

DO BROKERS KNOW THEIR VOTERS? A Test of Guessability in India

Abstract

Theories of clientelism broadly depend on the untested assumption that brokers possess fine-grained information on voters' political preferences prior to elections, and often can monitor their votes. As the first direct test of this assumption in a competitive democracy, I develop a measure, *guessability*, which measures the ability of local brokers to identify the partisan preferences of voters from their local area. I apply this method to elected village politicians in rural India who often perform brokerage functions. I find that these local leaders perform well at identifying the partisan preferences of co-partisans, but perform no better than a low-information benchmark that captures the level of guessability that outsiders can plausibly achieve with respect to non-core voters. This suggests that an electoral strategy rooted in quid-pro-quo exchange is extremely inefficient in rural India where clientelism is believed to be feasible, with implications for prominent theories applied to other settings.

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Extensive evidence suggests that parties distribute electoral handouts and condition particularistic state benefits on political support in democracies across the developing world (Hicken 2011). Scholarship that depicts distribution of this kind as clientelism— a quid pro quo exchange of benefits for votes— however, depends on the untested assumption that parties, through local brokers, can accurately identify voters’ partisan preferences and often monitor their votes (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2005; Stokes, Dunning, Narazeno, and Brusco 2013; Schaeffer 2007; Chandra 2004; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014). Studies in a wide range of democratic contexts including Argentina (Stokes 2005), Mexico (Medina and Stokes 2007), India (Chandra 2004; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2013), and Lebanon (Corstange 2016) assume that local brokers meet the steep informational demands of this strategy. Although research on vote buying overwhelmingly views brokers’ knowledge of voters’ partisan preferences and votes— which I refer to as *guessability*— as an essential solution to the challenge of ensuring efficient targeting in democracies where the ballot is secret, the extent to which this is the case has not been empirically examined.

There is reason to be skeptical that the assumption that brokers can identify voters’ partisan types—core supporters, swing, and opposition voters—holds in many developing world democracies. First, a genuinely secret ballot that voters recognize as such precludes vote monitoring at the level of individuals or small groups (Mares 2015). Second, countries characterized as clientelistic often lack the extensive party machines required to track voters’ preferences and votes as research in Kenya (Kramon 2016), Sao Tomé e Príncipe (Vincente 2007), and India (Chauchard 2016) attest.¹ Third, while democratic competition and clientelism

¹ Note that recent research in contexts of extensive party machines such as Mexico and Argentina also challenge the feasibility of vote monitoring where the ballot is secret (See Lawson and Greene 2015; Calvo and Murillo 2013).

are understood to coincide in many cases (Wilkinson 2007; Kitschelt and Kselman 2013; Weitz-Shapiro 2014; Corstange 2016), performance on guessability is particularly challenging in settings of intense party competition where multiple parties compete for the votes of the poor. While Finan and Schechter (2012) suggest that brokers know voters' partisan preferences well in Paraguay,² a dominant party system where few citizens believe the ballot is secret, the informational requirements of clientelism are less likely to hold in competitive democracies. In short, it is an empirical question whether brokers know their voters to the extent that existing theory suggests.

This article is the first systematic study of guessability in a competitive democratic setting: India,³ and is the first study to evaluate the added-value of brokers against a baseline that captures the level of information on voters' preferences we can expect from informed outsiders such as state politicians. Drawing on a novel and broadly replicable *cross-referenced* measure of whether local leaders (e.g., brokers) can accurately identify the partisan preferences of voters from their localities, I conduct two types of analyses. First, I compare observed rates of guessability by local leaders to the rates that would be achieved by *low-information* benchmarks based on stereotypes of party-group linkages available to outsiders.⁴ This comparison to low-information benchmarks provides a conservative test for determining whether brokers possess more informational on voters' partisan preferences and votes than could be achieved without

² Finan and Schechter (2012) collected data on a similar measure in Paraguay. In a 2010 Latin Barometer survey respondents were asked to characterize their trust in elections on a 7-point scale. Only 33% rated Paraguay as 5 or above. Numerous datasets have coded Paraguay as an electoral autocracy (See Morse 2012; Abunte-Brun 2009).

³ See the University of Pennsylvania Working Paper: Author (2014).

⁴ Note that the guessability assumption in existing theory does not refer to only voters who are targeted by the machine but to the population of voters in one's locality. Brokers uses this information to determine who to target (See Stokes et al. 2013; Calvo and Murillo 2013).

them. Second, following from observable implications of existing theories, I examine variation in guessability across broker and voter characteristics.

My analysis draws on data from a unique *cross-referenced* survey of nearly one thousand citizens and 200 elected village politicians across 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) in rural India. The results of the simple aggregate analysis and more nuanced regression analysis demonstrate that village politicians—widely understood to function as brokers—are no better at identifying voters’ partisan preferences than a low information benchmark based on blunt stereotypes of ethnic group-party linkages in the aggregate.⁵ They are more likely to correctly guess the partisan preferences of voters whose preferences require the least effort to identify—namely the members of demographic groups associated with major parties and members of their co-partisan networks. Variation in broker quality and the party affiliation of the local leader (Congress or the BJP) has no impact on guessability.

My results suggest that the steep informational requirements of vote buying are unlikely to be in place in rural India—a context where pervasive poverty, low population density, politicized state institutions, and ethnic politics are viewed as conducive to clientelism (Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2007; Ziegfeld 2016). Moreover, in a subsequent study that adopts my approach in a survey conducted shortly after the 2015 Bihar state assembly elections, Chauchard and Sircar (2016) find evidence of weak aggregate performance on guessability among elected and unelected brokers in Bihar, India.⁶ This suggests that my conclusions for the pool of brokers

⁵ Elected village leaders in India perform formal functions as local representatives and informal functions that align with the depiction of brokers in the literature on clientelism (Bohlken 2016).

⁶ This study finds that brokers identified by respondents achieved an aggregate guessability rate of 53%.

among elected village leaders in the state of Rajasthan is likely to apply to a diverse array of broker types and contexts in India.

This article makes important contributions to the literature on clientelism. First, my results suggest that parties, through their brokers, observe voters' partisan preferences with substantial error. Although scholars often assume that brokers have the fine-grained information on voters' partisan preferences required by clientelistic strategies, I find that robust electoral competition and a secret ballot make this assumption difficult to maintain in a poor, rural context where existing work suggests clientelism should be particularly feasible. Instead, I demonstrate that brokers often make educated guesses on limited information, particularly with respect to non-core (i.e., opposition and swing) voters. Second, I present a widely applicable research design for determining whether the informational micro-foundations of influential theories in the clientelism literature apply across contexts.⁷ Guessability provides one of the only direct measures of the information local leaders have on voters' partisan preferences,⁸ and the only measure of this in a context of inter-party competition and a secret ballot. Moreover, this is the first study to establish a baseline required to judge the *added informational value* brokers provide on guessability. My research design has advantages over small-n case studies (Auyero 2000), cross-national data from expert surveys (Kitschelt and Kselman 2013), and surveys of brokers without cross-referencing (Stokes, Dunning, Narazeno, and Brusco 2013), which do not directly measure whether brokers can correctly identify voters' preferences.

⁷ For a first example of the broad relevance and replicability of my research design beyond India, See Ravanilla, Hicken and Haim (2017) who implement my design in the Philippines.

⁸ Finan and Schechter (2012) include the only comparable measure in their survey of brokers in 10 villages in Paraguay. Their measure was presented as a descriptive statistic without in-depth analysis.

The Guessability Assumption in Theories of Clientelism

Existing research views local brokers—broadly defined as political agents embedded in local networks who possess fine-grained information on voters’ partisan preferences and vote inclinations— as essential to the execution of clientelistic strategies.⁹ Although scholars identify a wide range of local actors as brokers—including unelected fixers (Krishna 2007), elected officials in local government (Pattenden 2011; Szwarcberg 2016; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013), professional vote brokers (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016), and state employees (Mares and Young 2016)— the assumption that brokers possess the information required to accurately target selective benefits conditional on voters’ partisan preferences, and often votes, is widespread across a range of contexts, broker types and strategies (Hicken 2011).

