

More Local, More Clientelistic?

How Clientelism Tolerance Differs by Election Levels in Taiwan

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Presentation at National Cheng Kung University, Sep 19th 2025

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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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
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H3A: *Perceived officer power is lower in lower elections.*

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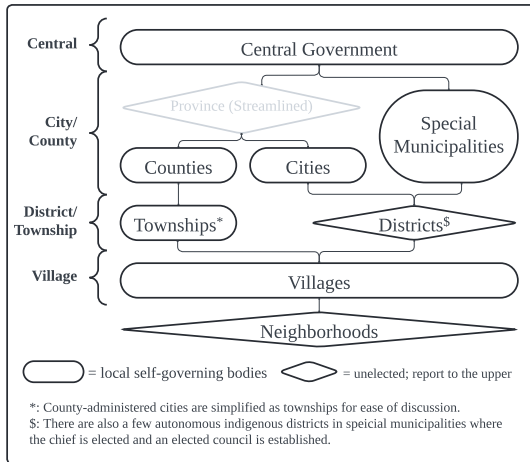
Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is lower in lower elections.*

H3B: *Clientelism tolerance is higher for officers with lower perceived power.*

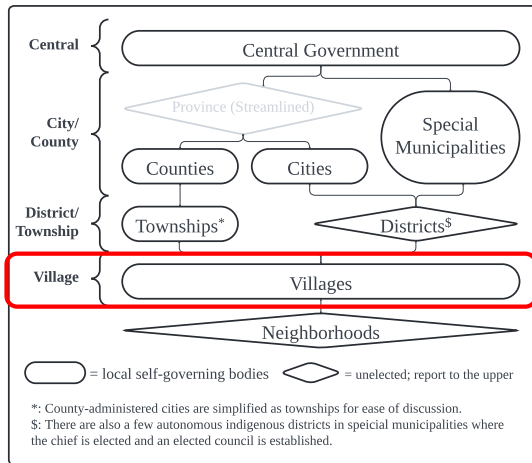
Research Design

Research Method: Conjoint Experiments



To examine my arguments, I deployed two conjoint experiments to simulate two levels of local elections in Taiwan as a high-income and consolidated third-wave democracy.

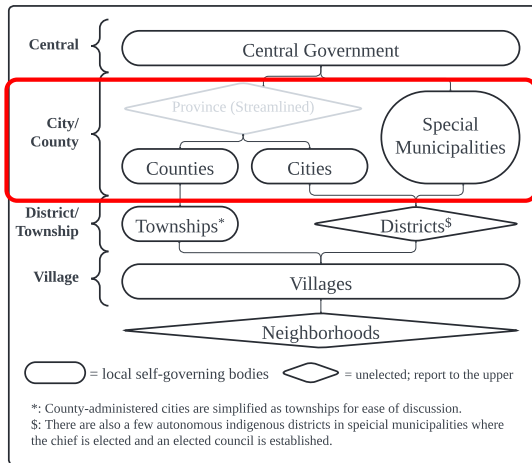
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- village chief (lower)
- county magistrate (higher)

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請問您會投給哪一位 里長 候選人？

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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: *Clientelism tolerance is higher in lower elections.*

Closeness Mechanism

H2A: *Perceived closeness to elected officer is higher in lower elections.*

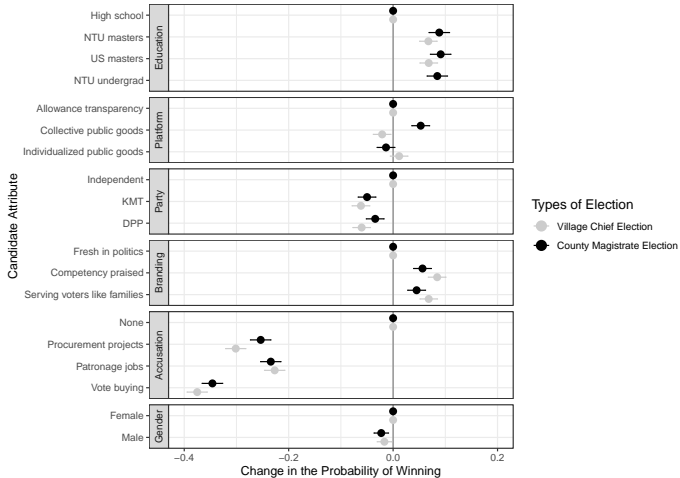
H2B: *Clientelism tolerance is higher with higher closeness to officers.*

