

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

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Abstract

Traditional leaders are often given sub-national authority in developing democracies. Though ubiquitous, the electoral consequences of their power have received little attention, often due to empirical challenges. We argue that traditional leaders, whose power and resources largely depend on the state, have incentives to support incumbent political parties who can guarantee their survival and provide them with rents. We study this *quid pro quo* in the former Bantustans of South Africa, showing that an alignment between the incumbent African National Congress and chiefs maps to increased electoral support for the party. Our results suggest that chiefs boost ANC vote share by between 6.6 and 8.2 percentage in the Bantustans, translating into a change in the national vote of between 2 and 2.5 percentage points. Our empirical strategy rules out that our results are driven by differences in ethnicity, race, or economic circumstances, which commonly confound the presence of traditional authorities.

Keywords: agency, incumbency, traditional leaders, electoral behavior, Africa

Supplementary materials are available in an online appendix. Replication data and code are available on the JOP Dataverse.

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Introduction

Across the developing world, unelected leaders are often afforded sub-national authority (Scott, 1972; Clapham, 1982; Schatzberg, 2001; Baldwin, 2014, 2015). This phenomenon is particularly evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, where “chiefs,” or traditional leaders whose immediate legitimacy resides in historical socio-cultural custom, regularly wield great influence (Lange, 2009; Logan, 2013a; Acemoglu et al., 2014; Clayton, 2014). At least twenty African countries have passed legislation granting substantial *de jure* roles to traditional leaders; others provide more informal *de facto* authority through either implicit coordination or the absence of state intervention (Herbst, 2000; Williams, 2010). Given their ubiquity, an important question is whether traditional leaders can influence democratic processes. In this study we argue that traditional leaders, whose power and resources largely depend on the state, have incentives to support incumbent political parties who can guarantee their survival and provide them with rents, and we quantify the effect that traditional authority can have on electoral outcomes.

The role traditional leaders play in modern democratic polities has generated rich debate, much of which focuses on an agency problem between chiefs and voters. Some scholars argue that chiefs use their social, economic, and political authority to provide votes to the highest bidder (Ribot, 2002; Ntsebeza, 2005). Koter (2013) goes so far as to label chiefs “king makers” (p. 187) who use their authority and resources to directly influence the electoral behavior of their dependants, ultimately wielding sufficient power that they may determine who wins an election. Others suggest that chiefs are instead accountable to their dependants and thus have incentives to support politicians that will bring resources to their local communities (Williams, 2010). Any electoral influence wielded by chiefs is thus based on (the promise of) local development (Baldwin, 2013, 2015). From an agency perspective, Ribot (2002), Ntsebeza (2005), Koter (2013), and others argue that traditional authorities are the principals and their dependants the agents. By contrast, Williams (2010), Baldwin (2014, 2015), and others suggest that that chiefs are instead the agents, and their dependants their principals. In this paper we approach the electoral role of chiefs by shedding light on a different agency relationship: that which exists between the incumbent party and traditional authorities.

Regardless of their particular methods or motives, traditional authorities may operate as agents of whichever political principals they choose. That is, even when chiefs are agents of their dependants they can trade votes in exchange not only for local developmental support, but for increased authority and personal rents. Chiefs are generally strategic actors, and may seek to align themselves with political parties that will best serve their interests, but only when they believe this to be electorally credible. In light of this, we argue

that chiefs are more likely to trade the votes of their dependants with incumbent elites, who have better access to resources than opposition parties, and are a superior electoral prospect (Svolik, 2014). These features are crucial for credibly maintaining chiefs' (formal or informal) authority, for securing access to personal rents, and for (potentially) ensuring developmental outcomes. The incentives faced by traditional leaders and political elites can thus induce collusive behavior in which incumbent parties offer traditional leaders what they desire in exchange for votes. The dynamic, which we term a "political *quid pro quo*," applies particularly (but not exclusively) to chiefs because their legal legitimacy and economic security are often weakened in modern democracies. Chiefs may thus pose a danger to institutional democracy not because of the nature of their relationship with their dependants, but because they may choose to act as agents of incumbent parties, thus undermining the extent of democratic competition.

In this study we consider the legacy of South Africa's apartheid-era independent ethnic homelands, or "Bantustans," one of history's most profound cases of social engineering. The Bantustans consolidated the authority of ethnic chiefs over an 80 year period, but were formally dismantled around 1994. Yet traditional leaders remain powerful and ever-present in the modern era; roughly 2,400 formally recognized traditional leaders remain, and their legal power has expanded since democratization (Williams, 2004, 2010). Using data from five elections between 2000 and 2011, along with extensive data from the 2011 census, we find that South Africa's chiefs may influence their communities to favor particular, typically incumbent, parties. The South African case provides a unique setting to study chiefs because the geographic boundaries of their influence were demarcated by the apartheid regime and remain relevant today, generating rich discontinuous variation. Furthermore, an over-time strategic realignment – a switch in political alliances – between particular chiefs and the incumbent African National Congress (ANC) allows us to map changes in the allegiances of traditional authorities to significant quantitative changes in electoral support for the ANC in traditional areas.

Our two main empirical analyses exploit these two different sources of variation to isolate the electoral effect of chiefs in the former Bantustans. Our general approach is to compare these areas, in which traditional leaders remain highly influential, to the rest of South Africa, where they are not. Our first analysis presents strong partial correlations between chiefly control and ANC voting, controlling for a host of covariates. We conduct these analyses for the whole of South Africa, and then as a border analysis that includes only geographically proximate areas just along the Bantustan borders. These analyses reveal that political ties between traditional leaders and the ANC descriptively map to systematically higher electoral returns for the ANC across South Africa. Voters who live in former Bantustans vote, on average, more for the ANC

than voters elsewhere, even considering only those either side of the borders, and controlling for a host of important covariates like racial and ethnic composition, income, education, and rurality.

Yet we also find evidence that the Bantustans themselves are markedly different to the rest of South Africa. Decades of under-development during apartheid left them economically deprived, and more ethnically and racially homogeneous than other parts of the country. Since these factors have been found to explain electoral behavior in the broad context of Sub-Saharan Africa, these differences might confound our results. We thus introduce a second empirical strategy to isolate the causal effect of chiefs on ANC vote share. This design makes use of the aforementioned strategic realignment in the ties between a particular set of traditional leaders – the Zulu chieftancy situated in the former KwaZulu Bantustan – and ANC elites. In 2007 the ANC party presidency switched from the hands of an ethnic Xhosa (Thabo Mbeki) to an ethnic Zulu (Jacob Zuma). Zulu chiefs saw opportunities for the ANC to make electoral inroads in the KwaZulu-Natal, reversing a perceived anti-Zulu bias in the ANC leadership and attracting voters who had previously supported the IFP. Zulu traditional elites saw their incentives aligned with the ANC's, and, *en masse*, switched party allegiance, bringing with them blocs of their dependant voters.

Using a difference-in-differences methodology we isolate the electoral effect of chiefs within this context. In particular, we examine how the difference in electoral outcomes between wards just inside and just outside the KwaZulu Bantustan changed compared to the difference in electoral outcomes between wards just inside and just outside all Bantustans, with the rise of Jacob Zuma to the ANC and, ultimately, national Presidency. We find results highly consistent with the partial correlations outlined above. Crucially, in all of our difference-in-differences specifications, we allow the relationship between covariates – such as ethnicity, race, and socio-economic status – and the ANC vote to vary before and after the rise of Jacob Zuma. This strategy helps ensure that our findings are not explained by differences in social or economic conditions, which our descriptive analyses can only imperfectly control for. This minimizes concerns that our results are driven by alternative explanations such as co-ethnic voting. By restricting our analysis to the border, we ensure that the presence, or change in behavior of, alternative local political elites do not drive our results. Together, these empirical results map to electoral consequences implied by the historically evident strategic alignment between the ANC and chiefs.

Our estimates – which are encouragingly consistent when considering the entire country, the border analysis, and the more credible difference-in-differences design – suggest that traditional leaders in South Africa can deliver, on average, between 6.6 and 8.2 percentage points at the polls to the incumbent party. This empirical consistency provides us the opportunity to extrapolate aggregate political effects from our

local effect estimates. Given that 17 million South Africans still reside under traditional authority inside the historical borders of the former Bantustans, the national-level effect is somewhere between 2 and 2.5 percentage points, which has been instrumental in sustaining the ANC's national electoral hegemony.

