

**Do individual MPs matter in India? Voter reactions to MPs' parliamentary performance in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha**

Ajit Phadnis

Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore

**Abstract**

The paper investigates the significance of the personal vote in the context of India, by examining whether the parliamentary performance of an incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) has a bearing on his/ her electoral prospects. We test for the influence of an MP's parliamentary activity, in terms of participation in debates, raising of questions, introduction of private members bills and disruption of parliamentary sessions, on their vote-share in the subsequent parliamentary elections. Our results demonstrate that raising parliamentary questions and disrupting parliament, the two MP activities that receive high media attention in India, do impact on vote-share. MPs, who are affiliated to the opposition party and other non-ruling parties, are rewarded for raising parliamentary questions. Further, MPs that represent rural constituencies gain votes for participating in the disruption of parliamentary proceedings, although the vote advantage for disruptions seems to diminish with the increasing urbanization of MP constituencies. To conduct this analysis we use data from the Indian Parliament's 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, the first complete parliamentary term after live telecast of parliamentary proceedings was introduced in India.

**Key words:** Personal vote, incumbency advantage, legislative performance, Indian elections

---

Does the personal vote exist?- has been a long-standing dilemma in the political economy and political science literature. Across different polities and institutional contexts, there is overwhelming evidence that political parties, party leaders and situational dynamics are heavy determinants of voting propensities. The personal vote, where it has been found to exist, seems to matter much less than these other factors, even in electoral systems, which are believed to encourage personal voting.

Why then is it important to study the personal vote? Consider the 2009 parliamentary elections in India: The median margin of victory across all constituencies was less than 7 per cent<sup>i</sup>. In such a scenario, even a small shift in constituency vote-share is likely to influence the victory chances of a party/ candidate. Given that India has the first-past-the-post electoral system, these small vote-share changes at the constituency level can aggregate into remarkable shifts in party seat-share in parliament, and consequently determine the party that rules the government of the day. So our investigation of the personal vote is motivated not by the consideration of its relative importance in the voting decision of the Indian electorate, but to ascertain whether it really matters and how crucial it is in terms of influencing the candidate/ party electoral prospects in a constituency.

While the scholarly analysis of the personal vote in the Indian context is scarce, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that it does matter in Indian elections. For instance, just before any Indian election, political party leaders are frequently quoted in the media to be scouting for candidates based on the ‘winnability’ criterion – what being winnable entails is, however, hardly elaborated. From the existing literature on Indian politics, we gather that candidate attributes such as caste, access to money and under certain circumstances, criminal record, are considered potentially vote-winning, but we are not convinced that the literature has covered all the facets that constitute the personal vote in India.

In this paper, we set out to excavate another potential determinant of the personal vote in India- the performance of the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) in parliament. Our analysis investigates whether what an MP does on the floor of the House has an impact on his/ her vote-share in the subsequent parliamentary elections. Asking this question in the context of contemporary Indian politics is important, since there is a widely held impression that what MPs do in parliament has no bearing on their electoral prospects. This seems a fair assumption, since till the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, voters had little access to information on what happens inside parliament. But that changed during the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha when parliamentary proceedings were telecast live to all parts of the country through a dedicated parliamentary channel. Following the introduction of live telecast, parliamentary occurrences have begun to receive wide coverage in the media- it is quite possible that a section of the voters are now aware of their MP’s parliamentary activities, and incorporate it into their voting decision.

Our findings, springing from an analysis of the connection of 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha MP performance with election vote-share, is that constituents do selectively react to MPs’ activities in parliament, particularly with regard to MPs’ raising of parliamentary questions and for their participation in the disruption of parliamentary proceedings- both of which receive high media attention. We find that constituents reward non-ruling party MPs for asking parliamentary questions, but their responses are muted over questioning by ruling party MPs. Further, rural constituents appear to reward MPs for disrupting parliamentary proceedings, while the support for disruptions reduces with urbanization and is likely to be less incentivized by constituents residing in cities. Constituents, however, do not show any consistent reaction to MPs’ participation in debates as well as the introduction of private member bills.

The next few sections are organized in the following manner. Section 1 discusses the previous literature that has dealt with the subject of personal vote in a variety of institutional contexts. Section 2 explains the estimation strategies employed in the paper and Section 3 presents the empirical findings. The last section discusses the findings and identifies further areas for research.

### **Literature on personal vote**

As mentioned earlier, the concept of personal vote has been independently as well as comparatively studied across various institutional contexts. Shugart & Carey (1992) predict that personal reputation of candidates is likely to be less important in a parliamentary constitutional

system, where intra-party cohesion is given a premium, than in a presidential system where the executive is independent of the assembly. Heitshusen et al (2005) extends this to incorporate the influence of the electoral system, when they present evidence that constituency focus by MPs is higher in Single Member district (SMD) than in Multi Member district (MMD) systems.

