

Machine [Gun] Politics: Why Politicians Cooperate with Criminal Groups

Chapter 1: What is Criminal Clientelism?

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As I sit in State Congressman Fulano's¹ office at the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, he tells me, "I went with a campaign staffer to the *boca de fumo*² to ask the drug traffickers for permission to campaign in their neighborhood. If you don't get their permission, they won't let you in and will tear down all your posters. They told me the price of entry was R\$5,000" – he paused – "which is really expensive. I told them no, but offered to hire them as security detail for my campaign in exchange for entry." The drug traffickers, insulted by the offer, refused to serve as the now-Congressman's security detail and did not let him or his staff run their campaign in their neighborhood. "Did they threaten you? Were you afraid?" I asked. "Oh, no. They know that the Federal Police will end their business if they hurt someone like me... They just found someone else that was willing to pay the price. Easy."

Inside a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Mengano, a man in his 60s who has lived in the favela his entire life, laughs while telling me that he used to hold his neighborhood's drug trafficking leaders in his arms when they were babies. "I watched them grow up, they were born and raised here." On the day of this interview, Mengano was taking me to meet some of the young leaders of his neighborhood's drug trafficking gang. As we walk up the crooked stairs in the favela, Mengano describes to me how politicians bribe drug traffickers in his neighborhood during political campaigns. "[The politicians] get the permission of the drug traffickers, come into the community, kiss everyone's babies, and make promises... After they win, they throw their SIM card out, get a new phone number, and we never hear from them again." A drug trafficker in Mengano's neighborhood confirms this. "Sometimes the politicians will be having rallies on Sundays on Copacabana beach. If they want to have a barbecue or dance party in our favela once the upper-class rally is over, they can." In fact, the trafficker said that he welcomes these events: when the politician is paying for the meat at the barbecue or the alcohol at a campaign event-turned-dance party, residents of the community show up, are happy, and are likely to buy drugs from him. "It's good for business," he says. I confirm this with Zutano, a personal trainer who lives in the favela and has several friends that are drug traffickers. "[The traffickers] will let any of these scoundrels [the

¹ All names in the following anecdotes have been changed.

² Drug den, in Portuguese.

politicians] enter the community, as long as they are paying enough... The candidates used to have to make promises to the community, but now, if they just tell the traffickers that they'll pay them enough money or help them get some confiscated guns back, the traffickers will close the deal with them and let them in.”

This depiction of enterprising politicians, willingly making deals with criminal groups in order to get votes, doesn't fit neatly with existing characterizations of organized crime and politicians cooperating. Existing accounts generally fall in one of two categories. The first is a story of the politician as a victim, cooperating with organized crime's demands in order to mitigate violence. This narrative gained notoriety through Pablo Escobar's *plata o plomo* “bullet or bribe” threats, inducing public officials to cooperate with the Medellín cartel or to face violent retaliation. The second account is one where politicians and criminal organizations are involved in a quid-pro-quo collusive relationship with some all-powerful criminal godfather. Popular culture depictions aside, this brings to mind images of mob or mafia leaders that lavish their favored politicians with campaign fund, bribes, and protection—but only as long as the corrupt politician holds up their side of the bargain. These two well-known characterizations of politician-criminal cooperation, however, are far too restrictive to adequately describe the many examples of cooperation between criminal groups and politicians, including the narratives above that are becoming all too common in Rio de Janeiro. The dominant theories of criminal-politician cooperation relegate politicians to taking a passive, reactionary role in their interactions with criminals, missing politicians' own capacity to initiate a deal with criminal groups.

However, when one tries to explain the behavior of politicians in Mengano's neighborhood, it raises questions about why politicians would choose to engage in a risky, potentially violent partnership. I explain these collusive relationships through an electoral theory of *criminal clientelism*, first by introducing the concept and its subtypes, and then by providing evidence that politicians and criminal groups in Rio de Janeiro may be behaving more like the canonical politicians and brokers in the clientelism literature than is commonly thought. In doing so, I explain why we see politicians like El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele³ or Governor of Rio de Janeiro Sérgio Cabral⁴ make arms-length deals with violent criminals for years.

³ President Bukele is accused of trading lax law enforcement with gangs in exchange for entry in gang-dominated neighborhoods while beginning his career in politics running for mayor in 2014 (McDermott and Dudley 2020).

⁴ Sérgio Cabral is accused of bribing drug traffickers for entry into communities and co-hosting barbecues and dance parties with them while running for state deputy early in his career. He is now in jail for corruption (Alfano 2017).

The core argument of this dissertation is that cooperation can be an election-winning strategy with tolerable levels of legal and physical risk, most explicitly so for candidates not embedded in the criminal group or surrounding community. This contrasts with conventional wisdom that affiliating with a criminal group will be reputationally toxic for a candidate (Arias 2006) and that criminal groups only cooperate with candidates or where the lines are blurred between candidate and criminal group (Albarracín 2018; Barnes 2017; Hidalgo and Lessing 2015). It also sheds light on why the politician I spoke to did not fear the criminal group’s retaliation upon rejecting their deal. In Chapter 2, I build out the logic of why outsider candidates (those unlike the residents in communities criminal groups govern) face lower risks of cooperating with criminal groups. I develop and test my arguments using a mixed-methods approach about *why* politicians would use cooperation as an electoral strategy, *which kinds* of politicians are more likely to use cooperation, and *how* criminal groups use their existing capabilities to mobilize votes as criminal brokers.

The assumption that politicians are strategic enough to make unsavory deals in order to get elected is not new. The clientelism literature has shown these assumptions in a variety of ways for decades, assuming that politicians will even break the law in order to get votes. Curiously, though, the political violence literature has not adopted this view of the entrepreneurial politician when theorizing about how politicians interact with organized crime. This chapter proceeds as follows. The following section explains how my contribution brings together the extant literature on criminal governance and clientelism. Section 2 introduces the concept of *criminal clientelism*, then shows how the interaction of two factors—the market for votes and candidate embeddedness in a community—predicts different subtypes. I introduce the case of Rio de Janeiro in Section 3 and explain how all four subtypes of criminal clientelism are present in the one case. Section 4 concludes with a roadmap for the rest of the dissertation.

1 Criminal Governance meets Machine Politics

This project connects the literature on criminal governance with that on clientelism, which have largely developed separately. In doing so, I explain how we can apply theories on how criminals influence and control citizens to a disparate area where politicians are seeking to influence citizens: at the ballot box. This project also departs from past studies of criminal involvement in electoral

politics by shifting the focus towards the politician, not the criminal group. In doing so, I provide a comprehensive theory of which, why, and how politicians subcontract criminal groups to run their political machines.

Studies of criminal governance have focused on three questions, illuminated in Lessing (2020): *who* is governed by criminal groups, *what* acts are governed by criminal groups, and *how* criminal groups govern, in terms of hierarchy, style, or structure. Studies of *who* is governed by criminal groups have largely focused on civilians, looking at what the criminal group's relationship is to the civilians in their area (Arias 2006, 2017; Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020) whether or not they are embedded in the community (Córdova 2019; Gambetta 1996; Magaloni et al. 2015), and what the criminal group's incentives are to govern civilians (Arjona 2016; Hidalgo and Lessing 2015; Trejo and Ley 2019). In contrast, research on *what* is governed by criminal groups focuses on their activities: whether criminal organizations act as law enforcement in their communities (Arias 2017), as arbiters of justice (Lessing and Willis 2019; Skarbek 2011) or as political middlemen or entrepreneurs (Albarracín 2018; Barnes 2017), to name a few. Lastly, research on *how* criminal groups govern overlaps with classic theories on state-building and territorial control. This research agenda focuses on how the structure of criminal organizations allows them to govern (Lessing and Willis 2019; Varese 2011), such as whether they exert their authority through control over territory (Grillo 2012; Trejo and Ley 2019), control over the illicit marketplace (Gambetta 1996; Tajima 2018), integration with local communities (Kolbe 2013; Magaloni et al. 2015) or corruption of state authorities (Dal Bo, Dal Bo, and Di Tella 2006). The who, what, and how a criminal group governs also varies according to a group's business goals (Levitt and Venkatesh 2000; Schelling 1971), the presence of competition (Dell 2015; Ley 2017; Rios 2013), and how much the state cracks down on crime (Bailey and Taylor 2009; Calderon et al. 2015; Lessing 2017; Osorio 2015).

