

Hi WGAPE,

Thank you in advance for your feedback! This paper includes material that I expect will be expanded into a few chapters of my dissertation. I welcome feedback on any aspect of the paper, but I did want to point out a few areas where feedback/suggestions would be really helpful for this paper and the larger project.

I do have funds to return to Kenya to do further iterations of this experiment, and so I welcome any suggestions on ways to change it, improve it, or make it more convincing. Suggestions for different sorts of tests, experimental or otherwise, would also be much appreciated.

I would like to do more to support my claim that a lot of vote buying cannot be understood as a form of clientelism. I don't think there is one piece of information that I can bring to bear on this that would be conclusive, so my strategy is to make as many points as possible that support the claim. Are there other pieces of information I could collect or tests I could run that would make this section more convincing?

For other sections of the dissertation I would like to use observational data that I am in the process of collecting to test some spatial implications of the argument and experimental results. Given what I find in the experiments, I would like to identify some implications for where we should expect to observe the most vote buying and where vote buying should be most effective (I distinguish vote-buying attempts from vote selling with survey list experiments that measure how much vote buying there is and how influential vote buying is in shaping vote choice).

I would be grateful for suggestions about the types of tests you might find convincing. The argument is that vote buying conveys information to voters about the politicians' ability and willingness to channel patronage and targeted benefits to poor voters. The experimental results also indicate that vote buying generates expectations of ethnic favoritism in the allocation of these benefits. Are there places where we would expect this information to be more important or influential on vote choice? For example, are there implications for the relationship between vote buying and community level ethnic heterogeneity? Or about whether ethnic minorities in communities will be targeted? Should we observe more vote buying where all candidates are from the same ethnic group? Should we observe more vote buying where the candidates are younger or less experienced politically, as voters would have less information about them from which to make an inference about their future behavior? Should the information signal be stronger in places where the incumbent has not been active with constituency development projects?

Thanks!

# Why Do Politicians Buy Votes When The Ballot Is Secret? Theory And Experimental Evidence From Kenya\*

Eric Kramon<sup>†</sup>

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Distributing money and other gifts to voters is a common campaign strategy in Kenya. In a survey conducted by the Afrobarometer after the country's 2002 elections, almost 45 percent of respondents report having been offered a bribe or a gift in exchange for their vote. In a survey I conducted after the 2007 elections, around 25 percent of voters report having received money from someone connected to a politician. A study conducted during the 2007 election campaign found that parliamentary candidates spent on average 40 percent of their budget on the distribution of material benefits to voters before election day (CAPF, 2008).

Much of the literature refers to this campaign strategy as "vote buying" (Schaffer, 2007; Stokes, 2007). Evidence from around the world illustrates that Kenya's experience is not unique. Indeed vote buying has a long history. It was prevalent in the Roman Republic (Yakobson, 1995) and during elections in 19th century Britain and the United States (O'Leary, 1962)). As democratic elections have spread across the globe since the early 1970s, so too has vote buying. Scholars have documented widespread use of the campaign strategy in countries as diverse as Nicaragua (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2011), Argentina (Brusco

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<sup>†</sup>Predoctoral Fellow, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University; PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles. Email: kramon@ucla.edu

et al., 2004; Stokes, 2005), Taiwan (Wang and Kurzman, 2007), and Lebanon (Corstange, 2010), as well in such African countries as São Tomé and Príncipe and Nigeria (Bratton, 2008; Vicente, 2008).

In this paper, I address a central theoretical puzzle of vote buying: Why, when the ballot is secret, do politicians expend limited resources buying votes? In a context of ballot secrecy, vote buyers cannot directly enforce vote-buying contracts. As a result, would-be vote sellers may simply take the money and vote according to some other criteria. Politicians have long recognized this problem. Roman politician and thinker Cicero complained that private voting “[allowed] a man to wear a smooth brow while it cloaks the secrets of his heart, and leaves him free to act as he chooses, while he gives any promise he may be asked to give” (Yakobson, 1995). Centuries later, when the British enacted legislation providing for the secret ballot, a parliamentarian noted that “the Ballot Act had promoted that most un-English practice of taking bribes from both sides, or voting against the side from which a bribe had been accepted” (O’Leary, 1962). Given this commitment problem, why would politicians in some contexts spend such vast sums buying votes?

Most often, vote buying is classified as a form of clientelistic exchange in which small material goods such as money or food are distributed to voters right before an election in the hopes of receiving their vote (Schaffer, 2007). Given this conceptualization, scholars have tended to explain vote buying’s effectiveness by emphasizing the mechanisms that the literature has found to promote cooperation between patron and client in the context of clientelist exchange. These mechanisms include the use of political machines to monitor voters (Stokes, 2005), repeated and ongoing personal interactions (Hicken, 2011; Stokes, 2005), or the role of social norms of reciprocity in leading those who receive resources to support the vote buyer (Finan and Schechter, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>An alternative explanation posits that in the context of ballot secrecy, politicians circumvent the commitment problem by purchasing the turnout of their known supporters (Cox and Kousser, 1981; Nichter, 2008).

I build upon recent conceptual scholarship about vote buying (Hicken, 2011; Schaffer and Schedler, 2007) and argue that the term vote buying is generally applied to a set of diverse phenomena. Some of these types of vote buying are clientelist in nature, and therefore can be understood through the lens of clientelist exchange. Yet I argue that much vote buying in Kenya and Africa more broadly does not share the features that the literature usually associates with clientelism. This is not to suggest that clientelism and patron-client ties are not important in Africa—indeed a long literature demonstrates that they are—or that some instances of vote buying on the continent cannot be explained through a clientelist framework, but rather that a great deal of vote buying cannot be fully understood through the lens of clientelism. The distinction between non-clientelist and clientelist vote buying is important because the mechanisms that make clientelist vote buying effective may be different than those which sustain non-clientelist vote buying. In the beginning sections of this paper, I draw upon qualitative and survey evidence from Kenya to support the claim that a large proportion of, though by no means all, vote buying in this context is relatively non-clientelist.

After establishing the non-clientelist nature of much vote buying in Kenya, I build upon evidence from focus-group discussions and interviews conducted in Kenya, past empirical results from experiments in Africa, and the qualitative and historical literature that has studied African elections to develop an argument explaining why politicians engage in relatively non-clientelist vote buying. I argue that in African and similar contexts, politicians buy votes because of the information it conveys to voters about their credibility with respect to the provision of targeted, particularistic, or patronage goods to poor voters. Vote buying signals credibility as a patron for the poor, and is therefore most effective with poor voters. Where vote buying conveys such information, vote buying is a dominant strategy for politicians—failure to buy votes when others do so is disadvantageous for a politician seeking to win votes from a largely poor electorate. Thus vote buying is effective inasmuch

as it establishes a politician's credentials as a candidate who will provide direct benefits to poor constituents. Where the poor have low expectations about politician credibility with respect to programmatic promises (Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008) do not expect to benefit from policies and programs, or lack the resources or information to monitor policy performance, credibility in this respect is effective in building political support.

I thus provide an alternative to explanations of vote buying's effectiveness with the poor that focus on the greater marginal utility of small material goods to poor voters. Whereas these explanations do not account for the commitment problem ballot secrecy poses to vote buying (Stokes, 2005), my argument provides a logic that explains why politicians buy votes even when they cannot or do not attempt to directly enforce a vote-buying contract.

In addition to testing the implications of the argument, I investigate the relationship of vote buying to ethnic voting, a prevalent political behavior in Africa (Carlson, 2010; Ferree, 2006; Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2005). The argument suggests two potential ways in which vote buying and ethnic identity might interact. First, due to strong perceptions of ethnic favoritism by politicians in Africa (Barkan and Chege, 1989; Burgess et al., 2010; Franck and Rainer, 2009; Kramon and Posner, 2011; Posner, 2005) politicians who provide patronage are expected to channel resources to their coethnics. Because vote buying builds credibility as a provider of patronage and those who provide patronage are expected to favor their coethnics, vote buying could be most effective with coethnics, thus reinforcing ethnic voting. On the other hand, vote buying could be a way to overcome a lack of common ethnic identity, signalling to recipients that the candidate is a credible patron despite the fact that expectations of ethnic favoritism would suggest otherwise. Vote buying would thus be particularly effective with non-coethnics.

Strong norms against supporting vote-buying politicians pose a challenge to the development of empirical tests of the argument. In particular, survey-based approaches risk bias due to social desirability problems (Corstange, 2010; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2011). I

therefore test the implications of the argument using data from a set of survey experiments I developed and conducted in multiple regions of Kenya. The experiments are designed to measure vote buying's effectiveness and to test my and other arguments about why it might be effective. They are also explicitly designed to avoid the problems of social desirability bias that can threaten other survey-based approaches. In addressing vote buying with an experimental methodology, this paper contributes to a growing literature that uses experiments to study clientelism and vote buying in African settings (Vicente, 2008; Wantchekon, 2003), as well as to an experimental literature that seeks to understand the factors that influence vote choice in developing countries (Carlson, 2010; Conroy-Krutz, 2008).

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the relationship of vote buying to clientelism, and provide evidence that much vote buying in Kenya is relatively non-clientelist. Second, I develop my argument about vote buying and the signals it conveys to voters about a politician's credibility with respect to the provision of patronage and targeted benefits in the future. Third, I detail the experimental design and the sample. The fourth section presents the main experimental results. I conclude with a discussion of the results' implications for how we understand vote buying in African contexts and for vote buying's relationship to political accountability.

## **Vote Buying and Clientelism**

Politics in Africa is often thought to be fundamentally clientelist (Wantchekon, 2003). Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) define "clientelistic accountability [as] a transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in exchange for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services." This definition is similar to that of Stokes (2007), who defines clientelism as "the proffering of material goods in exchange for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (or will you) support me?"

Because vote buying involves material resources and is proximate to elections, it is often characterized as a particular form of clientelism.

Vote buying is a diverse phenomena, however, and in recent years scholars have begun to recognize that many instances of vote buying do not fit neatly into the clientelist framework (Hicken, 2011; Schaffer and Schedler, 2007).<sup>2</sup> Clientelism is defined by the contingent nature of the exchange, where past or future political support is the attribute that dictates who receives material goods and other targeted benefits (jobs, security, health care, and so on) and who does not (Hicken, 2011; Kitschelt, 2000; Stokes, 2007; Weitz-Shapiro, 2008). Clientelistic relationships are on-going and hierarchical, and tend to rely on iterated and personalized face-to-face transactions (Hicken, 2011; Powell, 1970; Scott, 1972; Stokes, 2005). In addition, clientelist exchange often involves some effort on the part of patrons to monitor the voting behavior of their clients (Hicken, 2011; Stokes, 2005).

Some of the vote buying observers have documented around the world does not fit these criteria for clientelism (Hicken, 2011). Sometimes vote buying is a one-off interaction that occurs right before an election, rather than part of an on-going relationship of exchange. Sometimes the degree of targeting and the level of personalization in the interaction are very low, with goods being distributed in a non-discriminatory manner. Sometimes politicians and parties distribute money and gifts *en masse* and invest little effort in monitoring the subsequent voting behavior of those who receive the goods.

A relatively non-clientelist form of vote buying could involve the following: a politician visits a village or small town and individuals who turn out to see the politician are given cash by his agents. Such an instance clearly involves an attempt to win votes but the exchange is relatively anonymous—the goal seems to be to maximize the number of recipients, not to

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<sup>2</sup>Schaffer and Schedler (2007) critique what they call the “market model” of vote buying, in which vote buying is conceptualized in contractual terms. I interpret their critique as also applying to the notion that all vote buying is clientelist in nature.

target specific individuals—and seems to involve no attempt on the part of the politician’s agents to subsequently monitor recipients’ voting behavior.

