Politicians, institutions, and citizen welfare: Evidence from a Lab-in-the-Field Experiment in India

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Abstract

In spite substantive efforts to strengthen accountability, transparency and public sector performance, developing country progress is held up by office holder transgressions and other institutional weaknesses. We replicate key attributes of such a real-world institutional environment in a controlled lab setting to examine how politicians and non-politicians respond to institutional incentives. Using a modified dictator game, we vary treatments (and incentives) across the nature of interactions, the visibility of actions and an upfront promise. Under anonymity, politicians and non-politicians behave selfishly: both become significantly more generous when interactions are personalized. However, and while non-politicians respond to greater visibility more strongly than politicians, an upfront promise induces more pronounced politician responses. Whereas promise-breaking appears to be more costly for politicians, transparency, via social image concerns, appears to matter more for non-politicians. This mix of similarity and heterogeneity in response suggests that evidence about politician behaviour is key to effective policy design.

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1 Introduction

While democratically elected politicians fundamentally affect citizen welfare, holding office-holders to account is not always straightforward. In the hard to govern environments

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we study here, citizens may find it hard to ascertain whether a politician's actions or an institutional weakness is responsible if a policy initiative fails.[1] In such environments, elected representatives with self-serving agendas may be tempted to renege on election pledges to extract rents from office and blame factors outside their control. Uncertainty about the true cause of a governance failure—with a hard-to-mitigate asymmetric information challenge at its core—will therefore often prevail.

Developing countries have gone through recent waves of decentralization (Besley et al. (2005); Mookherjee (2015); Bardhan (2002)) to counter such governance challenges by strengthening democratic participation, improving accountability and bringing government and elected representatives closer to people[2]. In spite these efforts, bureaucratic inefficiency, office holder misconduct and other institutional weaknesses prevail. While costly monitoring or monetary incentives (e.g. Fisman et al. (2014); Duflo et al. (2012); Olken (2007); Banerjee et al. (2020)) can help align the conduct of office holders with the interests of the local citizenry, public purse constraints make orthodox incentive schemes less feasible in low-income settings. A policy bundle that combines orthodox incentives with norm-based or other behavioral insights may provide more suitable and affordable options.

In this paper, we use a modified dictator game to examine how politicians and non-politicians behave and respond to institutional incentives. Two key and largely neglected questions are whether politicians behave differently from non-politicians and, if this turns out to be the case, whether such behavioural differences are part of the received wisdom that informs accountability and transparency initiatives. Disentangling such behavioural differences becomes important since efforts to incentivize politicians to act in the public interest need to be informed by evidence rather than assumptions about how real world politicians behave.

[1] A compelling example from India is the widespread confusion among voters about what branches of government that are responsible for the provision of different health programmes and services (Heath et al. (2023)).

[2] It is customary to distinguish between political, administrative and fiscal decentralization with political decentralization the most relevant here.

Our experiment was carefully designed to mimic the institutional environment touched on above, initially with a low visibility and transparency of actions: this is a realistic starting point and makes it easy for a politician (dictator) to hide selfish behaviour and choose outcomes where the politician benefits at the expense of a citizen recipient. We proceed by building in and varying three key features of this institutional environment in our design: *the degree of anonymity in interactions*, *the visibility (transparency) of actions* and *prospects for making an upfront promise*. In our modified dictator game, the starting point is a benchmark where the interaction between a politician dictator and a non-politician recipient is anonymized. We introduce changes to this initial institutional environment by i) personalizing the interaction between the politician and the non-politician recipient, ii) introducing an upfront promise, and iii) increasing the visibility (transparency) of actions. To the best of our knowledge, this provides a first of it's kind attempt to explore how institutional incentives affect the pro-social behaviour of a unique sample of politicians and non-politicians in rural India.

Our findings may be summarised as follows. In the anonymized, no-promise benchmark, politicians and non-politicians allocate almost the entire endowment to themselves: average giving represents around 1 per cent of the endowment and 87 per cent of politicians and 93 per cent of non-politicians give zero. When the interaction between dictator and recipient is personalized, both politicians and non-politicians become more generous with a sharp rise in average giving to between 33 per cent and 35 per cent of the endowment. At the same time, the percentage of zero-giving drops to 26 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. For these two treatments, we find no statistically significant difference in politician and non-politician generosity and behaviour. However, and when an upfront promise is introduced, first with anonymized and then with personalized interactions, important behavioural differences appear. For the former and while both groups largely keep their word, politicians promise and give more: this difference in giving is statistically significant at a 5 per cent level. Further and when compared with anonymity, the behaviour of politicians

and non-politicians change dramatically when interactions in the promise treatment are personalized. For politicians, average giving increases from about 8 per cent to about 50 per cent of the endowment: among non-politicians the corresponding rise is from about 4 per cent to about 31 per cent. The difference in politician and non-politician behaviour is, once more, statistically significant and now at a 1 per cent level. Finally, with personalized interaction and high visibility, we find non-politicians to be more generous than politicians, with average giving representing 54.5 per cent of the endowment for non-politicians and 38.9 per cent for politicians. This behavioural difference is statistically significant at a 5 per cent level: while promise breaking appears to be more costly for politicians, transparency - via social image concerns - appears to matter more for non-politicians. This combination of similarity (for personalized interaction) and heterogeneity (for promise and visibility) in politician and non-politician response points to the need for evidence-based and contextualised tailoring of efforts to strengthen accountability and politician performance.

The rest of the paper is organized in four sections. Section 2 provides further background and motivation for our study. Section 3 describes the research design, the game and experimental procedures. Section 4 presents the analysis and reports on the main experimental findings: Section 5 concludes.

2 Background and motivation

The key features of our experimental design - the personalized interactions, promise-making and the visibility of actions - are inherent attributes of the way local politicians interact with citizens in rural India. Politicians elected into village council seats and local residents meet regularly face-to-face in Gram Sabhas, which are constitutionally mandated open assemblies where villagers express preferences for the public projects they want prioritised during the following financial year (see Besley et al. (2004), Bardhan (2002), Sanyal & Rao (2018)). Elected representatives commit to implement these projects, subject to

budgetary resource constraints.

