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Can Descriptive Representation Help the Right Win Votes from the Poor? Evidence from Brazil

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Abstract: *The electoral success of the Right in poor nations is typically attributed to nonpolicy appeals such as clientelism. Candidate profiles are usually ignored because if voters value class-based descriptive representation, it should be the Left that uses it. In this article, we develop and test a novel theory of policy choice and candidate selection that defies this conventional wisdom: it is the Right that capitalizes on descriptive representation in high-poverty areas. The Right is only competitive in poor regions when it matches the Left's pro-poor policies. To credibly shift its position, it nominates candidates who are descriptively closer to the poor. Using a regression discontinuity design in Brazilian municipal elections, we show that Right-wing mayors spend less on the poor than Left-wing mayors only in low-poverty municipalities. In high-poverty municipalities, not only does the Right match the Left's policies, it also does so while nominating less educated candidates.*

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Right-wing parties often win elections in developing nations where voters are overwhelmingly poor. Prevailing explanations for this puzzle typically focus on how they build a portfolio of electoral appeals such as clientelism (Murillo and Calvo 2019), ethnic mobilization (Huber 2017), positioning on "social" dimensions (Tavits and Potter 2015), or private provision of social services (Thachil 2014). The case of Brazil is similar: clientelism and personalistic politician–voter ties have been the primary explanation for why "conservative parties fare best electorally among relatively poor, less educated" voters (Mainwaring, Meneguello, and Power 2000), despite the fact that the Left is more likely to support redistributive policies.

Not surprisingly, these explanations seldom focus on the descriptive profile of the candidates nominated by the Right. The literature on political behavior suggests that voters value descriptive representation (Carnes and Lupu 2016; Dal Bo et al. 2019), and are more likely to trust and feel included by politicians descriptively closer to them (Gay 2002; Hayes and Hibbing 2017; Lawless 2004). In turn, when politicians stress that "I am one of you," their common identity helps them to better understand the needs of voters (Carnes and Lupu 2015), and provides incentives for the betterment of the status of their shared social group (Shayo 2009). Thus, if there are electoral returns to class-based descriptive representation, it is natural to expect that Left-wing parties are the ones that capitalize on it in poor areas. Former Brazilian president Lula (2003–10) is a clear example. He often used his lack of education to emphasize his ability to succeed as a politician, and to implement redistributive policies, mentioning, for example, that "a steelworker without a bachelor's degree created more universities than the PhDs that previously governed the country."[1]

However, in this article we uncover an empirical pattern in Brazilian municipalities that at first defies this conventional wisdom: it is the Right that capitalizes on descriptive representation in the poorest areas. We interpret this finding within the literature on party

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[1]Tania Monteiro, "Lula diz querer eleger alguém para fazer mais do que fez." *Politica*, June 2009, https://bit.ly/2X0U3rq.

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strategies in developing nations, with a novel theory of policy choice and candidate selection. The idea is simple: Right-wing parties are only competitive in very poor areas if they implement pro-poor policies that voters most often identify with the Left, and might not be credible for the Right. However, if voters are also more likely to trust candidates who "look like them," the Right can credibly shift local policy positions leftward by nominating candidates who are less educated than the average politician, and therefore descriptively closer to the poor.[2]

Our argument is best illustrated by the 2016 mayoral race in Camaçari (BA). Right-wing DEM (*Democratas*) and Left-wing PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) had mayoral candidates with opposite profiles: DEM nominated Elinaldo Araújo, a former manual laborer with only a secondary education. PT's candidate was Luiz Caetano, a federal deputy and a biochemist. Camaçari is a small, but strategic municipality, as it houses the largest petrochemical complex in Brazil. Nevertheless, it is highly unequal and poor. Not surprisingly, Elinaldo's campaign emphasized that he was a "true" representative of the people, in spite of being nominated by the traditional elite party in the state. A party leader described him as "a humble person, who does not have many possessions, an individual that identifies with the poorer people in Camaçari."[3] After winning, Elinaldo himself framed his low education as a virtue, saying that his opponent "cannot accept the fact that he lost the election to a humble person, without a college degree, but that understands the people."[4]

We develop this theory in a formal model of electoral competition between two ideologically opposed parties, building on Desai (2021). The model first provides the following hypothesis for both the implemented policy and the profile of Left- and Right-wing candidates: (i) In high-poverty areas, both parties offer similar policies. Lower programmatic differentiation at the local level boosts the chances of the Right winning the election. However, because pro-policies are only in line with the Left's ideals, the Right nominates less educated candidates. (ii) In low-poverty areas, the prediction is reversed: policies are more divergent, following the national pattern of party ideals, and both candidates come from the educated elite.

The empirical evidence comes from four Brazilian municipal elections (2004–16), which offer a suitable environment to test this theory. First, Brazil is a large and unequal democracy where we can observe candidate profiles and policy choices by the same parties in municipalities of high and low poverty. Second, Brazil's multiparty system exhibits a highly consensual, broad Left–Right (*L–R*) divide between the main parties, as shown by surveys with voters, experts, and politicians (Power and Zucco 2009; Samuels and Zucco 2018). Also, politicians in these groups display significantly different preferences for redistribution in the period under analysis (Power and Zucco 2012).

Our measure of pro-poor policy implemented by mayors is the share of the municipal budget spent on health, sanitation, education, and housing. We identify the causal effect of party ideology on policies with a regression discontinuity design (RDD) in close races between Left- and Right-wing parties. We also use the education level of mayoral candidates as a measure of their ability to descriptively identify with the poor. Because this variable is determined before the election, the estimates based on this outcome cannot be interpreted as a causal effect, but rather as a correlation between party ideology and candidate education.

The main estimates are in line with our first theoretical hypothesis: in low-poverty areas, Right-wing mayors spend significantly less on pro-poor categories, in line with the preferences revealed by Left- and Right-wing politicians in national surveys. In these locations, both parties field highly educated mayoral candidates. In high-poverty areas, policy differences disappear, as both Right- and Left-wing mayors increase their pro-poor spending to similar levels. However, Right-wing candidates are less educated than their Leftist competitors.

Our interpretation of these results is only valid in a context where party brands drive policy choices at the municipal level, and brands are recognized by voters. This at first poses a threat to our application, given the conventional wisdom that Brazilian municipal races are often driven by nonpolicy issues, and that the ideological politician–voter linkages are frail. Thus, we take additional steps to show that our framework is indeed consistent with the application. First, although it is evident that programmatic competition is *not* the primary driver behind municipal elections, our results show that it does play a role in these races. Otherwise, we would not see a consistent difference between Right- and Left-wing spending in low-poverty municipalities.[5] When we

[2]Education is highly correlated with economic class within countries (Krueger and Lindahl 2001).

[3]Aparecido Silva, "Recepção de Elinaldo em Camaçari é demonstração de que o povo confia, diz Neto." *BNews*, December 2015. http://bit.ly/32qpAmJ.

[4]Alexandre Galvão and Gabriel Nascimento. "Elinaldo nega dedo de Neto, de Azi em reforma administrativa." *Metro1*, April 2018, http://bit.ly/2IYqGys.

[5]Note that we are not the first to use an RDD to evaluate whether national party brands matter for local policy. Pettersson-Lidbom

consider our finding in the context of the extensive evidence in the literature that Brazilian voters both *observe* and *recognize* the policies and performance of mayors, and also *punish/reward* parties accordingly (Boas, Hidalgo, and Toral 2021; Feierherd 2020; Ferraz and Finan 2008; Klašnja and Titiunik 2017), party brands do matter locally, at least to a certain extent.

