

Winning Support by Distributing Houses? Evidence from India

Shikhar Singh

Yale University

3 October 2021



8.8 million houses in 4 years. 62% beneficiaries are [outside](#) the ruling party's ethnic core.

Census-based targeting, use of technology to minimize discretion and leakages.

Why distribute a house?

- ▶ **Immediate Goal:** A benefit can compensate for the voter's ethnic or ideological disutility, and help win their vote in an upcoming election.
- ▶ **Long Term Goal:** Building the party's reputation and clarifying their distributive intent to swing and weakly opposed voters.

Did programmatic distribution achieve its immediate and long term *political* objectives?

- ▶ Yes, the housing program did win subaltern support for the benefit-giving party in an upcoming election. BUT for different reasons:
 - ▶ **Gratitude** Beneficiaries more likely to think the party has done something for them, and that some people voted for the party because they got a house.
 - ▶ **Sociotropic Considerations** Non-beneficiaries support the party at similarly high levels, potentially because “many people like [them] got a house”. I rule out a range of alternative explanations.
- ▶ No, the housing program was not as successful in shaping perceptions of distributive intent.
 - ▶ **Reversion to Ethnic Considerations** More than half the study participants pick a co-ethnic politician over the ruling party politician in the Choose Your Dictator Game.

Agenda

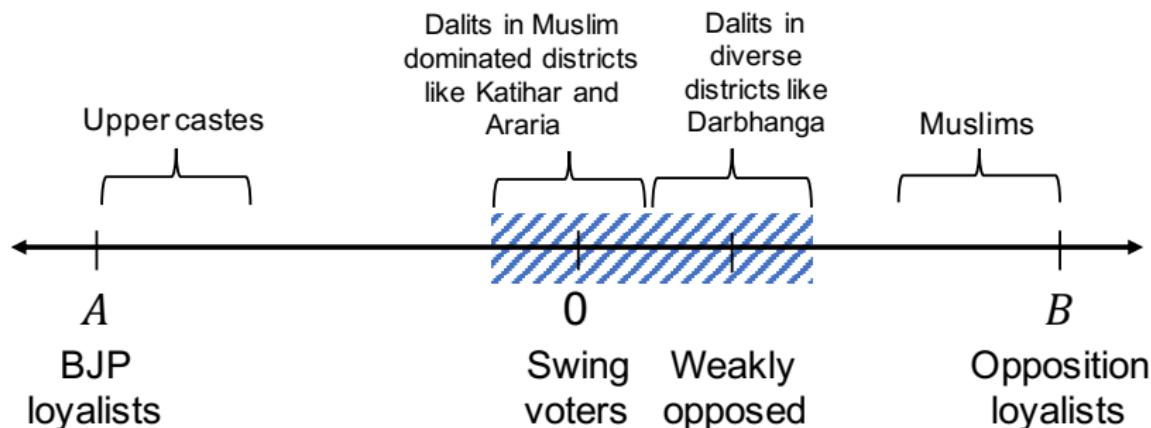
- ▶ Case Selection
 - ▶ Why study low caste Hindus (Dalits) in Bihar's Araria, Darbhanga and Katihar districts?
- ▶ Research Design (Identification and Estimation)
 - ▶ Novel and principled research design that leverages a naturally occurring regression discontinuity.
- ▶ Results
 - ▶ Wins support through two mechanisms: gratitude and sociotropic considerations
 - ▶ Ethnic considerations still salient while Dalits form expectations about distributive intent in the local political context.

Literature

- ▶ Optimal for parties to target benefits at swing voters and weakly opposed voters, or network-proximate/core voters.
- ▶ Mixed empirical evidence on the impact of material benefits on political preferences
- ▶ Brokers are locally influential and pivotal in the distributive process. Programs that by-pass brokers may reduce leakages and favoritism but also have weaker credit claiming and voter monitoring.

Case Selection

- ▶ Ethnicity moderates the relationship between material benefits and vote choice.
- ▶ Focus on Dalits who are ethnically cross-pressured and electorally pivotal.



Research Design

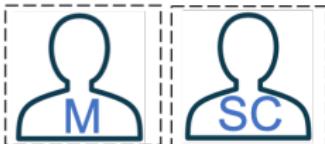


Census, 2011

Identify the universe of eligible beneficiaries, assign each household a "deprivation score"



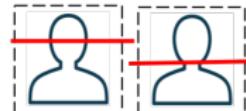
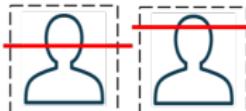
Village Assemblies, 2015-16



Assign each beneficiary to a category (SC, ST, Minority, Other), and rank order ("prioritize") beneficiaries within each category. **Every household must be assigned a distinct rank, and the ranking must be complete.** The village assembly can never prioritize a less-deprived household over a more-deprived household. It can only break ties in deprivation scores, relying on a set of centrally set guidelines.

