Do Rural Migrants Divide Ethnically in the City? Evidence from an Ethnographic Experiment in India ⬡ ⬡

Tariq Thachil   Vanderbilt University

Abstract: *Despite rapid urbanization across the Global South, identity politics within rural-urban migrant communities remains understudied. Past scholarship is divided over whether village-based ethnic divisions will erode or deepen within diverse poor migrant populations. I assess these divergent predictions through an 'ethnographic survey experiment' (N=4,218) among unique samples of poor migrants in India. Contra conventional expectations, I find intra-class ethnic divisions are neither uniformly transcended nor entrenched across key arenas of migrant life. Instead, I observe variation consistent with situational theories predicting ethnic divisions will be muted only in contexts triggering a common identity among migrants. I pinpoint urban employers and politicians as these triggers. Poor migrants ignore ethnic divisions when facing these elites, who perceive and treat them in class terms. However, migrants remain divided in direct interactions with each other. These bifurcated findings imply poor migrants may be available for both class-based and ethnic mobilization in the city.*

Populations across the Global South are increasingly urban. Yet poor rural-urban migrants (henceforth, migrants) contributing to these demographic shifts remain remarkably understudied. This article examines a long-standing concern for scholars of urbanization from the perspective of these overlooked populations. Will village-based ethnic identities divide poor migrants in the city? Or will such differences be obscured by similar class positions? These questions take on heightened significance in cities of the Global South, where poor migrants often concentrate into ethnically heterogeneous, economically homogenous settlements and worksites. Consequently, migrants engage in intra-class, interethnic interactions far more frequently than in their home villages.

Existing scholarship is divided on whether intra-class ethnic divisions will be entrenched or eviscerated within these settings. "First-generation" modernization theories anticipate urban migration will dissolve ethnic attachments and strengthen identification with class and nation.[1] Positive social contact models expect heightened interethnic interactions within diverse migrant communities to foster increased interethnic trust. By contrast, "second-generation" modernization theories argue intense competition between poor migrants will harden ethnic divisions between them. Similarly, negative contact models anticipate increased intergroup interactions within harsh urban environments will solidify rather than blur group boundaries. Finally, situational theories of ethnicity predict intra-class ethnic divisions will be neither uniformly inconsequential nor entrenched. Instead, these divisions will be negligible only in contexts that trigger a common cross-ethnic ingroup identity among migrants.

[1]I borrow this terminology from Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2010).

Influential theoretical traditions thus yield starkly divergent predictions begging empirical scrutiny. To provide such assessment, I distill these predictions into rival, testable hypotheses and then test these hypotheses across important arenas of migrant life: labor market competition, interpersonal cooperation, informal leader selection, and formal voting. Empirically, I blend street ethnography and large-scale survey experiments (N = 4,218) conducted with innovatively constructed samples of poor migrants in two Indian cities.

This multimethod study produces several key results. Contra both rival strands of modernization and contact theory, I find intra-class ethnic divisions are not uniformly irrelevant or salient across these arenas. Instead, their salience varies sharply, consistent with situational theories of ethnicity. I further pinpoint urban political and economic elites as important situational triggers of a common class-based migrant ingroup. Migrants believe these elites perceive and treat them in shared class rather than disparate ethnic terms. The latter's presence thus situationally diminishes the salience of intra-migrant ethnic divisions. However, these same divisions remain salient when poor migrants interact away from the unifying presence of urban elites.

Theoretically, this article shifts scholarly focus from more studied native–migrant interactions to dynamics *within* migrant communities in the urban peripheries of the Global South. The permanent move from farm to factory in Western Europe prefigured enduring class solidarities among the urban poor. Under more informal and circular migratory conditions, I find poor migrants in Indian cities contingently ignore internal ethnic divisions in the face of shared grievances or neglect. However, they do not form deeper solidarities that permanently bridge these divides within their nascent urban communities. More speculatively, my bifurcated findings imply poor migrants are susceptible to both class-based *and* ethnic mobilizing strategies in the city, suggesting exciting directions for future research.

Methodologically, I present a novel approach of adapting conversations from sustained street ethnography to construct "ethnographic experimental vignettes" grounded in the words and experiences of my informants. This approach offers a powerful solution to construct validity concerns with complex survey experiments that are often designed with scant engagement with target populations (Morton and Williams 2010). Additionally, I deploy an exportable worksite-based strategy for sampling highly mobile migrants who often lack official city residences.

Ethnicity, Class, and Urban Migration

Since Marx and Engels (1848), scholars of Western democracies have studied whether cultural differences divide members of the same class position. Scholars of ethnic politics in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have considered such questions far less frequently. This neglect stems partly from an understandable focus on rural societies that rarely contain ethnically diverse populations of the same class (e.g., Chandra 2004; Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Posner 2005). In sub-Saharan Africa, geographically bounded ethnic divisions ensure relatively homogenous villages (McCauley 2014). South Asian villages are ethnically diverse, but hierarchically ranked ascriptive differences correlate strongly with economic status.

By contrast, sub-Saharan African cities concentrate poor migrants from regionally distinct ethnic groups into multiethnic slums and marketplaces (Marx, Stoker, and Suri 2015; Nathan 2015; Resnick 2013). Indian cities mix poor migrants of different castes into heterogeneous slums and informal labor and vendor marketplaces (Auerbach 2016; Krishna 2013). Will ethnic differences prove salient within these densely diverse poor migrant communities?

Existing scholarship sharply divides on this question. "First-generation" modernization theories anticipate migration will break ties between mobile villagers and parochial homelands, inducing identification with class and nation over ethnic group (Apter 1965; Robinson 2014).[2] Similarly, psychological lab studies of intergroup contact find heightened contact between different social groups can rapidly reduce intergroup prejudice and promote intergroup trust (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Such effects are especially anticipated when interethnic economic differences are low, as is typical of many poor migrant communities (Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002).

A second set of arguments suggests intra-class ethnic divisions will be entrenched or exacerbated in the city. "Second-generation" modernization theories argue fierce competition for urban resources within diverse migrant communities inflames interethnic antagonisms (Bates 1983; Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010; Young 1965). Similarly, negative contact models within social psychology argue frequent contact, particularly under volatile conditions of economic hardship, generates intergroup animosity rather than trust (Islam and Hewstone 1993).

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[2] Following Chandra (2004), I limit ethnicity to subnational ascriptive groups.

A third set of theories predicts intra-class ethnic divisions between migrants will be of "critical relevance" in some situations and "totally irrelevant" in others (Okamura 1981, 460). Influential situational theories, notably the common ingroup identity model (CIIM), anticipate ethnic divisions will be muted only in situations that trigger the salience of a superordinate identity poor migrants share (Charnysh, Lucas, and Singh 2015; Gaertner and Dividio 2000). Encounters with an outgroup beyond this superordinate identity boundary often serve as situational triggers. For example, rival teams at a college sports event raise the salience of university affiliation, temporarily diminishing the salience of racial differences between students of the same institution (Nier et al. 2001).

For poor migrants, past studies suggest city elites as a key outgroup capable of triggering a common class-based migrant ingroup. Katznelson (1981) finds confrontations with urban employers muted intra-class ethnic divisions between poor immigrants at shared worksites in New York. Within their neighborhoods, however, immigrants "cease to see themselves primarily as workers . . . [instead] they are Croatians, Mexicans, Poles" (1961, 6). Waters (1999) finds poor West Indian immigrants and African Americans disregard internal ethnic differences in encounters with privileged whites, who perceive and discriminate against them through a common racial lens. However, the two groups remain polarized in direct interactions with one another.

The rest of this article systematically tests the predications of these three broad theoretical traditions among poor migrants in urban India. Studies of urban ethnicity often focus on discipline-specific outcomes: Political economists examine labor market competition, social psychologists study interpersonal cooperation, and political scientists analyze local leadership selection and voting. By contrast, this article simultaneously examines all four arenas. For each, I articulate testable rival hypotheses derived from each theoretical tradition. Collectively, these hypotheses constitute a theoretically motivated, multidimensional, and precise test of my central question.

Interpersonal Cooperation

Will ethnic divisions deter intra-class cooperation between migrants? First-generation modernization theories expect migrants to rapidly replace ethnoparochial attachments with modern class identities (Gluckman 1960). Positive contact theories argue multiethnic cities reduce prejudice by forcing poor citizens to interact with non-coethnics of the same class (Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston 2008). Both theories expect ethnic divisions to rapidly

lose salience in deterring intra-class cooperation between poor migrants.

