

The Discerning Voter:

Party-Voter Linkages and Local Distribution Under Multi-Level Governance

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What shapes voters' expectations of receiving private benefits and local public goods in developing world democracies? Models of instrumental voting suggest that voters' expectations are shaped by co-partisanship; however, this work does not consider the calculations that voters make in multi-level systems where different types of goods are allocated by different tiers of government. In this article, I argue that voters condition their expectations of private benefits on co-partisan ties with the local leader, but only do so with respect to local public goods when the local leader is aligned with the state government that controls the allocation of pork barrel spending. I test my argument with a vignette experiment conducted in rural India that randomly assigns the partisan affiliation of *real* village politicians and find empirical support for the argument. I also find suggestive evidence of strategic voting in local elections toward leaders aligned with the ruling party.

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What shapes voters' expectations of receiving private state benefits and local public goods? Existing research on distributive politics in developing countries suggests that politicians often favor their co-partisan supporters in the allocation of private state benefits and services and local public goods (Stokes et al. 2013; Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Min 2016; Bohlken 2017). Models of instrumental voting, thus, focus on the cues that voters use to determine which party will favor people like them, which shapes their vote preferences (Chandra 2004; Conroy-Krutz et al. 2016; Chauchard 2016; See Snyder and Ting 2002; Schafner and Streb 2002). Following from the view that voters make blunt judgments under limited information, this work broadly expects voters to form consistent distributive expectations vis-à-vis their preferred party across a wide range of state benefits. This work, however, does not consider partisan alignment in multi-level systems where different tiers of government (e.g., local, state, federal), which may be controlled by different political parties, hold discretion over private goods (e.g., welfare benefits) and local public goods (e.g., infrastructure). Are voters sufficiently sophisticated to take partisan alignment between local and higher levels of government into account in their *distributive expectations* and vote preferences in local elections?¹

In this article, I present a theory that explains the calculations that voters make in multi-level settings where elected local leaders have substantial discretion over the allocation of private benefits (e.g., welfare benefits), but rely on higher levels of government for discretionary funds for pork barrel projects that are often non-excludable within a village. I argue that voters expect favoritism in the allocation of private benefits and services from co-partisan local leaders, who are likely to share socio-political ties in the context of personalized village politics, but also understand that state leaders are likely to exclude localities represented by leaders from opposition parties. An important implication of this logic is that voters who are likely to fall

outside core partisan networks and those who value non-excludable local public goods are likely to vote for local leaders aligned with the ruling party at the state level.

To test my argument, I develop a *real candidate* vignette survey experiment that tests for the extent to which voters in the rural state of Rajasthan, India perceive the partisan affiliation of elected local leaders to shape the targeting of private goods (e.g., anti-poverty benefits) and local public goods (state development funds). Consistent with my argument, I find that voters were more likely to expect co-partisan sarpanch to provide private benefits over which they have significant discretion. Co-partisanship (relative to its absence), however, only impacts expectations on access to state funds when the local leader is affiliated with the governing party at the state level. I also find suggestive evidence of strategic voting toward the BJP, the party broadly believed to win the state elections, which is an implication of the argument.

Partisan Alignment and Distributive Expectations in Multi-Level Systems

While voters base their expectations of receiving state benefits, or *distributive expectations*, on a range of types of information from stereotypes of group-party linkages to beliefs about the credibility of parties to deliver on their promises, models of instrumental voting broadly view the vote decision as an instrumental act where voters strategically vote for the party they believe will be most likely to deliver state resources and services to people like them (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005; Calvo and Murillo 2013). My argument takes core propositions of instrumental voting models set in developing countries as a point of departure. First, politicians at various levels of government often target their co-partisan supporters (Calvo and Murillo 2004, 2013; Cox and McCubbins 1986; Stokes et al. 2013; Boehlken 2017; Dasgupta 2017; Nunes 2013).² Second, voters demand private goods targeted at the individual level and local

public goods that all members of a village can often access.³ Third, whether based on stereotypes of group-party linkages (Green et al. 2002; Chandra 2004), past distribution (Magaloni and Diaz-Cayeros 2007), or proximity to patronage networks (Calvo and Murillo 2013; Dunning and Nilekani 2013), voters know their partisan types (including non-partisans) and expect co-partisan representatives to be more likely to deliver resources to people like them than representatives from other parties.

Multi-level systems have important implications particularly for the third proposition above. First, local governments in multi-level systems such as India have substantial discretion over the selection of beneficiaries to central and state government programs (Bohlken 2016; Besley et al. 2004), but local leaders must lobby the ruling party at higher tiers of government (e.g., state and federal levels) for local public goods, which are widely understood to favor localities represented by co-partisan leaders (Armesto 2009; Dasgupta 2017; Boehlken 2017).⁴ Second, recent work makes an important distinction between the allocation of private benefits that can be conditioned on individual characteristics, such as proximity to partisan networks (Calvo and Murillo 2013; Dunning and Nilekani 2013), and local public goods, which can be targeted to constituencies represented by co-partisan politicians, but are accessible to all residents of the locality (Ichino and Nathan 2013). Since leaders from different political parties may hold power at the local and state levels in this setting, which has implications for the allocation of different types of goods, voters in multi-level systems are faced with a complex task in forming their distributive distributions across candidates for local office. Thus, rather than basing one's distributive expectations on co-partisan bias broadly, voter in multi-level systems should also consider which party holds power at the state level; which types of benefits (public or private goods) she prioritizes most, and the impact of partisan alignment between local and

higher-level leaders on her chances of receiving different types of benefits. An important implication of this calculation is that voters who value local public goods over private goods should strategically vote for a local candidate affiliated with the ruling party at the state level.