There has been a tremendous growth of research on the connection between criminal governance and electoral politics, most of which has left politicians in a black box in favor of focusing on criminal groups. In theorizing about possible causes of mayoral assassinations in Mexico, Blume (2017) states that organized crime “wields two main means of influencing the state.” The first is coercion, where criminal groups threaten or assassinate political rivals, and the second is collusion, where criminal groups partner with a sympathetic politician to achieve their policy or business goals.

The most developed of this literature attempts to explain how criminal groups coerce politicians. Dal Bo, Dal Bo, and Di Tella's (2006) pioneering theory of bribery and punishment argues that criminal groups coerce public officials by threatening them with violence to get them to accept a bribe and comply with the criminal group's wishes, citing Pablo Escobar's infamous *plata o plomo* threat (the bribe or the bullet, literally "silver or lead"). They find that these threats were extraordinarily effective for Escobar, as well as FARC narco-guerillas in Colombia, who threatened 463 of the country's mayors to resign, 222 of whom complied. The *plata o plomo* story has been the prevailing model explaining criminal-politician interactions by political economists and formal modelers in Colombia (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013; Chepesiuk 2005; Lessing 2017), Mexico (Blume 2017; Dell 2015), and Italy (Alesina, Piccolo, and Pinotti 2019; Daniele and Dipoppa 2017; De Feo and De Luca 2017).

The *plata o plomo* model of bribery and punishment can be applied to a range of political actors that criminal groups are trying to influence, not just politicians. In fact, politicians represent just a small portion of targets of Escobar's original *plata o plomo* threats. Lessing (2018) shows that the majority of Escobar's targets were at enforcers of the law, not lawmakers themselves. This includes judges, police, and investigators. Lessing argues that criminal groups use *plata o plomo* to purchase corruption directly from the enforcer of the law while criminal groups are more likely to use *violent lobbying* to influence politicians. He argues that *plata o plomo* is generally a private threat towards enforcers while violent lobbying is generally a public threat towards elected officials. Violent lobbying is intended to inflict direct political costs on the leaders through acts of terror, bombings, kidnappings, arson, etc. Despite the questions Lessing (2018) raises about whether *plata o plomo* indeed is the dominant mode through which criminal groups coerce politicians, it remains the default explanation of how criminal groups coerce politicians.

Works that adopt the *plata o plomo* model to explain how criminal groups coerce politicians represent the politicians as passive, only acting after being coerced with the oversimplistic choice between violence or a bribe (Alesina, Piccolo, and Pinotti 2019; Dal Bo, Dal Bo, and Di Tella 2006). In Dal Bo, Dal Bo, and Di Tella's (2006, p. 45) foundational model, the authors make the modeling assumption assume that the criminal group "holds all bargaining power and thus makes a take it or leave it offer." The politician's actions are constrained to a narrow set of reactive behaviors: accepting the bribe, rejecting it and facing punishment, or, in the $t-1$ stage, if the politician is forward-thinking, deciding whether or not to enter the race at all. Formal models and qualitative accounts that complicate this theory still, however, leave the politicians in a black box, restricting

them to the same reactive narrow set of strategies (Alesina, Piccolo, and Pinotti 2019) or only referring to them post-mortem, after the criminal group supposedly chose punishment (Blume 2017; Trejo and Ley 2019).

Other scholars suggest that *plata o plomo* does not adequately explain how criminal groups coerce politicians and offer alternative explanations, but these also remain focused on the criminal organization. Rios (2013) highlights the importance of local drug markets, arguing that drug cartels in Mexico use violence against mayors to pressure them for lax enforcement, despite the fact that local law enforcement efforts are often outside of the mayor's locus of control. Trejo and Ley (2020) also focus on geography as an important predictor of coercion, arguing that the Mexican cartels are more likely to coerce candidates in municipalities that are more important for the drug trade or nearer to major trafficking routes. Both of these theories suggest that there is little the politician can do to escape violence – law enforcement efforts and the geographic centrality of a city are out of the politician's control. Blume (2017) suggests that criminal groups use bribes and violence simultaneously, arguing that high electoral competition and criminal fragmentation created the conditions for criminal groups to bribe friendly politicians (*plata*) and target violence to rival politicians (*plomo*) in municipal races in Mexico.

On the other hand, theories on criminal-politician collusion center on the quid-pro-quo relationship between organized crime and friendly politicians. One would assume that politicians would be a more central part of the theory in these cases since the relationship is an exchange. These theories, however, skip to the consequences of the quid-pro-quo, sweeping the origins of the collusive relationship under the rug. Arguments such as those that focus on the consequences of the Mexican PRI's tolerance of drug cartels (Dell 2015; Rios 2013) or the long-standing amity between the CD and the Sicilian mafia (Daniele and Dipoppa 2017; De Feo and De Luca 2017) cite historians or journalism as evidence that collusion exists and move on. Works in this vein use historical evidence to label the candidates as “preferred” or “sympathetic” (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013; Albarracín 2018; Duran-Martinez 2017) but leave figuring out why the candidate is preferred or what they had to do to get in a preferred position as an exercise for the reader.

Few works deliberately try to explain how criminal-politician collusion arises, but those that do are vulnerable to the same pitfalls of focusing exclusively on criminals while leaving politicians in a black box. Albarracín (2018) develops a useful typology using the same case this dissertation focuses on: Rio de Janeiro. In it, he distinguished between forms of *criminalized electoral politics*, which

include deploying both violence and clientelism. While Albarracín offers a compelling explanation of when we are likely to see different combinations of violence and clientelism as campaign strategies, one of his main explanatory variables is the “nature of the criminal-politician relationship” – meaning that he takes the existence (or lack thereof) of a partnership as a starting point. Lessing and Hidalgo (2019), also focusing on the *milicias* in Rio de Janeiro, explain how these protection-style criminal groups persist by embedding themselves in the state, a process the authors call *endogenous state weakness*. In both articles, however, it is outside the scope of the project to explain the conditions favorable to the formation of these collusive relationships in the first place. Barnes (2017) provides a useful characterization of different forms of criminal politics, but does not predict why criminal-politician relationships develop. Lastly, there are several examples of what Eaton (2006) calls “armed clientelism,” where armed criminal groups use their violent abilities to sway voters or opposition candidates during elections in Indonesia, Mexico, and Colombia (Eaton 2006; Gallego n.d.; Tajima 2018; Trejo and Ley 2020). These works go in-depth explaining the criminal group’s incentives, resources, and preferences for getting involved in the election, but barely acknowledge the politician.

1.1 Beyond plata o plomo

What is missing from this literature on criminal-politician interactions is a clearer explanation of the incentives of the politician. The only comprehensive explanation for why politicians cooperate electorally with criminal groups is *plata o plomo* – which only represents a fraction of the diverse examples of politician-criminal cooperation – and which may be a more apt description of how criminal groups coerce enforcers of the law, not writers of the law. The examples of Fulano and Mengano in Rio de Janeiro highlighted at the beginning of this chapter have no place in a literature that only restricts politicians to being the victims of coercion or constantly under the thumb of a criminal group. The literature on collusion offers little guidance as well, sweeping paths to collusion under the rug while focusing on its consequences or focusing exclusively on the criminal group’s incentives while eschewing those of the politician. When scholars focus on the criminal group’s incentives, resources, and preferences, without duly considering those of the politician (or only pigeonholing the politician to being a reactive second-mover), they miss half of the story.

I recenter the analysis on the politician and argue that—under certain conditions—cooperation with criminal groups can be an election-winning strategy for politicians. When this is

the case, we will see politicians and criminal groups interacting similar to a brokerage relationship in the clientelism literature. Instead of hiring a community organizer, church leader, or local bureaucrat, the politician hires a criminal group to bring them enough votes to win.

