

Book Prospectus:

*Brokering the Vote in Mumbai:
Failed Clientelism and the Search for Alternative Strategies*

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I. Theoretical Focus and Significance

This book addresses a big – yet little-researched – question about on-the-ground efforts to broker the vote in contemporary India: how do candidates and their entourage mobilize, influence and convince citizens to vote for them? How might this differ from strategies that these elites previously employed?

Political campaigns, partisanship and influence networks have long been the focus of empirical work in American politics. Empirical scholars of Indian politics, on the other hand, had until recently overlooked these questions. A few important contributions have started filling this gap in recent years. Scholars have described the long-term strategy and base of some of India's leading parties (Chandra 2004, Thachil 2014); the style of political campaigns (Banerjee 2014); *some* of the actors in charge of influencing voters on the ground (Chhibber and Ostermann 2014, Auerbach and Thachil 2017, Bussell 2017, Chauchard and Sircar 2017)¹. Most importantly, they have tested whether (and how) specific factors drive voters preferences. So far, much of the scholarship has focused on whether ethnicity (Jaffrelot 2003, Chandra 2004, Chauchard 2016, Chhibber and Shastri 2014, Heath, Verniers & Kumar 2015, Huber & Suryanarayan 2016) and clientelism (Chandra 2004, Dunning and Nilekani 2013) explain electoral results. But more recent contributions have also considered whether socio-economic variables (Suryanarayan 2016), personalistic linkages (Price and Ruud 2012), campaign events (Nellis 2016, Björkman 2014), ideology (Chhibber and Verma 2016, Nellis et al 2016) and even media effects (Verma and Sardesai 2014) influence voters' preferences.

¹ Studies in political science and anthropology have, relatedly, described the set of actors that voters and citizens approach as they make claims on the state or try to access public office (Manor, 2000; Krishna, 2002; Auerbach, 2013; Dunning and Nilekani, 2013; Bussell, 2014; Kruks-Wisner, *forthcoming*, Björkman 2015, Witsoe 2013, Berenschot 2011). In India, a whole array of local characters plays such a role. While they have so far largely been clubbed under one label, as "brokers" or "intermediaries" in the comparative literature, these actors are astonishingly diverse. It is likely that they play a major role in vote brokerage as a result of their connectedness to voters. So far this however remains unclear.

These recent works have considerably updated our knowledge of political brokerage in India. However, because of their specific theoretical focus, none of these contributions has provided us with a detailed account of the repertoire of *actors* and *strategies* that elites rely on in order to remain relevant, and eventually, win elections in contemporary India. *Whom* do elites rely on during electoral campaigns to broker the vote? Which, if any, of the aforementioned *strategies* do these actors in practice rely on? Is this changing?

To fill this gap, this book focuses on the activities of low-level political workers in a single one urban constituency located in Mumbai over the course of three years; a period that includes two electoral campaigns². While it comes with limitations in terms of external validity, the combination of a broader theoretical focus, a narrow empirical one (a single constituency) and a patient, qualitative approach (further detailed below) presents a number of comparative advantages:

1. This approach allows me to provide a different perspective on political brokerage: rather than assuming that elites rely on specific strategies, interviews and close observations allow me to depict the strategies of political elites, as they describe them. Almost no work on political brokerage so far gives a voice to the actors devising these strategies. This more subjective perspective provides me with a better understanding of the challenges faced by actors in charge of political brokerage and of the rationales for the strategies they implement.
2. This approach also allows me to provide a more detailed account of the actors on whom candidates rely on at the very local level to broker the vote in contemporary India. A qualitative approach focused on a single constituency allows me to map entire influence networks. As such, this allows me to provide a thick description of what categories such as “partisanship”, “party worker” or “broker” often mean on the ground, and to better document the profiles of the heterogeneous group of individuals in charge of brokering the vote.³ While these individuals have been mentioned in numerous studies about brokers, parties or claim-making in recent years, no other scholars have so far attempted to properly describe this group of actors in the context of electoral campaigns.
3. Third, contrary to much of the literature on Indian voters’ preferences, this approach also allows me to eschew monocausal explanations and to jointly *weigh* the relative importance of various strategies. While most studies have *assumed* that elites rely on ethnicity or clientelism to broker the vote, my approach allows me to explore, from the ground up, whether incumbents do and can rely on clientelistic strategies, and whether political aspirants do and can rely on ethnicity to broker the

² A third *might* be added, depending on its timing.

³ Given the large size of constituencies in India (2 million voters on average in parliamentary constituencies, and 350,000 voters on average in assembly constituencies

vote. That is, I examine the extent to which candidates and political aspirants rely on each these strategies in practice. My approach also allows me to explore and theorize about the impact of alternative strategies that have so far received very little attention in the literature, in part because they have proven challenging to quantify or draw causal inference from: the role of the media and of new technologies (in particular cell phones/apps), the role of money and electoral handouts, the role of campaign events (meetings, rallies and processions), and the crucial role of constituency service and personalistic forms of politics.