At the same time, following from co-partisan biases at the local level, voters who strategically support a non-co-partisan leader face a risk of exclusion from private benefits if their choice wins the election. Evidence from rural India, for example, shows that local leaders favor voters whom they perceive are their co-partisan supporters with private welfare benefits (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Markussen 2011; Schneider and Sircar 2016). Thus, voters who prioritize private goods over local public goods should vote for a co-partisan local leader irrespective of the ruling party at higher levels. Finally, I expect non-partisans to vote for the local politician affiliated with the ruling party at the state level given that they are unlikely to benefit from co-partisan favoritism in the targeting of private goods and will benefit from the provision of non-excludable local public goods.⁵ This yields the following hypotheses:

H1: Voters, irrespective of party, will expect to receive greater access to private goods when they are co-partisans of the local leader.

H2: Voters will condition their distributive expectations on access to local public goods on co-partisanship when local representatives and the ruling party in state government belong to the same party.

H3: Instrumental non-partisan voters should support local leaders aligned with the party in power at the state level.

Distributive Politics in Rajasthan

I test the argument with data from a 2013 survey of rural voters in Rajasthan, a poor, rural state in north India. Rajasthan was selected for this study because it meets the scope conditions of my argument. First, following the passage of the 73rd amendment, substantial authority over the implementation of federal and state programs was devolved to elected village

councils (gram panchayats, GPs). This gave GP presidents (sarpanch) discretion over the selection of beneficiaries to state and federal welfare schemes and authority over the implementation of a large right to work program, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which guarantees 100 days of paid manual labor to all citizens (Dasgupta 2017). In addition, sarpanch selectively grant favors to villagers and facilitate access to higher level bureaucrats and politicians, which is often necessary for citizens to obtain benefits and routine services from an unresponsive state (Krishna 2011; Bohlken 2016). At the same time, state and federal governments retained authority over policy-making and GPs rely on state funds for a wide range of public goods and discretionary pork barrel projects (Devraj et al. 2008). This demonstrates that GPs in Rajasthan, and across India, fit my characterization of a multi-level system where discretion over targeting varies across types of goods.

Second, voters in Rajasthan value the goods examined in this paper: private anti-poverty benefits and state funds for local public goods. According to estimates based on consumption data from the 2004-5 National Social Survey, Rajasthan has a rural poverty rate of 19 percent, which is modestly below the 22.5 percent average for Indian states (Dev and Ravi 2007).⁶ This suggests that voters in Rajasthan are likely to value private welfare benefits,⁷ which are understood to be allocated with significant political biases (Dunning and Nilekani 2013). Research on the provision of schools, roads, and other pork barrel projects similarly establishes that political biases are widespread in the allocation of pork barrel project and other local public goods (Boehlken 2017; Min 2016).

Third, Rajasthan has an institutionalized, competitive two-party system where the Congress Party and BJP have alternated in power at the state level each term since 1993.⁸ This was similarly the case at the time of my survey in January 2013. Interviews at that time

suggested a widely held expectation among voters that the BJP would decisively defeat the incumbent Congress Party in the upcoming state elections in late 2013, which was the case.⁹ Moreover, although the election commission formally bans party symbols from the ballot in GP elections, evidence of partisan salience at the local level is widespread. Dunning and Nilekani (2013), for example, find that voters in Rajasthan correctly identified the party of the sarpanch 96 percent of the time, and sarpanch in my sample overwhelmingly (95%) identified with one of the state's two major parties. Following from the pervasiveness of partisan ties at the local and state levels, and the staggered timing of state and local elections,¹⁰ multi-level governance is often characterized by heterogeneity in partisan alignment across local and state governments.

Finally, GP elections in Rajasthan are contexts of high-information and dense social ties. GPs in Rajasthan comprise 1,100 households on average and have stable populations, which means that voters and local leaders are likely to know each other personally. In my data, for example, sampled sarpanch reported to know 95 percent of voters sampled from their GP personally.¹¹ The high-information context of GP politics, thus, warrants the research design described below as an alternative to fictional candidate experiments designed for low-information environments.

The Challenge of Identifying the Effects of Candidate Traits on Distribution

Due to the endogeneity of a leader's partisan affiliation, fictional candidate vignette experiments have become the method most commonly employed to identify the *causal* effect of politician characteristics on voters' assessments of candidates and votes. In this design, respondents are exposed to hypothetical politicians, which gives researchers the ability to randomly assign candidate traits in the context of a survey experiment (See Carlson 2015;

Conroy-Krutz 2013; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013). There are several reasons that I consider this approach problematic for studying the effects of party-voter linkages on distributive expectations at the local level. First, since politician-voter linkages in local elections are rooted in personal ties characterized by fine-grained information on numerous candidate traits accumulated over a long period of time, voters' distributive expectations are unlikely to rely on the information shortcuts that fictional candidate experiments capture. Second, fictional candidate experiments are often characterized by high cognitive demands and low motivation on part of the respondent because they require respondents to process complex, unfamiliar information in a short period. Research on the psychology of survey response suggests that when cognitive burdens are high and motivation is low, respondents are likely to engage in passive non-compliance, or a strategic attempt to fool the researcher (McDermott 2011; Krosnick 1991; Stolte 1994). Third, fictional candidate vignette survey experiments make the strong assumption that respondents' responses are a result of the profile of fictional candidate characteristics alone. Recent work, however, suggests that experimental cues prime respondents to consider other unobserved traits that are perceived as correlated with the treatment (Dafoe et al. 2016; See Gaines et al. 2007). The experimental design introduced in this article addresses these concerns by minimizing cognitive burdens, increasing realism, and capturing the informational and social context of village elections.