Second, we show that the average profile of local party coalitions also reflects the national Left–Right divide. In the Brazilian multiparty system, nearly every mayor is supported by a large coalition averaging more than six parties. In fact, on average, parties are more likely to formally support a coalition mayoral candidate than to run their own. In this context, although "inconsistent" alliances often exist (e.g., a Left party supporting a Rightist mayoral candidate), parties are still much more likely to support candidates within their ideological corner than the alternative.

Third, our theory also accounts for the fact that party brands might be irrelevant in many local elections. Formally, we allow parties to have mixed motivation, caring both about holding office and policy. We show that the less policy-motivated parties are, the lower the relevance of programmatic competition in the mayoral race, and the less likely we are to observe the empirical patterns outlined before. We test this second hypothesis using the ideological alignment within local party coalitions as a proxy for the relevance of party brands in each local race. The results are consistent: The patterns of policy differentiation and candidate selection are stronger in high alignment races and all but disappear in others.

The fact the Left consistently nominates highly educated politicians in poor areas also has strong implications for how we interpret the overall pattern in the data. Our results suggest that although descriptive representation has direct value for voters as shown by previous scholarship, it *also* has an indirect effect by making policy deviations credible. If this was not the case, both parties would be equally likely to nominate less educated candidates.

We also assess three alternative explanations for this surprising nomination pattern in high-poverty areas. First, if uneducated Right-wing politicians are systematically better at clientelism, the pattern could be interpreted as a consequence of the practice, which is ubiquitous in Brazil (Nichter 2018). However, we provide evidence suggesting that this is unlikely the case: (i) The nomination pattern remains robust for a subsample with the most programmatic parties only; (ii) Right- and Left-wing parties spend a similar amount of funds in mayoral campaigns, a proxy for clientelistic capacity; and (iii) the 2010 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)[6] survey shows that the education of the Right-wing candidate is uncorrelated with voters' perceptions on vote buying. Second, we show that this pattern is not driven by systematic differences in the pool of potential candidates of Left- and Right-wing parties. There is no difference in the number of highly educated local councilors across the Left and the Right.[7] Third, the pattern could also arise if parties face differential costs of electing uneducated mayors. That said, we use various measures of administrative performance and mobilization capacity to show that the cost indeed exists, but it is uniform across ideological groups.

Finally, this article complements the existing literature on party portfolio strategies, particularly on programmatic shifts. Recent work in Latin America has already shown that the Right becomes more attractive to poor voters by shifting policy toward redistribution across time and constituencies (Murillo and Calvo 2019). However, less attention has been paid to the credibility problem around these policy changes, which is the basis of the theory proposed here. In interpreting the empirical findings within this framework, this article also relates to the literature on mechanisms used by parties to commit to targeted redistribution (Huber 2017). Our findings also have significant implications for the burgeoning literature on political selection and its concern with the profile and quality of citizens that enter politics (Carnes and Lupu 2015; Dal Bó et al. 2017), especially to the extent that it reveals a context where parties optimally nominate candidates with lower human capital.

A Model of Candidate Nomination and Policy Choice

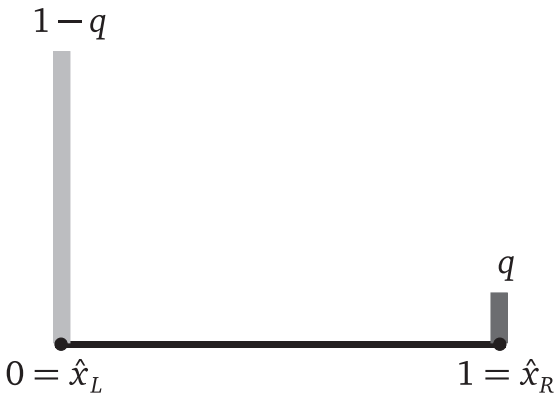
We develop a simple theory that incorporates findings of the political behavior literature on descriptive representation with mixed-motivation parties that strategically offer programmatic policies. The model is intended to be applied to developing democracies, where the majority of voters are poor, and in particular to Brazil.

(2008) also shows that party ideology matters for local economic outcomes in Swedish municipalities. Our article goes further to show that ideology matters locally *only* when it is optimal for parties.

[6]www.lapopsurveys.org. We thank the LAPOP and its major supporters (the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

[7]Given that the council is a stepping stone for mayoral candidacies, and they come from the very same pool as mayors (party membership rolls), this is a very natural measure of party candidate pools.

FIGURE 1 The Electoral Environment



Note: The light and dark bars represent the distribution of voter types *P* and *A*. Poor voters share their ideal point with party *L* and affluent voters share their ideal point with party *R*.

Model Setup

Our framework is based on Desai (2021), with two ideologically opposed parties L and R. The programmatic Left-Right dimension is defined as the [0,1] interval, and positions closer to 0 represent Leftist, pro-poor policies. The ideal point of party i is given by $\hat{x}_i$. Accordingly, L's ideal point is situated at 0, whereas that of R is situated at 1. There are two classes of voters, poor (P) and affluent (A), which share the ideal points of L and R; respectively. The distribution of voters is indexed by the proportion of A voters, denoted by q. Because we focus on a developing context, we assume that the affluent are always in the minority ($q < \frac{1}{2}$). This setup is reflected in Figure 1.

Parties: Before the election, parties announce policies and choose candidates. The candidate pool for each party contains elite candidates, which are descriptively closer to affluent voters, and nonelite voters, which are descriptively closer to the poor. An observable feature of elitism is, for example, education.

Although policies are chosen from the [0,1] interval, candidate selection is binary. We say that if $c_i = 1$, then i's candidate provides descriptive representation to the group that does not share its ideal point, and $c_i = 0$ otherwise. Let $\mathbf{x}_i = (x_i, c_i) \in [0, 1] \times \{0, 1\}$ be the policy announcement and candidate choice of party i. Both parties have mixed motivation, that is, they benefit both from holding office and policy outcomes. The weight attached to policy benefits is given by $w \in [0, 1]$, and the office benefit is normalized to 1. Denote

$$\varphi(\mathbf{x}_i) = \begin{cases} w\hat{x}_i + (1 - w)x_i & \text{if } c_i = 0 \\ x_i & \text{if } c_i = 1 \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

as the final policy implemented by i on winning the election with candidate c_i. The policy function (1) indicates that the more policy-motivated parties are, the more likely it is that their implemented policy deviates from their announced policy position in absence of a descriptively representative candidate. All else equal, both parties face a cost of κ when choosing a nonelite candidate. We interpret this cost framework as context specific. In Supporting Information (SI) Appendix B, we provide an extensive discussion on the motivation behind this assumption. We use both the literature and new empirical evidence to show that this particular cost framework is not only apt to the Brazilian context, but that it also fits the empirical results better than alternative assumptions.[8]

The objective functions of the two parties are given by

$$\begin{aligned} V_L(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) = w((1 - F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R)) \cdot u_L(\varphi(\mathbf{x}_L)) \\ + F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) \cdot u_L(\varphi(\mathbf{x}_R))) \\ + (1-w)(1-F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R)) - (1-c_L)\kappa \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$$\begin{aligned} V_R(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) = w((1 - F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R)) \cdot u_R(\varphi(\mathbf{x}_L)) \\ + F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) \cdot u_R(\varphi(\mathbf{x}_R))) \\ + (1 - w)F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) - c_R\kappa, \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where $u_i(x) = -|\hat{x}_i - x|$ and $F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R)$ is the probability that party R wins the election.

