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When clients vote for brokers: How elections improve public goods provision in urban slums

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ABSTRACT

Does electoral democracy improve public goods provision for the poor? This paper considers whether and how the introduction of elections to choose slum-level representatives affects the provision of basic public goods and services in these communities. To address this question I take advantage of an unexpected interruption in the judicial process that introduced elections in urban slums in Argentina. Drawing on an original household survey, an expert survey, and insights from in-depth interviews, I show that the introduction of elections enhanced public goods and services provision only in slums with high organizational density. In such a context, existing organizational structures and citizens' organizational experience facilitated individuals' endeavors to demand and monitor the provision of public goods and the emergence of new leaders other than partisan brokers that skewed political competition towards the provision of public goods. These findings contribute to our understanding of the relationship between elections, organizational activity and public goods provision in urban informal settlements and have implications for development practitioners: Under the right conditions, the democratic selection of slum intermediaries *vis-à-vis* the state can substantially improve the livelihood of these communities.

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1. Introduction

The developing world is full of examples of democracies that have been unable to provide basic public goods and services to large sets of their low-income population. Around 21% of the urban population living in democratic countries do so in slums with insecure tenure, little or no access to potable water, sewage, and electricity.[1] In all capital cities of the largest democracies in the Global South, from São Paulo and Mexico City to New Delhi and Jakarta, where the urban poor are geographically concentrated, both access and quality of the most basic public goods tend to decrease dramatically (UN-Habitat, 2016).

This lack of connection between electoral democracy and public goods provision has been attended by a strain in the literature that explains that in settings with low state capacity and where the

poor are concentrated, electoral incentives can introduce distortions to democratic accountability, diverting resources away from public goods and towards patronage spending (Keefer, 2007; Keefer & Vlaicu, 2007; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Kitschelt, 2000; Stokes, 2005; Robinson & Verdier, 2013). For instance, clientelism has been found to be especially attractive in settings where high electoral competition and high levels of poverty are combined (Weitz-Shapiro, 2012; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014), the poor to be the likely target of such practices [e.g.] (Auyero, 2001; Zarazaga, 2014; Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013; Mares & Young, 2016) and, among the poor, slum dwellers, the most exposed ones (Murillo, Oliveros, & Zarazaga, 2021). These pieces of evidence combined, suggest that, partially because clientelistic dynamics are difficult to alter (Fox, 1994; Stokes et al., 2013), a low public goods provision equilibrium is particularly likely in the context of poor informal settlements (Keefer & Khemani, 2005; Hicken & Simmons, 2008).

However, even in these settings where clientelism is widespread and the overall provision of public goods is very low, scholars have found there is a wide variation in the level of public goods across informal settlements. Whereas some slums are able to secure a high level of provision, others achieve a very low one. This variation has been attributed to levels of competition between

party networks (Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach, 2016), the presence of community organizations (Auerbach, 2017; Gay, 1990; Krishna, 2002; Lee, 1998) and the role of slum intermediaries (Auerbach, 2019; Bjorkman, 2015; Das & Walton, 2015; Gay, 1994; Krishna, 2011; Kruks-Wisner, 2018; Paller, 2015).

In this article, I share two main concerns present in these literatures. On the one hand, understanding the puzzling relationship between electoral democracy and the urban poors welfare. On the other, expanding our knowledge on why some urban informal settlements are better able than others to secure basic public goods. I draw on electoral and participative theories of democracy, and the burgeoning literature on clientelism and development to explain the effect of introducing democratic elections in urban slums on the provision of public goods for these communities. I argue that, in urban informal settlements where the poor are geographically concentrated and clientelistic dynamics tend to predominate, whether or not the introduction of formal democratic elections to select slum-level representatives helps improve the provision of public goods depends on the level of organization of civil society. In settings where civil societies are highly organized, that is where grassroots organizations are present, the introduction of elections can enhance public goods provision. In such a context, existing organizational structures and citizens' organizational experience facilitate the efforts of individuals to demand and monitor the provision of basic goods as well as the emergence of new community leaders that skew political competition towards public goods provision, overall, making previously non-elected brokers more responsive.

A challenge associated with studying the effect of slum-level elections on the provision of public goods is the designing of an identification strategy. The main endogeneity concern is that communities that have specific characteristics, such as being more organized, are more likely to elect their leaders via formal elections, making correlations between elections and public goods difficult to interpret. To address this problem, I leverage a plausible instance of as-if-random assignment of democratic elections to informal settlements. Specifically, I take advantage of a break in the introduction of slum-level elections in the City of Buenos Aires in Argentina. Following a judicial decision that introduced democratic elections to select slum-level representatives in this city, a quarter of the informal settlements within the city held their first democratic election between 2010 and 2012. This process was abruptly interrupted after the judge in charge was replaced, leaving the rest of the slums scheduled to celebrate their first election without democratically elected representatives. I make the point that this reform, and its posterior interruption, plausibly generates as-if-random variation in electoral democracy at the slum level, allowing us to approximately identify the effect of elections on public goods provision in informal settlements.

Using data from a previously unexploited expert survey that covers the full set of slums in the City of Buenos Aires, an original household survey I conducted in 10 randomly selected slums, and insights from 50 in-depth interviews with slum-dwellers, organizational leaders, and brokers, I find that the introduction of slum-level elections enhances public goods provision only in communities that are highly organized. I also show that where elections are implanted and organizational density is high, new leaders with no previous partisan attachments enter the competition to become slum representatives; that in these settings community organizations are more oriented towards the provision of public goods; and that brokers are overall perceived as being more responsive to residents' demands. These results, I explain, are evidence in favor of the idea that the formal electoral accountability mechanism injected by slum elections will be translated into public goods provision only where civil society is active.

Beyond the methodological advantages provided by the plausibly as-if-random assignment of elections to slums, more importantly, Argentina is an excellent laboratory to examine whether and how the exposure of slum brokers to formal elections affects the provision of public goods for substantive reasons. This young democracy has been an archetype case in the study of clientelism. The historical pervasiveness of clientelistic practices undertaken by its largest political parties at all levels of government and across its entire national territory, has fueled a rich literature on how clientelistic dynamics work in this specific context [e.g.] (Auyero, 2001; Stokes et al., 2013; Levitsky, 2003; Zarazaga, 2014; Szwarcberg, 2013b; Oliveros, 2016; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014; Stokes, 2005). Precisely because Argentina's slums are infamous for their clientelistic politics and brokers play a fundamental role in clientelistic relationships, this is an interesting case to explore the developmental consequences of exposing brokers to democratic political competition to represent their slum.

By exploring the developmental consequences of introducing democratic elections to select community leaders in urban slums, this article adds, first, to recent contributions that challenge the notion that clients have no choice over who their brokers are. In the context of urban slums in India, Auerbach and Thachil (2018) explore clients' preferences for different types of brokers and find that slum residents prefer brokers that are more capable of claim-making. My work builds on and seeks to expand this research by illuminating an uncommon mechanism via which clients select brokers: formal democratic elections. Second, it adds to a burgeoning literature that examines the political drivers of development in urban slums. In this regard, it contributes to previous studies that underscore the role of community leaders (Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach, 2016; Gay, 1994; Krishna, Rains, & Wibbels, 2020; Das & Walton, 2015; Jha, Rao, & Woolcock, 2007), intermediary organizations or institutions (Auerbach, 2017; Krishna, 2002; Lee, 1998; Gay, 1990) and partisan competition (Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach, 2016) as relevant factors, the idea that the type of mechanism via which brokers are selected by residents can have developmental consequences. In addition, by exploring the opening of democratic processes in small communities that ex-ante were ruled by informal practices to select leaders, this article also adds to existing efforts that rely on (quasi-) experimental designs to examine the consequences of electoral democracy in small communities that transitioned out from selecting their leaders via informal mechanisms. Whereas previous studies have explored the election of local clan chiefs (Baldwin & Mvukiyehe, 2015) or the creation of elected village councils (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013) and development committees (Humphreys, de la Sierra, & Van der Windt, 2015), this article concentrates on urban slums and, therefore, it is to my best knowledge, the first article to address the effects of exposing political brokers to slum-level electoral competition. Finally, this paper engages a broader multidisciplinary literature that addresses poverty traps in urban slums (Marx, Stoker, & Suri, 2013). To works that analyze the role of non-political mechanisms, such as human capital [e.g.] (Duflo, Galiani, & Mobarak, 2012; Yamauchi, Faye, & Zulu, 2009), property rights [e.g.] (De Soto, 2000; Field, 2005, 2007; Galiani & Schargrodsky, 2010; Webster, Wu, Zhang, & Sarkar, 2016), and social interactions (Macours & Vakis, 2014), the analysis that follows contributes by exploring the specific mechanisms by which community-level political organization is crucial for the successful conversion of demands into public service improvements.

This article is organized as follows. In the following section I situate this study within the literature of clientelism and development in urban slums. In Section 3, I present an argument that explains under what circumstances the introduction of slum-level elections fosters the provision of public goods. In Section 4, I provide background on the case under study and describe the

empirical strategy. In Section 5, I present the data I leverage in the econometric analyses. In Section 6, I present econometric evidence and two qualitative narratives in support of my argument. Finally, in Section 7, I conclude by discussing the implications of my results for the improvement of material development and the strengthening of democratic practices in urban slums.

2. Urban slums and brokerage politics

Urban slums are typically depicted by an interdisciplinary literature as settings where clienteslim[2] is a common practice and brokers are the main political intermediaries between these communities and both the state and political parties (Auyero, 2001; Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach, 2016; Gay, 1994; Murillo et al., 2021). An explanation for this is that the vulnerability that characterizes slums' residents, given by the lack of tenure and poor access to basic public goods and services, is what makes this group among the poor the most likely to be dependent on clientelistic exchanges with brokers (and parties) that control access to the resources they need the most (Murillo et al., 2021).

A burgeoning literature in comparative politics has documented how and explained why political brokers are critical actors in building and maintaining clientelistic exchanges in the context of poor urban settings [e.g.] (Gingerich, 2014; Szwarcberg, 2012; Szwarcberg, 2013a; Zarazaga, 2014; Stokes et al., 2013; Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Auerbach, 2016; Auyero, 2001). In a nutshell, from the party elite's perspective, brokers identify voters who would provide support in exchange for resources by building ongoing relationships with them (Auyero, 2001; Zarazaga, 2014), they target resources and direct them towards these voters (Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, & Estévez, 2007; Calvo & Murillo, 2004), monitor them and, if necessary, punish their behavior (Stokes, 2005; Stokes et al., 2013); from the low-income citizen's perspective, they are problem-solvers (Auyero, 2001), claim-makers *vis-à-vis* the state (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018), providers when in urgent need and the means to obtain access to state services (Zarazaga, 2014).

