Courting Votes Without Party Workers:

The Effect of Political Competition on Partisan Networks in Rural India

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Abstract

In most emerging democracies, political elites rely on local actors to influence voters ahead of elections. These actors are most often thought of as *partisan* actors in comparative politics. Yet these local-level actors (whom we refer to as "influencers" in this article) often are non-partisan in practice. In this article, we examine the extent to which elites and candidates rely on *partisan* vs. *non-partisan* networks to influence Indian voters. In much of India, as well as in a number of other emerging democracies, the ideology and the program of politicians matters less than their ability to distribute benefits; at the same time, ethnic identities are politically salient. In such context, we argue that the strength of partisan networks at the local level should be a function of political competitiveness: as political competition increases, local influencers are better off hedging between competing party networks, since this allows them to renegotiate their rent before elections. To test our argument, we rely on a large cross-referencing survey in Bihar, a state in which levels of political competition have been comparatively high for over two decades. Our design allows us to identify local influencers and to evaluate whether, and where, these actors are partisan. Consistent with our argument, our analyses show that local influence networks are overall weakly partisan in Bihar: a relatively small share of the local-level actors whom voters describe as "likely to influence [them]" ahead of elections are party members; besides, shared partisan preferences (i.e. copartisanship) do not strongly predict the connections between voters and influencers. A second set of results shows that levels of partisanship among influencers in our sample vary with local levels of competitiveness. This confirms the link between competitiveness and partisanship and suggests that strong party organizations are difficult to maintain when levels of competition rise.

1 Introduction

Elites influence the choices that voters make at the polls - that is, they have the ability to impact their decisions one way or another. The primary "influencers" are of course candidates themselves, as well as party leaders and other recognizable figures who attract media coverage. These higher-level actors typically influence the preferences of voters through their messages and actions in the public space. In most democracies, elites however also rely on the influence of actors who court votes *at the very local level*. Candidates and other higher-level elites rely on local actors to draw crowds to meetings, to canvass, to interpret political developments and eventually to influence voters. Depending on the context, the methods these local influencers rely on to influence voters vary: from legitimate discussion and canvassing to more problematic strategies such as gift-giving, or even coercion.

In this article, we are interested in the identity of these local actors rather than in their strategies. In emerging democracies - our other focus in this article -, local influencers have so far most prominently been portrayed as *partisan* actors, and especially as *clientelistic partisan* brokers (Magaloni, 2006; Stokes et al., 2013; Hicken, 2009; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Van de Walle, 2007). When influencers are *clientelistic partisan* brokers, parties develop permanent, deep-reaching networks on the ground. The actors in these networks invest time and resources in order to acquire a specialized knowledge of the electorate. This informational advantage enables them to identify and mobilize a group of co-partisans, and hence to incentivize a form of quid pro quo relationship - and in some cases enforce a form of "perverse accountability" - between politicians and voters. Whether and when elites have partisan troops on the ground to influence voters is thus normatively important. The strength of party networks at the very local level makes normatively problematic tactics more likely. If and when elites have partisan "machines" on the ground, citizens are more likely to fall prey to undue forms of influence and more likely to be captive of perverse equilibria.

In line with recent comparative evidence (Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Larreguy, Montiel and Querubin, 2016) showing that partisan actors often coexist with other influential actors at the local level, we argue that the partisan nature of these actors should not be taken for granted. More often than not, the basic scope conditions of elections in emerging democracies should instead lead to weak partisan networks on the ground. Specifically, when ideology matters less than politicians' ability to distribute benefits and when political competition has

evolved beyond one-party dominance, partisan organizations should have weak networks. This is because these conditions set the stage for the emergence of a market for influence at the local level, in which a multitude of non-ideological local actors should hedge between competing forces, leading to fluctuant and uncertain partisan affiliations on the ground.

We develop and test our argument in the context of rural India. Qualitative evidence on rural India suggests that non-partisan actors often wield influence influence at the local level (Manor, 2000; Krishna, 2002; Bussell, 2014; Björkman, 2014; Kruks-Wisner, 2015; Chauchard, 2016). Our main objective in this article is to explain this puzzling variation in the profiles of these local actors in rural India: when and why are the local actors who influence voters on behalf of elites and candidates *partisan*?

To address this question, we develop a simple argument to explain variation in the partisanship of the individuals who wield influence at the very local level - whom we simply refer as "influencers" hereafter. The scope conditions of our argument approximate those of rural India, but extend to a number of other emerging democracies. In most of rural India, the ideology and the program of politicians matters less than their ability to distribute benefits; at the same time, ethnic differences are politically salient. In such context, we argue that the strength of partisan networks at the local level should be a function of political competitiveness: as political competition increases, local influencers are better off hedging between competing party networks, since this allows them to renegotiate their rent before elections. Political competition thus makes if either impossible or very costly for elites to maintain strong and broad-reaching partisan organizations on the ground. Since candidates and elites may alternatively rely on other, non-partisan networks in order to reach and mobilize voters, the strength of partisan organizations decreases on the ground, and ethnic ties replace partisan ties as the primary avenue for mobilization and influence.

We test this argument in the context of Bihar, the second largest Indian state and a state whose population approximates that of the Philippines. Levels of political competitiveness have overall been high for over two decades in Bihar, however unequally across the state. This context allows us to evaluate the partisan nature of local influencers in a politically competitive context, but also to evaluate whether local differences in levels of political competition affect their degree of partisanship.

In order to identify local influencers, we do not rely on pre-defined categories. We instead ask a large sample of Bihari voters to identify individuals whom they believe to be influential

around them, at the polling booth area level (roughly the equivalent of a precinct). We subsequently select and interview the most influential of these actors. This data allows us to establish the profile of local influencers and to examine *how partisan* they are - concretely, the extent to which they are formally affiliated to a political party. The fact that we interview both influencers and voters about each other also allows us to cross-reference the characteristics these actors, and hence to evaluate the extent to which copartisanship (or coethnicity) predicts the connections between voters and influencers.[1] Altogether, this allows us to evaluate the extent to which voters are influenced along partisan lines in Bihar.

Consistent with our argument, our analyses show that influence does not follow partisan lines in Bihar. A relatively small share of the individuals who influence voters ahead of elections at the local level are party members; by contrast, a majority of the local actors identified as being influential at the local level are non-partisan "social workers". This suggests that elites rarely have influential partisan agents on the ground, and that the most convincing way for them to reach and influence voters would be to rely on non-partisan actors. The likelihood that prominent influencers are formally affiliated to parties however varies with levels of competitiveness: drawing on booth-level electoral data, we show that levels of partisanship among the influencers we select vary with political competitiveness at the booth level. More generally speaking, we show that copartisanship does not constitute the main principle around which villagers are influenced, as coethnicity more strongly explains the links between local influencers and villagers. Mirroring our findings on party membership, the strength of copartisan ties between influencers and voters however appears to vary with levels of political competition. As such, these results confirm that coethnicity - rather than copartisanship - remains the main dimension along which voters are influenced in India. Altogether, these results confirm that influence does not flow along partisan lines, and that the strength of partisan ties at the local level varies with levels of political competition.

These results contribute to a number of literatures. Identifying the profile of influencers provides us with unique evidence on the micro-level mechanics of electoral politics in Bihar, and beyond, in rural India. To the best of our knowledge, our study constitutes the first attempt to identify the actors who influence voters on the ground on a systematic basis, and to understand variation in their strategies. This differentiates our effort from comparative and India-

[1] Practically, we evaluate the extent to which shared partisan preferences in past elections (i.e. copartisanship) predicts the identity of the individuals that voters describe as "likely to influence [them]" ahead of future elections.

specific works on "brokers", who typically assume that individuals occupying a specific position in society wield influence on voters. Our results shows that these assumptions may be wrong, or at least that they miss an important nuance: the most influential actors at the very local level (i.e., those in touch with voters) are informal and often unaffiliated actors, hence actors whose profile cannot be easily assumed. On the other hand, this allows us to show that the "social workers" described in the literature on claim-making have electoral influence, beyond (or maybe in return for) the assistance they provide to citizens. These results also contribute to the comparative literature on clientelism and distributive strategies. We develop an argument that explains the puzzling variation in the profile of local intermediaries across the range of contexts in which these actors exist, by emphasizing the existence of a market for influence at the local level rather than assuming that rigid organizations always exist. Our empirical analyses in turn suggests that partisan organizations are likely to become less stable when politics becomes competitive. This likely explains the diversity in the degree of partisanship of "brokers" and other related intermediaries described in the comparative literature on elections in emerging democracies. It further implies that *quid pro quo* politics may coexist with weakly structured parties.

2 Theory: Political Competition and Influence at the Local Level

Who do elites rely on to influence voters on the ground in rural India? To what extent should we expect them to be partisan, and under what conditions?

