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**Seminar: Metropolis and Inequalities  
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# Poor Voters vs. Poor Places: Persisting patterns and recent changes in Brazilian electoral patterns\*

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## Abstract

Despite much attention paid recently to changes in Lula's historical electoral patterns, much less attention has gone into putting these results into perspective. Even before the Bolsa Familia, the reduction in poverty, and good economic performance, incumbent party candidates performed proportionally better in poorer places than they did in richer places. In this sense despite being a change for Lula, the new voting patterns are more a continuation than a rupture with historical trends.

The changes that did happen, however, are found in the least likely of places. Inspection of electoral results suggest that incumbent party candidates before Lula had a specially hard time winning the votes of the poorer voters in the richer municipalities, a group of voters which is larger, in absolute terms, than the poor voters in the poorest municipalities. Hence, paradoxically, the electoral effects of the Bolsa Familia might have been more influential in changing electoral patterns in the more developed, as opposed to the least developed places in the country.

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\*This is work in progress and results are still tentative. Prepared for the Center for Metropolitan Studies Seminar "Metropolis and Inequalities", São Paulo, March 24–26, 2010.

The 2006 presidential elections in Brazil marked a dramatic shift in Lula's traditional voting base away from the more developed regions of the country and into its poorest areas. Incumbent president Lula obtained a sweeping majority of the votes in the less developed areas of the country, reversing a two decade personal and party history of performing significantly better in more developed regions. However one looks at it, these elections represented a significant change in Lula's electorate (Zucco Jr. 2008, Nicolau & Peixoto 2007, Hunter & Power 2007). Higher socioeconomic level had been shown to be a historically strong predictor of party identification with the PT (Samuels 2006), and until very recently the party was all but absent from the most backward regions of the country. How could such a radical shift happen in such a short time-span?

An already sprawling literature has focused on the possible effects of social policy, and specifically on the Bolsa Familia (Hunter & Power 2007, Nicolau & Peixoto 2007, Zucco Jr. 2008), and it has also been said that the economy had a particular pro-poor economic growth (Carraro, Araújo Jr, Damé, Monasterio & Shikida 2007). In related work, I have examined the issue in detail and found that even after controlling for economic growth, the BF program had a considerable effect in winning over votes for Lula (Zucco Jr. 2010). However, there is evidence that at least part of the shift in Lula's voting base would have happened even if BF had not come about. There is more to it, and an interesting incumbency effect seems to be part of the story (Zucco Jr. 2008, Canêdo-Pinheiro 2009).

To be clear from the outset, this is not a paper about Bolsa Familia per se. It is about what is possibly a broader empirical regularity, that, to my knowledge, has not been properly explored. This paper is a first attempt at a more systematic study of a possible pro-government bias in poorer places in the country<sup>1</sup> It is a very tentative empirical exploration, combined with conjectures about the mechanisms causing it and about its possible implications for democracy and public policy.

The paper is built on the assumption that electoral patterns come about in response to government actions. This is an assumption, and as such is not empirically verified, though I later provide a brief justification for it. The core of the paper shows that though poorer places tend to support incumbents at higher rates than richer places, the behavior of poor voters, broadly considered, does not necessarily follow this aggregate movement. In particular, it is

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<sup>1</sup>This could also be read as an anti-government bias in the richer places, a not so trivial difference. This point was made by Eduardo Leoni.

interesting to inquire about how poor voters in richer places behave. If voters are being won over by particularistic handouts (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007), poor voters anywhere should be the ones being targeted. However, incumbents typically perform considerably better in poor places than among poor voters in richer places.

This distinction is important because electoral politics and policy provision have both a territorial/geographic component, specially with regards to the delivery of local public and private goods. Private goods, in principle, could be delivered to individuals without regard to their geographical location, but in practice the channels by which they are delivered operate through the smaller units of the state, around which government — and consequently elections — are structured. While only voters — and not places — vote, government actions are frequently dispensed according to geographical mechanisms, and geography is frequently a proxy for government decisions regarding individuals. Hence, a proper understanding of the interactions between policy and elections requires the analysis of both individual and ecological patterns.

I start by characterizing the shift in Lula's voting base between 2002 and 2006 and placing it within broader electoral patterns over the past presidential elections in Brazil. In the subsequent sections I explore ecological voting patterns in greater detail, and examine the electoral behavior of individuals (as opposed to places). The last sections are much more tentative and speculative: I first conjecture about the possible mechanisms generating the patterns I described above, and then present some possible implications of the situation.

## 1 Lula's Shifting Vote-Base

Lula da Silva (PT) ran for president in all of the five presidential elections since Brazil's return to democracy. After losing the first three — two of which to PSDB candidate Fernando Henrique Cardoso — Lula defeated José Serra in 2002, and won re-election in 2006 against Geraldo Alckmin, both from the PSDB. Despite obtaining a roughly similar share of the vote against candidates of the same party in the last two elections, Lula's voting patterns in 2006 deviated significantly from what he obtained in 2002 and in the preceding elections. While Lula traditionally collected proportionally more votes in the more well-off of Brazil's municipalities, in 2006 this pattern was reversed. This fact is relatively uncontroversial and can be seen in electoral results and in survey data.

One important intervening factor between the two elections was the creation of *Bolsa Fa-*

*milia*, a massive cash transfer program implemented and maintained by the federal government. When Lula took office in early 2003, there existed several different sectoral social programs that shared some characteristics with BF. At that time, there were 5 million families in *Bolsa Escola*, 1 million families in *Bolsa Alimentação*, and 9 million families in the *Auxílio Gás* program. These programs were administered separately by different ministries, there was considerable overlap in coverage, and the quality of the programs' roll (*cadastro*) was very poor. These programs were gradually phased out as BF was created and expanded to 3.6 million families by the end of 2003, to 6.5 million in 2004, 8.9 million in 2005, reaching 11 million families on the eve of the 2006 elections. BF, however, is not simply an unification of previous programs as it was built on a different institutional setup.

It makes sense to single out one specific policy as potential cause for such a dramatic shift only if one considers that the program reached, in October 2006, just over 20% of the population — about 40 million people. Almost 60% of survey respondents at election time reported knowing somebody that received the benefit. Of the 60% of respondents that agreed that the country had become more democratic under Lula, 60% said the main reason was that the now had more opportunities to improve their lives (Vox Populi 2006). In another survey also carried out close to election time, 34% of respondents chose “the fight against poverty” as Lula most successful policy initiative out of 15 possible policy areas, with “none of the above” coming a distant second with 9%,<sup>2</sup> and 67% approved of the government's policies to fight hunger and poverty (Ibope 2006).

