CASI WORKING PAPER SERIES

Number 14-01

09/2014

DOES CLIENTELISM WORK? A TEST OF GUESSABILITY IN INDIA

MARK SCHNEIDER Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Swarthmore College <u>mschnei1@swarthmore.edu</u> <u>http://markaschneider.com</u>

> CENTER FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF INDIA University of Pennsylvania 3600 Market Street, Suite 560 Philadelphia, PA 19104 <u>http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/index.htm</u>

© Copyright 2014 Mark Schneider and CASI

CENTER FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF INDIA



Acknowledgements:

I thank Robert Shapiro, Devesh Kapur, Lucy Goodhart, Kimuli Kasara, Jennifer Bussell, Anirudh Krishna, Rob Jenkins, Herbert Kitschelt, Daniel Corstange, Andrew Nathan, Phillip Oldenburg, Jenny Guardado, Adam Ziegfeld, Adam Auerbach, Pavithra Suryanarayan, Neelanjan Sircar, and Milan Vaishnav for helpful comments and suggestions. I thank Bhartendu Trevedi, Ved Prakash Sharma and MORSEL for support in executing the survey. A 2012-13 National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant supported the collection of data analyzed in this paper.

Abstract:

Research on clientelism broadly assumes that local political agents, or brokers, possess fine-grained information on voters' political preferences, and often can directly or indirectly monitor their votes. This assumption drives theoretical predictions on the efficiency of an electoral strategy of quid pro quo exchange of benefits-for-votes— relative to programmatic distribution – and on whether politicians should target core or swing voters with selective benefits. Despite its pervasiveness in this literature, scholarship does not test the monitoring assumption and analysis of variation in brokers' ability to identify voters' partisan preferences has not been conducted. This paper tests this assumption in the context of rural Rajasthan, India. I develop a unique measure, *quessability*, which measures whether or not an elected village council president correctly guessed the partisan preferences of voters sampled from their local areas. I find that local leaders perform no better on *quessability* than low-information benchmarks, contrary to the expectations of existing theory. Local leaders perform well at identifying the partisan preferences of voters who belong to ethnic groups closely identified with particular political parties or co-partisans. They perform poorly at identifying those whose partisan preferences are less certain and require monitoring to reveal. The magnitude of errors on guessability suggests that either a strategy of quid-pro-quo clientelism is extremely inefficient or it is less pervasive than existing theory suggests.

1. Introduction

Incumbent politicians in countries characterized as patronage-based are broadly understood to target selective state benefits or campaign handouts through a quid pro quo exchange of benefits for votes. To make this strategy efficient, politicians employ a large number of local brokers tasked with collecting extensive, often private information on voters' political preferences, monitoring their votes, and distributing private benefits in a way that induces passive supporters to turn out to vote or swing voters to vote for their candidate. This strategy places significant demands on local brokers where the ballot is secret and the results of democratic elections are uncertain. It is often assumed that brokers can identify voters' political preferences and monitor their votes. If this assumption holds, quid pro quo strategies undermine the basic notion that elections are instruments of democratic accountability. If brokers lack this capacity, elections provide a more meaningful mechanism for inducing democratic accountability than existing scholarship suggests. Despite its practical difficulty and centrality to theories of distributive politics, this has not been examined empirically.

In the first test of this assumption, I develop a measure of whether local leaders can accurately identify the partisan preferences of voters from their localities, which I refer to as *guessability*. I analyze guessability rates in the aggregate with respect to lowinformation benchmarks and model micro-level variation across the characteristics of voters and local leaders. This measure is based on unique data from a survey of approximately one thousand voters and two hundred local politicians across 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) in rural India. The elite survey employs a crossreferenced design. Specifically, I asked GP presidents (sarpanch)¹ to guess the party voters from their GPs, whom they overwhelmingly knew,² supported in the last state elections and the party they would support if an election were held tomorrow. These guesses were then matched to voters' responses to determine their accuracy (i.e. guessability). This provides one of the only measures of the information local leaders, who often function as local brokers to state politicians, have on voters' political preferences, and the only measure of brokers' preferences in a context of inter-party competition and a secret ballot. Moreover, *guessability* captures the information local leaders have accumulated about voters whom they know personally and have interacted with over a number of years prior to data collection. This distinguishes guessability from research on ethnic identifiability,³ which captures the ability of respondents to use experimentally manipulated cues to identify the ethnicities of unknown individuals shown in photographs.

To preface my results, I find that sarpanch, who often function as brokers to higherlevel politicians, incorrectly guess the partisan preferences of voters from their local areas 35.5 percent of the time and perform no better than low-information, low-cost benchmarks that do not depend upon the fine-grained information brokers are believed to possess.⁴ At the micro-level, I find that sarpanch are better at guessing the partisan preferences of voters who are either relatively easy to guess because they belong to demographic groups associated with particular parties, or who are co-partisans. My

¹ I sampled one sarpanch and one ward representative in each GP. I focus on Sarpanch due to their influence over distribution; however I report aggregate results on ward members in footnotes and in the appendix.

² Sarpanch and ward representatives reported to know 95 and 99 percent of sampled voters respectively.

³ See Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein 2009; Harris and Findley 2014.

⁴ Ward representatives, whose constituencies are nine percent as large as those of sarpanch perform similarly on guessability. They incorrectly guess voters' partisan preferences 33.6 percent of the time.

results suggest that the informational assumptions of research on swing targeting whether rooted in coercion or reciprocity— may not hold, which has important implications for the efficiency of this strategy.

While I expect my conclusions to resonate in many contexts, the data for this paper are drawn from India, and the state of Rajasthan specifically. I consider Rajasthan a 'hard case' to test the assumption or presumption that guessability is high because it has features that existing scholarship suggests are conducive to vote monitoring and the identification of voters' political preferences. First, scholarship on India broadly establishes its politics as patronage-based, which suggests that brokers have incentives to perform on guessability.⁵ Second, Rajasthan is a poor, rural state.⁶ Existing work suggests that the poor are most responsive to clientelistic benefits and that vote monitoring is most feasible in small towns and villages where population density is low.7 Third, Rajasthan has an institutionalized party system relative to other Indian states,8 and caste is a salient although imperfect predictor of partisanship.9 This suggests that guessability should be less difficult in Rajasthan as compared to less institutionalized, volatile party systems where vote preferences are particularly difficult to predict. I argue that if guessability is low in Rajasthan, it is likely to be low in most Indian states and many other new democracies where the secret ballot is protected and elections are competitive.¹⁰ This is

⁵ Chandra (2004) defines India as a "patronage democracy" characterized by a dominant state sector that controls primary avenues to upward mobility and survival and discretion over individualized provision of jobs and services. See also: Wilkinson 2007; Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013.

⁶ According to estimates based on consumption data from the 2004-5 National Sample Survey, Rajasthan has a 19 percent rural poverty rate— modestly below the 22.5 percent average for the 17 most populous Indian states (Dev and Ravi 2007).

⁷ See Calvo and Murillo 2004; Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013.

⁸ Chhibber and Nooruddin (2008) place Rajasthan in the bottom third among major states based on their measure of electoral volatility. See also Chhibber, Jensenius, and Suryanarayan 2014.

⁹ Huber and Suryanarayan 2013.

¹⁰ Sridharan and Vaishnav 2014; Mozaffar 2002; Hartlyn, McCoy. and Mustillo 2008.

consistent with Indian voters' own perceptions of ballot secrecy. According to the 2009 Indian National Election Study (NES) survey, only 13 percent of respondents believed that politicians can usually find out how Indians voted at the polls.¹¹

This article contributes to the study of political targeting in democracies characterized by patronage politics in three ways. First, existing research focuses on strategies inferred from targeting outcomes without taking into account the basic capacity of brokers to accurately identify core or swing voters in the first place. For example, Dixit and Londregan (and related models) assume that voters' political preferences are identifiable.¹² The results of this paper suggest that targeting in contexts of democratic competition take place amid significant uncertainty over voters' partisan preferences, and that brokers may fail to solve this information problem.

Second, it contributes to the paucity of systematic data on the technology of clientelism. Many of our insights on the mobilization and information gathering roles party agents perform come from small-n ethnographic studies;¹³ cross-national surveys of experts pitched at a high level of generality;¹⁴ or voter surveys and survey experiments that collect data on voters' self-reported access to state benefits or exposure to vote buying.¹⁵ Although this work often analyzes innovative, high quality data on clientelistic distribution, it has not assessed the information gathering capacities brokers must possess for quid pro quo strategies to be efficient. This article is among the first to employ a cross-referenced survey design, which allows me to evaluate whether brokers beliefs

¹¹ This combines those who said it was likely or somewhat likely that politicians could find out how they voted. See also Banerjee 2014.

