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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  - Democracy (Geddes 1991; Keefer 2007) $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ credibility of programmatic goods

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- General explanations of clientelism
  - Development (Kitschelt & Kselman 2013) → ↑ cost of handouts
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But obviously, they do not explain the whole picture of vote buying...

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$\rightarrow$ *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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Why do levels of election (or government) matter?

- Attention from the general public
- Chances to engage with voters
- Duties and discretion

Theories

Research Questions

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1. Do **degrees** of clientelism tolerance vary across election levels?

2. Do **mechanisms** of clientelism tolerance differ across election levels?

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I argue that clientelism tolerance varies by election levels through two mechanisms:

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- **Power**: *more local → less power → more tolerance*
  - Clientelistic goods are more acceptable if justified as smaller-scale public goods
  - With smaller power comes more trivial consequence

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Closeness Mechanism

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Research Design

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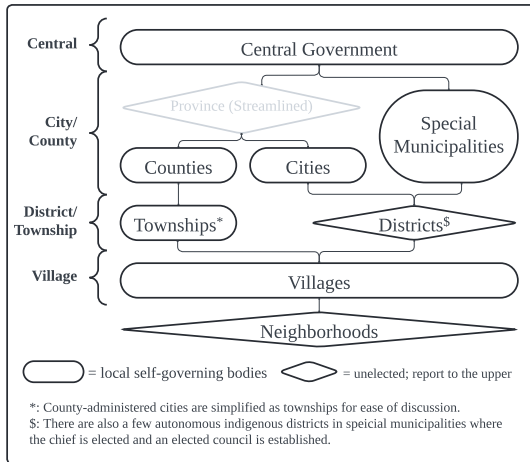
To examine my arguments, I deployed two conjoint experiments to simulate two levels of local elections in Taiwan as a high-income and consolidated third-wave democracy.

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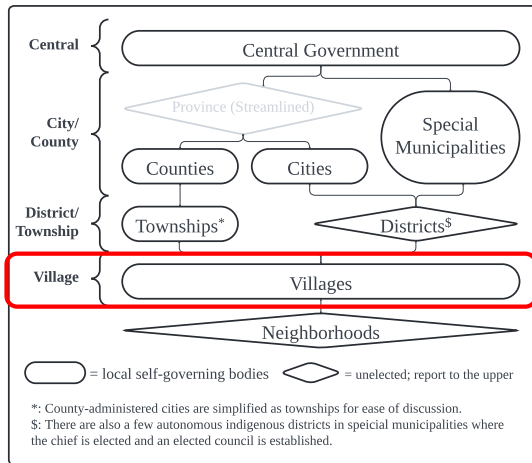
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- village chief (lower)

Research Method: Conjoint Experiments
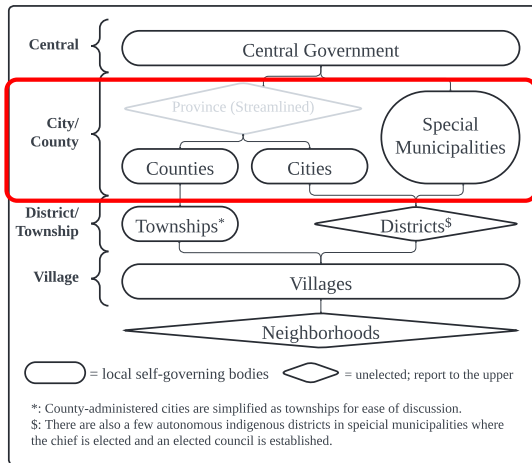
Central — Central Government

City/County — Province (Streamlined) — Special Municipalities — Counties — Cities

District/Township — Townships* — Districts$

Village — Villages

Neighborhoods

= local self-governing bodies   = unelected; report to the upper

*: County-administered cities are simplified as townships for ease of discussion.
$: There are also a few autonomous indigenous districts in speical municipalities where the chief is elected and an elected council is established.

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.

