

Does descriptive representation shape partisan competition?

Local level democratization, quotas, and winning margins at

the State constituency level in India

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Abstract

To what extent do quotas of descriptive representation shape electoral competition? This study investigates the extent to which the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation for village council presidents, also known as *Gram Pradhans* in the state of Uttar Pradesh, shape partisan competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* or state constituency level. More than the particular distribution of quotas, the paper argues that the rotation of quotas at the village council level makes Assembly constituencies more competitive. Using a sample dataset of 25,000 village councils, the paper finds evidence that a higher share of reserved village councils makes Assembly constituencies more competitive. This is also the case when considering the impact of the change in the share of reserved villages councils on changes in levels of electoral competition at the Assembly constituency level. In emphasizing the impact of local level democratization on partisan competition, the paper contributes to scholarship on local democracy, partisanship and political parties and the politics of contemporary India more generally.

The constitutional amendments passed in 1992–1993 to expand political competition at the local level in India have been particularly momentous. They have not only given a chance to Indian citizens to hold local government agencies accountable. They have also created leadership opportunities for millions of citizens through the organization of elections and the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation targeting women but also members of traditionally marginalized minorities (such as the Scheduled Castes or SC and the Other Backward Classes or OBC). This “democratization from above” (Bohlken 2016) has taken place within the *Panchayati Raj* Institution or PRI, the three-tiered network of local government agencies that forms the institutional foundation of democracy in India today.

Studies of local level democratization have long considered the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation to be an important explanatory variable in making local government more responsive and more accountable to citizens, particularly with respect to public goods provision and development more generally (Chattopadhyay and Dufflo 2004). We know far less about how local level democratization shapes the strategies and behavior of political parties in India. Theoretically, the puzzle asks important questions about party-building in a post-colonial democracy, one that was distinctly a “top-down” project at the time of independence (Khosla 2020), but that has considerably expanded since the introduction of constitutional amendments in 1992–1993.

This study considers the interaction between local government agencies of the *Panchayati Raj* through quotas of descriptive representation and patterns of electoral and partisan competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level in India. Elections to local government agencies are – save for a handful of exceptions – officially non-partisan in India. On paper, the multiplication of elected offices at the local level creates myriad potential entry points for political parties that continue to rely on brokerage to mobilize

voters ahead of elections. Yet the rotation of quotas creates conditions of institutional instability – such as frequent leadership changes and the scrambling of political coalitions – that may ultimately prevent parties from sinking deeper roots at the local level.

As evidence of the effect of the rotation of quotas, I consider changes in levels of partisan competition and electoral volatility at the Assembly constituency level. Focusing on the state of Uttar Pradesh, and using a sample of approximately 25,000 *Gram Panchayats*, I test the effect of differences in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* across Assembly constituencies and changes of that share between electoral cycles on levels of electoral competition across Assembly constituencies overtime. While I find that the relative share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* has a mixed effect on levels of partisan competition for individual elections, I find that changes in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* does an effect on levels of partisan competition – with an increase in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* leading to an decrease in the winning margin at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level. That effect, however, appears to be primarily driven by reservations for members of the *Scheduled Castes*.

While I do not discount the role played by District and Block *Panchayats* in structuring partisan involvement at the local level, I focus in this study on the *Gram Panchayat*, which is the lowest unit in the *Panchayati Raj* institution and the closest to voters in many ways. In exploring the relationship between the reservation status of *Gram Panchayats* and electoral competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level, this study advances our understanding of party-building against the backdrop of a democratic deepening but also weak party institutionalization. The paper thus makes contributions to scholarship on party-building and party-voter linkages, democratization and the politics of contemporary India in general.

The paper begins with a discussion of local level democratization in India, with a

focus on the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation as they shape political participation and competition at the local level. It then discusses the ways in which local level democratization may shape the incentives that parties have to rely on the *Panchayati Raj* institution to reach out to voters. The paper advances a theory of electoral competition that hinges on the effects of quota rotation and tests the theory using data from the state of Uttar Pradesh in North India. I conclude with a discussion of the broader incentives for party-building in India in the context of realignment and changing electoral cleavages.

1 India's latest democratic deepening

Democratization is often framed in terms of regime change: authoritarian leaders are removed, elections are held and a new democratically elected government is formed. Just as remarkable perhaps is the way states have in recent decades democratized *at the subnational level*, particularly in the post-colonial world. In many polities, local level democratization has translated into a vast expansion of political competition and participation. This has been the case in India, where the introduction of two constitutional amendments in 1992–1993 institutionalized local democracy in important ways.

1.1 *The institutionalization of local democracy*

India's independence in 1947 represented not just a break with foreign rule, but also a chance to develop local government institutions, which had been largely neglected by the British colonial administration (Tinker 1968). Yet the creation of local government agencies accountable to citizens did not come as a matter of course. The early leaders of Independent India wrestled not just with questions about the nature of India's future state and the protection of minority rights, but also debated the scope and depth of democratic

participation and competition.¹ While they initially embraced the creation of village *panchayats*, they steered clear of mandating local elections, though many states across India sought to organize elections at the local level, albeit infrequently.² There were attempts by the central government to formalize and institutionalize local government institutions, none of them were successful before the Congress party returned to power in 1991. And while the move to decentralize has often been associated with the Congress leadership’s desire to fend off both internal party challenges and threats from opposition parties (Bohlken 2016), there was nevertheless enough consensus among India’s political elite to allow the amendments to pass. The implementation of the amendments was left to the states, however, as local government remains one of their constitutional prerogatives. As a result, there is a significant amount of variation in the extent to which local government agencies have been empowered – in the state of Karnataka for instance, village councils are allowed to collect taxes.³ Across the country however, village councils are increasingly the face of the state, especially as they serve as “gatekeepers” for a growing number of public policies and social schemes (Kruks-Wisner 2018).

¹They were for instance deeply divided over the issue of local democracy: while some such as Gandhi expressed a belief in the value of India’s local communities as “village republics,” others such as Bhim Rao Ambedkar cautioned against organizing local elections, particularly in rural communities he famously described as a “cesspool of ignorance” (Khosla 2020). Ultimately, Jawahar Lal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India sided with Ambedkar and the Constitution of India adopted in late 1949 made no constitutional provision for local elections, while urging states to create village panchayats.

²In many states, such as Uttar Pradesh, elections were very infrequently organized, whereas in others, such as Kerala, the institutionalization of local democracy largely predated the 1992–1993 constitutional amendments. In the first decade after Independence, the Indian states focused primarily on bureaucratic reform and more often than not, Indian citizens faced bureaucratic rule at the local level, with little to no accountability.

³See Sadanandan (2017) and Bohlken (2016) for a review of devolution at the local level in India since the enactment of the constitutional amendments.

1.2 *The scope of a democratic deepening*

The constitutional amendments have not only ushered in an era of democratic accountability at the local level, they have also led to a significant expansion and renewal of India's political personnel. Not only are elections held across India's village, block and district councils, but these elections take place against the backdrop of affirmative action policies which target members of traditionally marginalized communities.⁴

The institutionalization of local level democracy brought about by the 1992–1993 constitutional amendments built on existing policies of affirmative action at the national and state levels to guarantee one third of all local council seats to women and a proportion of seats to members of the Scheduled Castes commensurate with their population at the state level.⁵ Some states, such as Uttar Pradesh, have gone further by awarding reservations to members of the Other Backward Classes or OBCs, which represent up to 30% of the state's population.^{6 7} The quotas rotate every five years, meaning that *Gram Panchayats* are either unreserved or reserved for different groups that benefit from these policies.

