Agents of the Regime?
Traditional Leaders and Electoral Clientelism in South Africa

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Abstract

Traditional leaders are often given sub-national territorial authority in developing democracies. Though ubiquitous, the political consequences of their power has received little rigorous attention. We argue that such traditional leaders, whose power depends on the state, may be incentivized to strategically support political parties who can guarantee their survival and provide them with rents. We study this quid pro quo in the Apartheid-era Bantustans of South Africa. We show that an alignment between the state party and the chiefs maps to increased political support for the party. Further, we provide quantitative evidence consistent with chiefs acting as clientelistic brokers. Our results suggest that chiefs boost African National Congress (ANC) vote-share by 8.2 percentage points in the Bantustans. This translates into roughly 4.5% of the ANC’s total vote-share, and a distortion in the national vote of 2.5 percentage points. This distortion is pivotal in determining whether the ANC is able to alter South Africa’s constitution.

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1. Introduction

From sub-Saharan Africa to south-east Asia, unelected leaders are often afforded sub-national territorial authority. This phenomenon is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where “chiefs”, or traditional leaders, whose immediate legitimacy resides in historical socio-cultural custom, serve as unelected leaders (Lange, 2009; Logan, 2009; Baldwin, 2013; Koter, 2013; Logan, 2013; Acemoglu et al., 2014). At least twenty African countries have passed legislation formally recognizing substantial de jure roles for traditional leaders; others provide more informal de facto authority through the absence of state intervention (Herbst, 2000; Williams, 2010). While the virtues and dangers of ceding authority to traditional leaders are the focus of scholarly debate in multiple disciplines (Mamdani, 1996; Goldstein and Udry, 2008; Acemoglu et al., 2014), studying their effects presents a difficult inferential challenge. We present precise quantitative estimates of the distortionary electoral effect that traditional leadership structures can have on the democratic process in South Africa. These results suggest that, in accordance with accounts of traditional leaders as electoral brokers (Scott, 1972; Callahan and McCargo, 1996; Koter, 2013), chiefs can influence voters in their communities to favor particular parties.

We first provide a novel explanation for why traditional leaders engage in this behavior. We argue that perverse incentives faced by both traditional leaders and political elites can induce collusive behavior. The resulting political dynamic is one in which political parties ensure traditional leaders’ legal tenure, which is often tenuous in constitutional democracies, in exchange for votes. The dynamic, which we term a “political quid pro quo”, applies particularly (but not exclusively) to traditional leaders because their legal legitimacy is often fragile. We then present empirical evidence that a strategic alignment between the state party and the chiefs maps to increased political support for the party. Our study considers the legacy of the Apartheid-era independent ethnic homelands, or “Bantustans”, which served to consolidate the authority of traditional leaders in South Africa over an 80 year period but were dismantled with democratization. Traditional authority structures remain powerful and ever-present in the modern era; there remain roughly 2,400 traditional leaders, and their power has gradually expanded since democratization (Williams, 2010). We find that, in exchange for protection since the end of Apartheid, traditional leaders in South Africa reward the ruling African National Congress with an extra 8.2 percentage points at the polls. Given that roughly 17 million South Africans still reside under traditional authority inside the borders of the former

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1 In poorer developing democracies these unelected leaders command great power: they may adjudicate legal disputes, oversee development initiatives, distribute land and resources, or preside over important social and cultural activities (Scott, 1972; Clapham, 1982; Schatzberg, 2001; Baland and Robinson, 2012; Baldwin, 2014).

2 Traditional authority structures, both contemporary and historical, are often endogenous to macro- and micro-political and economic outcomes.
Bantustans, this effect accounts for 4.5% of the ANC’s total votes, and implies a national-level distortion of 2.5 percentage points, or 10 out of 400 parliamentary seats. At the margins, this distortion has historically been sufficient to ensure that the ANC controls two-thirds of South Africa’s parliament, giving it the power to rewrite the constitution unilaterally.

We present two main empirical analyses. First, we present descriptive results using variation around the Bantustan borders in a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD) framework. We compare electoral outcomes in geographically proximate places that differ with respect to their status as former Bantustans. Because the Bantustan borders are not entirely randomly located, and the Bantustans suffered differential economic and demographic consequences as a result of Apartheid, we present a second empirical strategy to identify the causal effect of the Bantustans on ANC vote-share. We exploit a contemporary shift in the ties between a particular set of traditional leaders – the Zulu chieftancy situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal – and ANC political elites. In 2007 the ANC presidency switched from the hands of an ethnic Xhosa (Thabo Mbeki) to an ethnic Zulu (Jacob Zuma). We estimate the effect of this switch on electoral outcomes in areas controlled by ethnic Zulu chiefs, using a difference-in-differences strategy within the mentioned GRD framework. Using parallel trend plots and a regression-based placebo exercise we demonstrate that the identification assumption underpinning this approach is satisfied.

Analyses of electoral politics in South Africa have previously speculated that the role played by chiefs in delivering the rural vote for the ANC is clientelistic, with chiefs acting as brokers between the ruling party and rural voters (Jacobs, 2000; Beall et al., 2005; Ferree, 2011). Yet little quantitative evidence exists that traditional leaders in South Africa are indeed brokers. We thus present two further quantitative tests to explore the mechanism; our findings suggest that chiefs are engaged in electoral clientelism, defined as the exploitation of a social order for political or electoral gain. We show first that local-level bloc voting occurs at differentially higher rates within the Bantustans, relative to the rest of South Africa. This is consistent with previous work that links bloc voting to clientelism (Komito, 1984; Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008; Gottlieb, 2014). We then use geo-referenced Afrobarometer data to document that South Africans living inside the Bantustans report higher levels of vote-buying, more caution when engaging in political speech, and greater fear of electoral violence.

This study makes two major contributions. First, we offer a new theoretical explanation of the behavior of traditional leaders, which ties their behavior to national level politics and policy. Politicians appear to be able to trade guaranteed tenure for traditional authorities in exchange for votes. Second, we provide quantitative evidence that traditional authorities affect electoral outcomes, including precisely estimated
causal effects. We find substantial electoral distortions caused by traditional leaders, and present evidence that suggests this behavior is clientelistic. These findings are particularly important in that they inform active policy debates in sub-Saharan Africa. Legislation is currently under review in South Africa to further entrench the role of traditional leaders, and similar legislation has been tabled or passed in other countries. Herbst (2000) reports that by 2000 14 of Africa’s new democracies had created legislation to protect the existence of chiefs. By 2010 that number had increased to 20 (Williams, 2010). The findings of this research suggest that such legislation poses a danger to electoral democracy and, potentially, the well-being of those who live under traditional authority structures.

We proceed as follows. In Section 2 we outline the origins of the Bantustans, chart the historical establishment of a strategic alignment between the chiefs and the ruling ANC, and discuss the role of traditional leaders in the modern South African context. In Section 3 we introduce our data. Section 4 presents our first empirical approach, the descriptive geographic regression discontinuity design. Section 5 then introduces our central identification strategy, and the results. In Section 6 we present evidence that suggests the effect is the result of electoral clientelism. Section 7 concludes.

2. Bantustans and traditional leaders in South Africa

Traditional authorities are important social structures, but they often find the origins of their power in early colonial rule. British, French, and Portuguese colonial powers sought to co-opt local traditional structures into formal institutions, delegating power downward, allowing them to govern from afar (Crowder, 1964; Geschiere, 1993; Lange, 2004, 2009). After independence, and then democratization, many traditional authorities maintained their positions of power, often with either the implicit or explicit blessing of national political elites. In South Africa, the Apartheid-era Bantustans, or ethnic homelands, were no exception (Welsh, 1971; Costa, 2000). The Bantustans represent one of the largest social engineering exercises in human history, premised on the idea of empowering traditional leaders as indirect agents of the regime. Over an 80 year period white South African political elites stratified South Africa into geographically discrete areas, ten of which were set aside for particular black ethnic groups. Over 80 per cent of South Africa’s land was reserved for its small white population, while the majority black population was forced to live in the self-governing Bantustans.

