

## Sabyasachi Das

**Home Address:**

65 Lake Place, Apt 1,  
New Haven, CT 06511

**Office Address:**

Department of Economics  
27 Hillhouse Avenue  
New Haven, CT 06520-8268

**Telephone:** (850) 212 6421

**E-mail:** [sabyasachi.das@yale.edu](mailto:sabyasachi.das@yale.edu)

**Personal web page:** [dassabyasachi.wordpress.com](http://dassabyasachi.wordpress.com)

**Citizenship:** Indian (Visa: F1)

**Fields of Concentration:**

Development Economics  
Political Economy

**Desired Teaching:**

Development Economics  
Political Economy

**Comprehensive Examinations Completed:**

2011 (Oral): Political Economy, Microeconomics  
2010 (Written): Microeconomics, Macroeconomics

**Dissertation Title:** *Essays in Local Democracy*

**Committee:**

Professor Christopher Udry (Chair)  
Professor Larry Samuelson  
Professor Mark Rosenzweig  
Professor Eric Weese

**Expected Completion Date:** May 2015

**Degrees:**

Ph.D., Economics, Yale University, 2015 (expected)  
M.A., Economics, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, 2008  
B.Sc. (Economics Honors), St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, 2006

**Fellowships, Honors and Awards:**

Georg W. Leitner Fellowship in International and Comparative Political Economy, 2014  
South Asian Studies Summer Research Award, Yale University, 2014  
Colgate Fellow, 2013-14  
Dissertation Research Fellowship, 2014-15  
Cowles Foundation Fellowship, 2009-2013  
Doctoral Fellowship, Yale University, 2009-2015

DSE Merit Scholarship, Delhi University, 2006-2008  
Best Paper Presentation Award, 2<sup>nd</sup> All India Economics Students' Meet, Delhi University, 2005

**Professional Experience:**

Business Analyst, Risk Division, HSBC Global Resourcing, Kolkata, India, 2008-2009

**Teaching Experience:**

Intermediate Microeconomics (Instructor: Larry Samuelson), Fall 2011  
Intermediate Microeconomics (Instructor: Dirk Bergemann), Spring 2012  
Public Finance (Instructor: Ebonya Washington), Spring 2013  
Statistics and Econometrics (Instructor: Nancy Quian), Spring 2014

**Research Experience:**

Research Assistant: Professor David Atkin, Yale University, 2014

**Working Papers:**

“‘Town Hall’ Meetings in Electoral Democracy: Theory and Empirics from Indian Village Councils”, (November, 2014), *Job Market Paper*

“Information Revelation, Auditing, and Earmarking in Resource Allocation to Local Governments”

**Seminar and Conference Presentations:**

3<sup>rd</sup> West Bengal Growth Workshop, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, India, Dec 2013  
Alexander Hamilton Center Conference on Political Economy, New York University, May 2014  
Graduate Student Workshop on Economics, Mannheim University, Germany, June 2014

**Referee Service:**

*Journal of Development Economics, Journal of the European Economic Association*

**Languages:**

Bengali (native), English, Hindi (fluent), Nepalese (beginner)

**References:**

Prof. Christopher Udry  
Yale University  
Department of Economics  
New Haven, CT 06520  
PO Box 208269  
Phone: (203) 432-3637  
christopher.udry@yale.edu

Prof. Larry Samuelson  
Yale University  
Department of Economics  
New Haven, CT 06520  
PO Box 208281  
Phone: (203) 432-6737  
larry.samuelson@yale.edu

Prof. Mark Rosenzweig  
Yale University  
Department of Economics  
New Haven, CT 06520  
PO Box 208269  
Phone: (203) 432-3588  
mark.rosenzweig@yale.edu

Prof. Eric Weese  
Yale University  
Department of Economics  
New Haven, CT 06520  
PO Box 208269  
Phone: (203) 432-3617  
eric.weese@yale.edu

## Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation examines how the politics of public good provision in local governments are affected by the presence of deliberative democracy, in the form of local “Town Hall” meetings, and informational asymmetries across different levels of government. In the first two chapters I explore two different mechanisms – enforcement and information aggregation – through which “Town Hall” meetings can influence public good provision in local governments. I provide empirical evidence for the enforcement mechanism in the context of local meetings in Indian village councils. The second aspect of local democracy that I study in the third chapter is the role of auditing and earmarking in the Central or State government’s allocation of resources to local governments.

### Chapter 1: “Town Hall” Meetings in Electoral Democracy: Theory and Empirics from Indian Village Councils [Job Market Paper]

Deliberative institutions, such as “Town Hall” meetings, have persisted over centuries in many countries around the world. Yet our understanding about their relevance in electoral democracies is extremely limited. This chapter, for the first time, provides both a theoretical framework to analyze the “Town Hall” meetings, and compelling empirical evidence to show its importance and mechanism of influence in affecting public good provision. The model predictions are tested in a context where the deliberative institution operates at a scale unprecedented in history, namely the context of local meetings (“*gram sabha*”) in India’s 250,000 village councils. This study provides the necessary groundwork to pursue a larger research agenda of addressing the longstanding debate on the relative merits of deliberative and representative democracies.

