

LEGACIES OF CACIQUISM

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Abstract

Does historical exposure to political clientelism undermine citizens' capacity to coordinate their votes once competitive elections are introduced? Research on electoral coordination has emphasized contemporaneous institutional and contextual factors—electoral rules, party-system fragmentation, past volatility—leaving open whether coordination capacity is also shaped by factors rooted much deeper in a polity's history. We argue that clientelist rule erodes both the horizontal civic structures and the vertical partisan structures that voters rely on to identify and converge on viable options, producing a legacy of coordination failure that outlasts the clientelist order itself. We examine this argument in the Spanish Second Republic (1931–1936), exploiting Article 29 of the 1907 Electoral Law—which allowed unopposed candidates to be proclaimed elected without a vote—as a precise, rule-based measure of local clientelist (caciquista) control during the preceding Restoration period. A district-level analysis shows that districts more exposed to Article 29 between 1907 and 1923 exhibit significantly higher shares of wasted votes under the Republic. A municipal-level boundary regression discontinuity design, comparing municipalities on either side of now-defunct Restoration district borders, points in the same direction, though less precisely estimated. The results suggest that clientelism leaves durable marks on democratic electoral behavior.

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