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Civic Duty, Empowerment and Patronage: Patterns of Political Participation in India

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Introduction

Studies of voting behavior in India have pointed out that socio-economic status (SES) is not related to voting. A large proportion of the lower SES citizens turn out to vote especially when compared to the turnout among those of high SES (Yadav 1996; 2004). This finding is unusual for two reasons. First, most contemporary theories of political participation would suggest exactly that those of lower SES are less likely to vote than those with higher SES. Second, the voting in large numbers by the disadvantaged is also paradoxical since this group of citizens remain the worst supplied consumers of government services, whereas the well to do and those who are well placed remain the chief beneficiaries of state policy [1]. Even though a large proportion of citizens are not beneficiaries of State targeted programs they remain enthusiastic about voting. They queue up for long hours at the polling booths, sometimes in very adverse weather conditions. In some areas they wear clean or new clothes on election day, and forgo daily wages to go to vote, whereas those at the top end of the social spectrum stay away from the polls in larger numbers. In clear contrast to the well worn expectations of theories of voters as maximizing some utility based on the goods and services they receive from the state, the poor continue to vote despite not receiving or benefiting from government services, whereas the main recipients of government services stay at home on election day.

In this paper we argue that these differences in the voting patterns of opposite ends of the social spectrum exist because each group interprets the act of voting differently. Those of lower SES vote because they see the act of voting as either a 'right' or may feel coerced rather than as an exchange for goods and services from the state. For them voting represents empowerment - they view it as a valued right, which should be exercised. Amongst the upper SES groups, on the other hand, voting is viewed as a civic duty, which good citizens should fulfill. In contrast to both groups a third section of Indian society – those in the middle SES categories – voting is seen as an instrumental act, an act to gain access to the state and its resources.

Why do these groups of citizens view voting so differently? We claim that how a citizen interprets the act of voting is determined by the citizen's relationship to the state.

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[1] This is not always due to a shortage of resources allocated for them, but is also due to incredible leakages in the delivery mechanisms set up to bring services to the poor.

Our fieldwork, which involved focus groups and open-ended interviews in three Indian states, shows that the motivations of citizens to participate vary with the kind of relationship they find themselves in with the Indian state. Voters belonging to different SES categories are treated differently by the state and perceive their relationship to the state differently from each other. This variation in how the state relates to distinct groups of citizens lies at the heart of why members of these groups in India have particular reasons for exercising their franchise. We find that those at the lower end of the SES spectrum use the language of rights. Those of high SES think of their vote as a civic duty whereas the middle SES citizens think of voting instrumentally – as a means to gain access to state resources.

These findings stand in sharp relief to the dominant theories of political participation, the SES framework, rational voter explanations, party-based or association-based mobilization, and claims that tie voting in India to patronage. In existing explanations for the act of voting see, *all citizens are presumed to have similar motivations to be active in political life. These arguments assume that there is uniformity in the relationship of the State to its citizens and, furthermore, that all citizens view their relationship with the State similarly.* In this paper we show that all citizens are not treated similarly by the state and hence their motivations to go to the polls differ. Since the motivations of different groups to vote are different those of lower SES could turn out to vote in significant numbers since their expectations from the vote are not the same as those of higher SES.

After a brief description of patterns of turnout in India and the inadequacy of existing explanations to account for the differential rates of turnout among the various SES categories, we will develop our argument more fully. In the section that follows our theoretical claims we will discuss how we collected the data for the paper and define the categories into which we divided voters. This will be followed by a discussion of the differences in the nature of the relationship that the various group of voters have with the state. We will then show that the act of voting is indeed perceived differently across groups.

Section 1: Patterns of Political Participation in India

India has seen relatively high levels of turnout for national and state elections. In national elections turnout has been consistently over 55 percent and reached a high of 62 percent in 1984 (Figure 1). In state elections, too, the turnout has been quite high though the variance there is much larger with some states reporting over 80 percent turnout while in others on occasion turnout has been lower than 40 percent.

Figure 1

Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections
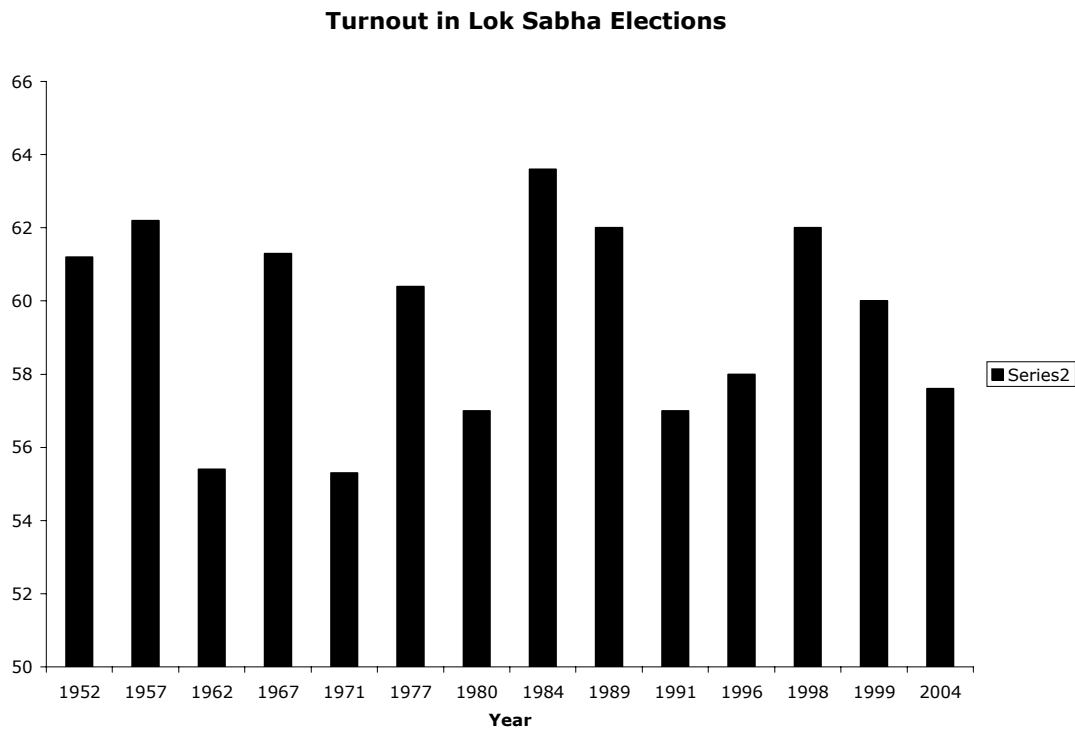
What makes voting patterns in Indian elections unique, however, is that a large proportion of Indian citizens who are of lower SES turn out to vote in large numbers with regularity.[2] The turnout rate in this section of society is almost as high if not higher than those who belong to a high socio-economic status. This observation was made most

