The Connections of Party Brokers

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Abstract

Seminal models of clientelism assert that parties value brokers for their strong downward ties to voters. Despite its dominance, scholars have not empirically scrutinized key assumptions of this theory due to the challenges of measuring brokers’ network connections. We analyze unique data from three sources – Ghana’s voter register, a handmade catalogue of local elites, and a large-scale survey of aspiring party brokers. We show that the observable implications of the standard model do not hold: brokers know surprisingly few voters, brokers with more downward connections are not the most active or effective, and parties do not select the brokers who know the most people. Instead, brokers with the most upward connections to local elites appear to be the most valuable to parties. We build inductively from these results to develop an alternative theory of brokers, proposing that many parties value “problem solvers” over “monitors.” (145 words)

Word count: 9,921.

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1 Introduction

Political parties in developing democracies often rely on grassroots intermediaries, or brokers, to pursue clientelist strategies (Mares and Young 2016). During campaigns, brokers mobilize votes: they distribute handouts (Stokes 2005), organize rallies (Szwarcberg 2012), and canvass (Brierley and Kramon 2018). Between elections, they build voter loyalty by providing access to vital public services (Auyero 2000, Zarazaga 2014). According to the dominant “information asymmetry” model of party brokers, parties primarily employ brokers because they have detailed information on individual voters that parties otherwise lack. Parties in turn leverage this knowledge to target benefits, and, crucially, enforce clientelistic exchanges by monitoring voter behavior (Brusco et al. 2004, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Stokes et al. 2013, Camp 2017).

Until now, key assumptions of this theory have not been empirically tested due to measurement challenges. Previous studies have assumed that brokers possess significant knowledge about voters, but have not measured these connections systematically or evaluated whether brokers with stronger ties to voters are more active and/or electorally effective.¹ Moreover, other than Auerbach and Thachil (2018a, 2018b), prior research has not explored which brokers parties select when given a choice. However, studying broker selection can reveal party leaders’ preferences for different types of intermediaries.

We overcome these measurement challenges using an original survey of 1,140 aspiring party brokers in Ghana’s ruling party: the New Patriotic Party (NPP). While the NPP also interacts with citizens via non-party brokers (e.g. chiefs, community and religious leaders), the party primarily relies on internal party agents – the actors we survey – to implement clientelist appeals. To our knowledge, this is the largest survey of party brokers in any developing democracy to date. The survey develops original and objective measures of brokers’ network ties. This includes leveraging

¹Important partial exceptions are Calvo and Murillo (2013), Schneider (2017), and Ravanilla et al. (2018), discussed in more detail below.
an unusually fine-grained data source – Ghana’s complete voter register – to estimate brokers’ *downward connections* by quizzing them about the identities of real voters in their communities. We also introduce an original measure of brokers’ *upward connections* by cataloguing and asking brokers the names and phone numbers of the local elites who they must contact to deliver patronage to voters. Moreover, because Ghana’s political parties hold internal elections to select brokers, we can identify which broker attributes party elites (and clients) value the most in real selection decisions.

We find little empirical support for central observable implications of the information asymmetry model. Brokers in Ghana know surprisingly few voters; they have no more knowledge of local voters than a reference group of non-brokers. In addition, brokers with more downward connections are neither more active during or after campaigns nor more electorally effective than those with fewer downward ties. Broker selection procedures also completely fail to screen for intermediaries with more ties to voters. Instead, our analyses show that brokers in Ghana’s ruling party have significantly more upward ties to local elites than non-brokers; that brokers’ ties to local elites are strong correlates of activism and electoral effectiveness; and that broker selection processes screen, at least partially, for intermediaries with the best upward ties.

Building inductively from this evidence, we propose an alternative explanation for the sources of brokers’ value to parties. Our theory extends recent studies that revisit canonical models of clientelism (e.g., Stokes 2005) to emphasize that many clientelist exchanges in the developing world are not monitored at the individual level (Munoz 2014, Kramon 2017, Nichter 2018), and are often initiated by voters themselves (Nichter and Peress 2017). In these exchanges, parties primarily rely on brokers to be “problem solvers” rather than “monitors” who keep close tabs on voters (Auyero 2000, Zarazaga 2014). The best brokers are those who can improve the party’s reputation and credibility by meeting voters’ demands for personalized patronage (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2016, Nichter 2018). This requires *connections up* to local elites – local party leaders, bureaucrats, and politicians – who brokers must lobby for patronage that they can deliver to voters.
(Auyero 2000, Auerbach and Thachil 2018a). Additionally, local party elites often have a private incentive to select brokers with whom they are connected, because these brokers can help them rise within the party ranks.

We focus on Ghana because of the unique measurement opportunities it affords. But we expect our alternative theory of brokers’ value to parties to extend broadly under two scope conditions. First, we expect that most exchanges between parties and voters are not monitored at the individual level. There is mounting evidence that unmonitored clientelism is extremely prevalent – or indeed the most prevalent form of clientelism – across the developing world, as we discuss below. Second, our theory is most relevant where brokers’ upward and downward ties are not strongly correlated. This forces parties (and clients) to decide which type of connections to prioritize when selecting brokers. This may not be the case where parties rely on external brokers, such as employers, associational leaders, or traditional elites: through their elite status and centrality in local networks, these individuals may have strong upward and downward ties.²

We make two main contributions to the study of clientelism. First, our results suggest a need to rethink untested assumptions about the sources of brokers’ value to parties. We do not argue that brokers’ connections to voters are irrelevant, but provide evidence that such ties may be far less central to their role than is typically claimed. We thus contribute to a broader, on-going theoretical re-assessment of central claims in the study of clientelism. Our observation that brokers’ ability to monitor individual voters is not their most salient feature closely complements other recent studies challenging the theoretical importance of monitoring and enforcement to the persistence of clientelist appeals (e.g., Kramon 2017, Nichter 2018).

