Overcoming the Political Exclusion of Migrants: Theory and Experimental Evidence from India

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Migrants Politically Marginalized Across Societies

Britain during industrial revolution

Urban proletariat "cast out and ignored by the class in power…living in a state of dilapidation, discomfort, and misery" (Engels 1845)

Northern U.S. cities during Great Migration:

African Americans met with "unwritten, mercurial, and opaque" resentment; "Chicago has not turned out to be the New Jerusalem" (Wilkerson 2010)

Countries in Global South experiencing rapid economic development

MNS MEN ON RAMPAGE AGAIN
Mumbai

MUMBAI:MIGRANTS TARGETED AGAIN

What accounts for migrants' under-representation in politics?

Migrants Participate Politically Lesser than Natives

Foreign-born naturalized citizens less likely to vote than native-born citizens

- 10 to 12 percentage point in the US in 2000s (Wang 2013)
- 11 percentage point gap across 50 countries in World Values Survey 2014 round
- Similar pattern across OECD, 2008--2016 (OECD 2019)

Equivalent participation chasm for internal migrants vis-à-vis long-term residents

- 8 to 10 percentage point gap in turnout in Costa Rica (Alfaro-Redondo 2016)
- Negative relationship b/w migration and voting in Turkey (Akarca and Tansel 2015)
- 7 percentage points decline in housing-relocation experiment in the US (Gay 2011)
- Similar evidence in Nigeria, Malaysia, Myanmar, Ukraine …

325 million migrants lack political voice in India, study site

- 60 to 83 percent of migrants did not vote in elections after moving (TISS 2015)
- Delhi: one in five migrants had voted in city elections (Thachil 2017)
- Mumbai: migrants 10 pp less likely to have city voter ID cards (Gaikwad et al 2020)
- De facto disenfranchisement "serious infirmity in the electoral process of the world's largest democracy" (Diplomat 2019)

Why Does Mobility Suppress Political Participation?

Theoretical Determinants of Factors Suppressing Migrants' Political Participation

Demand-side Factors

1. Voluntary Detachment

Migrants anchor politics at "home"

- Political interest develops early, socially, in specific locales
- Migrants socially isolated in host regions
- Maintain political voice at home to protect material assets

Supply-side Factors

2. Bureaucratic "Hassle Costs"

Voter registration difficult for migrants

- Everyday knowledge to navigate bureaucracies opaque to newcomers
- Language handicap for non-native speakers
- Movers lack documentation
- Double registration burden

3. Political Ostracism

Migrants disengage due to nativism

- Job competition, fiscal pressures, and ethno-cultural treats fosters nativism
- Passive and active (e.g. voter suppression)
- Anticipating ostracism, migrants decline participation

Study Context: Rural-to-Urban Migration in India

Case Characteristics

Background

India emblematic of countries experiencing explosive urban growth
- Current urbanization rate low: 33%
- Cities projected to double in size by 2040
- 70% of new jobs in cities

- Migrants face political discrimination, nativism, poor health outcomes (Auerbach 2019, Bhavnani and Lacina 2015, Nitika et al 2014)

Onerous Voter Registration

Voter Registration Steps
- De-register at home, apply to register at destination
- Paperwork: proof of residence, age, landlord affidavit
- Cumbersome paperwork
- Election authority visits to verify
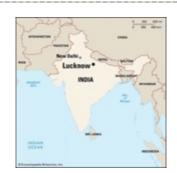- Voter ID card mailed if approved, otherwise no update
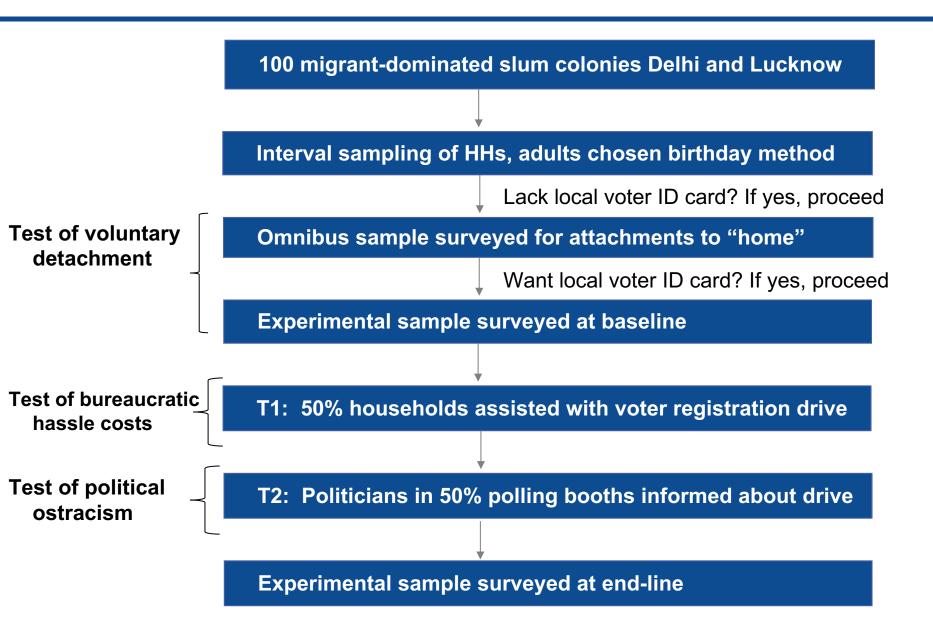

