

**Incorporating Marginal Citizens and Voters:
The Conditional Electoral Effects of Targeted Social Assistance in Latin America¹**

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In this paper we study how social assistance shapes election results across Latin America. Case studies in several countries have found electoral effects, yet it remains unclear whether and how effects vary cross-nationally, and whether electoral effects are due to mobilization or persuasion. We theorize that programs mobilize non-voters and convert the opposition simultaneously, but that the effects vary based on country-level political and programmatic differences. Using 2012 AmericasBarometer data, we develop a unified cross-national model that confirms that public assistance makes recipients more likely to turn out and, once at the polls, to vote for the incumbent. Compulsory voting laws and program politicization magnify the electoral effects of social assistance, but effects do not vary by presidential ideology or program conditionalities. These findings are consistent with the perspective that Latin American voters are boundedly rational, retrospective agents whose behavioral choices depend on their resources and environmental context.

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Over the last two decades Latin American governments have transformed their social policies. Where policies were once universal in principal, and in practice disproportionately targeted to urban middle classes and unionized workers, governments now seek to help their poorest and most vulnerable citizens through targeted means-tested aid (Barrientos and Santibáñez 2009). Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs such as *Bolsa Família* in Brazil or *Oportunidades* in Mexico provide highly targeted cash assistance for impoverished families on the condition that they keep their children in school and make use of public health services. Even in countries such as Venezuela, where assistance is not strictly conditioned on compliance with public health or education goals, social service budgets targeted to the very poor have grown rapidly. While controversy remains over these new programs' exact contribution to Latin America's modest declines in inequality, as well as its more pronounced declines in poverty, global development scholars broadly agree that the new programs have helped the poor by reducing reliance on child labor, increasing school enrollment and attendance rates, increasing public health service usage, and improving caloric intake (see Adato and Hoddinott 2010).

Yet many observers note that these programs may boost not only human development prospects but also executives' electoral bases. Indeed, by altering beneficiaries' pocketbook calculations and directly linking recipients' well-being with state actors and policies, social assistance has the obvious potential to alter voting behavior. Many scholars have criticized past assistance programs in Latin America as legalized, politically expedient vote-buying schemes (Bruhn 1996; Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Diaz-Cayeros 2008; Graham and Kane 1998; Penfold-Becerra 2007; Rocha-Menocal 2001; Schady 2000). Though many new programs were designed to reduce or circumvent strategic manipulation (Fiszbein and Schady 2009; Sugiyama and Hunter 2013), informal practices may subvert formal institutions.

Case studies in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, and Uruguay provide compelling evidence that the new wave of CCT programs have helped incumbent executives maintain or build electoral support (e.g., Baez et al. 2012; De La O 2013; Licio et al. 2009; Linos 2013; Manacorda, Miguel, and Vigorito 2011; Zucco 2013). Still, important questions remain unresolved. The first and most basic regards the extent to which the pro-incumbent effects found in these few countries, ones with politically important, large, and conditional social assistance programs, generalize more broadly across the region. Indeed, the case studies themselves differ in the magnitude and nature of reported effects. For instance, evidence from Honduras suggests that the country's program has no significant effect on electoral behavior related to incumbent presidents but a highly significant one on mayoral voting (Linos 2013), whereas evidence from Uruguay suggests that the program there increased presidential support by 11 to 13 percentage points (Manacorda 2011). Other case studies find 7 and 9 percentage point increases in turnout and incumbent vote share, respectively, from Mexico's *Progresa* program (De La O 2013); effects on voter registration, turnout, and incumbent vote share of about 1.5 to 2.5 percentage points each, from Colombia's *Familias en Acción* program (Baez et al. 2012); and a 0.12 to 0.18 percentage point increase in incumbent vote share for each percentage point increase in municipal *Bolsa Família* receipt in Brazil (Zucco 2013). It can be hard to reconcile these cross-country differences due to varying measures, theoretical approaches, and methods. More worrisomely, this country-by-country approach may have led to the non-publication of relevant null results in countries where social assistance has been found *not* to have electoral effects.

This variation in outcomes is matched by great variation in political and institutional contexts. Social assistance programs are highly institutionalized in some settings and personalized extensions of the executive office in others. In some countries they are implemented

by leftist administrations publicly perceived as committed to helping the poor, and in others by centrist or center-right administrations. In some countries programs entail strict conditions requiring compliance with public health and education goals; in other countries conditionalities are unenforced or do not exist at all. Does institutionalization make program viability less dependent on electoral outcomes and therefore less subject to strategic appeals by the incumbent? Are beneficiaries more likely to reward leftist than rightist incumbents? And are they more or less likely to support incumbents when cash transfers bear behavioral requirements? Answering these questions requires a cross-national comparative framework.

Beyond the direction of vote choice, we also address the puzzle of whether and how programs pull non-voters into the electorate. Social assistance programs, we argue, can significantly decrease the costs and increase the benefits of going to the polls for marginalized citizens with few pre-existing ties to the state or the political system. Indeed, a recent study attributes the pro-incumbent effects of Mexico's *Progresa* program to mobilization of non-voters rather than conversion of the opposition (De La O 2013). However, such mobilizing effects may be less pronounced in countries enforcing compulsory voting rules, which already drive turnout among many marginalized citizens targeted by social assistance programs. At the same time, we argue that newly incorporated voters under compulsory voting weight assistance benefits particularly strongly when deciding whom to support, as they lack other prior political ties.

In this paper we seek to develop a more comprehensive theory of social assistance and electoral outcomes. We argue that receiving assistance alters the boundedly rational utility calculations of both those who would otherwise stay home on election day and those who would otherwise vote for the opposition, calculations that depend strongly on the political, institutional, and policy context. Empirically, we propose a unified model of vote direction and turnout (Lacy

and Burden 1999) with the individual as the unit of analysis. We provide the first Latin America-wide test of the electoral effects of conditional and unconditional aid to the poor using the 2012 AmericasBarometer, the first public opinion survey to measure social assistance beneficiary status across the region. Our dependent variable, which we analyze with non-hierarchical and hierarchical multinomial logistic regression, is based on a question regarding how respondents would vote in a hypothetical election held one week after the survey interview: abstain; vote for the incumbent; vote for an opposition party/candidate; or vote null/blank. Response options are thus comparable across the region, independent of domestic party systems and campaigns.

This analysis demonstrates that country context meaningfully shapes the electoral effects of social assistance in Latin America. In particular, assistance more strongly drives pro-incumbent voting under compulsory voting rules, and when presidents directly control the relevant agency. At the same time, the *conditional* aspect of CCT programs appears largely irrelevant for recipients' utility calculations, as does the incumbent administration's ideology. These findings suggest that social assistance recipients are boundedly rational, pocketbook voters, and that there are institutional arrangements that can rein in the tendency and ability of political elites to use social policy strategically.

