

# 7

## Who Do Politicians Talk To?

Political Contact in Urban Punjab

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Fareed goes back and forth between tales of how close he is to all residents of his ward and how close he is to Sheikh *sahib*, the National Assembly member (MNA) within whose constituency his ward lies. Fareed is one of six general members in his union council (UC); twenty-one union councils comprise Sheikh sahib's National Assembly constituency in the heart of Lahore.<sup>1</sup> Yet Fareed claims to be one of his closest and most cherished aides: "Sheikh sahib gets reports about who is doing what in their areas, and the people of my ward say only good things about me."<sup>2</sup>

Later in the office of Farzand, Sheikh sahib's son and de facto political manager, Fareed, is less boastful. He wants to get Farzand's attention for more than a few seconds so that he can explain exactly why the streetlights in his ward are more important than the streetlights about which Farzand no doubt is also being asked. Responding to a question about how he comes to know how popular and hardworking the councilors in his area are, Farzand scoffs dismissively and uses the question as an excuse to lecture the few councilors present in the room, including Fareed. "I don't trust these union councilors and workers to keep in touch with my constituents for me. Anyone who has a problem can come directly to me," he tells us later.<sup>3</sup> On the face of it the latter part of his statement is true. His office is full of visitors, only a couple of whom are elected union councilors. He shows us documents on his computer that list the nearly four thousand visitors to his office over the years. Remarkable as that number is, it is smaller than the number of citizens with whom the more than one hundred local politicians in the NA constituency speak in a week.

One year earlier and a couple hundred kilometers away, then—federal minister Chaudhary sahib—like Sheikh sahib, a member of the Pakistan

Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N)—walks into a large room adjacent to his home office within his constituency headquarters on a hot Sunday in July. While he tries to make this trip from Islamabad every week, ministerial duties sometimes prevent it and on those weeks his son, Muhammad, the mayor of the district council in which Chaudhary sahib’s constituency lies, walks into the room instead, usually to encounter a smaller crowd.<sup>4</sup> There are almost fifty men in this room and only a handful of women; they are all here to see Chaudhary sahib. They are all residents of his constituency, which Chaudhary sahib has won repeatedly in the last few elections. His manager, Haji sahib, has already been hard at work for the past hour documenting every visitor’s stated problem or complaint. By far the most common problem raised is that of employment, or the lack thereof. The supplicants are mostly educated; they are largely hoping to get hired for the government or professional jobs that are scarcely available. Chaudhary sahib alternates between dispensing career advice, referring to stringent recruitment criteria, promising help, and making phone calls to the right people on the spot. He is attentive and patient and refuses to listen to only one person who, after Chaudhary sahib’s questioning, turns out to be from the neighboring constituency. The discovery leads Chaudhary sahib to turn his attention to those who are part of his potential vote bank.

Meanwhile, Muhammad is holding meetings with locally elected union councilors in an adjacent office. As we make our way to an event nearby where Chaudhary sahib is set to give a speech, he remarks that this Sunday gathering allows him to remain in touch with citizen needs.<sup>5</sup> We cannot help but wonder which of the two gatherings he is referring to.

On a later trip about half an hour from Chaudhary sahib’s home, during which we speak with three union councilors in his National Assembly constituency, we are told that few residents from their wards even know about these Sunday gatherings at his home.<sup>6</sup> “We know what their problems are, and we spend our days and nights trying to solve them, and still they complain. But these problems are not things for which they would need to go to Chaudhary sahib,” one tells us. These men, despite being elected union councilors, are probably the least educated of the men in Chaudhary sahib’s home office that Sunday, and the problems they are talking about are decidedly different from the ones being brought up by the supplicants in the minister’s constituency office.

These anecdotes emphasize how the structure and membership of political machines and how the manner in which these machines engage with voters have important implications for whose preferences get heard or have a chance of being represented in decision-making. These political party organizations—usually headed by a single boss, family, or small group that is in the business of organizing votes (Gosnell 1933; Scott 1969; Gans–Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014)—are complex and varied. They contain a mix-

ture of elected local “lower-tier” politicians and unelected party workers who expend considerable time and effort, both during elections and outside of election campaigns, maintaining contact with citizens. These machines are organized by “higher-tier” politicians competing for higher office—typically for national and provincial assembly seats—and their family members. The machines’ most important task is to garner votes for higher-tier politicians during general elections. In cases where members of these machines, whether local politicians or unelected party workers, have a personal following of their own, their relationship with higher-tier politicians is more symmetric, with the latter often having a great deal of trouble in keeping together rival local factions within the machine under the party banner. Local politicians and party workers are also valuable to higher-tier politicians for another reason: they act as aggregators of information about voters. Because citizens come to them with a range of municipal and nonmunicipal issues, they arguably know a lot more about citizen preferences than higher-tier politicians.

This chapter provides a description of political machines in urban Punjab and develops a typology of linkages between citizens and local politicians in order to shed light on how local politicians access information about voters and how machine structures facilitate or discourage the transmission of citizen voices. We consider three types of linkages between citizens and political actors: voters being targeted by a political machine for door-to-door election campaigns, voters initiating contact with members of the machine outside of an election campaign, and voters being personally known to local politicians.