While documenting politicians' self-selection with regard to personal attributes like education, experience and other dimensions of competence (e.g. legislative efforts) (Ferraz & Finan (2011); Dal Bó et al. (2017)) is quite straightforward, identifying social preferences is more challenging. It is increasingly recognised that the external validity of run of the mill laboratory experiments with student participants (Corazzini et al. (2014);Born et al. (2018); Feltovich & Giovannoni (2015); Fehrler et al. (2020)) would be of limited or no value since selection into politics and academic studies, including in the context of interest here, are incomparable (see Cappelen et al. (2015))[3]. To test the effects of institutional incentives, we therefore use a lab-in-the-field experiment with real world politician participants, an approach that has gained recent traction (Chaudhuri et al. (2022), Enemark et al. (2016), Kosfeld & Rustagi (2015)).

Further and in contrast to traditional choice theory, which forms the backbone of the political economy literature (Osborne & Slivinski (1996); Besley & Coate (1997)), recent behavioural and experimental studies have found that behaviour often deviates from the *homo economicus* assumption — people and politicians have intrinsic preferences, including for fairness (Kosfeld & Rustagi (2015)) and reciprocity (Enemark et al. (2016)). Relevant to our investigation, personalised interaction or reduced social distance have been found to affect behaviour. Studies using dictator games in the lab and charitable giving in the field suggest that individuals become more generous when they, e.g., see the face of the recipient (Bohnet & Frey (1999)), are matched with "friends" (Leider et al. (2009) and Goeree et al. (2010)), or when given access to seemingly irrelevant additional information, such as the family name of the recipients: randomly matched dictators in a different city were found to become more generous since the new information reduced "social distance" (Charness & Gneezy (2008)).

[3]Note that while some studies find that the behaviour of student volunteers in lab experiments can be representative, e.g., Falk et al. (2013), others report that behaviour in the lab differ from behaviour in the field, e.g., Cappelen et al. (2015).

As noted by Bénabou & Tirole (2006), the visibility of and thus greater transparency surrounding an action also affects pro-social behaviour by invoking reputational concerns. The risk of reputational loss has been found to strongly affect norm compliance related e.g. to voter turn out (Gerber et al. (2008)), recycling behaviour (Brekke et al. (2010), Kallgren et al. (2000)), voluntary contributions to public goods (Ariely et al. (2009); Andreoni & Petrie (2004); Milinski et al. (2006)), individual saving (Breza & Chandrasekhar (2019)), and other behaviours. A plausible a priori expectation about politicians, often accustomed to scrutiny from voters and peers, would be that they are likely to be more responsive to greater visibility and transparency to avoid reputational losses that might affect their re-election prospects (e.g., Ferraz & Finan (2011), Callander (2008), Bobonis et al. (2016),Cavalcanti et al. (2018)).

Further and moving beyond standard, accountability-related incentives, behavioural and experimental studies also suggest that people incur a psychological cost when lying or breaking a promise (Callander & Wilkie (2007); Corazzini et al. (2014); Cohn et al. (2019); Di Bartolomeo et al. (2019); Pruckner & Sausgruber (2013)) either because of preferences for keeping their word anchored in norms of promise-keeping (Ellingsen & Johannesson (2004); Vanberg (2008)) or because of guilt-aversion (Charness & Dufwenberg (2006); Gneezy (2005); Ederer & Stremitzer (2017)). Vanberg (2008)'s findings supported, mainly, the former explanation. In recent work, Abeler et al. (2019) find that both a preference for honesty and a preference for a reputation of being honest can explain why people keep their word [4]. For politician behaviour, evidence is conflicting: while a stereotype suggests that promise-breaking belongs to the fine art of political practice (e.g. Group et al. (2008); Thomson (2011)), some evidence suggests that politicians try to keep their words (Thomson et al. (2017)). While recent work by Janezic & Gallego (2020), for a sample of Spanish mayors, finds dishonest behaviour to be widespread among elected office-holders,

[4]In a different context, findings from the charitable giving literature suggest that a promise alone cannot increase donations, while a promise with a public recognition can (see Sutan et al. (2018); Hoffmann et al. (2015); Cotterill et al. (2013); Andreoni & Serra-Garcia (2021))

Chaudhuri et al. (2020) find some dishonesty among newly elected politicians, but also that the same politicians are less dishonest than ordinary citizens.

As noted, our modified dictator game draws on Andreoni & Bernheim (2009) who examined how the visibility of a dictator's action affected pro-social behaviour in a setting with personalised interaction. With low visibility, student dictators gave close to zero: giving shifted notably towards 50:50 sharing when visibility increased. Related to our inquiry, we expand on the Andreoni & Bernheim (2009) design first by adding an anonymous baseline to help identify the effect of personalised interactions. Second, we introduce an upfront promise to examine whether a pledge affects pro-social behaviour. For our institutional context, whether promises are honoured or not and therefore represent a viable norm-based alternative to orthodox incentive mechanisms when seeking to align politician behaviour with the interests of citizens has not been explored[5]. Finally, we explore the effect of increased visibility (transparency) on politician and non-politician behaviour.

3 Recruitment and experimental design

3.1 Recruitment

We envisaged two main challenges in organizing the experiments: (1) recruiting real politician participants; and (2) creating a neutral field-lab environment. For recruitment, we take advantage of India's decentralized Panchayat system where Gram Panchayats (village councils) are the lowest tier. A GP is sub-divided into wards (Samsads). Citizens elect representatives for each tier and elections are held at regular, five-year intervals. [6]

[5]Existing studies mostly implement the following test of lying aversion: after observing a random variable privately, a decision maker faces a trade-off: gaining a monetary pay-off by misreporting the variable (i.e., telling a lie) or giving up the monetary gain by telling the truth, which would suggest an intrinsic preference for honesty (Vanberg (2008), Abeler et al. (2019); for application see Hanna & Wang (2017); Dai et al. (2018)).

[6]Each ward represents around 500-800 voters and they elect at least one, in some cases two, ward members. Gram Panchayats (i.e., GPs) usually cover 10 — 15 wards/villages and somewhere in the 3,000 — 5,000 voters range, although size varies widely. Elected ward members form the village council. The second tier (i.e. block level) comprises 10 — 12 GPs while the final tier is the district council (i.e. Zila

In our study, we define a politician as a person who has either recently fought or recently won (in the last 10 years) an election for a village council ward member seat. [7] To create a neutral field-lab environment, with a view to elicit the true preferences of politician participants, we took great care to match politicians with ordinary citizen residents from villages at a sufficient distance from their own constituencies to instil confidence about no contact in the past, prior to and after the experiment. This was done to ensure that politicians were matched with strangers and to avoid that any generosity observed in the games could be dismissed as motivated by re-election-prospects. Participants from visitor villages knew they had to travel 25 km on average to participate, but had no prior information about where they were going and with whom they would be matched. Since no well-connected public transport was available, free transport and refreshments were arranged. We also chose the timing of the experiment to avoid overlap with election-related or other political campaigning.

