Making it Personal

Clientelism, Favors, and the Personalization of Public Administration in Argentina

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Conventional wisdom suggests that patronage significantly increases a party's chances of staying in power.[1] It is assumed that patronage jobs are distributed to an incumbent's supporters in exchange for a wide range of political services—helping with campaigns, attending rallies, mobilizing voters—that are essential for attracting and maintaining electoral support.[2] However, we have surprisingly little systematic evidence about the political services that patronage employees actually provide in exchange for their jobs. We do not have any precise assessment of the types of services that are being provided, which employees provide these services, or the extent of this practice in public administration. This article focuses on one of the political activities that patronage employees regularly perform and that has been particularly neglected in the literature: providing favors.

In general, the literature on clientelism refers to favors and gifts (or goods) interchangeably to denote the types of "things" exchanged in clientelistic relationships. Many surveys on clientelism ask respondents whether they have received a "gift or favor" from a broker or political activist during the last election.[3] Similarly, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), the biggest ongoing survey in the Americas, includes a question about whether the respondent has been offered "a favor, food or some other thing or benefit."[4] Although the literature treats favors and material benefits as functional equivalents, they are not. The actors distributing favors are usually public employees or agents with access to public employees and state resources. From the point of view of the politician, favors are "free" in the sense that during working hours, public employees, on a salary paid by the state, can provide favors to voters. Parties do not have to invest in complex territorial machines or in procuring actual goods to deliver to voters.

Moreover, patronage workers do not even have to go out of their way to provide real favors—they just need to frame their interactions with citizens to make them look like personalized exchanges. Indeed, public employees can often turn a regular administrative task into a personal favor. When bureaucratic activity becomes a

constant personalization of the most routine tasks—transforming the provision of political favors into the normal way of dealing with citizens (i.e., voters)—public administration can be easily used for political gain. These types of favors are different from the distribution of material goods that most of the literature has focused on because they are directly and necessarily channeled via the state apparatus by patronage employees, thus routinizing and disguising eminently political relations.

While others have extensively documented the distribution of material goods for political support, the literature has paid less attention to the distribution of favors. The provision of favors, however, deserves much more attention for a number of reasons. First, from a politician's perspective, the provision of favors by state employees can be a very effective and extremely cheap way of obtaining and maintaining votes, hence making it more appealing and widespread.[5] The recurrent use of discretion—or perceived discretion—in the everyday undertakings of public sector employees, and the consequent personalization of problem-solving, help give voters the impression that personal relationships are vital for getting things done in the public administration. Once established, these personal connections can work as a strong incentive for voters to try to preserve the political status quo and keep the incumbent in office. If a citizen has established a personal connection with someone in the public sector (or with regular access to it) who provides help when needed, why would she vote for another party that might fire her contact? Moreover, since the link between the favor and the administration is so immediate and clear, it significantly facilitates credit claiming. Finally, because these services are explicitly connected to public administration, they can potentially affect equality of access to the state.

Given these negative effects, it is surprising that we do not have a precise assessment of who does these things or how widespread the practice is. Part of the reason we know so little about these issues is that obtaining reliable and systematic data is extremely difficult. The general understanding in the patronage literature is that, in the absence of effective civil service rules, public sector jobs are allocated mainly to supporters of the incumbent.[6] Although systematic evidence of political bias in hiring decisions is not always particularly reliable,[7] the conventional wisdom is that, in return for their jobs, employees hired in this way would provide political support to their bosses. In these "patronage contracts," providing political services such as organizing and attending rallies, mobilizing voters, or campaigning is assumed to be an implicit or explicit part of the agreement.[8] Based mainly on ethnographic work, existing studies tend to assume that political bias in hiring decisions gets translated into different types of political services.[9] However, there is no systematic evidence of the extent of the phenomenon and the types of services that employees actually provide. By using innovative techniques that increase the anonymity of responses and, as a consequence, the reliability of the data, this article is the first attempt to provide systematic evidence about the provision of political favors by public sector employees.

Do public employees actually provide political services? How widespread is this phenomenon? Who are the employees involved in these services? Are supporters of the incumbent more involved in these services? Do they behave differently than

non-supporters? In order to answer these questions, I draw on an original survey of public employees conducted in three Argentinean municipalities. I also rely on months of ethnographic work, during which I conducted interviews with public employees, political brokers, and politicians.[10] If patronage jobs are in fact disproportionally distributed to supporters in exchange for political services, we should observe that those supporters tend to be more involved than non-supporters in the actual provision of services. Indeed, this article shows that this empirical implication holds. In particular, in the following pages, I show that a) public employees grant favors very often, b) supporters of the incumbent grant more favors than non-supporters, c) supporters get asked to grant favors more often, d) those who asked for favors tend to be known by the employees, especially in the case of supporters, and e) supporters tend to be more "helpful" than non-supporters. Taken together, this evidence shows that patronage employees—those supporters of the incumbent hired in exchange for their services—do in fact comply with their side of the agreement and provide political services in exchange for their jobs.

Granting Favors

The literature on pork-barrel politics provides extensive evidence that rules about the distribution of material benefits are often manipulated for political gain by both politicians and state officials.[11] This discretion in the administration of government-funded programs—often anti-poverty programs, targeted food assistance, or unemployment benefits—can also be found at the individual level. In places with weak institutions, public officials usually have considerable discretion on how and when to enforce the rules. In this situation, for many people—especially the poor— it is crucial to have regular access to someone in government or someone with access to government officials who can provide solutions to specific problems, or make exceptions when needed.

