

**Citizens and the state in urban India: an in-depth investigation on emergent
citizenship and public goods provision**
(excerpt from full proposal)
Case for support

Context and motivation

The behaviour of the state will be central to the evolution of both living conditions and the environment for business in India's cities and towns. Urban governance, and its links to both economic functioning and living standards, is relatively under-researched and ill-understood. The available evidence suggests India is behind other middle income countries in designs and practices for urban management.

From the perspective of poverty (in all its dimensions), India's rural poverty is both more extensive and deeper. But in terms of both numbers and intensity, urban poverty is huge by global standards, with over 80 million people living below India's (very parsimonious) expenditure-based poverty line in 2004/05 according to the National Sample Survey. It is also under-researched, with the relationships between tenurial insecurity, informality, environmental degradation, inequalities in living conditions and power, and urban violence weakly understood. This matters for now, and even more for the future: the performance of urban areas will, over the medium and long term, be crucial to poverty. The numbers of urban poor have been rising (at least until 2004/05), and there will be further relative urbanisation of poverty in the years ahead. Many of the children of today's rural households in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc, will be moving either to the great conurbations such as Delhi or Mumbai, or to smaller towns. Urban-to-rural interactions are already influencing rural lives, via remittances, flows of information and human contact, consumer goods and cultural shifts. This can have positive influences, via the experience of less rigid caste and gender difference in urban areas, for example, but urban areas can also be sites of heightened insecurity and inter-group violence.

Public good (under-)provisioning and citizen-state interactions

The well-being of people in urban areas is intricately linked to the provision of public goods, notably law and order, road and public transport systems, water and sanitation, air and water pollution, garbage cleanup and electricity access. Some of these involve city-wide public good features, while many involve, at least partly, local public goods in the neighbourhood e.g. around local aspects of water and sanitation networks, clean up, local roads etc. Some, such as home connections of water and electricity, involve private goods, but are heavily affected by spatial policies and practices of supplying agencies (that may not connect at all in some slum neighbourhoods).

Many of the urban poor in India—as elsewhere—suffer widespread underprovision of local public goods. This is typically in areas in which the state is expected to provide goods or services. Some relatively affluent areas opt out of state provision

with private companies solving the organisational problem of providing and charging for a provision of local public good. This is rarely an option for poor areas, especially where housing and land tenure is insecure—because of collective action challenges, insecurity and lack of material resources.

At the policy level most governments are committed to the provision of a whole range of public services and to providing tenurial security that might underpin these services. However in practice these services reach the poor as a result of active mobilization of resources through both individual and collective action, rather than simply as result of government largesse. Examples of action might include strategic demands put on candidates during elections, legal action such as public interest litigation, mobilization of the media, and public protests—all of which requires that people learn to act as citizens.

The case for in-depth and inter-disciplinary work

While it is in principle relatively easy to document proximate “failures” in service provision and levels of deprivation (though much more work is needed on this, especially in constructing city and town-level data down to local neighbourhoods), it is a much more complex challenge to understand the interactions between individuals, households and the state within a processual model. Interactions with the state are hypothesized to determine how individuals learn what it takes to make claims over the state functionaries and in turn, how the experience of street level state officials such as local patwaris (revenue collectors), policemen, census officials, and school teachers serves to inform the conduct of higher level functionaries. How are the relations between state and citizens mediated through local party functionaries? What role do collective events such as elections play in mobilizing citizen efforts to get basic provisions? If everyday life is punctuated by crises such as epidemics or episodes of collective violence, making peripheral areas of the city where the poor often reside visible to the agencies of the state, what role do these moments of crises play in longer-term public provisioning to the poor?

There is a strong case for inter-disciplinary work within the social sciences to deepen our understanding of these issues. This can fruitfully combine conceptual and methodological resources of disciplines, especially socio-cultural anthropology, political sociology and economics. For example, at the conceptual level, anthropology brings approaches to analyzing networks, practices, strategies and the nature of citizenship, economics brings analysis of the nature and implications of public goods, incentives for behaviour of households in relation to pursuit of living conditions, income, risk management, and the nature of rent-seeking behaviour; political sociology (and political science), brings frameworks for analyzing clientelism, voting behaviour etc. On the empirical side, different disciplines bring complementary empirical strengths: ethnographic and other “qualitative” techniques such as discourse analysis from anthropology, household survey design and analysis from economics etc. Inter-disciplinary work is of particular importance given the weakness of standardized methodological instruments in these areas.