In practice, the line between clientelist and non-clientelist forms of vote buying is blurry,<sup>3</sup> both for scholars and for those involved in vote-buying transactions. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to neatly demarcate the line between clientelist and non-clientelist vote buying. Indeed no such line exists. Rather, instances of vote buying each lie somewhere along a spectrum from most clientelist to most non-clientelist. As will become evident in the sections that follow, the experimental method used in this paper to identify vote buying’s effectiveness is well suited to identifying the impact of forms of vote buying that lie more toward the non-clientelist end of the vote-buying spectrum. On the other hand, it is less well suited to identifying the impact of those instances of strongly clientelist vote buying. As I document in the coming paragraphs, however, much of the vote buying we observe in Kenya, and perhaps much of Africa, is of the non-clientelist variety. This is not to suggest that clientelism and patron-client relationships are not prevalent and important to African politics. Indeed a long literature indicates that they are. Rather, I argue that much—but not all—of what we term vote buying is not sustained by clientelistic contract enforcement mechanisms.

### **How Clientelist is Vote Buying in Kenya?**

To determine whether an instance of vote buying is clientelist, Hicken (2011) suggests examining how targeted the vote buying is, whether voters accept multiple bribes (in which case the contingent nature of the exchange can be called into question), and whether politicians invest resources in monitoring those who receive goods. Though this list is not exhaustive, examining vote buying in Kenya as it relates to these items can aid in determining the extent to which clientelist or non-clientelist vote buying is most prevalent.

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<sup>3</sup>(Hicken, 2011) distinguishes between clientelist and what he calls “non-contingent” vote buying.

*How targeted is vote buying?* With respect to the targeting of vote buying, the central question is whether vote buyers target specific individuals—who are expected to provide political support—or whether vote buyers distribute in a less discriminatory manner in which the returns to each individual transaction are less well-known. In the latter case, Hicken (2011) gives the example of a politician handing out gifts along a parade route as an example of highly non-targeted, and therefore non-clientelist, vote buying.

Data about the location of vote buying in Kenya suggests that a large proportion of vote-buying instances occur in settings where the degree of targeting is likely to be very low. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of responses to a survey question asking those who received money from politicians about the location of the vote-buying event. Of the 290 respondents in the sample ( $N = 655$ ) who report having received money from a politician or party before the 2007 elections, fully 57 percent claim to have received the money at a campaign rally. In Kenya, campaign rallies are common venues where politicians' agents distribute money and gifts to voters. At such events, money is generally distributed to most, or depending on the size even all, of those who attend. This suggests a non-discriminatory and non-targeted form of vote buying in over half of the instances reported by survey respondents. Another 16 percent received the money while at the market, a setting where the degree of targeting is less clear. Only about 14 percent received money in a situation where the degree of targeting is likely to be very high: 8 percent at their own home and 6 percent on the side of the road (presumably after being approached).<sup>4</sup> Clearly many Kenyans are being directly targeted personally, but a much larger proportion experience vote buying in settings where the goods are allocated in a less discriminatory manner.

*Do voters receive gifts from multiple parties?* This question is important because the greater the extent to which voters receive multiple gifts, the lower the expectations of

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<sup>4</sup>These are the four most frequently mentioned locations. Others locations included school and the local bar.

political support in return might be Hicken (2011). The survey evidence indicates that voters often do receive gifts from multiple parties. Of those I surveyed who received money before the 2007 elections, about 50 percent claim to have received a bribe from more than one party.<sup>5</sup>

*Do politicians invest in the monitoring of those who they target?* Clientelism generally involves some effort on the part of politicians to monitor voters to ensure that clients follow through on their end of the vote-buying bargain. Generally, politicians can do this in one of two ways: they and their parties can invest in the construction of a political machine (Stokes, 2005); or they can purchase the services of pre-established patrons who do the monitoring on their behalf (Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008).

With respect to the former, Stokes (2005) argues that political machines embed themselves deeply into communities, fostering repeated interactions and facilitating better (if still imperfect) monitoring of voter behavior. These repeated interactions and abilities combine to deter defection. Because political machines appear to solve a fundamental problem of clientelism—that of voter defection from a clientelist bargain—some scholars equate clientelistic politics with machine politics (Gans-Morse et al., 2010).

According to Van de Walle (2007), very few African political parties have the organizational structure or capacity to systematically monitor the votes of those to whom they distribute goods, and often they do not try to do so. In Kenya, for example, parties are weakly organized and lacking in the grassroots infrastructure that tends to define political machines (Stokes, 2005). After the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, the long-time ruling party, KANU, fragmented. Numerous members of the old regime departed KANU to form their own parties that generally serve as the personal vessels of one or a few promi-

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<sup>5</sup>These responses could be biased, however, and so this evidence can only be suggestive. Respondents may believe that accepting a bribe is less morally objectionable if one accepts from multiple parties. Doing so indicates that the person has no problem taking money from a politician but does not actually intend to sell his or her vote.

ment elites and which lack strong societal roots (LeBas, 2011). These new parties have not invested in the kind of organizational development that would be required of a political machine. For example, parties generally do not have provincial or branch offices (LeBas, 2011), nor do they have a stable cadre of grassroots organizers and agents that work on their behalf in between elections. Rather, political mobilizers—those who work for politicians during campaigns—generally renegotiate their “contracts” with parties and politicians before each election. All of this suggests that politicians in Kenya have not invested substantial resources into the party organizational structures required to systematically monitor voters.

Rather than invest in the construction of a political machine, politicians might also buy the services of pre-established patrons and use the patron’s connections and power to monitor voters. In the Kenyan case, the pre-established patrons would generally be chiefs, who still enjoy somewhat discretionary power over local dispute resolution, divorce, and land allocations.

Though this method of monitoring voters surely persists in Kenya, there are several reasons why much of the vote buying that occurs is likely not enforced by the monitoring of traditional patrons. First, if a patron enjoys such power over his clients’ voting behavior, it is not clear that we should observe a great deal of direct vote buying of voters. Rather, the vote buying would be more indirect, with resources moving from the politician to the patron. The patron, preferring to consume most of these resources, would then use their traditional, persuasive, or coercive powers to deliver the votes. Second, though chiefs still enjoy discretionary power over issues important in many communities, their power to monitor voters has diminished. In Baldwin’s (2010) study of chiefs in Zambia, for example, she finds that chiefs have little ability to monitor voters (few people believe the chief can figure out how they voted). Rather, voters tend to support their chief’s preferred candidate because of the information a chiefly endorsement provides, and not because of any mechanisms that are coercive or based on deference to traditional authorities.

In addition, there are many instances in which politicians and their agents bypass the traditional patrons and buy votes wholesale directly from the voters. Indeed most of the political brokers hired by politicians to buy votes tend not to be associated with traditional authorities and are not traditional rulers themselves.<sup>6</sup> These independent political entrepreneurs, who are paid to buy votes, could in principle also be paid to monitor voters. Some of these political entrepreneurs do try to monitor voters, often in quite creative ways,<sup>7</sup> but many of them do not. This is because, as I show in the coming sections, vote buying can be effective without exerting the extra effort to monitor and because politicians have difficulty monitoring all of their agents, and so the agents often have little incentive to expend additional resources monitoring voters. Though they may be able to monitor voters should they choose, in many instances they do not invest in doing so. That a large proportion of individuals who receive bribes do so from complete strangers is suggestive in this respect.

Finally, if the monitoring of voters is widespread, there should be perceptions that the secrecy of the ballot is violated and that powerful individuals can influence an individual's vote. Perceptions are important because clientelist vote-buying exchanges can still be sustained by systematic perceptions of a lack of ballot secrecy (Chandra, 2004). Yet in Kenya there are widespread perceptions of ballot secrecy. In the most recent Afrobarometer survey conducted in the country, respondents were asked whether, despite the secret ballot, powerful individuals could discover how they voted. Over 80 percent responded "not at all likely" or "not very likely." When asked how free they felt to vote for whom they choose without pressure, almost all respondents said "completely free" or "somewhat free." Relative to the extent of vote buying in the country, these are high proportions. Figure 2 displays the distribution of responses to these questions. Of those I surveyed who received money before

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<sup>6</sup>Formally, it is illegal for chiefs to be involved with political campaigns.

<sup>7</sup>Anecdotes abound about the creative ways in which agents try to violate ballot secrecy in Kenya and in other countries. I do not want to discount the importance of these activities. However, they do not appear sufficiently widespread to enforce vote buying contracts with the large proportion of the population that receive money during elections.

the 2007 election, 87 percent believe that the person who gave them the money could not guess how they voted; moreover, 85 percent of all respondents do not believe that anyone connected to a political party can figure out how they voted. When asked whether they knew the person who gave them the money or gift, an overwhelming majority said that they received the bribe from a stranger. As one political mobilizer in a village in the Rift Valley's Eldoret North constituency summed up the perceptions of ballot secrecy in his area: "each of them [other villagers] knows that they can vote how they want in the box and nobody will know."

All of this evidence suggests that much, though by no means all, vote buying in the Kenyan setting is relatively non-clientelist in nature. Consistent with this argument, Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) in their review of the experimental literature on clientelism and vote buying in Africa note that much of the effectiveness of vote buying in the West African settings they study appears to arise due to mechanisms of self-enforcement. They explain that the "self-enforcement of vote buying transactions . . . is arguably the main driver of vote buying's effectiveness in [African countries], and probably the main remaining mystery concerning this phenomenon" They in turn call for "laboratory in the field" experiments designed to shed light on the mystery. This paper contributes directly to that endeavour.

## **Vote Buying and Credibility as a Patron for the Poor**

If much vote buying is not sustained by clientelistic contract enforcement mechanisms, why do politicians spend limited resources distributing money during campaigns? I suggest that in Kenya, and perhaps much of Africa, politicians engage in relatively non-clientelist vote buying because it conveys information about their credibility with respect to the provision of patronage and other targeted goods in the future. In particular, vote buying signals a willingness and capacity to deliver small private goods, which tend to be more highly

valued by poor voters. Vote buying thus signals credibility as a patron for the poor and as a candidate who understands the needs of poor constituents. The signal is particularly strong in Kenya and many other African countries because candidates for parliament or local government receive little financial support from parties and must therefore finance their campaigns using their personal finances (CAPF, 2008). A candidate who is willing and able to finance widespread vote buying during a campaign is perceived to be more likely to provide poor constituents with targeted benefits in the future.

As buying votes conveys a positive message to voters, a lack of vote buying sends a negative signal. Failure to distribute material resources while on the campaign trail sends the message that the candidate—whose wealth and lifestyle are often vastly different than his constituents—is out-of-touch and does not understand the needs of poor constituents (Nugent, 2007). Thus vote buying is often necessary but not sufficient for success in politics. Indeed in this setting, failure to buy votes is a dominated strategy when others are doing so. Politicians are thus in a stable but expensive equilibrium in which most of them spend significant sums buying votes and in which the vote buying is effective inasmuch as it establishes their credentials as acceptable candidates.<sup>8</sup>

Observations about the role of vote buying in other African settings provides support for the argument. In a study of elections in Benin, for example, Banegas (2002) makes the similar argument that distributing material goods during campaigns provides information to voters about a candidate’s willingness to provide targeted goods in the future. In a study of Ghana, Nugent (2007) notes that “voters expect to be showered with gifts as evidence that the candidate genuinely does have local interests at heart.”

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<sup>8</sup>The strategic situation parallels the prisoner’s dilemma. Financially, all politicians would be better off if no one bought votes and they competed on other grounds. However, no politician can commit to not buying votes, and so the dominant strategy for an individual politician is to buy votes. When most politicians do so, vote buying’s effectiveness diminishes for each individual politician. Thus in equilibrium, buying votes is effective to the extent that it keeps a politician on common ground with others who buy votes.

