Receiving more, expecting less? Social ties, clientelism and the poor's expectations of future service provision

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A B S T R A C T

Do citizens expect candidates who hand out goods at election time to provide services once they take office? The literature provides competing views of the relationship between electoral handouts and service provision. One sees handouts as pre-payment for the vote in lieu of future services; the second understands them as signaling the candidate's ability to provide future services. In this paper, we examine how electoral handouts may affect expectations of future service provision. We focus on the poor because they are most dependent on such service provision, and on expectations because they are more easily identified and are likely to reflect past experience. We argue the density of social ties within the community should moderate the relationship between candidates' campaign handouts and expectations of future services. We test this argument using hierarchical models to analyze observational and experimental data from over 14,000 poor Kenyans, Malawians, and Zambians in 631 communities. We find that respondents generally view monetary handouts to be in lieu of future services. However, we also find important differences in communities with more and less dense social ties. Vote-buying is more common and seen as more acceptable in socially dense than in less dense communities. Respondents from socially dense communities are also less likely to expect future service provision; however, they do not see candidates who give handouts as significantly less likely to provide services than those who do not. Indeed, there is evidence that not providing handouts in these communities may signal the candidate's inability to provide services. These findings highlight the importance of considering how communities' social density affects expectations over service provision and the need to consider, more broadly, how social context affects the distributive consequences of clientelism.

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1. Introduction

Do citizens expect candidates who hand out goods at election time to provide services once they take office? There are two competing answers to this question. Most scholars and policymakers believe vote-buying undermines public goods provision. For example, Khemani (2015) finds a negative association between health outcomes and areas with a greater prevalence of vote-buying in the Philippines, and she concludes that when 'politicians purchase political support through targeted transfers, they are likely to trade it off against the provision of broader public services on which poor people rely' (Khemani, 2015: 85). Keefer and Vlaicu (2017) concur, arguing that voters who accept these offers do not necessarily expect (or get) much after election day. In contrast, a minority view

holds that the distribution of cash or other material goods during a campaign signals that the candidate can deliver services in the future. Thus, for instance, Kramon (2019) argues that Kenyan voters prefer candidates who are reported to have publicly distributed fistfuls of cash during electoral campaigns because they expect such candidates are more likely to provide future services than those who do not.

In this paper, we consider the possibility that both perspectives are correct, depending on the community context. The relationship between voters and candidates, and even the meaning of electoral handouts, may be different in communities with more or less dense social ties (Stokes, 2005; Szwarcberg, 2012). In socially dense communities, citizens develop long-term relationships with others in the community. Voters may view candidates in this light, especially when they have ties to local intermediaries. They may expect that candidates who give campaign handouts are more likely to provide services after the election than those who do not. Indeed, voters may even react negatively to candidates who

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fail to provide such goods and services during campaigns. By contrast, in less socially dense communities, such exchange relationships are less common. Voters may view candidates who provide handouts with suspicion, as they may expect them to buy votes today in lieu of services tomorrow. Thus, voters may view candidates who provide electoral handouts as less likely to provide future services than those who do not. Drawing on findings surrounding community contexts and voting, we expect that individuals living in communities in which few know each other (i.e., communities with low social density) see electoral handouts as an immediate reward in exchange for future services, while those living in communities in which most people know each other (i.e., communities with high social density) view electoral handouts as a signal of the candidate's largess.

To explore this, we focus on the needy,[1] who rely the most on the community goods and services that politicians provide. We examine how community social density shapes the relationship between electoral handouts and service provision through an analysis of data from a unique survey of Kenyans, Malawians, and Zambians.[2] The survey is exceptionally useful for several reasons. First, it has a large number of respondents, allowing us to restrict our analysis to needy individuals (n = 14,117), the population for whom the distributional consequences of clientelism are most significant. Second, the survey has a heavily clustered sampling design,[3] which afforded the collection of both individual- and community-level data on vote-buying and social density. We employ hierarchical models to determine how community context affects both the prevalence and perception of electoral handouts. Finally, the survey was conducted across three countries, lending credence to the generalizability of our findings.

We find general support for the view that respondents view electoral handouts as given in lieu of future services, but we also find differences in communities with more and less dense social ties. Yet, the way in which social density changes perceptions of service provision is somewhat surprising. Individuals in high and low social density communities differ in their view of candidates who *do not* give handouts. Specifically, individuals in low density communities expect candidates not engaging in vote-buying are somewhat more likely to provide future services than those who do not provide monetary handouts. By contrast, those living in high density communities do not see candidates who campaign only as more likely than those who give monetary handouts to provide future services, since voters' expectations of candidates who campaign without giving handouts decrease.

These findings make several contributions. First, they help adjudicate between and partly reconcile competing visions of the relationship between electoral handouts and service provision: one vision that sees handouts as pre-payment in lieu of services (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2017; Khemani, 2015) and a second that sees them as a signal of future support (Kramon, 2019). Second, the findings demonstrate how social ties condition expectations of service provision following elections, extending the emerging research on the role of social density in electoral politics beyond the Philippines and India (Cruz, 2019; Ravanilla, Haim, & Hicken, 2021). Third, they provide insights into how social ties may affect the distributional consequences of clientelism. These are particularly important given the difficulty of examining these consequences using observational methods and the prevalence of electoral handouts to the poor (Corstange, 2016; Diaz-Cayeros, Estevez, & Magaloni, 2016; Stokes, Dunning, Naareno, & Brusco, 2013).

We proceed as follows. Section 2 outlines the current understandings of clientelism, social context, and service distribution and sets forth the hypotheses. Section 3 gives an overview of the data and method, while Section 4 presents the empirical results regarding citizens' perceptions of the likelihood of candidates fulfilling their campaign promises, conditional on the community's social density. We then explore alternative explanations for the findings, including exposure to electoral handouts, ethnic fractionalization and population density in Section 5. We conclude by considering broader questions about clientelism and its impact on poverty and inequality.

2. Electoral handouts and future services: The role of social density

Despite an extensive literature on clientelism, remarkably little is known about the distributional consequences of vote-buying. Most scholars focus on which voters candidates target (for example, see Calvo & Murillo, 2013; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014; Nichter, 2008; Stokes, 2005; Stokes et al., 2013; Zarazaga, 2014), the role of brokers (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018; Gottlieb, 2017; Stokes et al., 2013; Szwarcberg, 2012; Zarazaga, 2014), and whether or not voters support candidates at the ballot box (Baldwin, 2013; Kramon, 2016; Weghorst & Lindberg, 2013). Studies of electoral handouts and service provision are often based on the perception that the distribution of goods at election time and the voters' electoral support are part of a quid pro quo arrangement. This leads many analysts to assume that voters who accept electoral handouts do not expect future service provision and to view correlations between vote-buying and low service provision as causally related (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2017; Khemani, 2015). To our knowledge, however, analysts have not identified the impact of electoral handouts on voters' expectations of future service provision, nor have they considered how social contexts may shape these expectations.

The failure to examine the distributional consequences of electoral handouts partly reflects the challenges of studying vote-buying. Studies of clientelism often assume the contingent exchange of goods or services for voters' support but fail to demonstrate contingency. In fact, as Hicken and Nathan (2020) note, there is relatively little evidence that candidates monitor voters. This calls into question the extent to which a candidate's offer of money, goods, or services at election time 'buys' votes and how voters can be made to reciprocate (e.g., Stokes, 2005). Moreover, it raises questions over whether voters perceive the giving of gifts and services at election time as a quid pro quo exchange. Indeed, Kramon (2019) argues they are not. Rather, he contends that electoral handouts signal a politician's ability and willingness to provide future services.