To investigate the question of which voters are in contact with local politicians and whether they differ systematically from those with whom the politicians are not in contact, we draw on an original survey in 2017 of 2,150 adult males and females of voting age in forty-three union councils within four provincial assembly constituencies in Lahore. The four selected provincial assembly constituencies reflect a mix of competitive and non-competitive neighboring constituencies in the heart of the city. The two highly competitive provincial constituencies, PP-147 and PP-148, are within National Assembly constituency NA-122; the two other constituencies with less competition at the provincial and National Assembly levels are PP-146 in NA-121 and PP-149 in NA-124. The four constituencies are adjacent to each other in central Lahore.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we conducted semistructured interviews with thirty-three higher-tier local politicians in Lahore and other districts of Punjab province, plus a survey of sixty local politicians in Lahore district. All of this together provides a rich description of the characteristics of political machines and the demographic and political characteristics of voters with whom local politicians come into contact or know well.

In our surveys local politicians in Lahore state a preference for contacting opposition voters and those with unclear affiliations before contacting voters

from their own parties during election campaigns. From voter surveys, however, we find that undecided voters are no more likely to be targeted by parties during election campaigns. Instead of targeting undecided voters, parties target illiterate and male voters and those who have a high propensity toward political participation or a higher level of trust in democracy. This finding is consistent with theories that suggest that parties mobilize voters who are more likely to turn out on election day but do not possess the fine-grained information required to target other kinds of voters on the basis of their political inclinations or partisan affiliations (Stokes 2005, 2007; Stokes et al. 2013; Finan and Schechter 2012; Larreguy, Marshall, and Querebin 2016).

While undecided voters are no more likely to be targeted during campaigns, outside of election campaigns they are in fact more likely than decided voters to initiate contact with both government and opposition local politicians themselves. Compared to men, women are less likely to contact local politicians who are members of political machines organized by higher-tier politicians of the ruling and opposition parties, which is possibly due to structural and norm-based constraints to female political participation.

Using voters' beliefs about whether and how well their local elected officials know them, we find that local politicians are much less likely to know both undecided voters and opposition voters. The same is true for poorer, less social, female voters when controlling for contact during campaigns, demographic factors, and political affiliations. This implies that the voters who local politicians know well are different from the voters who contact local politicians themselves and that local politicians are much more likely to know their own supporters and much less likely to know those who are marginalized in society. Whether a politician in a local context knows a voter well or not is mediated by a range of sociopolitical factors, of which a voter's preferences or partisan affiliation is only one. Nonetheless, a key implication of these findings is that politicians' views of their constituencies are segmented and potentially exclude those who may need their attention the most. In fact, we find that within a union council of roughly twenty to twenty-five thousand voters, members of political machines are most likely to know higher-income male voters of their own party; this suggests both an anti-women and an anti-poor bias in the information that is transmitted upward to higher-tier representatives.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first section presents a brief review of the literature on citizen politician linkages broadly and in Pakistan specifically. Next is a description of the structure of political machines and the strategy political machines use to aggregate citizen voice. The third section introduces the three types of citizen-politician interactions, describes the data used to explore these interactions, and presents results on what kinds of voters are in contact with party machines. The chapter concludes with a brief look at whether these findings can extrapolate to the rest of Pakistan.

## Literature on Citizen Politician Linkages

A large body of literature on clientelism conceptualizes the relationship between voters and political parties in developing countries to be primarily about the distribution of benefits to voters and higher-tier politicians attempting to hold voters accountable for their vote. Susan Stokes et al. (2013) focus on the distinction between programmatic versus nonprogrammatic distribution and conditional versus unconditional benefits to draw out a “broker mediated theory of clientelism.” In doing so they acknowledge the limitations of the earlier unitary party theories that assumed that parties act as single unitary agents when interacting with citizens. In the theory of broker mediation, voters view parties through key members of political machines organized by higher-tier politicians who act as the imperfect agents of parties on the ground, doling out benefits in a conditional and largely clientelistic manner that is based on votes or turnout. Brokers are imperfect agents because their actions are not observed by higher-tier politicians, which gives them space to undertake or shirk actions that maximize their return even if it comes at the expense of their bosses.

Using an original survey of Argentinian brokers, Stokes et al. (2013) argue that brokers have a great deal of knowledge about the voters in their areas. This informational advantage makes them valuable to parties, though not always trustworthy, and makes it possible to sustain clientelistic exchange. Meanwhile, Mark Schneider (2018) finds that brokers do not have the claimed informational advantage in the case of opposition and nonpartisan voters and have only a slight advantage over a random guess in the case of partisan voters. The literature is undecided on the informational advantage of brokers depending on whom brokers target on behalf of parties.

