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Power to the Parents? Representation and Interest Aggregation in Delhi*

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Scholars and policymakers have increasingly relied on reforms that decentralize power to lower-levels of government to improve democratic representation. These reforms assume that decentralization will empower previously excluded groups and better align preferences to outcomes. We study one such reform in the city of Delhi that decentralized discretionary funds to elected bodies of parents. Motivated by three normative measures of representation, we ask if these reforms were representative of citizen preferences. We trace the full representative pathway from the selection of representatives to outcomes using two household surveys and embedded conjoint experiments, administrative data of all school-level expenditure across 52 schools in Delhi, and a natural experiment using a close election regression discontinuity design. We find that there is little *substantive* representation and outcomes are significantly different from the expressed preferences of citizens. Education is the strongest predictor of alignment between citizen preferences and expenditures. There are also low levels of descriptive representation, with citizens reporting preferences for representatives significantly different than their own identities and electing representatives that match those preferences. Finally, we find high-levels of trustee representation. Leveraging a conjoint experiment, we find citizens demand representatives that are better educated than they are, and who have the capacity to navigate administrative structures. When voting, they also act on these preferences. For policy, the paper provides evidence on where decentralization reforms fall short, and encourages scholars to broaden how we think of democratic representation at the local level given how decentralization may deviate from normative ideals.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars and policymakers have increasingly relied on reforms that decentralize power to lowerlevels of government to improve democratic representation (Casey, 2018). These reforms assume that decentralization will successfully transfer power to lower levels of government (Falleti, 2010), empower previously excluded groups (Brulé, 2020), and better align preferences to outcomes (Casey, 2018).

Implicitly, these reforms are motivated by normative theories of democratic representation, namely that decision-making bodies should be *descriptively* representative and reflect constituents on key markers of identity (Mansbridge, 1999; Pitkin, 1967), and that outcomes should be *substantively* representative and reflect the preferences of constituents over the distribution of public goods (Mansbridge, 2003). Arguments for each often go beyond merely making a case for a single form of representation and argue that descriptive representation can *lead to* substantive representation (Mansbridge, 1999; Chauchard, 2014; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Brulé, 2020).

This paper studies one case of decentralization in a large metropolis in India. We study a series of reforms in the city of Delhi that decentralized the administration of discretionary school-level budgets to elected bodies of parents. Specifically, in 2015, the Government of Delhi instituted elections for School Management Committees (SMCs), bodies of 12 parents and four members of the school, local community, and low-level bureaucracy. SMCs are theoretically supposed to represent the interests of parents and make decisions on how school budgets should be spent. In 2019, the Government increased the discretionary budgets of all schools by approximately twenty percent. In this paper, we ask if the types of representatives reflect the larger body of parents they are tasked with representing on a number of descriptive and substantive forms of representation.

We rely on two household surveys – one of 1985 parents who send their children to 52 government schools in Delhi, and one of 613 SMC members, 104 parents who ran for the SMC but were not elected, 100 teachers, and 89 political representatives in the same schools. We collect detailed data on the identity of parents, representatives, and school officials on a broad range of ascriptive and material indicators, as well as substantive preferences on how budgets should be spent. We also collected administrative data of all school-level expenditure across 52 schools, and a natural experiment using a close election regression discontinuity design.

We first document the entire chain of preferences over how resources should be spent and identify where along this chain representation breaks down. We find that it breaks down at the very beginning: representatives are not descriptively representative of constituents, and the preferences of constituents diverge significantly from outcomes and preferences of representatives. This is not necessarily a failure of representation. Constituents have preferences for representatives substantially different to them on socioeconomic lines – education is the strongest predictor of what parents demand in a representative. When given the opportunity to elect representatives, constituents act on these preferences. They elect representatives that are wealthier and more educated and are also of higher caste status. Next, representatives do not see their preferences met in budgetary expenditures. Finally, we adjudicate between competing explanations as to why substantive representation breaks down so early. Substantive representation could break down because of elite capture, low information among some citizens, or because citizens actually value a different form of representation. We find strongest support for citizens valuing a different form of representation.

We argue that the two traditional arguments for why representation fails — elite capture and low information — do not adequately explain this case, and it is actually because citizens value a different form of representation, what political theorists have called "delegated representation," (Burke, 1889). Semi-structured interviews with parents suggest they think of representatives as "trustees", tasked with managing public goods in the best way on behalf of the larger parent body.

On their face, these findings violate much of what the literature in political science considers normatively "good" representation. As representatives neither look like their constituents or advocate for their constituents demands, the reforms may appear to have failed. In our discussion, we provide two tentative reasons why these reforms may not appear anti or less than democratic. First, in contexts of deep inequality participatory reforms may appear as if they have failed in the first stage of the reform (Falleti, 2010), while they may require multiple rounds for reforms to take root and become institutionalized (Aiyar, 2024). Second, in contexts with low saliency, high-costs to participation, and informational asymmetries, delegated or trustee representation helps otherwise distracted citizens solve the representation problem. In this instance, citizens may look to their representatives to provide a bridge between citizens and the state (Manor and Crook, 1998; Manor, 2000; Chatterjee, 2004). We conclude by suggesting that scholarship on decentralization and representation require broader paradigms than those traditionally employed.

Our findings have important implications for policy and theory around decentralization policies. The predominant rationale for these types of policies is that they allow for better substantive representation of local interests. To better align these, policymakers have advocated for elections and various forms of quotas to ensure better representation. Conceptualizing representation as either descriptive or substantive, we see no evidence that parents demand that their representatives descriptively represent them: they both state that they want representatives of higher status than them, and when given the opportunity to select representatives, select representatives that are of higher status than them. In terms of substantive representation, however, elections bring the preferences of constituents both closer in line with those of representatives, and those representatives also do a better job of ensuring that actual budgetary expenditures match their preferences. Instead, the evidence in this paper suggests we need to broaden how we conceive of representation beyond merely descriptive and substantive representation, and incorporate the full range of potential demands citizens have of their representatives.

We also provide evidence on the impacts of decentralization programs from a new context: one of the world's largest, and India's second largest city in terms of population. For India specifically, much attention has been paid to decentralization in rural areas, particularly in India after the 73rd constitutional amendment that devolved many administrative and political powers to panchayats. Most work concentrated on decentralization in rural areas where relationships along lines of caste, gender, and wealth inequality are likely to be radically different in cities. Far less has been written about urban areas in India, and those of other low- and middle-income countries. ¹ We study conflict over service provision to a diverse group of urban citizens. Education is a rare service in which diverse citizens come into close contact, and conflict, over how to best provide a service.

Finally, much work on education in comparative politics has focused on the "inward conquest" of populations (Ansell and Lindvall, 2020; Paglayan, 2021). Most education provision today, however, follows a different logic, not of control, but of redistribution, looking to reduce inequalities of opportunity. While conflicts between citizens and the state still exist, conflicts over education are as much *between* groups of citizens as they are between citizens and the state. Education is a service that brings citizens from different backgrounds into close proximity and conflict over how resources should be distributed within schools. Moreover, as the reforms studied here took place in a large urban area, patterns of urbanization and development do not allow for segregation and homogenization in schools. As our data shows, the children of long-term urban residents share classrooms and playgrounds with the children of newly arrived migrants from rural areas, in an intermingling of class, religion, and identity. This intermingling raises questions of how to best represent the interests of body, and whose interests are best represented. Much of the evidence we have on service provision and claim-making in urban areas is within geographically circumscribed areas (Auerbach,

¹For some notable exceptions that we discuss further below, see Auerbach (2016); Auerbach and Thachil (2017), Auerbach (2017); Auerbach and Thachil (2018), Bertorelli et al. (2017), Post (2018), and Rains, Krishna and Wibbels (2019).

