Lawfare in Action: Evidence from Anti-Corruption Trials in Pakistan

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The strategic use of judicial processes against political rivals, often termed lawfare, has historically characterized authoritarian regimes and is now increasingly observed in democracies. A central empirical challenge is distinguishing uniform enforcement of wrongdoing from selective targeting of opponents. Using a regression discontinuity design and newly assembled data from Pakistan, we provide causal evidence on the existence and extent of lawfare. We show that political rivals face systematically greater judicial scrutiny, with effects large enough to crowd out legitimate anti-corruption efforts. These asymmetries consolidate incumbent power, as convictions of opposition politicians eliminate the well-documented incumbency advantage and reduce their chances of re-election. Although democratization is often expected to strengthen institutions, our results show that lawfare endures in both military and democratic rule. We further identify some conditions under which the weaponization of justice intensifies or recedes. These findings highlight how the political manipulation of the courts undermines the promise of rule-based accountability, even during periods of institutional reform and institutions designed to uphold justice can, when politicized, turn justice into a struggle for power rather than a safeguard of accountability.

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"There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of the law and in the name of justice."

Montesquieu, in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748),

I. Introduction

The growing prominence of lawfare, the use of judicial processes as a political weapon, has raised fundamental concerns about judicial independence and the impartiality of courts, and is increasingly viewed as a defining feature of democratic backsliding. While once seen as a pathology of fragile or transitional regimes, anxieties over the erosion of judicial independence through lawfare have now surfaced even in consolidated democracies, including the United States. The US President Donald Trump, for instance, repeatedly framed his legal troubles as evidence of lawfare, alleging that his adversaries had weaponized the justice system against him and describing former President "Biden regime's weaponization of our system of justice" as "straight out of the Stalinist Russia horror show." Critics, however, contend that President Trump himself engaged in lawfare by using the powers of the presidency to initiate investigations against his political rivals, including law firms linked to Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris. Similar concerns about the weaponization of justice have emerged internationally, in France, Hungary, Romania, and Turkey. The main controversy over lawfare turns less on whether misconduct is present than on whether enforcement is applied evenhandedly or strategically targeted against opponents. When courts are weaponized for political vendetta, they lose integrity and erode democratic legitimacy and public trust (Ferraz and Finan, 2025). As with corruption, which distorts incentives and weakens governance and development, the weaponization of the judiciary can create openings for authoritarian tendencies, eroding judicial independence, and undermining the rule of law, with adverse consequences for development (Mauro, 1995; Acemoglu and Verdier, 2000; La Porta et al., 2008; Olken and Pande, 2012; Acemoglu et al., 2013; Voigt et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, empirically establishing the existence and extent of lawfare remains both theoretically and empirically challenging. The core difficulty lies in distinguishing whether legal actions against political figures reflect an even-handed application of the law or selective targeting conditioned on political alignment. In principle, prosecutions may arise

from consistent application of legal standards, where courts scrutinize government affiliates and opposition politicians alike. Alternatively, they may reflect asymmetry in enforcement, where comparable acts are pursued only when committed by political rivals. Beyond a handful of well-known cases, however, it remains unclear whether lawfare is a systematic practice or merely a sequence of isolated events. Detecting its presence requires comparing individuals with ex-ante similar propensities for misconduct who differ only in their political alignment. If opposition-aligned individuals are pursued while government affiliates in comparable situations are spared, this asymmetry would signal strategic targeting rather than neutral enforcement. Ultimately, assessing the scope and magnitude of lawfare hinges on identifying these patterns of uneven accountability.

Pakistan offers a natural setting to study this. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB, hereinafter) courts, which have been repeatedly accused of pursuing political rivals, facilitate the study of lawfare "at scale" (Muralidharan and Niehaus, 2017). Far from being confined to isolated episodes, these concerns recur across regions, periods, and regime types. Pakistan also offers unusually detailed administrative data at the subdistrict level, which we link to judicial records to track prosecutions of both elected politicians and non-political civil servants under NAB jurisdiction. Finally, the country's alternating cycles of democratic and authoritarian rule create sharp variation in institutional constraints, with accusations of selective enforcement arising in both regimes. These features render Pakistan a valuable context for examining the prevalence, scale, and institutional consequences of lawfare.

We exploit this setting with a regression discontinuity design around electoral margins, comparing corruption convictions of narrowly winning and narrowly losing candidates. This design compares individuals who are ex ante similar but differ in their alignment with the ruling regime. We find that marginally winning opposition politicians are disproportionately prosecuted, while affiliated politicians are spared, displacing legitimate corruption cases against non-political actors. The pattern is not confined to authoritarian rule: lawfare persists under both military and democratic regimes and intensifies when judicial appointments are more vulnerable to political capture. At the extensive margin, marginal victories of opposition politicians result in approximately four additional corruption cases being filed against them, representing a 40 percent increase relative to the mean. At the intensive margin, conditional on facing a case, marginal opposition winners are 70 percent more likely to be convicted than marginal losers.

Equally striking is the treatment of government affiliates. Their electoral success does not result in additional cases at the extensive margin, and at the intensive margin, those who narrowly win are approximately 30 percent less likely to be convicted than their losing counterparts. This pattern indicates more than simple even-handedness: politically aligned incumbents are not merely spared scrutiny, they are actively shielded, receiving systematic leniency from the courts. These asymmetries are not confined to particular regimes or parties; they extend across elections and ideologies, whether the incumbent is the center-right, military-aligned Muslim League or the center-left Pakistan People's Party in democratic periods. Moreover, the dual pattern of shielding affiliates and targeting rivals has broader institutional spillovers: selective prosecution of opposition politicians crowds out cases against non-politicians, particularly in congested courts, with convictions of career civil servants falling most sharply in districts where opposition candidates narrowly prevail and judicial caseloads are heaviest.

The consequences extend beyond the courtroom. Opposition politicians who are convicted are significantly less likely to be re-elected, and the evidence suggests that the well-documented incumbency advantage disappears once opposition figures face convictions (Erikson 1971; Lee 2008; Fowler and Hall 2014; Dano et al. 2022) . These findings suggest how the selective manipulation of accountability institutions not only shields government affiliates but also transforms judicial asymmetries into a durable political advantage, entrenching incumbents while weakening the opposition's ability to compete on equal footing.

To explore the mechanisms behind lawfare, we consider several possible explanations. The evidence is consistent with a role for career concerns and selection effects among judges: those who convicted opposition politicians were somewhat more likely to be promoted to higher positions in district courts, transferred to special courts, or, in a few instances, advanced to High Courts and even the Supreme Court (PHC, 2018). This pattern appears weaker when the authority to appoint and promote judges is shifted from politicians to committees of judges themselves (see Mehmood, 2022). In elections held under the judge peer-based reformed system, we no longer observe a higher likelihood of promotion for convicting judges, nor do we find that opposition politicians who narrowly won elections were disproportionately convicted. Alternative explanations, such as peer effects among

judges, do not account for these findings, suggesting that career incentives and selection plausibly contribute to the observed patterns of judicial behavior.

Our paper speaks to several strands of the literature. First, we build on foundational studies in judicial independence and rule of law both of which are widely recognized as essential to sustaining democracy and enabling long-run development (Montesquieu, 1748; Hamilton, 1788; Hayek, 1960; Buchanan, 1974; North, 1986). A rich theoretical and cross-country literature underscores how independent courts promote prosperity and constrain executive overreach (Glaeser and Shleifer, 2002; La Porta et al., 2004; Besley and Persson, 2011; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Voigt et al., 2015). Yet we know relatively less about the political consequences of weakened judicial independence. In particular, little is known about how the weaponization of courts reshapes electoral competition and alters the dynamics of democratic contestation. Recent work shows that insulating judges from local pressures (Liu et al., 2024) or shifting to independent judicial selection (Mehmood, 2022) can strengthen judicial independence. Our contribution is to show that when judicial independence is undermined through lawfare, the consequences extend well beyond the courts: distorting accountability, reshaping political competition, and crowding out genuine anti-corruption efforts.

Second, our paper contributes to the literature on state capacity. While most work has highlighted fiscal and bureaucratic capacity as determinants of development (Dincecco and Katz 2016; Moreira and Pérez 2024; Bertrand et al. 2020; Beraja et al. 2023), the judiciary has received comparatively less attention despite being a core dimension of state effectiveness (Besley et al., 2022; Ferraz and Finan 2025). Existing studies emphasize how judicial efficiency fosters credit markets, investment, and resource allocation (Ponticelli and Alencar 2016; Boehm and Oberfield 2020; Li and Ponticelli 2022; Chemin, Kimalu, and Newman-Bachand 2024; Aberra and Chemin 2021). We shift the focus from efficiency to politicization: our results show that when courts are weaponized, state enforcement capacity is diverted away from public-good provision toward partisan ends. Instead of strengthening the rule of law, the judiciary is redeployed to shield affiliates, punish rivals, and crowd out legitimate anti-corruption cases. In this way, our findings highlight how the manipulation of legal capacity undermines the state's broader ability to deliver impartial enforcement, with consequences for the democratic order.

Last, we contribute to the literature on political competition and incumbency advantage. This literature documents how incumbents leverage visibility, resources, and institutions to entrench their position (Lee 2008; Fujiwara, Meng, and Vogl 2016; Fiva and Smith 2018; Dano, Ferlenga, Galasso, Le Pennec, and Pons 2022). Recent work highlights coordination failures among opposition parties and how electoral rules mediate entry and contestation (Galasso and Nannicini 2011; Le Pennec and Pons 2023), as well as how campaign finance structures distort democratic competition (Cagé 2020). We add a new perspective: lawfare alters political competition not by reallocating resources or votes, but by selectively prosecuting opposition politicians, thereby eliminating their incumbency advantage and reshaping the electoral playing field. By showing how the strategic use of anti-corruption law distorts democratic competition, our findings link the study of judicial politics with broader work on incumbency, entry, and the structural conditions under which elections remain genuinely competitive.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section provides background on the anti-corruption courts of Pakistan. Section 3 presents the data and our empirical strategy, while Section 4vpresents the results. A discussion of the mechanism takes place in Section 5. A final section provides some concluding remarks.

II. Background

Political Landscape.— Our empirical analysis of judicial decisions range from 1996 to 2018. In this section, I describe the political landscape and main players in power of Pakistan in the 1990s and 2000s. Following the end of military rule in 1988, the country was dominated by two major political parties, namely the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP). The PML-N, led by Mr Nawaz Sharif, won the 1990 elections and formed the government, but was dismissed in 1993 by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on allegations of corruption. The PPP, led by Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, subsequently came to power and held the government until its dismissal in 1996, also on charges of corruption. In 1997, the PML-N came to power once again, with Sharif serving as Prime Minister for the second time. However, in 1999 via a military coup General Pervez Musharraf seized control of the government of Pakistan through a coup d'état, dismissing the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) and appointing himself as the Chief Executive and later the President of the country. Musharraf also formed a new political party, the Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid (PML-Q). He too promised to root out corruption, and formed

special anti-corruption NAB courts in 1999. Even Transparency International lauded Musharaf's anti-corruption initiatives, noting "In the past few years, the fight against corruption in Pakistan has been waged with increasing success. Internationally, Pakistan is seen as having made headway." (Transparency International 2002). However, according to many media reports and anecdotal accounts, during Musharraf's regime, opposition politicians were suppressed, and many political leaders were arrested, disqualified or exiled, often after corruption convictions. The 2002 elections were won by the Musharraf supported PML-Q. Musharraf continued to rule the country until 2008. In the 2008 elections, the Centre-Left PPPP won a majority of seats and formed a coalition government, with Yousaf Raza Gilani as Prime Minister and Asif Ali Zardari as the President. However, the government was marred by political instability and was dismissed in 2013. The Centre-Right PML-N and Centre-Left PPPP remained the two major political parties, while Musharraf's PML-Q was largely perceived as a product of the military regime, though did continue to enjoy some support and influence.

Corruption Courts.—On 12th October 1999, In his "address to the nation", General Musharraf outlined his "7-point agenda" to be implemented in Pakistan. The chief among them was to clamp down on corruption to "*ensure swift and across the board accountability.*" Under this backdrop, the National Accountability Ordinance was enforced in November of 1999 by General Pervez Musharraf. This was to facilitate the prosecution of government officials and politicians involved in corruption. This reform gave powers to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecutor to arrest, investigate and detain suspects for up to 90 days without a formal charge. There were also additional provisions such as the conclusion of the trial within thirty days of charges filed (NAB, 1999). Amnesty International concluded in a 2002 report "The progress represented by the National Accountability Bureau and the recently formulated National Anti-Corruption Strategy must be sustained." (Transparency International Report 2002). However, vast amounts of qualitative evidence suggests that the government used the NAB courts to prosecute political opponents. For example, "from the time Pakistan's corruption watchdog, National Accountability Bureau (NAB), came into existence, it has served as a handmaiden of the powers-that-be to either fix political opponents or make them pliable" (Sareen, 2018) or "the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) — standing in the front row and believed to be targeting some, while sparing others." (Khattak, 2018). Likewise, in a landmark judgment by Supreme Court of Pakistan, it was noted that "The Accountability Bureau seems reluctant in proceeding against people on one

side of the political divide even in respect of financial scams of massive proportion while those on the other side are being arrested and incarcerated for months and years without providing any sufficient cause even when the law mandates investigations to be concluded expeditiously and trial to be concluded within 30 days." (Dawn News, 2020). The persecution of political opponents was also noted in a prominent Human Rights Watch Report on the 2002 elections- (HRW, 2002) Several instances imply that General Musharraf used NAB courts to target political opponents. For example, Syed Ghous Ali Shah, who had been held by NAB resigned as the opposition party (PML-N) president for Sindh province on March 2, 2001, the move was followed by Shah's transfer from NAB custody to a hospital, followed by acquittal in the NAB court. Similarly, on October 20th, 2003 an opposition politician, Javed Hashmi, held a news conference and proclaimed "General Pervez Musharraf and PML - Q are imposed on this nation. These national criminals have not only held the army hostage, but also the entire nation." On 29 October 2003, he was taken into custody by NAB prosecutors from the premises of the Parliament and convicted on April 12th, 2004. Many such examples abound, and I provide systematic empirical evidence of this in this paper.

III. Data and Empirical Strategy

Data Description: Our study utilizes a large-scale digitization of court decisions and personnel records from the National Accountability (NAB) Courts and the electoral records from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) allowing us to examine the impact of elections on corruption convictions and political affiliation. Specifically, we link corruption court judgments in the National Accountability Courts of Pakistan (NAB) to electoral data from the Election Commission of Pakistan to study the impact of electoral success on corruption convictions for over 10,000 corruption cases, spanning from 1996-2018 and across 1979 electoral districts and 3 national and state elections in Pakistan. To collect this dataset, we used a combination of official court data from the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) archives, judicial administrative data from High Courts and the judicial archives in Islamabad, and publicly available data form the Election Commission. Further details on the data breakdown and construction are provided in the Appendix A1.

Corruption Cases outcomes: The decision outcome of corruption cases for this study is taken from two sources, the National Accountability Bureau archives, which contain judgments of all cases decided by the NAB from its inception to 2018. The secondary source of data we use are newspaper reports of corruption cases during this time period. We

combine the official NAB court data with news reporting of corruption cases. The advantage of using these two sources is that it provides us with a comprehensive record of corruption cases in Pakistan, allowing for a detailed analysis. Additionally, combinings the dataset provides us detailed information on the outcome of each case, including whether the defendant was convicted, acquitted, pleaded guilty, or paid a fine. This is similar to analysis of corruption data in prior work e.g. Lambais and Sigstad, 2023.

Political affiliation and Election outcomes: Party of candidate and votes received from ECP, incumbency, constituency. The running variable for the winning margin of the candidates is developed using election data from the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) official website. We collect and clean the data for 2002, 2008 and 2013 general elections in Pakistan. The main goal of using this dataset is that it provides detailed information on electoral outcomes at the local or at the "constituency" level. This allows for the identification of politicians who either won the election or lost the election including the number of votes received by the politician in their electoral district, which is crucial for my identification strategy. NAB data, newspaper data and ECP election data were matched using perfect name matching. This allowed for the identification of politicians who were involved in corruption cases and also participated in elections. The advantage of using matched data is that it allows for a detailed analysis of the relationship between corruption and electoral outcomes. Additionally, I used perfect name matching to ensure a high level of accuracy in matching politicians across datasets.

Personnel records: To document the composition of the corruption judges and their career progression, we digitized judicial administrative data at the judicial archives in Islamabad and matched them with NAB annual reports. This data allows us to track when judges joined the NAB courts, their selection process, the duration of their service in corruption courts, and whether they were promoted to higher positions after completing their tenure. Moreover, we were able to note the types of cases that each judge adjudicated. Advantages of this data include understanding the structure of the judiciary and how corruption judges are selected and promoted, investigating potential bias or differences in their decisions, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the corruption court system Overall, the use of this comprehensive dataset can be an important contribution to the literature on corruption and politics. The data can be used to study insights into the relationships between politics, corruption, and the judicial system in Pakistan. The data can be used by other researchers,

policymakers and other stakeholders to study corruption, design effective policies and interventions aimed at reducing corruption and promoting good governance.

Empirical Strategy: I use a regression discontinuity design to estimate the impact of winning elections on corruption convictions. The key identification challenge in just comparing corruption convictions of winning versus losing opposition politicians is that elected and non-elected politicians are likely different, one is in office and the other is out of office, or they might be just involved in different types of corruption cases. The ideal experiment I would like to run is to randomly allocate elected offices to opposition politicians and investigate the impact on corruption convictions My regression discontinuity design approximates this ideal experiment by exploring close elections wins and loses that are likely determined randomly. In particular, I explore corruption cases filed at the NAB courts and compare convictions of politicians who marginally won the election relative to those who lost. The idea is that the winner of a close election is as good as randomly determined. Therefore, these two kinds of politicians would be involved in similar types of cases and have similar observed and unobserved characteristics.

As the main specification, I use a regression discontinuity design to estimate the impact of winning elections on corruption convictions. as proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020) with local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. I estimate the following regression of the form:

$$Conviction_i = \alpha + \beta\, Electoral\ Margin_i + \gamma\, Elected_i + e_i \quad (1)$$

The i index is for individual politicians. The electoral margin is the winning margin in elections for the politician and Elected is a dummy variable if the politician is elected. The main coefficient of interest γ gives the regression discontinuity estimate for the impact of close election on corruption convictions. To avoid discretion in the choice of control variables, I use no controls. I also run the above regression for cases filed and decided before the election as a placebo. If close elections are indeed randomly determined, I should not see any effect of the election victory on these cases. I report the main result using standard local linear specifications for different bandwidths, following the recent Calonico et al., 2020 bias-corrected optimal bandwidth. Standard errors are clustered at the electoral district (constituency) level. This is the level of variation of the running variable.

IV. Results and Robustness

5.1. Main Results

Persecution of Political Opponents.—Intensive Margin Results.- In Table 1, I report the result of estimating Equation (1) with the conviction dummy for opposition politicians as the dependent variable. The estimates from Column 1 of Table 1, indicate that marginal electoral winners are 40 percentage points more likely to be convicted. This is equivalent to a 80% increase in corruption convictions for opposition politicians if they marginally win the elections. In Column 2, we provide a crucial placebo check, examining if pre-treatment corruption convictions of opposition politicians are impacted by future electoral victory. Specifically, we investigate the cases filed and decided before the election. Reassuringly, the marginal victors do not impact corruption convictions.

This RDD results can also be visually observed in Figure 1 for the opposition politicians where a clear and sharp jump in conviction rate is observed for marginal winners of opposition political parties with the impact being statistically significant at conventional significance levels. Column (1) of Table (1) gives us the overall effect of electoral victory on corruption convictions for opposition politicians. We run eq (1), again this time for 2002 and 2008 elections separately. In 2002 the autocrat supported, centre right Muslim league came to power, and in 2008 the democratic, centre-left Pakistan People's Party came to power. Reassuringly, we observe a similar pattern, Figure B1 reports these results, Panel A reports the results that marginally winning elections increases the corruption convictions of opposition politicians by about 70% for 2002 national and state elections. Similarly, in the 2008 elections, as shown in Panel B of Figure B1 this persecution of political opponents persist: the marginal winners from the opposition politicians in 2008 national and state elections are 90% more likely to be convicted. The same result can also be seen in tabular form Column (1) of Panel A and Panel B of Table B1.