4. Finally, this approach also allows me to describe the potential interactions between these diverse strategies, and hence to provide a more dynamic perspective on the evolution of campaign strategies in India – as of now, relatively uncharted territory. As mentioned in Section IV below, I argue that clientelism and ethnicity are becoming increasingly unreliable strategies in urban India today, and that a mix of other strategies are deployed *as a result* of the increasing inefficiency of these traditional strategies. In this argument (based on interviews and other data described below), candidates' increasing reliance on electoral handouts and lavish campaign events can for instance be seen as a consequence of their decreasing power over voters. When voters cannot be pressured into voting for their incumbent because traditional patron-client relationships or caste ties are less effective, I argue, political aspirants resort to alternative strategies, including short-term strategies that bring the cost of campaigns up. In that sense, the book theorizes about the evolution of political brokerage styles, and in the process, explains recent trends in Indian electioneering that have attracted a lot of attention (like the role of money).

II. Empirical Focus

In this book, my investigations focus on a single urban assembly constituency in Mumbai, that I name *Savli*.⁴

While Mumbai and urban India are interesting in their own right, I choose to focus on an urban constituency precisely because of the dynamic objectives of my analysis. Since I am also interested not only in describing political brokerage today, but also in the way in which political brokerage strategies have evolved, it makes sense to focus on an urban constituency.

Much of the early work on patronage in Indian democracy, under the so-called "Congress System" (Srinivas 1955, Weiner 1967) focused on how the governing political party co-opted traditional local elites in order to stay in power. But the way in which elites *can* mobilize voters has radically changed over the past decades, under the combined effects of three types of structural changes:

⁴ The name is here changed to ensure the confidentiality of my interviews.

demographic changes (increase in the number of voters and in the size of constituencies), socio-economic changes (rising levels of education and increasing economic independence of voters), and electoral changes (rises in levels of political competition and increasing alternatives at the polls). These structural trends have made it more difficult for candidates and elites to enforce a form of perverse accountability on “captive” group of voters. They have also considerably weakened the ability of parties to build strong organizations, which has in turned decrease their ability to control voters.

Since these structural changes been more obvious in urban India than they have been in rural India, and since I am interested in the effect of these changes on political brokerage, I choose to focus on an urban constituency in which these changes have been particularly visible.

Savli is a typically large, socially and economically diverse and electorally competitive constituency. As is typical for State Assembly constituencies in India, *Savli* counted as of 2014 over 450,000 inhabitants and over 350,000 voters, divided over eight wards and more than 300 polling booths. Judging from vote margins, partisan politics in *Savli* has been marked by extremely high degrees of political competition over the past thirty years.⁵ What is more, the population of *Savli* is diverse by Mumbai standards. Largely established on marshlands that constituted, until the 1980s, the very edge of the city, *Savli* has progressively grown over the past hundred and fifty years with the arrival of each successive wave of migrants. This intense ethnic diversity overlaps with considerable diversity in terms of class and habitat. While over 40% of the population of the constituency is currently classified as living in slums, *Savli* also counts wealthier enclaves, and in some cases explicitly “exclusive enclaves”, in direct proximity to these slums. In between these extremes, the constituency also counts a large number of lower middle-class low-quality buildings erected over the past few decades, many as part of the various slum redevelopment schemes being implemented in Mumbai. A great deal of diversity also exists among the neighborhoods usually thought of as slums (or *chawls*). As a result of these multiple types of inequalities, the constituency includes populations with widely different needs and widely different modes of interaction with elected representatives.

⁵ Three political parties have an important presence on the ground throughout the constituency: the Indian National Congress (INC), the *Bharatyia Janta Party* (BJP) and the *Shiv Sena*. While one of the wards has been a stronghold of the Shiv Sena since the early 1970’s, the seven other wards have been historically competitive and have changed hands at least once over the last three municipal elections. The same is true of the assembly constituency, which has changed hands three times between the INC and BJP/Shiv Sena since 1985, and in which the vote margin of victorious candidates have never exceeded 7% of the vote.

III. Methods and Data

In order to document strategies and actors in political brokerage in *Savli*, this study relies on a three-pronged strategy.

Observations During the 2014 and 2017 Campaigns

I first rely on observations of political workers during two political campaigns at all levels of politics in the constituency, from the constituency-level (candidates, incumbent, and unelected party officials) to the most local level (i.e. the polling booth area level, with local characters such as booth-level party workers as well as a host of “social workers” – all extensively described in Chapter 3 of the book).