Given that the US has a presidential constitutional system and an SMD electoral system, both of which theoretically favor the cultivation of a personal vote, it comes as no surprise that a majority of studies on personal vote are situated in the US context. In particular, a large number of papers have analyzed the impact of candidate incumbency on voting patterns in the US Congress and Senate elections. Studies such as Erickson (1971) and Whitby (1986) have taken this a step further by investigating what could be the potential components of the incumbent vote advantage and why the magnitude of this advantage appears to vary across incumbent candidates. Both the studies demonstrate evidence of a relationship between legislative voting patterns by legislators as an incumbent with vote-share in the subsequent elections.

Following the abundant literature on personal vote in the US context, a number of studies have emerged in the context of parliamentary systems such as the UK. Gaines (1998), for instance, uses British election data from 1950-92 to give a tempered view that Liberal party candidates observe higher incumbency advantage as compared to incumbent candidates from Labour and Conservative parties. A nuanced effort in unpacking 'incumbency advantage' is Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina's *The Personal Vote* (1987), which draws a systematic comparison between US and UK. By analyzing the 1979 post-election survey data, they report evidence of a modest connection between respondent's opinions about an incumbents' performance with the election voting decision. Another paper, Norton & Wood (1990) associates higher constituency activity as a cause for the electoral advantage gained by first-time incumbents in the 1987 general election. Similar studies are also available for other countries. For instance, Cunningham (1971) reports that the individual effect of fielding a local candidate in Canada on an electoral outcome can be as high as 10 per cent. Bean (1990) estimates that attitudes towards the local member in the Australian national elections of 1987 could account for about 3% of vote-share.

While we see growing curiosity among researchers to investigate the significance of the personal vote in parliamentary democracies, but there have been few studies conducted in the context of India. Uppal (2009) presents a rigorous statistical exposition to demonstrate that unlike the case of US and UK, in India a legislator's incumbency in a state assembly constituency is associated with an electoral disadvantage. Further, his study suggests that the magnitude of incumbency disadvantage is tied to how voters view the 'performance' of the state government, measured in terms of the effectiveness of public provision. We are convinced that the performance of the state government is an important component of legislator incumbency, but we argue that the legislator incumbency may also be influenced by the performance of the individual legislator.

Verma (2012) attempts to delineate voter perceptions of performance at all three levels of governance: national, state and legislator in order to account for vote choice. The study uses a subjective voter evaluation of 'satisfaction with performance' as the explanatory variable at each

level, and thereafter demonstrates a connection between the voter satisfaction with MP performance with the candidate he/ she finally voted. However, as highlighted by the author himself, since the survey question on vote choice figures chronologically before the question on satisfaction with performance, there are concerns whether the survey responses on performance may have been primed.

This study endeavors to contribute to these earlier attempts at estimating the significance of the personal vote in the Indian context. Firstly, we argue that the magnitude of the incumbency disadvantage, as calculated in Uppal (2009), may not be the same for all incumbents; we expect that voters are likely to be less harsh towards incumbent legislators who perform well in the previous legislative term. Secondly, to overcome the circularity issues identified in Verma (2012), we introduce an objective measure of MP parliamentary performance that represents various types of MP activity in parliament.

### **Empirical Model**

As outlined earlier, the objective of our model is to test the impact of an MP's performance on his/ her electoral prospects in the subsequent elections. The earlier attempts at explaining election results have adopted two approaches to operationalize the dependent variable: (1) Probability of candidate Victory in the election and, (2) Candidate Vote-share in the elections. As mentioned earlier, we do not expect the independent effects of MP performance to have a substantive influence on whether the candidate wins or loses an election, since party affiliation, party leader approval and the situational dynamics are likely to be more prominent. We are concerned here with the granular impact of MP performance on his/ her electoral prospects, for which we feel the Candidate vote-share would be more reflective.

For our explanatory variables we propose a set of parameters, which reflect disparate components of an MP's performance in parliament as well as at the constituency. We elaborate below the applicability of these different parameters:

### ***Parameters of Parliamentary performance***

1. Participation in Parliamentary debates: Debates in the Indian parliament usually occur under two situations: (a) During consideration of a Bill and, (b) For discussions on an issue of public interest. Procedurally, it is the party that chooses which MP will speak on debates, so parties are more likely to give chance to MPs who are perceived to be loyal, and who will follow the party stance on a bill/ issue. In light of this, we expect that higher participation in parliamentary debates would attract more votes from party loyalists in the subsequent elections.
2. Parliamentary Questioning: Parliamentary questioning is an instrument by which MPs seek to hold the government accountable. As per the parliamentary procedure, questions to be asked in the House are selected from a ballot and parties play no formal role in the allocation of questioning opportunities. Raising of parliamentary questions is thus suggestive of the

MP's personal initiative in holding the government accountable, which we expect would be favorably evaluated by constituents. Since the Question Hour is scheduled during the first hour of the parliamentary proceedings, it receives a high degree of media attention.

