

# Clientelism and Vote Buying: Lessons from Field Experiments in West Africa<sup>\*</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

Electoral clientelism and vote buying are widely perceived as major obstacles to economic development. This is because they may limit the provision of public goods. In this paper, we review the literature on clientelism and vote buying and propose the use of field experiments to empirically evaluate the consequences of these phenomena. We summarize the results from two field experiments conducted by the authors in West African countries. Clientelism and vote buying seem to be effective and to enjoy widespread electoral support. The results from Wantchekon (2003) suggest that increased access to information and political participation by women may limit clientelism. In addition, Vicente (2007) finds that voter education campaigns may undermine the effects of vote buying on voting behavior. We argue that development aid interventions may be designed to effectively increase public-good political accountability.

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# 1 Introduction

A major dilemma in democratic policy-making is that bad policies can be good politics and good policies can be bad politics (Buono de Mesquita et al, 2003). For instance, broad public policies such as universal health care may be good for growth but may be electorally ineffective (Wantchekon, 2003). On the other hand, clientelism and vote buying may generate excessive redistribution at the expense of the provision of public goods and may therefore be seen as bad for development. Yet, these strategies are electorally effective (Wantchekon, 2003; Keefer, 2005; Vicente, 2007).

This misalignment between growth and electoral incentives is the reason why one of the most prominent policy goals of political economy of development has been to find ways to make growth promoting policies attractive for office-seeking candidates. This issue is of primary importance in the context of Africa, where the traditional political science literature has been pointing to clientelism and vote buying as structural, part of the local political culture, and even as a necessary stage in the process of political development of the continent emphasizing (as opposed to emphasizing electoral motives and circumstances<sup>1</sup>).

This paper proposes an in-depth study of the causes and consequences of clientelism and vote buying in developing countries. Namely we argue that experimental methods offer a precise and reliable framework to estimate these relationships. We focus our attention on African settings and report on the design and results of two field experiments conducted on purpose to study these phenomena in Benin and Sao Tome and Principe. Based on this work, we underline policy-oriented lessons (like institutional reforms that could help mitigate growth-depressing effects of clientelism and vote buying) and point to open research questions.

We begin by reviewing the theoretical literature on voting markets, while focusing on welfare implications and on our main concepts of interest: clientelism as the exchange of votes for favors conditional on being elected (e.g. jobs in the public sector), and vote buying as votes-for-cash (before the election). We discuss conditions under which opening a market for votes is not Pareto-improving, namely when political parties do not stand for long-term growth (if we follow Dekel et al, 2008), and argue that those may be underlying most African settings, consistently

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<sup>1</sup> See Lemarchand (1972) and Bayard (1993).

with Keefer and Vlaicu (2008) who analyze democracies where politicians are not able to credible commitments.

We then make the case that for empirically inferring causal effects of clientelism or vote buying on voting behavior, we need to focus on appropriate experimental methodology at the microeconomic level. We contrast this approach to standard observational techniques and discuss external validity. We argue that field experiments, while conserving a reasonable extent of external validity at the country level (when comparing to controlled experiments), offer precise identification of our parameters of interest.

The setting of the two field experiments we conducted in Benin and Sao Tome and Principe is then reviewed. In the first experiment (to the best of our knowledge, the first field experiment on African elections to be implemented - see Wantchekon, 2003), the content of electoral campaigning was randomized across villages, with a clientelism group, a public-policy group, and a control group (with both types of campaigning messages). In this project, active participation of the parties was central to its design. In the second experiment (see Vicente, 2007), an informational campaign against vote buying was randomized across census areas. This campaign was sponsored by the electoral commission of Sao Tome and Principe, as a voter education initiative. In both experiments measurement of outcomes came from both surveys and (for Sao Tome and Principe only) official electoral data at the ballot station level. We discuss difficulties and pitfalls of implementation of these randomized designs.

