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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Office Contact Information

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Undergraduate Studies:

BSc Econometrics & Mathematical Economics, LSE, 2011 (1st class honours)

Graduate Studies:

PhD, Harvard University, 2019

Thesis Title: “*Essays on Development Economics*”

References:

Professor Rohini Pande
Harvard University
rohini.pande@harvard.edu

Professor Michael Kremer
Harvard University
mkremer@fas.harvard.edu

Professor Abhijit Banerjee
MIT
banerjee@mit.edu

Professor Emily Breza
Harvard University
ebreza@fas.harvard.edu

Teaching and Research Fields:

Primary field: Development Economics

Secondary field: Political Economy, Labour Economics

Research Papers:

“*Like Father, Like Son? The Effect of Political Dynasties on Economic Development*”

(Job Market Paper)

This paper studies how dynastic politics affects economic development in India, using variation from three distinct natural experiments. Dynastic politics has theoretically ambiguous effects: bequest motives may lengthen politicians' time horizons (founder effects), but heritable political capital may make elections less effective at holding dynastic heirs accountable (descendant effects). We compile detailed biographical data on all Indian legislators since 1862, and present three empirical findings. First, we identify descendant effects using a close elections regression discontinuity design, and find that descendants worsen poverty and public good provision in villages they represent. Descendants underperform partly due to moral hazard: they inherit voters loyal to their family, which dampens their performance incentives. Second, we estimate founder effects by examining constituency boundary changes. Founders have positive effects on economic development, and this is partly driven by bequest motives: politicians with a son are twice as likely to establish a dynasty and exert more effort while in office. Third, we identify the overall effects of a dynastic political environment using an instrumental variables strategy based on the gender composition of past incumbents' children. Dynastic politics generates a “reversal of fortune” development pattern, where places develop faster in the short run (because of founder effects), but are poorer in the long run (because descendant effects outweigh founder effects). A simple overlapping generations model with heritable human and political capital explains these empirical facts.

“Texting Criminal Politicians Out of Office: Experimental Evidence from India”

(with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar and Yusuf Neggars)

Adverse selection to political office is now a salient concern in some mature democracies, but it is commonplace in the developing world. In India, 9% of legislators face charges for murder, kidnapping, rape or armed robbery. Using a field experiment around the Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections, we test the theory that criminal politicians get elected because voters lack information to screen candidates and coordinate on good candidates. We partnered with 3 telecom providers and ran a voter information campaign involving over 600,000 voters. Voters in treated villages received a voice call and text message informing them about the criminal charges of all candidates in their constituency. Our campaign caused *clean candidates* to receive 6pp more votes and the most *violent criminal candidates* (ie. murderers) to receive 7.7pp fewer votes. Effects were strongest for the *coordination* treatment arm, in which individuals were informed that many other voters had also received the message. The results suggest that voter frictions such as information asymmetry and coordination failure may cause bad political equilibria to persist.

“Debiasing Discriminators: Evidence from the Introduction of Neutral Referees in Cricket”

(with Nilesh Fernando)

Evaluators display significant in-group bias in many contexts. This paper shows that evaluators are less biased in the presence of a neutral colleague. We compile data on all international cricket since 1893, and analyse a series of reforms that introduced neutral umpires in international cricket matches. We present four results. First, prior to the reforms, both on-field umpires shared the nationality of the home team and make 9pp more discretionary calls against the foreign team. Requiring one of the two on-field umpires to be from a neutral country eliminates this bias. Second, half of this bias reduction is due to home umpires being less partial toward their team when paired with a neutral umpire. The de-biasing effects of neutral umpires are largest when an experienced neutral umpire is paired with an inexperienced home umpire. Third, we find, consistent with this, that a further reform requiring both on-field umpires to be from a neutral country had no additional bias reduction effect. Fourth, a “career concerns” reform that introduced TV referees and match executives to monitor and assess on-field umpires has no effect on bias. Collectively, these results suggest that social pressure from colleagues can discipline discriminators.