Political bias can then be found both at the aggregate level—in the distribution of resources across regions or groups— and at the individual level, as this article documents. For instance, Weitz-Shapiro shows that Argentinean mayors enjoy significant power to include or exclude specific people from the list of beneficiaries of a food assistance program.[12] In her study of machine politics in Argentina, Szwarcberg also describes situations in which problems are solved—and exceptions are made—at the individual level: "Anyone visiting local legislative offices on any business day will notice people waiting to talk with a councilor in the hopes that he or she can help solve a personal problem."[13] Auyero also provides various examples of the kind of problems that poor people get solved through the Peronist Party network in an Argentinean municipality.[14]

Although the poor are both most vulnerable to the arbitrariness of the state and most in need of its protection, the need for favors from government officials when dealing with the state is not restricted to them. For instance, Szwarcberg cites an owner of a taxi service in Argentina: "If local politicians want to punish a businessman they simply enforce existing local regulations."[15] And, of course, the types of favors provided by

political appointees in high-level positions very rarely benefit the poor: business and market regulations, subsidies, loans, and procurement contracts for government infrastructure are all activities that permit considerable discretion and case-by-case targeting.[16] Moreover, the diversion of state funds for political activities also requires having willing supporters of the incumbent in key administrative positions.[17] Having supporters appointed to relevant positions makes it easier for parties and politicians to get public employees to do them favors or make exceptions of this kind.

In this article I focus on the favors that low and mid-level bureaucrats grant to citizens and those who often act on their behalf (political brokers). Even when restricting the analysis to this group, the type of favors that employees provide is diverse. Since most of the literature has focused on the exchange of votes for material benefits, the manipulation of public policies that distribute these types of benefits has received a lot of attention. This is certainly important. For example, with regards to adding beneficiaries into the rosters of public welfare programs, one public employee explained that the way they found most of the cases of people in need is through their network of activists: "The majority are activists, the ones that come to me with the names of the people that need help … many of them [the beneficiaries] are politically active and I know them personally."[18] But public employees—both brokers and less important patronage employees—do a lot more than distribute or manipulate the distribution of material benefits.

The day I interviewed the employee mentioned above, for instance, he was about to meet with someone who wanted his help with organizing an art exhibition. As he pointed out, not all favors are about "issues of extreme need and urgency, of food. … To the extent that you can, you help with a bunch of [different] things."[19] Another employee referred to other examples:

> From a person that does not want to wait in line to get his driver's license and he calls us and says: "Is there any way that I can get the license without having to wait in line?" … To someone that has a problem because his father fell and broke his leg and needs to go to the hospital, and instead of calling the hospital directly, he calls us for us to send his father to the hospital. … To a group of young people that calls me because they want to meet with me to organize a party ….[20]

Note that in many of these cases more than one person is involved. Less influential employees can only get certain types of favors done, usually the ones that are closely related to their bureaucratic role. But brokers—often patronage employees themselves—can provide favors in many areas because they have connections to other patronage employees who help them help others. Another example illustrates this point:

> Imagine a guy whose father died and who does not have a place to hold a wake … But he knows that there is a broker (*referente*) who is a **friend** of the Secretary of Social Welfare at the Municipality, also in charge of the Cemetery … So you pick up the phone and in five minutes you are saying: "go see Juan, who is the director of the cemetery, **he** will give you a service, a coffin, a wreath, six hours in a place to hold a wake …."[21] (Emphasis added.)

When a broker gets something done for someone else, there are often other public employees involved—in this example, the director of the cemetery. So even in the cases in which brokers themselves do not hold public sector jobs, they use their connections with patronage employees to get things done. Repeatedly, the brokers interviewed referred to picking up the phone to solve things; the person on the other side of the phone is almost always a public official.

Making It Personal

The existing literature, as well as my own fieldwork, thus suggests that politicians and public officials enjoy significant discretion to manipulate public resources for political gain. Frequently, however, patronage employees do not manipulate the rules or provide any real favor. A normal administrative task can be perceived as a personal favor if the employee manages to personally claim credit for it—if she can appear to be helping. Without breaking any rules, maybe just by making an exception, or providing some information that the citizen does not have, in other words by simply doing their jobs or speeding things up, patronage employees can give the impression that they are the reason problems get solved and services are provided. If they manage to successfully create the perception that they—rather than the municipality as an institution—are personally responsible for the task accomplished, they can claim credit for it.

Patronage employees—especially the most active ones, political brokers—understand this logic perfectly, and they are fully aware of the importance of these personal connections that facilitate credit claiming. For instance, in discussing the difference between collecting food assistance with an ATM card as opposed to receiving a bag directly from the person in charge of distribution, a public employee (and local broker) puts it clearly: " … it is not the same thing because the ATM card does not listen to you, does not speak to you, does not understand you (*no te contiene*), does not ask you how you are doing …"[22] In contrast, another employee claimed to be happy with the new system of ATM cards because that would actually reduce poor people's "broker dependence" (*dependencia punteril*). Somewhat ironically, he communicated this change by personally calling all the beneficiaries he knew, and, when he did not know the beneficiary personally, he called the activist who referred the beneficiaries.[23] These efforts to create or reinforce the personal connection do seem to work. A passage from Auyero's ethnography of the Peronist network in a slum in Argentina illustrates this point:

> Most of the residents of Villa Paraíso also consider the brokers to be personally responsible for the distribution of goods and services. It is not the government that gets them their jobs, grants them their pensions, buys them their medicine, finds them their food. It is Matilde, or Juancito, or Andrea.[24]

Matilde, Juancito, and Andrea are brokers; Matilde is also a councilwoman and both Juancito and Andrea are local public employees. When things get solved, Matilde, Juancito, or Andrea are the ones who get credit, but other public officials are involved

in getting these things done. In other words, brokers—sometimes, public employees themselves—often act as intermediaries between voters and other patronage employees. In this role, they manage to claim personal credit for things that are in fact provided by the public administration with state resources.

