DO LOCAL LEADERS KNOW THEIR VOTERS?
A Test of Guessability in India

Abstract

Prominent theories of clientelism—the exchange of benefits for political support—depend on the assumption that politicians, through local agents immersed in local social networks, possess detailed information on voters' political preferences prior to targeting. This article provides the first direct test of this assumption. It develops a behavioral measure, *guessability*, which gauges the ability of elected village leaders, who often function as brokers and prominent vote mobilizers, to correctly identify the partisan vote intentions of voters in their locality. It then develops a method to estimate *added informational value*, which compares the performance of local leaders to low-information benchmarks that capture guessability rates that can feasibly be achieved by outsiders. Original data from surveys of voters and elected village politicians across 96 village councils in Rajasthan, India indicate that while these village leaders out-perform low-information benchmarks with respect to co-partisans, they perform no better that this baseline vis-à-vis non-co-partisans.

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1. Introduction

Research on clientelism—a contingent exchange of targeted benefits for political support—suggests that parties across the developing world condition the distribution of campaign handouts and access to particularistic state benefits and services on voters' partisan preferences (Hicken 2011). The efficiency of targeting strategies of this kind, however, depends on the assumption that parties, through local intermediaries (e.g., brokers), accurately observe the partisan preferences of voters' in their localities prior to targeting, if not monitor their votes after the election (Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014). Studies in a wide range of developing world contexts assume that a variety of local actors who perform distributive and vote mobilization functions for higher-level politicians—e.g., party activists, elected village leaders, and ethnic elites—meet these steep informational demands (Stokes 2005; Koter 2013; Witsoe 2012; See Mares and Young 2016).[1] Nonetheless, the extent to which the local leaders can accurately observe voters' partisan preferences, which I refer to as *guessability*, and whether they possess more accurate information on voters' preferences than what can be achieved by higher-level politicians without access to local has not been systematically examined.

While scholars have examined the pervasiveness of clientelistic practices and the characteristics of beneficiaries in sophisticated ways,[2] research on local political agents' (e.g.,

[1] I refer to brokers as those who perform informational, distributive, and vote mobilization functions for higher-level politicians from outside the village. While the conventional depiction of brokers, rooted in the Latin American context, focuses on unelected leaders, these functions are performed by local leaders within and outside state institutions (See Mares and Young 2016; Bohlken 2016).

[2] See González-Ocantos, Kiewiet De Jonge, Meléndez, Osorio, and Nickerson, 2012; Finan and Schechter 2012.

brokers') knowledge of voters' partisan preferences prior to targeting has received little attention. What is known is largely restricted to a small number of studies of Latin American party machines (e.g., Argentina, Paraguay) where competition is low, parties are well-organized, and voters widely doubt that the ballot is secret.[3] Although the assumption that brokers embedded in party machines know voters' partisan vote preferences may hold in these less competitive settings,[4] this is less likely to be the case in many contexts where competitive elections, less organized parties, a secret ballot, and patronage politics coincide, which makes voters' preferences more difficult to observe (See, e.g., Corstange 2016; González-Ocantos et al. 2012; Wilkinson 2007; Chauchard 2018; Banerjee 2014). Second, existing work primarily relies on qualitative and quantitative observations in a small number of localities (See, e.g., Auyero 2001; Finan and Schechter 2012). This work provides rich insights on party machines, however, small-n studies cannot precisely assess brokers' knowledge of voters' preferences in a broader context (e.g., rural Rajasthan). Third, despite a widespread view that employing local leaders embedded in voters' social networks as brokers provides higher-level politicians with informational advantages, scholars have not estimated the extent to which the local leaders they rely upon have more accurate information on voters' preferences than what could be achieved without them. This is particularly important to consider in rural India, among other contexts, where party leaders and state and national politicians outsource vote mobilization and brokerage functions to prominent local leaders in lieu of the extensive activist networks associated with

[3] Respondents were asked to characterize their trust in elections on a 7-point scale in the 2010 Latin Barometer survey; only 33% and 32% rated Paraguay and Argentina as 5 or above respectively.

[4] For example, Finan and Schechter find that brokers know how voters voted approximately 80% of the time in Paraguay. Numerous datasets have coded Paraguay as an electoral autocracy (Morse 2012).

party machines (Bohlken 2016; See Thachil 2014; Novaes 2018). Finally, existing work relies on brokers' self-reports of their knowledge and voters' impressions of this (See, e.g., Stokes et al. 2013). As my own interviews suggest, this is problematic because brokers have incentive to exaggerate their capabilities and voters' perceptions may exaggerate brokers' capacities.

This article presents a replicable method that directly measures the extent to which local leaders, often recruited as vote mobilizers to higher-level politicians, can correctly identify voters' partisan vote intentions (i.e., guessability), and develops a framework and empirical strategy to gauge their *added informational value* vis-à-vis higher-level politicians. First, I develop a large-scale cross-referenced survey measure of whether local leaders correctly identify the partisan preferences of sampled voters from their localities (i.e., guessability).[5] Second, I develop a framework and replicable empirical strategy that evaluates local leaders' performance on guessability relative to low-information benchmarks, which capture what can feasibly be achieved by informed outsiders (e.g., state politicians) with rudimentary knowledge of aggregate group-party linkages. By comparing guessability rates against low-information benchmarks, I provide a conservative test of the added informational value local leaders provide higher-level politicians in the aggregate and with respect to partisan groups emphasized in different clientelistic targeting strategies.

While the method I develop here can be applied to a wide range of local intermediaries and settings,[6] I apply my research design to data from a unique cross-referenced survey of citizens and elected village leaders across 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) in the

[5] Cross-referencing in this case involves asking elite survey respondents about voter survey respondents whom they overwhelmingly know personally.
[6] My research design has been adopted in studies in Latin America and South and Southeast Asia on a variety of broker types (See, e.g., Ravanilla et al. 2017).

north Indian state of Rajasthan. Rural Rajasthan, and India more broadly, is a compelling case to test the guessability assumption because its features of pervasive poverty and inequality, low population density, and ethnic politics are viewed as conducive to clientelistic strategies (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). I focus my analysis on elected village council presidents, or sarpanch.[7] These leaders are immersed in local social networks; engage in targeted distribution and informal brokerage on a routine basis in their capacity as local representatives and as brokers to higher-level politicians; and often serve as prominent vote mobilizers for higher-level politicians prior to contesting local elections, while in office, and after the end of their term in office (Krishna 2017; Kruks-Wisner 2018). While a wide range of local actors perform brokerage functions for state and national politicians in India, including unelected fixers (Manor 2000), party activists (Auerbach 2016), and elected local leaders (See Witsoe 2012), sarpanch comprise a prominent category of local leaders involved in vote mobilization and local distribution in rural India. In fact, in lieu of the dense activist networks associated with urban areas (Auerbach 2016), higher-level politicians in rural India have historically been compelled to outsource brokerage functions to prominent local leaders such as the sarpanch (Weiner 1967; Bohlken 2016).[8]

Moreover, examining the added informational value of sarpanch provides a conservative test of the assumption that parties, relying local agents immersed in voters' social networks, accurately observe voters' partisan preferences prior to campaign-time targeting. Sarpanch are

[7] I also provide data on guessability for ward members, who represent 9% as many households as sarpanch, but are less likely to function as brokers. I show that guessability rates among sarpanch and ward members do not significantly differ.