Voter behavior: A voter of class j receives the following utility from party i:

$$u_j(\mathbf{x}_i) = -|\hat{x}_j - \varphi(\mathbf{x}_i)|. \quad (4)$$

Let

$$\Delta u_j(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) := u_j(\mathbf{x}_L) - u_j(\mathbf{x}_R) \quad (5)$$

be the utility differential to voter of class j from the candidate–policy pairs of both parties. Each voter j has two idiosyncratic components to her utility, individual and aggregate. The voter has an individual preference η_j for party R, which is drawn identically and independently from a distribution G. This represents how voter j evaluates party R's characteristics on any other criteria other

[8] In summary, on the supply side the candidate pool in Brazil is biased in favor of higher educated candidates due to self-selection into politics. On the demand side, we show that less educated candidates perform worse on many measures of administrative performance indicative of lower valence, and are also worse at brokering votes for their parties in subsequent elections. We also discuss alternative cost structures to the one presented in the text and show that the resulting predictions are at odds from the empirical patterns observed in Brazilian data.

than economic policies (e.g., clientelism). In addition to this individual-level idiosyncratic component, all voters receive an aggregate shock ϵ, which is distributed according to the distribution H. This shock represents the aggregate popularity of party L over party R. It affects each voter identically, thereby resulting in parties facing aggregate uncertainty about the election outcome. A negative realization of ϵ means that the electorate is biased toward party R.

Voter j votes for party R if and only if the condition below holds:

$$u_j(\mathbf{x}_R) + \eta_j \geq u_j(\mathbf{x}_L) + \epsilon$$
$$\iff \eta_j \geq \Delta u_j(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) + \epsilon.$$

Thus, the proportion of voters voting R is $1 - G(\Delta u_j(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) + \epsilon)$. The total vote share for party R is given by the following random variable:

$$VS_R(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R; \epsilon) = \underbrace{(1-q)(1 - G(\Delta u_P(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) + \epsilon))}_{\text{Vote share from poor}} + \underbrace{q(1 - G(\Delta u_A(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) + \epsilon))}_{\text{Vote share from affluent}}, \quad (6)$$

and the vote share of party L is analogously $1 - VS_R(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R; \epsilon)$. Note that the model implies that the smaller Δu_j, the *less* voters vote on the basis of their economic preferences. The probability that R wins the election is the probability that its vote share is greater than that of party L, and is given by

$$F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R) := \int \mathbb{I}\left\{VS_R(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R; \epsilon) \geq \frac{1}{2}\right\} h(\epsilon)\, \mathrm{d}\epsilon. \quad (7)$$

The probability that L wins the election is simply $1 - F(\mathbf{x}_L, \mathbf{x}_R)$. We assume that G is uniform on $[-2, 2]$ and H is uniform on $[-\psi, \psi]$, where $\psi < 1$, for tractability.

The game proceeds as follows:

1. Parties choose their policy announcement x_i and candidate c_i.
2. Individual and aggregate shocks η_j and ϵ are realized.
3. Voters sincerely vote for their preferred party.
4. The winning party implements its policy according to $\varphi(\mathbf{x}_i)$.

In what follows, we make the following assumption on the nomination cost.

Assumption 1. *The cost to nominate a nonelite candidate is such that* $\kappa < \frac{\psi}{8}$.

Note that although policy choice is continuous, we adopt a discrete candidate selection framework for the sake of a cleaner exposition. In this class of models, candidate selection follows a cost–benefit analysis. Evidently, descriptive representation as a costly strategy is only viable if the cost is outweighed by the benefit, which is a weighted average of office and policy related benefits. Assumption 1 precludes the existence of a trivial equilibrium where a purely policy-motivated Right rationally chooses to lose the election *for sure* in very poor districts.

Before proceeding, we make a remark on the structure of the model. Our model captures multiple competitive frameworks. The parameter w measures how "programmatic" competition is: It simultaneously measures how motivated parties are on policy, as well as how final policy reflects party ideal points. If $w = 1$, we are in a purely policy-motivated setting where parties care *exclusively* about policy, and no policy position other than the party's ideal point is ex ante credible. On the contrary, if $w = 0$, then parties are purely office motivated, and because party ideal points have no meaning, there is no disconnect between implemented policy and party positions.

Model Results

We present our results in two propositions, each focusing on a particular kind of competitive framework. Party incentives depend on the nature of competition as well as poverty. These two considerations drive parties to reduce or increase programmatic differentiation, which in turn shapes candidate selection patterns.

First, we look at a relatively office motivated competitive framework.

Proposition 1 (Office-motivated framework)**.** *There exists a* $\underline{w} \in (0, 1)$ *such that for all* $w \leq \underline{w}$ *and for all* $q \in (0, \frac{1}{2})$*:*

1. *party L never nominates a nonelite candidate and implements* $x_L^* = 0$*;*
2. *party R never nominates a nonelite candidate and implements* $\varphi(\tilde{x}_R, 0)$ *upon winning the election, where*

$$\tilde{x}_R = \max\left\{\min\left\{\frac{w\psi - (1-2q)(w^2 + (1-w)^2)}{2w(1-w)(1-2q)}, 1\right\}, 0\right\}.$$

It is best to first focus on the case when both parties are purely office-motivated to understand this result. In this case, L and R both choose policies to maximize their probability of winning. Because their policy preferences are irrelevant, all promises are credible. In such a scenario, L and R *always* converge to the policy of the median voter. Because descriptive representation as a tool to establish credibility is unnecessary, both parties nominate elite candidates. When w is positive but small, this logic continues to hold. Although parties have some

policy motivation, it is not as high as the pressure to converge to the (poor) median voter's position to maximize the chance of winning. At the same time, *R* can credibly converge to a large degree because voters know that parties are very office-motivated and that their policy preferences do not matter for competition. As a result, in equilibrium, the expected policies of both parties are relatively close to each other and to the median voter,[9] and neither party resorts to the use of descriptive representation.

Next, we turn to a competitive framework where parties place a high weight on their policy preferences and because voters are aware of their policy motivation, they are skeptical of deviations from party ideals. The following proposition outlines equilibrium strategies by the Left and the Right.

Proposition 2 (Policy-motivated framework)**.** *There exists a* $\bar{w} \in (0, 1)$ *such that for all* $w \geq \bar{w}$*, there exists a* $\bar{q} \in (0, \frac{1}{2})$ *such that*

1. *party L never nominates a nonelite candidate and implements* $x_L^* = 0$*;*
2. *if* $q < \bar{q}$*, party R nominates a nonelite candidate and implements* x_R^* *upon winning the election, where*
$$x_R^* = \max\left\{\frac{w\psi - (1-w)(1-2q)}{2w(1-2q)}, 0\right\};$$
3. *if* $q > \bar{q}$*, party R nominates an elite candidate and implements its ideal point upon winning the election.*

Because $q < \frac{1}{2}$, party *L* maximizes policy divergence with *R* to capitalize on its brand advantage. *L*'s ideal point maximizes both its probability of winning as well as its policy benefit, thereby making it unnecessary to nominate a nonelite candidate. Because *w* is high, party *R* faces a trade-off between proposing a policy position very close to its ideal point with a standard elite candidate, or using a tailored (pro-poor) policy position with a nonelite candidate. This latter candidate choice is costly but can significantly increase *R*'s probability of winning. When policy promises are very similar, individual and aggregate shocks matter more to the election result, which may swing the race in *R*'s favor.

