When Clientelism Backfires: Vote Buying, Democratic Attitudes, and Electoral Retaliation in Latin America

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Abstract
Attempting to buy votes is, in some cases, inefficient and damaging to a clientelistic party. To explain why, we propose the concept of electoral retaliation: sanctioning clientelistic parties by voting against them or intentionally invalidating the ballot. These forms of negative reciprocity are meant to uphold the democratic norms—equal participation, popular sovereignty, electoral fairness—that vote buying undermines. Electoral retaliation is, we theorize, the domain of "democrats." Thus, we expect voters who highly value democratic norms to be most likely to retaliate against vote-buying parties. We test our theory's observable implications with a research design that pairs case study and subnational evidence from Argentina with cross-national evidence from Latin America. Results are consistent with the notion that when clientelistic parties target democrats, it is likely to backfire on the machine. Our analyses examine multiple indicators of democratic support, explore causal mechanisms, conduct placebo tests, and seek to rule out various forms of selection bias.

Keywords
clientelism, vote buying, political behavior, democratic attitudes, prosocial norms, Latin America

Vote buying—the exchange of excludable material goods for votes—pervades electoral politics in many democracies. Yet converting targeted electoral benefits into votes is imperfect, creating wide "effectiveness gaps" in some cases (Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015). Distributive politics scholars attribute this "leaky bucket" phenomenon (Dixit and Londregan 1996) to, among other things, party system dynamics (Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015), party-broker principal–agent problems (Szwarcberg 2015), and programmatic campaigns (Greene 2021). But they ignore a potentially integral piece of the puzzle: voters might actually *punish* parties that target them for electoral rewards. Given high electoral volatility (Cohen, Salles Kobilanski, and Zechmeister 2018; Hicken and Kuhonta 2015; Riedl 2014), widespread sanctioning of corrupt politicians (Klašnja, Tucker, and Deegan-Krause 2016; Manzetti and Rosas 2015), and significant rates of invalid voting in many developing contexts (Cohen 2018; Power and Garand 2007), this thesis warrants due consideration.

Probing more deeply, we ask: who is most likely to retaliate against vote buyers, and what retaliatory actions might they take? We theorize that targeting "democrats"—voters committed to democratic governance and norms—can fuel acts of *negative* reciprocity such as voting *against* vote-buying parties or casting an invalid ballot. Results from a case study of Argentina, including a within-case study of dominant-party provinces, and regional evidence from Latin America are consistent with this proposition. Our results are compatible with our proposed causal mechanism: being targeted for vote buying triggers democrats to retaliate by raising their perceptions of political corruption.

As such, this study makes several contributions. To the study of clientelism, it supplements macro-level accounts of the "leaky bucket" with compelling micro-level theory and evidence of voter agency. Our findings also complement the consensus that party operatives seek to target rewards with surgical precision by showing the high stakes of propositioning bad targets. Results for negative reciprocity fit with theories that connect vote buying with social preferences for positive reciprocity (Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014) and trust (Rueda, n.d.). And because negative reciprocity is the workhorse of social norm maintenance in evolutionary

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models of prosociality (Bowles and Gintis 2011; Henrich et al. 2006), electoral retaliation to maintain democratic norms is precisely what this line of theorizing would predict.

To the study of accountability, electoral retaliation represents a new form of sanctioning. Social contract theorists such as Locke, Mill, and the Federalists argue sanctioning—rewarding or punishing elected officials with the ballot—promotes accountability. Voters electorally retaliate to hold elected officials to account not for poor representation or performance but, rather, for violating fundamental democratic norms of electoral fairness, political equality, and popular sovereignty. Electoral retaliation thus parallels research on the electoral effects of violating other democratic norms, such as corruption (e.g., Manzetti and Rosas 2015) and electoral integrity (e.g., Norris 2014).

Below, we identify an undercurrent of moral disgust with vote buying in prior work before presenting our theory of electoral retaliation. From there, we describe our multipronged empirical strategy and test our theory's observable implications. Each stage of our analysis offers strong support for the key predictions of our theory. Results pass multiple robustness tests. Our conclusion discusses this study's theoretical contributions.

Who Rejects Vote Buying?

Building clientelistic networks around patronage and vote buying is a venerable method of linking political parties to voters (see review in Mares and Young 2016). Yet its effectiveness varies and even fails among certain classes of voters, for various reasons. A common thread is that vote buying offends some citizens' democratic sensibilities.

Of the many accounts focused on wealth, some hinge on logics orthogonal to citizens' underlying democratic orientations, such as the rich rejecting vote buying because of low marginal returns (Dixit and Londregan 1996) or the poor who are excluded from clientelism punishing clientelistic parties (Mares and Young 2019). And machine parties diversify their electoral strategies to deliver concrete policies to affluent voters and "non-policy" material inducements to poorer constituents (Calvo and Murillo 2019). But attitudinal factors are implicit in other socioeconomic accounts that suggest vote buying may be offensive to some classes of voters. When targeting poor voters, one Argentine broker interviewed by Zarazaga (2014, 10) notes, "You have to help the poor but be careful not to make it look like clientelism. Nobody likes being used." Parties may also avoid targeting middle-class voters for fear of reprisal because they view clientelism as a red flag for governance (Weitz-Shapiro 2014). Democratic values may, thus, underlie the expected reactions of both the poor and the middle class.

More explicitly, information theories highlight that support for democratic norms, ideals, and governance can undermine vote buying (F. C. Schaffer 2007). Civic education campaigns and greater voter sophistication reduce the effectiveness of vote buying in Taiwan (Fox 1994), as do leaflets exhorting citizens to vote their conscience, even if they accept electoral benefits in São Tomé and Príncipe (Vicente 2014). The twin rise of newspapers and literacy in Britain and the United States allowed political parties to make programmatic appeals to the masses (Stokes et al. 2013), and these dynamics have also transformed would-be clients into autonomous voters in Mexico (Greene 2021). Formal education undercuts vote buying because "[v]oters with higher levels of education are better equipped to see the system-level problems and have access to more sources of political information discussing the societal costs of vote buying" (Gonzalez Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson 2014, 201). Vote buying thus carries a "social stigma" for the most educated voters because they know its pernicious, if abstract, social and democratic effects (ibid).

Negative normative or moral reactions to the perversion of democratic norms and governance are common denominators to these and related studies (e.g., Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013). Vicente (2014, 385) claims anti-vote buying campaigns work due to an "increase in voting in good conscience." Most Nigerians, Bratton (2008, 1) posits, regard vote selling as an "[infraction] of public morality." F. C. Schaffer and Schedler (2007, 16) argue that some Latin Americans see vote buying offers as an affront; "to accept an offer would damage ones' self-respect." And Weitz-Shapiro (2014) links moral repugnance to wealthier Argentines' rejection of clientelistic parties. Kitschelt and Kselman (2013, 1459) even predict that as democracy and party competition stabilize,

> more voters will begin to take offense at the political inequality resulting from clientelism, namely, that those with access to large-scale state or private resources can commandeer vast numbers of votes, voiding the regulative democratic fiction of "one voter, one vote."

In sum, vote trafficking contradicts some voters' conceptions of democratic citizenship.

