<sup>40</sup>

Although voting is obligatory in Argentina, this legal requirement is rarely enforced, and there is variation in the share of registered voters who actually show up at the polls. Consistent data on numbers of registered voters are available only for one of the provinces included in the study (Salta), so instead I calculate a rough proxy for voter turnout: the number of voters over the total population in each municipality.<sup>41</sup> I also consider two additional 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 is based on census results that note the share of residents over age fifteen whose highest level of education corresponds to each category on a four-point scale, where I assign a value of 0 to the proportion of the population with no formal education or incomplete primary education, 1 indicates completed primary education, 2 indicates completed secondary education, and 3 indicates completed tertiary or university education or higher. The number of radio stations registered in the municipalities included in the sample ranges from 0 to 14, with a median value of one and a mean of almost two.

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<sup>39</sup>Cleary also treats municipal poverty as a measure of civic engagement although, as he admits, the link between poverty and civic involvement is not direct. In the theory developed here, poverty plays a much more direct role in shaping incentives for clientelism, and so I do not consider it a measure of civic engagement.

<sup>40</sup>Neither Cleary nor I have available the type of direct measures of participation that might be ideal—for example, data on the number and strength of civic organizations or neighborhood associations.

<sup>41</sup>For Salta, where data is available, actual turnout rates in the 2003 mayoral election are highly correlated with this proxy (correlation coefficient = .75). As with vote returns themselves, information on the total number of voters is available only for municipalities for which I have voting results, or about 75% of the sample. However, these data should not be subject to the same reliability problems that plague the data on actual election outcomes.

Table 1 presents summary statistics for all the variables discussed above. In section 5.2, I include a discussion of the expected direction of the coefficients on these variables before presenting the multivariate results.

Table 1: Summary statistics: Municipal clientelism

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Mayor list	0.67	0.47	127
Poverty	0.23	0.14	133
Total opposition	0.43	0.17	132
Largest opposition	0.32	0.13	132
Poverty * Total opposition	0.1	0.1	132
Poverty * Largest opposition	0.07	0.06	132
PJ	0.53	0.50	133
Governor party	0.62	0.49	133
Reelected	0.54	0.5	133
Mayor party dominates	0.27	0.45	133
Mayor party dominates (2)	0.49	0.5	133
Population (ln)	9.07	0.97	133
Turnout	0.52	0.11	98
Mean education	1.01	0.24	133
Radio stations	1.95	2.98	133

## 5 Explaining clientelism in the PNSA

### 5.1 Bivariate results

I turn now to a discussion of the correlates of mayoral involvement in creating and altering beneficiary lists. As detailed earlier, I consider mayoral involvement in the beneficiary list to be a strong indicator of clientelism, as such involvement will give a mayor knowledge about who benefits from the PNSA and communicates to voters that he is in a position to punish beneficiaries who do not reciprocate with political support. The interaction between political opposition and poverty should affect an incumbent politician's incentives to use clientelist practices in the implementation of government policies. Before turning to the multivariate analysis, I examine whether there is evidence for my hypotheses in simple bivariate relationships.

**Large opposition** I expect that where there is a large opposition, poverty will be a key determinant of the use of clientelism. The decreased security in office that accompanies a large opposition is likely to make politicians especially sensitive to the trade-offs clientelism creates in terms of expected support from poor and non-poor voters. As such, a large opposition should be more likely to decrease the incentives for clientelism in those cities with substantial numbers of middle class residents.

Indeed, table 2 shows just that. It examines only those cities where the size of the legislative opposition is above the mean level in the sample.<sup>42</sup> It then compares the rate of mayoral involvement in list-making between those municipalities with low levels of poverty (below the mean rate in the sample) and those with high levels of poverty. Examining these cities with high levels of competition, the mayor intervenes in the beneficiary list in 80% of the high poverty municipalities, whereas such intervention is far less frequent in the less poor municipalities, occurring only in about half of them. A chi-squared test indicates that this difference is statistically significant at the .02 level.