In service of the Apartheid government’s ideology of “separate development”, the Bantustans were given formal recognition. They were afforded improverished electoral, parliamentary, and administrative institutions, and traditional leaders were given, or assumed, substantial authority (Mamdani, 1996). This forced
devolution culminated in sub-national “independence” for a number of the Bantustans, essentially empowering local leaders as despots and, implicitly, as agents of the Apartheid regime. In the early 1990s, as Apartheid ended, the Bantustans were formally dissolved and legally re-integrated into South Africa. Constitutionally, and then legislatively, they were transformed into “Traditional Authority Areas”, in which many of the same chiefs and paramount chiefs who had been empowered under Apartheid were allowed to maintain, and in some cases even expand, their authority. As of writing, the Traditional Affairs Bill, a major and contested piece of legislation that seeks to further entrench the authority of traditional leaders is under consideration by the South African parliament (RSA, 2013a).3

2.1. Colonial origins of the Bantustans

As early as the mid-19th century, white colonists (both English and Dutch/Afrikaans) in Southern Africa had engaged in large-scale forced displacement of black Africans. South Africa, like a number of other African colonies, presented a demographic puzzle to colonial rulers. The collection of colonies was in possession of vast natural resources and wealth, and European immigrants had settled in large numbers. Yet the European population was dramatically outnumbered by the black African population, who were simultaneously a military threat and a pool of cheap labor.

Following the bloody wars of the late 19th century, the various colonies of South Africa were unified in 1910. Shortly after, the white leadership began instituting formal geographic segregation to “solve” the aforementioned demographic puzzle. At first, the stated intention was to define the limits of African ownership of land. The first major legislative act that regulated the ownership and distribution of land on the basis of race was the 1913 Natives Land Act. This defined the borders of a number of “homelands” for black South Africans, and restricted their rights to own or transfer property to only those areas. These borders, which would later be extended in 1936 in the Native Trust and Land Act, served as the basis for all future legislation on geographic segregation and land ownership, including the creation of the Bantustans.

2.2. Subnational authoritarianism and the independent Bantustans

Apartheid formally began with the National Party (NP) victory in the 1948 general election. Shortly after, the Bantustans emerged as a central pillar of Apartheid government political planning. The NP government embraced an ideology known as “separate development”, in which South Africa was envisioned as comprising

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3 Also, during the course of writing, another highly contested bill that sought to make traditional courts more powerful in adjudicating local legal disputes, the Traditional Courts Bill, was under consideration by Parliament but was finally jettisoned (RSA, 2013b). Speculation in the South African media is that parts of this bill may make their way into the Traditional Affairs Bill.
two distinct “parts”. One was a state for whites, the other a “separate but equal” set of states for black South Africans. In practice the areas set aside for blacks suffered from tremendous under-development.

Figure 1: South Africa and the Bantustans

![Map of South Africa and the Bantustans](image)

*Note:* This map depicts South Africa, the 10 Bantustans, and the country’s major cities.

The Bantustans, shown in Figure 1, were a central tool for the economic domination of land and resources by white South Africans. Simultaneously, they served as an invaluable tool for political repression. While political opposition to white rule had existed in various forms since the mid-19th century, it gained organizational capacity and energy in the 1950s, primarily due to the development of the ANC and the Pan-African Congress (PAC). The 1950s saw the emergence of protests from within the rural black heartlands of South Africa, and the traditional leaders of the Bantustans were used as agents to suppress these movements indirectly (Bank and Southall, 1996). Thus, without extending its arms into rural South Africa, the Apartheid regime was able to control rural black opposition movements through co-opted traditional leaders. It could then focus its military and political attention on urban uprisings and border disputes. To this end, the Apartheid government divested substantial sub-national autonomy, along with resources, to the
leaderships of the Bantustans – in return they would suppress opposition from within the homelands. By 1971, the process neared completion as the government began to grant legal independence to the Bantustans, essentially creating sub-national states within South Africa.\(^4\)

During this period the Bantustans also took on a distinctly ethnic dimension. The Apartheid government supposed that dividing the black population into ethnically distinct groups would undermine opposition movements that appealed to pan-Africanism or black nationalism. This accorded with the idea that races were better kept separate. As a result, the regime classified all people into not only race groups but sub-racial ethnicities. Black South Africans were then forcibly displaced, both from rural areas and from urban areas, to the “appropriate” Bantustans depending on their ethnic classification. This ethnic specificity of the Bantustans persists to this day.

2.3. The collapse of Apartheid

As with many traditional leaders co-opted by indirect colonial rule, the Bantustan leaders lived a precarious existence. They were, at once, drawing rents from the oppressive national government, and leaders of oppressed traditional communities. As the inevitability of Apartheid’s impending collapse became clear in the late 1980s, the leaderships of the Bantustans found themselves trapped: they were fiscally and institutionally dependant on the Apartheid government, but clearly had to make peace with their own communities over their historical complicity in the regime. It was against this backdrop that many traditional leaders began a process of simultaneously courting ANC elites (to protect their status in the post-Apartheid era), and publicly advocating for an end to the Bantustan system (to placate their communities).

In 1987, the chiefs and headmen of the KwaNdebele Bantustan, the northern homeland to the Ndebele people, formed the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA). The stated intention of CONTRALESA was to provide a forum for the coordination of those traditional leaders who opposed the Bantustan system. This, it was hoped, could bridge the schism that had formed between the chieftancy and the ANC. The ANC, along with the United Democratic Front (UDF), had in the early 1980s determined that the chieftancy was pro-Bantustan, anti-modern, anti-democratic, and essentially corrupted by greed and power (van Kessel, 1993). Given that the ANC would in all likelihood lead post-Apartheid South Africa, this position did not bode well for the future of the chieftancy. CONTRALESA – which exists to this day as a lobby group for traditional leaders – thus sought to align itself closely with the ANC. This allowed the chiefs to persuade the ANC of their electoral value, and potentially save their status after democratization. The

\(^4\)While no members of the international community ever recognized their independence, South Africa did, and in fact terminated the citizenship of their inhabitants, granting them citizenship of their respective Bantustans.
project was largely successful: Nelson Mandela personally welcomed CONTRALESA’s official formation in 1990, and famously “greeted” traditional leaders on his release from Pollsmoor prison. By 1992 the organization was a fully national endeavour, embraced by all of the Bantustan leaderships save KwaZulu’s Chief Buthulezi. The case of KwaZulu is importantly unique in South Africa, and we discuss it at length at various points in the paper.

While CONTRALESA was successful in bridging the gap between the chieftancy and the ANC, it was not in itself enough to placate the rural masses. This required an active intervention by the ANC, whose leadership (including Mandela) would routinely visit rural South Africa in the early 1990s, shake hands with chiefs in public, and comment on the importance of traditional leaders in reclaiming South Africa from Apartheid (Bank and Southall, 1996). This intervention by ANC elites, it is argued, was instrumental in quelling social uprisings in the Bantustans, and preserving the authority of traditional leaders (van Kessel, 1993; Bank and Southall, 1996; Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997).

The ANC went a step further than simple public shows of support for the traditional authority structures. While traditional leaders were excluded from CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) I and the ill-fated CODESA II negotiations, they were eventually invited to the MNF (Multiparty Negotiating Forum) in 1993. The Forum eventually produced the Interim Constitution of the Republic, in which legal guarantees were made for the existence of traditional leaders (section 11). These were later ratified, in an admittedly weaker form, in the final Constitution in 1996 (section 12) (Williams, 2010).