		Vote Monitoring	
		REQUIRED	NOT REQUIRED
Identification of Voters' Preferences	REQUIRED	Vote Buying Patronage Ethnic Patronage (Group Level)	Turnout Buying Vote Buying (Reciprocity-Based)
	NOT REQUIRED		Public Goods Provision Entitlements Indiscriminate Vote Buying Aggregate Targeting

Figure 1: Guessability and Targeting Strategies

I depict the menu of targeting strategies in terms of whether theoretical predictions depend on the guessability and monitoring assumptions in figure 1. The lion share of research on clientelism assumes that brokers can *both* identify voters’ partisan preferences (i.e., high guessability) before the election and monitor their votes after the election. For example, Stokes’ (2005) predicts that parties target electoral handouts to swing voters because they are the most

⁹ See for example Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013; Gans-Morse, Mazucca, and Nichter 2014; Gingrich and Medina 2013.

responsive to material inducements. The viability of this strategy depends on brokers' capacity to identify swing voters (indifferent or weak opposition supporters), and to subsequently monitor their votes to ensure that voters comply with their end of the vote buying contract. Where the monitoring assumption does not hold, however, targeted swing voters will vote their true preferences undetected and swing targeting becomes extremely inefficient.¹⁰ Similarly, Chandra (2004) argues that politicians in India carry out a strategy of quid pro quo exchange with respect to access to state benefits and services (i.e., patronage), which depends on the assumption that they have the ability to reward or punish individuals or small groups conditional on how they voted.

Recent work that questions the feasibility of vote monitoring under a secret ballot relies on the assumption that brokers know voters' partisan preferences prior to targeting. Theories of turnout buying argue that parties should target benefits to induce turnout among known supporters who may not otherwise vote (Nichter 2008; Gans-Morse et al. 2014). This crucially assumes that brokers can accurately identify passive co-partisan voters from swing and opposition voters. My results suggest that brokers often exaggerate co-partisan support, however, which suggests that passive non-co-partisans may be included in turnout buying where guessability is low. Similarly, Finan and Schechter (2012) argue that local brokers leverage the information they have on voters' social preferences to target individuals who are likely to reciprocate material benefits with their votes.¹¹ Nonetheless, even in the extreme case where any targeted voter reciprocates (See Lawson and Greene 2015), if brokers intend to target limited

¹⁰ This is consistent with extensions of Stokes' formal model which show that when the monitoring assumption is relaxed, the prediction of swing targeting either does not hold or becomes extremely inefficient (Nichter 2008; Guardado and Wantchekon 2014).

¹¹ 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.

resources to improve vote share for their party, reciprocity-based arguments implicitly suggest that brokers can accurately distinguish between reciprocal core, swing, and opposition voters.

Finally, scholars 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. Chandra (2004), for example, argues that group members assess parties according to the ethnic composition of party leadership and coordinate their votes as ethnic blocs. If this logic applies across a state or country, brokers can achieve a high level of guessability by simply relying on stereotypes about the social bases of political parties at the state level or above—information that is also available to their patrons from outside the village. Others argue that brokers can accurately identify voters' preferences and votes through knowledge of group-party linkages specific to their locality or through local ethnic networks characterized by dense information flows (Gingrich and Medina 2013; Corstange 2016). While ethnic cues to partisanship may be effective where ethnic polarization is extreme (Ferree 2006), this is less likely to be the case in settings like India where multiple parties compete for the same voters and where within group variation in partisan preferences is pervasive even within villages (Thachil 2014; Lindberg and Morrison 2008; Dunning and Nilekani 2013). In short, while an influential literature on clientelism broadly assumes that brokers condition distribution on voters' private partisan preferences and votes; whether brokers have the information required to carry out this strategy is an empirical question.

Evaluating Guessability: Macro-Level Observable Implications

What is a reasonable test for whether guessability meets the requirements of theories of prominent theories in the clientelism literature? An extreme interpretation of this assumption in

formal models of vote buying suggests that guessability should be quite high if not perfect (Stokes 2005; Stokes et al. 2013; Gans-Morse et al. 2014). It is however unlikely that perfect guessability is feasible, and short of this, it is unclear what level of guessability can be considered sufficiently high. For example, in Paraguay, a dominant machine party context where guessability should plausibly be particularly high, Finan and Schechter (2012) find that brokers can guess how 80 percent of voters voted correctly. Without a comparison to benchmarks that represent a low level of information on voters' preferences, however, we cannot determine whether 80 percent guessability in Paraguay, or any other context, is sufficiently high for theories of machine politics or whether that percentage represents a high rate of guessability relative to what can be achieved without brokers.

To address this problem, I consider whether brokers perform better on guessability than benchmarks that capture the level of guessability that can be plausibly achieved by outsiders such as state politicians and their staff. The lowest information benchmark is random guessing. In a two-party system, for example, an outsider could simply flip a coin between the major parties to make a fully uninformed guess on a voter's partisan preferences. A less extreme low-information benchmark is demographic guessing based on aggregate stereotypes about the partisan preferences of different ethnic groups (e.g., state or national patterns). Demographic guessing of this type only requires knowledge of basic stereotypes about how major ethnic groups generally vote in national or state elections, which can be obtained from rudimentary consumption of news reports or rudimentary knowledge of politics.¹² This does not require knowledge of group-party linkages specific to a locality, which may differ from aggregate

¹² For example, an average voter in the U.S. is likely to know that African Americans tend to vote for the Democratic Party, and certainly a candidate for Congress would have this information.

patterns, or information on voters' preferences that require routine interaction with voters to acquire. Thus, I argue that evaluating whether brokers provide added informational value on guessability can be tested by determining whether they are better able to identify voters' preferences than would be the case under benchmarks that do not require the fine-grained information brokers are believed to possess. By focusing on the added informational value of brokers, I crucially do not consider absolute guessability rates (e.g., 64.5% in Rajasthan or 80% in Paraguay) as evidence for whether brokers perform well or poorly on guessability; even a very high rate of guessability may be achievable by outsiders in an ethnically polarization context. I present hypotheses that test the observable implications of this approach below.

Hypotheses

As a baseline, in lieu of finer-grained information, we should expect brokers to use information that is publicly known to make an educated guess about voters' partisan preferences. This includes priors on the aggregate distribution of partisan preferences across demographic categories (e.g., ethnicity, class), which is available to those living outside the local context—such as a state politician. In rural India, among other settings, surnames and physical features reveal voters' ethnic identities, which are predictive of partisan preferences where identity markers are visible and politically salient (Dunning and Nilekani 2013).¹³ If brokers depend on information shortcuts from ethnicity to identify voters' partisan preferences, we should expect guessability to be higher for members of *core* ethnic groups that have more homogenous partisan preferences and lower for *swing* ethnic groups whose members have more heterogeneous partisan preferences. Similarly, where socio-economic status maps onto partisanship, we should expect local politicians' stereotypes about class-party linkages to explain variation in

¹³ In India, surnames reveal ethnic identities.

guessability.¹⁴ In short, where fine-grained local information is unavailable, priors on the social groups of parties will explain guessability; this will achieve higher accuracy for groups with more homogenous preferences.

If brokers possess the fine-grained information on voters' preferences that existing scholarship suggests, brokers should out-perform this baseline in the aggregate and with respect to partisan sub-groups. First, brokers should take publicly observable *local* cues to voters' partisan preferences that are unavailable to outsiders into account in guessability. This may include information on local patterns of group-party linkages specific to their locality,¹⁵ local cues to voters' political preferences from family reputations or observations of voters' participation in partisan activities, and voter-level information from direct, routine interactions with voters.¹⁶ If brokers provide added informational value as a result of their position in local social networks and efforts to identify voters' preferences, they should broadly outperform the baseline based on demographic guessing.

H1. Brokers should out-perform the low-information demographic guessing benchmark on guessability overall.

Moving to variation across voter characteristics, research on clientelism assumes that brokers have accurate information on the full range of partisan types including those whose characteristics make them more predictable (e.g. core supporters) *and* those who are less predictable (swing voters and supporters of other parties likely outside a broker's network).

¹⁴ Research on village leaders widely shows that local leaders have information on villagers' socio-economic status (Alderman 2002; Alatas et al. 2012). I test for class effects on guessability in the section on robustness checks.

¹⁵ For example, an individual immersed in a locality may have knowledge of variation across group-party linkages across locally relevant sub-groups (e.g., sub-castes).

¹⁶ In a village setting, any villager can feasibly observe public cues to partisanship.