This literature has also illuminated the multiple sources of brokers' power and legitimacy. Works that draw on both qualitative and quantitative research show that these are rooted in a combination of their party connections and local leadership (Auyero, 2001; Zarazaga, 2014; Auerbach, 2019), which tend to reinforce each other (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018). Brokers can be, but are not typically, implanted by political parties or formally elected; instead, their leadership is likely to be informal and based on the reputation obtained from the longstanding social interactions they cultivate in the communities in which they are embedded (Auyero, 2001) and from their efficiency in covering their neighbors' basic needs (Zarazaga, 2014; Auyero, 2001; Auerbach & Thachil, 2018), which in turn depends on the strength of their partisan connections (Camp, 2015).

All these works have expanded our understanding on the role of slum brokers in clientelistic exchanges and their relationship with residents, however, less is known about which are the *mechanisms* through which brokers achieve their leadership positions in these communities. We know from Auerbach and Thachil (2018)'s work that clients actively choose their political intermediaries and such a choice is based on a strategic calculation of brokers' capacity to provide for their communities. These authors' research demon-

strates an important point: Clients have agency over brokers' selection. If clients or voters decide who their brokers are, as Auerbach and Thachil (2018) show, the question that follows is how they do so and what are the consequences of choosing brokers via different selection mechanisms. The existence of variation in brokers' selection mechanisms has been documented by qualitative narratives present throughout the literature: Brokers achieve their power position through different means that range from the everyday support of their communities (Auyero, 2001) to selection via informal elections or by appointment in community meetings (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Gay, 1994; Ray, 1969). These works, however, do not attend the question of what are the consequences of brokers being selected through different selection mechanisms. In this paper I address this question by exploring an uncommon mechanism of broker selection: formal democratic elections.

3. How slum elections affect public goods provision

What are the developmental consequences of introducing slum-level elections? I begin by defining the introduction of slum-level elections or electoral democracy as the introduction for the first time of the secret vote in competitive elections, where all citizens are allowed to vote and each vote counts equally, to select slum-level representatives that are recognized as legal authorities of their slums by local and national state authorities. In this section, I advance a theory on how the introduction of slum elections affects public goods provision. I argue that elections in which brokers themselves formally compete for a leadership position in their communities, and slum residents are enabled to sanction (or reward) incompetent (well-performing) brokers with their vote, can contribute to achieving a higher level of provision of public goods. I explain that slum elections provide new incentives for brokers to be more responsive to residents' demand for public goods, but that they only respond to such incentives when these are well organized to hold them accountable.

To explain why and under what circumstances slum-level elections have a positive impact on the livelihood of slum residents I draw, on the one hand, on a longstanding literature that sustains (a) that the essence of politicians' responsiveness to their voters' demands is the "electoral connection", whereby voters can (threat to) remove re-election oriented politicians from their posts (Mayhew, 2004); and (b) that the decentralization of elections increases accountability by implanting such connection at the most disaggregate levels, allowing voters to monitor their representatives more closely (Gélineau & Remmer, 2006; Khemani, 2001; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Agrawal, 1999; Heller, 2001). On the other, I also build on works that underscore that, in the context of urban slums, bottom-up associational activity (Auerbach, 2017; Gay, 1994; Krishna, 2002) and political competition between party brokers are key factors that can help these communities secure public goods (Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach, 2016).

Building on these literatures, I make the case that by introducing a previously non-existent "electoral connection" between community brokers and their clients, slum-level elections enable the latter to monitor the former more closely and, for the first time, to sanction them directly with their vote, thereby inducing a new accountability dynamic that, in turn, contributes to enhance community development. Accountability linkages can be complex in these settings: Brokers have incentives to be responsive to their party bosses and hold their following accountable (Stokes, 2005); at the same time, brokers are also accountable to some extent to their following, the ultimate source of their legitimacy as intermediaries between their communities and the state (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Auerbach, 2019). I argue that exposing brokers to

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[2] Clientelism is defined as the practice whereby politicians engage in an asymmetric but reciprocal relationship with voters (Scott, 1972; Hicken, 2011; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007), in which the latter offer political support in the form of votes (Stokes, 2005), turnout (Nichter, 2008; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, & Nichter, 2014) or attendance at rallies (Szwarcberg, 2012; Szwarcberg, 2013a), while the former offer targeted benefits.

compete directly in slum-level elections to maintain or expand their network, creates yet another layer of accountability between them and slum residents, whereby the former have new incentives to actively respond to the latter's demand for essential public goods.

When brokers are formally elected by their communities, their success in keeping their leadership position is no longer given by their informal relationship with their neighbors and political parties alone; it is also a function of their own electoral performance in their communities. Winning slum-level elections is an attractive reward for any broker that seeks to survive politically because it gives access to resources and political connections. In addition, for those who have been active intermediaries between their communities and the state and/or political parties, losing slum elections can be sensed as a dishonor. Slum elections are a very close proxy of brokers' performance, thus, being defeated at the ballot box could be interpreted by both parties and residents as the loss of support and recognition of a broker's base. Therefore, brokers cannot afford to be indifferent to electoral results, which provide a new source of both material resources and popular legitimacy, and have incentives to make large efforts to win slum elections.

Winning slum elections is also important for the political parties brokers work for because it gives the winner both legal status and legitimacy to monopolize access to state resources. Thus, it is likely that competing political parties will reinforce their support for their brokers, now candidates, fueling them with more resources that will allow them to purchase a larger number of votes. In this regard, the introduction of elections can potentially encourage vote buying, a practice that has been found to be complementary to the provision of public goods (Magaloni et al., 2007; Kitschelt, 2000).

The question then is whether or not brokers respond to the accountability incentives given by the introduction of an electoral connection at the slum level by making larger efforts to answer slum-dwellers' demands, being one of the most important ones the provision of basic public goods. My response is that it depends on the extent to which civil society is organized and thus capable of making electoral accountability work. I define a highly organized civil society as one in which a wide array of grassroots neighborhood organizations that seek to improve the living conditions of the residents of their community are present. These organizations operate at the slum level, are run by slum residents, and focus on the improvement of housing and living conditions and obtaining better access to basic public goods and services, such as water, electricity, gas, paved roads, and sanitation.

I argue that without an active citizenship capable of holding leaders accountable, brokers face less incentives to make the necessary efforts to provide public goods that can hardly be attributed to them. Instead, where citizens actively participate in their communities, an organized civil society can constrain brokers' (now candidates') behavior and keep them accountable. Specifically, the presence of grassroots organizations triggers two mechanisms that make slum-level electoral accountability work. First, from the demand side perspective, organizational structures and individuals' experience of participation facilitate collective endeavors to demand and monitor the provision of public goods, making slum leaders more responsive to residents' demands (*Mechanism 1*). Second, from the supply side one, organizations are reservoirs of leadership making it more likely that, given the opportunity presented by the introduction of elections, new slum leaders that can skew political competition towards the provision of public goods will emerge enhancing competition (*Mechanism 2*).

Having explained why and how slum elections put in place new accountability incentives for brokers, in the remainder of this section, I develop the two mechanisms that explain under what

conditions this new accountability linkage leads to a higher provision of public goods.

3.1. Demand and monitoring

A first mechanism linking slum elections to public goods provision in settings where civil society is well organized is social capital, which I define as "the features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" [p. 174] (Putnam, 1994). Social capital is expected to be higher in contexts where civil society is more organized, that is where there is a high density of grassroots organizations. According to an extensive literature, social capital enhances political accountability, and politicians' responsiveness, that is, overall good governance (Weingast, 1997; Boix & Posner, 1998; Putnam, 1994). Specifically, it makes citizens more likely to monitor their representatives closely and eager to punish those who underperform in the ballot box, improving political accountability and, therefore, government performance (Boix & Posner, 1998).

There are multiple reasons why, in the context of small communities such as slums, social capital can make electoral accountability work, producing higher public goods provision.[3] First, community organizations establish trust and cooperative social ties that enable collective action, including active mobilization, to demand public goods (Putnam, 1994; Tarrow, 1994; Diani & McAdam, 2003). Second, associational linkages permit interconnected individuals to coordinate and agree on a common set of issues, such as the provision of certain public goods over others, that would otherwise not be dealt with by their leaders (Ferejohn & Kuklinski, 1990; Keefer & Khemani, 2005). This is particularly important in settings like informal settlements, where the lack of a broad range of public goods and services can make their demand too broad to achieve results. In such context, it is important that citizens agree on which are their community's needs and priorities to raise specific demands. Third, participation provides opportunities for citizens to discuss civic affairs, and to argue about whether or not their representatives are performing to improve their welfare. Finally, when embedded in associations, information tends to circulate more, and more quickly, creating better-informed citizens: the more informed citizens are, the more capable they will be of holding their representatives accountable (Keefer & Khemani, 2005; Coleman, 1988).

Following these arguments, and in line with existing research that argues social capital enhances public goods provision (Tavits, 2006; Coleman, 1988; Krishna, 2002; Auerbach, 2017; Tsai, 2007), I propose that by creating a new *formal* accountability linkage, the introduction of slum elections will help improve the existing accountability dynamic between brokers and residents only in settings where civil society is highly organized and therefore social capital is higher. In this scenario, residents are more likely to organize to demand public goods and to closely monitor the performance of slum leaders; meanwhile, leaders eager to win slum-level elections face greater incentives to respond to active residents' demands.[4]

At this point, it is relevant to consider that different types of grassroots organizations might coexist within slums. Previous research has shown that community and interest organizations can serve different purposes. Whereas some are more committed

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[3] A complete literature review on why social capital enhances democratic accountability can be found in Jottier and Heyndels (2012).

[4] Social capital can also help improve *informal* accountability mechanisms that lead to better local development outcomes [see:] (Tsai, 2007). However, the introduction of elections creates an overlapping *formal* accountability channel between brokers and residents that should improve public goods provision more than in settings where such *formal* accountability does not exist.

to programmatic goals, such as the provision of public goods, others act more as intermediaries for patronage exchange, that is, they are part of clientelistic networks focused on the distribution of selective benefits (Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Garay, Palmer-Rubin, & Poertner, 2020; Palmer-Rubin, Garay, & Poertner, 2021; Palmer-Rubin, 2019). For instance, Garay et al. (2020) show that community and interest organizations condition access to social benefits from the state. Some organizations help increase the chances of those who are eligible to otherwise hard-to-reach state benefits by empowering citizens; others directly mobilize their bases in exchange for benefits in a clientelistic fashion. In other work, they find that this type of organizations can pre-dispose their members towards particularistic rather than collective benefits (Palmer-Rubin et al., 2021). In the context of urban informal settlements, where both types of organizations typically coexist and more often than not organizations serve both programmatic and non-programmatic goals simultaneously (Cravino, 1998; Mitchell, 2016), two possible scenarios can emerge: one where more programmatic organizations prevail and another one where more clientelistic organizations are dominant.