Our second contribution is that we look inside what has hitherto been an empirical “black box”: who parties select as brokers. We present the first systemic study of real-life broker selection

²We restrict our analysis to partisan brokers because these are the most relevant type of broker in the areas of Ghana we study. We recognize that parties sometimes rely instead on the mobilization capacity of non-party brokers. For example, see Frye et al. (2014), Baldwin (2015), Holland and Palmer-Rubin (2015), Gottlieb (2017).
from the perspective of clients and party leaders simultaneously. This complements Auerbach and Thachil (2018a, 2018b), who also investigate client- and party-led broker selection, respectively. We extend this work by focusing on actual, as opposed to hypothetical, selection decisions and employing more direct measures of brokers’ attributes. Importantly, we show that brokers’ connections up to local elites are central to the selection process in a much larger variety of settings than informal slums, including rural towns and villages and rich and poor urban neighborhoods.

2 The information asymmetry theory of party brokers

2.1 Brokers’ value to parties

Parties in many developing democracies employ brokers as agents within their organizations. Seminal models of clientelism suggest that these brokers are valuable to parties because of their social ties with citizens. According to the dominant theory, party leaders leverage these ties to address information asymmetries between the party and voters.

The information asymmetry model of brokers emphasizes two ways in which brokers’ intimate knowledge of voters helps party leaders. First, brokers’ knowledge is thought to allow parties to tailor private patronage benefits to the needs of individual voters (Brusco et al. 2004, Stokes et al. 2013). Just as urban bosses in New York and Chicago “kept track of constituents’ likes and dislikes” (Dixit and Londregan 1996, 1147), party brokers in developing democracies are said to “deploy their detailed knowledge of constituents... to match distributive benefits to people’s needs and leverage individual circumstances for votes” (Camp et al. 2015, 567).

Second, brokers’ knowledge of voters is claimed to allow parties to monitor the exchange of goods for electoral support. Monitoring is an essential component of clientelism when it is defined as a quid pro quo in which parties distribute goods in return for votes. Under this definition, brokers are a sine qua non of clientelism because they make conditioning possible (Stokes et al. 2013, 76).
This monitoring and enforcement is sometimes explicit, through direct violations of the secret ballot (Baland and Robinson 2008). But more common are more subtle forms of surveillance through brokers’ sustained social interactions and personal relationships with voters (Brusco et al. 2004, Medina and Stokes 2007). This monitoring is said to help brokers deduce the choices of many voters in their social networks, which enables them to punish those who renge on clientelist transactions (Stokes 2005, Keefer and Vlaicu 2007). Parties that engage in clientelism are thus strongly incentivized to seek brokers with the best social ties to voters.

Brokers also benefit from developing these ties to citizens: they leverage their social networks to extract resources from the party. If parties do not deliver benefits, brokers with a large following can threaten to defect and take their clients to competitors (Camp 2017, Novaes 2018). In this way, brokers are thought to exploit the fact that they are more informed than parties about voters’ preferences and behavior.

2.2 Challenges to the information asymmetry theory

We discuss four reasons to question whether brokers’ primary value to parties truly lies in their connections with voters. Two of these reasons arise from empirical observations that appear to be at odds with assumptions about clientelism on which the information asymmetry theory of brokers is based. The other two issues relate to key measurement challenges common to studies of brokers.

First, recent scholarship suggests that parties in many developing democracies do not monitor most clientelist exchanges at the individual level (Munoz 2014, Kramon 2017, Chauchard 2018, Guardado and Wantchekon 2018, Nichter 2018). When parties use unmonitored clientelism, brokers do not necessarily need to have strong ties to a large number of individual clients. Kramon (2017) shows that politicians benefit electorally from clientelist handouts even when they do not

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3This even includes recent research on the empirical cases, such as Argentina, from which theories of monitored clientelism first emerged (e.g., Zarazaga 2014).
know who the recipients are, and have no means of monitoring them. Such transactions are often not direct exchanges for votes; they serve as signals to voters about the candidates’ viability and the credibility of their promises to continue to deliver resources if elected (Munoz 2014).

The second empirical challenge is that many transfers are “client initiated”: voters often contact brokers to demand assistance (Nichter 2018). When voters initiate exchanges, brokers do not need to leverage their downward connections to contact clients. Instead, brokers wait for clients – both those they know and those referred to them by others – to come to them (Nichter and Peress 2017). Brokers do not necessarily need to be familiar with constituents’ problems a priori, but must be able to help solve them if asked. Therefore, while a new broker may need a sufficient minimum number of ties to attract initial clients, marginal differences in brokers’ pre-existing connections to voters may not affect their electoral success.

The third objection arises from the fact that, due to measurement challenges, the key assertion that parties value brokers because of their ties to voters has not been rigorously tested. Indeed, few prior studies have systematically measured brokers’ knowledge about voters. Community social networks capturing brokers’ social ties are usually too complex to observe at scale. Most studies that have assessed brokers’ monitoring capabilities have simply asked brokers whether they think they are capable of monitoring voters. Alternatively, studies ask voters if they believe parties can monitor them. But these approaches have clear drawbacks. Brokers have incentives to inflate their importance by exaggerating the extent of their knowledge, and voters who are fearful of electoral intimidation may overestimate the extent of monitoring. Furthermore, in one of the only studies

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5 For example, Stokes et al. (2013, 100) rely on self-reports of monitoring ability.

6 Brokers may also believe they are good at inferring preferences, but lack any means to validate these beliefs if the ballot is secret.

7 For example, while Afrobarometer surveys suggest that some voters in Ghana believe party agents can observe their vote choices (Ferree and Long 2016), party agents widely admit they have no ability to monitor voters’ choices (Nathan 2019, 181-185). Also see Nichter (2018, 38) for a similar dynamic in Brazil.
to explicitly test brokers’ knowledge of vote choice, Schneider (2017) finds that intermediaries in rural India are surprisingly bad at identifying voters’ partisan preferences.

The fourth and final challenge is that scholars have thus far been unable to observe parties’ broker selection decisions in practice. In theory, investigating such decisions will reveal parties’ preferences over broker attributes. These observations represent another way to validate assumptions about brokers’ value to parties. Indeed, if parties prefer brokers who have in-depth knowledge about voters, they should be expected to design institutions that screen for this knowledge when hiring their brokers. However, prior studies have not systematically observed a real-life broker selection process to examine why parties select certain brokers. The closest exception is Auerbach and Thachil (2018a), who study broker selection in India indirectly via a survey experiment. In contrast to the information asymmetry model, they find that brokers’ education and ties to municipal governments are key criteria in their selection, rather than co-ethnicity or other proxies for their ties to voters.

