

Constituency Service in a Clientelist State:

Evidence from Indian Politicians

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Abstract: Scholars of distributive politics often underscore the role of local clientelism and partisan bias. I show, however, that high-level politicians in “patronage democracies” provide considerable assistance directly to individual citizens seeking state resources; frequently, they do not premise their aid on petitioners’ political support. I argue that the partisan nature of local allocation contributes, perhaps surprisingly, to the prevalence of such unbiased constituency service. Using novel data from India—including qualitative shadowing of politicians, nested surveys of citizens and politicians, and a nationwide audit experiment with legislators—I show that individuals who are denied local access to benefits, often due to partisan ties, are more likely to make upward appeals for assistance. State and national legislators, however, often do not necessarily condition their responsiveness on indicators of citizens’ electoral behaviors. These findings highlight a more representative form of democracy than is typically thought to exist in such settings.

At ten-thirty on a recent morning in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a state legislator, Ashok Rajan, has already been meeting with constituents at his home for over an hour.¹ A man arrives to tell the politician that he cannot afford his daughter's planned wedding, and Rajan pledges to help with the application for a state program that assists with marriage costs. Three men then report difficulties with water access in their village and request a hand pump. The legislator calls a contractor who has been installing state-funded pumps in the district and instructs him to follow-up on the request. Shortly thereafter, a woman approaches to complain that her widow pension has not come through; Rajan assures her that he will look into it and get the payment reinstated by the next month.

Such direct interactions between a legislator and individual citizens appear to echo accounts of *constituency service* in western democracies—in which politicians provide critical information to their constituents and exercise formal and informal power over bureaucrats to facilitate the provision of services.² Scholars emphasize the relatively universal character of constituency service: by definition, it is provided largely without attention to the partisanship or history of political support of the individual or group making a request.³ Research in developed-country contexts underscores the critical role of such assistance in the representation of citizens, the delivery of public benefits, and the electoral strategies of legislators.

From the perspective of received wisdom, however, constituency service should be unlikely in settings such as India. Research on clientelism in “patronage democracies”—where

¹ Shadowing subject D, June 2016. I discuss the methodology for shadowing politicians in greater detail below. Names of politicians are altered throughout to preserve confidentiality.

² Fenno 2003 [1978], Clarke 1978, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, Thomas 1992, Dropp and Peskowitz 2012, André et al. 2014.

³ Paraphrasing Fenno 2003 [1978]: 102. While recent experimental work often highlights a small partisan bonus (Butler and Broockman 2011, McClendon 2016), I follow Fenno in defining constituency service as a non-partisan activity.

the distribution of public resources is extensive, but highly discretionary—focuses centrally on *partisan* targeting that is in some way contingent on electoral behavior.⁴ Often, politicians are said to delegate distribution to local brokers, who have the monitoring capacity necessary to premise assistance on citizens’ political affiliations and behaviors.⁵ From this perspective, it appears surprising that state or national legislators with large constituencies would be personally responsive to the petitions of individual citizens. And even if they respond to direct appeals, these politicians are presumed to prioritize the needs of their co-partisans and target resources to their political supporters. Perhaps for this reason, research on such non-partisan assistance—that is, constituency service—has focused nearly exclusively on western democracies.⁶

Yet, there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that constituency service may be highly prevalent in such clientelist states. First, due to the inefficient nature of service delivery, citizens in these contexts have an especially profound need for assistance. Second, however, help from local actors is likely to be supplied in a highly partisan way; as existing research demonstrates, it may involve clientelist *quid pro quos*, in which brokers funnel aid to political supporters. Yet, citizens excluded from these patronage networks may be unable to obtain assistance locally; and they may therefore be prone to appeal to state and national legislators, who often hold important sources of power that enable them to provide aid. Finally, these high-level politicians—defined as representatives whose constituencies are sufficiently large that they cannot plausibly know most of their constituents personally and often cannot reliably verify the electoral behaviors of petitioners—will tend of necessity to offer assistance to individual

⁴ On patronage democracy, see Chandra 2004.

⁵ Stokes 2008, Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013, Camp 2016, Dunning and Nilekani 2012; Larreguy et al. 2017.

⁶ *Inter alia*, Fenno 2003 [1978], Clarke 1978, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, Thomas 1992, Dropp and Peskowitz 2012, André et al. 2014.

petitioners in a non-contingent, non-partisan way. Their incentives to do can be heightened precisely by the discretion and inefficiency that characterizes patronage democracies: constituents who are excluded from local partisan networks and therefore denied services may be especially prone to reward a politician's assistance with electoral support.⁷

In fact, I show empirically that constituency service is prevalent in just those settings where the received literature would find it unlikely. Using unique survey evidence from citizens and politicians in India, I find, in line with previous evidence, that those individuals who report sharing the partisanship of powerful local politicians are more likely to receive benefits controlled by local bodies. But I then show that individuals who *do not* share the partisanship of these proximate politicians are the most likely to expect appeals upward to high-level officials. I also establish, using reports from politicians, that citizens thereby seek to obtain benefits that can also be allocated locally. Thus, individuals blocked from assistance on partisan terms appeal to high-level politicians for the same goods they failed to receive via local intermediaries. The demand for assistance from high-level politicians emerges precisely from the uneven nature of intermediation and partisan targeting at the local level.

For their part, elected officials in India and other patronage democracies expend substantial time and effort addressing the petitions of individual constituents. As I demonstrate with evidence from qualitative shadowing of politicians and large-scale surveys of Indian politicians, providing direct assistance to citizens is a predominant activity of state and national legislators in such contexts. Strikingly, they also respond to petitions for assistance in a remarkably non-partisan and non-contingent manner. Drawing on my nationwide audit experiment with a near-census of Indian state and national legislators, I show that indicators of

⁷ Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987.

petitioners' partisanship and past electoral behavior do not demonstrably affect politicians' responsiveness. Together, my findings highlight that inefficiencies in service delivery and partisan targeting by local intermediaries, perhaps counterintuitively, can help to generate constituency service.

By theorizing the sources of constituency service and demonstrating its prevalence in patronage democracies, this paper makes several contributions. Constituency service is not a widespread theme in the study of distributive politics. Yet, this is not because it does not exist or does not constitute a significant form of distribution. Many existing theories of clientelism and partisan bias have overlooked the ways in which the very dynamics they describe—the use of electoral and partisan criteria to target voters for receipt of government resources—can generate a demand for alternative sources of assistance, and can also prompt the supply of aid by higher-level politicians. To be sure, as I discuss in the conclusion, constituency service complements such better-studied forms of distributive politics; yet my findings open new avenues in the study of politicians' distributional repertoires—which include partisan bias, yet are richer in content than we have supposed. My argument also has implications for our understanding of democratic representation in patronage democracies. While existing work has focused on the “perverse accountability” engendered by clientelism, politicians who supply constituency service appear more responsive to their constituents than we have previously believed.⁸ Nonetheless, the democratic accountability that this responsiveness implies remains limited on several dimensions, in particular because it depends on the continued inefficiency of the state and the discretionary nature of allocation. I return to these themes, and to the broader relevance of

⁸ Stokes 2005.

constituency service, after developing a theory of its demand and supply and offering evidence for its prevalence in India, a paradigmatic patronage democracy.

Distributive Politics and Intermediaries in Clientelist Settings

What is the character of distributive politics in settings such as India? Patronage states, in which the government is a primary source of resources but delivery is often inefficient and discretionary, plausibly account for more than half of the world's democracies.⁹ In such contexts, individuals face difficult conditions for acquiring services such as identity documents, access to public utilities, or welfare benefits. In related work, I show that for nearly half of a set of 39 countries that can be considered patronage democracies, fewer than 90% of citizens have access to basic forms of electricity, sanitation, and water, while in many of these countries access rates are as low as 40-50%.¹⁰ Though some recent improvements to the infrastructure of service delivery have led to higher service levels in parts of India and elsewhere, for many citizens the process of accessing basic and necessary benefits remains mired in difficulties.¹¹ Acquiring services can require visits to multiple government offices, long lines for assistance, and frequent demands for bribes.¹²

Such difficulties in access often encourage citizens to engage intermediaries for assistance. Across patronage democracies, on average 68% of citizens report that personal contacts are important for getting things done in the public sector.¹³ Studies of politics in contexts such as India focus substantially on the relevance of local political actors in

⁹ Chandra 2004. See Bussell, Forthcoming, for a coding of patronage democracies using data on public employment and discretion in service delivery.

¹⁰ Bussell, Forthcoming.

¹¹ World Development Indicators.

¹² World Bank 2008; Bussell 2012.

¹³ Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer; Bussell, Forthcoming.

distribution.¹⁴ Substantial research on clientelism suggests that local brokers make *quid pro quo* payoffs, exchanging access to benefits for electoral support.¹⁵ Recent work extends the typical emphasis in this literature on election-oriented payoffs to instead highlight the role for intermediaries in facilitating access to run-of-the-mill state benefits outside the time period of elections.¹⁶ This shift importantly highlights the daily role for local intermediaries in facilitating citizens' access to the state, frequently along partisan lines.

