Clients or Constituents? Distribution Between the Votes in India

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Abstract: Empirical accounts suggest that senior politicians in India expend considerable time assisting their constituents to acquire basic public benefits, yet recent research on clientelism focuses substantially on understanding the role of local brokers in structuring the supply of services, or "mediation from below." How can we adjudicate between these differing perspectives on distributive politics? I argue that senior politicians often play an important role in facilitating access to state benefits, engaging in "mediation from above," a dynamic that the dominant broker-oriented view of clientelism misses. Variation in these activities also cannot be explained by reference to strategic supply of assistance, and instead depends on choices made by informed individual constituents. Drawing on new and unique data from surveys administered to a random sample of citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians in India, including identical survey experiments, I show that citizens often seek assistance for particularistic benefits through direct contact with senior politicians, even relative to contacts with local brokers. Moreover, experimental evidence supports the argument that citizens differentiate their requests for assistance depending on the perceived power of politicians at different levels of government to assist with their requests. These findings suggest that existing accounts of distributive politics ignore important dynamics of demand-driven constituency service.

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What explains the character of distributive politics in developing countries? Research on clientelism posits that distributive outcomes are shaped by broker-mediated allocation of targeted, particularistic benefits (Stokes et al. 2013). In contrast, other work on citizen-state relations suggests that individuals have multiple potential pathways for accessing public goods and services (Collier and Handlin 2009; Kruks-Wisner 2011; Gupta 2012), and the literature on constituency service highlights demands from constituents in shaping the activities of senior politicians (Fenno 1978, Griffin and Flavin 2011, Harden 2013). Empirically, senior politicians in India are understood to receive a significant number of direct requests from citizens for assistance in accessing public benefits (Jensenius 2014, Chopra 1996, Maheshwari 1976). How can we adjudicate between broker-centered, clientelist accounts of distribution that focus on the strategic *supply* of benefits by politicians and evidence that politicians instead respond to specific *demands* for benefits from citizens making informed choices over a range of potential sources of assistance? What are the implications of this debate for our understanding of distribution in developing democracies?

In this paper, I argue that dominant accounts of clientelism, by focusing on broker-mediated allocation from below, in particular, and politician-driven supply of benefits, in general, ignore important dynamics of demand-induced, politician-mediated allocation from above. I develop an explanation of the advantages and importance of mediation from above and show that citizens avail themselves of this strategy when it is appropriate to do so. Citizens appeal directly to senior politicians, for assistance with both individual benefits and club or public goods, when they perceive that politicians can influence the distribution of these benefits through their power over the bureaucracy. Politicians respond to these requests in a general fashion, assisting all constituents to the extent feasible, without emphasis on the electoral relevance of a *particular*

individual, in terms of partisanship or related characteristics. Responding to citizens is necessary because of the potential electoral risk of denying assistance. Thus, even in contexts where the contingent distribution that typifies clientelism is a viable political strategy, politicians may still receive direct requests for assistance with public benefits and act on these requests despite being unable to make these efforts conditional on future votes.

Both types of distribution involve political intervention in the bureaucracy, but this "mediation from above" argument implies quite different empirical outcomes than those positing "mediation from below." If, as in existing accounts of clientelism, goods are allocated primarily via local brokers with expectations of conditionality, citizens should turn exclusively to a broker when making an appeal for benefits, rather than higher-level political actors. In addition, patterns of contacting should not differ on the basis of whether the type of good under demand is an individual, club, or public benefit, as all state resources will be allocated through local brokers.

If, in contrast, higher-level actors also play a role in the distribution of government benefits, and if citizens perceive themselves to have multiple potential strategies for accessing these goods, then we should observe a different set of outcomes. Senior politicians should receive direct requests from citizens for assistance with particularistic benefits and they should respond to these requests with little regard for partisanship. In addition, citizens should differentiate their choices about whom to approach for assistance, across the range of potential intermediaries, according to perceived power over the distribution of those benefits, but not in line with any shared partisan ties to politicians. If constituency service is a supplement to clientelism, rather than a substitute, local brokers are still likely to play an important role in distribution, both as direct points of contact and as conduits to higher levels of power, but this will be unrelated to patterns of constituency service.

In this paper, I test this alternative view of distributive politics using new and original data from surveys of citizens, politicians, and bureaucrats in India. India is a valuable test case because its formal federalist system and informal power dynamics, explained in greater detail below, provide opportunities for evaluating all aspects of the argument. I examine whether and which politicians have the power to influence goods distribution; whether, to what degree, and to what ends politicians at different levels of government receive direct requests for assistance from citizens and the extent to which this differs from requests to bureaucrats and non-state actors; and, finally, whether requests for assistance reflect informed citizen choices over types of mediation to maximize their chances of acquiring benefits.

I find that, in contrast with accounts of much existing literature on clientelism and claim-making, senior politicians receive a proportionate number of requests for assistance from citizens and these requests are predominantly for individual, targeted benefits. Politicians allocate a significant proportion of their time to answering these requests, but variation in this constituency service cannot be explained by reference to politician-level characteristics likely to be associated with strategic choices over the allocation of benefits. Instead, across a more diverse range of individual, club, and public goods, respondents perceive that citizens will make choices about whom to contact that reflect a sophisticated understanding of which individuals have formal and informal power over the distribution of goods. Individuals are expected to be more likely to contact senior politicians when they require assistance with benefits controlled by higher levels of the bureaucracy, where those politicians have more power to influence outcomes than local brokers. In addition, and in line with the existing literature on particularistic contacting, individual-level demographic characteristics are associated with choices over whom to contact for assistance. However, in line with my argument, individual choices are not correlated with

partisan ties. These findings suggest that senior politicians engage in non-contingent constituency service in response to the demands of their constituents and that these activities can play an important role in the overall character of distributive politics, even where clientelism may also exist.

This study differs from previous work in a number of ways. First, unlike studies that look only at citizens or politicians in evaluating distributive politics and constituency service, I consider both, as well as the bureaucrats who intermediate goods distribution, enabling a comparison of views on distributive relations that is rare in this field. Second, I include responses from politicians at all levels of government, from local councils to the national parliament, and bureaucrats from all levels within the states, a degree of comprehensiveness that has not been attempted in previous empirical accounts of Indian politics. Finally, the questionnaire incorporates survey experiments, allowing me to investigate differences across types of services in a more rigorous manner than previous accounts.

In the following sections, I draw on existing work on citizen-state relations and the political economy of the bureaucracy to establish an account of distributive politics that highlights a role for mediation from above in response to citizen demands for targeted, particularistic benefits. I then discuss the research design for the surveys analyzed here and provide an empirical basis for the assumptions underlying my argument regarding the character of visitors and requests received by politicians, the time spent by politicians responding to these requests, and the relative power of politicians to influence distribution of benefits via the bureaucracy. I test the argument first by evaluating the degree to which variation in constituency service can be explained by patterns of electoral competition, partisan alignment, or shared ethnicity. I then examine whether characteristics of demand for benefits offer a better

explanation for patterns in constituency service, in particular the relationship between power over the bureaucracy and patterns of citizen demands for assistance across different types of public benefits.

Brokers, Politicians, and Distributive Politics

In many developing countries, the state serves as a source of welfare provision for a majority of its citizens. In India, multiple policy channels influence the distribution of benefits, including subsidies on products such as electricity, provision of low-cost consumables, and creation of employment for millions of individuals through a national work program. In this context, decisions about who receives what benefits are fundamentally important to overall welfare. Yet it is often in the execution of these policies, rather than in their design, that decisions over access to benefits are made. As Scott noted, "[b]etween the passage of legislation and its actual implementation lies an entirely different political arena that, in spite of its informality and particularism, has a great effect on the execution of policy" (Scott 1969: 1142).

The politics of implementation are particularly relevant in contexts where the quality and efficiency of the distributive system leave much to be desired. Individuals in India are often faced with difficult conditions for acquiring services, including the need to visit multiple government offices to acquire one service, long lines at the offices, and frequent demands for bribes to facilitate access (World Bank 2008; Bussell 2012). While some recent improvements to the infrastructure of service delivery have led to higher service levels in parts of the country (Bussell 2012), the process of acquiring basic and necessary services, such as birth certificates, land records, welfare benefits, and driving licenses, remains mired in difficulties for most Indians, not unlike citizens of many other developing countries.

The political dynamic that emerges in this type of setting is often characterized by clientelism or patronage. Scott's classic work suggests that "machine" politics are most likely where individualistic demands emerge during policy implementation. This results in a party's (or machine's) use of "*particularistic, material rewards* to maintain and extend its control over its personnel" (Scott 1969: 1144, emphasis in original). Post-Independence India has often served as an important case for examining the effects of these dynamics on electoral politics and the character of distribution (Chandra 2004, Wilkinson 2007, Dunning and Nilekani 2012, Stokes et al. 2013).