We seek to overcome both of these measurement challenges, while building on recent scholarship that suggests many exchanges between parties and voters are unmonitored and client initiated. We begin by assessing three central observable implications of the information asymmetry model of clientelism (Section 5). First, if the information asymmetry model of brokers is correct, brokers should have high overall levels of knowledge about voters in their communities. Second, brokers with greater knowledge of voters should be relatively more active in – and effective at – facilitating clientelistic exchanges. Third, parties should structure their institutions for selecting brokers to choose agents who have the best ties to voters. After assessing these claims, we discuss our findings in light of the newer literature on unmonitored clientelism to suggest an alternative theory of brokers’ value to parties (Section 6).
3 Party brokers and party organization in Ghana

We study partisan brokers in Ghana, where the major parties share two features critical to our analysis. First, they rely on party brokers to engage in clientelism. Second, they use observable procedures to fill broker positions, which allows us to better examine their preferences regarding broker attributes.

3.1 Branch leaders as brokers

Ghana’s two major parties, the NPP – the incumbent following the 2016 election – and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), are organizationally thick, with hierarchical machine organizations. They have standing committees of internally elected executives at the national, regional, parliamentary constituency, and polling station levels. Polling station branches are our main focus. Branches are led by committees of branch leaders (or “executives”) who serve – at least on paper – at all of the country’s 29,000 polling stations. The NPP has five leaders per branch, while the NDC selects nine leaders per branch.8 Polling station branches oversee localized communities of roughly 500 to 1,000 registered voters, which is equivalent to an entire village or small urban neighborhood. Branch executives are themselves overseen by a committee of constituency-level leaders (or “executives”).9

Both parties regularly mobilize voters using non-programmatic appeals, including spot exchanges before elections, the politically targeted distribution of local public goods, and more iterated forms of “relational clientelism” through which the parties provide individualized benefits in return for support (Nathan 2019). Both parties rely heavily on their branch executives to facili-

8We focus on the incumbent NPP. The five positions at each branch are: chairman, secretary, organizer, youth organizer, and women’s organizer.

9These constituency-level leaders are the actors we refer to as “local party elites” below. As of the 2016 election, there were 275 parliamentary constituencies nested within 216 districts. Each district corresponds to a single local government.
tate these efforts (Fobih 2010, Bob-Milliar 2012). Our survey data (see below) demonstrates that branch executives serve as brokers both during campaigns and once their party takes power.

Branch executives are not the only actors who serve as brokers in Ghana. Both parties also sometimes work through traditional chiefs, especially in rural villages (Nathan 2019). However, branch executives conduct the largest share of brokerage activities nationwide. Separate parallel networks of informal brokers are rare. Parliamentary and presidential candidates both draw on branch- and constituency-level executives rather than build private campaign teams.

3.2 Selection institutions

Unlike in some other patronage-based democracies, branch leaders in Ghana do not emerge solely through informal, community-organized procedures (e.g., Auerbach and Thachil 2018). Instead, party positions at all levels are filled – at least on paper – via first-past-the-post internal elections. These elections are held every four years following the national election. Party members serve as the electorate for aspirants contesting branch leadership positions. Branch elections are not always held in practice, however. Constituency-level party executives also sometimes interfere to hand pick branch leaders who are personally loyal to them, since these lower-level officials serve as the electoral college in primaries for parliamentary candidates and vote to select the party’s constituency leaders. Variation in whether elections occur allows us to observe broker selection both when it is determined formally by ordinary party members and informally by constituency-level party elites.

The Online Appendix shows that substitution between chiefs and party brokers cannot explain our results.

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4 Data sources

4.1 Survey design

We surveyed aspirants to branch leadership positions in the NPP during the party’s most recent branch elections, held in January 2018.\textsuperscript{11} We restrict our analysis to the ruling party as it is the only party with access to significant state resources, which allows its branch leaders to serve as brokers at a large scale in the current period.

We construct a stratified, representative, random sample of NPP branches in five regions of southern Ghana.\textsuperscript{12} The final sample consists of 200 polling stations, now representing 232 separate branches,\textsuperscript{13} spread across 10 parliamentary constituencies (five urban and five rural). The survey was conducted over a four-week period immediately after the branch elections. All candidates as of election day for each of the five positions in each branch were interviewed. We also interviewed the incumbent branch chair, organizer, and women’s organize regardless of whether they re-contested. Our final sample of 1,140 respondents consists of four types of aspiring brokers: incumbent leaders who were re-elected, incumbent leaders who lost or did not re-contest, new contestants who won, and new contestants who lost. The Online Appendix provides further details on sampling.

4.2 Measuring broker connections

We conceptualize brokers as having two predominant types of network ties: connections down to clients – ordinary voters and party supporters – and connections up to politicians, public officials, and higher-level party leaders (see Figure 1). Our connections down measure assesses respondents’ knowledge of real voters from their polling station. We used the official voter register (from 2015)

\textsuperscript{11}These branch leaders will be in office until after the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections.
\textsuperscript{12}These are Ashanti, Greater Accra, Volta, Central and Eastern.
\textsuperscript{13}The Electoral Commission recently divided 32 of the selected 200 polling stations into two separate stations, necessitating the creation of parallel NPP branches at the split stations starting from the 2018 branch elections.
to randomly select 24 voters from each polling station, creating sheets of de-identified voters using their photographs (see Figure 2). The variable records the percentage of voters that each respondent named correctly.\textsuperscript{14}

To measure connections up, we tested branch leaders’ knowledge of 13 local elites. We focus on the main actors a broker in Ghana would need to contact in order to deliver patronage to individual voters. The list includes each of the main local politicians who control local governance decisions and can serve as patrons to voters.\textsuperscript{15} It also includes the district government bureaucrats who control the major sources of patronage.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, the list includes the full set of constituency-level party executives who take on informal positions of influence in district governments.\textsuperscript{17}

Each respondent was asked to name the current occupant of each position and to provide the

\textsuperscript{14}We employ a flexible coding scheme that allows for the possibility that respondents only know voters by a nickname (see Online Appendix).