With such notoriety, it is evident that the program's electoral effects have already been noted by the specialized literature. Hunter & Power (2007) published what was probably the first academic piece linking the BF to the 2006 electoral results, arguing that the program had been one of the pillars of Lula's victory. This was soon followed by Zucco Jr. (2008) and Nicolau & Peixoto (2007), who did more data intensive studies from Brazil's 5500 municipalities, finding more evidence in support for a BF electoral effect. Since then, others have dealt with different political aspects of the issue (Soares & Terron 2008, Licio, Castro & Rennó 2009, Fenwick 2009, Canêdo-Pinheiro 2009).

More importantly, however, the BFP was not the only “novelty” in Brazilian politics to appear between 2002 and 2006. In that period too, the PT became the incumbent party for

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<sup>2</sup>Another 15% of respondents listed “fight against poverty” as the second most successful area.

Table 1: Level of Development and Voting for the PSDB and PT Presidential Candidates

	1994	1998	2002		2006	
			1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Lula	Lula	Lula		<b>Lula</b>	
PT	0.04	0.30	0.34	0.29	<b>-0.74</b>	<b>-0.71</b>
	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
	<b>FHC</b>	<b>FHC</b>	<b>Serra</b>		Alckmin	
PSDB	<b>-0.36</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.29</b>	0.69	0.71
	<0.01	<0.01	0.07	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
N	5019	5513	5565	5565	5565	5565

*Notes:* Table reproduced from Zucco Jr. (2008). Figures indicate the correlations between the HDI-M and the vote share obtained by each party's presidential candidate, with the p-value shown in parenthesis. Figures in **bold** are for incumbent party candidates. Data were obtained from IPEA and TSE.

the first time. Incumbency, as it turns out, seems to have a conspicuous effect on electoral voting patterns. As first noted in Zucco Jr. (2008), all recent incumbent party candidates got a proportionally higher share of the vote in poorer places while the reverse applies to the main party in opposition. This does not mean that the incumbent party candidate always wins elections in poorer places, as his average level of support can vary for many different reasons. It does suggest, however, that incumbents have a built-in advantage in reaching these voters.

Table 1 illustrates this reversal of patterns for Lula, but it also shows the broader trend whereby all incumbents in this table do better in less developed places — hence the negative association of vote shares and level of development measured by the Human Development Index (HDI-M) — while the opposite holds for the same parties when fielding an opposition candidate.

It is not clear, yet, what is the actual mechanism behind this regularity, nor whether any specific policy instrument led voters in poorer places to vote disproportionately for incumbent candidates, but evidence suggests that where the public sector represents a larger share of the economy, and where the local government is *less* reliant on locally raised taxes (and more reliant on transfers), the incumbent candidate tends to get more votes (Zucco Jr. 2008). The actual story might hinge on direct financial dependence on the federal government by voters, but it might also be mediated by an alignment of local authorities — which depend on federal resources — with the powers that be in Brasilia, a conjecture I return to later in the text. At any rate, this pro-government tendencies should shift our focus away from Bolsa Familia itself, and towards the study of this pattern and its implications.

## 2 Where Parties Get Their Votes From

The basic fact that Lula constituency shifted considerably between 2002 and 2006 is quite clear, so I will not dwell on it extensively. The point of this paper is to inquire about the meaning of this shift, and to suggest that is more than just a Lula-specific phenomenon. I start by examining the PT's candidate shift, and then move on to other substantiate other such shifts.

Lula's case can be visualized in many different ways, but the Figures 1, below, are a nice summary. They report the results of a single regression on a pooled data of municipal level results from the first rounds of all five elections of the current democratic period. The regression examines mainly the association between the level of development of each municipality and Lula's vote share. This is done with the inclusion of an interaction term between the party's status (government or opposition) with development, and by allowing this effect to vary by state, with the inclusion of state random effects. The regression also includes a host of socio-economic controls at the municipal level such as the population size, share of the non-white population and share of pentecostal Christians.

To facilitate interpretation of these results, and especially that of the interaction term and the random effects coefficients, Figure 1 reports the predicted effects of development on Lula's vote-share for the two possible incumbency status.<sup>3</sup> The cloud of dots represents the actual municipal level returns, the main (average) effect of level of development is shown in red (thicker lines), and the variation from state to state is shown in gray. All other variables held at their mean values.

The results show that when in opposition, Lula tended to do better in richer places, a relationship that holds within almost every state — implying that it is not just regional across-state differences that drive the results. Once in opposition, Lula's voting patterns changed considerably, and the new pattern holds in every single state.

Just to corroborate the magnitude of the change in Lula's voting patterns between 2002 and 2006, it is worth mentioning that Lula's the swing itself (the difference between his vote share in 2006 and 2002 in each municipality) is negatively associated with the level of development of municipalities, a result that is observed in 24 of the the 26 states individually considered. As Figure 2 shows, this indicates not only that Lula improved considerably his vote share in poorer places, but that he lost votes in more developed places, a result I return to later in the paper

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<sup>3</sup>Strictly speaking, the word "effects" is not a very good one, and the argument is not clearly causal.

