

Authority Without Compliance: Evidence from a Field Conjoint Experiment in Rural China *

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Abstract

Citizens in authoritarian states answer to two kinds of local authority: formal officeholders backed by the state, and informal leaders whose standing comes from kinship and community ties. This paper examines how people weigh these competing sources, distinguishing between recognition (whom individuals turn to as authority figures) and compliance (whether they accept those figures' decisions when outcomes are costly). We field an in-person conjoint experiment in rural China across three domains of village affairs. Villagers consistently recognize formal officeholders as authority figures, especially those lacking access to dominant kinship networks and those in villages with longer exposure to party-state penetration. But recognition does not translate into compliance: under unfavorable outcomes, deference is driven instead by informal lineage ties and associational embeddedness. Those who prefer formal leaders are more demanding toward the state rather than more deferential, indicating that support for formal authority is instrumental.

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The consolidation of the modern state is understood as the progressive displacement of informal, personalistic authority by formal, rule-based institutions (Weber, 1978; North, 1990; Fukuyama, 2011). Yet in much of the developing world, this trajectory remains incomplete. Citizens face two competing sources of authority: formal officeholders backed by the coercive and distributive power of the state, and informal leaders whose standing derives from social embeddedness and community ties (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Baldwin and Holzinger, 2019).

This tension is especially acute in authoritarian settings. Authoritarian states deploy formidable coercive capacity and penetrate local society through hierarchical state or party organizations. Formal institutions thus acquire an unusually powerful presence in everyday life (Svolik, 2012; Gandhi, 2008). Yet precisely because formal institutions under authoritarian rule lack the consensual legitimacy required for voluntary compliance, informal institutions rooted in lineage and community serve as a meaningful substitute for formal authority in local governance (Tsai, 2007; Xu and Yao, 2015).

How citizens in authoritarian states evaluate, respond to, and weigh these competing sources of authority remains unclear. Existing work, which relies predominantly on observational studies, cannot cleanly separate them. This paper addresses the gap with an experimental design that identifies the independent effects of formal and informal origins of authority under authoritarian rule.

In doing so, we build on a literature that treats the recognition of authority as analytically distinct from compliance with it: citizens may regard an authority as rightful without deferring to its costly decisions, and may defer without granting it normative standing (Hurd, 1999; Levi, Sacks and Tyler, 2009; Gibson, Caldeira and Spence, 2005). We carry this distinction into our analysis, separating *recognition*, whom citizens choose as authority figures in ordinary settings, from *compliance*, whether citizens accept decisions from those figures when outcomes go against them. We identify a divergence in which recognition of formal authority does not necessarily generate compliance when compliance is costly. Such a divergence indicates that the authority in question is conditional on the expectation of favorable outcomes rather than normatively grounded.

Our empirical analysis draws on an in-person conjoint survey experiment conducted with

villagers in three provinces of rural China, a setting where disputes are common and enforcement is often decentralized. We randomly varied attributes of candidate profiles that capture formal institutional status (e.g., village party secretary and the head of the Villagers' Committee), informal embeddedness (e.g., kinship ties and social networks), demographic and capacity-based characteristics. Respondents completed repeated forced-choice tasks evaluating pairs of hypothetical candidates across three scenarios that reflect distinct domains of village authority: (1) adjudication of private economic disputes, (2) economic cooperation in investment partnerships, and (3) government intermediation over land expropriation. We estimate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) with village fixed effects to examine individual-level preferences for political authority.

We first examine recognition: whom villagers choose as authority figures. Across all three scenarios, villagers strongly prefer candidates holding formal institutional positions, particularly village secretaries. Informal attributes, including shared surname, kinship ties, and household social capital, have only limited effects on recognition. We then examine two mechanisms through which formal authority operates. The preference for formal officeholders is strongest among villagers from non-major lineages, who lack access to dominant kinship networks, consistent with formal authority serving as a substitute when informal channels of protection are unavailable. The preference is also more pronounced where party-state penetration is greater: villagers recognize formal authority more in places with longer exposure to concurrent leadership (一肩挑, *yijiantiao*, literally "carried on one shoulder"), a 2019 policy that strengthened the village party secretary's role in village governance.

We next analyze whether this preference for formal authority extends to compliance. We define compliance as the willingness to accept authoritative decisions even when they conflict with one's own interests. When confronted with an unfavorable mediation outcome, respondents are no more willing to accept the decision of a formal officeholder than that of anyone else. Compliance is instead driven by lineage ties and embeddedness in informal village associations. We conduct several robustness checks of our key findings, including using alternative outcome measures, incorporating respondent-level covariates, excluding low-quality questionnaires, controlling the false discovery rate, calculating marginal means, and reweighting the

sample to match the 2020 Census benchmarks.

Beyond documenting the recognition-compliance gap, we show evidence that this divergence reflects instrumental motivation. Respondents who recognize village secretaries as authority figures in the conjoint experiment are more demanding over land compensation. Villagers select formal officeholders because they expect them to deliver favorable outcomes, not because they accept formal authority as binding. When this expectation is unmet, compliance collapses.

While the conjoint design provides internal validity for the results, we also discuss two scope conditions that bear on the external validity of our findings. First, our results are most directly applicable to settings with strong state capacity and active institutional penetration into rural society, conditions exemplified by rural China after the 2019 nationwide adoption of concurrent village leadership, a directive mandating that the village party secretary and the head of the Villagers' Committee be held by the same individual which consolidated party control over grassroots governance (Zhao, 2025). Whether the recognition-compliance divergence predates this change is not directly testable with our experiment, but a 2008 rural household survey (Wang et al., 2011) shows a similar divergence before 2019: village cadres were widely recognized as the dominant authority yet rarely approached for redress after costly expropriation outcomes. The second concerns the level of economic development. Our multistage in-person sampling across three provinces captures meaningful variation in economic development, but the sample skews toward provinces with above-median income. Using an alternative nine-province survey conducted during the same period as our experiment (Zuo et al., 2024), we show that formal village authority is widely recognized beyond our field sites.

Contribution

This study contributes to a broad literature in comparative politics on the coexistence of formal and informal authority in local governance (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Ostrom, 1990; Scott, 1977; Baldwin, 2015; Henn, 2023; Whiting, 2017). Research on China has been central to this debate, with much of it emphasizing the role of informal institutions, particularly lineage

groups and solidary ties, in sustaining governance where formal institutions are weak (Tsai, 2007; Xu and Yao, 2015; Mattingly, 2016). We introduce a distinction between recognition and compliance that existing work has largely conflated. Prior scholarship tends to infer legitimacy from expressed preferences, but recognition is not compliance. Villagers who recognize formal officeholders are no more willing to accept unfavorable decisions from them. This pattern speaks directly to debates over authoritarian resilience. Our study shows that grassroots support is instrumental rather than normative, the state’s authority is contingent on continued delivery, and the deference it enjoys in ordinary times offers a poor guide to compliance under strain.

Our study also speaks to the literature on political trust in authoritarian regimes (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2008; Tang, 2016; Nicholson and Huang, 2023; Mattingly, 2021; Hu and Wright, 2023; Li, 2025). Scholars have shown that trust tracks performance evaluations and distributional expectations. Most of this evidence, however, comes from surveys that measure attitudes without information on cost to the respondent. Whether trust persists when authority imposes direct personal costs is a different question. Using a compliance measure embedded in our conjoint design, we show that it does not. Formal status generates no compliance under adverse outcomes, and respondents who most prefer village secretaries are not the most deferential toward state decisions but the most demanding about land compensation. This suggests that the regime’s local authority is more conditional than aggregate trust surveys indicate: it depends on the expectation of favorable outcomes, not on internalized acceptance of the right to rule.

Research Design and Context

We conducted an in-person survey experiment to analyze the sources of authority in rural areas of three Chinese provincial-level units: Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Anhui. Using 2024 GDP per capita figures, Shanghai is the most economically developed in China with 217 thousand RMB (\approx \$31,000 USD)¹. Zhejiang is a relatively affluent coastal province with 136 thousand RMB (\approx \$19,400 USD), while Anhui is comparatively less developed with 83 thousand RMB (\approx \$11,800 USD) which approximates the national median. Table A.1 details the geographic

¹USD figures are calculated at an exchange rate of approximately 7 RMB per USD.

distribution of our 310 respondents across 17 sampled villages. Within each site, respondents were recruited directly by the research team. This multistage random sampling design yields a sample representative of rural contexts with varying levels of economic and social development. The research design was pre-registered and approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the authors' institutions.

One important feature of our study is that the survey experiment was conducted in the field rather than online. As a result, our sample includes rural villagers, especially older residents, who rarely use the internet and are underrepresented in online samples. The in-person design also allows us to merge respondent-level experimental data with village-level information collected during fieldwork, including clan composition, local leadership structures, the timing of concurrent leadership adoption, and informal social networks. This linkage enables us to examine heterogeneous treatment effects across villages. Capturing this variation is central to our research question, as the relative weight of formal and informal authority is likely to differ across institutional contexts. Furthermore, being physically present in the field also facilitated both formal and informal interviews with village cadres and residents, which provide deeper qualitative insight into the behavioral logic and social motivations behind the experimental results.

Table A.2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of our sample of 310 individuals across the three provinces. Several patterns emerge from these descriptive statistics. First, the sample is relatively balanced in terms of gender, with women comprising 53.6% of respondents. The age distribution is also well-dispersed: 34.9% of respondents are aged 39 or younger, while nearly a quarter (24.8%) are aged 60 or older.

Educational attainment is relatively high: 31.1% of respondents hold a college degree, double the national average of 15% in the most recent Census ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021](#)). Two factors account for this. First, the surveyed provinces lie in the Yangtze River Delta, a region with high educational attainment both historically and today. According to the most recent Census, 33.8% of Shanghai's population is college-educated. Second, the sample includes only respondents who could understand the questions, as our enumerators could not convey the tasks clearly to illiterate respondents.

Regarding political status, 28.2% of respondents are members of the Communist Party of China (CPC), while the majority (62.1%) identify as Mass, a term in China that often refers to ordinary citizens with no party affiliation. Finally, while the overall household income distribution is relatively balanced across five levels, substantial regional heterogeneity exists. Zhejiang exhibits a more affluent profile, with 37.8% of households earning over 100,000 RMB annually, while Anhui shows a higher concentration of lower-income households, with over 40% earning less than 50,000 RMB per year.

Research Procedure

Figure 1 shows our research procedure. We first use a conjoint design to analyze whom villagers recognize as authority figures across three scenarios. We then examine compliance: whether the authority that villagers recognize commands deference when outcomes go against them. We do so through two follow-up questions: one in the dispute mediation scenario asking whether respondents would accept an unfavorable decision, and one attitudinal question about land compensation probing whether support for formal leaders is instrumental or normative.

In our conjoint design, respondents completed three rounds of repeated forced-choice tasks in which they were presented with two randomly generated profiles of hypothetical villagers who could assume leadership or decision-making roles in the community.² In each task, respondents evaluated both profiles in the given context by assigning a support score on a scale of 1 to 10 and then indicating which of the two candidates they would prefer. The presentation order of attributes was randomized to mitigate primacy or recency bias.

We use three scenarios to capture distinct domains of village authority. The first situates respondents in a private economic dispute and asks them to choose a mediator (dispute mediation). The second concerns the willingness to financially support a villager seeking to initiate an investment project (investment partnership). The third focuses on government intermediation over land expropriation, where respondents choose an individual to mediate between villagers and the state (government intermediation).

The second part of our design focuses on compliance. In the dispute mediation scenario

²Based on our pilot study, we reduced the number of rounds from five to three because respondents had difficulty maintaining adequate attention over five rounds.

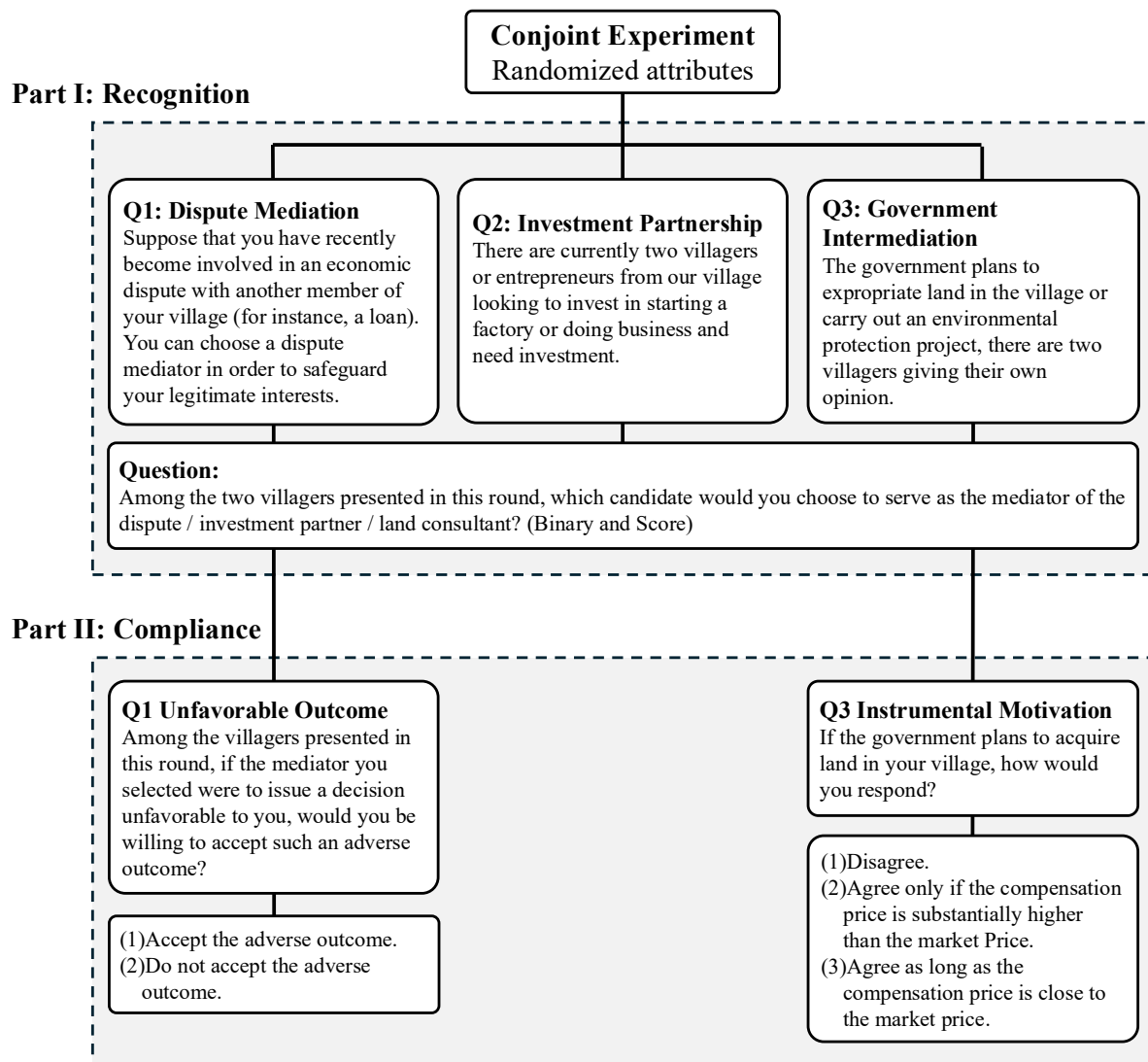


Figure 1: Research Design

(Q1), after respondents selected their preferred mediator, we posed a follow-up question asking whether they would accept an unfavorable decision from that mediator. This measures willingness to defer to authority when outcomes impose personal costs. In the government intermediation scenario (Q3), we asked respondents about their attitudes toward land compensation in the event of expropriation, which allows us to test whether support for formal leaders is instrumental (expecting them to fight for higher compensation) or normative (accepting the decisions).

