

Redrawing the Lines: Did Political Incumbents Influence Electoral Redistricting in India?*

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Abstract

In 2008, the boundaries of state electoral constituencies in India were redrawn for the first time since 1976. Using data from 23 states, we provide evidence that India's delimitation process was largely politically neutral. We construct three measures of redistricting in a given constituency that may be unfavorable to incumbents: the extent of demographic change, the share of new voters and whether there was a change in the reservation status for minority group representation. We find that, on average, constituencies represented by advisory members of the delimitation commission, state ministers, or members of the state ruling party did not have any preferential redistricting. In a few states, advisory committee members and state ministers are less likely to see reservation status change in their constituency.

Keywords: electoral redistricting, political influence, political reservations, nonpartisan redistricting, India.

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1. Introduction

Most democratic countries redraw their electoral boundaries every few years, with the goal of equalizing constituency population sizes based on the “one person one vote” principle. In first-past-the-post electoral systems, electoral district boundaries divide both people and territory, converting votes in particular places into legislative seats. As such, electoral boundary delimitation—the drawing and then periodic redrawing of legislative districts to accommodate demographic change—is a foundational administrative task that underpins representative democracy. This is because it structurally determines the politics that flow from it (Gudgin & Taylor 1979; Rehfeld 2005; Gardner 2012), at least to some degree. The redistricting process can be seen as undemocratic if influenced by incumbent politicians or ruling parties to their advantage, a process sometimes called “gerrymandering” (King 1989; Grofman & Handley 2008; Seabrook 2017; Wong 2019; Palmer & Schneer 2026).

In this paper, we examine whether a particular redistricting process in India was politically neutral. In 2008, India redrew national and state electoral constituency boundaries after a three-decade gap, with India’s non-political Delimitation Commission conducting this redistricting. While the design of the system is aimed at neutrality, it is an open question whether incumbent politicians still managed to influence the process; several were part of the Commission’s Advisory Committee and the literature suggests other possible paths to influence (Rossiter, Johnson & Pattie 1997; Thomas 2011). We construct and utilize three new neutrality measures to empirically determine whether partisans were in fact able to subvert the Indian Delimitation Commission’s processes and skew redistricting outcomes in their favor.

Using detailed, constituency-level demographic and electoral data, we measure the extent of change in a constituency’s demographic characteristics and the fraction of new voters in the

redrawn constituency, based on the assumption that such changes are likely to impose greater re-election campaign costs and are therefore adverse outcomes from an incumbent politician's perspective. A third measure is change in a constituency's constitutionally-provided-for reservation status (from unreserved to reserved for particular social groups¹ or vice versa). When reservation status changes, an incumbent politician is often explicitly barred from running and must find a new constituency to contest from—a significant disadvantage for an incumbent. We examine whether such adverse redistricting outcomes are less likely to occur for influential incumbents, defined as politicians who are advisory members of the Delimitation Commission, state ministers or members of the ruling party.

We find that India's 2008 redistricting was largely politically neutral. Across the three measures of redistricting and the three indicators of incumbent influence, we find no negative and statistically significant coefficients, suggesting that incumbents were not able to prevent unfavorable changes to their districts. In fact, the only significant coefficient is positive, indicating more demographic change in state ministers' constituencies. This is true despite the ministerial asset accumulation "premium" documented in other studies (Fisman et al, 2014). Even with respect to reservation status change, which can impose significant barriers to incumbents, we do not see incumbents' constituencies being less likely to be changed, on average. However, incumbent advisory committee members in seven states and state ministers in three states are less likely to have the reservation status of their constituency changed. All findings are robust to alternative model specifications.

¹ The Indian constitution provides for specific, geographically-based "reserved" constituencies in parliament and state legislatures for "Scheduled Castes" (SC) and "Scheduled Tribes" (ST), social groups that were historically marginalized and discriminated against. While many different social groups exist in these constituencies, only members of SC or ST can be candidates in reserved seats.

We contribute to the literature on redistricting in three distinct ways. First, we examine the pattern of redistricting and its *ex-ante* relationship with demographic and political characteristics; the existing literature largely conducts *ex-post* analysis (see, among others, Gelman & King (1990); Altman & McDonald (2015); Fraga (2016); *contra* Thompson (2004); Mann (2005); Cain et al (2005); McDonald (2006)).

