Chapter 8

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,¹ the Member of National Assembly (MNA) within whose constituency his ward lies. He is one of six General Members in his union council,² and there are twenty-one union councils in Sheikh sahib’s national assembly constituency in the heart of Lahore. 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 only say good things about me.”³

Later, in the office of Farzand, Sheikh sahib’s son and de facto political manager, Fareed is less boastful. He is trying to get Farzand’s attention for more than a few seconds so that he can explain exactly why the streetlights that the residents of his ward are demanding are more important than the other streetlights for which Farzand is no doubt also being asked. Responding to a question about how he finds out how popular and hard-working 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.⁴ 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 listing about four thousand visitors to his office over the years. Remarkable as that number is, it is less than
the number of citizens the more than 100 local politicians in the NA constituency speak to in a week.

One year earlier, and a couple hundred kilometers away, 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 in his constituency headquarters on a hot Sunday in July. While he tries to make this trip every week from Islamabad, ministerial duties sometimes prevent this from happening 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 a smaller crowd. 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 entering every visitor’s stated problems and complaints on a form designed specifically for this purpose. By far the most common problem raised is that of employment, or the lack thereof. The supplicants are mostly educated; they are largely looking for 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, refusing to listen only to one person, who after Chaudhary sahib’s prying turns out to be from the neighboring constituency instead of his own. Having discovered this, Chaudhary sahib turns his attention to those who are part of his own vote bank.

Meanwhile, Muhammad is in the adjacent office meeting with local elected representatives at the UC and ward levels. They go back and forth between discussing municipal service delivery
and local alliances. Later, 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 the citizen’s needs.6 We cannot help but wonder which of the two gatherings he is referring to.

On a subsequent trip during which we7 visit three union councilors in his national assembly constituency, about half an hour from Chaudhary sahib’s home, we are told that few residents from their wards would even know about these Sunday gatherings at his home. “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 less educated than most 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 individual supplicants in the Minister’s constituency office.

These anecdotes emphasize how the structure and membership of political machines and the manner in which political machines encounter voters have important implications for whose preferences get heard and have a chance of being represented in decision-making. These political machines – or political party organizations headed by a single boss or family or small group that are in the business of organizing votes8 – are complex and varied. They contain a mixture of elected local politicians or ‘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 politicians competing for higher office, or ‘higher-tier politicians,’ 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, both local politicians and 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 non-municipal 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 to shed light on how local politicians access information about voters and how the structures of machines facilitate or discourage the transmission of citizen voice. We consider three types of linkages between citizens and political actors: first, voters being targeted by a political machine for door-to-door election campaigns; second, voters initiating contact with members of the machine outside of an election campaign, and; third, 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 they are not in contact, we draw on an original survey of 2,150 adult males and females of voting age in 43 union councils within four provincial assembly constituencies in Lahore, Pakistan in early 2017. The four provincial assembly constituencies were selected to reflect a mix of competitive and non-competitive neighboring constituencies in the heart of Lahore. The two highly competitive provincial constituencies are PP-
147 and PP-148 within national assembly constituency NA-122, while the two 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 the heart of Lahore. In addition, we conducted, semi-structured interviews with 33 Pakistani higher-tier and local politicians in Lahore and other districts of Punjab province, and a survey of 60 local politicians in Lahore district, to provide 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 ahead of voters from their own party 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 high propensities towards political participation and have higher levels of trust in democracy. This finding is consistent with theories that suggest that parties will mobilize those voters who are more likely to turn out on election day, but do not possess the fine-grained information required to target voters on the basis of their political inclinations and partisan affiliations (Dunning et. al. 2013; Stokes 2005; Boix & Stokes 2007; Finan and Schechter 2012; Larreguy et al. 2016).

While undecided voters are not more likely to be targeted during campaigns, they are in fact more likely than decided voters to initiate contact with both government and opposition local politicians themselves, outside of election campaigns. Women are less likely to contact local politicians who are members of the political machines organized by higher-tier politicians belonging
to the ruling and opposition parties compared to men, which is likely 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, and female voters, controlling for contact during campaigns, demographic factors, and political affiliations. This implies that first, the voters who local politicians know well are very different from the voters who contact local politicians themselves and second, 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 local politician knows a voter well or not in a local context is mediated by a range of sociopolitical factors of which a voter’s preferences and partisan affiliation is only one – but a key implication of these findings is that politicians’ view of their constituency is segmented and possibly excludes those that may most need their attention. In fact, we find that within a union council of roughly 20 to 25 thousand voters, members of political machines are most likely to know higher income, male voters of their own party, suggesting an anti-women and anti-poor bias in the information that is transmitted upwards to higher tier representatives.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. Section I presents a brief review of the literature on citizen politician linkages broadly and in Pakistan. Section II provides a description of the structure of political machines and the strategy political machines use to aggregate citizen voice. Section III 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. Section IV concludes.