Remarkably, and with a handful of exceptions, the institutionalization of local democracy at the local level has happened against the backdrop of limited partisan involvement

⁴The distribution of quotas of descriptive representation has a long history in India, going back to pre-Independence debates on the need to ensure the representation of traditionally marginalized groups such as the Scheduled Castes or SC. Implemented with a view to empower members of traditionally marginalized communities, affirmative action policies in India have historically included both the reservation of seats in state agencies or universities, but have also extended to quotas of descriptive representation for elected positions at the national and state levels, going back to the immediate post-independence period (Jensenius 2017).

⁵The proportion of the population belonging to the Scheduled Castes varies quite a bit at the state level. While the largest number of SCs is found in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab has the highest percentage of SCs at the state level relative to its population.

⁶This means that, at any given time, more than half of all seats are reserved for various groups, such as women, SCs and OBCs. The gender quotas are not mutually exclusive of caste-based quotas. Some seats are indeed awarded to SC or OBC women, and reservations for women are also extended to non-members of the SC and OBC.

⁷The award of quotas follows different rules, depending on the states. The state of Karnataka, for instance, randomizes the assignment of quotas of descriptive representation, whereas the state of Uttar Pradesh assigns quotas on the basis of demographic data collected ahead of local polls every five years.

– at least officially. Indeed, while the vast majority of states in India allow the use of partisan labels in the two top tiers of the *Panchayati Raj*, namely the *Zilla* [District] and Block levels,⁸ they generally do not allow the use of these partisan labels for elections to village councils.⁹ Given the limited number of districts (640) and Blocks (approximately 3,000) at an all-India level, but the large number of *Gram Panchayats* across the country (more than 250,000), this provision is especially remarkable. Indeed, these village councils represent both the entry point for citizen claims and demands on the state (Kruks-Wisner 2018) and the end point for the implementation of public policies that are particularly important in a context of rural poverty or economic vulnerability.

While the debate about allowing partisan labels for village council elections occasionally resurfaces, there has been a surprising consensus in India *against* the introduction of partisan labels for these local elections. As recently as April 2023, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, declared that local level elections should remain non-partisan to preserve “local harmony.”¹⁰ Despite being officially nonpartisan, it is difficult to imagine that these elections would not generate interest among political parties. In the next section, I review and discuss existing research on partisan competition at the local level in India and the possible interaction between local level democratization and partisan strategies at the state level. I then introduce my argument about institutional volatility as a determinant of partisan competition.

⁸Political parties are allowed to field candidates at these levels, for both the election of councils (District and Block panchayats) and the head of these councils (Zilla Panchayat president and Block *Pramukh*).

⁹Partisan labels at the village council level are only allowed in a small number of states such as Karnataka and Kerala.

¹⁰See <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/president-droupadi-murmu-national-panchayat-awards-polls-8560950/>.

1.3 *Do local politics shape partisan competition at higher levels of governance?*

Existing research on local level democratization has generally treated partisanship as an explanatory variable rather than a variable to be explained. For instance, Bohlken (2016) argues that the adoption and implementation of constitutional amendments to democratize in India was squarely the product of strategic considerations by the incumbent, both at the national and state level. Local level democratization thus becomes more likely when the party in government faces challenges from the party organization, and when inter-party competition increases. Thus the decision by P.V. Narasimha Rao – Prime Minister of a Congress-led cabinet – reflected the desire to undercut growing challenges within the party and deal with the rise of regional and caste-based parties. In a similar vein, Sadanandan (2017) argues that the decisions made by states to hold elections at the local level were to some extent a reflection of party system fragmentation (with more fragmented party systems seen as more conducive to the decision to democratize local government agencies). Both have greatly contributed to our understanding of the timing and scope of local level democratization, but have crucially left out the ways in which political parties have adapted to the new institutional environment.

Another literature has attempted to explore the depth of partisan alignment at the local level. Dunning and Nilekani (2013) for instance find that the distribution of NREGS benefits within village councils appears to reflect partisanship rather than caste. Bussell (2019) suggests that while partisan labels are not allowed at the village council level, the partisan identity of *Gram Pradhans* is common knowledge among citizens. While this research sheds light on patterns of political competition at the local level, it relies mostly on survey instruments, and as a result cannot conclude that partisan behavior reflects the scope and depth of partisan networks at the local level. For instance, this research cannot distinguish the extent to which partisan alignment only reflects patterns

of political competition within a *Gram Panchayat* or is more broadly aligned with partisan competition at the *Vidhan Sabha*. It takes for granted the partisan identity of local level officials, without consideration for their relationship with party elites.

In parallel, and while we know quite bit about the effect of quotas of descriptive representation on development and public good provision Chattopadhyay and Dufflo (2004); Beaman et al. (2009), there is comparatively much less research on their effect on party building and partisan competition at the local level. For instance, Jensenius (2017) finds that members of the Scheduled Castes who benefit from the implementation of quotas struggle to move up the party hierarchy and leadership, regardless of their work for the party and performance in office. However, these findings only apply to national and state level constituencies in India. There is in general a lack of research to connect the implementation of quotas at the local level with patterns of partisan competition at the state and national level. Thus electoral competition and volatility are only defined with respect to electoral cleavages, whether programmatic (Heath 2005; Chhibber 2018) or non-programmatic (Chandra 2004; Ziegfeld 2016), without consideration for the way in which political parties effectively reach out to voters as they mobilize support ahead of elections. Likewise, studies of electoral volatility and incumbency advantage center on the behavior of party elites, rather than the determinants of electoral brokerage (Lee 2020).¹¹

The argument and theory I develop in the following section seek to bridge the gap between these different literatures, by emphasizing how the rotation of quotas, rather than the specific distribution of quotas at the local level shapes electoral volatility and partisan competition where partisan labels are indeed allowed, i.e. at the state level.

¹¹One of the challenges to a study of the interaction between local level democratization and partisan competition at higher levels of governance lies in the accessibility and quality of the data, and specifically the different methods used by the Indian state to collect electoral data. For instance, data on reservations are collected at the different levels of the *Panchayati Raj* such as the District, Block and *Gram Panchayat*, but the electoral data on partisan competition at the state and national level are disaggregated at the booth level, which do not correspond to individual units along the different tiers of the *Panchayati Raj* institution.

2 How local level democratization interacts with partisan competition

While local level democratization has remained non-partisan, there are reasons to believe that political parties have been affected by the expansion of political competition and participation, particularly with the creation of new elected offices. I emphasize the opportunities that electoral outreach creates for political parties and the continued use of brokerage by party elites who lack stable and deep ties with voters at the local level. Next, I turn to the consequences of the rotation of quotas for the institutionalization of political parties.

2.1 The continued reliance of electoral brokerage

Existing scholarship has long emphasized the elite nature of Indian political parties (Thachil 2014) that are weakly routinized and often personalistic. As such, these parties face significant information asymmetries as they seek to assemble winning coalitions. Rather than reflecting mass mobilization on the basis of ideology, political parties tend to reflect coalitions of elite groups which co-opt brokers at the local level to mobilize voters ahead of elections (Ziegfeld 2016). Combined with the large size of constituencies, which makes face-to-face interactions with voters difficult, low levels of institutionalization make the use of brokers indispensable as parties try to assemble winning coalitions.

These local brokers often hail from powerful family dynasties which occasionally change their partisan affiliation based on their anticipation of the relative appeal of political parties ahead of an election (Chandra 2016). Indeed, few parties in India can claim to have an extensive ground operation the sort of which historically defined ideologically Left wing parties in Western Europe (Bartolini 2000). This is even the case for the *Bhaaratiya Janta*

Party or BJP – India’s Hindu nationalist party – which has developed in recent years alternative strategies to reach out to voters, especially voters from traditionally marginalized communities such as the Scheduled Castes (Thachil 2014).¹²

The continued reliance on brokerage is usually associated with the distribution of patronage, which has long earned India the moniker of “patronage democracy” (Chandra 2004).¹³ Brokers, elected or unelected – are perceived to play a significant role in channelling these resources to the local level, given the lack of adequate partisan infrastructure. The reliance on brokerage is made also more appealing by the existence of community leaders who serve as problem solvers and fixers both in rural (Krishna 2002; Manor 2000) and urban areas (Auerbach 2020; Auerbach and Thachil 2018).

