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# Unpacking rural-urban clientelist networks

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of public goods provisioning for poverty reduction, empirical evidence shows gross under-provision of state resources in developing countries. This results in the establishment of clientelist networks between people of unequal social status. However, clientelism is not homogenous. It varies based on the environment in which it is cultivated. Using household-level data from villages and urban slums in Pakistan, we provide a rare direct comparison of rural and urban clientelism. We find that the clientelist exchange bundle varies depending on geography and settlement structure (landholding patterns in villages and legal status in slums). While rural brokers include public goods provisioning in their exchange bundle, urban brokers have to rely on more personal services to maintain their network. Our main finding then is that rural clientelist networks are more pervasive, vary in nature, and perform more functions than their urban counterparts.

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Clientelism; Pakistan; Rural networks; Slums; Public Goods Provision

## Introduction

Inequality and lack of state provision often results in the poor in developing countries seeking out clientelist relationships to ensure survival (Auyero, 2000; Cinar, 2016; Hicken, 2011; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Krishna, 2002; Medina & Stokes, 2007). Established between groups of unequals, the exchange consists of wealthy, connected, and influential brokers who offer access to a range of assets and services – including access to the state – in return for poor clients' labour and political and social following. While this was historically found in the countryside (Bardhan, 1980; Powell, 1970; Schmidt et al., 1977; Scott, 1972), recent literature has documented how clientelist networks also exist in cities (Auerbach, 2020; Auyero, 2000; Gottlieb, 2017; Medina & Stokes, 2007). To date, however, hardly any work has systematically compared clientelism across rural and urban contexts.<sup>1</sup> We help to fill this gap by directly comparing rural and urban clientelist networks to understand variations *between* rural and urban contexts and *among* villages and slums. Based on original household-level datasets from villages and slums in Punjab, Pakistan, we explore (i) whether the pervasiveness, nature and function of clientelism vary across rural and urban contexts, and in doing so; (ii) the role of two factors for clientelism: geography and settlement structure.

With respect to geography, we find that in certain settings rural brokers enjoy exploitative powers over clients that urban brokers lack. And even when they are not exploitative, clientelist networks in the countryside are generally more pervasive because villages are more isolated from markets and the state than urban centres – a key finding. This, in turn, incentivizes politicians to go

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**Table 1.** Three types of clientelist networks in Pakistan.

Extensive and exploitative	Extensive but problem-solving	Limited and problem-solving
Villages that are remote and have a single landlord.	Villages that are connected and/or have multiple landlords.	Slums irrespective of geography and settlement structure.

through rural brokers to channel public resources, whereas politicians opt to target public resources directly to residents in urban slums. Notably, this finding on how clients engage with the state in rural and urban contexts is in contrast with previous work (see Auerbach & Kruks-Wisner, 2020).

With respect to differences *among* villages and slums, we find that geography matters in a rural setting. In line with previous literature, we find that clients residing in villages that are connected to the outside economy have greater bargaining power over brokers than those residing in isolated villages (see Shami, 2012). By contrast, despite central slums having better access to markets and the state (see generally: Brown & Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Eckstein, 1990), we do not find variations in urban clientelist networks based on slums in city centres from those in city outskirts.

With respect to settlement structure, we focus on the core roles of land distribution in villages (equal vs. unequal) and settlement status in slums (legal vs. illegal). Here, again, we confirm findings from previous literature that settlement structure is important for variation in some rural contexts: clients in isolated villages with a single landlord-broker have considerably less bargaining power than in isolated villages with land distribution shared among multiple landlords competing for clients' following (see Banerjee & Iyer, 2005; regarding land distribution see also Shami, 2012). In urban contexts, by contrast, we do not find variations in clientelist networks depending on the legal status of settlements, despite dwellers in illegal settlements being more vulnerable.

From our results three types of clientelist networks thereby emerge, summarised in Table 1 below: extensive and exploitative networks found in remote villages with single landlord-brokers; extensive but problem-solving networks found in other villages; and limited and problem-solving networks in slums irrespective of their geography and settlement structure. The first two types of networks correspond with previous literature on rural clientelism, but this paper is the first to show that (i) urban clientelist networks are more limited than rural ones; and (ii) geography and settlement structure do not matter among slums in the way they do among villages. The results point to the role of exit options as the core underlying driver of both the nature and function of clientelist networks in rural and urban contexts. Rural networks are inevitably more pervasive, as the urban poor have much easier access to markets and state institutions and so are less dependent on these networks for their wellbeing. Equally, despite variation in both geography and settlement structures in slums, brokers have limited ability for exploitation in urban settings relative to villages where clients have no alternatives because they are isolated and face a single monopolistic landlord-broker.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section gives an overview of the literature and raises two empirical questions we ask from the data. The third section sets the context and discusses the methodology. The paper then goes on to present the empirical analysis, looking at the pervasiveness, nature and function of clientelist networks in urban and rural settings. We also explore how variations in geography and settlement structure cause variations in clientelist networks before concluding.

## Clientelism and its variations

Clientelism is a face-to-face exchange relationship between individuals of differing socio-economic status (Auerbach, 2020; Cinar, 2016; Hicken, 2011; Pellicer et al., 2022; Rains & Wibbels, 2023). Historically studied in the rural context, clientelism was conceptualised as between an all-powerful landlord-broker on the one hand and poor peasant-clients who needed access to his/her resources on the other. The landlord controlled the majority of village income-generating assets and enjoyed

social and political influence, whereas clients could offer their labour, social following, and votes for the landlord's preferred political candidate. Landlords used these services to increase their own rents. Labour services ensured that fields were harvested and sowed on time, while social and political services allowed the landlord to contract with politicians for access to public and private goods in exchange for guaranteed votes (see Schmidt et al., 1977 for essays on traditional clientelism). The relationship was highly extractive and ultimately relied on the landlord controlling economic, political and social markets in the village economy (Bardhan, 1980; Basu, 1986; Powell, 1970; Schmidt et al., 1977; Scott, 1972). Once clients got exit options, the expectation was that clientelist networks would inevitably break down (Lemarchand & Legg, 1972; Scott, 1972).