Research Design

To test my argument, I developed a *real candidate* vignette experiment that randomly assigns respondent-provided local partisan politician cues across the two major parties in Rajasthan, and asked respondents for their vote preferences and distributive expectations across

private and public goods after exposure to the treatment. Specifically, earlier in the survey, I asked respondents to identify the *most popular politicians from Congress and BJP in their gram panchayat*. Subsequently, I randomized whether respondents were exposed to the Congress or BJP politician they named earlier in the survey.¹² Since local politicians and voters in this context overwhelmingly know each other, voters are understood to have accumulated fine-grained information on the local leaders they identified prior to the implementation of the survey experiment. While this design is likely to produce heterogeneity on the specific leaders respondents identify, I interpret cued leaders on average to represent partisan leaders that respondents consider to be plausible candidates for sarpanch in the 2015 local elections.¹³ The experimental design, thus, captures voters' (across partisan types) distributive expectations under a plausible, known Congress and BJP sarpanch. This differs from other work that seeks to capture the effect of partisan information shortcuts (Conroy-Krutz et al. 2016).

In the vignette, I developed a scenario that would be simple and familiar to respondents. Sarpanch have discretion over the proposal of local public works projects in the gram panchayat and significant discretion over the selection of laborers for these projects, which often are funded through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act right to work program. Qualitative interviews with sarpanch suggest that the selection of local infrastructure projects such as the building of community centers or local roads are an important and visible aspect of the sarpanch position. The experimental vignette, thus, exposes respondents to partisan leader cues in the context of a local infrastructure project. After reading the vignette to the respondent, voters were asked to report their distributive expectations over salient private benefits and state funds for local public goods *if the cued (Congress/BJP) local politician were to win the next election to sarpanch*, which were to take place in 2015.

Distributive expectations (post-treatment) include two measures of private state (anti-poverty) benefits and one measure of local public goods provision. The main dependent variable concerns access to a job on the infrastructure project described in the vignette; which is an ordinal measure with a 4-point scale. Second, I include a dichotomous measure of expectations of obtaining a below poverty line (BPL) Card, which is required for eligibility to a wide range of benefits for the poor. Third, my measure on whether the cued leader would bring funds to the GP from the state government, which captures expectations of pork-barrel spending, is dichotomous. Finally, I include a dichotomous vote intention item that measures whether respondents would vote for the cued partisan leader.¹⁴ Since I am interested in the extent to which voters of different partisan types condition their distributive expectations on the partisan affiliation of the sarpanch, I focus on differences in means across the Congress and BJP leader cue treatment conditions.

Figure 1: Experimental Treatment (Vignette)

You must know that the sarpanch requests funds for public projects in the gram panchayat such as building a village road, school, or health center. For these projects, the sarpanch can tell the BDO [Block Development Officer] that he will choose workers for the project among people with a (MGNREGA) job card.

Let's say the **Congress/BJP** leader named _____ (*the strongest leader in the GP from Congress/BJP mentioned by the respondent in item B8/B9*) becomes sarpanch in the next GP elections two years from now.

The **Congress/BJP** leader named _____ will choose workers for a project to build a small community center in the village and a small number of people from the village will get jobs. Please think carefully about this situation and answer the questions about the project. Remember that Congress/BJP leader _____ is the sarpanch in this situation.

Outcome Measures

- 1) Would you or a member of your family get one of these jobs?
- 2) If this person were sarpanch next time, do you think he could help get you access to a below poverty line (BPL) card or Public Distribution System (PDS) benefits-- when new BPL cards become released?
- 3) If this person were sarpanch next time, would he be able to bring funds from the state government to the GP?
- 4) Would you give _____ [**Politician Name given**] your vote if he ran in the next GP elections?

Survey Sampling

The data for this article is based on a survey of 959 heads of household across 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) in Rajasthan, which was administered nine months before the 2013 state assembly elections won decisively by the BJP.¹⁵ Respondents were sampled from relatively poor and politically competitive sub-districts (blocks) across Rajasthan.¹⁶ These restrictions were applied to ensure that both Congress and BJP local candidate cues would be credible and that anti-poverty benefits would be salient in sampled GPs. Along with the vignette experiment, I collected data on demographics, political preferences, and access to government programs.

