Political Brokers: Partisans or Agents? Evidence from the Mexican Teachers’ Union

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Abstract: Political brokers mobilize voters all over the world, yet little is known about what motivates them to do so. This article theorizes about two drivers of brokers’ efforts: (1) incentives—monetary rewards or sanctions—and monitoring and (2) partisan attachment. We examine our theory using data on the Mexican National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), Latin America’s largest union and a well-known political machine. Consistent with the role of teachers as brokers, we find that the vote share of parties supported by the SNTE machine is higher in polling stations located in schools. This effect is absent when teachers are asked to mobilize voters in support of a party for which they have no partisan attachment, and it is uncorrelated with the union’s monitoring capacity. This suggests that partisan attachment, rather than incentives and monitoring, explains the SNTE’s effectiveness as a political machine.

Replication Materials: The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available on the American Journal of Political Science Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BFLPBK.

In many developing countries, politicians and political parties rely on political brokers as crucial intermediaries between themselves and voters. Brokers are responsible for mobilizing voters through clientelistic and vote-buying strategies that are critical to electoral success. However, while recent work has documented the electoral impact of brokers (Cantú 2016; Larreguy 2012; Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016; Rueda 2015), as well as the different strategies they pursue to mobilize voters (e.g., see Auyero 2000; Díaz-Cayeros, Estevez, and Magaloni 2016; Mares and Young 2016), we have little understanding of the drivers of brokers’ efforts. This limits our ability to comprehend the politics of contexts in which clientelism plays an important role in shaping electoral outcomes.

This article theorizes that there are two main drivers of brokers’ efforts. First, parties often incentivize brokers with pecuniary rewards or sanctions that are conditional on brokers’ observed mobilization efforts. The party–broker relationship is often subject to moral hazard: Whenever brokers’ electoral interests are not necessarily aligned with those of the party, brokers will have an incentive to shirk. Thus, parties must be able to monitor their brokers’ mobilization performance in order to enforce their efforts, and either withhold rewards from or impose costly sanctions on brokers who shirk or reward those who effectively mobilize voters. This is particularly relevant, for example, in contexts with hired political brokers (Larreguy 2012; Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016) who, absent any monitoring, would exert little or no effort in mobilizing voters.
The second main driver of brokers’ efforts may be that they are motivated to mobilize voters due to a partisan attachment originating from ideological ties or personal material interests in the success of the party, due, for example, to career concerns. Whenever the electoral interests of the party and the brokers are aligned, moral hazard is less of a problem and brokers should be motivated to exert effort even if there are no monitoring mechanisms in place. Understanding the ultimate drivers of political brokers is essential to comprehending the extent of clientelism across different political machines, parties, and other political organizations—and how it should vary over time with changes in the political system.

This article uses the Mexican National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), the largest union in Latin America, to highlight the implications of our theory. The SNTE is an ideal organization in which to study the motivation of brokers for several reasons. There is widespread anecdotal evidence that it operates as a political machine. Figures from the popular press suggest that its leadership uses more than 320,000 teachers (of the 1.4 million teachers who are affiliated with the SNTE) as political brokers to mobilize voters to support aligned candidates (Poy Solano 2009). Historically, the SNTE and its members have been associated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Under PRI governments and the SNTE leadership of Elba Esther Gordillo between 1989 and 2013, union members enjoyed a substantial improvement in salaries and employment conditions. This institutionalized alliance between the SNTE and the PRI gave the union (and, in particular, Gordillo) considerable power to distribute rents among teachers. Teachers thus became politically aligned with the PRI as well as subject to the control of the SNTE leadership, which exercised great discretionary power to allocate rents and monitor members’ political activities. Since its efficacy as a political machine may thus originate from both the attachment of its members to parties aligned with the union and the control its leaders exerted over teachers via incentives and monitoring, the SNTE is an ideal organization to highlight the implications of our theory.

In order to empirically assess the extent to which brokers’ success in the SNTE context is due to both partisan attachment and the capacity of the union’s leadership to incentivize and monitor their efforts during elections, we develop a novel empirical strategy to estimate the electoral impact of the SNTE machine on electoral outcomes. To that end, we exploit two main sources of variation. First, we use variation over time in the alliances between the SNTE leadership and different parties for specific offices. While the SNTE leadership has historically supported the PRI, in 2005 it created its own party—the New Alliance Party (PANAL)—following Gordillo’s exit from the PRI. Since then, the PANAL has put forward its own candidates for congressional and presidential elections. However, for the presidential races—in which the PANAL stands no chance of success—it has unofficially forged alliances with other parties. Second, we also exploit variation in the location of polling stations, particularly whether they are located in schools since this facilitates the role of teachers as political brokers in various ways. First, since teachers often serve as party representatives or election officials in the schools where they work, they can more closely monitor/influence their students’ parents’ voting decisions on Election Day. Second, research suggests that parents are more likely to respond to teachers’ political persuasion (even absent monitoring or coercion) when they vote in a place that they closely associate with their children’s teachers—and thus their authority.

We find that the SNTE machine has a significant impact on electoral outcomes. These results are robust to the inclusion of municipality or precinct fixed effects. Moreover, all our specifications include state-specific time controls to account for possible state-level institutional differences in polling station allocation. We also perform additional exercises to document that our estimates capture the role of teachers as political brokers and not other confounding characteristics of voters or polling stations located in schools.