Table 1 shows the attributes and their levels used in the conjoint design. The first attribute captures *formal authority*. We focus on formal village positions, including the head of the Villagers' Committee (hereafter, village head) and the village party secretary (hereafter, village secretary), using ordinary villagers as the reference group. The village secretary leads the CPC branch at the village level, while the village head chairs the popularly elected Villagers' Committee. Historically, the two positions were held by different individuals, often generating ambiguity and tension over the locus of authority within the village. This dual-leadership structure reflects an institutional contradiction: while the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees grants ultimate decision-making authority to the villagers' assembly, Party rules governing grassroots organizations emphasize the Party branch's leadership over all major decisions. Since 2019, the CPC has sought to resolve this tension by promoting a concurrent leadership policy (Martinez-Bravo et al., 2022). The 2019 Organization Regulations emphasize the "comprehensive leadership" of Party branches over village affairs and stipulate that village secretaries should, "through legal procedures," concurrently serve as village heads (Wang and Mou, 2021; Zhao, 2025). Following the full implementation of this policy, village secretaries are now generally expected to hold both positions simultaneously (Zhao, 2025). We distinguish between the two roles in our empirical design, as villagers may perceive the authority associated with each position differently.

The second set of attributes captures *informal origins of authority* through kinship ties and household-level social networks. Shared surname serves as a proxy for lineage-based embeddedness. In rural China, surnames mark membership in kinship groupings that structure trust, reciprocity, obligation, and reputational standing (Freedman, 1966; Fei, 1992). A candidate

Table 1: Attributes and levels used in the conjoint experiment

Attribute	Level
Village Position	Village head Village secretary Ordinary villager
Surname	The same as yours Different from yours
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank Holds a local government position Serves on a villagers' association Has a large social media following
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities Has strong clan influence in the village Can obtain governmental subsidies
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument Sides with whoever has more supporters Sides with personal acquaintances Remains neutral
Business Experience	Yes No
Gender	Female Male
Age	68 60 52 44 36

who shares the respondent's surname may be perceived as more trustworthy or more likely to defend the respondent's interests. We also include household social capital attributes that capture access to informal influence through family connections to a local bank, the local government, or a villagers' association.³ These ties may provide brokerage capacity, privileged information, and access to resources even when the candidate does not personally hold office. We use a geographically unrestricted social media presence as the base group to contrast with these localized, village-bounded forms of real-world social capital.

Third, we include attributes that capture *competence-based sources of authority*, specifically the capacity to mobilize resources. This dimension distinguishes a candidate's de facto competence from their formal or informal roles in the village. The job-creation attribute signals entrepreneurial initiative and developmental capacity. The subsidy attribute captures bureaucratic know-how and access to distributive channels. Although influence within surname groups is rooted in informal social structure, in this context it also captures a candidate's ability to mobilize other villagers and coordinate collective action.

We also include dispute resolution style and business experience as attributes. These attributes function as contextual cues that respondents may use in evaluating candidates within specific scenarios. Dispute resolution style is especially relevant in the mediation scenario, where it captures whether a candidate is perceived as impartial, majoritarian, relationally biased, or neutral. Business experience is especially relevant in the investment scenario, where it may signal credibility and managerial ability.

Finally, we include demographic attributes (gender and age) to capture socially coded expectations of authority in the rural Chinese context, where norms of seniority and gender continue to shape perceptions of who appears appropriate in positions of local influence.

The final section of the survey recorded the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the respondents, including individual and spouse surnames, year of birth, gender, educational attainment, political affiliation, and annual household income. To supplement individual-level data, we conducted structured interviews with village secretaries to gather administrative in-

³Villagers' associations refer to voluntary, self-organized community groups, such as elderly welfare associations and wedding and funeral mutual-aid societies, which coordinate collective activities and provide informal social support within the village.

formation across all sampled locations. These data cover the surnames and relative population shares of the two largest clans in each village, village-level per capita income, and the implementation and timing of the concurrent leadership policy. Integrating individual conjoint responses with village-level social and institutional data enables analysis of how local power structures and governance arrangements shape preferences regarding authority.

We follow our pre-registered analysis plan (available in Appendix B) and estimate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs), the standard estimand in conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). AMCEs capture the average causal effect of changing one attribute level, holding the joint distribution of all other attributes fixed, on respondents' probability of choosing a candidate or their evaluation of that candidate. We estimate the AMCEs using the following linear model:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \sum_k \beta_k X_{ijk} + u_v + \varepsilon_{ij}, \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ij} denotes whether respondent i chooses candidate j (or respondent i 's evaluation score for candidate j), X_{ijk} represents the value of the k^{th} attribute of candidate j , and u_v represents village fixed effects, which account for unobserved village-level heterogeneity. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level to account for within-respondent correlation induced by repeated choice tasks. Given the random assignment of attribute levels, each coefficient β_k can be interpreted as the AMCE of the corresponding attribute level.

Recognition of Authority

Figure 2 presents the AMCEs from the binary choice task across dispute mediation, investment partnership, and government intermediation. Across all three scenarios, formal positions consistently shape respondents' recognition of authority figures. Relative to ordinary villagers, candidates holding the position of village secretary are on average 10.8–14.9 percentage points more likely to be selected. The salient effect of the village secretary across all domains likely reflects, in part, the consolidation of authority under the concurrent leadership policy, which elevated the party secretary to the most powerful figure in village governance.

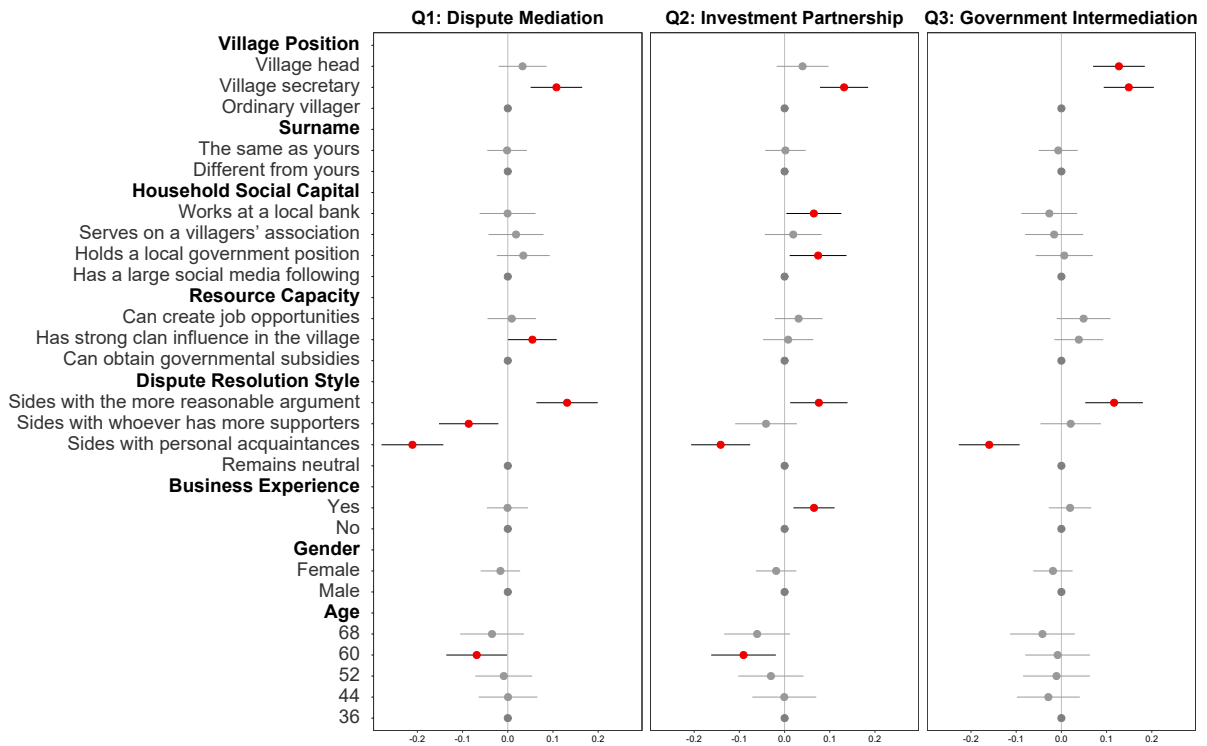


Figure 2: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Recognition Probability by Scenario

Note: Each point represents the AMCE of a given attribute level. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level. The full regression table is reported in Section E.

By contrast, the village head yields a statistically significant advantage only in intermediation over land expropriation. Unlike the party secretary, who is appointed through intra-party processes, the village head is popularly elected by villagers according to the law. In disputes with the state, particularly over land expropriation where villagers' material interests are directly at stake, respondents may perceive the elected village head as a more credible advocate because this bottom-up mandate aligns the head's accountability with the villagers' own interests.

Informal attributes, however, show less consistent effects on respondents' recognition of authority figures. Clan influence is only significant in dispute mediation, and the effects of having a household member who works at a local bank or holds a local government position are salient only in the scenarios of investment partnership. Moreover, the clan influence and bank employment effects do not survive the Benjamini-Hochberg False Discovery Rate (FDR) correction (Table A.7).

Dispute resolution style also matters for recognition. Respondents reward impartial candidates and penalize those who display favoritism. Candidates who side with the more reasonable argument are more likely to be selected, while candidates who side with personal acquaintances suffer a significant reduction in recognition probability.

Demographic attributes such as gender and age do not yield significant effects on candidate recognition across the three tasks, with one exception: candidates aged 60 are at a disadvantage in being selected as dispute mediators and investment partners. This may reflect the cultural salience of the statutory retirement age in China (60 for male workers), which signals a transition out of active economic and social life.

To test the robustness of our findings, we conducted three additional tests. First, we substituted the binary choice with the rating score as an alternative outcome variable (Figure A.2). Second, we incorporated respondent-level covariates into the model (Figure A.3). Third, we excluded questionnaires flagged by field enumerators for low data quality based on their observations of respondents' comprehension and engagement during the experiment (Figure A.4). The results across all three robustness checks remain highly consistent with our baseline findings.

We also applied the Benjamini-Hochberg (BH) procedure to control the False Discovery Rate (FDR) at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level across all three scenarios. Following the FDR penalty, 11 of the 17 initially significant AMCEs in Figure 2 retain their significance, and 3 fall within the 0.05–0.10 p-value range. Most importantly, none of our primary variables of interest (e.g., village position) are affected by this correction. Detailed FDR-adjusted p -values are provided in Table A.7. In addition, we calculated and plotted the marginal means (MMs) for each attribute level across the three scenarios (Figure A.5) (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2020). Consistent with the AMCE estimates, attribute levels with significantly positive (negative) effects generally exhibit marginal means significantly above (below) the 0.5 baseline.

Last, to examine whether our findings extend beyond the three-province sample, we reweight respondents to match 2020 National Population Census rural benchmarks on gender, age, and educational attainment, using three specifications: post-stratification on education, multi-way raking across all three variables, and a 12-block joint distribution on age and education. The weighted estimates are consistent with our primary findings on both recognition and compliance (Detailed Discussion is in Appendix D.2. Results are in Figures A.6, A.7, A.8, and A.9).

Institutional Substitution and State Penetration

We then examine why formal roles shape the recognition of authority documented above. We consider two mechanisms. The first is *institutional substitution*. In rural China, lineage groups organized along patrilineal descent are the primary informal institution (Freedman, 1966; Xu and Yao, 2015). However, access to these networks is unequal: villagers who belong to dominant surname groups benefit from embedded ties of trust and mutual aid, while those outside major lineages lack this informal resource (Tsai, 2007). The second is *state penetration*. Since 2019, the party-state has promoted the concurrent leadership policy, which advances top-down political imperatives by enhancing the CPC role in rural governance (Zhao, 2025; Wang and Mou, 2021).

Direct mediation analysis is infeasible here because sequential ignorability is violated (Imai et al., 2011). We instead provide suggestive evidence through an analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects, which, as Fu and Slough (2026) show, can be used to test mechanisms under

certain assumptions.

To examine the institutional substitution mechanism, we divide respondents according to whether their surname belongs to one of the two largest lineages in the village and estimate subgroup AMCEs. The left panel of Figure 3 shows that respondents from non-major lineages display a significantly stronger preference for candidates holding formal village positions, especially the village secretary.⁴ They also exhibit a stronger preference for mediators who side with the more reasonable argument, and appear less responsive to cues related to household social capital. Table A.21 reports the corresponding subgroup differences. The preference for formal authority is strongest among villagers who lack access to dominant kinship networks.

We examine the state penetration mechanism through variation in the timing of adoption of the concurrent leadership policy. We categorize the 17 sampled villages into two groups: (1) long-duration cases (concurrent leadership implemented in or before 2020, the median year) and (2) short-duration cases (implemented after 2020 or not yet adopted). The right panel of Figure 3 presents the results. Respondents in long-duration villages exhibit a larger preference for village cadres as mediators, though this difference is imprecisely estimated (p-value ≈ 0.14). Table A.21 reports the corresponding differences. Villagers in communities with longer exposure to the concurrent leadership policy place greater weight on formal authority in mediator recognition.

Compliance to Authority

While formal officeholders dominate respondents' choices of authority figures, does this preference translate into compliance? To gauge compliance, we exploit a follow-up question embedded in the dispute mediation scenario. After respondents selected their preferred mediator, they were presented with the following prompt:

Among the villagers presented in this round, if the mediator you selected were to issue a decision unfavorable to you, would you be willing to accept such an adverse outcome?

⁴The effect for village head is also significant at the 10% level.

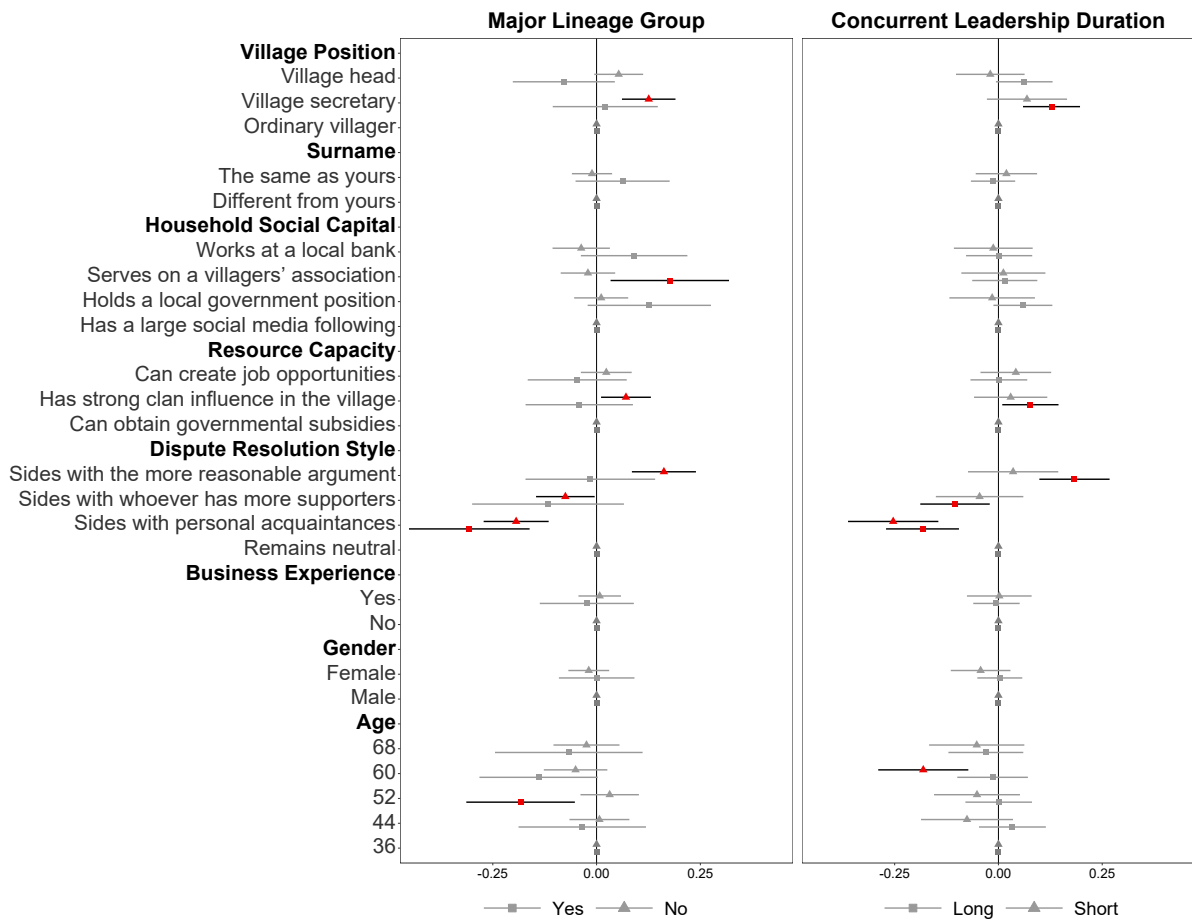


Figure 3: Heterogeneous effects on mediator recognition by lineage membership and concurrent leadership duration

Note: Each panel displays subgroup AMCEs for the dispute mediation recognition task. In the left panel, squares represent respondents from major lineages and triangles represent those from non-major lineages. In the right panel, squares represent villages with long concurrent leadership duration and triangles represent those with short duration. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level. The full regression table is reported in Section E.

