Do Politicians Discriminate Against Internal Migrants: Evidence from Nationwide Field Experiments in India

Nikhar Gaikwad and Gareth Nellis

Yale University

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Migrants face recurring political discrimination in rapidly urbanizing countries.
Politicians face an electoral tradeoff regarding migration

**Politicians’ Dilemma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Court native votes</th>
<th>Court migrant votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice nativist fears via anti-migrant campaigns</td>
<td>Seek migrants’ support, only if migrants vote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Uddhav Thackeray vilifies migrants**

“The migrant laborers are bringing malaria with them to Mumbai …

The influx of migrants continues … There is need to have a check on these migrants.”

**Abu Azmi courts migrants**

“Come to Mumbai and Maharashtra … as paupers and end up striking gold.

I will ensure that your dignity is not violated till the last drop of my blood.”

[Image of Uddhav Thackeray vilifying migrants]

[Image of Abu Azmi courting migrants]
**Electoral tradeoffs determine when politicians discriminate against migrants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario #1: Discrimination</th>
<th>Scenario #2: Enfranchisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants do not vote; politicians believe migrants will not vote</td>
<td>Migrants vote; politicians believe migrants will vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians rally natives with anti-migrant campaigns</td>
<td>Politicians downplay anti-migrant hostility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians disenfranchise migrants</td>
<td>Politicians court migrant votes; respond to migrant needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample: Municipal councilors across India

Municipal corporation characteristics

- Cities divided into electoral wards; each ward elects one councilor
- Ward size varies, but ca. 50,000
- Revenues raised by property and sales taxes; Mumbai annual budget Rs. 310 billion

Background

- Formal responsibilities include: public health & sanitation, public works, education, development, administration

Councilor duties

- Informally, councilors serve as key intermediaries with bureaucracy, e.g. “When people inform me that there is a problem, I immediately start to solve the problem. The official procedure is too long, it takes too much time” (Berenschot 2010)

Sample

- All councilors with listed addresses in 28 largest municipal corporations across India
- Directly represent 127 million citizens
# Study 1: Do politicians discriminate against migrants?

## Audit experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Send handwritten/typed letters from hypothetical citizens requesting help with problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Small, simple chit in plain envelope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modeled on real letters to councilors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Handwritten address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stamped and postmarked from local post office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vary characteristics of the citizen—specifically migrant/native status

Provide cell number and request callback on local SIM card

N = 3,013
Experimental setup

Treatment conditions orthogonally assigned

Native/migrant status: My family and I are native…

- to this city and we have lived here all of our lives
- (Maharashtra/ Bihar/ Assam/ Andhra Pradesh) and we recently moved to this city

Name: Hindu or Muslim

Occupation: High-skill or low-skill

Problem: Excludable or non-excludable

Party support: Belong to councilor’s party

Dependent variable captures willingness to provide constituency services
Is there a migrant-native gap in callbacks? Yes

Native: 23.4% more likely to receive callback than migrant

Diff. = -0.03 (SE = .012), p = 0.01

Native 23.4% more likely to receive callback than migrant
Migrant status affects rewards to other attributes

Migrants do not benefit from favorable attributes
- High-skilled natives 40% more likely to receive callback; skills irrelevant for migrants
- Co-ethnic natives 36% more likely to receive callback; ethnicity irrelevant for migrants
- Similar to Betrand & Mullainathan 2004: African-American aliases don’t benefit from better credentials

Migrants treated as political “underclass”

Do political or electoral mechanisms underlie this effect?
- Politicians might not believe that migrants are registered to vote in city elections
- Politicians might have uncertainty that help will translate into votes
Study 2: Test electoral mechanism with SMS experiment

Treatments

Five new political conditions:
Native not registered to vote
Native registered to vote
Migrant not registered to vote
Migrant registered to vote
Migrant registered to vote & supports incumbent

Example:
“I’m [Arjun / Salman]---[construction worker / engineer] in ur ward. Me & my family r originally from [bihar / assam]. we're registered 2 vote here & we've voted 4 u before. could u help me get [aadhaar card / street lamp fixed]?”

Experiment tests whether political/electoral mechanisms underlie effects of prior study
Results: Migrants registered to vote face no discrimination
Recap of findings

- When migrants don’t signal registration status, politicians discriminate against them
- When migrants signal registration status, politicians don’t discriminate against them

If electoral concerns are key, then politicians must not typically believe that migrants are registered to vote

This hypothesis is testable!
Study 3: Do politicians believe that migrants vote in cities?

Politician Survey Experiment Treatments

“Suppose a citizen living in your ward comes to you asking for some help with some matter.

The citizen is originally from [your city and has lived and worked in the city all his life / a different state and he has recently come to your city to live and work].”

If you had to guess, and based on your experience, do you think that this [long-term resident / migrant] would have a local voter ID card allowing him to vote in Municipal elections in this city?

Politicians do not believe that migrants are likely voters
Discussion

Start new research agenda on internal migration

- Provide evidence of anti-migrant discrimination; explain its triggers
- Establish electoral considerations undergirding migration responses
- Suggest directions for future research: Factors that might mediate the relationship between enfranchisement and political inclusion

Provide insights into study of urban poverty, economic competition, and ethnic strife

Contribute to immigration literature on political triggers of discrimination
- Immigrants vote in many local elections (e.g., Dancygier 2010)
### Table 1: Treatments in Letter Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Native/Migrant</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Problem Type</th>
<th>Party member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Aadhar card</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arjun</td>
<td>Migrant (Bihar)</td>
<td>Vegetable Seller</td>
<td>Income Certificate</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeta</td>
<td>Migrant (Assam)</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sushma</td>
<td>Migrant (Maharashtra)</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Drainage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zafar</td>
<td>Migrant (Andhra Pradesh)</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Government dispensary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Street lamp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waheeda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zahra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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## Treatments in SMS experiment

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arjun</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Aadhar card</td>
<td>Native (not registered to vote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Native (registered to vote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Migrant–Bihar (not registered to vote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Migrant–Bihar (registered to vote, voted before)</td>
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<td>Salman</td>
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<td>Street lamp</td>
<td>Migrant–Assam (not registered to vote)</td>
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Magnitude of migrant-native gap is large in comparison

![Graph showing treatment effects for different categories.](image-url)

- High (v. low) skill: p=0.013
- Hindu (vs. Muslim) name: p=0.014
- Party member mention: p=0.204
- Group (v. indiv.) problem: p=0.055
Are migrants and natives appraised differently? Yes

- High (v. low) skill: p=0.001
- Hindu (vs. Muslim) name: p=0.436
- Party member mention: p=0.010
- Group (v. indiv.) problem: p=0.231
- Native (N) / Migrant (M) problem: p=0.500
- Native (N) / Migrant (M) mention: p=0.094
- Native (N) / Migrant (M) comment: p=0.358
- Native (N) / Migrant (M) attitude: p=0.025
Effect of region of origin of migrants
Survival analysis in letters experiment

Days after mailing

Proportion unanswered

Native

Migrant