Next, we explore the motivating forces of the teachers’ work as brokers that underlie the electoral effect of the SNTE that we estimate. Are unionized teachers effective brokers because SNTE leaders are able to monitor them? Do teachers mobilize parents to vote for parties supported by SNTE leaders because they are motivated to do so by partisan attachment? While the qualitative accounts that we provide in the Background section suggest that both motivating forces might be at play, there is no quantitative evidence assessing their relevance. To test the importance of monitoring, we follow Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016) and exploit quasi-random variation in the number of polling stations at the precinct level. As explained later, an additional polling station facilitates the...
ability of SNTE leaders to use polling station–level electoral outcomes to monitor and reward teachers. However, we find no evidence that an additional polling station in a precinct affects our estimates of the SNTE’s electoral impact, which suggests that, to the extent that we can measure it, monitoring is unlikely to explain teachers’ effectiveness as SNTE political brokers.

To test the importance of partisan attachment, we exploit the identity of the party for which SNTE leaders requested teachers to mobilize voters. While in 2000 and 2012 SNTE leaders unofficially supported the PRI in the presidential election, in 2006 they unofficially supported the National Action Party (PAN). The PAN’s political platform differs noticeably from that of the PRI, the party with which teachers have traditionally been affiliated. If the partisan attachment of SNTE-affiliated teachers is the underlying motive behind their efforts as brokers, we should find no electoral impact of the SNTE machine in 2006, and indeed we do not.²

Our main contribution is providing a conceptual distinction between two important drivers of brokers’ efforts and suggesting an empirical approach to assessing their empirical relevance in the case of a machine where a priori both drivers could be at play. The SNTE is therefore an example of a case in which both of the two main sources of brokers’ efforts might play a role, which allows us to propose an empirical strategy to test for their importance in that specific context. Naturally, our specific empirical findings for the SNTE should not apply to other types of political machines. Our theory precisely indicates that, in the case of political machines that rely on hired brokers with relatively weak partisan links, it is likely that short-term monetary rewards and monitoring will play a more substantial role. Nonetheless, partisan attachment as a driver of brokers’ efforts should be an important explanatory variable when explaining the success of political machines that rely on brokers with historical attachment to the parties for which they work.

Understanding the ultimate drivers of brokers’ efforts is essential to appreciating the electoral impact of various political machines, as well as their importance over time. For example, it may help explain the survival and persistent strength of political machines that are traditionally attached to particular parties, even in contexts where those parties lose incumbency. Despite gaining access to resources to incentivize political brokers, newly elected parties find it very hard to co-opt or gain their support if the brokers have traditionally been attached to other parties. Examples of such a phenomenon include Argentina (Calvo and Murillo 2004), Mexico (Larreguy 2012), Indonesia, Korea, and Taiwan (Slater and Wong 2013).

Related Literature and Theoretical Argument

Our article has links to various literatures. It is naturally related to the work on clientelism that studies how political machines and brokers mobilize and persuade voters via coercion or targeted benefits.³ One strand of this literature focuses on the relationship between brokers and voters. Some scholars study the various strategies used by brokers to mobilize voters, including material incentives (e.g., money or favors [Auyero 2000] and access to government programs [Díaz-Cayeros, Estevez, and Magaloni 2016]) or violence and intimidation (Cruz 2013; Mares and Young 2016; Robinson and Torvik 2009).

Others study the reasons why voters comply with brokers; some argue that they do so out of self-interest or partisan attachment (Calvo and Murillo 2013), or due to reciprocity toward brokers (Finan and Schechter 2012; Lawson and Greene 2014). Finally, the studies by Gingerich and Medina (2013), Rueda (2015), and Smith and Bueno de Mesquita (2012) look at the monitoring mechanisms employed by brokers to overcome the secrecy of the ballot. While we present some qualitative evidence on the mechanisms teachers use to mobilize parents, the focus of our article is not the broker–voter relationship. Rather, we complement this literature by focusing on the driving motives of brokers rather than those of voters.

Another strand of the literature on clientelism focuses on issues governing the relationship between parties and brokers. Notably, Stokes et al. (2013) study the adverse selection problems that parties face when hiring brokers, and Camp (2012) looks at the collective action problem among brokers. Larreguy (2012) and Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016), in turn, study agency problems between parties and brokers, and they emphasize parties’ use of electoral outcomes at low levels of aggregation—such as the polling station or precinct—to elicit brokers’ efforts. Similarly, Szwarcberg (2012) shows that party leaders can use rally attendance to monitor brokers’ efforts to mobilize voters. We argue that monitoring is one of the main drivers of brokers’ efforts, particularly in the case of hired brokers with limited attachment to the party. An illustrative example from Mexico is the brokers

²Incidentally, this allows us to question the widely held belief that the SNTE played a critical role in the PAN’s presidential victory in 2006.

³Stokes et al. (2013) and Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) provide a broad overview of clientelistic practices in developing countries.
for hire who mobilize voters to turn out on Election Day, whose rewards are tied to the electoral performance in the precincts in which they operate (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016). Another example is those who Holland and Palmer-Rubin (2015) refer to as organizational brokers, who trade the votes of the members of the interest associations they represent for concessions, and often renegotiate ties to political parties between election cycles.

However, brokers often have a long-standing relationship and political alignment with the party for which they work (Calvo and Murillo 2004; Stokes et al. 2013; Szwarcberg 2015). We thus argue that brokers’ inherent motivation to mobilize voters out of partisan attachment, even in the absence of monitoring, represents another important driver of their efforts. Recent work focuses on such contexts and studies voter mobilization by individuals whose incentives are aligned with those of the party, for example, if they want to pursue a political career of their own (Szwarcberg 2015). Illustrative examples also come from Mexico, where the Cardenist Peasant Central (CCC) has traditionally been associated with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD; Palmer-Rubin 2016), whereas the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) has traditionally been attached to the PRI (Larreguy 2012). Members of the CCC and CNC have often occupied important party positions, as well as elected offices, under the umbrella of their corresponding parties.

