

Mass Organization and the Durability of Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence From Venezuela

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Abstract

Many studies highlight the critical roles of political parties in enhancing autocratic durability, mainly emphasizing mechanisms related to elite cohesion. The role of a mass party organization in stabilizing autocracies, though well recognized, has received relatively less emphasis. This article argues that the import of mass organization on autocratic durability is likely to vary with autocratic regime type and be greatest in competitive authoritarian regimes. I then exploit unusual survey data and an original data set containing information on 18,037 regime-affiliated “Communal Councils” to examine the effects of a regime-affiliated mass organization on the incumbent vote in Venezuela. The formation of Communal Councils exerted a large effect on incumbent support but the strength of this effect varied depending on whether Councils were located in communities receiving high levels of material resources. These findings suggest that mass organization can greatly enhance competitive authoritarian durability but must be backed by patronage to be effective.

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A large body of scholarship points to the central role of authoritarian political parties in enhancing autocratic durability. The mechanisms by which parties might buttress autocratic rule, however, are quite diverse. Many influential pieces of scholarship emphasize the role of political parties in elite management and recruitment. Authoritarian parties foster elite cohesion, provide institutional channels for credible power sharing, and serve as structures into which individuals in society, even non-elites, sink career investments, thus acquiring personal stakes in autocratic survival (Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, 1999; Magaloni, 2008; Svobik, 2012). Although often noted by scholars, a second type of mechanism has generally received less emphasis in research on authoritarian endurance: Authoritarian parties often (but not always) establish mass party organizations, consisting of local party offices or para-partisan entities. Mass organization can enhance autocratic durability through social control and the mobilization of popular support, especially during elections (Brownlee, 2007; Huntington, 1968; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Zolberg, 1966).

This article makes three primary arguments about the role of mass organization in autocratic stability. First, on a general theoretical level, it proposes that the impact of mass organization on autocratic stability is likely to vary across autocratic regime types (closed, hegemonic, and competitive authoritarian), with mass organization mattering more as regimes become more electorally competitive. Mass organization may be of relatively low import, when compared with mechanisms of elite management and recruitment, in the context of closed or hegemonic regimes, where elections are not held or, when held, not marked by meaningful levels of uncertainty. In the context of competitive authoritarian regimes, however, mass organization is likely to rise in relative importance as a mechanism promoting autocratic endurance and therefore deserves additional scrutiny. Second, the article argues that, at least in the competitive authoritarian context, the establishment of mass organization can exert a large effect on the vote for incumbents. When the threat of overthrow at the ballot box is real, an infrastructure of mass organization at the grassroots level can make a decisive difference for autocrats. Finally, the article argues that the effect of mass organization in building support for competitive authoritarian incumbents is likely to hinge on the distribution of resources through those organizations.

Although the first assertion above simply grounds the study theoretically, I test the second and third propositions in the case of Venezuela, where starting in 2006 the government of Hugo Chávez began a massive push to form “Communal Councils” across the country, para-partisan mass organization that served as the grassroots infrastructure for the Bolivarian Movement and its Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). To do so, I draw on survey data and an original parish-level data set containing information on 18,037 Communal Councils. I find that the presence of a Communal Council had a large impact on support for the regime in the 2006 presidential election, increasing the probability of a Chávez vote by .064 among Venezuelans living in neighborhoods where a council was formed. This effect size is remarkable when considering that around half the Venezuelan population was treated. However, I also find compelling evidence that the impact of Communal Councils depended greatly on material distribution: Effects were extremely strong in communities receiving high levels of material spending under the program and nearly non-existent in areas receiving little to no resources. Given that the research design is observational, I take three further steps to probe the strength of the findings: two placebo tests, a sensitivity analysis, and a replication test using the aggregate-level data set.

The article has several important implications for comparative research on autocratic endurance, especially in competitive authoritarian regimes. First, it underlines the value of considering autocratic regime type (along the competitiveness spectrum) in theorizing and understanding the mechanisms through which political parties enhance regime endurance and longevity. Although scholars typically theorize the importance of political parties to autocratic endurance and longevity in general, it may be useful to think in terms of diverse party-related mechanisms whose impact can differ depending on the level of electoral competitiveness within autocratic regimes and therefore the types of threats these regimes face. Second, the article provides a highly unusual empirical evaluation of the impact of mass organization on support for incumbents, and the role of patronage in making mass organization effective, in a competitive authoritarian context. These results offer a baseline for thinking about how mass organization affect the endurance of other competitive authoritarian regimes around the world and suggest the usefulness of integrating mass organization into explanatory models. Third, the key role of material distribution suggests that competitive authoritarian incumbents who rely on mass organization to sustain electoral majorities might be particularly susceptible to sharp economic downturns, a possibility underlined by the massive defeat suffered by the Venezuelan government in the recent 2015 legislative elections.

Mass Organization and Autocratic Endurance Across Regime Types

Recent research on authoritarianism has taken an “institutional turn” (Pepinsky, 2014), involving a focus on the organizations and institutions of autocratic regimes, especially those previously most often examined only in democracies. An extensive body of research examines the functions of authoritarian legislatures, elections, and political parties in solving basic problems of autocratic rule related to power distribution, coalitional management, social control, and legitimacy (Blaydes, 2010; Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, 1999; Lust-Okar, 2005; Magaloni, 2006, 2008; Svobik, 2012). Within this rapidly expanding body of research, particular emphasis has been placed on the central functions of political parties and partisan institutions in enhancing regime durability and longevity.

It may be useful to think of two categories of mechanisms by which political parties enhance autocratic durability. The substantial emphasis of authoritarian party research has been on mechanisms of elite management and recruitment. The agenda-setting work of Geddes (1999) on single-party regimes focused on the role of parties in mediating factional disputes and dissuading defections. Subsequent research has similarly emphasized the ways in which strong parties “mediate conflict and facilitate mutually acceptable solutions” (Brownlee, 2007), facilitate bargains with political opponents (Gandhi, 2008), and enable “credible power sharing” between dictators and elites that face commitment problems (Magaloni, 2008). And other research has further expanded this perspective to also consider the role of parties as institutional structures for career advancement, organizations into which aspirational and ideologically sympathetic citizens sink career investments and therefore acquire a long-lasting stake in regime survival (Svobik, 2012). Overall, these studies tend to view political parties mainly as organizations that provide stable institutions for structuring interactions between autocratic elites.