Table 2: High Opposition: Relationship between Poverty and Clientelism

		Poverty		Total
		Low	High	
Mayor List	No	25 (52%)	4 (20%)	29
	Yes	23 (48%)	16 (80%)	39
	Total	48	20	68

*Source:* Author-conducted survey. Pearson  $\chi^2 = 5.94$   $P < .02$

**Limited opposition** I expect that where political opposition is relatively limited, and a politician hence enjoys high levels of security in office, the propensity to employ clientelism should not be correlated with voter poverty.

Table 3 is consistent with the hypothesis that poverty is not an important determinant of clientelism where legislative opposition is low. It examines only those cities where the size of the total legislative opposition is below the mean level in the sample. As the table demonstrates, in a setting with limited opposition, the share of municipalities where the mayor intervenes in list-making is quite similar across cities regardless of poverty level; although clientelism appears to be slightly more likely when poverty is high, a chi-squared test indicates that these differences are not statistically significant. This supports my hypothesis that, in a limited opposition context, the incentives to use clientelism do not vary with poverty levels.

<sup>42</sup>Alternately, rather than divide the municipalities into two groups based on the mean share of seats held by the opposition in the sample, we could define high levels of opposition based on the difference in the absolute number of seats held by the mayor's party and opposition parties. If we do this, labeling a municipality as having a "large" opposition when the seats held by the mayor minus the seats held by the opposition is 1 or less (this value will be negative in cities where the opposition is a majority), the results from two by two tables constructed like tables 2 and 3 are very similar to those presented here. Defined this way, the share of low and high poverty municipalities that use clientelism is almost identical when the opposition is limited in size, whereas there is an almost 30 percentage point difference in the use of clientelism between high and low poverty municipalities when the opposition is large.

Table 3: Low Opposition: Relationship between Poverty and Clientelism

		Poverty		
		Low	High	Total
Mayor List	No	6 (25%)	7 (21%)	13
	Yes	18 (75%)	27 (80%)	45
	Total	24	34	58

Source: Author-conducted survey. Pearson  $\chi^2 = 0.16$   $P < .7$

## 5.2 Multivariate results

**Model specification** In this section, I conduct a more full test of the theory developed here. As described earlier, the outcome variable, *mayor list*, takes on the value of 1 if the mayor was involved in drawing up or altering the list of beneficiaries for the program and is an indicator of the use of clientelism. Before turning to the empirical results, I first briefly review the expected signs of the various predictor variables that follow from my theory (I discuss alternate hypotheses later). The main predictor variables of theoretical interest are the measures of the size of the legislative opposition, municipal poverty, 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. In contrast, where poverty is limited, increasing levels of opposition should decrease a mayor’s incentives to rely on clientelism, and as such, 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.

The expected signs for the other variables are straightforward. As the non-vote related costs of clientelism increase, clientelism should be less appealing, and hence less likely. A number of variables are intended to measure these costs—the indicator variables for whether the mayor is a member of the Peronist (PJ) party, whether the mayor and governor are from the same party, whether the mayor is reelected, and whether the mayor’s party has dominated the mayor’s office in the past. All of these variables take the value of 1 when these conditions are met. Thus, higher values indicate a lower cost to (and a higher likelihood of) clientelism and the coefficients on these indicator variables are expected to be positive and significant. As a town or city grows in size, implementing clientelism should pose greater difficulties, and so the coefficient on the measure of population is expected to be negative. Finally, I also incorporate indicator variables for two of the

three provinces included in the analysis—Córdoba and Río Negro—omitting Salta as the left-out category. Although I have no strong theoretical priors on the expected signs of these coefficients, the popular press would likely predict Salta, as part of Argentina’s poor Northwest, to have a greater use of clientelism, so we might expect the other two provincial indicator variables to be negative.