¹² Dixit and Londregan 1996; See also Stokes 2005.

¹³ Auyero 2001; Robinson 1988.

¹⁴ Kitschelt and Rozenas 2011.

¹⁵ Brusco, Nazereno and Stokes 2004; Corstange 2012.

about voters' political preferences match voters' self-reported preferences. Third, this article contributes to our understanding of the quality of India's democracy. My results suggest that Indian voters have the freedom to hold politicians accountable, which undermines the effectiveness of quid pro quo electoral strategies broadly.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I discuss the pervasiveness of the assumption of high guessability in the literature on clientelism and lay out three mechanisms to explain variation at the micro-level. In section 3, I describe the research design and context: Rajasthan, India. In section 4, I present aggregate results. In section 5, I test micro-level mechanisms with multilevel regression. I discuss theoretical implications and external validity in section 6.

2. Guessability and Theories of Clientelism

The assumption that brokers can identify voters' political preferences and monitor their votes is pervasive in research on clientelism. This is a particularly strong assumption for research that predicts the targeting of swing voters with selective benefits where the ballot is secret and elections are competitive. If brokers cannot monitor votes effectively particularly among swing voters who are the most difficult to predict— the voter side of the commitment problem that underlies clientelism's quid pro quo exchange of benefits for votes cannot be solved. Moreover, if brokers cannot accurately identify the political preferences of a large share of non-core voters, or the elasticity of these voters to material benefits, the problem of inefficient targeting becomes severe.

2.1 Guessability and Theories of Clientelism

Although the secret ballot is designed to make votes anonymous and brokermediated quid pro quo politics unfeasible, ¹⁶ a significant subset of research in the clientelism literature argues that brokers' central location in voters' social networks, real or perceived loopholes to the secret ballot, and routine interactions between brokers and voters allow the former to detect voters' political preferences and votes.¹⁷ As a result, brokers are thought to be capable of punishing those who vote against their party by withholding needed benefits. In perhaps the most influential example of this view, Stokes explicitly assumes that brokers can identify voters' partisan preferences and monitor their votes through their information gathering skills, central position in social networks, and power vis-à-vis low-income voters. Stokes' model predicts that party leaders will pursue a strategy of targeting swing voters because brokers can monitor the votes of all partisan types and swing voters' vote preferences are the most responsive to targeted distribution.

The viability of this strategy depends on brokers' capacity to identify the full range of voters' partisan types ex ante—core, swing, and opposition voters— and to monitor their votes ex post. If the monitoring assumption does not hold, swing targeting will be inefficient because politicians will be unable to ensure voters' compliance in the quid pro quo exchange. Unmonitored swing voters have an incentive to take politicians' resources and vote as they wish undetected. This is consistent with the results of Guardado and Wantchekon's extension of Stokes' formal model, which shows that when the monitoring assumption is relaxed, vote-buying becomes extremely inefficient or prohibitively

¹⁶ Mares 2015.

¹⁷ Stokes 2005; Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Chandra 2004.

expensive.¹⁸ Although it has not been systematically tested, scholars of clientelism invoke some form of the monitoring assumption in cases as diverse as India, ¹⁹ Mexico, ²⁰ Lebanon,²¹ and Taiwan.²²

If the monitoring assumption does not hold, brokers must be able to predict voters' responsiveness to targeted benefits. Finan and Schechter argue that in lieu of monitoring, local brokers leverage the extensive information they have on voters' political and social preferences to make compliance in the benefits-for-votes exchange predictable.²³ For them, the voter side of the commitment problem is addressed through reciprocity, which is self-enforced by voters rather than coercively enforced by party agents. Brokers are essential to maintaining the efficiency of this strategy because they have information on voters' social preferences (e.g. intrinsic reciprocity), which they use to distinguish between those who are more or less likely to reciprocate with their votes after receiving a handout.²⁴ Consistent with this view, data from their survey of brokers and voters in Paraguay show that the former correctly identified voters' partisan preferences 80 percent of the time-irrespective of their partisanship or social ties to brokers. While their theory and evidence suggest that the assumption that guessability is high is valid in this case, Finan and Schechter collected their data in a dominant party system at a time when Paraguay was characterized as a semi-democracy and citizens had low trust in the fairness of elections.²⁵ This limits the generalizability of their findings to more competitive

¹⁸Guardado and Wantchekon 2014.

¹⁹ Chandra 2004; Bardhan and Mookerjee 2012.

²⁰ Medina and Stokes 2007

²¹ Corstange 2012.

²² Wang and Kurzman 2003

²³ Finan and Schechter 2012.

²⁴ Brokers in this study correctly identified voters' levels of trust in others and how they played dictator games 74 and 66 percent of the time respectively.

²⁵ Finan and Schechter's data collection in Paraguay spanned from 2006 to 2010. Scholars considered the country a

contexts such as India where a credible secret ballot is in place and election outcomes are uncertain. This article suggests we should be skeptical that brokers in democratically competitive contexts possess this level of information on voters' political preferences.

This article also has implications for models of distributive politics that assume the political preferences of voters or groups of voters are known prior to allocation of selective benefits. This goes back to Dixit and Londregan, who assume that ideological distances between groups and parties are known, and applies to research on vote buying that assumes that brokers can distinguish swing voters from less responsive core and opposition voters as well as identify their partisan leanings. This is important because brokers need information on voters' preferences to determine the cost and feasibility of buying their votes.²⁶ Under similar assumptions, Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco model the efficiency costs of shirking by brokers, who target core voters against party leaders' wishes to target swing voters. This article suggests a more serious problem concerns the efficiency of broker-mediated swing targeting in the first place.

Finally, scholars of clientelism working in contexts where ethnicity is politically salient suggest that taking ethnic group-party linkages into account reduces the difficulty of identifying voters' partisan preferences and monitoring their votes. Kitschelt and Wilkinson argue that voters may pressure co-ethnics or members of the same locality to vote as a bloc because parties can punish the ethnic group or locality as a whole.²⁷

semi-authoritarian regime, which experienced 61 years of one-party rule until 2008 (Abente-Brun 2009). Freedom House coded Paraguay as partly free in this period. Moreover, 19 percent of voters interviewed in the 2006 Latin Barometer Survey said that elections in that country were free and fair, compared to 69 percent who said they were not, and Hartlyn, McCoy and Mustillo (2008) code Paraguay's election commission as highly politicized.

²⁶ See Stokes 2005; Gans-Morse, Jordan, Sebastian Mazzuca, and Simeon Nichter. 2014.

²⁷ Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007.

Similarly, Chandra argues that co-ethnics coordinate their votes in order to bargain with politicians for access to selective state benefits and services.²⁸ If ethnic coordination of votes and ethnic targeting means that voters' political preferences are relatively homogenous at the local level, we should expect guessability to be high in contexts such as India where ethnicity is politically salient and brokers have incentive to collect timely information on group-party linkages.²⁹ Recent work on elections in India suggests this is often not the case. For example, Dunning and Nilekani find substantial heterogeneity in partisan preferences among members of the same castes who reside in the same villages or GPs;³⁰ evidence at the state-level in India similarly shows that party preferences are heterogeneous within groups.³¹ This is similarly the case in sub-Saharan Africa among other cases.³²

2.2 Mechanisms of Guessability: Variation at the Micro-Level:

Beyond the importance of broad patterns, understanding variation in guessability across broker and voter characteristics contributes to our understanding of mechanisms at the micro-level. In this section, I lay out three mechanisms that capture the extent to which brokers are uniquely skilled at identifying voters' private partisan preferences, relative to their bosses who lack local information. Skilled brokers should be able to identify the partisan preferences of both voters whose characteristics make them more predictable (e.g. core supporters and members of ethnic groups closely aligned with one party) and those who are less predictable (swing voters and supporters of other parties).

²⁸ See Chandra 2004.

²⁹ This holds with a constructivist approach to ethnicity. We should expect local brokers to base their guesses on voters' partisan preferences on ethnic categories that are politically relevant at the local level.

³⁰ Dunning and Nilekani 2013.

³¹ Thachil 2011; Huber and Suryanarayan 2013. For an example of within group heterogeneity see

³² See Bratton, Bhavnani and Chen 2012.

To adjudicate between high and low information views of brokers, I explore variation in guessability with respect to three mechanisms: common knowledge, co-partisan ties, and broker quality.

