

# Incumbency, Parties, and Legislatures: Theory and Evidence from India

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## **Abstract**

Incumbent legislators in developing countries are often found to not possess an electoral advantage relative to challengers. This paper traces this effect to the balance of power between legislators and party leaders, and formal and informal constraints on legislators' ability to influence policy and stake positions. This theory is tested on a dataset of Indian national elections since 1977, using a regression discontinuity design to measure the effects of incumbency. The spread of legal restrictions on free voting is associated with a strong negative trend in incumbency effects. Corruption appears have little effect on incumbency disadvantage, while poverty has a weak effect. The results imply that the electoral effects of political office are conditional on the overall structure of the political system.

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# 1 Introduction

In the legislatures of developed countries with single member districts, holding office is associated with an increasing chance of subsequent reelection, an advantage usually to increased visibility and the ability to provide popular constituency services, win policies desired by constituents, and stake out visible policy positions (Gelman and King, 1990; Lee, 2001; Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart, 2000). While most of these findings focus on the United States, this advantage is also present in parliamentary systems with electoral systems in which voters choose candidates directly, such as the United Kingdom (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987), Japan pre-1993 (Hayama, 1992; McElwain, 2012) and Ireland (Redmond and Regan, 2015).

Studies of developing democracies, however, have found evidence that incumbency may hurt reelection chances of legislators and local officials (Linden, 2004; Uppal, 2009; Klačnja and Titiumik, 2014; Klačnja, Forthcoming; Eggers and Spirling, 2015; Ravishankar, 2009). While other studies have found no effect (De Magalhaes, 2015; Hall and Fowler, 2016), they have found no evidence for the type of positive effect found in other developed countries. However, with several notable exceptions, this literature has tended to focus its attention on the challenging task of identifying and estimating incumbency (dis)advantage, rather than on developing theories of its causes.

This paper develops a theoretical framework for understanding incumbency disadvantage that takes as its starting point the older American politics literature on incumbency. According to these authors, incumbency advantage comes from the ability of legislators to influence both public policy and patronage distribution in ways that are favorable to their constituents, creating a perceived valence advantage over challengers. In addition, incumbents are able to take positions on issues more visibly than challengers, enabling them to appear ideologically closer to their constituents than an unknown challenger.

This dynamic is possible because many legislatures and parties, such as those of the mid-century United States, evolved in ways that maximize the visibility and influence of individual members. By contrast, many developing countries, influenced by colonial and post-colonial authoritarianism, have developed highly centralized legislatures and highly personalized political parties. Common manifestations of this centralization include legal

or practical restrictions on voting against party orders, centralized nomination decisions, and small or non-existent committee systems and legislative staff support. Under such restrictions, members have little autonomy in their legislative role, making it difficult to build up a personal vote. Incumbency advantage, in this account, is the product of specific aspects of institutional design, and will not be present when these features are absent.

Legislators in high centralized systems thus are expected to represent their constituents' interests, but have little chance of influencing policy-making directly. This does not mean that they are powerless. Close associates of leaders, individuals thought to control bloc of votes, or expert manipulators on clientelistic networks, may all have considerable influence. However, this influence is independent of their status as incumbents: A crony of the party leader who does not hold office might be just as powerful as a legislator with similar connections, and more powerful than a legislator without them.

These hypotheses are tested on the Indian national legislature, using data on every election between 1977 and 2014. To deal with the problem that incumbents may differ from non-incumbents along both unobserved and unobserved characteristics, the analysis uses a regression discontinuity design that compares candidates who barely won or barely lost the previous election. To address issues of selective rerunning, all the main results are also replicated using an alternative "unconditional" definition of incumbency advantage.

India exhibits several examples of institutional features that privilege party leaders over legislators. Most notably, Indian legislators have, since 1985, been legally banned from voting against the wishes of their party's leadership, giving them little leverage to bargain with party leaders for concessions and little scope to take independent stances on issues. The primary empirical results feature comparisons of the regression discontinuity coefficients between subsamples of candidates affected by these restrictions, taking advantage of a (now repealed) loophole that allowed members from small parties to vote against the wishes of the leadership while members from other parties were forced to vote as they ordered. While this loophole was in place, small party members had higher electoral returns to winning than large ones, even though small party incumbents performed worse than large ones during the periods before and after, when the two groups faced the same legal restrictions. Similarly, before the introduction of this policy

large party incumbents did not lose from incumbency, but their performance declined immediately after its introduction.

A second implication of the theory is that there should be variation in incumbency effect across parties. Legislators who seek to influence policy internally come up against the fact that the parties themselves are almost uniformly undemocratic, controlled by charismatic leaders or “high commands” that not only shapes all policy decisions but have absolute control over the nomination and renomination of candidates. A secondary sets of tests compares the effects of incumbency between a subgroups of more or less personalized political parties. Candidates from less personalized groups are more likely to benefit from winning a previous election than other candidates, though it should be noted that these comparisons fail to account for the endogenous nature of party structure, and might therefore be driven by unobserved regional or ideological differences.

A final implication of the theory is that members with high levels of political skills should be able to exploit incumbency more effectively than other members, and thus reduce or eliminate the negative effect of these institutional restrictions. Some limited support for this contention is provided by the fact that older candidates, who are both more experienced and have faced a variety of selection pressures, face a much lower incumbency disadvantage than younger members.

While a theory of legislative weakness find strong support in the Indian data, other theories, such as those emphasizing the roles of poverty and corruption, have less empirical backing. Not only is candidate criminality unassociated with incumbency effects, but candidates facing criminal charges appear to benefit from incumbency slightly more than candidates with non criminal records. District-level social characteristics have perceptible, but generally statistically insignificant, effects. For reasons of space, these additional results are discussed in a supplemental appendix. To supplement the simple comparisons of coefficients of non-parametric models, the appendix also report the results of a series of logistic regression models that include control variables. The effect of anti-defection laws is not driven by specific years of data, the fragmentation of the party system, the reservation status of the constituency, the size of the party, or national level incumbency.

These findings support the idea that the benefits of incumbency are institutionally

specific: They demand a legislature that, like the “textbook congress” of the mid-20th century United States, allows considerable power and autonomy to its individual members. The non-existent incumbency advantage in poor democracies is thus not a product of their poverty, or even of the poor quality of their incumbents, but rather of the over-centralization of their political systems. These conclusions contribute to the literature on the role of legislatures in the developing world, and their differences from the American and European cases that have motivated most theory-building on legislatures.

Section Two describes the existing literature on incumbency advantage and disadvantage, while Section Three uses this literature to develop a theory of incumbency and anti-incumbency. Section Four will show how the theory applies in India, detailing the major limitations on independent action that legislators face. Section Five examines the regression discontinuity design, and the variables used to proxy for legislator powerlessness and local government effectiveness. Section Six reports the results of the analysis, and Section Seven concludes with a discussion of the role of anti-incumbency in India and in the developing world as a whole. Section A.1 discusses two major alternative explanations for incumbency advantage, poverty and corruption, and the robustness of the results to the inclusion of a variety of control variables.

## 2 Incumbency and Anti-Incumbency

### 2.1 The Developed World

Studies of the United States Congress have long found that legislators who win an election are likely to win the next one (Gelman and King, 1990; Lee, 2001; Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart, 2000), though this effect has declined somewhat in recent years (Jacobson, 2015). This effect operates both through straightforward voter preferences and through strategic entry by candidates (Cox and Katz, 1996). A wide variety of explanations have been proposed for this phenomenon. Congressmen may have superior access to resources that enhance electoral success, such as staff, campaign funds and the franking privilege (Mayhew, 1974), they may be able to perform popularity-enhancing constituent services (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987; Rivers and Fiorina, 1989), and are better able than challengers to gain media attention for their policy stances (Prior,

2006). These authors see voters as motivated to elect candidates who will advance their interests, and see incumbents as being better able than challengers to demonstrate (or publicize) their ability and willingness to do this. Voters will prefer the known quantity of the candidate to the less certain skills of the challenger. Closely related work has shown that incumbency advantage extends to non-legislative offices in the United States (Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr, 2002), and that incumbents in resource-rich developing countries benefit from the pork funds at their disposal (Mahdavi, 2015).

While theories of the incumbency advantage tend to emphasize the voter and the candidate, they make certain implicit assumptions about the structure of the legislative institutions in which incumbents operate. Primarily, they assume that legislators will have the power and autonomy to obtain services and pork for their constituents, take popular positions, and (possibly) influence policy in ways favored by their constituents. In the context of the mid-20th century US House these assumptions were quite realistic. Party discipline was weak, and members had a great deal of freedom to take positions that were at variance with the national parties position but popular in their constituencies, and at times even to impose their preferred policy against the wishes of the party leadership. Other pro-member features of the midcentury congress included a strong committee system that gave many legislators substantial power over defined areas of policy and a relatively large staff allowance that was useful for both patronage and constituency service. This pattern was not an accident: As Mayhew (1974) argued, many of these features of Congress had been designed by the members themselves, to enhance their probability of reelection.

## **2.2 Possible Scope Conditions: Electoral Systems and Presidentialism**

The existing literature on incumbency effects has focused on legislatures with district-based electoral systems, or directly elected executives like mayors, and made no claims about list-based legislative elections. The theoretical reasons for this are straightforward. Theories of the personal vote require that a members both be able to provide services and representation to an identifiable constituency, and (even more importantly) that

voters be able directly reward successful incumbents. Where electoral rules preclude voter selection of individual candidates (as in a closed party list), even an incumbent with a strong local following has no way of performing better than her party colleagues (Cox, 1997), leading to freeriding and weakened incentives to build up such a following. Carey and Shugart (1995) finds no evidence of incumbency disadvantage in closed list systems. However, a variety of electoral systems *do* provide opportunities for voters to directly reward individual candidates, including single-member districts (as in the US, British and Indian cases), single transferable votes systems (such as Ireland (Redmond and Regan, 2015)) and single non-transferable votes systems (such as Japan before 1993 (Hayama, 1992; McElwain, 2012)).<sup>1</sup>

Given that so many studies of incumbency effects have been focused on the United States (a presidential democracy) it might be imagined that incumbency is less important or unimportant in parliamentary democracies. Since in parliamentary systems the party composition of the legislature determines the composition of the executive, voters anxious to influence the composition of the executive might ignore individual-level traits (such as incumbency) and vote solely based on party. If this describes most voters, there is no reason to expect a positive incumbency effect in a parliamentary democracy (though it is unclear why we would ever observe a negative one).