By contrast, second-generation modernization theories anticipate ascriptive divisions to persistently deter cooperation between poor migrants (Habyarimana et al. 2009). Such deterrence may be rooted in dissimilar preferences across ethnic groups (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999), or because only coethnic social networks generate the trust (Fershtman and Gneezy 2001) and punishment (Besley, Coate, and Loury 1993) necessary for cooperation. Negative contact theories emphasize that frequent interaction heightens rather than attenuates perceptions of ethnic difference (Islam and Hewstone 1993).

Finally, situational theories anticipate intra-class ethnic differences to be muted only by the presence of outgroups, such as urban elites, who trigger a shared ingroup identity among migrants. Consequently, these accounts anticipate ethnic divisions will remain salient in intra-class cooperative interactions between poor migrants within their urban communities (Katznelson 1981).

H1: Ethnic differences [*do not affect/**decrease/ ***decrease] the likelihood of migrants engaging in intra-class cooperation.

Labor Market Competition

Will ethnic divisions intensify animosities stemming from labor market competition between poor migrants? First-generation and positive contact theories predict migrants will quickly shift to prioritizing class over ethnicity. At diverse urban worksites, migrants face competitive acts from coethnics and non-coethnics alike. Such experiences break down perceptions of ascriptive differences correlating with economic threats (Mayer 1961).

Second-generation theories conversely argue that migrants perceive intra-class competitive acts committed by ethnic outgroups as systematically more threatening than those by coethnics (Bates 1983). Some psychological studies similarly find negative threats from outgroups register more strongly than identical threats from ingroups (Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010; Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006). By concentrating poor migrants of diverse backgrounds at shared worksites, urbanization heightens incidents of outgroup economic threats, raising the salience of intra-class ethnic divisions.

Situational theories offer predictions similar to those of first-generation theories, but for distinct theoretical

*prediction for first-generation modernization/positive contact theory. **prediction for second-generation modernization/negative contact theory. ***Prediction for situational theory.

reasons. These accounts emphasize the unifying presence of employers at urban labor markets (Katznelson 1981; Waters 1999). Local elites are expected to activate a class-based ingroup between poor migrants, situationally reducing the divisive potential of internal ethnic divisions at competitive worksites (Charnysh, Lucas, and Singh 2015; Gaertner and Dividio 2000).

> *H2*: Ethnic differences [*do not affect/**increase/***do not affect] the likelihood of migrants perceiving intra-class competitive acts as threats.

Formal Politics

Intra-class political divisions are usually conceptualized as divergent citizen preferences for tax and transfer policies (Huber 2014). However, in nonprogrammatic developing democracies, voters are thought to choose the candidate most likely to channel benefits to them when in office. Will ethnic divisions divide migrant preferences for such formal political leaders in destination city elections?

The central logic of first-generation theories cuts against this expectation. Migrants to diverse, modern cities are expected to rapidly discard ethnic considerations when forming more cosmopolitan political preferences (Deutsch 1961; Lerner 1958). By contrast, second-generation theories emphasize that ethnic markers are more visible and sticky than class, and therefore preferred by politicians and voters in solving commitment problems inherent to clientelist pacts (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Poor citizens anticipate patronage to flow along ethnic lines, and they divide accordingly at the polls.

Situational theories do not anticipate intra-class ethnic electoral divisions, but not because of increasingly cosmopolitan migrant attitudes. Instead, they anticipate urban political elites will situationally trigger a common ingroup among poor migrants. Such unifying effects are especially anticipated if city politicians perceive and treat migrants in class terms. The likelihood of such class-based perceptions increases when poor migrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds are spatially concentrated at shared urban worksites and residences. Such concentration renders migrants' shared class far more visible to external elites than their disparate ethnicities, reversing ethnicity's traditional "visibility advantage."

> *H3*: Ethnic differences [*do not/**do/***do not] generate intra-class divides in migrant preferences for formal leaders in city elections.

Informal Politics

Studies of ethnic political behavior overwhelmingly focus on formal electoral preferences. Yet poor migrants in the Global South overwhelmingly work and live in informal conditions. Within these settings, distributive processes hinge on informal brokers, such as Indian slum fixers or Mexican street vendor leaders (Auerbach 2016; Cross 1998). First-generation accounts expect attitudinal modernization to reduce parochial attachments within migrant preferences for local community leaders. Conversely, second-generation theories highlight resource flows these intermediaries control (Adida 2014; Marx, Stoker, and Suri 2015). If poor migrants expect informal leaders to distribute benefits ethnically, they may systematically resist supporting non-coethnic intermediaries.

Situational theories emphasize that unlike formal political selection, informal leaders emerge *within* migrant communities, away from the unifying presence of urban political elites. These theories thus anticipate intra-class ethnic divisions to remain salient in selecting internal leaders.

> *H4*: Ethnic differences [*do not/**do/***do] generate intra-class divides in migrant preferences for informal community leaders.

Temporal Effects

These three perspectives also generate divergent temporal expectations that help adjudicate between them. First-generation modernization theorists anticipate moderating temporal effects: Migrants will increasingly adopt modern class identities and shed ethnic attachments as they spend time in cosmopolitan cities. Similarly, positive contact theories anticipate accumulated interactions with poor migrants of different ethnic groups over time will reduce interethnic distrust. By contrast, second-generation modernization theorists anticipate intra-class ethnic animosities generated by competing for scarce resources in the city intensify with urban experience. Negative contact theorists similarly anticipate the accumulation of interethnic interactions over time increases the likelihood of negative encounters with non-coethnics.

By contrast, situational theories anticipate moderating temporal effects, but only in arenas where a shared ingroup identity is activated by proximate outgroups. Recall these arenas include labor market competition (structured by elite employers) and formal politics (shaped by elite politicians). Growing exposure to such outgroups over time can increasingly moderate intra-migrant ethnic divisions *within* that arena. By contrast, situational

TABLE 1 Summary of Expectations

	Salient Intra-Class Ethnic Differences?		
Issue Area	First-Generation Modernization/Positive Contact	Second-Generation Modernization/Negative Contact	Situational (CIIM)
Cooperation	No	Yes	Yes
Competition	No	Yes	No
Informal Politics	No	Yes	Yes
Formal Politics	No	Yes	No
	Temporal Expectations for Ethnic Salience		
Issue Area	First-Generation Modernization/Positive Contact	Second-Generation Modernization/Negative Contact	Situational (CIIM)
Cooperation	Weaken	Strengthen	No Effect
Cooperation	Weaken	Strengthen	Weaken
Informal Politics	Weaken	Strengthen	No Effect
Formal Politics	Weaken	Strengthen	Weaken

theories predict no temporal moderation in issue domains located entirely within poor migrant communities (inter-migrant cooperation or informal leader selection). Table 1 summarizes all cross-sectional and temporal expectations outlined thus far.

Research Design

Vignette Experiment Design

I test Hypotheses 1–4 through four vignette experiments embedded within a survey of poor migrants in India (N = 3,018). Each vignette is centered on a hypothetical migrant or candidate, whose ethnicity is manipulated by varying his name.[4] Names identify the migrant's (or candidate's) narrow ethnic *jati*, highly localized endogamous

subcastes that denote traditional occupations. Names also place the hypothetical migrant within one of four broader ethnic categories: upper-caste Hindu, intermediate-caste Hindu (Other Backward Classes, or OBCs), lower-caste Hindu (Scheduled Castes, or SCs), or Muslim.[5] Nearly 90% of Indians belong to one of these four ethnic categories.

A respondent could receive any one of four different names in a vignette (listed in SI Supplement Section A3). Each name created an ethnic match or mismatch between the respondent and the hypothetical migrant along both narrow and broad ethnic dimensions. The salience of each dimension was measured by comparing responses in which the pair were coethnics to responses when they were not (Dunning and Nilekani 2013). The nested nature of these identities ensured all narrow *jati* coethnics were also broad caste coethnics, but not vice versa.[6]

Study Population Selection

My empirical and theoretical agenda required careful selection of a study sample from within India's massive internal migrant population. Empirically, I sought a substantively important subsample of poor migrants, who in India are defined by informality and circularity. Over 90% of low-income migrants work in the informal sector (National Sample Survey [NSS] 2007). The poorest migrants often cannot afford to relocate their families to expensive cities and predominantly observe circular patterns of migration (Bremen 1996; Sharma et al. 2011).