\textsuperscript{15}These are the Member of Parliament (MP), mayor (district chief executive), city/town councilor (District Assembly member), and city/town council chair (presiding member of the District Assembly).

\textsuperscript{16}These are the district head bureaucrat (district coordinating director), district engineer, the district coordinator for the National Disaster Management Organization, and the district’s Youth Employment Agency coordinator. The latter two supervise common avenues for grassroots patronage employment, while the district engineer oversees public works contracting, another main avenue for patronage.

\textsuperscript{17}These are the constituency party chairperson, secretary, treasurer, organizer, youth organizer, and women’s organizer.
last four digits of his/her phone number, creating a 25-item test of upward connections; names and numbers were scored separately. To ensure that we measure aspiring branch leaders’ connections from before the 2018 branch elections, we also ask if respondents first learned each name or number in the days or weeks between the election and the survey interview. If a respondent answered “yes” to this question, we removed their responses for this item. Our connections up variable records the percentage of items correctly identified by each respondent.

Figure 3 (left panel) shows that there is wide variation across aspiring branch leaders in both types of connections. Connections up ranges from 0% to 84% correct, with a median of 20% and standard deviation of 15%. Connections down ranges from 0% to 100%, with a median of 16% and standard deviation of 22%. Importantly, there is no individual-level correlation – in either the full sample or within either rural or urban constituencies – between each type of connection (r=−0.003). These two dimensions are likely uncorrelated because different life experiences and

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18 We only tested for the MP’s phone number, as MP names are widely known. Research assistants obtained correct phone numbers for each official before the survey was administered.
19 We again employ a flexible coding scheme that allows for the possibility that each official has additional phone numbers or nicknames (see Online Appendix).
socio-economic backgrounds best explain the formation of each type of connection.\textsuperscript{20}

### 4.3 Validating the measure of connections down

We address several potential concerns regarding our measure of connections down. First, what may matter most is the depth of brokers’ ties to voters, not simply the number of people they know. Indeed, prior studies conclude that it is brokers’ intimate knowledge of voters’ lives that is important (Stokes 2005, 317). Our measure of downward ties represents a minimalist operationalization of this deeper knowledge, because identifying voters’ names is a necessary prerequisite to a stronger relationship. Thus, while the depth of each tie remains unobservable, our measure provides an upper bound on each broker’s possible social connections to voters.

Second, it may be argued that our measure of downward ties is too noisy because of the small number of voters in our quiz. To validate that this is a reliable proxy for real ties to voters, we show that it strongly correlates with various attributes of brokers and communities that one should expect to differentially affect social ties. Figure 3 (right panel) displays correlations between respondents’ connections down and a number of individual- and polling-station-level attributes. In communities that are more tight-knit – for instance, those that are rural, more remote, and where citizens engage in a single line of work (e.g., farming) – citizens should be more likely to know each other, especially compared to richer, larger, or more urban communities where residents are more anonymous. As expected, brokers who operate in communities that are more remote ($r=0.43$)\textsuperscript{21} and have more farming households ($r=0.64$) know more voters. Brokers who work in urban communities that are wealthier and more ethnically fractionalized know fewer voters ($r=-0.63$, $r=-0.32$, $r=-0.49$, respectively). Considering individual attributes, respondents who have lived in a community longer

\textsuperscript{20}For example, activists who are better educated or work regularly with the local government should have relatively better upward ties (Auerbach and Thachil 2018\textsuperscript{a}), while those who occupy central positions in local family networks, or who work in “street-level” professions that put them in contact with community members on a regular basis, should have relatively better downward ties.

\textsuperscript{21}As measured by distance (km) to the next closest polling station.
Figure 3: Left: Individual-level correlations between connections up and connections down. Right: Correlates of connections down.

Notes: Left plot: The blue line represents a line of best fit. Right plot: Displays correlations between connections down and individual- and community-level variables. Variables that are measured at the individual level are identified with “(IND)” and those measured at the polling station level are identified with “(PS)”. Wealth, ethnic fractionalization, and percent farming households each use geo-coded 2010 census data to measure these attributes within a 2km radius of each polling station.
(r=0.27) or who are related to the local chief (r=0.26) – and are thus more central to local family networks – know more local voters. These correlations strongly suggest that our measure captures real social ties.22

Third, it can be argued that what matters most are ties to specific types of voters, not a random sample. We account for this in Section 5 and the Online Appendix through robustness tests in which we redefine connections down in several ways to examine ties to different subsets of voters.

### 4.4 Measuring broker activism

Finally, we use the survey to measure broker activism. These questions ask branch leaders about their work for the party during the 2016 presidential and parliamentary campaigns, as well as efforts since the election after the NPP took power. We create two indices that summarize these activities, listed in Table 1. The variable Campaign index sums the components under campaign activities. Branch leaders on average performed about four of the nine activities listed (mean = 4.56); a majority reported that they canvassed, organized voters to attend rallies, and distributed handouts – all common tasks for party brokers identified in the literature. Post-election index sums the post-election brokerage activities. Most branch leaders performed at least one of these activities (mean = 1.14).

These indices have the limitation that they measure the range of brokerage activities in which respondents engage, rather than the depth of that engagement. Measuring informal labor inputs is difficult (including for party leaders; e.g., Larreguy et al. 2016); survey questions asking brokers to recall the specific number of times they engaged in an activity are unlikely to be reliable. But because all of these are common tasks assigned to polling station branch leaders throughout Ghana, we expect the diversity of activities in which a respondent engages to proxy well for overall effort.

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22 Each of these variables is also a statistically significant predictor in regression analyses of connections down. See the Online Appendix.
Table 1: Summary of activities that branch leaders perform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campaign index</td>
<td>1,117</td>
<td>4.562</td>
<td>2.064</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House-to-house canvassing</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize people to attend rallies</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>0.772</td>
<td>0.419</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize community events</td>
<td>1,137</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute handouts (food, cloth, cash, t-shirts, phone credit)</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>0.573</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize transport for voters on election day</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide financial assistance to people</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate with the chief on behalf of the party</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally drive voters to polling stations on election day</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.387</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help people find jobs</td>
<td>1,136</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-election index</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>1.318</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help citizens contact party to discuss their problems</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>0.474</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help citizens contact local govt. to discuss their problems</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help party identify local citizens to provide with benefits</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>0.307</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Assessing the information asymmetry theory

In this section we evaluate the three observable implications identified above from the information asymmetry model of brokers.