Immediately after the end of Apartheid, large sections of the former Bantustans were set aside as specially designated “Traditional Authority Areas”, in which local leaders were once more reified and formally empowered. In 1997, ahead of the 1999 elections, Parliament began to revise upward the National House of Traditional Leaders Act (first passed in 1994), which established a “parliament” for traditional leaders to interface with elected officials. Then, in 2003, ahead of the 2004 elections, Parliament passed the encompassing Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, which laid the foundations for “democratic” traditional governance in the Traditional Authority Areas. It also passed the Communal Land Tenure Act, which proposed to transfer land rights to traditional communities (Murray, 2004; Ntsebeza, 2005). Both acts together significantly recalibrated the power of chiefs upward (Williams, 2010). The controversial (and ultimately discarded) Traditional Courts Bill then emerged in 2008, ahead of the 2009 elections, followed by the introduction of the Traditional Affairs Bill in 2013, ahead of the 2014 elections (Lund, 2012). Similarly,

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5In line with our theory that traditional leaders are particularly threatened in new democracies because of their tenuous legal status, it is interesting to note that the Constitutional Assembly (which drafted and ratified the 1996 Constitution) and the Constitutional Court have both rejected the role of the chieftancy in South Africa’s representative democracy. This behavior by independent arms of government is at odds with the behavior of the Parliament and the Executive, led by the ANC.
targeted perks for traditional leaders often appear in the months before elections – pay increases, home renovations, and medical insurance are some examples (Mkhize, 2014).

2.4. The political quid pro quo

Both the chiefs and the ANC were strategic in their switches in mutual support, as well as the particular policies they pushed forward. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the ANC strategically shifted itself from an anti-chief, anti-Bantustan party, to a pro-chief advocate (Ntsebeza, 2005). Simultaneously, the chieftancies shifted from Apartheid lackies to ANC supporters (Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997). Both shifts occurred against the backdrop of popular disapproval of the chiefs, as well as concerns over their constitutional and legal status. But they also occurred in an unfamiliar electoral landscape; the ANC wished to maximize its electoral support in rural South Africa, and the chiefs were uniquely positioned to offer this to them.

While the 1996 constitution weakened the power of traditional leaders, the ANC has since then repeatedly used carefully timed legislation to re-empower them. Each of the major pieces of traditional leadership legislation in the past 20 years was either passed or initiated in the run-up to a national election. This general historical analysis is corroborated by Jacobs (2000), Beall et al. (2005), who both note that CONTRALESA have made repeated electoral threats against the ANC before elections, demanding credible signals by way of legislation if they are to deliver the vote. They argue that the ANC’s pro-chiefs legislation responds directly to these threats, and predictably follows the electoral cycle. Even in the run-up to the 2014 election, CONTRALESA declared its dissatisfaction with the ANC’s lethargic legislative activity on traditional leadership, threatening to withdraw its electoral support (Lund, 2012).

2.5. The power of traditional leaders

The ANC has afforded traditional leaders a reasonable degree of autonomy and authority, seemingly in exchange for electoral support. Crucial to this argument, however, is that the de jure authority afforded by the ANC, and the de facto authority derived from tradition and custom, translate into actual power at the local level.

Qualitative evidence suggests that this is the case. Traditional authority structures still play a large role in shaping the lives of those who live under them (Ntsebeza, 2005; Oomen, 2005). The limited successes in the development of local government institutions by the ANC contribute to chiefs’ political and social importance (Murray, 2004). When the national government fails to extend its own authority into deep rural areas, traditional leadership structures are often able to fill the vacuum created. Given that South
African traditional leaders were empowered for decades under Apartheid to serve in exactly this role, it is not surprising that many have sustained their pre-1994 influence and authority in the absence of national state action.

Consequently, despite de jure roles usually limited to consultation and monitoring, chiefs in South Africa subsume domains typically thought of as belonging to the central state. It is well understood that they provide order in local communities, solve disputes between parties, and are often responsible for allocating land (Williams, 2010).

Quantitative survey evidence corroborates this account. We intersected geo-referenced Afrobarometer data and the polygons for the Bantustans to examine the political views of South Africans who live in traditional authority areas. These South Africans tend to see traditional leaders as powerful local elites. In 2008, 19% of South Africans living within the borders of the former Bantustans say that traditional leaders solve local disputes, 33% believe that they allocate land rights, and 48% say that they influence local governing. Further, 89% of these people believe that the powers afforded to traditional leaders are either staying steady or increasing (Afrobarometer, 2008).

The authority of chiefs over social and economic issues spills over into the political and electoral realm. Power over social relations – distributive decisions and conflict resolution – empower traditional leaders in other realms too. In a personalized local environment like a rural village, citizens do not wish to alienate themselves from those with near absolute authority. In an electoral context, this power provides traditional leaders with the capacity to persuade voters through both direct influence and biased information provision. More perversely, it also allows traditional leaders to monitor the behavior of voters through peer-on-peer reporting, or simply through direct harassment (Stokes, 2005). Finally, chiefs are also able to sanction misbehavior – those who vote against their wishes may find the cattle gone, their land use limited, and their family barred from cultural and social life.

Compounding this, chiefs have also been directly empowered in relation to electoral politics. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) depends on chiefs to ensure high rates of registration and mobilization in rural areas. In particular, the IEC often relies on chiefs to communicate to voters how the process works, and what the rules and guidelines (Williams, 2010). Chiefs are also encouraged to play a monitoring role at polling places, and are thus usually physically present on election day (Williams, 2010). This presence is in part because the government and the IEC have both relied on chiefs and other traditional leaders to help calm electoral tensions in KwaZulu-Natal, in turn building their status as authority figures in the electoral setting (Höglund and Jarstad, 2011).
In combination, the chiefs’ authority over social and economic relations, their ability to persuade, monitor, and sanction, and their direct involvement in the electoral process positions them as optimal electoral brokers (Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997; Koelble and Li, 2011). Rural voters follow the chief’s party choice, and have little capacity to deviate (Williams, 2010). As Koelble and Li (2011) note, political parties recognize this factor it explicitly into their political strategies. To this day parties with vested rural interests engage in intense battles over particular chiefs; they do so because winning that chief buys the chief’s constituents as a voting bloc.

These accounts are further corroborated by claims repeatedly made by South African chiefs themselves. As Chief Mwelo Nonkonyama of the Transkei claimed ahead of the 1999 elections, “…my people know where I stand politically... Because they trust me, then they will vote for my party” (quoted in Van Kessel and Oomen (1997)). More recently, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi said of the ANC, “[t]hey have courted traditional leaders for the purpose of securing electoral support and will continue to do this” (Buthelezi, 2013a). Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, then president of CONTRALESA, declared in 1990 that “[O]nce a chief has identified himself with us (CONTRALESAs), then we know that the whole tribe or the majority of the people in that area are now with the progressive forces (the ANC).”

3. Data

Qualitative evidence and the historical record both suggest our theory of political quid pro quo is plausible. We now take the theory to data, empirically assessing the electoral influence of traditional leaders in South Africa. We show that the strategic alignment between the ANC and the chiefs maps to increased political support for the ANC. Our unit of analysis is the political “ward”, the lowest political unit in South Africa. Wards, of which there are around 4,000 in South Africa, are clustered into municipalities, of which there are around 260. These numbers vary over time with re-districting. Wards are occasionally re-districted over time, but we see no reason to believe that the shifts affect our results.

3.1. Election data

Every five years South Africa’s wards are contested by councillors from different parties in winner-takes all elections. Our data includes 11,566 ward-year observations for the elections in 2000, 2006, and 2011, with roughly 4,000 unique wards per year. We add ward-level electoral returns for the 2004 and 2009 National
General Elections (which are straight PR ballots for the national parliament, but the votes are tallied at the ward level), bringing the total number of observations to 19,576 over 5 election years.

We construct as our dependent variable the percentage vote-share of the ANC in each ward-year election. The variable ranges from 0 (where an ANC councillor contested the election but received no votes) to 1 (where an ANC councillor contested and won all votes). Any ward-year in which the ANC did not field a candidate is excluded from the data\(^8\). We then spatially intersected the ward boundaries and the historical Bantustans boundaries, and created variables indicating, for each ward, what fraction of its area falls within a historical Bantustan\(^9\). In general, all variables are coded with a range of 0 to 1 to allow for ease of interpretation.

