POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, CLIENTELISM AND TARGETING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS:

Analysis of Survey Results from Rural West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

This paper provides evidence concerning political participation (turnout, awareness, attendance at meetings, campaign involvement, voting) and its relation to local governance (targeting of public services) in a developing country, based on a rural household survey in West Bengal, India. With the exception of education and immigrant status, we find that reported participation rates varied remarkably little with socio-economic status. Within villages, benefits disbursed by local governments displayed no relation to wealth, caste, education, gender or political affiliations. In contrast, allocation of benefits *across* villages by higher-level governments displayed bias against poor and low caste groups; these biases were larger in villages with more unequal landownership and lower participation rates in village meetings. Political support among voters for the dominant Left party was positively correlated with receipt of recurring benefits and help provided by local governments in times of personal need, but not long-term one-time benefits or local public goods provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

A critical aspect of successful functioning of a democracy is its capacity to induce elected officials to be accountable to citizens. Accountability pressures depend critically on the pressures imposed on elected officials by citizens, through the way they vote, exercise voice and receive information about the actions of officials. If a large fraction of citizens either do not express their opinions, lack proper information or understanding of policy issues, a democracy would create no incentives for politicians to espouse or implement policies in the public interest. Governments can then be corrupt and captured by special interest groups, without facing any threat of displacement. Uneven patterns of political participation across different socio-economic groups may thus be a powerful cause of perpetuation of social and economic inequalities. These hypotheses necessitate empirical research on patterns of political participation and awareness among citizens, and how

these relate to accountability of governments. While a number of such studies are available for developed and middle income countries, they are scarce for low income, developing countries. Given the contemporary interest in the relation between democracy and development, such studies are especially needed in the context of poor countries, to understand differences in functioning of democracy between countries at different stages of development.

Of particular interest is the functioning of local democracy. Many developing countries have recently embarked on experiments in decentralized development and local democracy. It has been noted by many authors that such experiments are prone to various pitfalls, most especially the possibility of elite capture of local governments. This is based on a presumption that democracy performs less well as an accountability mechanism at the local rather than the national level. While theoretical counter-arguments to such a presumption may be provided (Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000)), empirical research is required. To assess the promise of a decentralization as a strategy of economic development, one needs to assess patterns of political participation and accountability at the local level.

The connection between political participation and socio-economic characteristics has been studied using household surveys in the context of a number of countries, such as the United States (Verba and Nie (1972), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), Przeworski (2006)) , and Latin America (Gaviria, Panizza and Seddon (2002), Baiochhi, Chaudhuri, Heller and Silva (2006)). Przeworski (2006) provides an overview of many studies of electoral turnout across a wide cross-section of countries. A rough summary of the findings of this literature is that: (i) In general, political participation increases with measures of socio-economic status, but the extent varies across countries; (ii) In the United States, political participation varies sharply with socio-economic status, with large and significant variations across race and income categories in voting turnout, participation in campaigns, and political

awareness.[1] [2] (iii) In most other countries both developed and developing for which data is available, patterns of political participation vary relatively little with socio-economic characteristics.[3]

Yet with few exceptions (such as Baiochhi et al (2006) or Krishna (2006)), these studies do not correlate participation patterns with public policies such as targeting to different socio-economic groups. Hence they do not throw much light directly on the relation between political participation of citizens and government accountability. Nor do they pertain to local governments specifically. This paper presents an empirical analysis of patterns of political participation (turnout, awareness, attendance at political and civic meetings, involvement in political campaigns, voting) in local governance across socio-economic categories in rural West Bengal, a state in Eastern India. We relate these to targeting of services administered by local governments. We also examine ways that citizens voted for different parties in a poll we administered (with secret ballots), and how these related to benefits they received from local governments. We

[1] Rosenstone and Hansen report that representation ratios (to demographic weight) in voting, contribution to political campaigns, attendance at political meetings in the highest quintile are between three to six times higher in the highest income quintile compared to the lowest, as well as between those with 16 years or more of schooling compared with those with less than eight years of schooling.

[2] Przeworski (2006) reports from various studies that electoral turnout varies between 3 and 9 percentage points between top and bottom education quartiles across a large number of European countries, except Switzerland where the difference was 23 percent. In the United States this difference is nearly 40%. The turnout rate varies between 75 and 85% among lowest income or education levels in most European countries, compared with 50% in the United States. He summarizes that ``…somehow in the United States the poor are successfully barred from electoral politics, in spite of universal suffrage, egalitarian ideology, and all the ostensible devotion to democracy." (Przeworski, 2006, p.30).

[3] For instance, Gaviria et al find that across urban populations of 17 Latin American countries of widely varying levels of development, measures of participation and political attitudes are slightly (5—7 percentage points) lower for the bottom two quintiles than the rest of the population, but otherwise does not do not vary significantly across different income quintiles, after controlling for education and gender. Moreover, differences in participation rates between genders and between highest and lowest education categories are modest, usually within 10—15 percentage points. Hence, despite very large extent of inequality in socio-economic status in many of these Latin American countries, there is not much evidence that weaker sections are excluded or marginalized in the political process.

discuss possible implications of these results concerning the nature of accountability pressure imposed on local governments in rural West Bengal over the past quarter century.

The analysis is based on data collected from a household survey in a sample of 85 villages drawn from 15 major agricultural districts in West Bengal. This state is particularly interesting for a variety of reasons. It has a relatively long experience with local democracy spanning a quarter century, unlike other Indian states. Moreover, West Bengal is unique insofar as a coalition of Left parties has been repeatedly re-elected across six successive elections with an absolute majority, whereas other Indian states have witnessed incumbents losing elections regularly. However, the dominance of the Left in recent elections has been declining in the last two election rounds. The source of the political durability of the Left Front in West Bengal is therefore an intriguing question, as is the question of why it appears to be increasingly challenged in recent years. Has the durable political success of the Left in West Bengal resulted from its actions to relieve rural poverty via land reforms and broad-based distribution of benefits from development programs? Or does it reflect a strategy of clientelism which favored particular narrow groups to the exclusion of many others?

Details of the surveys are described in Section 2. An important drawback of our analysis must be acknowledged at the outset: it is based on a cross-sectional analysis in which any inference of causality is slippery. The correlations, particularly at the cross-village level, should be properly viewed as descriptive facts. Nevertheless, we believe that the underlying issues are important enough that such facts and their consistency with different hypotheses should still be of considerable interest. We shall also seek to corroborate these findings with others based on longitudinal village studies (e.g., with Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) who study the same set of villages spanning 1978—98, but using different data sources).

Section 3 examines patterns of political participation and awareness of citizens, and how they related to measures of socio-economic status. We examine both their averages and distribution across measures of socio-economic status. With few exceptions, we find that average levels of political participation in elections, village meetings, political campaigns as well as awareness of programs administered by GPs were high. We find no evidence of lower levels of participation or awareness among poor or low caste groups. The main determining factors are education, gender and immigrant status, rather than land or caste. These results are consistent with findings for other Indian states (e.g., for Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in Krishna (2006)) or many Latin American countries in Gaviria et al (2002)).

Section 4 studies targeting of benefits disbursed by local governments. This can be classified into divided by targeting of resources: (a) *within* a village by the concerned local governments, and (b) *across* villages and corresponding local governments by upper levels. The former is subject to more direct pressures of democracy, given the high levels of information within communities of the needs and entitlements of different residents. The latter involves negotiation among elected representatives from different local governments at the lowest level, members of the state bureaucracy, and representatives elected to higher echelons of the local government system (at the block and district levels). The nature of democracy is less direct in the latter, and the allocation process substantially less transparent. Differences between targeting performance of different levels of government have important implications for decentralization: arguments in favor of decentralization are strengthened if lower level governments achieve superior targeting.

Within villages we find (with a few exceptions) little evidence of systematic biases on the basis of agricultural landownership, caste, gender, education or immigrant status. Moreover, there was no bias in favor of those voting for the party with a majority of seats in the GP. Nor was there a bias in favor of those actively involved in political campaigns. Therefore there is little evidence that

local governments at the lowest level discriminated on the basis of wealth, education, caste or political partisanship in allocating benefits within villages.

