

# More Local, More Clientelistic?

## How Clientelism Tolerance Differs by Election Levels in Taiwan

Sanho Chung

Postdoctoral Fellow, International Taiwan Studies Center  
National Taiwan Normal University

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# Motivation

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Vote buying in democracies, including Taiwan, is not a new thing for us.



(“There is no masters in elections: you just need money to win.”)

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- *Corruption*: it relies on embezzlement and power abuse to reward voters.

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*But obviously, they do not explain the whole picture of vote buying...*

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→ *Why do voters in advanced democracies still tolerate court-certified clientelistic politicians at the local level?*

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- Low knowledge; unhappy with democracy performance (Gherghina et al. 2022)

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- Duties and discretion



# Theories

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- 2 Do mechanisms of clientelism tolerance differ across election levels?

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  - Clientelistic goods are more acceptable if justified as smaller-scale public goods
  - With smaller power comes more trivial consequence

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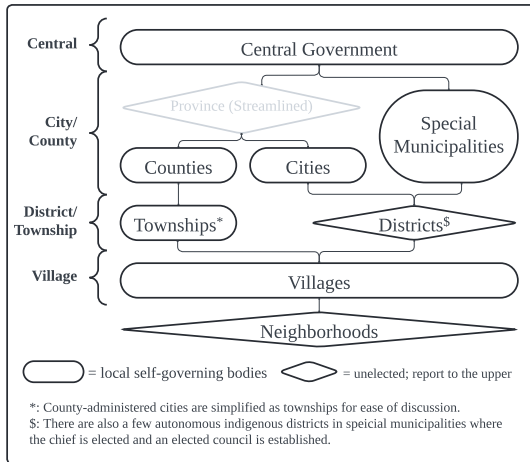
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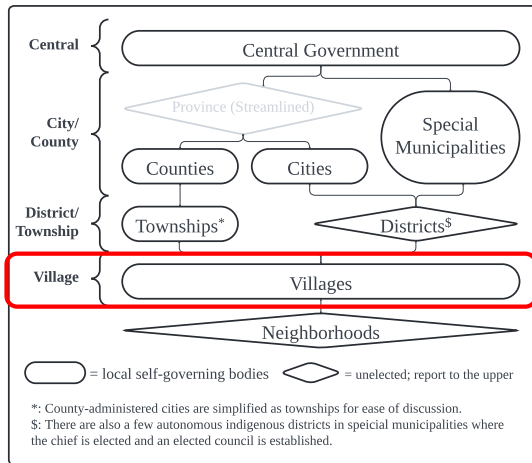
# Research Design

# Research Method: Conjoint Experiments



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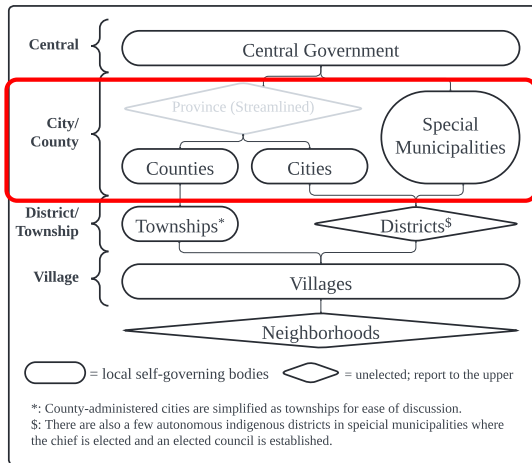
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- village chief (lower)
- county magistrate (higher)



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*In the experiment, I test the theories by analyzing the results of our key attribute: **accusation**.*