Electoral Retaliation as Democratic Norm Maintenance

If this tension between vote trafficking and democratic citizenship translates into a sense of vengeance, it should have important behavioral implications. Specifically, support for democratic norms and governance may condition voter reactions to electoral incentives and, in turn, fuel retaliatory voting behavior. Building to such a theory, we conceptualize *electoral retaliation* and describe

how democratic support induces voters to take revenge against vote traffickers.

Retaliation conjures up notions of reprisal, payback, and punishment. At base, it is a form of reciprocity: an interpersonal strategy for enforcing normative behavioral standards that facilitate cooperation through informal social sanctions (Fehr and Gächter 2000). Sanctions can be positive—rewarding those who obey norms—or negative—punishing norm violators. As large-scale societies rely heavily on non-kin cooperation, humans have co-evolved cultural norms of reciprocity and biological predispositions to other-regarding social preferences such as altruism, trust, and fairness (see Bowles and Gintis 2011 for a review).

Norms of reciprocity are central to early conceptions of clientelism: patrons grant clients access to private goods and receive political support in return (Powell 1970; Scott 1972). Reviving this idea, recent studies show that *positive* reciprocity norms match the quid pro quo social norms that facilitate vote buying (Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014). We examine the other side of this theoretical coin: voters who see vote buying not as a benign quid pro quo social norm but, rather, as a violation of democratic norms could respond with *negative* reciprocity meant to undermine the tactic by sanctioning political actors who employ it at the ballot box. We introduce the concept of electoral retaliation to capture such reactions.

Electoral retaliation refers to acts of *negative* reciprocity by which voters sanction political actors who violate the norms and ideals of democratic governance such as equal participation, popular sovereignty, and electoral fairness. It takes two forms: (1) voting *against* the vote-buying party and (2) invaliding the ballot. Like other forms of reciprocity, electoral retaliation is meant to enforce norms. But whereas vote trafficking reinforces *social norms* of (patron-client) cooperation via positive reciprocity, electoral retaliation enforces *democratic norms* via negative reciprocity to undermine vote buying. Thus, electoral retaliation seeks to hold political actors accountable—not for past job performance but for the reproduction of democratic norms.

Why Democrats Retaliate against Vote Buying

Being targeted for electoral incentives does not induce all voters to retaliate in attempts to uphold democratic norms. Democratic norm maintenance likely suffers the same collective action problems as other forms of public goods provision (Ostrom 1990). Electoral retaliators must, therefore, be "altruistic punishers" (Fehr and Gächter 2002) who are willing to incur personal costs—including the costs of voting—for the common good. What kinds of citizens are these?

We posit electoral retaliators must support democracy strongly enough to punish actors who undermine it. They should, in short, be *democrats*. Democrats support the norms of *inclusive* political participation, fair and free elections, and a range of civil liberties that make participation and competition effective (Dahl [1971] 2008). Inclusivity implies political tolerance. That is, democrats support a broad extension of political rights and civil liberties, even to those with whom they disagree (Prothro and Grigg 1960; Seligson 2000; Stouffer 1955). Democrats also prefer democracy, warts and all, to alternative forms of government. Stated democratic preferences may obscure mixed support for democratic norms but stated rejections of democratic governance usually indicate little respect for them (Carlin 2018; Kiewiet de Jonge 2016). Just as preferences for equality trigger the costly punishment of defectors in public goods games to uphold social norms (Johnson et al. 2009), political tolerance and preferences for democracy should trigger electoral retaliation against vote traffickers to uphold democratic norms. By striking back at clientelistic parties, democrats help resolve the collective action problems associated with maintaining democratic norms in electoral competition.

If democrats punish vote buyers, why would parties target them? Multiple studies suggest parties try to avoid citizens who find clientelism unseemly (Carlin and Moseley 2015; Gonzalez Ocantos, Kiewiet de Jonge, and Nickerson 2014; Weitz-Shapiro 2014). Yet that is easier said than done. Party brokers must weigh multiple factors in identifying targets for vote buying, including partisan affinity (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005), socioeconomic status (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2019), and social network placement (J. Schaffer and Baker 2015). Privileging other factors over democratic attitudes could lead to mistakenly targeting democrats. And individual brokers' motivations are sometimes at odds with broader party objectives (Szwarcberg 2015). So, while parties seek to avoid targeting specific subpopulations because of their distaste for clientelism, career-minded brokers could prioritize maximizing turnout above all else, targeting democrats in the process. Or brokers might cultivate a diverse portfolio of clients, including "core" voters they know well, and "swing" voters about whom they have only limited information (Stokes et al. 2013). In many democratic countries, the majority (upward of two-thirds) of individuals are democrats (Carlin, Love, and Singer 2014). Even for the most surgical brokers, avoiding democrats entirely is a tall task.

Our theoretical framework thus converges with extant research. First, the proposition that targeted democrats may retaliate against vote-buying parties complements Carlin and Moseley's (2015) finding that party brokers try to avoid targeting democrats for electoral incentives because as a group, they are unlikely to be wooed by

short-term material inducements. They posit democrats score higher on "positive satisfactions" derived from the act of voting comprising Riker and Ordeshook's (1968) *D* term.[1] If our theory holds, then these sentiments' effects extend beyond the *choice to vote* to *vote choice* itself. In other words, mistakenly targeting democrats for vote buying is not only an inefficient allocation of scarce party resources, it might even backfire due to their explicit repudiation of illicit vote-trafficking strategies.

Second, electoral retaliation resonates with the corruption voting literature. Citizens are more likely to punish politicians for corrupt dealings when information about them is readily accessible (Ferraz and Finan 2008; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2017). Because being a victim of corruption provides real information, it out-predicts mere perceptions of corruption when it comes to incumbent sanctioning (Klašnja, Tucker, and Deegan-Krause 2016). By the same token, when democrats are targeted for electoral rewards, they need not infer the vote-trafficking party's democratic commitment from party reputations (Weitz-Shapiro 2014)—they know it with certainty. Hence, citizens who highly value democratic norms should be less likely to support the party that targets them for electoral rewards. They might even view vote trafficking as an *indicator* of corruption itself (Singer 2009). Receiving a vote-buying offer could thus elevate perceptions of corruption, leading voters who are sensitive to perceived electoral crookedness—in our view, democrats—to punish the perpetrators or reject all options on offer.

Third, our theory dovetails with predictions of emotion-based theories of social behavior. Negative emotions (e.g., anger) can motivate individuals to identify a causal agent responsible and retaliate (Abelson 1995). Negative emotions sustain social norms as well, driving individuals to punish defectors in public goods games even at a cost (Fehr and Gächter 2000; 2002). By the same token, targeted democrats—offended normatively and morally—could be expected to retaliate against the offending party to uphold democratic norms. Indeed, receiving a vote-buying offer dilutes voters' faith in core political institutions (Cohen, Zechmeister, and No, n.d.), a factor linked to invalid voting (Cohen 2018; Moral 2016). And if purposeful invalid voting reflects not a rejection of democracy altogether but, rather, an act of "sophisticated citizens" (Moral 2016, 4), who "express disinterest or disgust with the political status quo" (Cohen 2018, 412), then it helps explain why some targeted democrats might choose to punish the machine party without supporting an alternative.

Reverse Causality Unlikely

If reverse causality or endogeneity is at play, then we should expect an affirmative answer to the following question: *do democrats' intentions to vote for the opposition or to cast invalid votes systematically induce brokers to target them for electoral benefits*? At least three reasons make this difficult to affirm with any certainty.

