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The Cost of Voting and the Cost of Votes

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In new democracies, political parties often use clientelist strategies to mobilize voters during elections. In this article, we show that political machines systematically use vote buying to target voters with low costs of voting. We employ a geocoded survey of 3,192 respondents collected immediately after the municipal elections of 2016 in South Africa. We combine the survey data with administrative data on the geographical location of more than 22,600 polling stations. Our identification strategy exploits discontinuities in distances to vote generated by voting district boundaries in South Africa. This allows us to proxy the cost of voting with distance to the polling station and estimate the causal effect of the cost of voting on parties' use of vote buying. The results have important implications for core assumptions concerning parties' targeting strategies and for how electoral institutions shape the linkage strategies parties use to mobilize political support.

Political parties in developing countries often use clientelist strategies to marshal political support and mobilize voters during election campaigns. While much attention has been devoted to how parties target voters on the basis of partisanship (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005), income (Jensen and Justesen 2014; Nichter 2018), and the role of party brokers for mobilizing voter support (Auerbach and Thachil 2018; Brierley and Nathan 2021; Stokes et al. 2013), we argue that clientelist parties' electoral strategies depend, in part, on voters' cost of voting. We develop an argument that vote buying—a particular type of electoral clientelism—is used to mobilize political support among voters with low costs of voting. We associate the cost of voting with voters' cost of traveling to vote—measured as the geographical distance to the polling station. The observable implication of this argument—which we demonstrate empirically—is that clientelist parties use vote buying to target people living relatively close to polling stations.

Our argument departs from recent theoretical developments in the study of clientelist parties suggesting that citizens' inclination to vote shapes party strategies for mobilizing electoral support (Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014; Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005). When the cost of voting is low, clientelist parties use vote buying targeted at swing voters; when the cost of voting is high, they use turnout buying targeted at core voters. As voters with low costs of voting already face incentives to turn out to vote, parties need to compensate them for voting for the "right" party (Gans-Morse et al. 2014) and make sure their votes do not end up with opposition. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, there is no causal evidence of this influential theoretical proposition. Since citizens living farther from polling stations are more likely to be exposed to clientelism for reasons other than the distance they need to travel to cast a vote, credible causal evidence will help us distinguish the effect of the cost of voting from confounders, such as urban-rural differences, that are correlated with distance to the polling station.

Our argument also builds on the work of de Kadt (2019), who shows that the electoral infrastructure—specifically, an increase in the number of polling stations—positively affects the likelihood that citizens participate in elections because it reduces the costs of voting. We expand on this work by teasing

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out the causal effect of voter distance to the nearest polling station on vote buying exposure, using a design where voters' distance to the nearest assigned polling station can plausibly be treated as exogenous—a claim we go to great lengths to validate.

We contribute to the literature in the following way: using evidence from South Africa, a dominant party system with a well-demarcated infrastructure of voting districts and polling stations, we show how the cost of voting affects voters' likelihood of being targets of vote buying during elections. To do so, we use data from an original and nationally representative survey of 3,192 respondents conducted in the wake of the 2016 municipal elections. We merge the survey data with geocoded data from the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) on the location of polling stations as well as voting district borders in the 2016 municipal elections. To identify the effect of the cost of voting on the incidence of vote buying, we exploit the fact that the demarcation of voting districts in South Africa generates discontinuities in voters' distance to the nearest polling station. Voting districts determine where voters vote. For voters close to the voting district border, distance to the polling station is orthogonal to other respondent characteristics that are likely to influence exposure to clientelism.

With the border proximity design, we find sizable and robust effects of distance on the probability of being a target of vote buying. Specifically, across model specifications, moving 1 kilometer farther away from the polling station decreases the probability of being targeted by 0.3–0.5 percentage points. With a baseline probability of being targeted of 6%–7% in South Africa, this corresponds to a 4%–9% change from the baseline probability. This is a noticeable effect, even for voters living at relatively modest distances from polling stations. We also find that the effect of distance to the polling station is inconsistent with a turnout-buying explanation, and we find no effects on ordinary forms of campaign activity, such as nonclientelist door-to-door canvassing. Consistent with models of how vote buying is targeted at swing voters, our findings show that the effect on vote buying is strongest in competitive municipalities. Similarly, a range of empirical tests corroborate that the results are not driven by alternative explanations, including broker effort and institutional manipulation. Finally, we conduct a number of placebo tests and use qualitative data from the IEC to provide evidence that strengthens our interpretation.

Our results complement the findings of Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016), who show that the cost of voting increases the use of turnout buying (up to the point where the compensation required by the voter drives the cost of voting above the clientelist party's reservation price). We also add to recent work by Bowles, Larreguy, and Woller (2020) showing how incumbents manipulate voters' cost of voting to improve the performance of the dominant party. Specifically, we show how the electoral infrastructure shapes whom clientelist parties target (voters with low costs of voting) and the specific type of clientelist strategy (vote buying) used to that end. These findings contribute to explain how parties adapt clientelist strategies to the electoral infrastructure in place. In the bigger picture, this adds to our understanding of how the finer details of electoral institutions shape the linkage strategies parties use to mobilize political support in new democracies.

THE COST OF VOTING: THE EFFECT ON VOTE BUYING

It is widely accepted that voters' likelihood of participating in elections depends on the cost of voting (de Kadt 2019; Harris 2021). If the benefits from voting are low—and the likelihood that one's vote will make or break an election is close to zero—even modest costs of voting may deter voters from turning out on election day. Voters who live farther away from the polling station need to travel longer distances in order to vote. This constitutes a direct "shoe leather cost" as well as an opportunity cost of the time spent going to the polls (Haspel and Knotts 2005). Unsurprisingly, therefore, distance has been found to dissuade people from participating in elections (Brady and McNulty 2011; McNulty, Dowling, and Ariotti 2009).

We argue that—in new democracies where the rules and norms of free and fair elections may not be fully consolidated—parties' use of clientelist strategies to mobilize political support during elections depend, in part, on voters' cost of traveling to vote. We focus on how voters' cost of voting affect parties' use of vote buying strategies. Vote buying is a type of electoral clientelism that involves the distribution of material goods (like money or food) by political parties during election campaigns in return for political support or votes (Gans-Morse et al. 2014). Vote buying directly aims to sway the party choice of voters and therefore differs from strategies like turnout buying that focus on mobilizing latent supporters (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005).

To illustrate how the cost of voting affects parties' use of vote buying during elections, we can think of a hypothetical bargain between a clientelist party and a citizen when the party broker must offer additional compensation to buy votes located at a distance from the polling station (Gans-Morse et al. 2014; Larreguy et al. 2016). For voters to accept such a bargain, the marginal benefit of the vote buying offer must at least be equal to the marginal cost of going to the polls. Brokers will anticipate the costs of voting for particular groups of voters—and the cost of voting is higher for voters living farther from the polling station—and substitute away from voters with a high expected reservation price, targeting instead

"cheaper" voters for whom the cost of voting is low. In addition, voters with low costs of voting are inclined to vote, and the party will therefore need to guarantee a supportive vote. Even if voters initially accept the clientelist offer, their promises to actually turn out and vote become less credible if they live farther from the polling station. Against this background, we expect the effect of the cost of voting on voters' exposure to vote buying to be negative: the cost of voting increases the cost of votes and, therefore, reduces the incidence of vote buying.

The underlying logic behind the negative effect of voting cost on exposure to vote buying is similar to the logic connecting poverty to vote buying: the financial inducement needed to buy the votes of poor people is lower than the inducements needed to buy off relatively wealthy people (Jensen and Justesen 2014; Stokes 2005). The cost of voting has similar implications. The material inducements parties need to offer to mobilize support are smaller for people whose cost of voting is relatively low.