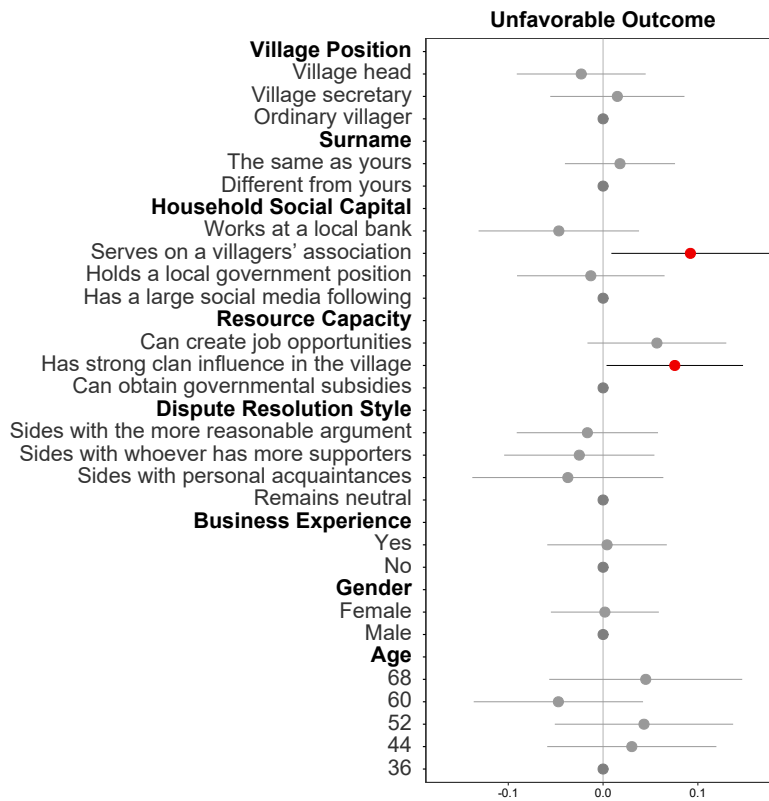


Figure 4: Effect of candidate attributes on compliance under unfavorable outcomes

Note: The figure shows AMCEs for compliance under unfavorable outcomes. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are significant at the 5% level. The full regression table is reported in Section E.

If formal authority generated genuine compliance, village cadres should command deference even under adverse conditions. If, instead, the preference for formal officeholders is driven by instrumental calculation, the advantage of formal authority should weaken once resolution outcomes become costly.

Figure 4 shows the AMCEs on compliance under the unfavorable outcome scenario. Formal roles, including village secretary and village head, have no statistically significant effect on respondents' willingness to accept an unfavorable result. Compliance is instead driven by attributes associated with informal social embeddedness. Respondents are more likely to accept unfavorable mediation outcomes when delivered by candidates who have household members serving in villagers' associations or who possess strong clan influence in the village. The former

reflects access to organized community networks through family connections, while the latter captures the capacity to mobilize resources through clan-based institutions within the village community.

The results show a divergence between recognition and compliance. Formal institutional status shapes whom respondents choose as mediators when no information on cost is revealed, but it does not command deference when decisions impose personal costs. Compliance flows through informal social embeddedness and clan-based capacity.

Explaining the Gap Between Recognition and Compliance

The compliance results raise a further question: if formal authority is so prominent in recognition yet absent in compliance, what explains the gap? We provide suggestive evidence by analyzing the correlation between respondents' conjoint-based preference for village secretaries to their expected material returns. If support for formal officeholders reflected genuine institutional legitimacy, respondents' preference for village secretaries should not be systematically associated with their compensation demands. If support is instrumental, by contrast, we may expect those who prefer village secretaries to be more demanding, because they select formal leaders precisely to fight for their interests.

In the government intermediation scenario (Q3), respondents were further asked:

“If the government plans to acquire land in your village, you would —

(1) Disagree;

(2) Agree only if the compensation price is substantially higher than the market price;

(3) Agree as long as the compensation price is close to the market price.”

For each respondent, we compute the *Village Secretary Share*, the proportion of candidates with the village secretary identity that the respondent selected across all conjoint tasks, as a proxy for revealed preference for the village secretary. We then estimate the relationship between this measure and attitudes toward land compensation using three specifications: a Linear Probability Model combining options (1) and (2) against option (3); a restricted LPM

excluding the nine respondents who chose option (1) to compare options (2) and (3) directly; and an Ordered Logit model exploiting the full three-category scale, coded so that higher values indicate more demanding attitudes. All three specifications include village fixed effects, with models estimated both with and without respondent-level characteristics.

Table 2: Conjoint Choice of Village Secretary and Land Compensation Demands

	Higher Land Compensation Demand					
	LPM (Opt. 1 & 2 vs. 3)		LPM (Drop Opt. 1)		Ordered Logit	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Village Secretary Share	0.284**	0.247**	0.302**	0.260**	1.970**	1.665**
	(0.121)	(0.098)	(0.123)	(0.107)	(0.977)	(1.063)
Respondent Chars.		Y		Y		Y
Village FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	303	295	295	287	303	295

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Village Secretary Share* refers to the proportion of candidates with the village secretary identity that the respondent selected across all conjoint tasks. Standard errors are clustered at the village level.

Table 2 reports the results. Across all specifications, the coefficient on *Village Secretary Share* is positive and statistically significant. The ordered logit results confirm the same direction. Respondents who more frequently select village secretaries in the conjoint are more demanding in state-led land acquisition, holding all individual-level covariates as equal. This finding indicates that support for formal leaders is likely to be instrumental rather than normatively internalized. A potential measurement concern is that respondent-level raw choice proportions may be noisy due to the finite number of conjoint tasks. To mitigate this concern, we estimate a hierarchical Bayesian logit model with respondent-level heterogeneity in attribute effects. We then use the posterior mean of each respondent's coefficient on the village-secretary attribute as a model-based measure of their latent preference for village secretaries (see Appendix C). The findings remain consistent.

This instrumental logic is corroborated by qualitative observations from our fieldwork. Alongside the structured interviews conducted to collect village-level data, informal conver-

sations with local cadres and residents consistently echoed this transactional view of authority. Several village cadres candidly acknowledged that villagers would heed their directives only if the cadres actively served villagers' economic interests. They further remarked that while authority could be fostered through the delivery of gains, any request for personal sacrifice met fierce resistance. As one village secretary put it, villagers would seldom "concede even a fraction of an inch" once their own interests are at stake. These ethnographic insights reinforce our quantitative results, illustrating how formal authority on the ground is maintained through practical brokerage and interest protection rather than unconditional deference.

Discussion

In sum, we show a divergence between the recognition of authority and compliance with formal and informal authority in an authoritarian regime. Formal authority in rural China is conditionally valued. Villagers turn to formal officeholders when they need protection or resources, especially when informal channels are unavailable or when the state has made formal office the most consequential position in village governance. This support is contingent on expected returns: we show that those who most prefer village secretaries are the most demanding toward the state. When formal authority fails to deliver, compliance collapses, and villagers fall back on the informal ties that structure village social life.

Two scope conditions qualify our findings. The first is temporal: our results reflect rural governance after the 2019 introduction of concurrent village leadership, which substantially raised the role of formal village authority. Whether the same recognition-compliance gap held in earlier periods is not directly testable with our experiment, but a 2008 rural household survey covering 119 villages across six provinces by [Wang et al. \(2011\)](#) offers parallel behavioral evidence. Formal authority was already highly visible in 2008: 50.7% of respondents reported that the village secretary had the final say in village management, and 75.7% identified village cadres as the most influential actors in negotiations over land expropriation, compared with only 5.7% who identified lineage elders (Table [A.23](#)). Recognition of formal officeholders did not directly translate into trust in these officials when villagers experienced adverse outcomes.

In land expropriation cases, only 6.6% of dissatisfied households approached village cadres to resolve the issue.⁵ Most either took no action or bypassed village authority altogether (Table A.25). These survey results also provide behavioral evidence supporting our experimental findings.

The second scope condition is about the level of development. Our three field sites (Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Anhui) span a wide range of economic development, from China's wealthiest municipality to a province near the national median. Nevertheless, the sample still skews toward provinces with above-median development. In addition to reweighting the sample with 2020 census benchmarks, we further address this concern using 2024 Rural Vitalization and Local Governance Survey (RVLGS) collected by Zuo et al. (2024), which covers 44 villages across nine provinces and was conducted during the same period as our conjoint experiment. The RVLGS offers a descriptive check on a broader population than our three-province sample, and the patterns are consistent with our experimental findings on recognition: 89.2% of respondents reported trusting village cadres, 66.0% ranked the village secretary and village head as the most prestigious local actors, and 34.8% reported contacting village cadres in the past year for urgent problems or suggestions. Further supporting evidence from both surveys is in Appendix F.

These checks reduce but do not eliminate concerns over external validity. In contexts where state capacity is weaker and formal institutions less present, the weight of informal authority will be greater, and the gap between recognition and compliance may take different forms. We therefore read our findings as most directly applicable to authoritarian governance under conditions of strong state presence, while the balance of formal and informal authority may vary across developmental and institutional contexts beyond our sample.

⁵Among 332 valid compensation-satisfaction responses, 73.5% involved dissatisfaction.

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Supporting Information for

Authority Without Compliance: Evidence from a Field Conjoint Experiment in Rural China

A Summary Statistics of Respondents

Table A.1: Respondent Distribution by Village

Province	County / Town	Village	Respondents
Zhejiang	Anji County	Village A	15
		Village B	15
	Deqing County	Village A	20
		Village B	40
Shanghai	Shuyuan Town	Village A	5
		Village B	10
		Village C	15
		Village D	15
		Village E	15
Anhui	Feixi County	Village A	20
		Village B	20
		Village C	20
		Village D	20
		Village E	20
		Village F	20
		Village G	20
		Village H	20
Total	3 Provinces	17 Villages	310

Table A.2: Survey Sample Demographics by Province

	Total	Zhejiang	Shanghai	Anhui
Gender				
Male	143 (46.4%)	36 (40.4%)	9 (15.0%)	98 (61.6%)
Female	165 (53.6%)	53 (59.6%)	51 (85.0%)	61 (38.4%)
<i>Observations</i>	308	89	60	159
Age Group				
≤ 39 years	107 (34.9%)	33 (36.7%)	18 (30.5%)	56 (35.4%)
40–59 years	124 (40.4%)	35 (38.9%)	27 (45.8%)	62 (39.2%)
≥ 60 years	76 (24.8%)	22 (24.4%)	14 (23.7%)	40 (25.3%)
<i>Observations</i>	307	90	59	158
Education				
Primary School (and below)	44 (14.2%)	14 (15.6%)	2 (3.3%)	28 (17.6%)
Junior High School	97 (31.4%)	20 (22.2%)	31 (51.7%)	46 (28.9%)
Senior High School	72 (23.3%)	22 (24.4%)	12 (20.0%)	38 (23.9%)
Bachelor	96 (31.1%)	34 (37.8%)	15 (25.0%)	47 (29.6%)
<i>Observations</i>	309	90	60	159
Political Status				
CPC Member	87 (28.2%)	25 (27.8%)	16 (26.7%)	46 (28.9%)
Mass	192 (62.1%)	56 (62.2%)	36 (60.0%)	100 (62.9%)
Others (CYL/Democratic)	30 (9.7%)	9 (10.0%)	8 (13.3%)	13 (8.2%)
<i>Observations</i>	309	90	60	159
Annual Household Income (RMB)				
< 30,000	50 (16.2%)	7 (7.8%)	10 (16.7%)	33 (20.9%)
30,000–50,000	61 (19.8%)	13 (14.4%)	12 (20.0%)	36 (22.8%)
50,000–70,000	62 (20.1%)	16 (17.8%)	10 (16.7%)	36 (22.8%)
70,000–100,000	60 (19.5%)	20 (22.2%)	13 (21.7%)	27 (17.1%)
> 100,000	75 (24.4%)	34 (37.8%)	15 (25.0%)	26 (16.5%)
<i>Observations</i>	308	90	60	158

Note: Cells report the count (n) with the corresponding percentage in parentheses. Observations (N) vary slightly across categories due to occasional missing responses.

B Experiment Design

The conjoint experiment consists of three sections. The first collects respondents’ surnames, which are later used as attribute levels (Clan). The second presents respondents with randomly generated hypothetical profiles and asks them to evaluate these profiles. The third section collects demographic information.

This study is pre-registered. To preserve anonymity during the review process, we have removed this information. We sketch the main parts here.

B.1 Attributes and Levels

B.1.1 Design and Measures

Respondents complete three rounds of profile comparisons.

Choice Task Respondents are asked to choose between two candidates for dispute arbitration. The attributes and levels are shown in Table 1.

- Binary choice outcome
- Rating outcomes (1–10 scale)

The attributes and levels in Chinese are shown in Table A.5.

Demographic Information For each respondent, we asked the following demographic information: year of birth, surname, spouse’s surname, gender, education, political party, average family income.

B.1.2 Estimation

We estimate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) using:

$$Y = X\beta + \varepsilon,$$

where Y includes both binary choice and rating outcomes and X consists of attribute indicators. We can add village fixed effect to capture the blocking by design.

We also explore heterogeneous treatment effects using demographic covariates. All tests use a significance level of 0.05.

B.1.3 Power Analysis

Figure A.1 shows power analysis using `cjpowR`. Even with an effective sample size of 800, we can detect AMCEs of approximately 0.12 with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.1$. We plan to recruit

Table A.3: Vignette and Outcome Measures (English)

Scenario 1: Dispute Mediation	Scenario 2: Investment Partnership	Scenario 3: Government Intermediation
<p>Suppose that you have recently become involved in an economic dispute with another member of your village (for instance, a loan). You can choose a dispute mediator in order to safeguard your legitimate interests.</p>	<p>There are currently two villagers or entrepreneurs from our village looking to invest in starting a factory or doing business and need investment.</p>	<p>The government plans to expropriate land in the village or carry out an environmental protection project, there are two villagers giving their own opinion.</p>
<p>Question: Among the two villagers presented in this round, which candidate would you choose to serve as the mediator of the dispute / investment partner / land consultant? (Binary and Score)</p>		
<p>Among the villagers presented in this round, if the mediator you selected were to issue a decision unfavorable to you, would you be willing to accept such an adverse outcome? (1) Accept (2) Reject</p>		<p>If the government plans to acquire land in your village, how would you respond? (1) Disagree (2) Agree only if the compensation price is substantially higher than the market price (3) Agree as long as the compensation price is close to the market price.</p>

Table A.4: Vignette and Outcome Measures (Chinese)

情境1: 纠纷调解	情境2: 做生意投资	情境3: 政府征地意见咨询
假设您最近和本村某村民有经济利益的纠纷（例如借贷）。为了保障你的权益，您准备找人来调解。现有以下两位村民可供选择。	如果现在有两位本村的村民准备做生意投资。他们都邀请您出钱入股。以下是两位村民的资料。	如果政府要在村里面进行征地，有两位村民给出了他们自己的意见。以下是两位村民的资料。
问题：在村民甲、乙中，您会选择谁来主持调解/投资/听取意见？		
如果您所选的村民做出了对您不利的调解，您是否会接受这一不利调解结果？（接受/不接受）		如果政府计划征收土地，你的反应是什么？ （1）不同意 （2）当征收价格显著高于市场价才同意 （3）和市场价差不多就会同意

at least 300 respondents, each of whom will complete three rounds of the study, yielding an effective sample size of 900 observations.

