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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Office Contact Information

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Undergraduate Studies:

BSc Econometrics & Mathematical Economics, LSE, 2011 (1st class honours)

Graduate Studies:

PhD in Political Economy and Government (Economics track), Harvard University, 2019 (expected)
Thesis Title: “*Essays on Development Economics*”

References:

Professor Rohini Pande
Harvard University
rohini.pande@harvard.edu

Professor Michael Kremer
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Professor Abhijit Banerjee
MIT
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Professor Emily Breza
Harvard University
ebreza@fas.harvard.edu

Professor Andrei Shleifer
Harvard University
shleifer@fas.harvard.edu

Teaching and Research Fields:

Primary field: Development Economics
Secondary field: Political Economy, Labour Economics

Research Papers:

“*Like Father, Like Son? The Effect of Political Dynasties on Economic Development*”
(with Dominic Ponattu, [Job Market Paper](#))

Politics remains an exceptionally dynastic occupation in democratic societies, even though many countries democratised to end hereditary rule. This paper studies the economic effects of dynastic politics in India, focusing on the different effects of dynastic founders and descendants. We compile detailed biographical data on all Indian legislators since 1862, and present three results using three different identification strategies. First, using a close elections regression discontinuity design, we find that dynastic descendants reduce earnings, asset ownership and public good provision of the villages they represent. Redistricting provides variation in how many votes descendants “inherit” from their predecessors each election. We find that inheriting votes dampens incentives to exert effort, and the resulting moral hazard explains a significant portion of descendant underperformance. Second, we show that the incentive to establish a dynasty motivates politicians to perform better. Redistricting allows us to identify villages that were exogenously exposed to founders but not descendants. Using this variation, we find that dynastic founders reduce poverty and improve public good provision in the villages they represent. Moreover, consistent with bequest motives, politicians with a son are twice as likely to establish a dynasty and exert more effort while in office. Third, we identify the overall effects of a dynastic political environment using an instrumental variables strategy based on the gender composition of past incumbents' children. Dynastic politics has negative economic effects and results in a “reversal of fortune” development pattern, consistent with positive founder and negative descendant effects. A simple overlapping generations model with heritable human and political capital explains these three empirical facts.

Taking the Path Less Travelled? Long-run Impacts of Vocational Secondary Education
(with Afiqah Suhaiemi)

In many countries, students are assigned to different educational tracks early in life. This paper studies the long-run impacts of vocational secondary education using a natural experiment in Singapore. Students are assigned to tracks in secondary school based on a cutoff score in the nationwide Primary School Leaving Examination. Using a fuzzy regression discontinuity design and social security administrative data, we find that students assigned to the vocational track are more likely to complete secondary school (3pp) and attain a post-secondary (usually vocational) qualification (9pp), but less likely to attain a university degree (3pp). Attending the vocational track has no average effect on later-life employment, earnings or wealth, because positive effects on some students balance negative effects on others. Despite evidence that some students benefit substantially from attending the vocational track, nearly all students given the choice opt for the academic track. These patterns are consistent with a simple theory where individuals have different learning styles and there is social stigma against the vocational track.

“Texting Criminal Politicians Out of Office: Experimental Evidence from India”

(with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar and Yusuf Neggers)

Adverse selection to political office is now a salient concern in some mature democracies, but it is commonplace in the developing world. In India, 9% of legislators face charges for murder, kidnapping, rape or armed robbery. Using a field experiment around the Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections, we test the theory that criminal politicians get elected because voters lack information to screen candidates and coordinate on good candidates. We partnered with 3 telecom providers and ran a voter information campaign involving over 600,000 voters. Voters in treated villages received a voice call and text message informing them about the criminal charges of all candidates in their constituency. Our campaign caused *clean candidates* to receive 6pp *more votes* and the most *violent criminal candidates* (ie. murderers) to receive 7.7pp *fewer votes*. Effects were strongest for the *coordination* treatment arm, in which individuals were informed that many other voters had also received the message. The results suggest that voter frictions such as information asymmetry and coordination failure may cause bad political equilibria to persist.

“Debiasing Discriminators: Evidence from the Introduction of Neutral Referees in Cricket”

(with Nilesh Fernando)

Evaluators display significant in-group bias in many contexts. This paper shows that evaluators are less biased in the presence of a neutral colleague. We compile data on all international cricket since 1893, and analyse a series of reforms that introduced neutral umpires in international cricket matches. We present four results. First, prior to the reforms, both on-field umpires shared the nationality of the home team and make 9pp more discretionary calls against the foreign team. Requiring one of the two on-field umpires to be from a neutral country eliminates this bias. Second, half of this bias reduction is due to home umpires being less partial toward their team when paired with a neutral umpire. The de-biasing effects of neutral umpires are largest when an experienced neutral umpire is paired with an inexperienced home umpire. Third, we find, consistent with this, that a further reform requiring both on-field umpires to be from a neutral country had no additional bias reduction effect. Fourth, a “career concerns” reform that introduced TV referees and match executives to monitor and assess on-field umpires has no effect on bias. Collectively, these results suggest that social pressure from colleagues can discipline discriminators.

