

Would You Sell Your Vote?

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Abstract

Prominent scholars in recent years have expressed alarm about political polarization, weakened civil liberties, and growing support for authoritarianism in the United States. But discussions of democratic backsliding pay short shrift to the value citizens place on one of the most fundamental democratic institutions: the act of voting. Drawing on nationally representative survey data, we show that despite traditional portrayals of the U.S. as the embodiment of a democratic “civic culture,” a substantial share of Americans express readiness to sell their votes for cash: 12% of respondents would do so for just \$25, as would nearly 20% for \$100. Citizens who place low importance on living in a democracy are significantly more willing to sell their votes. We argue that heightened attention to US voters’ attitudes toward clientelism would provide an additional barometer of democratic skepticism, help to integrate the study of American and comparative politics, and stimulate novel research agendas about the historic decline of vote buying in the United States.

Keywords

elections, democracy, vote buying, clientelism, machine politics

Many observers harbor concerns that democracy in the United States is under siege. Prominent scholars draw disturbing comparisons between recent developments in the U.S.—such as heightened political polarization, the success of extremist candidates, and weakened civil liberties—and warning signs that preceded democratic collapse in Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela, and beyond (Kaufman & Haggard, 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Other recent studies demonstrate that a considerable share of US voters would support violence to achieve political ends (Bartels, 2020), sacrifice democratic principles to support candidates aligned with their ideological and policy preferences (Carey et al., 2020; Graham & Svobik, 2020), or favor authoritarian political systems (Foa & Mounk, 2016). Meanwhile, surveys of political scientists reveal a pervasive belief that key components of democratic quality—electoral and civil rights, the accountability of government officials, and civil discourse across ideological divides—are declining in America (Carey et al., 2019).

Given such signals that US democracy is under duress, the present article investigates an understudied question: To what extent are contemporary Americans willing to sell their votes? In the historic U.S., observers estimated that many voters would do so; for example, in 1890 the *New York Times* found “a general concurrence in the estimate that at least 20 per cent of the citizens of [a Maine] town would as soon sell their votes as their wood, or their potatoes, or their fish” during a congressional election.¹ But this line of inquiry is now unfamiliar, in large part because the heyday of machine

politics in America passed many decades ago and only vestiges of vote buying continue.² Whereas important experimental work suggests that Americans who receive significant, nonpartisan financial incentives are more likely to turn out (Panagopoulos, 2013), the extant literature sheds little light on whether cash could influence US citizens’ vote choices as well as electoral participation.

Notwithstanding the rarity of clientelism in the contemporary U.S., evidence suggests that it is worthwhile to investigate Americans’ willingness to sell their votes. During the 2000 presidential elections, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Nebraska undertook legal actions to shut down *voteauction.com*, a website that enabled citizens to offer their votes for sale with the following slogan: “Cutting out the middleman and bringing the big money of presidential politics directly to you.”³ The notion of selling one’s vote apparently resonated with many Americans, as more than 15,000 voters quickly registered. In the words of one participant: “Selling my vote I think is a very obvious political statement. . . . It’s saying that if the buying and selling of votes is going on even now between closed doors, through the lobbyists, let’s make it a little more obvious.”⁴

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To address the paucity of evidence about this issue, we investigated Americans' willingness to sell their votes in a nationally representative survey just before the November 2016 elections. Respondents were presented with hypothetical vignettes, each asking if they would accept a vote-buying offer from a congressional candidate. The first vignette involved an offer of \$25 for the respondent's vote, and later vignettes progressively increased the amount up to \$1,000, stopping whenever the citizen indicated acceptance of an offer. Strikingly, 12% of respondents said they would do so for just \$25. Furthermore, nearly 20% expressed a willingness to sell their votes for \$100 or below, and almost a third of respondents indicated that they would accept offers of \$1,000 or below. These figures are especially remarkable when considering that selling one's vote would seem to be at odds with the norms of the "participatory civic culture" that political scientists have long associated with the US democratic political system (Almond & Verba, 1966). Perhaps even more noteworthy is that the share of Americans in our survey willing to sell their votes did not differ markedly from findings on countries with far more clientelism and far less robust democratic institutions. For instance, recent surveys discussed below reveal that 5% of Russians, 11% of Brazilians, 12% of Bulgarians, and 15% of Ugandans would sell their votes for approximately US\$20.⁵ Why might so many Americans indicate that they are ready to sell their votes?

Our interpretation is that the responses of these Americans reflect skepticism about the importance of living in a democracy and participating in elections. When studying countries where clientelism is far more common, scholars often emphasize that citizens unsatisfied with or uncommitted to democracy are more likely to exchange their votes for material rewards (e.g., Carlin & Moseley, 2015, p. 16; Lawson & Greene, 2014, p. 72; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014, p. 56). We contend that an analogous relationship holds in the U.S. even though clientelism is rare: Americans who are disillusioned with democracy are more likely to indicate that they would exchange their votes for money. To explore this possibility, we tested pre-registered hypotheses by conducting a second survey just before the November 2018 elections. Among this MTurk sample of Americans, the share of respondents expressing willingness to sell their votes was remarkably similar to our 2016 nationally representative survey: 10% would accept the initial offer of \$25, 22% would accept \$100 or below, and 42% would accept \$1,000 or below. More importantly, analyses below show that respondents who place low importance on living in a democracy—as well as those who express doubt about their ability to influence electoral outcomes—are more likely to indicate that they would sell their votes. Thus, we believe our findings contribute to the growing body of evidence that for a subset of Americans, attachment to the cornerstone of democracy—participation in free and fair elections—is perturbably weak.

To be clear, we do not claim that many Americans actually sell their votes. Indeed, only 2.7% of respondents in our 2016 nationally representative survey indicated they received a gift or favor from a candidate, party, or campaign worker. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the survey also employed a list experiment to mitigate potential bias; the estimated share of respondents indicating they received such benefits remained at 2.7% with this method. Our 2018 survey, which included a follow-up question for the 1.4% of respondents who directly reported receiving such benefits, reveals that some of these items are merely campaign paraphernalia such as pens.⁶ And it is worth emphasizing that our study does not suggest that voter fraud in the United States is widespread—on the contrary, rigorous analyses on that distinct topic consistently find the opposite (e.g., Ahlquist et al., 2014; Minnite, 2011).

