Effort or Entitlement? An Audit Experiment with Dynastic Legislators *

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Abstract

Do dynastic politicians exert less political effort than their non-dynastic counterparts? Using a pre-registered field experiment in India, this paper tests whether the state legislators political family connections affect their responsiveness to requests for help with common public goods provision. We find that dynastic legislators are on average more than 50% less responsive. This response rate is reduced further when legislators have strong political family ties. However, this difference in the response rate disappears when citizens provide a clear signal of their party preferences, and the raised concern isl. directly under the responsibility of the legislator. These findings suggest that dynastic legislators are willing to exert more political effort when this can affect their electoral support.

JEL Classification: D72, H70, O12

Keywords: Dynastic Legislators, Audit Experiments, Regression Discontinuity, Political Effort, India

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1 Introduction

Political power is often unequally distributed, where certain individuals enjoy an electoral advantage over others. This *de facto* power can come from various characteristics such as ethnicity (Banerjee & Pande, 2007) or incumbency (Lee, 2008). One prominent example of this phenomenon is political dynasties, where candidates belonging to political families are persistently elected to public office. Dynastic politicians are a mainstay in politics in various parts of the world, such as Japan, the Philippines, and the United States.

The literature highlights that the lower barrier to entry into politics, name recognition, and self-perpetuation can explain why political dynasties exist (Dal Bó et al., 2009; Querubin et al., 2016). The existence of dynasties has led to a small but growing literature that examines the effects of electing such legislators to public office. For example, Besley and Reynal-Querol (2017) show that the election of dynastic politicians can have potentially positive effects on economic performance. Likewise, Labonne et al. (2019) find that political dynasties can serve as a gateway for women to enter politics in Indonesia. In contrast, several country-specific studies in Brazil (Bragança et al., 2015), India (Dar, 2018; George & Ponattu, 2019) and Japan (Asako et al., 2015) find that the success of dynastic political power often has negative effects on economic growth. This paper departs from these existing studies and measures the effects of electing dynastic legislators on political effort.

Since political effort is not directly measurable, we conduct a pre-registered field experiment involving 4020 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in India to test whether the legislators' response to common voter concerns is affected by their political family connections. India provides an ideal setting, as political dynasties are prevalent at both the nation and state levels, with members of prominent families often holding political office for generations. Some examples include the *Nehru-Gandhi* family at the nation level, the *Yadav* family in the state of Bihar and the *Abdullah* family in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The experiment we use is an adaptation of previous audit experiments conducted by Butler and Broockman (2011) and McClendon (2016).[1] In this exper-

[1]Butler and Broockman (2011) and McClendon (2016) use an email experiment to test whether the legislators' response to constituency-related queries is impacted by the race of voters in the United States and South Africa, respectively.

iment, each legislator receives an email from a hypothetical voter asking about issues related to the provision of common public goods. In addition, we randomize the emails into two different treatment groups. First, we test whether legislators' responses differ depending on how responsible they are for the raised concern. Second, we test whether dynastic legislators are more likely to respond when the voter provides clear partisan preferences. We hypothesize that since dynastic legislators inherit their position and face lower barriers to entry, they might be less likely to exert political effort. Second, we argue that when faced with clear electoral benefits, dynastic legislators may be willing to exert as much effort as their counterparts to preserve their political legacy (George & Ponattu, 2019). To test this theory, we examine whether dynastic legislators respond more strategically when constituent engagement is publicly visible or politically salient. Lastly, we test whether the strength of the political family connection matters. For example, dynasts with "strong" political connections such as fathers or spouses may differ from dynasts with "weak" connections such as uncles or cousins.[2] Since strong dynasts have greater name recognition and face lower political competition, they may differ in the level of political effort they are willing to exert.

There are two potential challenges in evaluating the effect of electing dynastic politicians on legislator efforts. First, it is highly unlikely that the selection of a dynastic legislator is at random. It could be that certain dynastic candidates are more likely to run and win in certain constituencies than others. To overcome this endogeneity problem, we use a regression discontinuity (RD) design, comparing constituencies where a dynast politician barely won to constituencies where they barely lost. Given the close margin of victory, the success of dynastic candidates in these constituencies should be close to random (Lee & Lemieux, 2010). Using this set-up, we examine the impact of electing a dynastic politician on political effort at the constituency level in all Indian state assembly elections from 2018 to 2025.

A second challenge is that, while political dynasties are prevalent throughout the Indian political landscape, data on political family ties are limited.[3] To

[2]In particular, we define a candidate to have a strong dynastic link if their parent, spouse, or several family members had previously contested and won a national or state election.

[3]As per our knowledge, three studies have attempted to collect data on political families in India. Chhibber (2013) using data from 2009 Indian national elections tag parties that have dynastic only at the top positions within the party framework. Tantri and Thota (2017) collect data

overcome this challenge, we compile all political family ties for the top two finishing legislators for all state assembly elections held between 2018 and 2023 (N = 8040).[4] We find that dynastic politicians are widespread in India. About 15% of the candidates who came in the first two pole positions have links to family members who previously contested in a state or national election. Of these, 85% have strong dynastic family ties.

A preview of the results shows that the overall response of the Indian state legislatures is extremely low: less than 4% of the legislators who were emailed responded to the request. Although this level of responsiveness seems extremely low, it is consistent with other studies that have reported relatively low response rates for audit experiments in India. [5] Despite the relatively low response rate, we find significant differences in the response rate when comparing dynast to non-dynast legislators: dynastic politicians are 6.8 percentage points less likely to respond. This response rate falls further by 0.6 percentage points when the legislator has strong family connections. When looking at the various treatment groups, we only find significant differences in the response between dynastic and non-dynastic legislators in cases where the voters provide no clear signal of their partisan alignment. Looking at the results by the type of subject, there are no statistical differences in response rate when the subject matter comes directly in the purview of the legislators' responsibilities. These results suggest that dynastic legislators show a higher willingness to exert effort when this could potentially affect their electoral support.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical discussion. Section 3 discusses the experimental design. Sections 4 and 5 describe the data and introduce the empirical strategy, respectively. Section 6 presents the validity of the RD design, the results, and its robustness. Section 7

on the dynastic backgrounds of national legislators who contested in the 2009 Indian elections. The most comprehensive collection of data on the dynastic background is carried out by George and Ponattu (2019). They collect data for legislators who finished in the top two positions in national elections from 1999-2014. However, they restrict their analysis to only parental or spousal links and do not consider connections to state legislators.

[4] A detailed explanation of the political background data collection strategy and how dynasts are identified is provided in Section 4.2.

[5] Bussell (2017) using WhatsApp messages MLAs to request help obtaining street lamps or ration cards and reports a response rate of 9%. Likewise, Vaishnav et al. (2019) sends emails to MPs asking for assistance in enrolling in a government scheme and finds precisely the same response rate. Gaikwad and Nellis (2021) rely on SMS technology to send requests for voter registration issues and reports a response rate between 10% and 15%.

discusses how we plan to further extend this project. Section 8 provides some policy implications and concludes.

2 Theoretical Discussion

Ideally, citizens should be able to directly communicate with legislators about any concerns they may have in their region, and it is the responsibility of elected legislators to address these concerns. However, legislators with political family connections may be less diligent, resulting in reduced responsiveness to their constituents.