Brokers should perform particularly well at identifying the preferences of core co-partisan voters because parties are broadly closer to these voters, and in a local setting where brokers are pervasive, voters are likely to be linked to co-partisan leaders through social and political ties.¹⁷ Following from this, the expectation is that brokers will out-perform low-information benchmarks.

Vote buying models also assume that brokers can identify the partisan preferences of swing voters and supporters of the opposition who likely fall outside of voters' partisan networks. The latter category of voters are broadly seen as a voter type to exclude from benefits since they are unlikely to be persuaded to switch their vote to the broker's patron's party. Swing voters, the least predictable voter type, on the other hand, are seen as a particularly important group of voters to target since they are most responsive to election handouts relative to both core supporters and opposition supporters and pivotal to the election outcome (Stokes 2005). The expectation that brokers can identify the partisan leanings of swing voters is the most extreme form of the guessability assumption.

H2. Brokers should out-perform the low-information benchmark in identifying the partisan preferences of co-partisan (core) voters.

H3. Brokers should outperform the low-information demographic guessing benchmark with respect to the partisan vote preferences of swing voters.

H4. Brokers should outperform the low-information demographic guessing benchmark with respect to opposition party supporters.

Finally, where a secret ballot is in place, brokers are understood to use their central location in local social networks, rumors, and visible clues to identify the partisan preferences of

¹⁷ This is consistent with Cox and McCubbins (1986) who understand a party's core voters as those with a strong preference toward it who it knows well.

voters 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 some brokers to perform this function better than others. Following from this, higher quality brokers (i.e. those with characteristics that plausibly make them better at this job) should out-perform lower quality brokers on guessability. I consider brokers with more basic competence (education),¹⁸ experience, and connections to higher-level politicians to be most capable of performing this function and more motivated to do so.

H5: Higher quality brokers should achieve higher levels of guessability than lower quality brokers—relative to the low-information baseline.

Research Design

To test the above hypotheses, a direct measure of whether brokers know the partisan preferences and votes of voters in their locality is required. Unlike existing approaches that employ survey measures or survey experiments on the outcomes of clientelism,¹⁹ this requires dyadic data that makes it possible to test whether brokers' have accurate information on voters' preferences. Thus, I designed a cross-referenced survey that asks local leaders to guess the partisan preferences of voters from their locality. The survey includes nearly one thousand heads of household²⁰ and 200 local leaders across 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) sampled

¹⁸ For example, Krishna (2007) argues that education and connections is the most important attribute of fixers in India.

¹⁹ This research uses direct survey measures and more sophisticated list experiments to determine the pervasiveness of vote buying and perceptions of vote monitoring (See Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013; Corstange 2016; Gonzales-Octanos, Kieweit de Jong, Melendez, Osorio, and Nickerson 2012).

²⁰ I sampled predominately male heads of household because this is the most visible and stable population of voters in rural India; this makes guessability a conservative measure relative to what I would find with a random sample of the electorate as a whole.

from relatively poor and politically competitive blocks across the state of Rajasthan, India.²¹ I sampled politically competitive areas to ensure that my study captures a context where electoral uncertainty is a non-trivial, and guessability is therefore both relevant and valued.

In these surveys, which were administered nine months before the 2013 state assembly elections,²² voters reported (by secret ballot) the party they would support if an election were held today and the one they voted for in the previous state elections that took place in 2008.²³ The next day, local leaders were shown a sheet of 10 photographs of sampled voters, including information provided in the electoral roles: name, age, father's name, and house number.²⁴ Guessability is a measure of whether local leaders' guesses matched voters' self-reported responses on the vote intentions and past vote measures.²⁵ I focus the analysis on the vote

²¹ I obtained a sample of 959 household heads (i.e. citizens), 95 sarpanch, and 89 ward members. I restricted sampling to blocks with average margins of victors of 15% or less and below poverty line rates of 20% or more. I applied similar criteria within blocks for GP sampling. See Appendix C in the supplementary materials for details on sampling.

²² Note that it is important to measure guessability before the campaign has begun because targeting strategies are driven by pre-campaign information on voters' preferences. While candidate names were not yet announced 9 months before the election, elected, partisan leaders in frequent contact with constituents are likely to have been similarly aware of voters' partisan preferences 9 months before the election (as they anecdotally suggested in my interviews before the survey) than would be the case closer to the start of the campaign. Moreover, conducting such a study in the heat of a competitive campaign would have been likely to face safety concerns for interviewers and lower levels of cooperation (and honesty in responses) by elected leaders.

²³ I measure vote preferences and past votes for the vote intentions and 2008 vote choice items with a secret ballot survey instrument previously fielded in parliamentary and state election post-poll surveys conducted in Rajasthan by Lokniti, a national survey organization in India. I provide the survey instrument for vote preferences and test for response bias in appendix G.

²⁴ See Appendix E for the instrument. Note that if brokers know voters as well as existing theory expects, brokers will know extensive information beyond the basic information provided in voter rolls. If this is not the case, all brokers will know, at minimum, the caste identity of sampled voters.

²⁵ Guessability did not include monetary incentives for sarpanch performance. This would require revealing information on partisan preferences of voters which would pose risks to some or all of the 10 citizen respondents cross-referenced in the GP politician survey.

intentions measure, which captures partisan preferences on the day of the survey prior to the official start of the campaign.²⁶

Guessability has several novel features. First, it is the only measure of its kind fielded in a context of democratic competition and a secret ballot— where vote buying contracts should be particularly difficult to target and enforce (Medina and Stokes 2007).²⁷ Second, it is the only measure that considers the information brokers have on vote intentions prior to an election campaign. This is critical because research on vote buying views clientelistic distribution as a method to influence voters’ preferences and votes during election campaigns after observing voters’ political preferences *ex ante*.²⁸ Third, by providing local leaders with publicly available information from the electoral rolls, including surnames which reveal ethnic identities, I ensure that sampled local leaders had the information on voters’ demographics captured in the low-information benchmark. Finally, I use a secret ballot survey instrument to minimize response bias.²⁹

Case Selection

²⁶ Guessability on the 2008 vote measure is included as a robustness check rather than as a measure of vote monitoring given the problem of recall bias.

²⁷ 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. Research shows that Indian voters broadly see the ballot as secret (Sridharan and Vaishnav 2016; Banerjee 2014). Rajasthan is also a competitive state; the incumbent party has been displaced in close state assembly elections for each election since 1991. Moreover, to ensure a non-trivial level of electoral uncertainty I specifically sampled electorally competitive blocks and GPs.

²⁸ This study measure the information brokers possess prior to targeting, which means that measuring guessability prior to the election campaign is necessary. Moreover, as elected local leaders, sarpanch are in routine contact with voters beyond state election campaigns. Guessability, thus provides a reasonable measure of brokers’ perceptions of partisan types prior to efforts at targeting and persuasion in the context of the 2013 state election campaign.

²⁹ This was not the case with Finan and Schechter’s (2012) survey instrument.

I selected rural India, and the north-western state of Rajasthan specifically, for this study because its contextual characteristics are biased against my conclusion that brokers underperform on guessability. First, scholarship on India broadly establishes its politics as patronage-based, which suggests that brokers have incentives to perform on guessability.³⁰ India is also a case where the distribution of cash and other favors during elections campaigns is extremely pervasive (Wilkinson 2007).³¹ Second, Rajasthan is a poor, rural state,³² and male migration in rural areas is low.³³ 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 and local leaders have established a relationship over time with voters.³⁴ My sample of male heads of households from poor villages fits this description particularly well.³⁵ Third, Rajasthan has an institutionalized party system relative to other Indian states,³⁶ and caste is a salient although imperfect predictor of partisanship.³⁷ This means that it should be less difficult to perform on guessability in Rajasthan as compared to less institutionalized, volatile

³⁰ Chandra (2004) defines India as a “patronage democracy” characterized by a dominant state sector that controls primary avenues to upward mobility and discretion over individualized provision of jobs and services (See also: Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013).

³¹ In fact, candidates often refer to the distribution of cash as a campaign requirement for any viable candidate.

³² Estimates based on consumption data from the 2004-5 National Sample Survey show that 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).

³³ According to the National Social Survey (2007/2008), male rural-to-rural migration is only 5 percent across India. Thus, sarpanch are likely to know the male household heads I sampled (and their families) over many years.

³⁴ See Stokes, Dunning, Nazereno, and Brusco 2013.