Theoretically, what would a brokerage relationship look like when the broker is a member of a criminal group? I posit that a politician would consider partnering with a criminal organization in order to take advantage of the criminal group's organizational and coercive capacity to get votes. This type of brokerage relationship would look like Holland and Palmer-Rubin's (2015) description of *independent broker* or *organizational broker*-style relationships, where neither broker type is formally affiliated with a party, but rather they subcontract their labor to politicians. Unlike traditional party-based brokers such as the *punteros* deeply embedded in the Peronist political machine in Argentina (Levitsky 2003; Stokes et al. 2013; S. J. R. Zarazaga 2014), politicians that are seeking criminal groups – and the voters they have access to – are likely seeking criminal groups because these voters are difficult to access through party-based and other legal channels. The clientelism literature shows that politicians readily engage with brokers that are unaffiliated with the party, and are aware (and often comfortable with the idea) that these brokers deploy illegal vote-buying strategies in order to help the politician get elected (Mares 2015; Mares and Young 2016). Hiring a criminal group is a more extreme act than hiring a non-criminal broker to (illegally) buy votes, but they exist on the same continuum. Studies from around the world cited in Mares and Young (2016) show that there are plenty of examples of politicians that are willing to flout the law if it helps them get elected.

One could also think of a criminal group's violent potential as an extreme end of the range of coercive tactics used to induce voters. There is broad evidence that candidates appear willing to hire (non-criminal) brokers to coerce voters. Most examples of brokers coercing voters involve the withholding of benefits or social exclusion (Baldwin 2013; Mares and Young 2016; Stokes et al. 2013), but there are plenty of examples of non-criminal brokers punishing voters more severely with violence or the threat of it (Koter 2013; Lemarchand 1972; Mares and Young 2016). There are even documented cases of criminal groups or militias using violence to coerce voters in Colombia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, and Nigeria, though few of these studies describe the terms of the trade between politician and criminal broker (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013; Anderson 2002; Blume 2017; Gambetta 1996; LeBas 2013).

I believe the phenomenon of politicians subcontracting criminal organizations is even more widespread than what is shown in the few studies cited above. However, it has been left unexplored

as criminal governance research has focused exclusively on the role of the criminal group and the clientelism literature focuses more on the voter. If politicians subcontracted criminal groups as they subcontract other independent or organizational brokers, we may expect to see evidence of the classic behavior associated with clientelism: monitoring, the broker providing access to voters to the politician, and mobilizing voters, among others (Hicken and Nathan 2020).

I conducted an original survey in Rio de Janeiro that provides suggestive evidence that criminal groups *do* behave like brokers and politicians “hire” them through the provision of favors or rents. This suggests that Fulano and Mengano’s experiences are not an isolated phenomenon. Following the work of Thachil (2018), I conducted an in-person survey using *worksite sampling*⁵ about criminal leaders during an election. Conducted in the months after the 2018 federal and state elections and through a partnership with the local bus company, I used worksite sampling to interview municipal bus drivers and fare collectors at their place of business instead of their homes. Most respondents are low-income residents of criminally dominated areas; worksite sampling was used in order to protect respondents when asking sensitive questions and elicit more truthful responses than if they had been interviewed in their neighborhoods. In the survey, I conducted a list experiment (Blair and Imai 2012; Blair, Imai, and Lyall 2014) to ask voters about different types of clientelistic activity they observed between criminal groups and politicians in their neighborhood. The questions were focused on “neighborhood groups,” and as is standard with list experiment protocol, my control group was presented with a list of four possible organizations present in the neighborhood. The treatment group was presented with the same list, but with the addition of the “Drug Trafficking Organization” group⁶. I had survey enumerators ask respondents both in the treatment and control condition about the prevalence of the aforementioned neighborhood groups’ involvement in a variety of activities related to clientelism.

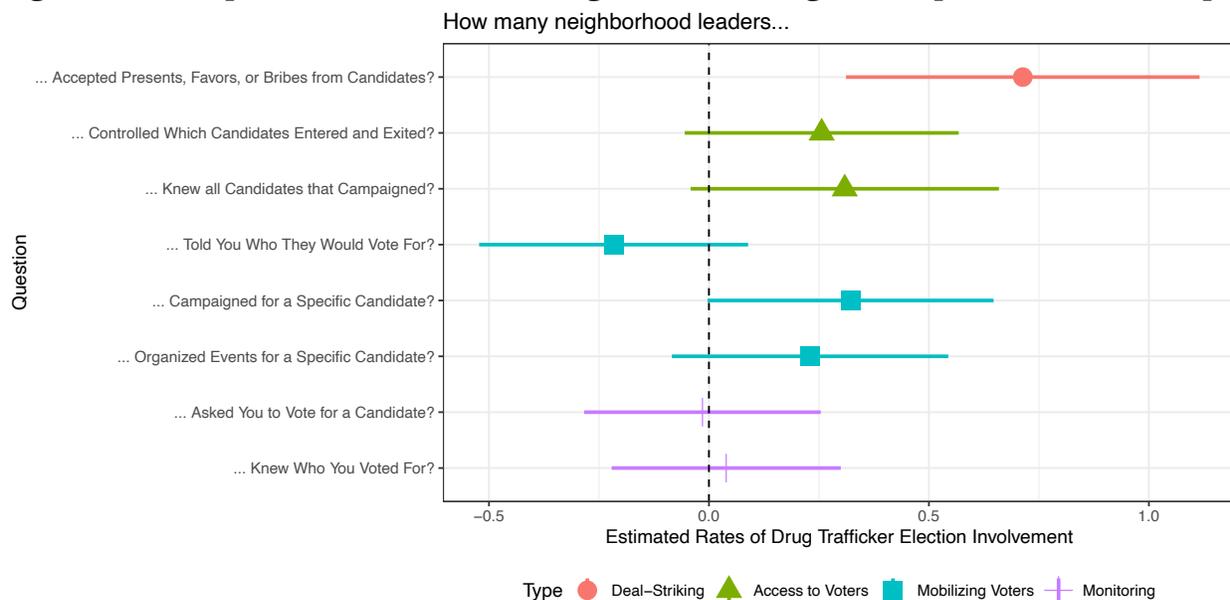
In the list experiment, I test for the presence of four common types of activities indicative of a politician-broker relationship: deal-striking, broker-provided access to voters, mobilization of voters, and monitoring. From these categories, there was strong supporting evidence of the existence of deal-striking between criminal groups and politicians, some supporting evidence of

⁵ Worksite sampling means that I recruited respondents and conducted the survey at their place of work instead of at their home. This method was useful for empirical reasons because I could reach respondents from various parts of the state while staying in the same location, but more importantly, it was a safer backdrop for them to talk about their experiences living in criminally governed territories without the fear that a criminal group leader would overhear the conversation.

⁶ I also conducted the list experiment with a second treatment group, the militias. These results are described in Chapter 3.

criminal groups providing access to voters and mobilizing voters, and little evidence of monitoring (Figure 1). First, there is broad consensus among survey respondents that drug trafficking organizations are willing to “accept presents, favors, or bribes from a candidate.” My results suggest that politicians are not merely passive actors in the criminal-politician relationship, but may behave in the same strategic and enterprising way that they are characterized in the clientelism literature. It also indicates that politicians can be bribe-givers—not just bribe-takers—when it is electorally advantageous for them to do so. Second, respondents also indicate that they perceive that drug trafficking organizations “control which candidates entered and exited” and “know all candidates that campaigned,” behaviors indicative of gatekeeping and controlling access to voters, though the effect size is slightly smaller than that of deal-striking behaviors (Aspinall and Hicken 2020; S. J. R. Zarazaga 2014). This is also the case with the third category, voter mobilization. There is weakly positive (though not statistically significant at the .05 level) evidence of two of three behaviors related to voter mobilization, specifically “organizing events for a specific candidate,” and “campaigning for a specific candidate” in the neighborhoods they dominate. Lastly, I find little evidence that survey respondents think that criminal organizations monitor voters. This, however, is broadly consistent with the evidence on monitoring in the broader research on clientelism: 82% of papers in the field find no evidence of broker-mediated monitoring of voters (Hicken and Nathan 2020).