First, machine parties target both loyal *and* swing voters for a range of electoral benefits (Calvo and Murillo 2019; Stokes et al. 2013). Standing vote intentions should be at least as consequential to voter behavior as to brokers' targeting decisions. Second, even ideologically proximate voters may sanction the machine party (Weitz-Shapiro 2014). Third, brokers appear to have a well-defined strategy for dealing with democrats—avoid them if possible (Carlin and Moseley 2015). Regardless of their vote intentions, good democrats are "bad targets" (ibid), yet brokers may underestimate democratic commitment or downplay it in prioritizing other traits of potential clients. Finally, working backward from voters' standing decision to invalidate the ballot to a systematic targeting strategy contravenes the main assumption of the core versus swing voter debate that dominates distributive politics research: the voter is ideologically closer to one party than to any other. That is, it fails to account for voters who reject *all* parties equally and, in turn, are primed to retaliate against vote traffickers at the polls. By these logics, it seems unlikely we have the causal arrow reversed or unanticipated endogeneity.

In sum, we theorize that democrats—for whom being targeted for electoral incentives runs afoul of the democratic norms they hold dear—are most likely to engage in electoral retaliation against vote-trafficking parties. Specifically, we expect democrats to seek to undermine vote buying as an electoral strategy either by voting against the machine party or purposefully casting a blank, null, or spoiled ballot. Altogether, electoral retaliation hurts vote-trafficking parties' electoral returns and makes their "buckets" of distributive politics "leakier." That vote buying is alive and well in many contexts bolsters our claim that these adverse effects are not widespread but localized to voters with specific profiles—democrats.

Research Design

Testing our theory's observable implications brings challenges on two levels. Design is the first. Respect for human respondents and professional ethics prevent us from conducting a field experiment, for example, creating treatment and control groups, offering to buy the votes of citizens in a treatment group, and confirming electoral decisions of both groups under a secret ballot. Recreating interactions between patrons and would-be clients in a lab setting or via a survey experiment is neither practicable nor likely to hold much external validity. Under these circumstances, an observational approach seems most feasible. Ideally, we could leverage the causal sequencing afforded by the Mexican (Lawson et al.

2013), Argentine (Lupu et al. 2015), or Brazilian (Ames et al. 2016) panel studies. However, the Mexico studies lack measures of support for democracy; the Argentina study asks if respondents *accepted* electoral benefits, not whether they were targeted; and, for the Brazilian studies, neither the questionnaire nor the party system provide any surety as to the targeting party.

Our empirical strategy seeks to overcome these inconveniences by triangulating evidence across subnational, national, and regional analyses using AmericasBarometer[2] surveys. As described below, we gain the most purchase on the question of "who is doing the targeting" in our *subnational* analyses within Argentina, where dominant-party provincial systems ensure that a single party—in most cases, the Peronists—monopolizes the state resources required for large-scale vote-buying strategies (e.g., Hiskey and Moseley 2020). Repeated cross-sectional models of Argentina at the *national level* permit a wider test with slightly less, but still relatively high, confidence that the Peronists are the vote-buying party. Two sources lend us additional external validity. Conceptually, Argentina is a "paradigmatic case" (Gerring 2001, 219) in the voting-buying literature: "[b]ecause of their importance (theoretically, conceptually), whatever we know about [paradigmatic cases] matters more than what we know about other cases." Empirically, we conduct pooled cross-sectional analyses of eighteen Latin American countries to enhance generalizability. These analyses give us no control over which party has targeted the respondent but allow us to examine invalid voting and a key causal mechanism implied by our theory.

Data and Method (Samples)

Our subnational (within-case) and national (single-case) analyses of Argentina are conducted on repeated cross-sections from the 2010, 2012, and 2014 AmericasBarometer surveys. A Peronist, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, was president during this period before a non-Peronist, Mauricio Macri, assumed the presidency in 2015. We conduct our regional analyses on a "full" sample consisting of all forty-one AmericasBarometer surveys that include our variables of interest and an "election year" sample, comprising the thirteen surveys in seven countries[3] conducted within twelve months of major national elections.[4]

Who Received a Vote-Buying Offer?

We tap *receiving a vote-buying offer* using the following item:

> In recent years and thinking about election campaigns, has a candidate or someone from a political party offered you something, like a favor, food, or any other benefit or object

in return for your vote or support? Has this happened often, sometimes, or never?[5]

We create a dichotomous variable scored 1 for "often" or "sometimes" and 0 for "never."[6]

Identifying the vote-buying party is less straightforward—the item above asks *if* respondents were targeted, but not *by whom*. However, Argentina's Peronist Party (PJ)—a machine party—does the preponderance of vote buying in the country.[7] Indeed, when in power, Peronists deploy state resources for distributive politics and rely heavily on clientelistic tactics at election time (Calvo and Murillo 2019). While parties such as the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and Republican Proposal (PRO) dabble in clientelism (Vommaro 2014), the PJ has by far the largest network of party activists, granting it a significant leg up over its competitors in delivering benefits to key constituencies (Calvo and Murillo 2013, 862). Furthermore, in the period under study, Peronists held the presidency, majorities in both chambers of congress, and governorships in most of Argentina's twenty-three provinces—crucial advantages given that clientelism in Argentina is largely funded with public resources. It is, thus, fair to assume that Peronist operatives are the primary vote buyers in Argentina.

This is true a fortiori in the subset of twenty-three provinces over which the Peronists have monopolized power since the return to democracy in the early 1980s. Hence, we begin with a subnational analysis on these provinces—where we are most sure which party was vote trafficking—before extending our analysis to the national level where we acknowledge our assumption is slightly shakier. For the regional collection of AmericasBarometer surveys, however, any assumption about which party is the vote-trafficker is imprudent. In some countries, all major parties practice vote buying, while in others, it is limited to incumbents or a select few. Or the machine party may not hold executive power (e.g., Mexico throughout most of the period under study) and lacks access to state resources that come with it. While this limits our ability to observe electoral retaliation via support for opposition parties at the regional level, we can still observe electoral retaliation via invalid voting. According to our theory, targeted democrats should be more likely to invalidate the vote *regardless of which party offered to buy it*.

Who Is a Democrat?

Testing our hypothesis that democrats—those who derive satisfaction from upholding democratic norms and are willing to punish actors who violate them—are more likely to engage in electoral retaliation requires modeling vote choice as an interaction of receiving a vote-buying offer and support for democracy. We gauge the latter with two measures.

Churchillian support. "Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?" We recode this variable 0–100.[8] This widely used measure offers an effective, albeit imperfect, holistic measure of democratic support that elicits strong attitudes (Carlin 2018; Kiewiet de Jonge 2016; see review in Mattes 2018).

Political tolerance. Following Seligson (2000), we measure respondents' tolerance of extending the rights to vote, conduct peaceful demonstrations, run for public office, and make speeches on television about those who object to the democratic regime (see Supplemental Material [SM] Table A8 for composite survey items). This measure avoids any social desirability bias that might derive from overtly asking respondents about "democracy" (Kiewiet de Jonge 2016). Like Seligson, for ease of interpretation, we code individual respondents as "High" or "Low" on the political tolerance scale. The results are unchanged using a continuous measure.

How Do Democrats Engage in Electoral Retaliation?