We subsequently devote our attention to the main findings of these experiments. We underline that while clientelism works particularly well for incumbents, vote buying seems to be more effective for challengers. Note that while clientelism induces 'bought' voters to vote for the 'buying' candidate (since only if he or she is elected, voters receive the agreed benefit), vote buying does not have a clear vote-enforcement mechanism. We may then hypothesize that, from the politicians' perspective, clientelism is taken as more 'efficient'. The bias in favor of the incumbent may then be simply rooted in a pre-election disproportionate control of public resources and allocations. We also report clear positive effects of vote buying on electoral participation/turnout.

Finally, we discuss development policy implications and propose open research questions. More specifically we underline the importance of empowering women (who are less prone to

clientelistic messages), and the effectiveness of voter education interventions, especially if targeting the uninformed and the less schooled voters. We make the case that bundling development with voter education within aid interventions at the local level may be particularly valuable in counteracting clientelism and vote buying. For future research, we underline the need to learn to design the contents and means of communication of cost-effective voter education campaigns.

## 2 Theory

The buying and selling of votes has long been studied in the political science and economics literatures. In this context, lobbying theory prominently led to a better understanding of how democracy works. It also brought a general sense of optimism regarding the implications of interest groups on policy efficiency. However, this positive tone relied on important hypothesis seldom present in the developing world: interest-group competition (Becker, 1983) and informed voters (Grossman and Helpman, 1996). And, in fact, if we reduce our scope to focused models of voting markets, we find that no clear consensus has emerged in terms of its welfare implications.

A number of important contributions help us make this point<sup>2</sup>. Weiss (1988) begins by showing the well-known result that no equilibrium exists for a majoritarian voting game with vote-selling: for positive prices anyone on the losing side will want to sell his or her vote, i.e. there is excess supply, and for zero prices there is excess demand. However his main results regard the relative welfare properties of the strategies that follow the introduction of vote-selling: Weiss argues these strategies are suboptimal. Philipson and Snyder (1996) circumvent the non-existence technical difficulty by assuming a market ‘specialist’, who directs vote trading. Under this assumption, equilibrium always exists and will involve vote-selling only when it implies a Pareto-superior outcome. Dal Bo (2007) pursues an alternative approach: he assumes that a committee is set to vote on an issue and that a principal seeks to influence the voting outcome through vote buying. Dal Bo finds that the principal can influence the committee’s decisions at no cost and induce inefficient outcomes. He argues that secret ballots hinder vote buying when buyers condition on pivotal votes.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that all electoral competition games relate to the Colonel Blotto game (see Roberson, 2006, for a review), where two opposing parties simultaneously allocate forces among a finite number of battles. Each battle is won by the party that allocated a larger force in that specific front. The overall winner is the party that wins a majority of the battles.

Most recently, Dekel et al (2008) adopt a model where two parties compete in a binary election and may purchase votes in a sequential bidding game. These authors analyze campaign promises that are contingent on the outcome of the election (what we define as clientelism) and upfront binding payments (what we see as ‘enforceable’ vote buying). It is found that under campaign promises only, total payments received by voters are higher and more widespread across voters than with upfront vote buying<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, efficiency is found to be independent from the presence of vote-selling and from the specific forms that it may take.

Note that, in this context, the only positive results regarding the efficiency of opening a voting market (Philipson and Snyder, 1996) may be founded on unrealistic assumptions regarding market information and behavior, particularly if we think of African countries where media and public opinion are not developed: i.e. the existence of an all-powerful market auctioneer, who directs transactions. In the less restrictive scenario studied by Dekel et al (2008), it is a clear implication that vote buying may lead to parties’ valuations rather than voter preferences being the driving force that determines the winner. Thus, nothing can be said in general on whether a voting market is likely to produce higher total utility than simple voting. In fact, if anything, we may recall that African politicians/parties are many times known for disregarding the interests of large sectors of the electorate, making it easy to argue that voting markets do not induce welfare improvements.