Understanding the extent to which electoral effects are replicable across countries is important not only for scholars curious about the nature of the "social assistance electorate," but also for policy designers and the general public. If social assistance programs really do shore up a permanent pro-incumbent voting base, this is relevant information for public policy debates in countries in the process of implementing, expanding, or reforming assistance programs. And if aspects of program design can enhance or mitigate such effects, this is also important information. The significance of our approach is thus that it reveals that both preexisting

institutional arrangements and elements of social programs themselves shape what policy makers, politicians, and publics can expect. At the same time, as we discuss in the conclusion, it appears that assistance programs present trade-offs between competing normative objectives, such as accountability and programmatic orientation.

Social Assistance, Electoral and Policy Institutions, and Electoral Outcomes

Why might social assistance programs affect presidential voting? Scholars have found that social policy shapes the democratic consequences (positive or negative) of economic hardship (Campbell 2012). Both elite initiative and citizens' behavioral responses to policy incentives may lead to a correlation between assistance receipt and electoral outcomes. From an elite perspective, incumbents seeking their own reelection or that of their allies typically claim credit for or politicize social assistance programs, especially as elections draw closer (Alt and Rose 2007; Ames 1987; Franzese 2002; Schady 2000; Tufte 1978). Credit claiming can and does take many forms, from direct actions (e.g., press releases, interviews, or public announcements) to indirect ones (e.g., displaying pictures of the president in assistance intake offices, or mentioning the executive office of the president in ads). Assistance programs target a largely unorganized segment of the population whose interests can be met at a much lower marginal cost than those of middle and upper class citizens. Thus, vote-seeking but budget constrained politicians can more easily and often more visibly increase the number of people benefited by their administration or the per capita utility of benefits through assistance programs than through universal public goods (Taylor-Robinson 2010). Targeted assistance policies are particularly effective tools for incumbents because their effects are more immediate than those of other economic policies and because they often employ unique brands and identifying features that are

easily marketed (Akhmedov and Zhuravskaya 2004). Thus, elite efforts can influence recipients' attributions of blame or reward, shaping retrospective evaluations as well as perceptions of risk from an incumbent loss.

At the citizen level, we argue that social assistance benefits simultaneously reduce the costs and increase the benefits of turning out to vote, the latter in part by shaping the calculated utility of a vote for the incumbent. First, benefits reduce the *costs* of voting simply by providing new income that helps very low-income households deal with the immediate and opportunity costs of going to the polls, from bus fares to time away from work. In addition, many programs require (and help) recipients obtain identification documents necessary for both program registration and checking in at the polls on election day. Familiarization with state bureaucracy through program participation could also reduce the psychological or cognitive costs of turning out at the polls for marginalized families with very few prior positive experiences with the state. Thus, we expect that participating in social assistance programs may increase turnout across the board.

Second, social assistance can increase the calculated *benefits* of voting and of incumbent support. Most generally, benefits may increase psychological attachment to the state and national politics; this may be one of marginalized families' few positive experiences with a national bureaucracy. Increased attachment (or decreased aversion) may spill over into higher turnout.

More specifically, and perhaps more importantly, social assistance can affect the expected utility of voting for distinct candidates. Here, we draw on the psychological theories of bounded rationality (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Simon 1985, 1995). Voters *intend* to make a rational choice between alternatives, but due to both individual cognitive limitations and environmental complexities they are unable to fully calculate the expected utility from all

possible choices. Instead, they use heuristics to satisfice, or to come to a satisfactory rather than a utility maximizing decision (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Such choices are subject to a status quo (i.e., reference point) bias that favors the incumbent (Levy 2003).

It is no easy task for voters to link their pocketbook economic status with national level electoral choices even under the best of conditions (Gomez and Wilson 2006; Powers 2001). Indeed, the first hurdle to pocketbook voting based on public assistance is for citizens to recognize that they receive a benefit from the government (Mettler 2011). Assuming that hurdle is met, assistance recipients have a strong and direct self-interest in maintaining benefits, not unlike lower income recipients of Social Security in the United States (Campbell 2003). The relative impact of even small benefits can be quite large for needy families. For instance, in Brazil, families that fit within the extreme poverty constraints of the Bolsa Família program can receive a cash benefit producing a *minimum* increase of 46.8% of the household's formal declared income.² Once they discover that the state can directly meet their needs, assistance recipients gain a new stake in political contests (Graham 1994). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising assistance programs produce an instrumental behavioral change in recipients.

But social assistance receipt might trigger not only pocketbook but also issue voting (Schneider and Jacoby 2003). Personally receiving assistance not only informs beneficiaries about public policy, but it increases the salience of that information. When asked in the survey interview context for political evaluations, recipients who recognize that they receive a government benefit have a strongly linked policy evaluation come immediately to the “top of the head” (Feldman 1995; Zaller 1992). While non-recipients may likewise approve of redistributive spending and have information about government efforts, that information will be less salient.

² The requirements for Bolsa Família are total monthly earnings less than R\$77 per capita, no more than 5 children under the age of 15, and no more than 2 adolescents ages 16 or 17.

At the same time, benefits' effects on the expected utilities of vote alternatives should depend on the political environment. Thus, we should observe that electoral effects vary across settings. We focus on and test the impact of four environmental conditions: assistance program independence from the executive, presidential ideology, enforcement of program conditions (if adopted), and compulsory voting laws. The country case-study approach used in the bulk of scholarship on the electoral effects of targeted assistance has thus far obscured the role of such country-level features.

First, we expect that assistance programs bureaucratically independent from the executive will have a weaker electoral effect. The mechanism may be retrospective; institutionalization constrains the executive's capacity to claim credit for policy outcomes and may reduce citizen attribution of responsibility for program administration to the incumbent, even in the Latin American environment of strong presidentialism. Alternatively, the mechanism may be prospective. When an executive directly controls a program, citizens may perceive greater risk in an opposition victory, especially if the incumbent frames the election in those terms. A new party in power could plausibly bring sweeping changes, altering program structure or cancelling a program altogether (Stokes 2001a, 61). In contrast, when assistance is controlled by a permanent and independent bureaucracy, presidential discretion is limited, especially if the agency structure empowers political actors whose tenure or political or budgetary interests are not immediately dependent on the executive (Lewis 2003, 45–49). Such an organization is much more difficult to dismantle and doing so may entail steep political costs as well as legislative battles. The emergence of such an agency signals broader societal commitment to social welfare.

Second, following Latin America's "leftward turn" of presidential politics in the mid-2000s, one might wonder whether leftist elites benefit disproportionately from social assistance.

