

Vote Buying under Competition and Monopsony:
Evidence from a List Experiment in Lebanon

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Abstract

Who sells their votes? Clientelism and vote buying are pervasive electoral practices in developing-world democracies and autocracies alike. I argue that buyers, regardless of regime type, prefer cheap voters, but that parties operating in uncompetitive environments are better able to price discriminate than those operating in competitive elections. I use an augmented list experiment to examine vote selling at the microlevel in Lebanon, in which both types of environment existed in its 2009 elections. I find that just over half of the electorate sold their votes, which is more than double the proportion willing to admit it. The evidence further shows that voters with low reservation prices are most likely to sell, and that monopsonistic buyers are better able to price discriminate among sellers than are dueling machines.

Who sells their votes? Vote buying, sometimes regarded as an obsolete practice of ages past when the urban boss and the country squire could command the allegiances of their hapless followers, continues to thrive in the developing world, where “a blossoming market for votes has emerged as an epiphenomenon of democratization” (Schaffer 2007b, 1). Clientelism is a commonly-used linkage mechanism in the developing world in both democracies and electoral autocracies (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b; Remmer 2007; Stokes 2007b). Vote buying continues to grow in importance as elections occur more frequently and regularly under both regime types. What we do not know, however, is how well clientelistic dynamics travel between democracies and autocracies.

Scholars continue to debate both whether parties focus on their core supporters or swing voters (Cox 2010; Dixit and Londregan 1996) as well as whether they try to buy votes or turnout (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005). Despite clear acknowledgment of each other’s work, however, those studying clientelism in autocratic settings and those studying it in democratic settings have, in some regards, been talking past each other. Consequently, we have yet to examine how vote buying by a dominant party (as in electoral autocracies) does or does not differ from vote buying by dueling electoral machines (as in patronage democracies). Here, I theorize that vote buyers, regardless of regime type, prefer to target cheap voters with low reservation prices. The competitive environment, however, determines how well buyers can price discriminate among sellers. Vote monopsonists, sheltered from serious electoral threat, can target the cheapest voters with precision and keep the purchase prices minimized at their reservation prices. Dueling machines, however, widen the relevant electorate and bid up the value of the vote. Electoral contestation forces machines to cultivate increasingly more expensive voters and to pay prevailing market rates for their ballots.

Empirically, I study vote selling at the microlevel in Lebanon, in which two distinct competitive environments prevailed in its 2009 elections: some districts were fiercely contested, while others were completely dominated by one faction or another. Examining the two district types allows us to compare vote buying under monopsony against dueling machines. I ex-

amine data from a nationally representative survey within which I embedded an augmented list experiment, an unobtrusive measurement technique designed to elicit truthful answers to sensitive questions (Corstange 2009). These data confirm that vote buying is both pervasive and sensitive: although 26 percent of respondents *admit* to selling their votes when asked directly, the list experiment reveals that more than double that number, 55 percent, actually sold their votes. Moreover, they demonstrate that buyers go after voters with lower reservation prices in both district types, but monopsonists are able to price discriminate more effectively than are dueling machines.

1 Prior Research and Theoretical Perspectives

Clientelism is a prominent mechanism linking politicians and their constituents throughout much of the developing world (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007a; Remmer 2007; Stokes 2009). Patron-client relationships are particularly widespread in both fragile democracies and electoral autocracies where party programs are non-credible or non-existent, hence limiting the effectiveness of programmatic linkages (Blaydes 2010; Keefer 2007; Keefer and Vlaicu 2008; Magaloni 2006; Mainwaring 1999). Debates over subtypes aside, scholars generally define clientelism as a contingent direct exchange of material rewards for political support. Emphasis on the *quid pro quo* — benefits only reach compliant voters — distinguishes clientelistic exchange from programmatic distributive politics (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007a; Magaloni 2006; Stokes 2007b; Wantchekon 2003). Payoffs typically include money, a wide range of consumer goods (Blaydes 2006; Schaffer 2007b), subsidized school fees, medical care, and utilities (Auyero 1999; Cammett 2010), access to government permits and licenses (Bates 1981; Chubb 1982), exemptions from the rule of law (Jamal 2007), and public sector employment (Remmer 2007; Robinson and Verdier 2003; van de Walle 2007).

Patron-client relationships logically culminate around elections, which give the client “one

additional resource — the vote — which he can use to repay his patron for other benefits” (Huntington and Nelson 1976, 55–56) and politicians “a means to regularize payments to their supporters and implement punishment to their enemies” (Magaloni 2006, 19). As regular, episodic events, elections serve as clientelistic focal points around which to clear accumulated backlogs of client demands through vote buying, a normatively-charged form of clientelism (Bratton 2008; Brusco et al. 2004; Schaffer 2007a; Stokes 2007b). Although the nominally secret ballot makes monitoring vote choice difficult in principle, patrons invest heavily in the capacity to monitor their clients by building electoral machines, subcontracting out to local notables and brokers, or exploiting kin and ethnic links, all of which embed monitors deeply in voters’ social networks (Collins 2006; Kasara 2007; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007a; Lemarchand and Legg 1972; Stokes 2007b). Coupled with the impressive range of strategems designed to circumvent the secret ballot as documented in the case study literature, many voters believe that they are voting publicly and behave as if their welfare depends on how they vote (Brusco et al. 2004, 79; Chandra 2004, 51–53; Gerber et al. 2009).

Which voters get targeted, in turn, animates ongoing debates in the distributive politics and vote buying literatures. An evolving formal literature has long contested whether parties target their core supporters or swing voters (synthesized in Cox 2010; Dixit and Londregan 1996). Its empirical counterpart, however, has found mixed results that support both predictions (Blaydes 2010, ch. 4; Calvo and Murillo, 2004, 2009; Cammett 2010; Dahlberg and Johansson 2002; Diaz-Cayeros 2008; Magaloni 2006, ch. 4). Vote buying, in turn, targets swing voters because parties can already count on their core supporters’ votes (Stokes 2005). Turnout buying, in contrast, mobilizes core supporters by giving them material inducements to go to the polls rather than stay home on election day (Nichter 2008). Finally, abstention buying demobilizes opponents by paying them to stay home (Cox and Kousser 1981).¹

¹Gans-Morse et al. (2009) demonstrate formally that a party’s best strategy always mixes vote buying, turnout buying, and abstention buying (what they call negative turnout buying), with the optimal mix depending on monitoring technology.

We can expect patrons to target clients strategically with offers and thus broadly define who has the opportunity to sell. The complementary question of who actually sells, meanwhile, depends on buyers meeting sellers' reservation prices below which the latter will not change their vote (or turnout) choices. Those voters with the lowest reservation prices — those most likely to sell — are those whose voting behavior is highly elastic (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007a). They require the lowest compensation to alter their choices, either by switching sides (vote/switch buying), turning out rather than staying home (turnout buying), or staying home rather than turning out (abstention buying). We can then ask what drives variation in voters' reservation prices — why some votes are cheaper and others more dear.

