

# International Clientelistic Networks and International Fora: The Case of Venezuela at the United Nations General Assembly (1999–2015)

Thales Carvalho, Dawisson Belém Lopes

## Abstract

In this article, we analyze how Venezuela under Hugo Chávez engaged in international clientelism—the exchange of material benefits for political support—to garner political support from several Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries at the United Nations. The instruments for dispensing this patronage were two regional organizations spearheaded by Venezuela—the Bolivarian Alternative for Our American People (ALBA) and PetroCaribe—which provided material support to smaller countries through the sale of oil at preferential prices. We claim that the reach of Caracas’ diplomatic strategy is broader and deeper than that of simple vote-buying tactics as it involved the promotion of structural rather than contingent ties, shielding Venezuela against unfavorable moves in international fora. An empirical test using data for all LAC countries for the years 1999–2015 confirms that clientelistic linkages produced political support for Venezuela at the United Nations General Assembly, while also moving its partners away from the United States inside that institution.

**Keywords:** International Clientelism; Vote-buying; United Nations General Assembly; Venezuela; Latin America and the Caribbean.

This paper was published by Latin American Politics and Society and can be found [here](#).

## Authors

### **Thales Carvalho**

Ph.D. Candidate, Federal University of Minas Gerais  
Email: [thalesleo1@gmail.com](mailto:thalesleo1@gmail.com)

### **Dawisson Belém Lopes**

Professor, Federal University of Minas Gerais  
Postdoctoral Resarcher, University of Oxford

## Suggested Citation

Thales, Carvalho, and Dawisson Belém Lopes. 2021.  
*International Clientelistic Networks: The Case of  
Venezuela at the United Nations General Assembly,  
1999–2015*. IGCC Working Paper No 1.  
[escholarship.org/uc/item/8386c0wr](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8386c0wr)

## Introduction

As international delegates launched the annual round of talks to decide which countries would take the available seats on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in October 2019, Latin American candidates started negotiating in order to secure themselves a place. Besides Brazil, which has the largest territory and population in the region, two other possible candidacies were introduced: Costa Rica's and Venezuela's. In the eyes of the world, it is no secret that San Jose's credentials in the realm of human rights promotion and protection far outweigh Caracas'. Therefore, one could promptly infer, Costa Rica was bound to easily defeat Venezuela and claim this regional representation at the world's highest human rights body. But this did not actually happen (BBC World, 2019).

Despite its domestic political situation, which includes abundant charges of human rights violations and arguably anti-democratic measures taken by president Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela was elected in 2019 for a seat at the UNHRC (BBC World, 2019), garnering 105 votes against Costa Rica's 96. Venezuela's *Chavismo*, a movement first led by former president Hugo Chávez and now by Maduro, has displayed some diplomatic strength, getting support both at the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Another good illustration is the fact that, at the OAS, although most of its members oppose Maduro's government, a resolution passing condemnation of Venezuela's human rights abuses could not be approved because of Caracas' alliance system (Bahar, Piccone, and Trinkunas, 2018).

In spite of the relatively radical nature of Venezuelan foreign policy under Nicolás Maduro and Hugo Chávez (Giacalone, 2013; Corrales and Penfold, 2011), which tends to move states away from the country, Venezuela has enjoyed a high level of political support, which it has achieved through diverse mechanisms, including diplomatic skills and ideological proximity. Chávez adhered, for instance, to the Southern Cone Common Market (Mercosur), increasing Venezuela's partnership with Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, but that didn't come to the detriment of Venezuela's long-established ties with Andean and Caribbean institutions and countries. He also took advantage of a period when left-wing leaders came to office in several countries in the region—the so-called “Left Turn”—thus producing ideological convergences between them to advance common foreign policy views.

---

1 Ph.D. Candidate at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. Visiting Graduate Student at the University of California - San Diego, U.S.

2 Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford, UK.

After all, there was one more grand strategy behind these moves: The cultivation of a robust clientelistic network of international partners. It consists, as we claim in this article, of a structural arrangement built up over the two decades under Chávez's and Maduro's rule, which enables Venezuela to exchange several favors and benefits, be them financial or not, for political support and deference from vulnerable actors, including votes and automatic alignments in international organizations. This network should not be mistaken for episodic, short-lived individual transactions between two or more countries. It involves a long-term link, in which clients become heavily connected and dependent on patrons over time (Nunes, 1997; Veenendaal, 2014).

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, international relations (IR) researchers such as Keohane (1967) and Wittkopf (1973) have studied the vote market in international institutions. Works note that the United States was and still is the most frequent "buyer" inside this market, exchanging money for political support since the Cold War. Afoaku (2000) associates patron-client dynamics with the U.S.-waged campaign to export democracy and human rights to a very heterogeneous set of partners in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa, while conceding that this American stance always lacked coherence and consistency, as Washington seemed "often unprepared for the fall of political clients abroad" (Afoaku, 2000, p. 37).

Another strand of literature sheds light on the American "foreign aid as foreign policy" strategy, that is, the weaponization of loans obtained from multilateral agencies for geopolitical purposes, which was a strategy deployed in Latin America even before the Cold War (Taffet, 2007). G7 countries are also among the most frequent "buyers" in this market, providing foreign aid, trade flows, and money lending from financial institutions to their allies (Dreher and Sturm, 2012). Along the same lines, one case to be further assessed in fuller detail is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was officially launched in the year 2017 and creates financial reliance on Beijing, especially in Africa, where BRI beneficiary countries may take on massive long-term loans to gain economic leverage and bring ambitious infrastructure projects to life (Fang and Nolan, 2019; Mações, 2018).

Still, there arguably is in today's Eurasia one phenomenon, which Obydenkova and Libman (2019) have dubbed "authoritarian regionalism," which alludes to Russia's military maneuvers towards former Soviet republics, namely Ukraine and Georgia, in order to secure unconditional allegiance—or to contain a perceived "westernization" of these countries, thus discouraging any prospective approximation between them and NATO/the European Union. This satellization of minor Eurasian countries is noticeable if one looks into the functioning of regional organizations like the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union. But, again, this is not what the Venezuelan experience is all about.

As former Venezuelan president Chávez took office and became politically stronger during his mandate, he increasingly implemented a “rebel” foreign policy, fiercely criticizing the existing global order. In order to propose alternatives to that order and implement his objectives, he increased the provision of foreign aid and foreign direct investment and used petroleum to get political support for his foreign policy objectives (Giacalone, 2013). Not that this was an entirely original move in the history of Venezuela’s foreign policy. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, oil has played a decisive role in the country’s international positioning. Leaders as diverse as Rómulo Betancourt, Rafael Caldera, and Carlos Andrés Pérez have explored Venezuela’s pivotal place in South America, and reached out to Central American and Caribbean officials in an attempt to project Caracas beyond its territorial limits (Mijares, 2021). But Chávez clearly benefited from the fact that Venezuela has one of the largest oil reserves in the world and the price of this commodity soared during the 2000s. Chávez pursued a position of regional leadership for his country using oil to secure its place (Romero and Mijares, 2016). The former president began to sell petroleum to strategic partners under very special repayment conditions and sponsored policies and projects in these countries (Sanders, 2007; Cusack, 2019; Corrales and Penfold, 2011).

Chávez also developed alternatives to traditional institutions at all levels—domestic, regional, and global. For example, the Bolivarian Alternative for Our American People (ALBA) and PetroCaribe, which was heavily based on Venezuelan oil shipments (Bryan, 2009).<sup>3</sup> Chavistas became valuable partners to several Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, providing benefits to improve their economic situations, given their vulnerabilities. Hence, according to the clientelistic framework, one could expect that the anti-systemic attitudes adopted by Chávez and Maduro were promptly emulated to some degree by Venezuela’s main partners. However, differently from a tit-for-tat dynamic, Chávez’s alternatives consisted of long-term, loyalty-based projects. This is why we posit a clientelistic lens to properly analyze this phenomenon.

This article aims to investigate whether international clientelism was a mechanism through which Venezuela gathered political support from Latin American and Caribbean countries in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). We use votes at this forum as proxy variables to represent foreign policy orientations at large of their member states, and to understand who are their actual international allies (see Bailey, Voeten and Strezhnev, 2015). This article’s main bet is that Chávez’s clientelistic attitudes would increase international political support to Venezuela during the “radicalization” of its foreign policy, a time when the ideological discourse was louder and sharper. Specifically, we expect this support to be more substantial in the main axes of Chávez’s

---

3 It cannot be ignored that before PetroCaribe, there was the San Jose Pact, one instrument through which Venezuela and Mexico articulated their energy capacities to stabilize and influence Central America and the Caribbean. See for instance <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1988/08/02/Mexico-and-Venezuela-renew-San-Jose-Pact/1031586497600/>, accessed on 25 August 2021.

foreign policy: (1) anti-Americanism; (2) sovereignty and self-determination; and (3) the reduction of global asymmetries, translated in both economic and human rights policies. Therefore, we use panel data for all Latin American and Caribbean countries from 1999 to 2015, together with qualitative evidence, to support our claims.