3. Introduction of Private Members Bills: Private member bills are used by MPs to introduce a legislation on an issue of public interest. While private member bills are rarely passed in the Indian parliamentary context, they help in highlighting an issue, and on many occasions the government follows this up with a government bill on the same subject. MPs, who introduce more private member bills, are likely to be seen as demonstrating higher legislative initiative by their constituents.
4. Disrupting parliamentary proceedings: Parliamentary disruptions are a form of legislative obstruction, where MPs disturb the parliamentary proceedings by shouting slogans and coming onto the Well of the House. By disrupting the parliamentary session, MPs break a parliamentary rule, but quite remarkably the frequency of these disruptions in India has increased over the last decade. While the legislative consequences of disruptions are known, it is unclear as to how voters react to disruptions. The parliament does not officially report the names of MPs, who organize disruptions, but occurrences of disruptions and names of MP participants are widely reported in the television/ print media in India.

Some commentators believe that disruptions are driven by MPs who want to 'play to the gallery', which gives the impression that disruptions are likely to electorally benefit MPs. But a recent survey of Indian voters conducted in large cities of India, shows that a majority of the urban voters disapprove of the recurring disruptions of parliamentary proceedings by MPs. We are, therefore, inclined to believe that urbanization could shape constituents' reactions to disruptions.

### ***Moderating variables***

We incorporate the view that voters do not perceive MPs to be unitary actors, so vote-share implications for their parliamentary actions would need to consider the MP's party affiliation and constituency type. In line with this, we expect that voter reactions to an MP's performance is likely to be moderated by two factors:

1. Ruling party affiliation: Voters are likely to incorporate the MP's party affiliation and the position of their party in Parliament, in their evaluation of an MP's performance. For instance, parliamentary questioning is perceived to be a tool to enforce accountability over the executive - we would expect this to be more profitably used by MPs from the opposition and other parties, rather than the ruling party. Non-ruling party MPs are, thus, expected to be rewarded for initiating parliamentary questions.

2. Urban population in constituency: A high proportion of urban population is associated with a higher ratio of middle class voters, which may have implications for how constituents view parliamentary functioning. For instance, we may expect that with urbanization and extensive media coverage, voters would be more aware of their MP's parliamentary contributions, such as questions, debates and private bills, and are likely to reward them more. On the other hand, middle class voters may view parliamentary disruptions as an impediment to the functioning of parliament, and may be less supportive or even punish the participating MPs.

### **Control Variables**

We control for the potential effects of five factors on MP vote-share: (a) Previous vote-share of MP-party combination in the constituency- accounts for a range of static influences across the two elections such as support for party among voters belonging to social groups (caste, class, religious affinities) and candidate attributes (b) Party effects, which characterizes any positive (or negative) electoral wave in favor (or against) a party for the given election (c) Ministerial position in the previous tenure- Ministerial positions presents an MP the power to selectively channel benefits to his/ her constituents thereby gaining electoral support, and (d) Change in State incumbent dummy, accounts for whether the MP's party matches the incumbent party ruling the state government at the time of election- we expect that an MP coming from a state incumbent party to attract more votes (e) MPLAD utilization- is an important indicator of an MP's constituency initiative, we would expect voters to reward MPs for higher utilization efforts.

### **Data**

We use data from the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha to test our expectations regarding the impact of MP performance on subsequent election vote-share (2014 elections). As mentioned earlier, analyzing this parliamentary term is insightful, since this is the first parliamentary term in India, where complete proceedings were telecasted live on television to all parts of the country.<sup>ii</sup>

For the vote-share of incumbent MPs in the 2014 elections, we refer to the election results published by the Election Commission of India. We also use number of Votes, Votes as percentage of No. of constituency electors and Vote-share difference as three alternate operationalization strategies for the dependent variable, in order to test the robustness of our results. For parliamentary performance parameters such as number of debates participated, number of questions asked and number of private member bills introduced by each MP during the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, we gathered data from published statistics by PRS Legislative Research. Since the range of values for MP's debate participation and number of questions was high, we developed categorical variables based on their position on the quartile scale. MP's whose participation fell in the lowest quartile were given a score of 0, while those in the top quartile were given a score of 3.