Table 4: Expected Coefficients: Municipal clientelism

Variable	Expected Sign
Poverty	0
Total opposition	(-)
Largest opposition	(-)
Poverty * Total opposition	(+)
Poverty * Largest opposition	(+)
PJ	(+)
Mayor-Governor party match	(+)
Reelected	(+)
Mayor party dominates	(+)
Mayor party dominates (2)	(+)
Population (ln)	(-)

**Results** Table 5 presents the results of a series of logistic regressions where the outcome variable takes on the value of 1 if the mayor is involved in drawing up or altering the beneficiary list for the PNSA. 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 theoretical expectations, as I discuss below. The model reported in column 1 does a somewhat better job predicting cases correctly, so I focus on interpreting the results presented there.<sup>43</sup> For comparison, I reproduce the results of the regression reported in column 1 in column 3, but without the provincial dummy variables. Once again, the results are very similar to those in the previous two columns, although the coefficient on the interaction term is attenuated slightly.<sup>44</sup>

A more crucial comparison is with column 4, which highlights the importance of including the interaction term between opposition size and poverty for the results reported here. Column 4 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. As is clear, the results of this regression are quite different from those discussed above. Without the interaction term in the analysis, we

<sup>43</sup>All the models improve on random guessing. Two-thirds of the municipalities in the sample use clientelism, and so randomly guessing that all municipalities use clientelism would leave us with an error rate of about 33%. In contrast, the models reported in columns 1, 2, and 3 have error rates of about 28%, 30%, and 29%, respectively. (All these figures treat a predicted probability of .5 or higher as predicting clientelism.) The model reported in column 1 improves the percent correctly predicted by about 17% over the original error rate of 33%.

<sup>44</sup>The same is true if we replicate the results in column 2 omitting the provincial indicators.

would have concluded that neither poverty nor opposition presence is associated with an increased propensity to use clientelism. In contrast, the results reported in the first three columns in table 5 demonstrate that opposition size is indeed correlated with the likelihood that a mayor will use clientelism, and that this correlation varies with the level of poverty in any given municipality. Thus, the interaction term is critical for recognizing the role that political competition and poverty may play in helping to predict the use of clientelism in the implementation of government policy.

Table 5: Mayoral Intervention: Regression results

	Total opp	Largest opp	No province dummies	No interaction
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Population (ln)	-0.43* (.25)	-0.49** (.24)	-0.51** (.24)	-0.49** (.24)
Poverty	-5.53 (5.07)	-1.84 (4.79)	-10.10** (4.37)	5.33 (4.12)
Total opposition	-9.28** (3.67)	.	-9.21** (3.66)	1.03 (1.49)
Largest opposition	.	-7.02* (4.10)	.	.
Poverty*Total opposition	37.89*** (11.88)	.	33.29*** (11.12)	.
Poverty*Largest opposition	.	37.43** (14.88)	.	.
PJ	.55 (.46)	.61 (.46)	.60 (.44)	.55 (.44)
Mayor party dominates	1.14 (.72)	.99 (.71)	.97 (.68)	.71 (.63)
Cordoba	1.92 (1.29)	1.91 (1.25)	.	.97 (1.14)
Rio Negro	.99 (1.04)	.83 (1.03)	.	.16 (.92)
Percent correctly predicted	72	70	71	68
Percent reduction in error	17	10	14	5
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. \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate significance at the .1, .05 and .01 levels.*

Returning to examine the results reported in column 1 of table 5, the coefficients on the main variables of interest are consistent with the theoretical expectations. As expected, the coefficients on the legislative opposition variable and the interaction term are negative and positive, respectively. The former indicates that increasing levels of opposition decrease the probability of observing clientelism where poverty is low. The latter supports the argument that, as poverty increases,

increases in the size of the opposition are associated with an increased probability of mayoral intervention into the PNSA.<sup>45</sup> The results thus support the claim that high levels of political competition are not consistent with a situation of uniformity in the use of clientelism. Instead, incentives to use clientelism when competition is high depend on voter poverty.