Power Mechanism

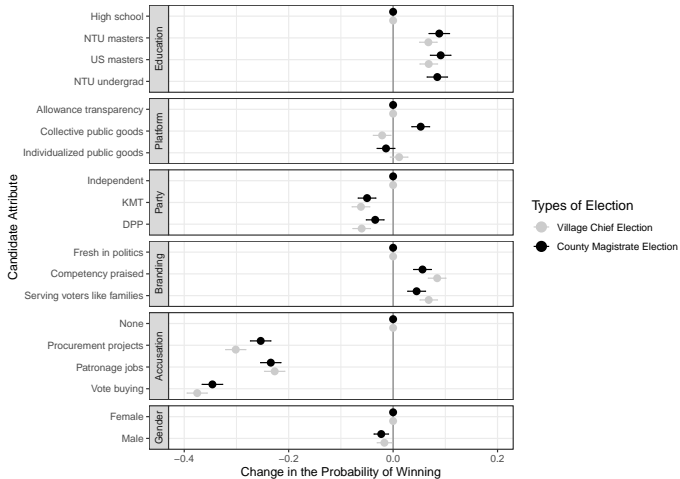
H3A: *Perceived officer power is lower in lower elections.*

H3B: *Clientelism tolerance is higher for officers with lower perceived power.*

H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)

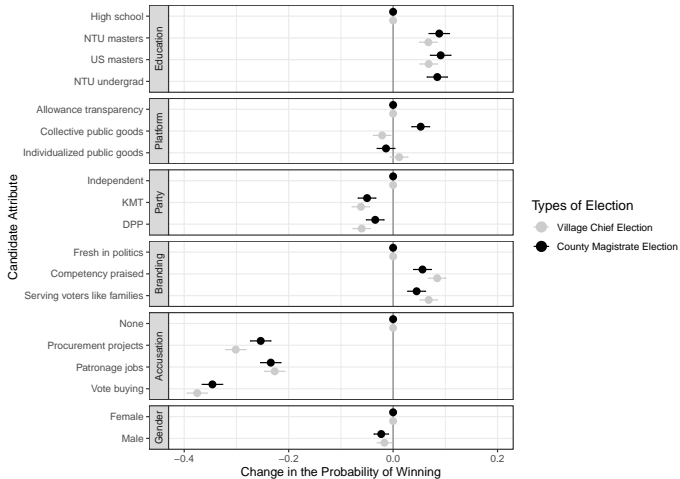


H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

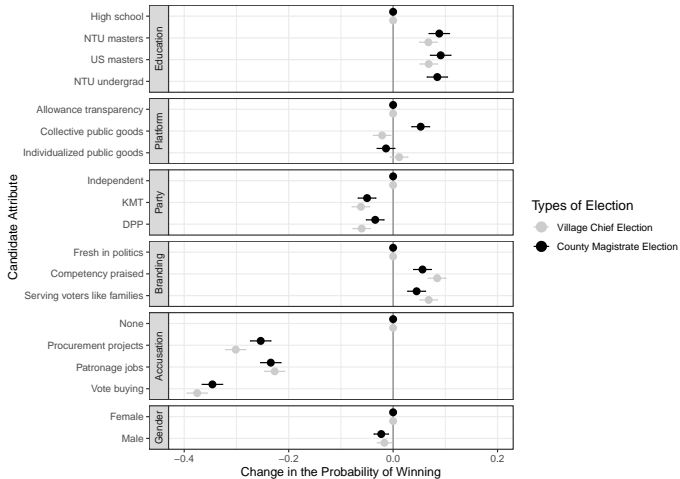
H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