Testing the Argument

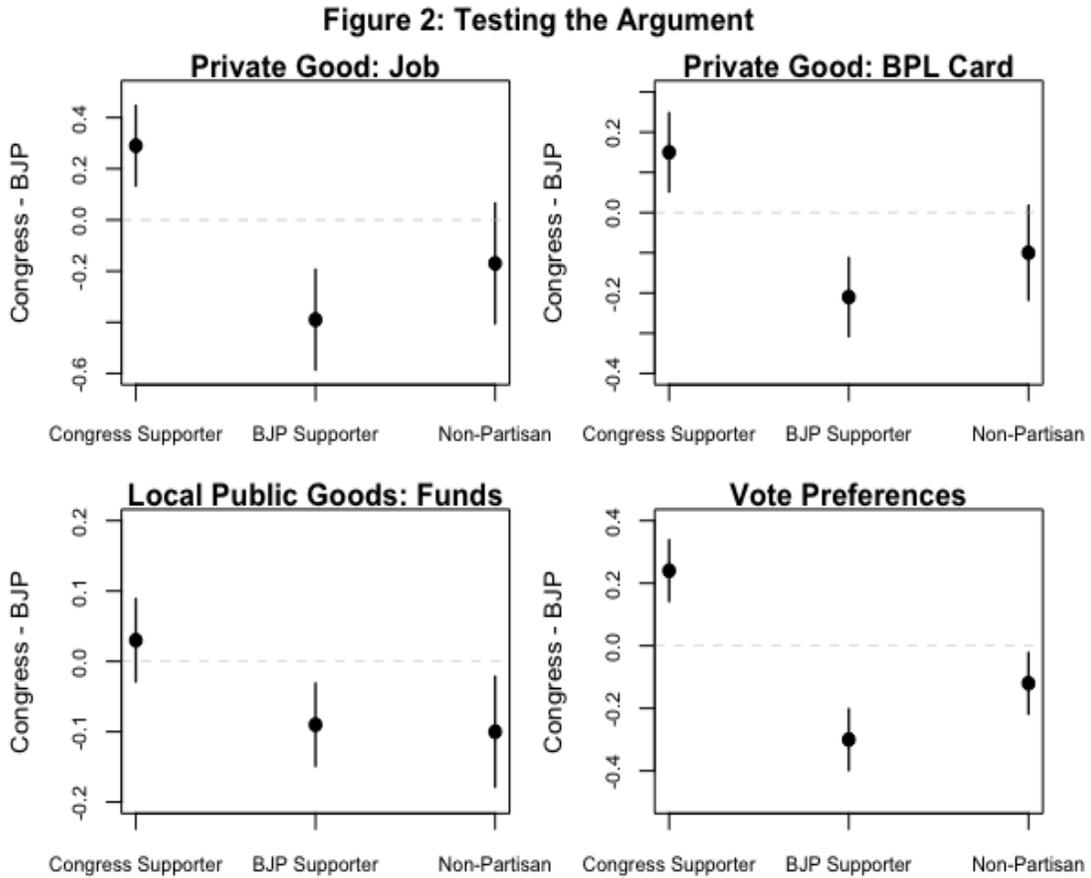
To test hypotheses 1 through 3, I take advantage of the randomization of Congress and BJP leader cues and compare distributive expectations and vote preferences across Congress and BJP leader treatments.¹⁷ Since the argument concerns the effect of co-partisan ties (or their absence) between voters and leaders, I condition my analysis of treatment effects on partisan sub-groups— BJP supporters, Congress supporters, and non-partisans— using a standard measure of psychological attachment.¹⁸ The results that follow present tests of differences in means, subtracting average distributive expectations for respondents in the BJP treatment from those in the Congress treatment groups with welch's standard errors to take different sample sizes into account. When differences in means are below zero, respondents assigned to the BJP treatment group reported higher distributive expectations than those Congress treatment and vice versa.

Results

I present differences in means in confidence intervals in figure 2 to test hypotheses 1 and 2 on distributive expectations. Evidence presented in the first row of confidence interval plots supports the expectation of hypothesis 1 that voters' distributive expectations of private goods are conditioned on co-partisanship irrespective of party. Congress Party and BJP supporters exposed to a co-partisan politician reported job expectations that were respectively .29 and .39 points higher (on a 4 point scale) than was the case when Congress and BJP partisans were exposed to a non-co-partisan. Similarly, Congress and BJP partisans were 15 and 21 percentage points more likely to expect a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card when the cued leader was a co-partisan leader as compared to a non-co-partisan leader. Non-Partisans held higher expectations of receiving both private goods (i.e., jobs, BPL card) under a BJP sarpanch, although these results fall below conventional levels of statistical significance.

Difference-in-means tests in the lower-left plot of figure 2 confirm hypothesis 2 that voters condition their expectations of local public goods on partisan alignment between the local leader and state government. BJP supporters and non-partisans were 9 and 10 percentage points more likely to expect a BJP sarpanch to bring state funds to their GP as compared to a Congress politician. Congress supporters', however, reported no significant differences across treatments on local public goods provision, contrary to their strong expectations for targeted goods from a co-partisan. This null result suggests that 9 months before an election in which Congress was expected to be displaced from power, even committed Congress supporters, held little expectation that their preferred co-partisan local leader could bring local public goods to their GP under a BJP state government. While Congress supporters were likely to face cognitive biases toward their preferred party, which plausibly explains why they did not report higher

expectations for the BJP leader, this demonstrates that voters consider partisan alignment and benefit characteristics before conditioning their distributive expectations on co-partisanship.



This figure provides 95% confidence intervals for differences in means on the four outcomes of the vignette experiment, conditioning on partisan sub-groups. Differences are calculated by subtracting mean BJP treatment outcomes from mean Congress outcomes (i.e., Congress–BJP Treatments).. The job outcome has a scale of 1 to 4. The remaining three are dichotomous outcomes. See table A5 in the appendix for details.