Most of the work on party-voter linkages focuses on elections and the exchanges that precede them. The question of how party machines and voters engage outside of election campaigns has received far less attention. Adam Auerbach (2016) conducted one of the first attempts at studying the consequences of interactions between local brokers and voters outside an election setting. Using survey data on almost two thousand households in Jaipur and Bhopal, India, he shows that the density of party workers in a slum is positively associated with service delivery outcomes. Interactions between voters and party machines, then, are not simply about exchanges of small favors for votes at election time.

The study of party-voter linkages in Pakistan is at a nascent stage and focuses more on rural settings. Shandana Khan Mohmand (2014) draws on previous research in Pakistan to identify four possible explanations for how politicians and parties connect with voters, namely: that feudal landlords aligned with parties dictate the preferences of voters (e.g., Alavi 1983); that clientelistic exchanges similar to those highlighted here occur between par-

ties and voters (e.g., Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath 2003); that voters organize and connect upward along kinship lines (e.g., Wilder 1999); and that party identification has started to matter (e.g., Wilder 1999; Jones 2003). Khan Mohmand concludes through a longitudinal study of a village in Sargodha district that all four explanations lack completeness, primarily because they fail to consider the objectives and incentives of local actors that mediate party-voter linkages. The focus here is on these local actors and how political machines function in urban Punjab.

The comparative literature on party-voter linkages and Khan Mohmand's conclusions point to two aspects of the next frontier of work in Pakistan: detailed microlevel analyses of voter attitudes and behaviors and more emphasis on urban areas (given Pakistan's rapid urbanization that has weakened traditional kinship-based explanations). A broader typology of party-voter interactions beyond the election cycle is needed as well as an understanding of information transmission in the political space with the voter being the initiator rather than recipient.

In the context of urban Punjab, the local councilor, party broker, and local actor that mediates between voters and parties may all be the same person. Entrepreneurial local intermediaries who are trusted by communities may often be picked up by parties as identifiable brokers that can formally organize the local vote, and party brokers who do well in this context may be rewarded with a party ticket when the local government election comes around.

### **Political Machines in Urban Punjab**

The political system in Punjab relies on local political machines for the upward transmission of preferences and demands and the downward transmission of programmatic policies, clientelistic exchanges, and campaign promises. Political machines tend to operate at the level of the provincial or National Assembly constituency, with each major candidate running for the National Assembly seat piecing together local-level coalitions to mobilize voters and win elections. In cases where a party's candidates for MNA or provincial assembly member (MPA) are strongly aligned, they share this machine. Of the sixty local politicians surveyed, forty-three (72 percent) had campaigned for both an MNA and an MPA candidate, eleven (18 percent) had campaigned for only one, and six (10 percent) had not participated in any higher-tier politician's campaign (where a higher-tier politician is defined as one contesting for or holding an MNA or MPA seat). Candidates for local elections are typically nominated by the party's MNA and MPA candidates for the area that houses the union council. This allows the MNAs and MPAs to exercise significant influence over local politicians. In fact, recent evidence shows that the strength of connections between local and higher-

tier politicians is an important determinant of the success of local candidates in union council elections because voters tend to reward more connected candidates (Liaqat et al. 2019).

These local political machines are consequential for a variety of reasons. The most obvious is the large size of political constituencies—the average National Assembly constituency in Lahore as delimited for the 2018 general elections, for example, had a population of more than 750,000. This necessitates the existence of intermediaries that help aggregate and transmit information upward and promises and services downward. Higher-tier politicians place a great deal of value on members of their machines—local politicians or political workers—and recognize that voters value local politicians' connections to higher-tier politicians who are members of the provincial or National Assembly (Liaqat et al. 2019). An examination of the nature of these local political machines is therefore central to understanding the linkages between political parties and voters.

### *Political Machine Membership and Roles*

Layers of political actors between the voter and the elected parliamentarian create the political machine. These actors are referred to as brokers, workers, or influencers in the literature of comparative politics (Auerbach and Thachil 2018; Schneider 2018; Stokes 2005). Because the term “broker” has a negative connotation, some Pakistani politicians instead refer to them as workers or organizers. With the reinstatement of a tier of local elected leaders in 2015, a significant portion of these actors have become local elected politicians in their own right. In this discussion, those who contest in a local election are referred to as “local politicians”; those who do not contest elections but are affiliated with and act on behalf of or in alignment with a party or politician are “political workers.” There is considerable overlap between these two categories, with an endogenous process of self-selection and nomination of local politicians from a group of political workers.

Each local and higher-tier politician interviewed confirmed that most of those who fall into the local politician category in Punjab today would have been classified as political workers before the local elections in 2015. In other words, before local elections allowed these individuals to contest for elected office themselves, they had already been acting as political workers for higher-tier politicians. Our survey of sixty local politicians in Lahore district confirms this: these politicians had been involved in politics for an average of fifteen years and twenty-six out of the sixty had contested an election before 2015.

