

The background features a stylized illustration of a city skyline in shades of orange and red. In the foreground, several people are depicted in various poses, some walking and some with their arms raised, suggesting a sense of movement and activity. The overall style is clean and modern.

Bringing Autocracy Home? How Migration to Autocracies Shapes Migrants' Support for Democracy

Nikhar Gaikwad ¹ Kolby Hanson ² Aliz Tóth ³

¹Assistant Professor, Columbia University

²Assistant Professor, Wesleyan University

³Assistant Professor, London School of Economics

IPES Annual Meeting 2024

Migration and Democracy Preferences

Strong link between outmigration and preferences for democracy (Barsbai et al. 2017, Bastiaens & Tirone 2019, Beine & Sekkat 2013, Docquier et al. 2016, Escribà-Folch et al. 2015, Pérez-Armendáriz & Crow 2010, Careja & Emmenegger 2012)

Migration and Democracy Preferences

Strong link between outmigration and preferences for democracy (Barsbai et al. 2017, Bastiaens & Tirone 2019, Beine & Sekkat 2013, Docquier et al. 2016, Escribà-Folch et al. 2015, Pérez-Armendáriz & Crow 2010, Careja & Emmenegger 2012)

But we are missing part of the picture:

Table 1: Migration Studies by Setting and Primary Focus

<i>Origin Country</i>	<i>Destination Country</i>	
	Democracy	Mixed or Non-Democracy
Democracy	34 (27%)	2 (2%)
Mixed or Non-Democracy	77 (61%)	14 (11%)

Note: We have examined every migration-related publication in the top five publications between 2014-2024.

Migration and Democracy Preferences

Why is this a problem?

1. Large and growing population moving to autocracies.

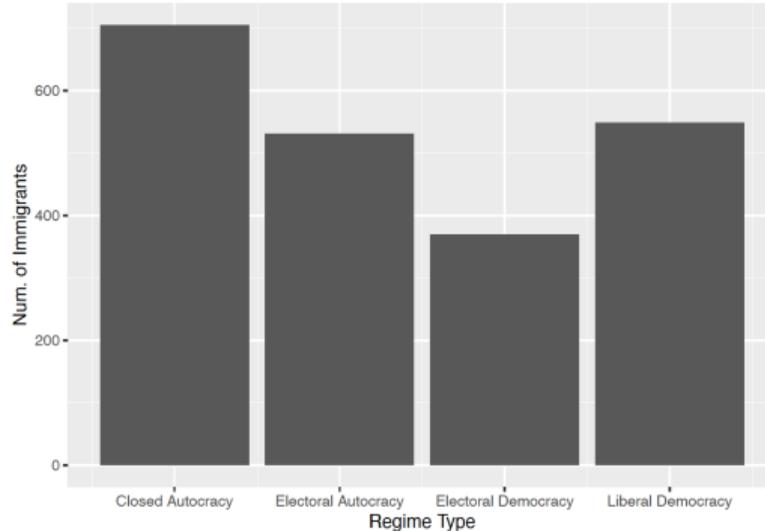


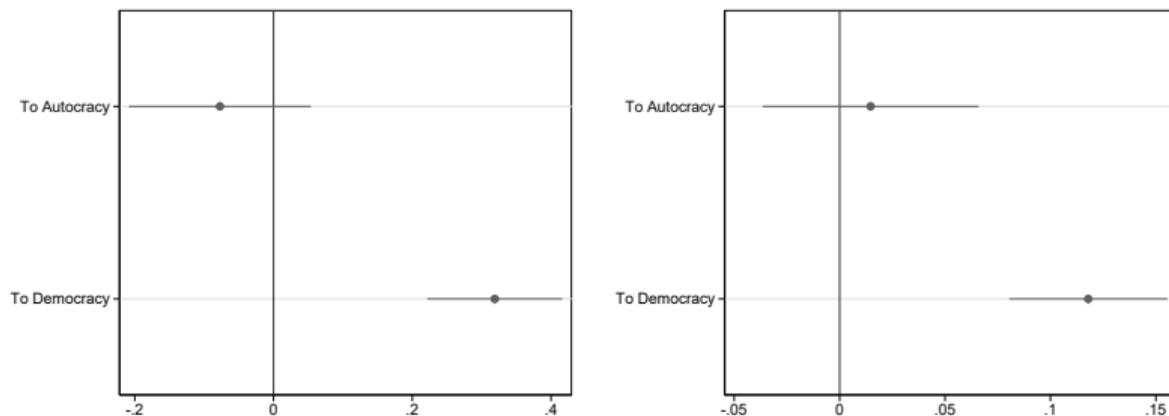
Figure 1: Immigrants from Asia (World Values Survey)

Migration and Democracy Preferences

Why is this a problem?