By the common knowledge mechanism, any broker should use information that is publicly known to make an educated guess about voters' partisan preferences in lieu of finer-grained, higher quality information. This includes two types of information: priors on the distribution of partisan preferences across ethnic and class groups and knowledge of voters' participation in publicly observable partisan political activities. The former requires the least effort or knowledge. In India, among other settings where ethnicity is politically salient, physical features and surnames allow brokers to identify voters' ethnic identities, which are predictive of partisan preferences where identity markers are visible and politically salient. In a village setting where brokers know voters personally, we should expect brokers to be able to accurately categorize voters according to ethnicity and socio-economic status.³³ If brokers depend on ethnic cues to identify voters' partisan preferences, we should expect guessability to be higher for members of *core* groups with more homogenous partisan preferences and lower for swing groups with more heterogeneous preferences. ³⁴ Similarly, where socio-economic status maps onto partisanship, we should expect local politicians' stereotypes about class-party linkages to explain variation in guessability.

In a local setting where villagers can easily observe other villagers' public activities,

³³ In my context (Rajasthan), social geography is ethnically segregated. Local leaders know voters' castes by surname and neighborhood. Socio-economic status of villagers is also visible. I find that local leaders' rankings of voters' wealth are highly correlated with wealth according to an asset measure.

³⁴ Heath 2005; Huber and Suryanarayan 2012.

participation in public partisan activities provides an additional source of information accessible to most villagers. While research suggests that brokers compel members of their partisan networks to attend rallies,³⁵ brokers should be able to easily observe who participates in public partisan activities whether they are co-partisans or supporters of another party. Brokers who have incentive to identify voters' partisan preferences should take this information into account when they guess voters' partisan preferences. That said, cues to partisanship from participation in political activities should be most available vis-à-vis voters who participate in these activities the most.

By the *partisan ties* mechanism, we should expect brokers to be more likely to correctly identify the partisan preferences of co-partisan (core) voters than non-core voter. This is the case because, in a local setting, voters are likely to be linked to co-partisan leaders through social and political ties. This is consistent with Cox and McCubbins who understand a party's core voters as those with a strong preference toward it who it knows well.³⁶ If this is true, brokers should be better at identifying the political preferences of co-partisans than non-co-partisans. This should be feasible with low effort compared to identifying the preferences of non-core voters who are likely to have weaker ties to local leaders.

The *broker quality* mechanism captures the conventional wisdom that brokers are capable of collecting information on voters' partisan preferences despite a secret ballot. Where a secret ballot is in place, brokers must use their central location in local social networks, rumors, and visible clues to identify voters' partisan preferences. Brokers use

³⁵ Auyero 2001; Szwarcberg 2011.

³⁶ Cox and McCubbins 1986; See also Calvo and Murillo 2013.

these tactics when elections are not imminent and during election campaigns to determine the allocation of selective state benefits that are routinely allocated or handouts distributed during election campaigns. Brokers are understood to be critical players in clientelism's quid pro quo exchange because they have the ability to identify the partisan preferences of voters from their communities who have characteristics that make them difficult to guess. If performing on guessability is an important part of a broker's job description, we should expect higher quality brokers (i.e. those better at this job) to perform better on guessability than lower quality brokers. Broker quality captures a local broker's skills to perform the functions the clientelism literature suggests brokers are expected to perform: information collection on voters' preferences, vote mobilization, and political targeting of selective benefits. I expect sarpanch with more education, experience, and connections to be most able to perform these functions.

3. Research Design and Sampling

The empirics of this paper are drawn from a 2013 survey of approximately one thousand heads of household and two hundred local politicians sampled from relatively poor, electorally competitive sub-districts (blocks) throughout Rajasthan.³⁷ I describe the research design and survey in this section.

3.1 Identifying Brokers Through Local Elections

I define *brokers* as local leaders embedded in their local communities who serve higher-level politicians as vote mobilizers or fixers. Although brokers in India may be elected or unelected, an important pool of brokers can be formally identified through the

³⁷ The survey was fielded approximately nine months before the 2013 state assembly elections.

results of direct elections for sarpanch.38

Sarpanch are an appropriate proxy for brokers for several reasons. First, sarpanch oversee implementation of government anti-poverty schemes funded by federal and state governments. They have discretion over the selection of beneficiaries to these programs, and evidence suggests they condition allocation of selective benefits on voters' political characteristics.³⁹ Second, recent evidence suggests that sarpanch are the first point of contact for voters seeking benefits or favors.⁴⁰ Third, ethnographic fieldwork and my own interviews suggest that prominent local brokers in India tend to be current or past sarpanch,⁴¹ and that prominent fixers are often recruited to contest for sarpanch. Fourth, sarpanch are active in election campaigns and serve as local mobilizers for state politicians. In survey questions on their political activities in the past 5 years, 92 percent of sarpanch reported that they campaigned for a state politician; 80 percent said they attended a campaign rally for a party or candidate; and 85 percent attended a party meeting. Finally, Yadav and Palshikar observe that despite the 73rd amendment's nonpartisan goals for local governance, parties have largely co-opted gram panchayats as a resource for recruiting local middlemen.⁴² This suggests that sarpanch-or their close family members- constitute a pool of leaders who perform functions identified with brokers in clientelism research.

3.2 Gram Panchayats and Sarpanch in India

Gram panchayats constitute the lowest level of elected government in rural India.

³⁸ See Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013.

³⁹ Dunning and Nilekani 2013; See Markussen 2011.

⁴⁰ Kruks-Wisner 2011; Bussell 2011

⁴¹ Pattenden 2011.

⁴² Yadav and Palshikar 2008.

In Rajasthan, each GP is comprised of a directly elected sarpanch who represents the entire GP and directly elected ward members, with one elected from each ward.⁴³ GPs in my data comprise 1,100 households on average; wards comprise approximately 100 households on average.⁴⁴ Although ward members represent smaller constituencies, closer to the size of broker networks in other countries,⁴⁵ they have limited influence over GP decisions, minimal power over the allocation of state benefits, and are less likely than sarpanch to serve as middlemen to state politicians.⁴⁶ This makes sarpanch a superior proxy for brokers.⁴⁷

Three characteristics of GPs are important for this study. First, sarpanch (95%) overwhelmingly know villagers in their GPs. ⁴⁸ The personal and routine nature of sarpanch-voter interaction distinguishes sarpanch from politicians with weaker ties to their constituents. Second, unlike the case at higher levels, party symbols are not permitted on the ballot in GP elections. Parties have nonetheless penetrated the GP.⁴⁹ They use the GP as a recruiting tool, sarpanch depend on partisan politicians such as state legislators (MLAs) and representatives of the higher tiers of the Panchayat Raj for funds for pork projects, and sarpanch often serve as middlemen to higher-level politicians. Moreover, voters are broadly aware of GP politicians' partisan affiliations: 96 percent of voters in Rajasthan correctly identified the party of the GP President.⁵⁰

⁴³ Ward member serve as council members who vote on GP decisions. The number of wards in a gram panchayat depends on population. There are 11 wards per GP on average in Rajasthan.

⁴⁴ I calculate the number of households in sampled GPs by linking population data from the 2011 Census and government data that maps GP boundaries to census village. I approximated the number of households in wards by dividing the number of households in GPs by 11 (the average number of wards per GP). ⁴⁵ See Zarazaga 2014.

⁴⁶ See Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Besley, Pande, Rahman, and Rao 2004.

⁴⁷ Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco (2013) also view sarpanch as brokers.

⁴⁸ Ward members reported to 99 percent of sampled villagers. In my sample, this refers to predominantly male heads of households.

⁴⁹ Yadav and Palshikar 2008.

⁵⁰ This is based on survey results presented in Dunning and Nilekani 2013.

Third, the 73rd amendment of the constitution, which reorganized rural local institutions in 1993, mandated reservations to elected local government positions for women and marginal groups. In Rajasthan's 2010 GP elections, quotas for scheduled castes (SC) scheduled tribes (ST), and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) applied to 18, 21, and 40 percent of sarpanch elections respectively. Across all caste categories, 53 percent of seats were reserved for women.⁵¹ Caste and gender quotas rotate across elections.⁵² Therefore, it is unlikely that an incumbent sarpanch will be eligible to seek re-election and sarpanch have rarely held that office for more than one term. Nonetheless, winning direct GP-wide elections requires that sarpanch (or their close family members) were viable local leaders prior to elections, and they often continue in leadership roles after leaving office.

3.3. Survey Instrument

Guessability is a dichotomous measure of whether or not there is a match between voters' responses to vote intention and 2008 state assembly elections vote recall questions and sarpanch's guesses about these voters' preferences and votes. I report guessability on the 2008 vote choice item as a robustness check; however, due to recall concerns, I center the statistical analysis on the rate of correct guesses for the vote intention question: *If an MLA (state assembly) election were to be held tomorrow, which party would you support?* This question captures voters' current partisan preferences nine months before the 2013 Rajasthan state assembly elections.⁵³ I measure vote preferences for both 2008

⁵¹ This means that sarpanch elections identify the most popular local leader conditional on eligibility criteria under the quota system in a given election year. I show that reservation categories of sarpanch do not impact guessability in section 4.