Consistent with theories of issue voting and issue ownership, the public may be more likely to perceive assistance programs as expressions of incumbent commitment to the poor when the incumbent is on the left (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Thus, for instance, Brazil's center-left President Lula was widely perceived as a friend to the dispossessed, and the *Bolsa Família* program as an expression of his personal commitments. Second, the *prospective* pocketbook risk associated with a potential opposition victory may often be more credible when the incumbent is on the left and the opposition on the right. Nonetheless, we can see no reason for a *retrospective* pocketbook electorate to take the incumbent's ideological persuasion into account. Social assistance programs have been embraced by incumbent executives on both the right and left in Latin America; behavioral conditionalities have helped to make such programs ideologically agreeable on the center-right. Indeed, centrist and rightist incumbents (e.g., in Mexico and Colombia) have reaped substantial benefits from assistance (Baez et al. 2012; Sewall 2008). Thus, we doubt whether leftists will manage to accrue extra advantage from the welfare dole.

Third, many assistance programs aim not only to reduce poverty, but to make society more inclusive and to help recipients become more able citizens, by stipulating public health and human development responsibilities as part of the assistance package contract. While in all but one of the countries we examine there is at least one major social program that on paper stipulates some behavioral requirement (the exception is Venezuela), not all countries effectively enforce conditions. Thus, conditionality has become an important variable in the region's social assistance regimes. Various studies examine the electoral effects of *conditional* cash transfer programs (CCTs), yet existing scholarship does not fully theorize whether or how conditions themselves matter. The extent to which conditionalities amplify or reduce the impact of social assistance under a framework of bounded rationality ultimately depends on beneficiaries'

attitudes towards the conditions. If conditionalities decrease the expected utility of benefits, they will depress pro-incumbent effects; they will *boost* incumbent support if they *increase* the value of social assistance (for instance, perhaps leading to greater citizenship and inclusion, as described by Hunter and Sugiyama (2009, 2011) and Sugiyama and Hunter (2013)).³ In addition, unenforced conditionalities may reflect a lack of state capacity, which may correlate with poor provision of program benefits. Thus, it is an open empirical question whether enforcing program conditionalities helps or hurts incumbents facing a boundedly rational public.

Fourth, enforced compulsory voting laws may somewhat reduce the turnout effects of social assistance, as the electorate incorporated under compulsory voting overlaps with those mobilized by social assistance (Panagopoulos 2008). At the same time, new voters incorporated through either compulsory voting or social assistance programs often lack pre-existing ideological or partisan ties, social networks, or other political information that would have induced them to vote in the absence of favorable public policies. Such voters may be especially likely to weigh benefits heavily in their boundedly rational utility calculations.

Data and Measurement

We test these hypotheses using individual-level data from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey.⁴ Respondents from 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean answered the question: “Do you or someone in your household receive monthly assistance in the form of

³ See Hevia (2011) for an alternative interpretation of the effects of CCTs on recipients’ engagement as citizens.

⁴ The AmericasBarometer survey data employs a complex sample design including stratification, clustering, and weighting of some observations. All of our analyses account for these design elements when estimating coefficients and standard errors.

money or products from the government?”⁵ A response of “No” was coded as ‘0’ and affirmative responses as ‘1’.⁶ This forms our key independent variable. The dependent variable, *presidential vote*, reflects what respondents said they would do “if the next presidential/general elections were being held this week”: not vote; vote for the incumbent candidate or party; vote for the opposition; or vote, but leave their ballots blank.⁷ We first model responses in 23 of the 24 countries using a multinomial logit model with country fixed effects to test whether prior findings in specific countries hold across the region as a whole, while accounting for the interdependent nature of turnout and candidate choice.⁸ We then assess the relative impacts within subgroups of countries defined by indicator variables for *enforced compulsory voting*, *program conditionality*, *ideologically leftist president*, and *assistance program independence* relative to the executive office (see Table 1).⁹ Finally, we test the statistical significance of the differential effects by moving to a hierarchical multinomial logit analysis. Due to data limitations

⁵ In Spanish, the question reads: ¿Usted o alguien en su casa recibe ayuda mensual en dinero o en productos por parte del gobierno?. In Portuguese, the question reads: O(a) sr./sra. ou alguém em sua casa recebe ajuda mensal em dinheiro ou em produtos do governo? It is plausible that respondents might include non-contributory pensions in their responses to this item. Nevertheless, we test the robustness of our findings by drawing on data from nine countries where an additional identifier question was asked specifically about participation in a major CCT program. We run robustness checks on our models in two ways: separating CCT recipients and other social assistance recipients; and using the CCT identifier alone. After doing so, we find that the substantive interpretation of our results is largely unchanged.

⁶ Item non-response is 9.14%.

⁷ Item non-response is quite high at 22.62%. In the online appendix we present analyses coding non-responders as abstainers; there are few substantive changes in our findings.

⁸ We exclude Haiti from all our analyses because of the state's very low capacity and the large role of international organizations in providing assistance. Under such conditions, there is no reason to expect that receiving assistance would boost incumbent support. Indeed, our analysis shows that in Haiti assistance recipients are actually biased *against* the incumbent, perhaps because this contact heightens awareness of the state's fragility.

⁹ The indicator of program conditionality is based on enforcement of sanctions related to the national program's conditions, drawn from data collected by Cecchini and Madariaga (2011, 90–100, 150–158) for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The indicator of program independence is based on whether the primary program is administered through the president's office or an executive agency (same source). Codings for Venezuela on these two measures are based on analysis conducted by Penfold-Becerra (2007). Note that Venezuela is the only country in the sample entirely without conditionalities related to public health or education in its social assistance programs; it is simply coded as "0" on this measure. The compulsory voting measure is based on International IDEA's Voter Turnout Database (<http://www.idea.int/vt/viewdata.cfm>). Leader ideology is based on the World Bank Database of Political Institutions. Country fixed effects in the non-hierarchical analysis also account for country-specific differences in mean electoral outcomes.

with the country-level variables and to maintain consistency across our models, we only analyze responses from citizens in 19 of the 24 countries in the hierarchical models.¹⁰

Table 1 about here, please

In addition, we account for several alternative individual-level explanations. A variable measuring *effectiveness of the current administration* is an index (rescaled to run from 0 to 1) and is based on a series of questions asking respondents to indicate on a seven point scale to what extent they would say that the current government fights poverty, corruption, and unemployment, protects democratic principles, and improves security.¹¹ Those who perceive the government as more effective should be more likely to support the incumbent, all else equal.