Electoral retaliation, we argue, is an intentional act meant to uphold democratic norms. To capture its essence, our dependent variable is a hypothetical electoral behavioral intention: "If the next presidential elections were being held this week, what would you do?" Respondents could choose from four answers: (1) "Wouldn't vote," (2) "Would vote for the incumbent candidate or party," (3) "Would vote for a candidate or party different from the current administration," and (4) "Would go to vote but would leave the ballot blank or would purposely cancel my vote."

We choose this hypothetical prospective item over reported retrospective vote choice because of potential problems with respondent recall, proincumbent biases, and the temporal ambiguity of using two past behaviors as independent and dependent variables (not to mention inconsistency across countries regarding timing of the last presidential election).[9]

In sum, we test our theoretical expectations by modeling hypothetical intentions to vote for the incumbent, to vote for an opposition party, to cast an invalid ballot, or to abstain (not reported) as a function of having received a vote-buying offer, conditional on support for democracy. We report two sets of models: one using Churchillian support and another using political tolerance. All models rely on controls that are unlikely to be tainted with posttreatment bias: age, gender, education, skin color, a wealth index, and urban/rural geographic location. Regional models include country and year

fixed effects. We perform multiple robustness checks, described below.

Analysis

We begin with a within-case study of Argentina at the subnational level before moving to pooled national models for Argentina and regional models for Latin America. If our theory holds, we should observe that, if targeted, strongly democratic Argentines more reliably intend to vote for an opposition candidate or to invalidate their votes than if they had never been targeted. Non-democratic targets, however, are more likely to carry out the will of the machine. All subsequent tables report results from multinomial logit models; intention to vote for a PJ candidate is the base category. We expect, and find, *Received Vote-Buying Offer* to prompt electoral retaliation conditional on our two indicators of support for democratic norms.

Subnational Analysis of Dominant-Party Provinces in Argentina

If more than one party engages in widespread vote buying, our results for one form of retaliation (voting for the opposition) will be hopelessly confounded. So, we begin by zeroing in on subnational contexts where there is little doubt as to which party is trafficking in votes. Namely, we confine our first analyses to the Argentine provinces in which the PJ-affiliated governing party had (as of 2014) never lost a gubernatorial election in the democratic era.[10] Hiskey and Moseley (2018, 2020) refer to these as "dominant-party systems" and note that these provinces boast rates of vote trafficking that are roughly twice the national average in Argentina. Clientelism is almost entirely financed with public monies, and given the fiscal advantages afforded to sparsely populated provinces in Argentina's co-participation scheme for distributing federal funds, provincial governors have enormous discretion to spend that money as they see fit (Gervasoni 2018). This often means deploying the power of the purse to reward local political allies—like co-partisan mayors—and punish opponents (Bianchi 2013).

Because dominant-party systems are mostly small provinces, the proportion of the national sample drawn from them for the AmericasBarometer surveys is small ($n = 450$). More critical is whether our subsample is representative of the population of interest. Broadly speaking, based on 2010 census data from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos* (INDEC), the data from dominant-party provinces are representative in terms of their share of the national sample compared with their share of the total population, on reported turnout rates, and on socioeconomic factors (see SM for details). However, we

Table 1. Multinomial Logit Models of Vote Intentions in Dominant-Party Provinces (Base Category = Would Vote for a Candidate from PJ).

	Model I: Churchillian support		Model II: Tolerance	
	Vote for opposition vs. vote for PJ	*Invalid vote vs. vote for PJ*	*Vote for opposition vs. vote for PJ*	*Invalid vote vs. vote for PJ*
Received Vote-Buying Offer	−2.707**	−0.620	−0.711	−0.848
	(1.354)	(1.334)	(0.618)	(0.835)
Support for Democracy	−0.017**	−0.013		
	(0.007)	(0.010)		
Received Offer × Support	*0.038***	*0.011*		
	(0.016)	*(0.017)*		
Political Tolerance			0.000	−0.005
			(0.003)	(0.005)
Received Offer × Tolerance			*0.015***	*0.020***
			(0.007)	*(0.011)*
Wealth (Quintiles)	0.340***	0.479***	0.278***	0.420**
	(0.102)	(0.171)	(0.103)	(0.175)
Skin Color	−0.110	−0.189	−0.141	−0.215
	(0.097)	(0.206)	(0.101)	(0.209)
Female	0.005	−0.091	−0.005	0.024
	(0.275)	(0.445)	(0.272)	(0.425)
Age	0.005	−0.024*	0.002	−0.025**
	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.008)	(0.013)
Education	0.077*	0.004	0.058	−0.001
	(0.042)	(0.070)	(0.042)	(0.071)
Urban	−1.366***	−0.454	−1.647***	−0.513
	(0.510)	(0.648)	(0.522)	(0.650)
2012	−3.265***	−3.770***	−3.846***	−4.261***
	(0.496)	(0.739)	(0.554)	(0.820)
2014	−2.006***	−1.727***	−2.524***	−2.085***
	(0.481)	(0.596)	(0.532)	(0.625)
Constant	3.479***	2.527	3.582***	2.367
	(1.176)	(1.632)	(1.142)	(1.574)
N	402	402	398	398

Standard errors in parentheses. PJ = Peronist Party.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$; Two-tailed tests.
Italicized coefficients are meant to focus the reader on the variables of theoretical interest. They are not meant to indicate a distinct level of confidence.

do find a slight overrepresentation of rural Argentines in the AmericasBarometer data. To achieve a more representative sample, we use ranking to calibrate design weights that correspond to the population parameters in the census data. These weights are included in the models reported in Table 1.

If our theory is valid, we should find strong empirical support for our hypotheses where we are the most certain which party is engaged in vote buying. This is, indeed, the case (see Table 1, models I and II). In model I, the interaction between *Received Offer* and *Churchillian Support for Democracy* is in the expected (positive) direction and precisely estimated as a predictor of supporting the opposition. Effect sizes are nonnegligible. Simulating an increase of *Support for Democracy* over its range (0–100) among voters targeted for rewards raises their probability of supporting the opposition by a factor

of 5, from .11 to .54 (Figure 1). Among nontargets, there is a slight negative association between *Support for Democracy* and voting for the opposition. For perspective, consider the wealth quintile variable, which should be positively associated with the likelihood that individuals choose to support a party opposing the PJ, given its working-class base. Increasing one's wealth quintile from the lowest to the highest increases the probability of supporting the opposition from .22 to .46. In other words, electoral retaliation among targeted democrats appears to be more substantively impactful in explaining prospective vote choice than wealth itself.