Table A.5: Attributes and levels used in the conjoint experiment (Chinese)

Attribute	Level
村职位	村委会主任 村支书 普通村民
姓氏	与您同姓 与您非同姓
关系	家里人在本地银行任职 家里人是当地干部 家里人是村民协会会员 家里人在社交平台有很多粉丝
个人能力	能搞一个创业项目带来工作机会 在本村同姓组群里有很大影响号召力 能获得政府补贴
处理纠纷方式	会支持有道理的一方 谁能赢得更多人支持就帮谁 会支持熟人 对于纠纷保持中立
经商经历	有 没有
性别	女 男
年龄	68 60 52 44 36

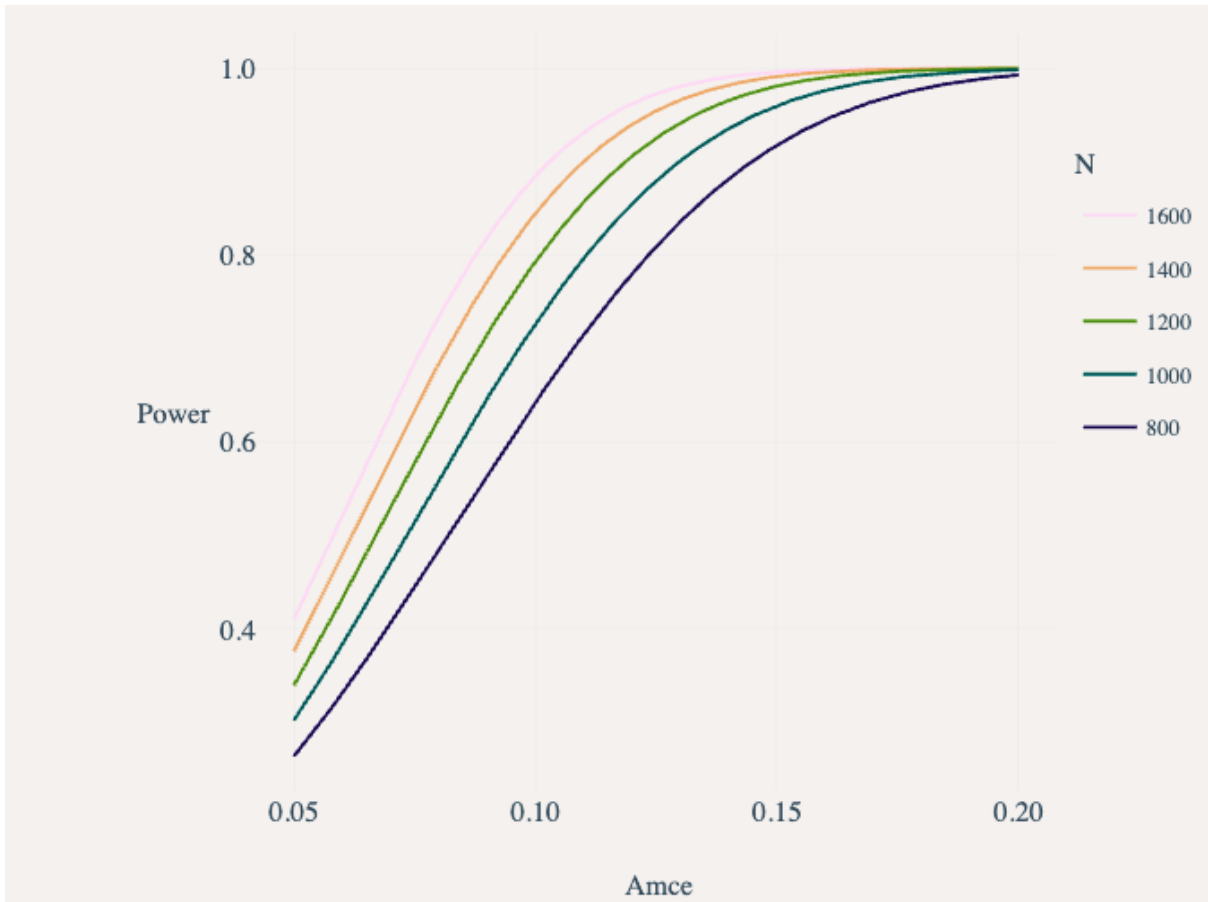


Figure A.1: Power analysis

C Hierarchical Bayesian Estimation

While the independent randomization of attributes in our conjoint design ensures that the observed choice proportions are free from endogeneity bias, such raw proportions may still be subject to measurement noise given the finite number of choice tasks per respondent. To more precisely recover the latent individual preferences, we employ a random-intercept, random-slope logit model to estimate respondent-specific part-worths for candidate identities⁶:

$$\text{Logit}(P(\text{Select}_{i,k} = 1)) = \alpha_i + (\beta_1 + \nu_{i,1})Z_{i,k,1} + (\beta_2 + \nu_{i,2})Z_{i,k,2} + \sum_j \eta_j X_{i,k,j} \quad (2)$$

In this specification, the dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether respondent i selected candidate k . Z_1 and Z_2 are dummy variables denoting the identities of “village secretary” and “village head,” respectively, while X_j represents other randomized candidate attributes. The key parameters of interest are the random slopes $\nu_{i,1}$ and $\nu_{i,2}$, which capture the individual-level deviation from the population mean preferences (β_1 and β_2) toward these institutional identities. A positive (negative) $\nu_{i,1}$ indicates that the respondent exhibits a stronger (weaker) preference for the village secretary compared to the sample average.

Given the inherent sparsity of observations at the individual level, we utilize a **Hierarchical Bayesian (HB)** estimation approach. By leveraging the population distribution as a prior, this method provides more robust individual-level estimates through Bayesian shrinkage, effectively mitigating measurement error in latent preference elicitation. Finally, we replace the simple *Village Secretary Share* used in our baseline regressions with the estimated latent preference $\nu_{i,1}$ to re-estimate our core models.

The results using the latent *Village Secretary Preference* remain remarkably consistent with our baseline findings. As reported in Table A.6, in the LPM specifications (Columns 1–4), the coefficients range from 0.752 to 0.839, indicating that a stronger latent preference for the village secretary in the conjoint choice task is robustly associated with a higher probability of demanding compensation above the market price. This positive relationship is further confirmed by the Ordered Logit models in Columns (5) and (6).

⁶Unlike the LPM used for aggregate AMCE, a logit model is adopted for individual-level estimation to ensure recovered preferences align with the random utility framework and remain within theoretically consistent bounds. This is critical for the subsequent stage where these estimates serve as independent variables.

Table A.6: Conjoint Preference for Village Secretary and Land Compensation Demands

	Higher Land Compensation Demand					
	LPM (Opt. 1 & 2 vs. 3)		LPM (Drop Opt. 1)		Ordered Logit	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Secretary Preference	0.757**	0.839**	0.752*	0.789*	4.925*	5.569**
	(0.320)	(0.378)	(0.358)	(0.411)	(2.560)	(2.685)
Respondent Chars.		Y		Y		Y
Village FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	303	295	295	287	303	295

Notes: Standard errors are clustered at the village level. **Secretary Preference** refers to individual-level latent coefficients for village secretary identity estimated via a Hierarchical Bayesian (HB) logit model.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

D Additional Figures and Tables

D.1 Robustness Checks of Baseline AMCEs (For Internal Validity)

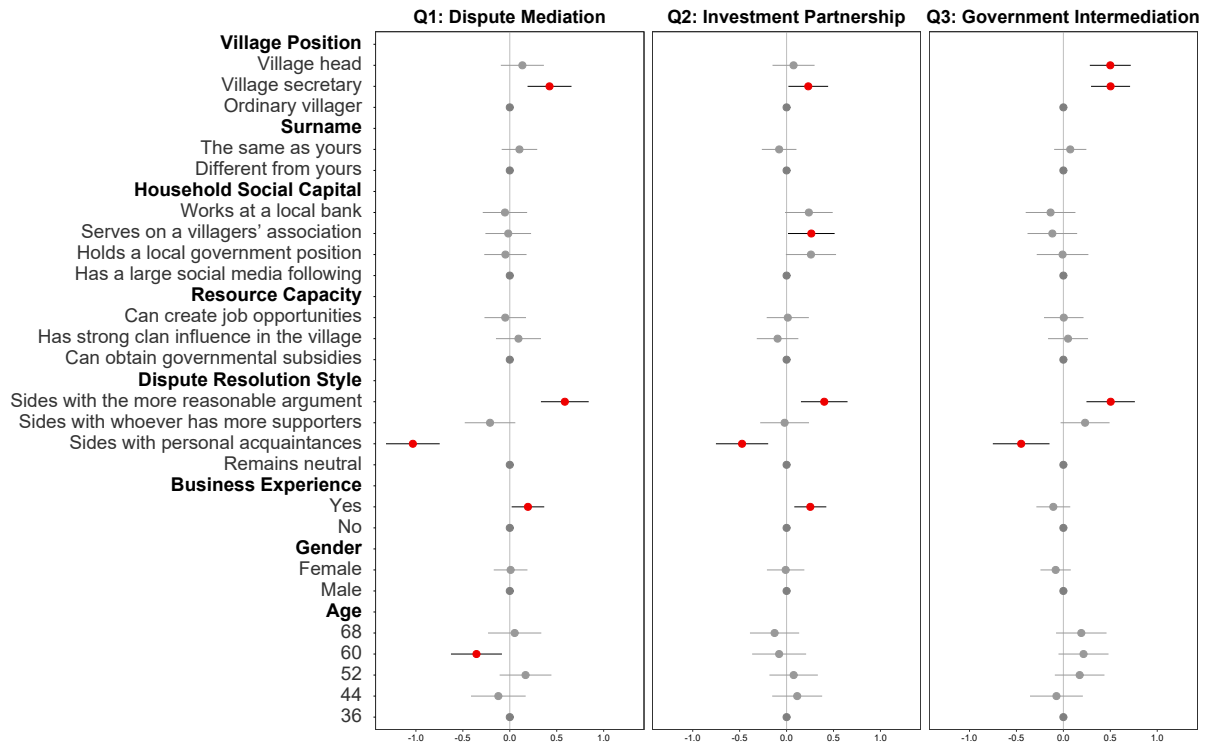


Figure A.2: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Scores by Scenario

Note: Each point represents the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) of a given attribute level. The horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

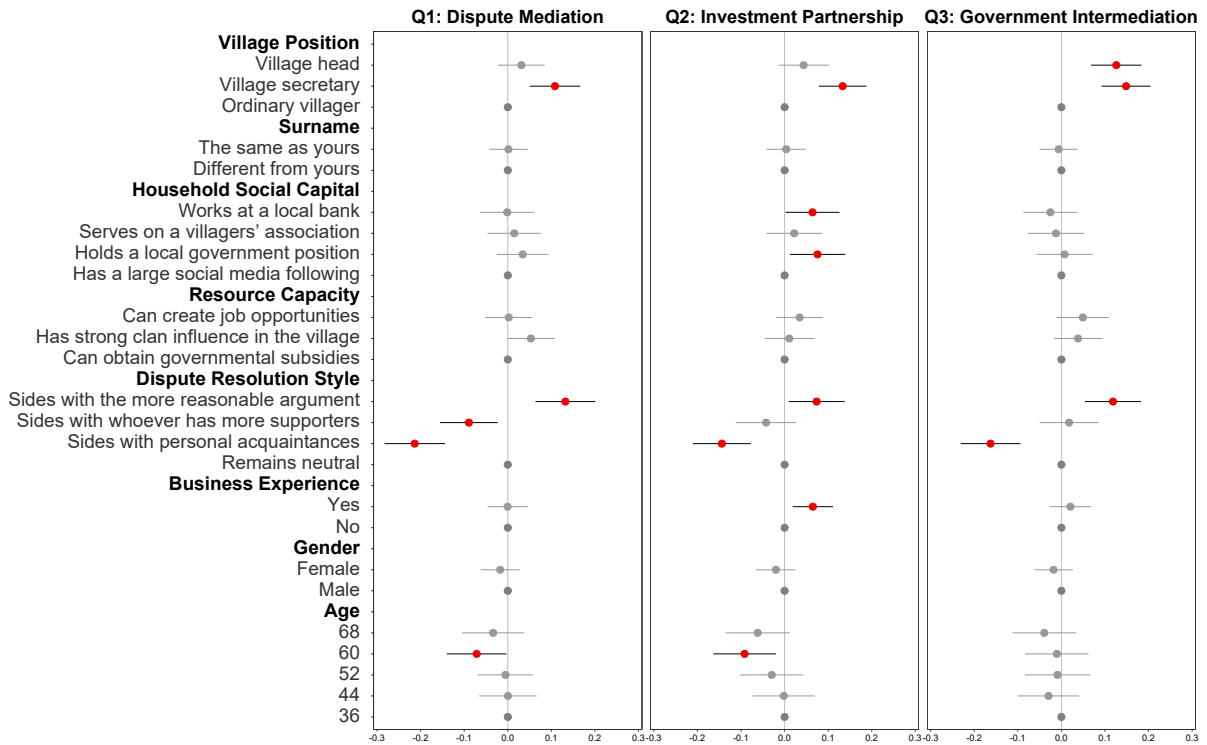


Figure A.3: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Selection Probability by Scenario (Controlling Respondent Characteristics)

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of candidate attributes on selection probability, controlling for a vector of respondent characteristics (including gender, age group, education, political status, family income, and lineage status). The coefficients for respondent controls are omitted for brevity. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

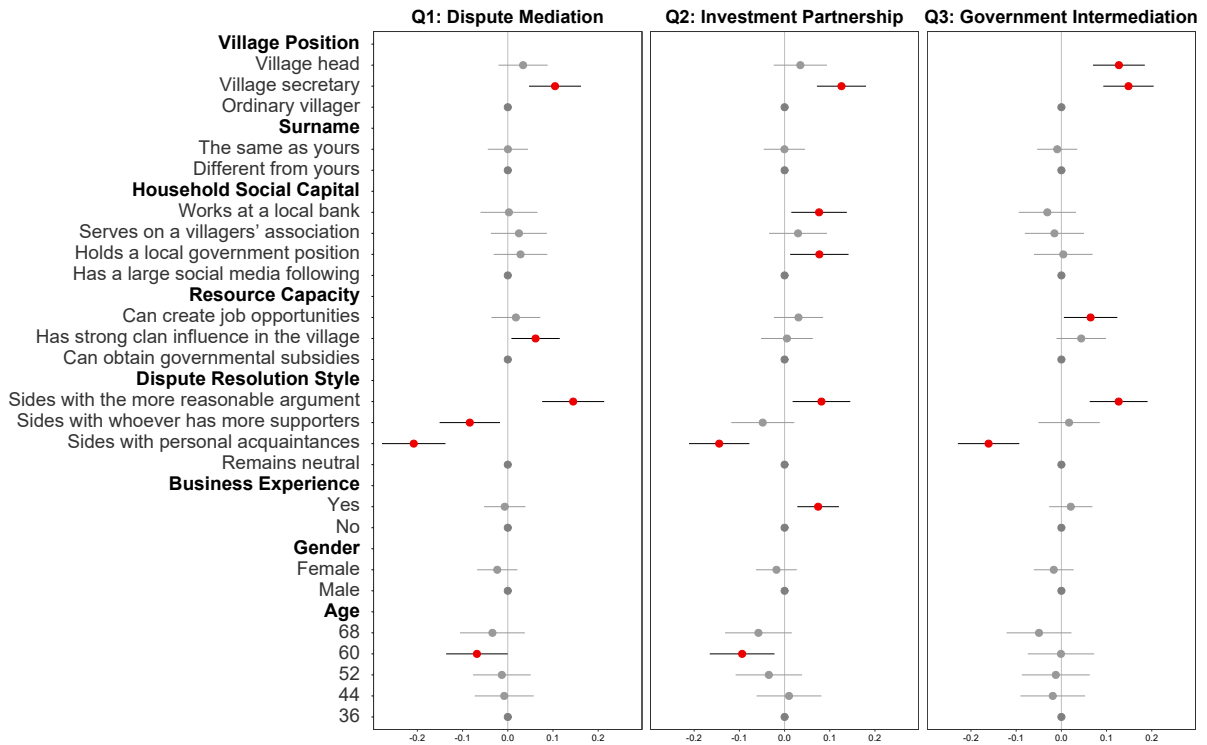


Figure A.4: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Selection Probability by Scenario (Excluding Low-Quality Responses)

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of candidate attributes on selection probability. Importantly, the analysis excludes questionnaires flagged for low data quality based on field enumerators' observations of respondents' comprehension and engagement levels during the interview process. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Table A.7: Detailed AMCE Estimates and Multiple Inference Adjustments