In 2014, I observed the activities of two groups of party workers (one was attached to the winning BJP candidate, while the other was attached to the defeated INC incumbent) during the six weeks leading to the 2014 Maharashtra State Assembly elections. The group of BJP workers was led by a young and dynamic BJP ward-*adhyaksh* (president) named *Rikhil* whom I had personally met a few months before the campaign started after having approached his office. The group of INC workers was lead by a former INC corporator named *Ravindran*, whom I was introduced to by my first field collaborator on this project, Dinesh Dubey. Dinesh Dubey had worked for *Ravindran* a couple years earlier. These pre-existing relationships between us initially made it possible for me to embed myself in the campaigns, attend daily strategy meetings, observe the work of both offices and the organization of meetings, rallies, and other campaign events. Dinesh Dubey (my collaborator during the first part of this project) and I spent most of our time following the life of these two groups of workers during the months leading to the election.

Along with Hanmant Wanole, I similarly observed crucial municipal elections in the winter of 2017. During these elections, we observed the work of the aforementioned two party networks, with whom I had by then developed trustful relations, as well as of a group of party workers from the Shiv Sena. We did so across across two separate municipal wards located within the Savli Assembly constituency.

Post-election Interviews

Second, I rely on repeated discussions and patient interactions with close to 85 party affiliates in this constituency, whom my collaborators⁶ and I repeatedly

⁶ Kaushik Koli is a resident of *Savli* with whom I have collaborated on this project since January 2015. Kaushik Koli, a Ph.D. student in political science at the

met over the course of the past 36 months, in some cases over 30 times during this period. Though many of these interviews started as spontaneous discussions during the first few months of research, they now tend to resemble semi-structured interviews. Because of their length, and because they require us to build trust with our interviewees, these interviews typically span over several meetings. These interviews cover a variety of topics related to political brokerage, to partisan politics and to the logistics of political campaigns. Given my interest in the motivations of political workers, most of these discussions start by covering biographic information and details of these workers' involvement with their party over time, before moving to more sensitive topics. Only in the third or fourth interviews with each of these actors are these topics – such as the role of cash in campaigns – approached. Because trust is hard to gain, particularly from an outsider interested in the less-than-savory or legal aspects of the campaigning process, a less patient strategy would likely fail.

Importantly, the men (and to a much lesser extent, women⁷) we interview belong to all parties playing a significant role in the constituency (the BJP, the INC, the SS, the NCP and the MNS), and serve at a variety of levels within their parties or within their parent organizations (youth wing, women unit, regional unit, etc.). While most of them are low-level party workers (or *karyakartas*), serving as presidents or vice-presidents at the booth or ward-level, this sample also includes, for the three main parties (the INC, the BJP and the SS), the party's candidate in a recent election (either the 2017 municipal elections or the 2014 Assembly elections), as well as district-level position-holders and members of the candidate's direct entourage. Because political brokerage is only partly a partisan affair – as shown in Chapter 3 of the book –, we also interview individuals who play a role in campaigns and in influence networks, but self-define as “social workers”, “local leaders” or “freelancers” rather than in strict partisan terms.

This extremely diverse sample of political workers provides me with a *range* of point of views on political brokerage, and with a range of interpretations for behaviors observed during campaigns. It also provides me with a unique opportunity to discuss brokerage strategies with those who have designed these strategies or have observed them up close.

University of Mumbai, joined the project later, starting as a translator and assistant. He now plays a major role in this research, and serves as a co-investigator on this project. Kaushik Koli and myself have alternately produced many of the materials on which I rely in the book manuscript – such as recordings and photos. Field notes and interview transcripts are usually the product of a collaborative process between the two of us. A similar collaboration takes place with Hanmant Wanole, who has replaced Kaushik in January 2017.

⁷ As noted by Berenschot (2011), women are at a serious disadvantage when it come to political work in India, including in urban areas.

Ethnography of Day-to-day Political Work

Finally, since January 2015, my field collaborators and I have accumulated visual materials, social media posts, posters, secondary accounts and recordings of meetings about routine political work in the constituency. Based on repeated, coded observations of the work of in public offices, we have also produced a rich set of fieldnotes describing the rather tedious day-to-day work of elected officials and local party leaders, and especially the nature of constituency service.

This rich material allows us to document the work and the strategies of incumbents in office at all three levels of governments within the constituency, and to a lesser extent, the strategies of their political rivals. As such, it is an important complement to the interviews described above.

IV. The Argument

How then do candidates and their entourage mobilize, influence and convince citizens to vote for them in contemporary urban India?

Failed Clientelism (or What Does not Work Anymore)

I argue that the strategy that scholars have widely described as the main strategy employed by Indian elites to broker the vote⁸ – a form of clientelism reinforced by caste vote-banks (Chandra 2004) – is actually becoming increasingly unlikely and unreliable in urban India. The demographic, socioeconomic and electoral changes listed above, I argue, have made it increasingly *impossible* for incumbents to develop the kind of *quid pro quo* relationship by which services and benefits are exchanged for votes during subsequent elections. As a result, incumbents' attempts at initiating forms of *quid pro quo* politics in between elections most often fail, despite their best efforts. While this "failed clientelism" does not warrant recourse to more short-term forms of exchanges with voters (see below), it does suggest that much of what we believe to be true about political brokerage needs to be rethought.