Across villages, however, we find considerable biases, against villages with a high fraction of landless households: villages with a high proportion of landless received fewer benefits per household from upper level governments. Villages with greater land inequality allocated a significantly lower share of benefits to scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST). Members of these groups have been historically disadvantaged in terms of their social and economic status. These results suggest greater accountability at the lowest level of local governments (*gram panchayats (GPs)* , compared with higher levels of government located at the block or district levels. These results match those of Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) based on a different data set (village panel data collected directly from the records of the local governments).[4]

We subsequently examine how benefit delivery patterns were related to attendance and participation rates in the village *gram sabha (GS).* The *gram sabha* is a key forum within these villages for citizens to meet at least twice a year and discuss matters pertaining to the activities of the GP. We find evidence that villages with greater GS participation were also those which delivered more benefits to the landless and SC/ST population. And villages with lower incidence of landlessness and ST presence exhibited greater GS participation. This is consistent with the hypothesis that village meetings formed a channel of accountability of GPs to the poor and low caste groups. It does not, of course, provide evidence of a causal impact of village meetings on targeting --- the results are equally consistent with the hypothesis that village meeting

[4]The analysis of that paper is based on information about various benefit programs from the records of local governments themselves, which contain names of beneficiaries and the nature and timing of benefits. The socio-economic characteristics of the beneficiaries were obtained from an independent indirect (third-party) household survey, in which some prominent village citizens were asked to identify land, caste, education and occupation details of each household in the village in 1978 and 1998. In contrast, the analysis of this paper is based on a one-time direct household survey carried out in 2003, where each household was asked to report the benefits it has received in the past.

participation and targeting both reflected the effect of deeper, unobserved characteristics of the community reflecting its `social capital'.

Section 5 examines voting patterns, in order to understand better the nature of electoral pressures, and sources of incumbency advantage of the Left. At the end of our survey, we conducted a secret ballot of respondents across major political parties active in the local area. We report how different kinds of benefits received, as well as measures of improvement of economic status since 1978, were correlated with the tendency for the respondent to cast a vote in favor of the local incumbent. We find that the likelihood a given respondent voted for the Left Front coalition in our survey was correlated with benefits received from programs administered by previous Left Front-dominated local governments. However, not all benefits nor all forms of improvement in economic status mattered equally. Receipt of recurring short-term benefits rather than one-time benefits or infrastructural improvements affected voting patterns. Improvements in income or housing *per se* did not matter, but improvements in agricultural land ownership did. Help provided by GPs dominated by the Left Front in the past with respect to easing difficulties faced in one's occupation, or in times of personal emergency --- classic symptoms of clientelism--- were also significantly correlated with voting in favor of the Left Front. Controlling for these factors, as well as other personal characteristics, poorer and SC/ST groups within a village were more inclined to vote Left. The support for the Left was also greater in areas with a higher incidence of agricultural occupations, controlling for other household and community characteristics.

These findings are consistent with the view that the continued domination of local government (*panchayat*) elections by the Left Front over five successive election terms owed partly to dispensation of recurring short-term benefit programs (such as IRDP, credit, minikits, employment and relief programs) by Left-dominated GPs to weaker sections of the community.

Personalized help and short-term benefits had a stronger effect on voter support, compared with infrastructural improvements or more substantial one-time benefits (such as receiving a land title, or getting a tenancy contract registered). The results also help explain why the political success of the Left (measured by vote or seat shares) in local government elections has been declining over the last fifteen years: rising population pressure, stagnation in agricultural yields and increasing urbanization have brought about a decline in agricultural land owned per capita and in the importance of agricultural occupations. At the same time, rising education and living standards have raised awareness and aspirations of citizens, and reduced their vulnerability to personal shocks and subsequent dependence on local governments for help in coping with such shocks.

It is however difficult to draw any definitive inferences concerning the role of clientelism *vis-à-vis* effective governance. The evidence can be interpreted in various ways. Proponents of the latter could argue that anti-poverty and relief programs have been distributed mostly to poorer, vulnerable sections of the population; and these sections have responded by voting in favor of the Left. There is no evidence that supporters of rival parties were excluded from benefits allocated, or favoritism towards active political campaigners. On the other hand, there are also a number of symptoms of clientelism: voting tended to be more responsive to help provided in times of personal difficulty or receipt of recurring short-term private benefit programs, rather than one-time, long-term benefits or provision of local public goods.

2. SURVEY DETAILS

Our surveys were carried out during 2003-05. They involved 2410 households in a sample of 85 villages in West Bengal. The village sample is a sub-sample of an original stratified random sample of villages selected from all major agricultural districts of the state (only Kolkata and Darjeeling are excluded) by the Socio-Economic Evaluation Branch of the Department of

Agriculture, Government of West Bengal, for the purpose of calculating cost of cultivation of major crops in the state between 1981 and 1996. In order to facilitate comparisons with their work, we use exactly the same sample of villages as Bardhan and Mookherjee (2004, 2006), which contain a more detailed description of the sampling procedure used. A random sample of blocks was selected in each district, and within each block one village was selected randomly, followed by random selection of another village within a 8 Km radius. Our survey teams visited these villages between 2003 and 2005, carried out a listing of landholdings of every household, then selected a stratified random sample (stratifying by landownership) of approximately 25 households per village (with the precise number varying with the number of households in each village). 2 additional households were selected randomly from middle and large landowning categories respectively, owning 5-10 acres and more than 10 acres of cultivable land. This was to ensure positive representation of these groups, which are small in number in many villages. The stratification of the sample of households was based on a prior census of all households in each village, in which demographic and landownership details were collected from a door-to-door survey.

Representatives (typically the head) of selected households were subsequently administered a survey questionnaire consisting of their demographics, land, economic status, economic activities, benefits received from various development programs administered by GPs, involvement in activities pertaining to local governments (gram panchayats (GPs)), politics and local community organizations. Response rates were extremely high: only 15 households out of 2400 of those originally selected did not agree to participate, and were replaced by randomly selected substitutes. At the end of the survey we asked each respondent to cast a ballot into a box, where they ticked off a political party of their choice best representing their party preferences for election of GP officials. Ballots were anonymous with no markers for identity of the voter. Voters were assured that the ballots would be opened only by us once we had returned to the research

center in Kolkata, and the outcomes would not be disclosed to anyone apart from the authors of the research project. The response rate was predictably lower: 310 household representatives out of the entire sample of 2410 refused to cast a ballot. A similar method is used by the National Election Survey in India.

While the National Election Surveys in India use household surveys to measure political participation and attitudes, until recently they did not allow these to be related to socio-economic characteristics of households. Moreover, most of the focus of those surveys is on national elections rather than local panchayat elections or processes of local governance. Studies of political participation in local governments have been carried out for three districts each of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh by Krishna (2006), and two Karnataka districts by Crook and Manor (1998). Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) have studied participation in village meetings (gram sansads) in a sample of 20 villages in Birbhum district of West Bengal.

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS

Table 1 describes household characteristics in our sample. Approximately half of all households were landless; another quarter were marginal owners with less than 1.25 acres of agricultural land. The interviews were conducted usually with the household head, 90% of which were male. Education measured by highest years of schooling across all household members rose from an average of 6.6 years among the landless to 13.9 years among the biggest landowners with more than 10 acres of agricultural land. One third belonged to scheduled castes (SCs) and 3.4% to scheduled tribes (STs). The proportion of SCs is negatively correlated with landholding, but this is not evident for STs. Excepting the landless, more than two-thirds were engaged in agriculture

Table 1: Sample Characteristics: Household Heads

Agricultural Land Ownership	Age	% Male	Maximum education in household	% SC	% ST	% Agriculture Occupation	% Immigrants
Landless	45	88	6.6	35	2.4	26	40
0-1.5 acres	48	88	7.8	34	4.9	65	17
1.5-2.5 acres	56	92	10.8	15	7.4	82	19
2.5-5 acres	58	93	11.1	24	3.1	72	10
5-10 acres	60	89	12.5	22	4.1	66	12
10 acres and above	59	100	13.9	24	6.9	72	14
ALL	49	89	8.0	32	3.4	47	28

as their primary occupation, and less than one-fifths had migrated into these villages since 1967. The landless in contrast were predominantly engaged in non-agricultural occupations and two-fifths were newcomers.