Persecution of Political Opponents.—Extensive Margin Results.- In Table 2 reports the extensive margin results. I report the result of estimating Equation (1) with the post election cases filed for opposition politicians as the dependent variable. The estimates

from Column (1) of Table (2), indicate that for oposition marginal winners there are on average 9 more cases or 90% additional cases, over the mean, are filed on them. This increase in case filing behavious is visually shown in Figure (3). Where we note a stark jump in the number of new cases filed on opposition politicians who marginally win the election. Then we in Column (3) of Table 2 we look at how many of these cases convert into convictions. This translates into and 20 percentage points more likely to be convicted. This is equivalent to a 60% increase in corruption convictions for opposition politicians if they marginally win the elections. In Column 2, we look at how many additional cases are filed on affiliates of incumbent party, we find no difference from zero on additional cases filed and, no effect for additional convictions, as shown in column (4).

The Escape of Incumbent Politicians.—Intensive Margin Results. The intensive margin RD results can be visually observed in Figure 2 for incumbent's affiliate politicians where a clear and sharp jump in conviction rate is observed for marginal winners. I find that when a politician from the incumbent political party marginally wins the elections, it does not increase her corruption convictions. In fact, I observe a large negative effect in the opposite direction: incumbent party politicians marginally winning elections leads to significantly more favorable judicial rulings – a substantial reduction in corruption convictions for the winners. These results are reported in Column 3 of Table 1. Specifically, there is a 0.60 percentage points decrease in corruption convictions for incumbent politicians marginally winning, about a 2 fold decrease in corruption convictions relative to the mean dependent variable. These results can be observed visually in Figure 2. We observe that marginally winning elections reduces the corruption convictions of incumbent politicians by about 105%. This effect is not specific to one election year. We run eq (1) again for the 2002 and 2008 national and state elections, we observe a similar pattern, Figure B2 reports these results, Panel A reports the results that marginally winning elections reduces the corruption convictions of incumbent politicians by about 120% for 2002 national and state elections. Similarly, in the 2008 elections, as shown in Panel B of Figure B2 this persecution of political opponents persist: the marginal winners from the opposition politicians in 2008 national and state elections are more likely to be convicted.

The Escape of Incumbent Politicians.—Extensive Margin Results.- In Table 2 reports the extensive margin results. I report the result of estimating Equation (1) with the post election cases filed for incumbent affiliate politicians as the dependent variable. The

estimates from Column (2) of Table (2), indicate that for incumbent affiliate marginal winners there no additional cases that are filed on them. We visually observe this in Figure (4). Where we note no difference in the number of new cases filed on opposition politicians who marginally win the election. Then in Column (4) of Table 2 we look at cases converted into convictions. This again translate into a null effect. There are no additional convictions on newly filed caces.

Crowd-out of non-politician's corruption cases.—We next analyze how the convictions of non-politicians, specifically bureaucrats, who are not affiliated with any political party, were affected by the convictions of opposition politicians. We found that in districts where opposition politicians marginally won and were subsequently convicted of corruption, bureaucrats were less likely to be convicted. We present these results in Figure 5, which shows that electoral districts where opposition politicians marginally won have fewer convictions of bureaucrats for corruption in the NAB courts. This likely suggests a crowd-out of non-politicians' corruption cases. A result consistent with Figure 5, can be seen in Figure 6 which indicates that congestion caused by corruption convictions has a crowd-out effect on non-political corruption cases. For instance, judges with the highest caseload are significantly less likely to convict bureaucrats than judges with lighter caseload. In other words, as the caseload of judges increases, they become less likely to convict bureaucrats, implying that the convictions of opposition politicians are crowding out corruption cases of non-politicians (Figure 6). Our study underscores the differential treatment of opposition politicians and non-politicians in terms of corruption convictions and highlights the potential implications for the allocation of judicial resources and the pursuit of justice.

Corruption Convictions and Incumbency Advantage. — Does the persecution of opposition politicians and rewarding of incumbent politicians allow governments to consolidate their power? To address this question we find incumbency advantage for opposition politicians Figure 6 reports these suggestive results. We find that opposition politicians are 50 % more likely to win the next election in the same constituency (12 to 18 percentage points increase likelihood to be elected), if they are exonerated for corruption charges. We can also interpret the results as opposition politicians who won the elections and are convicted for corruption are 50 % *less* likely to be reelected in the next elections. This "suggests that opposition politicians completely lose their incumbency advantage upon their corruption conviction.

Robustness to Bandwidth Selection and Balance Check.—These results are robust to different bandwidth selection and balance checks of marginal winners and losers across a long list of observed characteristics. In Figure B4 of Appendix, I report the results by varying the bandwidths and our results remain similar. This strongly suggests that the exact choice of bandwidth is not driving my results. This also suggests bunching around threshold is not likely to be an important determinant of my results. If there would be bunching around the threshold, I would see sharp differences in my coefficient estimates as moved across the different thresholds. However, I also perform a formal McCrary test of bunching around the threshold. Figure B5 reports these results. The evidence is consistent with minimal bunching if any. Finally, the regression discontinuity design rests on the assumption that marginal winners are similar to the marginal losers. To support this identification assumption, provide evidence in the form of a balance test. These results are reported in Table B2. I find that politicians who barely win the elections and those who do not are similar across a host of characteristics, including the type of cases they were previously involved in, gender, religion and their ethnicity. I also run the main regression equation (1) for cases filed and decided before the election as a placebo. If close elections are indeed randomly determined, I should not see any effect of the election victory on these cases. Reassuringly, I do not find any difference. The regression discontinuity plots for opposition politicians (figure B6) and incumbent party politicians (Figure B7) can been seen in Figure B6 and Figure B7

External Validity.— It is noted by List (2020) in an important paper that "all results are externally valid to some setting, and no result will be externally valid to all settings." Therefore, I follow the List (2020)'s SANS (Selection-Attrition-Naturalness-Scaling) conditions in my discussion of external validity of my results. First, in terms of selection, our sample consists of more than 10,000 corruption cases from 1996 to 2018 that include all marginal winners and losers in about 2000 elections held at the district (constituency level) as well as at the national level. Considering the naturalness of the setting, time frame and choice task, we obtain natural measures such as electoral victory. The policy makers are not placed on an artificial margin and perform natural tasks in the field. Second, the electoral structure in Pakistan is similar to many other developing countries, especially India and Bangladesh who, like Pakistan, inherited these political institutions during the British Colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan, India and Bangladesh alone consist of more than a quarter of world population making this study particularly relevant for a large number of people. We, however, view these results as a WAVE1 insight, in the nomenclature of List (2020), and

replications need to be completed to understand if the effect sizes can be applied to other general populations as well as other countries in the Global South.

V. Exploration of Mechanisms

In order to gain insights into the factors underlying the corruption convictions of opposition politicians, we conducted an analysis to explore various competing theories that could explain these outcomes. Our findings provide support for the hypothesis that career concerns among judges play a significant role in driving the convictions of opposition politicians. Judges who are most likely to convict opposition politicians are most likely to be promoted to the High Court. This suggests that judges who convict opposition politicians are more likely to be promoted to higher positions within the judicial system, indicating the influence of career considerations in their decision-making process. Reassuringly, we find no evidence of such rewarding of judges for convicting incumbent politicians. Specifically, Figure 7 suggests the larger the conviction of opposition politicians, the more likely the judge is promoted to High Court. In contrast, no such effect appears with conviction of politicians in power. In Figure 8, we observe the conviction rate of incumbent politicians in government and likelihood of promotion of judges are not increasing with respect to each other.

Interestingly, when the authority to appoint and promote judges is transferred from politicians to a committee composed of judges themselves, such persecution of opposition appears to disappear. This is reported is reported in Figure 8 (Panal A). We can also see a similar effect on the judicial subversion on government in power politicians, which also disappears as can see in Figure 8 (Panel B). These results are also consistent with Mehmood (2022) that finds that move away from political appointments to meritocratic peer appointment system increases judicial independence. In an election where the incumbent government no longer has the power to appoint or promote judges, we do not observe a higher likelihood of convicting judges who are being promoted, nor do we observe opposition politicians convicted of corruption if they narrowly win the election.

We also hope to next explore if our results can be attributed to alternative mechanisms of judge selection or peer effects among judges, to underscore the significance of career

concerns in shaping these outcomes. The findings nevertheless highlight career incentives, and corruption convictions, shedding light on the dynamics at play within the judicial system and political landscape.

VI. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the fight against corruption is crucial for ensuring trust in state institutions, political accountability, and economic development. However, anti-corruption drives have the potential to be used selectively and partially, which can lead to the persecution of political opponents and the erosion of trust in the accountability process. The academic literature has largely overlooked the unintended consequences of anti-corruption initiatives, and this study sheds light on how these initiatives can be influenced by electoral success and political affiliation. By examining corruption convictions in Pakistan's Anti Corruption courts and election data from the Election Commission of Pakistan, this study provides empirical evidence on the impact of electoral success, political affiliation, and incumbency on corruption convictions.

The study's large-scale data collection and digitization effort have allowed for the examination of this relationship between electoral outcomes and corruption convictions and the mechanisms that underlie them. Electoral success of opposition politicians increases the likelihood of convictions in anti-corruption courts by 70%, while no such persecution is observed for the success of politicians who win elections when their political party is in power. The use of a regression discontinuity design and focus on cases filed before the election speak to crucial concerns regarding the endogeneity of electoral success and case filing behavior. My findings highlight the role played by incumbent parties in persecuting political opposition through courts, potentially undermining the entire accountability process by crowding out legitimate corruption initiatives. Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of the inner workings of anti-corruption initiatives and their impact on political institutions.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Intensive margin Impact of Marginal Winners on Corruption Convictions of Opposition Members and Incumbents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Conviction Rate of Opposition Politicians	*Pre-Treatment Conviction Rates of Opposition Politicians*	*Conviction Rate of Incumbent's affiliate Politicians*	*Pre-treatment Conviction Rate of Incumbent's affiliate Politicians*
Winning Margin	0.406	0.197	-0.635	-0.0679
	(0.128)***	(0.164)	(0.148)***	(0.122)
	[0.105]***	[0.135]	[0.141]***	[0.147]
Observations	1,912	1,065	602	372
Mean	0.469	0.486	0.586	0.427
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.142	0.211	0.190	0.270

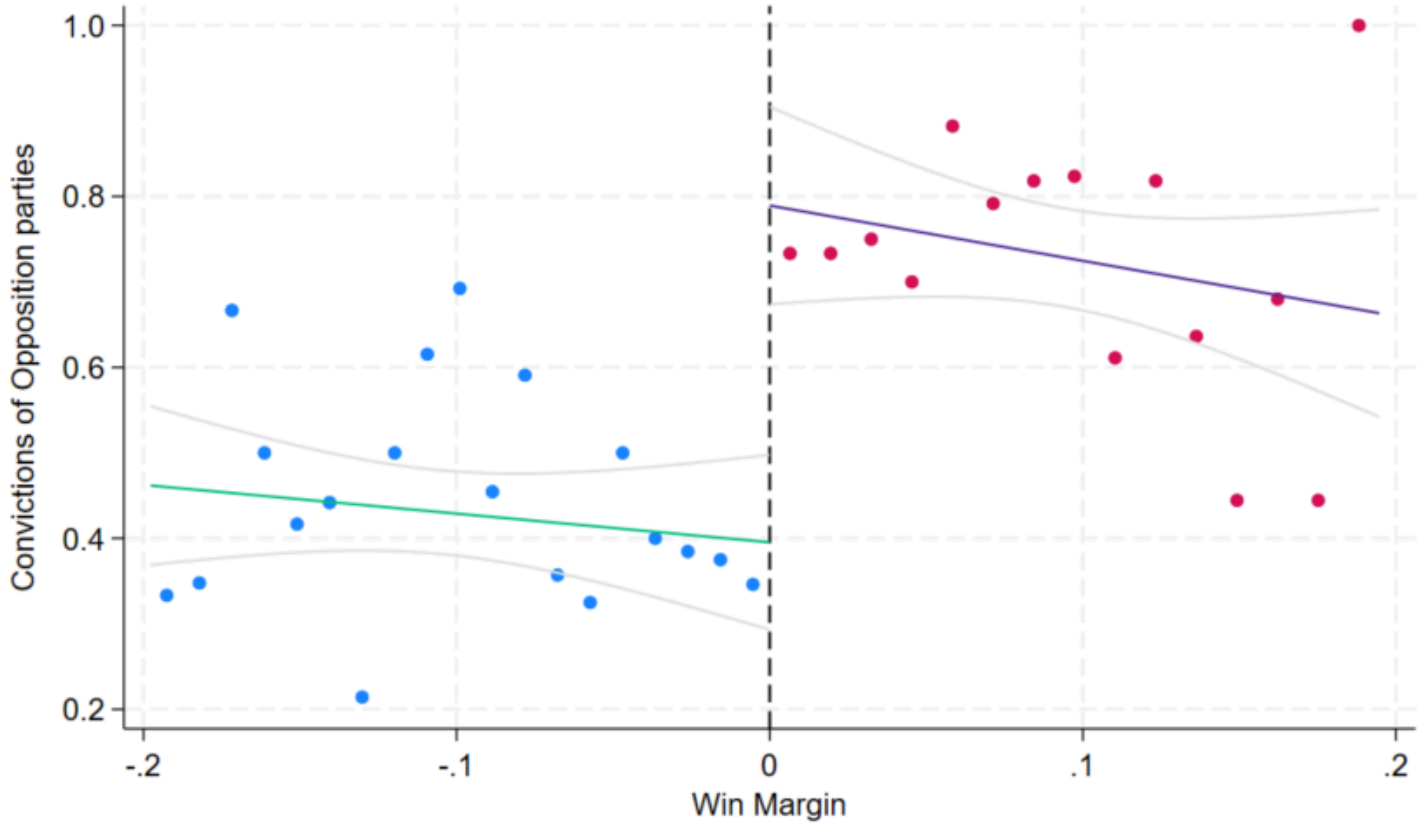
Note: The table reports the regression discontinuity estimates using bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020) that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin' it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. For example, a margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes compared to the winner. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 are in the control group. Comparison is done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth elected candidates. As with the RD design, units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020). No controls are added. *Conviction Opposition* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is part of the political opposition when the elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. *Conviction Incumbent* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is a member of the incumbent political party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty for corruption charges and is zero otherwise. Convictions of Oppositions Placebo and Convictions of Incumbent Placebo are estimates of the same equation but for pre-treatment outcomes i.e. it considers convictions of opposition and incumbent, respectively, for cases filed, adjudicated and decided before the elections. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are added in parentheses while. Calonico,Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) Cluster–Robust Standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2: Extensive margin Impact of Marginal Winners on Corruption Convictions of Opposition Members and Incumbent Affiliated

	(1) *Case Filed Opposition Parties*	*(2)* *Case Filed Affiliate Parties*	*(3)* *Convictions Opposition Parties*	*(4)* *Convictions Affiliate Parties*
Winning Margin	9.594***	28.56	0.201***	-0.406
	[0.661]	[18.63]	[0.0634]	[1.073]
Observations	3,020	71	2,270	65
Mean	10.23	8.408	0.326	0.462
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.0372	0.0567	0.136	0.0729

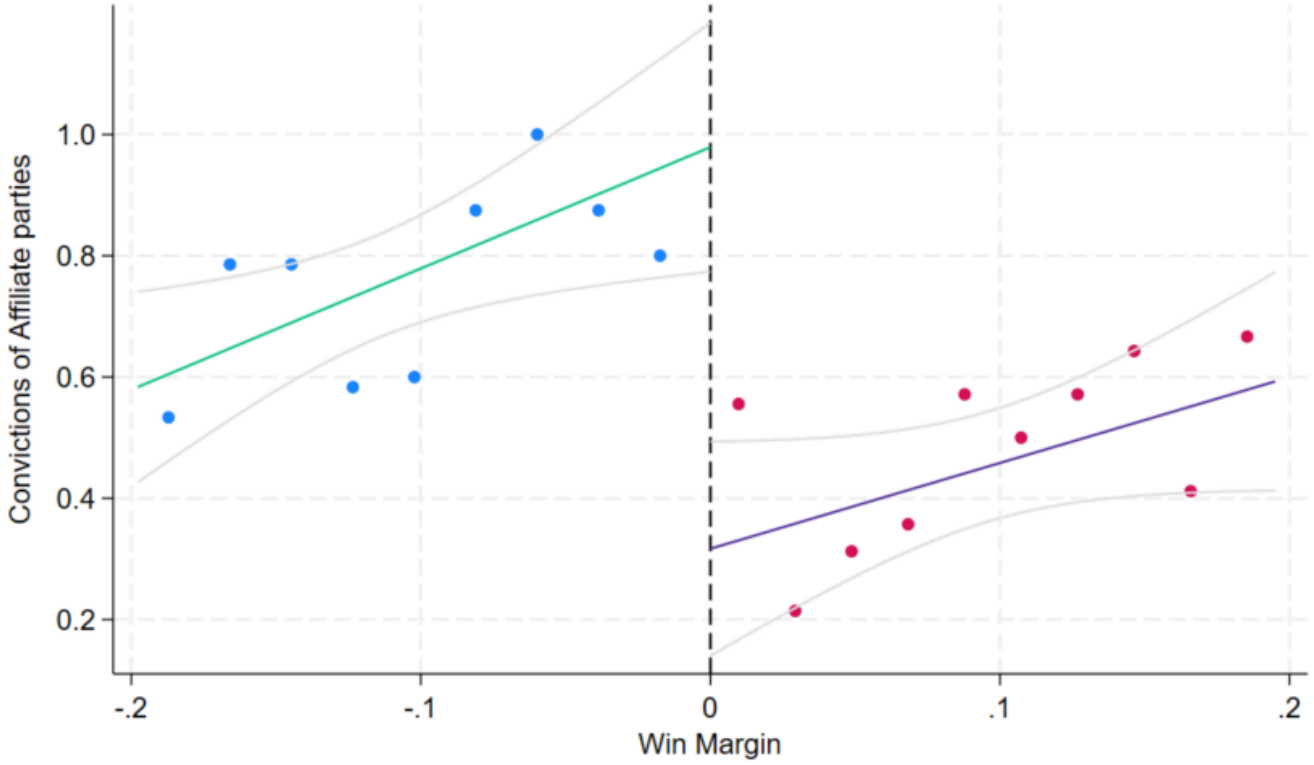
Note: The table reports the regression discontinuity estimates using bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020) that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin' it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. For example, a margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes compared to the winner. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 are in the control group. Comparison is done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth elected candidates. As with the RD design, units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020). No controls are added. *Case Filed Opposition Parties* is a count variable, for number of cases on each politician conditional on being part of the opposition party. *Case Filed Affiliate Parties* is a count variable, for number of cases on each politician conditional on being part of the incumbent's affiliate party. *Conviction Opposition* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is part of the political opposition when the elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. *Conviction Incumbent* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is a member of the incumbent political party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty for corruption charges and is zero otherwise. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are added in parentheses while. Calonico,Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) Cluster–Robust Standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 1: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Convictions



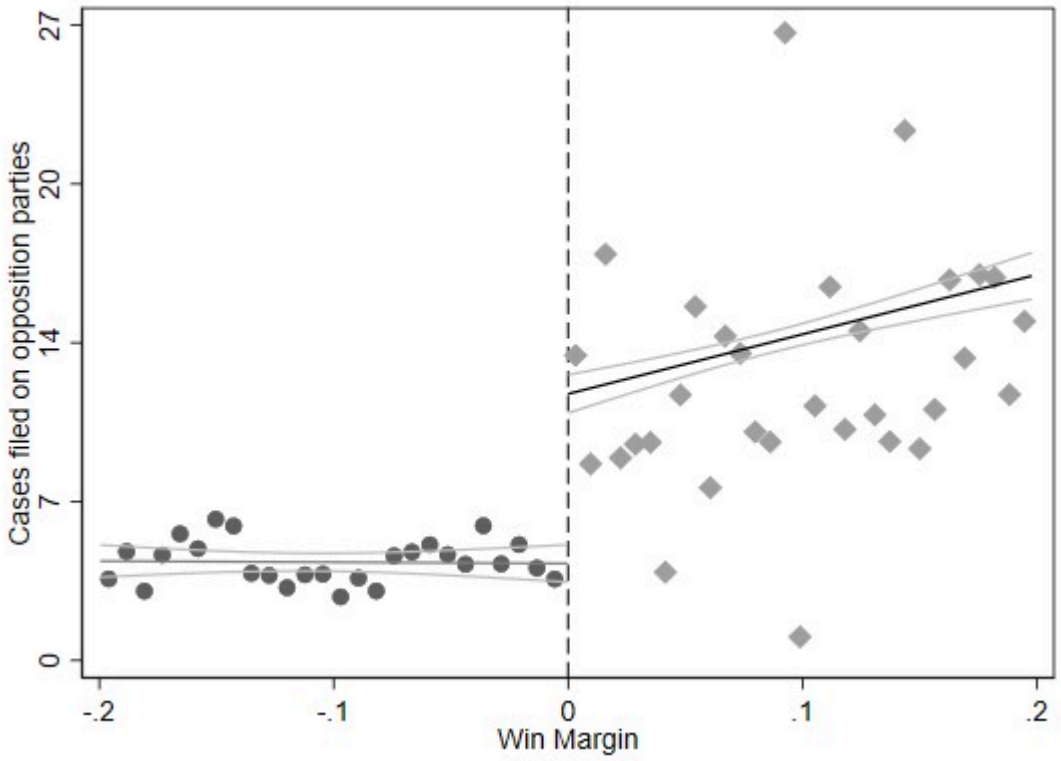
Note: The regression discontinuity plots shows the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the state and national elections for opposition candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the opposition parties at that win margin (these opposition parties that are all those who ran against the incumbent party. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 2: Intensive Margin Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Incumbents