Partisanship is yet another important factor. Preexisting partisan ties to the incumbent might confound the analysis, particularly if co-partisans of the incumbent are more likely to be targeted for or to seek out social assistance benefits. Conversely, anti-partisans might be less likely to seek out or receive benefits. We control for this possibility by including a categorical measure of *partisan identification* in our models.¹²

The complete model controls for several other potentially confounding factors.¹³ Support for state intervention in the economy could drive participation in social assistance and support

¹⁰ The countries with missing data are Belize, Guyana, Nicaragua, and Suriname. At the time of the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey Belize, Guyana, and Suriname did not have major conditional cash transfer programs. Nicaragua's CCT program, Red de Protección Social, was closed in 2006 due to a lack of domestic political will to keep it functioning (see Moore 2010, 117–122). In our country-level measures we focus on program characteristics of major CCT programs where they exist because these have been adopted most recently and are now the most visible assistance programs in the region.

¹¹ This index is constructed using the AmericasBarometer questions N1, N3, N9, N11, and N12.

¹² This measure is based on variables VB10 and VB11, which ask respondents if they currently sympathize with any political party and, if they do, which one. We create a three category measure that groups incumbent co-partisans, incumbent anti-partisans, and non-partisans. Non-partisans are the baseline category and coefficients are reported for co-partisans and anti-partisans respectively. The incidence of non-partisanship is high. Indeed, only Uruguay, where non-partisans constitute about 33% of the sample, has a level of non-partisanship below 60 percentage points.

¹³ In addition, clientelism may confound estimation of the effects of social assistance. First, as we discussed above, observers have charged that many social assistance programs in the region are tantamount to legalized vote buying schemes. If benefit recipients are (or perceive that they are) merely clients of contingent (i.e., clientelistic)

for the incumbent. Therefore, we include an index of *support for an interventionist state* (again rescaled to run from 0 to 1) to ensure that any relationship found between assistance and the presidential vote is not due to ideological perceptions of the role of the state in society.¹⁴

Another key concern is that participation in social assistance programs is non-random by design: only the poorest citizens are eligible. Thus, any effect of receiving cash transfers might simply reflect an underlying tendency among impoverished families. Thus, we include a relative measure of *household wealth*, measured in quintiles within each country (running from 1 to 5).¹⁵ To determine the impact of social assistance independently of broader economic perceptions and events, we include perceptions of the current *national* and *personal economy* (on 5 point scales and rescaled from 0 to 1) and indicators for *personal or household unemployment* and *household income loss*, both in the last two years.¹⁶ Any decrease in economic well-being is expected to lead to a lower likelihood of voting for the incumbent. We also include two indicators of other

exchanges rather than autonomous actors, then we cannot argue here that the beneficiaries hold political actors accountable for economic outcomes. After all, the hallmark of a clientelistic exchange is that politicians and political parties hold voters accountable for their support in elections, whereas voters cannot effectively reciprocate and hold elected officials responsible for policy outcomes (Hicken 2011). Second, even if social assistance benefits are not themselves the currency of clientelistic exchanges, the segment of the population eligible for social assistance is likely to overlap strongly with the group most likely to be targeted for clientelistic offers. We need to be sure that we are picking up the effects of social assistance, per se, not other factors associated with low socioeconomic status. While the 2012 AmericasBarometer did not include a measure of clientelism, the 2010 AmericasBarometer did ask respondents: "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?" In models using the seven countries in which social assistance receipt was measured in 2010, we found that those who said they "sometimes" received such offers were more likely to vote for the incumbent, but that the inclusion of clientelism did not alter results for our key independent variables.

¹⁴ This index is constructed using five questions from the ROS series asking respondents to indicate on a seven point scale to what extent they agree or disagree that the government is responsible for guaranteeing the well-being of citizens, creating jobs, reducing income inequality, supplying retirement benefits, and providing health care.

¹⁵ For more details on the construction of the index of household wealth see Córdova (2009).

¹⁶ The economic evaluations are based on variables SOCT1 and IDIO1. The indicator for any household job loss is based on responses to OCUP1B1 and OCUP1B2. The dummy variable for income loss is based on item Q10E.

experiences with the state, *crime* and *corruption victimization*; respondents victimized by crime and corruption in the previous year may show lower incumbent support.¹⁷

Further, we account for variables that may relate to political participation. We control for the respondent's sense of *internal efficacy*, *general system support*, *support for democracy*, and *community participation*, each coded to run from 0 to 1. Finally, we also control for the respondent's *age*, their *level of education*, their *gender*, and the *size of their place of residence*. Many programs target *female* heads of household; this necessitates a control for gender of the survey respondent to ensure that the effects observed are not due to gender. Furthermore, due to suggestions that social assistance programs are biased in favor of rural areas (*The Economist* 2010), the model controls for the size of the respondent's area of residence.

Results: Social Assistance, Electoral and Policy Institutions, and Electoral Outcomes

Individual-level results from a multinomial logit regression analysis appear in Table 2.¹⁸ The model includes country-level fixed effects, which are not displayed for ease of presentation. Using a 23-country sample, the results from Table 2 partially confirm De La O's (2013) findings based on the Mexican case: social assistance largely shapes electoral outcomes by mobilizing voters. On average, assistance recipients are less likely to abstain than non-recipients, and recipients who say they would turn out are more likely to choose to support the incumbent.¹⁹ The

¹⁷ Crime victimization is based on responses to VIC1EXT. Corruption victimization is measured using the EXC series questions 2, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16, asking respondents to indicate whether they were asked to pay a bribe by the police, a public employee, the municipal government, at work, in the courts, for health services, or at school.

¹⁸ To gauge the robustness of the multinomial logit results to any possible violations of the i.i.a. assumption, we reestimated this non-hierarchical analysis using multinomial probit. Results were substantively unchanged, and predicted probabilities were identical to the second decimal place.

¹⁹ There are several other results that merit attention. First is the importance of incumbent and opposition partisanship for turnout and vote choice. Moreover, positive perceptions of the national economic situation and the effectiveness of the current administration strongly predict voting for the incumbent. In addition, supporters of state

fact that social assistance has a robust impact on turnout and vote choice despite our stringent controls strengthens our confidence in our results.

Table 2 about here, please.

The main findings from Table 2 are easier to comprehend using predicted probabilities (Figure 1). Holding all other variables at their within-country means, we estimate that the change from non-recipient to assistance recipient is associated with a 2.5 percentage point decrease in abstention, a 3.6 percentage point increase in voting for the incumbent, a 0.5 percentage point decrease in the opposition vote, and a 0.6 percentage point decrease in null voting.²⁰ Thus, the net effect of assistance across the region is to mobilize voters, who then vote for the incumbent.

Figure 1 about here, please

These results are consistent with the argument that social assistance plays an important part in the evaluation of the costs of going to the polls as well as recipients' candidate choices. Although the changes in the region-wide model are relatively small, they are enough to guarantee incumbents a slight electoral advantage over opposition parties, on average and across the region. Even if beneficiaries constitute a small proportion of the electorate, this small benefit for the incumbent could tip a close election. Nonetheless, the results also demonstrate clearly that large effects found in some case studies are unlikely to be constant across the region.