A second type of mechanism by which parties might enhance autocratic stability is the establishment of mass organization, formal party offices or para-partisan organizations operating at the local level. As in democratic contexts, authoritarian parties can vary significantly in their organizational presence “on the ground.” Although many authoritarian parties lack a robust mass organization altogether, others possess extensive mass organization that allow them to penetrate local communities across the country. The nature of mass organization itself can also differ. Some parties possess formal party offices or units at the local level, entities that show up in organizational charts and party statutes. Yet many others possess similarly extensive mass organization but rely upon more informal para-partisan entities to provide their

grassroots presence, a pattern also common in democracies (Levitsky, 2003). Scholars examining a mass party organization in autocracies therefore often consider both formal party offices and more informal para-partisan entities as part of mass organization, given that they play de facto similar roles in partisan activity and mobilization (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Roberts, 2006). Although recognizing that mass organization can take multiple forms, however, it is also important to draw a clear line between mass organization and other kinds of entities that may become involved in political mobilization on behalf of an authoritarian regime. Therefore, we can define para-partisan entities as organizations that are overtly affiliated with a political party but are not formally part of its organizational structure and for which partisan political activity (signing up new members or participants, mobilizing voters during elections, proselytizing, etc.) is a primary *raison d'être*. These criteria distinguish para-partisan organizations from the wide range of civil society groups (labor unions, nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], neighborhood associations, etc.) that often come under the domination of authoritarian incumbents and engage in political activity but which are clearly not elements of a mass party organization.¹

While receiving less emphasis than mechanisms of elite cohesion in recent research, mass organization may buttress autocratic endurance by facilitating social control, mobilizing popular support, and serving as vehicles for patronage distribution (Brownlee, 2007; Huntington, 1968; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Zolberg, 1966). A motivating argument for this article is that the importance of mass organization to autocratic longevity is likely to vary across autocratic regime types, according to their level of electoral competitiveness. Ultimately, mass organization can be seen as a tool for helping solve the “problem of authoritarian control” over society (Svolik, 2012). Yet the way this tool is deployed, and its importance to autocratic stability in general, is likely to depend on the threats faced by particular authoritarian regimes, especially whether or not they face the need to regularly win elections and whether or not those elections are marked by real levels of uncertainty. Mass organization is likely to have the least impact in closed regimes, those that do not hold elections or only hold single-party elections. In such contexts, mass organization may still facilitate social control, either through the disbursement of benefits or by aiding security agencies in monitoring and repression. But since closed regimes do not face electoral threats and the need to continually mobilize popular support in large numbers, we might surmise that the import of mass organization will be lessened. In hegemonic authoritarian regimes, autocracies that hold multi-party elections that are regularly won by overwhelming margins such that electoral uncertainty remains minimal, mass organization will likely have a greater but still only moderate level of import.

Although electoral uncertainty is relatively low, mass organization can still play critical roles in making sure that regimes retain their seemingly unassailable electoral margins, keeping the regime's hold on power firm and dissuading elite defections (Magaloni, 2006).

Mass organization is likely to have the greatest influence on autocratic endurance and stability in competitive authoritarian regimes, those in which multi-party elections are held and electoral uncertainty is substantial but incumbents nonetheless abuse their power in ways that violate democratic practices and institutions. In such regimes, where "competition is real but unfair" (Levitsky & Way, 2010), removal via the ballot box represents a regular and significant threat for incumbents. Such regimes may not be less stable than other forms of autocracy but, if deposed, are more likely to be usurped through an election (Brownlee, 2009; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010, 2011). Therefore, the establishment of mass organization capable of engaging in campaign activism, distributing resources, and mobilizing voters to the polls during elections may be particularly decisive to their endurance and longevity. This article does not test this assertion empirically—although this might be an important extension in future research—but provides a unique empirical test of the effects of mass organization on incumbent electoral support in a quintessential competitive authoritarian regime, Venezuela under the rule of Hugo Chávez.

Although the above discussion focused on the influence of mass organization across autocratic regime types, it should be emphasized before proceeding that the utilization of mass organization to mobilize voters and distribute selective incentives is by no means an inherently or exclusively authoritarian practice. Rather, political parties with extensive mass organization are arguably most commonly found in democracies. But the use of mass organization to mobilize voters may be an even more powerful weapon in the competitive authoritarian context than under democratic rule, as incumbents tend to face fewer institutional checks on their ability to brazenly exploit the state in creating mass organization and distributing patronage through them.

Mass Organization in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes

Competitive authoritarian regimes have proliferated in the post-Cold War era, becoming one of the most common political regime types around the world.² Competitive authoritarian regimes vary significantly, however, regarding whether incumbents are backed by political parties with substantial mass organization. In numerous countries—such as Malaysia, Tanzania,

Zimbabwe, Mexico, Serbia, and Taiwan—autocratic incumbents had developed extensive mass organization in earlier periods, often in the context of closed or hegemonic regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010). When autocrats introduced reforms that moved regimes toward competitive authoritarianism, instituting multi-party elections or undertaking other reforms that allowed the opposition to become more competitive, they already possessed robust mass organization. In other countries—such as Russia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua—authoritarian regimes born during the post–Cold War period have made massive new investments in building mass organization (Handlin, 2013a; Reuter & Remington, 2009). And, in many cases, competitive authoritarian regimes do not possess or develop robust mass organization at all.

Variation among competitive authoritarian regimes in the incumbent's possession of a robust mass organization may reflect several factors. As noted above, some competitive authoritarian incumbents essentially inherit robust mass organization developed during previous periods whereas others do not. Among those that do not initially possess a robust mass organization, the decision to invest in constructing such organization likely involves several considerations. As Roberts (2006) argues, personalistic autocrats may be induced to build organizations when they feel greatly threatened, such as when influential elites oppose the regime. Investments in mass organization are also costly, in terms of both financial and human resources, and may only bear fruit over time. Competitive authoritarian incumbents may not be able or willing to pay the costs of these investments. And leaders with short time horizons (e.g., a term limited president) may be particularly hesitant to undertake a complex and costly endeavor that may not pay off in time to directly benefit them.

Variation in mass organization has not received great emphasis in explanations of competitive authoritarian regime outcomes. Rather, studies have tended to focus on either international variables such as Western linkage and leverage (Levitsky & Way, 2010) and the application of pressure and sanctions (Donno, 2013) or on characteristics of the political opposition, such as unity (Howard & Roessler, 2006; Wahman, 2011) or the development of a more multifaceted repertoire of strategies such as voter registration, mobilization through civil society, and effectively deploying exit polls and electoral monitors (Bunce & Wolchik 2010, 2011).³ One reason for the lack of attention to mass organization may be that we have relatively little insights into the impact of such organization on incumbent support during elections: Refined empirical evaluation of this topic is extremely difficult. Such studies require reliable and systemic data on the location or existence of regime-affiliated mass organization over territory, information difficult to find. If we cannot estimate the impact of regime-affiliated mass organization on the

pro-incumbent vote, however, it is difficult to know how much weight to place on this strategy in considering explanations of regime endurance and stability.

This article capitalizes on some unusual data to estimate the impact of mass organization on support for a competitive authoritarian incumbent and, by extension, the ability to stave off overthrow at the ballot box. A first baseline hypothesis is that the presence of a regime-affiliated mass organization in an individual's community should increase the likelihood of that individual voting for the incumbent:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): A regime-affiliated mass organization will increase the likelihood of an incumbent vote in areas where those organizations operate.

A second hypothesis investigates the importance of material spending on patronage to the effectiveness of mass organization in winning support. Studies of electoral autocracy frequently highlight the central role of patronage and other forms of material distribution to buttress the electoral fortunes of regimes (Blaydes, 2010; Bruhn, 1996; Greene, 2007; Hawkins, Rosas, & Johnson, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Penfold-Becerra, 2007; Schady, 2000). I ask the related but distinct question of whether the effects of mass organization on the incumbent vote depend on resource distribution through those organizations. Testing the second hypothesis also helps us better understand which kinds of incumbent advantages—not just the institutional levers that allow organizations to be created but also the state coffers that allow them to be financed—are necessary for mass organization to be effective. In so doing, examining the second hypothesis also illuminates the important question of whether there are circumstances, such as economic crises that sharply restrict state finances, which might strip away the advantages conveyed by mass organization.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The effect of a regime-affiliated mass organization on voting behavior is contingent on patronage distribution through those organizations.