Figure 1: List Experiment Results Indicating a Broader Range of Cooperative Relationships



This plot shows the difference in means for the list experiment questions about campaign strategies and involvement of drug trafficking organizations. As is conventional for a list experiment, the control group was shown a list of neighborhood

organizations and the treatment group was shown a list of the same number of organizations, with the addition of drug trafficking organizations. After a comprehension check with respondents, my enumerators asked the following eight questions. The coefficient reported is the difference in means between the treatment group and control group. A positive coefficient can be interpreted as the effect size of the treatment condition, the drug traffickers.

My survey evidence underscores the proposition that there is much more variation in criminal-political interactions than what is usually portrayed in the literature. In this dissertation, I propose an electoral theory that explains why politicians hire criminal groups as brokers, linking the literature on clientelism to that on organized crime. My theory allows us to have an alternative to *plata o plomo*, and may be a more apt characterization when the relationship is more symbiotic than coercive. This dissertation focuses on criminal-politician interactions that are *cooperative* and *electoral*. In the following section, I introduce the concept *criminal clientelism*, explain variation in types of criminal clientelism, and show what leads to the various forms of criminal clientelistic strategies.

2 The Concept

2.1 What is criminal clientelism?

This dissertation introduces the concept of *criminal clientelism* to distinguish interactions where politicians and criminals trade votes from other types of criminal-politician electoral interactions. Simply put, criminal clientelism describes the broad set of situations where politicians and criminal groups work together and exchange votes in order for the politician to get elected. Here I define criminal clientelism as an *interaction between politicians and criminal groups where votes are traded in order to influence elections*. To clarify the distinction between criminal clientelism and other types of electoral interactions, Figure 2 describes the key attributes.

First, criminal clientelism requires that the politician is interacting with a criminal group. Electoral interactions that do not include both a politician and criminal group fall into the broad category I call non-criminal electoral politics. The first component of the definition also indicates that criminal clientelism is distinct from interactions that occur completely between members of a criminal organization—where the criminal group and affiliated candidates are indistinguishable. Criminal clientelism as an act *between* two parties implies that candidates and criminal groups have different incentives and preferences, and in order to cooperate, they must interact strategically. In the absence of these divergent incentives and preferences, when criminal groups field their own candidates for election, the candidate is indistinguishable from the criminal group.

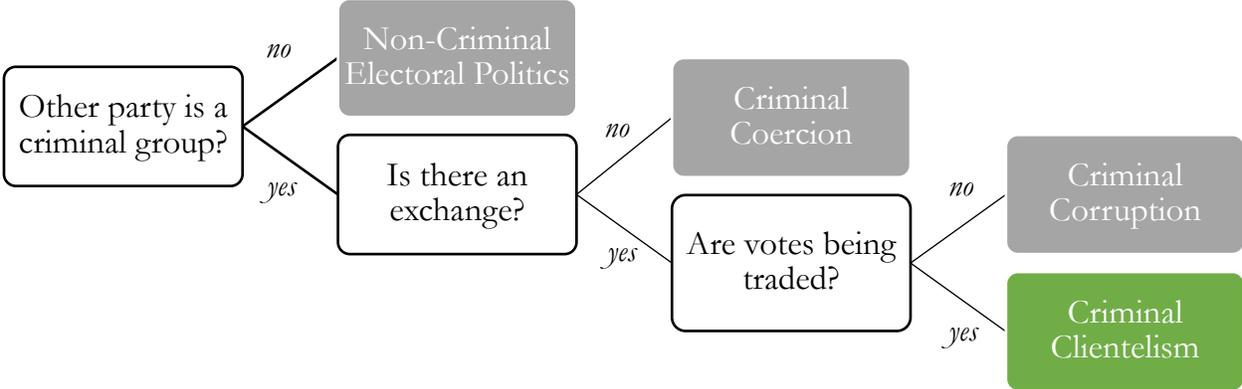
Second, whether or not there is an exchange distinguishes criminal clientelism from coercive electoral interactions between criminal groups and politicians. Interactions without an exchange, what I call criminal coercion, include any type of coercive or violent interaction where the criminal group tells the politician what to do – and the politician does it. This includes a subset of *plata o plomo* strategies where a politician does not accept a bribe and risks violence, as well as other acts of violence where a criminal group does not present politicians with an ultimatum choice, including threats and assassinations. Criminal clientelism, on the other hand, is predicated on the existence of an exchange (as is criminal corruption, which I will explain in the following paragraph). The existence of an exchange underlines the politician’s agency and access to resources that criminal groups may want in an exchange.

Third, and most importantly, votes must be part of the exchange in criminal clientelism. There is a wide range of cooperative electoral exchanges between criminal groups and politicians, from drug cartels financing political campaigns to street gangs threatening voters to vote for their preferred candidate. For votes to be traded in criminal clientelism, the exchange must include the criminal group promising to mobilize an agreed-upon number of voters for the candidate. This implies that the criminal group has access to and likely a connection to the voters in question, and further means that the criminal group becomes an integral part of the politician’s voter mobilization strategy. On the other hand, when criminal groups are exclusively trading things that are not votes (e.g. money, protection), this is what I call criminal corruption. Criminal corruption implies that the heart of the trade is about what a politician will *do* for a criminal group in office, not necessarily getting into office in the first place. In these cases, when votes are not a part of the trade, politicians may have extra bribe money to spend on their political campaigns, but aside from that, the criminal group plays no part in helping the politician get elected.

Criminal clientelism is distinct from criminal corruption or coercion precisely because votes are being traded and the criminal group occupies the traditional role of the broker, as an intermediary between the politician and voters. The exchange between the criminal broker and politician can range from complex policy favors to a spot deal, and—depending on the type of criminal governance regime—the voters are subject to a subsequent range of benefits from local pork to vote-buying to nothing at all. These differences map onto different subtypes of criminal clientelism, which can take several forms.

What explains which type of criminal clientelism will result? The next section turns our attention to answering this question. I focus on two dimensions that explain variation in subtypes of criminal clientelism: the market for votes and candidate embeddedness in the community.

Figure 2: What Criminal Clientelism is and What it is Not



2.2 *What determines variation in criminal clientelism?*

Recent estimates note that approximately 4.6% of Latin American citizens live under criminal governance, ranging from a high of 12.8% of the population (Honduras) to a low approaching zero (Peru) (Lessing, Block, and Stecher 2019). Authors note that tens, if not millions, of people worldwide live under criminal governance regimes, which is more than the share today that live under rebel governance regimes. The criminal groups that govern these millions of citizens are diverse: drug trafficking organizations, street gangs, mafia-style protection rackets, etc.

Political candidates trying to win the votes of citizens that live under criminal governance use criminal clientelism in different ways. Specifically, a candidate’s electoral strategy will be influenced by the marketplace for votes and whether or not they are embedded in the community. The first variable is about the institutional and geographic marketplace for votes that the candidate and criminal group operate in. The second variable is related to the social capital a candidate has with voters in the neighborhood in question. I first explain these two factors, then enumerate different types of criminal clientelism, show below in Figure 3. The unit of analysis for each subtype is the candidate-criminal group dyad. This is because of the idiosyncratic characteristics each candidate and criminal group bring to the interaction: for instance, in contexts where candidates are embedded in the community, the same candidate may be able to strike a different deal with a criminal group than when they are not embedded, even if the marketplace for votes remains constant.

2.2.1 *The Market for Votes*

In real estate, a buyer's market commonly refers to a supply glut of homes on the market, giving prospective home buyers leverage during negotiations over sellers. A seller's market is the opposite, a shortage of homes that incentivizes sellers or their real estate brokers to ratchet up the price to prospective buyers. I adopt this terminology when discussing the vote buyer's market, vote seller's market, and the criminal brokers that connect buyers to sellers.