We organize the article as follows. First, we provide an overview of the literature related to vote-buying at the UNGA. While doing so, we propose the operationalization of a concept that seems well suited to account for Venezuelan practices inside international organizations: *international clientelism* (Veenendaal, 2014; Afoaku, 2000). While vote-buying consists basically of a purely transactional “cash for vote” dynamic, clientelistic networks are firmly structured and loyalty-driven, including a variety of potential long-term benefits to would-be partners. Then, we introduce the empirical research design. Third, we proceed to statistical tests, followed by qualitative evidence to support our findings. Finally, we present some concluding remarks.

## The International Market of Foreign Policy Positions: Vote-Buying and International Clientelism

Since the inception of the United Nations, analyzing voting patterns at the UN General Assembly has been the standard tool to infer states’ foreign policy preferences. UNGA is a forum where all the states of the world regularly meet to discuss several matters, from environmental and gender to finance and security. Therefore it provides scholars with “comparable and observable actions taken by many countries at set points in time” (Bailey, Voeten and Strezhnev, 2015, pp. 2), an appropriate proxy to assess states’ preferences at the international level.

While trying to identify causes for states’ international behavior, several authors have identified correlation between voting patterns at the UNGA and the concession of foreign aid—see Keohane (1967), Wittkopf (1973), Dreher *et al.* (2008), Carter and Stone (2012), and Woo and Chung (2017), among others. This phenomenon became widely known in the literature as vote-buying. The mechanism is relatively simple: a country offers (typically financial) benefits to another state, often under a “foreign aid” rubric, in exchange for support in the approval of a relevant resolution (or a set of them). The conditional concession of bilateral foreign aid is not the only UN vote-buying method. Dreher and Sturm (2012) noted that countries that received more non-concessional loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank tended to present higher voting similarity with the G7 countries. Since the G7 countries exert control over decision-making levers at both institutions, it is reasonable to infer that these actors could use their degree of influence to indirectly make both multilateral banks concede money to their allies.

Trade flows are also an indirect tool for UN vote-buying. Keohane (1967), Dreher *et al.* (2008), and Stone (2004) point out that the concession of trade preferences may bring together two (or more) countries. Liberals claim, for example, that greater interdependence could lead to more similar opinions shared about a host of issues. On the other hand, the fear of losing access to markets may prevent a state from adopting some measures. Although higher trade dependence is not necessarily related to more significant political support, it can often be a useful tool to convince one actor to vote according to another's preferences at the UNGA.

These mechanisms are based on richer countries providing money in different forms to the poorer ones to get allies for their primary foreign policy proposes. However, in this article, we intend to go beyond this notion of cash-for-vote. Several Latin American and Caribbean countries are vulnerable in different senses—social, economic, and military, etc. These general weaknesses may give birth to dense clientelistic networks of political support (Stokes, 2011; Kitschelt, 2000). For Martz (1997), this concept still lies at the heart of social practices in modern South American political systems. Although clientelistic practices basically consist of the exchange of material benefits for political support and are not necessarily programmatic—that is to say, they do not have to come attached with ideological or broad interest-based agreements—they will oftentimes involve some degree of allegiance and vassalage (Carvalho, 1997). Clientelistic networks relate to patron-client connections, in which clients will consistently support their patrons to gain certain benefits.<sup>4</sup>

A conceptual note should be introduced regarding this notion. It should be emphasized that the sum of individual transactions involving two or more states is essentially different from a generalized scheme led by a patron country (a relatively powerful state, compared to its partners) to which clients (a group of vulnerable states) become strongly connected and dependent over time. Nunes (1997) even associates clientelism to kinship, but not in a literal connotation. This sense of belongingness, of constituting a family of a kind, a community of fate and value, is arguably the bulk of a traditional clientelistic network, particularly in rural Latin America and the Caribbean (Martz, 1997). Having a long-term partner to mitigate vulnerabilities and protect against potential menaces allegedly is a key component to build in-group confidence and familiarity.

Therefore, clientelism as a concept cannot be mistaken for a much simpler transactional, contingent, vote-buying dynamic. It always is context-based and covers the expectations of there being future, non-immediate interactions between and among the parties. And this thick web of alliances that nurtures a successful diplomatic

---

<sup>4</sup> Veenendaal (2014) uses this concept to refer to international patron-client dynamics, relying mostly on qualitative evidence – interviews with local officials from the South Pacific islands – to make his case. This example hints at the potentials of a nascent research agenda and the need to academically explore other promising cases, countries, and regions across the planet.

operation—we claim in this article—has not failed Venezuela’s Chavismo as yet. Exchanging cash for money—what we call vote-buying—is only one possible way to establish links between “clients” and “support-buyers.” Still, not every transaction of this sort might lead to a clientelistic relationship. As Gonzalez-Ocantos and Oliveros (2019) note, for the domestic level, it may also consist of repeatedly providing services and facilities for those who need it and other advantages in order to get one’s frequent support.

Hence, our operational concept of “international clientelism” can be divided into seven propositions, which, if properly met, will make up a clientelistic link:

*(#1) Country A pursues a particular set of objectives in the international arena. The accomplishment of these objectives depends on political support from other states (especially votes in international fora).*

*(#2) Country A gathers enough resources to afford the pursuit of these objectives in the international scene.*

*(#3) Country A decides to go beyond regular diplomatic negotiations, shared interests, and ideological convergences to get political support in international arenas. It decides to employ its own resources to provide other state(s) with benefits in exchange for political support.*

*(#4) Country B shows vulnerability/weakness in some substantive dimension, or in a given issue area, or in a particular situation.*

*(#5) Country A offers resources to address Country B’s vulnerabilities. The resources may include financial means, the provision of services, and even the building of facilities in Country B—but it is not limited to these options, and must relate to long-term benefits, not only ephemeral ones.*

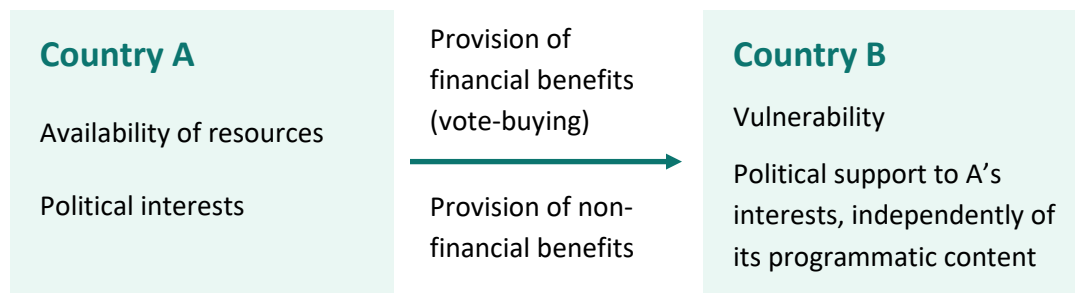
*(#6) Country B increases its political support for Country A in a concrete and consistent way: voting for, and taking sides with Country A’s proposals. It does not depend on specific programmatic convergences. Even if Country B has a right-wing party or leader in power, it could perfectly vote for resolutions in defense of left-wing positions.*

*(#7) The political support from Country A to Country B remains not only for one or two sessions, and not only for a few particular resolutions. They are long-term ties related to Country A’s main foreign policy objectives.*



In Figure 1, we summarize the building up of a clientelistic link between any two countries. These links can simultaneously reach several countries, thus transforming these bilateral connections into a far-reaching and deeply-rooted clientelistic network.

**Figure 1.** Building a clientelistic link between two countries



*Source: Own elaboration*

Considering the particular strategy Hugo Chávez put forth, especially in providing oil and other facilities to LAC countries, and this theoretical argument, three hypotheses stem regarding the Venezuelan action in the region:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Members of the Venezuelan clientelistic network will vote more similarly with the country than non-members.*

If increased political support is the main objective of building up a clientelistic network, then one could expect LAC countries that received advantages from Venezuela to present a more similar voting behavior with their patron after receiving the related benefits.

**Hypothesis 2:** *This voting similarity will predominantly occur with regard to leading Venezuelan foreign policy topics.*

As we mentioned before, one of the main conditions for a country to engage in creating a clientelistic network is the existence of foreign policy objectives that can only be achieved through foreign support. Therefore, if our theoretical bid is correct, the network will be built over key values for the patron and, as a consequence, an increased voting similarity among the patron and its clients will be observed in these topics. In the case of Venezuela, as already stated, these issues are supposed to be: (1) Anti-Americanism; (2) Sovereignty and self-determination; and (3) The reduction of global asymmetries, translated in both economic and human rights policies.

**Hypothesis 3:** *Clientelistic networks work primarily for vulnerable countries.*

The provision of benefits in exchange for foreign policy support tends not to work with larger and richer countries because the offers tend not to be attractive. In contrast, vulnerable countries, especially in the economic sense, will adhere to clientelistic networks, as there is a promise to address their vulnerabilities.

Before proceeding to empirical tests, we cannot ignore our main alternative hypothesis. While Chávez was establishing his clientelistic network in the region, left-wing leaders were taking office in several LAC countries—the former Venezuelan president was part of this group, being the first to be elected in the region (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). Potrafke (2009), Amorim Neto and Malamud (2015), and Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2015) perceived that the political orientation of the head of government influences a country's voting behavior at the UNGA. According to these authors, when it comes to foreign policy positions, left-wing governments, especially in Latin America, have moved away from the United States over the years.

