

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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Motivations

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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 here's a story about vote buying in Taiwan that struck me intellectually:

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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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Power Mechanism

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

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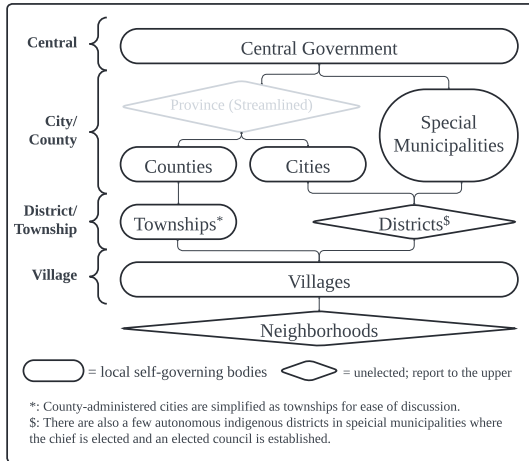
Power Mechanism

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

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

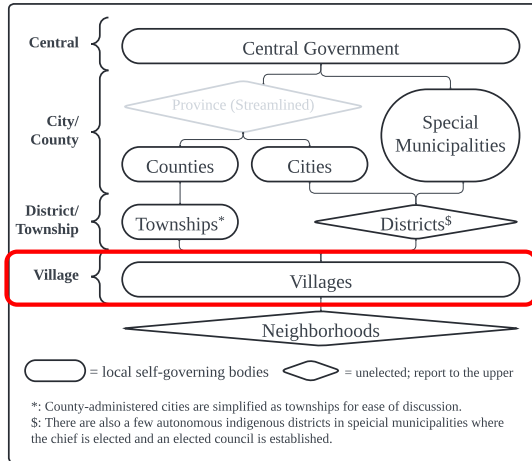
Research Design

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.

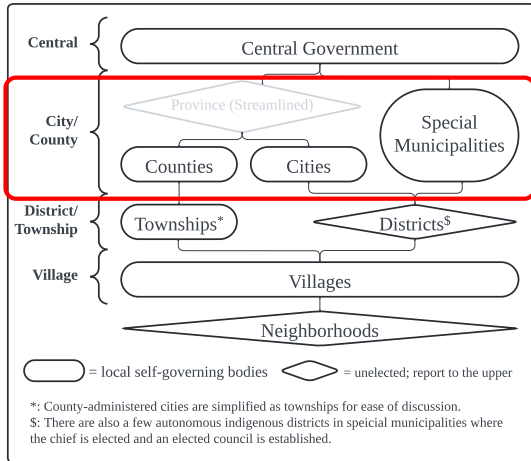
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- village chief (lower)
- county magistrate (higher)

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政黨	無黨籍	國民黨
介紹	空降政治素人，主打『新人新作風』	在望來縣長大，曾言『把望來縣民當成家人來服務』
學歷	公費留美碩士	公費留美碩士
政綱	針對縣內腐污水排放，建立水污染監測機制	加碼發放敬老金；擴大弱勢救助範圍

☐ 一號

☐ 二號

請為兩位候選人評分。(1 = 非常差, 4 = 還好, 7 = 非常不錯)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

一號

二號

The experiments were embedded in a regular survey of NTU Web Survey (NTUWS) from Oct 15-24, 2024.

- N = 1853 (bots, replicates excluded)
- 2 profiles per task
- Outcome Qs: forced choice, rate (1-7)
- 5 tasks per election level (10 in total)
- 6 attributes: party, education, gender, branding, platform, accusation
- Attribute order randomized between respondents, not tasks

*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.

