

Research Statement

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My research is motivated by a central question: how do governments determine where to allocate resources? I am driven by a desire to understand the causes and consequences of an unequal distribution of national resources in developing democracies. I am especially interested in how relationships between national and subnational politicians affects which territories receive additional access to central government resources. My secondary interest includes questions of how new institutions in developing democracies affect elite behavior and citizen representation. In my research, I am committed to using a mixed-method approach, including formal theory, regression analysis, and survey experiments, in order to overcome barriers to measurement. My use of mixed-methods also helps me to test my theories from a variety of perspectives.

Clientelism and Club Goods

How politicians choose to attract voters has implications for both who is elected into office and which citizens politicians will represent. In my dissertation, I explored questions of resource allocation with a particular focus on how club goods, or excludable public goods, are used as clientelist benefits. Throughout my research, I define clientelism as the targeted exchange of goods or benefits for political support and I define club goods as excludable public goods. I explore two central puzzles: 1) Where are politicians most likely to use club goods as clientelist goods and 2) What factors help determine when brokers are reliable?

In the first article of my dissertation, I explore the relationship between national and local politicians in distributing club goods benefits. I ask under what conditions local politicians will act as reliable brokers for national legislators. Reliable brokers are intermediaries who can translate the resources from politicians into votes from voters. However, when brokers are also elected politicians, they have independent incentives to claim credit for club goods benefits in order to improve their own standing with voters. To answer this question, I develop a formal signaling model of the interactions between legislators and local politicians. In this model, subnational politicians can send a signal to national politicians of whether they are “ambitious” or “unambitious” by investing in maintaining and strengthening their voter networks. After observing the signal, the national legislator can choose to provide a targeted good. The local-level politician then decides either to claim credit for the good or to attribute credit to the national politician. I find that concerns about credit hijacking will lead national politicians to moderate their use of benefits. This occurs because, under most conditions, unambitious mayors will mimic ambitious mayors in order to receive additional resources. I test this model using interview data from local and national level politicians in Colombia.

In the second article of my dissertation, I address the question of how to measure a local politician’s investment in building and maintaining their voter network. I use a Bayesian Mixed-Membership model in order to create a new, original model of local-level patronage based on patterns in public hiring practices. In Bayesian analysis, the parameter estimates

are a combination of the data used to fit a model and prior information. In order to estimate patronage, I fit the model using information about public employees conditioned on prior information about the demographic characteristics of a municipality. This technique allows me to estimate to what extent hiring decisions are political, as opposed to meritocratic, in nature. I validate my estimate of patronage using qualitative data and survey data on the clientelism and corruption from the Latin American Public Opinion Project.

Finally, in the third article of my dissertation I ask which municipalities are more likely to receive targeted benefits from national legislators. I argue that municipalities with clientelist mayors are more likely to receive benefits because clientelist mayors have stable, disciplined voter blocks that can be incentivized to support the national politician. As a result, clientelist mayors are better equipped to translate targeted local goods into votes, making the mayors desirable brokers for national politicians. I test this theory in the case of Colombia and I apply my new measure of local-level patronage, a specific type of clientelism that depends on repeated interactions, as a proxy for clientelism. I find that more clientelist municipalities are more likely to receive discretionary transfers from the central government, independent of municipal characteristics or the party affiliation of mayors. This tells us that local-level clientelism can increase access to additional central government resources and suggests that local-level clientelism may also be a strategy that helps increase access to central-government resources.

Clientelism and Credit Attribution

As I continue to explore questions of resource allocation, I am expanding my dissertation project in order to analyze how citizens allocate credit for locally targeted benefits and how citizens respond to non-programmatic political strategies. I ask if voters are able to identify which politicians provide targeted goods and how the allocation of these goods affects vote choice. I argue that when mayors attribute credit to national-level politicians, voters are both more likely to attribute credit to the national politician and expect the national politician to benefit during elections. However, the same is not true for local politicians. Instead, local politicians can receive credit for locally targeted goods even if they attribute credit to a national politician. I test this theory using a citizen survey of over 2,000 citizens throughout Colombia. I use a vignette experiment that varies which politicians attend an inauguration for a new public project and asks citizens who is most responsible for the project. Then, I randomly ask how the project will affect the vote share of the legislator or mayor. I find that when a national politician receives credit from a mayor, voters are more than twice as likely to identify legislators as responsible for funding the project and are more likely to vote for that legislator. Notably, I find that mayor's who attribute credit are not punished, suggesting that credit-claiming is less beneficial than expected.

I expand on this research in two additional projects. First, I am working on an elite survey experiment that analyzes under what condition local-level politicians are likely to attribute credit to national-level politicians. This study moves from how citizens respond to credit attribution behavior in order to understand how politicians consider credit when making resource allocation decisions. Second, I am designing an experiment to explore how citizens update their beliefs about which political actors deserve credit when faced with competing messages. In this project, I will look at how the timing and strength of different

signals change citizen's understanding of who is responsible for providing public resources. This project will allow me to further explore the puzzling finding that local politicians do not seem to be punished by voters for attributing credit to national politicians.

Moreover, my new research explores the dynamics of local-level clientelism beyond patronage. In a new project, I analyze how the dynamics of local-level clientelism affect how citizens respond to clientelist candidates. In particular, I analyze how the presence of clientelism at the local level affects how citizens evaluate clientelist candidates and their likelihood of responding positively to clientelist appeals. In this study, I try to determine what types of benefits are more likely to be accepted by the population writ large.

Finally, I'm interested in the effects of unequal resource allocation on both citizen's access to resources and government accountability. In a coauthored project with Jared Abbott, we explore how the presence of brokers in constituent assemblies changes citizens ability to access targeted resources and, in turn, their role in alleviating—or perpetuating—existing inequalities.

Clientelism During Elections

As part of my research agenda in the next few years, I will expand my research on clientelism to explore how different electoral cycles shape the type of clientelist strategies politicians use. I will analyze how resource allocation changes during national elections, local elections, and referendum elections in order to better understand how political dynamics between local and national governments affect resource allocation decisions.

Similarly, in a coauthored project with Cecilia Martinez-Gallardo, we ask how coalition politics affect which geographical areas receive additional discretionary transfers from the central government. We argue that members of both governing and electoral coalitions will have additional access to central government resources. As a result, even coalition members who are not represented in cabinets may be able to benefit from their former alliances with the governing party. This work will link the literatures on clientelism and coalition politics, and contribute to research on the exchanges that underpin the politics of electoral coalitions.

Politician Adaptation to Democratic Rules

In a secondary avenue of research, I explore how developing democracies adapt to new democratic rules. In a paper with Stephanie McNulty, we explore whether nationally mandated participatory reforms, such as participatory budgeting, help deepen democracy. In the first cross-national quantitative analysis of nationally mandated reform processes, we explore whether a combination of decentralization and participatory reforms improve governance. We find that with time, participatory reforms that are implemented at the local level improve participation and accountability but do not help to curb clientelism. In a related project, Stephanie McNulty, Jared Abbott, and I analyze the effects of participatory budgeting in Peru and ask whether robust participatory budgeting can increase pro-poor spending. Moreover, we explore how the composition of participants in both participatory budgeting meetings and technical councils affects the types of projects likely to be funded through participatory budgeting.