# Attributes of the Conjoint Experiment

Attribute	Level
Party Affiliation	[DPP] Democratic Progressive Party/DPP [KMT] Kuomintang [Independent]
Education	[High School] [NTU UG*] Undergraduate at National Taiwan University [NTU Master] Master's at National Taiwan University [US Master] Master's at a US University
Gender	[Female] [Male]
Branding	[Fresh] Fresh in politics, fresh in working style [Warm] Raised in the same village (county), the candidate promises to serve electorates as if they are family. [Competent] Praised by the ex-village chief(ex-county magistrate) when working for the village office (county government).
Platform	[Allowance transparency] Transparency of allowance usage for village (county) office [Collective public goods] Full underground power lines (Development of sewage disposal monitoring system) [Individualized public goods] Full salary donation for new ambulances and assistance of the vulnerable (Increase of pensions for the weak and elderly)
Accusation	[None] [Vote buying] Buying votes with cash through brokers [Procurement projects] Trading future procurement (construction) projects for donations [Patronage jobs] Rewarding brokers with village office (county government) jobs for their vote mobilization

\* : The level was accidentally omitted in the village chief experiment due to technical error.

## Descriptive Statistics: Sample ( $n = 1853$ ) vs True Population

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample ( $N = 1853$ )		Actual %
		n	%	
Gender	Female	916	49.4	50.1
	Male	937	50.6	49.9
Age	20-39	707	38.1	33.5
	40-59	914	49.3	38.1
	60 or above	232	12.5	28.4
Education	No degree	302	16.3	50.3
	Undergrad	1138	61.4	41.1
	Postgrad	413	22.3	8.6
Locality	City	1492	80.5	74.4
	County	361	19.5	25.6
Political Spectrum	Neutral	906	48.9	/
	Pan-Blue	359	19.4	/
	Pan-Green	588	31.7	/

Our samples underrepresented senior adults and non-degree holders, which is a common shortcoming for all online surveys.

# Findings

# Summary of Hypothesis Tests

## Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

**H1:** *Lower election* → ↑ *clientelism tolerance*

## Closeness Mechanism

**H2A:** *Lower election* → ↑ *closeness to officer*

**H2B:** ↑ *closeness to officer* → ↑ *clientelism tolerance*

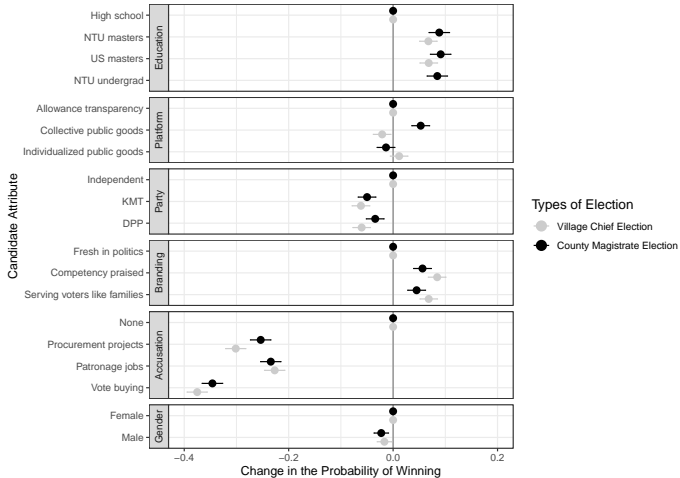
## Power Mechanism

**H3A:** *Lower election* → ↓ *perceived officer power*

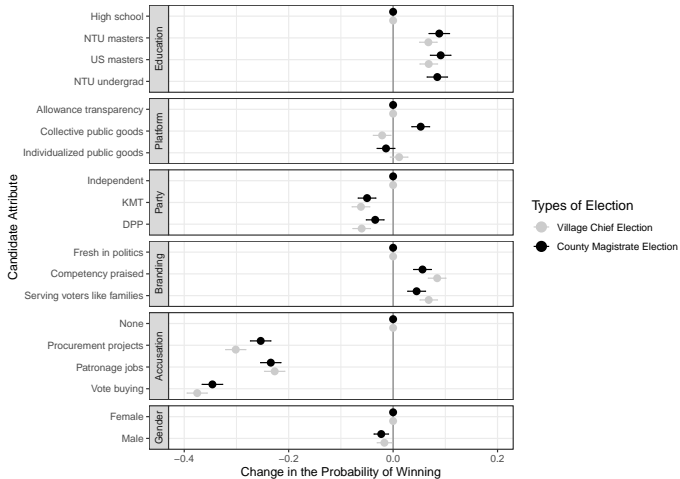
**H3B:** ↓ *perceived officer power* → ↓ *clientelism tolerance*