[8] Krishna (2017) notes that fixers have increasingly entered local government in recent years due to increasingly lucrative options for rent-seeking that came with further devolution of policy to local government.

likely to have extensive information on voters' preferences due to their frequent interactions with voters seeking state benefits and routine requests during and between elections.[9] As prominent leaders in the village, sarpanch are also likely to have access to information on voters' political preferences collected by lower-level brokers in their political networks. Thus, whether this is a result of their personal efforts or the collective efforts of subordinate brokers, sarpanch are likely to possess a relatively high level of information on voters' preferences. To support this interpretation, I find similar results for guessability among sarpanch and ward members, who represent nine percent as many voters as sarpanch; a later study that applies my method to a sample of unelected brokers in Bihar also finds similar aggregate results for guessability (Chauchard and Sircar 2016). This article, thus, presents a hard case for challenging the guessability assumption in India while providing a replicable method and framework for scholars to test this assumption across different broker types and contexts, which allows for valuable comparative analysis.

My results are at odds with the view that local leaders immersed in village social networks have the extensive information on voters' preferences required for strategies of targeting non-core voters. While sarpanch provide added informational value in identifying the partisan vote intentions of their co-partisans, they perform no better than a low information benchmark that captures information about the party preferences of ethnic groups at the state level in the aggregate or with respect to non-partisan (swing) voters, and perform worse than this benchmark with respect to opposition supporters. At the same time, my results are consistent with the view that local leaders prioritize interactions with and distribution to members of their

[9] Sarpanch reported to know 95% of voters personally in my survey. A survey of voters in Rajasthan showed approximately one-third voters sought a benefit from the sarpanch directly (See Krusk-Wisner 2018).

core partisan networks (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Stokes et al. 2013; Szwarcberg 2015). This suggest that a pool of local leaders in India overwhelmingly employed as brokers meet the informational requirements of models of core targeting and plausibly prioritize the role of constructing and maintaining local networks rather than investing in meeting the informational demands of strategies of quid pro that focus on non-core voters outside these networks.

2. Guessability in Theories of Clientelism

The informational expectations of brokers vary across prominent targeting strategies featured in the clientelism literature. Research on vote buying as a persuasive swing targeting strategy make the strongest informational assumptions.[10] In an influential model of this type, Stokes (2005) argues that parties target electoral handouts to swing voters because they are most responsive to material inducements, and exclude opposition and core supporters whose vote preferences are unlikely to be changed by targeted benefits. The efficiency of this strategy depends on brokers' capacity to identify the partisan preferences of voters of all partisan types (core, swing, and opposition) before distribution (Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014), and often monitor their votes after the election.[11] The informational requirements of this strategy are steep, however, because non-core voters fall outside core networks characterized by dense information flows and swing voters have volatile preferences (Calvo and Murillo 2013; Greene 2015). While brokers are often understood to have information on non-core voters despite its challenges, misclassification of co-partisan and opposition voters as swing voters is likely, particularly in competitive contexts without organized party machines.

[10] Swing voters are defined as those who are indifferent or weakly opposed to the broker's party.
[11] I do not test the monitoring assumption directly here, however this is a particularly strong assumption where the ballot is secret; even work in machine contexts with weaker electoral integrity suggests vote monitoring is unfeasible. See, for example, Lawson and Greene 2014.

The informational requirements of core targeting are substantially weaker than vote buying models described above. These models suggest that parties, through their local political agents, target benefits to voters located in their local partisan networks whom they are likely to know well and interact with often (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Calvo and Murillo 2013). Moreover, given voters' knowledge of leaders' targeting biases toward co-partisans, voters have strong incentives to reveal their shared partisan preferences to local leaders (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Author, forthcoming). Thus, local leaders who employ core targeting strategies should be expected to focus their attention on building high-information co-partisan networks and invest little effort in identifying the preferences of those outside these networks.

Finally, several targeting strategies are consistent with low levels of information on voters' preferences equivalent to what is feasibly available to informed outsiders. First, in regions or countries where ethnic groups are polarized across parties in what amounts to ethnic census elections, ethnic targeting does not require brokers' local knowledge (Ferree 2006). In a softer version of this argument, Chandra (2004) argues that voters use heuristics such as the share of co-ethnics in visible positions of leadership to determine their vote preferences across parties, which suggests that information on aggregate patterns of group-party linkages (available to informed outsiders such as state politicians) will make it possible to accurately identify voters' partisan vote preferences. While local leaders with access to local information may be valuable to state and national politicians if they can observe group-party linkages at the village level, which may differ from aggregate patterns, group targeting strategies that do not require such local information are common in programmatic as well as clientelistic systems. This article develops an empirical strategy that makes it possible to distinguish whether brokers meet the informational requirements of these broad strategies.

3. Evaluating Local Leaders' Added Informational Value

Although different models of clientelistic targeting strategies vary in their targets and informational assumptions, research broadly assumes that local leaders employed as brokers have access to more accurate information on voters' preferences than higher-level politicians from outside the locality. While higher-level politicians (and their staff) cannot observe the preferences or votes of individuals or small groups within a locality (See, e.g., Stokes et al. 2013), local leaders are expected to have detailed information on voters' preferences through their access to ethnic and political networks (Corstange, 2016; Calvo and Murillo 2013), observations of voters' political activities, and other information only accessible to those living in the locality. In this section, I develop a framework and simple empirical strategy for estimating added informational value—which tests for whether brokers' knowledge of voters' preference exceeds what higher-level politicians can feasibly achieve without local information.