Confounders related to the distance to the polling station

To test the empirical implication of the theoretical expectation that higher costs of voting reduce voters' exposure to vote buying, we proxy voters' cost of voting by their geographical distance to the polling station. However, distributive politics, parties' election campaign activities, and monitoring by election observers often vary systematically by geographical context (Ichino and Nathan 2013; Nathan 2016). Therefore, our proxy for the cost of voting—distance to the polling station—might be correlated with a number of confounding variables related to electoral geography.

Polling stations are overwhelmingly placed in central locations in the local community. For instance, of the approximately 22,600 polling stations in use during the 2016 South African municipal elections, 62% were located at schools, 6% in buildings belonging to businesses, 5% at community centers, and 7% at religious institutions. The remaining locations include, for example, government buildings and traditional institutions. While we expect the causal effect of voting costs on vote buying to be negative, citizens' exposure to electoral clientelism may—for other reasons—be lower among individuals living more centrally and closer to the polling station. Indeed, parties may target voters living farther from polling stations for a number of reasons.

First, on election day and during campaigns, monitoring by election observers and officials is typically concentrated around polling stations (Asunka et al. 2019; Hyde 2007). To steer clear of the monitoring efforts of election observers, parties may divert clientelist mobilization to areas farther away from polling stations in both urban and rural areas.

Second, distance to polling stations is systematically higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. In our data, the average voter distance to the polling station is 576 meters in urban areas and 2,061 meters in rural areas. It is well known that, in Africa, clientelist practices are more widespread in rural areas. This is partly because rural areas often have stronger traditional rule (Baldwin 2013; de Kadt and Larreguy 2018; Koter 2013a, 2013b), where chiefs and village headmen can play an important role as intermediaries between the centralized state and local communities. In addition, party brokers are better able to monitor voters collectively in rural areas, where voting districts tend to accommodate fewer voters (Medina and Stokes 2007). Whereas voting districts in rural areas of South Africa accommodate approximately 1,200 voters, voting districts in urban areas contain around 3,000 voters. Even if traditional leaders or party brokers cannot monitor individual voters, they are better able to monitor and sanction smaller groups of voters (Gottlieb and Larreguy 2020; Rueda 2017). This helps to reinforce the use of clientelism as a mode of governance in rural areas.

Third, voters living farther from the polling station may be more susceptible to clientelism than are those living more centrally. Polling stations are usually centrally located in schools, churches, or community centers, suggesting that civic engagement might be more concentrated closer to polling stations than farther from it. It is possible that voters with more civic attitudes self-select into central areas and that voters who live centrally have better access to civil society organizations, which are often seen as venues for democratic "training" and participation (e.g., De Tocqueville 2003, 46). Indeed, existing work shows that civic attitudes reduce the tolerance threshold for clientelism (Lawson and Greene 2014). Voters living closer to polling stations may therefore be less susceptible to clientelism than voters living farther away.

Overall, this implies that (i) election monitoring is more concentrated in the proximity of polling stations, (ii) vote buying and other forms of clientelism are more common in rural areas, and (iii) voters living farther from polling stations are more susceptible to clientelism.

Expectations

Our key expectation is that the causal effect of the cost of voting on the incidence of vote buying is negative: citizens living farther from the polling station have higher reservation prices, and parties need to provide them with additional compensation for going to the polls. The causal effect of distance is, however, confounded by contextual effects relating to voter self-selection, the strategies used by clientelist parties, and the monitoring efforts of election authorities.

The observable implication is that regressing vote buying exposure on distance in the full sample yields a coefficient whose sign is unclear a priori. Using a border proximity design, however, the confounding influence of the contextual effects should be removed if citizens are distributed in a near-random manner just around voting district borders. This design will allow us to remove the confounding influence of the contextual effects and isolate the causal effect of distance on vote buying.

CONTEXT

In the South African context, vote buying and electoral clientelism are typically associated with the dominant party—the African National Congress (ANC)—making it a case of "monopolistic clientelism" (Nichter and Peress 2017). The ANC has dominated South African politics at the national, provincial, and local level since the transition to postapartheid democracy in 1994 (Ferree 2018; Justesen and Schulz-Herzenberg 2018). Although the 2016 municipal elections provided the biggest electoral challenge for the ANC in the postapartheid era, the party maintained power in around 75% of local government councils across the country (Ferree 2018).

South Africa's strong party system and the dominant role of the ANC means that vote buying may be less frequent than in weakly institutionalized party systems (Driscoll 2018). However, evidence suggests that the ANC does use clientelism—including vote buying—as part of its strategy to maintain electoral dominance (Bøttkjær and Justesen 2021; Paret 2016). The fact that the ANC has a firm grip on national government places the party in a privileged position with regard to both programmatic and nonprogrammatic modes of distributive politics. Indeed, the links between the state and the ANC are so close that the South African government has transformed into a "party state," where the boundary between the state and the party is blurred (Booysen 2015; Southall 2016). This may contribute to cultivate beliefs in the electorate that access to state resources is contingent on loyalty toward the ANC (Dawson 2014).

At the local level, the distribution of resources is facilitated by the ANC's dense and well-organized network of local party branches (Darracq 2008). The local branches serve as party brokers—who are crucial for the community-level organization of clientelism (Auerbach and Thachil 2018; Brierley and Nathan 2021)—and provide the party with a strong capacity for grassroots mobilization during elections. The local branches contribute to maintain clientelist relations in poor communities (Dawson 2014) and are instrumental in brokering access to state resources—such as social grants—for voters (Darracq 2008). This makes the local branches an integral part of the ANC's electoral machinery.

During election campaigns, the ANC relies heavily on its local organizational machinery—both for purposes of generic election campaign activities and for campaign activities that involve clientelist distribution (Paret 2016; Plaut 2014). Part of the menu of campaign activities in South Africa consists in organizing election meetings and party rallies, which are sometimes used by the ANC as venues for distributing goods like food parcels (Plaut 2014). Importantly for our purposes, local party branches are also instrumental for orchestrating door-to-door canvassing. According to the Electoral Act, all candidates should be given lists (the "voters' roll") containing full addresses of registered voters (EISA 2016). Although not all voters had formal addresses during the 2016 election, the point of making the voters' roll available to parties and candidates is precisely to allow them to conduct more effective door-to-door canvassing—which is a key element of election campaigns and voter mobilization in South Africa (Paret 2016). In-person canvassing need not involve clientelism and is often simply part of more generic local campaign activities. However, canvassing is also a logistically important component of vote buying strategies aimed at mobilizing political support through the distribution of benefits like food parcels (Plaut 2014) and access to social grants and housing (Dawson 2014; Paret 2016).[1] In fact, media reports suggest that clientelist canvassing is orchestrated to such an extent that employees of the South African Social Security Agency—the government agency responsible for distributing food parcels and socials grants—have been affiliated with the distribution of material goods to voters during election campaigns (Booysen 2015). Such campaign practices—and the blurred line between the ANC and the South African state that engender them—have generated criticism from the South African public protector (ombudsman) for being "inconsistent" with the constitution.[2]

These features of the case mean that certain scope conditions surround our results. First, South Africa constitutes a case in which the dominant party has the organizational capacity to orchestrate relatively fine-grained clientelist targeting of voters. This means that our results do not necessarily travel to contexts of more fractionalized party systems, where parties are more weakly organized.[3] Second, South Africa is also a case in which the electoral dominance of the incumbent party is increasingly challenged. The fact that our survey was

1. A recent, crass example of ANC door-to-door canvassing using clientelist practices involved the ANC secretary general, Ace Magashule, distributing benefits to voters during the 2019 national election campaign (see Head 2019; Matiwane 2019).

2. See https://bit.ly/3p0qCAT.

3. However, recent contributions suggest that low party institutionalization need not hinder the use of clientelism (Bowles, Larreguy, and Liu 2020).

conducted in the aftermath of the 2016 municipal elections matters in this respect, as local elections may constitute "second order" elections, where citizens voice their dissatisfaction with the government (Justesen and Schulz-Herzenberg 2018). Indeed, the 2016 municipal elections produced the worst electoral outcome for the ANC in the postapartheid era, gaining only 53.9% of the nationwide vote. In terms of external validity, both the level of party institutionalization and the high political stakes surrounding the 2016 elections suggest that our results apply in contexts of strongly institutionalized parties relying on sophisticated clientelist strategies—rather than in contexts of weak parties using clientelism more erratically (cf. Driscoll 2018).