Recent work, by contrast, has documented the resilience and adaptability of these networks. Clientelism can be exploitative, but it can also be welfare-enhancing for clients in the absence of state provision and so continues to exist even when clients have exit options (see particularly Hicken, 2011). See also; Krishna, 2002; Shami, 2012; Auerbach, 2020; Pellicer et al., 2022). In problem-solving networks, brokers base their authority on social and political connections, alongside asset ownership and offer a range of intermediary services such as access to employment, the state, and public goods in exchange for clients' social and political following (Auerbach, 2020; Auyero, 2008; Brown & Ahmed, 2016; Gottlieb, 2017; Hicken, 2011; Krishna, 2002; Medina & Stokes, 2007; Pellicer et al., 2022; Rains & Wibbels, 2023).

Brokers are able to provide these services because of their social embeddedness in local settings, with deeply embedded brokers enjoying control over a greater range of services compared to less embedded brokers. For politicians, for instance, brokers with strong social ties can closely monitor voter behaviour<sup>2</sup> (Camp, 2017; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Ravanilla et al., 2022; Stokes, 2005), thus saving the politician time and energy from campaigning to individual voters (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). In such instances, political incentives are also altered as politicians now have an incentive to not provide directly (Hicken, 2011; Piattoni, 2001) and instead delegate the provision of visible targeted public goods – such as paved streets, drainage systems, and piped water – to brokers. This gives brokers access to public resources and allows them to include it in their exchange bundle, thereby strengthening their bargaining power vis-a-vis clients. The same would not be the case for brokers with weaker ties who have limited ability to monitor voter behaviour. Here, politicians tend to maintain control of targeted public goods for securing votes during election seasons. The result is a watered-down network (Medina & Stokes, 2007) where the broker has to arguably provide alternative and more personalised services, such as assistance with obtaining justice, access to welfare schemes, and help with obtaining (state) documentation.

Although the literature is increasingly exploring variations in clientelist networks, empirical work has tended to focus either on rural networks or urban ones rather than comparing the two. This leaves a gap in our understanding, for while the basic logic of rural and urban clientelism is similar, we argue that the networks also differ in important ways. To better understand this variation, we explore the role of two factors that prior literature has suggested may be particularly important: geography and settlement structure. Our expectation is that both should matter not only for the extent to which clients have exit options but also for the types of services brokers can offer (or withhold), which in turn will impact the nature and function of clientelist networks across and among rural and urban settings.

With respect to geography, we ask whether, and to what extent, different levels of isolation matter for how clientelist networks operate in villages and in slums. The rural economy tends to be self-contained with varying but limited levels of access to – and engagement with – external economic and political markets (Barrett et al., 2001; Popkin, 1979; Scott, 1972). By contrast, slums are neighbourhoods within cities and so residents engage extensively with markets outside the settlement itself (Brown & Lloyd-Jones, 2014). This gives the urban poor much greater access to exit options than their rural counterparts, which in turn should curtail urban brokers' power over clients. In addition, geography should matter for the extent to which brokers can offer (or withhold) different types of services to clients. Whereas all brokers can offer personalised services to clients,

monitoring is arguably easier in self-contained and isolated networks, which should incentivize politicians to allow rural brokers, unlike their urban counterparts, to also have access to public resources.

Different levels of isolation have also been found to matter *among* villages. Clients in villages that are open to the external economy, and thus more accessible, have greater outside opportunities, which along with information and improved communication networks strengthen their bargaining power over landlords. This, in turn, forces brokers to provide more in exchange for clients' services so as to maintain the legitimacy of their relationship (Hicken, 2011; Krishna, 2002; Shami, 2012). Slums, on the other hand, vary based on their location within the city, with those located in the centre having better access to various markets than those in the outskirts (Brown & Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Eckstein, 1990). This, in turn, could exert pressure on brokers in central slums to provide more in exchange for clients' services in the same way as has been found in rural contexts. Thus, the empirical question we ask is: how does geography impact the pervasiveness, nature, and function of clientelist networks? With 'pervasiveness' we mean the share of residents participating in such networks, with 'nature' we refer to levels of exploitation, and with 'function' we refer to services controlled by brokers. Our expectation is that geography is critical for clients' exit options and should therefore drive differences between rural and urban contexts as well as levels among villages and across slums.

With respect to the role of settlement structure, we again build on prior evidence from rural contexts. In villages, brokers tend to be landlords controlling the main income generating asset in the village (Bardhan, 1980; Basu, 1986; Schmidt et al., 1977). However, Banerjee and Iyer (2005) note how in South Asia land distribution vary with some villages dominated by large landlords and others having several small landlords. In the former villages, the landlord-broker controls economic, political and social markets, resulting in the establishment of a monopolistic broker able to exploit his/her clients for economic and political gain. The latter, on the other hand see a multitude of brokers, each competing for clients' following, thereby limiting any single brokers' exploitative powers (Shami, 2012).

Turning to slums, while these settlements do not vary based on landholdings, they do vary based on their legal status. The 1980s saw a shift in developing countries governments' policy towards recognizing slums as legal settlements based on certain conditions (Beall & Fox, 2009). Residents in illegal slums are more vulnerable than those in legal settlements, which may enable brokers to be better able to exploit them. Thus, our second empirical question is: how does settlement structure impact the pervasiveness, nature, and function of clientelist networks? We assess the role of settlement structures through variation in land distribution in villages and legal status in slums.

Lastly, we assess the *interaction* between geography and settlement structure. This, again, builds on prior results from rural clientelism, where isolated villages with monopolistic landlords have been found to be particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Shami, 2012). If the same effect travels to urban contexts, we should expect illegal slums in city outskirts to be more prone to exploitative clientelist networks.

### Empirical Analysis<sup>3</sup>

Our data comes from Pakistan. With its checkered history of democratic rule, political parties in Pakistan have struggled to make credible promises to voters and instead rely on clientelist networks (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). As a result, public goods provision in the country remains unequal and highly targeted (Hasnain, 2008; Majid & Memon, 2019). Driven by elite capture and an exploitative state, this perpetuates poverty and helps explain Pakistan's 'growth without development' (Easterly, 2001). Moreover, the dysfunctional nature of state institutions means that poor citizens are hesitant to approach them out of fear of harassment (Jackson et al., 2014) and instead should seek the assistance of local brokers.