Importantly, the continued reliance on electoral brokerage does not necessarily mean that parties extend their partisan reach. As such, brokerage remains conceptually distinct from partisanship. While brokers may be occasionally working for political parties and candidates ahead of an election, they may not be seeking to formalize ties with them. To some extent, brokers may be hedging their bets, by seeking to remain affiliated with the incumbent, regardless of partisan identity. But it is likely that both brokers and party elites have fundamentally different incentives as they reach out to voters. Indeed, while brokers may be more interested in nurturing a tight clientele, party elites may be interested

¹²Unlike other parties, the BJP can also count on the vast resources of the Sangh Parivar (Jaffrelet 1996), an umbrella for the myriad number of organizations that are dedicated to the promotion of a right-wing Hindu nationalist agenda. Chief among them is the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* or RSS, which the BJP occasionally relies on to canvas voters and increase its outreach (Thachil 2014).

¹³The extent to which Indian voters continue to respond to material incentives is debated today (Chhibber 2018). Many have argued that the implementation of new public policies that shorten the process of benefit delivery and close loopholes that allowed the exercise of discretion – bureaucratic or political – is increasingly reflected in “post-clientelistic” politics (Das and Maiorano 2019). Just as importantly, there are also reasons to believe that parties are not always in a position to offer individual incentives to voters, and perhaps even more importantly, are not able to monitor compliance, particularly as voters enjoy ballot secrecy. While there might be “no market for votes” (Björkman 2014), the distribution of cash handouts remains commonplace however, suggesting that parties seek to reach out to voters other than through exclusively ideological appeals. The motivations are many, from a purely performative act (Björkman 2014) to concerns about the risk of being outspent (Chauchard 2018).

in casting a broader net and reach out to voters that may be outside clientelistic networks at the local level (Stokes et al. 2013; Camp 2015).

2.2 *New opportunities for political parties*

On paper, both local level elections and the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation can help parties solve important challenges they face in reaching out to voters. Local level democratization creates myriad new elected offices, and the implementation of quotas makes the emerging local leadership more representative of the electorate and their preferences.

Elections at the three tiers of *Panchayati Raj* together create additional nodes of accountability for citizens and opportunities for political parties to strengthen their ties with voters. The organization of elections at the local level leads to the emergence of new political leadership, one that could be of use to political parties seeking to institutionalize their ties to voters. Making newly elected members of the *Panchayati Raj* into party cadres or at a minimum bringing them closer to a partisan infrastructure – could be expected to strengthen the ability of political parties to not only stay attuned to voters demands and claims, but also to better identify the voters needed to assemble winning coalitions, given the severe information asymmetries that parties face.¹⁴ “Elite parties” Thachil (2014) may thus be tempted to leverage the elected offices of the *Panchayati Raj* institution to fine tune their electoral strategies. Assuming that these elected officials have information on voters

¹⁴While smaller than national parliamentary constituencies (*Lok Sabha*), state assembly constituencies are still fairly large, since Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLA are elected in constituencies that can have up to 500,000 voters. This could make the existence of smaller elected offices especially appealing to members of the party elite and candidates to state assemblies. While members of the District and Block panchayats may function as brokers, elected officials at the *Gram Panchayat* are perhaps even more likely to do the job, given their proximity to voters. With the exception of the *Zilla Panchayat* [District Panchayat], these assembly constituencies include several units of the other two tiers of the *Panchayati Raj* institution, namely the Block *Panchayat* and *Gram Panchayats*. There is on average more than one Block *Panchayat* in any constituency, which by implication cover many *Gram Panchayats* – several hundreds on average.

that the parties need, these local elections would enable a form of “signaling” whereby parties would seek to work with the elected officials they believe are best at mobilizing the voters they need.

This form of signaling might be incomplete, however, if electoral rules distort the information that elections are intended to provide: for instance plurality rules do not require absolute majorities, meaning that elections might not produce broad winning coalitions. As a result, electoral victories at the local level may not be a strong indication of the quality of candidates, given the large number of candidates and high levels of competition.¹⁵ Additionally, the type of coalition assembled at the local level might not be easily replicable at a higher governance level, and may therefore be of little use to a political party.

Importantly, political parties must balance these opportunities of outreach with the risk of having to deal with emerging leaders who are accountable to voters, rather than members of the party elite.¹⁶ Indeed, party elites must balance the opportunity of building new ties to voters through local elected officials and increased dependence on these leaders who may be tempted to leverage their electoral legitimacy to build an independent base of support. Local elected officials are likely to make a similar calculation: they will have to balance their desire to build ties with a partisan network to access patronage resources, but will have to do that in a way that does not antagonize their voters, who may support them but not the party they are seeking to embrace. Likewise, party leaders may be wary of formalizing ties with elected officials at the risk of antagonizing voters at the local level. This last consideration will be especially important in the case of weakly routinized parties

¹⁵Levels of competition are nevertheless conditional on the reservation status of *Gram Panchayats*, since the award of a specific quota limits the competition for elected office to members of that ethnic group.

¹⁶In that sense, local level democratization produces political leadership that differs from the traditional brokers of party machines, who are dependent on members of the party elite for the distribution of patronage resources to voters. In many ways, this dilemma echoes an old problem of partisan organization, that of the principal-agent problem, though it recasts it as a problem between party elites and local elected officials, rather than a problem between party elites and voters in the sense originally documented by Michels (1959) in his seminal study of the German Social-Democratic Party.

(such as most Indian parties) which lack access to fine-grained information about voters, and who typically prefer to cast a wide net as they court voters ahead of an election.

The distribution of quotas of descriptive representation potentially adds another layer to these incentives. The adage that “Indian voters vote their caste as they cast their vote” (Verma 2012) has long summarized the relationship between ethnic identity and partisan behavior in India. To the extent that political parties in India tend to mobilize voters along ethnic (caste) lines, the award of quotas could also offer parties an opportunity to identify and reach out to candidates who hail from groups that parties seek to mobilize support from. A party that claims to represent the interests of a specific caste group could thus find the distribution of quotas useful to leverage caste identity at the local level.

Yet, while parties may find quotas useful to screen local elected officials with a view to build their local cadre or vet candidates to higher office, the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation may not necessarily help parties better identify their voters at the local level. For one thing, caste does not neatly predict partisan behavior, as recent evidence in the Indian context suggests (Thachil and Herring 2008; Jha 2017).

Second, the award of a specific quota does not say much about the ability of an elected official who benefitted from a quota to effectively sway voting behavior, including voting behavior within the in-group. Levels of income and status-based inequality may shape the ability of candidates who benefit from the award of quotas to effectively command authority at the local level. This is likely to be the case in communities where status-based and wealth-based inequality is especially high, as is often the case in rural communities across North India, where members of the Scheduled Castes or SCs elected to positions of power are occasionally “shadowed” by members of high status groups, such as *Thakurs* or *Brahmans*. There is in any case a challenge in deducting the partisan behavior of an entire community based on the partisan identity of an individual in that community – a typical

case of “ecological inference fallacy.”

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, while the different caste groups are found in the state of Uttar Pradesh, their distribution at the *Gram Panchayat* level is very idiosyncratic and probably only rarely reflects the actual proportion of the different caste groups at the state level. Quotas may thus be awarded to members of a community that only represents a fraction of the local population.