While our findings have broad implications for nascent democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, it may be the case that the effects may be constrained or moderated by various factors. For example, certain institutional arrangements – first-past-the-post rather than proportional representation, for example – could create incentives that countervail those we document. It is also plausible that our results hinge on the presence of a hegemonic incumbent party, and that in more electorally competitive settings the dynamics would be different. Likewise, the formal authority of chiefs are afforded may also moderate the effects we find. We return to this discussion in the conclusion.

These considerations aside, we make two major contributions. First, we contribute to the emerging literature that suggests chiefs play a key role in African elections (Van de Walle, 2007; Koter, 2013; Baldwin, 2014, 2015). To extend this literature, we study the relationship between elites and traditional leaders, which is largely independent of the nature of the relationship between traditional leaders and their dependents. Drawing on South Africa's history and on qualitative evidence of chiefs' lobbying efforts, we argue that contexts where local elites depend on government – either for rents or because of their tenuous legal status – generate perverse incentives which induce collusive behavior between incumbent political elites and traditional authorities. Importantly, our results suggest that even though chiefs may work as agents of local development, they may also pose a threat to democracy. If traditional leaders are more likely to work as agents for the incumbent, democratic competition may be stifled. Second, recent studies of the electoral effects of traditional authorities generally suffer from empirical limitations, notably that the presence of traditional authorities correlates with other factors known to explain electoral behavior in the context we study. In turn, we isolate the causal electoral effect of traditional leaders, provide precise aggregate measures of country-wide effects, and show that chiefs can potentially generate substantial electoral effects.

This study is particularly important in that it informs active policy debates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Legislation is currently under review in South Africa to further entrench the role of traditional leaders, and similar legislation has been tabled or passed in other countries. Herbst (2000) reported that by 2000 14 of Africa's new democracies had created legislation to protect the existence of chiefs. By 2010 that number had increased to 20 (Williams, 2010), despite uncertainty around the level of public support for traditional rule (Bratton and Mattes, 2001, 2004; Logan, 2013b). The findings of this research suggest that such legislation may pose risks to electoral democracy and, potentially, the well-being of voters and citizens.

Theoretical contributions

Isolating the electoral effect of traditional authorities is an empirical challenge. The spatial distribution of these authorities tends to be determined by pre-existing ethnic or racial geography. They are also disproportionately located in rural and impoverished places. These two facts raise the spectre of confounding variables: any electoral effects of traditional authorities may instead be explained by other determinants of voting behavior which correlate with the presence of traditional authorities.

Explanations of voting behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa have focused on a range of factors. One explanation which has received intense consideration is ethnicity. Researchers have argued, and demonstrated with empirical regularity, that voters tend to prefer co-ethnic candidates (Horowitz, 1985), and vote as ethnic blocs (Ishiyama, 2012). The reasons for this are complex and have born out a series of narrower debates about when and why ethnic voting occurs (Posner, 2004; Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Eifert et al., 2010; Carlson, 2015). In the South African case, ethnicity has been argued to play a crucial role during apartheid (Peele and Morse, 1974; Piper, 2002), during the transition to democracy (De Haas and Zulu, 1994), and in the post-apartheid period (Höglund and Jarstad, 2011). The other obvious demographic cleavage in South Africa is race (Louw, 2000; Ferree, 2006, 2011); black voters typically vote for the ANC, while other South Africans typically vote for other parties.

Researchers have also started to consider geography as a contributing factor to voting behavior. Voters behave differently depending on whether they live in rural or urban settings (Nathan, 2014), and the nature of ethnic or racial voting is moderated by local demographics and geography (Ichino and Nathan, 2012). This is particularly true in South Africa, where the rural-urban divide is sharply drawn, and urban geographies are strongly influenced by apartheid urban planning (Christopher, 2001; De Kadt and Sands, 2015).

Economic and issue voting has also returned to focus, with researchers arguing that economic concerns can sometimes be more important than ethnic or identity concerns (Mattes and Piombo, 2001; Posner and Simon, 2002; Bratton and Mattes, 2003; Weghorst and Lindberg, 2013). It is also worth noting that a number of researchers have argued that ethnic voting is in fact an expression of economic interests (or heuristics about group interests) rather than any pure co-ethnic effect, and may be moderated by other social features (Lieberman and McClendon, 2013).

Key to our study is demonstrating that the electoral influence chiefs exert over voters cannot be accounted for by any of these conventional theories. In Section we outline how our research design protects us from these alternative explanations. We use a mix of empirical techniques – covariate adjustments (controlling

for ethnicity, race, and socio-economic variables), and design-based solutions (difference-in-differences) – to isolate the effect of chiefs. Our results are robust to a range of specifications, yielding remarkably consistent estimates across the board, minimizing concerns that these confounders drive our results.

Of course, studying the virtues and dangers of ceding authority to traditional leaders is not new; researchers in multiple disciplines have considered this question (Mamdani, 1996; Goldstein and Udry, 2008). Researchers have long argued that traditional leaders may influence the behavior of people. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the British, French, and Portuguese co-opted local traditional structures into formal institutions, delegating power downward, allowing them to govern from afar (Crowder, 1964; Mamdani, 1996; Lange, 2009; Acemoglu et al., 2014). Chiefs played a crucial role as brokers between the colonial powers and locals, often trading their (and their peoples’) acquiescence for material or political goods. The calculus was relatively straightforward – concede ‘ultimate’ ownership over an area in exchange for local authority. That is, become ‘agents of the regime’. In line with this view, Ribot (2002) argues that chiefs are often disconnected from and even at odds with local communities. In the South African case, partly due to their role in the apartheid regime, traditional authority structures are particularly hierarchical, as opposed to some more egalitarian arrangements. Indeed, Ntsebeza (2005) goes so far as to label South Africa’s chiefs “despotic” (p. 22), while Picard and Mogale (2015) describes the institution as a form of “patriarchal authoritarianism” (p. 17).

Yet many scholars argue that chiefs and traditional leaders can play important developmental roles in their communities. Baldwin (2015) argues in favor of the developmental role played by chiefs in Zambia, a finding that accords with work that shows traditional leaders enjoy popular support in many parts of the African continent (Logan, 2013b). Likewise, Menkhaus (1996, 2007) argues that traditional institutions and practices have been a key component of what little state-building has been successful in war-torn Somalia. These arguments follow a rich literature that studies the role of traditional authorities in decentralization and local policy making in Southern Africa, particularly in the more egalitarian case of Botswana, arguing that chiefs may be best placed to protect the interests of their dependants (Picard, 1980, 1987).

Perhaps to reconcile these divergent views, a recent turn in the study of traditional leaders has been to focus on how institutional and political arrangements influence chief’s behaviors, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. For example, Acemoglu et al. (2014) find that, in the case of Sierra Leone, chiefs who are unconstrained by either institutions or elite competition may capture civil society for their own benefit and sustained rule. Yet Acemoglu et al. (2003) and Robinson and Parsons (2006) argue that the presence of relatively constrained chiefs during the precolonial period was an important determinant of Botswana’s

subsequent development.

This heterogeneity may even be present within the same setting. In the South African case, LiPuma and Koelble (2009) argue that some chiefs engage in genuine deliberative democratic representation, while many others are local autocrats. Similarly, Chinsinga (2006), studying Malawi, highlights both the formal developmental role of chiefs and the fact that poverty in Malawi sometimes compels chiefs to use their power for their own benefit. Carlson and Seim (2016) show experimental evidence that indicates that Malawian chiefs associated with the incumbent regime were more likely to engage in diversion and were less sensitive to monitoring. Yet their qualitative data hints that chiefs are perceived to be accountable to their subjects. Overall, Carlson and Seim (2016) highlight that, while there are corrupt chiefs, there are responsive ones—both types exist simultaneously.

These studies represent major contributions to understanding the mechanisms that potentially account for any electoral effect of traditional leaders. Our theoretical contribution is to extend this debate to focus on the relationship between incumbents and traditional leaders, itself largely independent of the nature of the relationship between traditional leaders and their dependents. Empirically, we quantify the aggregate electoral effect of chiefs with a research design that deals with to numerous potential confounders. Even Baldwin's (2013) unique survey experiment in Zambia, and Koter's (2013) deep qualitative analysis of Senegal and Benin, are hard to map to electoral outcomes.

Bantustans and traditional leaders in South Africa

Traditional authorities are important social structures, but their power is often a legacy of colonialism. After independence, and then democratization, many traditional authorities maintained their colonially-appointed positions of power, often with either the implicit or explicit blessing of national political elites. South Africa was no exception (Costa, 2000).