While most permanent migrants are women moving between villages after marriage (Census of India 2001), most circular migrants are male employment seekers moving to cities (NSS 2007,95). The latter are more appropriate for my study, and a sizable population in their own right. The best available estimates place India's circular migrants at 60–90 million people (Deshingkar and Akter 2009; UNESCO 2012).[7]

Theoretically, examining whether ethnic differences divide migrants of the same class required respondents who were ethnically heterogeneous, economically

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[4]Given my overwhelmingly male study population, I utilized an exclusively male sample.

[5]I discuss treating Muslims as comparable to broader Hindu caste categories in Supplement Section A3 in the supporting information (SI).

[6]No respondent was presented with the same name more than once. The vignette questions were randomized across four fixed places within the paper-based instrument.

[7]Are circular migrants truly "urban" populations? I argue yes: Respondents reported living in destination cities for 9.5 months per year on average. SI Tables S.7–S.8 show migrants also become more socially and politically embedded in the city over time (albeit slowly and unevenly).

homogenous, and had opportunities to regularly interact at shared urban worksites and residences. I therefore focused on the construction sector, reported to employ over 50% of Indian urban circular migrants.[8]

The next challenge was locating this precisely defined study population. Migrant construction workers are highly mobile and lack fixed urban addresses, rendering residence-based sampling unviable. Instead, I accessed informants at informal labor spot markets (*chowks*) at which they assemble to find work. Focusing on markets was especially appropriate given my theoretical concern with inter-migrant relations. For circular migrants who spend most of their day working or finding work, *chowks* are preeminent sites of inter-migrant interactions.[9]

Survey Implementation

My study was conducted in North India, the region encompassing 7 of India's 10 largest rural-urban migration streams (Indian Institute of Human Settlement [IIHS] 2011). My first study city was New Delhi, India's capital and largest recipient of migrant construction laborers (UNESCO 2013). I replicated my ethnographic and quantitative fieldwork in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. The considerable costs of combining ethnography with large-scale surveys of a mobile migrant population prevented further replication. Still, including one of India's three 10 million-plus megacities *and* one of its 50 million-plus "medium-size" cities improved the scope of the findings considerably.

To improve the robustness of my findings *within* each city, I made substantial efforts to avoid narrow convenience samples harvested from a handful of well-known *chowks*. Constructing a systematic sampling frame was challenging since there are no formal municipal lists of these markets. Instead, I led a team of Research Assistants (RAs) on a painstaking zone-wise enumeration of *chowks* in Delhi and Lucknow, drawing on information from the Department of Labor, local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local builders and contractors. Over a combined 4 months, we enumerated 212 labor markets across both cities. It is difficult to claim this exercise as exhaustive, given how rapidly new markets arise and old ones disappear. Yet these efforts included all major *chowks*, and (to my knowledge) they are the most comprehensive efforts to document such markets in any Indian city.

[8] The next biggest employer was manufacturing (20% share; NSS 2007).

[9] A total of 83% of respondents reported more close friends at worksites than in their urban neighborhoods.

Within each city, the survey was administered at labor markets randomly sampled from this list. In total, 3,018 migrant workers (1,818 in Delhi; 1,200 in Lucknow) were interviewed across 58 *chowks*. Extensive details about the listing exercise, pilots (N = 315), sampling strategy, and survey protocol are included in SI Supplement G. Unusually stringent efforts were made to ensure enumerator preparedness and probity. I led intensive training for all enumerators, including rehearsals at out-of-sample *chowks*. I also accompanied enumerators for the entire Delhi survey and three-fourths of the Lucknow survey, rotating between the three teams in a random, unannounced pattern. Overall, I observed 470 of the completed surveys (15.5%).

Constructing Vignettes through Ethnography

A first-order concern with vignette experiments is intelligibility and context sensitivity (Morton and Williams 2010). Such concerns are acute for poor and poorly understood respondents, yet often neglected. I addressed this issue through a novel approach: extensive "street-ethnography" (Shah 2014) at *chowks* to identify the real-life scenarios that best captured each hypothesis. I then adapted insights from fieldwork to word the specific vignettes in the language and experience of my informants.

To access a wide range of migrant experiences, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at marketplaces varying in location, age, neighborhood, and types of construction work typically found. I visited each of these sites in alternation from 7 a.m. to noon (market hours) from September to November 2013 in Delhi, and in February 2014 in Lucknow. During these visits (N = 86), I took part in informal conversations with circular migrant workers over tea, biscuits, and unfiltered cigarettes. I visited their sleeping quarters and scorching construction worksites, and in two instances, I traveled with workers back to their home villages. Such repeated interactions were essential in designing contextually sensitive tests of Hypotheses 1–4, outlined below.

Interpersonal Cooperation

The most important cooperative decision my informants reported making in the city was deciding with whom to share accommodations. The usual privacy and discretion of housing decisions were unaffordable luxuries in the tough world of *chowks*. Poverty, high city rents, and the need to live close to a *chowk* constrained my informants,

forcing them to share cheap rented rooms with (usually) 2–4 other migrants.

In some instances, these roommates are home village acquaintances. However, most migrants (>50%) find roommates at the *chowk* itself, often living with workers they have known for only a few days. Further, migrant workers cycle between village and city frequently and abruptly, creating constant demand for new roommates. Roommate selection is thus an important and frequent form of interpersonal cooperation among my subjects. Ethnography revealed other potential forms of cooperation—notably, lending money—as unsuitable for testing.[10]

Based on fieldwork, I constructed a vignette centered on a migrant looking for a roommate in the city (due to space constraints, each vignette's text is reproduced in SI Supplement A). Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to share a rented room with someone like the hypothetical migrant. The salience of ethnic differences here (and in all subsequent vignettes) is measured as the difference in average response when the hypothetical migrant and respondent are coethnics compared to when they are non-coethnics.

Importantly, my ethnography confirmed that sharing rooms with a non-coethnic migrant was sufficiently realistic:

> See here [in Delhi] people of all castes can stay in the same room. Village sections are separated by caste. And so people will say, I can't drink water from here, or touch someone from there. But we are all here in the city because of the compulsions of *dal-roti* [hunger/poverty]. And you meet people of all [caste] communities at the *chowk*.[11]

Yet while migrants *can* live with non-coethnics in the city, they may still prefer not to. Some informants voiced no concerns with ethnically mixed housing arrangements, but others betrayed clear ethnic preferences:

> It is best to live with people from your caste. . . . [I]f you share a room, someone can always make off with all of your things while you are working. So you need someone you can trust.[12]

Such variable answers only underscored the need to test whether intra-class ethnic divisions prove salient across a larger sample.

Labor Market Competition

The preeminent source of competition at each *chowk* stemmed from the oversupply of workers, which pressurizes migrants to undercut one another when negotiating wages from prospective employers:

> A lot of people here are such motherfuckers. Let us say you are a *thekedar* [contractor] who drives up to the *chowk* on a motorcycle. I am talking with you to try and fix a job . . . . While I am talking someone else comes and puts their leg up onto the motorcycle, and goes away with you, agreeing to work for less. Such people are the reason our *dehadi* [daily wage rate] remains so low.[13]

Such competitive wage-cutting clearly has divisive potential. Further, ethnography revealed threat perceptions stemming from wage-cutting could be colored by ethnic differences:

> It is one thing when we [lower castes] have to go for less money—that is usually just on days we can't find work, but upper castes? . . . They [upper castes] are *kamchors* (lazy) . . . in the village they are landlords so they can take it easy. So here they will go to the [construction] site and give such little effort they don't mind taking less money and cutting our rates.[14]

Note that ethnicity above does not influence *who* is seen to engage in competitive acts: the informant observes coethnics and non-coethnics cutting wages. Rather, ethnicity conditions *how* such acts are perceived. When committed by coethnics, wage-cutting is sympathetically described as compelled by poverty. When committed by non-coethnics, it is perceived as a systematic economic threat stemming from an intrinsic group attribute.

To test Hypothesis 2, I constructed a vignette presenting respondents with a migrant engaging in wage-cutting and then asked them to evaluate whether laborers like this migrant constitute an economic threat.

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[10]For example, my informants told me asking for money from another laborer was stigmatized as behavior associated with alcoholics or addicts among them.

[11]Interview, Rani Nagar (RN), November 10, 2013. All interviews were conducted by the author.

[12]Interview, Tilak Nagar (TN), September 25, 2013.

[13]Field notes, RN, September 22, 2013.