3 How quotas may shape partisan competition and electoral volatility

Rather than predicting partisan behavior at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level, I argue that both the *share of reserved Gram Panchayats* and *changes in that share* should be expected to shape partisan competition and electoral volatility. As explained in the introduction, I specifically focus on the interaction between *Gram Panchayats* and *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituencies, as I believe it to be the most likely to conform to my argument and theoretical predictions.

3.1 Quota rotation and electoral competition

Where implemented, local level democratization translates in the expansion of political participation and competition. It potentially creates new entry points for political parties seeking to institutionalize ties with voters. Yet, while the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation creates leadership opportunities for women and members of historically marginalized communities, it also translates into frequent leadership changes at the local level. And while not all *Gram Panchayats* see their reservation status change between electoral cycles, these changes have important consequences for the stability of

political coalitions and institutional capacity at the local level.

First of all, the implementation of quotas shapes the scope and the size of winning coalitions ahead of elections every five years. While *Gram Panchayats* vary in the distribution and size of caste groups, candidates at the local level typically try to assemble multi-caste coalitions and to the extent that the quotas of descriptive representation are based on either gender or ethnic (caste) identity, they restrict political competition at the local level to members of the community who benefit from these quotas. The different categories of quotas are associated with different levels of socio-economic development and elected officials who benefit from the quota enjoy various levels of individual autonomy and consequently exercise authority to a various extent. Therefore, changes in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* may translate into potentially significant power shifts at the local level.

Second, by often resulting in incumbents unable to run again, the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation scrambles patterns of political competition and the stability of political coalitions. The scrambling of political coalitions will be mitigated, to some extent, by the endurance of traditional status hierarchies and patriarchal norms. For instance, beneficiaries of descriptive quotas may not be in a position to truly exercise authority, especially if they find themselves economically dependent on high status groups. Male members of the household may end up “shadowing” female elected officials in what has been described as a case of *Purdah ka panchayat* (Brule 2020). Likewise, high status groups may continue to exercise authority in a way that blunts the effect of descriptive quotas targeted members of the Scheduled Castes, for instance. Parties may wish to strengthen ties with brokers who are able to work around the strict implementation of quotas in that way. Still, meaningful shifts in the balance of power among communities should be expected when the quotas are awarded to groups that are not considered high

status, but are still able to challenge the dominance of high status groups. This could be the case for instance when *Gram Panchayats* are awarded to members of the Other Backward Classes, which include caste groups – such as the *yadav* – that are often in a position to run effective campaigns against members of high status groups, such as *Brahmans* and *Thakurs*.

To the extent that political parties are not involved in the assignment of quotas at the *Gram Panchayat* level, they are not necessarily in a position to choose the leaders (*Gram Pradhans*) elected at the *Gram Panchayat* level. Instead, they must contend with a rotation among *Gram Panchayat* level that may vary significantly across *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies. In other words, parties seeking to assemble a winning coalition at the state level may face a different set of constituencies, in terms of share of reserved *Gram Panchayats*, but may also face changes in the distribution of reservations between electoral cycles.

3.2 Hypotheses

Thus, from the perspective of political parties, the rotation of quotas at the *Gram Panchayat* creates opportunities for outreach – particularly when quotas match the broader ethnic appeals made by political parties, but also engender a form of institutional “illegibility” and instability. In a sense, parties would have few incentives to build a relationship with elected officials who are term-limited, and may not be able to run again in the future. Quotas thus create a world of shifting sands, one in which political turnover at the local level prevents the formation of stable partisan coalitions led by party cadres at the *Gram Panchayat* level. The theory I advance yield two empirical implications which I proceed to test in the remainder of the paper.

The first implication is that the larger the share of reserved constituencies, the more

competitive *Vidhan sabha* or Assembly constituencies should be. While quotas of descriptive representation benefit women, members of the Scheduled Castes and members of the Other Backward Classes, I anticipate this will be particularly the case when more quotas are awarded to members of the Scheduled Castes and members of the Other Backward Classes. This is primarily because no party at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level claims to specifically represent the interests of women, but many do in fact claim to represent the interests of members of the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. The first hypothesis or H1 therefore anticipates that the larger the share of *Gram Panchayats* reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes and members of the Other Backward Classes, the more competitive a constituency should be.

The second implication is that changes in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* between *Panchayati Raj* electoral cycles should affect the extent to which *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituencies *become* more or less competitive. In other words, a higher number of reserved *Gram Panchayats* should translate into more leadership changes at the local level. These leadership changes, I argue, make it more difficult for political parties to institutionalize ties with local elected officials they would like to use as brokers. The second hypothesis or H2 therefore anticipates that a higher share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* should be correlated with a smaller margin of victory for the incumbent between *Vidhan sabha* electoral cycles, which I take to be a measure of how competitive *Vidhan sabha* or assembly constituencies are.

In the following section, I present the data and the empirical strategy used to test both hypotheses.

4 Testing the impact of quotas on patterns of partisan competition and electoral volatility

I test both hypotheses with a dataset on partisanship at the *Vidhan Sabha* (Assembly constituency) level and data on the reservation status of approximately 25,000 *Gram Panchayat* in the state of Uttar Pradesh. To the extent that the award of quotas of descriptive representation is not done at random in the state of Uttar Pradesh, I stop short of making causal claims.¹⁷

4.1 Data and methodology

I use of an original dataset that combines data on the reservation status of approximately 25,000 *Gram Panchayats* and data on partisanship at the state assembly level (*Vidhan Sabha*). The data cover two local electoral cycles (*Panchayati Raj* elections of 2010 and 2015) and two state level electoral cycles (2012 and 2017). In both cases, I use data from the State Election Commission of Uttar Pradesh. The original dataset has *Gram Panchayats* coded as 0 when they were not reserved in 2015, 1 when reserved for women, 2 when reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes, 3 for members of the Other Backward Classes, 4 for women members of the Scheduled Castes and 5 for women members of the Other Backward Classes. *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies are coded as either won by the incumbent or the opposition in both 2012 and 2017.¹⁸

¹⁷While the reservation status of village councils is assigned at random in some states (such as Karnataka), in most other states, the assignment of reservation status depends on pre-electoral surveys that are intended to capture demographic shifts at the local level. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the state election commission conducts a rapid survey to determine which village councils should be reserved for which groups, in addition to occasionally redrawing village council boundaries (in the process creating additional village councils, rather than merging them, given the trend of population growth in rural India). The overall determination is established by law and based on the relative share of the population belonging to the different groups. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, 30% of seats (at the *Gram Panchayat* level) are reserved for women.

¹⁸I have also coded *Vidhan Sabha* or assembly constituency according to their partisan identity, with constituencies won by the BSP coded as 1, constituencies won by the BJP coded as 2, constituencies won

I use a variable that measures the share of *Gram Panchayats* reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes and members of the Other Backward Classes for both the *Panchayati Raj* elections of 2010 and 2015 as my independent variable to test H1. To test H2, I use a different independent variable that measures the change in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* between *Panchayati Raj* electoral cycles.

I use a variable that measures the winning margin at the *Vidhan Sabha* level in both 2012 and 2017 to test H1. In order to test H2, I similarly use a variable that measures the change in the winning margin at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level between 2012 and 2017. Alternatively, as an alternative measure, I use a variable that captures the Effective Number of Parties or ENP, and changes in ENP between the 2012 and 2017.