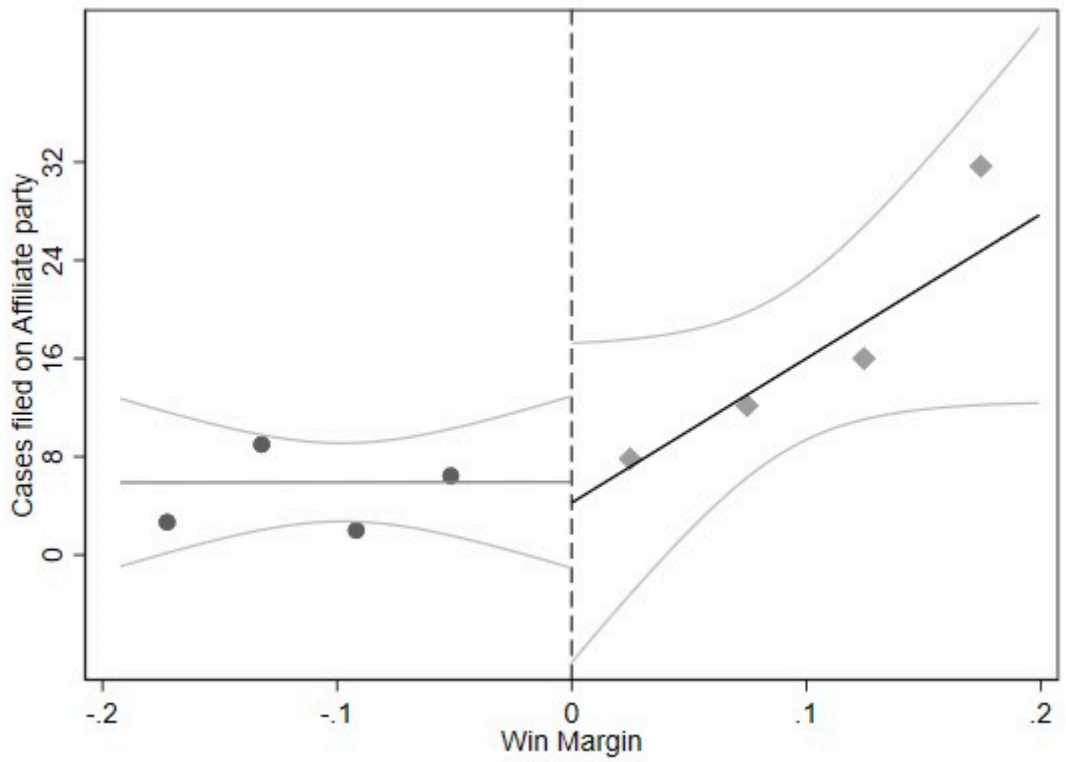
Note: The regression discontinuity plots shows the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the state and national elections for aafiliates of incumbent politicians. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the incumbent party affiliated politicians. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 3: Extensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Case Filing



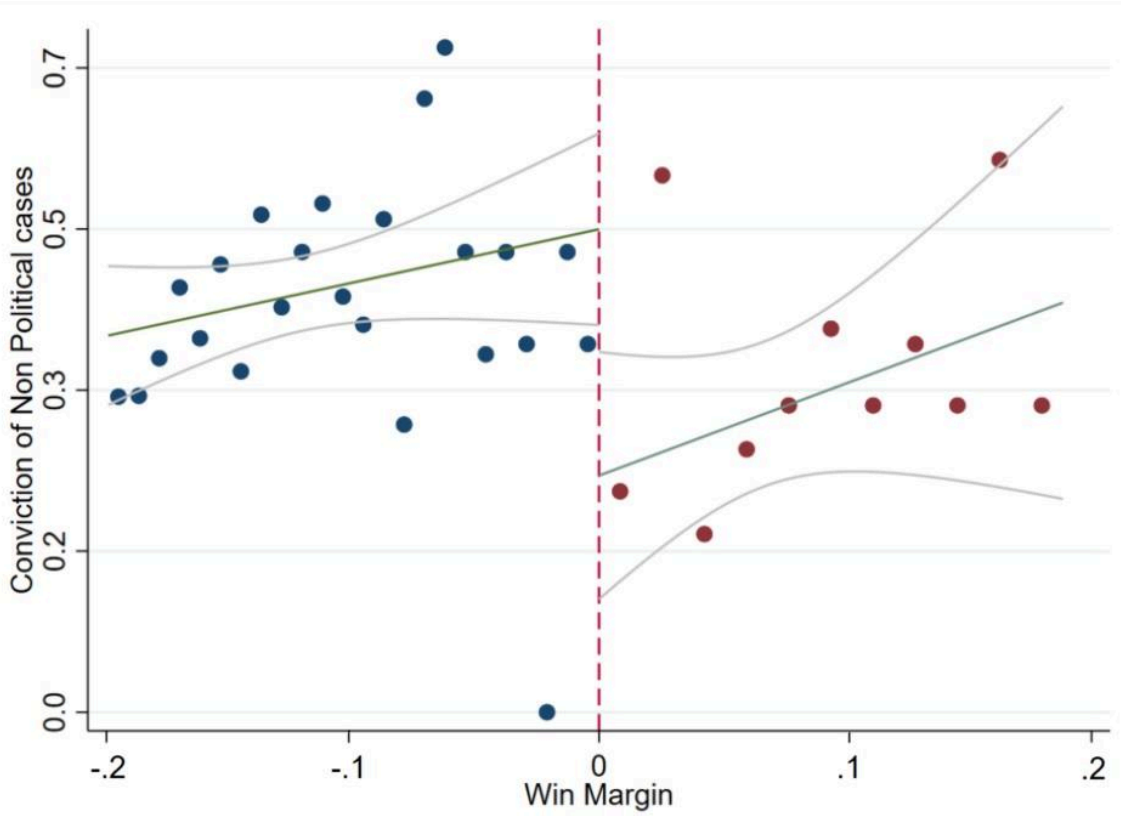
Note: The regression discontinuity plots shows the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the state and national elections for opposition candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean number of cases (reported on the vertical axis) is the count of cases of the opposition parties at that win margin (these opposition parties that are all those who ran against the incumbent party. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 4: Extensive Margin Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Incumbent's Case Count



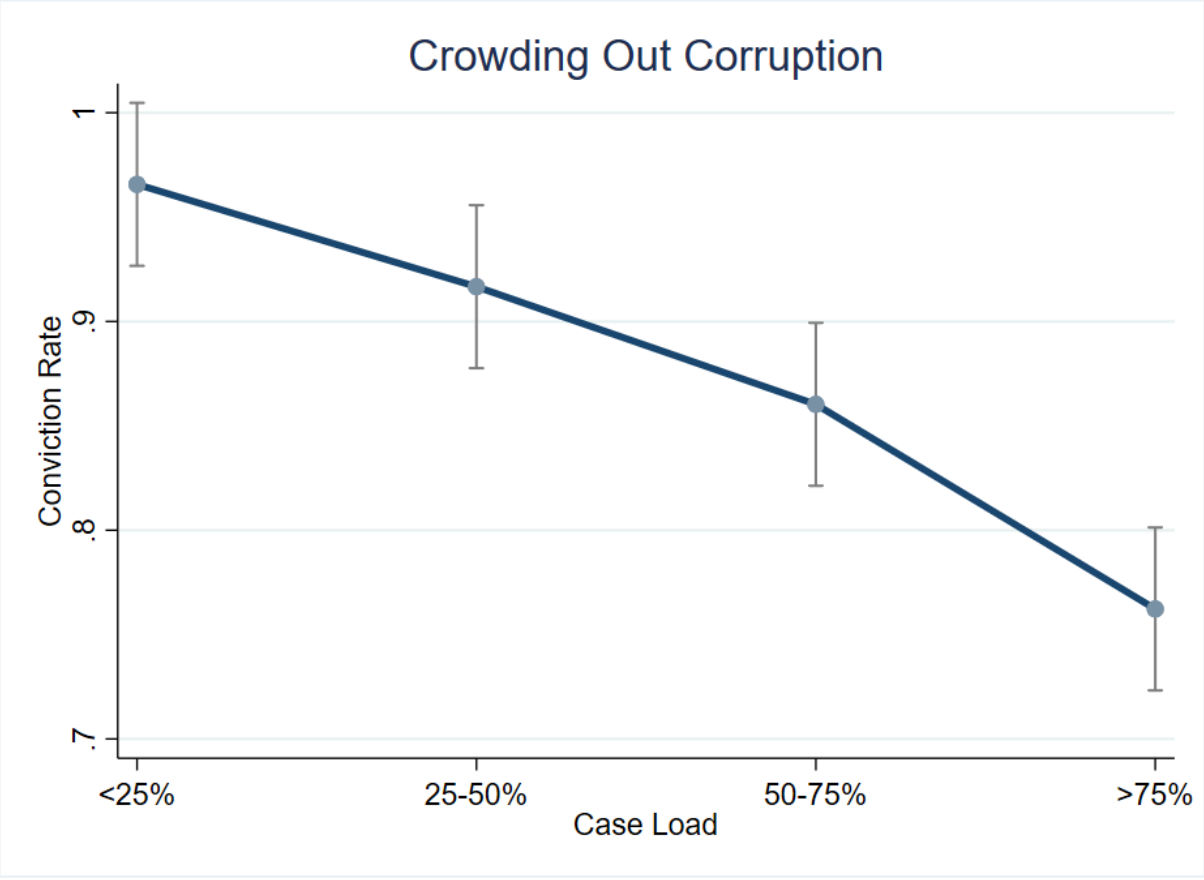
Note: The regression discontinuity plots shows the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the state and national elections for aafiliates of incumbent politicians. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean cases filed (reported on the vertical axis) is the case count of the incumbent party affiliated politicians. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 5: Crowdout - Impact of Marginal Winners' electoral districts on convictions of non-Politicians



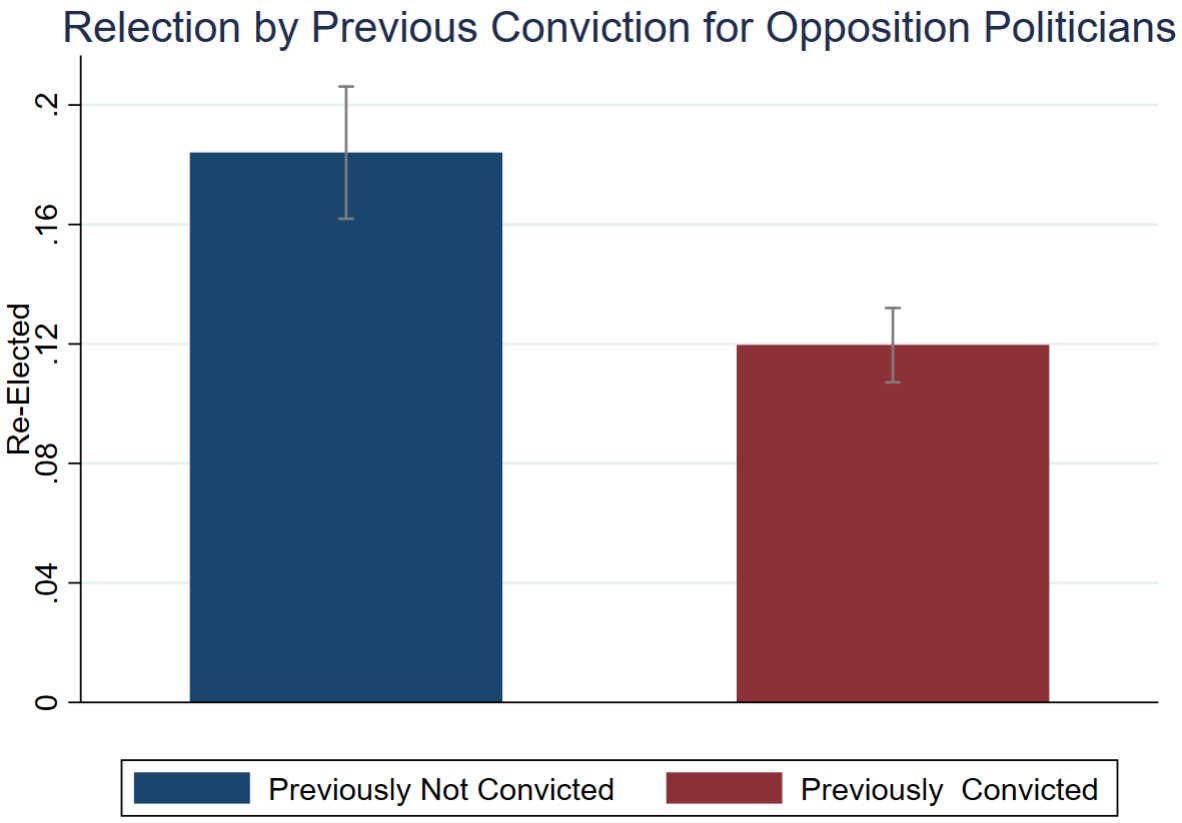
Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability for non politically salient cases (cases involving bureaucrats) in districts of marginal winners and losers for 2002 and 2008 state and national elections. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability for non politically salient cases (cases involving bureaucrats) in opposition winning constituencies. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 6: Conviction Rate of non-Politicians by Judge Caseload by Quartiles



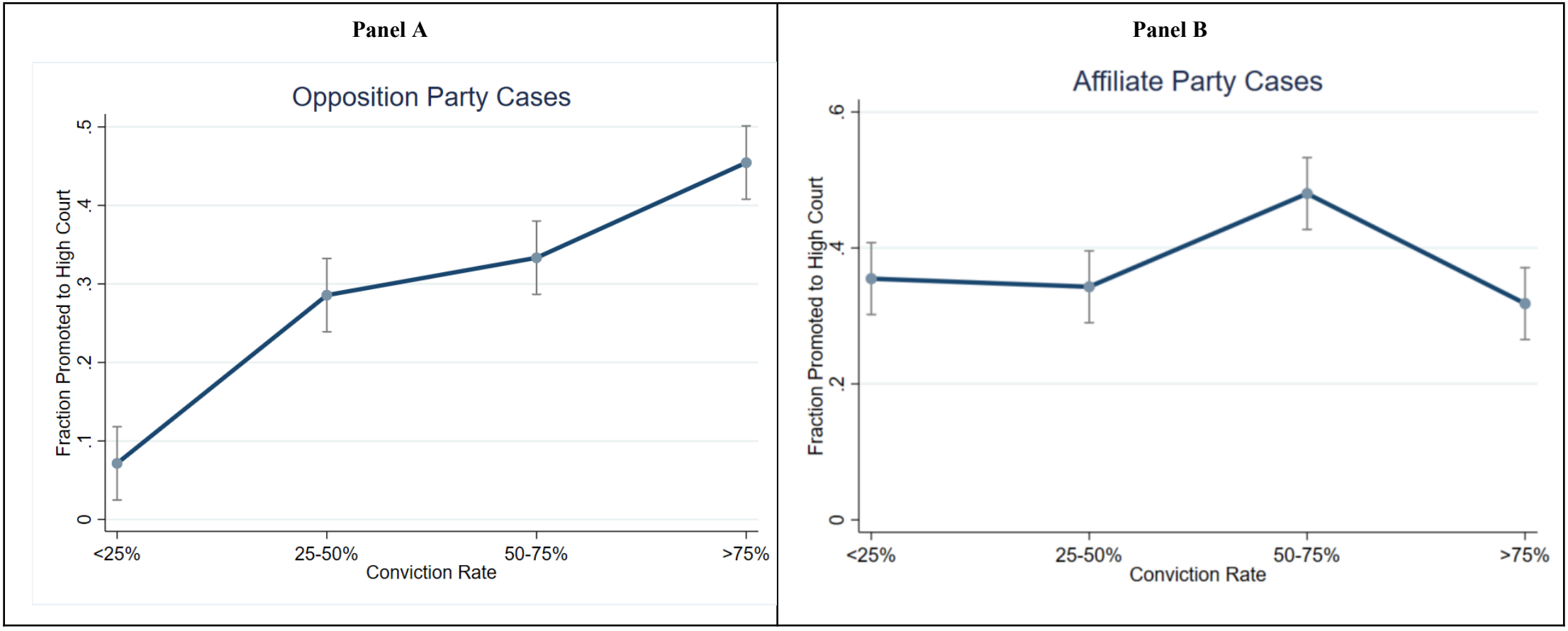
Note: The graph shows the conviction rate of non politically salient cases (cases involving bureaucrats) in the districts where the opposition parties won majority seats. The conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the mean conviction for each judge adjudicating bureaucrats' cases. The variable case load (reported on the horizontal axis) shows the percentile of cases adjudicated by the judge. The bars show the 95% Confidence interval

Figure 7: Incumbency disadvantage of Opposition Politicians if convicted previously



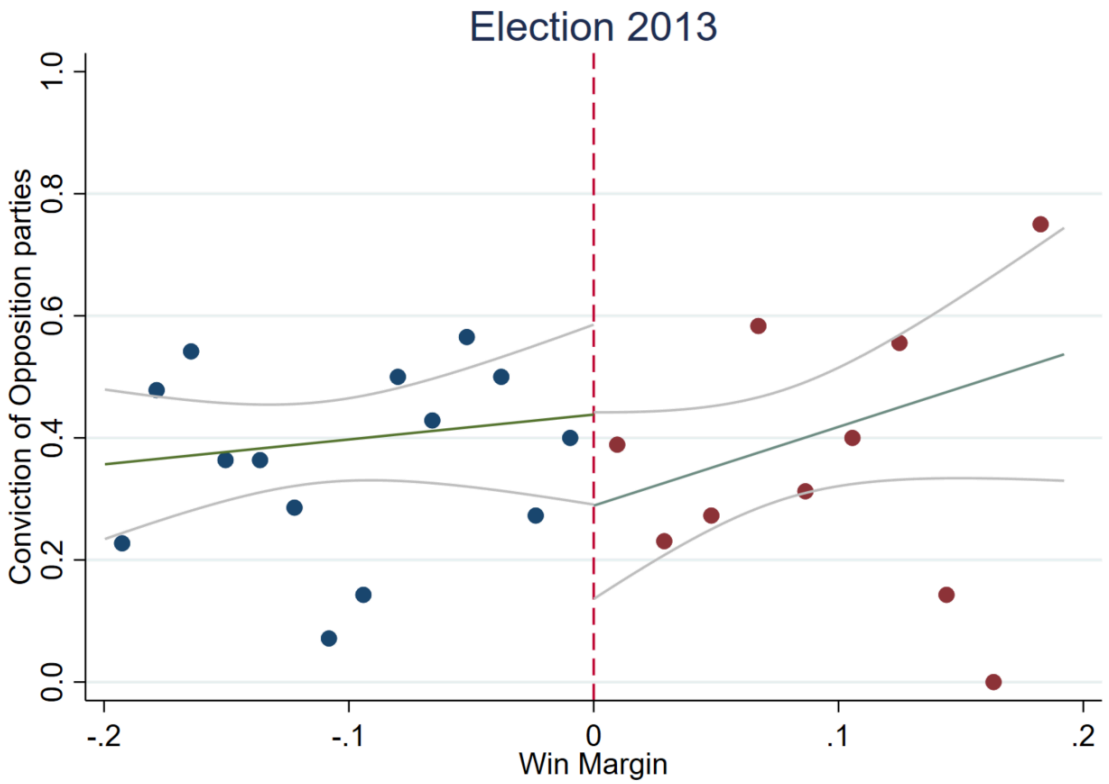
Note: The bar chart shows the effect on re-election for an incumbent opposition politician (marginal winners). The variable re-elected (reported on the vertical axis) is the probability of getting reelected if they had marginally won the last election. Previously Convicted and Previously Not Convicted (reported on the horizontal axis) is a dummy variable that takes the value one if the opposition candidate was convicted for corruption and zero otherwose. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported