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

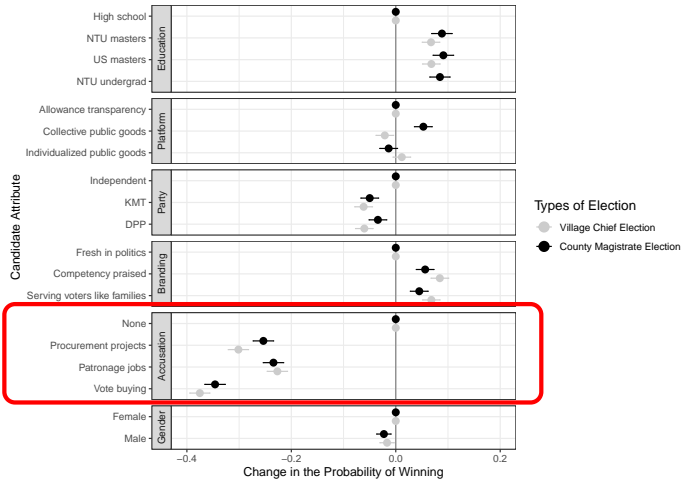
H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



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

H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



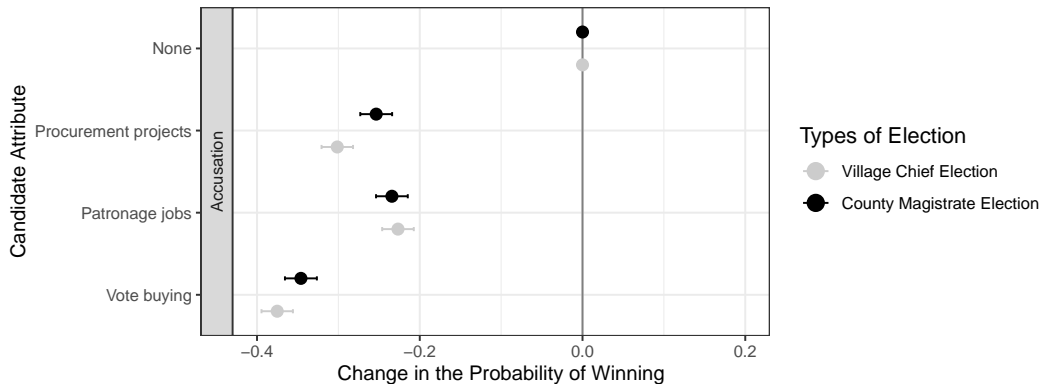
Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

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- 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