In order to test H1, I use Ordinary Least Squares with cross sectional data for both 2012 and 2017. To test H2, I use a difference-in-differences strategy which uses increases in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* as a “treatment” and compares changes in winning margins between groups of constituencies that saw no average increase in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* and groups of constituencies that saw an increase in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats*. In both cases, I use a number of control variables that could potentially shape winning margins and the extent to which *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies are competitive. These variables include turnout for *Vidhan Sabha* elections (2012 and 2017), whether the *Vidhan Sabha* constituency was reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes (2012 and 2017), and whether the incumbent Member of the Legislative Assembly was elected previously in the same constituency (2017).¹⁹ This variable is expected to capture the extent to which the level of competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* level reflects candidate

by the SP coded as 3, constituencies won by other parties coded as 4 and constituencies won by the Indian National Congress or INC as 5

¹⁹I can only code the data for 2012, because the 2007 election took place in constituencies that looked different from 2012 since the new delimitation of both *Lok Sabha* and *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies was only done in 2008 (on the basis of 2001 Census data).

characteristics, rather than exclusively partisanship. Lastly, and because *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies in my sample include very different numbers of *Gram Panchayats*, I include a variable that captures the number of *Gram Panchayats* in each constituency.

I begin the analysis by presenting data on the reservation turnover rates at the *Gram Panchayat* level. I then turn to the test of each hypothesis.

4.2 Quotas and leadership opportunities at the local level

With the enactment and the progressive implementation of the 1992–1993 constitutional amendments, Indian voters not only have more opportunities to vote, but also have more opportunities to run for office.²⁰ For instance, across India, there are 250,000 *Gram Panchayats*, and approximately 55,000 in the state of Uttar Pradesh alone, the empirical focus of this study. Elections at the *Gram Panchayat* level typically involve the selection of members of a local assembly, the *Gram Sabha*, and the *Gram Panchayat* president, known in the state of Uttar Pradesh as *Gram Pradhan*. In the state of Uttar Pradesh (but not necessarily elsewhere in India), members of the *Gram Sabha* are elected on the same ticket as the *Gram Pradhan*. Elections take place every five years for all offices in the *Panchayati Raj*, and this exercise involves the award of quotas of descriptive representations which critically shape leadership opportunities for members of rural communities. The legislation pertaining to quotas of descriptive representation varies from state to state, but in Uttar Pradesh, the distribution of quotas is done by the State Election Commission every five years ahead of local polls. Unlike other states, the assignment is not randomized, but determined by a rapid survey of the evolution of the population since the previous election.

²⁰These opportunities vary, depending on the level of governance within the *Panchayati Raj*. Leadership at the district level will require political capital not readily available to rural citizens. It is comparatively much easier for citizens to run for office at the *Gram Panchayat* level, which are typically smaller in size (around 5,000 voters), and where registration rules (such as the deposit) are more accessible). The number of seats up for election at a *Gram Sabha* depends on the number of wards, and thus, ultimately, on the size of the population for each *Gram Panchayat*.

The table below provides some descriptive statistics on the scope of turnover at the *Gram Panchayat*, based on a sample of the approximately 55,000 *Gram Panchayats* in the state. Because this paper focuses on *Gram Panchayats*, I only include data on *Gram Panchayats* (and not Block and Districts councils). I am interested here in comparing *Gram Panchayats* that saw their status change compared to *Gram Panchayats* that did not.

Table 1: Reservation Change Matrix (% of *Gram Panchayats*), 2010–2015

Reservation	Not reserved (2015)	Women (2015)	SC (2015)	OBC (2015)	Women SC (2015)	Women OBC (2015)
Not reserved (2010)	25.67	19.92	11.39	20.82	7.39	14.80
Women (2010)	33.45	15.54	17.18	15.97	10.07	7.78
SC (2010)	43.75	17.68	3.17	26.23	1.20	7.95
OBC (2010)	35.34	22.80	22.52	5.99	10.98	2.37
Women SC (2010)	49.20	12.39	8.26	22.47	1.69	6
Women OBC (2010)	44.13	16.35	19.06	11.90	4.54	3.99

Data from 2010-2015 show that a significant share of the *Gram Panchayat* faces institutional turnover, in the sense that the reservation status assigned to a *Gram Panchayat* changes from one election to the next. For instance, while 25.67% of the *Gram Panchayats* that were not reserved in 2010 remained in that same pool in 2015, approximately 20% of the same group in 2010 ended up reserved for women in 2015, 19% of these were reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes in 2015 and 35% were reserved for members of the Other Backward Classes or OBCs (inclusive of women in the case of SC and OBC). Though there is variation across reservation statuses, these percentages overall remain significant.

The extent to which the changes are indeed meaningful has been debated. For one thing, evidence suggests that patriarchal norms continue to shape the way in which women have access to leadership opportunities (Brule 2020). Cases of *purdah ke panchayat* [Panchayat behind the curtain] often translate into cases of male relatives of a woman elected to local office wielding power instead of her. This form of “shadowing” appears to shape access to elected office for members of the Scheduled Castes as well, especially when the latter are

economically dependent on wealthier and high status members of their communities. But the fact remains that all *Gram Panchayats* are likely to be affected over more than two electoral cycles, suggesting that this particular aspect of local level democratization has been particularly momentous.

Equally importantly for this study, there is a lot of variation across *Vidhan Sabha* or assembly constituencies at the state level in the share of the *Gram Panchayats* nested in these constituencies and that are reserved. This is because the assignment of a reservation is done at the *district* level irrespective of the size of the constituency, or the partisan identity of the Member of the Legislative Assembly or MLA. While figures 1 and 2 below show the variation of the percentage of reserved *Gram Panchayats* across assembly constituencies for two separate local electoral cycles (2010 and 2015), figure 3 displays the percentage change in the share of reserved seats between these two *Panchayati Raj* elections.

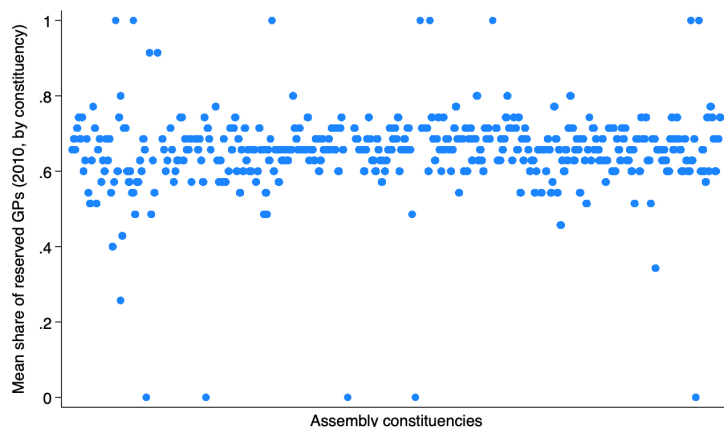


Figure 1: Mean share of reserved GPs, 2010 (by Assembly constituency)

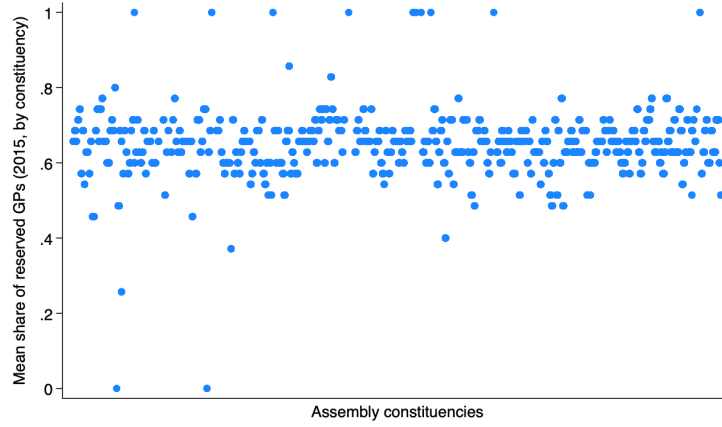


Figure 2: Mean share of reserved GPs, 2015 (by Assembly constituency)