Finally, the literature on patronage has studied how the nature of the party–broker relationship is affected whenever brokers are (or have the prospect of becoming) public servants thanks to their relationship with the parties they work for, as is the case for SNTE-affiliated teachers. Parties can use discretion in the allocation of jobs in the bureaucracies they control to provide incentives to brokers via either promises of new or better jobs or threats of job loss. Moreover, whenever brokers are government employees, they enjoy direct access to government resources that, together with their day-to-day interaction with (and knowledge of) members of the community, facilitate their implementation of clientelistic strategies (Oliveros 2016; Zarazaga 2014).

As previously stated, our main theoretical contribution is to provide a conceptual distinction between the main drivers of brokers’ efforts. The existing literature either abstracts from these motives or assumes that either partisan attachment or incentives and monitoring dominate, often in contexts in which both types of motives may play an important role. Importantly, we do not study whether incentives to brokers take the form of monetary payments, public employment, or coercion/sanctions, but rather emphasize that monitoring is essential for the enforcement of these incentives in the presence of moral hazard regardless of the form they take. Similarly, we do not study the specific reasons behind brokers’ attachment to a specific party, which can either be ideological or reflect career concerns tied to the party’s electoral performance.

These partisan linkages between brokers and parties often combine these two reasons and are the result of material benefits provided by the party over the long run, as illustrated by the case of SNTE teachers and the PRI. However, these long-term benefits are distinct from the short-term incentives offered to brokers for voter mobilization around elections—and for which monitoring plays a critical role. In sum, we argue that a thorough understanding of any given political machine’s effectiveness must assess the extent to which its brokers have been historically attached to a particular party, as well its capacity to put in place enforcement mechanisms that rely on monitoring.

Finally, our article is indirectly related to the literature on the political role of labor unions. We focus here on the drivers of brokers’ efforts and use the SNTE only as an example. While our specific quantitative results for the SNTE may not apply to other unions, we believe our theory regarding the driving motives of brokers’ efforts is broadly applicable. Moreover, most existing papers on the electoral role of unions focus on the political pressure that unions exert and the differential voting behavior of their members, rather than on their role as political machines that mobilize other (non-unionized) sectors of society.

**Background**

**The SNTE as a Political Machine**

The SNTE is the largest union in Latin America, with over 1.4 million members. Since its founding in 1949, it has functioned under the corporatist control of the PRI (Chapman 2012). In recent decades, its history has been tightly linked to the trajectory of Elba Esther Gordillo, who served as its main leader from 1989 to 2013, when she was imprisoned for embezzling USD 160 million. As described below, Gordillo was responsible for many of the wage and benefit gains for SNTE-affiliated teachers, as well as for the shifting political alignments of the union.

**Political Alignments of the SNTE and Teachers’ Partisan Attachment.** Up to 1992, when the union’s statutes were revised, it was compulsory for all SNTE teachers to be

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4 See Eaton and Chambers-Ju (2014), Levitsky (2003), and Murillo (2001) for the case of Latin America and Radcliff and Davis (2000) and Feigenbaum (2013) for studies of more developed democracies.
formally registered as PRI supporters (Cortina 1989). The SNTE regularly mobilized its teachers during elections to gather support for the PRI, and the party became an important vehicle of political ascendancy for the union’s leaders.  

Gordillo was very instrumental in cementing the strong alliance between the PRI and the SNTE. As we document in Section A.1.1 in the supporting information (SI), most wage increases and improvements in working conditions for teachers took place under her leadership and PRI governments that helped cement teachers’ loyalty to their union’s leader and their partisan attachment to the PRI.

In 2005, however, the traditional alliance between the SNTE and the PRI suffered a rupture when Gordillo was expelled from the party after engaging in a political war with the future PRI presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo. After leaving the PRI, Gordillo founded her own political party—the PANAL—to participate in the 2006 federal elections, and she steered the SNTE political machine toward her new party. Teachers were naturally aligned with the PANAL, not only out of loyalty to Gordillo, but also because the party’s platform looked after their interests. The Mexican presidency was no longer a feasible goal for Gordillo, who shifted her focus (and that of the PANAL) in the federal election to the share of federal representatives and senators that is chosen through proportional representation. However, Gordillo saw a way to profit from the votes that the SNTE political machine could deliver in presidential elections: by selling SNTE votes to other parties’ candidates.

Gordillo allegedly sold the support of the SNTE machine to the PAN candidate Felipe Calderón in 2006, and to the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012. According to the media and political analysts, these alliances, which we document in detail in Section A.1.2 in the SI, played a critical role in the electoral outcome, particularly in 2006. However, these claims have not been backed by empirical evidence, and it is uncertain whether teachers were motivated to mobilize voters for the PAN, to which they had very little historical attachment. As a journalist told us during an interview, “there are probably less than 5 teachers in the country that identify themselves with the PAN.”

The shifting alliances of the SNTE leadership from the PRI toward parties such as the PAN, the platform of which significantly differs from that of the PRI and the PANAL, allow us to assess the importance of partisan attachment in political brokers’ motivation to mobilize voters.

The SNTE’s Control and Monitoring of Teachers. Since its formation, the SNTE leadership has exploited the far-reaching structure of the union in order to turn it into a political machine. As we describe in detail in Section A.1.3 in the SI, the lack of transparency in the teacher hiring process, and the discretion that the SNTE leadership enjoys over the allocation of thousands of jobs and other benefits, allow it to use coercion and monitoring to enforce teachers’ efforts as political brokers. For example, in the so-called 10 × 1 strategy, teachers are requested to provide copies of the voting credentials of 10 parents, whose turnout is later monitored at the polling stations by the SNTE’s affiliates (Cantú 2009; Rojas 2012). If the teachers in charge of mobilizing the parents at a particular polling station are unable to deliver a predetermined number of votes, the SNTE investigates and punishes those who did not deliver (Coronel 2012; Del Valle 2009).

