

Introduction

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) are social programs that transfer cash to low-income households, while requiring familial childhood investments—most commonly promoting healthcare and education. Dozens of scholars have shown positive long-term educational and earnings outcomes and poverty reduction from CCTs. Far less explored is the political implementation of CCTs. The motivations driving maintenance, expansion, or repeal of CCTs are under-researched, and are especially salient in the wake of Mexico's 2018 dismantling of their CCT program—which had been a global model.

Latin American Trends

This broad analysis examined ninety-five different presidents. When examining their rhetoric over the first year a number of different categories were tracked. This included mention of Expansion Plans, Justice/Rights/Equality, Job Opportunities/Economic Development, Education, Health, Poverty Elimination, Women's Role, Public/Private/Nationalized Funding, Fraud/Waste/Transparency, Conditionality, and overall position towards the program.

Information about the presidents' Inaugural Year, whether they were the Program Founder, Party Name, Party's Economic Ideology, whether they Renamed/Restructured the program, and whether they Added/Subtracted a program, was added to the chart tracking their rhetorical patterns. This data was included to explore relationships between presidential identity, time frame, program behavior, and the rhetorical patterns they utilized.

Overall, comments were located for 67% of the presidents. For the 33% of Presidents without any recorded comment, discreet mention of their respective CCT programs cannot be definitely ruled out. However, this is a study of the role of presidential rhetoric. After an intensive search, there is relevance to the fact that comments could not be found. Additionally, seven of these thirty presidents without initial comment eventually renamed or restructured the program. This could indicate that their silence on an inherited program was a political strategy to reframe the program and capture political benefit for their own gain.

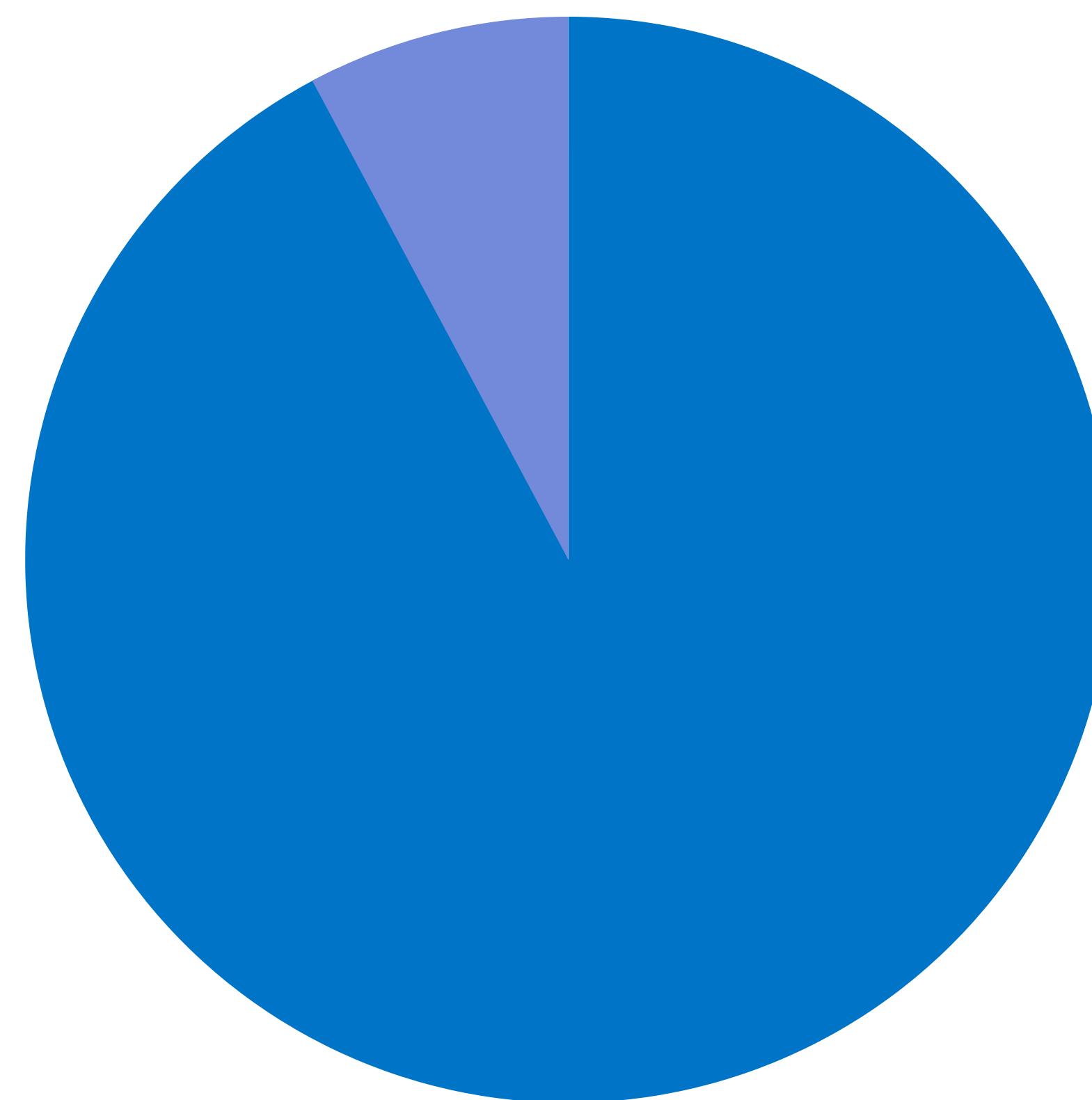
Objectives

This analysis contributes to the study of CCTs by examining the rhetorical political foundations associated with each program. An analysis of presidential comments about CCT programs, using a combination of news sources, interviews, and speeches, studies the rhetoric presidents utilize in order to address questions of politicization. By incorporating both a broad survey and a meticulous case study, this research establishes the foundation for the range of rhetoric that Latin American presidents have utilized in regard to conditional cash transfer programs.