To address these questions, we develop a simple argument to explain variations in the partisanship of influencers in political contexts whose scope conditions approximate those of rural India. We thus consider democratic systems in which voters distinguish parties on their relative abilities to distribute economic benefits rather than concrete policy or ideological differences (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). It is commonly argued that this assumption characterizes party politics in much of the developing world, including substantial parts of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia (*Ibid*). In keeping with our primary interest in rural India, we also focus on polities in which ethnic differences are politically and socially salient. As a result, these intermediaries may rely on copartisanship *or* coethnicity, or a mix of these strategies, as they develop their coalition. While these scope conditions approximate those of rural India, they also likely correspond to the scope conditions for citizens-elites relations in a number of other

contexts, across emerging democracies. In such context, we argue that the strength of partisan networks at the local level should be a function of political competitiveness.

2.1 Influence at the Local Level: The Strong Party Model

Over the past decade, much has been written in comparative politics about "brokers" and other local-level actors whom candidates and party networks employ to draw crowds to meetings, canvass and eventually attempt to convince voters. These actors have been most frequently thought of as *partisan* actors. Works on Peronist networks in Buenos Aires (Stokes et al., 2013) and PRI networks in Mexico (Magaloni, 2006) exemplify this trend. In this model, parties develop permanent, pyramidal, and deep-reaching networks on the ground.

In this model, influencers are partisan actors or "brokers"[2]. In this case, elites invest in party-building - that is, they invest time and resources in ensuring that their party has permanent, established workers on the ground, directly in touch with voters, and that a sufficient number of these actors exist. They also make sure that these networks of workers cover as much territory as possible and that these workers are the main actors engaging in political brokerage on the ground. In this case - which we will refer to as the "strong party model" hereafter -, one should thus expect that the main influencers at the local level would be committed, long-term party members.[3]

This model also, more generally implies that influence should flow along partisan lines at the local-level. That is, influencers should be especially likely to influence actors who share their partisan preferences, i.e. their copartisans. By this, we concretely mean two things. We first mean that they should be *better* able to influence their copartisans than they are to influence other voters. Second, we mean that they should be *better* able to influence their copartisans than they are to any other salient groups in the population. In rural India, on which we focus on this article, ethnicity (often, caste) plays an especially central role in the organization of social life. We accordingly think of strong partisan networks as networks that transcend (or go beyond) ethnic networks. In other words, networks that are more strongly organized around co-partisanship than they are organized around co-ethnicity.

[2]The term "broker" has most prominently been used to refer to partisan actors in comparative politics. For this reason, we use it to refer to party brokers. As should be clear, our influencers may or may not be brokers.

[3]What is commonly referred to in India as "party cadres".

2.2 The Evidence: Local Influencers Are Frequently Non-partisan

Despite the relative prominence of this ideal-type in comparative politics, empirical evidence suggests that other, less rigid types of organizations often exist on the ground. Parties which do not have established local actors on the ground at the most local levels of politics may instead temporarily ally themselves or hire more opportunistic local actors. These individuals may have some sway over voters because of their social function at the local level, or because they are closely connected to voters, rather than because of their affiliation to a party network.

Empirically, many of the individuals described as wielding influence in the literature on distributive politics do not appear to be partisan actors. In the comparative literature, this category sometimes also includes officials elected in local government (Pattenden 2011; Szwarcberg 2016; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013), professional, non-partisan vote brokers (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin 2016), state employees (Mares and Young 2016) and union officials (Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015). In India, a diversity of locally influential individuals likely exist. The literature on claim-making (Manor, 2000; Krishna, 2002; Auerbach, 2013; Kruks-Wisner, 2015)[4] in rural India has shown that citizens often require the assistance of local intermediaries who are not formal party workers. While some of these actors have partisan affiliations, many others derive their power from other traits such as shared ethnicity with citizens or other existing social relations (Manor 2000, Krishna 2002).

Assuming that these individuals were the most likely to influence voters around election time - an empirical question we address further down -, this would suggest that influence at the local level may not flow along partisan lines. In this case, elites and candidates would require a strategy different than the strategy described in the strong party model described above, in which election-time influence flows through *partisan* agents established at the local level. In this model, local influencers may not be partisan and they may also use ethnic or other non-partisan ties as the primary basis for their influence.

2.3 Explaining the Variation in Partisanship: The Role of Competitiveness

Both the comparative and the India-specific evidence suggest that the strong party model that has attracted much attention in comparative politics may be rare in practice. In contexts such as India, influencers may neither be formally affiliated to parties nor their ability to influence rely

[4]These informal actors have been described as fixers, dalals, or naya netas, among other terms.

on long-lasting copartisan ties. What explains this variation? When and why should we expect local influencers to be affiliated to parties and to build their network around copartisan ties?

We argue that the answer to this question depends on the degree of political competitiveness that exists in the political system. When politics is neither about ideology nor programmatic politics, and when ethnicity is salient, competitive politics makes the emergence and the survival of strong partisan networks practically impossible on the ground. A stylized exposition of influencers-elites relations under conditions of competitive and non-competitive politics explains why this should be the case.

When a single party dominates, influencers get a fixed rent from elites for their work, since there is no competition for their services. In this context, elites within the single party have no trouble convincing local influencers to flock to the party and become formal members of the organization. Maintaining such affiliation guarantees greater access to party elites in the short run; it is also a safe bet in the longer run, as the dominant party is (by definition) unlikely to lose the next elections. The fact that many influencers flock to the party allows party elites to build an extensive and far-reaching organization, in which each partisan influencer at the lowest level of the organization is in charge of a small number of voters. Since voters themselves have an incentive to join the party, influencers are formally partisan actors whose networks mainly include copartisans.[5]

As documented in the scholarship on party machines (Greene 2011), maintaining a strong party organization requires massive resources, and it requires exponentially larger resources in an ethnically fragmented context, as ethnic divisions help create the conditions for factionalism, splintering and centripetal pressures (Brass 1965). In the short run, leaders may be able to curb these pressures at a cost. But this will be a difficult equilibrium to maintain in the long run. As a result, a strong partisan organization is unlikely to survive and to maintain roots on the ground in this context.

Suppose now that a shock alters this equilibrium and generates the condition for more political competition. If and when real political competition exists, the incentives of local influencers change. Since they are not strongly ideological actors in this context, they quickly develop significant abilities to bargain with elites and to renegotiate the terms of their agreements with them. In this context, high-quality local influencers should be better off hedging between com-

[5]by *mainly*, we mean here to say that they include copartisans more than they include any other group of citizens including coethnics.

peting party networks. Refraining from affiliating themselves provides them with two advantages. It first allows them to more efficiently renegotiate their rents before elections. Influencers without affiliations can credibly propose their services and access to their network to any candidate before elections. Recent qualitative work on Indian campaigns suggest that these actors commonly do so (Berenschot 2011, Bjorkman 2014, Chauchard 2017). Second, hedging between competing party networks increases the chance that they will maintain access to the now uncertain winner of the next elections. Besides, since they are not formally affiliated to a party in the long run, the networks these individuals develop do not follow the lines of copartisanship - that is, they do not merely help and later influence citizens with whom they share partisan preferences. Instead, they revert to building networks along the lines of social organizations other than partisanship. In polities in which ethnicity is politically salient, this implies that ethnicity is likely to constitute a particularly natural basis around which these actors would organize their network. In this case, it is thus to be expected that coethnic ties would more strongly predict influencers-citizens relations than copartisan ones.

These market incentives make it much more difficult for incumbents to build a strong pyramidal organization reaching all the way down to voters, as it means that the individuals at the lowest echelons of their organization now have multiple partisan options, and a clear incentive to hedge. Of course, party elites may attempt to make local influencers' loyalty worth their sacrifice. If they ensure that the returns influencers receive when they are loyal party workers surpass those they might receive by behaving opportunistically at election time, they may be able to keep these actors in the fold. But importantly, this represents additional investments that party elites may not be able to recoup, and hence may not want to make in the first place (or may not be able to make). This suggests that political competition may eventually drive party elites themselves to refrain from engaging in the strong party strategy. The reason is simple: when influencers and workers have the ability to sell their influence networks to several party networks, the cost of building an organization quickly becomes too high. Since not building a strong, permanent organization does not entirely deprive them of the ability to influence voters - many more influencers should in fact propose their services once politics is competitive -, it does become preferable for them to rely on non-partisan actors. As a result, the strength of partisan organizations and partisan strategies decreases on the ground.

Altogether, this suggests that building a dominant party with extensive roots on the ground, along the lines of the machine parties showcased in much of the literature on clientelism (es-

pecially so in Argentina), should be more difficult or more costly in ethnically diverse democracies. While strong organizations might exist in this context - for instance in the wake of independence, when a single party has led the charge against the colonial power -, a more competitive party system should eventually be expected to emerge (Ferree 2013). Local influencers are in this competitive context less likely to be affiliated to a party, and influence is less likely to flow along partisan lines. Furthermore, as local party competitiveness grows, these influencers should be less likely to behave in a partisan manner.