There are several reasons why dynastic politicians might differ from their non-dynastic counterparts in terms of the political effort they are willing to exert. First, since dynasts often inherit their position due to their predecessors' legacies, they often enjoy an electoral advantage and face less political competition, which reduces their willingness to exert effort and perform well in office. For example, George and Ponattu (2019) theorize that moral hazard is a potential reason why dynasts underperform. They find that a significant fraction of political capital is hereditary where politicians who have had parents previously in power enjoy a substantial vote share advantage than non-dynastic politicians. This lack of political competition can also result in the selection of lower-quality candidates, individuals who are less qualified or experienced, ultimately leading to a reduced political effort and poorer economic outcomes. A third reason why dynasts might exert less effort is that they enjoy a selection advantage compared to non-dynasts due to a lower barrier to entry into politics and name recognition (Dal Bó et al., 2009). This is related to the literature showing that women politicians often have to perform better than men because they face stronger constraints to get political nominations and have lower voter approval rates (Anzia & Berry, 2011). Likewise, there is a growing body of literature on family firms that shows that when these firms are run by family CE0s, they significantly under perform compared to when competent professions are hired due to negative selection (Bloom & Van Reenen, 2007). In summary, we should expect that dynasts might be more likely to shirk their legislative duties because they inherit their positions by self-perpetuation, name recognition, or voter bias.

H1: Dynastic legislators exert less political effort than non-dynastic legislators.

Following Hypothesis 1, we can expect that all dynasts are not equal. Since strong dynasts come from more prominent political families and have a stronger political base, they might exert less effort than weak dynasts. To test this hypothesis, we examine whether the response rate differs by separating the sample between strong and weak dynastic politicians.

H1a: Strong dynasts exert less political effort than weak dynasts.

Do dynasts always under perform? We argue that when presented with clear electoral incentives, dynastic politicians might be willing to exert effort. Although dynastic politicians might exert overall less political effort, they can be incentivized to work harder when there are clear electoral rewards on offer. This is driven by their motivation to maintain their political legacy for future generations. For example, George and Ponattu (2019) show that dynasts with sons perform significantly better because they have an incentive to consolidate political capital for future generations. Thus, if dynastic politicians are looking to build political capital for the future, they might be strategically exerting effort to signal to the voter of their competence.

H1b: Dynastic legislators exert more effort when they believe it will significantly impact their electoral support.

3 Experimental Design

Using a pre-registered experimental design similar to the approach taken in Butler and Broockman (2011) and McClendon (2016), we send emails to all Indian state legislators currently in office from February to April 2023. The experimental design is as follows: We send emails using a fictitious gmail account that only indicated the first name of the constituent to all current MLAs with working email addresses.[6] Email addresses for legislators that were unavailable or bounced back have been discarded (approximately 25%).[7]

[6]Locating email addresses was not straightforward since many were missing or incomplete. In cases where email addresses had problems, various alternative sources were used, such as candidate affidavits, personal websites, and civil organization websites.

[7]There are in total 4123 state assembly seats in India, out of which 13 are vacant. Of the remaining 4110, email addresses for 270 legislators could not be found and 790 emails were bounced back providing a list of 3050 working email addresses.

To measure whether dynastic legislators exert less effort than their counterparts, we examine the responsiveness of the legislator dichotomously, according to whether the legislator replies to the emails. In particular, we construct a binary variable that scores a 1 if the MLA responded to the sender with (1) a solution to the raised concern, or (2) if the MLA provided the information for the relevant department, or (3) If the MLA forwarded or cc'ed their email to the relevant authority, or (4) if the MLA asked for additional information.

To test whether dynasts are more likely to respond when they believe it will impact their electoral support, we randomly alter emails in two different treatment arms. First, half of the emails contains a query on the lack of water supply in the legislator's constituency, which comes under the jurisdiction of the municipal cooperation. Thus, the MLA is not directly responsible for this problem, but can instruct the relevant authority to address the concern. The other half of the emails contain a query on the expenditure made under the MLAADS scheme. The funds in this scheme are allocated to each MLA to address particular local needs in their constituency. The unique feature of this scheme is that the expenditure of these funds is completely at the discretion of the MLA without any oversight from other government departments. Since the MLA has complete authority over choosing whether to exhaust the allocated budget and the type of projects to undertake, they are directly responsible for addressing any questions related to the scheme. By altering the subject matter, we can test whether dynast politicians are only willing to exert effort when confronted with questions that come directly under their duties, since this might affect their electoral support.

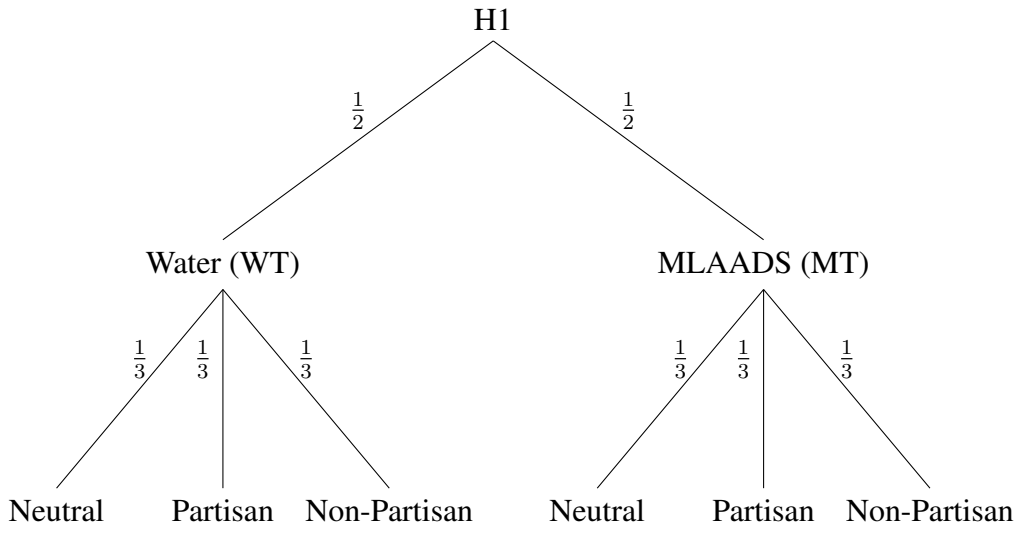
Second, we randomly alter the text of the email to suggest that the voter is neutral by not providing any indication of their partisan preferences, supporting the MLA's party, or supporting the opposition party. By randomly altering the text, we can directly test whether there are any differences in the response rate between dynast and non-dynast legislators depending on the voters' partisan alignment.

Beyond the main treatment, we take various additional steps to ensure that no alternative mechanisms could alter the legislators' response. First, ethnicity can play a key role in the way legislators engage with their constituents in India (Banerjee & Pande, 2007). Since last names can often indicate the ethnicity or caste of the sender, this information was not included in the email. Additionally, a natural first name was chosen for the experiment to avoid sending any signal

of the sender's religion. Second, the use of emails itself might be an indicator of the socioeconomic class of the constituent. Although email usage is widely spreading in India, legislators might get the signal that well-educated or richer constituents have a higher likelihood to correspond via email. Although groups that use emails might differ because legislators in the experiment receive the same treatment, this should not potentially affect the results. Lastly, all emails are translated into the most spoken vernacular language of the state, such as Bengali in West Bengal and Tamil in Tamil Nadu.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the experimental design along with the treatment arms. Box 1 shows the structure of the email.

Figure 1: Experimental Design



Box 1: Email sent to MLA

From: [name@gmail.com]

To: **MLAs Email Address**

Subject: *Subject Matter*

Dear **MLA name**,

[WT] *I am writing to you regarding my concern about the lack of a regular water supply in my area. I was inquiring about the steps your office is taking to fix the problem and / or if you could provide me with the contact details of the department to which I can speak about this problem.*

[MT] *I am writing to you regarding acquiring information on the MLA Development Funds. I would like to know what projects have already been carried*

out and how much of these funds have been used and what future projects have been planned under the scheme. I would appreciate if your office could provide me with these relevant details and / or if you could provide me with the contact details of the department that I can speak to regarding this?