3.2. Imbalances at the Bantustan borders

To the electoral returns we added rich demographic and economic data from the 2011 South African Census, allowing us to control for slow-moving demographic and economic factors that may influence electoral outcomes. This is particularly important in that politics in South Africa is still very much racially divided – controlling for demographic features is important. We include the fraction of the population that is white, population shares for each major black South African ethnic group (backed out from language shares in the census data), population (logged), population density (logged), the ward area (logged), gender, unemployment rates, formal/informal sectoral shares, school completion rates, and household income.

The former Bantustans are situated in less desirable lands than those historically owned by whites (particularly in that they are not in the highly productive Western Cape, which was colonized in the 17th century). The historical record suggests that the original borders, first drawn in 1913 and then extended in 1936, were circumscriptions around pre-existing traditional villages and towns. By the 1940s, the homelands existed as numerous smaller pockets of territory. Finally, when the Apartheid government began its ideological campaign to create black sub-states, they unified the smaller pockets into single territories for each ethnic group, expropriating land from white farmers and black freeholders to do so. It is hard to claim that the borders, while certainly haphazard, were consistently as-if randomly drawn\(^10\).

Further, Apartheid had economic and demographic consequences for the Bantustans, which appear to live on to this day. To illustrate this, we present semi-parametric estimates of differences between treated

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\(^8\)There are only 324 such observations in the entire data, and the results are robust to coding these cases as “0 vote share” and including them.

\(^9\)We conducted a similar exercise the newer Traditional Authority Areas, creating indicators for the share of a ward that falls within a new Traditional Authority Areas. We present some results later in the paper examining the differences between these areas, but the results are essentially similar. We feel the Bantustans are the more appropriate choice for treatment assignment given that they dictated local power structures for 80 years.

\(^10\)In analyses not presented here, we do find that the borders do not predict underlying soil quality and agricultural feasibility in local area. Still, it seems implausible to argue that no potential confounders exist.
Table 1: Semi-parametric estimates of differences in racial, ethnic, and economic covariates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covariates</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>isiZulus</th>
<th>isiXhosas</th>
<th>isiNdebeles</th>
<th>sePedis</th>
<th>seSothos</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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<tr>
<td>All Bantustans</td>
<td>-0.0799***</td>
<td>0.0672***</td>
<td>0.0216**</td>
<td>0.0174*</td>
<td>0.0173</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.00618)</td>
<td>(0.0195)</td>
<td>(0.0108)</td>
<td>(0.00914)</td>
<td>(0.0158)</td>
<td>(0.00709)</td>
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<th>siSwatis</th>
<th>tshiVendas</th>
<th>xiTsongas</th>
<th>log(pop)</th>
<th>log(pop density)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>All Bantustans</td>
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<td>-0.00751</td>
<td>0.0238**</td>
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<td>(0.0170)</td>
<td>(0.00630)</td>
<td>(0.0121)</td>
<td>(0.0297)</td>
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<td>0.0283***</td>
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<td>0.0110</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.10696)</td>
<td>(0.00215)</td>
<td>(0.0108)</td>
<td>(0.00783)</td>
<td>(0.00579)</td>
<td>(97.50)</td>
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</table>

Observations: 5,984
$R^2$: 0.195, 0.853, 0.827, 0.173, 0.631, 0.232

Parenthetical standard errors clustered by municipality

*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1

Note: These differences are the result of an application of the GRD empirical strategy outlined in the next section, using only observations within 1km of the Bantustan borders. For ease of interpretation in this Table we exclude the details of the specifications (see Table 2 for the specification details in Table form). See Section 4 for the exact specification – in the Table presented here the coefficients represent $\beta$, with each covariate as the dependent variable, and no other covariates on the right hand side of the regression.

and control areas in a number of economic and demographic covariates collected in the 2011 census, in Table 1 (see the note on Table 1 for details). The coefficients presented are the estimated differences in the value of a given covariate when moving from just outside of a Bantustans to just inside.

This analysis reveals systematic differences between wards just 1km inside the Bantustans and wards 1km outside, even when flexibly controlling for space.\(^\text{11}\) To partially address the fact that imbalances on economic and demographic covariates might confound cross-sectional estimates we include all 18 covariates as controls, but acknowledge that this represents only an imperfect solution. To account for this problem, our central identification strategy is a difference-in-differences specification, which does not rely on continuity

\(^\text{11}\)While there are systematic differences, there are still many commonalities. Figure 5 in the Appendix shows that there is a good degree of common support on Demographic variables between treated and control areas 1km either side of the boundary. Similarly, Figure 4 shows the same for economic variables.
of covariates at the border.

4. Descriptive analysis: Bantustan borders as a geographic regression discontinuity

Our first empirical approach is a descriptive analysis that treats the historical borders of the Bantustans as a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD). We use this approach to generate the most reliable and most conservative estimates of the cross-sectional association between the Bantustans and ANC vote share. As suggested previously, this approach is still best seen as a descriptive exercise. It remains valuable in that it provides suggestive associations between the Bantustans and voting behaviors, and because the results are general to all Bantustans across the country. We take confidence from the fact that the results presented here are essentially consistent with those from our main identification strategy, the difference-in-differences approach.

The GRD framework treats physical space as the forcing variable, employing a flexible expansion of two-dimensional coordinate space using latitude and longitude (Dell, 2010). This allows us to smoothly control for the variables that jointly induce treatment assignment, thus controlling for those confounders that are predicted by geography. It is for this reason that we rely on the semi-parametric GRD to estimate the association between Bantustans and ANC vote share – by focusing on the area just adjacent the borders, and by controlling for confounders predicted by geography (as well as a host of important covariates), we are able to generate conservative estimates of the association.

Throughout this paper the results presented use cubic polynomial expansions of the forcing variable, though the substance of the main results are virtually unchanged by linear and quadratic expansions.\(^\text{12}\) The central specification for estimating voting behavior differences at the discontinuity is:

\[
Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta \text{Bantustans}_i + \tau \text{KwaZulu}_i + \theta Z_i + \gamma W_i + \delta_t + \delta_{\text{border}} + \epsilon_m,
\]

where \(i\) is an electoral ward, \(t\) is an election year, \(m\) is a municipality, and \(\text{border}\) is a particular Bantustan-border. \(\text{Bantustans}\) is an indicator of Bantustan status, \(\text{KwaZulu}\) indicates whether that Bantustan was KwaZulu (which we have reason to treat separately), \(Z\) is a matrix of ward-level covariates\(^\text{13}\), \(W\) is a matrix of flexible geographic coordinates, \(\delta_t\) are year fixed effects, and \(\delta_{\text{border}}\) are Bantustan-border fixed effects. \(Y_{i,t}\) is the ANC vote-share in ward \(i\) and year \(t\). We move the away from a pure parametric approach by

\(^{12}\) We tested three expansions of latitude and longitude as \(x\) and \(y\) coordinates. (1) Linear: \(x + y + xy + x^2 + y^2 + x^3 + y^3\). (2) Quadratic: \(x + y + x^2 + y^2 + xy + x^3 + y^3\). (3) Cubic: \(x + y + x^2 + y^2 + xy + x^3 + y^3 + x^4 + y^4 + x^5 + y^5 + x^6 + y^6 + x^7 + y^7\).

\(^{13}\) We include as covariates all of the racial, ethnic, demographic, and economic measures presented in Table 1.
limiting the data to observations near the border, thus semi-parametrically estimating treatment effects. For completeness we present results for 50km, 10km, and 1km bandwidths around the discontinuity, though our preferred specifications use the 1km bandwidth. Figure 2 shows the wards included in the subset for the year 2011.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2}
\caption{1km Bandwidth Sample of Wards}
\end{figure}

\textit{Note:} This map shows the electoral wards (our unit of analysis) subset in blue to only those which fall in part within 1km of a Bantustan boundary. These are the wards that are used in our semi-parametric estimates. This map represents a single time point, and the boundaries of the wards do vary slightly over time. For any particular year we include only the relevant wards, but the sample looks similar to that depicted above.

\( \beta \) is the quantity of interest\textsuperscript{15}. If the estimates are unconfounded, \( \beta \) can be interpreted as the effect of moving from having no part of a ward intersect with a Bantustan to having the entire ward inside a Bantustan’s borders. More cautiously, as is our preference, it can be seen as the conditional association between having the entire ward inside a Bantustan and ANC vote share.

