MANDATED POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND LOW-LEVEL CONFLICT: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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MOTIVATION

Affirmative action policies (e.g., quotas, reservations): increase political representation of disadvantaged groups.

Mandated political representation: more **equitable political outcomes**, but **distributional effects** may cause backlash [1,2].

So far, there is no empirical work on how reservations affect conflict.

India: political reservations for different groups, but very controversial. Reservation debate accompanied by frequent violent protests and crimes against lower castes (in particular, scheduled castes – SCs).

Approach:
- We study effects of reservations from the perspective of incentives created for politicians on reserved seats.
- We compare outcomes at **constituency level** (seats **permanently** reserved) to **village level** (reservation **rotates** randomly [3,4]).

THEORY

Simple one-period political economy model, in the spirit of [5]:

Citizens
- belong to majority or (disadvantaged) minority
- get utility from group-specific income and (distance to) public good
- engage in conflict if they are dissatisfied because their utility falls below a random, individual-specific threshold.

Politicians
- belong to one of the groups
- provide the level of public good
- get utility from re-election (probability decreasing in conflict) and from implementing their preferred public goods level.

Permanent reservation	Rotational reservation
↳ Realistic re-election chances for SC politicians in closed election	↳ Low re-election chances for SC politicians in open election
↳ Implement more moderate policies to appease majority	↳ Implement policies closer to group preference

→ **Reservation leads to relatively less conflict in permanently compared to rotationally reserved systems.**

The model also predicts an interaction effect: reservations are more conflict-reducing when the minority group is large.

DATA

Focus entirely on reservations for **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** – India's largest and most prominent collection of underprivileged groups.

Assembly constituencies / permanent reservation

Reservations for local member of legislative assembly (MLA). For identification, use discrete cut-off rule from 2008 redistricting:

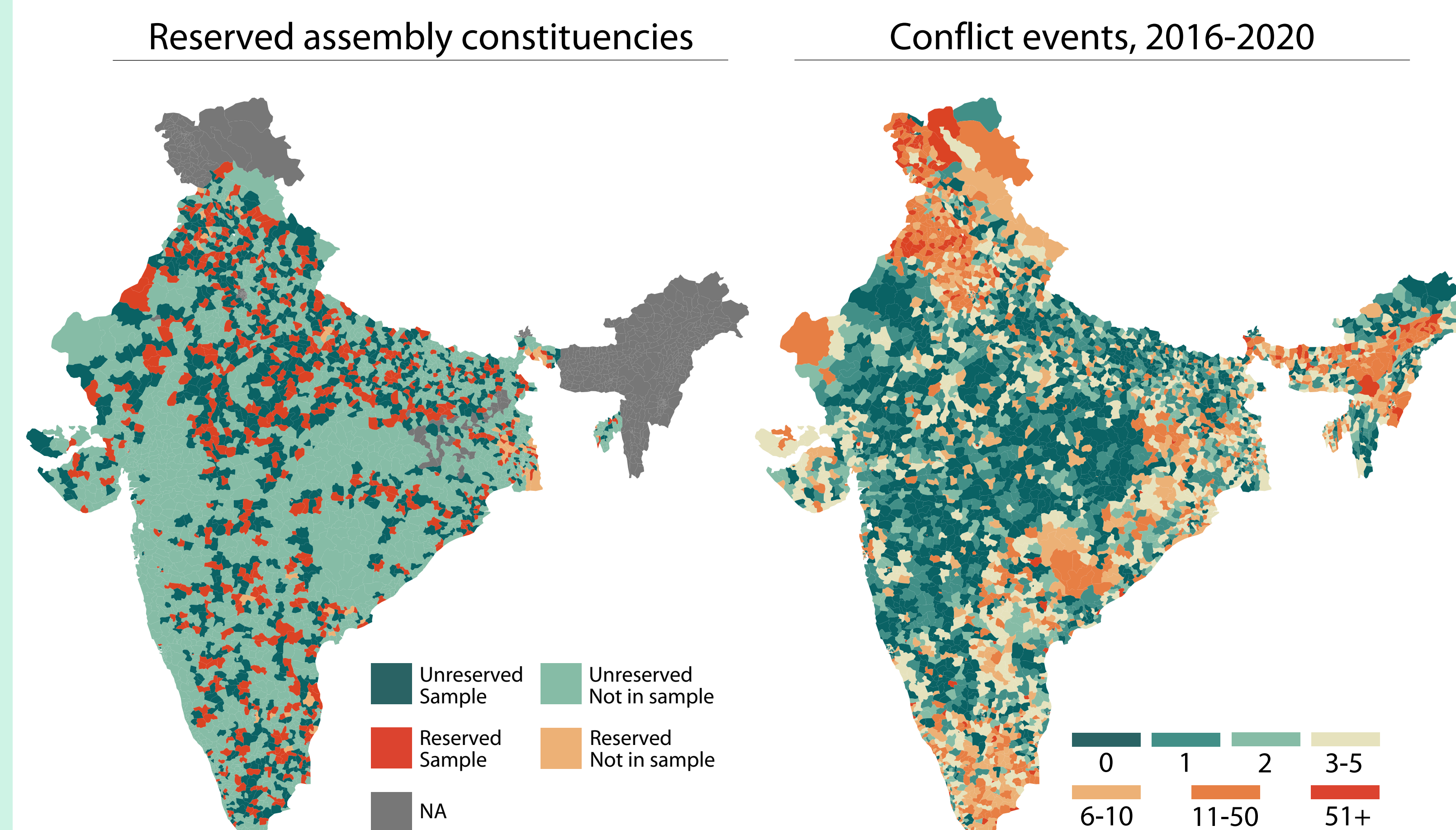| Assembly constituencies	% SCs	Reserved?	
DISTRICT GURDASPUR	24.75		
Bhoa (SC)	42.48	Yes	
Dina Nagar (SC)	32.32	Yes	Reserved Sample
Sri Hargobindpur (SC)	28.12	Yes	
Sujanpur	26.71	No	Unreserved Sample
Fatehgarh Churian	25.68	No	
Batala	23.07	No	