While I am a supporter of the opposition party/As a supporter of (MLA party name)], I wanted to bring this matter to your attention as my representative. I would be very grateful to receive your response and I am sure that my family and friends would be happy to hear that I heard back from you.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Samar

Notes: The bold text represents the treatment groups and the italic text represents the sub-treatment groups.

Ethical Considerations

Three main ethical issues were considered in the formulation of the experimental design: First, the decision to use deception and waive informed consent in the experimental design was not taken lightly. Since the main objective of this study is to examine political effort, a slight use of deception is necessary in the experimental design. If politicians were aware that they were participating in a study, this could potentially change their behavior. As a result of this knowledge, the findings would be biased. Using fictitious constituents with mild deception allows us to draw valid inferences, which would not be possible if the politicians were informed beforehand. Thus, only by using deception can the effect of electing dynastic legislators on political effort be captured. This is interesting not only as a research perspective but also for society in general.

In this respect, this study joins a growing body of literature in the field of political science that uses audit experiments to generally test some form of discrimination (such as race or gender) in how the treatment group responds to a type of request (for example, an email sent, a job or housing application, etc.). An in-depth review of studies that have used such experimental designs is provided in Butler and Crabtree (2021). The experimental design proposed in this project is closest to that of Butler and Broockman (2011) and McClendon (2016). The experiment used in this study is an adaptation of these works and

aims to capture the response of politicians based on their family connections.

A second concern was to reduce any potential harm the experiment might cause the legislator. Various steps were taken to maintain the anonymity of the legislators' responses. Any personal identifiers are separated from the response data to ensure that the reported behavior cannot be identified to any particular legislator (pseudonymized). In addition, any personal data are encrypted and stored separately with limited access to the researchers involved in the study.

Lastly, further considerations were made to reduce the burden placed on the legislators' time. Although some burden was essential to gauge how much effort and time the politician exerts, the subject matter chosen was fairly easy to respond to. Additionally, since the query falls mostly under the legislators' duties, this reduces any potential concerns that the experiment takes the legislators' time from dealing with crucial matters in their constituency.

4 Electoral Context and Data

4.1 Electoral Context

The state government in India follows a parliamentary structure with two houses: Upper House (*Vidhan Parishad*) where members are nominated and Lower House (*Vidhan Sabha*) whose members are elected. Those elected to the Lower House, the focus of this study, are elected using a "first-past-the-post" system for a period of five years into a single-member constituency. The state legislatures in India have various responsibilities, such as proposing bills and making laws, allocating funds for development projects, and providing access to public schemes.

4.2 Data

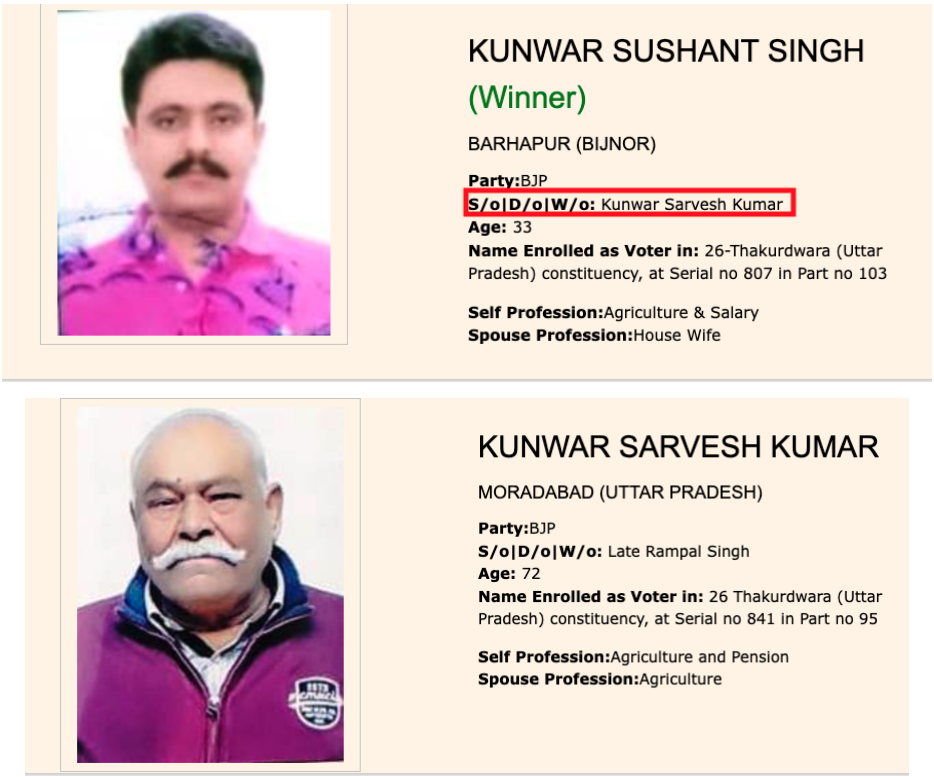
Data on all candidates who contest the 2018-2023 Indian State Assembly election were collected from the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (TCPD).[8] In total, 44109 candidates contested from 4123 assembly constituencies.

[8]TCPD provides data for all the elections held both at the national and state level from the original reports available from the Election Commission of India (Agarwal et al., 2021). The data includes various election-related information, such as constituency names, their reservation status, electoral size, turnout, candidate names, their affiliated party, and their election results. The data is available at: https://lokdhaba.ashoka.edu.in/.

To identify the dynastic ties of politicians, we exploit several data sources using a multi-step approach. To our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive novel data collection effort in the context of India. We take advantage of the Indian Supreme Court judgment in 2003 mandating all political candidates contesting at national and state elections to submit an affidavit disclosing information on their backgrounds. In addition to various attributes of the candidate, the affidavit contains the name of the candidate's parent or spouse. Originally, these affidavits are available on the ECI website as PDF forms. Association of Democratic Reform (ADR), an organization created as an election watchdog, has entered and compiled the data, making them freely available to the public.[9] We first extract the name of the parent or spouse from the MyNeta repository. Then we search the database for all national and state elections ever held and tag a politician as a dynast if their father or spouse had previously contested in Indian elections at the state or national level. Figure 2 provides an example of how MyNeta was used to identify family ties between politicians.

[9]ADR has created a dedicated website called MyNeta that provides data on the candidates; party affiliation, education, age, assets, liabilities, and criminal record: https://myneta.info.

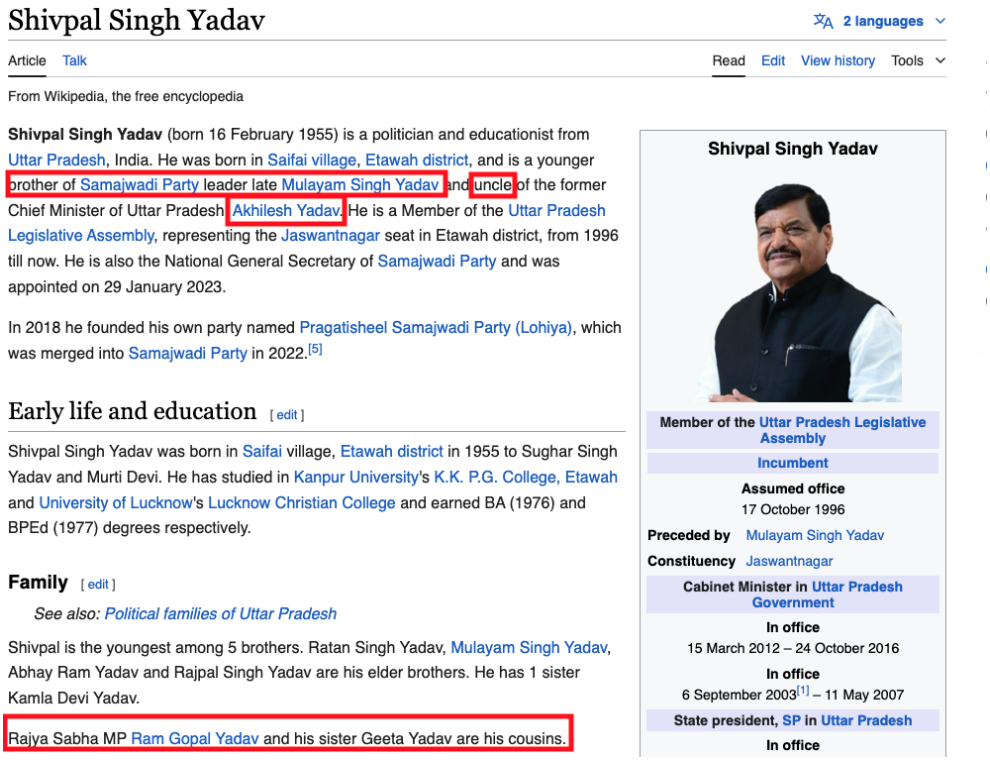
Figure 2: Identify Dynastic Politician using MyNeta