This suggests the following hypotheses, which we test in the rest of this article:

1. Local influencers decreasingly affiliate to parties as levels of political competition increase. Concretely, this leads us to test two propositions:

    a. In polities in which levels of political competition are high, few influencers should be affiliated to parties.

    b. Influencers should be decreasingly affiliated to parties as *local* levels of political competition increase.

2. Influence networks decreasingly rely on copartisan ties (as compared to coethnic ties) as levels of political competition increase. Concretely, this leads us to test two additional propositions:

    a. In polities in which levels of political competition are high, influence networks rely on coethnic ties more than they rely on copartisan ties.

    b. Influence networks decreasingly rely on copartisan ties (as compared to coethnic ties) as *local* levels of political competition increase.

3 Research Design

In order to test these hypotheses, we implement a research design that allows us to identify local influencers, and to interview them along with voters as part of a cross-referencing exercise.

3.1 The Context: Bihar

This project was conducted in the Indian state of Bihar 9 to 12 monhts after the 2015 state elections. Bihar is known as a state where caste and religion are highly salient social cleavages, as

well as a state in which political mobilization has for a few decades mostly taken place along caste lines (Witsoe 2013, Vaishnav 2017). As a result of these dynamics, levels of political competitiveness have overall been high for over two decades in Bihar. In that sense, Bihar differs from a few cases across India, in which one single party has clearly dominated for the past decade (West Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat), but resembles most other states.

Until recently, Bihar politics was largely characterized by competition between the Rashtriya Janata Dal [RJD] and the Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)]. The RJD, led by the charismatic Lalu Prasad Yadav, is often described as having a core base made of Yadavs and Muslims, the so-called "Y-M coalition," governed the state from 1997 to 2005.[6] The JD(U), which has ruled the state since, is largely associated with "other backward castes" (OBCs) outside of the Yadav population. In the 2015 election, once bitter foes RJD and JD(U) joined forces in a pre-electoral alliance to contest against an ascendant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party largely associated with upper caste Hindus in India.

As we show below, levels of competition however vary extensively across the state, as each of these parties has over the years consolidated "strongholds" at the local level. This context thus allows us to evaluate the partisan nature of influence networks in a politically competitive context, but also to evaluate whether local differences in levels of political competition (within Bihar) affect the degree of partisanship of local influence networks.

3.2 Sampling

In this project, we identify influencers at the most local level of politics in Bihar. In order to do so, we selected the polling booth area (PBA) as the lowest sampling unit for the study. State-level legislators, or Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), are selected from assembly constituencies (ACs). Each AC contains approximately 200 polling booths, and polling booths average approximately 1000 voters. The polling booth is the smallest political unit in India (much like a precinct in the United States). Large villages may contain multiple polling booths, while smaller villages are typically represented by a single one. As such, the PBA is a political unit often smaller than a village and thus characterized by extremely dense social relations.

We sampled polling booths from 3 districts of Bihar: Buxar, Nalanda, and Vaishali. These were chosen to ensure some minimal levels of cultural, political and socio-economic diversity in

[6]Mr. Yadav is widely considered as one of the key faces of the "post-Mandal era" in Indian politics, where certain backward castes (particularly Yadavs) gained greater political power and representation in the system (**?**).

our sample.[7] In each of these three districts, we then randomly selected three blocks.[8] In each of these blocks, we randomly selected polling booths using a variant of systematic random sampling.[9] The outcome of this process was a random sample of 179 PBAs over 9 blocks and 3 districts of Bihar.

3.3 Phase 1: Identifying Influencers

In the first phase of our study, we identified influencers in each selected polling booth area (PBA).

3.3.1 Generating a 'Long List' of Influencers

To generate such a list, the research team asked the following three questions in at least five locations within each selected PBA, in the following order:[10]

1. *Who among residents of this area is most influential?*
2. *When it comes to social issues, whose opinions do people listen to the most around here?*
3. *When people seek to solve small problems outside the family in this village without approaching the panchayat or political party, who do they go to?*

We deliberately posed questions that were *not* specific to politics, so as to generate as large an initial list (hereafter "long list") as possible.[11] Although the research team was tasked with

[7] Nalanda is located about 50-100 km south of Patna (the state capital) and is a Magahi-speaking area. Buxar is located about 125-200 km west of Patna and is located in the Bhojpuri-speaking area of the state. Finally, Vaishali is located just across the Ganges River, north of Patna, and is located in the Maithili-speaking area of the state.

[8] In each district, we excluded a small number of blocks that would be prone to flooding (which would have made the work of the research team complicated during the rainy season) as well as several blocks that were not easily accessible by road, prior to random sampling. This was to ensure the security of survey teams as well as to guarantee that our implementing partner (SUNAI) would be able to implement the complex protocol detailed below in a timely fashion.

[9] We broke the list of polling booths in each block into 40 intervals with approximately the same number of polling booths, randomly selected whether we would take odd or even numbered intervals (i.e., first, third,..., or second, fourth,...), and then we randomly selected a polling booth in each interval. Each interval contained consecutive "polling booth numbers" which means that they are likely spatially clustered. This protocol thus minimizes the likelihood that we select neighboring polling booths.

[10] These areas were by design dispersed within the booth, based on information about the caste/religious composition of the booth.

[11] The 3rd question specifically excludes partisan and elected individuals - so as to ensure that villagers do not feel compelled to focus on these actors. The first two questions however potentially include these individuals. As a result, villagers named both elected or partisan individuals as well as more informal actors, usually known as "social workers".

collecting at least ten different names in each PBA, they collected over fifteen on average, suggesting that enumerators typically had no trouble collecting names. Nonetheless, if fewer than ten names were collected at the end of this process, the research team visited additional locations (within the PBA) until the list included at least ten names. Obtaining at least ten names in such a small area ensures that we obtain a relatively exhaustive list of intermediaries, including elected officials, local party leaders and other potentially influential individuals at the local level, such as "social workers." As they obtained names in response to these questions, the research team asked for a few additional details about each of the individuals named (their phone number, whether they hold a position in a political party, whether they are elected in any political or non-political local body, as well as their profession, age, and community/social group). The research team used their responses to create a 'long list' of influencers which we subsequently used in our voter survey.

3.3.2 Selecting Influencers

Using official voters' lists, we then randomly sampled twelve male voters in each PBA.[12]

We first asked these voters to report information about their caste, education, occupation, living conditions and political preferences, which we use in our statistical analyses below. Most importantly, we asked these respondents to choose the two most influential individuals from the 'long list' of influencers described above. Specifically, we asked each respondent to name two individuals on the long list of influencers in response to the following question(s): *Which two of these people would you (you personally) be most likely to listen to and follow? Which of these would most influence you?* To illustrate this somewhat abstract concept of influence and anchor it in the context of electoral politics, interviewers followed up with the following statement: "if you had to choose between two candidates in elections, which of these individuals would most likely affect your decision?". Since it is unlikely that our relatively exhaustive "long list" of influencers missed the most influential individuals at the PBA-level, and since a random sample of voters answered this question, we are confident that this process allows us to select the most popular influencers at the PBA-level.

We select the two most popular influencers within each PBA. To select our first influencer, we simply selected the most popular individual on the list (that is, the influencer that had been

[12]While we were interested in differential response by gender, we chose not to select female respondents to minimize risks, insofar as we feared that some responses provided by female respondents could put them at risk. In practice, we used a Kish table to randomly select one male voter from the set of male voters in the household.

nominated as influential by the largest number of respondents within in each PBA). We went down the list in order of popularity if he or she was unavailable or if did not provide consent.[13] We refer to the first chosen influencer as the $T1$ influencer below. The second influencer (the $T2$ influencer) was the most popular influencer among those remaining on the list.[14]

In addition to using these data to determine who the most popular influencers are, we code whether or not each voter selected each of the two selected influencers ($T1$ and/or $T2$). Matching what we know on the political preferences of each of these voters to what we know about influencers, this helps us evaluate the extent to which copartisanship and coethnicity predict the identity of the local characters that voters identify as being the most likely to influence them. Practically, we define "copartisanship" as shared political preferences (i.e., vote choice) over the past two major elections.[15] We present these analyses in section 5 below.

This cross-referencing design, building on Schneider and Sircar (2015), presents a number of advantages. It first allows us to understand the networks and the preferences of real-world voters and influencers, as opposed to hypothetical characters presented as part of vignettes. Second, it helps circumvent social desirability concerns, insofar as it allows us to make inferences as to whether ethnicity influences the behaviors of influencers without having to explicitly mention the ethnicity or the partisanship of voters.[16]

Note that in addition to selecting two "real" influencers ($T1$ and/or $T2$), we also selected a 3rd "benchmark influencer" (the $T3$ influencer hereafter) in each PBA, who was the head of household of a randomly drawn household within the polling booth area. This character provides a benchmark against which we can assess the profiles of "real influencers" (i.e. $T1$ and $T2$ influencers) selected by our sample of voters.