To compare rural and urban clientelism in Pakistan, we make use of two original household-level datasets. The urban dataset explored the effects of variation in state recognition of slums on poor residents’ coping strategies,<sup>4</sup> whereas the rural dataset looked at the effects of connectivity on villages’ clientelist networks and the power of brokers.<sup>5</sup> Both datasets were collected from Punjab, the most populous province in Pakistan and used very similar questionnaires, thereby allowing for comparison.<sup>6</sup> Combining the two datasets allows us to test the varying effects of exit options and settlement type on the pervasiveness, nature and functioning of clientelist networks both between and across villages and slums as theorized in the second section.

**Slums**

Slums are found both in the centre and outskirts of Pakistan’s cities. Some remain illegal squatter colonies, whereas others have been registered with the state under the 1985 Katchi-Abadis Act (Kachi-Abadi is the Urdu word for slums). Under the Act, slums can be recognised as a legal settlement – referred to as registered slums – provided they existed before a cut-off date and have a minimum of 40 households.<sup>7</sup> Registered slums cannot be evicted, are eligible for state provisioning<sup>8</sup> and fall under the jurisdiction of the Katchi-Abadis’ Directorate, the government department responsible for slums.

Our sample of slums is from Lahore, a major cosmopolitan city which is also the political capital of Punjab, thereby placing these settlements at the heart of political and economic activity in Punjab. Therefore, we expect that these slums will have high exit options. The city is home to 14 million residents – half of which are estimated to live in slums (UNHAIATAT, 2028; see also Khan, 2015). We obtained the complete list of all slums in Lahore from the Katchi-Abadis’ Directorate and randomly drew a sample of 12 slums. Following our interest in geography and settlement structures, the sample was stratified on location (central – accessible vs. outskirts – remote) and registration status (registered vs. unregistered) (see Table 2), while also considering the size of the population<sup>9</sup> to ensure comparability, particularly of brokerage networks. Our sample is representative of medium-sized slums in Lahore. For each slum, first a map was drawn (see Figure 1), which was then used to draw a 20% random sample to be interviewed. This resulted in 667 households being surveyed.

**Villages**

Our rural sample was compiled in Hafizabad district, Punjab, 121 kilometres from Lahore. Hafizabad district is home to 1.2 million people, with the majority living in villages. The district is mostly agrarian and has high levels of inequality (GHK, 2005). Focusing on Hafizabad allows us to build on the limited previous empirical literature on clientelism in the region, including the roles of exogenous variation in isolation from external markets and variation in landholding structures (Cheema & Mohmand, 2004; Shami, 2012). The former is driven by differences in access to a major highway exogenous to village characteristics, and the latter by differences in historical land allocation resulting in some villages having a single landlord who controls all assets within the village, while others have landholdings spread over multiple landlords; ‘egalitarian villages’ (Banerjee & Iyer, 2005). Clients are equally landless in egalitarian villages, but the availability of multiple brokers results in competition for clients’ following and thus, increases their exit options. Moreover, villages on the highway are better connected due to an increase in traffic which offer easily available

Table 2. Slum sample distribution.

	Registered	Un-Registered
Accessible	3	3
Remote	3	3





Figure 1. Map from a sampled slum.

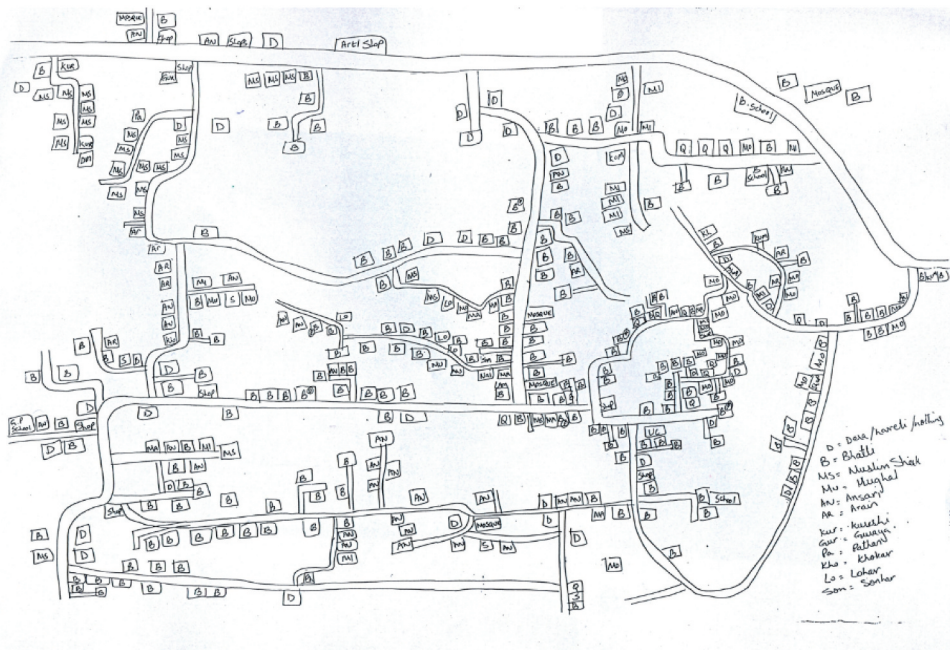


Figure 2. Map of a sampled village.

transport to larger markets and political/state offices. Although we expect these exit options to improve outcomes in connected villages relative to remote ones, we conjecture that outcomes will still be at a lower level than those in urban slums due to the villages' distance from economic and political centres.

