

PROPOSAL: POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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The failure of elected governments to implement appropriate policies is widely considered to be an important reason for the absence of sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in many parts of the world. However, our understanding of how economic development affects, and is affected by, the functioning of political institutions remains limited. This study will use a combination of survey, and district-level, data for India to examine how politics works in a low income country, and its implications for policy-making. The first project examines the evolution of political corruption in India. We conducted a survey about the political record of over 600 politicians in Uttar Pradesh last summer. We are now combining these data with information on economic and political outcomes in their constituencies, and over the summer plan to analyze the relationship between economic development and/or political competition and the extent of political corruption. The second project examines how the conduct of village meetings can affect local governance. We have recorded over 200 village meetings across India, and are currently having these recordings transcribed. Over the summer we will use language software to code these data, and then examine how differences in who participates in village meetings and who presides over these meetings affect the conduct of these meetings, and decision-making over the distribution of public goods.

The research assistant's tasks would involve some data cleaning and programming. It will be essential that the student has working knowledge of Excel and STATA. He/she will learn how to use datasets for research analysis, and get acquainted with how fieldwork is done in developing countries. He/she will also have the opportunity to work on managing ongoing surveys in India.

SUMMARY

Sarah Goff, Class of 2006

I worked with Professor Pande on a project about political participation in Indian villages. There are two hundred transcripts of village meetings, in which there is information about attendance, seating arrangements, the local authorities' (called the "panchayat") respective genders and parties, and about what is said over the course of the meetings. The research emphasizes the impact of a policy to reserve the seat of the main leader, known as the "sarpanch," to female politicians; in addition, the project requires attention to the accusations of corruption and other complaints filed by the villagers during the meetings.

My responsibilities have been varied, allowing me to get a sense of each step of the research process. To begin with, I coded the transcripts: this meant that I would read them and provide information about them in numeric form, such as the number and type of issues discussed and the identities of those who participated in discussions. I found this quite challenging, especially due to the inevitable problems of data collection in developing countries, which in this case consisted largely of translation difficulties. I was also impressed with the importance of careful research design, realizing that if one of the later transcripts illustrated the need for a different question, this would be impossible to retrieve from transcripts already read and coded.

I was also involved in analysis of the results, partially using variables and analysis already performed by Lori, the graduate student with whom I worked, and partially designing my own analysis. I became much more familiar with STATA over the course of the summer, even learning for the first time to program command files for frequent use. Over the course of the year, I will keep working on the project with Professor Pande and will hopefully continue learning new skills.