[13] If there was a tie in popularity, the research team randomly picked one of the (equally) popular individuals.

[14] As above, if there is a tie in popularity, the team randomly picked among equally popular individuals. Note that in our original design, an additional requirement existed for T2: they had to be currently unelected. This allowed us to ensure that we did not only select influencers who currently are (or just were) elected. Note that in a vast majority of cases analyzed here, we however do not select a single elected individual, as the two most popular influencers, as defined here, often are unelected. Because of this, the difference between our T1 and T2 influencers is best thought as a mere difference in popularity (with T1 being named as the most "influential", and T2 being named as the second most "influential"). Thus, we always pick two different individuals, and at least one individual who is not elected.

[15] Our results are robust to several alternative definitions of this variable.

[16] An influencer may, for instance, be reticent to directly reveal that he is more willing to help a coethnic if ethnicity is explicitly mentioned, whereas in this study the researcher can simply cross-reference an influencer's willingness to help with a measure of coethnicity obtained from the voter and influencer surveys.

3.4 Phase 2: Interviewing Influencers and Cross-Referencing

In the second phase of the study, we conducted interviews with our selected influencers. This allowed us to collect basic demographic information on these two influencers and hence to "cross-reference" the profile of these influencers with voter information from phase 1. This cross-referencing allows us to measure whether a voter is copartisan and/or a coethnic of the influencer, by matching information on caste and partisan support across voter and influencer surveys. These influencer interviews also allows us to generate measures indicative of the degree of influence of $T1$ and $T2$ over specific voter profiles. While we do not rely on these measures in this paper, a companion paper (Sircar and Chauchard 2017) analyses responses to these items.

Before we test our hypotheses, it is useful to provide descriptive data on these actors. In order to understand who our selected influencers are, table 1 (as well as Figures 1 and 2) compare their characteristics to that of the benchmark influencer ($T3$) and that of the general population we sample. As can be seen from these data, our benchmark $T3$ influencer is representative of the overall population sampled ("voters") across a wide array of socio-economic characteristics.

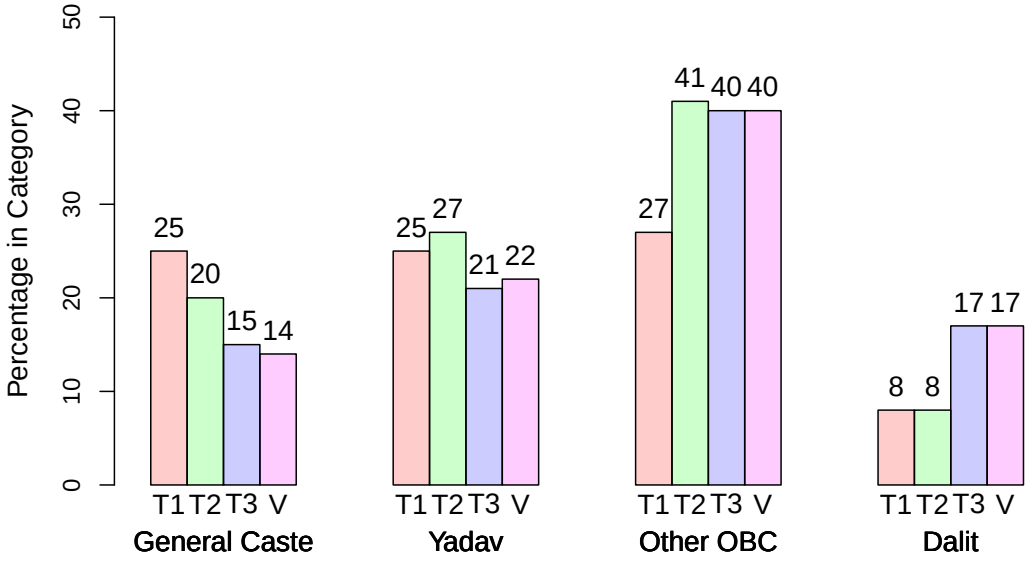
	T1	**T2**	**T3**	**Voter**
Upper Caste (%)	25	20	15	14
Yadav (%)	25	27	21	22
Other OBCs (%)	37	41	40	40
SC (%)	8	8	17	17
Under Class 5 (%)	7	12	35	32
Class 5 Pass (%)	6	6	13	14
Class 8 Pass (%)	7	12	18	15
Class 10 Pass (%)	26	23	18	18
Class 12 Pass (%)	53	48	16	21
Pucca House (%)	84	75	56	58
Number of Rooms (Avg.)	5.13	5.16	3.38	3.35
Owns Motorized Vehicle (%)	56	49	22	21
Age (Avg.)	50.42	51.47	48.50	45.35
Persons visiting/week	29	19	N/A	N/A
Total N	179	179	179	2148

Table 1: Comparing Voter and Influencer Attributes

A cursory look at the data demonstrates that the selected $T1$ and $T2$ influencers are overall "higher status" individuals, compared to the population, and that this is especially true of $T1$. As compared to the general population, a significantly higher percentage of influencers belong

to upper castes (and markedly fewer belong to the Scheduled Castes); they are much more educated (i.e. many more have passed class 12); they also tend to live in larger houses (as measured by the number of rooms); finally, they are much more likely to live in permanent (*pucca*) structures and to own a motorized vehicle. These data also confirm that these actors play a central role in village life, and that we do select relatively connected individuals: $T1$ influencers report an average of 29.48 visitors per week, whereas $T2$ influencers report an average of 19.45 visitors per week.[17]

Figure 1: Caste Profile of Influencers

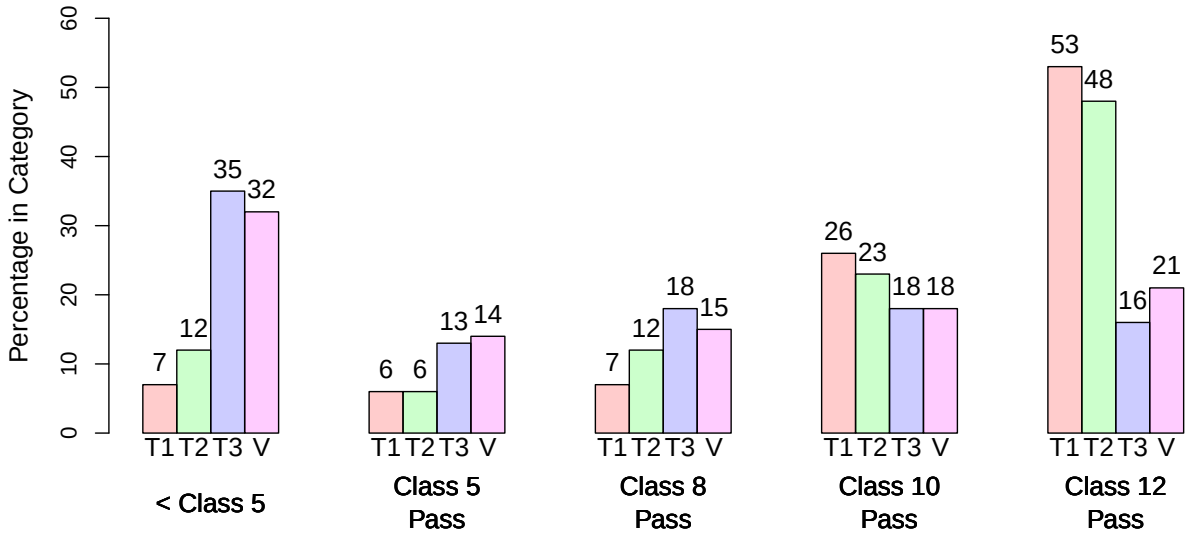


3.5 Measuring Competitiveness at the local level

Since our central objective in this article is to evaluate the effect of political competitiveness on the partisanship of local influencers, we in addition measure political competitiveness in each of the PBAs in which our study took place. The Election Commission of India (ECI) publishes electoral results at the polling booth level (much like precinct-level results in the United States). Using these vote tallies, we calculate our measure of political competition, *margin of victory* (MOV). The MOV is defined as the difference in vote share between the top two vote-getters in the polling booth, and, thus, a low MOV corresponds to a competitive scenario.

[17] We simply asked influencers to estimate the number of villagers that visited them every week to seek their help. These relatively large numbers, although they need to be taken with a grain of salt since they are self reports, confirm that the individuals we select are intermediaries frequently described as "social workers" or *dalals* in the scholarship on state-citizens relations in India.

Figure 2: Education Levels Among Influencers



Overall, there is quite a bit of variation within our sample on competitiveness, with the MOV ranging from nearly 0 to 84%. About 10 percent of the sample has an MOV of 6% or lower, and the median is at 32%.

4 Testing H1: To What Extent Are Influencers Affiliated to Parties?

In this section, we evaluate the share of partisan actors in our sample of selected influencers across Bihar. This allows us to test H1a. We then test whether variations in local levels of competitiveness affect the degree of partisanship of influence networks, in order to test H1b.