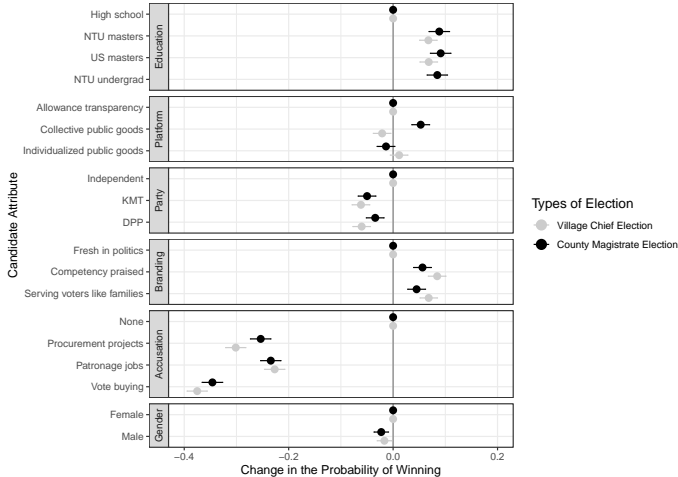
Descriptive Statistics: Sample ($n = 1853$) vs True Population

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	/
Self-assessed Social Status	1-3 (Low)	229	12.4	/
	4-6 (Medium)	1081	58.3	/
	7-10 (High)	543	29.3	/
Political Discussion	Never	133	7.2	/
	Seldom	872	47.1	/
	Often	727	39.2	/
	Usually	121	6.5	/
Political Knowledge	Both wrong	229	12.4	/
	One correct	1046	56.4	/
	Both correct	578	31.2	/

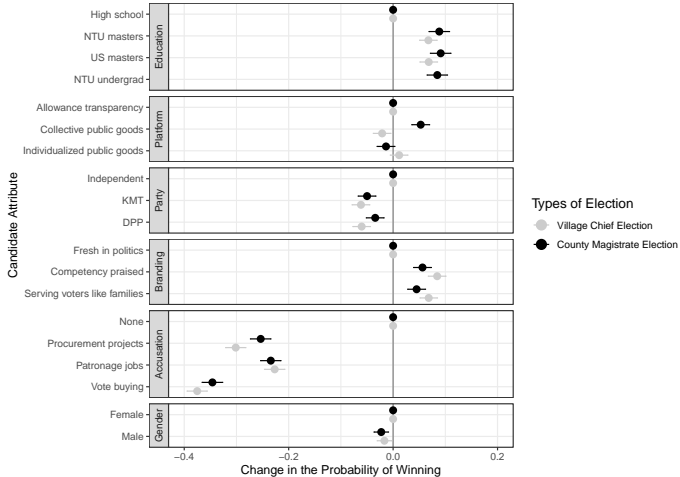
Our samples underrepresented senior adults and non-degree holders, which is a common shortcoming for all online surveys.

Findings

H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)