⁵² See Dunning and Nilekani 2013.

⁵³ See appendix E for further details on the secret ballot survey instrument.

vote choice and vote intentions items with a secret ballot survey instrument previously fielded in parliamentary and state lection post-poll surveys conducted in Rajasthan by Lokniti, a national survey organization in India.

In the elite survey conducted the following day, I asked sarpanch to guess which party each of ten voters sampled from their GP would support if a state assembly election were held tomorrow and which he voted for in 2008.54 Sarpanch were shown a sheet of 10 photographs of sampled voters including information provided in the electoral roles: name, father's name, and house number.⁵⁵ They were then asked to guess the past votes and vote intentions of each of the voters sampled from their GP. Fieldwork suggests that GP politicians took the task of guessing voters' partisan preferences seriously.56

Sampling 3.4.

The survey sampled 96 GPs from twelve sub-districts (blocks) across seven districts and six of Rajasthan's seven administrative divisions.⁵⁷ The sample generalizes to voters and GP politicians in moderately poor rural contexts where inter-party competition is intense. I made three restrictions to the population of blocks that could be sampled. First, I restricted my sample to blocks with a 75 percent rural population according to the 2001 census to reduce the chance of sampling GPs that function as suburbs. Second, I excluded blocks with less than 20 percent of households in the BPL category in 2001 to ensure that the chance of sampling voters eligible for anti-poverty programs was non-trivial. Third, I excluded blocks where the median margin of victory

⁵⁵ See figure 1 for an example.

⁵⁴ Note that I allowed the husbands of female GP politicians to participate in interviews since they often play a role in GP decision-making.

⁵⁶ Anecdotally, I observed sarpanch respondents taking their time and thinking aloud as they developed their guesses— taking caste into account for example. ⁵⁷ Rajasthan has 33 districts, 249 blocks, 7 administrative divisions, and 9177 GPs in all.

across Panchayat Samiti ward elections was greater than 15 percent to increase the chance of sampling competitive GPs.⁵⁸ I randomly sampled one district in 5 of Rajasthan's seven divisions from districts in which three or more blocks were eligible for sampling according to these criteria, and randomly sampled two blocks in each sampled district.⁵⁹ I collected data on political competition across GPs through interviews with block party presidents: party organizers immersed in the politics of GPs in their block. ⁶⁰ I excluded noncompetitive GPs to increase the chance of sampling GPs where inter-party competition is genuine, and randomly selected four form the list of GPs described as very and somewhat competitive respectively. I randomly selected one ward in each sampled GP,⁶¹ sampled households from voters' lists, ⁶² and interviewed (predominantly male) heads of household.⁶³

4. Results for Guessability: Descriptive Statistics

In this section, I present aggregate descriptive statistics on guessability for sarpanch.⁶⁴

4.1 Aggregate Guessability Rates

Figure 2 shows that sarpanch guess voters' partisan preferences incorrectly 35.5

⁵⁸ Each member of this block-level legislative body is directly elected from one ward and directly elected by plurality rule.

⁵⁹ In Udaipur, the sixth division selected, three eligible blocks did not exist in any one district. As a practical alternative, I randomly selected one block each from two neighboring districts in this division: Udaipur and Rajsamand.

⁶⁰ This was necessary because Electoral Commission data on GP elections is not available from a centralized source. ⁶¹ This was done because the elite survey samples one ward member in each GP for analysis of guessability of ward members.

⁶² Voter lists are publicly available from the Indian Election Commission.

⁶³ This more visible (head of household) population makes results on guessability conservative.

⁶⁴ The results I present are based on survey data with restrictions that ensure my measure of guessability is conservative. See Appendix D for details.

percent of the time. To establish that my results are not a function of constituency size, I show that ward members perform only slightly better than sarpanch.⁶⁵ Moreover, while it is plausible that this low rate of guessability is due to the depressing effect of the quota system on broker quality, data suggests this is not the case.⁶⁶ To address this, I conducted difference-in-means tests on guessability rates comparing female and male sarpanch and comparing sarpanch from the upper castes and other backward castes (OBCs) and those from marginal groups: scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who are rarely elected when a quota is not in place. T-tests show no significant differences across these groups.⁶⁷

4.2 Benchmarks of Guessability

To establish that guessability is low, I show that local politicians perform as well as or worse than benchmarks that do not require the presence of brokers to identify vote preferences. First, in a two-party system, the least impressive benchmark is random chance or 50 percent— equivalent to guessing partisan preferences (without any information on voters' preferences) by flipping a coin between Rajasthan's two major parties: Congress and the BJP. Figure 2 shows that aggregate guessability rates on vote intentions and 2008 vote choice items exceed random chance. Aggregated to the GP (or sarpanch respondent), 70 and 67 percent of sarpanch perform above the 50 percent random chance benchmark for vote intention and 2008 vote recall measures of guessability. Observed guessability on the vote intention item also exceeds guessability rates that would be achieved if sarpanch blindly guessed that all voters: support the party

⁶⁵ I also find no effect on guessability in multilevel models that control for the number of households across GPs (using census data matched to sampled GPs).

⁶⁶ See Tables A3 and A4 in the appendix on guessability rates across sarpanch and ward member demographics. ⁶⁷ Note that interviews with female sarpanch were conducted with their husbands (when possible) to capture the maximum level of information sarpanch have on voters' preferences.

the sarpanch feels closest to (49%); share the same vote intention as the sarpanch (42%), or (c) support the BJP entirely given the anti-incumbency wave (56%). This suggests that sarpanch have *some* information on voters' preferences and take this into account when they guess voters' preferences.

The next benchmark compares observed guessability rates against the rates that party leaders would have observed if they used publicly available results from state assembly election post-poll surveys conducted by Lokniti, a national survey institute in India, following the previous two elections in 2003 and 2008. Published in newspapers and at the time, these results include aggregate statewide vote shares for BJP and Congress across major caste groups and Muslims.⁶⁸ I develop a blunt yet plausible decision rule based on voting patterns across these ethnic categories as follows. When the difference in vote share between support for the Congress Party and BJP (averaged between the 2003 and 2008 elections) among members of broad caste categories or Muslims is greater than or equal to 15 percent in Rajasthan as a whole, sarpanch guess that all members of that group supported that party. When the difference in vote share for that group is less than or equal to 15 percent, sarpanch randomly guess whether each members of that group has Congress or BJP vote intentions with a .5 probability.⁶⁹ Since Rajasthan is a two-party system, this simple decision rule is equivalent to a coin toss and assumes no guesses of third party support.⁷⁰ If sarpanch followed this decision rule, they would have achieved an aggregate guessability rate of 65.3 percent. Taking uncertainty into account, both sarpanch and ward members, who are immersed in voters' social

⁶⁸ These groups include Muslims, forward castes, Jats, Gurjars, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward castes (middle peasant castes), which exclude Jats.

⁶⁹ I base my measure of *swing group* in regression analysis on this decision rule as well.

⁷⁰ Sarpanch guessed third parties for 7 of 806 voters in the restricted samples; 2 of these were correct. Thus, the 2-party focus fits sarpanch behavior.

networks, perform no better on guessability than this low-information benchmark.71

4.3 Guessability and the Core-Swing Debate

The general pattern of low guessability, particularly among non-core voters, holds when guessability rates are disaggregated by partisan types. This is true when partisan preferences are measured in terms of attachment and when a broader definition of swing voters is adopted.⁷²

First, I show the pattern in guessability among co-partisans, opposition supporters, and non-partisans who are indifferent across party options. I measure partisan preferences with a survey measure of psychological attachment to parties.⁷³ I identify core voters as those who feel closest to the partisan preference of their sarpanch;⁷⁴ opposition voters as those who feel closest to a party different than their sarpanch's party; and swing voters as those who do not feel close to any party (i.e. non-partisans). Sarpanch guessed co-partisans, partisans of an opposition party, and non-partisans correctly 79, 57 and 55 percent of the time respectively. I show in figure 3 that sarpanch out-perform the decision rule only with respect to co-partisans. Sarpanch guess co-partisans at a rate 15.7 percent higher than the decision rule would achieve. On the other hand, they guess partisans of the opposition 15.3 percent worse than the decision rule and are statistically indistinguishable from the decision rule with respect to swing voters.

 $^{^{71}}$ When I change the threshold from a 15 percent average margin of victory to a 10 and 20 percent margin, the decision rule yields guessability rates of 66.7 and 61.6 percent respectively. Taking margin of error of +/- 3.3% into account, both of these are statistically equivalent to observed guessability.

⁷² Since India has a broadly non-ideological party system, I used partisan attachment rather than ideology.

⁷³ The survey question asked to voters and sarpanch is as follows: 'Do you feel close to any particular party? [If so] Which one?'