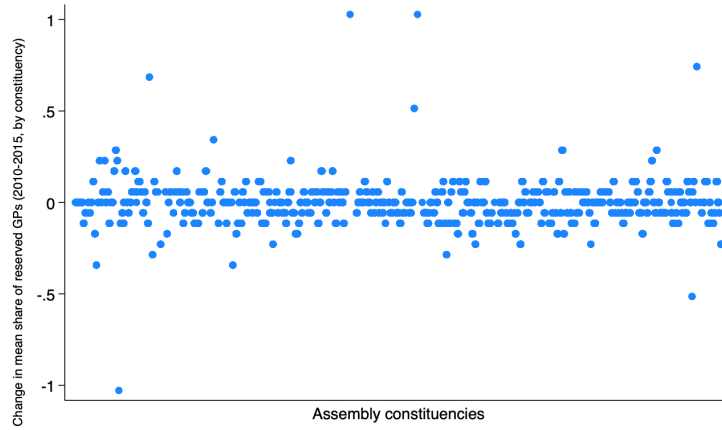


Figure 3: Change in mean share of reserved GPs, 2010-2015 (by Assembly constituency)

For the 2010 award of reservations, the mean share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* is 65% (with a standard deviation of 0.06), while it is 64% (with a standard deviation of 0.056) for the 2015 award of reservations, a share that is remarkably stable. Overall, the average rate of change of reserved *Gram Panchayats* is -1 % (with a standard deviation of .08).

5 Results

I now test both hypotheses derived from the theory. I first show results for H1, using cross-sectional data for both 2012 and 2017. To reiterate, H1 hypothesized that the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* would be correlated with electoral competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* level. In other words, the higher the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* in a *Vidhan Sabha* constituency, the more competitive the constituency should be, and empirically the smaller the margin of victory for the incumbent should be. Figures 4 and 5 below show scatter plots for each year. Figures 6 and 7 show the coefficients for 2012 and 2017 (full results are included in the appendix).

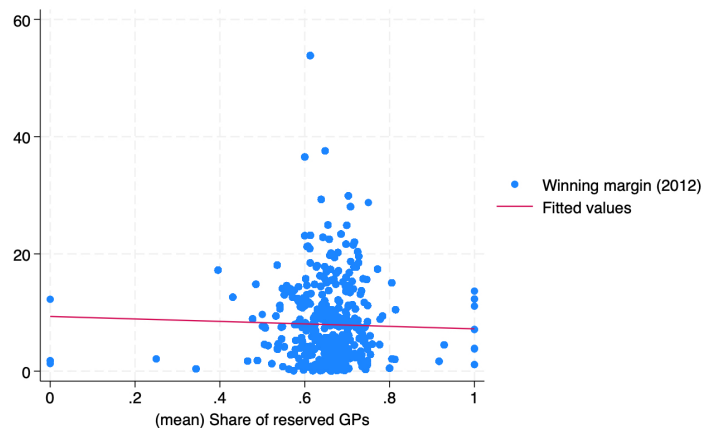


Figure 4: Scatter plot for 2012 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat* reservation award)

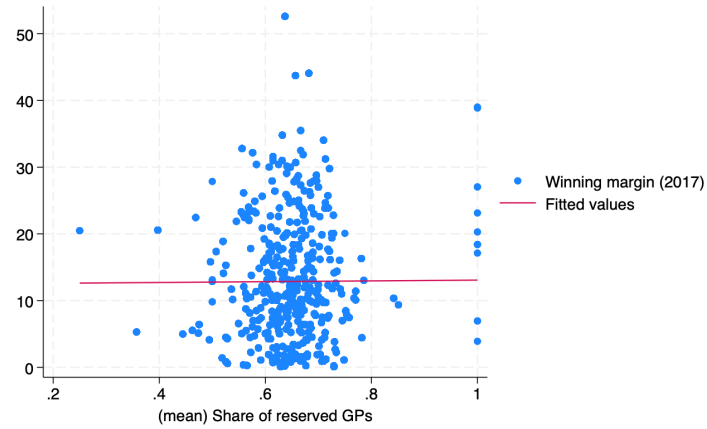


Figure 5: Scatter plot for 2017 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2015 *Gram Panchayat* reservation award)

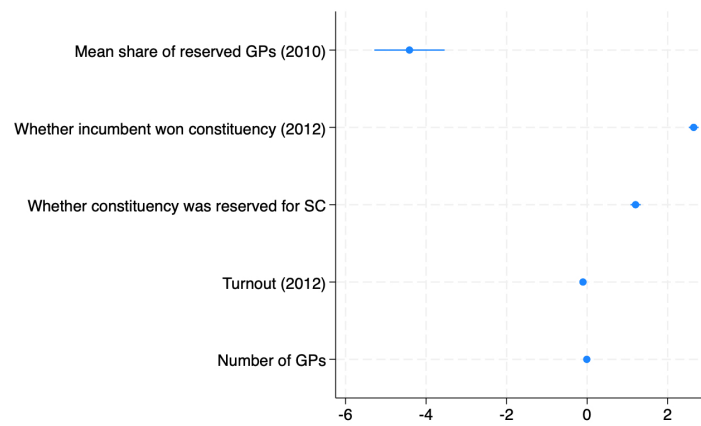


Figure 6: Coefficient plot for 2012 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat*)

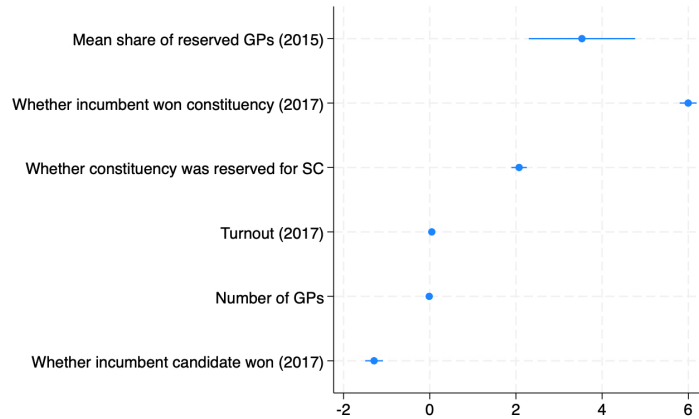


Figure 7: Coefficient plot for 2017 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat*)

The evidence suggests a contrasting effect of the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* on electoral competition. While a higher share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* does appear to be correlated with a smaller margin of victory for the incumbent, the effect in 2017 is the reverse, when one includes the controls listed previously. In both cases, the results reach conventional levels of statistical significance (though with a low R-squared, suggesting the model only partially explains the total variance). While the results for 2012 are consistent with the theory, the analysis for 2017 suggests that a higher share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* is indeed correlated with a large increase in the winning margin at the Assembly constituency level. What could explain this discrepancy? One hypothesis is that the 2017 election was unique compared to previous elections in that it led to a landslide victory by the BJP, which captured more than 300 seats in the *Vidhan Sabha* out of 402. In other words, the scope of the BJP victory, both in vote share and seats was such that it overpowered other factors shaping electoral competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* level.

In order to determine whether the results were driven by a specific reservation status (either members of the Scheduled Castes or members of the Other Backward Classes), I

also disaggregated the type of reservation to determine whether either one of them was driving the overall trend. Figures 8 and 9 present the results for 2012 and 10 and 11 the results for 2017, respectively.