Under what conditions would the information that vote buying conveys be important? In new democracies in Africa and many other developing countries, voter expectations about politicians' and parties' willingness and ability to follow-through on their programmatic and good governance promises are extremely low (Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008). Poor voters may also lack the resources or information with which to monitor politician policy and programmatic performance. In addition, poor voters may not believe that they benefit directly from certain policies. If politicians cannot make credible promises, voters lack the resources to monitor policy performance, or voters do not expect to benefit from policies, voter expectations about future allocations of patronage and other targeted benefits are likely to weigh more heavily in their decision making.

Moreover, institutional structures in many new democracies constrain the ability of many politicians to impact policy or the nature of governance. In most African countries, for example, political power is highly centralized in the office of the executive president (Posner and Young, 2007; Van de Walle, 2007) and legislatures have generally been weak and lacking in effectiveness with respect to policy and the nature of government. This institutional environment constrains the range of outcomes that many politicians can reasonably be expected to impact, and in turn influences the types of politicians that voters tend to desire as their representatives. Kenya provides an excellent example. Knowing that most of their elected representatives would have little chance to impact the nature of government or its policies, parliamentary elections since independence have largely focused on the delivery of development resources and patronage. Indeed the country's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, purposely cultivated the notion that MPs should be judged on their ability deliver resources to constituents and in particular their participation and funding of "self-help" Harambee projects (Widner, 1992). As a result, parliamentary elections have been focused on the selection of a representative to go to the capital and compete for resources on behalf of the constituency (Barkan, 1994; Hyden and Leys, 1972; Throup and Hornsby, 1998). Writing

about Kenya and Tanzania, Hyden and Leys (1972) describe the nature of elections in these countries:

“In different ways the rules of both systems [Kenya’s and Tanzania’s] made it clear that the voter was not being offered the choice of a government; and consequently this reinforced his conviction, based on tradition and experience, that the significance of the election was to choose a local patron who would do most for his particular constituents within the framework permitted by the government.”

The argument has multiple implications that I test in the remainder of the paper. First, if vote buying conveys information to voters, it should have an impact on voter evaluations of candidates, regardless of whether the individual voter has received a handout—observing vote buying should also influence the onlooker’s evaluations. Second, voters should expect vote buying politicians to be more credible providers of patronage goods and, in particular, small private goods. The section that follows outlines my method for testing these predictions.

## **Methodology**

Testing these implications poses an empirical challenge for a number of reasons. First, vote buying is often illegal and violates widely accepted democratic norms. The sensitivity of the subject poses a challenge to qualitative researchers conducting interviews or focus-group discussions and to quantitative researchers conducting surveys: in both instances, the information provided by participants is likely to be biased because of social embarrassment (“social desirability bias”) or fear of legal action. Indeed survey list experiments conducted in Lebanon (Corstange, 2010) and Nicaragua (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2011) have found that survey respondents substantially under-report experiences with vote buying during election campaigns. In my own list experiments conducted in Kenya, I show that there is no bias

in direct survey items asking people whether they received money during the previous election, but that there is large bias in survey items asking whether the receipt of such money influences the vote. Unless the propensity to under-report is distributed randomly across the population, which is unlikely, such under-reporting is likely to bias inferences about key questions related to vote buying (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2011).

A second difficulty arises from the fact that there is no convergence in the literature about the strategies that parties employ when deciding from whom to buy votes. This is problematic because understanding the treatment assignment mechanism—in this case the process that leads some individuals to receive gifts while others do not—is central to causal inference (Morgan and Winship, 2007).

Finally, there is an observational equivalence problem that makes causal inference about vote buying’s impact difficult, at least with cross-sectional data. Different theories of vote buying predict outcomes that are hard to distinguish empirically. In particular, if a respondent expresses support for the party that bought his or her vote, it is difficult to distinguish whether they support the party because of the gift (as in Stokes (2005)) or whether they received the gift because they support the party (as in Nichter (2008)).

The experimental methodology presented in this paper solves each of these problems. First, the design of the experimental manipulations permits a subtlety that does not cue respondents to the research objective. Second, the random assignment of experimental conditions facilitates causal inference. Third, the nature of the experiment ensures that the direction of causality runs from treatment in the vote-buying condition to opinions about politicians, and not the other way around.

The first experiment, which was conducted over a three-week period at the end of July and the beginning of August 2010, works as follows. Study participants are recruited using random sampling techniques (the “random walk” used by Afrobarometer and other survey firms in Africa) and are randomly assigned to a vote-buying condition group or a

control condition group. Each respondent is asked to listen to a recorded radio discussion of a campaign event held by a candidate running to be a member of parliament in the respondent's constituency. The radio report was recorded in Swahili by Nairobi residents and was intended to simulate the type of discussion that might occur on a popular radio station. After listening to the recording, which lasts about 90 seconds, respondents answer a series of questions about what they heard.

Recordings for vote-buying and control groups are exactly identical in almost all aspects. They each discuss the promises that the candidate made about bringing public goods, fighting corruption, and growing the economy, and reference the candidate's qualifications and past experience as a local government councillor. The only difference between the vote-buying and control condition recordings is that the vote-buying recording includes a very short discussion, less than ten seconds, about the fact that agents of the candidate had given out 500 Kenya shillings (about 4 US dollars) to many of the people who attended the campaign event being discussed.<sup>9</sup> In all other respects the recordings are exactly the same and so any differences to answers to post-recording questions designed to assess opinions and expectations of the hypothetical candidate can be attributed to the vote-buying treatment. The nature of the experiment thus permits analysis of whether and why vote buying is effective without the need to ask a single direct question about vote buying itself.

The experiment is by design very simple and the experimental treatment is similarly designed to be subtle. The subtlety was necessary in order not to signal to respondents the purpose of the study and thus potentially bias their responses to post-recording questions. The subtlety also means that the treatment is "weak" in the sense that the vote buying information is short relative to the entire recording. This should bias the study toward a

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<sup>9</sup>Audio recordings are available from the author.

null finding, thus strengthening confidence that the effects I present below are not artifacts of the experimental manipulation.<sup>10</sup>

To address the relationship of vote buying to ethnic voting, I built upon the original experimental design and implemented a second set of experiments with 655 participants in Nairobi and in a set of rural and peri-urban constituencies near Eldoret Town in Kenya’s Rift Valley Province. This experiment was conducted during a three-week period at the end of October and the beginning of November, 2010. In this experiment, cues about the ethnicity of the candidate were integrated into the original treatment and control recordings. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six experimental groups in which they would either hear about a vote-buying or control candidate and hear one of three ethnic cues: no ethnic cue, a coethnic cue, or a non-coethnic cue.<sup>11</sup>

I have taken a number of steps to ensure the construct validity of the experimental treatment (Morton and Williams, 2010). I conducted focus-group discussions and field tests of the audio recordings. Surveys and focus groups indicate that most recipients of money

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<sup>10</sup>The experimental approach is related to a number of recent experiments that use vignettes to identify the factors that determine respondent evaluations of politicians (e.g. Carlson, 2010; Conroy-Krutz, 2008). In these experiments, respondents are generally read short descriptions of competing candidates and are asked to choose the one that they prefer or for whom they would vote. My design is different in that respondents listen to a radio recording about one candidate and answer questions designed to elicit evaluations and expectations about that candidate. I chose this approach for several reasons. First, the radio recording ensures that each respondent is exposed to the exact same treatment. Audio software allows me to ensure that the only difference between the control and treatment conditions is the reference to vote buying. In all other manners, aside from the small difference in length, the recordings for each of the conditions are exactly the same. The potential for enumerator effects, perhaps due to differences in the manner in which vignettes are read, is therefore reduced. An additional advantage of the audio-recording approach is that it permits a subtlety that is more difficult to achieve with vignette-based experiments. Because there are strong norms against appearing to support corrupt politicians, and politicians that buy votes are considered corrupt, it is critical that the experimental design does not cue respondents to the underlying goals of the study. The radio recording provides a good instrument for making the treatment “stick” while at the same time keeping it subtle in a way that reading vignettes does not. A final advantage is with respect to participant privacy. Though enumerators were instructed to conduct the surveys in private, the nature of life in dense urban areas and in tightly knit rural communities is such that survey enumerators often attract attention and curiosity from onlookers. The audio recordings afford participants privacy even if onlookers are close by, reducing the likelihood that post-recording survey questions will be influenced by social dynamics. Indeed the post-survey questions are meaningless to those who did not hear the recording.

<sup>11</sup>In the results presented in this paper, I code coethnic or non-coethnic matches based upon the respondent’s reported ethnicity and the ethnicity that I signalled in the recording that the respondent heard.

from politicians receive the funds at campaign events or meetings. Thus the reference to the distribution of money at a campaign event in the treatment recording is realistic. The same exercises also indicate that most recipients of money receive between 50 and 1,000 Kenya Shillings (the highest was 2,000) with most receiving around 400 or 500 Kenya Shillings (800 Kenya Shillings is about 10 US dollars). Thus the 500 Kenya Shilling amount referenced in the recording will therefore not be unusual to respondents. Finally, data collected during field tests of the audio recordings confirm that most respondents interpret the distribution of money at a campaign event as constituting the giving of “bribes or gifts.”

A common critique of experiments is that they can lack external validity. Or, in other words, it can be difficult to extrapolate the findings from an experiment to real-world settings. That I conducted the experiment in the field in Kenya using random sampling techniques, rather than in a laboratory or with university students in Nairobi, helps to alleviate some external validity concerns. Yet the experiment does not randomly allocate money to voters and then observe their voting behavior afterward, an approach that is ethically problematic. One could reasonably argue that the effect of actually receiving money from a politician may be different from hearing about it in a recording. I concede this point. However, because much vote buying in Kenya and other parts of the developing world is conducted in public settings, such as meetings or campaign events, and people are likely to hear about such behavior from friends and through news sources such as the radio, the experimental treatment employed in the project does capture a real-world political phenomena.

## **Measurement and Data**

After listening to their assigned recording, respondents were asked a series of questions designed to assess their opinions and expectations of the hypothetical candidate presented in the recordings. Because recordings were assigned randomly and identical in all respects except

for the short reference to vote buying, any differences in responses to questions between the vote-buying treatment and control groups can be attributed to the vote buying-information.

Each post-recording question was framed in terms of the participant’s belief in the likelihood of a future event. They were asked to identify their belief on a scale from zero to ten, where zero is equivalent to “no chance at all,” ten is equivalent to “definitely,” and five is equivalent to “fifty-fifty.” To help participants answer the questions, a visual aid was used. Figure A.1 in the appendix presents the visual aid. After being read the questions, respondents were asked to point to the number that corresponded to their belief. Though imperfect, this method improves upon methods that ask participants to select terms such as “likely” or “very likely” because such terms mean different things to different people. Most respondents were very comfortable thinking in terms of probabilities and the visual aid helped facilitate the translation of their beliefs into a number on the scale.

With respect to the impact of vote buying on support for the hypothetical candidate, the main question of interest is response to the question: how likely would you be to vote for the candidate? Post-recording questions also gauged respondents expectations about the politician’s performance in a number of areas, including fighting corruption, helping economic growth, providing public goods, and providing targeted and particularistic benefits to his constituents.

In addition to estimating vote buying’s main effect on the full sample, I also conduct sub-group analyses designed to determine whether vote buying is more effective with poor voters.<sup>12</sup> To address vote buying’s impact on the poor, I break respondents into three household asset classes (low, medium, and high). The household asset class provides a rough measure of household wealth and of the socio-economic status of the respondent. To generate the measure, respondents were asked whether their households have a number of

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<sup>12</sup>The false positive rate can be quite high when one conducts a number of post-hoc sub-group analyses using experimental data. I therefore only conduct sub-group analyses on this theoretically justifiable set of sub-groups.

common items ranging from a cell phone and a radio to a car and computer. Respondents were then placed into asset categories depending on the number of items they own.<sup>13</sup> In the second experiment, the survey also included a question about the respondent's income, which is positively correlated with the asset measure ( $r=0.76$ ). Figure B.1 in Appendix B illustrates the average income in each of the household asset groups, demonstrating the strong correlation household assets and reported household income. Appendix D presents results with alternative coding methods and measurements of wealth.