⁷⁴ Both measures are restricted to sarpanch who reported partisan preferences, which requires me to drop 34 observations among four non-partisan sarpanch.

Finally, since the above measure of partisan types cannot distinguish between strong and weak partisans, I leverage data on guessed vote intentions to identify visible core and opposition voters as a more nuanced alternative. ⁷⁵ I code voters as core supporters when they are co-partisans whom the sarpanch guessed to have co-partisan vote intentions. I code opposition voters as partisans of another party whom the sarpanch guessed to support another party. This captures voters who have partisan preferences that are *visible* to the sarpanch. Sarpanch guessed both *visible* core and opposition voters correctly 96 percent of the time. I code voters outside these two categories (45 percent of observations) as swing voters. ⁷⁶ Sarpanch guessed only 28 percent of swing voters correctly. Importantly, 70 percent of mistakes on guessability for this broad measure of swing voters were due to false negatives, or guessing co-partisan vote intentions among non-supporters. Congress Party sarpanch were particularly optimistic. They guessed that 74 percent of swing voters had co-partisan vote intentions, which was correct only 22 percent of the time. BJP sarpanch did so 62 percent of the time and were right 59 percent of the time.

Broadly, the results in this section show that sarpanch are no better at identifying non-core voters' partisan preferences than low-information benchmarks that do not require the fine-grained information brokers are believed to be uniquely capable of collecting. Since voters guessed to have co-partisans are seen as plausible members of a sarpanch's coalition, and therefore likely to be targeted with benefits, these results broadly suggest that quid pro quo swing targeting is deeply inefficient during an election

⁷⁵ Since these calculations require a measure of sarpanch partisanship, I exclude responses from four non-partisan sarpanch. This includes a total of 772 observations on guessability.

⁷⁶ This includes non-partisans, co-partisans guessed to support another party, and opposition supporters guessed to have co-partisan vote intentions.

year.

5. Explaining Variation in Guessability: Regression Analysis

In this section, I analyze variation in guessability across voter and sarpanch characteristics in terms of mechanisms (section 2.2.) using multilevel modeling. Consistent with the pattern in aggregate results, regression results show that sarpanch achieve higher levels of guessability when information from group-party linkages and copartisan ties are available. Sarpanch with high levels of broker quality perform no better on guessability than low quality brokers. This suggests that local brokers in India (sarpanch) lack information on voters' private partisan preferences, particularly when this information is not readily available.

5.1. Statistical Method

Since voters are nested in gram panchayats represented by a sarpanch, I fit twolevel multilevel models (logit) with varying intercepts with GPs as the higher level. A stochastic term is added to the higher level in order to capture the effect of all other attributes at the gram panchayat level that have not been explicitly included in the regression equation. This also addresses the concern that the data are clustered by gram panchayat. The regression model is written as:

$$\Pr(y_i = 1) = logit^{-1}(\alpha_j + \beta X_i + \gamma U_{j[i]})$$
(1)

$$\alpha_j \sim N(\gamma U_j, \sigma_\alpha^2) \tag{2}$$

where each observation corresponds to a guess made by the sarpanch in GP j on the partisan vote intentions (or past vote) of voter i. The outcome y_i is a binary indicator for whether voter i's partisan vote preference or past vote were correctly guessed by their

sarpanch respectively.⁷⁷ β is a vector of coefficients on voter and dyadic characteristics, γ is a vector of GP politician characteristics, and ∂_j are gram panchayat random effects modeled by a group-level intercept and a normally distributed error term.⁷⁸ X_i is a matrix of voter characteristics and U_j is a vector of sarpanch characteristics. The varying-intercept, or random effects, model can be interpreted as a model with a different intercept on guessability for voters (i.e. guesses) in each GP.

5.2 Measures

In this section, I discuss the measurement of variables included in regressions below.⁷⁹ As discussed above, the dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether or not partisan vote preferences were guessed correctly by the sarpanch.⁸⁰

I created three types of measures to test the common knowledge mechanism. First, I created *swing group* to evaluate whether the preferences of voters from swing ethnic groups are less likely to be guessed correctly. This required two steps: (a) I coded voters' self-reported sub-caste identities and religious identities into politically relevant caste categories and Muslim religion. ⁸¹ (b) I coded Rajasthan's politically relevant ethnic groups as core or swing groups according to the 15 percent margin polling data-based decision rule discussed in section 4.2. By this rule, upper castes (including rajputs) and other backward castes (excluding Jats and Gujjars) are core groups of the BJP; scheduled

⁷⁷ Parties other than Congress and BJP were grouped together into a single category ('Others') due to the small number of observations in narrow categories. Sarpanch guessed third party vote intentions (both incorrectly) in only two cases.

⁷⁸ Random effects capture a combination of sarpanch and GP characteristics.

⁷⁹ See appendix C for further details on coding of these variables.

⁸⁰ This is coded by matching sarpanch guesses and voters' secret ballot responses on the vote intention and vote recall measures.

⁸¹ Muslims are coded as a single group irrespective of caste because they are treated as an ethnic voting bloc in most analyses of Indian electoral behavior. See appendix D for details on caste coding.

caste, scheduled tribes,⁸² and Muslims are core groups of Congress; and Jats, an upwardly mobile other backward caste (OBC), Gujjars, (an OBC) and Meenas, an upwardly mobile scheduled tribe are swing groups.⁸³

Second, to evaluate the effect of cues from class-party linkages on guessability, I measure socio-economic status using a standardized wealth index based on 15 asset items in the voter survey and weights derived from principal component analysis, which I divide into wealth quintiles.⁸⁴ Third, to measure variation in participation in public partisan activities, I create a composite participation index that includes binary questions on whether or not a respondent reported that he participated in one of four public political activities in the last 5 years: attending a rally, attending a party meeting, putting a party flag in front of their home, and canvassing for a candidate during an election campaign. I then sum these self-reported activities and divide by two standard deviations to capture large differences political participation relative to zero.

To test the co-partisan ties mechanism, I measure co-partisans as voters who share the same partisan preference as their sarpanch according to the psychological attachment measure discussed above.

Finally, according to the *broker quality mechanism*, higher quality sarpanch, distinguished by basic competence (education), experience in the GP, and connections to higher-level politicians, should perform better on guessability than low quality brokers.

⁸² Note that available results from polling data (See tables A5 and A6) grouped Meenas (a swing group in Rajasthan) together with scheduled tribes. For this reason, STs as a whole were coded as a swing group. Consistent with conventional wisdom, I code Meenas as a swing group and all remaining STs as a (Congress) core group for the regression analysis. See the appendix for regressions that use group indicators instead.

⁸³ Swing groups typically vote against the incumbent party at the state level. For example, according to Lokniti state assembly election post-poll surveys, margins in Jat support swung from favoring the BJP by 13 percent in 2003 to supporting Congress by one percent in 2008 (Lodha 2009).

⁸⁴ Filmer and Pritchett 2001.

Education captures the basic ability a sarpanch has to navigate the GP in order to target benefits to her constituents or mobilize voters.⁸⁵ I measure this with an ordinal variable ranging from 0 to 13 according to years of education and divide by two standard deviations to capture large increases in education relative to no school at all, or illiteracy. Experience captures a sarpanch's local political power and knowledge of how to maneuver within the GP. I measure experience directly as tenure: the number of terms a sarpanch served in the GP as either GP president or ward member.⁸⁶ I measure experience indirectly as an indicator for membership in a political family, which I measured in the elite survey by asking sarpanch whether any family members hold elected office currently or did so in the past.⁸⁷ This is a measure of experience because sarpanch who belong to political families are likely to have interacted with villagers in a political or social work capacity prior to becoming politicians; they are likely to draw on the experience of family members directly as sarpanch.⁸⁸

Connections to higher-level politicians capture an important component of broker quality because local brokers who have close ties to higher-level politicians are more likely to be brokers to these politicians and higher quality brokers are likely to have more access to higher-level politicians. I measure a sarpanch's level of connections to higher-level politicians with survey questions on the self-reported frequency of contact (in the past month) between sarpanch and MLAs (state legislators) and representatives and

⁸⁵ Interviews with sarpanch in three Indian states suggest that poorly educated, and particularly illiterate, local politicians are less active in political and government activities and more deferential to better educated elites. See Afridi, Iversen, and Sharan, 2013.

⁸⁶ Tenure is a standard measure of politician quality understood to capture observable and unobservable politician characteristics. See Cox and Katz 1996.

⁸⁷ Sarpanch were then asked to list the family members, positions, and years when they held these positions.