Second, we contribute by conducting *ex-ante* analysis with newly constructed measures that make use of highly detailed GIS maps, an approach that can be generalized to other contexts. Prior literature mostly constructs seats-votes curves for the entire state or country, rather than examining constituency-level changes; Ansolabehere et al. (2000) is a notable exception, but not without criticism (Sekhon & Titunik 2012). There has also historically been a focus on geographic traits like “compactness,” “contiguity,” and “communities of interest,” (Hacker 1963; Polsby & Popper 1991; Altman 1997; Webster 2013) which has shifted to using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) algorithms and advanced spatial simulation packages, such as BARD (Better Automated Redistricting), to generate tens of thousands of alternative districting plans which comply with all legally mandated constraints (Altman & McDonald 2011; McWhorter & DeFord 2026; McCartan 2022; McCartan et al 2026; O’Sullivan, Imai & McCartan (preprint) 2026). While these advancements are important and suggest a path towards more neutral redistricting, they rely on comparisons with existing maps, which may not be neutral to begin with. The new measures we construct are constituency-specific and we examine their association with specific measures of incumbent influence.

A third contribution is examining electoral redistricting in a relatively young democracy in the Global South, where voter information and accountability mechanisms are likely less widespread than elsewhere. Previous literature has largely focused on the United States, and

therefore on issues central to U.S. politics. For instance, both law and political science scholars have focused on how district geometry impacts minority descriptive representation and approaches to overcome these disadvantages (Shockley 1991; Polsby & Popper 1991; Davidson & Grofman 1994; Lublin 1997; Karlan 1997; Ostrow 2018; Avenancio-Leon et al 2026). U.S. studies find that multi-member districts complicate re-districting processes and make gerrymandering more difficult (Stephanopoulos and McGhee 2015; Garg, Gurnee, Rothschild & Shmoys 2021), while systems that are plurality-based and employ single member districts can easily be manipulated to devalue an opponent's raw vote-share. They do so by "packing," concentrating that politician's strength in handful of districts won by very large majorities, or "cracking," dispersing that politician's votes over a large number of districts, such that he/she will not have enough to win in any one district (Cain 1985; Owen & Grofman 1988; King 1989; Friedman & Holden 2008; Stephanopoulos & McGee 2015; Jeong & Shenoy 2024).

Once achieved, partisan re-districting is often consequential for voters and politicians, as well as for public policy outcomes (Cain 1985; Gelman & King 1994b; Baqir 2002; Besley and Preston 2007; Hayes & McKee 2009; Engstrom 2006; Broockman 2013; Caughey, Tausanovitch & Warshaw 2019; Williamson 2019; Fraga, Moskowitz & Schmeer 2022; Rushovich, White & Krieger 2026). In particular, redistricting can impact a range of political outcomes, including incumbent name recognition, the likelihood of voting in post-redistricting elections, policy moderation and race entry decisions by politicians. Interestingly, the effect of redistricting on incumbency advantage remains contested, with some studies finding an incumbency advantage arising from partisan redistricting (Gilligan & Matsusaka 1999; Shotts 2001; Forgette & Winkle 2006; Gul & Pesendorfer 2010), and others finding no relationship (Friedman & Holden 2009).

Electoral redistricting in India ("delimitation" or "re-delimitation," locally) has generated

only limited scholarship (Singh 2000; McMillan 2000; Verma 2002; Jensenius 2013; Patel & Sekher 2024; Mishra 2025), despite India redrawing national and state electoral constituency boundaries in 2008 after a three-decade gap. Some media reports claimed that many politicians' electoral prospects were harmed by this process (*The Hindu* 2009; Rahman 2013), but other commentators cited the Delimitation Commission's work as being "without any obvious political partisanship" (*Economic and Political Weekly* 2008). To our knowledge, there has been no systematic empirical analysis of the redistricting process.

Finally, we contribute by examining whether non-partisan delimitation processes actually deliver politically neutral redistricting. Many countries (Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico) and several U.S. states have used non-partisan redistricting commissions, but the resulting outcomes have been mixed. Henderson et al. (2018) find that the maps produced by independent redistrictors offer the same degree of insulation to incumbents as those produced by partisan redistrictors. In contrast, Trelles et al. (2022) find that political parties exerted only a marginal effect on redistricting outcomes. India is the largest and most heterogeneous democracy using non-political commissions for re-drawing constituency boundaries and, arguably, the best test-case for whether these can achieve neutrality.

2. Electoral Redistricting in India

2.1. India's Political System

India's political system is a parliamentary democracy at both the national and state levels, with first-past-the-post elections conducted every five years. India conducts the largest electoral exercise in the world, with more than 900 million voters and 100 recognized political parties. State elections have an average of ten candidates contesting from each constituency. Voter

turnout is quite high: it was approximately 58% in the 2009 general election and 66.1% in the most recent general elections, in 2024. As mentioned earlier, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) were provided reserved constituencies in the national parliament and state legislatures, in proportion to their population-share. Prior to re-delimitation, 22.1% of national parliamentary seats were reserved for these communities, and 24.1% were reserved after re-delimitation. This is consistent with their population share of 21.5% in the 1971 census and 24.4% in the 2001 census.