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

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- $N = 1853$ (bots, replicates excluded)
- 2 profiles per task
- Outcome Qs: forced choice, rate (1-7)
- 5 tasks per election level (10 in total)

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- Attribute order randomized between respondents, not tasks

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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

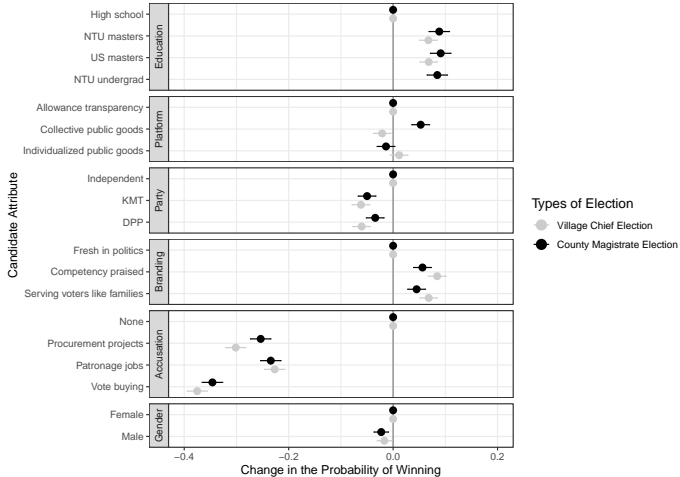**H2A:** _Lower_ election → ↑ closeness to officer
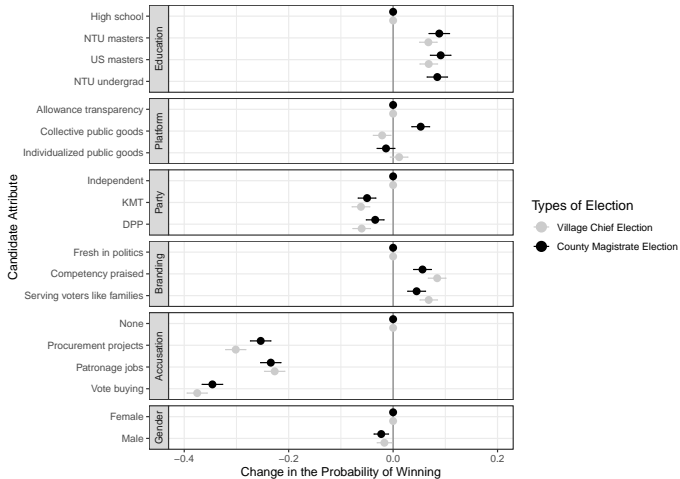**H2B:** ↑ closeness to officer → ↑ clientelism tolerance

Power Mechanism

H3A: _Lower_ election → ↓ perceived officer power
H3B: ↓ perceived officer power → ↑ clientelism tolerance

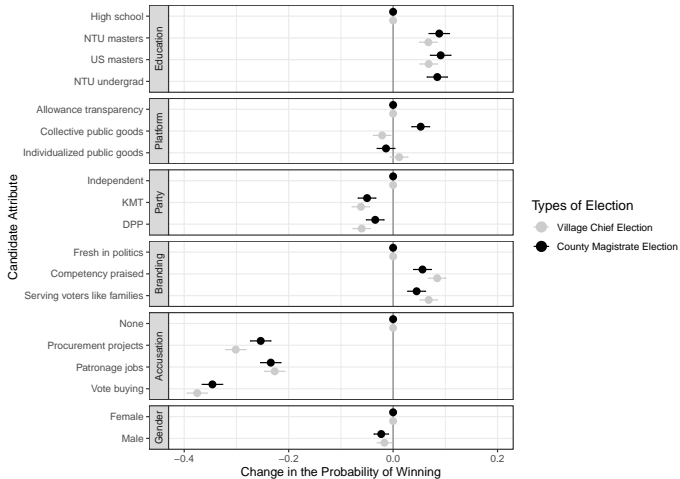# H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)

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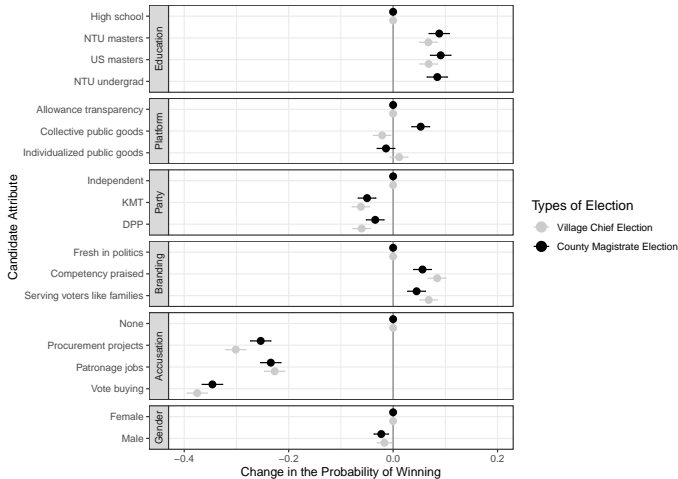Estimates = Average Marginal
Component Effects (AMCEs)