## **The Sample**

The first round of experiments were conducted with 355 randomly sampled participants in the urban, peri-urban, and more rural areas around Nairobi, Kenya's capital. The second round, which also tested the relationship of vote buying to ethnic voting, was conducted with 655 participants in Nairobi and in the rural constituencies near Eldoret Town in the Rift Valley Province (Figure A.2 in the Appendix A shows the research locations). Within each sampling site, participants were selected using the random walk techniques employed by Afrobarometer and other survey organizations working in Africa.

Study participants have experienced vote buying at about the same rate as the rest of the Kenyan population (as estimated by the Afrobarometer). Of the 1000 participants in the experiments, about 40 percent claim to have received money before the 2007 elections. Eighty percent report that parties or politicians hand out money to voters in the area where they live. Of those who received money, almost all received cash in amounts that varied from about 1 US dollars to almost 15 US dollars, with the modal transfer being about 4 US dollars. In the more rural areas, transfers were much smaller, often amounting to around 50 cents to 1 US dollar. These are fairly substantial transfers in a country with a GDP per

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<sup>13</sup>These include a refrigerator, a sofa set, a radio, a television, a car, a motorcycle, a bicycle, a cell phone, and a computer. The low asset class individuals have 0-3 items, the medium asset class has 4-6 items, and the high asset class has 7-9 items.

capita of around 800 US dollars and where many people, especially in the rural areas, live on a cash income of around 1 US dollar per day.

Table C.1 and the figures in the Appendix C confirm the effectiveness of the randomization procedure: none of the pre-treatment covariates are significant predictors of placement into the vote-buying treatment condition in both experiments and in the pooled full sample.

## Results

I now turn to the main experimental results. First, I present results establishing vote buying's effectiveness. I then present experimental evidence consistent with the main theoretical proposition of the paper: that vote buying builds credibility with respect to the provision of patronage and the distribution of targeted goods and benefits.

### Is Vote Buying Effective?

Do participants prefer a politician who engages in non-clientelist vote buying to an otherwise identical candidate who does not? To address this question, participants were asked to report how likely they would be to vote for the politician in the hypothetical recording. In the full sample of participants in the first baseline experiment, the difference in means between responses of the vote-buying treatment respondents and the control respondents was 0.7, a difference equivalent to about 15 percent of the entire scale. The difference in means is statistically significant with a 95 confidence interval running from 0.012 to 1.39 ( $p = 0.04$  in the T-test of difference of means with unequal variances). Because the construction of the 95 percent confidence interval (and the p-value) relies on parametric assumptions, I also conduct non-parametric Mann-Whitney tests comparing the distribution of responses in treatment and control groups. The Mann-Whitney tests are also less sensitive to high influence cases.

The results are robust to the use of this non-parametric test: the distribution of responses in the vote-buying treatment group is greater than the distribution of responses in the control group, and the difference is statistically significant ( $p = 0.026$ ).

### **Is Vote Buying More Effective With The Poor?**

Is vote buying more effective with the poor? Often the poor are most likely to be targeted by vote buyers (Brusco et al., 2004; Stokes, 2005), and many models of distributive politics and vote buying assume that the poor are influenced by particularistic and material benefits to a greater degree than are the middle class and wealthy (Dixit and Londregan, 1996; Stokes, 2005). This assumption is generally driven by the fact that diminishing marginal returns to income imply that a small transfer has a greater impact on a poor person's utility than it would on a wealthier persons. However, because the poor can accept money and in principle vote however they choose, it is not obvious that non-clientelist vote buying should disproportionately impact poor people's evaluations of politicians.

Figure 3 provides support for the notion that vote buying is more effective with the poor. The figure illustrates the mean responses (and 95 percent confidence intervals) of vote-buying and control condition groups for individuals in each of the three household asset classes. Respondent support for the control condition candidate is roughly comparable for people of all household asset levels. Support for the vote buying candidate, however, varies greatly across the classes. For the poorest individuals, the vote-buying candidate is substantially more desirable than is the control candidate: the difference is about two points on the scale and is statistically significant ( $p = 0.012$ ). The same is true for individuals in the middle asset category, though the magnitude of the vote buying treatment effect is smaller: the difference is about one point on the scale ( $p = 0.01$ ). Support for the vote buying candidate amongst high asset individuals, on the other hand, is lower than it is for the control candidate: the mean level of support for the control candidate is about one point

higher ( $p = 0.02$ ).<sup>14</sup> Importantly, while there are statistically significant treatment effects in each household asset group, there are also significant differences (both statistical and substantive) between the treatment effects in each group (see Table 1).<sup>15</sup>

Table 1 confirms that these results are robust to the inclusion of control variables. In addition, the results are robust to the expansion of the dataset to include the 655 participants in the second round experiment. The vote-buying treatment effect is consistently positive amongst the poorest participants and negative amongst the wealthiest (though the significance level sometimes shifts to 0.1).

The assignment of participants to household asset groups is admittedly somewhat arbitrary. Appendix D discusses alternative methods that I use to measure participant wealth and Table D.1 presents results using these different measures. In each instance the inference is the same: vote buying is effective in building support from poorer participants and the vote buying treatment effect decreases as participant wealth increases.

On average, individuals in the low asset class report having an income between 30 and 60 US dollars a month.<sup>16</sup> Individuals in the middle asset group have an average income between 240 and 270 dollars a month, and individuals in the high asset category have an average income between 330 and 360 dollars a month. The incomes in the latter categories may seem small, but Kenya’s GDP per capita is around 800 US dollars and so these represent relatively large incomes. The average Kenyan lives on around 2 to 3 dollars a day. Thus vote buying is most effective with the average and median Kenyans, who live with between one and two dollars a day—or right around the poverty line.

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<sup>14</sup>To check robustness, I also conduct non-parametric Mann-Whitney tests. In the low asset class, the distribution of responses in the vote-buying group is significantly greater than the distribution of responses in the control condition group ( $p = 0.004$ ). The same is true in the middle asset level group ( $p = 0.009$ ). In the high asset group, the distribution of responses after hearing the vote-buying recording is significantly lower than it is for those who heard the control recording ( $p = 0.018$ ).

<sup>15</sup>Two-way ANOVA results (not shown) confirm that the main effects of the vote-buying treatment and household asset level are both statistically significant, and that the interaction between the vote-buying treatment and household asset level is also statistically significant.

<sup>16</sup>In the survey, respondents estimated their income in Kenya Shillings.

## Why is Vote Buying Effective?

The experimental results provide robust empirical support for the notion that vote buying is more effective with poorer voters. Often, the effectiveness of vote buying with poor voters is interpreted as a reflection of the fact that small material goods have a greater marginal utility to poor voters. The problem with such arguments is that they do not account for the commitment problem discussed in the introduction (Stokes, 2005). My theory posits a different mechanism: vote buying is more effective with poor voters because it conveys information about the future provision of small private goods and patronage. In short, vote buying builds a politician's credibility as a patron for the poor and can therefore be effective despite ballot secrecy.

The experimental design is well-suited to test this explanation. Post-recording questions probed participant expectations of the politicians in a number of areas related to patronage and the distribution of targeted goods. One question asks whether the candidate will provide jobs for "people like you." A second question asks whether the candidate would help people to pay school fees or cover health expenses. A third questions asks whether the candidate would help people in case of an emergency.

The results are consistent with the argument that vote buying is effective because it creates higher expectations with respect to the provision of targeted benefits or patronage. Figure 4 presents average treatment effects in each household asset level on answers to three question about the future provision of patronage. In the high asset group, expectations of the vote buying candidate are lower than they are of the control candidate for each of these items. In the low and middle asset groups, the treatment effects are all positive (except that the middle group does not expect jobs). Though the treatment effects in the low asset group are not statistically significant at conventional levels, a large proportion of the 95 percent confidence intervals cover positive areas. Moreover, the pattern of responses across

individuals in each of the asset groups are consistent with the argument's expectations. However, because the treatment effects are not statistically significant, this evidence should be considered tentative.

I also test competing arguments about why non-clientelist vote buying might be effective. Vote buying might, for example, signal the competency of the candidate, creating higher expectations of future policy performance or public goods provision (Schaffer and Schedler, 2007; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009). Vote buying may also convey information about the likelihood that a candidate will win an election. In Kenya and other similar settings, there is a general perception that access to valued resources, either for the individual or for the community, is tied to supporting successful politicians, and, alternatively, that supporting a loser could elicit punishment from the victor (Van de Walle, 2007). In Kenya, such perceptions are not wholly illegitimate. A number of studies have documented the disproportionate allocation of education and health expenditures, and roads infrastructure toward areas known to support the president (Barkan and Chege, 1989; Burgess et al., 2010; Franck and Rainer, 2009). In addition, individuals who are coethnics of the president and cabinet ministers are more likely to finish primary school and have more years of schooling (Kramon and Posner, 2011). Projecting strength might therefore garner support from voters seeking access to valued—and scarce—goods for themselves and their communities (Schaffer and Schedler, 2007).

Figure 5 presents results from post-recording questions designed to assess respondent expectations about the candidate's abilities with respect to the provision of public goods. The figure presents average treatment effects in each of the three household asset levels for four questions. On balance, expectations about the vote-buying candidate are either the same or worse than they are of the control candidate. When asked about the candidate's ability to help the economy, provide electricity, clean water, and other public goods, and help all Kenyans, responses in the treatment and control groups are similar for people in the low

and middle asset classes. On all three of these items, however, the vote buying treatment effect is negative amongst the wealthiest participants. With respect to expectations of the candidate's ability to fight corruption, the treatment effects are negative and significant in all three of the asset groups (in the low asset class, the treatment effect is significant at the 0.1 level). The evidence is therefore not consistent with a mechanism whereby vote buying signals competence in the policy or public-goods provision arenas. If there is any effect at all, vote buying generates negative expectations in these areas.

Though the vote-buying candidate is generally perceived as less likely to provide broad public goods, promote good policies, or improve governance, expectations about the control candidate are also extremely low. In the full sample, the average respondent in the vote-buying treatment group believes the candidate has about a 20 percent chance of improving the economy. In the control group, the average respondent's expectations are only slightly higher at around 27 percent. With respect to the provision of public goods, respondents believe the vote-buying candidate has a 24 percent chance of providing the services that he promises in the recording, and they believe that the control candidate has about a 27 percent chance of doing so. Expectations are particularly low in regards to efforts to fight corruption, an extremely salient political issue in Kenya. Whereas the vote-buying candidate is expected to have about a 12 percent chance of fighting corruption, the control candidate is expected to have about a 20 percent chance. These findings are indicative of a political climate in which politicians have little credibility with respect to the provision of programmatic policies or public goods (Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008).

Finally, I assess perceptions of a candidate's likelihood of winning an election by asking respondents whether they believed people would vote for the candidate and whether they believed the candidate would win the election. In the full sample, expectations of the vote buyer are higher in these respects—by between 0.5 to 1 point on the scale—and the differences are significant at the 0.1 level. As Figure 6 illustrates, however, there are

no differences in expectations across the household asset classes and, within these groups, the treatment effects are not statistically significant (though in the middle asset group the treatment effects are positive and borderline significant).

## **Vote Buying and Ethnic Voting**

Up to this point, I have considered vote buying as an independent phenomena. However, vote buying occurs in a context in which competing and potentially complementary forces shape voters' preferences over politicians. In particular, vote buying in Kenya and many other African settings occurs in a context in which ethnic identity is politically salient and in which voting along ethnic lines is common. How does vote buying relate to ethnic voting?