2. The effect of migration to autocracies may look very different:

Migrant respondents agreeing that democracy is important & good



Source: World Values Survey

Migration and Democracy Preferences

Why is this a problem?

3. It is not clear what drives migration's effect on democratic preferences:

- Migration often takes place from *less* to *more* developed and democratic countries.
- Migrants' preference for democracy may stem from liking a) democratic institutions; b) higher levels of economic development.

Theory

We focus on migration from *more* democratic *less* developed to *less* democratic *more* developed countries.

Theory

We focus on migration from *more* democratic *less* developed to *less* democratic *more* developed countries.

Conceptualizing democratic support:

- Intrinsic preference for democracy (above and beyond economic benefits)
- Trust in democratic institutions
- Political participation

Theory

We focus on migration from *more* democratic *less* developed to *less* democratic *more* developed countries.

Conceptualizing democratic support:

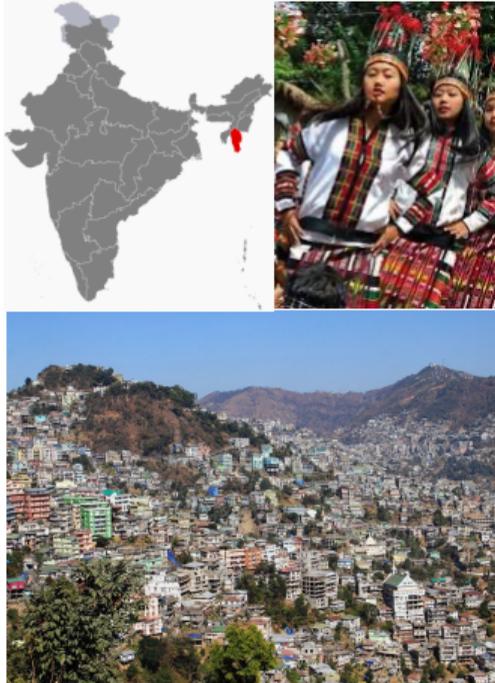
- Intrinsic preference for democracy (above and beyond economic benefits)
- Trust in democratic institutions
- Political participation

Table 2: Summary of Predictions for Effect of Migration to Autocracy

<i>Basis of Deomcratic Support</i>	Support for Democracy		
	Democracy Preference	Trust in Govt	Participation
Instrumental / Economic	-	-	-
Intrinsic / Political	+	+	?

Research Design: Setting

Mizoram, North-east India



Context

Background

- Mizoram, small NE state with high geographic barriers to employment
- Population ~ 1 million
- GDP per capita is around USD 1,600
- High unemployment rates
- Largest employer: government
- Yet 92% literacy
- Language: Mizo, English widely spoken
- Predominantly Scheduled Tribe (ST)
- Lack local job opportunities; face discrimination in mainland India

Experimental Interventions

Stage 1: Skills Training

Hospitality sector skills training program

- Classroom Training
 - Food safety
 - Communication, etiquette, cultural sensitivity
 - Kitchen & food production
 - Food & beverage service
 - Coffee & bar
 - Housekeeping (guest rooms, kitchen, public areas)
 - Grooming & hygiene
 - Interview preparation
- Job Exposure Training
 - Practical 2 week training in local Aizawl hotels and restaurants