³⁵ I sampled male heads of household because they are the most visible voters in the village and most likely to have resided in the village (with their extended families) for their entire lives (unlike women who move to their husband’s village). This means that my results are likely to be conservative as guessability may be lower when less visible voters are included.

³⁶ Chhibber and Nooruddin (2008) place Rajasthan in the bottom third among major states based on their measure of electoral volatility.

³⁷ See Huber and Suryanarayan 2013.

party systems where vote preferences are particularly difficult to predict. Thus, if guessability is low in rural Rajasthan— where existing work suggests it should be quite high— it is likely to be low in more populous urban India, more electorally volatile Indian states, and new democracies where my scope conditions of a genuine secret ballot and competitive elections hold.

Case Selection: Elected Village Leaders

I apply guessability to an important category of brokers in rural India: elected village council presidents, or sarpanch. While existing research identifies multiple types of local leaders— elected local politicians (Pattenden 2011; Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Kruks-Wisner 2016), unelected fixers (Krishna 2007), and party activists (Auerbach 2016)—who perform brokerage functions for higher-level politicians, the results of direct elections to the village council (gram panchayat, GP) identify an important pool of brokers in India and share many of the characteristics and functions of this heterogeneous pool of brokers. First, a defining feature of brokers is their immersion in local social networks. This is similarly the case for sarpanch who overwhelmingly (95%) know their constituents personally, and are by far the most likely local leader to be contacted by citizens seeking state benefits and favors (Schneider and Sircar 2015; Kruks-Wisner 2015).³⁸ Second, despite an Election Commission ban on party symbols in GP elections, sarpanch in my case of Rajasthan are known partisan actors with consistent partisan preferences.³⁹ Thus, sarpanch more closely resemble the depiction of brokers in the broader

³⁸ In a citizen survey in Rajasthan, Kruks-Wisner (2015) finds that citizens are 45% more likely to contact GP representatives than unelected fixers.

³⁹ In my data, 84 of 91 (91%) of sarpanch who answered both vote preference questions (91 of 95 sampled sarpanch) reported consistent partisan preference for the 2008 vote recall and vote intention questions. Dunning and Nilekani (2013) similarly find that voters in Rajasthan correctly identified the partisan affiliation of their sarpanch 96% of the time (Dunning and Nilekani's 2013). This makes sarpanch more comparable to partisan brokers in other settings than non-partisan fixers in India (Manor 2000).

clientelism literature as compared to the non-partisan fixers described by others (Manor 2000; Chauchard and Sircar 2016).⁴⁰

Third, the decentralization of government schemes to GPs in recent years has made the position of sarpanch lucrative. As a result, prominent brokers previously seen as strictly non-state actors have increasingly entered the GP, and continue this role informally as sarpanch (Kruks-Wisner 2015; Bohlken 2016; Dunning and Nilekani 2013).⁴¹ The central role that sarpanch play in political mobilization and in facilitating party-voter linkages broadly was evident from my interviews with sub-district (block)-level party organizers and state legislators (MLAs) who were in frequent contact with co-partisan sarpanch. Fourth, sarpanch are active in election campaigns and frequently serve as local mobilizers for state politicians or higher-tier politicians in local government (See Bohlken 2016). 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. Anecdotal evidence with sarpanch and voters also suggests that sarpanch provide money and favors to voters prior to elections and encourage them to vote for their preferred candidate.⁴²

Finally, the choice to focus on sarpanch as an important broker in India follows from the rural Indian context where party organizations are weak, long-term party activists are rare, and political parties often rely on local institutions (e.g., the GP) as a resource for recruiting political

⁴⁰ This is a key difference from the Indian setting and contexts of party machines such as Argentina.

⁴¹ The husband of a female sarpanch is often the relevant broker where quotas for women are in place. To capture the level of information in the household of the sarpanch, interviews with female sarpanch were conducted with their husbands (whenever possible).

⁴² This is based on informal interviews in Karnataka in 2011 and in Rajasthan in 2012-2013.

activists (Bohlken 2016). Here, politicians rely on local leaders with significantly large networks as vote mobilizers, whom they can easily identify by local election returns under information constraints. Similarly, since a reliable sample frame to identify relevant brokers rarely exists,⁴³ local elections provide a consistent and objective mechanism for the researcher to identify the most prominent local leaders. In short, sarpanch are widely understood to comprise an important type of political brokers in India and should plausibly be expected to have fine-grained information on voters' preferences.⁴⁴

Results: Do Brokers Add Informational Value?

Sarpanch guess voters' partisan preferences incorrectly 35.5 percent of the time overall.⁴⁵ Before testing my core hypotheses, I show that my results are not driven by the relatively large number of voters in a GP. In figure 2 below, I show that the guessability rates of GP council (ward) members, who represent 9 percent as many households as sarpanch, are only slightly above those of sarpanch.⁴⁶ Moreover, while it is plausible that India's rotating systems of quotas, which require candidates for sarpanch in a GP to be women or members of marginal castes in a

⁴³ Official lists of party members have been used in urban India where parties are better organized (Auerbach 2016). In rural areas, such records are less accessible and it is difficult to determine the relevance of leaders on these lists.

⁴⁴ In fact, in informal interviews with sarpanch in Rajasthan in 2012 and in Karnataka in 2011, sarpanch directly claimed to know voters' preferences for a large number of voters. These claims were the impetus of this study.

⁴⁵ The results I present are based on survey data with restrictions that ensure my measure of guessability is conservative. See Online Appendix F for further details.

⁴⁶ In my data, sarpanch represent 1,100 households (the entire GP of several village) and ward members represent 100 households generally in the same village. 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).

given election, may plausibly depress guessability rates by preventing the highest quality brokers from contesting elections,⁴⁷ comparison of means tests show no significant differences.⁴⁸

Low-Information Benchmarks

We can only determine if brokers provide added value on guessability by comparing observed guessability rates to low-information benchmarks that capture what a politician could achieve without brokers immersed in voters' social networks. First, in a two-party system, the lowest information 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 exceed random chance for sarpanch and ward members. Aggregated to the GP (or sarpanch), 70 and 67 percent of sarpanch perform above the 50 percent random chance benchmark for vote intention and 2008 vote recall measures of guessability respectively. 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 the sarpanch feels closest to (49%); share the same vote intention as the sarpanch (42%), or only support the BJP given the anti-incumbency wave palpable at the time of the survey in 2013 (56%). This suggests that sarpanch have *some* information on voters' preferences and take this into account when they guess voters' preferences.

To test hypotheses on guessability presented above, I compare observed guessability rates against a low-information decision rule benchmark that captures the guessability rate we can

⁴⁷ See Dunning and Nilekani (2013) for details.

⁴⁸ I find no significant difference in T-tests that compare guessability rates between male and female sarpanch and lower (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) and higher (Other Backward Castes and upper castes) status groups respectively.

expect outsiders to achieve without brokers. This benchmark captures performance on guessability when guesses are naively based on which ethnic groups are core partisan groups and which are swing groups at the state level. It also capture patterns in group-party linkages in Rajasthan that would plausibly be known to politicians and their staff living outside the village.⁴⁹ To approximate this, I develop a decision rule that draws on results from state assembly election post-poll surveys conducted in the state by Lokniti, a national survey institute in India, following the two state elections conducted prior to the survey in 2003 and 2008. Published in newspapers at the time, these results include aggregate statewide vote shares for Rajasthan's two major parties—BJP and the Congress Party— across politically relevant ethnic groups in Rajasthan.⁵⁰ I average results from the 2003 and 2008 elections to capture blunt patterns in partisan support across groups that are consistent across more than one election.

Following from this, I develop a blunt yet plausible decision rule. 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 for 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 flip a coin on whether an individual from that group will support the Congress or BJP. Since Rajasthan is a two-party system, this simple decision rule assumes no guesses of third

⁴⁹ Since sarpanch generally perform vote mobilization tasks for higher-level politicians who live outside the village but are knowledgeable of politics in their state and district, this information can be seen to capture common knowledge among outsiders who are most likely to employ sarpanch as brokers. Interviews with party organizers at the district and sub-district levels, who also live outside the local areas of voters in this study similarly demonstrates that this information is quite basic for a range of relevant outsiders.