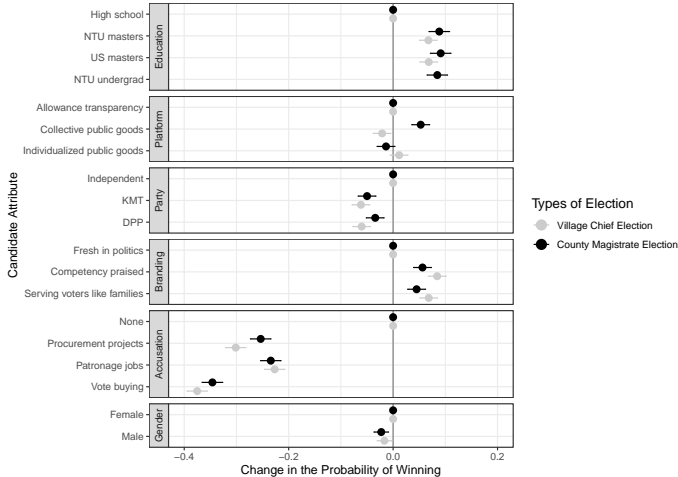


H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

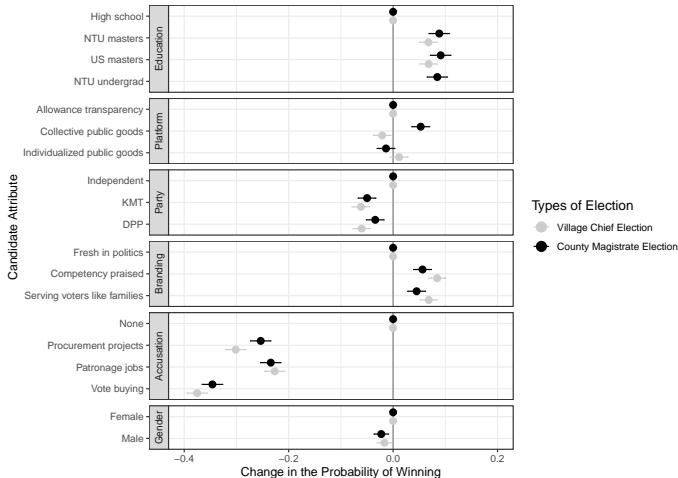
H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



Estimates = Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

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

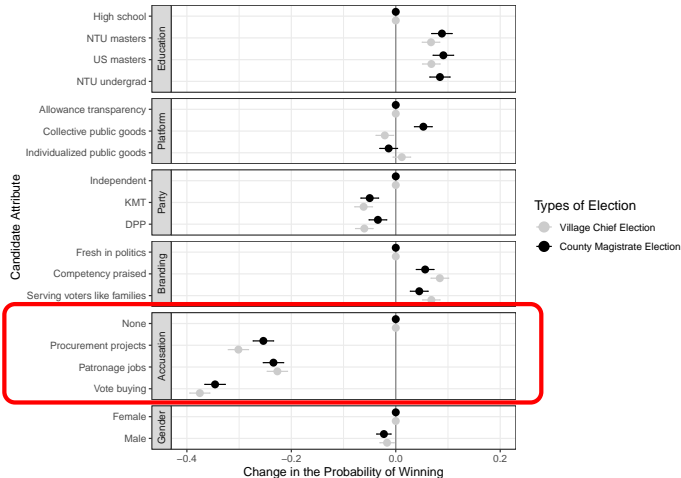
H1 (More tolerance in lower elections)



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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)

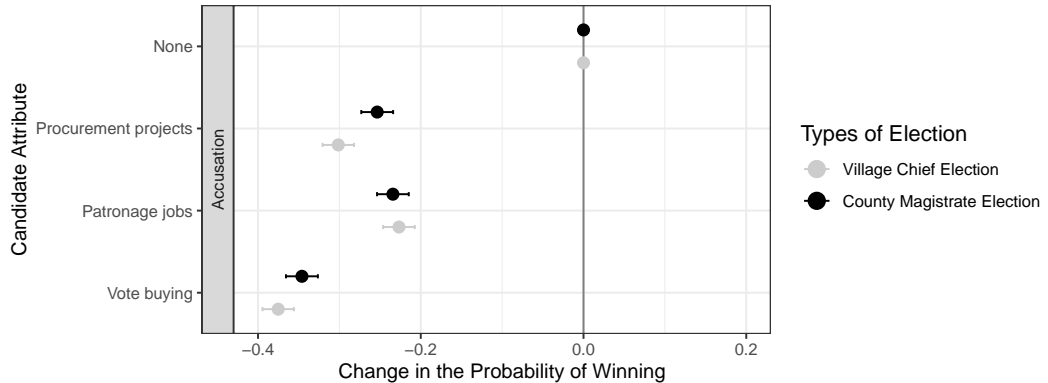


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But for H1, our focus would be the accusation results.

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



H2A (More closeness in lower elections): Supported

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample (N = 1853)	
		n	%
Closeness to Legislators	Very far	1193	64.4
	A bit far	447	24.1
	A bit close	177	9.6
	Very close	36	1.9
Closeness to Mayor	Very far	1308	70.6
	A bit far	372	20.1
	A bit close	153	8.3
	Very close	20	1.1
Closeness to Village Chief	Very far	356	19.2
	A bit far	531	28.7
	A bit close	573	30.9
	Very close	393	21.2

More than 50% in total find village chiefs a bit/very close.
But for higher officers, it is only around at most 12%.