Experimental Interventions

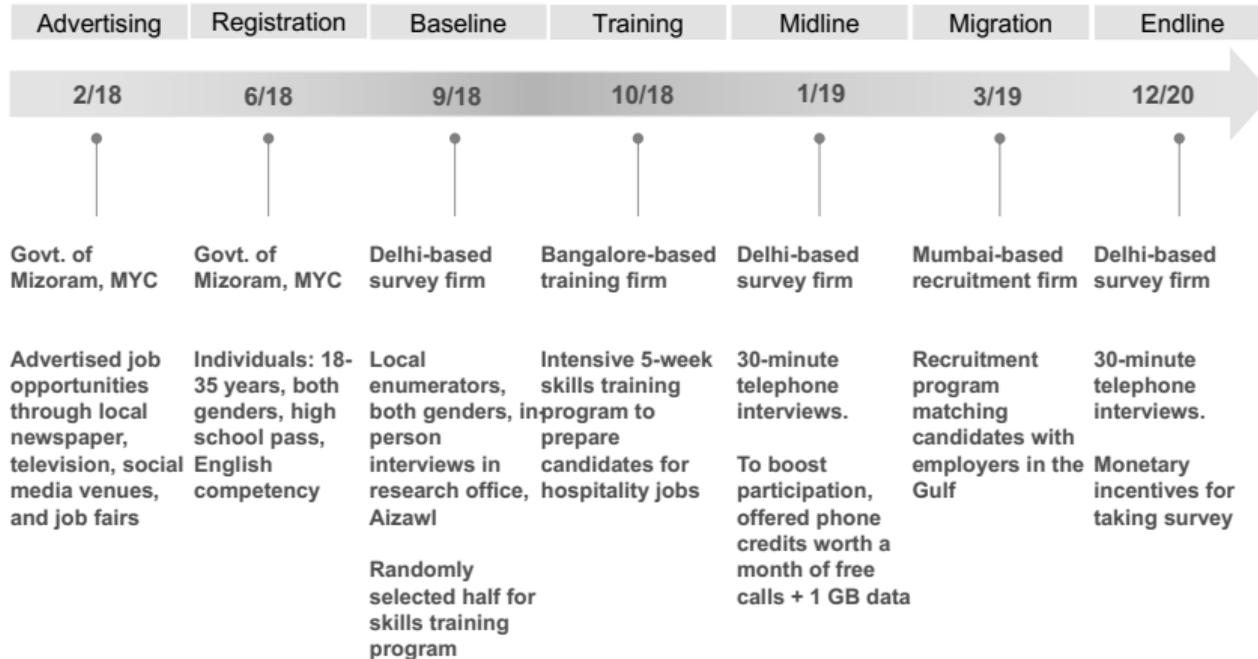
Stage 2: Recruitment Program

Interviews with GCC hospitality sector firms

- Interviews with employers
 - CVs
 - Mock interviews
 - Certificates
 - Match with employer interviews
 - Guide through visa, migration processes
- Employers
 - Costa Coffee
 - Chili's, Papa Johns, La Brioche
 - Emirates Airways
 - Al Abraaj
 - Mandarin Oriental

The collage includes three screenshots of the Vira recruitment portal, each showing a profile page with fields for Name, Address, Contact, and Education. Below these are photos of participants in blue suits, a group receiving a certificate, and a grid of logos for various GCC hospitality and aviation companies. At the bottom are several employment contracts and visa documents.

Study Structure and Timeline



Ethical Considerations

Labor migration poses risks

Goal: minimize risks; ensure benefits flowed to migrants and communities (Teele 2014, Humphreys 2015)

Government of Mizoram and local NGOs have sought to promote overseas Gulf recruitment to tackle endemic unemployment

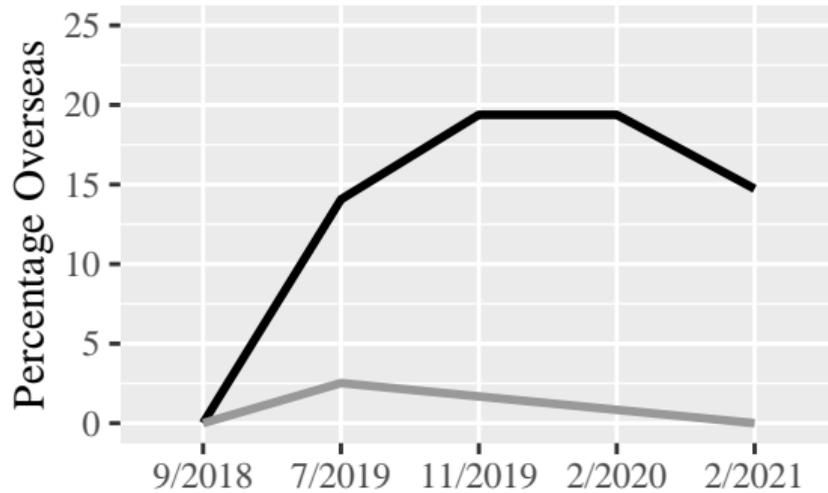
- Builds on prior government attempts to promote GCC employment
- Researchers helping evaluate efficacy of program
- Build blueprint for ethical and safe labor migration in region