Study Sites

City 1: New Delhi
- Population 19 million
- 30-40% internal migrants

City 2: Lucknow
- Population 2.8 million
- Tier II city, popular for new migrants (Thachil 2017)

Research Design: 2019 General Election

100 migrant-dominated slum colonies Delhi and Lucknow

Interval sampling of HHs, adults chosen birthday method

Lack local voter ID card? If yes, proceed

Test of voluntary detachment

Omnibus sample surveyed for attachments to "home"

Want local voter ID card? If yes, proceed

Experimental sample surveyed at baseline

Test of bureaucratic hassle costs

T1: 50% households assisted with voter registration drive

Test of political ostracism

T2: Politicians in 50% polling booths informed about drive

Experimental sample surveyed at end-line

Testing Bureaucratic Hassle Costs

T1: Registration Assistance

Preparing applications, gathering documentation

- NGO workers deliver door-to-door assistance in registering to vote

Submitting applications, interfacing with bureaucracy

- NGO workers track applications, help connect election officials verifying paperwork with applicants
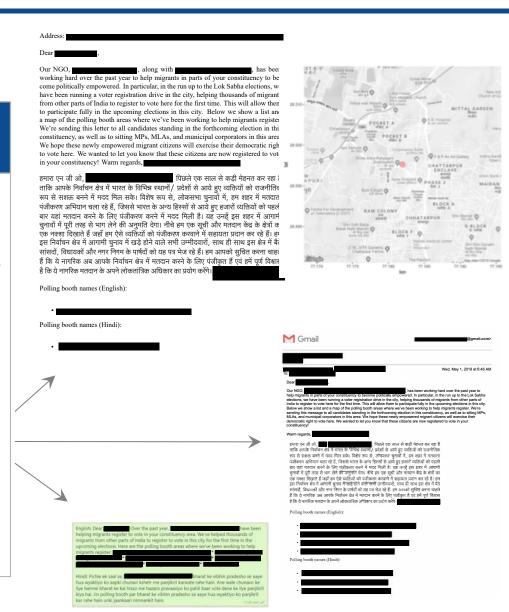
Testing Political Ostracism

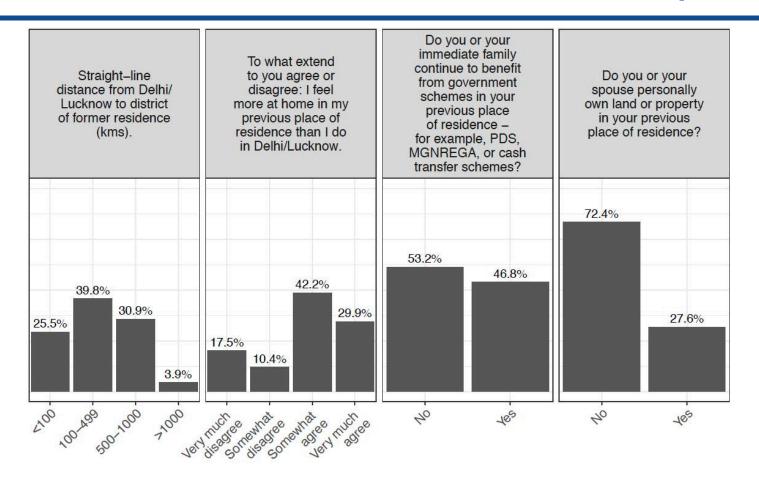## T2: Informing Politicians about Drive

Sample

- Citizens assigned to 87 nearby polling booths
- Randomization at polling booths
- Politicians: MPs, MP candidates, MLAs, MCs