Since the mechanisms of accountability and selection empower citizens to demand more of their slum leaders, including those who run grassroots organizations, then which of these predominate will be relevant to the expected increase in public goods. In the first case, we would expect the mechanism of social capital to unroll as expected by previous works that find a strong correlation between organizational activity, social capital and government responsiveness to collective demands (Tavits, 2006; Coleman, 1988; Krishna, 2002; Auerbach, 2017; Tsai, 2007). In this case, these demands are shaped by the more programmatic nature of organizations, and therefore we should expect a higher increase in public goods demands, and thus provision. In the second case, the creation of social capital should also enhance individuals' capacity to demand organizational leaders the provision of bene-fits. However, since participation is more likely to be associated with individualistic tendencies, these demands will include a higher component of private rather than public goods. The implica-tion is that the extent to which the civil society as a whole demands and monitors the provision of public goods might be mit-igated compared to the first scenario, as the most organized indi-viduals are more focused on particularistic benefits. Still, the expectation is that, however moderated, the demand for more pub-lic goods will still increase, as less particularistic individuals increase their capacity to demand public goods and (all types) of organizations respond to this demand.[5]

3.2. Increasing competition and the emergence of new leaders

A second mechanism I propose connects the introduction of slum elections with an improvement in public goods provision in slums that are highly organized, is increasing competition due to the emergence of new community leaders. As Auerbach (2019) argues and shows, in urban slums, higher competition between brokers for a following is associated to higher local public goods because brokers become more responsive to their clients' demands when these have exit options. I make the case that slum-level elec-tions can fuel fierce competition between existing brokers that fight for sustaining their leadership position in the ballot box. The risk of losing an election to represent the slum is high: Only

the winners get access to state resources and are recognized as intermediaries by state agents. Notwithstanding, competition is more likely to thrive in societies that are highly organized because it is in these settings where there is a larger reservoir of commu-nity leaders that despite having experience working in community organizations have no previous ties with political parties. The emergence of this type of leadership enhances slum-level compe-tition and skews the electoral playing field towards the provision of public goods.

In principle, the introduction of slum elections reduces the cost of entry into slum politics for any individual, including those with-out previous partisan attachments. Although elections do not cre-ate a *tabula rasa*, political connections with parties are no longer the only mechanism to obtain resources that allow a slum leader to sustain a leadership position in the slum. In this regard, elections provide an opportunity for outsiders that carry reputational rather than longstanding political credentials to compete for a leadership position. In small communities, where people know each other very well, reputation is as important as political influences for a candidate. Both reputation and political connections work as the mechanisms that endow leaders with the credibility that they will deliver on their promises. However, it is unlikely that new leader-ships will emerge in a vacuum. Instead, the pre-existence of com-munity organizations has a major role in producing new leaderships (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Han, 2014). Dense social networks and connective structures are formed where individuals participate, and this encourages them to take up leadership posi-tions. Furthermore, individuals' participation in organizations endows them with skills and knowledge regarding organizing and leadership, regardless of the nature of the organizations where they participate (Lynch, 2016).

Therefore, given the opportunity opened by the introduction of slum elections, in places where individuals have organizational experience, it is more likely that new leaders will run in slum elec-tions. This is important for two reasons. First, because the specific characteristics of the new leadership may impact their strategic choices, including which type of demands to prioritize (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). Specifically, the background and previous experiences of leaders without partisan attachments provide them with a different set of lenses through which to see the relationship between their community and the state, making them likely to make larger efforts to demand public goods.[6]

Second, because the emergence of a new leadership increases political competition. By threatening old brokers' position in the system and giving citizens new exit options, the emergence of new and more contenders contributes to skewing the playing field towards the distribution of public goods for two reasons. On the one hand, more contenders increase the amount of effort leaders have to make in order to win elections. More competitors seeking out votes translates into an increase in the price of each vote, and with it in the cost of clientelism, changing the cost-benefit rela-tionship between distributing private vs. public goods. On the other hand, increasing competition opens new exit opportunities for voters (Auerbach, 2019; Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015), who can now consider better offers from new rivals, pressing brokers to become more responsive to their demands. In this new setting, brokers need to adapt their strategies to survive politically, and the distribution of public goods can serve as the mechanism to enhance their credibility compared to their new competitors (Piattoni, 2001).

Short- vs. long-run effects of slum elections The argument I have presented so far should apply to the transition period, that

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[5] An increase in the provision of public goods does not rule out a parallel increase in clientelistic exchanges as particularistic individuals prevail. Although the focus of this paper is on the effect that slum elections have on public goods rather than on clientelism, in the Appendix, on Section A.4.2, I show evidence that suggests that clientelism levels did not change with the introduction of elections.

[6] On the emergence of leaders and how their individual background and experiences affect the collective and organizational choices they make, see for example: Han (2014); Morris and Staggenborg (2004); Veltmeyer and Petras (2002).

is, when slum elections are implemented for the first time. Although this is certainly likely to have implications for the future, fully understanding the long-run effects of slum residents electing their own representatives via democratic elections, would require further theorizing how elections change the political dynamics of slums in the medium and long run, as well as testing the implications of this theory, which is beyond the objectives of this paper. I do, however, return to the implications of my theory for these long-term dynamics in the conclusions.

3.3. Empirical implications

In the rest of this paper, first, I test the main empirical implication of my argument in the context of urban slums in the City of Buenos Aires, namely that: The introduction of slum-level elections has a positive effect on public goods provision in communities where civil society is highly organized, whereas they do not in weakly organized slums (*Hypothesis 1*). Second, I present evidence in support of the two mechanisms at work behind the proposed relationship between slum-level elections, civil society organization, and public goods provision. On the one hand, once slum elections are introduced, in highly organized settings, we would expect active citizens to be more likely to coordinate their efforts to demand public goods and to hold their representatives accountable. Therefore, we should observe brokers that can be removed from their posts are more responsive where civil societies are more organized, that is where grassroots organizations are present (*Mechanism 1*). On the other, we would expect new community leaders (with no previous partisan attachments) to be more likely to emerge and become electoral contenders in democratic slums with higher organizational density (*Mechanism 2*).

4. Background and empirical strategy

Testing the relationship between elections and public goods provision is difficult because of two main threats to inference. The first of these is reverse causality. Since there is a well-established long-term connection between public goods provision and political factors in slums, like the presence of party networks and the prevalence of clientelism [e.g.] (Auerbach, 2019; Krishna, 2002; Gay, 1994; Murillo et al., 2021; Zarazaga, 2014), it is typically difficult to disentangle the direction of causality between both sets of factors. Particularly, greater levels of public goods can provide the infrastructure needed for the organizational processes that lead to the development of democratic institutions. The second problem is the presence of confounders, factors that affect both the likelihood of having elections and the level of public goods provision. Thus, to examine the effect of democratically electing slum representatives on the provision of public goods, I take advantage of a court ruling that introduced slum-level elections in the City of Buenos Aires (CBA). As I explain below, because the process of introducing elections was implemented in sequential stages and at a certain point interrupted, leaving a set of slums without democratic elections, this judicially-induced reform allows me to identify a comparison group of slums that did not select their representatives via open elections and compare their access to public goods to that of slums that did.

The implementation of this judicial decision provides plausibly exogenous variation in the form of selecting slum representatives, creating an ideal opportunity to test the effect of slum-level elections on the provision of public goods. The as-if-random process by which slums were assigned to have elections or not allows me to isolate the elusive effect of democratic decision-making on public goods provision. This process secures that (a) the proposed treatment (slum-level elections) preceded the changes in public goods provision that I record in my analysis and, most importantly, that (b) assignment into the treatment was uncorrelated with the many factors that can affect both the level of public goods provision and the probability of developing democratic mechanisms of decision-making. The latter is true for a factor that is central in my analysis: civil society's level of organization, which could otherwise be suspected of confounding the relation between elections and public goods provision.

Slums in the CBA are informal housing settlements that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s as workers who migrated from rural to urban areas to work in the expanding industrial sector illegally settled on vacant lands. In the 1970s the slum population had reached a peak of 225,000, before falling to 13,000 in 1981 after the military dictatorship's policy of eviction and compulsory relocation (De la Torre, 2008). After the transition to democracy, and particularly since the 1990s, the rate of population growth exponentially accelerated; according to the most recent figures, in 2017, 250,000 people lived in slums in the CBA (Salvia, Agustín, & Márquez, 2017).[7]

The political dynamic of slums in the CBA has been attached historically to the presence of community leaders or brokers (*referentes* or *punteros*).[8] In the early 1980s, upon the re-occupation of vacant lands, slum *referentes* emerged as a group of entrepreneurial neighbors committed to improving the living conditions in their communities, some of which were the organizers of slum-based civic associations created to attend the needs of their residents. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when economic liberalization began, that city-level state actors started using *referentes* and their networks as vehicles to provide basic goods and to distribute social plans in slums (Suárez, Lourdes, & Lépore, 2014). In this process, slum *referentes* became the informal intermediaries between slum residents and the state. This change in the relationship between brokers and the state opened the opportunity for the expansion of clientelistic practices as the population in slums continued increasing. During these decades, slums quickly transitioned into complex polities where rivalries between political parties, which supported different brokers, reached their peak, attracting the attention of observers and scholars interested in clientelism.[9]

Slums' grassroots organizations are also a key aspect of the political life of these communities (Cravino, 1998). These started emerging in the 1970s during the military dictatorship as human rights associationsand, in the early 1980s, in the form of initiatives such as *ollas populares* (soup kitchens) to battle the effects of the economic crisis of the time. Later, in the 1990s, as the basic health, nutrition, and education needs of this sector of the population continued deteriorating, grassroots organizations started focusing even more on the provision of basic public goods and services (Mitchell, 2016). In a survey conducted by Lépore et al. (2012), in 2010 in two slums of the CBA (Villa 1–11-14 and Villa 21–24), they find that the type of community organizations that prevail are those which pursue collective goods. In Villa 21–24, 69% of organizations fulfill social activities, whereas 15% of these are dedicated to political activities and 15% to religious activities; in Villa

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[7] The latest national population census, in 2010, indicates that 165,000 people (6% of the city's population) lived in slums on that year, that is 50% more than in 2001 and more than three times as many as in 1991 (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, 2010). Fig. A1 in the Appendix shows a map with the current distribution of slums across the City.

[8] From now on, I will refer to community or slum leaders, brokers, *referentes* and *punteros* interchangeably.