However, the claim that incumbency effects only hold in presidential systems ignores overwhelming evidence that some voters care about the identity of their representatives even in parliamentary systems. Theoretically, some subset of voters might value the provision of goods to himself or his constituency, or the advocacy of a particular issue, so highly that he would be willing to put less weight on party control of the executive. Even in the UK, with its centralized state and tightly disciplined party system, some MPs are able to build up a personal vote through effective constituency service, enabling them to win even as similarly situated members of their parties lose (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987). While these effect sizes are smaller than those in the US, legislators in systems with strong traditions of clientelistic distribution and less salient ideological divisions between the parties, such as Ireland (Redmond and Regan, 2015), have found

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<sup>1</sup>Ariga (2015) finds evidence for an incumbency *disadvantage* in Japanese elections, but the validity of this finding has been strongly disputed (Hall and Fowler, 2016)

incumbency effects comparable to those in the United States.

## 2.3 The Developing World

In some developed nations, however, incumbency often has negative effects for both legislative and executive incumbents. While journalists had noted the phenomena for decades, [Linden \(2004\)](#) did the first systematic study, which found large negative effects of incumbency in the Lok Sabha. This study, like other work in this literature, has tended to focus on identifying the effect of incumbency rather than explaining it, though three patterns of explanation stand out:

*Poverty and Public Goods:* A series of studies of Indian elections have attributed incumbency disadvantage to poor government performance. [Uppal \(2009\)](#) found an incumbency disadvantage in state elections, while [Ravishankar \(2009\)](#) showed the effect held for incumbent state governments.<sup>2</sup> In this formulation, voters systematically punish incumbents for the low quality of state services that is endemic to the developing world. As [Eggers and Spirling \(2015\)](#) point out, this theory requires voters to behave somewhat irrationally, punishing incumbents without any reasonable expectation that their successors will perform better. Also, as we shall see, incumbency disadvantage in India does not appear to have a strong relationship to development.

*Corruption:* Another influential set of ideas links incumbency disadvantage to corruption. [Klašnja \(Forthcoming\)](#) found that Romanian mayors face an incumbency disadvantage, one that is higher among mayors with greater incentives to corruption. [Aidt, Golden and Tiwari \(2011\)](#) attributed the disadvantage to competition from criminal candidates among Indian legislators, though this finding stems from their use of a post-treatment variable (criminal candidate entry) closely associated with unobserved characteristics of incumbents. While corruption is a potentially persuasive explanation, it also presents some difficulties. While corruption and rent-seeking might well make an incumbent unpopular, the skills associated with being a corrupt politician might well be associated with enhanced effectiveness in the kind of patronage politics that make incumbency advantageous, or be seen as a sign of political authenticity ([Vaishnav, 2011](#)).

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<sup>2</sup>[Barooah \(2006\)](#) found little incumbency disadvantage for parties.



*Case-Specific Explanations:* Some accounts of incumbency have focused on explanations unique to specific cases. Linden (2004) traced incumbency disadvantage to the decline of the Congress Party’s monopoly on power in India, noting that the disadvantage became more marked after the 1980s. Some Eggers and Spirling (2015) found that 19th century members of the British parliament suffered from incumbency disadvantage, which they attribute to non-incumbent parties being free to select high quality candidates. Klačnja and Titiunik (2014) found that Brazilian mayors faced an incumbency disadvantage, which they trace to a combination of term limits, rent-seeking, and weak parties. None of these explanations, however, are easy to generalize from: Many democracies with weak incumbents (including India) have no term limits, a candidate selection theory cannot explain individual (as opposed to party-level) incumbency disadvantage, and dominant party systems cannot explain incumbency advantage in the United States and Britain.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Variation in Institutional Structure

In Mayhew’s formulation, the US Congress favors incumbents in part because it was designed by incumbents to increase their chances of reelection, and thus creates opportunities for incumbents to take positions, serve constituents and run effective election campaigns, even when these efforts hurt the interests of their parties. In contrast, most legislatures in the developing world, were not designed by incumbents, but rather by colonial officials anxious to limit the power of the first generation of elected representatives, and by post-independence rulers eager to maintain their party’s grip on power and their own control over their parties. This has led to several noticeable differences between the institutional position of American incumbents and those in poor countries.

*Position Taking and Voting Restrictions:* In the US, Ireland and (to a lesser extent) the UK, a member can safeguard her personal vote by proposing locally popular measures and opposing locally unpopular ones. Under certain limited circumstances, she may even be able to get her preferred measures enacted against the wishes of the leadership. However, in other countries this freedom does not exist. In the legislatures

of many non-western countries, legislative initiative rests with party leaders, and formal informal rules limit the ability of members to vote independently of their parties. In a surprising number of emerging democracies, party switching is legally banned, a prohibition sometimes buttressed by prohibitions on cross voting.<sup>3</sup>

*Resources:* In the US Congress, members are provided with large staffs, seats in committees, and frequent access to the media. These institutional resources provide members with much greater opportunities than challengers to distribute patronage and make their achievements known to the public. In many centralizing legislatures, however, members have little or no staff, no committee structure, and serve in bodies that meet only infrequently. Wang (2013), for instance, finds that the United States is an outlier in the level of power granted to committees, in particular in the availability of staff. If we follow the logic of the US congress incumbency literature, these differences limit the ability of members to gain popularity by representing or serving their constituents.

*Personalized Parties:* Even if legislators cannot influence policy or take independent positions influence, they may be able to influence the party's policy and positions. In the United States, legislators are nominated through contested primaries, and their status as party nominees is thus independent of their relationships with party leaders. Even in the UK, local party branches play a major role in the nomination process, and the "deselection" of a sitting member is a difficult and relatively rare procedure. In many systems, party leaders like the British Prime Minister and the US Speaker of the House are also selected by members. Members thus have some leverage in negotiations with these leaders (who they can remove but who cannot remove them), and may use this leverage to gain access to patronage resources or influence policy in ways that benefit their constituents.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, parties in poorer democracies are also often dominated by a small group of leaders, who have absolute control over nominations and the internal party machinery with little or no democratic accountability. The personalist parties

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<sup>3</sup>Janda (2009) shows party switching to be legally restricted in Armenia, Bangladesh, Fiji, Gabon, Kenya, Macedonia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Belize, Bulgaria, Ghana, Guyana, Hungary, Lesotho, Mexico, Namibia, Romania, Samoa, Senegal, Suriname, Ukraine, Pakistan, India, Israel, Portugal and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>4</sup>Interestingly, as the US house has become more centralized, with control of committee chairmanships and party funds centralized in the leadership, incumbency advantage has declined(Jacobson, 2015)

found in many developing countries are only the most obvious manifestation of this phenomena, which also manifests itself in limited level of internal party democracy in these countries (Cross and Katz, 2013).

In a system where major decisions are taken by the party leaders and office per se confers little independent power. Influence depends on relationships with those leaders, rather than on formal positions. A member with a “poor equation” with the party leader (to use the Indian expression) may have little real influence, while a party official or crony with a “strong equation” may be powerful even if they do not hold a seat. In such a situation, formal incumbency status becomes less relevant than personal connections in judging an individual’s level of influence.

### 3.2 Skilled and Connected Members

The argument thus far has presented reasons why incumbency conveys less real influence in some political systems than in others, and how this might reduce incentives to retain incumbents. By itself, however, it cannot explain incumbency *disadvantage*. After all, if legislators were simply immaterial, voters would be better off ignoring them and voting solely for parties.

Consider, however, the possibility that *some* members are capable of operating effectively within the constraints of a centralized political system, and can deliver policy and/or patronage benefits to their constituents. These members may simply be very highly skilled at manipulating the bureaucracy, have better interpersonal skills, or be more educated than their peers. Alternatively, these members may be the cronies of party leaders, and thus able to have influence over patronage or policy denied to ordinary members.

If such members exist, voters have strong incentives to elect one in their constituency. Just as in classic incumbency advantage theories, voters will wish to retain a member who is effective in representing their interests in order to continue to received these benefits. However, while in developed-world parliaments all members have the ability to provide these benefits, in many countries only a few members are available with these abilities. In the US Congress, in other words some power is inherent in the office itself,

while other situations power may depend in skills and network ties uncorrelated with office.

This heterogeneity in abilities, however, might change the incentives of the voters, by creating the possibility that an ineffective legislator may be replaced with a more effective one. In such a situation, voters might tend to reject incumbents who have disappointed them and select from the pool of opponents, since there is at least some probability that one of these candidates is skilled or connected. Note that this type of systematic rejection of incumbents would not occur if all members were empowered to supply benefits and policy influence (since in that case voters would have “something to lose” by rejecting the incumbent) or if all potential candidates were equally ineffective (since in that case voter would have “nothing to gain” by rejecting her).<sup>5</sup>

To summarize, institutional circumstances influence the ability of members to supply effective representation, and thus popular perception of that representation. In decentralized legislatures, all but a few incumbents are able to deliver some level of policy and pork representation to their constituents, and voters are correspondingly reluctant to see a member of median skill defeated and replaced by a randomly chosen challenger. In centralized legislatures, many incumbents are ineffective (since officeholding by itself confers little power), creating incentives for voters to reject a member of median skill in favor of a challenger who may come from the high skill or high-connection group.

### **3.3 Party Leaders’ Incentives**

By portraying a world populated by party leaders who exclude their own members from decision making to the extent that they face an electoral disadvantage, Section 3.1 would seem to have described self-defeating behavior by party leaders. Since party leaders seek to win legislative majorities, they would seem to have incentives to transfer resources to incumbents, or at least those in marginal districts. There are, however, three reasons to think that party leaders may be behaving rationally in decreasing the value of legislative office.

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<sup>5</sup>For this mechanism to hold, it is that voters cannot observe the abilities of candidates until they are elected—otherwise they would simply reelect highly skilled candidates indefinitely. This is reasonable because of the strong incentives of candidates to pool on declaring high levels of skill and connections—a feature of many developing world elections.

Firstly, leaders may draw rents from absolute control of policymaking. Consider a party leader choosing between two distributional strategies: One in which the leader granted every member some level of influence (roughly, the US model) and another one in which he made all made decisions himself. In the second arrangement, a leader is free to distribute patronage to himself, his family and close allies, while selecting the policies that they favor. Understandably, a leader might prefer this arrangement to one in which influence and benefits must be shared more widely. This trend is accentuated by the fact that ordinary members may well be factional enemies of the leader, or from different parties.