Hooghly district in West Bengal and Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh were selected because of the researchers' prior experience working there. From among the administrative blocks in each district, we randomly selected two blocks following a stratified random sampling based on geographical location. For example, from among Hooghly's 18 administrative blocks, we randomly selected Singur and Dhaniakhali. In Uttar Pradesh, Badagaon and Sevapuri blocks were selected using a similar procedure. GPs were then randomly selected from each block. For each GP, we used publicly available Election Commission data [8] to prepare a list of individuals who had contested or been elected during the two most recent Panchayat elections. We then randomly selected politicians from the list and invited them to participate using an invitation letter prepared by the research team. The letter neutrally framed the purpose of the study (e.g. to study challenges of rural development)

Parishad) with 15 — 20 (on average) blocks.

[7] We purposely avoided recruiting village council heads (pradhans) because of their typically greater and more visible role in their party's political machinery, and the higher likelihood of being known to more villagers within a district. The opportunity cost of time for village council heads would also be higher than for ward members.

[8] www.websec.gov.in

and explained the random selection of the village/GP and participants (the letter text is provided in the supplementary Appendix).

From each village and based on a household census [9], we also invited randomly selected ordinary citizens (non-politicians) to participate in the experiment. The presence of non-politicians allowed for the comparisons of interest but also helped reduce experimental demand effects, since a sample comprising only politicians could intensify the feeling of being under scrutiny.

In the invitation, the randomly selected potential participants were informed that (i) their names had been selected through a random process; (ii) that participation was voluntary; (ii) they would receive monetary payments if they decided to participate (a fixed participation fee of Rs 300 with prospects for earning upto Rs 1000), and refreshments; (iii) they would also get free transport if they had to travel to a different location; and (iv) their identity, personal information and data on behaviour in the experiments would be strictly anonymized. Each participant was given time to confirm their participation and also knew that they could withdraw any time without providing any explanation. [10] Based on post-experiment informal discussions with some participants, we understand that the incentives — monetary (receiving more than a day's average wage, refreshments, and possibility to earn almost five times of the average daily wage) and non-monetary (that they had been randomly selected by reputed national and international universities/institutions in a study of rural development) — were attractive enough to take part. Anticipating a few drop-outs, we had over-sampled and invited more participants than required. In cases

[9] Our research assistants recruited local enumerators to collect participant information. They prepared a list (census) of households, which was always kept with them only, containing basic demographic information (name of household head, sex, education, occupation). Following a blinded, random protocol, the enumerators selected potential participants and invited them, following the same procedure as above.

[10] We are confident that our approach to random selection of politician and non-politician participants created an unbiased sample. Notice that it was not easy for a politician participant to understand that they had been selected because of their politician status, since they could easily find out that their non-politician neighbours had also been invited. There is nothing in the invitation letter or in the implementation of the experiment that should make politicians feel different. After the experiment, all participants filled in a short questionnaire colleting simple demographic and socio-economic information where they were also asked about their politician identity for the first time.

of full attendance, we randomly chose who could play the game and paid the participation fee to those who were sent home without participating in the experiment.

3.2 Design and experimental procedure

We describe our design in Table 1.

Table 1: Experimental Design.

		No personalised interaction	Personalised interaction
Low visibility	No promise	T1	T2
Low visibility	Promise	T3	T4
High visibility	No promise	—	T5
High visibility	Promise	—	T6

In our design and in the low visibility treatment, there is a high exogenous probability (0.8) that the endowment is randomly assigned to the dictator or the recipient. The dictator plays with complementary probability and knows, when making a decision, that the decision will be implemented; in contrast, a recipient who receives zero does not know whether the dictator or bad luck is responsible. Notice that a dictator will reveal a chosen distribution if any other amount than the full endowment is allocated. A selfish dictator can therefore - and with ease - conceal a selfish decision to allocate the entire endowment to him/herself. In the anonymous baseline, dictators and recipients do not meet each other. When interactions are personalized, participants say 'hello' to each other before they start playing the game. In the upfront promise-treatment, a dictator makes a promise seen by the recipient before the dictator knows whether they will be able to choose the allocation or not. Finally, in the high visibility treatment, we reduce the exogenous probability that the endowment will be randomly assigned to the dictator or the recipient to 0.1. In this case, it is thus much more difficult for dictators to hide their selfish action.

Our experimental design has six treatments modifying the interaction between dictators and recipients along the anonymity, promise and visibility dimensions. In T1, dictators

make decisions in an anonymous setting with a low visibility of their actions (i.e., high probability that the endowment is randomly assigned to the dictator or the recipient). In treatment 2, interaction is personalized while visibility remains low. In treatment 3, interaction is anonymous but dictators are forced to make an upfront promise that is communicated to their matched recipient. In treatment 4, the interaction is personalized and dictators make an up-front promise with low visibility. In treatments 5 and 6, the visibility of a dictator's action is high. In treatment 5, we add high visibility to treatment 2 (i.e., personalised interaction without promise). In treatment 6, dictators meet and greet each other, make an upfront promise to their respective recipients, with a high visibility of action.

We now describe the experimental procedure in the steps followed in each treatment.

3.2.1 Treatment 1 (T1): no personalised interaction, no promise, low visibility

Step 1: Twenty participants from the home-village (where the venue was located) and twenty from a visitor-village (a distant location) took part in each session with 10 politicians and 10 non-politicians participating from each village. *Step 2*: Visitor-village and home-village participants arrived separately and were seated in different rooms (rooms V and H). H and V participants did not meet before, during or after the experiment. *Step 3*: Each participant in Room H was matched randomly with a participant in Room V to form a pair. *Step 4*: Participants in each pair were randomly assigned the role of dictator (D) or recipient (R) and kept their role during the entire session.[11] *Step 5*: Each pair received a fixed endowment of INR 1000 (USD 15.50) in each round. This was common knowledge. In each round, the D decided how to allocate the endowment between D and R with the following modification to a standard dictator game.

