

# Delivering the Vote: Community Politicians and the Credibility of Punishment Regimes in Electoral Autocracies

Rachael McLellan\*

University of Glasgow

Word count: 11245

August 30, 2022

## **Abstract**

How do authoritarian regimes in developing countries target or coerce individual citizens in the absence of a well-funded formal security apparatus? I argue that elected community politicians make ‘punishment regimes’ credible. Strengthened by community-driven development reforms, these politicians have the information and leverage necessary to identify and punish opposition supporters on behalf of the regime. However, when opposition parties win community elections, this leverage is handed over to their opponents weakening their control over the electorate. I use mixed methods evidence from Tanzania to test my theory. Drawing on interviews, I show that regime-loyal community politicians use their distributive and legal-coercive powers to discourage opposition support and so ‘deliver the vote’. When opposition community politicians take over, I find that the regime is far more constrained in the tools they can use to punish opposition voters. In a survey with experimental components, I find that voters then fear individual reprisals for opposition support substantially less under an opposition community politician than one from the ruling party. Taken together, these results show that the reach of the Tanzanian regime’s reach and strategy set are conditional on the results of hyper-local community elections. This study therefore demonstrates the importance of paying close attention to the local microfoundations of electoral autocrats’ distributive and coercive strategies to understand regime durability.

---

\*Email: rachael.mclellan@glasgow.ac.uk

Electoral autocrats generally win elections by large margins. Voters routinely support the ruling party because loyalty to it is the primary route to material resources, opportunities and personal safety (Magaloni, 2006). Autocrats enforce ‘punishment regimes’, directing state resources and the state’s coercive capacity to punish opposition voters (Blaydes, 2010). This discourages opposition support and keeps voters loyal to the ruling party. There is consistent evidence that regimes target opposition areas for punishment based on their vote counts (Magaloni, 2006; Lust-Okar, 2006; Blaydes, 2010; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009). But given the secret ballot, how do regimes enforce a punishment regime at the individual level? Is there subnational variation in how able an electoral authoritarian regime is to punish individual voters?

Many scholars have focused on the role of the security services in gathering information about citizens in autocracies and how this strengthens regimes (Wedeen, 1999; Bellin, 2012; Greitens, 2016). But many of the world’s autocracies are developing countries which lack the money and state capacity to sustain the kind of coercive apparatus we would expect to find in the Middle East and China.<sup>1</sup> How do low-income and middle-income autocracies punish individual citizens who do not support the regime?

One answer may come from the extensive literature on electoral intermediaries, the local agents that parties use to mobilize voters at election time. Intermediaries, also known as brokers, use clientelist and coercive inducements and threats to convince voters to support a given political party. The intermediary exploits their local knowledge and whatever leverage they have over individual voters to induce them to vote the way the intermediary wants. In autocracies, huge inequality in resources between the ruling and opposition parties generally translates to a similarly large disparity in parties’ ability to mobilize intermediaries (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Scholars of autocracy consistently argue that the strength of the regime’s local apparatus is central to their durability (Brownlee, 2007; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Svoboda, 2012). Most studies on electoral intermediaries in autocracies describe who these local intermediaries are, how they operate and how effectively brokers can hold voters to account. Few studies define where the regime can mobilize these intermediaries and where they cannot. This is in part because what unites many commonly studied intermediaries is that their access to and power over voters is already in place. Parties recruit them as brokers *because of* that position of power.

In this study, I focus on community politicians’ role as intermediaries in electoral autocracies. What differentiates this type of electoral intermediary from other brokers is that parties must win community elections to be able to mobilize that information and leverage for their own ends. That information and leverage is borne out of control and operation of an office rather than specific to a given person. By community politicians, I refer to leaders who are elected to office in highly local subnational elections. These community

---

<sup>1</sup>Of the seventy countries classified as ‘Closed Autocracies’ or ‘Electoral Autocracies’ by V-Dem in 2016, only twenty six of them had a GDP above \$12000 USD. Of the fifty two ‘Electoral Autocracies’, only seventeen had a GDP above \$12000.

politicians are commonplace across the developing world. As part of community-driven development (CDD) reforms during the 90s and 00s, many countries empowered elected community-level leaders (Mansuri et al., 2004; Mansuri and Rao, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Community leaders generally have both distributive and coercive powers at a highly local level.

I ask two questions in what follows. First, what role do community politicians play in punishing opposition voters? Second, what determines where regimes can punish individual voters? I argue that community politicians can act as the final link in the chain which makes individual clientelist and coercive punishment possible. They use their deep knowledge of their constituents and their leverage over them to discourage opposition support. Because they control state resources and can mobilize between as well as during elections, I contend community politicians play an even larger role than traditional brokers in delivering the vote for the regime. As a result, I argue that who wins community elections has a significant and overlooked influence how able regimes are to punish opposition voters. Anywhere where opposition is strong enough to get a small foothold on power, the regime's ability to punish individuals and discourage opposition support is weakened as these powers are handed over to the other side.

I use a mixed methods design to test my argument. First, I use evidence from interviews in regime and opposition-controlled villages in Tanzania to characterize how community politicians use their coercive and distributive powers differently and how that affects political behavior in the community. I then use evidence from a survey with list experiments to show that voters in opposition communities are significantly less likely to fear individual punishment for opposition support than those in regime communities. This study makes several important contributions to the literatures on authoritarian politics and clientelism. I explore the critical role community politicians play in clientelist bargains, expanding our understanding of this type of broker. Furthermore, I pin down the microfoundations of the punishment regimes which are so widely discussed in the authoritarian politics literature from a higher-level perspective. In so doing, I show highly local politics determines autocrats' reach. I demonstrate that the credibility of individual punishment is contingent on hyper-local variation in community election results. This suggests that once we pay attention to local institutions, autocrats are more constrained than they are ordinarily portrayed. Additionally, I demonstrate that winning control of community offices provide opposition parties with the initial foothold on power they need to gain support. This contributes to the burgeoning literature on the origins of opposition parties in electoral autocracies.

---

<sup>2</sup>These leaders are particularly important for the state's reach because structural adjustment reforms weakened the local state, security and party apparatuses

## Clientelism and coercion in electoral autocracies

Electoral autocrats stay in power by winning elections. The playing field in these elections is heavily skewed in their favor (Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2010; Schedler, 2006). If they can make sure that the ruling party is the only game in town and keep the costs of opposition support high then voters have little incentive or interest in defecting from the ruling party (Magaloni, 2006). At the center, that means maintaining control of countervailing institutions and elite cohesion (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Svobik, 2012). At the local level, that means being able to implement a punishment regime. A ‘punishment regime’ is the distributive logic employed in many electoral autocracies where state resources and other powers are used to sanction opposition support (Albertus et al., 2018).<sup>3</sup>

Regimes can use election results to punish electoral districts. More granular targeting — of communities, individuals — requires additional information. This more granular targeting is important because it is a powerful disincentive to voters to defect from the ruling party. When a regime punishes an electoral district or a large group, the cost of opposition support accruing to the individual is lower in expectation than when the regime can punish individuals or small groups. If voters know this to be the case, it is incredibly hard for opposition parties to coordinate any significant support because individual punishment makes it more likely that opposition sympathetic citizens will choose to stay home or vote for the ruling party. This ensures the ruling party remains the only game in town and preserves the centripetal logic which keeps these highly dominant parties in power (Pempel, 1990).

To punish opposition voters, the regime must be able to identify them. Regimes rely on local agents, individuals embedded at the local level willing to work on their behalf, to make this targeting feasible. In democracies and autocracies alike, those at the local level are the most likely to be able to find out about individuals’ political beliefs. At election time, they may be able to do so by violating the secret ballot (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Schaffer and Schedler, 2007). Local agents also make it possible to find out about vote choice between elections by drawing on local knowledge. Studies show that community networks have the most credible information about political preferences of individuals (Stokes, 2005; Stokes et al., 2013; Finan and Schechter, 2012; Cruz, 2018). Those embedded in communities can identify their neighbors’ partisanship with perhaps surprising accuracy. Local agents can make use of that knowledge to improve the accuracy of targeting. Local agents’ access to local knowledge is arguably more important than their ability to monitor votes directly. Information about who is supporting or even considering supporting an opposition party is most useful before elections. Intermediaries use this to discourage potential opposition voters before they even step into the polling booth.

---

<sup>3</sup>Autocrats may use different distributive logics. I focus on punishment regimes because this logic is well-documented and likely the most prevalent.

Local agents also need leverage over individual voters. To discourage opposition support, intermediaries induce voters' cooperation through various channels. First, they can exploit norms of reciprocity (Finan and Schechter, 2012; Lawson and Greene, 2014). Second, they can exploit pre-existing dependency and moral authority (Koter, 2013; Conroy-Krutz, 2018). Third, they can use clientelist or coercive inducements to deliver the vote. Most studies focus on positive inducements (Gingerich and Medina, 2013; Stokes et al., 2013; Kramon, 2016). However, there is mixed evidence that this kind of 'vote buying' is actually effective (Guardado and Wantchékon, 2014).