Given the argument put forth in this paper, there are two potential ways in which vote buying and ethnic identity might interact. First, vote buying might reinforce ethnic voting, helping politicians to build support amongst coethnics and undermining support amongst non-coethnics. In Kenya, good patrons are often expected to channel resources to coethnics. These perceptions are not unfounded: Kenyan presidents and cabinet members have systematically favored their coethnic constituents since the country's independence (Barkan and Chege, 1989; Burgess et al., 2010; Franck and Rainer, 2009; Kramon and Posner, 2011). Thus, in signaling credibility as a distributor of patronage, vote buying could help build support amongst coethnics, who may believe they have a reasonable chance of benefiting from future targeted benefits, and could undermine support amongst non-coethnics, who may not expect to receive future transfers.

On the other hand, vote buying could be a way to overcome a lack of common ethnic identity, signalling to recipients that the candidate is a credible deliverer of goods despite the fact that expectations of ethnic favoritism would suggest otherwise. In this respect, vote buying would be particularly effective with non-coethnics.

Across a number of indicators, the results are consistent with the first argument: that vote buying strengthens ethnic voting. Vote buying strengthens support of coethnic politicians and increases expectations that they will provide benefits in the future. On the other hand, vote buying has the opposite effect on support for non-coethnic politicians. This pattern holds in response to a number of different post-recording questions. Figure 7 shows the vote-buying treatment effects in each of the ethnicity treatments with respect to participants' agreement with the following statement: all candidates should be like the one in the recording. Figure 8 shows the same treatment effects on agreement with the statement: I would like the candidate to run in the next election. Both of these results show that vote buying increases support for a coethnic, but has a negative or neutral effect on support for non-coethnics.

Figures 9 and 10 present more evidence consistent with these results. Vote buying increases expectations that a coethnic candidate will help people who are living in poverty, but decreases expectations that a non-coethnic candidate will do so. In addition, vote buying increases voter expectations that they will receive cash or other handouts from coethnic candidates, but decreases these expectations from a non-coethnic (though this treatment effect is not statistically distinguishable from zero). These results suggest that vote buying reinforces or may even strengthen ethnic voting by activating expectations of patronage and other particularistic forms of distribution from politicians.

Taken together, all of these results provide strong evidence in favor of my central theoretical proposition: in Kenya and similar settings, politicians buy votes despite the secret ballot because it helps them to build credibility with respect to the future provision of patronage and small private goods. With voters who expect that they might reasonably be on the receiving end of a politician's particularistic transfers—namely the poor and coethnics of the politician—vote buying is effective in the absence of a direct vote-buying contract

enforcement mechanism. With those who do not expect to benefit from such transfers—the wealthy and non-coethnics of the politician—vote buying proves ineffective.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

In this paper, I seek to resolve one of vote buying’s central theoretical puzzles: why do politicians expend limited resources buying votes when the ballot is secret and vote-buying contracts cannot be directly enforced? In so doing, I make multiple contributions to our understanding of vote buying in Africa. First, I highlight the need to recognize the diversity of phenomena that the term vote buying generally encompasses. I argue that instances of vote buying can be conceptualized along a spectrum between two extremes: from highly clientelist vote buying to highly non-clientelist vote buying. I then use qualitative and survey evidence collected in Kenya to demonstrate that a large proportion of the vote buying observed in that setting tends to lie toward the non-clientelist side of the vote-buying spectrum.

A second contribution is the use of experimental methods to measure and explain the effectiveness of relatively non-clientelist forms of vote buying. I demonstrate that this type of vote buying is effective in building political support, even from individuals who do not receive money but only observe the vote buying. Further, I show that vote buying is most effective with poor voters and that wealthier members of the electorate punish those they observe buying votes. I also provide empirical support for the argument that vote buying is effective because of the signals it conveys to poor voters about future access to patronage and other targeted benefits. The argument and results thus provide an alternative to explanations about vote buying’s effectiveness with the poor that focus on diminishing marginal returns to income.

In addition, the argument and results can help to explain why so many voters in Kenya receive money and gifts from multiple parties. Because of the information that vote

buying conveys to poor voters, who make up a large proportion of the electorate in African countries, the politicians' strategic situation is akin to the prisoner's dilemma. If a politician fails to buy votes while others do so, that candidate risks punishment at the polls. When politicians cannot or do not coordinate and credibly commit to not buy votes, vote buying is the dominant strategy for all politicians. Thus, in equilibrium, most politicians should buy votes and vote buying is effective to the extent that it establishes a politician as a candidate worthy of consideration by poor voters. This explains why so many voters receive money and gifts from multiple parties.

The results also shed light on the connection between vote buying and ethnic voting. I show that vote buying reinforces and strengthens ethnic voting. I argue that this relationship is driven by strong perceptions of ethnically based patronage. Where such perceptions exist, candidates will be able to rely upon vote buying to activate amongst their coethnics expectations of patronage and targeted benefits in the future.

In addressing empirical questions about vote buying's effectiveness, the paper's results have implications for the nature of governance, accountability, and democracy in Africa and other settings where vote buying is prevalent. They provide empirical support for the notion that vote buying is more effective with the poor. The result may help to explain why the introduction of democracy does not always lead to more redistribution or pro-poor policies, as is predicted by multiple influential theoretical models (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). In demonstrating how poor members of the electorate can be attracted with relatively small material transfers right before an election, the result provides a rationale for why public policy and other forms of targeted distribution may not benefit poor voters even when the median voter is poor in countries such as Kenya.

A second implication relates to the types of policies or institutional reforms that may reduce the prevalence of vote buying or its effectiveness. My findings suggest that policies and reforms strengthening ballot secrecy—though important for a number of reasons—will

likely not reduce the prevalence of vote buying in Kenya or other African contexts as they seemed to have done in earlier time periods in Britain and the United States.

Finally, the results murky the normative waters surrounding vote buying. On the one hand, that much vote buying seems to be effective in the absence of an implicit or explicit coercive vote-buying contract enforcement mechanism makes the normative evaluation of vote buying more ambiguous. In addition, because many citizens receive very few benefits from the government in countries such as Kenya, vote buying can serve as an informal system of redistribution and eliminating it could have the impact of lowering the welfare of the poor, at least in the short term. On the other hand, the results have discouraging implications with respect to politicians' incentives to be responsive to their poor constituents. If politicians can buy the votes of the poor, democracy's prospects for improving government accountability and responsiveness to those living in poverty may be limited.

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## Tables and Figures

Table 1: **Vote Buying Treatment Effects in First Experiment and Pooled Sample.** OLS regression models. Dependent variable is response to question: How likely are you to vote for the candidate? The scale runs from 0 (not at all) to 10 (definitely).

	1	2	3	4
(Intercept)	3.68***	3.79***	3.16***	3.81***
	(0.30)	(0.19)	(0.84)	(0.45)
Low Assets Treatment Effect	2.00*	1.08*	1.73†	0.91†
	(0.89)	(0.54)	(0.89)	(0.55)
Middle Assets Treatment Effect	1.14**	0.22	1.00*	0.20
	(0.44)	(0.27)	(0.43)	(0.27)
High Assets Treatment Effect	-1.49*	-0.82†	-1.58*	-0.79†
	(0.68)	(0.44)	(0.66)	(0.44)
Low Assets	0.66	0.38	0.78	0.39
	(0.75)	(0.43)	(0.74)	(0.46)
Middle Assets	0.37	0.16	0.83	0.25
	(0.55)	(0.36)	(0.57)	(0.36)
Secondary Education			-0.00	0.32
			(0.50)	(0.31)
Higher Education			-1.18*	-0.37
			(0.54)	(0.32)
Woman			0.35	-0.10
			(0.34)	(0.34)
Age			0.25†	0.08
			(0.13)	(0.07)
Household Electricity			0.09	0.23
			(0.62)	(0.22)
Past Vote Buying Experience			0.28	0.02
			(0.38)	(0.22)
<i>N</i>	346	978	344	945
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.02	0.13	0.04
Sample	Experiment 1	Pooled	Experiment 1	Pooled

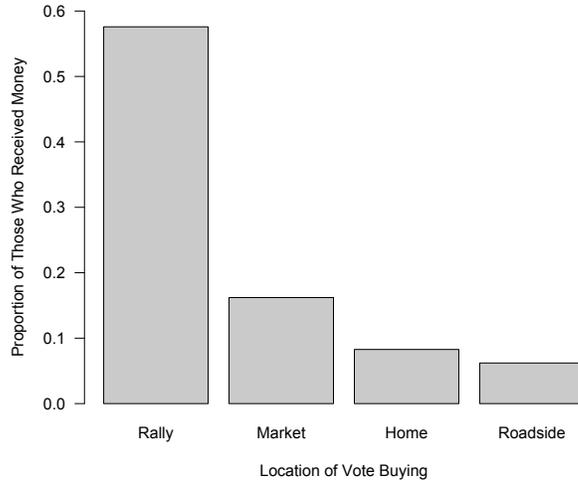
Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Primary education and high assets are omitted reference categories.

### Figure 1: Where Does Vote Buying Occur?

Four most frequent responses among the 290 respondents who report having received money or a gift before the 2007 elections. Source: Authors Survey.



### Figure 2: Perceptions of Ballot Secrecy in Kenya. Source: Afrobarometer Survey

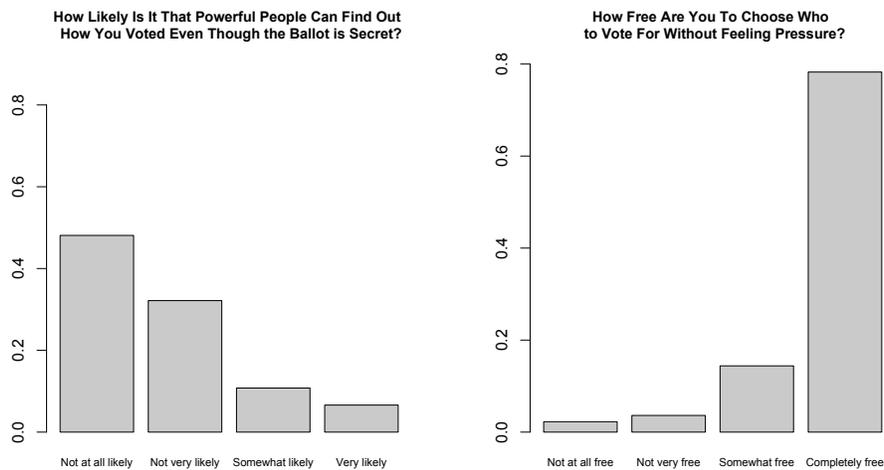


Figure 3: **Respondent Likelihood of Voting for Candidate, by Household Asset Level.** Dependent variable is response to question: How likely are you to vote for the candidate? The scale runs from 0 (not at all) to 10 (definitely). The bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals around the mean response in each group.