Given the non-linearities in the predictions inherent in a logistic regression, the substantive significance of the interaction term is best illustrated with a graph. Figure 1 shows the predicted probability that a mayor will be involved in drawing up lists of beneficiaries in two different types of cities. Both panels show the predicted probability that the mayor of a city of average size, and one in which his own party 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.<sup>46</sup>

The top panel shows the predicted probability of mayoral involvement for this typical Peronist-governed municipality in the province of Córdoba, whereas the bottom panel shows the predicted probability of such involvement for a typical non-Peronist municipality in that same province. In contrast to the relatively limited relationship between partisanship and the probability of clientelist behavior, the substantive importance of poverty and opposition size is striking. In both panels, the solid line represents the predicted probability of mayoral intervention for a municipality with the median level of poverty in the sample, whereas 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.<sup>47</sup> Both panels depict the unexpected results that mayoral intervention will actually be slightly less likely in poor municipalities at very low levels of opposition. However, as I discuss below, simulations demonstrate that there is significant uncertainty around the predictions at this low level of opposition size, making these already minor differences statistically insignificant. As opposition size increases from that point, the predicted probability of clientelism increasingly diverges based on poverty rates. As the opposition's share of seats in the local council increases, so does the probability that the mayor will intervene in the PNSA beneficiary list in our typical high poverty city, whereas it declines quite sharply in our typical low poverty municipality.<sup>48</sup>

In order to give a sense of the uncertainty surrounding these estimates, I conduct 1000 simulations of the difference in the expected probability of clientelism in a high versus low poverty

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<sup>45</sup>The coefficient on poverty is insignificant, as expected, although its sign is negative. Note that in the third model the coefficient on poverty is both negative and statistically significant. Although this finding is not robust across specifications, this would suggest the somewhat surprising result that, if anything, clientelism is actually less likely where poverty is high when opposition is limited.

<sup>46</sup>The figure is drawn using coefficients taken from the regression results in column 1 of table 5.

<sup>47</sup>The mean, 25% and 75% rates of household poverty are 18%, 11%, and 32%, respectively. As discussed earlier, the poverty measure I used is not based on household income estimates and likely underestimates actual levels of poverty. As such, these figures should not be treated as reliable measures of the absolute level of poverty in these municipalities, although they can be treated as reliable measures of relative poverty across municipalities.

<sup>48</sup>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 5, the coefficients are extremely similar to those reported there.

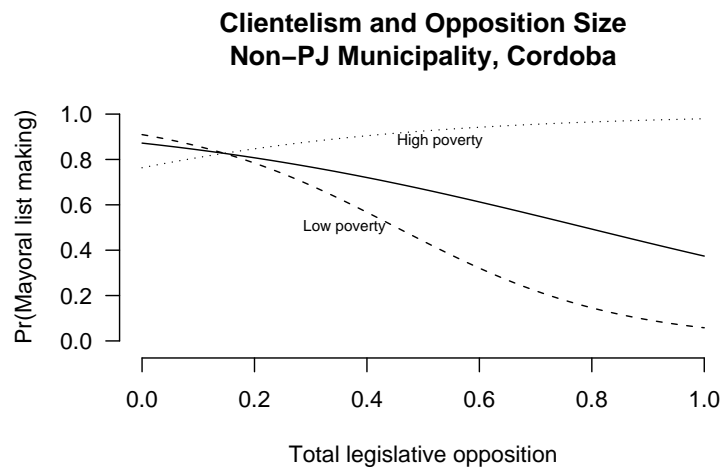
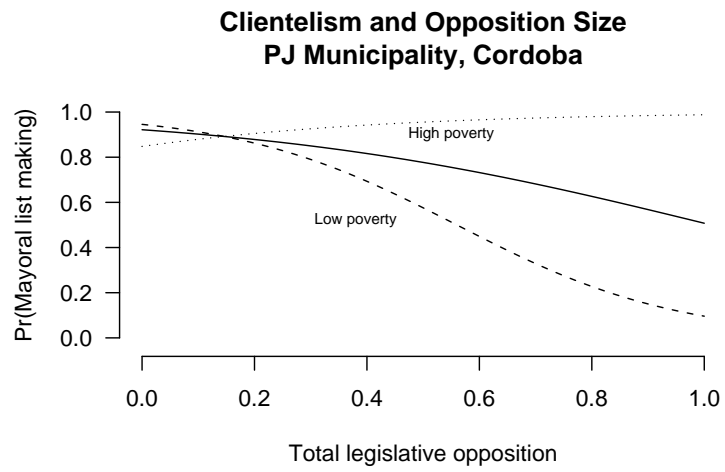