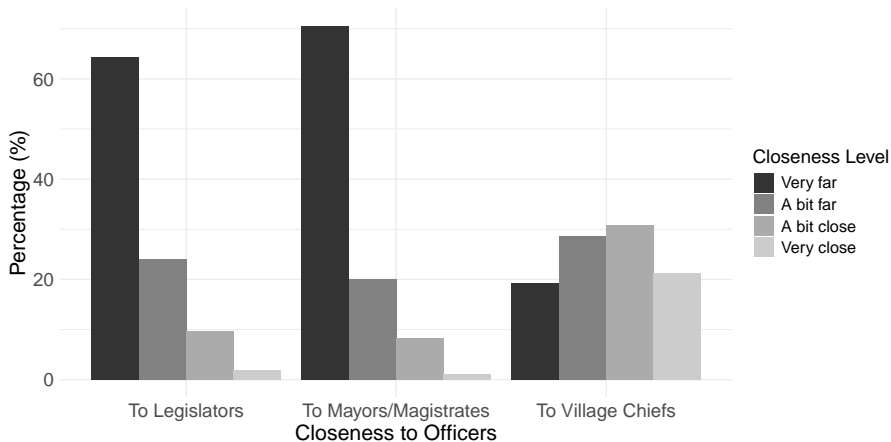


Figure: Respondents' (N = 1853) Perceived Closeness to Officers by Levels

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

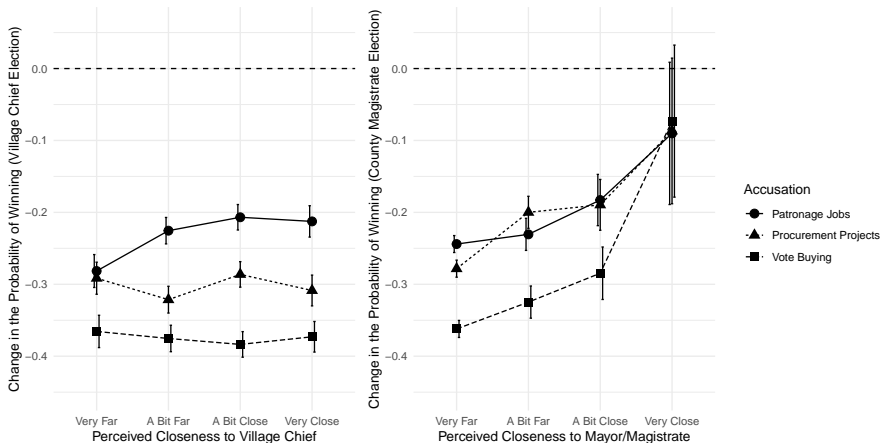


Figure: Interaction Between Closeness and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

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Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is lower in lower elections.*

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H3A (Less perceived power in lower elections): Supported

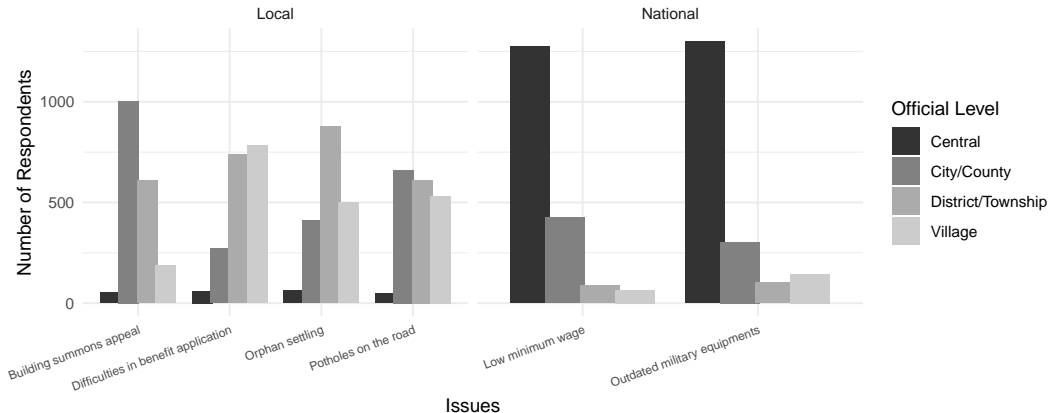


Figure: Levels of Officials Respondents (N = 1853) Would Reach Out to for Different Issues

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).

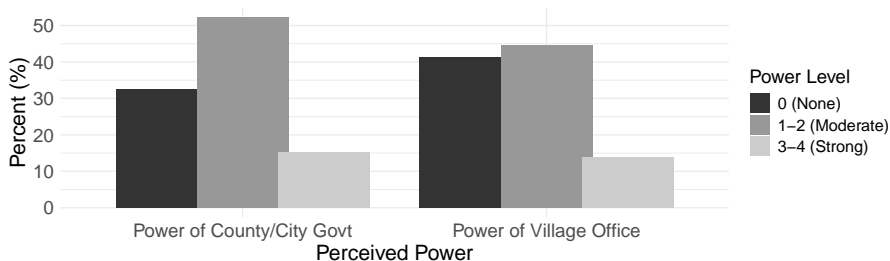


Figure: Respondents' (N = 1853) Perceived Power of Different Levels of Offices

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

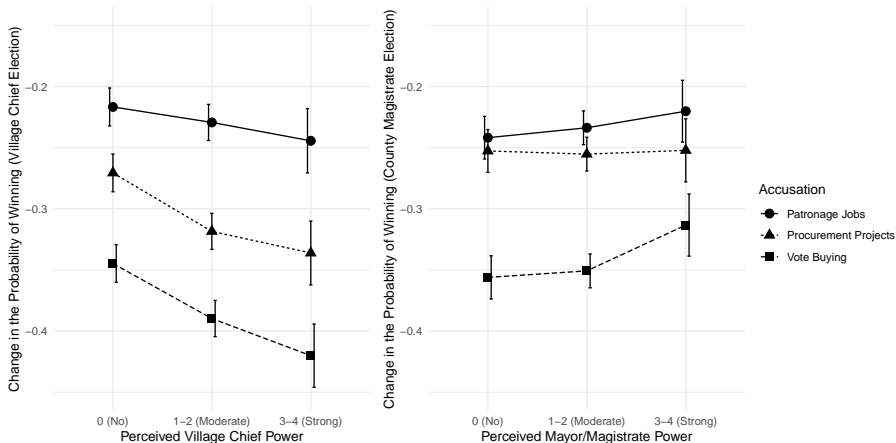


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Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