Quid pro quo politics is, first, hard to achieve when politicians have more constituents to take care of. While many elected representatives present themselves as champions of the common man, they cannot feasibly solve the problems of several hundred thousand people. Worse, because they inevitably end up solving the problems

⁸ Whether or not this has indeed been their main strategy, or whether clientelism is a purely abstract construction thought by scholars, remains an open question. To address this point, part of my current investigations is more historical in nature, as I try to better ascertain what political brokerage looked like until the 1990s.

of some and not others, including their core supporters, they often end up alienating some groups of voters. When infrastructures are limited and basic state services are dysfunctional, even the most dynamic officials can only solve a portion of the problems that voters ask them to solve. Besides, problems that are solved are not always rewarded with a vote. This is because of a specific type of *attributability* problem (Harding and Stasavage 2014). Politics in more populous constituencies requires the involvement of an ever-larger number of intermediaries in order to get the attention of the elected politician. In this context, voters are likely to attribute a positive outcome *to a variety of actors*, and not necessarily to the official herself. As a result, they may feel more indebted to their intermediaries than to their elected official when re-election time comes. This, I argue, undermines the ability of incumbents to develop a loyal following.

These demography-related issues might be minimized if politicians had a strong group of loyal supporters on the ground to broadcast their achievements. Unfortunately for most incumbents, this is rarely the case. I attribute this organizational weakness to a second trend: the steady rise in levels of political competition. *More* candidates automatically means more uncertain elections, and hence more anti-incumbency. But there is a more indirect, though important, effect of rising levels of political competition: it also makes it much more difficult for incumbents to build a strong pyramidal organization reaching all the way down to voters. The demographic changes just described imply that organizational growth is required, since it is crucial for politicians to have agents in close contact with voters.⁹

But increased competition complicates this task, as it means that the workers at the lowest echelons of party organizations – at the booth level – now have multiple partisan options. As a result, they are increasingly opportunistic, decreasingly loyal, and often unreliable. Extremely few parties in India possess the kind of strong, loyal organization that guarantees that the achievements of their candidates can be sufficiently publicized at the very local level come election time. By the same token, these relatively weak organizations do not allow proper monitoring of voters ahead of elections. This is not to suggest that the lowest echelons of parties never include earnest supporters or ideologically committed individuals. All do, to some extent. My interviews however suggest that many more of these low-level party agents do *not* constitute the kind of loyal, hard-working, and reliable workers that party higher-ups typically dream of recruiting. While there are other causes behind this relative disorganization of parties – including the lack of internal party democracy and unfair rules for advancement within parties, which frequently discourage low-level workers – this organizational weakness makes it even more difficult for incumbents to maintain themselves in office.

⁹ This is one way to interpret the recent membership drive of the BJP: namely, as an attempt to identify additional party agents at the local level.

The last factor that makes *quid pro quo* politics unlikely has to do with social and generational changes that have emerged in recent campaigns, notably the rising number of young educated voters, beyond the reach of parties' influence and independent from their families' partisan preferences, which may herald the progressive disappearance of "vote banks". According to many party workers I interviewed – this is a theme that has emerged with surprising regularity over the course of my interviews –, young urban voters are increasingly difficult to read, as they sort amongst candidates on their own merits rather than on caste or party labels, or are frankly disinterested in the political process. Political workers lament these changes, as they increasingly break down the natural connections that existed between members of some groups and some parties. This, in turn, can deprive incumbents of the support that they might have automatically received from some groups. Given the difficulties they otherwise face when they attempt to publicize their achievements, this further complicates the task of parties.

Altogether, these new difficulties mean that most incumbents face an uphill task as they strive to get reelected, and more generally, that purely clientelistic strategies cannot work anymore in urban India. This may be good news for the political system, as it suggests that voters are rarely captive, that they have increasing options and that they exercise them freely. From a normative point of view, this independence and the absence of proper political machines on the ground is tremendously important.

Whether or not this is really good news however depends on what strategy or strategies eventually replace this increasingly failed form of clientelism. This is what the second part of my argument addresses.

The Search for Alternative Strategies

In an age in which political elites are increasingly losing the ability to control voters through some form of *quid pro quo* politics, and in which their organizations are made ever weaker by the structural trends listed above, how do they broker the vote?

My interviews and observations lead me to portray the current period as a transition period, in which local elites scramble to broker the vote through an unlikely combination of heterogeneous strategies. Contrary to many political analysts, local elites on the ground have lost all certainty as to what works, and are frequently upfront about it. Confronted with steep competition from all sides, they thus multiply efforts and essentially *hedge their bets*. In part 3 of the book, as detailed in my outline below, I argue that the new context in which elections take place leads them to engage in four different kinds of strategies. The following paragraphs detail each of these alternative strategies in turn.