Teachers as Brokers

The role of teachers as political brokers is nicely summed up by Ornelas (2012), who cites an SNTE leader referring to teachers as “electoral plumbers.” Effective political brokers need to be close to their community and identify which voters are more likely to respond to their influence (Auyero 2000; Finan and Schechter 2012; Zarazaga 2014). Teachers do so in many different ways, both during the course of their jobs and within the community. As community leaders (Cantú 2009), they exert informal authority and can influence the voting decisions of other citizens. Teachers are held in high regard by parents, who respect their opinions and take cues from them regarding the candidates who best suit their interests. In addition, and unlike other types of public servants, teachers interact with parents on a regular basis in school meetings and community events. They also engage in broader, coordinated strategies of voter mobilization. Under Gordillo, the SNTE organized “brigades of political education” composed of groups of 10 teachers who would use school

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3In 1982, for example, the SNTE had 25% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies allocated to the PRI’s popular organizations (Cortina 1989).

4Mexican Congress members are chosen through a mixed system of plurality voting (PV) and proportional representation (PR). Of the 500 representatives, 300 are chosen through PV and 200 by PR. Out of 128 senators, 96 are elected by PV, and 32 through PR.
meetings to instruct parents on how to vote (and whom to vote for), distribute political promotional material on school grounds, and mobilize the parents of schoolchildren on Election Day (Loyo-Brambila 2008).7

Beyond the political propaganda and persuasion teachers use to try to influence parents’ voting decisions, there is also evidence of more coercive and openly illegal practices. For example, the SNTE takes advantage of teachers’ access to parents’ residential addresses to target them for political purposes (Alianza Civica 2009). Similarly, vehicles of the Mexican Public Education Secretary are used to transport parents to vote on Election Day, a practice known as acarreo, which is illegal in Mexico (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016). School directors also mobilize parents with threats that they will not enroll their children the following academic year if they do not turn out to vote for the indicated candidate (Llaven 2012).

**Why the Location of Polling Stations in Schools Matters.** Teachers’ influence over parents, as well as their ability to engage in voter coercion, is enhanced whenever their students’ parents vote at the same school (Alfaro Galán 2012). A broad psychology literature documents that behavior and response to authority are context and situation specific (Ross, Nisbett, and Gladwell 2011). Parents may be primed to respond to a teacher’s authority and persuasion when they vote in the location that they associate with the teacher’s influential role in the community. More recent work documents that polling station location affects voters’ behavior. A study of the 2000 elections in Arizona by Berger, Meredith, and Wheeler (2008) found that parents who vote in schools were more likely to support an initiative to increase education spending.

Moreover, the allocation of polling stations to schools facilitates SNTE’s ability to select teachers as party representatives, which further enhances their ability to influence voters. The electoral law establishes that political parties can register two party representatives and a substitute per polling station.8 The PANAL has an advantage over other parties in its ability to appoint its own brokers as party representatives, thanks to the ubiquitous presence of SNTE teachers across the country, particularly when polling stations are situated in schools in localities where teachers live close by. This implies that, once selected as party representatives, teachers can operate more effectively as brokers when polling stations are placed in schools in localities where teachers have influence.

The allocation of polling stations to schools also allows SNTE to place teachers as polling station officials to further enhance their ability to influence voters. Election officials are randomly selected in a series of lotteries conducted in every electoral district.9 If they accept the invitation to serve as officials, they must attend a training session that often takes place at the polling station location. When the training is conducted on school premises, school directors and teachers can identify parents who have been selected to act as election officials and persuade them not to show up on Election Day (Franco 2012; Rivera 2012).

While the Mexican electoral law establishes that absent polling station officials should be replaced by other electors standing in the voting line, school directors and teachers often abuse their authority to act as replacements (Raphael 2007), a practice associated with electoral fraud (Cantú 2014). Importantly, polling station officials interact with voters during the voting process, which reinforces their authority and influence.10 The role of teachers as election officials further facilitates their ability to monitor parents’ turnout decisions.

However, beyond their potential role as party representatives or election officials, teachers have easier access than other citizens to school premises, and the law does not prevent them from being present in schools on Election Day. This also facilitates their overall influence over parents. For example, electoral observers report teachers closely monitoring parents standing in line to vote and engaging in outright vote buying on school premises (Alianza Civica 2009).

Due to the nature of the anticipated empirical strategy, a natural concern is that the allocation of polling stations to schools might be systematically manipulated by or correlated with other variables. However, the rules regarding the allocation of polling stations within precincts, which we explain in detail in Section A.1.5 in

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7 The teachers also operate as political brokers outside of schools, by organizing door-to-door campaigns to promote their candidates. A common strategy is known as 4 × 4, in which teachers mobilize members of the community to vote for the SNTE’s favored political party in the four local offices: governor, mayor, local council member, and Chamber of Deputies. They also organize political events in which more standard clientelistic activities take place, such as raffles, provision of free basic medical and dental services, and free haircuts (Alianza Civica 2009).

8 Their rights include setting up the polling station, denouncing irregular activities throughout Election Day, and presenting written notice of these incidents after the vote count.

9 More details on the method of selecting election officials can be found in Section A.1.4 in the SI.

10 They are responsible for asking voters for their voting credentials, checking them against the list of voters registered at the polling station, and marking their thumb with ink to signal they have voted to prevent double voting.
the SI, suggest this is not a major concern. Moreover, we always rely on a within-state-year variation by including state-year fixed effects in all specifications, which allows us to deal with most such concerns.