2016; Auerbach and Thachil, 2017; Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner, 2020; Bertorelli et al., 2017; Post, 2018; Rains, Krishna and Wibbels, 2019), yet one of the promises of urbanization is that it will bring diverse groups of people together in the same space.

DECENTRALIZATION AND REPRESENTATION

The decentralization of administrative, fiscal, and political responsibilities to lower level administrative units, and community-driven development (CDD) and participatory governance reforms have increased over the last three decades with the intention of improving local public goods provision (Heller, 2001; Casey, 2018).² By bringing government closer to the people (in the case of decentralization) or giving beneficiaries a greater say in how public goods are distributed (in the case of CDD programs), public goods provision is supposed to be more responsive to local needs and better reflect the demands of beneficiaries. At the same time, there is concern that decentralization and CDD programs can result in elite capture as elites are best able to mobilize and capture the benefits of decentralization (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2000).

Questions about whether decentralization and CDD programs are subject to elite capture are ultimately concerned with issues of representation. Elite capture implicitly suggests that either the positions of power have been captured by elites or the final distribution of public goods favor elites. To understand whether local politics have been captured, however, we need to first ask whose interests are represented and how interests are aggregated from individuals to the final distribution of public goods.

Decentralization represents the process of shifting the locus of responsibility for the administration of service provision, either the collection of local revenues or expenditure of revenues transferred from higher level administrative units, or the competitive selection of representatives at lower-level administrative units (Falleti, 2010). Positive accounts of decentralization suggest that by bringing the administrative of service provision closer to the people, public goods will more closely reflect the preferences of eventual recipients, or be better able to respond to changing demands or needs. Fiscal decentralization is presumed to increase accountability of expenditures as how revenue is raised or budgets spent are more visible to end users. Finally, political decentralization should hold local level representatives more accountable as they are directly elected by their constituents.

²Reforms of this nature have variously been called community-driven development (Casey, 2018), participatory governance (Abers, 2000), and representative democracy (Heinze, Brulé and Chauchard, 2025) among others. We rely on the shorthand CDD through the remainder of this paper.

Normative theories of representation suggest a number of ways of thinking about representation that we call Hobbesian, descriptive, and Burkian, with different empirical implications that follow. Pitkin (1967) has argued that Hobbesian representation suggests that representatives "act for" rather than "stand for" constituents. Pitkin views this conception of representation as profoundly undemocratic, as representatives do not take the preferences of their constituents into account when deciding how to act. Empirically, we would observe this form of representation if the preferences of representatives diverged substantially from the preferences of their constituents.

Turning to descriptive representation, Mansbridge (1999) makes a case for descriptive representation on four grounds: that in-group members would better internalize the preferences of their group members (see also Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004)), that there would be better channels of communication between in-group members (see also Munshi and Rosenzweig (2015) and Munshi (2019)), that representation by previously discriminated groups would serve to create perceptions that they could rule (see also Chauchard (2014)), and finally that they increase the legitimacy of the representative body (see also Parthasarathy, Rao and Palaniswamy (2019), Rao and Sanyal (2010), Rao (2019), and Rao and Sanyal (2019)). For Mansbridge (1999), however, in three of the four arguments for descriptive representation, this only matters in as much as representatives then accurately reflect the preferences of their constituents, setting a higher bar than whether representatives *look* like their constituents. For descriptive representation to be defensible, representatives should also channel bottom-up demands accurately and be *substantively* representative of their constituents.

Finally, a far less common form of representation discussed in academic and policy conversations is that of "trusteeship". Dismissed as anti-democratic, Edmund Burke (1889) has argued that representatives serve as "trustees" of the interests of constituents, doing what is best for the community without necessarily representing the interests of the community. Hill and Huber study how an individual's preferences for roll call votes change once they are given information on what their representatives support. When constituents are provided with this information, their preferences begin to align more closely with those of their legislators. This suggests a process of "Burkian" representation: representatives have more time to invest in understanding what the problems are of their community and will naturally have different preferences than their constituents as a result. While we should not expect parents and SMC members to hold similar preferences as parents are not as informed on the problems of their schools as their representatives, the context is not analogous to Hill and Huber (2019), as parents are likely to have better information on the quality of their children's school given the near daily contact they have with schools either directly or through their children. Although not always explicitly discussed in the language of normative theory, some of the canonical examples of representation and CDD programs in the academic literature are rooted in the assumptions of normative theories of democratic representation. For example, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) essentially argue that the descriptive representation of women in Gram Panchayats in two states in India leads to better substantive representation. The channel from descriptive representation runs from candidates holding certain identities sharing policy preferences with citizens of the same identity. Broockman (2013) suggests a second channel: descriptive representation increases the intrinsic motivation of candidates to better represent their constituents' demands.

EDUCATION IN DELHI: CONTEXT TO THE REFORMS

Like many of the reforms studied in the academic literature, the reforms in Delhi and India more broadly, although they do not explicitly reference normative theories of representation, draw on many of the ideas inherent in them. With the passage of the Right to Education Act in 2009 every school in the country was required to have a School Management Committee (SMC) that was responsible for drawing up a school development plan, although further responsibilities of SMCs were deleted to state governments (Government of India, 2009).

With the election of the Aam Admi Party (AAP) in 2015, SMCs in Delhi were given various powers in Delhi that were designed to make them more representative of citizens that sent their children to government schools. First, the Government of Delhi introduced elections to select members of the SMC (Directorate of Education, 2015). Each SMC is composed of twelve parents, one teacher, the head of school, a social worker from the local community, and a representative from the office of the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the constituency in which the school is located.³ Schools were required to hold elections to elect the twelve parent members who would serve on the SMC for two years. Our fieldwork was conducted after the second round of elections in November 2017.

SMCs are tasked with putting together a school development plan that outlines how the school will spend the discretionary portion of their budgets over the school year. In late 2018, in a second reform, the Government of Delhi increased the size of the discretionary budget, from ₹300,000 (approximately \$4,000) to ₹500,000 (approximately \$7,000) to ₹700,000 (approximately \$10,000)

³In practice, the social worker was also often a member of the AAP, the incumbent party in Delhi during fieldwork. For the rest of this paper, we refer to the teacher and head of school together as "teachers" and the social worker and MLA representative together as "party workers".

depending on the size of the school and SMCs were tasked with the administration of these funds. In other contexts, school boards have been shown to increase school resources and student achievement (Jeong et al., 2023). School development plans and budgets could be spent on six broad categories: infrastructure in the school including small repairs and new classrooms, health and sanitation that included the fixing or building new toilets or improving the school's drinking water sources, security that included hiring additional security guards in the school or installing security equipment such as CCTV cameras, teaching and learning material for classrooms such as textbooks or equipment, hiring new temporary teachers,⁴ and on extracurricular activities that could be for children in the school or for the larger community such as celebrations around festivals.

The Government of Delhi saw the reforms as part of a larger packages of reforms, including raising the education budget and investing in school infrastructure, that would improve citizen perceptions of the quality of their local schools, increase trust in the state, and increase trust in programmatic service delivery across the city (Biswas, 2020). As much as descriptive representation would advance those goals, we can consider these an important outcome of the reforms.

It is important to note that the reforms took place in a dense urban area with high levels of migration from many parts of the country. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that urban politics operate differently than rural politics. Robinson (2014) finds that ethnic identity is weaker in urban areas and Ichino and Nathan (2013) argue that ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods in cities weaken expectations of ethnic favoritism in the distribution of public goods, suggesting that ethnic ties may lose importance in the provision of public goods in urban areas. Providing further evidence on the declining significance of ethnicity, Auerbach and Thachil (2018) find that individuals in urban area value the ability of brokers to "get things done" rather than shared ethnicity. Thachil (2017) finds that ethnic identities are situationally salient, with migrants identifying along ethnic lines when dealing with each other, but ignore ethnic divisions when dealing with elites.

