What Goes around Comes around: Perceived Vulnerable Employment and Economic Voting in Developing Countries

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Abstract: Voters who perceive the economy to be weak are generally less likely to support the incumbent government. Yet there is a debate over whether all people respond equally to economic shifts or if the state of the economy is more salient for those who feel economically vulnerable. I examine whether insecure employment situations and employability concerns strengthen responses to the government’s economic record. Data from Latin America and Eastern Europe confirm that workers who feel anxious about being fired or who believe it would be difficult to find a new job place significantly greater weight on sociotropic evaluations than do those with more secure employment situations. Thus incumbents who create risks for vulnerable workers are sanctioned while those who create opportunities are rewarded most.

Keywords: Economic voting, insecure employment, employability, salience, vulnerability

1 The author would like to thank Ryan Carlin, Herbert Kitschelt, Lyle Scruggs, Karen Remmer and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments-all remaining errors remain the responsibility of the author. Please visit my website http://www.polisci.uconn.edu/people/faculty/faculty.php?name=singer for a web appendix with details on question wording and alternative specifications.
People are more likely to support the incumbent government if they perceive that the economy is strong than if they have a mixed view of the incumbent’s economic record (see Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2007, 2008 for recent reviews). Yet there is an ongoing debate over whether all citizens give equal weight to consider the incumbent’s economic record. Some studies argue that economic voting is ‘widespread, affecting all classes and conditions of voters almost equally’ (van der Brug et al 2007: 136) because ‘the economy is always an important issue to voters’ (Wlezien 2005: 556). Others argue ‘that the impact of the economy on citizen evaluations of government’s competence varies substantially across voters and political contexts’ (Singer 2011a: 302) because ‘groups respond more strongly to economic issues that are more likely to affect their economic interests’ (Dorussen & Taylor 2002: 107).

Economic vulnerability has been posited to lead voters to emphasize economic performance. Most people prefer a strong economy and are likely to reward governments that provide it. Yet individuals who have the most to lose in a recession or the most to gain from a strong economy should have even greater incentives to focus on the incumbent’s ability to manage the economy. The extant evidence for this hypothesis is mixed, however, as studies that attempt to link economic-based evaluations of the government to demographic variables such as age, gender, or income group reach divergent conclusions depending upon the sample and model specification (see van der Brug et al 2007; Singer 2011a for reviews and evidence).

Three recent studies have shown, however, that the weight given to economic factors may differ across types of workers. Hellwig (2001) finds that non-union workers are more likely to base their evaluations of the government on economic performance than are union workers.

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2 This is true for both election outcomes and government popularity, although the role of the political context differs between these settings (Pickup 2010).
workers, as are public sector workers compared to private sector workers and service sector workers compared to industrial sector employees. Singer (2011a) finds that public sector workers were substantially less likely to say that economic performance was the basis of their vote. Finally Dorussen and Taylor (2002) find that the correspondence between the unemployment rate and government popularity is stronger among low-skilled workers.

The theme of these analyses is that workers whose skills, union status, or employment sector decreases their job security generally place more weight on economic performance when evaluating the incumbent. This suggests a general hypothesis: workers who feel secure in their employment have less to fear from an anticipated macroeconomic downturn and thus are less likely to see the economy as the pressing concern when evaluating the incumbent. In contrast, voters with vulnerable employment situations may reward governments who can prevent macroeconomic shocks that would otherwise place their employment at risk and who can create employment markets that provide multiple opportunities should a dislocation occur.

I test this hypothesis using cross-sectional survey data on government approval from Latin America and Eastern Europe that directly measure two different facets of worker uncertainty about their employment situation. The focus in the Latin American survey is on fears of becoming unemployed, or employment insecurity. The East European surveys ask about citizens’ perceived likelihood to find new work should they become unemployed, or employability. In both cases, the perceived vulnerable of work situations shapes the economy’s

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3 An additional implication of these studies is that work situations are more direct proxies of economic vulnerabilities than are more general demographic characteristics like age and gender, thus making employment situation a better test of the underlying theory than much of the extant literature.
salience. Specifically, the effect of evaluations of the national economy on government support (commonly referred to as sociotropic-based executive support) is larger if individuals worry about losing their job or believe it would be difficult to find a new job if unemployed.