Evidence that co-partisans of local actors are more likely to receive benefits does not, however, indicate that individuals have little choice over intermediaries. Indeed, the advantages in terms of receipt of state benefits for co-partisans of local politicians, highlighted in existing work, might plausibly be larger if those citizens did not have exit options from partisan brokers. Recent work on intermediation in urban India highlights the degree to which individuals do make choices over intermediaries within their local community. Importantly, these choices are determined not only by partisanship, but also by citizens' perceptions of an intermediary's capacity viably to provide access to the desired goods or services.¹⁷

In line with this work, I posit that individual citizens may have access to multiple possible intermediaries, and that they have the liberty to make discerning choices over possible pathways to the state.¹⁸ Yet, in contrast with existing theories, which largely consider only various local-level actors, I suggest that citizens' choices may also be multi-level in nature, and

¹⁴ Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013, Chauchard 2017, Kruks-Wisner 2018, Auerbach and Thachil 2018.

¹⁵ *Inter alia*, Auyero 2000, Stokes 2005, Nichter 2008, Dunning and Nilekani 2013, Weitz-Shapiro 2014, Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015, Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016, Chauchard 2017, Auerbach and Thachil 2018.

¹⁶ Auerbach and Thachil 2018, Kruks-Wisner 2018.

¹⁷ Auerbach and Thachil 2018: 10-11.

¹⁸ Auerbach and Thachil 2018, Kruks-Wisner 2018.

this wider range of potential intermediaries is key to understanding the character of constituency service across many democratic contexts.

Specifically, I argue that high-level politicians with large constituencies, such as state or national legislators, can also become important targets for appeals. Individuals will petition those politicians when they have difficulty accessing benefits locally and they perceive higher-ranking representatives to have the power and willingness to adjudicate their requests successfully.¹⁹ As shown in existing work, individuals do have difficulty accessing the state—and the degree of difficulty may often be correlated with, and possibly caused by, the character of their partisan ties. Individuals who are left out of local patronage networks have an incentive to find alternative sources of assistance for accessing their desired benefits and services.

In this setting, high-level politicians can emerge as potential points of assistance. Where these representatives have effectively allocated to themselves control over significant resources—sometimes through policy design—they may be perceived to exert considerable influence over distribution.²⁰ Politicians may also have either formal or informal control over the behavior of bureaucrats—for example, via power over promotions or transfers—which can give them considerable scope to influence individual citizens' access to services.²¹ If this is the case, then citizens may see these actors as attractive targets for appeals.

¹⁹ In line with Ahuja and Chhibber (2012), it is possible that individuals make appeals as a part of a desire to be heard by their representative in the democratic context. While this motivation may underlie some appeals, it seems insufficient to justify the considerable cost entailed in most appeals to high-level politicians, and appears inconsistent with the material nature of appeals for benefits documented below. Thus, I emphasize here motivations more closely related to the potential success of the appeal.

²⁰ Wilkinson 2007, Gupta 2017. One such policy—constituency development funds—typically allows allocation of resources with minimal conditions for spending (Keefer and Khemani 2009, Baskin and Mezey 2014, Chhibber and Jensenius 2016).

²¹ Wade 1985, de Zwart 1994, Bussell 2012, Iyer and Mani 2012, Brierley 2016.

Yet, what are the incentives of high-level politicians to provide such assistance? Scholars of distributive politics in developing countries have not typically seen providing direct aid to individual constituents as an important distributional tool or electoral resource for state or national legislators. Significant research suggests that such politicians target state goods and services tactically for electoral advantage. They may direct group-oriented goods to particular geographic areas, responding to the interests—and electoral support—of specific factions within their constituencies.²² Alternately, according to many existing accounts, politicians may allocate resources to individuals indirectly, delegating the clientelist targeting of state services to local-level intermediaries.²³ Nonetheless, older work on the activities of state and national legislators across a range of countries shows that assisting individual citizens is a key aspect of these actors' daily activities.²⁴ Similarly, some more recent analyses highlight the key role that direct assistance to citizens plays in the overall repertoire of elected legislators—as I document using new data later in this article.²⁵

I argue that high-level politicians engage in direct, non-contingent assistance to individual citizens in accessing the state and that they do so given the nature of electoral politics and a lack of partisan *observability*. As in many developed countries, constituency service allows politicians to improve their personal reputations and foster a personal vote, or a base of voters who support a politician on the basis of that candidate's individual character and acts, rather than

²² Cox and McCubbins 1986, Lindbeck and Weibull 1987, Dixit and Londregan 1996, Porto and Sanguinetti 2001, Chandra 2004, Chhibber and Nooruddin 2004, Wilkinson 2007, Arulampalam et al. 2009, Keefer and Khemani 2009, Kramon and Posner 2013, and Baskin and Mezey 2014, Ejdemyr et al. 2017, Chhibber and Jensenius 2018.

²³ On clientelism and partisan linkages, see *inter alia* Auyero 2000, Stokes 2005, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Nichter 2008, Stokes et al. 2013, and Weitz-Shapiro 2014. For a capacity argument emphasizing the role of traditional authority, see Baldwin 2013.

²⁴ For a cross-national overview, see Jewell 1970. On India, see Maheshwari 1976, Mohapatra 1976, Chopra 1996, and Jensenius 2017.

²⁵ UNDP and IPU 2012.

an association with a particular political party.²⁶ The potential to build this personal vote may also be more feasible in patronage democracies than it initially seems. The provision of aid to citizens who are often substantially in need of benefits from the state, but have difficulty accessing them, may actually offer higher levels of appreciation among those who receive help than in other contexts. In addition, the response of a high-level politician to an individual's request—whether helpful or unhelpful—is likely to merit discussion in that individual's network. As a result, a politician may anticipate important spillover effects from helping even one person.

In addition, high-level politicians are unlikely to make their assistance contingent on a given individual's partisanship, because there is a lack of observability into citizens' partisan preferences and, most importantly, their political behavior. These officials have very limited information on the partisan behavior of those individuals who approach them for assistance, for two primary reasons. First, "high-level" politicians are explicitly defined here as those elected officers who have constituencies sufficiently large so as to make it unlikely for them to know personally all of their constituents. This makes it more difficult for them to infer preferences on the basis of prior personal interactions.

Second, the chance of citizens approaching a high-level politician with an intermediary who can verify their partisanship—or monitor their electoral behaviors—is relatively low. While some individuals do approach these representatives with the assistance of a personal introduction, the character of local political dynamics makes this less common than might otherwise be assumed. This is because, as previously discussed, individuals who are co-partisans of local actors are more likely to be assisted at the local level, and so will not need to extend their

²⁶ Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987.

requests to a higher-level actor. It is instead those individuals who do not have access to a local intermediary who are the most likely to direct their request upward.²⁷

Thus, high-level politicians frequently have both the power and willingness to help a broad range of individuals who need assistance navigating the state. Simultaneously, they are sufficiently removed from the local level so as to stand outside village networks, and thus have limited ability to detect or enforce particular political behaviors on the part of petitioners, making them especially attractive to individuals who may have been blocked locally on partisan or other political grounds.

In sum, this theoretical discussion suggests that we should more generally observe three key empirical outcomes in patronage democracies such as India's. First, local partisan blocking should result in high-level politicians receiving substantial requests for assistance, including for goods and services typically allocated at the local level. Second, this latter outcome is driven particularly by the requests of individuals who do not share the partisanship of their local politicians, and so make requests upward even for those goods formally distributed locally. Thus, local blocking generates "shopping" for alternative sources of assistance, in particular, from higher-level politicians.

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, the response of high-level politicians to individual petitions should generally not reflect attention to partisan cues. Even if individuals indicate a partisan preference, high-level politicians' inability to verify these claims and subsequently monitor behavior should reduce their inclination to condition their responsiveness on any

²⁷ In related work (Bussell, Forthcoming), I provide empirical evidence that local intermediaries ("fixers") are a small portion of the people making appeals to high-level politicians, particularly relative to individual citizens.

available information on partisanship. These politicians, then, should generally offer non-contingent assistance—that is, constituency service—to individual voters.

The Local Sources of Demand for High-Level Assistance

I test these claims using new and unique data on citizen and politician behavior in India. These data combine surveys of citizens and politicians in three large Indian states—Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh; qualitative data from interviews and close-range shadowing of legislators; and a nationwide field experiment involving state and national-level politicians.

For the surveys, I chose three states in India’s Hindi-speaking belt, with a population approximately equivalent to that of the United States, because they represent the least developed region of India, where government inefficiencies and corruption are rife and clientelism of various forms is documented in public services. They thus may represent a “least likely” case for the novel form of political responsiveness that I document.²⁸ I randomly sampled politician respondents through a nested selection process. At the state and national levels, I attempted to survey all legislators, resulting in a sample of 532 high-level legislators from a population of 862. I also randomly sampled local political units from rural India’s three-tier system of governance—district, block, and village councils (in descending size). Thus, in each state I selected districts; within those districts, blocks; and within those blocks, village council constituencies. The data are therefore nested geographically, allowing for analysis across linked jurisdictions. At the district and block levels, the president of the elected council and one council member were sampled. Village council respondents include the council president and two

²⁸ Chandra 2004.

council members.²⁹ This resulted in a sample of 2,025 lower-level politicians, for a total politician sample of 2,557.