As part of this account, I first track, mainly through interviews, how this changing context has prompted *some* parties – and chiefly among these, the ruling BJP party – to invest in a completely different form of political brokerage. Namely, a form of brokerage that transcends localism and mutual interdependence at the local level, and instead insist on a national-level party brand and on clearly identified personalities at the national level (in the case of the current BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Party president Amit Shah).

Quid pro quo politics by definition relies on a relationship between local elites and voters. When this form of exchanges does not work anymore, I argue, elites may be tempted to court voter on less local promises. While the BJP has always been somewhat of an ideological party, and in that sense has always courted voters on a less local basis than other parties, I use visual materials and recordings of meetings to show that this trend has accelerated in recent years. Interviews with BJP leaders in and out of the constituency in turn explain why. Local elites embraced the new emphasis on the persons of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah during State and municipal campaigns to not only because there were top-down pressures for them to accept it, but also because they genuinely saw the creation of a party brand as a solution to their difficulties on the ground. Young ambitious elites from the party frequently criticize old forms of politics relying on patronage *in a principled fashion*. But repeated discussions also suggest that they do for much more practical reasons. Namely, because they increasingly believe that local-level patronage does not work, and because they believe that more voters are in the market for more national-level solutions imposed from above (the crusade against corruption and “black money” being frequently seen, at least until recently, as one of these solutions).

As part of these efforts towards less local and more programmatic forms of political brokerage, two salient trends deserve attention, and as such are highlighted in the chapter devoted to this question in the book. The first one is the efforts of the BJP to recruit members of the party on a mass basis since the 2014 elections, and especially during the impressive membership drive carried out during the spring of 2015 (the BJP is now, reportedly, the largest party in the world, ahead of the Chinese Communist Party). These efforts have sometimes been seen as attempts by a party at the apex of its popularity to re-create a strong party organization on the ground, in a way that might eventually enable it to engage in a form of “machine politics”. While these efforts have been impressive, and *to some extent* successful, I however reject this hypothesis. The membership drive, I argue, instead needs to be understood as an attempt at recruiting local “opinion leaders” who will relay the national-level messages of the party rather than work hand-in-hand with local elected officials from the party and engage in “old-school” political brokerage work on the ground. In that sense, I analyzed the drive as a move towards more programmatic politics, and away from local interdependence networks. A second trend that deserves attention is the emphasis of the BJP – but also all other parties – on the sharing of national or state-level messages through social media. The rich data that Kaushik Koli and I collected through our friendships with local political workers (and regular citizens) on *facebook* and *whatsapp* allows us to show the

importance of more programmatic and less local forms of political brokerage, and to speculate about the possible rise of media effects in Indian politics.

The second alternative strategy on which I report (and on which other works on Indian politics have recently reported¹⁰) is constituency service. While some political parties – mainly the BJP – have heavily invested in less local forms of political brokerage, it remains that large groups of poor voters mostly care about local issues in urban India. Besides, as described by much scholarship on the State in India (Chandra 2004, Gupta 2012), many of these voters still require the intervention of elected officials on an almost daily basis in order to “pressure” various agents of the state. This generates a need for generous constituency service. While both this need and constituency service have always existed, I argue that the emphasis on constituency service has increased and that the style of constituency service itself has changed. Relying on fieldnotes and observations of three offices within the constituency – the office of the current BJP State Assembly member, and two more local offices –, I show that these officials now spend the lion’s share of their time patiently listening to voters and writing letters on their behalf. By contrast, I show that they spend surprisingly little time – almost no time at all when it comes to the BJP member of the State Assembly – doing legislative work in their respective assemblies. Besides, repeated interviews with these officials suggest that they now do see this task as their *main* task in their quality of elected official. According to these officials and to my own observations, this form of “obsessive constituency service” is qualitatively different both from what constituency service used to be and from a more partisan form of constituency service. Comparatively, a remarkable aspect of constituency service in *Savli* is how un-mediated it now is. Common citizens often visit these offices on their own, without the help of a connected party affiliate or a local power broker. They can come unaccompanied and, after some waiting time, access their State Assembly member on an almost daily basis. More surprisingly maybe are two other facts. The first one is that the most reasonable of their requests are granted on an almost equal basis, regardless of their identity, preferences, age or gender. The second one is that these elected officials do almost nothing to monitor that these services bring them votes or whether the recipients of these services become somewhat loyal to them. This is not, I argue, because elected officials are unwilling to discriminate or monitor. It is rather, I argue, because they only have a weak sense of which voters belong to their core group of supporters and which do not, since their organization on the ground is overall weak.