Step 6: Each D received a random (and confidential) private number between 1 and 10

[11] As it was challenging to recruit politician participants, we did not follow an equal split while randomly allocating the roles of politicians and non-politicians. Instead, we did the following for each session:randomly chose a number between 5 and 8 and chose the split accordingly (e.g., if number 6 is drawn, 6 out 10 politicians played the role of dictator for that session).

that no other person in the room, not even the experimenter, would know. *Step 7*: At the start of each round, each D received a decision sheet and the experimenter announced two randomly chosen numbers between 1 and 10. Ds filled in their decision sheets one by one in private. Only Ds whose numbers were announced could choose and record a distribution on the decision sheet: others would just tick a box stating that nature would give zero to either D or R (see decision sheet example in Appendix). *Step 8*: All Ds who made a decision or ticked a box folded their own decision sheet and put it in an envelope, named, for example, Round 1-Decisions. The Rs, other Ds and the experimenter knew the probability (i.e. 0.8) but did not know whether nature or D made the decision when the outcome was either zero or INR 1000 (this holds only if D chose the same division as nature). *Step 9*: Step 7 and Step 8 were repeated five times (i.e. in each session, participants played five rounds). *Step 10*: At the end, one of the five rounds was randomly selected to determine payments. The envelope with decision sheets for this selected round was handed to a person outside the venue (an external person) who had no information about the game or the participants. He checked the decision sheets in a separate room and put the payment in a separate envelope for each dictator. He also decided whether D or R got INR 1000 when nature intervened by flipping a coin.

The external person gave a result sheet to the experimenter and small sealed envelopes for each participant, with their group number and role in the game written on the top. These envelopes contained their earnings from the game — based on the decisions they, their partners or nature made — plus a fixed participation fee of INR 300. *Step 11*: The experimenter then showed the results to each D and their corresponding R sitting in the other room. *Step 12*: Each participant left the room and venue one by one and received their envelopes with their payment from the experimenter. Participants from the visitor-village left the venue first.

3.2.2 Treatment 2 (T2): Personalised interaction, no promise, low visibility

Step 1: As in Treatment 1, there were twenty participants from each of the home-village and the visitor-village: 10 from each village were politicians. They arrived separately in the venue. *Step 2*: Out of 20 participants from the visitor-village, 10 were randomly chosen to be seated in one room and the others were seated in another room. A similar procedure was followed for home-village participants. Participants from these two different locations did not meet each other before entering the laboratory. *Step 3*: Following a random matching protocol, a subject from the visitor-village formed a pair with a subject from the home-village in each session. *Step 4*: Participants in each group were randomly assigned the role of dictator (D) or recipient (R) and kept this role during the entire session. Each pair D and R (from different villages) were asked to stand up and greet each other. *Step 5*: We then followed Step 5 to Step 10, as in Treatment 1. *Step 6*: After receiving the result sheet from the external, the experimenter published the results in the room (e.g. write each pair's allocation on a board, see result sheet in Appendix for details). *Step 6*: Step 12 in treatment 1 was then followed.

3.2.3 Treatment 3 (T3): no personalised interaction, promise, low visibility

In this Treatment, we added a *promise* to treatment 1. We followed *Step 1* to *Step 6* as in treatment 1. Then, each D in each room was asked to write how they would allocate INR 1000 between him/herself and R on a promise slip (see Appendix for an example of promise slip). Each D went to an enclosed area and wrote this in private; then they put the folded promise slip into an envelope and returned it to the experimenter. The experimenter carried the promise slip to the corresponding Rs (without looking at it) seated in the other room. Each R observed the D's promise in private and then put the slip in an envelope named, for example, Round 1-Promise. We then followed Step 7 to Step 12, as in treatment 1. Note that Ds made the promise before the two numbers were announced and, therefore, before knowing whether D or nature would decide how to divide the endowment. They

then chose the actual allocation, which, as in treatment 1 and 2, no one could observe. Ds thus had the option to break their promise and increase their private gain without being detected.

3.2.4 Treatment 4 (T4): Personalised interaction, promise, low visibility

In this Treatment, we added a 'promise' to treatment 2. We followed *Step 1* to *Step 4* as described in treatment 2 and then Step 5 and Step 6 as in Treatment 1. As in treatment 3, We then asked each D to write how they would allocate INR 1000 between him/herself and R on a 'promise slip' and followed the same procedure as for the promise slip as in treatment 3. The rest was the same as in treatment 2.

3.2.5 Treatment 5 (T5): Personalised interaction, no promise, high visibility

We change the probability of nature's intervention from 0.8 to 0.1, i.e., visibility of a dictator's action increases. Now, in any session with 10 dictators, 9 out of 10 dictator have to choose how to distribute the endowment. And, in only 1 out 10 cases the nature chooses the outcome—either D or R receives the entire endowment.

In this treatment, we follow the procedure described in Treatment 2 with high visibility, i.e., in the beginning of each round, the experimenter announced nine randomly chosen numbers between 1 and 10. Dictators with those announced numbers could choose the distribution. Other than this, the process was identical with T2.

In each treatment, experimenters read out and carefully explained the instructions and the games to participants. We then administered a short quiz to test each participant's comprehension. Experimenters spent more time to explain the game if anyone was unable to answer a particular question in the quiz. Participants then played two practice rounds to ensure they completely understood and were familiar with the process.

Table A1 in the Appendix provides details of the number of observations per treatment, by politician and non-politician. We have 429 observations in total: 311 for politicians and

218 for non-politicians.

3.2.6 Treatment 6 (T6): Personalised interaction, promise, high visibility

In this treatment, we add high visibility to Treatment 4. The only change to the process described in T4 was that at the start of each round, the experimenter announced 9 numbers between 1 and 10 so that 9 out of 10 Ds would be making decisions.

4 Results and analysis

This section presents our findings for the 355 politicians and 233 non-politicians in our sample [12].

Result 1: In the baseline treatment with anonymity and low visibility (T1), politicians and non-politicians give close to nothing.

In T1, 87 percent of politician dictators give zero with average giving of INR 13.33 or about 1.3 percent of the endowment (see Table 2). In comparison, 93 percent of non-politicians give zero and average giving is INR 5, which represents 0.5 percent of the endowment. This suggests that both politicians and non-politicians are guided by strong self-interest. When testing differences in average giving and the proportion of zero giving, we find no statistically significant differences in the behaviour of politicians and non-politicians (see Figure 1 and Table 4).