Scenario	Attribute	Level	Estimate (SE)	Raw P-value	FDR P-value
Dispute Mediation	Village Position	Village secretary	0.108*** (0.029)	< 0.001***	0.001***
		Village head	0.033 (0.027)	0.226	0.495
		Ordinary villager			
	Surname	The same as yours	-0.001 (0.022)	0.948	0.989
		Different from yours			
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.000 (0.032)	0.989	0.989
		Serves on a villagers' association	0.018 (0.031)	0.557	0.768
		Holds a local government position	0.034 (0.030)	0.250	0.495
		Has a large social media following			
	Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.055** (0.027)	0.047**	0.140
		Can create job opportunities	0.009 (0.027)	0.746	0.928
		Can obtain governmental subsidies			
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.086*** (0.033)	0.010***	0.046**
		Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.131*** (0.035)	< 0.001***	0.001***
Sides with personal acquaintances		-0.211*** (0.035)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***	
Remains neutral					
Business Experience	Yes	-0.001 (0.023)	0.980	0.989	
	No				
Gender	Female	-0.016 (0.022)	0.465	0.698	
	Male				
Age	68	-0.035 (0.036)	0.332	0.627	
	60	-0.069** (0.034)	0.045**	0.140	
	52	-0.009 (0.032)	0.782	0.928	
	44	0.001 (0.033)	0.986	0.989	
	36				
Investment Partnership	Village Position	Village secretary	0.132*** (0.027)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***
		Village head	0.040 (0.029)	0.174	0.423
		Ordinary villager			
	Surname	The same as yours	0.002 (0.023)	0.937	0.989
		Different from yours			
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.065** (0.031)	0.037**	0.125
		Serves on a villagers' association	0.019 (0.032)	0.550	0.768
		Holds a local government position	0.074** (0.032)	0.021**	0.075*
		Has a large social media following			
	Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.008 (0.028)	0.781	0.928
		Can create job opportunities	0.031 (0.027)	0.249	0.495
		Can obtain governmental subsidies			
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.041 (0.035)	0.238	0.495
		Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.076** (0.032)	0.019**	0.075*
Sides with personal acquaintances		-0.141*** (0.033)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***	
Remains neutral					
Business Experience	Yes	0.065*** (0.023)	0.005***	0.026**	
	No				
Gender	Female	-0.019 (0.023)	0.413	0.650	
	Male				
Age	68	-0.061 (0.037)	0.102	0.282	
	60	-0.091** (0.037)	0.013**	0.055*	
	52	-0.030 (0.037)	0.411	0.650	
	44	-0.001 (0.036)	0.984	0.989	
	36				
Government Intermediation	Village Position	Village secretary	0.149*** (0.028)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***
		Village head	0.127*** (0.029)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***
		Ordinary villager			
	Surname	The same as yours	-0.007 (0.022)	0.753	0.928
		Different from yours			
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.027 (0.031)	0.397	0.650
		Serves on a villagers' association	-0.016 (0.033)	0.625	0.839
		Holds a local government position	0.006 (0.032)	0.842	0.955
		Has a large social media following			
	Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.039 (0.028)	0.162	0.414
		Can create job opportunities	0.049 (0.030)	0.105	0.282
		Can obtain governmental subsidies			
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	0.021 (0.034)	0.546	0.768
		Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.117*** (0.033)	< 0.001***	0.002***
Sides with personal acquaintances		-0.160*** (0.034)	< 0.001***	< 0.001***	
Remains neutral					
Business Experience	Yes	0.019 (0.024)	0.421	0.650	
	No				
Gender	Female	-0.019 (0.022)	0.402	0.650	
	Male				
Age	68	-0.042 (0.037)	0.252	0.495	
	60	-0.008 (0.037)	0.820	0.951	
	52	-0.011 (0.038)	0.773	0.928	
	44	-0.029 (0.036)	0.417	0.650	
	36				

Note: Adjusted p-values are calculated using the BH procedure. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Bold values indicate significance at the 0.10 level. Empty rows within each attribute represent the baseline levels.

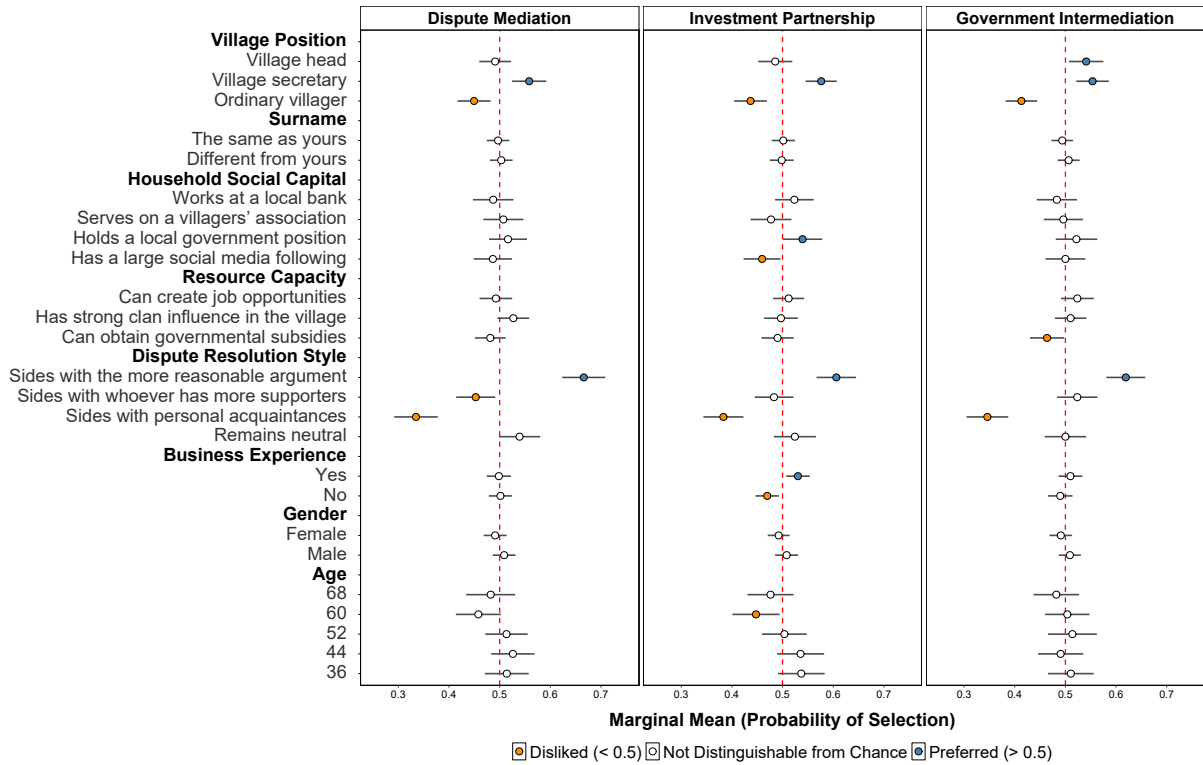


Figure A.5: Marginal Means of Profile Attributes Across Three Scenarios

Note: Points represent marginal means (MMs), which indicate the average probability of a profile being selected when it includes a specific attribute level. The dashed vertical line at 0.5 represents the baseline probability of selection by random chance. Horizontal bars denote 95% confidence intervals. Colored markers highlight attribute levels that are significantly preferred (blue, $MM > 0.5$) or disliked (orange, $MM < 0.5$), while white markers indicate estimates that are not statistically distinguishable from the 0.5 baseline.

Table A.8: Detailed Marginal Means Across Three Scenarios

Scenario	Attribute	Level	Estimate (SE)	P-value (vs. 0.5)
Dispute Mediation	Village Position	Village head	0.491 (0.016)	0.575
		Village secretary	0.558*** (0.017)	< 0.001***
		Ordinary villager	0.449*** (0.017)	0.002***
	Surname	The same as yours	0.497 (0.011)	0.783
		Different from yours	0.503 (0.011)	0.783
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.487 (0.020)	0.532
		Serves on a villagers' association	0.507 (0.020)	0.715
		Holds a local government position	0.517 (0.019)	0.388
		Has a large social media following	0.487 (0.019)	0.488
	Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.493 (0.016)	0.649
		Has strong clan influence in the village	0.527* (0.016)	0.091*
		Can obtain governmental subsidies	0.482 (0.016)	0.235
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.666*** (0.022)	< 0.001***
		Sides with whoever has more supporters	0.453** (0.020)	0.016**
		Sides with personal acquaintances	0.335*** (0.022)	< 0.001***
		Remains neutral	0.539* (0.021)	0.059*
	Business Experience	Yes	0.498 (0.012)	0.895
		No	0.502 (0.012)	0.895
Gender	Female	0.491 (0.012)	0.439	
	Male	0.509 (0.011)	0.438	
Age	68	0.482 (0.025)	0.475	
	60	0.458* (0.023)	0.064*	
	52	0.514 (0.021)	0.527	
	44	0.526 (0.022)	0.230	
	36	0.514 (0.022)	0.524	
Investment Partnership	Village Position	Village head	0.486 (0.017)	0.402
		Village secretary	0.576*** (0.016)	< 0.001***
		Ordinary villager	0.437*** (0.017)	< 0.001***
	Surname	The same as yours	0.502 (0.012)	0.894
		Different from yours	0.498 (0.012)	0.894
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.523 (0.019)	0.230
		Serves on a villagers' association	0.477 (0.021)	0.268
		Holds a local government position	0.539** (0.020)	0.046**
		Has a large social media following	0.460** (0.019)	0.030**
	Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.512 (0.016)	0.443
		Has strong clan influence in the village	0.497 (0.017)	0.854
		Can obtain governmental subsidies	0.490 (0.016)	0.545
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.606*** (0.020)	< 0.001***
		Sides with whoever has more supporters	0.483 (0.019)	0.387
		Sides with personal acquaintances	0.383*** (0.020)	< 0.001***
		Remains neutral	0.524 (0.021)	0.251
	Business Experience	Yes	0.530** (0.012)	0.011**
		No	0.470** (0.012)	0.010**
Gender	Female	0.492 (0.011)	0.489	
	Male	0.508 (0.012)	0.489	
Age	68	0.476 (0.023)	0.308	
	60	0.448** (0.024)	0.027**	
	52	0.504 (0.023)	0.870	
	44	0.536 (0.024)	0.133	
	36	0.537 (0.023)	0.115	
Government Intermediation	Village Position	Village head	0.541** (0.017)	0.018**
		Village secretary	0.554*** (0.016)	0.001***
		Ordinary villager	0.413*** (0.016)	< 0.001***
	Surname	The same as yours	0.494 (0.011)	0.564
		Different from yours	0.506 (0.011)	0.564
	Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.483 (0.020)	0.405
		Serves on a villagers' association	0.496 (0.020)	0.836
		Holds a local government position	0.522 (0.021)	0.298
		Has a large social media following	0.500 (0.020)	1.000
	Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.523 (0.017)	0.157
		Has strong clan influence in the village	0.510 (0.016)	0.516
		Can obtain governmental subsidies	0.464** (0.017)	0.035**
	Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.619*** (0.020)	< 0.001***
		Sides with whoever has more supporters	0.523 (0.020)	0.250
		Sides with personal acquaintances	0.346*** (0.021)	< 0.001***
		Remains neutral	0.500 (0.021)	1.000
	Business Experience	Yes	0.510 (0.012)	0.410
		No	0.490 (0.012)	0.411
Gender	Female	0.491 (0.011)	0.425	
	Male	0.509 (0.011)	0.424	
Age	68	0.482 (0.023)	0.434	
	60	0.504 (0.022)	0.868	
	52	0.514 (0.025)	0.575	
	44	0.491 (0.023)	0.677	
	36	0.511 (0.023)	0.644	

Note: This table presents the marginal means (MMs) for each attribute-level. Stars and bold values indicate that the selection probability is significantly different from the 0.5 baseline (random chance) at the 0.10 level. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

D.2 Weighted AMCEs Based on the 2020 Census (For External Validity)

We first conduct a series of analyses using weighted regressions based on the 2020 National Population Census rural data, which provides official benchmarks for the rural population across gender, age group, and educational attainment. We employ three weighting specifications: (1) single-variable post-stratification weighting on educational attainment (Figure A.6), chosen because educational attainment exhibits the most pronounced discrepancy between our sample and the national rural population among the three indicators; (2) multi-way iterative proportional fitting (raking) across gender, age group, and educational attainment (Figure A.7); and (3) a 12-block exact joint-distribution post-stratification based on age group and educational attainment (Figure A.8).⁷ The weighted results are highly consistent with our primary findings across all three scenarios. The formal authority of the village secretary maintains a positive and significant effect, and the village head continues to exert a significant positive effect in Scenario 3 of government intermediation.⁸ Applying the same three weighting specifications to the unfavorable mediation result scenario (Figure A.9) likewise produces results consistent with the unweighted baseline: formal positions remain statistically insignificant for the acceptance of unfavorable outcomes, while “serving on a villagers’ association” remains significant across all weighting methods. Although the significance of “having strong clan influence” is slightly reduced, the substantive pattern and direction of the estimates are fully preserved.

⁷Due to our finite sample size, a full 24-block cross-tabulation including gender, age group, and educational attainment would have yielded empty cells for specific demographic intersections; we therefore use the 12-block age-by-education joint distribution to ensure statistical stability and reliable weight estimation.

⁸The only decrease in statistical significance occurs for the effect of the village secretary in Scenario 1 (Dispute Mediation), where p-values across the three weighting specifications are 0.051, 0.167, and 0.122, which remain close to conventional significance levels.

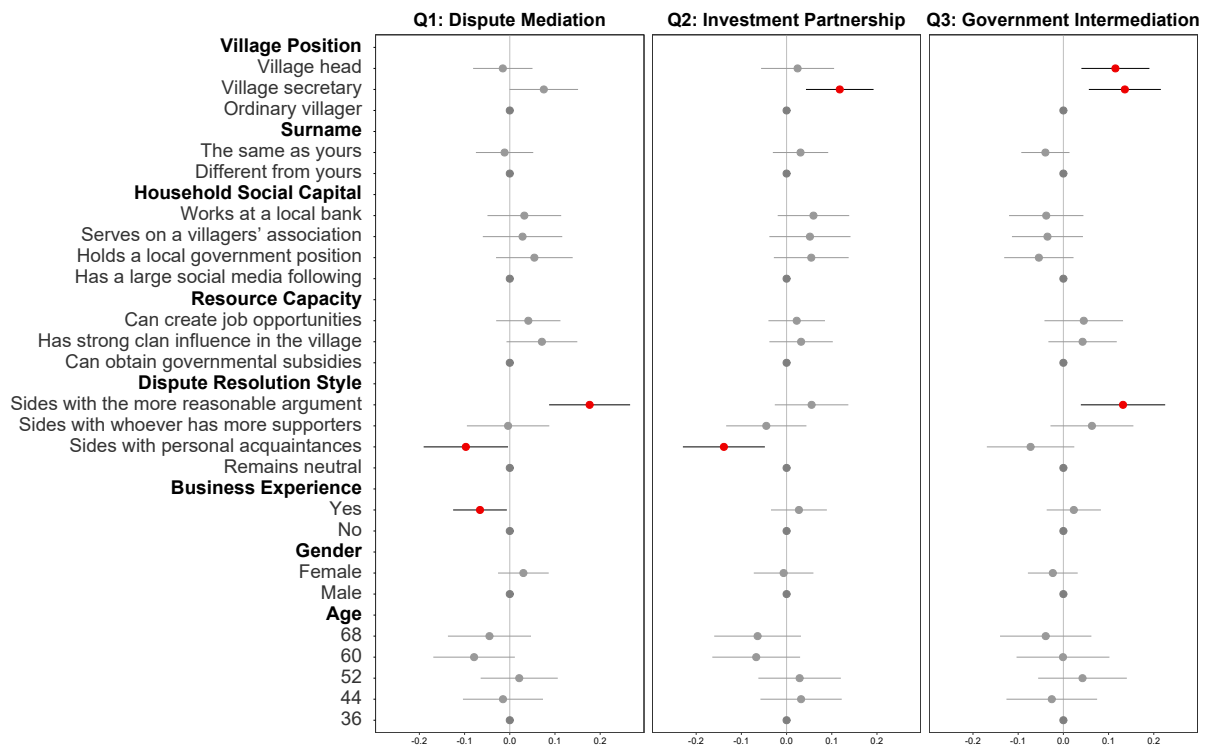


Figure A.6: Conjoint Results with Education Post-Stratification Weighting

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) estimated using a single-variable post-stratification weight. The sample is weighted to align with the educational distribution of the rural population aged 15 and above from the 2020 Chinese Census to address the structural over-representation of highly educated respondents. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