Specific to the Indian context, work on urbanization and the urban poor has mixed findings. In a study of access to services in urban Bangalore, Bertorelli et al. (2017) show that service delivery is uneven across all traditional markers of identity such as caste and religion. Using satellite imagery, Rains, Krishna and Wibbels (2019) show that much variation in the conditions of slums is a result of differences *between* rather than *within* slums, suggesting that access to services are heterogeneous between neighborhoods.

Schools provide an ideal site for questions of service provision and representation, especially in

⁴It is important to note that teachers that could be hired with this money would not be permanent civil service employees, but temporary teachers on short term contracts that did not last longer than the academic year.

urban areas. As there are 1,030 government secondary schools in Delhi serving approximately 20 million residents, each school serves approximately 20,000 residents.⁵ our sample is heterogeneous on caste and religious lines (Table 1) and reflects the ethnic heterogeneity of Delhi as a whole. This suggests that the ultimate beneficiaries of public education in Delhi are heterogeneous across a range of identities, and that questions of how heterogeneous groups come together to select representatives and distribute public goods are relevant in this context. Moreover, teachers, the bureaucrats that serve as the front-line functionaries of the state within schools (Lipsky, 2010), command high wage premiums in India and other low- and middle-income countries (Barton, Bold and Sandefur, 2017; Kremer et al., 2005), and are likely of higher social status than the families they serve in schools. Unlike individual neighborhoods that can often be segregated on lines of class, religion, and ethnicity, schools have catchment areas that cross several neighborhoods and are a site of integration in the city. Next, we turn to our data collection and how we traced the chain of representation from citizens to outcomes empirically.

data & methods

We conducted fieldwork between mid-2018 to late 2019, between six and eighteen months after the second set of SMC elections had been held. For a number of reasons endogenous to individual schools, approximately half of the schools in Delhi *did not* hold elections for SMCs. In those schools a combination of teacher appointments and parent volunteers served on the SMCs in those schools, although 12 parents sit on the SMC in all schools in the city.

We collect several sources of data to construct our measure of interest representation. We randomly sampled 52 schools in the city. Delhi is divided into 13 education districts, and we sampled two schools that held elections and two schools that did not hold elections in every district in the city. We sampled schools by stratifying the 1,029 schools in Delhi by the thirteen education districts across the city. Within each district, we sampled two schools that held elections and two schools that did not hold elections in each district, for a total of 26 schools that held elections and 26 schools that did not hold elections. We show the location of the sample schools in Figure 1, with schools that held elections marked in green and schools that did not hold elections marked in red.

⁵The Delhi school district serves approximately 1.5 million students (Biswas, 2020). To get a comparative sense of scale, the Delhi school district serves as many households as the New York and Los Angeles school districts combined, the two largest school districts in the United States. If we assume, at a minimum, a two adult household for the 1.5 million children in Delhi Government schools, this represents at least a quarter of the city's population that is in regular contact with the state through schools.

From there, we conducted household surveys of approximately 40 parents per school that expressed no interest in running for the SMC, household surveys of all the parents that *stood for elections* in the 26 election schools, and household surveys of all the SMC members in the schools that did not hold elections. We also surveyed the teacher and head of school, both who sit on the SMC, and the social worker and MLA's representative in all 52 schools.



Figure 1: Location of Schools in the Sample

Notes: Location of sample schools within Delhi. Green dots represent schools where elections were held and red dots represent schools were no elections were held. The colored lines represent the lines of the Delhi Metro system.

We also collect data on actual expenditures of the schools by asking the head of school to complete a survey that provides the amount of each bill spent by the SMC, the bill number, and what the money was spent on. We match this to official public administrative records on school expenditures to verify the amounts self-reported by the principals and find a high level of correspondence between what the head of school self-reported and the official and public documentation of budgets, despite these being reported at different points of time. We describe each source of data independently below.

Parent, SMC Member, and SMC Candidate Survey Data

We collected household survey data on 1,407 parents across the 52 sampled schools. The household survey collected data on a broad range of socioeconomic indicators, including wealth, level of education, caste and religion, as well as a constrained choice question that asked parents to distribute expenditure on budgetary items designed to mimic what SMC members would face when spending their school budgets. The constrained choice question is similar to "quadratic voting" from economics where individuals are given a budget which they can allocate over a number of goods (Lalley and Weyl, 2018). The tool is useful for valence goods such as education which almost all citizens have the same directional preferences (Holland, 2023; Stokes, 1963).

We administered an identical survey to all candidates for the SMC election in 26 schools, for a sample of 71 parents that ran but did not win election to the SMC, as well as all the 240 parents that ran and won a position on the SMC, and 187 parents that serve on the SMC in the 26 schools that did not hold elections, for a total of 498 SMC members.

Head of School, Teacher, Social Worker, and Representative of the Member of Legislative Assembly Survey

We administered a shorter version of the household survey to all the school-level members of the SMC, including the head of school, teacher, social worker, and representative of the member of the legislative assembly's office. We surveyed 36 heads of school, 37 teachers, and 31 MLA representatives and social workers.

National Capital Region Survey

We also leverage a representative survey of the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi to evaluate how representative households that send their children to Delhi schools are to the larger population of the city (Chakravorty and Sircar, 2021).⁶

Budget Data

We collected budget data from two different sources. First, we asked the heads of schools of all the schools in Delhi to complete an online survey that asked them to list their expenditures from the School Management Committee Fund, along with their bill number, the item the bill was spent on, and the total amount of the bill. We also scraped the official Ministry of Education portal that lists

⁶We thank Neelanjan Sircar for providing access to this data.

	Ν	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Male	2,053	0.36	0.48	0	1
SC/ST	2,053	0.28	0.45	0	1
OBC	2,053	0.33	0.47	0	1
Upper Caste	2,053	0.38	0.49	0	1
Muslim	2,053	0.18	0.39	0	1
Number of Assets	2,053	8.77	2.67	1	17
Years of Education	2,053	7.45	4.70	0	16
Budget: Health and Sanitation	2,053	3.56	1.68	0	20
Budget: Infrastructure	2,053	3.18	1.67	0	20
Budget: Security	2,053	3.00	1.39	0	20
Budget: Teaching and Learning	2,053	3.96	1.71	0	20
Budget: Teachers	2,053	2.99	1.58	0	20
Budget: Extracurriculars	2,053	2.74	1.44	0	19

Table 1: Summary Statistics

individual bill numbers along with the total amount spent on each bill, although it does not list what the bill was spent on.⁷ We then used the bill numbers to match these two sources to verify the expenditures the heads of school reported with the officially reported figures.

We provide summary statistics of all individuals in our sample in Table 1. Just under two thirds of the sample are women, 28 percent are Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, 38 percent are Other Backward Classes, 38 percent are Upper Caste, 18 percent are Muslim. For socioeconomic markers, the average household owns just under 9 assets in a list of assets, and respondents have 7.5 years of education. The next six variables are summary statistics for the number of tokens respondents selected for each of the six budgetary categories.

RESULTS

We begin by providing descriptive evidence on the relationship between preferences of constituents and representatives as well as the final budgetary expenditure at the school level. We plot the relationship between the preferences of constituents and final outcomes, constituents and representatives, and representatives and final outcomes in Figure 2.

There are several outcomes to note. First, representatives were far more likely to engage in a portfolio diversification strategy in which they spent some share of the budget on all categories. This is in contrast to some constituents and the final outcomes in schools. Some constituents spent a

⁷The public portal can be found at http://www.edudel.nic.in.