Result 2: When interactions are personalized (T2), politicians and non-politicians give significantly more and in the range of 33-35 percent of their respective endowments.

When interactions are personalized and politicians and non-politicians meet and greet their 'unknown' recipients before making their allocation decision, we find notable changes in behaviour. Both groups become more generous, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. Among politicians, average giving increases from 1.3 percent of the endowment in T1 to

[12]Table A1 in the Appendix presents the number of politicians and non-politicians who participated in each treatment. Table A2 presents summary statistics for politician and non-politician attributes.

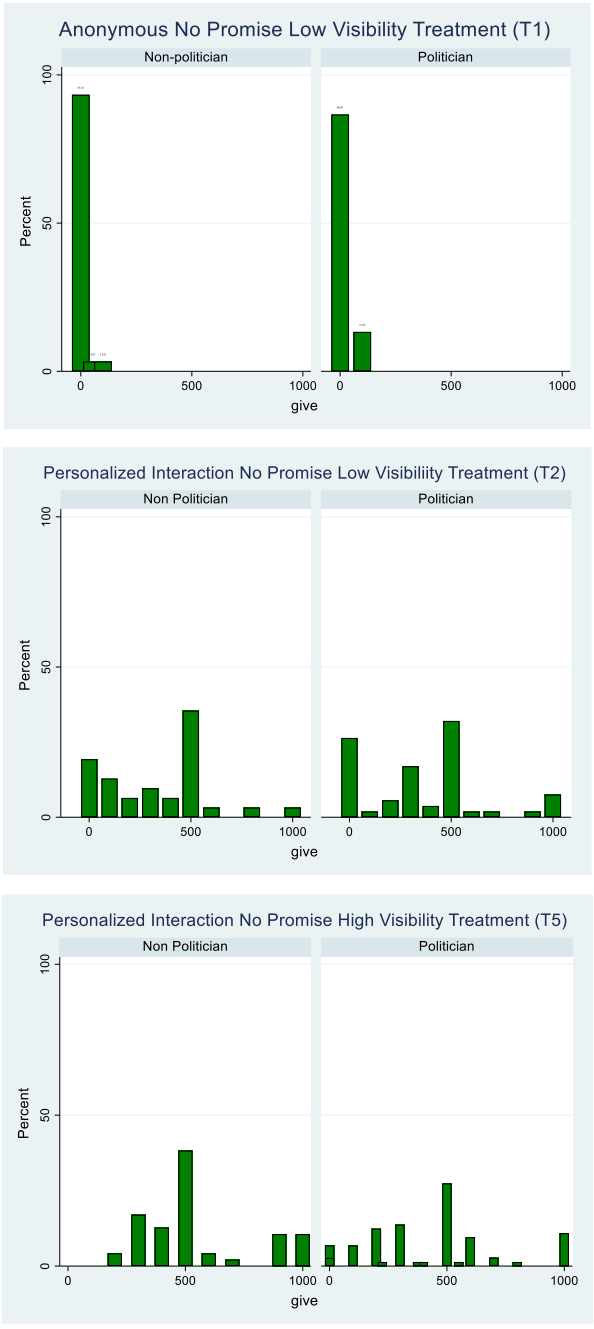

Figure 1: Amount given by politicians and non-politicians in T1, T2, and T5

Table 2: Summary statistics

	Mean giving (INR)		Zero giving (%)		Mean promise (INR)	
Trt	Pol	Non-pol	Pol	Non-pol	Pol	Non-pol
T1	13.33 (34.57)	5.00 (20.13)	86.67	93.33	—	—
T2	356.60 (291.88)	335.48 (256.32)	26.42	19.35	—	—
T3	80.33 (86.40)	41.33 (50.63)	36.67	43.33	87 (95.23)	41.33 (50.63)
T4	504.41 (293.42)	308.69 (245.69)	11.76	28.26	513.23 (252.68)	476.08 (234.93)
T5	428.10 (281.96)	544.68 (236.65)	6.84	0	—	—
T6	474.26 (221.20)	483.67 (267.97)	0	0.06	551.48 (192.67)	567.35 (177.23)

Notes: Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Table 3: Pair wise comparisons across treatments: ttests

	Mean giving (INR)		Mean promise (INR)	
Treatment	Pol	Non-pol	Pol	Non-pol
T1 vs T2	−6.40*** (0.00)	−7.04*** (0.00)	—	—
T1 vs T3	−3.94*** (0.00)	−3.76*** (0.00)	—	—
T2 vs T4	−2.78*** (0.00)	0.46 (0.65)	—	—
T2 vs T5	−1.38 (0.17)	−3.69*** (0.00)	—	—
T3 vs T4	−7.70*** (0.00)	−5.87*** (0.00)	−8.94*** (0.00)	−9.96*** (0.00)
T4 vs T6	−0.76 (0.44)	−3.31*** (0.00)	1.28 (0.21)	−1.90* (0.06)
T5 vs T6	−1.21 (0.23)	1.18(0.24)	—	—

Notes: *, ** and ***: significant at the 10, 5 and 1 per cent levels of significance; p-values are in parenthesis. Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann-Whitney) tests show similar findings.

35 percent (i.e. from INR 13 to INR 357) in T2. For non-politicians, the corresponding increase is from 0.5 percent to 33 percent (i.e., from INR 5 to INR 335). Further, zero-giving drops to 26 percent among politicians and to 19 percent among non-politicians. While these T1 to T2 changes are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level for both politicians and non-politicians (Table 3), t-tests of differences in average giving and of the proportion of zero giving, show no significant difference in the behaviour of politicians and non-politicians in T2 (Table 4). So far, responses are similar and there are thus no statistically significant differences in politician and non-politician behaviour.

We next consider the role of promise making.

Result 3: Politicians promise and give more than non-politicians under anonymity (T3). With personalized interaction (T4), politicians continue to give more than non-politicians, and are also more likely to keep their promise.

We observe a difference in the amount politicians promise and give compared to non-politicians in the anonymity and promise treatment (T3): politicians promise more than non-politicians - INR 87 versus INR 41 - and also give more - INR 80 versus INR 41. These differences in the amount promised and given are both statistically significant (Table 4). A similar pattern is observed for the personalized interaction and promise treatment (T4) (Table 4). Politicians give significantly more (INR 504 vs INR 309 for non-politicians) and the difference is statistically significant at a 1 percent level. At the same time, there is no statistically significant difference in the amount promised by the two groups.