The Election Commission of India is responsible for conducting elections to the national parliament and to state legislative assemblies. Election Commission staff are career bureaucrats who are required to be politically neutral. For instance, they may not join political parties or otherwise engage in partisan political activity. The Election Commission of India has established a reputation for conducting free and fair elections and has undertaken many measures to safeguard the integrity of elections (McMillan, 2010; Ahuja & Ostermann 2018).

2.2. Electoral redistricting prior to the 2001 census

After independence from colonial rule, electoral redistricting was initially undertaken after each decennial census (see timeline in Appendix Figure A.1). However, this stopped after complaints from several states that the process undermined states' incentives to implement population control policies, since a bigger population would result in more state representatives in the national parliament. In 1976, the 42nd Amendment to the Indian Constitution required that all electoral boundaries as of 1977 be frozen in place “until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2000 have been published” (Articles 81 and 82).

2.3. Electoral redistricting after the census of 2001

After the census of 2001, the delimitation process commenced began with the enactment of the Delimitation Act, 2002 and the Delimitation (Amendment) Act 2003. Since the concerns about distorting population control incentives for state governments continued to be relevant, this redistricting exercise specified that the total number of electoral constituencies would remain the same, both for the national legislature as well as for state legislatures. Further, each state would continue to have the same number of representatives in the national legislature, i.e. there would be no reallocation of seats across states. The decision not to increase the number of state representatives in line with increases in state population, and the decision to not reallocate parliamentary seats across states, have both come under heavy criticism as violating the principles of representative democracy (McMillan 2001; Yadav 2008). The goals of the post-2001 redistricting exercise were two-fold: First, to equalize the population across electoral constituencies *within* each state, and second, to re-demarcate the electoral constituencies to be reserved for the SCs and STs in proportion to their increased population share. The goal of population equalization was subject to the constraints that the constituencies should be geographically compact and contiguous, every state assembly constituency should lie wholly within a national parliamentary constituency, and all assembly constituencies should lie wholly within administrative districts. Factors such as physical features, facilities of communication, and public convenience were also to be considered, such that areas divided by rivers or hilly ranges or forests or ravines and other such natural barriers were not to be put in the same constituency, to facilitate the logistics of conducting elections. Since these constraints make the exact equalization of population across constituencies difficult, the Delimitation Commission agreed that the population in a specific constituency could vary up to 10 percent above or below the district

average. This guideline has been criticized for being arbitrary, and for being violated in many cases (Kumar 2009).

After these constituencies were mapped out, constituencies that were to be reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) were demarcated. The overall number of constituencies to be reserved for the SCs and STs were based on their population share in the state, and the exact constituencies chosen for reservation were the ones that have the largest population shares of these communities. In our analysis sample of 3251 state assembly constituencies, there were 492 constituencies reserved for SC and 237 reserved for ST prior to redelimitation; these numbers increased to 563 and 366 respectively after redelimitation.

In each state, re-delimitation was carried out by an independent (non-partisan) three-member Delimitation Commission, comprising a former Supreme Court judge, the Chief Election Commissioner of India and the State Election Commissioner of the state. Ten elected representatives from the state, five from the state legislature (*Vidhan Sabha*) and five from the national parliament (*Lok Sabha*), acted as “associate members” to advise each state’s Delimitation Commission, though they had no voting power on the Commission’s final decisions. After examining data from the 2001 census and local maps, consulting with district officials, and meeting with these associate members, the Delimitation Commission published a detailed draft proposal with the proposed boundaries of each electoral constituency. Public comments were invited on the draft proposal, and several public meetings were held to hear the views of citizens. Political parties in each state scrutinized these proposals and submitted their views for consideration, often proposing new boundaries for certain constituencies. After taking into account these views, the Delimitation Commission published final reports for each state. The new electoral boundaries were approved by the President of India in February 2008. By law, these new

boundaries cannot be changed until the first census after the year 2026.

3. How Might Incumbent Politicians Influence Redistricting?

In order to generate testable hypotheses about the role of politician influence on redistricting, we primarily focus on the role of existing incumbents on the assumption that they are in a position to exert much greater influence on any policymaking exercise compared to non-incumbents in single-member, simple-plurality districts (Erikson 1972; Mayhew 1974; King & Gelman 1991; Gordon & Landa 2009; Fourniaies & Hall 2014).² We further assume that incumbent politicians, having successfully won an election from a given constituency, would have a strong motivation to avoid any changes being made to their constituency (Stratmann 2000; Ansolabehere et al 2000). Based on this, we construct three measures of how much any constituency was changed during the redistricting process (details in Section 4 below).