To select citizen respondents, two villages were randomly chosen within each village-level council's domain. Within these villages, eight citizens were randomly selected on the basis of three criteria.³⁰ This resulted in a stratified random sample of 9,296 respondents. Summaries of the samples and respondent demographic statistics are provided in Tables A1 and A2.³¹

The Demand for Assistance

How, then, do political affiliations influence the delivery of benefits at the local level—and do they shape citizens' upward demands for intermediation? Consistent with expectations from the literature on clientelism, my data suggest that partisan affiliations play a considerable role in resource distribution by local brokers. Following recent work on intermediation in India, I operationalize brokers as presidents (*mukhiya/sarpanch/pradhan*) of local village councils (*gram panchayat*).³² I asked citizen respondents about their own partisanship and their perception of their president's partisanship. In a separate section of the questionnaire, I asked a set of questions

²⁹ The protocol stratified the sampling so that at least one of the three respondents be Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe (i.e., members of minority groups included on official state schedules) and one a woman. Village councils within selected blocks were chosen via a regression discontinuity design based on the reservation of council president seats for scheduled castes. This design was employed in a separate study using only the citizen and local council surveys and is not germane to this analysis.

³⁰ Surveyors used (1) interval sampling to select households and (2) the next birthday method to select respondents within households. The sample was also stratified by gender, to achieve a balanced sample of men and women in each village.

³¹ This survey was approved by the University of California, Berkeley Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects under protocol #2013-07-5471.

³² Dunning and Nilekani 2013, Schneider 2016.

about citizens' receipt of benefits from the government, including from the local council and via specific government schemes.³³

I present in Table 1 results of difference-in-means tests evaluating the relationship between shared partisanship—defined as a respondent reporting that they are a “member” of a specific political party—with the local council president and receipt of any benefit from the government, receipt of benefits directly from the local council, and participation in a government jobs program.³⁴ As the results suggest, being a member of the village council president's party is, under most conditions, strongly associated with increased chances that a person will receive public benefits, relative to all other respondents. The relationship between co-partisanship and benefit receipt can be quite substantial. For example, sharing the partisanship of the village council president is associated with an increase of 4 percentage points in the likelihood that a citizen receives benefits from the local council, a 36% increase over the 11% baseline among non-co-partisans. The same is the case for the receipt of work from a rural employment program, MGNREGA. Here, sharing the local president's party is associated with a 33% increase in the likelihood of receiving work, an increase of 5 percentage points over the 15% baseline for non-co-partisans. Thus, while the relative size of the effect may be small when considering all benefits, individuals seeking locally-delivered programs are substantially more likely to access

³³ While related work has demonstrated a relationship between citizens' partisan affiliation with the council president and benefit receipt in several Indian states (Dunning and Nilekani 2013), my analysis here extends the range of examined states, and, critically, allows me to examine connections between partisanship, benefit receipt, and upward appeals to higher-level politicians.

³⁴ What it means to be a “member” of a political party was undefined by the survey questionnaire, and so may have been interpreted differently by different respondents. Respondents were also asked to which party they felt “closest.” A larger portion of respondents replied to this question, implying that there is a more formal connotation to being a member of a party than feeling close to it. I find similar but weaker results using this broader measure.

those programs if they are co-partisans of their local elected officials.³⁵ To be sure, the results presented in Table 1 do not on their own prove the causal effects of partisan ties; with this evidence, for example, it is difficult to determine whether partisan ties are determining access to benefits, or sometimes vice versa. Yet, the evidence does strongly suggest—consistent with my argument and with findings in previous work—that benefit distribution in this context is occurring, at least partially, on partisan lines. Together with other qualitative evidence I present elsewhere, these results suggest that local patronage networks help to shape who does, and who does not, receive state resources.³⁶

Table 1 – Benefit Receipt is Tied to Co-Partisanship with Local Council President				
	Party ID of Local Politician	Not Party ID of Local Politician	Estimated Effect (Difference of Means)	N
Received Any Benefit	.79 (.02)	.76 (.02)	.03⁺ (.02)	9,278
Received Benefit from Local Council	.11 (.01)	.07 (.00)	.04^{***} (.01)	9,280
Accessed a Work Program (MGNREGA)	.20 (.02)	.15 (.00)	.05^{***} (.02)	9,296

Cells report means or differences of means, with standard errors in parentheses. Respondents are all individuals in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh who responded to questions about benefit receipt. Party ID of Local Politician includes those who reported being members of a political party that matched the party they associated with the local council president.

Perhaps more novel and more important for my argument is the claim that the partisan dynamics of access to benefits at the local level, highlighted both in the previous literature and in Table 1, should generate a demand for assistance from high-level politicians, especially from

³⁵ Table A3 provides additional evidence for the predominance of partisan allocation in locally-controlled benefits versus national programs.

³⁶ Bussell, Forthcoming.

those individuals who do not share the partisanship of their local politician. I test this expectation using data from surveys of both citizens and their elected representatives. In all cases, I operationalize high-level politicians in India as elected members of the national and state assemblies (Members of Parliament, or MPs, and Members of the Legislative Assemblies, or MLAs, respectively). In line with my definition of high-level politicians—those who are likely to know only a small proportion of their constituents personally—these are actors who typically have constituencies of at least 300,000 people.

In the citizen survey, respondents were presented with a vignette involving a description of an individual who requires assistance with a public service.³⁷ The respondent was then asked which of a set of people and organizations the hypothetical individual might ask for assistance. Response options were chosen based on those utilized in previous research and the goal of inclusivity; they included politicians and bureaucrats at multiple levels of government, individual, non-state intermediaries (e.g. middlemen), and non-state organizations (e.g. neighborhood associations).³⁸ The respondent was asked about whether the individual would appeal to each actor type, so multiple positive responses were possible. This reflects the feasibility of petitioning multiple actors for assistance with the same request.³⁹ Here, I consider only whether respondents said that an individual would make an appeal to a local and/or high-level politician.

³⁷ Four services were included in the scenarios and randomly assigned to respondents: acquiring a caste certificate, approval for a new building for a business, building a health center in the village, and installing a tube well in the village. I consider variation in responses to different vignettes in related work.

³⁸ The full set of options was: local council president, local council member, state legislator (MLA), department minister, Chief Minister, local council secretary, department bureaucrat, Block Development Officer, District Collector, Middleman (*dalal*), local/new leader, NGO representative, caste association representative, traditional panchayat representative, village association representative, neighborhood association representative, family member, other.

³⁹ Kruks-Wisner 2017.

I chose a perceptions-based strategy—as opposed to one in which I asked respondents about their own claim-making activities—for a number of methodological reasons. First, while many forms of contacting are legal, some may include paying a “fee” for better service (e.g. when approaching an intermediary) or requesting something that is illegal (e.g. receiving a benefit to which one is not entitled), thus increasing the risk of social desirability bias in reporting on one’s own activities. As a result, a perceptions-based question may provide a better account of contacting than a direct measure. Second, using a perceptions measure allows for gauging responses in a symmetric way across a range of potential services and goods with which citizens might require assistance.

Cross tabs highlighting the bivariate relationship between partisanship and appeals to high-level politicians, shown in Table 2, suggest that there is a correlation between shared partisanship, or lack thereof, and perceptions about the character of citizen appeals. Specifically, individuals who are not aligned with their local council president—those reporting a different party preference or no party ID—are approximately 8 percentage points more likely to expect an individual to make an appeal to a high-level politician. Difference in means tests, comparing those individuals who feel closest to the party of the local council president to those who do not, show that these differences between groups are highly statistically significant (Table A4).⁴⁰ Note that while those without a party ID (swing voters) and those preferring a different party might plausibly be expected to behave differently from each other, both groups are left out of local patronage networks and thus require alternatives for assistance. These findings suggest that both groups perceive high-level politicians to be appealing intermediaries, in line with my expectation that the assistance such individuals provide does not discriminate on the basis of partisanship.

⁴⁰ Tests including only those individuals who report being members of a political party produce similar results.

Table 2 –Non-Copartisans of Local Politicians Anticipate More Appeals to High-Level Politicians

Respondent Partisanship	No Party ID	Not Party ID of Local Pol	Party ID of Local Pol	<i>Total</i>
Perception of Appeals				
Would Appeal to High-Level Politician (w/ or w/out Local Pol)	.68 (1,351)	.68 (3,876)	.60 (911)	.66 (6,138)
Would Not Appeal to High-Level Politician	.32 (639)	.32 (1,914)	.40 (605)	.34 (3,158)
<i>Total</i>	.21 (1,990)	.62 (5,790)	.16 (1,516)	1.00 (9,296)

Notes: Respondents answered a question about likely appeals for assistance when in need of a specific government service/benefit. Entries in cells are proportion of respondents expecting an appeal to a high-level politician (top row) or only a local politician (bottom row), with total respondents in each partisanship category in parentheses. Respondents with No Party ID and Not Party ID of Local Pol include both those respondents who did and did not know the party ID of the local council president.

These results provide evidence that those individuals who are non-copartisans of their local council president are more likely to think not only that an individual would need to go beyond the local level in order to acquire a service or benefit, but, specifically, that they would appeal to a high-level politician. In other words, they are more likely to perceive blocking at the local level than co-partisans, and to expect individuals to act on that blocking by appealing to higher levels.

Again, it is difficult to assess whether these results indicate a causal effect of partisan ties. With this type of observational data, it is therefore reasonable to use a multivariate analysis to account for possible confounding characteristics of respondents that may be correlated with both perceptions of politician contacting and with membership in the partisan categories. In Appendix Tables A5 and A6, I present the results for linear probability models regressing expectations about the character of appeals on partisan ties in two models—without covariates

and with a set of theoretically relevant covariates.⁴¹ The results of estimating both models support those presented here. In addition, F-tests of the expanded multivariate OLS model in Table A6 suggest that the addition of covariates measuring respondent income, caste group, and gender all improve the model fit. That finding helps to validate the perceptions-based approach on which this analysis relies: if respondents do not project themselves onto the individual in the scenario, then we should not expect individual covariates of respondents—including partisanship—to predict responses to questions about what the hypothetical individual would do. Nor would we expect to find the effects of co-partisanship described above. In sum, the data suggest that citizens’ local partisan affiliations do influence the likelihood of making upward appeals to high-level politicians.