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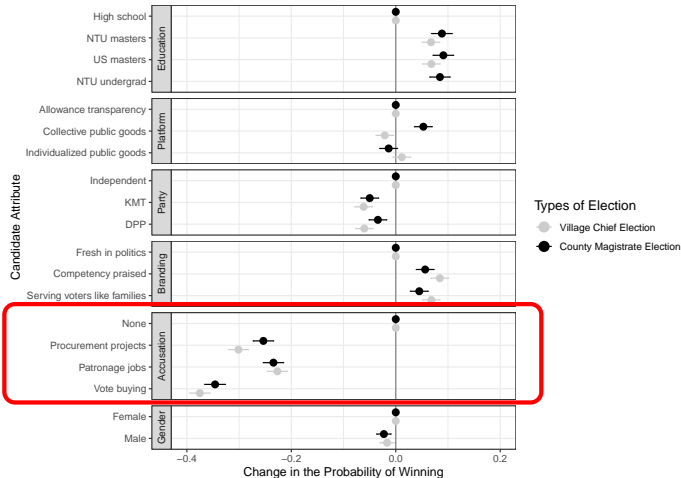- ● = how likely a profile with that feature is chosen instead of the baseline feature

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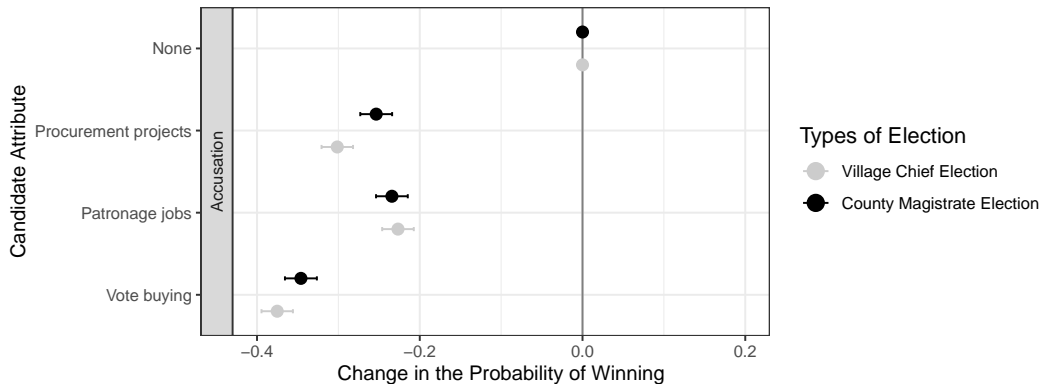
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- E.g. AMCE of KMT = how likely a KMT candidate is chosen instead of independent

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)

Types of Election
- Village Chief Election
- County Magistrate Election

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Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

H1: <u>*Lower*</u> *election* → ↑ *clientelism tolerance* ✕

Closeness Mechanism

H2A: <u>*Lower*</u> *election* → ↑ *closeness to officer*
H2B: ↑ *closeness to officer* → ↑ *clientelism tolerance*

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H3A: <u>*Lower*</u> *election* → ↓ *perceived officer power*
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H3A: _Lower_ election $\rightarrow$ $\downarrow$ perceived officer power
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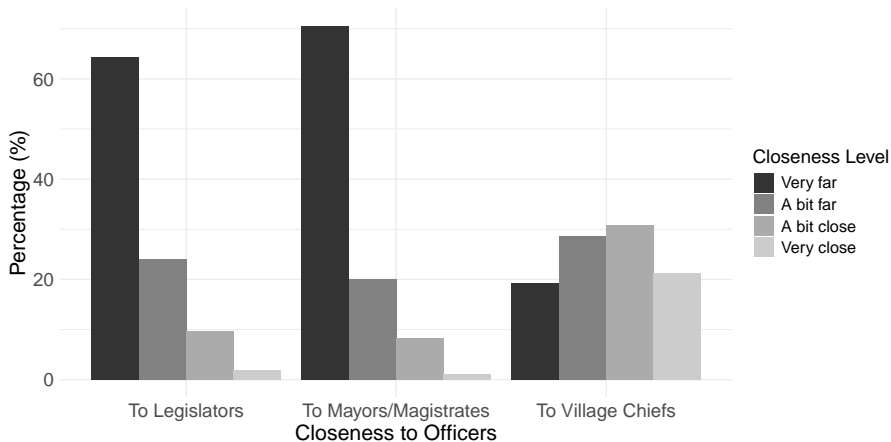# H2A (Higher closeness in lower elections): Supported

