BUYING OUT THE POOR?

BOLSA FAMÍLIA & THE 2010 ELECTIONS IN BRAZIL

By: Pui Shen Yoong, April 2011
INTRODUCTION: Bolsa Família

- Conditional Cash Transfer program (CCT)
- Health & education requirements
- 12.6 million families
- 32 – 242 reais per month
A Vote-Buying Strategy?

LUÍZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA
WORKERS’ PARTY (PT)
2002 – 2010
2010 Presidential Elections

From L-R:

Dilma Rousseff
(Worker’s Party, PT)

José Serra
(Social Democratic Party, PSDB)

Marina Silva
(Green Party, PV)

DILMA (PT)  SERRA (PSDB)  MARINA (PV)
RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there a clientelistic relationship between politicians and Bolsa Familia beneficiaries?

→ How does the Bolsa Familia program influence electoral outcomes?
Clientelism

A ‘patron’ of higher socioeconomic status provides protection and benefits to a ‘client’, in exchange for general support and assistance.” (Scott 1972:92)
METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews with 31 female beneficiaries
RESEARCH FINDINGS

1) Unpredictability

“I know that the Bolsa Familia isn’t going to last forever. Nothing does. Now that there is going to be another President – not Lula anymore, but Dilma – *we don’t know if the program will continue or not.*”
2) Continuity over Change

“You have the different political parties – PT, PSDB, etc. Let’s say that PT is in charge of all the projects and plans. If the power shifts from PT to PSDB, everything changes. So for us, we are essentially part of PT. We can say “this candidate is no good,” but if we don’t vote for him, there won’t be Bolsa Familia, there won’t be anything.”
3) Confusion & Distrust

“What would [politicians] do for us? They say, “I’ll continue with Bolsa Familia.” I personally don’t buy it, so I just chose the candidate that I think is best. Some even say that they’ll increase Bolsa Familia. But I don’t vote for them because instead of doing what they say, they’ll do the opposite. So instead of voting for them, I voted for the opposition.”
CONCLUSIONS

- Clientelism or what?

- Beneficiaries’ votes → influenced by perceptions of which candidate will best manage Bolsa Familia.

- Enough to mobilize votes?