In sum, my own fieldwork and existing qualitative studies provide substantial evidence of the widespread practice of favor provision by public employees. This qualitative approach, however, is limited in its ability to measure the extent of the phenomenon and to provide precise and systematic evidence about political bias. Based on these studies, the conventional wisdom is that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services—the provision of favors being one of those services. The main empirical implication of this assumption is that supporters—those that are more likely to have obtained their jobs through a patronage agreement—should be more involved in the provision of services than non-supporters. To assess the validity of this claim, however, we need individual level data and a reliable way of measuring the provision of favors. In order to study the political bias in the provision of favors by public employees, I now turn to the survey and survey experimental evidence collected across local public administrations in Argentina.

Research Design

Case selection Survey data were gathered in face-to-face interviews of 1,184 lower- and mid-level local public sector employees in three Argentinean municipalities.[25] I selected three very distinct municipalities from different provinces: Salta (Salta), Santa Fe (Santa Fe), and Tigre (*Conurbano Bonaerense*, Buenos Aires). Although the municipalities were not selected at random, they are illustrative of the diverse economic and political realities of the country. By including a municipality from the poorer north dominated by the Peronist party (Salta), a municipality from the relatively richer and more competitive center (Santa Fe), and one from the *Conurbano Bonaerense* (Tigre), I capture the regional diversity of Argentine politics. The municipalities—while similar in population size—vary significantly in their political and economic characteristics, providing a good opportunity to study the provision of favors across different political and economic environments.[26]

The Survey[27] Together with a team of research assistants, I interviewed around 400 employees in each municipality. Within each municipality, I generated a random sample based on the official list of public employees (excluding elected officials and high-level positions).[28] The selected employees were then approached at public offices during their working hours.

Asking directly about the provision of favors is problematic because respondents could get offended, refuse to answer, or provide untruthful responses. To get around this problem of social desirability bias, increase the response rate, and produce more valid estimates, I implemented two distinct but complementary strategies.

First, I embedded a list experiment in the survey. Second, I followed Scacco's strategy and split the questionnaire into two parts.[29] Part A of the survey instrument contained questions on the background and general information about the respondent, the less sensitive questions, and the list experiment described below. Part B had the most sensitive and direct questions about voting behavior and political preferences. Each part of the questionnaire was marked with a different identification number that could only be matched with a document not available to the enumerators. Apart from this number, the second part of the questionnaire had no information that could be used to identify the respondent. Enumerators administered Part A of the questionnaire, while Part B was read and filled out by the respondents themselves. In this way, the other employees in the office were neither able to hear the questions nor the answers. Finally, the respondents were asked to store the second part of the questionnaire in a sealed cardboard box similar to a ballot box.

List Experiment In a list experiment, the survey sample is split into random halves: a treatment and a control group. Each group is read the same question and shown a card with a number of response options.[30] Cards for the control and treatment group differ only in whether the item we care about is included with a list of other items. Respondents are asked to report the number of items on the card that applies to them, but not which ones. To study the provision of favors, both groups were read the following question: "Now I am going to hand you a card that mentions a number of activities. Please, I would like for you to tell me HOW MANY of those you did in the last week. Please, do not tell me which ones, just HOW MANY." The control group received a card with the following activities: (A) Talk about politics with someone, (B) Try to convince someone of the strengths and weaknesses of some politician, (C/D) Try to convince someone of the strengths and weaknesses of some public policy, and (D/E) Have a serious fight with someone due to political differences. The treatment group was given a similar card, with an extra activity placed in the third position: (C) Help someone with an errand or task (*trámite o gestión*) at the City Hall.

The question does not ask the respondent to mention specific activities, only how many of those activities she did. Thus, as long as the respondent understands that the anonymity of her response is protected, list experiments generate more accurate responses and more valid estimates than direct questioning. Since respondents were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups, as long as the randomization was successful, the two groups would be identical, on average, on both observable and unobservable characteristics.[31] Therefore, an estimate of the proportion of respondents providing favors can be obtained by comparing the average responses across groups.

Granting Favors: List-Experiment Estimates

Table 1 presents the results of the list experiment in which the treatment category is "help someone at the City Hall." Note that the question asks about helping "someone"

so it might refer to directly helping citizens, but it could also refer to helping other patronage employees help citizens. The average number of activities reported by employees in the control group is 1.14, while the average in the treatment group is 1.58. The estimated percentage of employees helping others with errands or tasks at the City Hall in the week prior to the interview is a highly significant 44 percent. This result indicates that the provision of favors is a frequent activity in these Argentine municipalities, providing the first systematic test for the conventional wisdom on this topic.

Table 1 List-Experiment Estimate

	Favors
Treatment	1.58
	(0.05)
	N=591
Control	1.14
	(0.05)
	N=590
Treatment effect	0.44***
	(0.07)
	N=1181

Note: List-experiment control and treatment values are the mean number of items identified by respondents in each group (Rows 1 and 2). Row 3 displays the average treatment effect (estimated proportion of the population that reported providing favors). Standard errors in parentheses and number of subjects in each condition (N) display below. Two-sample t-test with unequal variance. *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 90, 95, and 99 percent levels.

To be sure, I am not claiming that 44 percent of the employees were involved in clientelistic arrangements in which help is provided with the expectation of getting political support in return. However, personalized interactions between public employees and voters are a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for generating clientelistic relations. Clientelistic exchanges are simply unfeasible in an impersonal administration. Exploring whether the provision of these favors might or might not be used for political gain is the goal of this article.