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[2] Mitra and Singh (1999) provide a comprehensive analysis of SES and voting for the 1996 national elections.

tellingly by Yadav (2000) who, after a comparison of turnout data from the post-election surveys of 1971 and the 1996 concluded that the low SES citizens were voting in numbers that were comparable to those of high socio-economic status.[3] A detailed study of voter participation reported for the 2004 national elections shows that voter participation rates do not seem to vary by social status at all. Table 1a provides income-based breakdown of turnout for the 2004 national election as reported by the National Election Study (NES) conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies. In the 2004 national election, the turnout among the poor was 58.6%, it was 56.5% among the middle income group, and 57.6% for those falling in the upper income category. This finding clearly raises an important question – why, despite the well-known predictions that rates of political participation are proportional to socio-economic status, are voters belonging to high and low socio-economic status categories voting in similar percentages? [4]

Table1a
Community and class wise breakdown of turn out in the 2004 National election

Income category/Turnout	Upper	Middle	Poor
Total Percentage	57.6	56.5	58.6

Source: NES 2004 Full Source.

Section 2: Accounting for Patterns of Participation in India

Voting patterns in India are in direct contradiction to a well-established explanation that voting is linked to socio-economic characteristics. The question of who votes is answered with reference to the ascriptive and achievement characteristics of eligible adults such as their gender, age, education, and residential location (Nie, Powell, & Prewitt, 1969). In its elemental form this approach is known as the SES

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[3] In addition to Yadav, in the NES findings as reported in Alam (2004), the average turnout amongst the college educated in the 1971 elections was 61 percent This was 6 percent above the national average turnout of 55 percent. For the same elections, the average turnout reported for the nonliterate was 51.5 percent, 3.5 percent below the national average turnout of 55 percent. This had changed in the 1996 elections with the college educated voters reporting a turnout of 55 percent. This was 5 percent below the national average turnout of 60 percent, where as for the same elections the turnout reported by the nonliterate respondents was 60.5 percent, 0.5 percent above the national average turnout of 55 percent.
[4] Hariss (2005) also reports similar findings. Using a more exhaustive measure of participation, akin to that of Verba et.al, he finds that the poor were fare more likely to engaged in political activity than the non-poor.

(socioeconomic status) model in which education, income, and occupation— alone or in some combination" carries the explanatory burden (Bennett & Bennett, 1986, p. 183; Conway, 1991, p. 21; Milbrath & Goel, 1977, p. 92; Nagel, 1987, p. 59; Verba et. al., 1978, p. 63).

Why would the poor in India turn out in large numbers? A compelling variant of the SES model – the Civic Voluntarism explanation would suggest that resources for participation, engagement in politics, and mechanisms for recruitment-lead to political participation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). Ordinary, non-political activity in these three spheres can lead to the development of skills that are politically relevant and therefore, can ease political participation. While this explanation is compelling for the US it can hardly account for patterns of voting in India. First, intermediate organizations in India are few and far between and membership in these associations is skewed – i.e. those of higher SES are more likely to belong to such associations but less likely to vote. Various surveys have reported either very low levels of organizational membership in India, or that very few Indians see organizations other than the state operating in their area (National Election Study for India 1996, 1998, and 2004).

Another approach explains, who participates, through the lens of political institutions. Viewed from a macro perspective, political institutions are system-wide sets of rules like constitutional and electoral laws that concern, for example, franchise eligibility, the delimitation of electoral districts, and rules for determining winners and losers in elections (Franklin, 1996; Powell, 1982; 2000). Since the more macro level institutions are similar across India one would be hard put to explain the variance in the voting patterns in India due to some formal institution such as electoral rules. There are other institutions that could influence who votes.

First, voter registration could act to lower the rates of voter participation. Compulsory registration is not a feature of the Indian electoral system. The Election Commission of India is charged with the responsibility of updating the voter list every few years. This absolves citizens of the responsibility of registering them selves for the purpose of voting.

Second, political parties could be mobilizing those of lower SES to vote for after all they are the majority in India. But, party organizations in India, with perhaps the

exception of the communist parties, who have an active presence in only two states, are weak. Findings from national election studies in India also have shown that party representatives contact few voters. Other organizations, which could act as surrogates for political parties, too do not have an active presence in most of India.

Third, non-formal institutions such as coercion too could have a large bearing on who turns out to vote. While there are indeed some parts of India where coercion does play a role in increasing or decreasing turnout, by and large, Indian elections are held without any element of coercion. Two surveys, conducted after the 1989 and 1991 elections provide clear evidence that claims that tie voting in India to coercion are anecdotes. In both surveys over 80 percent of the respondents said that they had felt safe while voting and did not know of anyone who was threatened to vote or not to vote. There was no difference across different levels of socio-economic status on any of these issues. Data drawn from the 2004 national election study reported in Rao (2005) also shows that the elections are by and large seen as fair with the poor more likely to believe in the fairness of the elections than those belonging to the upper and middle classes.