Based on a list of all villages in Hafizabad from the Punjab Government, along with information regarding landholding patterns, villages were divided into landlord-dominated and egalitarian

**Table 3.** Village sample distribution.

	Landlord-dominated	Egalitarian
Accessible	2	2
Remote	2	2

villages and accessible or remote based on their location vis-à-vis the highway. From this list a random eight villages were selected (see Table 3). Here too villages were first mapped (see Figure 2) and then a stratified random sample of 20% of households was surveyed. Stratification was done along *biradery* (kinship groups) lines, which has been found to be a good proxy for social status/power in rural South Asia (Alavi, 1972). A total of 367 household-level surveys were collected.

### Households

The household-level survey used closed- and open-ended questions to inquire about a wide range of issues, such as households' status and needs, socio-economic background, social networks, and who they approached for problem-solving. This provided us with both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data is used to explore variations in the pervasiveness, nature, and function of clientelist networks. With respect to function, in particular, we focus on two services that brokers can provide: public goods provision and assistance with obtaining justice. While the former requires brokers' access to state resources, the latter is a personalised service, which is particularly valuable because of the dysfunctional nature of the Pakistani justice system (Jackson et al., 2014).

We also conducted key respondent interviews with local schoolteachers, shopkeepers, *imams* (Muslim clergy), and brokers to get a better understanding of the political economy of slums and villages.<sup>10</sup> The qualitative data gives insights into the inner workings of clientelist networks which enabled us to again gauge variations across networks and the strength of brokers social ties. Lastly, four officials at the Katchi-Abadis Directorate were interviewed<sup>11</sup> to understand the growth and development of slums. Combined, the quantitative and qualitative data are used to answer the questions raised in the second section regarding the effects of geography and settlement structure on the pervasiveness, nature and function of clientelist networks.

Table 4 below presents an overview of the sample slum and village populations. We find slum residents to have slightly higher average monthly spending than rural ones, significant at the 1% level, most likely due to the higher cost of living in the city. These spending levels are in line with costs of living expenses, as estimated for a bundle of essentials for rural and urban areas (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2014), making these settlements representative of the national average.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics.

	Rural	Urban
<i>Economic Variables</i>		
Average monthly spending (in \$) <sup>12</sup>	133	200
Primary employment; day labourer	20	11
Primary employment; the state	4	7.65
<i>Social Variables</i>		
Lowest social class	23	12
Upper social class	45	31
<i>Clientelism Variables</i>		
Member of a clientelist network	88	56
<i>Primary reason for joining broker's network/basis of broker's influence</i>		
Feel the broker caters for their needs	12	77
Needs access to the broker's economic resources	85	8
Observations	367	667

All figures are percentages unless stated otherwise.



Furthermore, a higher percentage of rural households worked as agricultural labourers, also significant at the 1% level, which aside from its precarity has low social value (Cheema & Mohmand, 2004).

Turning to social variables we can see that the social composition of the slums vs. villages, as measured through households' *biradery*, is different – significant at the 1% level.<sup>13</sup> This could partially be explained by urban households giving less importance to this classification – something we also observed during our interviews. Alternatively, it could be households taking advantage of the anonymity of the city to reinvent themselves. Thus, the nature of this variable is different in slums and villages.

Furthermore, clientelist networks are much more pervasive in villages than in slums: close to 90% of households are part of these networks in villages, but only 56% report the same in slums.<sup>14</sup> This is important and suggests that the relatively self-contained nature of the rural economy makes clientelist networks the dominant way households gain access to public and private resources, resulting in deep engagement between clients and brokers. In slums, by contrast, about half of residents do not rely on clientelist networks, likely because of the relatively open and fluid nature of the settlement. We explore this further below.

While we did not run a survey amongst brokers, we did ask households why they joined his network, giving insights into the basis of brokers' authority/influence. Here, we find that the primary reason for joining rural clientelist network was access to brokers' economic resources irrespective of the type of village the household finds itself in. These differences were also reflected in brokers' own wealth status. Whereas rural brokers were landowners who collectively owned the majority of village land, urban brokers were chosen because of their connections with politicians and government officials and ability to effectively provide personalised services.

Turning to variation among villages and slums, village interviews confirmed considerable variation in clients' attitude towards brokers based on the type of village they resided in. In line with previous literature, village residents in isolated landlord-dominated villages were part of exploitative clientelist networks. Clients saw no option but to comply with the wishes of the landlord-broker due to the absence of alternatives. This was exemplified by households' response to why they obey brokers' wishes: 'if we don't (obey him) what will happen to us when he kicks us out (of the village)'<sup>15</sup> while another stated 'how will we survive without him'.<sup>16</sup> In all other villages, exit options – either from the market or alternative brokers – curbed the brokers' exploitative powers, resulting in clients talking about the reciprocity of the relationship: 'he helps us because he wants our votes and needs us to work in his fields'.<sup>17</sup>

In slums, we found no evidence of outright exploitation. Over 70% of urban households' primary reason was his ability to provide for their needs. These networks were problem-solving and seen as beneficial by clients – 'he works for us and gives us respect',<sup>18</sup> 'he helps us when we have a problem'.<sup>19</sup> From Table A3 (see Appendix) we find that this holds irrespective of the type of slum households resided in. Thus, contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence of location and settlement structure impacting the nature of clientelist networks.

Taken together, we find that rural networks are more pervasive and can be more exploitative than urban ones. Moreover, while settlement structure matters for brokers' exploitative powers in villages, its disadvantage is only felt in isolated villages. In all other villages brokers were found to operate problem-solving networks rather than exploitative ones. In slums, on the other hand, location and settlement structure have no significant impact on the extent to which households join the network, or the brokers' level of control. Here, too, brokers operated problem-solving networks.

Turning to the function of clientelist networks, we next explore what services brokers control in villages vs slums and across villages and across slums.

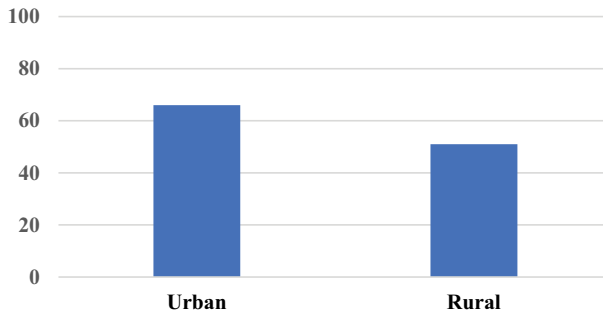


Figure 3. Public goods provision.