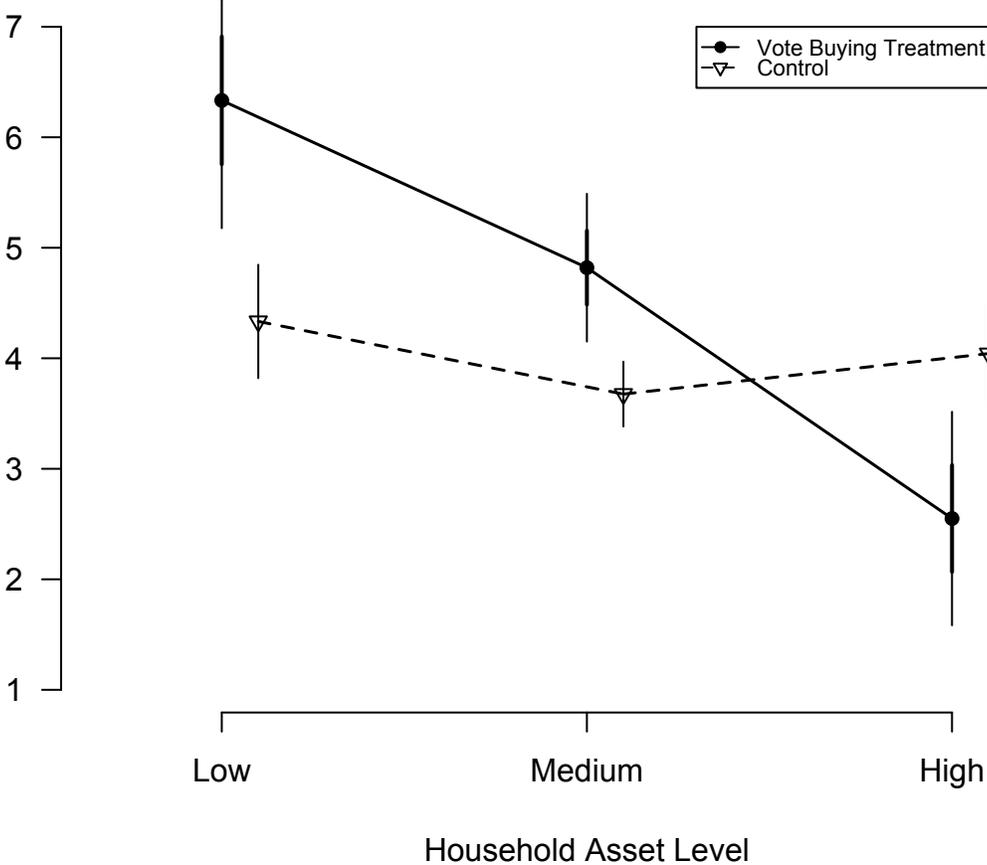


Figure 4: **Vote Buying and Expectations of Patronage and Targeted Goods Provision.** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the household-asset groups.

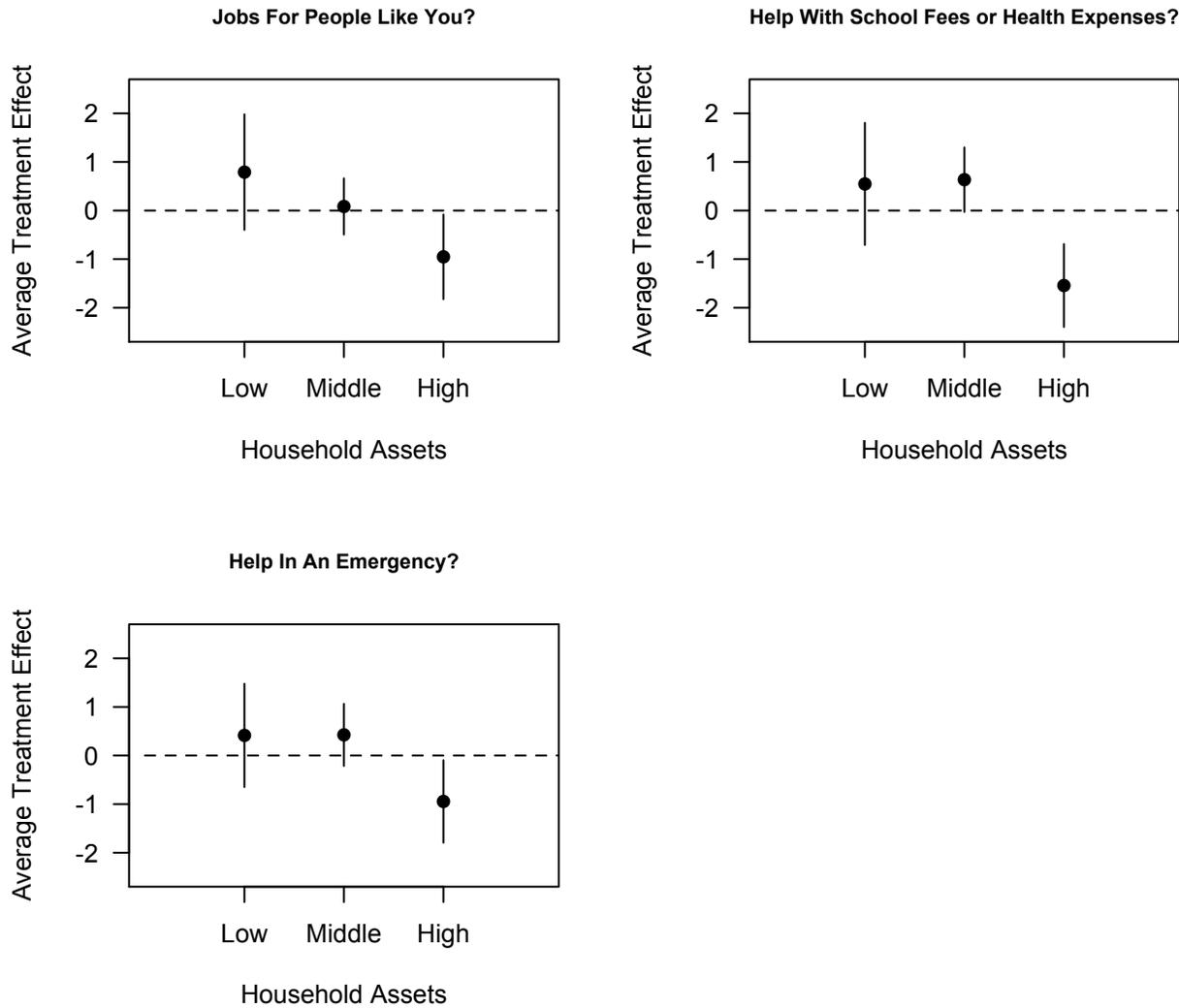


Figure 5: **Vote Buying and Expectations of Public Goods Provision.** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the household-asset groups.

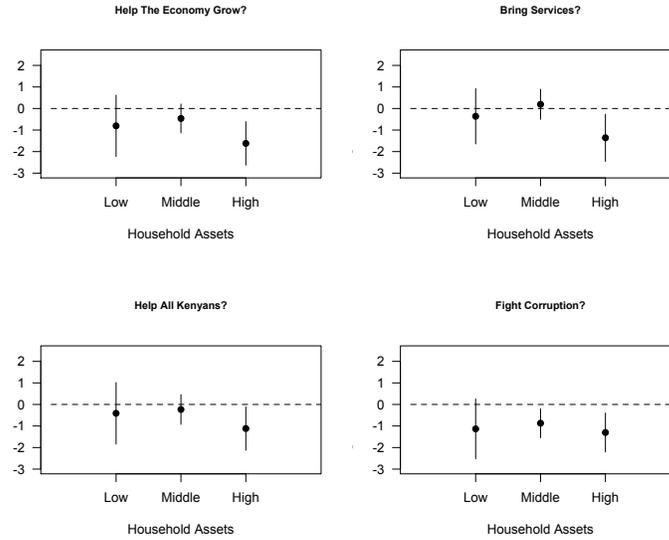


Figure 6: **Vote Buying and Expectations of Political Strength.** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the household-asset groups.

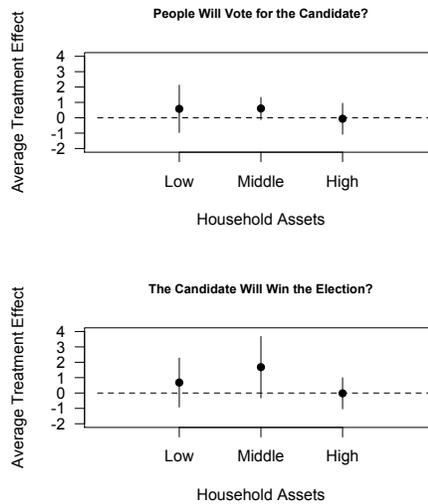


Figure 7: **Should All Candidates Be Like the One in the Recording?** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the ethnicity condition groups.

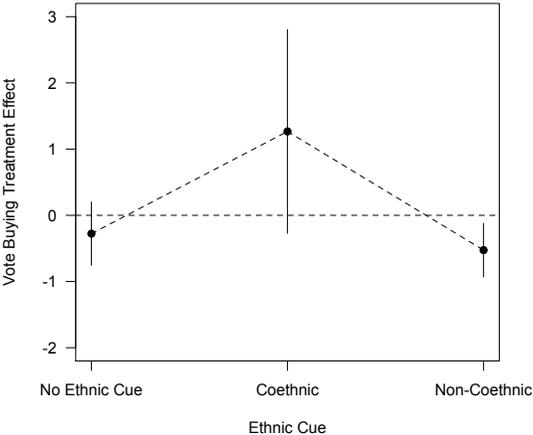


Figure 8: **Do You Want the Candidate to Run in the Next Election?** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the ethnicity condition groups.

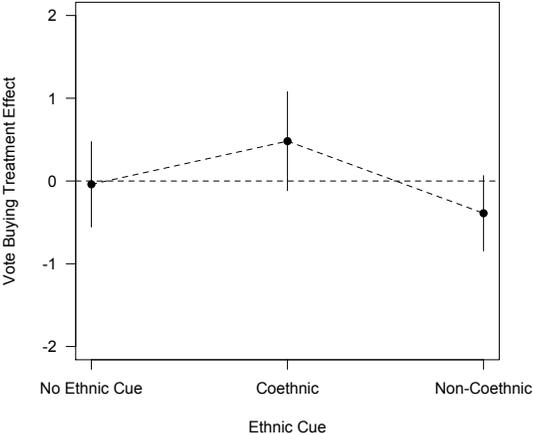


Figure 9: **Will the Candidate Help People Living in Poverty?** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the ethnicity condition groups.

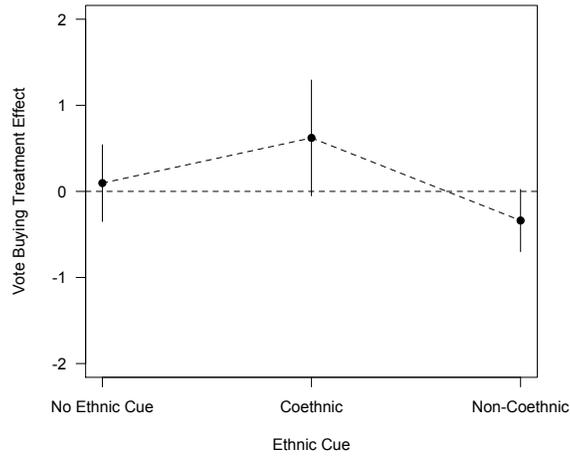
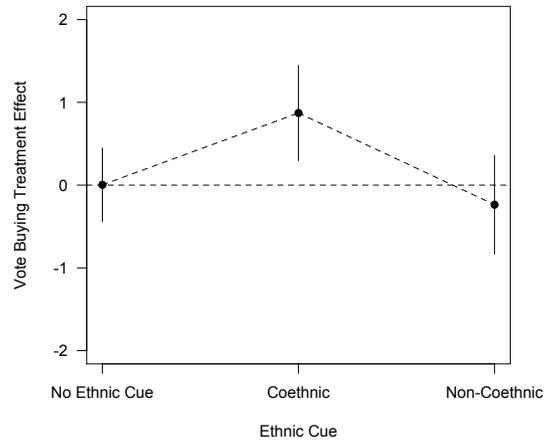


Figure 10: **If the Candidate Wins, Will You Receive Money or Gifts?** The figure displays average vote buying treatment effects, and 95 percent confidence intervals, in each of the ethnicity condition groups.



# A Research Areas and Measurement Tool

Figure A.1: The Ladder.