The same framework can be applied to the market for votes. What determines the relative bargaining power between the two actors are (1) the electoral threshold and (2) the extent of criminal control. In a *vote buyer's market*, the politician has relatively more bargaining power than the criminal organization, whereas in a *vote seller's market*, the criminal organization has relatively more bargaining power than the politician. What distinguishes the two is whether votes in criminally dominated territory are pivotal in an election. In vote buyers' markets, they are not, whereas in vote sellers' markets, they are, simply, because without some votes that are under the control of the criminal group, the politician cannot win.

Electoral Threshold. The electoral threshold is an important component in determining who has more leverage in the market for votes. I use the classic definition of electoral threshold, the minimum share of the vote a candidate or political party needs to obtain in order to gain office (Lijphart 1994). It is worth emphasizing that the electoral threshold is defined at the election-district level. For example, we would expect the threshold to be higher – the winner would have to win more votes – in a statewide first-past-the-post election for governor than for a statewide election for numerous congresspeople (assuming all congresspeople were at-large). In the case of the latter, in a multi-member legislative race across the entire state, each winning representative would need fewer votes to win than the governor would to win the only seat in the executive race. The electoral threshold for any race tells us how many votes a politician needs to get in order to win. We can assume that any serious politician is also doing back-of-the-envelope calculations estimating the number of votes they think they have secured, and the difference between the two.

Extent of Criminal Control. The extent of criminal control for any electoral district is the number of voters in that district under the control of a specific criminal group. This variable defines the geographic boundaries of where (and who) a criminal group governs. Measuring the extent of criminal control is also important in determining who has more leverage in the market for votes because it tells us how many voters, within any district, are under the influence of a criminal

organization. A growing body of scholarship measures the extent of criminal control at the local level. Researchers have pinpointed which exact census tracts and neighborhoods are controlled by different *maras* (street gangs) in San Salvador (Córdova 2019; Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla, and Sviatschi 2020), which Mexican drug cartels control territory, even in small rural communities (Coscia and Rios 2012; Magaloni et al. 2015; Sobrino 2020), and which street gangs in Medellín control different neighborhoods (Blattman et al. 2021). In electoral districts where there are two or more criminal groups present, I consider the extent of each group’s control separately.

Comparing Vote Buyer’s and Vote Seller’s Markets. If the extent of a criminal group’s control in a district surpasses the electoral threshold, the voters in that community could unilaterally elect their chosen candidate(s), if they voted in bloc. Because the politician could win unilaterally with just the votes that the criminal group influences – because it is a *vote seller’s market* -- the criminal leader has a significant amount of bargaining power. Now suppose that the number of voters the criminal group controls in this same district falls short of the electoral threshold. In this case, because the number of voters controlled by the criminal group is not pivotal, and a candidate can still collect enough votes to get elected while passing up on deals with the specific criminal organization, a *vote buyer’s market* comes into play. Lastly, let’s consider a race in a district where there are two criminal groups present, and one criminal group dominates a small community of voters that could not unilaterally elect a legislator (under the threshold), while the other dominates a large community of voters (over the threshold). Politicians considering campaigning in the first community have relatively more leverage – at best, in order to win, they’d have to combine the votes they “bought” from this community with votes they obtain elsewhere – than in the second. The criminal groups dominating this larger mass of voters have relatively more bargaining power than politicians because they could theoretically elect the candidate with one deal, minimizing transaction costs. Past research on clientelism also suggests that brokers that control a greater number of voters are in more demand by candidates (Stokes et al. 2013).

In *vote seller’s markets*, the local criminal boss has the upper hand. not only because he can employ extra-legal violence, as most often portrayed, but also. because of the group he heads controls a pivotal number of voters. Because politicians in vote seller’s markets are dependent on the criminal group to win, politicians, in turn, become more vulnerable to threats, violence, and coercion. The electoral strategy the politician uses in a seller’s market, then, will be one that is highly

responsive to the demands of the criminal organization⁷. If a politician is trying to use criminal clientelism to get votes in a seller's market, she may do her best to deliver whatever rents or favors the criminal organization requests, in exchange for votes. If a politician is trying to get votes without the help of a criminal organization in a seller's market, they will still be responsive to the demands of the criminal organization if threatened with violence. Alesina et al (2018) show how political parties in seller's markets that are unaffiliated with criminal groups select campaign strategies on the perceived strength and levels of violence that criminal groups are willing to use against them. Dell (2015) shows how rural areas in Mexico that elect mayors unaffiliated with criminal groups suffer higher levels of retaliatory violence. In yet another vote seller's market, rural Colombia, unknown third-party candidates that had tacit ties to the AUC self-defense group in the 1990s rose to power (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013). They almost certainly would not have gotten elected without the brokerage tactics of the AUC, who controlled a pivotal – and nearly universal – number of voters in their districts. The third-party candidates could promise policy favors and pro-AUC votes while in Congress, and in exchange, they relied on the AUC criminal brokers to help them get elected, mainly by deploying intimidation tactics and threats to voters and rival candidates.

Vote buyer's markets, on the other hand, free the politician from needing the voters that live under criminal in order to get elected. In this case, candidates may only enter into transactions with the criminal organization when it benefits them to do so, and their success at the ballot box does not wholly depend on one local criminal boss. In fact, in a vote buyer's market, the politicians are not obligated to interact with the criminal organizations at all, though doing so may be a cost-effective path to victory for some.⁸ In vote buyer's markets, the criminal groups are the ones that are highly responsive to the demands of the politicians. For instance, if a criminal group uses violence indiscriminately against politicians, they should be prepared for the politicians to not come back and try to campaign in their neighborhood. The cost of violence against a potential ally, then, is electoral rents, because the politician may be able to win without the help of the criminal group. If the criminal group wants electoral rents, the surest way it can get them in a vote buyer's market is to offer to deliver a competitive sum of votes to prospective candidates. There are examples of vote buyer's markets in Indonesia and Jamaica, where local politicians routinely subcontract gangs to help

⁷ These are the strategies that, in the past, have characterized the politician as agency-less or completely responsive to the criminal organization's demands. This is a slight mischaracterization; the politician does have agency, but they are choosing to yield to the criminal group's demands in order to ensure their physical safety.

⁸ I explain micro-foundations of which politician are more likely to engage with criminal groups in Chapter 2.

with their campaign and mobilize voters. In both cases, politicians appear to be the driver of the transaction and do so to improve their chances of winning, not because the criminal group is holding the votes hostage (Gunst 1996; Tajima 2018). Furthermore, there is no evidence of the criminal group receiving benefits after the election ended, trying to renegotiate the terms of the deal, or coercing the politician, all of which suggest that the politician had the upper hand in this relationship.

Criminal groups in vote buyer's markets are more constrained in their use of violence and threats when interacting with possible allies. Since politicians can choose which local criminal bosses to engage with (or not engage at all), the use of violence from criminal organizations is not as credible of a threat as is in the vote seller's market. The relative influence that the threat of violence has over a politician in a vote buyer's market is diminished because the politician can protect herself (by disengaging) from physical or reputational costs of violence to herself or to the community, respectively. As an example, journalists in Rio de Janeiro frequently report that drug traffickers charge politicians for safe passage to be able to campaign in their criminally-dominated neighborhoods. While this shows the criminal organizations' violent prowess, it also shows that for every politician that may be willing to take the risk and pay a bribe to enter a criminally-dominated neighborhood, there are several more that decline to pay, walk away, and campaign somewhere else. This usually happens nonviolently, though the threat of violence is present. In an interview with a state deputy, I was told, "If [the traffickers] ask me to pay, I won't enter... I'll find another way to run my campaign in areas where I don't have to negotiate with them."⁹ Of these candidates that do not pay, some go on to win – like the one I spoke to above – showing that access to that one particularly costly pool of voters wasn't necessary in securing their victory.