Fourth, an explanation that has significant currency today would suggest that patronage or patron-client relations influence the vote in India. This explanation comes in its current form suggests that citizens exchange their votes for favors, most of which are nothing but everyday services, which any State must provide. Citizens, therefore, on election day, turn up to vote for the most desirable patrons, if they have a choice, or support the one in front of them, if they do not (Brass 1968, Weiner 1968, Chandra 2004). This argument exaggerates the influence the politicians have in proportion to the other organs of the State in its every day running. Whereas the patronage argument may be true for some part of the electorate, our research finds a substantial chunk of the voters in India vote without any tangible expectation in terms of improved access to state services or private benefit. Moreover, successive surveys have shown that the credibility of the campaign promises made by candidates is fairly low with the voter. As such, voters have little confidence in political parties. Patronage networks do exist, but the consumers of the services of such networks are limited in number. In fact we find that these patronage networks are extremely thin in poor neighborhoods with so-called clients having little ability to engage or punish the patrons.

A fifth explanation suggests that citizens vote because they are offered direct material benefits such as money. The bribery argument rests on anecdotal evidence, which suggests that voters are bribed a few days before elections or even on election day with food, alcohol, and sometimes money to seek their vote. The bribery argument is week because of the following reasons: First, over the years, these actions have come under increasing scrutiny by the largely independent Election commission. Second, The monitoring problem faced by the candidate or the party, especially during Parliamentary and state assembly elections (where the size of the electoral district is very large), makes bribery less profitable. For local body elections, however, the size of the district is far smaller. In these districts the candidates are more likely to know the voters personally, making the monitoring problem less severe. Also, the supervision of local body elections by an independent agency is poor, as is the media coverage of these elections. Two surveys conducted after the 1989 and 1991 elections provide clear evidence that claims that tie voting in India to money are anecdotes. In both surveys over 80 percent of the respondents said they did not know of money being exchanged for casting a ballot. There was no difference across different levels of socio-economic status in response to this question.

A final set of explanations seeking to account for why despite the fact that 'one's vote does not make a difference' individuals go to vote. A whole range of explanations have been developed. Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordeshook (1968) argue that that individuals vote because of a 'a civic duty', while Fiorina (1976) argued that the utility from voting also depends upon the act of expressing a preference akin to applauding a fine symphony performance or cheering the success of a home team (Aldrich, 1997). Recently, Fowler and Kam (2006) have attributed the act of voting either to "*social identification*, which creates a desire to improve the welfare of certain groups in society, possibly at the expense of other groups. These individuals will likely participate when they believe that their actions will give them an opportunity to help their preferred group(s). Other people are motivated by *altruism*, a willingness to pay a personal cost to provide benefits to others in general, regardless of the identity of the beneficiaries. These individuals will likely participate when they believe that their actions will give them an opportunity to make everyone better off".

Section 3: Citizens and the State and Patterns of Voting

The central claim of this paper is that the reason offered by a citizen for why she votes is determined by her relationship to the state. All of the explanations that have been developed for why people go to vote have been developed in a context where the state, by and large, is perceived having a similar relationship to most of its citizens. This is, however, not the case everywhere. In India, the state relates differently to different citizens – it acts on the behest of some and simultaneously either actively ignores or coerces many of its citizens. As a result the reasons these groups offer different reasons for why they vote. In this section we first discuss the relationship between the state and the citizens at a more abstract level before providing evidence in support of our claims later in the paper.

All nation-states deliver some goods and services and are the legitimate users of force, against their own citizens.[5] In most states however, all citizens do not share equally in the services provided by a state. There are citizens who need the state's services but do not have access to them, and are consistently (over a long period of time) excluded from the public goods provided by the state. This could be either due to state policies that do not address the interests of this group of citizens, or the state does make policies for this group but there are leakages in the implementation of these policies. We term this group of citizens the *Marginalized*. In India, the government does announce policies to address the needs of the marginalized but there are enormous leakages in the delivery of services to this group. According to the government's own estimates less than half of all the resources allocated for the marginalized ever reach them. What makes the situation worse for this group is that when they take their concerns to the state for redressed, they are often either not heard or dismissed. They are mistreated by the agents of the state – particularly the bureaucrats (Breman 1992). The marginalized in India also

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[5] Mann (198x) terms this infrastructural and coercive power.

face the brunt of the ad hoc nature of the coercive arm of the state – the police.[6] Furthermore, the marginalized see other groups benefit from state policies and complain that they have little or no access to the state's beneficence (Dube 1995).

Not all citizens are similarly disempowered. There is a group of citizens who have access to state resources, but are not guaranteed their regular supply. This group has to continuously make an effort, often through personal connections, to gain access to the resources they need. They rely on patrons within the state to gain access to these resources. When the state responds to their needs, it is often through interpersonal connections. We term this group the *State's Clients*.

Finally, there is a third group of citizens – the *Elite* - who either do not need the state, or the state works on their behalf – both through the policies made by the state and having access to the state's resources. The Elite have the economic capability to exit from the state. Members of this group can deal with the failure of the state to provide public goods by making self-provision of these goods. The best example of this is the elite providing themselves with security (private guards), electricity (generators at home), education (private schools), healthcare (private hospitals) and drinking water (bottled water). This group, in India, has also quite literally exited the state in that many of them have children or relations in the developed world (Sinha 2005). They have no fear of ad hoc treatment by the bureaucracy or politicians since both groups respond to their needs rapidly.