DATA AND DESIGN

The data used in our analyses come from two sources. First, data on vote buying and other respondent characteristics are from a survey we conducted of 3,192 respondents across South Africa. The survey was administered in collaboration with Citizen Surveys based in Cape Town, and fieldwork was implemented in the wake of the South African municipal elections on August 3, 2016. The sample covers all nine provinces in South Africa, including the eight Metros and most local municipalities in the rest of the country. Sampling was done using a stratified multistage probability sample, which provides us with a nationally representative sample of the South African voting-age population. Fieldwork was done by enumerators in face-to-face interviews using tablet-based questionnaires available to respondents in one of six South African languages.

We use responses to the following question to measure vote buying: "How often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food, or a gift or money if you would vote for them in the elections?"[4] We also report results from a question asking respondents whether people in their community or village have been offered benefits in return for their votes. Both are coded as binary variables, taking the value 1 if people report experiences with vote buying and 0 otherwise.

Using these measures, approximately 6% of respondents report that they have been offered material benefits in return for their votes during the 2016 municipal elections, while around 7% report having observed vote buying in their neighborhood. While these numbers suggest that vote buying in South Africa is not as common as in other African countries (Jensen and Justesen 2014), they still indicate that the number of people in the electorate targeted by clientelist offers is substantial enough to affect election outcomes, particularly in municipalities where the election is highly contested.

A common concern in the analysis of survey data on electoral clientelism is social desirability bias—that is, that respondents may be inclined to underreport their actual experience with sensitive or illegal issues, such as clientelist offers by political parties. The analyses using the measure of perceived vote buying in the neighborhood are arguably less prone to social desirability bias (Adida et al. 2019; Hariri and Lassen 2017; Kiewiet De Jonge 2015). However, using data from our survey, the work of Bøttkjær (2019) provides similar results when comparing findings from a list experiment and the direct question on personal experience with vote buying offers during the 2016 municipal elections in South Africa. This suggests that social desirability bias is not a major concern in our data.

We match the survey data with data on the centroid of each enumeration area (EA)—the most disaggregated level at which population data exist in South Africa—within which each respondent resides. EA centroids are geocoded using global positioning system coordinates captured automatically by the tablet during the interviews. This allows us to combine the survey data with the location of approximately 22,600 polling stations as well as an equal number of voting districts, on the basis of their location during the 2016 municipal elections (see fig. 1). Geocoded data on voting districts and polling stations were made available by South Africa's IEC. EAs are quite small, and with approximately 80,000 distributed across South Africa, EAs on average contain only 690 citizens and cover an area of less than 4 × 4 kilometers, although some are as small as a building block.

The sampling strategy identified respondents using a random walk from a randomly generated starting point in each EA (an approach that does not rely on individual respondents being present in official population registers). Consequently, respondents are, on average, randomly distributed within the EA. Distance to the polling station captures the "shoe leather costs" of traveling to the polls as well as the opportunity cost of the time spent going to the polls (Haspel and Knotts 2005). Following McNulty et al. (2009), the central causal variable, distance to the polling station, is calculated as the great circle distance from the centroid of the EA where the respondent lives to the unique polling station to which the respondent is administratively assigned.

According to the South African Constitution's article 1d, all elections in the country must be based on a national common voters' roll. The eligible electorate has to be located geographically in order to guarantee that any individual only appears once on the voters' roll. The Electoral Act 73 of 1998

4. Respondents were given different questions on vote buying and turnout buying. Figure A.1 indicates that respondents are able to distinguish the questions.

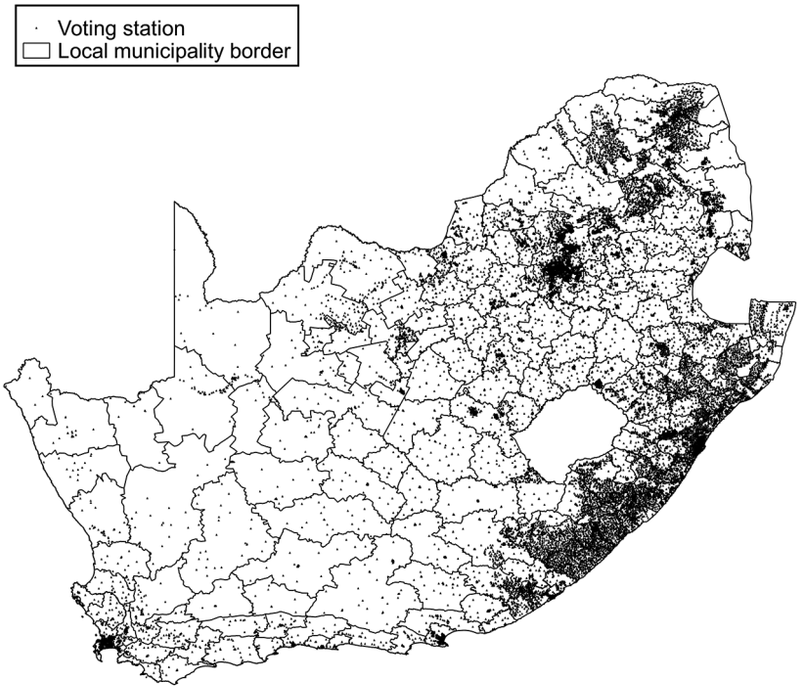

Figure 1. The 22,612 polling stations across South Africa (2016)

provides the basis for the creation of voting districts where one voting district has one polling station and represents one segment of the National Voters Roll (Electoral Act 73, p. 64). An individual will only be able to vote at the unique polling station assigned to the voting district where she resides. We can therefore assign the correct polling station to all respondents in the data set.

Border proximity and the cost of voting

To estimate the causal effect of respondents' cost of voting on the incidence of vote buying, we rely on a border proximity design. The design aims to identify the causal effect of distance to the polling station on exposure to vote buying. Each voting district in South Africa contains a single polling station. However, for voters living near voting district borders, the polling station assigned might not be the closest one. If the closest polling station is located in a neighboring district, voters cannot use it. The voting district border therefore provides us with a geographical discontinuity (Keele and Titiunik 2014). It follows that if the exact location of the voting district border is orthogonal to other factors affecting citizens' exposure to clientelism, the border proximity design provides us with exogenous variation in individual citizens' distance to the polling station.

Voting district delimitation in South Africa

In the case of South Africa, this assumption seems plausible. The South African Delimitation Directorate of the IEC is responsible for delimiting the entire geographical area of South Africa into voting districts, using EAs as building blocks. For the same reason, EAs cannot be split by a voting district. Importantly, voting districts are designed to be exclusively administrative—not political—units since politicians are not elected at the voting district level. Before the national and provincial elections in 1999, delimitation was performed algorithmically by electronically grouping EAs, starting in turn from the north, south, west, and east, such that the resulting voting districts would conform to a number of predetermined rules. Urban voting districts should contain approximately 3,000 voters located within a radius of some 7.5 kilometers of the polling station. Rural voting districts should accommodate some 1,200 voters located within a radius of around 10 kilometers of the polling station (the thresholds have since been relaxed). The algorithmically generated voting districts were then inspected by municipal IEC officials to ensure they would work (and were not cut by, e.g., railways, major roads, or rivers; du Plessis 2003, 50). IEC officials also identified venues that could be used as registration and polling stations. Voting districts were supposed to be as geographically contiguous as possible, so as to secure the highest possible degree of equal access to a polling station in the center of the voting district. However, in practice voters within the same voting district experience large variations in distance to the polling station (de Kadt 2019).

