

# Cultivating Clients: Reputation, Responsiveness, and Ethnic Indifference in India's Slums

**Adam Michael Auerbach** American University  
**Tariq Thachil** Vanderbilt University

**Abstract:** *Studies of clientelism overwhelmingly focus on how brokers target voters with top-down benefits during elections. Yet brokers also receive requests from voters for assistance between elections, initiating the processes through which they cultivate clients. Why are brokers responsive to the requests of some voters and not others? We provide the first study of broker preferences when evaluating client appeals. Theories emphasizing brokers as vote monitors anticipate they will prefer co-partisans and coethnics, whose reciprocity they can best verify. Theories emphasizing brokers as vote mobilizers anticipate they will prefer residents who will maximize their reputations for efficacy. We test these expectations through a conjoint experiment with 629 Indian slum leaders, ethnographic fieldwork, and a survey of 2,199 slum residents. We find evidence of reputational considerations shaping broker responsiveness. We find mixed support for monitoring concerns, highlighted by an absence of the strong ethnic favoritism assumed to dominate distributive politics in many developing countries.*

**Verification Materials:** The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QBTECH>.

In much of the world, accessing public services involves confronting discretionary and dismissive state institutions. This is especially true for poor citizens who lack the wealth and personal connections to directly command the audience of officials. In such contexts, the poor often turn to political brokers to help navigate state bureaucracies. Brokers simultaneously represent the most grassroots extensions of party machines in many settings, tasked with securing support in the neighborhoods where they operate.

The distributive activities of brokers have been widely analyzed (Koter 2013; Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016; Stokes et al. 2013). However, most studies focus on how they facilitate the top-down *targeting* of party resources to voters during elections. Scholars have yet to

sufficiently investigate the factors structuring the bottom-up *responsiveness* of brokers to quotidian requests for assistance. Yet client requests have been found to be the predominant form of broker–voter interactions in many parts of the world (Auyero 2000; Krishna 2002; Nichter and Peress 2017; Szwarcberg 2015). Explaining patterns of broker responsiveness to client requests is therefore crucial to understanding distributive politics across the developing world.

Our contribution focuses on understanding broker responsiveness when deciding which residents to cultivate as clients. We address this question by identifying the hitherto unstudied preferences of brokers when evaluating everyday requests from potential clients. We argue that brokers are careerists, whose responsiveness to

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Adam Michael Auerbach is Assistant Professor, School of International Service, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20016 (aauerba@american.edu). Tariq Thachil is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Vanderbilt University, 230 Appleton Place, Nashville, TN 37203 (tariq.thachil@vanderbilt.edu).

Authors are listed alphabetically. The authors thank Ward Berenschot, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, Barry Driscoll, Jessica Gottlieb, Anirudh Krishna, Mashail Malik, Gareth Nellis, Simeon Nichter, David Samuels, Emily Sellars, Susan Stokes, Ashutosh Varshney, Gilles Verniers, Erik Wibbels, Steve Wilkinson, and seminar participants at Ashoka University, Claremont McKenna College, Duke University, George Washington University, McGill University, MIT, Queen's University, Texas A&M University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Washington, and Yale University for their valuable comments on this article. This study received institutional review board approval from American University (15098) and was preregistered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (20160813). Ved Prakash Sharma and the survey team provided excellent research assistance. This research was made possible by grants from the MacMillan Center, Yale University, and the School of International Service, American University.

*American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 64, No. 3, July 2020, Pp. 471–487

potential clients is informed by two concerns. Each concern stems from one of the two primary roles brokers play within party machines: monitoring and mobilizing voters. The need to monitor voters leads brokers to ask: Is the potential client someone whose political behavior I can verify? The need to mobilize voters leads them to ask: Is the potential client positioned to enhance my reputation with other potential clients?

We expect each concern to compel brokers to prioritize cultivating clients with specific attributes. Monitoring concerns should compel strong preferences for voters in shared ethnic or partisan networks, whose political behavior they can more confidently observe. By contrast, reputational concerns generate incentives to favor voters whose support projects inclusivity. Inclusive reputations spread a broker's appeal among the broadest possible swathe of clients. For example, reputation seeking encourages brokers to *avoid* serving only certain social groups, including their own coethnics. Reputational concerns should also lead brokers to prioritize socially influential residents, who are positioned to spread word of a broker's efficacy, maximizing reputational spillovers.

We test these expectations, and the relative weight of monitoring and reputational concerns, within India's proliferating slums. Slums are a productive setting in which to situate our study, as they are vulnerable, densely populated spaces rife with political intermediaries. First, most slum leaders are archetypal brokers who hold positions within party organizations. Second, the underdevelopment of slums forces leaders to choose between many daily resident requests. Third, the demography of slums provides rich variation in the ethnic, occupational, and partisan characteristics of potential clients whom brokers must consider as they build their followings. Fourth, the relative newness of these settlements, combined with high resident turnover and significant heterogeneity in resident villages of origin, ensure client cultivation is an important and ongoing process. In these conditions, slum leaders—typically migrants and political novices—must stitch together a client base from scratch.

To test our theoretical framework, we administered an ethnographically informed conjoint survey experiment to a unique sample of 629 slum leaders across 110 slums in two north Indian cities.<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to choose between two hypothetical residents asking for help in obtaining a public service. The attributes of these two potential clients were randomly assigned, theoretically linked to reputational and monitoring concerns, and operationalized through qualitative research. We then

assess whether experimentally revealed broker preferences align with observational data from slum residents regarding whether they received assistance. Our multi-pronged approach draws on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews across our study cities; an original survey of 2,199 residents across the same 110 settlements; and short, open-ended interviews appended onto our broker survey.

Our results suggest broker responsiveness is strongly guided by reputational concerns. We find slum leaders on average prefer residents whose support helps project an inclusive image, and who occupy socially central positions. Most arresting, given ethnicity's presumed preeminence in Indian politics, we find no evidence of strong preferences for co-ethnic clients. We argue ethnic indifference is driven by incentives to build broad, multiethnic followings in India's diverse slums. We find more mixed evidence of the importance of monitoring concerns. On average, slum leaders demonstrate a preference to help co-partisans, as monitoring theories predict. However, their ethnic indifference contradicts monitoring theories' expectations of ethnic favoritism. Few slum leaders, moreover, believe they can effectively monitor residents, even if they wish to do so.

Our article makes several important contributions to the study of distributive politics. We provide the first systematic study of the preferences guiding broker responsiveness to resident requests.<sup>2</sup> For the residents and brokers we studied, such demands are more important than election-time vote-buying efforts in cementing broker-client relations. We therefore seek to motivate research in other contexts on patterns of broker responsiveness to bottom-up client demands, not simply their role in the top-down targeting of party handouts during elections.

Second, our findings challenge the presumed centrality of ethnicity in distributive politics within "ethnicized" democracies like India (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). The ethnic indifference suggested by our experimental and qualitative and quantitative observational data partly reflects the changing realities wrought by rapid urbanization across Asia and Africa. The heightened diversity of slums especially diminishes the usefulness of ethnicity in crafting coalitions of support, even at highly localized levels. This striking finding contributes to efforts to understand whether and how urbanization alters ethnic politics (Nathan 2016).

Third, our findings underscore the importance of viewing brokers as careerists seeking upward mobility within parties, rather than actors content to remain

<sup>1</sup>On using ethnography to design survey experiments, see Thachil 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Stokes et al. (2013) examine which clients brokers prefer to target with top-down party resources, and exclusively focus on partisanship.

perpetual rent-seeking intermediaries. Our findings suggest brokers are ambitious actors who seek to build personal reputations, and not simply enforce electoral compliance. Our fieldwork and surveys build on and corroborate recent qualitative evidence of the importance of broker reputations (Szwarcberg 2015), as well as the limited efforts brokers make to monitor voters (Zarazaga 2014). However, we move past these studies by theorizing and testing the implications of reputational concerns for how brokers evaluate and respond to clients.

Fourth, we make original empirical contributions by providing one of the first systematic surveys of brokers. It is also, to our knowledge, the first large and representative survey of slum leaders ever conducted. With over 850 million people living in slums worldwide, understanding the motivations of these actors to address resident needs is of global importance.

