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Pressure, Favours, and Vote-buying: Experimental Evidence from Romania and Bulgaria

ISABELA MARES, AURELIAN MUNTEAN & TSVETA PETROVA

Abstract

This article examines the mix of non-programmatic strategies used by politicians to gain voter support in contemporary Eastern Europe. We use a mixed-method design that combines survey-based experiments and qualitative research in a paired comparison of localities in Romania and Bulgaria. Our article documents that the mix of clientelistic strategies differs across localities with different turnover rates. In both Romania and Bulgaria, we find that the use of clientelistic strategies that politicise state resources is higher in localities with long-term political incumbents.

POLITICAL CLIENTELISM IS A PERVASIVE FEATURE OF ELECTORAL POLITICS in many contemporary elections. Both in new and in more established democracies, politicians do not appeal to voters only through programmatic electoral promises, but also through other strategies that include promises of monetary reward, offers of administrative favours, and/or privileged access to the state bureaucracy. Some investigations of the evolution of Western European parties have found that patronage continues to play a crucial role in these polities (Kopecky & Scherlis 2008). A large number of recent studies have further examined the occurrence of this phenomenon in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia and documented a variety of non-programmatic strategies deployed by politicians and brokers acting on their behalf at times of elections (Stokes 2005; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007; Vincente & Wantchekon 2009; Calvo & Murillo 2013; Stokes *et al.* 2013; Luna 2014).¹ Some of the same issues are studied in the literature on the simultaneous reform of the party systems and state institutions in post-communist Europe and the resultant ‘politicisation’ of the state in that region (Ganev 2001; Meyer-Sahling 2004; O’Dwyer 2006; Dimitrov *et al.* 2006; Grzymala-Busse 2007).

Our article builds on and contributes to the growing literature on political clientelism by unpacking the menu of non-programmatic strategies that are used by politicians at election time. We document two distinct electoral strategies through which state resources are deployed in Eastern European elections. The first involves the provision of favours and administrative

¹The term ‘broker’ is a standard concept in the literature on clientelism (Stokes *et al.* 2013). It refers to political intermediaries mediating between candidates and voters.

advantages, such as obtaining licences and permits or preferential access to social policy programmes. The second strategy, which has been relatively overlooked in the literature, is more coercive and involves the use of pressure and threats of post-electoral punishment. Our central hypothesis is that the length of political incumbency affects the mix of clientelistic strategies in different localities. More specifically, we conjecture that reliance on electoral strategies that politicise state resources is higher in localities with longer political incumbency.

Empirically, our study examines the incidence of and variation in clientelistic practices in two Eastern European countries, Romania and Bulgaria. To assess the variation among these electoral strategies, our study takes advantage of new survey methodologies—such as the list experiment—which allow us to elicit unbiased and truthful responses to sensitive political topics. By adopting a methodology that has been used successfully in recent years in the study of electoral clientelism, we generate estimates of the prevalence of these phenomena that allow us to compare the types of electoral clientelism encountered in these two countries.

The remaining part of the article presents an overview of the menu of clientelistic electoral strategies deployed by political actors. We then formulate our predictions about the factors that are likely to affect the variation in the incidence of these strategies across different localities. Next, we present our research design and the design of our list experiment. After discussing our findings, we conclude by clarifying the implications of our study for the broader literature on clientelism.

Electoral clientelism in contemporary Eastern Europe

The existing literature on electoral clientelism distinguishes between programmatic and clientelistic competition (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007). In the former case, candidates or parties appeal to voters by differentiating their programmatic promises. In the case of clientelistic competition, candidates offer goods or services to voters in exchange for their political support at the ballot box. Electoral clientelism is in itself a highly aggregated category, involving a wide range of strategies that vary along multiple dimensions. Our article attempts to disaggregate among some of the varieties of electoral clientelism. We draw on Hicken's definition of clientelism as a chain of dyadic relationships between politicians, agents (or brokers), and voters (Hicken 2011). The behaviour in these relationships is contingent or reciprocal—a contract for an exchange of electoral support by an agent in exchange for agreed behaviour by the principal.

We distinguish between the strategies by which parties seek to influence voter choices, setting apart strategies premised on positive inducements from those that involve coercion. We further differentiate among the goods/services that are offered as part of the clientelistic exchange.

One dimension of variation in clientelistic strategies at election time is the use of positive or negative inducements. Positive inducements involve offers of rewards that increase the current or future utility of voters. Examples of such positive strategies are offers of gifts or privileged access to the state in exchange for a vote. These types of exchanges have been widely studied by the existing literature on electoral clientelism under rubrics such as vote-buying, patronage, corruption, and pork-barrel politics.

By contrast, negative inducements involve threats of economic or social sanctions in response to a voter's political choices at the ballot box. As discussed in a recent study by Allina-Pisano, these strategies are 'primarily subtractive for publics, who stand not so much

to gain through compliance as to lose through non-compliance' (Allina-Pisano 2010, p. 374). Examples of such negative inducements include threats to cut off access to benefits on which voters depend, to interrupt their state or private-sector employment or of post-electoral punishment for voters who make 'incorrect' political choices.² Negative inducements can be deployed by a variety of brokers. In Ukraine, for example, members of state land resources committees in some regions are reported to have closed regional private farmers' organisations after they refused to contribute to a particular campaign; bread deliveries and buses to other regions were stopped after voters in these districts refused the demands of agricultural enterprise heads to sign a statement indicating their intention to vote for a particular candidate (Druzhinina 2004). As Allina-Pisano argues, 'goods that publics take for granted, such as salaries, use of public infrastructure, and access to public education and markets in consumer goods, become linked to political support for specific candidates' (Allina-Pisano 2010, p. 374).