For most of the 20th century, white minority governments maintained ethnically specific sub-national homelands for black South Africans. The Bantustans, as they became known, were discrete areas reserved for particular groups of black South Africans, many of whom were forcibly displaced and relocated. The 1913 Natives Land Act regulated the ownership and distribution of land on the basis of race, defining the borders of a number of homelands, and restricting black South Africans' rights to own or transfer property. These borders, which would later be extended in 1936, served as the basis for all future legislation on geographic segregation and land ownership, including the creation of the Bantustans. The creation of the Bantustans,

shown in Figure 1, followed shortly after the start of apartheid in 1948, in service of the National Party's ideology of "separate development."

[Figure 1 here]

While a central tool for the domination of land and resources by whites, the Bantustans also served as a political tool. The 1950s saw the emergence of protests from within the peri-rural black heartlands of South Africa, and the traditional leaders of the Bantustans were tasked by the apartheid regime with managing this social discontent (Bank and Southall, 1996). Without extending into rural South Africa, the regime thus controlled rural black opposition movements through co-opting traditional leaders.

In exchange for maintaining political order, the apartheid government divested substantial sub-national autonomy and resources to traditional leaders. This process culminated in 1971 with independence being granted to some Bantustans, creating sub-national states in which traditional leaders drew rents from the oppressive national government.¹ As apartheid's impending collapse became clear in the late 1980s, the chiefs found themselves compromised; fiscally and institutionally dependent on the incumbent regime, but socially and politically dependent on often rebellious communities. Against this backdrop, many chiefs began to court ANC elites, the presumptive new incumbents. Hoping to protect their legal, economic, and social status, traditional leaders sought to persuade the ANC – a party that was typically opposed to the institutions of chieftancy – of their worth (Van Kessel, 1993).

The political quid pro quo

The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) was established in 1987 to coordinate traditional leaders who opposed the Bantustan system, bridging the schism between the chieftancy and ANC. CONTRALESA – which still exists as a lobby group for traditional leaders – sought to persuade the ANC of the chiefs' electoral value in exchange for preserved status. The project was largely successful: Nelson Mandela welcomed CONTRALESA's official formation in 1990, and "greeted" traditional leaders on his release from Victor Verster Prison (Oomen, 2005b). By 1992 CONTRALESA was a fully national endeavor, embraced by almost all of the Bantustan leaderships.

During the transition to multi-party democracy, the ANC shifted itself from an anti-chief, anti-Bantustan party, to a pro-chief advocate (Ntsebeza, 2005). The ANC sought to maximize its electoral support in rural

¹While no members of the international community ever recognized their independence, South Africa in fact terminated the citizenship of their inhabitants, granting them only citizenship of their respective Bantustans.

South Africa, and the chiefs were uniquely positioned to offer this. The ANC leadership (including Mandela) routinely visited rural South Africa in the early 1990s, shaking hands with chiefs in public, and commenting on the importance of traditional leaders in reclaiming South Africa from apartheid (Bank and Southall, 1996; Oomen, 2005b). This intervention was instrumental in quelling social uprisings and preserving the authority of traditional leaders, whose constitutional and legal status in the post-apartheid era was unclear (Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997). In exchange, chiefs shifted from apartheid lackies to ANC supporters (Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997). Ultimately, the legal status of traditional authorities constitutionally ratified, and the Bantustans were re-integrated into South Africa as “Traditional Authority Areas,” many of them led by the very same leaders who served the apartheid regime.

Within these new structures, traditional leaders are typically insulated from contestation by their subjects. While on rare occasions elections do occur, the majority of kings, queens, chiefs, and headman are appointed by hereditary custom (“applicable customary law”). Yet the national legal structures that establish and empower traditional leaders also make them susceptible to influence from the state. For instance, the President is entitled to revoke traditional leaders’ official recognition in certain (quite broad) circumstances. It is also the President’s role to establish or disestablish kingships or queenships, larger collections of traditional areas under a single king or queen (RSA, 2009). Similarly, traditional leaders’ ability to extract rents, which in part determines their power, is regulated by the national and provincial governments. These forces – the power to mobilize, the tenuous legal position, and the extraction of rents – are central to the political *quid pro quo*.

Since 1994 traditional authorities’ power has expanded through timely legislation preceding elections, under collective threat from the chiefs. CONTRALESA acts as a coordinating forum, making electoral threats against the ANC in the run up to elections (Jacobs, 2000; Beall et al., 2005), and demanding credible legislative signals if they were to deliver the vote (see Appendix Section A for greater discussion). Government sponsored perks, provided by national, provincial, and municipal governments, are often targeted to traditional leaders in the months before elections – pay increases, home renovations, and medical insurance are some examples (Mkhize, 2014).

The case of KwaZulu

We have a specific interest in the historical trajectory of one former Bantustan, KwaZulu, created for the amaZulu people in the province KwaZulu-Natal. During the 1980s KwaZulu’s leadership did not join CONTRALESA, and remained at odds with the ANC throughout and beyond the transition. The ANC

has often been accused of being Xhosa-centric, not catering to the needs of rural Zulus. As a result, those in KwaZulu regularly voted for an alternative party, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), led by Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi (who himself ruled KwaZulu as Chief Minister from 1970 to 1994). The IFP, which took control of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in 1994, was a logical political ally for Zulu chiefs (Beall et al., 2005; Koelble and LiPuma, 2011).

This status quo was disrupted in 2007 when a party coup displaced Thabo Mbeki as sitting President of the ANC. The ousted Mbeki, an ethnic Xhosa, was replaced by Jacob Zuma, a Zulu. In late 2008 the ANC then “recalled” Mbeki as President of the Republic, an extraordinary act and the first of its kind in South Africa’s young democracy. He was briefly replaced by interim President Kgalema Motlante, and Jacob Zuma was then inaugurated after the 2009 election. Zuma’s ascendancy represented the first time in 40 years that the ANC was led by a Zulu – Mbeki, Mandela, and Tambo, who had led the party in succession since chief Albert Luthuli’s death in 1967, were all Xhosa. This shift in the ethnic composition of the ANC elite represented a shock to the ties between the ANC leadership and the South African chieftancy, which enables us to implement a difference-in-differences design. In particular, Jacob Zuma made concerted and well documented efforts to court the chieftancy of KwaZulu, hoping to gain votes (Twala, 2010). While the ANC began penetrating KwaZulu-Natal and other rural areas of the country in the mid-2000s to move away from reliance on urban centres (Muriaas, 2009; Mayende, Mayende; Ndletyana et al., 2014; Pillay, Pillay), the dramatic and unanticipated change in leadership in 2007 acted as a clear shock to the relationships between the regime and its potential agents in KwaZulu. With this notable political exception, KwaZulu is socio-economically, institutionally, and historically very similar to the other Bantustans, both in terms of the power of traditional leaders and their relationship to the apartheid regime.

The power of traditional leaders

But can chiefs deliver votes? Traditional authorities play a large role in shaping the lives and livelihoods of those who live under them (Ntsebeza, 2005; Oomen, 2005b). The ANC’s limited successes in the development of local government, especially in the face of profound socio-economic needs, contribute to chiefs’ political and social importance (Murray, 2004). The failure to extend governmental authority into deep rural areas has provided an opportunity for traditional leadership structures to fill this vacuum as agents of both development and patronage (Bratton et al., 2005; LiPuma and Koelble, 2009; Muriaas, 2011). Given that South African traditional leaders were empowered for decades under apartheid to serve exactly this role, it is unsurprising that many have sustained their pre-1994 influence and authority.

Despite *de jure* roles usually limited to consultation, monitoring, and collaboration with municipal councils, chiefs in South Africa subsume domains typically thought of as belonging to the state. It is well understood that they provide order, solve disputes, and are often responsible for allocating land (Williams, 2004, 2010; Logan, 2013b). They often enter into co-operative governance schemes with municipalities, often in the realm of public goods provision, placing them in a unique position to bring development to their people (RSA, 2009).

Traditional leaders' natural capacity to persuade and mobilize voters is enhanced by the informal role they play in facilitating elections. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) uses chiefs to ensure mobilization in rural areas (Oomen, 2005a), relies on chiefs to communicate to voters electoral rules (Williams, 2004), encourages them to play a monitoring role at polling places (Williams, 2010), and even used them calm electoral tensions in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1990s (Höglund and Jarstad, 2011).