Increasingly scholars of clientelism have focused on negative inducements like coercion and material threats (Mares and Zhu, 2015; Mares and Young, 2016; Frye et al., 2019). Core voters are offered long term access to material resources and freedom from violence under the threat of withdrawal if they prove themselves disloyal (Mares and Young, 2019). This logic echoes the logic of punishment regimes in the autocracies literature (Magaloni, 2006; Blaydes, 2010). In autocracies, negative inducements are particularly important to how autocrats stay in power. Threats of material sanction and violence are a prominent feature of authoritarian elections. As such, I focus on negative inducements in this study.

What leverage intermediaries have depends on their relationship to the voters in question. Intermediaries can take many forms. Brokers can be non-partisan. These intermediaries rely on existing leverage to motivate voters. They can be those involved in interest associations (Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015), employers (Mares and Zhu, 2015; Hertel-Fernandez, 2017), traditional chiefs (Baldwin, 2013; Koter, 2013), state employees (Weitz-Shapiro, 2012; Oliveros, 2016) and so on. They use their positions of power to offer voters something or threaten them. Intermediaries can also be party agents who use their social network and operate by extracting rents from the party and distributing to their network (Svolik, 2012; Stokes et al., 2013).

Generally when scholars discuss partisan brokers, they do not include politicians as they are understood as a candidate not a broker. I contend that this overlooks the importance of community politicians. Community politicians differ from other types of intermediaries because their leverage is *won* rather than already in place or paid for, which I will argue has important implications for the regime's reach. While community politicians cannot, by definition, act as an intermediary for their own election campaign, I argue that highly local politicians do act as important intermediaries for higher level elections and warrant specific attention.

## Community-driven development and village government

This is particularly true given the wave of community-driven development reforms at the turn of the century. Community-driven development (CDD) reforms introduced or strengthened a level of community politicians

in many developing countries (Mansuri et al., 2004; Mansuri and Rao, 2012; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007). The adoption of these reforms was promoted in low-income regions by international financial institutions like the World Bank in the 1990s and 2000s. That means CDD reforms were implemented in low-income democracies and autocracies alike. CDD reforms devolve control of planning and budgeting for local development projects to communities. More than 80 countries implemented CDD reforms (Tanaka et al., 2006). To support these reforms, the World Bank funded 190 projects to the tune of 9.3 billion USD between 2000 and 2005 alone (Tanaka et al., 2006).

As with other decentralization reforms, CDD reforms varied from country to country (Tanaka et al., 2006). In their study of decentralization reforms, Riedl and Dickovick (2014) contend that more autocratic regimes with a stronger hold on power are likely to decentralize more to take advantage of the clientelist advantages provided by local capacity because they face a weaker, more fragmented opposition. Applying this logic to CDD reforms, autocracies with poorly organized or institutionalized oppositions at the time of decentralization were more likely to introduce more extensive CDD reforms. In these cases, autocrats viewed it as unlikely that the opposition party would be able to organize to even contest most of these hyper-local races. This accounts for why these reforms were commonplace in autocracies but the question remains how they influenced the development of political competition and the autocrat's hold on power going forward?

Many CDD reforms centered on the creation of community development councils (CDCs). They gave community councils unprecedented autonomy over development spending and planning. Importantly, that means that CDD reforms moved decision-making power over the distribution of state resources *within* the community to the community. In some contexts, traditional or other appointed leaders chair these councils<sup>4</sup> and oversee the councils' administrative and political duties. In others, it is elected politicians (Jochem et al., 2016). The chairs of these councils or village governments are highly powerful. They lead the decision-making body which decides how resources are allocated and utilized. Moreover, they are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the community's projects. Thus they are often ceded discretionary administrative and coercive powers. As I discuss in the next section, this position of power gives them the leverage and the information they need to act as highly effective intermediaries.<sup>5</sup>

Despite their prevalence, village governments do not receive much attention in the literature on electoral autocracies. Much of what we know about the effect of village government on regime support and service provision comes from the one-party regimes like China and Vietnam. Scholarship from China suggests elected village governments are good for autocrats as they increase support for the regime and trust in community politicians (Manion, 2006; O'Brien and Han, 2009; Sun, 2014). However, others have found

---

<sup>4</sup>See Baldwin (2013); Díaz-Cayeros et al. (2014); Jochem et al. (2016)

<sup>5</sup>In this study, I focus on elected politicians but the arguments I make about leverage and information carry to elected and unelected community leaders alike.

elected village governments may increase citizens' demands for democratic reform and public good provision with community politicians as a conduit for these demands (Li, 2003; Tsai, 2007; O'Brien and Han, 2009).

This suggests that elected community politicians and governments create a trade-off for autocrats even in a one-party context. On the one hand, elected village governments improve responsiveness and participation making citizens more likely to approve of and buy into the regime. On the other hand, elected village governments create a pathway for those who want something different from what the regime is offering to make claims on the regime, which may be destabilizing. In electoral autocracies, this is even more likely to be the case because it is rival parties who can exploit village governments. We know from studies of CDD reforms that elite capture – the cooptation of local autonomy and resources for the ends of the privileged in the community – undermined the anticipated effects of these reforms for accountability and equitable participation (Bernard et al., 2008; Fritzen, 2007; Platteau and Gaspart, 2003; King and Samii, 2014). I will argue that who wins community elections determines which elite – ruling party or opposition – can exploit village governments for their own partisan ends.

## **Community politicians as electorally-contingent intermediaries**

To understand the strength of an electoral autocrat's hold on power, I contend we must look beyond the center and also seek to understand the the mechanics of their local political machine and hence where they can reach voters. It is at that level that the most accurate information about individuals' political leanings is available. What role do community politicians have in acting on that information and punishing individual voters? How do the results of community elections – often overlooked as inconsequential to regime durability – influence the regime's ability to punish individual voters and discourage opposition support?

First, I argue that community politicians are important electoral intermediaries. Their access to rich local knowledge and their distributive and coercive powers allow them to accurately punish individual voters both at election time and between elections. With their cooperation, it becomes easier to punish individual voters. Second, I contend that voters' incentives to stay loyal to the ruling party partly depends on who wins community elections. While autocrats have a range of other intermediaries they can call on, their ability to rely on these important particular intermediaries is contingent on the results of these elections. Control of the powers and resources associated with these offices and access to local political information is contingent on the community politician being aligned with the ruling party. If opposition parties win control of community offices, the regime's ability to punish individual voters is constrained. When opposition parties are in charge, the costs of opposition support are lower making it easier for voters to switch to and remain loyal to opposition parties. This suggests that even highly local politics can have important implications for

autocrats' hold on power.

Community politicians' powers vary from country to country. In all instances, the role of community politicians is to bridge the gap between the state and society. In authoritarian countries, this often becomes a case of bridging the gap between regime and society. Community politicians are in charge of identity/eligibility verification in lower income states. They may also be charged with distributing state resources allocated to the community. Often, they oversee the collective projects initiated by the CDC. They are often empowered with coercive powers to induce constituents' cooperation and maintain order. This requires close and regular interactions with citizens. I contend that these interactions give community politicians the information and the leverage they need to punish individual voters.

Community politicians have access to extensive information about their constituents, which facilitates individual targeting. They are generally at the center of established social networks which may run to only a few hundred voters. Given their position in the community, these politicians are likely to learn about individuals through both open discussion, information gathering and exchange of gossip and hearsay. They learn about all their constituents through the sustained interactions that come from enacting their duties. That means that they have superior knowledge about the distribution of political preferences in the community when compared to partisan brokers, whose networks are more segmented and spring into action primarily at election time.

Community politicians also have the leverage necessary to punish individual voters. Community officials act as gatekeepers to individually excludable resources like school places, medical referrals, business permits, government and community social assistance and so on. Community politicians can threaten to exclude voters from these entitlements as punishment for opposition support. Community politicians may also be in charge of maintaining community order.<sup>6</sup> They can exploit these coercive powers to punish individuals' for their partisanship. Community politicians have these distributive and legal-coercive powers during a whole electoral cycle. Taken together, that means they have substantial leverage over their constituents. Indeed, they can impose greater costs than contracted partisan brokers, who primarily offer positive inducements at election time but may not have any leverage to threaten between elections.

This combination of leverage and information makes community politicians important intermediaries. Community-driven development reforms empowered those with the densest information with the leverage they need to punish individuals. In autocracies, agents of the regime try to curry favour with higher ups to avoid being punished themselves (Landry, 2008; Benton, 2017). I contend that the same incentives motivate community politicians to use their leverage and information to deliver votes for the regime by punishing

---

<sup>6</sup>This is especially likely to be the case in low and middle income countries where police presence is more likely to be sparse.



opposition support on a voter-by-voter basis.<sup>7</sup> Community politicians run the risk of losing opportunities for political advancement or personal enrichment if they do not use their powers to punish opposition voters. Thus, community politicians are important intermediaries who strengthen the regime's ability to reach individual voters for reward or sanction.

As a consequence, the regime's reach is partly determined by the results of community elections, elections which receive little attention in the extant literature. When the ruling party wins community elections, they can rely on party loyalty and discipline to ensure that the community politician works to deliver the vote. When opposition parties win these elections, the community politician faces no such incentive to deliver the vote.<sup>8</sup> Without a politician from the ruling party in place, it is harder and costlier for the regime to gather information about individuals. Furthermore, the regime loses delegated control over community level powers in that area. Taken together that means that opposition victory in community elections weakens the regime's ability to implement their punishment regime at the individual level.

