

**SARIKA GUPTA**

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## HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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### **Office Contact Information:**

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### **Personal Information:**

Citizenship: USA

### **Undergraduate and Masters Studies:**

B.A. (Hons) Political Science & International Studies, St. Louis University, *Summa Cum Laude* 2008  
M.Sc. in Development Studies, London School of Economics, *with Distinction* December 2009

### **Graduate Studies:**

Harvard University, 2012 to present  
Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy  
Thesis Title: “*Essays in Development Economics*”  
Expected Completion Date: May 2018

### **References:**

Professor Rohini Pande  
Harvard University  
(617) 384-5267, rohini\_pande@harvard.edu

Professor Gautam Rao  
Harvard University  
(734) 846-7754, grao@fas.harvard.edu

Professor Rema Hanna  
Harvard University  
(617) 496-1140, rema\_hanna@hks.harvard.edu

### **Research and Teaching Fields:**

Primary Field: Development Economics  
Secondary Fields: Political Economy, Public Policy, Gender

### **Job Market Paper:**

“Perils of the Paperwork: The Impact of Information and Application Assistance on Welfare Program Take-Up in India”

Governments worldwide administer targeted social programs to improve the well-being of vulnerable groups, yet many eligible citizens do not take up these programs. This paper examines take-up of an unconditional cash transfer program for poor widows and divorcees in Delhi, India. Despite the considerable benefits, only one-third of eligible citizens are enrolled,

with lower enrollment among more vulnerable women. I conduct a field experiment with over 1,200 pension-eligible women to identify barriers to program take-up and their distributive implications. One group of women is provided with only information about the program. Others receive information plus *mediation*: assistance with filling out the application form (basic mediation) or assistance engaging with political authorities (intensive mediation). I find that information alone raises application rates only among literate women. On the other hand, basic and intensive mediation increase average application rates by 41% and 70%, respectively. Furthermore, providing mediation changes the applicant pool to include more vulnerable women: those who are illiterate, politically disconnected, or lack autonomy in their household. While conventional wisdom suggests that application ordeals ensure take-up by those with the highest marginal utility of enrollment, I show that ordeals can interact with capabilities of poor citizens to select *out* those with a high need for the program. Simpler enrollment procedures and strengthened channels of bureaucratic mediation may facilitate more widespread and inclusive take-up.

### **Research Paper(s) in Progress**

“Can We Text Bad Politicians Out of Office? Experimental Evidence from an Indian Election”  
(with Siddarth George and Yusuf Negggers)

Adverse selection into politics is commonplace in the developing world. In India, nearly 1/3 of major party candidates have criminal charges and 15% have violent charges like murder, rape, and kidnapping. Existing work argues that deep-seated structural factors like clientelism explain the prevalence of criminals in Indian politics. In this project, we study whether light-touch, mobile-based information interventions can materially affect criminal candidates’ electoral outcomes. We collaborated with 3 Indian telecom companies to run a large-scale field experiment involving over 1 million voters around the state assembly elections of Uttar Pradesh. Polling station areas within a single constituency were randomly selected to receive voice calls and text messages containing information about the criminal charges of candidates. We find that receiving a voice call and text message informing voters about candidates’ criminal charges reduced the vote share of criminal candidates by 6.5pp. In treated polling station areas, candidates with murder charges receive 20pp less votes, while candidates with no criminal charges receive 13pp more votes. The effects are largest when the information message is accompanied by a public signal telling voters that many others have received the message, suggesting that voter coordination is one channel through which the effect operates.

“Claiming Cash: The Impact of Engaging the Welfare State and Receiving Cash Transfers on Women’s Empowerment and Well-Being in India”

Women in India are less likely than men to make claims, or demands, regarding their rights and entitlements from the government. In addition, especially vulnerable women can be left out of welfare programs due to the design of application procedures. Given this reality, there is limited evidence on how engaging with the state and receiving cash transfers impacts women who at status quo are less likely to partake in these activities without intervention. In this paper, I use the context of the widow pension scheme in Delhi to ask whether experimental variation in attempting to apply for this cash transfer effects women’s perception of the state and causes them to update on their ability and desire to apply for other government programs in the future. In addition, I measure whether receiving this cash transfer improves the personal well-being of beneficiaries in terms of food security, physical and mental health, quality of life, and decision-making power in the household. These findings can contribute to our understanding of how to empower vulnerable citizens to interact with the welfare state and highlight the implications of receiving an unconditional cash transfer from the government on mitigating challenges associated with poverty, especially among women who are often left out of such programs.