Figure 2: Preferences Over Budgetary Expenditures for Constituents and Representatives, and Final Budgetary Expenditures

Notes: Panel A presents a scatterplot of the relationship between the preferences over the budget between constituents and representatives. Panel B presents a scatterplot of the relationship between the preferences over the budget between constituents and final outcomes representatives. Panel C presents a scatterplot of the relationship between the preferences over the budget between representatives and final outcomes. The dashed line represents the 45 degree line of an exact match in preferences and outcomes.

large share of their budget on a broad range of categories, while the majority of schools spent most of their budget on infrastructure. Second, SMC members were willing to spend a large share of the budget on teaching and learning materials, while parents did not share these preferences, and very few schools did spend their budgets on teaching and learning materials.

Descriptive Representation: Do Representatives Look Like Their Constituents

Next, we turn to differences in socioeconomic characteristics between school parents, SMC candidates, and school and community members of the SMC. We begin by looking at socioeconomic characteristics of the entire population in schools to observe if there are any differences along gender, caste, education, wealth, and religious lines (Table 2). To understand differences in the parental body, the pool of representatives, and school and community members of the SMC, we run a model of the form:

	Male (1)	Education (2)	Assets (3)	SC/ST (4)	OBC (5)	Upper Caste (6)	Muslim (7)	Delhi (8)
Representative	0.003	2.867***	0.818***	-0.046**	0.005	0.055**	-0.022	0.092***
	(0.024)	(0.257)	(0.132)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.026)
Teachers	0.108	9.363***	3.700***	-0.052	-0.140***	0.205***	-0.120***	-0.163***
	(0.079)	(0.188)	(0.295)	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.060)	(0.028)	(0.017)
Community	0.208***	7.460***	4.109***	-0.160***	-0.024	0.198**	-0.052	
	(0.063)	(0.275)	(0.457)	(0.047)	(0.059)	(0.075)	(0.041)	
Ν	1927	1799	1961	1944	1944	1944	1960	1899
Parent Mean	0.34	6.07	8.33	0.3	0.32	0.36	0.19	0.17

Table 2: Characteristics of Representatives

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Each column represents a linear model of the probability that each member of the SMC holds that characteristic. Column one is a dummy variable for whether the respondent is male. Column two represents the years of education of the respondent. Column three is a count of the number of assets in the respondent's household. Column four is a dummy variable equal to one if they identify as Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. Column five is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as a member of an Other Backward Class. Column six is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Brahmin or other upper caste. Column seven is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as all members of the community are expected to live in Delhi, we did not ask their state of origin and therefore coefficients on these variables are missing. The reference category in all regressions are parents in the school.

$Y_{is} = \beta \text{Representative}_{is} + \zeta \text{Teachers}_{is} + \theta \text{Community Member}_{is} + \iota_s + \epsilon_{is}$, (1)

Where Y_{is} is either whether candidate i in school s is male, their years of education, how many assets they own in their household, whether they are SC or ST, whether they are OBC, whether they are upper caste, or whether they are Muslim. Representative is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if they serve as a representative on the SMC, Teachers is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if they are a teacher on the SMC, and Community Mmeber is a dummy variable that takes the value value of 1 if they are a party worker on the SMC. ι_s are school fixed effects, and ϵ_{is} is the error term.

First, teachers appear to be far more educated than the population of parents (Column 2 of Table 2). While the average level of education of parents is just over six years of education, representing a primary school education, teachers have an average of 15 years of education, representing the advanced degrees required of many public sector teachers in India. Unsurprisingly given the wage premium for public sector workers in low- and middle-income countries (Barton, Bold and Sandefur, 2017), teachers own about 3.7 more basic assets than the population of parents, and about the same number of assets as community members (Column 3 of Table 2). Teachers also appear to be of higher social status within traditional caste hierarchies, as they are less likely to identify as Scheduled Caste (SC) or Tribe (ST) or Other Backward Class (OBC), but are more likely to identify as upper caste

(Columns 4, 5, and 6 of Table 2 respectively). There is a clear gap between the social status of teachers and all parents, whether they sit on the SMC or not.

Turning to differences between parents and representatives, we also find differences in social status, although they are less pronounced than that between teachers and parents. Representatives, are better educated and own more assets than parents who did not run as representatives. While representatives are of higher status as indicated by lower proportion of SC and ST (column 4) and higher proportion of upper caste SMC members (column 6), this does not hold for for appointed members. Twenty percent of parents are likely to be Muslim, slightly higher than the population of Delhi in general (approximately 12%), and this is higher than representatives and teachers in the school.

While we should not expect teachers to be descriptively representative of the families that send children to the schools they work in given the strong effects of selection into education in low- and middle-income countries (Evans, Yuan and Filmer, 2022), we find that representatives are also not *descriptively* representative across a range of demographic and socioeconomic indicators. Representatives have more years of schooling, are wealthier as measured by the number of assets they own, are less likely to identify as from a marginalized group, and more likely to identify as part of a traditionally privileged caste. The SMC body fails to meet this normative goals of descriptive representation. We turn next to *substantive* representation – a second normatively desirable measure of representation and often argued to be more important, or at least the end of the descriptive representation means (Mansbridge, 2003).

Substantive Representation: Do Representatives Hold Substantively Similar Preferences?

To measure substantive representation, we look at two aspects of this representation. First, we look at preferences over the six broad budgetary categories that SMCs can spend money on. We run a similar regression as in Equation 1, using the six budgetary categories as the dependent variable, controlling for the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondent. The dependent variable in each column can range from o to 20, with o meaning that the respondent did not allocate any of the budget to that item and 20 meaning the respondent allocated the entire budget to that category. We present these results in Table 3 and more details of this constrained choice question is presented in Appendix A1.

The two largest deviation between the preferences of parents and members of the SMC is on how much the SMC should spend on health and sanitation, infrastructure, and security. Parent represen-

	Health and Sanitation (1)	Infrastructure (2)	Security (3)	Teaching and Learning (4)	Teachers (5)	Extracurricular Activities (6)
Representative	-0.591***	0.097	-0.157**	0.174*	0.193*	-0.122
	(0.101)	(0.092)	(0.073)	(0.093)	(0.102)	(0.074)
Teachers	-0.072	0.905***	-0.415**	-0.141	-0.335	-0.015
	(0.184)	(0.293)	(0.181)	(0.180)	(0.289)	(0.180)
Community	-0.409*	-0.168	-0.219	0.126	0.190	0.259
	(0.210)	(0.188)	(0.162)	(0.231)	(0.198)	(0.218)
Ν	1781	1781	1781	1781	1781	1781
Parent Mean	3.73	3.3	3.02	3.99	2.93	2.82

Table 3: Differences in Preferences Among SMC Members

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. The dependent variable of each column represents the value in response to how much of the SMC budget the respondent would want to spend on the item and can range from 0 to 20 for the number of tokens they could allocate to that category in a constrained choice question. Health and sanitation represents expenditures such as new toilets, a sanitation worker, or a water filter. Infrastructure represents expenditures on a new classroom, repairs on school buildings, or an estate manager to manage infrastructural issues. Security represents expenditures on CCTV cameras in the school, security guards for the school, or a boundary wall or gate for the school. Teaching and learning represents new desks and chairs for a classroom, a new smart classroom in the school or computers, or buying equipment for a science lab. Teachers represents the hiring of a new teacher. Extracurriculars represents the purchase of equipment for sports and arts extracurriculars. Controls include gender, education, an asset index, and dummies for whether the respondent is SC, ST, OBC, or Muslim, and school fixed effects.

tatives and community members both believe the SMC should spend less on health and sanitation than parents, while the coefficient on teachers is also negative although not significant. Teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, want far more money spent on infrastructure than all other members of the SMC, and want less money spent on additional teachers, although again this coefficient is not significant. Both teachers and parent representatives want less money spent on school security than parents. The biggest differences in the other direction emerges on categories we can broadly group under "quality": parent representatives want more spent on teaching and learning materials as well as new temporary teachers relative to parents.