⁸⁸ A sarpanch whose husband or close family members held elective office is likely to draw on the experience of these family members (often involving them directly) in GP decisions. This is particularly true under gender quotas were female sarpanch are less likely to have political experience.

presidents of the two upper tiers of local government in India: panchayat samiti (blocklevel) and zilla parishad (district level). Responses vary along a 5-point scale from zero meetings in a month to more than one weekly meeting.⁸⁹ I create an index variable comprised of standardized contact with presidents and representatives of the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad using weights from principal components and a separate measure for contact with the MLA.⁹⁰ I include an indicator for self-identified party activists as a proxy for motivation.

5.3 Results

Regression results show that guessability is powerfully explained by the *common knowledge* and *co-partisan ties* mechanisms. I discuss regression results for the vote intention measure of guessability and use the 2008 measure as a robustness check.

Confidence intervals displayed in figure 4 show that sarpanch employ information shortcuts from demographic cues to partisanship with respect to ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The coefficient on swing group is large and statistically significant, which is robust to the 2008 vote recall measure of guessability.⁹¹ The odds that a sarpanch will correctly identify a voter from a swing group are 16 percentage points less than is the case for voters from core groups, holding wealth and participation to their means. Following a similar logic, we should expect higher guessability rates for the richest and poorest voters since they are more associated with the BJP and Congress respectively.⁹²

⁸⁹ There is substantial variation on these variables with a mean of 1-2 meetings in the last month and standard deviation of one point on the 5-point scale across these measures.

⁹⁰ To correct for inflated responses, I standardized measures of contact and divided by two standard deviations to capture significant increases in the frequency of sarpanch-reported meetings relative to the mean

⁹¹ Coefficients on ethnic and class indicators are significant at the 99 percent level. Regression tables are provided in tables A7 and A8 of the appendix. Confidence intervals use results from model 2 in both tables.

⁹² See Verma, Mishra, Sardesai, and Kumar 2014.

Those in the two poorest and one richest wealth quintiles are significantly more likely to be guessed correctly compared to the median quintile, which is robust to the 2008 vote recall measure of guessability. The odds of correctly guessing the vote preferences of the two poorest and one richest wealth quintiles are respectively 12, 11, and 14 percentage points higher than is the case for those in the middle wealth quintile.

Surprisingly, voters with high levels of participation in public partisan activities are guessed not better than those who do not do participate in these activities. Voters with rates of political participation two standard deviations above zero, which refers to those who participated in 3 to 4 (of 4) types of public political participation, are no easier to guess than those who do not participate in these activities.⁹³ These results suggest that sarpanch employ information shortcuts on voters' group characteristics, which does not require fine-grained information on voters' preferences, but do not draw on locally observable signals of partisanship from voters' political activities.⁹⁴ Models that test copartisan ties and broker quality mechanisms include variables from this baseline model.

Results for independent effects on measures of co-partisan ties and broker quality are displayed in figure 5.⁹⁵ I also include a control for co-ethnicity, which has a point estimate of zero as a main effect.⁹⁶

Evidence does not support the expectation that higher-skill sarpanch out-perform

Note that the richest and poorest voters in a GP are also more likely to interact with the sarpanch than other socioeconomic groups.

⁹³ This holds for both guessability measures as well as models in which I include only the largest component of the participation index: rally attendance. This effect does not differ across Congress and BJP sarpanch and interactions between co-partisanship and participation are not statistically significant.

⁹⁴ Note that I also find no effect in interaction between voters' political participation and broker quality (not included in this article).

⁹⁵ Confidence intervals summarize results from model 5 in tables A9 and A10 in the appendix.

⁹⁶ *Swing groups* is included in this model. The effect of co-ethnicity estimates the effect of shared ethnicity among members of co-ethnic groups— when swing group equals 0. Descriptively, the guessability rate among co-ethnics is 64.3 percent, which is slightly below the overall rate of guessability in my sample.

those with low skill on guessability. None of the measures of basic capacity and experience achieve statistical significance at conventional levels, and they are not jointly significant according to an f-test or composite measure. An increase of two standard deviations in years of educational attainment—from illiterate to completion of middle school— does not have a significant effect on guessability.⁹⁷ Second, neither tenure nor belonging to a political family has a significant or substantial effect on guessability. Third, moving up two standard deviations on frequency of contact with presidents and members of the two upper tiers of the panchayat raj (local government) system has no effect on guessability.⁹⁸ Frequency of contact with the state legislator (MLA) is negative but does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance in models for either measure of guessability.⁹⁹

Moreover, to ensure that the null result I find on broker quality is not due to a lack of motivation, I explore interactions between an indicator for whether a sarpanch is a selfidentified party activist and measures of broker quality. GP politicians who self-identify as party activists are likely to exhibit strong connections to partisan politicians, be particularly engaged in vote mobilization, and have interest in political careers beyond the GP.¹⁰⁰ *Activist* has no independent effect on guessability, and I find no statistically significant interaction effects on the vote intention measure of guessability.¹⁰¹ In short,

⁹⁷ I also estimated education effects as indicators for primary, middle, and secondary, and post-secondary school (with those with no schooling in the baseline). Illiterates are indistinguishable from the most educated on this specification.

⁹⁸ The only effect that reaches statistical significance is contact with a state assembly legislator (MLA), which is negative.

⁹⁹ This negative effect is significant at the 90 percent level. When co-partisanship is not included in the model, it is 95 percent significant (Model 1 in table A9 in the appendix). The negative sign is consistent with my conclusion that measures of broker quality do not positively effect guessability.

¹⁰⁰ T-tests show that activists report significantly higher levels of contact with state legislaotrs (MLAs), panchayat samiti members and zilla parishad members.

¹⁰¹ Results on interaction effects are obtained from model 6 in tables A9 and A10 in the appendix.

evidence broadly shows that sarpanch who are likely to be higher quality brokers, even activists who should be particularly motivated, perform no better than the baseline common knowledge mechanism alone. This analysis challenges the expectation that brokers can identify the preferences of core and non-core voters alike.

The strong effect of co-partisanship on guessability falls in stark contrast to this. Results in figure 5 show that co-partisanship has a large, positive, and statistically significant effect on guessability.¹⁰² All else equal, the odds that sarpanch will guess copartisan voters' preferences correctly is 19 percentage points higher that is the case for non-co-partisan voters. I estimate effects from interactions with co-partisanship in figure 6. 103 The interaction between co-partisanship and co-ethnicity is not statistically significant. This can be explained by the generally high level of guessability among copartisans overall.¹⁰⁴ The interaction between co-partisanship and *swing group* is not statistically significant; however, the coefficient is positive for both measures of guessability in contrast to the large, negative coefficient on swing group as an independent effect.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the coefficient on the interaction between co-partisanship and self-reported contact between the sarpanch and politicians in the upper tiers of the panchayat raj is substantially larger than the latter independent effect and significant at the 90 percent level.¹⁰⁶ Although this applies to a small number of observations, the odds that a sarpanch who reported high levels of contact with politicians from the panchayat

¹⁰² Co-partisanship is significant at the 99 percent level on both measures of guessability.

¹⁰³ Co-partisan interactions are obtained from model 6 in tables A9 and A10 in the appendix.

¹⁰⁴ Descriptively, the rate of guessability among co-ethnic co-partisans is only three percent higher than for copartisans overall.

¹⁰⁵ In regressions (displayed in appendix B) that include group indicators instead of *swing group*, coefficients on the interaction between co-partisan ties and Jats and Meenas, two key swing groups, flip dramatically from negative to positive. The interaction between co-partisanship and Meenas reached statistical significance at the 90 percent level. ¹⁰⁶ Note that education and measures of political experience do not have an impact as interactions or main effects.

raj (local government) system guesses a co-partisans' partisan preference correctly is 130 percentage points higher than would be the case if the voter was a non-co-partisan.

To summarize regression results, statistical analysis of variation in guessability at the micro-level broadly supports the core claim of this paper that guessability is low, particularly with respect to non-core voters. Evidence does not support the assumption that skilled brokers identify voters' privately political preferences despite the secret ballot.¹⁰⁷ Instead, sarpanch use information shortcuts that could be adopted by an outsider, and otherwise perform reasonably well at identifying core voters whom they know the best. These results suggest that a state politician interested in identifying voters' preferences during an election year would be better serving hiring a polling agency than employing brokers immersed in voters' local communities.

6. Discussion

The conclusions of this article are inconsistent with theories that assume brokers can monitor votes or accurately identify the distribution of vote preferences among noncore voters. This has implications for clientelism research that assumes that swing voters can be efficiently targeted through a quid pro quo strategy because brokers can leverage the information they have on voters' preferences and votes to solve the principal-agent problem underlying clientelism's quid pro quo exchange. Second, this article has implications for how we understand local mechanisms of distributive politics in rural India, a context broadly seen as characterized by quid pro quo clientelism in existing work. Finally, this article opens up several avenues for future research that will advance

¹⁰⁷ I demonstrate robustness of these results with simple checks in appendix F.

our understanding of micro-level mechanisms across contexts.