Despite the non-partisan composition of the state's Delimitation Commission, it is possible that political incumbents could have exerted some influence on its decisions. Incumbent members of the state legislative assembly, as well as national parliament members from the state, constituted the Advisory Committee and therefore had the ability to make their views known during their attendance at meetings, despite their lack of voting rights. Beyond this official capacity, several incumbent politicians provided detailed written comments during the public comments period. Earlier literature has documented the impact of political parties on electoral redistricting (Rossiter et al., 1997) and on bureaucrat actions more generally (Iyer & Mani 2012; Gulzar & Pasquale 2017). Legislators belonging to the ruling party are likely to exert influence over policy to benefit themselves or their constituencies (Asher & Novosad, 2017); incumbents who are ministers are

² There is mixed evidence on whether incumbents in India are advantaged in electoral terms: some studies find an incumbency advantage in terms of contesting the next election (Uppal 2009), while others do not (Lee 2020).

likely to be particularly influential (Fisman et al 2014; Khalil et al 2021).

Based on this literature, we construct three measures of influence for each incumbent member of the state legislative assembly: whether they are a member of the Delimitation Commission's Advisory Committee, whether they are a minister in the state cabinet, and whether they belong to the ruling party of the state. We obtained this information from public sources such as the Delimitation Committee's reports, government gazette announcements and newspaper reports. Note that these measures are not very highly correlated with each other, beyond the fact that ruling party members are more likely to be state ministers (Appendix Table A.1). We also conduct robustness checks using similar indicators for the member of parliament (MP) representing the area of each state constituency, namely whether they are a member of the Advisory Committee, whether they are a minister in the national government, and whether they belong to the ruling party at the national level.

If influential incumbents are able to exert influence over the redistricting process, we expect their constituencies to experience a lesser degree of change during the redistricting process compared to the constituencies of incumbents who are less influential. We proceed to formally test this hypothesis using the measures described below.

4. Measuring Redistricting

We analyze data from all 23 states in India that underwent delimitation in 2008.⁴ We use village- or town-level demographic data from the 2001 census and overlaying these with GIS maps

⁴ For a variety of reasons, the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Manipur, and Nagaland did not redistrict following the 2001 Census.

of pre-2008 (“old”) and post-2008 (“new”) constituency boundaries.⁵ This enables us to compute old and new constituency demographic characteristics.

To define the extent of redistricting, we need to match old constituencies to new constituencies; we do this based on whichever new constituency contains the largest proportion of the population from the old constituency. We should note that different constituencies underwent different degrees of change. Appendix Figure A.2 shows the old and new constituency maps of Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. It is noticeable that the boundaries of some constituencies did not change at all (e.g. Macherla and Vinukonda), some became larger (e.g. Sattenapalle) while yet others became smaller than before (e.g. Prathipadu). Despite these changes, it is relatively easy to map constituencies before and after redelimitation e.g. both Sattenapalle (old) and Prathipadu (old) are matched to the new constituencies of the same name, since those contain the largest share of the population from the old constituencies.

We construct three measures of the extent of redistricting. Our first measure relates to the extent of demographic change in a given constituency; it is computed as $\sqrt{\frac{1}{5} \sum_j (D_{j,new} - D_{j,old})^2}$, where $D_{j,old}$ is demographic characteristic j for the pre-delimitation constituency, and $D_{j,new}$ is the characteristic for the post-delimitation constituency. The demographic characteristics we use are those available at the village level from the census: the shares of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, literate and rural population. Since all the demographic variables are between 0 and 1, this measure would be zero for constituencies where there were no boundary changes and one for constituencies where all the demographics changed from zero to one (e.g. if it went from completely rural to completely urban and from having no SC/ST to having all SC/ST population

⁵ The imperfect GIS overlay was complemented by extensive manual checks. We are unable to match constituencies within cities as the number and boundaries of wards changed substantially. Thus, some large cities (accounting for 6% of our constituencies) are dropped from the analysis.

etc). In our data, the maximum for this measure is 0.469 and the average is 0.039 (Table 1). It is of course possible that some demographic changes may be beneficial for specific incumbents, so that they may exert influence to achieve those changes. This measure is also limited by the characteristics available at the village level e.g. only literacy is available rather than more detailed education measures.