Voters in opposition communities therefore face weaker incentives to remain loyal to the regime than those in regime communities. Consider a voter who ordinarily votes for the ruling party but is considering supporting the opposition in an upcoming presidential election. Under a ruling party community politician, that voter, if identified, can expect to be excluded from benefits to which they are entitled or subject to discriminatory use of legal-coercive powers. Given the high potential costs of opposition support, that voter may choose to stop questioning their loyalty to the ruling party and remain loyal. If the community leader is from an opposition party, that voter is less at risk of individual reprisals. That makes it easier for that voter to consider switching and subsequently vote for opposition parties.

This matters because it is the threat of material loss, alienation and violence at hands of the regime's various clientelist and repressive strategies which prevents ordinary voters from voting against the regime even when they are dissatisfied with it. Opposition victory in highly local elections limits the regime's reach, making it harder for them to mobilize voters and return large electoral victories. This argument highlights the importance of local politics and territorial control in understanding the seeds of threats to regime durability in electoral autocracies. Most accounts of regime durability focus on central institutions like the presidency, military, legislature and so on. Furthermore, much of the scholarship on authoritarian distribution

---

<sup>7</sup>Several scholars have proposed why bloc voting occurs (Koter, 2013; Baldwin, 2015; Conroy-Krutz, 2018). These accounts focus on the role of intermediaries at election time. I conceive of delivering the vote as an ongoing process because punishment regimes inform distribution throughout the electoral cycle, which distinguishes these dynamics in democratic and non-democratic cases.

<sup>8</sup>Opposition community politicians may face an incentive to use their powers to deliver the vote for their own party. I do not focus on this because there are important asymmetries in the de facto powers of opposition politicians in autocracies even if their de jure powers are the same. Autocrats' hegemony over the judiciary in particular makes opposition politicians vulnerable to legal repercussions if they use their distributive and legal powers to discriminate against those loyal to the regime. In contrast, the judiciary is likely to turn a blind eye to the kind of mistreatment of opposition supporters that I discuss in this study. I provide evidence for this asymmetry later in the article.

and coercion characterizes the broad logic of regime strategy. Instead, I focus on the microfoundations of these strategies and demonstrate that highly local institutional control can condition some of the strategies available to the regime in a given area.

This theory applies to cases where meaningful CDD reforms were passed to create community-level elected institutions with power over distribution and/or community order. It is likely to hold best in cases where clientelism is commonplace, the regime relies on a punishment regime to stay in power but cannot call on an extensive formal security apparatus to gather information and punish individuals directly. This suggests that theory is likely to hold best in low and middle-income autocracies. I focus on autocracies because they are much more likely to rely on the kind of negative inducements I discuss. Furthermore, the implications of this theory are particularly significant in autocracies. My theory points to limits on incumbent hegemony and gaps in their punishment regimes, which run counter to existing characterizations of autocracy. My theory also points to one possible way that opposition party support first takes root, something broadly undertheorized in the literature. That said, the importance of community politicians in information gathering and mobilizing state powers to punish voters is likely to apply in a number of clientelist democracies too, particularly those with a dominant party.

## Hypotheses and empirical approach

In the remainder of this study, I test my theory using interview and survey evidence from Tanzania. First, I consider the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Community politicians from the ruling party use their office to punish individual opposition voters and deliver votes to the regime

If my theory holds, community politicians in areas controlled by the ruling party should use their distributive and coercive powers to sanction those they suspect of voting for the opposition. I should find less evidence of community politicians engaging in individual punishment in communities won by opposition parties because opposition politicians have an incentive to shield their own voters from punishment and the regime has lost an important conduit of information and access to individual voters with that electoral loss.<sup>9</sup> Given H1, I also expect the following hypothesis to hold:

**H2:** Voters fear punishment for opposition support less in opposition communities than in ruling party communities

---

<sup>9</sup>I am likely to find little evidence of punishment more broadly. Opposition community politicians are likely to face recriminations if they discriminate against regime voters given the regime's capture of the judiciary, police and bureaucracy.

If community politicians are indeed important to an electoral autocrat's reach, I would expect to find variation in how voters perceive the costs of opposition support depending on who wins community elections. Taken together, these hypotheses allow me to test my theory that community politicians act as the final link which allows regimes to punish individuals and hence their ability to do so is dependent on the results of community elections.

I test these hypotheses using evidence from Tanzania, an electoral autocracy in East Africa which introduced community-driven development reforms in the 1990s and 2000s. I select this case for two reasons. First, its CDD reforms are comparable to other low and middle income autocracies. As I will discuss more in the next section, these reforms empowered village councils, headed by an elected politician, to engage in highly local public good provision and organize development activities. As with most CDD reforms, the powers ceded to community politicians in Tanzania are relatively weak and their position is clearly subordinate to higher levels of politicians and officials. Second, it is a case where we might not expect local politics to matter to regime reach. The regime's hegemony over the central institutions of the state, including the security services, is broadly unchallenged after almost sixty years in power.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the ruling party, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM), has relatively high organizational capacity and local presence when compared to ruling parties in other low and middle income autocracies. Tanzania is thus a place where we might expect the regime to be able to gather information and exert leverage through other channels. If I can demonstrate that community politicians make a difference to how able the Tanzanian regime is to punish individuals, this suggests community and politicians' and elections' importance in understanding how electoral autocracy operates and survives in a range of cases.

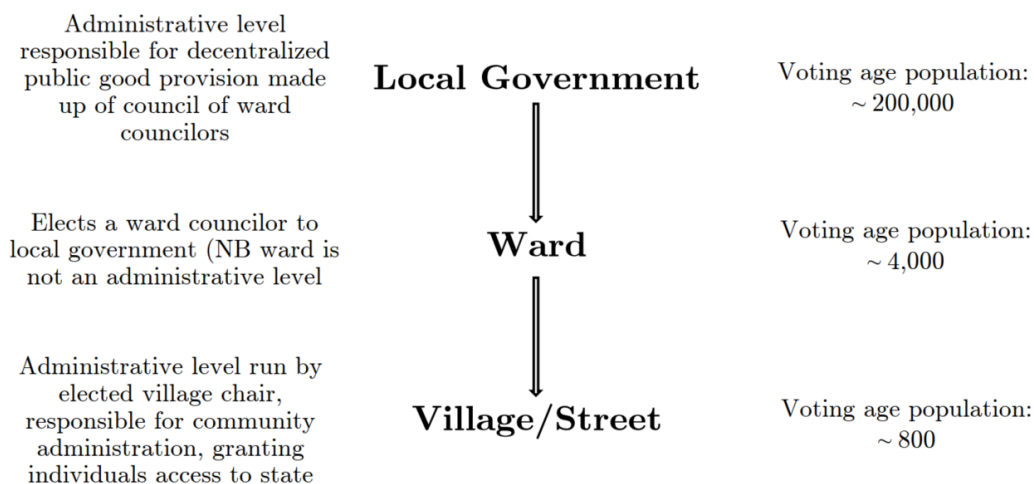
I take a mixed methods approach. First, I use interview evidence from three regions of Tanzania to provide evidence in support of H1 and H2. I spoke with community politicians, the bureaucrats who support them as well as voters.<sup>11</sup> By speaking to those loyal to the regime and the opposition, I am able to triangulate from multiple viewpoints and understand the dynamics of punishment in regime and opposition communities respectively. Second, I use a survey with experimental components to provide further evidence in support of H2. I use a list experiment designed to illicit truthful responses to sensitive questions to assess how worried voters are about punishment for opposition support in making their vote choice.<sup>12</sup> I then compare the rates of fear of punishment between regime and opposition communities to test H2. This mixed methods approach allows me to draw on the richness of interviews to properly characterize the ways in which community politicians exploit their position and then test the observable implications of the dynamics I find with a larger sample of voters.

---

<sup>10</sup>Before 1977, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* was known as Tanganyika African National Union (TANU)

<sup>11</sup>I describe these cases and interviews more in the relevant section

<sup>12</sup>I describe this method and the survey data in more detail in the final section



**Figure 1:** Levels of subnational government in Tanzania

## Village/street government in Tanzania

Tanzania introduced the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) in 2000. The reforms restructured and repurposed subnational institutions like local governments and community offices. Before LGRP, these subnational institutions existed but they were so under-resourced and lacking in capacity that they were completely marginalized by the central government. The LGRP increased local capacity and ceded subnational institutions new powers that gave them much more say over local affairs. Figure 1 summarizes the main levels of subnational government in Tanzania.

In this study, I focus on the village/street level. The LGRP created common community development councils across Tanzania by introducing street chairpeople and councils in urban areas and strengthening village chairpeople (VCs<sup>13</sup>) and councils, which already existed in rural areas. These institutions and the community politicians who run them became the frontline of the state. As such, they are an important tool of ruling party hegemony in Tanzania (Croke, 2017).<sup>14</sup> These VCs act as the gatekeeper to public resources and services to which citizens are entitled. They verify voters' identities and eligibility for benefits like conditional cash transfers and provide referrals to other parts of the state for things like student loans, high school places and hospital admission. This gatekeeping role gives VCs the power to turn statutory state benefits into discretionary ones.