Initial resolutions to the classic paradox of voting invoked psychic or expressive benefits to explain turnout when the cost of voting is non-negligible (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Less civic-minded but more practical buyers, however, can simply pay voters (Lyne 2007). In doing so, however, they must compensate sellers not only for the costs of voting, but also for their scruples and possibly for voting against their own ideological preferences. All else equal, then, “near-median” voters (Dekel et al. 2008) — weak supporters or opponents of the buyer — are the most elastic. Strong opponents would require substantial compensation to switch allegiances or abstain, making their votes much more costly than those of mildly-opposed voters. Strong supporters, in turn, would vote for the buyer regardless of material inducements, so their ballots need not, and strictly speaking cannot, be bought.²

We should pause, however, to distinguish ideological distance between buyers and sellers — the common metric for “weak” and “strong” is spatial models — from the *weight* that voters place on ideology when casting their ballots. As discussed previously, clientelistic linkages thrive in environments where political programs and ideologies are not credible (Keefer 2007; Keefer and Vlaicu 2008; Kitschelt 2000; Remmer 2007), and voters frequently vote for patrons against their own programmatic preferences (Blaydes 2010; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009;

²Technically, if a material inducement does not alter a voter's *a priori* vote (turnout) choice, then that vote has not been bought.

Magaloni 2006). Moreover, it is not immediately obvious how voters could actually have an ideological or programmatic commitment to patrons and their electoral machines, which by traditional definition and observed behavior act as non-ideological catch-alls.³ Consequently, we should expect many voters to discount ideology heavily in clientelistic exchanges. Sellers may diverge a little or a lot from their buyers, but this divergence carries minimal weight in most people’s vote choices, with only a small subset of activists weighting ideology heavily.

Buyers prefer highly elastic voters because they have lower asking prices than do their more inelastic peers. We might therefore expect buyers to begin their campaigns in such constituencies, but we cannot also assume that they necessarily end there as well. The ability of buyers to restrict themselves to elastic voters, and to minimize the purchase price at the reservation price, rests on their ability to price discriminate. The ability to price discriminate, in turn, rests on the local vote market’s competitiveness. Hence, we need to distinguish between credible electoral competition for votes and monopsonistic vote buying.

Most commonly, the formal literature makes what Stokes (2009, 20) has called the “single machine assumption.” In such a competitive environment, only one electoral machine exists that can buy votes, and it is arrayed against an opponent — usually a marginal player — that either cannot or does not buy votes or otherwise engage in clientelism. Under these conditions, the single machine operates as a discriminating monopsonist that can pick and choose its sellers. Sheltered from competitive pressures, the machine enjoys wide discretion to price discriminate because it faces no credible threat to its dominance of the vote market. Such a single-machine environment probably prevails in approximate forms in electoral autocracies and dominant-party systems such as contemporary Egypt (Blaydes

³A similar conceptual difficulty bedevils the definition of “core” voters in the swing-versus-core debate (Calvo and Murillo 2009). Although ideology appears to play a muted role in clientelistic settings, we could still employ the spatial distance between voters and patrons by interpreting it in social identity terms. We could, for example, think of the distance in terms of differences in ethnicity, class origins, or even party brand loyalty.

2010) or Mexico in the heyday of the PRI (Magaloni 2006).

In contrast, many developing world democracies host genuine electoral competition between dueling machines. This competition widens the relevant electorate and bids up the value of the vote. Dueling machines cannot price discriminate as precisely as those in single-machine environments because opponents can credibly bid for sellers who would otherwise be ignored or lowballed. Rather than paying only reservation prices to highly elastic sellers, competition drives machines to pay prevailing market rates for more and more marginal (i.e., more expensive) voters. Such a dueling-machines environment probably prevails in many patronage democracies such as India (Chandra 2004; Chhibber and Nooruddin 2004) or post-authoritarian Argentina (Brusco et al. 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Remmer 2007).

Theoretically, then, voters vary in their asking prices, machines vary in their willingness to buy, and markets vary in their competitiveness. All three factors should influence who ultimately sells their votes, which is this paper's empirical focus. Here, I derive three testable hypotheses from the above theoretical discussion framed around vote selling:

Hypothesis 1 (Patron Side) *Vote selling increases with opportunities to sell.*

Hypothesis 2 (Client Side) *Vote selling decreases with reservation prices.*

Hypothesis 3 (Market Mediator) *Price discrimination decreases with electoral competition.*

Vote selling requires access to willing patrons (H_1). First, electoral machines should be more inclined to buy from voters they can monitor effectively than those that are harder to monitor. Better monitoring increases the buyer's certainty that sellers are fulfilling their obligations, which raises the expected value of their votes relative to sellers about whom they are less certain. Second, areas where clientelistic campaigning is prevalent should present voters with more opportunities to sell than areas where it plays a more restrained role.

On the client side, elastic voters with low reservation prices should be more likely to sell than more expensive voters (H_2). One of the most common claims in the literature is that buyers target impoverished voters because the declining marginal utility of consumption implies that the poor make less costly demands than do their wealthier peers (Auyero 1999; Blaydes 2006; Bratton 2008; Brusco et al. 2004; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Scott 1969). While plausible, the claim is incomplete because it conflates “poor” with “cheap.” Political disinterest also lowers reservation prices. First, it drives down the compensation buyers must pay for ideological divergences. Second, the disinterested nonetheless require some material incentive to get them to the polls because they are unlikely to derive much psychic or expressive benefit from the act of voting and are not activist enough to go without compensation.

Lastly, the competitive environment in which buyers and sellers transact influences the degree to which the former can price discriminate among the latter (H_3). Although all buyers prefer elastic voters with low reservation prices, electoral competition drives the machines to target more inelastic voters with higher asking prices as well. Consequently, dueling machines in competitive markets are less able to price discriminate among sellers than are vote monopsonists in the markets they dominate. In effect, the competitive environment conditions the strength of the relationships predicted in H_1 and H_2 , which should be strongest where the single-machine assumption holds and weaker elsewhere.

