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Why do community members support clientelistic deals? How collective voting decisions are taken in Uru Indigenous communities, Bolivia

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GIGA Research Programme:
Accountability and Participation

**Why Do Community Members Support Clientelistic Deals?
How Collective Voting Decisions are Taken in
Uru Indigenous Communities, Bolivia**

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Abstract

This article explores the practice of “instructed voting” prevalent among rural Indigenous communities in Bolivia, referring to the taking of collective electoral decisions. It adds to the debate on clientelistic bloc voting by revealing voters’ motives for participating in clientelistic deals, as based on interviews with Uru Indigenous community members and politicians. It shows the ambivalent significance of the practice for the Indigenous communities under study, being a protective mechanism against external threats on the one hand and a gateway to vote buying on the other. Social norms and trust in community authorities are found to be central drivers for achieving voters’ compliance. The article adds another piece to the puzzle on how clientelistic deals happen in democratic systems under a secret ballot yet without apparent infringements of the law, which is the case in the communities under study here.

Keywords: Bolivia, clientelism, bloc voting, collective voting decisions, Indigenous peoples

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Why Do Community Members Support Clientelistic Deals? How Collective Voting Decisions are Taken in Uru Indigenous Communities, Bolivia

Aline-Sophia Hirseland

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1 Introduction

This article attempts to assess “instructed voting” (*voto consigna*) in Bolivia, a phenomenon which has not yet been explored as part of the body of work on clientelism. Instructed voting refers to the taking of collective electoral decisions in determined groups, following the recommendation of an authority within this group. The taking of collective decisions is part of the sociopolitical organisation of many Indigenous communities in Bolivia, as high-ranking

politicians and anthropologists stated in both interviews and informal conversations.¹ In terms of clientelistic practices, instructed voting allows the acquisition of large numbers of votes in one go with the help of community authorities acting as vote brokers – as such, it is attractive to party candidates. Few media reports have, however, covered this key phenomenon.²

Large parts of the scholarship on clientelistic bloc voting revolve around the question of how the manipulation of electoral decisions functions in seemingly democratic systems, with no signs of coercion on the involved constituencies and without the payment of rewards. Voters' motives in going along with this practice have remained understudied in the literature. Based on its analysis of instructed voting in Bolivia, the article finds social norms and the trust in authoritative personalities within Indigenous communities to be central drivers of related electoral behaviour. It adds to the literature on bloc voting by conceptualising instructed voting and showcasing a form thereof that works without the coercion of or rewards being offered to constituencies. Unlike similar forms of clientelistic bloc voting (Ando 1969; Auyero 2001; Baland and Robinson 2007; Joshi 1981), constituents actively participate here in electoral decision-making. However, this form of agency seems restricted when they are guided through the process by a corrupt authority.

The article looks at Uru communities in the Bolivian federal state of Oruro, and specifically their voting behaviour during the 2014 elections held for special Indigenous representatives. The 2009 Constitution reserved seats for special Indigenous representatives in parliament. The Uru are an ethnic minority not only in Bolivian society but also in relation to the larger Andean peoples, the Aymara and Quechua, comprising merely a few hundred members (INE 2012). The step taken aimed at allowing parliamentary representation of Indigenous minorities. One special Indigenous representative can be elected per state, plus one substitute per state, except for the two states that do not have Indigenous minority peoples (Chuquisaca and Potosí); this adds up to a total of seven special Indigenous representatives plus seven substitutes countrywide. Each candidate has to run for a political party.

Forms of Indigenous self-governance have been established in many Latin American countries in recent years. States like Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela have included Indigenous forms of self-governance in autonomous Indigenous territories in their Constitutions (Aguilar et al. 2010; Gonzales and González 2015; González 2015, 2016). Bolivia's 2009 Constitution allowed Indigenous peoples in autonomous territories to

1 I use the term “communities” throughout as a translation of the Spanish *comunidades*, which refers to specific modes of sociopolitical organisation and economic production (in the highlands, involving collective land cultivation). More precisely, “the community as the specific structure of collective and public authority of these populations” (Quijano 2005, 71). Indigenous communities are not always congruent with state administrative units. They comprise only several dozen or a few hundred persons.