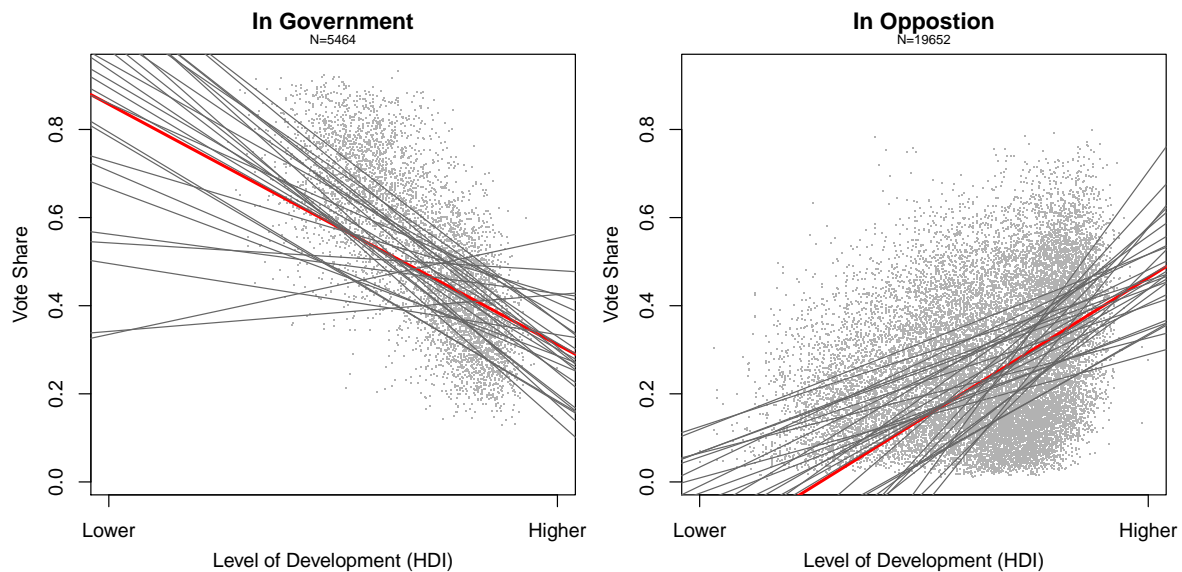


Figure 1: PT Vote Share by Level of Development: 1989–2006

*Notes:* Figure shows the predicted vote for the PT’s presidential candidate based on a regression of vote share at the municipal level in five elections on status as incumbent or opposition and level of development of the municipalities. Regression includes socio-economic controls and state random effects. The cloud of dots represents the actual municipal level returns, the main (average) effect of level of development shown in red, the variation from state to state shown in gray. All other variables held at their mean values.

when considering the urban electorate, in particular.

The obvious problem with any generalization from the PT’s case is that we only observe one shift in incumbency status over time. Any attempt to analyze this shift will effectively partition our observations into a “before” and “after” period, and will be capturing the effect of *any* time trending variable, as well as *any* specific one-time shock that might have occurred at the time of the shift. Until the PT loses the presidential election and fields an opposition contender, there is no way around this problem. However, we might try to reason by analogy, by looking at other “cases”.

The analysis of the PSDB’s electoral patterns provides us with slightly more leverage as the party’s incumbency status shifted twice. The PSDB, formed in 1988 as a splinter from the PMDB and fielded presidential candidates in all presidential elections since democratization. In 1989, Mario Covas was obviously not the “main” opposition candidate, but he finished a respectable fourth place with 11% of the vote, behind Brizola and Lula (both close to 17%) and Collor (30%). In 1994, though not technically the incumbent party (Itamar Franco governed without any partisan affiliation) Fernando Henrique Cardoso ran as the incumbent candidate.



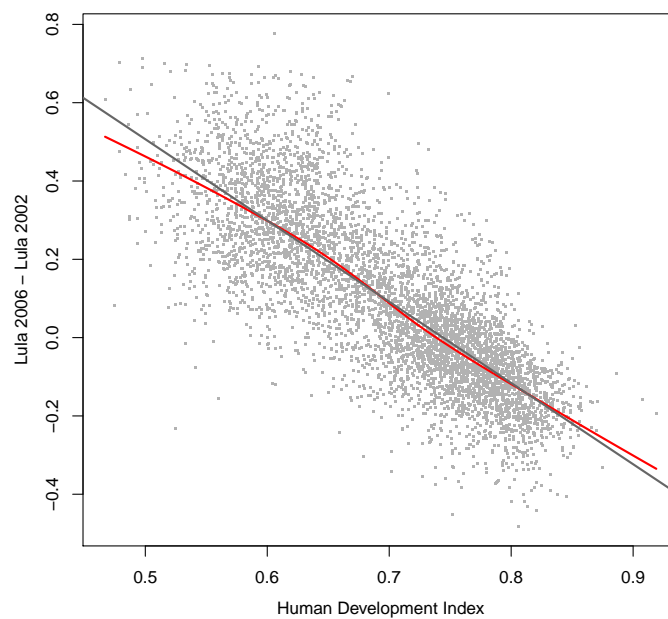


Figure 2: PT Electoral Swing and Level of Development 2006–2002

*Notes:* Figure shows how the difference between Lula’s performance in 2006 and 2002 relates to the level of development of municipalities. Higher values in the horizontal axis indicate places where Lula performed better in 2006, and lower values where he performed better in 2002. Both a linear and lowess regression are shown.

He had been the finance minister in charge of the Real stabilization plan, and ran and won with support of president Itamar Franco. In 1998, again with Cardoso, and 2002 with José Serra, the PSDB also ran as the incumbent party. In 2006, Alckmin was the PSDB's candidate, and main opposition contender.

In the two elections in which the PSDB contested the presidential election as an opposition party, the socio-economic ecological patterns of its vote were similar, and positively associated with the level of development of municipalities. In other words, as an opposition party the PSDB does better in poorer places. In 1989, despite the fact that Covas achieved his highest vote share in relatively poor state of Ceará, the overall relationship between his performance and the level of development of municipalities is clearly positive, and it was positive in 24 of the 26 states.<sup>4</sup> The strong negative relationship is found precisely in Ceará, where the PSDB was particularly entrenched and exerted significant control over the state machine. In 2006, again an opposition party, the PSDB performed considerably better in less developed places.<sup>5</sup> In the middle three elections, two with Cardoso and one with Serra, the relationship between the PSDB's electoral performance and level of development was reversed.

Figure 3 was produced from the same regression explained in the analysis of the PT voting patterns, and presents very similar results. Results for the PSDB are a little noisier than for the PT. When in government, the negative association does not hold in seven states, and when in opposition it does not hold in one state. But the average effect is clearly negative in one case and positive in the other, just like was found in the case of the PT.

Differently from the PT, the PSDB fielded four different presidential candidates in the period, so part of the variation in patterns could be attributed to differences between the candidates themselves. However, it is important to note that all four candidates were originally from the State of São Paulo, which reduces, somewhat, comparability issues. Still, the PSDB provides a more interesting case than the PT because the party shifted incumbency status twice, ruling out the the time trend explanations that could affect analysis of the PT's case.

Closer attention to the two incumbency status shifts the PSDB went through provides an even clearer picture. As Figure 4 shows, the swing experienced by the party in presidential elections between 1989 and 1994 is strongly negatively associated with the level of development

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<sup>4</sup>The Distrito Federal is not subdivided into municipalities, so within state effects cannot be estimated.

<sup>5</sup>The patterns exhibited by the party in 2006 display a correlation of 0.34 with those results from 1989, once the outlying state of Ceará is dropped. With Ceará, where the PSDB lost much of its electoral clout due to defections, this correlation is lower, but still positive and statistically significant.