As *q* increases, this trade-off becomes more binding because the optimal policy by *R* is increasing in *q*. As the share of poor voters decreases, the gains from class-based descriptive representation start to decrease in relation to the nomination cost. Thus, there exists a cutoff $\bar{q}$ that divides the parameter space into low- and high-poverty regions. In the high-poverty region, *R* pays the cost to nominate nonelite candidates and credibly reduce programmatic differentiation with *L*. In the low-poverty region, *R* nominates elite candidates, and diverges more in terms of policy from *L*.

Importantly, we do not consider direct voter preferences regarding descriptive representation in the model. As discussed in the introduction, there is certainly a wealth of evidence suggesting that voters value descriptive representation independent of its effect on policy commitments. However, to focus on this indirect policy effect, we choose to abstract away from direct preferences over representative candidates. We revisit this in SI Appendix B where we discuss the robustness of our theoretical results when poor voters also directly value descriptive representation, in addition to its indirect effect on policy credibility. To summarize that discussion, our results continue to hold in a qualitatively similar fashion as long as poor voters' preferences for descriptive representation are independent of the candidate's party affiliation, and low enough relative to the cost of nominating a nonelite candidate. That is, the direct benefits of nominating an uneducated candidate are the same for both parties, and do not mitigate electoral uncertainty enough relative to the cost.

Empirical Implications

We derive two main theoretical insights that we can take to the data, summarized in the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. When parties are policy-motivated and their brands are valued by voters:

(a) In high-poverty regions, policy differentiation is low, but the Right-wing candidates are less educated.
(b) In low-poverty regions, candidate profiles are similar, but policy differentiation is high.

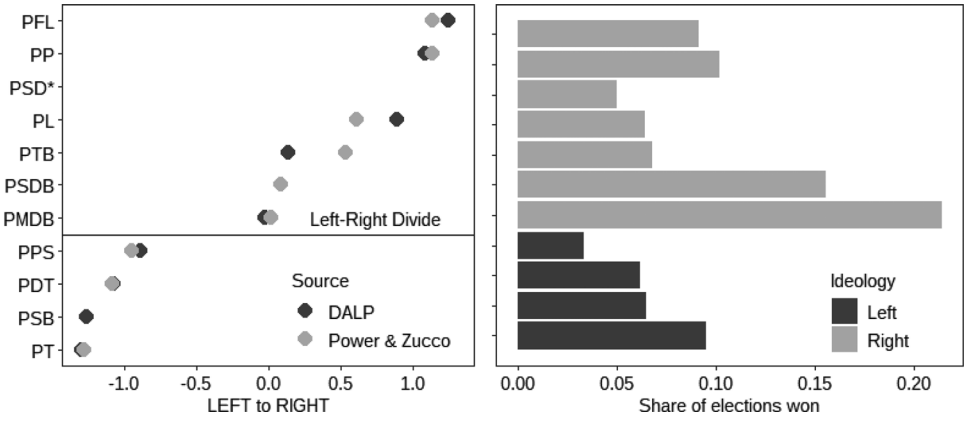
Hypothesis 2. When programmatic labels have little meaning for voters and parties:

(a) Policies and candidate profiles of Right and Left are indistinguishable, in both low- and high-poverty regions.

First, when parties are policy-motivated and their brands are recognized by voters, our model suggests that the Right chooses to reduce policy differentiation with the Left when the electorate is extremely poor. Because voters recognize national brands, the Right cannot easily commit to pro-poor promises. To demonstrate such

[9]Note that $\varphi(\bar{x}_R, 0)$ is weakly increasing in *q* but is close to 0 when *w* is small and *q* is not near $\frac{1}{2}$.

FIGURE 2 Left–Right Categorization of Brazilian Parties



Note: All parties below (above) the line are categorized as Left wing (Right wing) for the purpose of this empirical application. DALP data are from 2008; the "Power and Zucco" data shown here are from 2005. PSD became the third largest party in Brazil after its creation, in 2011, by dissidents of other Right-wing parties (namely PP and PFL). Party names: PFL (Partido da Frente Liberal), PP (Partido Progressista), PSD (Partido Social Democrático), PL (Partido Liberal), PTB (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro), PSDB (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira), PMDB (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro), PPS (Partido Popular Socialista), PDT (Partido Democrático Trabalhista), PSB (Partido Socialista Brasileiro), and PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores).

commitment, they nominate candidates who are less educated like poor voters, and are therefore more likely to be trusted by them. As the electorate becomes wealthier, the policies offered by the parties diverge, in line with their ideological positions, and candidate profiles converge.

Second, we show that it is necessary that *both* parties and voters care about programmatic brands for these results to hold. When programmatic labels have little meaning for both parties and voters, both policies and candidate profiles converge.

Party Ideology and Local Politics in Brazil

Before moving on to the empirical exercise, we provide some background regarding the ideological partisan divide and local politics in Brazil. Brazil has a fragmented party system with institutions that favor candidate-centered elections, and where a sizable share of the electorate does not identify with any party (Ames and Smith 2010).[10] Moreover, clientelism is pervasive (Nichter 2018), and parties often form ideologically inconsistent coalitions. In recent work, Samuels and Zucco (2018) argue that the main partisan cleavage in the period under analysis is between partisans and "antipartisans." This dichotomy has, on one side, voters that favor the labor party PT (the "partisans"), and on the other side, voters that reject it but do not necessarily identify with any specific Right-wing party.

However, even if this context undermines the scholars' ability to build a fine-grained ideological scale for all parties, there is a widely accepted consensus by experts, voters, and politicians alike on what constitutes the broader Left–Right divide in Brazil. Recent surveys with legislators place the main parties in a fairly cohesive scale (Power and Zucco 2009, 2012), displaying a clear-cut divide between Left and Right (Figure 2).[11] In fact, they emphasize how the ideological distances between parties are less meaningful within each group, but significantly large across the divide. This categorization is confirmed by the DALP expert survey (2008),[12] and supported by the 2010 LAPOP survey,[13] which shows that voters that

[10]The authors show that the voters less likely to identify themselves with party ideologies also "tend to be latent Rightists."

[11]The 11 largest parties by the number of mayors in the period were PMDB, PSDB, PT, PFL, PP, PTB, PL, PDT, PSB, PPS, and PSD. PSD was only created in 2011—that is why we do not have PSD's ideological scores for this period in the plot. Given that the party was formed mainly by dissidents from the Right-wing parties PFL and PP, we consider PSD as Rightist. Many of these changed their name since. PMDB became MDB, PFL became DEM, and PPS became CIDA.

[12]Democratic Accountability Linkages Survey. https://sites.duke.edu/democracylinkage/.

[13]See https://www.lapopsurveys.org.

identify with a Left party are also significantly more likely to label themselves as Leftist (SI Figure E.6).