In combination, chiefs' authority, their access to economic resources for developmental and other purposes, their ability to persuade, monitor, and sanction, and their direct involvement in the electoral process positions them as optimal electoral agents (Van Kessel and Oomen, 1997; Koelble and LiPuma, 2011). Whether because they are coerced by their chiefs (Koter, 2013) or they believe that voting for the parties or candidates supported by their chiefs will bring local development (Baldwin, 2013), rural South African voters often follow the chief's party choice, and rarely deviate (Williams, 2010). As Koelble and LiPuma (2011) note, political parties recognize this and factor it explicitly into their electoral strategies. Parties with vested rural interests engage in intense battles over particular chiefs; winning a chief buys constituents as a voting bloc.² This is corroborated by claims repeatedly made by South African chiefs themselves. Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, then president of CONTRALESA, declared in 1990 that "[O]nce a chief has identified himself with us (CONTRALESAs), then we know that the whole tribe or the majority of the people in that area are now with the progressive forces (the ANC)." Chief Mwelo Nonkonyama of the Transkei, quoted in the 1990s, provides a first hand account of this dynamic: "...my people know where I stand politically... Because they trust me, then they will vote for my party" (quoted in Van Kessel and Oomen (1997)). More recently with regard to KwaZulu, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi said of the ANC, "[t]hey have courted traditional leaders for the purpose of securing electoral support and will continue to do this" (Buthelezi, 2013a).

The recent case of the AbaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo provides further evidence that elites court chiefs to deliver votes. First, with the goal of making inroads in rural Eastern Cape, the Democratic Alliance (DA) actively courted King Dalindyebo while he was suffering serious legal troubles in the mid-2000s

²See Appendix Section E.B for an empirical assessment of bloc voting in South Africa's Bantustans.

(van Onselen, 2015). Dalindyebo was subsequently tried and incarcerated, leading the DA to cut formal ties with him. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which since its creation after the 2011 local election has struggled to find political traction outside of Gauteng and Limpopo, took this opportunity to court the King, hoping to expand their reach to the Eastern Cape (Raborife, 2016; Thamm, 2016). Possibly in response to these movements, President Zuma formally stripped Dalindyebo of his Kingship (Koyana, 2016).

Research design and data

Qualitative and historical evidence suggest a political *quid pro quo* between chiefs and the ANC in South Africa; chiefs appear to use their influence to extract financial rents and legal power. To quantitatively study the electoral effect of this *quid pro quo*, we exploit two different research designs using data at the the political “ward” level.³ Definitions and summary statistics of the variables we use are presented in Appendix Section B. Empirically, we first look for differential electoral outcomes inside and outside the former Bantustan borders which mark the historical boundaries of chiefs’ authority. We find that the strategic alignment between the ANC and the chiefs maps to increased political support for the ANC from those living under chiefly rule within the Bantustans. Yet these analyses may be confounded by ethnic, racial, or socio-economic variables. As such, we introduce a second research design to isolate the causal effect of chiefs on ANC vote share, a difference-in-differences analysis that exploits the rise of Jacob Zuma. The difference-in-differences analysis yields very similar results to the border analysis; this consistency in our results provides us with confidence in our ability to extrapolate out the electoral and political implications of our results.

Research design

As pointed out in Section , studying the electoral effects of chiefs is challenging. The types of places in which chiefs maintain authority are no doubt different from most places where chiefs are absent. These differences may be demographic, geographic, economic, political, or even sociological. While controlling for covariates can go some way to addressing these concerns, the validity of simple covariate adjustment can always be challenged. Given South Africa’s history of apartheid, these concerns are particularly acute. As such, we take great care to design a study that can reliably isolate the effect of chiefs on electoral outcomes.

³Wards are the lowest level of aggregation at which both electoral and census data are systematically available. Wards, of which there were 4,277 for the 2011-2014 electoral cycle, are clustered into municipalities, of which there were most recently 234. These numbers vary slightly over time because of re-districting. Municipalities control local governance and local budgetary decisions, and so we cluster all standard errors at their level.

Aside from controlling for covariates, our research design also leverages two distinct sources of variation. First, we use spatial variation in the location of the borders to compare the voting behavior of voters in wards that fall just either side of the border. This design should eliminate confounders that correlate with both geographic location and electoral outcomes. There may be features that follow geography (e.g. the quality of soil, unemployment rates, or other political boundaries) that jointly predict the location of the Bantustans and voting behavior of South Africans. Our border analysis should alleviate many concerns, but the history of the Bantustans suggests that even comparing proximate areas may not eliminate all confounders. In particular, we should be concerned about demographic (racial and ethnic) and socio-economic differences induced by the under-development of the Bantustans during apartheid.

As such, we leverage the aforementioned 2007 rise of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of both the ANC and South Africa as a second source of variation. We study the differential post-2007 switch in electoral behavior within the KwaZulu bantustan, while controlling for the overall Zuma-period switch just within all Bantustans. We thus estimate the degree of change in voting behavior that can be attributed to the fact that many Zulu chiefs switched their allegiance to the ANC once Zuma was in power. For this strategy to capture the electoral influence of chiefs, the key assumption is that there exist parallel trends in electoral outcomes between the wards in KwaZulu and those in the other Bantustans. We provide evidence in favor of this assumption in Section . Further, we must ensure that our results are not driven by co-ethnic voting – Zulu voters may have switched their votes as a results of Zuma’s ascension to power – or behaviors by local elites other than chiefs. To rule out these alternative explanations we interact ethnic population shares with the timing of Zuma’s rise to power, and focus our analysis on only those wards closest to the Bantustan borders. The interacted ethnic shares ensure that our results are not driven by ethnic voting triggered by Jacob Zuma, while the focus on the border means that we compare only places very close to one another, where behaviors of local elites other than chiefs are held constant. Our analysis thus isolates the relationship between traditional leaders and electoral outcomes.

Election data

Every five years South Africa’s wards are contested by councillors from different parties in single-member winner-takes-all elections.⁴ Our baseline data includes ward-year observations for the elections in 2000, 2006,

⁴It should be noted that the local governance in South Africa uses a mixed electoral system. There are three votes cast on each ballot in each ward – local council winner-takes-all, local council proportional representation, and District council proportional representation). We focus exclusively on the winner-takes-all ballots.

and 2011.⁵ We add ward-level electoral returns for the 2004 and 2009 National General Elections, which are closed-list proportional representation ballots for the national parliament (tallied at the ward level). With roughly 4,000 unique wards observed per year, the total number of observations in our data is 19,576 over 5 election years.⁶ We combine both types of elections in our analysis since, even though there is a small degree of split-ticket voting across election types, South African elections are party-centric rather than individual-centric (Piper, 2012). While South Africa’s local politics brings with it some unique dynamics, local elections are often seen by both the media and the elite as mid-term referenda on the national government, evinced by the ANC’s concerns about national-level corruption and its prospects in the 2016 local elections. Moreover, the ANC remains dominant in both settings – they routinely win over 60% of the vote in national elections, and around two-thirds of municipal councils in local elections.⁷

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

Census data

To the electoral returns we added demographic and economic data from the 2011 South African Census, allowing us to control for slow-moving demographic and economic factors that may influence electoral outcomes. This is particularly important in that politics in South Africa is still very much racially divided – controlling for demographic features is important. We include the fraction of the population that is white, gender proportions, population shares for each major black South African ethnic group (from language shares

⁵Wards are redistricted over time, but we see no reason to believe that this affects our results

⁶To assess the robustness of our results over time we include the 2014 election data, which provides an extra 4,277 observations. We present these results, which are consistent with our main results, in Appendix Section D.B, but exclude the 2014 data from our main results because Jacob Zuma’s relationship with local Zulu elites became more fraught ahead of the 2014 election. Further details of this recent history are available in Appendix Section A.

⁷Reported in Appendix Section D.C are results from our difference-in-differences specifications (with linear but not squared time-trends given the fewer time periods) for the National and Local elections separately. In both specifications the results are statistically significant and consistent in magnitude with our main results as reported later. We find somewhat larger effects for the National elections than for the Local elections, but would urge caution in over-interpreting the differences.

⁸There are only 324 such observations in the entire data, and the results are robust to coding these cases as a vote share of zero and including them.

in the census data), population (logged), population density (logged), the ward area (logged), unemployment rates, formal/informal sectoral shares, school completion rates, and household income.