These two scenarios—one in which handouts are viewed as vote-buying and another in which handouts are signals of strength—are observationally equivalent: candidates give handouts during a campaign, and voters support them. However, the expectations of service provision in these two scenarios differ greatly. In the first, voters do not expect long-term rewards when they accept the short-term offer. In the second, voters believe that the candidate who gives electoral handouts will provide services once elected. Studying the relationship between handouts and service provision requires us to distinguish contingent offers from others that look the same on the surface.

Observational studies of vote-buying and service provision face further difficulties. Ideally, one would know which candidates engaged in vote-buying, which won, and whether they provided services once elected. One could then compare service provision from candidates who bought votes with service provision from those who did not. However, vote-buying is often clandestine,

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[1] We also focus on the needy as this was the charge given by the UNU-WIDER for the special issue, of which this paper is a part.

[2] Analyses presented here and elsewhere find important differences in the experiences and opinions of the poor (or needy) and less needy respondents (see Appendix D).

[3] For additional information on the sampling, see Appendix A.

making it difficult to identify vote-buying candidates and the politicians elected. Brokers' ledgers, through which we could glean a better understanding of who is served and by whom, are generally closed. Even if it were possible to identify elected officials who have engaged in vote-buying, observational studies suffer thorny endogeneity problems since the election of such candidates is most likely not random (Khemani, 2015). This is particularly problematic as vote-buying is expected to be cheaper and more likely in areas with poorer populations and inferior services (Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Jensen & Justesen, 2014; Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, & Estévez, 2007). Thus, it is equally plausible that poorer services explain more prevalent vote-buying as it is that successful vote-buying politicians explains the lack of services.

Experimental studies overcome some of these problems. For example, Leight, Foarta, Pande, and Ralston (2020) implement a laboratory experiment in Kenya and the United States and find that subjects (acting as voters) were more willing to tolerate expropriation and reduce their welfare expectations when their votes were bought. They concluded that 'vote-buying increases politician rent-seeking and reduces voter welfare even in the absence of any effect on politician selection—and even when voters have full information around vote payments' (Leight et al., 2020: 2). This study is impressive, but it raises questions regarding external validity and does not explore how social context may affect voters' perceptions of vote-buying.

Other scholars have employed survey experiments to gauge citizens' attitudes towards vote-buying. They have done so across a range of contexts, including Argentina (Weitz-Shapiro, 2014), Kenya (Kramon, 2019), Malawi (Kao, Lust, & Rakner, 2017), and South Africa (Justesen & Mares, 2019). These studies focus on voters' support for candidates rather than on their expectations of future service provision.[4] They also draw some contradictory conclusions regarding fundamental issues, such as how much the poor welcome vote-buying (see, for instance, Kao et al., 2017; Kramon, 2019). However, because they explore different types of handouts, use different methodologies, and do so in very different contexts, it is difficult to adjudicate debates or develop a better understanding of how contexts shape the relationship between electoral handouts and service provision.

Moreover, there is good reason to expect that context shapes the relationship between voters and politicians. Social ties likely affect whether individuals are offered handouts. Cruz (2019) and Ravanilla et al. (2021) find that social ties facilitate monitoring and make vote-buying more effective in the Philippines. Communities with dense social ties also are likely to have a greater sense of 'we-ness' (Singh, 2011) and thus have 'additional group-level incentives for voters to comply with vote-buying agreements' (Cruz, 2019: 383). As Spater and Wibbels (2021) show in their study in India, socially dense neighbourhoods also have more unified leadership and party support among the residents and thus can more effectively coordinate votes. In turn, the authors argue, they are more likely to act as 'vote banks.' Given their stronger information flows, group-level incentives, and unified leadership, socially dense communities are attractive sites for vote-buying candidates. Thus, the poor in socially dense communities should be more likely to report experience with vote-buying candidates.

Consequently, we expect:

H1. Voters in more socially dense communities are more likely to report offers of electoral handouts than those in less socially dense communities.

But what of the distributional consequences of vote-buying, and how do community social ties shape them? To our knowledge, these questions remain unanswered. However, we anticipate that the relationships between candidates (and their brokers) and voters are different in communities with dense and less dense social ties. Socially dense communities may better support traditional, long-term exchanges of individual or collective goods based on personal relationships (for a review, see Pellicer, Wegner, Bayer, & Tischmeyer, 2020). As Paller (2019) points out, in such cases, the distribution of resources at election time is part of a long-term exchange. Or, as Kramon (2019) argues, we may expect that electoral handouts signal that the candidate should also have access to resources and services to provide these in the future and would also be more willing to share resources with voters as she gave out handouts before.

In this article, we cannot directly test whether voters in socially dense areas are more likely than those in less socially dense areas to view candidates' offers as part of traditional clientelistic relations. However, we expect the different contexts, and the forms of clientelism within them, help reconcile the two perspectives on electoral handouts – a one-shot exchange or a signal of future support. Voters in socially dense communities are more likely to have long-term exchanges with candidates or their brokers, who are often members of the community. They are thus likely to see handouts as a signal of a candidate's ability and willingness to provide future assistance. Ultimately, this implies that in socially dense communities, those who do not provide such handouts may be seen as less able and willing to provide services once they take office. In contrast, voters in less socially dense communities are unlikely to have long term exchanges with brokers, yet alone candidates. They are thus more likely to view electoral handouts as part of a one-shot exchange and to expect the candidate's offer to be accepted at the expense of future services. These voters have lower expectations of service provision from vote-buying candidates than they do of those who do not make such promises.

Thus,

H2. Voters in less socially dense communities will view handouts as a quid pro quo exchange and therefore not expect future service delivery, while those in more socially dense communities view handouts as a signal of strength and therefore expect future service delivery.

3. Examining campaign handouts and service provision in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia

We employ data from Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia to examine how social context affects the prevalence of electoral handouts and expectations regarding politicians who make such offers. These three countries are useful cases to explore the relationship between community contexts, handouts, and service provision expectations as they have large poor populations: 37 per cent of Kenyans (World Bank, 2020a), 71 per cent of Malawians (World Bank, 2020b), and 59 per cent of Zambians (World Bank, 2020c) live under the international poverty line.[5]

Moreover, many need assistance to access services (Apfelbacher, Brandstetter, Herr, Ehrenstein, & Loerbroks, 2017; Taulo, Gondwe, & Sebitosi, 2015). Healthcare – the service the

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[4] Notably, Kramon (2019) examines service provision in chapter five, but his experiment is not sufficiently powered to draw conclusions.

[5] The percentages living under the national poverty lines in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia are 36 per cent (2015–16), 52 per cent (2015), and 54 per cent (2016), respectively (World Bank 2020a,b,c).

candidate promises in this study – is a major concern. Survey evidence from Malawi found that 80 per cent of respondents reported having suffered from a disease in the previous two years, and more than half reported being in poor or very poor health (GLD, 2016). Njagi, Arsenijevic, and Groot (2020) report similar unmet needs in Kenya. Not only are the poor unable to afford healthcare, but catastrophic healthcare costs thrust many into poverty; each year, the costs of medical care, medicines, and other out-of-pocket expenses push an estimated 150,000 Zambians (Chitah & Jonsson, 2015) and over 450,000 Kenyans[6] into poverty (Barasa, Manyara, Molyneux, & Tsofa, 2017; see also Chuma & Maina, 2012).