**Job insecurity and the salience of economic factors**

Theories linking economic outcomes to political support for the incumbent share a set of common assumptions. Citizens must believe that their personal economic opportunities are greater when the economy is strong than when it is weak or otherwise prefer a strong economy to a weak one. This is relatively uncontroversial, although there are debates over whether voters focus primarily on changes in the national economy (and their specific priorities between growth, inflation, and unemployment) or on the state of their personal finances (see Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2007 for a review). People must also believe that governments are at least partially responsible for creating an atmosphere in which the economy can flourish. The political/economic context in which the incumbent operates affects beliefs about incumbent responsibility as do citizens’ characteristics (for example, partisanship, political sophistication) (see Anderson 2007). Finally, national economic prosperity must be sufficiently important to people that they incorporate it into their vote. Much less attention has been given to this assumption until recently.

Economic performance is frequently relevant to citizens making political evaluations, but it is not the only area that citizens can use to evaluate the government: social policy, foreign policy, public security, and good governance (among many other issues) may also be important concerns. This multiplicity of issues on which people can evaluate the incumbent creates two sets of problems. First, people face cognitive limits on the amount of information they can process simultaneously (Marois & Ivanoff 2005) and thus are unlikely to evaluate the incumbent
based on his or her handling of all their responsibilities. Instead, people facing complex multidimensional choices tend to emphasize some concerns at the expense of others to simplify decision making (Lusk & Hammond 1991; Payne 1976; Reilly & Holman 1977; Bettman & Park 1980). Second, while voters are likely to approve of a government that delivers good outcomes in all policy areas and to disapprove of one that oversees problems on multiple policy fronts, in most cases they will be forced to evaluate a government that has had some successes and some failures. Under those circumstances, voters must ask themselves whether to prioritize the issues on which the government succeeded or those on which it failed.

As voters focus on some issues and not others, not all people will consider the economy equally important. For example, when respondents in 39 countries were asked what the most important issue was in determining the party for which they voted, many different types of issues were mentioned including foreign policy and national security, governance and corruption, social policy, the environment, and of course macroeconomic performance (Singer 2011a). In many cases, the maxim ‘it’s the economy stupid’ was justified; in 26 of the 39 countries (and in the sample as a whole) economic outcomes were mentioned more frequently than were any other group of issues. Yet across the sample, a slight majority (51 per cent) of respondents said their vote was motivated by considerations beyond economic performance. Differences in issue priorities affected citizen behaviour. The relationship between macroeconomic outcomes and government support was significantly weaker for citizens who said their vote was based on non-economic issues (Singer 2011a). Similarly, voters in recent U.S. and Mexican presidential elections who said their vote was based on issues other than economic performance had a weaker

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4 Economic performance was a minority concern in 28 of the 39 election samples, even if it was the most frequently mentioned concern in many of them.
correspondence between their perception of the national economy and their support for the incumbent party (Singer 2009, 2011c).

This raises the question of why some voters are especially prone to focus on economic performance. Amongst the diverse set of issues that are politically relevant, citizens tend to focus on issues that are accessible and personally important. Accessible issues are those that receive attention in the media and by political campaigns (for example, Iyengar et al 1982; Vavreck 2009). Yet citizens do not passively follow parties’ agenda or media coverage but also deliberately focus on issues that are personally important to them. Specifically, people emphasize issues that have a strong connection to their personal wellbeing. Those who believe a policy area will strongly affect them have more ready opinions about it, more accurately perceive candidate positions on it, and weigh it more than other issues that affect them less (Aldrich & McKelvy 1977; Brehmer 1977; Krosnick 1988; Lavine et al 2000; Bizer & Krosnick 2001; Bizer et al 2004).