First, this article suggests that the information parties possess on swing voters' preferences is low. Although local leaders identify co-partisans' vote preferences at a high rate, especially when core is defined narrowly, they perform badly at identifying the partisan leanings of swing voters whether narrow or broad definitions of swing voters are employed. In the Indian context, this comprises a quit large share of the electorate. Since swing voters are overwhelmingly incorrectly guessed to have co-partisan vote intentions, my results suggests that swing targeting is inefficient in India, among other competitive democracies. This is especially the case if the capacity of politicians to monitor votes ex post is as weak in India and other democratic contexts as recent work suggests.¹⁰⁸

This has implications for influential models with swing targeting predictions. For example, Stokes argues that brokers should target electorally decisive swing voters, whose preferences are known and whose votes can be monitored. Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter argue that voters pursue a mixed strategy of mobilizing weak supporters through turnout buying and buying the votes of weak opposition supporters. My results suggest that brokers' ability to distinguish swing voters who lean toward the opposition from those who lean co-partisan is characterized by uncertainty. If this is the case, parties face serious limitations in determining an efficient allocation of limited resources prior to an election. This problem is particularly severe in competitive democracies like India where broadly non-ideological parties compete for similar voters. Vote preferences are likely to be particularly volatile over time in these settings.¹⁰⁹

Following from this point, this article suggests that we should be skeptical that the

¹⁰⁸ See Lawson and Greene 2014.

¹⁰⁹ See Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, Frederico Estevez, and Beatriz Magaloni 2012.

requirements of quid pro clientelism hold in contexts where guessability is low. Synthesizing the broad thrust of this literature, Kitschelt and Wilkinson argue that the efficiency of quid pro quo clientelism depends on the ability of parties, through local agents, to accurately predict vote intentions (and their elasticity to material benefits) or monitor votes. This article shows that an important pool of brokers perform poorly at identifying the vote intentions of swing voters (broadly conceived) in rural India—a context of low density and dense social ties where existing theory would expect guessability to be high. Since vote monitoring and identifying the elasticity of voters' preferences pose more severe informational demands than guessability, relative to lowinformation benchmarks, this article suggests that coercive quid pro quo politics may be far less pervasive than expected where the ballot is genuinely secret.

This has theoretical and empirical implications. First, the predictions of theories that rely on the monitoring assumption may not hold if guessability is low. For example, Stokes' prediction that swing targeting is efficient because brokers can monitor the votes of the least predictable types of voters may not hold in contexts of low guessability. While the monitoring assumption may be more reasonable in some contexts, this article suggests that brokers' capacity and incentive to monitor votes is an empirical question. Similarly, understanding variation across contexts in the capacity and incentives of local leaders to collect fine-grained information on voters' political preferences is an empirical question. I argue that exploring the consequences of variation in guessability, and related concepts like monitoring capacity, will lead to important theoretical and empirical advances. For example, do higher-level politicians' electoral and targeting strategies change at varying levels of guessability? Do they invest less in brokers or incentivize core over swing targeting where guessability is low but not where it is high? Understanding the

answers to these questions will help scholars develop more precise mechanisms of brokermediated politics.

Finally, this article has implications for how we understand party-voter linkages and targeted distribution at the local level in rural India. First, my findings suggest that India has a robust secret ballot, which ensures that voters are free to express their preferences contrary to a more coercive view. This is consistent with evidence on India's anti-incumbency effect, which should not exist if voters believe that they will be punished for voting against the incumbent.¹¹⁰ Consistent with Vaishnav's observations in Andhra Pradesh, this suggests that even if politicians distribute money to voters during election campaigns, they are unlikely to believe or attempt to ensure that this money is targeted strategically.¹¹¹ Second, my results are consistent with three scenarios: that quid pro quo politics (targeted to individuals or small groups) is present but inefficient, that quid pro quo clientelism is in a moment of collapse, or that it hasn't functioned for decades. If the first scenario is correct, my results suggest that even sarpanch who have characteristics that make them most likely to be effective brokers fail at a central task party leaders expect them to perform. Alternatively, brokers may invest minimal effort in guessability because party leaders only expect them to organize voters into local networks of reliable supporters. If this interpretation is correct, the high rate of guessability among copartisans suggests that sarpanch perform rather well given my sample frame of competitive blocks and the anti-incumbent election year when the survey was conducted. Future work is needed to precisely determine which of these two mechanisms is dominant; however, both are consistent with my broad conclusion that the depiction of

¹¹⁰ Uppal 2009.

¹¹¹ Vaishnav 2015.

quid pro quo politics in India requires revision.

7. Scope Conditions and External Validity

I expect my conclusion that guessability is low to hold across most Indian states although its level should vary with the extent of polarization in group-party linkages (common knowledge mechanism) and local party organization. With respect to the former, Survanarayan and Huber's analysis of group polarization across Indian states shows that Rajasthan is a typical case with respect to caste polarization across parties.¹¹² Voters in states with more ethnically polarized systems such as Assam may be easier to guess by this mechanism while voters in less ethnically polarized states such as Tamil Nadu will be more difficult to guess.¹¹³ The co-partisan ties mechanism suggests that guessability will be higher in contexts where voters have ties to co-partisan brokers, which is more likely where there is a party machine that can link to a large number of voters in this way. While parties in Rajasthan lack the local organization of machine parties like the PRI or UCJ in Mexico and Argentina,¹¹⁴ recent work coded its party system as one of the most organized (at the district level) in India and the most organized in North India.¹¹⁵ This suggests that guessability is unlikely to be lower in Rajasthan than in most Indian states. Broadly speaking, where the ballot is secret, elections do not resemble ethnic censuses at the local level, and parties lack organized machines, guessability is likely to

¹¹² Rajasthan falls at the middle of the distribution on Huber's Group Vote Polarization (GVP) across Indian states (based on 1999 and 2004 parliamentary elections post-poll data). GVP captures the extent to which a group's vote is polarization across parties, aggregated to the level of Indian states and takes the number and size of groups and parties into account.

¹¹³ Vaishnav and Sircar 2012.

¹¹⁴ Calvo and Murillo 2013.

¹¹⁵ Chhibber, Jensenius, and Suryanarayan 2014.

be low.116

Guessability, like the predictability of vote preferences, is also likely to vary across time. While vote choice was not dramatically more difficult to predict in 2013 (seen as the beginning of an anti-Congress wave) than in other recent state elections,¹¹⁷ we should expect guessability to be higher where voters' preferences are more stable and the average level of volatility in vote preferences may vary variables such as the state of the economy that affect the degree of anti-incumbency in a given election year. The extent to which this is the case, like guessability in general, is an empirical question.

8. Conclusion

Research on clientelism literature suggests that brokers perform an essential information-gathering role that party leaders cannot perform. This makes local agents indispensable. Evidence presented here suggests that local brokers do not perform as well as theory predicts, and perform no better than inexpensive, low-information alternatives that require only information on basic demographics or polling data that party leaders can easily access or collect themselves. If party leaders in state capitals and legislators and staff sitting in constituency offices can out-perform sarpanch on guessability, scholars would be wise to look beyond the coercive quid pro quo logic of clientelism. Instead, it may be more prudent for them to explore theories that explain how parties, politicians, and their local brokers attract and retain voter support where there is a secret ballot and genuine, if not necessarily programmatic, democratic competition that shapes the behavior of voters and politicians alike. Here, the challenge parties face is how to respond

¹¹⁶ This does not mean that guessability is as high as expected in countries with machine parties such as Argentina. This is an empirical question.

¹¹⁷ See appendix F for a discussion on anti-incumbency in Rajasthan.

to rising demands for governance and selective benefits in an environment where accountability is not perverse.