5.1 Implication 1: brokers have strong connections to voters

First, contrary to standard expectations, we find that most brokers have relatively few ties to voters, knowing only a small proportion of the registered voters at their polling stations. On average, respondents were only able to identify five (21%; see Table 2) of the 24 randomly selected voters. This knowledge is predicted primarily by attributes of the constituency and community as opposed to brokers’ characteristics. For example, brokers who represent polling stations in urban constituencies know significantly fewer voters (9%) than those who serve in rural areas (31%). Within constituencies, much of the variation in knowledge is explained by variables that proxy for the remoteness of the polling station: the number of registered voters, the distance to the next
Table 2: Mean connections down of aspirant branch leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean connections down</th>
<th>Absolute n. of voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(out of 24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full sample</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Akan voters</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akan voters</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-incumbent branch leader</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent branch leader</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

station, and the share of farming households.\textsuperscript{23} For example, the polling station where the average broker knows the most voters (76%) is a small cocoa-farming community on the western edge of the Ashanti Region. This community has 98 registered voters, the next-nearest polling station is over 2 km away, and two-thirds of households engage in farming. By comparison, in 11 stations the average broker could not name a single voter. These polling stations have an average of 710 registered voters, the nearest polling station is less than half a kilometer away, and roughly 6\% of households engage in farming.

The data also imply that branch leaders may not know significantly more voters than other residents of their communities. While we did not collect data on ordinary residents’ connections, we leverage variation in the types of respondents in the survey to compare the connections of incumbent branch leaders, who have already been serving as NPP brokers, with those of non-incumbents – aspiring activists who have not yet worked for the party in a formal capacity. We find no substantively significant difference in the connections down of aspiring vs. incumbent branch leaders.

\textsuperscript{23}A regression that contains these three variables has an R-squared of 0.43. Regression models that include only individual-level variables have less predictive power (see Online Appendix).
brokers. On average, incumbents know fewer than one person more than new aspirants (22% versus 19%). These results suggest that branch leaders do not develop ties to a large number of voters while they are in office. Moreover, even if the only types of residents who seek positions as brokers are those with the greatest ties to community members, Table 2 demonstrates that these especially well-connected residents often at most only know a small minority of voters, let alone have more substantive relationships with them that would facilitate monitoring at scale.

One can argue that brokers’ downward connections are limited to party supporters, as opposed to ordinary residents. Given the Akan ethnic group’s close alignment with the NPP, we also use ethnicity as a rough measure of partisanship. We employ a dictionary-based method to code ethnicity using voters’ names (see Online Appendix). The results show that while branch leaders know relatively more Akans than non-Akans (22% compared to 19%), this difference is not substantively significant. Even when restricting the data to likely party supporters, most brokers continue to know only a small minority of the voting population, even within small communities. Overall, the data do not support the claim that brokers have deep ties to large segments of voters. This is especially true in urban communities, where clientelism is still quite prevalent in Ghana (Nathan 2019).

5.2 Implication 2: brokers with more connections down are more active

We next assess the claim that brokers who know more voters are the most active and effective. We differentiate between activities undertaken by brokers during Ghana’s 2016 election campaign (Campaign Index) and activities since the party took power (Post-campaign Index). There is significant variation in branch leaders’ level of activity during the campaign.24 Over a third of branch leaders (35%) engaged in six or more of the nine campaign activities, while 28% performed three or less. In OLS regression models, brokers’ connections down do not predict overall campaign

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24We restrict this analysis to incumbent branch leaders who held positions as of 2016.
activism, as visualized in Figure 4 (left panel). But brokers’ connections up are a strong predictor of campaign activity. A one-unit increase in connections up (i.e. 0% to 100%) predicts that a branch leader conducted 2.79 additional campaign activities on the nine-point scale (Figure 4, left panel). There is also significant variation across incumbent branch leaders in their post-campaign brokerage. While more than half of respondents engaged in none of the three post-election activities, more than one-third engaged in all three. As before, respondents’ connections down do not predict these activities, while connections up is significantly associated with more post-campaign brokerage.

The right plot of Figure 4 disaggregates the two activism indices into their components. Figure 4 plots the change in the predicted probability of a broker engaging in each item as the number of connections increases from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean. Connections up positively predicts each of the nine items in the campaign index, and two of the three post-campaign items. But brokers’ downward ties are only associated with three of the nine campaign activities: canvassing, working with the chief, and finding jobs for residents. Connections down is not associated with any of the three post-campaign items. Overall, these results suggest that knowing more voters is at best only very weakly associated with brokers’ campaign and post-election activism.

One concern is that we can only measure brokers’ connections after they have performed these activities. This makes it difficult to know if the connections are driving activism, or if they have changed because brokers are active. In particular, a broker who is active on the campaign trail is likely to meet more local residents. But this should bias our results in favor of a strong positive correlation between connections down and activism, as opposed to the largely null relationships we document. This implies that brokers are engaging in campaign activism without necessarily developing the social ties to voters that we would expect if they intended to monitor their behavior.

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25These models include constituency and position fixed effects, and both community- and individual-level controls (See Online Appendix).
Figure 4: Left: Predicting broker activism (OLS regressions) Right: Change in predicted probabilities of activism (logit regressions)

Notes: The right plot simulates changes in the predicted probability of engaging in each activity as connections down and up increase from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean.
In addition, we develop an approximate measure of the electoral effectiveness of the NPP’s brokers by examining changes in NPP (presidential) vote share between the 2012 and 2016 elections at the polling station level. In the Online Appendix, we regress the NPP vote swing from 2012 to 2016 at each polling station on the average characteristics of the slate of five incumbent branch leaders – those serving during the 2016 campaign. We control for constituency-wide trends in NPP support to identify which branches performed unusually well relative to neighboring branches. We find that branches at which the NPP’s branch leaders have greater average connections down actually perform worse relative to the trend in the surrounding constituency, not better, as would be expected if these ties to voters were central to brokers’ performance (see Online Appendix).