\textsuperscript{14}See Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the appendix for detailed maps of the wards, borders, and 1km subsample.

\textsuperscript{15}In the specifications presented here \( D \) measures the share of a ward’s area that falls within a Bantustan. The variable is thus continuous between 0 and 1, and is bimodal. The distribution clusters at either end of the range, but the results are essentially unchanged by using a dummy instead of a continuous share.
4.1. Geographic regression discontinuity results

In reporting the results of the GRD, we focus first on the substantive and statistical significance of the coefficient on the Bantustan share variable. As noted in the specification above we report the associations for two different sets of Bantustans within the same specification – all Bantustans (excluding KwaZulu), and KwaZulu. The reasoning behind this, as outlined earlier, is that the chieftancy of KwaZulu has historically been aligned against the ANC and in favor of the IFP, despite the ANC’s repeated efforts to turn chiefs away from the IFP (Beall et al., 2005; Ferree, 2011). We thus anticipate a different sign in KwaZulu – electoral clientelism should be evident, but it should not favor the ANC.

Table 2 presents the results from our first approach. There are three main columns, each of which presents a semi-parametric estimation of the association. The first column presents the estimated association when we consider wards that fall within 50km either side of a border. The second column moves this bandwidth inward, to 10km. Finally, the third column presents our favored estimation strategy, in which we consider only those wards that fall at least partially within 1km of the border. Estimated coefficients for covariates and fixed-effects are omitted in all Tables throughout the paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>50km only</th>
<th>10km only</th>
<th>1km only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bantustans</td>
<td>0.0998***</td>
<td>0.106***</td>
<td>0.0762***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0154)</td>
<td>(0.0176)</td>
<td>(0.0161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu</td>
<td>-0.206***</td>
<td>-0.167***</td>
<td>-0.138***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0260)</td>
<td>(0.0229)</td>
<td>(0.0209)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Border FE: ✓  ✓  ✓
Year FE: ✓  ✓  ✓
Spatial smoothing: ✓  ✓  ✓
Covariates: ✓  ✓  ✓
Observations: 11,119 8,360 5,984
$R^2$: 0.617 0.651 0.657

Parenthetical standard errors clustered by municipality.
*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1

The results in Table 2 provide three main takeaways. First, the declining magnitude of the coefficients as the bandwidth moves from 50km to 10km to 1km suggests that the semi-parametric GRD is indeed absorbing confounders spuriously inflating the estimates. Second, and most important, the main result is an estimated 7.6 percentage point association (in the 1km bandwidth, which is our preferred specification) of Bantustans on ANC vote-share. This means that, for any given ward, falling inside any Bantustan border (excluding
KwaZulu, which is interpreted below) is associated with an increase in ANC vote-share of 7.6 percentage points. Third, Table 2 shows that KwaZulu is negatively associated with ANC vote-share, which decreases by roughly 6.2 percentage points when moving from outside the KwaZulu border to within \((0.0762 - 0.138 = -0.0618)\). These associations are as predicted – the traditional leaders of KwaZulu have historically held an anti-ANC disposition, and are captured by the opposition IFP, and this reflects strongly in the voting behavior of those living under their influence.

5. Difference-in-differences approach

The cross-sectional GRD approach is suggestive of a relationship between the former Bantustans, ruled by chiefs and headmen, and ANC electoral outcomes. To estimate a causal effect we now turn to our central identification strategy. This exploits variation over time in the political ties between traditional leaders and political elites in the African National Congress. In particular, we focus closely on the case of the KwaZulu Bantustan, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

We identify off the variation in ANC elite composition over time, focusing on the effect of a 2007 “palace coup.” While the ANC has always been a traditionally multi-racial and multi-ethnic party (Ndletyana, 2008), the position of Zulus within the party has been contested since the late 1980s (van Kessel, 1993). While many Zulu voters have traditionally voted for the ANC, those in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal – specifically within the borders of the former Bantustan KwaZulu – have instead supported the Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP). Much of this support stems from the close relationship between the IFP and the hereditary chiefs of Zululand. These traditional Zulu elites, who represent a large portion of the largest ethnic group in South Africa, have often claimed that the ANC is a Xhosa-centric organization, and that it does not cater to the needs of rural Zulus. The IFP, led by Prince Mangosuthu Buthulezi (who ruled the KwaZulu Bantustan as Chief Minister from 1970 to 1994), acted as a natural home for Zulu chiefs, who brought their people’s votes with them (Beall et al., 2005; Koelble and Li, 2011). This narrative history is well supported in our previous quantitative analysis. A strong negative cross-sectional conditional association between the KwaZulu bantustan and ANC vote share is shown in Table 2, even when controlling for the proportion of the population that is Zulu.

This political status quo was disrupted in 2007 when, at the Polokwane Conference in Limpopo, a faction of the ANC launched a party coup that displaced Thabo Mbeki as sitting President of the party. The ousted Mbeki, an ethnic Xhosa, was replaced by Jacob Zuma, an ethnic Zulu. In late 2008 the ANC then “recalled” Mbeki as President of the Republic, an extraordinary act and the first of its kind in South Africa’s young
democracy. He was briefly replaced by interim President Kgalema Mothlante, and Jacob Zuma was then inaugurated after the 2009 National General Election. South Africa, while a nominally parliamentary regime, vests a great deal of centralized power in the hands of the President. In turn, given the ANC’s dominance of South African politics, the President of the party and the President of the Republic tend to be one in the same. Zuma’s ascendancy represented the first time in 40 years that the ANC was to be led by a Zulu – Mbeki, Mandela, and Tambo, who had led the party in succession since chief Albert Luthuli’s death in 1967, were all Xhosa. It also represented the first time a Zulu would be President of the Republic.

This shift in the ethnic composition of the ANC elite represented a shock to the ties between the ANC leadership and the South African chieftancy. In particular, Jacob Zuma made concerted and well documented efforts to court the chieftancy of KwaZulu-Natal (Twala, 2010). In his time as a provincial minister in KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma had established a close relationship with King Goodwill Zwelithini; he used this to establish lower-level connections and trust with the Zulu chiefs and headmen. Zuma, unlike Mbeki, also engaged in active electioneering in rural KwaZulu-Natal, clarifying to traditional leaders that their economic interests would be protected and catered to under ANC leadership. Indeed, the fate of traditional leadership became a key point of contestation for both the ANC and IFP in the run up to the 2009, 2011, and 2014 elections (Buthelezi, 2013b). Particular attention was paid to the ANC’s track record as regards the institutionalization of traditional leadership structures as agents of local development (Twala, 2010; Buthelezi, 2013b). Despite the IFP’s resistance, by offering a newly credible signal that the ANC was able and willing to protect the interests of the zulu chieftancy, Zuma and the ANC were able to break the IFP’s almost universal hold on the KwaZulu chieftancy. While this prompted a backlash from the IFP, whose leadership had historically sanctioned chiefs who sought to “defect” (Beall et al., 2005), the new found trust in the ANC made defection appealing and reasonably safe.

Using this temporal variation in the ties between chiefs and the ANC elite, we implement a difference-in-differences design within the GRD framework used in the previous section. We estimate the effect of a shift to a Zulu ANC presidential candidate on the clientelistic behavior of Zulu traditional leaders, who were previously captured by the IFP. Through a shift in the ties between ANC elites and one specific group of previously “outsider” traditional leaders (bringing them “inside”), we can estimate the effect of traditional leaders on ANC vote-share. In this framework the we estimate the difference-in-differences in the Bantustan-ANC GRD association, between KwaZulu and the other former Bantustans. This strategy improves upon the descriptive analysis presented above in that it is robust to the covariate discontinuities at the border. We demonstrate through parallel trends plots and placebo tests that the identification assumption of the
difference-in-differences approach is satisfied.