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

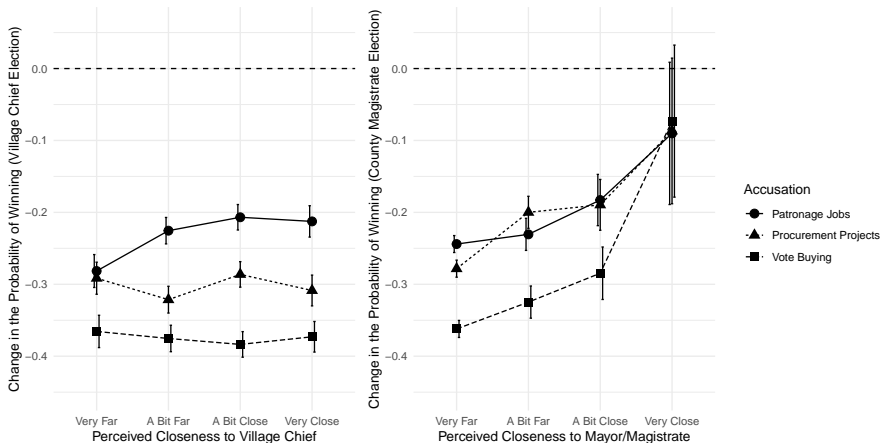## H2B (Higher closeness leads to more tolerance): higher elections only

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

Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

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Closeness Mechanism

H2A: _Lower_ election → ↑ closeness to officer ✓
H2B: ↑ closeness to officer → ↑ clientelism tolerance ✓(county)

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H3A (Less perceived power in lower elections): Supported
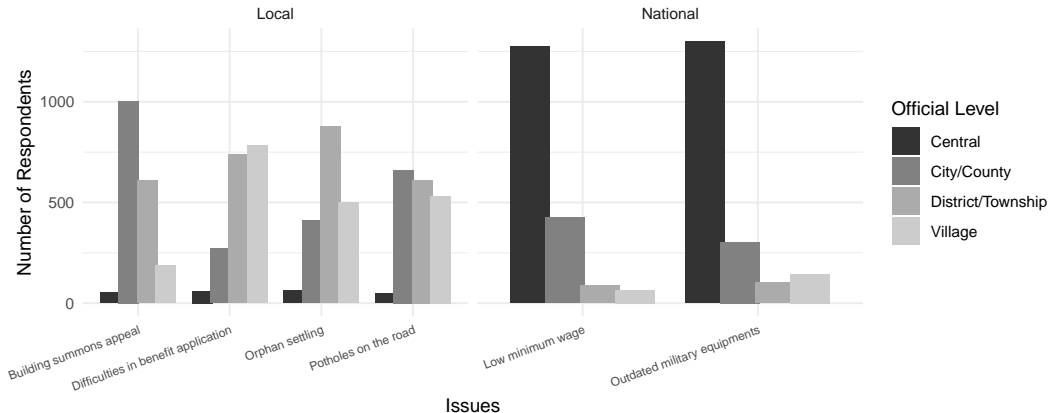

Figure: Levels of Officials Respondents ($N = 1853$) Would Reach Out to for Different Issues

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).
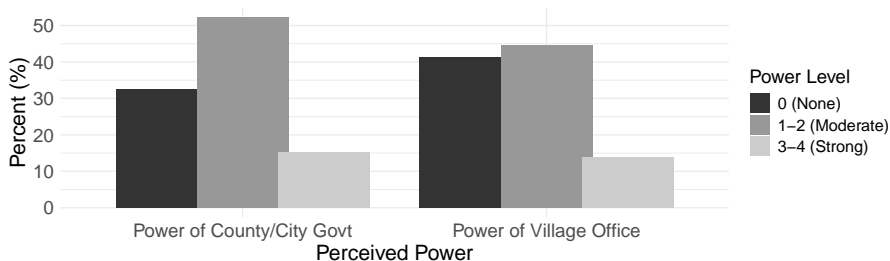