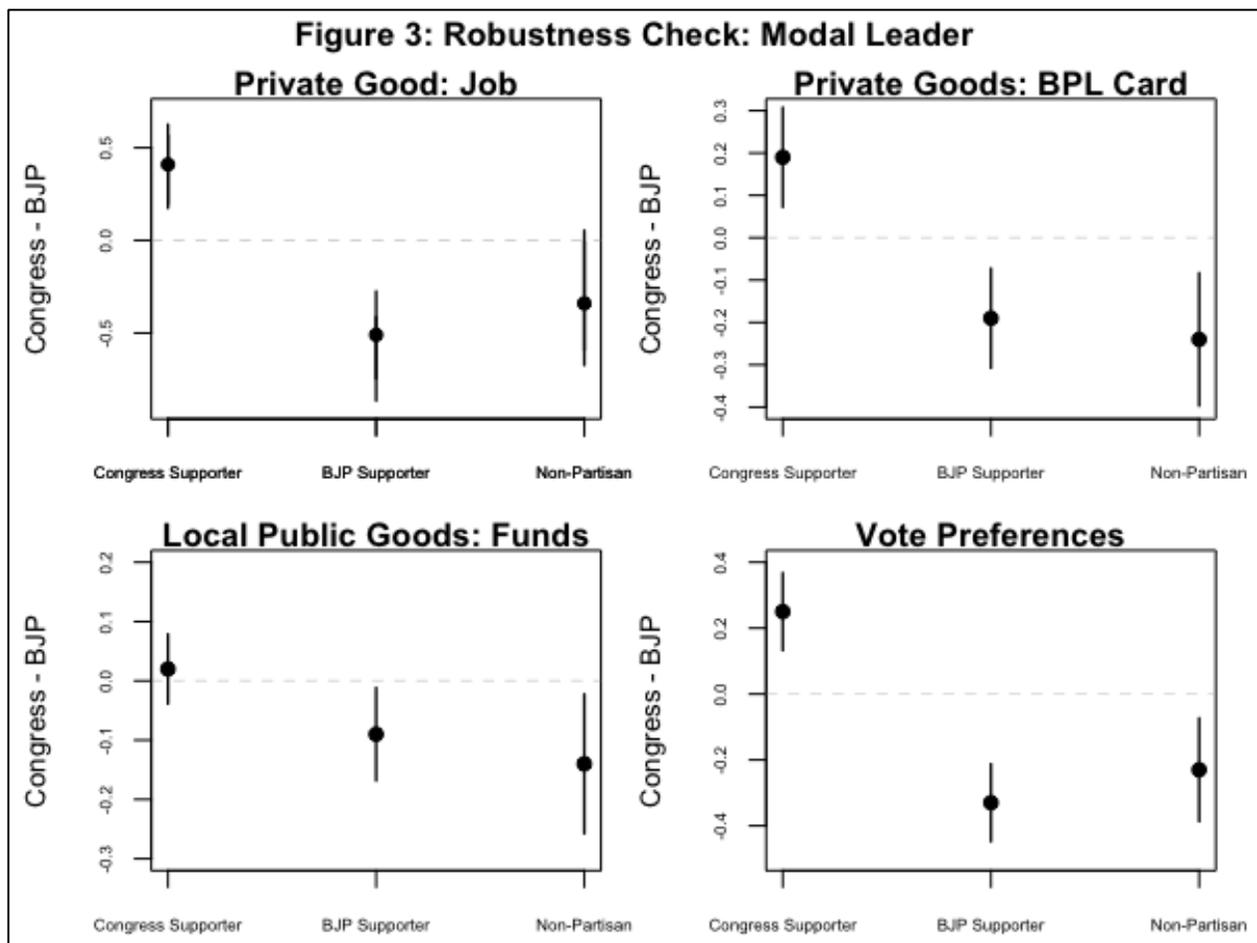
Robustness Tests

The evidence presented above supports hypotheses 1 and 2; however, due to the heterogeneity in partisan leader names provided by respondents in the same GP, it is plausible that these results are in-part a result of the unobserved characteristics of leaders identified by voters rather. To establish the robustness

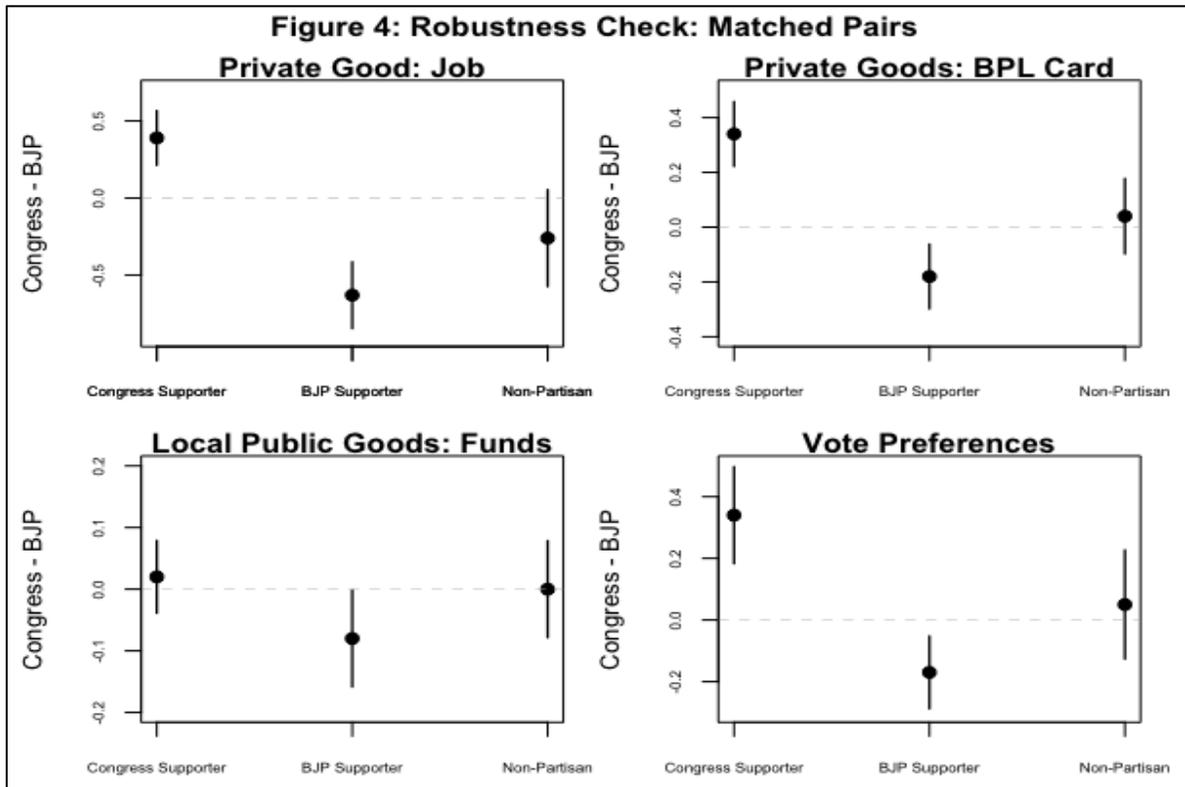
of my findings, I conduct two robustness tests that hold leader names constant within GPs.¹⁹ First, I restrict the analysis to 549 respondents (approximately 57% of the full sample) who identified the modal named Congress and BJP leader conditional on treatment assignment. For this test, I identified respondents who identified the most common Congress leader and BJP leader names in their GP who were assigned to treatment conditions that cued those leaders in the vignette.²⁰ By holding constant leader characteristics (among the treated), this robustness check addresses the concern that the effect of partisan ties and partisan alignment is explained by responses to leaders' unobserved personal traits or idiosyncratic features of voters' selections idiosyncratic leader selections. Second, I conduct a substantially more restrictive test with matched pairs (with replacement), using the *matching* package in R. Here, I match pairs of respondents in the same GP who identified the same Congress and BJP leaders—thus holding leader characteristics that inform voters' comparative assessments across plausible Congress and BJP candidates. This includes approximately 340 observations (35% of the full sample) who identified the same BJP and Congress leaders in their GP.