Citizens often seek help from their elected officials to address such problems. Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia are all multiparty democracies in which members of parliament (MPs) play an active role in development. Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in each country help MPs support development projects (CLGF 2018; Ejdemyr, Kramon & Robinson, 2018; Harris & Posner, 2019). Citizens expect personal assistance as well. In focus group discussions in Malawi and Zambia, citizens indicated that they expected representatives to solve a variety of issues: from providing spaces for marketers and pipes for agricultural irrigation, to building roads and equipping towns with water, sanitation, and hygiene structures, to (on a more personal level) assisting individuals to obtain healthcare or electricity, or even elevating a youth's talent in the arts or sport.

Such conditions provide fertile ground for clientelistic bargains, but they also call into question expectations regarding future service provision. Voters may have reason to expect, and demand, service provision from those they support, particularly as a community. As a 50-year-old Zambian businessman from Mandevu explained, 'resources and development are withheld from tribal groups who didn't vote'[7] but may be available to those who did. At the same time, given their need for immediate financial support, the poor may be willing to exchange their votes for cash, with no expectation of future services. A 33-year-old Malawian woman explained:

> A person can have their decision to vote … but these party groups come with money and give to people to switch their person of choice. People do vote for those that they do not want because they have received money. [8]

Results from Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia thus provide insights into the conditions under which individuals view campaign handouts as one-off, quid pro quo exchanges of support, and when they see them as a sign of future provision.

3.1. Survey design

We explore the impact of community social density on handouts and expected service provision using survey data from the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) employed in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia (Lust et al., 2019). The surveys were carried out between May and October 2019 by the Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) (see Appendix A for details).

The survey design has several unique advantages for studying the questions at hand. First, it was implemented using heavily clustered sampling, which allows us to derive community- and individual-level measures. We also employ hierarchical models in our analyses to account for the nested structure of the data. Second, the survey included observational measures of individuals witnessing and accepting electoral handouts, as well as attitudes

towards such handouts. Combining these measures with the community-level measures allows us to examine the extent to which community context is associated with the prevalence and perception of electoral handouts. Finally, the survey included a survey experiment. This helps us identify the effect of candidates' electoral actions and characteristics on voters' perceptions of future service delivery, although it is important to note that our analysis of how social context moderates the impact of experimental treatments is observational.

In the experiment, respondents were presented with a hypothetical candidate and asked to what extent they believed the candidate would provide services if elected. The experiment varied the presence of clientelistic behaviour (e.g., passing out money or goods during campaigns) and candidate characteristics (e.g., co-ethnicity, co-locality, co-partisanship, gender). This variation allows us to address three problems inherent in a purely observational approach: 1) that candidates are not randomly distributed, thus making it difficult to separate expectations of different types of candidates from the communities that give rise to them; 2) that candidates make bundles of offers during campaigns, coming to voters with 'chickens, meals and a lot of "sweet talk,"'[9] which makes it difficult to separate different campaign activities and promises; and 3) that vote-buying is often clandestine, undermining our ability to empirically study the link between campaign handouts and politicians' service provision after elections. Randomizing candidate profiles, including different aspects of the candidate's campaign appeals and characteristics, and explicit descriptions of monetary and material handouts, helps us overcome some of the problems noted above.

Moreover, examining the relationship between candidate profiles and respondents' expectations over future service provision provides insights into the distributive consequences of clientelism. Past experiences often shape future expectations, and thus voters' expectations regarding future service provision are most likely based on actual service provision from past candidates. Combining the experimental data with observational data on community context, we can further consider how expectations are conditional on the community type.

3.2. Data and measurement

We analyze a subsample of the dataset, using observations[10] that allow us to explore how community contextual variables affect the relationship between campaign handouts and expectations of future service delivery for poor individuals.

First, we define a community as individuals living within the same square kilometre using the LGPI sampling scheme (see Appendix A for more information). As some of our community contextual variables are aggregate measures of individual variables, we set a minimum threshold of 20 observations in a community[11] and drop communities with fewer than 20 interviews. In the next step, we drop individuals who are not needy from our sample. To do so, we employ a poverty measure that focuses on unmet needs. Specifically, we rely on a survey question about whether respondents can cover their needs, which reads as follows:

I will read out a few statements about your income. Please tell me which of the following statements is closest to your situation:

Our household income covers the needs well—we can save.

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[6] This number reaches over 600,000 if transport costs are taken into account in Kenya (Barasa et al., 2017).
[7] Focus group discussion in Lusaka, Zambia, 13 August 2018.
[8] Focus group discussion in central Malawi, 18 September 2018.
[9] Author's notes from interview with headwoman, Mulaisho Village District, Zambia November 3, 2017.
[10] The full sample includes 23,000 respondents in over 1,200 communities. We exclude observations in geographic communities with fewer than 20 observations.
[11] Analyses on communities with 25 or more respondents, reported in Appendix G, find the coefficient estimates are robust to a higher threshold. However, our results are no longer significant due to the significantly smaller sample size.

Our household income covers the needs all right, without much difficulty.

Our household income does not cover the needs, there are difficulties.

Our household income does not cover the needs, there are great difficulties.

Don't know.

Refuse to answer.[24]

Based on these categories, we create a binary variable, *Unable*, for individual-level poverty, with people who cannot cover their needs coded as one, and zero otherwise. We also define a community-level variable, *Share of Poor*, which is computed as the proportion of all poor respondents in that community (i.e., *Unable* = 1).

After dropping individuals whose needs are met and those in communities with fewer than 20 respondents, we have 14,117 poor respondents in 631 communities for the analysis. Thus, unless otherwise noted, analyses are based on this sample of needy individuals from communities with at least 20 observations.

We measure individual-level social ties to community members using a survey question about whether the respondent knows most others living in the neighbourhood or village. The question reads:

In this village/neighbourhood, would you say:

You hardly know anyone at all?

You know few people?

You know many people?

You know almost everyone?

Don't know.

Refuse to answer-[12]

Again, we recode this to be a binary variable, *Individual Ties*, indicating whether people know many or almost everyone in the community or not. We measure the density of social ties in the community, *Social Density*, by calculating the percentage of respondents in the square kilometre who know many or almost everyone in the community (i.e., for whom *Individual Ties* = 1).[13] Finally, we also include contextual variables indicating whether the community is rural or urban. The binary variable determines whether the respondent is inside or outside a highly populated area (using Facebook-provided data) or near a city or trading centre. (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of our community-level measures.)

4. Analyses and results

We undertake two sets of analyses. We first explore the prevalence of clientelistic handouts in socially dense and less dense communities and whether respondents view these handouts as morally acceptable. Then we interrogate whether receiving handouts during the campaign affects respondents' expectations about the candidate's future performance and how this varies with community density. In all analyses, we use hierarchical modelling to account for the nested structure of our theory and data, and to more accurately estimate the uncertainty of the estimates (Peugh, 2010). All analyses were performed using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression.

4.1. Community social ties and campaign handouts

We draw on observational survey data to interrogate whether the practice of vote-buying is more prevalent and accepted in socially dense communities. We examine 1) whether respondents report vote-buying takes place in their area, 2) whether they have personally received gifts, money, or personal favours from one or more candidates in the past, and 3) whether they think that it is morally acceptable for candidates to hand out gifts, money, or personal favours during election time. (For exact question wording, see Appendix B.) All three dependent variables are binary.[14]

We specify a two-level hierarchical model, using the random intercept model as our baseline. We include regional fixed effects, contextual variables, and individual-level controls for gender, age, education, and the time the respondent has lived in the community in all our models. Thus, the full model (M1-M3 in Table 2) is specified as.