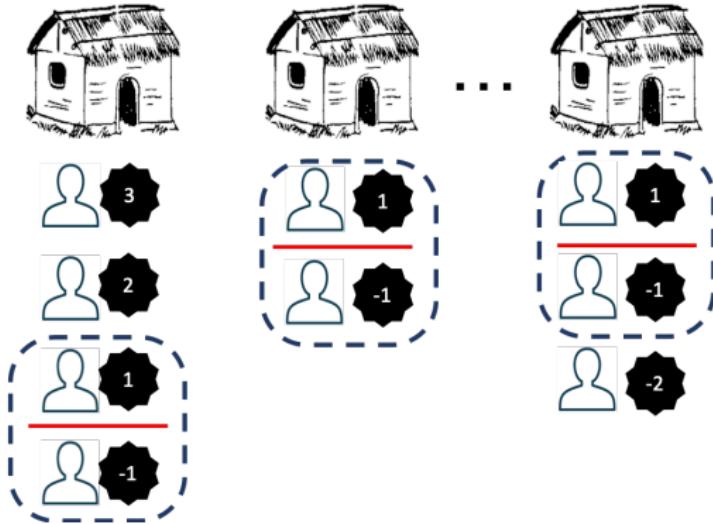


Implementation, 2016-19



The central government fixes an "**annual construction target**" and **releases money** to the state government. These governments then **set district-level targets** and allocate money. A non-political district-level bureaucrat then **allocates money to each village-category**.

Research Design



- ▶ Estimand: $E[Y_i(1) - Y_i(0)|\text{Distance}_i = 0]$
- ▶ Visit 60 villages, interview everyone within the pre-registered bandwidth ($\pm 3\%$), and 10% of people randomly selected from outside the bandwidth ($n = 832$). Identified a replacement sample *before* collecting data.
- ▶ We interview 530 households in 53 villages. Contact rate of 63.7%.

Gratitude

Table 1: Primary Outcomes Analysis

Outcome	Hyp.	RD (MSE optimal BW)				RD (BW = 3%)				$\bar{Y}_{Z=0}$
		$\hat{\tau}$	SE	p	n	$\hat{\tau}$	SE	p	n	
BJP has done something for me (0-4)	Pos	0.615	0.295	0.037	348	1.015	0.578	0.079	180	2.255
Some people voted for the BJP because they got a house (0/1)	Pos	0.189	0.089	0.035	299	0.216	0.162	0.184	152	0.199
Programmatic Awareness Index (0-4)	Pos	0.42	0.18	0.02	295	0.87	0.35	0.01	152	2.55

Specification Curves

Sociotropic Considerations

- ▶ Dalits who have not been offered a house *also* think BJP has done something for people like them. On average they put 3 out of 4 coins in support of this statement.
- ▶ They also think the condition of Dalits has improved in the last five years. On a +1 to -1 scale, the average response is 0.8
- ▶ Their social networks are saturated with the benefit:
 - ▶ 70% ($se = 4$) know at least one other beneficiary
 - ▶ On average, they *personally* know 9 other beneficiaries ($se = 1.58$)
- ▶ Can rule out a range of alternative explanations like the role of material and ethnic factors, clientelistic capture or inertia, misattribution, low satisfaction, and anticipation effects at the cut-point.

Material Impact

Clientelistic Capture or Inertia

Ethnic Prejudice

Choose Your Dictator Game



In this example match-up respondents are shown two (hypothetical) local politicians. Politician 1 is Kishori Lal Paswan (Age 35), Politician 2 is Giriraj Jha (Age 29). Politician 1's last name (Paswan) cues their ethnicity, or Dalit identity in this case. Politician 2's last name (Jha) cues an upper caste identity, while a saffron gamcha (scarf) and tilak cues partisan affiliation to the BJP. Respondents have to pick one of the two politicians.

CYD: Party label v. Co-ethnicity

Choose your Dictator Game: Percentage picking BJP politician

Z	Anonymous Round		Profiled Round		
	Percent	se	Percent	se	n
0	47.9	4.2	48.6	4.2	140
1	49.7	2.6	43.2	2.5	382

- ▶ Dalits who are offered a house ($Z_i = 1$) are 6.5 percentage points less likely to pick the BJP politician in the profiled round ($t = 1.82$, $p = 0.069$).
- ▶ Dalits next-in-line pick the BJP politician at comparable rates to beneficiaries.