Confidence intervals from robustness tests displayed in figures 3 and 4 support hypothesis 1. Congress supporters reported distributive expectations for jobs that were .41 and .39 points (of 4) higher when the cued leader was a co-partisan (as compared to a non-co-partisan) across the modal leader and matched pairs robustness checks respectively, while BJP supporters reported expectations that were .51 and .63 points higher. Congress and BJP supporters were both 19 percentage points more likely to expect a BPL card from a co-partisan leader (than a non-co-partisan); Congress supporters were 34 percentage points more likely to expect a BPL card on the more restrictive matched pairs test when the cued leader was a co-partisan as compared to BJP supporters who were 19 percentage points more likely to expect a BPL card from a co-partisan. Results also confirm hypothesis 2. BJP supporters expected co-partisan leaders to be 9 and 8 percentage points more likely to bring state funds (i.e., pork) to their GP (as

compared to a Congress leader) across the modal leader and matched pairs analyses respectively. The partisan affiliation of the sarpanch had no effect on expectations of state funds among Congress supporters. Finally, results from the modal leader test shows that non-partisans expected the ruling party to be more likely to attract funds from the state by 14 percentage points; the non-partisan sample size in the matched pairs test (approximately 50 respondents) is too small to detect effects for these voters.



This figure provides 95% confidence intervals based on differences in means from the modal leader robustness check across four outcomes of the experiment. Differences are calculated by subtracting mean BJP treatment outcomes from mean Congress outcomes (i.e., Congress - BJP Treatments). The Job outcome has a scale of 1 to 4. The remaining three are dichotomous outcomes. See appendix A for details.



This figure provides 95% confidence intervals based on differences in means from the matched pairs robustness check across four outcomes of the experiment. Differences are calculated by subtracting mean BJP treatment outcomes from mean Congress outcomes (i.e., Congress– BJP Treatments). The job outcome has a scale of 1 to 4. The remaining three are dichotomous outcomes. See appendix A for details. See TableA7 for details.

Ethnic Vs. Partisan Effects on Distributive Expectations

Although I do not have causal leverage on the ethnic identity of the cued leader, which varies according to voters’ perceptions of the most popular Congress and BJP leaders in their GP, I examine the extent to which the effects of partisan ties and partisan alignment on distributive expectations are robust to ethnic considerations in tables 1 and 2. To code the caste identities of voter survey respondents, I asked them to self-report their caste identities. I code the castes (and Muslim religion) of named leaders by asking survey respondents to provide the castes of the leaders they named earlier in

the survey.²¹ At the outset, 35 percent of respondent-named partisan leaders (with respect to treatment) were co-ethnics according to politically relevant caste and Muslim religion. This suggests substantial ethnic heterogeneity across the two major parties in Rajasthan, and that respondents did not name only leaders from their own community who are likely to live in their rural neighborhoods (See also Dunning and Nilekani).

Results broadly shows that partisanship shapes voters' distributive expectations over private goods (e.g., jobs and BPL card) when a variety of caste characteristics of named leaders and voters are considered. First, I find the co-partisan effect on expectations of private goods to hold when respondents identified both BJP and Congress leaders from the same caste—thus holding caste constant in the partisan comparison. For this subset, Congress and BJP supporters' distributive expectations for jobs were .35 and .44 points (out of 4) higher when the cued leader was a co-partisan (as compared to a non-co-partisan), while Congress and BJP supporters expected a co-partisan sarpanch to be 25 and 22 percent points more likely to provide them with a BPL card (than a non-co-partisan) when the castes of named leaders from both parties are the same. Second, Congress and BJP supporters who identified leaders from different castes, who plausibly perceived caste to be salient to local partisan competition, reported distributive expectations for jobs that were .25 and .35 points (out of 4) higher when the cued leader was a co-partisan (as compared to a non-co-partisan) while expectations for a BPL card that were 17 and 22 percentage points higher for Congress and BJP supporters in this subset when the cued leader was a co-partisan (as compared to a non-co-partisan). Third, co-partisanship shapes distributive expectations for both private goods when the cued leader is a non-co-ethnic (irrespective of the caste of the untreated leader). Co-partisan effects broadly hold for expectations of a job benefit when respondents are exposed to a co-ethnic leader, although the result for Congress supporters is statistically

significant at the 90 percent level. Co-partisan effects on BPL cards have the correct sign but do not reach conventional (i.e., 95%) levels of confidence.