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \, individualcontrols_{ij} + \beta_2 \, contextvariables_j \\ + \beta_3 \, regions_j + \beta_{0j} + \beta_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where *i* denotes the individual (respondent), *j* denotes the community individual *i* belongs to, *k* denotes which outcome variable is used, β_0 represents the intercept, and β_1 includes the coefficients of the individual-level controls in the fixed part of the model. We also have β_2, which represents the coefficients of the contextual variables for poor, socially dense, and highly populated communities. Lastly, we have β_3, the coefficients of the region fixed effects, β_{0j}, which represents the random effect of community *j*, and e_{ij} the individual-level residuals.

Table 2 reports the fitted models for the practice of vote-buying in the area (Model 1), whether the respondent has personally received clientelistic offers (Model 2), and whether they think offering such handouts is morally acceptable (Model 3). Our analysis shows that the greater the share of people who know most others in the community, the more likely our poor respondents are to answer all three survey questions in the affirmative.

A one-standard-deviation change in our social density variable results in a 3.8 percentage point increase (15.8*0.24) in the probability of reporting vote-buying in the area (M1) and a 3.2 percentage increase (13.4*0.24) in the probability of reporting personal experience with vote-buying (M2). The probability that vote-buying is seen as morally acceptable increases by 1.4 percentage points (6*0.24) for each one-standard-deviation increase in our social density variable (M3). In contrast to conventional wisdom, our data provides no evidence that the share of poor people in the community, and whether the community is in an urban or rural area, affect experience with, and perception of, vote-buying.[15]

4.2. Campaign offers and expectations of service provision

Next, we examine how campaign handouts affect citizens' expectations of future service provision. To do so, we employ a survey experiment embedded in the Malawi and Zambia LGPI surveys. Here, we restrict our analysis to the sample of needy respondents

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[24] Don't know and refuse to answer are not read out loud.

[12] Don't know and refuse to answer are not read out loud.

[13] In order to obtain reliable estimates of community-level variables, we compute them on the sample that included both poor and wealthy respondents after communities with fewer than 20 respondents were dropped from the sample.

[14] Whether people received offers from one or multiple candidates was recoded as a binary variable, with zero for 'never received money or goods' and one for 'received money or goods from one or multiple candidates.' Distributions for the different answer categories for all three dependent variables are found in Appendix C.

[15] The focus of this study is on the poor, but it is worth noting that the results are quite different for less needy respondents. We do not find less needy respondents to be more likely to report the practice in communities with higher social density. Similarly, they do not appear to think that vote-buying is morally acceptable when social ties to neighbours are denser within their community. However, less needy respondents are more likely to report personally receiving money or goods if they live in socially dense communities. Models using the full and wealthy samples are found in Appendix D.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Community-Level Measures: Share of Poor, Social Density, and Urban.

Contextual variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Observations
Share of Poor	0.73	0.20	0.05	1	631
Social Density	0.61	0.24	0	1	631
Urban	0.40	–	0	1	631

Source: authors' calculations.

(n = 4,811) in the 221 communities for which we have more than 20 respondents.[16]

Table 2
Observational analysis of vote-buying in the community.

	Model (1): practice occurs	Model (2): personally received	Model (3): morally acceptable
Individual-level			
Age (18–34 as baseline)			
35–55	−0.032***	−0.014	−0.066***
	(0.009)	(0.016)	(0.009)
greater than55	−0.036**	−0.007	−0.070***
	(0.012)	(0.022)	(0.012)
Female	0.004	−0.001	0.022**
	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.008)
Education (no schooling as baseline)			
Some schooling	0.038**	0.037	−0.060***
	(0.013)	(0.023)	(0.013)
Lived (less than a year as baseline)			
More than one year	−0.000	−0.022	−0.025+
	(0.014)	(0.025)	(0.014)
All their life	0.003	−0.063*	−0.018
	(0.016)	(0.028)	(0.015)
Individual ties	0.001	0.068***	0.005
	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.010)
Community level			
Social density	0.158**	0.134*	0.064*
	(0.049)	(0.058)	(0.032)
Share of poor	−0.035	0.048	0.023
	(0.059)	(0.070)	(0.039)
Urban	−0.001	0.002	0.010
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.011)
Controls			
Region (Lilongwe as baseline)			
Lusaka	0.577***	0.350***	0.025
	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.019)
Malawi border	0.134***	−0.033	−0.017
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.015)
Nairobi	0.636***	0.414***	−0.063**
	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.024)
Zambia	0.585***	0.355***	0.097***
	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.018)
Constant	0.058	0.029	0.238***
	(0.060)	(0.074)	(0.041)
Variance (constant)	0.024	0.011	0.004
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Variance (residual)	0.162	0.177	0.169
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.002)
Observations	11,654	4,016	12,101
Number of groups	627	594	627

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1. Standard errors in parentheses. The analysis is conducted using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression. The number of respondents in this analysis is lower than the total number of needy respondents in the full sample because these questions were randomly subsampled. This was due to time and space considerations in the survey. The number of observations for the question regarding whether respondents have personally received clientelistic handouts is particularly low as this question was only put to those who had previously responded that vote-buying occurred in the area. We also drop 'refuse to answer/don't knows' from the analysis.
Source: authors' calculations.

The experiment begins with the following prompt:

> Please listen closely as I read you the following description. I will then ask you a few questions about the person I now describe.

The interviewer then proceeds to read a vignette in which key attributes are randomly assigned. The key attributes in the experiment, and the treatment arms associated with each, are presented in Table 3.

The treatment attributes are randomly chosen[17] and included in a vignette:

> Please imagine that a candidate is running in a {local/parliamentary} election. The candidate is a {male/female}[18]{co-ethnic/non-co-ethnic} and {he/she} is running as member of the {co-party/ other party}[19] in your district. {He/she} {visits communities, campaigning and handing out kitenges, lesos, hats, and T-shirts/visits communities, campaigning and handing out money/ visits communities to campaign} and {promises to deliver better health services/promises to provide personal assistance in accessing health centres, paying hospital bills and other fees} to {voters who support {him/her}/voters regardless of whether they support {him/her}/communities who support {him/her}/communities regardless of whether they support {him/her}}. {He/she} is from {nearby village/village on the other side of the district}. {Wealthy/0} local elders urge you to vote for {him/her}/ {wealthy/0} party leaders urge you to vote for {him/her}/{wealthy/0}{candidate ethnic group} leaders urge you to vote for {him/her}/{wealthy/0}members of the candidate's family urge you to vote for {him/her}.

To provide a clear example: a respondent is read a description as follows, in which the italicized words correspond to a treatment arm:

> Please imagine that a candidate is running in a *parliamentary* election. The candidate is a *female Chewa*, and she is running as a member of the *Malawi Congress Party* in your district. *She visits communities, campaigning and handing out kitenges, lesos, hats, and T-shirts, and she promises to provide personal assistance for accessing health centres, paying hospital bills, and other fees to voters who support her. She is from a nearby village. Local elders urge you to vote for her.*

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[16] The smaller sample size compared to the size for the observational analysis presented in Table 2 results from two design decisions. First, the experiment was not included in the Kenya sample. Second, respondents in Zambia and Malawi who said they did not have a party they felt close to were not presented the vignette. This has potential implications for the scope conditions of this study as we focus on poor respondents who feel close to any political party. We could imagine that their expectations about a candidate's future performance more strongly reflects their party preferences. We have randomized co-partisanship versus non-co-partisanship in the experiment and can estimate the effect on expectations in our sample.