This new emphasis on constituency service (what I term “obsessive constituency service”) also extends beyond the realm of these politicians’ offices, as these officials more generally strive to project the image of service-oriented politicians through a new kind of political discourse and through a new type of demonstrative actions. I illustrate this trend by extensively shadowing the activities of *Savli*’s member of the State Assembly. I argue that *Savli*’s representative illustrate

¹⁰ Jennifer Bussell’s project on claim-making largely covers this question.

the rise of a new presentational style of politics. Following in the steps of Narendra Modi, a new generation of politicians from all parties have made it a priority to present themselves – sometimes theatrically, as when they take it upon themselves to fumigate neighborhoods affected by mosquitoes, help clean streets or clear gutters – as “servants of the people”. This new presentational style, I argue, is a consequence of the fact that citizens-politicians relations are progressively becoming more horizontal, at least when it comes to brokering the vote. Because voters cannot be pushed around and influenced as easily, elected officials strive to present themselves as servants. While part of these moves are no doubt very hypocritical, or do not bring sustainable benefits to voters, this is additional evidence of the fact that elected officials scramble to find a soft spot in voters’ hearts.

The third and fourth alternative strategies I detail in the book relate to short-term factors and to the renewed importance of political campaigns. When long-term *quid pro quo* politics is impossible and when party organizations are weak, I argue, political campaigns become as crucial as they have become in recent years in *Savli*.

This leads me to rely on the rich material I collected during the 2014 campaign (and that I will collect during the 2017 municipal campaign) in order to explain, first, the importance of rallies, meetings, processions and other campaign-time events. According to all of my informants, the scope and the frequency of these events has considerably increased over the past decade in *Savli*, precisely because politics has become more competitive and because party leaders are less and less certain of the size of their base.

Scholars of American politics have long researched why politicians organize campaign events and which of these events, if any at all, “work” in electoral terms. However, no such work so far exists in Indian politics. While this is a strand of scholarship that I hope to contribute to in more quantitative terms in coming years, my ethnography of political campaigns in *Savli* provides me with intuitions about these questions. Both my interviews and observations lead me to argue that local political elites, including incumbents, do not invest so much time, effort and money (most participants are poor people attending on a wage, leading to a phenomenon of “paid crowds”) in organizing campaign events in order to convince attendants to these events or to publicize their platform.

Instead I argue that they do so, at tremendous costs, for two alternative reasons. The first one has to do with the imperative of “looking strong”: insofar as large events project confidence, they can suggest that a candidate stands a chance of winning the election. This ability, I argue, has become crucial to politicians embroiled in extremely competitive and often unpredictable races. This is reinforced by the fact that voters have reportedly become increasingly strategic and prone to follow winning predictions late in the campaign (i.e. a behavior referred to as following the wind or *hava*). I illustrate this through interviews of both voters and party workers in charge of guessing the behaviors of these voters. Second, I

argue that local elites invest in campaign events because of a second imperative: the imperative of “looking connected”. The spectacle of campaign events allows candidates to project their connectedness both up and down. Because good campaign events usually include “VIP guests”, they first allow Assembly candidates to show that they are connected to ministers or to powerful actors within their party. Because voters know this to be crucial to the development of the constituency, large events are seen as being beneficial. Most importantly, lavish campaign events allow candidates to display in full view that they are connected downwards, that is, that they have a network of *karyakartas* or workers ready to help voters on the ground. At a time when every vote counts, and when parties-citizens connections are weak, this kind of last-minute effort is perceived as crucial by political workers at all level of politics.

Similar scope conditions also explain the fourth alternative strategies I detail in the book (and in a separate article currently under review): the increasingly important role played by gifts, handouts and goodies in recent campaigns. Gifts and handouts have been a prominent feature of local electoral campaigns for almost three decades. But they are also, reportedly, increasing at alarming rates in Savli.

Handouts were common during the 2014 Assembly election campaign (and presumably will be in the 2017 elections). Collecting data on the *amount* of handouts disbursed by candidates is no easy task. Estimates collected during our discussions with political workers however suggest that all four major candidates spent large amounts in 2014. The *Shiv Sena* candidate – a serious contender in the race¹¹ – clearly spent the least, “somewhere between 1 and 2 crore rupees” (i.e., somewhere between \$158k and \$316k). The BJP and the INC candidates spent far more (estimates vary from 1 to 5 crores for the BJP candidate, and from 2.5 to 6 crores for the INC candidate). The NCP candidate, who was *not* a contender at the beginning of the race – the NCP having no presence in *Savli* – but ended up with a vote share in the high single digits, surpassed all of these candidates, with estimates ranging from 9 to 16 crore rupees (that is, roughly from \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million).¹² Because party workers do not in practice differentiate between handouts and other campaign expenses, these sums include legal campaign expenses that are officially listed as campaign expenses in public reports (car rentals, chairs and stage rental for meeting, printing costs, etc.). Because the legal limit on spending was around \$50,000, it is likely that an overwhelming share of these amounts was spent on *illegal* handouts.

¹¹ I deliberately refrain from providing final vote shares to maintain anonymity.

¹² In addition to these amounts, many of our interlocutors confirmed that it is customary for candidates to pay a large sum of money to their party before or after they have been attributed the ticket. As far as I can tell, this was equally true of all four parties described in this section.

These estimates most likely are underestimates. They however indicate, as was echoed in many subsequent discussions with party workers, that *all* four main candidates spent large amounts compared to legal limits.