**Public goods**

For provision of public goods, we focus on drainage systems and paved streets, which are highly visible, and targetable public goods (Cheema & Mohmand, 2004). Figure 3 below shows provision levels of drains and paved streets across slums and villages. Slums have a significantly higher probability (at the 1% level) of receiving public goods relative to villages. This could be the result of an urban bias on part of the state, yet in our household interviews hardly anyone identified the state as the provider.<sup>20</sup>

Alternatively, it could be that low rural provision is driven by under-provision in the more broker-exploited remote landlord-dominated villages. Yet, when splitting the data by the different types of settlements, we find that while these villages are indeed worse off, even the highest levels of provision in villages still do not come close to that in central slums (Figure 4).<sup>21</sup>

Another explanation, then, may be that urban brokers are better at obtaining public goods for their clients. Yet amongst households receiving public goods, Table 5 below shows that while rural households are significantly more likely (at the 1% level) to attribute credit to their broker for public goods provision, urban households claimed politicians were responsible for provisioning. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that, amongst the 34% of urban households attributing credit

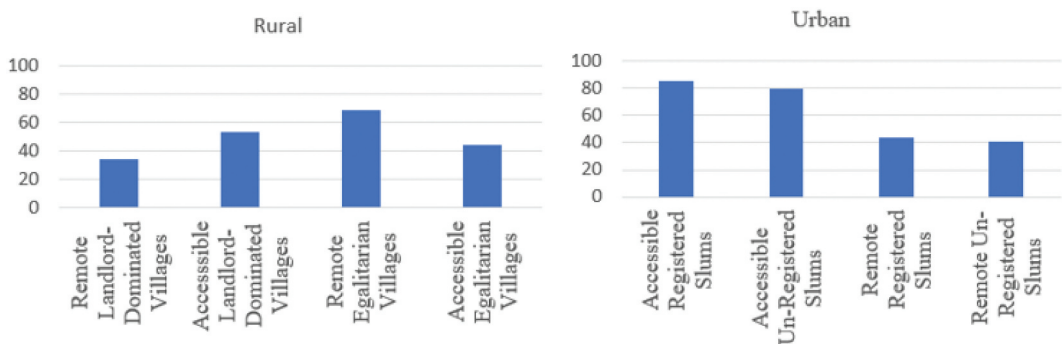


Figure 4. Public goods provision.

Table 5. Who households credited with providing public goods.<sup>22</sup>

	Rural, %	Urban, %
Government	2	1
Politician	0	64
Broker	86	34
Observations	187	641

to the broker, only 6% believed he was the main provider of the public good. The other 28% claimed that while the broker played a role in the provision process, the politician was also involved. This is in contrast to villages where 86% of households claimed the broker was the sole provider of public goods.

In villages, clientelist networks are extremely pervasive, with 88% of households being a part of this network. Clients use these networks extensively and engage on a day-to-day basis with their broker. The strength of rural brokers' social ties appears to incentivize politicians to delegate public spending decisions to brokers, thereby allowing them to include public provision in their exchange bundle. This is corroborated by the fact that no one attributed credit to the politician in villages. Those not crediting the broker claimed others such as neighbours, friends or village 'elders' provided it.

Political dealings in slums are considerably different. Unlike in villages, only 56% of slum households are part of clientelist networks. Moreover, the fluid and open nature of the settlement means that clients don't rely on their networks as extensively. Thus, urban brokers' networks, though still valuable to politicians, are unable to deliver votes in the same way as their rural counterparts. Therefore, in slums politicians directly provide public goods – and claim credit by visiting (or sending someone from their office) during the construction of the goods – in their efforts to secure political office.<sup>23</sup> This provision is non-programmatic and provided out of politicians' discretionary funds, rather than funds allocated for public goods provision, which explains why unregistered slums – which are legally not entitled to public provision – are receiving public goods (see Figure 4).<sup>24</sup>

Given the differences found in Table 5 between rural and urban households' perceptions of who provided the public goods, Table 6 looks at whether these perceptions vary based on settlement structure and household wealth<sup>25</sup> within the settlement.

Table 6 also explores if perceptions regarding brokers providing public goods vary based on households' economic status and the type of settlement they reside in. Here we find that, those residing in landlord-dominated villages are least likely to attribute credit to the broker (significant at the 5% level). This is contrary to expectations. However, when splitting landlord-dominated villages by geography (Appendix Table A2), we find that this is driven by landlord-dominated villages that are accessible to the market. Moreover, within connected landlord-dominated villages the lowest perception is amongst poorest households. We conjecture that exploitation amongst the asset poor – who are most dependent on brokers – should be highest in remote landlord-dominated villages. Thus, when alternatives become available, we stipulate that these households should be most likely to take advantage of them. This is corroborated by the finding that 70% of the poorest households are clients in accessible landlord-dominated villages as compared to over 90% (of poor households) in all other types of villages. Table A2 also suggests that brokers are focusing on middle and upper classes, arguably to maintain his client base. This is further substantiated by the broker's claim that he was working tirelessly to provide public goods to the village, but not to himself.<sup>27</sup> Thus it appears that connectivity, and the exit options that come with it, caused the broker to lose some of

**Table 6.** Broker credited with providing public goods.<sup>26</sup>

	Rural, %	Urban, %
<i>Economic Variables</i>		
Poor households	83	35
Rich households	87	37
Middle wealth households	86	31
<i>Location Variables</i>		
Accessible	85	37
Remote	86	30
Structurally desirable settlement	90	32
Structurally undesirable settlement	78	37
Observations	187	641

his most exploited clients, thereby incentivizing him to alter behaviour so as to maintain the integrity of his network.

In slums, by contrast, we don't find *any* significant variation in the extent to which brokers are credited with public goods provision across central or remote settlements and legal or illegal ones. This suggests that since exit options are more easily available in the city, the control of brokers is inherently limited, even in illegal and remote settlements. This, in turn, incentivizes politicians to maintain control over public provision, thereby curtailing urban brokers' ability to include access to state resources in their exchange bundle.