The first step toward developing this comparison is to establish a baseline that captures information on voters' preferences available to higher-level politicians in lieu of local political agents. I argue that higher-level politicians have access to information on the distribution of partisan preferences across politically relevant demographic groups (e.g., ethnicity, class) aggregated to the state or country level. This is reasonable and conservative because newspapers and other media in India and elsewhere publish results from election surveys, among other pieces that inform one's priors on group-party linkages, and politicians and their staff have strong incentives to monitor the local and regional press for information on voters' political leanings while also collecting this information by speaking to prominent group leaders and even

conducting their own public opinion polls.[12] As a result, higher-level politicians are likely, at minimum, to have priors on which groups are politically relevant and which groups comprise core bases of major political parties and which have more heterogeneous preferences.[13]

Local leaders immersed in village social networks provide added informational value (on guessability) to higher-level politicians if he has more accurate information on voters' partisan preferences than what higher-level politicians can achieve with aggregate (e.g., state, national) priors on party-group linkages. Thus, if local leaders are employed as brokers to overcome efficiency problems associated with campaign-time distribution, they should at minimum take local information into account when they identify voters' partisan preferences. Moreover, since different voter types are prioritized across different targeting strategies, local leaders' added informational value should be evaluated by considering whether they have more accurate information on the preferences of partisan types emphasized in targeting strategies described above. While brokers provide higher-level leaders with a variety of information beyond voters' preferences, and can improve efficiency in targeting by performing functions beyond informational ones (Zarazaga 2014), local leaders involved in brokerage and vote mobilization should distinguish themselves on guessability for relevant partisan types if targeting conditional on partisan preferences is feasible.

[12] Interviews with state assembly representatives (MLAs), their aids, and district-level officials in the party organization broadly shows that candidates and their staff have extensive knowledge of group voting patterns in their state and constituency. For evidence on the rise of campaign polls designed to collect such information see: *The Guardian* (2/15/2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/16/india-big-data-election-pollsters-target-age-caste-religion-uttar-pradesh>.

[13] This means that outsiders (without brokers) are likely to achieve high levels of guessability in contexts where ethnicity provides a reliable cue to partisan preferences overall or for specific groups.

To operationalize brokers' added informational value, I compare the performance of sarpanch on guessability to two types of low-information benchmarks. First, I develop a decision rule benchmark that captures the level of guessability that can be achieved by outsiders if they simply guess that all members of core ethnic groups (e.g., Muslims), which are strongly associated with a party (e.g., Congress Party) have vote intentions for that party, and guess the preferences of all others randomly (across major parties). This follows three steps. First, politically relevant ethnic groups in a given setting can be identified by considering groups typically included in election analyses in that setting (See, e.g., Lodha 2009). Second, I identify ethnic groups as core groups by calculating average differences in vote share across parties for each politically relevant group across the past two election cycles based on state assembly post-poll election surveys publicized in newspapers and other outlets at the time.[14] Although other cut-offs may be appropriate in other applications, I identify a group as core if differences among group members in partisan support toward a particular party is greater than 15%. Third, I apply the low-information decision rule; in Rajasthan: a two-party system. Brokers' added informational value can then be determined by estimating the difference between this benchmark and the guessability rates of sampled brokers to this benchmark.

As an alternative benchmark that is less conservative but does not require the selection of a cut-off for core groups, I compare observed guessability rates to the predictive performance of a simple multinomial model on partisan vote intentions including indicators for politically relevant groups as independent variables. This makes it possible to establish whether a low-quality polling firm with minimal information on voters' characteristics can better predict vote

[14] This provides a consistent picture of group-party linkages. I chose two elections to capture recent trends; replications of this approach could include a larger number of elections.

intentions than leaders immersed in voters' local social networks. Applying the added informational value approach to targeting strategies with different informational assumptions yields the following hypotheses:

H1. Local leaders out-perform low-information benchmarks with respect to core (co-partisan) and non-core (opposition, swing) voter types (Vote Buying Strategy)

H2: Local leaders out-perform low-information benchmarks for politically relevant ethnic groups (Ethnic Targeting Strategy).

H3: Local leaders out-perform low-information benchmarks with respect to co-partisans (Core Targeting Strategy).

4. Research Design

4.1 The Survey

To test the above hypotheses, I designed a cross-referenced survey that includes face-to-face interviews with 959 heads of household and over 180 elected village council presidents (sarpanch) and ward members in 96 village councils (gram panchayats, GPs) in relatively poor and politically competitive sub-districts (blocks) across Rajasthan.[15] I sampled politically competitive areas to ensure that my study captures a context where electoral uncertainty is non-trivial, and guessability is therefore relevant and likely to be valued by brokers and higher-level leaders. I sampled poor villages to increase the chance that targeted benefits would be salient. Predominantly male heads of household—the most visible voters in village political life—were

[15] 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. Voter survey respondents were randomly sampled using the voters list. See Appendix A for descriptive statistics and Appendix C for details on sampling.

sampled to ensure that my results for guessability are conservative.[16] Surveys were fielded in early 2013, nine months before Rajasthan's state assembly elections, to capture information that brokers have on voters' partisan preferences before election campaign distribution.[17] While state assembly candidate names were not yet announced at the time, partisan vote preferences in my survey and a state assembly pre-poll survey conducted six months later by Lokniti, a national survey firm in Delhi, similarly show a strong BJP advantage over Congress.[18]

4.2. Measuring Guessability

To address the concern of response bias in brokers' self-reported responses, I develop a cross-referenced measure of guessability. Respondents in the voter survey reported (by secret ballot) the party they would support if an election were held today.[19] The next day, sarpanch 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—and asked to guess their vote preferences. My choice to measure guessability for a random sample of voters in poor villages—

[16] Males are most likely to participate in local political life, and according to the National Social Survey (2007/2008), male rural-to-rural migration is only 5 percent across India. This means that my sample likely over-reports guessability rates relative to a broader sample frame that represents women who often change villages due to marriage (Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, 2010).

[17] Elected local leaders in India are in frequent and routine contact with constituents and have numerous opportunities to identify voters' partisan preferences, and have incentive to do so in the context of routine distribution and during an election year. Moreover, given the sensitivity of the cross-referenced survey, conducting such a study closer to the start of the campaign would have likely resulted in low levels of cooperation by local leaders.

[18] The October 2013 Lokniti pre-poll survey, which asked the same partisan vote intentions question to a representative sample of Rajasthan voters (also before candidate names were released), shows an 18% margin for the BJP compared to 11% in my poorer, competitive sample. See Lokniti, "Rajasthan 2013 Pre-Poll Survey Report," available at: http://www.lokniti.org/pdfs_dataunit/Questionairs/rajasthan-prepoll-2013-survey-findings.pdf.

[19] I measure vote intentions 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. See Appendix D for the instrument.

rather than only voters who are targeted—follows from the assumptions of models in the vote buying literature, which suggests that brokers' knowledge of the vote intentions of the local population as a whole makes it possible for them to choose whom to target with material benefits (See, e.g., Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter, 2014). Guessability is a measure of whether local leaders' guesses match voters' self-reported (secret ballot) responses on partisan vote intentions.[20] To ensure that my estimates of errors in guessability are conservative (i.e., that guessability is conservatively high), I analyze guessability with several restrictions described in Appendix E.