The Book

Why parties use brokers to distribute some benefits and rule-based programs to give out other benefits, and the consequences of these distributive decisions on elections and ethnic politics

- ▶ Parties have an incentive to use brokers to distribute cheap benefits and government programs to give out expensive ones.
 - ▶ Parties still value the broker's embeddedness: they need the broker to credit-claim, mobilize votes in an election, disseminate ideology, and diversify risk or reduce dependence on bureaucrats.
 - ▶ Brokers are less likely to canvass beneficiaries before an election if they are excluded from the distribution of that benefit
 - ▶ Cheap clientelistic benefits (\$5 cooking-gas cylinder) can end up having as much political impact as expensive programmatic ones (\$2000 house)
- ▶ Voters recognize distributive efficiency, and reward good policy.
 - ▶ Voters outside the benefit-giving party's ethnic core still believe a co-ethnic politician is more likely to offer benefits to them.

Thank you for tuning in!



Appendices

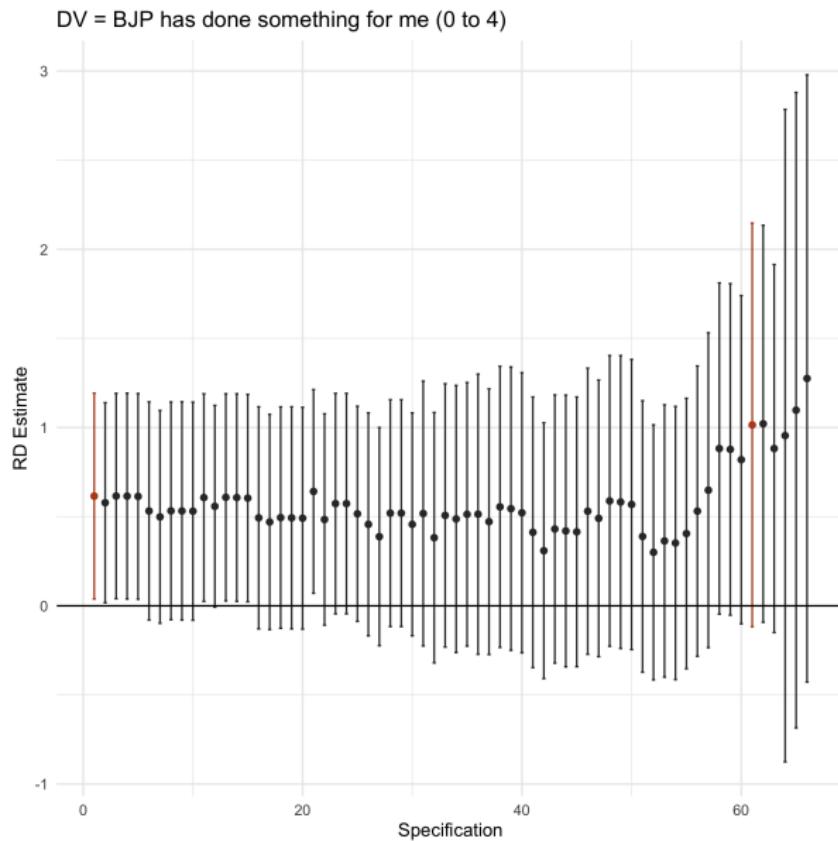
Specification Curves

Material Impact

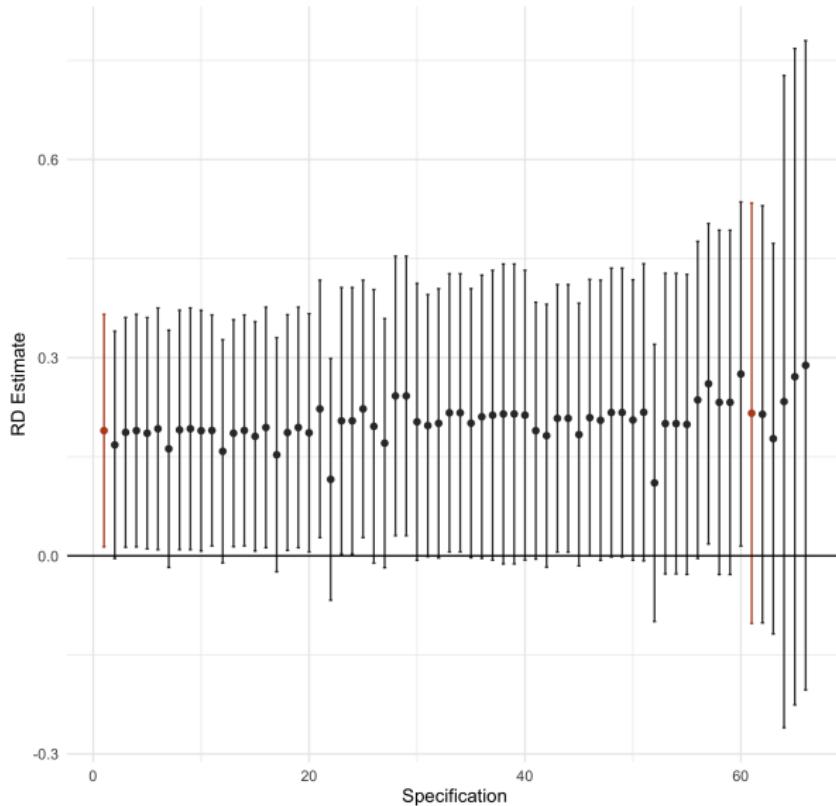
Clientelistic Capture or Inertia

Ethnic Prejudice

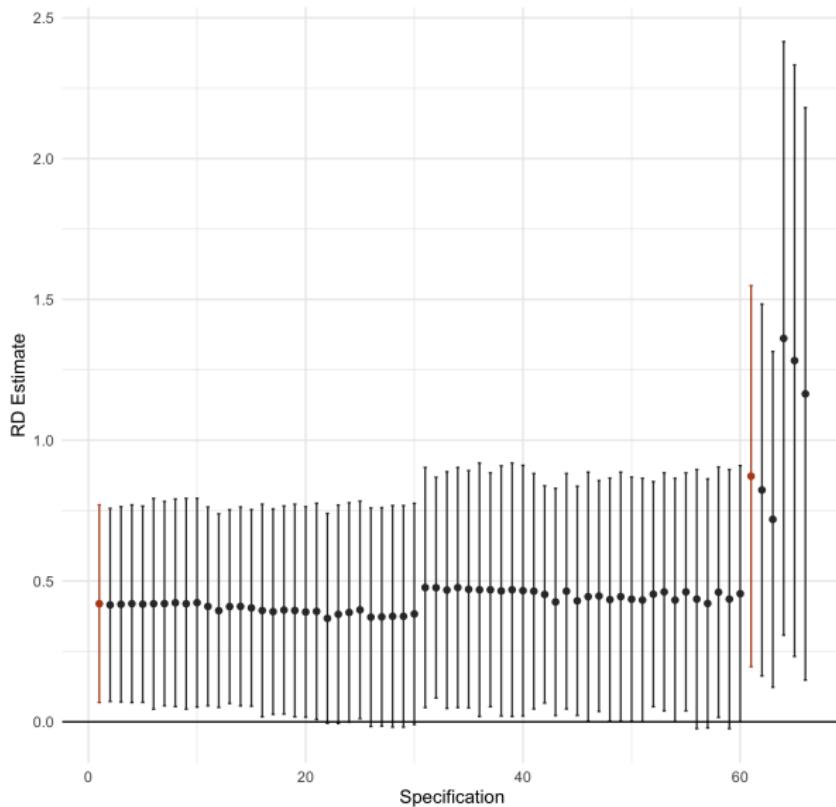
Specification Curves



DV = Gratitude (0 or 1)



DV = Programmatic Awareness (Index)



Impact on Material Conditions

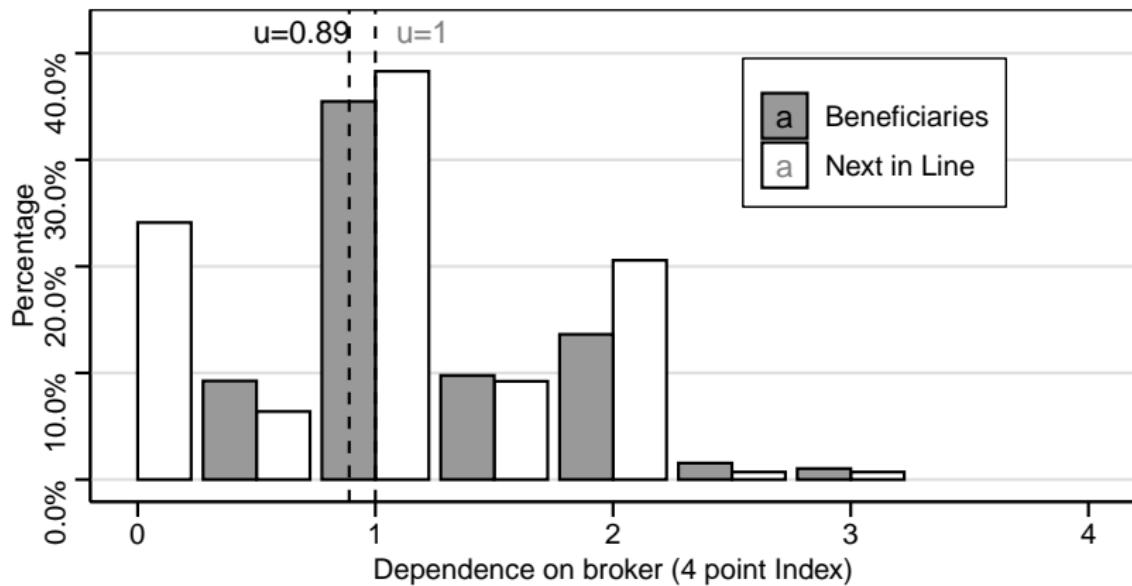
Table 7: Material impact of the housing program