Figure 8: Effect on Judges promotion



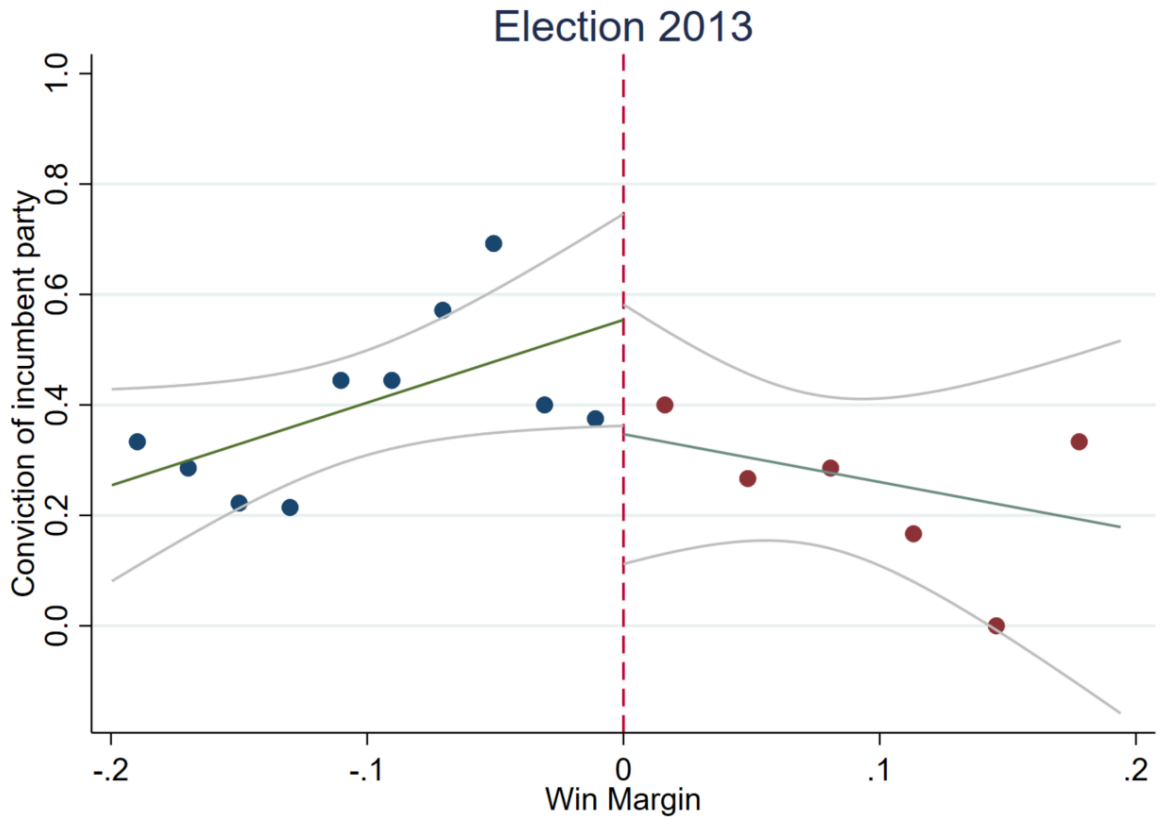
Note: The graph shows the fraction of judges promoted to the high court after completing their tenure at the corruption court. The fraction promoted to high court (vertical axis) shows the probability of promotion. The conviction rate (horizontal axis) is the mean conviction for each judge, when subsampling for cases only involving opposition party politicians (Panel A) and incumbent party affiliate politicians (Panel B) . The bars show the Confidence interval at 95%

Figure 9: Regression Discontinuity Opposition parties 2013



Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability of the marginal election winners and losers of the 2013 for the state and national elections for opposition candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the opposition parties at that win margin (these opposition parties are all those who ran against the incumbent party Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)). The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers.Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure 10: Regression Discontinuity Incumbent Party 2013



Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability of the marginal election winners and losers of the 2013 for the state and national elections for incumbent candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the incumbent party Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N). The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers.Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Appendix B - Additional Tables and Figures

Table B1: Impact of Marginal Winners on Corruption Convictions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Conviction Rate of Opposition Politicians	*Pre-Treatment Conviction Rates of Opposition Politicians*	*Conviction Rate of Incumbent's affiliate Politicians*	*Pre-treatment Conviction Rate of Incumbent's affiliate Politicians*
Panel A: Election 2002				
Elected	0.513***	0.234	-0.724***	-0.102
	(0.219)**	(0.164)	(0.209)***	(0.243)
	[0.173]	[0.151]	[0.208]	[0.323]
Observations	418	846	330	110
Mean	0.720	0.486	0.597	0.464
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.156	0.211	0.149	0.0996
Panel B: Election 2008				
Elected	0.380***	0.158	-0.382	0.0366
	(0.140)***	(0.645)	(0.513)	(0.110)
	[0.120]	[0.361]	[0.343]	[0.321]
Observations	1,494	219	297	262
Mean	0.399	0.461	0.552	0.412
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.145	0.110	0.124	0.155
Panel C: Election 2013				
Elected	-0.0612	0.424	-0.0783	-0.406
	(0.294)	(0.637)	(0.586)	(0.943)
	[0.164]	[0.541]	[0.206]	[0.694]
Observations	2,211	189	882	295
Mean	0.386	0.466	0.341	0.268
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.127	0.0959	0.150	0.0866

Note: The table reports the regression discontinuity estimates using a bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020) that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin' it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. For example, a margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes compared to the winner. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated) and get a value of 1, while units with margin < 0 are in the control group and get a value of 0. Comparison is done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth elected candidates. As with the RD design, units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following Calonico, Cattaneo and Farrell (2020). No controls are added. *Conviction Opposition* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is part of the political opposition when the

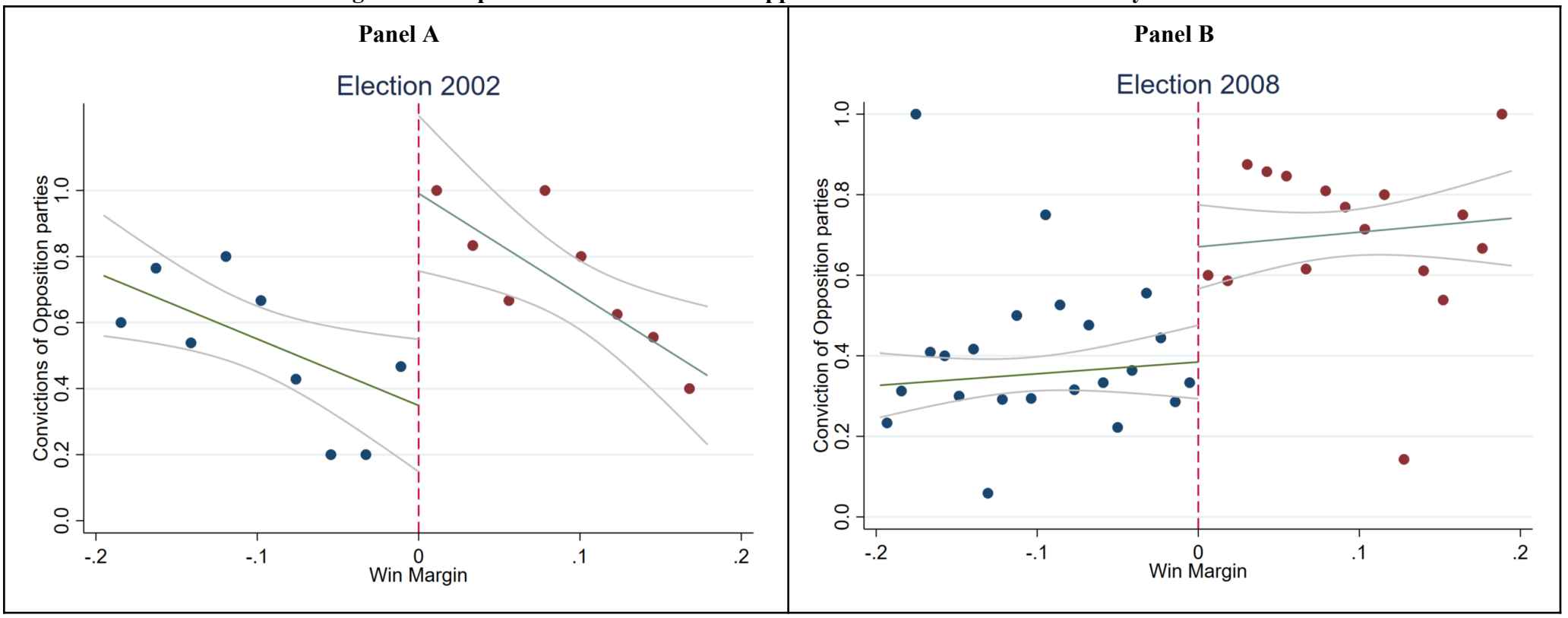
elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. *Conviction Incumbent* is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is a member of the incumbent political party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty for corruption charges and is zero otherwise. Convictions of Oppositions Placebo and Convictions of Incumbent Placebo are estimates of the same equation but for pre-treatment outcomes i.e. it considers convictions of opposition and incumbent, respectively, for cases filed, adjudicated and decided before the elections. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are added in parentheses while. Calonico,Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) Cluster–Robust Standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table B2: Test for Balance

	(1) Pre-Election Convictions	(2) Gender Politician	(3) Religion Politician	(4) # Lawyers in Defense	(5) Allegation Type	(6) Left Politician
Marginal	0.0639	-0.000405	-0.000133	0.0545	0.00389	0.00703
Winner	[0.0402]	[0.000633]	[0.000158]	[0.0372]	[0.0345]	[0.0275]
Observations	846	27,392	27,392	13,789	27,362	27,429
R-squared	0.003	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
Mean	0.486	0.998	0.998	5.046	7.315	0.0461

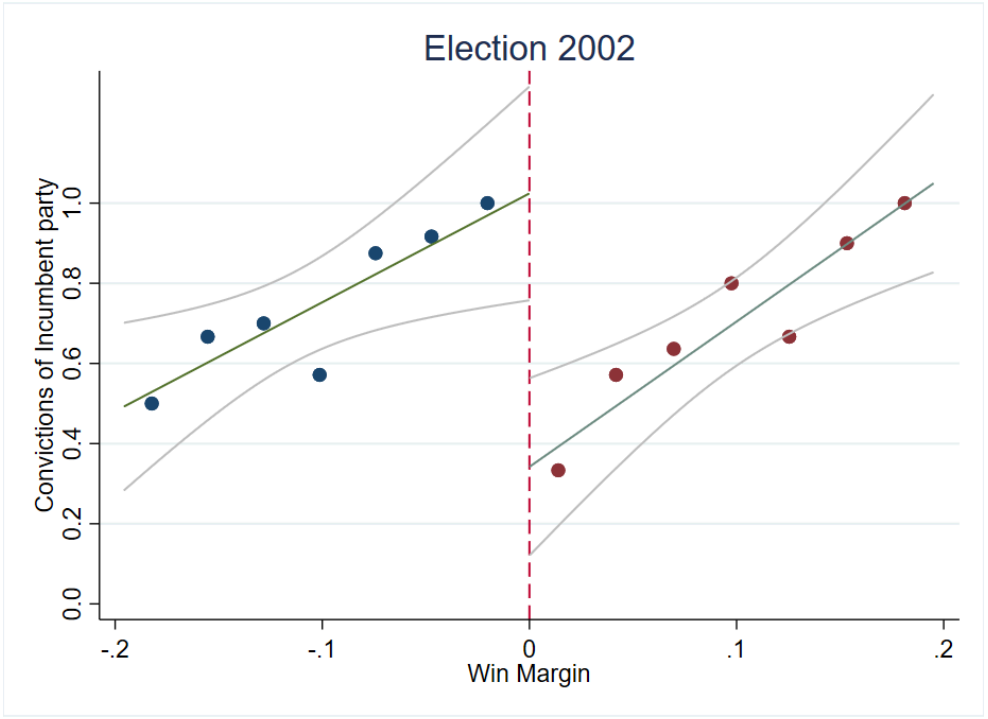
Note: Regression discontinuity coefficients showing the estimated difference between marginally winning and marginally losing candidates for various covariates. Pre-election conviction is a dummy for whether the politician is convicted. Politician gender is a dummy variable for the sex of the politician. Politician religion is a dummy for whether the politician is a muslim. Allegation type is the variable listing the different type of allegations on the politician (e.g. taking bribe, embezzlement of funds, misuse of power etc.). Left politician variable is a dummy for a politician being a member of the left political party. Estimated using the bias-corrected estimator proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2022) with a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias-correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin. No control variables. Standard errors clustered at the municipality times election level.

Figure B1: Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Convictions by Election

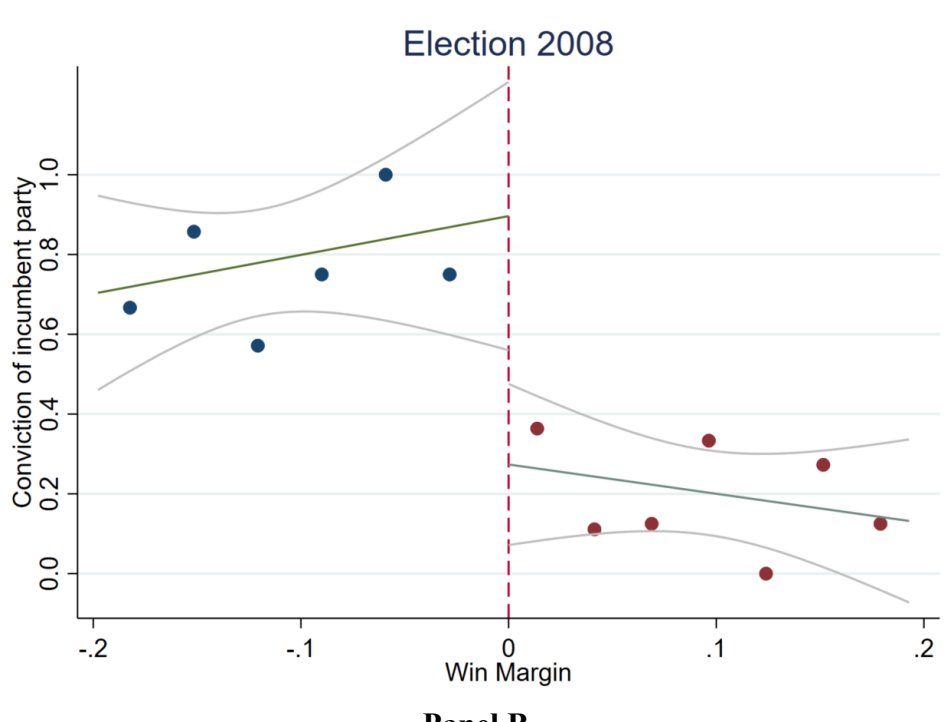


The regression discontinuity plots shows the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the 2002 (Panel A) and 2008 (Panel B) state and national elections for opposition candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represent the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the opposition parties at that win margin (these opposition parties that are all those who ran against the incumbent party Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q party for 2002) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP for 2008). The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Figure B2: Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Incumbents by Election



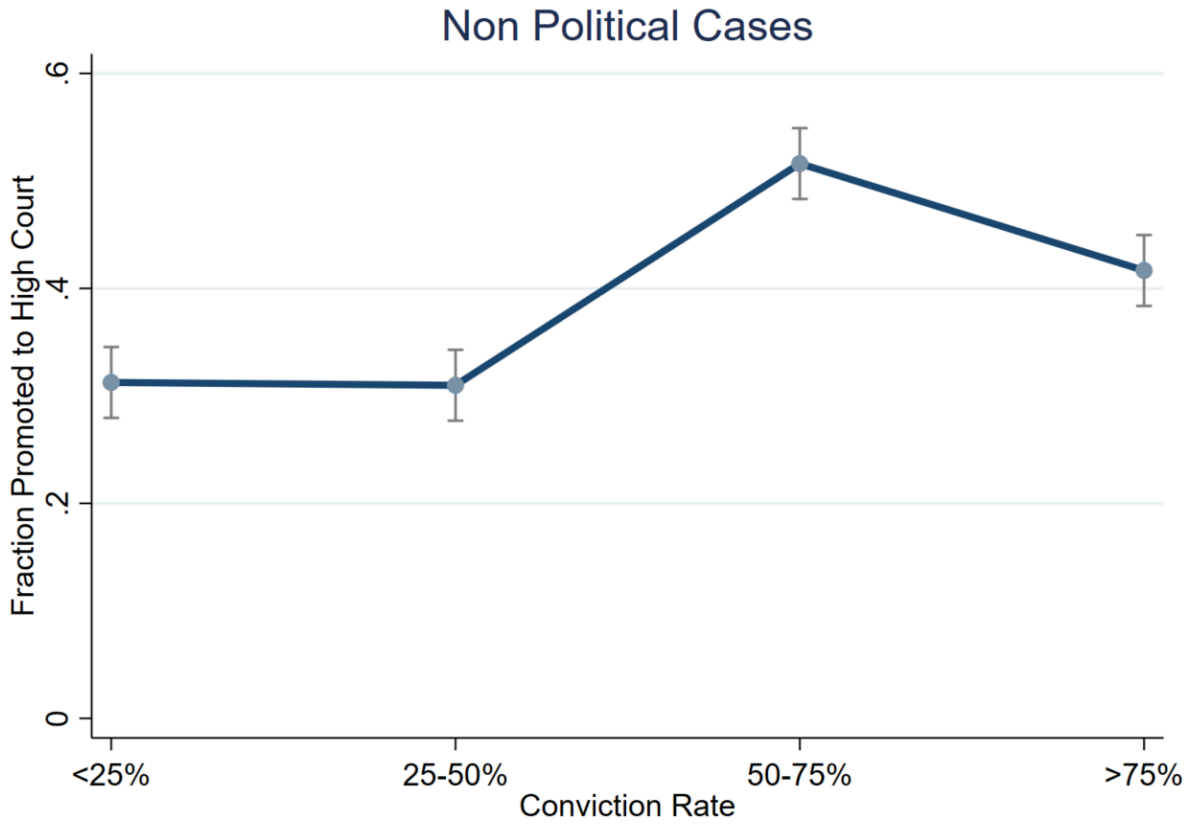
Panel A



Panel B

Note: The regression discontinuity plots show the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the 2002 (Panel A) and 2008 (Panel B) state and national elections for incumbent candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the incumbent party (Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q) for the 2002 elections) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) for the 2008 elections. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers.Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported

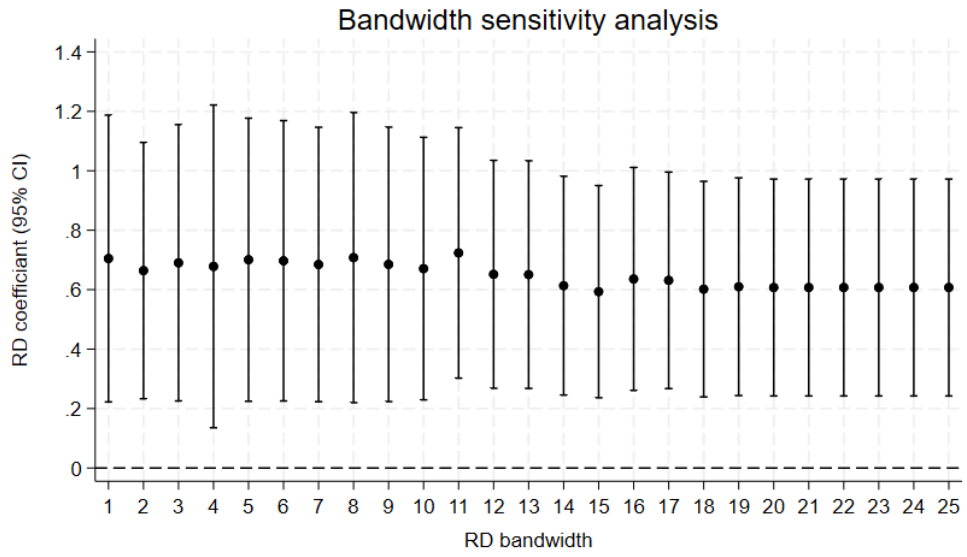
Figure B3: Effect on judges promotion on convictions of non political cases (cases involving bureaucrats)