2 Empirics: Vote Trafficking in Lebanon

Data for the analysis come from an original mass-attitude survey conducted around Lebanon’s 2009 parliamentary elections. Formerly one of the “usual suspects” in studies of clientelism, post-civil war Lebanon is reemerging as a compelling venue to study clientelistic linkages and vote buying (Cammett 2010; Cammett and Issar 2010; el Khazen 2000; Hamzeh 2001; Harik 1980; Johnson 1986; Landau 1961; Lijphart 1977; Scott 1969). Despite some idiosyncracies, the most familiar of which are its consociational power-sharing institutions, Lebanon shares

a large number of characteristics with other societies in which clientelistic linkages predominate. A fragile, developing-world democracy, Lebanon has a middling income level,⁴ Latin American levels of income inequality,⁵ and African levels of social diversity.⁶ Politicians make extensive use of clientelistic links, and employ electoral machines that have well-developed monitoring capabilities. Crucially, however, the elections witnessed dramatic district-to-

⁴Lebanon's 2005 GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms was \$9,500. The global average was \$8,800, while the Latin American average was \$8,700. Countries in Lebanon's PPP neighborhood include Brazil (\$8,500), Bulgaria (\$8,700), Malaysia (\$11,800), South Africa (\$8,500), and Turkey (\$11,000). All data rounded to the nearest \$100 and taken from the 2010 World Development Indicators.

⁵Makdisi and Marktanner (2009, 10) cite a Gini coefficient of .56 for Lebanon, which is more than a standard deviation above the global mean according to Deininger and Squire 1996 ($\hat{\mu} = .39, \hat{\sigma} = .11$) and the UNDP's 2009 Human Development Report ($\hat{\mu} = .41, \hat{\sigma} = .09$). Lebanon's score is comparable to the Latin American average, a region long associated with high income inequality ($\hat{\mu} = .51, \hat{\sigma} = .05$). Countries in Lebanon's Gini neighborhood include Argentina (.50), Brazil (.55), Colombia (.59), and Mexico (.48). UNDP figures taken from <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/161.html>, accessed 14 July 2010.

⁶Based on voter roll data from the 2009 elections, Lebanon's fractionalization index is .69 when Christians are aggregated and .80 when they are disaggregated into their sub-denominations (<http://elections.naharnet.com/locations/>, accessed 4 June 2009). Lebanon's fractionalization score is about a standard deviation above the global mean according to the measures in Fearon 2003 ($\hat{\mu} = .48, \hat{\sigma} = .26$), Alesina et al. 2003 ($\hat{\mu} = .42, \hat{\sigma} = .19$ for the 3-index average) and the Soviet ELF index reported in Taylor and Hudson 1972 ($\hat{\mu} = .42, \hat{\sigma} = .30$), and sits approximately at the mean of the Africa sub-sample (Fearon $\hat{\mu} = .72, \hat{\sigma} = .20$; Alesina et al. $\hat{\mu} = .63, \hat{\sigma} = .18$; Soviet $\hat{\mu} = .66, \hat{\sigma} = .24$). Using the Fearon data, countries in Lebanon's fractionalization neighborhood include Benin (.62), Bosnia and Herzegovina (.68), Kenya (.85), and Zambia (.73).

district variation in competitiveness, with one faction or another completely dominating about one-third of the districts and multiple machines fiercely contesting the rest. We can consequently compare single- and dueling-machine dynamics while holding a host of other contextual factors relatively constant, including political regime, culture, and electoral rules.

Clientelism and vote buying are endemic in Lebanon, encompassing small-scale payoffs like food baskets targeted at the poor and extending up through the middle and even upper classes with subsidized medical care, scholarships, licenses, and government jobs. Programs and platforms provide little substance during campaign season, and tactical electoral alliances frequently bring together strange bedfellows who part ways shortly afterwards (el Khazen 2000, 2002; Hudson 1968). Scholars have long emphasized the pervasiveness of vote buying, “one of the banes of the Lebanese elections” (quoting Harik 1980, 30; also see Author; el Khazen 2000; Hamzeh 2001; Hudson 1968; Johnson 1986; Sufa 2005). Foreign journalists, in turn, descend on the country from election to election to report colorful anecdotes about the inglorious underbelly of Lebanese democracy.⁷ Not to be outdone, the Lebanese themselves roundly condemn what civil society activists call Lebanon’s “national sport,”⁸ with political leaders loudly denouncing each other’s vote buying tactics *ad nauseam* and religious leaders exhorting parishioners not to sell their votes.⁹

⁷Examples from the 2009 elections include “With votes for sale in Lebanon, money from abroad floods in,” *New York Times*, 23 April 2009; “Going rate for a vote in Lebanon? \$700,” *Global Post*, 2 June 2009; “Lebanon vote draws expatriates’ interest,” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 2009; “Vote buying is rampant in ‘cold war’ poll; Lebanon,” *Times of London*, 6 June 2009; “Tiny Lebanon’s titanic vote,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 June 2009.

⁸Interview, senior officials in the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), July 2008.

⁹Interview, senior officials in the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), 2 July 2008. For a sampling of elite discourse, see “Fadlallah forbids electoral money...,” *al-Safir*, 17 March 2009; “Patriarch at Easter service: those who buy you, sell you,” *NOW Lebanon*, 10 April 2009; “Mario Aoun: March 8 will win despite ‘vote buying’,” *NOW*

Parties and patrons have invested heavily in the machines to monitor their voters, embedding themselves deeply into social networks while making use of local brokers and other “electoral keys” (Johnson 1986). Moreover, numerous characteristics of the electoral system enable the electoral machines to subvert the nominally secret ballot. These features include party-distributed ballots that vary fonts and permute the list order of candidates’ names, assigning voters to polling booths by extended family code, and counting conducted at very low levels of aggregation with party representatives invited to scrutinize every ballot magnified under a projector. According to senior officials in Lebanon’s foremost election monitoring organization, these subversions enable the machines to know, within a person or two, how an entire family voted. This considerable monitoring capacity has, in turn, stimulated a lively and wide-ranging vote market allegedly worth hundreds of millions of dollars.¹⁰

The parties were also willing to spend large sums of money during the campaign because the stakes were high and the elections were expected to be extremely close. The 2009 contest was a continuation of an ongoing dual-game struggle (Cammett 2010; Mainwaring 2003) between the Western- and Saudi-supported March 14 alliance against the opposition March 8 coalition backed by Iran and Syria.¹¹ To the degree that there was any programmatic *Lebanon*, 23 March 2009; “Karami: we will not leave the field to the coalition of money,” *al-Safir*, 28 April 2009; “Tueni: No one ‘can buy or sell voters’,” *NOW Lebanon*, 18 May 2009; “The season of the money pump begins early in the capital of the South,” *al-Akhbar*, 21 May 2009; “Aoun: We will ‘smash heads’ of those who buy Metn votes,” *NOW Lebanon*, 26 May 2009; and “Aoun warns against ‘market of idiots’,” *al-Safir*, 29 May 2009.

¹⁰Interviews, senior LADE officials, July 2008 and April 2009; MPs and senior officials in governing and opposition alliances, April 2009; foreign technical experts, April 2009. Participant observation, polling day 2009.