[17] For the distribution of treatment conditions, see Tables H3–H6 in Appendix H.

[18] Note that the vast majority of surveys are conducted in non-gendered languages, and thus the vignette does not place heavy emphasis on the candidate's gender, despite the repeated use of gendered pronouns and possessives in the English version.

[19] Co-ethnicity and co-partisanship are piped in from responses to earlier questions that asked the respondent's ethnicity and partisanship. Non-co-ethnic and non-co-party treatments are randomly chosen, with piped-in ethnic and party labels that do not match the respondent's ethnic group and party preference, respectively.

Table 3
Experimental conditions.

Attribute	Randomized treatment arms
Actions at campaign rallies	1. Visits communities, campaigning and handing out kitenges/lesos, hats, and T-shirts 2. Visits communities, campaigning and handing out money 3. Visits communities to campaign
Type of good distributed	1. Promises to deliver better health services 2. Promises to provide personal assistance for accessing health centres, paying hospital bills and other fees
Type of distribution	1. Voters who support him/her 2. Voters, regardless of whether they support him/her 3. Communities who support him/her 4. Communities, regardless of whether they support him/her
Endorser endowment	1. Wealthy 2. Blank
Community actor expressing opinion	1. Local elders urge you to vote for him/her 2. Party leaders urge you to vote for him/her 3. Ethnic leaders urge you to vote for him/her 4. Members of the candidate's family urge you to vote for him/her
Ethnicity	1. Co-ethnic (*ethnicity is piped in*) 2. Non-co-ethnic (*a randomly chosen, non-co-ethnic identity is randomly piped in*)
Living status	1. From a nearby village 2. From a village on the other side of the district
Partisanship	1. Co-partisan (*respondent's preferred party is piped in*) 2. Non-co-partisan (*a randomly chosen, non-co-party is piped in*)
Gender	1. Male 2. Female

Source: authors' compilation.

We trained interviewers to read the vignette carefully, paying close attention to the wording, and programmed the survey to place a reminder on the tablet screen which notified the interviewer that the next item was an experiment. After reading the vignette, the interviewer then read eight follow-up questions. Interviewers restated the vignette when asking the first, third, fifth, and seventh follow-up questions.

In this study, the dependent variable of interest gauges how likely the respondent believes the candidate would be to deliver on the promise. This is the sixth follow-up question,[20] which reads: 'How likely do you think this candidate is to {deliver better health services/provide personal assistance for accessing health centres, paying hospital bills and other fees}?' with a four-point Likert scale response. 'Don't knows' are dropped from the analysis.

The experiment is only shown once to each respondent, and thus statistical adjustments for potential correlations in responses at the individual level are not needed. We include random slopes for the type of campaign activity to allow the effect of receiving money, T-shirts, and hats during the campaign to vary across communities in our models. Our random slope model without including community social density (M1 in Table 4) is:

$$\text{expectations}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{action}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{experimentalcontrols}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{region}_{ij} + \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \text{action}_{ij} + e_{ij} \quad (2)$$

where *i* denotes the individual and *j* denotes individual *i*'s community. The term β_0 is the intercept. In the fixed part of the models, $\boldsymbol{\beta_1}$ is the coefficient for the type of handout, $\boldsymbol{\beta_2}$ is the coefficient for the additional experimental controls, and $\boldsymbol{\beta_3}$ is the coefficient for the region effects. The random components are $\boldsymbol{\beta}_{0j}$, the random community effect on the individual's expectations about future service provision, $\boldsymbol{\beta}_{1j}$, the random effect of handout type, and the residuals e_{ij}.

Then we add our contextual variables for the density of social ties to our model (M2 in Table 4). This yields:

$$\text{expectations}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{action}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{experimentalcontrols}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{region}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{socialdensity}_j + \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \text{action}_{ij} + e_{ij} \quad (3)$$

where β_4 is the coefficient of social density. Finally, we create a model that includes a cross-level interaction to empirically test whether the effect of receiving money, T-shirts, or hats during the campaign—compared with no clientelistic appeal—varies by community social density (Model 3 in Table 4):

$$\text{expectations}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{action}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{experimentalcontrols}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{region}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{socialdensity}_j + \beta_5 \text{actionxsocialdensity}_{ij} + \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \text{action}_{ij} + e_{ij} \quad (4)$$

where β_5 is the coefficient of the interaction between action and social density.

The fitted models can be found in Table 4. Additional analyses using the full and wealthy samples are reported in Appendix D.

Model 1 shows findings from our random slope model, in which we allow the candidate's campaign appeal to vary across communities. We do not find notable variation in the effect of action type across communities, but we leave the random slope in our model because we calculate cross-level interaction effects that require random slopes for the lower-level variable (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019). Our analysis provides some evidence that poor respondents have lower expectations of future service provision: we find a decrease of 1.65 percentage if the candidate hands out money during the campaign (p < 0.1) when compared to no handouts. The effect of handing out T-shirts and hats is negative but not statistically significant in our model. Thus, it appears that handing out money during the campaign negatively affects people's expectations about future service provision but distributing material goods does not.

In Model 2, we include contextual variables for the density of social ties within the village or neighbourhood. We find no evidence that the density of social ties in the community is associated with higher expectations of the candidate' future performance. The effect of community density alone is not significant in our model.

Model 3 includes a cross-level interaction between the type of activity and our contextual variable for the density of community ties. To correctly interpret the positive and significant interaction effect (p < 0.10) reported in Table 4, we draw on the marginal effects presented in Figure 1. We see that, on average, respondents

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[20] Other dependent variables in this experiment are as follows: 1. First, I would like to ask: how likely would you be to vote for this candidate in the next election? 2. How likely do you think it is that this candidate will be able to mobilize resources from the central government? 3. Who do you think the candidate will benefit most: your village or other villages? 4. Who do you think the candidate will benefit most: men or women? 5. Who do you think the candidate will benefit most: your ethnic group or other ethnic groups? 6. How likely do you think it is that the candidate, if elected, will exploit the office for his/her own gain? 8. How likely do you think it is that this candidate, if elected, would refuse to help voters who did not vote for him/her? For the distributions of all outcome variables, see Tables H1 and H2 in Appendix H.

Table 4
Multilevel regression results with expectations about future service provision as the dependent variable.