Work in Progress

What Happened to Midnight’s Children? Long-run Impacts of Accepting Refugees from India’s Partition (with Kathryn Nicholson)

Refugee policy is a contentious issue in many countries. Yet there remains little empirical evidence on the long-run economic impacts of accepting refugees. We examine this question by analysing refugee resettlement during the Partition of India in 1947, one of the largest population displacements of the twentieth century. Using rich data on migration flows and the location of refugee camps, we document that districts which had a Partition-era refugee camp are more industrialised today: they have more manufacturing firms, a higher share of employment in manufacturing industries, and a lower share of employment in agriculture. An instrumental variables strategy exploiting distance from the border and historical railway lines suggests a causal interpretation.

Breaking The Curse of Cash: The Effect of Demonetisation on Corruption in India

Uber for Farm Equipment: The Effect of Rental Technology on Agricultural Productivity (w/ Wyatt Brooks & Nilesh Fernando)

Who should hold the purse strings? Empirical evidence on fiscal decentralisation from Indian budgets
(with Kapil Patidar)

Policy Writing

[*Transforming the Fight Against Poverty in India*](#) (with Arvind Subramanian), *New York Times*

[*Clearing the Air on Cash Transfers in India*](#) (with Arvind Subramanian), *Financial Express*

Teaching Experience:

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| 2017 | Development Economics (undergraduate), Prof Emily Breza |
| 2014 | Development Economics (graduate, Harvard Kennedy School),
Prof Asim Khwaja, Rohini Pande & Lant Pritchett |
| 2014 | Immigration Economics (undergraduate), Prof George Borjas |
| 2013 | Political Corruption (undergraduate), Profs James Alt & Daniel Ziblatt |

Research Experience and Other Employment:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 2015-16 | Economist, Office of Chief Economic Adviser (Arvind Subramanian), Ministry of Finance, Govt of India |
| 2014- | Co-founder, SeeHow (sports tech/IoT startup that has developed a smart cricket ball, cricket's first consumer hardware product) |
| 2011-12 | Economist, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Govt of Singapore |

Professional Activities

Referee: *Quarterly Journal of Economics, Review of Economics and Statistics, American Political Science Review*

Presentations:

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|------|---|
| 2018 | Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics (World Bank), Trans-Atlantic Doctoral Conference (LBS), Evidence-Based Economics meeting (Munich), American Political Science Association annual meeting, Political Economy lunch (MIT), Northeast Universities Development Conference (Cornell), Harvard University (econ) |
| 2017 | Harvard University (econ), Northeast Universities Development Conference (Tufts) |
| 2016 | Harvard University (econ), Midwest Political Science Association annual meeting |

Research Grants

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| 2018 | International Growth Centre grant, <i>The economic effects of political dynasties</i> \$11,000 |
| 2017 | LEAP, <i>Texting bad politicians out of office</i> (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggars) \$9,230 |
| 2017 | Watson Institute, <i>Texting bad politicians out of office</i> (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggars) \$5,000 |
| 2017 | Warburg Fund, <i>How do political dynasties affect economic development?</i> (with Dominic Ponattu) \$3,000 |
| 2017 | Economics Department Fall Research Grant, <i>Vocational education in Singapore</i> \$700 |
| 2016 | LEAP, <i>How do political dynasties affect economic development?</i> (with Dominic Ponattu) \$4,570 |
| 2016 | Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative, <i>Time vs State in Insurance</i> (with Lorenzo Casaburi, Bheeshm Chaudhary, Jack Willis) \$29,789 |
| 2016 | Institute of Quantitative Social Science, <i>Lobbyist Networks</i> (with Andrea Passalacqua) \$3,000 |
| 2016 | Warburg Fund, <i>Uber for farm equipment</i> (with Sharan Mamidipudi) \$3,800 |

- 2015 J-PAL Governance Initiative, *Texting bad politicians out of office* (with Sarika Gupta, Manoj Kumar, Yusuf Neggars) \$48,875
- 2015 Weiss Fund, *Time vs State in Insurance* (with Lorenzo Casaburi, Bheeshm Chaudhary, Jack Willis) \$31,600

Languages

English (native), German, Stata, R