Reported registration and turnout were near universal (above 98%) for all excepting the landless (88-89%): it is likely these have been subject to some degree of over-reporting. The aggregate voter turnout rate was similar to that reported (95%) in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan by Krishna. Among the landless, more than a tenth said they were not registered or did not vote. A larger fraction (15%) among the landless and marginal landowners also reported disturbances at or near the polling booth, or declined to answer this question, compared with 6-9% among the rest.[5] Table 2 reports conditional logit regressions for registration, turnout, and disturbances (either reported or declined to answer), with village fixed effects. Within villages, it shows that

5 Only 4 households in the entire sample reported not being able to cast their vote because of fear of disturbances, or because they discovered their vote had already been cast by someone else, or because they had to wait too long at the polling booth. So we describe instead their response to the question whether they faced any difficulties or disturbances when they went to vote (which does not seem to have prevented them from casting their vote). About 5% households reported facing difficulties disturbances in and around voting booths, and nearly 200 households did not respond to this question. This suggests that there is some substance to allegations in the media concerning incidence of polling disturbances, but it affected a small proportion of households (between 5 and 12%), and did not affect their ability to vote.

lower registration and turnout among the landless resulted from a combination of factors apart from their lack of ownership of land: higher incidence of immigrants, nonagricultural occupations and lower education were correlated with low registration and turnout. We shall see below that voters with low socio-economic characteristics (SECs) were more inclined to vote in favor of the Left Front, so these patterns of turnout and registration worked to the disadvantage of the Left. At the same time, it may have reduced accountability of elected officials towards the landless *vis-à-vis* other classes. But the difference in reported registration rates and turnouts were modest, more similar to the European patterns rather than the steep asymmetries in the United States. With regard to voting disturbances, there was no clear correlation with socio-economic status. Nor was there any tendency for polling disturbances to affect Left-leaning voters more or less than Congress-leaning voters.

We now turn to attendance in political meetings, such as rallies, election meetings called by political parties. Attendance rates were quite high, averaging 48% across the population, much higher than the corresponding attendance rate reported for Rajasthan and MP was 33% (Krishna (2006)). Attendance rates did not exhibit any marked unevenness across different land classes, lying above 40% for every land class, rising to 65% among big landowners. This is more likely to owe to higher education among the landed: the regression in the first column of Table 3 shows that attendance rates fell with landownership and rose with education levels, after controlling for other characteristics. Moreover they were higher among SC and ST households. As expected, males, non-immigrants, and those engaged in agricultural occupations were more likely to attend.

TABLE 2. Logit Regressions: Voter Registration / Turnout / Disturbance (All Regressions with Village Fixed Effects)

	Voter Registration	Voter Turnout	Disturbance
Agricultural Land	1.40**	0.36	0.05
	(.70)	(0.24)	(0.05)
Other Land	1.77	0.19	-0.88*
	(2.70)	(0.46)	(0.47)
Agriculture- Occupation	17.44***	0.96***	-0.51***
	(.25)	(0.27)	(0.16)
Immigrant	-2.67***	-2.75***	-0.24
	(.26)	(0.27)	(0.18)
Max Education in hh	.12***	0.12***	-0.03
	(.03)	(0.04)	(0.02)
ST	1.23	1.10	0.72
	(.06)	(1.05)	(0.52)
SC	-.70***	-0.66***	0.10
	(.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)
Male	-.45	-0.70**	0.08
	(.33)	(0.35)	(0.27)
Age	.03***	0.12***	-0.00
	(.008)	(0.04)	(0.03)
No. of observations	2237	2237	1997
pseudo-R^2/p-value	.36/0.00	.36/0.00	0.013

Note: All three regressions also include interactions of North Bengal dummy with male, agricultural land, SC & ST only
* Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 3 also reports on a more active form of political participation: in political campaigns. Approximately 26% of all households were engaged in campaigns. This is similar to the Karnataka districts studied by Crook and Manor (1998) (where it was 23%) , but lower than the Rajasthan and MP districts studied by Krishna (2006) (where it was 43%). In our sample this proportion was distributed quite evenly across different land classes, with the lowest proportion being 23% among the landless, and the highest participation rate being 38% among the biggest landowners. The regression results in Table 3 show no association with land or occupation. It is interesting to note the SC households are significantly more involved in campaigns, corroborating accounts of the increasingly active role played by some SC groups by Ruud (1999). A similar finding is reported for Karnataka, Rajasthan and MP by Crook and Manor (1998), and Krishna

(2006) respectively. As with all other measures of participation, males and more educated heads were significantly more likely to be involved, and immigrants less likely to be involved.

TABLE 3: Political Activity Regressions: Attendance, Participation and Contribution (Conditional Logits)

	Attendance (Village Fixed Effects)	Participation (Village Fixed Effects)	Contribution to Political Campaigns (No Village Fixed Effects)	Contribution to Political Campaigns (Village Fixed Effects)
Agricultural Land	-.076***	-.038	.049	.065*
	(.028)	(.026)	(.032)	(.038)
Other Land	.141	-.031	.458**	.231
	(.101)	(.089)	(.216)	(.171)
Agriculture- Occupation	.240**	.139	.150	-.044
	(.105)	(.114)	(.101)	(.123)
Immigrant	-.274**	-.344***	.102	.028
	(.111)	(.125)	(.106)	(.129)
Max Education in hh	.044***	.067***	.096***	.103***
	(.013)	(.014)	(.012)	(.015)
ST	1.237***	-.492	.781**	.206
	(.374)	(.355)	(.309)	(.407)
SC	.567***	.208*	.601***	.079
	(.134)	(.124)	(.124)	(.152)
Male	.407**	.448**	.371**	.435**
	(.185)	(.192)	(.152)	(.196)
Age	.010	-.006	-.001	.065**
	(.019)	(.021)	(.003)	(.022)
Other Land* North Bengal dummy	-.187	.219	-.747**	-.701*
	(.238)	(.322)	(.324)	(.374)
SC* North Bengal dummy			-.605***	-.138
			(.224)	(.296)
Male* North Bengal dummy			-2.145***	-1.297
			(.615)	(.846)
Agriculture Land* North Bengal dummy			.206***	.120
			(.070)	(.085)
No. of observations	2384/87	2353/84	2400	
Pseudo-R^2/p-value			.06/0.00	

* Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Finally, a staggering 69% of households reported making financial contributions to political campaigns, with the lowest proportion being 61% among the landless, rising from 74% among marginal landowners to 93% among the biggest. The regressions show some but limited association with land owned, and a stronger association with education.

Table 4 describes reported attendance and participation rates in village meetings (*gram sabhas)* that discuss matters relating to local government activities. One-third of all households reported attending these within the previous three years, compared with 17% in the Karnataka districts studied by Crook and Manor (1998). Attendance rates exhibit some unevenness across land classes, rising from 33% among the landless to 44% among marginal landowners and 50% for those with between 1.25 and 2.5 acres, and falling thereafter to between 35 and 44% among those owning more land. The regressions in Table 4 show little association with land or caste status, but are correlated with education and immigrant status.

Our survey included questions about the nature of active participation in *gram sabhas:* whether respondents were accustomed to standing up to speak or ask questions. These participation rates rose from 6.5% among the landless, to between 14 and 19% among marginal, small and medium landowners, and 38% among big landowners. Hence there is some unevenness in active participation in the village meetings only at the extreme ends of the economic spectrum. However, the regressions in Table 4 show the only significant predictors of active involvement in *gram sabhas* to be education, gender and immigrant status. For the vast majority of landowning households (i.e., excluding the top 1% of the population owning more than 10 acres of agricultural land) the likelihood of speaking in *gram sabhas* hardly varied. Moreover, SC/ST households were just as likely to speak up as non-SC/ST households.

We now turn to evidence concerning political awareness. Table 5 pertains to responses to questions pertaining to regularly watching (or hearing) political or economics news on TV (or radio). TV news exposure was positively associated with land status, as one might expect. The proportion rose from 31% among the landless, to 72% among big landowners. Table 5 shows it was significantly negatively associated with agricultural occupation, ST-SC status, and positively with education and male gender. With regard to radio news, the overall proportion was similar to TV(about 33%), but was much more even across socio-economic categories. Only education and gender were significantly correlated with exposure to radio news.