Politicians are more likely to keep their promises, relative to non-politicians, when interactions are personalized. In T3 with anonymity, promises are small and 97 percent of politicians and 100 percent of non-politicians keep their promises: there is no statistical difference in promise-keeping between politicians and non-politicians. In contrast, and in T4, 81 percent of politicians keep their promises as compared to 54 percent of non-politicians (see Figure 3). Further, in T4, 54 percent of politicians and 50 percent of non-politicians promise exactly half of the endowment and politicians mostly keep their promise (84 per cent of politicians keep their promise), but not their counterpart (only 23 percent of non-politicians keep their promise when promising half their endowment). The mean difference between the amount promised and amount given is 8.82 for politicians and 167 for non-politicians in T4.[13]

These results suggest that a non-binding promise, coupled with personalised interaction in the presence of partial observability, significantly affects politicians' behaviour and mitigates selfishness: they keep less for themselves and give more to citizen recipients, as

[13]We ran regressions with a dummy equal to one if amount given equalled amount promised (zero, otherwise), with controls and a dummy for politicians, and found that the politician dummy was positive and statistically significant for T4, but not for T3.

Table 4: T-tests, by treatment, Politicians vs Non-politicians.

Treatments	Give	Promise	Zero giving (%)
T1	1.14 (0.26)	—	−0.86 (0.39)
T2	0.33 (0.74)	—	0.72 (0.46)
T3	2.13** (0.04)	2.32**(0.02)	−0.52 (0.61)
T4	3.72*** (0.00)	0.79 (0.43)	−2.25** (0.03)
T5	−2.35**(0.02)	—	1.84* (0.07)
T6	0.23 (0.82)	0.48 (0.62)	−1.71*(0.09)

Notes: z-statistics are in parenthesis; ** and ***: significant at the 5 and 1 per cent levels of significance

well as keep their promises. Such a behavioural change is not observed for non-politicians.

We next consider the role of transparency and visibility.

Result 4: With personalized interaction and high visibility of dictator action (T5), the average giving of politicians and non-politicians both increase. However, the non-politician response to high visibility is significantly more pronounced than the politician response: only the non-politician response is statistically significant.

For politicians, the amount given increases from INR 357 in T2 to INR 428 in T5. The corresponding numbers for non-politicians are INR 335 and INR 545, respectively. Compared to the low-visibility treatment, the proportion of politicians and non-politicians who give zero decreases significantly with high visibility - to 7 per cent for politicians and 0 per cent for non-politicians (see Table 2, Figure 3, and Figure 1). However, and compared to T2, the overall increase in the average amount given in T5 is not statistically significant for politicians, but is statistically significant for non-politicians (Table 4). Furthermore, the increase in the amount given is far more pronounced among non-politicians than among politicians: the t-test for a difference between politician and non-politician giving in T5 is statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The t-test of a difference in the proportion of zero-giving between the two groups is statistically significant at the 10 percent level (Table 4). Non-politicians thus respond more strongly to an increase in the visibility of the dictator's actions than non-politicians, suggesting, somewhat counter-intuitively, that

social image concerns are more pronounced among non-politicians than politicians. [14]

Result 5: a) With personalised interaction, an upfront promise and high visibility (T6), politicians are, on average, slightly more generous than in T5, but give less, on average, than in T4. None of these differences are statistically significant. High visibility does thus not change politician behaviour, even with an upfront promise. b) In T6, non-politicians give more than in T4, but less than in T5. However, only the T6 vs T4 difference is statistically significant. As in T5, high visibility makes non-politicians more generous but not politicians. An upfront promise, on the other hand, makes politicians more generous, so the net effect is such that there are no observable differences in the amount given between politicians and non-politicians in T6.

Politicians' average giving decreases slightly from INR 504 in T4 (i.e., personalised interaction with promise and low visibility) to INR 474 in T6 (see Table 2, Figure 2). This change is not statistically significant (Table 3). While they promise more in T6 than in T4 (i.e., INR 551 in T6 vs INR 513 in T4), this change is also not significant. Politicians give more, on average, in T6 than in T5 (i.e., INR 474 in T6 vs INR 428 in T5) (see Table 2, Figure 3) but this increase in giving is again not statistically significant. This suggests that increased visibility - and transparency - does not affect the behaviour of politicians in our sample. This contrasts with non-politicians, whose average giving is significantly higher in T6 (INR 484) than in T4 (INR 309). This increase is statistically significant at a 1 percent level. Further and while average giving among non-politicians is lower in T6 than in T5 - a drop from INR 545 to INR 484 - this difference is not statistically significant. Regarding promise-keeping behaviour, as seen in T4, politicians tend keep their promises slightly more frequently than the non-politicians (see Figure 3).

We now investigate whether this behaviour across treatments from unconditional sum-

[14] One possible concern is whether the promise results are caused by an experimenter demand effect (EDE) which could occur, first because politicians could have felt they were under "special"scrutiny when they received the invitation to participate. Second, in the lab, a politician-dictator could respond to the explicit presence of the "audience", including the experimenters (this was a deliberate feature to heighten the social-image effect (as in Andreoni & Bernheim (2009)). We are confident that this was not the case since participation was voluntary and a politician concerned about being scrutinized could simply opt out. In addition, the results in T2, where one-third of the dictators gave zero, suggest that scrutiny did not interfere with and discourage selfish behaviour. Since EDEs would be expected to be consistent across treatments, this limited impact on behaviour in T2 suggest limited impacts on behaviour in the promise treatment as well.