The economy tends to be one of the major issues in most campaigns because it is generally both accessible and important. Economic fluctuations are extensively covered by the media while a core topic of political debates is allocating credit or blame for those fluctuations (Vavreck 2009). Most people also have a stake in a strong economy while other issues come in and out of public consciousness (for example, governance after scandals, foreign policy) or are limited to more narrow issue publics. Yet the economy’s accessibility and importance are not constants - they increase during a recession due to greater media coverage and increased citizen anxiety about being their own positions (Bloom & Price 1975; Soroka 2006; Singer 2011c). Attention to the economy can be drowned out by foreign policy crises or political scandals (Abramson et al 2007; Singer 2011a). Finally, and most important for this study, individuals are
hypothesized to differ in the personal importance of the national economy, in part because people differ in their levels of economic vulnerability.\textsuperscript{5}

Specifically, people differ in their (1) connection to the national economy and (2) their access to resources that can help mitigate the negative impact of an economic shift. For some individuals, a shift in the national economy is particularly likely to result in a personal economic dislocation while other voters are insulated from economic shifts, with lifetime employment being an extreme example of this kind of insulation. Individuals whose wealth and personal connections allow them to better cope with an economic dislocation also have less to lose if the incumbent government cannot prevent a recession.\textsuperscript{6} The ability quickly to find a job if fired is a similar coping resource. People who feel relatively secure in their situation still have a preference for a good economy and may hold the government accountable for providing it. But vulnerable individuals are hypothesized to have especially large incentives to ensure the incumbent manages the economy well to remove economic threats from their lives (and create opportunities for them should an idiosyncratic dislocation occur) and to base their evaluation of the incumbent on their economic record while economic security creates opportunities for voters

\textsuperscript{5} People, of course, may differ in their issue priorities for other reasons (for example, they have religious and cultural concerns, participation in the military, membership in specific demographic groups, etc). Modeling the more limited set of factors that specifically focus voter attention on the economy is a useful starting point, however.

\textsuperscript{6} Thus at a macro-level, policies that reduce the economic impact of macroeconomic shifts reduce the economy’s salience (Pacek & Radcliff 1995; Grafstein 2005; Singer 2011b). Future work should examine if welfare protections interact with employment insecurity - there is not a sufficiently large number of country cases to explore that hypothesis here.
to feel comfortable focusing on other important issues.

However, the hypothesis that vulnerable voters are more likely to be economic voters receives mixed empirical support in empirical work. Voters in the 2008 American presidential elections who were most afraid of being affected by the recession placed the greatest weight on the national economy, thus verifying this general theoretical concept (Singer 2011). Yet the few recent attempts to identify demographic subgroups that are ‘economically vulnerable’ have had mixed results. It is an open question if economic voting patterns differ across genders (Kam 2009) or age groups (Dorussen & Taylor 2002; Van der Brug et al 2007). More consistent evidence has been found with respect to economic voting differences across income levels (Weatherford 1983; Palmer & Whitten 2011). Yet the most consistent patterns in the economy’s political effect are found across employment situations. Economic voting tends to be strongest among workers who are low-skilled, who work in high trade-exposed sectors, and who do not enjoy the protections of civil service contracts or unions (Hellwig 2001; Singer 2011a; Dorussen & Taylor 2002). The untested implication of these studies is that perceived worker vulnerability in a job situation can create uncertainty that focuses workers’ attention on the economy instead of other issues.