Robinson and Verdier (2002), Robinson and Torvik (2005), and Keefer and Vlaicu (2008), on more applied theoretical settings, propose the idea that inefficient redistribution arise as a consequence of low ability of political competitors to make credible pre-electoral commitments to voters. Specifically, Keefer and Vlaicu assume that politicians can either try to build reputations (informing voters on electoral promises and following up on those pledges) or rely on mediating patrons that are by definition credible with voters. This model is able to explain why public investment and corruption are higher in young democracies than in old. In addition, it implies that reliance on patrons may in the long run undermine the emergence of credible political parties.

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<sup>3</sup> These patterns are consistent with the historical studies of Cox and Kousser (1981), Cox (1987), for late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain and U.S. These authors report that before secret ballots were introduced in these countries, upfront vote buying was widespread and consisted of small amounts of money being offered to voters.

Other important contributions to our theoretical understanding of vote buying include Groseclose and Snyder (1996), who explain why non-minimal coalitions are bought in equilibrium, Lindbeck and Weibull (1987) and Dixit and Londregan (1996), who find conditions for the targeting of swing voters in the presence of special interests, Myerson (1993), who study incentives to make campaign promises that favor small groups, rather than appealing equally to all voters, under different electoral systems, and Lizzeri and Persico (2001), who take a similar approach while focusing on public good provision as the outcome of interest.

### **3 Experimental Methodology**

In recent years, experimental methodologies have become increasingly popular in the development economics literature. This trend has been boosted by the need to correctly evaluate aid policy interventions. Observational studies always struggled with selection into policy adoption. And convincing instrumental variables, disentangling causality from simple correlation, are not possible to find in a systematic way. The novel idea within the development literature was to induce randomization of policies so that treated and control groups are comparable in terms of unobservable characteristics and unbiased causal effects can be estimated. With this methodology (field<sup>4</sup> experiments), numerous advancements have been achieved in our understanding of incentives, social learning, and inconsistent time preferences (see Duflo, 2006, for a review).

Research on political economy has been facing similar challenges. When analyzing campaign expense effectiveness, the literature, which almost uniquely focuses on American elections, departs from Jacobson (1978), who argued that challengers' expenses are more effective (Jacobson mainly used OLS - his observation was reinforced by Jacobson, 1985, 1990, and Abramowitz, 1988). Later Green and Krasno (1988), Levitt (1994), Gerber (1998), and Erikson and Palfrey (2000), find that effectiveness of campaign spending is comparable across incumbents and challengers and close to zero. These authors used more precise econometric techniques, with a wider set of control variables and better instrumental variables, and following candidates over time by using panel data.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Field' stands for maintaining the natural conditions of the real world, in opposition to 'laboratory' or 'controlled' experiments, where stylized games are played and the payoff structure is constructed by the researcher.

Like in the development literature, political economy studies have been increasingly using field experiments (see Druckman et al, 2006, for a review). Following an early literature initiated by Gosnell (1927), which embedded some statistical limitations, Gerber and Green (2000) marked the beginning of a new series of experimental studies with their influential large-scale experiment related to non-partisan voter turnout in the US. Specifically on campaign expense effectiveness, Gerber (2004) constituted a turning point. This author recovers the pattern of Jacobson (1978), challenger-favoring, by analyzing several randomizations of direct mail-based campaigning in a number of different elections in the US. In face of the described state-of-the-art of observational studies - arguing for no effects of campaign spending - experiments clearly changed the course of the literature.

In this context, we argue that, if our focus is the study of the effects of clientelism and vote buying on voting behavior in developing countries, we ought to consider the use of field experimental methods. Note that our research interest resides on individual voting behavior. We therefore shall analyze behavior at the microeconomic level. This explains the complete lack of studies, contrary to what is the norm in political economy, looking at cross-country patterns. At the same time, we aim at making causal statements. And as conveyed above, the literature has been emphasizing the goodness of having, by design, comparable treatment and control groups to assess the effects of any policy.