4.1 How Many Influencers Are Affiliated to Parties?

Because it is not clear in practice what should count as a "partisan actor", we look at various possible definitions of partisanship in our data.

Our survey of influencers includes three variables that we can leverage: whether the influencer reports being a "supporter" of any party, whether he is a formal "member" of any party, and whether he is a "position-holder" [meaning that they has official responsibilities in that party, beyond simple membership]. Because merely "supporting" a party does not reflect a strong, long-term commitment to a party, we do not focus on this measure. Because the number of position-holders is in turn, by definition limited (and hence would be a very conservative

measure of the presence of parties at the local level), our analyses in this manuscript focus on party *membership*[18].

	T1	T2	T3
Party Supporter	66	68	41
Party Member	38	33	18
Party Position-holder	13	11	3
Stable Party Supporter	49	56	37
Stable Party Member	27	28	17
Stable Party Position-holder	9	9	2
Party Supporter (of a main party)	61	59	38
Party Member (of a main party)	33	29	16
Party Position-holder (in a main party)	13	11	3
Party Supporter (in the locally dominant party)	32	35	21
Party Member (in the locally dominant party)	19	16	9
Party Position-holder (in the locally dominant party)	6	5	0
Total	176	176	176

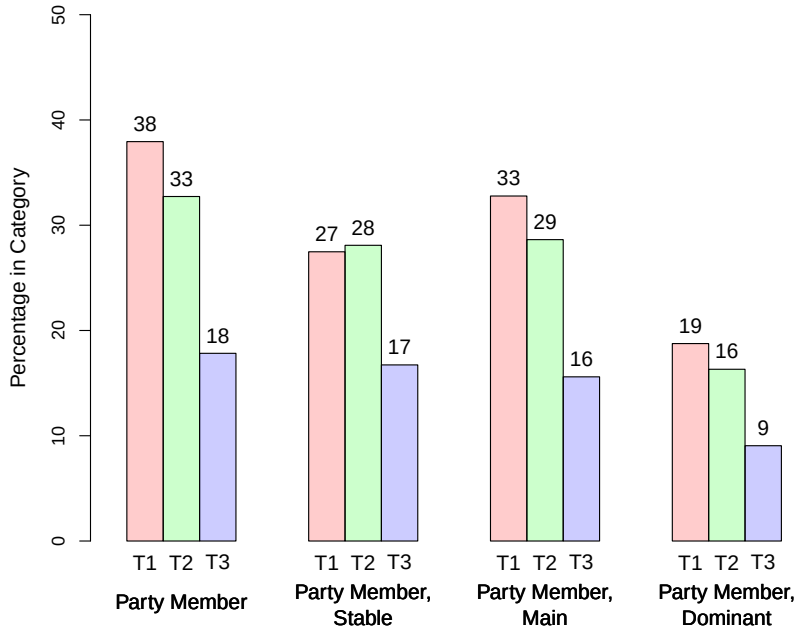
Table 2: Influencer Attributes (Percent displaying attribute in each category)

Table 2 below provide the share of influencers with each of these characteristics in our data. As can be seen from the table, we can also restrict these measures to being a supporter or member *in one of the main parties* that are likely to have networks on the ground throughout the state (the BJP, the RJD and the JD(U)), and to the party in this list that is dominant in each polling booth (as measured by the identity of the party that won the parliamentary seat each polling booth are is located in during the October 2015 state elections). This allows us to provide measures of the shares of partisan actors if we exclude actors working for smaller parties or parties that are extremely unlikely to be competitive at the polls, or to matter locally.

As can be seen from Table 2, the share of partisan actors among our "real" influencers (T1 or T2) is small. About a third of the individuals named as being the most likely to be influential at the local level are not even willing to self-describe as being *supporters* of a party. This is in our opinion a first bit of evidence for the weakness of party networks, considering the fact that the 2015 elections happened less than a year before these interviews took place, and in light of the fact that there are no temporal implications to being a supporter of a party (i.e. it does not imply any sort of commitment to a party). Besides, this is only 20 percent more than what the rate is among common villagers (T3 interviewee, here).

[18]It should however be noted that our results do not differ if we use "position-holder" instead of "member"

Figure 3: Percentage of Party Members Among Influencers



Only about a third of T1 and T2 influencers in turn report being *members* of parties. These are relatively likely to hold some sort of positions within their respective parties (as seen from statistics about position-holders), but the overall numbers remain low. This suggests that an overwhelming *majority* of polling booth areas did not name a partisan actor when asked to identify who would be the most influential actors (importantly, a majority of PBA-specific "long list of influencers" did not even include a single party member). These numbers get even smaller when we restrict our sample to members in the main parties or in the dominant party at the local level, as in Figure 3 (and table 2). While this is not reported in the table, note in addition that a substantial share of these party members or position-holders (more than 25 percent of them) recognize in a separate question having been supporters of one of the *other* parties in the recent past. This testifies to the overall dearth of committed, long-term party workers on the ground.

Altogether, these different statistics in our opinion indicate that party networks rarely extend to the most local level of politics - the one we study here -, and that most common voters in rural Bihar are rarely - if ever - likely to be in contact, let alone be influenced, by a party member. This in and of itself should suggest that none of the main parties in Bihar have what clientelism scholars refer to as "machines" on the ground. They do have a limited number of in-

fluential party members on the ground; but these are overall probably too few to generate the workforce that they need to efficiently broker the votes for candidates and other elites. We take this to be consistent with our argument presented in section 2 (and to provide support for H1a): in competitive polities such as Bihar, few influencers are formally affiliated to parties.

4.2 Who is Influential in Rural India?

If local influencers rarely are partisan actors, what is their profile? While this is beyond the scope of this paper - we address this question at length in a companion paper, appendix A below provides a brief summary of our findings on this point. These findings suggest that the most influential individuals at the local level in rural India are likely to be the informal actors, often referred to as "social workers", who provide much needed intermediation between Indian citizens and the State (Krishna 2002, Kruks-Wisner 2018). By contrast, they are unlikely to be elected officials (as suggested by Dunning and Nilekani 2013) or traditional upper-caste leaders.

4.3 Does Competitiveness Change the Likelihood that Influencers Affiliate to Parties?

What explains the fact that some influencers are party members while others are not? We argue that levels of competitiveness may explain this puzzling variation.

In order to evaluate whether local variations in levels of political competitiveness change the likelihood that influencers affiliate to parties (and hence test H1b), we look at the relationship between competitiveness of the polling booth according to our MOV measure and percentage of the selected influencers who are a member of any party. Although the analysis is not particularly sensitive to cutoffs, we define a competitive polling booth to be one in which the MOV is less than 5% (approximately the 10% most competitive constituencies), and a non-competitive one to be one in which MOV is greater than 30% (approximately greater than median level of competitiveness). To be precise, when the MOV is low and a polling booth highly competitive, the influencer can credibly renegotiate terms with each party as small changes at the polling booth level may push one party over another. When there is near certainty as to the winner, the ability to renegotiate in this manner is diminished.

Table 3 displays the percentage of party members by T1, T2, separately and combined, broken down by polling booth level competitiveness. The table demonstrates that there is a strong

negative relationship between party membership and polling booth level competitiveness. The difference in the percentage in each column is highly statistically significant according to a two-sample t-test ($p < 0.01$).

Table 3: Percentage of Party Members vs. Competitiveness

	T1	**T2**	**T1 + T2**
Competitive	15	23	19
Non-Competitive	34	32	33

Thus, we find strong evidence confirming H1b: in PBAs in which levels of competition are higher, influencers are less likely to declare being party members. While this cannot be interpreted as causal evidence suggesting that political competition increases or decreases partisanship, it suggests that competition and partisanship evolve one with another.[19]

5 Testing H2: To What Extent Does Copartisanship Structure Local Networks?

Voters may be influenced along partisan lines in rural India even if the individuals they identify as likely to influence them are not formal party members. While we have no reason to doubt that it would be, party membership may somehow be an imperfect measure of the degree of partisan commitment of these local actors. Accordingly, we more generally explore whether copartisan ties (compared to ethnic ties) predict the connections between influencers and voters (allowing us to test H2a), and whether local levels of competitiveness affect the extent to which copartisanship matters (allowing us to test H2b).

5.1 Copartisanship and Coethnicity Across Bihar

In the following analyses, our primary dependent variable of interest is whether each sampled voter named either of the influencers that we ended up selecting (either $T1$ or $T2$). In each polling booth, a voter may have named both, one, or neither of these selected influencers as "likely to influence [them]". In the following analyses, we are interested in whether the existence of coethnic or copartisan ties affect the likelihood of nominating the selected influencer,

[19] We return to the causality question in our discussion below.

and the relative importance of each type of social tie; as discussed above, copartisanship and coethnicity between voter and influencer can be ascertained from the cross referencing design. Practically, we code as "copartisan" an influencer-voter dyad in which both individuals have voted for the same parties during the past two major elections; we in turn code as "coethnic" influencer-voter dyads in which both individuals belong to the same subcaste (*jati*).