The interaction coefficient for the invalid voting comparison is less precisely estimated in model I but in the expected direction. Results for *Tolerance* are consistent with our expectations for both forms of electoral retaliation (Table 1, model II). Whereas an increase in tolerance
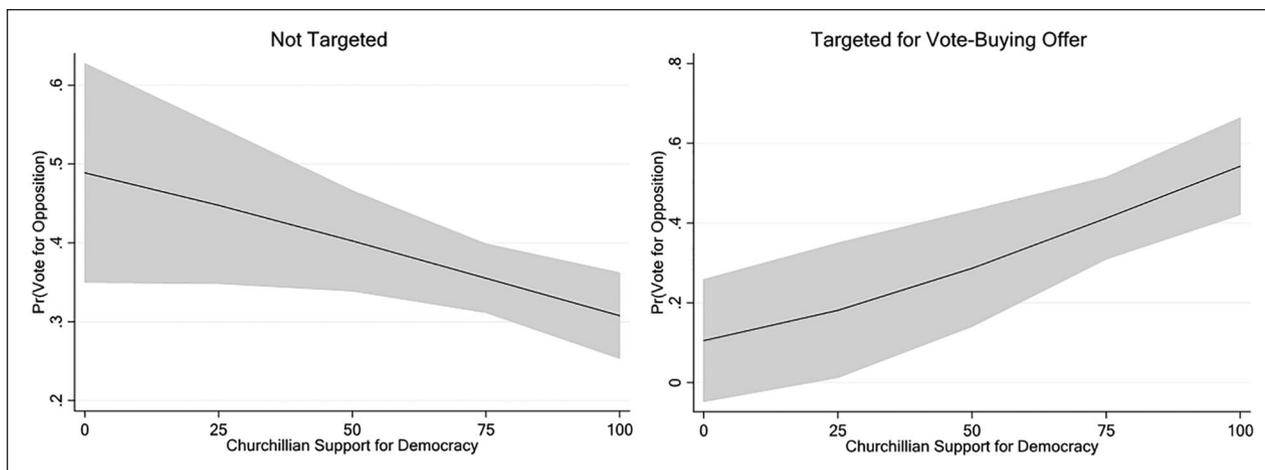
Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of voting for opposition by receipt of vote-buying offer and democratic support in Argentina's dominant-party provinces (90% confidence intervals).

reduces nontargets' probability of voting for the opposition, it increases the likelihood that targeted individuals will retaliate. Targeted individuals characterized by high tolerance are .18 more likely to opt for the opposition than intolerant targets, whereas we observe no difference in vote intention among low- and high-tolerance individuals who were not approached for clientelistic rewards. In sum, according to these subnational findings from Argentina, non-democrats are the best bet for dominant-party machines; targeting democrats can backfire.

These results are even stronger in expanded models that include an array of control variables (SM Table A1). Again, we find that targeting non-democrats raises their probability of voting for the machine. But firsthand experience with vote trafficking predicts that democrats will intend to vote against the incumbent party or cast an invalid vote at higher rates.

National Analysis of Argentina

Having established that electoral retaliation occurs among democrats in contexts where we have great certainty about the identity of the vote-buying party, we turn our gaze to pooled national samples of Argentines. We assume that, throughout the country, the Peronists are the primary vote-trafficking party. Our results support that assumption and our theory of electoral retaliation.

The positive and significant interaction term, *Received Offer × Support* in model I (Table 2, column 1), suggests targeted democrats are more likely to intend to vote for an opposition candidate than are targeted non-democrats. Figure 2A depicts the predicted probabilities of supporting an opposition party based on *Received Vote-Buying Offer* over the range of *Churchillian Support for Democracy* (0–100).[11] Among targeted voters, this simulation raises the probability of supporting the

opposition over the incumbent from 1 in 3 (.33) to 1 in 2 (.48)—a nearly 50 percent increase. Among those not targeted, the effects are negligible. In terms of marginal effects, targeted individuals are systematically *less likely* to support the opposition at low levels of democratic support compared with nontargets and *more likely* to support the opposition at the highest levels of democratic support ($p < .05$).

Moving to the second column in Table 2, we examine intentions to vote for the incumbent versus intentions to cast an invalid vote. Again, the interaction term *Received Offer × Support* has a positive sign ($p < .16$). Marginal effects suggest that democrats who receive a vote-buying offer are slightly more likely to intend to cast an invalid ballot (rather than vote for a Peronist candidate) than democrats who did not receive an offer. This aligns with our expectation that electoral retaliation results when strong democrats are targeted for vote buying. And, indeed, among those *not* targeted for vote buying, simulating an increase of support for democracy over its range roughly halves (from .13 to .07) the predicted probability of intending to cast a null vote.

Model II (Table 2) swaps *Churchillian Support for Democracy* for *Tolerance*. Evidence corroborates the findings above on electoral retaliation by voting for the opposition, though the coefficient is less precisely estimated ($p < .11$). The coefficient for *Received Offer × Tolerance* is significant ($p < .07$) in the invalid voting versus PJ comparison. As predicted probabilities in Figure 2B illustrate, *Tolerance* decreases the likelihood of casting an invalid ballot among individuals who are not targeted for clientelistic rewards. Conversely, democrats, when targeted, are more apt to cast blank votes than to vote for the Peronists compared with nontargets.

Our national-level results from Argentina are robust to controls, alternative measures, modeling approaches, and

Table 2. Multinomial Logit Models of Vote Intentions in Argentina (Base Category = Would Vote for a Candidate from PJ).

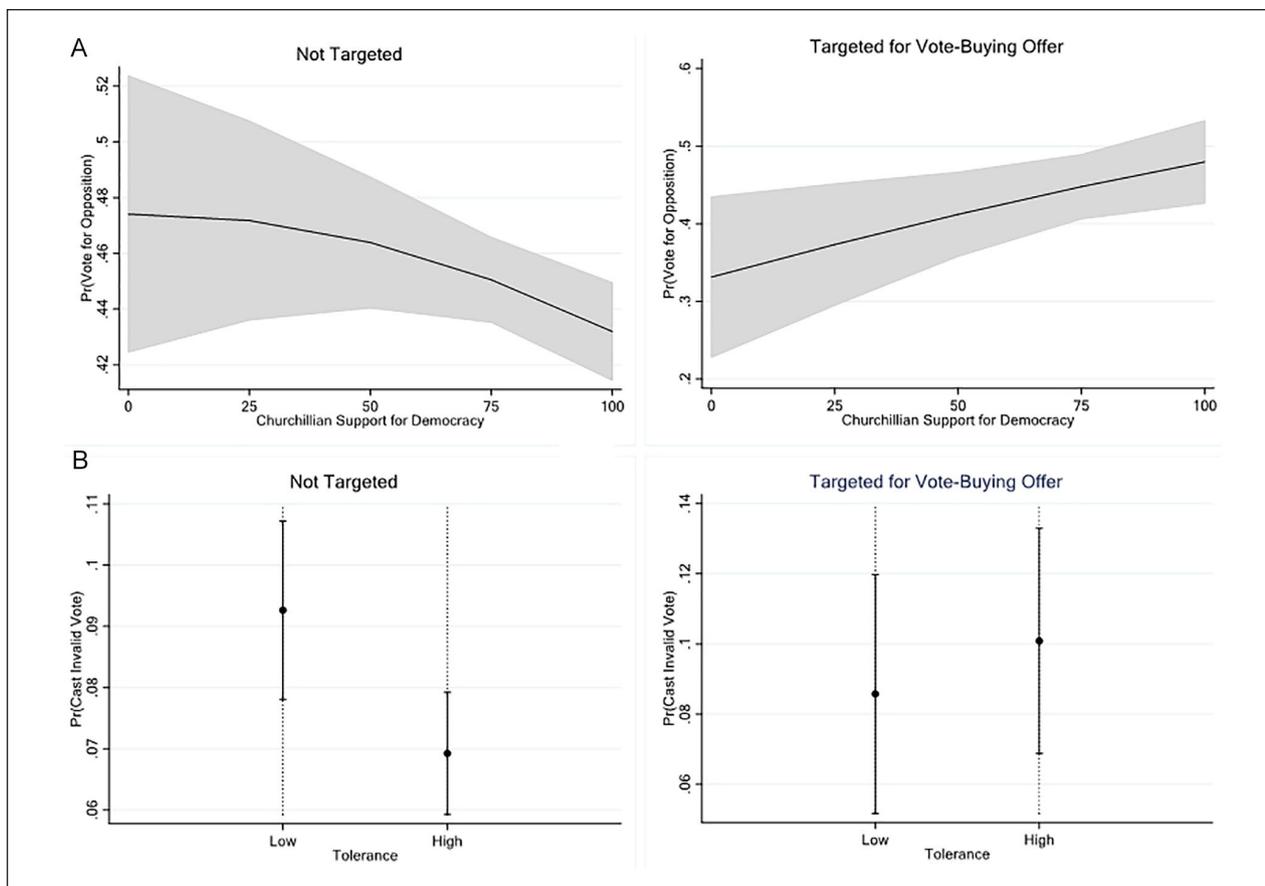|	Model I: Churchillian support		Model II: Tolerance	
	Vote for opposition vs. vote for PJ	Invalid vote vs. vote for PJ	Vote for opposition vs. vote for PJ	Invalid vote vs. vote for PJ
Received Vote-Buying Offer	−1.011** (0.399)	−0.731 (0.527)	−0.304 (0.207)	−0.297 (0.311)
Support for Democracy	−0.009*** (0.002)	−0.015*** (0.003)		
Received Offer × Support	0.011** (0.005)	0.009 (0.007)		
Political Tolerance			0.237** (0.094)	−0.202 (0.155)
Received Offer × Tolerance			0.418 (0.271)	0.728* (0.403)
Wealth (Quintiles)	0.220*** (0.034)	0.095* (0.054)	0.203*** (0.034)	0.082 (0.055)
Skin Color	−0.092*** (0.030)	−0.062 (0.049)	−0.087*** (0.030)	−0.078 (0.049)
Female	0.165* (0.086)	0.016 (0.140)	0.170** (0.086)	−0.007 (0.140)
Age	0.003 (0.003)	−0.015*** (0.005)	0.001 (0.003)	−0.018*** (0.005)
Education	0.067*** (0.013)	−0.006 (0.021)	0.056*** (0.013)	−0.009 (0.021)
Urban	−0.163 (0.137)	−0.141 (0.224)	−0.210 (0.137)	−0.089 (0.221)
2012	−1.617*** (0.116)	−1.489*** (0.176)	−1.590*** (0.115)	−1.446*** (0.177)
2014	−0.544*** (0.118)	−0.917*** (0.181)	−0.479*** (0.118)	−0.871*** (0.184)
Constant	0.632* (0.344)	1.435*** (0.526)	−0.011 (0.322)	0.466 (0.509)
N	3,307	3,307	3,290	3,290