	Model (1): basic random slope	Model (2): community density	Model (3): interaction model
Individual variables			
Action type			
Money	−0.066[+]	−0.066[+]	−0.324[*]
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.159)
T-shirts, hats	−0.049	−0.049	−0.115
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.156)
Community-level			
Social density		−0.153	−0.297[+]
		(0.112)	(0.164)
Interaction			
Money*Social density			0.356[+]
			(0.214)
T-shirts and hats*Social density			0.091
			(0.209)
Controls			
Co-ethnic	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.169[***]
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Village nearby	0.023	0.023	0.023
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Female	0.072[*]	0.073[*]	0.073[*]
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Co-party	0.120[***]	0.120[***]	0.120[***]
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Experimental arms	✔	✔	✔
Region	✔	✔	✔
Constant	2.919[***]	3.031[***]	3.134[***]
	(0.065)	(0.103)	(0.136)
Variance (action)	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Variance (constant)	0.022	0.021	0.021
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Variance (residual)	0.960	0.960	0.959
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Observations	4,811	4,811	4,811
Number of groups	221	221	221

Note: *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.1$. Standard errors in parentheses. The analysis is conducted using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression. All experimental dimensions of the conjoint are included in the analysis. For tables including all values for the experimental arms, see Appendix D. For robustness checks using contextual controls, see Table G3 in Appendix G.
Source: authors' calculations.

living in the least socially dense communities have lower expectations of future service provision from candidates offering money (2.89 with 95% CI = [2.64, 3.14]) than from those who do not provide handouts (3.21 with 95% CI = [2.97, 3.45]) or who provide only t-shirts and hats (3.10 with 95% CI = [2.86, 3.34]). In communities with the highest level of social density, average expectations about future service delivery increase slightly (2.95 with 95% CI = [2.84, 3.05]) for the monetary handout condition, yet they decrease (2.92 with 95% CI = [2.81, 3.02]) for the campaigning only condition and for the providing t-shirts and hats condition (2.89 with 95% CI = [2.79, 2.96]). The difference between expectations in the money and no handouts conditions shrinks from 0.32 to −0.03. The confidence intervals almost completely overlap in the high socially dense areas, and thus the effects are not distinguishable from each other. In other words, in lower-density communities, we see that the difference between handing out money or nothing is greater than for communities with higher social density. This difference disappears in high density areas because of decreasing expectations of those candidates who are not giving out money.[21]

Based on these findings, we conclude that handing out money has a steady impact on expectations across different levels of community social density. Monetary handouts may be better seen as a quid pro quo exchange rather than a signal of strength. Importantly, however, not all respondents view candidates who *do not give* such handouts similarly. This is particularly true for our treatment in which respondents are told that the candidate is campaigning only. In low social density communities, respondents see candidates who campaign only as more likely to provide services in the future than those who give monetary handouts. In high social density communities, they view those candidates as no more likely to provide future services than those who provide handouts. This finding indicates that respondents' expectations are decreasing with higher levels of social density when they are not receiving handouts, monetary or otherwise. In fact, there is some weak evidence that the trend moves in the opposite direction. The poor may view the lack of handouts as a signal of the candidate's inability and unwillingness to provide future services, although this is not statistically significant.

5. Alternative explanations

We now turn to two sets of alternative explanations for the patterns that we observe in the data. First, some might expect that vote-buying may be simply experienced by voters as more common in some areas and that monetary handouts thus may less likely spur negative reactions where they are prevalent. Second, some may expect alternative factors to be associated both with more (or less) socially dense communities and expectations for future service provision. These include whether communities are rural (or urban), have higher (or lower) levels of poverty, or are more (or less) ethnically homogeneous, and thus have greater (or lesser) experience with and expectations over co-ethnic candidates.

5.1. Vote-buying as common practice

To interrogate whether the prevalence of vote-buying in an area is driving the relationship we find between monetary handouts and expectations about future services, we run our main models presented in Table 4 with an aggregated measure of the reported occurrence of electoral handouts. We rely on a survey question about whether respondents report that vote-buying occurs in their area (for question wording see Appendix B). We aggregated responses from the binary variable by calculating the percentage of respondents in the square kilometre who report that vote-buying takes place in their area. We may expect monetary handouts to trigger negative sentiments towards candidates where these handouts are less prevalent and to observe generally lower expectations in areas where they are more common. The findings in Table 5, Model 1 indicate that the poor are less likely to expect future services in areas with a higher prevalence of vote-buying ($p < 0.001$). Yet we do not find evidence that expectations of future services are related to the interaction between the prevalence of

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[21] Respondents' expectations after receiving monetary handouts are lower than when the candidate is not giving out monetary handouts. It may seem like we observe slightly higher expectations in the monetary handouts condition than in the campaigning only condition when looking at the highest density areas, (see Figure 1), but there is no substantial variation in expectations of future services among these two groups: the difference is only 0.03. Moreover, the interaction effect (alpha=0.1 level) for minimum 20 respondents by community becomes insignificant when varying the minimum number of respondents. We thus do not find support for an increase in expectations of candidates who hand out money compared to those who do not provide handouts with increasing levels of social density. (The results are available in the Appendix Figure G4.).
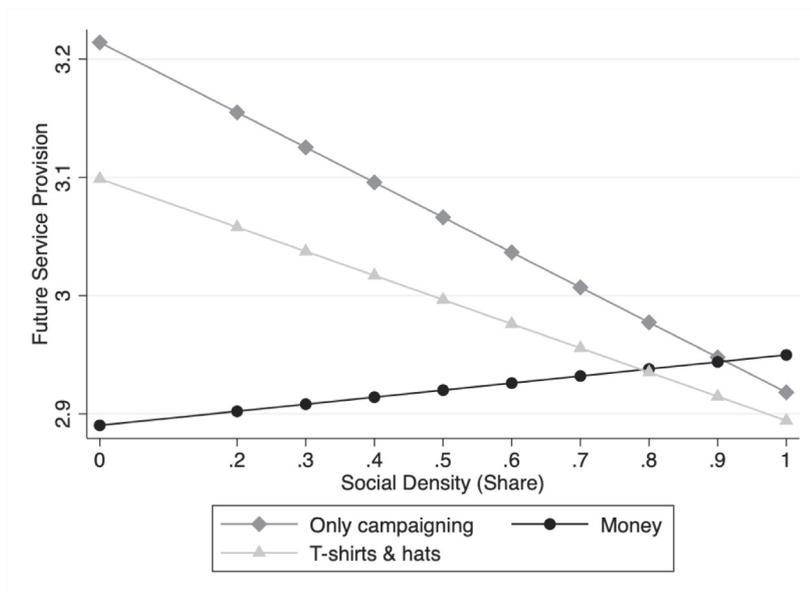
Note: Marginal effects are presented for the clientelistic handouts at different levels of community social density.

Source: authors' illustration.

Fig. 1. Predicted values of expectations about future service provision over type of activity by community social density (Model 3). Note: Marginal effects are presented for the clientelistic handouts at different levels of community social density. Source: authors' illustration.

handouts in an area and the action type (Table 5, Model 2). In fact, Figure 2 shows that expectations about future service provision decrease with higher levels of reported vote-buying in all three conditions. The trends we observe in Table 4 cannot simply be understood as the results of higher prevalence of vote-buying in some areas.

5.2. Shared identity

There is also reason to believe that voters' reactions to candidates who hand out money is shaped by their social identities. Previous literature has shown that voters are more likely to support co-ethnic, co-local, or co-partisan candidates, in part because they believe such candidates are more likely to provide constituent services (Franck & Rainer, 2012; Harris & Posner, 2019; Lust-Okar, 2006; Schneider, 2019). As with much of Africa, ethnicity and partisanship play a role in Kenyan, Malawian, and Zambian elections (see Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008; Ferree, 2020; Ferree, Gibson, & Long, 2021; Norris & Mattes, 2003; Osei-Hwedie, 1998). We found evidence for a main effect of a shared ethnic identity on expectations of future services in Table 4 above. Here, we interrogate whether there is an interaction effect between shared identity and the candidatés action type during the campaign.