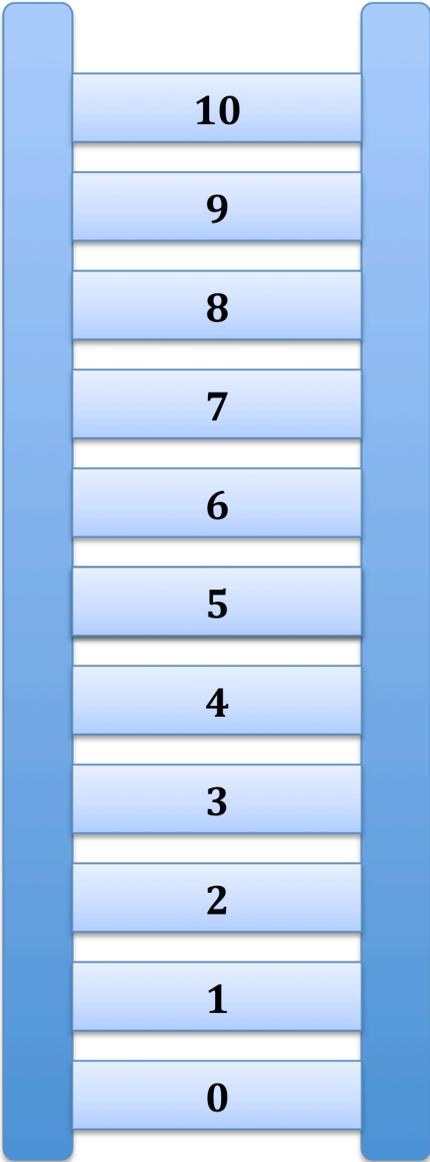
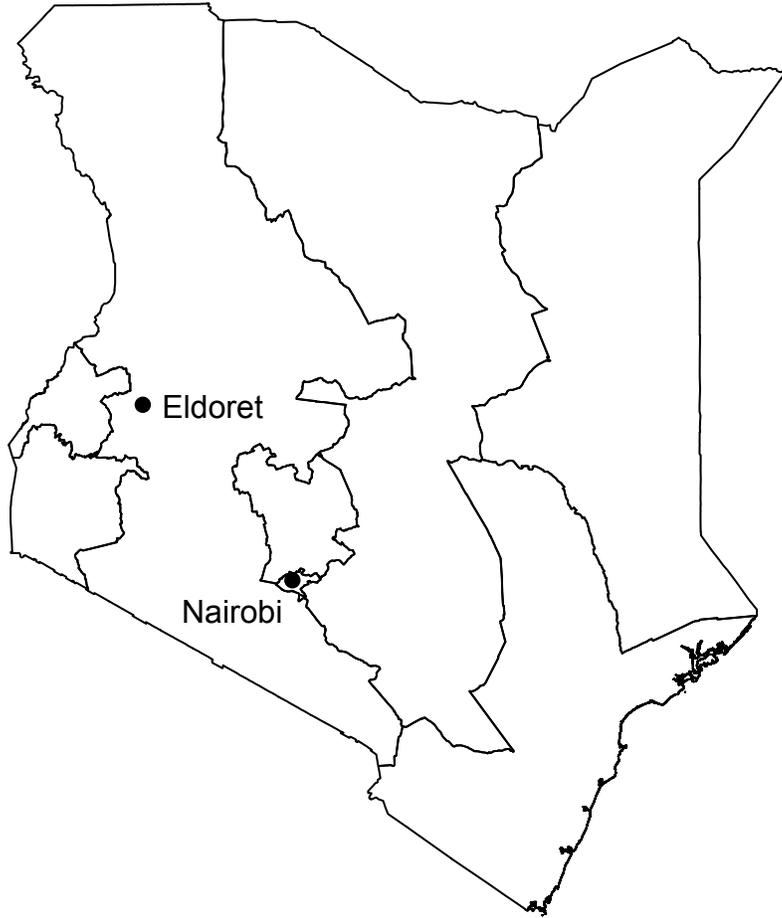
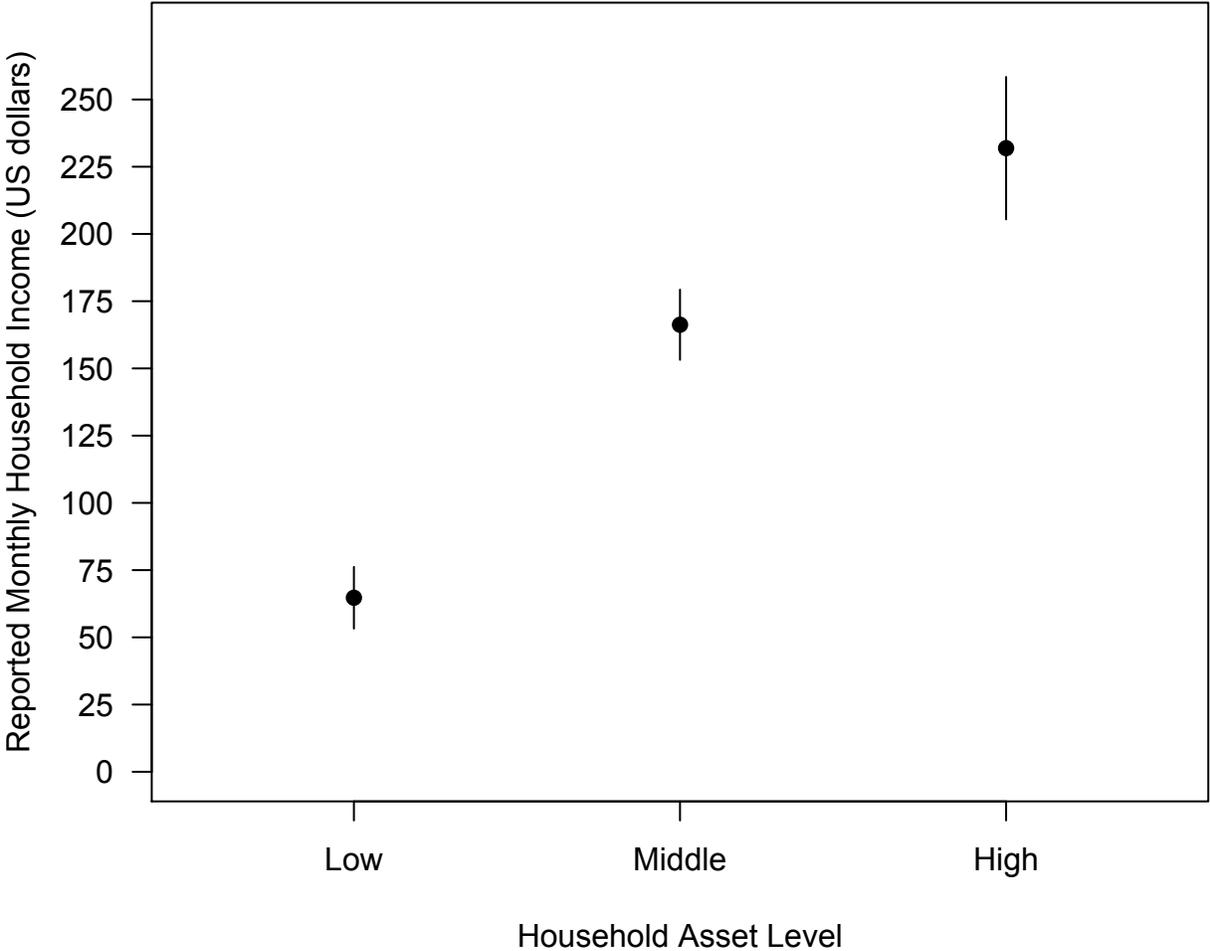


Figure A.2: Research Locations in Kenya



## B Validation of Household Asset Measure

Figure B.1: **Average Reported Monthly Income in Each Household Asset Class.** Data from second round experiment only (income question not asked in the first round). Bars show 95 percent confidence intervals around the mean. Respondents were asked to estimate their household's monthly income.



## C Balance Between Vote-Buying and Control Condition Groups

Table C.1: Logistic Regressions Testing Balance Between Vote Buying Treatment and Control Groups. Dependent variable is 1 if assigned to vote buying treatment, 0 if not.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	-0.28 (0.55)	-0.01 (0.30)	-0.10 (0.26)
Middle Assets	-0.44 (0.33)	0.17 (0.26)	-0.07 (0.20)
High Assets	-0.28 (0.40)	0.06 (0.31)	-0.12 (0.24)
Secondary Education	0.49 (0.33)	-0.34 (0.24)	-0.02 (0.19)
Higher Education	-0.23 (0.35)	-0.45 (0.25)	-0.33 (0.20)
Female	-0.19 (0.22)	0.18 (1.43)	-0.17 (0.22)
Age	0.01 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.04)
Has Electricity	0.53 (0.42)	0.32 (0.17)	0.39* (0.16)
Vote Buying Experience	-0.01 (0.25)	0.06 (0.17)	0.03 (0.14)
Nairobi		0.11 (0.17)	0.05 (0.16)
<i>N</i>	348	609	957
Sample	Experiment 1	Experiment 2	Pooled

Standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Low assets, primary education, Eldoret, and male are omitted categories

Figure C.1: **Balance Between Treatment and Control Groups in the Pooled Sample.** Points are population proportions in the treatment and control groups. Bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.

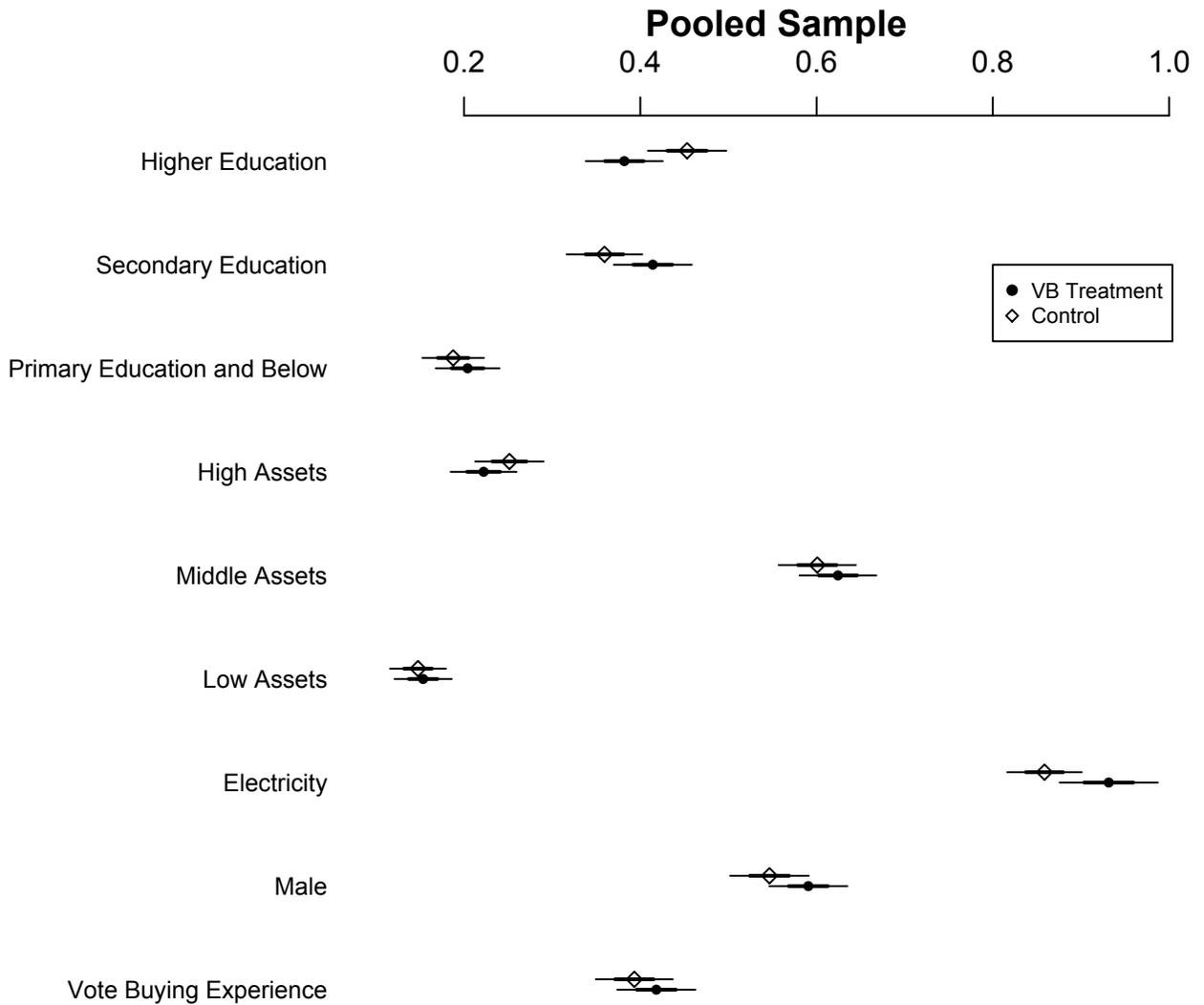


Figure C.2: **Balance Between Treatment and Control Groups in Experiment 1.** Points are population proportions in the treatment and control groups. Bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.