Figure 1: Legislative Opposition and Clientelism



municipality over the whole range of values of legislative opposition.<sup>49</sup> Figure 2 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 clientelism 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 clientelism 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 clientelism is more likely in relatively better off municipalities.

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. As the size of the legislative opposition increases, the predicted probability of clientelism 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 clientelism. 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 use clientelism.

Among the other variables of interest, only municipal population is statistically significant and in the expected direction. Clientelist practices appear to be less likely in larger cities, which is consistent with findings reported by Brusco et al. (2004) on Argentina. In the data, an increase in the size of a municipality from the mean (a population of about 8,000) to one standard deviation above the mean (equivalent to a population of about 23,000) is associated with a seven percentage point decrease in the average predicted probability that a mayor will use clientelism.<sup>50</sup>

Turning to the variables intended to measure the non-vote related costs of clientelism, the re-

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<sup>49</sup>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 1000 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. For the simulations, I assume a city of average size in the province of Córdoba with a Peronist mayor whose party has not held office continuously since 1983.

<sup>50</sup>I define the average predicted difference following Gelman and Hill (2007, 101-104). The authors consider a case in which  $u$  denotes the input variable of interest,  $v$  is a vector of all other variables, and  $\beta$  is a vector of regression coefficients. Then they define the predictive difference in probabilities,  $\delta$ , associated with a change in the value of  $u$  from its high to low value as follows:

$$\delta(u^{high}, u^{low}, v, \beta) = Pr(Y = 1|u^{high}, v, \beta) - Pr(Y = 1|u^{low}, v, \beta)$$