## Which Clients Will Brokers Cultivate?

Studies of clientelism emphasize the question of why parties (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005) and their brokers (Stokes et al. 2013) target certain voters for particularistic benefits, especially during elections. In focusing on these episodic, top-down *targeting* decisions, the literature has neglected the cacophony of daily requests poor voters make on local brokers, and *uneven broker responsiveness* to those requests. A few important studies note the significance of client requests (Auyero 2000; Krishna 2002; Zarazaga 2014) and find residents who make demands receive more benefits than those who do not (Nichter and Peress 2017). Yet no study has sought to systematically identify how brokers choose between residents asking for assistance.

If such requests are indeed the foundations upon which a client base is built, understanding how brokers make such decisions is crucial.<sup>3</sup> Broker autonomy in these decisions is enabled by their proximity to residents and relative distance to party patrons (Stokes et al. 2013). Yet hard resource constraints prevent brokers from addressing every request to maximize their base of support. Slum brokers have limited time, personal and party resources, and political capital with party elites, forcing

<sup>3</sup>Past studies suggest preexisting personal ties between clients and brokers are weak, and largely constructed through the problem-solving process. Even for iconic machines like the Peronist Party in Buenos Aires' shantytowns, Auyero (2000, 94) argues, "the potential beneficiaries of the broker's distributive capacities are related to the broker through *weak ties*. They contact the broker when problems arise . . . but they do not develop ties of friendship or fictive kinship with brokers."

tough choices. The experiences of residents reflected such discretion. Some described their slum leaders as helpful:

Earlier our road was unpaved but [our slum leader] met the ward councilor and got a cement road constructed.<sup>4</sup>

[Our slum leader] goes to the waterworks with us. If the borewell stops functioning, he makes a few calls.<sup>5</sup>

Yet other residents of the same settlements complained of unresponsive leaders:

These local leaders don't listen . . . I went to them once, but [they] did nothing.<sup>6</sup>

If we go to the [slum leaders], they tell us they will come over but they never do.<sup>7</sup>

Which kinds of clients do brokers prioritize? Our framework, presented below, emphasizes two concerns that respectively flow from brokers' dual roles as vote monitors and vote mobilizers.

### Concern 1: Monitoring Reciprocity

Scholars frequently conceptualize clientelism in terms of election-time vote buying (Schaffer 2007; Stokes 2005). Parties distribute handouts during campaigns, and voters reciprocate at the ballot box. Such transactional efforts create a commitment problem: How can parties ensure voters return the favor? This problem compels parties to monitor voters through local brokers. "Monitoring-centered" models of clientelism anticipate parties will evaluate brokers in terms of their ability to verify client electoral compliance or turnout (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016; Nichter 2008; Stokes et al. 2013).

For our study, the key implication of monitoring-centered models concerns the types of clients they anticipate brokers to most strongly prefer when considering requests. Monitoring reciprocity is challenging in contexts like India with secret ballots and dense, diverse electorates. Consequently, monitoring theories anticipate brokers to heavily prioritize residents whose vote choices they can most confidently observe through shared social and political networks (Stokes et al. 2013). Brokers in Latin America have been viewed as tightly linked to

<sup>4</sup>Settlement B, Interview 7.

<sup>5</sup>Settlement B, Interview 1.

<sup>6</sup>Settlement B, Interview 10.

<sup>7</sup>Settlement B, Interview 17.

co-partisans through shared political networks, informing their preference for such voters (Calvo and Murillo 2012). This logic aligns with theories arguing risk-averse political actors will favor loyal “core” voters over persuadable “swing” voters (Cox and McCubbins 1986).<sup>8</sup> Nichter (2008) argues parties focus on buying turnout, which is easier to monitor than vote choice, prompting them to target co-partisan *non*voters over swing voters.

Scholars of clientelism in South Asia and Africa have emphasized the equivalent utility of shared ethnic networks (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Coethnics are often embedded within dense social networks, facilitating cooperation and trust (Habyarimana et al. 2007). As such, brokers may be better able to monitor coethnics, and hence more likely to prioritize them. Such preferences are plausibly conditioned by the size of the shared ethnic group (Posner 2005). Monitoring through shared social ties is most effectively enabled within narrowly defined ethnic communities (i.e., caste or tribe), whose members are more tightly linked than coethnics within more broadly defined communities (i.e., religion or language).

The expectations from monitoring-centered studies yield two hypotheses:

- H1a:* Brokers will on average prefer requests from co-partisan voters over independents or rival partisans.
- H1b:* Brokers will on average prefer requests from co-ethnic voters over non-coethnic voters. This favoritism is more likely for narrow-category coethnics than broad-category coethnics.

## Concern 2: Building Local Reputations

A focus on credible commitments as the preeminent problem besetting clientelism stems from an emphasis on election-time exchanges of handouts for votes. In studies of vote buying, client support is assumed to flow axiomatically from benefit receipt, with brokers acting as little more than spigots through which handouts flow (Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005). Given brokers do little on their own to generate support within such transactional clientelism, it makes sense to focus on monitoring.

Yet numerous studies have found parties rely on brokers to mobilize voters, not simply monitor them (Auyero 2000; Camp 2015; Novaes 2018; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014).

<sup>8</sup>Although Cox and McCubbins (1986, 379) do not explicitly focus on monitoring, they do argue risk-averse political actors target core voters because they are “infrequent and intensive contact with them and [have] relatively precise and accurate ideas about how they will react.”

This role is apparent if we shift focus from election-time transactions to everyday interactions between brokers and voters. Such interactions typically take the form of voters approaching brokers for help accessing public services. Brokers who establish reputations for efficacy in problem solving can attract large personal followings. The incentives to build such reputations are considerable. Popular reputations yield rents from a larger number of clients, and even more handsome election-time fees from parties.<sup>9</sup>

Yet reputation seeking is not simply compelled by immediate rent seeking, but by longer careerist aspirations within party organizations. Our survey data and interviews confirmed most brokers see their reputations with clients as central to their upward mobility:<sup>10</sup>

I was first a party supporter. But when I went to party meetings, and brought 10–20 people with me, party leaders saw I was making the party popular. They were impressed and made me [Ward] Vice President.<sup>11</sup>

Even though not all brokers can ascend party ranks, broker aspirations should not be dismissed as wishful thinking. In all, 66% of surveyed slum leaders held at least one *pad* (position) within party organizations (415 out of 629). The trajectories of these position holders are presented in Figure 1; 67% of the 415 position holders secured multiple *pads*, which tended to follow an upward trajectory.

Extant studies recognize the importance of reputations for careerist brokers (Stokes et al. 2013; Szwarcberg 2015; Zarazaga 2014). Yet none theorize how reputational concerns structure broker responsiveness to potential clients, a task to which we now turn.

## Signaling Inclusivity

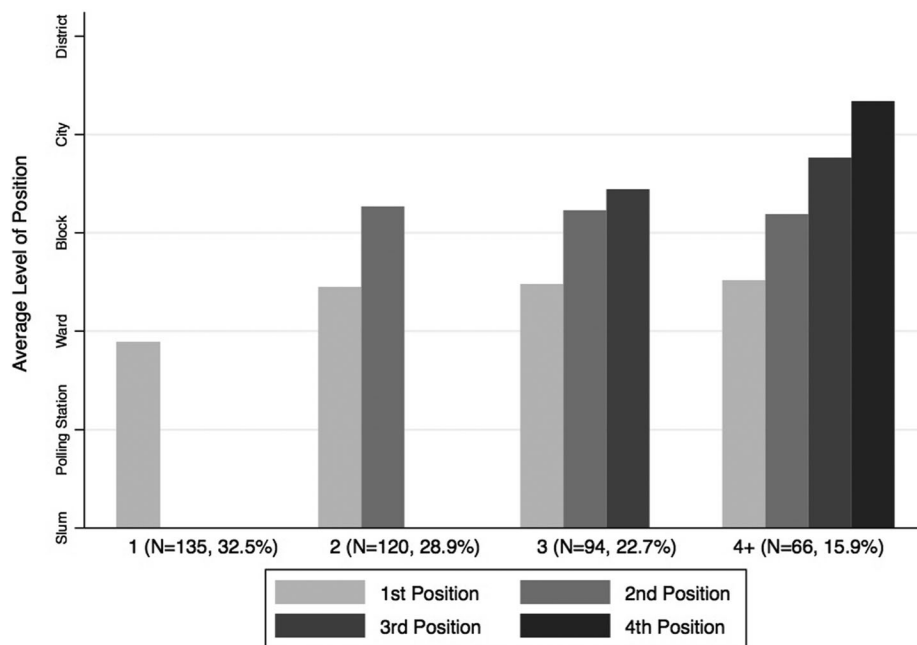
First, brokers looking for client-maximizing reputations should look to cultivate clients with attributes that help

<sup>9</sup>We did not find coercion to play an important role in leader capabilities. We conducted short interviews with each surveyed slum leader about his or her rise to leadership and coded them for any allusion to the use of force. Only 14 (2.2%) made any such allusion. These results align with data from clients suggesting they were not under the thumb of any one leader, allaying fears of desirability bias. In all, 22 of 37 clients we extensively interviewed sought help from multiple leaders, and 45% of surveyed residents even said they could remove brokers from slum leadership positions.