Nevertheless, our findings that a substantial share of Americans—especially those skeptical about democracy—express willingness to sell their votes should raise concern among both political scientists and policymakers. The following empirical sections provide a descriptive overview of results from our two surveys, as well as regression analyses that test our hypotheses regarding the association between democratic skepticism and readiness to sell votes. We then explore three key implications in the Discussion section. First, our findings indicate that researchers and policymakers concerned about measuring and conceptualizing democratic skepticism in the United States should consider willingness to sell votes as an important and relevant indicator. Second, our analyses draw attention to the ways that greater focus on US voters' attitudes toward clientelism could help integrate the study of American and comparative politics, thereby stimulating productive methodological debates and novel theory building. And third, our findings suggest scholars should reassess whether US parties curbed their use of clientelism *because* of a dwindling supply of votes—as is commonly assumed—or whether they did so *despite* some Americans' continued willingness to sell their votes.

Willingness to Sell Votes

To explore Americans' willingness to sell their votes, we first included questions in a nationally representative survey conducted in the days before the 2016 presidential and congressional elections. This YouGov sample included 1,000 adult US residents surveyed online on November 5 to 6, 2016. Respondents were presented with the following vignette: "Let's say a campaign worker offered you \$25 to vote for a specific candidate running for Congress. Would you accept the money?" Those who rejected the offer were then asked: "What if the campaign worker offered you \$50 to vote for that candidate? Would you accept the money?" For respondents rejecting the offer, the price then increased progressively to \$100, \$200, \$500, and ultimately \$1,000. The left panel of Figure 1 shows that 12.0% of respondents

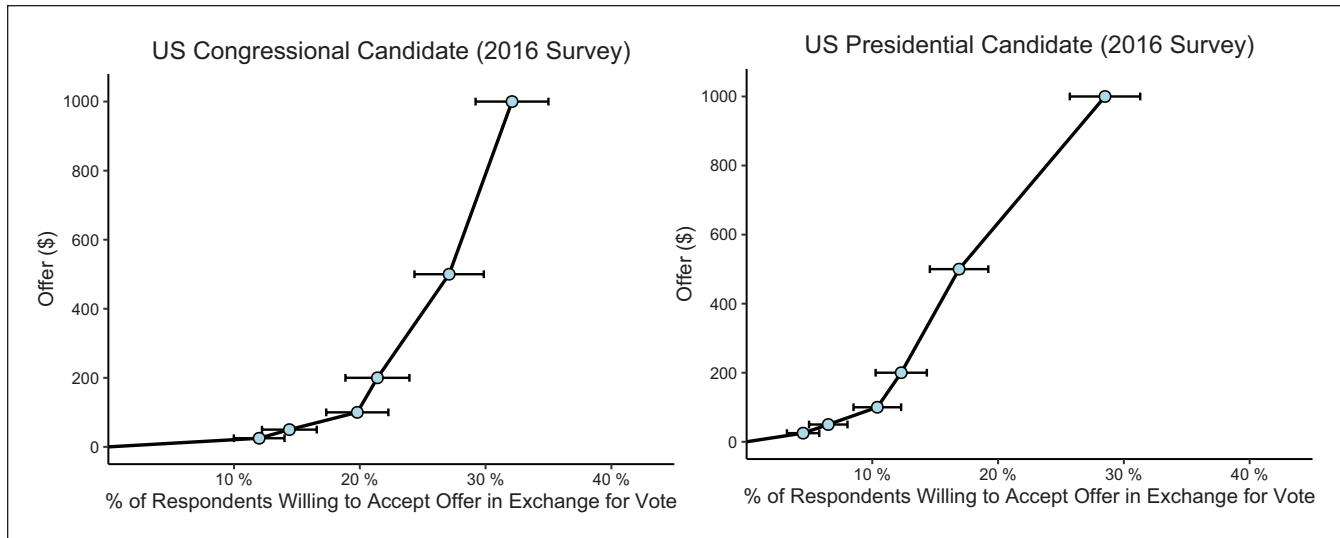


Figure 1. Willingness to accept vote-buying offers.

Note. The supply curve on the left (right) shows the cumulative percentage of respondents indicating they would accept the amount offered or less to vote for a specific congressional (presidential) candidate. Circles reflect the percent responding affirmatively; bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. In the congressional vignette, the starting offer of \$25 was increased consecutively to the following amounts for respondents rejecting previous offers: \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and ultimately \$1,000. A single follow-up question was used for the presidential vignette, in which respondents were asked about the least amount of money they would accept, providing the options of \$25, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and \$1,000, as well as the option of not accepting any amount. Data are from a nationally representative YouGov survey of 1,000 adult US residents conducted on November 5 to 6, 2016.

(95% CI: [10.0%, 14.0%]) indicated they would sell their votes for just \$25. This share increased as we ratcheted up the offer: 19.8% [17.3%, 22.2%] said they would accept \$100 or lower, as did 27.1% [24.3%, 29.9%] for \$500 or lower. Moreover, almost a third of respondents expressed willingness to sell their votes for \$1,000 or lower; more specifically, 32.1% [29.2%, 35.0%] of respondents.⁷

After this battery of questions, we next inquired about respondents' willingness to accept clientelist offers in presidential campaigns. Given space constraints, the survey employed a single question: "Now, let's consider the election for President. Let's say a campaign worker offered you money to vote for a specific candidate running for President. We would like to know the least amount of money you would accept, if any." Respondents were presented with the options of \$25, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and \$1,000, as well as the option of not accepting any amount. While differences in format limit comparability with the congressional scenario, once again a substantial share of Americans expressed readiness to sell their votes—though many required a larger reward size to do so. The right panel of Figure 1 reveals that 4.5% of respondents [3.2%, 5.8%] said they were willing to sell their vote for \$25 in the presidential election, as were 10.4% [8.5%, 12.3%] for \$100. A substantially higher share expressed willingness to sell their votes for higher dollar values—16.9% [14.6%, 19.2%] for \$500, and 28.5% [25.7%, 31.3%] for \$1,000.