H1: *Clientelism tolerance is higher in lower elections.* ✗

Closeness Mechanism

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H2B: *Clientelism tolerance is higher with higher closeness to officers.* ✓✗(county)

Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is lower in lower elections.* ✓

H3B: *Clientelism tolerance is higher for officers with lower perceived power.* ✓✗(village)

Discussion

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Main Takeaways

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- People in general are deeply averse to clientelism.

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- Partial evidence on higher tolerance in higher local elections, why?

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Main Takeaways

- 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

Intellectual Contribution?

Discussion

Intellectual Contribution?

- **Clientelism:** Election level as a novel angle (probably the first)

Discussion

Intellectual Contribution?

- **Clientelism**: Election level as a novel angle (probably the first)
- **Democratic backsliding**: Subnational politics as a lens on democratic resilience

Discussion

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

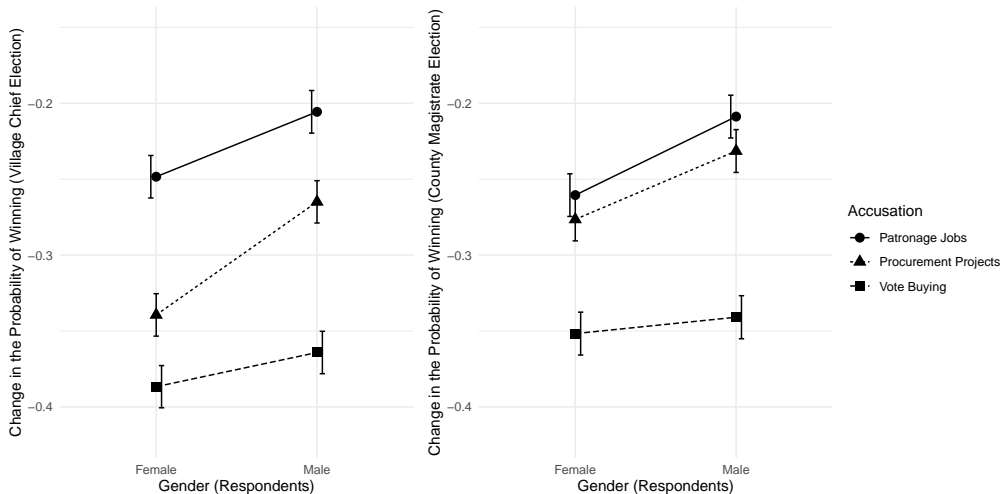
Discussion

Prospects for further investigation

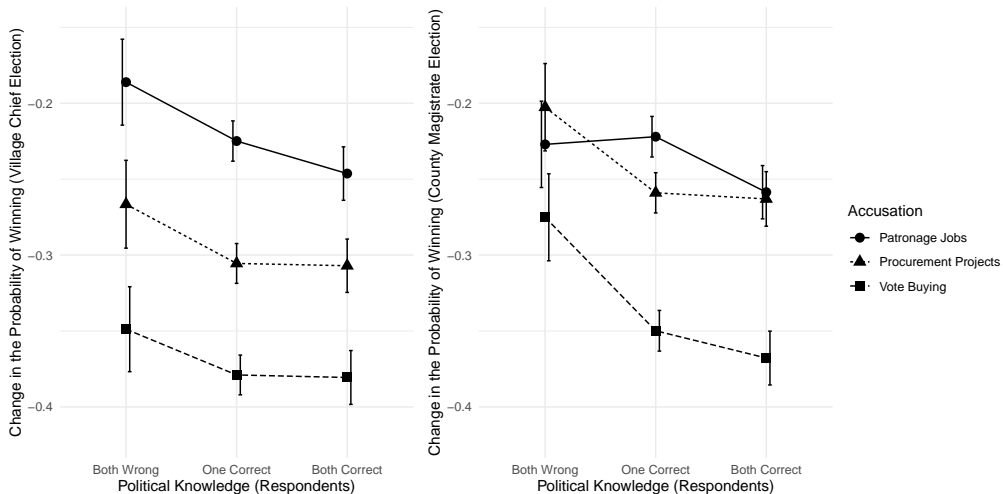
- More election levels (e.g. national)?
- Lawmakers instead of executive head?
- Electoral systems other than SMD?
- More numbers of profile?
- More profile attributes?
- Randomize order of elections?
- And more...