⁵⁰ Politically relevant ethnic groups include upper castes (excluding Rajputs), Rajputs, other backward castes excluding Jats and Gujjars), Jats, Gujjars, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and Muslims.

party support.⁵¹ Thus, this decision rule provides a blunt measure of what state politicians and their staff (or other outsiders) could achieve on guessability if they simply made educated guesses based on blunt priors on group-party linkages. I compare observed guessability to what can be achieved with this benchmark for my sample overall and apply the decision rule to ethnic and partisan sub-groups below.

Surprisingly, if sampled sarpanch followed this decision rule, they would have achieved an aggregate guessability rate of 65.2 percent— a rate statistically indistinguishable from what sarpanch themselves achieve.⁵² This suggests that we can reject hypothesis 1—that brokers know voters’ partisan vote preferences overall at a finer grained level than outsiders can plausibly achieve. Moreover, we might expect that sarpanch can observe group-party linkages more accurately than this benchmark given their knowledge of locally specific group-party linkages, which may differ from the aggregate statewide patterns captured by the decision rule. I show sarpanch performance on guessability relative to what could be achieved with the decision rule across politically relevant ethnic groups in figure 3. I find that sarpanch achieve guessability rates that are significantly higher than the low-information benchmark for only two groups. This suggests that sarpanch in my setting add little if any added value at the individual or ethnic group levels on guessability in the aggregate.

Next, I test hypotheses on guessability across partisan types to adjudicate between the expectations of models of core and swing targeting. I identify core voters as those who feel

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² 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— These cut-offs yield statistically indistinguishable or superior guessability rates relative to sarpanch performance. Results for alternative thresholds are available upon request.

closest to the partisan preference of their sarpanch;⁵³ 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).⁵⁴ Contrary to the assumptions of models of vote buying (e.g., Stokes 2005), I show in figure 4 that sarpanch match or under-perform what could be achieved by the low-information benchmark with respect to non-core voters. Sarpanch guessed partisans of an opposition party and non-partisans (swing voters) correctly 57 and 55 percent of the time respectively. The benchmark out-performs sarpanch by 15.3 percentage points with respect to opposition supporters and is statistically equivalent to sarpanch vis-à-vis swing voters. Contrary to the assumption in prominent theories, this shows that guessability for sarpanch is worse than what we should expect those immersed in local networks to be able to achieve; we can thus reject hypotheses 3 and 4.

My results are more consistent with core targeting models in the clientelism literature. Sarpanch correctly identify the vote intentions of 79 percent of co-partisan voters, which out-performs the decision rule by 5 percent (hypothesis 2). That said, sarpanch incorrectly identified the vote intentions of those who intended to vote for the opposition party as co-partisans 48 percent of the time.⁵⁵ This suggests that brokers perform well with identifying the vote preferences of co-partisans, but substantially over-estimate co-partisan support. This has implications for the efficiency of core targeting strategies such as turnout buying.

⁵³ This includes a total of 772 observations on guessability. Since these calculations require a measure of sarpanch partisanship, I exclude 34 responses from four non-partisan sarpanch.

⁵⁴ Since India has a broadly non-ideological party system (Chandra 2004), I used partisan attachment rather than ideology to determine partisan types. The survey question is as follows: 'Do you feel close to any particular party? [If so] Which one?'

⁵⁵ Congress Party sarpanch guessed that 145 of 282 voters with BJP vote intentions would support the Congress Party if an election were held tomorrow; BJP sarpanch guessed 39 of 100 voters with Congress party vote preferences would vote for the BJP.

Finally, given the emphasis on ethnicity (e.g., caste) and co-ethnic ties in analyses of Indian politics and other ethnically diverse contexts, I show that my results hold when co-ethnicity is taken into account.⁵⁶ At the outset, it is important to underscore that there is substantial heterogeneity in partisan preferences within ethnic groups in India.⁵⁷ Thus, if co-ethnic ties provide information beyond the low-information benchmark, we should see guessability rates among co-ethnics exceed this benchmark and exceed guessability rates vis-à-vis non-co-ethnics. I find no evidence that shared ethnicity improves the ability of sarpanch to correctly identify voters' partisan vote preferences.⁵⁸ The guessability rate among co-ethnics, 65.2 percent, is statistically indistinguishable from the aggregate guessability rate of 64.5 percent. Moreover, the low-information benchmark applied to co-ethnics and non-co-ethnics performs 1.4 percentages and 1.6 percentage points better than sarpanch themselves respectively. Similarly, simple difference in means tests show that sarpanch do not perform significantly better at identifying the vote intentions of co-ethnic co-partisans, opposition partisans, or non-partisans (i.e., swing voters) relative to non-co-ethnics respectively.

In short, aggregate results show that sarpanch rely on blunt stereotypes on group-party linkages if they cannot leverage information from co-partisan networks where voters are likely to reveal their preferences. While co-ethnicity may more significantly affect guessability in more

⁵⁶ To identify the ethnic identities of voters and local leaders I code respondents' self-reported jatis (sub-castes) into the politically relevant castes and Muslim religion described above. When sarpanch and voters belong to the same ethnic category they are coded as co-ethnics.

⁵⁷ This is evident in post-poll data from 2003 and 2008 discussed above, and apparent in recent studies that include Rajasthan data as well as in my 2013 data (See Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Huber and Suryanarayan 2016).

⁵⁸ See Online Appendix A for details on the comparison to benchmark calculation.

ethnically polarized party systems (See Chauchard and Sircar 2016), it has no impact in Rajasthan.