We recognize that social desirability bias may affect these responses in a negative and/or positive direction. On the one hand, some respondents may be unwilling to respond

affirmatively because vote buying runs counter to democratic norms and is against the law (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). On the other hand, some respondents may experience less social approbation when agreeing to sell their votes in response to a survey vignette than they would if friends and relatives discovered that they actually undertook this action on Election Day. Notwithstanding these caveats, our findings are especially striking when placed in comparative perspective. As mentioned in the Introduction, responses in our US surveys do not differ markedly from findings in contexts with more clientelism and less robust democratic institutions. For example, a poll conducted in August 2016 showed that just 5% of Russians would be willing to sell their vote in a parliamentary election for 1,000 rubles (US\$16). For 2,000 rubles (US\$31) or less, 7% would do so; for 5,000 rubles (US\$78) or less, 18%.⁸ A similar analysis from a survey of rural Brazilians in 2012 found just over 11% willing to sell votes for 50 reais or less (US\$21), 16% for 100 reais or less (US\$42), 26% for 500 reais or less (US\$212), and 33% for 1,000 reais or less (US\$424). According to Transparency International, for the 2011 presidential and municipal elections, 12% of Bulgarians expressed willingness to sell votes for between 15 and 25 euros (US\$20–US\$35) and 19% for between 50 and 75 euros (US\$70–US\$104) or less. And in Uganda, a study showed that 5% of respondents would sell their vote for 10,000 shillings (US\$3) and 15% would do so for 80,000 shillings (US\$24) or less. Although head-to-head comparisons should be treated with caution given differences in survey formats, the broad similarity of supply curves for selling votes between these countries and that of the United

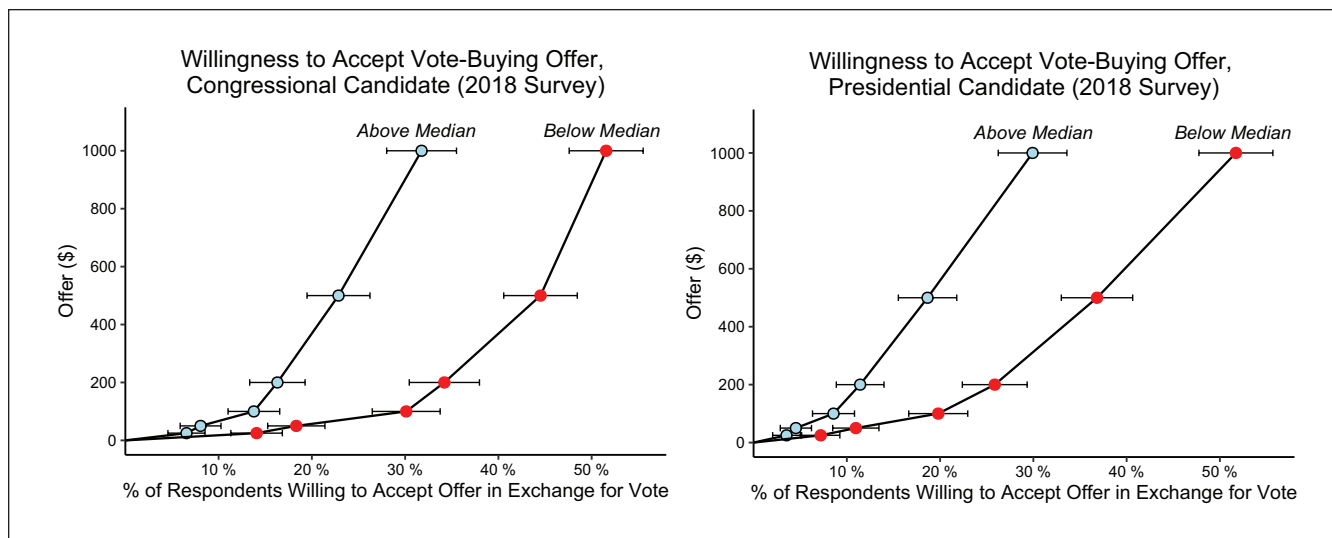


Figure 2. Willingness to accept vote-buying offers, by perception of importance of democracy (above vs. below median).

Note. The supply curves in the left (right) panel show the cumulative percentage of respondents indicating they would accept the amount offered or less to vote for a specific congressional (presidential) candidate. In each panel, supply curves are shown for respondents with above-median and below-median responses to an “Importance of Democracy” question. Circles reflect the percent responding affirmatively; bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. Details about the clientelism questions are provided in the notes to Figure 1. The *Importance of Democracy* question, which is from the World Values Survey, asks respondents to rate democracy’s importance on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents “not at all important” and 10 represents “absolutely important.” Data are from an MTurk survey of 1,206 adult US residents conducted on November 5, 2018.

States—one of the world’s most established democracies—is remarkable.

As we discuss in the article’s concluding section, in the context of developing countries, studies published in top journals regularly ask respondents about hypothetical vignettes involving clientelism. Journalists, meanwhile, often take such data at face value.⁹ But given that day-to-day clientelism is so rare in the U.S., how should our findings about the US electorate be interpreted? In the following section we offer evidence that willingness to sell one’s vote is in part a manifestation of democratic skepticism.

Vote Selling and Democratic Skepticism

To examine the association between willingness to sell votes and democratic skepticism, we tested pre-registered hypotheses by fielding a survey of 1,206 adult US residents on MTurk on November 5, 2018, the day before the 2018 congressional elections.¹⁰ As summarized in the Introduction, despite employing a non-representative platform, respondents in our second survey expressed a remarkably similar willingness to sell their votes to those in our 2016 nationally representative sample.¹¹ Both surveys employed identical questions about whether citizens would accept clientelist offers, as described above. To explore respondents’ commitment to democracy, we included a World Values Survey question in our 2018 survey: “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?” Informants rated democracy’s importance on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1

represents “not at all important” and 10 represents “absolutely important.” Forty-nine percent of our survey respondents answered with the top score of 10, the exact percentage of US respondents answering with the top score of 10 in the most recent wave of the World Values Survey.¹²