Secondly, leaders may fear that giving too much power to ordinary legislators might limit their tenure in office. This problem is especially pronounced in parliamentary systems, where legislators who are free to change parties may trigger the fall of the government, or where democratic internal procedures may allow a successful leadership challenge. Such fears are far from idle, given examples such as the frequent fall of Indian state governments before 1985 due to defection<sup>6</sup> and the deposition of leaders such as Margaret Thatcher (UK 1990), or Tony Abbot (Australia 2015) in internal party coups.

Thirdly, decreasing the value of patronage distribution and policy concessions flowing to incumbents does not necessarily diminish the overall levels of distribution and concessions: Starving incumbents of resources does not necessarily mean starving the voters. Party leaders, as described above, may structure distribution through the party organization or through trusted individuals who may or may not be legislators. Such a distributional pattern is consistent with a strong patronage network and high levels of policy responsiveness, and in may be more flexible than one that relies on ordinary members as a distributional conduit.

### 3.4 Executive vs. Legislative Office

Section 3.1 described some constraints that are faced by legislators in highly centralized political systems, and the empirics below also focus on legislators. It should be noted, however, that the logic could potentially extend to any type of elected official with

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<sup>6</sup>Examples include Orissa (1972), Nagaland (1975) and Haryana (1967)

relatively poor facilities for independent policymaking or position taking. This is one potential explanation for finding anti-incumbency effects among local executive officials like mayors (Klašnja, Forthcoming; Klašnja and Titiunik, 2014). To the extent that local officials merely implement policy decisions made at higher levels of government or higher levels of their own party, they should suffer from the same type of electoral disadvantages legislators do. Given the fiscal and institutional weakness of local governments in many poor countries, and the relative strength of links between the local and national party systems outside the United States, it is not at all implausible that local officials in developing countries should have less practical autonomy than american congressmen or local officials. It is also, possible, however, that incumbency effects among executive and legislative officials may be casually distinct.

## 4 Legislators in India

India provides an excellent illustration of the types of centralizing policies that described in Section Three. Shaped by the authoritarian tendencies of both the colonial state and the Congress Party's period of single party dominance, India's legislative institutions are highly centralized and tend to favor party leaders over ordinary legislators. This section will examine four major elements of this centralizing pattern, all of which differ considerably from the American and British experience. The effects of the first two of these, which vary among legislators, will be the focus of quantitative testing in Section Five. The second two elements, which vary at the national level, are not tested but are presented to suggest explanations for differences between India and other countries.

### 4.1 Anti-Defection Rules

In the decades after independence, India's democratic institutions were dominated by the Congress party, which won nearly every state election between 1947 and 1967, and every national election between 1947 and 1977. In its period of dominance, the Congress had had little reason to worry about the loyalty of its legislators, since expulsion the party meant permanent exclusion from political office. By the 1970s, however, the weakening of

the party's hold meant that legislative defection became more common. Defectors from the Congress had played a key role in the election of the first non-Congress government in 1977, and splits had been the major cause of that government's fall. At the state level, legislators used the possibility of defection to extort huge bribes from rival parties (a process euphemistically referred to a "horse trading"), and the parties responded by keeping them under lock and key before major votes (Tully, 1991).

In 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi set out to address this problem for the parties. The 52nd amendment to the constitution banned legislators (both state and national) from voting or abstaining against their party leader's wishes under any circumstances, under penalty of being disqualified by the speaker and losing their seats. The only exception was that if at least one third of a party's legislators agreed to act together, their defection would be considered a merger with another party, and not penalized.

As might be expected, the effect of this reform was that legislators since 1985 have had little leverage relative to party leaders. While ordinary members might previously have used their votes to bargain for private rents or policy concessions, they now have no credible threat of defection, and operate without even the remote possibility of defection found in other Westminster systems. While a few cases of individual defection still occur, as in the bribery surrounding the 2008 trust vote, they generally occur at the end of sessions, when the threat of expulsion is less intimidating.

The 52nd amendment left a substantial loophole. In parties with three or fewer members, a single individual constituted a third of the legislative party, and legislators these parties were thus free to vote as they pleased, under cover of "splits" or "mergers." Even this modest opening to member autonomy was considered unacceptable, and in 2003 the 91st amendment raised the threshold for splits and mergers to two-thirds of the legislative party. Even legislators who were the only members of their party were required to follow the instructions of leaders outside of parliament, while independents were threatened with expulsion if they joined a party.

## 4.2 Personalized Parties

The absolute control of Indian parties over their members' votes would be less important if members had some measure of control over party policy through internal mechanisms. In the British system, for instance, individual members have a considerable role in removing and choosing the party leader. Indian political parties have generally undemocratic constitutions, with their leaders selected through indirect elections that are opaque and easily manipulated by the leadership. Many parties do not even bother with this charade: The Congress had not held internal elections since 1973.

This is not to say that the Congress's rivals are models of internal democracy. Many of these parties were founded by or are closely associated with a single charismatic leader—the BSP's Mayawati, the RJD's Laloo Prasad Yadav, the AIDMK's Jayalalitha—who has complete absolute control over the party organization, and who treats the party as an extension of their personality. [Farooqui and Sridharan \(2014\)](#), in their analysis of Indian political parties, find that Indian parties are all in the two highest of six categories of party centralization drawn from the comparative literature.

Developed country legislators are sometimes selected through competitive procedures, such as primary elections, that make their status independent of the leadership, and limit the leadership's ability to sanction disloyalty. In India, by contrast, all nomination decisions are made centrally, a process revealingly called the "distribution of tickets" ([Farooqui and Sridharan, 2014](#)). During the author's fieldwork, he attended one such session, during which prospective candidates, including incumbent members of the legislature, touched the feet of the party leader and pledged undying loyalty. Outside the gates of the leader's bungalow, unsuccessful aspirants for tickets, includes one sitting MLA, chanted slogans and attempted to bribe the guards to be let in. In such a situation, it is easy to see why individual members are in little position to demand pork or policy concessions from leaders.

This hypothesis about the power of party leaders over ordinary members should not be taken to mean that Indian party organizations are monolithic: While they are personalized, they are not necessarily centralized. Many Indian political parties, and in particular certain units of the Indian National Congress, are noted for having high levels



of internal factionalism (Brass, 1965; Nellis, 2012). However, this factional infighting is quite distinct from the type of mature intra-party democracy that might empower individual members. In particular, the resolution of factional disputes within Congress units depends not on votes within the legislative caucus (as they would be in US state legislatures) but on successful appeals to the national leadership by factional leaders. If the Congress demonstrates that fierce internal contestation is not necessarily associated with internal democracy, “cadre” parties such as the CPI(M) demonstrate that the opposite is also possible. While such parties are often mentioned as being centralized (in the sense that they are successful in keeping members from publicly dissenting from party policy) through their more formalized party structure may allow ordinary members greater influence over the shaping of that policy than they would possess organizations with a very powerful single leader.

### 4.3 Weakly Institutionalized Legislatures

In the “textbook congress,” the internal operations and procedures of the legislature gave legislators considerable advantages over their opponents in reaching the people, and some possibility of influencing policy. The Indian Lok Sabha, however, is a very poorly institutionalized body relative to the legislatures of developed countries, and state legislatures are even less so. This is most obvious in the matter of staff. While US Congressmen have at least a dozen staffers, Indian MPs, with over three times the number of constituents, have only a single personal assistant, or two sharing the salary of one. Any additional staff members must be paid out of the candidate’s own pocket or by the parties, just as they would be by challengers.

In the US congress, a strong committee system allows even relatively junior members to gain policy expertise, and an increased chance of policy influence on certain narrow issues. Members can also use their position on committees to gain influence over bureaucratic agencies (which are particularly solicitous of members on the committees that control their budget), and develop relationships with interest groups in the committee’s subject area (Fenno, 1973). However, this opportunity to build up a power base outside of the party system is not available in Indian legislatures. Many state legislatures have

no committees at all, while the Lok Sabha had (in 2015) committee seats for only a third of its members. Those committees that do exist are backwaters, either handling administrative matters like member absences or simply rubber-stamping decisions made by ad-hoc “all party” meetings of leaders. This has led ordinary Indian parliamentarians being described “Marginal players in marginal assemblies” (Chopra, 1996).

#### 4.4 Bureaucratic Centralization

When legislators receive requests from their constituents, the legislator cannot usually supply the good himself, but must try to pressure the bureaucracy to do so. In the mid-century United States, the bureaucracy is generally portrayed as relatively anxious to serve individual members, both because of congress’s ability to help or hinder particular agency, the formal and informal independence that many agencies enjoy relative to the executive, and their dependence on congress for appropriations. The mutually beneficial relationships between bureaucrats and agencies became one leg of the “iron triangles” thought to dominate many areas of american policymaking Arnold (1980).

The Indian bureaucracy, like that of many other poor nations, developed in a very different way. The same forces in 20th century Indian history that worked to create a highly centralized set of party organizations also worked to create a highly centralized set of executive institutions. The British, distrusting elected institutions that would be controlled by Indians, sought to concentrate power in the hands of bureaucrats and central government institutions that they retained control over. Within the state bureaucracy, responsibility is generally quite centralized in the hands of ministers in general and the chief or prime minister in particular. These officials retain the crucial power to transfer civil servants from one job to another. The ability of members to influence the bureaucracy is thus dependent on their relationship (or perceived relationship) with party or factional leaders, as evidenced by the large number of individuals in India who exercise political influence without holding office.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, and give MPs some independent patronage, all Indian MPs have since 1993 received a fixed budget to distribute in local public works, the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). How-

ever, since these works must still be constructed by the district administration, they do not eliminate members' needs to interact with the bureaucracy to get things done. Moreover, it is unclear if the program actually adds to the total stock of patronage at a members disposal, or merely puts under a separate budget projects that might have been granted informally in the past. It is therefore not surprising that while some members use MPLADS more effectively than others [Keefer and Khemani \(2009\)](#), incumbency disadvantage has actually increased somewhat in the years since the program's introduction.

## 5 Data and Models

### 5.1 The Regression Discontinuity Design

A well-known problem in the study of incumbency is that incumbents differ systematically on both observed and unobserved characteristics from non-incumbents. To deal with this problem, the analysis uses a regression discontinuity design, though it should be noted that the main results could also be produced using a simple OLS comparison of the incumbent and non-incumbent groups. In a regression discontinuity design, all observations have a score, and observations above a known cutoff are treated while those below the cutoff are not. In this case, the unit of analysis is the candidate, the treatment is incumbency, the score is the vote margin at the previous election, defined as the difference between the proportion of the vote gained by the candidate and the average of the vote proportion for the two highest candidates,<sup>7</sup> and cutoff is that average, normalized to zero. The dependent variable is whether the candidate won the election at time  $t+1$ .<sup>8</sup> The intuition behind the design is that in very close elections assignment to treatment or control is as-if-random, an interpretation that has been found reasonable across a wide variety of contexts ([Eggers et al., 2015](#)).