**Difference in expected probability of clientelism  
between high and low poverty municipalities**

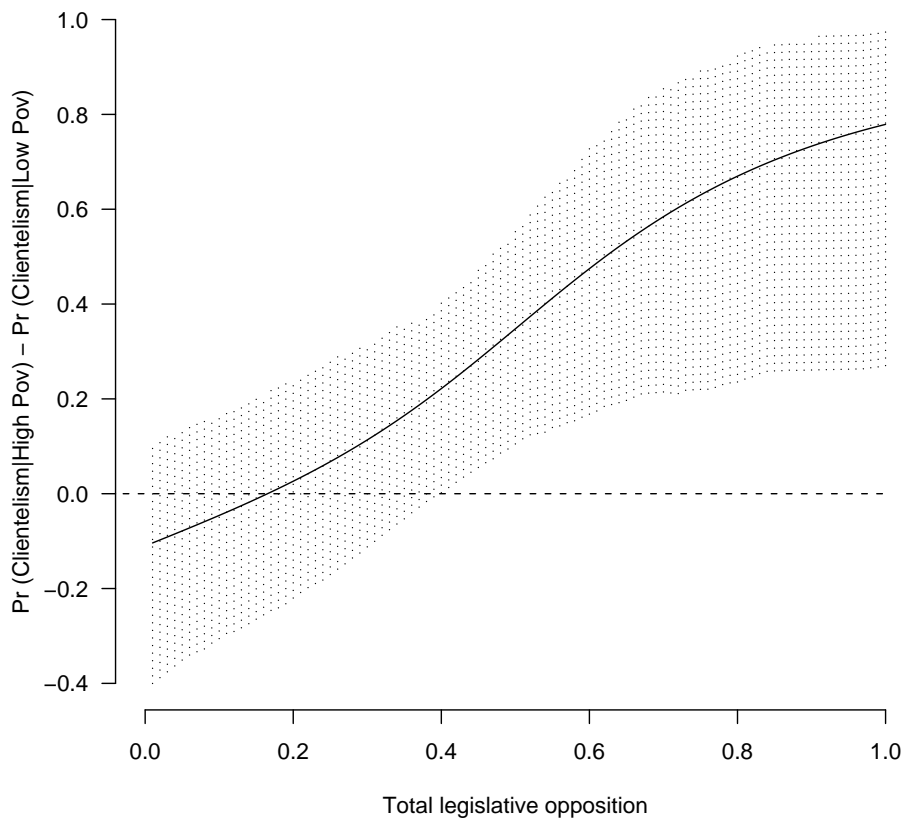


Figure 2: Simulations: Differences in Clientelism

gression results reported in table 5 include the indicator variables for mayor partisanship (PJ) and whether the mayor’s party has held the position continuously since 1983.<sup>51</sup> Although never statistically significant, the coefficients on both these indicator variables are consistently positive (the expected direction).<sup>52</sup> 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, which is certainly not trivial and is consistent with the general understanding in Argentina that the Peronist party is especially reliant on clientelism. However, as a comparison of the two panels in figure 1 shows, differences associated with partisanship are much smaller than those associated with the main variables of theoretical interest. This suggests that the demographic and competitive environment, rather than partisanship per se, better explain how the PNSA is implemented in a given municipality. 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.

Taken together, these results are broadly consistent with the expectation that the use of clientelism is related to the non-vote related costs of clientelism that politicians may experience. It appears that mayors with characteristics the literature associates with stronger networks that would make monitoring clients easier, like Peronist party membership and a long history of control over local government, are more likely to use clientelism. These characteristics are fixed over time and are unlikely to reflect the nature of political competition in any given administration. Nonetheless, even controlling for these correlations, there is a significant and substantively important correlation between poverty, political opposition, and the use of clientelism. This suggests that the use of clientelism does not simply reflect certain immutable characteristics, but rather that politicians’ decisions about whether to use clientelism reflect their perceived security in office at a given point in time.

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In order to calculate the average predictive difference, we simply calculate  $\delta$  for each observation in the dataset, each time setting  $v$  equal to the values the other variables obtain for that particular observation, and then average over all values of  $\delta$ .

<sup>51</sup>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.

<sup>52</sup>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.

### 5.3 Alternate hypotheses

Finally, I consider the main alternative hypothesis discussed briefly in section 4.2. As mentioned there, others have argued that civil society organization and citizen mobilization, rather than the direct pressures of electoral politics, are more likely to create incentives for improved government performance. I consider three variables, similar to those used in existing studies, intended to measure the strength of the civic community—voter turnout in the most recent local election, the mean level of citizen education, and the number of radio stations. In each case, 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, as indicated in table 6.<sup>53</sup>

Table 6: Expected Coefficients: Alternate hypotheses

Variable	Expected Sign
Turnout	(-)
Mean education	(-)
Radio stations	(-)

Table 7 displays the results of regressions intended to test this “civic community” hypothesis. Column 1 simply reproduces the results from the first column of table 5, while column 2 incorporates the education and radio stations variables.<sup>54</sup> Contrary to the logic of the civic participation 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. Finally, the third column incorporates the approximate measure of voter turnout described earlier. The number of observations is reduced in this model, as a result of the unavailability of these figures for a substantial number of cities included in the sample. Once again, the coefficient on this variable intended to measure civic engagement is in the opposite of the expected direction and is not statistically significant.