Likewise, politicians in vote buyer's markets respond differently when threatened by a criminal group than politicians in a vote seller's market. In a vote seller's market, opposition candidates invest less resources in the campaign when they see that a criminal group is willing to be violent, according to Alesina (2018). This is because the tie between criminal group and voters is so strong in seller's markets: the candidate knows that the only way to get to the voter is "through" the criminal group, and the price of going through is violence. This is not the case in a vote buyer's market. When faced with a similar threat of violence in a vote buyer's market, candidates can abandon the transaction, protect their physical safety, and appeal to different constituents in their

⁹ Interview with ALERJ deputy, November 18, 2018.

jurisdiction. They can still run a competitive campaign and occasionally, win, despite ignoring the criminal group and the voters in that territory. Criminal extortion is a less powerful tool in the vote buyer's markets because of the options candidates have to abandon a risky transaction and turn elsewhere. This prediction is in line with Novaes' (2018) and Holland and Palmer-Rubin's (2015) argument that brokers can be "bought," but it complicates the story by arguing that candidates, too, are shopping for the most attractive package offered by many possible local brokers if they are in a vote buyer's market.

2.2.2 *Candidate Embeddedness in the Community*

The second factor explaining variation in forms of cooperation is whether or not the politician is embedded in the community. This matters because it determines the terms of the trade. Candidates that are embedded include those that are members of the community as well as non-community members that have established, long-term connections (i.e. connections that were not just constructed because of the campaign) to local social program or civic organization, such as churches or NGOs. Candidate embeddedness occurs in vote buyer's markets and in vote seller's markets, but yields different predictions for each. The reason candidate embeddedness is an important predictor of cooperation is because it sheds light on the possible existence of a relationship between the candidate and voters outside of the electoral context. Candidates that are embedded in the community may have more opportunities to interact with the voters than those not embedded, which can influence the terms of the trade.

One challenge for all candidates that engage in criminal clientelism is obscuring the relationship with a criminal group. For any politician, any visible connection to a criminal group is likely to be politically toxic and place them in legal jeopardy (Arias 2006). Though I delve deeper into the specific incentives motivating candidates to engage or not engage in Chapter 2, it is important to mention here because a politician's desire to obscure ties weakens trust on the part of the criminal group that the criminal group will do what they say and make good on their side of the deal. In short, it creates a commitment problem.

I begin by clarifying what I mean by embeddedness with some stylized descriptions of embedded candidates in Rio de Janeiro. On one hand, an embedded candidate may be an auntie (*tia*) that was born and raised in a favela. She has been an active member of the community for her whole life, does mutual aid and community advocacy work, and is now running for office. On the other, an embedded candidate may be a middle-class small business owner that lives outside of the

community. He has hired workers from the community and routinely supports social programs in the community related to education and children's health. In this case, the businessman is embedded not because he lives in the community, but because the connection to the community is long-lasting and exists outside of the election cycle.

Research shows that candidates that are more embedded in the community, like the auntie and the businessman, have higher levels of trust among voters. It is easier for candidates with local ties to reach voters (Finan and Schechter 2012; Nichter 2018; Thachil 2018; R. Zarazaga 2015), even in the presence of organized crime (Gay 1993, 1999). Regardless of how the marketplace for votes looks, embedded candidates will have different opportunities to interact with voters precisely because of their ties to other civic organizations and their reputation within the community.

I argue that embedded candidates also have higher levels of trust among criminal groups. Both the auntie and the businessman have existing connections to the community and do not need to begin relationship-building from scratch when considering buying votes from a criminal organization. In either type of marketplace, trust and a reliable reputation could indicate to the criminal group that the politician could be a reliable collusive partner in a mutually beneficial relationship, or at a minimum, that the candidate will make good on whatever programmatic policies or pork they campaign on because of their ties to the community. Though the criminal group can't control which politicians make a deal to try and buy votes in their community in a buyer's market, they may believe that the candidates most likely to deliver these goods for the neighborhood members are those that are embedded – that these candidates' promises are more credible and less likely to lead to a commitment problem.

Deals struck with outsider politicians, on the other hand, are likely to be characterized by the absence of trust. With no connection to the voters, outsider candidates may pay no reputational or emotional penalty for renegeing on a programmatic promise or pork that they claimed they would deliver during the campaign period. As such, outsider candidates may be more likely to defect from a longer-term policy deal that is suggestive of a collusive relationship with the criminal group. I posit that the criminal groups recognize this impulse to defect among outsider politicians and adjust the terms of the trade accordingly. Absent the trust that embedded politicians have, criminal groups that sell votes to outsider politicians adjust the terms of the trade so that at least part of it is a spot transfer, where the politician pays up in full on the day of the trade.

This discussion about trust and defection yields a few predictions for what cooperative agreements will look like for embedded and outsider candidates. Predictions for embedded candidates are more straightforward. Embedded candidates, due to their higher perceived trustworthiness and connection to the local community, may be perceived as a reliable partner for criminal groups that want to push their political agenda. Despite this, embedded candidates may be reluctant to partner with a criminal group for a few reasons. The first is the aforementioned reason about legal risk – candidates with ties to communities dominated by criminals may be under heightened scrutiny during campaigns because of these known ties. The second, though, is because they may plausibly be the voters’ first choice candidate, if they are known in the community – and the candidate may think their resources are better spent elsewhere. Candidates that are embedded likely do not need to buy votes – they may win them on their own merit by being good community members, and representing the wishes of people like them. They may be the preferred choice among community members in their direct circle without doing anything illegal. What does a criminal group do when their chosen candidate is not one that is from the community? My qualitative research suggests that criminal groups *still* allow embedded candidates safe passage while campaigning because of their reputation in the community, though they don’t go out of their way to host events or campaign for the candidate. (They reserve these acts for the bribe-paying candidates.) A former embedded candidate confirms this, saying, “The criminal groups didn’t support my campaign in the neighborhood, so I was limited to the people in my social circle and my church.” The candidate lost the election.

In either a vote seller’s or a vote buyer’s market, outsider candidates have to do something to prove their loyalty or trustworthiness to the potential criminal partner. In a vote seller’s market, where candidates already have less bargaining power than the criminal group, the criminal group can be selective with which outsider candidate they choose to make an alliance with, if any. Absent the trust an embedded candidate would have, I predict that criminal groups in vote seller’s markets will only sell votes to embedded candidates that pay a premium and sweeten the pot with credible favors down the line. Absent the favors, a criminal group would prefer to strike a deal with a candidate they trust – it is the addition of these favors that encourages a criminal group to cooperate with an outsider candidate. In Rio de Janeiro, a federal police officer explains to me how *milícias* sell votes to outsider candidates that are linked to local utilities companies. The outsider candidates not only have the funds to buy votes at the *milícias*’ asking price, but they promise to not interfere in one of the

milicias' sources of revenue: illicit connections to electricity, cable TV, and other utilities. So long as this cooperative agreement remains incentive-compatible for both parties, cooperation is possible.

For outsider candidates in a vote buyer's market, the candidate has relatively more bargaining power than the criminal group, but the playing field is leveled a bit since the candidate lacks trust with the criminal actors and the community members. If an outsider candidate wants to buy the votes in a criminally dominated community, the only way to counteract the low trust and suspicions of defection of a longer-term deal are to pay in full in a spot transaction. A deal with clear terms, where the outsider politician exchanges something concrete (money, contraband) in exchange for votes, is the most likely form of cooperation to emerge in the vote buyer's market.

My account of candidate embeddedness differs from most work on criminal-politician relationships in that I show pathways to cooperation even for outsider politicians. Some pathways to cooperation that address candidate embeddedness just focus on embeddedness in the group itself, not in the larger community of voters (Albarracín 2018, Barnes 2017), but the majority of studies do not specify candidate origins or connections to the criminal group or community. What is more, most studies show that the outcome of electoral interactions for outsider candidates is violence. This is not always the case. This study emphasizes that even outsider politicians can cooperate with criminal groups willingly and knowingly in order to win elections. In Chapter 2, I go into more detail on how candidate embeddedness, coupled with other candidate demographic characteristics, relates to the risks of cooperating with criminal organizations and the ensuing principal-agent or commitment problems.

