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More Local, More Clientelistic?

How Clientelism Tolerance Differs by Election Levels in Taiwan

Sanho Chung[1]

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University of Arizona

Prepared for the 5th World Congress of Taiwan Studies, May 23rd 2025

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Research Puzzle

Puzzle 1: Anticipation/tolerance for vote buying even after democratization, why?

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$\rightarrow$ *What else accounts for the variation of this tolerance?*

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Puzzle 2: Subnational nuances of vote buying on both supply and demand sides

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- Philippines: brokers prioritize local over higher elections (Aspinal et al. 2022)

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$\rightarrow$ *How does vote buying practice differ across levels of government/election?*

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Electoral clientelism (inc. vote buying) is an undesirable phenomenon.

- What is electoral clientelism?

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- What is electoral clientelism?
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- Electoral clientelism matters because it is bad to democracy.

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- Electoral clientelism matters because it is bad to democracy.
  - *Perverse accountability*: it holds electorates instead of politicians accountable.
  - *Corruption*: it usually relies on embezzlement and power abuse to reward voters.

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Election level is an important but missing perspective in the literature of electoral clientelism.

Subnational variation is addressed in the literature, but in a limited way.

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Literature Review and Theory
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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

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Research Questions

In this study, from the demand side (voter) perspective I examine the relationship
between electoral clientelism and election levels with two research questions:

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Research Questions

In this study, from the demand side (voter) perspective I examine the relationship between electoral clientelism and election levels with two research questions:

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

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Research Questions

In this study, from the demand side (voter) perspective I examine the relationship
between electoral clientelism and election levels with two research questions:

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

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

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A Theory of Clientelism Tolerance and Election Levels

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

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- **Closeness** mechanism: *more local → more closeness → more tolerance*

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A Theory of Clientelism Tolerance and Election Levels

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

- **Closeness** mechanism: *more local → more closeness → more tolerance*
    - Shortcuts to infer a person's "intent for good" (Fiske et al. 2007)

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- **Power** mechanism: *more local → less power → more tolerance*

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- **Power** mechanism: *more local → less power → more tolerance*
  - Clientelistic goods are morzelized into more acceptable smaller-scale public goods
  - With smaller power comes more trivial consequence

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H1: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*

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H2A: *Perceived closeness to elected officer is <u>higher</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*

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H2A: *Perceived closeness to elected officer is <u>higher</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*
H2B: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> with <u>higher</u> closeness to officers.*

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H2B: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> with <u>higher</u> closeness to officers.*

Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is <u>lower</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*

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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.*

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Case Study: Taiwan

I test the theory of electoral clientelism in Taiwan.

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Case Study: Taiwan

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- Why Taiwan?

Case Study: Taiwan

I test the theory of electoral clientelism in Taiwan.

- Why Taiwan?
  - Case-wise, Taiwan has a unique blend of features as a case of clientelism.

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Case Study: Taiwan

I test the theory of electoral clientelism in Taiwan.

- Why Taiwan?
  - Case-wise, Taiwan has a unique blend of features as a case of clientelism.
    - high income ($\sim$30,000USD GDP per capita)

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Case Study: Taiwan

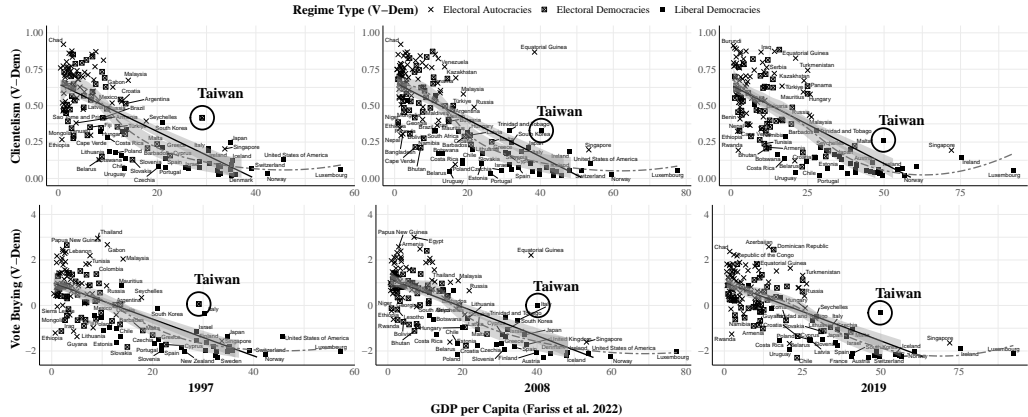I test the theory of electoral clientelism in Taiwan.