Partners, employers, sector of employment carefully vetted

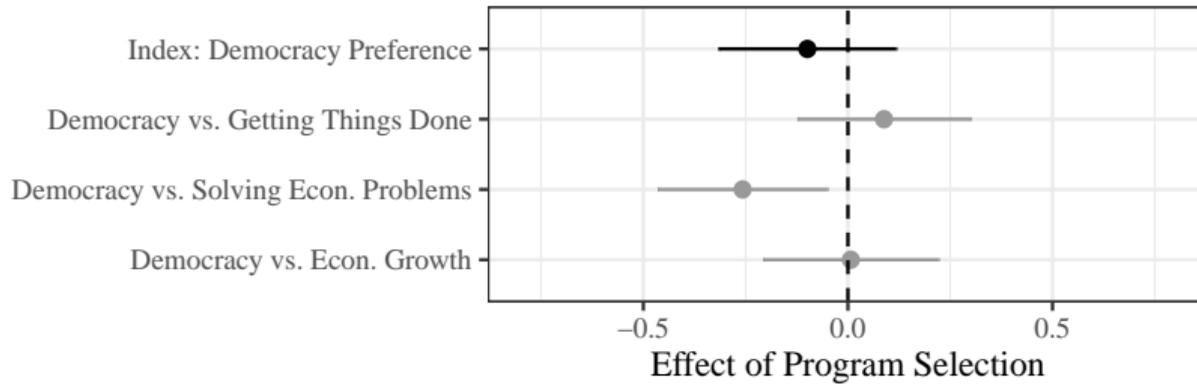
- Focus on hospitality sector; lucrative pay; reputable jobs

Subjects connected with government and non-governmental support systems; provided extensive information on rights and recourses