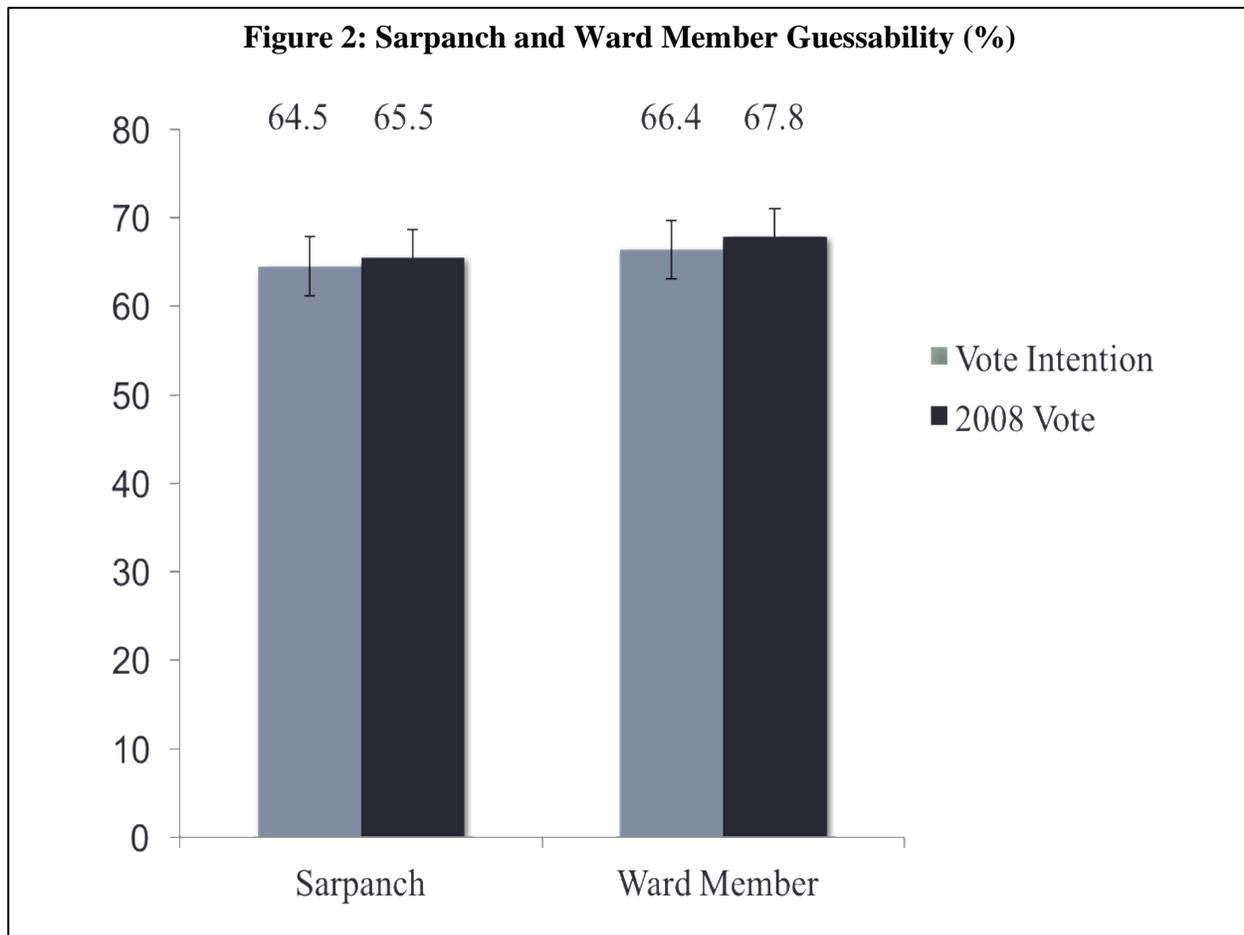
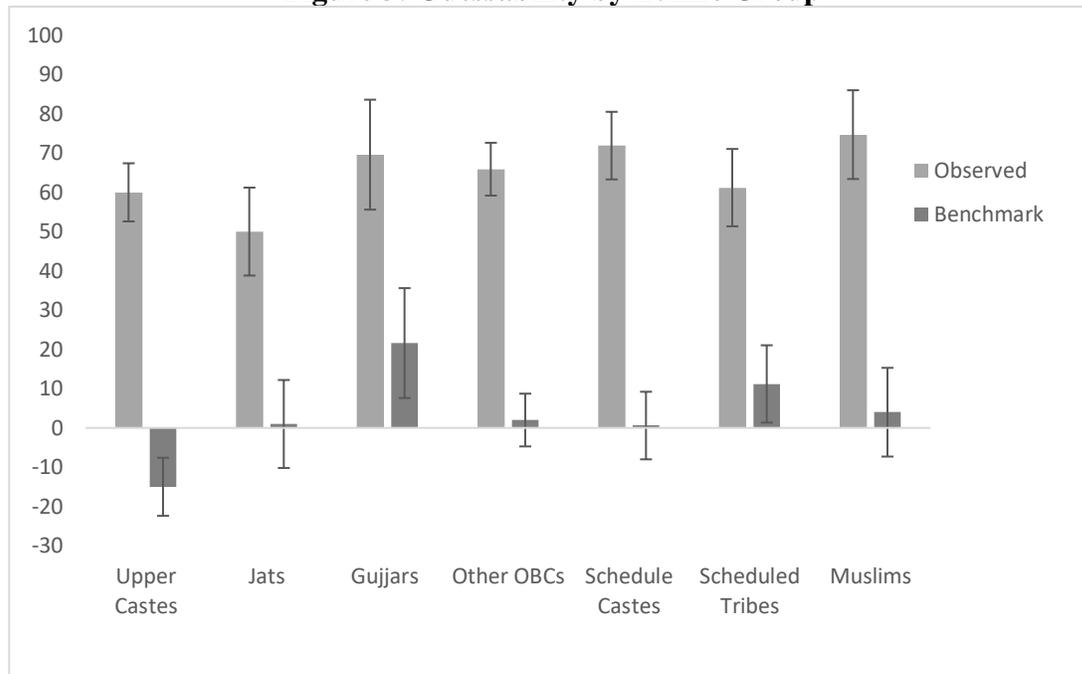
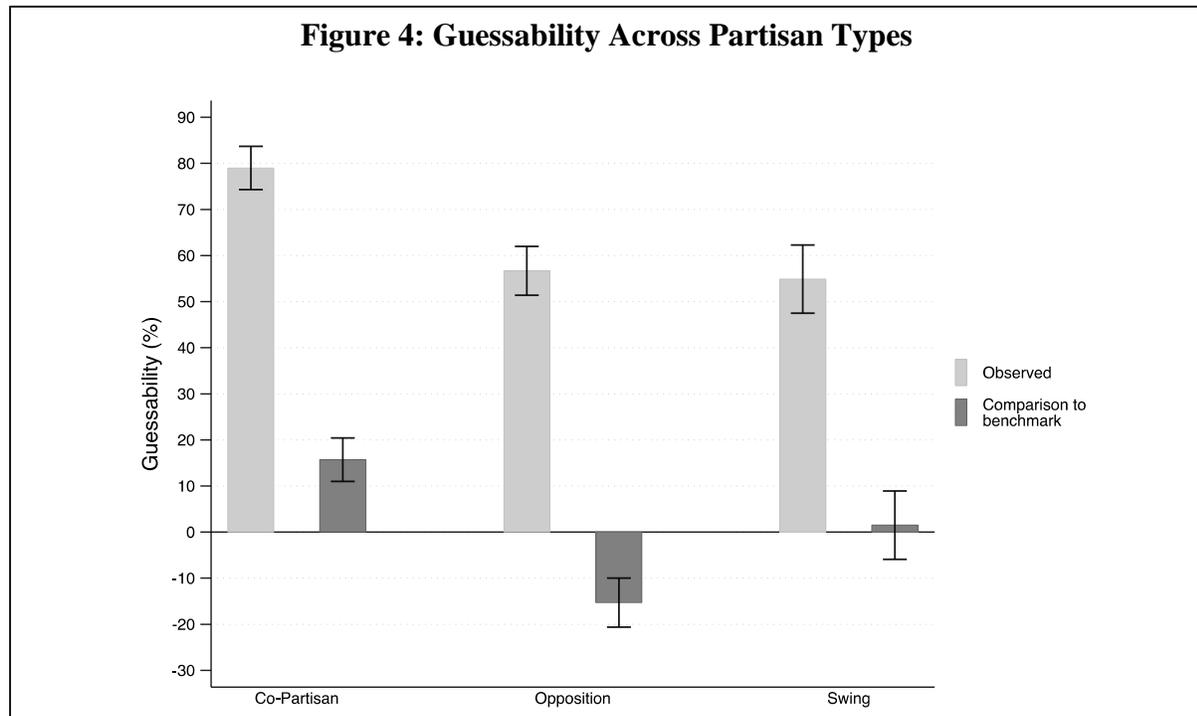


Figure 2 shows guessability rates for sarpanch and council (ward) members with respect to vote intentions and past vote choice measures of guessability. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.

Figure 3: Guessability by Ethnic Group



This figure shows guessability rates for vote intentions across politically relevant ethnic groups in dark gray and the difference between the guessability rates that could be achieved by the decision rule benchmark and sarpanch performance on guessability. Dark gray bars below 0 indicate that the decision rule out-performs observed guessability. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.



This figure shows the overall guessability rates across voter types (in light gray) and the difference between the rates of correct guesses of sarpanch and the rates we would expect by applying the low-information polling benchmark in dark gray. When the comparison to the benchmark is above zero, this means the sarpanch out-perform the benchmark and vice versa. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.

Regression Analysis: Robustness

The aggregate analysis shows that while sarpanch perform reasonably well at identifying the preferences of core supporters, sarpanch perform no better than a low-information decision rule available to outsiders with respect to non-core voters. In this section, I show that my conclusions from the aggregate analysis are robust to more nuanced statistical tests and variation in measures of broker quality.⁵⁹ Consistent with aggregate patterns in guessability, results from varying intercept multilevel models show that sarpanch achieve higher levels of guessability

⁵⁹ Details on variable coding are provided in appendix D. Regression tables are provided in Online Appendix A.

when information from group-party linkages and co-partisan ties are available.⁶⁰ Sarpanch with high levels on measures of broker quality (hypothesis 5) perform no better on guessability than low quality brokers.

Since voters are nested in gram panchayats represented by one sarpanch, I estimate a series of varying intercept multilevel models (logit) on the vote intention and 2008 vote recall measures of guessability. The regression model is written as:

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

$$\alpha_j \sim N(\gamma U_j, \sigma_\alpha^2) \quad (2)$$

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) was correctly guessed by their sarpanch.⁶¹ β is a vector of coefficients on voter and dyadic characteristics, γ is a vector of GP politician characteristics, and a_j are gram panchayat random effects modeled by a group-level intercept and a normally distributed error term. X_i is a matrix of voter characteristics and U_j is a vector of sarpanch characteristics.