Who Grants Favors?

The general understanding in the literature is that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political backing. If public sector jobs are in fact disproportionally distributed to supporters in exchange for their services, one should observe a disproportional number of supporters involved in the provision of those services. In order to show that supporters are in fact more involved in the provision of favors than non-supporters, I calculate the difference in the list experiment estimates across sub-groups. Support for the mayor ("Mayor Party") is measured by asking

respondents whether they identify themselves with the party of the mayor. As an alternative measure, I use "Mayor Voter," employees that reported having voted for the incumbent mayor in the last election. Table 2 presents the list experiment estimates of the provision of favors across supporters and non-supporters, as well as the difference between them.

Table 2 List-Experiment Estimates Conditional on Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristic	No	Yes	Differences in Effects
Mayor Voter	0.25**	0.54**	0.29**
	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.15)
	N=430	N=680	N=1110
Mayor Party	0.37***	0.57***	0.20
	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.15)
	N=797	N=384	N=1181

Note: Average treatment effects calculated as the difference between the treatment and the control groups. Standard errors in parentheses calculated with unequal variance; ***p < 0.01, **p< 0.05, *p < 0.1.

Table 2 shows that there are large differences in means in the expected directions. First, supporters are in fact more likely to be involved in helping people. Among the subgroups of employees who reported having voted for the current mayor ("Mayor Voter"), the proportion of those who reported helping someone is 54 percent; among those who reported not voting for the current mayor the proportion is 25 percent. The 29 percentage-points difference is significant at the 95 percent level. Among the subgroup of employees who self-identified with the party of the mayor ("Mayor Party"), the proportion of those who reported providing favors is 57 percent; among those who do not identify with the party of the mayor, the proportion diminishes to 37 percent (though this 20 percentage-points difference is not significant). Taken together, these results provide evidence that supporters of the mayor are indeed more likely to grant favors, suggesting that patronage agreements between mayors and their supporters are in place and working effectively.

Asking for Favors

The fact that supporters are more involved in helping people is both consistent with a situation in which supporters are more often asked for favors and a situation in which supporters and non-supporters are equally likely to be asked for favors, but only supporters are willing to grant those favors—a distinction with very different implications. The first scenario might indicate a general public that understands that there are benefits in approaching employees who are better connected politically. The second one shows a different attitude among supporters and non-supporters—the former being more willing (or capable) to help. Here, I present evidence in favor of the first scenario. A higher proportion of supporters—both those who reported voting for the incumbent mayor

and those that identified themselves with her party— provides favors more often, at least partially because they are asked for favors more often.

To test this claim I asked employees: "How frequently do people come to you to ask you for favors related to your work here at the municipality?" Responses were coded on a 1–6 scale: (1) never, (2) a couple of times a year, (3) a couple of times a month, (4) 1–2 times a week, (5) 3 times a week and more, and (6) every day. To measure support, I use the variables described above, "Mayor Voter" and "Mayor Party." I also include controls for two variables that might affect employees' willingness or ability to provide political services, namely, education and type of contract. Presumably, more educated employees occupy positions of more power that provide more opportunities to grant favors. In addition, tenured employees, who cannot get fired, might behave differently from non-tenured employees. The education variable ("College") is coded 1 when the respondent has a college degree and zero otherwise. The contract variable ("Tenure") is coded 1 when the respondent enjoys tenure rights and zero otherwise. The models also include controls for age, gender, time of hiring, and municipality to control for regional effects. The age variable ("Age") takes on values from 1 to 5, corresponding to respondents who are 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, and older than 55. The gender variable ("Female") is coded 1 for female respondents and zero otherwise. The time of hiring ("Current Mayor") is coded 1 when the respondent was hired by the current administration and zero otherwise. Finally, the models also include a variable ("Reciprocal") to control for personal propensity to help others. This variable was measured with the following question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'We always have to return the favors that people do us'." Respondents were offered the following response options: strongly agree, agree more than disagree, disagree more than agree, strongly disagree. This variable is coded 1 if the respondent said "strongly agree" or "agree more than disagree," and zero otherwise.[32]

Table 3 presents the results of a series of OLS regressions in which the outcome variable takes on values from 1 to 6, with higher numbers corresponding to higher frequencies of being asked for favors. The regression results reported in columns 1 and 2 measure support using previous vote for the incumbent mayor ("Mayor Voter"), whereas results reported in columns 3 and 4 measure support using self-identification with the party of the mayor ("Mayor Party"). Columns 1 and 3 include only controls for age, gender, education, and municipality, whereas results in columns 2 and 4 also include controls for type of contract, time of hiring, and reciprocity. The main results from the different models are quite similar and consistent with my expectations. The models that include the full sets of controls (columns 2 and 4) provide slightly stronger results for the variables of interest, so I focus on interpreting these results.

The coefficients on "Mayor Voter" and "Mayor Party" are both positive and significant, indicating that being a supporter is correlated with a higher frequency of requests for favors. Both measures of support are associated with a significant 0.5 unit increase in the frequency of demand for favors (measured on a 1–6 scale).