We found that data on an MP's participation in parliamentary disruptions is not officially reported by the Lok Sabha Secretariat, so we went about creating a primary data-set for it. Here we outline the data gathering process. We define disruption as an event when the Session Chair of the Lower

House is forced to prematurely ‘adjourn’ a parliamentary sitting<sup>iii</sup> at least once owing to disturbances emanating from some MPs. MPs are counted as ‘participants of disruption’ if they exhibit evidence of coming onto the Well of the House or making statements signaling intent to disrupt proceedings within the last 20 minutes of the Speaker/ House Chair’s announcement of adjournment. Through a manual reading of parliamentary debates for 353 (out of 357) sittings of the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, we created a primary dataset enumerating the number of disruptions participated by each MP.

The data on the level of urbanization of the constituency is not easy to find, since the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and districts in India do not perfectly overlap. We use urbanization data that has been laboriously put together by Francesca (2015) by aggregating statistics reported at the block level to get our constituency level measure of urbanization.

For the control variable on Ministerial position, we construct a variable, whose value ranges from 0 to 1 depending on the proportion of time spent in the Ministerial position. For instance, a value of 1 means that the MP was a Minister during the entire parliamentary term, while 0.5 suggests that he/ she was a Minister for half the term.

For data on MPLAD utilization by MPs, we referred to the statistics published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. We created categorical variables for every 10% increase in MPLAD utilization; 95% or higher utilization got a score of 3, while less than 75% utilization was scored 0.

Since the dependent variable for our study is vote-share of incumbents in 2014 elections, our sample is limited to 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha MPs, who were re-nominated by their parties in the 2014 elections. Further, we have also excluded the small number of re-nominated MPs, who changed party affiliation or constituency location for the 2014 elections. After these deletions, the sample size of MPs considered for our analysis is 343 out of 540 Lok Sabha MPs. The substantive reduction in the sample size of MPs may invoke concerns regarding the possibility of selection bias impacting on our results. We consider this issue in the next section.

### **Selection bias concerns**

We analyze that selection bias would be a concern if there is a likely difference between the way our sample group, and the excluded constituencies react to an MP’s parliamentary performance. In such a scenario, the results from the analysis of our sample are likely to be biased, and we would find it difficult to generalize our findings. We, therefore, develop a test to verify the seriousness of the selection bias.

One of the key determinants of how constituents may respond to an MP’s parliamentary performance, is the demographic profile of the constituents and the level of infrastructure support within the constituencies. For instance, it is reasonable to expect that in constituencies, where media reach is extensive, information regarding an MP’s parliamentary activities is likely to touch a large number of constituents. Along with this, higher literacy levels of constituents

enables more constituents to receive this information and education empowers them to make evaluative judgements. Since media reach and literacy are both correlated to the urbanization pattern of constituencies, we assess that the level of urbanization is an important variable for explaining variations in constituent responses to an MP’s parliamentary performance.

Our test for selection bias is, therefore, devised to investigate whether the sample and excluded constituencies differ with regard to urbanization<sup>iv</sup>. Table 1 presents descriptive data on the distribution of sample and excluded constituencies, based on the level of urbanization:

*Table 1: Distribution of Sample & Excluded Constituencies, based on Urbanization*

<b>Urbanization categories</b>	<b>Percentage of Sample Constituencies</b>	<b>Percentage of Excluded Constituencies</b>
1 (<20%)	46.2%	48.5%
2 (20-40%)	32.0%	31.0%
3 (40-60%)	10.7%	10.0%
4 (60%+)	11.2%	10.5%

*Table 2: Model to test Urbanization with Sample*

The table shows remarkable parallels in the distribution of sample and excluded constituencies based on urbanization. Pursuant to this, we ran a model to re-inforce our evaluation of the descriptive data, the results of which are shown in the table on the right. As expected, the finding is that the Sample dummy shows no significant relationship with the Urbanization category.

<b>Dependent Variable: Urbanization Category</b>	
(Intercept)	0.82500
Sample dummy	0.04482 (0.08897)
R-square (Adj.)	-0.001392

We would have ideally liked to test for the impact of our sample dummy on constituency-level demographic variables such as education level, and infrastructural support measures such as density of roads and coverage of electricity connection, but the constituency-level data for these measures is not available. We are, however, optimistic that results for these variables are also not likely to be significant, since urbanization encompasses many of the progresses on the demographic and the infrastructural front. Given that our urbanization test does not report a significant difference between the sample and excluded constituencies, we are convinced that our sample does not suffer from selection bias.