2.3 *A Typology of Criminal Clientelism*

The market for votes and candidate embeddedness combine to generate four subtypes of criminal clientelism, shown in Figure 3. I briefly explain each subtype below and illustrate with examples across the world. In each individual cell in Figure 3, I list the subtype of criminal clientelism, alongside my prediction for what the politician will exchange for the votes. I specify two broad types of exchanges: favors and spot deals, which I denote **(F)** and **(S)** respectively. Favors correspond to any favor or deal that is contingent on being elected and takes place over repeated play. Spot deals are just the opposite, and the exchange can be completed in a one-shot transfer. I will provide more quantitative and qualitative evidence about the consequences of each type and how they arise in later chapters.

Figure 3: Strategies of Criminal Clientelism (Politician vis-à-vis criminal broker)

	<i>Vote Seller's Market</i>	<i>Vote Buyer's Market</i>
<i>Politician is Embedded</i>	Relational (F)	Direct-to-Voter -
<i>Politician is not Embedded</i>	Collusive (F & S)	Subcontracted (S)

Note: **(F)** and **(S)** correspond to predictions of what is being offered by the politician in exchange for votes. They correspond to favors and spot deals, respectively.

Relational. Criminal clientelism that is relational is most likely to occur when the politicians are embedded in the community and they are interacting in a vote seller's market. Drawing from the literature on relational clientelism (without criminal brokers), criminal clientelism that is relational is recognizable by the exchange of favors and deals that do not solely occur in the electoral cycle (Nichter 2018). This is perhaps the most common form of criminal clientelism shown in the media and in mass depictions of criminal-politician electoral interactions. We see relational criminal clientelism when a mob boss that can sway voters in his district strikes a deal with a trusted politician and the relationship sustains over a long duration, not just cropping up every four years. Prominent examples of relational cooperation include the trust and embeddedness we observe between the Christian Democrats and the mafia in Italy after World War II or the Cali Cartel and local leaders in Colombia until 1988 (Chepesiuk 2005; Lessing 2017). Despite the trust that embeddedness confers, criminal clientelism that is relational is still characterized by the politician's dependency on the criminal boss' control over a pivotal number of voters. We see this too in the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra's* sanctioning of the Christian Democrats after they failed to make good on a promise. Gambetta (1996, p. 187) reports that, upon the news that the Christian Democrats hadn't made good on a promise, mafia leadership issued a mandate "... instructing all men of honor to vote, and encourage relatives and friends to vote, for the Socialist party... The order was extended to the entire Cosa Nostra of Sicily." Despite the long-standing amity between the two, the mafia was successful in revoking access to voters when a candidate crossed them. In a vote seller's market, a criminal group can withdraw support as quickly as they can give it out.

Collusive. Collusive criminal clientelism is most likely to occur in a vote seller's market and when the politician is not embedded in the community. This type of cooperative interaction is a

high-stakes transaction. The market for votes is a vote seller's market, which means that the criminal group wields significant power over voters and the election outcome and partnering with them could make or break the electoral race for any candidate. As such, the criminal groups in these areas charge a hefty price when partnering with outsider candidates. I predict that this exchange will be characterized by both short-term bribes as well as longer term favors. The only type of outsider candidate a criminal group would want to cooperate with when they are in such a privileged position is a candidate that brings something special to the table through their own connections. Collusive criminal clientelism can make strange yet powerful bedfellows – examples include the purported favor trading with street gangs in exchange for votes by the now-president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele (Dudley 2020). The electoral markets in the street gangs' districts are undeniably seller's markets, where the gangs can handily influence the outcome of the election. Why cooperate with an outside candidate, like Bukele, instead of a trusted embedded candidate, or even a member of the gang? I submit that the favors Bukele supposedly offered related to law enforcement and social benefits were appealing enough that the street gangs chose to collude with him rather than a local candidate that plausibly was more trustworthy but has less to offer.

Direct-to-Voter. In all subtypes of criminal clientelism in a vote buyer's market, the politician will have more leverage than a politician in a vote seller's market. I posit that embedded candidates in vote buyer's markets will have enough communal goodwill to bypass favors or bribes targeted at the criminal broker and will target all of their vote-buying or favor-promising towards voters in the community. Like in the case of relational criminal clientelism, the candidate embeddedness indicates at best a general level of trust between candidate and criminal group, or at worst, mutual tolerance. In a vote buyer's market, where there is a supply glut, the criminal group's challenge is to find a political patron willing to "buy" those voters for their asking price. Candidates that are embedded in the community will be among those *least* likely to try and buy access to voters because they already have a relationship of trust or rapport with voters in that very community. Despite this, I do not expect criminal groups to flip the metaphorical table over and forbid embedded candidates from campaigning in a community they have ties to. Rather, the exchange between politician and criminal broker in direct-to-voter criminal clientelism is, and will be characterized by the criminal group's granting of access to voters and passing of clientelistic benefits directly to the voters.

Subcontracted. The subcontracted type of criminal clientelism is most likely to occur in a vote buyer's market where the politician is not embedded in the community. When the market for votes privileges the vote buyers, vote sellers (criminal brokers) will be looking for candidates to buy

the votes in their community that make the highest bid *and* that will follow through with their promises. Even if outsider candidates come with deep pockets, I predict that criminal groups are reluctant to make deals with outsider candidates in a vote buyer's market because they know the candidate could walk away from the deal or renege on a deal that extends over multiple future periods. Due to the absence of a relationship or trust between these two parties, deals between criminal groups in vote buyer's markets and outsider politicians that avoid the commitment problem often come in the form of a spot payment for a series of concrete campaign tasks. Similar to how subcontracting appears in the clientelism literature, when politicians subcontract criminal groups, the timeline for the exchange is usually no longer than the campaign period and the criminal broker receives payment is paid for their agreed-upon tasks, access, or other campaign work.

How do these subtypes compare to *plata o plomo*? It is worth noting in the above subtypes that the focus is predominately on *plata* – on the cooperative side of the transaction. The probability of the threat of violent retaliation by the criminal group (*plomo*) is nonzero in all of the above subtypes, though it is more likely in some cases than others. Beyond that, though, the broader purpose of explaining each subtype is to illustrate variation in criminal clientelistic strategies between politicians and criminal groups, many of which aren't linked to the explicit threat of *plomo* at all. This variation maps onto what voters receive from different types of exchanges and different electoral outcome, which I explain in greater detail using a quasi-experimental design in Chapter 4.

3 Case Selection

This dissertation focuses on local and state-level politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to illustrate four subtypes of criminal clientelism, both for theoretical and empirical reasons. First, there are both buyer's and seller's markets present in the one case. There are multiple criminal groups present in the city and throughout the state that govern approximately a third of the state's residents. In the state, there are three different kinds of drug trafficking organizations present, several factions of the protection racket-style *milícias*, and illicit gambling rackets. There is significant variation in the extent of the size of communities they control – in Rio de Janeiro's legislative elections (single district, open-list proportional representation), several but not all communities governed by criminal groups could elect one or more candidates unilaterally. We can observe the power imbalance between candidates campaigning in a vote buyer's market (e.g. one of the capital city's small favelas with less

than 1000 residents) and a vote seller's market (e.g. Rocinha, South America's largest favela with a population of ~ 90,000) within the same case.

Second, there is significant variation in candidate embeddedness. Again, due to the electoral rules for legislative races, there is a proliferation of candidates for legislative seats, and parties are allowed to submit 1.5 times as many candidates as there are available seats. For an election with 51 seats (Rio de Janeiro municipality's city council race), the number of candidate vying for a seat has exceeded 1000 in recent election years. These candidates come from wealthy neighborhoods that have never been in a favela (outsider), are favela activists that know the names of everyone in their community (embedded), and are every possible type in between the two. This variation in candidate ties to criminally-dominated communities allows me to make candidate-to-candidate comparisons holding community constant.