VCs also oversee development projects in their communities. Communities create their own projects

<sup>13</sup>I use VC to refer to both urban and rural chairpeople for ease of exposition

<sup>14</sup>This study departs from Croke (2017) by providing detailed evidence of *how* VCs deliver the vote and explicitly comparing ruling party and opposition communities. Both studies agree that these hyper-local politicians are an important determinant of CCM hegemony.

through village development committees. Communities are supposed to receive a small amount of discretionary funding each year to fund these projects. However, often this discretionary money does not come or is delayed. That means many projects rely on contributions of labor and funds from the community. As a consequence, VCs have the legal authority to enforce these obligations and punish those who do not contribute.

VCs chair the village/street assembly, which is made up of all citizens and is a space for voters to discuss the needs of the community. They also chair various village level committees pertaining to different areas of public good provision like water. VCs head the community's security council which is responsible for day-to-day law and order. By virtue of this position, VCs have coercive powers which include imposing fines, labor duties and exile orders as well as making arrests and referring cases to higher authorities. As I will discuss, these powers give them the distributive and legal-coercive tools they need to punish opposition support.

It is important to note that VCs existed before the LGRP. During *ujamaa*, the period of collectivization in the 1970s, village party leaders were highly powerful. At this time, Tanzania was a one-party state and these village leaders were crucial to the enforcement of founding President Julius Nyerere's nation-building policies. Over time their importance and the resources and powers they could mobilize waned. CDD reforms rehabilitated these old party institutions and turned them into elected state offices. This meant that highly local organizational capacity, formerly exclusively under the purview of the ruling party and central to scholars' appraisals of authoritarian regimes' strength, could be taken over by opposition parties.

## The role of VCs in individual punishment in Tanzania

In this section, I present qualitative evidence to show that community politicians from the ruling party use the leverage and information they draw from their office to punish individual voters and deliver the vote to the regime. I use evidence from around 75 interviews conducted in three regions of Tanzania — Dodoma, Iringa and Kilimanjaro — with VCs, village bureaucrats (VEOs), higher politicians and citizens between 2015 and 2018.<sup>15</sup> I select these three regions because they vary on the level of opposition office-holding at higher levels (local government councilors, MPs). Kilimanjaro is an opposition stronghold, Dodoma is a regime stronghold and Iringa is more of an intermediate case. Thus, if I can show that patterns of punishment are consistent across these three regions then this suggests the variation between opposition and CCM communities is indeed driven by who wins community elections and not the consequence of variation in who controls the local government or legislative seat. I use these interviews to demonstrate that not only

---

<sup>15</sup>I provide further details on the interview methodology in the SI

are CCM VCs motivated to deliver the vote but that they have the power to do so *because of* the office they hold. I show that much of the information that local party officials, a key example of traditional partisan brokers, and higher level politicians have comes from these VCs. I then contrast the experiences of those in CCM communities to those living in opposition communities to show that the regime's ability to punish is constrained by highly local electoral geography.

VCs are motivated to punish opposition voters because they and their community stand to lose out if they do not. The bargain of 'resources for votes, sanction for disloyalty' is common knowledge across Tanzania. Furthermore, community leaders are also at risk of personal sanction from the party and removal at the next election for low vote shares.<sup>16</sup> It is commonly understood that holding the position of VC is an avenue to personal enrichment and to a lesser extent promotion within the party. Given this, CCM VCs are highly motivated to deliver votes to the regime and they use their office to fulfil this aim. As one VC put it, "It is important that the village stays with the CCM because the CCM is the system...I have to use all of my powers to get people to vote for the party."<sup>17</sup> The office of village/street chair in Tanzania is highly powerful, a fact which village chairs interviewed universally acknowledged. Almost all VCs said that they were expected to mobilize their community to vote and to vote for the CCM. The CCM VCs I spoke to saw themselves as a powerful and integral part of the wider party machine particularly when it came to delivering the vote and took pride in this role. For example, one described himself as the "face of the central government and the party" in the community.<sup>18</sup> When asked why VCs variously cited their knowledge of their community and the powers they had at their disposal. I address each of these in turn.

I contend that local knowledge is essential to enforce a punishment regime on an individual-by-individual basis. VCs' embeddedness in the community gives them substantial information about their constituents. The centrality of the village chair in daily life of the communities allows them to garner a huge amount of information. The majority of VCs are from the community or have lived there for some time and so already have a good idea about many of their neighbours. When they take office, VCs described learning about all of their constituents' needs and views as a priority. A voter explained that "community politicians pinpoint [*people's partisanship*] when they first take power. They find out who is part of an opposition party from ordinary voters in the area."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, those VCs interviewed were overwhelmingly confident about their knowledge of their constituents. The majority said they would be able to identify the partisanship of all or most of their constituents.<sup>20</sup> One VC said that "I know a lot, know everyone and their politics. I know how

---

<sup>16</sup>Interview #9753

<sup>17</sup>Interview #5229

<sup>18</sup>Interview #5109

<sup>19</sup>Interview #6220

<sup>20</sup>This contrasts to Village Executive Officers, community bureaucrats appointed by central government who live outside the community. Most said that they knew far less than the VCs and got most of their information from them.

they vote.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, village chairs can call on allies in the community to communicate their suspicions about the partisanship of their neighbors. Most voters I interviewed said they knew the partisanship of the majority of their neighbors. VCs can then draw on this information. Citizens helped illuminate how information spreads and reaches VCs and other community officials. One explained the risks of being open: “I keep very quiet about how I feel about the opposition. In this area, everyone is CCM. If I tell the wrong person how I vote, maybe someone tells someone who tells the VC, maybe I stop getting help, maybe they don’t listen to me in meetings anymore, maybe they don’t let me sit with them in the grocery.”<sup>22</sup> This suggests both the ease with which information spreads and the real social and political costs of being ‘outed’ as an opposition supporter in areas hostile to defectors. Interviewees reported similar dynamics in all three case regions.

Interviews also suggest that VCs are a crucial source of information for the CCM’s other electoral intermediaries and candidates. VCs from both major parties describe meeting with party officials regularly. Interviews suggested that CCM leaders met more regularly with party officials than their Chadema colleagues and that meetings increased substantially during election times. These meetings often centered around VCs passing information about their communities’ political support to party officials. These discussions show that VCs and more traditional partisan brokers work together and that, in many cases, VCs are brokers’ source of information. Furthermore, interviews with higher level politicians made clear the importance of community-level information for the regime’s ability to win elections. One councilor in Dodoma said that they work closely with community officials: “They (VCs) know 90 percent (of their constituents). We work with the chair because these are the ones with the people - these are the ones who know the citizens, they know what’s going on in these areas and who the people are. Having a good working relationship with the chair helps a lot so we can communicate and gather information about the citizens.”<sup>23</sup> Another politician said that “the chairs can give you a sense of how the election is going to go. When anything happens, the first thing the citizen must do is to tell the chair. A chair is the only person that is communicating directly to the citizens. They are so important. If they do not work well with the citizens, the election will be difficult because we need to use this network.”<sup>24</sup> These interviews show that VCs do indeed act as highly important electoral intermediaries for higher level elections, in this instance by relaying information to higher levels.

However, I contend that the more important facet of their role as electoral intermediary is borne out of their ability to act on this information directly. VCs have substantial leverage which allows them to punish individual citizens themselves. This eliminates the risk that this information leaks before it is acted

---

<sup>21</sup>Interview #6565

<sup>22</sup>Interview #1459

<sup>23</sup>Interview #2580 - respondent 2

<sup>24</sup>Interview #2580 - respondent 4

on as is more likely with traditional partisan brokers who must liaise with higher levels to deny services or direct resources. VCs have important clientelist and legal-coercive powers which allow them to exert real discretionary power over individual citizens' access to state resources and fair treatment before the law. I deal with each of these in turn.

The village office endows regime-loyal VCs with a toolkit of powers to punish individual voters. First, VCs can grant access to services clientelistically. In a village in Kilimanjaro, a student described her struggle to get approval for a universal educational loan. With all the paperwork assembled, she arrived at the village chair's office for a simple stamp to verify her identity. However, the chair refused. There was no ink; she would have to come back. When she came back, he again refused. So next time, the student came with ink from a stationery shop in town and again he refused. This was not 'official government ink' he claimed; he still could not give her the stamp she needed. Despite her persistence, the chair was adamant in his refusals and the deadline for the loan passed. The chair was an elected CCM politician and the student's parents were known Chadema voters.<sup>25</sup>

This is one of example of the range of different services Chadema voters were blocked from by village chairs. Chadema voters I spoke to were denied signatures to be bailed from jail, hospital referrals, access to conditional cash transfers and even access to disaster relief. An opposition local politician summarized the ways that community officials can exploit their powers to punish opposition supporters: "Some (parts of the state) treat Chadema voters as if they are not Tanzanians...VCs and VEOs supervise government projects at village level, they are implicating them (Chadema voters) as trouble makers and using village bylaws against them. CCM villages are alienating Chadema voters. They are excluded from social assistance and village offices. They have to pay for the signatures.<sup>26</sup>...They are subject to strict penalties if they don't help with the disasters committee but then they cannot access to help from the disaster committee themselves...They discriminate because of political issues. For example, CCM don't contribute funeral expenses for Chadema people but do for CCM. It's all about discouraging people from voting for Chadema."<sup>27</sup>

Voters from both sides corroborate that VCs use their control over state resources to punish opposition voters. When asked if their politics affected how they were treated by the community, an opposition voter in Dodoma replied: "A lot. For example, I once had a problem and they (local officials) didn't sign the form that I was a Tanzanian citizen. The VC and VEO wouldn't help me to fix the paperwork...Often, the VC won't see me. I can't get help for my disabled grandchild when there is money that should go to me."<sup>28</sup> I then asked if other people in similar situations get that help and he confirmed that they did. He then

---

<sup>25</sup>Interview #9978

<sup>26</sup>Signatures from the VC on relevant official forms are required to gain access to higher level government services

<sup>27</sup>Interview #6798

<sup>28</sup>Interview #8031



went on to explain how he was excluded from influence in CDD meetings that determine how community resources are used: “I do not have freedom to talk openly. The opposition parties are not respected in these meetings.”