The way in which voters and politicians understand Left–Right ideology might also vary across countries and time. For the period of our analysis (2004–16), this divide is highly aligned with politicians' views on redistribution: Leftist legislators are much more likely to express pro-poor preferences (Power and Zucco 2012). The same is shown in contemporary voter surveys: Lupu (2016) for example finds that, "when asked which party most protects them, poor respondents in 2006 were far more likely to choose the PT than any other party."

Samuels and Zucco (2014) also show that partisanship in Brazil is, in fact, meaningful to voters, and that party identification shapes voter attitudes even in this political environment. They focus on PT and PSDB, known for being more "programmatic" than their counterparts. They argue that "even though Brazil's two main parties have converged on the political center, agree on many of the issues, and have allied with a confusing array of parties, party labels for the PT and PSDB have the same effects scholars find for parties in older democracies."

Accordingly, in our empirical application, we conservatively classify parties in these two *L–R* groups. That said, this categorization warrants two additional comments. First, parties within a group are not necessarily cohesive in other dimensions, especially the Right (Power and Rodrigues-Silveira 2018). For example, there is heterogeneity in *modus operandi* (some are highly clientelistic), origins, or "rent-seeking" behavior (some are more prone to alliances with the Left). We acknowledge that any idiosyncratic source of party heterogeneity could also influence both candidate selection and local spending. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this project to precisely examine the effects of alternative party categorizations. Nevertheless, the SI Appendix provides evidence that our results are robust to slight variations in these *L–R* groups (SI Table E.5), and nonexistent for alternative party categorizations that are uncorrelated with the *L–R* scale like small versus large parties (SI Table E.3).

Second, these surveys reflect national ideological positions that, although consistent, might not trickle down to local races. In fact, the conventional wisdom in Brazil discounts the role of Left–Right ideology in municipal elections in favor of other issues such as dynastic rivalries (Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo 2019). In response, we note that our theoretical framework takes into account the possibility that ideological brands are not very meaningful for parties and voters. Our primary hypothesis should *only* hold when they do. Thus, the relevance or irrelevance of national brands for local politics in Brazil is a dispute that our empirical results can help adjudicate. However, before delving in the results, we look at the pattern of local mayoral coalitions to provide at least some preliminary evidence that national brands drive local politics to a certain extent.

Given the high number of parties in Brazil, nearly every mayor is supported by a large, preelectoral coalition averaging more than six parties. In fact, even the 11 parties above are more likely to formally support a candidate from a competing party than to run their own. In this context, the ideological consistency of these alliances can reflect the degree of influence of party brands in mayoral races. The data from 2004 to 2016 show that, although "inconsistent" alliances often exist (e.g., a Left party supporting a Rightist mayoral candidate), parties were three times more likely to support a candidate from the same ideological group, or to refrain from any support, than to rally behind a candidate with opposing ideology as shown in SI Figure E.4. This statistic is even stronger if we limit the data to the largest parties only, which suggests that party brands are highly informative of local leadership's behavior.

Candidate Selection and Policy Making in Municipalities

The Brazilian party system is fairly decentralized, which gives the municipal party branches ample control over the nomination of mayoral candidates.[14] The nomination can be a highly competitive process that mobilizes a relatively high share of the population: even though many voters do not identify with a party in surveys, the party membership rate in Brazil is among the highest across democracies (10+% of voters). Recruitment is also highly concentrated in the year before local elections, often as a display of electoral strength by mayoral hopefuls (Frey 2020). These precandidates not only compete with other partisans for the candidacy but also with politicians from parties that are potential coalition members. This preelectoral competition is emphasized by the following press reports from Pontal do Araguaia (MT), Batayporã (MS), and Sorocaba (SP); where local parties/coalitions even rely on polls to find the optimal candidate.[15]

Within this decentralized system, why would local party branches implement policies aligned with national party preferences? The answer lies in the quid-pro-quo

[14]State/national leadership could actively interfere in the nomination process, but only in larger or more strategic municipalities—see, for example, Camaçari (BA) in the introduction.

[15]See the links in https://bit.ly/2HuZ86e , https://bit.ly/3lafqzv and https://bit.ly/3meDhis , respectively.

between mayors and other partisan politicians that characterizes Brazilian politics. Mayors play an important role in supporting the vertical strength of their parties, as they have ample control over the distribution of public goods: in Brazil, municipal administrations implement the bulk of spending in the areas of health, education, and infrastructure. Not surprisingly, mayors can effectively help (or hurt) their parties in higher elections (Feierherd 2020; Novaes 2018). On the other hand, mayors also depend on party leaderships to obtain budget resources.[16] Although the bulk of these funds comes in the form of nondiscretionary federal transfers, Congress members have (limited) access to budget amendments that can be targeted to municipalities in a way that is electorally efficient for parties. Many local electoral campaigns are also dependent on the party coffers, and from corporate donations obtained with the influence of the leadership,[17] and many mayors sustain careers within the party after leaving office.

Data and Empirical Design

We use data from the municipal elections of 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016; and consider only races between the largest parties in the country—Figure 2 shows both the classification and the number of mayorships won by each party in the period.[18]

Our measure of pro-poor policy implemented by mayors is the share of the four-year municipal budget invested in the following four categories: health, sanitation, education, and housing.[19] In SI Appendix C, we show results for an alternative measure of pro-poor policy, based on the campaign proposals of each mayoral candidate released in advance of the 2012 and 2016 elections.[20] As mentioned before, our measure of descriptive representation is based on the education level of mayoral candidates. Unlike the main policy variable, here we observe the education for both candidates. The variable is thus defined as the difference between the education of winner and loser in the election. Education is measured on a scale of 1–8, the lowest level meaning that the candidate is illiterate, and the highest that she has at least a four-year bachelor's degree.[21] In SI Table E.7, we show that the results are robust to alternative specifications where we use only the education of the winner, or code education as a dummy that indicates whether candidates have a bachelor's degree.

This measure is an attractive proxy for descriptive representation of poor voters for three reasons. First, it is easily obtainable, verifiable, and not open to interpretation, as for example is race in Brazil (Bueno and Dunning 2017). Second, education has been shown to be highly correlated with socioeconomic status within countries (Krueger and Lindahl 2001). Third, our theory does not require a perfect correlation, that is, we do not expect every less educated politician to be poor, or vice versa. In fact, the idea here is to measure the candidate's ability to descriptively *identify* herself with the lower classes of the population, as opposed to actually *be* poor. Many of these candidates are self-made entrepreneurs who grew up in poverty, and thus identify with the poor on their "humble origins" and lack of education, even if later they became successful.[22] Thus, all that our theory requires is that poor voters, when in the presence of a less educated candidate, perceive him to be "one of them."

Regression Discontinuity Design

The empirical evidence that supports our hypotheses comes from comparing both the policies and education of mayors elected by Right- and Left-wing parties in Brazil. Our main explanatory variable is a dummy that indicates whether the elected mayor belongs to a Right-wing party, following Figure 2. A simple comparison of our outcomes between Right- and Left-wing mayors is

[16]Local taxes play only a very minor role in financing such investments.

[17]Public campaign funds are allocated to parties according to their congressional seats. Corporate donations were allowed in Brazil until 2012.

[18]Data on both the profile of candidates and election results were obtained from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).