Next, consider principal sources of information concerning GP activities apart from the media. These are remarkably similar across different land classes, with the exception of the top 1% that owned more than 10 acres. Between 43 and 48% got information from elected GP officials, between 29 and 38% from friends, relatives or neighbors, and between 18 and 25% from political party activists. *Gram sabhas* and government bureaucrats did not have any significant role as information providers. The regression results shown in Table 5 indicate almost no pattern of variation with SECs, except for a slight tendency for more educated heads to rely less on informal sources (family, friends or party activists). These results imply homogenous access to information concerning GP activities across various socio-economic categories within villages.

Finally we consider awareness of development or antipoverty programs administered by GPs. On average, less than 20% in most classes were aware of these programs, which seems quite low (and probably reflects the small scale of these programs: the average proportion of households that reported receiving benefits from any single program did not exceed 4%; and only in three or four programs did reported benefit rates exceed 1%). The raw averages show some tendency for the top 1% of the population to be more aware, and the landless to be less aware, but otherwise awareness tends to vary little across land classes. The regression results in Table 6 show that

TABLE 4: Gram Sabha Attendance and Participation Regressions (Conditional Logits With Village Fixed Effects)

	Gram Sabha Attendance Conditional Logit	Gram Sabha Participation Conditional Logit
Agricultural Land	-.015	.041
	(.029)	(.036)
Other Land	.035	.044
	(.090)	(.109)
Agriculture- Occupation	.260	.100
	(.110)	(.164)
Immigrant	-.469***	-.713***
	(.120)	(.194)
Max Education in hh	.024*	.160***
	(.014)	(.021)
ST	.487	.153
	(.349)	(.588)
SC	.049	.237
	(.140)	(.217)
Male	1.052***	1.301***
	(.232)	(.479)
Age	.072***	.067*
	(.022)	(.076)
Other Land* North Bengal dummy	.093	.177
	(.280)	(.235)
SC* North Bengal dummy	-.096	.195
	(.270)	(.373)
ST* North Bengal dummy	-.147	.492
	(.661)	(1.080)
Agriculture Land* North Bengal dummy	-.085	-.132**
	(.054)	(.065)
No. of observations	2191/85	2158/69
Pseudo-R^2/p-value	/0.00	/0.00

Std. errors are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denotes significant at 1%,5%,10% resp.

1. Also includes square of age

those with less land were more likely to be aware, after controlling for education, immigrant status and gender. SC and ST heads were likely to be just as aware as anyone else, and in some cases (employment programs for STs and housing programs for SCs) were likely to be significantly more aware. Across different programs there was a tendency for awareness to vary with need and/or entitlement: landless households were more aware of loan and employment programs earmarked for the landless; marginal landowners more aware of loan and seed programs that only they would find useful.

In summary, rates of political participation appeared high on average, and did not vary much with socio-economic characteristics such as land and caste, with some exceptions: lower voter turnouts and participation in *gram sabhas* among the landless and SC/ST groups. They did, however, vary significantly with education, gender and immigrant status. Controlling for these, there was little evidence of political marginalization or exclusion of weaker socio-economic groups. Marginal landowners, SC or ST populations seemed well integrated into local political life, often participating more vigorously than others, with access to similar information flows concerning GP activities. Only immigrants, women and those with low education seemed significantly less involved and aware.

Table 5: Information Sources (Multinomial Logits)

	Panchayat Members	Political Party Activists	Friends/ Relatives/ Neighbors
Agricultural Land	0.228	0.237	0.282
	(0.175)	(.176)	(.176)
Other Land	3.956	4.039	3.610
	(3.856)	(3.857)	(3.858)
Agriculture- Occupation	-.039	.149	.137
	(.459)	(.464)	(.462)
Immigrant	.656	.592	1.056
	(.567)	(.574)	(.569)
Max Education in hh	-.079	-.129**	-.128***
	(.057)	(.057)	(.057)
ST	-.423	-.434	.016
	(1.064)	(1.080)	(1.062)
SC	.021	.084	.050
	(.472)	(.478)	(.475)
Male	.340	.202	-.616
	(.767)	(.778)	(.704)
Other Land* North Bengal dummy	-4.437	-4.489	-3.339
	(3.962)	(3.979)	(3.951)

(n=1991, pseudo R^2 =0.026)

TABLE 6: Information Regarding GP Administered Development Programs (Conditional Logit with Village Fixed Effects:)[1]

	Current GP programs	New GP programs	Past Loan Program	Seed Program	Employment Programs	Construction /Housing Programs
Agricultural Land	0.044	.050	-.054*	-.002	-.030	-.068**
	(.041)	(.036)	(.032)	(.033)	(.038)	(.033)
Other Land	.066	.053	-.130	.030	-.067	-.077
	(.114)	(.115)	(.110)	(.103)	(.126)	(.105)
Agriculture-Occupation	.054	.045	.455***	.986***	.083	.274**
	(.176)	(.164)	(.132)	(.160)	(.157)	(.126)
Immigrant	-.527***	-.516***	-.521***	-.706***	-.339*	-.419***
	(.196)	(.188)	(.152)	(.197)	(.177)	(.140)
Max Education in hh	.180***	.123***	.040**	.120***	.045**	.016
	(.024)	(.022)	(.016)	(.020)	(.020)	(.016)
ST	.856*	.268	-.123	.371	.802**	.341
	(.477)	(.433)	(.340)	(.394)	(.365)	(.320)
SC	-.011	-.021	-.170	.173	.241	.279**
	(.197)	(.182)	(.148)	(.178)	(.173)	(.136)
Male	1.167***	1.606***	.629**	-.011	.224	.257
	(.409)	(.470)	(.246)	(.286)	(.262)	(.212)
Age	.043	.049	.081***	.036	.013	.035
	(.038)	(.036)	(.028)	(.032)	(.031)	(.025)
Other Land* North Bengal dummy	-4.420	-.859	-.864	-.613	.018	.042
	(2.809)	(.630)	(.784)	(.547)	(.449)	(.354)
No. of observations	1685/43	1891/58	2218/76	2113/72	2086/70	2308/82
p-value	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Std. errors are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denotes significant at 1%,5%,10% resp.

1. Includes age squared.

4. TARGETING PATTERNS AND GRAM SABHA ATTENDANCE

In this section we consider the distribution of benefits within and across villages, the extent to which they were targeted to poor and SC/ST groups, and how these targeting patterns varied with one form of political participation – attendance and participation in *gram sabhas*. Since we are relying on a one-time household survey, we can only examine cross-village regressions of targeting with political participation. Such cross-section regressions are fraught with all the customary qualifications: they do not establish causation, and may reflect the joint effect of unobserved community characteristics. These regressions merely represent one way of checking whether the evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that political participation affects accountability of elected government officials. One additional value of the exercise is that data concerning allocation of benefits of various public services is often lacking, while evidence on political participation is more easily available (e.g., attendance rates in civic and political meetings). The results can inform us on the extent to which attendance rates be taken to be an indicator or proxy of how well the democratic process is functioning with regard to service delivery.

Table 7 provides averages of various benefit programs (house, water, employment, minikits, IRDP, roads, relief against disasters or old-age or widow status, and ration card) that households reported receiving over the periods 1978-98 and over 1998-2005. We report these two periods separately, as the reported benefits for the earlier period may be subject to greater recall bias. We see that the proportions reported receiving benefits of most kinds were substantially higher for the later period. We therefore use reported benefits for the 1998-2005 period subsequently in our analysis of targeting. Table 7 shows a large fraction of village households benefited from various programs during the 1998-2005 period. The largest benefits were reported for roads (32%) and

water (24%). Ration card and relief programs were reported by 12%, minikits and employment by 5% and 2-3% for IRDP and housing.

Table 7 also indicates the high proportion of these benefits that were allocated to landless and SC/ST categories, consistent with the results in Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) based on data collected for 1978-98 from local government records. Between 50-67% of houses constructed by the GP benefited SC/ST households, who collectively comprised less than 40% of the population. For other programs (with the single exception of minikit allocation to the landless) the proportions of landless and SC/ST households reported receiving benefits was approximately similar to or higher than their demographic weight.

Table 8A examines determinants of the number of benefits (aggregating across different programs) received by a household over the period 1998-2003, controlling for village fixed effects. This indicates the nature of intra-village targeting. The first column shows that those with more non-agricultural land were somewhat likely to receive more benefits. Apart from this, there was no tendency for GPs to discriminate on the basis of education, caste or agricultural land. *There was no noticeable bias against the poor, against women-headed households, or against immigrants.* In villages with higher attendance rates in the *gram sabha*, the bias in favor of those with more non-agricultural land was significantly less, and there was better treatment of the SC households.