Notes: This figure shows how we used the MyNeta repository to identify dynastic ties between two politicians. Kunwar Sushant Singh is the MLA from Barhapur in the state of Uttar Pradesh. His father, Kunwar Sarvesh Kumar Singh, served as a five-term MLA from Thakurdwara constituency from 1991 to 2007 and 2012 to 2014 until he was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) from Moradabad Lok Sabha General Election in 2014. The highlighted field in Panel A shows the father's name that was used to search the database for family ties between politicians.

Although this provides us with a comprehensive list of family ties, to identify other family connections such as siblings, cousins, or uncles, we collect this data using several sources, such as information available on civil organization websites, newspapers, online news coverage, and Wikipedia. We write an algorithm to search for the legislators' names and to tag websites which include certain keywords such as dynast, family, and different family relationships. Using this procedure, we scrape the data from these websites to tag other political connections. Figure 3 for an example shows how Wikipedia was used to identify dynastic relationships.

Figure 3: Identify Dynastic Politician using Wikepedia



Shivpal Singh Yadav

2 languages

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From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Shivpal Singh Yadav (born 16 February 1955) is a politician and educationist from Uttar Pradesh, India. He was born in Saifai village, Etawah district, and is a younger brother of Samajwadi Party leader late Mulayam Singh Yadav and uncle of the former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Akhilesh Yadav. He is a Member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, representing the Jaswantnagar seat in Etawah district, from 1996 till now. He is also the National General Secretary of Samajwadi Party and was appointed on 29 January 2023.

In 2018 he founded his own party named Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohiya), which was merged into Samajwadi Party in 2022.[5]

Early life and education [edit]

Shivpal Singh Yadav was born in Saifai village, Etawah district in 1955 to Sughar Singh Yadav and Murti Devi. He has studied in Kanpur University's K.K. P.G. College, Etawah and University of Lucknow's Lucknow Christian College and earned BA (1976) and BPEd (1977) degrees respectively.

Family [edit]

See also: Political families of Uttar Pradesh

Shivpal is the youngest among 5 brothers. Ratan Singh Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Abhay Ram Yadav and Rajpal Singh Yadav are his elder brothers. He has 1 sister Kamla Devi Yadav.

Rajya Sabha MP Ram Gopal Yadav and his sister Geeta Yadav are his cousins.

Shivpal Singh Yadav

Member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly

Incumbent

Assumed office
17 October 1996

Preceded by Mulayam Singh Yadav

Constituency Jaswantnagar

Cabinet Minister in Uttar Pradesh Government

In office
15 March 2012 – 24 October 2016

In office
6 September 2003[1] – 11 May 2007

State president, SP in Uttar Pradesh

In office

Notes: This figure shows how Wikipedia was used to find the family connections between politicians. Shivpal Singh Yadav is the MLA from the Jaswantnagar constituency in Uttar Pradesh since 1996. The highlighted text shows that he is a younger brother of Mulayam Singh Yadav who was first elected as a MLA in the same constituency in 1967 and later became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. He is also the uncle of Akhilesh Yadav who is the current Chief Minister. His cousin Ram Gopal Yadav was a MP from of Sambhal constituency from 2004 to 2008. This is one of the examples of how Wikipedia was used to tag various political family connections.

Lastly, we manually check whether each political family connection is coded correctly to ensure precision. Using this procedure in the baseline specification, we define a binary variable that equals 1 if the politician has any political family ties and 0 otherwise. Lastly, to distinguish between strong and weak dynasts, we construct a dummy variable strong dynast that equals 1 if the candidate has had a parent, spouse, or several family members who have previously contested and won a national or state election and 0 otherwise. Since the process of identifying family ties is complicated by restricting the sample to only strong dynasts also provides some assurance that the data are not affected by outliers.

Given the setup of the RD design, we only consider elections where one of the top two candidates has a political family connection. Therefore, this provides a smaller sample of 740 election races with 1480 candidates. Table 1 shows the prevalence of dynastic politicians in the Indian legislature. 17% of the current MLAs have some form of political family connections. Of these, more than

85% belong to strong political families. Likewise, Figure A.1 shows the share of dynastic MLAs in Indian states.

Table 1: Distribution of Dynastic Candidates

	Top 2 Candidates			RDD Sample		
	Winner	Runner-up	All	Winner	Runner-up	All
Non-Dynast	3327	3522	6849	293	447	740
Weak Dynast	101	78	179	60	42	102
Strong Dynast	592	420	1012	387	251	638
Total	4020	4020	8040	740	740	1480

How prominent is dynasty politics in India compared to the world? Figure A.2 provides the number of dynastic legislators in various parts of the world. As the figure shows, India seems to have more dynastic legislators than most countries except Japan. For example, Dal Bó et al. (2009) using data from 1789 to 1996 finds that about 9% of US Congressman had relatives previously in Congress. Likewise, Fiva and Smith (2018) find that in 7% of the legislators in the 2013 Norway national elections had some form of political family connection. Smith and Martin (2017) and Bragança et al. (2015) show that 14% of the Irish Parliament legislators in 2016 and 14. 8% of the Brazilian municipal elections in 2012 had connections with previous family members who had held public office. In contrast, Asako et al. (2015) finds a substantially higher number of dynastic legislators in the lower house of parliament using data from the lower house elections between 1996 and 2012.

5 Empirical Strategy

Using a RD design, we estimate the effect of electing dynastic politicians on legislative effort. Since dynastic candidates might be more likely to run and be elected to office in certain constituencies over others, we exploit only close elections, comparing constituencies where a dynast barely won to constituencies where they barely lost. Given the close margin of victory, the success of dynasts in such a constituency should be close to random. The empirical benchmark model that this paper estimates is the following:

$$y_{ist} = \alpha + \beta dynast_{ist} + \delta_1 MV_{ist} + \delta_2 dynast_{ist} \times MV_{ist} + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