2 The popular radio station EA Bolivia reported on instructed voting in the highlands in 2011. My interview partners from the lowlands testified to its existence there as well (<https://www.eabolivia.com/2011/9903-oposicion-observa-voto-consigna-en-el-altiplano.html>, last accessed 26 March 2022).

elect their authorities according to their own uses and customs (*usos y costumbres*), hereby legalising instructed voting. The Uru were granted their autonomy in 2018.

Revealed, then, are the underlying mechanisms to instructed voting. The following contributes to theories on clientelistic bloc voting by closely examining a case that works without the coercion, sanctioning, or rewarding of voters. The analysis is based on qualitative data gathered during research stays in the four focus communities between 2016 and 2017, done in order to reconstruct the voting patterns found in these communities. Guided interviews with politicians and community members and small-scale electoral data (*mesa electoral*) showed that community members cast their ballots based on instructed voting. Two of the communities would see large majorities in favour of the winning candidate. According to interview sources, they were reportedly involved in clientelistic deals. The results in the two other communities were more heterogeneous. No evidence for clientelism could be found in the latter communities. The qualitative approach taken allows close examination of the electoral decision-making within the chosen case study.

The article proceeds in four steps: First, I conceptualise instructed voting. Second, I develop a theoretical framework on clientelistic bloc voting as the basis for the subsequent analysis of instructed voting. Third, I outline the ways in which the employed data was collected. Fourth, the empirical data is analysed. Fifth and finally, I draw conclusions for research on clientelism going forwards.

2 Conceptualising “Instructed Voting”: How Collective Decision-Making is Linked to the Sociopolitical Organisation of Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia

Bolivian civil society is highly organised, and very effectively so too (Albó 2002, 2008). The colonial experience contributed to Indigenous peoples’ sophisticated skills in political (counter-)organisation (Antezana Ergueta 1994; Nasini C. 2002; Rojas Ramírez 1989). The sociopolitical organisation of Indigenous communities into peasant unions, Indigenous organisations, precolonial, or other communitarian structures has been crucial for the defence of Indigenous interests vis-à-vis the state or private (for example mining) companies and an effective defence mechanism of minority interests in the face of more powerful actors. Most of the country’s Indigenous peoples nowadays organise via peasant unions or Indigenous entities (Albro 2005), co-existing with or even replacing precolonial community structures.

Correspondingly, the governing party MAS,³ which has been in power nearly continuously since 2005 and would be led for 14 years by the country’s first Indigenous president Evo Morales Ayma (2006–2019), had its roots in a social movement composed of Indigenous and other civil organisations in the late 1990s (Farthing and Kohl 2014; Madrid 2012; Postero 2007;

3 Movimiento al Socialismo (“Movement to Socialism”), a leftist political party founded in 1997 by Filemón Escobar and Morales, the latter being Aymara.

Yashar 2005; Zuazu 2009). In spite of conflicts with its Indigenous base in recent years, MAS is still deeply entrenched in large parts of that constituency (Hirseland and Strijbis 2018), transcending the boundaries of specific peoples (Madrid 2005).

The extensive Indigenous highland population comprises the large Aymara and Quechua groups in addition to several smaller peoples, including the Uru (INE 2012). The latter have avoided mingling with the larger peoples in external formats, in an attempt to maintain their independence and stance as a minority people vis-à-vis the majoritarian peoples who dominate the unions (de la Barra Saavedra, Lara Barrientos, and Coca Cruz 2011). Instead, the Uru have maintained the *ayllu* structures as a means of communitarian organisation. They are characterised by their cooperative nature: the soil is owned and cultivated collectively by the *allyu* members (Cusicanqui 1990, 100). “We are organised by communities, and our major authority is the *qhastan yoqztañ qamñi zóñi* [see below]. [...] We are very [...] cautious of integrating with the Aymara and Quechua. This is why we don’t belong to these organisations.” (8)

Indigenous communitarian organisation entails political concepts that differ fundamentally from democratic paradigms of European origin, such as collective political decision-making.