### **Econometric analysis**

We begin our analysis with a simple multi-variate model regressing the explanatory variables of MP performance with Vote-share in the subsequent elections. Table 3 below illustrates the results.



Table 3: Multi-variate model of MP performance with Election vote-share

Dependent Variable:	Vote-share 2014	Votes 2014	Votes% of electorate2014	Vote-share diff. (2014-2009)
<i>Explanatory variables</i>	<b>1a</b>	<b>1b</b>	<b>1c</b>	<b>1d</b>
(Intercept)	-3.75628	-3.782e+04	0.02375	-18.34980
Debates participation (category)	0.03571 (0.59969)	7.166e+02 (6.518e+03)	0.10293 (0.42225)	-0.08206 (0.62519)
Questions asked (category)	0.57835 (0.57518)	5.199e+03 (6.198e+03)	0.11476 (0.40180)	0.98132 (0.59495)
Private Bills introduced	-0.07012 (0.18716)	1.354e+02 (2.036e+03)	-0.02330 (0.13142)	-0.15557 (0.19454)
Disruption participation	0.08043 (0.08100)	9.570e+02 (8.797e+02)	0.04155 (0.05703)	0.07254 (0.08449)
<b>Control variables</b>				
Lag Vote-share/ Votes/ Votes%electors	0.65590*** (0.06382)	8.858e-01*** (6.105e-02)	0.66863*** (0.05332)	NA
Ministerial position	3.80432' (2.05312)	4.221e+04' (2.230e+04)	2.43106' (1.44579)	3.56124' (2.14132)
State incumbent (change)	6.27303*** (1.19406)	4.751e+04*** (1.294e+04)	3.43910*** (0.84469)	6.70909*** (1.24279)
MPLAD performance	0.84238 (0.63630)	4.404e+03 (6.886e+03)	0.60428 (0.44620)	0.37419 (0.65759)
Party fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-square (Adj.)	0.6265	0.6541	0.6471	0.5298
N	343	343	343	343
<b>Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.10</b>				

Table 3 demonstrates similar results for models with all four measures of the dependent variable: Vote-share, Number of Votes, Vote to electorate percentage and Vote-share difference. None of the MP's parliamentary performance metrics: Participation in debates, questions asked, private member bills introduced and participation in disruptions prove significant in any of the models. Even the MPLAD performance is not significant. This aggregate analysis of all MPs suggests that parliamentary and constituency performance has no influence on vote-share in the subsequent elections.

The control variables that we incorporate in the models meet our expectations. Lag vote-share is expectedly significant; we find that holding Ministerial position for the full parliamentary term can increase vote-share by 3.8% (at 10% significance). The largest impact on vote-share is seen when the MP shares party affiliation with the incumbent government at his/her state- it leads to about 6.3% increase in vote-share.

The aggregate analysis of MPs of the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha gives an impression that MP's individual performance does not influence on his/ her vote-share in the next elections. Does this continue to hold when we engage with fine-tuned analysis? We investigate this in the next two models.

### ***Interaction with ruling-party affiliation***

In the next model (Table 4) we introduce the interaction of MP performance with ruling party affiliation to account for any variations associated with ruling party membership. As mentioned earlier, we would expect parliamentary questioning to be incentivized for non-ruling party MPs but less favored for ruling party MPs.

*Table 4: MP performance relationship with Vote-share after interacting with Ruling party affiliation*

<b>Dependent Variable:</b>	<b>Vote-share 2014</b>	<b>Votes 2014</b>	<b>Votes% of electorate2014</b>	<b>Vote-share diff. (2014-2009)</b>
<b><i>Explanatory variables</i></b>	<b>2a</b>	<b>2b</b>	<b>2c</b>	<b>2d</b>
(Intercept)	-7.00195	-5.949e+04	-4.78398	-18.743056
Debates participation (category)	0.75030 (0.72621)	7.736e+03 (7.845e+03)	0.59054 (0.50956)	0.464974 (0.755322)
Questions asked (category)	1.40552 <sup>*</sup> (0.74624)	1.721e+04* (8.028e+03)	0.83164 (0.52258)	1.861758* (0.773146)
Private Bills introduced	-0.01365 (0.22951)	1.346e+03 (2.487e+03)	-0.01103 (0.16153)	-0.009146 (0.239361)
Disruption participation	0.04845 (0.08097)	6.601e+02 (8.768e+02)	0.02185 (0.05695)	0.040524 (0.084434)
<b><i>Interaction variables</i></b>				
Debates participation*INC	-2.10867 <sup>*</sup> (1.23442)	-1.933e+04 (1.335e+04)	-1.38467 (0.86608)	-1.626829 (1.283949)
Questions asked*INC	-1.75020 (1.12282)	-2.582e+04* (1.217e+04)	-1.53193 <sup>*</sup> (0.79096)	-1.938354 <sup>*</sup> (1.170421)
Private Bills*INC	-0.15374 (0.38078)	-3.359e+03 (4.117e+03)	-0.05178 (0.26756)	-0.378002 (0.394701)
Disruption participation*INC	1.71229 (1.11871)	1.180e+04 (1.208e+04)	0.85127 (0.78494)	2.148583 <sup>*</sup> (1.163604)
<b><i>Control variables</i></b>				