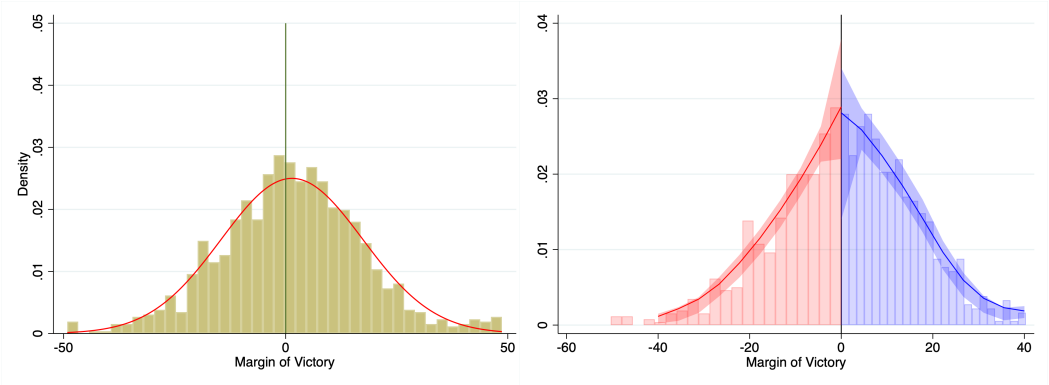
where, y_{ist} is the main outcome that measures political effort in constituency i in state s at time t. $dynast_{ist}$ is a dummy variable that equals 1 if a candidate has dynastic ties and 0 otherwise. The coefficient β captures the local average treatment effect of electing a dynast in constituency i in state s at time t on the outcome of interest. MV_{ist} is the forcing variable and measures the margin of victory between the dynast and non-dynast candidates. Positive values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a dynast winner and that of a non-dynast runner-up. Negative values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a non-dynast winner and that of a dynast runner-up. Since the response rate can be affected by the timing of state elections and the severity of the request in the region, γ_s accounts for any state-level variation. ϵ_{ist} denotes the robust standard error. To estimate the regression, we estimate a local linear regression using the bandwidth proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012) denoted by h.

6 Results

6.1 RDD Validity

To validate the use of an RD design, two main assumptions must be met (Imbens & Lemieux, 2008). The first assumption is the absence of manipulation of the running variable. Specifically, if a dynastic candidate anticipates a close election, they might attempt to rig or manipulate the results to secure a win. In this case, we expect to observe a higher concentration of dynastic candidates near the threshold. A visual inspection of the density of the margin of victory in Figure 4 shows no evidence of dynastic candidates clustering at the threshold. More formally, the density test proposed by Cattaneo et al. (2020) does not provide statistical evidence of sorting.

Figure 4: Continuity of Margin of Victory between dynast and non-dynast candidates



(a) Density of Margin of Victory

(b) RD Density Test

Notes: The forcing variable is the margin of a victory that measures the difference between the vote share received by a dynast candidate and that of a non-dynast candidate. Positive values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a dynast winner and that of a dynast runner-up. Negative values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a non-dynast winner and that of a dynast runner-up. The Cattaneo et al. (2020) density test provides a t-value = -0.886 with a p-value= 0.38 for the continuity test at the cut-off point.

The second assumption of the RD design is that the observable characteristics that could potentially influence the outcome should be continuous throughout the threshold. Although the characteristics of the constituents and candidates can vary throughout the sample, they should be identical at the point of discontinuity.[10]. Table 2 presents formal tests for a range of constituency and candidate characteristics.[11] Thus, these validity checks provide sufficient evidence for the use of a RD design.

[10]A description of the constituency and candidate profile for the full sample is provided in Table A.1

[11]Although the treatment and control groups are mostly balanced across both constituency and candidate characteristics, in constituencies where a dynast candidate barely lost, have lower income levels. Although this should not affect the outcome of interest, Table B.1 provides estimates with the inclusion of various constituency and candidate controls and remain robust and qualitatively similar to the baseline findings.

Table 2: Balance of Covariates

VARIABLES	Coefficient	SE	Bandwidth	Obs.
SC/ST Reserved Constituency	-0.001	0.075	17.12	529
Total Votes (in Logs)	0.088	0.122	18.53	553
Voter Turnout	-4.309	3.503	13.04	443
Electoral Size (in Logs)	0.197	0.168	14.43	476
Winner Income (in Logs)	0.408	0.316	10.87	377
Runner-Up Income (in Logs)	-0.689**	0.274	16.45	516
Winner Liabilities (in Logs)	0.436	0.479	9.458	267
Runner-Up Liabilities (in Logs)	-0.639	0.435	11.29	310
Winner Male	0.015	0.082	8.776	318
Runner-Up Male	0.088	0.064	15.25	491
Winner Incumbent	-0.011	0.103	10.41	358
Runner-Up Incumbent	-0.135	0.114	9.165	325
Winner Criminal Record	-0.372	0.641	11.14	387
Runner-Up Criminal Record	-0.196	0.506	13.93	465

Notes: RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012). The asterisks denote the significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

6.2 Main Results

A preview of the field experiment provided in Figure A.3 shows that only 4% of the Indian legislators responded to the emails: Of the 4020 legislators currently in office, about 24% of the email addresses could not be located or were not working. Of the 3050 emails successfully sent, we received 103 responses.[12] Despite the low response rate, as Figure A.4 shows, the response rate was not similar between non-dynast and dynast legislators.

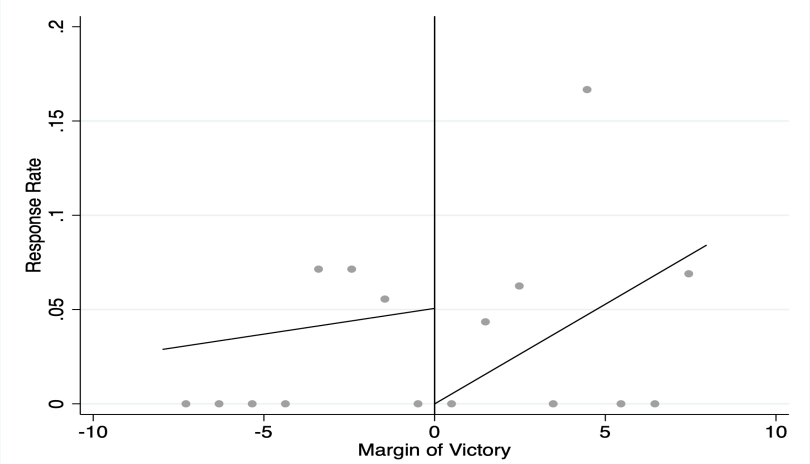
Are dynastic legislators less responsive than non-dynastic legislators? Figure 5 presents the graphical illustration of the RD specification estimating the differences in responsiveness between dynastic and non-dynastic legislators dichotomously. The plot is generated using a local linear regression with a triangular kernel and an optimal bandwidth criterion proposed by Imbens and Kalya-

[12]The response rate remains similar when restricting the sample to the RDD specification.

naraman (2012). A positive margin of victory indicates a constituency where a dynast candidate won against a non-dynast candidate. A negative margin of victory implies that the dynast candidate lost and the non-dynast won. The vertical line represents the change in discontinuity when the margin is equal to zero and reflects the causal effect of the legislator's political family connection on the response rate.

The RD figure shows a clear drop at the threshold, implying that dynastic legislators are less likely to respond to constituents relative to non-dynastic legislators. In terms of magnitude, Table 3 column (1) reflects the estimates provided in Figure 5 and indicates that the response rate falls by 6.8 percentage points, which implies a drop of more than 50% compared to the mean of the non-treated group at the cut-off.

Figure 5: Effect on Election Dynastic Legislators on Response Rate



Notes: The figure provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate. The forcing variable is the margin of a victory that measures the difference between the vote share received by a dynastic candidate and that of a non-dynastic candidate. Positive values indicate the differences between vote share received by a dynast winner and that of a dynast runner-up. Negative values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a non-dynast winner and that of a dynast runner-up. The y-axis represents the response rate which equals 1 if the legislators replied and 0 otherwise. The model includes state fixed effects with robust standard errors. The scatter plot represents the evenly spaced mimicking variance (esmv) number of bins using spacing estimators. The RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012).