Local politicians in Lahore and in Chaudhary sahib's constituency informally estimate that somewhere between thirty and one hundred active

political workers operate in a union council. Using our voter survey data from forty-three union councils in three NA constituencies in Lahore to calculate a “party network density” of about 0.85 political workers for every thousand residents means that between seventeen and twenty-five political workers operate in each union council. This number is a little lower than the estimate provided by Auerbach (2016) from his work on urban slums in Jaipur and Bhopal. The difference could be explained by India’s longer experience with democracy, but more likely it is the difference in the political environment of slums versus formal settlements, as in the case of our Lahore sample. Close to twenty-five individuals in each union council can be considered local politicians at a minimum: thirteen of these sit on the council.<sup>8</sup> A higher number would usually have contested council seats but lost; some would either have chosen not to contest or did not receive tickets. With the introduction of elected local governments in 2015 the importance of local politicians vis-à-vis unelected political workers has increased.

In order to be effective, political workers and local politicians—the key agents of a political machine—must spend a lot of time in their localities, and in cases where their work takes them out of the UC area on a regular basis, they tend to suffer political costs.<sup>9</sup> These actors have a range of occupations including local business owners, lawyers, or government employees. For some, such as shopkeepers, their occupation involves a fair amount of public dealing, which can be integrated into their role as political workers. Political workers and local politicians allocate a significant portion of their time to politics. The major activities in this broad ambit are: (i) fixing citizens’ municipal services problems through relevant political and bureaucratic channels; (ii) supervising infrastructure and development projects being undertaken in their union council areas; (iii) arbitrating household disputes; (iv) strategically attending weddings, funerals, and related events; and (v) campaigning for their candidates during election time. While these actors’ primary sources of income are their business, agricultural, or professional positions, they may derive rents from politics as well. This rent may come in the form of direct payments from politicians but more frequently it comes in the form of indirect payments from projects in their areas and also in the form of heightened social standing.

### *Relationships between Political Workers and Higher-Tier Politicians*

There is enormous diversity in political workers’ loyalty to parties and politicians. They may have a clear party affiliation, which sometimes flows through generations of workers. In a situation akin to the generational transmission of party identity in the United States, several workers in Chaudhary sahib’s constituency and Lahore district stated that they defaulted into being part

of the PML-N: their fathers acted as workers for the party and they simply took over from their fathers. There are cases in which the loyalty toward the politician is stronger than their loyalty to the party.

Pir sahib, a contender for a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) seat and the son of a well-known PTI MNA, described two categories of political workers that predominantly form his family's political machine. The first is the worker who has been loyal to his father since he joined politics in the late 1980s and who seamlessly switched with him from the PML-N to the PPP in the mid-1990s and from the PPP to the PTI in 2011. The second type of worker—much less common—is the PTI loyalist who became part of the political machine only after his father joined the party. Sardar sahib, the son of a prominent PML-N member of the National Assembly from Lahore, reports similar dynamics.<sup>10</sup> When asked about the strength of their affiliation to the party versus to the higher-tier politician with whom they are associated, forty of the local politicians surveyed report that their affiliation with the party is stronger, ten report that their affiliation with the politician is stronger, and the remaining ten report that their degree of affiliation with the party and the politician is equal.

The power relationship between higher-tier politicians and members of their political machine may be clearly asymmetric in favor of the politician or more symmetric, with the local politicians and political workers having a lot of leverage due to their personal local followings. To the extent that a party's voters at the local level are loyal to local politicians and party workers directly, the members of the machine are able to exercise influence over the higher-tier politicians. Higher-tier politicians tend to be heavily dependent on local politicians and political workers not only during campaign times but also during the implementation and monitoring phases of development projects. One member of the provincial assembly commented that one of his main headaches is to keep together factions of local politicians who are aligned with him but are sometimes inclined to switch allegiance due to internal factionalism.<sup>11</sup> Because parties lack formal systems and criteria for recruiting local workers, and because so much depends on how entrepreneurial a worker appears to the higher-tier politician, local competition between brokers can be intense even when they all work for the same party. This entails recruiting groups of voters and then jealously ensuring their loyalty through delivering benefits or solving other problems. Higher-tier politicians may often be required for such solutions, thus many of the requests that reach them are related to the imperatives of local-level competition between party workers. Workers who do not receive sufficient attention may be courted by candidates from other parties that are looking to strengthen their local presence. It is against this backdrop that we examine how political machines aggregate and transmit citizen voice.

*Transmission of Information*

Higher-tier politicians typically communicate directives to members of his or her political machine, whether that be the planning of a gathering or corner meeting in his or her locality, indicating the area's priorities and needs, or supervising the implementation of a project in the area. The union council chairperson has become pivotal in the electoral machine since the revival of elected local governments in 2015, in particular in the allocation of projects and funds within the council area. The local politician usually tries to convince the higher-tier politician to allocate projects using special MNA funds or, of late, district council funds; higher-tier politicians typically allocate based on a combination of electoral targeting concerns, maintaining loyalties of workers, and convenience. Higher-tier politicians often have little to no information about active local politicians aside from the union council chairperson, except for a small number of favorites.