Types of Requests to Politicians

Given this evidence that high-level politician are being petitioned for assistance, do they receive requests for the same types of goods and services that are requested of local intermediaries? To test the implication of my argument that the denial of access to a particular good at the local level results in a request for assistance with that same good from a higher-level intermediary, I asked politicians at low and high levels about the types of goods and services for which they receive requests. When politicians were asked specifically what the most common thing is that citizens request when they visit, representatives largely responded with accounts of petitions for interventions related to government policies or programs. Respondents were provided with an initial set of response categories and also given the opportunity to reply in an open-ended format. I then coded these responses as pertaining to 1) Individual-oriented public

⁴¹ Results are consistent using a logistic regression; in Appendix Tables A5 and A6, I use OLS to simplify the interpretation of the coefficients.

programs (“schemes” in India)—e.g. subsidized food, 2) Group-oriented programs—e.g. a road, or 3) Non-policy assistance—e.g. dealing with the police. In addition, some politicians, rather than mentioning one “most common” request, reported they generally receive requests for assistance with “all schemes.” Because “schemes” in India are typically understood as public programs that benefit individuals, I code these responses as requests for assistance with individual benefits.

As Table 3 shows, most requests have to do with assistance for specific government policies or for non-policy assistance related to dealing with various government departments or actors, such as the police. Importantly, the results highlight the significance of requests for assistance with individual welfare benefits in the form of government schemes. For example, among national and state politicians, the plurality of requests is for help with access to individual benefits (in bold), including “all schemes.” For instance, requestors frequently require access to subsidized basic commodities (ration cards) or documentation for welfare schemes (caste certificates). A somewhat smaller proportion of requests are for various group benefits.

Table 3 – Citizens Request Assistance with Individual-Level Benefits from High-level Politicians (Most common request made by citizens, as reported by politicians)

Type of Politician:		National and State	District and Block	Village
Type of Assistance:				
“All schemes” (individual)		33.6	10.7	1.0
Specific individual schemes	Ration card	2.8	18.0	34.2
	Caste certificate	0.9	6.7	5.5
	Job schemes	0.6	2.1	3.1
	Other or multiple	4.1	15.2	3.0
Group programs		29.3	23.8	31.6
Non-policy assistance	Employment referral	9.0	6.7	10.2
	Police cases	12.8	7.3	6.9
	Land affairs	6.4	5.5	1.2
	Education Dept.	0.5	4.0	3.3
<i>TOTAL</i>		<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Cells are percentages of politicians at each level who noted a particular type of assistance as the “most common” request made by individual citizens. Open-ended responses to the “Other schemes” option included both specific schemes, e.g. pensions, and combinations of schemes, e.g. ration cards and pensions. Responses including *only* individual level schemes are coded as an individual scheme response (in bold).

Strikingly, these types of benefits are the same as those typically associated with locally-mediated distribution. Overall, the percentage of requests to high-level politicians for individual-level programs, 42%, is lower than but comparable to those for village level politicians, 47%. These data therefore suggest that high-level politicians are seen as an important source of assistance for obtaining targeted individual benefits.

The Provision of Constituency Service

The evidence to this point documents citizens’ demand for assistance from high-level politicians with the same sorts of benefits thought to be facilitated by local intermediaries; and it suggests that partisan targeting at the local level helps to generate that demand from those left out of local

patronage networks. Yet, how do politicians respond to these demands—and is their response indeed non-contingent constituency service?

My quantitative evidence from representative surveys, and my qualitative evidence from interviews and in-depth shadowing of politicians, both suggest that responding to citizen petitions constitutes a heavy burden on politicians, in terms of time and effort. First, evidence from the large-scale surveys described in the previous section highlights the predominance of citizen interactions in politicians' daily lives. I asked politician respondents how many hours per week they spend on different activities, including policy work, office work, and meeting with a range of different actors, including citizens, bureaucrats, other politicians, and representatives of private organizations. I then divided responses from each politician by the total number of hours reported across all types of activities by that respondent. In Table 4, I present the proportion of time spent on each type of activity based on averages across all politicians at a given level of office.⁴²

⁴² This strategy assumes that even where politicians overestimate the total hours worked, they report relative allocations of time with reasonable accuracy.

Table 4 – Politicians Spend 1/5 to 1/3 of Their Time Attending to Citizens

Position of Politician	National and State	District and Block	District Council	Block Council	Village Council
Type of Activity					
Meeting citizens	.22	.22	.27	.31	.35
Meeting bureaucrats	.05	.04	.08	.12	.12
Meeting politicians	.24	.23	.15	.10	.04
Meeting private sector	.10	.10	.12	.08	.02
Meeting NGOs	.04	.02	.05	.03	.01
Meeting others	.16	.18	.10	.14	.09
Policy work/Office work	.18	.19	.22	.22	.37
N of Politicians	84	446	78	249	1,605

Table reports proportion of time spent on each activity, across types of politicians. Respondents were asked how many hours a week they meet with each type of visitor. I divided responses from each politician by the total number of hours reported across all types of visitors by that respondent and averaged these measures across all politicians of a given office to calculate the proportions shown here. When asked to specify the allocation of time to “other,” the most common response was time with friends and family. Respondents are politicians from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

As the findings in Table 4 suggest, citizens make up an important component of politicians’ overall allocation of time, representing between a fifth and a third of a representative’s schedule, on average. Strikingly, the time high-level politicians allocate to meeting their constituents approaches that of local politicians, who might be expected to have smaller burdens in terms of policy work and legislation. For national parliament and state assembly members, only meeting with other politicians rivals the time they spend meeting citizens—with face-to-face meetings with bureaucrats and representatives of the private sector or NGOs lagging far behind.

Substantial insight into the nature of these interactions comes from qualitative observations of politicians in their constituencies, gathered through sustained shadowing of elected representatives over multiple days. Eighteen state legislators in five Indian states were

observed, in most cases for one week.⁴³ These field studies shed light on the routine, daily activities of high-level legislators and, in particular, the nature of their interactions with individual citizens, during the large portion of their terms when they are not in the legislature.⁴⁴ I provide here an excerpt of the prose version of field notes from shadowing of one state legislator, to highlight the ways in which such observations inform my argument about the demand for, and supply of, constituency service.

Prem Kumar, a legislator from a rural constituency in Bihar, is meeting visitors outside his home by 9:30 AM.⁴⁵ One person brings a letter signed by 144 people telling the legislator that there is no school in his village and this is causing problems for local families. Kumar tells the man that he is committed to getting a school put in place soon (9:35 AM). Next, four people arrive and complain about the lack of drinking water in their village due to non-functioning handpumps. Kumar calls the village council president and asks about the availability of handpumps, saying that the president should contact the local administrative officer. He then tells the men that he will get the existing handpumps fixed and two new pumps installed within 10 days (9:40 AM). Two new individuals arrive and tell Kumar that their names have been removed from the below poverty line list, making it difficult for them to acquire welfare benefits. He notes down their names and contact information before promising that he will have their names relisted shortly (9:45 AM). Two groups of individuals subsequently arrive, each wanting to invite the politician to events in their villages. In each case the legislator promises to participate in the events (9:55 AM). Kumar subsequently receives a phone call from an

⁴³ Additional methodological details on the shadowing technique are provided in Bussell, Forthcoming.

⁴⁴ As Jensenius and Suryanarayan (2015) show, Indian state legislators are typically in session for only a small portion of the five years typical of a politician's term.

⁴⁵ Shadowing subject M

individual whose family is being accused of killing their daughter-in-law and is having trouble with the police. The MLA promises he will do his best to help (10:10 AM). When he gets off the phone, Kumar talks with an older couple who tell him that the wife is not receiving her pension. He tells them that he will speak with the local president and work out the formalities to start the pension (10:15 AM). Over the remainder of the morning, Kumar continues to meet with petitioners who make requests for assistance with constructing local roads, mediating disagreements between groups, and providing financial support for a religious pilgrimage.

This vignette highlights multiple dynamics that I found to be common across observations of high-level legislators and that corroborate my argument in important ways. First, these legislators spend a substantial portion of their day responding to requests from individual citizens. These petitions are for a wide range of benefits and services.

Second, the provision of assistance to individuals in India is not ad hoc: legislators design their meetings with citizens to allow them to respond effectively to a large volume of demands. Like politicians in other contexts who hold “surgeries” to make themselves available to constituents, politicians in this setting tend to hold daily open hours at their homes or offices.⁴⁶

Third, the interactions between politicians and their constituents do not typically evoke strong elements of hierarchy, and instead are often characterized by apparent mutual respect between the two parties. While individuals will nearly always approach elected officials with deference, this need not indicate servility or submissiveness. Instead, individuals tend to interact with politicians as peers, and are quite blunt in their requests and expectations; they have the general expectation that representatives are there to help constituents and expect that their own representative will do her best to provide assistance in their time of need.

⁴⁶ Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987.

Fourth, in line with the evidence in Table 3, a substantial portion of individual-oriented requests from citizens are for rather routine claims for individual benefits, which the petitioners could nonetheless not obtain successfully on their own. Across all of the politicians we observed, these requests for assistance with basic services and benefits to which citizens were often *de jure* entitled—such as pensions, employment programs, compensation for the injured or disabled, voting cards, arms licenses, school admission, proof of residency, public loans, and bank accounts—could in many cases be resolved with a phone call or letter from the legislator.