Standard errors in parentheses. PJ = Peronist Party.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$. Two-tailed tests.

placebo tests. Controlling for known predictors of invalid voting (e.g., political knowledge, interest in politics, economic evaluations; Cohen 2018) and targeting decisions (e.g., partisanship, political evaluations) does not alter our results (SM Table A2). Following the logic of experimental design, we address bias from selection on observables by rerunning our models after preprocessing our data with entropy balancing (Hainmueller 2012) to balance democrats and non-democrats on demographic and theoretical confounders (Ho et al. 2007). Results indicate democrats are, indeed, more likely to retaliate vote-buying offers (see SM Tables A4–A6). We also use two-stage Heckman (1979) selection correction models to mitigate selection bias derived from the fact that voters are not a random draw of the population. In this setup, we first model whether or not individuals intend to vote and then model intended vote choice (SM Table A7). Our core findings hold under this alternative modeling strategy.

We conduct three placebo tests with alternative treatments that, while related to being targeted for vote buying, should not, theoretically, be systematically related to electoral retaliation (Sekhon 2009). First, we replace receipt of a vote-buying offer with attendance of a party meeting and find no significant effect for the interaction (SM Table A10). Second, we substitute political interest for support for democracy and, similarly, find null effects. Third, we model church attendance—a seemingly apolitical act—as a function of democratic support and receipt of a vote-buying offer, and find no significant relationship. These placebo tests increase our confidence that it is the clientelistic nature of individuals' interaction with parties, and their strong commitment to democratic norms, that fuel electoral retaliation.

Hence, a clear picture emerges from our subnational and national case studies of Argentina. For democrats, who constitute a large majority of one of the most

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of voting for opposition by receipt of vote-buying offer and democratic support in Argentina (90% confidence intervals). Part A corresponds to Model I based on Churchillian support for democracy. Part B corresponds to Modell II based on political tolerance. Point estimates for both are reported in Table 2.

democratic populaces in the region (Carlin, Love, and Singer 2014), receiving a vote-buying offer is related to two forms of electoral retaliation: voting against machine candidates and intentionally invalidating the ballot. We posit that these retaliatory actions represent a form of *negative* reciprocity meant to bolster democratic norms. Yet, for non-democrats, vote-buying offers boost their chances of *positive* reciprocity, that is, supporting a candidate from the Peronist machine. Our results hold under alternative approaches to the thorny issues of nonrandom assignment. Overall, targeting voters strongly committed to democratic norms has negative externalities for Argentina's machine party. Below, we test whether, at least vis-à-vis invalid voting, democrats across Latin America engage in electoral retaliation when targeted for electoral rewards.

Regional Analysis of Eighteen Latin American Electoral Democracies

Having found evidence consistent with our theory in Argentina, we probe its generalizability to all eighteen

Latin American electoral democracies. Namely, we regress vote intentions on receiving a vote-buying offer interacted with *Churchillian Democratic Support* and *Tolerance*. Because we cannot know with confidence which party offered to buy respondents' votes, we do not examine rejection of the incumbent and, instead, restrict our attention to retaliation via invalid voting.

Table 3 groups results by sample and measure of democratic support. Consistent with our results from Argentina, in the full sample, the coefficient for *Received Offer × Tolerance* (model II) is positive and significant. That is, being offered electoral rewards increases democrats' hypothetical intentions to cast an invalid ballot as opposed to supporting a candidate from the incumbent president's party. Among targeted non-democrats, we observe no such effect—and perhaps most striking, democrats who never interact with clientelistic parties are even *less* likely to cast invalid votes than non-democrats (Figure 3A). Results in the far columns of Table 3 indicate that homing in on citizens contemplating actual alternatives in upcoming elections strengthens our findings with respect to *Churchillian Support* (model III),

Table 3. Multinomial Logit Models of Vote Intentions in Latin America (Base Category = Would Vote for a Candidate from Incumbent's Party).

|	Full sample (18 countries, 41 surveys) *Invalid vote vs. vote for incumbent candidate*		Election year sample (7 countries, 13 surveys) *Invalid vote vs. vote for incumbent candidate*	
	Model I: Churchill	Model II: Tolerance	Model III: Churchill	Model IV: Tolerance
Received Vote-Buying Offer	−0.094	−0.024	−0.343*	0.167
	(0.158)	(0.063)	(0.182)	(0.134)
Support for Democracy	−0.010***		−0.009***	
	(0.001)		(0.001)	
Received Offer × Support	*0.002*		*0.007****	
	(0.002)		*(0.002)*	
Political Tolerance		0.022		0.070
		(0.036)		(0.068)
Received Offer × Tolerance		*0.262****		*0.031*
		(0.095)		*(0.191)*
Wealth (Quintiles)	0.030	0.025**	0.110***	0.109***
	(0.021)	(0.012)	(0.033)	(0.024)
Skin Color	−0.026	−0.026***	−0.004	−0.005
	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.028)	(0.017)
Female	0.040	0.049	−0.039	−0.056
	(0.045)	(0.032)	(0.055)	(0.060)
Age	−0.012***	−0.013***	−0.014***	−0.015***
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Education	0.011	0.007	0.025*	0.020**
	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.009)
Urban	−0.287***	−0.278***	−0.488***	−0.493***
	(0.086)	(0.039)	(0.151)	(0.079)
2012	−0.552	−0.540***	0.011	−0.018
	(0.351)	(0.065)	(0.012)	(0.221)
2014	−0.025	−0.006	0.993***	1.063***
	(0.224)	(0.035)	(0.140)	(0.090)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.490**	−0.106	−1.641***	−2.258***
	(0.201)	(0.140)	(0.152)	(0.272)
N	49,937	51,070	15,226	15,540

Standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01. Two-tailed tests.

while the coefficient for the interaction with *Tolerance* in model IV is positively signed but insignificant.