But what are we giving out in exchange for having such an advantageous research technology? Well, we think there are two important shortcomings with experimental methods for studying clientelism and vote buying.

The first is external validity. Generally we will have limitations in applying our research statements to different settings. This is because most experiments that can be done will have attached the very specific conditions that enabled them to be carried out – namely we will not be able to conduct an experiment in the highly insecure 2008 Zimbabwean elections. This means there is certainly selection into being-able-to-conduct-an-experiment. It is probably safer not to apply the results of our research to Zimbabwe. However we must stress that the fact that we are focusing on real world conditions - in ‘field’ experiments – is already minimizing the ‘external validity’ problem that applies to most ‘controlled’ experiments.

The second limitation is randomization, and that links up with the first shortcoming. The problem is that randomization is difficult to achieve on any policy intervention in the real world. And despite the examples provided in this paper, it is even more difficult to convince policy-makers to randomize an intervention if we are talking of an election. Since we definitely do not want to sound pessimistic, let us turn to two successfully implemented examples.

## **4 Two Field Experiments**

In this paper we review the design, implementation and results of two randomized experiments conducted in West Africa, in Benin (for the presidential elections of 2001) and Sao Tome and Principe (for the presidential elections of 2006). While the first drew upon the randomization of clientelistic campaign platforms with the agreement of the main political parties, the second was based on the randomization of a voter education campaign against vote buying (sponsored by the local electoral commission).

Wantchekon (2003) analyzes the main results of the Benin experiment. This paper identifies the effect of voting platforms on voting behavior using an experiment that exposed randomly selected villages to ‘purely’ redistributive/clientelistic or ‘purely’ national public goods platforms, while the remaining villages were exposed to the default mixed platforms. The experiment took place during the first round of the presidential elections. Sixteen candidates, representing or endorsed by sixteen parties, took part in the first round of these elections. The research team identified the five most important candidates, and invited four of them to participate in the experiment.

To avoid a potential effect on actual election results, the experiment was conducted by candidates only in their respective stronghold districts. A district was defined as a party's stronghold if the party gained at least 70 percent of the votes in each of the previous presidential elections (1991 and 1996). Using this definition, 70 out of the 77 districts in Benin were classified as strongholds of one party, while the other ones were classified as competitive. Once the strongholds were identified, two stronghold districts were randomly picked for each of the four parties participating in the experiment. In each chosen district, two villages were randomly selected to take part in the experiment. If the two villages were less than 20 kilometers apart, the second village was put back into the pool and another village was picked. Then a coin was flipped to decide which one of the two villages would be in the public goods treatment group, and which one would be in the clientelistic treatment group. A representative survey of all villages covered by the experiment

was conducted after the elections. The submission of the corresponding questionnaire enabled the collection of demographic and electoral behavior data.

Vote buying in Sao Tome and Principe, defined as the exchange of cash for votes before elections, has been a rampant phenomenon in that country. In fact it was reported to have increased dramatically after the late nineties oil discovery (see Vicente, 2006). Vicente (2007) describes the results of the Sao Tome and Principe vote buying experiment. Its main results regard the effect of the anti-vote buying campaign on voting behavior (turnout and specific voting decisions). The design of the experiment also enables the identification of the effect of vote buying on voting behavior: by using the presence of the campaign as an instrumental variable, and assuming that its effect on voting behavior is channeled through repercussions on vote buying. The voter education campaign was based on the distribution of a leaflet, encompassing the slogan ‘Do not let your conscience have a ‘banho’<sup>5</sup> - Your vote should be free and in good conscience’, an allusive drawing for the illiterate, and passages of the STP law (Constitution and Campaign Financing Law) regarding the illegality of vote buying. 10,000 leaflets were distributed, which averaged one per household in treatment locations.