Because of changes in population and settlement patterns, tracked with aerial photography and satellite imagery, the

voting districts have since been revised. To help us understand these changes, we corresponded with a senior IEC official who informed us that the need to accommodate changes in population density often results from such factors as the development of new formal residential areas, new informal settlements, and the depopulation of localities (e.g., decommissioned mines in the Free State province). The actual changes of voting district borders are also informed by a dialogue between municipal IEC officials and local representatives of political parties in so-called local party liaison committees (PLC), which report to provincial and national officials of the IEC.[5] PLCs have representation by all political parties represented in a given municipal council and are chaired by an IEC official. This makes PLCs venues of consultation between the IEC and political parties on matters pertaining to the electoral process—rather than vehicles of partisan gerrymandering.

It is evident that the IEC is conscious of political interests related to voting district delimitation and polling station placement. Our IEC interviewee stated that "PLC members do take seriously the voting district delimitation consultation process." This is so because the "spatial configuration of voting districts and choice of venues as polling stations could either enhance or hinder certain sections of the population from accessing the vote." All voting districts and registration and polling station venues must be confirmed by municipal representatives of all political parties. This means that the political parties in the municipal council need to approve voting district borders and the location of polling stations—which provides an institutional safeguard against electoral engineering.

The role of the municipal IEC official in this process is to ensure that voting district boundaries are configured and venues are chosen as polling stations in a manner that establishes consensus and minimizes disputes. Official dispute data strongly suggest that the IEC is successful in this regard: disagreements are resolved through consensus reached in the PLCs with effectively no formal disputes concerning voting district borders and polling stations (for the 1999 elections, only 11 disputes were filed, corresponding to less than 0.08% of the districts; for the 2016 elections, no formal disputes were lodged with the IEC concerning the 22,600 voting districts). As opposition parties have a strong interest in calling out fraudulent behavior, the extremely low number of disputes is a strong indication that partisan manipulation of voting district borders and polling station placement is very limited. This interpretation is corroborated by the work of de Kadt (2019). In interviews with opposition politicians, de Kadt (2019) finds no indication that the IEC factors in partisan concerns in the design of South Africa's electoral infrastructure. This suggests that the IEC operates independently and that voting district delimitation in South Africa is not captured by partisan interests. We return to this issue below where—as a robustness check—we rerun the analyses using only straight-line voting district borders that are hard to manipulate.

Illustrating the design

To illustrate how we use the voting district delimitation to obtain causal estimates for distance to the polling station, figure 2 shows the border proximity design using actual data. In figure 2, the respondent's home is represented by the circle and polling stations by triangles. The respondent lives close (less than 70 meters) to the voting district border (*solid line*), which is unobservable and in all likelihood unknown to the respondent. The respondent lives approximately 1 kilometer from the polling station. However, since the respondent lives close to the voting district border, one can easily think of a hypothetical situation in which the location of the border had been marginally different (illustrated in fig. 2 by the dotted line). While the hypothetical voting district border is very close to the actual border, for the respondent in this example, it increases the distance to the polling station quite dramatically: from about 1 to about 5 kilometers. For the subset of respondents living within 100 meters of the voting district border, the exact location on either side of the border results in an average difference in distance to the polling station of half a kilometer. In this way, the voting district border presents a discontinuity in distance to the polling station (see fig. A.4). If we zoom in on respondents living close to the voting district border, it is likely that respondent characteristics other than distance to the polling station will, on average, vary smoothly at the border. If this is the case, we can treat respondents living

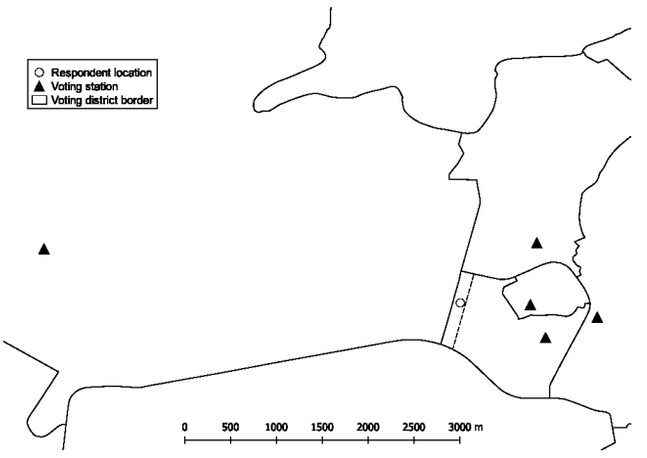

Figure 2. Border discontinuity design

5. There are 213 local and metropolitan municipalities in South Africa with 213 corresponding PLC structures.

on either side of the border—and in close proximity to it—as reasonable counterfactuals for each other: they are on average close to identical on all relevant variables except their cost of voting, measured by their distance to the polling station.

Requirements for causal identification

Our design requires that local party brokers know voting districts well enough to correctly match respondents living on either side of a voting district border to their assigned polling station. This will allow brokers to assess voters' cost of voting. In South Africa, this assumption is plausible given the ANC's dense network of local party branches embedded into local communities throughout the country (Booysen 2011; Darracq 2008). Party agents operating in local communities often have intimate knowledge about the local context and serve as brokers connecting citizens to the party and (local) government—not least around election time (Darracq 2008; Dawson 2014). Information on the location of polling stations is also easily accessible through the IEC's Voting Station Finder on the commission's website, or the IEC South Africa app for mobile phones. Simply typing in a street address of interest results in a visual map showing not only the location of the polling station and street addresses but also the voting district borders. For party agents, this serves as a low-cost way of obtaining information on where voters have to vote and how far they will have to travel (see fig. A.3).

The border proximity design has several advantages in addition to the as-if-random placement of borders. The risk of compound treatments—other treatments overlapping with the cost of voting treatment—affecting the outcome of interest simultaneously is minor. The IEC's voting districts have been created for purposes of electoral efficiency and planning only. Therefore, being located on either side of a voting district border does not overlap systematically with other relevant factors. Identification could still be threatened by indirect compound effects. These occur where the border overlaps with other boundaries by chance, which might affect exposure to vote buying. However, the placebo tests shown later (e.g., fig. A.12) suggest that this is not a cause of concern.

Voter self-selection based on voting district borders is also highly unlikely. Even if voting technology (like the app mentioned above) makes information on voting districts easily accessible to citizens, they have no incentive to use this information to sort on either side of the voting district border. The purpose of voting district borders is technical, not political, so voters would be relocating for the sole reason of affecting their distance to the polling station. They would bear the cost of relocating and receive no benefit (other than a changed distance to the polling station). Voters could choose to self-select into schooling districts (and schools are commonly used as polling stations). For this to pose a risk to identification, school districts and voting districts would have to be identical: voters would have to sort around the school district (i.e., voting district) border, not the school itself. However, in South Africa, school districts and voting districts do not overlap. Empirical tests also find no support for respondent sorting around the border.[6]

Another risk is that distance to the polling station captures party brokers' travel costs when they target citizens. Brokers are more likely to "shirk" from efforts to mobilize voters located farther away (Larreguy et al. 2016; Stokes et al. 2013). Our design rules out this alternative explanation in cases in which brokers work larger areas. Recall how the border proximity design compares voters close to each other—but on opposite sides of the voting district border. This means that although the costs of voting vary for citizens on either side of the voting district border, the distance traveled by party brokers (e.g., from the local party office) should be close to identical.[7] Still, this design trait does not rule out cases in which brokers are working a single polling station. In such cases, brokers are incentivized to work in one voting district, but not the neighboring district, and borders may thus present a discontinuity in broker effort. To address this concern, we show that parties' generic campaign activities are uncorrelated with voters' distance to polling stations (see fig. 4*B*). This suggests that party brokers do not systematically concentrate their efforts in areas closer to polling stations. We corroborate this finding below by showing that results are robust to controlling for polling station size (see fig. A.2), one way to assess broker effort (Bowles, Larreguy, and Liu 2020; Bowles, Larreguy, and Woller 2020; Larreguy et al. 2016). We also show that results hold when limiting the within-voting-district variation in population density, which reduces brokers' incentives to ignore parts of the district (see fig. A.21).