[9] Important works in the literature on clientelism, including Auyero (2001), have examined the politics in slums in Argentina, particularly in the Metropolitian Area of Buenos Aires Province. However, few of them have studied slums in the CBA, the empirical focus of this paper. An exception to this is Auyero (2012), an ethnography of a typical trajectory of an applicant to welfare benefits.

1–11-14, 79% pursue social activities, 14% political and 7% religious activities.[10] Furthermore, considering both slums together, only 7% of organizations report to be in contact with political parties and 11% with social movements. These examples suggest that the vast majority of slum organizations are on the programmatic spectrum, oriented towards the provision of public goods.[11]

Like in other similar settings, slum brokers in the CBA have historically served as intermediaries between slum dwellers and the state, that is as slum representatives, without being democratically elected to occupy this role.[12] Instead, their emergence can be best described as the outcome of an informal selection process that depends on two factors. One is the support of their base or network of followers, which is a product of the extent to which they are recognized by slum dwellers as problem-solvers (Auyero, 2001; Auyero, Svampa, & Pablo, 2000; Szwarcberg, 2012, 2013a; Zarazaga, 2014); the other one, is the support received from political parties (and the local government) in the form of material resources to be distributed among their following. This produces a dual source of legitimacy that make brokers value both capturing benefits for their following and positive electoral results for the party or candidate they work for (Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013a; Camp, 2015), suggesting they can be accountable both to parties and slum dwellers in their network of followers.

On November 30, 1998 this dynamic was challenged. It was then when the CBA's legislative council passed law 148, which ruled that "social and housing problems will be [the city state's] priority" (Legislatura de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2008). Specifically, the law was designed to advance in solving "the deterioration and lack of infrastructure, and irregularities in the possession and titling of land and housing" in slums within the city (Legislatura de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2008). For this purpose, the one concrete action proposed by the law was the creation of a single participative committee (*Comisión Coordinadora Participativa*) where the relevant stakeholders (state, slums' residents, and civil society organizations) would take part in jointly deciding an annual budget for social and housing policies, which would be subject to the approval of the executive government. According to the law, the committee would be integrated by a member of the local executive power, a representative from each caucus in the local legislature, six representatives from two inter-slums organizations, and most importantly, by one representative from each slum elected in formal elections. Because up to that point slums did not have formally elected representatives at the slum level, the law established that the first task of the committee was to build the electoral rosters and design the rules to call for elections in each slum no later than a year after its constitution. In sum, law 148 created a city-level participative consultative committee which constitution required slums to celebrate formal democratic elections to select one representative per slum.

The main purpose of having an elected representative per slum was to centralize the fragmented authority of the slums in order to facilitate negotiations between the state and each slum regarding the urbanization process. These negotiations involved issues such as land and house titling, housing conditions, eviction, and access to public goods and services. Slum presidents were to be recognized by the state as the only legal representatives of their slum, invalidating efforts by non-elected brokers to bargain with the state.[13]

After the approval of the law, the committee was never called into action. In other words, elections to select slum-level representatives were not celebrated and each slum continued to operate under the usual informal rules. On the one hand, elected city government officials preferred to maintain their linkages with brokers as they were. On the other, it was not in the most powerful brokers' interests to fight in favor of introducing democratic procedures that could risk their leadership positions. However, those brokers and community leaders that had been excluded from the government's flux of resources, made informal attempts to celebrate elections. In some cases, elections were called without the state's approval and, every time this occurred, results were challenged, thus encouraging even more uncertainty about who represented the slum. In other words, there was no pressure from above to celebrate democratic elections, and pressure from below was blocked by incumbent brokers who had much to lose from the reform.

Finally, in 2008, a City Council member filed a lawsuit against the city government to enforce law 148, that is, to normalize the electoral situation in slums. When asked why, he said:

> The internal organization of [slum] neighbors was not only important for the implementation of the urbanization process but also to create a dialogue between slums' neighbors and the state, and to end the vicious clientelistic logic that favors brokers functional to the government. The state is now obliged to work with democratically elected slum representatives.[14]

As a result of this lawsuit, on December 18, 2008 a judge from the CBA resolved that democratic elections to select slum-level representatives were to be held immediately. Every slum was supposed to select community representatives in democratic, open, and non-compulsory-voting elections. For this purpose, the judge appointed external independent supervisors from the University of Buenos Aires to prepare the electoral roll and monitor the electoral process. In his decision the judge considered that: "(…) the lack of application of law 148 affects the political rights of the inhabitants of slums given the non-existence of slum authorities that are democratically and regularly elected and work as valid interlocutors between the needs of their neighbors and other powers of the state" (Judge's Resolution, 2008).

The court ruling was going to be implemented by an ad hoc agency (*secretaría*) created by the judge for this purpose. The lack of resources to organize the implementation of elections in multiple slums at the same time led to the judge's decision to implement elections in different steps starting in 2010.[15] Therefore, interventions were scheduled to occur in every slum at different times. However, this schedule was interrupted in October 2011, after a first set of slums had already had or had initiated the process to have their first slum-level election, when the judge in question took a leave of absence to accept the post of adjunct general attorney (Centro de Información, 2011). At that moment, the lawsuit was transferred to the courthouse of a new judge who decided to continue with the implementation of elections in slums where the judicial intervention process had already begun but not to intervene in those slums that

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[10] The authors also break down the type of activities of these organizations in the following categories: social assistance, education, church-related, human rights, cultural/recreative activities, political, and labor, and find that social assistance is the most widespread in both slums: 46% of community organization in Villa 21–24 pursue this activity and 63% in Villa 1–11-14, whereas the rest of the categories only account for in between 1% and 17% of community organizations.

[11] In the Appendix (Section A.4.1), I discuss similar trends for other five slums in an extension of this survey conducted in 2012 by Suárez et al. (2014).

[12] Stokes et al. (2013) find that it is not uncommon that brokers from municipalities in the Greater Buenos Aires, which does not include the CBA, run in local elections to become *consejales* (members of municipalities' legislative bodies) at some point in their careers. However, in the CBA I found no records of slum brokers running in elections at the municipal, provincial or national levels.

[13] Slums are not constituted as formal political units, thus slum presidents would not receive a budget for their neighborhoods or a salary for their work.

[14] Author's interview with city council member (July 17, 2014). Author's translation.

[15] As he explained, his courthouse did not have enough employees nor material capacity to undertake this decision at once: "(…) the lack of physical space was critical at the moment of elections because of the need to store materials—from water dispensers to papers, and other materials such as electoral rolls, laptops for voting date, etcetera." [Author's interview with judge (July 28, 2013). Author's translation.]

had not yet received this treatment.[16] By the time the original judge left office, the intervention process had begun in ten slums. All the processes completed under the first judge, as well as those completed under the second judge between 2011 and 2012, were regulated by the city government and monitored by NGOs whose role was to guarantee the transparency and peacefulness of the electoral process.[17]

The final outcome of the 2008 court ruling was that a group of slums, those dealt with before the original judge left office, were treated with their first democratic formal election, whereas the remaining group did not receive this treatment. I propose that this interruption in the process of implementation of slum-level elections across the CBA constitutes a unique opportunity to assess the relationship between slum-level democratic elections and the provision of public goods in poor urban settings.

It is important to note here what the characteristics of the treatment are. First, the main features of slum-level elections were being democratic (each vote counts equally), open (all slum residents could vote regardless of their nationality), and voting was both secret and non-compulsory. Second, elections were formally organized by the state (via the independent interveners appointed by the judge). This means that state officials produced the rosters, secured a venue and the presence of state authorities and police for the election day, and monitored the electoral process. Third, each slum would choose one slum president and a neighbors' committee (*junta vecinal*). These slum-level authorities would be recognized by the local government as the legal and legitimate representatives of their slums. As an implication of this, in slums that were treated, political power was automatically centralized in the figure of a formal/legal representative, the slum president. Meanwhile, in those slums where formal elections to select slum representatives were not introduced, political dynamics did not change: Political power remained diffuse and mostly fragmented, and brokers remained competing as usual to become the most powerful intermediaries between slum residents and the state.[18] Importantly, besides ones being treated and others not, both slums in treatment and control group remained comparable. The judge's decision to introduce elections was not accompanied by any other changes, such as the introduction of new sources of funding or any other political prerogative that sub-local districts (*comunas*) have. Hence, the only difference between treatment and control groups is that the first set elected slum representatives in formal elections and the other group did not, clearing concerns that the introduction of elections represents a compound treatment.

In sum, this interruption in the process of first-time implementation of slum elections in informal settlements allows me to compare, on the one hand, slums where brokers continued to be selected via informal processes, and slums where brokers are formally and democratically elected by all slum residents, that is, where a new formal accountability channel is incorporated. The expectation is that in the first scenario, where things remain unchanged, the provision of public goods will remain unaltered, whereas in the second one the provision of public goods should improve as a result of the greater accountability of leaders to residents.

One of the concerns of this paper is whether the judge's criteria of treating some slums before others led to the introduction of elections in slums that would have presented the same level of public goods provision in the absence of elections. Information gathered from in-depth interviews with the main actors involved in this process and quantitative evidence presented in the following section suggest that the sequential implementation of the court's ruling was unrelated to slums' characteristics, and whether these might have directly or indirectly influenced the outcome. In addition, the environment in which the introduction of elections was implemented is conducive to identifying the effect of elections on public goods because the reform was confined to the slum level within the same city, which mitigates the confounding influence of omitted variables. However, even in truly randomized social experiments there is always the concern of a lack of balance between treatment and control groups (Gerber & Green, 2000). If the treatment and control groups do not have the same distribution of characteristics, differences in the provision of public goods could be reflecting this lack of balance and not the treatment itself. In this case, we know that selection into the democratic path was not purely randomly assigned and thus a conclusive causal test is not feasible.

I address this concern in several ways. First, I use existing quantitative data to show that slums with and without elections were comparable groups before the introduction of elections in some of them. Second, I test the core hypothesis derived from my argument using expert survey data collected for the entire universe of slums in the CBA right after the first set had its first election. This strategy takes advantage of the as-if-random assignment of slums into having slum-level elections. This process assures that individuals cannot self-select into living in slums with elections because moving from a slum to another is a costly process that is unlikely to be justified by the potential benefits of participating in slum-level elections. Third, to test *Mechanism 1* I rely on an original household survey in ten slums, half in the treatment group and the other half in the control group, that were selected employing a combination of random sampling (to create a sample of five units in the treatment group) and nearest neighbor matching (to create a matched sample of five slums in the control group). Combined with the demanding controls for observable factors I explain below, this sampling strategy should help isolate the effect of elections on broker/leader responsiveness and organizational claim-making from any sources of bias. Finally, to assess *Mechanism 2*, I rely on qualitative data from secondary sources and in-depth interviews with slum brokers, leaders of community organizations and residents. In addition, I address various endogeneity concerns about my argument in the Appendix (Section A.4), including those concerning the association between slum elections and participation, on the one hand, and clientelism, on the other.[19] In this way, the triangulation of aggregate- and individual-level data from different original sources, both quantitative and qualitative, complement the quasi-experimental nature of the research design, providing further validation of the results presented below.