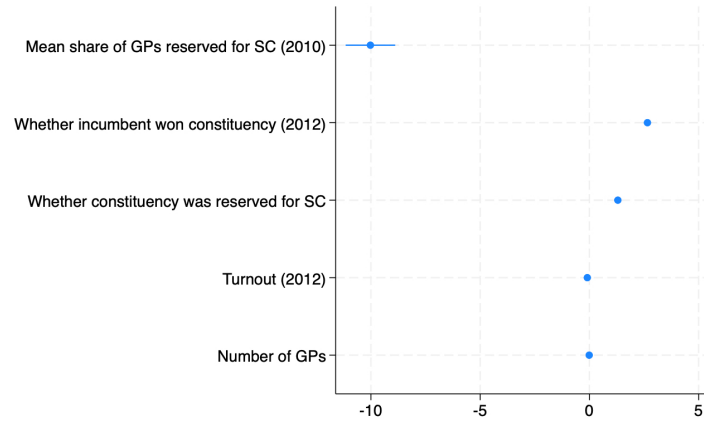


Figure 8: Coefficient plot for 2012 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat* SC reservation award)

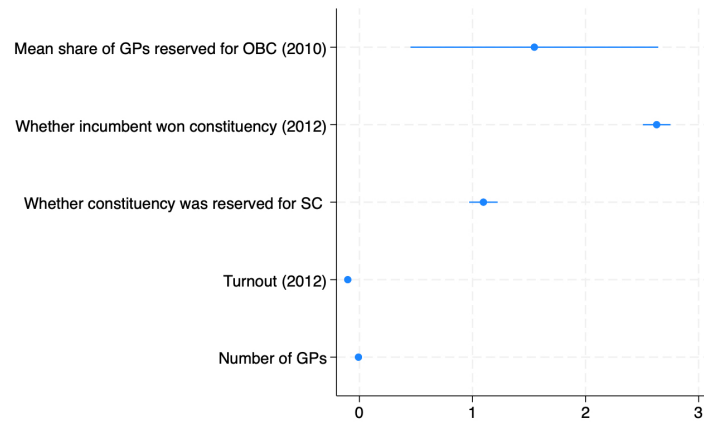


Figure 9: Coefficient plot for 2012 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat* OBC reservation award)

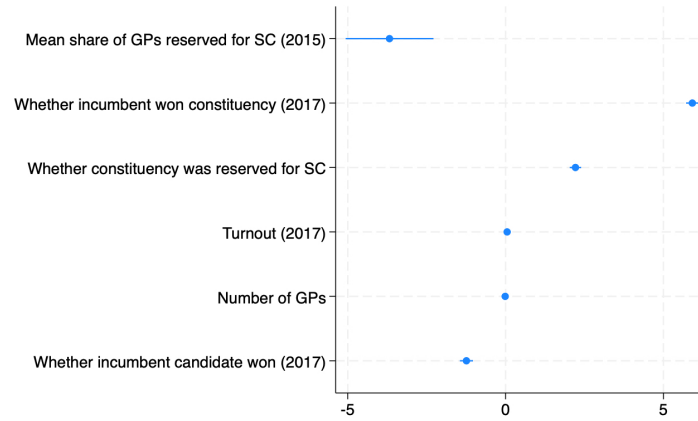


Figure 10: Coefficient plot for 2017 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2015 *Gram Panchayat* SC reservation award)

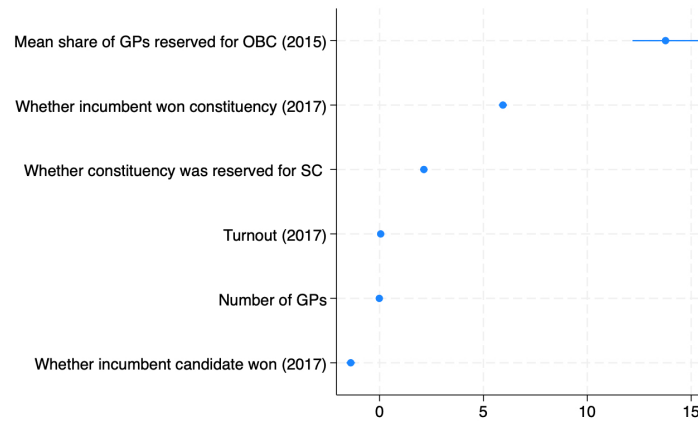


Figure 11: Coefficient plot for 2017 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2015 *Gram Panchayat* OBC reservation award)

The data for each election are remarkably consistent in that they show reservations for members of the *Scheduled Castes* as the main driver of the overall negative effect. Coefficients for all control variables are also consistent across reservation type and for both elections.

I then turn to H2, which is a test of the impact of *changes* in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* between *Panchayati Raj* election cycles on *changes* in the winning margin between *Vidhan Sabha* electoral cycles. I test this hypothesis in two steps. First I run a first difference model (OLS) that posits changes in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* between *Panchayati Raj* electoral cycles are correlated with changes in the level of competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency level. I then use a different approach that considers *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituencies in which the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* increased as “treated” relative to *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies in which that share did not increase (either stayed the same or decreased. Figure 12 below presents results from the OLS model.

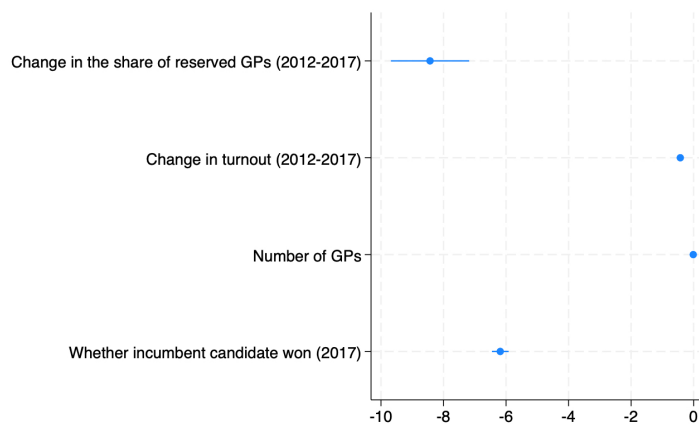


Figure 12: Coefficient plot for 2012 *Vidhan Sabha* or Assembly constituency elections (2010 *Gram Panchayat* reservation award)

The coefficient is negative suggesting that an increase of the share of reserved by 10 percentage points results in a decline of the margin of victory by .58 (significant at statistically conventional levels). When disaggregated by type of reservation, the coefficient remains negative for the share of *Gram Panchayats* reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes, but positive for both women and members of the Other Backward Classes, sug-

gesting that, much like in the case of the cross-sectional data, the negative effect is driven by reservations for members of the Scheduled Castes.

The results of the difference-in-differences model track with the first difference model and show a negative effect of the change in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats*. The coefficient is negative (-.36) for all reservations taken together, negative for SC reservations taken individually (-.57) and positive for members of the Other Backward Classes (.68) – though none of these coefficients are significant at statistically conventional levels.²¹

6 Discussion

The results overall point to an effect of the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* on levels of partisan competition. In other words, the higher the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats*, the lower the winning margin for the incumbent at the *Vidhan Sabha* constituency level. Similarly, changes in the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* between two electoral cycles at the *Gram Panchayat* level led overall made *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies more competitive. A difference-in-differences analysis pointed to evidence of a “treatment” effect, whereby *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies in which the share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* had increased between 2010 and 2015 were more competitive in 2017, compared to 2012.

This effect of a higher share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* appeared to be largely driven by reservations for members of the Scheduled Castes, and were in the opposite sign for members of the Other Backward Classes, suggesting the implementation of quotas for the Scheduled Castes may be more consequential for political parties than other types of quotas. So far as they limit political competition at the *Gram Panchayat* level, these quotas may have more of an impact on the formation of winning coalitions at the *Gram Panchayat*

²¹I first ran the DiD model with an interaction term that combined the treatment and the post-treatment period. The results were robust to another strategy which computes the treatment effect automatically and absorbs fixed effects (*didregress* command in Stata).

level and the emergence of local political leadership that parties can consistently rely on. And while reservations for members of the Other Backward Classes limit competition at the local level, they do so to a much lesser extent, given the size of the OBC population in rural Uttar Pradesh (27% of the population). Moreover, this broader category belies greater variation in the socio-economic position of the different caste groups included. A group such as the *yadav* is on the whole much more economically privileged than groups that are at the bottom of the caste system (and so just above the Scheduled Castes, who are technically outside the caste system), such as the *telis* (oil pressing caste) or *kumahars* (tile making caste). It is very likely that the effect of OBC reservations is dampened by the political influence of upper OBC castes such as the *Yadav*.