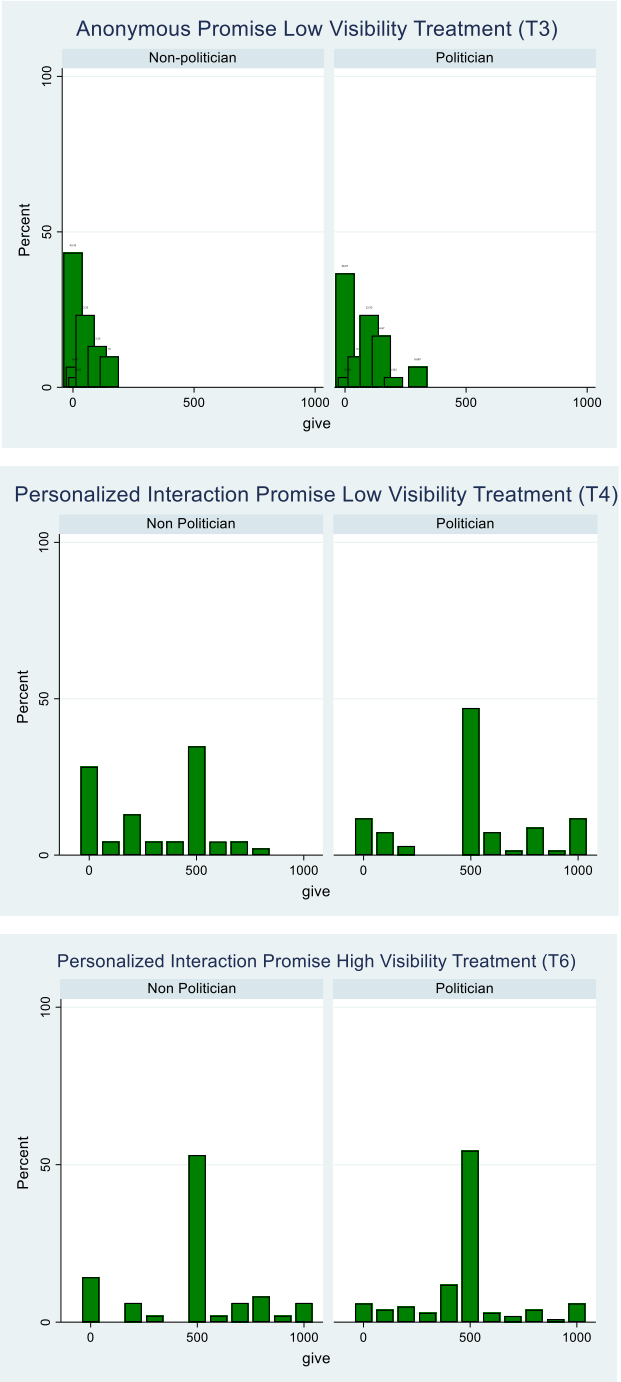

Figure 2: Amount given by politicians and non-politicians in T3, T4, and T6

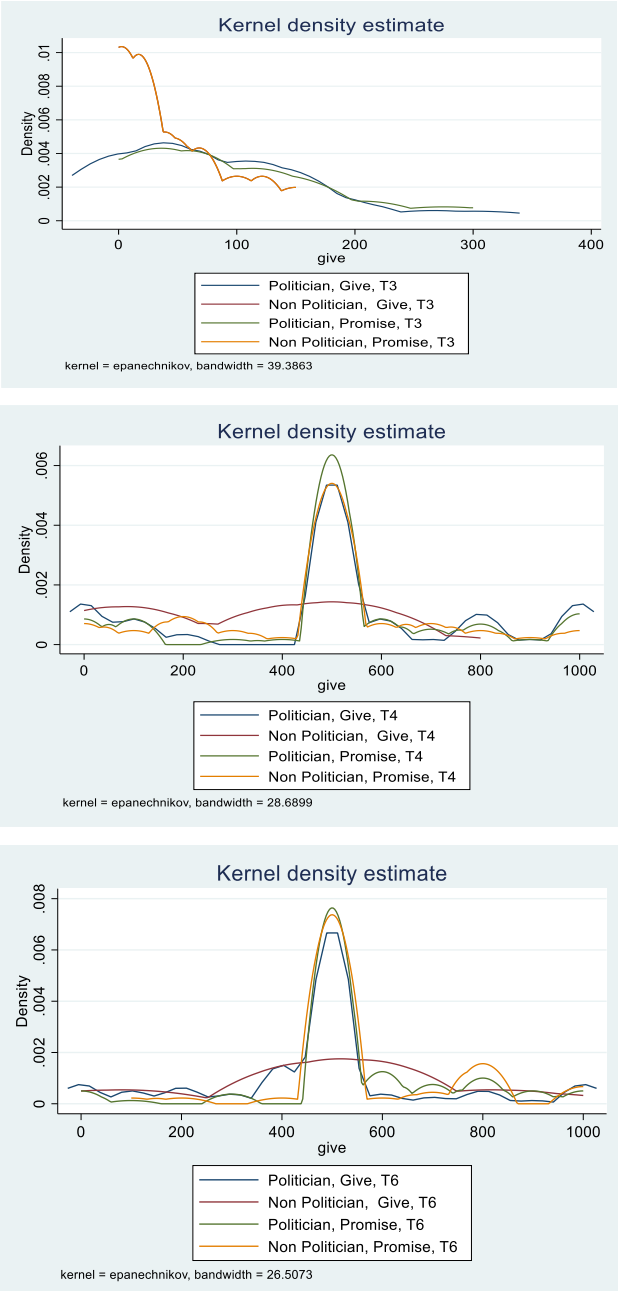

Figure 3: Kernel Density Plot, Amount Promised and Given, for Politicians and Non-Politicians in T3, T4, and T6

mary statistics are sustained under conditional regression analysis or whether the results, instead, may be driven by differences in the observable characteristics of politician and non-politician participants. In separate regressions, reported in Table 5, we regress the amount given, and a dummy for zero-giving on a politician dummy, treatment dummies, interactions between politician and treatment dummies and politician and non-politician characteristics (gender, age, and years of education along with dummies for occupation and state). We estimate equations using the following specification:

$$Y_{is} = a_0 + a_1 * D_{is} + \sum_{j=2}^{6} \delta_{js} * T_{ijs} + \sum_{k=2}^{6} \varphi_{ks} * T_{iks} * Pol_{iks} + \sum_{m=1}^{n} \omega_{ms} * Z_{ims} + u_i \quad (1)$$

Where Y is the amount given by the dictator or a dummy for zero-giving, i stands for dictator, either politician or non-politician, and s for session. T_{ijs} are Treatment 2 to Treatment 6, with T1 being the baseline treatment. D_{is} takes the value 1 if the dictator is a politician, and the value 0 if the dictator is a non-politician. Z_{ims} is a vector of control variables (gender and age of the dictator, years of education, as well as state and occupation dummies). The coefficients δ_{js} show how much the dictator gives in Treatments 2 to 6, relative to T1 (and the propensity of zero giving in T2 to T6 relative to T1). The coefficients φ_{ks} show the amount given and the propensity of zero giving among a type of dictators, e.g., politicians relative to other types, e.g., non-politicians, and to Treatment 1 in Treatments 2 to 6. u_i is the error term. We use bootstrapped standard errors clustered at session level.