4.3. The Case of Elected Local Leaders in Rural India

I examine guessability with data from elected local leaders in poor villages in Rajasthan, a rural state in North India.[21] I consider rural India, and Rajasthan specifically, to represent a context of competitive clientelism where existing theory would expect guessability to be high.[22] First, its politics is characterized as patronage-based (Chandra 2004; Keefer and Khemani 2004), and vote buying is so pervasive that candidates often refer to it as a necessity for any viable candidate (Chauchard 2018). Beyond election campaigns, targeted state benefits and services are widely viewed to be politically targeted at the local level. Existing research and my fieldwork shows that village council presidents (i.e., sarpanch) have influence over which citizens to include as beneficiaries to government programs, which requests for help in accessing state

[20] Since candidates had not yet been announced, guessability measures partisan vote preferences rather than candidate preferences.
[21] 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).
[22] The incumbent party in Rajasthan had been displaced in closely contested state elections in each election cycle from 1991 to the time of the survey.

services to answer, and which government forms (e.g., land titles) to sign—and condition access to these benefits and services on voters' political characteristics (Chauchard 2017). In short, the discretion local leaders have over targeted benefits and personal favors gives local leader incentive to identify voters' partisan preferences on a routine basis, while frequent interactions with voters seeking benefits and services provide numerous opportunities to collect this information.

Second, existing research suggests that high performance on guessability is particularly likely in rural Rajasthan—a context of low population density, pervasive poverty, and stable populations where voters and leaders often interact. My sample of male household heads in poor villages captures this context particularly well. Moreover, Rajasthan has an institutionalized two-party system relative to other Indian states (Chhibber and Nooruddin 2008),[23] and caste is a salient although imperfect predictor of partisanship (Lodha 2009). This means that it should be less difficult to perform on guessability in rural Rajasthan as compared to less institutionalized and more volatile party systems where vote preferences are particularly difficult to predict (e.g., Tamil Nadu), or urban contexts where populations are less stable due to migration. In short, if the guessability assumption applies in competitive contexts with a secret ballot, we should expect sarpanch in Rajasthan to out-perform low-information benchmarks on guessability.

Third, this study focuses on an important category of local leaders who function as brokers in rural India: directly elected village council presidents, or sarpanch.[24] Along with their

[23] Chhibber and Nooruddin place Rajasthan in the bottom third of major states on their measure of electoral volatility.

[24] In my data, sarpanch represent 1,100 households (the entire GP of several village) on average (2001 Census of India). I also present data on directly elected ward members (who represent 100 households). Descriptive statistics on the sarpanch and ward member sample are provided in Appendix A.

formal powers as local representatives, sarpanch comprise an important category of brokers in India. First, sarpanch are active in election campaigns and frequently serve as local mobilizers for state politicians or higher-tier politicians in local government.[25] The central role that sarpanch play in political mobilization on behalf of state and other higher-level politicians 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. Second, in India, where party organizations are weak at the local level, political parties often rely on local institutions (e.g., the village council) for recruiting political activists (Bohlken 2016). This is reasonable as sarpanch often were known as effective brokers prior to contesting elections (Kruks-Wisner 2018). Third, a defining feature of brokers is their immersion in local social networks. Sarpanch in my data 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.[26] Fourth, despite an official ban on party symbols in GP elections, sarpanch in Rajasthan are known partisan actors with consistent partisan preferences.[27] Thus, sarpanch resemble partisan brokers in the clientelism literature more closely than non-partisan fixers with volatile partisan affiliations (Manor 2000). Finally, as noted above, a survey of unelected brokers that implements my method for

[25] To illustrate the role of sarpanch in campaigns, 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. Moreover, 94% of voter survey respondents reported that the sarpanch supported a party candidate in the past 5 years.

[26] Voters identified the sarpanch (or an ex-sarpanch) as the modal leader to contact to access a wide range of state services associated with brokerage. Similarly, Kruks-Wisner (2018) finds that citizens in Rajasthan are 45% more likely to contact GP representatives than unelected fixers.

[27] 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.

guessability following the 2015 state elections shows that guessability is substantially lower among popular unelected brokers than is the case with sarpanch in this study (Chauchard and Sircar 2016). This suggests that my results for sarpanch are likely to hold for a variety of brokers types and contexts in India—although this is ultimately an empirical question for future studies.

4.4. Comparison to Low-Information Benchmarks

I estimate elected local leaders' added informational value on guessability by comparing their performance on guessability against low-information benchmarks that capture guessability rates that can be achieved by outsiders. I focus on the decision rule benchmark described above as it is the more conservative benchmark and reflects my observations of the thought processes employed by sarpanch while making their guesses.[28] To calculate guessability in Rajasthan using this benchmark, I determine group vote margins across the two state elections from aggregate results from post-poll surveys conducted by Lokniti after the 2003 and 2008 elections, which were publicly available in media reports.[29] I identify core groups as those with average margins of greater than 15%, which identifies groups typically viewed as core groups in analyses of electoral politics in Rajasthan.[30] I also provide a comparison between brokers' performance on guessability and the percent of correct predictions in a minimal statistical (multinomial) model of voters' partisan vote intentions, which includes indicators for the same politically relevant

[28] Local leaders often voiced their thought process in ways that fit the decision rule benchmark. Moreover, sarpanch guessed third parties for 7 of 806 voters in the restricted samples; 2 of these were correct. Thus, the 2-party focus fits behavior on guessability in this setting.
[29] See Table F1 in the appendix for details on partisan vote margins.
[30] Politically relevant ethnic groups in Rajasthan include upper castes, other backward castes (excluding Jats and Gujjars), Jats, Gujjars, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and Muslims. I provide details on vote margins for these groups and implementation of the decision rule benchmark in Appendix F. When I consider a 20% cut-off for core groups (instead of 15%) sarpanch (and ward members) perform slightly better than the decision rule, however, this cut-off is inappropriate as scheduled castes—a traditional core group of the Congress Party—are coded as a swing group under this cut-off.

groups used to calculate the decision rule benchmark. This captures brokers' added value over information that can be obtained from pre-election polls increasingly fielded by candidates and political parties.