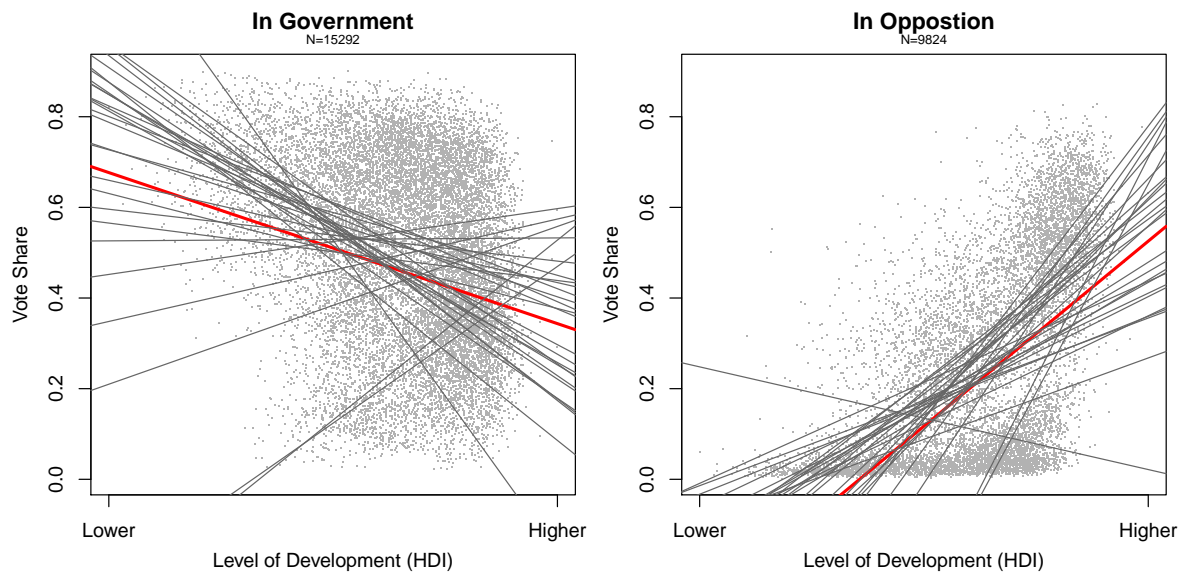


Figure 3: PSDB Vote Share by Level of Development: 1989–2006

*Notes:* Figure shows the predicted vote for the PSDB presidential candidate based on a regression of vote share at the municipal level in five elections on status as incumbent or opposition and level of development of the municipalities. Regression includes socio-economic controls and state random effects. The cloud of dots represents the actual municipal level returns, the main (average) effect of level of development shown in red, the variation from state to state shown in gray. All other variables held at their mean values.

of municipalities. That is to say, the party grew much more in poorer places while declining or growing much less in richer ones, a result that holds within 22. In 2006 the story is reversed, as the swing is strongly positively associated with level of development and holds in 23 states. The PSDB grew more in poorer places when it won government, and underwent the reverse process when it returned to opposition.

This general process might, in fact, have been at work in Brazil for even longer, concealed under limitations in electoral participation. To this end, there is considerable second hand evidence suggests that a similar shift occurred with the PMDB at around the mid-eighties but hard data is harder to come about. The first obvious problem is that the lack of presidential elections make a direct comparison with the current period difficult. It is safe to assume, however, that national legislative elections at the time were the ones that more closely resembled the current presidential elections. Senate elections, in particular, were the most “nationalized” but, unfortunately, even state level senatorial results are hard to obtain for 1986. I focus, instead, on elections for the *Camara of Deputados*, for which state level results could be compiled for

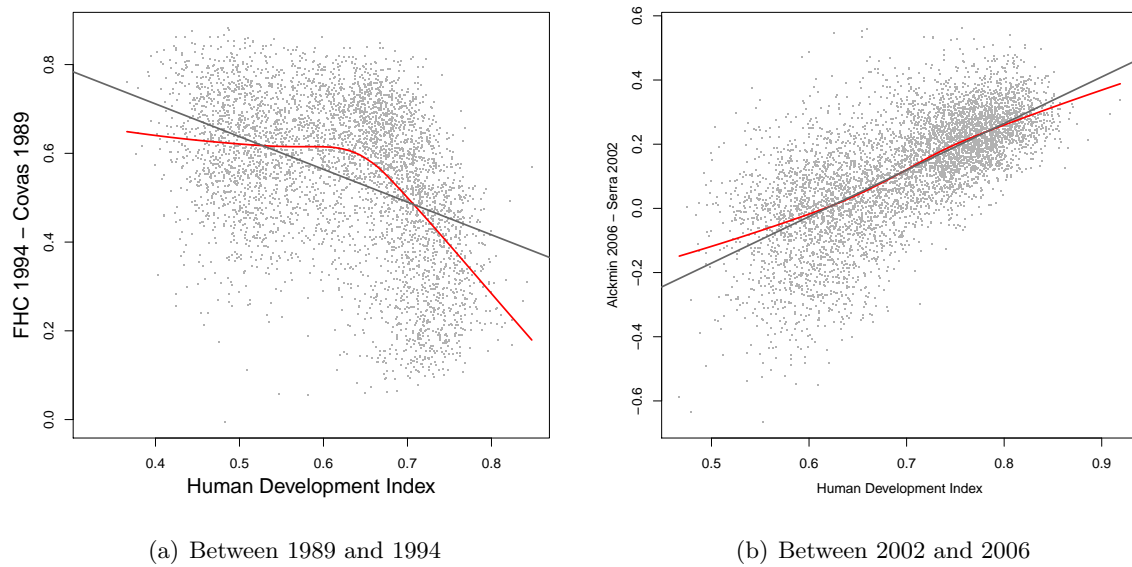


Figure 4: PSDB Electoral Swings and Level of Development

*Notes:* Figures show how the difference between the PSDB candidates performance between two selected pairs of consecutive elections varied with the level of development of municipalities. Higher values in the horizontal axis indicate places where the PSDB performed better in the second election, and lower values where he performed better in the first election of each pair. Both a linear and lowess regression are shown.

the whole period.<sup>6</sup>

Table 2 reports the results of a simple OLS regression on the pooled data-set of 96 state level observations for the MDB/PMDB from 1970 through 1986. This regression is analogous to the analyses that produced results for the PT and the PSDB except that there are no random effects by state (because there are no within state observations) and there are no other controls<sup>7</sup>. The status variable is simply a dummy that takes on the value of 1 when the PMDB ran as the incumbent party.<sup>8</sup> For the years in which the PMDB ran as the opposition variable, status is zero, and the effect of development on the PMDB's vote share is clearly and significantly positive — as measured simply by the coefficient on HDI. However, when the PMDB runs as the incumbent, the total effect of HDI becomes the combination of the coefficients on HDI and on the interaction term. This total effect is negative, albeit non-significant.