Citizens' voices reach higher-tier politicians primarily through the machine and in particular through union council chairpersons. The local politicians interviewed were typically confident that they knew their constituents' preferences and needs, political affiliations, and household circumstances. For instance, a union council vice-chairperson from Lahore insisted: "Take me to any street in my union council and I can tell just by looking at a house's gate who lives there and who they vote for."

However, higher-tier politicians on more than one occasion expressed concern that they may be getting a distorted picture. One MNA candidate commented that he was aware that local politicians regularly bad mouth certain individuals and regularly praise others.<sup>12</sup> Some try to bypass this situation by occasionally visiting localities themselves. One reported that when he visits localities himself, if the local politician becomes aware that the senior politician has some direct information as well, the local politician will change his report.<sup>13</sup> These higher-tier politicians are aware that winning elections requires putting together a broad coalition of voters through patronage and service delivery to ensure a majority. The question is, how well placed are their local political machines to deliver on this expectation?

**Contact and Linkages**

How does this political machine develop linkages with citizens, and what are the prevalent forms of contact between citizens and political machines? There are correlates for three main forms of contact between citizens and members of political machines:

- (i) door-to-door canvassing during election campaigns;
- (ii) voter-initiated contact with party workers or local politicians outside of election campaigns;
- (iii) citizens' personal knowledge of party workers or local politicians.

*Door-to-Door Canvassing during Election Campaigns*

Conversations with sitting MNAs and MNA candidates of the two main political parties, the PML-N and PTI, reveal how campaigns are typically planned at the level of the national constituency. This constituency is divided into smaller units and lists of active party workers are drawn up for each of these units. With the reintroduction of a tier of local elected leaders, these smaller units are likely to correspond to union councils. Party workers are tasked with going door-to-door in their localities to deliver the party's message, to inquire how the family intends to vote, to thank those who indicate their intention to vote for the party, and to persuade those who do not intend to vote for the party (by offering promises or, in the case of incumbents, by relying on targeted delivery before and/or after elections).

In one of our sample NA constituencies the political manager claimed an intention to visit every household in the constituency at least once during the election campaign. In another constituency the opposition candidate from PTI played down the importance of door-to-door campaigns, insisting instead that messaging delivered through the media played a larger part in persuading voters.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the political manager's claim that PML-N workers visit every household during an election campaign, only 30 percent of voters surveyed in his constituency reported that their household had received a visit from a representative of a party.<sup>15</sup> Between the central plan to visit all households and the execution of such a plan by party workers, several decisions are made about how to allocate a limited amount of workers' time to household visits. It is important to investigate which individuals receive visits from party workers during campaign time because of these decisions.

We ran a simple regression (table 7.1 column 1) of a binary variable on a range of demographic variables for whether the respondent was contacted during an election campaign by political workers of any party.<sup>16</sup> As one would expect, women are much less likely to report contact during election campaigns by political workers. Even though the survey question asked about whether the *household* received a visit from any political worker, women are 10 percentage points less likely to say they did. This suggests that women are often so far removed from the political process that they might not even know if their own household was contacted by a political worker, let alone have a direct conversation with a visiting party worker. Those who are less educated and have strong social linkages (i.e., those who report having more friends in the community and having attended more weddings in the previous three months) are somewhat more likely to be contacted. This indicates some amount of targeting based on visibility (for the more social) and low social status (where educational attainment is used as a proxy for social status).

**Table 7.1. Correlates of politician-voter contact**

	(1) <i>Campaign contact (0-1) b/se</i>	(2) <i>Voter-initiated contact with local PML-N politicians (0-1) b/se</i>	(3) <i>Voter-initiated contact with local PTI politicians (0-1) b/se</i>	(4) <i>Knowing UC chairperson well (1-5) b/se</i>
PTI voter	-0.017 (0.029)	-0.040** (0.018)	0.023 (0.014)	-0.154** (0.072)
Small-party voter	0.080 (0.113)	0.001 (0.069)	0.027 (0.055)	0.143 (0.294)
Undecided voter	0.023 (0.022)	0.054*** (0.013)	0.053*** (0.011)	-0.228*** (0.057)
Female	-0.096*** (0.020)	-0.081*** (0.012)	-0.062*** (0.010)	-0.736*** (0.051)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.002)
Education	-0.010*** (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.008)
HH expenditure	-0.063 (0.042)	-0.020 (0.025)	-0.002 (0.020)	0.438*** (0.106)
Migrant	-0.025 (0.024)	0.033** (0.015)	0.027** (0.012)	0.020 (0.062)
Friends	0.004** (0.002)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.030*** (0.004)
Participation index	0.566*** (0.074)	0.641*** (0.045)	0.504*** (0.036)	1.740*** (0.180)
Trust index	0.099*** (0.012)	0.025*** (0.007)	0.013** (0.006)	0.133*** (0.033)
Constant	0.002 (0.081)	-0.069 (0.050)	-0.044 (0.039)	1.079*** (0.211)
R-squared	0.111	0.192	0.173	0.279
Observations	1951	1938	1949	1765

\* p&lt;0.1

\*\* p&lt;0.05

\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Source: Original survey data. Note: Each column shows a separate OLS regression. The dependent variable for column (1) is a binary variable for whether the respondent stated that his or her household was visited by a member of any party during the 2013 election campaign. The dependent variables for columns (2) and (3), respectively, are binary variables for whether the respondent stated that he or she had contacted a local PML-N or PTI politician, respectively, since the 2015 local election; the dependent variable for column (4) is the respondent's answer to the question: "How well do you think your union council chairman knows you?" on a scale of 1-5, with the scale ranging from 1 = Not at All to 5 = Very Well. Sampling point fixed effects are included and standard errors are reported in parentheses.