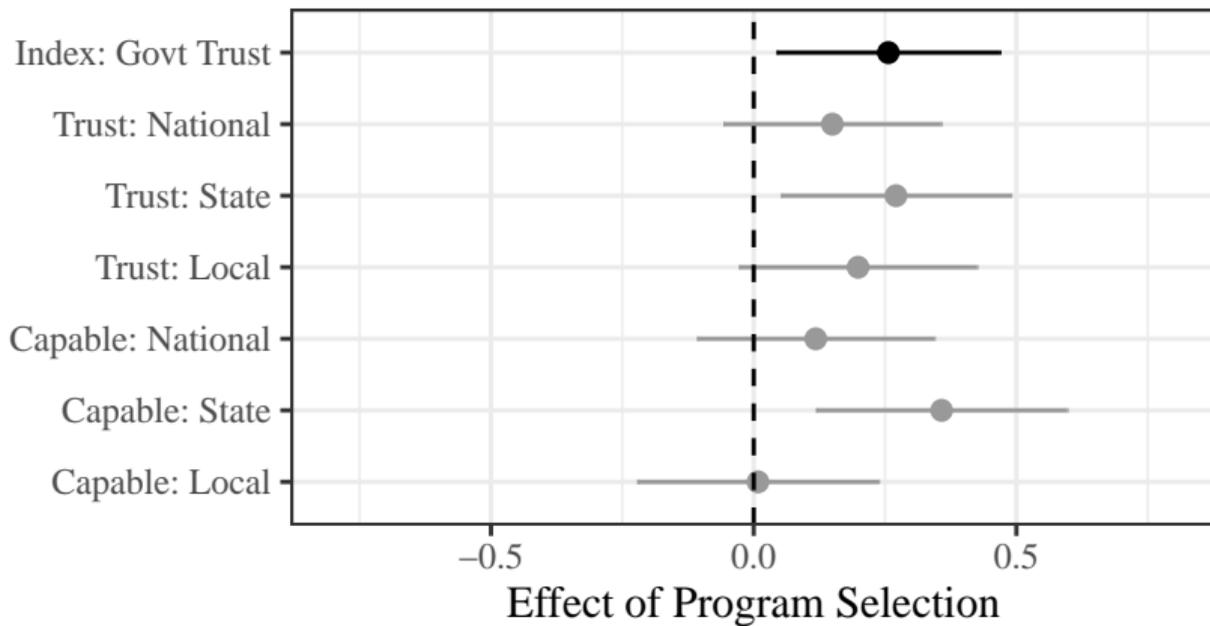
Results: Migration Outcomes



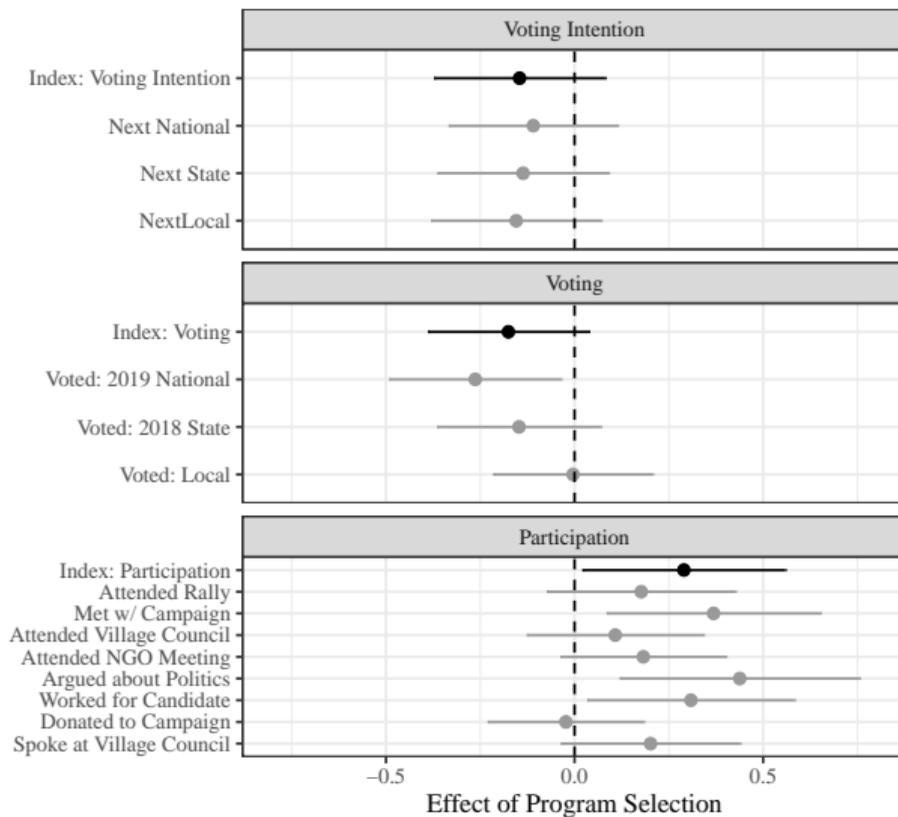
Views on Democracy



Trust in Democratic Institutions



Political Participation



Key Takeaways

- We do not find evidence that migration to autocracies lowers preference for democracy. In fact, migrants to the Gulf come away more supportive of democracy.
- Migrants value the political benefits of democracy, not just higher levels of development.
- Former migrants may act as pro-democracy leaders in their home communities even when they lived in less democratic countries.
- Migration may reduce formal participation in the short run, policies reducing the costs of voting from abroad could be really effective to bridge this gap.

Thank you for listening! Questions?

nikhar.gaikwad@Columbia.edu

krhanson@wesleyan.edu

a.toth1@lse.ac.uk



Empirical Strategy

Intention to Treat Framework

- Effect of program selection on post-migration attitudes and behaviors.

Main Outcomes are Z-Score Indexes

- 2-6 survey questions measuring each outcome

Control for baseline measures for pre-treatment outcomes

- Robustness: Also include demographic covariates

P-values estimated using randomization inference

- Robustness: Use OLS standard errors instead

One-sided hypotheses tests (hypothesis directions pre-registered), except when noted

Survey and Analysis

	<i>Endline</i>
Response Rate: Treatment Group	65.8%
Response Rate: Control Group	60.7%
Difference in Response Rate	5.1%
P-Value: Two-Sample T-Test	.296
P-Value: RI-based Test	.268

Notes on Attrition:

- Not significantly affected by treatment.
- Had no effect on balance of treatment groups.
- Not predicted by any pre-treatment covariates or by program attendance.