Our second measure of the extent of redistricting is the fraction of new voters in the new constituency. This is based on the assumption that an incumbent would prefer to retain as many of their old voters as possible. For constituencies with no boundary changes, this measure would be zero and for constituencies where all the voters were new, this measure would be one; in our data, the average is 0.33, i.e. that an incumbent's constituency retains about two-thirds of the original voters. Again, it is possible that some incumbents may want to carve out voters who did not vote for them and include voters from other constituencies who may be more likely to support them, so that all incumbents may not desire to retain as many old voters as possible. The advantage of this measure is that it captures changes that may not be fully captured by the specific demographic measures for which we have data.

Our third redistricting measure is whether a constituency's reservation status changed. In our data, 13% of unreserved constituencies became reserved post-delimitation, while 7% of reserved constituencies became unreserved (Table 1). For this measure, it is pretty clear that incumbents are disadvantaged when either type of change occurs to their constituency. However, not all constituencies in all states are at risk for such a change to happen. Note that these three measures of redistricting are positively correlated with each other (Appendix Table A.1). In particular, the measure of demographic change is higher when there are more new voters in the constituency; the correlations with changing reservation status are small (less than 0.10).

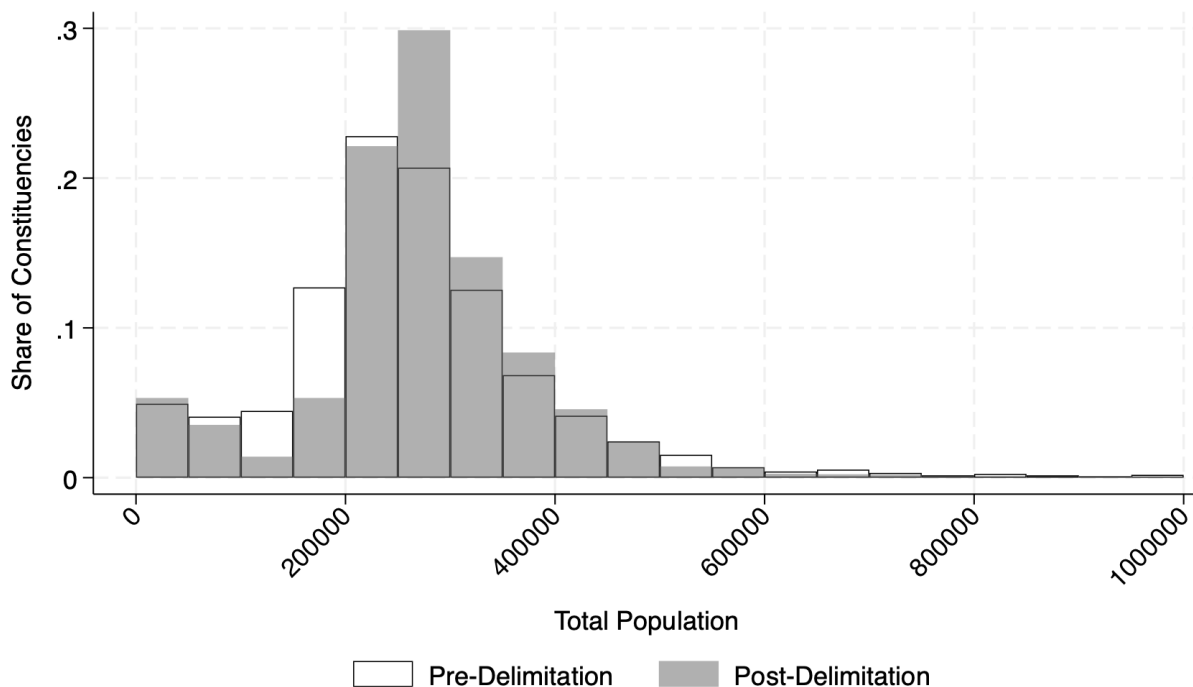
Table 1: Summary statistics

	(1) Obs.	(2) Mean	(3) Std. dev.	(4) Min	(5) Max
<u>Panel A: Measures of Redistricting</u>					
Demographic Change	3,251	0.039	0.048	0	0.469
Fraction of New Voters	3,251	0.329	0.224	0	0.999
Reservation Change	3,251	0.199	0.399	0	1
<u>Panel B: Measures of political influence</u>					
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	3,251	0.030	0.169	0	1
Incumbent is a state minister	3,251	0.112	0.315	0	1
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	3,251	0.478	0.500	0	1
<u>Panel C: Demographic Characteristics</u>					
Population	3,251	264,209	163035	314	3,190,943
Fraction literate	3,251	0.540	0.132	0	0.868
Fraction women	3,251	0.487	0.016	0.404	0.566
Fraction SC	3,251	0.170	0.094	0	0.946
Fraction ST	3,251	0.109	0.212	0	1
Fraction rural	3,251	0.824	0.224	0	1

Notes: Panel B measures of influence are for incumbent members of the state legislative assembly. Panel C shows demographic characteristics of village-level data from the 2001 population census, aggregated to pre-delimitation assembly constituencies.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of constituency populations before and after delimitation. We see that the post-delimitation population distribution is more concentrated towards the center of the distribution i.e. there is less variation in constituency sizes after the delimitation. The variance of constituency populations prior to delimitation was 163,035 which decreased to 127,845 after delimitation (a 22% decline). Thus, the delimitation process achieved the primary goal of considerable (though not complete) equalization of population sizes across constituencies.