Riggirozzi and Grugel (2015), Merke, Reynoso, and Schenoni (2020), and Wiesehomeier and Doyle (2012) note that changes in foreign policy behavior in Latin American countries under left-wing presidents also included supporting the reduction of inequalities worldwide, the criticism of liberal institutions, and a renewed discourse with an emphasis on national sovereignty. These claims are similar to those aforementioned Chávez's foreign policy principles, even if not displaying the same level of intensity and virulence—authors such as Levitsky and Roberts (2011) and Castañeda (2006) consider the Chavistas too radical, as compared to other left-wing leaders. If this is so, the “Left Turn” in the region leads us to the following alternative hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 4: Latin America's Left Turn triggered more similarity in foreign policies between Venezuela and Latin American countries with left-wing governments in office, mostly due to their ideological convergences.***

## Empirical Strategy

We rely on a database containing information for all Latin American and Caribbean countries from 1999 (the first year of Hugo Chávez in office) to 2015. We utilize a three-step methodology to empirically test our theory. First, we run panel data analysis in order to identify the effects of our proposed mechanism: international clientelism. This first step intends to show that Venezuela was able to gather political support for Hugo Chávez's foreign policy through clientelistic means (hypothesis 1), as well as to test the alternative hypothesis (hypothesis 4). As we are talking about a clientelistic network, we also provide further evidence using network analysis. In the second step, we test for hypothesis 3 using logistic regressions to assess the role of vulnerabilities in allowing for countries' adherence to the Venezuelan clientelistic network. Finally, we use panel data to investigate our hypothesis 2. Summary statistics and robustness checks are available in Supplementary Materials.

### Dependent Variable

We assess foreign policy positions from LAC states by evaluating the voting similarity between Venezuela and these countries in each year as the dependent variable, either overall or by issue areas. We rely on Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten's (2009) database, updated in 2020, containing votes for all countries at the UNGA since 1946. The voting agreement was calculated using Thacker's (1999) procedure. For every resolution, we attributed score +1 when Venezuela and a LAC country voted in the same way, 0 when they disagreed over a resolution, and +0.5 when one of them abstained. Absences were not considered because, as Voeten (2013) notes, they tend not to be related to foreign policy preferences but with other factors beyond their control, such as civil wars and/or the temporary lack of government. Then, we summed the scores for all resolutions of each country in a year and divided the result by the annual number of resolutions.

### Key Independent Variable

As we cited above, Hugo Chávez proposed at least two Venezuelan-led alternatives to existing multilateral institutions in order to implement his foreign policy objectives: ALBA in 2004, and PetroCaribe in 2005. These institutions were based on a 'solidarity mechanism,' in which each member should provide what they could and receive what they needed. As both of them involved the exchange of benefits provided by Venezuela, which would be the "paymaster" in the two cases (Giacalone, 2013), these institutional alternatives provide us with a useful option to assess membership in the analyzed clientelistic network in an objective and comparable way.

The first of these institutions was ALBA. It included financial aid and cooperation involving oil from Venezuela, while other governments provided what they could—Cuba, for example, contributed with health services and goods. However, we cannot consider ALBA membership a determining condition for the membership in the Venezuelan clientelistic network because, despite the exchange of benefits, it also had a strong ideological component. ALBA members were supposed to agree and manifest alignment with Chávez’s “21<sup>st</sup> century socialism” and were, essentially, left-wing governments (Cusack, 2019; Belém Lopes, Faria, 2016; Raby, 2011; Girvan, 2011). Thus, as we cannot accurately identify the mechanism operating behind ALBA, we may not consider it as a treatment variable but rather as a control variable, containing a hybrid mechanism, combining ideology and clientelism.

The same does not apply to PetroCaribe. It consisted of a mechanism through which special conditions were provided for its signatories to buy Venezuelan oil and petroleum products. PetroCaribe also included energy projects in signatory countries financed by Chávez’s and Maduro’s governments (Sanders, 2007). The agreement offered two primary benefits to its signatories: (a) cheap credit and advantageous conditions to acquire Venezuelan oil, with the possibility to finance around 40 percent of oil shipments for 25 years, with an interest rate that was below market value (1 percent per annum). It could also be repaid with other means, such as food and medical services (Cusack 2019; Giacalone, 2013); and (b) funding for development initiatives in these countries, by allowing PetroCaribe members to invest in projects with “social purpose,” especially with the money they would not spend acquiring oil because of such special conditions. In addition, Venezuela would arguably provide money for some projects in those countries (Cusack 2019; Giacalone, 2013).

While ALBA had an underlying ideological component, PetroCaribe did not. It was first offered to all LAC countries (under the rubric PetroAmérica), and, at the end of the day, was only accepted by the Caribbean and Central American countries. One cannot claim that signing PetroCaribe was a reward for political support since the mechanism was offered to the entire region. Contrary to ALBA, non-left-wing governments such as Belize, Grenada (under Tillman Thomas), and Honduras (under Porfirio Sosa) also joined the PetroCaribe agreement. In Figure 2, we present countries that joined these institutions—some of them joined both institutions later, while others left them before 2015.

**Figure 2.** ALBA and PetroCaribe Membership



*Source: Own elaboration*

Therefore, we use PetroCaribe membership each year to assess whether countries belonged to a Venezuelan clientelistic network. It is a dummy variable—countries can be members (1) or non-members (0) for each year under assessment. ALBA, considered here a control variable because of its hybrid mechanism, has received the same score attribution treatment. Finally, we considered PetroCaribe members those countries that signed the agreement<sup>5</sup> and received Venezuelan oil at any moment. In order to identify oil shipments within the agreement’s umbrella, we relied on annual official reports from *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A*<sup>6</sup> (PDVSA).

## Control Variables

Together with ALBA membership, which received the same codification procedure as PetroCaribe, we control for variables based on the literature as conditioners of voting in the UNGA. First, as we presented earlier, the United States remains an important actor in the vote-buying market, making it essential to control for this variable (Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele, 2008; Alesina and Dollar, 2000). As we expect Venezuela to gather political support against the U.S., we can also expect that American action in this market moved LAC countries away from the Chavistas.

We assess the U.S. action in three ways, following the vote-buying literature (Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele, 2008; Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2013). First, we measure each country’s trade flow with the U.S. We look for the log of both imports and exports (respectively coded as *logusimport* and *logusexport*). Data were obtained from the United States Census Bureau. We also test the American foreign aid effect, based on the log of values committed by the U.S. government, instead of actual disbursements—coded as *logusaid*. We made this option because a promised value may not be delivered to a country as a punishment for disagreement over some topical question. It could eschew the estimation since the amount received would be a consequence of one’s voting behavior, not its actual cause. Data can be retrieved from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

According to Dreher *et al.* (2008), more democratic nations are likelier to follow the U.S. recommendations in the Assembly. The authors adopt the Freedom House index of democracy, based on civil liberty and political rights, to infer how democratic a state is. Considering such a Western approach (based on the notion of liberal representative democracy), we assume that countries with a higher score are more similar to the U.S. on political grounds. Consequently, they tend to support Washington in foreign policy

---

5 We considered the date each country signed the agreement. Also, despite being signatories, the Bahamas, Saint Lucia and Guatemala did not actually join this institution; none of them subsidized oil shipments, according to the PDVSA reports. Thus, we consider them as non-members of PetroCaribe.

6 Available at [http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6538&Itemid=1186&lang=es](http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6538&Itemid=1186&lang=es) on 25 August 2021.

moves. We also used Freedom House's Freedom in the World Index and coded it as *dem* (Freedom House, 2019). Lower counts flag countries as more democratic than the average.

We also test for the alternative hypothesis: left-wing governments tended to present higher voting similarities with Chávez's Venezuela (Potrafke, 2009; Amorim Neto and Malamud, 2015; Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten, 2015). Lacking a classification that includes all the Latin American and Caribbean governments in the analyzed period, in order to objectively identify the ideologies behind each government, we considered as left-wing the presidents and prime ministers whose parties were members of the *Foro de São Paulo* or the Progressive Alliance in each year, considering that these organizations include all Latin American associations often mentioned by scholars who study the Left Turn (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Ruggirozzi and Grugel, 2015; Castañeda, 2006).

This criterion may not perfectly fit most parties in the Caribbean since there is not just "one left" in LAC countries. Left-wing organizations in these countries have very different trajectories, especially when we consider that these are long-lasting movements, originated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rooted in race and colonial struggles (most of these states would only become independent during the 1960s, 1970s, or even the 1980s). Therefore, to better classify parties from these nations, we rely on Mars's (1998) classification of political parties in the region. The variable was coded as *polori* and consists of a dummy variable: governments that met these requisites were considered to be leftist and received a score +1. The others were given score 0. Summary statistics for all variables are available in the manuscript appendix, as well as a detailed description of the codification of the political orientation.