Since these three groups stand in different relationships to the state we would expect that they would also use different criteria to vote. The marginalized, who are disempowered by the state (either coerced in urban areas and/or ignored in the rural areas) - use the language of rights to explain why they vote. The notion of rights is prevalent in this group as they perceive unequal and unfair treatment by the state. The marginalized cannot take their rights for granted. They are shut out of the state's delivery system and the state regularly reneges on its commitment towards them. Elections marka sharp departure from this state of affairs. It is one of the very few occasions when the state takes seriously its obligation to extend a right, the right to vote, to all the citizens.

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[6] See for example Shah and Mandava who document the daily struggles of street hawkers in and pavement dwellers in Delhi, who despite regularly bribing the police and municipality officials live in their fear.

As the result, for the marginalized, the actual availing of this right makes it significant for them. Moreover, at the time of elections, the state turns up on their doorstep. Having been regularly dismissed and ignored, when they find themselves being needed by the State to legitimize its working through voting, they are keen to exercise this right.

The state's clients both in rural and urban areas have a different relationship to the state – they know people who have either direct or indirect access to the state. For members belonging to this group access is determined and limited by whom you know. The clients as major consumers of state patronage, goods and services, vote for greater access to the state and its services. They see the State as the key provider, and voting is used as one of the different instruments to get access to this provision mechanism. They vote in the expectation of getting something from the state.

The elite either control the state and/or possess enough resources to opt out of state services. The state does not ignore their concerns (as it does for the marginalized), and neither do they need indirect connections to access the state (as the state's clients do). The *Elite* in India do not depend on the State for certain essential services yet this group defines the face of the state in India (Bardhan 1984, Kohli 1992, Varma 1999). They possess resources for their private provision. In other words, this group is able to enjoy the rights and freedoms that the State promises to its citizens, almost at will. Their status turns the right to vote in to just another right, and sometimes does not hold any special significance. So when people from this group turn up to vote, they do it out of a sense of civic duty. They do not evoke the language of rights because they are able to exercise all or most of the rights with a high degree of freedom.

To sum up, since these three groups have different relationships to the state they interpret the act of voting differently with the *Marginalized* perceiving voting as a right, the *State's Clients* vote because they can 'get something from the state' whereas the *Elite* vote, because they feel it is their civic duty.

Who belong to these groups?

In our analysis the *Marginalized* include, unskilled labor who work in informal sector either in rural or urban areas. Often they are agricultural labor; migrant labor; and/or peasants. The *State's Clients* are those who benefit from or need the state either

for their livelihood or business. This group is constituted of small landowners who need input and price supports; small business owners who need various licenses and have to deal with various instruments of the state such as local governments, tax personnel, or the police); and low level government officials. The third group the *Elite* is composed of professionals; very large landlords; high-level government servants (Class 1 and 2 officers) and large businessmen. We use this classification in categorizing our respondents in the voter and citizen surveys and focus groups that provide the evidence for our claims.

Why do we focus on voting?

We decided to focus on voting on Election Day because of its centrality to the democratic process, and its uniquely egalitarian nature. Among all the forms of participation, such as participation in rallies, writing petitions, protesting etc, voting requires the least amount of resources. Voting is the most egalitarian act among all possible modes of political participation. Everyone has to queue up to caste their vote regardless of their class or social status. The rules are the same for everyone. Even though voting is an episodic act, it is *a* single action whose sanctity the State ensures. There is also, therefore, far less intimidation on election day. While not all claim that intimidation on Election Day has stopped in its entirety, but its incidence is very low as we observed earlier in the paper. Above all the day of polling especially for Parliamentary and assembly elections are those few days when, in the words of Corbridge et. al. (2005), the state can be sighted similarly by one and all.

Section 4: Data Collection

We rely on two kinds of evidence. Some of the evidence will come from voter surveys conducted after the 1989 and 1991 elections, a national survey of citizens carried out in 2001/02; and the NES survey conducted after the 2004 national elections. The bulk of the paper, however, relies on data gathered through focus groups. We selected focus groups as the preferred means of gathering data, on why Indian citizens go to vote for the following reasons: First, survey responses to the question of why respondents

vote for a particular party yield a large proportion of don't know/can't say. Second, we wanted to gather data on a fairly specific range of voter behavior i.e. why voters go to vote on the day of polling. An interaction confined to a moderated discussion around select questions with the study participants allowed us to generate the necessary information for our question. Third, the focus group method (as compared to something like participant observation) also allowed us to replicate the questions across different areas to allow some test for the robustness of our findings (Morgan1997). By observing a representative sample of the participants comparing and sharing their views on voting, we were keen to contrast individual opinions with the participants' consensus view, or a set of distinct opinions. We tabulated all the responses of the participants. In this paper, however, we only report modal responses to our questions. Fourth, the focus group method allowed our respondents to more thoroughly vet our project and interact with us with more confidence.[7]

We also conducted long open-ended interviews to supplement information gathered through the focus groups. Our field research was conducted across three large Indian States, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and the capital city of Delhi. Over all, we conducted 30 focus groups. These were carried out across middle class, poor and wealthy localities, in villages, small towns and big cities across all three states. We conducted 27 focus groups across 3 states and 3 in the national capital Delhi. All the localities and neighborhoods were randomly selected across the three states and within the locality we used the random sampling method to invite people to participate in the focus groups. As each locality, especially in the rural areas and small towns, had a similar caste and income profile, the focus groups allowed us to control for these factors within the locality. Neighborhoods are good proxies for income levels in rural and urban India. In both these settings, there exists segregation along class lines. Within a given locality there may be household income differentials within a certain range, but we have assumed attitudes are similar within this range. Each focus group included 15 to 18 people; overall 470 people participated in the focus groups. In the urban areas, both men and women

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[7] Even when presented with documentation clearly outlining the project aims and the institutional affiliation of the researchers, respondents in India do worry about who they are speaking to. We were often asked which political party or government department we were from.

participated in these groups. In rural areas across all the localities, the participation of women was very limited. In Uttar Pradesh it was negligible, whereas in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra women participated in greater numbers in the rural areas. In some urban and rural localities, the focus groups were conducted separately with men and women. Each meeting lasted 1.5 – 2.5 hours.