**Employment insecurity: Types, causes, and consequences**

Vulnerable workers come in two types (Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Anderson & Pontusson 2007). First, voters differ in the perceived probabilities that they will become unemployed. *Insecure workers* are those who feel anxious about losing their jobs in the near future. Worker

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7 This is not surprising because the key difference between income categories is an economic one while the other studies look at demographic differences that may be correlated with economic vulnerabilities but include other differences as well.
insecurity is higher in sectors with high levels of trade and FDI (Scheve & Slaughter 2004) and lower in countries with stronger collective bargaining provisions (OECD 1997). Many workers also have employment situations that are inherently vulnerable due to their own lack of skills or the informality of their employment contracts. High skilled workers and union members tend to feel more secure (Wiefek 2003; Cusak et al 2006; Bender & Sloane 1999; Näswall & De Witte 2003). Public sector workers with civil service protections report the highest levels of security (Clark & Postel 2005; Anderson & Pontusson 2007) while temporary workers experience the least security (Clark & Postel 2005; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Manski & Straub 2000; c.f. Böckerman 2004). Insecurity increases with age (as workers fear being replaced by younger workers), decreases with education (Näswall & De Witte 2003), and is not different across genders (Böckerman 2004; Manski & Straub 2000). Finally, while insecure employment has increased in most countries, labour-market volatility remains higher and job protections weaker in developing countries than in developed ones (ILO 2004).

A second form of insecurity stems from the inability of workers to find comparable work if they are fired: a lack of employability. As jobs have become less secure, personal employability has been conceptualized as the ‘job security of the modern labor market’ (Berntson et al 2006, 224). Variations in employability across countries and regions are associated with opportunities provided by the local labour market (Berntson et al 2006). Yet individuals also differ greatly in their perceptions of economic opportunities. Education increases feelings of employability (Berntson et al 2006; Wittekind et al 2010) although workers

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8 This potentially creates a cleavage between the unionized and non-unionized (Rueda 2006).
9 See ILO (2004, chapter 6) for a more general discussion of how insecure employment varies globally. See OECD (2009) for a discussion of how it varies within countries across sectors.
with very specific skills may have a hard time shifting sectors should that become necessary (Iversen & Soskice 2001). Older workers also perceive greater difficulties in finding new jobs than do younger ones (Berntson et al 2006). There is less evidence that dense career networks and strong knowledge of the labour market generate confidence in workers’ ability to gain new employment if necessary (Wittekind et al 2010).

Insecure employment and a lack of employability reflect the two different forms of vulnerability, with insecure employment emphasizing the risks that workers perceive of a personal dislocation while employability captures access to skills and attributes that allow workers to cope with a dislocation. Yet both forms of vulnerable work situations have negative consequences for those in them because both force workers to consider uncertain futures. Insecure workers and those with employability concerns, for example, have lower job satisfaction and productivity and higher levels of anxiety and depression, worsening health, and deteriorating family situations (see Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Newman 2008; and Scherer 2009 for reviews on insecurity; see Berntson & Marklund 2007; De Cuyper et al 2008; and Silla et al 2009 for evidence with regard to employability).10

Vulnerable workers turn to multiple coping mechanisms to reduce their exposure to risks such as union membership, working greater hours, and taking on a second job (de Witte 2005; Burchell et al 2001). Insecure work leads workers to mobilize electorally for parties that will protect their interests, to oppose policies that they feel expose them to greater competition (for example, trade openness), and to support the extension of welfare protections (Hibbs 1977; Alt 1985; Grafstein 2000; Iversen & Soskice 2001; Mughan & Lacy 2002; Scheve & Slaughter

10 The combination of high perceived insecurity in your job and weak employment opportunities in the future may be especially deleterious for satisfaction and health (Silla et al 2009).
2004; Cusack et al 2006; Anderson & Pontussen 2007; Rehm 2009). In the limited studies of this topic in the United States, however, there is little evidence that insecure workers differ in their propensity to support the incumbent candidate (Schlozman & Verba 1979: 314-6; Mughan & Lacy 2002).\(^{11}\)

The extant literature on insecure employment and employability demonstrates that these forms of economic vulnerability have social and political consequences. The literature on motivated citizen attention suggests that insecure work and a lack of employability should have an additional effect on how workers evaluate the incumbent by making his or her economic management salient. Insecure workers are likely to perceive that a weak economy may cost them their jobs. Workers with low levels of employability know that if the weak economy costs them their jobs they are unlikely to be able to find a new one. Both sets of workers thus have much to fear in a recession. On the other hand, both kinds of vulnerable workers are particularly likely to benefit from a strong economy that makes job losses less likely and creates opportunities should a job dislocation occur. This suggests the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceptions of the national economy will have a larger marginal effect on how people evaluate the incumbent government among those who are worried about losing their jobs.