Taking the Path Less Travelled? Long-run Impacts of Vocational Secondary Education

(with Afiqah Suhaiemi)

In many countries, students are assigned to different educational tracks early in life. This paper studies the long-run impacts of vocational secondary education using a natural experiment in Singapore. Students are assigned to tracks in secondary school based on a cutoff score in the nationwide Primary School Leaving Examination. Using a fuzzy regression discontinuity design and social security administrative data, we find that students assigned to the vocational track are more likely to complete secondary school (3pp) and attain a post-secondary (usually vocational) qualification (9pp), but less likely to attain a university degree (3pp). Attending the vocational track has no average effect on later-life employment, earnings or wealth, because positive effects on some students balance negative effects on others. Despite evidence that some students benefit substantially from attending the vocational track, nearly all students given the choice opt for the academic track. These patterns are consistent with a simple theory where individuals have different learning styles and there is social stigma against the vocational track.

Work in Progress

What Happened to Midnight’s Children? Long-run Impacts of Accepting Refugees from India’s

Partition (with Kathryn Nicholson)

Refugee policy is a contentious issue in many countries. Yet there remains little empirical evidence on the long-run economic impacts of accepting refugees. We examine this question by analysing refugee resettlement during the Partition of India in 1947, one of the largest population displacements of the twentieth century. Using rich data on migration flows and the location of refugee camps, we document that districts which had a Partition-era refugee camp are more industrialised today: they have more manufacturing firms, a higher share of employment in manufacturing industries, and a lower share of employment in agriculture. An instrumental variables strategy exploiting distance from the border and historical railway lines suggests a causal interpretation.

Uber for Farm Equipment: The Effect of Rental Technology on Agricultural Productivity (with Wyatt Brooks and Nilesh Fernando)

Who should hold the purse strings? Empirical evidence on fiscal decentralisation from Indian budgets (with Kapil Patidar)

Policy Writing

[Transforming the Fight Against Poverty in India](#) (with Arvind Subramanian), *New York Times*
[Clearing the Air on Cash Transfers in India](#) (with Arvind Subramanian), *Financial Express*

Teaching Experience:

2017	Development Economics (undergraduate), Prof Emily Breza
2014	Development Economics (graduate, Harvard Kennedy School), Profs Asim Khwaja, Rohini Pande & Lant Pritchett
2014	Immigration Economics (undergraduate), Prof George Borjas
2013	Political Corruption (undergraduate), Profs James Alt & Daniel Ziblatt

Research Experience and Other Employment:

2015-16	Economist, Office of Chief Economic Adviser (Arvind Subramanian), Ministry of Finance, Govt of India
2014-	Co-founder, SeeHow (sports tech/IoT startup that has developed a smart cricket ball, cricket's first consumer hardware product)
2011-12	Economist, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Govt of Singapore

Professional Activities

Referee for *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *Journal of Public Economics*, *Journal of Human Resources*, *Economica*.

Invited Presentations:

2019	National University of Singapore, University of Maryland, Paris School of Economics, IIES Stockholm, Yale, Yale SOM, Northwestern Kellogg MEDS, University of Virginia, Dartmouth, Stanford GSB, World Bank DEC, INSEAD
2018	Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics (World Bank), TADC (LBS), EBE meeting (LMU), APSA meetings, PE lunch (MIT)
2017	NEUDC (Tufts)
2016	MPSA annual meeting

Research Grants

2018	International Growth Centre grant, <i>The economic effects of political dynasties</i> \$11,000
2017	LEAP, <i>Texting bad politicians out of office</i> (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggers) \$9,230
2017	Watson Institute, <i>Texting bad politicians out of office</i> (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggers) \$5,000
2017	Warburg Fund, <i>How do political dynasties affect economic development?</i> (with Dominic Ponattu) \$3,000
2017	Economics Department Fall Research Grant, <i>Vocational education in Singapore</i> \$700
2016	LEAP, <i>How do political dynasties affect economic development?</i> (with Dominic Ponattu) \$4,570
2016	Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative, <i>Time vs State in Insurance</i> (with Lorenzo Casaburi, Bheeshm Chaudhary, Jack Willis) \$29,789
2016	Institute of Quantitative Social Science, <i>Lobbyist Networks</i> (with Andrea Passalacqua) \$3,000
2016	Warburg Fund, <i>Uber for farm equipment</i> (with Sharan Mamidipudi) \$3,800
2015	J-PAL Governance Initiative, <i>Texting bad politicians out of office</i> (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggers) \$48,875

2015 Weiss Fund, *Time vs State in Insurance* (with Lorenzo Casaburi, Bheeshm Chaudhary, Jack Willis) \$31,600

Languages

English (native), German, Stata, R