Thus, the strength of the association may vary; we suggest that this variation is systematic and depends on the institutional features of elections and assistance policies in each country. In Figure 2, we develop a preliminary test of this argument by examining whether

economic interventions, the overall political system, and democracy generally are less likely to abstain; as are men, those who participate in their communities, and those who feel internally efficacious.

²⁰ Results are identical when those who reported that they were not registered to vote or were in the process of registration are excluded. When non-respondents are coded as abstainers, social assistance receipt is associated with an estimated 4 percentage point rise in pro-incumbent voting and a 4 percentage point rise in turnout (see online appendix).

effects vary across different clusters of countries, as defined by indicator variables for *enforced compulsory voting*, *program conditionality*, *ideologically leftist president* and *assistance program independence* relative to the executive office. The figure presents the marginal effect of social assistance receipt on each potential outcome (abstention, null/blank voting, voting for the incumbent, or voting for the opposition), by country type.²¹ Thus, positive values suggest that recipients are more likely than non-recipients to choose the given option under the country-level condition listed at the left of the figure; conversely, negative values suggest that recipients are less likely than non-recipients to choose that option.

Figure 2 about here, please

Differences in marginal effects' statistical significance across the different groups of countries presented in Figure 2 must be read tentatively, since we have not yet formally tested these differences in the context of a hierarchical model. Nonetheless, the results strongly suggest that political, institutional, and programmatic contexts alter how we understand the electoral effect of social assistance. In countries with presidential control over assistance, the predicted probability of voting for the incumbent is 10.7 percentage points higher among assistance recipients than among non-recipients, compared to a mere 0.9 percentage point boost in incumbent voting when an institutionalized agency oversees the program; the confidence intervals of the marginal effects strongly suggest that these differences are statistically significant. And while social assistance leads to similarly sized increases in turnout (i.e., drops in abstention) in the two types of countries, only in ones with presidential control over the program is assistance receipt associated with a statistically significant (5 percentage point) drop in support for the opposition. These results are consistent with our approach of bounded rationality, in that

²¹ These multinomial logit models also include all individual-level controls and country fixed effects. Coefficients for the key independent variables are provided in the online appendix.

recipients more strongly favor the incumbent when the incumbent's role in benefits provision is clearer. At the same time, it remains to be determined whether the mechanism is retrospective or prospective; recipients might simply be more likely to recognize a job well done under these circumstances, or they might reason that their benefits are in greater danger of discontinuation.

By contrast, Figure 2 indicates that the ideological orientation of the president may be relatively unimportant. While the marginal effects of social assistance on abstention and incumbent voting are statistically significant at $p < .05$ in countries with leftist presidents but only at $p < .10$ in ones with centrist/rightist presidents, these effects are very similar in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable. Thus, rightist incumbents can benefit equally with leftist ones from social assistance. This hints that the electoral gains reaped from social assistance are *not* a result of ideologically driven or issue voting among assistance recipients for whom social assistance programs are especially salient. Rather, they once again suggest that recipients reward incumbents for programs' direct impacts on the family pocketbook.

Figure 2 also reveals how enforcement of both social assistance conditionalities and compulsory voting rules shapes (or not) the utility calculations of boundedly rational voters who receive social assistance. First, the marginal effects of social assistance on abstention and incumbent support are somewhat larger in magnitude in countries with enforced conditionalities, yet they are not statistically distinguishable from those found in countries with no or unenforced conditionalities. This non-finding may mean that across the region, benefit recipients simply do not inherently value the public health and citizenship-related conditions that accompany CCT programs. Alternatively, it is consistent with a pattern in which beneficiaries very much value program conditions in some countries, and dislike them in others.

At the same time, though, Figure 2 shows that enforced compulsory voting rules strongly shape the boundedly rational utility calculations of social assistance recipients considering what to do on election day. First, social assistance has a somewhat (though not significantly) larger effect on turnout in voluntary voting countries (3.0 percentage points vs. 1.5 in compulsory systems). This suggests that the approximately 11 percent of the electorate for whom the expected utility of going to the polls turns positive under compulsory voting rules may overlap to some extent with the group mobilized by social assistance. At the same time, even in compulsory voting countries, some citizens may remain who do not respond to compulsory voting rules alone, but who do respond when voting costs are reduced through social assistance programs. In turn, the large electorate mobilized by compulsory voting weighs assistance benefits particularly strongly in their vote decisions, perhaps because they lack other strong community, partisan, and ideological ties to the political system. While the marginal effect of social assistance on candidate choice is statistically insignificant in voluntary voting countries, under compulsory voting rules social assistance is associated with a highly statistically significant 6.0 percentage point advantage for the incumbent and a 4.2 percentage point deficit for the opposition.

To further assess the statistical significance of the differences in effects across various groups of countries, in Table 3 we present the key results of four hierarchical multinomial logit models, each testing a country-level moderator of the relationship between social assistance and electoral behavior across 19 countries.²² First, though, we examine the direct association between vote choice and the country-level variables. In line with common sense and previous studies, compulsory systems are associated with lower abstention (11 percentage points in our data, $p < .05$ with 24 country cases) and higher blank voting (6 percentage points, $p = .06$). In

²² These models are estimated using HLM v6, while all other analysis in the paper is estimated using Stata v12.

addition, interestingly, countries with leftist presidents may have higher turnout (9 percentage points, $p = .09$). Apart from these results, none of the other associations between country-level variables and the vote is statistically significant at the country-level.

Table 3 about here, please

Results from the hierarchical models broadly confirm the country-by-country analysis; predicted probabilities (see Online Appendix) are similar in magnitude and nearly identical in statistical significance.²³ First, executive ideology and enforcement of program conditions significantly condition social assistance's impact on voter behavior only for blank voting. Thus, conditionalities may effectively incentivize some types of social participation, but they appear not to shape *electoral* behavior.

Estimating the joint effects of social assistance and its interaction terms, we find that social assistance decreases the propensity to vote blank when the president is a centrist or rightist, and when conditions are enforced.²⁴ However, presidential program control strongly and significantly conditions each of the three relationships. When the executive office administers the country's major assistance program, recipients are less likely than non-recipients to abstain, to vote for the opposition, and to vote blank, compared to voting for the incumbent. However, in countries where assistance is administered by an institutionalized agency, benefit receipt has a small association with turnout, but not with support for any particular candidate. Compulsory

²³ In a fifth model presented in the online appendix, we include all four country level measures and their interactions with social assistance receipt. With just 19 country cases, degrees of freedom are limited, and this "full" model must be read as exploratory. Nonetheless, it provides suggestive evidence regarding the relative importance of the four conditioning variables. Results are essentially identical to those from Table 3. Presidential program control significantly modifies the impact of assistance on mobilization and blank voting, while this variable and compulsory voting have effects similar in magnitude on voting for the opposition. Presidential ideology is entirely unassociated with the impact of social assistance, while conditionalities only matter for blank voting.