Research on clientelism posits that the distribution of individual benefits in this context will be characterized by strategic targeting of particular voters to maximize electoral benefits (Cox and McCubbins 1986, Lindbeck and Weibull 1987, Nichter 2008, Weitz-Shapiro 2014). Distributive goods will be directed to voters who exhibit a particular set of characteristics or past behaviors. Clientelism also assumes a *quid pro quo* relationship in that parties should be able to condition the distribution of benefits on an individual's vote choice (Stokes 2005).

Recent work on the political economy of public service delivery highlights the potentially important role for both elected and non-elected "brokers" in mediating the delivery of benefits to individuals in clientelist relationships (Camp 2014, Dunning and Nilekani 2013, Stokes et al. 2013). Brokers play the essential role of monitoring voting behavior while also distributing benefits to individual voters. In the Indian context, analysts emphasize the role of local elected elites, in particular village council presidents, in brokering the distribution of goods to individual voters (Dunning and Nilekani 2013, Stokes et al. 2013), while also highlighting a role for both party-affiliated and non-party unelected intermediaries at the local level (Gupta 2012; Corbridge

et al. 2005; Krishna 2011, 2002; Manor 2000). In all of these accounts, local brokers are the primary point of contact for mediating access to particularistic benefits of the state.

In contrast to this broker-focus, research on constituency service suggests politicians, including those at high levels of office, allocate a portion of their time to the needs of individual citizens in a non-contingent manner. Citizens request assistance for navigating bureaucratic procedures, often in an effort to access public benefits, and politicians respond to these demands as a part of their overall representative activities largely due to perceived electoral benefits (Fenno 1978, Griffin and Flavin 2011, Harden 2013). Fenno (1978) highlighted the important role of constituency service in the activities of U.S. Congressional representatives, emphasizing the actions legislators take to respond to specific, particular needs of their individual constituents. In a subsequent comparison of legislator behavior in the U.S. and Great Britain, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina emphasized the importance of constituency service for increasing an incumbent's "personal vote," meaning "that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record" (Cain et al. 1987: 9).

Yet, this type of behavior by politicians is not unique to developed countries. Analysts of India have similarly noted that Indian Members of Parliament (MPs) receive a large volume of requests from constituents (Maheshwari 1979). Similarly, at the sub-national level, others have noted the importance of "complaint handling" by state legislators (Members of the Legislative Assembly, or MLAs), what Mohapatra calls their "ombudsmanic role" (Mohapatra 1976), and Chopra claims that "When people need help they go to their legislator" (Chopra 1996: 102). In this "listening post" or "errand boy" function, Indian politicians are in certain ways "no different from the legislators of many other developing and even developed countries. We have seen that

legislators, even in developed countries like the U.S.A., find that errand running is part of their job" (Chopra 1996: 108).[1]

These supply-driven perspectives, while offering multiple potential sources of particularistic benefits, and thus setting up potential contrasts between mediation from above and mediation from below as well as mediation from within versus outside the state, discount the potential role of individual citizens in shaping the incentives for acting on citizen requests and thus the resulting patterns of distribution. Clientelistic accounts conceive of voters only in terms of their relative preferences or likelihood of voting, not in terms of how the choices they make about placement of demands on the state might actually affect distributive outcomes.

A more demand-focused approach is in line with a long tradition of research on political participation in general and claim-making in particular. Individual contacting of representatives for assistance in accessing the state has long been recognized as an important element of political activity. In the classic work of Verba and Nie (1972) and Verba, Nie, and Kim (1979), "particularized contact," in which individuals engage in "contacting a local or extralocal official in regard to problems having a personal referent" (Schonfeld 1975: 139), is placed alongside voting, campaign activity, and communal activity as a common type of political participation. Substantial subsequent analysis has examined this interaction between citizens and their representatives as an important reflection of citizen-state relations in a democratic context,

[1] What potentially sets constituency service in India apart from similar activities in non-patronage democracies is that the requests being made by citizens can often involve going outside the legal frameworks for distribution. As Chopra recalls from visits with MLAs in their constituencies, "Constituents came to ask for favours that clearly contravened rules and laws" (Chopra 1995: 105). Thus, while some requests may be valid attempts to gain assistance with a formidable bureaucracy or resolve a situation where there is "a clear case of discrimination or injustice against the complainant" (Ibid.), it is this underlying illicit nature of many other requests distinguishes constituency service in developing democracies.

emphasizing the importance of constituent-level characteristics for shaping the character of contacting (Jones et al. 1977; Jones 1980; Sharp 1982, 1984; Hero 1986; Hirlinger 1992; see also MacLean 2010; Kruks-Wisner 2011).

Work on particularized contacting also highlights that contacting of government officials is often one of many techniques that an individual may use in response to some perceived need. The analysis of interest intermediation in Latin America by Collier and Handlin (2009), focusing on problem solving by individuals as well as associations, suggests that both state-targeted and society-targeted strategies are viable (Collier & Handlin 2009: 33-35). In an analysis of individual-state relations in Rajasthan, India, Kruks-Wisner (2011) notes that contacting a bureaucrat or elected representative is only one type of "claim making" in which individuals may engage, alongside requesting assistance of a local association, contacting an NGO, or staging a protest.

Why an individual utilizes one point of intermediation rather than another is thus an important open question. In addition, while the research on particularistic contacting and claim-making emphasizes the empirical fact that individuals contact elected officials, as well as other actors, in efforts to access the state, it has not yet established whether these demands on politicians affect the character of constituency service that politicians provide in response.

Distributive Politics and the Demand for Mediation from Above

Building on these literatures, I argue that, in contrast to broker-centered accounts emphasizing mediation from below, senior politicians can play an important role in affecting distribution of the same particularistic state benefits that are core to clientelist strategies. In contrast to the perspective that politicians differentiate between constituents in the supply of benefits on the

basis of electoral characteristics unrelated to need, such as partisanship or ethnicity, politicians respond in general to constituent demands. Citizens make requests for assistance to high-level politicians and these politicians provide assistance without a strong expectation of subsequent electoral support.

This mediation from above occurs despite the fact that it may be less efficient on some dimensions for both citizens and politicians. Citizens should find it more costly to contact senior politicians at a remove from the village level than to approach their more proximate local brokers. Yet, mediation from above is a viable strategy for individual citizens to pursue when politicians have the power to influence the behavior of bureaucrats tasked with distribution. If individuals perceive that higher-level officials have more power to assist with their demand than do local brokers, and if receipt of this assistance will not be contingent on the sale of a vote, then the likelihood of accessing an unconditional benefit may overwhelm the additional costs of contacting a more senior politician.

Politicians also have incentives to utilize direct contacts with citizens as an electoral strategy. While acting on behalf of individuals is relatively costly—Jensenius (2014: 65-68) and Chopra (1996: 112) both highlight the work required of state politicians to help fill in applications, write letters, make phone calls, and document the cases brought to them—it does not exhibit other costs associated with broker-mediated strategies. As Stokes et al. (2013) highlight, the use of brokers is economically costly, in terms of payments made to these intermediaries, and these actors are more difficult to control than individuals more proximate to a politician. Broker-oriented strategies are also potentially costly in electoral terms, in that brokers have incentives to target different types of voters than would be preferred by those higher up in the party hierarchy (Stokes et al. 2013: 128-129). Finally, broker strategies are particularly costly

in India in light of recent evidence that local brokers themselves cannot do a good job of monitoring voting behavior (Schneider 2014). Given these costs, senior politicians may be incentivized to allocate time to generating the good will associated with constituency service, rather than requiring contingent distribution.

Not providing constituency service may also pose important costs to politicians. Citizens in India expect that their representative will be available to meet them and politicians cannot risk angering anyone who visits them by not hearing them out. As Jensenius found, most politicians discover that it is "very hard work to maintain their network and support" (Jensenius 2014: 66), such that "getting things done (or at least maintaining the image of doing so) is essential to the popularity of MLAs [state legislators] (Ibid., see also Chopra 1996:4-5). So politicians engage in this behavior because it is *demanded* of them by their constituents and, in doing so, they build relationships with citizens that may serve them well at the next election. In some cases, they will be able to provide assistance, due to institutional powers that I describe in greater detail below. But even when they simply "serve as a safety valve for people to off-load their grievances" (Chopra 1996: 108), by listening to a citizen's concern, they are, at the very least, *avoiding* the negative response by the citizen that they would likely generate if they simply turned the person away without listening to their request. This is particularly important in a context of high electoral competition and incumbency disadvantage (Uppal 2009).

If citizen demands for assistance are the primary determinant of constituency service, then whether citizens make different requests of different politicians is important for understanding the resulting effects on patterns of distribution. Whether a politician has the power to influence distribution of a particular benefit may be particularly important in determining citizen choices over claim-making, but previous accounts have either assumed a public ignorant

of variations in distributive power or a lack of variation in this power across potential intermediaries.