**Work in Progress**

“Leveraging Technology and Entrepreneurship to Increase Take-Up of Government Programs in India”  
(with Jennifer Bussell, Rema Hanna, Ben Olken)

Low take-up of government programs continues to be a challenge in many countries, including India. It has been shown that citizens can fail to enroll in social programs due to information constraints and inability to navigate complex application procedures without assistance. Many formal and informal intermediaries have emerged in India to facilitate access to the state, but they do not often cater to all citizens equally. In this project, we partner with a social enterprise in India called Haqdarshak in order to measure the impact of a private alternative to existing mediation services on the magnitude and composition of citizens who enroll in social programs. Haqdarshak has developed a mobile app that screens citizens for government programs, informs them of which programs they are eligible for, and helps them apply for these programs. A community facilitator, or Haqdarshak, is sent into rural communities to administer this app for a fee. In this project, we will offer Haqdarshak services to 10,000 households in rural Rajasthan and randomize prices charged as well as the gender of Haqdarshaks to better understand citizen demand for mediation and how this demand reflects personal characteristics of both the citizen and the intermediary.

“Does Mommy Know Best? The Impact of Maternity Cash Transfers on Newborn Health in Delhi”  
(with Jan Cooper, Jessica Leight, Simone Schaner)

Developing countries are increasingly using conditional cash transfers as a vehicle to improve maternal and child health. While these programs have been shown to have positive results, less is known about how to optimize the design of such programs to have the largest impact possible given limited government budgets. In partnership with the Government of Delhi, we plan to administer a maternity cash transfer to poor families and vary the timing and conditionality of the transfer as well as whether the transfer is given to fathers or mothers. We will then measure the impact of these variations in transfer design on newborn health outcomes. This will help elucidate the mechanisms through which cash transfers can improve child health as well as contribute to our understanding of household bargaining power and financial decision-making among poor women in this context.

**Teaching Experience:**

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|--------------|---|
| Spring, 2016 | EC 970: Governance, Corruption and Development, Harvard University, Instructor      |
| Spring, 2015 | EC 970: Governance, Corruption and Development, Harvard University, Instructor      |
| Fall, 2014   | SW 50: Political Corruption, Harvard University, TF for Prof. Alt and Prof. Ziblatt |

**Research Experience:**

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|-----------|--|
| 2015      | Research Editor, Gender Action Portal, Women and Public Policy Program |
| 2011-2012 | Research Associate, Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) South Asia       |
| 2010-2011 | Research Assistant, Plan USA International, Washington D.C.            |
| 2010      | Summer Researcher, UNICEF India  |
| 2010      | Research Intern, Center for Economic Policy Research, Washington D.C.  |

**Honors and Fellowships:**

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| 2017      | Harvard Dissertation Completion Fellowship                             |
| 2017      | Summer Research Fellow, Mathematica Policy Research                    |
| 2016      | Harvard University Bok Center Distinction in Teaching Award            |
| 2015-2016 | Graduate Student Associate, Harvard South Asia Institute               |
| 2014-2018 | Graduate Affiliate, Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences |
| 2014-2016 | Director of Events and Operations, Harvard India Students Group        |
| 2012-2014 | Graduate Fellowship, Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Science       |

**Research Grants**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 2017       | Cash Transfers for Child Health (CaTCH) Research Grant, \$28,905 (co-PI)   |
| 2017       | Watson Collaborative Research Grant, \$5,000 (co-PI)                       |
| 2016       | Development Impact Lab Innovate Grant, \$55,000 (co-PI)                    |
| 2015       | J-PAL Governance Initiative Grant, \$50,000                                |
| 2015       | Weiss Family Program Fund Grant, \$37,000                                  |
| 2015       | Institute for Quantitative Social Science Graduate Research Grant, \$3,000 |
| 2015       | J-PAL Governance Initiative Grant, \$48,505 (co-PI)                        |
| 2015       | South Asia Institute Graduate Student Associate Research Stipend, \$3,000  |
| 2014       | South Asia Institute Winter Grant for Exploratory Research, \$2,000        |
| 2014       | J-PAL Governance Initiative Research and Travel Grant, \$5,000             |
| 2013; 2014 | Weiss Family Program Fund Exploratory Research Grant (\$2,425, \$1,658)    |

**Other Publications:**

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|------|---|
| 2011 | “WASH and Women: A Situation Analysis of Living and Working Conditions in the Tea Gardens of Dibrugarh District, Assam.” Publication. New Delhi: UNICEF. (with Rachel Amiya, Nasreen Habib, and Ellen Whitesides) |
| 2010 | “Reconciliation and Representation: The Share of the Population Represented by the Democratic Majority.” Publication. Washington D.C: Center for Economic and Policy Research.                                    |
| 2010 | “The High Budgetary Cost of Incarceration.” Publication. Washington D.C: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2010. (with John Schmitt and Kris Warner)   |