Table 3: Effect on Election Dynastic Legislators on Response Rate

	(1)	(2)
	All Dynasts	Strong Dynasts
RD Estimate	-0.068**	-0.074**
	(0.030)	(0.030)
Observations	289	298
Bandwidth Size	7.969	8.796

Notes: The table provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012). The asterisks denote the significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

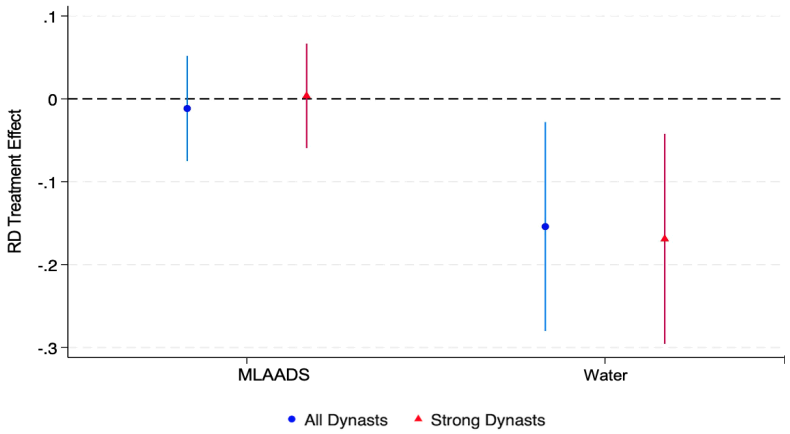
Does this response rate change if the legislator has strong political family connections?[13] Table 3 column (2) presents the results of this exercise and suggests that constituents do not enjoy the same response rate from legislators with strong dynastic links: Strong dynasts are 0.6 percentage points more likely to respond than weak dynasts.

Next, we test whether this response rate varies by the subject matter. As mentioned earlier, dynastic legislators might behave differently when confronted with issues that directly come under their duties because they might believe that this can affect their electoral support. Figure 6 shows the differences in response between dynast and non-dynast legislators when the subject of treatment is altered between the request for assistance in solving the problem of irregular water supply and the MLA development fund. The results show that there seem to be no differences in the response rate between dynast legislators and their counterparts when questions are raised on their allocation of the constituency development scheme. However, voters do not enjoy the same responsiveness when legislators are asked to provide a solution to the lack of water supply in their constituencies: the response rate falls by around 15 percentage points.

[13] RD validity checks for these specifications are provided in Figure C.1 and Table C.1.

Likewise, when the sample is restricted to strong dynasts, we can see that the pattern remains consistent. These results suggest that dynastic legislators might be willing to exert as much effort as their colleagues when they believe that this could impact their electoral support.

Figure 6: Effect on Election Dynastic Legislators on Response Rate by Subject Matter

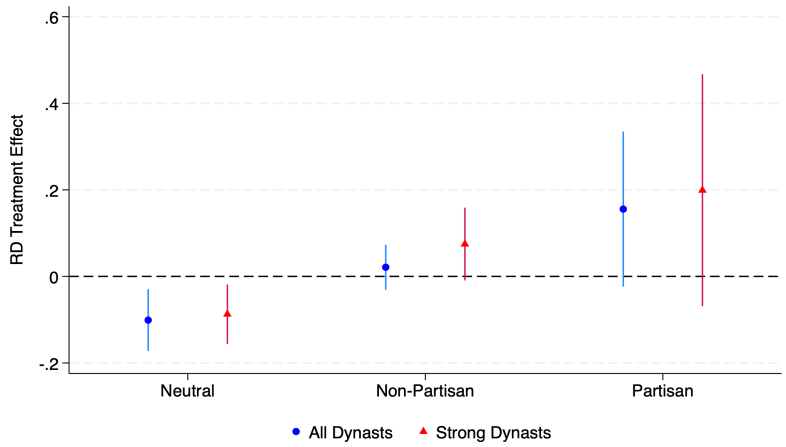


Notes: The figure provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate for each subject matter. The blue line represent the estimates for the MLAADS treatment and the red line for the irregular water supply treatment. The circles represent coefficients for all dynasts and the triangles for the strong dynast sample. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012).

In the last specification, we randomly alter emails to indicate whether the constituents had partisan preferences.[14] Figure 7 provides the results of this exercise. We can again see a clear pattern in which the negative response rate is concentrated for the neutral treatment group. When the voter sends a clear signal of their partisan preferences, dynast legislators are more likely to respond as their non-dynast counterparts. Again, this pattern holds when the sample is restricted to only strong dynasts. These results are in line with the previous specification that dynast legislators are willing to exert effort when they believe this could affect their electoral support.

[14]Dynastic politicians are mainly concentrated in the top two political parties with 46% of them representing BJP, 42% in Congress, and the remaining 12% spread across various regional parties. This provides some assurance that the estimates capture the effect of electing dynastic politicians rather than political ideology.

Figure 7: Effect on Election Dynastic Legislators on Response Rate by Partisan Preferences



Notes: The figure provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate by the constituents' partisan alignment. The blue line represent the estimates for neutral voters, red line for partisan voters, and green line for non-partisan voters. The circles represent coefficients for all dynasts and the triangles for the strong dynast sample. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012).

6.3 Robustness

We first examine the sensitivity of the estimates using different levels of bandwidth. Figure B.1 provides the results for this exercise. Looking at the figure, we can observe that the estimates remain stable for a range of bandwidth specifications but lose statistical power at extremely low and high bandwidth levels. In the next specification, we estimate the RD effect by varying the functional form. Figure B.2 presents the estimates for the response rate using a linear, quadratic, and cubic function. Looking at the figure, we can see that the estimates remain robust for the linear and second-order polynomial. However, when the results are estimated with the cubic function, although they lose statistical power, they are along the lines of the baseline specification.

In the last robustness check, we estimate the results including various covariates in the model. One concern could be that the baseline estimates might capture not only the effect of electing dynastic politicians, but all potentially compounding candidate and constituency-level factors that can differentiate dynastic from non-dynastic candidates (Marshall, 2022). In Table B.1, we account for this by estimating the results, including a range of candidate and constituency level controls. In columns (1)-(3), the estimates include constituency controls

for whether the constituency was reserved for SC/ST, the log of total votes cast, voter turnout, and the log of the constituency electoral size. In columns (2)-(4), the reported estimates include candidate controls for their gender, age, income, liabilities, criminality, and incumbency for both the winner and the runner-up. In general, the results remain robust and similar in magnitude to the baseline specification, suggesting that the findings capture the effect of electing dynastic legislators rather than any other characteristic.

7 Ongoing Work

The ongoing work on this project will involve expanding our sample to include MLAs from states where elections were recently held in 2024 and 2025. These newly elected representatives will be included in the email audit experiment.

In addition to the email-based experiment, we intend to supplement our analysis with a WhatsApp audit study. We plan to compile mobile numbers of the legislative representatives in our sample. This data will be collected from several sources, such as candidate affidavits and civic engagement websites. To ensure consistency across communication platforms, the MLA will receive the same WhatsApp message as in our email experiment. This allows us to test whether the communication platform matters and whether this is a potential mechanism driving our results.

At the end of the audit experiment, for the legislators who do not respond, we plan to message them on Twitter. Twitter introduces a high degree of public visibility and a potential reputation risk that can affect the response rate. Following H1b, we argue that dynastic legislators could be more likely to respond when their actions (or inaction) are observable to a broader public, since failure to respond might lead to loss of electoral support. This dynamic may be especially salient for dynastic legislators, who may feel less pressure to respond in private channels but could be more responsive when reputational incentives, such as preserving the public image and political legacy, are at stake.

We also plan to extend our analysis to examine the effect of electing dynastic legislators on economic activity. Following H1, we argue that if dynastic legislators exert less effort, this can in turn lead to lower administrative oversight, resulting in poorer economic outcomes. To test this theory, we examine the effect of electing dynastic legislators at the constituency level using satellite-based

night lights data (as a proxy for GDP growth) and the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (a national rural road construction program).