Fifth, resolving an individual's request often involved contacting a *local* politician, most commonly the village council president. This provides additional evidence that these local actors have the potential to resolve these cases but that they had not, for some reason, done so for the individual(s) in question. Yet, legislators expected that, with their prodding, the local actor would now resolve the problem to the citizens' advantage, suggesting important power dynamics in favor of the higher-level official which could offset partisan (or other) preferences at the local level.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, qualitative observations offer little to no indication of partisanship or other conditionalities in the provision of this assistance. Instead, this evidence suggests at least a stated adherence to an ethic of public service. In most cases, legislators had only limited information about an individual, and not necessarily even their home village, when making a decision about how to help. Even if the representative did know the village in which a petitioner resided, he or she typically did not make any additional efforts to determine whether or not the individual was a co-partisan. To be sure, assessing the extent to which personal assistance to citizens is contingent on petitioners' partisanship or other attributes—or instead is non-contingent constituency service—is subtle, and these observations

alone cannot establish this. What they do offer is substantial evidence that high-level politicians are engaging in the kinds of direct assistance to individual citizens that are unanticipated in current theories of distributive politics and that could, potentially, be non-contingent in nature. I now turn to experimental evidence to evaluate further the effect of co-partisanship on politicians' responsiveness to individual requests.

The non-contingency of assistance

A core implication of my argument is that high-level politicians should respond to requests from individuals in a largely non-partisan and non-contingent manner. This does not imply that their motivations are non-electoral—indeed, I expect they are often acting to maintain or improve their standing in the constituency—but that in the actual provision of assistance, they do not condition their actions on the perceived electoral behavior of the petitioner.

I test these claims using new experimental data on politicians in India. Though shadowing offers substantial insights, assessing aspects of politician behavior from such observations is challenging, as situations in which individuals have knowledge of being observed may result in Hawthorne effects, such that they do not act in a manner akin to their normal behavior. Business studies often deal with this risk by utilizing a “secret shopper” strategy and, increasingly, work in the social sciences is adopting similar techniques. Research analyzing the behavior of politicians has recently utilized a related experimental audit approach to address these challenges.⁴⁷

In response to these limitations, I conducted what is the first experimental audit with a near-census of high-level politicians in India, to evaluate responses to petitions from citizens.

⁴⁷ Butler and Broockman 2011, Dropp and Peskowitz 2012, McClendon Forthcoming, Gaikwad and Nellis 2016. Related studies have also been conducted on bureaucrats in the United States (White et al. 2015) and China (Distelhorst and Hou 2015). See also Bussell 2012.

Thus, I test whether state- and national-level politicians in India respond to requests for assistance sent to them by individuals via text message or the mobile messaging service WhatsApp. In doing so, I vary the content of the messages in a random manner, so as to evaluate the effects of partisan and personal vote treatments on politician responsiveness.

Text messages and WhatsApp are now common forms of communication between politicians and their constituents in India. While in-person visits are a frequent mode of interaction, phone-based contacts are also quite common. In a related survey, I asked politicians how many times in a typical week individual citizens come to their home or office, call them on the telephone, contact them on WhatsApp, send them a text message, send them an email, or contact them on a social media platform. In a given week, state and national-level politicians report, on average, receiving 342 phone calls, 328 WhatsApp messages, and 146 text messages from citizens, compared with 366 visits from citizens at their home or office.⁴⁸

At least two structural and institutional factors in India facilitate phone-based access to politicians. First, the penetration of mobile phones is remarkably high for a developing country, at 91%.⁴⁹ Second, it is generally not difficult to get the phone number of an elected official. Many state governments post the contact information for their legislators online, and candidates for elected office are required to submit an affidavit prior to the election with their contact information including, since 2013, their mobile phone number. The non-profit organization Association for Democratic Reforms digitizes this data and makes it available at

⁴⁸ Bussell, Forthcoming.

⁴⁹ Actual penetration varies across urban and rural areas. Mobile connections per 100 people (teledensity) were estimated at 168 in urban areas and 57 in rural areas in December 2017 (Reuters 2018). Given that a single household may share use of one phone, this suggests substantially high rates of access even in rural areas.

www.myneta.org. I was able to access this information to facilitate this audit, and individual citizens may also reasonably be able to obtain their representative's contact information.

In the study, subjects were sent messages from fictitious constituents who requested assistance with acquiring a basic form of local infrastructure—a street lamp—or an identity document—a ration card.⁵⁰ Over the course of two weeks, each politician received six messages. Message receipt timing was randomized across the study period, with the following constraints: subjects received a maximum of one message per day and no more than two messages two days in a row. I allowed fifteen days after each message for collection of responses. Rollout of the experiment was staggered across Indian states to allow for the same team at my partner survey organization to implement the protocol, boosting quality control.⁵¹ This survey firm used state-specific mobile phone numbers to contact politicians.⁵² The eligible study population was all incumbent members of the legislative assemblies and national parliament in India. The sample size was 4,156, which is the set of state and national legislators from the total population of 4,591 for whom I was able to collect mobile phone numbers.

For those politicians who use WhatsApp, I chose randomly whether to send each message as a text message or a WhatsApp message, with approximately 50% of messages using each mode.⁵³ This reduced the chances that politicians perceived that there was a study taking place and also took advantage of the differing technologies available for contacting subjects. In

⁵⁰ The analysis was pre-registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) under registration ID 20160926AA.

⁵¹ The audit was implemented by CVoter, a survey and polling organization.

⁵² Thus, the survey firm used SIM cards specific to each state or telecommunications circle in which a state sits.

⁵³ When a user downloads and opens the WhatsApp application, all of the individuals in the phone's contact list who have a WhatsApp account are shown in the application. In order to identify those politicians who use WhatsApp, we put all of the collected contact numbers into the phone contact lists of the phones that would be used to send messages. Once WhatsApp users were identified, we then incorporated that information into the randomization protocol.

practice, there was no statistically significant difference in the response rates for messages sent via text message versus those sent from WhatsApp. For those politicians who were not active on WhatsApp, all six messages were sent via text message.⁵⁴

The content of the messages sent to politicians was randomized along four primary dimensions: name of the petitioner, information on electoral preferences, past requests for assistance at the local level, and type of good requested. I did not randomize gender and used only male names in requests. The full experimental design is provided in Table A7; each politician in a state had the same probability of assignment to each treatment condition.

Here, I consider the effects of the electoral treatments, in which the message sent to politicians either provided no information on past electoral behavior; stated that the person voted for the politician in the last election; stated that the person supports the politician's party; or combined the latter two treatments. The goal of these treatments is to measure whether having a partisan cue affects the likelihood or character of response. In the analyses described below, as pre-specified, I evaluate the effects of the pooled electoral treatments relative to the control condition while also pooling across the additional treatments shown in Table A7.⁵⁵ I take into account the full design in calculating the statistical significance of estimated effects, for example, adjusting for multiple statistical comparisons. In related work, I discuss observed differences across the individual electoral treatments, which provide additional tests of my overall argument.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ An audit of 3% of the collected phone numbers prior to the study showed that 44% of numbers were active and associated with the subject politician, 8% were incorrect, and 48% could not be verified either way.

⁵⁵ The names of petitioners were randomized at the state level. I examine hypotheses related to the naming treatment and other primary treatments in related work.

⁵⁶ Bussell, Forthcoming.

The full set of messages corresponding to each treatment condition, along with the list of states and languages used, is provided in Table A8. The messages were translated into eleven (11) national and local Indian languages and sent in the most commonly used major language in a given state. In smaller states where none of the eleven major languages are used but where English is used, the message was sent in English. This latter strategy was necessary for only a small number of cases, mainly the lowest population states in India's Northeast region. A representative example of a message is:

Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you. I am writing because I would like help getting a ration card. I contacted my local leader but he is not my party and he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?

The basic content of the message was determined based on related fieldwork and previous experimental work of a similar nature in India.⁵⁷ The intention was to make the message as short as possible, akin to what is typical of text messaging, while still allowing for sufficient information to implement the treatments. The translations also allowed for informal word and abbreviation usage, so as to mimic standard language use in the text message format.

This audit experiment—along with all of the human subjects-related aspects of this article—was approved by my institutional review board.⁵⁸ In this case, it is worth discussing potential ethical concerns with deception used in the design. As with all behavioral studies, if the subjects know that they are being evaluated, they may act in ways unlike how they might

⁵⁷ Gaikwad and Nellis 2015.

⁵⁸ This experimental audit was approved by the University of California, Berkeley Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects under protocol #2016-02-8365.

otherwise behave. It is possible to avoid these Hawthorne effects in an audit study through the use of deception.⁵⁹

In many cases, subjects of a study involving deception are informed at its completion. Here, I chose not to debrief participants, as this had potentially harmful implications for political responsiveness. As noted above, politicians receive large volumes of requests from citizens, both in person and via text message. Responses to these requests are an important element of political representation. However, if politicians knew that some small portion of these requests were due to a research study, they might become slightly less likely to respond. This would be a detrimental outcome for the broader population. Thus, given the likely small cost to politicians of being included in the study—involving six additional messages over a two-week period, which may not add appreciably to their burden given the volume of texts and WhatsApp messages many already receive—but the potentially larger cost to the broader population of informing politicians that they were included in a study, as well as associated threats to the potential for related forms of research, I did not include a debriefing element in the research design.