We specifically identify the effect of the shift to a Zulu ANC president on the conditional association between the KwaZulu Bantustan and ANC vote-share. Our design compares this effect to the effect of the ethnic shift on other Bantustans, thus voiding the need for exogeneity of the Bantustan borders. To test the effect formally we implement the following regression:

\[
Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta Bantustans_i + \phi KwaZulu_i + \zeta post + \xi [post * All_i, post * KwaZulu_i]^T + \\
\theta Z_i + \eta [post * Z_i]^T + \\
\gamma W_i + \delta_{border} + \delta_t + \delta_{bantustan,t} + \epsilon_m,
\]

where, as before, \(i\) is an electoral ward, \(m\) is a municipality, \(t\) is an election year, and \(border\) is a Bantustan-border. For all elections we introduce a binary indicator \(post\), which equals 1 if election \(t\) occurred after 2007 (in practice this means either 2009 or 2011). \(Bantustans_i\) indicates the degree to which ward \(i\) shares geographic space with any Bantustan, and \(KwaZulu_i\) indicates the same but specifically for KwaZulu. As before, \(Z\) is a matrix of covariates, \(W\) is a matrix of flexible geographic controls, \(\delta_{border,t}\) are Bantustan-border-year fixed effects. Further, to control for time trends in voting behavior, we include time and time squared, as well as \(\delta_{bantustan,t}\), which represents flexible Bantustan-specific time trends (both linear and quadratic).

Importantly, note that in this specification all covariates are controlled for flexibly with respect to \(post\) through the term \(post * Z_i\). This allows for the effect of each covariate to vary in the pre- and post-periods. This is particularly important in that it controls for ethnic voting – we include the fraction of isiZulus in the population, \(isiZulu_i\), as well as its interaction with \(post\).\(^{16}\)

5.1. Parallel trends and placebo tests

As with any difference-in-differences design, our key identification assumption is that there are parallel trends in ANC vote share in the wards narrowly inside the KwaZulu border and the wards narrowly inside other Bantustan borders. Before presenting the results we demonstrate the validity of this assumption. Figure 3 presents the fitted values from our regression. The parallel trends between wards just inside the KwaZulu border and those just inside the borders of other Bantustans are evident. Further, the jump in ANC vote

\(^{16}\)There is a good degree of common support in the covariates either side of the border. See Appendix Figures 5 and 4 for general common support. See Appendix Figure 6 for common support in the fraction of the population that is Zulu either side of the KwaZulu border.
share in KwaZulu after Jacob Zuma's rise to power is clear.

Figure 3: Parallel Trends in Voting Behavior (1km)

Note: This figure shows the mean predicted values for ANC vote share in the Bantustans excluding KwaZulu, KwaZulu, and the rest of South Africa. The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The X-axis shows the dates of the five elections in the study period, while the gray rectangle indicates the period in which post = 1, after Jacob Zuma's ascendancy to the head of the ANC.

Additionally, we conducted a placebo test that show little divergence in pre-treatment trends between treated and control. We move “treatment” assignment forward from the period 2007-2011 to 2006 and then 2004-2006, excluding the 2007-2011 data. We then replicate the difference-in-differences estimation within the GRD framework. If parallel trends exist, the estimated “placebo effect” (the interaction term) should be close to zero. The results of this test are available in Table 7 in the Appendix, and shows a precisely estimated zero for the coefficient of interent in 2006. This suggests that the key identification assumption for the difference-in-differences estimation is satisfied. Both of these exercises make us confident that the following estimates identify the causal effect of traditional leaders on ANC vote share.
5.2. Difference-in-differences results

Table 3 presents the difference-in-differences estimates. As before, the estimation strategy is semi-parametric within given distances from the border. We present the results for the 50km, 10km, and our preferred specification, the 1km bandwidth. We omit from the Table the rest of the estimated controls.

Table 3: D-i-D Estimated Effect of Bantustans on Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>50km only</th>
<th>10km only</th>
<th>1km only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu</td>
<td>-0.228***</td>
<td>-0.202***</td>
<td>-0.175***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0294)</td>
<td>(0.0275)</td>
<td>(0.0237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantustans</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td>0.112***</td>
<td>0.0784***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0167)</td>
<td>(0.0207)</td>
<td>(0.0166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post*KwaZulu</td>
<td>0.142***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
<td>0.0823***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0316)</td>
<td>(0.0316)</td>
<td>(0.0266)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post*Bantustans</td>
<td>-0.0891***</td>
<td>-0.0731***</td>
<td>-0.0415**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0178)</td>
<td>(0.0236)</td>
<td>(0.0180)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post*Covariates</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial smoothing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear TT</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadratic TT</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>11,119</td>
<td>8,360</td>
<td>5,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.662</td>
<td>0.697</td>
<td>0.706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parenthetical standard errors clustered by municipality.
*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1

The difference-in-differences estimate is given by the coefficient on $\text{post} \times KwaZulu$, in row 4 of Table 3 (recall that Bantustans includes KwaZulu, so any difference-in-differences between other the Bantustans and KwaZulu is given solely by the coefficient on $\text{post} \times KwaZulu$). The result suggests a strong effect of Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy on electoral returns in wards just 1km inside the KwaZulu Bantustan versus wards 1km outside, as compared to wards just inside versus wards just outside other Bantustans. The difference-in-differences is estimated to be roughly 8.2 percentage points in the 2009 and 2011 elections, a major change in voting behavior in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. While slightly larger than the associations estimated in our descriptive exercise, the difference-in-differences estimates are very similar in magnitude. Note, crucially, that these estimates allow for the effect of the proportion of Zulu voters in a given ward on ANC vote-share to vary between the pre- and post-Zuma period. This means that the results presented in Table 3 are net of any ethnic voting effect in which Zulus swing toward the ANC.
Overall, this is consistent with our theoretical proposition – that *quid pro quo* is at work between chiefs and parties. For a political *quid pro quo* to work, commitments from both sides (party and chief) need to be credible. The party upholds its side of the bargain if it secures tenure and relevance for traditional authorities. Chiefs, on the other hand, uphold their side of the bargain if they deliver the vote, through whatever means. Zuma’s rise to the leadership of the ANC generated new ties between the ANC leadership and the Zulu chieftancy. These ties appear to have generated sufficient trust for both the ANC’s policy promises and the chieftancy’s electoral commitments to be seen as credible (Twala, 2010).

If traditional authorities reward the ANC with 8.2 percentage points more at the polls in each election, what are the implications for South Africa? The number of South Africans living inside the borders of the former Bantustans is roughly 17 million, approximately 31% of the country’s current population. A 8.2 percentage vote boost from the former Bantustans translates into an extra 2.5 percentage points at the polls for the ANC nation-wide each year. This implies that the effect of traditional leaders on South Africa’s electoral democracy is a pro-ANC distortion of around 10 seats in the national parliament (out of 400). This is an important difference in the South African context. For the past 3 election cycles the ANC has battled to maintain a two-thirds majority in parliament, for which it requires 267 out of the 400 available seats. The two-thirds majority provides both explicit power and discrete bargaining power to the ANC by increasing the credibility of legislative threats. With such a majority the party is able to unilaterally amend the Constitution in parliament, affording it both great power and the ability to credibly threaten the opposition. In 1999 the ANC won 266 seats, in 2004 279 seats, and in 2009 264. Thus the 10 seats secured by traditional leaders appear crucial in securing the ANC’s dominance in South Africa’s parliament. Given these narrow margins and high stakes, the role that traditional leaders play in shaping the ANC’s electoral fortunes should not be underestimated. Indeed, in the most recent elections (2014), the ANC only secure 62.15% of the national vote – without the chieftancy vote they would have earned less than 60%, an important symbolic target for opposition parties.