**Empirical Strategy and Data Description**

In this section, we present an empirical strategy aimed at testing and measuring the electoral impact of the SNTE machine. Our goal is to provide evidence in the Results section that SNTE-affiliated teachers do indeed operate as political brokers, and to quantify their electoral impact. Then, in the last section before we conclude, we use this measure to assess the relevance of monitoring as well as partisan attachment as main drivers of brokers’ efforts.

**Empirical Strategy**

The empirical strategy to test and measure the electoral impact of the SNTE machine exploits two sources of variation: (1) the official and unofficial alliances that SNTE leaders have established with various parties for different races over time, which have determined which parties the SNTE machine has de facto supported; and (2) the fact that locating polling stations in schools makes it easier for SNTE-affiliated teachers to operate as political brokers.

Intuitively, our empirical strategy exploits how patterns of split-ticket voting for president and the Chamber of Deputies differentially follow the political alliances of the SNTE leadership in polling stations located in schools. For example, in the 2006 election, while the PANAL (the party officially supported by SNTE leaders) put forward its own candidates for both offices, the SNTE leadership formed an unofficial alliance with the PAN’s candidate for the presidential race. Thus, the SNTE machine de facto supported the PAN’s (not the PANAL’s) presidential candidate. Split-ticket voting consistent with unofficial SNTE alliances would entail voting for the PANAL for the Chamber of Deputies, and the PAN for president.

Denote $\text{Gap within Official}$ as the difference in the vote shares of candidates from the party officially supported by SNTE leaders with and without the de facto support of the SNTE machine. Following the above example, in 2006 this corresponded to the PANAL’s vote share for the Chamber of Deputies race minus its vote share in the presidential race. A larger $\text{Gap within Official}$ in polling stations located in schools is then consistent with teachers’ influencing parents to engage in split-ticket voting, reflecting the alliances of SNTE leaders, and provides a measure of the electoral impact of the SNTE machine on electoral outcomes.

The candidates who were officially supported by the SNTE leadership were affiliated with the PRI in 2000, and the PANAL in 2006 and 2012. For elections for representative to the Chamber of Deputies, the candidates officially supported by SNTE leaders always received the de facto support of its machine. For presidential elections, however, only the PRI candidate who was officially supported by SNTE leaders in 2000 was also de facto supported by its machine. In 2006 and 2012, however, SNTE leaders made unofficial alliances, and its machine de facto supported the PAN and PRI presidential candidates, respectively. We define an indicator for candidates from parties that the SNTE machine de facto supported. The coding of the party officially supported by SNTE leaders and the de facto support of the SNTE machine is summarized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party officially supported by SNTE leaders</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>PANAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

where P and R indicate president and representative to the Chamber of Deputies, respectively.

We then test and measure the electoral effect of the SNTE machine using a regression of the following form:

\[
y_{pemsto} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot dsm_{to} + \beta_2 \cdot pss_{pemst} + \beta_3 \cdot dsm_{to} \cdot pss_{pemst} + \gamma o + \gamma s + \epsilon_{pemsto},
\]

(1)

where $y_{pemsto}$ is the vote share of the party officially supported by SNTE leaders in polling station $p$ in precinct $e$ in municipality $m$ in state $s$ in year $t$ for office $o$, $dsm_{to}$ is an indicator that the candidate running for office $o$ in year $t$ receives the de facto support of the SNTE machine, and $pss_{pemst}$ indicates that the polling station is located in a school. In our most demanding specification,
we include precinct fixed effects, \( \eta_p \). We also control for state-year fixed effects, \( \gamma_{st} \), to account for possible state-level institutional differences in polling station allocation.

Notice that \textit{Gap within Official} corresponds to \( \beta_1 \) for polling stations not located in schools, and to \( \beta_1 + \beta_3 \) for polling stations located in schools. \( \beta_3 \) then captures the effect of the de facto support of the SNTE machine.\(^{12}\)

### Data Description

As an outcome variable, we use election data at the polling station level for the federal races for president and Chamber of Deputies for the years 2000, 2006, and 2012. The data come from the “Elections in Mexico” website, and they contained content from the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and various state electoral institutes.\(^{13}\)

To identify whether a polling station was located in a school, we used data provided by the IFE in a Freedom of Information law request on the location of each polling station during the federal elections in 2000, 2006, and 2012.\(^{14}\)

We also used several studies and newspaper articles to code the school sections where teachers object to federal leaders’ control of the SNTE. We mainly obtained data on the local school sections under the control of either the National Educational Workers Coordinator (CNTE) or independent state teachers’ unions from Secretaría de Educación del Distrito Federal (2008), Santibáñez and Jarillo (2008), and Simonnet (2012).

Finally, we also requested the geographic coordinates and opening year of all schools in Mexico from the Mexican Public Education Secretary via a Freedom of Information request. We use this information to compute the share of voters who are likely to vote in a polling station located in the school their children attend.

The descriptive statistics for our main dependent and independent variables of interest are reported in Table A.1 in the SI.

\(^{11}\)We also report regressions with state and municipality fixed effects.

\(^{12}\)The inclusion of the 2000 election is important such that \( \text{dsms}_0 \) does not simply capture a difference between legislative and presidential elections. Moreover, it helps to estimate state-specific time trends that might correlate with both our dependent and independent variables.

\(^{13}\)See http://www.eleccionesenmexico.org.mx/.

\(^{14}\)The information was requested through https://ciudadania.ife.org.mx/infomex/ActionInitSAILoginINFOMEX.do.