MODELS AND IDENTIFICATION

To estimate the effect of the cost of voting on the incidence of vote buying, we first run the following model:

$$\text{VoteBuy}_i = \beta_1 \text{Distance}_i + \boldsymbol{X}_i\beta + \gamma + \varepsilon_i. \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable, VoteBuy_i, is a dummy that takes the value 1 if respondent i answered yes to receiving an offer to sell her vote in the run-up to the election and 0 otherwise. The analyses using this measure are labeled "individual,"

6. A McCrary sorting test yields $p = .61$ (within 70 meters) and $p = .43$ (within 100 meters). This indicates that respondents do not sort around the border.

7. When peaking, the ANC had 2,700 local party branches (Darracq 2008).

while those using the measure of vote buying in the community are labeled "neighborhood." Distance_i is our proxy for voter i's cost of voting, the distance from the centroid of the EA in which respondent i lives to the polling station. The coefficient of interest is β_1, measuring the association between distance to the polling station and vote buying, and $\boldsymbol{X}$ is a vector of individual-level controls, including, for example, respondents' race and socioeconomic characteristics (see fig. A.5 for a full list of controls). Municipality fixed effects, γ, capture factors that are common to respondents within municipalities, such as the identity of the ruling party in local government and the demographic composition of the municipality.[8] Summary statistics are available in table A.3, and table A.4 provides descriptions of all variables.

As discussed above, distance to the polling station will likely correlate with parties' clientelist efforts, authorities' monitoring efforts, and voters' susceptibility to clientelism. In analyses of how the cost of voting affects the incidence of vote buying, these contextual factors related to distance are unobservable confounders. To minimize the confounding influence of these factors, we employ the following border proximity design:

$$\text{VoteBuy}_i = \beta_1 \text{Distance}_i + \beta_2 \text{DistBorder}_i + \gamma + \varepsilon_i | \text{DistBorder}_i \leq m. \quad (2)$$

Here, we zoom in on respondents' proximity to the voting district border in meters, m, and regress vote buying on respondents' distance to the polling station. Once we zoom in on the invisible voting district borders, respondents' location on either side of the border—and their proximity to the polling station—should not be correlated with other covariates. If Distance_i, in this design, is uncorrelated with the error term, ε_i, β_1 will identify the causal effect of distance to the polling station on vote buying. We include proximity to the voting district border as a control variable, as well as local municipality fixed effects. Local municipality fixed effects allow us to only compare respondents in the same area (because of lack of statistical power, we cannot include border fixed effects). We increase m in small increments. This gradually increases the number of respondents at the cost of relaxing the as-if-random sorting of citizens around voting district borders.

Full sample results

Figure A.5 reports coefficients from a model corresponding to equation (1). The coefficient of interest (reported in the first row) is positive and significant when vote buying is measured at the individual level (and indistinguishable from zero when measured in the neighborhood). The model suggests that, on average, respondents living 1,000 meters farther from the polling station face a 0.8% increased probability of being exposed to vote buying. Recall how distance to the polling station not only captures the cost of voting but may correlate with unobservables like citizens' susceptibility to clientelist practices. The positive coefficient on the Distance variable suggests that the confounding, contextual factors influencing how distance is related to vote buying are larger than the causal effect of the cost of voting.

Figures A.7 and A.8 and tables A.1 and A.2 document that the results from figure A.5 are robust across a range of specifications including voting district size fixed effects, racial classification fixed effects, and controls for language instead of racial groups.

Causal estimation

Figure 3 plots the coefficient of interest, β_1 from equation (2), zooming in on respondents living close to voting district borders. To see how the coefficient changes as we allow for more sorting, we gradually increase the values of m. It is important to note that whereas the proximity to the voting district border is capped at particular intervals, the variable of interest (respondents' distance to the polling station) is free to vary continuously.

When we zoom in on respondents living close to the unobservable district border, the coefficient of interest turns negative: distance to the polling station now has a negative effect on the incidence of vote buying. For m less than about

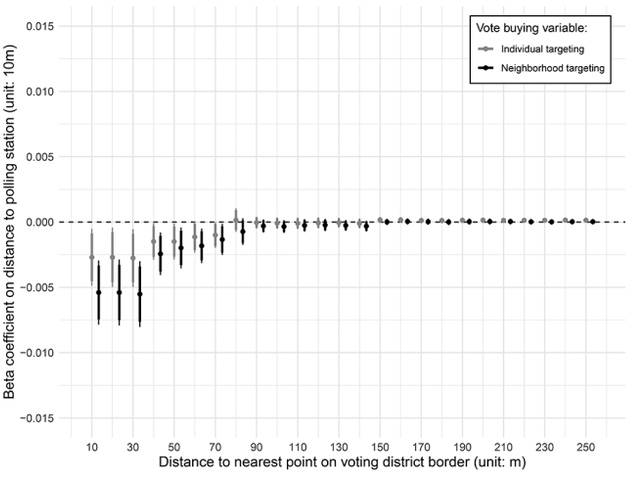

Figure 3. Border discontinuity estimation, which builds on equation (2). The number of respondents is 70, 172, and 513 for subsets within 10, 40, and 80 meters, respectively. Figure A.19 additionally controls for longitude and latitude.

8. Identical results obtain for estimators other than ordinary least squares; see fig. A.6.

70 meters, the coefficient is significantly negative. This is the case whether we measure vote buying at the individual level or in the neighborhood. Results hold when using a single dependent variable measuring whether respondents were targeted with any of the two (see fig. A.15). The reason, we argue, is that the border proximity design removes the confounding influence of other variables related to distance.

For respondents living within 30 meters of the voting district border, the effect is strongest with a coefficient of 0.0025 and 0.005 for individual targeting and neighborhood targeting, respectively. The magnitude of the coefficient for individual vote buying implies that a citizen living 1 kilometer closer to the polling station is 0.25% more likely to be exposed to vote buying compared to an otherwise identical citizen 1 kilometer farther away. Measured at the neighborhood level, the estimate is 0.5%. This corresponds to a 4%–9% increase from the baseline probability of being targeted.

As respondents living farther from the border are included in the analysis, the absolute size of the negative coefficient falls (as does the uncertainty due to a larger sample size). It is unsurprising that the coefficient increases, when we gradually increase m and zoom out from the border region. In the limit, where m is unbounded, the coefficient of interest from equation (2) will approach the positive (but confounded) coefficient from equation (1). This result provides evidence that parties target vote buying campaigns at voters with low costs of voting—living in close proximity to polling stations.

This interpretation could be challenged by a number of alternative explanations. First, it is possible that our findings may reflect higher levels of general clientelist distribution in the vicinity of polling stations, rather than an increase in vote buying specifically. This is particularly the case in dominant party systems where turnout buying is a common clientelist strategy for mobilizing voters. To check this possibility, we reproduce the findings of figure 3 using a measure of turnout buying instead of vote buying. This question asks respondents: "How often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food, or a gift or money if you would show up to vote in the elections?" Unlike the vote buying question, the turnout buying question asks respondents whether they have been offered material benefits if they would turn out to vote. The survey was designed to capture differences between the two questions, and although some respondents might still find it hard to distinguish between the two, figure A.1 shows that respondents answer the questions on vote buying and turnout buying quite differently. Indeed, figure 4*A* shows that the effect of distance on turnout buying is smaller compared to the corresponding effect on vote buying, shown in figure 3. This suggests that voters' cost of voting mainly affects exposure to vote buying (rather than turnout buying).