5.3 Implication 3: parties select brokers with more connections down

Finally, we assess whether parties select brokers who have the strongest downward connections. We find no evidence that the NPP favors branch leaders with the best knowledge of voters.

In Ghana, as elsewhere, national party leaders lack the localized knowledge necessary to identify potential brokers in each community. This means they are forced to delegate broker selection to local actors: local party elites (candidates and intermediate-level party officials) or clients (ordinary party members). Broker selection decisions can be analyzed to reveal the preferences of these local actors. More importantly, the fact that senior party leaders allow a set of selection procedures to persist over time – rather than finding a new process – can indicate their preferences for broker characteristics.

Broker selection in Ghana has long been formally delegated to party members via branch-level elections. Despite this de jure process, elections are rare. Constituency-level party leaders – one tier up from the branch leaders – sometimes intervene to prevent elections from taking place,

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26Party leaders in Ghana, and elsewhere, can evaluate brokers’ performance based on polling station results (the lowest level at which results are aggregated) (e.g., Larreguy et al. 2016, Rueda 2016).
ensuring that they can select preferred branch leaders. Table 3 displays the selection process for each leadership position in all branches in our survey in 2018. Contested elections occurred for 10% of positions. The large majority of positions (74%) were uncontested (“acclamation”). For the remaining 16%, two or more aspirants stepped forward, but no election was held because a deal was struck for all but one to withdraw at the last minute (“backroom deal”).

Table 3: Mode of branch leader selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uncontested</th>
<th>Contested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. aspirants:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Acclamation</td>
<td>Election held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74% (721)</td>
<td>10% (97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1 Selection by clients

First, we examine selection via elections (N=60 elections). In these instances, local clients (NPP party members) are the selectorate. We estimate a logistic regression predicting electoral victory on the connections of each aspirant, as well as an indicator of whether the aspirant is the incumbent, and branch-position fixed effects, to compare contestants for the same branch-level position. Whether an aspiring broker has more connections down than her opponent is not associated with winning the branch leadership election ($p=0.66$; see Online Appendix). Instead, connections up strongly predicts victory. Additional analyses demonstrate that this result is most likely due to aspirants’ connections, rather than correlates of those connections (see Online Appendix).
5.3.2 Selection by local party leaders

Second, we study selection via either acclamation or backroom deals to determine the preferences of local party elites. Constituency leaders can influence the likelihood of acclamation by preventing the entry of multiple aspirants through their control of the election schedule and the distribution of nomination forms that all prospective aspirants must submit (see Online Appendix). If multiple aspirants enter, constituency leaders can also use their powers to strike “backroom deals”: they sometimes apply pressure on candidates to step aside to allow a favored branch leader to win.

During our fieldwork (which coincided with the NPP’s 2018 branch elections), we witnessed illustrative examples of both of these actions. In one case, we arrived at the polling station’s “election” to find that it was only attended by a single, handpicked aspirant for each position and had not been publicized to other party members, none of whom were gathered to vote. Nomination forms had not been distributed in advance by constituency leaders, restricting the pool of candidates. Every position was won via acclamation. By contrast, at another polling station there were three candidates for the position of branch youth organizer, but a constituency executive pressured two to withdraw, allowing his favored candidate to win without an election taking place.

Systematically assessing the impact of party elites’ interference is complicated by the need to separate constituency leaders’ actions from more mundane reasons positions may go uncontested. For instance, some acclamations occur because there is no interest in a position. Elsewhere, strong incumbents deter the entry of challengers without help from constituency leaders. To isolate strategic interference by local party elites, our analysis therefore includes controls for both sets of factors. To account for the potential lack of interest in positions, we control for the baseline number of likely NPP supporters, operationalized as 2016 NPP presidential vote share at the branch (polling station) level, and whether the branch is dormant, measured by the percentage of respondents who report the branch has not held meetings over the past year.\footnote{We also control for local ethnic fractionalization, which may indicate greater competition between groups for control} To account for the
role of the incumbent’s decision to re-contest a position on selection outcomes, we use incumbent characteristics as the main reference point for explaining the decisions of other actors.

In Table 4 (columns 1 and 2) we examine the predictors of full branch-level acclamations – instances in which all five positions go uncontested, which may indicate that constituency-level party leaders are placing restrictions on access.\textsuperscript{30} The predictors are the average connections of the incumbent branch leaders, alongside the controls listed above.\textsuperscript{31} Column 1 suggests that branches with the least local party elite interference are those where branch leaders have the best knowledge of voters. This is in contrast to what we would expect if constituency leaders wanted to protect brokers with the best ties to voters. Simulating from column 1, branches with incumbent branch leaders that have average connections down at the 90th percentile (49%) are 25.6 percentage points less likely (95% CI: 4.1, 43.9) to have all positions go unopposed than branches at the 10th percentile (1%). Moreover, Column 2 suggests that not only do constituency-level party leaders not protect the most downwardly connected branch leaders; they also do not protect slates of branch leaders who may have performed best, measured as the polling station-level NPP presidential vote swing between 2012 and 2016 relative to the rest of the parliamentary constituency.

Columns 3–7 (Table 4) examine the predictors of backroom deals. Because deals can only occur if multiple aspirants step forward, we first investigate what predicts the entry of multiple aspirants (columns 3–4) and then examine predictors of deals conditional on multiple entrants (columns 5–7). The unit of analysis is now the position, rather than the branch. We use the incumbent’s characteristics and decision to re-contest as the main predictors: other aspirants decide whether to enter the race based on the incumbent’s characteristics.\textsuperscript{32} Columns 3 and 4 provide

\textsuperscript{30}This occurred at 38% of the sampled branches.

\textsuperscript{31}We include constituency fixed effects in order to compare branch elections supervised by the same slate of constituency leaders.