I. Literature on Citizen Politician Linkages

There is a large literature on clientelism in political science that 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. Stokes et al. (2013) focus on the distinction between programmatic versus non-programmatic distribution and unconditional versus conditional 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 this theory of broker mediation, voters view parties through brokers—who are key members of political machines organized by higher-tier politicians - act as the imperfect agents of parties on the ground, doling out benefits in a largely clientelistic manner with the benefits being conditional on votes or turnout. Brokers are imperfect agents because their actions are not observed by higher-tier politicians, which gives them space to shirk or undertake actions that maximize their return even if this 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 area. This informational advantage makes them valuable to parties, though not always trustworthy, and makes it possible to sustain clientelistic exchange. Schneider (2018) finds that brokers do not have the claimed informational
advantage in the case of opposition and non-partisan voters and only have a slight advantage over a random guess in the case of partisan voters. The literature is undecided on the informational advantage of brokers, as it is on who actually brokers target on behalf of parties.

Most of the work on party-voter linkages focuses on elections and exchanges preceding them. The question of how party machines and voters engage outside of election campaigns has received far less attention. Auerbach (2016) conducts 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 2,000 households in Jaipur and Bhopal in 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 before elections for votes.

The study of party-voter linkages in Pakistan is at a nascent stage and focuses more on rural settings. Mohmand (2014) draws on previous research in Pakistan to identify four 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); clientelistic exchanges similar to those highlighted above occur between parties and voters (e.g. Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath 2003); that voters organize and connect upwards along kinship lines (e.g. Wilder 1999); and finally, that party identification has started to matter (e.g. Wilder 1999; Jones 2003). She concludes through a longitudinal study of a village in Sargodha district that all four explanations lack completeness, the primary reason being that they fail to consider the objectives and incentives
of local actors that mediate these linkages. It is these local actors that we focus on in this chapter as we describe how political machines function in urban Punjab.

The comparative literature on party-voter linkages and Mohmand’s conclusions point to two aspects of the next frontier of work on such linkages in Pakistan that this chapter focuses on: detailed micro-level analysis of voter attitudes and behavior and an emphasis on urban areas given Pakistan’s rapid urbanization that weaken traditional kinship-based explanations. This chapter aims to present a broader typology of party-voter interactions beyond the election cycle and an understanding of information transmission in the political space with the voter being the initiator rather than a recipient.

In the context of urban Punjab, to which we turn next, local councilors, party brokers, and local actors that mediate between voters and parties may all be the same person. Entrepreneurial local intermediaries that are trusted by communities may often be picked up by parties as their identifiable brokers to organize the local vote for them more formally, and then party brokers who do well may be rewarded by a party ticket when the local government election comes around.

II. 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 National or Provincial Assembly constituency, with each major candidate for the National Assembly seat piecing together local-level coalitions under their banner to mobilize voters and win elections. In
cases where a party’s Member of National Assembly (MNA) and Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) candidates in an area are strongly aligned, they share this machine. Out of the 60 local politicians surveyed, 43 (72 percent) had campaigned for both an MNA and an MPA candidate, 11 (18 percent) had campaigned for only one while only 6 (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 MNA and MPA to exercise significant influence over these 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 of these is the large size of political constituencies - the average national assembly constituency in Lahore as delimited for the 2018 general elections has a population of more than 750,000. This necessitates the existence of intermediaries that help aggregate and transmit information upwards, and promises and services downwards. Higher-tier politicians end up placing a great deal of value on members of their machines—local politicians or political workers—and recognizing that, voters end up valuing local politicians' connections with higher-tier politicians who are members of the provincial or national assembly (Liaqat et al. 2018). Examining the nature of these local political machines is therefore central to understanding linkages between political parties and voters, which is what this section sets out to do.
Political Machine Membership and Roles

Between the voter and the elected parliamentarian, there are layers of political actors that create the political machine. These actors are referred to as brokers, workers, or influencers in the comparative politics literature (Auerbach & Thachil 2014; Schneider 2018; Stokes 2005). Because the term ‘broker’ has a negative connotation, some Pakistani politicians refer to them instead as workers or organizers. With the reinstatement of a tier of local elected leaders in 2015, a significant proportion of these actors have become local elected politicians in their own right. In this chapter, those who contest in a local election are referred to as ‘local politicians’ while those who do not contest elections but are affiliated with a party or politician and act on behalf of them or in alignment with them are referred to as ‘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 recent 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 60 local politicians in Lahore district confirms this: these politicians had been involved in politics for an average of 15 years and 26 out of the 60 had contested an election before the 2015 local government elections.