# H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)

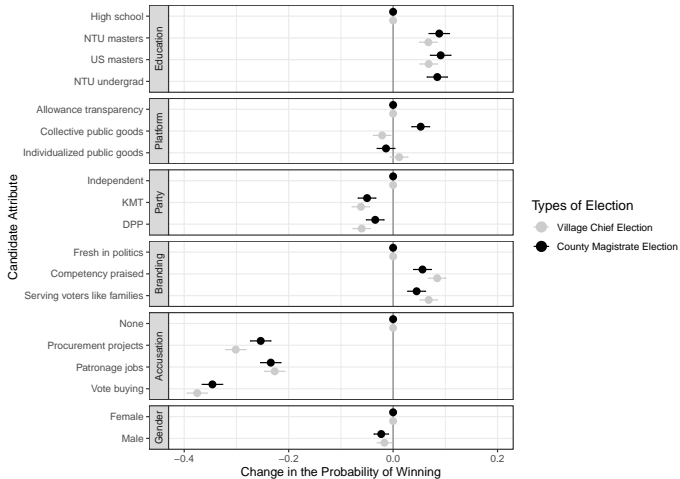


# H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

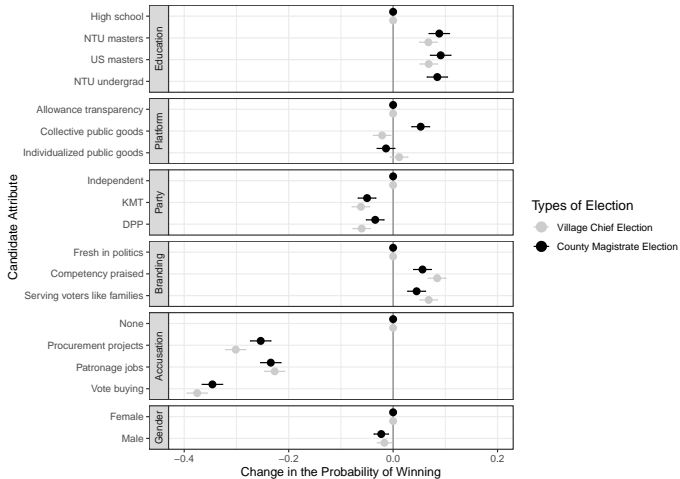
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● = how likely a profile with that feature is chosen instead of the baseline feature

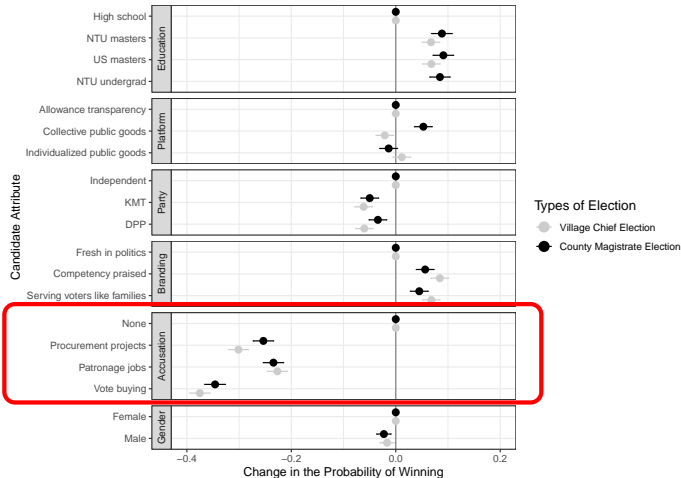
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- E.g. AMCE of KMT = how likely a KMT candidate is chosen instead of independent