¹¹This description is a considerable simplification of Lebanon’s Byzantine coalitional politics. As of 2009, most Sunnis and Druze supported March 14, most Shiites supported March 8, and Christians split down the middle. Additional details in Author. Among the most prominent events in the ongoing contest between the blocs were the massive popular

debate, campaign rhetoric revolved around Lebanon's foreign policy orientation and Hizballah's weapons. Yet the campaigning also focused heavily on jockeying over the composition of the universally-anticipated post-election unity government. The blocs consequently fought for seats in order to name their preferred formateur and to claim the largest share of the cabinet. They also, however, fought for the national popular vote as distinct from the seats to establish who spoke for the "real majority" which, in turn, would grant elite negotiators more or less of a mandate in pushing their preferred policies in the cabinet. Hence, the blocs had distinct incentives to win not only seats, but also votes even when seats were safe.

Fiercely-contested elections at the national level, however, belied considerable variation at the district level. Some districts, principally those that were multi-sectarian or demographically Christian, were extremely competitive, with just a percentage point or two separating winners and losers. Other districts, in contrast, were completely dominated by one faction or the other to the degree that the opposing alliance did not even bother to run a slate of candidates.¹² Hence, Lebanon as a whole supported two very different competitive environments within the same system. The dominated districts approximated the single-machine assumption in which buyers could act as discriminating monopsonists, while the competitive districts approximated the dueling-machines dynamics. Consequently, examining outcomes demonstrations and subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian armed forces in spring 2005, the parliamentary elections of summer 2005, the Hizballah-Israeli war of 2006, lengthy opposition sit-ins and the paralysis of parliament, the Hizballah-led armed takeover of the capital in 2008, and the resulting Doha agreement that produced a national unity government.

¹² Neither March 14 nor its allied independents chose to run slates in the Shia-dominant districts of Zahrani, Sour, Bint Jbeil, Nabatieh, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Baalbek-Hermel (unaffiliated independents formed lists in the latter two districts with no hopes of winning). March 8, for its part, chose not to run slates in the Sunni-dominant districts of Akkar or Minieh-Donieh. List composition taken from "Candidates' lists according to electoral districts," *NOW Lebanon*, 1 June 2009.

in Lebanon allows us to compare the effects of the competitive environment while holding other systemic factors like regime type, electoral rules, and political culture constant.

3 Data and Methods

Here, I utilize data from an augmented list experiment embedded in a nationally representative sample of the voting age population of Lebanon conducted shortly after the conclusion of Lebanon’s June 2009 parliamentary elections. The $n = 2500$ sample consists of randomly selected adults from each of the country’s 30 administrative districts (*cazas/qadas*), with the sample proportional to the district population size. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face by members of the same sex and same sect.¹³

Although the formal literature on clientelism and vote buying continues to grow robustly, we have been unable to keep pace on the empirical side due to serious data gathering limitations: people, especially vote sellers, do not like to admit to selling (Bratton 2008; Brusco et al. 2004). Theoretical models in Dal Bó (2007) and Dekel et al. (2008), for example, formalize “how vote buying would function in an environment in which it is allowed and free of stigma,” modeling “corrupt” voting where payments are either illegal or “deemed inappropriate.” Vote buying evokes “a powerful image of electoral corruption” subject to “almost universal condemnation” (Hasen 2000, 1324–1325), with the United States Supreme Court bluntly

¹³Beirut-based Information International (<http://www.information-international.com/info/index.php>) drew the sample and conducted the interviews. It sampled residents of the main town and two randomly selected villages in each district proportional to population size. In all cases Sunnis interviewed Sunnis, Shiites interviewed Shiites, and Druze interviewed Druze. Given the multitude of small Christian sects in Lebanon, we relaxed our requirement for same-sect interviewers such that Christians interviewed Christians, although Armenians always interviewed Armenians.

declaring that “no body politic worthy of being called a democracy entrusts the selection of leaders to a process of auction or barter” (*Brown v. Hartlage*).

High degrees of sensitivity make it extraordinarily challenging to get reliable empirics on vote selling. Surveys routinely uncover much lower levels of selling than what qualitative accounts would suggest (Blaydes 2006; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2010; Transparency International 2004) because people are “understandably reluctant to admit that they had been approached with a forbidden offer, especially if they had subsequently entered an agreement and complied with its terms” (Bratton 2008, 624). Common work-arounds to coax respondents to reveal truthful answers include sanitizing questions, using multiple versions of varying degrees of directness, and asking about what friends and neighbors have done (Bratton 2008; Brusco et al. 2004; Vicente 2008). These methods, however, are questionable at best because they either fail to measure what scholars hope to measure, remain sensitive, or both (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2010). Schaffer (2007b, 3) puts it mildly when he says that figures derived from mass surveys “must be treated with care,” while Wantchekon (2003, 402) more bluntly dismisses survey methods as unreliable and inappropriate because clientelism “is perceived by most politicians and voters as morally objectionable.” Hence, we face a serious disconnect between what we hope to learn from voters and what they are willing to tell us.

A promising alternative method for eliciting truthful answers to sensitive questions is the list experiment, which has been used to study racism in American society (Kuklinski et al. 1997), anti-Semitism and sexism in US presidential elections (Kane et al. 2004; Streb et al. 2008), support for electoral violence in Africa (Weghorst 2010), and vote buying in Latin America (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2010). The data collection procedure works as follows. A control group receives a list of K yes/no non-sensitive items and is asked how many of the items they do/believe, and not which ones. A treatment group receives the same list plus one additional sensitive item, and receives the same instructions. All respondents indicate a count of the list items they do/believe without revealing which items are in their counts. For treatment group respondents, the count transparently provides them with anonymity

about their answer to the sensitive item — e.g., an answer of “two” on a four-item list does not reveal whether or not the sensitive item was or was not part of the count. Data analysis for the basic version of the list experiment consists of difference-in-means tests, although Corstange (2009) has recently augmented the procedure to permit multivariate analysis. I follow this revised procedure here, which for technical reasons requires a small administrative change in which control group respondents answer each list item individually.

The vote selling list experiment proceeds as follows. I began by randomly assigning half the respondents to the control group and the other half to the treatment group. The question itself began with a prompt delivered to both groups:

Peopled decided who to vote for based on a lot of different reasons. I’ll read you some of the reasons people have told us: please tell me if they influenced your decision to vote or your decision over who to vote for.

Respondents received a list of four items in the following order that included common influences on vote choice. Three of the items — newspaper coverage, platforms, talking with friends — were non-sensitive, while the third, italicized item was the sensitive one:

- You read newspaper coverage of the campaign regularly.
- You read the candidates’ campaign platforms thoroughly.
- *Someone offered you or a relative personal services, a job, or something similar.*
- You and your friends discussed the election campaign and the candidates.