To estimate these treatment effects, I follow standard practice and estimate two

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<sup>7</sup>A candidate winning one more vote than the average of the two highest candidates will always win the election, and one with one less will always lose.

<sup>8</sup>Similar results can be produced by using the candidate's  $t+1$  vote margin. However, winning, rather than increasing vote share, is assumed to be the main goal of candidates.

weighted linear regressions above and below the cutoff.<sup>9</sup> In these models, the dependent variable is a individual’s vote margin at the next election, with weights computed based on applying a kernel function to the distance of each observation from the cutoff. The standard errors are calculated using the procedure outlined in [Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik \(2014\)](#), which corrects for asymptotic bias. For further details, see the documentation of the stata package `rdrobust`. In [Tables A.3 and A.12](#), the main results are replicated using a simple logistic regression model, without weighting. These models also include year fixed effects and a variety of control variables.

Regression discontinuity estimation requires a bandwidth, which specifies how close observations must be to the cutoff to be included in the analysis. The main analysis uses the optimized bandwidths calculated following [Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik \(2014\)](#). [Table A.10](#) reports very similar results from models that use a single, usually more conservative, bandwidth of .05, and the logit models also use this bandwidth.

Since incumbency disadvantage itself is a fairly well-studied phenomenon in India, most of the discussion will focus not on the effects of incumbency itself, but on the difference in the effects of incumbency across subsamples. When comparing subsamples, the coefficient of interest is the difference between the estimated effects of incumbency in the two samples. The standard error of this difference is calculated from 1000 bootstrapped replications.

To test the validity to the underlying assumptions of the RD model, I examined the distribution of data points immediately around the cutoff to test the hypothesis that parties and candidates are able to manipulate their electoral position relative to the cutoff. The density test described in [Cattaneo, Jansson and Ma \(2015\)](#) finds no support for this hypothesis: Indian elections outcomes fail to cluster on one side the cutoff ( $p=.986$ ). See [Linden \(2004\)](#) and [Uppal \(2009\)](#) for further discussion of the validity of the regression discontinuity design for Indian legislative elections.

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<sup>9</sup>Table [A.11](#) shows the results for quadratic link functions.

## 5.2 Conditional vs. Unconditional Incumbency Advantage

The approach outlined above, like most previous empirical work on incumbency in poor countries, compares rerunning challengers to rerunning incumbents, and thus bases its estimates on the subset of candidates who run in the same constituency in consecutive elections. These candidates are obviously not representative of the universe of candidates as a whole—in particular, incumbents are much more likely to run than non-incumbents. This concern is particularly troubling if parties strategically deny renomination to weak challengers, or if weak challengers are less likely to run than weak incumbents. [De Magalhaes \(2015\)](#) argues that much, and possibly all, of the incumbency disadvantage observed in poor countries is a product of strategic exit. [De Magalhaes \(2015\)](#) proposes that incumbency disadvantage should instead be estimated by examining “unconditional” incumbency disadvantage (the probability that a candidate who ran at time  $t$  will be elected at time  $t+1$ , whether or not they ran).

The unconditional advantage is an unbiased estimate of the effect of winning in the past on winning in the future. However, as a way of measuring (anti)incumbency bias within the electorate, the problem on which the existing literature has focused, it presents difficulties ([Hall and Fowler, 2016](#)). While some part of differences in rerunning rates are the product of strategic calculations about electability, many are not. Party leaders could seek to reward incumbents for loyalty during the legislative session, or incumbents could develop a “taste” for office, or a set of social ties that encourage them to rerun office, more readily than a similarly situated challenger might. To the extent that non-electoral factors might cause incumbents to rerun at higher rates than other candidates, any unconditional model will severely underestimate incumbency disadvantage among voters. It is perfectly, plausible, for instance, that if the effect of incumbency on rerunning is sufficiently high there could be a positive unconditional effect of incumbency effect if voters are strongly prejudiced against incumbents. Since the theory in this paper focuses on voter behavior, I use the traditional conditional model for the main results. However, [Table A.6](#) shows that the main results of the paper hold even when unconditional incumbency is used.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>[Hall and Fowler \(2016\)](#) question the consistency of both unconditional and conditional versions of the incumbency advantage due to strategic entry and exit of candidates. They point out that estimates

## 5.3 The Data

This analysis focuses on elections to the lower chamber of the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha. I use data on every national election between 1977 and 2014, which gives ten elections for which lagged data are available. Data from 1977-2009 are taken from [Kollman et al. \(2011\)](#), and for 2014 from the Election Commission of India. Lok Sabha districts were constant from 1977 to 2004, but were redrawn for the 2009 elections. For the purposes of assessing incumbency, 2009 districts were associated to 2004 districts if the new district had a majority of the population of the old district and had a majority of its population from the old district. Since some new districts could not be matched, the 2009 election year has slightly fewer observations than the others.

One major problem in measuring the extent of incumbency in India is the inconsistent policy of the Election Commission toward candidate names, which means that a single person may be known by several different spellings and abbreviations ([Linden, 2004](#); [Uppal, 2009](#)). To deal with this issue, names were laboriously standardized by hand across years. By-elections and members who switched constituencies were ignored, but party switchers remained in the dataset, grouped by their previous party.

# 6 Analysis

## 6.1 Basic Effects

The first row of [Table 1](#) shows the results of the basic conditional RD model of candidate vote share across the entire dataset. The findings reproduce the basic incumbency disadvantage finding of [Linden and Uppal](#): Rerunning incumbents suffer a substantially less likely to win than otherwise similar rerunning challengers. It appears that this bias is attached to both individuals and parties. When we focus on party vote share, the party of the incumbent (whether or not they run) is still less likely to win than they would

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of incumbency advantage can vary considerably across specifications. However, their preferred method (party-level estimates using a predetermined reference party) is difficult to apply in contexts (such as India) with high-levels party-switching, considerable variation in constituency-level dominant parties, and a theoretical focus in individual levels effects. The results below will show that while aggregate-level estimates in incumbency advantage do vary between the conditional and unconditional models, the between-subgroup differences do not.

had they lost the previous election, though the effect is smaller than for individuals. Candidates from incumbent parties where the incumbent does not choose to run have a much smaller, though still perceptible, disadvantage.

Table 1 also shows that the results are not driven by candidate selection, as Eggers and Spirling (2015) suggest. Even in cases where the entire set of candidates (including candidates outside the bandwidth) remains completely unchanged from the previous election, incumbency is a disadvantage.

The fifth line of Table 1 shows the results for unconditional incumbency bias—the probability that incumbents will at time  $t+1$  whether or not they run. As De Magalhaes (2015) found, there is no statistically significant incumbency effect in the unconditional framework, though the estimated effect is negative, and there is no evidence for an incumbency bonus. This difference in estimates means that it is difficult to determine whether India has an incumbency disadvantage or whether there is no effect. The basic theory of Section 3.1, however, is agnostic as to which of these is the case.

Table 1: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Core Sample

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
Rerunning Individuals	-0.156	0.040	0.000	0.062	2667	
Rerunning Parties	-0.128	0.092	0.000	.061	5068	
Substituted Candidates	-0.065	0.043	0.127	0.073	2556	
Non-Conditional Incumbency	-0.010	0.026	0.717	0.044	2456	
Same Group of Candidates	-0.157	0.124	0.203	0.044	251	
Incumbent Parties	-0.120	0.066	0.071	0.079	1089	.061
Non-Incumbent Parties	-0.181	0.049	0.000	0.058	1691	(.09)

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$  except in the second line, where it is the party’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The other columns report standard errors, p values and the number of cases. The subgroups in the fourth and fifth rows are defined by whether the candidate’s party formed the government at the national level. “Non conditional incumbency” is the probability of candidates being an MP after the next election, whether or not they ran. The estimate in the last column is the difference between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

Another interesting question is whether anti-incumbency bias operates at the national or constituency level (Chakrabarti, Gangopadhyay and Krishnan, 2005)—whether voters punish all MPs or only MPs who were part of the ruling party or coalition. The last two lines of Table 1 compare incumbency advantage among incumbent party and

non-incumbent party candidates. The two groups are virtually identical in their estimated incumbency disadvantage. This finding provides some limited evidence against the incumbency disadvantage being associated with voter disgust against political corruption or government mismanagement. The members with the best opportunities for rent-seeking, and who are closely associated with the government's actions, perform virtually identically to members who sat on the opposition benches. It also provides some circumstantial evidence that ordinary members are relatively benefit little from pork distribution and policy influence, since members in the majority perform similarly to opposition members whose opportunities in this regard are much more limited.

Given the large literature on regional variation in India, it is remarkable that spatial variation in the effects of incumbency has never been examined. Table A.5 shows the estimated effects of incumbency by region. Analysis of the state level data show that there is an enormous variation in the effect of incumbency. Overall, incumbent disadvantage does not hold in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal—in these states, incumbents *gain* from barely winning. The rest of India tends to discriminate against incumbents, but does so to varying degrees, with incumbents faring the worst in Maharashtra, Assam and Haryana.

## 6.2 Anti-Defection Rules

If incumbency disadvantage stems from powerless legislators, it follows that it should be smaller in circumstances when incumbents are powerful relative to party leaders, enabling them to stake independent positions and bargain more effectively for patronage. To examine this effect, I take advantage of the introduction of anti-defection laws in 1985 and 2003. Members affected by these laws should suffer from incumbency, while members who were not affected by these laws should benefit from incumbency.

Since the introduction of anti-defection laws occurs at a particular point in time, any differences in incumbency effects between time periods might plausibly be associated with other time-varying factors. To examine whether these effects are driving the results, I also examine another quirk of these rules. Recall that between 1985 and 2004, legislators could still legally leave their party and keep their seats provided that they



defected with at least one third of their party caucus. While this precluded individual indiscipline in large parties, members of parties with three or fewer members (where every member was more than a third of the party) could still vote as they pleased, as could independents. To the extent that incumbents gain from being able to bargain over votes, we should expect incumbency disadvantage to be attenuated in small parties from 1985 to 2004, but that small party incumbents should have no significant edge in the periods immediately before and after, when they faced the same legislative rules as large parties.