References

- Abente-Brun, Diego. 2009. "Paraguay: the Unraveling of One-Party Rule. *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1: 143-156.
- Afridi, Farzana, Vegard Iversen, and M.R. Sharan. 2013. "Women Political Leaders, Corruption and Learning: Evidence from a Large Public Program in India" (No. 7212). Discussion Paper Series, Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit.
- Auyero Javier. 2001. *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Banerjee, Mukulika. 2014. Why India Votes. Delhi: Routledge Press.
- Bardhan, Pranab and Dillip Mookherjee. 2012. "Political Clientelism and Capture: Theory and evidence from West Bengal, India." Presented at University of California, Berkeley.
- Besley, Timothy, Rohini Pande, Vijayendra Rao. 2005. "Political Selection and the Quality of Government: Evidence from South India." Typescript.
- Besley, Timothy, Rohini Pande, Lupin Rahman, and Vijayendra Rao. 2004. "The Politics of Public Goods Provision: Evidence from Indian Local Councils." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 2: 416–426.
- Björkman, Lisa. 2014. "You Can't Buy a Vote": Meanings of Money in a Mumbai Election." *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 4: 617-634.
- Bratton, Michael, Ravi Bhavnani, and Tsi-Hsin Chen. 2012. "Voting Intentions in Africa: Ethnic, Economic or Partisan?" *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1: 27-52.
- Brusco, Valeria Marcelo Nazareno, and Susan Stokes. 2004. "Vote Buying in Argentina." *Latin American Research Review 39*, no. 2: 66-88.
- Bussell, Jennifer. 2011. "Representation Between the Votes: Informal Citizen-State Relations in India." Typescript.
- Calvo, Ernesto and M. Victoria Murillo. 2004. "Who Delivers? Partisan Clients in the Argentine Electoral Market." *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4: 742-757.
- --- 2013. "When Parties Meet Voters: Assessing Political Linkages Through Partisan Networks and Distributive Expectations in Argentina and Chile." *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 7: 851- 882.

- Chandra, Kanchan. 2004. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*. New York: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chhibber, Pradeep and Irfan Nooruddin. 2008. "Unstable Politics Fiscal Space and Electoral Volatility in the Indian States." *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8: 1069-1091.
- Chhibber, Pradeep, Francesca Jensenius, and Pavithra Suryanarayan. 2014. "Party Organization and Party Proliferation in India. *Party Politics* 20, no. 4: 489-505.
- Corstange, Daniel. 2012. "Vote Trafficking in Lebanon." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3: 483-505.
- Cox, Gary and Jonathan Katz. 1996. "Why Did the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections Grow?" *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 2: 478-497.
- Cox, Gary and Matthew McCubbins. 1986. "Electoral Politics as a Redistributive Game." *Journal of Politics* 48, no. 2: 370-389.
- Dev, S. Mahendra and C. Ravi. 2007. "Poverty and Inequality: All-India and States, 1983-2005." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 6: 509-521.
- Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, Frederico Estevez, and Beatriz Magaloni. 2012. *Strategies of Vote Buying: Democracy, Clientelism and Poverty Relief in Mexico.* Typescript.
- Dixit, Avinash, and John Londregan. 1996. "The Determinants of Success of Special Interests in Redistributive Politics." *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4: 1132-1155.
- Dunning, Thad and Janhavi Nilekani. "Ethnic Quotas and Political Mobilization: Caste, Parties, and Distribution in Indian Village Councils." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1: 35-56.
- Filmer, Deon and Lant H. Pritchett. 2001. "Estimating Wealth Effects Without Expenditure Data." *Demography* 38, no. 1: 115–132.
- Finan, Frederico, and Laura Schechter. 2012. "Vote-Buying and Reciprocity." *Econometrica* 80, no. 2: 863–81.
- Gans-Morse, Jordan, Sebastian Mazzuca, and Simeon Nichter. 2014. "Who Gets Bought? Vote Buying, Turnout Buying, and Other Strategies." Harvard University Weatherhead Center for International Affairs working paper 09-0006.
- Gelman, Andrew and Jennifer Hill. 2007. Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models: Analytical Methods for Social Research. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

- Guardado, Jennifer and Leonard Wantchékon. 2014. "Do Electoral Handouts Affect Voting Behavior?" Manuscript.
- Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel Posner, and Jeremy Weinstein. 2009. *Co-Ethnicity: Diversity and the Dilemmas of Collective Action*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Harris, Adam and Michael Findley. 2014. "Is Ethnicity Identifiable? Lessons from an Experiment in South Africa." *Journal* of Conflict Resolution 58, no. 1: 4-33.
- Hartlyn, Johnathan, Jennifer McCoy and Thomas Mustillo. 2008. "Electoral Governance Matters Explaining the Quality of Elections in Contemporary Latin America." *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 1: 73-98.
- Heath, Oliver. 2005. "Party Systems, Political Cleavages and Electoral Volatility in India: a State-Wise Analysis, 1998–1999. *Electoral Studies 24*, no. 2: 177-199.
- Huber, John D. and Pavithra Suryanarayan. 2013. "Ethnic Inequality and the Ethnification of Political Parties: Evidence from India." Presented at the Columbia University Seminar on Comparative Politics.
- Kitschelt, Herbert and Steven Wilkinson. 2007. "Citizen-Politician Linkages." In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kitschelt, Herbert and Arturas Rozenas. 2011. "Contingent Exchange and Contractual Opportunism: Making Clientelistic Relationships Work." Manuscript.
- Kramon, Eric. 2011. "Why Do Politicians Buy Votes When the Ballot Is Secret? Theory and Experimental Evidence from Kenya." Manuscript.
- Krishna, Anirudh. 2007. "Politics in the Middle: Mediating Relationships Between the Citizens and the State in Rural North India." In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson (Eds.), *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kruks-Wisner, Gabrielle. 2011. "Making Claims: Citizenship and Service Delivery in Rural India." Ph.D. Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Lawson, Chappell and Kenneth F. Greene. 2014. "Making Clientelism Work: How Norms of Reciprocity Increase Voter Compliance." *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1: 61-85.
- Lodha, Sanjay. 2009. "Rajasthan: Dissatisfaction and a Poor Campaign Defeat BJP." *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 6: 23-26.

- Mares, Isabella. 2015. From Open Secrets to Secret Voting: Democratic Electoral Reforms and Voter Autonomy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Markussen, Thomas. 2011. "Inequality and Political Clientelism: Evidence from South India." *Journal of Development Studies*, 47, no. 11: 1721-1738.
- Medina, Luis and Susan Stokes. 2007. "Monopoly and Monitoring: An Approach to Political Clientelism." In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mozaffar, Shaheen and Andreas Schedler. 2002. "The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance—Introduction." *International Political Science Review* 23, no.1: 5-27.
- Pattenden, Jonathan. 2011. "Gatekeeping as Accumulation and Domination: Decentralization and Class Relations in Rural South India. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 2 :164-194.
- Robinson, Mary. 1988. Local Politics: the Law of the Fishes: Development through political change in Medak District, Andhra Pradesh. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sircar, Neelanjan. 2015. "A Tale of Two Villages: Kinship Networks and Preference Formation in Rural India." Columbia University. Manuscript, Philadelphia.
- Sridaran, E. and Milan Vaishnav. 2014. "Election Commission of India." in Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta, eds. *Building an Indian State for the 21st Century* (forthcoming).
- Stokes, Susan. 2005. "Perverse Accountability." *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3: 315-325

Stokes, Susan, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno, and Valeria Brusco. 2013. *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: the Puzzle of Distributive Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Szwarcberg, Mariela. 2009. *The Political Effects of Party Rallies: Clientelism and Electoral Competition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Thachil, Tariq. 2011. "Embedded Mobilization: Non-State Service Provision as Electoral Strategy in India." *World Politics* 63, no. 3: 434-69.
- Uppal, Yogesh. 2009. "The Disadvantaged Incumbents: Estimating Incumbency Effects in Indian State Legislatures." *Public Choice* 138, no. 1-2: 9-27.

- Vaishnav, Milan. 2012. "Ethnic Identifiability: Evidence from a Survey of Indian Voters." Presented at the 2012 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.
- --- 2015. When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics. Book Manuscript.
- Vaishnav, Milan and Neelanjan Sircar. 2012. "The Politics of Pork: Building Schools and Rewarding Voters in Tamil Nadu, India." Manuscript.
- Verma, Rahul, Jyoti Mishra, and Shreyas Sardesai, and Sanjay Kumar. 2014. "Return of the 'National' in Indian Elections: When do National-level Factors Play a Role in Influencing the Outcomes of State Assembly Elections?" *Studies in Indian Politics 2, no.* 1: 81-97.
- Wang, Chin-Shou and Charles Kurzman. 2007. "The Logistics: How to Buy Votes." In Frederic Schaeffer, ed., *Elections for Sale: The Causes and Consequences of Vote Buying*. Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Wilkinson, Steven. 2007. "Explaining Changing Patterns of Party-Voter Linkages in India." In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, eds., Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yadav, Yogendra. 1999. "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989-99." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 34/35: 2393-239.
- Yadav, Yogendra and Suhas Palshikar. 2008. "Ten Theses on State Politics in India." In Seminar 591 (November): 14-22.
- Zarazaga, Rodrigo. 2014. "Brokers Beyond Clientelism: A New Perspective Through the Argentine Case." *Latin American Politics and Society* 56, no. 3: 23-45.



supported in the last MLA elections in 2008?

b) BJP c) Other











© Copyright 2014 Mark Schneider and the Center for the Advanced Study of India