In contrast with the implicit assumption that power over distribution of benefits is unrelated to citizen claim-making strategies, I suggest that distributional influence is likely to differ across levels of officials and across elected and non-elected officials. In addition, citizens are likely to have a reasonably sophisticated understanding of these power differentials. If this is the case, then citizens may choose to appeal to different types of actors depending on their perceived ability to provide assistance. Work on the political economy of the bureaucracy in India provides insights that help to explain why an individual might appeal to a senior politician for assistance with access to a particularistic benefit and also why the decision to do so might differ across types of benefits.

First, in India, formal control over the distribution of benefits often differs by the type of good. Allocation of a significant portion of public benefits has been decentralized to the village council (*gram panchayat*) in coordination with public meetings (*gram sabhas*) that are tasked with identifying potential beneficiaries for welfare programs and choosing projects for public works initiatives. However, in practice, the elected officials of the council and, in particular, the council president (*mukhiya/pradhan/sarpanch*) often make these decisions (Dunning and Nilekani 2013), thus serving as local brokers for public distribution (Stokes et al. 2013).

For those services not allocated at the village council level, most other benefits are provided either at the block or district level, the two primary administrative units within Indian states. It is at these levels that government departments administer their services, such as those related to land administration, under the supervision of state and national bureaucratic officers.

Formally, then, senior politicians have minimal responsibility for the allocation of

goods. Elected officials may oversee departments or councils that control certain goods and services, but direct responsibility over distribution resides either with bureaucrats or with citizens in open public meetings. The two exceptions to this general rule in India are occasional policy decisions that affect where goods will be distributed and the regular use of constituency development funds. In the latter case, politicians can allocate goods within their constituency in whatever manner they choose, within the regulations on development funds.

These formal structures of responsibility and power, however, are not the only institutions shaping the allocation of public benefits. Indian bureaucrats are typically understood to be under the informal control of elected politicians (Iyer and Mani 2012, de Zwart 1994, Wade 1985). While politicians can generally not control the hiring and firing of state or national administrative officers, they may control transfers of bureaucrats between positions, leading to a "market for public office" (Wade 1985) that creates incentives for officials to respond to political demands.

The result of these informal power dynamics is that at least some politicians should be able to influence the distribution of goods via their power over bureaucrats. Politicians at higher levels of government, primarily those in the state and national legislatures and especially cabinet ministers, should have more power than local politicians to influence the distribution of a *range* of services. Thus, local politicians are most likely to be able to influence those benefits officially distributed at their level, and may only influence distribution at higher levels through contacts (often partisan) with more senior officials (Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Wilkinson 2007). Senior politicians, on the other hand, can informally influence goods distributed at all levels.

Recent qualitative evidence suggests that these dynamics are regularly at play in the everyday activities of senior Indian politicians, and in particular members of state legislatures. In

Jensenius' account of legislator activities, she cites a district official who noted that state politicians "sometimes try to help their constituents by sending letters…or by contacting [the district official] directly, and that when something really matters to them they might even threaten the bureaucrat with an unfavorable transfer" (Jensenius 2014: 65). Similarly, a state legislator explained that, "to sort out a problem he would first call contacts on the phone, but that if nothing happened he would send one of his party workers, and as a last resort he would go to the government office or police station himself to deal with a situation" (Jensenius 2014: 67).

These characteristics of politician-bureaucrat relations imply that at least some subset of politicians has the potential to influence bureaucrat behavior, and thus the distribution of state benefits. This power over distribution, however, may vary across politicians and particular types of benefits.

To summarize, I argue that senior politicians in India play a substantial and important role in distributive politics, not merely through the development of policy, but also by affecting the implementation of policy via mediation from above of citizen claims. They do so on the basis of demands from citizens, rather than the strategic supply of assistance to particular individuals or groups. These activities may occur on their own or in parallel with mediation from below by brokers, but citizens will direct their claim making to specific actors based on both the availability of various intermediaries and the perceived power of those actors to facilitate a particular request.

This theoretical argument rests on three empirical assumptions that I must verify before testing the argument itself. First, in order for politicians to respond to requests from citizens, those citizens must approach politicians for help in accessing the state. In other words, politicians in general, and senior politicians in particular, should receive requests for assistance.

Second, the nature of at least some of these requests should be access to the type of particularistic goods that are at the heart of clientelist accounts of distributive politics. Third, politicians should exhibit some ability to help with access to these benefits, such as through their control over the bureaucracy.[2] Each of these initial implications has been shown in the qualitative literature on India, but a more comprehensive quantitative analysis has not verified that these are general trends.

My argument then has four empirical implications that I test here. First, if politicians are providing constituency service, then they should actually spend time responding to citizen requests. Second, if this is constituency service based on citizen demand, not supply by politicians, then the amount of time spent should not be correlated with characteristics that we might otherwise expect to be associated with the supply of benefits by politicians, such as levels of electoral competition in their constituency. One potential exception to this is that politicians representing parties in the ruling government might receive more requests for assistance, however given the single member district system in India, even this is somewhat unlikely. Instead, if constituency service is driven by citizen demands, then variations in constituency service should reflect the demands of citizens. This implies, third, that individual level characteristics of citizens are likely to be associated with demands choices, and, fourth, that when citizens demand goods that are controlled by different sets of actors within the state, they should differ in their choices about which politicians to approach for assistance with these benefits. In particular, citizens should be more likely to approach a senior politician for

[2] While this last assumption is not necessary if we believe that politicians may attempt to help citizens even if they have no power to produce results, it seems more plausible that citizens will approach politicians for assistance if there is at least a modicum of potential that they might be able to help.

assistance when the public benefit in question is allocated by bureaucrats at a relatively higher level of government than that of local brokers.

Research Design and Methods

I test these expectations with data from a set of new citizen, politician, and bureaucrat surveys conducted in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh, three Hindi-speaking states in northern India. The surveys included politicians and bureaucrats at all of the common administrative levels of the country: the village council, block, and district (in ascending size),[3] as well as state legislators and national parliament members, whose constituencies do not map perfectly to the administrative boundaries.

Respondents for the higher-level politician and bureaucrat surveys were sampled randomly, through a tiered selection process. First, districts were randomly selected in each state. Within each district, blocks were then randomly selected. Block and district level politicians and bureaucrats were chosen accordingly, with the president of the council and one council member included in the sample at each level, as well as the block development officer and the district collector, the two key administrative positions at each level. For members of the legislative assembly and members of parliament, the blocks and districts in the sample were mapped to state and national constituencies and all of the politicians whose constituencies fell in the overlapping areas were included in the sample.

[3] The village council (*gram panchayat*), typically covers 5 villages in Bihar, 7 in Jharkhand and 2 in Uttar Pradesh, the block council (*panchayat samiti*), typically includes about 16 village councils in Bihar, 20 in Jharkhand, and 65 in Uttar Pradesh, and the district council *(zilla parishad*), incorporates approximately 14 blocks in Bihar, 9 in Jharkhand, and 12 in Uttar Pradesh. Bihar has approximately 38,475 villages, 8,463 village councils, 534 blocks, and 38 districts; Jharkhand has 32,620 villages, 4423 village councils, 212 blocks, and 24 districts; and Uttar Pradesh has 97,607 villages, 51,974 village councils, 814 blocks, and 70 districts.

Selection of village council-level politicians and citizens was done through the same initial steps, but village councils were selected on the basis of a regression discontinuity design based on the reservation of council president seats for scheduled castes.[4] The village council politicians selected included the council president and two members of the council, with the condition that at least one of the three be a woman and one be either scheduled caste or scheduled tribe. Once village councils were chosen, two villages were randomly selected within each council's domain. In each village, eight individuals were randomly selected on the basis of three criteria.[5] A summary of the sample is presented in Table 1 and summary demographic statistics for the respondents are provided in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Table 1 – Sample Summary Statistics

Respondent Group	Respondent Type	Sample Size (n)
Citizens		9296 (807 villages)
Bureaucrats	Village Council Secretary	497
	Block Development Officer	190
	District Collector	52
Politicians	Village Council President	562
	Village Council Member	1154
	Block Council President	117
	Block Council Member	133
	District Council President	37
	District Council Member	41
	Member of State Assembly	151
	Member of Parliament	37

[4] The citizen and local council surveys were conducted in coordination with Thad Dunning and Janhavi Nilekani. For more details, see Dunning and Nilekani 2012.
[5] First, surveyors chose a different location in each village as a starting point. Once completing a survey at a house, they then skipped four houses and did the next survey at the fifth house. Within each house, the individual was chosen on the basis of the next birthday. If the person with the next birthday was currently not home, but would be returning later, the surveyors returned later in the day. If the chosen individual was not returning that day, they attempted to interview the person with the subsequent birthday. If that person was unavailable, they marked the house as a refusal and went to the next fifth house. The surveyors were also required to interview four men and four women in each village, so if the first four individuals interviewed were men, then they were instructed to chose the woman with the next birthday in all subsequent houses.