Two other results are worth mentioning. The first one is the strong and positive relation between being a woman and the frequency of favors asked. One possible

Table 3 Frequency of Favors

	Mayor Voter		Mayor Party	
Mayor Voter	0.50***	0.54***		
	(0.12)	(0.12)		
Mayor Party			0.46***	0.50***
			(0.12)	(0.13)
Age	0.04	−0.06	0.01	−0.08
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Female	0.42***	0.45***	0.46***	0.49***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
College	−0.45***	−0.44***	−0.55***	−0.55***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Salta	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.03
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.16)
Santa Fe	−0.03	−0.04	−0.02	−0.06
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Tenure		0.21		0.26
		(0.17)		(0.16)
Current Mayor		−0.24		−0.20
		(0.16)		(0.15)
Reciprocal		−0.11		−0.10
		(0.16)		(0.17)
Constant	2.76***	3.15***	2.98***	3.34***
	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.19)	(0.27)
Observations	1,096	1,085	1,063	1,054
R-squared	0.040	0.046	0.042	0.051

Note: An alternative specification for these models would be an ordered probit since the frequency of favors is measured on a 1–6 scale, but results were very similar so I opted for OLS for simplicity. Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

explanation is that in Argentine administration women are common in positions that involve more face-to-face interactions with citizens, which allows for more requests for favors than jobs that are out of the view of ordinary citizens. Calculating the difference in the size of the list experiment estimate across gender shows that among female employees, the proportion of those that reported providing favors is 55 percent; among male employees, the proportion diminishes to 34 percent (though the 20 percentage-points difference is not significant).[33] Another result that is intriguing is the significant and negative relationship between the outcome variable and education: those without college degrees are more frequently asked for favors. Calculating the difference in the size of the list experiment estimate across those with and without a degree, however, shows that those without a degree are not more involved in the provision of favors than those with a degree.[34] Thus, although less educated employees are more frequently asked for favors—maybe because, as with women, they are more reachable than employees in higher positions—they may not be in a position to deliver effectively.[35]

It is possible that to be able to grant favors, employees need to be in positions of relative power, which are more often occupied by college-educated employees.

In sum, supporters are more frequently asked for favors than non-supporters. It is possible that employees more willing to provide political services self-select into positions that allow them to provide these services.[36] Another possibility, as I have argued elsewhere, is that personal connections and referrals are used for political screening, and politicians use political preferences to hire supporters rather than non-supporters.[37] Politicians might also use this information to assign patronage employees to those positions that involve more possibilities to grant favors. However, a situation in which citizens simply choose to ask favors from supporters, regardless of their positions, is also consistent with the data. So citizens may just prefer supporters. But how do citizens know how to screen supporters from non-supporters? And, if they prefer supporters, is there any evidence that supporters respond differently to these types of petitions? The next two sections deal with these issues.

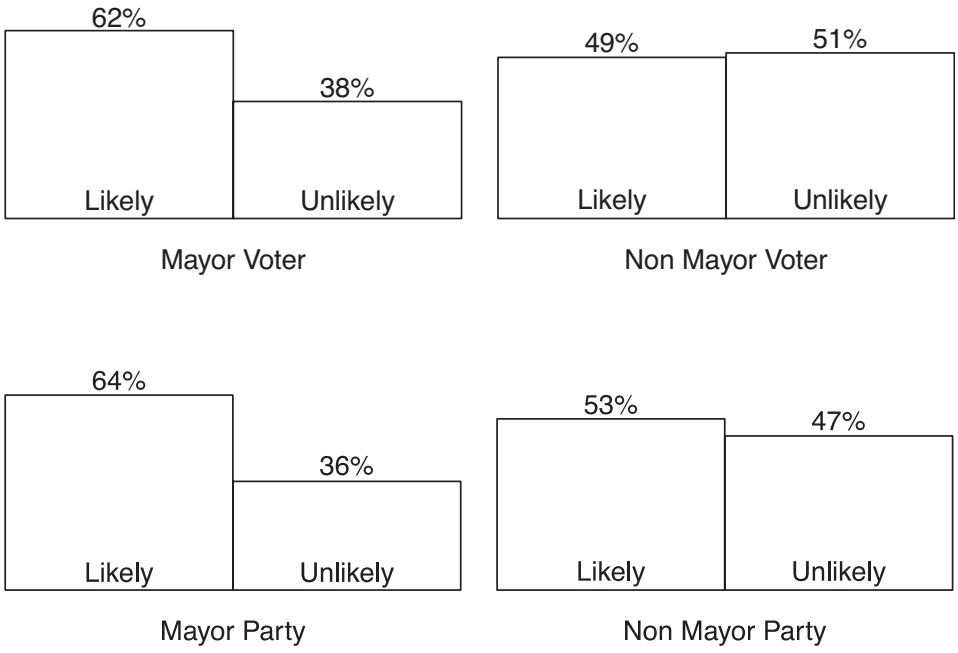
Personal Connections

How can citizens screen supporters from non-supporters? Although the most influential patronage employees—brokers—are usually well-known by everyone, screening supporters from non-supporters might be harder with respect to less influential patronage employees. Here, I provide evidence that people asking for favors are able to target supporters because they actually know them.

To test this claim I used the following question: "How likely is it that the person who is asking you for a favor is: a) a friend or acquaintance, b) a relative, c) an stranger sent by someone you know, and d) a complete stranger?" The response options were: very likely, likely, not very likely, and unlikely. I coded the former two options as "likely" and the latter two as "unlikely" to facilitate the discussion. Figure 1 displays the responses for option "a" (friend or acquaintance), across supporters (left panels), and non-supporters (right panels).

Figure 1 shows that supporters respond significantly differently than non-supporters. About 60 percent of those who reported voting for the mayor in the previous election (top-left panel) responded that it was very likely/likely that the person who asked for a favor was a friend or acquaintance; while a little less than 40 percent responded that this was not very likely/unlikely. In contrast, among non-voters, the responses were equally distributed among the two categories (49 and 51, respectively). I find a similar pattern for partisans and non-partisans. Among those who self-identified with the party of the mayor, 64 percent reported that it was very likely/likely that the person who asked for a favor was a friend or an acquaintance, while only 36 percent responded that this was not very likely or unlikely. In contrast, among those who do not identify with the party of the mayor, while we still find slightly more responses in the very likely/likely category (53 percent), the difference with the other category (47 percent) is only five percentage points.