Figure 2 shows that respondents with above-median responses to this democracy question are over twice as likely to refuse vote-buying offers at most price points, when compared with those with below-median responses. As shown, respondents who place more value on democracy’s importance are significantly more likely (at the .01 level) to refuse offers for all six price points for each office. For a congressional candidate, among the 49% of respondents who rated democracy’s importance as 10: 6.6% would accept our starting offer of \$25, 13.8% would accept \$100 or below, and 31.8% would accept \$1,000 or below. Among those who rated democracy’s importance below 10: 14.1% would accept \$25, 30.1% would accept \$100 or below, and 51.6% would accept \$1,000 or below. Similar patterns are observed for the scenario involving a presidential candidate. Among respondents who rated democracy’s importance as 10: 3.5% would accept \$25, 8.6% would accept \$100 or below, and 29.9% would accept \$1,000 or below. Among those who rated democracy’s importance below 10: 7.2% would accept \$25, 19.8% would accept \$100 or below, and 51.7% would accept \$1,000 or below.

Although Figure 2 provides evidence of a link between respondents’ commitment to democracy and their willingness to sell votes, it does not control for factors such as income level and partisanship that could plausibly be

correlated with both willingness to sell votes and attitudes toward democracy. To account for potentially confounding variables, we next examine the relationship between vote selling and democratic skepticism more extensively through regression analyses in Tables 1 and 2. Given our reliance on observational data, we make no claims about causality, but the specifications discussed below demonstrate that our findings are robust to the inclusion of a wide range of control variables and state fixed effects. The dependent variable in each specification is a dichotomous indicator for whether the respondent would be willing to sell her vote for the given price or lower. We employ linear probability models; all results are robust when using logistic regressions.

With regards to the *Importance of Democracy* question discussed above, Table 1 shows that respondents in our 2018 US survey who place a greater importance on living in a democracy are significantly less likely to indicate that they would accept money to vote for a specific congressional candidate. Substantively, the coefficient of -0.027 in Column 4 suggests that a standard deviation increase in *Importance of Democracy* (1.9 points on a 10 point scale) is associated with a 5.1 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$25. Similarly, Columns 7 and 10 suggest that a standard deviation increase in this variable would decrease the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$100 (\$1,000) or below by 6.5 (4.6) percentage points. These findings are statistically significant at the .01 level, as are findings for the three other price points shown in the Supplemental Appendix. The specifications include various individual-level controls described in the notes to Table 1: income, partisanship, age, gender, education, race, and registration status. Moreover, they include a dummy for congressional districts deemed competitive by the Cook Political Report, and state fixed effects to address any omitted variables that are invariant across respondents in a given state.

As an alternative measure, our 2018 survey also inquired about another facet of democratic skepticism: respondents' doubt about their capacity to affect electoral outcomes. Using a question from the American National Election Studies (ANES), we asked the extent to which respondents agree with the following statement: "So many other people vote in the national elections that it doesn't matter much to me whether I vote or not." Responses employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with a mean rating of 4.0 ("disagree"). Table 1 shows that respondents who more strongly believe that voting matters are significantly less likely to express willingness to sell their votes in a congressional election, even when accounting for a full set of control variables and including state fixed effects. Substantively, the coefficient of -0.039 in Column 5 suggests that a standard deviation increase in *Voting Matters* (1.1 points on a 5-point scale) is associated with a 4.3 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$25. In addition, Columns 8 and 11

suggest that a standard deviation increase in this variable would decrease the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$100 (\$1,000) or below by 8.5 (11.2) percentage points. Again, these findings are statistically significant at the .01 level, as are findings for the three other price points shown in the Supplemental Appendix. When including both *Importance of Democracy* and *Voting Matters* in the same specification, both remain statistically significant at the .01 to .05 level for five of six price points (see Table 1 and the Supplemental Appendix).

Table 2 shows that results are similar when asking respondents about their willingness to accept clientelist offers in presidential instead of congressional campaigns. With respect to the *Importance of Democracy* variable, the coefficient of -0.013 in Column 4 suggests that a standard deviation increase is associated with a 2.5 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$25. Similarly, Columns 7 and 10 suggest that a standard deviation increase in this variable would decrease the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$100 (\$1,000) or below by 4.4 (6.3) percentage points. With respect to the *Voting Matters* variable, the coefficient of -0.026 in Column 5 suggests that a standard deviation increase is associated with a 2.9 percentage point decrease in the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$25. In addition, Columns 8 and 11 suggest that a standard deviation increase in this variable would decrease the likelihood that a respondent would sell her vote for \$100 (\$1,000) or below by 6.3 (11.2) percentage points. These findings are all statistically significant at the .01 level, as are comparable findings for all three other price points (see Supplemental Appendix). When including both variables jointly, *Voting Matters* is significant at the .01 level for all six price points, and *Importance of Democracy* is significant at the .01 to .05 level in five of six price points.

In summary, the evidence presented in this section conforms with our pre-registered hypotheses that US citizens who place low importance on living in a democracy—and those who express skepticism about their capacity to affect electoral outcomes—are significantly more likely to indicate they are ready to sell their votes.

Other Correlates of Vote Selling

While our primary focus is on the relationship between democratic skepticism and Americans' willingness to sell their votes, it is also worthwhile to discuss several correlates included in the analyses in Tables 1 and 2.

In the clientelism literature—which does not focus on the contemporary U.S.—income is one of the most frequently cited predictors of whether a citizen will accept a clientelist offer. Many studies posit that lower-income citizens are more likely to sell their votes, in part because the diminishing marginal utility of income suggests they place relatively greater value on material benefits than on ideological preferences

Table I. Respondents' Willingness to Accept Vote-Buying Offer (Congressional Candidate).