It is important to note that the article does not test a third possible hypothesis, that the effect of patronage distribution is contingent on being delivered through mass organization. In essence, the article evaluates whether resource distribution makes mass organization more effective at winning votes but does not have the data necessary to evaluate whether mass organization makes resource distribution more effective. There are at least two reasons,

however, to believe that mass organization do make a difference in this respect. First, scholarship from other competitive authoritarian contexts has suggested that patronage spending, when not channeled through mass organization, may not deliver great payoffs, finding either small effects (Bruhn, 1996; Hiskey, 2000) or statistically significant relationships of somewhat unclear substantive impact (Magaloni, 2006). Second, many studies of mass organization, both under autocracy and democracy, emphasize the close connection between parties having a presence “on the ground” and parties being able to effectively reap the benefits from patronage spending, by targeting resources toward communities and individuals in advantageous ways, by mobilizing the recipients of resources to the polls, and by more effectively claiming credit (Levitsky, 2003; Magaloni, 2006; Sczarcberg, 2015). The notion that patronage distribution through mass organization might be more effective than distribution without mass organization is well established. The key point to emphasize, then, is that though H1 evaluates the impact of mass organization on support for incumbents and H2 evaluates whether these effects are contingent on patronage distribution, a positive finding on H2 would not necessarily suggest that it is patronage, not mass organization, that truly matters (in essence, perhaps contradicting H1). Rather, an affirmation of H2 would suggest that the *combination* of mass organization and patronage distribution is particularly powerful at winning votes: Mass organization may need to be backed by patronage spending to be effective and regimes are likely to get particularly high “bang for their buck” when distributing through mass organization.

Competitive Authoritarianism and Mass Organization in Venezuela

Venezuela is a particularly useful case for studying mass organization in competitive authoritarian regimes. There is broad consensus among leading scholars that the country experienced a transition under the rule of Hugo Chávez from democracy to competitive authoritarianism (Coppedge, 2002; Corrales & Penfold, 2007; Levitsky & Loxton, 2012; Mainwaring, 2012). The precise timing of this transition produces more debate. Some scholars engaged in case study research have considered Venezuela competitive authoritarian since the early Chávez years, emphasizing the abuses of power that surrounded the process of constitutional reform and the government’s attempts to marginalize its political opponents and monopolize major state institutions (Corrales & Penfold, 2007; Levitsky & Loxton, 2012). Cross-national regime indicators such as the Autocratic Regimes Data Set and Freedom House scores, which form the basis of several measures of

competitive authoritarianism utilized in large-*n* research, generally pick up a transition in 2004 or 2005, in the wake of a recall referendum characterized by the massive deployment of state resources to support the pro-Chávez position and the open persecution of citizens who had signed the recall petition. Ultimately, scholars may reasonably disagree regarding the precise moment of transition from an illiberal democracy to a competitive authoritarian regime. The key analytic point for present purposes is that all approaches concur that Venezuela possessed a competitive authoritarian regime by the start of 2006, when the Communal Council program was launched.

Competitive authoritarianism in Venezuela has proven relatively durable thus far, surviving despite conditions that should strongly favor democratization in competitive authoritarian contexts according to extant theory. Venezuela has very high levels of linkage to the West, a product of both geography and a long history of relations with the United States. International actors, particularly the United States, have applied various forms of overt pro-democratic pressure. Finally, the Venezuelan opposition, despite longstanding difficulties with internal conflicts, has presented a meaningful threat to win power for a significant period. Infighting along party lines and disputes regarding the wisdom of electoral participation and abstention greatly undercut the opposition in the early years of the Fifth Republic and these internal rifts have continued to hamper the opposition in significant ways. Discord within the opposition therefore has likely contributed to regime durability. Nevertheless, since at least 2006, the opposition has still manifested numerous characteristics that scholars associate with the electoral overthrow of competitive authoritarian regimes, including a unity coalition, strong linkages with student movements, and sophisticated deployment of electoral monitors and exit polls. In this sense, while conflicts within the opposition might have helped the Bolivarian regime stay in office, the opposition has nevertheless presented a more substantial threat than that faced by most competitive authoritarian incumbents.

One possible explanation for regime durability involves the enormous investments that the government has made in tilting the playing field through mass organization and distributive spending. When Chávez and the Bolivarian Movement arrived in power, they lacked a robust mass organization. The *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (MVR) party, which had only been formed in July 1997, existed on paper but not on the ground (Hawkins, 2003; Pereira Almaso, 2002). As the country descended into open conflict, the Chávez government launched its first major push to form mass organization that could mobilize support. Great disenchantment with political parties had characterized Venezuelan politics at the end of the Fourth Republic and ran particularly strongly through the Bolivarian base. As a result, Chávez opted

not to build mass organization formally through the MVR but to urge the establishment of “Bolivarian Circles,” para-partisan groups overtly affiliated with the MVR and Bolivarian Movement but which would not be tainted with the label of a party office (Hawkins & Hansen, 2006). Although the Bolivarian Circles played important roles in some of the tumultuous events of 2001-2003, this early attempt at establishing mass organization proved poorly institutionalized and articulated with the MVR, withering away over time.

When the opposition refocused its attention on the electoral arena as a means for removing Chávez, launching a referendum to recall him from office, the government responded with a series of massive new social programs, the Bolivarian Missions. These programs were highly politicized and likely integral to the regime’s ability to win the 2004 recall referendum and consolidate support (Corrales & Penfold, 2007; Handlin, 2013a; Hawkins et al., 2010; Penfold-Becerra, 2007). Although they had organizational components and operated at the local level of Venezuelan communities, the Missions did not involve the creation of durable mass organization suited to engage in the kinds of sustained electioneering and other mobilizational activities that one would normally expect from mass party organizations or para-partisan groups. For example, Barrio Adentro, the most famous of the Missions, established local health clinics manned by Cuban doctors in thousands of communities. The program was highly successful at winning popular support, but it did not establish mass organization suited to operating as the grassroots arm of the MVR or Bolivarian Movement.

After triumphing in the recall referendum and realizing that the electoral arena would be the site of future battles with the opposition, the Chávez government turned toward the construction of a much more robust and durable partisan organization. First, the government launched a program to encourage the formation of “Communal Councils” across much of the country. The program was launched in early 2006 and established a process by which small communities of 150 to 400 families could form local organizations tasked with governance functions.⁴ Adoption was extremely rapid, with more than 12,000 Communal Councils formed before the end of 2006 and more than 18,000 by early 2008. Second, in late 2006, regime announced plans to form a new political party, the PSUV, that would unite the extant pro-Bolivarian parties.