While the results for vote buying are consistent with models of how parties use clientelism to target (swing) voters with low costs of voting (Gans-Morse et al. 2014), the results for turnout buying do not match theoretical priors to the same extent. On the one hand, we expect (and find) that low costs of voting significantly increase the likelihood of vote buying exposure. On the other hand, the relationship between distance to polling stations and turnout buying is negative (fig. 4*A*). This does not conform to the expectation of theoretical models that, when the cost of voting increases,

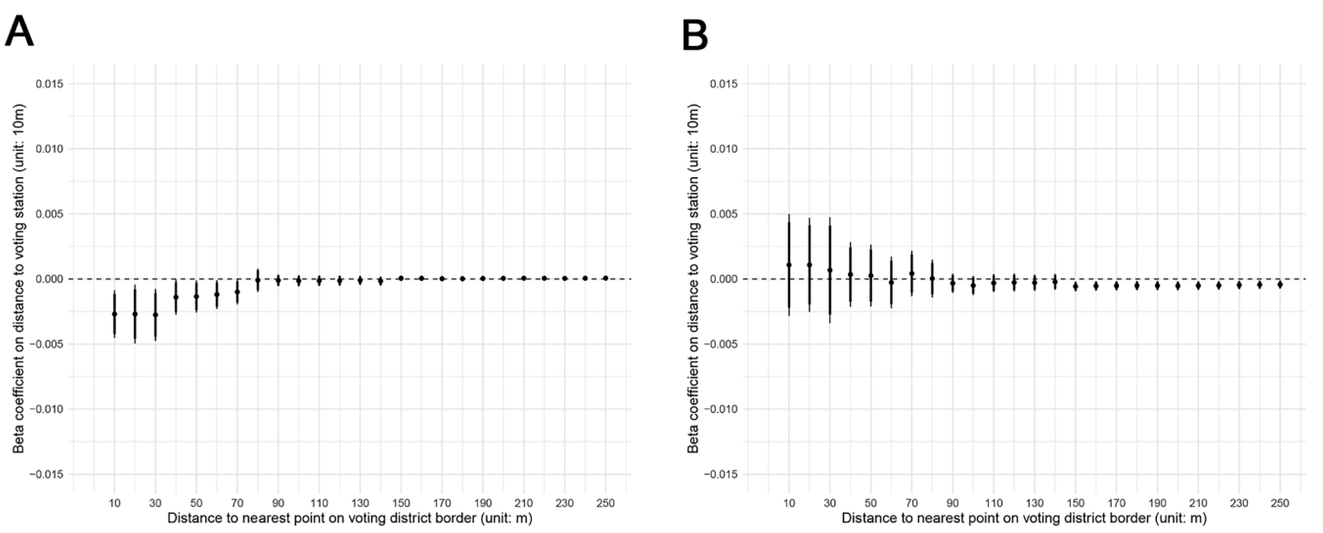

Figure 4. Border discontinuity estimation with alternative outcomes: *A*, turnout buying; *B*, general canvassing.

supporters become less inclined to vote—which gives parties an incentive to distribute material incentives in return for turning out to vote (Gans-Morse et al. 2014).

We interpret these results as a strong indication that the effect of the cost of voting pertains to vote buying exposure and is not a reflection of a bundle of clientelistic strategies. However, we also need to interpret the effect of costs of voting on turnout buying with caution because the data within the causal subset—close to voting district borders—are better suited to study vote buying than turnout buying. This is because the design only includes voters closer to voting district borders and tends to exclude voters with the longest distances to polling stations, who are also the most likely targets of turnout buying (see fig. 8). Nonetheless, while distance to polling stations has a strong negative effect on vote buying, there is some evidence that turnout buying is sometimes used to mobilize voters closer to polling stations. Indeed, in addition to their use of vote buying strategies, it is plausible that parties engage in turnout buying to mobilize supporters who—in spite of living close to polling stations—are disinclined to turn out.

Another threat to our interpretation is that the results reflect more generic forms of campaign activity—such as regular door-to-door canvassing—and that parties use canvassing to target people living closer to polling stations. If party operatives run more active election campaigns in areas closer to polling stations, what we observe as vote buying—and a negative effect of distance on vote buying—could be a reflection of a higher frequency of (clientelist and nonclientelist) campaign activity targeted at voters with low costs of voting. To address this concern, figure 4*B* replaces the vote buying variable in figure 3 with a measure of general campaign activity that asks: "During the election campaign, did any party or representative of a party contact you?" This question asks whether respondents have been contacted by a party (representative) but does not ask about the involvement of clientelist distribution in such a contact. Therefore, it is well suited to test whether generic campaign activity (e.g., lawful door-to-door canvassing) is used differently from (unlawful) vote buying—and in particular whether distance to polling stations affects vote buying campaigns differently from broader campaign activity.[9]

As shown in table A.3, the proportion of respondents who report being contacted by a party (representative) is far higher (17.8%) than respondents who report being targeted by vote buying offers (5.8%). When we reproduce the analysis in figure 3 using campaign activity as the dependent variable, figure 4*B* shows no effect of distance to polling stations on general campaign activity. This suggests three things. First, the vote buying measure and the campaign activity measure capture different phenomena: vote buying is not just an expression of more general campaign activity. Second, generic campaign activity is geographically more spread out and less targeted—relative to voters' distance to polling stations—than vote buying. Indeed, whereas generic campaign activity seems to be orthogonal to distance to polling stations, vote buying campaigns are more geographically targeted at voters closer to polling stations. Third, since brokers are not less likely to target general campaign activity at voters farther from polling stations, the negative effect of costs of voting on vote buying exposure is not an obvious consequence of brokers' shirking on their efforts to target voters far from polling stations and population centers.

Finally, parties may use clientelism and vote buying more frequently in competitive elections (Driscoll 2018). The effect of the cost of voting on parties' use of vote buying strategies could be stronger in highly contested elections, where parties cannot solely rely on mobilizing latent supporters (Nichter 2008) but also have to compete for undecided voters. As an extension of the results in figure 3, we have therefore examined how electoral competition moderates the impact of distance to polling stations on vote buying. As a proxy for political competition, we use the absolute difference—the vote margin—between the vote shares of the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA), the main opposition party in South Africa, measured at the municipality level (see table A.4). Table A.6 provides evidence that electoral competition—which is likely higher in municipalities with relatively more swing voters—strengthens the effect of distance to the polling station on vote buying. The stronger negative effect of distance on vote buying in competitive districts is consistent with the literature. Indeed, Gans-Morse et al. (2014) suggest that clientelist parties target swing voters with low costs of voting—who are inclined to vote—and are therefore offered benefits in return for supporting the distributing party. Our findings are consistent with this idea, as the effect of the cost of voting on vote buying is stronger in highly competitive municipalities.

Our findings have several implications for the wider theoretical literature on parties' use of different types of clientelist strategies. First, the cost of voting has a negative effect on vote buying. This is consistent with the literature emphasizing that low cost of voting causes parties to switch from turnout buying to vote buying strategies (Gans-Morse et al. 2014). Second, we find a negative effect of distance to polling stations on turnout buying. In theory, the effect of distance on turnout

9. Generic campaign activity—and brokers making contact with voters—may also happen in contexts such as party rallies. We account for this by controlling for whether respondents have attended any party meetings or rallies during the election campaign (see tables A.3 and A.4 for details).

buying should be positive, but we do not find support for this idea. Although the border proximity design is less ideal for capturing the effect of distance on turnout buying (farther from polling stations), our results provide some indications that clientelist distribution is sometimes used to mobilize turnout closer to polling stations. Finally, our results show that vote buying is much more targeted at voters with low costs of voting than general campaign activities. This suggests that parties tailor their use of clientelist distribution to the local electoral infrastructure, whereas general campaign activities are more widely used and less targeted at voters with low costs of voting.

ROBUSTNESS

Figure 5 summarizes results from a type of balance test that explores whether distance to the polling station is uncorrelated with covariates for respondents close to the voting district border. We rerun a modified equation (1), in which we regress the distance to the polling station on covariates at increments of 10 meters (in the interval from 10 to 250 meters). If the design is valid, we would expect that the association between distance and other covariates is weaker for respondents close to the voting district border.