The campaign was implemented in 40 of the 149 census areas of the country. These locations were selected randomly among a group of 50 representative census areas. A panel survey, encompassing 1275 individuals, was implemented before the electoral campaign and after the elections in these 50 villages/neighborhoods. The survey was used to gather data on demographics, perceptions and experience about vote buying, voting intentions (before), and voting reported behavior (after). The design allowed controlling for self-report biases regarding vote buying measures<sup>6</sup>. Vicente (2007) also uses official voting results per ballot station/census area as an alternative outcome measure.

#### *4.1 Implementation*

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Banho’ refers to vote buying in local Portuguese, meaning literally ‘bath’ or ‘shower’.

<sup>6</sup> Since the baseline measurement of vote buying (in the pre-election survey) concerned an anterior date (the relevant questions were asked about the 2006 Parliamentary elections, which had taken place approximately three months before), and provided the leaflet was shown/discussed to/with the respondent just before asking about vote buying, we are able to measure the report bias (as the difference between treatment and control baseline). We are also able to control for this bias in our estimation given the fact that we only care about the difference-in-difference parameter (across treatment vs. control and across time): the bias is present both before and after; therefore the difference over time is measured with higher precision.

The implementation of these two field experiments required an intensive presence of the research teams in the field at all times of both the campaigns/treatments (designed electoral campaign in Benin and anti-vote buying campaign in Sao Tome and Principe) and measurement activities (post-election survey in Benin and panel survey in Sao Tome and Principe). However, neither experiment would have happened without the support of local policy-makers.

For the Benin experiment, probably the most difficult set of conditions was achieved: having politicians randomizing the content of their campaigns, but most of all, having them agreeing not to diffuse clientelistic messages in some villages. Of course some details helped the realization of this design. First, the close local knowledge of the researcher was instrumental in earning the confidence of the parties. Second, only strongholds of each party would be targeted by the experiment, meaning that the probability that the experiment would change actual election results was low. Third, all major candidates were brought into the deal, which reinforced the idea that no real effects on aggregate election results were expected.

In Sao Tome and Principe, the aimed level of collaboration of the local authorities was less ambitious. The researcher designed the contents of the leaflet in strictly legalistic terms in order to maximize the likelihood of support by the Sao Tomean Electoral Commission. The high degree of independence of that public body, together with the inexistence of a clear prior regarding the effects of the informational campaign, enabled the acceptance of the researcher's proposal.

However, we must stress that in both experiments it was crucial to bring our own resources to help out with the implementation of the treatments. Namely, the research team was involved in the conduction (partially or in full) of both the clientelistic/public-policy electoral campaign and the anti-vote buying campaign. Some costs of materials were also supported by the research budget.

We shall also underline, in terms of implementation of these experiments, that a competent matching between treated subjects and surveyed respondents was crucial for the success of the experimental designs. In Sao Tome and Principe, attention to this issue was extreme. The fact that our Sao Tome and Principe campaign was door-to-door (the subject of the campaign was sensitive and we tried to make interaction with campaigners as private as possible) increased the difficulty/importance of precise matching. Since we designed the treatment to be

contemporaneous to the pre-election survey, we were able to submit the leaflet primarily to surveyed households<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, not enough emphasis can be given to the need to keep randomization procedures to the researcher, or at least giving the researcher the possibility of monitoring such decisions. The whole point of running an experiment is to be able to select statistically similar treatment and control groups. In addition, a precise sampling framework (making use of census data, voter registration data, auxiliary maps of villages/neighborhoods) is essential for a suitable choice of treatment subjects and rigorous measurement of outcomes through surveys or official voting data.

## *4.2 Results*

Wantchekon (2003) shows that clientelism is electorally effective, i.e. works for all types of candidates, in particular for regional and incumbent candidates. The Benin experiment shows that incumbent candidates have the means to make clientelistic appeals more credible, and that opposition candidates can take advantage of the revealed incompetence of the incumbent in providing the public goods during the previous electoral cycle to make its public goods-type promises more appealing. The results also indicate that, because most clientelistic-type policies disproportionately benefit men over women or because rural women might value child welfare policies more highly than men do, women are more likely than men to have preference for public goods. The same result applies to co-ethnics of the candidates and to those with better access to information. Finally, respondents from cosmopolitan districts tend to respond positively to public policy messages and those from more insulated districts tend to be more responsive to clientelism.