Intervention:

- Postal letters
- Emails
- WhatsApp messages
- Informed politician of migrant-centered voter registration drive in polling booths

1. Voluntary Detachment? No
Attached to Home, but Want New Political Incorporation

- Home attachments predict village-based voter ID cards and returning to village to vote
- But no evidence that attachments reduce interest in obtaining city-based voter ID cards
- Of 2,350 subjects who entered baseline, 98% wanted to take steps to register locally
- Demand-side constraints do not explain low rates of migrant political engagement

2. Bureaucratic Hassle Costs? Yes
Voter Registration Barriers Constrain Political Participation

	Has City-Based Voter ID (1)	Voted in City in 2019 (2)	Likelihood of Voting in City in Future (3)
T1 treatment	0.236	0.203	0.031
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.009)
p-value (upper)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Control mean	0.161	0.178	0.856
Observations	2,120	2,120	2,120
Adjusted R^2	0.084	0.065	0.011
DV values	$\{0, 1\}$	$\{0, 1\}$	$\{0, 0.33, 0.67, 1\}$

Secondary Effects of Voter Registration

Voter Registration Impacts (Some) Political Beliefs
- Significant increases in "political interest" and perceptions of "political accountability"
- But no impact of intervention on "political efficacy" and "political trust"; deeper beliefs about state unchanged

Voter Registration Less Effective for Disadvantaged SES Groups
- Less educated, Muslims, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes benefit significantly less from voter registration drives
- Minorities face discrimination, asked to produce more onerous documentation, held to higher standards

Political Incorporation Promotes Socio-Economic Assimilation
- Positive effect on social integration, inter-ethnic tolerance, and willingness to pay urban taxes
- Political integration of migrants may catalyze deeper forms of integration

3. Political Ostracism? No
Elites Amplify Electioneering Intensity in Response

| | Campaigning Exposure Index (1) | Index Components | | | | |
		Basti Visits by Politicians (2)	Home Visit by Politician or Party Worker (3)	Number of Gifts (4)	Migrant- Focused Campaigning (5)	Perceived Campaign Intensity (6)
T2 treatment	0.100	0.066	0.036	0.017	0.014	0.073
	(0.057)	(0.078)	(0.038)	(0.012)	(0.047)	(0.031)
p-value (upper)	0.042	0.203	0.174	0.073	0.384	0.010
Control mean	-0.059	0.559	0.550	0.013	0.425	0.676
Observations	1,969	1,969	1,969	1,969	1,969	1,931
No. of Clusters	87	87	87	87	87	87
Adjusted R^2	0.055	0.070	0.047	0.019	0.008	0.021
DV values	$[-0.97, 3.73]$	$\{0, \ldots, 4\}$	$\{0, 1\}$	$\{0, 1, 2\}$	$\{0, 1\}$	$\{0, 0.33, 0.67, 1\}$

- Informing politicians of migrant-focused voter registration drive leads politicians to direct campaign resources in migrant slums
- Positive impact from increase in campaign intensity and gifts offered to migrants
- Once costs of migrant registration borne by others, politicians curry migrant support

Implications: Electoral Foundations of Migrant Exclusion

What can be done to remedy the political marginalization of (im)migrant communities?

- Subsidizing voter registration costs has sizable positive impacts on enrollment, participation, and other indicators of political engagement

- Informing politicians that registration drives have affects campaign strategy; politicians are not beholden to nativist anti-migrant coalitions

- Suggests low-cost policy tools for NGOs, governments, and election bodies in host states
    – Voter-initiated registration procedures pose multiplex challenges, esp. for migrants
    – 16 of 20 low- and middle-income democracies: voters must initiate enrollment
    – Automated systems can be beneficial
    – But special attention should be paid to disadvantaged SES groups

- Implications for cross-border immigration to western economies
    – Immigrants naturalize and register to vote at lower rates than eligible (Bass and Casper 2001)
    – Voter registration drives can help immigrants overcome political exclusion