After the initial prompt, control group respondents addressed each of the list’s items individually. Treatment group respondents first received the following additional instructions:

I'm going to read you the whole list, and then I want you to tell me *how many* of the different things influenced your choice. *Don't tell me which ones*, just tell me how many.

After hearing these instructions, treatment group respondents gave a single count of list items that influenced their vote choice.

In the control group, 37 percent reported that newspaper coverage influenced their votes, 42 percent said that campaign platforms did so, and 53 percent claimed that discussions with friends helped them decide. In addition, fully 26 percent of the control group admitted that offers of personal services, jobs, and other such inducements swayed their votes. Although this figure is substantial, it is roughly in line with the upper range of findings from other studies of vote buying (Bratton 2008; Brusco et al. 2004; Schaffer 2007b; Wang and Kurzman 2007). Nonetheless, we should consider it to be the floor due to the sensitivity surrounding vote selling. The direct question tells us only that about a quarter of the population is willing to *admit* to selling their votes, not how many people *actually* did so.

Four clarifying comments are in order. First, all three non-sensitive items tap into routine components of the campaign season about which respondents can speak freely and which deemphasizes the novelty of the list format. Moreover, the list includes one “easy” item, talking with friends, which we — and, more importantly, Lebanese respondents — might anticipate many people to do. The presence of at least one plausible “yes” provides additional cover for treatment group respondents because it makes non-zero counts credible regardless of vote selling. Second, the sensitive item about vote selling casts a wide conceptual net to include not only cash payments, but also standard clientelistic inducements such as personal services and jobs.¹⁴ Third, it captures the idea that inducements paid to a relative can

¹⁴Existing evidence suggests that buyers offer cash in only a minority of vote buying attempts. Finan and Schechter (2009, 13) report that only about a quarter of those who received offers were offered cash, while Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2010, 17 fn. 25) report an

nonetheless sway voters, an important dynamic that is missing from most other empirical studies. Lastly, the focus is not on who voters choose, but rather whether or not offers of payoffs influenced that choice.

I include two variables to test H_1 . *Rural* residents — given the particularly dense social networks in which they are embedded along with the continued influence of local patrons — are potentially easier for vote buyers to monitor than their urban counterparts, which makes them relatively attractive sellers.¹⁵ *Services* indicates the scope of vote selling opportunities derived from respondent assessments of the importance of individually-targeted payoffs (e.g., jobs or scholarships as opposed to infrastructure) during campaigning in their districts.¹⁶ For H_2 , I measure wealth with respondents' monthly family *Income*. Given the lack of a party system, meaningful party platforms, and transitory electoral alliances, ideology is difficult to operationalize or measure in a satisfactory way in Lebanon. Instead, I use respondents' weight on expressive or ideological voting, which I operationalize as their interest in politics (*Interest*).¹⁷ To capture the mediating effect of the market's competitiveness (H_3), I create

analogous figure of only 6 percent.

¹⁵Sample proportions are 72 percent urban, 28 percent rural.

¹⁶The question reads: "I'm going to read you a list of 5 factors that many Lebanese say played an important role in the last elections. Please tell me which one you think was (most/second-most/third-most) important in your district." The five factors are "campaign platforms," "promises for collective services like infrastructure and development programs," "*promises for individual services like jobs or scholarships*," "sectarian speech," and "family politics." I transform this battery into a 4-point services scale based on how respondents rank the importance of the italicized factor about individual services: most important (18 percent), second-most important (29 percent), third-most important (27 percent), less than third-most important (26 percent). I scale the variable 0–1 from low to high.

¹⁷The question reads: "Generally speaking, how interested would you say you are in politics?" Response options are "not/little interested" (combined, 34 percent), "interested" (40 percent), and "very interested" (26 percent).

an indicator for districts *Dominated* by one faction or the other (see fn. 12), which I interact with the preceding variables. Lastly, I include several demographic controls, including *Female*, *Age*, and *Education*, as well as indicators for *Sunni* and *Shia* respondents, the former allegedly the most likely to sell and the latter allegedly the most ideologically-driven.¹⁸

4 Results

Before turning to the multivariate analysis, I first examine the pervasiveness of vote selling in the aggregate population using the original list experiment methodology. To do so, I perform a difference-in-means test between the treatment and control group counts, the latter calculated by summing up the individual “yes” answers to the non-sensitive questions. Because the treatment group has one more option from which to choose (vote selling) than does the control group, the difference in means is bounded between 0 and 1 and represents the proportion of the treatment group that said “yes” to vote selling. The control and treatment group means are 1.29 ± 0.06 and 1.84 ± 0.06 , respectively, yielding a difference in means of 0.55 ± 0.09 at the 95-percent confidence level. Consequently, we can infer that about 55 percent of the Lebanese electorate engaged in vote selling, more than double the proportion willing to admit to it.¹⁹

¹⁸The sample splits evenly by sex. The sample minimum is for age is 21, maximum is 75, mean is 40.31, and standard deviation is 13.72. *Education* measures the highest degree of education obtained, collapsed to a three-point scale for those not completing secondary school (41 percent), those who completed secondary school (30 percent), and those who had attained a college degree or better (29 percent). Sunnis and Shiites each constitute 27 percent of the sample.

¹⁹Technically, this procedure departs slightly from the original list experiment because the control group received a list of non-sensitive items rather than each item individually. Flavin and Keane (2009) raise the concern that the change in question format could introduce

Which half sold their votes and which half did not? Here, I present multivariate results to explain variation in the treatment group. Table 1 reports coefficient estimates for completeness, but for ease of interpretation I translate the effects into probability scales and plot them in Figures 1 and 2.²⁰ The results support the main propositions as well as the hypothesized conditioning effect of the competitive environment: monopsonists are better able to price discriminate among sellers. I subsequently and briefly discuss parallel results from the control group to demonstrate how dramatically our inferences would change were we only to study admitted rather than actual behavior.

[Table 1 about here]

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

systematic response bias in the control group by inflating baseline responses and making it more difficult to reject the null. There is little evidence of such a problem in these data, however. A difference in means between the treatment group \bar{T} and the control group with all four items added together \bar{C}_A yields a format difference of $\bar{T} - \bar{C}_A = (1.84 \pm 0.06) - (1.50 \pm 0.07) = 0.34 \pm 0.09$, which when added to the control group's baseline response to the sensitive item \bar{C}_S is $(\bar{T} - \bar{C}_A) + \bar{C}_S = (1.84 \pm 0.06) - (1.50 \pm 0.07) + (0.26 \pm 0.03) = 0.60 \pm 0.10$. Hence, this alternate estimate puts the aggregate prevalence of vote selling slightly higher at around 60 percent of the population. Finally, however, there is no detectable difference between the original and alternate estimates: $(\bar{T} - \bar{C}_N) - (\bar{T} - \bar{C}_A + \bar{C}_S) = \bar{C}_A - \bar{C}_N - \bar{C}_S = (1.50 \pm 0.07) - (1.29 \pm 0.06) - (0.26 \pm 0.03) = -0.05 \pm 0.10$, which is well within the sample's margin of error ($p = 0.31$). We can consequently rule out question formatting concerns.