Partisan brokers can engage in the pre-electoral harassment of voters. Scholars of African politics have documented the ample use of such threats by candidates, which at times lead to electoral violence (LeBas 2013). Studies of electoral clientelism in Colombia, for example, have documented the use of threats by paramilitaries (Garcia Sanchez *et al.* 2015).

Other types of negative clientelistic strategies include threats of legal punishment for previous irregularities committed by voters, such as administrative infractions or failure to comply with tax obligations. A number of participants in our focus group conducted in Focsani, Romania in March 2013 referred to the constant harassment of self-employed persons (such as shopkeepers and taxi drivers) by employees of the local state.³

A second dimension of variation in clientelistic strategies at election time is the type of goods and services offered as part of the clientelistic exchange—some involve the resources of the state and others leverage private resources. One type of goods or services that may be offered is preferential public policies or administrative favours. Partisan brokers might promise privileged access to existing public policies and make such access conditional on political support. In Argentina, one important programme used for clientelistic purposes is the National Food Security Programme (*Programa Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria*), which includes several sub-programmes, such as the self-production of food (community farms) and *comedores* (soup kitchens) (Weitz-Shapiro 2014, p 77). In the post-communist space, employment in state institutions and enterprises, salaries, bonuses, pensions, and student stipends, tuition and health-care access, and business and organisation registrations and licences, have all been documented as forming the object of clientelistic transactions. The agents who mediate between candidates and voters in such exchanges are the relevant employees of the state, attached to the national or local policy administration.

Another type of exchange involves goods of small monetary value that are usually funded privately. Such items may include food, drinks, or small amounts of cash. The study of contingent exchanges that involve such offers is at the centre of a vast literature on electoral clientelism—the examination of vote-buying. In Romania, voters included in our focus groups reported offers of buckets of flour, bottles of cooking oil, or meals.⁴ The agents who mediate between candidates and voters in such exchanges are generally partisan brokers with detailed

²Even though ballot secrecy is nominally protected, candidates rely on a variety of strategies to pierce ballot secrecy. These include stationing of representatives at the voting place, chain-voting, as well as post-electoral discussions that ascertain vote choices.

³Focus group, 20 participants (ten male, ten female), aged 30–40, Focsani, 16 March 2013.

⁴Focus group, Focsani, 16 March 2013.

information about the preferences of voters. Stokes considers such partisan agents as ‘a long-term neighbour of the people she is trying to organize’ (Stokes 2005, p. 318). Finan and Schechter’s study of clientelistic exchanges in Paraguay describe these political operatives as ‘village leaders, professional in politics and the backbone of the election campaign ... who know their fellow villagers well’ (Finan & Schechter 2012, p. 867). Finan and Schechter view partisan brokers as ‘locally embedded agents of the machine who command the knowledge of voter preferences and partisan inclinations’ (Finan & Schechter 2012, p. 867).

Research design

In our empirical analysis presented below, we examine the incidence of the three different clientelistic strategies discussed above: the use of coercive state clientelism (or what our respondents colloquially referred to as ‘political pressure’); state inducements (or ‘political favours’ in the words of our respondents); and vote-buying. Finally, the emphasis of the article is on clientelistic exchanges between candidates and their brokers, on the one hand, and voters, on the other hand. As such, we exclude electoral irregularities that are not broker-mediated, including voter fraud; that is, irregularities that are committed by election officials after the ballots are cast.

Several questions have figured prominently in the existing scholarship. One set of studies has examined whether the use of electoral clientelism has implications for political outcomes, such as the strength of the political incumbent (Magaloni *et al.* 2007). Other studies have examined the use of electoral clientelism from the perspective of the voter, exploring the individual-level attributes that explain voters’ susceptibility to clientelistic strategies (Stokes 2005). A third body of work has focused on either the international constraints on non-programmatic mobilisation (Pridham 2007; Haughton 2007; Vachudova 2009) or the national-level political factors that facilitate electoral clientelism, including the organisational origins of the party and the character of the state bureaucracy (Shefter 1994; Hale 2003), the particularistic practices under the previous/pre-democratic regime (Kopecky & Spirova 2011), and the level and character of political/party competition (O’Dwyer 2006; Grzymala-Busse 2007) among others.

Our study seeks to build on and complement these findings by examining the sub-national variation in the incidence of clientelistic strategies. Given the menu of possible non-programmatic strategies described in the previous section, what explains candidates’ choices among them? Does the resulting mix of non-programmatic strategies differ significantly across localities? If so, what explains this variation?

The relative importance of these different strategies of electoral clientelism is likely to differ significantly across the localities in a polity. Yet, despite the recent growth in scholarly interest in the phenomenon of political clientelism, this question has not been systematically addressed in the literature.⁵ Moreover, the relevant literature has paid much more attention to the use of vote-buying than to the leveraging of state resources. When existing studies have focused on the latter strategies, they have generally understudied the coercive mobilisation of voters by state employees.⁶ Finally, one important limitation of the existing literature on electoral clientelism is that it examines one type of clientelistic strategy rather than the

⁵For a notable exception, see Luna (2014).

⁶For a notable exception, see Darden (2001, 2008), Allina-Pisano (2010), Frye *et al.* (2014).

mix of various non-programmatic strategies. As a result, questions pertaining to the various combinations of different kinds of non-programmatic mobilisation have remained empirically unexamined.

Hypotheses

Our aim is to begin addressing these gaps in the relevant literature. Our central hypothesis is that the length of political incumbency at the local level affects the ability of politicians to deploy state resources during elections and, consequently, the observed variation in the mix of non-programmatic strategies.