Descriptive analysis

We begin with a descriptive analysis of the relationship between the presence of traditional authorities – the Bantustans – and electoral behavior. Using ordinary least squares (OLS), we estimate the cross-sectional association between a ward being within a Bantustan and ANC vote share. We then conduct a border analysis to study the consequences of a ward lying just inside (relative to just outside) the historical borders of the Bantustans. Such an approach eliminates confounders that are predicted by geography. It also rules out that the results are driven by other political geographies, as these cross-cut the Bantustan boundaries when focusing on the border. As such the border analysis yields a more conservative estimate of the cross-sectional association between the Bantustans and ANC vote share. These exercises provide suggestive associations between the Bantustans and electoral outcomes, and the results are general to all Bantustans across the country. Previewing our results, we take confidence in both the robustness of these findings and our ability to extrapolate from them because they are also very similar to those from the difference-in-differences methodology, presented in the next section.

We estimate the OLS coefficients using the following specification:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta Bantustans_i + \phi KwaZulu_i + \rho Z_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_m,$$

where i is an electoral ward, t is an election year, and m is a municipality. *Bantustans* is an indicator of Bantustan status, *KwaZulu* indicates whether that Bantustan was KwaZulu, which we treat separately for the reason explained in Section , Z is a matrix of ward-level covariates,⁹ and δ_t are year fixed effects. $Y_{i,t}$ is the ANC vote share in ward i and year t .

The border analysis then departs from the OLS approach by controlling for a flexible expansion of two-dimensional coordinate (latitude and longitude) (Dell, 2010). This approach generally controls for those confounders that are predicted by geography – for example, if Bantustans are typically in areas with poorer quality soil. Throughout this paper the results presented use cubic expansions of latitude and longitude, though the main results are virtually unchanged by linear and quadratic expansions.¹⁰ The border analysis

⁹We include as covariates all of the racial, ethnic, demographic, and economic measures presented in Table 1.

¹⁰We tested three expansions of latitude and longitude as x and y coordinates. (1) Linear: $x + y + xy$. (2)

specification is similar to the OLS one, but with W_i , the flexible expansion of latitude and longitude, and Bantustan-border fixed effects, δ_{border} , included:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta Bantustans_i + \phi KwaZulu_i + \rho Z_i + \gamma W_i + \delta_t + \delta_{border} + \epsilon_m,$$

We estimate this equation for the whole country, and then by limiting the data to observations near the border, an approach we then replicate in the difference-in-differences analysis. We present results for the whole country, and for 50km, 10km, and 1km bandwidths around the border. Our preferred specifications use the 1km bandwidth, and is best at dealing with socio-economic differences and alternative political geographies. Narrowing the focus of the estimates down to those wards very close to each other, including border-specific fixed effects, and controlling for space, should absorb a range of observed and unobserved potential geographic confounders. Figure 2 shows the wards included in the 1km subsample for the year 2011.¹¹

[Figure 2 here]

β is the quantity of interest, which captures the change in vote share attributable to moving from a non-Bantustan to a Bantustan ward.¹² As the borders of the Bantustans describe the spatial boundaries of the chieftancy’s authority, this captures the differences in voting attributable to the presence of traditional leadership. If the estimates are unconfounded, β can be interpreted as the effect of moving from having no part of a ward intersect with a Bantustan to having the entire ward inside a Bantustan’s borders. More cautiously, it can be seen as the conditional association between having an entire ward in a Bantustan, and thus under the influence of a chief, and ANC vote share. In Appendix Section C.B we show that this descriptive relationship is not driven by any particular Bantustan, but is general across the country.

Differences at the Bantustan borders

The former Bantustans are situated on less desirable land than that historically owned by whites. The historical record suggests that the original borders, first drawn in 1913 and then extended in 1936, were circumscriptions around pre-existing traditional villages and towns. By the 1940s, the homelands existed

Quadratic: $x + y + xy + x^2 + y^2 + x^2y + y^2x + x^2y^2$. (3) Cubic: $x + y + x^2 + y^2 + xy + x^2 + y^2 + x^2y + xy^2 + x^3 + y^3 + x^3y + y^3x + x^3y^2 + y^3x^2 + x^3y^3$.

¹¹See Appendix Section G for detailed maps.

¹²In the specifications presented here D measures the share of a ward’s area that falls within a Bantustan. The variable is continuous between 0 and 1, and is bimodal, clustering at either end of the range. The results are unchanged when using a dummy variable.

as numerous smaller pockets of territory. Finally, when the apartheid government began its ideological campaign to create black sub-states, they unified most pockets into larger territories for each ethnic group, expropriating land from white farmers and black freeholders. While certainly haphazard, the borders were likely not as-if randomly drawn.¹³

Further, apartheid had persistent economic and demographic consequences for the Bantustans. To illustrate this, we estimate the 1km border analysis, for differences between Bantustan and non-Bantustan areas, in a number of covariates collected in the 2011 census. The results are presented in Table 1 (see note for details).

[Table 1 here]

This analysis reveals systematic differences between wards just 1km inside the Bantustans and wards 1km outside, even though there remains overlap in the distributions.¹⁴ To partially address the fact that imbalances on economic and demographic covariates might confound cross-sectional estimates we include all 18 covariates as controls, but acknowledge this is an imperfect solution. Our difference-in-differences results presented in Section are much less reliant on the inclusion of all these potential confounders and yet provide remarkably similar estimates.

OLS and border analysis results

In reporting the results of the OLS and border analyses, we focus first on the coefficient on the Bantustan share variable. As noted in the specification above we report the associations for two different sets of Bantustans within the same specification – all Bantustans and KwaZulu. The reasoning behind this, as outlined earlier, is that the chieftancy of KwaZulu has historically been aligned against the ANC and in favor of the IFP, despite the ANC’s repeated efforts to turn chiefs away from the IFP (Ferree, 2011). We thus anticipate a different sign in KwaZulu.

Table 2 presents the results in five columns, each corresponding to a different estimation, all of which control for covariates. The first column presents the results of a OLS regression without spatial smoothing (latitude and longitude). Columns two through five present border analysis estimates of the association. Column two presents the estimated association when we consider all wards in the country. Column three to five respectively focus on those wards that fall within 50km, 10km and 1km either side of a border, where

¹³In analyses not presented, we did not find that the borders predict soil quality and agricultural feasibility. Still, it seems implausible to argue that no potential confounders exist.

¹⁴There is a good degree of common support in the covariates, see Appendix Section F.

the last column presents our most credible estimate. Throughout the paper we omit estimated coefficients for covariates and fixed-effects, but full tables are available Appendix Section C.A. It is worth noting that the various covariates that measure ethnic, racial, economic, and geographic features behave as would be expected in light of both the discussion in Section and previous research on voting in South Africa.

[Table 2 here]

The results in Table 2 provide three main takeaways. First, the results are consistent across all five specifications, though the magnitude varies slightly. The declining magnitude of the coefficients in columns three through five, as the bandwidth moves from 50km to 1km, suggests that the border analysis is absorbing confounders spuriously inflating the estimates. This is particularly true of the estimates for the KwaZulu Bantustan. Second, and most important, the main result is an estimated 7.6 percentage point association (in the 1km bandwidth, which is our preferred specification) of Bantustans on ANC vote share. This means that, for any given ward, falling inside any Bantustan border (excluding KwaZulu, which is interpreted below) is associated with an increase in ANC vote share of 7.6 percentage points. Third, Table 2 shows that KwaZulu is negatively associated with ANC vote share, which decreases by roughly 6.2 percentage points when moving from outside the KwaZulu border to within ($0.0762 - 0.138 = -0.0618$). These associations are as predicted – chiefs in KwaZulu have historically held an anti-ANC disposition.

Difference-in-differences analysis

The cross-sectional OLS and border analyses provide suggestive evidence of an electoral return to the connections between chiefs in former Bantustans and the ANC. Yet there remain potential omitted variables that could account for our results. To isolate the effect of traditional leaders we now turn to our difference-in-differences methodology, which exploits variation over time in the political ties between traditional leaders and political elites in the ANC. In particular, we focus closely on the case of the KwaZulu Bantustan, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

We exploit the variation in ANC elite composition over time, focusing on the effect of the 2007 “palace coup,” in which the Xhosa Thabo Mbeki was replaced by Jacob Zuma, a Zulu. This shift in the ANC elite changed ties between the ANC leadership and the KwaZulu chieftancy. In his time as a provincial minister in KwaZulu-Natal, Jacob Zuma had established a close relationship with Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini. These ties were used to establish lower-level connections and trust with the Zulu chiefs and headmen, especially those in the Southern reaches of KwaZulu (Twala, 2010). Zuma, unlike Mbeki, also engaged in active

electioneering in rural KwaZulu-Natal, clarifying to traditional leaders that their economic interests would be protected and catered to under ANC leadership. Together with the IFP’s struggle to retain relevance at either the national and provincial level, the ascendancy of Jacob Zuma credibly signalled a likely shift in the local electoral prospects of both parties.