Conflict data from ACLED: data on violent conflict **events**, at very precise geographical level (town), aggregated over 2016-2020.

Villages / rotational reservation

First (2005-06) and second (2011-12) round of Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS).

Reservations for mayor/pradhan (included in first round).

Conflict: question at household level – conflict in general, conflict between communities/castes.

Reserved assembly constituencies

Conflict events, 2016-2020

Unreserved Sample | Unreserved Not in sample
Reserved Sample | Reserved Not in sample
NA

0 | 1 | 2 | 3-5
6-10 | 11-50 | 51+

RESULTS

Assembly constituencies / permanent reservation

Estimate number of conflict events during 2016-2020 at constituency level. Table shows results from OLS and negative binomial regressions:

	OLS: log(events+1)	Negative binomial
Seat reserved for SC	-0.193	-0.228
	(0.065)	(0.096)
Percent SC population	0.229	0.267
	(0.032)	(0.047)
Observations	993	993
Adjusted R^2	0.140	-

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Included covariates: total population, primary schools per capita and percent paved roads in 2001 (before the 2008 redistricting).

→ **Significantly reduced conflict (around 18% fewer events).**

Villages / rotational reservation

The two rounds of the survey allow to estimate (bounds on) a DiD-regression (shown is the average of upper and lower bound):

Outcome: perceived conflict	Overall	Between castes
Seat reserved for SC	-0.004	0.046
	(0.070)	(0.051)
N Respondents	22,482	22,476
N Villages	581	581
Within R^2	0.04	0.02

Note: Standard errors clustered by village in parentheses. Included covariates: time trend, village fixed effects, log(income).

→ **No strong relation between reservation and conflict.**

FUTURE WORK

- Robust appeasing effect of permanent reservations at assembly constituency level. More work is required to understand precise mechanisms behind this.
- To use full richness of the data: analyze spatial dimensions of conflict, consider interaction between different layers of government.
- To investigate the mechanism on the conflict side: study directed violence, e.g. caste-related conflict (this study), crimes against SCs.
- To investigate political mechanisms: consider intermediate outcomes (public goods provision).

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