<sup>10</sup>We asked slum leaders the biggest reason for securing a party position: 56.8% said intra-slum popularity (the next highest item accounted for 10.11% of responses).

<sup>11</sup>Leader 3, Settlement E.

**FIGURE 1 Slum Leader Trajectories in Party Organizations**



Note: Horizontal axis denotes total number of positions held by a broker. Column height indicates level of position: 0 (slum level), 1 (polling station), 2 (municipal ward), 3 (administrative block), 4 (city), 5 (district), or 6 (state). Percentages in parentheses indicate proportion of position-holding brokers within each category.

craft an *inclusive image*, rather than a parochial reputation of serving subgroups of voters. We focus on two resident characteristics that facilitate such inclusive reputations. The first is a potential client’s ethnicity. Garnering a reputation for excluding non-coethnics can severely limit a broker’s ability to construct broad, multiethnic coalitions. These constraints are especially punitive in diverse slums. A Brahmin slum leader, for instance, told us he would never favor Brahmins over lower castes because he could not afford a reputation as a “Brahmin leader.”<sup>12</sup>

Prior studies suggest the reputational penalty for favoring coethnics to be inversely related to the size of the ethnic category along which a broker’s favoritism is observed (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). A reputation for favoring coethnics along the narrow dimension of sub-caste may thus be more constraining than a reputation for favoring coethnics along the broader dimensions of religion and region of origin. Yet the careerist ambitions of brokers may provide incentives to display indifference even for these broader categories. Slum leaders do not simply seek narrow pluralities within their settlement. Rather, they hope to assemble the largest possible support bases within their settlement to help launch their careers outside them.

The second characteristic is a potential client’s relative disadvantage within their settlement. Our argument here is distinct from the idea that clientelist machines target the “poor” as a macro-category due to the latter’s high marginal utility of income (Calvo and Murillo 2004). It is less clear how such macrolevel targeting shapes microlevel broker responsiveness *within* impoverished localities. In our study sites, most residents are poor and unskilled relative to national averages. The average per capita income in our settlements was only \$1.09 per day, and 87% of households earned less than \$2 per capita, well below the national average.<sup>13</sup> Based on their income, brokers should be responsive to every slum resident. Yet brokers cannot assure benefits to all, and must select residents to privilege.

Despite the absolute poverty of such settings, *relative* socioeconomic disadvantage may still play a role in shaping broker responsiveness. Although most residents engage in low-income work, a large number toil in jobs that are plagued by informality or irregular pay. Preferences for such disadvantaged voters cannot be explained by their demands’ being especially cheap, or their being especially electorally responsive. Given the basic lack

<sup>12</sup>Author fieldnotes (May 31, 2016).

<sup>13</sup>The unadjusted per-capita income in India is \$7.93 per day (World Bank 2018).



of development within slums, residents of all types request help accessing public services. Further, we do not find turnout to be higher among disadvantaged residents than other slum residents (as we later report).

Instead, we found brokers prioritizing residents from relatively underprivileged categories because of perceived reputational gains. First, prioritizing the occupational “elite” in slums is more easily perceived as exclusionary by larger, relatively disadvantaged professions than vice versa. One leader explained, ‘I will help the *mazdoor* (laborer) before the *karamchari* (clerk). If I am known to help the *mazdoor*, everyone will come to me. If I am known to help the *karamchari*, *mazdoors* may not see me as their man, or worse still may see me as in the pockets of the *karamcharis*.’<sup>14</sup> Second, even if either form of targeting was equally likely to be perceived as exclusionary by neglected residents, unpopularity among potential clients from larger, low-status categories is costlier than among smaller, relatively high-status occupational groups.

### Social Centrality

We anticipate clients with socially central positions to be plausibly more likely to spread positive information stemming from a broker’s assistance than residents who are peripheral. Our expectation here aligns with Schaeffer and Baker (2015), who argue “social multiplier effects” can incentivize parties to privilege voters who are central within local political discussion networks. However, they examine who vote-seeking parties aim to target in their top-down efforts to buy support. We examine whom brokers seek to prioritize when responding to bottom-up requests for assistance. These distinctions inform further differences regarding what is expected of socially central residents. For Schaeffer and Baker, parties target socially central voters because the latter engage in electoral persuasion, essentially acting as nascent brokers. Our focus on broker reputations expects less of socially central citizens. These clients are merely expected to spread word of a broker’s assistance, widening the net of people who may approach the latter for help.

To summarize, a focus on reputation building yields the following three hypotheses:

*H2a:* Brokers will not prefer coethnic voters to non-coethnic voters on average. Ethnic indifference will be stronger for narrow category coethnics than broad category coethnics.

*H2b:* Brokers will on average prefer voters who are relatively disadvantaged within their local communities to those who are relatively advantaged.

*H2c:* Brokers will on average prefer voters who are socially central within their local communities to those who are peripheral.

Reputational and monitoring concerns can be complementary on certain dimensions, but they can also yield contrasting expectations on others. Hypothesis 2a with Hypothesis 1b illustrate that for ethnicity, the two concerns generate rival expectations. Monitoring concerns should lead brokers to exhibit ethnic *favoritism*, most strongly for narrow coethnic groups. Reputational concerns should lead brokers to exhibit ethnic *indifference*, again most strongly for narrow coethnic groups.

## Research Design

To identify the preferences underpinning broker responsiveness, we conducted a forced-choice conjoint survey experiment among slum leaders in our study cities, Bhopal and Jaipur. Slum leaders were presented with a scenario in which another slum leader, in a settlement like theirs, was approached by two residents asking for help accessing a public service for residents in their alley. Respondents were given information about several randomized attributes of each resident. Each attribute was linked to a core concept of interest: coethnicity, co-partisanship, social centrality, and socioeconomic disadvantage. Respondents were then asked to advise the slum leader as to whom to help first.<sup>15</sup>

We chose a conjoint survey design because this method was designed for identifying preferences—our core analytic concern. Second, conjoint analysis disentangles the effects of multiple resident attributes that are often observationally correlated (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).

Third, this design can reduce social desirability bias by offering respondents the confidentiality of several potential justifications for each choice. Fourth, we chose a forced-choice design specifically, because it compelled leaders to choose one resident over another, as they must in real life.

However, survey experiments can raise concerns of construct validity, which often stem from boilerplate designs that prioritize theoretical interest over contextual resonance. To reduce such concerns, we drew on ethnographic fieldwork to operationalize our core theoretical

<sup>14</sup> Author fieldnotes 6/2/2016.

<sup>15</sup> The exact wording of the question was: ‘In your opinion, which of these two residents should the leader help first?’

concepts into five simple, contextually resonant attributes (see Section S.1 in the supporting information [SI]).

### Ethnicity

We assess three key dimensions of ethnicity in India. First, we examine *jatis*, endogamous subcastes that denote traditional occupations, are highly localized, and number in the hundreds. Our treatments varied a resident's name, which indicates his or her subcaste. Slum leaders were assigned (with equal probability) to evaluate residents from their own *jati*, one of three well-known upper-caste Hindu *jatis*, one of three well-known lower-caste Hindu *jatis*, or one of three well-known Muslim *jatis*. This manipulation created a *jati* match or mismatch between the respondent and resident. These names also identified a resident as Hindu or Muslim, allowing us to classify slum leaders as ethnic matches or mismatches on religion.