The development of the Indigenous organisational structures established a communitarian system; a system of collective decision-making that the Indigenous people have assumed [...]. There is no such consciousness like the one we have in the Western world of a liberal citizenship. The consciousness of collective citizenship was consolidated with the creation of peasant unions. (3)

Instructed voting is a well-established practice among Indigenous communities in Bolivia. Taking collective voting decisions is considered part of “communitarian democracy” (*democracia comunitaria*): that is, of Indigenous uses and customs. Respected community authorities advise the community on the most convenient candidate. At times, they do so in a biased manner, in case a clientelist deal was previously sealed with the respective candidate. The prevailing collective nature to many Indigenous communities’ sociopolitical life impacts on their notion of the individual and the latter’s political decision-making, as a former Bolivian president would relate:

The idea that each person has their own consciousness and capacity to take decisions and the right to decide what they want is very liberal, very Western. In the world of the Aymara and the world of the Quechua, the collective structure defines [...] a consciousness of all. People don’t perceive it as something that violates their liberty when you tell them: “You know what; [...] the peasant union has decided that your vote in the presidential elections has to be for Evo Morales.” This decision has an imperative nature; not because someone takes a pistol and tells you: “You have to vote for Evo Morales.” But because when you had to take decisions in your life, about what to cultivate, how to

protect your soil [...], you have done it via the peasant union or the Indigenous organisation. These collective decisions, which are taken for the sake of defending you in your basic rights, are also taken for the purpose of giving you instructions on what to do. This is taken for something natural. That's the idea behind instructed voting. (3)

Indigenous parliamentarians who were elected by instructed voting speak about it openly, explaining it as “raising awareness” (*tomar conciencia* (2)) among community members. A Uru parliamentarian from the municipality of Chipaya described the procedure for their election as an overall assembly of Uru from different *ayllus*: “The voting took place and there was an assembly with the brothers of Lake Poopó” (1).

Though collective decision-making is per se part of Bolivia's Indigenous peoples' sociopolitical organisation, the practice of instructed voting facilitates the acquisition of large amounts of votes by political candidates, achieved by accessing community leaders without the need to bribe each individual member of a given community. Clientelistic organisational structures likely account for differences in the voting behaviour of Bolivia's various Indigenous peoples (Hirseland and Strijbis 2018). There, Indigenous party candidates make use of the sociopolitical structures in their home communities and negotiate deals with community leaders to the benefit of the latter in exchange for their community's votes.

3 Theoretical Approaches to Clientelistic Bloc Voting

Social networks are crucial for the study of the dynamics informing clientelistic relations (Auyero 2001; Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013; Fox 1994; Martz 1997). Voters embedded in large social networks are more vulnerable to clientelism than those who are not (Cruz 2018). As such, “organizational membership is one of the strongest, yet overlooked, predictors of vote buying across Latin America” (Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015, 1).

Bloc voting refers to the acquisition of vote packages, which is facilitated when members of social networks take collective electoral decisions. Forms of bloc voting which have been described in the literature – such as “homogenous voting” in Jamaica's “garrison communities” (Figueroa and Sives 2002), the Philippine “Church of Christ” (Iglesia Ni Cristo, INC) (Ando 1969), “indirect vote buying” in the context of employment relationships in Brazil and Italy (Baland and Robinson 2007), and among caste voters in India (Joshi 1981) – are commonly based on the exchanging of money, goods, positions, and similar in return for receiving blocs of votes.

However, they vary in their ways of achieving voter cooperation, regarding the rewards and their receivers, as well as with concern to monitoring and sanctioning. For instance, systematic control of voters' political choices, sanctions such as physical punishment, or the withdrawal of voters' bases for life in case of defection or rewards such as free rent, electricity, or water supply in case of compliance form part of the Jamaican homogenous voting bloc

(Figueroa and Sives 2002). In contrast, other forms of bloc voting function without the threat of penalties and also without the direct rewarding of voters for compliance, while clientelistic deals are seemingly sealed between brokers and politicians only (Ando 1969; Baland and Robinson 2007; Joshi 1981). The latter cases are particularly relevant for our understanding of the drivers of constituencies' compliance, though the motives of voters have scarcely been studied to date.