To my knowledge, this sampling procedure results in the most comprehensive set of joint surveys of Indian citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians ever conducted to date. The response rate was also quite good: in Bihar, we were able to interview all but 4 of the 219 sampled mid- and high-level politicians, the majority of which were block panchayat presidents, for a non-response rate of only 1.8%. In Jharkhand, we were unable to interview 3 of 115 mid- and high-level politicians, all of whom were block panchayat presidents, resulting in a non-response rate of 2.6%. While the content of the surveys differed to a degree across types of respondents and the three state samples, a number of questions were repeated verbatim, allowing for a comparison of responses across all respondents.

Questionnaires

I use a set of descriptive questions, posed to politicians, to measure who visits politicians, what requests are made of them, and how they allocate their time to various activities. I use a second set of descriptive questions to evaluate whether or not politicians have the power to transfer bureaucrats and a parallel set of questions, posed to bureaucrats, to estimate the frequency with which bureaucrats are transferred.

A final set of scenario-based experiments are used to evaluate respondents' perceptions of the likelihood that citizens would approach certain individuals or groups for assistance when attempting to acquire a publicly provided service or good and the power these actors have to help in accessing the particular benefit. These questions were posed to all citizen, bureaucrat, and politician respondents. Four services were presented in the scenarios and randomly assigned to

respondents:[6] acquiring a caste certificate, getting approval for a new building for a business, having a new health center built in the village, and installing a tube well in the village.

The scenario was read aloud and the respondent was then asked which of a set of people and organizations the individual might ask for assistance. I chose types of individuals and groups to include as response options based on those utilized in previous research and the goal of inclusivity. Options included politicians and bureaucrats at multiple levels of government; individual, non-state intermediaries (middlemen and fixers); and non-state organizations (such as NGOs and neighborhood associations). More detailed descriptions of each type of included actor are provided in the Appendix. The respondent was asked independently about whether a person would contact each individual or organization, so multiple, non-exclusive choices were possible. Respondents were then asked which individual or group would be *most likely* to receive requests for assistance—forcing a choice between the response options—and which would have the *most power* to provide assistance.

The services in the scenarios were chosen to reflect variation in the level of government at which benefits are allocated. All of the benefits are typically allocated above the level of the village council or village meeting, but they vary in the degree to which a local broker could potentially influence distribution. *Caste certificates* and *building approvals* are both individual benefits typically allocated at the block level. Caste certificates are identity documents that verify an individual is from a particular caste, often a scheduled caste, and are typically provided by the block development office or Revenue Department. Thus Block Development Officers (or

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[6] Politicians above local council level were presented with two scenarios each, with the order varying by questionnaire version. Local council level politicians and bureaucrats, as well as citizens, were presented with one scenario each.

Tehsildars in Uttar Pradesh)[7] have the most formal control over the allocation of this resource. However, these documents require identity verification and local politicians often serve as representatives of individuals in this regard.[8] As a result, it should be relatively feasible for lower level officers to influence the process. *Building approvals* represent a more substantial investment and are less likely to be influenced by local politicians. The Block Development Officer is likely to have the most direct control over this resource. *Health centers* and *tube wells* represent club or public goods that can be targeted to particular areas. Health centers are typically provided by the state government through the Department of Health and Family Welfare, while tube wells (water wells that draw from the underground aquifer) are more often provided through the Department of Public Health or Water. As such, bureaucrats from each of these departments have direct control over the allocation of these resources. In some cases, senior politicians may also choose to allocate a health center or tube well directly through the use of their constituency development funds.

Hypotheses

To reiterate the empirical assumptions and expectations outlined above, I expect that:

1) Politicians at all levels should receive direct requests for assistance.
2) Citizens should request assistance with accessing basic, particularistic benefits from politicians at all levels of government.

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[7] In Uttar Pradesh, there is an additional administrative layer between blocks and districts, the tehsil. The *tehsildar* is the top bureaucratic official at that level.

[8] For example, to open a bank account or to receive an Aadhaar number (a new biometric identification number in India) it is sufficient proof of identity to have a certificate with a photo that is issued by the village council president.

3) Politicians should exhibit control over bureaucrats and some evidence of using this control.
4) Politicians should spend time interacting with constituents, proportionate to the percent of their visitors who are constituents.
5) The amount of time politicians spend with constituents should be uncorrelated with measures of electoral competition and partisanship
6) Individual-level characteristics of citizens should shape propensities to engage in claim-making
7) Citizens should choose whom to approach for assistance according to the level of government at which benefits are controlled and, thus, senior politicians should be relatively more likely to receive requests for assistance with benefits allocated at higher levels of government.

Findings

In the following analyses, I present the results of questions posed to politicians, bureaucrats, and citizens in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh, India. In each sub-section, I specify the specific group(s) of respondents for which I am reporting results.

Testing the Assumptions

Politicians, Time, and Constituency Service

I first evaluate whether politicians at all levels of government receive requests from citizens for assistance. I then examine whether these requests reflect demands for the types of particularistic goods generally understood by the clientelism literature to be distributed by local brokers. In order to estimate the volume of citizen requests, I asked politicians how many visitors

they receive at their office on a daily basis and the breakdown of these visitors by type of individual. I also asked how they allocate their time across a variety of activities, including meeting with constituents.

The results presented in tables 2-4 suggest that individual citizens are the predominant type of visitor to all politicians and that politicians spend a substantial portion of their time dealing with the requests of these individuals. The results for daily visitors are shown in Table 2, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the politicians' constituencies at each level of government. These results suggest both that politicians at all levels receive a considerable number of visitors every day and that politicians at senior levels of government receive a generally proportionate number of visitors relative to their constituency size. Indeed, these senior officials report having hundreds or thousands of daily visitors, which is a much more substantial logistical undertaking than the tens of visitors received by local officials. Though the average numbers of reported visitors to national and state legislators may seem high, these numbers are in line with anecdotal reports of senior politicians receiving thousands of visitors a day when in their constituencies (Jensenius 2014: 67).

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the types of visitors to senior politicians (national, state, district, and block) and lower level (village) politicians. These findings highlight that the principal type of visitor is an individual citizen. Thus, even if local politicians are acting as intermediaries to facilitate access to some goods, in addition to distributing goods at their own level, they do not make up a substantial number of the visitors to senior politicians, nor do non-state intermediaries (fixers). Yet, these figures do not provide a clear indication of the total number of citizens visiting all politicians at each level of government on a given day.

In Table 4, I offer estimates of total citizen visitors at each level by state. Here, I create the measure by multiplying the average reported number of visitors by the percentage of these visitors who are citizens and the size of constituencies in each state. These estimations show clearly that senior politicians, and in particular state legislators, play a disproportionately important role in mediating citizen requests, despite sitting relatively far away from most individuals. State legislators receive more total visitors across each state in a given day than national legislators, district politicians, or block politicians. In Bihar, they also receive more total visitors than local council politicians, while they receive a similar number of visitors in Jharkhand. Only in Uttar Pradesh do local politicians receive a substantially larger total number of visitors than do state politicians.

Table 2 – Number of Daily Visitors to Politicians, but not Visitors as a Percent of Overall Constituency, is Monotonically Related to the Level of Government[9]

Location of Politician / Visitors	Parliament	Legislative Assembly	District Council	Block Council	Village Council
Average Daily Visitors at Constituency Headquarters[10]	5257	3922	2508	406	86
Daily Visitors as Proportion of Overall Constituency	0.21	0.85	0.10	0.19	1.68

[9] Responses not available for village council politicians

[10] Politicians at the block level and higher were also asked the number of visitors received at their capital or regional office. These numbers were lower across the board, but did not exhibit any additional differences across politician type.

Table 3 – Citizens are the Predominant Type of Visitor to All Politicians

Location of Politician / Type of Visitor	Parliament	Legislative Assembly	District Council	Block Council	Village Council
Citizens	.63	.63	.62	.79	.73
Fixers	.05	.05	.06	.04	.05
Bureaucrats	.03	.03	.03	.02	.07
Businessmen	.06	.05	.06	.03	.03
NGO representatives	.02	.03	.03	.01	.01
Party workers/Local politicians	.13	.14	.12	.05	.04
Other party/State politicians	.08	.07	.07	.03	.02
Other	.00	.00	.02	.02	.06

*Proportion of visitors by type to politicians at each level of government

Table 4 – Substantial Numbers of Individual Citizens Visit Senior Politicians Every Day*

Location of Politician / State	Parliament	Legislative Assembly	District Council	Block Council	Village Council	***Total State Population***
Bihar	140,000	520,214	53,068	206,573	398,100	***103,804, 637***
Jharkhand	40,425	206,515	39,894	81,527	280,241	***32,966,757***
Uttar Pradesh	256,731	1,031,849	110,513	311,795	3,149,105	***199,281,477***

*Estimated total visitors to each type of politician across the entire state each day, based on average politician reports about number of visitors, proportion that are citizens, and constituency size at each level of government.

Politicians and Types of Requests

My argument posits that citizens come to politicians with specific requests associated with the distribution of public benefits, rather than other types of appeals. In order to address this claim, I asked politicians to report the *most common* thing that both citizens and individual intermediaries (fixers) requested of them. This was an open-ended question. Table 5 reports these results.