Finally, Dreher *et al.* (2008), Dreher and Jensen (2013), Flores-Macías and Kreps (2013), and Amorim Neto and Malamud (2015) note that state capabilities, especially the economic ones, may affect their voting behavior—which matches hypothesis 3. However, controlling for the country's size is harder because we use models in which time-invariant variables are not useful, and capabilities vary too little over fifteen years in LAC countries, except for the economic ones. We included GDP as a control in our models to better address it, using data from the World Bank, coded as *loggdp*. While testing for hypothesis 3, we also relied on each country's population size (*logtpop*) and oil rents, as a percentage of the GDP (*oilrent*). Both of them were also attained from the World Bank. Finally, as we are dealing with a period in which oil prices skyrocketed, we also control for this variable using data retrieved from *Our World in Data*. Detailed variables, codes, and sources are available in the Supplementary Material.

## Results

### Did membership in the Venezuelan clientelistic network lead to an increased voting similarity at the UNGA?

We begin by testing hypothesis 1—meaning that the membership in the Venezuelan clientelistic network, proxied by the variable PetroCaribe, is expected to deliver greater voting similarity with Venezuela since the year 1999. In this section, we also tested for the alternative hypothesis (hypothesis 4)—that ideological similarities should lead to more voting convergence. Descriptive evidence, available in Figure 3<sup>7</sup>, provides empirical support to both claims.

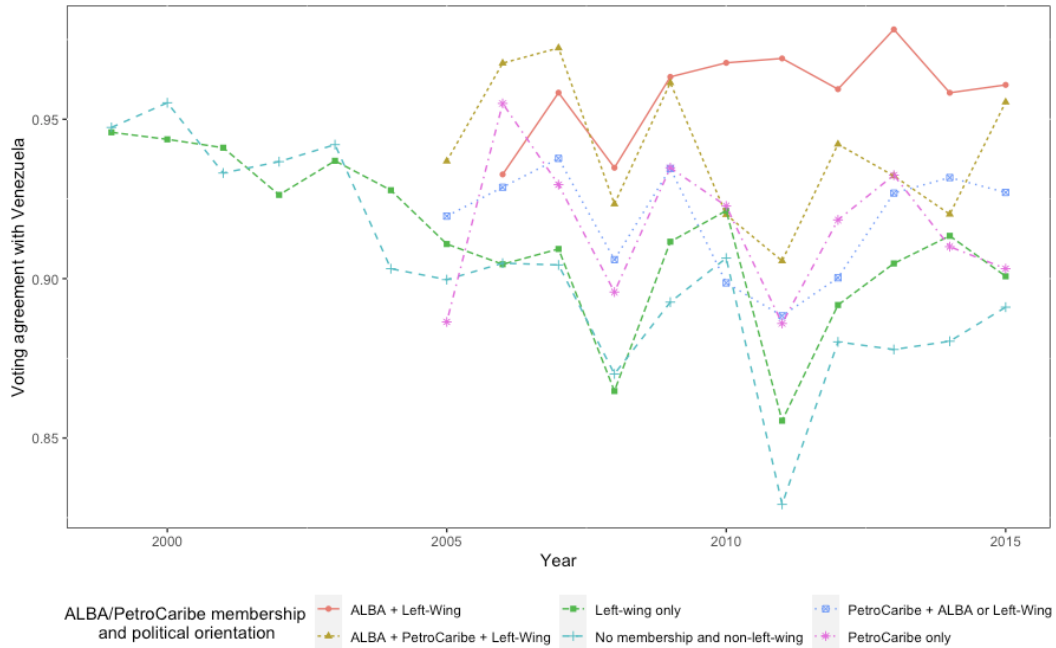
As we can see, as Chávez’s foreign policy became more radical during the 2000s, there was a general trend to reduce voting similarities between LAC countries and Venezuela. Considering that, we can observe that both PetroCaribe signatories and left-wing countries were the ones that voted more similarly to Venezuela since then, as well as those ALBA members. To say it in other words, within a context of increasing voting divergence between LAC countries and Chávez’s government, political orientation and membership in Venezuela-led institutions seemed to play a role in reducing these disagreements. It reinforces the idea that both hypotheses tend to be correct. Also, Figure 3 suggests that one mechanism (ideology or clientelism) does not depend on the other to work. Both PetroCaribe members with non-left-wing governments, and PetroCaribe non-members ruled by left-wing leaders voted more similarly to Venezuela than those which do not present any of these characteristics. We can also observe that (1) while looking only at left-wing governments, PetroCaribe members presented increased voting similarity to Venezuela, and (2) the same applies to non-left-wing governments.

---

7 Points represent the mean voting agreement with Venezuela for each group (considering ALBA/PetroCaribe membership and political orientation) in each year.



**Figure 3.** Latin American and Caribbean Countries' Voting Agreement With Venezuela, 1999–2015 (according to the means regarding political orientation and Venezuelan-led institutions' membership)



*Source: The authors, based on Voeten, Bailey, and Strezhnev (2009) data*

These descriptive findings are confirmed by Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) models, including fixed-effects<sup>8</sup> for countries and years, with voting similarity with Venezuela as the dependent variable. Results are available in Table 1. PetroCaribe effects proved to be significant whatever the specification is. In Model 2, we control for the political orientation and membership to ALBA. As we expected, left-wing governments tended to move LAC countries closer to Venezuela. Also, both ALBA and PetroCaribe produced significant effects. These results, which were corroborated by all models, provide strong evidence for both hypotheses 1 and 4. As ideology and international clientelism are not mutually exclusive mechanisms, we can accept both hypotheses.

<sup>8</sup> Results from Hausman Tests showed that fixed-effects models work better for this analysis than random-effects models.

**Table 1.** Effects of Venezuelan Clientelistic Links on Voting Agreement With Venezuela

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Voting Agreement with Venezuela						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
PETROCAR IBE	0.026**	0.020***	0.033***	0.025***	0.025***	0.031***	-0.005
	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.013)
oil_price							-0.001***
							(0.0001)
polori		0.017***		0.020***	0.020***	0.022***	0.019***
		(0.006)		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
ALBA		0.028**		0.022*	0.026***	0.023*	0.022*
		(0.012)		(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.012)
logusimport			0.005	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.006
			(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
logusexport			0.011*	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.007
			(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)
logusaid			-0.006*	-0.005	-0.004	-0.005	-0.004
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
dem			-0.004	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.004
			(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
loggdp			-0.013	-0.020	-0.020	-0.019	-0.021
			(0.047)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.030)
PETROCAR IBE:ALBA					-0.006		
					(0.019)		
PETROCAR IBE:polori						-0.009	
						(0.009)	

PETROCARIBE:oil_price							0.0003** (0.0001)
Observations	544	544	471	471	471	471	471
R <sup>2</sup>	0.047	0.141	0.067	0.150	0.150	0.152	0.250
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.046	0.053	-0.047	0.042	0.040	0.042	0.178
F Statistic	24.192*** (df = 1; 495)	26.867*** (df = 3; 493)	4.988*** (df = 6; 419)	9.193*** (df = 8; 417)	8.171*** (df = 9; 416)	8.293*** (df = 9; 416)	14.307*** (df = 10; 429)
Note:	Robust standard errors are in parentheses, clustered by country. Models 1 to 6 include country and year fixed-effects. Model 7 include only country-fixed effects, because oil prices is a unit-invariant variable. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01						

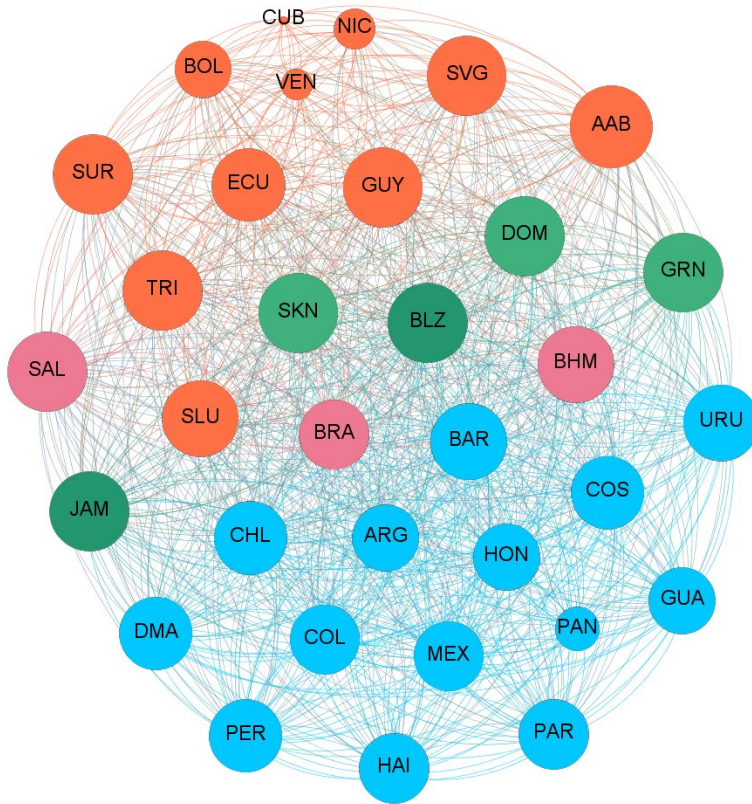
As for Model 3, we control for economic relations with the United States, the political regime, and economic development over time. Exports to the U.S. and the foreign aid provided by the great power proved to be a significant factor, moving LAC countries away from Venezuela—and probably closer to the United States. In Model 4, we use all variables, while in Models 5 and 6, we included interactions between PetroCaribe and ALBA, and PetroCaribe and the political orientation variable, respectively. Results show that the agreement effectively produced political support for the Chavistas, independently of the recipient’s ideology. In other words, ideology and clientelism are not mutually excluding mechanisms and can even work in tandem.