Table 2: Determinants of PMDB vote share by state: 1970–1986

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	-0.5815	0.3553	-1.64	0.1044
log(valid)	1.0023	0.0239	41.86	0.0000
log(hdi)	0.6469	0.1265	5.12	0.0000
status	-0.3052	0.2160	-1.41	0.1605
log(hdi):status	-0.7086	0.4085	-1.73	0.0854
N = 96			Adj R <sup>2</sup> = 0.94	

*Notes:* Dependent variable is the log of PMDB's vote for the federal legislature, observed at the state levels for the five elections between 1970 and 1986. Regression was estimated by OLS.

While the shift in the PMDB's voting patterns is clear, these results do not show the same strong negative associations that are found for the PT and PSDB when in government. Part of the problem might be just the lack of municipal level data, but there were also a host of confounding factors, such as transition to democracy itself. Still, we are quite certain that the strong negative opposition vote patterns throughout the 1970's hold at the municipal level. Most analysis of the period suggest this was the case and based on a compilation of municipal level results from 1978 Kinzo (1988) found that the within each of the five regions of Brazil, the MDB

<sup>6</sup>I have began assembling results at the municipal level for the same period, but currently, only fragments of such data are available. Future research will allow me to reconstruct a considerable subset of municipal level results for this period

<sup>7</sup>Future versions of this paper will include other socio-demographic state level controls, but there was not enough time to compile these data for the current version.

<sup>8</sup>As in the case of the PT, the PMDB only becomes the incumbent party in the last year of the series, and hence it might be capturing any time trending omitted variable. One could extend the series further, but once presidential elections start to take place, the meaning of legislative elections changes considerably.

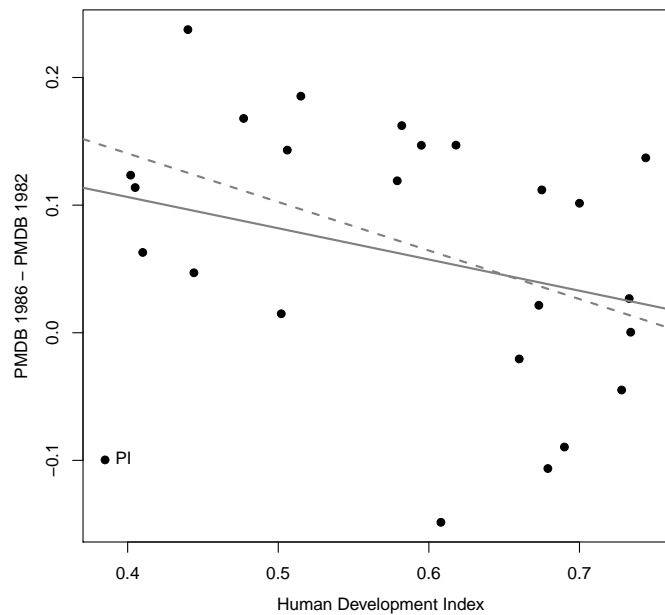


Figure 5: PMDB Electoral Swing and Level of Development 1986–1982

*Notes:* Figure shows the association between PMDB’s swing in vote share by state between 1986 and 1992 plotted against the level of development of each state. The solid line shows the linear association between the two quantities, and the dashed line reports the same association after excluding the state of Piauí.

performed systematically better in state capitals than in middle sized cities, and considerably worse in smaller towns, ruling out an intrinsically regional phenomenon. Municipal level data are only readily available for the whole country in 1982, and my analysis indicate that in that year the PMDB still exhibited the typical opposition patterns of performing better in richer places. To definitely observe the swing, however, it would be important to obtain municipal level data 1986. While that is not possible, I tentatively present an analysis of state level swings in Figure 5. As expected, the PMDB did seem to grow more in poorer places as suggested by negative association in the Figure, but this result is much less pronounced than I found with the PSDB and the PT. If one excludes the state of Piauí, a clear outlier where the PMDB lost ground where it “should” have gained, the negative association become considerably stronger, and I strongly suspect that municipal level data — when available — will corroborate the pattern as well.

<<<< MUNICIPAL LEVEL RESULTS WILL BE ADDED WHEN AVAILABLE >>>>

In short, all the available data suggests, albeit tentatively, that there exists a “government”

and an “opposition” ecological voting pattern which hold regardless of who government and opposition are.

### 3 Voters and Places

The ecological analyses of the preceding section dos not tell us much about how individual voters behave. Ultimately, it is individual and not places that vote. This distinction is particularly interesting if one considers who are the likely targets of government largesse. From the redistributive perspective, governments should target the poorer voters with particularistic benefits, as these voters are then ones more likely to be swayed. Still, it is not clear that the government can, in fact, reach such voters easily. The state’s organization into geographic units provides institutional incentives for governments to focus on places as a proxy for individuals. This alternative way of targeting, however, can only be very imperfect, for a large share of the poor individuals are not located in poor places, and smaller but non-negligible number of people in poor places, are not in fact poor. This conundrum seems to reflect itself in the data once one attempts to account for the distinction between behavior in poor places and the behavior of poor voters.

The same aggregate electoral returns analyzed above can tell us a little more about this distinction once we apply ecological inference techniques to the data. Opening up the vote of the poorer voters in in rich and poor places suggests a twist to the general empirical regularity explored in the previous section. As one would imagine given the persistent pro-incumbent ecological patterns, incumbent candidates before Lula 2006 received more support from poor voters in poor places than from poor voters in richer places (Table 3). The difference was smaller for Cardoso 1994 — probably due to the success of the Real stabilization plan — and the absolute level of support has varied, but the relative pattern is there. This, however, is not what happened under Lula.

These results should definitely be taken with a grain of salt. Ecological inference techniques are estimates — not actual results — and there is debate over how reliable they really are. Additional evidence, however, can be obtained from individual level data. While these are somewhat more certain data, obtained from surveys close to the election date and which predict the results of the elections quite well, there are limits to the extent that which they can be disaggregated into subgroups of interest.