Figure: Respondents' (N = 1853) Perceived Power of Different Levels of Offices

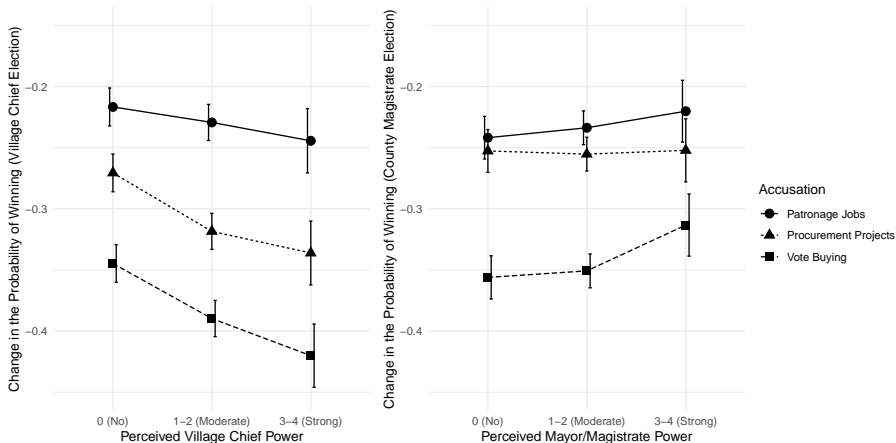## H3B (Less perceived power leads to more tolerance): lower elections only

Figure: Interaction Between Perceived Power and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

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H2B: ↑ closeness to officer → ↑ clientelism tolerance

Power Mechanism

H3A: _Lower_ election → ↓ perceived officer power
H3B: ↓ perceived officer power → ↑ clientelism tolerance

Motivation
○○○○○○○

Theories
○○○○

Research Design
○○○○○

Findings
○○○○○○○○○○○○○●

Discussion
○○○○

FWIW
○○○○○

My R & T
○○○○

The End
○

Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

H1: _Lower_ election $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ clientelism tolerance ✗

Closeness Mechanism

H2A: _Lower_ election $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ closeness to officer ✓
H2B: $\uparrow$ closeness to officer $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ clientelism tolerance ✓✗ (county)

Power Mechanism

H3A: _Lower_ election $\rightarrow$ $\downarrow$ perceived officer power ✓
H3B: $\downarrow$ perceived officer power $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ clientelism tolerance ✓✗ (village)

Discussion

Discussion

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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Discussion