Figure 1 Being Asked for Favors from Friends and Acquaintances, Across Supporters and Non-Supporters



In sum, supporters get asked for favors by a disproportionate number of friends and acquaintances, suggesting that most people understand the importance of political connections. The testimony of an employee from Salta provides a good example of this dynamic. Besides working at the local administration, she was involved in voluntary work as the head of a neighborhood center. These centers organize social and cultural events, and, in poor neighborhoods like hers, they are also often used as soup kitchens and for the distribution of food assistance benefits. When asked about how much interest she had in politics, she emphatically replied: "Very interested! All the contacts [you need] to bring things to your neighborhood are political contacts."[38]

Moreover, the fact that citizens prefer going to supporters they know when in need of help reinforces the idea that these are considered to be favors and not regular administrative tasks that any employee would do. As discussed in previous sections, a regular administrative task can be framed and perceived as a favor. To the extent that employees can appear to be helping, to be providing some personalized service, they can claim credit for it, and the data presented here strongly suggest that citizens consider personal connections to be important to get things done. If these connections were not seen as relevant by citizens, they would not choose supporters over non-supporters, and employees they knew over strangers. When knowing a public employee who can provide this type of personalized help becomes important to citizens, the public administration can be easily used for political gain.

Note that those asking for favors could be voters themselves or brokers acting on their behalf. Many of the "friends and acquaintances" who ask for favors might be brokers asking for something for one of their clients. And, of course, brokers know perfectly well who the employees are that could help and where they can be found. Recall the conversation quoted earlier in the article about a broker calling the director of the cemetery (his friend) to help organize a wake. Brokers themselves are also well-known. A conversation with a public employee (and broker) from La Matanza illustrates this point: "For instance, if I had a problem, I wouldn't think about calling you," I said to him; "Because you don't know me," he replied. He then explained the kind of people that usually come to him for help: "All kinds of people. … It can be people who know you because you have a friendship relation, a neighborhood relation, people who know you are in politics. … I'm 55 years old, and I've been politically active since age 16. … People know me one way or the other."[39]

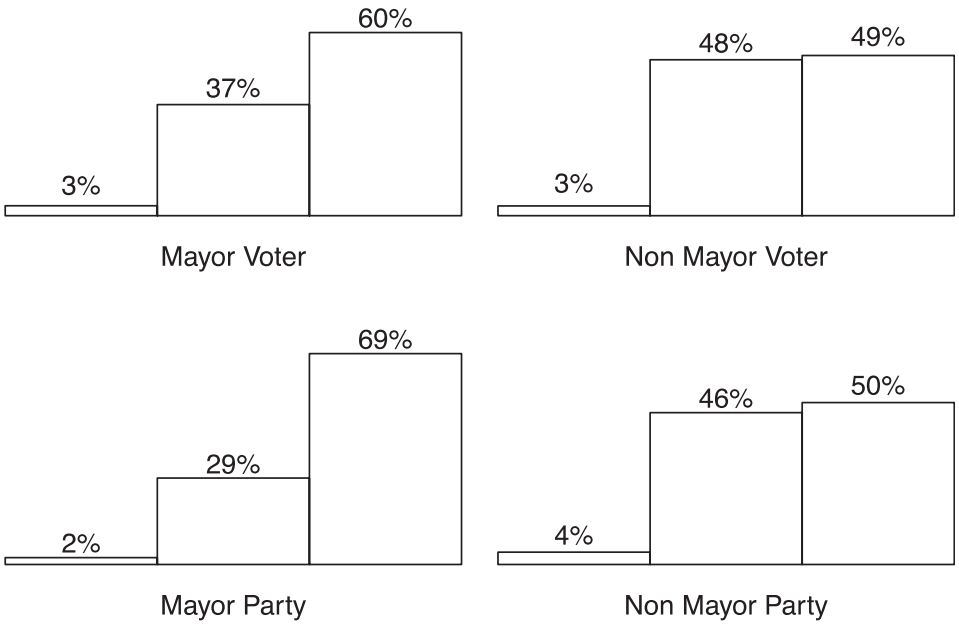
Whether the favor comes directly from a public employee or from a broker—who may or may not be an employee herself— knowing the right person seems to be fundamental for getting things done. Voters may know a broker who might act on their behalf or they may know a less influential employee. Brokers, in turn, are known by everyone, and they know better than anyone who can be asked to do what, which allows them to provide a very diverse portfolio of favors—more than regular employees who might only be able to help people in their own area of work. Brokers are, in Auyero's words, at the center of the "problem-solving network."

Are Supporters More Helpful?

Supporters more frequently grant favors, and they are also more frequently asked for favors (especially by friends and acquaintances). From the voters' point of view, to the extent that supporters of the mayor are more eager to help than others, it is reasonable to keep on asking supporters for help. To study differences in responsiveness among employees, I asked the following question: "Now I am going to ask about a hypothetical situation: Imagine that someone comes to you and asks you for a favor, but the thing she is asking is actually handled by another office or person, then you: a) tell her that you are not the person in charge of that, b) tell her to which office she has to go, or c) tell her to which office she has to go and give her the name of someone that you know at that office to make sure that the problem gets solved." About 3 percent responded "a," about 40 percent responded "b," and about 57 percent responded "c."[40] To test whether these responses vary across supporters and non-supporters, Figure 2 presents the set of responses split across those who reported voting for the incumbent mayor in the previous election and those who did not (top panels) and those who self-identified with the party of the mayor and those who did not (bottom panels).