The discussion began by asking the participants to recount the problems in their locality. They were then asked if they talked about or discussed these issues among themselves. Next, we asked our participants whether they had approached the local administration or the elected representative with their problems. We then asked whether they had voted. Finally, we asked those who had voted to spell out their reasons for voting and those who did not do so to do the same.[8]

Section 5: Citizens' Relations with the State
The Marginalized

The marginalized are either coerced, or ignored by the State. This group faces the heavy hand of the state in the urban areas whereas in rural areas they are often treated with indifference. Both in urban and rural areas, when members of this category contact state functionaries or elected representatives, the efficacy of this interaction is very low. These functionaries or representatives are more often than not from a different social class, and remain outside any effective accountability mechanism for the marginalized group (Dube1995, Gorringe 2005, Frøysted 2005).[9]

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[8] A reasonable question may be raised about the validity of focus group data: Does it privilege group opinion over individual opinion, and does it allow us to draw inferences on voting behavior which is essentially an individual act? We will like to argue that to the extent possible, it does. First, anthropologists and sociologists working on India tell us that in rural India, individuals often gather the little political information they can, through group discussions. Our observations also confirm this finding. In this sense individual opinion is already contaminated with group opinion. Second, we did take the precaution of conducting open-ended interviews to supplement the focus group discussions. Finally, we use focus group and interview findings in conjunction with findings of the survey data.

[9] Where as the marginalized in rural area find them selves ignored by the State, which regularly reneges on its commitments towards them without the fear of the consequences, in the urban areas, in addition to the neglect, the State denies them even what Isaiah

In urban areas the residential situation of the marginalized is precarious; tied to it are access to the public distribution system and other livelihood issues. There is a constant threat of their settlement being uprooted and derecognition as dwellers of the city. The primary fear in these urban areas is that without political protection the politicians and city administrators could easily dispense with their settlements and their hutments could be destroyed. The residents of slums in cities like Delhi and Bombay, where there is a large premium on land often made this connection with remarks like "We have to make ourselves count, otherwise, we will be evicted" or "You think the parties are interested in our welfare? If we are very fortunate, our slum will be legalized". It is the fear of coercion from the state that constantly dogs this group.

In rural areas, farm and non-farm work pays close to the minimum wage level. In many instances, the incomplete implementation of the land redistribution program by the state has left the marginalized with land entitlements, but no control over the actual holdings. The state has generally failed to intervene on their behalf to ensure the transfer of land. Despite this, the marginalized express a strong preference for any form of association with the state and still expect the state to deliver public goods. Access to the state and state jobs, however, remain out of their reach. Across all our cases, knowing someone in the government and bribery were cited as the prerequisites for getting jobs with the government. For most rural respondents, issues of livelihood and security were central to their lives and they said they would bribe and become clients of the state if they had the resources to do so. They also said that they seldom count and the state is not interested in addressing their issues. And, when they do contact the state, the interaction is fraught with hurdles. When it takes place, in the absence of resources, the language of favors is adopted and, on the occasion when resources do flow from the state, they have to be shared with the state's functionaries as bribes. Most respondents also said that that when they did interact with the state they were often treated disrespectfully and

Berlin calls negative freedoms. Isaiah Berlin (1969) proposed a classic dichotomy between "positive" freedoms (freedoms to) and "negative" freedoms (freedoms from). Even the most minimalist view on the role of the state argues for the state to be the guarantor of at least negative freedoms like freedom from starvation, coercion, epidemics etc.]

summarily dismissed. They also complained of intimidation and coercion by the state's functionaries. [10]

As citizens of a democratic state and consumers of public services, the marginalized should ideally enjoy equal access to state services. But, according to them, in schools where they have no control over the teachers, in police stations where they are openly intimidated, in health centers where there is rampant neglect, and in district offices where their petitions get put on the backburner, the State fails them on many counts.

One respondent stated this view quite succinctly: "No one listens, no one is interested. We stand there for hours on end, give up our daily wage, but get only five minutes of their time, and sometimes not even that. How does one keep doing it?" "*Gareeb admi ki kaun parva kartha hai*?" or "Who cares about the poor?"[11] In almost all the neighborhoods and settlements, respondents wanted to know if their petitions could be relayed to government officials and why newspapers did not write about them. In some of the discussions the participants were very forthright in expressing their anger, "The government is shameless." "We are the forgotten people."

State's Clients

This group of citizens is very heavily dependent on State support. Unlike the *elite* they do not possess the resources to opt out of the system of State supplied goods and services. Members of this group have a direct relationship with the State. Their current socio economic status and prospects for mobility are contingent on State support. Most of the *state's clients* who participated in the focus group said that knowing important party workers and politicians by either joining politics or being associated with parties is useful. Access to the police, courts, credit and government jobs are all negotiated through the State functionaries and politicians. Having patrons matters and politics is to be taken seriously (Mitra 1991; 1992; 2001).

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[10] For the poor, unlike rural areas where the state is either not present or its presence is intermittent the state is present in urban areas. The marginalized in the urban areas observed that bureaucrats discriminated between the citizens on the basis of socio economic status. This discrimination manifested itself in how the officials interact with them (made them wait for long hours) and often did not give due attention to their petitions.