Measurement of Variables

Similar to the aggregate analysis above, I created *swing group* to evaluate whether the preferences of voters from groups with more heterogeneous preferences are more difficult to guess than those with more homogenous preferences. Drawing on results from the 2003 and

⁶⁰ I show in appendix B that my results hold when group indicators instead of *swing group* are included in the baseline model. My results are also consistent when estimated with a logit model using fixed effects and clustered standard errors (available on request).

⁶¹ 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.

2008 Lokniti post-poll surveys, I code respondents as belonging to a swing group if the difference in support for Congress and BJP was 15 percent or less on average.⁶² To test for the impact of information shortcuts from priors on class-party linkages, 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 are then divided into wealth quintiles.⁶³ I measure variation in participation in public partisan activities to capture a publicly observable cue to voters' partisan preferences that is available to local leaders investing in guessability (and villagers broadly) but unavailable to outsiders.⁶⁴ I test for co-partisanship and co-ethnicity using the measures described in the aggregate analysis above.

I use the following measures to test hypothesis 5, that sarpanch with higher levels of broker quality— distinguished by basic competence (education), experience in the GP, and connections to higher-level politicians— perform better on guessability than low quality brokers. I measure educational attainment of the sarpanch with an ordinal variable for years of education and divide by two standard deviations to capture large increases in education relative to zero. I

⁶² By this rule, upper castes (including Rajputs) and other backward castes (excluding Jats and Gujjars) are core groups of the BJP; scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, 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. Note that muslims are coded as a single group irrespective of caste as the case in many analyses of Indian electoral behavior. Also, while available results from polling data grouped Meenas (a swing group in Rajasthan) together with scheduled tribes. I code Meenas as a swing group and all remaining STs as a (Congress) core group for this regression analysis. This is consistent with conventional wisdom on Meenas in Rajasthan.

⁶³ This follows the method described in Filmer and Pritchett (2001).

⁶⁴ 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 sum these activities and divide by two standard deviations to capture large differences in political participation relative to zero.

measure experience directly as tenure in the gram panchayat: the number of terms a sarpanch served in the GP President (sarpanch) or ward member.⁶⁵ I measure experience indirectly as an indicator for membership in a political family.⁶⁶ Political family ties measures 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, and are likely to draw on the experience of family members directly as sarpanch.⁶⁷ I measure connections to higher-level politicians with survey questions on the self-reported frequency of contact (in the past month) between sarpanch and state legislators (MLAs) and representatives and presidents of the two upper tiers of local government in India: panchayat samiti (block-level) and zilla parishad (district level).⁶⁸ 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. I also create a separate measure for contact with the MLA.⁶⁹ Finally, I include an indicator for self-identified party activists as a proxy for motivation to perform on guessability.

Regression Results

Confidence intervals in figure 5 show that the coefficient on swing group is large, statistically significant, and robust to the 2008 vote recall measure of guessability. The odds that a sarpanch will correctly identify a voter from a swing group are 16 percentage points less than is

⁶⁵ Tenure is a standard measure of politician quality (See Cox and Katz 1996; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2012). I do not restrict this measure to tenure as sarpanch because rotating quotas that change eligibility criteria reduce the number of terms one is eligible to contest as sarpanch.

⁶⁶ Sarpanch were asked if any family members hold elected office currently or did so in the past.

⁶⁷ A sarpanch whose husband or close family members held elective office is likely to involve them directly in GP decisions. This is particularly true under quotas for women.

⁶⁸ Responses vary along a 5-point scale from zero meetings in the last month to more than one weekly meeting.

⁶⁹ To correct for inflated responses, I standardized measures of contact and divided by two standard deviations; this captures large increases in self-reported meetings relative to the mean.

the case for voters from core groups, holding wealth and participation to their means. Similarly, 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—which is statistically significant and robust to the 2008 measure. Surprisingly, voters with levels of participation in public partisan activities two standard deviations above zero— those who participated in 3 to 4 (of 4) partisan activities— are no more likely to be guessed correctly than those who do not participate in these activities.⁷⁰ This suggests that sarpanch employ information shortcuts from demographic cues,⁷¹ but do not take more nuanced local cues into account.⁷²

Next, confidence intervals from regressions of sarpanch characteristics, which include variables from the prior demographic baseline model, are presented in figure 6. Consistent with the aggregate analysis, I find that co-partisanship has a large, positive, and statistically significant effect on guessability. All else equal, the odds that sarpanch will guess co-partisan voters' preferences correctly is 19 percentage points higher than is the case for non-co-partisan voters. As in the aggregate analysis, co-ethnicity has no effect on guessability.⁷³

Figure 6 also shows that sarpanch who score higher on measures of broker quality that capture basic competence (education), experience, and ties to higher tier representatives who are likely to employ sarpanch as brokers perform no better on guessability than sarpanch who score

⁷⁰ 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 (see Online Appendix A).

⁷¹ Recall that ethnicity is revealed in the survey instrument. Sarpanch demonstrated that they had information on respondent's socio-economic statuses in wealth rankings of citizen respondents.

⁷² I find no effect on the interaction between voters' political participation and broker quality.

⁷³ The party identity of the sarpanch also does not have an effect. Results are available upon request.

low on these measures. Sarpanch perform no better on guessability if they have substantially higher levels of education (relative to zero),⁷⁴ more experience in office, more interaction with politicians from higher tiers of local government, or belong to political families.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ Moreover, while sarpanch who self-identify as party activists are likely to exhibit strong connections to partisan politicians and have motivation to perform on guessability (if this is an important part of their role as brokers),⁷⁷ *Activist* has no independent effect on guessability, nor do interactions between *activist* and measures of broker quality.⁷⁸ This suggests that the low performance on guessability that I find are not a function of broker quality.

In summary, evidence broadly shows that variation in guessability is explained by information shortcuts from demographics and co-partisan ties.⁷⁹ Sarpanch who are likely to be high quality brokers, including activists who should be particularly motivated, perform no better than the baseline public information mechanism alone. Since broker quality isolates sarpanch who are most likely to resemble brokers in other settings, this gives me further confidence in the robustness of my results for sarpanch. My results are inconsistent with theories which assume

⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁵ Measures of basic capacity and experience are not jointly significant according to an F-test.

⁷⁶ The negative sign is consistent with my conclusion that broker quality does not positively affect guessability.

⁷⁷ T-tests show that activists report significantly higher levels of contact with state legislators (MLAs), panchayat samiti members and zilla parishad members.

⁷⁸ See online appendix A.

⁷⁹ See the online appendix for additional robustness checks.

that brokers can identify non-core voters' partisan leanings through their access to local networks. Additional robustness checks are provided in the online appendix.