[19]For 2016, the measure only includes three years of spending, given that the 2020 data were not yet released. In Brazil, although public health and education services are formally "universal," they are effectively used only by the poor—most middle- and upper-class citizens use private alternatives. In SI Table E.7, we show that the results are robust to alternative specifications where we either subtract public security spending (a salient Right-wing policy) or add expenditures on social assistance. In SI Table E.2, we also show that the past values of this variable are balanced at the discontinuity. The breakdown of budget expenses for Brazilian municipalities was obtained from the National Treasury.

[20]This SI Appendix describes the construction of this alternative variable, and shows the estimation results in SI Table C.1—the empirical findings are consistent with the main results.

[21]This is how TSE categorizes the education of candidates. See the full scale in SI Figure E.2.

[22]Former president Lula, for example, was by no means poor at the time of his presidential runs. Nevertheless, he often used his lack of formal education to vouch for his ability to be in touch with the populace.

TABLE 1 Mayor's Partisanship, Education, and Pro-Poor Spending

	Pro-Poor Spending as Percentage of Budget			Education Gap (Winner minus Loser)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
High poverty	1.062	0.734	0.349	−0.805*	−0.757*	−0.681*
	(0.828)	(0.739)	(0.679)	(0.335)	(0.290)	(0.260)
Pretreatment baseline	59.659	59.630	59.579	−0.033	−0.021	−0.003
Low poverty	−1.904*	−2.030*	−1.928*	0.514†	0.244	0.099
	(0.857)	(0.762)	(0.694)	(0.281)	(0.249)	(0.226)
Pretreatment baseline	50.307	50.352	50.421	0.164	0.136	0.117
Bandwidth	3.97	5.29	6.61	4.05	5.40	6.76
Observations	1544	2026	2464	1566	2061	2504
Bandwidth rules	0.75 × op.	Optimal	1.25 × op.	0.75 × op.	Optimal	1.25 × op.

Note: Standard errors are clustered by municipality (parentheses). The estimates represent the difference in outcomes between municipalities with Right- and Left-wing mayors for each subsample, at the discontinuity. The coefficients come from the estimation of equation (8). †p< .1; *p < .05.

likely to be biased by unobserved municipal characteristics that either influence policies or are correlated with the education of the candidates who run and win elections. We address this problem with an RDD that compares only municipalities where a Right-wing party won (or lost) to a Left-wing party by a close margin.

For the policy variable, the RDD estimates represent the local treatment effect of electing a Right-wing mayor, precisely identified for a municipality were the margin of victory in the election was zero. However, our estimates for the education outcome cannot be interpreted as an *effect* of electing a Rightist politician, given that the nominations happen before elections. Instead, they should be interpreted as the correlation between education and the winner's party ideology.

Nevertheless, there are benefits from also using the RDD to estimate this correlation. First, using an empirical approach consistent with the one used to identify the policy treatment effect, and a comparable sample, the RDD allows to precisely connect both results, as required by our theory. Second, the RDD is a very transparent way to show that this empirical pattern is not driven by a potential correlation between ideology and other observed variables, including other characteristics of candidates. Accordingly, SI Table E.1 shows the balance around the discontinuity of predetermined or fixed covariates. In addition, we also show that the observed relationship between partisanship, education and poverty in Brazil is robust to alternative empirical approaches, such as OLS (cross-section) estimation and panel analysis, and not driven by the RDD assumptions. SI Figure E.1 and Table E.9 show the results of these empirical strategies.

We provide estimates for two subsamples with municipalities with poverty rate above and below the median.[23] Municipal poverty is measured by the share of poor families, estimated by the Ministry of Social Development (MDS).[24] The main estimating equation is

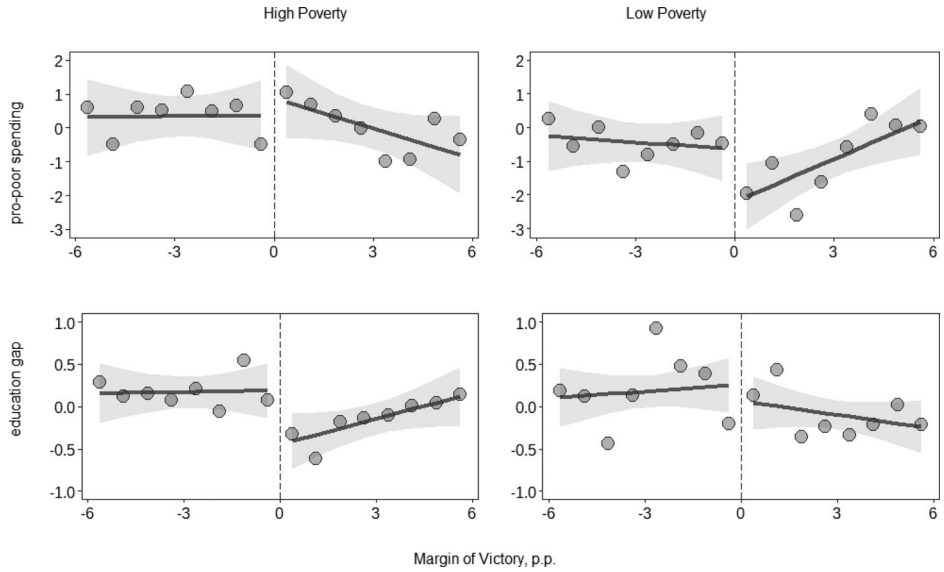
$$\begin{aligned} y_{mt} = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 R_{mt} + \beta_2 W_{mt} + \beta_3 R_{mt} W_{mt} \\ & + (\beta_4 + \beta_5 R_{mt} + \beta_6 W_{mt} + \beta_7 R_{mt} W_{mt}) M_{mt} \\ & + \delta_t + \theta_{mt} + \xi_{mt}, \end{aligned} \tag{8}$$

where outcome y_{mt} for municipality m in period t is regressed on the Right-wing dummy R_{mt}, and on the dummy that indicates whether the municipality is in the low-poverty group (W_{mt}). The margin of victory is the difference in the vote share between the winner and runner-up (M_{mt}), δ_t are election fixed-effects, and θ_{mt}

[23]SI Table E.6 shows that the results are robust to the choice of poverty cutoff. In SI Table E.12, we show that they are also robust to nonbinary measures of poverty, and a different definition of the poverty variable that uses the municipal Human Development Index.

[24]This is the base for several federal government benefits including *Bolsa Família*.

FIGURE 3 RDD Effects by Variable and Poverty Level



Note: For every plot, the Right (Left) side shows the municipalities where a Right-wing (Left-wing) party has won the mayoral election. The lines are a linear fit, and the points represent the average outcome for the corresponding level of margin of victory (in percentage points) in each bin. For presentation, the outcomes are normalized by the average of the subsample.

is a vector of pretreatment covariates and other candidate characteristics.[25] Accordingly, β_1 is the effect of having a Right-wing mayor in a high-poverty municipality, whereas $\beta_1 + \beta_3$ is the effect in a low-poverty municipality.

Results

Table 1 shows the RDD estimates from equation (8) for different bandwidths.[26] Robustness to the exclusion of covariates and polynomial choice are shown in SI Table E.4.

The pattern that emerges from the estimation is in line with *Hypothesis* 1: in high-poverty locations, Right and Left implement indistinguishable policies, that is, both parties allocate nearly 60% of the budget to pro-poor spending. However, for the same sample, Right-wing winners are on average less educated than their Leftist opponents by nearly one point on the 1–8 scale. As municipalities become less poor, the policy effect becomes significant: Right-wing incumbents spend 2.0 percentage points less than Left-wing incumbents on the poor, from a baseline of 50% of the budget. However, when municipalities are less poor, both parties nominate politicians with virtually indistinguishable education.

