**Challenges in democratization: A comparative study of democratic and traditional local leaders in rural Namibia**

Abstract: We experimentally analyze two main attributes of local political leaders, namely their procedural fairness preferences and their engagement in preferential treatment of relatives or friends regardless of merit. Our main focus is on testing theoretical considerations that democratically elected leaders should outperform appointed traditional village chiefs in those two domains. In addition, we deployed an incentivized social preference task and standardized surveys on local governance perceptions. Our sample consists of 64 leaders and 384 villagers in rural Namibia, where democratically elected leaders and traditional chiefs co-exist within the same village. Our results contradict theoretical priors as traditional chiefs are slightly more likely to implement fair, democratic procedures and that they are also less likely to act nepotistic. Moreover, we find support that differential selection into office is not driving these results, as elected leaders and chiefs share similar fundamental social preferences and personality traits. Rather, we find a substantial discrepancy between planned and de-facto democratic institutions at the local level in Namibia jointly with perceptions of chiefs being legitimate, popular among its villagers and upward accountable.