[11] Corbridge et. al. (2005) confirm this finding when they state quite succinctly, the poor see the state when the state wants to see them

Citizens belonging to this group do not have the resources to find private solutions to their problems. They rely very heavily on the State for the provision of goods and services. Their criticism of the State was most extensive, and since they are the heaviest users of state services, members belonging to this category made the maximum number of complains. Briefly put, they would like to see a larger role of the State, and they regard it as a potent force. The government intimidates them, but they are better networked with it than any other group. One respondent said that "having a contact or two is important and … when you do not have money, you need a godfather, or many godfathers to get things done and *when that is not the case, there is no difference between me, and the person who resides in the slum behind my neighborhood*". For the state's clients *sarkari nokri*, (or government service) holds a special place in their worldview.

Another respondent observed that "the government does many things for us, but we are not happy with the quality of the services in this area. We go with complaints to the administration, and sometimes things improve, but then some official gets transferred, and things go back to being bad again. In one state, respondents in rural and urban areas complained," power cuts are the bane of our existence. We come back home after a long day and there is no electricity, children cannot study, the roads are dark, and our electricity bills just keep increasing. Who do we complain to? We cannot afford generators". A group of women respondents in an urban locality said, Last summer when there was a water shortage, we kept requesting for a water tanker, but the tankers did not come regularly, and when they did, the water was of a very poor quality. In the summer the water board runs our lives. Our waking hours are determined by the water supply."

The dependence of this group on the state was observed by another respondent who said "education in the private schools is very expensive, especially post secondary education. Even then, the jobs for the children in our area are not guarantied. So many of the boys in this area are unemployed. They all keep writing exams for public sector or civil service jobs, but very few of them make it. Without money or some contact, who gets a job these days? The Municipal councilors, the members of the legislative assembly (MLA) and the members of national parliament (MP), no one will do much. They only promise us things. If you know them personally, things may be different. Knowing

government officials is very helpful. They can make things happen. Some of them are even more powerful than the politicians".

The *state's clients* in rural areas also aspire to be better networked with the state. The State plays a pivotal role in determining their economic life and prospects for upward mobility. A paucity of employment opportunities in the non-farm sector, high reliance on state support of the farming sector, privileges the position of the state in rural India. People are therefore, sensitive to its presence and performance. It can play the role of creator, preserver and destroyer of power in the rural areas". The cost of implements, tractors, threshers, livestock, labor everything has increased, the only thing which has not been increasing is the price of produce." Another remarked that in the village "to run things you need resources, without resources, you cannot do anything. So it is important that people who become panchayat presidents are people of means" and that "Politicians are not to be trusted, they are not loyal to anyone. You have to work with them. We can meet them, after-all come election time, they need us. You have to know more than one, though. If your man does not win the election, then things can become difficult. The police and patwaries don't cooperate, not to mention the access to loans and credit flow, which can quickly dry up". And one rural respondent said, "in our area the rule is simple, *Jiski lathi, uski bhains* (If you have the muscle power, you can rule)". Another reiterated his dependence on the state and said, "I am trying to get two of my sons established in the city, but here in the village the State is God. I need a connection with it through someone, a politician, an official, through the village president, anyone. Without influence how can you get any thing done?"

The Elite

The elite have the resources to access state goods and services. They are also directly or indirectly networked to the upper echelons of the state. The press widely covers its concerns and it utilizes its access to the judiciary. Where it is not satisfied with the quality or quantum of public goods and services such as water, electricity, law and order, education, it has the resources to exit the system, and purchase these in the market. This group is critical of the state, but it is not intimidated by it. It turns to it, when it needs it, on other occasions it can do without the State (Varma 1999). They did not feel

disrespected by state officials. Respondents of this segment in the focus groups said that the bureaucrats were corrupt and inept but paying them to get the work done was "all right". Almost this entire group of citizens had a horror story to tell about a visit to a government office but in the end their work always got done without too many exceptions. The government for this group is an irritant and at times a disappointment, but it does not intimidate them. They did not think that it the government does not think about their concerns or their issues but that the state failed to deliver those goods and services adequately. This is in sharp contrast to the *marginalized* and the *state's clients* who did not think that the state necessarily made policy with their concerns in mind. Some *elite* respondents felt that the government had its compulsions, and the ineptness was a price which had to be paid for being a poor country and a democracy. Others were, however, not as generous in their assessment. The government for them was dysfunctional, self-serving, and out to exploit them. One respondent said, "When we pay our taxes, we want things to work, but they don't", a view never heard among the marginalized or the state's clients.

The landed elite in rural areas also belong to this category though they cannot exit from the state as easily as the urban elite. They see a very large role for the state in the rural areas, and believe that the state is abdicating from its responsibility towards them. They said that high politics is in the cities and politicians keep urban interests at the forefront. One respondent said, "We are the heart of the country, and provide the food for the people, but our needs are not taken seriously. Politicians and bureaucrats have become arrogant….but you have to work and deal with them. Without them, things don't happen". In an unusually telling remark about the relationship of this group to the state another respondent remarked, "Politicians are corrupt, but if you are going to keep a *guard dog*, you will have to feed it meat".[12]

In contrast to the *state's clients* who depended on the state the elite have exit options. One said, in contrast to the observation of *a state's client* that "No one in this area sends their children to government schools, who wants to ruin their life? We need more good colleges in this area, especially more vocational colleges and professional

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[12] Kathinka Frøystad's ethnographic work in the state of Uttar Pradesh also provides evidence for the existence of a high density of networks connecting the elite to state officials.

colleges. Look what is happening outside, our children also need to get MBAs and engineering degrees. Right now we just send them to other cities. If you don't have good colleges in this city, why will industry want to relocate here?"

Summing Up

Our focus group interviews revealed that in the absence of grassroots level pressure groups, a perceived alienation from judiciary and the law and order machinery, and neglect by the press, the *marginalized* in rural India lack an effective voice. Given their level of vulnerability they remain easy to coerce and intimidate. Finding private solutions for the services a state should provide requires resources, which they do not possess. The *state's clients* face a somewhat similar dilemma. They need the state for their livelihood and cannot exit the state because they, too, do not have the resources needed to exit. The means to upward mobility being very limited, they remain highly dependent on the State services. They, however, do have some connections with the state and can use those to get access to it. The *elite*, on the other hand, can exit the state's realm partially, or entirely, by providing themselves with the public goods they need. They can also turn to courts and the press to get the state to respond to their concerns.