The Communal Council program was simultaneously a means to enhance local participatory governance and an initiative geared toward creating a new mass organizational base for the Bolivarian Movement and, eventually, PSUV.⁵ The Communal Councils clearly meet the criteria for being considered para-partisan mass organization. From the inception of the program,

Chávez and other regime leaders framed the Communal Councils as explicitly Bolivarian organizations that would be central to the “true revolution” in Venezuela (El Universal, 2006). Once the PSUV was formed, prominent politicians candidly noted that “the Communal Councils represent the base of the party” (Guia, 2010). In interviews with the author, officials tasked with implementing the Communal Council program readily acknowledged its overt partisan affiliation, noted that many Communal Councils effectively functioned as local-level PSUV offices, and even declaring “PSUV=CC” in response to question about the relationship between the two entities.⁶ Furthermore, the Communal Councils are widely understood to frequently engage in partisan political activities such as registering members for the PSUV, mobilizing voters to the polls, and attending rallies. Although the PSUV would eventually develop an extensive organizational structure, the Communal Councils continued to serve as the most important and most prevalent pro-regime organizations at the local level.

The government in Venezuela also utilized the Communal Councils as vehicles for resource distribution. Councils received funds to implement community development projects, mainly in the areas of electricity, water, housing, and other local infrastructure (Machado, 2008). The extent of government expenditure on the program has been enormous. In 2006, the first year of the program, the Councils received over US\$1 billion by most estimates. By 2008, the national budget provided for about US\$1.7 billion for the Communal Councils, an amount roughly half of that provided in the same budget to all of the Bolivarian Missions combined and roughly 3% of the entire budget (El Universal, 2007). The program was overtly designed to improve infrastructure and service provision in poorer communities, such that areas already possessing robust infrastructure had little chance of receiving substantial funds and often received none at all. Chávez and other politicians framed the Communal Council program’s resource component explicitly in terms of helping the poor. And in interviews with the author, multiple top-ranking program officials stated that resources flow overwhelmingly to the poorer half of Venezuelan communities, the proportion that lack basic infrastructural needs. As detailed below, though data on expenditures are unsurprisingly unavailable, the needs-based design of the program opens up opportunities for analyzing the importance of material distribution to its effects on incumbent support.

Research Design and Data

I test the article’s two hypotheses by empirically evaluating the effects of Communal Council formation on the pro-regime vote and the heterogeneity of

these effects across poor and non-poor communities, a viable proxy for material distribution given the needs-based nature of allocation. The research design is best seen as an observational one in which assignment of individuals to the “treatment” of council formation in their neighborhoods was semi-random. Whether or not a council was formed in a respondent’s community involves a degree of random chance, yet covariate adjustment is still necessary. We can expect the set of Venezuelans living in communities where councils were formed to differ from the set of Venezuelans living in communities where councils were not formed, a point illustrated in Figure 1. Most importantly, given the highly politicized nature of the Communal Council program, we can expect that councils were more likely to be formed in areas of stronger pro-regime support. The primary threat regarding endogeneity, then, is that the pre-council political preferences of individuals are likely to be correlated with whether they received the “treatment” of a Communal Council being formed in their neighborhood. Critically, however, the relationship between pre-council political preferences and whether a council was formed is not that strong. The bivariate correlation between a pro-regime vote prior to the start of the council program and whether or not a council was formed in an individual’s neighborhood is only .12, whereas that between the level of prior pro-regime support in the respondent’s parish and council formation is only .13.⁷ The weakness of these relationships is perhaps not surprising given the scale of the program, the heterogeneity of communities, and the fact that assignment to the “treatment” of council formation is arguably semi-random for any given individual. In sum, this is an observational research design in which endogeneity concerns must be dealt with carefully through covariate adjustment (in this case, genetic matching) and robustness tests. But these endogeneity concerns do not raise insuperable obstacles to the estimation of the effects of Communal Council formation on incumbent support.

The article tests H2 by estimating and comparing the effects of Communal Council formation on the vote across poor communities and non-poor communities. To do so, data on the mean household income of a respondent’s parish (a sub-municipal jurisdiction representing the lowest political division in the country) were imported into the data set and respondents were divided into poor and non-poor areas. The key assumption for this test, supported by interview data as well as many secondary sources, is that councils in poor communities generally receive huge amounts of resources under the program whereas councils in non-poor communities generally receive few or none. Individuals in poor communities where a council is formed thus generally receive one kind of treatment (Council formation plus significant resource distribution) whereas those in non-poor communities generally receive a different kind of treatment (council formation alone). Comparing average

treatment effects in the two kinds of communities therefore should offer perspective on whether the political efficacy of mass organization varies with resource distribution.

This part of the research design raises several issues that should be addressed directly. Although the program is largely needs-based, in that the overwhelming share of resources flows to Communal Councils in poor communities, it would be naive to believe that political considerations do not enter into at least some allocation decisions in a case like Venezuela. Some Communal Councils in poor communities undoubtedly are denied resources due to political reasons, whereas some pro-regime Communal Councils in non-poor communities likely receive resources they do not deserve. Yet the politicization of some allocation decisions should not pose major problems for the analysis, for two reasons. First, the key assumption necessary to test H2 is that poor communities receive the overwhelming share of resources whereas non-poor communities receive few to none, an assumption still consistent with some politicization in allocation. Even if some councils in poor communities do not receive resources and some in non-poor communities do receive resources, we should be able to usefully compare estimated effects in aggregate across those two categories. Second, to the extent that politicization might affect estimates of the impact of Communal Council formation on the vote in poor and non-poor communities, this should work against an affirmation of H2. If some councils in poor communities are unfairly denied resources and some councils in non-poor communities are unfairly given resources, then the effects of Communal Council formation on the vote in poor and non-poor communities should appear more similar. If we find evidence to the contrary, we have particularly strong reason to affirm H2. In sum, politicization should make the test more difficult.

Several other issues also bear some attention. First, how do we choose a cutpoint between poor and non-poor areas? In interviews, program officials repeatedly mentioned resources flowing to the poorer half of Venezuelans. I thus choose the cutpoint (390,000 Bolívares in 2001 currency) that divides the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) sample into equal halves. As this exact cutpoint is necessarily arbitrary, I also replicate this part of the analysis using slightly higher and lower cutpoints to make sure that substantive conclusions are not driven by cutpoint choice.

A second issue is whether Communal Councils in poor and non-poor areas differ in other ways that might explain heterogeneous effects on voting behavior. We cannot rule out every possible difference in this respect. But we can examine the most obviously pernicious possibility—that councils in poor and non-poor areas differ systematically in their degree of support for the government. The overtly pro-regime nature of the program makes this

unlikely, dissuading opposition supporters from becoming council leaders in general. But we can gain further insights into the issue in two ways. First, I was able to gather data on the political affiliation of the leaders of a sample of councils in poor and non-poor areas and found no meaningful differences.⁸ Second, the survey used in the principal analysis contained a question asking respondents about whether the council in their community was more slanted toward the government or opposition. Venezuelans in both poor and non-poor areas responded overwhelmingly that their council was overtly pro-government, with no meaningful difference between the two categories. Although we lack refined quantitative measures of other types of council activities, there is no reason to believe, based on the qualitative evidence, that this pro-government orientation of councils in poor communities manifests itself differently than the pro-government orientation of councils in non-poor communities when it comes to their participation in activities such as voter mobilization, in which both seem to heavily engage. The most glaring and important difference between councils in poor and non-poor communities is their receipt of material resources.