Long-term incumbency generates strong electoral advantages for the party of the mayor. Long-term incumbents can staff the local administration with supporters who can be mobilised at election time. As discussed above, public sector employees can both offer positive inducements to voters—such as administrative favours or preferential access to policy benefits—and engage in repressive strategies, which involve the harassment or intimidation of voters.

In localities characterised by frequent political turnover, no party enjoys hegemonic control over state resources. Incumbents find it more difficult to rely on state officials at times of elections. Higher levels of political alternation mean that local bureaucrats are likely to owe allegiance to several principals. Thus, incumbents have a smaller network of state employees to mobilise at election time, and even local bureaucrats appointed by the incumbents may hedge against future political alternation and exercise restraint. Voters with experience of high levels of political turnover may also discount political blackmail and promises of privileged access to state resources. This, in turn, is likely to lower the incentives of partisan brokers to use these strategies. Therefore, we expect that the prevalence of clientelistic strategies that involve state resources is likely to be lower in localities characterised by high political turnover compared to localities with long-term incumbencies. Challengers in localities without a history of long-term incumbency are likely to mobilise other political resources and brokers and are more likely to make use of vote-buying strategies.

To summarise, we hypothesise that the mix of clientelistic strategies will vary in systematic ways between localities characterised by a history of long-term political incumbency and localities with high political turnover. We expect to find a higher mobilisation of state resources at election time in the former localities. This involves the use of positive strategies premised on promises of access to policy benefits and administrative favours as well as negative strategies based on pressure and coercion.

A pairwise comparison of localities in two different Eastern European countries

The research sites of our study are two new and fragile democracies in Eastern Europe—Bulgaria and Romania. The literature on clientelism in Eastern Europe has primarily focused on party patronage, thus overlooking the wider range of electoral clientelism strategies. The themes explored in this existing work, however, are in line with our general argument that the concentration of resources breeds more non-programmatic mobilisation (and economic intimidation in particular). For example, the literature on party patronage has tended to agree that robust political and party competition lowers the prevalence of this electoral clientelism

strategy (O'Dwyer 2006; Grzymala-Busse 2007).⁷ Others similarly point out that the early transition 'winners'—the oligarchs—systematically undermined the capacity of state institutions in order to appropriate assets held by other social groups (Ganev 2007).

Both Bulgaria and Romania rank high on scales of political corruption and electoral clientelism according to ratings by both academics and various monitoring agencies.⁸ For example, in Herbert Kitschelt's *Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project*, which is based on expert coding of different parties in the region, Bulgaria and Romania record higher values on the measure of 'electoral clientelism' than other countries in the region (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999; Kitschelt 2013).

At the same time, there is very little qualitatively different about the nature and patterns of electoral clientelism in Bulgaria and Romania, compared to other democracies in the region (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999). In other words, Romania and Bulgaria are typical cases that take extreme values on the 'dependent variable'. Gerring considers such cases as 'paradigmatic of the phenomenon of interest' (Gerring 2007, p. 101). We expect the clientelistic mobilisation of voters in Romania and Bulgaria, while representative of such mobilisation in the rest of Eastern Europe, to be more pronounced (and therefore easier to measure) when compared to other countries in the region.

Since we expect that the length of political incumbency accounts for variations in the ability of politicians to leverage state resources for electoral purposes, we selected localities that are similar and about average for each of the two countries on a variety of observable demographic and economic variables, but which differ in the length of the local government's political incumbency.

In Romania, the two localities selected for our comparison were Adjud and Titu. We selected Adjud as a representative Romanian locality that has experienced long-term incumbency. Adjud is a locality of 16,000 inhabitants situated in Vrancea county in southeastern Romania, with an ethnic composition that is close to the Romanian average. Ethnic Romanians represent 88% of the population. In this locality, ethnic Roma are the second largest group, at 6% of the population. Economically, the locality is dominated by several medium-size firms. Politically, the locality has been dominated by the same incumbent left party (Social Democratic Party (*Partidul Social Democrat*—PSD)) since 2000. The PSD has won both national and local elections in this locality. The incumbent mayor, Constantin Armeancea, has been re-elected three times since 2000.

Titu is a locality in Dambovită county, southern Romania. Titu's population is slightly below 10,000 inhabitants, 93% of whom are ethnic Romanians. Roma, the second largest ethnic group in this locality, make up 3% of the population. As in Adjud, employment in Titu is fragmented among five firms, which hire somewhere between 100 and 200 employees each. The most important difference between Titu and Adjud is in the level of political competition. Unlike Adjud, Titu has experienced significant changes in political incumbency between 2000 and 2013. In recent years, political control over the city hall has shifted from

⁷For a challenge to this broad consensus, see Meyer-Sahling and Veena (2012).

⁸See expert assessments, such as, '2012 Corruption Perception Index', Transparency International, available at: <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012>, accessed 20 July 2017; 'Iris Dataset', Political Risk Services Group, available at: <http://epub.prsgroup.com/index.php/products/iris-dataset>, accessed 20 July 2017; 'Nations in Transit 2012', Freedom House, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2012%20%20NIT%20Tables.pdf>, accessed 20 July 2017.

the centre-right Democratic Liberal Party (*Partidul Liberal Democrat*—PDL) to the leftist Social Democratic Party.

The two Bulgarian localities included in our study are Karnobat and Karlovo. Karnobat is a locality with a population of 18,000 inhabitants located in the Burgas region, southeastern Bulgaria (NSI Bulgaria 2011). Eleven percent of Karnobat's population self-identify as members of Bulgaria's Turkish and Roma ethnic minority groups. Karnobat has a diversified economy: the dominant industrial employers are in machine-building, textiles, and spirits. Beginning with the 1997 election, considered to mark the beginning of Bulgaria's democratic breakthrough, Karnobat has had an unbroken succession of leftwing mayors.