For all covariates, except a dummy for respondents living in rural areas and a dummy for white respondents, there is no association for respondents close to the border. The positive association between distance to the polling station and the rural dummy reflects that rural voting districts are systematically larger than urban districts. In rural areas, the positive association between the white dummy and distance to the polling station may arise if white citizens are more likely to own and reside on farms, while black and colored citizens tend to live in smaller towns where polling stations are also located. In urban areas, the positive association may arise if white citizens disproportionately live in gated communities within suburban neighborhoods at a distance from urban centers where polling stations tend to be located. This is consistent with the fact that the racialized urban segregation of the apartheid regime has persisted in South Africa.

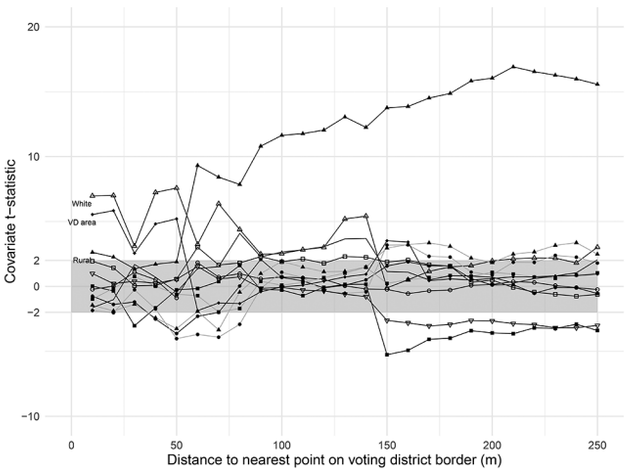

Figure 5. Balance tests. $\text{Distance}_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i$ is estimated on subsets conditioned on distance to the voting district border, where βX_i is a vector of plausible pretreatment covariates. At the polling station level: dummy indicating rural area, ANC and DA electoral results in 2000, polling station size (registered voters), and voting district size. At the respondent level: education, occupation, racial group, poverty, and 2016 election registration status.

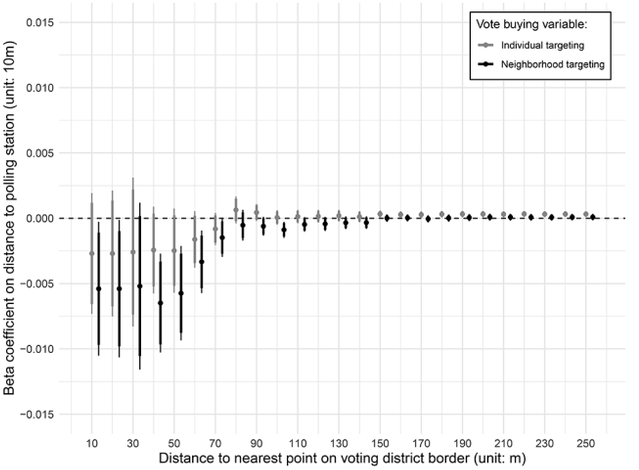

Figure 6. Causal estimation addressing imbalances. Identical to figure 3, except that the model includes dummies for white respondents, voting district size, and rural residence.

Overall, however, figure 5 shows that when we zoom in on respondents close to the voting district border, most relevant covariates are uncorrelated with distance to the polling station. This suggests that the design does in fact capture as-if-random placement on either side of voting district borders. To further probe the robustness of the effect of the cost of voting on exposure to vote buying, the analysis in figure 6 includes dummy variables for white respondents and respondents living in rural areas. This does not change the substantial interpretation of our estimates from figure 3. In fact, including the controls results in effect sizes that are more consistent across the measures of vote buying, even if the statistical uncertainty increases (an effect of 0.3%–0.5% when moving from 1,000 to 2,000 meters). Figure A.20 shows that the results remain unchanged for subset analyses when we exclude white or colored respondents and respondents in rural areas, respectively.

Placebo borders

Figure A.12 shows results from analyses identical to those reported in figure 3, except that they zoom in on respondents living close to two placebo borders—ward and mesozone

boundaries—instead of voting district borders. The idea is that if voting district demarcations overlap with other, politically important boundaries, this might be driving the results. Figure A.12 shows that the coefficient on distance shows no particular pattern for subsets of respondents living close to mesozone boundaries or ward boundaries. This finding is consistent with the argument that we can treat the cost of voting as exogenous for respondents close to the voting district border. The finding is particularly strong since mesozone and ward boundaries to some extent are expected to overlap with voting district borders by pure chance.[10]

Institutional manipulation

Our identification strategy hinges on the assumption that the electoral infrastructure is orthogonal to respondent characteristics. In addition to the qualitative evidence from the IEC above, we examine whether there is evidence of political manipulation of (1) the location of voting district borders and (2) the location of polling stations.

Gerrymandering of voting districts constitutes only a minor risk since local government politicians in South Africa are (in part) elected at the ward level, not at the level of voting districts. Still, we test whether our results are driven by electoral engineering of voting district borders by rerunning the analysis using only those voting district borders that would be particularly hard to manipulate. Specifically, we extract individual line segments (coordinate pairs) from all the voting districts if the length of the line segment—the distance between the two pairs of (X,Y)-coordinate points—is above the 90th percentile of line segment lengths. The intuition is that a district border of 1 kilometer that is made up of only two pairs of (X,Y)-coordinates (a straight line) is a lot less flexible compared to a 1 kilometer border made up of, say, 10 points. Table A.5 shows results from analyses using only straight border segments; results remain robust.

Our design would be challenged, also, if the location of the polling stations was manipulated by partisan interests. A particular concern is that the ANC might seek to tilt competitive wards by directing polling stations to areas supporting the ANC but located within competitive wards (for a similar argument, see Nichter [2008]).[11] The ANC could potentially skew political competition in highly contested wards by decreasing the costs of voting for ANC supporters within those

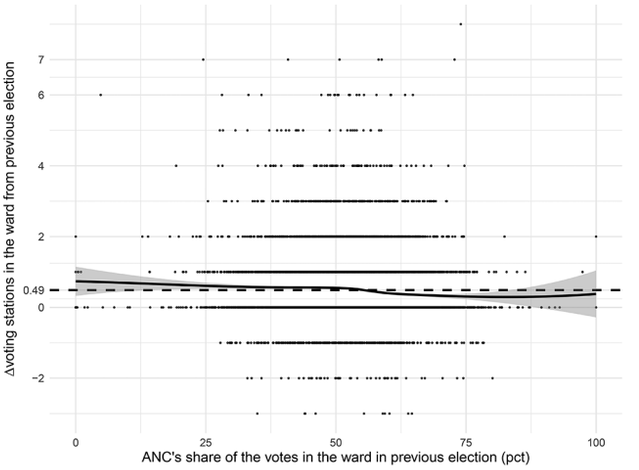

Figure 7. Detecting political manipulation of polling station expansion. Dashed line is global mean. Data represent municipal elections in the years 2006, 2011, and 2016. Year 2000 not included due to the lagged nature of the *X*-axis.

wards. To explore this possibility, figure 7 plots the change in the number of polling stations in a given ward as a function of the support enjoyed by the ANC in that ward in the previous municipal election. If new polling stations tend to be placed in, say, previously competitive municipalities, it could indicate that the ANC assigns polling station locations strategically.

Even if there is a tiny tip around the ANC vote share of 55% in the previous election in figure 7, the loess curve is close to flat: irrespective of the level of ANC's vote share in the previous election, most wards have seen an average increase of 0.5 polling stations. The slight decrease around 55% is unlikely a consequence of deliberate gerrymandering. Municipal elections in South Africa are conducted using a mixed electoral system, combining proportional party lists and ward-based single-member districts (Justesen and Schulz-Herzenberg 2018). A vote share of 55% constitutes a majority situation with strong ANC dominance—far from the closely contested elections where one expects to see gerrymandering.