Table 2 examines the effect of variation in party size and structure on incumbency. The first two lines support the basic contentions of Section Three. While members from parties effected by anti-defection rules face a substantial (and statistically significant) negative effects relative to bare losers from these parties, members not effected by these rules slightly increase their chances of winning. This pattern is shown graphically in Figure A.1. While the raw chances of winning generally increase with lagged margin of victory for members with no voting constraints, they dip noticeably for bare winners who suffer from these constraints.

Since anti-defection laws were introduced over time, these results might simply be the results of temporal changes.<sup>11</sup> However, these patterns also show up when we compare members within a single time period. The second pair of lines in Table 2 report the effects of incumbency on parties with more or less than three MPs from 1985 to 2004, when small parties were not effected by the defection laws. While parties with more than three MPs had an estimated incumbency disadvantage in this period, MPs from small parties had a small incumbency *advantage*. The difference between the two coefficients is statistically significant at the 10% level.

It is of course possible that small parties differ from large ones in some other significant way that enhances their incumbency advantage. However, an examination of the data from before 1985 and after 2004 (when there was no difference in party discipline between the two types of party) does not support this conclusion. Before 1986, there is a substantial difference between small and large party incumbency effects, but in the opposite direction. Large party incumbents seem to benefit from barely winning in this

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<sup>11</sup>Though Table A.3 shows that this is not the case.

Table 2: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Anti-Defection Laws

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Diff.
No Anti-Defection Rule	0.073	0.077	0.343	0.121	727	.293***
Anti-Defection Rule	-0.220	0.046	0.000	0.056	2091	(.101)
Very Small Parties 1985-2004	0.056	0.146	0.700	0.077	185	.292*
Large Parties 1985-2004	-0.235	0.059	0.000	0.053	1268	(.156)
Very Small Parties Pre 85	-0.204	0.369	0.581	0.114	37	-.349
Large Parties Pre 85	0.144	0.097	0.136	0.114	437	(.397)
Very Small Parties Post 2004	-0.276	0.272	0.309	0.081	44	-.128
Large Parties Post 2004	-0.149	0.102	0.143	0.055	452	(.300)
Parties 4-50 Seats 1985-2004	-.194	.069	.005	.062	923	
Parties 51+ Seats 1985-2004	-.143	.042	.001	.066	1391	

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of “defection rules” candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005. The subgroup small parties is defined by whether a party had fewer than four seats at time  $t$ .

period, while the small number of small party incumbents, loses votes on average. The large negative difference between small and large party incumbency also holds in the 2004-2014 period, when all members saw their voting autonomy restricted. Note also large parties (and thus, the legislators overall) had no incumbency advantage before 1985.

Might there be something about the 1985-2004 period that privileged small parties over large ones, for instance the relative weakness of the Congress Party during this period? The last two lines of Table 2 compare large parties such as the Congress (those with over 50 seats) to smaller parties that were nonetheless affected by the rule change. The two groups have similar negative effects, indicating that the shift to an incumbency disadvantage among parties with more than four seats was not exclusive to the national parties.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the effects of incumbency do not seem to be driven by the increased value of individual votes in close parliaments. Table A.7 shows that members in the two parliaments where the fate of the government actually hung on close trust votes actually

<sup>12</sup>In the sample as a whole, the advantage of small parties does not extend to small parties with enough members to be relatively immune from defection. Table A.7 compares parties with less than 30 seats (about 5.5% of the house) with legislators from larger parties. Using this definition of a small party, these groups have no advantage at all—in fact their incumbents perform slightly worse than those from large parties.

suffer more from winning than incumbents in other years.

### 6.3 Types of Parties

By international standards, most Indian parties are highly personalized. However, there is variation in the power of the leadership, with some parties having, for historical reasons, a stronger tradition of empowering lower level activists and officeholders. Table 3 shows the results for two sets of comparisons between candidates from parties or party units though to be more effected by centralization and those less affected. These results test an observable implication of the theory, they do not have the attractive causal inference properties of the anti-defection rule analysis: Parties are not assigned randomly to levels of leadership domination, and the incidence of particular parties is associated with regional differences.

The most basic of these distinctions is based on a subjective coding by Kitschelt (2012), who divides major Indian political parties into more and less centralized groupings as part of a broader typology of Indian political parties. The “more centralized” groups correspond to the type of highly personalized party discussed in Section Three, where all decisions are made by a single charismatic leader. Four of the eight are currently controlled by their founders, and the other four by close associates or relatives of a deceased founder.<sup>13</sup> The major national parties, the BJP and Congress are not included. Table 3 compares the two groups of parties, and shows that incumbents from highly centralized parties lose much more electorally from winning than members from other parties. This pattern is also reflected in Figure A.2, which shows the probability of winning by lagged vote margin: Among candidates from centralized parties, there is a very noticeable decline in the probability of winning for bare winners relative to bare losers.<sup>14</sup>

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), India’s largest left wing party, is often thought of as being different from other Indian political parties. Relative to other parties, the CPI(M) parties appears to have more functional systems for members to sanc-

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<sup>13</sup>The eight parties are the AIDMK, BSP, SP, BJD, JDU, Shiv Sena, RJD and AITC.

<sup>14</sup>Table A.3 shows that this effect hold after accounting for years, all these parties have become more electorally successful over time.

Table 3: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Party Types

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwidth.	N	Difference
Less Centralized Parties	-0.107	0.046	0.021	0.075	2110	.376***
Centralized Parties	-0.483	0.110	0.000	0.052	328	(.132)
CPI(M)	0.235	0.168	0.160	0.076	181	.428**
Non-CPI(M)	-0.188	0.041	0.000	0.062	2521	(.197)

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#).

tion the leadership (including, at times, contested internal elections). Relative to other parties, leadership turnover also appears to be higher, individual leaders appear to be less important, and family ties less crucial to elite recruitment [Chhibber, Jensenius and Suryanarayan \(2014\)](#); [Chhibber \(2013\)](#). Table 3 compares the effect of incumbency on CPI(M) and non-CPI(M) candidates. CPI(M) candidates have a statistically significant incumbency advantage, while candidates from other parties have an incumbency disadvantage of approximately equal magnitude.<sup>15</sup>

One obvious critique of this second set of findings is that the centralization of parties is closely associated with many other party-specific traits, such as their ideology, size and support base. Since most Indian political parties are stronger in some states than in others, the traits of parties are also closely bound up with unobserved aspects of the politics and culture of particular states. In such circumstances, interpreting the comparisons in the last column of Table 3 as causal is difficult, even though the same results appear using a variety of different subsetting rules. Table A.9 provides some very limited additional support for the results by showing a number of paired comparisons of parties or state-parties *somewhat* similar on unobservables. The first two lines compare candidates the CPI(M) to the Communist Party of India, from which it split in 1964. This two parties are both similar ideologically and have broadly similar regional bases. However, the CPI has historically been much more centralized, a legacy of being formed by the incumbent (pro-Moscow) faction of the old party, and the long-term influence of the KGB in party affairs. Table A.9 shows that these similar organizations have very

<sup>15</sup>Given the frequent accusations of electoral fraud against the CPI(M) in its West Bengal stronghold, one might be tempted to attribute these results to manipulation. However, CPI(M) incumbency advantage is larger outside West Bengal than within it.

different incumbency effects. While CPI(M) candidates benefit from incumbency, CPI incumbents have a sizable estimated disadvantage.

## 6.4 Skill and Connections

One of the implications of Section Three was that candidates who are skilled and or politically connected should benefit from incumbency more than other members. Finding a way of grouping Indian candidates based on their underlying skills is difficult, given that the qualities and personal connections necessary to be effective in the Indian political system are hard to measure, and little data has been collected on the individual characteristics of Indian legislative candidates, or even on members.

One (somewhat) measurable factor that is plausibly correlated with the political skills of candidates is their age. Candidates may gain more experience and connections as they get older. In addition, over time candidates may face electoral and non-electoral selection pressures as they age, with the most talented candidates remaining in politics and the less talented ones being defeated or retiring. We should thus expect older candidates to have substantially higher levels of unobserved talent than younger ones, a point substantiated by the fact that older candidates are overrepresented from close seats. The age data was taken from [Jaffrelot \(2003\)](#), though unfortunately the data covers only candidates in Northern India who won at some point before 2009. The members on whom we have data are thus concentrated in states where incumbency disadvantage is relatively high, and over-represents bare winners relative to bare losers.

Table 4: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Politician Traits

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwidth.	N	Difference
Age>52	-0.089	0.043	0.041	0.064	2272	.386***
Age<53	-0.475	0.084	0.000	0.073	538	(.098)
Age>64	0.000	0.041	0.01	0.088	2332	.474***
Age<65	-0.474	0.066	0.000	0.062	813	(.083)

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel.

The results, shown in [Table 4](#), are dramatic. Candidates above the median age (52

years)<sup>16</sup> have a statistically significant incumbency disadvantage, but younger members face a much stronger one, over five times as large. The difference between the incumbency effects in the two samples is positive and statistically significant, providing some evidence that candidates with high levels of skill are better able to exploit incumbency for electoral advantage than other candidates. Similarly, candidates more than one standard deviation above the median age (65 and over) experience no incumbency disadvantage, while younger members experience a massive one.

## 6.5 Selective Rerunning

Perhaps the most important potential concern is that the results are driven by selective rerunning by strong candidates, particularly strong non-incumbents. This concern is given plausibility by the fact that rerunning rates differ substantially between incumbents and non-incumbents: In the overall sample, 1777 bare winners ran again, as against 890 bare losers.

To test whether selective rerunning is driving the results, Table A.6 examines the unconditional effects of incumbency—the probability that a member will win at time  $t+1$  whether or not they ran again. Recall that Table 1 found that there is no statistically significant unconditional incumbency effect overall. However, the differences between the subgroups identified in Section Four are substantial. Candidates affected by anti-defection laws are less likely to run and win again than other candidates, as are candidates and party units thought to be less centralized. These findings indicate that restrictions on the autonomy of legislators have a strong influence on whether incumbency helps members subsequently hold office, even when rerunning decisions are taken out of the equation.

An additional piece of evidence that selective rerunning is not leading us to overstate incumbency disadvantage is that the disadvantage does not appear to be lower during periods when many candidates reran. Table A.7 shows that in the three elections with the highest running rates (the years when the period between elections was shortest) incumbents do slightly worse than in other periods.

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<sup>16</sup>Note that a large majority of candidates in close elections are above the median age of the sample of candidates as a whole.