Traditional leadership thus became a key point of contestation for both the ANC and IFP in the run up to the 2009 and 2011 elections (Buthelezi, 2013b). Particular attention was paid to the ANC’s track record as regards the institutionalization of traditional leadership structures, and their potential to electorally erase the IFP (Twala, 2010; Buthelezi, 2013b). Despite resistance, Zuma could offer a credible signal that the ANC was able, willing, and likely to protect the interests of the Zulu chieftancy, breaking the IFP’s stranglehold on a large number of traditional leaders. While the IFP was expected to lash out against those who broke ranks – its leadership had historically sanctioned chiefs who “defected” (Beall et al., 2005) – the increased personal and electoral credibility of the ANC made defection appealing and safe.

Using this temporal variation in the ties between Zulu chiefs and the ANC elite, we implement a difference-in-differences design. To be as conservative as possible, we do this both without and within the border analysis framework used in Section . We isolate the effect of Zulu traditional leaders on electoral outcomes by studying how their electoral outcomes change in their areas of influence with the rise of Jacob Zuma, contrasted with other traditional leaders in South Africa. Through the shift in the ties between ANC elites and one specific group of previously “outsider” traditional leaders (bringing them “inside”), we can estimate the effect of traditional leaders on ANC vote share. We implement the following specification:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta Bantustans_i + \phi KwaZulu_i + \zeta post + \xi post \cdot Bantustans_i + \theta post \cdot KwaZulu_i + \rho Z_i + \eta post \cdot Z_i + \gamma W_i + \delta_{border} + \delta_t + \delta_{bantustan,t} + \epsilon_m,$$

where, as before, i is an electoral ward, m is a municipality, t is an election year, and $border$ is a Bantustan-border. We introduce a binary indicator $post$, which equals 1 if election t occurred after 2007 (in practice this means either 2009 or 2011), indicating the period under Zuma’s Presidency. $Bantustans_i$ indicates the degree to which ward i shares geographic space with any Bantustan, and $KwaZulu_i$ indicates the same but specifically for KwaZulu. As before, Z is a matrix of covariates, W is a matrix of geographic controls, δ_t are time fixed effects, and δ_{border} are Bantustan-border fixed effects. To control for time trends in voting behavior, we include $\delta_{bantustan,t}$, which represents Bantustan-specific time trends (both linear and quadratic).

Assumptions and Robustness

For our difference-in-differences design to isolate the causal effect of traditional authorities on electoral outcomes, we require three core assumptions. First, we assume that had the Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy not occurred in 2007, voting outcomes in KwaZulu wards in 2009 and 2011 would have run parallel to the trends observed in other Bantustans. We probe this “parallel trends” assumption empirically with visualizations and placebo regressions. Figure 3 presents raw mean ANC vote shares over time for the 1km border sample, for all Bantustans (excluding KwaZulu), KwaZulu, and the rest of South Africa. The parallel trends between wards just inside the KwaZulu border and those just inside the borders of other Bantustans are evident in the period prior to Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy. The jump in ANC vote share in KwaZulu after Jacob Zuma’s rise is also clear.

[Figure 3 here]

We also conduct a placebo test that shows no divergence in pre-Zuma-period trends between treated and control. “Moving” Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy forward from the period 2007-2011 to 2006, and excluding the 2007-2011 data, we replicated our main difference-in-differences estimation. If parallel trends hold, the estimate should be zero. The test shows a precisely estimated zero (results in Appendix Section D.D), both when focusing only on the border cases and also when analysing the entire country, demonstrating that voting patterns in KwaZulu and the other Bantustans were likely following similar trends prior to Jacob Zuma’s rise.

The second key assumption is that covariates that differ across units do not drive the observed changes in voting behavior over time. To that end we include all the covariates – ethnic, racial, and socio-economic – interacted with the Zuma-period indicator variable *post*. This allows for the effect of each covariate to vary in the pre- and post-periods. This is particularly important in that it controls for ethnic voting. We include not only the fraction of Zulus, which does not correlate perfectly with the KwaZulu borders, but also the rest of South Africa’s primary ethnic groups, and their respective interactions with the Zuma-period variable. This absorbs any ethnic swing from Zulu voters toward the ANC in the post-2007 Zuma-period, helping us to isolate instead how KwaZulu chiefs affect the vote. To further rule out the possibility that our results are driven by ethnic voting, we implement a placebo test in which we estimate whether the Zuma-period led to a decline in support in the ANC dominated Xhosa Bantustans, the Ciskei and Transkei. Reassuringly, these tests, results available in the Appendix D.E, show no such effect.

Lastly, there is the concern that our results could be confounded by other types of local elites – for instance local councillors or politicians – responding to the ethnic shift. Qualitatively, this seems unlikely in the South African case where local governance structures, especially in the period of study, are relatively weak. Furthermore, no other local elite structures map to the Bantustan boundaries, and municipal boundaries routinely cut across them. Quantitatively, our focus on wards just around the Bantustan boundaries is also helpful in this regard. Any reaction by local ANC elites other than chiefs to Zuma’s rise is absorbed in those specifications that focus exclusively on differences either side of the Bantustan borders.¹⁵

Results

Table 3 presents the main difference-in-differences estimates. As before, we present OLS and border analyses for all wards in the country, and border analysis estimates for all the wards within 50km, 10km, and 1km of the Bantustan borders. We present the estimates for *KwaZulu* and its interaction with *post*, which identifies the local average effect for chiefs in KwaZulu. We omit the rest of the estimated covariates (full results in the Appendix C.A). In light of the prior discussion of the assumptions underpinning our approach, the 1km border analysis is most credible, as the parallel trends assumption is supported by Figure 3 and our placebo tests, and the likelihood of cross-boundary time-varying confounders is minimized.

[Table 3 here]

The difference-in-differences estimates are given by the coefficients on *KwaZulu* interacted with *post* in the second row of Table 3.¹⁶ Focusing on column five, our preferred specification suggests a strong effect of Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy on electoral returns in wards just 1km inside the KwaZulu Bantustan versus wards 1km outside, as compared to wards just inside versus wards just outside other Bantustans. The difference-in-differences is estimated to be roughly 8.2 percentage points in the 2009 and 2011 elections, a major change in voting behavior in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The difference-in-differences estimates are very similar in magnitude to the descriptive results presented in Table 2, which range from 6.6 percentage

¹⁵While controlling for *isiZulu_i* and its interaction with *post* should eliminate ethnic voting, other evidence also suggests that the swing is not purely ethnic. In particular, the swing within KwaZulu wards toward to the ANC after 2007 is not uniform across the Bantustan, but bloc based. That is, whole wards switch to the ANC rather than simply a few voters from each ward. This also provides evidence that the swing is not based on differential campaigning by the ANC over time, as this would not account for bloc-based shifts unless chiefs are themselves the central agents of campaigns. Note that the swing is much stronger in the south and weaker in the north. This is because Jacob Zuma’s influence among the chieftancy is stronger among the southern chiefs, in particular those who live around and below his home village of Nkandla.

¹⁶Recall that the *Bantustans* variable includes KwaZulu, so any difference-in-differences between the other Bantustans and KwaZulu is given solely by the coefficient on such an interaction.

points to 10.1 percentage points. Crucially, the difference-in-difference estimates allow for the effect of the proportion of Zulu voters in a given ward, as well as other demographic and economic covariates, to vary between the pre- and post-Zuma period. This means that the results presented in Table 3 are net of any ethnic voting effect in which Zulus swing toward the ANC. As noted above, those estimates in columns 3 through 5, that focus exclusively on the border, control for possible changes in strategy of local politicians or elites other than chiefs.

Finally, note that in Appendix Sections D and E we present a range of robustness checks and extensions of these estimates, over and above the placebo exercises outlined previously. We show that the results are consistent if we use the modern Traditional Authority boundaries rather than the historical Bantustan boundaries, that the results are robust to including later elections, that the results hold for both local and national elections, and that the pro-ANC swing is balanced out by an anti-IFP swing after 2007.