3.1 Social Norms as Drivers of Bloc Voting

Studies of social norms' role in clientelistic practices in Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Paraguay (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016; Auyero 2001; Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014; Omobowale 2008) show that networks and social proximity help brokers establish close, friendship-like ties with voters. This aids selection of particularly receptive voter groups. Studies of local networks suggest that social proximity fosters cooperation with brokers without the need for enforcement, while social distance hinders it (Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013; Chandraskhar et al. 2018; Duarte et al. 2019; Gingerich and Medina 2013; Rigger 1999, 1994; Rueda 2014; Smith and Bueno de Mesquita 2012; Stokes 2011; Wang and Kurzban 2007).

Personal relationships play a major role herein, and motives like gratitude, friendship, solidarity, and obligation might influence voters' decisions. Social norms can supersede monitoring, sanctioning, and the offering of rewards: "The alternative to monitoring voters is to leverage cultural norms that work in favour of vote buying by creating a sense of obligation among voters to cast their ballot as agreed, reducing the need for monitoring" (Cruz 2018, 4). The knowledge of brokers on norms determining specific groups' political behaviour is a valuable commodity to party candidates. Auyero (2001) demonstrates in his study of clientelist networks in Argentina that mechanisms of vote buying function very subtly. Brokers distribute goods and favours to their constituencies, knowing that: "After what you just saw, [...] votes will come. I don't have to go and look for them [...]. Votes will come anyway" (Auyero 2001, 82). Politicians and brokers gain constituencies' confidence and support within what Auyero calls "problem-solving networks."

Montgomery (2007) shows that patronage systems are sustained by the norms associated with the relationship between patron and client, such as mutual support, defence, or protection. Also, feelings of reciprocity and commitment can affect voters' choices. Finan and Schechter (2012) find that community leaders in Paraguayan villages, acting as brokers between political candidates and constituencies, frequently target reciprocating individuals: that is, community members who are known to be inclined to repay what is given and in whom the receiving of rewards provoked feelings of mutual obligation (see also, Duarte et al. 2019). Rueda (2014) identifies how clientelism is facilitated when voters worry about the welfare of

other voters and about possible disadvantages for the whole group in case of insufficient electoral support. The case study presented here thus contributes to theories on social norms as determinants of clientelistic deals.

3.2 Relations Between Candidates, Brokers, and Constituencies

Clientelistic relations are often considered as hierarchic; the patron being at their head, the brokers functioning as intermediators, and the clients at their lower end (Hicken 2011). Holland and Palmer-Rubin describe the role of brokers within clientelistic networks as local spokespersons or local authorities, finding that “leaders of interest associations often mediate clientelistic exchanges” (2015, 2). Opinion leaders within specific groups can effectively influence these constituencies by drawing on their authoritative standing (Gingerich 2014; Rosas et al. 2014; Schaffer and Baker 2015). In the previously mentioned cases of bloc voting, Ando described the impact of religious authority in the Philippine Church of Christ, a politico-religious sect that instructs its followers on which political candidates to vote for during services, resulting in a “solid INC voting bloc” (1969, 337). In line with this, “[many] INC voters reportedly believe that it is their duty to avoid dissension by voting for the candidates endorsed by the INC hierarchy rather than relying on their own political judgment” (Ando 1969, 337). Baland and Robinson observed for Brazil and Italy the phenomenon of indirect vote buying in relationships of subordination within employment contexts: brokers sell blocs of votes from a given company’s employees while the latter “have ceded, or contracted away, their political rights” (2007, 124). Schaffer systematically examined family households around the world, specifically the authoritative role male heads of families exercised to shape the electoral decision-making of their relatives: “Influence acts to shape the ‘opinion’ of the voter, and family members who exert influence are sometimes called ‘opinion leaders.’” (2014, 350). The impact of opinion leaders in small social entities appears to be of relevance when attempting to identify the drivers of voters’ electoral decision-making. The active participation of voters in the electoral process was, however, not described in any of the abovementioned cases.