Lag Vote-share/ Votes/ Votes%electors	0.65952*** (0.06375)	9.014e-01*** (6.005e-02)	0.68142*** (0.05310)	NA
Ministerial position	1.76149 (2.14326)	1.612e+04 (2.321e+04)	0.83900 (1.50752)	1.670321 (2.235154)
State incumbent (change)	6.31118*** (1.17714)	4.859e+04*** (1.272e+04)	3.44550*** (0.83135)	6.760799*** (1.224505)
MPLAD performance	0.09072' (0.05418)	4.246e+02 (5.805e+02)	0.06884' (0.03795)	0.048331 (0.055899)
Party fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-square (Adj.)	0.6369	0.6658	0.6577	0.5432
N	343	343	343	343
<i>Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.10</i>				

We find that the results in Table 4 that incorporates the interaction with ruling party (INC) affiliation bring new insights into the relationship between the variables of our interest. Parliamentary Questions shows significance at 5% and 10% levels in three of the four models, which suggests its relevance after accounting for the differential impact of ruling party affiliation. The substantive impact of jumping to the next higher quartile in terms of number of questions asked, leads to a 1.4% gain in vote-share!

As expected the interactive term between Parliamentary Questions and ruling party affiliation is consistently negative and significant (at 5% & 10% levels) in three of the four models supporting our earlier conjecture that voters are less inclined to support (and even punish) ruling party MPs for asking questions.

It is striking to us that the interaction between Debates participation and ruling party affiliation is also consistently negative and is significant (at 10% level) in one of the models. We do not have a specific hypothesis to explain this, but believe that it may be a characteristic of the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, where the ruling party (INC) gained notoriety for 'policy paralysis'. Given this scenario, we feel that MPs, who represented the government's stand in parliamentary debates, may have been punished by voters.

The control variables on lag vote-share and state incumbency retained their strong significance. None of the models, however, demonstrated significance of the coefficient on Ministerial position that we observed in Model 1.

### ***Interaction with Urbanization***

Table 5 shows the results after incorporating the urbanization variable in our analysis.

Table 5: MP performance relationship with Vote-share after interacting with Urbanization

<b>Dependent Variable:</b>	<b>Vote-share 2014</b>	<b>Votes 2014</b>	<b>Votes% of electorate2014</b>	<b>Vote-share diff. (2014-2009)</b>
<i>Explanatory variables</i>	<b>3a</b>	<b>3b</b>	<b>3c</b>	<b>3d</b>
(Intercept)	-9.25739	-3.697e+04	-3.85622	-20.79888
Debates participation (category)	-0.39053 (0.78242)	-3.226e+03 (8.488e+03)	-0.05173 (0.55351)	-0.58788 (0.81601)
Questions asked (category)	0.14190 (0.72475)	-4.012e+03 (7.833e+03)	-0.14768 (0.51027)	0.52493 (0.75302)
Private Bills introduced	0.27903 (0.28528)	4.087e+03 (3.096e+03)	0.13482 (0.20190)	0.27157 (0.29786)
Disruption participation	0.28937 <sup>†</sup> (0.16316)	4.009e+03* (1.768e+03)	0.19595 <sup>†</sup> (0.11530)	0.23025 (0.16996)
<b>Interaction variables</b>				
Debates participation*Urban	0.47311 (0.54945)	3.674e+03 (5.957e+03)	0.17064 (0.38886)	0.56653 (0.57339)
Questions asked*Urban	0.59748 (0.52945)	1.169e+04* (5.744e+03)	0.37742 (0.37470)	0.62226 (0.55278)
Private Bills*Urban	-0.32627 <sup>†</sup> (0.18049)	-3.710e+03 <sup>†</sup> (1.956e+03)	-0.15634 (0.12751)	-0.37855* (0.18817)
Disruption participation*Urban	-0.22719 (0.14735)	-3.256e+03* (1.597e+03)	-0.16693 (0.10422)	-0.17467 (0.15351)
<b>Control variables</b>				
Lag Vote-share/ Votes/ Votes%electors	0.65695*** (0.06406)	8.819e-01*** (6.110e-02)	0.64160*** (0.05482)	NA
Ministerial position	4.45775* (2.08402)	4.869e+04* (2.261e+04)	2.85138 <sup>†</sup> (1.47422)	4.26396 <sup>†</sup> (2.17560)
State incumbent (change)	6.11501*** (1.20663)	4.615e+04*** (1.307e+04)	3.40823*** (0.85662)	6.50630*** (1.25753)
MPLAD performance	0.09624 <sup>†</sup> (0.05667)	2.894e+02 (6.087e+02)	0.07364 <sup>†</sup> (0.04016)	0.05419 (0.05859)
Party fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-square (Adj.)	0.6289	0.6594	0.6476	0.5289
N	337	337	337	337
<b>Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.10</b>				