8 Conclusion

This paper examines the causal effects of electing dynastic legislators on political effort. Using an experimental approach, we test the responsiveness of legislators to email requests for common voter concerns as a proxy measure for political effort. In the experiment, we also randomize emails to test whether the response varies by subject matter and partisan alignment of the sender.

Using a close election regression discontinuity design, we find that dynastic legislators are significantly less responsive than their counterparts. This lack of political effort is more pronounced when legislators belong to prominent political families. However, dynastic legislators show a willingness to exert effort when the raised concern comes directly under their responsibility or the voter sends a clear partisan signal.

From a policy perspective, these findings have two main implications. First, while India has taken great strides towards making the government more digitally accessible, this does not seem to translate to citizens being able to communicate with their representatives. Many MLAs do not even have their email addresses on their website, or the ones provided are inaccurate. In addition, even official government email addresses often bounce back. Since this could easily be fixed, it seems that neither the government nor the legislator seem very interested in improving online communication.

Second, the findings of this paper have significant implications for democratic governance and political accountability. This paper shows that political dynasties are less likely to exert political effort. This is in line with the research of several other studies showing that the election of dynastic politicians has a large negative impact on economic welfare (Bragança et al., 2015; Dar, 2018; George & Ponattu, 2019). An explanation for the negative effect of dynasties could be that they inherit their positions. Although previous family members might have established their political foundations through hard work, this allows their descendants to take advantage of their legacy and shirk their responsibilities. This perpetuates dynastic politics since voters are often unaware of the implications of electing political dynasties. Thus, while this is beyond the

scope of this paper, citizens might benefit from understanding the potential differences in representation offered by dynastic versus non-dynastic politicians, which might even make dynasts to act as better legislators.

A Data and Summary Statistics

Figure A.1: Share of Dynastic Legislators across India

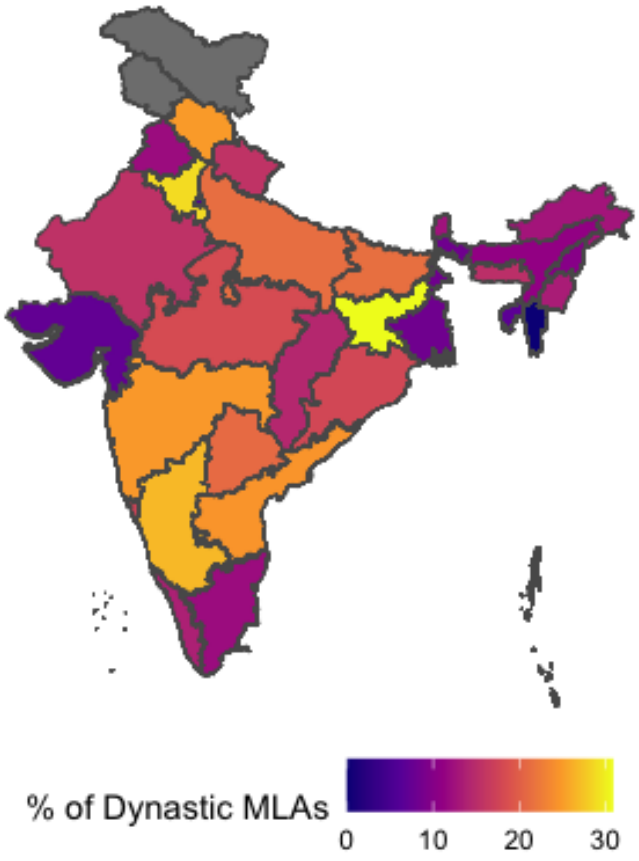


Figure A.2: Dynastic legislators across countries

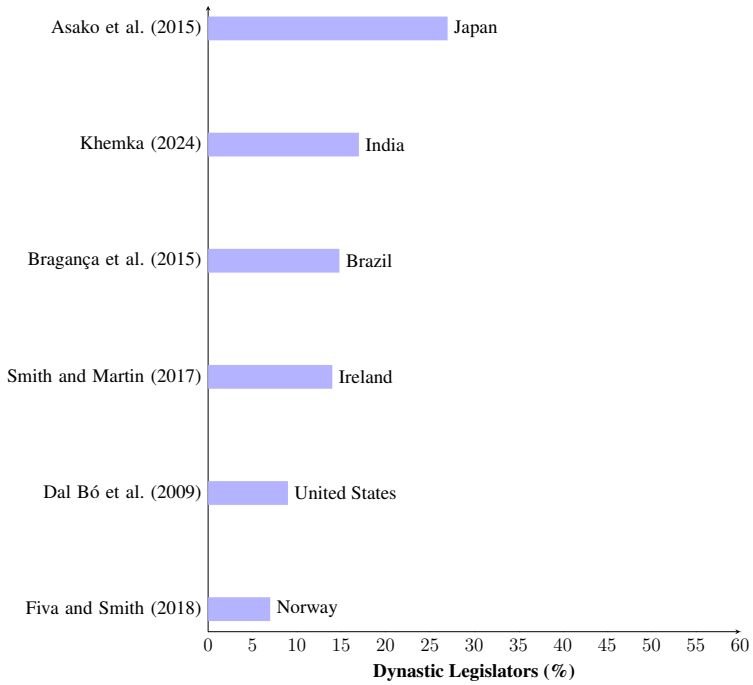


Table A.1: Constituency and Candidate Characteristics

Variable	Dynast	Non-Dynast	Total/Average
Constituencies	693	3327	4020
SC/ST Reserved AC	0.280	0.168	0.260
	(0.449)	(0.375)	(0.439)
Total Votes (in Logs)	11.87	11.96	11.89
	(0.665)	(0.517)	(0.641)
Electoral Size (in Logs)	12.34	12.43	12.36
	(0.773)	(0.644)	(0.752)
Turnout Percentage	64.78	64.68	64.76
	(16.42)	(15.56)	(16.26)
Incumbent	0.390	0.402	0.392
	(0.488)	(0.491)	(0.488)
High School Degree	0.807	0.895	0.823
	(0.394)	(0.307)	(0.382)
Income (in Logs)	17.57	18.34	17.71
	(1.490)	(1.415)	(1.506)
Liabilities (in Logs)	15.18	15.84	15.30
	(1.941)	(1.936)	(1.956)
Male	0.931	0.801	0.907
	(0.254)	(0.400)	(0.290)
Criminal Record	0.473	0.462	0.471
	(0.499)	(0.499)	(0.499)

Notes: Dynast refers to assembly constituencies where a dynast legislator won.