The second Bulgarian locality included in our study is Karlovo, located in the Plovdiv region, central Bulgaria. Ten percent of Karlovo's population of 22,600 self-identify as members of an ethnic minority (NSI Bulgaria 2011). The dominant employers are the machine-building, food, and cosmetic industries. However, in contrast to Karnobat, Karlovo has experienced significant political turnover. The incumbent party has lost in each election since 1997. Karlovo is thus very similar to Karnobat in all theoretically important ways except in the length of political incumbency (see Table 1).

Measuring the mix among different clientelistic strategies: the list experiment

Measuring illegal, or 'improper', behaviour is extremely difficult using traditional survey methods. Respondents have incentives to provide inaccurate answers due to fear of retaliation or social desirability bias, a tendency to provide responses that are viewed favourably by others. The 'list experiment' was designed to elicit truthful answers regarding precisely such behaviour (Corstange 2008; Imai 2011; Blair & Imai 2012; Glynn 2013). We used a common methodology to design and conduct our list experiment in both countries (for a detailed discussion of our data collection, see Appendix 1). Our face-to-face questions attempted to measure the non-programmatic influences on voters most relevant to this article, defined as follows: vote-buying—offers of money, gifts, or food in exchange for votes; political favours—offers by city-hall or state employees of administrative favours in exchange for votes; and political pressure—pressure by an employee of the city hall or of the state to vote for a particular candidate.

In addition, we collected personal background information for each respondent in our survey: their age, gender, education, ethnicity, income level, and party preference/affiliation, if any.

In Bulgaria the list experiment was implemented a few weeks after the May 2013 elections. In Romania, the list experiment was carried out in July 2013 in Titu and in September 2013 in Adjud. We surveyed close to 700 citizens in each locality.

TABLE 1
HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE INCIDENCE OF CLIENTELISTIC MOBILISATION ACROSS LOCALITIES

<i>Country</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Political incumbency</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>
Romania	Adjud Titu	High Low	Higher levels of political pressure and political/administrative favours in Adjud compared to Titu
Bulgaria	Karnobat Karlovo	High Low	Higher levels of political pressure and political/administrative favours in Karnobat compared to Karlovo

Results: differences in the mix of electoral clientelism across localities

Romania

Tables 2 and 3 display the aggregate results of our survey in the two Romanian localities included in our sample. The results presented in these tables show the mean number of items supported by respondents in the control group and treatment group respectively. By subtracting the mean number of items of respondents who received the control version of the questionnaire, we obtain the estimate of the incidence of the particular electoral irregularity measured in the survey.

Table 2 presents the results for Adjud, Romania—the locality with long-term incumbency. In this locality, we find the use of both negative and positive non-programmatic inducements, which involve public resources. We estimate that 15% of the population has experienced some political pressure in this locality. In addition, 9% of voters report having received or been promised administrative favours by state employees in exchange for their political support. In this locality, the ample leveraging of state resources seems to have crowded out other types of electoral clientelism: we find no statistically significant evidence of vote-buying.

In Table 3, we report the results of the list experiment in Titu—the Romanian locality that has experienced frequent political turnover. Consistent with our overarching hypothesis, we find no evidence of the use of state resources at election time that is statistically distinguishable from zero. Neither do we find evidence of other types of electoral clientelism, such as vote-buying.

TABLE 2
INCIDENCE OF CLIENTELISTIC MOBILISATION IN ADJUD

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Mean: control group</i>	<i>Mean: treatment group</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Favours	739	0.627 (0.56; 0.68)	0.72 (0.65; 0.78)	9%** (−0.018; −0.00)
Pressure	739	0.52 (0.47; 0.57)	0.66 (0.60; 0.73)	14%*** (−0.22; 0.06)
Vote-buying	739	0.63 (0.58; 0.69)	0.71 (0.65; 0.77)	7% (−0.15; 0.02)

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 3
INCIDENCE OF CLIENTELISTIC MOBILISATION IN TITU

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Mean: control group</i>	<i>Mean: treatment group</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Favours	563	0.97 (0.89; 1.06)	1.00 (0.92; 1.08)	2% (−0.14; 0.08)
Pressure	563	0.96 (0.90; 1.01)	1.02 (0.96; 1.09)	6% (−0.15; 0.018)
Vote-buying	563	0.89 (0.82; 0.96)	0.93 (0.85; 1.02)	4% (−0.15; 0.07)

As such, a comparison of the mix of electoral irregularities across these two Romanian localities lends support to our central hypothesis—we see statistically significant leveraging of state resources, deployed either coercively or in the form of positive inducements, in the locality with longer levels of political incumbency and no significant use of such strategies in the locality with high political turnover.

Bulgaria

In Tables 4 and 5 we present the results of our statistical analysis of the incidence of different non-programmatic strategies in Bulgaria. Table 4 reports the results from Karnobat—the locality with long-term political incumbency. In Table 5, we present the results of our survey in Karlovo, the locality that has experienced political turnover. Our survey documents the evidence of clientelistic strategies involving positive inducements that leverage state resources in the left-dominated Karnobat. Nine percent of the respondents in our survey were offered political favours by state officials in exchange for political support, an estimate that reaches significance at conventional levels. By contrast, we do not find statistically significant evidence of favours in Karlovo, where political power has changed hands frequently.

Furthermore, we also find evidence of the use of administrative pressure by state employees in the left-dominated Karnobat. Eight percent of the respondents in this locality have experienced this non-programmatic strategy. Again, in contrast, we find no statistically significant evidence of the prevalence of this strategy in Karlovo, where political turnover has been frequent.