\textsuperscript{32}Moreover, almost all “backroom deals” struck by constituency leaders were used to protect incumbents.
Table 4: Predictors of selection mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit of analysis</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome (DV)</strong></td>
<td>All positions acclaimed (0,1)</td>
<td>All positions acclaimed (0,1)</td>
<td>Multiple aspirants (0,1)</td>
<td>Multiple aspirants (0,1)</td>
<td>Backroom deal (0,1)</td>
<td>Backroom deal (0,1)</td>
<td>Backroom deal (0,1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. connections down (%) of incumbents</td>
<td>~3.065*</td>
<td>~3.840*</td>
<td>(1.394)</td>
<td>(1.518)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. connections up (%) of incumbents</td>
<td>~0.723</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>(1.848)</td>
<td>(1.987)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent's connections down (%)</td>
<td>~0.089</td>
<td>~0.073</td>
<td>~0.812</td>
<td>~0.428</td>
<td>0.450</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent's connections up (%)</td>
<td>~0.648</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.716)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent’s cnxs. up to politicians (%)</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>~2.432*</td>
<td>~3.314**</td>
<td>~3.323**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent’s cnxs. up to bureaucrats (%)</td>
<td>~0.923</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>2.501</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent’s cnxs. up to const. execs. (%)</td>
<td>~0.935</td>
<td>2.192*</td>
<td>2.281*</td>
<td>2.027†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP PS-level vote share (2016)</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>1.273†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swing in NPP PS-level vote share (2012 to 2016)</td>
<td>~11.371*</td>
<td>(1.292)</td>
<td>(0.757)</td>
<td>(0.764)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is re-contesting (0,1)</td>
<td>~0.304</td>
<td>~0.300</td>
<td>~0.067</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Incumbent demographic characteristics</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Branch-level controls</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Position FEs</strong></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituency FEs</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at p < .10; ** p < .05; ***p < .01. All models are logistic regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

no evidence that incumbents who have better connections down deter challengers. Columns 5–6 restrict the sample to positions for which multiple aspirants initially filed nomination forms. Column 7 further restricts the sample to positions in which the incumbent chose to re-contest. Because the sample size becomes much smaller, we forego the full set of controls used in the previous columns. Again, we find no evidence that constituency leaders protect incumbent branch leaders in their positions if they have better downward ties to voters. Ultimately, Table 4 is inconsistent with a broker selection system in which local party leaders actively interfere in the selection process to choose brokers with better ties to voters.

33 Moreover, there is no evidence that the pool of aspirants is somehow pre-screened to weed out brokers with especially low downward ties. Indeed, the median branch leader protected through a backroom deal had very low connections down: 12.5%. This is lower than the median among all respondents (17%).
In the Online Appendix we examine the robustness of these results using three approaches. First, it could be the case that what is important are the total connections held by the set of branch leaders. However, aspirants with more unique connections down – those who can identify more voters not already known by the other aspiring brokers at their branch – are not more likely to be protected by constituency leaders. Second, local party elites may value downward ties to particular types of voters. However, the null results in Table 4 are robust to testing for ties to Akan voters only – those most likely to be loyal NPP supporters – as well as to other sub-types of voters, such as youth and likely family heads (see Online Appendix). Third, local party elites may only prefer brokers with strong downward connections in competitive polling stations, where a broker’s ability to monitor vote buying is potentially most useful. But our results do not change when we subset to competitive areas.\textsuperscript{34}

6 Towards a new theory of brokers’ value to parties

Section 5 is inconsistent with observable implications derived from the information asymmetry theory of brokers: most brokers lack ties to the vast majority of voters in their communities, brokers’ ties to voters do not predict activism or effectiveness, and agents with better downward connections are not more likely to be selected. These findings suggest a need to reconsider common assumptions about brokers’ value to parties. We theorize that parties may instead prefer brokers who have better upward ties to local bureaucratic and party elites, for two reasons. First, upward ties allow brokers to better solve voters’ problems, which helps the party sustain and gain popularity. Second, these brokers are most likely to be loyal to the party leaders who operate above them, which helps local party leaders advance their own political careers. We discuss each in turn.

\textsuperscript{34}Similarly, the results remain the same if we subset only to urban polling stations, where greater anonymity makes brokers’ information on voters potentially more valuable (Stokes et al. 2013), or to polling stations at which other types of brokers, such as traditional chiefs, are not active and the party is least able to substitute away from its branch leaders when engaging voters (see Online Appendix).
In contrast to canonical models of clientelism rooted in monitoring and enforcement, recent literature suggests that many – if not most – clientelistic exchanges in the developing world are unmonitored, and that voters initiate a significant share of these exchanges (Lawson and Greene 2014, Munoz 2014, Kramon 2017, Guardado and Wantchekon 2018, Nichter 2018). When clientelism is either unmonitored or client initiated, it becomes more important for brokers to build local reputations as effective “problem solvers” (Auyero 2000, Zarazaga 2014). Instead of helping to entrap voters in enforced *quid pro quo* exchanges, brokers in such contexts work to create a perception that a party is generous and will credibly address voters’ needs in the future (Kramon 2017, Nichter 2018).

These reputational signals require brokers to possess ties *up* to local party elites, politicians, and local bureaucrats, on whom brokers must rely to extract the benefits that they provide to voters (Auerbach and Thachil 2018a). An Argentinian broker described this succinctly: “90 percent of my problem is to keep connections in the municipality. If you have friends there, then doors will open when you knock” (Zarazaga 2014, 26). Similarly, a broker quoted in Auyero (2000) explains: “You have to know how to pull the right strings, knock at the right door [in the local government]. The most important thing is to know the right person” from whom to obtain goods for voters (56).

During our fieldwork, we observed directly how better ties to local elites can help brokers better solve voters’ problems. For example, while visiting an NPP constituency party office in Greater Accra, we saw voters submitting applications for jobs through the country’s Youth Employment Agency scheme. The voters reported that they were directed to the office by branch leaders at their polling stations. Before filing each application, the constituency party secretary called the branch leaders to confirm that the applicants were party supporters. Without ties to constituency leaders, these branch leaders would likely have been unable to deliver these potential jobs to their voters.