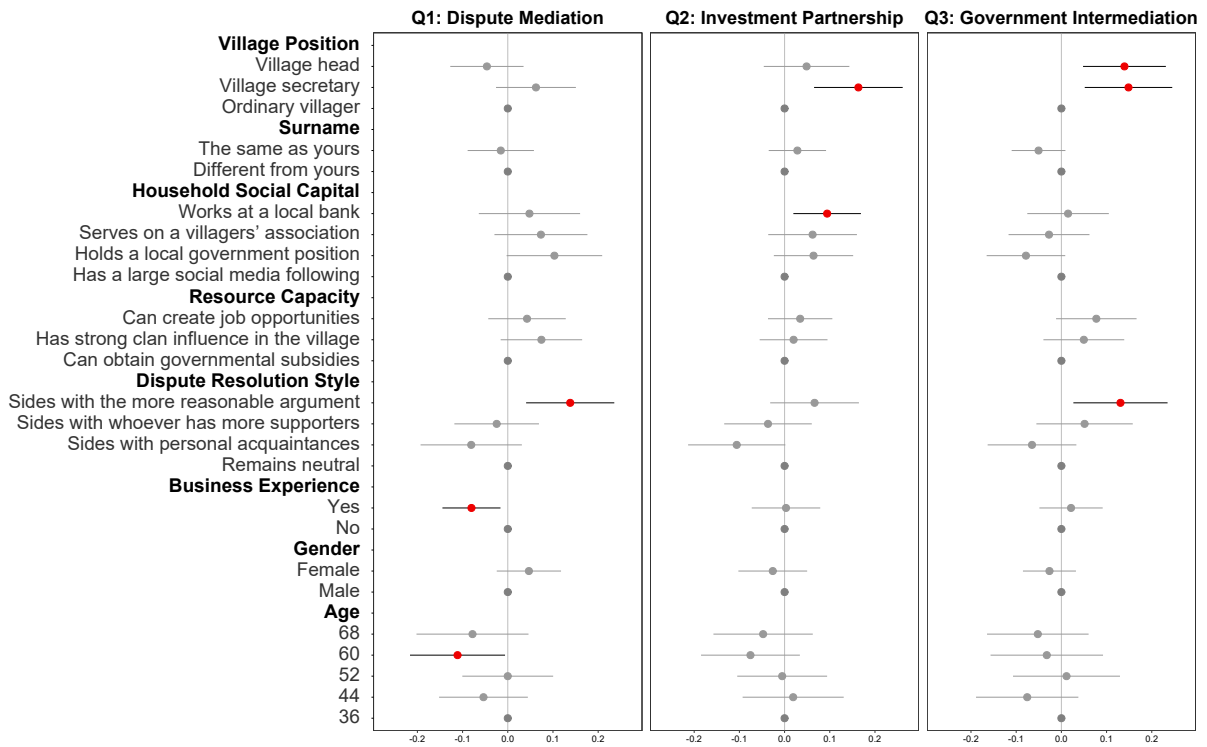


Figure A.7: Conjoint Results with Iterative Proportional Fitting (3-Way Raking)

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) estimated using iterative proportional fitting (raking). The sample is weighted to match the marginal distributions of gender, age group and educational attainment of the rural population aged 15 and above from the 2020 Chinese Census. To prevent variance inflation from extreme weights, maximum weights are capped at 5. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

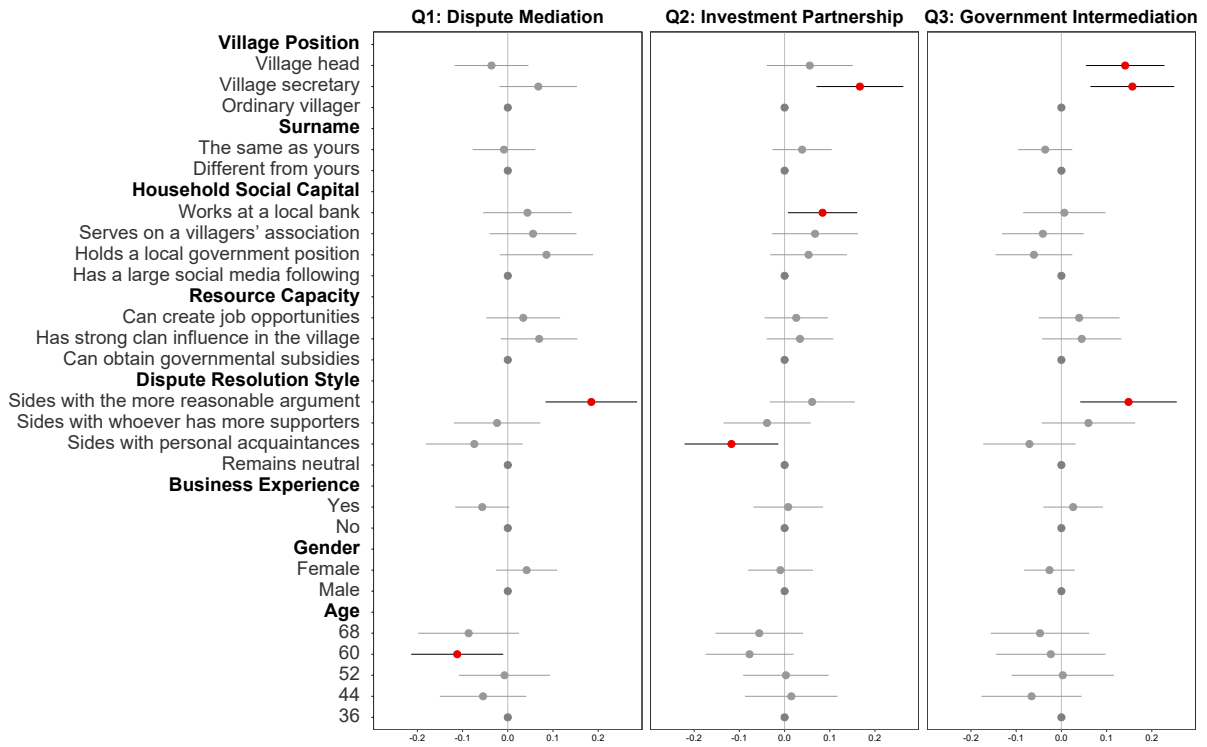


Figure A.8: Conjoint Results with 12-Block Exact Joint-Distribution Weighting

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) estimated using exact joint-distribution post-stratification weights. Due to sample size constraints that preclude a full 24-block cross-tabulation (incorporating gender) without introducing empty cells, the sample is weighted to precisely match the 12-block cross-tabulated proportions of age group and educational attainment for the rural population aged 15 and above from the 2020 Chinese Census. To stabilize variance resulting from sparse cells, maximum weights are capped at 5. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

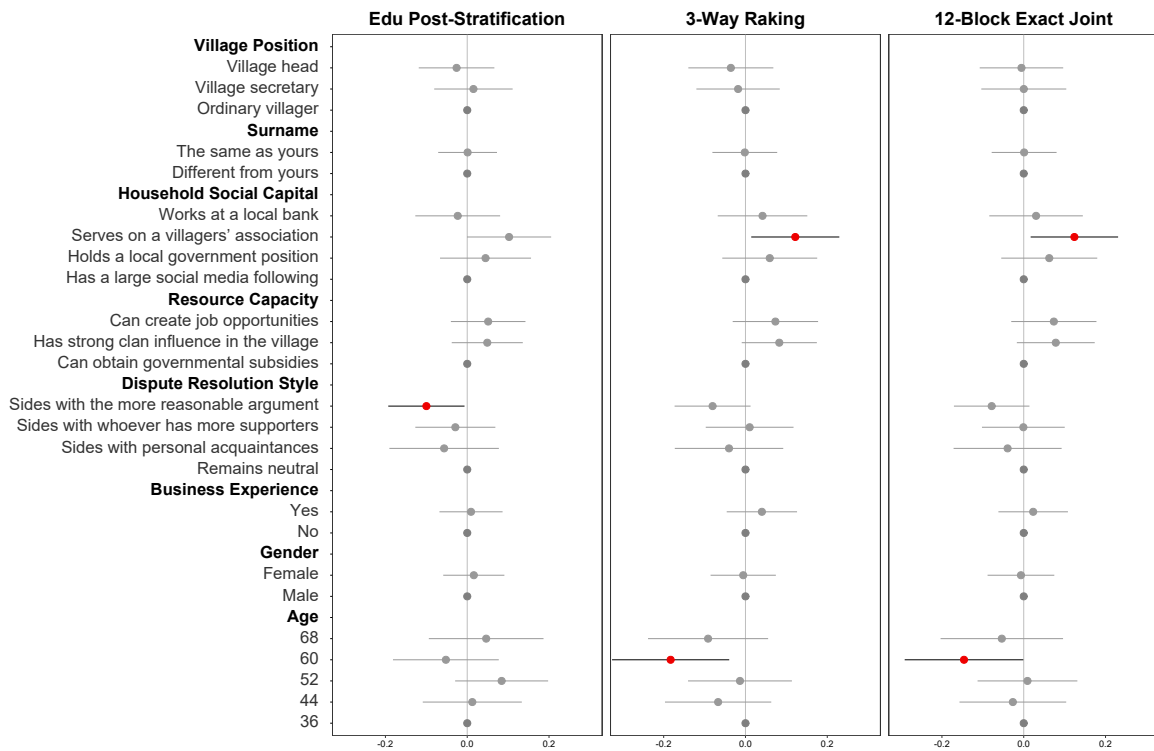


Figure A.9: Weighted AMCEs for Acceptance of Unfavorable Mediation Results

Note: This figure presents the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) estimated using three distinct weighting specifications to assess the external validity of the findings regarding the likelihood of accepting unfavorable mediation results. From left to right, the panels display results using: (1) single-variable post-stratification on education; (2) multi-way iterative proportional fitting (raking) across gender, age group, and education; and (3) a 12-block exact joint-distribution post-stratification of age group and education. All weights are based on the 2020 Chinese Census for the rural population aged 15 and above, with a maximum weight cap of 5 to ensure statistical stability. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

D.3 Further Subgroup Analysis

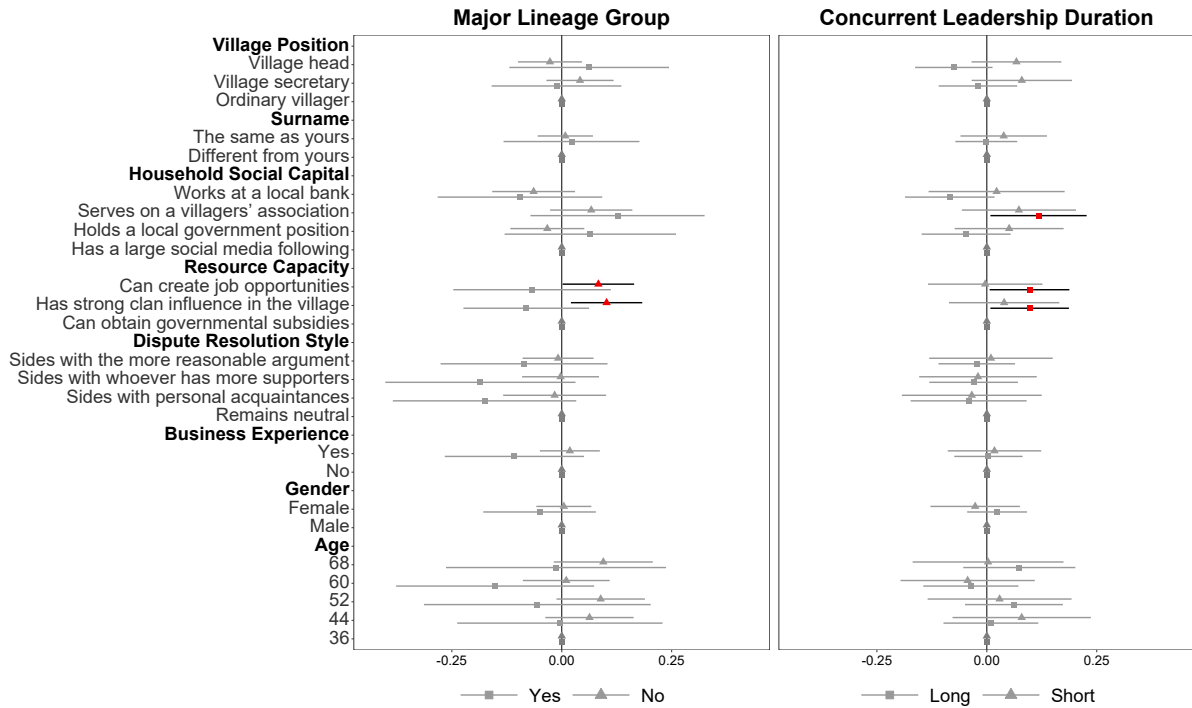
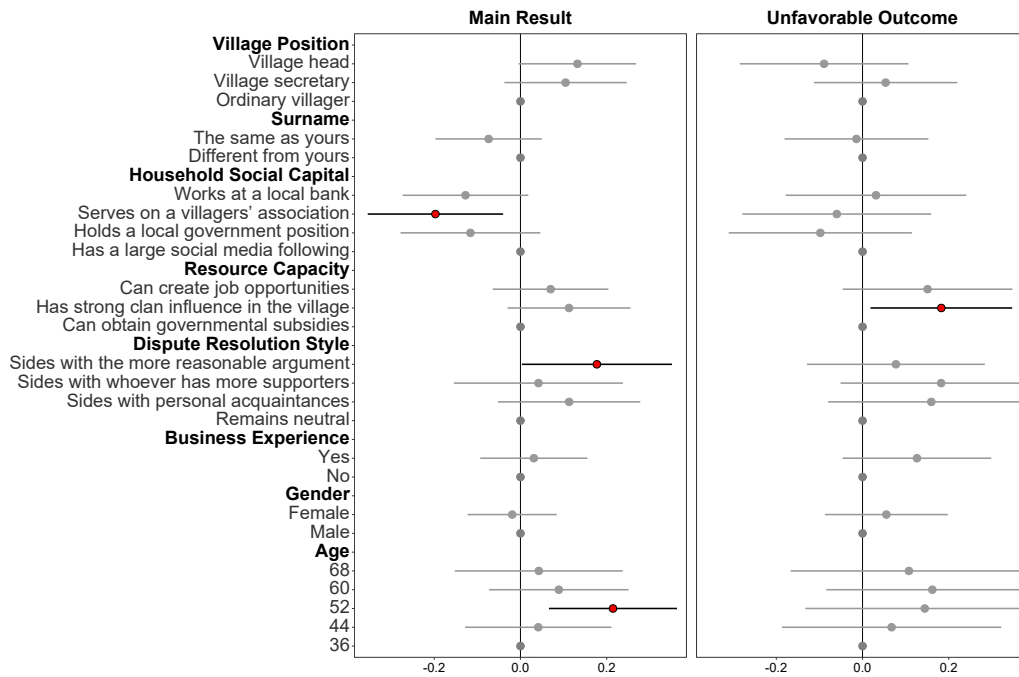


Figure A.10: Subgroup Analysis of AMCEs on the Unfavorable Mediation Results

Note: Each panel displays subgroup AMCEs for the unfavorable mediation result. In the left panel, squares represent respondents from major lineages and triangles represent those from non-major lineages. In the right panel, squares represent villages with long concurrent leadership duration and triangles represent those with short duration. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Panel A: Major Lineage Member (No - Yes)



Panel B: Duration of Concurrent Leadership (Long - Short)

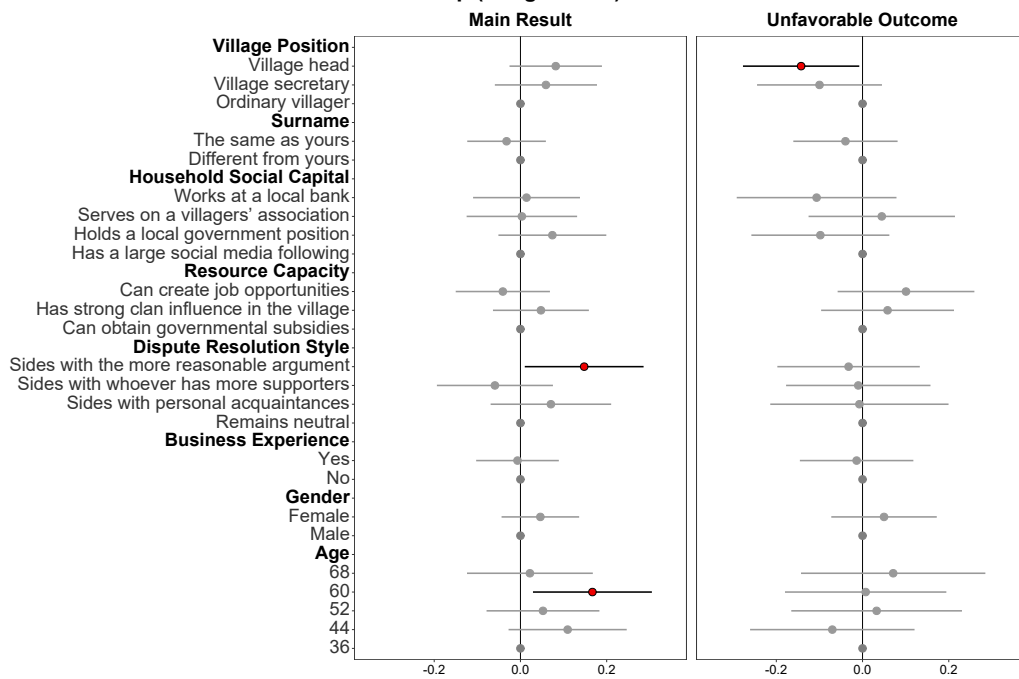


Figure A.11: Differences of AMCEs in subgroup analysis

Note: This figure presents the results of tests for differences in AMCEs based on the subsample analyses shown in Figure 3 and Figure A.10. Panel A shows the differences between non-major and major lineage members. Panel B shows the differences between villages with long and short durations of concurrent leadership. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Red dots denote estimates that are statistically significant at the 5% level.