Substantively, it appears that parent representatives have a different set of concerns over the school and how discretionary school budgets should be spent. While parents prefer categories that can largely be grouped under the quality of the student experience outside of the classroom, parent representatives shift their preferences to preferences over the quality over the pedagogical experience within classrooms. Overall, representatives do not share substantive *preferences* over how budgets should be spent.

Second, to unpack whether the lack of descriptive representation drives these differences in budgetary preferences, we turn to differences between representatives and their constituents on identity and socioeconomic lines. We construct dyadic measures of agreement between school-level representatives and parents over how budgets are spent over the fiscal year. In this model, the dependent variable can range from o to 20 for each budgetary category. We then sum all these values to provide a measure of deviation across *all* the budgetary categories and this variable can range from o to 40. A positive coefficient on any of the independent variables means deviation between the preferences of SMC members and parents, and a negative value means that the preferences of SMC member and parents are moving closer together. We run the specification in Equation 2:

 $|\text{Budget preference}_{gms} - \text{Budget preference}_{gps}| =$

$$\beta_1$$
Gender Match + β_2 Caste Match_{mps} + β_3 Religion Match_{mps} + β_4 Wealth Gap_{mps}
+ β_5 Education Gap_{mps} + γ_m + θ_p + ζ_s + ϵ_{gmps} , (2)

Where Budget preference_{gms} represents the amount spent on a budget item g by SMC member m in school s, Budget preference_{gps} represents the amount spent on budget item g by parent p in school s, and the dependent variable is the absolute difference between these two values. Caste Match_{mps} takes the value of 1 if member m and parent p in school s are of the same caste category and o otherwise, Religion Match_{mps} takes the value of 1 if member m and parent p in school s are of the same religion. Wealth Gap_{mps} is the difference in the number of assets owned by member m and parent p in school s, while Education Gap_{mps} is the difference in the number of years of schooling between member m and parent p in school s. γ_m , θ_p , and ζ_s are member, parent, and school fixed effects respectively, and ϵ_{gmps} are robust error terms clustered at the school-level. There are 20,478 unique parent-SMC member dyads.

We plot the results from Equation 2 in Figure 3. The most consistent predictor of the differences between the preferences of parents and representatives is differences in the wealth of parents and representative, with the effect of SMC members owning one additional asset than a matched representative is between -0.1 to 0.2 tokens spent on that budgetary item. Given that representatives have 0.8 more assets than a parent, this substantively represents $\mathbf{\xi}_{4,000}$ (approximately \$54) and $\mathbf{\xi}_{22,750}$ (approximately \$310) maximum difference in how SMC budgets should be spent between parents and representatives.

Gender, caste, and religion, three traditional markers of hierarchy, do not predict differences in preferences between parents and representatives, with only preferences for money being spent on teachers moving closer to the preferences of members of the same caste, and no effects of gender



Figure 3: Differences Between Budget Preferences of SMC Members and Preferences of School Parents

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the school level. Point estimates for differences in preferences between parents and SMC members in health, infrastructure, security, teachers, teaching and learning materials, and extracurriculars estimating the model in Equation 2. "Gender Match" represents the coefficient on whether the parent and representative are of the same gender. "Caste Match" represents the coefficient on whether the parent and representative are of the same gender. "Caste Match" represents the coefficient on whether the parent and representative are of the same caste, "Religion match" represents the coefficient on whether the parents and representative are of the same religion, "Wealth gap" represents the difference in the number of assets between the SMC member and representative, and "Education gap" represents a difference in the number of sasts between the SMC member and representative, and "Education gap" represents a difference in the number of assets between the SMC member and representative for models in columns 1 through 6 range from 0-20, with 0 indicating perfect alignment between the parent and the SMC member and 20 indicating perfect deviation between the parent and the SMC member. The dependent variable for models in columns 1 through 6 range from 0-20, with 0 indicating perfect alignment between the parent and the SMC member and 20 indicating perfect alignment and we model in column 7 ranges from 0-40 with 0 indicating perfect alignment and 40 indicating perfect deviation. All models include parent and member fixed effects. We provide a table of these results in Table A2. We rescale all continuous independent variables (education and wealth) by two standard deviations so they have mean zero and standard deviation 0.5 and are comparable to the other binary independent variables (Gelman, 2008).

and religion on preferences for *any* budgetary expenditure. Together, these results suggest that the most important differences in schools are not along lines of gender, caste and religion, but wealth. Traditional status markers do not appear to drive differences in preferences, while markers likely to be highly salient in urban areas, such as wealth, appear to have strong effects on differences in preferences. Finally, we turn to the question of trusteeship representation, looking at preferences for representatives and how money is actually spent and whose preferences these reflect.

Burkian Representation: What Do Constituents Want From Their Representatives?

Finally we turn to evidence from an embedded conjoint experiment administered on school parents to understand their preferences for SMC members and test theories of trustee representation. The conjoint experiment was designed to understand parental preferences for who would represent them on their school SMC through visible characteristics of candidates such as caste, religion, and gender, as well as party affiliation, and place of residence. We take evidence from the conjoint as evidence of *stated* preferences for representatives. In the conjoint, we asked parents to choose between two fictional candidates for SMC elections in a school just like theirs. We varied characteristics of the candidates on lines of gender, level of education, caste, religion, party, their state of origin, and how far they lived from the school. We presented a non-partisan option, whether the respondent was a member of their local residential welfare association (RWA) to test for the effects of partisanship.

Figure 4 shows how each attribute affects the likelihood of an SMC candidate being preferred to serve on the schools SMC. The figure displays both the average marginal component effect (AMCE) as points and the 95% confidence intervals as bars.

We find the strongest effect in preferences being driven by the level of education of representatives. Parents strongly prefer representatives with greater levels of education, and this effect increases monotonically with the level of education: candidates with university degrees are preferred to candidates with a secondary school degree, who are preferred to candidates with a primary school degree. Most parents in our sample have about a primary level of education (see Tables 1 and 2), so they have preferences for representatives that are significantly more educated than them. Second, there does not appear to be strong preferences on the basis of caste, but very strong preferences on the basis of religion. Respondents prefer Hindu candidates to Muslim candidates, with no significant differences for other religions. Parents prefer female candidates, and candidates that live close to the school which we take to be a measure of the cost to being an SMC member as those that live closer to the school will spend less time commuting to attend SMC meetings (Auerbach and Thachil,



Figure 4: A Conjoint Experiment Shows Respondents Prefer Educated Candidates

Notes: The plot on the left hand side shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned SMC candidate attribute values on the probability of being preferred as a member of the SMC. The plot on the right hand side recodes all attributes relative to the respondent. Estimates are based on an OLS model with standard errors clustered by respondent. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The points without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute.

2017).

The preference for women and discrimination against Mulsim candidates, appears to be driven by the fact that most of our respondents were Hindu women. When we recode the attributes of the conjoint experiment relative to characteristics of the respondent – for example whether a female respondent received a female profile or a Muslim respondent received a Muslim profile – this preference for women and discrimination against Muslims disappears (Panel B of Figure 4). School parents prefer candidates that are affiliated with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the ruling party in Delhi. Finally, parents weakly prefer candidates from Delhi, rather than candidates who are migrants from other states. The preference suggests that they prefer candidates from Delhi rather than discriminate against any particular state.