The principal analysis exploits a highly unusual opportunity presented by the 2006-2007 wave of the LAPOP survey in Venezuela, which included a question asking respondents, "Does a Communal Council exist in your neighborhood?"⁹ Questions on the existence of a regime-affiliated mass organization are rare in surveys. What makes the opportunity particularly unusual is that the program's design allows for high levels of confidence in the reliability of responses. In most cases, a regime-affiliated mass organization might exist in a respondent's community without that individual knowing. In this instance, however, the process of forming and registering a Communal Council requires all households in the represented sector to be informed in person at multiple stages, including the initial steps and during the election of Council officers, and that public notices be posted. If a council was formed in their neighborhood with responsibilities for covering their household, respondents should know. Factors also working in favor of respondents knowing if a council had been formed in their community include the massive fanfare attending the early years of the program and the relatively granular size of the neighborhood units covered by each Communal Council. When a Communal Council only covers a few blocks or, in some cases, a single apartment building, it is harder for residents to remain unaware of its existence.

We therefore have an unusual opportunity to examine the relationship between the establishment of a regime-affiliated mass organization and support for the regime, as measured by the vote in the 2006 election, coded as a binary in which 1 indicates a vote for Chávez and 0 indicates either a vote for

the opposition or abstention.¹⁰ The LAPOP data set offers a wide range of observable variables to utilize as covariates. Demographic indicators include sex, age, religion, race, wealth, education, and region. We can also draw upon two measures of pre-treatment political behavior, voting behavior in the previous legislative elections and prior participation in a Bolivarian Circle, pro-regime organizations that preceded the Communal Councils but which had largely died out by the time the council program had begun. Because the data identify the parish of each respondent, it was also possible to import into this data set information on Chávez vote share in the 2004 recall referendum in the surrounding community.

The replication test at the aggregate level draws upon an original data set containing information on 18,037 Communal Councils, gathered from a website maintained by the Venezuelan government until early 2008. This data set was complemented with parish-level information on voting behavior and socio-economics, obtained from various entities of the Venezuelan government.

The Effects of Communal Councils on Support for the Regime

To analyze the data, I utilize genetic matching to construct control groups that are balanced with the treatment group (a Communal Council formed in the respondent's neighborhood) on baseline covariates (Diamond & Sekhon, 2013). Genetic matching is a generalization of Mahalanobis matching and propensity score matching that utilizes an evolutionary algorithm to search for the set of matches that optimizes the covariate balance between treatment and control groups. This matching procedure has become increasingly common as a method of covariate adjustment in observational research (Eggers & Hainmueller, 2009; Ladd & Lenz, 2009; Weaver & Lerman, 2011).

To evaluate H1, I used the following procedure. As a first step, I modeled the likelihood of treatment on the pre-treatment covariates using logistic regression and estimated a propensity score for each case. I then conducted genetic matching, using the propensity score as well as the same covariates utilized in the propensity score model. For each procedure, I utilized the default option of the GenMatch function for R, which is to search for the combination of matches that maximizes the minimum p value across all covariates from both a paired t test and a bootstrapped Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) test. The matching procedure greatly improved balance between treatment and control groups on the baseline covariates, as illustrated in Figure 1. Before matching, the populations with and without Communal Councils formed in their neighborhoods differed substantially on numerous covariates. After matching, the two matched groups were nearly identical.¹¹

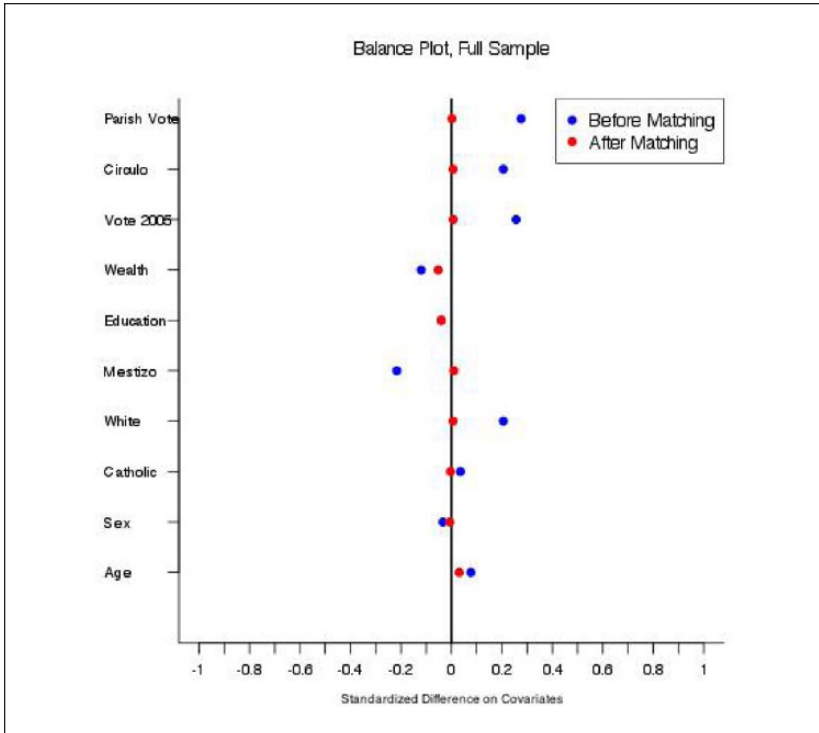


Figure 1. Covariate balance between treatment group and control group, before and after matching.

With satisfactory balance achieved on the baseline covariates, a next step is to estimate treatment effects. Expressed formally, let T_i be a binary treatment indicator, equal to 1 if a Communal Council was formed in respondent i 's neighborhood and equal to 0 if no council was formed, $Y_i(0)Y_i(1)$ denote the potential outcomes on the vote choice variable for the i th respondent, and \mathbf{X} is the matrix of baseline covariates. Assuming unconfoundedness given those baseline covariates ($Y_0Y_1 \perp T | \mathbf{X}$) and common overlap ($0 < Pr(T = 1 | \mathbf{X}) < 1$), the mean difference on the outcome variable between treatment and control groups will be an unbiased estimate of the average treatment effect among the treated (ATT). These results, presented in the top row of Table 1, show strong support for H1. The formation of a Communal Council in a respondent's neighborhood increased the likelihood of a vote for Chávez in the 2006 election by .064, a substantively large effect on

Table 1. Estimation Results.

	Council	No council	ATT
Full sample	.626	.562	.064** (.022)
Poor community (high distribution)	.691	.550	.141*** (.036)
Non-poor community (no/little distribution)	.571	.564	.007 (.033)
Poor–non-poor			.134** (.048)

Note: ATT = among the treated. The values in parenthesis refer to standard errors.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

behavior.¹² The substantive impact of the program, however, must also be viewed in light of its massive scope. In the LAPOP sample, just over 50% of Venezuelans reported that a Communal Council had been formed in their neighborhood. The government's strategy to expand its mass organization therefore did not just produce powerful effects at the individual level, but did so among a huge swath of the Venezuelan population.