Discussion

While in general it is hard to extrapolate from estimates that recover local average effect, the consistency of our estimates across various specifications and research designs place us in a position to explore, the electoral influence of chiefs for South Africa. There is of course uncertainty around these estimates, so to be conservative, we calculate electoral implications for South Africa for two estimated coefficients: the smallest point estimates we retrieve of 6.6 percentage points (column 2, Table 2), and our preferred point estimate of 8.2 percentage points (column 5, Table 3).¹⁷

The number of South Africans living inside the borders of the former Bantustans is roughly 17 million, approximately 31% of the country's current population. A 6.6 percentage vote boost within the former Bantustans translates into an extra 2 percentage points at the polls for the ANC nation-wide, while an 8.2 percentage point boost would grant them a 2.5 percentage point increase. Given these narrow margins and high stakes, the role that traditional leaders play in shaping the ANC's electoral fortunes should not be underestimated. In the most recent elections (2014), the ANC secured 62.15% of the national vote – our estimates suggest that without the chieftancy vote they would have earned less than 60%, an important symbolic target for opposition parties.

Crucially, the electoral effects of traditional leaders are not only felt in the macro-political landscape. It

¹⁷Consistent with our theory, these votes were won almost entirely from the IFP. As shown in Appendix Section E.A, when replicating our difference-in-differences approach with the IFP's vote share, we find a corresponding decline of around 8 percentage points in the IFP's vote share in the Zuma-in-power period.

is also highly likely that they directly affect those South Africans who live in traditional areas. One possible implication of our finding is that political contestation is extremely difficult in the former Bantustans. Indeed, setting aside KwaZulu, the ANC won almost every ward in the former Bantustans in 2000, 2006, and 2011. This lack of competition is likely to stifle opposition politics, and lower the quality of democratic representation.

Conclusion

Traditional authority structures are ubiquitous in Africa, and common in south-east Asia and Latin America. These leaders serve cultural, legal, economic, and social roles. Prior research argued that traditional leaders may serve important electoral functions too; due to both *de jure* and *de facto* authority, and control of developmental resources, chiefs are often well positioned to influence voters. In this study, we argue that contexts where chiefs depend on government – either for rents or because of tenuous legal status – might lead to a political *quid pro quo*. Chiefs rely on political leaders’ beneficence, while political elites seek electoral support. These incentives allow for an alignment of interests that can produce collusive behavior: traditional leader offer votes to incumbents in exchange for legal tenure and rents, serving as “agents of the regime.”

We study this general proposition in the case of South Africa’s Bantustans, where white minority governments empowered traditional leaders for over 80 years. Similar strategies of indirect rule were adopted by colonial powers throughout Africa and south-east Asia. As apartheid ended chiefs switched from agents of the apartheid regime to agents of the ANC, while the ANC switched from anti-chief to pro-chief. Through quantitative analyses we show how this *quid pro quo* maps to current-day differences in electoral support. Using OLS and border analyses, along with a difference-in-differences design, we present both descriptive and causal quantitative evidence in support of our theory. Our empirical strategy isolates the effect of traditional authorities, net of many confounders highlighted by prior research on electoral behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa. We find that, in exchange for protection since the end of apartheid, traditional leaders in South Africa reward the ruling ANC with, on average, between 6.6 and 8.2 percentage points at the polls. This effect implies a national-level aggregate effect of around 2 - 2.5 percentage points.

These findings suggest that empowering traditional leaders may have problematic consequences for electoral democracies. Of course, certain institutional arrangements or political factors could countervail the effects we find, but it is worth considering some plausible conditions of generality. In thinking about the implications of our findings beyond the borders of South Africa, we begin from the premise that both chiefs

and political parties are strategic actors, looking to further their particular interests. One implication of this is that if institutional arrangements – for example the electoral system – make the votes that chiefs can provide less useful, the *quid pro quo* is less likely to emerge. Chiefs’ dependants are typically geographically concentrated, and so it is plausible that they are most electorally valuable in more proportional systems, like the highly proportional system in place in South Africa’s national elections. In first-past-the-post settings these concentrated votes may simply be inefficiently located and not worth pursuing (Chen et al., 2013).

If chiefs’ are strategic actors too, they are likely to align themselves with the political party (principal) that they believe will protect them. This decision hinges on whether the commitment to protect them is credible, requiring that the party who offers protection be a plausible electoral victor. In the case of single-party dominant systems, autocratic regimes, or regions with sub-national dominant parties, this is usually guaranteed, making the chief’s strategic decision easier. As such, it seems likely that our results provide insights for other politically hegemonic Sub-Saharan African countries. Namibia, for example, is ruled by the hegemonic South West African People’s Organization, and traditional authorities remain influential.

Yet even in cases of political uncertainty, traditional leaders might be able to protect their interests in the way we propose here. As demonstrated in the case of KwaZulu – a far more competitive setting than most of South Africa – chiefs were willing to cross partisan divides when they believe that it is in their interests to do so. This suggests that in both cases of political hegemony or of competitive and shifting strategic grounds, chiefs can exert substantial influence over voters, and strategically choose to deliver to the highest bidder. This suggests that our results may generalize to other places, for example Senegal, where chiefs are powerful but politics are highly competitive.

Finally, the nature of particular traditional institutional arrangements may also moderate the implications of our study. In particular, arrangements in which chiefs are more formally protected may help to insulate them from the influence of political elites. In the South African setting chiefs are continuously engaged in a battle to maintain legal legitimacy; the more tenuous a traditional authority’s legal status, the more likely they may be to seek protection from above.

Both quantitatively and qualitatively, we are able to show that traditional leaders may have dramatic electoral effects. We are hopeful that future research into the political roles that chiefs play in young democracies can further probe the mechanisms that translate traditional authority into electoral consequences for particular political parties. Such research is of pressing concern, as many young democracies have empowered, and continue to empower, traditional or cultural leaders. Our findings sound a call to these countries to think carefully about policy; empowering traditional leaders can have profound electoral consequences.

Tables

Table 1: Estimates of differences in covariates

Covariates	Whites	isiZulu	isiXhosa	isiNdebele	sePedi	seSotho
All Bantustans	-0.0799*** (0.00618)	0.0672*** (0.0195)	0.0216** (0.0108)	0.0174* (0.00914)	0.0173 (0.0158)	-0.00334 (0.00709)
Observations	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984
R^2	0.195	0.853	0.827	0.173	0.631	0.232
Covariates	seTswana	siSwati	tshiVenda	xiTsonga	log(pop)	log(pop density)
All Bantustans	0.0356*** (0.0101)	-0.0191 (0.0170)	-0.00751 (0.00630)	0.0238** (0.0121)	-0.105*** (0.0297)	1.492*** (0.133)
Observations	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984
R^2	0.880	0.523	0.400	0.437	0.149	0.312
Covariates	log(ward area)	Gender	Unemployment	Sector	Schooling	Income
All Bantustans	-1.5643*** (0.10696)	0.0283*** (0.00215)	0.222*** (0.0108)	0.0110 (0.00783)	0.0866*** (0.00579)	-1,172*** (97.50)
Observations	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984	5,984
R^2	0.371	0.359	0.328	0.065	0.452	0.189

Standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parenthesis.

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

Note: These differences are the result of an application of the border analysis outlined above, using only observations within 1km of the Bantustan borders, the most conservative approach. We exclude the details of the specifications; they are the same as in Table 2. The coefficients are β from the border analysis, with each covariate as the DV, and no covariates on the right hand side. IsiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, sePedi, seSotho, seTswana, siSwati, tshiVenda, and xiTsonga are ethno-linguistic groups within the larger population of Black South Africans. Whites are the minority racial group.

Table 2: Association Between Bantustans and ANC Vote Share

	All (OLS)	All (border)	50km (border)	10km (border)	1km (border)
Bantustans	0.0718*** (0.0168)	0.0657*** (0.0152)	0.0998*** (0.0154)	0.106*** (0.0176)	0.0762*** (0.0161)
KwaZulu	-0.244*** (0.0355)	-0.220*** (0.0300)	-0.206*** (0.0260)	-0.167*** (0.0229)	-0.138*** (0.0209)
Border FE			✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spatial smoothing		✓	✓	✓	✓
Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	15,955	15,955	11,119	8,360	5,984
R^2	0.579	0.617	0.622	0.655	0.659

Standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parenthesis.

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

Table 3: Difference-in-Differences Estimates

	All (OLS)	All (border)	50km (border)	10km (border)	1km (border)
KwaZulu	-0.272*** (0.0374)	-0.245*** (0.0331)	-0.228*** (0.0294)	-0.202*** (0.0275)	-0.175*** (0.0237)
Post*KwaZulu	0.171*** (0.0407)	0.170*** (0.0355)	0.142*** (0.0316)	0.111*** (0.0316)	0.0823*** (0.0266)
Border FE			✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post*Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spatial smoothing		✓	✓	✓	✓
Linear TT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quadratic TT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	15,955	15,955	11,119	8,360	5,984
R^2	0.621	0.658	0.662	0.697	0.706

Standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parenthesis.