		2016 YouGov survey										2018 MTurk survey												
		Outcome variable: Respondent would sell at specified price or below																						
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	
\$25	\$100	\$1,000	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$1,000	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Importance of Democracy			-0.027***			-0.034***					-0.024**													
Voting matters																								
Income																								
Strong Democrat	-0.01* (0.005)	-0.010+ (0.005)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.039*** (0.010)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.028** (0.010)	-0.012*** (0.004)	-0.077*** (0.013)	-0.011* (0.004)	-0.011* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)
Strong Republican	-0.072* (0.032)	-0.077* (0.038)	0.016 (0.023)	-0.006+ (0.003)	0.016 (0.023)	0.025 (0.023)	-0.026 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.030)
Age	0.039 (0.038)	0.046 (0.044)	-0.060 (0.052)	-0.041 (0.032)	-0.037 (0.033)	-0.037 (0.033)	-0.066 (0.045)	-0.059 (0.041)	-0.059 (0.041)	-0.059 (0.041)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.042)
Female	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)
Education	-0.049* (0.023)	-0.052+ (0.028)	-0.079* (0.033)	-0.057** (0.019)	-0.054** (0.018)	-0.054** (0.018)	-0.078** (0.025)	-0.074** (0.024)	-0.074** (0.024)	-0.074** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)	-0.073** (0.024)
Black	0.009 (0.008)	0.006 (0.010)	-0.000 (0.012)	0.012+ (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)	0.011 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)
Asian	0.112* (0.044)	0.148** (0.052)	0.123* (0.057)	0.051 (0.042)	0.051 (0.042)	0.047 (0.042)	0.044 (0.051)	0.039 (0.051)	0.039 (0.051)	0.039 (0.051)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)
Hispanic	-0.019 (0.041)	-0.000 (0.054)	-0.141* (0.059)	0.040 (0.048)	0.033 (0.048)	0.038 (0.048)	0.089 (0.060)	0.079 (0.059)	0.079 (0.059)	0.079 (0.059)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)	0.085 (0.058)
Other minority	0.007 (0.052)	0.017 (0.065)	-0.121+ (0.068)	-0.078* (0.036)	-0.073+ (0.038)	-0.077* (0.037)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)	-0.079 (0.038)
Registered voter	-0.032 (0.043)	-0.053 (0.054)	-0.068 (0.060)	0.072 (0.053)	0.077 (0.051)	0.090+ (0.053)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)	0.123+ (0.073)
Competitive district	0.023 (0.040)	0.020 (0.047)	-0.010 (0.056)	-0.002 (0.022)	-0.001 (0.022)	-0.000 (0.022)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.010 (0.028)
Constant	0.250*** (0.056)	0.513*** (0.069)	0.772*** (0.077)	0.373*** (0.077)	0.323*** (0.070)	0.420*** (0.077)	0.691*** (0.097)	0.697*** (0.089)	0.697*** (0.089)	0.697*** (0.089)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)	0.801*** (0.097)
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	843	843	843	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	1,171	
R ²	0.072	0.108	0.121	0.095	0.087	0.102	0.117	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	0.140	

Note. Linear probability models with robust standard errors in parentheses; all results are robust when employing logit regressions. + significant at $p < .10$; * at $p < .05$; ** at $p < .01$; *** at $p < .001$. Dependent variable is coded 1 if respondent indicated she would accept the amount offered or lower to vote for a specific candidate for Congress; 0 otherwise. The starting offer of \$25 was increased consecutively to the following amounts for respondents rejecting previous offers: \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and ultimately \$1,000. The Supplemental Appendix provides results for values not shown above. *Importance of Democracy* is a World Values Survey question asking respondents to rate democracy's importance on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents "not at all important" and 10 represents "absolutely important." *Voting Matters* is an ANES question asking respondents the extent to which they agree that "So many other people vote in the national elections that it doesn't matter much to me whether I vote or not"; the scale is 1 to 5 where 1 represents "strongly agree" and 5 represents "strongly disagree." *Income* is measured on a 16-point ordinal scale ranging from under \$10,000 of annual household income to over \$500,000. *Strong Democrat* and *Strong Republican* are dichotomous variables taking a value of 1 for individuals reporting their political affiliation as aligning with 1 or 7, respectively, on a standard 7-point party identification scale, and 0 otherwise. *Education* is measured on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from less than a high school education to college degree or higher. *Registered Voter* is a dummy for whether an individual reports being registered to vote. *Competitive District* is coded as 1 if the Cook Political Report indicated that the congressional district was competitive in the 2016 (for Columns 1–3) and 2018 (for Columns 4–12) elections. Excluded category for the ethnicity dummy variables is Caucasian.

Table 2. Respondents' Willingness to Accept Vote-Buying Offer (Presidential Candidate).