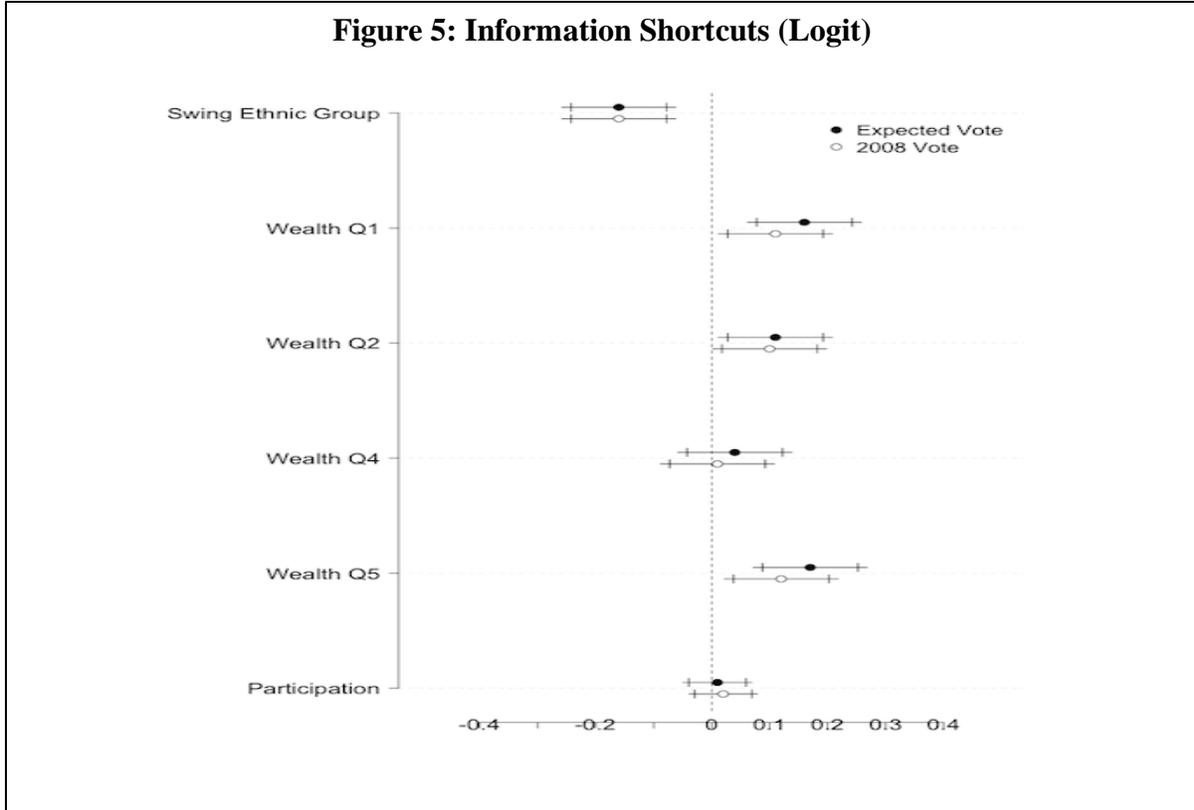


Figure 5 provides confidence intervals for logit coefficients on characteristics of the baseline demographic guessing mechanism including ethnicity, socioeconomic status (wealth quantiles) and a standardized measure of participation in partisan. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.

Figure 6: Effects of Elite Characteristics on Guessability (Logit)

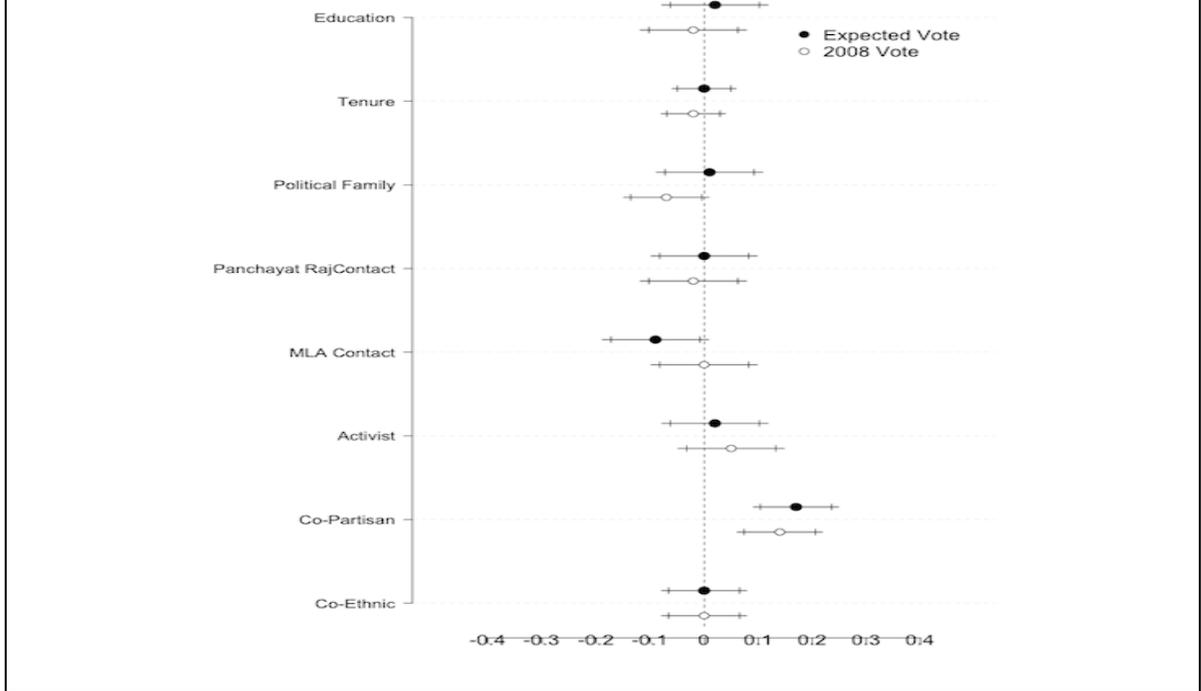


Figure 6 shows confidence intervals for logit coefficients on sarpanch characteristics including co-partisanship, co-ethnicity, and measures of broker quality. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.

Discussion

This article provides a direct test of the assumption that brokers know voters’ partisan preferences and votes and takes a first step at opening the black box of guessability in competitive democratic contexts. While most studies focus on which types of voters receive targeted benefits, this article examines whether local leaders who target selective benefits know voters’ partisan preferences well enough to efficiently execute a quid pro quo clientelistic strategy. Although this study cannot determine whether parties can efficiently pursue a narrow strategy rooted in quid pro quo exchange vis-à-vis a small number of pivotal voters, my results demonstrate that an important and prominent pool of brokers lack the information required for a mass strategy of this type in the context of democratic competition and a secret ballot. Robustness checks which show that even sarpanch who are likely to be particularly competent

and motivated brokers (and related work that adopts my research design to a different population of brokers) suggests that brokers in India—a prominent case in the clientelism literature—are unlikely to have the capacity to subvert democratic accountability by pressuring voters on a large scale to vote against their true preferences. This is consistent with the pattern of anti-incumbent elections in India, and research on vote buying in India and other competitive democracies, which suggests that quid pro quo exchange is understood (often by vote buyers themselves) to be inefficient and unmonitored (Chauchard 2016; Kramon 2016; Lawson and Greene 2014).

This study advances the clientelism literature in important ways. First, it demonstrates that parties in India, through local brokers, observe the preferences of individuals or small groups with substantial error—often performing no better than low-information benchmarks that capture what those who do not know voters personally can achieve. This challenges models which assume that parties accurately observe voters’ partisan preferences prior to targeting (Stokes 2005; Stokes et al. 2013; Nichter 2008; Gans-Morse et al. 2014). My results are particularly consequential for the predictions of swing targeting models such as Stokes (2005), which require accurate targeting and monitoring at the individual level. Since guessability captures information from past monitoring and continuous effort at identifying voters’ preferences, my results suggest that the requirements of this strategy do not hold in competitive democratic settings such as India. The Indian cases is consequential here because while the assumptions of this theory may be most reasonable in the context of Latin American machine parties (e.g., Peronists) where this theory originates,⁸⁰ theories of this type have broadly been applied to cases in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa that more closely resemble rural India than Urban Argentina.

⁸⁰ As noted, these assumptions have also been challenged in machine contexts. My research designs allows this assumption to be tested in these cases as well.

On the other hand, my findings are consistent with the informational requirements of theories of targeting through partisan networks (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Szwarcberg 2016). In fact, an important implication of this paper is that guessability will be higher in contexts where parties are more likely to integrate voters into such networks.⁸¹ This suggests that brokers may prioritize organizing core networks over performance on guessability vis-à-vis non-core voters. That said, further research is needed to demonstrate the extent to which the exaggeration of partisan support among non-co-partisans impacts the efficiency of core strategies such as turnout buying.

Second, this article develops a widely replicable research design that facilitates new data collection on guessability across context, which makes it possible to ask questions about how guessability varies across countries, regions within countries, party systems, broker types, and ultimately time. This will provide important insights on questions ranging from whether distributive strategies respond to varying levels of guessability to how the availability of different types of social and political networks explain variation in guessability across broker types and countries. My design has already led to new research in India and the Philippines that will open avenues for comparative theorizing and analysis.

Finally, this article has implications for how we understand party-voter linkages and democratic quality in rural India. My findings suggest that India's secret ballot ensures that voters are free to express their preferences contrary to a more coercive view of Indian elections. At the same time, my results are consistent with two scenarios: (1) that quid pro quo politics (targeted to individuals or small groups) is present but inefficient, or (2) that quid pro quo

⁸¹ Existing research suggests that voters in such networks are likely to reveal their partisan preferences voluntarily (Calvo and Murillo 2013).

clientelism is in a moment of collapse or 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 networks of reliable supporters. If this is correct, the high rate of guessability among co-partisans 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 quid pro quo politics in India requires revision. In India, and I expect many other democratic contexts where the ballot is secret, parties face the challenge of winning elections in a context of rising demands for governance and selective benefits where electoral accountability is not perverse.

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