Results on expectations of local public goods are relatively weak when ethnicity is taken into account due to low variation on this measure, however, the general expectation of hypothesis 2 hold. Congress partisans do not respond to the partisan cue treatment on local public goods. While these effects often fall below conventional levels of statistical significance due to low variation on this measure, BJP partisans and non-partisans broadly expect a BJP sarpanch to be more likely to bring state funds to their GP. All differences in means among BJP supporters have the expected sign, however, the effects among BJP supporters are statistically significant at the 90 percent level for sub-groups exposed to co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic leaders and there is insufficient variation among the sub-group of BJP supporters who identified leaders from different castes to identify a statistically detectable effect. Non-partisans also are more likely to expect the BJP leader to bring state funds to their GP as indicated by the negative sign, although these results fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. In short, results tentatively support hypotheses 1 and 2, although ethnic considerations also play a role in shaping distributive expectations in some cases. Given that named leaders' ethnic characteristics are endogenous to voter and GP characteristics, and not directly addressed in the experimental design, future studies are required to evaluate the relative impact of co-ethnic and co-partisan ties.

Table 1: Partisan and Ethnic Effects on Expectations of Private Benefits (Caste)

	<u>Jobs</u>			<u>BPL Card/ Public Benefits</u>		
	Congress Partisans	BJP Partisans	Non-Partisans	Congress Partisans	BJP Partisans	Non-Partisans
Same Caste (For Both leaders)	.35** (.14) N=117	-.44** (.14) N=112	-.1 (.18) N=84	.22** (.08) N=115	-.15** (.07) N=167	.01 (.09) N=84
Different Castes	.25** (.1) N=212	-.35** (.15) N=196	-.16 (.16) N=152	.17*** (.07) N=163	-.22** (.07) N=159	-.14* (.08) N=146
Co-ethnic (W/ Cued Leader)	.32* (.18) N=97	-.45*** (.15) N=155	-.19 (.21) N=80	.17* (.09) N=96	-.08 (.07) N=153	0 (.09) N=78
Non-Co-Ethnic (W/Cued Leader)	.28*** (.1) N=237	-.35*** (.13) N=216	-.35*** (.15) N=161	.13** (.06) N=234	-.31*** (.06) N=209	.14* (.08) N=157

Standard errors are in parentheses. *p<0.001 *** p<0.05 +p <0.1 ** p<0.01 + >.05* N indicates the number of respondents in both treatment conditions in a given cell. Differences in means are calculated by subtracting the average distributive expectations of respondents exposed to the BJP cue from the average distributive expectations of those exposed to the Congress cue (i.e.: Congress –BJP).

Table 2: Partisan and Ethnic Effects on Expectations of Local Public Goods (State Funds)

	Congress Partisans	BJP Partisans	Non-Partisans
Same Caste (For Both leaders)	0 (.05) N=115	-.12** (.05) N=170	-.08* (.05) N=83
Different Castes	.05 (.04) N=208	-.05 (.05) N=192	-.09 (.06) N=144
Co-ethnic (W/ Cued Leader)	.05 (.05) N=93	-.11* (.05) N=153	-.08 (.06) N=79
Non-Co-Ethnic (W/Cued Leader)	.02 (.03) N=234	-.07* (.04) N=211	-.11** (.05) N=153

Standard errors are in parentheses. *p<0.001 *** p<0.05 +p <0.1 ** p<0.01 + >.05* N indicates the number of respondents in both treatment conditions in a given cell. Differences in means are calculated by subtracting the average distributive expectations of respondents exposed to the BJP cue from the average distributive expectations of those exposed to the Congress cue (i.e.: Congress –BJP).

Implications for Vote Choice

Finally, I consider the implications of the argument on distributive expectations for vote preferences in local elections. Returning to figure 2 above, I find that non-partisans were 12 percentage points more likely to report vote preferences for the BJP leader as compared to the Congress leader, while self-identified Congress and BJP supporters were 24 and 30 percentage points more likely to report vote intentions for a co-partisan leader than a leader from the other major party. As 94 percent of non-partisans expected the BJP leader to bring state funds to the GP, compared to 84 percent under the Congress leader treatment, this provides suggestive evidence of strategic voting. This is consistent with comparable survey evidence from Rajasthan in 2011 which shows that 57 percent of voter who do not consider themselves party members voted for the incumbent Congress Party.²² Moreover, the large share of non-partisans in my data (25%) and rather high level of BJP partisans in a poor rural area that elected sarpanch from the Congress Party more than 60 percent of the time in 2010 also suggests that there was movement in party attachments and vote preferences away from Congress and toward the BJP in rural Rajasthan in 2013 when the BJP was ascendant. That said, the strong co-partisan pattern in vote preferences suggests that the discretion that sarpanch holds over private distribution is consequential. Consistent with my argument, it is plausible that Congress supporters in poor rural societies, given their low-income profile in Rajasthan,²³ particularly value private goods and personal responsiveness. It is also plausible that self-identified Congress Party supporters are particularly close to the Congress Party, given the level of attrition in 2013, and thus, consistent co-partisan voters. In short, while future research is required to more systematically test hypothesis 3, evidence from the vignette experiment is consistent with the strategic voting implication of the argument.

Discussion

This paper shows that voters condition their expectations of receiving private state benefits on the party affiliation of local representatives (e.g., the sarpanch). When it comes to private benefits over which the sarpanch has discretion, voters condition their expectations on co-partisan ties with the sarpanch; however, voters take partisan alignment with the ruling party at the state level into account when it comes to local public goods. These results are consistent with my argument that voters take variation in the level of government that holds discretion across different types of benefits and the impact of partisan alignment across levels of government into account in forming their distributive expectations. My results show that BJP supporters strongly condition expectations on local public goods provision on co-partisanship with a leader aligned with the ruling party in the state, while Congress supporters, whose party was expected to be displaced from power at the state level, are unresponsive to partisan cues on this outcome. On the other hand, both Congress and BJP supporters both strongly condition their distributive expectations on co-partisanship with respect to private goods. These results support the view that partisan discrimination is substantial at multiple levels of government and that voters understand and respond to this environment.