5. Results

The main results suggest that elected local leaders, who comprise an important category of brokers in rural India, provide added value with respect to co-partisans (hypothesis 3) while they do not provide added informational value in the aggregate or with respect to non-co-partisan voters (hypothesis 1). Figure 1 shows aggregate guessability rates for sarpanch and ward members and guessability rates that would feasibly be achieved by outsiders using the decision rule and demographic model benchmarks. Sarpanch achieve an overall guessability rate of 64.5% on partisan vote intentions. If a sarpanch (or state politician) followed the low-information decision rule described above, he would achieve an aggregate guessability rate of 65.2%; the multinomial demographic model correctly predicts partisan vote intentions for 68% of voters, which is a significantly higher rate of guessability than what sarpanch embedded in the locality achieved.[31]

To establish that results for guessability are not driven by the size of the sarpanch's constituency (i.e., the GP), I show that the aggregate guessability rate of GP council (ward) members, who represent 100 households on average, is statistically indistinguishable from that of sarpanch. While ward members are less prominent (compared to sarpanch) and less likely to resemble brokers according to the traits described above, they comprise a pool of local leaders who frequently participate in brokerage activities at smaller scale that more closely resembles the

[31] Regression results from the multinomial model are provided in Table A5 of the appendix.

depiction of brokers in other settings (e.g., Argentina).[32] Ward member achieve a guessability rate of 66.3% on vote intentions as compared to 64.5% for sarpanch. The decision rule and demographic model benchmarks applied to ward members achieve guessability rates of 65.5% and 68.2% respectively—which are both statistically indistinguishable from the rates achieved by ward members.[33] Moreover, while it is plausible that India's rotating systems of quotas, which requires candidates for sarpanch in a reserved GP to be female or members of marginal groups may depress guessability rates among sarpanch, I show in table A4 of the appendix that sarpanch and ward members from these categories (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women) do not have significantly different guessability rates than those outside these categories.[34]

Although sarpanch do not provide added informational value on aggregate guessability, it is important to note that guessability rates exceed rates we would expect if sarpanch guessed voters' preferences blindly in ways that do not consider aggregate information on group-party linkages captured in low-information benchmarks. The benchmark that captures the least information is pure random guessing; in a two-party system, this is equivalent to guessing voters' preferences with a coin flip between Rajasthan's two major parties—with a guessability rate of 50%. Aggregate guessability rates for sarpanch (64.5%) and ward members (66.6%) exceed pure

[32] See Table A3 of the appendix for descriptive statistics on ward members. On average, ward members are less partisan, report lower levels of contact with higher-level leaders, and are less likely to canvass for politicians.
[33] See Appendix F for details on the calculation of ward member guessability.
[34] Note that female sarpanch were permitted to include their husbands in completing the guessability measure (if requested) to capture the level of information on voters' preferences available to female sarpanch in practice in rural Rajasthan—where a male family member is often the relevant political broker.

random guessing.[35] Guessability on vote intentions also exceeds 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 all support the BJP given the anti-incumbency wave that was palpable at the time of the survey in 2013 (56%). In short, while sarpanch take relevant, easily available priors on voters' preferences into account in guessability, they do not provide added informational value in the aggregate when compared to what can be achieved by outsiders using a blunt decision rule based on demographic guessing, or a rudimentary analysis of group vote preferences from polling data increasingly available to political parties and candidates in India.

Figure 1: Aggregate Guessability Relative to Benchmarks

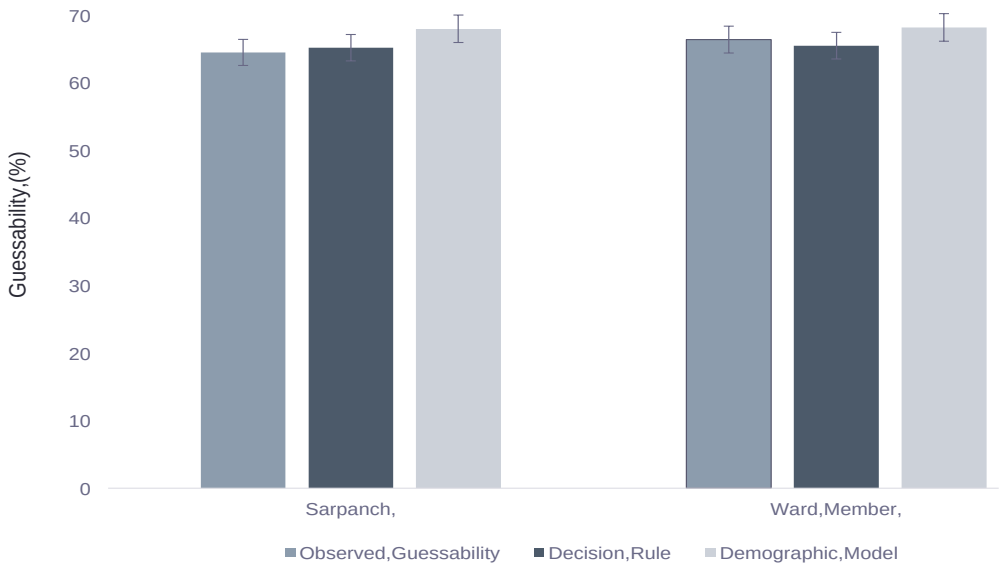

Figure 1 shows observed guessability rates and guessability rates under the decision rule and demographic model low-information benchmarks. 95% confidence intervals show uncertainty.

5.1 Guessability at the Group-Level

[35] Aggregated to the GP, 70 percent of sarpanch perform above the 50 percent random chance benchmark for vote intentions.

In India, where heterogeneity in partisan preferences among members of the same ethnic group is common (Dunning and Nilekani, 2013), local leaders may provide added informational value by observing the distribution of partisan preferences among ethnic groups in their locality more accurately than what is feasible for outsiders relying on aggregate patterns of group-party linkages across a region or country (Hypothesis 2). I show the performance of sarpanch on guessability across politically relevant ethnic groups relative to what could be achieved with the more conservative decision rule benchmark in figure 2. Results show that sarpanch achieve guessability rates significantly higher than this low-information benchmark for two groups (scheduled tribes and Gujjars); the less conservative demographic model predicts vote preferences as well or better than sarpanch for all ethnic groups. Thus, although sarpanch can feasibly observe party-voter linkages of sub-castes, whose preferences may differ from the broad caste groups (e.g., upper castes) included in these benchmarks,[36] sarpanch in rural Rajasthan provide modest added informational value on guessability at the level of ethnic groups.[37]

[36] For example, Chandra (2004) finds that different castes in the broader category of scheduled castes vote for different parties—which is information plausibly available to a local leader.
[37] Ward members out-perform the decision rule and demographic model for three groups respectively. See table F8 in the appendix.