In addition to the PI and co-investigator from CPR, the research will in substance be designed and implemented jointly with Veena Das, a distinguished anthropologist, Rajendran Das, an economist who works closely in the field with Veena Das, and Jeffrey Hammer, an economist with extensive research and policy experience (see Annex on additional investigators). Walton has also worked in the past with anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists.

Outline of research design

No existing data base has the mix of information on conditions and processes required to tackle the questions of citizen-state interaction in situations of emergent citizenship in India. The research will involve primary data collection in three communities in greater Delhi, using a mix of techniques, including questionnaires, interviews with key informants and discourse analysis. Two of these will be in poor communities of historically migrant households, with low levels of recognition of property rights. A third will be in a more established community in terms of tenurial security, though located in a similar low-income neighborhood.

Intensive conversation around design, conceptualization, empirical strategy and interpretation between anthropology, economics and urban sociology will be integrated into every phase of the process.

Links to other research on urban India

Work on urban governance in India is less well-developed than in many other countries, but there has been some relatively recent work on citizen-state interactions and service delivery in an urban context (see in particular Baud et al, Eckert, Chandoke et al, Houtzager et al, in the references). While there are similarities in some of the issues tackled, the proposed research is distinctive in its focus on emergent citizenship, in areas in which local level state institutions are not formally integrated into community life, and its methodological focus on integration of relatively small sample survey-based approaches with key informant and other techniques to get at the underlying processes.

While the research will be of interest in its own right, it forms part of a planned research programme on urban governance, citizen behaviour and well-being that the Mukopadhyay and Walton are engaged in (co-managed with the political sociologist Patrick Heller of Brown University; Heller will be available to advise on this project). This includes an initial DFID-funded small project that combines an assessment of formal and informal aspects of urban regimes in Bangalore, Delhi and Bangalore, with quantitative analysis of existing national surveys on inequalities of well-being in urban areas (especially from the National Sample Survey and National Family Health Survey). Future research on overall urban functioning, including state-business-society interactions and links to both competitiveness and the

distribution of well-being is being planned, with initial discussions with the Rockefeller Foundation. This proposed research here will directly feed into this.

Hypotheses

- *There is significant under-provision of public goods for urban living, especially in poor neighbourhoods with uncertain de jure and de facto property rights.*
- *This is related to “weak” influence of poorer groups on the behaviour of the state with respect to service delivery, despite relative success in avoiding eviction; state agencies are driven by agendas and motivations (maintaining vote-banks, providing jobs for state workers, top-down initiatives, patronage, response to “emergencies” such as epidemics and floods) within which the daily needs of the poor have little weight.*
- *Most poorer groups engage the state through a variety of contacts—some direct (requests for water, electricity, documents, the police), some indirect (via politicians, local community leaders, fixers)—with daily struggles for material resources an important source of their time and effort allocation.*
- *There is substantial heterogeneity and inequality across households in provisioning, outcomes and household strategies vis-à-vis the state, even within poor neighbourhoods, with large spatial and social gradients, linked to migration, assets, work and histories, and to religious and caste “identity”.*
- *There is heterogeneity across different state agencies and programmes, in terms of the extent and nature of responsiveness, that is (tentatively) associated with their links to rent-seeking, patronage, as well as contingent histories of agency leadership and work cultures.*
- *There are periodic bouts of more intensive interaction, through mobilization around a collective issue, around election times, or in response to “crises” such as epidemics or outbreaks of collective violence.*
- *The strategies and goals of individuals and households in relation to provisioning of public (and private) goods) evolve in a process of learning and engagement from both daily struggles/interactions with the state and periodic intense engagement—this constitutes an evolution of citizenship, especially when there is co-evolution of state behaviour. In economic parlance this can also involve an evolution of preferences.*

Research strategy

The core strategy will be in-depth exploration of households and key informants in three communities in the greater Delhi area, including 300-400 households and some 40 key informants in each neighbourhood. It is planned to complement this with a briefer survey of 5-7 additional communities in greater Delhi. The research will be essentially descriptive and interpretative—given our current state of understanding it is premature to consider design of field experiments for impact evaluation.