We also assess the salience of region-of-origin differences by randomizing each resident's home state. Residents were randomly assigned to come from the slum leader's home state, the state of the study city (Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh), another prominent source state within north India's "Hindi belt" (Uttar Pradesh or Bihar), or a prominent source state from a different linguistic region of India (West Bengal or Maharashtra).

The salience of shared *jati*, faith, or regional identities is provided by the difference in probability of residents' being preferred when they are coethnics with a slum leader on that dimension, compared to when they are not.

### Partisanship

We randomly assign residents to either be supporters of one of the two major parties in our study cities, the Indian National Congress (Congress) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or to be "swing" voters who sometimes vote for the Congress and other times for the BJP. The salience of co-partisan identities is provided by the difference in probability of selection when residents are co-partisans of the respondent, compared to when they are not.

### Socioeconomic Disadvantage

While all slum residents are underprivileged in absolute terms, we argue that reputational concerns prompt slum leaders to prefer relatively underprivileged constituents (Hypothesis 2b). We randomize resident occupations, which fieldwork revealed as the most observable indicator of relative disadvantage. For occupations indicating relative privilege, we selected low-level jobs within the mu-

nicipality: municipal sweeper, security guard, and clerk. These occupations have modest earnings, as we intended them to be realistic for slum residents to hold. Yet the stability of government work is still coveted, compared to private contract work or self-employment.

Our protocol also includes three jobs understood as relatively low in status: unskilled house painters, street vendors, and autorickshaw drivers. We find that 43% of surveyed residents held such "disadvantaged" jobs—the largest employment category in our sample<sup>16</sup> The salience of socioeconomic disadvantage is provided by the difference in probability of residents being preferred when they hold one of these low-status jobs, compared to when they hold high-status municipal jobs.

### Social Centrality

We indicate how socially central a resident is in two ways (Hypothesis 2c). The first is a set of occupational treatments, indicating jobs that locate someone centrally within the slum's social environment, compared to jobs that take residents outside of the slum. The clearest examples of such socially central jobs were shopkeepers who ran stores within the slum. These shopkeepers work within the settlement, and their stores are popular spaces for residents to socialize. Our experiment included three shopkeepers: corner shop owners, tea stall owners, and cigarette-*paan*<sup>17</sup> stand owners.

The salience of social centrality in our experiment is provided by the difference in probability of residents' being preferred when they hold one of the within-slum storekeeper jobs, compared to when they hold one of the municipal jobs. We chose municipal jobholders as the baseline category because, like shopkeepers, they are considered privileged occupations relative to our "disadvantaged" category. However, unlike shopkeepers, municipal jobholders have occupations that take them outside the settlement. From a broker's perspective, we expect the main difference between these two relatively secure job types is their degree of social centrality.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>This figure includes all laborers and painters, drivers, and street vendors.

<sup>17</sup>*Paan* is a stimulant combining betel leaves and areca nuts.

<sup>18</sup>We were reluctant to specify a level of social centrality ("Resident A has many/some/no friends"). Such evaluative statements provide an ordering of clients and carry normative connotations that one trait (and resident) is more desirable than another, exacerbating desirability concerns. Such treatments are also abstract, raising construct validity concerns. Brokers cannot directly observe a resident's social connections and must infer this quality from observable traits. We prefer nonevaluative, observable measures of centrality, such as occupation and time in the slum.

Evidence from our slum resident survey supports this operationalization. Storekeepers were 10 percentage points more likely than other residents to socialize with neighbors (74.7% compared to 65.3%,  $p < .08$ , two-tailed). By contrast, we do not find significant differences between shopkeepers and high-status jobholders in average house quality, or the proportion holding a metered electric connection or owning a gas cooker. For reference, residents in our “disadvantaged job” category fared worse than those in high-status jobs across these asset indicators.

Our second measure of social centrality is the length of time a resident has spent in the slum. Veteran residents have more social relationships within the slum than new arrivals. Residents who had lived in the slum for over 10 years were 8 percentage points more likely to socialize with their neighbors than residents who arrived under 3 years ago (68% compared to 60%,  $p < .01$ , two-tailed). Veteran residents will thus be more attractive potential clients to reputation-seeking brokers. Our baseline category is a resident who had only been in the settlement for a few months. The other half of the residents were said to have lived in the settlement for 10 years.<sup>19</sup>

### Client Demands

Our interest is in how attributes of clients, not the nature of their requests, shape broker responsiveness. To ensure leader evaluations were not impacted by differences in perceived effort or cost between the two requests, our protocol had both clients make identical demands. This premise was believable, as slum leaders frequently receive identical requests for basic necessities. To guard against our results being specific to any one particular demand, we randomized the goods being requested across pairs of respondents (see SI Table S.2). We also ensured that requests, while identical, were understood as separate and mutually excludable. To do so, each request was for the potential client’s specific alley within the slum, and we specified each came from different alleys.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>The average sampled resident has lived in his or her settlement for 22 years. Yet we found rates of socializing to be similar for residents with tenures between 10 and 22 years (67%) and those with tenures longer than 22 years (68.4%). Thus, for an indicator of social centrality, we preferred the lower value as a conservative treatment. At the other end, 2–3 months unambiguously signals a newcomer.

<sup>20</sup>We prefer “alley-level” goods because slum-level public goods benefit all residents and violate the premise of choosing between clients. Household-level private goods (e.g., voter IDs) can be sufficiently low cost for leaders to fulfill both requests simultaneously. SI Table S.10 reports the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) for request type (none are significant). We also do not find any client attribute AMCEs to be conditioned by request type.

### Sampling Slum Leaders

The key empirical challenge we faced was constructing a large, representative sample of slum leaders. There are no publicly available lists of such leaders. Instead, we had to construct our sample through a laborious, multiphase procedure.

The first step was constructing a comprehensive sampling frame of slums in our study cities.<sup>21</sup> We began by collecting official lists of slums in Jaipur and Bhopal. These lists included both officially recognized and nonrecognized slums, ensuring our sample was not biased toward established settlements. This listing yielded 273 slums in Jaipur and 375 in Bhopal.

The next step was isolating squatter settlements—the specific type of slum under study—from other types of urban poverty pockets.<sup>22</sup> The resulting list of squatter settlements—115 in Jaipur and 192 in Bhopal—was then stratified by population and geographic area to maximize variation in size and exposure to politicians. A combined total of 110 settlements were randomly selected across these strata.

The third step was to generate a reliable list of slum leaders. In 2015, we conducted a survey of 2,199 slum residents across all 110 settlements, which we combined with an earlier 2012 resident survey conducted in 80 of these settlements (see Auerbach 2016). Both surveys asked residents to provide the names of their slum leaders. Next, we created a census of party workers across all 110 slums through settlement visits, interviews with party workers, and available party membership rosters. Our final sample included individuals named by more than one resident on our survey (a modest bar to reduce frivolously named individuals), and any confirmed party worker. The final sampling frame totaled 914 slum leaders.<sup>23</sup>

We conducted our leader survey in the summer of 2016. Enumerators were extensively trained with the instrument and protocol for finding slum leaders, and we frequently monitored them in the field. We attempted to interview all 914 informal leaders, and successfully interviewed 629 (68.16%). Most nonresponses were due to death, sickness, or moving out of the settlement. Only 24 (2.62%) were refusals. Our exhaustive listing process

<sup>21</sup>See SI Section S.7 for more details on the survey design.

<sup>22</sup>Squatter settlements are unplanned neighborhoods cobbled together by low-income migrants without official sanction.

<sup>23</sup>SI Section S.7 discusses the multifocal nature of slum leadership and why our sample frame captures the dense concentrations of these actors across settlements. See Auerbach and Thachil (2018) on how competition among slum leaders for clients shapes processes of broker emergence in India’s slums.



combined with this high response rate provides a plausibly representative sample of slum leaders in the two cities.