²⁰I use the observed value approach when calculating the point estimates and confidence intervals for the predicted probabilities and differences (Hanmer and Kalkan 2009). In the figures, lines represent the 95-percent confidence intervals, with the hashes denoting their 90-percent counterparts. For notation in the main text, I report estimates and confidence intervals as *Point Estimate* $\frac{\text{Upper Bound}}{\text{Lower Bound}}$ rather than use the \pm convention because the confidence intervals are asymmetric.

Hypothesis 1 posits that vote selling increases with more opportunities to sell. To the degree that rural voters are easier to monitor than their urban counterparts, we would expect buyers to prefer the rural market. Consistent with this claim, the rural effect is indeed positive — but only detectably so in the districts dominated by monopsonists (Figure 1a). In competitive districts, rural residents are about 20 percent more likely to sell than their urban counterparts in relative terms, but the effect is imprecisely estimated and not detectably different from zero (21_{-49}^{80}). Yet in monopsonized districts, the relative difference is almost 40 percent, detectable at the 90-percent confidence level (37_{08}^{74}). These results imply that, consistent with H_1 , machines prefer to buy from rural voters but also that, consistent with H_3 , monopsonists have comparatively more leeway to focus their efforts in the villages.

Also consistent with H_1 , voters are more likely to sell as clientelistic campaigning becomes more pervasive and gives them more opportunities to sell (Figure 1b). Consistent with H_3 , though, the slope of the services effect is much steeper in districts dominated by monopsonists compared to competitive districts. The two types of districts are indistinguishable when clientelistic campaigning is restrained, but then diverge as clientelism takes on increased importance. By the time personal services become the most important component of campaigning, voters in monopsonized districts are, in relative terms, nearly 50 percent more likely to sell than voters in competitive districts, detectable at the 90-percent level (44_{0}^{114}). These results suggest that monopsonists are able to be more precise in who they target, primarily making offers to those who will indeed sell.

Hypothesis 2 posits that vote selling decreases as voters' reservation prices rise, i.e., elastic voters are more likely to sell than their inelastic peers. To the degree that politically disinterested voters put little weight on expressive and ideological voting, they should have lower reservation prices than their more active peers. Consistent with this claim, the disinterested are indeed the most likely to sell their votes (Figure 1c). Consistent with H_3 , however, the downward slope of the interest effect is much steeper in dominated districts. Very interested voters behave the same in both district types, but their behavior diverges as they lose inter-

est in politics. Disinterested voters in districts dominated by monopsonists are, in relative terms, nearly 50 percent more likely than their counterparts in competitive districts to sell, detectable at the 90-percent level (45 $\frac{88}{99}$). Again, these results suggest that monopsonists are better able to restrict their purchases to the most elastic voters.

The results are mixed for the income effect. Figure 2a reveals that selling does decline among wealthier voters, but only in districts dominated by monopsonists. Surprisingly, the income effect is *positive* in competitive districts, where the wealthier are more rather than less likely to sell. Figure 2b plots the absolute and relative differences between the two district types, and reveals that the poor are much more likely to sell in monopsonized districts, but that voter behavior in the two environments converges as income increases. Consistent with H_3 , these results suggest that monopsonists are better able to price discriminate in favor of poor sellers with low asking prices. Voters in competitive districts, however, appear to behave contrary to expectations.

Parallel estimations using the control group data produce stark inferential differences that demonstrate how crucial it is to come to empirical grips with sensitivity. I present these comparative results briefly to conserve on space, but all results are available upon request. In brief, there are absolutely no detectable rural or interest effects, regardless of district type. We still observe the positive services effect, but there is no difference in magnitude between the district types. Only the income effects are qualitatively the same, decreasing in monopsonized districts and increasing in competitive ones to converge among the wealthiest.

Differences in the control variables reinforce the dramatic changes in inference we would make were we to rely on data tainted by response bias. Sunni voters, allegedly the most likely to sell, are simply more willing than others to admit it (about 60 percent more), but this difference disappears in the treatment group. Shia voters, supposedly the most ideologically driven, are indeed least likely to admit to selling their votes (about 75 percent less), but in fact are the *most* likely to sell in reality (about 60 percent more). While there are no sex differences in the control group, women are over 60 percent more likely to sell than men.

Finally, older voters are significantly less willing to admit to selling, but are significantly more likely to sell in reality.

5 Conclusion

Studies of clientelism and vote buying have mushroomed in recent years as scholars have attempted to understand electoral strategies and behavior outside the narrow confines of the advanced, institutionalized democracies. Theoretically, this paper has conceptualized vote selling in the context of variation in voters' reservation prices, below which they will not alter their vote or turnout choices. Voter elasticity helps to identify the cheapest voters, who are buyers' preferred targets. It has also argued, however, that electoral competition, or the lack thereof, influences how easily buyers can price discriminate between sellers and restrict themselves only to the cheapest voters.

Empirically, this paper has analyzed patterns of vote selling in the 2009 Lebanese elections, in which some districts approximated the single-machine assumption and others the dueling-machines dynamic. As predicted, selling increased in rural areas where voters were easier to monitor, localities with more clientelistic campaigning, and among the politically disinterested whose reservation prices were lowest. Further, it found that these effects were strongest in the districts dominated by one faction or another who could behave as discriminating monopsonists.

The most surprising finding from this analysis was the income effect. As anticipated, poorer voters were more likely to sell than wealthier ones — but only in single-machine districts where monopsonists could price discriminate. Counter to expectations, however, these data suggest that voters were more likely to sell as income *increased* in competitive districts rather than simply produce a milder downward slope. This dynamic is, moreover, quite robust to various attempts to rescale the income variable and to replace it with alternatives such as

access to electricity. Further, this income effect was the only one to turn up qualitatively unchanged in the parallel analysis of the control group data on who admits to selling.

The anticipated link between poverty and clientelism is understandably the dominant supposition in the literature. Nonetheless, there appears to be accumulating evidence that material deprivation plays a much weaker and more inconsistent role in clientelistic exchange than commonly supposed (Chubb 1982; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2010; Hicken 2007; Remmer 2007). The poignant image of party operatives handing out bags of food in slums and shantytowns surely help drive our expectations about poverty. We must also, however, be mindful of parties handing out more valuable rewards such as government jobs and scholarships to their better-heeled clientele in the middle and upper classes. This paper offers an explanation for the latter: electoral competition. Monopsonists can afford to price discriminate and restrict their offers to the poorest and cheapest voters, whereas competition forces dueling machines to approach increasingly more expensive voters in order to win the election.