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[16] When asked about the rationale behind this decision the new judge explained: "(…) judges are not supposed to be pro-active but to act on demand of parts." [Author's interview with the new judge (June 2, 2014). Author's translation].

[17] A complete timeline of events is presented on Fig. A2 in the Appendix.

[18] As the Director of the City Housing Institute explained when asked about his relationship with a slum's elected representative: "Since the election, in [name of the slum] I can only talk to Sara [slum's elected president] (…) they [slum presidents] control everything in the slum. If I have to change a bulb or pave a street I first have to call the president and ask for permission for the trucks to enter the slum; and, many times, I have to pay a *peaje* [toll/fee]." [Author's interview (June 15, 2014). Author's translation.]

[19] In the Appendix, using my household survey data, I address two further endogeneity concerns about my argument. The first one is that the relationship between slum elections and community organization is sequential rather than interactive, as I propose. I show that slum elections have not affected individual participation in multiple types of community organizations in the immediate years after the first election (see Section A.4.1). The second concern is that slum elections might affect clientelism dynamics and therefore the observed difference in the provision of public goods in slums with elections is driven by such changes. To address this, I show that clientelism is comparable in slums with and without elections (see Section A.4.2).

4.1. Balance test

In this section, I provide evidence that slums that experienced elections were similar in observables to those that did not before the implementation of the court ruling. Fig. 1 shows the geographic location of treatment and control groups. Even though most slums are concentrated in the southern part of the city, the map shows that the geographical distribution of slums with elections does not follow a specific pattern.

Table 1 presents the balance test between treatment and control groups across a set of different observable covariates that include measures on public goods provision, socio-demographic, and socio-economic characteristics of slums previous to the judge's intervention. These covariates were compiled from the 2010 National Census, the only pre-treatment complete dataset on public goods and access to services in all the slums of the city prior to the introduction of elections.

The table shows balance between the full sample of treated and non-treated slums. The vast majority of the differences in means are not statistically significant at the 90% confidence level and, moreover, most differences are substantively small (<10%). There are however a few exceptions worth a second look. Both poverty and the proportion of illiterate population appear with significant but arguably not substantively relevant differences. In the case of literacy, there is a significant difference of only 1.2 %. Both groups are, nevertheless, very high compared to the Argentine national average of less than 2% in the 2010 census. In the case of poverty, there is a difference of around 10 % (69,13% for treated slums and 81% for the control group), which again pales in comparison to the difference either of the groups has with the average of the City of Buenos Aires (6% according to the 2010 census) or even the poorest *comuna* in the city (*Comuna* 1, with 15,9%). By any standard then, these are areas of very high poverty. Moreover, it is also necessary to point out that these are just two dimensions of the socioeconomic status of the population, whereas the other three included in the balance test, measuring important aspects such as unemployment, educational attainment, and access to a cell phone, show insignificant differences. However minute, or insignificant despite their non-negligible size, these differences are further justification for the sampling strategy introduced in the previous section that achieves higher balance across the samples of treated and control slums used in the comparison.

Due to lack of available data I cannot present a pre-treatment balance test on some variables of interest. Two of these merit further development: organization levels and the prevalence of clientelism. To attend the concern that slums that received the treatment were previously more organized than the ones that did not, I provide two more pieces of evidence besides the mentioned fact that the mechanism of assignment of slum elections should be orthogonal to pre-treatment unit characteristics. In Section A.4.1 in the Appendix I show that elections do not trigger more organization and that in both treatment and control groups there are slums with high and low levels of organization; furthermore, a difference in means test based on a limited sample indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups in this dimension. In Section A.4.2 in the Appendix, I show that the prevalence of clientelism in both groups is indistinguishable controlling for individual participation levels in grassroots organizations. Thus, there is a relation between participation and clientelism, but this relation is the same across groups, as is the prevalence of clientelism overall. In Section A.4.2 of the Appendix I also further discuss how this result is evidence against the idea that differences in the prevalence of clientelism in the pre-treatment period may have driven both slum level elections and public goods outcomes, and how this is additional evidence in favor of *Mechanism 1*.

5. Data

For the econometric analyses presented below, I rely on two main sources of quantitative data. First, I use expert survey data collected by an NGO in 2013 in every slum identified in the CBA.[20] This dataset compiles aggregate information on slums' access to public goods, neighbors' organizational capacities and ownership situation. The collection process was conducted in three stages: (1) a team of experts recruited and trained conducted six months of field-work to gather the information of interest and to identify key informants in each slum. Depending on the size of the slum, between three and six informants were selected per unit "considering their level of knowledge on the slum situation and the time they have lived in the slum" [p.13] (TECHO Argentina, 2013); (2) a semi-structured survey was given to all the key informants identified; and (3) data analysts crossed check the responses from the informants with data gathered by field experts, and where inconsistencies emerged the expert teams went back to the field to re-measure the value of the response in question (TECHO Argentina, 2013). At the end of this process, between three and six data points per slum, depending on the number of key informants, were generated across all variables. Finally, to generate a single value per slum on each of the variables of interest, an average of the responses provided by the key informants in each slum was taken.

Second, I use an original household survey I conducted between July and September 2014 in ten slums of the CBA: five had already been exposed to elections and five that had not yet received this treatment.[21] In each slum where the survey was carried out, 40 individuals aged 18 years or above were interviewed. Respondents were uniformly sampled from sectors/areas of each slum, and these sectors were identified with the help of key informants.[22] The treatment group was randomly chosen out of the ten slums that have already had elections; and the five slums in the control group were selected using nearest neighbor matching across a set of social, economic and demographic covariates, to pair the slums in the treatment group with comparable ones that had not had elections, achieving the highest possible balance between treated and control slums. This technique tries to recover a random research design from observational or imperfectly randomized data to provide a basis for causal interpretation of the estimates. While individuals could not self select into treatment, matching helps ensure that inference is not based on treatment and control samples that are too different, which is not guaranteed by simply including these variables as controls in a regression in standard fashion (Ho, Imai, King, & Stuart, 2007).

Finally, I rely on qualitative evidence from 50 in-depth interviews with slum residents, brokers, and community organization leaders. These were conducted in the slums where I launched the household survey.

6. Empirical results

I examine whether the relationship between elections, community-based organization, and public goods provision is as proposed by *Hypothesis 1* via ordinary least squares regression using the following equation:

$$y_j = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Elections_j + \beta_2 Organization_j$$
$$+ \beta_3 Elections_j \ X \ Organization_j + \mathbf{X}_j + \mu + \varepsilon_j \qquad (1)$$

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[20] The NGO that conducted the survey, TECHO, operates in 19 countries in Latin America and is dedicated to attending housing problems across the region.
[21] The five slums surveyed in the treatment group were: Villa 1–11-14, Villa 20, Villa 21–24, Villa 3/Fátima and Piletones; the five slums in the control group were: Villa 19/INTA, Cildañez, Scapino, Calacita and Villa 15/Ciudad Oculta.
[22] Key informants include: priests, NGO workers, and historical neighbors identified by slum residents.
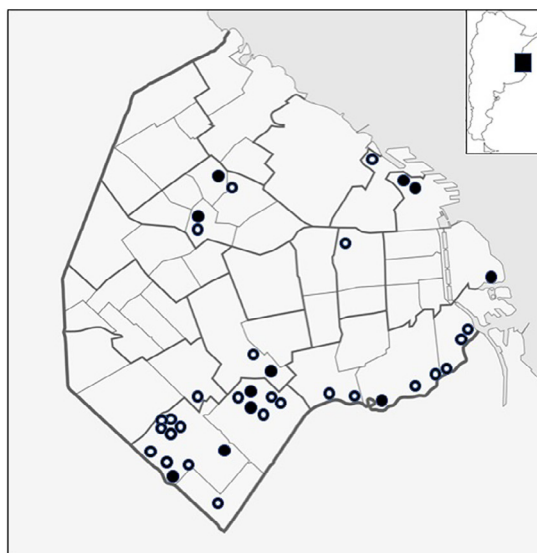
Note: The bold black lines denote the borders of fifteen comunas in the City of Buenos Aires. Full circles denote the location of slums that had elections and empty circles the location of slums that did not have elections for slum representatives. In the upper right corner, the figure displays a map of Argentina showing the location of the CBA.

Fig. 1. Location of slums with and without elections. (*Note:* The bold black lines denote the borders of fifteen comunas in the City of Buenos Aires. Full circles denote the location of slums that had elections and empty circles the location of slums that did not have elections for slum representatives. In the upper right corner, the figure displays a map of Argentina showing the location of the CBA.)

Table 1
Balance test between slums with elections and slums without elections.

	Slums with elections Mean (SD)	Slums without elections Mean (SD)	p-value	Fisher-test p-value
Sociodemographic characteristics				
Population density	1,560.145 (661.517)	1,826.681 (2,069.671)	0.639	0.948
Household density	400.474 (220.642)	422.458 (413.055)	0.862	0.914
Prop. women in population	0.501 (0.007)	0.506 (0.011)	0.203	0.230
Prop. working age population	0.661 (0.023)	0.653 (0.025)	0.381	0.378
Prop. population with some property title	0.611 (0.103)	0.601 (0.170)	0.854	0.856
Socioeconomic characteristics				
Poverty	0.691 (0.086)	0.810 (0.091)	0.003	0.004
Prop. unemployment	0.046 (0.010)	0.042 (0.011)	0.373	0.372
Prop. illiteracy	0.083 (0.009)	0.071 (0.015)	0.021	0.028
Prop. school drop-out	0.581 (0.047)	0.561 (0.058)	0.354	0.362
Prop. population without cell phone	0.140 (0.031)	0.138 (0.042)	0.859	0.918
Access to basic public services				
Unsatisfactory access	0.181 (0.155)	0.115 (0.112)	0.255	0.224
Construction quality				
Prop. houses built with basic construction materials	0.343 (0.108)	0.318 (0.108)	0.562	0.504

Note: Columns 1 and 2 display the mean of the variable with the standard deviation listed in parentheses for slums with and without elections, respectively. Column 3 displays the p-value from an unequal t-test of the null hypothesis that the mean is not different. Column 4 displays the p-value for Fisher's exact test of independence.

where y_j is the level of public goods in slum j, which I measure as an index that comprises different public goods and services. I create this continuous public goods index using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to combine experts' categorical answers about the quality of the following public goods and services, which could range between *poor* and *excellent*: water access, sanitary sewer, garbage collection, public lighting, storm sewer, and pavement of streets. *Elections$_j$* is a binary indicator indicating whether

slum-level elections were held or not in slum *j*. *Organization$_j$* is the level of organization at the slum level, which I measure using PCA as an index that combines measures on whether slum residents are organized to improve housing conditions, access to public goods and services, or other purposes.*Elections$_j$ X Organization$_j$* is the interactive term between elections and level of organizational activity, which indicates democratic slums with higher organization levels experienced a greater increase in public goods provision than those with lower organization; $\mathbf{X}_j$ is a set of slum-level controls (population size and number of years since the slum's funding); μ denotes commune fixed effects, which capture sub-district specific and time invariant characteristics (such as whether the slum is embedded in a rich/poor neighborhood, the City budget targeted to the commune where the slum is located, commune-level authorities, and approximate geographic distance of the slum to key points in the city)[23]; finally, ε_j is the error term. For all estimates of β, I provide heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. In Table A1 in the Appendix, I present the summary statistics for all the variables included in the main models and robustness checks. Furthermore, also in the Appendix (Section A.2.1), I provide a detailed explanation on how I constructed each measure used in the main models and robustness checks, and the advantages of using PCA over additive indexes.