Evaluating Politician Responsiveness

My primary response measure is whether a politician replied to a message in any way, including a phone call, text message, or message via WhatsApp. In general, responsiveness to these messages is substantial. I find that, on average, politicians respond to 11.3% of citizen requests, while 31.5% of politicians responded to at least one message. These response rates are

⁵⁹ On elected officials see, *inter alia*, Butler & Broockman 2011, Gaikwad & Nellis 2016, McClendon 2016.

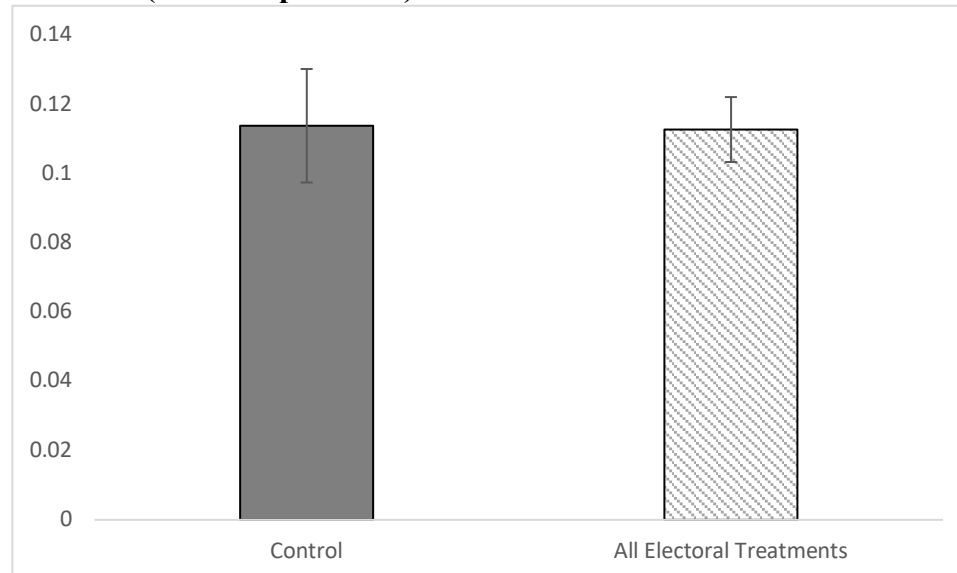
akin to those observed in similar studies.⁶⁰ I analyze data from the experimental audit using difference-of-means tests, focusing on intention-to-treat analyses.

Are politicians more likely to respond when provided information on past electoral behavior and political party preferences of a petitioner? If this assistance is largely constituency service, its supply should not reflect the electoral characteristics of requestors in a significant way. Even if politicians observe indicators of a person's partisanship that is different from their own, they may still assume that providing this individual with assistance has potential electoral benefits, in terms of generating a positive reputation in the constituency.

In Figure 1, I report the mean response rates for politicians who received the control message—which gave no information on partisanship or past support for the politician—and for all those who received one of the electoral treatments. The findings in Figure 1 show that in this large experiment, there is no statistically significant difference in response rates to messages with electoral treatments compared to the control. The results of difference-in-means tests comparing these response rates, as well as disaggregated tests, in which each electoral treatment is compared to the control, are consistent with this finding (Figure A1 and Table A9). Thus, we see a general trend toward constituency service, with no preference offered toward any petitioners on the basis of electoral information.

⁶⁰ E.g., Gaikwad and Nellis 2016 or McClendon, 2016.

Figure 1 – Politician Responsiveness is Not Conditioned by Information on Electoral Behavior (Audit Experiment)



The figure reports mean response rates and 95% confidence intervals for the control condition of no information on partisan behavior (gray bar) and the consolidated partisanship treatment conditions (patterned bar). The dependent variable is whether the politician replied to the experimental message. The total sample sizes are: 5,773 for the control condition and 17,478 for the electoral treatments.

Note that this null estimated effect is also not likely to be due to issues of statistical power. As designed and implemented, I should have at least 80% power to detect an effect size of a 1% difference in response rate. Thus, the experiment is quite adequately powered even against very small effects. In addition, the difference in response rates measured here is of little substantive relevance. If the average effect for the electoral treatments were statistically significant, it would represent an absolute increase in response rate of 0.1%, or only 0.9% over the baseline response rate in the control condition of 11.4% (.001/.114). The evidence presented in Figure 1 and in the accompanying Table A9 thus suggests an overall null effect of electoral characteristics on politicians' responsiveness. In the Appendix, I provide additional evidence that the electoral treatment also has no discernable effect on the quality of responsiveness, as measured in this experiment (Figures A1 and A2, and the accompanying discussion).

As a robustness check, I conduct all of these same analyses using only the response to the first message a politician received. There are no substantive differences in the comparisons across treatment and control groups when only the first message sent is considered. In addition, I conduct the same tests only for those politicians in the three states included in the surveys analyzed above, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh. The findings in these states are consistent with those for the country as a whole.

Overall, this large, well-powered experiment offers little support for the claim that responsiveness is contingent on the electoral behavior that petitioners signal to politicians. Instead, the evidence suggests that high-level politicians respond quite robustly to citizen requests for help, regardless of the partisanship of their constituents. This implies that these politicians are willing to provide assistance to all citizens in their electoral district, regardless of partisanship.⁶¹ Thus, I find a baseline level of constituency service that is both substantial and quite surprising from the perspective of previous research on patronage democracies.

Discussion and Conclusion

Constituency service has long been recognized as an important element of representation across many democracies. And yet, it is those democracies where we might expect to see the least need for assistance from politicians—those with established and functional bureaucracies and a relatively minor role for discretion and partisan targeting in the provision of public services—that have received the bulk of academic attention on this topic. While important work on those contexts shows that growth in constituency service paralleled growth in the size of the welfare state, such as in the American case, this simply reinforces the expectation that it is those places

⁶¹ In related work, I consider politician- and state-level characteristics that help to explain variation in responsiveness (Bussell, Forthcoming).

where the state is a significant provider of benefits where we should observe this form of intermediation.⁶² Thus, it is puzzling that little attention has been given to the potential for constituency service in the large number of patronage democracies.

In this paper, I have shown that constituency service from high-level politicians is an important, but under addressed, component of distributive politics in India's patronage state. Partisan politics characterizes the delivery of state benefits at the local level, leaving a substantial portion of the population without local intermediation to help in accessing the state. However, state and national politicians assist citizens in acquiring the same benefits and do so in a largely non-partisan way. This suggests an important, albeit informal, pathway for citizens to access the state and one that is not marked by the same "perverse accountability" associated with clientelism.⁶³

This discussion also raises a number of theoretical and normative questions. If politicians have incentives to provide constituency service in some cases, when will they favor more partisan allocation? In related work, I provide a theoretical logic for, and empirical tests of, the conditions under which high-level politicians will emphasize partisanship in distributive politics—such as through clientelism—versus when they will rely on non-contingent constituency service.⁶⁴ I show empirically that given the ability to allocate club goods to particular geographic areas—for example, through expenditures from constituency development funds—the same politicians who engage in constituency service often also rely on partisan targeting. Yet, constituency service provides a crucial complement to this electoral strategy, for example, by allowing them to reach potential supporters who do not reside in incumbents'

⁶² Fiorina 1977, Norris 1997.

⁶³ Stokes 2008.

⁶⁴ Bussell, Forthcoming.

political strongholds. In short, this argument highlights the limitations of partisan allocation strategies and outlines the relative benefits to politicians of constituency service for certain segments of the population and types of goods and services.

Normatively, what are the implications of these dynamics for our understanding of the links between distributive politics and democratic representation in patronage democracies? From one perspective, the form of responsiveness I document is fundamentally more in line with normative ideals of accountability and representation than behaviors typically associated with high-level politicians in these settings. The politicians I study in this article offer individual petitioners, in general, a form of assistance that is quite different from the biased intermediation they may encounter locally. These representatives do not appear substantially to discriminate on the basis of partisan ties, even when provided information on co-partisanship in the context of a request. This provides us with a fundamentally different view of these politicians than is common in the literature—that of highly partisan actors focused only on opportunities to distribute benefits to political supporters.

At the same time, the form of accountability to which constituency service contributes is limited on several dimensions. While substantial in value, constituency service cannot address the concerns of all individuals and groups: high-level politicians can only respond to the requests that are posed to them, and some types of citizens (for instance, those with more education or from higher-status groups) are more likely to make petitions than others.⁶⁵ High-level politicians can also only use the influence and power that is at their disposal, and they may be limited in their ability to facilitate certain kinds of assistance. Critically, while politicians may not directly condition assistance on the political affiliations behaviors of petitioners, I have shown that the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

requests to which high-level legislators respond are shaped by partisan behaviors in other realms, especially at the local level.

Perhaps most importantly, and as I explore empirically in related work, politicians' electoral ambitions do incentivize them to respond to citizens' petitions.⁶⁶ Thus, mediation can be an important electoral resource, and politicians may therefore have an incentive to ensure that at least some state processes can, and need to, be mediated, so as to retain their personal value to their constituents.⁶⁷ In this way, the underlying factors that generate demands for assistance—inefficient and discretionary allocation of resources—can also discourage a complete and thorough bureaucratization of the state. I therefore suggest that the dynamics of demand and supply I document comprise a form of “constrained accountability” that is more representative—and not perverse, in Stokes' sense—than existing accounts would suggest. Yet, it still does not hold politicians fully accountable for the performance of the state.