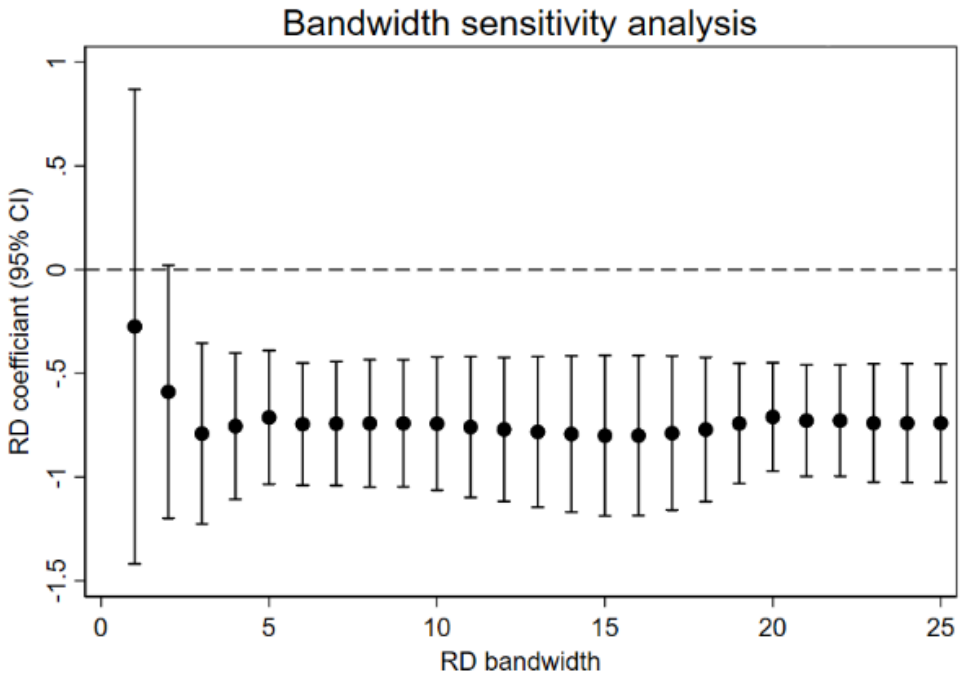
Note: The graph shows the fraction of judges promoted to the high court after completing their tenure at the corruption court. The fraction promoted to high court (vertical axis) shows the probability of promotion. The conviction rate (horizontal axis) is the mean conviction for each judge, when subsampling for non politically salient cases involving bureaucrats. The bars show the Confidence interval at 95%

Figure B4: Robustness to Different Bandwidths

Panel A: Opposition Politicians

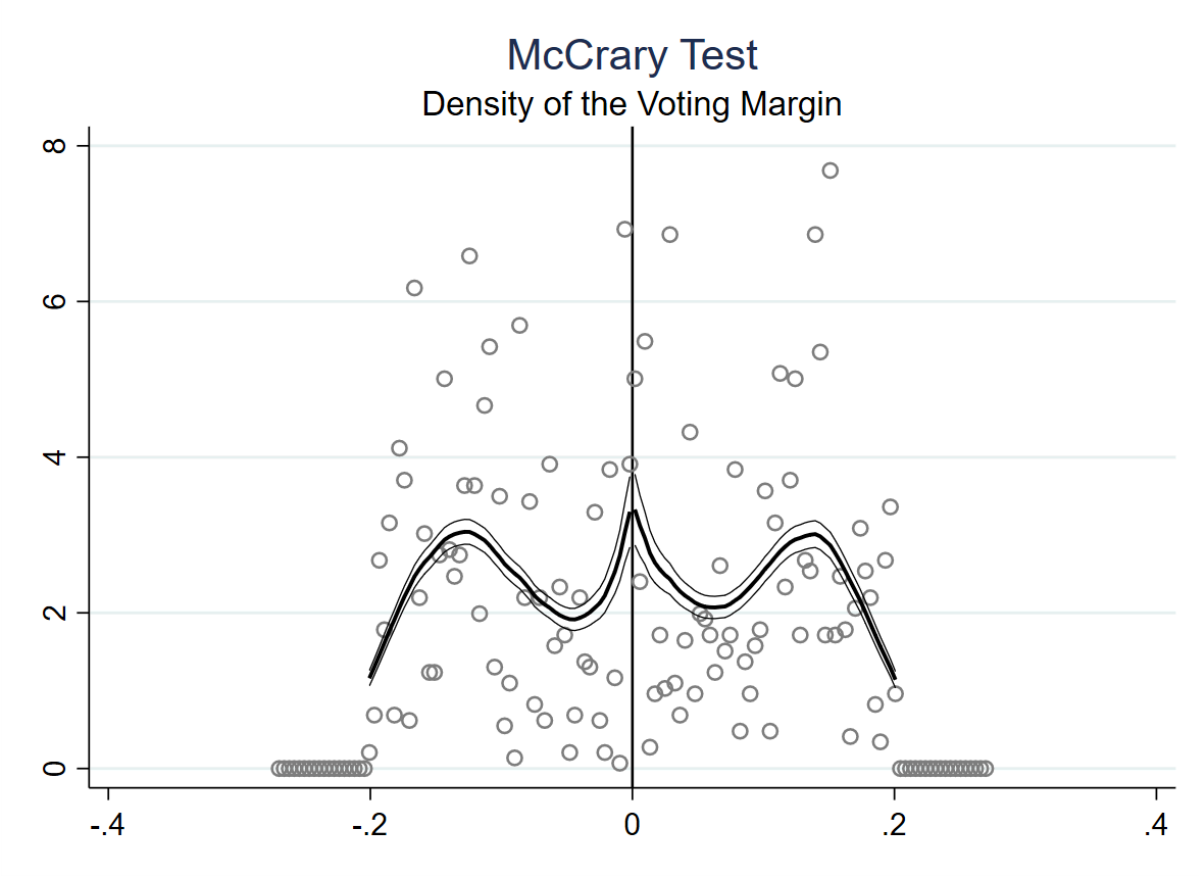


Panel B: Affiliate Politicians



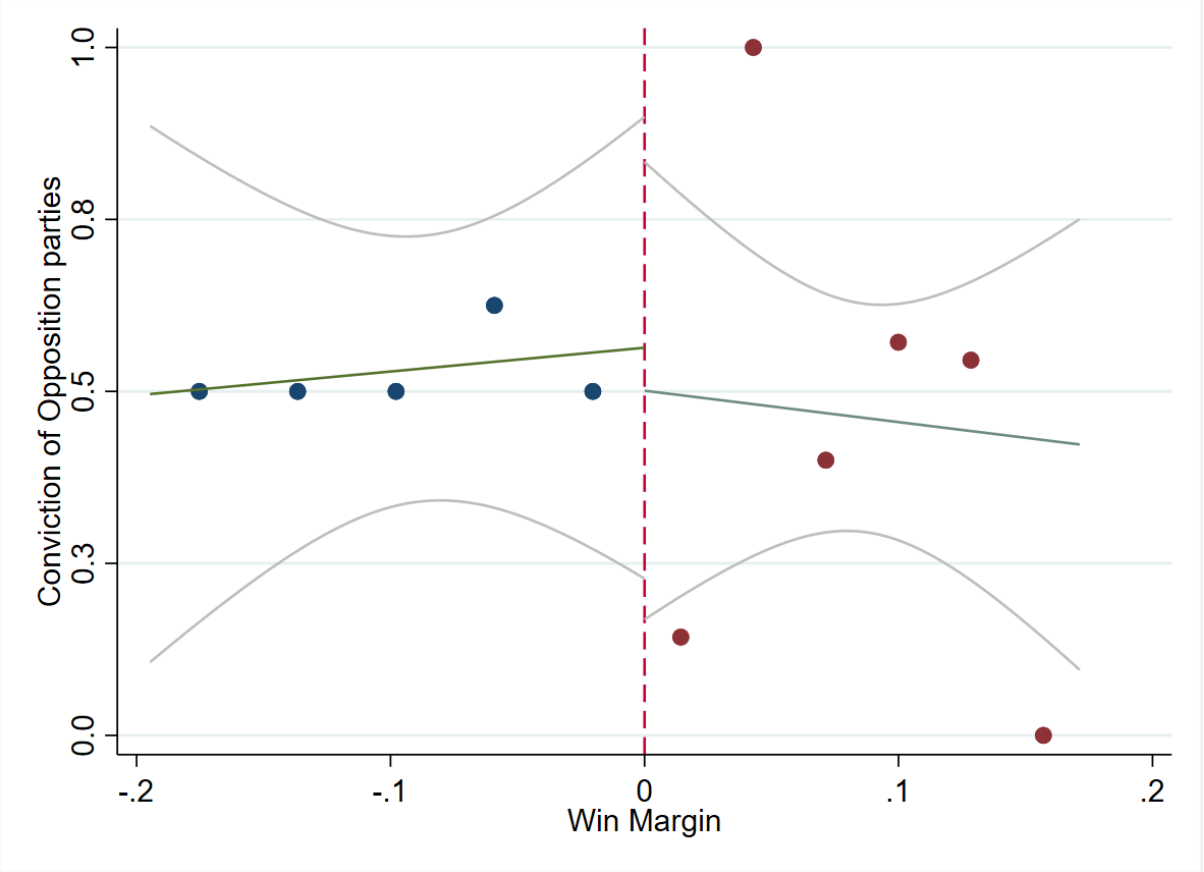
Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions across a range of bandwidths. Panel A reports results for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot represents the estimated discontinuity at a given bandwidth, with vertical bars showing 95 percent confidence intervals. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up).

Figure B5: Test for Bunching



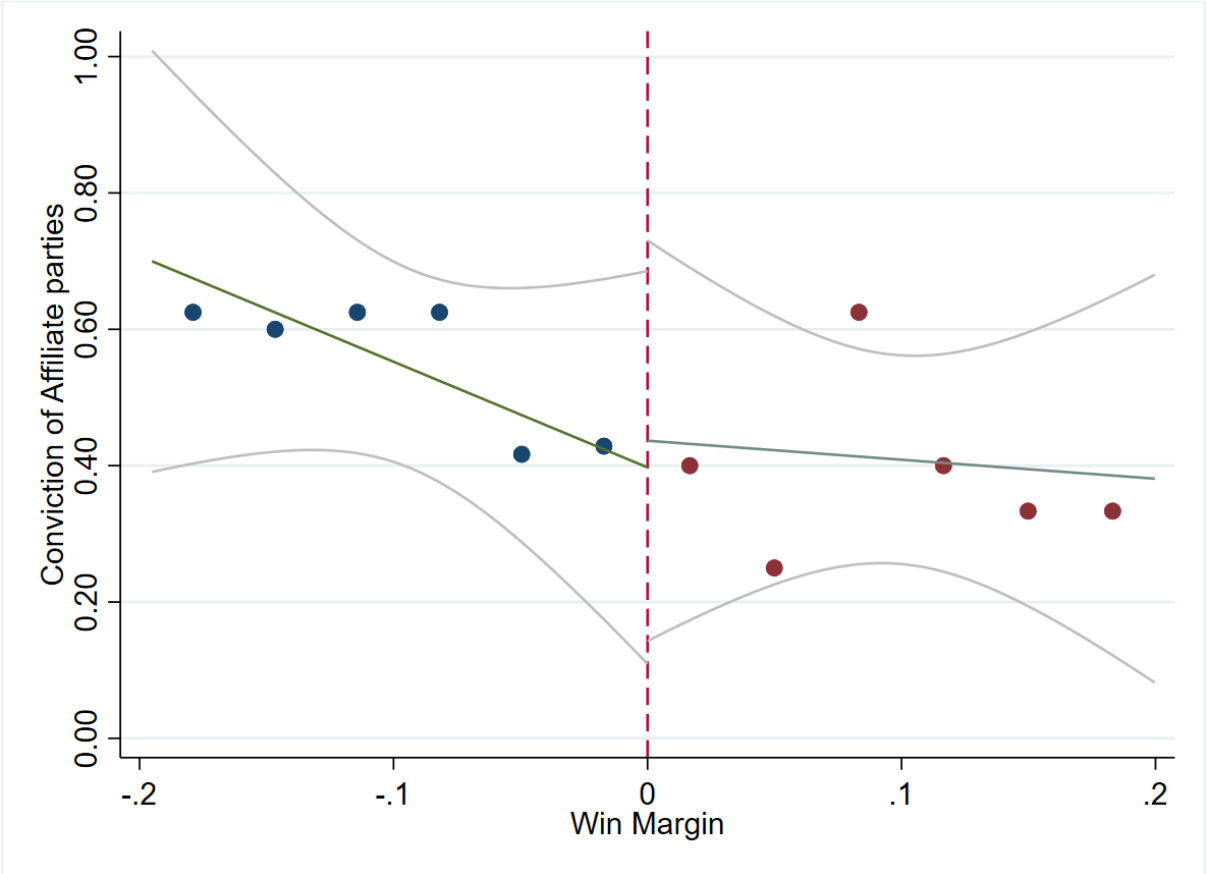
Note: Testing for self-selection, sorting or bunching. This figure tests for a jump in the density of the running variable at the threshold. The solid line represents the density of the running variable. Thin lines represent the confidence intervals. We do not observe a discontinuity at the cutoff point which implies low chances bunching.

Figure B6: Opposition Cases decided before 2002 Election



Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability of the Marginal election winners and losers of the 2002 Elections for cases filed and resolved before the 2002 Election. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (horizontal axis). The mean conviction rate (vertical axis) is the conviction probability at that win margin for the autocrat's opposition parties. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Lines are Linear fit. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

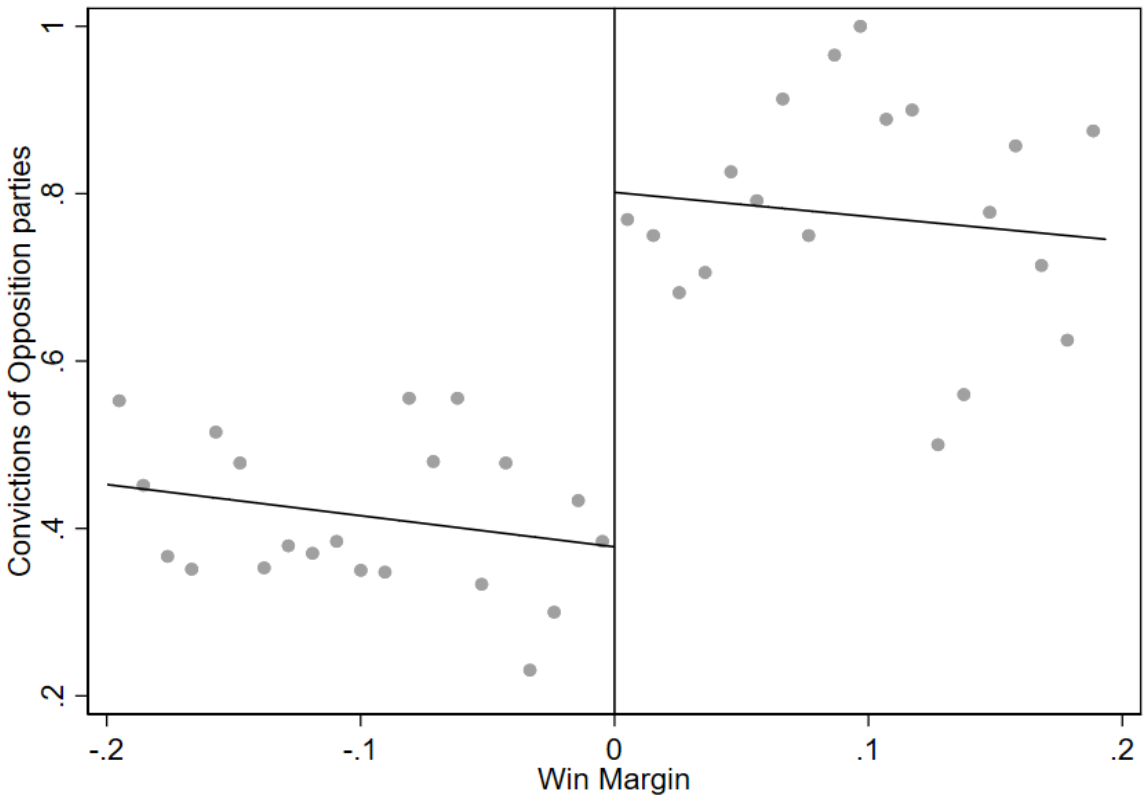
Figure B7: Politicians from Government in Power in Cases decided before the Election



Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability of the Marginal election winners and losers of the 2002 Elections for cases filed and decided before the 2002 Election. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (horizontal axis). The mean conviction rate (vertical axis) is the conviction probability at that win margin for the autocrat's affiliate parties. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Lines are Linear fit. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

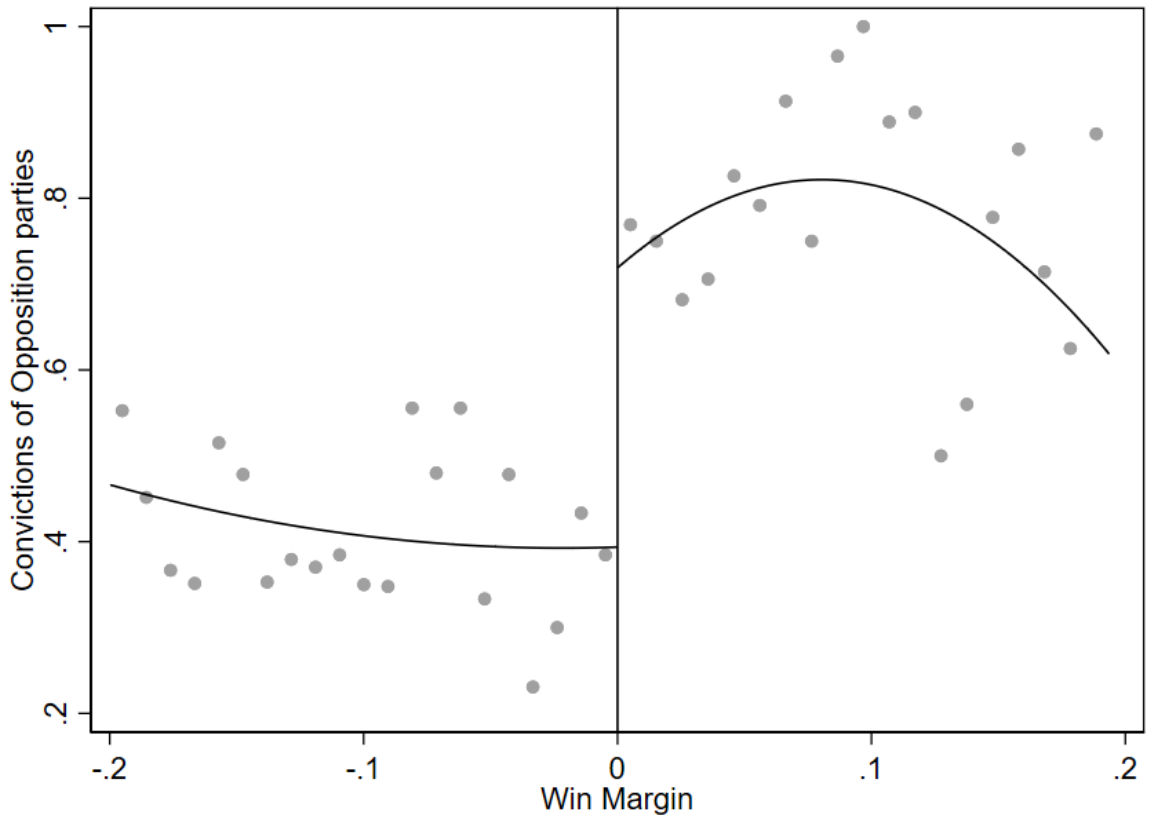
Appendix C- Additional Tables and Figures

Figure C1: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Convictions (rdplot)



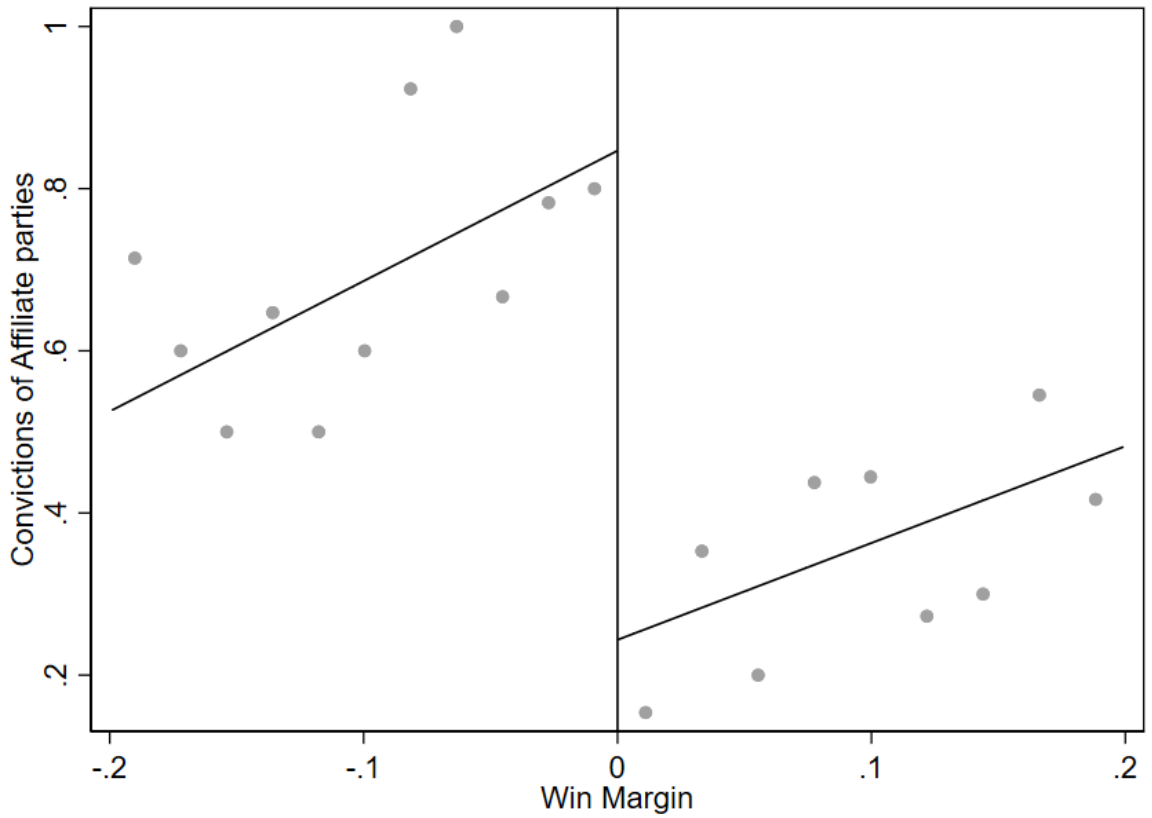
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of *rdplot*. Separate local linear regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the *rdplot* routine from the *rdrobust* package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020).