Figure 2 shows that supporters responded differently than non-supporters to the hypothetical question. First, option "a," the least "helpful" of the three options, was chosen by a very small percentage of employees (2–4 percent) across all groups, so

Figure 2 Helpful Responses, Across Supporters and Non-Supporters



I focus on discussing the other two, more interesting, response options. About 60 percent of those who reported voting for the incumbent mayor (top-left panel) chose option "c," the most "helpful" option, while about 37 percent chose option "b," the least helpful option, a difference that is substantively and statistically significant. Among non-voters (top right panel), 49 percent chose option "c" and 48 percent chose option "b." A similar pattern is found when comparing supporters of the mayor's party to non-supporters. About 69 percent of those who self-identified with the party of the mayor (bottom-left panel) chose the more helpful option ("c"), while 29 percent chose the less helpful one.[41] In contrast, about 50 percent of non-supporters of the party of the mayor chose the helpful option, while 46 percent chose the less helpful option.[42]

These results show that supporters are more prone to try to help voters (or brokers on behalf of voters), suggesting that it might make perfect sense for citizens to try to find supporters when in need of a favor. Either because supporters are more eager to provide political services (favors to citizens, in this case) or because supporters are better equipped (they may know the "right" person to ask), citizens' preferences for seeking help from supporters seem to be based on real differences in supporters' predisposition to respond positively.

Conclusion

In this article, I provide evidence that those who are more likely to have gotten their jobs through patronage agreements—supporters of the incumbent—are those who are

in fact more involved in the provision of political services. In particular, supporters of the incumbent are disproportionally more involved in granting favors than non-supporters. The literature assumes that patronage jobs are distributed to the incumbent's supporters in exchange for different forms of political services that are crucial for attracting and maintaining electoral support. This article is, to my knowledge, the first to provide systematic evidence in support of this conventional wisdom. Using novel techniques that increase the anonymity of responses and, as a consequence, the reliability of the data, I am able to provide reliable evidence on the provision of political favors by public sector employees. First, using the list experiment technique, I provide a precise estimate of how many employees are actually involved in the provision of favors within the local administrations studied. Second, I show that supporters of the incumbent do in fact provide favors more often than non-supporters and that they are also more eager to help. I also provide evidence that voters can screen supporters from non-supporters and that they—possibly because they understand the importance of political connections—choose to ask favors more often from supporters than from non-supporters.

The fact that supporters do in fact provide more favors than non-supporters—i.e., they actually comply with their side of the patronage agreement—leads one to ask the "why" question. Why would public employees comply with their side of the patronage contract after receiving the job? What motivates employees to keep on providing these types of services? Although beyond the scope of this article, this is of course an important question that remains unanswered by the analysis presented above. Existing explanations are based either on fear of punishment (clients comply with their side of the agreement because they are afraid the patron will cut off the benefit if they fail to do so) or feelings of reciprocity (clients comply with the agreement because they want to help the person who has helped them). In a theory of patronage developed elsewhere, I argue, in contrast, that the reason supporters are more involved in the provision of political services (in this case, providing favors) is that patronage jobs are disproportionally distributed to supporters who believe that their fates are tied to the political fate of the incumbent.[43] Patronage jobs (and working conditions) enjoyed by supporters will be maintained by the incumbent politician (their patron) but not by a competing politician. The reason for this is that supporters of the incumbent cannot credibly commit to provide political services for the opposition. Supporters then have large incentives to provide political services to help the incumbent stay in power, which makes their original commitment to provide these services credible. As a result, supporters are more involved in helping those who asked for favors because they understand that it is in their best interest to try to help the incumbent politician remain in power.

This article focuses on a unique type of political service—the provision of favors—that is not necessarily attached to the electoral cycle. As an employee bluntly explained it, "people get needy" around elections, but favors are requested and granted in non-electoral times as well.[44] The fact that patronage employees provide favors is not only important because it is an activity that is done continually, but, most significantly, because it is a very cheap and potentially effective way for the incumbent to gain

and maintain electoral support. The use, or the perceived use, of discretion in the everyday tasks of public employees gives voters the impression that personal relations are important for getting things done in the public administration. Once established, these personal connections can work as strong incentives favoring the maintenance of the status quo. Citizens who receive help from state officials or intermediaries understand that their personal connections have been critical for that purpose. If a citizen established a personal connection with someone in the public administration (or with easy access to it) who provides help when needed, why would she vote for another party? Citizens seem to have a strong incentive to want to maintain the status quo by keeping the incumbent in office and their connection with the state intact.

It is also important to note that proximity to political networks is not necessarily need-based.[45] Even if a voter is in crucial need for help, she may not be connected to a patronage employee who is in a position to help. The fact that public sector jobs are distributed with a partisan bias raises serious questions about the independence of public administration and the possibility of equal access to the state. A politicized bureaucracy that lacks independence leads to a lack of impartiality in the treatment of citizens. As Chandra argues, in patronage democracies "proximity to a state official increases a voter's chances of obtaining valued state resources and services."[46] What about citizens with no "proximity to a state official?"

NOTES

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1. In this article, I define patronage as the discretionary and personalized exchange of public sector jobs for political support. I use the term patronage contract to denote that patrons and clients engage in a *contract-like* exchange relationship in which politicians provide public jobs in exchange for political support. Patronage contracts are implicit or explicit agreements between those who get (or expect to get) a patronage job (the client) and those who get (or expect to get) political support in return (the patron). Similarly, patronage employees are simply those who got their jobs with the *expectation* of providing political support in return.

2. I define supporter simply as a public employee who supports the incumbent. At the very minimum, this support involves electoral support.