The results indicate that the credibility of clientelistic appeals and accessibility of clientelistic goods greatly influence voting behavior. More specifically, incumbent candidates have the means to make clientelistic appeals more credible, most probably by displaying control of public allocations and resources before the elections<sup>8</sup>. As a response, opposition candidates may have a comparative advantage on emphasizing the limitations of the incumbent in providing public

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<sup>7</sup> The field instructions were in fact to submit the leaflets to the surveyed respondents and to a pre-defined number of neighboring households of each surveyed household.

<sup>8</sup> Note also that, historically, a disproportionately high proportion of African elections featured incumbents winning (see Bratton, 1998). This fact may add to the incumbent advantage in doing clientelism at any specific election.

goods. These observations draw light on the consequences of specific campaigning strategies by incumbent vs. challenger Beninese politicians.

The demographic patterns of these effects provide a better understanding of the determinants (or at least the microeconomic correlates) of clientelism. From the above findings we can clearly infer that clientelism seems to be particularly suitable to men, less informed and segregated voters. These observations open avenues for policy intervention, as we argue next.

Vicente (2007) shows that the anti-vote buying campaign was effective in terms of diminishing the frequency of vote buying, but mostly in terms of diminishing its impact on voting choices (as perceived by the respondents in our panel). This is consistent with the message of the campaign that underlined the need to ‘vote in conscience’ (more than that of not accepting gifts).

Concerning voting behavior, Vicente (2007) finds that vote buying induces higher voter turnout (working as an energizer of the electorate). In that paper it is also concluded that the campaign had a clear and significant effect on increasing changes of votes (from intention before elections to actual voting reported after elections) towards the incumbent, which is consistent with a setting where the incumbent has a relative advantage in doing clientelism and the challenger can only buy votes through offering cash before the elections. Indeed, Vicente (2007) explicitly identifies vote buying to be favoring the challenger more than the incumbent<sup>9</sup>. In that paper, it is also checked whether the campaign had an effect on the actual election results: this is done by exploring effects on per-ballot station data, whereby coherent (with the panel-based regressions) and robust estimates are found.

Vicente (2007) also performs a number of robustness tests on his main findings: evidence of conformity biases in some but not all of the vote buying outcomes is provided (which offers a good assessment of the measurement of the various vote buying outcomes), the demographic profile of the subjects that responded most to the intervention, in terms of vote buying and voting behavior (in parallel to the analysis for the Beninese experiment), is identified to be composed of less schooled and poorer voters (providing reassuring evidence about the proposed mechanism of the experiment), and contamination of control areas is ruled out.

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<sup>9</sup> This finding, revealing that vote buying is indeed driving voters, is consistent with earlier work by Brusco et al (2004) in Argentina. Note however that their observational findings are based on direct survey questions about the effectiveness of vote buying.

The big picture we take from these experiments is then that, while clientelism works particularly well for incumbents<sup>10</sup>, vote buying seems to be more effective for challengers. This pattern may be due to the fact that clientelism is a safer way to buy voters – since they have the incentive to vote accordingly (the counterpart for the vote comes only after the election and only if the buying candidate is elected – e.g. a public sector job, to make the prominent example in Robinson and Verdier, 2002). On the contrary, cash-for votes before elections does not embed any obvious enforcement (of transactions) mechanism<sup>11</sup>. At the same time incumbents are in a better position to offer credible clientelistic proposals: they hold the public sector resources and allocations before the elections.