Figure C2: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Convictions (Ployn 2)



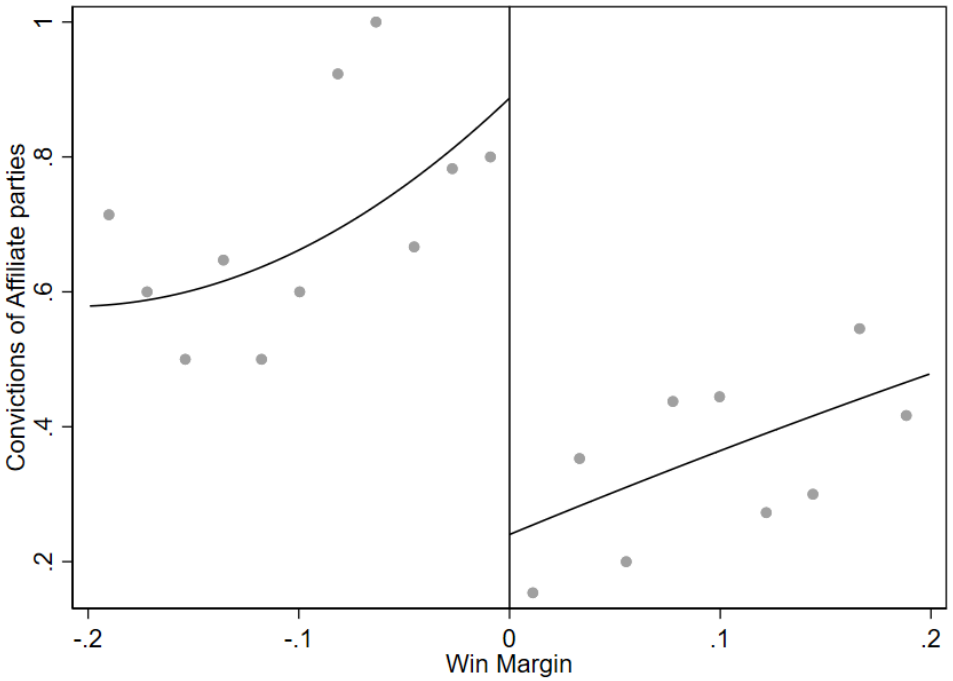
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of *rdplot*. Separate local quadratic regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the *rdplot* routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020).

Figure C3: Intensive Margin Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Affiliates



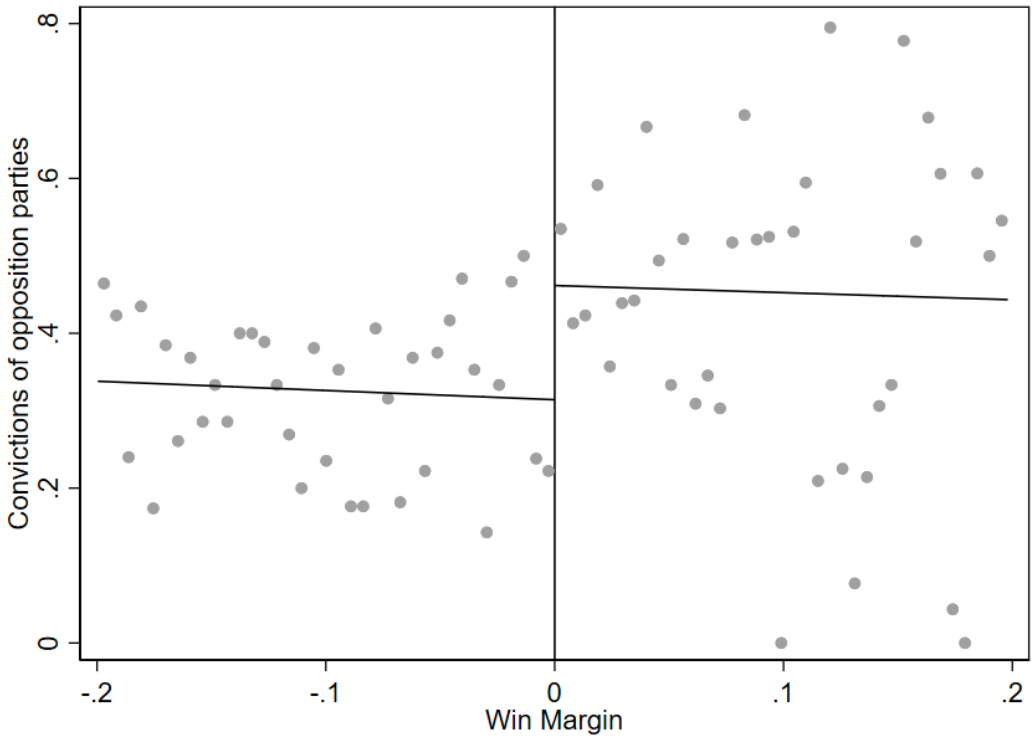
Note: The figure plots the share of incumbent-affiliated politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of *rdplot*. Separate local linear regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the *rdplot* routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020).

Figure C4: Intensive Margin Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Affiliates (Ployn 2)



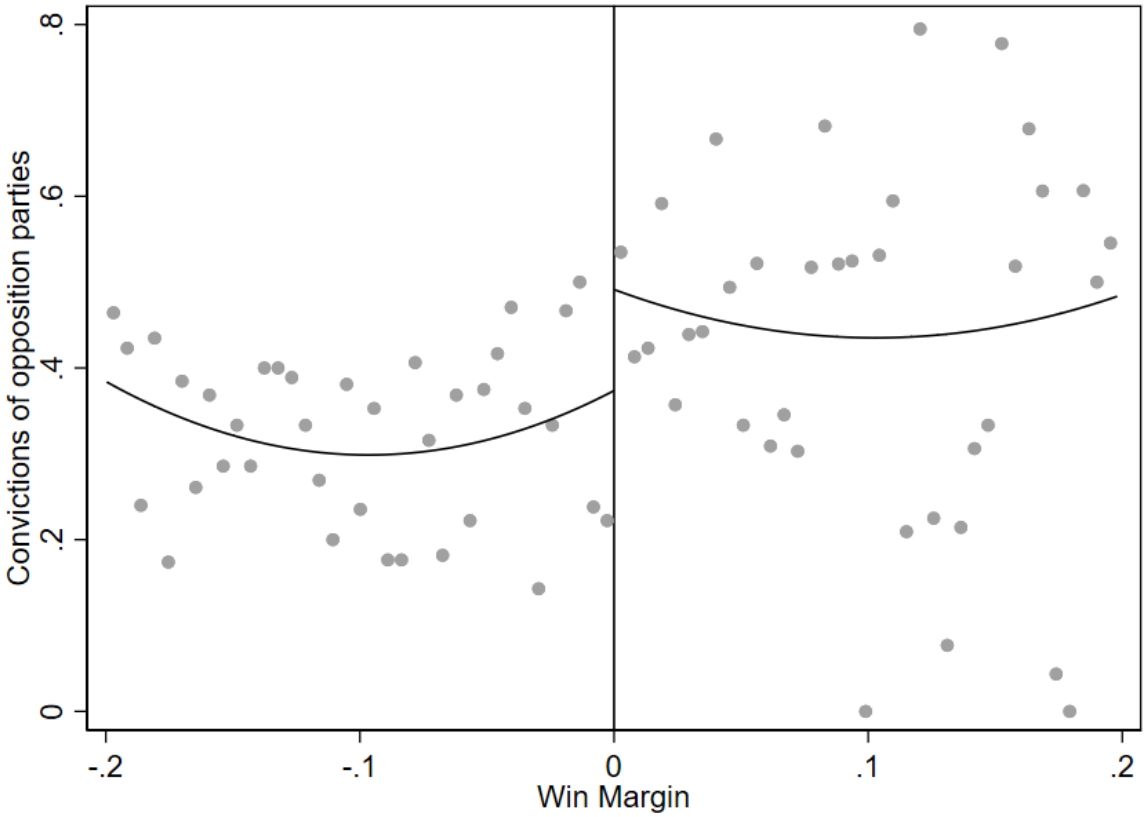
Note: The figure plots the share of incumbent-affiliated politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of rdplot. Separate local quadratic regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020).

Figure C5: Extensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians



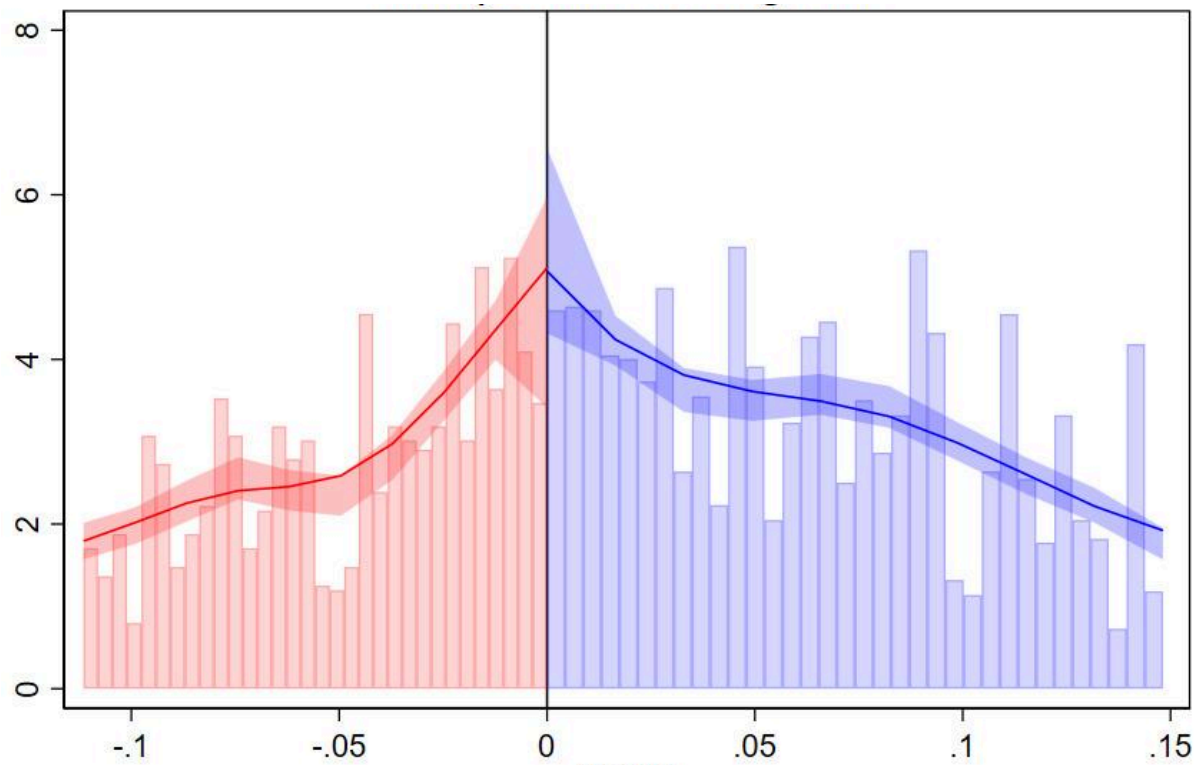
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of rdplot. Separate local linear regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020).

Figure C6: Extensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Case Filing



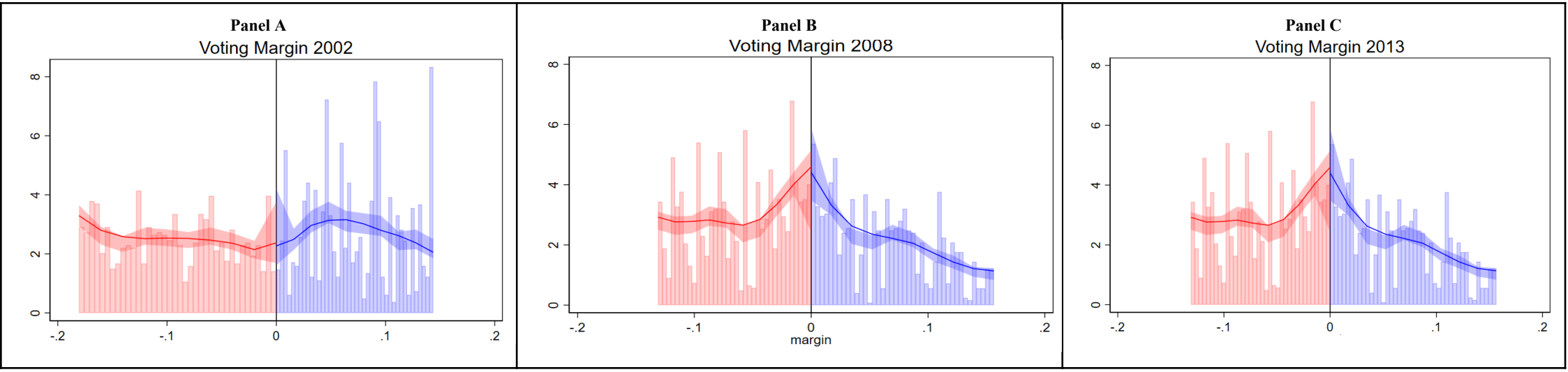
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of rdplot. Separate local quadratic regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020)

Figure C7: Test for Bunching at the Electoral Threshold.



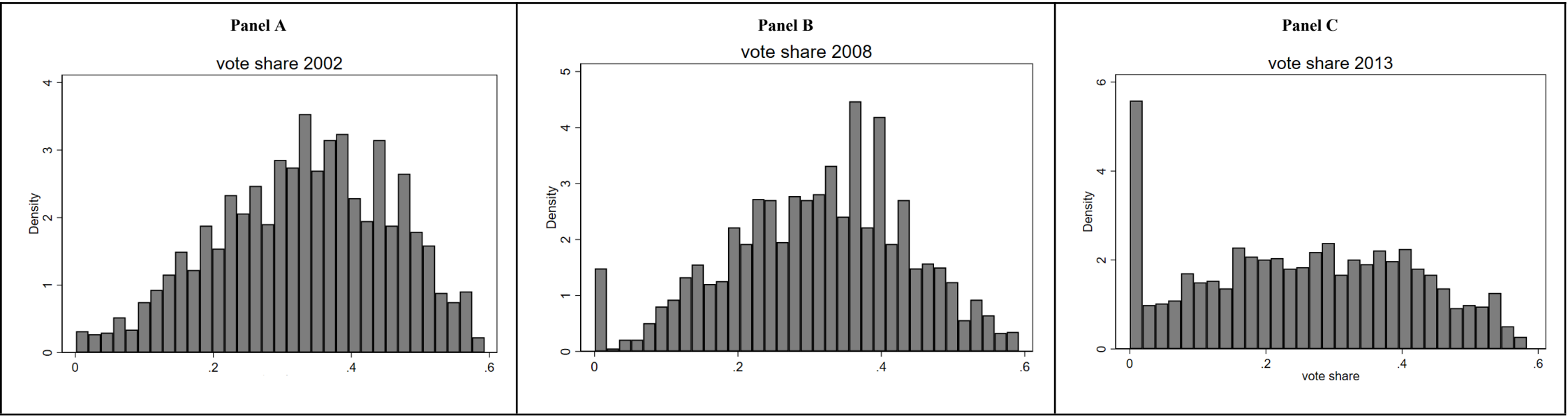
Note: The figure plots the density of the running variable (vote margin) for all elections around the cutoff. Bars show the histogram of the running variable, and the fitted lines show local polynomial estimates of the density on each side of the threshold, with shaded bands denoting 95 percent confidence intervals. We test for a discontinuity at the cutoff using Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2018). No evidence of manipulation or bunching is detected.

Figure C8: Test for Bunching at the Electoral Threshold.



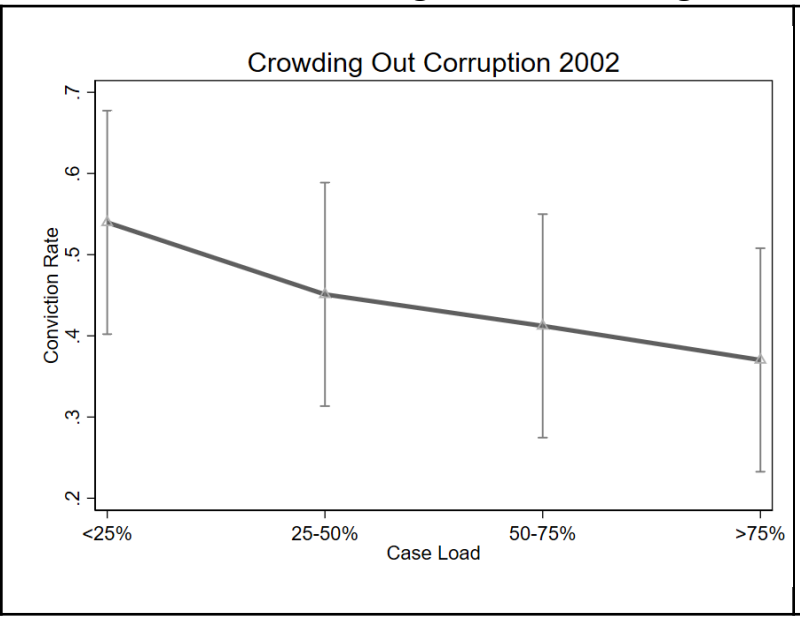
Note: The figure plots the density of the running variable (vote margin) around the cutoff separately for the 2002 (Panel A), 2008 (Panel B), and 2013 (Panel C) elections. Bars show the histogram of the running variable, and the fitted lines show local polynomial estimates of the density on each side of the threshold, with shaded bands denoting 95 percent confidence intervals. We test for a discontinuity at the cutoff using Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2018). No evidence of manipulation or bunching is detected in any election year.

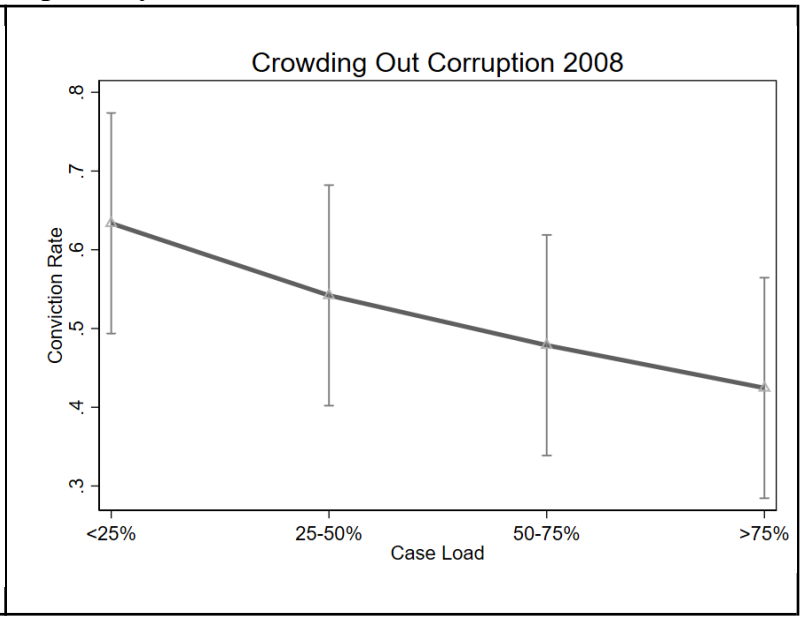
Figure C9: Distribution of Vote Shares by Election Year.