Figure 2: Guessability by Ethnic Group

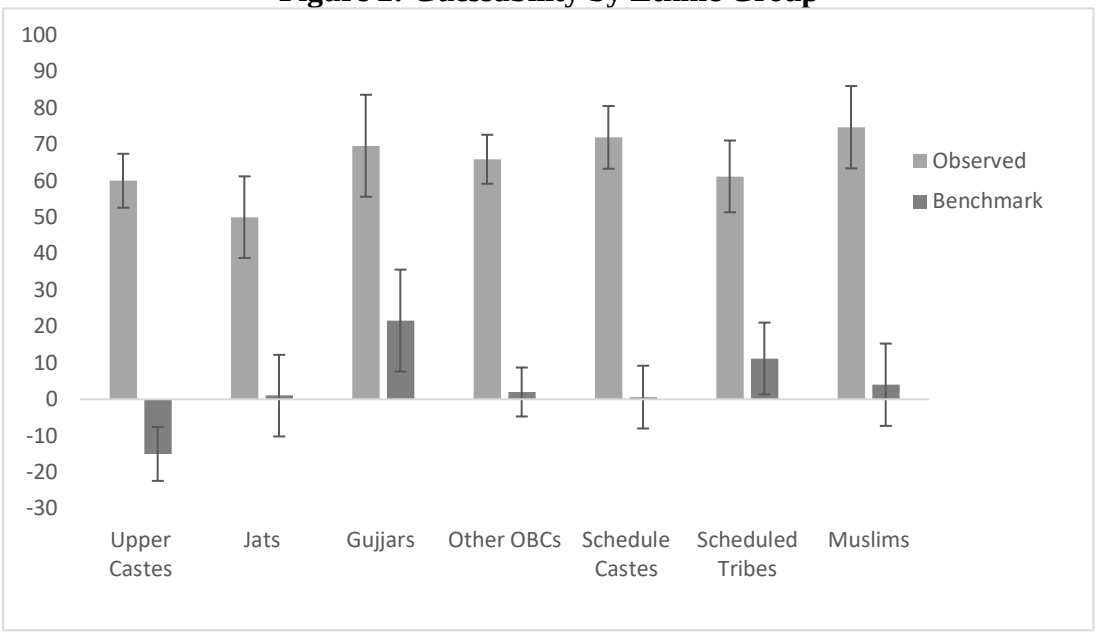

Figure 2 shows guessability rates for sub-groups of sampled voters from politically relevant ethnic groups in Rajasthan, and differences between guessability rates and the rate that is achieved by the more conservative decision rule benchmark. Errors reflect 95% confidence intervals.

5.2. Guessability Across Partisan Types

To test hypotheses 1 and 3, I examine whether sarpanch provide added informational value on guessability across voters' partisan types. I identify core voters as those who feel closest to the partisan preference of their sarpanch;[38] 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). Contrary to the assumptions of vote buying models, I show in figure 3 that sarpanch match or under-perform what could be achieved by the more conservative low-information benchmark with respect to non-core (i.e., swing, opposition) voters.[39] Sarpanch

[38] Since guessability for co-partisans and opposition supporters requires a measure of sarpanch partisanship, responses from four non-partisan sarpanch are not included in calculations of guessability for co-partisan and opposition supporters.

[39] Since India has a broadly non-ideological party system (See 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?'

guessed partisans of an opposition party and non-partisans (swing voters) correctly 56.8 and 55 percent of the time respectively. The decision rule and demographic model benchmark out-perform sarpanch with respect to opposition party supporters by 15.3 and 24.7 percentage points respectively, and both benchmarks achieve statistically indistinguishable guessability rates from those of sarpanch with respect to swing voters. Contrary to the expectations of Hypothesis 1, this suggests that sarpanch, an important broker type in rural India, do not provide added informational value on guessability with respect to non-core voters.[40]

On the other hand, results show that sarpanch provided added informational value on guessability with respect to co-partisans (Hypothesis 3). Sarpanch correctly identify the vote intentions of 79.6 percent of co-partisan voters, which out-performs decision rule and demographic model benchmarks by 16.3 and 14.3 percentage points respectively. This is consistent with research which suggests that brokers prioritize integrating voters into local partisan networks rather than investing in monitoring the preferences or votes of non-core voters. Moreover, since voters within these networks have strong incentives to reveal their shared partisan preferences, the effort required to identify co-partisan voters' preferences is likely to be low (Calvo and Murillo, 2013; Dunning and Nilekani, 2013; Author). 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.[41] This suggests that brokers often over-estimate co-partisan support; which has implications for the efficiency of turnout buying strategies in competitive

[40] I show in appendix F9 that this is similarly the case for ward members.
[41] 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.

contexts such as India.[42] In summary, aggregate results show that sarpanch out-perform low-information benchmarks by leveraging information from co-partisan networks, and otherwise rely on blunt stereotypes on group-party linkages available to outsiders.

Figure 3: Guessability Across Partisan Types

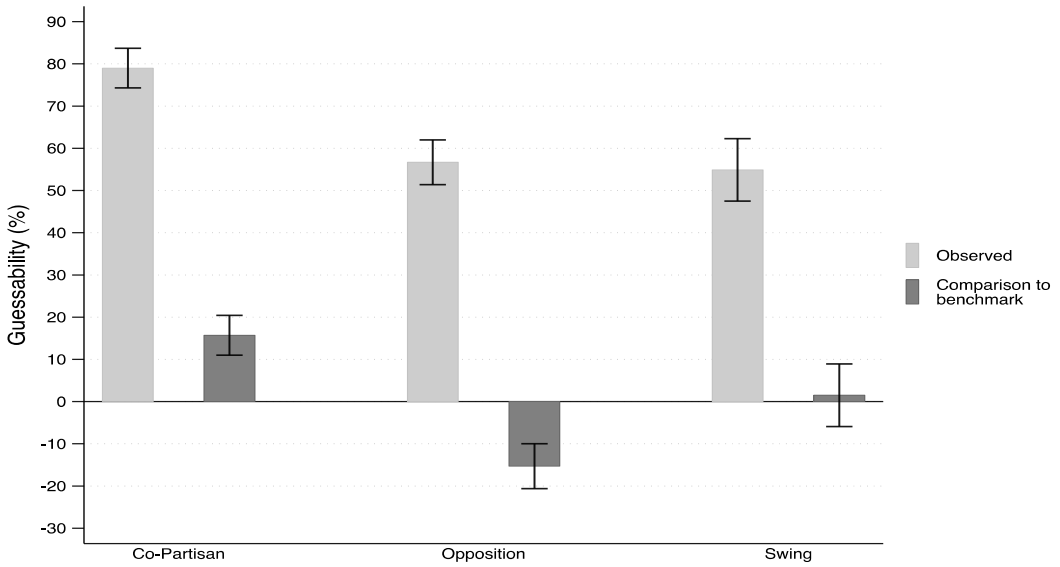

Figure 3 shows the overall guessability rates across voter types (in light gray) and the difference between the rates of correct guesses of sarpanch and the rates we would expect by applying the low-information polling benchmark in dark gray. When the comparison to the benchmark is above zero, this means the sarpanch out-perform the benchmark and vice versa. 95% Confidence intervals show uncertainty.