# H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



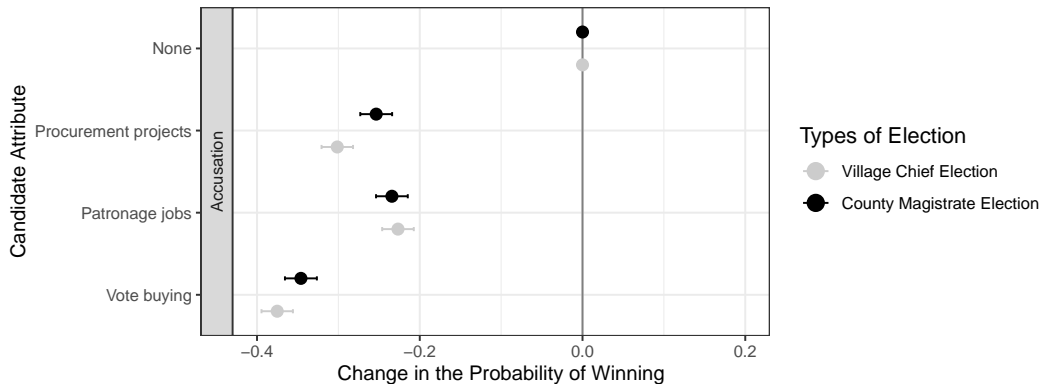
Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

- = how likely a profile with that feature is chosen instead of the baseline feature
- E.g. AMCE of KMT = how likely a KMT candidate is chosen instead of independent

*But for H1, our focus would be the accusation results.*

# H1 (More tolerance in lower elections): not supported, even the opposite

More tolerance = closer to zero (though still negative)



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## H2A (Higher closeness in lower elections): Supported