Figure 1: Redelimitation resulted in more equal population sizes across constituencies



Note: Constituencies with populations over 1,000,000 people were excluded from this figure. This includes 6 constituencies in the pre-delimitation sample and 17 from the post-delimitation sample.

5. Did Incumbent Politicians Influence Redistricting?

5.1. Regression specification

To determine if politicians were able to influence the delimitation process and achieve preferential constituencies, we estimate the following regression:

$$Redistrict_j = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AdvisoryComm_j + \beta_2 Minister_j + \beta_3 RulingParty_j + \mathbf{X}_j' \gamma + \eta_j \quad (1)$$

where $Redistrict_j$ is a measure of redistricting in constituency j : demographic change, fraction of new voters, or change in reservation status. $AdvisoryComm_j$, $Minister_j$ and $RulingParty_j$ are, respectively, indicators for whether the incumbent state legislative assembly member was an advisory member of the Delimitation Commission, a minister in the state government, or a member of the ruling party. Since the redelimitation process was within-state, we conduct a comparison of constituencies in a state with others within the same state by including a vector of state fixed effects

X_j . If the redistricting process was particularly favorable to incumbents in the sense of avoiding unfavorable redistricting outcomes, we expect the coefficients β_1 through β_3 to be negative and significant.

5.2. Do incumbent politicians influence measures of redistricting?

We find no evidence that the redistricting process was favorable to influential incumbents. Across our three measures of redistricting and our three measures of incumbent influence, we find no negative and statistically significant coefficients (Table 2). In fact, the only significant coefficient is positive, suggesting that state ministers' constituencies had a larger extent of demographic change than those of non-ministers.

Table 2: Do incumbent politicians affect redistricting?

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.005 (0.006)	0.008 (0.024)	-0.009 (0.038)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010 (0.014)	-0.027 (0.021)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.008)	0.023 (0.014)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.073	0.039	0.108

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly from that constituency. Regressions include state fixed effects. Full specification available in Appendix Table A.2.

In addition to being statistically insignificant, the negative coefficients in Table 1 are also small in terms of magnitude. For instance, being a member of the state ruling party reduces the fraction of new voters in a constituency by 0.5 percentage points and the index of demographic change by 0.001; both effect sizes are only 2 percent of the relevant standard deviations. Being on the delimitation advisory committee reduces the chances of an incumbent's constituency

experiencing reservation changes by less than 1 percentage point, while being a state minister reduces the probability by less than 3 percentage points; note that the average chance of such reservation change is 20 percent. Examining the confidence intervals around our estimates, we can rule out negative effects larger than 0.14 standard deviations in the measure of demographic change, 4 percentage points in the fraction of new voters and 8.3 percentage point reduction in the probability of reservation change.

5.3. Robustness checks

We verify that the results of Table 2 are robust to a range of changes in the regression specification. The coefficients remain similar when controlling for pre-redistricting constituency demographic characteristics, how far its population was from the district average (which would shape the extent of boundary change experienced) and the extent of pre-redistricting political competition as measured by the vote margin between the winner and the runner-up (Appendix Table A.3). Similar to Table 2, we see no significant negative coefficients when we exclude state fixed effects or include state random effects instead of state fixed effects (Appendix Table A.4). We verify that our results remain similar when dropping the constituencies with extremely high values of demographic change or share of new voters (Appendix Table A.5), or if we examine membership in the ruling coalition instead of the ruling party (Appendix Table A.6).

We examine whether our main result of political neutrality varies by state. We find no incumbent influence on the constituency's demographic change (Appendix Figure A.3) and only three negative significant coefficients for the fraction of new voters (Appendix Figure A.4). When it comes to change in reservation status, we do see incumbent advisory committee members exerting significant influence in seven states and state ministers showing negative and significant

coefficients in three states (Appendix Figure A.5); constituencies represented by members of the ruling party do not experience significantly different levels of redistricting.