Could mass organization help competitive authoritarian regimes ward off electoral opposition and endure longer? Buoyed by a very favorable economy, Chávez won the 2006 election in a landslide, so it seems unlikely that mass organization was decisive in this contest. Yet subsequent elections in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013 were much closer, with the regime's margin of victory in the popular vote ranging from 1 to 11 percentage points. We lack the data to estimate the effects of mass organization in these subsequent contests. But it seems likely that the Communal Council program remained as effective over time or even became more effective. Over the years, the Communal Councils have become more entrenched in communities, received more total funding, developed stronger relationships with the new PSUV, and expanded much further in scope, with treatment thus reaching even broader populations. In the hyper-competitive electoral environment of recent years—the regime beat the opposition by only 1% in the 2013 presidential elections and 2010 legislative elections—mass organization may have been a decisive factor in allowing the regime to maintain its stranglehold on power.

The previous analysis underlined the power of mass organization but did not explore the mechanisms through which these organizations influence pro-regime sentiment. Does mass organization build support for incumbents

simply through day-to-day operations and outreach? Or does the effectiveness of mass organization depend substantially on the distribution of material rewards? We can explore these questions by testing H2.

Although refined data on government expenditures are unsurprisingly not available, the needs-based nature of allocation through the Communal Council program allows us to test H2 by examining the heterogeneity of effects across poor communities (receiving high levels of resources under the program) and non-poor communities (receiving few to no resources, because they already possess adequate basic infrastructure). To do so, I divide the sample based on the median household income level of a respondent's community and whether or not a Communal Council was formed in that community, creating four subgroups referred to below as A (non-poor, council), B (poor, council), C (non-poor, no council), and D (poor, no council). The goal is to balance the groups on baseline covariates, estimate effects in the AC and BD dyads, and compare those estimates. Matching allows us to address the basic complication of comparing effects among dissimilar populations, which could be particularly problematic in Venezuela, given that the Chávez regime is known for having a particularly strong base of support among the poor (Handlin, 2013b). It might be that poorer Venezuelans, obviously more highly represented in poor communities, are simply inclined to react differently to the Communal Council program than other Venezuelans, more highly represented in non-poor communities. Were the AC and BD dyads separately balanced on baseline covariates and effects estimated within each dyad, two estimates would be produced, but among very different populations, making the comparison of estimates difficult.

A better alternative is to use matching to balance all four subgroups on the baseline covariates, such that each has equivalent characteristics and estimated effects within the AC and BD dyads can be more fruitfully compared. This procedure involves three steps. First, Group C was matched (with replacement) onto Group A, balancing A and the matched controls of C on baseline covariates. Second, Group D was matched (with replacement) onto Group A, balancing the matched controls of D with the previous two groups.¹³ Finally, Group B was matched (with replacement) onto the matched controls from Group D.¹⁴ We therefore can estimate effects within each of the AC and BD dyads, following the same process for estimating ATT as used above, and have a substantially improved basis for comparing the effects of Communal Councils in poor communities, which received the lion's share of resources under the program, and other communities, which received few resources.¹⁵

The results, presented in the second through fourth rows of Table 1, show strong support for H2, that the effect of mass organization is contingent on

material distribution. In non-poor communities, receiving few or no resources under the program, there is no evidence of a treatment effect from Communal Council formation. In poorer communities, however, estimated effects are strikingly large. The difference between the two estimates is substantively quite large and itself statistically significant (Gelman & Stern, 2006). These findings are also robust to different cutpoints for distinguishing poor and non-poor communities.¹⁶

Discussion

Although we must remain a little circumspect about the proxy for material rewards, there is compelling evidence that the Communal Councils were only effective tools for winning political support when backed by patronage spending. This finding, of course, does not imply that the Communal Councils, as mass organization, were themselves unimportant. There is no way to test whether the distribution of similar local infrastructural resources not channeled through Communal Councils would have exerted such strong effects on the voting behavior of recipient communities. But there are many reasons to believe that the Communal Councils made patronage spending particularly effective, by serving as local entities that could target goods, make sure that the PSUV and government could effectively claim credit for the spending, and mobilize the recipients of patronage to the polls. In sum, although we cannot demonstrate the point statistically, we can surmise with considerable confidence that the Councils gave the Bolivarian government more “bang for its buck” in distributive spending than would otherwise have been possible.

These findings inform comparative research on competitive authoritarian dynamics and durability in several ways. For one, they provide a baseline for thinking about the political payoffs to mass organization and patronage spending through those organizations in other cases. The Sandinista government under Daniel Ortega, for example, has made similar investments in para-partisan mass organization, forming “Citizen Power Councils” in communities across the country and distributing patronage heavily through these entities. Several of the world longest standing competitive authoritarian regimes, such as those in Tanzania and Malaysia, continue to rely upon much more established party organizations that deliver high levels of patronage. Mass organization channeling patronage are a key weapon in the arsenal of these regimes and the findings here offer unusual empirical insights into its power and limitations.

The results also suggest that competitive authoritarian regimes reliant on mass organization might be unusually sensitive to economic crises and downturns. For example, consider a regime that relies heavily on mass organization to consistently win elections. In normal times, this regime might avoid other

strategies of tilting the playing field, such as significant repression, believing such controversial tactics unnecessary when it could simply rely on its massive organizational advantage. Yet if a sharp economic crisis were to hit, severe enough to meaningfully curtail distribution through mass organization, this regime could find itself under great threat. Indeed, this dynamic may have contributed to the decisive electoral defeat suffered by the Venezuelan government in the recent 2015 legislative elections. Although popular discontent with economic mismanagement in general likely loomed largest, reductions in government patronage spending may have also caused its mass organization to lose mobilizational effectiveness. This possibility has interesting implications for debates about the role of economic variables in destabilizing autocracies. While many researchers have argued this position (Geddes, 1999; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995), others have questioned the explanatory power of economic conditions within the competitive authoritarian case universe (Greene, 2010; Levitsky & Way, 2010). These results suggest a possible synthesis, that a specific subset of competitive authoritarian regimes—those highly reliant on mass organization—are particularly sensitive to economic shocks.

A final note might be made regarding the implications of the article's findings for our understanding of politics in Venezuela. Scholars have paid great attention to the role of the Bolivarian Missions in helping Chávez win the recall referendum of 2004 and rebuild a strong base of popular support (Corrales & Penfold, 2007; Handlin, 2013a; Hawkins et al., 2010; Penfold-Becerra, 2007). But the subsequent electoral success of the government—sweeping elections held nearly every year from that point until the legislative elections of 2015—was underpinned not just by the Missions but also by new investments in the PSUV and the Communal Councils. The findings of this article offer a unique empirical perspective on the electoral impact of the Bolivarian government's investment in mass organization. Yet, in addition to illuminating the sources of regime durability, the findings also speak to certain continuities in Venezuelan politics. Mass organization were also established by the Punto Fijo parties, most notably Acción Democrática, and utilized for patronage distribution. These continuities suggest that whether such support-building strategies are features of the political landscape is likely to depend less on specific regime context and more on underlying variables such as the rentier basis of the economy and a political culture that fosters certain expectations about distributive spending (Coronil, 1997).