The distribution of *Gram Panchayat* reservations is one of the factors shaping the performance of political parties and candidates as reflected in the winning margins of incumbents at the *Vidhan Sabha* or constituency level. While this study attempted to model candidate characteristics, they remain notoriously difficult to measure empirically. It could be that more than partisan incumbency, *candidate incumbency* – as a reflection of the candidate’s clout – at the local level may shape more decisively competition at the *Vidhan Sabha* constituency level. It is not unreasonable to imagine that a candidate having run several times in the same constituency might have made the constituency less competitive overall.

7 Conclusion

The introduction of constitutional amendments in 1992–1993 to institutionalize local democracy was a momentous development in India, one that has considerably expanded the scope and depth of democratic participation and competition. The creation of additional elected offices in the *Panchayati Raj* institution has led to the emergence of new and

arguably more diverse political leadership at the local level. Indeed, the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation benefit sections of the population – rural and urban – that has historically been underrepresented or marginalized, such as women, and members of the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. This new leadership is instrumental to the relationship that citizens seek to build with the state, particularly for local leaders involved in the distribution of social benefits or the implementation of the multiple poverty alleviation policies that the state has pursued in India since independence.

Political parties that have superficial roots in society and rely on forms of electoral brokerage – as is generally the case in India – should naturally be inclined to work with this new crop of politicians, particularly at the *Gram Panchayat* level, which is the most direct entry point to the electorate for party elite. This study hypothesized nevertheless that the institutionalization of local democracy through regularly scheduled elections and the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation might not necessarily help parties reach out to voters more directly. For one thing, elected officials at the local level are accountable to voters at the local level, and not to party elites, as unelected brokers generally are. Additionally, the implementation of quotas of descriptive representation adds another layer to the relationship between political and local elected officials. While the reservation of seats for members of traditionally marginalized communities may create openings for parties that claim to represent these communities in a country where people “vote their caste as they cast their vote” (Verma 2012), the frequent *rotation of quotas* may create an institutional environment that fosters instability. While parties may theoretically benefit from the selection of local elected officials who represent more accurately the preferences of a majority of voters, they will also find it difficult to establish ties with elected officials who rotate too frequently, owing to the nature of reservation assignments, which are redistributed every five years across a majority of *Gram Panchayats*. All things being equal,

this could be expected to scramble political coalitions at the *Gram Panchayat* level, and make it difficult for political parties to sink deeper roots in society.

This study brought forth partial evidence for the theory. While it found that a higher share of reserved *Gram Panchayats* made *Vidhan Sabha* constituencies more competitive, it also found that the effect was primarily driven by *reservations for members of the Scheduled Castes*. In other words, a higher share of *Gram Panchayats* reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes was correlated with smaller winning margins at the Assembly constituency level. The effect appeared to be the opposite for the share of *Gram Panchayats* reserved for women and members of the Other Backward Classes. This analysis is obviously limited to the overall *mean* share of reservations at the *Vidhan Sabha* level, and thus cannot shed light on the relationship between *particular arrangements* of reservations and political competition. Likewise, in the absence of a match between electoral booth-level data and the data on *Gram Panchayat* reservations, this study cannot provide evidence of a direct link of the partisan relationship between elected officials at the *Gram Panchayat* level and political parties at the *Vidhan Sabha* level. Nevertheless, the study points to the effect of institutional design on the relationship between political parties and citizens, and ultimately, of the quality of democracy in a large post-colonial country such as India.

Appendix

H1: Higher shares of reserved Gram Panchayats translate into smaller winning margins for individual Vidhan Sabha elections (2012 and 2017)

Table 2: Effect of share of reserved GPs (aggregated) on AC winning margins (2012 and 2017)

	(1) Winning margin (2012)	(2) Winning margin (2017)
Mean share of reserved GPs (2010)	-4.413*** (0.445)	
Mean share of reserved GPs (2015)		3.531*** (0.630)
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2012)	2.647*** (0.0624)	
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2017)		5.997*** (0.0999)
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2012)	1.203*** (0.0649)	
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2017)		2.073*** (0.0909)
Turnout (2012)	-0.103*** (0.00578)	
Turnout (2017)		0.0474*** (0.00659)
Whether incumbent candidate won		-1.292*** (0.105)
Number of Gram Panchayats	-0.00831*** (0.000370)	-0.0125*** (0.000580)
R-squared	0.0610	0.107
Observations	51426	51426

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Effect of share of GPs reserved for the SC on AC winning margins (2012 and 2017)

	(1) Winning margin (2012)	(2) Winning margin (2017)
Mean share of GPs reserved for SC (2010)	-10.02*** (0.579)	
Mean share of GPs reserved for SC (2015)		-3.677*** (0.710)
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2012)	2.658*** (0.0630)	
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2017)		5.915*** (0.101)
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2012)	1.302*** (0.0659)	
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2017)		2.213*** (0.0925)
Turnout (2012)	-0.0944*** (0.00595)	
Turnout (2017)		0.0487*** (0.00660)
Whether incumbent candidate won		-1.241*** (0.106)
Number of Gram Panchayats	-0.00786*** (0.000372)	-0.0124*** (0.000578)
R-squared	0.0650	0.107
Observations	51426	51426

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Effect of share of GPs reserved for the OBC on AC winning margins (2012 and 2017)

	(1) Winning margin (2012)	(2) Winning margin (2017)
Mean share of GPs reserved for OBC (2010)	1.547*** (0.559)	
Mean share of GPs reserved for OBC (2015)		13.77*** (0.812)
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2012)	2.629*** (0.0624)	
Whether incumbent party won constituency (2017)		5.938*** (0.100)
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2012)	1.097*** (0.0645)	
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2017)		2.134*** (0.0902)
Turnout (2012)	-0.103*** (0.00585)	
Turnout (2017)		0.0541*** (0.00666)
Whether incumbent candidate won		-1.387*** (0.105)
Number of Gram Panchayats	-0.00878*** (0.000374)	-0.0119*** (0.000585)
R-squared	0.0597	0.111
Observations	51426	51426

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

H2: Changes in the share of reserved Gram Panchayats translate into changes in the winning margin at the Vidhan Sabha level between 2012 and 2017

Table 5: OLS: effect of change in share of reserved GPs (2010 to 2015) on changes in AC winning margins (2012 and 2017)

	(1) Change in winning margin (2012–17)
Change in average share of reserved GPs (2010)	-8.431*** (0.639)
Change in turnout between 2012 and 2017	-0.426*** (0.0172)
Whether incumbent candidate was reelected in 2017	-6.185*** (0.136)
Number of Gram Panchayats	-0.0115*** (0.000689)
R-squared	0.0540
Observations	51426

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6: DiD model: effect of change in share of reserved GPs (“treatment”) (2010–2015) on changes in AC winning margins (2012–2017)

	(1) Winning margin (2017)
Treated Group	0.614 (0.750)
Post-Intervention	5.596*** (0.743)
Treatment $\times$ Post-intervention	-0.368 (1.225)
Change in turnout (2012 to 2017)	-0.123 (0.126)
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2012)	3.253 (3.838)
Whether constituency was reserved for SC (2017)	-1.159 (3.820)
Turnout 2012	-0.111** (0.0529)
Whether incumbent candidate was reelected in 2017	-0.161 (0.874)
Number of GPs	-0.0136*** (0.00437)
R-squared	0.120
Observations	766

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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