The second column of Table 8A indicates the extent to which benefits received varied with how politically active the household was, and the way that the household voted. If benefits were granted in a politically partisan manner, one would expect that controlling for other relevant characteristics, the party in power would discriminate in favor of those voting for it. We also see how benefits correlated with attendance in political meetings, and participation or contribution to

political campaigns. We find no significant association with the way the household voted: those voting for the opposite party were likely to be treated the same way as its own supporters. The association with political meetings and campaigns is complex: with a bias in favor of those attending meetings and *against* those participating in campaigns in villages with low *gram sabha* attendance rates. These biases are significantly smaller in villages with high *gram sabha* attendance rates.

Table 8B further explores the possible role of political partisanship in distribution of benefits, distinguishing further between swing voters and those voting consistently for one party over successive elections. In the next Section we shall see that almost half the sample reported voting for the Left in all past elections: we call these *Left-secure voters*. A substantially smaller fraction voted consistently for non-Left parties in all past elections: we refer to them as *non-Left-secure voters.* Those changing their allegiance are denoted *non-secure voters.* Conceivably, the Left may seek to woo swing voters and favor them relative to Left-secure voters in the distribution of benefits. Alternatively, voters that have been treated worse by a Left-controlled GP may be more inclined to switch allegiance to a non-Left party, so Left-secure voters may have been treated better than swing voters. Moreover, a party controlling a GP may discriminate against voters committed to the rival party, relative to swing or its own secure constituency. Four additional variables are included in the regression, based on the combination of majority party in the GP (Left, or non-Left), and whether the voter is a Left-secure or non-Left-secure voter. None of these turn out to be statistically significant, while other coefficients are unchanged compared with Table 8A. Hence there appears to be no evidence of any partisan treatment by either Left-controlled or non-Left-controlled GPs.

Table 7: Average Percentage of Households Receiving Different Kinds of Benefits, for the period 1978-1997 and 1998-2005

	House	Water	Employment	Minikits	IRDP	Road	Relief	Ration card
% HH Recd Ben (1978-1997)	1.29	23.78	1.67	2.42	6.66	9.7	1.64	27.16
% HH Recd Ben (1998-2005)	3.0	23.41	5.21	5.0	2.33	32.11	11.91	12.33
Fraction of benefits accruing to SC/ST (1978-1997)	67.74	32.22	0.40	32.76	0.45	33.48	45.71	33.44
Fraction of benefits accruing to SC/ST (1998-2004)	52.77	37.72	49.41	46.67	55.36	32.68	35.66	32.43
Fraction of benefits accruing to landless (1978-1997)	64.5	49.39	52.5	15.51	48.13	49.78	57.14	46.32
Fraction of benefits accruing to landless (1998-2005)	65.28	53.5	44.89	12.5	46.43	43.84	68.5	43.92

Table 8A: Intra Village Targeting Within Villages, Based on Household Responses
(OLS Regression with Village Fixed Effects)

	Number of GP Benefits Received by Household	Number of GP Benefits Received by Household
Education	-0.2 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)
SC Dummy	-0.37 (0.36)	-0.22 (-0.59)
ST Dummy	1.41 (1.02)	1.14 (1.09)
Non agricultural land owned	0.70* (0.37)	0.72* (0.39)
Agricultural Land Owned	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.08)
Political Meeting Attendance Dummy		0.95** (0.42)
Political Campaign Involvement Dummy		-0.87* (0.48)
Campaign Contribution Made Dummy		-0.08 (0.40)
Voted for Winning Party Dummy		-0.32 (0.34)
GS Att Rate * Education	-0.08 (0.12)	-0.12 (0.13)
GS Att. Rate * SC	1.98** (1.01)	1.51 (1.08)
GS Att. Rate * ST	-1.67 (2.95)	-1.06 (2.98)
GS Att Rate * Nonagr Land	-1.84* (0.98)	-2.05* (1.09)
GS Att Rate * Agr Land	0.09 (0.19)	0.14 (0.19)
GS Att Rate * Pol Meet Attendance Dummy		-1.96* (1.13)
GS Att Rate * Pol Campaign Involvement Dummy		3.17** (1.25)
GS Att Rate * Campaign Contribution Dummy		-0.06 (1.22)
GS Att Rate * Voted for Winning Party Dummy		0.28 (0.93)
N, p-value	2176, 0.0000	2001, 0.0000

Note: Standard Errors in Parentheses
Controls Include age, gender, occupation, immigrant dummy and interactions

Table 8B: Intra Village Targeting Within Villages, Based on Household Responses, including swing, Left-secure, non-Left-secure dummy
(OLS Regression with Village Fixed Effects)

	(1)	(2)
	Number of GP Benefits Received by Household	Number of GP Benefits Received by Household
Education	-0.025	-0.023
	(0.045)	(0.048)
SC	-0.456	-0.313
	(0.366)	(0.387)
ST	1.323	1.055
	(1.024)	(1.049)
Non Agricultural land	0.704*	0.719*
	(0.376)	(0.393)
Agricultural land	-0.055	-0.060
	(0.078)	(0.080)
Education*GS Attendance	-0.089	-0.126
	(0.126)	(0.133)
SC*GS Attendance	2.008**	1.557
	(1.014)	(1.090)
ST*GS attendance	-1.824	-1.232
	(2.933)	(2.992)
Non agricultural land* GS Attendance	-1.819*	-2.062*
	(0.981)	(1.106)
Agricultural land*GS Attendance	0.129	0.172
	(0.194)	(0.199)
Winning party and Left Secure	-0.044	-0.010
	(0.137)	(0.179)
Winning party and Non Left Secure	0.288	0.619
	(0.349)	(0.397)
Non Winning party and Left Secure	0.361	0.166
	(0.276)	(0.290)
Non Winning party and Non Left Secure	-0.022	-0.332
	(0.179)	(0.208)
Political meeting participation		0.960**
		(0.424)
Political campaign involvement		-0.903*
		(0.481)
Contribution to Campaign		-0.011
		(0.407)
Winning party Dummy		-0.433
		(0.382)

Political meeting participation Interaction		-1.924*
		(1.137)
Political campaign involvement Interaction		3.237**
		(1.260)
Contribution to Campaign Interaction		-0.076
		(1.228)
Winning party interaction		0.025
		(0.967)
Observations	2252	2074
Number of Numeric code of each village	73	73

Standard errors in parentheses
Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%
Other controls include age, occupation, male, immigrant dummy and their interactions

Table 9: Cross-Village Regression of Intra-Village Targeting Ratios
Dependent Variable: Share of GP Benefits 1998-2003 going to specified group in the village

	Landless % Share	SC/ST % Share
GS Attendance	-0.35**	-0.32**
	(0.15)	0.12
GS Att. * % Landless	1.69***	
	(0.41)	
% Landless	-0.05	
	(0.20)	
% SC (LL)	-0.01	
	(0.06)	
% ST (LL)	-0.13	
	(0.10)	
Land Gini	-0.03	-0.57***
	(0.24)	(0.21)
Education Gini	0.33	
	(0.22)	
GS Att. * % SC Landless		6.02***
		(2.28)
GS Att. * % ST Landless		2.19***
		(0.45)
N, R-Squared	88, 0.55	88, 0.32

Note: Standard Errors in Parentheses;
Controls Include average land, education

Table 9 examines how intravillage targeting ratios (aggregating across all benefits) for the period 1998-2003 were correlated with gram sabha attendance rates across villages, besides measures of inequality in land and education (controlling for the demographic weights of the landless and SC/ST groups, and average land holdings and education in the village). A higher demographic weight of the landless indicates a higher incidence of landlessness in the village, given the average landholding in the village --- i.e., greater poverty.[6] Note that if per capita benefit received by members of a particular group do not vary with the relative size of the group, the share of this group as a whole would increase proportionally with the demographic weight of the group. If the per capita benefit accruing to the landless rises (resp. falls) with the extent of landlessness, the targeting share of the landless would be decreasing in their demographic weight. The first column shows an insignificant association of the targeting share of the landless with their demographic weight --- suggesting that their per capita benefit was declining significantly with the extent of landlessness. Moreover, there was a significant positive interaction between GS attendance rates and the demographic weight of the landless. This suggests that the per capita benefit was significantly higher in villages with higher GS attendance rates. Otherwise, the targeting share did not co-vary with land or education inequality.