Accessing individual public benefits dominates requests for assistance, with the combination of identification needed to access welfare schemes (caste certificates), a specific welfare scheme (ration cards), a government employment scheme (MGNREGA), and other welfare schemes making up a majority of responses related to both citizens and fixers. Thus, the general assumption that the time politicians allocate to citizens is dominated by distributive concerns seems valid, as does the specific hypothesis that senior politicians, not just local brokers, would receive these requests for particularistic benefits.

Table 5 – Citizens Request Assistance with Public Benefits from All Politicians*

Type of Politician Respondent	Senior Politicians		Village Politicians	
Type of Requestor What is Requested	**Citizen**	*Fixer*	**Citizen**	*Fixer*
Recommendations for Employment	**8.8**	*15.1*	**11.7**	*20.8*
Help resolving police cases	**9.0**	*18.2*	**7.9**	*18.9*
Help with land affairs	**7.6**	*8.4*	**1.5**	*4.8*
Help getting ration card	**14.0**	*8.2*	**39.2**	*26.1*
Help getting caste certificate	**5.8**	*2.2*	**6.3**	*4.3*
Help with MGNREGA	**2.2**	*3.1*	**3.5**	*4.9*
Help with other welfare scheme	**48.7**	*43.2*	**24.5**	*15.6*
Help with Education Dept.	**3.0**	*0.0*	**3.7**	*1.2*
Help with other government service	**1.0**	*1.7*	**1.7**	*3.3*

*Percent of responses. Getting a ration card, caste certificate, MGNREGA, and other welfare schemes all reflect particularistic public benefits.

Politicians, Bureaucrats, and Transfers

My argument posits that citizens will approach senior politicians for assistance with accessing benefits primarily because of their perceived power to influence the bureaucracy through the use of transfers. While research suggests that a significant number of politicians in India have the power to transfer bureaucrats in their domain (Wade 1985, de Zwart 1994, Iyer

and Mani 2012), this work is limited in at least two ways. First, it has largely focused attention on the transfer of bureaucrats in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which, though fundamentally important for the functioning of the Indian state, represents only a small portion of Indian government employees. Second, the quantitative work that exists analyzes patterns of transfers, but does not provide clarity on which politicians actually have the power to effect these moves of personnel.

Here, I offer evidence on transfer power from two questions posed to politicians at the national, state, district, and block levels, in which they were asked whether they have the power to transfer bureaucrats and, if so, what types of bureaucrats (Table 6).[11] Overall, 34% of respondents across levels stated that they could transfer at least some bureaucrats, but, as expected, this finding differs quite dramatically by the level of politician. 81% of national legislators and 54% of state legislators said that they could transfer bureaucrats, while 30% and 21% of district and block council presidents said that they could, respectively. Only 12-13% of district and block council members reported that they had the power to make transfers.

Among those politicians who reported having the power to make transfers, a general hierarchical pattern can be observed in the types of individuals over whom they hold transfer power. Politicians at higher levels of government have greater power over senior bureaucrats and their power increases as we move down in the bureaucratic hierarchy, with 94% of MPs who said they could transfer bureaucrats reporting that they can transfer individuals at the lowest levels in their constituency. In addition, council presidents at the district and block levels report having considerably more power to transfer than council members, particularly in the case of districts. This evidence offers strong support for the claim that a significant number of politicians,

[11] This question was not asked of village council presidents.

particularly those in the state and national legislatures, have the power to transfer the bureaucrats who are charged with the distribution of public goods and services.

Table 6 – Senior Politicians Have the Greatest Power to Transfer Bureaucrats*

Type of Respondent Politician		National Legislators	State Legislators	District Council Presidents	District Council Members	Block Council Presidents	Block Council Members
Proportion with Power to Transfer		.81	.54	.30	.12	.21	.14
Type of Bureaucrat can Transfer	IAS in constituency	.60	.29	.27	.00	.00	.00
	State AS in constituency	.87	.72	.54	.00	.28	.28
	Lower level in constituency	.94	.86	.82	.83	.96	.94

*Proportion of respondents reporting that they have the power to transfer any bureaucrat and, within that group, proportion that have power to transfer bureaucrats of a given type. IAS refers to Indian Administrative Service, AS refers to state administrative service.

Even if politicians have the power to transfer, however, they may not utilize this power. Thus, it is also important to examine the degree to which bureaucrats are moved between positions. While multiple Administration Reforms Commissions have recommended that officers have terms of at least two years in each appointment, research on the Indian Administrative Service has shown that "the average tenure of IAS officers in a given post is 16 months, and only 56% of District Officers spend more than one year in their jobs" (Iyer and Mani 2012: 725).

In my sample of bureaucrats, District Collectors reported that they had been transferred, on average, 2.6 times in the previous five years while Block Development Officers reported 2.7 transfers, for an average of approximately 22 months in each position. While this tenure is slightly longer than that reported by Iyer and Mani (2012), it still suggests relatively frequent transfers of officers at the level of both the district and the block. Thus, politicians, and, given

the findings in Table 5, especially state and national-level politicians, do utilize their power to transfer bureaucrats within the states on a relatively regular basis. Moreover, the credible threat of doing so surely gives politicians substantial leverage over bureaucrats, even if they don't always exercise that threat.

Testing the Argument

Allocation of Time by Politicians

The first hypothesis to test is that politicians spend a portion of their time dealing with citizen requests, in proportion to the demands that are placed on them by their constituents. An initial step in testing this hypothesis is to determine how politicians allocate their time across various activities. Table 5 highlights that politicians on average spend 24-35% of their time meeting with citizens, with the remainder of their time spent on policy work or meeting with other types of individuals. This is a minimum measure of time allocated to citizen requests, as it does not necessarily account for time spent talking with bureaucrats or other politicians on behalf of individual citizens.

The amount of time that politicians at different levels of government spend meeting with citizens is relatively proportionate to the percentage of their visitors who are citizens (comparing Tables 3 and 7), with MPs and MLAs spending a slightly smaller portion of their time with citizens than politicians at the district and block level. The exception here is Village Council members, who do spend a larger proportion of their time with citizens than other politicians, based on citizens as a share of visitors. Overall, this provides strong evidence that dealing with the direct requests of individual citizens is an important activity for all politicians, including those at the most senior levels of government.

Table 7 – Politicians Spend 1/4 to 1/3 of Their Time Attending to Citizens*

Location of Politician / Type of Activity	National Legislature	State Legislature	District Council	Block Council	Village Council
Policy work/Office work	.19	.21	.22	.22	.37
Meeting citizens	.24	.24	.27	.31	.35
Meeting bureaucrats	.06	.05	.08	.12	.12
Meeting politicians	.29	.27	.15	.10	.04
Meeting private sector	.09	.09	.12	.08	.02
Meeting NGOs	.04	.04	.05	.03	.02
Meeting others	.08	.10	.10	.14	.09

*Proportion of time in a typical week spent on each endeavor. Respondents were asked how many hours a week they spent on each activity. Responses for each activity from each politician were then divided by the total number of hours reported across all activities for that respondent. These measures were then averaged across all respondents of a given type to calculate the proportions.

Constituency Service and Electoral Competition

If variations in constituency service are shaped by strategic choices of politicians to provide benefits to particular groups, then we should expect measures of constituency service to be associated with political characteristics at the level of the politician. I use two different strategies for testing this perspective on constituency service. First, I examine the relationship between measures of constituency service and measures of electoral competition and links between senior and local politicians. Second, I use a pair of survey experiments to evaluate the degree to which politicians identify the provision of constituency service with electorally relevant categories such as ethnicity or partisanship.

Previous analyses highlight the potential importance of electoral competition for shaping the effort politicians exert to provide benefits to their constituents (Keefer and Khemani 2009). I test the relationship between two measures of constituency service—Politician reports of the proportion of time in a week spent with constituents and the proportion of visitors received in the

constituency who are citizens—and levels of electoral competition.[12] To measure electoral competition, I use the victory margin of the politician in the most recent election (for MLAs and MPs only) and whether their party is in power in the state government.

Perhaps more importantly for our understanding of whether constituency service exists as a substitute for or complement to clientelism, I also evaluate whether constituency service is associated with links between senior politicians and local actors. If constituency service by senior politicians is a substitute for clientelistic activity on their behalf by local politicians, then we should see a negative correlation between provision of constituency service and links between senior and local politicians. My primary measure for strength of relationship between senior and local politicians is whether a senior politician said that they would go to a local council president for help with their election.

I also include individual-level variables measuring whether a politician has been a member of a different political party in the past, which may imply that they need to dedicate more time to building their reputation with constituents as a part of their current party, and demographic to measure other potentially relevant charaacteristics of the politicians, such as capacity.

