

Research Statement

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I am a political scientist studying democratic institutions in developing democracies, with an empirical focus on India. My research follows two agendas. The first investigates how institutional design in local governance, such as quotas, eligibility requirements, and executive selection, creates unintended spillover effects on political representation. The second examines misinformation, focusing on how information quality and transmission patterns shape citizen beliefs and political behavior. My work combines rigorous causal identification strategies with original data collection from field experiments, surveys, and administrative records.

Local Governance and Political Representation

Dissertation: The Spillover Effects of Local Institutions

My dissertation develops a theoretical framework for understanding these *institutional spillovers*—how reforms in one area systematically affect outcomes in others. The central argument is that institutional choices often produce differential effects across social groups because they interact with pre-existing norms, incentives, and power structures in unexpected ways. Drawing on India’s village council system, which governs more than 600 million rural citizens, my three papers show how reforms can reinforce or challenge marginalized representation patterns, establishing spillovers as a crucial yet understudied feature of democratic governance.

Paper 1: Do Electoral Quotas for Historically Marginalized Groups Improve Women’s Representation?

In my job market paper, I ask how caste quotas affect women’s descriptive political representation in India’s village councils. Theoretically, the contribution of the paper centers on the concept of *intersectional institutional effects*—how quotas designed for one dimension of identity can have unintended consequences for another. I argue that the effectiveness of electoral reforms depends critically on how they interact with existing social norms that vary across group boundaries.

My empirical analysis leverages a novel design that uses quasi-random variation in caste quota assignment within 4,800 village wards in Maharashtra, comparing women’s representation across seats with identical electorates but different quota statuses. The results confirm my theoretical predictions: women’s candidacy is approximately 1.5 times higher in seats with caste quotas compared to seats without any quotas, and electoral success is 2 times higher. This paper demonstrates how the interaction of intersectional identities with institutional design can reveal unexpected positive spillovers across different dimensions of marginalization, with direct implications for designing inclusive electoral systems. I intend to submit this work to leading journals, such as the *American Journal of Political Science* and the *British Journal of Political Science*, by December 2025.

Paper 2: Do Electoral Eligibility Laws Hurt Political Candidacy of Specific Groups?

Building on the spillover framework, this paper examines how electoral requirements can exclude marginalized groups. I develop a theory of *norm-institution conflict*, arguing that when laws clash with prevailing social expectations, disadvantaged groups face sharper dilemmas. Studying two-child eligibility laws for local office in India, I use a difference-in-differences design across states to show the rules reduce Muslim candidacy while leaving other groups largely unaffected. A survey of 1,200 potential candidates confirms the mechanism: Muslim aspirants face distinctive community pressures around family size. I plan to submit this paper to *Comparative Political Studies* and *World Development* by October 2025.

Paper 3: The Effects of Executive Selection Methods on Political Entry and Exit

Comparing direct and indirect elections of village heads, I find that switching to direct elections reduces entry into council races, particularly where caste quotas differ between head and council seats. The change disproportionately excludes women, illustrating how reforms that overlook institutional complementarities can unintentionally undermine participation. I plan to present this paper across conferences this year and submit this work to leading peer-reviewed journals by December 2026.

Beyond the Dissertation: Local Governance Research Agenda

Mere Proxies or Genuine Leaders? (with Apurva Bamezai and Rithika Kumar, *under review*)

My co-authors and I develop and validate a low-cost, scalable phone-based measure of proxy leadership in local village councils: does a female politician personally respond to a governance-related phone survey? Phone surveys of 1,100 politicians reveal women are 37% less likely than men to personally respond. Citizen surveys confirm that responsiveness predicts citizen recognition of female leaders. This scalable measure provides policy makers with a tool to track the effectiveness of quota. The paper is under review at *British Journal of Political Science*.

Misinformation

My second research agenda examines how information quality and transmission patterns shape citizen beliefs and political behavior.

Countering Misinformation Early (with Simon Chauchard, Sumitra Badrinathan, and Florian Sichart, *Forthcoming at American Political Science Review*)

This project tests whether a four-month media and information literacy curriculum with 13,500 students in Bihar is effective in countering misinformation. Treated students improved by 0.4 standard deviations in distinguishing false from true information, with effects persisting months later. They also reduced reliance on unreliable sources and alternative medicine. Crucially, parents of the treated students, who did not receive direct exposure, showed parallel gains, indicating household spillovers. These results suggest that school-based interventions can build durable, transferable critical thinking skills and strengthen democratic information environments. This research has been recognized with the APSA Experimental Research Section Best Paper Award (2025) and received Honorable Mention for the APSA Comparative Politics Section Sage Best Paper Award (2025).

Future Research Directions

My research agenda will continue to examine how institutions shape democratic governance, expanding in three directions:

- 1. Comparative Institutional Analysis:** Expand the spillover framework into a book that compares institutional design and representation in the democracies of the global South.
- 2. Information and Governance:** Explore how stronger information environments interact with institutional reforms to improve representation.
- 3. Technology and Participation:** Investigate how digital platforms shape barriers for marginalized groups, asking if they complement or substitute traditional reforms.