The second column provides corresponding results for the targeting share of the SC/ST group. Consistent with the results in Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) based on an entirely different source and nature of data for the same villages covering the period 1978-98, we find a significant

[6] In Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006), increasing landlessness was associated with significantly lower wage rates for agricultural workers, controlling for village fixed effects and other time-varying village characteristics (such as rainfall, population density, agricultural yields and other measures of land distribution).

negative association with land inequality.[7] We also find a significant positive interaction between GS attendance rates and the demographic weights of these groups.

Table 10A examines the pattern of inter-village allocation of benefits. The dependent variable is the number of benefits received per household (aggregating across all programs) in a village over the period 1998-2003. Villages with a larger proportion of landless received significantly *smaller* benefits, indicating a perverse pattern of targeting by higher level governments. This is also consistent with the results in Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006). Combined with Table 9, this indicates lower government accountability to the poor in villages with greater poverty: a village with more landless households got fewer resources as a whole from upper-level governments. And of the resources they obtained, they allocated a lower share to the landless. We do not see signs of any significant bias in cross-village allocations with respect to the proportion of SC/ST groups.

The second column in Table 10A includes the share of the Left Front in local government seats during the 1998-2003 period, and the third column also adds the square of this share. There is a significant U-shaped relation with the extent of Left domination of the local government, with a turning point at around 57%. This suggests a tendency to allocate more resources to GPs where the Left Front was solidly entrenched (i.e, had a two-third majority or higher), compared with those more evenly contested. Hence there seems to be evidence of political partisanship in the inter-village allocation, in contrast to intra-village allocations.

[7] That paper was based on data concerning distribution of IRDP credit, minikits and employment from local government sources, and pertained to regressions of the targeting ratio for SC/STs on time-varying measures of land distribution in the village, controlling for village fixed effects.

Table 10A: Cross-Village Benefit Targeting Regressions 1998-2003

	(1) Number of Benefits per Household	(2) Number of Benefits per Household	(3) Number of Benefits per Household
Proportion Landless	-0.980**	-1.099***	-1.076***
	(0.391)	(0.400)	(0.385)
Proportion SC	-0.133	-0.188	-0.180
	(0.385)	(0.385)	(0.370)
Proportion ST	0.015	-0.062	0.163
	(0.527)	(0.527)	(0.513)
Left Share 98_03		-1.124	-10.738***
		(0.715)	(3.517)
Left Share Squared			9.475***
			(3.400)
Constant	1.666***	2.285***	4.541***
	(0.227)	(0.454)	(0.920)
Observations	89	88	88
R-squared	0.08	0.10	0.18

Standard errors in parentheses
* Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 10B: Inter Village Targeting Ratios Across Villages 1998-2003
Dependent Variable: Number of GP Benefits per Household in Village, 1998-2003

	Using GS Attendance Rate of all	Using GS Attendance Rate of poor
GS Attendance	1.95	2.20
	(1.95)	(1.96)
GS Att. * % Landless	0.72	5.78
	(2.63)	(7.93)
% Landless	-2.23	-2.70**
	(1.36)	(1.15)
% SC	-0.41	-1.76**
	(1.06)	(0.88)
% ST	0.18	-0.78
	(0.96)	(0.73)
Land Gini	1.32	1.80
	(1.54)	(1.48)
Education Gini	5.01**	5.82***
	(2.21)	(1.90)
GS Att. * % SC	2.81	5.04**
	(2.49)	(2.49)
GS Att. * % ST	-2.78	2.41
	(3.41)	(4.86)
GS Att * Ed Gini	-11.04**	-16.69***
	(5.25)	(5.67)
N, R-Squared	88, 0.21	88, 0.25

Note: Standard Errors in Parenthesis; Controls Include average land

Table 11: GS Attendance/Speech Rates: Cross Village Regression

	Attendance (OLS)	Attendance (District FE)	Speech (OLS)	Speech (District FE)
% Landless	-0.48**	-0.36*	-0.06	-0.03
	(0.16)	(0.20)	(0.10)	(0.11)
% SC	0.05	-0.01	-0.05	-0.12**
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.05)
% ST	-0.30**	-0.38***	-0.11*	-0.17**
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Land Gini	0.35	0.27	0.11	0.21
	(0.29)	(0.32)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Education Gini	-0.12	-0.10	-0.13	-0.09
	(0.21)	(0.24)	(0.13)	(0.14)
N, R-Squared	88, 0.20	88, 0.18	88, 0.06	88, 0.18

Controls Include Average Land

Table 10B examines how inter-village allocations were affected by GS attendance rates within those villages. If we differentiate between villages with high and low attendance rates of the poor (the second column of Table 10B), the inter-village biases become even more sharply evident. Among villages with low attendance rates, those with more landless or SC households received significantly fewer benefits. In addition, villages with greater inequality in education were favored. These biases were substantially smaller in villages with high GS attendance rates of poor households.

Hence the results indicate that *gram sabha* attendance rates were positively correlated with targeting in favor of landless and SC groups. Could *gram sabha* participation represent one channel by which inequalities in land or social status were associated with poorer targeting? Recall from Table 4 that attendance rates were not significantly associated with land or caste at the household level. Table 11 examines how attendance and participation rates were correlated with village characteristics (across villages). Villages with a higher incidence of landlessness and ST status exhibited lower attendance rates, irrespective of whether we control for district fixed

effects. Controlling for this, land or education inequality was not significantly associated with attendance rates.

In summary, *gram sabha* attendance rates were correlated with measures of targeting to vulnerable sections of the population. They were also negatively correlated with landlessness and incidence of ST households. Hence *gram sabha* participation represented one possible channel by which inequality in land and in social status translated into lower accountability of *panchayat* officials to the landless and SC/ST groups.

5. VOTING PATTERNS

We now analyze voting patterns across different political parties in the secret ballot we administered at the end of the household survey. Each respondent was asked to select from symbols representing different parties used in elections, and cast the ballot into a sealed box. Ballots were marked by a code number for each respondent and opened later, and recorded in data sheets. A similar procedure has been used in National Election Surveys.

Approximately two thirds of small, marginal and landless households voted in favor of a Left Front party; the remainder voted for either the Indian National Congress (INC) or the Trinamul Congress (TNC). Among medium and large landowning families the proportion voting Left was slightly above 50%, and among the big landowners this proportion dropped below 50%, with a correspondingly higher share for the INC/TNC.

The election statistics for these villages shows that the Left won 57% of votes cast in GP elections in three election years of 1978, 1983 and 1988. This fell subsequently to 55% in 1993 and 49% in 1998. Their share in GP seats varied between 75 and 71% in the first three elections,

falling thereafter to 68% and 56%. These indicate strong dominance of the Left Front, but which was beginning to wane since the early 1990s. A panel regression of GP seat share of the Left in Bardhan and Mookherjee (2005) shows a strong positive incumbency effect (captured by lagged Left seat share), controlling for village land, occupational and caste distribution, apart from variables representing strength of the Left at the district, state and national levels.

Part of the continued domination of the Left Front has been associated with a large loyal base of voters. 45% of respondents reported that they vote the same way as their fathers, while an even higher proportion (67%) reported voting for the same party the last 25 years. The proportion that voted for Left Front parties in our ballot was 65%. Among those voting Left, the proportions of loyal voters were slightly higher than in the entire population: 48% reported voting like their father, and 76% reported having voted consistently for the same party the last 25 years. This implies approximately half of all voters have been loyal to the Left throughout the past quarter century.

Table 12 presents regressions predicting whether a respondent voted for a Left Front party in our ballot, on the basis of number of reported benefits and their timing, apart from various household characteristics. Receipt of benefits is interacted with the seat share of the Left Front in the year that the benefits were received, since the `gratitude' of the voter would be likely to be directed to the party in power in the local government at that time. We separate the role of benefits received by the household in question, from those received by friends or kin, and the proportion of households in the village as a whole that received benefits. We also include help provided by the GP to the household in connection with difficulties faced by the latter in their occupation, and in times of disturbances or personal emergency. The precise year that such benefits were provided was not recorded, so these are interacted with the average Left share over the entire period 1978-2004, to indicate the support among voters that such forms of personal help may have generated

for the Left Front. The regression also controls for various indicators of personal economic improvement for the period 1978-2005, all of which are interacted with the average Left share: percentage change in incomes, changes in type of housing (from *kuccha* to *pucca)* and in the number of rooms, and changes in agricultural land owned.