Table 3: Incumbent Candidate Voting by Poor Voters in Different Types of Municipalities

		1994	1998	2002	2006	2006	2006
		Cardoso	Cardoso	Serra	Lula	Share Poor*	Poor Voters*
Level of Development	Lowest	64.88	66.33	32.17	76.63	74.80	5.51
		63.24	51.23	34.33	76.87	64.67	6.34
	↓	70.78	44.85	23.86	77.41	45.81	4.62
		69.08	29.35	8.11	64.82	30.33	4.85
	Highest	49.83	28.56	9.41	74.20	16.73	8.77

*Notes:* Table reports ecological inference estimates for the share of poor voters voting for the incumbent party candidate across five subsets of municipalities, ordered by level of development. Development is measured by income per head. Definition of poverty and share of each municipality's population that is poor was obtained from IPEA. \*Total number of poor is expressed in millions or *voters* actually voting in 2006. Last two columns apply 2000 poverty rates to 2006 voting figures, and are for illustration purposes only. Since poverty is known to have declined between 2000 and 2006, actual figures are probably smaller.

Table 4 shows results from DataFolha surveys close to each of the last four elections. While most available surveys do not indicate the specific municipality from which individual respondents were drafted, I approximated the level of development of the municipality by grouping them into metropolitan and hinterland (interior), a classification that is available in all surveys.<sup>9</sup> I further broke down respondents into the lowest income group — earning less than two minimum wages at the time of each survey — and a group composed of those earning more than five minimum wages.<sup>10</sup>

Table 4: Vote Intention for Incumbent Party Candidate Close to the Elections 1994–2006

	1994	1998	2002	2006
	Cardoso	Cardoso	Serra	Lula
Metro Poor	39.77	33.05	11.87	54.07
Hinterland Poor	45.74	45.98	21.37	57.04
Metro Upper-Middle	44.08	44.00	17.72	31.65
Brazil	44.75	45.88	18.29	46.49

*Notes:* Table reports vote intention for the incumbent party candidate for three sub-groups of respondents to DataFolha surveys taken close to the first round of each presidential election (Datafolha 1994, Datafolha 1998, Datafolha 2002, Datafolha 2006).

It is obvious that the absolute levels of support for each candidate have varied over time.

<sup>9</sup>For surveys that reported metropolitan municipalities and capital cities separately I lumped the categories together. This division, however, is less accurate than what we would obtain if looking at the level of development of the municipality, as many hinterland municipalities in the South are considerably richer than those in the Northeast.

<sup>10</sup>As the number of respondents in these surveys was quite large, there are at least 700 respondents in each of these categories in each survey, and many more than that in several instances.



While this variation is potentially very interesting, I focus simply on another aspect of these results. Prior to Lula in 2006, incumbents performed worse among the metropolitan poor than among both the more well-of metropolitan groups and the hinterland poor. Lula was the first to perform equally well among poor voters wherever they are.

The reverse side of the coin is that poor voters in richer places, and in specifically in metropolitan regions, seem to be an elusive lot from the point of view of incumbents, at least before Lula. Though I do not have more detailed figures for earlier periods, there is evidence that this was the case even during the military regime. In several studies spanning many decades, Lamounier provides ample evidence that within the city of São Paulo's, the poorer administrative regions voted more for the MDB. More generally, poorer voters in richer places seemed to have been the staple of opposition and the basis on which political contestation has emerged. The PCB and later the PTB had substantial support in working class districts within the city of Sao Paulo (Lamounier 1975) and later that ARENA always performed better in richer places of what is Brazil's richest city, and its support in the poorest regions dropped to single digit figures by 1978 and remained in the teens up through 1982 (Lamounier 1980, Lamounier 1986).

The 1989 elections do not speak directly to the argument because there was no relevant incumbent candidate. While Collor was identified with many of the more conservative parties that had occupied power in the previous decades, he was by no means the incumbent candidate. Still, it is interesting to note that on the eve of the first round, Collor had 40% of the vote intention among the poor in non-metropolitan regions, but was roughly tied with Brizola among the metropolitan poor for just over 20%, with Lula slightly behind. If one lumps together the groups making under 5 minimum wages at the time, then there is a basically a three way tie among the metropolitan poor. So while conservative elements previously associated with past government — both the civilian government under the PMDB and the previous military regime — jumped on Collor's bandwagon, they were not able to deliver the same levels of support among the metropolitan poor that they helped secure in the poorer places. The truly opposition candidates — Brizola, Lula and Covas — more success mobilizing urban poor than Collor.

Individually considered, these results could be interpreted as a conservative–progressive divide, and at the time that was the basic interpretation. However, considering all the shifts and realignments alluded to earlier, it seems clear that ideology cannot really explain the overall

Table 5: Vote Intention Close to the 1989 Elections

	Metro Poor	Hinterland Poor
Collor	23.76	35.48
Brizola	21.27	13.58
Lula	16.30	11.71
Covas	9.12	8.49
Maluf	8.01	10.36

*Notes:* Table reports vote intention for the five main candidates in the 1989 presidential election, in a Ibope survey taken close to the election (Ibope 1989).

patterns. Taken together with the patterns shown in the previous section, the electoral results and surveys shown here suggest that the true novelty of Lula's electoral performance in 2006, was **not** so much that his electorate switched towards the poorer regions — which had happened before with new incumbents — but rather his capacity to reach poor voters irrespective of where they are.

## 4 The Mechanisms Behind the Patterns: A Conjecture

Incumbent party candidates tend to do better in poorer places, regardless of how they performed when in opposition, regardless of their personal characteristics, and regardless of ideology. However, the same story does not hold exactly with regards to poor voters, as incumbents seem to have a harder time reaching the poor in richer places. The novelty in the case of Lula was that the incumbent performed well among the urban poor. How can we make sense of the persisting trends, and how to interpret the change that Lula represents?

The distinction between poor voters and poor places suggests that political processes that operate at the level of the geographic units (states and municipalities) have, to date, trumped any other political processes that might operate at the level of individuals. This, in itself, is suggestive that ideology is not the driving force behind these results, as it would be hard to imagine ideological swings following the geographical patterns we observe. A more likely candidate to a geographic mechanism is that voters, and poor voters in particular, are responding to the delivery of tangible benefits, either directly in the form of pensions, benefits, in kind transfer to voters, or indirectly as through support for local projects and programs is a potential culprit that elicit the support and mobilization efforts of local political leaders. In this context, the Bolsa Familia was one such highly visible policy in 2006, but it is probably the case that

other policies, formal or informal, were playing the Bolsa Familia's role in previous periods, though probably less efficiently. The rest of the paper assumes that the swings I have shown are, in fact, responses to some type of government action.