Admittedly, these measures of civic community are far from perfect. Nonetheless, they are comparable to those used elsewhere (see especially Cleary (2007)) and do include aggregate measures of individual characteristics and behavior (education and voter turnout), as well as a community-level measure of organization (radio stations). The findings reported in table 7 offer no support for the

<sup>53</sup>Theoretical expectations with respect to turnout are somewhat ambiguous. Cleary (2007) and de la O. (2006), both working on Mexico, consider high voter turnout to be a sign of civic participation in government. Cleary, as discussed earlier, finds a positive correlation between voter turnout and improved government performance. On the other hand, Nichter (2008) argues that clientelism may be especially useful for increasing turnout, not only for changing vote choice, among clients. For internal party elections, Kemahlioglu (2006) also points out that participation might be the result of clientelist exchange. Thus, in some cases, at least, high turnout might signal coerced participation, not the type typically thought likely to create more accountable government. In fact, it is precisely for this reason that Putnam (1994, 93) uses turnout in referenda, rather than in legislative elections, as a measure of civic community in his research on Italy.

<sup>54</sup>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.

hypothesis that municipalities with a stronger civic community or higher levels of participation create systematically different incentives for mayoral behavior than their less civic counterparts.

Table 7: Mayoral Intervention: Regression results (alternate hypotheses)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Population (ln)	-.43* (.25)	-.49 (.39)	-.37 (.66)
Poverty	-5.53 (5.07)	-2.29 (6.43)	-1.37 (8.60)
Total opposition	-9.28** (3.67)	-9.24** (3.72)	-5.91 (4.02)
Poverty*total opposition	37.89*** (11.88)	38.65*** (12.16)	27.71** (12.70)
PJ	.55 (.46)	.61 (.47)	1.18** (.60)
Mayor party dominates	1.14 (.72)	1.12 (.72)	.67 (.77)
CBA	1.92 (1.29)	2.32* (1.40)	1.13 (1.53)
RN	.99 (1.04)	1.48 (1.21)	1.03 (1.34)
Mean education	.	1.72 (2.14)	1.63 (2.97)
Radio stations	.	-.01 (.12)	-.09 (.16)
Turnout	.	.	1.56 (5.40)
Obs.	126	126	93

*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. \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate significance at the .1, .05 and .01 levels.*

## 6 Conclusions: the mixed consequences of competition and the high bar set by poverty

In this paper, I ask what explains variation in clientelism across space. I argue that in order to understand this variation, we need to shift the discussion of clientelism away from an exclusive focus on the poor recipients of government goods and consider clientelism's effects on the voting behavior of middle class constituents, as well. Incorporating the preferences of this latter group leads to a close examination of the interaction between political competition and poverty. It suggests that high competition (low politician security in office) should be compatible with clientelism when poverty is high, but should lessen the incentives for clientelism as poverty decreases. In contrast, where political competition is limited and security in office is high, we should not expect constituent

poverty to determine the incentives for clientelism.

This paper tests these predictions using an original dataset on clientelism in a sample of Argentine municipalities. It relies on an innovative measure of clientelism that focuses on 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 (as measured by opposition size in the local council) decreases the incentives to use clientelism in predominantly middle class settings while having little impact on the reliance on clientelism in settings with large poor populations. Taking into account the costs of clientelism improves our ability to understand the incentives faced by reelection-seeking politicians. Once we account for these factors, the role of partisanship per se, often emphasized in the literature on Argentina, remains, but it is relatively limited, and there appears to be no relationship between levels of civil society organization and the propensity to use clientelism. This paper then draws attention to the serious difficulty of establishing good governance practices in impoverished places.

## 7 Appendix: Question wording

**Making the list** Can you tell me if any of the following people recommended any families to be included in the list of beneficiaries [for the PNSA] or in some other way participated in the making of that list?

**Changes to the list** Can you tell me if any of the following people is consulted or participates in decisions about adding to or taking anyone off (*dar de alta/baja a los beneficiarios*) the beneficiary list?

For both questions, respondents were then read the following names and asked to say yes or no to each one: the mayor, members of the local legislature, members of the local “consultative council” [an organization municipalities are supposed to establish to monitor social welfare policies, although not all have one], the head of social welfare, employees in the social welfare area, or others.

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