Finally, in Model 7, we substitute year fixed-effects for the yearly average price for the oil barrel and interact it with PetroCaribe membership. When we look only at the oil prices, results show that the higher the value, the lesser the voting similarity between LAC countries and Venezuela. This is expected because, at the same time this value skyrocketed, *Chavistas* were adopting a radical foreign policy, consequently different from all others’ regular practices. However, results also show that, as these prices rose, signing PetroCaribe led countries to a greater voting convergence with Venezuela than the convergence found with non-signatories, thus providing more evidence for hypothesis 1. These results are all supported by the robustness checks available in the Supplementary Material.

The Venezuelan clientelistic network can also be observed while relying on a network approach, as we show in Figure 4. We applied a descriptive network analysis, intending to provide evidence that clientelistic practices gave place to a real network of clients based on Venezuela's Chavismo. Each country is represented as a node—a vertex, that is to say, a point in the network—and, when they agreed with each other above an established threshold, they would become connected by edges, lines linking nodes (Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Newman, 2010). As Venezuela is the case study of this article, we mobilized the median of the agreement score between LAC countries and Venezuelan governments from 2008 to 2015 as a threshold to determine the existence of edges between two nodes—which was precisely 0.8959. Whenever the voting agreement between two states was equal to or higher than this value, we considered them connected in the network.

We considered the period from 2008 to 2015 to provide a sufficiently good depiction of this phenomenon. During this time window, almost all PetroCaribe members had already signed the agreement and received subsidized oil shipments, making it arguable that vote-buying was in progress. Then, we considered the mean agreement score between each dyad (made up of LAC countries) for the timeframe of this analysis, using Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey's (2009) data. We used two network statistics in the graph that allowed us to meet the conditions in order to reach our conclusions. The first one concerns the degree of a vertex, applied to the size of each node. According to Newman (2010, pp. 9), "the degree of a vertex in a network is the number of edges attached to it." Therefore, the greater the node, the larger the set of countries that presented a voting similarity of at least 89.59 percent, considering the stock of UNGA resolutions. The second one was modularity, as applied to the color of each node. Modularity indicates particular divisions within networks by comparing the actual number of existing edges within groups with an expected number within simulated networks with random edges. Based on these measures, we can statistically assess group divisions in the network under analysis (Newman, 2006; 2010). Therefore, node colors represent belongingness to specific groups. Results are available in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** A Network of Voting Agreement Between LAC countries (2008–2015)



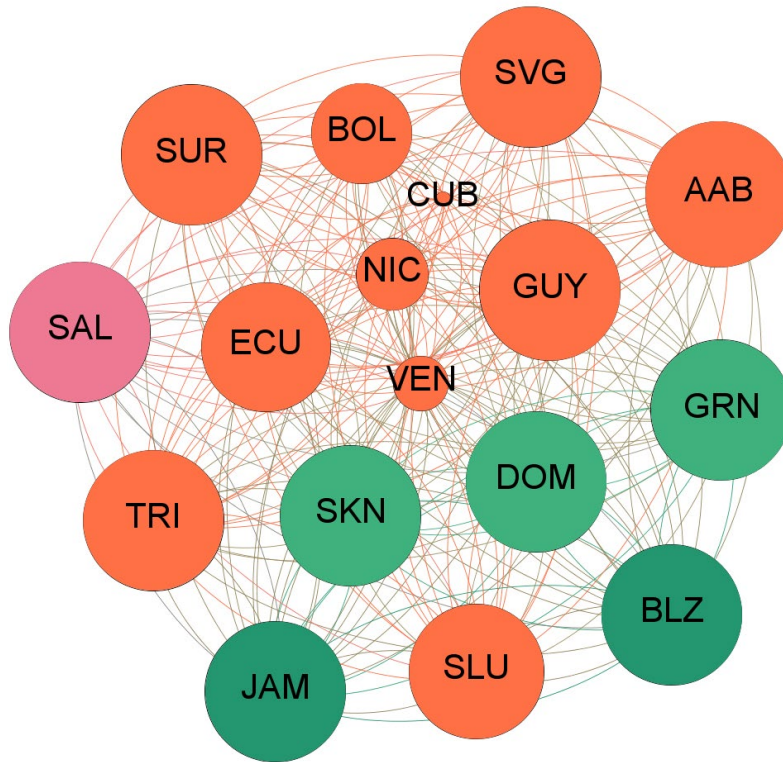
*Source: Own elaboration, based on Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey's (2009) data*

One can promptly infer that more radical left-wing governments—Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Castañeda, 2006)—displayed a lower degree as compared to other nodes. It stresses the fact that fewer states tended to agree with states that adopted radical postures on UNGA resolutions. This network suggests the existence of five groups: one that is relatively apart from Venezuela (in blue), one comprising close Venezuelan supporters (in orange), and three middle-ground groups (represented in green and pink). The clientelistic network might include member countries from the latter four groups.

The Venezuelan ego-centered network allows for a more accurate diagnosis. We present it in Figure 5—maintaining the same node sizes and colors as in Figure 3. First, there was a group based on ideological support for Chavistas including Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. Second, there was another group in which support was based on clientelistic instruments, made up of Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname. We acknowledge that some of them had left-wing governments in offices and even some of Chávez's sympathizers, such as Saint

Vincent and the Grenadines. However, as we have shown in our previous section, ideological convergences do not nullify the effect of clientelism, allowing us to infer that this was the clientelistic network built by Hugo Chávez's (and eventually Nicolás Maduro's) Venezuela paying dividends.

**Figure 5.** Venezuelan Ego-Centered Network



*Source: Own elaboration, based on Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey's (2009) data*

Therefore, we can affirm that both ideological convergences and international clientelism were significant mechanisms to produce political support for Venezuela, and even that the latter gave birth to a network of Chávez's and Maduro's clients. In other words, we can consider hypotheses 1 and 4 corroborated. Within the context of decreasing agreement between LAC countries and Chavistas, mostly due to radical foreign policy measures implemented by Caracas, each of these instruments helped to maintain voting coincidence between Venezuela and LAC countries at the UNGA by around two percentage points higher than the expected.

## Did vulnerability play a role in the construction of the Venezuelan clientelistic network?

Descriptive statistics provide evidence for hypothesis 3—that is, greater state vulnerability leads to increased efficiency of the clientelistic network. As we show in this manuscript’s Supplementary Materials, 15 out of the 20 smallest LAC economies in the region adhered to at least one of the Venezuelan cooperative schemes between 2004 and 2015. On the other side, when one takes the other 12 largest economies, only three effectively joined<sup>9</sup> at least one of these arrangements: Cuba and Ecuador, which had radical left-wing governments at the time, and the Dominican Republic, which was also ruled by a left-wing president (Levitsky; Roberts, 2011). Preliminary evidence shows that vulnerability led the poorer countries in the region to adhere to Venezuelan-led institutions.

This argument is corroborated by the logistic regression models in Table 2. We used data from 2005 to 2015 because both institutions—ALBA and PetroCaribe—did not exist before this time period. We also ran separate tests for a subsample, including only the Central American and the Caribbean states. As our objective was to provide cross-sectional evidence about the role of vulnerability, we did not use fixed-effects. Results show that as states’ GDPs are higher, the probability of them adhering to either ALBA or PetroCaribe decreases. Oil rents seemed not to have effects over the admission to either institution, while the size of the population unexpectedly seemed to play a role regarding PetroCaribe. In the end, the link between vulnerability and adherence to the Venezuelan clientelistic network was corroborated. In order to provide an additional test for it, we also ran models interacting the log of the GDP with the political orientation of each government in the region. Its predicted effects are available in Figure 6.