Figure 7 only accounts for the potential strategic use of additional polling stations—not how the same number of polling stations might be reshuffled. Between the 2011 and 2016 elections, 11.7% of polling stations moved more than 50 meters (8.8% in the causal subset). Generally, for polling stations moving more than 50 meters, the median polling station moved 262 meters, and 75% moved less than 671 meters. Thus, even though a proportion of the polling stations have been relocated, the actual distance they have been moved is often small, corresponding to a relocation across the street or farther down the road.

Moreover, moving polling places does not seem to improve ANC vote shares. For polling stations that moved more than

10. Appendix sec. J contains a brief description of wards and mesozones. Figure A.13 suggests that the results in fig. A.12 are not driven by the smaller subsamples.

11. The logic applies to all parties. However, since ANC is the dominant party, it is the most likely party to exert influence on the location of polling stations.

50 meters between 2011 and 2016, the ANC's vote share was reduced by 6.1 percentage points on average, compared to a reduction of 3.2 percentage points for polling stations with the same location. Even if the ANC were to attempt it, it seems to have little success in relocating polling stations for electoral purposes (which is consistent with the qualitative evidence above). Admittedly, we cannot entirely rule out that voting district borders or polling station placement might sometimes be subject to political manipulation and gerrymandering. However, our results are consistent with de Kadt (2019), who finds that the IEC operates independently of partisan interests. Combined with the evidence we have presented, this strongly suggests that political manipulation of South Africa's electoral infrastructure is not driving our results.

Inference

Figure 8 shows results from comparisons of means for relevant covariates across estimation samples. If the means are similar across sample subsets, this indicates that the respondents included in the border proximity analyses are not on average different from those included in the full sample (except that in the subsamples zooming in on the border, distance to the polling station is as-if random).

Generally, there are only minor differences across subsamples, suggesting that the border proximity subsamples are representative of the full sample. A few exceptions include the two variables Distance to the polling station and Size of the voting district, both of which are smaller by construction in the causal subsamples. There are more borders per area in smaller voting districts, which means that our causal subsets inadvertently include a disproportionate number of geographically smaller voting districts. This also means that the average distance from the respondent to the polling station is smaller in the subsamples. However, since voting districts are politically inconsequential, there is little reason to suspect that this should threaten inference. Also, figure 8 suggests that the causal subsamples are from slightly more competitive municipalities, perhaps because they are more urban. Thus, the difference between ANC and DA vote shares at the municipal level is 3.6 percentage points smaller for the 70 meter subset compared to the full sample, although only 1.2 percentage points smaller for the 50 meter subset. The setting in which we are able to identify effects of distance may thus be slightly more competitive, although less so close to the voting district border.

CONCLUSION

We show that the cost of voting—proxied by the distance to polling station—negatively affects individuals' likelihood of being targets of vote buying. The reason, we argue, is that citizens living closer to the polling station have lower costs of voting. Parties therefore use clientelism to sway the party choice of voters who are already more inclined to vote.

In order to identify the causal effect of distance on citizens' exposure to vote buying campaigns, we have used a design that zooms in on respondents living close to voting district borders in South Africa. These borders are unobservable and inconsequential for citizens, except that they assign citizens to

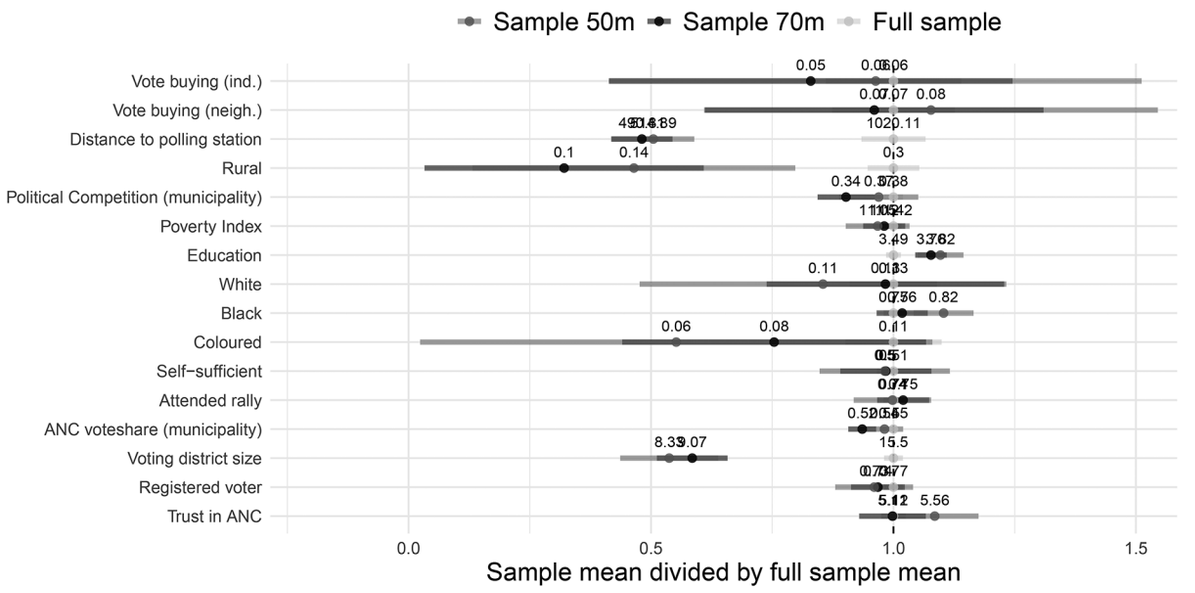

Figure 8. Descriptives for covariates across subsamples. Shaded lines represent 95% confidence intervals. For presentational reasons, "Indian" is excluded. Full sample mean for this variable is 0.01, sample within 70 meters is 0.03, and sample within 50 meters is 0.005.

their polling station and, therefore, determine voters' cost of traveling to vote on election day. Zooming in on subsamples of respondents in close proximity to the voting district border allows us to achieve near-random assignment of confounding variables and exogenous variation in distance to the polling station. Using the border proximity design, we find a robust negative effect of the cost of voting on the likelihood of being targeted by vote buying offers.

These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, our results suggest that the cost of voting does in fact influence clientelist strategies (Nichter 2008). The two dominant models on clientelist targeting in the literature—the swing voter (Stokes 2005) and core voter (Nichter 2008) models—are divided exactly on the issue of voters' inclination to vote. More recent contributions use costs of voting to distinguish between swing and core voter targeting strategies (Gans-Morse et al. 2014). In cases in which citizens have high costs of voting, parties mobilize core voters through turnout buying, but when citizens face low costs of voting, parties attempt to sway swing voters with vote buying (Gans-Morse et al. 2014). Our results support one part of this theoretical setup: parties use vote buying strategies to target voters with low costs of voting. In terms of turnout buying, the results are less clear and do not conform to the expectations of existing models—but this may (at least in part) be an artifact of the border proximity design that excludes a subset of respondents who, on average, reside farther from polling stations, where turnout buying is likely to be more common. However, our findings do show that the effect of distance on vote buying strategies is not driven by general election campaigning—such as nonclientelist door-to-door canvassing and in-person visits—in the vicinity of polling stations. This suggests that in contexts where vote buying and electoral clientelism feature on the menu of strategies used by political parties during elections campaign, parties discriminate between their use of clientelist campaigning and other more generic forms of election campaigning—and use those two modes of mobilizing political support in different ways.

In the bigger picture, our article speaks to questions on how the design of electoral institutions may affect the linkage strategies political parties use to marshal political support (Bowles, Larreguy, and Woller 2020). Our results suggest that in a context in which clientelist parties cannot manipulate the electoral infrastructure itself, they adapt their voter mobilization strategies to the local electoral landscape: Clientelist election campaigns—in particular those relying on costly vote buying—are disproportionately targeted at people whose votes are less costly to buy. While generic forms of election campaigning by parties may be less contingent on voting district delimitation and the placement of polling stations, our results show that low costs of voting increase parties' use of vote buying strategies during election campaigns. This suggests that parties and their brokers carefully consider the local geographical architecture of electoral institutions to tailor and orchestrate their use of clientelist distribution during election campaigns.

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