This account was echoed by numerous other opposition voters. A voter in Iringa DC said that they were indeed treated badly by community officials: “I am not involved in development now. I have no influence over community affairs now.”<sup>29</sup> When asked why they were excluded, they said: “Because my politics have changed. They think it’s bad for them that I vote for an opposition party...They think it will be harder to get help so they don’t help me.” CCM voters acknowledge that the punishment regime is in place to sanction their neighbors as this voter in Dodoma discusses: “If a person does that (votes opposition), he will have to explain himself before he gets help. We would bring him in front of the VC. He probably just wanted to destroy peace in the area... Wasaliti (*traitors*) cause lack of peace. Those who vote opposition are traitors and do not get helped.”<sup>30</sup> These interviews all make clear that the clientelist powers of the VCs’ office are used to punish opposition voters. They are denied access to supposedly statutory state and community benefits and those involved are open about the strategic logic that drives this discrimination.

Furthermore, I found that VCs also used their legal powers to sanction opposition supporters. The VC maintains peace in the community. To this end, they have far-reaching powers, including the ability to fine, confiscate property and even exile constituents. One of the most persistent reasons that people cite for supporting CCM is that they maintain peace in a region where episodes of civil conflict and war are not uncommon. The goal of village government and indeed the CCM in keeping peace in Tanzania came up in a number of interviews with village chairs. Opposition supporters and politicians are often described as ‘wasaliti’ or troublemakers. The word also translates as a defector or traitor. Opposition supporters get subsumed into this same category alongside thieves, criminals and other disruptive people. By framing opposition supporters as troublemakers, they are then considered to be subject to the supervision and authority of the village security council and the legal powers of the village chair. This legal/security role was often listed by village chairs interviewed as their primary function and the main source of their power in the community.

One CCM VC described the coercive power of local politicians: “CCM are more powerful at solving these kinds of (compliance) issues – they have experience, they have authority...CCM can impose consequences whereas Chadema cannot.”<sup>31</sup> They can impose punishments and restrictions, might be exiled from the area,

---

<sup>29</sup>Interview #4453

<sup>30</sup>Interview #1734

<sup>31</sup>Chadema VCs are constrained because the legal system is co-opted by the regime. When Chadema VCs I spoke to tried to engage in similar tactics, they were often brought before the courts on what they claimed were politicised charges. Those who did not try and sanction CCM voters did not report similar prosecutions.

might give them forced labor in local activities.”<sup>32</sup> Any ‘troublemakers’ in the community can be held accountable by the VC. When asked what kind of people were ‘troublemakers’, several CCM chairs listed Chadema voters. One VC, when asked how he deals with ‘troublemakers’, replied: “Force if they do not listen. I use a lot of force to control the Chadema people in the village”<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, Chadema supporters talked of punitive use of legal powers against them: enforcement of bylaws which went otherwise unenforced, harsher fines and punishments and even intimidation by village militias and police. With VCs viewing themselves as the final word on legal matters in their community, chairs keen to deliver the vote can and do use these powers punitively to target opposition supporters. According to one Chadema voter “We don’t get help from the chair. The opposition competes with the VC’s party so he won’t help. We might get cases against us brought by the VC.”<sup>34</sup> Similar political prosecutions were described by voters in Iringa: “The police came from town and put it (a political dispute) down and took in the people from Chadema for insulting language.”<sup>35</sup> Opposition voters also described being treated more harshly for relatively banal crimes. As one voter described, “Once, I didn’t go to cleaning duty and went to something else through the opposition party, they (community officials) took my wife and fined and punished her.”<sup>36</sup> Others reported intimidation including this voter in Dodoma: “Because the VC from that area is from the ruling party, he organised to send women to my house to tell my mother to take down the flag. They threatened that the house would be torn down by the Council [if he refused]. I took down the flag.”<sup>37</sup>

Across all regions I visited, I found similar reports of punitive use of the VCs’ legal powers. Community officials loyal to CCM leverage the legal powers of community office against individuals who they suspect may harm the community by voting for opposition parties. Opposition supporters in regime-loyal communities therefore run the risk of violence and being treated unfairly before the law. Given the extensive clientelistic and legal-coercive powers of these community offices, VCs exert substantial leverage over voters. When combined with their extensive local knowledge, this makes community politicians in Tanzania particularly powerful brokers for the ruling party in line with hypothesis H1.

If my theory holds, opposition supporters should not be subject to individual distributive sanction once the VC office is won by an opposition parties. Indeed, once this happens, the costs of opposition reported in interviews become substantially more banal. Opposition voters in opposition communities mentioned social pressure from CCM-loyal neighbors and worries about access to funding from higher levels of government controlled by the regime. However, they were clear that they could rely on their chair now. As one voter

---

<sup>32</sup>Interview #1710

<sup>33</sup>Interview #9753

<sup>34</sup>Interview #1326

<sup>35</sup>Interview #7101

<sup>36</sup>Interview #8031

<sup>37</sup>Interview #6220

in Kilimanjaro said, “the street bureaucrat and street chair in the community are there to help us now.”<sup>38</sup>. When asked if being an opposition supporter made it less likely that they would get helped by the VC, a voter replied: “In the past this was true. Now there is not discrimination in how the development spending is allocated. There used to be a contradiction in who gets services... If you were Chadema, they would take your information and not help you with your problems in the (community) office. It would just be delayed and delayed but CCM voters would be helped immediately.”<sup>39</sup>

Voters living under opposition VCs also report more even access to justice. In CCM-led communities, VCs, VEOs and voters routinely discussed how VCs used legal-coercive powers to punish those who voted against what the majority viewed as the community’s best interest. The powers that CCM VCs used ranged from fines to directing militias to use harassment and violence against community members. The powers that Chadema VCs used were less extreme, mostly limited to fines and raising concerns to higher legal authorities. No Chadema VCs directly admitted to using their legal-coercive powers against CCM voters with an explicit sanctioning logic while CCM VCs did admit to using their powers to punish opposition on multiple occasions. CCM voters in opposition communities did not report fear of violence while Chadema voters in CCM communities did.

These differences are in part because opposition VCs in incumbent and opposition local governments alike are not allowed the same legal impunity as their CCM counterparts. Those higher up use their own judicial powers to punish elected opposition officials who try and use the same strategies used by elected CCM officials. That means they cannot punish regime voters in the way that CCM VCs punish opposition voters. A VC in Iringa explained that “there is a big difference in how CCM and Chadema VCs are treated. If they make a mistake, it will be disregarded by the police. If we do anything however minor then the police come.”<sup>40</sup> Another said: “In my position as a VC from opposition party, I have to be prepared. False allegations are the order of the day. They may do an illegal search, an illegal arrest and there is nothing we can do. All our activities are closely monitored and we just have to be ready. Now we are more educated on what our rights are.”<sup>41</sup> An opposition VC in CCM-controlled part of Kilimanjaro faced similar problems: “I have cases related to issues of power. If I push against corruption or CCM-linked people, they bring legal cases to get me held and harassed.”<sup>42</sup> These interviews therefore indicate that opposition VCs are able to strategically exploit state capacity ceded to community offices to sanction. The consequence of that is that opposition community control disrupts the punishment regime rather than simply flipping it. Instead my interviews suggest that opposition VCs have to seek re-election more programmatically, focusing

---

<sup>38</sup>Interview #3809

<sup>39</sup>Interview #3658

<sup>40</sup>Interview #8248

<sup>41</sup>Interview #1595

<sup>42</sup>Interview #3561

on job performance, rather than using their position clientelistically to the same extent as CCM VCs.