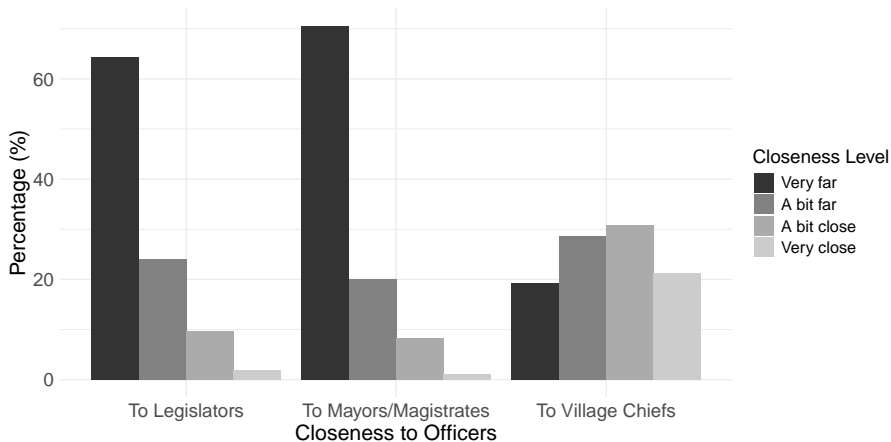


Figure: Respondents' (N = 1853) Perceived Closeness to Officers by Levels

## H2B (Higher closeness leads to more tolerance): higher elections only

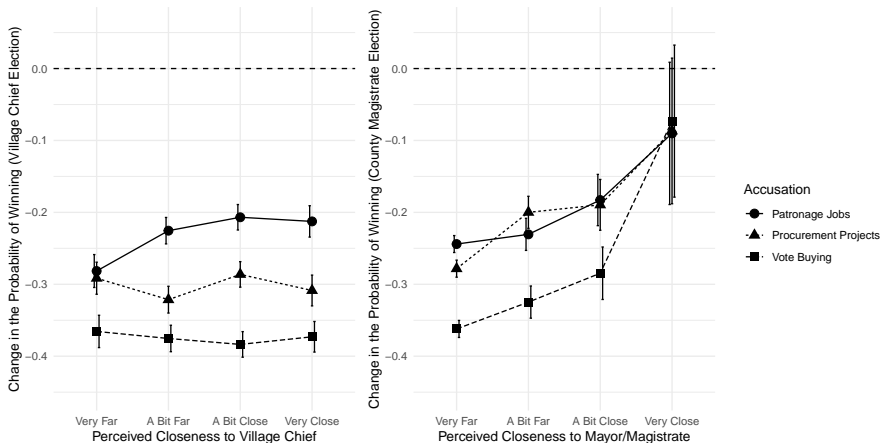


Figure: Interaction Between Closeness and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

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## H3A (Less perceived power in lower elections): Supported

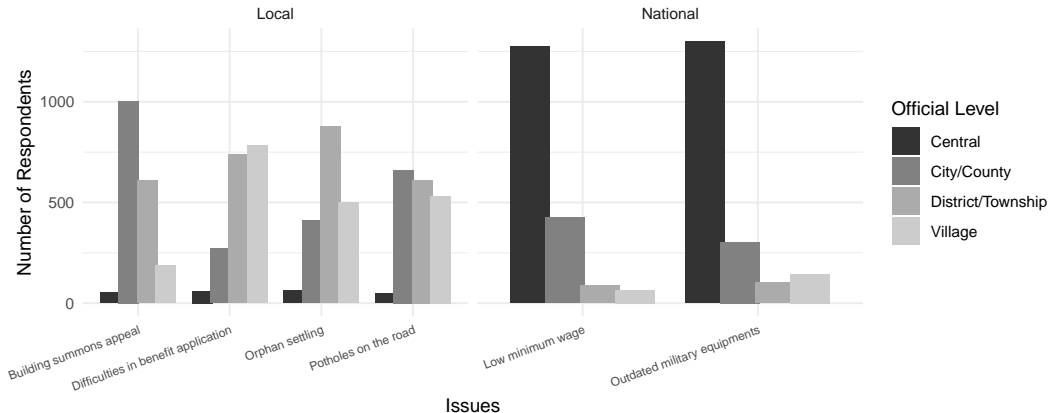


Figure: Levels of Officials Respondents (N = 1853) Would Reach Out to for Different Issues

## Operationalizing “perceived power” to test H3B

To operationalize perceived power of each level of official for each subject, I first count the number of issues the respondents would reach out to, and then categorize the sample into 3 bins accordingly (0 = none, 1-2 = moderate, 3 to 4 = strong).