Attitude towards CCTs for Recorded Presidents

Neutral or Negative

5



Positive

59

Predictive Trends

There were no clear trends that would suggest a president's CCT support. Examples of both positive and non-existent comments were tracked across political parties, economic ideologies, and time frames. There may be a loose pattern regarding the renaming of programs. In this study, 75% of the time a president renamed a program occurred when their party had just assumed the presidency from a different political party. However, the baseline rate of political party change at the presidential level was 65% after removing the founding presidents which did not have a transition data point.

Thus, given the small sample size, it is unclear if a new party power leads to program renaming at a rate significantly different from the baseline expectation. There appears to be a pattern even if not completely indicative.

Pie Chart Analysis

The Attitude for Recorded Presidents chart shows the attitude towards existing CCT programs for all presidents where a position could be discerned. Of the sixty-four presidents with tracked comments, fifty-nine spoke positively about the CCT program that they inherited or founded. Three were categorized as neutral, while only two were negative. With theorization about the electoral politicization of CCT programs, it is noticeable that negative comments are essentially nonexistent.

Methodology Phase 1

The unit of analysis for this study is the first year of governance for Latin American presidents, with the examination focusing on their rhetoric towards existing CCTs. The study examined and cataloged presidents' rhetoric about CCTs in eighteen Central and South American countries. Utilization of the Latin American Newsstream database, through the Georgetown University Library, facilitated the combing of varied news sources for articles about both the relevant president and program. While the collection of their rhetoric wasn't exhaustive, multiple comments could be collectively studied. Expanding beyond the first year, for the entire set of ninety-five presidents, would have been impossible within the timeframe parameters of this research. Limiting to the first year additionally retained a focus on new presidents' reactions, with a window inclusive of proposals and rhetoric during presidential transitions and their early administration. Observing which programs were most prominently discussed was informative for understanding the political motivations and incentives driving presidential rhetoric regarding conditional cash transfer programs.

Research Conclusions

While this research did not find any clear determinant factors that correlate to consistent rhetorical behavior, it did demonstrate the political significance of conditional cash transfer programs in presidential electoral politics. An examination of ninety-five presidents showed less than a 3% rate of negative comments. Irrespective of ideology or prior positions, this data demonstrates how politically unfeasible it is for a president in Latin America to publicly oppose these programs. Additionally, presidents have a variety of programmatic topics which they can selectively discuss and include in their rhetoric.

This research lays the groundwork for substantial future studies, while establishing a broad portrait of Latin American presidential rhetoric regarding conditional cash transfer programs. The case study shows the political salience of these programs, the electoral significance of their support and expansion, and the ways in which presidents navigate these realities for their own political benefit. Conclusions from this study should inform how social scientists understand future presidential behavior regarding conditional cash transfer programs. In the last few years, Latin America has experienced instances of programmatic expansion and elimination. Given the findings of this research, expansion is likely to be proudly and publicly announced at the presidential level. However, circumstances informing elimination are less clear. It appears likely that any attempt toward eliminatory measures will occur discreetly, as presidents have rarely spoken negatively about conditional cash transfer programs.

Methodology Phase 2

Phase two focused on a close case study of presidents in Brazil. The study utilizes the rhetoric of President Lula da Silva, President Rousseff, and President Bolsonaro. This case study examines a more complete rhetorical profile from the entirety of their presidential terms. The study analyzes the rhetoric of Lula da Silva, Rousseff, and Bolsonaro. These presidents were chosen because of the Brazilian political circumstances and the variety of rhetoric they represent. This case study focuses on four topics: conditionality, the scope of benefits, fiscal cost, and political context. Each of these four categories is analyzed for the three presidents. All four were chosen because of their appearance in scholarly work, and their general consensus on politically fraught topics that must be decided during CCT implementation.

Case Study Conclusions

While each president had their own style, the rhetoric generally became more expansionary with time. President Lula was widely popular for his implementation of the program, and President Rousseff attempted to associate herself with President Lula's success. Although President Bolsonaro had been critical before his election, he quickly pivoted and expanded Bolsa Familia benefits. By the end of his presidency, Bolsonaro was attempting to claim political credit by renaming and rebranding the flagship program.

The realities of this case study have not been fully realized. Perhaps the most interesting development will occur in October 2022 when Brazilians will make a choice between Lula da Silva and Bolsonaro to serve as their next president. The 2022 election outcome—and the strong rhetorical focus on CCTs—will provide additional information about the significance of these presidents' rhetoric and actions regarding Brazil's Conditional Cash Transfer program. While this case study cannot predict the election outcome, an updated analysis post-election would benefit this research. By exploring the rhetoric specific to the two electoral campaigns, further insight could be gained into rhetorical strategy and its electoral effects regarding conditional cash transfer programs.



Left to right: President Lula de Silva, President Rousseff, and President Bolsonaro