Since these groups have different relationships to the state we would expect that their responses to survey questions would reflect these differences. All groups look to the state to provide them public goods but the *marginalized* are more reliant on the state than either the *state's clients* or the *elite*. Respondents in our 2004 survey were asked, who should be responsible for addressing the problems that they faced – the state, the people and the community or the state and the community. In Tables 2a and 2b, we see that the *marginalized* rely on the state in larger proportions than either the state's clients or the elite to deliver these public goods. Similar findings are reported by Chandoke (2005) and Harriss (2005) from a survey carried out in and around Delhi. They, too, find that the poor overwhelmingly rely on the state to meet their needs.

Table 2a: Social Groups and Environmental Cleanliness

	People and community	State	State and community
Marginalized	41	46	12

State's Clients	49	34	16
Elite	54	25	21

Source: 2002 citizen survey, N=3954

Table 2b: Social Groups and the Provision of Law and Order

	People and community	State	State and community
Marginalized	17	74	10
State's Clients	17	69	14
Elite	24	55	21

Source: 2002 citizen survey, N=3954

One reason for why the marginalized group relies on the state is that there are no other organizations they can turn to for assistance. We asked respondents whether there were organizations other than the state that operated in their area and helped address their concerns. Five percent of the marginalized and 10 percent of the state's elite identified organizations other than the state that operated in their areas whereas a fifth of the elite knew of groups other than the state they could turn to address their concerns.

The disgruntlement of the marginalized with the state is on the count of three failures: first, there is a genuine shortage of policies and services directed for them; second, there is enormous leakage in the implementation of the policies and programs that exist; and, third, there a lack of accountability and the virtual absence of a redressal system to correct these concerns for the marginalized. Evidence of the mistreatment by the state or the marginalized appears in the lower numbers of them who are likely to contact either bureaucrats or politicians for their concerns. In Table 3 we report respondent answers to whether they ever contacted a bureaucrat or politician. Only 33 percent of the marginalized had whereas over 50 percent of the elite had some dealing with the state.

Table 3: Who contacts the State to redress their concerns?

	Contacted Government	Did Not Contact Government
Marginalized	33	67

State's Clients	43	57
Elite	54	46

N=5435

Furthermore, even when the *marginalized* approach the state they rarely do so alone. Respondents were asked whether they went alone or with someone else when they did contact either a politician or bureaucrats. Whereas 28 percent of *elite* went alone; among *State's Clients* only 17 percent went alone whereas only12 percent of the *Marginalized* approached the state by themselves.

As a group the *marginalized* in India remain the most poorly supplied consumers of public goods and services. This is despite their acute need for these public goods. In fact, an Indian prime minister is on record for stating that out of every 100 rupees intended for the poor, only 15 rupees gets to them (Economist, March 2005). Survey data and our focus group responses clearly indicate that across the country, like all other groups, the marginalized do display a high degree of awareness of the programs the State runs for them. In a survey conducted in 2002, we asked respondents if they knew of three national government programs directed towards the poor – the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, the Below Poverty Line Ration Card Scheme, and the Indira Housing Scheme. The responses were coded into three categories – those who knew of all three programs, those who knew one or two and those who were aware of none. A large proportion of the *marginalized* knew of the programs that were devised for them. Yet, when asked if they benefited from these programs 60 percent said they had not benefited.

Since these groups have such different relationship with and expectations from the state we expect that their reasons for participating would be different, too. The *marginalized* would use the vote as a voice, as recognition of them as equal citizens. Since equal treatment is not that much of a concern for the *state's clients,* but the goods and services provided by the state are, they would vote to increase their access to the state. The *elite* do not need access to the state through the electoral process, the state either responds to their needs or they have the means to 'exit.' And, hence when they do vote, it is neither to look for equal protection nor for goods and services. For them it is a civic duty.

Section 6: The Vote

The Marginalized

On election day, the *marginalized* queue for long hours, even in adverse weather conditions, give up their daily wages to caste their vote, and in some places wear new clothes especially for the purpose of voting. Across gender and age cohorts people turn up to the polling booth to vote. On being asked, why, their response was fairly uniform across these cohorts. "It is our right". In fact, some people found the question offensive. Who were we to question their right to vote? Many said that the day of the election is the one-day, when they matter. The party workers and politicians come to them before election seeking them out. Their vote can change the government. The new one may not be any better than the one which got voted out, but they can claim the change. Candidates ask for their votes, and the State needs them on this day. This is the one day, where their citizenship counts, is recognized and acknowledged. In urban areas the primary fear is that if they do not turn up to vote, the politicians may not protect their settlement, and their hutments could be destroyed. It is the fear of coercion from the state, and the absence of what Isiah Berlin calls negative freedoms, which takes them to the polling booths. "If we don't vote, who knows what may happen". "We could lose our homes, our ration cards, or may be the police will come around more often to harass us". Others said, "If we don't vote, we are dead for the state".

In the course of the discussions, we presented those people in this group who voted, with a question, what if nothing changes over the next two elections in terms of your material conditions, would you still continue to vote? In most cases the answer was an unequivocal, yes. As this poor villager in Azamgarh put it, "I am because I vote on Election Day, otherwise, what is my stature in this society?" Another participant said, "Election is the one event which ties us to the government. Politicians, people like you, journalists everyone comes looking for us. If we did not vote, there will be no elections and we will be left for dead".