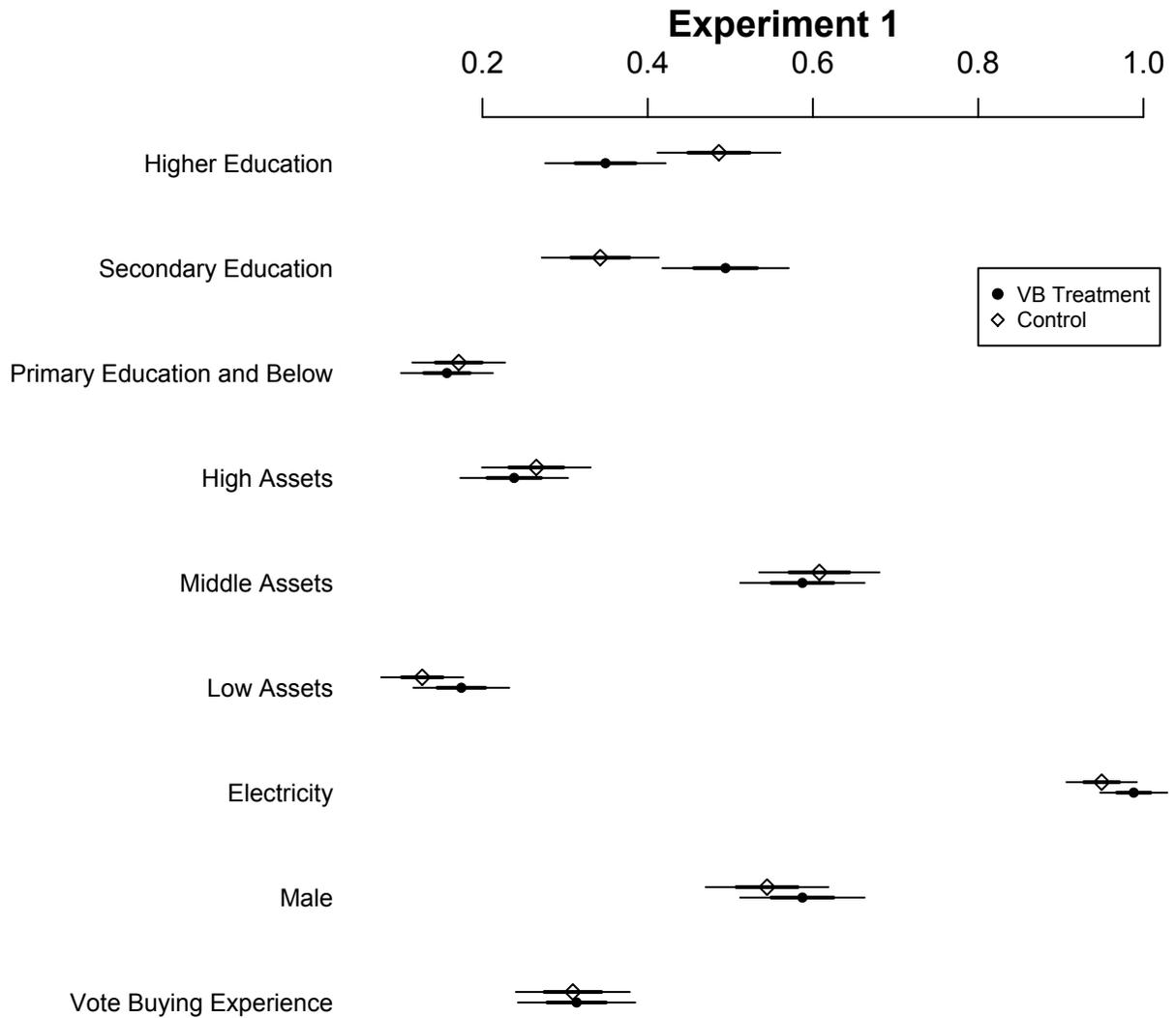
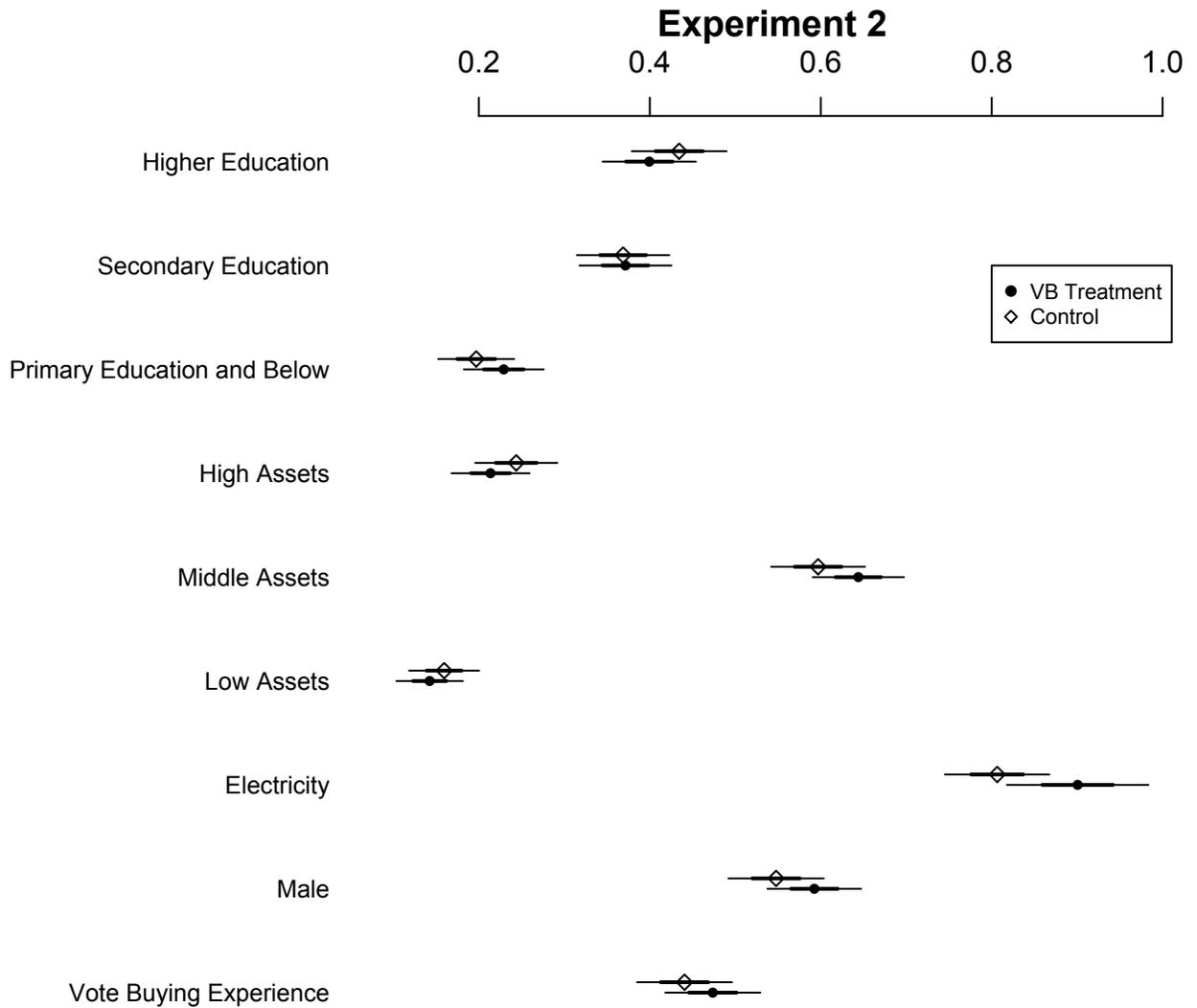


Figure C.3: **Balance Between Treatment and Control Groups in Experiment 2.** Points are population proportions in the treatment and control groups. Bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.



## D Robustness Checks

In the main results, I break respondents into three household asset categories (low, middle, and high) and present results illustrating that the vote buying treatment effect is different in each of these groups. The results suggest that the vote buying treatment is strong and positive in the low and middle asset groups, and negative in the high asset group. However, the coding of respondents into low, middle, and high asset categories depending on the number of items they report owning is somewhat arbitrary. In this section, I present results illustrating that the main inference—that vote buying is effective with the poor and not effective with the wealthy—is robust to different ways of measuring respondent wealth.

In a first set of robustness checks, I use the participants' raw number of household assets (0 – 9) as a continuous measure of wealth. Use of the continuous measure avoids the need to identify arbitrary cut points in the creation of household asset groups. Columns 1 and 2 of Table D.1 present results in which the raw household assets measure is interacted with the vote buying treatment. In both the first experiment and the pooled sample, the results are the same: the vote buying treatment effect is decreasing in the respondents number of household assets.

In a second robustness check, I use the participants' reported monthly income as the measure of wealth. Unfortunately, this information was not collected during the first experiment and so the analysis can only be conducted on the sample from the second experiment. Column 3 of Table D.1 presents results in which participant income is interacted with the vote buying treatment. The results are similar when the income measure is used: the size of the vote buying treatment effect decreases as participant income increases (the interaction is significant at the 0.10 level).

In a third set of robustness checks, I use a different method for coding participants into household asset groups. In this coding, I use the 33rd and the 66th percentiles of the raw number of household assets variable to identify the cutpoints. Columns 4 and 5 of Table D.1 presents results with this set of recoded household asset measures. The results are similar to those when the original coding is used.

Table D.1: **Vote Buying Treatment Effects with Different Measures of Participant Wealth.** OLS regression models. Dependent variable is response to question: How likely are you to vote for the candidate? The scale runs from 0 (not at all) to 10 (definitely).

	Exp. 1	Pooled	Exp. 2	Exp. 1	Pooled
Vote Buying Treatment	3.05**	1.75**	0.64		
	(1.09)	(0.67)	(0.43)		
Number of Assets	-0.08	-0.06			
	(0.14)	(0.08)			
Vote Buying Treatment*Number of Assets	-0.45*	-0.29*			
	(0.19)	(0.12)			
Income			-0.02		
			(0.03)		
Vote Buying Treatment*Income			-0.09†		
			(0.05)		
Low Assets (recoded) VB Treatment Effect				2.23**	1.02*
				(0.68)	(0.40)
Middle Assets (recoded)* Vote Buying Treatment				-2.10*	-0.96†
				(0.93)	(0.57)
High Assets (recoded)* Vote Buying Treatment				-2.20*	-1.43**
				(0.85)	(0.51)
N	346	948	568	346	978

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$