Moreover, our surveys allow us to identify the existence of vote-buying in Karlovo, the locality that has experienced significant turnover. According to our estimates, 10% of the

TABLE 4
INCIDENCE OF CLIENTELISTIC MOBILISATION IN KARNOBAT

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Mean: control group</i>	<i>Mean: treatment group</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Favours	703	0.90 (0.85; 0.96)	0.99 (0.93; 1.06)	9%** (−0.17; 0.006)
Pressure	703	0.66 (0.60; 0.72)	0.74 (0.69; 0.80)	8%** (−0.15; −0.002)
Vote-buying	703	0.88 (0.82; 0.93)	0.96 (0.89; 1.01)	8% (−0.16; 0.002)

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 5
INCIDENCE OF CLIENTELISTIC MOBILISATION IN KARLOVO

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Mean: control group</i>	<i>Mean: treatment group</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Favours	701	0.83 (0.76; 0.89)	0.89 (0.81; 0.97)	6% (−0.16; 0.03)
Pressure	701	0.71 (0.65; 0.77)	0.80 (0.73; 0.87)	9% (−0.18; 0.00)
Vote-buying	701	0.87 (0.80; 0.93)	0.97 (0.90; 1.04)	10%** (−0.20; −0.04)

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

respondents in Karlovo reported having been offered money or gifts in exchange for their vote. The results confirm our hypothesis that the politicisation of state resources for elections is lower in localities that have experienced significant electoral turnover. The findings in Bulgaria suggest that clientelistic strategies premised on vote-buying act as a substitute for clientelistic strategies that deploy state resources in competitive localities where none of the candidates can access these resources.

In sum, our findings in both countries lend support to our hypothesis that the non-programmatic use of state resources at election time is higher in localities controlled by long-term incumbents. In Romania, we find a high reliance on both positive and negative inducements by the state in Adjud, the locality with an entrenched mayor. By contrast, we find no statistically significant evidence of the use of state resources for clientelistic purposes in Titu, the locality with high levels of political turnover. Our empirical findings in Bulgaria are similar: we find statistically significant evidence of administrative favours and political pressure by state employees in Karnobat, the locality with long-term political incumbency, and no such evidence of these strategies in Karlovo, the locality with high levels of political turnover. In both countries, the importance of vote-buying in the mix of clientelistic strategies is lower than that of other forms of electoral clientelism that politicise the resources of the state.

Additional qualitative evidence

Romania

To further examine the differences in clientelistic exchanges across the localities included in our study and to identify the strategies by which candidates appeal to voters, we conducted additional qualitative research in both localities. In Bulgaria, we interviewed 27 knowledgeable observers at the national level, including journalists, civic activists, and academics, as well as 35 knowledgeable observers in the two localities sampled, including state employees, party workers, civic activists, and a random sample of voters who chose to participate in the exit poll conducted after the 12 May 2013 election by the agency that later carried out our experiment. In Romania, we conducted 19 interviews in the two studied localities with a similar sample of knowledgeable observers and voters.

In Adjud, the locality with the long-term incumbency advantage, our additional qualitative data provided more evidence that employees of the state were used in a political capacity at election time. For example, several respondents noted that state employees were used to increase turnout among known party supporters. To this end, city-hall employees, such as the school bus driver, the city-hall tractor driver, and councillors were deployed by candidates in order 'to deal with requests to provide ballot boxes outside the polling place, help in transporting the voters to polling stations where more votes are needed to win elections'.⁹ Transporting voters to the voting place is not an activity that simply aims to enhance the local civic consciousness but rather a deliberate strategy to influence voters' political choice right at the ballot box. In the words of a mayor of another locality we interviewed as part of our study, to persuade voters and win elections, one has to be the last person in contact with voters.¹⁰

⁹Interview 1, Adjud, 3 December 2015.

¹⁰Interview with a mayor, Teleorman county, 21 August 2015.

In addition to these strategies of ‘turnout-buying’, state employees promised voters preferential access to various social programmes in exchange for political support. An election observer for ProDemocratia, one of Romania’s leading civic groups, reported that policies of income support or social assistance were used extensively in this locality before the elections of interest in this article.¹¹ Candidates also offered non-perishable goods, financed by EU funds for the locality, in exchange for political support. As described by one voter from this locality,

these products are delivered to voters who receive social assistance right before the elections with the specific message that they are offered by the locality mayor, thus highlighting the dependency of poor voters on the mayor. The vote-share of the mayor is higher in neighbourhoods with a higher number of poor people receiving social assistance benefits.¹²

Vote-buying—more specifically, the offer of goods financed by the candidate—was not entirely absent in this locality. It was, nonetheless, less prevalent than the incidence of clientelistic strategies financed through public resources. In our interview with the local mayor, he confirmed our conjecture that vote-buying represents a less desirable strategy for a long-term incumbent.

Sometimes voters wait for you to offer them sausages, beer and ice-cream at food-and-drink parties. But these cost money and we cannot afford them, since we have to pay for this from our own pockets. Sometimes we manage to get financial help from local businessmen. I am very nostalgic for this way of doing politics, but now it no longer makes sense to organise such parties at election time because of denunciations made by competitors, which may result in prosecution by the anti-corruption authorities.¹³

The mix of clientelistic strategies encountered in Titu differed significantly from the mix of strategies in Adjud. Non-programmatic strategies that deployed state resources were much less common in the accounts of our respondents from this locality, as compared to Adjud. One of our respondents noted that the legal affairs expert from the local city hall was involved as a vote-mobiliser during elections: ‘She made use of her official position, since voters needed her services’.¹⁴ Another respondent noted that city-hall employees promised voters publicly financed subsidies, more specifically, city-hall subsidies in exchange for their political support.¹⁵ Such reports, however, were far less numerous than the reports of similar non-programmatic offerings we heard in Adjud.

