

SUPPLEMENT TO “VOTE-BUYING AND RECIPROCITY”: QUOTES  
FROM TRANSPARENCIA PARAGUAY  
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FROM JULY TO SEPTEMBER of 2005, *Transparencia Paraguay* (the national branch of *Transparency International*) carried out a major project regarding the financing of electoral campaigns. This project included interviews carried out in 10 municipalities across the country with legislators, mayors, and members of civil society. Focus groups were also carried out in four municipalities with political operatives and middlemen.

The final write-up contains an explanation written by *Transparencia Paraguay* as to how the political campaign works. They discuss the role of the “*operador político*”:

For the community to conform, the candidate needs an *operador político* in the field: the *operador político*, a professional in politics, leader of his community, who becomes the backbone of the election campaign. Through *operadores políticos*, candidates can build their network of promises of aid, favors, and meet the expectations of the poorest people in the electorate. This will allow the candidate to form the community which will sustain his candidacy on election day.

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In the scheme of an election campaign such as the one we drew out on previous pages, based both on the promotion of the candidate, as well as building a clientele available to vote for him on election day, the figure of the *operador político* assumes particular importance, so much so that they are considered by many legislators and mayors as the key to success at the polls.

The *operador político* is a professional in politics. He is the one who visits potential voters during the election campaign, bringing them the proposals of the candidate and also becoming a kind of caseworker for families with limited resources (almost half the population of the country), bringing them immediate solutions such as: medicine, food, payment of bills and more. But, for an *operador político* to be successful he must also be committed to the candidate, and he must be recognized in the neighborhood where he works, a local *caudillo*, who the voters recognize as someone to go to when there’s a problem.

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The third circle is composed of *operadores políticos*. They are essential for the election campaign and their value is directly proportional to both their commitment to the candidate and their integration with the community in which they seek votes for the candidate. The more they are recognized as a community leader, or at least as someone who solves the problems of the community, the better they can perform their job as promoter of the candidate during the election campaign.

The interviews and focus groups are extremely interesting in their own right. Here are excerpts which say something about reciprocity.

I am going to explain how a primary election takes place. One candidate from one party calls the political operative of the other to complain. He says to him: “It’s a shame. In

school X, on the day of the elections, you are buying the votes for 70,000 guaraníes.” And the other person replies: “How could we be buying for 70 when you are buying for 100?” That happens in all the primaries. The candidate that spends better on election day wins the primaries. And the candidate who positions himself badly loses. This is so much the case that there is the accusation of treason in one of the biggest parties—I will not say which one. The problem was that the money did not arrive in time to buy the votes; thus, the other candidate could buy them. This happened in Cordillera. The voters were waiting for the money to go out and vote, but the money did not arrive; what arrived instead was the message “vote for whoever you want.” On the corner, the political operatives of the other candidate were waiting, and they bought all the votes for sale. The consequences were that there were layoffs, anger, and annoyances. They were supposed to have spent so many millions of dollars on the day of the elections, and only a fraction of that sum was spent.—*Hermes Rafael Rambo Sagüier (Liberal), ex representative in the national legislature.*

The voters prostitute themselves and cause the campaign to be very expensive. Everyone gets sick; their ceiling needs repair; their taxes need to be straightened out. If you don't go out prepared, you are not going to win. That's the way it is, and that is 40 days before the election. You could take care of a person for a year, and then five days before the election you don't bring him the medicine that he asked you for and he votes for someone else.—*Derlis (Colorado), municipal government worker in Coronel Oviedo.*

The issue of medicine was a big one because several of the candidates for governor, mayor, and representatives were doctors. It is true that doctors can be of service and the service they provide is important. But, what happens when the people become accustomed? The first thing they say to you is “Is there a little medicine? Are there free appointments?” The voters say to you “You're a lawyer. Mr. So-and-so helped me out with a judgement. You could do that too.” That is the condition. “Could you help me out with this, because if you don't then I am going to go to the other side and So-and-so is going to help me.” It is a black-mailing attitude. Then I say to the voter that I don't think our situation will ever improve with that kind of attitude. I believe that the electoral authorities must make voting obligatory, but no one controls it. If people are going to vote then they should go ahead and vote for whomever they want, that's not a problem, as long as people go and perform their civic duty. Nevertheless, nowadays you have to take them to go to vote in a minibus, you have to pick them up, you have to give them breakfast or a snack, and that's the only way they'll go. If they don't have shoes then you have to buy them that. They'll tell you “I am not going to go to vote because I don't have shoes,” and so you have to buy them. Nowadays that is our situation. Politics is a business deal.—*Enrique (Liberal), lawyer and ex-member of the municipal legislature in Coronel Oviedo.*

I just want to say what the campaigns cost, the banners, the posters, all that has a cost, the shirts, the pens. And who are the ones that criticize you? The press and the radio criticize you. We are captives of the radio, because the radio is what arrives in the rural area and we are protective of our electorate in the rural areas because in the rural areas people still believe in the power of their word. When they pawn their word, they respect it. Nevertheless, in the urban and peri-urban areas, the majority goes with the highest bidder, but in the rural areas the pawned word is respected.—*Adela (Colorado), staff in the Ministry of Health in Coronel Oviedo and member of the Council of Colorado Women.*

There is a new way that the people do things, especially in urban areas. Someone tells you, “I have access to 30 votes, I have their ID cards here.” He tells you 30 people, 30 ID cards. He went out to collect them and then he brings them to you. Then you ask him if they know who they are going to vote for and he answers no. He says “For 10,000 each we will vote for you”, and if there are thirty of them then it's 300,000 Gs. Some are more expensive but others only need 5,000 so they can buy some liquor or cigarettes for that same day.

These are the people from the marginal districts. That's how they work and that's what they dedicate themselves to on election day. You have to have money in your pocket. If you already invested however many millions in the campaign and then for 300,000 you are going to lose 30 votes which could change the results.—*Adela (Colorado), nurse working for the Ministry of Health in the regional offices in Coronel Oviedo.*

I am going to tell you one thing. I go and I tell my friend who has 4 children, let's pick a name, Mary, let's go vote. How am I going to tell her to vote for free? She has to feed her 4 kids who she is leaving home alone to go vote. I at least have to give her 20,000 Gs.—*Guadalupe (Colorado), leader of the Colorado youth organization in Asunción.*

Obviously, with the needs that exist in this country, when one goes to visit the neighborhoods one receives a lot of requests for assistance. This could be in the form of medicine, payment of electricity bills, payment of water bills, telephone, payment of school fees, university fees, rent, various loans, payment for foodstuffs or for things that have been pawned, everything, everything that you can imagine happens. All these problems seem to be just waiting for the moment when there's an election campaign, and one has to deal with such situations. If someone comes up to you and you don't solve those problems, then you're not a leader. You simply don't exist if you can't find a solution to these problems. . . . And the people said, "I am with you. I have so many people and give me so much [money]." I said, "No, no, I don't have it." So then they go and that's that. There were candidates who had economic resources and so they paid them. But on one opportunity I denounced them [to the police] because a sort of, as it's called, "little train" came up and there were 15 guys, and one came and told me, "Well, here I have 15 ID cards and there the people are all seated on the wall."—*Martin Arévalo (Colorado), head of the municipal legislature in Asunción.*

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