If this is the case, then the theoretical and empirical observations offered here suggest there may be merit to rethinking not only the presence of constituency service in patronage democracies, but also the fundamental nature and normative import of constituency service in western democracies. Constituency service emerges in those spaces where publicly stated rules and criteria do not bind distribution.⁶⁸ Constituency service is well-entrenched in our conceptions of democratic practice in the most “developed” democracies, yet its sources in such discretionary forms of distributive politics are critical to bear in mind. The forces of demand and supply that sustain constituency service's practice as a particular form of individual representation may also limit the degree to which it creates broader opportunities for political accountability.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See also Berenschot 2010.

⁶⁸ Thus, constituency service is a form of non-programmatic distributive politics; see Bussell, Forthcoming, Chapter One.

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Online Appendix

Table A1. Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh Politician Survey Sample Demographic Statistics								
Politician Type	Sample Size (n)	Age	Percent Male	Education Level*	Monthly Income ('000 rupees)*	Percent Hindu	Percent Forward Caste	Percent Other Backward Class
Village Council Member/President	1,716	N/A	54.5	Class 8 (8.2)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Block Council Member/President	250	39.8	50.0	Class 9 (9.5)	6-7	92.8	23.6	57.7
District Council Member/President	78	40.8	46.2	Intermediate (11.0)	9-10	87.2	19.2	54.0
Member of Legislative Assembly	448	47.6	87.7	Intermediate (12.0)	10+	88.2	40.4	41.3
Member of Parliament	85	54.2	85.9	Intermediate (12.2)	10+	84.7	45.9	28.2
Politician AVERAGE*	861	46.0	81.4	Intermediate (11.3)	9-10	87.8	39.7	41.9

*The Politician Average excludes Gram Panchayat members and Presidents. For education, the average number of years in school is shown in parentheses. N/A = Not available.

Table A2 – Citizen Samples – Demographic Statistics								
State(s)	Sample Size (n)	Age	Percent Male	Education Level*	Monthly Income ('000 rupees)	Percent Hindu	Percent Forward Caste	Percent Other Backward Class
Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh	9296	38.8	50.3	Class 7 (7.0)	2-3	88.0	19.8	52.0
Karnataka	1064	37.3	77.5	Class 9 (8.6)	3-4	91.5	5.7	82.0

*For education, the average number of years in school is shown in parentheses.

Table A3 – Relationship between Shared Party Membership with Local Council President and Benefit Receipt Differs Across States and Benefits – All Respondents

	Not Party ID of Local Politician	Party ID of Local Politician	Estimated Effect (Difference of Means)	N
Any Benefit	.76 (.00)	.79 (.02)	-.03⁺ (.02)	9,278
Benefit from Local Council	.07 (.00)	.11 (.01)	-.04^{***} (.01)	9,280
Subsidized Consumables (PDS)	.91 (.00)	.92 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	7,083
Housing (IAY)	.12 (.00)	.10 (.01)	.02 (.02)	7,081
Self-Help Groups (SGSY (ICDS)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	7,078
Low Price Grains (AY)	.10 (.00)	.10 (.01)	-.00 (.02)	7,080
Pre/Post Natal Care (JSY)	.20 (.00)	.21 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	7,077
Work Program (MGNREGA)	.09 (.00)	.12 (.02)	-.03[*] (.01)	7,078
Old Age Pension	.15 (.00)	.20 (.02)	-.05^{***} (.02)	9,296
State Pension	.04 (.00)	.03 (.01)	.01 (.01)	7,081
	.09 (.00)	.08 (.01)	.01 (.01)	7,081

Cells report means or differences of means, with standard errors in parentheses. Respondents are individuals in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh who responded to questions about benefit receipt. Party ID of Local Politician=1 for those respondents who reported being members of a political party that matched the party they associated with the local council president.

Table A4 – Non-Copartisans of Local Council President are More Likely to Expect Appeals to High-Level Politicians (Bihar, Jharkhand & Uttar Pradesh)

	Not Party ID of Local Politician	Party ID of Local Politician	Estimated Effect (Difference of Means)	N
Individual would Appeal to High-Level Politician	.67 (.00)	.60 (.01)	.07*** (.01)	9,296

Cells report means or differences of means, with standard errors in parentheses. Respondents are all individuals in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh who responded to questions about appeals for assistance. Party ID of Local Politician includes those reported feeling closest to a political party that matched the party they associated with the local council president.

Table A5 – Local Partisan Ties are Strongly Associated with Appeals to High-level Politicians (Multivariate Analysis)

		Model	
		(1)	(2)
Explanatory Variables:			
Partisanship	No Party ID	.08*** (4.84)	.09*** (5.40)
	Not Party ID of Local Politician	.07*** (5.02)	.07*** (5.10)
Income			.004+ (.002)
Gender	Male		.02* (2.19)
Caste Category	Scheduled Caste		-.02 (-1.50)
	Scheduled Tribe		-.06** (-2.74)
	Other Backward Caste		-.01 (-.91)
Constant		.60	.59
N		9,296	9,271

Ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with t-ratios in parentheses. Citizen responses. The dependent variable is the probability that a High-level Politician will receive a request. For the explanatory variables, the excluded partisanship category is “Shares Party ID with Local Politician,” the excluded Gender is Female, and the excluded Caste Category is Forward Castes. + = p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, and *** = p<.001.

Table A6 – Partisan Ties Affect Perceptions of Appeals to High-level Politicians, with covariates – Ordinary Least Squares Full Model (Bihar, Jharkhand & Uttar Pradesh)

Variables		
Partisan Relationships	No Party ID	.08*** (5.41)
	Not Party ID of Local Politician	.07*** (5.81)
Requested Service	Building Approval	.36*** (28.36)
	Health Center	.46*** (35.71)
	Tube Well	.35*** (27.27)
Monthly Income (Rupees)	0-1,000	.03 (1.09)
	1,001-2,000	.01 (.34)
	2,001-3,000	.09** (3.36)
	3,001-4,000	.11*** (3.90)
	4,001-5,000	.07* (2.47)
	5,001-6,000	.06+ (1.84)
	6,001-7,000	-.10 (.39)
	7,001-8,000	.18** (3.27)
	8,001-9,000	.06 (.88)
	9,001-10,000	.08+ (1.78)
Gender	Male	.02* (2.52)
Caste Category	Scheduled Caste	-.03+ (1.84)
	Scheduled Tribe	-.05* (2.08)
	Other Backward Caste	-.01 (.56)
State	Bihar	-.03* (2.20)
	Uttar Pradesh	.04** (2.92)
Constant		.24
Adjusted R-squared	.15	
N	9,271	

* Ordinary least squares model with coefficients listed and t-ratios in parentheses. Citizen responses only. The excluded party affiliation category is “Party ID of Local Politician,” the excluded service type is caste certificate, the excluded income category is “more than 11,000 Rupees per month,” the excluded caste category is forward castes, and the excluded state is Uttar Pradesh.

Table A7 – Factorial Design of Field Experiment: Treatments with Allocation of Subjects and Messages (Total observations)

Electoral Behavior (1)	Local Appeals (2)	Type of Request (3)
a. No individual electoral information (5,859)	a. No local appeal information (8,384)	a. Ration card (11,922)
b. Voted for politician in last election (5,857)	b. Appealed to local politician, but he didn't help (7,517)	b. Street lamp (11,694)
c. Shares party with politician (6,117)	c. Appealed to local politician, who is not petitioner's party, but he didn't help (7,715)	
d. Shares party and voted for politician (5,783)		

Total Observations (sum in each column): 23,616

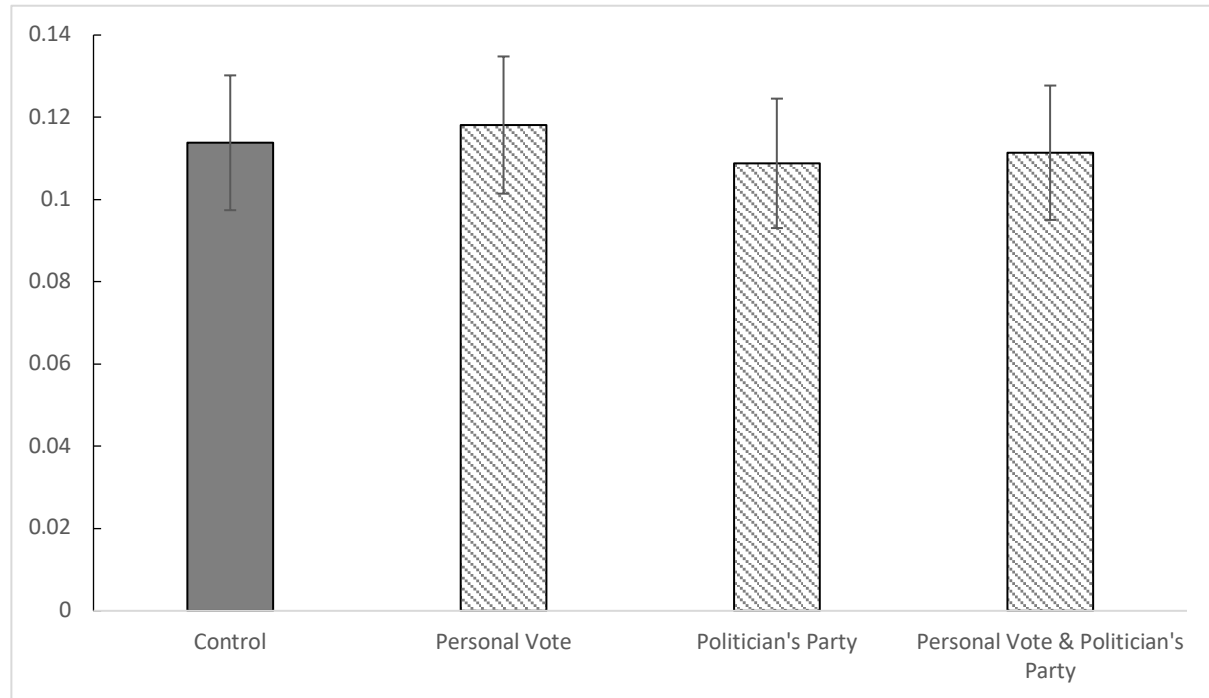
The table lists the treatment conditions and the numbers of messages in each condition in my audit experiment, per my pre-registered protocol. Each individual politician (N=4,156 or 3,936 after wrong numbers dropped from data) received a total of six text or WhatsApp messages in the experiment, resulting in a total of 23,616 messages. Within subjects, assignment to treatment condition was randomized, so politicians could receive up to six different combinations of treatments, with no restrictions on the randomization.