This article also takes a first step toward developing an experimental design that takes the informational context of local politics into account. I argue that fictional candidate experiments have weaknesses in identifying the causal effects of partisanship on distribution in this informational setting and that their degree of experimental control is likely to be exaggerated. At the same time, there are limitations to the experimental design presented here. First, perhaps due to the nature of leader-voter ties of named local leaders, I find substantial floor effects in distributive expectations measures, which limits the level of variation I observe on distributive

outcomes. For this reason, I emphasize the impact of partisan cues on partisan sub-groups rather than variation on distributive expectations in absolute terms. This captures the extent to which party-voter linkages shape local distribution. Second, although fictional candidate experiments have their own potential for confounder effects, real candidate experiments also introduce unobserved characteristics of leaders that may impact my results. I address this concern through robustness checks that demonstrate that my conclusions hold when leader characteristics are held constant. Moreover, in village elections, where party-voter linkages reflect a personal socio-political tie, a mix of unobserved personal characteristics (beyond ethnicity which I test for) reflects the realistic nature of party-voter linkages on the ground. In short, while my experimental design does not solve all of the problems of a difficult methodological problem—identifying causal effects of endogenous candidate traits—it takes an important step toward addressing this challenge.

My argument and results suggest important avenues for future research. First, although detailed data collection on voters' policy preferences is beyond the purview of this study, future research on voters' preferences across types of government policy benefits and the information that voters have on discretion across these goods would be valuable for more nuanced theorizing in distributive politics. It would also be valuable to map preferences over goods to vote preferences, vote switching, and changes in partisanship. For example, while Magaloni and Diaz-Cayeros (2007) argue that party preferences and the erosion of party loyalties are endogenous to past distribution, understanding how this logic applies when voters vary in their preferences over goods and the party they think is most able to provide valued goods in the near term would be a major contribution.

In conclusion, this article contributes to an accumulation of evidence from developing country contexts that suggests voters are savvier participants in their democracies than previously expected

(Baldwin 2013; Sircar 2016; Ichino and Nathan 2013). My argument suggests that these calculations may be complex, particularly in multi-level systems where the level of government that holds discretion over allocation varies across types of goods. This more nuanced view of political behavior has broad explanatory power in India and beyond.

¹ *Distributive expectations* refer to voters' prospective judgments of government allocation of state benefits of various types.

² While this research is diverse in its characterization of core supporters, there is extensive evidence of partisan targeting across private and local public goods.

³ Private goods may include anti-poverty benefits and everyday responsiveness to constituent requests (Schneider and Sircar 2016; Kruks-Wisner Forthcoming).

⁴ Local government in India and many other developing countries primarily perform an implementation (i.e., targeting) role rather than a policy-making role (Bohlken 2016).

⁵ In India's decentralized system, highly salient resources are controlled by the state (Chhibber et al. 2004). Where valued goods are under the discretion of the federal government, we should see strategic voting for local leaders aligned with the ruling party at the center.

⁶ This takes into account the 17 most populous states.

⁷ In my data, 60% of respondents reported to have participated in the MGNREGA right to work program and 34% reported to have a BPL card.

⁸ Chhibber and Nooruddin (2008) place Rajasthan in the bottom third among major Indian states in their measures of electoral volatility (See also Heath 2005).

⁹ The BJP and Congress Party won 45.2% and 33% of votes respectively in 2013. In 2008, the BJP and Congress won 33.3% and 37.8% of the votes respectively.

¹⁰ Local and state assembly elections in Rajasthan are conducted three years apart.

¹¹ This result is based on a survey of sarpanch that cross-referenced sampled voters conducted by the author. Research in other settings similarly establishes the high-information context of village politics (Alderman 2002).

¹² Respondents provided both Congress and BJP local leader names 84% of the time and the leader of the party for the partisan treatment condition to which they were assigned 93% of the time. When voters could not provide leader names, I provided a list of four alternate backup names provided by the sarpanch prior to the survey. The first name on the list that a respondent reported to know was used as an backup cue. See appendix C for details.

¹³ In the robustness check, I demonstrate that the results hold when I restrict the analysis to respondents who identified the same partisan leaders (within a GP).

¹⁴ Since I cue only one politician in the treatment, I do not interpret this as a measure of vote choice per se; however, I expect it to capture voters' partisan vote preferences in local elections.

¹⁵ I sampled predominately male heads of household as males are most likely to request and receive state benefits, and therefore have informed distributive expectations (Asop et al. 2000).

¹⁶ I restricted sampling to blocks with average margins of victors of 15% or less and below poverty line rates of 20% or more. See Appendix B for further details on the sampling procedure.

¹⁷ I provide balance statistics in appendix A.

¹⁸ The survey question asked: Do you feel close to any party? If so, which one. I respondents as non-partisans if they answered ‘No’ to the first question. I identify voters as partisan supporters (BJP, Congress, or a third party) if they answered ‘yes’ and provided the party name. I exclude 5 respondents who reported preference for third parties from the analysis.

¹⁹ Robustness checks include respondents who provided relevant leader names (those who required backups are excluded).

²⁰ In GPs where there treated leader names were all unique, I included the modal leader name irrespective of treatment. When names were included in the treatment the same number of times, I randomly selected one name.

²¹ Caste categories included the following mutually exclusive categories: upper castes, Rajputs, Jats, Yadavs Other Backward Castes, scheduled castes, Meenas, scheduled tribes, and Muslims. I coded self-reported caste names into politically relevant caste categories using a codebook provided by Lokniti, a national survey organization in Delhi. Since Muslim religion is a politically relevant category in rural India, I code Muslims as an ethnic category that does not overlap with caste.

²² See replication materials from Dunning and Nilekani (2013). This survey similarly uses a sample frame that targets a high level of poorer citizens given its focus on GPs with reasonably high populations of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

²³ Congress supporters are .6 (of 5) wealth quantiles poorer than BJP supporters on average.

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