## Results

Before presenting our experimental findings, we provide descriptive information on our sampled slum leaders. Surveyed slum leaders were ethnically diverse, belonging to 160 distinct *jati*. These *jatis* represent all strata of Hindu castes, and a large number of scheduled tribes and Muslim *zat*. In our sample, 70.75% are Hindus, 26.87% are Muslims, and a small percentage are Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists (2.39%). Most leaders hail from Rajasthan (58.19%) and Madhya Pradesh (26.71%), the two study states. Others migrated from all over the country, including Bihar, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

Slum leaders are predominantly male (87.76%). Their average age was 47.75 years, and average education was 8.37 years. Finally, the vast majority of slum leaders in our sample had a connection to a party; 544 sampled leaders (86.49%) had a party affiliation, and 415 leaders (65.97%) held positions within a party organization.<sup>24</sup> In terms of partisan profiles, 215 expressed support for the Congress and 321 for the BJP.

Our sampled slum leaders report performing several activities for residents, including writing and submitting petitions for public services (86%), assisting residents with obtaining voter IDs and ration cards (94%), and helping residents deal with the police (86%). Leaders also report mobilizing residents for rallies (85%), bringing residents to the polls (91%), and canvassing during elections (94%). The ubiquity of both sets of activities aligns with studies of “relational clientelism,” which view bottom-up problem solving and top-down voter mobilization as connected, with the former facilitating the latter (Auyero 2000).

Returning to our experiment, our main interest is in estimating the average marginal component effect (AMCE)—the marginal effect of an attribute averaged over the joint distribution of the other attributes. We follow Hainmueller et al. (2014), who show ordinary least squares (OLS) produce consistent estimators of attribute AMCEs.<sup>25</sup> In our model, the dependent variable is coded 1 for residents whom slum leaders preferred within a

pair and 0 for those whom they did not. The independent variables are all binary variables measuring whether a resident had a given attribute (1) or not (0). Thus, the AMCEs in our analysis refer to the impact a given attribute has on the probability of preferring a given profile.

Note that our unit of analysis is the evaluated resident *profile*. Each of our 629 slum leaders evaluated three pairs of residents (six profiles), yielding a total of 3,538 rated profiles for our analysis. To account for the nonindependence of ratings from the same respondent, we cluster the standard errors by slum leader.

Figure 2 shows how each attribute affects the likelihood of a resident being selected. The figure displays AMCEs and the 95% confidence intervals (see SI Section S.3 for the main results table).

Our first finding was that slum leaders do not appear to prefer residents from their *jati* (0.8 percentage points [pp],  $p < .694$ ) or religion (0.9 pp,  $p < .587$ ) on average.<sup>26</sup> This finding is striking, as both shared *jati* and religion are seen as central in structuring electoral politics in India (Chandra 2004), in part because, as Hypothesis 1b notes, coethnic clients are anticipated to be easier to monitor (Habyarimana et al. 2007).

By contrast, we theorized reputation seeking should compel brokers to avoid ethnic favoritism, for fear of projecting an exclusionary reputation that constrains the size of a client base (Hypothesis 2a). Our results indicate that, with respect to ethnicity, broker preferences are on average more consistent with expectations of reputational concerns than of monitoring concerns.

Hypotheses 1b and 2a suggest another contrast between monitoring and reputation concerns based on the breadth of an ethnic identity. Monitoring concerns suggest brokers should most strongly privilege coethnics along narrower ethnic identities. Reputational compulsions predict narrower ethnicities are precisely the ones brokers will avoid favoring, as they will be the most constricting. Figure 2 again suggests reputation concerns outweigh monitoring concerns. To the degree that preferences for residents do indicate ethnic favoritism, they do so along broader region-of-origin identities (5.3 pp,  $p < .003$ ), rather than narrow *jati*.

Yet our findings do not neatly align with expectations that favoritism will manifest for larger ethnic categories that more closely approximate winning coalitions (Posner 2005). On average, brokers appear indifferent to religion, which is comparably encompassing to region.<sup>27</sup> The larger

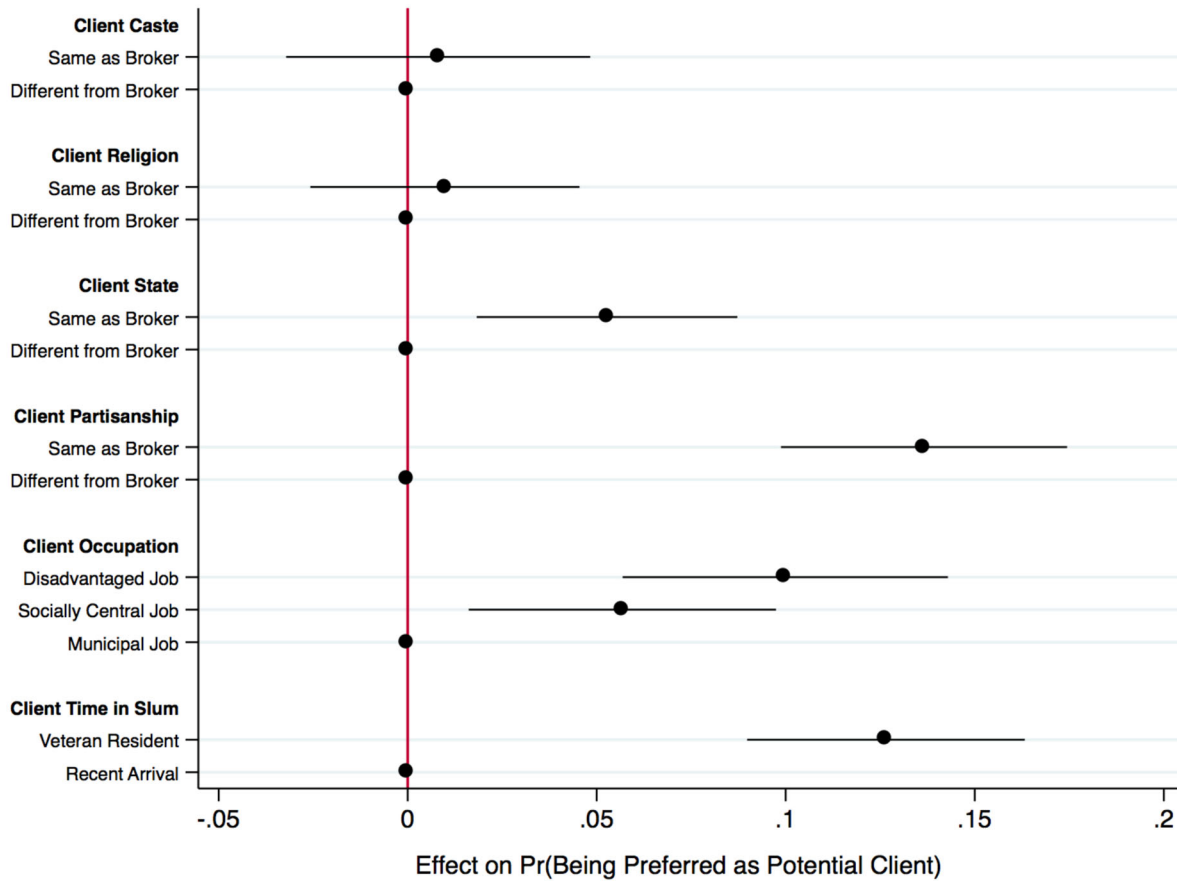
<sup>24</sup>Our main results are largely robust to truncating our sample to slum leaders who have held formal party positions, and excluding nonpartisan leaders (Table S.11, p. 18).

<sup>25</sup>Results are substantively unchanged if using a logit specification (Table S.3, p.8).

<sup>26</sup>All p-values are for two-sided tests.

<sup>27</sup>For caste, the average fractionalization score in our slum sample was 0.81. For religion and region of origin, they were 0.17 and 0.28.

**FIGURE 2 Which Clients Do Brokers Prefer?**



*Note:* This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned slum resident attribute values on the probability of having a request prioritized by a slum leader. Estimates are based on an OLS model with standard errors clustered by respondent; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The points without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute.

career ambitions of slum leaders may explain the absence of strong favoritism across narrow and broad ethnic categories. Recall most leaders seek both to rise within their slum and to parlay their leadership into a political career. Such ambitions require leaders to not simply win a narrow plurality within their settlement, but also to assemble the broadest possible coalition of support with which to launch into city politics.