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.
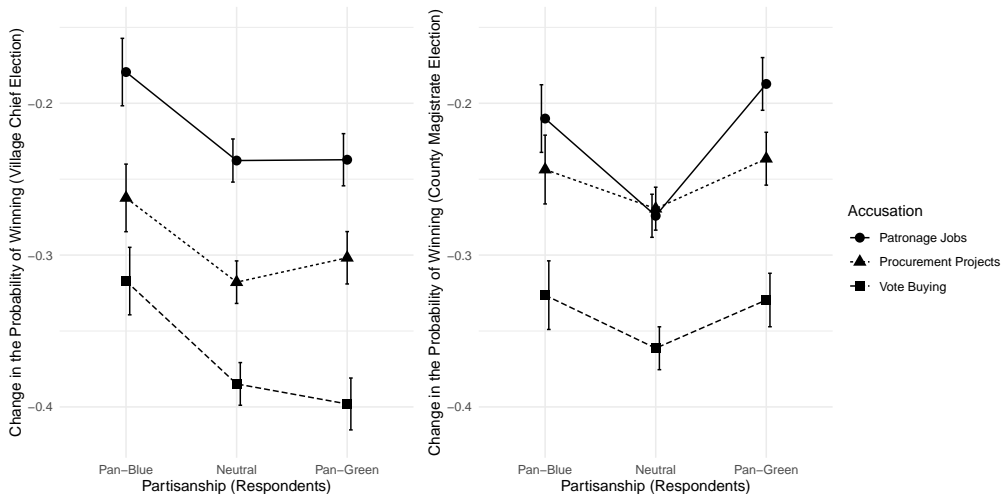
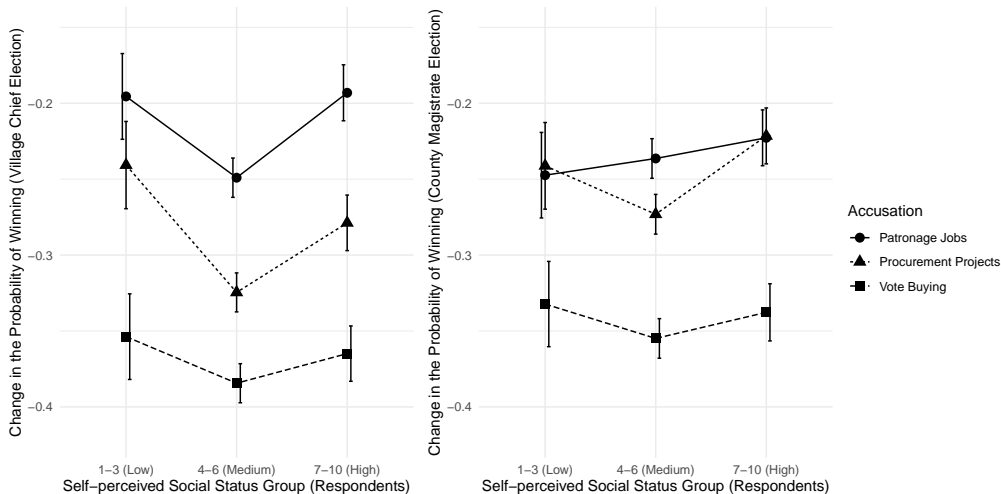## FWIW 1: Gender and Clientelism Tolerance
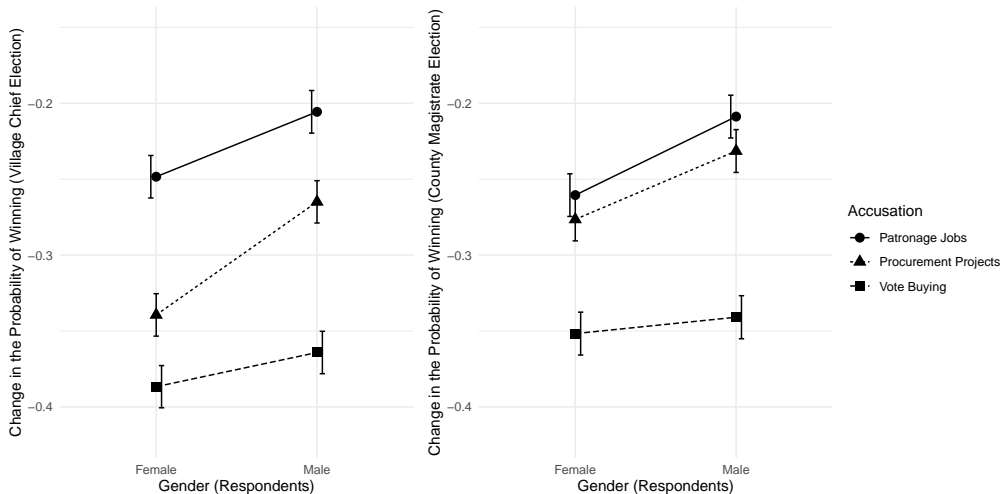
FWIW 2: Political Knowledge and Clientelism Tolerance
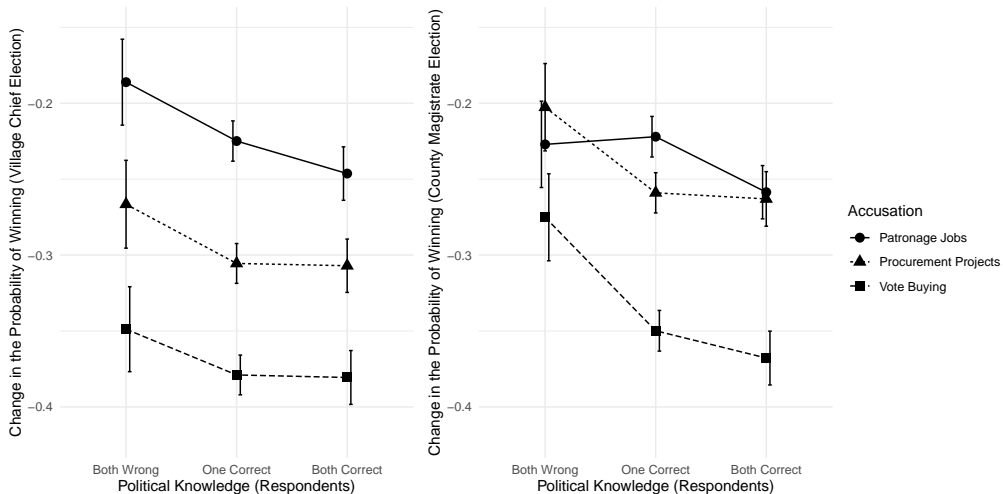
FWIW 3: Partisanship and Clientelism Tolerance

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!

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