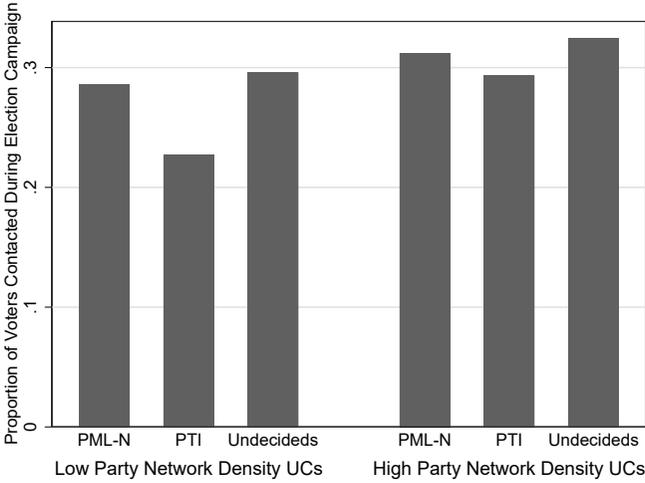
Contrary to the existing literature that finds that parties focus on swing voters during election campaigns (Larreguy, Marshall, and Querebin 2016; Stokes et al. 2013), our evidence finds no significant difference in the political affiliations of those visited by parties during election campaigns. Undecided voters are not any more or less likely to be the target of political campaigns compared to partisan PML-N or PTI voters.

The literature also finds that local party workers' responsiveness is positively associated with the density of party workers in a locality (Auerbach 2016). Again, contrary to the literature, we do not find a strong correlation between the extent of campaign contact with political party workers and the density of political worker networks.<sup>17</sup> In other words, it is not the case that the mere presence of more political workers results in more campaign contact (figure 7.1).<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the main factor constraining these visits is not the number of party workers and that more competition at a local level does not induce greater effort on the part of party workers.

#### *Voter-Initiated Contact Outside Election Campaigns*

Outside of election campaigns, voters initiate contact with local politicians and party workers primarily for resolving service-delivery issues or disputes. During these meetings it is natural that voters complain about certain local service-delivery issues or, less frequently, national-level policy issues. It is largely through these meetings that local politicians obtain information about what citizens care about and about which way their political affiliations and service-delivery preferences might be leaning. This is also critical information that allows politicians and party workers to engage in targeted delivery. In our sample of sixty local politicians, the median number of citizens who visit politicians in a week is thirty-eight. Roughly twenty-seven of these are men and eleven are women. According to these local politicians, the most common reasons for male citizens to contact them are drainage issues, issues with the police or local courts (*thana katchery*), and disputes outside the neighborhood. Female citizens, on the other hand, are said to most commonly discuss interpersonal domestic issues, water supply, and gas-supply concerns.

Which voters are most likely to contact local politicians?<sup>19</sup> The answer to this question has implications for politicians' beliefs about the policy positions and political attitudes of their constituents. In the case of voter-initiated contact, we do find evidence of undecided voters being significantly more likely to contact party workers from both the PML-N and the PTI (table 7.1 columns 2 and 3). There is also clear partisanship in voter-initiated contact. PML-N voters are much more likely to contact PML-N workers as compared to PTI workers. PTI voters stay away from PML-N workers despite



**Figure 7.1. Extent of campaign contact between voters and politicians**

Source: Original survey data.

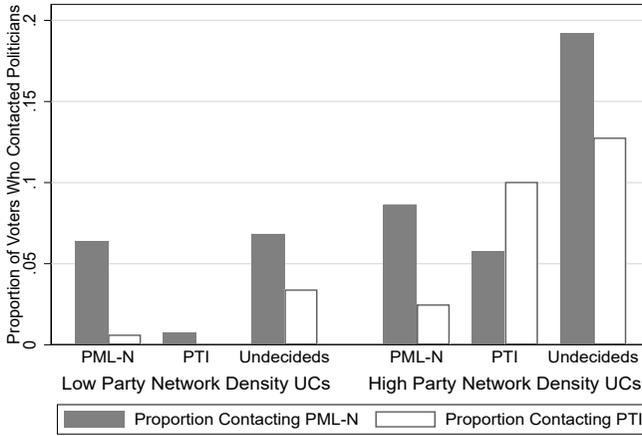
Note: The figure shows the proportion of respondents of different party affiliations who reported being contacted by a representative of any political party during the 2013 election campaign. The bars show campaign contact in union councils where Party Network Density is below the median (left side) and above the median (right side).

the PML-N being in power at the time of the survey and controlling access to service delivery at the local, provincial, and national levels.