Due to the broad variation in the market for votes and candidate embeddedness, I identify all four subtypes of criminal clientelism in this one case. A common national and institutional setting allows me to control for other political, social, or economic factors and isolate the effect of the criminal-politician deal on electoral and welfare outcomes. The following section details examples of the four subtypes of criminal clientelism I identify within the case of Rio de Janeiro.

3.1 *Criminal Clientelism in Rio de Janeiro*

Relational. In Rio de Janeiro, we observe relational criminal clientelism between the *bicheiros*—lottery magnates that run the illegal “animal game” (*jogo do bicho*) and the samba schools prevalent during Carnival—and their political allies. The *bicheiros*' influence is strongest in the suburbs of the capital city where the samba schools are located – municipalities like Nilópolis, Duque de Caxias, and Niterói. In these suburbs, such as Nilópolis, the market for votes is a vote seller's market. The samba schools are so powerful that their influence extend over the entire jurisdiction, far surpassing the minimum electoral threshold. Here, candidates that are affiliated with the samba school are most certainly embedded in these communities: politician tied to the samba school and supported by the samba school (and the illegal lottery money behind it) is likely to win in local races, and even win enough votes from that district to get a state-level or federal-level seat (a Nilópolis *bicheiro*'s cousin is currently serving their eighth consecutive mandate as a federal deputy). Concluded police investigations into *bicheiros*' conduct, like “Operation Hurricane,” show evidence that this relationship is indeed one where the *bicheiros* have the upper hand. Politicians associated

with the *bicheiros* had clear guidelines for the policies they should support, the groups they should influence, and how to steer the money towards favorable industries for *bicheiro* leaders. Since they are embedded, the candidates need not make one-off transfers to the criminal bosses, but rather, they are the perfect vessels for pursuing longer-term favors and policies that favor the criminal organization.

Collusive. In Rio de Janeiro, collusive criminal clientelism is the *modus operandi* between *milícias* and their political affiliates. The *milícias*, vigilante, paramilitary-style groups, grew quickly in the 1990s as a reaction to the growing power and accompanying violence caused by the city's drug trafficking organizations. They are composed of current or former police, firefighters, or military officials, and are known for using extralegal violence during their "off duty" hours to combat the drug traffickers and protect their communities (Cano and Duarte 2012). Today, they make most of their money by charging local business owners in their community protection taxes, creating illegal connections to utilities (gas, electricity, cable TV) and selling them to residents at a high price. Collusive criminal clientelism between *milícias* and affiliated politicians is noticeable in the West Zone of the city and deeper into the state in a region called the Baixada Fluminense. Both the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro and the Baixada Fluminense are vote seller's markets where the *milícias* command extremely high levels of control over the populations they extort and could elect several candidates in both state- and local-level legislative races unilaterally. As *milícias* continue to expand their territory, they wield increasing high bargaining power over their potential partners. The politicians that they contract with are often not embedded in the communities – in an interview with a member of a *milícia*, he said that the candidate profile that they typically let in to the community is "upper-middle class person that usually has never been to the community before" with a connection to a private sector firm or to law enforcement that could be useful for the criminal group further down the line.

Direct-to-Voter. This form of criminal clientelism in Rio de Janeiro is most prevalent between drug trafficking organizations and residents of *favelas* that choose to run for office. Unlike the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro that are under centralized control by a *milícia* or *bicheiro* boss, and unlike the West Zone neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro that control a vast swath of the city's population, most communities governed by drug trafficking organizations in Rio de Janeiro represent a smaller share of voters and are governed independent of each other (like franchises), even if they are part of the same unifying group. Because of this, most of the territory governed by drug trafficking groups (the South, Center, and North Zones in Rio de Janeiro) is a vote buyer's

market – where politicians can shop for votes across favelas, trying to gain (or buy) access to voters, but very few can elect a candidate unilaterally. Consistent with the above predictions, candidates embedded in these favelas still run their campaign there and receive access from the criminal group but no other favors or campaign assistance. Many of these candidates run on campaigns that include programmatic policies aimed at community members, but also supplement these with promises of pork or patronage if elected. A state deputy from a favela told me, “I don’t live in that favela anymore—I live on the asphalt¹⁰—but I know I am always welcomed back because people there know me... I don’t pay the drug traffickers, and I know they have their own candidate, but I am still allowed in to campaign.”

Subcontracted. We are more likely to observe subcontracted criminal clientelism between upper-middle class politicians and drug trafficking gangs in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Subcontracted criminal clientelism is more likely to occur in vote buyer’s market. The city of Rio de Janeiro, save the West Zone which is nearly exclusively dominated by the *milícias*, is a vote buyer’s market, carved up into many small criminal fiefdoms from favela-to-favela. As drug trafficking gangs give embedded candidates a “free pass” to engage directly with voters with no necessary exchange, as shown in the anecdote above, they hold out most of their influence and organizing power for the candidates willing to pay up: the upper-middle class candidates that are not embedded and have “never set foot in a favela,” according to a State Deputy. Outsider candidates in a vote buyer’s market can take their pick of which favelas (and criminal groups) to buy votes from, within their budget and risk constraints. Several candidates whom I interviewed told me that drug trafficking organizations do not punish candidates that do not “pay up” and pay the entry fee. Candidates that choose not to buy the votes in a specific community walk away from the transaction unharmed *and* with many other options to cobble together a large enough coalition. The higher bargaining power that candidates have affords them the opportunity to walk away from deals they do not want and use criminal clientelism—to subcontract their criminal brokers.

¹⁰ The “asphalt” is the common way to refer to middle-class neighborhoods that are more incorporated into the formal sector than favelas.

4 Roadmap

I spent 18 months in Rio de Janeiro¹¹ personally conducting 100+ interviews with politicians, criminal group members, and local brokers, and then running an in-person survey with favela residents using worksite sampling to engage hard-to-reach urban poor residents who live in criminally governed territories, reaching a sample size of $n = 356$ and hiring and training a team of 7 undergraduate Brazilian students to help administer the survey. I also built a database of criminal dominance in each favela in Rio de Janeiro (there are 1100+ favelas), which I constructed by scraping the open-source *Blog Crimes News* that reports on daily feuds between criminal groups. I created a database to identify the geolocation and gang from each report, tag the day, and created a panel data set from 2015-present on criminal groups' territorial control. I am now working with a cross-university team of researchers in Brazil to build a more sophisticated database that goes back further in time and has broader institutional support. I also gathered granular quantitative data on crime, voting, and candidate characteristics, including politicians' criminal connections or histories, some of which required me to sign non-disclosure agreements.

The rest of the dissertation draws on this mixed-methods evidence to answer the following questions. In Chapter 2, I consider the micro-level explanations of why politicians cooperate with criminal groups and model their individual-level decision making to show how criminal clientelism “solves the principal-agent problem” inherent in clientelistic exchanges. This chapter draws from extensive candidate interviews while in the field. Chapter 3 extends this argument to explain why some candidates are more likely to cooperate with criminal groups than others, arguing that outgroup candidates are exposed to lower risks than embedded candidates. I analyze micro-level data on electoral returns and candidate characteristics and pair with a candidate survey¹². Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the voters by explaining the mechanisms through which criminal groups are effective brokers. This chapter includes a natural experiment leveraging exogenous variation in voter polling assignment to estimate the value of criminal brokers to a politician. Chapter 5 looks even further downstream, considering what voters get when their community elects a candidate via criminal clientelism. This includes how responsive a candidate is to the constituents from that area, how often they travel there or hold events there, and how they vote on policies that could favor that area. I argue that criminal-politician cooperation is welfare reducing for the constituents in an area

¹¹ I spent 3 months in summer 2016 and summer 2017 doing exploratory interviews, and June 2018-June 2019 doing more in-depth interviews, quantitative data collection, and fielding the survey.

¹² In progress.

and can lead to a “tragic peace” between the criminal groups and politicians, and show this through a quantitative analysis of roll call data the targeting of club goods and social benefits while in office. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes by examining criminal clientelism in comparative perspective around the world and at other times in history.

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