3. See, for example, Ezequiel González Ocantos, Chad Kiewiet De Jonge, Carlos Meléndez, Javier Osorio, and David Nickerson, "Vote Buying and Social Desirability Bias: Experimental Evidence from Nicaragua," *American Journal of Political Science*, 56 (January 2012), 202–17; Susan Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno, and Valeria Brusco, *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

4. Others have opted to ask only about material benefits: Ernesto Calvo and María Victoria Murillo, "When Parties Meet Voters. Assessing Political Linkages Through Partisan Networks and Distributive Expectations in Argentina and Chile," *Comparative Political Studies*, 46 (July 2013), 851–82; Frederico Finan and Laura Schechter, "Vote-Buying and Reciprocity," *Econometrica,* 80 (March 2012), 863–81; Ezequiel

González Ocantos, Chad Kiewiet De Jonge, and David Nickerson, "The Conditionality of Vote-Buying Norms: Experimental Evidence from Latin America," *American Journal of Political Science,* 58 (January 2014), 197–211.

5. However, for the potential costs of clientelism, see Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro, "What Wins Votes: Why Some Politicians Opt out of Clientelism," *American Journal of Political Science,* 56 (July 2012), 568–83.

6. Indeed, in Virginia Oliveros, *A Working Machine: Patronage Jobs and Political Services in Argentina,* Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 2013), I show the existence of political bias in hiring in the three municipalities studied.

7. For an exception, see Ernesto Calvo and María Victoria Murillo, "Who Delivers? Partisan Clients in the Argentine Electoral Market," *American Journal of Political Science,* 48 (October 2004), 742–57.

8. Ernesto Calvo and Gergely Ujhelyi, "Political Screening: Theory and Evidence from the Argentine Public Sector," Working Paper (2012).

9. See, for example, Javier Auyero, *Poor People's Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Mariela Szwarcberg, *Making Local Democracy: Political Machines, Clientelism, and Social Networks in Argentina,* Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2009); Rodrigo Zarazaga, "Brokers beyond Clientelism," *Latin American Politics and Society,* 56 (2014), 23–45.

10. Interviews were conducted in Buenos Aires, Salta, Santa Fe, and Tigre between 2009 and 2011.

11. For a review of this literature, see Miriam Golden and Brian Min, "Distributive Politics around the World," *Annual Review of Political Science,* 16 (May 2013), 73–99.

12. Weitz-Shapiro.

13. Szwarcberg, 51.

14. Auyero.

15. Szwarcberg, 144.

16. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction," in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients, and Policies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–49.

17. Daniel Gingerich, *Political Institutions and Party-Directed Corruption in South America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

18. Interview, La Matanza, August 10, 2009.

19. Interview, La Matanza, August 10, 2009.

20. Interview, La Plata, August 5, 2009.

21. Name was changed to ensure anonymity. Interview, La Plata, August 5, 2009.

22. Interview, La Plata, August 5, 2009.

23. Interview, La Matanza, August 10, 2009.

24. Auyero, 165.

25. Top positions at all levels of government, even in the cases where civil services regulations do exist, are discretionally appointed. Civil service systems usually allow for political appointments at the higher levels of the bureaucracy. Top positions were, therefore, excluded from the sample.

26. See Table A1 in the Supplementary Appendix for more information on the municipalities. It is available at http://virginiaoliveros.com/writing/

27. More information about the survey is provided in the Supplementary Appendix.

28. Information on public employment is not publicly available, and Argentinean politicians are usually very reluctant to share it, so obtaining these data was particularly challenging. The fact that obtaining these lists was a daunting task illustrates the opacity of the Argentine civil service.

29. Alexandra Scacco, "Who Riots? Explaining Individual Participation in Ethnic Violence," Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 2010).

30. Since most interviews were conducted in front of others, the list of responses was not read aloud.

31. Table A5 in the Supplementary Appendix reports the average gender, age, education, and salary for both groups. The similarity of these averages across the two groups suggests that groups were balanced in terms of observable characteristics and that the assignment was indeed random.

32. The distribution of responses was: 66% strongly agree, 20% agree more than disagree, 8% disagree more than agree, and 6% strongly disagree. An alternative coding, grouping the last three responses together, yields similar results.

33. See Table A6 in the Supplementary Appendix.

34. Among the subgroups of employees with college degrees, the proportion of those that reported helping someone is 42 percent; among those without a degree the proportion is 44 percent. The 2 percentage-points difference is not significant. See Table A6 in the Supplementary Appendix.

35. Another possibility is that, as shown by González Ocantos et al. (2014), social desirability bias is higher among the more educated, so, when asked directly, those with college degrees tend to lie more.
36. Calvo and Ujhelyi.
37. Oliveros, 2013.
38. Interview, Salta, June 15, 2011.
39. Interview, La Matanza, August 10, 2009.
40. These percentages are calculated over a population of 895 employees, those that did not answer "never" to the question about how often they were asked for favors.
41. In both cases ("Mayor Voter" and "Mayor Party"), a chi-squared test indicates that we can reject the null hypothesis that being a supporter is independent of the response about the hypothetical favor.
42. Note, however, that these different responses across supporters and non-supporters are not based on years on the job. Comparing the responses of those who got their jobs during the incumbent's administration and those who got their jobs before yields no significant differences. See Table A7 on the Supplementary Appendix.
43. Oliveros.
44. Interview, Tigre, January 6, 2011.
45. Calvo and Murillo, 2013.
46. Kanchan Chandra, "Counting Heads: A Theory of Voter and Elite Behavior in Patronage Democracies," in Kitschelt and Wilkinson, eds., 87.