6. Added Informational Value: Regression Analysis

In this section, I show that my conclusions from the aggregate analysis are robust to more nuanced statistical tests. I examine variation in added informational value, relative to the low-information demographic model benchmark, across voter and sarpanch characteristics that

[42] This is consistent with research which suggests that activists exaggerate their persuasive capacities and the extent to which others agree with them. See, for example, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).

plausibly explain variation in guessability.[43] Added informational value is a measure of the difference between whether a sarpanch correctly guessed a voters' partisan vote intention (i.e., guessability) and an indicator for variable for whether the baseline demographic (multinomial) model correctly classifies (predicts) that voter's partisan vote intention. It takes a value of -1, 0, or 1 and is calculated:

$Added\ Informational\ Value_i = Guessability\ (Sarpanch)_i - \ Correct\ Classification\ _i$.[44]

I estimate a model of added informational value on voter and broker characteristics using ordinary least squares and clustered errors for GPs to capture the hierarchical structure of the data where one sarpanch guesses the vote intentions of all sampled voters in their GP. I compare results from this model to results from a logit regressions which captures variation across sarpanch and voter characteristics.[45]

6.1. Measurement of Independent Variables

Existing theory suggests that three types of characteristics are likely to explain brokers' relative performance on guessability relative to low-information benchmarks: partisan and ethnic ties; locally observable cues to voters' partisan preferences from political participation; and measures of broker quality which capture competence and incentives of sarpanch to perform core functions of their brokerage job. I test for the effect of partisan ties on added informational value using the psychological attachment measures described above. I include indicators for co-partisans and opposition supporters with swing voters (i.e., non-partisans) as the reference

[43] Details on variable coding are provided in appendix D. Regression tables are provided in Appendix Tables A6 through A7.

[44] Correct classification means that the largest predicted probability in the multinomial model is associate with the party the voter reported he would vote for if an election were held today. Positive values indicate that sarpanch guess vote preferences more accurately than the demographic model.

[45] Results on guessability are provided in table A7 of the appendix.

category. Co-ethnicity is an indicator for shared self-reported group membership in politically relevant caste groups or Muslim religion (irrespective of caste). I measure variation in participation in public partisan activities to capture a publicly observable cue to voters' partisan preferences that are visible to local leaders but those outside the village.[46] Broker quality measures variation in education,[47] tenure in the GP, and connections to higher-level politicians. I measure educational attainment of the sarpanch with a 14-point ordinal variable for years of education and divide by two standard deviations to capture large increases in education relative to zero (no schooling). I measure tenure in the gram panchayat as the number of terms a sarpanch served in the GP as sarpanch or ward member and divide by two standard deviations to capture large differences relative to zero (no political experience before becoming sarpanch).[48] I construct measures of connections to higher-level politicians with questions on the self-reported frequency of contact (in the past month) between sarpanch and the state legislator (MLA), representatives and presidents of the two upper tiers of local government (panchayat raj) in India: panchayat samiti (block-level) and zilla parishad (district level), and the block party president of the sarpanch's party—another important partisan leader in the block.[49] I create a separate measure for MLA contact that captures variation on the contact measure divided by two standard

[46] I create a composite participation index that includes binary questions on whether 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.
[47] Scholars view education as important for a variety of broker functions. See Krishna 2011; Auerbach and Thachil 2018.
[48] I do not restrict this measure to tenure as sarpanch only because rotating quotas that change eligibility criteria reduce the number of terms one is eligible to contest as sarpanch.
[49] Responses vary along a 5-point scale from zero meetings in the last month to more than one weekly meeting. I also include self-reported contact with block-level party (organization) president from the sarpanch's party in the panchayat raj contact measure. This is an unelected but important higher-level partisan contact in the block.

deviations to capture large differences from zero (no reported MLA contact). Panchayat Raj Contact is an additive measure of contact measures for all other leaders listed above divided by two standard deviations to capture large differences from zero on this measure. Finally, I include an indicator for sarpanch who identified as party activists as a proxy for motivation to perform on guessability and an indicator for BJP support (among sarpanch) to test for party effects.[50]

6.2. Do Local Leaders Provide Added Informational Value?

Figures 4 shows results from regressions on added informational value. The left plot (4A) shows results from an OLS regression of ethnic group indicators (included in the demographic benchmark model); indicators for partisan types (co-partisan and opposition supporter); and co-ethnicity vis-à-vis the sarpanch.[51] Consistent with the sub-group analysis above, results show that sarpanch add informational value among their co-partisans;[52] sarpanch out-perform the correct classification rate of the demographic model by 15 percentage points when guessing the preferences of co-partisans compared to swing voters, but guess the vote intentions of opposition supporters correctly 24 percentage points less often than swing voters. Sarpanch do not significantly out-perform this low-information benchmark for any ethnic group, and sarpanch do

[50] Note that I exclude 34 observations from four independent (non-partisan) sarpanch from regression analysis since opposition and core voters cannot be coded for these local leaders. Thus, BJP support compares BJP and Congress affiliated sarpanch.
[51] Scheduled castes and Non-Partisan (swing) voters, which both have mean of zero on added value, are the reference categories for ethnic groups and partisan type respectively.
[52] The co-partisan effect is statistically significant at the 90% ad 95% levels in the baseline and full models respectively.

not vary on added value when voters are co-ethnic.[53] These results hold in logit regressions on guessability.[54]

In plot 4B, I present results from a model that estimates the effect of voter participation in public partisan activities, broker characteristics on added value, and demographic variables from the prior model (not shown for simplicity of presentation). Results show that the general pattern for added informational value holds for co-partisans and opposition supporters when broker quality and other relevant characteristics are considered. Second, sarpanch do not add value over a simple demographic model with respect to non-core voters who report to participate in numerous political activities. Third, measures of broker quality—education, tenure, and contact—have no independent or joint effect on added informational value or guessability. Performance of sarpanch who identify as BJP supporters (compared to the Party) and party activists (compared to those who do not) does not significantly differ on either outcome.[55]

In short, sarpanch provide added informational value among their co-partisans. Sarpanch, with rare exception, match the performance of a low-information demographic model on vote intentions that can be easily replicated by polling firms in India and many other countries. Similarly, I do not find significant variation on guessability (irrespective of benchmarks) when considering these voter and sarpanch characteristics. This suggests that a prominent category of local leaders involved in higher-level election campaigns do not meet the informational requirements of persuasive quid pro quo strategies.