A reader may be concerned about reverse causality in my account. Those villages and streets that elect opposition politicians may be those where it was already more difficult for VCs to sanction. If that were the case, opposition communities would be those which always had low levels of individual punishment, which could account for the differences I find. However, many interviews point to a change in dynamics in a given community over time. This casts doubt on this alternative explanation. Most of those interviewed in opposition communities pointed to the previous operation of a punishment regime in that community which ceased upon opposition victory. What then accounts for opposition victory in village elections? Opposition victory in highly local elections is possible if difficult even when voters face the threat of individual punishment. Given the small size of these electoral units (they range from a few hundred to a few thousand), regime VCs can lose these elections for very local and idiosyncratic reasons. CCM VCs are often long-standing having won elections repeatedly during the period where there was very limited political competition. That lack of competition was not good of politicians' effort and this often explained where these early opposition victories occurred. Voters in these places often pointed to poor performance (including and especially corruption, absenteeism and drunkenness) of the incumbent VC precipitating a collective decision to take a risk when a known local opposition candidate entered the race. These unexpected losses provide opposition parties with a foothold on power which then allows them to disrupt the punishment regime at the local level.

Evidence from three regions of Tanzania clearly demonstrates the importance of community offices in the regime's ability to punish individual voters for their disloyalty. When the regime wins local elections, they can command the information and leverage associated with the community office and use to target opposition voters for direct and excludable punishment. However my interviews also show that the ability to target individuals becomes more constrained once the regime loses community elections and that information and leverage is handed to opposition parties. This is important because it lowers the individual costs of long-term opposition support in these communities, making it easier for opposition supporters to remain loyal and for remaining regime voters to switch. The voter calculus in opposition communities then fundamentally differs from that in regime communities where voters make their choices given the threat of individual sanction after the election. In the next section, I use list experiments to demonstrate that voters do indeed fear individual sanctioning less when they are in opposition communities.

---

<sup>43</sup>I do not name districts due to safety concerns

## Using list experiments to measure fear of individual punishment

To supplement my interview evidence, I conducted a pre-election survey in Kilimanjaro in 2015, selecting three local governments (LGs): one opposition and two CCM.<sup>43</sup> In each LG, communities were categorized as by opposition or regime VC and communities were then selected at random from each list. A total of 20 villages were included in the sample with a total of 766 respondents. Households were selected using ‘random walk’ from a centroid of each village. The core of the survey was a short battery of list experiments. Respondents are likely to avoid or lie when asked direct questions about sensitive topics. List experiments use an item count technique, where respondents report a number of the items they agree with, to allow respondents to have plausible deniability for affirming a sensitive item. Half of respondents, the treatment group, are given the non-sensitive items and the sensitive item. The other half, the control group, are given only the non-sensitive items. Estimates of the rate that respondents agree/identify with the sensitive item(s) are made by comparing the item response counts of the treatment group and the control group. To increase the anonymity of item responses, respondents did not say aloud their response, rather they wrote it down (either number or marks) and placed it in a sealed envelope. I include more information on implementation and manipulation checks in the SI. In this study, I focus on two list experiments, which assess perceptions of costs of voting for the opposition coalition, Ukawa, headed by Chadema. In these experiments, the same question was posed with different control and sensitive items:

*Some people are worried about voting for the opposition in the upcoming election. How many of these things would you worry about in voting for the opposition?*

The sensitive items were as follows:

1. I, a member of my family or a friend may be worse off if I back Ukawa, for example I or someone I know may lose a job, a business license, a position of influence
2. If I vote opposition, I may be subject to discrimination before or after the election<sup>44</sup>

These items arbitrate address individual costs of opposition support. The discrimination question is intended as a robustness check. One plausible objection is that positive response to the first sensitive items may be driven by respondents’ concerns about service delivery under an opposition party. The discrimination sensitive item allows me to dismiss this objection; respondents are asked directly whether they fear being

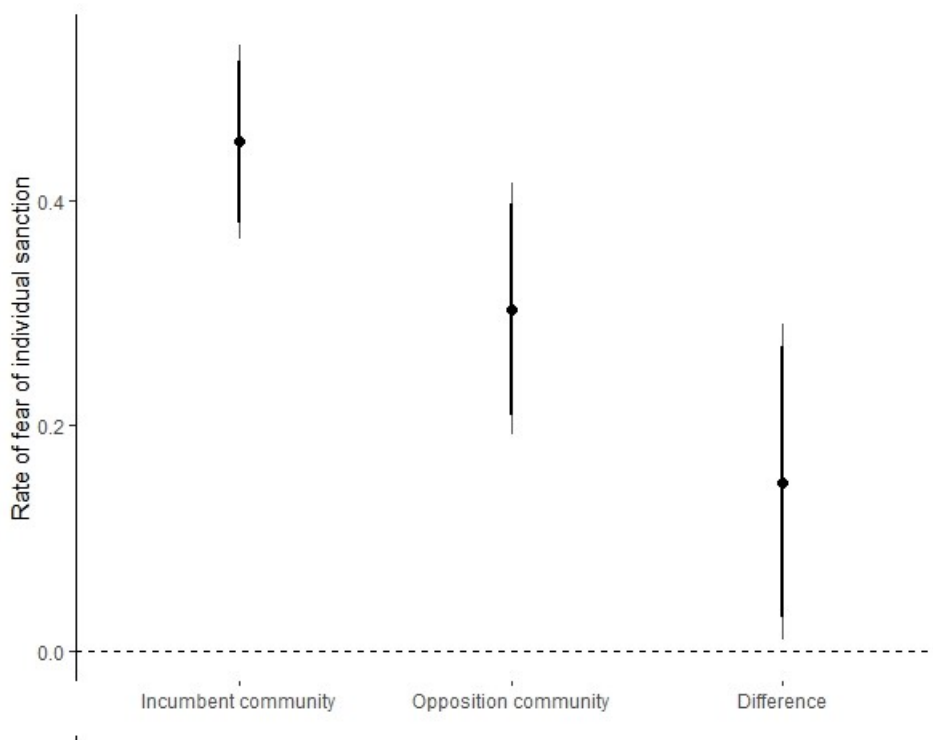
---

<sup>44</sup>Discrimination is not a perfect translation of the Kiswahili word used. While discrimination can be used to interchangeably refer to treatment of groups and individuals in English, the phrasing here applies more to individuals. In this sense, ‘victimized’ would be another way of translating this item

treated unfairly based on their political support. The full text of the list experiments is in SI.

Village chairs were elected in December 2014 before the main round of elections in October 2015. Thus, respondents knew the partisanship of the village chairs who would oversee their communities for the majority of the following electoral cycle. Thus voters made decisions about the presidential, parliamentary and council elections *given* the partisanship of the VC. This feature of election timing makes it possible for me to cleanly identify the effect of community leadership without incumbency at any other level confounding it.

To test my hypothesis that voters in opposition communities fear individual punishment less than those in regime communities, I use a maximum likelihood regression technique developed to analyze item count data with sensitive items (Blair & Imai, 2010). This method allows me to directly estimate the proportion of the population who ‘agree’ with the sensitive item, while controlling for covariates.



**Figure 2:** MLE estimates of the effect of community control on fear of individual sanction. Plots show 90% and 95% confidence intervals. This plot is based on Model 3 in Table 1

The results from my main list experiments provides strong support for H2. I plot my main result in Figure 2. Full results are shown in Table 1. I find that those in both opposition communities and regime communities fear individual punishment. However, the real test of my theory is whether the difference between the two types of communities is significant. Indeed, I find that it is. Importantly, the result is a substantively large one. Once opposition politicians win community elections, the proportion of the community that fears individual punishment falls by eighteen percent.

We may worry that these differences in proportions are driven just by the difference in proportions of opposition voters and regime voters in these communities. As such, I control for vote choice in the 2014 local election<sup>45</sup> in Model 4. With this additional control, respondents in regime communities still are significantly more likely to fear individual sanction than those in opposition communities but this falls marginally short of being significant at a 0.05 level. Taken together, these results corroborate what I find in my interviews: community control makes it easier for autocrats to sanction individuals hence voters fear sanctioning less once opposition parties take over the role of community politician.

**Table 1:** MLE estimates of effect of community control on fear of sanctions

	% affirmative responses to sensitive item			
	<b>Fear of individual sanction</b>			
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)
Comm control: <i>Incumbent</i>	0.473*** (0.044)	0.467*** (0.044)	0.459*** (0.043)	0.452*** (0.044)
<i>Opposition</i>	0.301*** (0.053)	0.308*** (0.054)	0.280*** (0.053)	0.303*** (0.057)
<i>Difference</i>	0.172*** (0.069)	0.159** (0.069)	0.178*** (0.068)	0.149* (0.072)
<i>N</i>	766	766	766	766
LG party	X	✓	✓	✓
Controls	X	X	✓	✓
Partisanship control	X	X	X	✓

Robust standard errors in parenthesis.

Models control for age, income, gender, ethnicity, party running LG, vote choice in 2014 indicated

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

I now turn to my second list experiment to assess the robustness of my main results. I test if who wins community elections affects fear of discrimination. I replicate Models 3 and 4 from my main analysis using the list experiment which directly addresses fear of individual discrimination for opposition support. The results of this are shown in Figure 3 in the SI. As I anticipate, fear of individual sanction falls. However, this difference is only significant if respondent partisanship is not controlled for. These results hence provide additional suggestive evidence for my theory.

Thus, I show that voters fear punishment for opposition support significantly less in opposition communities than in ruling party communities. The results from the list experiments strengthens the qualitative evidence I present previously for H2 by showing that the dynamics I find in my interviews hold for a broader sample of voters than it is possible to reach through interviews. Once opposition parties win community

<sup>45</sup>Results are robust to different measures of partisanship. I choose local vote choice because it is a pre-survey measure and

elections, the regime is less able to gather information and exert leverage over voters, allowing voters in opposition communities to cast their ballot subject to a significantly lower level of individual coercion.