[14]Interview, TN, October 29, 2013.

Formal Politics

To test Hypothesis 3, I presented survey respondents with a hypothetical political candidate planning to run in a state assembly election.[15] The candidate's randomized name came from the same list as the other vignettes. The vignette also varied whether the politician was contesting from an urban constituency within the destination city or from a rural constituency within the respondent's home state. Here, I leveraged a unique aspect of my informants' lives—their personal experiences of both urban and rural elections—to compare how their preferences varied across the two settings.[16]

Respondents were read a short speech the candidate was said to have given during an election rally. To simulate the standard distributive promises made by actual Indian politicians to poor voters, I utilized a blend of phrases used in campaign speeches I observed during elections in six Delhi constituencies (November 15–30, 2013). Respondents were then asked whether they would support someone like this candidate in an election.[17]

Informal Politics

To operationalize Hypothesis 4's concept of informal leadership, I drew on conversations my informants would frequently have about the importance of informal unions regulating employment and fixing wage rates.[18] One respondent told me, "If we have unity (*ekta*) among us, we can fix a minimum wage rate, and try to ensure payment. But for that we need an organization."[19] Another respondent concurred, saying, "There should be a big register kept with all the laborers' names. Then one man should be kept as the leader who will say that now it is your turn—that is how the taxi drivers do it, and do you see any of them starving?"[20]

My interviews also suggested ethnic differences might fracture migrant preferences for such leaders:

Laborer A: There should be a union.

Laborer B: But then how will they choose who gets the jobs? Should the union leaders choose?

Laborer A: Yes, they will have to choose.

Laborer C: Then they will just choose their own men. Their own men from their own [caste] community . . . and others will get the job after waiting a year . . . so then what?[21]

To test Hypothesis 4, I presented respondents with a vignette about a migrant seeking to become an informal "union" leader. Respondents were asked whether they would join such an organization at their *chowk* if it were headed by someone like the hypothetical migrant.

Main Results

Surveyed migrants were extremely economically homogenous: 75% earned less than $2 per day, 77% had no secondary education, 75% owned less than one acre of rural land, and 74% had no household electric connection. The sample was also highly ethnically heterogeneous: 27% were lower castes (SCs), 44% were intermediate castes (OBCs), 18% were upper castes, and 12% were Muslims. There were no statistically significant differences in average income across these ethnic groups. Such homogeneity sharply contrasts with representative survey data from villages in the two states from which over 90% of respondents originated.[22] The author survey also found evidence of increased interethnic interactions within cities. In total, 93% of survey respondents said they interacted with members of other castes more frequently in their destination cities than in their home villages.

I now turn to the pooled experimental results.[23] SI Supplement B details results showing randomization successfully ensured balance for baseline respondent characteristics across each experimental subgroup. Average treatment effects are derived from ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions where the dependent variable (always scaled between 0 and 1) measures a respondent's evaluation of a hypothetical migrant or candidate.[24] The primary independent variable is coded 1 when the

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[15] The candidate was assigned a political party (partisan effects, examined separately, do not affect the results). The state assembly level maximized comparability of rural and urban candidates. More localized village councils and urban municipalities are not easily comparable. I selected constituencies where respondents were unlikely to have lived. Such respondents were excluded (N = 8).

[16] A total of 9% had voted in city elections. Over 70% had attended election rallies in destination cities.

[17] In total, 94% of respondents said the candidate sounded like politicians they observed.

[18] Interview, RN, September 18, 2013.

[19] Interview, RN, September 15, 2013.

[20] Interview, RN, September 30, 2013.

[21] Interview, RN, February 12, 2014.

[22] The village sample (N = 2,501) was from the 2004 Lokniti National Election Study. Full details appear in SI Supplement Section C7A.

[23] Results are statistically indistinguishable across my study cities.

[24] SI Supplement Table S.2 presents the full results in tabular form.

respondent and hypothetical migrant are from different ethnic groups, and 0 otherwise. Recall the experimental setup allowed me to manipulate both narrow and broad ethnic dimensions.

The regressions include market fixed effects, standard demographic controls, and standard errors corrected for clustering by market.[25] However, all results presented here also hold if we use a simple nonparametric difference-of-means test comparing migrant evaluations of coethnics and non-coethnics.

The results presented in Figure 1 counter expectations of first-generation modernization and positive social contact theories that intra-class ethnic divisions will be uniformly negligible across all four arenas. They also cut against second-generation modernization and negative contact theories, which predict these divisions will prove uniformly salient. Instead, the analysis finds variation more consistent with situational theories.

First, Figure 1 shows ethnic differences socially divide poor migrants by inhibiting cooperation rather than exacerbating competitive animosities. Respondents were 10.4 percentage points (pp) less likely to share housing with a migrant from a different *jati* than a *jati*-coethnic. This constituted a 32% drop that was highly significant (p < .001). The effect of broader ethnic differences was even larger (12.7 pp, p < .001). By contrast, respondents were not statistically more likely to perceive wage-cutting migrants as threats if they come from a different narrow *jati* (2.0 pp, p < .443) or broad caste (2.3 pp, p < .126).

Second, Figure 1's bottom panel reveals ethnic differences politically divide poor migrants by fracturing preferences for informal community leaders, rather than formal city politicians. Respondents were significantly less likely to support migrant union leaders from different narrow (11.7 pp, p < .001) and broad ethnic categories (6.7 pp, p < .003). By contrast, poor migrants did not divide along *jati* (0.1 pp, p < .870) or caste (2.0 pp, p < .321) when evaluating candidates contesting in urban elections.[26]

Strikingly, migrants do divide ethnically when evaluating otherwise identical candidates running from a *rural* constituency in their region of origin (SI Supplement Figure S.1). Posttreatment questions suggest these divergent results may be underpinned by distributive expectations (Figure 2). Respondents believed non-coethnic union leaders were significantly less likely to provide them

with employment than coethnics, and non-coethnic rural candidates were less likely to provide them with government benefits. Yet respondents did not view non-coethnic *urban* candidates as less likely to provide them with government benefits.

Situational theories are further supported by patterns of ethnic salience conditioned by the years since a migrant's first urban migration (Figure 3).[27] Intra-class ethnic differences are statistically salient for new migrant arrivals across *all* four arenas (Year 0). Table 1 noted first-generation modernization and positive contact theories expect the salience of ethnicity to uniformly decrease across all four vignettes with time in the city. Yet ethnicity's salience wanes only in the competition and urban politics vignettes. Table 1 also shows second-generation modernization and negative contact theories expect ethnic divisions to uniformly intensify. Yet this pattern manifests only in the cooperation vignette.

Situational theories emphasizing the role of outgroups (such as urban elites) better anticipate these divergent temporal effects. Such theories expect city elites to activate a common class-based migrant ingroup in arenas in which they are present (competition and formal politics vignettes). Further, these ingroup ties are anticipated to strengthen with increasing exposure to these elites over time. By contrast, situational theories anticipate no temporal moderation in arenas contained within migrant communities (cooperation and informal politics vignettes). Overall, situational theories anticipate seven of eight results in Figures 1 and 3 (see Table 1). The only exception is the cooperation vignette, in which we see a trend of rising ethnic salience. By contrast, first- generation/positive contact theories predict only four, and second-generation/negative contact theories predict only three.

One concern with Figure 3 is that the conditioning variable is not randomly distributed. Veteran migrants systematically differ from recent arrivals in multiple respects (see SI Supplement Table S.8). To account for these systematic differences, the CATE analysis plotted in Figure 3 included controls for 14 major migrant characteristics. This analysis cannot rule out the possibility of unobserved confounders. Yet the robustness of results to including numerous important controls does improve our confidence in them.

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[25]Findings are unchanged if naïve standard errors are used.

[26]Equality of coefficient F-tests found Average Treatment Effects (ATEs) for *jati* (p < .05) and caste (p < .00) were significantly greater in the cooperation vignette than in the competition vignette. Similarly, ATEs for *jati* (p < .000) and caste (p < .1) were greater in the informal politics vignette than in the formal politics vignette.