**Hypothesis 2:** Perceptions of the national economy will have a larger marginal effect on how people evaluate the incumbent government among those who believe they would have a hard time finding a new job if they were to become unemployed.

The implication of these hypotheses is that vulnerable workers who perceive the economy to be

\(^{11}\) If optimistic vulnerable workers reward the government while pessimistic ones punish it, then these effects may cancel each other out.
good reward the incumbent while those who perceive it to be weak punish the incumbent.

Data

I test these hypotheses with surveys that contain direct measures of worker vulnerability. I focus on developing economies because they should have higher levels of vulnerability, which will facilitate the identification of attitudes within this group. Moreover, developed welfare states may cushion the risks of unemployment even for workers whose employment situation is insecure, with the effect of reducing the economy’s overall salience (Pacek & Radcliff 1995; Grafstein 2005; Singer 2011b) while developing economies where these protections are weaker are most-likely cases for finding that insecure employment affects government approval.

Data on worker insecurity comes from the 2002 Latinobarometer, which includes data from 17 Latin American countries. Respondents were asked ‘How concerned would you say you are that you will be left without work or unemployed during the next 12 months? Very concerned, concerned, a little concerned, or not at all concerned?’ Among those respondents who were employed at the time of the survey, 54 per cent reported that they were very concerned that they would be left unemployed in the next year.

The second data source is the second wave of the Post-Communist Publics (PCP) study, conducted in 14 East European countries between 1997 and 2001. This survey includes the

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12 Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

13 In both surveys these questions were only asked of workers; unemployed individuals, students, retirees, and homemakers are excluded from the analysis.

14 Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech republic, Estonia, East Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine.
most commonly used measure of employability concerns: ‘If for some reason you lost your job, how easy would it be to find a suitable replacement? Very easy, easy, a little difficult, very difficult, I don’t think I could find a suitable replacement.’ 14 per cent of respondents said they would not be able to find a suitable job and another 37.8 per cent said it would be very difficult to find one.

I outline the specification of each model in more detail below, but in each case the dependent variable is whether the respondent approves of the current government. If insecure employment and a lack of employability make the economy more salient, then there should be a positive multiplicative interaction between job worries and respondents’ evaluations of the economy that increases the economy’s marginal effect on government approval.15, 16 I include additional demographic and political controls that vary by survey (according to availability) and region.17

15 The surveys used here do not have direct measures of the economy’s salience similar to those analyzed by Singer (2009, 2011a, forthcoming). Yet a positive interaction term is consistent with the argument that the economy’s salience varies across individuals even if we cannot identify the mechanism with more certainty.

16 There are not sufficient numbers of country-cases (Maas & Hox 2005) to explore whether economic voting differs across contexts due to recessions, governance scandals, or party system fragmentation. Residual differences across countries will be partially captured by the country fixed effects.

17 Unfortunately the surveys do not have measures of party identification and so I cannot include that as a control. In alternative specifications I have added a measure of left-right ideology (allowing its slope to vary by country) and this variable does not change the substantive
In dealing with cross-country survey data, an additional challenge arises due to clustering of the standard errors. Dummy variables that both correct for the clustering and capture country-level differences in the outcome (for example, different baseline levels of presidential popularity) and predictors are appropriate for cases such as the current one where all the variables are measured at the level of individual respondents and within-unit clustering is a statistical nuisance instead of an outcome of theoretical interest (Steenbergen & Jones 2002). The country effects are available in the web appendix.