Hypothesis 2a states that the relative importance of coethnicity should be greater than that of copartisanship. We test the hypotheses in this section in a hierarchical modeling framework. Let $choose_{ijk}$ denote a binary variable that takes the value of 1 when respondent i votes for influencer $j \in \{T1, T2\}$ in polling booth k. Further define C_{ij} to be a binary variable taking the value of 1 when respondent i is a coethnic of influencer j and Q_{ij} as a similarly defined binary variable denoting copartisanship between respondent i and influencer j. The core regression model is:

$$P(choose_{ijk} = 1) = logit^{-1}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 C_{ijk} + \beta_2 Q_{ij} + \alpha_i + \alpha_j + \alpha_k) \tag{5.1}$$

$$\alpha_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_i^2); \quad \alpha_j \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_j^2); \quad \alpha_k \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_k^2)$$

where the β terms are the main parameters of interest in the model, and the α terms correspond to random effects at the voter, influencer, and polling booth level in a hierarchical model. The random effects help address sources of variation at each of the voter, influencer, and polling booth level, as well as a complex "clustering" in the data at these levels. It is thus a conservative model of the data, and in our opinion the most adequate one.[20]

Table 4 displays the regression results from the model described in (5.1). The magnitude of the coefficient on coethnicity is about 3.5 times that of the coefficient on copartisanship, providing strong evidence that coethnicity has a much stronger impact on influence than copartisanship in our sample. These results thus provide a strong confirmation of hypothesis 2a. Substantively, this implies that voters surveyed were much more likely to identify as "likely to influence [them]" at election time individuals who were their coethnics than individuals who shared their partisan preferences (empirically, individuals who had voted like them over the past two major elections). This in our opinion adds to the above evidence pointing at the weakness of partisan networks at the local level.

To illustrate this finding, Figure 4 displays the estimated partial effects from (5.1) for copar-

[20]The (Bayesian) regression is fit using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) using the `JAGS` software (called within the `R` framework) and is based on 3 chains and 3750 simulations of the posterior distribution. This protocol applies to all regression models run in this paper.

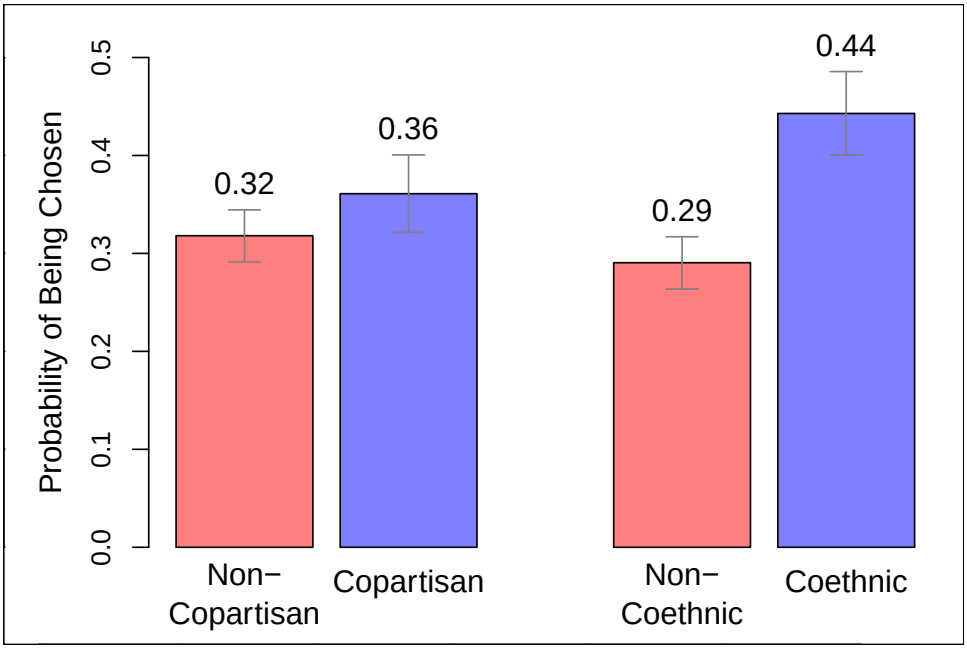
Table 4: The Relationship Between Coethnicity, Copartisanship and Influence

	Dependent variable: Influencer Chosen (Logit)
Intercept	-0.947^{***}
	(0.069)
Coethnicity (C_{ij})	0.664^{***}
	(0.098)
Copartisanship (Q_{ij})	0.191^{**}
	(0.093)
pD	366.9
DIC	4608.9
Note:	$^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

Results report estimates from a 3750 posterior simulations from a regression model estimated in a Bayesian framework through Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) with 3 chains and diffuse priors on all parameters, using the program `JAGS`. Standard deviations of the posteriors on the respective parameters are given in parentheses. Statistical significance in the model is given with respect to the posterior distribution. In particular, let $\widehat{\pi}$ be a vector of values drawn from the posterior distribution of a parameter of interest. Then, we define $\underline{\pi} = 2 * P(\widehat{\pi} < 0)$. The deviance information criterion (DIC) is a measure of fit that is defined as the sum of one-half of the estimated variance of deviance (pD) and the expected value of the deviance. The lower value of DIC is taken to be a better fit, with pD entering as a penalty for overfitting the data.

tisanship and coethnicity.[21] As seen on the figure, the size of the partial effect for coethnicity is much greater than that of copartisanship. The heights of bars give the mean predicted probability from the posterior distribution, and the gray intervals give the 95% predicted probability interval from posterior distribution. While the difference between coethnic and non-coethnic is statistically significant and large, the difference between copartisan and non-copartisan is not. Ethnic ties thus better predict the connections between influencers and voters than copartisan ones in Bihar. Insofar as levels of political competition are high in Bihar, this is coherent with Hypothesis 2a.

Figure 4: Estimated Partial Effects of Coethnicity and Copartisanship



5.2 The Effect of Competitiveness on Copartisanship and Coethnicity

To what extent do local levels of political competition affect these effects? Hypothesis 2b states that the relative importance of coethnicity vis-à-vis copartisanship should diminish as the polling booth area is less competitive. In order to test this hypothesis, we vary the dyadic effects of coethnicity and copartisanship (as in 5.1) by competitiveness at the polling booth level, as measured by margin of victory (MOV) at the polling booth level.

[21] In order to simulate the partial effects, we assumed that the other variable was held at the sample mean and calculated predicted probability of the influencer being chosen from 3000 draws from the posterior distribution from the estimated model.

The new model including these interactions can be written as:

$$P(choose_{ijk} = 1) = \tag{5.2}$$

$$logit^{-1}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 MOV_k + \beta_2 C_{ijk} + \beta_3 MOV_k * C_{ijk} + \beta_4 Q_{ij} + \beta_5 MOV_k * Q_{ij} + \alpha_i + \alpha_j + \alpha_k)$$

$$\alpha_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_i^2); \quad \alpha_j \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_j^2); \quad \alpha_k \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_k^2)$$

Table 5: The Relationship Between Coethnicity, Copartisanship and Influence

	Dependent variable: Influencer Chosen (Logit)
Intercept	-0.973^{***}
	(0.111)
Competitiveness (MOV_k)	0.090
	(0.312)
Coethnicity (C_{ij})	1.070^{***}
	(0.183)
$MOV_k * C_{ij}$	-1.137^{***}
	(0.454)
Copartisanship (Q_{ij})	-0.024
	(0.185)
$MOV_k * Q_{ij}$	0.617
	(0.455)
pD	403.4
DIC	4628.0
Note:	$^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

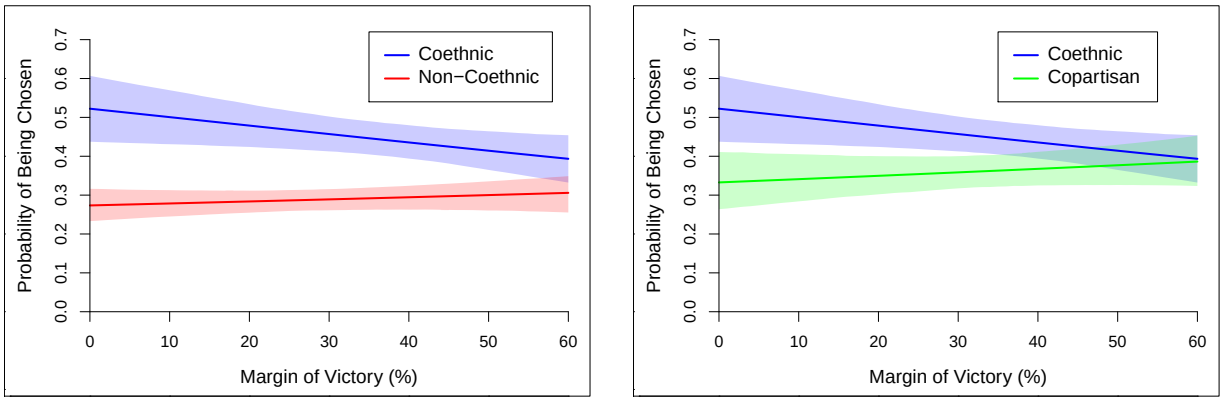
Results report estimates from a 3750 posterior simulations from a regression model estimated in a Bayesian framework through Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) with 3 chains and diffuse priors on all parameters, using the program `JAGS`. Standard deviations of the posteriors on the respective parameters are given in parentheses. Statistical significance in the model is given with respect to the posterior distribution. In particular, let $\widehat{\pi}$ be a vector of values drawn from the posterior distribution of a parameter of interest. Then, we define $\underline{\pi} = 2 * P(\widehat{\pi} < 0)$. The deviance information criterion (DIC) is a measure of fit that is defined as the sum of one-half of the estimated variance of deviance (pD) and the expected value of the deviance. The lower value of DIC is taken to be a better fit, with pD entering as a penalty for overfitting the data.