Tables 8 and 9 report the results for proportion of time spent with constituents and constituents as a proportion of visitors in the constituency, respectively, disaggregated by level of politician respondent. In each case, we see that measures of constituency service exhibit no consistent relationship with electoral competition, suggesting that politicians are not conditioning their allocation of time to constituents on any perceived variation in electoral vulnerability. In

[12] A supplementary measure of the proportion of visitors to the capital/headquarters who are citizens displays no consistent differences with the results presented here.

addition, constituency service is not clearly related to a senior politician's ties to local level politicians who may act as brokers for clientelist distribution schemes. These findings suggest both that constituency service is not shaped by factors that we might traditionally associate with the supply of benefits to constituents and that if clientelism exists in local areas then constituency service is a complement to these activities rather than a substitute.

Table 8 – *Proportion of Hours in Week Spent with Constituents* Displays No Consistent Relationships with Measures of Electoral Competition, Patron Relationships, or Demographic Characteristics

	National Legislators	State Legislators	District Council Members	Block Council Members	Village Council Members
Victory Margin	.00 (.85)	-.00 (-.10)			
State Government Party	.15** (4.30)	.02 (1.08)	.04 (1.26)	-.01 (-.34)	-.00 (-.33)
Party Switcher	.01 (.31)	.04 (2.09)	.00 (.07)	.01 (.32)	.00 (.02)
Local Council President Help	.06 (1.75)	-.01 (-.54)	-.01 (-.26)	.06 (1.53)	
Age	-.00 (-.68)	.00 (1.68)	-.00 (-.73)	-.00 (-.38)	
Male	-.01 (-.31)	-.00 (-.15)	.01 (.44)	.02 (.63)	.00 (.36)
Education	.01 (.26)	.01 (1.54)	-.02** (-2.90)	-.01* (-2.42)	-.00 (-.90)
Constant	.06 (.39)	.03 (.26)	.52 (4.65)	.42 (5.72)	.35 (22.97
Adjusted R-squared	.38	.04	.08	.01	-.00
N	31	147	76	242	1339

*OLS with coefficients reported in cells and t-statistic in parentheses. For all tests in this paper, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, and *** = p<.001.

Table 9 – *Proportion of Visitors in Constituency Who are Citizens* Displays No Consistent Relationships with Measures of Electoral Competition, Patron Relationships, or Demographic Characteristics

	National Legislators	State Legislators	District Council Members	Block Council Members	Local Council Members
Victory Margin	.00 (1.17)	.00 (1.18)			
State Government Party	.13** (2.90)	.01 (.31)	.01 (.24)	-.06* (-2.45)	-.01 (-.79)
Party Switcher	.09 (1.93)	.02 (.77)	-.22** (-2.98)	-.02 (-.58)	-.00 (-1.45)
Local Council President Help	-.04 (-.79)	-.04 (-1.42)	-.08 (-1.44)	-.03 (-1.00)	
Age	-.00 (-1.17)	-.00 (-.44)	-.00 (-.50)	-.01 (-1.46)	
Male	-.17** (-3.12)	.01 (.15)	.07 (1.22)	.06* (2.13)	-.01 (-.66)
Education	.03 (.89)	-.00 (-.02)	-.02 (-1.13)	-.00 (-1.08)	.00** (2.77)
Constant	.32 (.61)	.63 (3.35)	.88 (4.32)	.92 (13.70)	.71 (44.27)
Adjusted R-squared	.33	-.01	.10	.03	.00
N	31	148	76	243	1326

*OLS with coefficients reported in cells and t-statistic in parentheses.

A second set of tests evaluates the degree to which politicians associate ethnicity or partisanship with their ability to provide assistance to citizens. To evaluate the importance of ethnicity, in this case understood as caste, I use a scenario experiment in which respondents were presented with an individual who is attempting to file a complaint with the police for items that were stolen from his home. He is described as a voter in the respondent's constituency, but in each version of the questionnaire his caste name is varied. The respondent is then asked how likely it is that he would be able to help the individual.

In the second scenario, another person is said to be having difficulty with a case that has been brought against him in the local court. He is described as an active member of the

community who often engages in social work, as well as being a supporter of a particular political party, with the name of the party varied across versions of the questionnaire. Again, the respondent is asked how likely it is that he would be able to help this person.

Difference of means tests do not show any clear differences in the likelihood that politician respondents perceive that they would be more or less able to help an individual on the basis of caste or party affiliation (results not shown). More important, however, is whether the respondent and the individual described in the scenario are from the same caste or have the same party affiliation. Bivariate regressions relating a respondent's reported likelihood that they would be able to help an individual to a dichotomous variable measuring whether they share the same caste group or party affiliation as the individual described in the scenario are reported in Table 10. There is no discernable relationship between sharing these characteristics and a respondent's likelihood to report that they would be able to help an individual.

Table 10 – Politicians' perceptions of ability to help citizens show no relationship with shared caste group or party affiliation (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh)[13]

	Model 1	Model 2
Same Caste Group	.01 (.26)	
Same Party		.05 (.27)
Constant	4.92 (267.27)	3.82 (43.97)
N	406	405
Adjusted R-squared	.00	-.00

OLS with coefficient reported in cells and t-ratio in parentheses. Tests include Block, District, State, and National level politicians.

[13] Results of these tests do not change in any substantive manner if we disaggregate the respondent groups by type of politician.

Together with the previous set of results, these findings suggest that our expectations about what factors should shape politician provision of constituency service in a context where they have clear control over the supply of these services are not associated with the measures of constituency service used here. Neither proportion of hours in a week spent with constituents nor proportion of visitors in the constituency who are constituents is consistently related to measures of electoral competition or ties to local politicians and perceived ability to help constituents is not related to shared caste or partisanship. Given these findings, I now examine whether measures of citizen demand can provide greater leverage over variation in constituency service.

Individual Requests, Constituent Characteristics, and the Type of Benefits

To this point, the analyses presented establish that politicians at all levels entertain direct requests from citizens for particularistic benefits, without mediation by brokers and in settings in which explicit conditionality (vote buying) is unlikely to operate. The characteristics of politician responses to these requests are uncorrelated with politician-level characteristics, including measures of electoral competition. In this sub-section, I examine whether individual-level characteristics are associated with variations in demand for constituency service. In particular, I analyze scenario survey experiments intended to test claims about whether and how individual requests for assistance are related to variation in the power of politicians to influence the distribution of particular public benefits.

To reiterate, these questions presented a randomly assigned scenario that described an individual attempting to acquire a public benefit. Respondents were given a list of individuals and organizations and asked which individual or group would be the *most likely* to receive requests for assistance with a given benefit and which would actually have the *most power* to

assist with the request. Figures 1 and 2 summarize the results for these questions, respectively, across all respondent groups: citizens, village bureaucrats, senior bureaucrats, village politicians, and senior politicians. Each respondent group is weighted equally (rather than according to the sample size) for ease of presentation. Independent results for each respondent group exhibit largely similar patterns across groups and type of services.

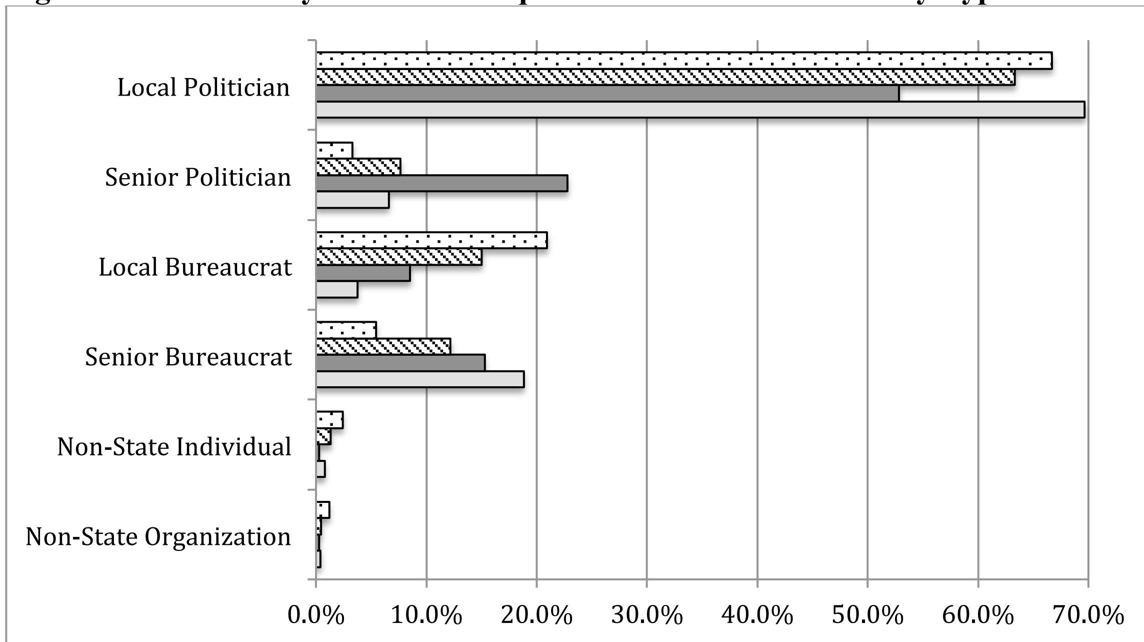
The figures highlight a number of important characteristics of perceptions about citizen requests for assistance with public benefits. First, these results reinforce the previous findings that politicians are important points of contact for citizens, but also show that politicians are important sources of assistance *relative* to bureaucrats and non-state intermediaries. In other words, when choosing among the state and non-state actors that they might approach, elected officials are seen as relevant and viable points of contact.