Cols. (1) and (2) in Table 5 present the results where the dependent variable is the amount given, first with no controls and then with controls included. Col. (3) present the results with the dependent variable being the dummy variable for zero-giving. The politician dummy is insignificant across all three columns, suggesting that there is no observable difference between politicians and non-politicians in average giving and zero-giving across

all treatments. The coefficients on all treatments T2 to T6 are positive and significant for average giving suggesting that politicians and non-politicians give more in all treatments relative to the baseline treatment — T1 (anonymous, no promise, low visibility). This changes marginally when controls are added, with the T3 coefficient turning insignificant. Considering the coefficients for the interaction between the politician and treatment dummies, we first note that as above, both politicians and non-politicians respond strongly to the change from anonymity to personalized interactions. Further, as in Table 2 and a key result, there are no differences between politician and non-politician response. Next and for the personalized interaction-promise treatment (T4), the coefficient is positive and significant at the 5 percent level when the dependent variable is the amount given, both without and with controls: politicians give significantly more in T4 relative to non-politicians and relative to the baseline treatment (for T3, the interaction term is positive and significant when the model is run without controls, but the significance disappears when controls are included). Politicians give significantly more than non-politicians when they meet and greet their unknown recipients and make an upfront promise, even when a decision to allocate the entire endowment to themselves would be easy to hide. In contrast, the coefficient for the interaction of the politician dummy and the personalized interaction, high visibility and no promise treatment (T5) is negative and significant, suggesting that non-politicians respond to high visibility more strongly than politicians. However, there is no discernible difference in the generosity of politicians versus non-politicians in T6 when all the behavioural instruments are implemented simultaneously. Finally, and considering zero giving and the column (3) results, the likelihood of zero giving is reduced only in the high visibility treatments (T5 and T6). In the absence of a promise (T5), politicians are more likely than non-politicians to give zero: this difference disappears once a promise is introduced (T6).

Table 5: Regression results

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Constant	15.25* (0.38)	15.25 (0.38)	0.66*** (7.32)
Politician	8.33 (0.80)	1.01 (0.38)	−0.25 (0.12)
T2	330.48*** (7.21)	320.82*** (4.97)	−2.09 (1.35)
T3	36.33** (2.87) 23.51 (1.22)	−1.50 (1.02)	
T4	303.70*** (7.42)	293.36*** (5.70)	−1.81 (1.30)
T5	539.60*** (10.39)	531.58*** (10.27)	−6.85*** (4.45)
T6	478.67*** (7.69)	467.53*** (6.15)	−2.37* (1.65)
Pol*T2	12.79 (0.31)	20.25 (0.37)	0.49 (0.23)
Pol*T3	30.67* (1.84)	34.51 (1.46)	0.17 (0.08)
Pol*T4	187.38** (2.92)	196.79** (2.73)	−0.46 (0.23)
Pol*T5	−124.91** (2.03)	−122.82*** (2.06)	4.45** (2.23)
Pol*T6	−17.75 (0.33)	−8.99 (0.13)	−0.19 (0.09)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.37	0.38	0.35
N	588	588	588

Notes: Controls are occupation and state dummies, years of education, age, gender. The z-statistics is given in parentheses for Columns (1), (2) and (3);. ***, **, and * indicate level of significance at 1, 5, and 10 per cent, respectively. Column (1) and (2), dependent variable: amount given; Column (3), dependent variable: dummy if give=0, 0 otherwise.. The estimator is ordinary least square for Columns (1) and (2), and probit for Column (3). Standard errors are clustered at session level and are bootstrapped.

The regression results confirm the findings from the unconditional comparison of politicians and non-politicians behaviour (and in particular, the t-tests presented in Table 4). While both politicians and non-politicians are strongly selfish under anonymity, both respond similarly and strongly to a change from anonymized to personalized interactions. In contrast, promise-making induces more generous behaviour among politicians than non-politicians, while non-politicians are more generous than politicians when their actions are more visible, but where promise-making is not part of the treatment. The role of promise making in inducing more generous behaviour from politicians as compared to non-politicians suggests that breaking a promise is more costly for politicians than non-politicians. On the other hand, social image concerns seem to matter more for non-politicians than politicians.

5 Concluding Remarks

Our work provides a first attempt to use behavioural experiments to investigate how politicians and non-politicians (ordinary citizens) respond to institutional incentives in a setting where partial observability represents a governance challenge. Using a modified dictator game, we varied treatments — and institutional incentives — across the nature of interactions, whether an upfront promise was included and the visibility of actions. Under anonymity, both politicians and citizens were strongly selfish: both were significantly more generous when interactions were personalized. However, non-politicians were more generous than politicians when actions were more visible. In contrast, a promise induced greater generosity among politicians than non-politicians: while breaking a promise appears to be more costly for politicians, social image concerns (and transparency) appear to matter more for the non-politicians in our sample. Our regressions results confirm the findings from our t-tests of means differences.

These results have clear real-world analogs. First, personalised interaction and promise-making are inherent attributes of the way local politicians interact with citizens in rural India. Our findings suggest that every day interactions between politicians and citizens in Gram Sabhas along with promise-making of politicians to their constituents add a behavioural incentive for politicians to prioritise and improve citizen well-being. The finding that politicians are less responsive to social image concerns is consistent with Vaishnav (2017) portrayal of a subset of Indian politicians for whom public display of generosity may not be a prioritized concern. They are free to have their cake and eat it as long as they are perceived to be effective in other domains that matter for local voters.

Our findings challenge assumptions about the uniformity of response to and thus the effectiveness of incentives promoted in public policy initiatives. These findings also provide new insights to debates about the design of cost-effective mechanisms to prevent politician capture in environments where it is difficult to distinguish office holder misconduct from a range of other hurdles to governance success. The results of the lab-in-the-field experiments provide additional and direct evidence that, even in the absence of the material incentives induced by repeated interactions with voters and electoral competition and campaigns, and even if promise-breaking can easily be

concealed, it is possible to significantly improve citizen welfare by leveraging politicians' social preferences embedded in local norms. Our study suggests that closer and more personalized interaction between politicians and their constituencies, not only during electoral campaigns but also when they are in office, could provide incentives to politicians to be more pro-social.

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