The most general point of this tentative theorization is a refinement of an insight of clientelism theory. It is not enough to be the poorest voters in order to be preferentially targeted by government handouts. The channels for delivery of benefits must be in place so that voters can be reached. While in some polities party networks play this role (such as in Argentina, or Mexico under the PRI) in contemporary Brazil local networks seem to be less partisan, and maintained by the availability of resources from higher spheres of government. As the nationally competitive parties are not the same that control local politics, local networks are available to be "rented out" to different political forces. From the perspective of local leaders, the choice of which national level candidate to align themselves with involves identifying which force is likely to provide the most benefits to the locality (and its political forces), giving rise to an interesting market in which state and federal politics interacts with local politics.

If this is the mechanism at work, it closely resembles the phenomenon of "cartorialismo" as described by Carvalho (1966),<sup>11</sup> but this market would be somewhat different from the regional political dynamic identified by Brasil (1983). Arguing against the inexorable decline of the "conservative" parties suggest by earlier work (Soares 1973), Brasil focused on the interplay between national and local politics. As part of this dynamic, he noticed that groups that dominated local politics were quite different than those politicians in state and national politics, even though they were typically within the same party. Today, the fact that the relevant national parties are not typically the same parties that dominate politics at state and local levels, the "market" is more unconstrained, resulting in greater freedom for local groups to align with the government in search of better opportunities.

It is hard to know if this is a completely different dynamic than what existed before, or whether the 1946–1964 arrangements would have eventually evolved into something similar to this. National parties were first formed at the end of the Vargas dictatorship, but they were

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<sup>11</sup>Once rural oligarchies lost their structural (economic) control over municipalities, some were able to maintain political control through the control of public jobs and public resources. However, most municipalities are too poor to sustain a significant number of jobs or considerable resources, so much of the is provided from outside of the municipality itself. Evidently, there not all municipalities got significant resources from the state and federal governments. It was necessary that the local oligarchies obtain some type of projection beyond the municipality for that to happen. The success of local oligarchies became dependent on their capacity to forge links between local interests and state and national level politics, nece "cartorialismo."

not entirely new. In fact, they were basically a re-sorting of mostly oligarchical elites, into its roughly pro-Vargas regime camp (PSD) and anti-Vargas camp (UDN), which explains. These parties were able to form so quickly and dominate the 1945 elections precisely because they were merely a coordination of existing state level groups (Soares 1973, p.70). The communist party (PCB) had laid its national organizational foundations during the Vargas regime, despite proscription, and though restricted to larger cities was the first truly national party to emerge. The PTB was build on the union infra-structure created during the Vargas regime, but was emerged gradually after 1945. If the PTB had eventually reached an accommodation with local chapters of older state-based parties, it would have probably resembled a lot the relationship that exists today between the PT and the PSDB and the other parties.

For the purposes of this paper, however, this historical digression is just to illustrate a plausible mechanism by which a pro-government bias in the poorest places could have emerged under the current electoral conditions. Here, I am not implying governmentism of the most obvious and blatant type, as practiced in during the “Old Republic” of the early 20th Century, when all 11 presidential elections were won by the government candidate with more than 80% of the vote (Lamounier 1990, p.36). In fact, it is not even the case that the government candidates win the largest share of the vote in poorer places. Rather, the phenomenon is that, all else equal, incumbent candidates perform better in poorer places. I take this to evidence of greater ease to reach voters in poorer places or, conversely, greater difficulties by the opposition to reach them, and the reason might simply be that local government in poor places depend on the Federal government, and are willing to align themselves with the incumbents to increase their access to resources.

## 5 Possible Implications

In this section I sketch some possible answers for the “so what” question. Assuming that the patterns I showed before really exist, and assuming that these patterns are produced by electoral responses to government actions, what are its possible consequences?

**Possible Implications for Democracy:** Evidence suggests that Brazilian political system provides incentives for presidential candidates to seek out the same group of voters, regardless of who were their original constituents. For such tendency, let us call the current Brazilian po-

litical system “constituency diluting” — for parties and candidates have different “constituents” depending on their government or opposition status. This situation might not be the true in other countries and, in fact, there is *prima facie* evidence that other polities are “constituency maintaining”. Future work will seek to identify which polities fall into each category, but a tentative hypothesis is that constituency maintaining systems in highly unequal countries would lead to instability.

This, for instance, was the view implicit in Furtado’s analysis of the tensions in the 46–64 regime, where the executive had incentives to make (irresponsible) promises to the urban electorate, and to attempt to deliver on those promises. Congress, on the other hand, was representative of the rural and oligarchic groups (Furtado 1965), and eminently a conservative or even reactionary force. In a related point, Soares (1973) saw that structural changes would move the country away from conservative parties, and fears of a progressive shift in in the electorate prompted the coup. The underlying logic of both analysis is that elected politicians would, in fact, represent the interests of the constituencies that brought them to power, and as the balance of social forces in the country was changing, those on the losing side could anticipate that democracy was not in their best interests.

I conjecture that similar dynamics might hold in other poor and unequal polities where parties cater to specific socioeconomic or geographic groups. The “impossible game” in Argentina (O’Donnell 1973), pre-Pinochet Chile (Valenzuela 1978), and possibly Bolivia in more recent times could be cases of constituency maintaining systems that suffer from instability precisely because one group gets the upper hand or is entirely locked out of the system.

Current Brazil, in this sense, exhibits a “happy” coincidence that might make electoral democracy sustainable in the long run. In wanting to appeal to the cheapest voters, incumbents are called upon to favor poorest places. This provides relief for local political leaders, irrespective of what they stand for, and probably trickles down to voters. Rather than invading strongholds and displacing local politicians, the party in charge of the federal government becomes symbiotic with the local political leaders, in an accommodation of interests. While this probably reduces the speed of political change, it provides buy-in from all political forces. If democracy is, indeed, an equilibrium, Brazil’s very imperfect version might be an interesting example.

**Implications for Urban Voters:** Regardless of the potential stability of this arrangement, urban voters, and especially the poor urban voters are — or have been — on the losing side.