Second, the responses to these questions suggest that, in line with the existing literature on clientelism, respondents do perceive local politicians to be intermediaries for accessing a range of particularistic benefits. While none of the benefits included in the scenarios are officially allocated at the level of the village council, a majority of respondents expect local politicians to be the most likely recipients of requests for assistance for each type of benefit. This is despite the fact that a much smaller percentage of respondents, only 20% to 40%, depending on the benefit, perceive these actors to have the most power to provide assistance. This suggests that proximity to local politicians is an important factor in shaping individuals' choices about whom to approach for assistance.

At the same time, senior politicians are also important points of contact, and the perceived likelihood that an individual will approach a senior official for assistance with a given benefit accords with informal power over different benefits. Senior politicians are expected to be

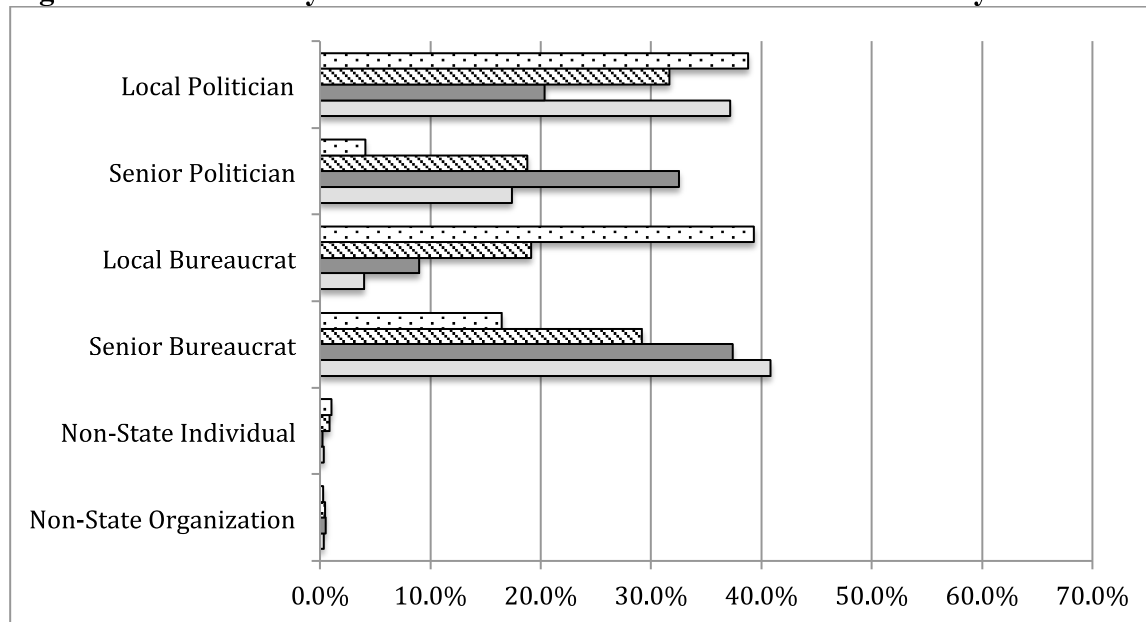
more likely to receive requests for assistance when the benefit in question is a Health Center, a type of good allocated at a higher level than caste certificates or building licenses. For a tube well, the other type of benefit that cannot be allocated at lower levels of government, individuals are instead expected to appeal senior bureaucrats for assistance. This suggests that individuals have a good understanding of who holds power over distribution and are often willing to overlook the costs associated with approaching a more senior official when that actor is expected to have relatively greater power over the distribution of a benefit than a more proximate actor.

Figure 1 – Most Likely to Receive Requests is Perceived to Differ by Type of Benefit



All respondents (citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians). Bars are percent of respondents reporting that an individual or group in each category would be the most likely recipient of requests for assistance. Dotted bar is Caste Certificate, striped bar is Building Approval, dark gray bar is Health Center, and light gray bar is Tube Well.

Figure 2 – Most Likely to Have Power to Assist is Perceived to Differ by Benefit



All respondents (citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians). Bars are percent of respondents reporting that an individual or group in each category would have the most power to help with requests for assistance. Dotted bar is Caste Certificate, striped bar is Building Approval, dark gray bar is Health Center, and light gray bar is Tube Well.

Because it is the behavior of citizens that is of the greatest interest here, and because the existing literature highlights the importance of individual characteristics in shaping particularistic contacting, it is worth considering citizen responses to these questions in greater detail. First, I conduct difference of means tests to compare responses to the four scenarios using only the citizen sample. In Table 11, I report results of t-tests comparing scenarios according to the proportion of respondents reporting that senior politicians are the most likely individuals to receive requests for assistance or have the most power to provide assistance. These tests suggest that elected officials at high levels of government are most likely to receive requests for a health center and that they are also likely have the most power over this particular benefit relative to those in the other scenarios.

Table 11 – Citizens perceive strong differences in the Power of Senior Politicians and the Likelihood that They Will Receive Requests for Assistance Across Types of Benefits

Difference of Means / ***DV***	Caste – Building	Caste – Health Center	Caste – Tube Well	Building – Health Center	Building – Tube Well	Health Center – Tube Well	*N*
Senior Politician Most Likely to Receive Request	-.07*** (-12.06)	-.15*** (-18.92)	-.05*** (-8.70)	-.08*** (-7.70)	.03*** (3.76)	.10*** (11.35)	4637-4648
Senior Politician Most Likely to have Power to Act	-.20*** (20.92)	-.41*** (-37.82)	-.18*** (-19.59)	-.22*** (-16.05)	.02 (1.38)	.44*** (17.47)	4637-4648

*Difference of means tests reporting the mean of the first scenario listed in the column minus the second scenario listed. Difference in means is reported in cells with t-statistic in parentheses.

Given that existing work emphasizes the importance of individual characteristics for shaping claim-making, it is also relevant to consider whether individual characteristics matter in this context and whether the cross-scenario findings in Table 11 still hold once those factors are taken into account. To do so, I test the relationship between whether a person reported that they thought a senior politician was most likely to receive a request or most likely to have power to act on that request with a host of individual-level characteristics including age, income, gender, caste group, whether the individual has politicians among their close friends or family, and whether they are a member of a political party. The results for these tests are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 – Individual Characteristics Predict Perceptions of Who Will Receive Requests, but not Who Has Power to Act on Requests

		Senior Politician Most Likely to Receive Request	Senior Politician Most Likely to have Power to Act
Scenarios	Building License	.97*** (9.25)	1.30*** (15.72)
	Health Center	1.29*** (12.71)	1.92*** (23.45)
	Tube Well	.75*** (7.01)	1.20*** 14.41)
Age		-.00 (-.32)	-.00 (-1.27)
Education		.02** (2.77)	.01** (2.77)
Income		-.03** (-2.94)	.01 (1.67)
Female		-.04 (-.64)	-.09 (-1.72)
Caste Group	Scheduled Caste	-.30*** (-3.78)	-.06 (-.91)
	Scheduled Tribe	-.39* (-2.27)	.02 (.17)
	Other Backward Class	-.13* (-2.16)	.02 (.39)
Close to Politician		-.04 (-.33)	.00 (.24)
Political Party Member		.12 (1.92)	.01 (.28)
State	Bihar	-.21* (-2.57)	-.20** (-3.15)
	Jharkhand	-.41*** (-5.29)	-.65*** (-10.51)
Constant		-1.95 (-12.57)	-1.83 (-14.32)
Pseudo R-squared		.10	.17
N		5207	5207

*Probit models with coefficient reported in table and z-statistic in parentheses. The excluded categories are Caste Certificate for the scenarios, Upper Caste for the caste groups, and Uttar Pradesh for the states.

These models both reinforce the results of the difference of means tests and suggest two additional findings. First, the differences in perceptions across scenarios hold while controlling for these additional individual-level characteristics. Second, individual characteristics are in many cases important predictors of whether a respondent thinks a citizen will go to a senior politician for assistance. In particular, more educated individuals, those with lower incomes, and those who are from the upper castes were more likely to expect constituents to appeal to their senior representatives. Interestingly, and in line with the findings above for politician reports on their own activities, political variables—having a family member or close friend who is a politician and being a member of political party—are not associated with a perception that citizens will approach senior politicians. The third major finding is that these individual-level characteristics *do not* exhibit similar relationships with citizen respondents' perceptions of who holds power over the distribution of benefits. This suggests again that people in general understand political power structures and it is other factors, such as the individual characteristics tested here, rather than variations in political sophistication, that shape claim-making.