Table 2 displays the main results. In addition to presenting results for the linear model where the dependent variable is the continuous index of public goods (model 1), I show that results are likely to hold when estimating standard OLS (models 2–4) and linear probability models (LPM, models 5–7) that consider separately each of the components in this measure. In models 2–4, the response variables are categorical variables indicating whether the quality of provision of the following public goods and services was between *poor* and *excellent*: potable water access, disposal of solid waste, garbage collection. In models 5–7, the dependent variables are dichotomous and measure whether slum *j* has or not public lighting, sanitary sewer system, and most of its streets paved. Before interpreting these results, it is important to note that all the models presented in this table are based on the full population of slums and not on a representative sample, and therefore the number of observations is the entire universe of interest.[24]

As proposed by H1, the coefficient of the interaction term between elections and organization is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level and positive in all models except for the linear probability ones where the dependent variables are having or not public lighting (model 5) and paved streets (model 7). In principle, this indicates that the effect of elections on public goods increases as organization levels increase, that is, as communities become more active.

Still, from the interpretation of the constitutive terms and the magnitude and significance of the coefficient of the interaction term it is not possible to infer if elections have a substantively meaningful conditional effect on public goods provision for values of participation other than zero (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006).

Thus, to illustrate the results presented on Table 2, I present graphical evidence.

Fig. 2 shows the marginal effect of slum elections on public goods provision conditional on community organization (model 1) is positive and statistically significant in slums with higher organization levels and zero or negative in slums with low organization levels. For instance, the graph shows that introducing elections in a slum with an organization level of 1.14 (25th percentile) is associated with a decrease of 0.63 points in the public goods index, but associated with improvements in the provision of public goods for slums that have organization levels above the mean value (1.68). Specifically, the introduction elections in a slum with an organization level of 2.41 (75th percentile) is expected to generate an increase of 0.87 points, or half standard deviation, in the public goods index and doing so in a slum with the maximum possible value of organization (3.55) an increase of 2.23 points, that is, almost one and a half standard deviations. These magnitudes are substantively interesting: Elections generate an improvement of 70% in the provision of public goods in slums at the 75th percentile of organization level compared to slums that are at the 25th percentile.

Robustness Checks In the Appendix, on Section A.3.1, I show that all results hold after considering a series of robustness checks. Tables A3 and A4 show results are not sensible to the inclusion/exclusion of covariates. Fig. A3 provides additional graphical evidence in support of models 2–7 on Table 2, which is in line with the results presented on Fig. 2. In addition, I show that the results presented on Table 2 do not change under other model specifications such as logistic and ordered logistic (Table A5) or when changing the measurement technique for the public goods index (Table A6). Finally, I show the main results pass standard sensitivity tests for small samples (Table A7). Specifically, I present p-values from a two-sided randomization inference test of zero treatment effect for any unit. The results hold when using this procedure which has the advantage of providing inference with correct size regardless of the sample size.

6.1. Substantiating the mechanisms

6.1.1. Mechanism 1: Holding slum representatives accountable

I proposed that one of the mechanisms by which slum elections help improve the provision of public goods in contexts where civil society is highly organized is that, in these settings, residents are expected to make larger efforts to hold slum leaders accountable. As an implication, we should observe brokers become more responsive to residents' demands and civil society organizations larger providers of public goods. This section attempts to test the direct individual-level implications of such mechanism. First, if *Mechanism 1* holds, (a) residents in slums with elections should be more likely to perceive and report that their brokers are more responsive to their demands than residents in slums with no elections since the electoral sanctioning mechanism generates more incentives to represent the claims of slum residents to avoid punishment at the polls. Secondly, to further substantiate this mechanism, I exploit differential expectations based on individuals' tendency to participation. Elections, I proposed above, make brokers and leaders of community organizations more responsive. Likewise, organizational linkages that are developed by active participation in community-based organizations provide citizens that participate in them resources to closely monitor the provision of public goods, and most importantly, information about where their claim-making efforts are concentrated. Therefore, elections should make leaders more accountable and likely to demand public goods and participation should make citizens more knowledgeable about these efforts. As a result of these two insights, I expect that (b) participative/active individuals in slums with elections should be

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[23] It would be ideal to account for any unobserved potential confounders at the slum level. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data and the fact that slums are the unit of analysis (Table 2) or that treatment status does not vary within slums (for the individual level analysis in Table 3) precludes the use of slum fixed-effects. I therefore use fixed-effects at the *comuna* level, the administrative district immediately above the slum, a powerful control since there are only around 2.8 slums on average in each *comuna*. The CBA is divided in 15 communes that have political and administrative competence over between one and three of the 48 neighborhoods. Each commune has a president and a board (*junta comunal*) that are elected every four years concurrently with city-level elections.

[24] Note that the question on *garbage collection* was not asked in 6 slums, therefore decreasing the number of observations in model 4 (Table 2) and, as a result, the number of observations in model 1 (Table 2), where the dependent variable the public goods index.

Table 2
Slum Elections, Community Organization, and Public Goods Provision.

	Model 1 Public goods	Model 2 Water access	Model 3 Sanitary sewer	Model 4 Garbage collection	Model 5 Public lighting	Model 6 Storm sewer	Model 7 Paved streets
Elections	−1.994***	0.844	0.218	−0.351**	−0.310	−0.571**	−0.508
	(0.625)	(0.739)	(3.181)	(0.156)	(0.271)	(0.243)	(0.400)
Organization	−0.423*	−0.004	−0.980	−0.076	−0.030	−0.078	−0.049
	(0.226)	(0.071)	(0.755)	(0.055)	(0.101)	(0.057)	(0.079)
Elections X Organization	1.192***	0.237	2.388**	0.280***	0.167	0.191*	0.159
	(0.252)	(0.191)	(1.120)	(0.063)	(0.118)	(0.100)	(0.133)
N	33	39	39	33	39	39	39
R²	0.630	0.412	0.373	0.719	0.432	0.463	0.254
Covariates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Comuna FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	LPM	LPM	LPM

Note: Robust standard errors in parenthesis; *p < .1; **p < .05; ∗ ∗ ∗p < .01.
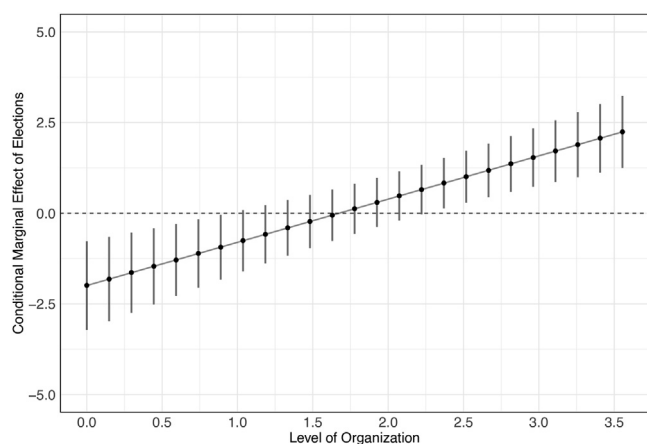
Note: Figure based on model 1, Table 2.

Fig. 2. Marginal Effect of Elections on Public Good Provision at Different Levels of Organization. (*Note:* Figure based on model 1, Table 2.)

more likely to report that organizations are oriented towards public goods provision than equally participative citizens in settings where there are no elections. To examine these implications empirically, I estimate two individual-level models based on the original household survey described on Section 5. I estimate the model in Eq. 2 to test (a) and the one in Eq. 3 to test (b):

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Elections_j + \beta_2 Participation_{ij} + \mathbf{X}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \qquad (2)$$

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Elections_j + \beta_2 Participation_{ij} + \beta_3 Elections_j \ X \ Participation_{ij} + \mathbf{X}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \qquad (3)$$

where $Elections_j$ denotes living in a slum that had elections. $Participation_{ij}$ indicates the level of individual participation in community-based organizations. This measure was constructed using PCA as an index based on the household survey, where respondents were asked whether they participate *frequently*, *sometimes* or *never* in the following: (1) *meetings to discuss the slum's affairs*, (2) *neighborhood associations*, (3) *religious organizations*, (4) *sports clubs*, (5) *ollas populares*, (6) *cooperatives*, and (7) *independent social organizations* that seek community improvement. The control variables included, $\mathbf{X}_{Iij}$, are: gender, age, educational level, whether the respondent has a property title or not, whether the respondent is an immigrant, and the year in which the respondent moved into the slum. In every case I compute standard errors clustered at the slum level (ε_{ij}) and perform a series of robustness checks, including

models that account for the problem of clustered data with few clusters, which I describe below.

I begin by estimating an OLS model where the dependent variable (y_{ij}) is individual perception on how responsive the brokers in their slum are. This variable is measured as a categorical variable indicating the extent to which slum *referentes* are effective at solving slum problems: *not at all*, *to some extent*, *very much*. Then, I estimate another linear model where the dependent variable is individuals' perception on how much organizations have contributed to advancing demands for the provision of specific public goods. I measure this variable by constructing a PCA index based on residents' answer to a set of questions on their perception about the extent to which slum-level organizations have contributed to the improvement in the following public goods since the first election (or in the last couple of years where elections were not celebrated): (1) *connection to electricity*, (2) *connection to gas network*, (3) *infrastructure development of common areas in the slum* (e.g. entrance, meeting points, football field), (4) *social and recreational activities* supported by the state, and (5) *presence of health care facilities* in the slum. In the Appendix, on Section A.2.3, I explain step by step how I constructed each of the measures incorporated in the individual-level analyses.