Finally, we conduct a parallel analysis of the extent of redistricting of parliamentary constituencies. The lower house of India's national parliament (the Lok Sabha) has 543 total constituencies, a figure left unchanged by the 2008 redelimitation exercise. Our sample consists of 477 seats in the 23 states that underwent redelimitation. Each parliamentary constituency consists of 6-7 state assembly constituencies. Members of Parliament (MPs) were also members of the delimitation advisory committee. We compute similar measures of the extent of delimitation of parliamentary constituencies and measures of influence for the incumbent MP. Using regression specification (1), we find that MPs also do not influence how much change was experienced by their constituency (Appendix Table A.7).

5.4. Do incumbent politicians influence draft reports?

As described in Section 3.3, the Delimitation Commission published draft reports which were followed by a period of public comments and written requests for changes. Based on reports from 15 states that published these requests, we find that 71 people, many of them incumbent legislators, requested changes to 505 different constituencies. We therefore analyze the draft reports to examine whether our finding of politically neutral redistricting was present at the draft stage itself, or arose because of the public comments process. We computed similar measures of redistricting as before, namely the extent of demographic change, the fraction of new voters and the change in reservation status, but in this case computed using the constituency boundaries proposed in the draft reports. We find that these measures are correlated very highly with the measures computed from the final reports, with correlations of 0.43, 0.87 and 0.95 for the three

measures respectively.

We find very similar findings when we run regression (1) using the draft report figures, namely that influential incumbents do not see significantly better redistricting outcomes for their constituencies (Table 3). The coefficients are quantitatively similar to those in Table 3 as well; the largest difference is in the impact of being on the delimitation committee on the reservation status change. Overall, our conclusion is that the non-partisan Delimitation Committee created politically neutral redistricting plans to begin with, rather than making large changes towards political neutrality as a result of the public comments process.

Table 3: Do incumbent politicians influence draft reports?

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.000 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.026)	-0.044 (0.035)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.008** (0.003)	0.014 (0.015)	-0.031 (0.021)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.013 (0.009)	0.016 (0.015)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.084	0.043	0.111

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly from that constituency. Regressions include state fixed effects.

6. Conclusions

This paper examines the 2008 electoral redistricting process in India, which substantially changed both state and national electoral constituency boundaries. We find that, by and large, the process achieved its primary goal of reducing population size dispersion across constituencies and that the redistricting process does not appear to have been substantially influenced by incumbent

politicians. In particular, the extent of redistricting is not statistically different for constituencies of ruling party politicians and those in ministerial positions.

Our study constitutes a methodological advance in that it puts forward simple, comparable measures of the extent of constituency redistricting that can easily be computed using GIS data to match constituencies. As such, this methodology is generalizable to other countries and electoral systems. An important policy conclusion is that it is possible to implement politically neutral redistricting plans in a developing country, provided that a non-political body is in charge of the process, and that the process is transparent and inclusive of all relevant stakeholders. India, as well as other countries throughout the world, would do well to replicate this approach in any future delimitation.

7. References

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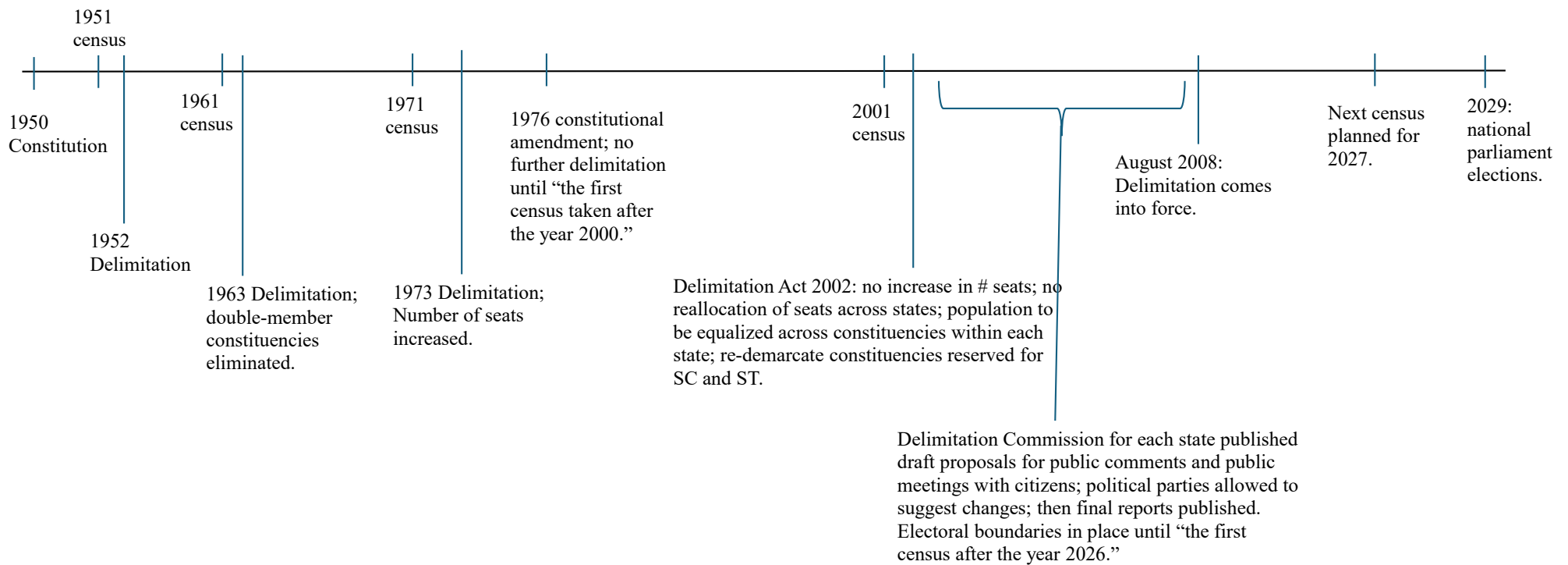
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Redrawing the Lines: Did Political Incumbents Influence Electoral Redistricting in India?

