

Research Statement

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In my research, I ask two main questions: How are discretionary resources allocated across municipalities? and How do politicians engage in credit claiming for local public goods? In particular, I am focused on questions of resource allocation in the Global South. I am especially interested in weakly institutionalized party systems and how relationships between national and subnational politicians influence both how resources are redistributed and how voters determine who to reward for local improvements. My secondary interest includes questions of how new institutions in developing democracies affect elite behavior and citizen representation. I am committed to using a mixed-method approach, including formal theory, regression analysis, and survey experiments in order to test my theories from a variety of perspectives.

Distributive Politics in Weakly Institutionalized Party Systems

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 explore questions of resource allocation with a particular focus on how politicians use local public goods to persuade voters and encourage turnout.

In the first article of my dissertation, which is currently under review, I ask why local public goods are largely underprovided in new democracies. I argue that existing explanations tend to focus on the importance of copartisanship in order to explain how national politicians choose to target discretionary funds. However, in weakly institutionalized party environments, these explanations fall short since politicians are responsible for building and maintaining their own networks. I argue that where there are weakly institutionalized political parties, redistributive strategies will be shaped by national politician concerns about credit hijacking. I use a formal signaling model of the interactions between national politicians and mayors to analyze when mayors will attribute credit to national politicians. Mayors can choose to signal their ambition by investing in building and maintaining their voter network. The national politician observes this signal and then decides whether to provide a local public good to a municipality. Finally, the mayor decides whether to attribute credit to the national politician. I show that ambitious mayors, who aspire for higher level office, are more likely to attribute credit for local public goods than unambitious mayors and that under most conditions, national politicians will not be able to distinguish between ambitious and unambitious mayors. As a result, national politicians will moderate their use of benefits to reduce the potential risk of attributing benefits without receiving credit. I test this model using interview data with local and national level elites 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 voter networks. I use a Bayesian Mixed-Membership model in order to create a new, original measure 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, which is currently under review, 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 these 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.

I am currently expanding this research agenda in three ways. First, I am working on a project that considers how politicians adapt their strategies for distributing discretionary funds during different types of electoral cycles, including local elections, national elections, and elections for referenda. Second, 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. Finally, in a coauthored project with Jared Abbott, we explore how the presence of clientelist brokers in Venezuela's constituent assemblies intended to increase citizen access to decision making affects citizens access to government resources. We argue that these participatory venues are often coopted as a way to distribute clientelist benefits and look at the role of constituent assemblies in alleviating—or perpetuating—existing inequalities.

Credit Claiming in Weakly Institutionalized Party Environments

In my new research project, I am focusing on questions of credit claiming and credit attribution. In the first project, 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 there is an asymmetry in how citizens assign credit to politicians. Local level politicians will always receive credit due to their proximity to local projects. As a result, there is a ceiling effect where additional credit claiming will have no effect on how voters perceive local politicians. Conversely, national politicians need to engage in credit claiming in order to be associated with local projects. I argue that this means credit attribution is non zero-sum and that politicians can successfully share credit, even in weakly institutionalized party environments. 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 is invited to an inauguration, voters are more than twice as likely to identify legislators as responsible for funding the project and expect the legislator to receive electoral rewards. Moreover, when the national politician receives credit, voters are neither less likely to attribute credit to mayors nor are they less likely to anticipate the mayor receiving electoral rewards.

In order to better understand why voters do not update their beliefs on whether a mayor is responsible for providing local goods, I am designing an experiment to explore how citizens update their beliefs about which political actors deserve credit when faced with competing messages. Often, citizens receive contrasting information about what level of government provides local goods. I argue that citizens decide how to attribute credit to politicians based on the timing, intensity, and proximity of competing signals. I will vary who sends signals about credit, when these signals are sent, and how often signals are sent in order to understand when voters are likely to update their beliefs about which politician provides local benefits.

I also ask how local politicians decide when to attribute credit to national politicians. Although my citizen survey experiment shows that credit claiming does not harm a mayor's relationship with voters, I argue that mayors will be hesitant to share credit because of concerns about their own reputations. Therefore, only mayors who prioritize their elite networks are going to attribute credit. I use an elite survey experiment sent to mayors, town council members, and municipal bureaucrats in Colombia. This study moves from how citizens respond to credit attribution behavior in order to understand how politicians consider credit when making resource allocation decisions.

Finally, I am beginning a project with Natalia Bueno analyzing how local politicians use social media in order to claim credit for government projects. We compare the cases of Colombia and Brazil in order to see how different party systems and variation in the nature of local level governance affect how politicians communicate with citizens.

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, which is currently under review, 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 two related projects, 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.