	2016 YouGov survey						2018 MTurk survey					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	\$25	\$100	\$1,000	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Importance of democracy				-0.013** (0.005)		-0.010+ (0.005)	-0.023*** (0.007)	-0.057*** (0.011)	-0.015* (0.007)	-0.033*** (0.008)		
Voting matters					-0.026** (0.008)	-0.021** (0.008)			-0.050*** (0.011)			
Income	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.007* (0.003)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.007** (0.002)	-0.007** (0.002)	-0.007** (0.002)	-0.010** (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.012* (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)
Strong Democrat	-0.007 (0.019)	-0.020 (0.026)	-0.084* (0.036)	-0.010 (0.016)	-0.010 (0.017)	-0.003 (0.017)	-0.041+ (0.024)	-0.035 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.025)	-0.093* (0.036)	-0.075* (0.036)	-0.063+ (0.037)
Strong Republican	0.018 (0.024)	0.046 (0.035)	-0.036 (0.049)	-0.016 (0.024)	-0.014 (0.024)	-0.012 (0.024)	-0.050 (0.037)	-0.044 (0.036)	-0.041 (0.036)	-0.140* (0.055)	-0.126* (0.052)	-0.122* (0.052)
Age	-0.002*** (0.000)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)
Female	-0.018 (0.015)	-0.030 (0.022)	-0.078* (0.032)	-0.019 (0.014)	-0.018 (0.014)	-0.018 (0.014)	-0.043* (0.021)	-0.040+ (0.021)	-0.039+ (0.021)	-0.084** (0.029)	-0.078** (0.029)	-0.077** (0.028)
Education	0.002 (0.005)	0.001 (0.008)	0.002 (0.012)	0.010+ (0.006)	0.007 (0.006)	0.009 (0.006)	0.016+ (0.009)	0.013 (0.009)	0.015+ (0.009)	0.007 (0.012)	0.002 (0.012)	0.005 (0.012)
Black	0.015 (0.029)	0.057 (0.041)	0.100+ (0.054)	-0.001 (0.029)	-0.002 (0.029)	-0.004 (0.029)	-0.074* (0.037)	-0.078* (0.037)	-0.081* (0.037)	-0.059 (0.057)	-0.069 (0.055)	-0.073 (0.055)
Asian	0.007 (0.065)	0.103 (0.099)	0.124 (0.120)	-0.033 (0.024)	-0.036 (0.024)	-0.034 (0.025)	0.009 (0.050)	0.002 (0.049)	0.007 (0.049)	0.000 (0.064)	-0.009 (0.063)	-0.004 (0.063)
Hispanic	-0.022 (0.030)	0.011 (0.045)	0.006 (0.058)	-0.003 (0.033)	-0.006 (0.033)	-0.004 (0.033)	-0.023 (0.047)	-0.029 (0.045)	-0.026 (0.046)	-0.008 (0.060)	-0.018 (0.060)	-0.014 (0.060)
Other minority	-0.019 (0.030)	-0.056+ (0.034)	-0.096 (0.066)	-0.045+ (0.026)	-0.044 (0.027)	-0.045+ (0.026)	-0.043 (0.050)	-0.041 (0.052)	-0.043 (0.051)	-0.199** (0.072)	-0.196** (0.073)	-0.199** (0.073)
Registered voter	-0.003 (0.030)	-0.036 (0.043)	0.008 (0.059)	0.002 (0.043)	0.009 (0.042)	0.015 (0.043)	-0.013 (0.065)	0.010 (0.060)	0.018 (0.062)	0.123 (0.081)	0.171* (0.076)	0.182* (0.078)
Constant	0.172*** (0.040)	0.346*** (0.056)	0.730*** (0.074)	0.206*** (0.062)	0.201*** (0.058)	0.242*** (0.063)	0.513*** (0.085)	0.532*** (0.079)	0.598*** (0.086)	0.992*** (0.110)	1.070*** (0.099)	1.150*** (0.107)
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	865	865	865	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177
R ²	0.066	0.091	0.131	0.079	0.082	0.087	0.085	0.098	0.103	0.135	0.164	0.168

Note. Linear probability models with robust standard errors in parentheses; all results are robust when employing logit regressions. + significant at $p < .10$; * at $p < .05$; ** at $p < .01$; *** at $p < .001$. Dependent variable is coded 1 if respondent indicated she would accept the amount offered or lower to vote for a specific candidate for President; 0 otherwise. Respondents were presented with the options of \$25, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and \$1,000, as well as the option of not accepting any amount. The Supplemental Appendix provides results for the ethnicity dummy variables is Caucasian. See the note to Table 1 for information about covariates. Given the role of the Electoral College in presidential elections, this table adjusts for electoral competitiveness through state fixed effects; by contrast, Table 1 focuses on congressional candidates and thus also controls for the competitiveness of each congressional district.

(Dixit & Londregan, 1996, p. 1114; Stokes, 2005, p. 315).¹³ To measure income, our surveys included a 16-point ordinal scale with categories ranging from under \$10,000 of annual household income to over \$500,000. Tables 1 and 2 are consistent with theoretical expectations; in both 2016 and 2018, the expected negative association between income and willingness to accept a vote-buying offer is always observed. These findings are statistically significant at the .01 to .10 level in all analyses about offers to vote for a presidential candidate, as well as in the vast majority of analyses about offers to vote for a congressional candidate.¹⁴

Political preferences are another commonly discussed predictor of whether a citizen will accept a clientelist offer. In accordance with spatial voting models, many analyses of clientelism emphasize that whereas strong partisans will reject such offers, citizens who are indifferent or weak supporters may switch their votes in exchange for material rewards (Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Stokes, 2005). To measure strong partisanship, we created two dichotomous variables for individuals identifying as a “Strong Democrat” or a “Strong Republican,” the endpoints on a standard 7-point party identification scale.¹⁵ Although the association between strong partisanship and willingness to sell votes is less robust than our findings concerning income, for higher price points both the *Strong Democrat* and *Strong Republican* variables are negative and statistically significant at the .05 level for the majority of specifications in congressional and presidential campaigns. Furthermore, the coefficients for both variables are negative in most other specifications.¹⁶ The clientelism literature also emphasizes that citizens unlikely to turn out may also be reward recipients (Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Nichter, 2008). Such studies suggest that citizens with greater voting costs require higher rewards to meet their reservation value for participating in clientelist exchanges (*ceteris paribus*). Unlike for political preferences and income, our study did not pre-register predictions about turnout; analyses do not reveal a robust link between citizens’ turnout propensity and their willingness to sell votes.¹⁷

Tables 1 and 2 also show that older respondents and women are less likely to indicate that they are willing to sell their votes. In other words, to the extent that this willingness is an expression of democratic skepticism, the prevalence of this phenomenon is greater among younger voters and males. Meanwhile, contrary to classic studies emphasizing education’s importance for instilling democratic values (e.g., Lipset, 1959), we do not find an association between education and willingness to sell votes.

As mentioned, these findings about correlates of vote selling are ancillary, in that our primary focus is on perceptions of democracy. Nevertheless, the fact that numerous specifications for income and political preferences conform with theoretical expectations provides additional evidence that US respondents were not arbitrarily responding to our vignettes about whether they would sell their votes.

Discussion

Whereas prominent scholars raise concerns about political polarization, weakened civil liberties, citizens’ willingness to sacrifice democratic principles, and the extent to which Americans hold favorable views of authoritarian political systems, we argue that these important debates pay short shrift to the value citizens place on one of the most fundamental democratic institutions: the act of voting. We show that despite political scientists’ longstanding portrayal of the U.S. as the embodiment of a democratic “civic culture” (Almond & Verba, 1966), a substantial share of Americans indicate they would trade their right to express political preferences at the polls for relatively small sums of money: 12% of respondents would do so for just \$25, as would nearly 20% for \$100.