	Male (1)	Education (2)	Assets (3)	SC/ST (4)	OBC (5)	Upper Caste (6)	Muslim (7)	Delhi (8)
Elected	-0.175**	0.708	0.619*	0.066	-0.106*	0.040	-0.015	-0.002
	(0.071)	(0.653)	(0.305)	(0.071)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.028)	(0.042)
Ν	416	416	416	409	409	409	415	416
Candidate Mean	0.52	8.69	8.8	0.23	0.41	0.36	0.14	0.31

Table 4: Differences Between Elected Representatives and Candidates

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Each column represents a linear model of the probability that each elected member to the SMC holds that characteristic. Column one is a dummy variable for whether the respondent is male. Column two represents the years of education of the respondent. Column three is a count of the number of assets in the respondent's household. Column four is a dummy variable equal to one if they identify as Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. Column five is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as a member of an Other Backward Class. Column six is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as a Brahmin or other upper caste. Column seven is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim. Column eight is a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent identifies as Muslim.

We also re-run the models of the conjoint experiment by recoding all variables to a dummy for whether the respondent shares that characteristic or not (Panel B of Figure 4). Coefficients represent the difference between candidates that share the characteristic with the respondent and those that are different than the respondent. For example, if a respondent is Hindu and the profile they are shown is a Hindu candidate, they will be coded as being "Caste same as respondent". This recoding does not change the interpretation of the results, with the exception of gender as noted above. Religion still appears to be a strong dividing line. Most of our respondents are Hindus and when recoding by religion, we see that most respondents prefer co-religious candidates. Perhaps surprisingly, caste does not have any effects in either way of presenting the results.

Next, we explore what happens when parents were given the opportunity to vote for their preferred representatives. In approximately 50 percent of the schools, schools held elections to select their SMC representatives. We collected electoral data on both winning and losing candidates in 26 of these schools, with demographic and socioeconomic data on both sets of candidates. We leverage this data to explore the *revealed* preferences of parents. For this, we run a regression of the form,

$$Y_{is} = \beta \operatorname{Elected}_{is} + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{is}, \tag{3}$$

where Y_{is} are the same outcomes from Table 3, β Elected_{is} is a dummy for whether candidate i in school s won the election, and γ_s are school fixed effects. We present results in Table 4.

Turning to differences between candidates that *won* and *lost* the elections to serve on the SMC, there are differences along the same lines we find in Table 3. Parents vote are less likely to vote for

male candidates (Column 1), consistent with a belief that education is the mother's domain, there are no effects of education on choices for the SMC, although both winning and losing candidates have significantly higher levels of education than parents (Column 2 of Table 4, and Tables 1 and 3). Parents elect wealthier parents when given the choice (Column 3). As in the conjoint, there are no strong preferences for upper caste or SC/ST candidates (Columns 4 and 6), although OBC candidates do worse in the election (Column 5), and no discrimination against Muslim candidates when parents are asked to vote. In sum, elections appear to select for wealthier women, with no marked caste or religion preferences.

The electoral selection process appears to reflect the stated preferences of parents from the conjoint experiment, with a highly educated Hindu woman the modal SMC member. SMC members do not appear to be descriptively representative of the parent body, but this also appears to reflect the preferences of the parent body. Bureaucratic and political members of the SMC are also of significantly higher status than the parent body, producing a SMC body that looks significantly different than the parents they are supposed to represent. Together with the conjoint experiment in Figure 4, we take this as evidence that parents do not attach importance to descriptive representation, nor do they act as if this matters when given the choice.

Next, we look at differences between the preferences of SMC members and what is actually spent in the budget or who gets what they want. We run the same specification as in Equation 2, but instead of looking at the differences between parents and SMC members, we look at differences between SMC members and actual budgetary expenditures. We collect data on budgetary expenditures directly from schools from self-reported expenditures and bills, and from formal sources of the official expenditures posted publicly on the Directorate of Education's website.⁸ We match expenditures by calculating the percentage of the budget from official expenditures that is spent on each of the six items, and the percentage of tokens an SMC member allocated to that budgetary item. These outcomes range from o to 1 and are continuous percentage differences. We look at the various types of SMC members, elected, appointed, teachers, and party workers, in our data, to understand which group holds the most influence in the actual expenditures of SMC budgets. A negative coefficient represents a closer match between the preference of that representative and final outcomes.

We present these results in Figure 5. Each facet represents the difference between the preference of that particular type of member and the expenditure on the budget, with community members as the reference category. The most important set of results is that the preferences of teachers are

⁸Public reports of expenditures can be found at http://www.edudel.nic.in/welcome_folder/finance_public_report.htm.



Figure 5: Differences Between Actual Expenditures and Preferences of SMC Members

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the school level. Point estimates for differences in the preferences of SMC members and actual budgetary expenditures. The dependent variable of each column represents the absolute value of the difference between the percentage of the budget the respondent would want to spend on the item and the percentage of the actual budget that was spent on that item. Health and sanitation represents expenditures such as new toilets, a sanitation worker, or a water filter. Infrastructure represents expenditures on a new classroom, repairs on school buildings, or an estate manager to manage infrastructural issues. Security represents expenditures on CCTV cameras in the school, security guards for the school, or a boundary wall or gate for the school. Teaching and learning represents the hiring of a new teacher. Extracurriculars represents the purchase of equipment for a sport a science lab. Teachers represents the fill deviation in column seven represents the sum of the deviation for each budget item. We provide a table of these results in Table A₃. We rescale all continuous independent variables (education and wealth) by two standard deviations so they have mean zero and standard deviation 0.5 and are comparable to the other binary independent variables (Gelman, 2008).

those that are closest to being reflected in how budgets are spent within the school. Teachers are about 4 percentage points more likely to have their preferences over the entirety of the budget met than community members, and this coefficient is also statistically significantly different from the point estimate for representatives. This is primarily driven by their preferences over teachers, which from Table 2 we know they prefer less of. Relative to community members, parent representatives are no more or no less likely to have their preferences represented in final outcomes, except for their preferences over spending on extracurriculars, over which they are more likely to have their preferences represented.

Next, we test which characteristics of parental representatives are most likely to predict their preferences represented. We look see if certain groups or certain characteristics of SMC members are able to extract a greater share of the budget? Formally, we calculate,

$$|\text{Share of Budget}_{is} - \text{Share of Budget}_{ims}| = \beta_1 \text{Male}_{ms} + \beta_2 \text{Education}_{ms} + \beta_3 \text{Wealth}_{ms} + \beta_4 \text{SC/ST}_{ms} + \beta_5 \text{OBC}_{ms} + \beta_6 \text{Muslim}_{ms} + \zeta_s + \epsilon_{ims}, \quad (4)$$

where Share of Budget_{is} is the share of the budget spent on item *i* in school *s* from the six budget categories, Share of Budget_{ims} is the share of the budget on item *i* member *m* in school *s* stated in the constrained choice game. Male, Education, Wealth, SC/ST, OBC, and Muslim are all individual level characteristics of member *m* in school *s*, ζ_s are the school-level fixed effects, and ϵ_{ims} are the error terms. This model presents the difference between how budgets are actually spent and how members want budgets spent as a function of individual level characteristics of members.

We present results graphically in Figure 6. A positive point estimate indicates that there is a larger difference between how budgets are spent and how the SMC member wants to spend money, while a negative point estimate indicates a smaller gap. There are two results of interest: the effect of being either scheduled caste or tribe, and the effect of being Muslim. Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe respondents see less of their demands for budgets met. While each individual item *except* infrastructure is not individually significant, cumulatively, they see fewer of their demands met. Perhaps surprisingly, Muslim respondents see more of their demands met. This is likely driven by some level of religious clustering within schools, with some SMCs composed of mainly Muslim members.

We have shown that parents for representative that do not look like them. Above anything, they prefer representatives that are better educated than them, as well as representatives with connections to higher levels of political power and physical proximity to the locus of decision-making: the school. We interpret these results as a demand for representatives that can "get things done." At the ballot box, parents vote for representatives that are wealthier on average than the larger candidate pool and less likely to be male. Together, we take these results as suggestive of a preference for "Burkian" representation. Citizens state and show preferences for higher-status representatives, along lines of wealth and education. They, do not however, show preferences for higher-status representatives along more traditional ascriptive markers of identity such as caste and religion.