To test if these bivariate results also hold after including relevant household-level and settlement-level controls, we run the following multivariate logistic regression model.

$$Y_{is} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Rural_s + \alpha_2 Remote_s + \alpha_3 Structure_s + \alpha_4 Remote_s * Structure_s + \alpha_5 W_{is} + \alpha_6 Client_{is} + \alpha_7 Rural_s * Client_{is} + \mu_{is} \tag{1}$$

$Y_{is}$  takes the value of 1 if household  $i$  in location  $s$  thinks the broker provided them with public goods. The independent variables focus on village/slum- and household-level factors. We include a fixed effect for belonging to a village –  $Rural_s$ . Furthermore,  $Remote_s$  controlling for location, is 1 if the household resides in a village far from the highway, or a slum in the outskirts of town. These locations provide limited outside options for households by virtue of their distance from markets and other core activities. We stipulate that the absence of alternatives should influence how clientelist networks function. Households' interaction with their broker would also be impacted by the structure of the community they reside in.  $Structure_s$  controls for this by taking the value of 1 if the household resides in a landlord-dominated village or an un-registered slum. Lastly,  $Remote_s * Structure_s$  is an interaction term that captures the effect of being in a structurally disadvantaged community in a remote location.<sup>28</sup>

Turning to household-level variables,  $W$  is a vector for household wealth. The model includes controls for the rich and poor and uses the middle class as the reference category. The rich and poor are the two extremes who should have very different bargaining power vis-à-vis the broker. Poor households are expected to be relatively more dependent on brokers as they have few resources of their own. Conversely, rich households should enjoy more options as their wealth should enable them to buy alternatives outside of the network (see for example Majid, 2022).<sup>29</sup>  $Client_{is}$  takes the value of 1 if household  $i$  in location  $s$  is part of a brokers' network. Lastly, we include an interaction term,  $Rural_s * Client_{is}$  which looks at the differential impact of being a rural client.<sup>30</sup>  $\mu_{is}$  is the error term, clustered by location.

From Figure 5 we can see that the results from Tables 5 and 6 hold when we control for slum/village- and household-level characteristics. Figure 5, panel a runs the fixed effects model. In Figure 5, panel b we run the full sample with a control for belonging to villages. The model finds that rural households are 53% more likely to credit brokers with public goods provision when

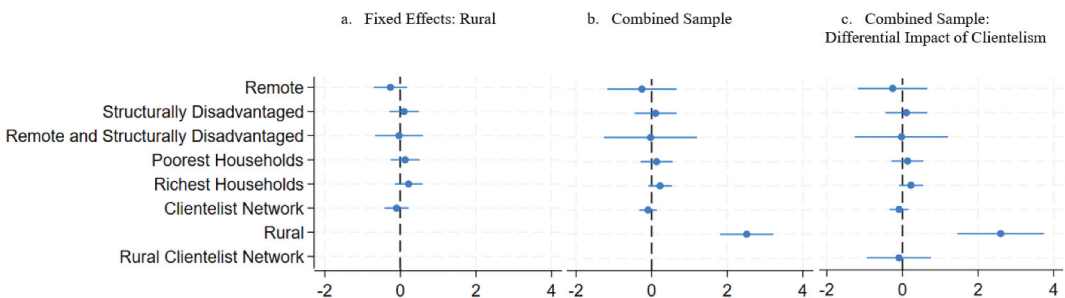


Figure 5. Broker credited with providing public goods.<sup>31</sup>

compared to slum residents. **Figures 5**, panel c runs the sample with an additional interaction term that captures the differential impact of being in a rural clientelist network. The interaction term is significant, highlighting that rural clients are indeed more likely to believe their broker provided them with public goods. The remaining results are unchanged. Thus, the results further support the finding that rural brokers are able to include public provision in their bundle, whereas urban brokers are not.

### **Assistance for obtaining justice**

Despite urban brokers not being able to claim credit for public goods provision, most urban clients felt the broker was catering to their needs. This is achieved by brokers providing personalised services. To explore this further, we focus on one such function: assistance with obtaining justice in the context of disputes, either by providing mediation or accompanying households to the police (to more effectively make their case and/or reduce the chances of harassment).<sup>32</sup>

**Table 7** looks at who amongst the different types of villages and slums are likely to avail such services from their brokers. As a starting point, we note that about half of slum dwellers use brokers for obtaining justice. This is the type of time-consuming service that politicians will rarely be able to provide, and therefore justify residents turning to brokers who, because of their close interaction with households, understand their idiosyncratic needs and how to assist. Even so, rural households remain significantly more likely (at the 1% level) to approach the broker for assistance. This, combined with the findings above, highlight how much more rural households rely on clientelist networks in relation to urban residents – likely due to a lack of alternatives when compared to slum dwellers.

Turning to village and slum level variations, two findings are again worth highlighting. The first is households in remote villages being more likely to use brokers for assistance with obtaining justice (significant at the 5% level). Splitting the data shows that this is driven by households residing in isolated landlord-dominated being significantly more likely (at the 1% level) to use these services (**Table A3**). Further investigation through interviews revealed that brokers in these villages demanded that clients approach them, arguably to limit households' options outside of brokers. Again, this highlights the extent of the brokers' control in landlord-dominated villages, which doesn't hold in accessible landlord-dominated villages.

Amongst slums, however, we again find no variation in households seeking assistance for obtaining justice across different locations and settlement structures. This is likely due to the combination of brokers having no exploitative powers and the proximity of the formal judicial system in the city.