Table A8 – Experimental Treatments

Message Number	Treatment Number	Message
1	1a/2a/3a or 3b (Control)	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
2	1a/2b/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
3	1a/2c/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he is not my party and he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
4	1b/2a/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
5	1b/2b/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
6	1b/2c/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he is not my party and he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
7	1c/2a/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
8	1c/2b/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
9	1c/2c/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he is not my party and he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
10	1d/2a/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you and am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
11	1d/2b/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you in the last election and am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?
12	1d/2c/3a or 3b	Hello, I am [name] in your constituency and I voted for you in the last election and am a supporter of XYZ party. I am writing because I would like help [getting a ration card/installing a street lamp]. I contacted my local leader but he is not my party and he didn't help. I tried to call and come to see you, but you were busy. Are you in the constituency now? Please could you text back and help me or give me a number of who to contact?

Here, party XYZ is the party of the politician to whom the message is addressed.

Figure A1 – Information on Electoral Behavior Does Not Affect Politician Responsiveness



The figure reports mean response rates and 95% confidence intervals for the control condition of no information on partisan behavior (gray bar) and each of the three main partisanship treatment conditions (patterned bars). The dependent variable is whether the politician replied to the experimental message. The total sample sizes are: 11,530 for the Personal Vote comparison, 11,793 for the Politician’s Party treatment, and 11,474 for the Personal Vote and Politician’s Party treatment.

Table A9 – Politician Responses are Not Strongly Conditioned by Information on Electoral Behavior

	Electoral Treatments	Control	Estimated Effect (Difference of Means)	N
Overall Response	.11 (.00)	.11 (.00)	.00 (.00)	23,251
Substantive Response	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.00 (.00)	23,251
Request to Call or Meet	.02 (.00)	.02 (.00)	.00 (.00)	23,251

The first column shows average response rate for the consolidated “partisanship” treatments: whether the petitioner voted for the politician, shares the politician’s party, or both. The second column gives average response in the control condition where no partisan information was given. The third column shows the estimated effect of information on partisanship, while the final column gives the N for the comparison. Estimated standard errors are in parentheses.

Additional Analysis of the Field Experiment

Does Electoral Information Affect the Quality of Responsiveness?

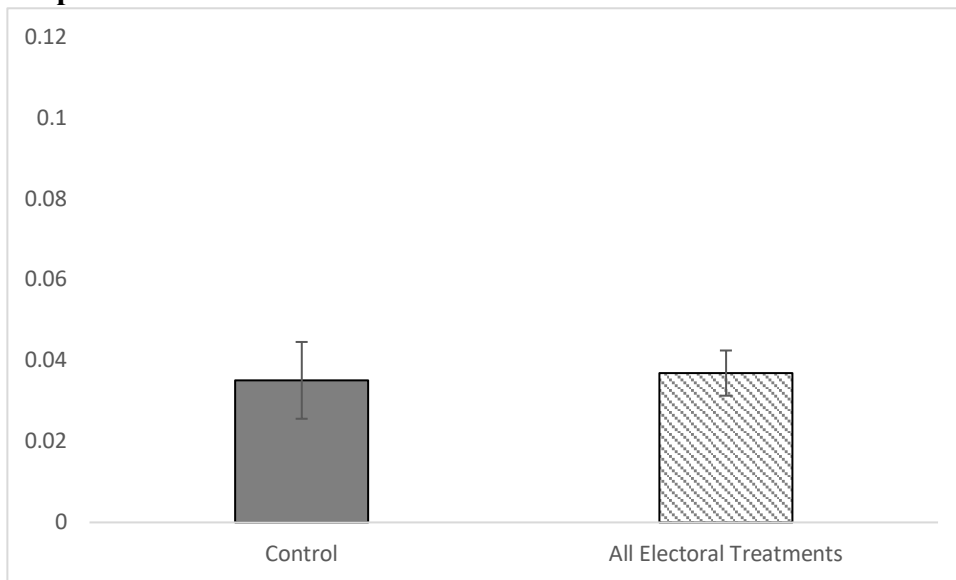
One potential concern with the evaluation of overall response rates in the politician field experiment is that this outcome measure may mask variations in the quality of responses offered to different types of petitioners. In these additional empirical analyses, I consider whether there is any evidence that politicians offer higher quality responses to certain types of constituents.

In order to test the effects of electoral information on the quality of response, I analyze a second set of outcome variables, which gauge the substance of a politician's response, conditional on having provided a response. In doing so, I ask: did politicians simply call the individual back, or did they provide the petitioner with specific information on how to proceed forward? Using information on the content of text and WhatsApp replies to our messages, I can evaluate these additional nuances of responses. I consider here two specific types of response, that I coded directly from translations of messages received: 1) Any reply with additional information, including a name and/or phone number of another person to contact, information on office hours, requests to meet or call the politician, and information on other strategies for acquiring the desired service, and 2) a more specific measure of additional information that is coded one only when the politician asked the petitioner explicitly to call or come meet him. Here, I am testing whether the politician responded in a substantive manner and whether that response encouraged the individual to engage directly with the politician in order to acquire a desired service.

In terms of the more general measure of substantive response, Figure 2 reports the results of difference-in-means tests comparing the electoral treatments with the control. We see again

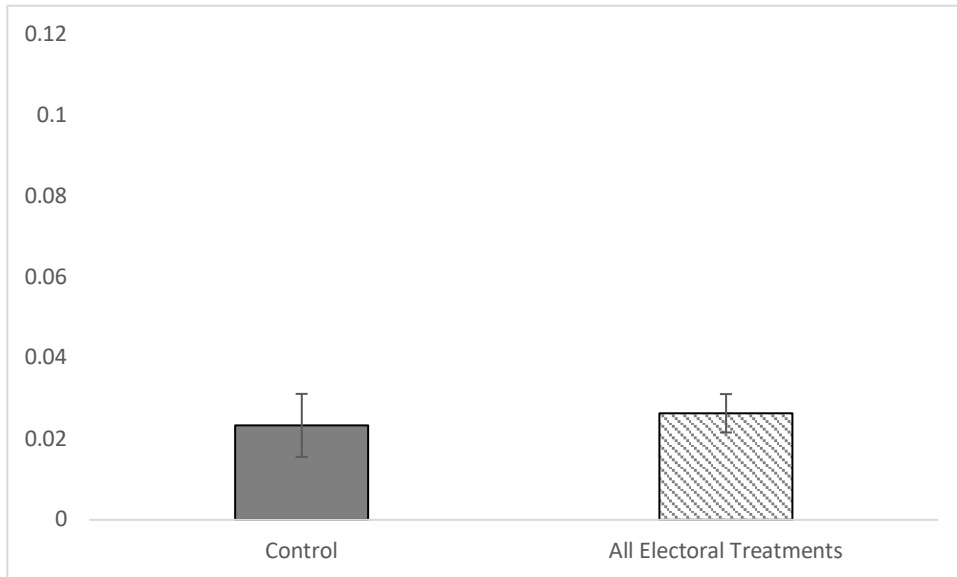
that there is no statistically significant difference between the rates at which politicians offer a substantive response to the control and electoral treatment conditions. Similarly, the results provided in Figure 3 show that politicians are also not any more likely to request a call or personal meeting with those individuals who express their support for the politician or his party (difference-in-means tests comparing the electoral treatments with the control for both analyses are provided in Table A9).

Figure A1 – Information on Electoral Behavior Does Not Affect Substantive Responsiveness



The figure reports mean response rates and 95% confidence intervals for the control condition of no information on partisan behavior (gray bar) and the consolidated partisanship treatment conditions (patterned bar). The dependent variable is a measure of whether the politician provided further information on how to acquire the desired service. The total sample sizes are: 5,773 for the control condition and 17,478 for the electoral treatments.

Figure A2 – Information on Electoral Behavior Does Not Affect Requests to Call or Meet



The figure reports mean response rates and 95% confidence intervals for the control condition of no information on partisan behavior (gray bar) and the consolidated electoral treatment conditions (patterned bar). The dependent variable is a measure of whether the politician requested that the petitioner call back or come to the politician’s home or office to meet. The total sample sizes are: 5,773 for the control condition and 17,478 for the electoral treatments.