## Conclusion

Absent the kind of security apparatus we find in higher income, higher state capacity autocracies like China and those in the Middle East, brokers take on additional importance in how able a regime is to discourage opposition support in lower income autocracies. Community driven development (CDD) reforms increased the importance of community politicians, empowering them in many cases with distributive and legal-coercive powers over their constituents. I contend that this makes community politicians important brokers in developing countries, particularly in autocracies where negative inducements are so important to political control. I demonstrate this with evidence from one such autocracy, Tanzania. Community politicians use their superior information and leverage between elections to identify and punish opposition support. The consequence of this is that hyper-local electoral geography constrains the reach of the regime and generates subnational variation in how able the regime is to punish individual voters and deliver the large majorities in presidential and parliamentary elections which sustain their appearance of invincibility and hold on power.

Based on interviews with voters and community politicians as well as the bureaucrats, party officials and politicians who work with them in several regions across Tanzania, I find consistent evidence of village/street chairs using their powers to punish individual voters for their political beliefs. They use their role as gatekeepers to state resources to selectively deny individuals' access to benefits to which they are entitled. Furthermore, VCs use their power as leader of their community to exclude opposition supporters from mutual assistance from the community. I also demonstrate that they punitively exploit their legal-coercive powers to crack down on opposition voters. The VCs and voters I spoke to were clear that the intent of this was to deliver as many votes as possible to the regime and keep opposition support as low as possible.

I then show that this punishment of individuals influences voter calculus. List experiments allow us to estimate the rate of fear of individual sanction in a sample. I find that voters living under a ruling party community politician are significantly more likely to fear repercussions for supporting the opposition coalition in the 2015 presidential election than those who live under opposition community politicians. The substantive effect of this difference is large at over fifteen percent. Furthermore, I find suggestive evidence that this result is robust to controlling for individual partisanship and to alternative question wording. This demonstrates that voters living under opposition VCs face fundamentally voter calculus which makes it easier for them to switch their votes or remain loyal to opposition parties going forward.

---

one which respondents were most likely to answer.



These findings are important because they help us understand where a regime can use negative inducements to keep ruling party high and where it is more constrained. This is a critical and well documented part of an autocrat's toolkit to win elections. I show that losing control of hyper-local community offices can dampen the regime's ability to punish individuals. This makes it harder to discourage opposition support in these communities because voters feel less vulnerable to reprisals.

I contend that this demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the microfoundations of our often centre-focused, top-down accounts of authoritarian strategy. I show that we must understand who on the ground is implementing the regime's strategy and when local conditions can limit the reach of the regime. To do so, I bring insights from the literature of clientelism. In so doing, I show that autocrats face real subnational variation in their toolkit and hence their control of electoral politics because elected community politicians act as brokers to deliver the vote to the ruling party in countries like Tanzania.

This study has number of important implications. I contribute to the study of clientelism by taking seriously an often overlooked form of electoral intermediary which is common across the developing world and the authoritarian world. In so doing, I show that we must look beyond the center to fully understand how secure an autocrat's hold on power is. The results of highly local elections can create enclaves of opposition control where the regime's strategy set is more limited and the costs of opposition support lower because the regime's reach into communities has been curtailed. This may help us then understand the origins of opposition support in electoral autocracies. It only takes relatively small if concentrated pockets of opposition support to create such enclaves from which opposition parties can win over voters through good performance and build their support out from these enclaves. This may also suggest that decentralization, often considered to be a boon for autocrats, may in fact be a double-edged sword. Community offices strengthen the regime when they can keep winning these local elections. However, once the opposition starts to make inroads electorally, decentralization means these important offices and important intermediaries are handed over to opposition parties who can use them for their own ends.

## References

- Albertus, M., S. Fenner, and D. Slater (2018). *Coercive Distribution*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baldwin, K. (2013, October). Why Vote with the Chief? Political Connections and Public Goods Provision in Zambia. *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4), 794–809.
- Baldwin, K. (2015). *The paradox of traditional leaders in democratic Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bellin, E. (2012). Reconsidering the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring. *Comparative Politics* 44(2), 127–149.
- Benton, A. L. (2017). Configuring authority over electoral manipulation in electoral authoritarian regimes: evidence from Mexico. *Democratization* 24(3), 521–543.
- Bernard, T., M.-H. Collion, A. De Janvry, P. Rondot, and E. Sadoulet (2008). Do village organizations make a difference in African rural development? A study for Senegal and Burkina Faso. *World Development* 36(11), 2188–2204.
- Blair, G. and K. Imai (2010). list: Statistical methods for the item count technique and list experiment. *The Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN)*.
- Blaydes, L. (2010, November). *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brownlee, J. (2007). *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Conroy-Krutz, J. (2018, September). Individual Autonomy and Local-Level Solidarity in Africa. *Political Behavior* 40(3), 593–627.
- Croke, K. (2017). Tools of single party hegemony in Tanzania: evidence from surveys and survey experiments. *Democratization* 24(2), 189–208.
- Cruz, C. (2018, August). Social Networks and the Targeting of Vote Buying. *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Dasgupta, A. and V. A. Beard (2007). Community driven development, collective action and elite capture in Indonesia. *Development and change* 38(2), 229–249.
- Díaz-Cayeros, A., B. Magaloni, and A. Ruiz-Euler (2014). Traditional governance, citizen engagement, and local public goods: evidence from Mexico. *World development* 53, 80–93.

- Finan, F. and L. Schechter (2012). Vote-Buying and Reciprocity. *Econometrica* 80(2), 863–881.
- Fritzen, S. A. (2007). Can the design of community-driven development reduce the risk of elite capture? Evidence from Indonesia. *World Development* 35(8), 1359–1375.
- Frye, T., O. J. Reuter, and D. Szakonyi (2019). Vote Brokers, Clientelist Appeals, and Voter Turnout: Evidence from Russia and Venezuela. *World Politics* 71(4), 710–746.
- Gandhi, J. and E. Lust-Okar (2009). Elections Under Authoritarianism. *Annual Review of Political Science* 12(1), 403–422.
- Gingerich, D. W. and L. F. Medina (2013). The endurance and eclipse of the controlled vote: a formal model of vote brokerage under the secret ballot. *Economics & Politics* 25(3), 453–480.
- Greitens, S. C. (2016). *Dictators and their secret police: Coercive institutions and state violence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Guardado, J. and L. Wantchékon (2014). Do Electoral Handouts Affect Voting Behavior? *Unpublished Manuscript, Princeton University*.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A. (2017). American employers as political machines. *The Journal of Politics* 79(1), 105–117.
- Holland, A. C. and B. Palmer-Rubin (2015). Beyond the machine: Clientelist brokers and interest organizations in Latin America. *Comparative Political Studies* 48(9), 1186–1223.
- Jochem, T., I. Murtazashvili, and J. Murtazashvili (2016). Establishing local government in fragile states: Experimental evidence from Afghanistan. *World Development* 77, 293–310.
- King, E. and C. Samii (2014). Fast-track institution building in conflict-affected countries? Insights from recent field experiments. *World Development* 64, 740–754. Publisher: Elsevier.
- Kitschelt, H. and S. I. Wilkinson (2007). *Patrons, clients and policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Koter, D. (2013, April). King Makers: Local Leaders and Ethnic Politics in Africa. *World Politics* 65(02), 187–232.
- Kramon, E. (2016). Electoral Handouts as Information Explaining Unmonitored Vote Buying. *World Politics* 68, 454.

- Landry, P. F. (2008). *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China*. Cambridge University Press New York.
- Lawson, C. and K. F. Greene (2014). Making clientelism work: How norms of reciprocity increase voter compliance. *Comparative Politics* 47(1), 61–85.
- Levitsky, S. and L. Way (2002). The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 51–65.
- Levitsky, S. and L. A. Way (2010). *Competitive Authoritarianism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, L. (2003). The empowering effect of village elections in China. *Asian Survey* 43(4), 648–662.
- Li, Y. (2019). Relaxing the no liars assumption in list experiment analyses. *Political Analysis* 27(4), 540–555.
- Lust-Okar, E. (2006). Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan. *Democratization* 13(3), 456–471. Publisher: Taylor & Francis.
- Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for autocracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Manion, M. (2006). Democracy, community, trust: The impact of elections in rural China. *Comparative Political Studies* 39(3), 301–324. Publisher: Sage Publications Sage CA: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mansuri, G. and V. Rao (2012). *Localizing development: does participation work?* World Bank Publications.
- Mansuri, G., V. Rao, and others (2004). *Community-based (and driven) development: A critical review*, Volume 3209. World Bank.
- Mares, I. and L. Young (2016). Buying, expropriating, and stealing votes. *Annual Review of Political Science* 19, 267–288.
- Mares, I. and L. Young (2019). Varieties of Clientelism in Hungarian Elections. *Comparative Politics* 51(3), 449–480.
- Mares, I. and B. Zhu (2015). The production of electoral intimidation: Economic and political incentives. *Comparative Politics* 48(1), 23–43. Publisher: City University of New York.
- O’Brien, K. J. and R. Han (2009). Path to democracy? Assessing village elections in China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(60), 359–378.
- Oliveros, V. (2016). Making it personal: Clientelism, favors, and the personalization of public administration in Argentina. *Comparative Politics* 48(3), 373–391.
- Pempel, T. J. (1990). *Uncommon democracies: The one-party dominant regimes*. Cornell Univ Press.