### Results

### How Big Is the Electoral Impact of the SNTE Machine?

The regression results based on Equation (1) are reported in Table 1. Columns 1–3 include state, municipality, and precinct fixed effects, respectively. The positive and statistically significant estimates of \( \beta_1 \) indicate that candidates from parties officially supported by SNTE leaders enjoy a 2 percentage point larger vote share whenever they are de facto supported by the SNTE machine. The point estimates are stable across the different specifications, which suggests that our estimates are not being driven by omitted variables at the municipal or precinct level. Moreover, once we include precinct fixed effects, the small and statistically insignificant estimate of \( \beta_3 \) suggests that whether the polling station is located in a school has no effect on candidates from parties that are not de facto supported by SNTE leaders.

These findings provide evidence of the SNTE’s importance as a political machine, and they suggest that our results do not simply reflect the underlying preferences of voters from polling stations located in schools. Rather, our results suggest that individuals voting in schools are more likely to support the candidates that the SNTE leadership wants them to support (and have instructed teachers to deliver votes for) than candidates from the party officially aligned with the union. Additionally, relative to the average electoral support enjoyed by the PANAL (4% of the votes), the estimated effect is sizable. Our estimates of the electoral impact of the SNTE machine explain roughly half of the PANAL’s vote share.

### Corroborating the Role of the SNTE Machine and Teachers as Political Brokers

In this section, we report results from three additional exercises that show that our estimates in Table 1 indeed reflect the electoral role of the SNTE machine and, in particular, the work of teachers as political brokers in delivering the votes of their students’ parents. We describe each exercise more carefully in the SI but summarize the intuition and results in this section.

First, recall that in presidential elections, where the PANAL candidate has a negligible chance of winning the election, SNTE leaders make unofficial alliances with candidates from other parties to whom they direct the de facto support of their electoral machine. We use an empirical approach analogous to the one described by regression Equation (1) but where \( \gamma_{pennato} \) is instead the vote share of the party unofficially supported by SNTE leaders. In
Table 1: The Effect of a Polling Station in a School and the de facto Support of the SNTE Machine on the Vote Share of Candidates of Parties Officially Supported by SNTE Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: Vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by SNTE leaders</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine ($\beta_1$)</td>
<td>0.0174***</td>
<td>0.0177***</td>
<td>0.0181***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling station in a school ($\beta_2$)</td>
<td>0.0016***</td>
<td>-0.0033***</td>
<td>0.00054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine \times Polling station in a school ($\beta_3$)</td>
<td>0.0153***</td>
<td>0.0147***</td>
<td>0.0141***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes municipality fixed effects</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes precinct fixed effects</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>669,244</td>
<td>669,244</td>
<td>669,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.8213</td>
<td>0.8434</td>
<td>0.8707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In all specifications, the unit of observation is the polling station. We include state-year fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the state level. The outcome variable is the vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by the SNTE (the PRI in 2000, and the PANAL in 2006 and 2012). **p < .05, ***p < .01.

Section A.3.1 in the SI, we show that the votes that the candidates of the parties officially supported by SNTE leaders lose when they do not receive the de facto support of the SNTE machine go to the candidates of the parties that SNTE leaders supported unofficially.

Second, to further show that our estimates capture the role of the SNTE machine, we exploit the fact that some school sections are under the control of dissident teachers’ unions. In Section A.3.2 in the SI, we show that in states where teachers are not under the control of SNTE leaders, \textit{Gap within Official} exhibits no difference in polling stations located in schools.\footnote{Relatedly, while we cannot assess whether a polling station is located in a public or private school for every election year in our sample, we find that our estimates become slightly larger once we restrict our sample to polling stations located in schools \textit{estimated} to be public (based on an imputation of the public school using information for the year 2000). This provides further evidence of the role of SNTE teachers as brokers since they are unlikely to exert any influence on parents in private schools.}

Third, in Section A.3.3 in the SI, we show that the location of polling stations in schools effectively captures the influence of SNTE teachers over the parents of their students, as opposed to other confounding characteristics of individuals who vote in schools. To that end, for each polling station, we compute the fraction of precinct voters whose polling station is likely to be located in their children’s school. We then show that \textit{Gap within Official} is higher in polling stations located in schools, but only if a large enough fraction of voters is likely to send their children to that school. This is consistent with the effect of the SNTE machine being driven by the teachers’ influence over the parents of their students.

Finally, in Section A.3.4 in the SI, we rule out the possibility that our results simply reflect differential strategic voting of those voting in schools, rather than the role of teachers as political brokers. In particular, we show that the differential patterns of split-ticket voting that we exploit for identification are not present for other small parties that are unrelated to the SNTE and stand a very small chance of winning the presidential election.

What Motivates Teachers to Act as Brokers?

Table 1 and SI Tables A.2–A.4 document the robust electoral impact of the SNTE machine and the role of teachers as political brokers in delivering their students’ parents’ votes. In this section, we explore the underlying forces that lead SNTE teachers to operate as effective political brokers: Is it because of SNTE leaders’ capacity to monitor them? Or is it because of teachers’ attachment to parties supported by SNTE leaders?