Other results in Figure 2 further underscore the importance of inclusive reputations. Hypothesis 2b anticipated that residents in relatively low-status jobs would be preferred to relatively privileged municipal employees. Both types of jobs take place outside of the slum, and hence are equally socially peripheral. Yet being known to serve disadvantaged residents is helpful in projecting reputations for inclusivity, as well as expedient given such residents constitute a larger share of the slum’s votes. We find significant preferences for residents from relatively

disadvantaged jobs compared to those in municipal jobs (10.0 pp,  $p < .000$ ).

Reputational concerns were anticipated to push slum leaders to prefer residents with profiles indicative of social centrality. Consistent with this expectation, veteran slum residents were significantly preferred to newcomers (12.7 pp,  $p < .000$ ). We anticipated this result, given veteran residents have more friends and acquaintances within the slum than new arrivals, who remain more socially embedded within their sending village. Figure 2 also shows residents who worked as local shopkeepers were significantly preferred to those in out-of-settlement municipal jobs (5.7 pp,  $p < .006$ ). Recall slum shopkeepers were chosen as having jobs that were as economically secure, comparatively, as municipal job-holders, yet more firmly embedded within slum social life.

Overall, Figure 2 strongly supports a view of brokers as preferring clients best positioned to boost their

local reputations. The importance of reputational concerns, however, does not preclude the importance of all monitoring-related attributes. We also find consistent and strong preferences for co-partisan residents (13.7 pp,  $p < .000$ ), aligning with theories of core (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Nichter 2008) rather than swing voter targeting (Stokes 2005).

The relative preference for partisan over ethnic targeting goes against India's conventional portrayal as a democracy with weak parties and strong ethnic attachments. Our theory and empirics cannot provide conclusive explanations for this preference. However, our findings do align with recent studies that emphasize political actors must knit together partisan coalitions of diverse ethnicities, even at the local level (Dunning and Nilekani 2013). Further, unlike ethnicity, partisanship is not an immutable identity. Excluding a resident along partisan lines does not forever foreclose the possibility of a future relationship, especially given many residents (34%) reported voting for different parties across recent elections.

## Robustness Checks

The supporting information reports a number of robustness checks (SI Section S.4, Tables S.5–S.8). First, we conduct a randomization balance check by regressing important respondent attributes on indicator variables for all client profile attributes. Next, we examined experiment order effects, carryover effects, profile order effects, and even attribute order effects. We find little evidence of systematic design effects.<sup>28</sup>

Next, we assess and find our results are robust to slum-level and leader-level fixed effects (SI Table S.9). We also examined whether our results were driven by a subset of leaders. We individually interacted each of our seven attribute indicators with five key moderator variables (SI Tables S.12–S.16): whether the leader is female; whether the leader was selected via an informal election; the city in which the slum leader resides (Bhopal or Jaipur); and the

<sup>28</sup>Conjoint analysis does not require all attribute combinations to be equally likely (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Yet we might worry if certain combinations are so unrealistic that they threaten ecological validity. Perhaps Muslim clients never support the BJP, or higher-caste residents never work in disadvantaged jobs. We drew on our resident survey to select attribute values minimizing this concern. For example, we found 21% of Muslim respondents identified as BJP supporters, and all caste groups were represented among all occupation groups (e.g., 19% of elite Brahmins were manual laborers).

leader's years of schooling and years in the settlement.<sup>29</sup> Overall, we find our results are broadly similar across leader subgroups. Only 3 of 35 interactions are significant across these tests, about what we would expect by statistical chance.<sup>30</sup>

## Alternative Interpretations of Main Findings

We consider alternative explanations of our reputational variables. Perhaps preferences for residents in low-status jobs are not due to reputational concerns, but because they are the cheapest votes to buy. Transactional models of clientelism view brokers winning over voters individually, focusing on picking off marginal voters as cheaply as possible. Our reputational model—in which brokers consider clients as socially connected, and seek to craft widespread images of efficacy—does not anticipate such a minimalist approach.

Our survey data do not align with expectations of a minimalist, transactional model. First, brokers viewed cheap strategies of election-day gift giving, emphasized by transactional models, as relatively unimportant and ineffective. A majority (55.29%) said less than 10% of residents would have their vote affected by such gifts. Instead, leaders noted the importance of everyday, relational activities that appeal to all residents.

Second, if brokers target cheap, low-status residents, the latter should display higher electoral turnout—the crucial act of client reciprocity (Nichter 2008). Yet turnout among “disadvantaged” jobholders (934 respondents) was 89.60%, essentially equal to the 91.86% rate for residents in government and other “high-status” jobs (86 respondents). Far greater is the difference between reported slum turnout (nearly 90% across our sample) and general turnout in urban local elections (50–65% in our study cities). Practically all slum residents turn out to vote, irrespective of their occupation. Finally, if brokers focus only on attracting the most marginal residents, they should prefer relatively new clients, who are more likely to require the cheapest and most basic services. For example, obtaining ration cards is cheaper than fulfilling requests to obtain piped water or streetlights—63% of residents who had arrived in the slum within the past 5 years still required a ration card, compared to just 10%

<sup>29</sup>We also examine and find no consistent evidence of slum-level social trust and ethnic diversity moderating responsiveness to co-ethnics, relative to non-coethnics (SI Section S.5).

<sup>30</sup>Omnibus F-tests fail to reject the null hypothesis that all seven interaction effects are jointly equal to zero at the .05 level for each of the five moderators, and the .1 level for four.

of those who had lived in the settlement for 10 years or more. Yet brokers still prefer veteran residents.

Another possibility is that the result for disadvantaged voters does not reflect a preference for building inclusive reputations, but instead the fact that slum leader services are only valuable to a slum's poorest residents (wealthier residents may have more direct avenues of claim making). In contrast to this explanation, our data show that slum leaders are almost uniformly in demand across income groups: Surveyed residents in the bottom and top per capita household income quintiles have turned to slum leaders for assistance at similar rates (35% and 41%, respectively).<sup>31</sup> This is likely the product of widespread pessimism among slum residents regarding their ability to command the attention of officials alone, without the help of an intermediary. Indeed, in an earlier 2012 survey we conducted in 80 of the 110 settlements, only 12% of 1,925 resident respondents believed they would get attention from public officials if they went to them alone.

An alternative interpretation of the preference for veterans is that slum leaders see them as more deserving of assistance because veterans have been waiting longer to acquire that particular good. This interpretation is unlikely to be correct for several reasons. First, deservedness could, a priori, cut in both directions: A slum leader might see new entrants as especially vulnerable since they have fewer social connections in the settlement and are thus more deserving of assistance. Second, our social centrality results also hold for our alternative measure of socially central jobs. It is hard to see why residents with such jobs would be considered more deserving. Third, we do not find the preference for veterans to be conditioned by the nature of client requests in a manner consistent with the deservingness logic.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, an alternative interpretation of our finding on socially central jobs (shopkeepers) is that slum leaders believe municipal workers have alternative means of accessing the state and are therefore less needy. We believe

<sup>31</sup>If slum leaders' clients were limited to the most marginal residents, this might have underwritten other results, such as that of ethnic indifference. If leaders have a restricted pool of potential clients, they cannot afford to focus on coethnics. However, the above discussion suggests ethnic indifference is not due to a dependence on the poorest residents.

<sup>32</sup>Brokers may view all clients as deserving of widely available goods. By contrast, they may view veterans as more deserving of goods that residents less commonly enjoy. For example, although 71% of resident respondents had alley-level paved roads, only 29% lived in areas with sewers, and only 46% had a streetlight near their home. The interaction between a dichotomous variable for "rarer" services (sewers, streetlights, and community taps) and the veteran resident variable, however, is substantively small and statistically insignificant.

this is incorrect for two reasons. First, within the setup of our experiment, both residents have made the decision to approach the slum leader for help and thus reveal the need for assistance. Second, municipal workers may have the potential to use their jobs to develop bureaucratic connectivity. Yet to develop actual connectivity with bureaucrats from these humble posts entails considerable work and time. Such efforts may be worthwhile for aspiring *leaders* for whom connectivity can yield a client base, but they are unappealing for ordinary *residents* merely seeking narrow assistance for themselves. In line with this logic, ordinary residents who are municipal workers do not appear to obtain better services than other residents.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, a majority of surveyed municipal workers (54%) who acknowledged slum leadership reported turning to the latter for assistance.