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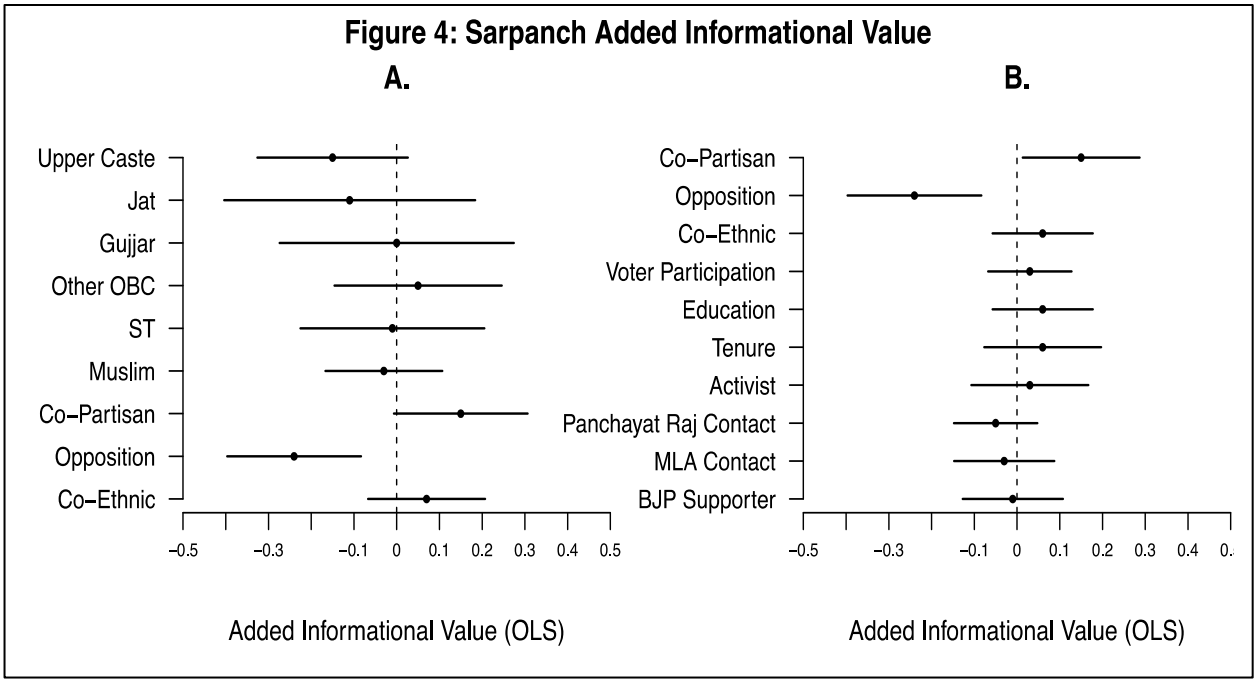
[53] I also show in Appendix Table A7 that guessability does not vary between co-ethnics and non-co-ethnics.

[54] I do not find an effect on opposition supporter in models on guessability because while the demographic model predicts the former more accurately than the latter, brokers guess both types at similar rates.

[55] *Party Activist* has a large, positive effect in the guessability regressions but does not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance.



The left plot provides 95% confidence intervals from an OLS regression (with clustered standard errors) of added informational value including voter demographics (Other OBCs is the reference category), voter participation in partisan activities, and dyadic characteristics—comparing the accuracy of the demographic model benchmark to sarpanch guessability. The right plot provides 95% confidence intervals for a model of added value that includes sarpanch characteristics. All independent variables from the left plot are included in the regression but excluded for simplicity. Results from the full models are provide in table A6 in the appendix.

7. Discussion

This article develops a direct test of the assumption that parties can accurately observe voters' partisan preferences prior to making campaign-time targeting decisions. My results demonstrate that elected village leaders who often function as brokers to higher-level leaders meet the information requirements of a strategy of targeting voters within their local partisan networks, but do not meet the steeper informational requirements of vote buying strategies that target non-core voters—a substantively significant category of voters that comprise approximately 66% of voters in this study. My results are consistent with research in India and other settings which suggest that elected and unelected local leaders prioritize constructing and maintaining high-information local partisan networks and primarily invest effort in targeting and mobilizing voters within these networks (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Szwarcberg, 2015;

Auerbach and Thachil 2018). If this is the case, and state and national politicians expect local political leaders such as sarpanch to acquire extensive information on those in their partisan networks, my results may be interpreted as evidence that sarpanch provide substantial added informational value to higher-level politicians.

That said, while the conventional wisdom in research on vote buying suggests that brokers are valued for their ability to accurately and efficiently target selective benefits conditional on voters' preferences, my findings suggest that quid pro quo strategies that target non-co-partisan voters are likely to be inefficient or absent in contexts such as India where party competition is intense. In fact, regression results which show that measures of broker quality and voter participation have little effect on guessability, with rare exception, suggest that an important category of brokers invests little effort in monitoring the preferences of non-core voters, even when local cues are available. In such settings parties are likely to target non-core voters through strategies that do not require fine-grained information on voters' preferences or votes such as expanding quotas for public college to all members of a swing ethnic groups (e.g., Jats) in the state; indiscriminate targeting in a locality as a strategy to signal responsiveness to a category of voters (e.g., the poor); or local public goods provision.[56]

Finally, this article presents a framework and replicable method which makes it possible to determine whether brokers offer added informational value over alternative sources of aggregate information available to higher-level leaders. I apply this approach to the villages in Rajasthan, where local brokers are ubiquitous and politicized institutions, pervasive poverty, and low population density suggest that guessability is likely to be high. While research on brokers emphasizes a small number of contexts of party machines in Latin America (e.g., Argentina),

[56] Kramon, 2016; Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2016; Auervach 2016.

where it is plausible that guessability is high, my results suggest that this is less likely to be the case in India and other countries where weakly organized parties and intense party competition make performance on guessability challenging. Particularly in these settings, examining the informational capacities of brokers, and whether they add informational value relative to inexpensive, low-information alternatives is essential to understand the distributive outcomes we observe. By developing a replicable survey design and empirical strategy for such an analysis, this article facilitates future applications across countries and broker types, which will lead to important insights on broker-mediated targeting strategies and its alternatives.

Above all, this article suggests that while cash is often distributed during elections, parties are unlikely to have the capacity to fundamentally undermine democratic representation through a quid pro quo strategy of benefits for votes. While I do not directly test the ability of parties to monitor votes after an election, evidence which suggests that local leaders broadly lack the information required to carry out an efficient vote buying strategy prior to distribution suggests that this steeper informational demand is unlikely to be met by local leaders in India. Along with Rajasthan's history of anti-incumbency and robust competition, this attests to the view that elections in India are in the hands of voters. Consistent with my conclusions, Indian politicians have increasingly pursued public goods provision and entitlement programs aimed to garner support in a context where the threat of democratic accountability is ever present.

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