In this concluding section, we first discuss two potential objections to our interpretation of these findings, and then emphasize three key takeaways from our study. One might object to interpreting survey respondents’ willingness to sell votes as an expression of democratic skepticism, because respondents who answer affirmatively may believe their preferences would nevertheless be expressed in a democratic manner. For example, respondents may express readiness to support an unnamed candidate in exchange for cash under the assumption that, particularly in a two-party system, they would have likely voted for that candidate anyway. Conversely, they may answer that they are willing to sell their votes, with the intention of renegeing and voting for their preferred candidate.¹⁸ Without denying these possibilities, we emphasize that they are by no means unique to our study in the context of the United States. Rather, comparativists have shown that such considerations are part and parcel of everyday clientelist transactions in political systems where scholars and citizens have long argued that the practice is antithetical to democracy. Clientelist politicians often deliver payments to their own core supporters (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Nichter, 2018), and political machines regularly deliver handouts despite their imperfect ability to monitor how recipients vote (Hicken & Nathan, 2020; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Another potential objection to interpreting willingness to sell votes as an expression of democratic skepticism is that it presupposes that the practice is inherently undemocratic. After all, from a rational choice perspective, selling one’s vote might be considered an optimal strategy if it is highly unlikely that a vote will be pivotal. Yet scholars have convincingly demonstrated the many ways in which clientelist transactions are at odds with key democratic principles. For example, clientelism has been shown to: (1) undermine political equality, as the poor are more likely to need to sell their votes; (2) distort the expressive role of votes as a means for society (and political leaders) to tally aggregate policy preferences; and (3) weaken the electoral mechanisms through which voters in well-functioning democracies can hold

politicians accountable (Hasen, 2000; Karlan, 1994; Stokes et al., 2013). Additionally, if it were indeed the case that Americans do not perceive clientelism to be undemocratic, that finding would in and of itself be striking: research suggests that even in countries with far weaker democratic traditions than the U.S., many voters have highly negative views of clientelism (e.g., Carlin & Moseley, 2015; Weitz-Shapiro, 2014)—and those without direct vote-selling experiences tend to be more averse to the practice (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2014).

Stepping back, the present study suggests three key take-aways. First, our findings suggest that researchers and policymakers concerned about measuring and conceptualizing democratic skepticism in the U.S. should recognize that citizens' willingness to sell their votes is another important indicator to consider. Given that elections are a core feature of democracy, the sheer number of Americans expressing readiness to accept clientelist offers is an intrinsically noteworthy measure of the low value that many citizens place on voting. Moreover, we find that this propensity is greater among respondents who place low importance on living in a democracy or who express doubt about their capacity to affect electoral outcomes. Altogether, this evidence suggests that the level of Americans willing to sell their votes should be added to the cluster of symptoms frequently cited in ongoing discussions of democratic skepticism in the U.S. To this end, future studies should also consider alternative approaches for measuring citizens' willingness to sell votes. For example, some of our survey respondents may not have fully realized the implications of selling their votes. One alternative approach would be to first ask respondents about their intended vote choices, and then ask if they would be willing to accept money to vote for an opposing candidate. A second approach would be to adopt research designs that directly link participants' incentives to their responses; Güth and Weck-Hannemann (1997), for example, examine abstention buying by investigating whether German university students were willing to hand over their voting documents in exchange for cash several days before a national election. A third approach would be to include characteristics that tie questions to specific contexts in contemporary American politics (e.g., mentioning candidates' names), which may also yield additional insights about underlying mechanisms.¹⁹

Second, heightened attention to citizens' willingness to sell their votes would also bring the study of US politics into line with broader trends in the discipline. Over the past two decades, clientelism has been one of the most active areas of research among scholars of comparative politics. But clientelism-related questions that are standard fare on surveys throughout much of the world are rarely presented to American voters, presumably because scholars consider vote buying in the U.S. to be a spectacle of the past. Without denying the rarity of clientelist transactions in the U.S., an unfortunate consequence of this approach is that we have scant evidence about the attitudes of contemporary Americans

about selling their votes. Our data demonstrate, however, that despite the United States' esteemed role as one of the world's most established democracies, American voters are willing to commodify their votes at levels comparable to voters in countries with far weaker democratic traditions, such as Brazil and Uganda. Integrating the U.S. into broader debates about the condition of democracy forces scholars and policymakers to confront these types of potentially uncomfortable comparisons, which are likely to stimulate productive methodological debates and encourage novel theory building. For example, while it may be tempting to dismiss findings based on hypothetical scenarios, such a dismissal would raise questions about how to interpret findings from the hypothetical vignettes widely used in research on clientelism,²⁰ not to mention in research on various other topics of a sensitive nature. If researchers take claims about large percentages of Brazilians or Ugandans being willing to sell votes at face value, they should also carefully consider the authenticity of research subjects' responses in the US context. Alternatively, researchers might consider whether even in the context of developing countries, citizens' responses to hypothetical scenarios truly represent readiness to participate in clientelist exchanges, or if instead their responses are better understood as a proxy for broader skepticism about democratic institutions.

Third, our findings suggest that scholars should reassess whether US parties curbed their use of clientelism because of a dwindling supply of votes for sale, or whether they did so *despite* many Americans' continued willingness to sell their votes. Classic works on clientelism have suggested that citizens' refusals to accept vote-buying rewards is a key reason why parties and politicians shifted away from contingent exchanges. For example, Banfield and Wilson (1963, p. 121) explain that in the U.S., "The main reason for the decline and near disappearance of the city-wide machine was—and is—the growing unwillingness of voters to accept the inducements it offered." Over the years, this same passage has been quoted by prominent scholars who reach similar conclusions: for instance, by Stokes et al. (2013, pp. 236–238) when arguing that economic and social modernization made it exorbitantly expensive for US political machines to buy the votes of increasingly wealthy citizens, and by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 25fn) when discussing the role of economic development in clientelism more broadly. But the striking gap revealed in our study between the substantial share of Americans willing to sell their votes and the small share who actually do so suggests that citizens' willingness to accept rewards may not actually impose a binding constraint on clientelism in the U.S.; after all, over a tenth of contemporary American voters said they would sell their votes for just \$25. Future research should rigorously investigate the possibility that US parties shifted away from clientelism even though many citizens remained ready to sell votes, building on the handful of studies to have broached this topic. For example, Lehoucq (2002, pp.