The research builds on past work in these areas: as part of a multidisciplinary team, Veena Das and Ranendra Das have been engaged in building panel data covering a total of 400 households over 10 neighborhoods in Delhi since the year 2000, in collaboration with the Institute of Socio-economic Research in Development and Democracy. One cluster of 40 survey households, living in different kinds of houses ranging from shanties to half-pucca (of permanent material) houses in Noida, is part of this panel data. This is an unrecognized community with a predominance of migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, largely from the scheduled castes and other backward castes. Past data collected includes budget surveys, weekly and monthly morbidity surveys, and surveys on financial transactions (income, debt, credit, assets, and major commodities bought and sold). Qualitative research on this neighborhood has included ethnographic interviews on household and neighborhood relations, the history of major disputes, and participant observation on an emerging movement for housing. The focus of their research has been on understanding health and well-being and on neighborhood relations.

Three communities will be selected for in-depth survey work: the above community in Noida, a second community of a comparable insecure character, but with a higher proportion of Muslim residents, and a longer established community in Delhi for which (it is hypothesized) patterns of exercise of citizenship will be more evolved. (See the Annex on community choice and sampling.) The characteristics of these communities will be related to a broader descriptive analysis of health, well-being and asset gradients from the National Sample Survey, the Census, and the National Family Health Survey (already in train and financed), in order to position the households in relation to national profiles of such socio-economic characteristics.

An approach of in-depth investigation with a small sample (or communities) was selected to develop an understanding of the nature and process of interaction with the state, with intermediaries and with other groups. While the communities will not be statistically representative of Greater Delhi, they are of particular interest because of their high migrant element, their lack of recognition by the state and the emergent nature of citizenship. Dynamic aspects will be explored through the material from the subsamples of 40 households in communities in which research has already been ongoing for several years, plus retrospective questions and interviews.

There are important methodological questions over empirical techniques that efficiently capture information and understanding around the practices, nature and potential emergence of behaviours related to citizenship. In particular, we do not know: (a) what kind of information can be obtained from brief, once-off interviews (with households and informants), as opposed to requiring repeated interactions and the building of trust with interviewees; and (b) what kind of information is common to a community (for example on public good provision and conditions), so requiring only a small number of informants, and where there is substantial heterogeneity within a community. The survey approach has been designed to

provide answers to the question, with important implications for future research design, by this group and other researchers.

Research design and analysis

The *design phase* will involve synthesis and interpretation of existing work on strategies of the poor in relation to the state in everyday life, finalization of specific geographic scope of the research, and the statistical strategy for household selection, plus selection of initial key informants, from politicians, fixers, community leaders, NGOs, state planning and service-supplying agencies. It will also involve the development and translation of household questionnaires (demographic, socio-economic status, contacts with the state, migration and work history, health status, aspirations, networks) and the research protocol for key informants.

Field work will be undertaken in two rounds: the first will involve the initial round of key informant interviews and household interviews (with two to three visits) plus review of administrative policies and interviews of the state agencies (planning and service delivery). An interim workshop will involve an initial analysis of the pattern of everyday interactions, major episodes of collective or state action and of the “performance” of the household questionnaire in relation to the reliability of information from initial surveys, and heterogeneity across households. There will then be revision of protocols and questionnaires, and both further interviews and surveys in the three in-depth communities, plus a more rapid investigation of about five or more additional communities, with both the research protocol and the coverage (types of key informants and number of households) based on the results of this interim review.

Analysis will involve a mixture of descriptive statistical analysis and interpretation of results from the interview and other material. For example, the pattern of under-provision of local public goods can be explored from combining household responses with the detailed spatial observations of surveyors. We plan to use GIS techniques for the micro-spatial mapping of the community. This can be linked to household reports on who they know and connect with (neighbours, fixers, big men, politicians) to explore how different households get their desires met. Documentation of major events of collective significance, around crises or state action, will come from both key informant and household sources. Detailed, intensive interviews may get at evolving preferences. Interpretation of the underlying narratives and histories on the side of households, intermediaries and state actors will come from interviews (including retrospective information) and discourse analysis. Our analysis will allow us to see how the state is embodied in everyday life; the boundaries between formal law and practices that mimic the law and acquire legitimacy through practice (but are distinct from customary law); the role of networks that are generated as intermediaries between the community and the functionaries of the state; and the processes through which ideas of and aspirations to citizenship are learnt in the course of everyday life. This work will

add to the growing literature on the poor that views them not as passive recipients of the largesse of the State, but as actors who make choices, learn and act within a highly constrained environment.