We examine this potential explanation in two ways. First, we explore, more broadly, whether voters will have different expectations of candidates who give campaign handouts if they have shared identities, including whether the respondent and candidate are co-ethnic, co-partisan, co-local, as well as if the candidate is female. To do so, we use data from the conjoint experiment presented in Table 4. We run same-level interactions between individual-level characteristics—co-ethnic, co-local, co-partisan, and female—and clientelistic handouts on respondents' expectations about the candidate's future service provision.

As shown in the interaction models in Table 6, shared identity does not shape how respondents perceive candidates providing monetary handouts.[22] We do find some evidence of an interaction

between co-local candidates and handouts of T-shirts and hats. When the candidate is from a village nearby, poor respondents are less likely to expect service provision after receiving T-shirts and hats during the campaign. The marginal effect is −0.118 (p < 0.05) for receiving T-shirts and hats from a co-local, but not significantly different from zero for a non-local candidate. Overall, however, there is no evidence that handouts of money are viewed more positively when they are made by a candidate who shares the voter's identity.

Second, we explore the relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and social density. To measure ethnic heterogeneity, we calculate the ethnic fractionalization index (ELF) for each community using survey data from our sample. The Pearson's correlation coefficient is −0.29, indicating a moderate negative correlation between the two continuous variables for the share of people who know most others in the communities (our social density measure) and ELF (221 observations). Results presented in Table 7, Models 1 and 2 further indicate that ethnic heterogeneity of the community does not statistically predict expectations of future service provision. Similarly, we do not find an ELF moderating effect on the relationship between the type of clientelistic handout and the respondents' expectations. In previous work, we have shown considerable variation in the density of social ties across poor communities; social density, not poverty or ethnic fractionalization levels, affects the nature of authority in such communities (Jöst and Lust, 2022). These findings suggest that (1) social density and ethnic heterogeneity do not capture the same concept, and (2) social density, not ethnic heterogeneity, appears to influence how respondents perceive clientelistic handouts.

5.3. Urban and poor communities

Communities' poverty levels and their urban or rural status, rather than their social density, may also explain the differences in expectations about a candidate's future service provision. For instance, scholars point to rural communities as those where the monitoring of voters is easiest (Stokes, 2005) and traditional brokers and party operatives are available (Auerbach, 2019; Auerbach & Kruks-Wisner, 2020; Paller, 2019). We argue that

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[22] Marginal effects tables are reported in Appendix F.

Table 5
Multilevel models with expectations about future service provision by occurrence of vote-buying and clientelistic handouts.

	Model (1): votebuying	Model (2): interaction model
Individual variables		
Action type		
Money	−0.069*	−0.067
	(0.035)	(0.056)
T-shirts, hats	−0.053	−0.056
	(0.035)	(0.056)
Community-level		
Votebuying	−0.363***	−0.364**
	(0.090)	(0.117)
Interaction		
Money*Votebuying		−0.007
		(0.137)
T-shirts and hats*Votebuying		0.010
		(0.135)
Controls		
Co-ethnic	0.167***	0.167***
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Village nearby	0.021	0.021
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Female	0.072*	0.072*
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Co-party	0.117***	0.117***
	(0.029)	(0.029)
Experimental arms	✔	✔
Region	✔	✔
Constant	2.987***	2.988***
	(0.066)	(0.070)
Variance (action)	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Variance (constant)	0.017	0.017
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Variance (residual)	0.960	0.960
	(0.020)	(0.020)
Observations	4,811	4,811
Number of groups	221	221

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Standard errors in parentheses. The analysis is conducted using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression. All experimental dimensions of the conjoint are included in the analysis. *Source*: authors' calculations.

social ties are a more direct and theoretically relevant driver of the relationship between handouts and expectations than urban/rural contexts or the level of poverty within communities. Nevertheless, we test whether we can find a similar trend when we examine high population density in the community and differences in the share of poor respondents. To do so, we run the models presented in Table 4 with an aggregated measure of community poverty and our measure of population density, representing whether respondents live in an urban or rural community.

Findings in Table 7, Model 3 indicate that poor respondents are more likely to expect future services from a candidate when they live in communities with a higher share of needy individuals, although this is only statistically significant at the alpha = 0.10 level. We do not find similar effects for whether respondents live in rural or urban communities (Model 5). Moreover, the interactions in Table 7, Models 4 and 6, are insignificant: there is no indication that the impact of money on expectations of future service provision is contingent on either the share of poor people in a community or the population density.[23]

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[23] We ran additional models where we exclude social density. We did not find the share of poor people in the community to predict the occurrence of vote-buying in these areas. Models including the share of poor people in the community and rural versus urban communities can be found in Appendix D.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study contributes to the current literature on clientelism and vote-buying in three important ways. First, the study advances the study of the distributive consequences of clientelism, finding support for the quid pro quo understanding of vote buying that goes beyond correlational evidence. Second, the study raises new questions regarding how voters view candidates who do not provide electoral handouts. While studies on vote-buying inevitably also consider those who do not provide goods during elections, the question of how candidates who do not engage in vote-buying are perceived is not studied explicitly. This study suggests it is an important area of future research. Third, this work underlines the importance of context when studying vote-buying, focusing on how community social density is associated with changes in the ways candidates who provide handouts are viewed vis-a-vis those who do not.

Leveraging observational data and a survey experiment embedded in a large, heavily clustered survey in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia, we find differences in the experiences of monetary electoral handouts between those living in socially dense and less dense communities. Those living in socially dense communities are more likely to report that vote-buying occurs in their community and that they have personally received such an offer in the past. They are also more likely to think that vote-buying is morally acceptable. Thus, vote-buying not only seems to be more prevalent in these areas but also social norms and perceptions of vote-buying appear to differ between socially dense and less dense communities.

We find no evidence that social density moderates the relationship between candidates' campaign strategies and voters' expectations over future service delivery. The needy seem to have lower expectations over candidates who provide monetary handouts than those who do not regardless of the density of social ties in their community. Importantly, however, we find that the difference in expectations between those who provide monetary handouts and those who only campaign decreases as the density of social ties increases. This is due to a change in individuals' perceptions of candidates *who do not* provide handouts during election time. In less dense areas, candidates who campaign only are seen as more likely to provide services in the future than those who give out money, while in dense areas, this is not the case.

These findings help adjudicate between and partly explain different expectations over the relationship between electoral handouts and future service provision. The finding that the needy have low expectations over service provision from candidates who give monetary campaign handouts, regardless of community social density, lends support for the quid pro quo understanding of vote-buying. At the same time, the fact that voters in high density areas are less likely than those in low density communities to expect that candidates who do not hand out money during campaigns will provide future services may help to explain the view that monetary handouts are a signal of strength. We do not find significant evidence that handouts are a signal of the candidates' strength and, thus, increase expectations of future service provision. However, these findings do explain why scholars may find evidence that voters' in socially dense communities may prefer candidates who give such campaign handouts.