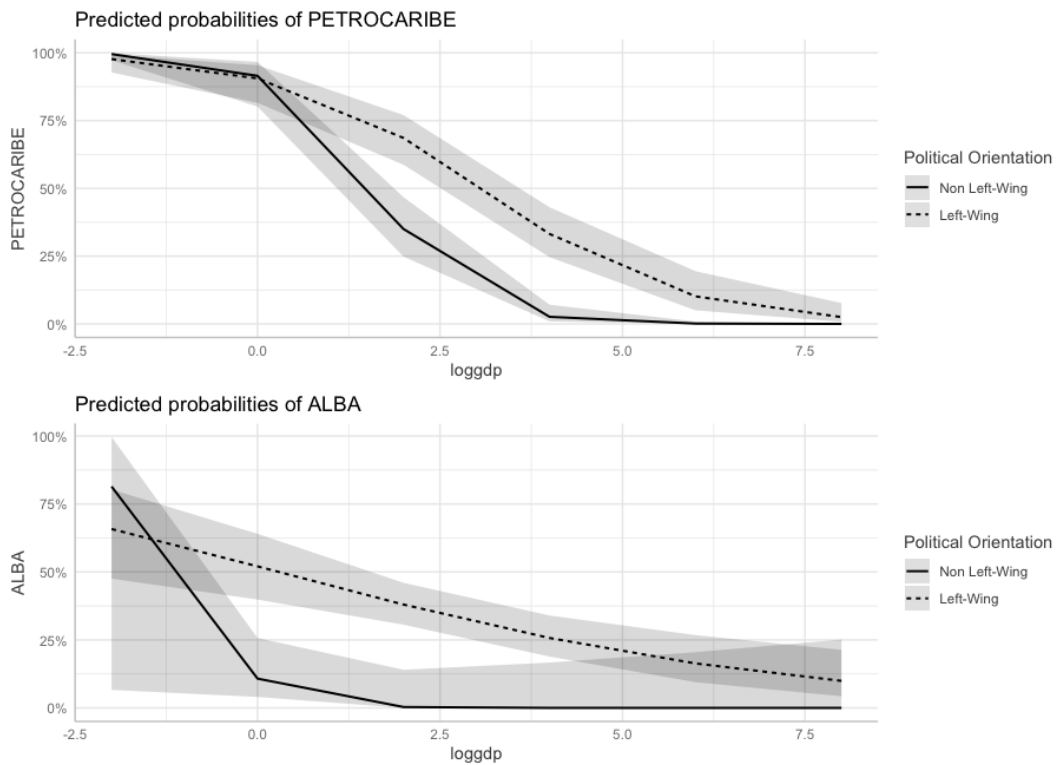
**Table 2.** Effects of Vulnerability on Adhering to PetroCaribe and ALBA

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	PetroCaribe		ALBA	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
loggdp	-1.731*** (0.236)	-1.696*** (0.276)	-1.271*** (0.248)	-0.582* (0.309)
oilrent	-0.044 (0.049)	0.083 (0.063)	0.108*** (0.041)	-0.170 (0.122)
logtpop	0.795***	0.989***	0.865***	0.370

<sup>9</sup> By “effectively joined”, we imply that these countries signed at least one of the agreements and received at least one oil shipment from Venezuela, as a consequence of these agreements.

	(0.186)	(0.214)	(0.207)	(0.237)
Constant	3.498***	3.530***	0.775*	-0.407
	(0.467)	(0.538)	(0.432)	(0.553)
Sample	Full	Central America and the Caribbean	Full	Central America and the Caribbean
Observations	352	231	352	231
Log Likelihood	-152.620	-128.752	-148.001	-102.539
Akaike Inf. Crit.	313.240	265.504	304.003	213.078
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

**Figure 6.** Marginal Effects of GDP on the Probability of Becoming A Member of ALBA and PetroCaribe



Source: Own elaboration



Results fitted in our theory and provided more evidence for hypothesis 2. Regarding PetroCaribe, when we look at the poorer countries, the probability of them signing the agreement is near 100 percent, regardless of the government's political orientation. Ideology will only play a role with medium-income states, while richer states will not adhere to the institution. Economic vulnerability is thus a valuable condition to understand PetroCaribe membership. In the case of ALBA, the economic vulnerability will play a role in the case of the poorest countries. However, as GDP increases, adherence to the institution will be conditioned on the existence of a left-wing leadership. The “hybrid mechanism” behind ALBA—partly ideological, partly clientelistic—can thus be inferred. Therefore, we consider hypothesis 3 to be corroborated. Vulnerability was a key driver of the Venezuelan clientelistic network, in the sense that low GDPs produced higher probabilities to sign the agreement and, as we presented in the last section, led to increased voting similarity with the patron.

### **Was the increased political support related to the main Venezuelan foreign policy topics?**

Finally, we provide evidence for hypothesis 2—that is, the increased political support provided by the Venezuelan clients was centered on the leading Venezuelan foreign policy topics. In Table 3, we disaggregate voting behavior in specific thematic areas as per Voeten, Bailey, and Strezhnev’s (2009) classification in six different contents: human rights, economic development, colonialism, the Palestinian conflict, nuclear materials (including nuclear weapons), and arms control and disarmament<sup>10</sup>. We also estimate the effect of Venezuelan practices for a voting alignment on resolutions considered important by the U.S. State Department. We use OLS regressions with country and year fixed-effects in all models.

When we disaggregate votes by thematic areas, one can observe some interesting additional findings. U.S. economic influence tends to have almost no impact in separate thematic areas. The only perceived effect was the one that U.S. foreign aid provision had in moving countries away from Venezuela on resolutions considered priorities according to the U.S. State Department. Also, we can perceive that the less democratic or the more prosperous a country becomes, the more it goes away from Venezuela’s pattern when colonialism is concerned. In contrast, richer countries voted more similarly to Chavistas in economic development issues, suggesting that wealthier countries uphold a different economic system.

---

<sup>10</sup> Robustness checks are available in the Supplementary Material.

Left-wing countries voted more similarly to Venezuela in resolutions connected to human rights, colonialism, and the Palestinian conflict, as well as in those considered to be important by the U.S. As we already mentioned, this is expected to be connected with foreign policy changes in Latin America during the Left Turn (Belém Lopes and Faria, 2016; Riggiozzi and Grugel, 2015). ALBA members tended to present increased voting coincidence with Chavistas on human rights, economic development, and matters important for the U.S., which also meets our expectations regarding the coexistence of ideological and financial interests to drive countries' choices.

Finally, results provide strong evidence for our hypothesis 2. PetroCaribe drove its members closer to Venezuela in priority areas of Chávez's foreign policy: socioeconomic asymmetries (human rights and economic development), sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples (colonialism and the Palestinian conflict) and the American hegemony in the world (important resolutions for the U.S.). On the other side, although the agreement in Arms Control resolutions showed statistical significance in Model 6, it was not sustained in our robustness checks, as in the case of Nuclear Matters. It was an expected outcome because, as we discussed in previous sections, these two areas did not appear as priorities of Chávez's foreign policy.

**Table 3.** Effects of Venezuelan Clientelistic Links On LAC Countries' Voting Agreement with Venezuela at the UNGA by Thematic Area

<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
	Human Rights	Economic Development	Colonialism	Palestinian Conflict	Nuclear Matters	Arms control/International Disarmament	Important resolutions for the U.S.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
PETROCARIBE	0.043***	0.020***	0.026***	0.038**	-0.010	-0.014	0.094***
	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.025)
ALBA	0.053***	0.045***	0.003	-0.002	-0.001	0.011	0.097**
	(0.020)	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.040)
Polori	0.033**	0.005	0.016*	0.055***	0.004	0.005	0.059***
	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.019)

logusimport	0.001 (0.013)	0.010 (0.006)	0.006 (0.009)	0.005 (0.017)	0.004 (0.005)	0.0003 (0.006)	0.023 (0.016)
logusexport	0.011 (0.013)	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.012 (0.011)	-0.028 (0.031)	0.008 (0.008)	0.006 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.021)
logusaid	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.011)	0.0003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.013** (0.006)
Dem	-0.005 (0.011)	0.0004 (0.012)	-0.015** (0.008)	-0.020 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	0.012 (0.019)
loggdpp	0.050 (0.081)	0.066* (0.036)	-0.088 (0.058)	-0.151 (0.113)	-0.030 (0.044)	-0.009 (0.041)	0.098 (0.111)
Observations	467	471	465	464	455	457	471
R <sup>2</sup>	0.163	0.143	0.129	0.131	0.016	0.022	0.255
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.056	0.034	0.017	0.019	-0.113	-0.107	0.160
F Statistic	10.080*** (df = 8; 413)	8.701*** (df = 8; 417)	7.628*** (df = 8; 411)	7.740*** (df = 8; 410)	0.841 (df = 8; 401)	1.121 (df = 8; 403)	17.801*** (df = 8; 417)
<i>Note:</i>	Robust standard errors are in parentheses, clustered by country. All models include country and year fixed-effects. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01						

We can conclude that Venezuela was able to acquire political support from small or vulnerable countries in Central America and the Caribbean in order to implement Hugo Chávez's foreign policy. It is important to consider it within the context of the Left Turn in Latin America. While the foreign policy implemented by Chavistas tended to move LAC countries away from Venezuela in international fora, ideological convergences allowed for some increased support for Chávez's projects. When this mechanism was not present or sufficient to gather support and nations displayed vulnerabilities, then Venezuela was able to deploy international clientelistic measures to secure itself allies. Even when there were left-wing governments in office, Chavistas were able to increase support for their ideas with its clientelistic practices.

## Qualitative evidence: The Venezuelan oil-based diplomacy under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro

Having corroborated all hypotheses through statistical tests, we now present further qualitative evidence on our causal mechanism— international clientelism. It is important to acknowledge that Venezuelan oil-based diplomacy was not invented during Chávez's rule. Rather, it dates from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even the provision of oil benefits and subsidies to LAC countries was not new. The San José Accord, for example, a previous example of this kind of agreement, was signed in 1980, (Trinkunas, 2008; 2011; Clem and Maingot, 2011; Giacalone, 2013; Ewell, 1982). Notwithstanding, what was new in the Venezuelan foreign policy that allows us to talk about international clientelistic practices?