When we test to see how well these representatives are able to "get things done," the results suggest that relations of power have not been changed between representatives and the state as represented by teachers in schools. Citizen representatives are no more likely to have their preferences



Figure 6: Differences Between Actual Budgetary Outlays and SMC Member Preferences

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the school level. Point estimates for differences in preferences between actual budgetary outlays for each school and SMC members on health, infrastructure, security, teachers, teaching and learning materials, and extracurriculars estimating the model in Equation 4. The dependent variable for models in columns 1 through 6 range from 0-20, with 0 indicating perfect alignment between the parent and the SMC member and 20 indicating perfect deviation between the parent and SMC member. The dependent variable for the model in column 7 ranges from 0-40 with 0 indicating perfect alignment and 40 indicating perfect deviation. All models include school fixed effects. We provide a table of these results in Table A1. We rescale all continuous independent variables (education and wealth) by two standard deviations so they have mean zero and standard deviation 0.5 and are comparable to the other binary independent variables (Gelman, 2008).

realized in budgetary expenditures than members of the SMC body that look to represent higherlevel politicians. Instead, the group most likely to have their preferences met are teachers, the group previously most empowered in determining school-level budgetary expenditures.

DISCUSSION

The most common forms of representation discussed in the academic and policy literature are descriptive and substantive representation. In this case of decentralization in a large school district in India, we found that neither form of normative representation explains the empirical patterns we observe. Instead, we have suggested that our findings are better explained by a process of "Burkian" representation. What implications does this have for scholarship and policy?

We suggest three. First, in contexts of high social distance between constituents and representatives, constituents have often demanded representatives that can "get things done" (Auerbach and Thachil, 2017; Berenschot, 2015) and navigate a bureaucracy that privileges the ability to navigate paperwork and administrative burdens (Mathur, 2015; Moynihan and Herd, 2019). It should be no surprised, then, that constituents then choose representatives best positioned to do this. This form of representation resembles early writing on the importance of the administrative state in urban governance and was decried as anti-democratic (Murphy, 2002). This paper presents a, hopefully, more optimistic account of the democratic potential of administrative governance.

Second, reforms of this nature take time to institutionalize. In ethnographic work in Delhi schools at the same time as these reforms, Aiyar (2024) argues that the "thick" implementation tasks such as changing pedagogical practices within classrooms, as in her case, or changing the relationships of power between previously excluded citizens and the state, in this case, are transaction-intensive and take a long time to fully embed within the bureaucracy and citizens. This also proved to be true from other empirical examples in the same city (Goyal, 2025).

Finally, scholars and policymakers would do better to recognize the full range of agency of citizens, particularly low-income and marginalized citizens. In this case, evaluating the *outcomes* through the lenses of descriptive or substantive representation would lead to us labeling this reform a failure. By looking at what constituents demand of their representatives, however, we see that constituents largely got what they wanted from their representatives: likely representatives that could represent them more fully in a setting where there is large degrees of social distance between constituents and the state.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we study the decentralization of discretionary school-level budgets to bodies of citizen representatives and front-line bureaucrats. We provide evidence on which normative ideals of representation dominate and how they deviate from the goals of policy makers and questions scholars ask. We trace the aggregation of interests from school parents, the constituents who select their representatives, to members of school committees tasked with choosing how school-level budgets are spent, to actual expenditures of the money.

We find that there is little descriptive representation in the representative body. Representatives are wealthier, have higher levels of education, are more likely to identify as an upper castes and less likely to identify as lower caste. Turning to the substantive representation of parents, who we see as the ultimate constituents, we find that the preferences of parents differ markedly from the preferences of representatives. Parents have strong preferences for expenditures on goods that improve the quality of education *outside* of the classroom, while representatives have preferences for expenditure on goods that improve the quality of education *inside* the classroom.

Instead, we argue that the normative description of representation that best describes our findings is that of "trustee" representation: parents think of their representatives as trustees of the proper functioning of schools. Parents both state and reveal preferences for representatives of higher status than them. Unfortunately, trustee representation breaks down when it comes to the actual distribution of public goods. Representatives are no better at having their preferences met at the school level.

More generally, this paper advanced our understanding on three literatures: an emerging literature on public goods provision in urban areas in low- and middle-income democracies, normative theories of representation, and the effects of decentralization and CDD programs. This paper adds to a growing body of evidence that suggests that public goods provision in urban areas is likely to be substantively different than in rural areas. While traditional hierarchies of caste and religion appear to drive public goods provision in rural areas, we find no evidence that those matter in this context. Instead, we find evidence that it is wealth and education that drive differences in preferences, and if we think of elite capture in urban areas, we should be paying closer attention to these differences in future work. Finally, we find evidence that one particular design aspect of decentralization and CDD programs – elections – rather than necessarily improving descriptive or substantive representation, still holds considerable normative value in meeting the demands of citizens in selecting representatives they believe will do a better job..

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A1 BUDGET CONSTRAINED CHOICE

To understand respondent's preferences over how school-level budgets should be allocated, we presented all respondents with a constrained choice question in which they were asked to allocate an imaginary budget over the six broad categories that SMC budgets could be spent on. Respondents were told that the SMC budget for their school was ₹500,000 and that they had 20 tokens, each worth ₹25,000 to allocate as they wanted between the six categories in their school's budget.⁹

To represent the six budget categories, we presented respondents with 12 illustrations presented in Figure A1. Respondents were then asked to place tokens on the illustrations depending according to their preferences over allocation of the budget. Surveyors counted the number of tokens respondents placed on each of the categories and entered this data.

We asked respondents the following,

We would now like to see how this SMC spends SMC fund. We have recently presented our initial findings to the education minister and the director and they were interested in knowing how the SMC fund is utilized. We will present you with these pictures (show pictures) indicating broad areas under which you could spend the SMC fund and 20 tokens each representing Rs. 25,000. Please use all the tokens according to your priorities by putting them on the pictures lying in front of you.

⁹Actual budgets range from ₹500,000 to ₹700,000 depending on the size of the school. We set the budget at ₹500,000 during the survey for ease of calculation and implementation in the field.

Figure A1: Figures Used for Constrained Choice Question



(a) Health & Sanitation Illustration



(c) Infrastructure Illustration



(e) Security Illustration



(g) Teaching & Learning Illustration



(i) Teachers Illustration



(k) Extracurricular Activities Illustration



(b) Health & Sanitation Illustration



(d) Infrastructure Illustration



(f) Security Illustration



(h) Teaching & Learning Illustration



(j) Teachers Illustration



(l) Extracurricular Activities Illustration

	Health and			Teaching and		Extracurricular	Total
	Sanitation	Infrastructure	Security	Learning	Teachers	Activities	Deviation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Male	0.009	0.005	-0.004	-0.002	0.006	-0.007	0.003
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.010)
Education	-0.001	0.000	-0.000	-0.001	-0.001	0.000	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Wealth	0.001	0.000	-0.001	0.003*	0.002	-0.001	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
SC/ST	0.002	0.018*	0.006	0.004	0.007	0.006	0.021**
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.009)
OBC	-0.000	0.008	0.003	0.014	-0.004	-0.007	0.008
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Muslim	-0.002	-0.004	-0.016**	-0.012	-0.009	-0.003	-0.023***
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.007)
Ν	415	415	415	415	415	415	415
Parent Mean	0.15	0.4	0.16	0.15	0.13	0.14	0.57

Table A1: Differences Between Actual Budgetary Outlays and SMC Member Preferences

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.Robust standard errors clustered at the school level. Point estimates for differences in preferences between actual budgetary outlays for each school and SMC members on health, infrastructure, security, teachers, teaching and learning materials, and extracurriculars estimating the model in Equation 4. The dependent variable for models in columns 1 through 6 range from 0-20, with 0 indicating perfect alignment between the parent and the SMC member and 20 indicating perfect deviation between the parent and SMC member. The dependent variable for the model in column 7 ranges from 0-40 with 0 indicating perfect alignment and 40 indicating perfect deviation. We rescale all continuous independent variables (education and wealth) by two standard deviations so they have mean zero and standard deviation 0.5 and are comparable to the other binary independent variables (Gelman, 2008). The table presents the results from Figure 6 in table form. All models include school fixed effects.