- Platteau, J.-P. and F. Gaspart (2003). The risk of resource misappropriation in community-driven development. *World development* 31(10), 1687–1703.
- Riedl, R. B. and J. T. Dickovick (2014). Party systems and decentralization in Africa. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 49(3), 321–342.
- Schaffer, F. C. and A. Schedler (2007). What is vote buying. *Elections for sale: The causes and consequences of vote buying*, 17–30. Publisher: Ateneo de Manila University Press Quezon City.
- Schedler, A. (2006). Electoral authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition.
- Stokes, S. C. (2005, August). Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina. *American Political Science Review* (03), 315–325.
- Stokes, S. C., T. Dunning, M. Nazareno, and V. Brusco (2013). *Brokers, voters, and clientelism: The puzzle of distributive politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, X. (2014). Autocrats’ dilemma: The dual impacts of village elections on public opinion in China. *The China Journal* (71), 109–131.
- Svolik, M. W. (2012, September). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tanaka, S., J. Singh, and D. Songco (2006, September). A Review of Community-Driven Development and Its Application to the Asian Development Bank. *Asian Development Bank*, 100.
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 355–372.
- Wedeen, L. (1999). Ambiguities of Domination.
- Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2012). What wins votes: Why some politicians opt out of clientelism. *American Journal of Political Science* 56(3), 568–583.

# Supplemental information:

## Interview protocol

Interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2018. For the majority of the interviews, I selected respondents by randomly selecting streets/villages stratified by the partisanship of the community politician. In Kilimanjaro, I used a modified version of this procedure to drop communities included in the survey. I oversampled opposition communities. I negotiated for permission to visit these communities from the regional, local government, ward and community authorities where necessary. I interviewed the VC and, where possible, the VEO separately. I then asked to be allowed to speak to citizens. In each community, I spoke to a small number of individuals through a random walk procedure. The VEO or the previous participant introduced me to the next respondent to establish trust/permission. Because I am interested in treatment of opposition supporters, I recruited additional participants by working with the main opposition party. They connected me to some of their supporters (none of whom were politicians in their own right) who I met with either in their homes or at opposition party offices. Those interviews done in party offices were not supervised by party officials.

Interviews were conducted in either Swahili or English. Before beginning, participants were read a consent script which stressed that the interview may cover sensitive party political topics and were asked if they wished to continue. Participants were not paid to participate but were generally provided with a token of thanks e.g. a small packet of soap powder. The question flow was designed to very gradually increase the sensitivity of the questions. If respondents were evasive, not responsive or seemed uncomfortable in answering relatively non-sensitive political questions, I concluded the interview before getting to the more sensitive topics to safeguard the interview subject. Where it was not possible to interview a participant alone, I avoided the more sensitive topics for the same reason. This meant that interviews varied between fifteen minutes and around an hour. Interviews were not recorded so were not transcribed in full. During initial pilots of interview procedure, the overwhelming majority of participants would not consent to recording. As a result, I was limited to taking notes while conducting the interview.

No participant names were taken to protect the respondents' anonymity in the event I was forced to show the authorities my devices and their contents. In this study, I report interviews by the region and an anonymized interview code to protect participants' anonymity. I keep geographic details as minimal as possible in my reported findings for a similar reason. Notes from the interviews include more geographic and biographical details (e.g. gender, age, occupation). However, the interview records are not directly linked to the code numbers. A key to link the two is stored separately as an additional level of protection.

## List experiments text

1. Some people are worried about voting for the opposition in the upcoming election. How many of these things would you worry about in voting for the opposition:

- a) Ukawa may be corrupt
- b) Development in Tanzania may slow down
- c) I do not trust Edward Lowassa; he has been found to have done bad things in government
- d) CCM are the only party which can protect stability and peace in Tanzania
- e) I, a member of my family or a friend may be worse off if I back Ukawa, for example I or someone I know may lose a job, permits and permissions, a position of influence.

2. Here is another list of reasons given. Please tell me again how many of this list you would worry about in voting for the opposition?

- a) The idea of change in the way politics works scares me
- b) People like me don't vote for a party like Ukawa
- c) I don't like what they stand for
- d) Tanzania will be a worse country to live in if the opposition take over
- e) I may be subject to discrimination before or after the election

## Survey implementation

I conducted a pre-election survey in Kilimanjaro in 2015 in August and September before the 2015 general election. I selected three LGs: one opposition and two CCM.<sup>46</sup> In each district, villages were categorized as by opposition or incumbent VC and villages were then selected at random from each list. A total of 20 villages were included in the sample with a total of 766 respondents. Because of limitations of the permissions I was given by the regional authority, the survey is underpowered as I was only able to go to a small number of communities. I negotiated permission with the regional, local government, ward and community authorities in each EA. Households were selected using 'random walk' from a centroid of each village. Individuals were assigned to treatment or control via a coin flip.

---

<sup>46</sup>I do not name districts due to safety concerns

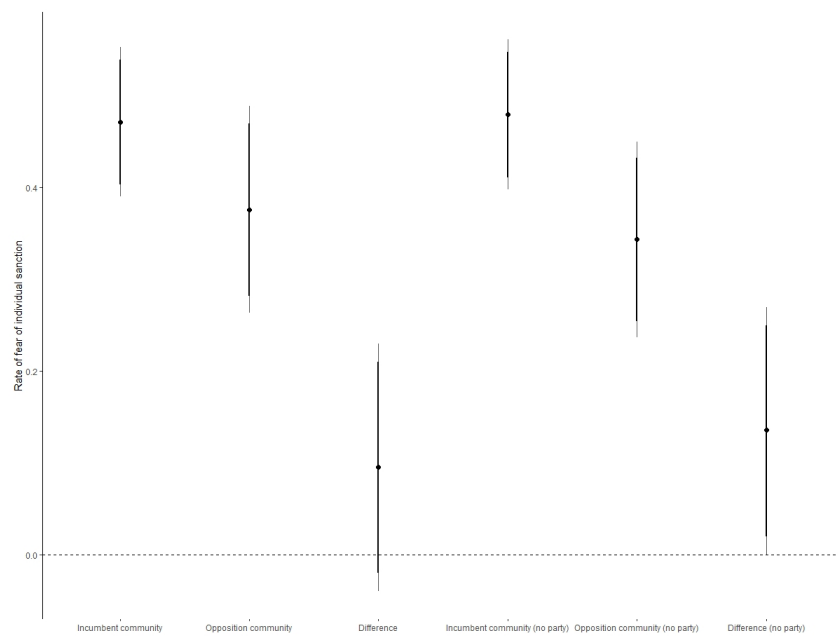
The core of the survey was a short battery of list experiments. Respondents are likely to avoid or lie when asked direct questions about sensitive topics. List experiments use an item count technique, where respondents report a number of the items they agree with, to allow respondents to have plausible deniability for affirming a sensitive item. Half of respondents, the treatment group, are given the non-sensitive items and the sensitive item. The other half, the control group, are given only the non-sensitive items. Estimates of the rate that respondents agree/identify with the sensitive item(s) are made by comparing the item response counts of the treatment group and the control group.

For inference to hold, two assumptions must hold: the 'no design effects' assumption and the 'no liars' assumption (Li, 2019). The 'no design effects' assumption states that the text of the sensitive item must have no effect on respondents' answers to control items (ibid). I designed the control items so that they pertained to national level politics rather than local politics. That means I am confident that the sensitive items on local clientelism did not influence respondents' answers to the control items. The 'no liars' assumption states that respondents must give truthful answers for the sensitive item (ibid). In practice, Li (2019) states that the 'no liars' assumption fails if 'a treated respondent who favors all or a large number of control items and the sensitive item may be reluctant to answer truthfully, as it reveals with certainty or a high probability that the respondent favors the sensitive item.' This is sometimes called a ceiling effect. The converse, i.e. where a respondent may not answer truthfully because they would be reluctant to respond positively to any control item, is referred to as a floor effect. Estimation of effects in list experiments is biased if there are floor or ceiling effects. To assess the plausibility, I use the techniques described in Blair and Imai (2010) to assess the risk of floor and ceiling effects in my data. I find no evidence of significant floor or ceiling effects for the two list experiments included in this study.

To increase the anonymity of item responses, respondents did not say aloud their response, rather they wrote it down (either number or marks) and placed it in a sealed envelope. The rest of the survey included questions on basic demographics, political support, political behavior, community behavior and cooperation and political information. Respondents were walked through two practice list experiments (on towns visited in the area and fruit preferences) before attempting the main battery. There were a small number of respondents who could not complete the list experiments and they were dropped from the sample.



## Additional plots



**Figure 3:** MLE estimate of the effect for community control on fear of discrimination (with and without partisanship controls. 90 and 95% confidence intervals are shown