### Distinguishing Social and Political Preferences

We also consider whether our findings capture a general set of social preferences for other residents, not specific political preferences for potential clients. This problem plagues most political choice experiments, which lack benchmarks of baseline social preferences. To establish such a benchmark, our survey included a second experiment (see SI Section S.2). We asked respondents to evaluate two people looking to move into the slum with their families. Leaders were asked to indicate which person they would prefer to have as a neighbor. The attributes manipulated in this experiment replicated those on the client question with one exception. Since our neighbor experiment focused on a family looking to move into the settlement, we could not vary time in the settlement.<sup>34</sup>

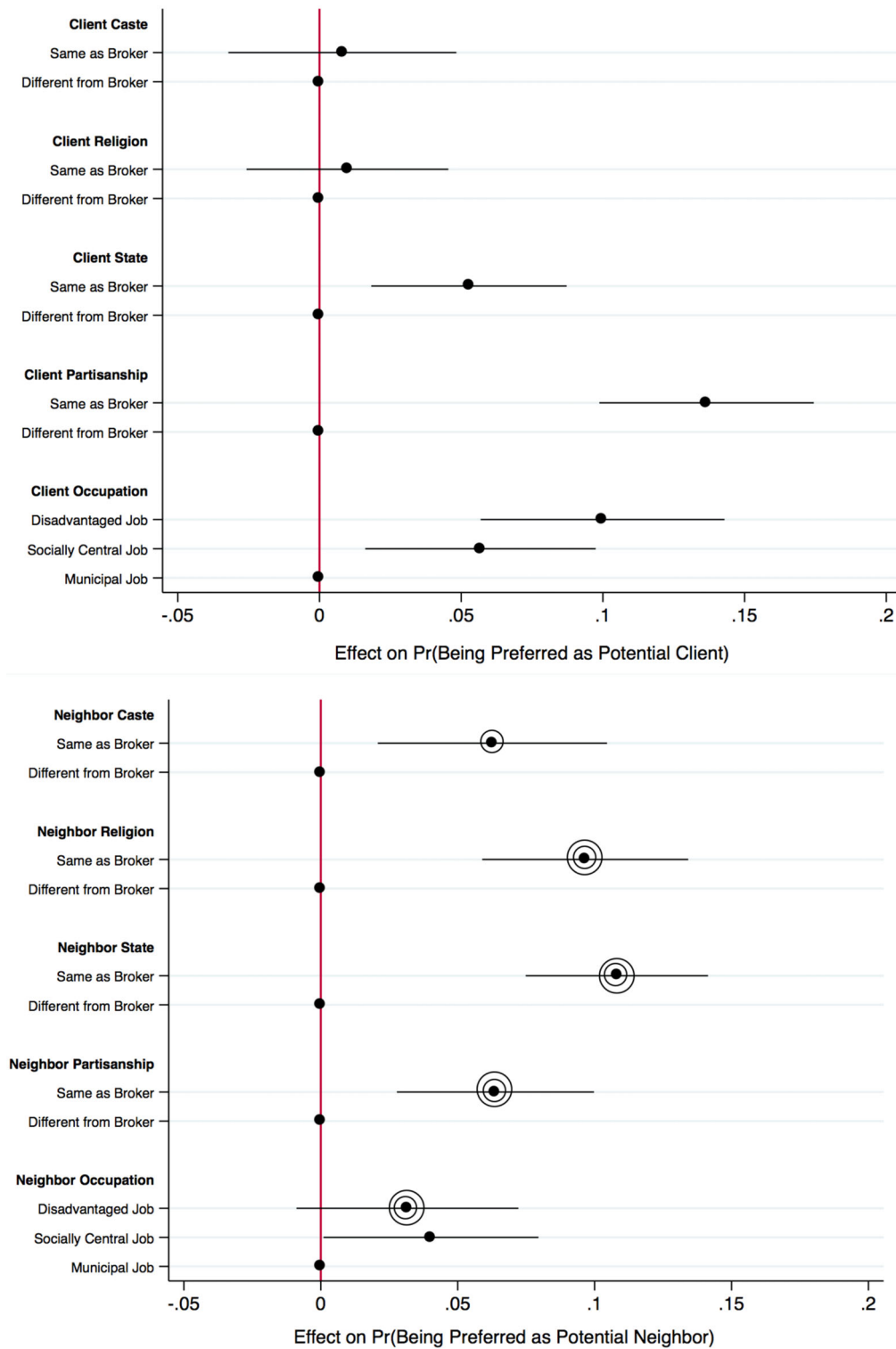
Figure 3 shows clear differences between political preferences for clients (top panel) and social preferences for neighbors (bottom panel). First, all three ethnic identities are more highly salient in evaluating neighbors. The AMCE for *co-jati* neighbors was 9.66 percentage points, whereas for clients it was only 0.8 percentage points (a difference significant at the 92% confidence level). Similarly, AMCEs for shared religion and shared state are stronger for neighbors than clients, and these are respectively significant at the 99% and 95% confidence levels. By contrast, shared partisanship is a more important

<sup>33</sup>For example, 39% of such residents said the municipality cleaned their gutters, *lower* than the sample average (45%). Consequently, municipality-employed residents request help from slum leaders.

<sup>34</sup>To equalize the number of attributes across neighbor and client experiments, we randomized the potential neighbor's education (no schooling, an eighth-grade education, or a college BA).



**FIGURE 3 Comparing Preferences for Clients and Neighbors**



*Note:* The figure shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned attribute values on the probability of a resident being preferred by a broker as a client (top panel) and neighbor (bottom panel). Estimates are based on OLS models with standard errors clustered by respondent; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The points without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute. Rings indicate significant differences between the AMCEs in the client and neighbor models (1 ring =  $p < .1$ ; 2 rings =  $p < .05$ ).

determinant of preferences for clients (13.66 pp to 6.38 pp, significant at the 99% level). Similarly, the AMCE for disadvantaged occupations is far stronger for clients than for neighbors (9.98 pp to 3.16 pp, 99% level).

These differences clearly suggest preferences on our client experiment do not simply reflect general social preferences. Second, they help assuage concerns of social desirability on our main experiment. Perhaps the muted importance of shared caste and religion in the client experiment reflects brokers' unwillingness to appear parochial to enumerators. Yet brokers appear perfectly willing to express strongly parochial preferences for coethnic neighbors on average. Similarly, the reported preference for targeting disadvantaged clients may indicate a desire to appear charitable. Yet we find no such preference in the neighbor experiment.

### Do Leader Preferences Align with Resident Experiences?

To further assess whether our findings simply reflect cheap talk, we examine whether they anticipate which respondents from our 2015 resident survey reported someone in their household was able to meet a slum leader for assistance with resolving a problem in the past year.<sup>35</sup> We coded a number of explanatory variables to best match attributes manipulated in our experiment. We then estimated whether these variables correlate with residents who met with local leaders for help using a simple OLS regression with standard errors clustered by settlement (SI Table S.21).

Several results align with those of our experiment. First, the coefficient for time in the settlement is positive and statistically significant. Second, none of our ethnic variables registered significant effects, aligning with our experimental findings of ethnic indifference. Our results regarding relative disadvantage were more nuanced. We find a positive but insignificant effect of our overall indicator of disadvantaged jobs. Upon further inspection, this result appears heavily inflected by gender. We find the indicator for disadvantaged jobs was positive and significant for the 32 male-dominated disadvantaged professions ( $n = 667$ ), and negative and significant for the five female-dominated disadvantaged professions ( $n = 268$ ). Given our experiment presented male residents, we see our experimental findings aligning at least partially

<sup>35</sup>We preferred this to asking residents whether slum leaders had successfully helped them. This measure better matches our experiment, which follows most experimental studies of political responsiveness in conceptualizing responsiveness in terms of *willingness* to assist, not *efficacy* in request fulfillment.

with observational data on this dimension. This result also suggests future work should systematically examine how broker responsiveness is shaped by a potential client's gender.

Overall, these tests show key broker preferences are largely consistent with their actual patterns of responsiveness. That said, two observational results were not anticipated by our experiment. We do not find significant positive effects for residents who work in "socially central" jobs, or for residents who have a co-partisan leader. We discuss these findings in more detail in SI Section S.6.