Table 3 shows evidence in support of *Mechanism 1*. Model 1 confirms that residents in slums with elections are more likely to perceive that their brokers are responsive to the demands of slum residents. Holding everything else constant, living in a slum where representatives are selected via elections increases by 0.41 points (in a scale that ranges between 0 and 2) the chances of perceiving brokers are responsive to the residents' demands. This suggests that, as proposed above, slum elections trigger a new accountability dynamic that improves leaders' responsiveness.

Now I turn to interpreting the results from model 2, where the dependent variable is individuals' perception of whether organizations in their slum have re-oriented towards the improvement in public goods provision. These results can be better interpreted by looking at Fig. 3. Two conclusions emerge from this figure. First, that as expected, in slums where leaders are not selected via elections (right-hand side figure), residents (with diverse levels of participation in community associations) do not perceive that organizations in their slum have moved towards the provision of public goods. Second, that in slums where leaders are selected in elections (left-hand side figure), residents report that organizations have repurposed to help provide public goods. As expected, such effect is larger for those who are more involved in organizations and know how these work first hand. Combined, these two graphs make clear that there are systematic differences in the way in which equally participative individuals, who know first-hand how community-based organizations work, portray the objectives

Table 3
Slum Elections and the Response to Voters' Demands.

	Model 1 Brokers responsive	Model 2 Org. public good providers
Elections	0.412***	0.013
	(0.083)	(0.188)
Participation	0.075***	0.016
	(0.022)	(0.072)
Elections X Participation		0.167**
		(0.082)
N	386	386
R²	0.119	0.077
Covariates	Yes	Yes
Model	OLS	OLS

Note: ∗p < .1; ∗∗p < .05; ∗ ∗ ∗p < .01.

of slum organizations. Whereas those who live in slums with elections report these work toward the provision of public goods, those who live in slums without elections do not. This finding supports *Mechanism 2*: Elections reorient the purposes of organizations towards the provision of public goods.

Robustness Checks In the Appendix, I address a number of concerns about the individual-level analyses presented in this section. The first one is that the small number of clusters might be associated with standard errors that are biased downward, potentially leading to spurious significant effects (Maas and Hox, 2005). To attend this problem, I conduct a series of robustness checks using methods that have been pointed out by the literature as solutions to the problem of small samples and few clusters. As shown in Table A10, the results presented above are robust across a wide variety of methodologies to tackle this problem. For multilevel models (MLMs) (Bell, Morgan, Schoeneberger, Kromrey,& Ferron, 2014; Browne & Draper, 2006; Hox, van de Schoot, & Matthijsse, 2012; Maas & Hox, 2004, 2005) and Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) (Angrist & Pischke, 2008; Cameron, Gelbach, & Miller, 2011) I employ the corresponding small-sample corrections that make them able to maintain the desirable statistical properties with as few as 10 clusters. I use the Kenward-Roger (Kenward & Roger, 1997, 2009), Mancl-DeRouen (Mancl & DeRouen, 2001), and Kauermann-Carroll (Kauermann & Carroll, 2001) corrections.

In addition, I show that the results presented in Table 3 are not sensitive to the inclusion/exclusion of covariates (see Tables A8 and A9); that results from model 1 (Table 3) hold when conducting ordinal logistic regression (see Table A11); and that results from model 2 (see Table 3) maintain after disaggregating the dependent variable into its different components (see Table A12).

6.1.2. Mechanism 2: Emerging leaders and increasing competition

The econometric analyses presented above show that the combination between having both slum elections and a vigorous civil society enables these communities characterized by the practice of clientelism to secure basic goods and services. I presented evidence that one of the mechanisms that partially explains why such combination is beneficial is that the presence of organizational structures, and individuals' organizational experience, facilitate residents' demand and monitoring of public goods provision when they can punish their brokers with their vote, making the latter more responsive. In this section, I develop two qualitative narratives to illustrate *Mechanism 2*: Given the opportunity brought by the introduction of slum elections, more organized civil societies encourage the emergence of new leaders who contribute to skewing political competition around the issue of public goods provision. These qualitative narratives are short stories aimed to illustrate a specific part of the argument by telling personal stories (Bruner, 2004). In this case, I present the stories of the new leaders that emerged in settings of high organizational level after the introduction of elections and the stories of the old brokers that remained in power in settings of low organizational level. These narratives illustrate that slums that had a stronger organizational history before the introduction of slum elections were more likely to produce new leaders that challenged existing brokerage structures once elections were introduced.

To trace the process through which slum elections triggered the emergence of new leaders in contexts of high organizational activity and did not in settings with low organizational activity, I explore the cases of Villa 3 and Villa 20. The selection of these two cases reflects my theoretical objectives. These two slums share a set of characteristics, they both are part of the group that was treated with slum elections, among this group they both have a medium size population, they were populated around the same time, and they are geographic neighbors. However, Villa 3 has a
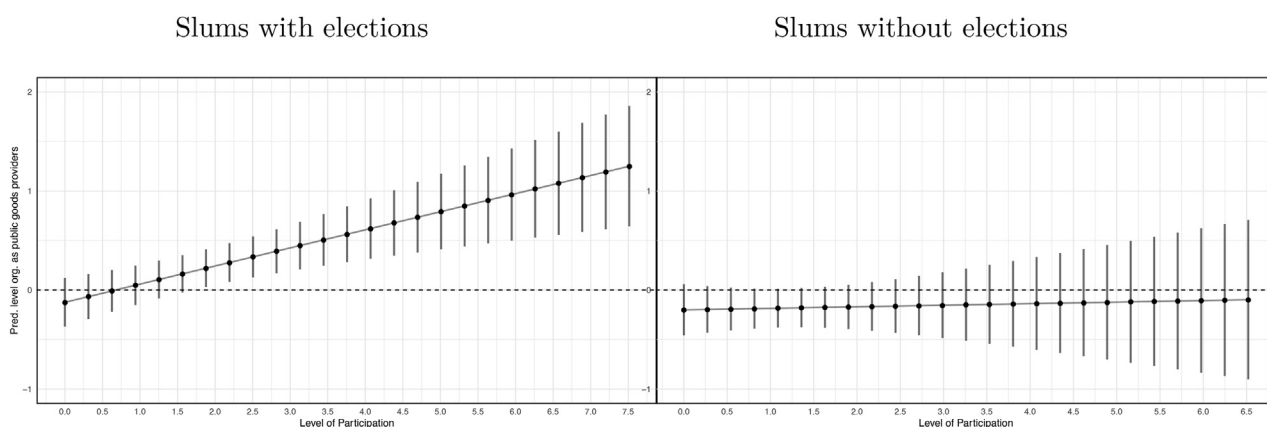
Note: The figure on the left side shows the predicted level of organizations as public goods providers at different levels of participation in slums that were exposed to having slum-level elections. The figure on the right side shows the same for slums that did not have elections. Both figures are based on model 2, Table 3.

Fig. 3. Predicted Contribution of Community Organizations to Public Goods Provision. (*Note:* The figure on the left side shows the predicted level of organizations as public goods providers at different levels of participation in slums that were exposed to having slum-level elections. The figure on the right side shows the same for slums that did not have elections. Both figures are based on model 2, Table 3.)

history of stronger organizational activity than Villa 20. If new leaders are more likely to emerge and credibly compete in contexts where civil society is more organized, this process should be most clearly observed in the case of Villa 3, one of the most organized slums in the CBA with 2.7 organizations every 1,000 inhabitants (Universidad Católica Argentina, 2012). Differently, if elections do not have such effect in settings that are weakly organized, we should observe how competition between existing political brokers and their machines remains unchanged or changes very little as in the case of Villa 20, one of the largest slums in the city but weakly organized compared to others with only 1.1 organization every 1,000 inhabitants (Secretaría de Hábitat e Inclusión Social, 2009). Between these two extremes, in mid-level organization settings we should expect an intermediate situation where a combination between machine competition as usual and the emergence of new community leaders takes place. The latter case is developed in the Appendix on Section A5.

Evidence in this section is drawn from in-depth interviews I conducted with slum residents, brokers, community leaders, and social workers that operate on a daily basis on the field. To reconstruct the organizational and political trajectories of these communities, I also gathered secondary sources, particularly local newspapers. Combined, these pieces of data, provide suggestive evidence in favor of the argument that when elections were introduced, slums that were originally better organized produced new leaders willing to compete in elections, challenging existing historical brokers and thus changing the political dynamics of their communities. Differently, slums that were not highly organized, did not produce new leaderships upon the introduction of elections, and these only formalized the already existing competition between brokers.

6.1.3. Villa 3: High level of organization and the emergence of new leaders

Villa 3 originally emerged in the 1940s when a group of migrants settled in a vacant public plot of land used for garbage disposal in the neighborhood of Villa Soldati. In the 1960s it was the largest slum in the city but it was then evicted during the military dictatorship and, when repopulated in 1984, the original plot was divided into two slums. Currently, it has a medium-size population of 10,643 (2010 National Census) and it is one of the most organized slums: according to the household survey I conducted in 2014, 65% of respondents participate in some type of organizational activity.

The vibrant organizational life of Villa 3 has a long history. In an interview with a resident that participates in an *olla popular*, she explains that most of these organizations emerged as a response of the economic crisis of the late 1980s and early 2000s: "We started in 2001 feeding about 50 families per day, and sometimes even more. You have no idea. Many of us were unemployed and this was a full time job. "[25] This type of initiatives continued flourishing after the 2001 crisis. In a survey conducted in 2011 in this slum, Suárez et al. (2014) found that, before the introduction of elections, there were 28 active slum-based organizations, that is 2.7 per 1,000 inhabitants—the highest density among the slums that were surveyed. According to this survey, the vast majority of these organizations are categorized as public service providers. Specifically, 61% of them were dedicated to providing social assistance (particularly food assistance), education, and the organization of cultural and recreative activities; 14% were engaged in religious activities; and only 10% were engaged in political activities or activities related to labor unions (Suarez et al. 2014).

This broad picture of the organizational life of Villa 3 provides context around the time when slum elections were introduced via judiciary intervention. The 2010 intervention of Villa 3 immediately produced tension between two main groups in the slum. The first one, headed by a group of historical brokers, strongly opposed to it because "judicial action allows the intrusion of people from outside and the imposition of a logic that is against the genuine leadership practices that the slum has historically had."[26] A second group, lead by independent community organizers and residents, instead, backed up the intervention because it guaranteed that the slum leadership would be decided "by votes and not by imposition, threats or intimidations."[27] The tension around this issue was such that the first attempt had to be canceled due to a series of violent events (including the burning of the intervener's trailer where his mobile office operted) that occurred in the previous days of the election and that the media attributed to disputes among historical powerful brokers (Página 12, 2011a).