Table A.8 reruns the main results using party vote shares rather than individual ones. One advantage of this method is that the party effects are less likely to be biased by differences in rerunning. Unlike individuals, parties virtually always rerun in constituencies where they won or came close to winning in the the previous election. However, it is unclear if the theory, which focuses on the difficulties of members in building up a personal vote, extends to party-level outcomes, since party leaders might be able to reduce or eliminate incumbency disadvantage by replacing unpopular incumbents with new candidates, though party brands might be tainted by the previous incumbent’s ineffectiveness, and voters might draw conclusions about the quality of the pool of candidates in each party from the incumbent’s ability. Put another way, the effect of restrictions on member autonomy on party vote might be attenuated by the ability of parties to present replacement candidates from the challenger pool.

Table A.8 shows that the party-level results are similar to the individual ones, though incumbency bias is in general much smaller. The difference between the restricted and unrestricted subgroups is also smaller, and not statistically significant for defection rules, the measure that most closely captures the ability to rebel against the party leadership. This shows that while there are perceptible effects of centralization on party election outcomes, they are less severe than those on individuals.

## 7 Conclusion

The lack of an incumbency advantage, remain a persistent, and indeed increasing, feature of the Indian political scene, developing in the 1980s and becoming stronger since that time. However, not all incumbents are hurt by holding office. Incumbents possessing one of the core powers of legislatures, the right to cast their vote freely, suffer less from incumbency than other members. Section A.1 shows that factors associated with voter grievance against politicians, such as criminal charges, poverty and state spending, are only weakly associated with incumbency effects, and do not appear to be driving the main results. Similarly, Section A.1 shows that the results are not driven by political changes such as national incumbency, the fragmentation of the party system and caste reservation are driving the results.

These findings suggest that the bias towards incumbent legislators found in many

developed countries is a product of a very specific set of institutional scope conditions. In the US Congress, incumbents were able to design for themselves an institution that provides incumbents with remarkable opportunities to build up a personal vote, including a large staff, loose party discipline, a committee system, and generous opportunities for position taking. They have also benefited from other features of the American political system, such as the decentralization of party organizations. When these conditions are not present, as in the hyper-personalized political economy of modern India, we have no reason to expect incumbency advantage to exist. Put simply, when holding office confers relatively little independent power, there is less reason why politicians should benefit from holding office.

Indian MPs, in this understanding, may well be influential, but this influence comes from their own political following and connections rather from their status as legislators. Party leaders, correspondingly, may be highly responsive to voters, but this responsiveness is unlikely to be channeled through legislators. In this sense, “ordinary” Indian incumbents are casualties of the century of political centralization that began under the British and continued under the Nehrus, while “ordinary” American ones are beneficiaries of an equally long process of legislative institution building.

The problems of personalized parties and institutionally weak legislatures extend outside India. As we have seen, many developing nations feature restrictions on legislative voting, limited staffing, weak committees, short sessions, and other institutional features that make ordinary members powerless both relative to their leaders and to their developed world counterparts. While anti-incumbency voting is a relatively benign symptom of these problems, the concentration of political power among people who are not necessarily directly accountable to voters is potentially worrisome for citizens who would prefer a political class more responsive to their needs.



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# Online Appendix

## A.1 Alternative Hypotheses

### A.1.1 Alternative Hypotheses: Corruption

One of the hypotheses about incumbency advantage most current in the literature concerns corruption. Incumbents, in this view, have greater opportunities to both to accumulate rents and to have this accumulation publicized than non-incumbents, and voters sanction them for this (Klašnja, *Forthcoming*; Davidson and Kerosky, 2015). This is consistent with Bhavnani (2012)’s finding that Indian incumbents accumulate assets much more rapidly than non-incumbents.

However, it is possible that corrupt legislators will have resources and abilities unavailable to honest ones, such as control over violence, skill in manipulating informal patronage networks, and authenticity (Vaishnav, 2011). If this is the case, then we should expect corrupt candidates to be more successful and incumbents than honest ones. If criminality is correlated with a candidate’s level of political skills, we should thus expect the results to be similar to those in Table 4, with the more highly skilled set of candidates doing better than less skilled candidates.

Table A.1 uses as a measure of corruption the number of criminal charges pending against a candidate at the time  $t$ , as reported in affidavits they are required to file with the election commission. Since the affidavit requirement is recent, the data, coded by Aidt, Golden and Tiwari (2011), only covers the 2004 and 2009 elections. Criminal candidates have a slight estimated incumbency advantage, but that among non-criminals is more than twice as large. Very similar results emerge when we compare “corrupt” constituencies (where any candidate had a criminal charge against them at time  $t$ , to other constituencies. While the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant, they provide strong evidence against the idea that criminality is disadvantaging

Table A.1: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Crime and Corruption

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
Criminal Can.	0.052	0.161	0.747	0.047	121	.258
Non-Criminal Can	-0.207	0.108	0.056	0.067	409	(.236)
Criminal Const.	-0.043	0.110	0.693	0.074	306	.204
Non-Criminal Const.	-0.248	0.139	0.074	0.053	224	(.200)

The running variable is the individual's vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of criminal candidates is made up of candidates with no criminal charges against them at the time of the previous election at the 2009 and 2014 elections. The subgroup of criminal constituencies is made up of constituencies where a candidate had a criminal charge against them at the time of the previous election at the 2009 and 2014 elections. The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

India incumbents.<sup>17</sup>

This finding raises the slight possibility that incumbency disadvantage is driven by the *positive* effects of criminality. Such a pattern would be consistent with the theoretical claim that highly skilled incumbents should not be effected by incumbency, but would raise questions about the generalizability of the findings. Testing this hypothesis is made difficult by the limited amount of data available on criminality: There is no variation in defection law incidence or CPI(M) membership among members with criminal charges. However, Table ?? shows that the interaction of party centralization and incumbency is still statistically significant and negative after candidate criminality has been controlled for. In fact, candidate criminality has little effect on criminality once party centralization has been accounted for.

## A.1.2 Alternative Hypotheses: Poverty and Spending

Another popular hypotheses about incumbency advantage, briefly alluded to by Uppal (2009), and common in journalistic discussions of the issue, is that it is a reaction against poverty and/or low levels of government services. Developing country voters, in this view, see their poor material conditions, and the low quality of government services,

<sup>17</sup>Aidt, Golden and Tiwari (2011) found that incumbents running against criminals have lower incumbency advantages, but it is difficult to know how to interpret this, since time  $t+1$  entry decisions are endogenous to unobserved candidate quality, and are not accounted for in the RD design.

and punish their representatives whether or not they are directly responsible. While this view implies some strong assumptions about the psychology of both politicians and voters, it is a hypothesis worthy of close examination.

Table A.2: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Poverty and Gov. Spending

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
High Literacy	-0.064	0.059	0.283	0.077	1412	.163*
Low Literacy	-0.221	0.051	0.000	0.067	1359	(.089)
High Marginal Work.	-0.137	0.055	0.013	0.063	1423	.037
Low Marginal Work.	-0.184	0.056	0.001	0.069	1211	(.085)
High Urbanization	-0.094	0.065	0.150	0.074	1183	.085
Low Urbanization	-0.181	0.049	0.000	0.066	1531	(.087)
High Exp. PC	-0.082	0.066	0.216	0.074	1032	.106
Low Exp. PC	-0.199	0.068	0.004	0.056	862	(.103)
High Dev. Exp. Prop.	0.003	0.061	0.959	0.078	1139	.260**
Low Dev. Exp. Prop.	-0.269	0.072	0.000	0.056	866	(.111)
High SDP	-0.098	0.070	0.161	0.081	967	-.126
Low SDP	-0.224	0.067	0.001	0.052	931	(.098)
High Poverty Gap	-0.000	0.123	0.999	0.102	295	.073
Low Poverty Gap	0.073	0.078	0.348	0.108	787	(.166)
Reserved Constituency	-0.099	0.074	0.183	0.082	762	.093
Unreserved Constituency	-0.193	0.049	0.000	0.053	1858	(.092)

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroups in the third and fourth rows are defined by whether the candidate’s party formed the government at the national level. The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error. The high-literacy constituencies are those who parent district had over 54% literacy at the 2001 census. The high-marginal constituencies are those who parent district had over 77% of its worker classified as marginal workers at the 2001 census. The high-urbanization constituencies are those who parent district had over 26% of its population in urban areas at the 2001 census. The high expenditure per capita constituencies state-years where the state government spent more than Rs. 706 in constant 1960 rupees per person in the previous year. The high-development expenditure proportion constituencies state-years where the state government spent more than 64% of its total expenditure on development in the previous year. The high poverty constituencies were those that had a rural poverty gap of

Table A.2 shows a set of regression discontinuity estimates subsetted by a variety of variables that might be plausibly correlated with poverty, voter information, or the quality of public services: the literacy of the district, the proportion of workers classified as “marginal workers” (a poverty proxy) the proportion of the population urban, the state government’s expenditure per capita, and the proportion of the state’s expenditure



spent on development, a category that includes education, healthcare and roads. The literacy, marginal worker, and urbanization data was collected at the district level as part of the 2001 census of India, and was then matched to individual constituencies. The expenditure data was collected at the state-year level by the Reserve Bank of India

While high-service and low-poverty areas are generally slightly kinder to incumbents than other areas, the results are quite weak none of these differences is statistically significant except literacy at the 10% level. This in general accords with the regional patterns in Table A.5, which found that while the areas with the lowest levels of incumbency disadvantage were relatively wealthy, some of the wealthiest states in India have high levels of incumbency disadvantage as well. The evidence for poverty causing incumbency disadvantage thus appears ambiguous.

Could poverty be driving the main results? Table A.14 reports the results of a simple logistic regression model that includes interactions of these variable with incumbency and vote margin. While incumbency still has a direct negative effect on vote margin, the interaction between incumbency and the development measures is never significant, except for literacy. The estimated effects of party and defection rule variables also remain constant in these models, with the exception of the CPI(M) interaction, which drops below conventional levels of statistical significance. This accords with the regional findings in Table A.5, which showed that while several poor areas had high estimated levels of incumbency disadvantage, several wealthy states, such as Maharashtra, have high levels of disadvantage as well.

### A.1.3 Alternative Tests and Controls

Table A.3 uses a simple logistic model with controls for the vote margin, incumbency, and the interaction of these variables with the independent variable of interest, while focusing only on cases within five percentage points of winning or losing. In these models, the coefficient of interest of interest is the interaction of incumbency with the variable of interest. These models can be thought of as stripped down replication of the main results, without the weighting or bandwidth optimization procedures used in the main models, or the bootstrapped standard errors needed to compare coefficients.

These models produce very similar results to Tables 2 and 3, with party centralization and anti-defection laws being negatively associated with the electoral performance of near winners.

