

Abhinav Khemka

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Education

PhD Candidate University of Barcelona and Institute of Economics Barcelona (IEB)	2020 - present
Research Visiting Scholar Department of Political Science, University of California Berkeley Host: Pradeep K. Chhibber	Fall 2023
Masters in Models and Methods of Quantitative Economics (QEM) Universite Paris I Pantheon Sorbonne IDEA Graduate Program, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	2018 - 2020
Masters in International Economics and Finance (Advanced) University of Queensland	2013 - 2015
BA in Economics Michigan State University	2007 - 2011

Research Interest

Primary: Political Economy, Development Economics
Secondary: Comparative Politics, Applied Economics

PhD Working Papers

Manipulating the System: Clientelism and Criminality in Politics (Job Market Paper)

Abstract: Why do voters often fail to reject corrupt or criminal politicians? In this paper, I argue that in settings where government institutions are weak and corruption is widespread, criminal politicians can gain control over state resources and use their delivery as a mechanism to buy voter support. To test this theory, I examine the causal effects of electing criminal politicians on India's largest rural workforce program in the state of West Bengal during the 2011 to 2020 period. Using a regression discontinuity design, I find that the election of a criminal politician leads to a drop in the number of completed projects and a rise in work allocation. This effect is more pronounced for legislators who seek re-elections, are accused of serious criminal allegations, and contest from non-reserved constituencies. The results further indicate that criminal politicians spend a significantly larger portion of the funds on the labor dimension of the program rather than on materials. These findings suggest that criminal politicians use the program to deliver clientelistic public goods to their constituents. This could explain why voters might be willing to support such candidates, despite the criminal allegations against them.

Do Dynasts Make Better Politicians? (Work in Progress)

Abstract: Does the politicians family connections affect the level of effort they exert once elected to public office? Economic theory predicts that political power is often unequally distributed, where certain individual enjoy an electoral advantage over others. One prominent example of this phenomenon is political dynasties, where candidates belonging to political families are persistently elected to political office. While the existing literature highlights why dynastic politicians maintain political power, the consequences of electing such politicians is relatively unknown. In this paper, I examine if dynastic politicians under perform in terms of their effort once elected to political office in the context of India, where members of prominent families often hold political office for generations. I use two main proxy measurements to measure political effort: (i) A field experiment to investigate whether the dynastic ties of the legislator affects their response to citizens' request about the lack of regular water supply and (ii) the amounts of funds utilized under the constituency development scheme available to each politician in their constituency. Using a regression discontinuity design, I estimate the effect of electing a dynastic politician on politician effort at the constituency level for all Indian state assembly elections held during the period of 2018 to 2023.

Publications

Why Do Voters Elect Criminal Politicians? *European Journal of Political Economy*, 82 (2024): 102527
Export-Led Growth in India: A Bounds Testing Approach (with Temesgen Kifle and Bryan Morgan), *Journal of Developing Areas*, Volume 52, Number 1, Winter 2018.

Work in Progress

Empowerment through Engagement: The Impact of Women's Self-Help Groups on Political Participation and Voter Preferences
The Impact of History Textbook Changes on Nationalistic Sentiments

Research Experience

Country Economist, International Growth Center (IGC), 2016 - 2018
Research Associate, Abdul Latif Jamil Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), 2015-2016

Teaching

Instructor, Public Economics (upcoming), Spring 2024, University of Barcelona
Instructor, Principles of Taxation, University of Barcelona, Fall 2021, Teaching Evaluation: 8.3/10
Teaching Assistant, Introductory Microeconomics, University of Queensland, Spring 2014

Academic Achievements

Best PhD Paper Award Runner-up, 2022: School of Economics, University of Barcelona.
Best Postgraduate Thesis Award, 2015: Economics Department, University of Queensland.
Best Undergraduate Thesis Award, 2011: Economics Department, Michigan State University.

Grants and Scholarships

Mobility Grant for Young Researchers, 2023: SEBAP 4,200€.
Ethnic Identities and Political Selection, 2021: Institute of Economics Barcelona (IEB) 1750€.
FI Doctoral Scholarship, 2021-2024: AGAUR, Catalan Government 80,000€.
Erasmus Mobility Scholarship, 2019: QEM program, Universite Paris I Pantheon Sorbonne 5,000€.
Consortium Scholarship, 2018-2020: QEM program, Universite Paris I Pantheon Sorbonne 15,000€.

Conferences and Workshops

2024 UB PhD Economics Student Seminar, European Public Choice Society Annual Meeting,
European Political Science Association Conference (upcoming)
Spanish Economic Association Meeting, European Economic Association Summer Meeting,
2023 International Corruption Research Forum, European Public Choice Society Annual Meeting,
UB PhD Economics Student Seminar,
2022 UB PhD Economics Student Seminar, UB PhD Economics Workshop
2021 IV UB PhD Workshop on Empirical Political Science
2020 IDEA Graduate Program Workshop

Skills

Technical Stata (Advanced), R (Advanced), Python (Intermediate), Matlab (Beginner)
Others SurveyCTO, KoBoToolbox, LaTeX
Field Work Bihar, India (2016-2018, 2021), Sierra Leone (2018)
Language English(Fluent), Hindi(Native), Bengali(Native)

References

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