The individuals in the model are divided into two social groups and preferences over policy are group-specific. They have preferences over both the policy choice and the ability of the policymaker. The individuals first elect a policymaker and then decide to attend a “Town Hall” meeting. I consider a mechanism in which meetings have enforcement power, i.e., meetings, through deliberation and voting, can constrain the policy choice of the policymaker after she has been elected. The policymaker may have partial control over the meeting procedure. Equilibrium attendance rates of the two groups are characterized under policymakers from different groups. Voters anticipate and incorporate these meeting equilibria while voting. The model produces sharp characterization and comparative static results. I show, that “Town Hall” meetings help individuals elect a more able policymaker.

The empirical analysis uses a survey dataset from India that contains information on individuals’ participation in meetings, preferences for public goods, and village level public good provision for a sample of 220 villages. The Indian setting provides an exogenous variation in the policymaker’s preference, and hence allows for a meaningful test of the results on meeting attendance. In every village council election one-third of the village-chair (“*Pradhan*”) seats in each state are randomly chosen by the state government to be reserved for women (known as the women reservation policy), i.e., only women can run as candidates for the *Pradhan* in those reserved village councils. This is helpful in this context because in India, preferences for local public goods are starkly different across gender.

Consistent with my theory, I find that among villages where women are a minority, the meeting attendance rates of *both* men and women are higher in women reserved villages than in unreserved ones, while among the villages where women are a majority they are lower. This result is sharp enough to rule out other channels of influence for meetings, such as information aggregation and auditing of policymaker’s effort. In addition, the effect of divergence in preferences across gender on the relative attendance rate of women, as predicted by the theory, is different in villages with men and women *Pradhan*. I find that an increase in relative participation of women shifts the relative provision of public goods towards the ones relatively more preferred by women, such as sanitation and health. This result shows, that the ability of women to directly affect policymaking, in the presence of “Town Hall” meetings, is underestimated if we only focus on their representation in electoral politics.

## **Chapter 2: “Town Hall” Meeting as Information Aggregation Platform [In Progress]**

In this chapter, I discuss how the “Town Hall” meetings can influence policymaking in local democracies when the meetings do not have any enforcement power. I propose a model where individuals have preferences over a one-dimensional policy, but the median preference is unknown to everyone including the policymaker. The policymaker, already elected, wants to maximize her reelection probability. The voters first commit to a voting policy (for the reelection stage) as a function of policymaker’s own preference, the policymaker’s chosen policy, and challenger’s preference. The policymaker then convenes a “town hall” meeting. Meeting attendance is costly for the voters. The meeting attendees report their preferences at the meeting. The policymaker chooses a policy after the meeting ends, presumably taking into account the profile of reported preferences. A candidate then challenges the incumbent. The voters cast their votes following their committed voting policy. I look at equilibrium attendance and reporting behavior of individuals and the policy choice by the policymaker. The comparative static results of this model are then compared to the results derived in the theory section of the previous chapter to examine the implications of the different mechanisms.

## **Chapter 3: Information Revelation, Auditing, and Earmarking in Resource Allocation to Local Governments**

One of the primary arguments in favor of decentralization is that local governments are better informed about local preferences for public goods, and therefore, local public good provision would become more efficient with decentralization. In many developing countries, however, local governments do not enjoy enough taxation power, and most of their resources come from transfers from a higher tier government (“the Center”). Hence, for the Center to allocate resources across local governments, it must know something about their local preferences. In absence of any punishment for misreporting, the local governments would exaggerate its demand for resources by reporting more extreme preferences.

In this chapter, I build a model of a two-tier governance system to examine the Center’s resource allocation policy in presence of asymmetric information. I assume that, the Center doesn’t have access to an auditing technology which can verify local preferences prior to resource transfer. The motivation for the second assumption is the observation that preferences for local public goods are generally much harder to verify than cost parameters. I do, however, allow the Center the ability and commitment power to audit whether the local governments comply with their reports after receiving their grants (and to punish if found non-compliant). This verification is assumed to be costly for the Center.

I show that in presence of such “compliance auditing” the Center can implement only a trivial allocation policy, where the allocation is insensitive to the reported preferences, i.e., the Center allocates a constant fraction of the resource to each local government. The Center’s inability to audit the local preferences drastically reduces the set of implementable allocations. I also show, that the set of implementable allocations expands (and includes the second best) when the Center can earmark the allocations for specific public goods. The earmarks, however, distort the allocation of resources across local public goods by making it more extreme than the (truthful) report. This paper provides a rationale for earmarking in presence of information asymmetry and auditing, and highlights the tension between decentralization and efficient resource allocation.