First, Venezuelan foreign policy objectives were drastically different. Chávez implemented a highly anti-systemic and anti-American policy, differently from his predecessors. Implementing a pro-American (or, at least, a non-anti-systemic) policy did not require a clientelistic network, because there were several other variables acting on these objectives (such as the U.S. action). When that was not the case (i.e., during Carlos Andrés Pérez's rule), there were no conditions at all to go beyond instruments such as diplomatic negotiations, shared interests, and ideological convergences to get international political support, for several reasons such as international and domestic contexts and constraints—i.e., lack of internal support (Trinkunas, 2011; Clem and Maingot, 2011).

Second, we lack evidence on points six and seven of our concept to consider previous experiences as clientelistic. That is, there is no evidence of persistent political support provided by Venezuela that was rewarded with international political support, independently of the programmatic convergences. On the contrary, Venezuelan support to democracies in the region, for example, came about because of programmatic links (i.e., democratic-prone groups). Therefore, we cannot relate the Venezuelan petro-diplomacy before Chávez to an international clientelistic network.

Hence, let's get our focus back to PetroCaribe. Although the agreement was offered to all Caribbean and most Central American countries, some received this initiative with precaution. Barbadian representatives refused to join the initiative under the justification that it would generate fiscal debt to the country—a loan facility. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, while the government in charge signed the agreement, the leader of the opposition party and former prime minister of the country, James Mitchell, criticized the alliance with Venezuela. In the case of Saint Lucia and the Bahamas, prime ministers who took office after the signing of the agreement decided not to pursue membership in the institution (Sanders, 2007).

At the same time, the agreement was welcomed by several countries in the region, which could help themselves with benefits. After his interviews with officials from Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Girvan (2011) notes that the main benefit for the members of the Venezuelan-led initiatives, in their opinion, was the financial cooperation. In some cases, these countries did not even have the specialized workforce to deal with bureaucracies and request money from other institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union.

Regarding policymakers' perceptions of these initiatives, as the former Honduran Minister for Planning and Foreign Cooperation, Arturo Corrales, summarized it: "PetroCaribe is a trade mechanism, strictly commercial, while ALBA is a political mechanism" (Efe, 2011). Corrales was a member of a non-left-wing government, as was the former Jamaican prime minister, Bruce Golding, who, according to Maingot (2011, p. 108) saw PetroCaribe as "a purely business arrangement." Thus, we can reinforce the claim that, while ALBA presents a hybrid causal mechanism, PetroCaribe focuses on the exchange of benefits.

According to the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA, 2015), from 2005 to 2014 Venezuela funded 432 projects in the region through PetroCaribe, in fields as diverse as infrastructure, housing, agriculture, education, and health services. Just to mention some examples, Girvan (2011) and Cusack (2019) show that St. Vincent and the Grenadines received money to build a new international airport and a fuel storage plant, while Dominica received EC\$ 40.2 million for low-income housing projects. Sewerage and road infrastructure were also improved in the country through PetroCaribe. Plants to store and distribute oil were built in Nicaragua, St. Kitts and Nevis, El Salvador, and Grenada (SELA, 2015). In Jamaica, improvements in the international airport Norman Manley, the refinery Petrojam, and docks, as well as the refinancing of Jamaican public debt, were all funded through PetroCaribe mechanisms (Transparencia Venezuela, 2013). And, not a least important thing, we need to mention that the increasing improvement in social conditions and spending is also reflected in the popularity of the chiefs of government domestically, allowing them to get reelected (Cusack, 2019). Hence, PetroCaribe consisted not only of a typical cash-for-a-vote instrument but included a broad set of benefits and facilities provided to its members. And they were not tit-for-tat exchanges, but long-term advantages provided by the patron all along the analyzed period.

Chavistas' clientelistic actions produced changes in regional leaders' attitudes beyond UN votes, perceived during the 2000s. The former American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, noted that, after getting Venezuelan benefits, "Eastern Caribbean leaders [have] been more outspoken—and some unusually critical of the United States when praising Venezuela" (State Department, 2009). For example, the Antiguan Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, who was seen as a "fairly calculating pragmatist," surprised

American diplomats by saying that “Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered greatly as a result of coercive and imperialistic models of colonialism and later the Washington Consensus” (Embassy Barbados, 2009a). Another illustrative quote was provided by the Belizean ambassador for foreign trade, Adalbert Tucker. Despite speaking on behalf of a right-wing government, in his words,

*“[It is] to give encouragement to Venezuela to continue the good work it is doing for democracy, for progress, development for the people of the Latin America and the Caribbean. [...] President Chavez and Venezuela embraced all of us as part of the family. And that Bolivarian Revolution is what we need to become human beings in the 21st century. He shared wealth, ideas and he also encouraged us to share back with them what we can share.”<sup>11</sup>*

It provides illustrative evidence of the common values shared within the loyalty-based clientelistic network, just as our theory claims. It also shows that these values did not depend on the political orientation of the governments in charge, but only on the membership in these networks. And this support has been durable, as we saw in the first pages of this article when referring to votes at OAS and the election to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Therefore, we consider this qualitative evidence to support the claims and findings of this article.

## Conclusion

Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela has adopted an increasingly radical foreign policy over the years in international fora, and it remained like this under Nicolás Maduro’s rule. For the purposes of this piece of writing, Chávez’s foreign policy can be split into two main components: (1) the contestation of American hegemony in the world, and (2) an agenda related to reducing inequalities and asymmetries across the globe, and reinforcing peoples’ self-determination to decide how to pursue their own destinies. As our empirical analysis shows, two fundamental mechanisms explain political support for this agenda: ideological convergences and clientelistic practices. While the former was partly covered by authors such as Amorim Neto and Malamud (2015), Potrafke (2009), and Bailey, Voeten, and Strezhnev (2015), the latter consists of this work’s potential original contribution.

We claim that international clientelism is a mechanism much broader and deeper than mere vote-buying practices. Over 15 years or so, Venezuela did not only provide money to its partners in exchange for political support but also created a solid and durable network based on dependency ties of vulnerable Central American and Caribbean countries, providing them with other services in kind as well, such as subsidized oil,

---

<sup>11</sup> Available at <https://amandala.com.bz/news/venezuela-belize-strengthen-ties/> on August 25, 2021.

refineries, airports, housing, and others. Qualitative evidence and especially statistical findings support this claim, showing that membership to PetroCaribe produced increasing similarities in the voting at the UNGA between its members and Venezuela, whereas moving them away from the United States' voting pattern. These convergences mostly relate to human rights, colonialism, and matters related to the Palestinian conflict, being noticed primarily in resolutions whose subjects are considered of importance by the U.S. Department of State.

## REFERENCES

Afoaku, Osita G. 2000. "U.S. Foreign Policy and Authoritarian Regimes: Change and Continuity in International Clientelism." *Journal of Third World Studies*, 17 (2) (Fall): 13–40.

Alesina, Alberto, and David Dollar. 2000. "Who gives foreign aid to whom and why?" *Journal of Economic Growth* 5, no. 1, 33–63.

Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (ALBA). 2019. *Documentos*. <http://www.portalalba.org/index.php/alba/documentos>. Accessed May 17, 2019.

Amorim Neto, Octávio, and Andrés Malamud. 2015. "What determines foreign policy in Latin America? Systemic versus domestic factors in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, 1946–2008." *Latin American Politics and Society* 57 (4). 1–27.

Antigua Observer. 2016. "St. Lucia says it is not adversely affected by the Venezuelan crisis." *Antigua Observer*, 12 May 2016. <https://www.antiguaobserver.com/st-lucia-says-it-is-not-adversely-affected-by-venezuela-crisis/>. Accessed October 3, 2019.

Bahar, Dany, Ted Piccone, and Harold Trinkunas. 2018. "Venezuela: A Path out of Misery." Brookings (Policy Brief).

Bailey, Michael, Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten. 2017. "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(2), 430–456.

BBC World. 2019. "Venezuela wins seat on UN Human Rights Council." <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50087394>. Accessed November 23, 2020.

Belém Lopes, Dawisson, and Carlos Faria. 2016. "When Foreign Policy meets Social Demands in Latin America." *Contexto Internacional*, 38 (1), 11–53.

Bryan, Anthony. 2009. "PetroCaribe and CARICOM: Venezuela's resource diplomacy and its impact on Small State regional cooperation." In: Cooper, Andrew; Shaw, Timothy (eds.). *The Diplomacies of Small States: between vulnerability and resilience*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Carter, David, and Randall Stone. 2015. "Democracy and multilateralism: the case of vote-buying in the UN General Assembly." *International Organization*, 69 (1), 1–33.

Carvalho, José M. de. 1997. "Mandonismo, Coronelismo, Clientelismo: Uma Discussão Conceitual." *Dados: Revista de Ciências Sociais* (40:2).  
[https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0011-52581997000200003](https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0011-52581997000200003). Accessed on April 12, 2021.

Castañeda, J.G. 2006. "Latin America's Left Turn." *Foreign Affairs* 85, 28.