Columns 2 and 3 of table 7.1 also show that gender is a stark predictor of voter-initiated contact—women are 8 percentage points less likely to contact PML-N workers and 6 percentage points less likely to contact PTI workers. This is consistent with a model in which household bargaining leads to an equilibrium in which the men specialize in the political space and the norm proscribes female political participation. Figure 7.2 also shows that in union councils with higher worker density, more voters contact party workers. This implies that while denser machines may not be better at campaigning, they do allow citizens to reach out to them in higher numbers.

*Citizens Knowing Party Workers or Local Politicians Personally*

The third and final measure is a measure of closeness—specifically, a response to survey questions about how well the voter believes he or she is known by the union council chairperson and their local councilor(s). The politician in question could know the voter through a political channel or simply by virtue of living in the same locality or being part of the same networks.



**Figure 7.2. Extent of voter-initiated contact with political parties**

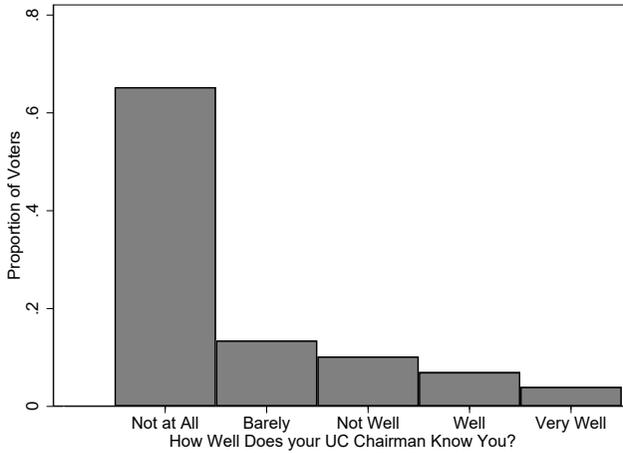
Source: Original survey data.

Note: The figure shows the proportion of respondents of different party affiliations who reported that they had contacted local politicians since the 2015 general election. The bars show campaign contact in union councils where Party Network Density is below (left side) and above (right side) the median, respectively. The dark bars show the portion of respondents who reported contacting PML-N local politicians; the white bars show the portion of respondents who reported contacting PTI politicians.

Whatever the channel, personally knowing a voter makes it much more likely that the politician is aware of the voter’s preferences as opposed to the preferences of other voters.

As shown in figure 7.3, a majority of citizens report that their union council chairperson does not know them at all while about 11 percent report that their chairperson knows them well or very well. Given that in 2015 each union council had an average of fifteen thousand registered voters, this is perhaps not unexpected, although the rates are much lower than those claimed by local politicians themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Which voters are more likely to report that their union council chairperson knows them well? The answer is shown in table 7.1 column 4. The outcome variable in each case is on the 1–5 scale shown in figure 7.3. In addition to the expected gender difference, the starkest difference between the characteristics of the voters who are known to politicians and those who are not is whether the voter is undecided. Undecided voters are much less likely to say that their local politician knows them, indicating a major difference in the subset of voters who contact politicians versus those who are known well by the politicians. PTI voters are also significantly less likely to say that local politicians know them, which is expected given that most elected union



**Figure 7.3. Closeness between UC chairperson and citizens**

Source: Original survey data.

Note: The figure shows responses to the question: “How well do you think your union council chairman knows you?” on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = Very well.

council politicians belong to the PML-N. Another important difference is that politicians are significantly more likely to know richer voters, voter with strong social linkages, and voters who place higher trust in democracy.

This implies that local politicians’ personal networks are highly skewed. Outside of the average of five voters who contact them in a day, politicians are mostly surrounded by citizens who support their party, who are far richer than the average voter, and who are predominantly men. If a politician is basing his or her beliefs about what voters care about solely through their interactions with these voters, their beliefs may be largely reflective of only richer male voters who are affiliated with their own party.

## Conclusion

Political contact and closeness takes many forms, and while the immediate reasons for the initiation of political contact may be linked to electoral campaigning or the resolution of service-delivery issues, contact and closeness also serve as the primary vehicles for the transmission of citizen preferences to politicians and party workers. Those who are in contact with or close to politicians have markedly different characteristics from the average voter. To the extent that politicians derive their beliefs about citizen preferences from these forms of contact and closeness, and to the extent that they take political decisions based on their own beliefs about citizens’ preferences, these findings have important implications for the representation and implementation of citizen preferences. They also demonstrate the critical role that political

machines play in transmitting information about citizen preferences up to higher-tier politicians.

Unaddressed here is an assessment of the next link in the chain: when politicians are exposed to voters whose personal characteristics, political affiliations, and policy preferences are different from those of the average voter, do they indeed form beliefs about citizens' preferences that are biased and do they act on these beliefs in a manner that is detrimental to the representation of citizens' preferences? This question is taken up by Asad Liaqat (2019), who finds that local PML-N politicians in Lahore have highly inaccurate beliefs about citizens' preferences but, encouragingly, respond to accurate information about citizens' preferences by moving their recommendations closer to these preferences.