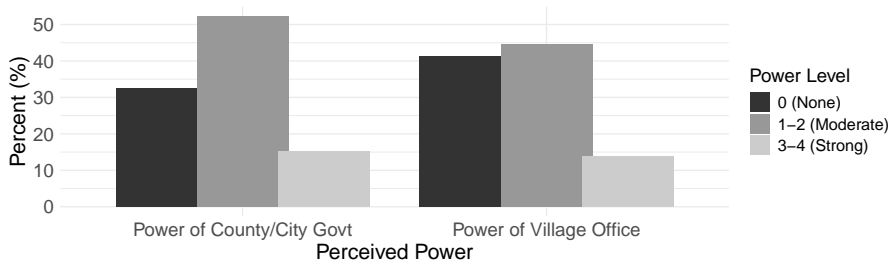


Figure: Respondents' (N = 1853) Perceived Power of Different Levels of Offices



## H3B (Less perceived power leads to more tolerance): lower elections only

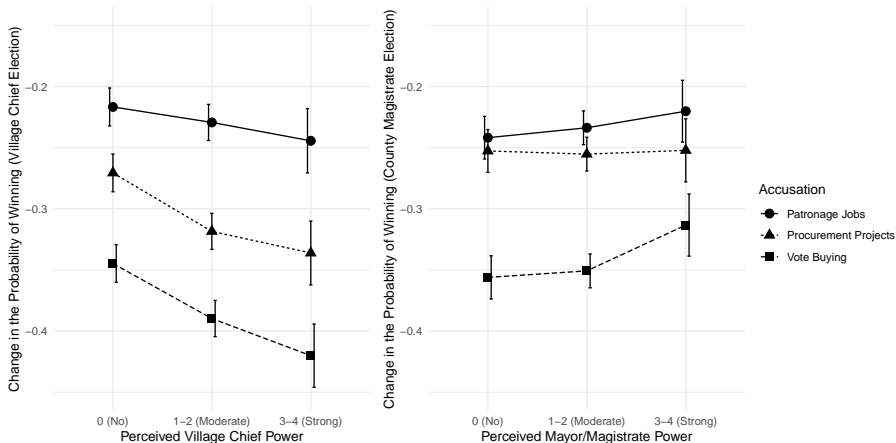


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## Power Mechanism

**H3A:** *Lower election* → ↓ *perceived officer power* ✓

**H3B:** ↓ *perceived officer power* → ↓ *clientelism tolerance* ✓✗(village)

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- People in general are deeply averse to clientelism.
- Partial evidence on higher tolerance in higher local elections, why?
  - Lower expectation to more experienced (indicated by election levels) politicians?
- Power(less) mechanism for lower local; closeness mechanism for higher local.

# Discussion

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## Intellectual Contribution?

- **Clientelism**: Election level as a novel angle (probably the first)
- **Democratic backsliding**: Subnational politics as a lens on democratic resilience
- Policy implications for enhancing electoral integrity

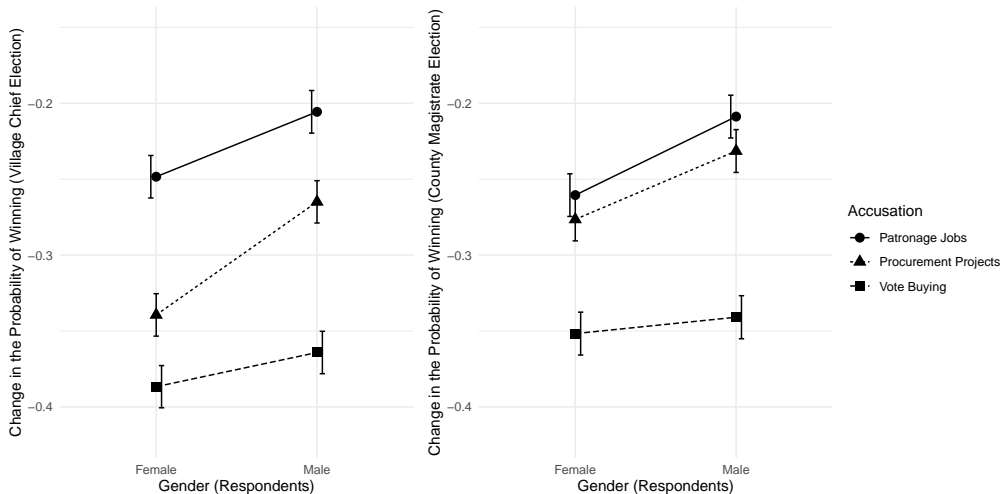
# Discussion

## Prospects for further investigation

- More election levels (e.g. national)?
- Lawmakers instead of executive head?
- Electoral systems other than SMD?
- More numbers of profile?
- More profile attributes?
- Randomize order of elections?
- And more...