Table 5 shows that when we account for the effects of urbanization as an interactive term in the model, the coefficient associated with an MP's disruption participation is positive and significant (5% & 10% levels) in three of the models. This means that rural voters appear to reward MPs for participating in the disruption of parliamentary proceedings. In fact every disruption that an MP participates, is likely to give him a vote-share increase of 0.3%, which can be quite substantive in the Indian electoral context. On the other hand, the interaction term of disruption participation with urbanization is consistently negative in all models and significant (5% levels) in one of the models. This suggests that in constituencies, which are more urbanized, voters are less likely to encourage disruptive behavior from their MPs.

We do not find strong evidence for connecting other parliamentary performance measures with vote-share. The interaction term of Parliamentary questions with urbanization gives a consistently positive sign and is significant in only one of the models. This suggests evidence (although weak) that urbanization leads to higher vote rewards to MPs for raising questions.

We are, however, perplexed at the negative sign on the coefficient of the interaction term of Private Bills introduced with urbanization, which is also significant (5% and 10% level) in three models. This suggests that with urbanization, voters tend to punish MPs for raising private member bills- this finding needs to be investigated further to understand the causal linkage. With regard to the control variables of lag vote-share, state incumbent position and Ministerial position, we find that they maintain significance across the models.

## **Discussions & Conclusion**

We believe that our analysis makes an important contribution to the emerging dialogue on the personal vote in the Indian context. It adds to the existing work by introducing objective data on MP performance, rather than subjective notions of 'incumbent (dis)advantage' or 'satisfaction with MP' used by earlier studies. The value of this disaggregation is that it enables us to pin-point what kinds of parliamentary activities of MPs are more likely to be rewarded (or punished) by voters, and presents nuanced insights on the determinants of voting behavior in India.

Coming to the specifics of what parliamentary activities contribute to vote-share, our first finding suggests that MPs do get rewarded for raising parliamentary questions, especially if they belong to non-ruling parties. The substantive interpretation, in terms of vote-share, is that an MP's movement from one quartile to the next for number of questions raised, translates into a vote-share increase of 1.4%. This increase in vote-share for raising more questions is, however, muted for MPs affiliated to the ruling party.

The question that may arise is why do voters only react strongly to parliamentary questions and not the MP's participation in debates or the introduction of private member bills? We interpret that this may be a function of the institutional positioning of the Question Hour within the

parliamentary procedure. The Question Hour constitutes the first hour of a parliamentary sitting, which is the time when the media contingent in parliament is at its peak strength; as a result MP's raising of questions are known to receive more media coverage than participation in debates and introduction of private member bills. Consequently, voters are more likely to be aware of the MP's contributions to parliamentary questions as compared to debates and private members bills, which may explain why the MP's use of parliamentary questions is rewarded and not the use of other parliamentary instruments.

Our second finding demonstrates the electoral connection for an MP's participation in the disruption of parliamentary proceedings. The results show that participation in disruptions is profitable for MPs, with each disruption contributing to about 0.3% increase in vote-share. The positive connection between disruptions and vote-share is, however, found to diminish with increasing urbanization of constituencies.

The evidence responds to a leading point of speculation by politicians and political commentators alike on how voters in India perceive and react to the regular disruptions in parliament. In 2012, a senior MP<sup>v</sup> wrote a media article in which he mentions, "I find myself asking to what extent do (these) tactics of disruption impress our voters? Do people watch these proceedings and silently applaud their representatives? Are the silent majority put off by what they see on their TV screens, or are they just not bothered one way or the other?" Around the same time in 2011, another MP<sup>vi</sup> expressed in a print media article, "It is our burgeoning middle class that is most dismayed by the sub-optimal functioning of Parliament... the growth of our middle class will gradually build pressure on legislators to adhere to better standards of public behavior'. We believe that our results present empirical evidence to back the claim that urban constituencies, where middle class voters are likely to be concentrated, show less support for disruptive behavior from their MPs.