National opposition parties do not control the government machine, and hence have a harder time reaching voters in the poorest places. This generates two sets of reinforcing incentives.

First, the logical strategy for opposition parties is to contest the urban votes, which are the ones over which governments typically lack access advantage they have in the poorer places. The opposition will campaign by criticizing the government's performance, a strategy that can be effective if times are bad. Not only the urban voters can see for themselves the considerable inequality of the country, but they can be reached by tv, radio, and other direct appeals, and are much less likely to be influenced by government handouts.

The problem, from these voters' perspective, is that the same reasons that make them an attractive constituency for the opposition, make them a less attractive for government handouts, even if the opposition wins government. The reason is not so much that these voters would not respond to governments initiatives, but rather that the distribution networks present in smaller places are not in place in richer ones. An option would be to provide public goods, and option which makes economic sense in denser places. However, reaching voters with universal public goods provides uncertain electoral returns, at best (Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni & Estévez Forthcoming), and the very poor might end up crowded out of fruition of these goods by the better off. Hence, if urban voters are an uncertain bet for incumbents, comparative advantages suggest they would concentrate on the poorer places instead.

This is of particular interest to those interested in public services provisions and on the politics of metropolitan areas. The urban poor are a particularly large group of people, but one that is hard to reach with visible government policies, and voters that are hard to mobilize.

**How Targeted social policies fit in:** Within this context, Bolsa Familia does appear to be a novel policy, but not for the reasons usually cited. What makes it new is precisely the ability to reach this poor voters in richer places. In doing this, it might be shutting the opposition out of access to the poorest voters everywhere, and this might have important electoral consequences.

Figure 6, below, is reproduced from previous work and shows the *estimated* vote for Lula among Bolsa Familia beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in municipalities with different levels of development. The left side of the graph shows very high support for Lula in poorer places by both groups. Here, however, BF represents only a quantitative change from previous elections. A greater share of people in poor places voted for the government candidate, but these voters have always been more inclined to vote for the government than people in the richer places.

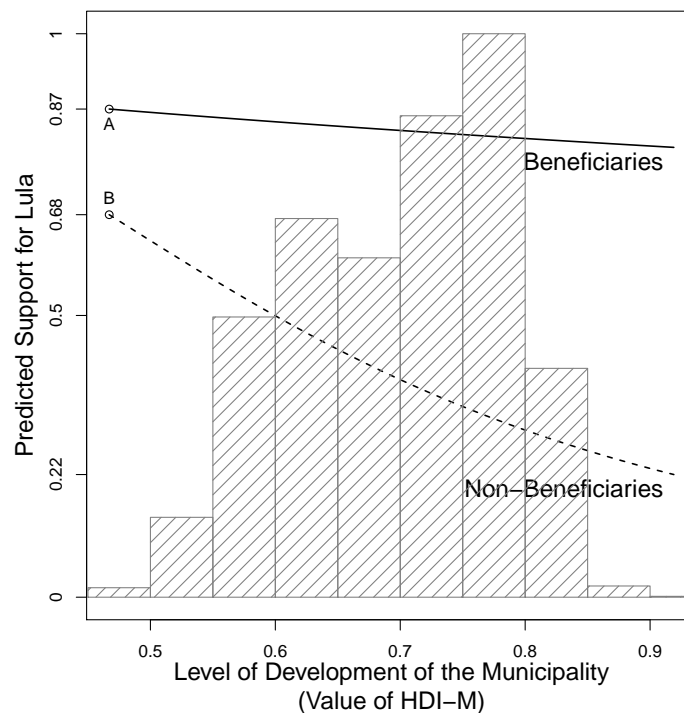


Figure 6: Predicted Support for Lula Given Level of Development

*Notes:* Figure reproduced from Zucco Jr. (2010). Figure shows the predicted vote for Lula among *Bolsa Familia* beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries across the range of municipal development level (HDI-M) actually observed. Predicted votes were computed from regression results using ecological inference estimates of the vote for Lula among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The histogram in the background depicts the actual distribution of the HDI-M variable.

The real differences to previous incumbent candidates, however, appears in the right side of the figure. Recipients, arguably the poorest segment of urban voters, voted massively for Lula. For all the focus on how Bolsa Familia has changed the landscape of Brazilian electoral politics especially in the least developed areas, the electoral effects of the Bolsa Familia and other targeted policies might be more influential in changing patterns in the more developed regions. In particular, it seems to represent a major breakthrough in the provision of benefits and consequently in the electoral behavior, or the urban poor.

By winning support of the poorest segments of the electorate, government candidates might not need to cater to middle class voters to be competitive in the cities. Middle class services such as universities, hospitals, public service jobs, or even issues such as income taxes, that mostly do not affect the very poor, might be dropped altogether from electoral platform. The electoral success of policies such as the BF might, in the end, reduce attempts to provide other public services. To the extent to which this reduces distortive government spending, it might not be a bad outcome.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that this paper is based on the votes that candidates *effectively obtain*, but that it makes claims about votes that candidates in general, and incumbents in particular, *seek* to gain. For the most part — except for the recent case of the Bolsa Familia — little evidence has been provided in terms of how policy instruments are linked to electoral returns. This link is assumed, and not shown. Hence, the most fundamental assumption behind the interpretation of the electoral patterns shown here is that these are responses to the provision of public and private goods to voters, done by government, and not based on ideological links between voters and candidates.

With these important caveats, and acknowledging that much empirical work remains to be done, the paper has shown that the dramatic change in Lula's electorate between 2002 and 2006 is not unheard of in Brazil. Much to the contrary, there seems to be a pattern by which incumbent party candidates do better in poorer places while opposition candidates do better in conservative places, regardless of who they are, and what they stand for. These results suggest that Lula's electorate would probably have switched between 2002 and 2006 *even if* the BFP had not been implemented. The program, in this sense, seems to have mostly amplified



pre-existing trends to the extreme.

The one important true novelty of the 2006 election was that, for the first time, the incumbent party candidate did very well among the poor voters in the richer places of the country. I conjecture that targeted social policies allows the government to deliver particular benefits to the poorest voters without being subject to the geographical logic of service and benefits distribution that is intrinsic to government. This, however, is merely a conjecture.

The obvious question not addressed in the paper is why Lula was able to implement such a program, and why hadn't it been tried before – at least not with in its current order of magnitude. This is a question that probably can only be answered comparatively, and it will be subject of future research. Still, as I have speculated in the preceding section, BF it is a policy with potentially important — though still undeterminate — long term electoral effects.

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