A2 RESULTS TABLES

In this section, we provide regression tables for all coefficient plots presented in the main manuscript.

Table A1 presents the results for Figure 6 in the main body of the paper. The columns in the table correspond to the columns in the Figure and the rows correspond to the six facets.

Table A2 presents the results for Figure 3 in the main body of the paper. The columns in the table correspond to the columns in the Figure and the rows correspond to the four facets in the Figure.

Table A₃ presents the results for Figure 5 in the main body of the paper. The columns in the table correspond to the columns in the Figure, and the rows correspond to the four facets in the Figure.

	Health and			Teaching and		Extracurricular	Full
	Sanitation	Infrastructure	Security	Learning	Teachers	Activities	Deviation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Gender Match	0.024	0.009	-0.011	0.015	-0.018	-0.016	0.002
	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.023)
Caste Match	0.002	-0.003	0.014	-0.017	-0.027*	0.003	-0.014
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Religion Match	-0.007	-0.006	0.007	-0.005	-0.012	-0.006	-0.014
	(0.015)	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.032)
Wealth Gap	0.224*	0.075***	-0.100	0.253*	-0.111	0.114*	0.228
	(0.115)	(0.002)	(0.062)	(0.130)	(0.352)	(0.066)	(0.362)
Education Gap	0.020	-0.000	0.011	0.023	0.062	0.012	0.064
	(0.016)	(0.000)	(0.009)	(0.018)	(0.048)	(0.009)	(0.050)
Ν	20837	20837	20837	20837	20837	20837	20837
Reference Mean	1.3	1.47	1.38	1.33	1.5	1.27	4.12

Table A2: Differences Between Budget Preferences of SMC Members and Preferences of School Parents

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. The dependent variable of each column represents the absolute value of the difference between the number of tokens SMC members would spend on a budgetary item and the number of tokens school parents would spend on a budgetary item. Health and sanitation represents expenditures such as new toilets, a sanitation worker, or a water filter. Infrastructure represents expenditures on a new classroom, repairs on school buildings, or an estate manager to manage infrastructural issues. Security represents expenditures on CCTV cameras in the school, security guards for the school, or a boundary wall or gate for the school. Teaching and learning represents new desks and chairs for a classroom, a new smart classroom in the school or computers, or buying equipment for a science lab. Teachers represents the hiring of a new teacher. Extracurriculars represents the purchase of equipment for sports and arts extracurriculars. The full deviation in column seven represents the sum of the deviation for each budget item. All models include parent, SMC member, and school fixed effects. The table presents the results from Figure 3 in table form.

	Health and			Teaching and		Extracurricular	Full
	Sanitation	Infrastructure	Security	Learning	Teachers	Activities	Deviation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Representative	-0.017	0.002	-0.004	0.004	-0.001	-0.021**	-0.018
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Teachers	0.015	-0.026	-0.009	-0.013	-0.026*	-0.020	-0.039**
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.015)
Ν	544	544	544	544	544	544	544
Community Member Mean	0.18	0.39	0.17	0.15	0.14	0.17	0.59

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level. The dependent variable of each column represents the absolute value of the difference between the percentage of the budget the respondent would want to spend on the item and the percentage of the actual budget that was spent on that item. Health and sanitation represents expenditures such as new toilets, a sanitation worker, or a water filter. Infrastructure represents expenditures on a new classroom, repairs on school buildings, or an estate manager to manage infrastructural issues. Security represents expenditures on CCTV cameras in the school, security guards for the school, or a boundary wall or gate for the school. Teaching and learning represents new desks and chairs for a classroom, a new smart classroom in the school or computers, or buying equipment for a science lab. Teachers represents the hiring of a new teacher. Extracurriculars represents the purchase of equipment for sports and arts extracurriculars. All models include controls for gender, years of education, wealth, caste, and religion. The full deviation in column seven represents the sum of the deviation for each budget item. The table presents the results from Figure 5 in table form.

A3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIECONOMIC STATUS AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

In this section, we explore the relationship between sociecnomic status and social indicators available in our data. We run a simple model of the relationship between caste, gender and religion on education and wealth of the form:

$$Y_{is} = \beta_1 \text{Male}_{is} + \beta_2 \text{SC/ST}_{is} + \beta_3 \text{Upper Caste}_{is} + \beta_3 \text{Muslim}_{is} + \theta_i + \gamma_s + \epsilon_{is},$$

Where Y_{is} is either the number of years of education or the number of assets respondent i in school s owns, Male is a dummy for whether the respondent is male, SC/ST is a dummy for whether the respondent is a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, Upper Caste is a dummy for whether the respondent is either Brahmin or other Upper Caste, Muslim is a dummy for whether the respondent is Muslim, θ_i is a vector of controls for whether the individual is an elected or appointed SMC member, whether they ran for SMC elections, if they are a teacher or party worker. Hindu OBC women parents are our reference category.

We present these results in Table A4. Men have about two years of education more than women, although male respondents do not live in wealthier households than women. Scheduled Castes and Tribes are no different to OBCs in terms of education or assets, while upper castes have about one more year of education than OBCs and nearly half an asset more. Muslims have a year and a half of education less than OBCs and half an asset less than OBCs.

Table A4:DifferencesBe-tweenActualExpendituresandPreferencesofSMC Members

	Education (1)	Assets (2)
Male	1.783***	-0.008
	(0.238)	(0.117)
SC/ST	0.009	-0.020
	(0.255)	(0.188)
Upper Caste	0.985***	0.355**
	(0.257)	(0.138)
Muslim	-1.403***	-0.310*
	(0.335)	(0.178)
Ν	1852	1980
Reference Mean	6.63	8.71

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Education measures the years of education of the respondent. Assets is a sum of the number of assets in the respondent's household. All models include controls for position within the SMC and school-level fixed effects.

A4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLS THAT HELD AND DID NOT HOLD ELECTIONS

While all schools across the city were mandated to hold elections, this mandate was not strictly enforced, and if a school did not have more than twelve parents submit their candidacy, the school would appoint those twelve parents to the School Management Committee. In this section, we look at differences between schools that held elections and schools that did not hold elections.

We collect data on school infrastructure for all schools in Delhi and test whether there are differences between election and non-election schools on observables. We plot these differences in Figure A2. While there are clear differences between the two types of schools, there is no clear pattern on the type of infrastructural differences between the two types of schools.

In Figure A₃, we plot results from an analysis of the same conjoint experiment on parents dividing the sample by whether their children go to a school that held an election or not.

While results between the full conjoint presented in Figure 4 and the conjoint experiment by subsample in A₃, parents in schools that did not hold elections are more likely to express preferences for scheduled caste and tribe candidates.

Figure A2: Differences on Observables Between Schools That Held Elections and Schools That Did Not Hold Elections



Notes: This figure presents differences between schools that held elections and those that did not. We present a simple t-test between election and non-election schools on observables.



Figure A3: Preferences for Representatives

Notes: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned SMC candidate attribute values on the probability of being preferred as a member of the SMC. Estimates are based on an OLS model with standard errors clustered by respondent. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The points without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute. The conjoint experiment varied characteristics on lines of religion and caste, gender, and political party the fictional SMC candidate belonged to. In this analysis, we run models by whether respondents sent their child to a school that did or did not hold an election.