In fact, our qualitative evidence suggested that candidates in Titu campaigned in a non-programmatic manner, primarily on the basis of offers of money and other goods in exchange for political support. According to voters, representatives from both parties made use of this strategy. One respondent noted that ‘the Social Democratic Party gave voters money directly at their party office’.¹⁶ By contrast, the opposition candidate from the PDL was reported to

¹¹Interview with an election observer for ProDemocratia, female, Focsani, 17 March 2013.

¹²Interview 2, female, 50s, Adjud, 4 December 2015.

¹³Interview 2, female, 50s, Adjud, 4 December 2015.

¹⁴Interview 19, female, 60s, Titu, 20 November 2015.

¹⁵Interview 18, female, 50s, Titu, 20 November 2015.

¹⁶Interview 11, male, 63, Titu, 19 November 2015.

‘give money directly on the street, both in the centre of the city, as well as in the villages that are part of the locality. This is the way in which the PDL won office. Florin Popescu [a deputy of the PDL] gave voters a chicken and a bucket’.¹⁷ Another voter confirmed this account, remarking ‘the PDL gave voters one chicken and 50 Lei during elections’.¹⁸

Bulgaria

Our qualitative data from Bulgaria paint a broadly similar picture to what we found in Romania, consistent with our general hypothesis. In Karnobat, the locality with long-term political incumbency, our respondents remarked on the political dominance of the left, which had penetrated the local state apparatus. They reported that in the months before the election, many of the local services were provided with a ‘reminder’ that ‘things run so well [administratively] in our municipality because of the Socialist Party’ and that ‘people who vote for the party can continue to enjoy administrative facilitation and preferential treatment’.¹⁹ Such mobilisation took place in at least one local state enterprise, the pensions office, and the municipal hospital, as well as in the municipal office dealing with licences and records.

The local coercive apparatus was also deployed in the service of the Socialist Party, reminding voters of petty legal infractions that had been overlooked thanks to the benevolence of the party—benevolence that would be summarily withdrawn should they not support the party at the polls.²⁰ The reported targeted misdemeanours included squatting on public land and collecting communal resources (such as wood, grapes and hay) for private use. Such intimidation was even more aggressive among influential voters known to sympathise with other parties, who were discouraged from voting at all.²¹

Some of the Karnobat mayor’s political intermediaries were visibly present on election day, transporting voters to the polling stations and then monitoring the turnout either at or in close proximity to the polling stations. Some of them were further reported to have entered at least one polling room to ‘instruct’ the leftwing members of the polling committees and another one to ‘assist’ voters right before they cast their ballot because these voters supposedly ‘didn’t have their glasses’ or ‘were confused about the ballot’.²² The Socialist Party was also reported to have co-opted or rewarded some local influential community members, who could mobilise others or sway their vote, by appointing them as representatives to the polling committees.²³

In Karlovo, the locality that had experienced political turnover, reports of such non-programmatic mobilisation were much less frequent and less coercive. An employee in the social services office combined positive and negative inducements by reminding beneficiaries that they might be excluded from the unemployment benefits programme if they did not support the party in power.²⁴ A local teacher was reported to have reminded his students’ families about the generosity of the current mayor towards the school.²⁵

¹⁷Interview 12, male, 60s, Titu, 19 November 2015.

¹⁸Interview 17, male, 60s, Titu, 19 November 2015.

¹⁹Interviews with exit poll participants 5, 7, 13, 16, 17, 20, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

²⁰Interviews with exit poll participants 7, 9, 10, 14, 17, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

²¹Interviews with exit poll participants 1, 3, 5, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

²²Interviews with exit poll participants 5, 8, 16, 18, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

²³Interviews with exit poll participants 2, 11, 16, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

²⁴Interview with exit poll participant 4, Karlovo, 12 May 2013.

²⁵Interview with exit poll participant 15, Karlovo, 12 May 2013.

In both municipalities, we received some reports about vote-buying among the local Roma communities. In Karlovo, some of our respondents reported winter clothes and food being distributed in front of polling stations in Roma neighbourhoods.²⁶ In Karnobat, we also encountered reports of a vote-buying scheme that included credit in certain local stores and restaurants run by Socialist Party affiliates.²⁷

Conclusion

This article sheds light on the multi-dimensionality of electoral clientelism and illustrates its variation across different localities. Although many previous studies of this phenomenon exclusively examine vote-buying, politicians often employ a wide mix of non-programmatic electoral mobilisation strategies, including those that leverage state resources, both for positive inducement and for coercion. Our analysis has focused on the politicisation of state resources for electoral purposes in recent Eastern European elections. We have argued that the length of political incumbency at the local level affects the capacity of politicians to deploy state resources during elections and, by implication, the observed variation in the mix of non-programmatic strategies. We thus provide a theoretical framework to explain the incidence and relative importance of favours and intimidation within the broader mix of clientelistic strategies politicians use at election times.

Our evidence comes from two Eastern European countries, Romania and Bulgaria. The evidence from both countries is consistent with our predictions and suggests the need for further investigation of the local-level factors that shape the mix of clientelistic strategies used by politicians during elections. We took advantage of new advances in survey-based research methodologies to provide systematic evidence of the levels of various non-programmatic strategies. Our research strategy combined this survey-based evidence with additional qualitative research in the localities of our study. A possible next step is testing our predictions in other new democracies in the region and beyond. In addition to further empirical testing, another productive direction for future research would be continued theory-building about the ways in which other economic and socio-demographic characteristics of the locality affect the mix of non-programmatic strategies.

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²⁶Interviews with exit poll participants 7, 11, Karlovo, 12 May 2013.

²⁷Interviews with exit poll participants 16, 20, Karnobat, 12 May 2013.