Table A.3: Logistic Regression: Main Hypotheses

VARIABLES	(1) Centralized P.	(2) Weak P.	(3) Defection Rule	(4) CPIM
Loser Vote Margin	8.821 (6.453)	0.549 (18.57)	-14.44 (12.70)	15.52*** (5.308)
Winner Vote Margin	7.077 (4.332)	0.952 (9.216)	14.45 (9.861)	13.43*** (3.863)
Incumbent	-0.417 (0.316)	0.270 (0.608)	0.395 (0.588)	-0.611** (0.287)
Variable	0.418 (0.403)	0.745 (0.479)	0.802* (0.427)	-0.335 (0.676)
Variable*Incumbent	-1.261** (0.512)	-1.849*** (0.572)	-1.063* (0.560)	2.304*** (0.810)
Variable*Loser Vote Margin	37.19** (16.61)	15.98 (21.18)	35.69** (13.99)	-3.308 (34.29)
Variable*Winner Vote Margin	22.69* (11.88)	13.60 (11.23)	-4.145 (10.64)	-34.72** (15.10)
Constant	-0.0915 (0.256)	-0.554 (0.511)	-0.789* (0.451)	-0.131 (0.229)
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1,896	1,117	2,265	2,287

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

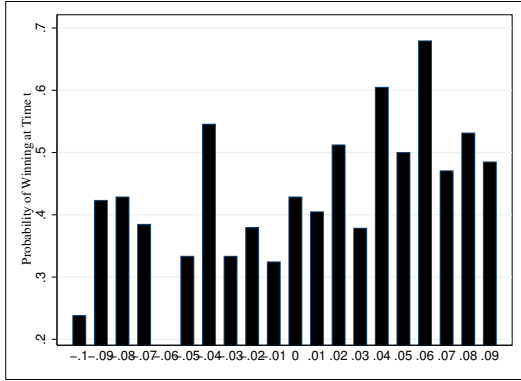
The table reports coefficients from a logistic regression with the margin of victory at time  $t+1$  as the dependent variable, and with the variable named in the column title as the key independent variable. Each model includes the margin of victory at time  $t$  on either side of cutoff and a dummy variable for whether a candidate won at time  $t$ , the interactions of those variables with the independent variable of interest, and the direct effect of the independent variable. Only observations within 5 percentage point of the cutoff are included.

One problem with the comparisons of RD coefficients reported in the main tables is that the effects may be a products of unobserved variables correlated with both the subsetting variables and the ability of incumbents to benefit from office holding. Tables A.3 and A.3 examines the sensitivity of the inclusion of control variables that account for other factors that might plausibly influence the electoral success of members, including membership in the national incumbent party or coalition, the lagged party seat

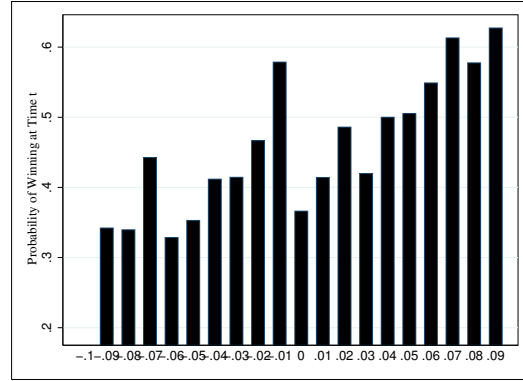
share, the lagged vote fragmentation in the constituency, the reservation status of the constituency and the number of terms the candidate had served, real per capita development expenditure, and the proportion of individuals at the 2001 census who were urban, literate, marginal workers or members of scheduled castes or tribes. The models include both these measures and their interactions with incumbency, along with year fixed effects. The inclusion of these control variables, makes the estimated effect of centralized parties statistically insignificant, but does not reduce the effect of the CPI(M), party unit weakness, and post-defection rule party size on incumbency, providing some limited indication that the results are not driven by any of the more obvious observable confounders.

Figure A.1: Election Rates by Previous Election Margin of Victory

(a) No Defection Rule



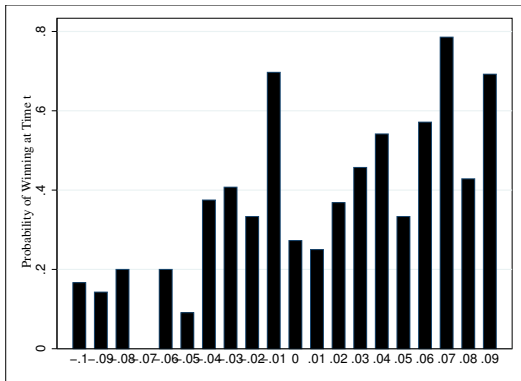
(b) Defection Rule



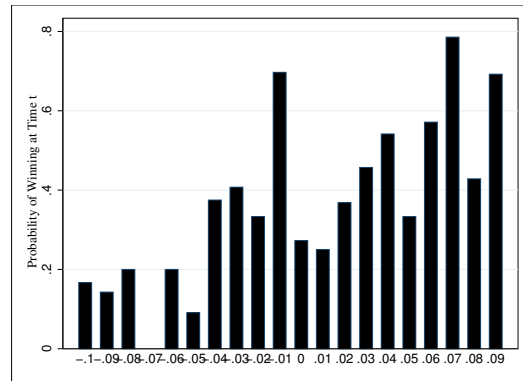
The bars show the actual probability of winning for candidates whose previous vote margin was in a specific bin. Bins are defined in increments of .01, and the bin labeled 0 thus represents margins of victory between 0 and .01 of the vote. The subgroup of “defection rules” candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005.

Figure A.2: Election Rates by Party Centralization

(a) Less Centralized Party



(b) More Centralized Party



The bars show the actual probability of winning for candidates whose previous vote margin was in a specific bin. Bins are defined in increments of .01, and the bin labeled 0 thus represents margins of victory between 0 and .01 of the vote. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#).

Table A.4: Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Lagged Vote Margin	0.013	0.114	5300
Winner	0.354	0.478	16924
Incumbent	0.221	0.415	15685
Lagged Party Seats	130.392	118.745	5363
National Incumbent	0.306	0.461	16924
Centralized Party	0.139	0.346	4512
Weak Unit of National Party	0.743	0.437	6145
Left Party	0.082	0.275	5712
Local Spending Prop.	0.043	0.039	11872
Local Spending Prop. 2001	0.294	0.192	16337
Small State	0.04	0.197	16861
Lagged Criminal Charge	0.253	0.435	878
Criminal Constituency	0.473	0.499	3221
Literacy Rate	0.541	0.103	15491
Marginal Worker Rate	0.773	0.071	15491
Urban Rate	0.264	0.145	15491
Prop Dev. Spending	0.642	0.072	11931
Real Total Spending PC	1127.711	663.408	11931
Rea Central Grants PC	159.201	116.345	12933

Table A.5: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Region

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwidth.	N
South	0.090	0.081	0.267	0.071	659
West	-0.284	0.102	0.005	0.082	417
East	0.042	0.144	0.773	0.046	263
North	-0.297	0.060	0.000	0.065	1073
Northwest	-0.290	0.124	0.019	0.076	300
Northeast	-0.033	0.167	0.842	0.134	164

The running variable is the individual's vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroups in the third and fourth rows are defined by whether the candidate's party formed the government at the national level. The "South" includes Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, The "West" includes Gujarat, Goa and Maharashtra, the "East" includes Orissa and West Bengal, the "Northeast" includes Assam and neighboring small states, the "North" includes Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and the "Northwest" includes Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Table A.6: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Unconditional Incumbency

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
No Anti-Defection Rule	0.085	0.042	0.045	0.106	1715	.111*
Anti-Defection Rule	-0.027	0.030	0.356	0.043	3637	(.060)
Less Centralized Parties	0.025	0.031	0.426	0.048	3276	.121*
Centralized Parties	-0.096	0.054	0.077	0.070	981	(.071)
Strong Nat. Party Unit	0.152	0.064	0.018	0.045	658	.189*
Weak Nat. Party Unit	-0.033	0.038	0.381	0.062	1973	(.107)
CPI(M)	0.270	0.115	0.019	0.050	265	.297*
Non-CPI(M)	-0.026	0.026	0.314	0.046	4380	(.159)
Age>64	0.071	0.026	0.006	0.05	4025	.458***
Age<65	-0.387	0.061	0.000	0.054	1092	(.069)

The running variable is the individual vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether or not the individual was an MP at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of “defection rules” candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#). The subgroup of criminal candidates is made up of candidates with no criminal charges against them at the time of the previous election at the 2009 and 2014 elections. The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

Table A.7: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Additional Tests

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
Close Parliament	-.254	.074	.001	.078	752	-.139
Non-Close Parliament	-.120	.0461	.009	.063	2081	(.093)
More than 31 Seats	-0.102	0.045	0.023	0.071	2060	.309***
4-30 Seats	-0.412	0.091	0.000	0.054	546	(.110)
High Central Transfers	-0.066	0.125	0.599	0.062	242	.106
Low Central Transfers	-0.166	0.051	0.001	0.054	1620	(.157)
Party Switcher	-0.188	0.045	0.000	0.057	2122	-.084
Non-Party Switcher	-0.093	0.072	0.199	0.101	624	(.098)
High Running Rate	-0.222	0.061	0.000	0.067	1151	-.114
Low Running Rate	-.108	0.051	0.036	0.063	1674	(.093)

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of parties with more than 30 seats is based on the situation at election  $t$ . “Close parliaments” are 2004-2009 and 1998-1999. The high-central transfer constituencies are state-years where the state government received more than Rs. 500 in constant 1960 rupees from the central government in the previous year. The subgroup of party switchers comprises the candidates whose  $t$  party is different from their  $t+1$  party. The subgroup of High rerunning rate years comprises the candidates who ran in years where over 50% of candidates in close races from the previous election ran again (1991, 1998 and 1999). The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

Table A.8: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Party Vote Margins

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwidth.	N	Difference
No Anti-Defection Rule	-0.049	0.067	0.468	0.109	973	.112
Anti-Defection Rule	-0.161	0.034	0.000	0.052	3869	(.077)
Less Centralized Parties	-0.086	0.032	0.007	0.072	4179	.175**
Centralized Parties	-0.262	0.075	0.000	0.056	795	(.081)
Strong Nat. Party Unit	0.077	0.069	0.263	0.067	829	.206**
Weak Nat. Party Unit	-0.130	0.044	0.003	0.081	2287	(.083)
CPI(M)	0.187	0.110	0.089	0.074	318	.338***
Non-CPI(M)	-0.152	0.030	0.000	0.063	4883	(.119)
Age>64	-.048	.028	.093	.074	2829	.420***
Age<65	-.468	.059	.000	.063	849	(.075)

The running variable is the party vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the a candidate from the party was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of “defection rules” candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#). The subgroup of weak units of national parties are defined as candidates of national parties from states where the party won more than one election in the 1977-2014 period and the the number of years in office per individual party chief minister is less than five. The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

Table A.9: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Selected Comparisons

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwidth.	N
CPI	-0.254	0.332	0.444	0.051	47
CPI(M)	0.235	0.168	0.160	0.076	181
Samajwadi Party	-0.452	0.191	0.018	0.041	104
UP BJP	-0.252	0.185	0.172	0.036	111
Tamil Congress	0.078	0.251	0.757	0.079	34
Andhra Congress	-0.093	0.253	0.712	0.046	103

The running variable is the individual’s vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with triangular kernel. The columns report standard errors, p values, bandwidths, and number of cases.