Note: The figure plots the distribution of candidates' vote shares across parliamentary constituencies in the 2002 (Panel A), 2008 (Panel B), and 2013 (Panel C) general elections. Each histogram shows the density of the vote share variable for all candidates in the respective election year

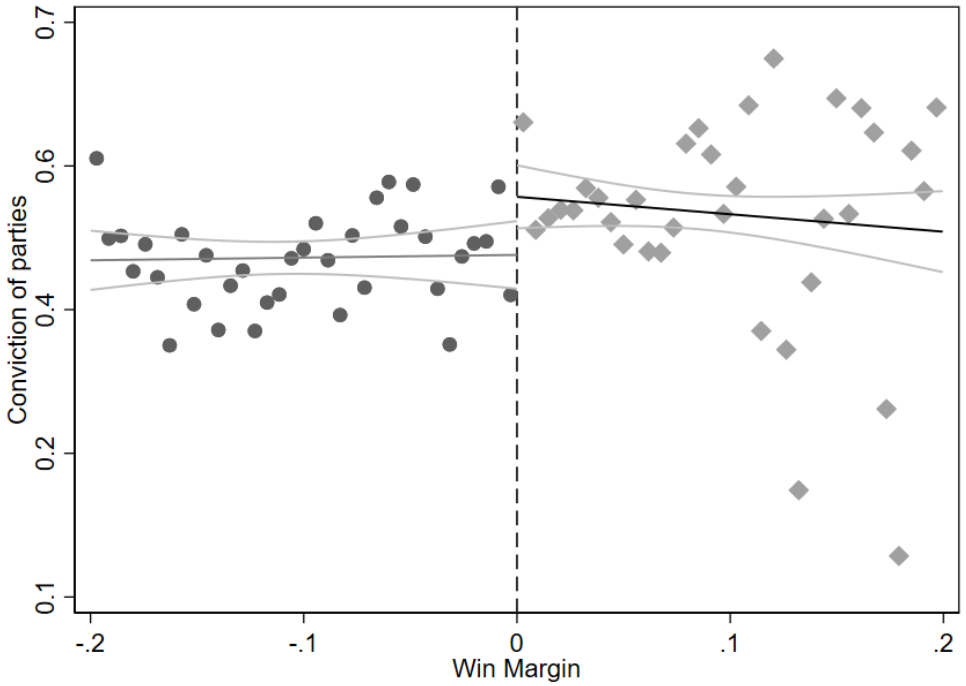
Figure C10: Crowding out corruption by Election Years





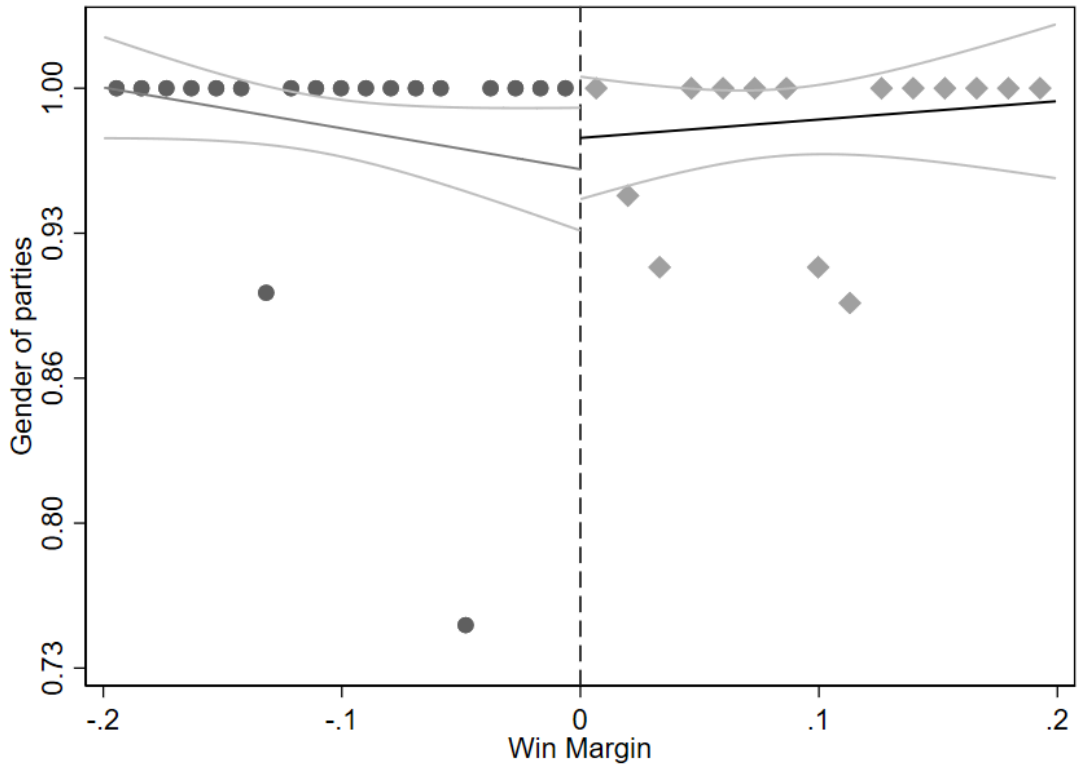
Note: The graph shows the conviction rate of non politically salient cases (cases involving bureaucrats) in the districts for 2002 and 2008 where the opposition parties won majority seats. The conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the mean conviction for each judge adjudicating bureaucrats' cases. The variable case load (reported on the horizontal axis) shows the percentile of cases adjudicated by the judge. The bars show the 95% Confidence interval

Figure C11: Balance Test Using Pre-Election Convictions of Politicians.



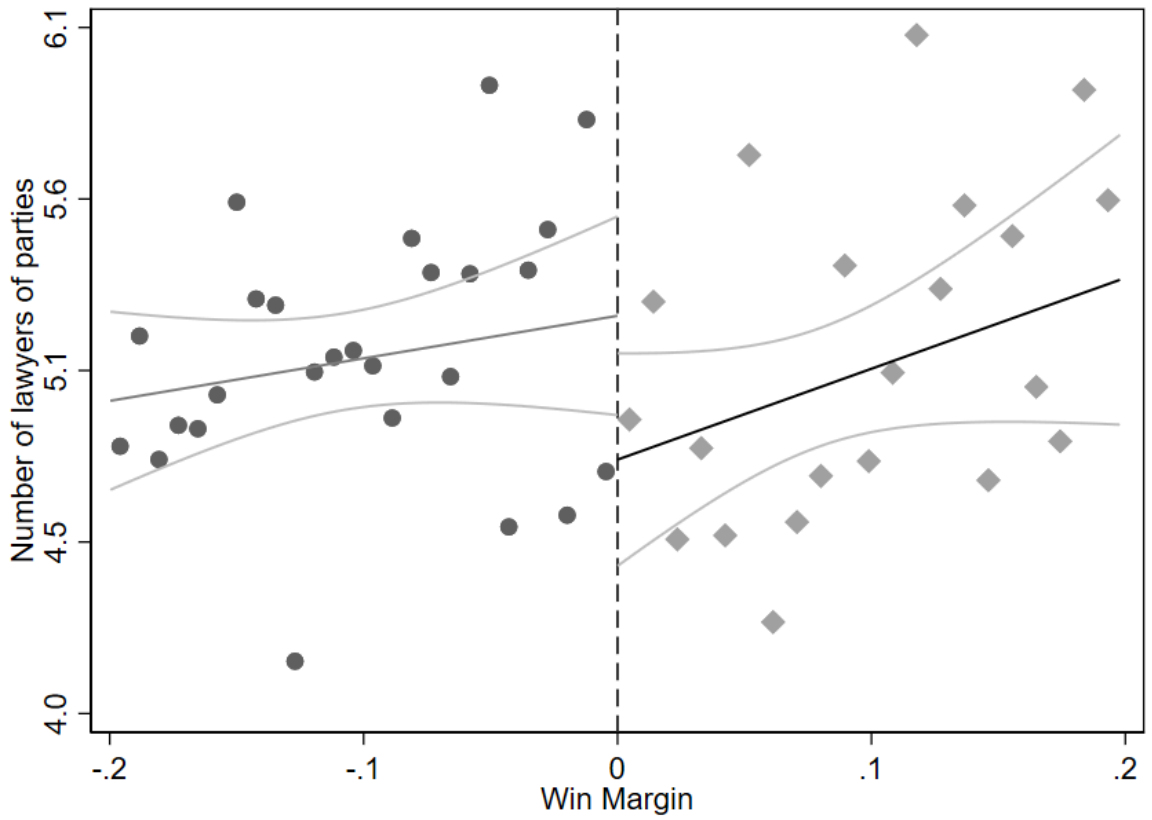
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians convicted of corruption in cases filed and resolved before the election against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The absence of a visible discontinuity at the cutoff indicates that marginal winners and marginal losers are similar in terms of pre-election convictions, supporting the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Figure C12: Balance Test Using Gender of Politicians



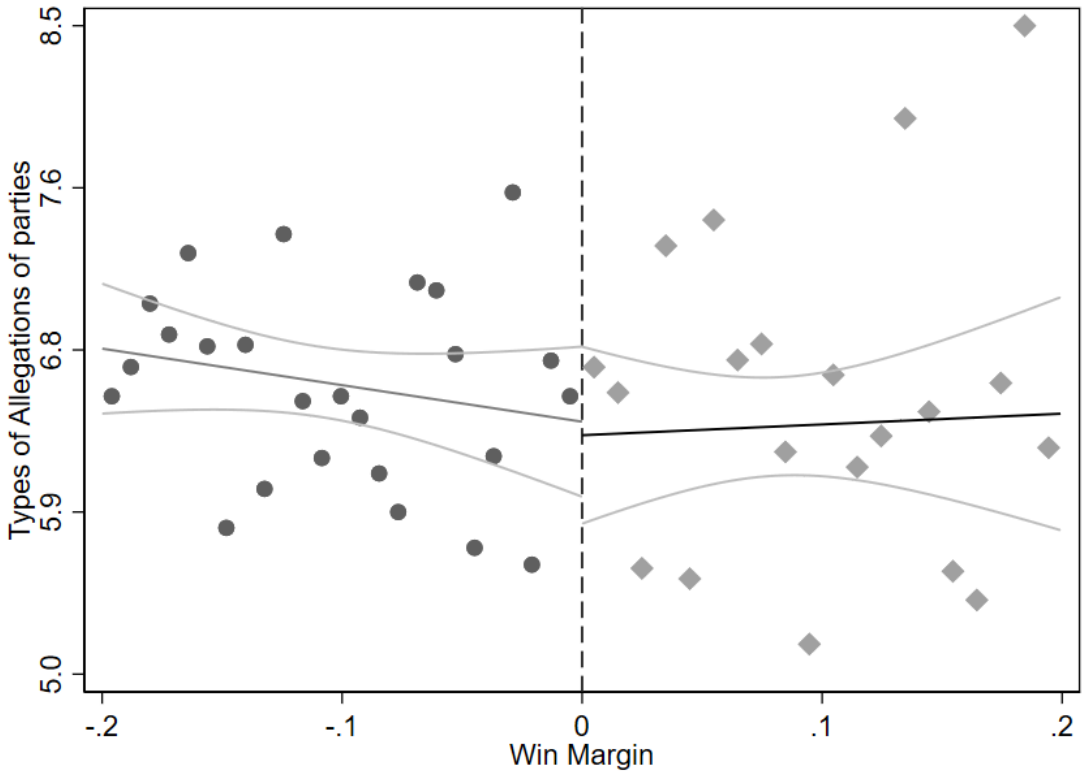
Note: The figure plots the share of male opposition politicians against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. No discontinuity is observed at the cutoff, indicating that narrowly winning and narrowly losing opposition candidates are similar in terms of gender composition. This balance check supports the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Figure C13: Balance Test Using Number of Defense Lawyers for Politicians.



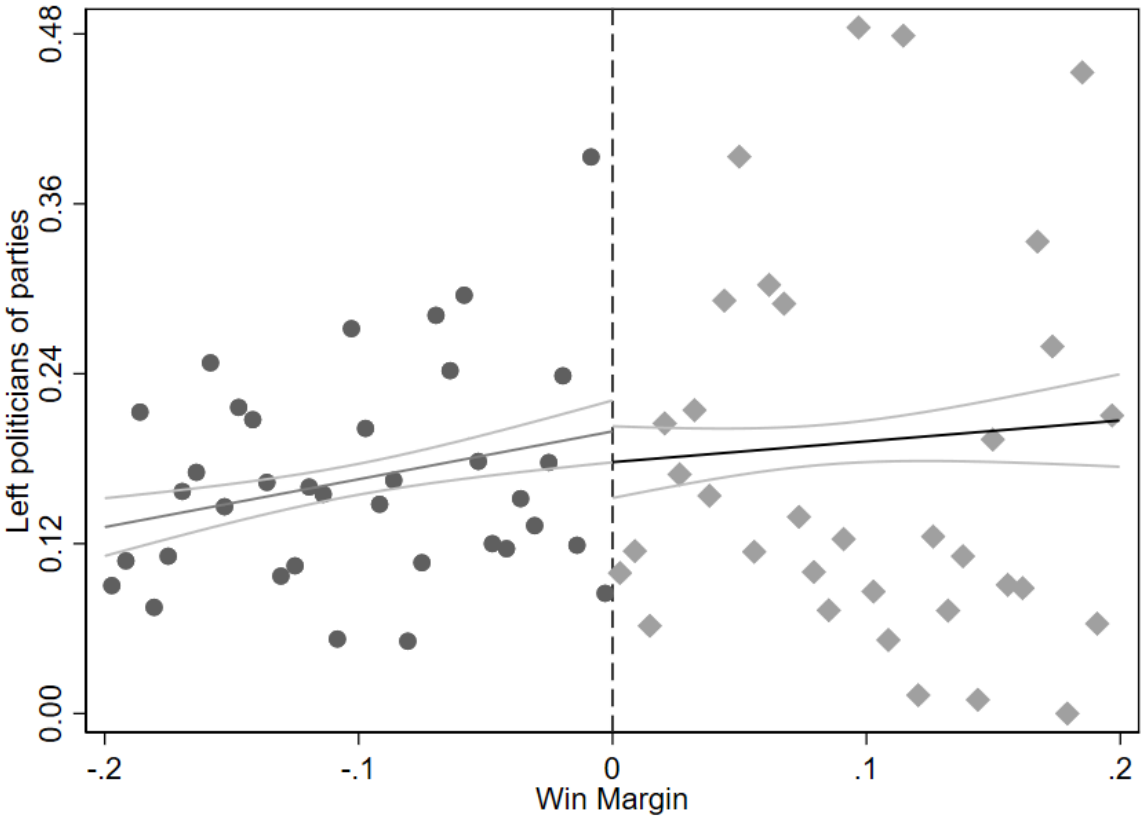
Note: The figure plots the average number of defense lawyers representing opposition politicians against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the mean within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. No clear discontinuity is observed at the cutoff, indicating that narrowly winning and narrowly losing opposition candidates are similar in terms of legal defense resources. This balance check supports the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Figure C14: Balance Test Using Types of Allegations Against Politicians



Note: The figure plots the average number of allegation categories (e.g., bribery, embezzlement, abuse of office) involving opposition politicians against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the mean within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. No discontinuity is observed at the cutoff, indicating that narrowly winning and narrowly losing opposition candidates face similar types of allegations. This balance check supports the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Figure C15: Balance Test Using Party Ideology of Politicians



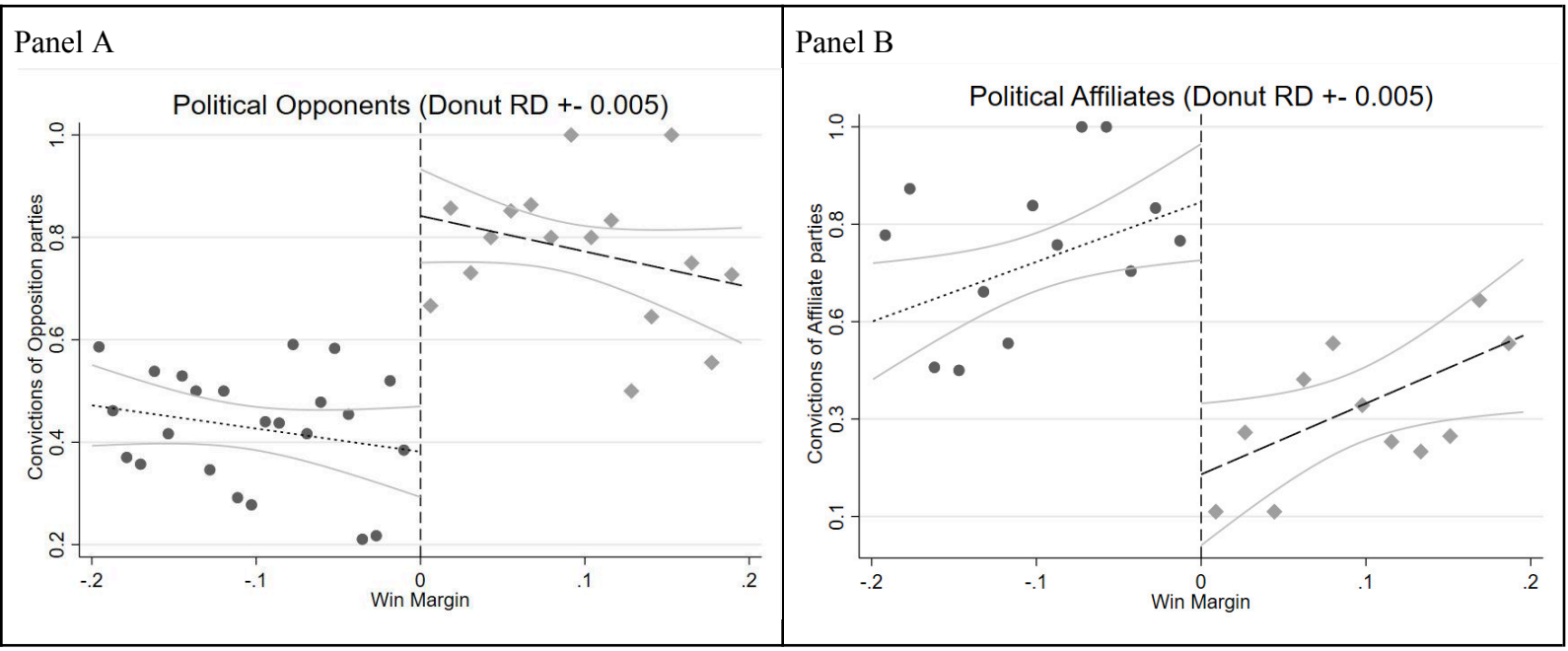
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition politicians affiliated with left-leaning parties against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the mean within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. No discontinuity is observed at the cutoff, indicating that narrowly winning and narrowly losing opposition candidates are similar in terms of party ideology. This balance check supports the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Table C2: Placebo discontinuities

Panel A: Placebo discontinuities - Political Rivals						
	(±1%)	(±2%)	(±3%)	(±4%)	(±5%)	(±6%)
			Conviction Opposition			
RD_Estimate	0.0350	-0.135	-0.151	0.0344	0.00249	-0.0932
	(0.165)	(0.143)	(0.151)	(0.163)	(0.109)	(0.151)
	[0.343]	[0.145]	[0.157]	[0.101]	[0.033]	[0.177]
Observations	804	774	743	710	677	562
Mean	0.544	0.547	0.553	0.562	0.569	0.605
Bandwidth	0.0384	0.0456	0.0511	0.0436	0.0454	0.0346
Panel B: Placebo discontinuities - Political Affiliates						
			Conviction Affiliates			
RD_Estimate	-0.151	0.235	-0.166	-0.172	0.176	0.327
	(0.133)	(0.258)	(0.194)	(0.181)	(0.200)	(0.245)
	[0.1606]	[0.248]	[0.241]	[0.178]	[0.279]	[0.226]
Observations	298	294	295	290	272	240
Mean	0.547	0.548	0.542	0.541	0.551	0.537
Bandwidth	0.0695	0.0361	0.0765	0.0762	0.0647	0.0513