11–14) notes that many 19th-century voters in the U.S. (and Britain) considered selling their vote to be a “right,” and that in at least one Ohio county “voters threatened to vote against the first party to establish agreements” against vote buying. Our findings, along with such tantalizing fragments of evidence, are by no means dispositive but point to what we believe constitutes a research agenda with noteworthy potential.

In summary, our findings indicate that more data and a better understanding of voter attitudes toward clientelism would facilitate political scientists’ analysis of Americans’ commitment to democracy, advance the study of clientelism by placing the U.S. in comparative perspective, and contribute to new insights into the historic decline of clientelism. The findings also serve as yet another ominous indicator for observers concerned about vitality of democracy in the United States.

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Notes

1. “Ballots as a Commodity,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1890.
2. David Fahrenthold, “Selling Votes is Common Type of Election Fraud,” *Washington Post*, October 1, 2012.
3. Richard Stenger, “Embattled Vote Auction Site Returns to the Web,” CNN.com, October 24, 2000; “Courts Assail Online Vote-Swap and Auction Sites,” CNN.com, November 7, 2000.
4. Ronna Abramson, “Web Site Offering to Sell Votes Shut Down,” CNN.com, August 23, 2000.
5. Figures correspond to 1,000 rubles (US\$16) in Russia (“Expectations of Electoral Abuses,” Levada Center Press Release, August 22, 2016), 50 reais (US\$21) in rural Brazil (Nichter, 2018, p. 97), 15 to 25 euros (US\$17–28) in Bulgaria (“Turk to Run for Bulgarian Presidency,” *Hurriet Daily News*, October 30, 2011), and 80,000 shillings (US\$20) in Uganda (Shaker et al., 2019, p. 1620).
6. In addition to other paraphernalia (e.g., mug, pin, and voting card), respondents also mentioned various items (e.g., gift card, car wash, yard work, and hotel stay).
7. Results are nearly identical when limiting the analysis to the 90% of respondents who report being registered voters.
8. Data on Russia are from “Expectations of Electoral Abuses,” Levada Center Press Release, August 22, 2016; on Brazil, from Nichter (2018, p. 97); on Bulgaria, from “Turk to Run for Bulgarian Presidency,” *Hurriet Daily News*, October 30, 2011; and on Uganda, from Shaker et al. (2019, p. 1620).
9. For example, reporting on the Levada Center survey cited above, *The Moscow Times* published a story with the headline “Almost One-Quarter of Russians Ready to Sell their Votes, Says Poll” (August 22, 2016).
10. Hypotheses were pre-registered on the Open Science Framework registry. Two hypotheses focused on democratic skepticism: (1) voters indicating it is less important to live in a democracy will be more willing to sell their votes; and (2) voters who believe their vote rarely matters because so many people vote will be more willing to sell their votes. Other hypotheses tested below predicted that higher incomes and stronger partisan preferences would be negatively correlated with willingness to sell votes. Two brief survey experiments later primed respondents to “do your civic duty and vote” and that “your vote may make the difference”; neither affected vote selling.
11. Recent studies provide evidence that political scientists can draw credible inferences from analyses based on MTurk samples, particularly when controlling for a basic set of demographic control variables (see, e.g., Huff & Tingley, 2015; Levay et al., 2016). To mitigate potential concerns about respondents’ attentiveness, we employed two screener questions (following the approach advocated by Berinsky et al., 2014). Over 93% of respondents answered both questions correctly. All results in Tables 1 and 2 are robust when controlling for levels of attentiveness.
12. In our survey, the mean rating for this question was 8.6 with a standard deviation of 1.9. In the World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017–2020), the mean for US respondents was 8.3 with a standard deviation of 2.3 ($N=2,596$).
13. Other reasons for poorer citizens, greater involvement in clientelism may include risk aversion and time preferences (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007, p. 3; Stokes et al., 2013, pp. 163–164).
14. Tables 1 and 2 show results for offers of \$25, \$100 or below, and \$1000 or below; analyses for offers of \$50 or below, \$200 or below, and \$500 or below are presented in the Supplemental Appendix.
15. We create separate variables for strong partisans in each political party to allow for the possibility that partisanship influences Democrats and Republicans in different ways. With respect to party identification more broadly, we find no consistent differences across Democrats, Republicans, and independents with respect to willingness to sell votes. We also do not find robust differences between respondents who approve or disapprove of President Donald Trump; this question was only asked in 2018.
16. We also show in the Supplemental Appendix that the associations between partisanship and willingness to sell votes in the 2018 survey become more pronounced in specifications that exclude the *Importance of Democracy* and *Vote Matters* variables.
17. The 2018 MTurk survey—but not the 2016 YouGov survey—includes a question about citizens’ likelihood of voting in the contemporaneous election. The Supplemental Appendix shows the robustness of results when including this covariate in Tables 1 and 2. Likely voters are not significantly more or less likely to sell their votes with one exception: they are less likely to sell their votes for \$25. Additional insight may be gleaned from the *Registered Voter* control in Tables 1 and

2. Registered voters, who may have lower additional voting costs than those who have not yet registered, are significantly more likely to be willing to sell their votes in a quarter of specifications.
18. Although many clientelist transactions across the world do not rely on monitoring (Hicken & Nathan, 2020), note that a considerable minority of Americans harbor doubts about ballot secrecy. Gerber et al. (2013) find that 25% of US survey respondents did not believe that their votes are kept secret. In a different question, 40% of US respondents thought it would not be difficult for politicians to discover their vote choices.
19. The authors thank two anonymous reviewers for suggesting these alternative approaches. The first and second alternatives build on influential studies by White et al. (2014) and Güth and Weck-Hannemann (1997), respectively.
20. Examples of recent studies on clientelism employing hypothetical vignettes or questions include Conroy-Krutz (2017), Croke (2017), Kiewiet de Jonge (2015), Frye et al. (2019), Gonzales-Ocantos et al. (2012, 2014), Gottlieb (2016), Heath and Tillin (2018), Kao et al., (2017), Kramon (2016), Lawson and Greene (2014), Leight et al. (2018), Murillo et al. (2021), Pradhanawati et al. (2018), Tawakkal (2017), and Weitz-Shapiro (2012).

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