State's Clients

The patronage networks of the urban middle and lower middle classes are varied. Only when the distance between the voter and politicians is lower is there enthusiasm about voting. So in areas where there are prominent party representatives or party workers staying in the locality, people were keen on voting. Knowing these party representatives had potential returns on it, and people cited them as reasons for associating with a certain party and voting on election day. In contrast, those who work for the state administration have their patrons inside the government departments, and are not always affected by the electoral fortunes of the government. For them, voting is not very profitable.

In the rural areas once again, the participant in the focus groups displayed a mixed attitude towards voting. The wealthy farmers are power brokers, but on the other hand, they are dependent on the State. The dependence on state resources and services is even greater for the medium sized farmers, and is reflected in their attitude towards voting. "Look, if our man gets elected, a lot of things become easier. You can contact him in the state capital or Delhi. Things move faster at the district and block level. We vote thinking, if we do our job, the people who will assume power will do theirs". Another said "voting is important to keep the government interested in us. If we don't vote, why will they listen to us? Sometimes we think about collectively boycotting the elections if the promises are not kept. We thought about taking such an action this time. Only after receiving assurance from the candidate that he will do something to resolve the water problem in our village, did we reconsider our stand". In Maharashtra a respondent said " in our area the government has done a lot of work. Why shouldn't we vote? Look around here. This is a prosperous area in Maharashtra. We are trying to diversify and get in to other crops like grapes and flowers. The government is helping with the process. We should vote for them". Amongst the medium sized farmers, voting was a serious issue, when someone from their area was an important functionary or elected member". We think since the member/ party leader is from our area, he will give priority to our needs". Another farmer in Southern Tamil Nadu said, " When the governments don't listen to our needs, we vote to throw them out. This government has gone mad, and has imposed electricity tariffs on us. We cannot pay, that is why all of us voted against it this time".

Finally, in another focus group one citizen summed up the perspective of the state's clients quite succinctly – *"Voting for one's candidate is very important, otherwise, there is no hope of getting anything.* When you need something from the government, nothing moves without letters and phone calls. If you know your representative you can hope to get these."

The Elite

Most of the people belonging to this group, took a dim view of the elected representatives and their politics. Referring to the televised proceedings of the parliament, one said, "Look what happens in the parliament; these people are uneducated, unpresentable. The country is in the wrong hands." They read the newspapers, and are well informed about the local and national politics. Very few of them, however, show up to vote on Election Day. Those who do go to vote often said they did so because they see it as their duty. These people read newspapers, and have well informed opinions about the candidates and the parties. Many of them "wanted the party and the candidate of their choice to win, but they did not expect a substantial impact on their life if this did not happen". A majority said that they would like more people to "go out to vote because it is everyone's democratic duty, and should not be taken lightly".

One respondent summing up perhaps the perspective of this group, said "My family would never go, but in last election, I made everyone accompany me to the polling booth. *This country and state is run in our name,* we must cast our vote to have a say. I don't think me or my family matter directly in how the country is run, but we need to voice our opinion". Another observed, "I voted because it made me feel good, like I was a part of something really big". "My family and I, we all go to vote together on election day. It's a habit and I guess it has continued. The youngest of this group does not think much of voting". One said, "Sometimes in our building association meetings we talk about politics. We don't expect any reward or returns on our vote. This is a democratic country, people should vote during elections".

The rural upper income groups expressed a much higher interest in who won the elections. Their interest in electoral participation is also much higher than the urban upper income groups. They go to vote, arrange for campaign resources, provide protection and

try to use their influence to garner votes. Knowing important party workers and politicians by either joining politics, or being associated with parties is seen as valuable. Almost everyone who participated in the focus group from this category had a close connection with a district level political functionary.

Those wealthy farmers who are networked to the state through family or community ties in the administration, Orin the local government bodies, took interest in local politics and voted. When this was not the case, there was ambiguity about voting. "Our vote does not matter, what matters is our capability to get votes delivered of other villagers". "When the large farmers get together, it is not possible for a candidate to win without our support, but that does not happen these days".

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown the poor and the marginalized in India continue to vote despite not being beneficiaries of state action. They vote because they interpret the act of voting as a 'right' rather than as an exchange for goods and services from the state. How a citizen interprets the act of voting is, as we saw, determined by a citizen's relationship to the state. For the marginalized, voting represents empowerment. They view it as a valued right which should be exercised. In urban areas, they also vote out of fear. Amongst the *elite*, on the other hand, voting is viewed as a civic duty, which good citizens should fulfill. For the *state's clients* patronage ties are most instrumental in determining whether to vote or not. Our argument has implications for the literatures on both participation, and democratic accountability.

The Indian experience points to the limits of theories of participation. We have shown that why a citizen participates is determined by her relationship to the state. And, as long as the state has varying relationships with groups of citizens the reasons for voting and the rates of turnout among groups will be different. This explanation addresses the central paradox of Indian politics for scholars of turnout – why those of lower SES turn out to vote in large numbers. Our claim is that the patterns of voting in India are paradoxical only if one believes in theories that link SES to voting – either through civic voluntarism or demographic attributes. We suggest that if the motivation to vote for

different groups is different then the fact that those of lower SES turn out to vote in large numbers is no paradox at all - our theories are perhaps wrong.

Amartya Sen informs us that in open societies comprising of a free press and accountable governments, famines do not occur. Yet, while writing on India's developmental record, Sen goes on to observe that "the elections, the newspapers, and the political liberties work powerfully against dramatic deprivations and new sufferings, but easily allow the quiet continuation of an astonishing set of persistent injustices." He notes, :It permits endemic malnutrition and hunger that is not acute, so long as these happen quietly... It permits the injustice of keeping a large majority of the people illiterate while the elite enjoy the benefits of a vast system of higher education." In this paper, by illustrating the nature of the relationship of accountability between the Indian state and the marginalized citizen, we are able to propose a possible explaination for why in India despite political liberties, there has been a continuous and quiet persistence of deprivation.

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