The Andhra Congress Party has historically been factionalized, and has had several leaders imposed by the Delhi high command. While the Tamil Congress is weaker electorally, it has historically been better at defying Delhi, most notably when G.P. Moopnar and his son led the entire state leadership into a breakaway party before successfully negotiating their return (1996-2002). Predictably, the estimated effect of incumbency among Tamil Congressmen is much higher than that in Andhra. In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the BJP is often mentioned as being a relatively well institutionalized for an Indian party, while the regional Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party) is completely controlled by the family of its charismatic leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav. Despite coming from the same state, the UP BJP suffers less from incumbency than the SP does.

Table A.10: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Fixed Bandwidths

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
No Anti-Defection Rule	0.143	0.110	0.195	0.050	335	.374***
Anti-Defection Rule	-0.027	0.030	0.356	0.043	3637	(.115)
Less Centralized Parties	-0.120	0.055	0.028	0.050	1578	.365***
Centralized Parties	-0.485	0.111	0.000	0.050	319	(.122)
Strong Nat. Party Unit	0.092	0.140	0.511	0.050	346	.333*
Weak Nat. Party Unit	-0.239	0.078	0.002	0.050	771	(.141)
CPI(M)	0.194	0.209	0.354	0.050	142	.387*
Non-CPI(M)	-0.189	0.045	0.000	0.050	2146	(.207)
Age>64	-.025	.052	.626	.05	1599	.441***
Age<65	-.467	.073	.000	.05	668	(.088)

The running variable is the individual's vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally linear regression with a triangular kernel and a bandwidth of .05. The subgroup of "defection rules" candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#). The subgroup of weak units of national parties are defined as candidates of national parties from states where the party won more than one election in the 1977-2014 period and the the number of years in office per individual party chief minister is less than five. The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.

Table A.11: Regression Discontinuity Estimates: Locally Quadratic Regression

Subsample	Estimate	SE	PValue	Bdwdth.	N	Difference
No Anti-Defection Rule	0.059	0.100	0.558	0.139	829	.293**
Anti-Defection Rule	-0.235	0.052	0.000	0.095	2866	(.122)
Less Centralized Parties	-0.111	0.054	0.041	0.119	2660	.423***
Centralized Parties	-0.534	0.132	0.000	0.075	294	(.151)
Strong Nat. Party Unit	0.079	0.153	0.605	0.094	487	.321
Weak Nat. Party Unit	-0.242	0.086	0.005	0.092	1164	.196
CPI(M)	0.205	0.186	0.268	0.135	229	.401*
Non-CPI(M)	-0.196	0.043	0.000	0.125	2814	(.225)
Age>64	-0.023	0.055	0.680	0.104	1568	.463***
Age<65	-0.486	0.072	0.000	0.118	1190	(.099)

The running variable is the individual's vote margin at time  $t$ . The outcome is whether the candidate was elected at time  $t+1$ . The estimate is the average treatment effect with locally quadratic regression with triangular kernel. The subgroup of "defection rules" candidates are candidates who either ran before 1986 or whose parties won three or fewer seats at the previous election between 1986 and 2005. The subgroup of centralized parties is defined based on [Kitschelt \(2012\)](#). The estimates in the last column are the differences between the two estimates, and the number in parentheses is the bootstrapped standard error.



Table A.12: Logistic Regression: Controls

VARIABLES	(1) Centralized P.	(2) Defection Rule	(3) CPIM
Loser Vote Margin	8.417 (6.519)	-14.49 (12.75)	15.27*** (5.346)
Winner Vote Margin	6.313 (4.434)	10.02 (10.02)	11.04*** (3.969)
Incumbent	-1.947*** (0.596)	-0.985 (0.696)	-2.038*** (0.483)
Variable	0.351 (0.434)	0.859* (0.451)	-0.362 (0.688)
Variable*Incumbent	-0.864 (0.551)	-1.389** (0.590)	2.124*** (0.824)
Variable*Loser Vote Margin	38.66** (16.73)	35.62** (14.03)	-4.573 (34.33)
Variable*Winner Vote Margin	19.42 (12.00)	-1.362 (10.81)	-29.98** (15.16)
National Incumbent	0.217 (0.221)	0.0945 (0.193)	0.0736 (0.189)
Lagged Party Seats	-0.00140 (0.00127)	-0.000499 (0.00105)	-0.000217 (0.000943)
Candidate Terms	-0.00663 (0.0694)	-0.00874 (0.0644)	0.0300 (0.0566)
Lagged Herf.	0.493 (1.062)	-0.00112 (0.946)	0.135 (0.944)
Reserved Seat	0.0517 (0.195)	-0.0268 (0.177)	0.000443 (0.175)
National Incumbent*Incumbent	-0.410 (0.266)	-0.52** (0.234)	-0.488** (0.231)
Lagged Party Seats*Incumbent	0.00180 (0.00152)	0.00183 (0.00124)	0.00202* (0.00116)
Candidate Terms *Incumbent	4.323*** (1.325)	5.081*** (1.185)	4.322*** (1.187)
Lagged Herf.*Incumbent	-0.189 (0.241)	-0.0140 (0.220)	-7.76e-08 (0.219)
Reserved Seat*Incumbent	0.0254 (0.0807)	0.0595 (0.0752)	0.0132 (0.0688)
Constant	-0.157 (0.479)	-0.809 (0.540)	-0.206 (0.377)
Year FE	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1,895	2,264	2,286

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The table reports coefficients from a logistic regression with the margin of victory at time  $t+1$  as the dependent variable, and with the variable named in the column title as the key independent variable. Each model includes the margin of victory at time  $t$  on either side of cutoff and a dummy variable for whether a candidate won at time  $t$ , the interactions of those variables with the independent variable of interest, and the direct effect of the independent variable. Only observations within 5 percentage point of the cutoff are included. The “political controls” include membership in the national incumbent party or coalition, the lagged party seat share, the lagged vote fragmentation in the constituency, the reservation status of the constituency and the number of terms the candidate had served. The “demographic controls” include real per capita development expenditure (from the Reserve Bank of India, and the proportion of individuals at the 2001 census who were urban, literate, marginal workers or members of scheduled castes or tribes. The models include both these controls and their interactions with incumbency.

Table A.13: Logistic Regression: Alternative Hypotheses

VARIABLES	(1) Centralized P.	(2) Defection Rule	(3) CPIM
Loser Vote Margin	11.66 1 (8.055)	-24.43* (14.23)	16.19** (6.611)
Winner Vote Margin	9.825* (5.343)	13.70 (11.55)	13.17*** (4.817)
Incumbent	-1.385 (1.364)	-1.769 (1.358)	-3.314*** (1.197)
Variable	1.011* (0.597)	1.198** (0.523)	0.0188 (0.708)
Variable*Incumbent	-2.110*** (0.790)	-1.714** (0.687)	1.289 (0.873)
Variable*Loser Vote Margin	42.91* (22.27)	52.05*** (16.13)	-13.32 (35.45)
Variable*Winner Vote Margin	22.57 (18.87)	-1.542 (12.61)	-8.961 (18.02)
Urban	1.465 (1.196)	1.901* (1.085)	1.868* (1.065)
Literacy	-3.224** (1.602)	-3.912*** (1.479)	-3.710** (1.455)
Development Exp.	0.000613 (0.000567)	6.30e-05 (0.000506)	2.52e-05 (0.000498)
SDPPC	1.53e-05 (2.75e-05)	9.86e-06 (2.65e-05)	1.82e-05 (2.68e-05)
Incumbent*Development Exp.	-0.00112* (0.000670)	-0.000219 (0.000602)	0.000108 (0.000600)
Incumbent*SDPPC	-1.27e-05 (2.98e-05)	-1.03e-05 (2.88e-05)	-1.84e-05 (2.90e-05)
Incumbent*Urban	-1.958 (1.398)	-2.311* (1.269)	-2.047 (1.257)
Incumbent*Literacy	6.927*** (1.864)	7.242*** (1.697)	6.070*** (1.689)
Constant	-0.759 (1.048)	-0.467 (1.016)	0.465 (0.868)
Year FE	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1,205	1,487	1,497

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

The table reports coefficients from a logistic regression with the margin of victory at time  $t+1$  as the dependent variable, and with the variable named in the column title as the key independent variable. Each model includes the margin of victory at time  $t$  on either side of cutoff and a dummy variable for whether a candidate won at time  $t$ , the interactions of those variables with the independent variable of interest, and the direct effect of the independent variable. Only observations within 5 percentage point of the cutoff are included.

Table A.14: Logistic Regression: Criminality

VARIABLES	(1) Centralized Party
Loser Vote Margin	-34.16 (38.31)
Winner Vote Margin	-8.834 (20.85)
Incumbent	1.710 (1.352)
Variable	2.358 (1.666)
Variable*Incumbent	-3.820* (2.070)
Variable*Loser Vote Margin	66.33 (60.73)
Variable*Winner Vote Margin	49.25 (46.39)
Lagged Charge	-0.00840 (1.047)
Incumbent*Lagged Charge	0.189 (1.208)
Constant	-1.954 (1.209)
Observations	96

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

The table reports coefficients from a logistic regression with the margin of victory at time  $t+1$  as the dependent variable, and with the variable named in the column title as the key independent variable. Each model includes the margin of victory at time  $t$  on either side of cutoff and a dummy variable for whether a candidate won at time  $t$ , the interactions of those variables with the independent variable of interest, and the direct effect of the independent variable. Only observations within 5 percentage point of the cutoff are included.