The regressions show the number of personal benefits received from Left-dominated GPs was significantly related to the likelihood of voting for the Left. This is true within as well as across villages; the coefficient changes little with the incorporation of village fixed effects. Higher benefits received by the village as a whole or by friends and family did not matter, controlling for own-benefits. The second notable result is the importance of help received from the GP in connection with ones' occupation (within the village) and in times of personal difficulty (across villages). Third, changes in personal economic circumstances measured by income or housing were not significant, but changes in agricultural land were. Those whose landownership increased (resp. decreased) at times when the GP was dominated by the Left, were more inclined to vote in favor of the Left. Apart from these factors, support for the Left was negatively related to land and education status, and positively related to SC/ST status. Age, gender and immigrant status *per se* did not matter. Agricultural occupations were significant only in the regression without village fixed effects, implying that this was a relevant community rather than household characteristic: regions relying more on agricultural occupations were characterized by greater support for the Left.

TABLE 12: Logistic Regressions for Left Vote Dummy on Number of Benefits Received (1998_2003), Improvement in Standard of Living and GP help

	No. of Benefits	No. of Benefits (with Village Fixed Effects)
Personal benefits *left share[1]	0.153**	0.147*
	(0.071)	(0.079)
Acquaintance Benefits* left share	-0.060	-0.084
	(0.042)	(0.055)
Propn of vill benefits*left share	0.059	
	(0.278)	
GP help with occupation * left share	0.167	0.441**
	(0.161)	(0.185)
GP help in disturbances * left share	0.377***	0.260
	(0.132)	(0.158)
Improvement in income over 1978-2004*average left share[2]	0.014	0.020
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Improvement in # of rooms in the house over 1978-2004 * left share	0.035	0.082
	(0.078)	(0.091)
Improvement in house type over 1978-2004 * average left share	0.120	0.118
	(0.184)	(0.201)
Increase in agricultural land 1978-2004 * average left share	0.054**	0.096***
	(0.023)	(0.028)
Agricultural land	-0.079***	-0.137***
	(0.026)	(0.031)
Other land	-0.194**	-0.150*
	(0.088)	(0.091)
Education	-0.034**	-0.028
	(0.015)	(0.017)
ST	0.895**	0.999**
	(0.349)	(0.488)
SC	0.398***	0.408***
	(0.122)	(0.144)
Agricultural occupation	0.262**	0.014
	(0.117)	(0.135)
Immigrant	0.155	0.170
	(0.139)	(0.151)
Observations	1695	1637

Regressions include gender, age and its square as additional controls

[1] Left Share in the time block that the benefit was received [2] Average Left Share over 1978 to 2004

In order to investigate the interpretation of the preceding results as symptoms of clientelism, Table 13 separates benefits further into two different categories: one-time and recurring benefits. Clientelism involves an implicit *quid pro quo,* an exchange of (recurring) favors for (recurring) political support. The latter category includes IRDP, credit, minikits, employment and relief programs, while the former includes the rest. Some programs are inherently one-time, such as land reform benefits, building of houses, toilets or installation of drinking water taps in the neighborhood. Others are ambiguous, such as road programs. We include roads in the one-time category partly because that seems the more appropriate classification, besides the fact that the one-time category includes programs of a more infrastructural, local public good nature. Besides, we ran the regressions also including roads in the recurring category and found the results largely unchanged.

Table 13 shows that only the recurring benefits received from Left-dominated GPs was associated with higher support for the Left. Moreover, controlling for one's own receipt of recurring benefits, increased recurring benefits received by kin from Left-dominated GPs reduced support for the Left. These results suggest that personalized exchanges of short-term benefits played a significant role in electoral support for the Left --- those aware of benefits received by others rather than oneself from Left-dominated GPs were less inclined to vote for the Left. Moreover, the importance of recurring rather than one-time benefits suggest the importance of an implicit *quid pro quo* between beneficiaries and the party perceived to be dispensing the benefits. They also suggest that electoral accountability pressures would have operated more with regard to distribution of recurring rather than one-time private or local public good benefits.

Table 14 examines association of Left support with other indicators of household well-being, such as whether it lived in a non-permanent (*kuchha)* house, and whether it reported that the food

intake of the household is `insufficient for its needs'. Approximately 11% of the sample reported an insufficient food consumption. The regression also adds dummies for political awareness and participation: whether the head watches political and economic news on TV and radio, whether (s)he attends the *gram sabha*, and speaks up in the *gram sabha* meeting. None of these variables are significant in the regression with village fixed effects, with the exception of the *gram sabha* attendance dummy. The non-permanent home dummy has a significant positive coefficient only in the regression without village fixed effects. Hence there is greater support for the Left in poorer villages, though not within a village across type of house.

Table 15 explores determinants of whether a voter tended to vote consistently for the Left or its opponents across successive elections. We have seen above that almost half of the respondents were Left-secure voters, constituting a secure `vote-bank' for the Left. Columns 3 and 4 present a logit for whether a respondent was a Left-secure voter, Columns 5 and 6 for a secure-non-Left voter, and columns 1 and 2 for whether the household was a secure voter for either Left or non-Left. There is a strong positive association of SC, ST status, and help received from GP in times of disturbance with Left-secure. Conversely, there is a strong negative association of SC/ST with non-Left-secure, and a positive association with land owned. Immigrants were less inclined to be secure voters for either party, or to be secure non-Left supporters. `Swing' voting was more likely among those with more education, land, non-SC, immigrants, and received less help from GPs. Among village attributes relevant in predicting secure Left support, high land inequality and low education spread were negatively correlated. Hence Table 15 shows that the Left was more likely to have a secure vote-bank among poorer, lower caste, less educated sections of the population, and in villages with lower land inequality. This is consistent with explanations for stable support of the Left in terms of vulnerability and lack of education among poor, lower caste sections, and in their reliance on local governments for personal help. In villages with lower land inequality, the Left has been more successful in mobilizing these groups.

TABLE 13: Logit Cross-Household Regressions for Left Vote, with respect to Number of Benefits Received (One time versus Recurring benefits, 1998-2003), Improvement in Standard of Living and GP help

	No Village Fixed Effects	With Village Fixed Effects
No. of personal benefits (One time)*left share	0.066	0.044
	(0.087)	(0.095)
Number of friends/family benefits received (one time)*left share	-0.019	-0.038
	(0.059)	(0.073)
Number of personal benefits received (recurring)*left share	0.468***	0.403**
	(0.152)	(0.165)
Number of friends/family benefits received (recurring)*left share	-0.151	-0.277*
	(0.137)	(0.160)
Proportion of benefits received in the Village*left share	0.099	
	(0.284)	
GP Help with Occupation* average left share	0.132	0.410**
	(0.162)	(0.186)
GP Help during disturbance * average left share	0.396***	0.284*
	(0.132)	(0.159)
Improvement in income over 1978-2004*average left share	0.014	0.020
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Improvement in number of rooms in the house over 1978-2004 * average left share	0.024	0.076
	(0.076)	(0.089)
Improvement in house type over 1978-2004 * average left share	0.136	0.128
	(0.185)	(0.202)
Improvement in agriculture over 1978-2004 * average left share	0.053**	0.093***
	(0.023)	(0.028)
Agricultural land owned	-0.078***	-0.136***
	(0.026)	(0.031)
Other land owned	-0.202**	-0.159*
	(0.088)	(0.091)
Education	-0.037**	-0.030*
	(0.015)	(0.017)
ST	0.916***	0.986**
	(0.349)	(0.485)
SC	0.376***	0.397***
	(0.123)	(0.145)
Agricultural sector occupation	0.255**	-0.003
	(0.117)	(0.135)
Immigrant	0.171	0.172
	(0.140)	(0.152)
Male	-0.036	0.037
	(0.183)	(0.199)
Observations	1695	1637