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Appendix 1

While prevalent, the clientelistic strategies parties use to mobilise voters at times of elections are either illegal or considered 'improper' or 'illicit' by many citizens in new democracies. As a result, voters are reluctant to admit that they have been the objects of clientelistic mobilisation.²⁸ One research strategy, which seeks to remedy this measurement problem, is the list experiment (Corstange 2008; Imai 2011; Blair & Imai 2012; Glynn 2013). While the list experiment was initially used to study socially undesirable attitudes (such as racism or anti-Semitism), its use in the study of electoral irregularities has gained increasing importance in recent years. Using list experiments, scholars have documented the existence of electoral irregularities in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Lebanon, Mexico and Nicaragua (Corstange 2011; Gonzalez Ocantos *et al.* 2012; Oliveros 2013; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters 2013).

In list experiments, respondents are presented with a list of items and are asked how many (as opposed to which items) are true. To capture the incidence of illicit behaviour, respondents

²⁸'Clean and Transparent Election Process', Transparency International, 2013, available at: http://transparency.bg/wp-content/files/2013_Monitoring%20Repot_Paliamentary_Elections_TI-BG_09.07.2013_BG.pdf, accessed 27 July 2017.

are divided randomly into two groups. While respondents in the control group are given lists that only include non-illicit items, respondents in the treatment group are presented with the same list of non-illicit items as presented to the control group together with an illicit item. The difference in the mean number of items reported by respondents in the treatment and in the control group allows us to estimate the prevalence of illicit behaviour in the population. Existing applications of the list experiment to the study of electoral corruption have generally attempted to estimate the incidence of one form of electoral irregularity, most often vote-buying. Our study builds on and extends these approaches by trying to estimate the incidence of multiple forms of electoral clientelism, both positive and negative. The positive inducements we study include the prevalence of vote-buying and favours provided by the state. Among the negative inducements we examine is political pressure by local state officials.

In both countries, we began by conducting focus groups that allowed us to identify the prevalent types of non-programmatic appeals in each country as well as the ways in which local citizens refer to such mobilisation. We also conducted numerous interviews with election observers, journalists, politicians, and representatives of non-governmental organisations to gain additional information about the menu of electoral strategies ‘on the ground’. This preliminary research increased our confidence about the quality of the questions in our experiment and allowed us to fine-tune it to ensure that respondents were not uncomfortable about participating.

We conducted small surveys in both countries (in Bulgaria, the sample size of our pre-test was 220 respondents, while in Romania it was 200) to select both the treatment and the control items to be included in our list. The goal of the pre-test was to design the list in such a way as to avoid ‘ceiling’ and ‘floor-effects’, thus increasing our confidence that respondents were reporting illicit behaviour truthfully.²⁹ Our design also attempted to reduce the variance in the means-estimate for the treatment and control groups (Kuklinski *et al.* 1997; Glynn 2013) by including three non-illicit items: a low-prevalence item and two negatively correlated high-prevalence items. We selected low-illicit items that were chosen by fewer than 15% of the respondents and high-prevalence items that were chosen by more than 50% of the respondents but that were strongly negatively correlated ($r > -0.7$). Consider the following example of a list that was included in the survey administered in Romania. The appendix to the article lists all the other items that were used in the surveys.

People vote for many different reasons. I will enumerate some of them. How many of these reasons in total are true in your case? I am not asking you to record which one(s) of these reasons explain why you voted, but how many are true in your case?

- (*Low prevalence*) The candidate has a good reputation in China.
- (*High prevalence 1*) I voted for political change.
- (*High prevalence 2*) I voted against political change because too much political change is undesirable.

Our questionnaires for respondents who voted and were in the treatment group included items that attempted to measure the various non-programmatic influences on voters:

²⁹Ceiling effects are likely to occur when a large number of respondents choose answers that are close to the highest possible values on the response scale. By contrast, floor effects occur when a large number of the responses take values that are close to the lowest possible values on the response scale.

- Vote-buying: someone offered me money, gifts, or food to vote for a particular candidate.
- Political favours: an employee of the city hall or of the state offered me an administrative favour in return for my vote for a particular candidate.
- Political pressure: a city hall or state employee pressured me to vote for a particular candidate.

To maximise the analytical leverage of our sample sizes, we assigned each respondent to the control group in half of the lists and to the treatment group in the other half of the lists. More specifically, each respondent who did not vote received one control and one treatment list, while each respondent who voted received two control or and two treatment lists. Respondents were randomly assigned to each cluster of treatment and control lists. Since each respondent was asked to evaluate multiple lists, both the questions and the items on each question were rotated to avoid ‘list-order effects’, in other words, the relationship between the response and the position of the illicit item on the list (Glynn 2013). To ensure both the randomisation of the order of questions on the survey and the randomisation of the illicit item on the list, we administered six different versions of the questionnaire for voters and four different versions of the questionnaire for non-voters.

Each survey fitted on a single A4 page and took no more than five minutes to complete.

In both Romania and Bulgaria, we collected our data through face-to-face surveys that were administered by a professional polling firm in Bulgaria and by students of the Political Science Department of the National School of Public and Social Administration (*Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative*—SNSPA) in Romania. In Bulgaria the list experiment was implemented a few weeks after the May 2013 elections. In Romania, the list experiment was carried out in July 2013 in Titu and in September 2013 in Adjud.

In both Romanian localities, our sample included around 1,000 respondents per locality. Our enumerators contacted every single household in each locality and randomly selected the participant in the household by asking to speak to the individual whose birthday was closest to the day of the interview. The surveys were filled out by the respondents and placed in sealed boxes. In Bulgaria, the polling company used the 2011 census to identify a representative sample of voters and interviewed 600 citizens (voters and non-voters) in each locality. Each respondent who consented to participate was asked to fill in the questionnaire and to place the response in a sealed, non-transparent box.