[27]For expository purposes, Figure 3 graphs regression interaction effects that assume a linear moderating effect (Brambor et al. 2006). The results are robust to strategies that do not impose this assumption. SI Table S.9 interacts the treatment indicator with a binary moderator partitioning the sample by mean time since first migration. Once again, ethnic divisions are less salient among veteran migrants only for the competition and urban politics vignettes.
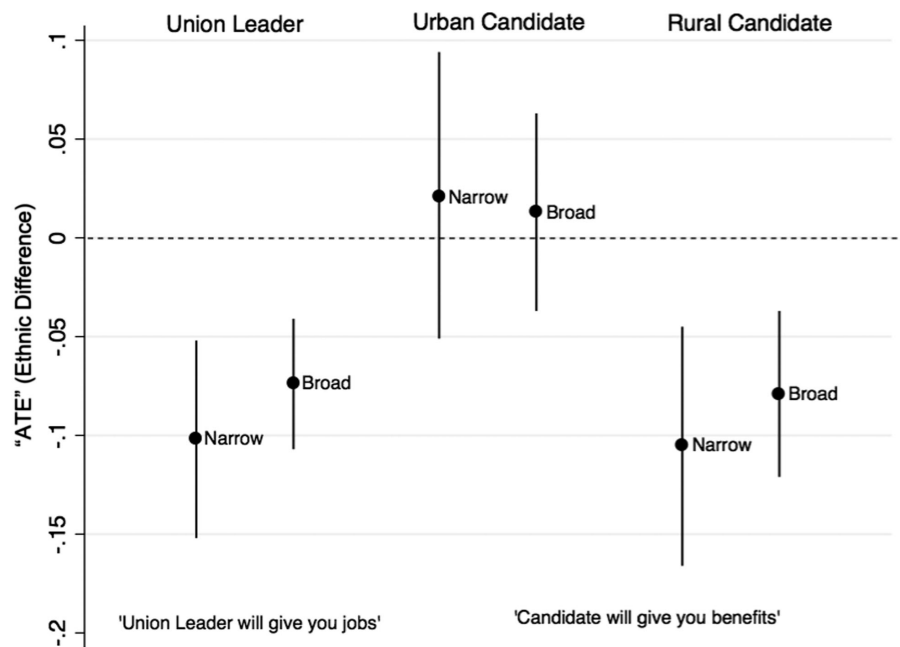
FIGURE 1 Average Treatment Effects
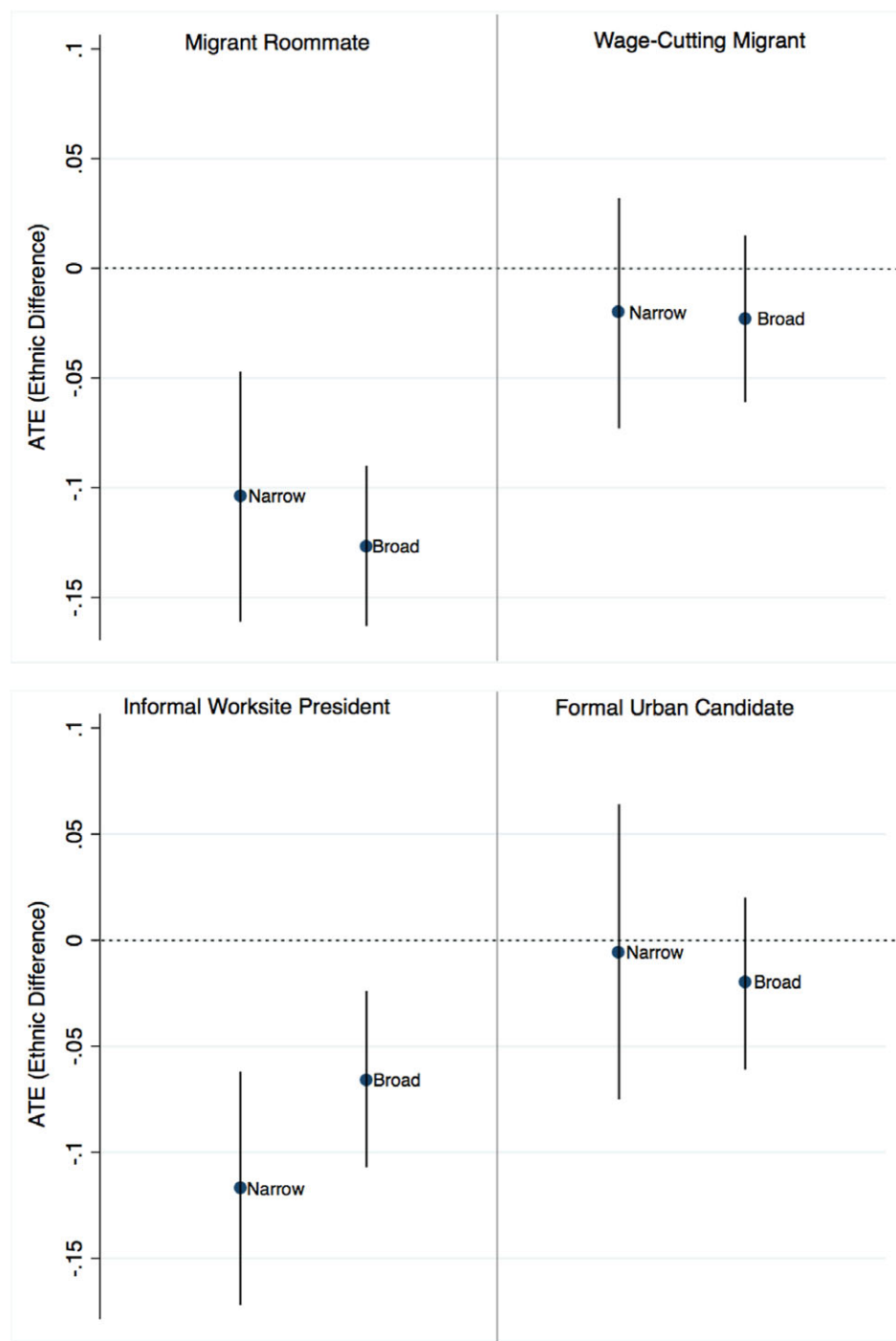
Note: Average treatment effects indicate the impact of ethnic difference on evaluations of a hypothetical migrant/candidate. Negative values indicate bias against non-coethnics relative to coethnics. ATEs from OLS regressions with market fixed effects and market-clustered standard errors are shown. Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Robustness Checks

Additional Specifications

To investigate potential design effects, I first confirm average treatment effects (ATEs) do not systematically vary among the four broad ethnic groups (SI Supplement Section C3), high- and low-status ethnic groups, interview lottery groups (C4), or vignette order (C5). Second, SI Supplement Table S.3 separately isolates the ATEs of the Hindu–Muslim religious cleavage, and region-of-origin

FIGURE 2 Distributive Expectations

Note: Average treatment effects are indicated by points. Negative values indicate lower distributive expectations from non-coethnics relative to coethnics. ATEs from OLS regressions with market fixed effects and market-clustered standard errors are shown. Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

differences.[28] Both largely follow the same pattern of situational variation. This consistency of results across ethnic dimensions of varying breadths cuts against arguments anticipating ethnic salience to be a function of group size (Posner 2005). Third, I test and find little evidence that individual-level ATEs are significantly conditioned by *market*-level characteristics (SI Supplement D).

Noncompliance

The results report intent-to-treat estimates. To account for possible noncompliance bias, I examined the complier average treatment effect on respondents who "correctly" perceive the treatment (i.e., correctly classify migrants as coethnics or non-coethnics). The adjustments (SI Supplement E) show intent-to-treat estimates are conservative, and complier treatment effects are 40–50% higher.

Measurement Validity

I also assess whether behavior on the vignette experiments correlates with stated actual behavior (SI Supplement F).

In the first set of tests, a binary independent variable indicates whether the respondent agreed to share a room with a non-coethnic in the vignette experiment. The binary dependent variable indicates whether a respondent reported ever *actually* living with a non-coethnic. The models also included a vector of individual-level control variables (for a similar analysis, see Grossman and Baldassarri 2012). The results indicate interethnic social cooperation on the survey experiment significantly predicts ($p < .001$) equivalent interethnic cooperative behavior in real life.[29] Similarly, willingness to join a union headed by a non-coethnic on the survey experiment significantly predicts actual interethnic worksite cooperation (having helped a non-coethnic find a job at the *chowk*). While imperfect, these analyses improve confidence that behavior revealed by the vignette experiments approximates reported real-life migrant behavior. In doing so, they help validate the painstaking process of vignette construction.

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[28]The vignettes also varied a migrant's region of origin. Those results are the focus of separate work and do not affect the main results here.

[29]Willingness to live with a non-coethnic on the survey was associated with an increase in the predicted probability of doing so in real life from 40.13% to 71.96%.