E Raw Results for All Conjoint Figures

E.1 Main Text Conjoint Figures

Table A.9: AMCEs on Selection Probability Across Three Scenarios (Figure 2)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	0.033 (0.027)	0.040 (0.029)	0.127*** (0.029)
	Village secretary	0.108*** (0.029)	0.132*** (0.027)	0.149*** (0.028)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	-0.001 (0.022)	0.002 (0.023)	-0.007 (0.022)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.000 (0.032)	0.065** (0.031)	-0.027 (0.031)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.018 (0.031)	0.019 (0.032)	-0.016 (0.033)
	Holds a local government position	0.034 (0.030)	0.074** (0.032)	0.006 (0.032)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.009 (0.027)	0.031 (0.027)	0.049 (0.030)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.055** (0.027)	0.008 (0.028)	0.039 (0.028)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.131*** (0.035)	0.076** (0.032)	0.117*** (0.033)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.086*** (0.033)	-0.041 (0.035)	0.021 (0.034)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.211*** (0.035)	-0.141*** (0.033)	-0.160*** (0.034)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	-0.001 (0.023)	0.065*** (0.023)	0.019 (0.024)
	No			
Gender	Female	-0.016 (0.022)	-0.019 (0.023)	-0.019 (0.022)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.035 (0.036)	-0.061 (0.037)	-0.042 (0.037)
	60	-0.069** (0.034)	-0.091** (0.037)	-0.008 (0.037)
	52	-0.009 (0.032)	-0.030 (0.037)	-0.011 (0.038)
	44	0.001 (0.033)	-0.001 (0.036)	-0.029 (0.036)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.10: Subgroup Analysis of AMCEs on Dispute Mediation (Figure 3)

Attribute	Level	Major Lineage Group		Concurrent Leadership Duration	
		Yes	No	Long	Short
Village Position	Village secretary	0.021 (0.065)	0.126*** (0.033)	0.128*** (0.035)	0.069 (0.049)
	Village head	-0.079 (0.063)	0.053* (0.030)	0.062* (0.035)	-0.020 (0.042)
	Ordinary villager				
Surname	The same as yours	0.063 (0.058)	-0.011 (0.025)	-0.013 (0.027)	0.019 (0.038)
	Different from yours				
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.090 (0.065)	-0.037 (0.035)	0.002 (0.041)	-0.012 (0.048)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.176** (0.073)	-0.021 (0.033)	0.015 (0.040)	0.012 (0.052)
	Holds a local government position	0.127* (0.076)	0.011 (0.033)	0.059 (0.036)	-0.015 (0.053)
	Has a large social media following				
Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	-0.042 (0.066)	0.071** (0.031)	0.077** (0.035)	0.029 (0.045)
	Can create job opportunities	-0.047 (0.061)	0.023 (0.031)	0.001 (0.035)	0.042 (0.043)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies				
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.117 (0.093)	-0.075** (0.036)	-0.105** (0.043)	-0.045 (0.054)
	Sides with the more reasonable argument	-0.015 (0.080)	0.162*** (0.039)	0.183*** (0.043)	0.035 (0.055)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.307*** (0.074)	-0.194*** (0.040)	-0.183*** (0.045)	-0.253*** (0.055)
	Remains neutral				
Business Experience	Yes	-0.024 (0.058)	0.008 (0.026)	-0.005 (0.029)	0.002 (0.040)
	No				
Gender	Female	0.000 (0.046)	-0.019 (0.025)	0.003 (0.028)	-0.043 (0.037)
	Male				
Age	68	-0.067 (0.091)	-0.024 (0.041)	-0.030 (0.046)	-0.052 (0.058)
	60	-0.140* (0.073)	-0.051 (0.039)	-0.014 (0.043)	-0.181*** (0.055)
	52	-0.183*** (0.067)	0.032 (0.036)	0.001 (0.041)	-0.052 (0.053)
	44	-0.035 (0.078)	0.007 (0.037)	0.034 (0.041)	-0.076 (0.057)
	36				

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.11: AMCEs on Unfavorable Mediation Results (Figure 4)

Attribute	Level	Unfavorable Outcome
Village Position	Village head	-0.023 (0.035)
	Village secretary	0.015 (0.036)
	Ordinary villager	
Surname	The same as yours	0.018 (0.030)
	Different from yours	
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.047 (0.043)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.092** (0.043)
	Holds a local government position	-0.013 (0.040)
	Has a large social media following	
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.057 (0.037)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.076** (0.037)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies	
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	-0.017 (0.038)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.025 (0.040)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.037 (0.051)
	Remains neutral	
Business Experience	Yes	0.004 (0.032)
	No	
Gender	Female	0.002 (0.029)
	Male	
Age	68	0.045 (0.052)
	60	-0.047 (0.046)
	52	0.043 (0.048)
	44	0.030 (0.046)
	36	

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

E.2 Appendix Conjoint Figures

Table A.12: AMCEs on Scores Across Three Scenarios (Figure A.2)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	0.134 (0.139)	0.074 (0.136)	0.500*** (0.132)
	Village secretary	0.423*** (0.142)	0.231* (0.129)	0.503*** (0.126)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	0.103 (0.115)	-0.079 (0.112)	0.073 (0.104)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.052 (0.144)	0.237 (0.154)	-0.136 (0.161)
	Serves on a villagers' association	-0.016 (0.148)	0.264* (0.151)	-0.118 (0.161)
	Holds a local government position	-0.047 (0.137)	0.260 (0.162)	-0.009 (0.167)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	-0.048 (0.134)	0.013 (0.136)	0.004 (0.128)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.093 (0.146)	-0.096 (0.135)	0.050 (0.129)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.586*** (0.155)	0.401*** (0.151)	0.504*** (0.157)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.210 (0.164)	-0.021 (0.158)	0.231 (0.159)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-1.033*** (0.174)	-0.474*** (0.169)	-0.450** (0.184)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	0.194* (0.105)	0.253** (0.104)	-0.107 (0.110)
	No			
Gender	Female	0.009 (0.109)	-0.010 (0.121)	-0.082 (0.098)
	Male			
Age	68	0.052 (0.172)	-0.128 (0.159)	0.191 (0.163)
	60	-0.355** (0.165)	-0.079 (0.175)	0.215 (0.162)
	52	0.168 (0.168)	0.075 (0.157)	0.173 (0.161)
	44	-0.122 (0.177)	0.113 (0.162)	-0.074 (0.171)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.13: AMCEs on Selection Probability (Control Respondent Characteristics, Figure A.3)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village secretary	0.108*** (0.029)	0.133*** (0.028)	0.148*** (0.029)
	Village head	0.031 (0.027)	0.044 (0.030)	0.126*** (0.029)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	0.002 (0.023)	0.004 (0.023)	-0.006 (0.022)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.001 (0.032)	0.064** (0.032)	-0.025 (0.032)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.015 (0.031)	0.022 (0.033)	-0.012 (0.033)
	Holds a local government position	0.034 (0.030)	0.076** (0.032)	0.007 (0.033)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.053* (0.028)	0.011 (0.029)	0.038 (0.028)
	Can create job opportunities	0.002 (0.027)	0.034 (0.027)	0.049 (0.031)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.089*** (0.034)	-0.042 (0.035)	0.018 (0.035)
	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.132*** (0.035)	0.074** (0.033)	0.119*** (0.033)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.214*** (0.035)	-0.144*** (0.034)	-0.163*** (0.035)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	-0.000 (0.024)	0.065*** (0.024)	0.021 (0.024)
	No			
Gender	Female	-0.017 (0.023)	-0.020 (0.023)	-0.018 (0.023)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.034 (0.036)	-0.062 (0.038)	-0.039 (0.037)
	60	-0.071** (0.035)	-0.092** (0.037)	-0.010 (0.037)
	52	-0.005 (0.032)	-0.029 (0.037)	-0.009 (0.038)
	44	0.000 (0.034)	-0.002 (0.036)	-0.029 (0.036)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute. Respondent characteristics are controlled but omitted from this table.

Table A.14: AMCEs on Selection Probability (Exclude Low-Quality Responses, Figure A.4)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	0.034 (0.028)	0.035 (0.030)	0.127*** (0.029)
	Village secretary	0.105*** (0.029)	0.126*** (0.028)	0.148*** (0.028)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	0.000 (0.023)	-0.000 (0.023)	-0.009 (0.023)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.003 (0.032)	0.076** (0.031)	-0.031 (0.032)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.025 (0.032)	0.030 (0.033)	-0.015 (0.033)
	Holds a local government position	0.028 (0.030)	0.077** (0.033)	0.004 (0.033)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.018 (0.028)	0.031 (0.028)	0.065** (0.030)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.062** (0.027)	0.005 (0.029)	0.044 (0.028)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.145*** (0.035)	0.082** (0.033)	0.127*** (0.033)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.084** (0.034)	-0.048 (0.036)	0.017 (0.035)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.208*** (0.036)	-0.145*** (0.034)	-0.161*** (0.035)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	-0.007 (0.023)	0.074*** (0.023)	0.021 (0.024)
	No			
Gender	Female	-0.023 (0.023)	-0.018 (0.023)	-0.017 (0.022)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.034 (0.037)	-0.058 (0.038)	-0.049 (0.037)
	60	-0.068** (0.035)	-0.094** (0.037)	-0.001 (0.037)
	52	-0.013 (0.033)	-0.035 (0.037)	-0.012 (0.038)
	44	-0.008 (0.033)	0.010 (0.037)	-0.019 (0.036)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.15: AMCEs on Selection Probability (Education Weighted, Figure A.6)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	-0.015 (0.034)	0.024 (0.041)	0.115*** (0.038)
	Village secretary	0.075* (0.039)	0.118*** (0.038)	0.136*** (0.041)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	-0.011 (0.032)	0.031 (0.031)	-0.040 (0.027)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.032 (0.042)	0.059 (0.040)	-0.038 (0.042)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.028 (0.045)	0.052 (0.046)	-0.035 (0.040)
	Holds a local government position	0.054 (0.043)	0.055 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.039)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.041 (0.036)	0.022 (0.032)	0.045 (0.044)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.071* (0.040)	0.032 (0.036)	0.042 (0.039)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.177*** (0.046)	0.055 (0.042)	0.132*** (0.048)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.004 (0.047)	-0.045 (0.045)	0.063 (0.047)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.097** (0.048)	-0.139*** (0.046)	-0.073 (0.049)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	-0.066** (0.030)	0.027 (0.032)	0.023 (0.031)
	No			
Gender	Female	0.030 (0.029)	-0.007 (0.034)	-0.023 (0.028)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.045 (0.047)	-0.064 (0.049)	-0.039 (0.052)
	60	-0.079* (0.046)	-0.067 (0.050)	-0.001 (0.052)
	52	0.021 (0.044)	0.029 (0.047)	0.042 (0.050)
	44	-0.015 (0.045)	0.032 (0.046)	-0.026 (0.051)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.16: AMCEs on Selection Probability (3-Way Raking, Figure A.7)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	-0.046 (0.041)	0.049 (0.048)	0.140*** (0.047)
	Village secretary	0.062 (0.045)	0.163*** (0.050)	0.149*** (0.049)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	-0.015 (0.037)	0.028 (0.032)	- 0.051* (0.030)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.048 (0.057)	0.094** (0.038)	0.015 (0.046)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.073 (0.052)	0.062 (0.050)	-0.027 (0.046)
	Holds a local government position	0.103* (0.054)	0.064 (0.045)	- 0.078* (0.044)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.043 (0.044)	0.034 (0.036)	0.077* (0.045)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.074 (0.046)	0.020 (0.038)	0.050 (0.046)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.138*** (0.050)	0.066 (0.050)	0.131** (0.053)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.025 (0.048)	-0.037 (0.049)	0.051 (0.054)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.081 (0.057)	- 0.106* (0.055)	-0.065 (0.050)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	- 0.080** (0.033)	0.003 (0.039)	0.021 (0.036)
	No			
Gender	Female	0.047 (0.036)	-0.026 (0.039)	-0.026 (0.030)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.078 (0.063)	-0.047 (0.056)	-0.052 (0.057)
	60	- 0.111** (0.054)	-0.076 (0.056)	-0.032 (0.063)
	52	-0.000 (0.051)	-0.005 (0.051)	0.011 (0.060)
	44	-0.054 (0.050)	0.019 (0.057)	-0.076 (0.058)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.17: AMCEs on Selection Probability (12-Block Joint Weighted, Figure A.8)

Attribute	Level	Dispute Mediation	Investment Partnership	Government Intermediation
Village Position	Village head	-0.036 (0.042)	0.056 (0.048)	0.141*** (0.044)
	Village secretary	0.068 (0.044)	0.167*** (0.049)	0.157*** (0.047)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	-0.008 (0.035)	0.039 (0.033)	-0.036 (0.030)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	0.044 (0.050)	0.084** (0.039)	0.007 (0.046)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.056 (0.049)	0.067 (0.049)	-0.041 (0.046)
	Holds a local government position	0.086 (0.053)	0.053 (0.043)	-0.061 (0.043)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.034 (0.042)	0.026 (0.036)	0.039 (0.046)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.069 (0.043)	0.034 (0.038)	0.045 (0.045)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.185*** (0.052)	0.061 (0.048)	0.149*** (0.054)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.024 (0.049)	-0.039 (0.049)	0.060 (0.053)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.074 (0.055)	- 0.118** (0.053)	-0.071 (0.052)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	- 0.057* (0.030)	0.008 (0.039)	0.026 (0.034)
	No			
Gender	Female	0.042 (0.034)	-0.009 (0.037)	-0.026 (0.029)
	Male			
Age	68	-0.087 (0.057)	-0.056 (0.049)	-0.047 (0.056)
	60	- 0.112** (0.052)	-0.077 (0.050)	-0.023 (0.062)
	52	-0.007 (0.051)	0.003 (0.048)	0.003 (0.058)
	44	-0.055 (0.049)	0.015 (0.052)	-0.066 (0.056)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.18: Weighted AMCEs on Acceptance of Unfavorable Mediation Results (Figure A.9)