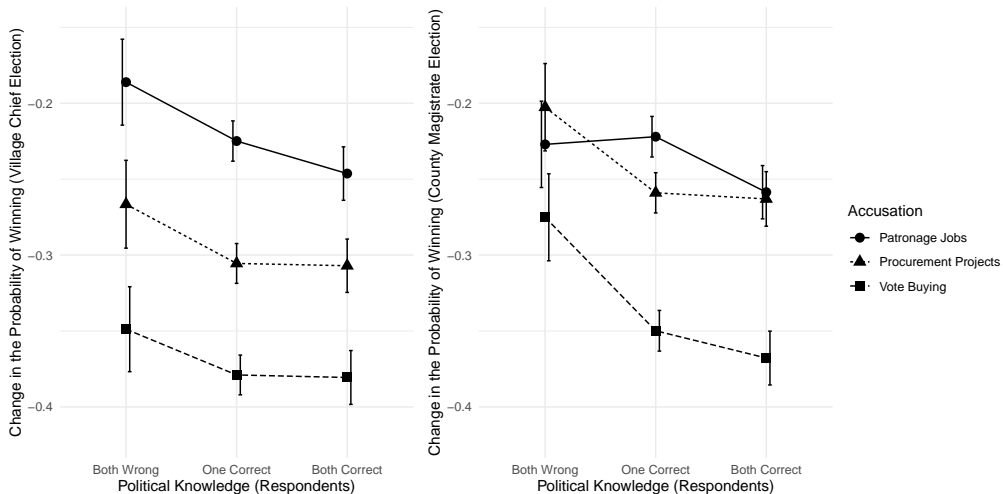
Also, here are some “for what it’s worth” additional findings which could lead to other spin-off projects in the future.