The greater capacity of vote monopsonists to price discriminate among sellers does not, however, mean that there is a large drop-off in vote buying in competitive districts. Figures 1 and 2 show that selling remains quite common and, within these data, the average monopsony effect is small and indistinguishable from zero. The point is that the dynamics are muddier in competitive districts: buyers cannot be as precise in who they target, and this imprecision translates into weaker observed relationships. Hence, we still observe a trend in favor of rural voters in competitive districts, but not a precise one because buyers must also cultivate less easily monitored urban voters as well. Likewise, we still see a trend in favor of the disinterested, but a milder one because competition forces buyers to approach more interested (and hence more expensive) voters in order to win elections.

Keen competition at the national level almost surely helped to drive up the aggregate volume of vote buying. Large influxes of foreign funds to the parties likely contributed as well. If anything, though, the excess money made it *harder* to detect the hypothesized relationships by relaxing parties' budget constraints and consequently eroding the incentive to target

their offers efficiently. With more funds available, parties could afford to take risks on more uncertain sellers as well as go after more inelastic voters than they otherwise would have considered. With tighter budget constraints, parties would have been forced to be choosier in who they targeted with offers, and we would expect to observe stronger relationships.

The conceptual distinction between swing and core voters originated in the study of distributive politics in advanced democracies where programmatic linkages are prominent. We need to revise these concepts if we wish to port them over to the developing world where programs are not credible and clientelistic linkages are pervasive. Voter elasticity is a promising start insofar as it supercedes the false dichotomy between swing and core, but additional research should investigate both the individual determinants of elasticity and the competitive conditions under which it matters. Variation in the degree of electoral competition, in turn, can help us make meaningful comparisons between electoral autocracies and legitimate democracies in the developing world. We might expect to observe monopsonistic, single-machine dynamics under the former and dueling machines in the latter, but additional research in varied settings is needed to test this conjecture.

Vote trafficking is clearly a sensitive enterprise for both buyers and sellers. As many scholars have acknowledged, studying it empirically can be extraordinarily challenging because those who engage in it have strong normative (and often legal) incentives to hide their behavior. The data analyzed herein puts an exclamation point on these sensitivity concerns, with more than twice as many people selling their votes as are willing to admit it. Moreover, correcting for response bias changes the inferences we are able to draw from survey data in theoretically and substantively important ways. Hence, this paper has demonstrated the importance of turning to data collection tools like the list experiment when we study sensitive behavior.

So what if voters sell? One compelling argument holds that a sold vote is one emptied of its content because parties have little need to consider the opinions of those from whom they buy when formulating policy. Consequently, vote buying systematically erases voices from the electorate and skews the aggregate distribution of social preferences away from

those who sell. Variants of this argument are most frequently made about poor voters, who are bought off piecemeal with cheap clientelistic rewards rather than through comprehensive pro-poor social welfare policies (Stokes 2007a).

We can, and should, take this argument further. This paper has demonstrated that people throughout the income spectrum sell, so large portions of the electorate are no more than nominally represented. Greater emphasis on clientelism, in turn, weakens the incentives for parties to supply productive public goods and services. Moreover, to the degree that the non-ideological and politically disinterested are moderate voters, widespread vote buying guts the middle of the vote market and ends up buying political polarization. Hence, even setting aside equity and other normative concerns, clientelism and vote buying contribute to two other undesirable aggregate outcomes: misallocated public resources leading to slower economic development, and misplaced emphasis on extreme voices leading to more political instability.

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	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)	
	b	$se(b)^p$										
Intercept	-3.69	1.55**	-3.44	1.54**	-3.20	1.56**	-4.78	1.74**	-5.52	1.88**	-5.58	2.04**
Female	1.22	0.54**	1.10	0.54**	1.44	0.59**	1.56	0.58**	1.46	0.60**	1.87	0.70**
Age	0.04	0.02*	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.02*	0.05	0.02**	0.05	0.03**
Education	-0.48	0.74	-0.53	0.75	-0.49	0.73	-0.49	0.67	-0.11	0.78	0.03	0.75
Shia	1.25	0.84	1.36	0.86	1.52	0.82*	1.62	0.97*	1.35	0.84	1.68	0.88*
Sunni	-0.01	0.64	0.05	0.65	0.11	0.67	0.17	0.64	0.09	0.73	0.35	0.69
Dominated	0.75	0.67	0.42	0.74	-0.57	0.90	2.46	1.15**	3.74	1.44**	5.10	2.48**
Rural	1.02	0.68	0.27	0.97	1.12	0.68	1.02	0.69	1.24	0.71*	0.66	1.01
Services	2.60	1.03**	2.70	1.02**	1.03	1.04	2.58	1.02**	2.82	1.01**	1.28	0.97
Interest	-2.67	0.86***	-2.73	0.86***	-2.73	0.92***	-1.38	0.81*	-3.33	0.97***	-1.82	0.90**
Income	2.08	1.00**	2.04	1.00**	2.29	1.04**	2.12	1.08**	4.11	1.47***	3.63	1.35***
Dominated × Rural			1.26	1.28							2.58	1.83
Dominated × Services					3.57	1.94*					6.38	3.42*
Dominated × Interest							-3.97	1.97**			-6.73	3.35**
Dominated × Income									-5.27	2.09**	-6.57	2.85**
$\ln(L)$	-3262		-3261		-3256		-3258		-3257		-3243	
Treatment n	974		974		974		974		974		974	
Control n	1029		1029		1029		1029		1029		1029	