²⁴ The effect of social assistance should only be interpreted in combination with the interaction terms. For help in interpreting the interactions, we used an online tool developed by Preacher et. al (2006) to analyze interactions from HLM models. See their website at <<http://www.quantpsy.org/interact/hlm2.htm>>.

voting also strongly shapes the relationship between assistance and voting for the opposition; only in compulsory voting countries are recipients less likely to vote for the opposition.

Discussion and Conclusion

These results provide region-wide evidence that social assistance programs incorporate and anchor marginalized citizens in their countries' electoral processes. While there is not, as yet, systematic evidence that programs help beneficiaries become more cognizant citizens, they do help these beneficiaries overcome obstacles to voting and give them a tangible economic stake in political outcomes. Not only does added household income help citizens bear the immediate and opportunity costs of going to the polls, but assistance programs also shape the expected benefits of voting – both expressive ones and the utility attached to an incumbent victory. These dual (though on average modest) impacts on turnout and vote choice make assistance an important electoral tool for incumbents. Still, the value of this policy tool depends to a great degree on institutional features. Compulsory voting and program control by the executive office, in particular, alter the effects of social assistance benefits in favor of the incumbent or their party. Conversely, in countries with voluntary voting and agency program control, benefits may have small effects on turnout, yet they appear not to shape citizens' choices once in the voting booth.

With these results we begin to make out a portrait of the “social assistance voting base” across Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a boundedly rational electorate that is responsive to the perceived costs and benefits of voting. Moreover, the fact that ideologically rightist presidents benefit equally with leftist ones, and that effects occur in countries with both conditional and unconditional assistance programs, suggests that recipients are swayed not so

much by rhetorical issue ownership or by broader concerns about citizenship, as by concrete, implemented policies that directly affect their individual pocketbook economics. Thus, our results have implications for the literature on policy responsiveness, indicating that social assistance recipients in Latin America respond electorally to this particular public policy in direct and particularistic ways and that electoral and policy institutions can constrain the ability of incumbents to derive direct electoral benefit from such programs.

But two puzzles remain, defining a long-term agenda for research. First, is the vote retrospective or prospective? Our results and the perspective of boundedly rational pocketbook voting are consistent with two alternative stories: that recipients simply reward incumbents who have helped them; or that recipients support incumbents out of fear the opposition might discontinue benefits. This question has normative and practical consequences. If the social assistance electoral effect is due to fear of program discontinuation, beneficiaries might be highly responsive to incumbent manipulation in the short-term, and yet in the long-term the effect would fade as recipients discovered that programs instituted under previous administrations continued to provide benefits under opposition rule. Without information on perceived threat of program discontinuation, it is not entirely possible to solve this puzzle. Nonetheless, we note that it has become common for opposition candidates of all ideological stripes to publicize their commitment to social assistance. This observation, and the fact that we find electoral effects among incumbents on the right and left suggest to us that prospective threat or risk is not driving the social assistance electoral effect.

The retrospective economic voting assumption underlying most studies of electoral behavior posits the electorate as, in V.O. Key's famous phrase (1964, 568), a "rational god of vengeance and reward." Recent work argues that the broader Latin American voting public is

strongly retrospective and sociotropic (e.g., Nadeau, Lewis-Beck, and Bélanger 2013; Singer and Carlin 2013). Here, we uncover evidence to support the perspective that even Latin America's poorest and most marginalized citizens hold their politicians responsible for economic outcomes, albeit pocketbook ones. In the hands of (also rational) elected leaders, this pocketbook rationality can be manipulated, especially in certain institutional settings. Elites can proactively and strategically adopt relatively cost-efficient programs that strongly reinforce their voting base, and they can manipulate institutional design to claim credit more effectively. Still, manipulation has limits; variables such as national economic evaluations and perceptions of government effectiveness also shape electoral outcomes. As important as they are in beneficiaries' utility calculations, social assistance provides no sure guarantees of incumbent electoral success.

The second remaining puzzle is related to the first: in what way does presidential control over assistance programs make it possible for executives to claim credit more effectively? When the executive office directly controls the program, the president may have greater capacity to strategically allocate benefits in relation to the electoral calendar, program marketing materials may be more likely to carry personalistic statements clearly identifying the president with the recipients' benefits, or program administration may be less reliant on lower level political actors who muddy attributions of responsibility to the president. Whatever the specific mechanism, the pattern we report may eventually break down because there may be a political equilibrium point beyond which further expansion of and investment in social assistance becomes politically untenable or unjustifiable. Thus the findings presented here may reflect effects only observable at this particular point in time in the development of social assistance programs in Latin America. Beneficiaries may also eventually incur social costs, such as becoming the target of

negative stereotypes. Evidence of such patterns has yet to emerge from the Latin American assistance programs, but it may only be a matter of time.

More broadly, our results have implications for scholars interested in the ability of the poor to hold elected officials accountable for policy decisions. Our results suggest that targeted social policies entail a trade-off between two normatively desirable political objectives. Boundedly rational voters who receive social assistance are more likely to link pocketbook concerns to voting behavior when it is easier to attribute responsibility to elected officials; this is most likely to happen when presidents control programs more closely. Yet, such control also makes it possible for executives to abuse programs for their own or their party's electoral benefit if they choose. Thus, unless one can rely on the virtue of elected leaders, it seems that these targeted programs place programmatic politics and accountability-based politics at odds with each other. Ultimately, we suggest that policy-makers will need to take into account complex electoral and representational as well as human development impacts when they design or reform social assistance programs.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Country-Level Variable Coding and Estimated Proportion of Population Receiving Government Assistance for Countries in the 2012 AmericasBarometer Sample

Country	Compulsory Voting (Enforced)	Program Conditions (Enforced)	Presidential Control of Program	Leftist President	Proportion Receiving Assistance
Argentina	YES	YES	NO	YES	0.15
Belize	NO	--	--	--	0.09
Bolivia	YES	NO	NO	YES	0.55
Brazil	YES	YES	NO	YES	0.19
Chile	NO	YES	NO	NO	0.15
Colombia	NO	YES	YES	NO	0.16
Costa Rica	YES	YES	NO	YES	0.15
DR	YES	YES	YES	NO	0.23
Ecuador	YES	NO	NO	YES	0.17
El Salvador	NO	YES	YES	YES	0.11
Guatemala	NO	YES	NO	NO	0.08
Guyana	NO	--	--	YES	0.20
Haiti	NO	--	--	NO	0.16
Honduras	YES	NO	YES	NO	0.05
Jamaica	NO	YES	NO	YES	0.20
Mexico	NO	YES	NO	NO	0.16
Nicaragua	NO	--	--	YES	0.08
Panama	NO	NO	NO	NO	0.09
Paraguay	YES	NO	YES	YES	0.08
Peru	YES	NO	YES	YES	0.07
Suriname	NO	--	--	NO	0.22
T&T	NO	NO	NO	YES	0.19
Uruguay	YES	YES	NO	YES	0.17
Venezuela	NO	NO	YES	YES	0.08

Note: Countries with no data (--) on any variable are excluded from hierarchical models.