FIGURE 3 ATEs Conditioned by Time in City
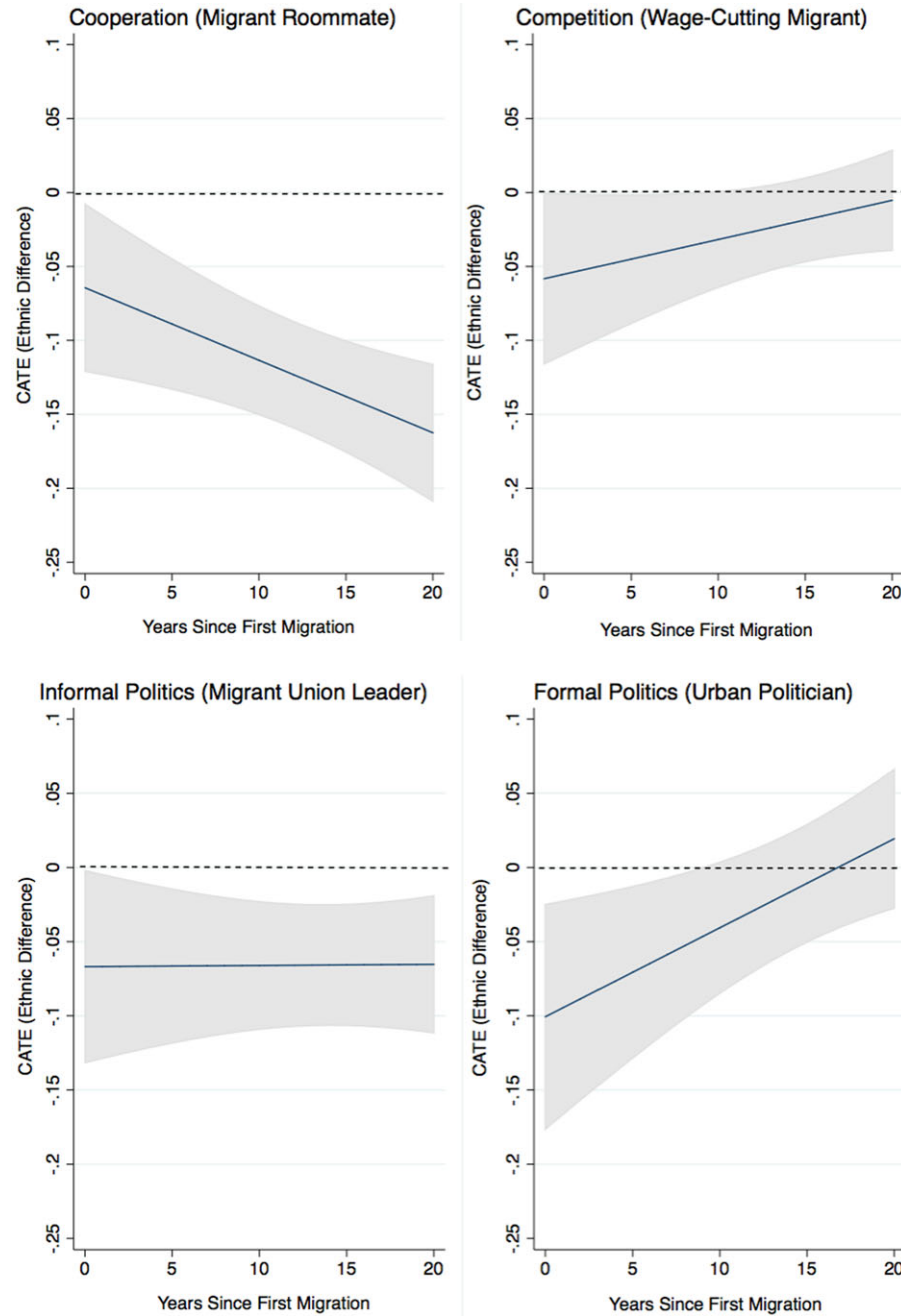
Note: Solid lines represent the treatment effect of ethnic difference (caste) conditioned by years since a migrant's first migration. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals.

External Validity

Construction is the preeminent employer of circular migrants in India. Yet the results might differ for self-employed migrants, the second largest migrant employment category (NSS 2007, 95). To address this concern, I replicated my ethnography and experiment with migrant street vendors, an occupation estimated to encompass 14% of *all* urban informal workers in India (Chen and Raveendran 2011).

Since wage-based labor and self-employment encompass 85% of poor migrant employment in India, the vendor survey broadens the scope of my study considerably. Further, vendor markets differ from labor markets across important dimensions, including sources of risk (wage nonpayment vs. theft/loss of goods) and market spatial structure (fixed positions for vendors vs. fluid positions for laborers). These differences help strengthen the robustness of any findings common to both market types.

A random sample of 1,200 street vendors across 36 markets was interviewed in Lucknow (cost concerns prevented replication in Delhi as well). Informal marketplaces were again randomly selected from a larger list created through a zone-wise enumeration process with the help of a local NGO (Nidaan) and the Lucknow municipality. The vignettes were constructed through prior ethnographic research and designed to mimic the labor market vignettes as closely as possible (full text in SI Supplement A).

In three of four instances, the vignettes were practically identical, asking respondents to evaluate hypothetical migrant roommates, informal market "presidents" (*adhyaksh*), and city politicians. For the competition vignette, I replaced a migrant laborer engaging in "wage-cutting" with a migrant vendor engaging in "price-cutting" (i.e., undercutting another vendor's price to make a sale). Figure 4 shows the main results are strikingly similar for migrant street vendors.

Explaining Situational Variation: Qualitative Evidence

The experiment revealed considerable cross-sectional and temporal variation in the salience of intra-class ethnic divisions between poor migrants. Such variation aligns with situational theories that anticipate ethnic divisions to be muted only in contexts that trigger a shared ingroup identity among migrants. To help pinpoint these contextual triggers, I draw on evidence from debriefing interviews and postsurvey ethnography.

Debriefing Interviews

Debriefing interviews were separately conducted with a random subset (roughly 15%) of survey respondents. Each interview asked migrants to reflect on one of the four experimental vignettes, selected at random. This rich data (N = 452) reveals how elite outgroups activate a common ingroup identity among poor migrants. This is not to suggest that elite attitudes are the *only* situational

triggers of migrant solidarities. Rather, this evidence illustrates how elite outgroups are one important influence shaping when migrants divide or unite across ethnic divisions.

For example, in the competition vignette, debriefing interviewees who evaluated a wage-cutting migrant of a different ethnicity (N = 98) were far more likely to make *unsolicited* criticisms of urban employers (N = 52) than the wage-cutter's ethnic group (N = 27):

> *Makaan maliks* [homeowners] and *thekedars* [contractors] play us against each other, they make us cut each other's rates so they can pocket more of the money. (Delhi)

> It [wage-cutting] is about who is hungry and who is not. And all of us *mazdoors* [laborers] have been hungry at some point because of how these builders use us to fill their own stomachs. (Lucknow)

Urban elites (i.e., contractors, builders, and middle-class homeowners) activate a shared ingroup because migrants believe elite mistreatment is indiscriminately applied across ethnic boundaries. Indeed, interviewees did not believe urban employers even perceived ethnic differences between them:

> You think these *maaliks* [owners] who drive up to the markets know I am a [upper-caste] Brahmin? We are all just labor—and worse than the dogs who they will let ride in the cars with them.[30]

> See if we go to work in a rich upper caste man's house. In the village, an upper caste worker will normally be allowed to have tea from the house cups. But that is not the case in Lucknow—here we are all seen as labor.[31]

My theoretical concerns are with how migrants' perceptions of elite behavior shape dynamics within their communities. However, interviews with labor contractors and real estate developers in New Delhi validated these perceptions (N = 9). Urban employers agreed they primarily viewed migrant laborers in class terms, contrasting themselves with rural employers of agricultural labor. The latter use ethnic networks to facilitate group hires for full seasons, as coethnic work gangs are regarded as better at preventing costly mid-season dropouts (Bremen 1996). Urban employers did not feel

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[30] Interview, TN, January 22, 2014.

[31] Interview, Etta Nagar (EN), Lucknow, April 14, 2014.