The overall pattern in the results is illustrated in Figure 3, and is robust to slightly different definitions of Left–Right groups (see SI Table E.5). In fact, our baseline categorization provides estimates that are more conservative than these alternative specifications. For example, when we restrict our comparison to PT versus Right-wing parties only, both the policy and education coefficients are higher in magnitude, by 17% and 70%; respectively.

In addition to being highly consistent with the theory, the policy result in low-poverty areas provides an additional insight to the specific Brazilian case: parties consistently implement policies in line with their ideological brands, that is, national ideologies are informative of local policies.[27]

Capitalizing on the decision of the Brazilian Electoral Court (TSE) to force mayoral candidates to release a document with their campaign proposals since 2009,

[25] As it is usual in RD designs, covariates are often included to reduce the variance of the estimated coefficients. We include all covariates listed in SI Table E.1, which also shows that these variables are balanced at the discontinuity. SI Table E.4 shows robustness to the exclusion of covariates.

[26] Bandwidths are estimated using the algorithm in Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014).

[27] We also stress that, if the mechanism we propose is true, we would never observe policy differentiation in high-poverty areas, even if party brands are relevant and informative.

TABLE 2 Effect Heterogeneity, by the Local Level of Ideological Alignment

	Pro-Poor Spending as Percentage of Budget			Education Gap (Winner minus Loser)		
	Full Sample	Low	High	Full Sample	Low	High
High poverty	0.734	0.704	0.989	−0.757*	−0.472	−0.987*
	(0.739)	(0.984)	(1.048)	(0.290)	(0.379)	(0.424)
Low poverty	−2.030*	−1.126	−2.647*	0.244	0.179	0.255
	(0.762)	(0.998)	(1.138)	(0.249)	(0.397)	(0.344)
Optimal bandwidth	5.29	5.29	5.29	5.40	5.40	5.40
Observations	2026	969	1057	2061	984	1077

Note: Standard errors are clustered by municipality (parentheses). The estimates represent the difference in outcomes between municipalities with Right- and Left-wing mayors for each subsample, at the discontinuity. The coefficients come from the estimation of equation (8). The sample split is described in the text. †$p < .1$; *$p < .05$.

we check whether this pattern is also observed in policy *proposals*, rather than implemented policies. In SI Appendix C, we run the same RDD design as in models (1)–(3) of Table 1. Using two different measures of "pro-poor" policy proposals, we find that there is no difference in the campaign promises of the Left and the Right in high-poverty municipalities, whereas in low-poverty municipalities the Right is less likely to campaign on pro-poor issues than the Left. The evidence broadly provides strong support to the assumption that party brands play a significant role in many local races, especially in a political context where voters have been shown to *recognize* the policies and performance of mayors, and to *punish/reward* parties accordingly (Boas, Hidalgo, and Toral 2021; Feierherd 2020; Ferraz and Finan 2008; Klašnja and Titiunik 2017).

As for the education gap in high-poverty areas, we show in the SI Appendix that it is primarily driven by cases where the Left fields college-educated candidates—see SI Table E.10. In other words, the descriptive representation gains accrued by the Right come primarily from the comparison between candidates with and without a bachelor's degree,[28] in line with the representation gap depicted in SI Figure B.1. SI Table E.7 also shows that the education result remains robust when the variable is built with dummies that indicate whether the candidates have a bachelor's degree. Finally, the OLS and panel results in SI Figure E.1 and Table E.9 are also consistent with our findings.

[28]As opposed to with and without high-school, for example. SI Figure E.3 shows that, although the Left fields more candidates with a bachelor's degree, the Right has more candidates in every other education category.

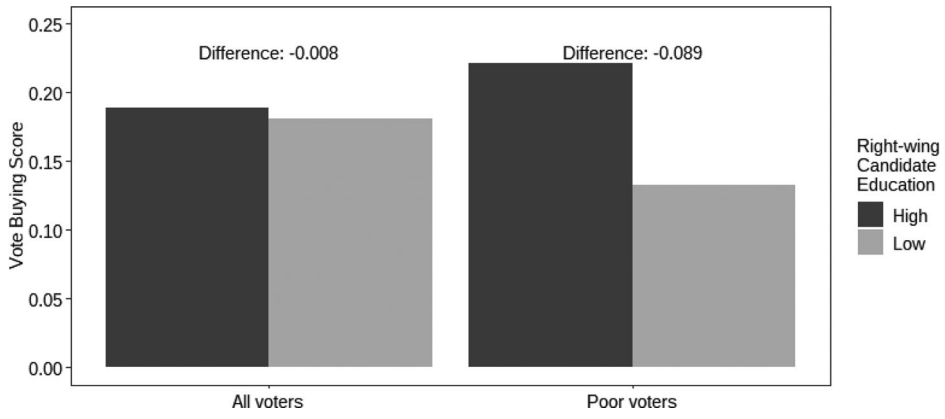
Heterogeneity by the Degree of Local Ideological Competition

Our theory accommodates the possibility that party brands might be less informative of local policies, which could often be the case in Brazil. In such locations, *Hypothesis* 2 predicts that the pattern depicted in Table 1 should be weaker, or even nonexistent. To check whether our results exhibit such heterogeneity, we split the overall sample into high and low ideological alignment groups, based on the profile of the party coalitions of Left- and Right-wing candidates in each municipal election. The intuition is that ideological competition is more salient for parties and voters in races where these coalitions are highly aligned with the national *L*–*R* divide.[29] Table 2 shows the results of this exercise. Columns (1) and (4) run our main specifications on the full sample. In columns (2) and (5), where we run the analysis on the *low alignment* sample, all relevant coefficients are statistically insignificant as expected. In columns (3) and (6), we show that the results in the *high alignment* sample are both significant and higher in magnitude.

SI Table E.5, columns (3) and (6), provide additional evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2. We show results for a subsample with races between parties at both extremes of the *L*–R scale (i.e., PT/PSB vs. PFL/PP/PSD/PL). Because these parties have more extreme ideological positions, we also expect the effects to be stronger for this subsample, which is indeed the case.

[29]More specifically, for every race, we compute the share of the 11 main parties that support a mayoral candidate from the same *L*–*R* group. This is our municipality-election measure of alignment, which has maximum value of 1, when all parties support aligned candidates, and a median value of 0.45, used to divide the sample.

FIGURE 4 Self-Reported Vote Buying and the Education of Right-Wing Candidates



Note: Data include 983 voters in 25 municipalities. High education refers to the group of candidates with more than a secondary degree. $^{\dagger}p < .1$; $^{*}p < .05$.

Finally, in the SI Appendix we show two additional tests of the overall framework. In SI Table E.10, columns (3) and (4) show that the education gap results are stronger in municipality-years where the previous mayor was Leftist. This is in support of the mechanism that the Right nominates less educated candidates to reinforce their commitment in matching the Left's pro-poor policies. In this context, the Right's strategy should be more relevant where voters have not recently been exposed to the policies of a Right-wing mayor, and there is more uncertainty around the Right's commitment to policy shifts. In SI Appendix D, we use the LAPOP survey to show that poor voters feel more represented by parties than non-poor voters only in high-poverty municipalities that are governed by a less educated mayor.