Table 5 displays the regression results from (5.2). As seen from the table, the interaction between coethnicity and competitiveness ($MOV_k * C_{ij}$) is large, significant and negative, suggest-

ing that the coethnicity effect described in the previous section is attenuated as polling booth gets less competitive. This concretely means that voters were significantly less likely to nominate a coethnic individual as "likely to influence [them]" ahead of elections wherever levels of political competition were the highest. This suggests that the connections between voters and influencers ("influence networks") had less to do with coethnic ties in less competitive areas. Given the overall effects described in the preceding section, this also means that the coethnicity effect becomes less differentiated from the copartisan effect as polling booth become less competitive. We thus take this finding as supporting hypothesis 2b.

To illustrate this point graphically, Figure 5 displays the estimated partial effects from (5.2) varying by MOV, with figure5(a) displaying partial effects for coethnic and non-coethnic voters and figure5(b) displaying partial effects for coethnic and copartisan voters.[22] The solid curve gives the mean predicted probability from the posterior distribution, and the lighter colored bands give the 95% predicted probability interval from posterior distribution. As competitiveness decreases, the relative influence for a coethnic vis-à-vis a non-coethnic diminishes (Figure5(a)) as does the relative influence for a coethnic vis-à-vis a copartisan (figure5(b)).

Figure 5: Partial Effects of Coethnicity and Copartisanship Varying by MOV



(a) Effect of Coethnicity by MOV

(b) Effect of Coethnicity/Copartisanship by MOV

Together, these figures illustrate the fact that local levels of competitiveness affect the kind of ties that exist between local influencers and voters. Ethnicity matters a great deal and voters are almost always likely to identify a coethnic over a non-coethnic as likely to influence

[22] In order to simulate the partial effects, we assumed that the other variable was held at the sample mean and calculated predicted probability of the influencer being chosen from 3000 draws from the posterior distribution from the estimated model.

them (Figure 5a). As noted above, coethnicity also matters much more than copartisanship. Yet, when levels of political competition decrease, this difference dissipates: voters are equally likely to be influenced by coethnics than by copartisans in this context. In line with H2b, this shows that the effect of coethnicity relative to copartisanship decreases as competitiveness decreases.

6 Discussion

The evidence presented so far suggests that influential individuals at the local level in Bihar are rarely party members and, more generally, that influence flows along ethnic lines more than along partisan ones.

For this conclusion to hold, we first need to demonstrate that we have selected truly influential individuals at the local level. A potential concern here might be that we were only able to interview marginally influential individuals. This may be the case, for instance, if the most influential individuals systematically refused to be interviewed by our research team. This may be a problem, for instance, if the most influential actors at the local level were partisan but were also unwilling to be interviewed. One way to evaluate this is to examine the number of votes received by each of our selected influencers (in the survey of voters we use to determine who were T1 and T2 influencers should be). This confirms that the T1 influencers we managed to interview were on average seen as very influential by voters in our sample: on average, more than 6 (out of a total of 12) voters in each PBA chose these individuals as being the most likely to influence them, on a list that contained an average of over 16 names. Besides, over 80 percent of these T1 influencers were the first choice (meaning that they did receive the largest number of votes among those we polled in the PBA). Given our design (detailed above), our T2 influencers were significantly less popular in this vote, with about 3 votes on average. But as can be seen from our data (table 1 above), even T2 influencers were not traditional villagers. They received a large number of villagers seeking assistance every week, and overall resembled more to T1 influencers than they resembled to the average villager (T3 and "villager" columns).

A second and interrelated concern may be that the individuals on our initial "long list" of influencers may be influential in general, though not necessarily *during elections* or in politics. In order to alleviate this concern, it is necessary to return to the process through which we selected our influencers. It is first the case that a number of influencers relevant to political discussions made it to that list, insofar as voters were asked to list individuals in response to a

question about political and social discussions (*when it comes to social issues, whose opinions do people listen to the most around here?*). Second, and more importantly, voters were specifically asked which of these individuals were likely to influence them *in reference to an electoral decision*.

Our evidence also suggests that influencers decreasingly affiliate to parties and that influence decreasingly flows through copartisan ties (as compared to coethnic ties) as levels of political competition increase. An important disclaimer is here in order: this cannot and should not be taken to suggest the existence of a causal relationship. Even if we measure levels of political competition at t minus 1, our results cannot be simply interpreted as evidence that political competition has a causal effect on partisanship. This is because these two variables may have evolved together across time, mutually impacting each other, or simply because lower partisanship may have caused greater political competition in the first place. As may be obvious, a perfect causal test is not feasible, as manipulating levels of political competition is of course impossible. It should in addition be noted that evidence on a larger scale, across Indian states, or panel data, would help but not directly address this causal question.

All of this warrants caution when describing these effects. It is nonetheless important to emphasize that a good rationale for why lower levels of partisanship would lead to increased competition does not easily emerge. A dominant party whose membership crumbles should face defeats with increasing regularity. But nothing guarantees that that party's losses would not benefit one or several challenger parties, whose membership would then simultaneously increase. In fact, challenger parties may only be able to beat that dominant party if they themselves increased their membership. If that was the case, overall levels of partisan memberships and partisanship *across parties* - what our data capture here - would not go down. It can just as easily be theorized that these overall levels of partisan memberships and partisanship would need to go *up* instead for the dominant party to lose and for competition to increase. Accordingly, it is unclear to us why lower levels of partisanship would lead to increased competition.

In the Indian case, we know that locally influential individuals were very likely to be Congress members up until the 1970s (Wilkinson 2007), and that a series of shocks related to the personality of the Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi), to factionalism within the Congress and to various social and economic crises however led to an opening of the political space in the late 1970s. In Bihar and in most other states, it is likely that this coincided with lower rates of affiliations to the Congress on the ground. Since the Congress was still extremely dominant until that point, this likely led to a decrease in overall levels of party membership. Admittedly, these lower lev-

els of partisanship may initially have helped precipitate over time the Congress' fall. Our argument however explains why, in the long run, these locally influential individuals did not subsequently become members of the parties that had defeated the Congress, and why levels of partisanship among these actors did not go back up to their initial level under Congress Dominance. As seen in our data, they remain very low: though we lack data, presumably much lower than they were under Congress dominance. This suggests that the opening of the political space that took place then, and gave rise to a host of new, often ethnic parties may have in the long run also led to a decrease in overall levels of party membership.

In light of this discussion, these findings contribute to current scholarship on political brokerage, partisanship and influence networks in at least three important ways.

It first provides a more nuanced and more precise description of the range of local political actors who are in charge of brokering the vote for more than 500 million voters in rural India. We identify the characters that voters describe as being "influential" from the ground up and provide measures allowing us to determine which, among these, candidates and elites should strive to recruit in order to broker the vote on the ground. Our inferences should thus be of interest to both scholars of political campaigns and to practitioners in charge of organizing these campaigns and in charge of recruiting competent ground-level troops for their candidates, echoing recent studies ran in other contexts (Enos and Hersh, 2015; Dewan, Humphreys and Rubenson, 2014). Furthermore, the inferences made in this project allow us to determine which kinds of influencers should be recruited in order to best connect with specific subgroups of voters.

Second, a model of campaign and organization different from the models popularized in comparative politics emerges from our research. Scholars of distributive politics (most recently, Stokes et at 2014) have long highlighted the role of *partisan* brokers (Magaloni, 2006; Stokes et al., 2013; Hicken, 2009; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Van de Walle, 2007). Other works more specific to the Indian context have suggested that officials *elected* at the most local level, especially if they are partisan actors, serve as key brokers or influencers (Dunning and Nilekani, 2013; Schneider, 2014). Both our argument and our data however emphasize the existence of a market of influence at the local level, in which non-ideological individual who wield some influence on voters hedge between various parties. Many of these locally influential individuals are non-partisan, and derive their power from other traits such as shared ethnicity with citizens or other existing social relations. Accordingly, elites need not, or may not be able to - have

troops on the ground, insofar as they may ally themselves on a temporary basis with a diversity of non-partisan actors in order to broker the vote.