Sources: Leader ideology is from the World Bank Database of Political Institutions. Program conditionality and presidential control are both based on data collected by Cecchini and Madariaga (2011, pp. 90–100, 150–158).

Compulsory voting is based on the Voter Turnout Database of International IDEA

(<http://www.idea.int/vt/viewdata.cfm>). Venezuelan coding for conditionality and presidential control is based on Penfold-Becerra (2007). Proportion receiving assistance is based on responses to 2012 AmericasBarometer survey question CCT1NEW.

Table 2. Multinomial Logit Model: Determinants of Vote Choice and Turnout (with Incumbent Vote as Baseline), 2012 AmericasBarometer

	Would Not Vote		Would Vote for Opposition		Would Vote Blank/Null	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Received Public Assistance	-0.268***	0.065	-0.144*	0.058	-0.174*	0.077
Government Partisan	-2.601***	0.074	-2.524***	0.070	-2.489***	0.114
Opposition Partisan	-0.700***	0.083	1.314***	0.063	-0.367***	0.106
Perception of National Economy	-0.672***	0.114	-0.966***	0.103	-1.089***	0.140
Perception of Personal Economy	-0.095	0.125	0.023	0.113	-0.125	0.159
Wealth Quintile	-0.021	0.018	0.035*	0.015	-0.003	0.022
Unemployment	0.000	0.087	0.051	0.082	0.153	0.108
Decline in Income	0.124*	0.053	0.092^	0.049	0.171*	0.068
Bribe Victim	-0.090	0.109	-0.073	0.097	0.146	0.117
Crime Victim	-0.055	0.060	-0.020	0.053	-0.017	0.066
Effectiveness of Current Administration	-2.148***	0.121	-2.802***	0.111	-2.308***	0.150
Support for State Economic Intervention	-0.421***	0.121	-0.022	0.119	-0.196	0.148
Educational Level	-0.041	0.035	0.168***	0.031	0.048	0.045
Woman	0.096*	0.041	0.036	0.038	0.074	0.053
Size of Place of Residence	0.018	0.018	0.003	0.017	0.015	0.022
Age	-0.041***	0.007	-0.006	0.006	-0.012	0.009
Age Squared	0.000***	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Internal Efficacy	-0.251**	0.079	0.038	0.072	-0.181^	0.103
System Support	-0.868***	0.138	-0.067	0.119	-0.924***	0.161
Support for Democracy	-0.381***	0.081	0.079	0.074	-0.157	0.102
Community Participation	-0.716***	0.111	-0.134	0.095	-0.147	0.138
Constant	3.268***	0.253	1.993***	0.226	1.577***	0.309
<i>Number of Observations</i>	25789					
<i>F</i>	65.25					

Note: Baseline response is voting for the incumbent. Country fixed effects are included in analysis but omitted from table for ease of presentation. Coefficients are statistically significant at ^ p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of Hypothetical Electoral Outcomes by Beneficiary Status, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012 AmericasBarometer

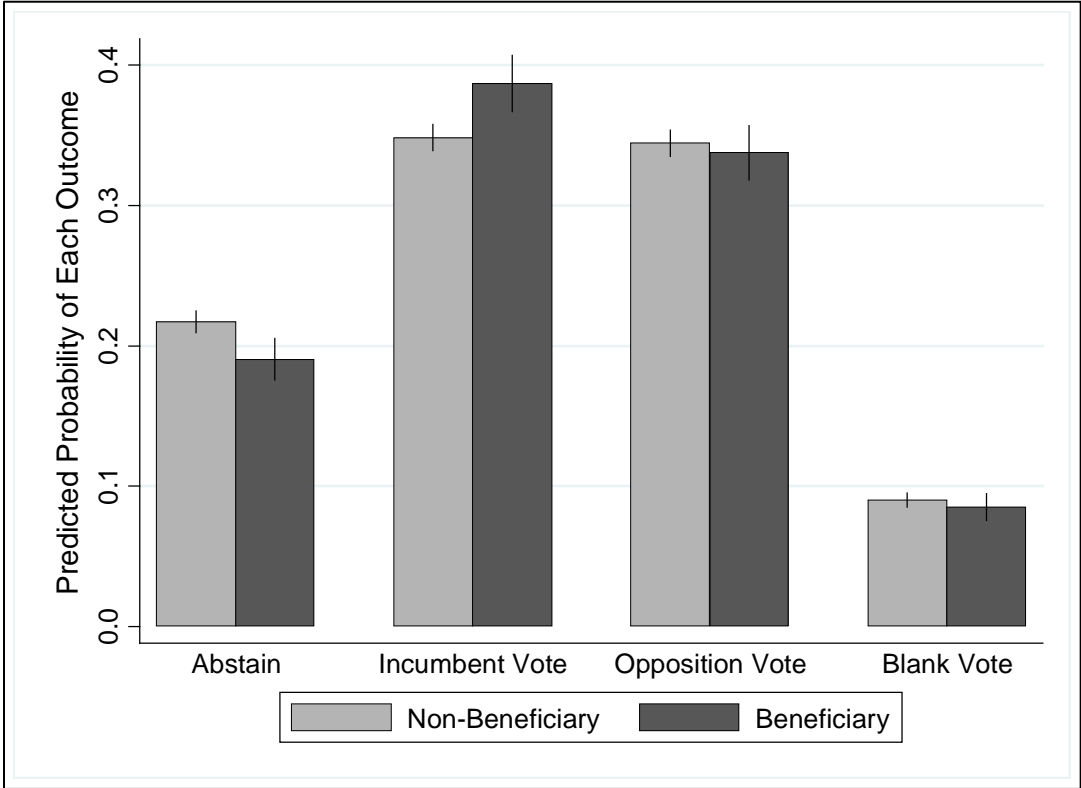


Figure 2. Changes in Predicted Probabilities of Hypothetical Electoral Outcomes between Beneficiaries and Non-Beneficiaries, by Country Type