Local politicians in Lahore and in Chaudhary sahib’s constituency informally estimate that there are anywhere between 30 to 100 active political workers in a union council. We use our voter
survey data from 43 union councils in three NA constituencies in Lahore to calculate a ‘party network density’ of about 0.85 political workers for every thousand residents, resulting in between 17-25 political workers in each union council. This number is a little lower than the estimate provided by Auerbach (2016) from urban slums in Jaipur and Bhopal in India. The difference could be explained by India's longer experience with democracy, but more likely by 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 to be local politicians at a minimum: thirteen of these sit on the Council, a higher number would usually have contested Council seats but lost, and 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.

To be effective, political workers and local politicians, the key agents of a political machine, must spend a lot of time in their locality, and in cases where their work takes them out of the UC on a regular basis, they tend to face political costs. 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 proportion of their time to politics. The major activities in this broad ambit are: (i) trying to get citizens’ municipal services problems fixed through the relevant political and bureaucratic channels; (ii) supervising the infrastructure/development projects being undertaken in their union council; (iii) solving household disputes as arbitrators; (iv) strategically attending weddings, funerals, and related
events; and (v) campaigning for their candidate during election time. While their primary source of income is their business, agricultural, or professional income, they may derive rents from politics as well. These may come in the form of direct payments from politicians, but more frequently in the form of indirect rents from projects in their areas and also in the form of heightened social standing in their local areas.

**Relationships between Political Workers and Higher-tier Politicians**

There is enormous diversity in the loyalty of political workers to parties and politicians. They may have a clear party affiliation, one that sometimes flows through generations of workers. 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 that towards the party.

Pir sahib, a contender for a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) MNA seat ticket and son of a well-known PTI MNA, described two categories of political workers that predominantly form his family’s political machine. The first type of worker has been loyal to his father since he joined politics in the late 1980s, and seamlessly switched with him from the PML-N to PPP in the mid-1990s and from the PPP to PTI in 2011. The second—and much less common—worker 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 MNA from Lahore, reports similar dynamics. Local politicians were asked about the strength of their affiliation with the party versus the higher-tier politician with whom they are associated in our qualitative survey. Forty reported that their
affiliation with the party is stronger, ten reported that their affiliation with the politician is stronger, whereas the remaining ten reported 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 worker having a lot of leverage due to their personal local following. 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 politician. Higher-tier politicians tend to be heavily dependent on local politicians and political workers not only during campaign time but also for the implementation and monitoring of development projects. One member of the provincial assembly commented during an interview 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.13 Because parties lack formal systems and criteria for recruiting local workers, and because so much depends on how entrepreneurial a worker can appear to the higher-tier politician, local competition between brokers can be very intense, even when they all work for the same party. This entails recruiting groups of voters and then jealously ensuring their loyalty through delivery or by solving other problems. Higher-tier politicians may often be required for such solutions, and so, many of the requests that reach them have to do with the imperatives of local-level competition between party workers. Workers that do not receive sufficient attention may be courted by candidates from other parties
that looking to strengthen their local presence/hold. It is against this backdrop that we examine how political machines aggregate and transmit citizen voice.

Transmission of Information

The higher-tier politician communicates directives to members of his political machine, which may be to plan a gathering or corner meeting in his locality, indicate the area’s priorities and needs, and supervise the implementation of a project in the area. The union council chairperson has become pivotal in the machine since the revival of elected local governments in 2015, in particular in the allocations of projects and funds within the council area. He tries to convince higher-tier politicians to allocate projects in his union councils from special MNA funds or, of late, district council funds, and higher-tier politicians allocate based on a combination of electoral targeting concerns, maintaining loyalties of workers, and convenience. Higher-tier politicians typically have little to no information about the active local politicians aside from the union council chairperson, except for a small number of favorites.

Citizen voice gets to higher-tier politicians primarily through the machine and in particular through union council chairperson. The local politicians interviewed were typically very confident that they are aware of (i) the preferences and needs, (ii) the political affiliations, and (iii) the household circumstances of their constituents. 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. An MNA candidate commented that for each local politician
with whom he deals, he is aware that there are certain individuals that the local politician tries to bad-mouth and certain individuals that are always praised. Some try to by-pass this by occasionally visiting localities themselves. One reported that when he visits localities himself, the version of citizen voice that is transmitted through local politicians also changes, when the local politician becomes aware that the senior politician has some direct information as well. These higher-tier politicians are aware that winning elections requires putting together a broad coalition of voters through patronage and service delivery, which ensures a majority—the question is how well placed are their local political machines to deliver on this expectation?