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  - Case-wise, Taiwan has a unique blend of features as a case of clientelism.
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    - Clientelism taken root in the authoritarian period now still lingers at local levels

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Case Study: Taiwan

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- Why Taiwan?
    - Case-wise, Taiwan has a unique blend of features as a case of clientelism.
        - high income (∼30,000USD GDP per capita)
        - relatively consolidated third-wave democracies
        - Clientelism taken root in the authoritarian period now still lingers at local levels
    - Theory-wise, in the scholarship on clientelism in Taiwan, the emphasis has always been local factions, and the role of voters was missed out.

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Vote Buying/Clientelism Indices (V-Dem) and GDP per Capita

GDP per Capita (Fariss et al. 2022)

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I deployed two conjoint experiments to examine the arguments.

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- Two experiments to simulate two levels of local elections in Taiwan

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  - county magistrate (higher)

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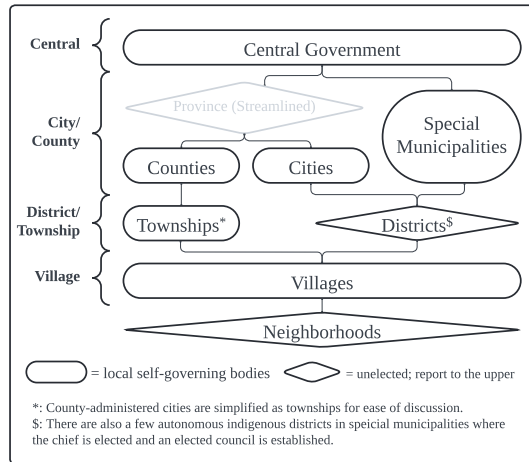## I deployed two conjoint experiments to examine the arguments.

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- Effective samples = 1853
- 2 profiles per task (pick one, and rate both on the scale of 1 to 7)

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Conclusion
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I deployed two conjoint experiments to examine the arguments.

- Two experiments to simulate two levels of local elections in Taiwan
  - village chief (lower)
  - county magistrate (higher)
- Platform: National Taiwan University Web Survey (NTUWS)
- Embedded in their regular sweepstakes survey from Oct 15-24, 2024
- Effective samples = 1853
- 2 profiles per task (pick one, and rate both on the scale of 1 to 7)
- 5 tasks per level of election (10 in total)

Literature Review and Theory
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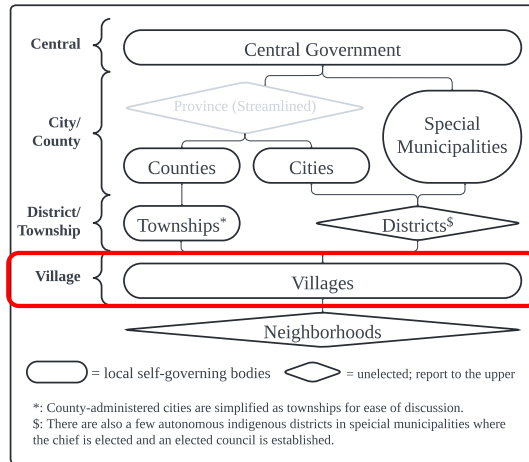- Attribute order randomized only between respondents, but not between tasks

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In the experiment, I test the theories by analyzing the results of our key attribute:
<u>accusation</u>.

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Levels of Elections Involved in the Experiment

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Levels of Elections Involved in the Experiment

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Levels of Elections Involved in the Experiment

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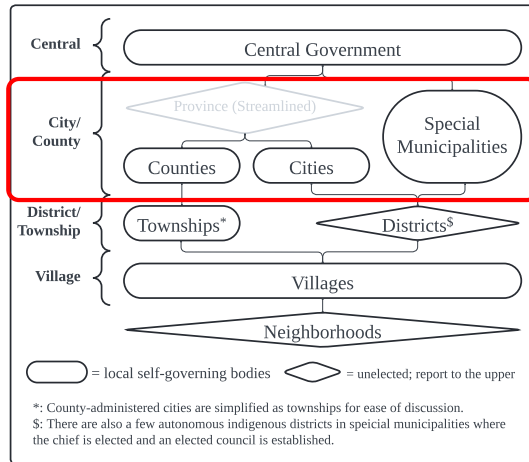
Attributes of the Conjoint Experiment

Attribute	Level
Party Affiliation	[DPP] Democratic Progressive Party/DPP [KMT] Kuomintang [Independent]
Education	[High School] [NTU Undergrad*] Undergraduate at National Taiwan University [NTU Master's] Master's at National Taiwan University [US Master's] Master's at a US University
Gender	[Female] [Male]
Branding	[Fresh] Fresh in politics, fresh in working style [Warmth] Raised in the same village (county), the candidate promises to serve electorates as if they are family. [Competency] 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.