The overall verdict of the paper on the central question on 'whether individual MPs matter' is a resounding 'Yes', they do matter, and the evidence suggests that it does influence the vote decision of at least a section of the constituents. But at the same time, it is essential to re-emphasize that the impact of an MP's personal vote, computed for parliamentary performance, is likely to be much smaller than the singular influence of party support, party leadership approval, social mobilization or situational factors that are stronger determinants of voting in India. Yet we argue that given the slender margins of electoral victory observed in the parliamentary elections of India, the narrow boost to vote-share from the personal vote could prove decisive in many constituencies.

The research contributes to the discourse on the personal vote, by unpacking a specific component of incumbent advantage/ disadvantage: performance of an MP in parliament. We contend that in the context of parliamentary systems, an MP's creative use of parliamentary instruments is a better indicator of his/ her independent performance than legislative voting,

which is known to be driven by the party whip. Our research is limited in the sense that we consider only objective counts regarding use of parliamentary instruments, such as parliamentary questions, as our explanatory measures. Further research can bring rich insights into the subjective dimension of an MP's participation by analyzing the content of parliamentary questions, debates, private bills and the issues driving disruptions in parliament.

---

## References

1. Bean, C. (1990) The Personal Vote in Australian Federal Elections, *Political Studies*, 38, 253-268
2. Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Dobrzynska, A. & Nevitte, N. (2003) Does the Local Candidate Matter? Candidate Effects in the Canadian Election of 2000, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36:3, 657-664
3. Cain, B., Ferejohn, J. & Fiorina, M. (1987) *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*, Harvard University Press
4. Carery, J. & Shugart, M. (1995) Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: a Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas, *Electoral Studies*, 14:4, 417-439
5. Cunningham, R. (1971) The Impact of the Local Candidate in Canadian Federal Elections, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 4:2, 287-290
6. Dutta, B. & Gupta, P. (2014) How Indian Voters Respond to Candidates with Criminal Charges, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49:4, 43-51
7. Erickson, R. (1971) The Electoral Impact of Congressional Roll Call Voting, *The American Political Science Review*, 65: 4, 1018-1032
8. Francesca J. (2015). "A sign of backwardness? Where dynastic leaders are elected in India." In Kanchan Chandra (Ed.) *Democratic Dynasties: State, Party and Political Families in India*. Cambridge University Press
9. Gaines, B. (1998) The Impersonal Vote? Constituency Service and Incumbency Advantage in British Elections, 1950-92, 23:2, 167-195
10. Heitshusen, V., Young, G. & Wood, D. (2005) Electoral Context and MP Constituency Focus in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, *American Journal of Political Science*, 49:1, 32-45
11. Norris, P., Vallance, E. & Lovenduski, J. *Do Candidates Make a Difference? Gender, Race, Ideology and Incumbency*, Oxford University Press
12. Norton, P. & Wood, D. (1990) *Constituency Service by Members of Parliament: Does it contribute to a personal vote?*, Oxford University Press
13. Ravishankar, N. (2009) The Cost of Ruling: Anti-Incumbency in Elections, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44:20, 92-98
14. Soroka, S., Penner, E. & Blidook, K. (2009) Constituency Influence in Parliament, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 42:3, 563-591

15. Whitby, K. & Bledsoe, T. (1986) The Impact of Policy Voting on the Electoral Fortunes of Senate Incumbents, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 39:4, 690-700
16. Uppal, Y. (2009) The disadvantaged incumbents: estimating incumbency effects in Indian state legislatures, *Public Choice*, 138, 9-27
17. Verma, R. (2012) What Determines Electoral Outcomes in India?: Caste, Class, or Voters' Satisfaction with Government Performance?, *Asian Survey*, 52:2, 270–297

---

<sup>i</sup> Karthik Shashidhar, "The closeness of electoral contests". *The Mint*, 18<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2013

<sup>ii</sup> Live telecast of parliamentary proceedings commenced in 2006 i.e. in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha

<sup>iii</sup> One parliamentary sitting constitutes a single day of parliamentary proceedings

<sup>iv</sup> We would have also liked to add literacy to the analysis, but the data is difficult to get at the constituency level since constituency and district boundaries in India do not overlap, and the education data is available only at the district level

<sup>v</sup> Omar Abdullah, 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha MP in NDTV Opinion, 'Disrupting Parliament: How Much Is Enough?'

<sup>vi</sup> Baijayant Panda, 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha MP in Indian Express, 'Parliament is a difficult place'