Of course, the electoral effects of traditional leaders are not only felt in the macro-political landscape. They most directly affect those South Africans who live in traditional areas. One central implication of our finding is that political contestation is often impossible in the former Bantustans. The outcomes of local government elections tend to be heavily one-party. Indeed, setting aside KwaZulu, the ANC won almost every ward in the former Bantustans in 2000, 2006, and 2011. This lack of competition probably means that opposition politics cannot take hold, that service delivery is likely to be stunted, and that the quality of democratic representation will lag behind the rest of the country.
6. Mechanisms

Up until this point we have provided little quantitative evidence that speaks to how traditional authorities generate greater electoral returns for one party. In this section we present quantitative evidence consistent with the qualitative account provided in Section 2 – that traditional leaders operate as clientelistic political brokers for the ANC. Clientelism typically entails the exploitation of a social order for political or electoral gain. In the present case it would manifest as traditional leaders exploiting their social and economic authority to induce voters to vote for a particular party.

To investigate whether chiefs in South Africa are engaged in clientelism, we first demonstrate that there is a higher degree of geographic bloc voting within the Bantustans. We show that this is systematic across all of South Africa’s Bantustans. Crucially, we also show that bloc voting does not emerge differentially in KwaZulu, which suggests that it is a process orthogonal to ANC voting within the Bantustans. Second, we analyse self-reported survey data from the Afrobarometer, which suggests that individuals in Banustans are subject to higher levels of clientelism than those living outside Banustans. Within the Banustans we find evidence of vote buying, as well as monitoring and enforcement technologies.

6.1. Bloc voting

Previous research into electoral clientelism has used “bloc voting” – the propensity for voters to vote as one – as a means to measure clientelism. Bloc voting occurs when voters within a discrete location (a particular urban area, or a self-contained village), jointly and knowingly vote for the same party. The result is an unusual level of homogeneity within local geographic areas. This is symptomatic of clientelism – it suggests that voters make their choices for reasons outside of conventional ideational or party politics (Komito, 1984). Bloc voting can thus be used to measure clientelism (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008; Gottlieb, 2014).

To estimate bloc voting in our data we begin with polling station level electoral data for the period of study (all five elections, 2000-2011). This data is at a resolution five times higher than the ward – there are roughly 20,000 polling stations in the country at any given time. While we do not know the exact location of each polling station (hence we use wards in the main analyses above), we do know to which ward each polling station is attached. The polling stations serve a smaller geographic unit within each ward; in rural South Africa they generally serve a small urban center or a nexus of small villages.

We then created dummies that, for each polling station, code whether the community voted as a bloc. These variables indicate whether the vast majority of voters in a small geographic area choose just one single
party. In principle bloc should capture bloc voting not just for the ANC but for any large party. Despite this, given the ANC’s electoral dominance it correlates with ANC vote share. To deal with this we partial out ANC vote share using linear regression, described below. We estimate the residuals from this regression, and use these as our bloc voting dependent variable.

To create the basic measure of bloc voting we chose a cutpoint for the majority party vote share. If the majority party vote share exceeds this cutpoint, bloc voting is indicated to have taken place. As this choice is somewhat arbitrary we demonstrate robustness by replicating the analysis at three different cutpoints, 70%, 75%, and 80%. We aggregate these dummy variables – still at the polling station level – to the ward level, so as to obtain a measure of bloc voting for each ward. The following procedure for ward $i$ and each ward-specific polling station $p_i$ generates our a measure of bloc voting:

$$bloc_{i,t} = \sum_{p_i=1}^{P_i} bloc_{p_i,t} \times \frac{RegVoters_{p_i,t}}{RegVoters_{i,t}}$$

We then regress the ANC’s vote share, $ANC_{i,t}$, on $bloc_{i,t}$. From this regression we estimate the residuals for each observation, giving us a measure of bloc voting that is orthogonal to ANC vote share. The variable thus captures the non-linear effect of bloc voting, rather than the linear effect of vote share. We re-estimate the GRD analysis from Section 4 with this residual variable as the dependent variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Estimated Association Between Bantustans and Bloc Voting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cutpoint = 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantustans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors clustered by municipality.
*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1

The results, using only data in the 1km bandwidth, are presented in Table 4. We find an association between Bantustans and bloc voting, largely consistent across the cutpoints. Bantustans are more likely to “vote as one”, independent of their propensity to vote for the ANC. We find no statistically significant
independent association with KwaZulu, suggesting that bloc voting does not occur differentially between KwaZulu and the other Bantustans. In general, these results are consistent with differentially higher levels of clientelism inside the Bantustans relative to wards in the rest of South Africa.

6.2. Self-reports of clientelism

To further buttress these findings, we return to geo-referenced survey data from the last four rounds of the Afrobarometer. We estimate the association between living within a Bantustan and three direct measures of self-reported clientelistic electoral experiences. *Vote buying* measures whether individuals experienced offers of goods in exchange for their vote, and is a direct measure of one common form of clientelism. Second, *monitor speech* measures whether individuals feel they need to be cautious when they speak about politics in public. This proxies for a clientelistic monitoring tool. When individuals feel they must be cautious in their political speech, it implies that they feel they are being monitored, and that they fear sanctioning. If voters are indeed being bought through traditional leaders, they may fear that their political behavior is being closely monitored, and that the traditional leader may sanction them if he or she suspects disloyalty. Finally, *electoral violence* measures whether individuals fear electoral violence, and is a measure of a common enforcement mechanism in clientelistic arrangements. Together, these three variables provide a reasonable individual-level measure of clientelism – both of the act of vote buying and the mechanisms of monitoring and enforcement. All three variables are rescaled from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates more vote buying, caution about speech, or fear of violence.

We estimate the association within the following framework, adapted from the earlier GRD:  

\[ Y_i = \alpha + \beta D_i + \theta Z_i + \delta_p + \delta_t + \epsilon_{ea}, \]

where \( D_i \) is a dummy for living within a Bantustan, \( Z_i \) are individual level economic and demographic covariates,\(^{18}\) \( \delta_p \) are province fixed effects, \( \delta_t \) are year fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the enumeration area level (the census block level, the lowest identifier in the data).

While we cannot make claims about these estimates as causal effects, the results, presented in Table 5 complement our bloc voting findings. Individuals living inside Bantustans report systematically more exposure to vote buying practices, believe they must monitor their political speech more carefully, and fear greater electoral violence. This provides suggestive evidence that vote buying occurs at differentially higher

\(^{17}\)We lack enough Afrobarometer data to be able to restrict the set of observations to 1km bandwidths around the discontinuity and flexible control for space.

\(^{18}\)We include sex, age, employment status, education level, and self-reported quality of living conditions.
Table 5: Differential Self-Reported Experiences of Clientelism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote Buying</th>
<th>Monitor Speech</th>
<th>Electoral Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Bantustans</td>
<td>0.0152**</td>
<td>0.0390***</td>
<td>0.0263*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00670)</td>
<td>(0.0132)</td>
<td>(0.0155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province FE</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,436</td>
<td>6,268</td>
<td>2,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors clustered by enumeration area.

*** p-value < 0.01, ** p-value < 0.05, * p-value < 0.1

rates within the Bantustans, that their political behavior is monitored at higher rates than people living outside the Bantustans, and that they differentially fear enforcement through electoral violence.

Together, these two pieces of quantitative evidence – bloc voting and self-reports of clientelism – are consistent with the hypothesis that chiefs engage in electoral clientelism. It appears that they exploit their social and economic position to influence, monitor, and potentially sanction electoral choices. The result is a differentially high degree of bloc voting, even after controlling for a battery of economic and demographic covariates.

We then submit that, when our quantitative contribution is considered alongside qualitative and historical evidence, clientelism seems to be the mechanism. In Section 2 we highlighted a range of historical and qualitative studies that suggest that traditional leaders do indeed play a clientelistic role, acting as brokers between the ANC and voters (Bank and Southall, 1996; Oomen, 2005; Beall et al., 2005; Koelble and Li, 2011). Chiefs play a central and important role in social and economic relations, one that was established in the old Bantustans and has been carried through to the present day (Williams, 2010). This provides them with the power to influence, monitor and sanction. This power is often largely uncontested, as the central government often has little ability or desire to penetrate rural areas (Murray, 2004). Similarly, chiefs are often relied upon to facilitate registration processes for elections, to monitor polling places, and to mobilize voters to participate Williams (2010); Höglund and Jarstad (2011). In sum, the qualitative evidence combined with our new quantitative tests certainly suggests that chiefs indeed leverage their social and economic status to induce political behavior consistent with their interests.
6.3. Vote buying or turnout buying?