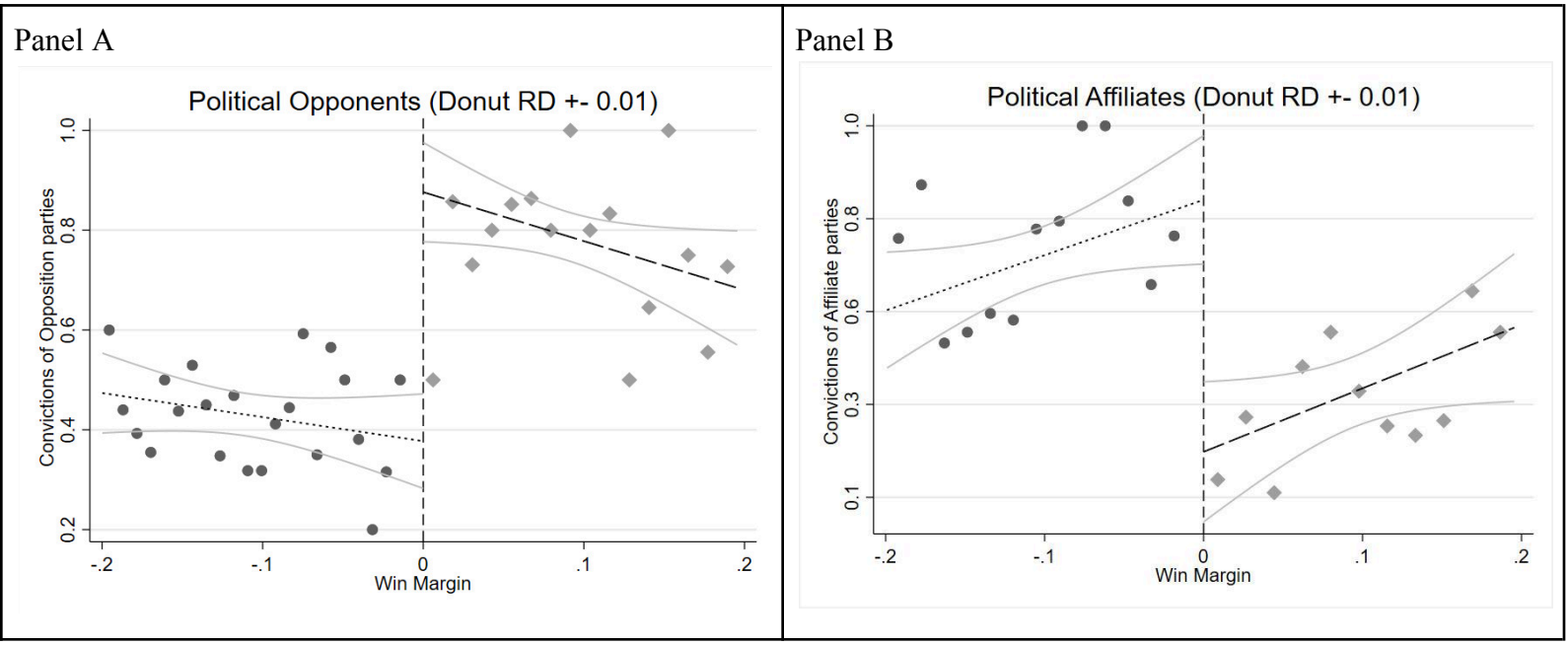
Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of placebo tests at artificial thresholds other than zero. Panel A presents results for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each column reports the estimated discontinuity in conviction rates when shifting the cutoff to ±1%, ±2%, ±3%, ±4%, ±5%, and ±6% from the true electoral margin threshold. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in parentheses; CCT robust standard errors are reported in brackets. No systematic discontinuities are detected at placebo cutoffs, supporting the validity of the design. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.Calonico,Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) Cluster–Robust Standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure C16: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.



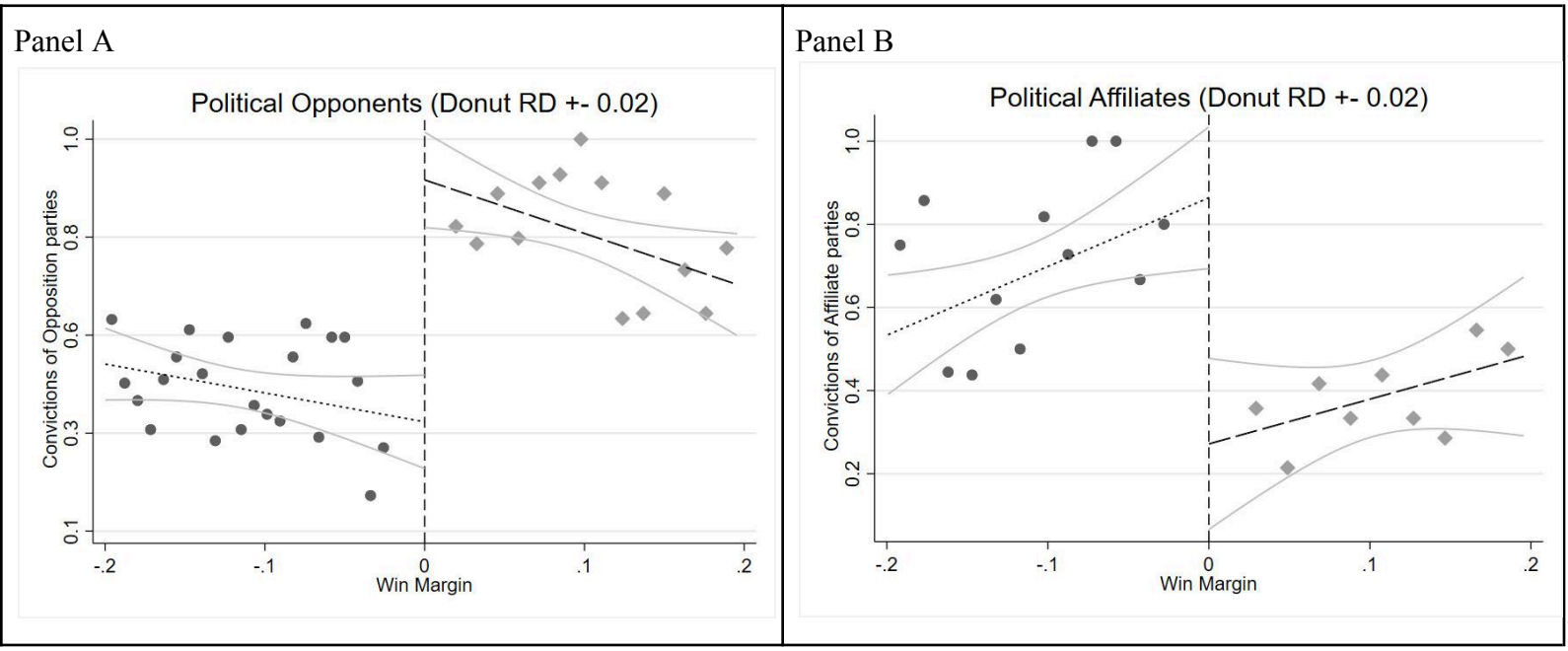
Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.005 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

Figure C17: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.



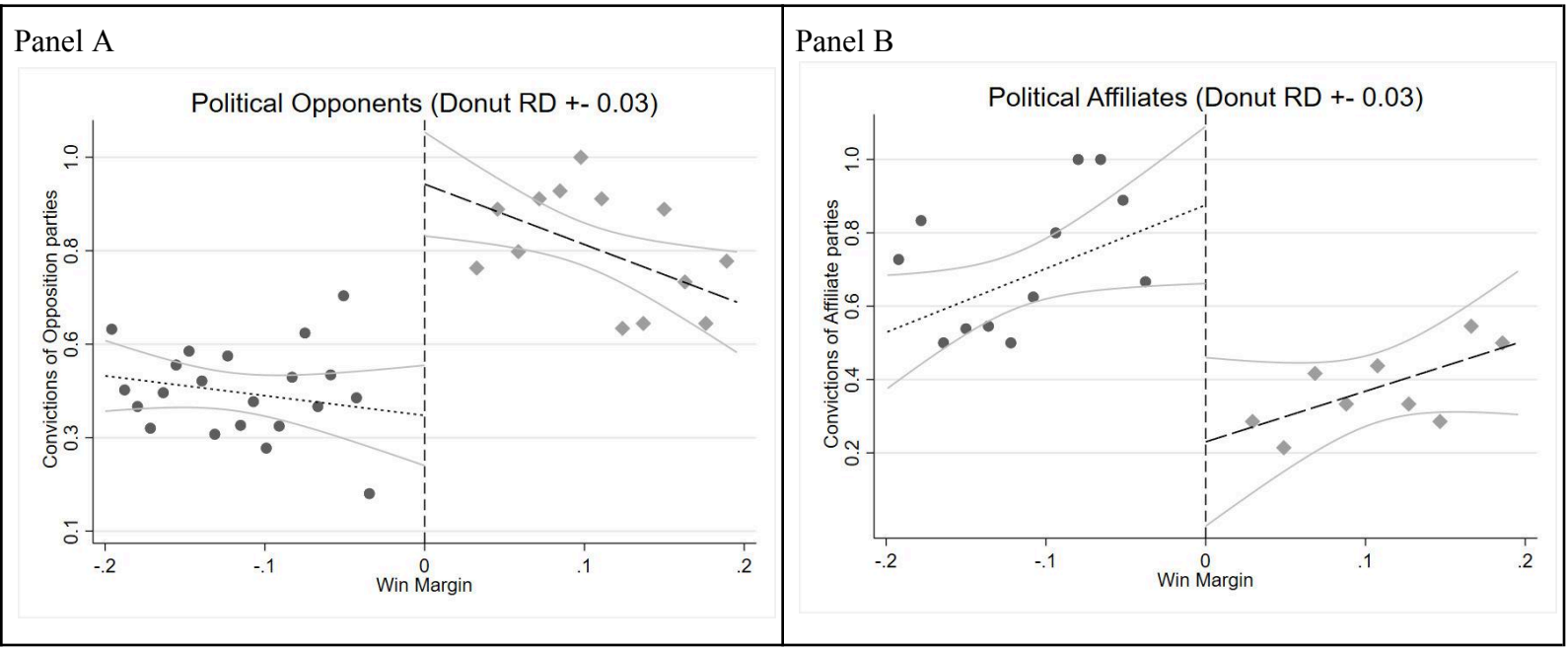
Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.01 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

Figure C18: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.



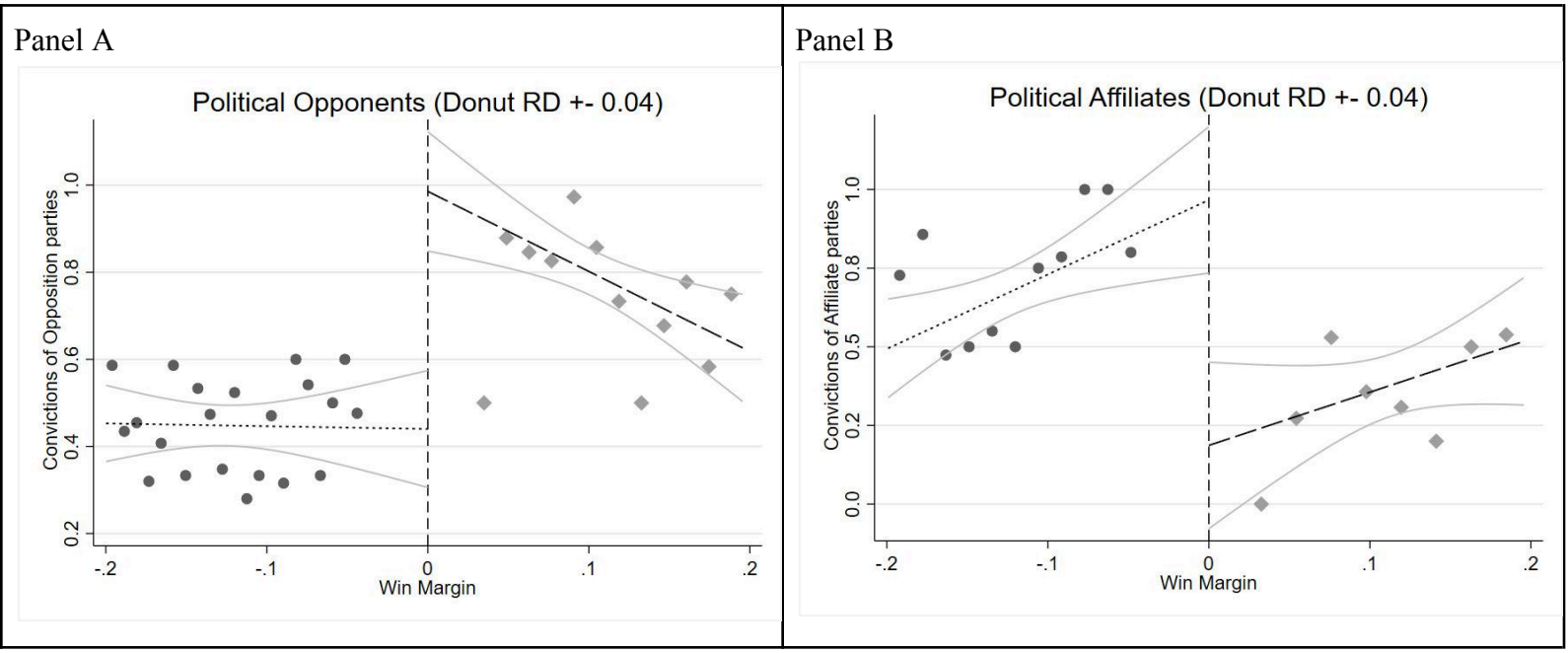
Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.02 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

Figure C19: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.



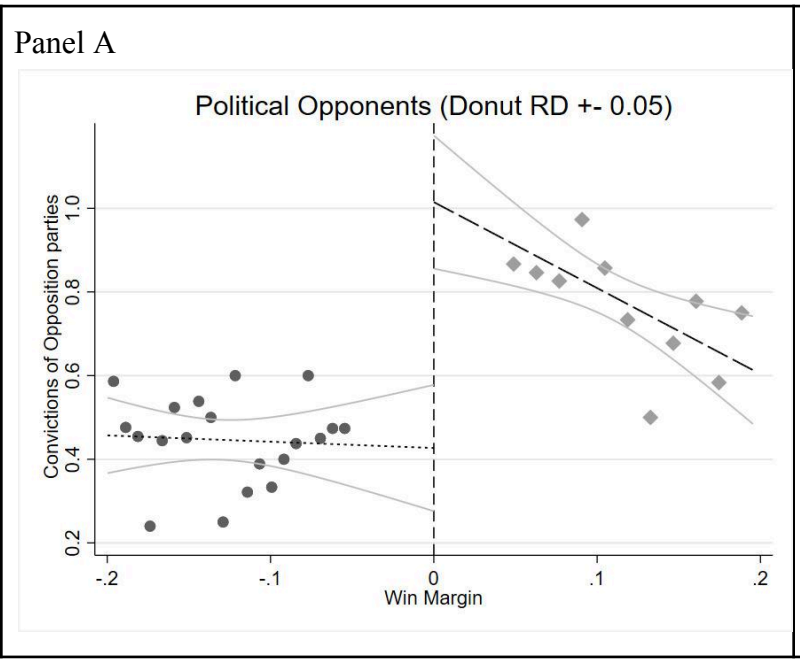
Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.03 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

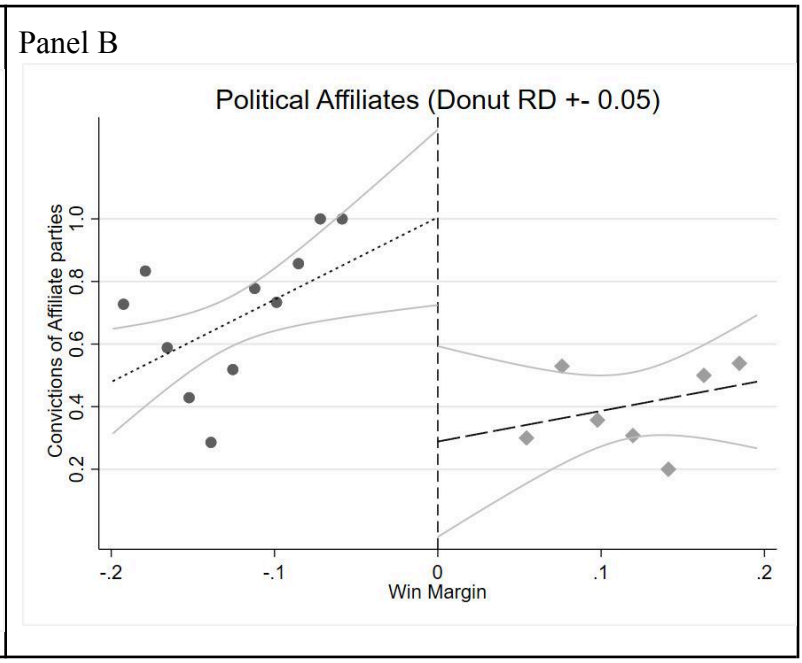
Figure C20: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.



Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.04 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

Figure C21: Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions.





Note: The figure plots the share of politicians convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin, excluding observations within ±0.05 percentage points of the cutoff. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and dashed lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. Excluding observations closest to the threshold addresses potential concerns about manipulation of narrow election outcomes.

Table C3: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Convictions (with Controls).

VARIABLES	(1) Conviction Opposition	(2) Conviction Opposition Placebo	(3) Conviction Affiliate	(4) Conviction Affiliate Placebo
RD_Estimate	0.351***	0.0705	-0.617***	-0.0539
	[0.0913]	[0.0886]	[0.106]	[0.197]
Observations	1,712	1,451	531	253
Mean	0.551	0.565	0.544	0.549
Bandwidth	0.118	0.167	0.176	0.140

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption convictions. Columns (1) and (2) show results for opposition politicians, while Columns (3) and (4) report estimates for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Placebo outcomes (Columns 2 and 4) use cases filed and decided before the election. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020), with local quadratic regression for bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. All specifications include politician-level controls for gender, religion, ideology, and pre-election case characteristics. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table C4: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on opposition Convictions with Alternate Kernels.

VARIABLES	(1) Conviction Opposition triangular	(2) Conviction Opposition epanechnikov	(3) Conviction Opposition uniform
RD_Estimate	0.351***	0.355***	0.407***
	[0.0913]	[0.0922]	[0.0994]
Observations	1,712	1,712	1,712
Mean	0.453	0.453	0.453
Bandwidth	0.118	0.107	0.0795

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of opposition politicians using alternative kernel functions. Column (1) employs a triangular kernel, Column (2) an Epanechnikov kernel, and Column (3) a uniform kernel. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table C5: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on incumbent with Alternate Kernels

VARIABLES	(1) Conviction Affiliate triangular	(2) Conviction Affiliate epanechnikov	(3) Conviction Affiliate uniform
RD_Estimate	-0.617***	-0.612***	-0.607***
	[0.106]	[0.109]	[0.0993]
Observations	531	531	531
Mean	0.453	0.453	0.453
Bandwidth	0.176	0.159	0.192

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption case outcomes, using alternative clustering of standard errors. Columns (1) and (2) show results for the number of corruption cases filed against opposition and incumbent-affiliated politicians, respectively, while Columns (3) and (4) report results for convictions. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Standard errors are clustered at an alternative level (relative to the main constituency-election clustering) and reported in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table C6: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Convictions Excluding Major Districts.

VARIABLES	(1) Conviction Opposition KCI	(2) Conviction Opposition LHR	(3) Conviction Opposition PSH	(4) Conviction Opposition QTA	(5) Conviction Opposition RWP
RD_Estimate	0.395***	0.364**	0.380**	0.386**	0.356**
	[0.151]	[0.156]	[0.153]	[0.152]	[0.154]
Observations	699	736	730	739	733
Mean	0.449	0.446	0.448	0.445	0.448
Bandwidth	0.0422	0.0418	0.0421	0.0418	0.0417

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of opposition politicians after sequentially excluding cases from major urban districts. Columns (1)–(5) exclude Karachi (KCI), Lahore (LHR), Peshawar (PSH), Quetta (QTA), and Rawalpindi (RWP), respectively. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table C7: Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Incumbent Convictions Excluding Major Districts.

VARIABLES	(1) Conviction Affiliate KCI	(2) Conviction Affiliate LHR	(3) Conviction Affiliate PSH	(4) Conviction Affiliate QTA	(5) Conviction Affiliate RWP
RD_Estimate	-0.614***	-0.646***	-0.617***	-0.616***	-0.612***
	[0.110]	[0.103]	[0.106]	[0.107]	[0.108]
Observations	524	527	528	528	528
Mean	0.468	0.453	0.455	0.454	0.459
Bandwidth	0.173	0.170	0.178	0.174	0.169

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of Incumbent politicians after sequentially excluding cases from major urban districts. Columns (1)–(5) exclude Karachi (KCI), Lahore (LHR), Peshawar (PSH), Quetta (QTA), and Rawalpindi (RWP), respectively. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.