These results hold when we include additional controls. We run equation 1 with  $Y_{is}$  taking the value of 1 if household  $i$  in location  $s$  approaches the broker for assistance for obtaining justice. From **Figure 6** we find that rural households are 23% more likely than urban households to

**Table 7.** Seek the brokers' assistance in obtaining justice.<sup>33</sup>

	Rural %	Urban %
Household credited broker	75	47
Member of a clientelist network credited broker	77	56
<i>Economic Variables</i>		
Poor households	78	43
Rich households	72	49
Middle wealth households	75	50
<i>Location Variables</i>		
Accessible settlement	71	48
Remote settlement	79	46
Structurally desirable settlement	73	46
Structurally undesirable settlement	77	49
Observations	367	667

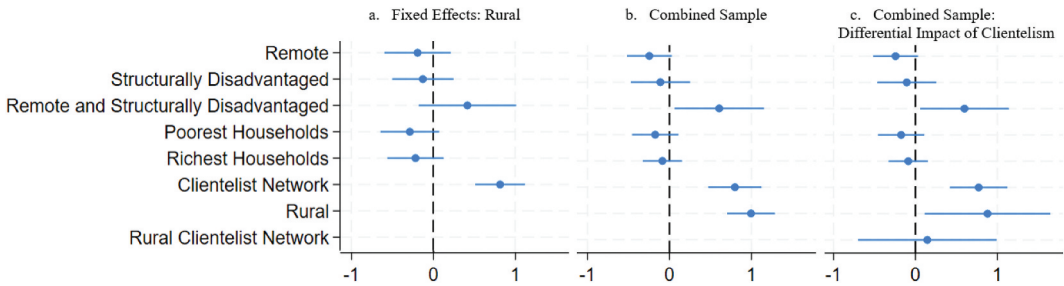


Figure 6. Would you seek the broker's help for obtaining justice?

approach the broker to obtain justice rather than go to the formal judicial system directly. Distance, combined with the fear of harassment from the police, we conjecture acts as an effective barrier for these households. Furthermore, those belonging to a remote and structurally disadvantaged settlement are more likely to seek the brokers' assistance with justice.<sup>34</sup> However, from the findings from Tables 7 and A3 we can see these results are being driven by villages rather than slums.

Lastly, we find that brokers target these services to clients, both in villages and in slums. This is not surprising as these are personalised and time-consuming goods that brokers offer their followers. Including the interaction term in Figure 6(c), for rural clients finds that while rural clients are 42% more likely (significant at the 1% level) than rural non-clients to approach brokers for assistance for obtaining justice, in slums clients are 19% more likely than non-clients to do the same.

## Discussion

Taken together, our results highlight how clientelist networks operate differently in villages and slums with respect to their pervasiveness as well as their degrees of exploitation (nature) and the services controlled by brokers (function). Two findings stand out. First, whereas almost all residents rely on clientelist networks in villages, it is only about half of residents in slums. This is important, but also unsurprising: the village economy tends to be more self-sustained and isolated from both external markets and the state, thereby leaving the rural poor with fewer outside options than those in cities. This, in turn, has a knock-on effect on the function of these networks, as politicians allow brokers to claim credit for providing public goods in exchange for brokers guaranteeing votes from clients. This is a win-win as rural brokers strengthen their bargaining power vis-à-vis clients by adding provision of public goods to their exchange bundle, and politicians don't need to canvas or campaign. In the more fluid and less wide-spread clientelist networks in slums, brokers have weaker social ties. This, in turn, make them less attractive partners for vote-seeking politicians who instead decide to provide targeted public goods directly to residents – a highly visible item that is valuable political currency. This further waters-down urban brokers' networks by restricting their function to the provision of personalised services.

Secondly, when it comes to the nature of clientelist networks we find variation among rural networks based on their location and settlement structure, but not in urban slums. As also found in previous literature, clientelist networks in remote landlord-dominated villages are particularly exploitative, as the broker can use the lack of exit options to control his clients. In connected landlord-dominated villages and egalitarian ones, the presence of alternatives mean that brokers have significantly less exploitative powers. These differences are unique to the rural context, however. Contrary to our expectations, we find no such variation among different slum settlements depending on their geography or settlement structure. It seems that exit options for clients in *all* slums prevent exploitative clientelist networks – even in illegal settlements – comparable to those found in some rural contexts.



Combined, our findings underscore the importance of exit options. Slum residents rely less on clientelist networks due to the abundance of alternatives found both in the economic and political sphere. Conversely, rural households, even when connected, rely on brokers for access to vital services. Thus, while connectivity has significantly reduced rural brokers' exploitative powers, it has not reduced the pervasiveness of clientelist network as the rural economy remains distant from economic and political centres when compared to urban slums.

## Conclusion

By comparing urban and rural clientelist networks, the paper highlights how geography and settlement structure can influence the pervasiveness, nature and function of clientelist networks. Our analysis suggests that variations in clientelist networks are ultimately driven by the differences in access to alternative options. Exit options come in three 'layers'. The first comes from the multiplicity of brokers – found in egalitarian villages and in all our urban slums. The second layer comes from access to external markets – found in connected villages and, again, all slums. Yet another layer comes from proximity to the state, its actors and its institutions – found in all slums. Residents in slums engage directly with the state and turn to brokers only where needed, whereas residents in villages interact with state institutions and its actors through the broker. A direct result of these differences is that rural brokers enjoy the additional benefit of being able to include state resources in their exchange bundle.

Looking at variation amongst villages and slums, the different roles of geography and settlement structures in rural and urban contexts was surprising and underscores the need for data-driven, in-depth analyses undertaking direct comparisons to uncover the specific mechanics of the broker-client exchange. Future research should explore further variations through direct comparisons. And yet, the policy prescription from our results is nevertheless clear: greater exit options for the poor improve their bargaining power in clientelist relationships and result in networks driven not by fear and control but the capacity to improve their wellbeing in countries where the state fails to deliver.