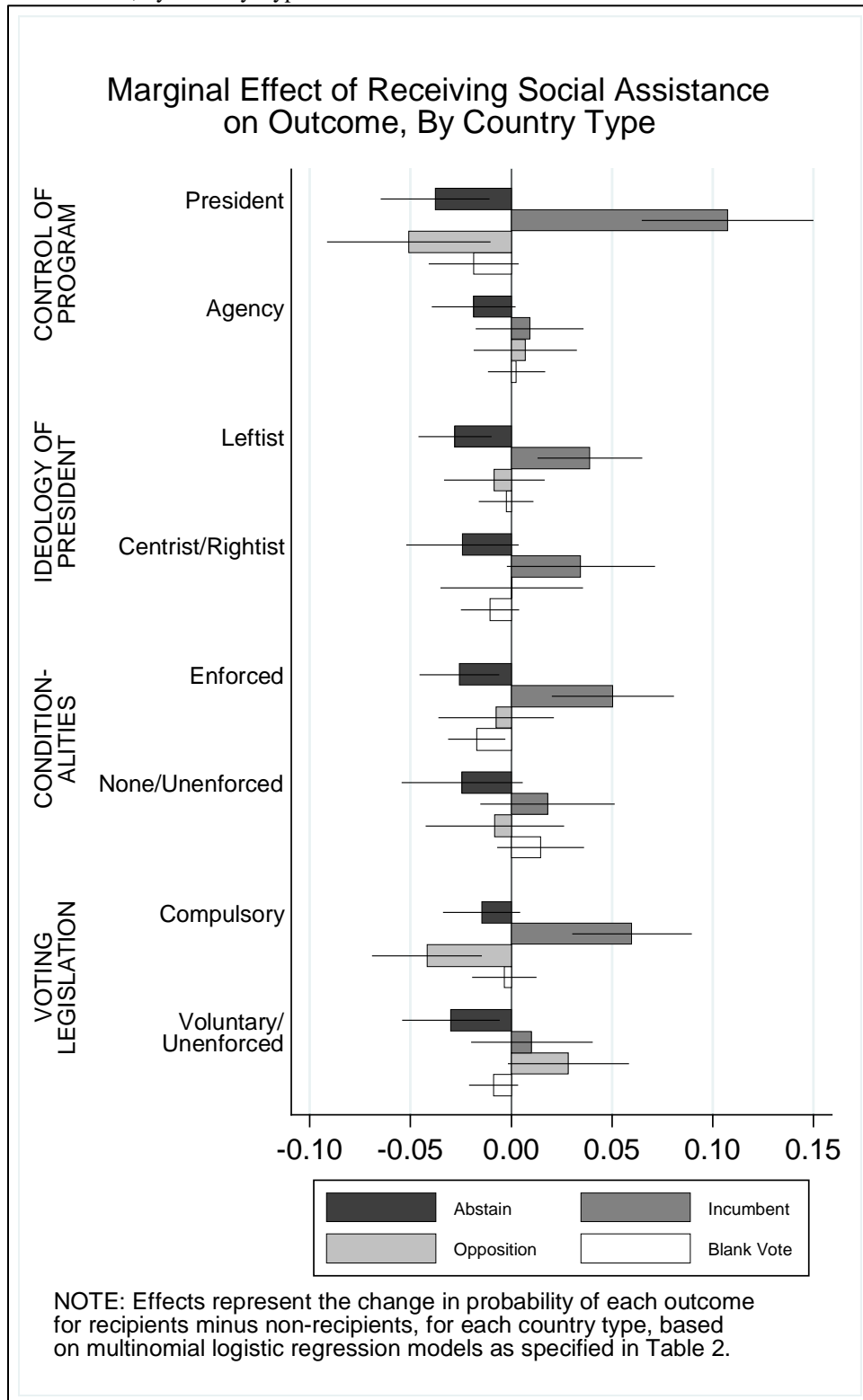


Table 3. Hierarchical Multinomial Logistic Regression Models: Country-Level Determinants of the Relationship between Social Assistance and the Vote

		No Vote		Vote for Opposition		Blank Vote		
		Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	
Model 1	Received Public Assistance	-0.171*	0.078	-0.039	0.065	0.020	0.083	
	Presidential Control	0.296	0.564	0.213	0.322	0.186	0.459	
	Beneficiary*Presidential Control	-0.452***	0.151	-0.475***	0.127	-0.548**	0.172	
	<i>Random Effects</i>							
		<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>1.179</i>		<i>0.690</i>		<i>0.950</i>	
		<i>Variance Component</i>	<i>1.391</i>		<i>0.448</i>		<i>0.903</i>	
		<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>2031.549</i>		<i>999.627</i>		<i>878.741</i>	
Model 2	Received Public Assistance	-0.282*	0.112	-0.121	0.099	-0.381*	0.150	
	Leftist President	-0.895	0.522	-0.371	0.312	-0.277	0.456	
	Beneficiary*Leftist President	-0.024	0.139	-0.065	0.119	0.342*	0.171	
	<i>Random Effects</i>							
		<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>1.093</i>		<i>0.650</i>		<i>0.947</i>	
		<i>Variance Component</i>	<i>1.196</i>		<i>0.422</i>		<i>0.897</i>	
		<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>1893.045***</i>		<i>991.436***</i>		<i>941.757***</i>	
Model 3	Received Public Assistance	-0.279*	0.109	-0.151^	0.087	0.079	0.105	
	Conditionality Enforced	-0.314	0.548	-0.436	0.300	-0.263	0.442	
	Beneficiary*Conditionality	-0.022	0.137	-0.006	0.113	-0.408**	0.147	
	<i>Random Effects</i>							
		<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>1.174</i>		<i>0.637</i>		<i>0.936</i>	
		<i>Variance Component</i>	<i>1.378</i>		<i>0.406</i>		<i>0.876</i>	
		<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>1991.911***</i>		<i>890.334***</i>		<i>773.129***</i>	
Model 4	Received Public Assistance	-0.156	0.100	0.126	0.092	-0.142	0.142	
	Compulsory Voting	-0.833	0.511	-0.169	0.315	0.212	0.448	
	Beneficiary*Compulsory Voting	-0.209	0.135	-0.462***	0.116	-0.003	0.165	
	<i>Random Effects</i>							
		<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>1.094</i>		<i>0.670</i>		<i>0.950</i>	
		<i>Variance Component</i>	<i>1.196</i>		<i>0.459</i>		<i>0.903</i>	
		<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>1920.018***</i>		<i>1033.154***</i>		<i>876.755***</i>	

Note: Random effects are estimated at the country level. Baseline response is voting for the incumbent. Coefficients are statistically significant at ^ p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001. Controls for partisanship, perception of the personal/national economy, wealth, unemployment, income decline, victimization by bribery and corruption, ratings of the current administration, education, location of residence, age, efficacy, system support, support for democracy, and community participation are included in the analysis but omitted from the results (see full cross-level interacted model in the online appendix). All models include 21,468 Level 2 observations, and 19 Level 2 units.