To appreciate these effects, Figure 3B plots the predicted probabilities associated with casting a blank vote, based on whether one was targeted for vote buying at varying levels of *Churchillian Support for Democracy*. Results in section (B) derive from the election year sample. As in Argentina, targets and nontargets make diverging choices at high degrees of democratic support but behave indistinguishably at low degrees of democratic support. This divergence translates into a 25 percent increase in professed invalid voting among targeted democrats compared with those who were never targeted (from .08 to .10; Figure 3B). In sum, democrats are

generally less likely than non-democrats to vote invalidly but, among those targeted, the propensity to invalidate the ballot rises or remains steady compared with nontargeted democrats. Such a result is hard to explain absent a theory of electoral retaliation to uphold democratic norms.

As with the Argentina national findings, the basic inferences we draw from these regional models are robust to the alternative modeling strategies described above—preprocessing our data with entropy balancing (SM Table A6) and employing Heckman selection correction models (SM Table A7) to address selection biases. When we include controls for economic evaluations, presidential approval, and interest in politics, among others, the results become even stronger (SM Table A3).
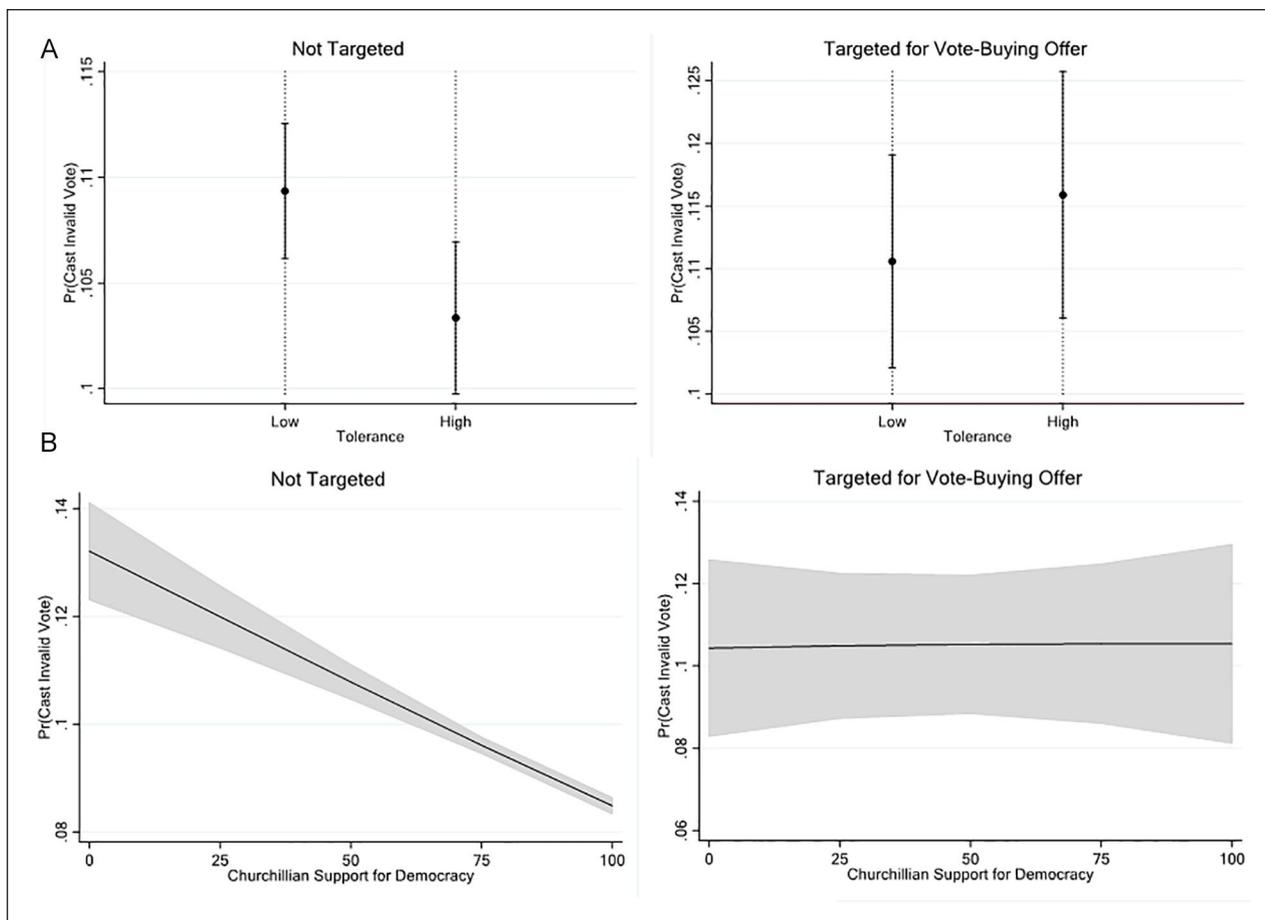
Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of casting a blank vote by receipt of a vote-buying offer and democratic support in Latin America (90% confidence intervals): (A) full sample and (B) election year sample.

Before concluding, recall that our theory suggests that when democrats are targeted, they infer that the offending party is corrupting democratic norms. As such, citizen perceptions of political corruption serve as a mechanism linking the receipt of a vote-buying offer to electoral retaliation—but only among individuals who recognize such tactics as undemocratic. This generates empirical implications that we explore by modeling (1) perceptions of corruption and (2) evaluations of governments' efforts to combat corruption as a function of being targeted for vote buying and democratic support (see SM Table A11). Results support the expectation that democrats who receive vote-buying offers are more likely to conclude that the system and/or current government are corrupt compared with nontargeted democrats. Among non-democrats, in contrast, there is no observable difference (SM Figures A2a and A2b). These results reinforce the notion that vote buying can have negative reputational consequences for parties (Weitz-Shapiro 2014) and might even fuel perceptions that the system itself is rigged (Singer 2009), at least among citizens who cherish democratic principles.