**Analysis**

*Insecure Workers in Latin America*

The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether or not the respondent approves of the current executive. I interact the measure of whether or not the respondent is worried about losing his or her job with two economic perceptions measures, one of which asks about the respondent’s evaluation of the current state of the national economy while the other asks about the current state of the respondent’s personal finances (question wording in the appendix). The theoretical expectation from H1 is that insecure workers will be more likely to reward the incumbent if they perceive the economy to be good and disapprove of him or her if the economy is bad. Additional controls include evaluations of trends in preventing crime, drug addiction, and corruption in the country (three issues voters in developing countries frequently cite as key issues in determining their vote - see Singer (2011a)) and demographic measures.

Table 1 presents the logit model. There are few consistent relationships between demographic concerns and presidential approval. There is some evidence that age and income are associated with higher levels of government approval on average while high levels of conclusions presented here.
education are associated with negative evaluations of the president. These null findings are not surprising in a model that pools presidents from a variety of different partisan stripes. However, in this case they reflect the weakness of demographic variables as predictors of government support in most countries. While education is a significant predictor (p<0.05) of government approval in 6 of the 17 countries included here, none of the other variables is significant at this threshold in more than 3 countries. Demographic variables are simply, in this region, weak predictors of government approval in the region.\(^{18}\)

(Table 1 about here).

However, the results do show that citizens strongly consider the current conditions in their country when evaluating the sitting president. Consistent with previous work on economic voting elsewhere, evaluations of the national economy have a stronger impact on evaluations of the incumbent than evaluations of the respondent’s personal financial situations do. Presidents are also being held accountable for non-economic outcomes. Citizens who believe that crime rates and corruption have gotten worse are less likely to support for the incumbent, although changes in perceived drug addiction rates did not have a significant effect in this sample.

Consistent with previous work on the United States, worker anxiety does not have a negative effect on evaluations of the sitting incumbent on average (column 1). Yet the results in columns 2 and 3 confirm that insecure workers are different from the rest of the workforce in the weight they give to the state of the national economy.\(^{19}\) There is a significant association

\(^{18}\) Excluding them from the analysis also does not change the substantive conclusions regarding insecure employment reported below.

\(^{19}\) In column 2, I include the interaction of insecure employment with both sociotropic and egotropic economic perception measures. The interaction term between insecure employment
between evaluations of the national economy and evaluations of the incumbent among those who are not worried about becoming unemployed. Feeling secure in your job does not render the economy irrelevant to respondents’ well being and thus it remains salient for many workers. However, the positive interaction term suggests that the marginal effect of changing economic perceptions is significantly greater among insecure workers.

To place these results in context, Figure 1 graphs the predicted likelihood that respondents with average values on all other variables approve of the incumbent government as their perceptions of the economy change, conditional upon their level of economic security. It also graphs the 95 per cent confidence interval of that prediction. Changes in economic perceptions from their minimum to their maximum increase the predicted probability that a worker who is secure in her employment approves of the incumbent by 0.39. The magnifying effect of insecure employment results in a similar change in economic perceptions increasing the probability of government approval by 0.55 among those who feel very worried about losing their jobs. Insecure workers who think that the national economy is weak are 6 per cent less likely to disapprove of the president than is a worker who is secure in his or her job. Among voters who think that the economy is strong those voters who feel otherwise insecure in their employment are nearly 10 per cent more likely to approve of the government than those who are...
secure in their employment. Vulnerable workers punish the government for bad outcomes and reward them for generating economic opportunities more heavily than do workers who are confident in their employment prospects. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

(Figure 1 about here)

Employability and Government Support in Eastern Europe

The dependent variable in the East European sample is a 10-point evaluation of whether or not the respondent is satisfied with the current government, which I model using an ordered logit framework. The rest of the model specification is similar to the one used in the Latin American survey except the available economic perception questions focus on changes compared to the previous year (question wording in the on-line appendix). I include controls for government performance on non-economic issues, demographics, and country-fixed effects.