Preferences in political decision-making can be shaped by allegiance to one’s ethnic group. It has been shown that ethnic affiliation and clientelism frequently come in tandem (Chandra 2004) and that voters tend to vote for party candidates who represent their own group (Isaksson and Bigsten 2014, 2). Several articles deal with the issue of traditional or autochthonous authority in rural contexts. Outside Latin America, cases of autochthonous leaders acting as vote brokers and influencing political decisions within specific villages have been described, inter alia, in the case of South Africa (De Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Ntsebeza 2005). As to Latin America, scholars have analysed of late the role of traditional authorities and autochthonous self-governance in the representation of Indigenous peoples (Aguilar et al. 2010; Gonzales and González 2015; González 2015, 2016). Social proximity within networks fosters cooperation

with local authorities in political decision-making without the need of enforcement (Chandraskhar, Kinnan, and Larreguy 2018).

Several studies find that vote buying is facilitated where voters have limited access to information about politics: that is, where political knowledge is low (Driscoll and Nelson 2014; Kramon 2016; Vicente and Wantchekon 2009). Mobility in rural communities – or what Gingerich (2014) calls “agrarian societies” – is often limited, which allows brokers to control access to political information. In those contexts, “despite advances in media and communications technology, [...] personal interactions are still crucial for transmitting information in rural villages, especially when that information is sensitive” (Cruz 2018, 5). It is precisely this “diffusion of information through social networks [that] can help to sustain clientelism as an electoral practice” (Duarte et al. 2019, 27). Where voters have access to alternative sources of information about politicians, parties, and their political choices in general, the impact of vote buying decreases (Kramon 2016, 399). In Bolivia, members of rural Indigenous communities enjoy access to tertiary education less often than urban residents do (INE 2012).

While large parts of the scholarship describe clientelistic relations as asymmetric, the ambivalence of patron–client relations as well as the types of agency that can be exercised by voters have received closer academic attention recently. Reyes describes how Philippine voters engage in “networks of trust” (2019, 150), which aim at developing a more egalitarian electoral system – namely, as an alternative to the prevailing sociopolitical networks forming part of the patronage system. He also highlights constituencies’ agency when choosing the most convenient patron.

4 Data and Methods

For my analysis, I employed semi-structured interviews with parliamentary politicians and Uru community inhabitants and small-scale election data. In total, 27 interviews were conducted in the course of two research stays in November and December of 2016 and in May and June of 2017.

The interviews with politicians from different political parties provided hints on instructed voting and potential vote buying during the election of special Indigenous representatives in 2014 in Indigenous communities, among them four Uru communities in the state of Oruro. Subsequently, I conducted interviews with inhabitants of these communities, covering details regarding the communitarian decision-making process, the vote cast during elections, as well as their own motives at the moment of polling. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and ranged in length between ten to 30 minutes long.

On-site I was introduced to the community members by a Bolivian anthropologist who had spent almost a year living with the Uru. She also provided me with details on the voting mechanisms in the communities as part of an expert interview and helped me establish contacts with the latter’s members. Many Indigenous community members are very sceptical of

“white” foreigners, the majority of whom visit the communities for purposes related to the mining industry; most community members were reluctant about giving interviews. I was able to conduct semi-guided interviews with 16 community members. Interviews were anonymised. The analysis is based on a convenience sample. The interviews were systematised and analysed with atlas.ti. Unfortunately, community leaders were not willing to give interviews and I was not allowed to participate in community assemblies.

Additionally, small-scale election data on the smallest administrative unit (*mesa electoral*) was drawn on, as kindly facilitated by Bolivia’s National Institute of Statistics (INE), which permitted seeing the voting results for each respective community. According to the 2012 census, 4,097 persons self-identified as Uru in Bolivia. The majority of them (2,497) lived in the state of Oruro, around the dried-out salt lake Poopó; other communities live in the state of La Paz, around Lake Titicaca. About 93 per cent of people in the communities under analysis self-identify as Uru, which allowed the isolated analysis of their electoral results (INE 2012). Three of the four communities comprise only several dozen persons, only one (Chipaya) has roughly 300 inhabitants.

In the course of the interviews, I obtained hints on vote buying in two of the four communities provided by their members. The electoral results in the selected communities seem to support the reported claims. As evidence for vote buying is hard to find, this article delivers rare empirical data.