Attribute	Level	Education Weighted	3-Way Raking	12-Block Joint
Village Position	Village head	-0.026 (0.047)	-0.036 (0.053)	-0.006 (0.052)
	Village secretary	0.015 (0.049)	-0.018 (0.052)	0.000 (0.053)
	Ordinary villager			
Surname	The same as yours	0.001 (0.037)	-0.002 (0.040)	0.001 (0.040)
	Different from yours			
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.023 (0.053)	0.042 (0.056)	0.030 (0.058)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.102* (0.052)	0.122** (0.055)	0.124** (0.055)
	Holds a local government position	0.045 (0.057)	0.059 (0.059)	0.062 (0.060)
	Has a large social media following			
Resource Capacity	Can create job opportunities	0.051 (0.047)	0.073 (0.053)	0.074 (0.053)
	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.049 (0.044)	0.083* (0.047)	0.078 (0.049)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies			
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with the more reasonable argument	-0.100** (0.048)	-0.080* (0.047)	-0.078* (0.047)
	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.029 (0.050)	0.010 (0.055)	-0.001 (0.052)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.056 (0.068)	-0.040 (0.068)	-0.039 (0.067)
	Remains neutral			
Business Experience	Yes	0.009 (0.039)	0.040 (0.044)	0.023 (0.043)
	No			
Gender	Female	0.016 (0.038)	-0.006 (0.041)	-0.007 (0.042)
	Male			
Age	68	0.046 (0.072)	-0.091 (0.075)	-0.054 (0.076)
	60	-0.052 (0.066)	-0.183** (0.073)	-0.146** (0.074)
	52	0.084 (0.058)	-0.013 (0.065)	0.009 (0.062)
	44	0.012 (0.062)	-0.067 (0.066)	-0.027 (0.067)
	36			

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.19: Heterogeneous Effects on Accepting Unfavorable Results (Figure A.10)

Attribute	Level	Major Lineage Group		Concurrent Leadership Duration	
		Major	Non-major	Long	Short
Village Position	Village secretary	-0.012 (0.075)	0.042 (0.039)	-0.020 (0.046)	0.080 (0.058)
	Village head	0.062 (0.093)	-0.027 (0.037)	-0.075* (0.045)	0.067 (0.052)
	Ordinary villager				
Surname	The same as yours	0.022 (0.079)	0.008 (0.032)	-0.001 (0.036)	0.038 (0.050)
	Different from yours				
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.095 (0.095)	-0.064 (0.048)	-0.084 (0.052)	0.022 (0.079)
	Serves on a villagers' association	0.127 (0.101)	0.067 (0.048)	0.118** (0.056)	0.073 (0.066)
	Holds a local government position	0.065 (0.099)	-0.033 (0.043)	-0.047 (0.052)	0.051 (0.063)
	Has a large social media following				
Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	-0.081 (0.073)	0.102** (0.041)	0.097** (0.046)	0.039 (0.064)
	Can create job opportunities	-0.067 (0.091)	0.083** (0.042)	0.097** (0.046)	-0.004 (0.066)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies				
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	-0.185* (0.110)	-0.003 (0.045)	-0.030 (0.051)	-0.020 (0.068)
	Sides with the more reasonable argument	-0.086 (0.097)	-0.008 (0.041)	-0.023 (0.044)	0.009 (0.072)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	-0.176* (0.106)	-0.016 (0.060)	-0.041 (0.067)	-0.034 (0.081)
	Remains neutral				
Business Experience	Yes	-0.108 (0.081)	0.018 (0.035)	0.004 (0.040)	0.017 (0.054)
	No				
Gender	Female	-0.050 (0.065)	0.005 (0.032)	0.023 (0.035)	-0.027 (0.052)
	Male				
Age	68	-0.013 (0.128)	0.094* (0.057)	0.074 (0.065)	0.003 (0.088)
	60	-0.152 (0.115)	0.010 (0.050)	-0.036 (0.055)	-0.044 (0.078)
	52	-0.056 (0.132)	0.089* (0.051)	0.062 (0.057)	0.029 (0.084)
	44	-0.004 (0.119)	0.063 (0.051)	0.009 (0.055)	0.079 (0.080)
	36				

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.20: Differences in AMCEs between Subsamples (Figure A.11)

Attribute	Level	Major Lineage Member (No - Yes)		Duration of Concurrent Leadership (Long - Short)	
		Main Result	Unfavorable Outcome	Main Result	Unfavorable Outcome
Village Position	Village secretary	0.105 (0.072)	0.054 (0.085)	0.059 (0.060)	-0.100 (0.074)
	Village head	0.132* (0.070)	-0.089 (0.100)	0.082 (0.055)	-0.142** (0.069)
	Ordinary villager				
Surname	The same as yours	-0.074 (0.063)	-0.014 (0.085)	-0.032 (0.047)	-0.040 (0.062)
	Different from yours				
Household Social Capital	Works at a local bank	-0.127* (0.074)	0.031 (0.107)	0.014 (0.063)	-0.107 (0.095)
	Serves on a villagers' association	-0.197** (0.080)	-0.060 (0.112)	0.003 (0.065)	0.045 (0.087)
	Holds a local government position	-0.116 (0.083)	-0.098 (0.108)	0.074 (0.064)	-0.098 (0.082)
	Has a large social media following				
Resource Capacity	Has strong clan influence in the village	0.113 (0.073)	0.183** (0.084)	0.047 (0.057)	0.058 (0.079)
	Can create job opportunities	0.070 (0.068)	0.151 (0.100)	-0.041 (0.056)	0.101 (0.081)
	Can obtain governmental subsidies				
Dispute Resolution Style	Sides with whoever has more supporters	0.042 (0.100)	0.182 (0.119)	-0.059 (0.069)	-0.010 (0.085)
	Sides with the more reasonable argument	0.177** (0.089)	0.077 (0.105)	0.148** (0.070)	-0.032 (0.084)
	Sides with personal acquaintances	0.113 (0.084)	0.159 (0.122)	0.071 (0.071)	-0.007 (0.105)
	Remains neutral				
Business Experience	Yes	0.031 (0.063)	0.126 (0.088)	-0.007 (0.049)	-0.014 (0.067)
	No				
Gender	Female	-0.019 (0.053)	0.055 (0.073)	0.046 (0.046)	0.050 (0.062)
	Male				
Age	68	0.043 (0.099)	0.108 (0.140)	0.022 (0.074)	0.071 (0.109)
	60	0.089 (0.083)	0.162 (0.125)	0.167** (0.070)	0.007 (0.095)
	52	0.215*** (0.076)	0.144 (0.141)	0.052 (0.067)	0.033 (0.101)
	44	0.041 (0.087)	0.067 (0.130)	0.109 (0.070)	-0.070 (0.097)
	36				

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The table presents the differences in AMCEs between the indicated sub-groups. The row with empty estimation results represents the baseline level of each attribute.

Table A.21: Tests of Subgroup Differences in AMCEs

Question	Attribute Level	Δ Estimate (SE)	P-value
Panel A: Institutional Substitution Channel (Non-major Lineage - Major Lineage)			
Main Result	Village cadre (secretary + head)	0.113* (0.062)	0.070
Unfavorable Outcome	Village cadre (secretary + head)	-0.005 (0.079)	0.947
Panel B: State Penetration Channel (Long Duration - Short Duration)			
Main Result	Village cadre (secretary + head)	0.073 (0.050)	0.144
Unfavorable Outcome	Village cadre (secretary + head)	-0.118* (0.062)	0.055

Note: "Main Result" refers to the choice of mediator, and "Unfavorable Outcome" refers to the acceptance of unfavorable mediation results. Heterogeneity is analyzed by respondent lineage status (Panel A) and the duration of the village leader's concurrent leadership (Panel B).

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.22: Post-Rejection Choice between Local Remediation and Court-Based Channels

	Court mediation vs. another mediator		Court path vs. another mediator	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Village cadre	-0.117** (0.050)	-0.073 (0.045)	-0.115** (0.049)	-0.068 (0.046)
<i>p</i> -value	0.019	0.107	0.019	0.135
Village fixed effects		Y		Y
Observations	454	454	494	494
Respondent clusters	175	175	184	184

Note: In columns 1–2, the outcome equals 1 if the respondent chose court mediation and 0 if the respondent chose another mediator. In columns 3–4, the outcome equals 1 if the respondent chose court mediation or lawsuit and 0 if the respondent chose another mediator. Village cadre combines village secretary and village head, with ordinary villagers as the reference group. Mediator’s other attributes are all controlled. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Because court-related options were added after the first 60 respondents had completed the survey, those respondents are excluded from the regression sample. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

F Additional Results from Observational Survey Data

Table A.23: Recognition of Formal Village Authority in the 2008 Rural Household Survey

Survey item	Response	Count	Percent
Actual final say in village management	Village party secretary	1,178	50.7%
	Village head	249	10.7%
	Joint decision-making	591	25.4%
	Do not know	307	13.2%
Most influential actor in land expropriation talks	Village cadres	199	75.7%
	Lineage elders	15	5.7%
	External household elites	6	2.3%
	Other	43	16.3%

Note: Cells report counts over valid responses. “External household elites” refers to household members working outside the village as cadres, teachers, business people, or entrepreneurs.

Table A.24: Formal Authority Recognition by Major-Surname Status

Outcome	Surname	Count (Percent)	Diff.	Fisher p
Village cadres most influential in land expropriation talks	Major	93 (70.5%)	10.3%	0.062*
	Non-major	105 (80.8%)		
Village cadres resolved homestead dispute	Major	14 (27.5%)	24.7%	0.064*
	Non-major	12 (52.2%)		

Note: Major-surname status is measured by whether the household head’s surname belongs to a major surname group in the village. Diff. reports the difference between non-major and major-surname households. Fisher p reports two-sided Fisher’s exact test p-values. * $p < 0.1$.

This appendix reports additional descriptive evidence from two observational rural surveys. The purpose of these results is corroborative rather than causal.

(1) Further Evidence from the 2008 Rural Household Survey

The 2008 survey records how households reported resolving disputes, bypassing grassroots authority through petitioning, and engaging in direct or collective forms of noncompliance.

Table A.26 complements the recognition results by showing that formal village authority was a salient dispute-resolution channel in actual village conflicts. Across farmland, land-adjustment, and homestead disputes, a substantial share of households reported turning to village committees, village groups, or village cadres. At the same time, many disputes were handled through self-resolution or remained unresolved, which is consistent with the paper’s core distinction between recognizing formal authority and actually accepting its intervention.

Table A.27 speaks more directly to bypassing behavior. Petitioning represents an effort to move disputes beyond grassroots authority. The high share of unresolved petitioning outcomes

Table A.25: Dissatisfaction and Responses after Land Expropriation Compensation

Outcome or response	Count	Percent
Dissatisfied with compensation	244	73.5%
<i>After dissatisfaction with compensation</i>		
No action	166	68.0%
Escalated beyond village cadres	50	20.5%
Collective or confrontational action	43	17.6%
Asked village cadres to resolve the issue	16	6.6%
Others	12	4.9%

Note: The first row uses all 332 land expropriation events with valid compensation-satisfaction responses as the denominator. The remaining rows use the 244 dissatisfied events as the denominator. Escalation beyond village cadres includes individual or collective petitioning, court action, demonstrations, road blockages, preventing land use, or written appeals. Collective or confrontational action is a subset of escalation and includes collective petitioning, demonstrations or road blockages, and preventing land users from using the land. Other responses include court action, written appeals, and so on.

and the frequent use of county, township, and higher-level targets indicate that households did not treat village authority as the only available arena for dispute resolution when conflicts persisted or became costly.

Table A.28 provides further descriptive evidence on direct and collective forms of noncompliance. These behaviors are not common in absolute terms, but their presence is theoretically important: households sometimes contested local decisions through media-based protest, phone mobilization, obstruction, confrontation, road blockages, or collective fighting. This pattern is consistent with the experimental finding that recognition of formal village officeholders does not necessarily translate into compliance under unfavorable outcomes.

All percentages use valid responses as denominators. Nonresponse, inapplicable responses, don't-know responses, and refusal codes are excluded when they can be identified from the questionnaire structure. For multi-response items, each option is coded as whether the respondent selected that option; therefore, percentages within a block need not sum to 100%. The collective-event module records household reports of village-level events, not unique village-event counts.

Table A.26: Dispute Incidence and Resolution Channels

Dispute module	Incidence	Village formal authority	Higher authority	Self/no resolution
Farmland disputes	117 (4.9%)	33 (37.1%)	4 (4.5%)	53 (59.6%)
Land adjustment disputes	25 (3.2%)	11 (45.8%)	2 (8.3%)	11 (45.8%)
Homestead disputes	80 (3.4%)	26 (34.7%)	6 (8.0%)	41 (54.7%)

Note: Cells report counts with percentages in parentheses. Incidence percentages use valid module responses as denominators; resolution-channel percentages use households with valid resolution information. Village formal authority includes village committees, village groups, or village cadres. Higher authority includes township government, judicial institutions, courts or police stations.

Table A.27: Petitioning as Bypassing of Grassroots Authority

Survey item	Category	Count	Percent
Petition outcome	Problem not resolved	241	48.8%
	Fully resolved	93	18.8%
	Partially resolved	81	16.4%
	Other	27	5.5%
	Retaliation	14	2.8%
	Intercepted en route	13	2.6%
	Pending	7	1.4%
Petition target	County	178	34.8%
	Township	144	28.1%
	Municipal	88	17.2%
	Provincial	52	10.2%
	Central	23	4.5%
	Other	27	5.3%
Petition method	Visit	343	87.5%
	Phone	27	6.9%
	Letter	18	4.6%
	Fax/other	4	1.0%

Note: The petitioning module records 494 petition events with valid cause text from 449 households. Petition-outcome percentages use these 494 events as the denominator. Petition target and method percentages use recorded target selections and method selections in 2005–2007 as denominators, respectively. Because these are multi-response items, percentages need not sum to 100 percent within the outcome panel.

Table A.28: Direct and Collective Noncompliance Behaviors

Module	Behavior	Count	Percent
Direct protest behavior	Media-based protest	49	2.2%
	Phone mobilization	33	1.7%
Reported village collective events	Block construction/demolition	73	3.1%
	Confront cadres/police	42	1.8%
	Road blockage	29	1.2%
	Collective fighting	26	1.1%
	Other events	12	0.5%

Note: The first two rows are household-level direct protest behaviors, with valid denominators of 1,890 and 2,243, respectively. The collective-event rows are household reports of village-level events since 2000, with valid denominators ranging from 2,369 to 2,377. The same village event may be reported by multiple households, so these figures should be interpreted as descriptive evidence that such actions were present rather than as unique event counts.

(2) Evidence from 2024 Rural Vitalization and Local Governance Survey

The second source is the 2024 Rural Vitalization and Local Governance Survey Dataset collected by Zuo et al. (2024): Cai (Vera) Zuo, Zhongyuan Wang, Yanfeng Gu, and Qingjie Zeng. 2024. *The Rural Vitalization and Local Governance Survey Dataset*. Fudan University. Because we do not get village-level information, we use it only as descriptive corroboration.

Table A.29 shows that formal village authority remained highly visible during the same period as our conjoint experiment. Village cadres were widely trusted, village secretary and village head were most often ranked as the most prestigious local actors, and village cadres were the most common target when respondents sought help or made suggestions about urgent problems. The table also shows limits to such authority: among respondents who had reported problems to village cadres, 30.9% said that the problems remained unresolved. Petitioning and calls to the mayor or 12345 hotline were rare, so these outcomes are best treated as weak evidence of bypassing rather than as a central behavioral finding.

Table A.29: Formal Authority and Reported Behavior in the 2024 Rural Survey

Survey pattern	Count	N	%
<i>Formal authority recognition</i>			
Trust village cadres	1,027	1,151	89.2%
Rank village cadres first in prestige	666	1,009	66.0%
Village committee represents villagers, score 8–10	737	1,072	68.8%
Village leaders lead conflict resolution	234	264	88.6%
<i>Behavioral contact with village authority</i>			
Reported problems to village cadres	354	1,215	29.1%
Contacted village cadres for urgent problems	419	1,203	34.8%
Village cadres visited household since 2020	745	1,165	63.9%
Problems resolved after reporting	235	353	66.6%
<i>Limited resolution or bypassing</i>			
Problems unresolved after reporting to village cadres	109	353	30.9%
Petitioned, ever or recently	29	1,168	2.5%
Called mayor/12345 hotline, ever or recently	31	1,171	2.6%

Note: Cells report counts, valid-response denominators, and percentages. All rows use the villager survey except “Village leaders lead conflict resolution,” which uses the village-cadre survey. The table is descriptive and contemporaneous corroborative evidence.