Randomisation was successful in all localities—none of the demographic items we measured in our survey is correlated at conventional levels with the cluster of treatment questions received by the each respondent.

Appendix 1.1. Romanian questionnaire

You have told us that you participated in the last parliamentary elections. We would like to present a number of statements about the elections and to ask four questions related to these elections. We assure you that your answers will be anonymous.

There are several reasons why people vote for a particular candidate. We will enumerate some of these reasons. We would like to ask you how many of the statements below are true in your case. We will not ask you WHICH of these statements below are true, but only HOW MANY.

Here are four reasons.

- An employee of the city hall or of the state, a person known in the community or a representative of the party offered me money, gifts or food to vote for a particular candidate. [Treatment group only]
- The candidate has a good reputation in the countries of the European Union.
- The candidate has promised that the state will invest more in infrastructure, such as highways.
- The candidate has promised that the state will invest more in the quality of people's lives, not in highways.

Please write the number of statements that are true in the box below. The number can be 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

Here are four additional reasons.

- An employee of the city hall, a person known in the community or a representative of a party pressured me to vote for a particular candidate. [Treatment group only]
- I voted for political change.
- I voted against political change. Too much political change is undesirable.
- I was impressed by the youth of the candidate.

Please write the number of statements that are true in the box below. The number can be 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

Here are four additional reasons.

- Somebody at the workplace, for example, my boss or a co-worker, pressured me to vote for a particular candidate. [Treatment group only]
- The candidate has a good reputation in the United States.
- The candidate continued to fight against the former communists who still hold positions of political responsibility.
- The candidate has promoted consensus and understanding.

Please write the number of statements that are true in the box below. The number can be 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

Here are the final political reasons.

- An employee of the city hall or of the state, a person I know in the community or a representative of a party offered me administrative favours (*favoruri si inlesniri*) if I vote for a particular candidate. [Treatment group only]
- The candidate is good-looking.
- The candidate promised to maintain the flat income tax rate of 16% for everyone, irrespective of income.
- The candidate promised to reduce income tax for people with a low income and increase it for those with a high income.

Please write the number of statements that are true in the box below. The number can be 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

Below are seven additional questions. Please circle the answer that is true for you.

What is your age?

1. 18–30
2. 31–40
3. 41–50
4. 51–60
5. 61–70
6. Over 70 years.

What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

What is your ethnicity?

1. Romanian
2. Hungarian
3. German
4. Roma
5. Other. Please specify what it is, please _____.

Please indicate your highest level of education

Primary	Gymnasium	Professional school	High school
Vocational school*	University	Post-university	No school

*Romanian (*Scoala post-liceala*)

What was your income last month?

Below 560 lei	Between 561 and 1,600 lei	Above 1,601 lei
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What is your occupation?

I am self-employed	I am employed with a formal contract	Employed without a formal contract
Unemployed	Retired	Student

You said you did not vote in the last parliamentary election in December 2012. What party do you feel closest to?

UDMR (Democratic Union of Romanian Hungarians— <i>Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România</i>)	PPDD (People's Party— <i>Dan Diaconescu</i>)	PNL (National Liberal Party)
PDL (Democratic Liberal Party)	PSD (Social Democratic Party)	Another. Please mention which

Appendix 1.2. Bulgarian questionnaire

You voted in the parliamentary elections last week. I would like to ask you four questions about that. There are many ways in which parties appeal to voters. I will list several of them. How many of them apply to you?

(Your answers will be anonymous. To that end, please note that I am not asking you which ones but only how many apply to you.)

Here are four ways in which parties appeal to voters:

1. Someone offered me money, gifts, or food to vote for a particular party. [Treatment group only]
2. The party leader visited my hometown.
3. The party promised to raise wages and pensions.
4. The party proposed to cut spending in order to avoid inflation spikes.

How many of these apply to you? ____

Here are four more ways in which parties appeal to voters:

1. Some state official, community leader, the candidate or another party representative pressured me to vote for a particular party. [Treatment group only]
2. The party promised to break up the electricity monopoly.
3. The party promised to regulate the electricity monopoly.
4. The party leader has a good reputation in the US.

How many of these apply to you? ____

Here are four more ways parties appeal to voters:

1. Someone at work, for example, my boss or a colleague, pressured me to vote for a particular party. [Treatment group only]
2. The party candidates impressed me with their youthfulness.
3. The party promised to invest in national highways.
4. The party promised to invest in people's quality of life, not in national highways.

How many of these ways apply to you? ____

Here are four additional ways parties appeal to voters:

1. A politician or a state official offered to do, or did me, a favour so that I would vote for a particular party. [Treatment group only]
2. The party leader is a family man.
3. The party promised to reform the state-subsidised healthcare system.
4. The party promised to improve the quality of private healthcare.

How many of these apply to you? ____

What is your age?

1. Less than 30 years old.
2. My age is between 31 and 60.
3. I am over 60 years old.

What is your gender?

1. Female
2. Male

What is your ethnicity?

1. Bulgarian
2. Turkish
3. Roma
4. Other

What is your level of education?

1. I have not completed high school.
2. I have completed high school.
3. I have gone to college.

What is your income?

1. Below 350 Leva
2. Below 800 Leva
3. Above 800 Leva

Which party did you support in the last election?

1. GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria—*Grazhdani za evropeisko razvite na Bălgarija*)
2. BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party—*Bulgarska sotsialisticheska partiya*)
3. DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms—*Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi*)
4. DSB (Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria—*Demokrati za silna Bălgarija*)
5. Ataka
6. Other