### *4.3 Policy Implications*

The clearest result of the Benin experiment, that clientelism seems to provide incumbents with a patent advantage in terms of political competition, has a very direct policy implication: incumbents should see their power limited or regulated. Term limits, clean campaign financing, and an independent electoral commission constitute the most obvious specific counterparts for that general prescription. But the results in Wantchekon (2003) go farer: they indicate clearly that voting behavior is far from being entirely determined by ethnic affiliation and, more importantly, that clientelistic appeals - even if they are strong in many cases - are not universally accepted even among poor voters.

The result on gender gap has important policy implications. In a given region or within a given ethnic group, the promise of government jobs may be less appealing to women than to men because men are more likely to be the beneficiaries or because women care more about such public goods as health and education. By contrast, electoral promises related to public health or child welfare such as vaccination and education campaigns (public-good platforms) could have a greater impact than patronage jobs on women's voting behavior. This would imply that initiatives to promote women's participation in the political process at all levels of government have the

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<sup>10</sup> Collier and Vicente (2008) also present evidence that this is the case. Specifically in Nigeria, for the 2007 round of federal and state level elections, it was found that the incumbents were using mainly clientelism and fraud (provided their control of state resources and bodies), while marginal challengers were using violence and intimidation.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Vicente (2007) finds that rural locations are more prone to vote buying, which implies that enforcement may be easier in these settings (where people are less anonymous).

potential to help improving the provision of public goods. That is indeed the hope of quota systems that have been implemented in developing countries - see Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) for an example in India.

The influence of voter information and media access on the effectiveness of clientelism shows that voter education and media coverage/quality expansion may improve public governance: informed voters are more willing to support candidates who want to run on public policy platforms. This may be a crucial result in view of development policy, as indeed it provides a clear endorsement for recently popularized local accountability interventions, like the World-Bank sponsored Community-Driven Development projects, which are directed at small (mainly rural) communities, have a clear political component, and emphasize local downward accountability.

Vicente (2007) shows that if one is interested in increasing electoral competition or counteracting the incumbent's clientelistic advantage, cash-for-votes before the election may help (by helping mostly the challenger). In addition vote buying seems to be increasing voter turnout in Sao Tome and Principe (this finding could arguably be plausible for clientelism as well), which is generally taken by policy makers interested in political participation as a positive effect. If one believes in partial equilibrium (since the informational campaign was highly unanticipated), these seem to be competition and participation -improving effects of cash-for-votes.

However, if one is interested in longer term political accountability, letting vote buying thrive may prove to be bad for development, as the political system may then be biased against public-good provision. Like clientelism, vote buying may be a substitute for public-good accountability. If that is the case, vote buying has a weakness that clientelism does not have: it has a weaker enforcement mechanism, as the cash is transferred to voters mainly before the election. Measures to protect the secrecy of the ballots (so that conditioning on observable voter behavior is made impossible<sup>12</sup>) are historically proven to reduce the prevalence of this phenomenon.

Finally, the experiment in Sao Tome and Principe showed that specific and directed voter education can be highly effective in changing voters' electoral behavior. Even if one cannot

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<sup>12</sup> There are indeed several reports in Sao Tome and Principe that: voting was made collectively in some rural locations, cameras were used to photograph filled ballot paper, ballot paper was substituted, and id cards were bought (to prevent known opponents from voting).

easily convince poverty-ridden voters not to accept cash before the election, one can still persuasively argue in favor money-free voting decisions ('voting in conscience'). That was clearly driving most of the voting changes in the Sao Tome and Principe setting. Moreover, less educated (like in Benin) and poorer voters seem to be the centre of action for vote buying. This observation reinforces the idea that voter education bundled together with local development interventions may be a very focused and effective way to counteract vote buying and clientelism - based politics.