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

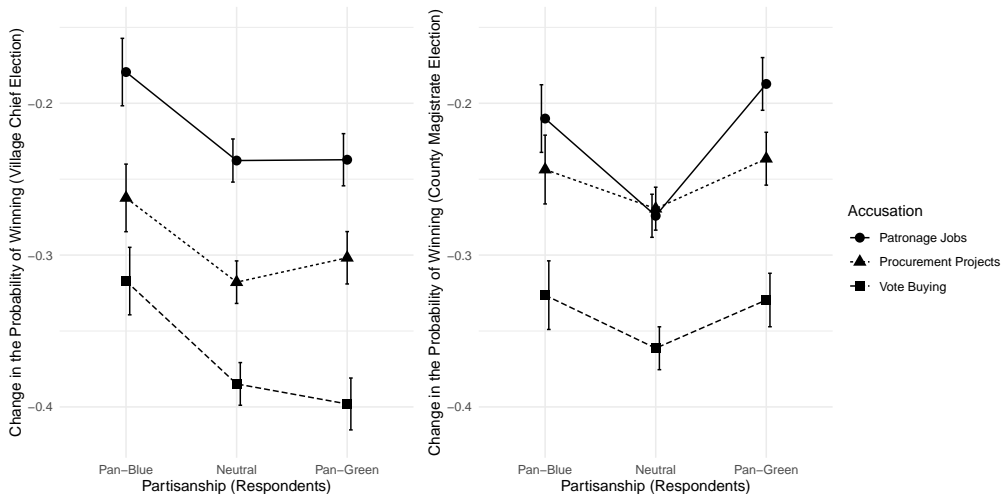
FWIW 1: Gender and Clientelism Tolerance



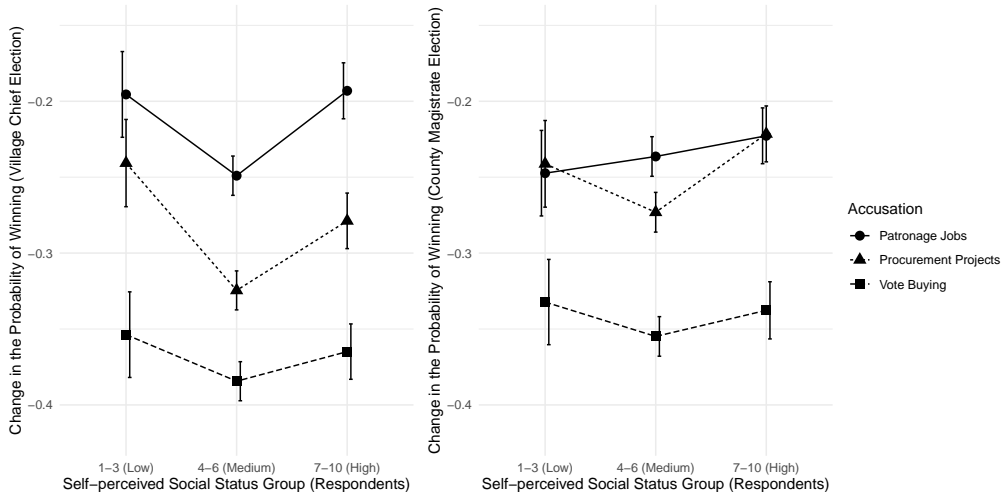
FWIW 2: Political Knowledge and Clientelism Tolerance



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