Outcome	RD (MSE optimal BW)				RD (BW = 3%)				$Y_{Z=0}$
	$\hat{\tau}$	SE	p	n	$\hat{\tau}$	SE	p	n	
Economic insecurity (0-4)	-0.29	0.18	0.10	388	-1.06	0.38	0.01	180	3.66
Skipped a meal in last 7 days (0-1)	0.14	0.09	0.10	313	0.27	0.19	0.16	152	0.28
Monthly income (Rs)	-1605.14	1067.77	0.13	274	-3105.91	1700.80	0.07	152	6902.84
Recent debt (Rs/binned)	2273.17	1552.68	0.14	307	7029.30	3143.90	0.03	152	5897.16

Clientelistic Capture or Inertia

Brokers and claim-making

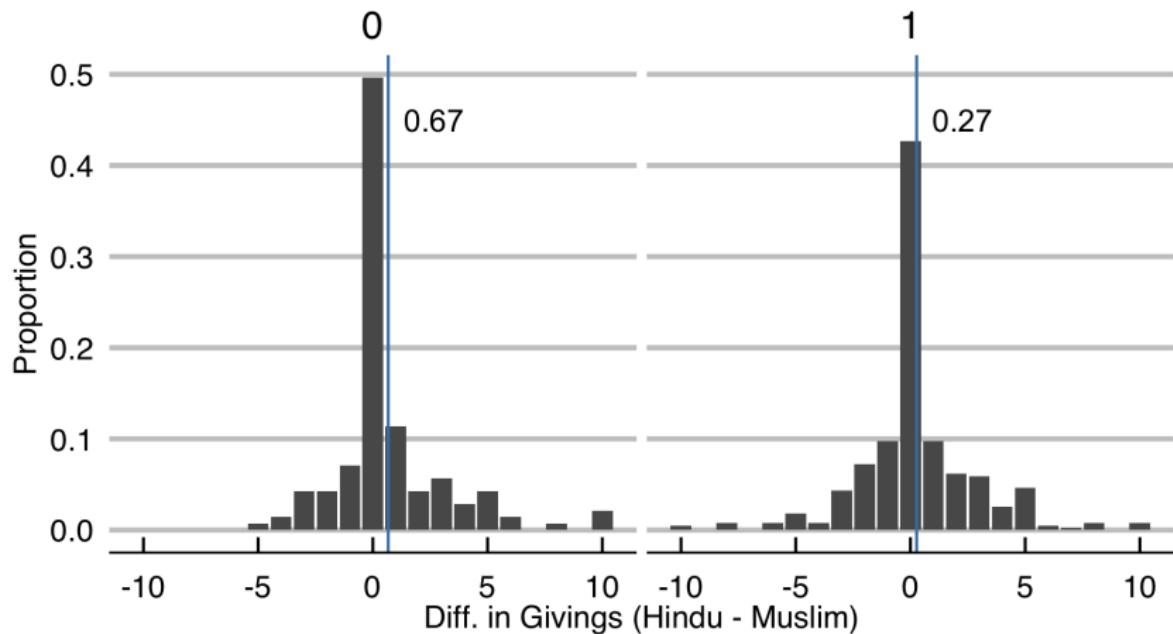
Did the respondent need the broker's help to register documents,
build the house, learn about the scheme, and
thinks its important to get along with the broker in order to benefit?



Ethnic Prejudice

Dictator Game

(Difference in giving to Hindu and Muslim recipient)



Prejudice against minorities: Dictator Game