Our data and research design also allows us to assess a recent debate in the study of clientelism: do traditional leaders, serving as clientelistic brokers, buy votes, or turnout (Nichter, 2008)? Buying turnout from loyal supporters rather than votes from neutrals has advantages for brokers; it solves a difficult monitoring problem when the ballot is secret (Stokes, 2005). Given the high levels of ANC support in the former Bantustans and the fact that South Africa has a credible secret ballot, it seems plausible that traditional authorities might choose either, or both, of these strategies.

We are able to test which strategy is adopted by traditional leaders in South Africa. To do so we use the GRD specification from Section 4, including the same covariates, fixed effects, and clustering procedures. We substitute as the dependent variable the total turnout – the total number of votes cast divided by the total number of registered voters. This gives an estimate of the association between the Bantustans and turnout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>50km only</th>
<th>10km only</th>
<th>1km only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Bantustans</td>
<td>-0.0263***</td>
<td>-0.0103**</td>
<td>0.00005</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00593)</td>
<td>(0.00506)</td>
<td>(0.00500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu</td>
<td>0.0249***</td>
<td>0.0179**</td>
<td>0.0147**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00845)</td>
<td>(0.00776)</td>
<td>(0.00671)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border FE</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year FE</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spatial smoothing</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
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<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.702</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.744</td>
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</table>

Table 6: Estimated Association Between Bantustans and Turnout

Standard errors clustered by municipality.
*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1

Table 6 presents the results of these tests. Each column presents the estimated effect in one of the three specifications. The first column shows the estimated association between Bantustans and turnout in the GRD framework for all Bantustans and for KwaZulu.

While this test is not definitive, little evidence emerges to suggest that traditional leaders seek to increase turnout in general. To further test for turnout buying we examined the possibility of “registration buying”. We calculated the registration rate in wards – the number of registered voters divided by the number of citizens over 16 years of age (the minimum registration age) as reported in the 2011 census. These results, not presented here, are similarly small and non-significant (either for the
with turnout. Given the strength of traditional leaders in KwaZulu (on the basis of the results presented earlier), it may be possible that turnout buying occurs in these cases, but not in the rest of the country. Even if this were the case, the 1km result is close to a 1% increase in turnout, far smaller than our estimated effect sizes for ANC vote share. Broadly, we interpret these results as suggesting that the effect of traditional leaders is not fully driven by turnout buying in South Africa.

7. Conclusion

Traditional authority structures are ubiquitous in Africa, and common in south-east Asia and Latin America. These leaders – often chiefs in the African case – serve cultural, legal, economic, and social roles. Prior research speculated that traditional leaders may play important political roles too; due to both de jure and de facto authority, chiefs are potentially well positioned to influence the choices made by voters. In this study we introduce a theory of political quid pro quo that explains why traditional leaders may have an incentive to act as electoral brokers. Historically, we document how the incentives faced by both traditional leaders and political elites can induce collusive behavior in the form of clientelism. Traditional leaders, by dint of their tenuous existence in modern representative democracies, require the legitimacy, support, and beneficence of the state. Political elites, at the same time, seek electoral support. These incentives allow for a perverse alignment of interests: the traditional leader may offer the votes of their people in exchange for guaranteed legal tenure.

We study this general proposition in the case of South Africa’s Bantustans. White South African governments empowered traditional leaders as local despots for roughly 80 years. Similar strategies – usually known as indirect rule – were adopted by colonial powers throughout Africa and south-east Asia. We document how, as Apartheid ended, chiefs switched from agents of the Apartheid regime to agents of the ANC, while the ANC switched from anti-chief to pro-chief. Through quantitative analyses we show how this strategic re-alignment maps to current-day distortions in electoral support. Using a geographic regression discontinuity design, along with a difference-in-differences design, we present both descriptive and causal quantitative evidence. In exchange for protection since the end of Apartheid, we find that traditional leaders in South Africa reward the ruling African National Congress with, on average, an extra 8.2 percentage points at the polls. This effect accounts for 4.5% of the ANC’s total votes, implying a national-level distortion of 2.5 percentage points.

full sample, assuming the 2011 census can be used to estimate the voting age population backward in time, or for only the 2011 election).
These findings suggest that empowering traditional leaders can have dangerous consequences for electoral democracies, especially when those electoral democracies are dominated by hegemonic parties. This latter point is crucial in understanding the implications of our findings beyond the borders of South Africa. Traditional leaders are strategic actors, and may seek to align themselves with the party that they believe will protect them, but will only do so when the commitment to protect them is credible. This requires that the party who offers protection be a plausible victor in the elections. In the case of single-party dominant systems this is usually guaranteed, making the chief’s strategic decision easier. However, even in cases of political uncertainty traditional leaders are often able to protect their interests. As demonstrated in the case of KwaZulu-Natal, chiefs are willing to cross partisan divides when they believe that it is in their interests to do so. In either case – political hegemony or shifting strategic grounds – chiefs exert substantial influence over voters, and are able to deliver to the highest bidder.

We are also able to suggest a mechanism to explain the main effects. We suggest that traditional leaders are actively engaged in electoral clientelism, the exploitation of social order for political or electoral gain. Chiefs certainly have the tools required to act as brokers – they are powerful and influential, have the power to monitor behavior, and have the ability to sanction those who act against their interests. Further, traditional leaders are often given active roles in electoral settings, increasing their perceived authority during elections. To complement qualitative accounts presented by others, we provide quantitative evidence suggests that chiefs deliver whole blocs of voters, symptomatic of clientelism, and do so through influencing, monitoring, and sanctioning voters.

Finally, this study is also one of the first to address the political legacies of one of the most dramatic modern exercises in social engineering. Apartheid’s Bantustans placed millions of people under institutionalised traditional authority for 80 years. In the post-Apartheid era an estimated 14.5 million people still live under direct formal traditional rule, and an estimated 17 million within the former Bantustan borders. We demonstrate that the consequences of this massive feat of social engineering are both deep and long-term. They remain in demographic, economic, and, crucially, political terms.

Both quantitatively and qualitatively, we are able to show that empowering traditional leaders has dramatic electoral effects, and that these effects likely occur in the form of electoral clientelism. We are hopeful that future research into the political roles that chiefs play in young democracies can further probe the mechanisms that translate traditional authority into electoral distortions. Future research in this area is of pressing concern, as many young democracies have empowered traditional or cultural leaders. Our findings sound an early warning call to these countries; empowering traditional leaders can have profound and
dangerous electoral consequences in developing democracies.


Buthelezi, M. (2013b). Meeting of the kwazulu natal provincial house of traditional leaders, address by prince mangosuthu buthelezi mp.


8. Appendix

8.1. Appendix Tables

Table 7: Placebo Difference-in-Differences Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Post = 2006</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>50km only</td>
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<td>1km only</td>
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<td>KwaZulu</td>
<td>-0.138***</td>
<td>-0.139***</td>
<td>-0.133***</td>
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<td>(0.0345)</td>
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<td>(0.0304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantustans</td>
<td>0.0691***</td>
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<td>0.0604***</td>
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<td>(0.0189)</td>
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<td>(0.0181)</td>
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<td>-0.0272</td>
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<td>0.00520</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>0.756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors clustered by municipality.

*** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.1
8.2 Appendix Figures

Figure 4: Economic Covariate Densities around all Bantustan borders (incl KZ)
Figure 5: Demographic Covariate Densities around all Bantustan borders (incl KZ)
Figure 6: Density of Zulu Fraction around KwaZulu border

![Graph showing the density of Zulu Fraction around KwaZulu border.](image)
Figure 7: Variation around Bantustan borders, 1km window, East Coast
Figure 8: Variation around Bantustan borders, 1km window, North East
Figure 9: Variation around Bantustan borders, 1km window, North West
Figure 10: Variation around Bantustan borders, 1km window, South East Coast