$p \leq 0.01$ ***, $p \leq 0.05$ ** , $p \leq 0.10$ *

Table 1: Results

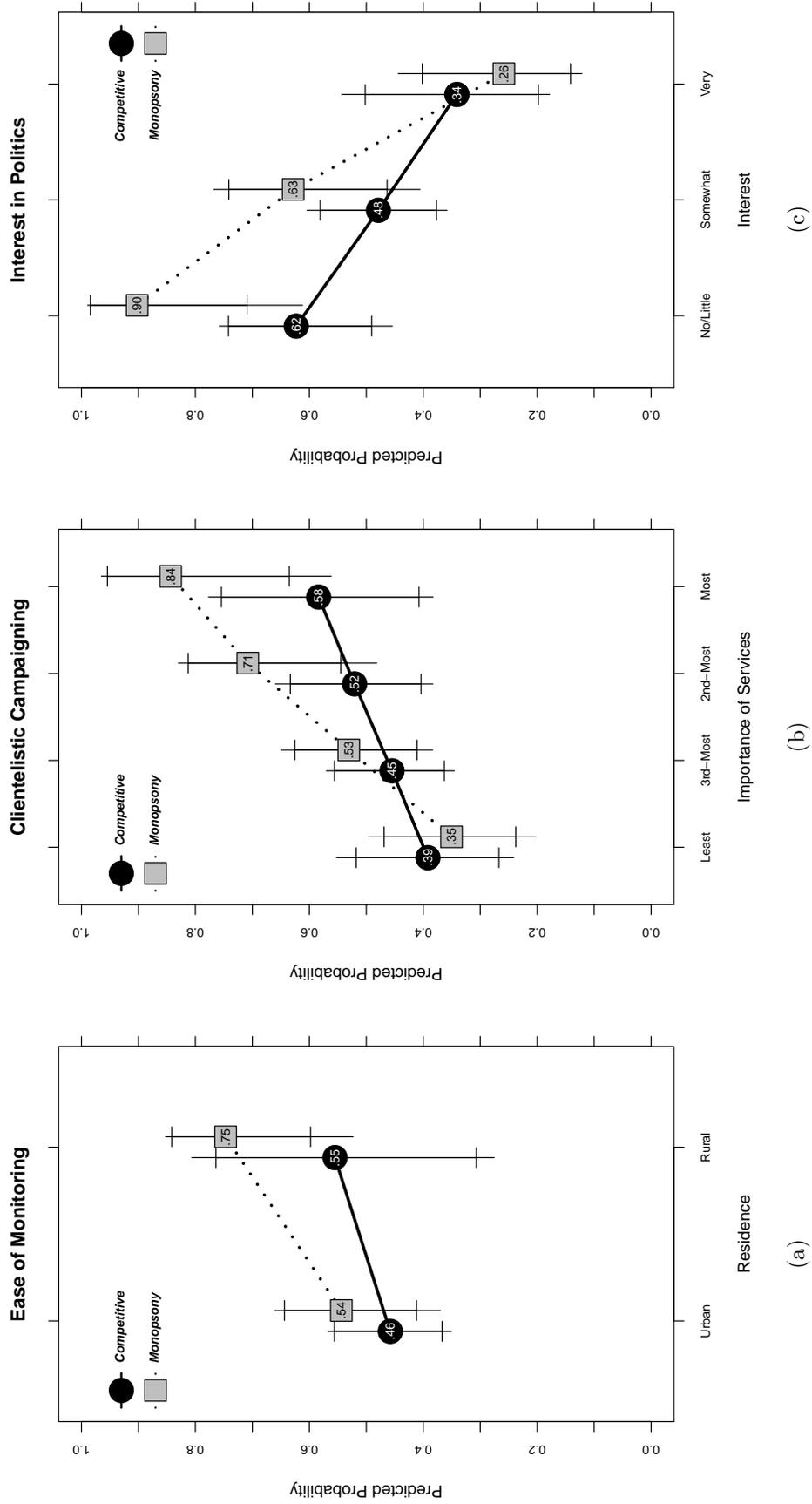


Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Selling

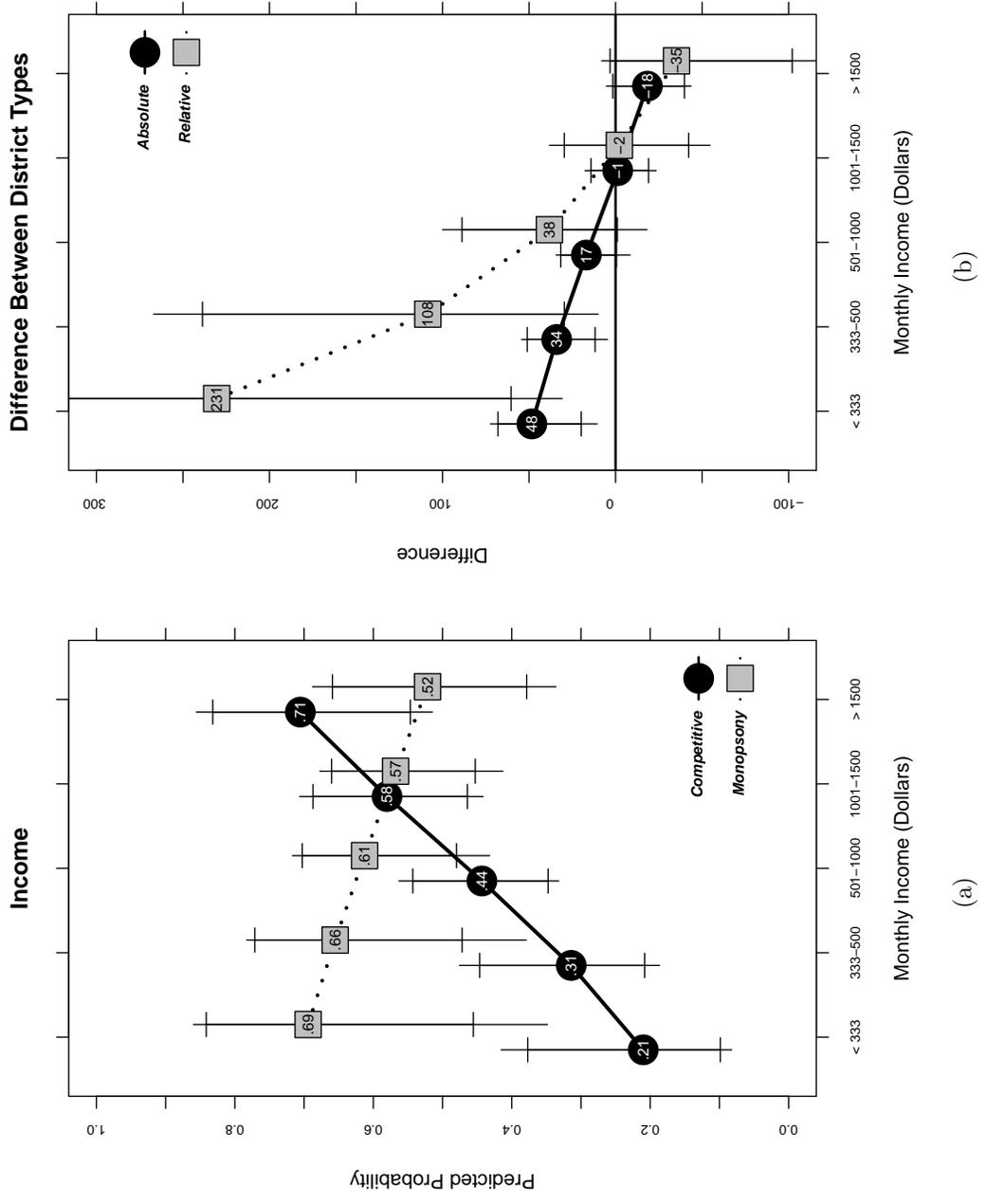


Figure 2: Income Effect