Table 2 presents the model of approval for East European governments. As in Latin America, there are few consistent relationships between demographic factors and government approval in this broad cross-section of countries. High-income voters have higher levels of approval for sitting incumbents in this cross-section, but that correlation is only significant at the 0.05 level in two of the countries under consideration. No other demographic variable is significantly correlated with government approval in more than two countries. Thus the null results for the demographic variables do not seem to reflect problems from pooling from

\[20\] While insecure workers tend to have slightly more negative evaluations of the national economy than the rest of the sample (which explains a portion of their personal insecurity), they still comprise 46 per cent of the respondents who reported that the national economy was good or very good. Thus these workers who rewarded the incumbent average out those who thought the economy was weak, generating the insignificant effect on average in column 1.
countries where governments have different partisan stripes but instead may reflect a general weakness of demographic anchors for political attitudes in this time period and sample.

Performance concerns, however, do have a strong association with government approval. Just as in Latin America, evaluations of the national economy have a substantially larger impact on opinions about the government than personal considerations do. Increased corruption and crime also decrease support for the government. In fact, the predicted effect of changing perceptions of corruption from their minimum to their maximum in this sample is larger than the effect of changing economic perceptions by the same amount. Thus citizens in Eastern Europe are holding politicians accountable for outcomes during their term.

In contrast to the United States and the Latin American data presented above, the results in Table 2 suggest that pessimism about employment prospects has a negative effect on government approval on average.\textsuperscript{21} Voters who think that it would be hard to find another job like the one they have are significantly more likely to disapprove of the sitting government. However, this result is being driven by results in Russia and the Ukraine; in no other country is this relationship significant at conventional levels and if these two countries are excluded from the analysis the average effect of pessimism about employment options is not significant.

The results in the second and third columns of Table 2 are, however, consistent with Hypothesis 2: employability concerns focus citizen attention on economic issues. Specifically,\textsuperscript{21} Respondents with low levels of employability also were significantly more likely to place themselves on the ideological left. The substantive results in Table 2 do not change, however, if I control for the respondent’s ideology. Moreover, there is no evidence that vulnerable workers were less likely to base their evaluation of leftist governments on their management of the economy than they were right-leaning or centrist governments.
the positive interaction between sociotropic evaluations and low levels of employability suggests that respondents who have negative views of their job prospects place greater weight on the state of the national economy.22 Citizens who believe that the economy is bad but that it would be easy to find a new job are significantly less likely to sanction the incumbent than those who perceive the same economy and are uncertain about their job prospects (Figure 2). As the perceived economy improves, it is workers who have the most dismal views of their job prospects who place the most weight on those improvements and become significantly more likely to approve of the incumbent when the economy is good, rewarding him or her for an improved economy that will hopefully make looking for a new job unnecessary.23 Thus the predicted effect of national economic evaluations as they go from their minimum to their maximum is to increase the probability of giving the government a 5 or higher on the approval scale by 0.17 if the voter feels like they could easily find another job and 0.25 if the worker thinks that they could not find a comparable job in the future. Pessimistic workers who worry about their employability punish the government more heavily for generating threats while optimistic ones reward it for creating opportunities.

(Figure 2 about here)

**Conclusion**

22 Moreover, this result is not contingent upon outcomes in Russia and Ukraine; the substantive conclusions and significance tests for the interactive terms do not change if they are excluded from the analysis.

23 Respondents in the bottom two low employability categories make up 35 per cent of respondents in the “economy is better” category compared to 53 per cent of the entire sample, a sufficiently large number to nearly average out those who said the economy was worse.
Economic performance is an important component of government support. Yet previous studies show that there are occupational differences in how citizens convert economic outcomes into government assessments (Hellwig 2001; Dorussen & Taylor 2002; Singer 2011a). The data presented here generalize those findings: workers in vulnerable employment situations differ in their issue priorities. Citizens who feel insecure in their job show a stronger correspondence between their opinion of the incumbent and their evaluations of the national economy than do voters who are not at risk. A similar pattern exists among those who are employed but worry that they could not find a similar job should the need arise. Thus vulnerable workers in turn have the ability to make politicians insecure in their own job prospects if they cannot avoid economic slowdowns.