III. 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? In this section, we describe and present 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 knowing party workers or local politicians personally.

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. The constituency is divided into smaller units, and lists of active party workers are drawn up for
each of the smaller units. With the re-introduction of a tier of local elected leaders, these smaller units are likely to correspond to union councils. These 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 attempt 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 that they plan with the intent of visiting every single household in the constituency at least once during the election campaign. In another constituency, the opposition candidate from PTI, on the other hand, plays down the importance of door-to-door campaigns, insisting instead that messaging delivered through the media plays a larger part in persuading voters.16

Despite the political manager’s claim that PML-N workers visit every single household during an election campaign, only 30 percent of voters surveyed in his constituency reported that their household received a visit from any representative of a party.17 Between the central plan to visit all households and the execution of this plan by party workers, several decisions are made about how to allocate a limited amount of workers’ time to these household visits. It is important to investigate which individuals receive visits from party workers during campaign time because of these decisions.

To investigate this, we run a simple regression (Table 8.1, Column 1) of a binary variable for whether the respondent was contacted during an election campaign by political workers of any party on a range of demographic variables.18 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 yes in response to this question. 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 the party worker visiting. Those who have strong social linkages (i.e. who report having more friends in the community and having attended more weddings in the past three months) and are less educated 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 we use educational attainment as a proxy for social status).
Table 8.1: Correlates of Politician-Voter Contact

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<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>0.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Each column shows separate OLS regressions. The dependent variable for column (1) is a binary variable for whether the respondent stated that their household was visited by a member of any party during the 2013 election campaign. The dependent variables for columns (2) and (3) are binary variables for whether the respondent initiated contact with local PML-N or PTI politicians, respectively. The dependent variable for column (4) is a five-point scale indicating the level of knowing the UC Chairperson well.
respectively are binary variables for whether the respondent stated that they contacted a local PML-N or PTI politician respectively since the 2015 local election and 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 1-5 scale ranging from “1 - Not at All” to “5 – Very Well”. Sampling point fixed effects are included and standard errors are reported in parantheses. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

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

The literature also finds that local party worker 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. In other words, it is not the case that the mere presence of more political workers results in more campaign contact. This indicates that the main constraint to 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.
**Figure 8.1: Extent of Campaign Contact between Voters and Politicians**

![Bar graph showing campaign contact between voters and politicians](image)

**Notes:** The figure shows separate bars for the proportion of respondents of different partisan affiliations who reported being contacted by a representation of any political party during the 2013 election campaign. The three bars on the left and right show campaign contact in UCs where Party Network Density is below and above median respectively. Source: Original survey data.

**Voter-Initiated Contact outside of 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 which way their political affiliations and service delivery preferences might be leaning. This is also critical information that allows them to engage in targeted delivery. In our sample of 60 local politicians, the median number of citizens who come visit politicians in a week
is 38. Roughly 27 of these are men whereas 11 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, or gas supply concerns.

Which voters are most likely to contact local politicians?\(^2\) 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 PTI (Column 2 and 3 of Table 8.1). There is also clear partisanship in voter-initiated contact. PML-N voters are much more likely to contact PML-N workers compared to PTI workers. PTI voters stay away from PML-N workers, despite 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 8.1 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 results in an equilibrium where the men specialize in the political space and there is a norm against female political participation. Finally, Figure 8.2 also shows that in union councils where there is 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.
Figure 8.2: Extent of Voter-Initiated Contact with Political Parties

Notes: The figure shows separate bars for the proportion of respondents of different partisan affiliations who reported that they contacted local politicians since the 2015 general election. The bars on the left and right show campaign contact in UCs where Party Network Density is below and above median respectively. The darker bars show the proportion of respondents who reported contacting PML-N local politicians while the lighter bars show the proportion of respondents who reported contacting PTI politicians. Source: Original survey data

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 thinks the union council chairperson and their local councilor know them.