## FIGURE 4 External Validity (Migrant Vendors)
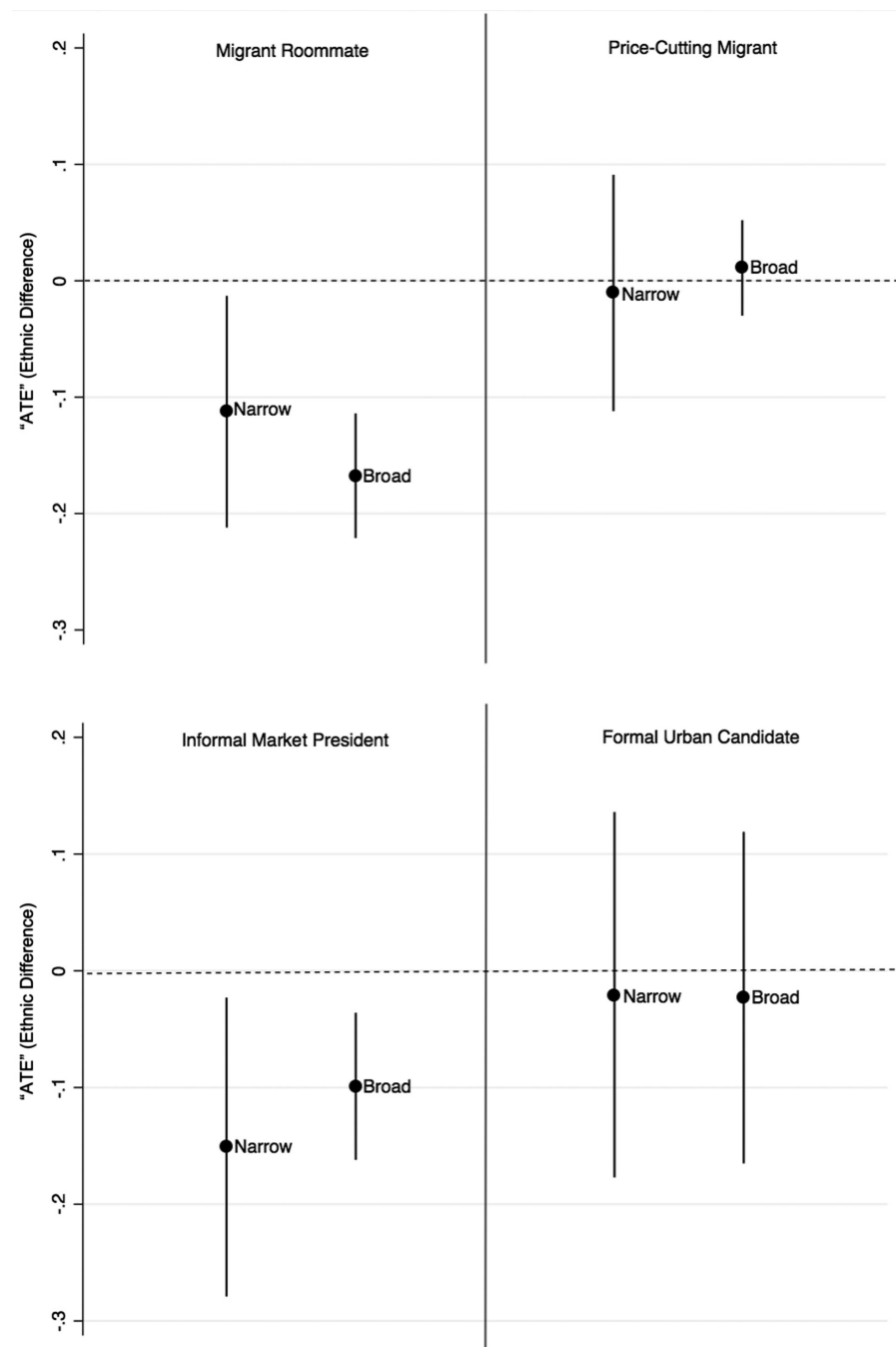
Note: Average treatment effects indicate the impact of ethnic difference on evaluations of a hypothetical migrant/candidate. Negative values indicate bias against non-coethnics relative to coethnics. ATEs from OLS regressions with market fixed effects and market-clustered standard errors are shown. Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

similar compulsions. Abundant, replenishing supplies of substitutable *chowk* labor enabled them to rely on the individualized sanctioning power of single-day contracts.[32] Additionally, city employers face far higher costs in discerning and verifying an individual's ethnicity at crowded, diverse, impersonal, and highly fluid urban labor markets.[33]

[32]Interview, Delhi, May 25, 2015.

[33]Interview, Delhi, May 30, 2015.

FIGURE 5 Migrant Views of Elite Perceptions
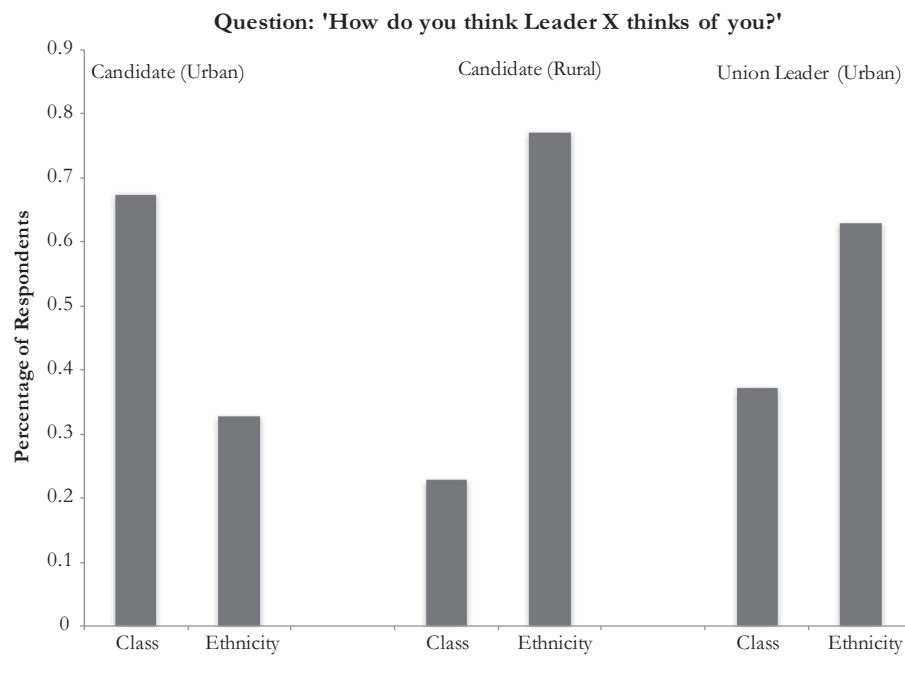
Source: Debriefing interviews (Delhi and Lucknow).
Note: N = 49 for urban candidate; N = 48 for rural candidate, N = 113 for union leader.

A broadly similar dynamic surfaced among street vendors considering a price-cutting migrant. Unlike laborers, vendors lack single direct employers. Prior work suggests this reduces the potential for elite-triggered, class-based solidarities (Roberts 2002). Yet vendor informants often described their urban customers in explicit class terms, as "colony people."[34] Furthermore, these customers were often seen as responsible for competitive price-cutting. As one informant said, "The problem is that colony people play games with us. They come and say he is selling for Rs. 15—will you sell for Rs. 12. No vendor will want to sell for less otherwise."[35]

Debriefing interviews with *chowk* workers revealed that in situations removed from the unifying presence of urban elites, intra-class ethnic differences remain highly socially salient. Interviewees revisiting their responses in the cooperation vignette frequently deployed the fracturing language of ethnicity:

The thing is that to share a room requires trust. What if the man runs away with all my things?

[34]Middle-class residential neighborhoods are often called "colonies."

[35]Interview, EN, March 12, 2015. This is not to deny alternative sources of interethnic vendor solidarities within the labor market arena. Rather, it cautions against assuming urban elites play *no* role in structuring such solidarities.

Such things happen all the time in places like Lucknow. That is why it is better to live with someone from your *jati samaj* [subcaste community]. (Lucknow)

[Lower-caste respondent]: It is difficult for me to live with a Brahmin. He is not from my community, and they [Brahmins] are often lazy. How do I know he will earn enough to pay his share of the rent? (Delhi)

In the sample, 64 of the 96 debriefing interviewees presented with a non-coethnic roommate had refused to live with him; 84% of explanations of these refusals made voluntary reference to ethnic differences.