Alternative Explanations

In this section, we assess three alternative mechanisms that could be driving the observed candidate nomination pattern. First, there is no doubt that clientelism plays a significant role in Brazilian politics. Rather than ruling out the relevance of this practice, we show several pieces of evidence suggesting that clientelism is unlikely to drive the candidate selection pattern shown before. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that descriptive representation and clientelism are likely *substitute* electoral strategies in this context.

The nomination pattern we uncover in Brazil could be an artifact of clientelism as opposed to our explanation if (i) Right-wing parties are consistently better at it than the Left (e.g., either because they possess better broker networks or more resources); and (ii) less educated candidates have a competitive advantage in the practice. Under these assumptions, the Right selects less educated candidates to boost clientelism in poor areas, which would not be efficient for the Left.[30]

We assess this explanation with three empirical exercises. First, we examine the correlation between ideology and education gap only in races between the two most "programmatic" large parties on each group, PT (Left) and PSDB (Right). SI Table E.10 shows not only that the political selection mechanism still holds for this less clientelistic subset, but that the magnitude of the correlation is more than double the one of the full sample. This could suggest that rather than being an alternative explanation to our results clientelism *attenuates* the Right's need to appeal to descriptive representation to become competitive among poor voters.

Second, we show that there is no evidence that Right-wing parties spend more than the Left in mayoral campaigns, both in high- and low-poverty areas. Although this is not a direct measure of clientelistic capacity, it is a good proxy for the parties' ability to buy votes during the election period. In SI Table E.8 we show that our RDD framework produces statistically insignificant estimates when the outcome variable is the gap between the spending of the Right and Left candidates.

Third, we use the 2010 LAPOP survey to elicit voters' perceptions on vote buying, and how they vary according to the education level of the Right-wing mayoral

[30]We emphasize that this narrative does not threaten our results on programmatic differentiation in low-poverty municipalities.

TABLE 3 Education of Partisan Council Members

	Councilors with Secondary Education		Councilors with a Bachelor's Degree	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
RDD estimate	0.140	0.061	0.019	0.041
	(0.185)	(0.075)	(0.103)	(0.051)
Optimal bandwidth	5.51	5.38	5.05	3.98
Observations	1082	1058	998	799

Note: The dependent variable is always the gap between the outcomes for winner and loser. Standard errors are clustered by municipality (parentheses). The RDD estimates are the difference in outcomes between municipalities with Right- and Left-wing mayors, at the discontinuity, for the high-poverty sample only. Columns denoted by (A) and (B) consider all councilors, or only the two most voted members in the council, respectively. $^{\dagger}p < .1$; $^{*}p < .05$.

candidate in the municipality.[31] Vote buying is coded as a dummy that indicates whether the voter was offered to sell their vote. We focus on the municipalities with higher than median poverty level, where on average 19% of voters were offered to sell their vote. Figure 4 shows that the presence of a more educated Right-wing candidate in the 2008 race did not trigger higher reporting of vote buying by voters (both differences are statistically insignificant, and negative).

A second alternative explanation for the education gap result is that Right- and Left-wing parties face a different pool of candidates in high-poverty municipalities. For example, the same nomination pattern would arise if the Left simply has better recruitment networks than the Right among the highly educated in these areas. We assess this narrative using the education of incumbent councilors for each party at the moment of the election, given that councilors come precisely from the same pool as mayors (party membership rolls), and the council can be a stepping stone to a mayoral candidacy.[32] Here the outcome variable is the difference in the number of highly educated councilors[33] between the mayor's party and the runner-up's (similar to the construction of the education gap described in "Data and Empirical Design" section). Table 3 shows the RDD estimates for the high-poverty sample. Columns denoted by (A) consider all councilors, and columns denoted by (B) only consider the two most voted councilors in each municipality.

As it is evident, the coefficients are statistically indistinguishable at the discontinuity. If anything, a victory of a Right-wing mayor is (weakly) correlated with the Right-wing party also having a larger pool of educated councilors. SI Table E.11 and Figure E.5 show similar findings in both a panel analysis and in the raw data. Together, these results suggest that it is unlikely that the nomination pattern in poor municipalities is being driven by the candidate pools available to the parties.

Finally, the selection pattern could arise if the recruitment of less educated candidates is particularly costly to the Left. We provide an extensive discussion in SI Appendix B about the potential costs of recruiting less educated candidates. In short, our multiple measures of administrative performance and mobilization capacity strongly suggest that uneducated mayors are indeed costly to parties, but also that the cost is uniform across ideological groups.

Conclusion

This article uses an RDD in Brazilian municipal elections to uncover a puzzling empirical regularity: in high-poverty municipalities, Right- and Left-wing mayors devote a similar share of budget to pro-poor policies, but Right-wing candidates are relatively less educated. In low-poverty areas the pattern is reversed: candidate profiles are similar, but Right-wing mayors spend less on the poor. We interpret these findings within a theory where the Left always chooses pro-poor policies in line with party ideals. The Right, on the other hand, can only

[31]The 2010 wave of this survey had the following question: In recent years and during electoral campaigns, did any candidate or any member of a political party offered you something like a favor, food, or any other benefit or good in exchange for your vote or support?

[32]We must note here that Right-wing parties, on average, have much larger party memberships than Leftist parties in most Brazilian municipalities, already making this alternative argument less likely.

[33]We use two different specifications for "high education." The first includes at least secondary education (levels 6–8 of our scale), and other that considers only a college degree (level 8).

credibly promise pro-poor policies when it nominates candidates who are descriptively closer to the poor. This strategy allows the Right to become competitive in poorer regions, despite its less popular brand. In less poor areas, where more voters are aligned with the Right's preferences, this strategy is unnecessary.

These findings have significant implications for the future study of party strategies in developing democracies, where most research attributes the success of elite-driven parties to the erosion of programmatic brands, and the prevalence of nonpolicy politician–voter linkages. Although these findings in no way imply that nonpolicy strategies such as clientelism are irrelevant, they suggest that their success may also depend on how they interact with programmatic differentiation. Additionally, given that our results on the education gap are stronger in poor municipalities with a Left-wing incumbent mayor (i.e., municipalities where there was no recent experience of a Right-wing mayor diluting the brand), our results suggest that party brands are not only relevant but also sticky across electoral cycles. Future research can perhaps shed some light on the dynamic nature of party brands in local races in developing democracies.

Given the relative paucity of descriptive representation of the poor in the literature (Carnes and Lupu 2015), our results suggest that, at least in Brazil, it is surprisingly Right-wing parties who more often capitalize on this shortage. More broadly, the results also imply that there is more to descriptive representation than its direct effects on substantive representation, which has been the focus of the bulk of this literature. Our article suggests that parties might also use strategic descriptive representation as a tool to convey their commitment to policy shifts.

Finally, the mechanism proposed here is context driven, where fielding less educated candidates is costly for parties, and there is a trade-off between this cost and the electoral benefits (direct or policy-driven) of descriptive representation. Otherwise, the nomination strategy uncovered here would be optimal for all parties.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Mathematical Appendix
Appendix B: The Costs and Benefits of Less Educated Mayors
Appendix C: Candidate's Campaign Proposals
Appendix D: Self-Reported Representation in Lapop
Appendix E: Tables and Figures