As vote buying is a highly sensitive topic, I guaranteed my interviewees the greatest possible anonymity and did not ask either for their names or for specific personal information. For this reason, I can unfortunately not provide more insight on the interviewees themselves. Informed oral consent was obtained by all interviewees beforehand. I took these precautions since it was imaginable that individuals exposing their communities to unspecific risks by giving information to outsiders might have to face unfavourable consequences. This suggests that my anonymity strategy was probably effective enough to protect the respondents.

5 Tracing Uru Community Members’ Motives for Engaging in Instructed Voting

Based on this data, I will now attempt to trace Uru community members’ motives for engaging in collective electoral decision-making. Before doing so, however, I will outline the circumstances surrounding the 2014 elections for special Indigenous representatives. Then I proceed to describe the communitarian decision-making process in the selected communities.

During the 2014 elections, the victorious candidate Santos Paredes Mamani ran for Democratic Unit (UD). Oruro was the country’s only federal state that provided a UD representative, with all other special Indigenous representatives standing for MAS. According to interview sources, Paredes had first attempted to run for MAS but was not admitted as candidate by the local MAS administration, as he had previously been mayor in Chipaya running for other political parties and hereby disqualified himself. MAS presented an opponent.

Paredes gained nearly two-thirds of the votes (63 per cent) in the largest community, Chipaya, in addition to the vast majority of votes in Llapa Llapani (92 per cent) and Puñaca (79 per cent). The latter communities were involved in vote buying, according to interview sources (9, 15). The majority of the votes in the fourth community, Wilañeque, went to the MAS candidate (see Table 1).

Table 1. Electoral Results of the Special Indigenous Representatives in the Uru Communities in Oruro in 2014

| Community | MAS | UD | Valid votes | All votes | Valid votes as percentage of all votes |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|--|
| Chipaya | 37% (147) | 63% (248) | 100% (395) | 463 | 85% |
| Llapa Llapani | 8% (9) | 92% (97) | 100% (106) | 119 | 89% |
| Puñaca | 21% (8) | 79% (30) | 100% (38) | 50 | 76% |
| Wilañeque | 89% (51) | 11% (6) | 100% (57) | 64 | 89% |

In order to secure his victory, the candidate needed the support of at least three of the four communities. Paredes possibly considered the constituents of his home community Chipaya his core voters, where he had already worked as mayor, and could be relatively certain of their support.

Llapa Llapani is a village. They are our descendants. [...] A candidate from here went there. [...] But what happened there? The constituents were internally bought, or rather their votes. Santos went there to buy the vote, so that they would give it to him. Hence, all of this Murato group voted for UD. UD had won [enough votes] here [in Chipaya], added to these [Murato] votes, that's how he won. (9)

Assumingly, the candidate decided to seal clientelistic deals with the community leaders of Llapa Llapani and Puñaca, who likely proceeded to convince their constituencies of the candidate in community assemblies. The fact that, of the 16 interviewees, only two members of different communities reported suspicions of vote buying in Llapa Llapani and Puñaca hints to the respondents' reluctance to speak about it openly. Otherwise, it seems likely that most community members were simply uninformed about deals sealed between community leaders and politicians.

As to the political decision-making structures in the respective Uru communities, a group of *ayllus* forms a "council" (*cabildo grande* (5, 9)). The Uru people in the state of Oruro comprise the *ayllus* in the municipalities of Chipaya and Poopó. There are different levels and sizes to *ayllus*. The smallest (*ayllu menor*) is synonymously called a "council" (*cabildo*). Besides a number of state-defined positions – such as Governor, Mayor, and similar – the Uru communities possess a system of traditional authority, too.

The *mallku* is the leader of an *ayllu*, locally called *qhastan yoqztan qamñi zóñi* in Chipaya municipality and *mallku cota* in Poopó municipality, which comprises the communities Llapa

Llapani, Puñaca, and Wilañeque. Decisions concerning the community are taken in assemblies by majority vote. The assemblies are presided over by the *mallku* and attended by the community members. “The assembly is convoked by the *mallku*. The *mallku* is from here, from the community, [the head] of just four *ayllus*. [...] The *mallku* convokes the assembly and the large part [interpretation of the author: majority] decides” (9).