For students of the linkage between economics and government support, this article provides further evidence that not all citizens respond equally to economic shifts. While the economy is frequently important to the average voter, economically vulnerable citizens have an increased personal stake in the economy and evaluate the incumbent accordingly.

This study raises several questions that merit further research. For example, the present analysis suggests that employment insecurity raises the profile of the overall national economy, but it cannot show whether vulnerable workers differ in the specific economic outcomes that they focus on. Specifically, vulnerable workers may focus particularly on unemployment rates and not growth or inflation as unemployment is their largest fear (see Dorussen & Taylor 2002). Or insecure workers may focus on growth rates as a measure of economic opportunities being created and demand for their services. The number of countries in either survey is not sufficiently large for aggregate economic outcomes to be added in a multi-level framework (Maas & Hox 2005), but further work that pools countries or data from various years can
Another question arises regarding whether these findings are generalizable to different geographic regions. I focus on developing economies because I suspect that the combination of high insecurity rates and low levels of welfare protections would make this the region where employment insecurity’s effect would be most likely to be observed. This leaves the question, however, of whether vulnerable workers in developed countries with established welfare programs behave in a similar fashion. More generally, does the country’s level of wealth, social protection, or overall formal employment rate condition the political impact of economic insecurity? Insecure workers might not be equally vulnerable everywhere. A related question is how economically vulnerable workers would evaluate an incumbent government who oversaw a weak economy but strengthened welfare protections - do they reward them for constructing the nets that will catch them or punish them for placing them in economic risk? The surveys used here unfortunately do not have the necessary questions on how respondents perceive social safety nets in their countries in order to answer that question. An analysis that looks at a larger sample of countries with comparable data on vulnerable employment can embed vulnerable respondents in social safety-nets and see if their responses differ across contexts.

Yet the general findings in the present study suggest that, in the developing world at least, insecure workers are highly responsive to economic fluctuations. Thus these workers should potentially give the incumbent pause. Workers who feel vulnerable to swings in the national economy are more likely to consider economic management the most salient issue of the incumbent’s profile. The specific effect on incumbent fortunes depends upon whether the economy is doing well or poorly; insecure workers who believe the incumbent is managing the economy well are likely to give the ruling party an electoral bonus for reducing the consequences
associated with the immediate threat of unemployment. But growing worker insecurity globally may increasingly drive electoral agendas to core questions of economic management.
Works Cited


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Table 1: Employment Insecurity and Presidential Approval in Latin America (2002)

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<td>-0.154***</td>
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<td>(0.306)</td>
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| N | 8210 | 8210 | 8210 |
| Wald $\chi^2$ | 2136.80*** | 2141.35*** | 2141.32*** |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.195 | 0.195 | 0.195 |
| Log pseudolikelihood | -4422.96 | -4420.68 | -4420.7 |

Logit Model, Standard Errors in Parentheses, Country Fixed Effects Not Presented;
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
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<td>(0.090)</td>
<td>0.574***</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
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<td>0.536***</td>
<td>(0.094)</td>
<td>0.512***</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
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<td>-0.110**</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>-0.114***</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
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<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>0.080**</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
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Ordered Logit Model, Standard Errors in Parentheses, Country Fixed Effects Not Presented

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Figure 1: The Conditional Impact of Economic Perceptions on Government Approval in Latin America

Estimated Coefficient for Insecure Employment, Conditional Upon Economic Perceptions

- Effect of Insecure Employment
- CI
Figure 2: The Conditional Impact of Economic Perceptions on Government Approval in Eastern Europe

Estimated Coefficient for Employability, Conditional Upon Economic Perceptions