While much of this money was spent on salaries and wages against attendance at campaign events, cash distribution more directly related to candidates' intentions to influence the choices of voters also existed. This "*influence money*" was disbursed in at least two ways. According to workers, the way in which most "*influence money*" was disbursed in *Savli* was through lump payment to influential citizens (housing society presidents, temple or mosque association presidents, regional or caste association presidents, and union leaders). Accounts across party lines suggest that these transactions typically took place weeks ahead of the elections rather than at the last minute. If not the candidate herself, usually a very close associate of the candidate – often even a family member – arranged for the delivery of the cash.

Another, more basic form of "*influence money*" however existed in *Savli*, as elsewhere in India.¹³ In addition to targeted payments channeled directly from the candidate to influential citizens, money from several candidates trickled down party networks, which led to gifts in kind (especially liquor) and cash handouts being showered on voters in a relatively indiscriminate manner during the last few hours of the campaign. This indiscriminate distribution was restricted to very specific areas. Namely, the poorest areas and the ones in which voters were the least organized. Because this is the only form of influence that the authorities can really hope to crack down on, observing such distribution was extremely challenging, as the lanes of *Savli* were filled with police the nights before the poll. Discussions with party workers on Election Day however hinted at the fact that the much joked-about "rat meetings" during which such handouts are delivered had occurred at many locations in the hours leading to the opening of the booths.

While scholars in comparative politics have often thought of gifts and handouts as "vote-buying", and hence as a form of *quid pro quo* exchange, I reject this hypothesis. Instead I argue that handouts are proliferating precisely because long-term clientelism has become impossible and because parties increasingly lack a sense that they have a loyal base. Drawing on observations and interviews of low-level party operatives, I argue that handout-distribution strategies are best understood as prisoner's dilemmas in competitive politics such as *Savli*. Drawing on my description of (weak) party networks in the constituency, I show that most candidates cannot engage in the costly monitoring inherent to machine-based strategies, because they have no proper "machine" to work with. These candidates shower liberal amounts of cash on poor communities during campaigns for other, more strategic reasons. Even though party workers see this as a very uncertain strategy, I show that they also acknowledge that deviating from the handout strategy adopted by most other candidates is risky. The presence of multiple gift-givers, combined with weak information, makes gift-giving a dominant strategy.

¹³ Vij, Shivam. "An Election in Matsura", *The Caravan*, August 2010. Piliavski, Anastasia (2015). "India's demotic democracy and its 'depravities'", in *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*, ed. Anastasia Piliavski. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This explains why handouts may proliferate in the absence of political machines, and in the presence of high levels of political competition. In such a context, these handouts however constitute a strategic and defensive attempt at splitting the votes of handout-reactive voters rather than attempts at “vote-buying” *per se*.

Epilogue

Given the wide diversity of these alternative brokerage strategies – and the obviously problematic nature of some of them, it is obviously difficult to project simple optimism in normative terms about the future of political brokerage in *Savli* and beyond, in urban India.

On the one hand, a move towards more programmatic politics and towards improved forms of constituency service clearly sounds like a positive change, at least from the voters’ standpoint. At the same time, political workers’ concurrent emphasis on the need for last-minute influence highlights the fact that the demise of traditional forms of brokerage may bring forms of brokerage that are, in normative terms, even less desirable. The growing size of campaign events and the increasing role played by handouts, goodies and gifts in Indian campaigns signal that citizens-elites relations are becoming more equal than they once were, as voters now have to be courted if they are expected to turn out and vote. They however also signal that undue forms of influence may play a *growing* role in Indian elections.

Of course, these undue forms of brokerage are likely to disappear in the distant future, as these strategies become too costly or impractical. Whether and when they do is however hard to predict. One thing is certain though: which, if any, of these strategies ends up prevailing in the future will determine the kind of democracy that India really is.

V. Organization of the Book

The book is divided in 11 chapters, organized as such:

1. Chapter 1 - Political Brokerage in Urban India (Introduction, Question and Methodology)

In this chapter, I introduce the question; review the literature on campaigns and brokerage in American politics, comparative politics and Indian politics; I also introduce the qualitative methodology of the study and the different types of materials on which I draw to make inferences. Finally, I introduce my three field collaborators.

2. Chapter 2 - Context: A Brief History of Society and Politics in *Savli*.

In this chapter, I extensively – including through visual materials – introduce the context of the study, the *Savli* constituency of suburban Mumbai. While a substantial part of the chapter merely describes the history, society and socio-economic contexts in which most inhabitants of *Savli* live, most of the chapter insists on the *political* history of the neighborhood, and on how political brokerage used to function in *Savli* slums until the late 1980s (the constituency was mostly slums until then, and was dominated by a single party, the INC). To do this, given the absence of historical records on the matter, I will heavily rely on long interviews of senior and often retired party workers from all parties (that is workers 70 years old or older). This will set the stage for the more dynamic parts of my analysis in subsequent chapters.