Elections for slum president and delegates finally took place on March 2011. For the first time, Villa 3 formally elected its representatives. Turnout was high for a first election, 45% of registered voters participated. Seven lists competed in the election and List 10 was elected with 53% of the votes. The second main contender was List 7, which was headed by the historical *puntero* associated with the incumbent government in the city and only achieved 13% of votes, even though according to the neighbors' accounts "it displayed all the weight of the machine" (Página 12, 2011b). The number of contenders in this first election gives us a sense of the extent to which residents unrelated to historical brokers, which had coalesced under List 7, were willing to run in elections to represent their slum.

The winning list described itself as a "front of base organizations [that was] integrated by neighbors from social and political organizations (...) that had not attempted to occupy representative positions in the slum before".[28] Indeed, Rosa, the elected president of the slum, was the leader of a civic organization that helped women who suffered gender-based violence (*Refugio Mujeres Unidas en Acción*), which she founded together with other women from the slum in 2001, more than a decade before slum elections were introduced. This group of women used to work together *cartoneando* (collecting recyclable materials to sell) and later on preparing and selling food at a fair. In that way, they got to know each other and started helping women that suffered gender-based violence until they incorporated their association. In an interview, Rosa explains at the beginning, that part of the money they collected was used to "pay for bus tickets (to go to work) and medicine for women that could not afford it."[29] Later, they grew as they started supporting more women and hence began working closely with lawyers, the state, and NGOs to achieve their mission.

The 2011 election was the first time Rosa and these women who accompanied her jumped into politics. She explains: "discrimination is over. I am Paraguayan, Rosemary [ticket mate] is Bolivian, and the sister [ticket mate] is Argentine. We're women that defend, we put our heart and body, and we represent everyone" (Página, 2012). In another interview she added, "Our neighborhood has been forgotten for a long time. Today we are working to improve water, public lighting and paved streets".[30]

As the slum's priest summarizes, this first election encouraged neighbors other than traditional brokers to (successfully) compete for the representation of the slum. In his words, "I think that in the

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[25] Author's interview with resident from Villa 3 (July 27, 2014). Author's translation.

[26] Author's resident with neighbor from Villa 3 (July 27, 2014). Author's translation.
[27] Author's interview with social worker from Villa 3 (July 18, 2014). Author's translation.
[28] Author's interview with activist from Villa 3 (July 18, 2014). Author's translation.
[29] Interview with Rosa (Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos, 2021).
[30] Interview with Rosa (Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos, 2021).

neighborhood election there was not so much vote buying [...] There were like 5 or 6 lists, all of them very fragile, it's like if I come tomorrow and say 'I want to be president of the slum', I start gathering together people and that's it; it is very but very difficult because all of a sudden all the politicians are talking to you like the representative of the slum and you have to take over the public works that are being carried out [...]."[31]

The emergence of Rosa, a lifelong community organizer, as slum representative suggests that community organizations are a fertile ground where new slum leaders that had no previous partisan connections can emerge from to become the formal representatives of their communities. These organizations, like the *Refugio de Mujeres en Acción*, provide both the organizational experience needed by a candidate and the structure to its candidacy.

6.1.4. Villa 20: Low level of organization and competition between machines

Villa 20 was also first populated in 1948, then evicted during the military dictatorship and populated back again with the return of democracy in 1983. Historically, the organizational activity of Villa 20 has not as dense as in the case of Villa 3. Before elections were introduced, this slum had 1.1 organizations per 1,000 inhabitants (Gobierno de la Ciudad 2009).

For over 20 years, this slum had been "managed" by a single *referente*. He is the owner of a gym in Villa 20, created by a generous donation from a former mayor of the CBA, and has monopolized the linkage between the slum and the state, gaining access to public work contracts, social plans, and other material benefits. "Chancalay", as everyone calls him, is the stereotype of an independent broker. As he explains, he has worked with different parties and governments: "I'm no one's broker. I have always worked with the incumbent because we need to manage resources" (2014).

Everyone knows Chancalay in Villa 20. He has attained some public goods for the slum, such as the football field he inaugurated himself with the vice-mayor of the City and a famous soccer player. But he is also known for his corrupt and clientelistic practices: he has been registered as a municipal state employee and accused of corruption (Diario Ámbito Financiero, 2014a; Diario Ámbito Financiero, 2014b; Diario La, 2014). For more than 20 years Chancalay did not face any real competition within the slum. He was an efficient broker with strong and longstanding ties to politicians at various levels of government, and no credible challenges to his leadership. [32]

However, in Villa 20 the introduction of elections ended Chancalay's monopoly. On June 12 2011, a coalition of existing brokers and community leaders defeated Chancalay by more than 2,000 votes. This coalition was headed by Victor, a *referente* with ties with the national level incumbent party; Reynaldo, the owner of the slum's radio; and Diosnel, an social movement activist.

These three came from different backgrounds and were known in the slum for different reasons. Victor was an old broker fallen on hard times under Chancalay's rule; Reynaldo was known for his work at the radio and his leadership position as a *puntero* within the Bolivian community; and Diosnel for being active in independent social movements. None of them could have defeated Chancalay by themselves. However, the introduction of elections created the opportunity to challenge his monopoly, exploiting their prior experience, diverse reputations and credentials.

People in Villa 20 know that Victor and Chancalay used to work together. "They are the same thing and nothing has changed. (...) The national and the city government put a lot of resources to win

the slum", explains one of the residents.[33] However, many people recognize things are different. The election of new community leaders with no relationship with political parties to occupy seats in the Neighborhood's Committee (*junta vecinal*), all of them active in independent social organizations, is a signal that the political dynamic in the slum is mutating.

In his platform, one of them, Diosnel, proposed to fight for access to quality services, to improve the health center, to remove the car cemetery next to the slum (a source of water contamination), to solve the garbage collection problem, and to fight against drugs. A well known leader in the slum also points out that Diosnel "has campaigned without buying a single vote". But she adds, she would not put her "hands in the fire" for the rest of them.[34] Such mixed feelings about the winning coalition are widespread across the slum. Elections have enhanced competition between the city- and national-level incumbent machines, headed by Chancalay and Victor, respectively. At the same time, they have encouraged new leaders such as Diosnel to get involved in politics, generating hope among neighbors tired of old practices.

These two examples illustrate how when elections are introduced in communities where there are dense organizational structures, new leaders from different backgrounds than those of traditional brokers are more likely to emerge. Given the political opportunity, people like Rosa from Villa 3 run for office against historical brokers putting the distribution of public goods and services at the forefront of their electoral platform. Many of them had no previous linkages with political parties and public officials. Instead, they relied on their reputation and credibility among neighbors because they have been active in different types of civic associations, or have occupied a relevant position in their community. At the same time, where civil society was previously weakly organized, elections became a formal mechanism of competition between existing brokers such as Chancalay and Victor from Villa 20. In the Appendix, on Section A5, I present a third qualitative narrative that illustrates a case of intermediate level of organization and the emergence of a coalition between new leaders and old brokers.

7. Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper suggest that the introduction of formal elections to choose slum representatives can enhance community development by improving access to basic public goods only when slum residents are well organized. In other words, the introduction of elections can serve as a mechanism that helps overcome the low public goods provision equilibrium present in these settings on the condition that there is an active civil society. In such a context, existing organizational structures and individuals' participation experience facilitate, first, collective endeavors to demand and monitor public goods provision, and second, the emergence of new community leaders that skew political competition towards the provision of public goods. These, I find, are necessary conditions for slum-level electoral accountability to work and foster development.

What conclusions can we draw from the experience of elections in urban slums in Argentina? First, that complex accountability relationships between slum brokers and clients are non-stable and could be artificially altered. If my argument holds, giving new electoral incentives to previously informally selected slum brokers can improve the level of responsiveness of the latter. This does not mean that existing informal accountability dynamics

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(Tsai, 2007) that govern these settings will disappear. Slum elections only introduce a formal accountability linkage that overlaps with existing informal ones. Thus, we need to think about accountability relationships between slum leaders and residents as a multidimensional process where formal and informal linkages coexist.

Second, we have to pay attention to the mechanisms through which brokers are selected because, as the case presented here shows, these can have important developmental consequences. Different selection mechanisms may trigger different forms of accountability dynamics at the slum level, leading to divergent development outcomes. Future works should investigate the developmental consequences of other formal and informal ways of selection of brokers other than democratic elections.

Third, political dynamics in urban slums tend to vary over time and space, and hence it is a matter for future investigation to assess if the developmental effects of introducing formal slum elections can be generalized to other contexts and time periods. We know from previous research [e.g.] (Auerbach, 2019; Krishna, 2002; Gay, 1994; Murillo et al., 2021) that the problem of variation in the provision of public goods in slums is widespread across developing democracies with dense urban centers; that clientelistic practices are common in these settings; that brokers are key political actors that intermediate the provision of both public and private goods for these communities; and that the presence of community organization with roots in society beyond political parties (clientelistic or otherwise) is not a unique feature of slums in the CBA. Therefore, I would expect that an intervention like the one studied here, namely the introduction of slum-level elections, can follow a similar path in urban slums in other developing democracies that share these same characteristics. Of course, like in the case of Argentina, for the intervention to work as expected, the state must have sufficient enforcement capacity to implement free and fair elections at the slum level. Although not applicable to all developing democracies, this condition is likely to be prevalent in large developing democracies, such as India, Brazil or Mexico.

Fourth, the results presented in this article speak to policy debates on improving the poor's welfare. Policymakers need to be aware that context matters. Introducing elections in communities where civil society is not organized, or enhancing participation where the electoral mechanisms of leaders' selection are not present, may be empty efforts in settings where clientelistic linkages predominate. If my argument stands across time and space, development programs that simultaneously promote participation and the decentralization of elections down to the slum level might contribute to improving the welfare of slum residents.

Finally, this study has considered only the short-run implications of introducing slum elections. Thus, the question of whether or not the positive effect of elections in settings of high organizational activity remains over time is still open. The expectation is that, compared to a situation where there are no such mechanisms of selection via elections, their continued presence should perpetuate the mechanisms analyzed here and secure a better provision of public goods. However, whether this effect will be larger or, on the contrary, mitigated over time, as the first shock of moving from no elections to their introduction is endogeneized in the political process, and as the actors involved adapt their strategies and resources, is certainly an interesting question for future research to undertake. It could be the case that voters and leaders adapt their strategies to the new environment and converge into traditional clientelistic practices that undermine public goods provision, or that a new accountability dynamic crystallizes, eventually transforming old party brokers into sustainable accountable leaders. Despite this, the findings presented here are an important data point for researchers and policymakers interested in understanding whether and how slum elections help the residents of informal settlements overcome the constraints that prevent them from being receptors of the most basic public goods and services.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105919.

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