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

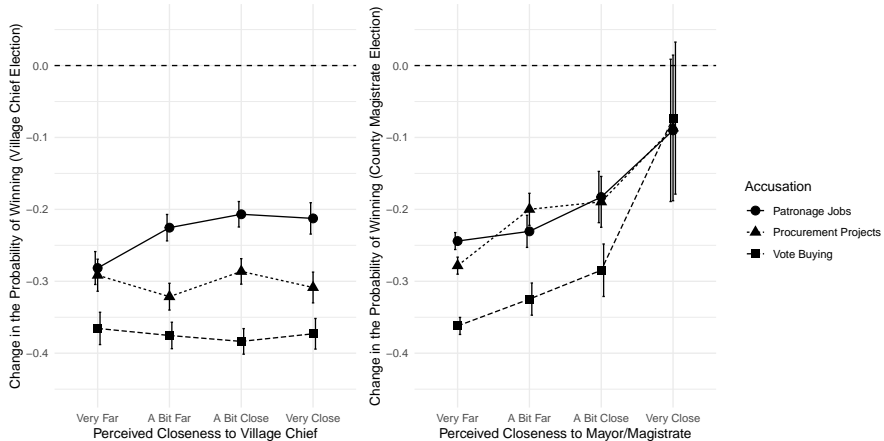


Figure: Interaction Between Closeness and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

H3A (Less perceived power in lower elections): Supported

Scope	Issues	Central	City/County	District/Township	Village
National	Outdated military equipments	1299	304	104	146
	Low minimum wage	1274	426	88	65
Local	Potholes on the road	47	662	612	532
	Difficulties in benefit application	60	271	738	784
	Orphan settling	64	411	877	501
	Building summons appeal	53	1004	610	186

Table: Levels of Officials Respondents would Reach Out to for Different Issues

The distribution shows that lower officers are perceived to be responsible for more trivial and daily issues.

Operationalizing “perceived power” to test H3B

To operationalize perceived power of a level of official, I count the number of issues the respondents would reach out to. And then, I categorized the sample into 3 bins (0 = none, 1-2 = moderate, 3 to 4 = strong).

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample (N = 1853)	
		n	%
Power to County/City Govt.	None	601	32.4
	Moderate	968	52.2
	Strong	284	15.3
Power to Village Office	None	767	41.4
	Moderate	829	44.7
	Strong	257	13.9

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

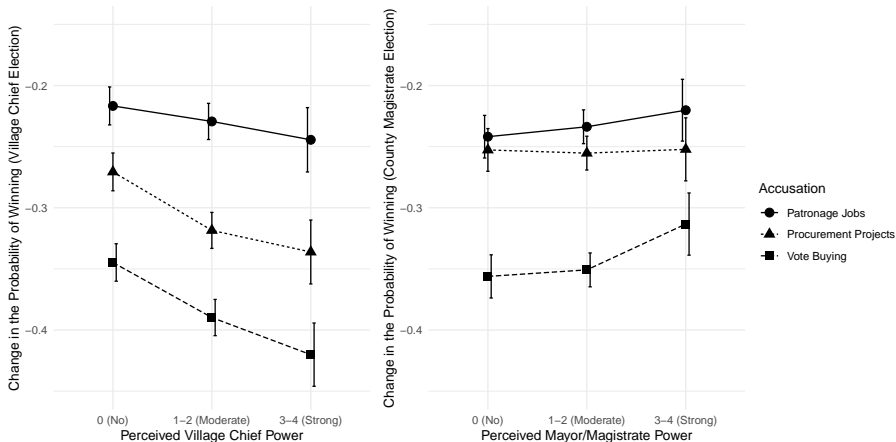


Figure: Interaction Between Perceived Power and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

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.*

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.* ✓✗(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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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 profile attributes?
- Randomize order of elections?
- And more...

Thank You!

sanhochung@gmail.com