PART 1: THE ACTORS OF BROKERAGE TODAY

The first part of the book (chapters 3 and 4) then describes the actors of political brokerage in *Savli* today.

3. Chapter 3 - *Who Brokers the Vote?*

The figure of the broker has so far mainly been embodied in comparative politics by the figure of the partisan broker (Stokes et al 2013). Yet candidates may not always be able to rely on neatly organized and hierarchical political organizations, and there may not even always be a specific category of loyal partisan actors in charge brokering the vote at the local level. Besides, many individuals operating as brokers may *simultaneously* approach voters during campaigns. Political brokerage may be, in other words, a messier business than has commonly been suggested.

In Chapter 3, I show that a great diversity of characters *simultaneously* played a role in brokering the votes in the two elections I closely observed, in 2014 and 2017: candidates and their entourage, party elites, on-the-ground workers operating at the lowest levels of politics, including a wide diversity of non-partisan

actors. I provide a typology of these actors and I describe the type of relationship that each of these different types of political workers maintains with party networks. To do this, I rely on observations of three competing political networks in a Mumbai ward during as well as long, repeated interviews of political workers from each of these networks.

The ethnographic approach on which I rely allows me to show that a wide diversity of local-level actors, most of whom exhibit few signs of partisanship outside of electoral periods, *simultaneously* engage in political brokerage during Mumbai elections. As a result, it is in this context difficult to identify who “brokers” are, precisely because many actors simultaneously engage in political brokerage, many of whom are not thought of, or do not explicitly think of themselves, as “brokers”. In this context, voters are unlikely to interact with a single broker belonging to a long-term partisan network, as most models of political brokerage have until now suggested. Many different individuals with rather flimsy and ephemeral political affiliations instead attempt to simultaneously influence their behavior, after they are temporarily contracted by campaigns to do so.

4. Chapter 4 - “Clever Voters” and Disappearing Vote Banks

In chapter 4, I switch my attention to the voters of *Savli*, and to what political workers have to say about them. Two parallel narratives emerge from my interviews of political workers and structure the chapter. The first one is the constant discourse among workers according to which voters cannot be manipulated anymore and have become exceedingly “clever” (meant as an insult, here) for the old tactics of partisan networks. As mentioned above, workers associate this to the rise in levels of education among the electorate and to the increasing economic independence of voters employed in the private sector. The second narrative relates to the slow but much-lamented disappearance of caste-based vote-banks. While workers recognize that caste and religion are still good predictors of one’s vote in the constituency, they also believe this to be a less automatic association than it once was (which my data, as well as Thachil and Auerbach’s data both corroborate). Because the electorate is more atomized, with individuals being increasingly independent from their kinship networks in political terms, political brokers now have to target individuals rather than families.

PART 2: FAILING CLIENTELISM AND THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

The second part of the book focuses on strategies. It first describes the difficulty of implementing a clientelistic strategy today (Chapter 5), before describing the mix of alternative strategies that political actors now appear to rely on instead (Chapters 6-8)

5. The Difficulty of Clientelism in Urban India

In this chapter, I explain why quid pro quo politics cannot work in urban India today (see pages 7-9 “The Argument” above for an outline), and why caste (or ethnic) vote banks are less secure than they once were.

6. Programmatic elements? Media Effects and the Rise of Party Brand

In this chapter, I describe how this changing context has prompted *some* parties – and chiefly among these, the ruling BJP party – to invest in a completely different form of political brokerage. Namely, a form of brokerage that transcends localism and mutual interdependence at the local level, and instead insist on a national-level party brand and on clearly identified personalities at the national level (in the case of the current BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Party president Amit Shah).

As part of this chapter, I also insist on the new role that social media appears to be playing in vote brokerage (described at greater length above, page 9-10), by describing the omnipresence of social media managers in Indian campaigns – I profile a few of these individuals –, including at the most local level.

7. “Obsessive Constituency Service”

In this chapter, I describe a second alternative brokerage strategy, which I refer to as “Obsessive constituency service” (described above, page 10-12)

8. “Looking Strong”, “Looking Connected”: The Importance of Campaigns

In this chapter, I describe the renewed importance of campaign events (described above, page 12-13)

9. The Darker Side of Political Brokerage: Black Money, Goodies and Handouts.

In this chapter, I describe the last alternative strategy that political candidates rely on in urban India: gifts and electoral handouts. (Described above, page 13-14, and in a separate article titled “The Cost of Political Competition”)

PART 4 - EPILOGUE

10. Beyond *Savli*: Political Brokerage Across India

In this chapter, I examine how *Savli* compares to other urban centers and to constituencies in other regions of India, and as such speculate about the external validity of my findings.

To do this, I draw on fieldwork in a rural block of Nanded district.

11. The Future of Political Brokerage in India

In the final chapter, I discuss in more general terms the future of political brokerage in India and speculate about possible scenarios.

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