Addressing Threats to Causal Inference

Given the observational nature of the research design, particularly the attendant concerns regarding endogeneity and selection into treatment, it is

Table 2. Placebo Test for Effects on Robinson Enrollment.

	Full sample	Poor community	Non-poor community
ATT	-.018	-.013	-.026
SE	.013	.015	.017

Note: ATT = average treatment effect among the treated. The values in parenthesis refer to standard errors..

important to subject the findings to greater scrutiny. Is it possible that, even after matching, there is some difference between treatment and control groups, perhaps stemming from the politicized nature of the program, which could be driving the findings? One perspective can be gained through placebo tests, which probe for evidence that covariate adjustment might have failed to eradicate this kind of difference (Sekhon, 2009). A common placebo test for social scientists conducting observational research evaluates whether treatment predicts a prior event (Eggers & Hainmueller, 2009; Ladd & Lenz, 2009). In an observational setting, as effect cannot precede cause, such a finding would suggest that covariate adjustment was inadequate. I evaluate whether the treatment of a Communal Council forming in an individual's neighborhood predicts that person's previous participation in a social program devoted to adult literacy, Misión Robinson, that was launched in 2003 and had almost entirely died out by 2006, when the Communal Council initiative started. This placebo test is particularly useful because participation in Misión Robinson was particularly high among Chávez supporters. If the treatment group had greater pro-regime inclinations than the matched control group before treatment, it would likely show up in their higher likelihood of participating in Misión Robinson. Table 2 presents the results of placebo tests for the full sample analysis as well as the subsamples corresponding to the spending proxy. There is very little evidence of a treatment effect for any results. No ATT estimate is substantively meaningful; each of the estimates runs in the opposite direction from that which one would expect if the treatment group was more inclined toward the regime, and none are statistically significant. These results should increase our confidence that matching succeeded in adequately balancing treatment and control groups, such that confounders are unlikely to be driving the major substantive findings.

Another placebo test probes the success of the more complex matching procedure utilized to compare the effects of Communal Councils across poor and non-poor communities. To understand the logic of this test, it is useful to consider what the study might have looked like were an experiment possible. Subjects would have been randomized into three groups: a treatment group in

Table 3. Sensitivity Analysis.

τ	Full sample results	Poor area results
1.0	.00	.00
1.1	.01	.00
1.2	.06	.00
1.3	.18	.01
1.4		.03
1.5		.07
1.6		.13

Note: The values in parenthesis refer to standard errors.

which a Communal Council was formed, but received no material rewards (like Group A); a treatment group in which a Communal Council was formed and received material rewards (like Group B); and a control group (Groups C and D combined). In this situation, randomly selected subsets of the control group should not differ in expectation with respect to the outcome variable. One way to evaluate the success of the matching procedure is to examine whether the two Control Groups C and D do actually differ on the outcome. If so, we would be forced to conclude that the balancing procedure did not fully eradicate some underlying difference between those in poor and other communities that affects voting behavior. As Table 1 showed, however, Groups C and D differed on the outcome variable by an extremely marginal .01. Passing this placebo test should increase our confidence in the procedure of matching across subgroups and the conclusions drawn from those results.

Another way to assess threats to causal inference stemming from endogeneity is through sensitivity analysis (Rosenbaum, 2002). Instead of looking for evidence that covariate adjustment might have failed to eradicate differences between treatment and control groups, we ask how powerful an unobserved confounder would have to be to change our conclusions about treatment effects. Sensitivity analysis sheds light on this question by assigning different values to the sensitivity parameter τ , an odds ratio representing the most two individuals who are otherwise identical in terms of the measured covariates could differ in their likelihood of having a council formed in their neighborhood (i.e., if $\tau = 2$, one individual is potentially twice as likely to be assigned to treatment). By attaching different values to τ and seeing how the upper bound p values change in a statistical test, we can examine sensitivity to hidden bias.¹⁷

Table 3 shows results regarding the full sample analysis and poor areas analysis, where we previously found treatment effects. These results suggest that

hidden bias will have to be quite substantial to jeopardize major inferences. For example, in the full sample, a confounder would have to make one Venezuelan roughly 20% to 30% more likely than an otherwise identical (in terms of the baseline covariates) Venezuelan to have a Council formed in his or her neighborhood and also be a very strong predictor of the outcome. Although the existence of such a powerful hidden confounder cannot be ruled out, it seems quite unlikely.

A Replication Test With Aggregate Data

A final robustness test evaluates whether the findings are replicated with aggregate-level data. Although this test will not address threats to causal inference in the principal analysis, if a different data set produces similar findings, our confidence in the overall conclusions of the article should still increase. To explore whether H1 and H2 are supported by aggregate-level data, I draw upon an original data set containing information on voting patterns, sociodemographics, and the formation of Communal Councils across Venezuela's 1,135 parishes during the period from 2006 to 2008. I specify a series of linear regression models in which the dependent variable is change in support for the Chávez regime position between national referenda held in August 2004 and December 2007. This measure was chosen because the interval between the two referenda closely coincides with the interval during which Communal Council formation could be measured through government data. The two referenda each presented voters with a stark choice about whether to endorse the regime and its agenda with a yes/no vote. The independent variables of interest are the number of Communal Councils formed in each parish during this time period per 300 registered voters and the interaction of this variable with a dummy variable for poor neighborhoods, using the same cutpoint as the analysis above. Other covariates include population, whether the local mayor supported the regime, the proportion of workers employed in the public sector, the proportion of workers employed in agriculture, and state-level dummy variables.

Table 4 presents results from four statistical models, the second and fourth of which include an interaction between Communal Council density and the poor parish dummy. Two findings can be underlined. The first and third models, which do not seek to capture any kind of heterogeneous effect of council formation across different communities, suggest a strong and significant relationship between council density and the change in support for the regime. The second and fourth models, which include the interaction term, suggest that effects are heterogeneous across poor and non-poor communities. When the poor community dummy is set to 0, these models predict almost no effect of council density on change in the pro-regime vote. When the poor

Table 4. Covariates of Change in Pro-Regime Vote.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Council density	0.041*** (0.004)	0.012 (0.012)	0.024*** (0.004)	-0.008 (0.011)
Poor community	0.012* (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)	-0.015** (0.007)	-0.024*** (0.007)
Council × Poor		0.031** (0.012)		0.034*** (0.011)
Pro-regime mayor			-0.0004 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
Public employment			0.001*** (0.0003)	0.001*** (0.0003)
Population (log)			-0.015*** (0.002)	-0.015*** (0.002)
Agriculture			0.087*** (0.014)	0.087*** (0.014)
Constant	-0.099*** (0.007)	-0.092*** (0.008)	0.013 (0.024)	0.020 (0.024)
<i>n</i>	1,030	1,030	1,025	1,025
State dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R ²	.321	.325	.406	.411

Note: The values in parenthesis refer to standard errors.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

community dummy is set to 1, these models predict that pro-regime vote share in the parish should increase by about 3 percentage points for every increase of 1 in the council density variable. There are well-known limitations to our ability to draw conclusions about individual-level behavior from aggregate-level data. We therefore should not make too much of these estimates and we should give them far less weight than those derived from the principal analysis. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that the key substantive conclusions of the principal analysis are also reflected in aggregate-level data.