# FWIW 1: Gender and Clientelism Tolerance

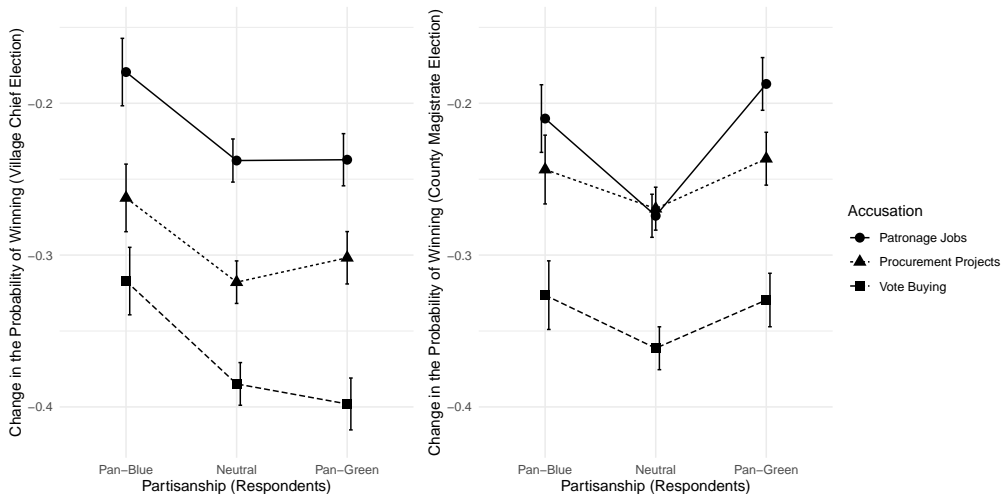




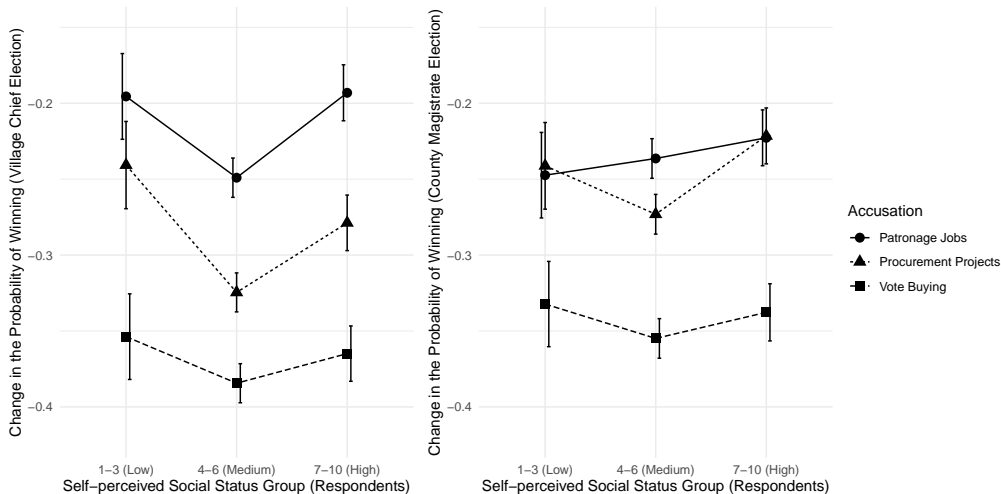
## FWIW 2: Political Knowledge and Clientelism Tolerance



## FWIW 3: Partisanship and Clientelism Tolerance



# FWIW 4: Social Status and Clientelism Tolerance



# Ongoing Research

## Clientelism

- **Clientelism Tolerance by Election Levels in Taiwan (Under Review in APSR)**
- Subnational Centralization and Clientelism in Taiwan (Draft Completed)
- Cross-national Quantative Analysis of Subnational Centralization and Clientelism (In Preparation)
- Elderly Voters' Fragility to Clientelism in Aging East Asian Democracies (Research Design)

## Autocratization in Hong Kong

- Diaspora, Transnational Linked Fate, and Political Preferences Abroad (R&R in Political Behavior)
- Impacts of Purging the Opposition on Pro-regime Legislators' Floor Performance (under review in BJPS)
- Rightward Tendency Among Post-2019 Hong Kong Migration Wave (First Draft Completed)
- Logic of Elite Co-optation through Public Bodies in Post-Handover Hong Kong (First Draft Completed)

## Others

- Partisan Intolerance in Taiwan (Draft Completed)
- Anti-Hong Kong Sentiment among the Pro-Independence in Taiwan (Research Design)
- Consequences of Small Country Exclusions in Cross-National Datasets (Research Design)

## Selected Journal Publications (Bold = SSCI)

### Elections in Taiwan

- **Chung, Sanho (2025). “Road Not Taken: Current Status of Clientelism Studies in Taiwan and Its Predicaments.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*.**
- Chung, Sanho (2024). “Behind the Pursuit of ‘Frozen Garlic’: Changing Trends of Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) Campaigns in Taiwan.” *Journal of Taiwan Politics*.

### Nationalism and Social Movements in Hong Kong

- **Chung, Sanho (2023). “ ‘Because Hongkongers Should Support Hong Kong’: Entanglement of National Identity, Political Ideology and Football Fandom in Hong Kong.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*.**
- **Yuen, Samson, & Chung, Sanho (2018). “Explaining Localism in Post-handover Hong Kong: An Eventful Approach.” *China Perspectives*.**
- Wong, Wai-kwok Benson, & Chung, Sanho (2016). “Scholarism and Hong Kong Federation of Students: Comparative Analysis of their Developments After the Umbrella Movement.” *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal*.

# International Engagements

## Service

- Global Research Association of Politics in Hong Kong (GRAPH) - APSA Related Group

## Research Collaboration

- Hong Kong Diaspora Studies Initiative (HKDSI): teammates based in the US, UK, and Japan
- SSHRC (Canada) grant application jointly with US, Canada, and UK scholars

(and more in the future)

# Teaching

Courses I can teach ( \* = syllabus ready)

- Dictatorship\*
- Politics of East Asia\*
- Society, Culture and Politics of Hong Kong
- Comparative Politics\*
- Democracy and Democratization
- Local Governments
- Research Methods
- Contentious Politics
- Corruption and Clientelism

# kám-siā! Thank You!

[sanhochung@gmail.com](mailto:sanhochung@gmail.com)