Some of these findings may extrapolate well to the rest of Pakistan. The size of electoral constituencies is large across the country and political machines exist in some form or other across all provinces. The informational gap between members of political machines and voters may, however, be lower among highly rural constituencies. At the same time, it is unlikely that selection in political contact does not take place along some dimension of privilege since rural politics often exhibit more rigid hierarchies than urban politics. One important caveat is that Lahore is the political heartland of both the PML-N and the PTI. Party identification is perhaps more salient in Lahore than most other parts of Pakistan, which means that the results on partisanship in voter-initiated contact may not extrapolate well to other parts of Pakistan where party identification is weaker.

## Notes

1. *Sahib* is a term of address or honorific for men used commonly in the subcontinent. Union councils are the lowest elected unit of local government in Pakistan's Punjab province. Each union council is divided into six electoral wards that elect one representative each via the first-past-the-post system.
2. Asad Liaqat interview of Fareed, February 2018. Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.
3. Asad Liaqat interview of Farzand, February 2018.
4. Under the terms of the Local Government Act of 2013, "district council" is the term for the local government of the rural areas of a district.
5. Asad Liaqat interview of Chaudhary sahib and Muhammad, June 2017.
6. Asad Liaqat interviews of three councilors, July 2017.
7. Within each provincial constituency all UCs were included in the sample, with two exceptions: two UCs in PP-147, which had very high income and wealth levels and were composed predominantly of elite government or private housing; and four UCs in which only a minority of polling stations fell inside the sample provincial constituencies while a majority fell outside the sample pro-

vincial constituencies. The excluded union councils constitute only 9.3 percent of the registered voters in the sample constituencies, with vote shares of dominant parties and voter turnout rates within 1 percentage point and 2 percentage points of included UCs, respectively. Within a UC the sampling strategy was as follows: five random GPS points were dropped within each UC's boundary. The surveyors were equipped to accurately reach these points in the field. Once the surveyors reached a point, they surveyed five households around that point using a right-hand rule to ensure randomization. Within each household one female and one male surveyor conducted an interview with a randomly selected female and male registered voter, respectively. The survey was conducted on tablets using SurveyCTO software and extensive field and remote monitoring was conducted to ensure high-quality accurate survey data.

8. These include the union council chairperson, the union council vice-chairperson, six general members, two women councilors, one youth representative, one working-class representative, and one minority representative. It is perhaps inaccurate to consider all youth, all working class, and all minorities representatives as local politicians because anecdotally these are often token nominations from the party. In the case of women councilors, the situation is a bit more complicated because even if the nominations come from the party and appointment is contingent upon the election of UC chairperson and vice-chairperson candidates, they are later tasked with mobilizing female voters. Union councils are set to be replaced by nonpartisan neighborhood councils under the Local Government Act of 2019.
9. Asad Liaqat interview of a UC vice-chairperson from Lahore, July 2017.
10. Asad Liaqat interviews of Pir sahib, July 7, 2017, and of Sardar sahib, February 2017.
11. Asad Liaqat interview of Khawaja sahib, June 2017
12. Ali Cheema and Asad Liaqat interview of Malik sahib (PTI MNA candidate), June 2017.
13. Asad Liaqat interview of District Council Mayor Muhammad, August 2017.
14. These examples are not necessarily reflective of the campaign strategy of PML-N and PTI candidates in general; there are certainly cases of PTI candidates who run extensive door-to-door campaigns.
15. Political contact during a campaign is measured as the response to a question asking whether the household received a visit from any representative of any party during the 2013 general election.
16. We use a novel estimation strategy to isolate the variation that stems from a very small geographical area with a radius of about 20 to 30 meters. This is achieved through a sample that is obtained by randomly dropping 5 GPS points per sample UC and surveying five households at each of these points, using a random walk rule. In the regression we employ "point" fixed effects to ensure that the variation exploited only comes from within the five households surveyed at each point and not from the range of political, geographical, and service-delivery differences that one would expect to exist across a range of these points.
17. These densities are calculated as the average number of political workers re-

- ported in a union council by an average of fifty survey respondents in each union council. Low- and high-density union councils are defined as those in the bottom and top half of the party network density distribution, respectively, with the cutoff being at 0.83 workers for every one thousand residents.
18. While figure 7.1 does show slightly higher rates of contact in high-density union councils, the differences are marginal and not statistically significant. Only PTI voters are significantly more likely to be contacted in high-density union councils compared to low-density councils.
  19. We are not making any causal claims here. It could well be that certain characteristics make voters more likely to contact voters. On the other hand, it could be the case that political machines target voters with certain characteristics.
  20. It is not the case that citizens are more likely to report that their ward councilor/general member knows them well. 59 percent report that their councilor does not know them at all and 13 percent report that their councilor knows them well or very well.