Conclusions and Implications

Mass organization represents an important mechanism by which political parties buttress autocratic endurance, one likely to be particularly effective in competitive authoritarian contexts. Yet we possess only limited insights regarding the effectiveness of this strategy at winning votes and tilting the electoral playing field. Limitations in this respect make it difficult to judge the importance of mass organization vis-à-vis other variables and to best integrate mass organization into explanatory models of competitive authoritarian endurance and change. This article capitalized on some unusual data from the Venezuelan case to examine the effects of mass organization on support for

the incumbent regime, producing two key findings. First, the establishment of mass organization had a large effect on support for the incumbent regime, especially when one considers the high proportion of the population treated by the Communal Council program. Second, these effects were strongly heterogeneous across areas that received high and low levels of material distribution through the program. It seems to be the combination of mass organization and patronage distribution that is particularly effective at winning votes.

These findings have several important implications for the study of competitive authoritarian stability and change. A regime-affiliated mass organization can exert significant effects on incumbent support, enough to constitute a decisive factor in otherwise close elections. A logical extension is that mass organization might plausibly decrease the likelihood of regimes falling, even when conditions were unfavorable. A cursory consideration of other cases certainly suggests the plausibility of this hypothesis. Some of the longest enduring competitive authoritarian regimes in the world, such as those in Tanzania, Botswana, and Malaysia, have achieved their endurance on the back of powerful mass organization. And the new wave of competitive authoritarian regimes in Latin America, which have together amassed a nearly undefeated record in electoral contests, has similarly made huge investments in mass organization.

Although the findings just discussed primarily contribute to research on competitive authoritarian regimes, they may also inform research on mass party organizations and distributive spending in democracies. The core claim of the article that a mass party organization exerts a positive impact on electoral results is consistent with recent research on party organizations in Brazil (Dyck, 2014). It seems plausible that this notion, as well as the finding that these effects vary with the ability of parties to distribute resources through party organizations, might also hold in democratic contexts. Obtaining reliable data on a local party organization is generally easier in democratic contexts than in autocracies, so these questions could be ripe for further empirical evaluation.

Future research might also explore, across broader samples, whether authoritarian regimes backed by mass organization really do last longer and enjoy greater stability than others and whether the impact of mass organization really does vary across autocratic regime types, as this article argued was likely to be the case. To do so, it would be useful to construct a cross-national measure of mass organization in authoritarian regimes. Drawing upon extensive analysis of the secondary literature, it might be possible to score mass organization according to its existence, the scope of coverage, and the depth and robustness of its grassroots operation, being careful to distinguish

between those regimes with mass organization that exist largely “on paper” from those with robust organizational presence on the ground. In this respect, the work of Levitsky and Way (2010) might provide an important starting point, as one dimension of their “organizational power” variable captures the presence of a mass party organization of significant scope.

Another hypothesis to be explored further is that the effects of mass organization on regime longevity might be contingent on economic conditions. Although the future of the regime remains uncertain as of this writing, in December 2015 Venezuela joined a group of cases—also including Nicaragua in 1990 and Serbia in 2000—in which competitive authoritarian incumbents with extensive mass organization experienced electoral defeat in the midst of adverse economic conditions. Future research might test whether the effects of mass organization disappear when a regime is faced with economic crisis, shedding new light on a long-standing debate regarding the importance of economic variables to autocratic stability.

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Notes

1. Although such organizations can engage in political activities, they generally do not have partisan political activity as a primary *raison d'être*. Furthermore, though such organizations may develop strong ties with ruling parties, their affiliation is often not overtly advertised.
2. Depending on measurement strategy, scholars have classified 20% to 25% of the world's political regimes as instances of competitive authoritarianism in the post–Cold War period (Handlin, 2015; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Schedler, 2013).
3. Levitsky and Way (2010) incorporate mass organization into their measure of autocratic organization, but this is only one component of many and this variable overall does not affect the outcome of democratization in their theoretical model.
4. The Communal Councils were also supposed to have some responsibility for supervising and liaising with any Bolivarian Missions that existed in their communities. The degree to which this has occurred in practice is not clear.
5. It is not uncommon for autocratic regimes to establish mass organization that play roles in both political mobilization and local governance. For one example, see the “Ten House Cell” system established by the Tanganyika African National Union in Tanzania.

6. Interviews were conducted with officials in FUNDACOMUNAL, the agency implementing the Communal Council program, during April to May of 2008.
7. These correlations are found in the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) data used in the principal analysis.
8. The Venezuelan government's registry of Communal Councils contained information on the cedula numbers (akin to social security numbers) of council leaders. I was able to gather these numbers for about 100 councils and match them to information in Venezuela's infamous "Maisanta" database, which contains information on whether millions of Venezuelans signed a petition to recall Chávez in 2004. Leaders in poor neighborhoods and leaders in non-poor neighborhoods did not meaningfully differ in their likelihood of signing this petition.
9. The survey was designed to produce a nationally representative sample, implemented through a clustered sampling strategy and producing a final sample size of 1,500.
10. An opposition vote and abstention are combined because we would like to assess the capacity of the Communal Councils to both persuade and turnout voters. Approximately 11.5% of the data are missing on the outcome variable, a level not unusual for the LAPOP question on vote choice in the previous presidential election. After diagnostics showed that "missingness" on the outcome variable was largely unrelated to other measures of political identification or to treatment, the decision was made to drop these cases.
11. See Table B in the Supplementary Materials for full balance results.
12. To investigate the sensitivity of these estimated effects to the specific combination of different covariates, I conducted a series of robustness checks eliminating different covariates from the matching procedure and re-estimating effects. All these checks produced similar among-the-treated (ATT) estimates. See Table C in the Supplementary Materials.
13. Unfortunately, we cannot match groups in the BD dyad with those in the AC dyad on parish-level regime support. As the two dyads are distinguished from each other by a parish-level socioeconomic cutpoint, it is simply impossible to subsequently match them back again on another parish-level variable that is highly correlated with that cutpoint. We can still integrate the parish-level regime support variable, however, when we match within each dyad. Effects within each dyad are therefore still estimated between treatment and control groups nearly identical in terms of regime support in their surrounding communities.
14. Balance results, including the means of each matched subgroup on each covariate, are presented in Table D of the Supplemental Materials. The sequence of matching reflected several pragmatic concerns. It is advantageous to choose as the "reference" group (that which others would be matched onto) one of the smaller subgroups. Group A was chosen because it is one of the groups that received the Council treatment. Once A was made the reference group, another option for the last two steps in the process would have been to match B to A and then D to the matched controls of B. The difference in size between Groups B

- and D, however, makes this approach somewhat undesirable, as we would be constructing a control group out of 274 cases to match to the larger B group.
15. One unavoidable consequence of this approach is that we are no longer examining the entire treated population in poor communities. This drawback seems to pale in comparison with the advantages conferred by being able to more reliably compare estimated effects.
 16. See Table E in the Supplementary Materials.
 17. For binary data on the outcome variable, Rosenbaum's methods use McNemar's test of significance in 2×2 tables.

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