Overall, the analysis of the benefit scenarios suggests that influence over distribution varies across different types of goods and services and that individual citizens have a good understanding of this variation. While citizens may be more likely, in general, to contact their most proximate elected official for assistance, they can vary this choice in cases where a different individual is clearly seen to have more power to influence a particular matter. That said, individual characteristics, including education, income, and caste, are also likely to affect a citizen's overall likelihood of approaching senior politicians for assistance.

Conclusion

Citizens in India face a challenging environment when interacting with the state. The government offers considerable welfare resources, especially for the poor in rural areas, but accessing these goods and services can entail substantial time visiting multiple government offices, paying bribes, and still waiting long periods to receive benefits. As a result, individuals often go outside the formal lines of government to negotiate access to the state. How they choose to do so helps us to understand better the character of distributive politics in the Indian setting.

This paper provides both a new theoretical contribution to our understanding of distributive politics as well as empirical support for this argument using new and unique data. Theoretically, in contrast with predominant accounts of clientelism that position local brokers as the as the primary, if not only, points of citizen contact for accessing public benefits, I argue that senior politicians can play an important role in facilitating access to distributive goods. I suggest that requesting assistance from senior politicians is a viable strategy for citizens to pursue because receipt of benefits is not contingent on future votes and because senior politicians can viably assist them in accessing goods, at least in part due to politicians' power over the bureaucrats charged with distribution. Senior politicians also have an incentive to provide this assistance to citizens, despite the costs associated with many individual interactions, due to the potentially high electoral and economic costs of the alternative broker-oriented model.

In addition, I posit that variations in the nature of this constituency service are shaped not by the strategic supply of assistance to specific citizens, but rather by the nature of demands for citizens themselves. Because politicians do not seek out constituents to whom they will provide assistance and because not providing assistance to those who make requests would be a

potentially detrimental electoral strategy, politicians must respond to however many and whichever requests their constituents decide to make.

Empirically, I use new and unique surveys of citizens, politicians, and bureaucrats in India to offer evidence of "demand-driven mediation-from-above" by first establishing the empirical basis for the theory, specifically that senior politicians receive substantial requests for assistance; that these requests concern particularistic benefits, and that politicians have the power to assist with these requests given their power over the bureaucracy.

I subsequently provide evidence to support the argument itself by showing that politicians spend time responding to these requests, in line with the amount of requests receive; politician-level measures of supply-driven mediation, such as electoral competition, are uncorrelated with variations in this constituency service; and citizens choose whom to approach for assistance based not only on their individual characteristics, but also according to a sophisticated understanding of which actors have the most power to assist with their claims.

These findings suggest both that supply-oriented perspectives of distributive politics in general provide a limited understanding of the dynamics shaping distribution and that existing accounts of clientelism in particular provide too narrow a view of opportunities for senior politicians to build relationships with their constituents outside a contingent paradigm. Future work should consider the potential role of more senior politicians in directly influencing public distribution, as well as examining in greater detail the tradeoffs made between strategies of demand-driven mediation from above and below and the subsequent effects on distribution and electoral politics.

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Appendix

Table A1 – Sample Demographic Statistics

Politician Type	Sample Size (n)	Age	Percent Male	Education Level*	Monthly Income ('000 rupees)*	Percent Hindu	Percent Forward Caste	Percent Other Backward Class
Citizens	9296	38.8	50.3	Class 7 (7.0)	2-3	88.0	19.8	52.0
Village council Secretary	497	N/A[14]	99.6	Class 11 (11.5)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Block Development Officer	190	47.8	90.0	College (12.6)	10+	96.8	46.8	30.5
District Collector	52	36.8	75.0	Post-graduate (13.0)	10+	92.3	63.5	13.5
Village Council President	562	N/A	63.0	Class 9 (9.2)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Village Council Member	1154	N/A	50.4	Class 7 (7.7)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Block Council President	117	40.6	41.0	Class 10 (10.0)	7-8	93.2	24.8	52.1
Block Council Member	133	39.1	57.9	Class 9 (9.1)	4-5	92.5	22.6	55.6
District Council President	37	39.5	29.7	Intermediate (11.3)	9-10	86.5	10.8	64.9
District Council Member	41	42.0	61.0	Intermediate (10.7)	8-9	87.8	26.8	55.2
Member of Legislative Assembly	151	45.1	89.4	Intermediate (12.0)	10+	92.7	40.4	42.4
Member of Parliament	37	49.6	78.4	Intermediate (12.4)	10+	89.2	48.6	32.4
Politician AVERAGE*	221	42.2	63.0	Intermediate (10.7)	7-8	91.7	29.6	49.6

*The Politician Average excludes Gram Panchayat members and Presidents. For education and income levels, responses were coded on a scale for which each number represented a range of education level or income. The respective range for the average score on the scale is shown in the cell, with the average for years of education in parentheses. N/A = Not available.

[14] These characteristics were not measured for village council-level politicians and bureaucrats.

Table A2 – Variation in Constituency Size Across Levels of Government in Sampled States

State	Bihar		Jharkhand		Uttar Pradesh		Overall
Type of Constituency	Total Seats	Average Constituency Size	Total Seats	Average Constituency Size	Total Seats	Average Constituency Size	Average Size/ Total Pop
MP	40	2,595,116	14	2,354,731	80	2,494,769	2,510,093
MLA	243	427,180	80	412,078	403	495,240	463,295
District	38	2,731,701	24	1,373,593	70	2,851,165	2,548,124
Block	534	194,391	212	155,501	814	245,186	215,611
Village Council	8,463	12,266	4,423	7,453	52,905	3,772	5,112
Total Population	103,804,637		32,966,238		199,581,520		336,352,395

Types of individuals and groups included as answer categories in scenario questions

Politicians

As noted above, politicians from all levels of government in India were included in the survey, excluding major metropolitan areas. Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected to the national legislature from state constituencies approximately every five years, unless the government falls or an election is called early. Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are state legislators also elected to a five-year term in a parliamentary system, though the elections often do not coincide with those for the central government. Below the state level, there are three layers of local councils, or panchayats. These councils are at the district/zilla, block/tehsil, and village/gram level, and also serve five-year terms. Politicians at the gram panchayat level are typically not allowed to campaign on the basis of party membership, though party membership is sanctioned at higher levels.

Bureaucrats

The bureaucrats considered in this study are government employees who are not elected and typically serve in either the Indian Administrative Service or the respective State Administrative Service. Respondents included bureaucrats in three posts: District Collector, Block Development Officer, and Panchayat Secretary. Each individual is the highest-ranking bureaucrat at their level of the administration and each is typically responsible for the implementation of government schemes delegated to their particular level. The District Collector has historically been seen as one of the most powerful actors in rural India, given the preponderance of central government schemes with implementation decentralized to the district level. In recent years, more implementation of schemes has been shifted to the block and,

especially, panchayat level, potentially increasing the relative power of panchayat secretaries, though this remains up for debate.

Individual Intermediaries

This group is made up of two types of individuals, middlemen and fixers, who play some role in facilitating access to government services, but who do not hold any official position with the government. While both types of actors' primary role is to facilitate access to services, their modes of operating and the basis of their relationship with those whom they assist differ. Middlemen (*dalal*) are actors who tend to play a particular role associated with a single service or set of services. These are individuals who will often be found outside government offices offering to help an individual apply for a government service, for a fee. These agents have received relatively little theoretical attention, though they have been highlighted in a number of recent empirical studies of corruption in India (Bertrand et al. 2007; Pinto & Peisakhin 2010). Fixers (*naya neta*/new leaders or *stahniya neta*/local leaders), on the other hand, play a more fluid role, serving the range of needs of individual citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians at any particular moment. While the importance of these actors has been shown to differ quite radically over different parts of India (Manor 2000; Corbridge et al. 2005; Kruks-Wisner 2011), their general role is consistent: "These are political operatives 'who do not hold any formal political or administrative positions,' but who practice the art of approaching officials for favors and making the wheels of administration move in support of such favors'" (Manor 2000: 817, quoting Reddy and Haragopal 1985). Fixers are much less likely to receive a set fee for their services, and instead may act on the expectation of a future favor in return.

Local Organizations

This category includes a range of intermediary organizations of which individuals may be a member or may be an acquaintance of members. Two are regionally oriented, the village and neighborhood associations. The former are organizations representing the entire village, while the latter act for particular neighborhoods within a village. Caste associations are similar, but act on behalf of a particular caste group within the area, rather than the area as a whole. These groups may advocate on behalf of their members, implement projects within the village, or put on various events for the community.

Traditional panchayats are more formal organizations that reflect a history of local councils in India that predates the formalization of these bodies through the 73rd amendment of the Indian Constitution. Some of these bodies have been maintained and serve as an alternative source of governance and dispute resolution within the local community.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are any other bodies working within the local community. Often these organizations are based elsewhere in the country, but their activities have become quite common in rural India. In many cases these are domestic NGOs, not necessarily the offshoots of international organizations. They may be working for general "development" goals or for more specific issues such as clean water or women's empowerment.