The politician in question could know them through a political channel or simply by virtue of living in the same locality or being part of the same networks. Whatever the channel may be, personally knowing a voter makes it much more likely that the politician is aware of their preferences as opposed to those of other voters.
Figure 8.3: Closeness between UC Chairperson and Citizens

Notes: The figure shows responses to a question: “How well do you think your Union Council Chairman knows you?” on a 1-5 scale ranging from “1 - Not at All” to “5 – Very Well”. Source: Original survey data

As shown in Figure 8.3, a majority of citizens report that their union council chairperson does not know them at all, and about 11 percent report that their chairperson knows them well or very well. Given that each union council had about 15,000 registered voters on average in 2015, this is perhaps not unexpected; although the rates are much lower than those claimed by local politicians themselves.²²

Which voters are more likely to report that their union council chairperson knows them well? These results are shown in Column 4 of Table 8.1. The outcome variable in each case is on the 1-5 scale shown in Figure 8.3. In addition to the expected gender difference, the starkest difference between the characteristics of the voters known to politicians and those who are not is whether they are undecided voters. 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 and 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 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 those who place higher trust in democracy.

This implies that local politicians’ personal networks are highly skewed. Outside of the 5 or so voters who contact them of their own accord in a day, they are mostly surrounded by citizens who support the same party as them, who are far richer than the average voter, and are predominantly men. If a politician is basing his/her beliefs regarding what voters care about through their interaction with these voters, these beliefs may be largely reflective of only richer male voters who are affiliated with their own party.

IV. 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 serves as a primary vehicle for the transmission of citizen preferences to politicians and party workers. This chapter shows that 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
citizen 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.

This chapter leaves unaddressed 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 citizen preferences that are biased, and do they act on these beliefs in a manner that is detrimental to the representation of citizen preferences? This question is taken up by Liaqat (2019), who finds that local PML-N politicians in Lahore have highly inaccurate beliefs about citizen preferences - but encouragingly, they respond to accurate information about citizen preferences by moving their recommendations closer to citizen 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 the other across all provinces. The informational gap between members of political machines and voters may, however, be lower in 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 exhibits more rigid hierarchies than urban politics. One important caveat is that Lahore is the political heartland of both the PML-N and PTI. Party identification is perhaps more salient in Lahore than most other parts of Pakistan, implying that the results on partisanship in voter-initiated contact may not extrapolate well to other parts of Pakistan where party identification is weaker.
References


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1 A term of address or honorific used commonly in the subcontinent for men.

2 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 through the first-past-the-post system.

3 Interview with Fareed by Asad Liaqat in February 2018. Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

4 Interview with Farzand by Asad Liaqat in February 2018.

5 District Council is the term used in Punjab, under the Local Government Act of 2013, for the local government for the rural areas of a district.

6 Interview with Chaudhary sahib and Muhammad by Asad Liaqat in June 2017.

7 Interview with three councilors by Asad Liaqat in July 2017.

8 Gosnell (1933) and Rauch (2016).

9 Within each provincial constituency, all union councils (UCs) were included in the sample, with two exception rules stated below. Under the first exception rule, two UCs in PP-147 were excluded that had very high income and wealth levels and composed predominantly of elite
government or private housing. Under the second exception rule, four UCs are excluded where only a minority of polling stations fell inside the sample provincial constituencies while a majority fell outside the sample provincial 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, a female and 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.

10 These include the union council chairperson, union council vice-chairperson, six General Members, two women councilors, one youth representative, one working class representative and one minorities representative. It is perhaps inaccurate to consider all youth, working class, and minorities representative local politicians because anecdotally, these are token nominations from the party in many cases. 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 non-partisan neighborhood councils under the Local Government Act of 2019.

11 Interview with a UC Vice-Chairperson from Lahore by Asad Liaqat in July 2017


13 Interview with Khawaja sahib by Asad Liaqat in June 2017

14 Interview with Malik sahib (PTI MNA candidate) by Ali Cheema and Asad Liaqat in June 2017.

15 Interview with District Council Mayor Muhammad son of Chaudhary sahib August 2017.

16 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.

17 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.

18 We use a novel estimation strategy to isolate the variation stemming 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 UCs, and surveying 5 households at each of these points using a random walk rule. In the regression, we employ ‘point’ fixed effects to ensure that the variation we exploit only comes from within the 5 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.
These densities are calculated as the average number of political workers reported in a union council by an average of 50 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 1,000 residents.

While Figure 8.1 does show slightly higher rates of contact in high density union councils, these 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.

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 very well be the case that political machines target voters with certain characteristics. While unpacking causality remains an important area of future work, nonetheless understanding the association between voter characteristics and contact with local politicians provides rich insights into how machine politics works in urban settings in Pakistan.

It is not the case that citizens are more likely to report that their ward councilor / general member knows them well. 59% report that their councilor does not know them at all and 13% report that their councilor knows them well or very well.