Prior to elections, people debate the political options for the community in assemblies; most community members attend. “There was an assembly to decide what to vote, yes. [...] Here in Chipaya it is always like that. But there is always a part that opposes or does not participate. So, it amounts to around 90 per cent” (9). Within the assemblies, community members discuss and assess the candidates and their promises to the community. The *mallku* as the community’s highest Indigenous authority gives their opinion on the candidate they sees as most convenient for the community and advises its members on their electoral decisions (9, 19). While the interviewed politicians (as well as media reports) employed the term “instructed voting,” community members did not, referring instead to decisions being taken in assemblies.

Gathering in assemblies and taking collective decisions are an inherent part of Uru community life: “we do it every month” (18), and people discuss “what is necessary for the community, the soil we need [...], what needs to be done” (18). Community cohesion appears to be a main driver of social interaction. Collective organisation does not apply to political decision-making alone but is likewise present in other social spheres such as work: “We relate to each other as part of a community. We are always in community, but not in a political party. We work in community” (11). Per the communitarian logic, it appears natural to community members to decide collectively who should get the community’s votes and which political offer would best benefit them all. People take that voting decision collectively “because we are used to it” (17). Compliance with collective decision-making is very strong, and community members go along with a decision even if they do not personally agree with it: “What can I do if the majority says so? The majority decides, even if one doesn’t want it” (17).

Interviewees did not report monitoring of the individual vote cast or punishment in case of potential deviation. When asked about the nature of the ballot, community members stated vote casting was secret (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 18, 19). Apparently, constituents did not feel monitored in the moment of them submitting their individual votes. Coercion does not seem to be a driving force here, then. Sanctions for deviators seemed to be widely absent in the Uru communities, and fear of punishment did not appear to impact people’s decision-making at the ballot box. While individuals mentioned the group pressure existing to stick to the community’s decision, they emphasised its non-binding nature. Interviewees related that individuals could deviate without the risk of penalty (7, 9, 14, 15, 16). The election results in the two communities reportedly involved in clientelistic deals confirm that deviation does happen (see Table 1). In principle, this means that voters could cast their ballots freely. The main driver here seems to be the social norm of respecting the community’s decision.

The reported clientelistic deals appear to materialise between candidate and *mallkus* solely, the latter being rewarded for providing the votes of their communities. Community members did not report receiving rewards for electoral compliance, such as payments, material resources, or favours. On the contrary, respondents expressed disappointment with the candidate's unfulfilled post-election promises, while he had distributed food, drink, and cattle to the communities in question during his campaigning.

We thought he would keep his word. These people speak confidently. He brought coca and more things, he was very kind. He came day and night. He also brought llamas, anything we wanted. [...] After the assembly, he prepared food. [...] He brought everything [...], cooked chicken. But when he assumed office: bye. This is politics; they talk and talk, "brothers, sisters," hugs and greetings. [...] He promised projects. He was well-dressed. [...] Now we are dying from hunger and he doesn't remember us. (17)

It was not the first time a victorious candidate failed to deliver on their prior promises. Most villagers uttered general disenchantment with state politics and politicians: "The politicians come to get votes. 'Give me votes!' they say. This is how they come. [...] And they make promises. 'We will give you this,' they say. But they don't keep their promises" (5); "He offered us roads, a health centre, because that's what we need most. There is even a document of commitment. [...] But he did not distribute the funds for it, nothing" (15).

As to the relations between client and patron, voters showed preferences for candidates that had qualified themselves by being industrious and dedicated to the community. The victorious candidate Santos gained his post because the communities had seen that "he is a hard-working person" (6). This applied to political candidates in general: "They need to show, they need to prove [...], they need to work to become the candidate. [...] This is within the community" (16).

Respondents also expressed a preference for a shared social background (15, 16, 18, 19), not necessarily in terms of belonging to the same Indigenous people but more generally a rural upbringing, social hardship, and Indigenous provenance.