TABLE 14: Logit Cross-Household Regressions for Left Vote, with respect to Number of Benefits Received (One time versus Recurring benefits, 1998-2003), with added controls for house type, food availability, media exposure, GS attendance and participation

	(1)	(2)
		With VFE
Personal benefits (one time) *left share	0.068	0.070
	(0.082)	(0.090)
Acquaintance Benefits (one time)* left share	-0.032	-0.077
	(0.056)	(0.067)
Personal benefits (recurring) *left share	0.469***	0.404**
	(0.154)	(0.167)
Acquaintance Benefits (recurring)* left share	-0.069	-0.249
	(0.133)	(0.155)
Propn of vill benefits*left share	-0.257	
	(0.272)	
GP help with occupation * left Share	0.196	0.434**
	(0.154)	(0.175)
GP help in disturbances * left Share	0.146	0.059
	(0.126)	(0.150)
House Type (1=kuccha)	0.402***	0.179
	(0.111)	(0.126)
Sufficient Food dummy	0.130	0.114
	(0.187)	(0.210)
GS speech	-0.201	-0.190
	(0.175)	(0.188)
GS attendance	0.386***	0.438***
	(0.120)	(0.131)
TV	-0.003	0.083
	(0.117)	(0.125)
radio	0.145	0.162
	(0.107)	(0.121)
agri_present	-0.075***	-0.122***
	(0.025)	(0.030)
otherland_present	-0.167*	-0.165*
	(0.089)	(0.094)
edumax	-0.010	-0.024
	(0.015)	(0.017)
st	1.146***	1.214***
	(0.319)	(0.408)
sc	0.537***	0.524***
	(0.115)	(0.135)
does respondent work in the agricultural sector?	0.109	-0.045
	(0.109)	(0.123)

Is the respondent an Immigrant into the village?	0.222*	0.285**
	(0.122)	(0.132)
male	-0.261	-0.188
	(0.172)	(0.185)
Constant	0.584	
	(0.614)	
Observations	2002	1944

Standard errors in parentheses
* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 15: Logit Regressions for Secure, Left-Secure and Non-Left-Secure Voter Dummies on Household and Village characteristics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Secure Voter	Secure Voter (VFE)	Left Secure Voter	Left Secure Voter (VFE)	Non Left Secure Voter	Non Left Secure Voter (VFE)
Age	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age Squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Male	-0.31*	-0.28	-0.16	-0.10	-0.15	-0.14
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Edumax	-0.02*	-0.02*	-0.03**	-0.03**	0.01	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
St	0.25	0.28	0.80***	0.94***	-1.15**	-1.30***
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.29)	(0.31)	(0.45)	(0.47)
Sc	0.25**	0.26**	0.44***	0.47***	-0.38**	-0.39***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Occupation Agr.	-0.08	-0.07	0.11	0.07	-0.23*	-0.16
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Immigrant	-0.26**	-0.28**	0.04	0.08	-0.48***	-0.56***
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.16)
Panchayat help in Disturbance	0.17*	0.25**	0.24**	0.31***	-0.12	-0.11
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Panchayat help in Income	0.01	0.07	0.07	0.27**	-0.11	-0.32**
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.16)
Other Land	-0.14*	-0.17**	-0.06	-0.07	-0.13	-0.16
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Agricultural Land	-0.07***	-0.07***	-0.15***	-0.15***	0.08***	0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
land gini	-2.14***		-1.73***		-0.28	
	(0.49)		(0.45)		(0.55)	
education gini	-0.96		-1.24		0.52	
	(0.96)		(0.88)		(1.10)	
Propn educated	-0.16***		-0.12**		-0.05	
	(0.06)		(0.05)		(0.07)	
propn sc	0.10		0.16		-0.10	
	(0.25)		(0.23)		(0.29)	
propn st	1.25*		0.41		0.82	
	(0.70)		(0.57)		(0.66)	
Constant	4.53***		2.99***		-1.04	
	(1.10)		(1.01)		(1.25)	
Observations	2215	2189	2215	2208	2215	2110

6. SUMMARY

Our results can be summarized as follows. West Bengal villages are characterized by high levels of reported political participation: 50% households attend political meetings, 25% participate in political campaigns, 70% contribute to political campaigns, 37% attend gram sabha meetings, 11% ask questions at these meetings. By comparison, in Karnataka districts studied by Crook and Manor (1998), 23% were involved in campaigns, 17% attended gram sabhas, and 6.5% asked questions. So reported participation rates are higher in West Bengal on many dimensions. Moreover, one third of West Bengal households report watching political and economic news on the TV and on radio. 40% obtain news about activities of the GPs from the GP directly, indicating a high level of personal contact.

With the exception of education, gender and immigrant status, reported participation rates vary remarkably little with socio-economic status. Weaker sections of the population, defined by land or caste status, participate at rates similar to those of the remaining population, and have access to similar information channels. There is negligible evidence of exclusion or marginalization of these sections from the local political process.[8] The importance of education in predicting political participation suggests the possible role of education policy in strengthening local democracy. Of course, this is only suggestive as it is based on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal evidence: it is equally possible that it reflects unobserved traits that correlate with both education and political participation.

[8] The only exception was with regard to voter registration, where landownership was positively correlated with the likelihood of being registered, and 12% of landless were not registered.

95% households reported absence of disturbances or irregularities in local elections. 99% of those registered turned out to vote, and almost no voters reported failure to cast their vote owing to disturbances. This compares favorably with the Karnataka districts studied by Crook and Manor, where 95% reported believing elections were fair.

The allocation of benefits within villages displayed almost no association with wealth, caste, education or gender of household head. Nor was there any evidence of exclusion of those supporting the rival of the locally dominant party. There is no evidence that GPs dominated by either Left or non-Left party discriminated on the basis of political partisanship: secure voters for either party and swing voters did not receive significantly different benefits, controlling for their individual characteristics. The only exception was a positive association between attendance in *gram sabhas* and benefits received. There was also some tendency for villages with greater land inequality to allocate fewer benefits to SC/ST groups. Across villages, there was evidence of targeting biases against landless and low caste households. The contrast of intra-village targeting with inter-village targeting is striking, matching findings of Bardhan and Mookherjee (2004, 2006) based on different datasets. The high level of intra-village targeting to vulnerable socio-economic groups and lack of political partisanship most likely reflects a high level of accountability of the lowest rung of local government officials to the local community. In turn this seems related to the high and even rates of political participation and awareness of different socio-economic groups in the activities of the local GP and *gram sabha* meetings. This is encouraging news for decentralization advocates: governments at the lowest layer seemed less prone to `capture' by local socio-economic elites than were governments at upper levels.

With regard to voting patterns, we found electoral support for incumbent parties among households was related to the benefits they received from GPs dominated by the incumbent in the past. This is unlikely to reflect voter gratitude *per se*, because it pertained only to recurring

benefits such as credit, minikits, employment or relief payments, and help received from the GP in times of personal need. One-time benefits from road, water projects or from the land reforms were not associated with electoral support. This is suggestive of personalized relationships with political parties as a source of ensuring continued political support. On the other hand, as explained above, there is no evidence that these benefits were concentrated narrowly to favor particular groups within the village, which provides evidence against clientelism as the dominant source of the support for the Left. Finally, one reason for the continued political success of the Left in rural West Bengal is the existence of a large fraction of committed Left supporters, almost one half of the total population. With such a secure vote base, the ability of the Left to garner majority control of GPs requires attracting a fraction of the swing voters that constitute one-third of the voters.

Secure support for the Left was concentrated among SC and ST groups, those with less land and education, and those relying on support from GPs in times of personal emergency. This fact can also be viewed in different ways. Supporters of the Left Front could argue that the political durability of the Left owes to the support it has provided to poor and more vulnerable sections of the rural population. Critics could interpret the same facts as implying that continued political dominance of the Left will require perpetuation of vulnerability of these groups.[9] In either case, the results indicate some causes for the increasingly contested nature of local government elections over the past decade lie in the decline in agricultural occupations, reduced economic vulnerability and rising levels of education and aspirations among the poor.

[9] Even the latter statement needs to be qualified by the fact that increases in agricultural land over time in Left-dominated villages by a given household translated into a greater likelihood of voting for the Left. In contrast, cross-sectional variations of voting patterns indicate a general tendency for wealthier, better educated people to vote against the Left.

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