Testing for the Importance of Monitoring

We first assess the quantitative importance of monitoring on the electoral effect of the SNTE machine, a driver that may be relevant, as the qualitative evidence provided in "Teachers as Brokers" subsection suggests. The recent theoretical literature shows that it is possible to monitor political brokers when electoral outcomes are observed at a low level of aggregation (Larreguy, Marshall, and
Figure 1  Number of Polling Stations as a Function of Registered Voters by Precinct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of polling stations (black)</th>
<th>Number of registered voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>3,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>5,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$$y_{\text{pensto}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot dsm_{to} + \beta_2 \cdot aps_{emst} + \beta_3 \cdot dsm_{to} \cdot aps_{emst} + \beta_4 \cdot pss_{penst} + \beta_5 \cdot dsm_{to} \cdot pss_{penst} + \beta_6 \cdot aps_{emst} \cdot pss_{penst} + \beta_7 \cdot dsm_{to} \cdot aps_{emst} \cdot pss_{penst} + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{\text{pensto}},$$

in a sample restricted to +/- 20 voters around the threshold that determines the creation of each additional polling station, as in the baseline specification in Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016). The term $aps_{emst}$ is an indicator that precinct $e$ in municipality $m$ in state $s$ and election year $t$ was split into an additional polling station, $p_{penst}^i$ for $i = 1, \ldots, 10$ are indicators for whether the precinct is around threshold $i$, and the remaining variables follow the same definition as in Equation (1). The coefficient of interest is $\beta_7$, which tests for the differential effect of the SNTE machine when there is an additional polling station in a precinct, and thus shows how such an effect varies with increased monitoring ability by the SNTE leadership.

Thanks to the inclusion of indicators that each precinct is around threshold $i$ and restricting the sample to precincts close to a threshold, Equation (2) is effectively a regression discontinuity (RD) design that compares the electoral returns of polling stations in precincts that are barely above or below the threshold required to split precincts into more polling stations. This guarantees

16 Each new polling station must be located in the same building or an adjacent building, and voters are divided alphabetically (by surname) among polling stations. The addition of a new polling station therefore does not affect the distance that voters must travel to vote. Given that surname does not predict voter behavior in Mexico (Cantú 2014), the assignment of voters to polling stations is exogenous with respect to our voting outcomes.

17 Threshold $i = 1$ is at 750 registered voters, $i = 2$ at 1,500 registered voters, and so on until threshold $i = 10$ at 7,500 registered voters.
that precincts on either side of the threshold are comparable to each other, and only differ in the number of polling stations.

To illustrate the empirical validity of our test, in SI Table A.6, we report the estimates for the effect of an additional polling station on overall turnout and the vote share of each of the three major Mexican parties for the legislative elections between 2000 and 2012. This essentially reproduces the results reported in Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016) that illustrate how an additional polling station translates into a higher vote share for the PRI and the PAN, parties known to monitor hired brokers who mobilize voters on their behalf.

Before turning to the estimates of Equation (2), reported in Panel B of Table 2, we first provide estimates on the role of monitoring that abstract from whether the

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### Table 2: The Effect of an Additional Polling Station and the de facto Support of the SNTE Machine on the Vote Share of Candidates of Parties Officially Supported by SNTE Leaders (20 Registered-Voter Bandwidth)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: Vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by SNTE leaders</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine ($\beta_1$)</td>
<td>0.0243***</td>
<td>0.0261***</td>
<td>0.0281***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0028)</td>
<td>(0.0029)</td>
<td>(0.0027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling precinct split ($\beta_2$)</td>
<td>-0.0005</td>
<td>0.0016</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0006)</td>
<td>(0.0011)</td>
<td>(0.0071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine $\times$ Polling precinct split ($\beta_3$)</td>
<td>0.0038</td>
<td>0.00089</td>
<td>-0.0024*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0029)</td>
<td>(0.0027)</td>
<td>(0.0012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes municipality fixed effects</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes precinct fixed effects</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>32,057</td>
<td>32,057</td>
<td>32,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.8305</td>
<td>0.8841</td>
<td>0.9743</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Panel B** | | | |
| De facto support of the SNTE machine ($\beta_1$) | 0.0162*** | 0.0193*** | 0.0281*** |
| | (0.004) | (0.0036) | (0.0028) |
| Polling precinct split ($\beta_2$) | -0.0013 | -0.00008 | -0.0052 |
| | (0.0008) | (0.0017) | (0.0071) |
| De facto support of the SNTE machine $\times$ Polling precinct split ($\beta_3$) | 0.0036 | 0.00087 | -0.00087 |
| | (0.0045) | (0.004) | (0.0013) |
| Polling station in a school ($\beta_4$) | 0.0025** | -0.0028 | 0.0036 |
| | (0.0011) | (0.002) | (0.0181) |
| De facto support of the SNTE machine $\times$ Polling station in a school ($\beta_5$) | 0.0131*** | 0.0109*** | -0.0001 |
| | (0.0037) | (0.0035) | (0.0023) |
| Polling station in a school $\times$ Polling precinct split ($\beta_6$) | 0.0011 | 0.0027 | 0.0056 |
| | (0.0009) | (0.0022) | (0.0111) |
| De facto support of the SNTE machine $\times$ Polling station in a school $\times$ Polling precinct split ($\beta_7$) | 0.00049 | 0.00027 | -0.0025 |
| | (0.0051) | (0.0048) | (0.0022) |
| Includes municipality fixed effects | X | | |
| Includes precinct fixed effects | | X | |
| Observations | 32,057 | 32,057 | 32,057 |
| R-squared | 0.8317 | 0.8844 | 0.9743 |