A similar bifurcation manifested across the two political vignettes. Respondents believed urban politicians, like urban employers, perceived them in class terms:

See you have people from all castes and regions here: *Rajputs*, *Khatris*, *Yadavs* [caste names] . . . but to politicians in the city we are all the same thing. We are all just labor *log* [people]. (Lucknow)

Migrants even reported that parties view them in class terms when recruiting them as paid "volunteers" at election rallies: "At the rallies—who goes? The local Delhites don't go. They round up all of us laborers and take us

FIGURE 6 Temporal Effects for Urban vs. Rural Politics
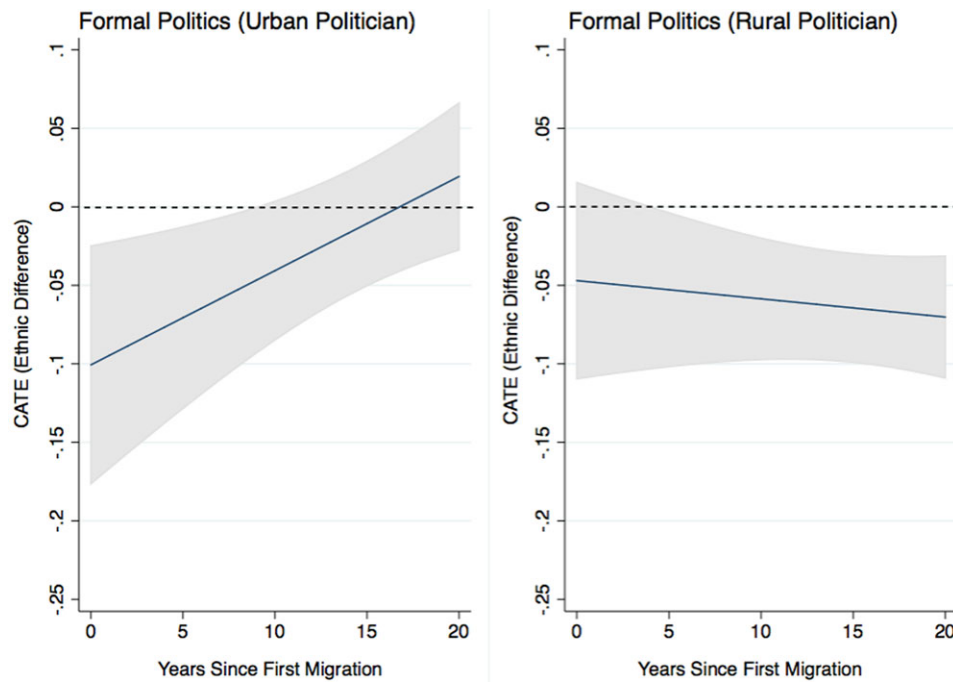
Note: Solid lines represent the treatment effect of ethnic difference (caste) conditioned by years since a migrant's first migration. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals.

instead."[36] Debriefing interviewees were explicitly asked whether they thought the candidate primarily saw them in class or ethnic terms. Figure 5 shows 67% of interviewees said the urban candidate would perceive them in class terms, whereas only 33% mentioned *any* ethnic identity.

In the political arena, such perceptions inform migrants' belief that their neglect by urban politicians is ethnically indiscriminate. Such shared, cross-ethnic neglect can powerfully raise the salience of a class-connoted "poor migrant" ingroup, and even increase willingness to make claims on the basis of that ingroup:

> Urban politicians don't listen to us, because they just see us as poor laborers . . . Now if there are 100–200 of us workers here who go to him together and say we will vote as one. Then he will understand we can make the difference between winning and losing. (Delhi)

However, the weak electoral salience of ethnicity is not solely attributable to cross-ethnic, class-based neglect.[37] If it were, ethnic divisions should remain salient

among veteran migrants, who are more likely to have urban political connections and voice, and are less likely to be neglected. Yet veteran migrants cue *less* than more recent arrivals on ethnicity in evaluating city politicians (Figure 6 and SI Supplement Table S.9). Ethnic divisions were also not salient for respondents who have acquired voting rights in the city. Further, over 40% of migrants do expect urban political candidates to deliver some benefits to people like them.

Thus, ethnicity's lack of salience is at least partially driven by migrant beliefs that such assistance, when given, will not flow along ascriptive divisions. Such beliefs make sense, given that migrants see urban elites as not even perceiving their ethnic identities (Figure 5). These perceptions in turn disrupt the distributive expectations underpinning ethnicity's electoral salience (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Consistent with this interpretation, Figure 2 showed respondents do not view coethnic urban politicians as more likely to channel benefits to them.

At the same time, intra-class ethnic divisions reemerge in political decisions removed from the unifying presence of urban elites, such as informal worksite leader selection. Respondents expected such leaders, who

[36]Interview, TN, November 17, 2013.

[37]My respondents' use of class often denoted a specifically *migrant* underclass, one subtly distinct from poor urban natives. For my

analysis, the key point is the cross-ethnic nature of this shared ingroup.

emerge from within migrant communities, to accurately discern their ethnic identities (Figure 5). Leaders are then expected to act on this knowledge and channel benefits along ethnic lines (Figure 2):

> If a Yadav [member of the Yadav caste] were to head a union, he would just run it for himself and his close friends. (Lucknow)

> How can I support a Muslim as the market leader? He will bring all his relatives and only give jobs to them. That is how he will stay as the head of the union. (Lucknow)

> Can you imagine what would happen if a [upper-caste] Brahmin became the leader? Would a [lower-caste] Dalit like me ever get a job? (Delhi)

This broad logic also helps explain why ethnic differences fracture migrant evaluations of *rural* political candidates. For instance, 77% of debriefing interviewees believed rural candidates primarily see them in terms of ethnicity (Figure 5) and favor coethnics when providing benefits (Figure 2). These perceptions contrast sharply with those of urban politicians, suggesting the "visibility advantage" of ethnicity over class is reversed as migrants shift from ethnically organized Indian villages to ethnically mixed poor urban communities (Chandra 2004). Consistent with this logic, Figure 6 shows ethnic salience decreases in evaluations of urban candidates, as migrants spend more time in the city (and are increasingly exposed to urban politicians). However, ethnic salience remains entrenched over time in rural candidate evaluation.

This growing rural–urban divide in migrant political attitudes suggests a novel channel through which migration may dampen the logic of ethnic voting in urbanizing democracies. However, the scope of this channel hinges on how many migrants actually become part of the urban electorate. SI Table S.7 suggests a definite, but slow and uneven trend of political urban integration: 18% of migrants whose first migration occurred over 20 years ago have voted in urban elections, compared to just 3% of recent migrants (0–3 years).

Conclusion

Despite rapid urbanization across the Global South, studies of poor rural-urban migrants are surprisingly rare. Do village-based ethnic identities divide poor migrants in the city? Or do these populations discard ethnic markers in favor of class-based solidarities? A novel ethnographic vignette-experiment from India finds intra-class ethnic divisions are neither uniformly trivial nor entrenched across important arenas of migrant life. Instead, the salience of these divisions is muted when migrants face urban elites who view and treat them in shared class terms, but pronounced when migrants interact with each other away from this uniting external influence.

This study opens several avenues for future research. Theoretically, it provides intriguing implications for how ethnicity might shape city politics in urbanizing democracies. Specifically, my analysis suggests anti-elite populism may directly mobilize poor migrants across ethnic lines in pursuit of common interests, even as migrants remain sharply divided within their communities. Conversely, this study suggests that despite shared grievances, migrants can be ethnically mobilized indirectly via local leaders, provided the latter have ethnically informed local bases. Examining when parties deploy either approach is an exciting topic for further study.

This article can also be empirically extended in several directions. One natural extension is to assess how intra-class ethnic divisions interact with professional divisions in an occupationally mixed poor migrant sample. My focus on circular migrants also prompts comparisons with migrants who more permanently settle in cities. Finally, the generalizability of my findings outside the important case of India needs assessment. The comparative potential of such inquiries is aided by the universal importance of the issue domains examined here, and the fact that Indian cities are hardly unique in concentrating poor villagers from various ethnic backgrounds at shared worksites and settlements. As the rural poor of the Global South shift to cities, scholars of identity politics will have to follow suit.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Part A: Text of Vignettes
Part B: Summary Statistics and Orthogonality Tests
Part C: Main Results and Additional Tests
Part D: Market- Level Analysis
Part E: Treatment on Compliers Tests
Part F: Does the Survey Experiment Predict Real-Life Behavior?
Part G: Survey Protocol Details