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Interface of the Experiment

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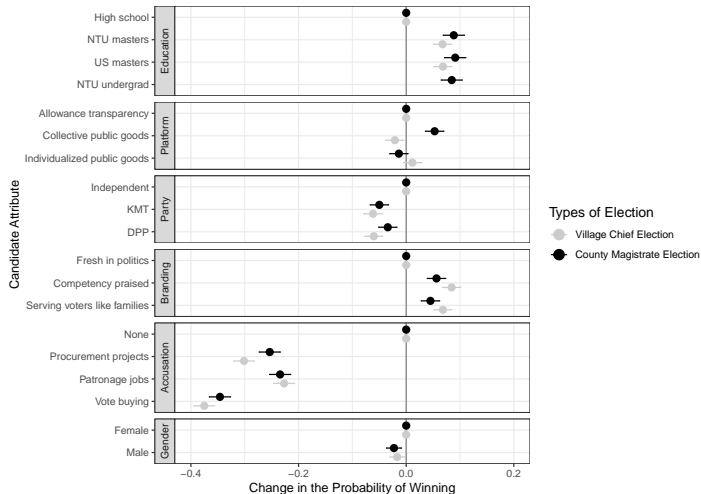
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H1 (More tolerance in lower elections): not supported, even the opposite

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

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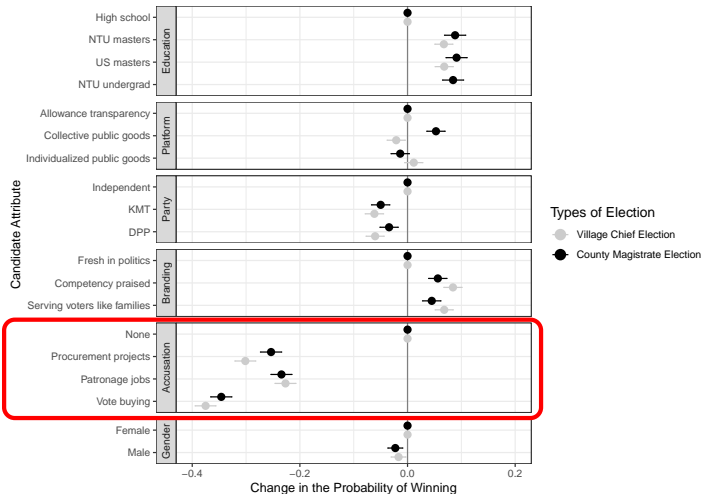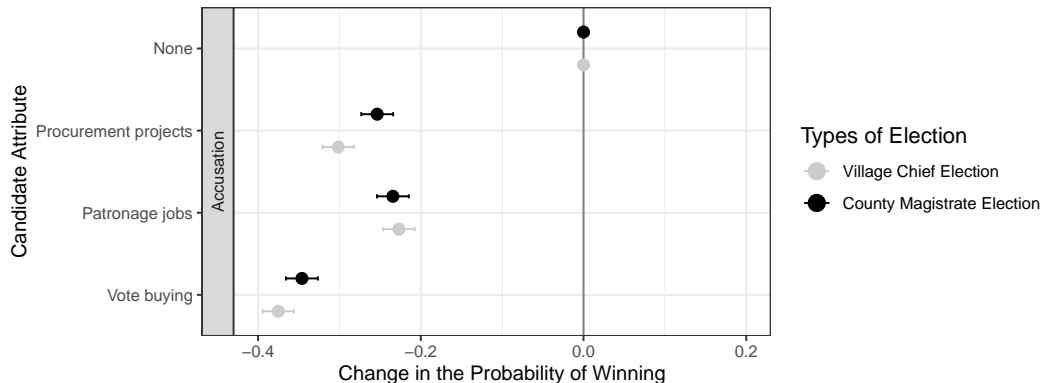
H2A (More closeness in lower elections): Supported

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%.