The party is not important. The person is more important to us. It has to be a neighbour, someone as humble as Evo, who knows where he comes from, who used to shepherd llamas: this kind of person. Someone who didn't grow up in the countryside cannot feel the same. (15)

Consequently Morales, as the country's first Indigenous president who grew up in humble circumstances in rural Oruro, would enjoy great respect and support within the Uru communities; MAS was, as such, the party Uru voters preferred, according to community members (5, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17). In spite of the latter preference, however, the vast majority of constituents in Llapa Llapani and Puñaca ended up voting for the UD candidate instead. A member of the Puñaca community relates how the *mallku* convinced them to vote for Paredes.

There was something, this is why Puñaca voted for Santos Paredes. [...] Certainly, money flowed through Pedro Condori [Puñaca's mallku, name redacted]. [...] And he insisted to the community on voting for him, [...] to the community neighbours and the authorities. So the community said: "We have to vote for Santos Paredes." (19)

Despite the presence of television sets and mobile phones, when asked about elections and the two political parties that had been involved in the 2014 elections my interviewees seemed to have some knowledge gaps on the country's overall political system, displaying a general discomfort when speaking about politics ("I don't know how to talk about politics" (14)) or an unawareness of the existence of other political parties than MAS ("We voted for Evo here. It's all MAS here. [...] I don't know more parties" (7)). The explanation for this political preference occasionally seemed somewhat arbitrary: "[because MAS is] the most famous [party] world-wide" (16). Aspects of the political system that were not directly linked to their communities appeared to be of minor relevance to respondents, such as party agendas. In terms of expectations regarding their representatives, community members desired legal support for the protection of their people (6) or direct material services for their communities. "I care about the road. [...] If you don't have a good road, you walk poorly" (5). State services were not perceived as a reallocation of polity resources, but as personal favours by the president, who at the time of the data collection was Morales: "There is a lot of help by Evo. This is why I like him" (11); "Thanks to Evo we have these brick houses now" (7). These statements hint to a rather personalised conception of state and politics taking hold among community members.

6 What Instructed Voting in Uru Communities Tells Us About Voters' Motives Regarding Clientelism

This article has outlined the motives behind Uru voters engaging in clientelistic deals. The unity achieved by taking collective political decisions protects Uru communities against external threats. Their members seem to place very high confidence in this protective social structure as well as in advice regarding the most convenient political representatives given by community leaders. They strongly embrace the norm of valuing collective over individual judgement, as the conducted interviews showed. Voters place trust in political authorities who legitimise themselves by proving to be hard-working and who have a similar biography to the respective constituencies.

Community members exercise a certain degree of agency by engaging in assemblies prior to elections and rating the offers made to their communities by political candidates. In theory, they are free in their electoral decisions as they are not exposed to potential penalties. However, this agency seems limited when the authority advising them is corrupt. The rather low levels of political knowledge prevailing in the communities make them even more susceptible to biased guidance by their community leaders. In the selected Uru communities, clientelistic

deals are likely sealed between politicians and specific community leaders and only the latter enjoy the payment of rewards. The social norms internalised by community members and their trust in community leaders dispenses with rewarding, monitoring, and sanctioning practices.

In the observed case, the political preferences of community members who are impacted by vote buying differed from the electoral advice given by their community leaders; still, voters followed their suggestions. The case study cannot fully explain how voters are convinced to deviate from their own preferences. Besides, promises were not fulfilled after the candidate's victory – something community members had experienced before. It remains somewhat unclear how an iterative dynamic can be maintained. Both questions are thus key tasks for future research.

Even though the admission of autochthonous self-governance bears opportunities for the diversification of democracy and for a higher identification of autochthonous groups with the overall political system, it also includes risks regarding the legalisation of shady practices – such as the swaying of entire communities. However, it would be misleading to conclude that instructed voting is plainly an instrument of clientelistic manipulation. It is, rather, primarily a core means of decision-making established in many of Bolivia's Indigenous communities.

These findings enrich current theories on clientelistic bloc voting, namely by highlighting the key importance of social norms and the authoritative impact of the electoral advice given by community leaders. In certain contexts, seemingly, monitoring, sanctioning, and rewarding are not necessary: namely, ones where group authorities acting as brokers can be certain of the internalised collectivist norms of voters and of the trust the latter place in them. Such active participation of voters in political decision-making is, indeed, a novelty among current case studies on bloc voting.

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