### Do Slum Leaders Have Multiethnic Coalitions?

We argued slum leaders display ethnic indifference to help attract multiethnic clientele. This argument implies leaders should possess diverse followings. We asked our 629 slum leaders to recall the last five residents who approached them for help. We then asked them to list the surnames of these five residents, providing us with their *jati*.

A striking 77% of the slum leaders named at least one client from a different *jati* than their own, whereas only 5% stated exclusively co-*jati* clients (18% provided no answer).<sup>36</sup> These patterns extend to broader religious identities. In slums in which our resident survey indicated the presence of multiple faiths (79 of 110 settlements), 46% of leaders reported multi-faith client bases, compared to 40% who only provided names of coreligionists.<sup>37</sup>

In-depth interviews with 36 randomly sampled residents in two Jaipur slums further confirm ethnic indifference.<sup>38</sup> Interviewed residents were diverse, representing 22 *jati* and three faiths. Our interviews confirmed the importance of political mediation, with 30 of 36 residents reporting having sought help from a slum leader. These interviews also revealed supply-side constraints to mono-ethnic client bases. Only seven respondents had a co-*jati*

<sup>36</sup>Fifteen slum leaders helped non-coreligionists in settlements where we did not randomly draw a religiously diverse resident sample. We take advantage of this additional information and code them as having helped non-coreligionists.

<sup>37</sup>These data reduce ecological validity concerns regarding presenting leaders with religious non-coethnics in our experiment. In addition to a high proportion of leaders with religiously mixed clientele, we find rates of non-coethnic clients are stable for Hindu and Muslim leaders across slums with Hindu and Muslim majorities (SI Table S.20), varying levels of religious fractionalization (Table S.18, p. 27), and levels of trust between residents (Table S.17, p. 26).

<sup>38</sup>We selected these settlements because they were ethnically diverse, were average in terms of population, and exhibited multifocal slum leadership.

leader in their settlement. Twenty-five of the 29 respondents without *co-jati* leaders still approached a broker for help. Further, even when co-ethnic leaders are available, residents often went to non-coethnic brokers. Of the seven respondents with *co-jati* leaders, two went to multiple leaders (at least one of whom was a non-*cojati* leader), and two went exclusively to a non-*cojati*.

Before concluding, it is useful to triangulate the findings across our multiple experiments and observational data. Across these sources, we consistently find support for two results linked to reputational concerns: ethnic indifference and favoring veteran residents. Both are strong preferences expressed in our main experiment, and they are consistent with evidence from our resident surveys and from leaders regarding the composition of their clientele.

We find less consistent support for our other indicator of social centrality based on occupations. We cannot confirm the preference for shopkeepers was specifically political, nor do we find observational support for it among residents. Our results for co-partisanship are also mixed. Although we do find it to be a strong preference that is explicitly political, our observational evidence suggests responsiveness does not always occur along co-partisan lines. Our data further suggest this may reflect the difficulties of partisan-driven responsiveness in localities where partisan loyalties are fluid.

## Conclusion

Scholars of distributive politics have yet to systematically theorize and identify the preferences shaping broker responsiveness to bottom-up voter requests. This lacuna reflects a preoccupation with explaining the top-down targeting of particularistic benefits during elections. Studies of broker responsiveness also face an empirical hurdle: generating a large and representative sample of these informal leaders.

We offer the first systematic study of how brokers choose which clients to cultivate. We hope to spark a research agenda examining the determinants of everyday broker responsiveness to clients. We provide a theoretical framework that can be exported or recalibrated for use in other contexts. At the same time, future work can go beyond our focus on client characteristics and examine the impact of variation in client requests (private versus collective), proximity to elections, and contextual factors that shape local demand for brokers. The pool of potential clients is expansive within slums, where precarity surrounding work, land tenure, and access to public

services is widespread. Brokers operating in localities with more constricted demand for intermediaries (e.g., due to stronger land tenure security, higher levels of resident education, or more responsive government) may face different incentives in cultivating a base of clients, presenting an important area of future study.

We also contribute to studies of how rapid urbanization across Asia and Africa affects the presumed political centrality of ethnicity in these regions (e.g., Nathan 2016). Our results suggest conventional wisdom derived from studies of rural politics cannot be mechanically extended to cities. Our results contradict expectations of ethnic favoritism, as well as the importance of group size in structuring such favoritism (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Part of this difference may be contextual. Prior studies largely focus on voter–candidate linkages in mostly rural constituencies characterized by low information and large constituencies. Such conditions may amplify the utility of ethnicity as a coordinating heuristic between relatively distant candidates and voters. By contrast, we focus on voter–broker ties in localized, diverse, and information-rich contexts.

More fundamentally, our study suggests the value of viewing brokers as ambitious entrepreneurs seeking upwardly mobile political careers, rather than actors content to remain perpetual intermediaries within their locality. Read in this light, ethnic indifference may reflect ambitious brokers seeking not simply to construct minimum winning coalitions within their settlements, but to build the broadest possible coalition with which to launch their career.

The scope conditions of our theoretical framework are few and have broad geographic reach. Rapid urbanization and ballooning informality characterize much of the Global South. Slum leaders have been found spearheading claim-making efforts and serving as grassroots nodes of larger political networks across a wide range of countries. India's caste, linguistic, and religious diversity may be unique. Yet ethnically diverse neighborhoods are common across cities in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Auerbach et al. 2018; Thachil 2017). These settlements are also frequently described as containing multiple slum leaders who compete for a local following (Auyero 2000). While dynamics might be considerably different in wealthy urban areas, poor communities remain *the* iconic population for theories of clientelism.

Beyond cities, while Indian villages may often not exhibit the same levels of diversity as slums, they too frequently house communities of multiple castes and faiths. Extant research shows political entrepreneurs in rural India seek to build multiethnic coalitions at the village level (Dunning and Nilekani 2013), must respond to

resident demands (Bussell 2019; Kruks-Wisner 2018), and face competitive brokerage environments (Krishna 2002). Thus our findings may well resonate in rural communities with similar conditions as our study slums.

Finally, the local broker–client networks studied here should not be construed as a world unto themselves. Slum leaders' local followings are the building blocks of larger urban political coalitions, and hence shape the latter. For example, multiethnic client bases aggregate into diverse coalitions at higher levels of electoral politics. This intertwining can be tautened by the upward mobility of slum leaders themselves within parties. The multilevel studies of machine anatomy needed to trace such connections between local clientelism and higher-level politics remain rare, presenting a valuable path for future scholarship.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

**FIGURE S.1:** Resident Cognitive Placeholders

**TABLE S.1:** Resident Attribute Treatments

**TABLE S.2:** Demand Treatments

**FIGURE S.2:** Slum Neighbor Cognitive Placeholders

**TABLE S.3:** Main Experimental Results (Client Experiment)



**TABLE S.4:** Main Experimental Results (Neighbor Experiment)

**TABLE S.5:** Randomization Checks

**TABLE S.6:** Experiment Order Effects

**TABLE S.7:** Carryover Effects

**TABLE S.8:** Profile Order Effects

**TABLE S.9:** Main Experimental Results (with Slum and Slum Leader Fixed Effects)

**TABLE S.10:** Client Request Type

**TABLE S.11:** Varying Thresholds of Leadership

**TABLE S.12:** Results Conditioned by Slum Leader Gender

**TABLE S.13:** Results Conditioned by Slum Leader Selection (Election or Not)

**TABLE S.14:** Results Conditioned by City

**TABLE S.15:** Results Conditioned by Slum Leader Education

**TABLE S.16:** Results Conditioned by Time in Settlement

**TABLE S.17:** Social Trust and Ethnic Indifference

**TABLE S.18:** Settlement Diversity and Ethnic Indifference

**TABLE S.19:** Settlement Age and Ethnic Indifference

**TABLE S.20:** Group Size and Ethnic Indifference

**TABLE S.21:** Observational Analysis

**TABLE S.22:** Disadvantaged Jobs Coding and Gender Breakdown

**TABLE S.23:** High Status and Socially Central Jobs Coding

**FIGURES.3:** Example Squatter Settlement Image (Google Earth, DigitalGlobe Image, 2019)

**FIGURE S.4:** Locations of Sampled Squatter Settlements in Jaipur

**FIGURE S.5:** Locations of Sampled Squatter Settlements in Bhopal