Brokers’ connections to voters may not be irrelevant. But upward ties should be relatively more important, especially because parties often have other ways to identify voter preferences and mitigate the commitment problem with voters that is inherent in clientelism. Where voters regularly
approach brokers to request specific benefits, a party does not need its brokers to have detailed pre-existing knowledge of voters’ needs (Nichter and Peress 2017). In addition, Nichter (2018) argues that voters often help parties sidestep the commitment problem by making costly public displays of support, for example by becoming official party members, prominently displaying party paraphernalia, or regularly attending party rallies. These public actions help align voters’ own ability to access future benefits with the electoral success of the party.

Evidence from Ghana suggests that most clientelistic exchanges are unmonitored, and that parties have multiple ways to determine who voters will support without explicitly monitoring them. Before elections, both parties widely distribute handouts through their branch leaders, which both party leaders and voters claim is focused on reputation building instead of vote buying (Nathan 2019, 181-185). After elections, Lindberg (2010) describes that party supporters regularly approach the party to demand assistance, including by lining up outside MPs’ homes and local party offices to initiate transactions. Branch leaders in Ghana can also identify likely supporters without relying exclusively on their pre-existing ties. Shared ethnicity can provide one such cue. In our fieldwork, we also observed that many branches keep detailed lists of their members. For example, several branch leaders showed us that they used their printed copies of the voter register to record NPP membership, ticking off voters’ photos which residents at their polling stations had taken membership cards or attended public branch meetings. This allows branch leaders to identify voters who have made public displays of support even if they do not know them personally.

This alternative view of brokers as “problem solvers” rather than “monitors” fits more closely with the empirical patterns in Section 5. Table 2 suggests that brokers in the NPP do not have more downward ties to ordinary voters than non-brokers. But incumbent brokers score a full 9% more on the connections up measure than non-incumbents. Similarly, connections up is consistently correlated with greater broker activity in Figure 4, while connections down is not. We also find that the average connections up of the sitting NPP branch leaders at each polling station strongly predicts better NPP performance relative to surrounding communities (see Online Appendix). These
findings must be interpreted with caution due to endogeneity concerns: \textit{connections up} is measured after the 2016 election and could have changed as a result of brokers’ activity during the campaign. But when viewed together, these patterns are more consistent overall with a theory in which brokers’ \textit{connections up} are the central source of their value than with standard expectations that \textit{connections down} are the most important.

Also consistent with our hypothesis that brokers with better upward ties are the most effective is evidence that clients themselves (when given the opportunity to select brokers) screen based on brokers’ upward connections. Indeed, we find that an aspiring broker whose \textit{connections up} are in the 90th percentile (36%) has a 27-percentage-point (95% CI: 1.2, 46.5) greater chance of winning a branch election compared to a broker with connections up at the 10th percentile (4%) (see Online Appendix).

The second reason why parties may prefer brokers with strong upward ties is that these brokers may be more likely to remain loyal. The party has an incentive to select brokers who are less likely to defect with their followers to another party in the future (e.g., Camp 2017, Novaes 2018). Brokers with strong social relationships with existing party elites may be less likely to do so.

Moreover, while local party elites have the goal of securing victory for their party, they also desire to rise within the party organization or position themselves to pursue elected office. Local elites’ pursuit of a political career often requires support from the grassroots brokers who operate below them in the party hierarchy. In some parties, as in Ghana, this tie is formalized: brokers vote in internal party elections on elites’ promotions to internal party positions or nominations for elected offices (Ichino and Nathan 2012).\textsuperscript{35} Elsewhere, the tie of dependency is informal: the size of a local party elite’s following among brokers influences her power within the party by affecting her ability to bargain for promotions and nominations.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35}Such intra-party elections are especially common in the most organizationally thick parties, such as Botswana’s ruling Botswana Democratic Party, South Africa’s African National Congress (Darracq 2008), and the Worker’s Party in Brazil (Hunter 2010; 40).

\textsuperscript{36}For example, Levitsky (2003; 67–79) describes how leaders of Peronist party factions at the municipal level in

29
In Ghana, these intra-party elections incentivize constituency leaders to choose branch leaders to whom they have personal ties. Our results provide suggestive evidence that constituency party elites work to protect and promote brokers with whom they already have personal connections, rather than select broker with better ties to voters. In columns 5–7 of Table 4, a clear predictor of whether constituency leaders protect an incumbent branch leader through a “backroom deal” is the branch leader’s ties up to constituency leaders. Simulating from column 6, a “backroom deal” is 25.8 percentage points (95% CI: 1.3, 46.4) more likely for positions in which the incumbent branch leader has upward ties to constituency leaders at the 90th percentile (60%) than the 10th percentile (0%).

7 Conclusion

Classic theories of clientelism assume that brokers are primarily valuable to parties because of their social connections with voters. This claim builds directly on an antecedent assumption that clientelist transactions take the form of a monitored and enforced quid pro quo between the party and voters, which is mediated by the broker (e.g., Stokes 2005). But a new empirical literature increasingly challenges the prevalence of monitoring and enforcement in clientelist exchanges across the developing world (Kramon 2017, Nichter 2018).

In this paper, we suggest that revising core assumptions about how clientelist transactions unfold also requires adjusting our downstream assumptions about the roles brokers play and how they become valuable to machine parties. This is particularly because key assumptions about brokers have rarely been evaluated systematically due to measurement limitations. Using original data from Ghana, we seek to overcome those measurement challenges by developing objective measures of brokers’ network connections and observing broker selection directly for the first time.

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Argentina must jockey for the loyalty and support of grassroots branch leaders as they seek to control municipal governments.
Our empirical results are broadly inconsistent with standard expectations about brokers: they instead imply that brokers’ upward ties to local elites are more important to the party than their social connections to voters. Upward connections affect a broker’s ability to secure resources to help solve her clients’ problems. Furthermore, local party elites may have an incentive to select brokers with whom they are connected because these individuals can help them climb the party ranks.

Future research can test the extent to which these dynamics extend to contexts beyond Ghana. Future studies should also re-examine other aspects of existing theories of brokered politics, including assumptions about how brokers bargain with parties for payment, and expectations about the ways in which brokers develop their relationships with higher-ranking party elites.
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