Finally, and more generally, by identifying knowledgeable and locally influential individuals in rural India, we contribute to a growing literature interested in the way in which useful information and virtuous behaviors can spread thanks to particularly central or connected individuals. In this spirit, scholars interested in the diffusion of health-related behaviors, microfinance and other issues have investigated the extent to which social networks can be used to make policy interventions more effective (Banerjee et al., 2013; David A Kim et al., 2015). These interventions have now shown that targeting network-central individuals can lead to virtuous behavioral cascades. While our approach is less ambitious - rather than mapping entire networks, we merely identify local influencers through survey methods -, we develop a relatively cheap and low-tech way to identify the characteristics of the most connected individuals, and hence the most likely to influencer behavioral change.

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A If not Party Workers, Who Are Influencers?

Drawing on the recent scholarship on claim-making and intermediaries in India (Manor, 2000; Krishna, 2002; Auerbach, 2013; Bussell, 2014; Kruks-Wisner, 2015), elites may tap into three potential types of non-partisan local networks to reach and mobilize rural Indian voters:

1. *Institutional Networks*

   Individuals elected in village-level political institutions may be valuable to candidates and party elites for a number of reasons. They should be expected to be very well connected to voters because they are (or were) in a position in which voters might actually have solicited their assistance in order to access state benefits, employment on a public project under the NREGA or simply because they were trying to obtain official documentation. As documented at length in Chauchard (2017), village council presidents, as well as *some* ward members, play a central role in village life. This is because they sometimes have power over the allocation of limited state resources, but also because of their extended notarial role and their informal function as intermediaries with higher-level actors. Because of their function, elected officials may also have access to systematic information about villagers that other individuals may not have.

2. *Traditional Dominance Networks*

   Second, parties may rely on *traditional dominance networks*, that is, on prominent individuals from social groups that have traditionally dominated transactions in village life, such as members of the upper-castes. Individuals from these groups may be connected to voters or have some influence on them because their socio-economic status naturally makes them an important resource or authority in village life, and because villagers might ask for their assistance for that reason. In the context of rural India, this may be the case for land-owning traditional elites drawn from the upper castes, who often play a central role as money-lenders and/or agricultural job-purveyors.

3. *Informal Intermediation Networks*

   Third, party elites may rely on *informal intermediation networks*, that is, on the individuals who self-define as "social workers" and who spend a significant share of their time helping other villagers solve their administrative issues and access the state. As mentioned in the literatures on "claim-making" and electoral campaigns in India (Manor, 2000; Krishna,

2002; Auerbach, 2013; Dunning and Nilekani, 2013; Bussell, 2014; Björkman, 2014; Kruks-Wisner, 2015; Chauchard, 2016), a large number of such informal actors exists in India. These informal actors may be particularly valuable to party elites insofar as they often are the only pathway through which common villagers can access the state. As such, villagers are likely to be indebted to them and to trust them more than they trust other types of local elites. Insofar as they are chosen by citizens - who approach them with claims -, we may also expect citizens with whom they are connected to share a number of preferences and characteristics with them.

Our survey of influencers includes two variables that we can leverage to measure influencers belong to *institutional networks*: whether the selected influencer reports being currently elected and whether the selected influencer reports having been elected in the past. Using these two variables, we construct a third one, evaluating whether the influencer has been elected in the past OR is elected now. While we focus on this last variable in the analyses that follow, our results are not significantly different if we simply rely on the variable indicating whether these officials are currently elected. Since we are in addition especially interested in *non-partisan* elected officials[23], we break down this variable in two categories: partisan elected officials and non-partisan elected officials.

Figure 5 (and Table 2) below provides the share of influencers with each of these characteristics in our data. As can be seen from the second series of bars in Figure 5, only a minority of T1 and T2 influencers are currently or have been elected in office. This suggests that voters relatively infrequently name elected officials (or people who have been elected) as being the most influential in their area. Besides, a majority of these elected officials are non-partisan (in the sense that they are not members of a party[24]).

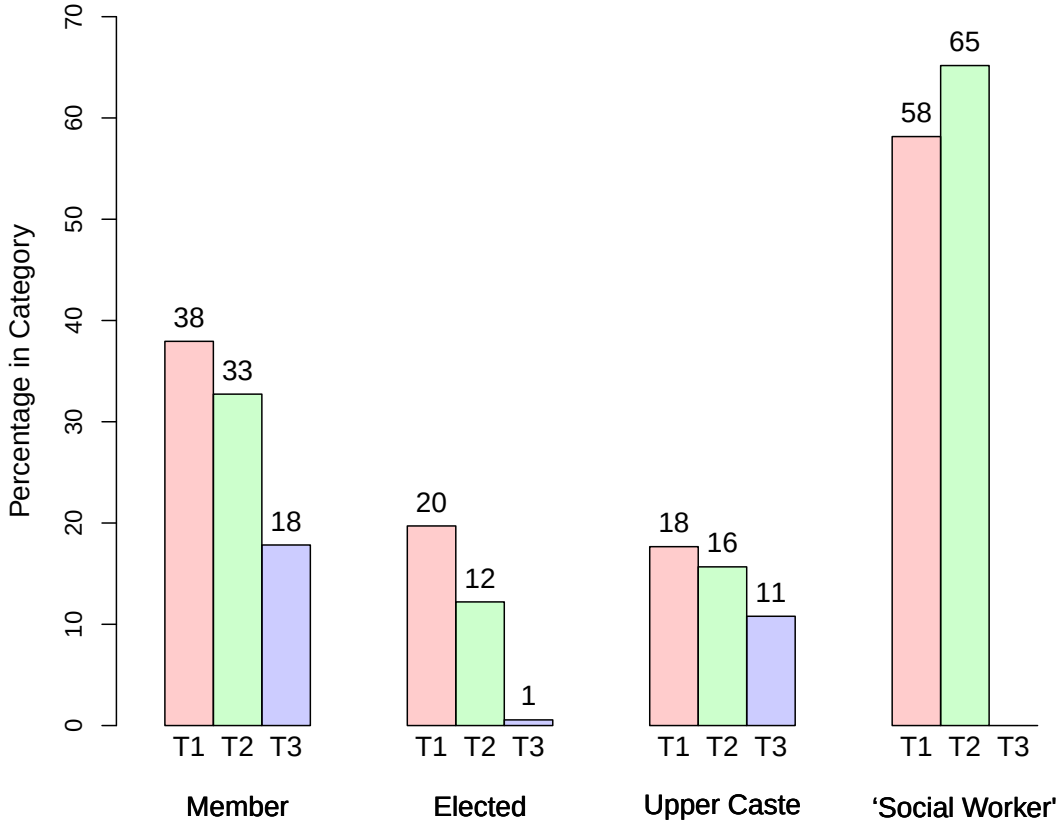
To evaluate whether influencers instead belong to *traditional dominance networks*, we measure the share of individuals from the upper castes (defined here as twice-born castes) and from dominant castes (upper castes + Yadavs) in our sample of selected influencers. Since we are especially interested here in *non-partisan* individuals from these castes [25], we focus in Figure 5 (third series of bars) on *non-partisan* upper-caste influencers. As evidenced by the figure, few

[23]Since part of our partisan actors were party members, we are interested here in establishing whether non-party members may be able to compensate for the weakness of party networks

[24]Though this is not mentioned in the table, a similar proportion of them declares "supporting" a party

[25]Since part of our partisan actors were party members, we are interested here in establishing whether non-party members may be able to compensate for the weakness of party networks

Figure 6: Percentages of Partisan and Non-Partisan Influencers (in our sample)



such influencers exist in our data, which suggests that traditional dominance networks do not play a major role in the PBAs surveyed.

Finally, we evaluate whether party elites may rely on *informal intermediation networks*, that is, on the individuals who spend a significant share of their time helping other villagers solve their administrative issues and access the state. If this is true, voters should recognize "social workers" as being among the most influential individuals in their polling booth area. To test this hypothesis, we rely on two different types of variables in this section. We first rely on a variable measuring whether our selected influencers self-describe as "social worker" (*samaaj sevak* in Hindi). Because many elected and partisan actors also self-describe as "social worker", we however construct alternative variables indicating whether influencers self-describe as "social worker" but are also unelected, non-partisan or both. As can be seen from Figure 5, a *majority* of influencers in our sample fall in this category. Remarkably, this shows that a majority of the individuals that villagers recognized as being most likely to influence them were neither elected

or partisan, but rather were mere informal actors. This clearly implies that influence at the very local level is diffuse and that it is *not* the monopoly of a few institutional actors, nor of parties. In other words, the actors the most likely to influence voters and engage in political brokerage at the very local level are informal, non-partisan actors. This is coherent with our argument.