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H2B (More closeness leads to more tolerance): higher elections only
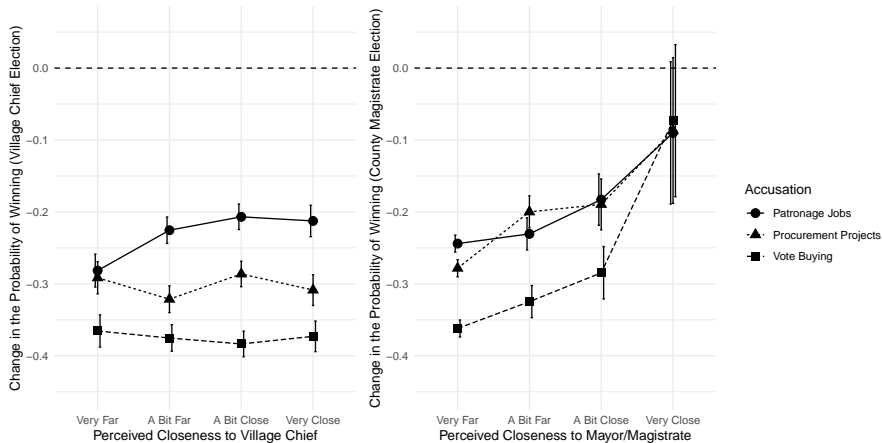
Figure: Interaction Between Closeness and Clientelism Accusation in the Two Elections

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H3A (Less perceived power in lower elections): Supported

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.

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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

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H3B (Less perceived power leads to more tolerance): lower elections only
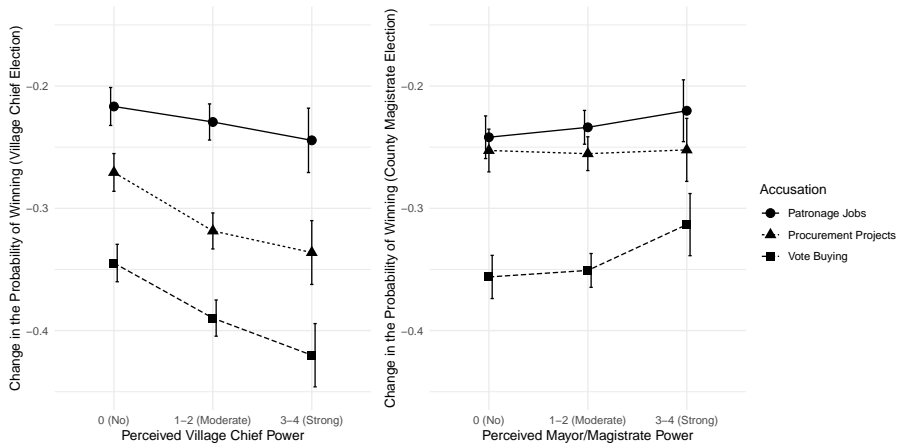
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Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Variation of Clientelism Across Election Levels

H1: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*

Closeness Mechanism

H2A: *Perceived closeness to elected officer is <u>higher</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*
H2B: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> with <u>higher</u> closeness to officers.*

Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is <u>lower</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.*
H3B: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> for officers with <u>lower</u> perceived power.*

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

Power Mechanism

H3A: *Perceived officer power is <u>lower</u> in <u>lower</u> elections.* ✓
H3B: *Clientelism tolerance is <u>higher</u> for officers with <u>lower</u> perceived power.* ✓✗(village)

