


## Yields and electoral dangers of public spending in Argentina [Reditos y peligros electorales del gasto publico en la Argentina]

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### RESUMEN

Scholars and citizens in Latin America's new democracies decry patronage, clientelism, and the partisan distribution of public resources. Several studies of Argentina detect such discriminatory distribution, but they leave some key questions unanswered. When governments channel public resources in a particularistic manner, do they favor their loyal supporters, or marginal voters whom a small payoff may tip in favor of their party? What are the electoral consequences of patronage and clientelism? And in a federal system, do voters give credit to national political actors or to local actors who distribute benefits in their communities? Using an original ecological database that encompasses more than 60% of the national population, in which each observation corresponds to a municipality, we offer answers to these questions. We study spending on personnel by local governments, and the distribution of Plan Trabajar funds among municipalities, as well as the electoral consequences of both forms of spending. Our major findings are (1) that government authorities in Argentina in the late 1990s engaged in discriminatory spending; (2) when they did so, their strategy tended to be one of pursuing the support of marginal voters, rather than of rewarding loyal voters; and (3) sometimes such spending increased electoral support for the local governing party, but sometimes it had no effect or even undermined this support. Hence the electoral dangers of public spending. This last finding leads us to reconsider, theoretically, the tradeoffs or what we call negative mobilization that may result from patronage and clientelism.

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