## **5 Concluding Remarks**

In this paper we emphasize the need to understand electoral incentives in developing countries. We review the theoretical literature on clientelism and vote buying, while underlying that opening markets for votes is likely not to be welfare-improving in West Africa. We then present an overview of two field experiments on the effectiveness of clientelism and vote-buying in generating electoral support. The results indicate that clientelistic and vote buying appeals, although generally strong, are not homogeneously effective, even among poor voters in low economic development settings – education seems to be a crucial dimension. Our findings also indicate that the use (by politicians) and effects (on voters) of clientelism and vote buying can be controlled with civic campaigns around elections. Our main policy prescription then goes in the direction of local accountability interventions bundling development with voter education.

Some final remarks are due on research questions that were made wide open to us after we began this research agenda. First and foremost, we need to know what the characteristics of a cost-effective voter education campaign are (i.e. identifying the features of the intervention that are 'carrying' voters, quantifying their effects, and recording their costs). More effort is welcome on learning to design these interventions, many times seen as 'black box' interventions. It is essential to be able to distinguish the relevant effects from psychological biases that come with measurement or with conformity of subjects. In this vein, Wantchekon (2008) reports on a new randomized experiment in Benin (which took place in the presidential elections of 2006) where there was a deliberation intervention through which voters were consulted on policy issues that were subsequently presented as purified campaign platforms (with no clientelistic component). Preliminary results point to public deliberation as a highly attractive feature of clientelism-free campaigning.

Other strands of related possible future research effort are (the continuation of) the study of ways to increase female political empowerment and the analysis of self-enforcement of vote buying transactions (arguably the main driver of vote buying effectiveness in countries like Sao Tome and Principe, and probably the main remaining mystery concerning this phenomenon). The second topic may indeed yield more precise empirical statements about ways to undermine the effectiveness of vote buying transactions. For instance, if the main mechanism for self-enforcement is taking vote buying as signaling for good policies during the mandate, that is relevant information to be fed into effective voter education campaigns. We are convinced that field experiments are the appropriate methodology to formally target these research questions.

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Vote-buying and accountability in democratic Africa, PhD Dissertation, UCLA. Google Scholar. Lawson, C. & Greene, K. F.. 2014. Making clientelism work: how norms of reciprocity increase voter compliance, *Comparative Politics* 47, 1: 61-85. CrossRef Google Scholar. Is vote buying effective? Evidence from a field experiment in West Africa, *Economic Journal* 124: 356-87. CrossRef Google Scholar. Vicente, P.C. & Wantchekon, L.. 2009. Clientelism and vote buying: lessons from field experiments in African elections, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 25, 2: 292-305. CrossRef Google Scholar. Wantchekon, L. 2003. Clientelism and voting behavior: evidence from a field experiment in Benin, *World Politics* 55, 3: 399-422. CrossRef Google Scholar. CLIENTELISM AND VOTING BEHAVIOR Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin. By LEONARD WANTCHEKON\*. I. INTRODUCTION OMPARATIVE politics scholars have long considered electoral politics in Africa to be systematically and inherently clientelist. African rulers, whether self-appointed or democratically elected, rely on the distribution of personal favors to selected members of the electorate in exchange for ongoing political support.<sup>1</sup> This observation relies on the implicit assumption that African voters invariably have a much stronger preference for private transfers than for public goods or proj List Experiments, Political Sophistication, and Vote Buying: Experimental Evidence from Mexico. This research conducted list experiments to estimate the percentage of respondents who received electoral gifts during the 2015 legislative and the 2015 and 2017 subna-tional campaigns in Mexico. Consistent with recent studies on more. In addition, we conjecture that clientelism carries programmatic signals, such that the choice between inducements and coercion depends on local political conditions. We test our predictions using a post-electoral survey fielded in 2014 in ninety rural Hungarian communities. Electoral clientelism and vote buying are widely perceived as major obstacles to economic development. This is because they may limit the provision of public goods. In this paper, we review the literature on clientelism and vote buying and propose the use of field experiments to evaluate empirically the consequences of these phenomena. We provide an overview, discuss implementation, and interpret the main results of recent field experiments conducted by the authors in West African countries. Clientelism and vote buying seem to be effective and to enjoy widespread electoral support. The results