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Discussion

- 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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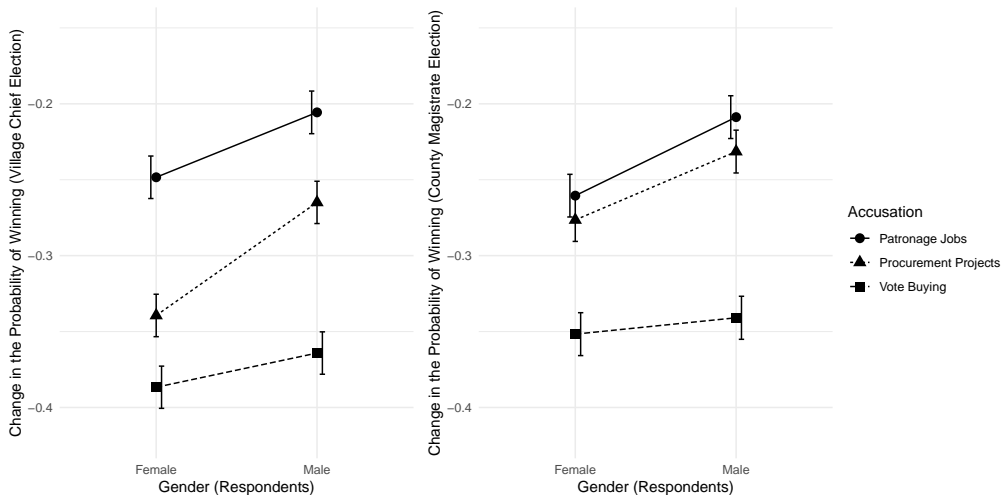
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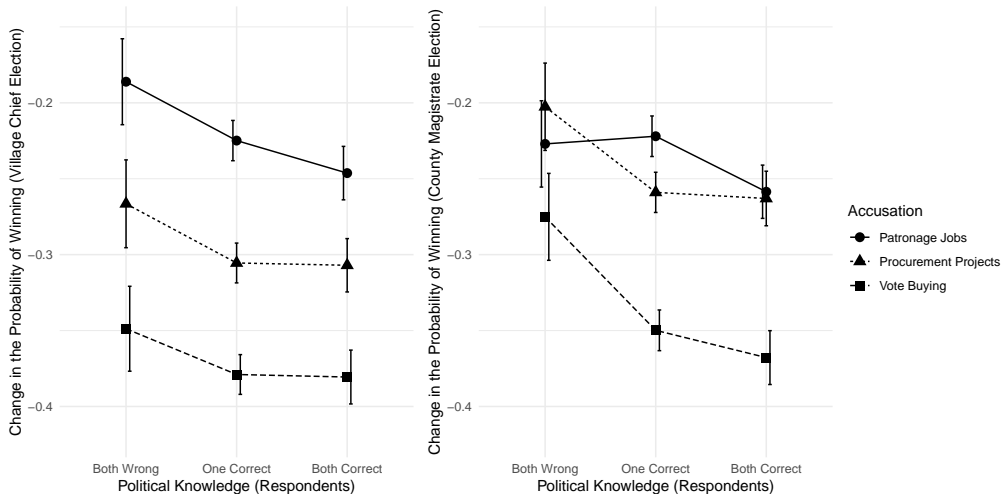
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- Different mechanisms for clientelism tolerance variation kick in at different levels of elections.
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  - Power mechanism ($\downarrow$ power $\rightarrow$ $\uparrow$ client): village chief

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

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FWIW 1: Gender and Clientelism Tolerance

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FWIW 2: Political Knowledge and Clientelism Tolerance

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FWIW 3: Partisanship and Clientelism Tolerance

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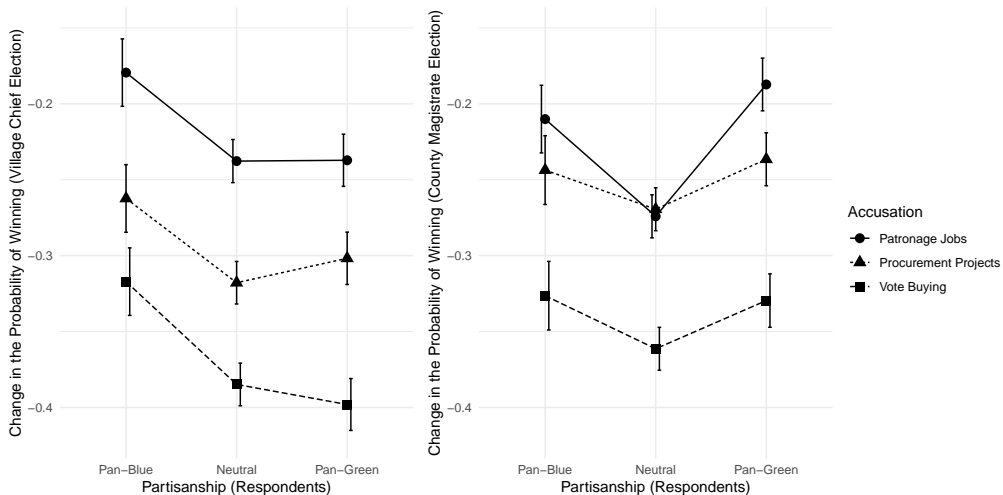
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FWIW 4: Social Status and Clientelism Tolerance

Overview

1. Literature Review and Theory

2. Research Design

3. Conclusion

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- Main takeaways

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Literature Review and Theory
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  - Policy implications for enhancing electoral integrity

Literature Review and Theory
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  - Policy implications for enhancing electoral integrity
  - Insight into democratic resilience

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Prospects for further investigation

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Prospects for further investigation

- More election levels (e.g. national)?

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Prospects for further investigation

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Conclusion

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Conclusion

Prospects for further investigation

- More election levels (e.g. national)?
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- More profile attributes?

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Prospects for further investigation

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- Randomize order of elections?

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Conclusion

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...

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Thank You!

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