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

Figures

Figure 1: The Bantustans

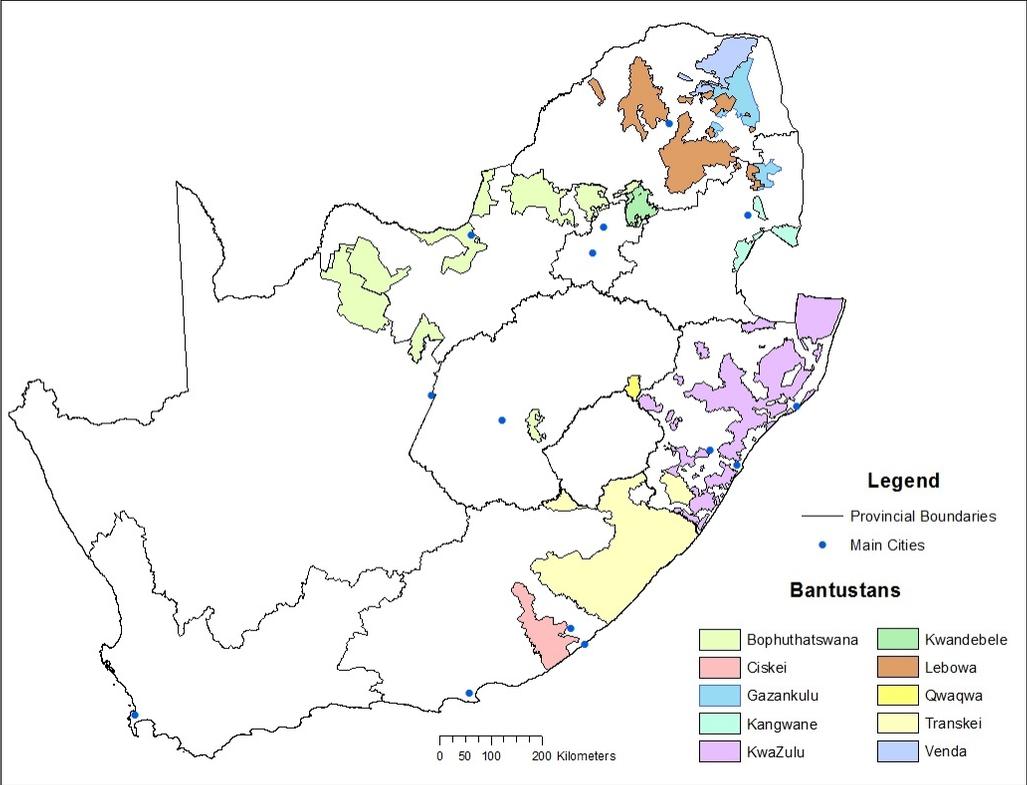
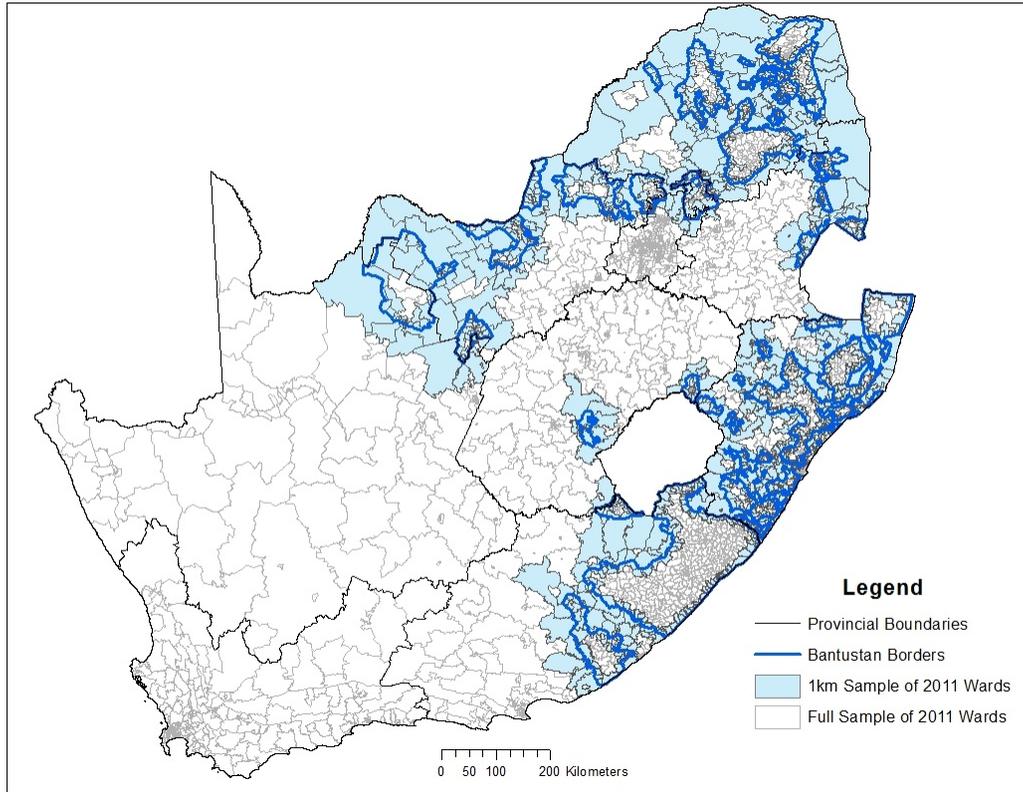
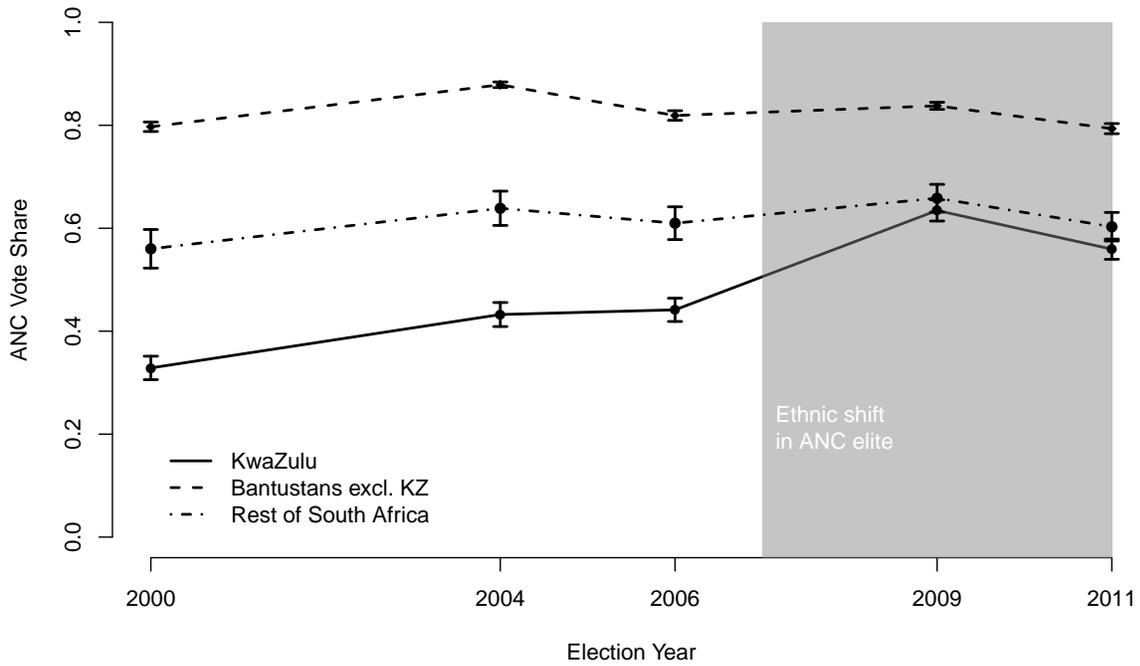


Figure 2: 1km Bandwidth Sample of Wards



Note: The electoral wards, subset in blue to only those which fall in part within 1km of a Bantustan boundary, in 2011. These wards are used in our preferred specifications.

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



Note: This figure shows the mean values for ANC vote share in the Bantustans (excluding KwaZulu), KwaZulu, and the rest of South Africa, only within 1km of the Bantustan boundaries. The error bars represent 95% CIs. The X-axis shows the five elections in the study, while the gray rectangle indicates when $post = 1$, after Jacob Zuma's ascendancy. A similar figure, which includes the entire country, is available in Appendix Section D.F

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