## Notes

1. The few exceptions are Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner (2020) and Cinar (2016).
2. Socially embedded brokers can also impose social sanctions on non-complying clients (Cruz, 2019; Ravanilla et al., 2022).
3. All brokers in our sample are men which is why we use the pronoun he/him/his.
4. For details of recent publication from this project see Majid and Shami (2024) and Shami (2024).
5. For details of recent publication from this project see Shami (2022, 2019)
6. Within Pakistan clientelist networks vary across provinces. This is revealed when we juxtapose our work against for example Naqvi (2018) who looks at Islamabad and Gazdar and Mallah (2011) who focus on Karachi. A direct comparison across provinces is another area future research can explore.
7. Report from Katchi-Abadis' Directorate.
8. Rashid Mahmood, Katchi-Abadis Directorate, Personal interview, Lahore 10 April 2015.
9. The costs of clientelism, especially of monitoring, are found to increase in population size. See for example Ravanilla et al. (2022) and Weitz-Shapiro (2012) for a discussion.
10. Key respondent interviews: 24 rural, 36 urban – unstructured interviews, inquiring about the local political economy and development.
11. The Director and three secretaries within the ministry.
12. Along with physical mapping we also conducted social mapping of settlements. Social upper classes were Bhattis, Kharrals, Jutts and Rajputs and lower classes were Muslim Shiekhhs, Ansari, Massaih and Kombo.
13. It is worth noting, that average household size in both slums and villages was 8 people. Hence, the average monthly spending amounts to less than a dollar a day per person in both contexts with rural households being significantly lower.
14. A client household is one that names the local broker as their leader, and votes collectively under the direction of the broker, and/or approaches him regularly for assistance.
15. Household ID 3003, remote, landlord-dominated village 1.
16. Household ID 8032, remote, landlord-dominated village 2.

17. Household ID 2019, connected, landlord-dominated village 1.
18. Household ID 210,064, remote, unregistered slum 3.
19. Household ID 206,026, accessible, registered slum 2.
20. Households named a specific politician who would use his discretionary funds for provisioning. This provision is not through the bureaucracy, nor does it use funds ear-marked for public goods. Officials in the Katchi-Abadi Directorate also confirmed this.
21. The higher provision in remote egalitarian villages compared to accessible egalitarian ones seems surprising given these networks' low exploitative powers. We found that in accessible egalitarian villages brokers were starting to provide underground drain while all other villages had overground paved-drains (the norm in Pakistani villages). Underground drains are more expensive and therefore fewer households received public goods. Brokers compensated unprovided households by offering other services.
22. Table restricted to sample of households that received public goods. Differences insignificant unless stated otherwise. Significance is considered at the 5% level.
23. We were told this by multiple key respondents in different slums.
24. Rashid Mahmood, Katchi-Abadis Directorate, Personal interview, Lahore 10 April 2015.
25. We calculate household wealth status using information on household assets following the methodology laid out in Filmer and Pritchett (2001). This creates a wealth index generating three equal groups - rich, middle-income and poor.
26. Table restricted to sample of households that received public goods. Differences insignificant unless stated otherwise. Significance is considered at the 5% level.
27. Broker interview, Accessible landlord-dominated village.
28. For full effect of the interaction terms is the three terms added together (Remote +Structure +Remote\*Structure). Moreover, an extra test needs to be conducted to test for significance.
29. She finds that rich households can improve their welfare by buying unprovided goods and services from the private market.
30. It is worth mentioning that the inclusion of the interaction term means that *Client<sub>is</sub>* now compares clients to non-clients in slums (i.e. it assumes *Rural<sub>s</sub>* is 0).
31. Table restricted to sample of households that received public goods.
32. Thus, the broker assists client with using the formal justice system.
33. Differences insignificant unless stated otherwise. Significance considered at the 5% level.
34. The full effect of interaction term is only significant at the 10% level.

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## Appendix:

Table A1. Descriptive statistics.

	Rural	Landlord-dominated villages	Equalitarian Villages	Remote villages	Accessible villages	Urban	Registered slums	Un-Registered Slums	Accessible Slums	Remote Slums
<i>Economic Variables</i>										
Household Average monthly spending (in \$)	133	143	126	133	132	200	205	194	206	190
Household's primary employment is as a day labourer	20	19	20	22	17	11	9	14	7	18
Household's primary employment is with the state	4	5	3	3	4	3	8	8	7	9
<i>Social variables</i>										
Lowest social class	23	21	25	21	25	12	5	19	15	8
Upper social class	45	51	40	45	44	31	33	30	29	34
<i>Clientelism Variables</i>										
Household is part of a clientelist network	88	88	88	90	86	56	57	56	55	57
<i>Primary reason for joining broker's network/Basis of broker's influence</i>										
Household feels the broker caters for their needs	12	9	16	13	11	77	83	72	81	71
Household needs access to the broker's economic resources	85	89	82	87	84	8	6	10	6	12
Observations	367	167	200	183	184	667	341	326	399	268

All figures are percentages unless states otherwise.

**Table A2.** Broker credited with providing public goods<sup>1</sup>.

	Accessible Landlord-dominated villages	Remote Landlord-dominated villages	Accessible Egalitarian villages	Remote Egalitarian villages	Accessible registered slums	Accessible un-registered slums	Remote registered slums	Remote un-registered slums
Household credited broker	76	82	96	87	34	41	28	32
<i>Economic Variables</i> <sup>2</sup>		80	93	93	28	44	25	42
Poor households	56							
Rich households	76	88	100	90	39	41	29	31
Middle wealth households	91	80	94	80	32	38	30	23
Observations	45	28	44	70	223	176	116	126

<sup>1</sup>Table restricted to sample of households that received public goods.

<sup>2</sup>Apart from Accessible Landlord-Dominated villages, all differences between the different wealth groups are statistically insignificant. Please see main text for an explanation for this difference.

**Table A3.** Seek the brokers' assistance in obtaining justice.

	Accessible Landlord-dominated villages	Remote Landlord-dominated villages	Accessible Egalitarian villages	Remote Egalitarian villages	Accessible registered slums	Accessible un-registered slums	Remote registered slums	Remote un-registered slums
Household credited broker	67	88	74	72	48	49	42	49
Member of a clientelist household credited broker	73	90	77	70	54	60	53	53
<i>Economic Variables</i> <sup>3</sup>		92	73	69	47	37	42	46
Poor households								
Rich households	60	94	73	73	49	52	42	47
Middle wealth households	74	78	75	74	47	56	41	54
Observations	85	82	99	101	223	176	118	150

<sup>3</sup>All differences between the different wealth groups are statistically insignificant.