Balance Tests

Predictors of Response

Ethnographic Interviews w/Migrants

I prefer democracy because I think the citizens should have the power to elect their leaders. Respondent #320

The government in Qatar does a better job because they give lots of benefits to their citizens and lots of free food and rations. Respondent #80

I like it generally because it is safe, wherever we go it is safe, and maybe it is because alcohol is banned and we don't find any drunkards on the street
Respondent #40

There is no catcalling and eve-teasing, especially for women, so I feel safe and secure here. Respondent #59

I would prefer living in a country where the government takes better care of its citizens even if they are not elected leaders. Respondent #44

Balance Tests

	Baseline	Midline	Endline
Age	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.011)	-0.006 (0.011)
Male	0.005 (0.053)	0.016 (0.062)	-0.041 (0.067)
Education	0.028 (0.033)	0.008 (0.038)	0.060 (0.041)
Employed	0.035 (0.109)	-0.116 (0.128)	-0.116 (0.145)
Scheduled Tribe	-0.044 (0.123)	-0.057 (0.162)	-0.095 (0.166)
Married	0.131 (0.202)	0.147 (0.310)	0.266 (0.314)
English Ability	0.002 (0.026)	-0.015 (0.030)	-0.006 (0.032)
Economic Status	-0.025 (0.040)	0.031 (0.050)	0.051 (0.052)
Economic Confidence	-0.013 (0.039)	0.023 (0.045)	0.008 (0.052)
Economic Attitudes	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.018 (0.029)	0.017 (0.030)
Observations	384	286	244
F-Stat P-Value	.990	.993	.912
F-Stat P-Value (RI)	.944	.980	.851

Predictors of Response Rate

Midline

Demographics	✓	✓	✓
Pre-Treat Outcomes		✓	✓
Treat x Demographics			✓
Treat x Outcomes			✓

Observations	389	384	384
F-Stat P-Value	.252	.399	.417

Endline

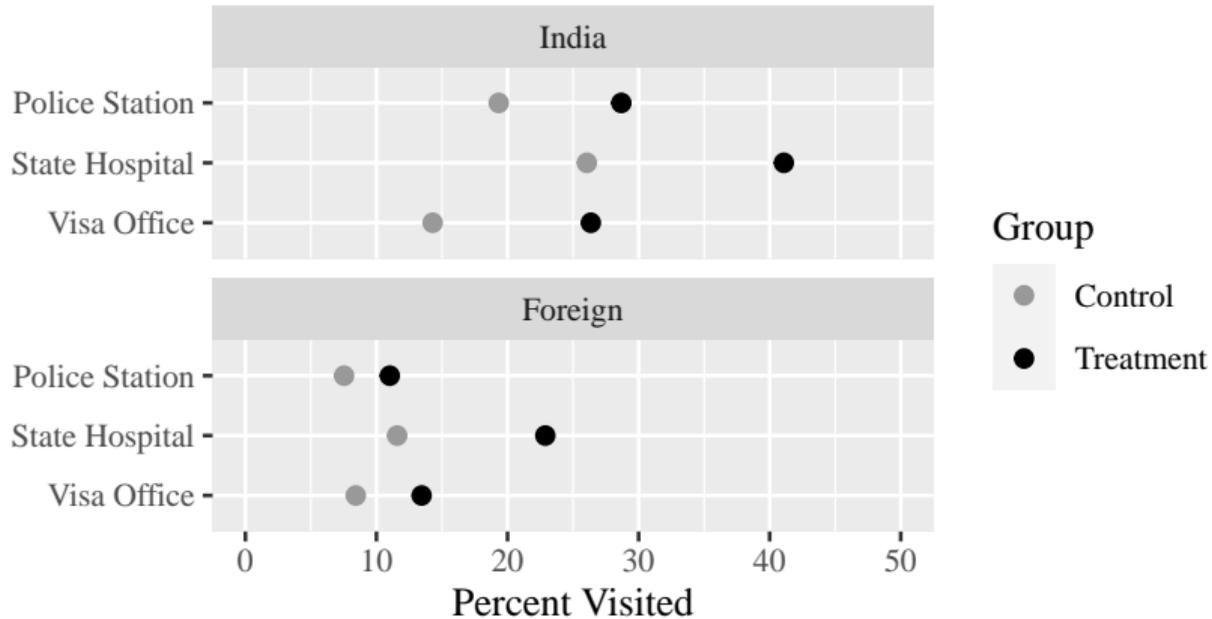
Demographics	✓	✓	✓
Pre-Treat Outcomes		✓	✓
Treat x Demographics			✓
Treat x Outcomes			✓