**Note**: In all specifications, the unit of observation is the polling station. We include state-year fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the state level. The outcome variable is the vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by the SNTE (the PRI in 2000, and the PANAL in 2006 and 2012). Polling station split indicates that a precinct received an additional polling station. Indicators for precincts being located around each of the cutoffs that are multiples of 750 voters are omitted. ***$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.
Table 3 The Effect of a Polling Station in a School and the de facto Support of the SNTE Machine on the Vote Shares of Candidates of Parties Officially Supported by SNTE Leaders by Attachment to the Party Unofficially Supported by SNTE Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: Vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by SNTE leaders</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine (β₁)</td>
<td>0.0048</td>
<td>0.0054</td>
<td>0.0059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling station in a school (β₂)</td>
<td>0.00062</td>
<td>−0.0042**</td>
<td>−0.00085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine × Polling station in a school (β₃)</td>
<td>0.0245***</td>
<td>0.0236***</td>
<td>0.0229***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine × No partisan attachment (β₄)</td>
<td>0.0329***</td>
<td>0.0324***</td>
<td>0.0319***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling station in a school × No partisan attachment (β₅)</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
<td>0.00037</td>
<td>−0.0012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto support of the SNTE machine × No partisan attachment (β₆)</td>
<td>−0.031***</td>
<td>−0.0302***</td>
<td>−0.0294***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes municipality fixed effects X
Includes precinct fixed effects X
Observations 669,244 669,244 669,244
R-squared 0.8222 0.8443 0.8716

Note: In all specifications, the unit of observation is the polling station. We include state-year fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the state level. The outcome variable is the vote share of candidates of parties officially supported by the SNTE (the PRI in 2000, and the PANAL in 2006 and 2012).  "No partisan attachment" is an indicator for 2006, when the SNTE leadership unofficially supported the PAN.

∗∗p < .05, ∗∗∗p < .01.

polling station is located in a school. We simply drop pss, pemst and its interactions from Equation (2) and test whether the increase in the vote share of parties with the de facto support of the SNTE machine is higher when the precinct has an additional polling station. This specification parallels that of Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016) and does not account for the fact that the SNTE machine had a much stronger presence and effectiveness in polling stations located in schools. Panel A shows the results of this specification. The estimates of β₂ and β₃ are small and statistically insignificant, which suggests that, on average, monitoring plays a limited role in incentivizing brokers who mobilize voters for the candidates with de facto SNTE leadership support.

However, these estimates may naturally mask variation in the presence and effectiveness of the SNTE’s brokers in polling stations located in schools. To account for this important heterogeneity and effectively test whether an improved SNTE leadership monitoring capacity leads to a greater electoral effect of the SNTE machine, the estimates of Equation (2) are reported in Panel B of Table 2. The estimate of β₃ is close to zero and statistically insignificant. This is robust to the inclusion of municipality and precinct fixed effects. The absence of a differential effect of the SNTE machine across precincts with an additional polling station suggests that, to the extent that we can measure it, monitoring is unlikely to be the driving force behind teachers’ effectiveness as brokers.

Testing for the Importance of Partisan Attachment

Next, we test whether the partisan attachment of teachers with parties supported by SNTE leaders is an important motivation for them to exert effort as political brokers. As shown earlier, teachers have historically been aligned with the PRI and the PANAL, but not with the PAN. Thus, if partisan attachment motivates teachers to operate as brokers, we should find no difference in Gap within Official in polling stations located in schools in 2006, when Gordillo unofficially offered the de facto support of the SNTE machine to the PAN’s presidential candidate.

To test this, we first define a No Partisan Attachment indicator, npa, that takes a value of 1 in 2006, when the SNTE leadership offered unofficial support to a party with which teachers are not naturally aligned, and
partisan attachment plays a critical role in explaining the efficacy of the SNTE machine. However, we find that the monitoring capacity of the SNTE leadership, as captured by the existence of an additional polling station in an electoral precinct, does not seem to affect the machine’s electoral impact.

Our empirical strategy and findings highlight the implications of our theory. Party organizations’ ability to facilitate clientelistic exchanges depends on the extent to which they have access to rents and monitoring mechanisms to provide pecuniary incentives, and on whether they have historical attachments to a specific party. Understanding what drives political brokers enhances our understanding of the ability of organizations to mediate clientelistic exchanges, and how such mediation should vary over time with changes in the political system.

Although we use the SNTE only as a case study, our theory suggests that unions can have an important electoral role. This may be particularly relevant for the case of public-sector unions that have members who are traditionally aligned with particular political parties, interact with citizens on a regular basis, and are responsible for the delivery of essential public goods such as health and education. In many democracies, teachers have strong connections with politicians and political parties, and their ubiquitous presence and close interaction with citizens make them ideal political brokers. Similarly, in many democracies, it is common for teachers to be election officials and for polling stations to be located in schools. The combination of these institutional features opens the door for teachers to influence voters’ choices through a variety of legal and illegal means. Some examples include India and Thailand, where teachers have control over polling stations and are often engaged in clientelistic transactions (Betelle 2009; Chattharakul 2010). In Indonesia, Pierskalla and Sacks (2016) find an increase in the hiring of temporary teachers to help mobilize voters during election years.

Conclusion

While political brokers mobilize voters all over the world, little is known about what motivates them. In this article, we distinguish between two common drivers of brokers’ effectiveness: (1) monitoring, essential to enforce brokers’ effort through both rewards and sanctions; and (2) partisan attachment. Bringing this theoretical insight to the data, we first test and measure the electoral impact of one of Mexico’s most important political machines—the SNTE—and then assess the extent to which it is driven by the teachers’ attachment to the parties supported by the union’s leaders and by monitoring from the union’s leadership.

The absence of an effect of the SNTE machine in 2006, when the union’s leaders unofficially supported a party with which teachers were not aligned, suggests that partisan attachment plays a critical role in explaining the efficacy of the SNTE machine. However, we find that the monitoring capacity of the SNTE leadership, as captured by the existence of an additional polling station in an electoral precinct, does not seem to affect the machine’s electoral impact.

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References


Pierskalla, Jan, and Audrey Sacks. 2016. “Personnel Politics: Elections, Clientelistic Competition, and Teacher Hiring in


Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s website:

A.1 The SNTE as a Political Machine: Additional Background
A.2 Descriptive Statistics
A.3 Additional Results and Robustness Checks