Conclusion

The allure of simply paying for votes is as strong as it is timeless. Although often illegal, local customs and norms may render it acceptable, if not expected, among the electorate. This may explain why a spot market for votes exists, but not why these markets can be so inefficient. To us, at least some of the "leaky bucket" owes to (mis)targeting dyed-in-the-wool democrats. Like all public goods, democracy is at the mercy of free riders and defectors. Its viability depends on the creation, reproduction, and maintenance of norms such as electoral fairness, political equality, and popular sovereignty. Parties that traffic in votes violate these norms. Electoral retaliation represents an intent to sanction such parties and, in turn, to uphold democratic norms. Hence, our study brings studies of clientelism into dialogue with models of accountability and generates novel theoretical questions at their intersection.

Within the clientelism literature, we identify a set of behavioral outcomes hitherto unappreciated. Committed democrats are not passive players in distributive politics.

They are willing to engage in costly punishment to sanction parties who violate democratic norms. Whether electoral retaliation forces clientelistic actors to alter their strategies is a question that deserves scholarly attention. But it could help explain why Peronists avoid middle-class Argentines and why those voters reject clientelism (Weitz-Shapiro 2014). Our research, furthermore, clarifies the critical role democratic attitudes play in vote buying. Carlin and Moseley (2015) argue party brokers eschew all-out democrats because they are less likely to accept rewards. An implication of our study is that brokers cannot do this very effectively. And when they fail, they can incur the wrath of democratic citizens.

Within the accountability literature, electoral retaliation for vote buying parallels conclusions from the study of economic and corruption voting. Yet, as with studies in these veins (inter alia, Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013; Tilley and Hobolt 2011; Tillman 2008), partisanship could alter the decision calculus for electoral retaliation. Namely, voters who want to sanction their own party face a selection problem that makes voting for another party difficult. Its electoral zero-sum nature makes doing so, effectively, a double sanction. Thus, electoral retaliation by voting against the vote-trafficking party ought to be less prevalent among "core" machine partisans than is invalid balloting. Such a claim warrants future investigation with a more appropriate research design.

At the intersection of these two literatures, we join a broader conversation about prosociality, clientelism, and democracy. Political scientists focus a great deal more attention on the social norms—namely, trust, altruism, fairness, and positive reciprocity—that improve the functioning of democratic institutions than on the behaviors—such as negative reciprocity, costly punishment—that sustain them. But a growing consensus across the social sciences suggests evolutionary pressures favor groups in which a critical mass of individuals with the latter counterbalances larger swathes of the population with the former (Bowles and Gintis 2011; Henrich et al. 2006). Without individuals willing to punish defectors who take advantage of altruism, betray trust, and act unfairly, such social norms erode. Might the same be true for democratic norms?

A firm answer is beyond the scope of this paper. Our co-evolved willingness to engage in *positive* reciprocity has many social benefits but appears to do more harm than good when it comes to clientelism (e.g., Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014). However, the *negative* reciprocity exhibited in electoral retaliation, coupled with a commitment to democratic governance and norms, constitutes a possible way out of this trap. Though no silver bullet, without negative reciprocity toward vote-traffickers, constructing or maintaining norms of political equality, autonomy, and accountability is all the more fraught.

Though we feel confident in this conclusion, important questions remain. Among them are how clientelism might pervert or offset the democratic benefits of prosocial norms. For example, Putnam (1994) famously argues that prosocial norms of reciprocity and trust, cultivated through civic associationalism, are critical to "making democracy work." But vote buying potentially blunts some of their positive externalities. Indeed, in a twist of irony, top targets for vote traffickers are the sorts of citizens seen as crucial to a robust civic culture—positive reciprocators (Lawson and Greene 2014) as well as participants in civic associations (Rueda, n.d.) and community life, and people who seek to persuade others to vote for a particular candidate (J. Schaffer and Baker 2015). At the same time, other prosocial preferences and norms may be the antidote. Rueda (n.d.), for example, finds those who are more trusting of others tend not to be targeted for vote buying. In conjunction with the results presented here, the implication is that scholars need to theorize carefully about the roles of prosociality, democratic norms, and civic culture in promoting democratic quality in the context of vote buying.

Broadly speaking, this study suggests curtailing vote buying in Latin America depends, to some extent, on boosting democratic support, which has begun to flag in the region (Carlin, Love, and Singer 2014). Policymakers keen to root out vote buying should, thus, consider policies that deepen commitment to basic democratic norms such as formal education, voter education programs, and anti-vote-buying campaigns focused on democratic principles. Citizens, for their part, should not dismiss the power of socialization (Easton 1975) in the instillation and transmission of democratic norms. All these factors could, indirectly, curb vote buying and thereby reverse the "perverse accountability" (Stokes 2005) that sustains the practice.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. (1) Complying with the ethic of voting, (2) affirming one's allegiance to the political system, (3) affirming a partisan preference, (4) informing oneself about if and how to vote, and (5) affirming one's efficacy in the political system.
2. We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.
3. Bolivia (2014), Brazil (2010, 2014), Costa Rica (2010, 2014), Colombia (2010, 2014), Dominican Republic (2012, 2014), Panama (2014), and Venezuela (2010, 2014).
4. This reduces temporal slippage between responses to the item tapping electoral rewards targeting and intended electoral behavior, and addresses the possibility that vote intentions gauge *amenability* to invalid voting rather than a firm intention in a real electoral context.
5. Filter items that include the phrase "in return for your vote" may frustrate gauging, in a follow-up item, the *acceptance* of electoral rewards by creating problems of social desirability and recall (Castro Cornejo and Beltrán 2020). We doubt the severity of these issues for our study on the following grounds. First, we do not analyze who *accepts* electoral rewards but, rather, who is *targeted* for them. The former should suffer more social desirability bias than the latter. Second, recall problems are, essentially, compliance issues. Our estimates may, thus, relate only to "compliers" and not represent average treatment effects.
6. Answer categories changed from indicating frequency in 2010 to a simple yes or no in 2012. Question wording remained nearly identical. Mapping this indicator to our theory requires an assumption that respondents in 2010 and 2012 interpret "recent" as "the most recent" election; in 2014, the item refers to the most recent election.
7. Ahead of the 2015 elections, in which the Peronist Party (PJ) suffered major losses throughout Argentina, 71 percent of respondents who both reported having traded their vote for some kind of material reward *and* identified the offending party pointed to the PJ; the same proportion identified the PJ as having targeted their "neighbor" (Lupu et al. 2015).
8. This recoding matches the standard approach to research using AmericasBarometer data and, thus, enhances comparability with other studies.
9. Stated intentions to cast null votes may overestimate actual rates (Cohen 2018). We broadly corroborate our inferences if we use reported vote choice (see Supplemental Material [SM] Table A9).
10. Formosa, Jujuy, La Rioja, Neuquén, Salta, San Luis, and Santa Cruz. Neuquén was a difficult case to classify given that it is dominated by a provincial party: the *Movimiento Popular Neuquino*. This party emerged as an offshoot of the PJ, and its leadership has often diverged from the Peronists on important national issues. However, during the period from 2010 to 2014, the governor, Jorge Sapag, was an ally of the Kirchners: https://www.cronista.com/economia-politica/Sapag-trabajara-por-la-candidatura-de-Cristina-20110228-0087.html. Another dominant-party enclave not dominated by the PJ in 2014, Río Negro, was omitted from the analysis.
11. The underlying distributions of democratic support in the Argentina and Latin American samples are skewed so that confidence intervals are widest at the lower levels of democratic support (see SM Figure A1).

Supplemental Material

The AmericasBarometer data are available here: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/raw-data.php. Replication materials will be provided upon request. Supplemental materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (*PRQ*) website.

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