Observations	389	384	384
F-Stat P-Value	.314	.461	.220

Migration Progress

	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Control</i>
Did not apply for a job abroad	48%	64%
Applied, but did not receive an offer	18%	27%
Received an offer, but did not accept	7%	4%
Accepted a job, but did not receive a visa	2%	3%
Received a visa, but did not move	1%	0%
Moved abroad	23%	2%

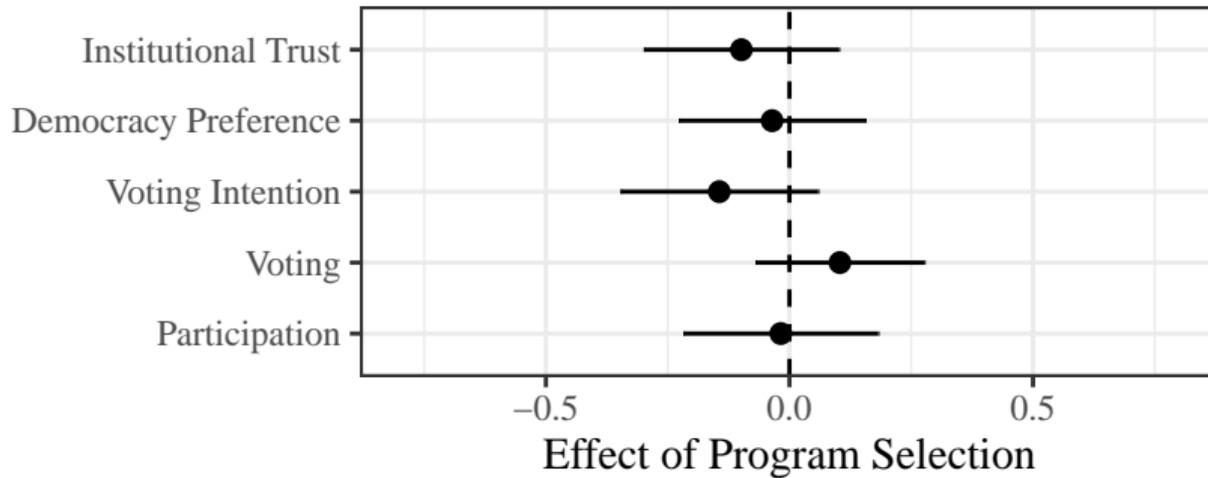
Exposure to Government Institutions



Trust to Institutions

Migration

Results: Household Members



- Barsbai, T., Rapoport, H., Steinmayr, A. & Trebesch, C. (2017), 'The effect of labor migration on the diffusion of democracy: Evidence from a former soviet republic', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* **9**(3), 36–69.
- Bastiaens, I. & Tirone, D. C. (2019), 'Remittances and varieties of democratization in developing countries', *Democratization* **26**(7), 1132–1153.
- Beine, M. & Sekkat, K. (2013), 'Skilled migration and the transfer of institutional norms', *IZA Journal of Migration* **2**, 1–19.
- Careja, R. & Emmenegger, P. (2012), 'Making democratic citizens: The effects of migration experience on political attitudes in central and eastern europe', *Comparative Political Studies* **45**(7), 875–902.
- Docquier, F., Lodigiani, E., Rapoport, H. & Schiff, M. (2016), 'Emigration and democracy', *Journal of Development Economics* **120**, 209–223.
- Escribà-Folch, A., Meseguer, C. & Wright, J. (2015), 'Remittances and democratization', *International Studies Quarterly* **59**(3), 571–586.
- Pérez-Armendáriz, C. & Crow, D. (2010), 'Do migrants remit democracy? international migration, political beliefs, and behavior in mexico', *Comparative political studies* **43**(1), 119–148.