

Ahana Basistha

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Education

Ph.D. Economics, Economics and Planning Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi (Expected 2023).

Thesis advisor: Prof. Farzana Afridi

M.A. Economics, Delhi School of Economics, India, 2015.

B.Sc. Economics, Presidency College, University of Calcutta, India, 2013.

Research Fields

Political Economy, Corruption, Public Service Delivery

Working Papers

[Do Crises Affect Citizen Activism? Evidence from a Pandemic](#) (Joint work with Farzana Afridi, Amrita Dhillon and Danila Serra)

Media coverage: [The Wire](#)

Abstract: Do critical junctures drive citizens' motivation to fight corruption? We elicit perceptions about corruption in the health sector and the willingness to act against it in an online survey, conducted with nearly 900 men during the height of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India between March and July 2021. We assess how these measures changed with the severity of the pandemic during this period, using both incentivized and non-incentivized measures of citizen activism. We find a significant surge in the proportion of respondents agreeing to participate in protests after the COVID-19 peak, as well as in the willingness to take anti-corruption actions. Furthermore, we observe a substantial increase in subjects' perception of corruption and their level of information on citizen rights and entitlements during the same period. The evidence, therefore, suggests that the second wave of the pandemic not only acted as a focal point leading to greater willingness to act, but it also increased the probability of citizens taking an anti-corruption action.

[Information, Beliefs and Citizen Activism: An Experiment](#) (Joint work with Farzana Afridi, Amrita Dhillon and Danila Serra)

Abstract: Citizens' effective participation in the fight against corruption faces informational constraints and collective action problems. We conduct an online survey experiment in India to test how increasing information about corrupt practices in the health sector and correcting beliefs about others' willingness to fight corruption affect individuals' anti-corruption activism. In one treatment, we expose subjects to a short informational video, aimed at generating awareness on how corruption and fraud took place in hospitals in India during the pandemic. In another treatment, we correct individuals' misaligned

beliefs about others' willingness to stand up against health sector corruption. In a third treatment, we combine the video and the belief correction interventions. We assess individuals' willingness to engage in anti-corruption actions that differ in their expected costs and benefits, and the extent to which they are subject to collective action problems. In particular, we experimentally manipulate whether subjects are given the chance to: 1) sign a petition to the Ministry of Health, 2) make a monetary donation to a local non-profit organization, 3) watch a 5-minute informational video on how to concretely fight corruption in health, or 4) choose among the three anti-corruption actions.

Electoral Cycles in Road Building: Evidence from India (Joint work with Amrita Dhillon and Arka Roy Chaudhuri)

Abstract: This paper analyzes the existence of electoral cycles in infrastructure provision in the context of a large rural road building program in India. We use data covering 150,000 roads over a decade to demonstrate an increase in road building activity before state elections. These electoral cycles in rural road building do not translate into efficiency losses in terms of quality, cost or delay. However, we find evidence that politicians build roads with a lower stipulated construction time before elections. In line with our model's predictions, we also find that electoral constituencies with a larger share of uninformed voters as measured by the fraction of illiterate population display larger electoral cycles.

Works in Progress

Extension to "Information, Beliefs and Citizen Activism: An Experiment" [In progress] - Currently collecting data from a new sample, with the aim of quantifying the costs and benefits, including the collective action components, of the three forms of activism investigated in this paper (Petition, Donation, and Video).

Preliminary stage (design): *"Urban Sanitation in India: An Experiment" [working title]* (Joint work with Vishal Narayan, Nishith Prakash and Raisa Sherif)

Grants

Planning and Policy Research Unit (PPRU) research grant 870 CE, "Public good provision and political competition" 2019, INR 464,200, (Co-Principal Investigator)

Conferences and Invited Seminar Presentations

Winter School 2022, organized by Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics and The Econometric Society, Delhi 2022 (forthcoming)

17th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development organized by Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi 2022 (forthcoming)

Behavioral Research in Economics Workshop, India sponsored by Society for Advancement in Behavioral Economics (SABE), 2022 (forthcoming)

100 Years of Economic Development organized by Cornell University, 2022

Symposium on Economic Experiments in Developing Countries (SEEDC) organized virtually by FAIR at the Norwegian School of Economics and the Department of Economics at the Monash Business School, 2021

Indian Democracy at Work: Money Power in Politics; a workshop organised by Indian School of Business, University of Hyderabad and Foundation for Democratic Reforms, 2020

Awards and Fellowships

Senior Research Fellowship (SRF), Indian Statistical Institute, 2018-present

Junior Research Fellowship (JRF), Indian Statistical Institute, 2016-2018

Teaching Experience

Teaching assistant in Selected Topics III (Instructor: Dr. Megha Patnaik, Jan - Jun 2019)

Teaching assistant in Econometric Methods II (Instructor: Dr. Arka Roy Chaudhuri, Jul - Dec 2018)

Teaching assistant in Introduction to Financial Economics (Instructor: Dr. Renuka Sane, Jul - Dec 2017)

Fields

Political Economy, Corruption, Public Service Delivery, Econometrics, Statistics

Software Used

proficient in STATA, MS-Office Suite, L^AT_EX, Qualtrics

working knowledge in QGIS software

basic knowledge of R

Languages

fluent in English, working proficiency in Hindi, native proficiency in Bengali

References

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