Cederlöf, G., Kingsbury, D. 2019. "On PetroCaribe: Petropolitics, energopower, and post-neoliberal development in the Caribbean energy region." *Political Geography*, 72, 124–133.

Clem, Ralph S., and Anthony Maingot. (Eds.). 2011. *Venezuela's petro-diplomacy: Hugo Chávez's foreign policy*. University Press of Florida.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813035307.001.0001>.

Comunidade de Estados Latino-Americanos e Caribenhos (CELAC). 2011. *Procedimentos para o funcionamento orgânico de la CELAC*. Caracas.

Corrales, Javier, and Michael Penfold. 2011. *Dragon in the Tropics: Hugo Chávez and the Political Economy of Revolution in Venezuela*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Cusack, Asa. 2019. *Venezuela, ALBA, and the limits of Postneoliberal Regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Palgrave Macmillan U.S..

Dreher, Axel, Peter Nunnenkamp, and Rainer Thiele. 2008. "Does US aid buy UN general assembly votes? A disaggregated analysis." *Public Choice*, 136, 139–164.

Dreher, Axel, and Jan-Egbert Sturm. 2012. "Do the IMF and the World Bank influence voting in the UN General Assembly?" *Public Choice*, 151, 363–397.

Dreher, Axel, and Nathan M. Jensen. 2013. "Country or Leader? Political Change and UN General Assembly Voting." *European Journal of Political Economy* 29 (March): 183–96.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2012.10.002>.

Dreher, Axel, Jan-Egbert Sturm, and James Vreeland. 2006. "Does membership on the UNSC influence IMF decisions? Evidence from panel data." *ETH Working Paper*, no. 151.



- Efe, Agencia. 2011. "Honduras decidiu voltar à PetroCaribe, diz ministro." In: G1, May 30, 2011. <http://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2011/05/honduras-decidiu-voltar-a-petrocaribe-diz-ministro.html>. Accessed October 3, 2019.
- Embassy Barbados. 2009a. "ALBA's allure to Antigua et al." *Wikileaks* cable: 09BRIDGETOWN471\_a. Dated: August 4, 2009a. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRIDGETOWN471\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRIDGETOWN471_a.html).
- Ewell, J. 1982. "The Development of Venezuelan Geopolitical Analysis Since World War II." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 24 (3), 295–320. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165499>
- Fang, Cai and Peter Nolan (eds.). 2019. *Routledge Handbook of the Belt and Road*. New York: Routledge.
- Flores-Macías, Gustavo A., and Sarah E. Kreps. 2013. "The Foreign Policy Consequences of Trade: China's Commercial Relations with Africa and Latin America, 1992–2006." *The Journal of Politics* 75 (2): 357–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000066>.
- Freedom House. 2019. *Freedom in the World Data and Resources*. <https://freedomhouse.org/content/freedom-world-data-and-resources>. Accessed October 15, 2019.
- Giacalone, Rita. 2013. "Venezuelan Foreign Policy: Petro-Politics and Paradigm Change." In: Beasley, Ryan, et al. (eds.). *Foreign Policy in comparative perspective: domestic and international influences on state behavior*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- Girvan, Norman. 2011. "Is ALBA a new model of integration? Reflections on the CARICOM experience." *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 3 (2/3), 157–180.
- Gonzalez-Ocantos, Ezequiel, and Virginia Oliveros. 2019. "Clientelism in Latin American Politics." *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Keohane, Robert. 1967. "The study of political influence in the General Assembly." *International Organization*, 21 (2), 221–237.
- Kitschelt, Herbert. 2000. "Linkages between citizens and politicians in democratic polities." *Comparative Political Studies*, 33 (6–7), 845–879.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Kenneth M. Roberts (eds.). 2011. *The resurgence of the Latin American left*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Maçães, Bruno 2018. *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mars, Perry. 1998. *Ideology and Change: the transformation of the Caribbean left*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

- Martz, John D. 1997. *The Politics of Clientelism in Colombia*. New York: Routledge.
- Merke, Frederico, Diego Reynoso, and Luis Leandro Schenoni. 2020. "Foreign Policy Change in Latin America: Exploring a Middle-Range Concept." *Latin American Research Review*, 55 (3), 413.
- Mijares, V. 2021. "The foreign policy assertiveness of the Latin American petro-state: Venezuela's enduring patterns." In: Baisotti, P. (ed.), *Problems and Alternatives in the Modern Americas*. New York: Routledge.
- Newman, M.E.J. 2006. "Modularity and community structure in networks." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 103, 8577–8582.
- Newman, Mark. 2010. *Networks: an introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.
- Nunes, E. 1997. *A Gramática Política do Brasil: Clientelismo e Insulamento Burocrático*. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar.
- Obydenkova, Anastassia and Alexander Libman. 2019. *Authoritarian regionalism in the world of international organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Our World in Data. 2020. *Crude Oil Prices*. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/crude-oil-prices?time=1991..2019>. Accessed September 9, 2020.
- PETROCARIBE. 2005. *Acuerdo de cooperación energética PETROCARIBE*. Puerto la Cruz, Venezuela, 2005.
- Potrafke, N. 2009. "Does government ideology influence political alignment with the US? An empirical analysis of voting in the UN General Assembly." *Review of International Organizations*, 4 (3), 245–268.
- Raby, Diana. 2011. "Venezuelan Foreign Policy Under Chávez (1999–2010): The Pragmatic Success of Revolutionary Ideology?" In: Gardini, Gian Luca; Lambert, Peter (eds.). *Latin American Foreign Policies: Between ideology and pragmatism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Riggirozzi, Pia, and Jean Grugel. 2015. "Regional governance and legitimacy in South America: the meaning of UNASUR." *International Affairs* 91, 781–797.
- Romero, Carlos, and Victor Mijares. 2016. "From Chávez to Maduro: continuity and change in Venezuelan Foreign Policy." *Contexto Internacional*, 38 (1), 165–201.
- Sanders, Ronald. 2007. "Venezuela in the Caribbean: Expanding its sphere of influence." *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 96 (391), 465–476.
- Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe (SELA). 2015. *Evolution of the PETROCARIBE Energy Cooperation Agreement*. Caracas, Venezuela.

State Department. 2009. *Eastern Caribbean Leadership* (C-AL9-01941). Wikileaks Cable: 09STATE101238\_a. Dated September 29, 2009.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE101238\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE101238_a.html).

Stokes, Susan. 2007. "Political Clientelism." 604–627. In: Boix, Carles; Stokes, Susan (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Taffet, J. 2007. *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.

Thacker, Strom. 1999. "The high politics of IMF lending." *World Politics*, 52 (1). 38–75.

Transparencia Venezuela. 2014. *Boletín PetroCaribe*. 3.  
<https://transparencia.org.ve/project/venezuela-con-petrocaribe-aporta-mas-de-lo-que-recibe/>. Accessed October 3, 2019.

Transparencia Venezuela. 2013. *Boletín PetroCaribe No. 4*, 9 Feb. 2013.  
<https://transparencia.org.ve/project/jamaica-financia-su-deuda-publica-con-dinero-de-petrocaribe/>. Accessed May 12, 2020.

Trinkunas, H. 2008. "Energy security: The case of Venezuela." In D. Moran & J. A. Russell (Orgs.), *Energy Security and Global Politics: The Militarization of Resource Management* (0 ed). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203892831>

Trinkunas, H. 2011. "The Logic of Venezuelan Foreign Policy during the Chávez Period." In R. S. Clem & A. P. Maingot (Orgs.), *Venezuela's petro-diplomacy: Hugo Chávez's foreign policy*. University Press of Florida.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813035307.001.0001>

Veenendaal, W. P. 2014. "Analyzing the foreign policy of microstates: the relevance of the international Patron-Client model." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13 (3), 561–577.

Voeten, E. 2013. "Data and analyses of voting in the United Nations General Assembly." In: Reinalda, B. (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of International Organization*. Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, 54–66.

Voeten, Erik, Anton Strezhnev, and Michael Bailey. 2009. *United Nations General Assembly Voting Data*. Harvard Dataverse.

Wasserman, Stanley, and Katherine Faust. 1994. *Social network analysis: methods and applications*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York.

Wiesehomeier, Nina, and David Doyle. 2012. "Attitudes, Ideological Associations and the Left–Right Divide in Latin America." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 4, 3–33.

Wittkopf, Eugene. 1973. "Foreign aid and United Nations votes: a comparative study." *The American Political Science Review*, 67 (3), 868–888.

Woo, Byungwon, and Eunbin Chung. 2017. "Aid for vote? United Nations General Assembly voting and American aid allocation." *Political Studies*, 66 (4), 1002–1026.

World Bank. 2019. *World Bank Open Data*. <https://data.worldbank.org/>. Accessed September 15, 2019.

## Notes

We thank Cristiane Lucena, Vinicius Santos, Yulieth Martínez Villalba, Kelly Meira, Florencia Lorenzo, Enrique Natalino, Jéssica Fernandes, Camilo López Burian, Ian Batista, Rafael Mesquita, and Víctor Mijares for their invaluable comments and contribution to the article. We also thank the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) for the funding.