The findings not only lend support for the quid pro quo understanding of vote-buying, but they also turn our attention to the previously overlooked question: How do voters view candidates who *do not* give electoral handouts? Scholars have tended to focus on voters' views of candidates who give monetary handouts, considering whether different voters welcome such actions. Our study suggests that different voters may respond similarly to candidates who provide electoral handouts, but very differently to those who
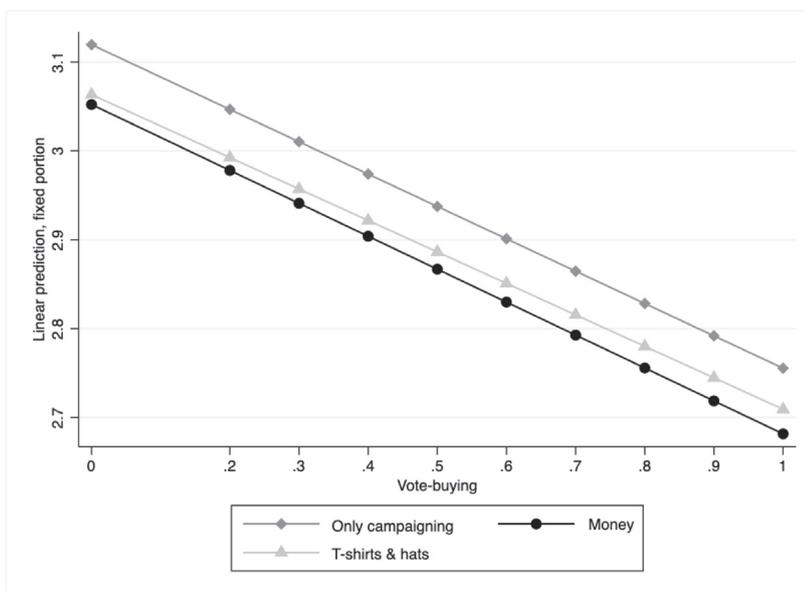
Note: Marginal effects are presented for the clientelistic handouts at different levels of community social density.

Source: authors' illustration.

Fig. 2. Predicted values of expectations about future service provision over type of activity by the prevalence of vote-buying in a community (Model 2). Note: Marginal effects are presented for the clientelistic handouts at different levels of community social density. Source: authors' illustration.

Table 6
Multilevel regression models with same-level interactions between candidate characteristics and clientelistic handouts and expectations about future service provision as dependent variable.

	Model (1): co-ethnic	Model (2): co-partisan	Model (3): co-local	Model (4): female
Individual variables				
Action type				
Money	−0.076	−0.076	−0.053	−0.096[+]
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.049)	(0.050)
T-shirts, hats	−0.024	−0.087[+]	0.019	−0.054
	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Co-ethnic	0.180[***]	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.169[***]
	(0.049)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Co-partisan	0.120[***]	0.089[+]	0.120[***]	0.121[***]
	(0.029)	(0.050)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Co-local	0.023	0.023	0.078	0.022
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.050)	(0.028)
Female	0.072*	0.072*	0.071*	0.050
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.050)
Interactions				
*Action*Individual characteristic*				
Money*Individual characteristic	0.020	0.020	−0.025	0.060
	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.070)
T-shirts and hats*Individual characteristic	−0.050 (0.070)	0.074 (0.070)	−0.137* (0.070)	0.009 (0.070)
Controls				
Experimental arms	✔	✔	✔	✔
Region	✔	✔	✔	✔
Constant	2.913[***]	2.934[***]	2.891[***]	2.931[***]
	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.068)	(0.068)
Variance (action)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Variance (constant)	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.022
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Variance (residual)	0.960	0.960	0.959	0.959
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Observations	4,811	4,811	4,811	4,811
Number of groups	221	221	221	221

Note: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Standard errors in parentheses. The analysis is conducted using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression. Random slopes models are specified. We run interactions between the type of handout and the individual characteristics (co-ethnic, co-partisan, co-local and female). We use a survey question on respondent's expectations about future service provision as dependent variable in the models. All experimental dimensions of the conjoint are included in the analysis. For tables including all values for the experimental arms, see Appendix D. For marginal effects analyses, see Tables F1–F4 in Appendix F.
Source: authors' calculations.

Table 7
Multilevel models with expectations about future service provision by community context and clientelistic handouts.

	Model (1): ELF	Model (2): interaction	Model (3): share of poor	Model (4): interaction	Model (5): rural vs. urban	Model (6): interaction
Individual variables						
Action type						
Money	−0.066[+]	−0.110[*]	−0.066[+]	−0.136	−0.066[+]	−0.054
	(0.035)	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.266)	(0.035)	(0.043)
T-shirts, hats	−0.049	−0.040	−0.049	−0.232	−0.050	−0.086[*]
	(0.035)	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.259)	(0.035)	(0.043)
Interactions						
Action*Share of poor in the community						
Money*Share of poor				0.080		
				(0.300)		
T-shirts and hats*Share of poor				0.208		
				(0.292)		
Action*Urban communities						
Money*Urban						−0.035
						(0.074)
T-shirts and hats*Urban						0.108
						(0.074)
Action*ELF						
Money*ELF		0.142				
T-shirts and hats*ELF		(0.102)				
		−0.031				
Context variables		(0.100)				
Share of poor			0.296[+]	0.196		
			(0.159)	(0.236)		
Urban					0.024	−0.001
					(0.037)	(0.057)
ELF	−0.039	−0.074				
	(0.050)	(0.078)				
Controls						
Co-ethnic	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.170[***]	0.170[***]
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Village nearby	0.022	0.023	0.021	0.022	0.023	0.022
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Female	0.072[*]	0.072[*]	0.072[*]	0.072[*]	0.073[*]	0.071[*]
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Co-party	0.121[***]	0.121[***]	0.120[***]	0.120[***]	0.120[***]	0.120[***]
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Experimental arms	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Region	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Constant	2.927[***]	2.937[***]	2.644[***]	2.732[***]	2.909[***]	2.918[***]
	(0.065)	(0.068)	(0.161)	(0.222)	(0.066)	(0.068)
Variance (action)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Variance (constant)	0.022	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.021
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Variance (residual)	0.960	0.959	0.960	0.959	0.960	0.959
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Observations	4,811	4,811	4,811	4,811	4,811	4,811
Number of groups	221	221	221	221	221	221

Note: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Standard errors in parentheses. The analysis is conducted using Stata's 'mixed' command for linear multilevel regression. Random slopes models are specified. For marginal effects plots, see Appendix F. For robustness checks using WorldPop population density measures to proxy urbanization, see Tables G1–G2 in Appendix G.
Source: authors' calculations.

do not. Specifically, voters in low social density areas may expect candidates who campaign only will provide future services, while those in high density areas may have low expectations of candidates who turn up empty handed. This finding may help explain why politicians sometimes complain that they cannot go out to campaign unless their pockets are full. These funds may not buy the candidates votes, but rather can help to keep the candidate in the race. Further studies should seek to determine the extent to which these campaign strategies not only affect expectations over future services, but willingness to support the candidate.

Finally, the study provides important evidence that community social ties shape the relationships between candidates and voters. We find that social density is associated with the prevalence of and attitudes toward vote-buying, and that it decreases expectations of

those candidates who do not provide any goods during the campaigns. Moreover, we rule out several alternative explanations. We do not find support for the alternative interpretation that monetary handouts are welcome in communities that regularly experience vote-buying and lead to negative expectations in communities where they are uncommon. For all three campaign conditions we find decreasing expectations with increasing levels of reported vote-buying. We rule also out that sharing the social identity of the candidate drives perceptions about electoral handouts across communities, and that the share of poor people who live in a community, the ethnic fractionalization in the community, and whether it is urban or rural appear to be driving our results. The impact of community density on expectations over future services highlights the importance of understanding the role of local

context on political outcomes. Making sense of how social contexts shape clientelism, and the scope conditions this implies, is an important next step for future work.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Prisca and Ellen both engaged in data collection, Prisca did analyses and writing, Ellen did writing and funding.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106008.

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