Figure A.3: Overall Response Rate

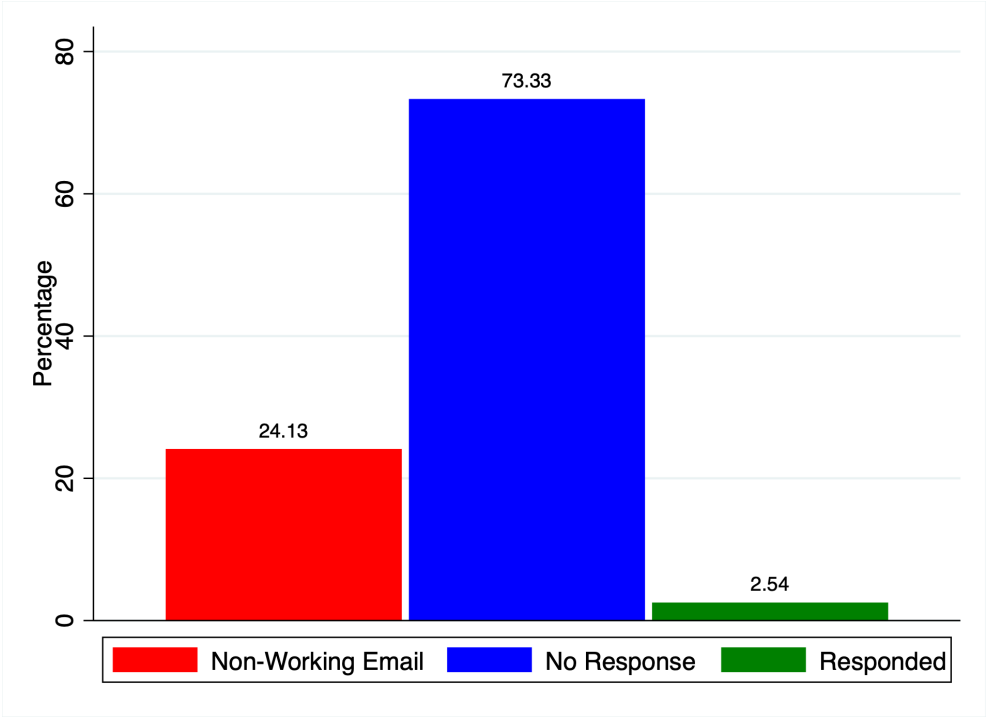
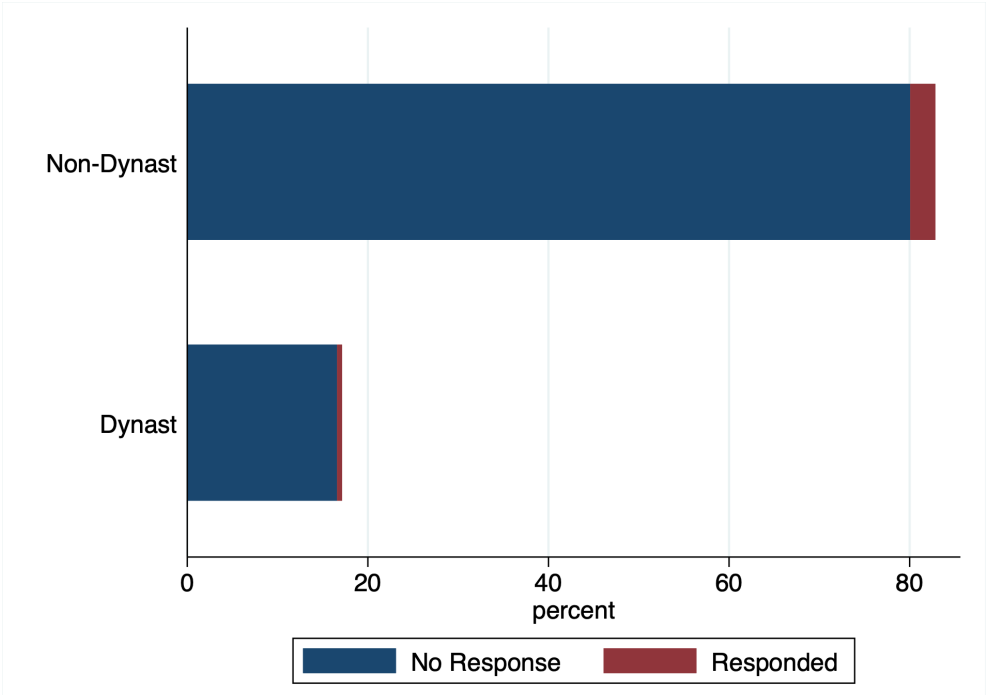
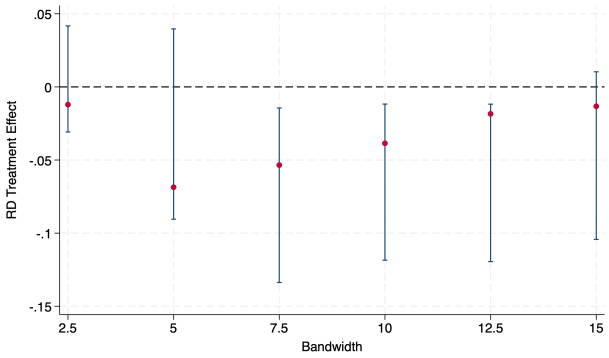


Figure A.4: Response Rate:Dynast vs Non-Dynast



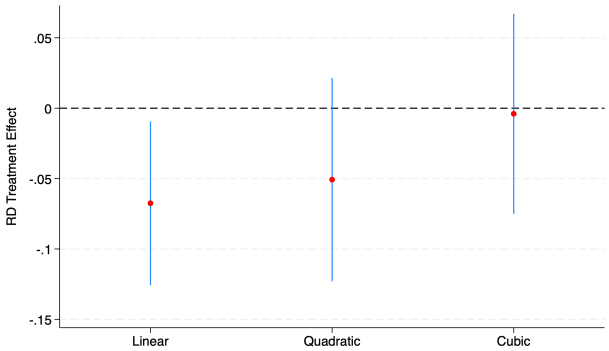
B Robustness Checks

Figure B.1: RD Estimates for Different Bandwidths



Notes: The figure provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate at different bandwidth levels. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel.

Figure B.2: RD Estimates for Different Functional Forms



Notes: The figure provides the treatment effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate for different functional forms. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012).

Table B.1: RDD Specification with Covariates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	All Dynasts		Strong Dynasts	
RD Estimate	-0.068**	-0.046*	-0.064*	-0.076**
	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.037)
Observations	289	196	271	184
Bandwidth Size	7.969	7.969	7.969	7.969
Constituency Controls	Yes	No	Yes	No
Candidate Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: In column (1)-(2) the estimates provide the effect of electing a dynastic legislator on the response rate. In column (3)-(4) the estimates provide the effect of electing a strong dynastic legislator on the response rate. Column (1)-(3) the estimates include constituency level controls. Column (2)-(4) the estimates include candidate level level controls. All models include state fixed effects with robust standard errors. RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012). The asterisks denote the significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

C RDD Validity for Strong Dynasts

Figure C.1: Manipulation Test for Strong Dynasts

Figure C.2: RD Density Test

Notes: The forcing variable is the margin of a victory that measures the difference between the vote share received by a strong dynast candidate and that of a non-strong candidate. Positive values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a strong dynast winner and that of a non-strong runner-up. Negative values indicate the difference between the vote share received by a strong dynast winner and that of a non-strong dynast runner-up. The Cattaneo et al. (2020) density test provides a t-value = -0.209 with a p-value= 0.83 for the continuity test at the cut-off point.

Table C.1: Balance of Constituency Characteristics

VARIABLE	Coefficient	SE	Bandwidth	Obs.
SC/ST Reserved Constituency	0.00316	0.0743	16.96	477
Total Votes (in Logs)	-0.0771	0.139	11.92	387
Turnout Percentage	-0.436	4.374	8.400	283
Electoral Size (in Logs)	-0.0628	0.184	10.51	341
Winner Income (in Logs)	0.185	0.244	18.05	491
Runner Income (in Logs)	-0.707**	0.311	12.48	396
Winner Liabilities (in Logs)	0.0422	0.517	9.152	245
Runner Liabilities (in Logs)	-0.548	0.410	11.76	305
Winner Male	0.0234	0.0831	9.737	321
Runner-up Male	0.0880	0.0676	14.22	434
Winner Incumbent	-0.0592	0.0903	14.05	429
Runner-Up Incumbent	-0.263**	0.128	7.823	267
Winner Criminal Record	-0.328	0.357	23.92	568
Runner-Up Criminal Record	0.286	0.418	9.637	318

Notes: RD estimates are based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel. The optimal bandwidth uses a mean-squared error optimal bandwidth selector proposed by Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2012). The asterisks denote the significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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