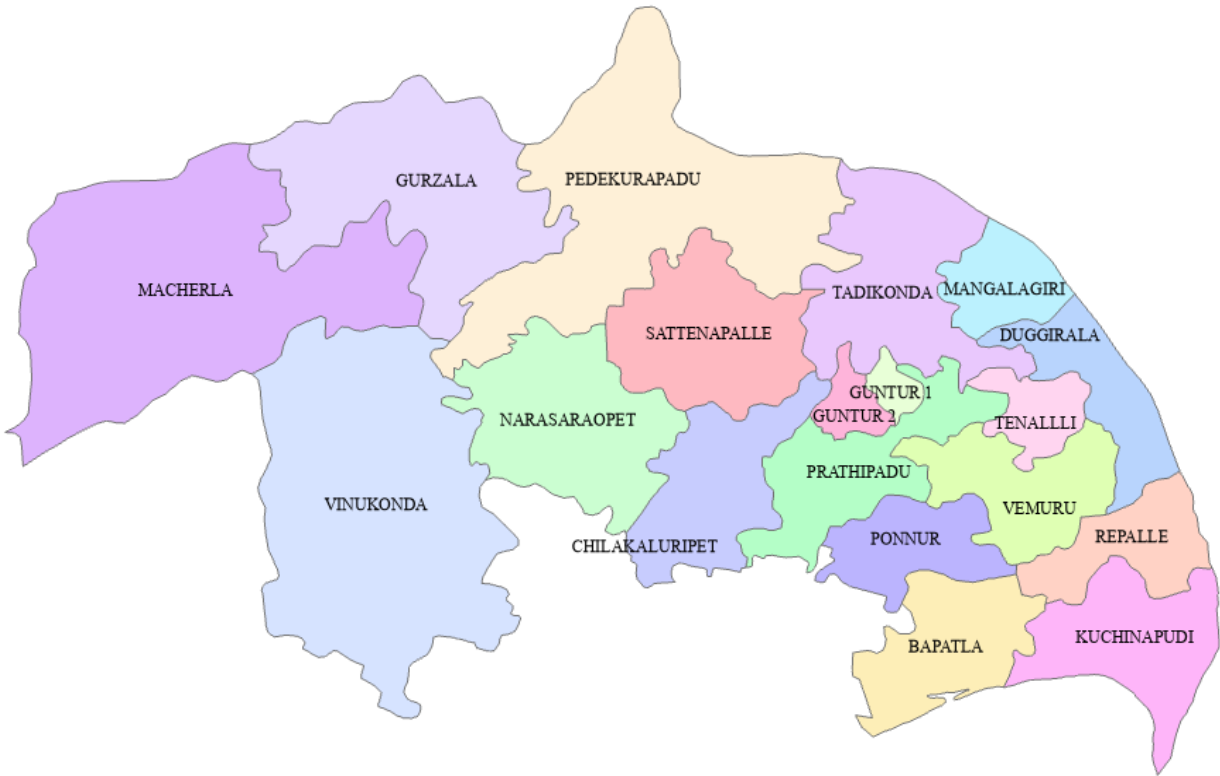
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Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

Appendix Figure A.1: Delimitation Timeline



Appendix Figure A.2: Old and New Constituency Boundaries in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh

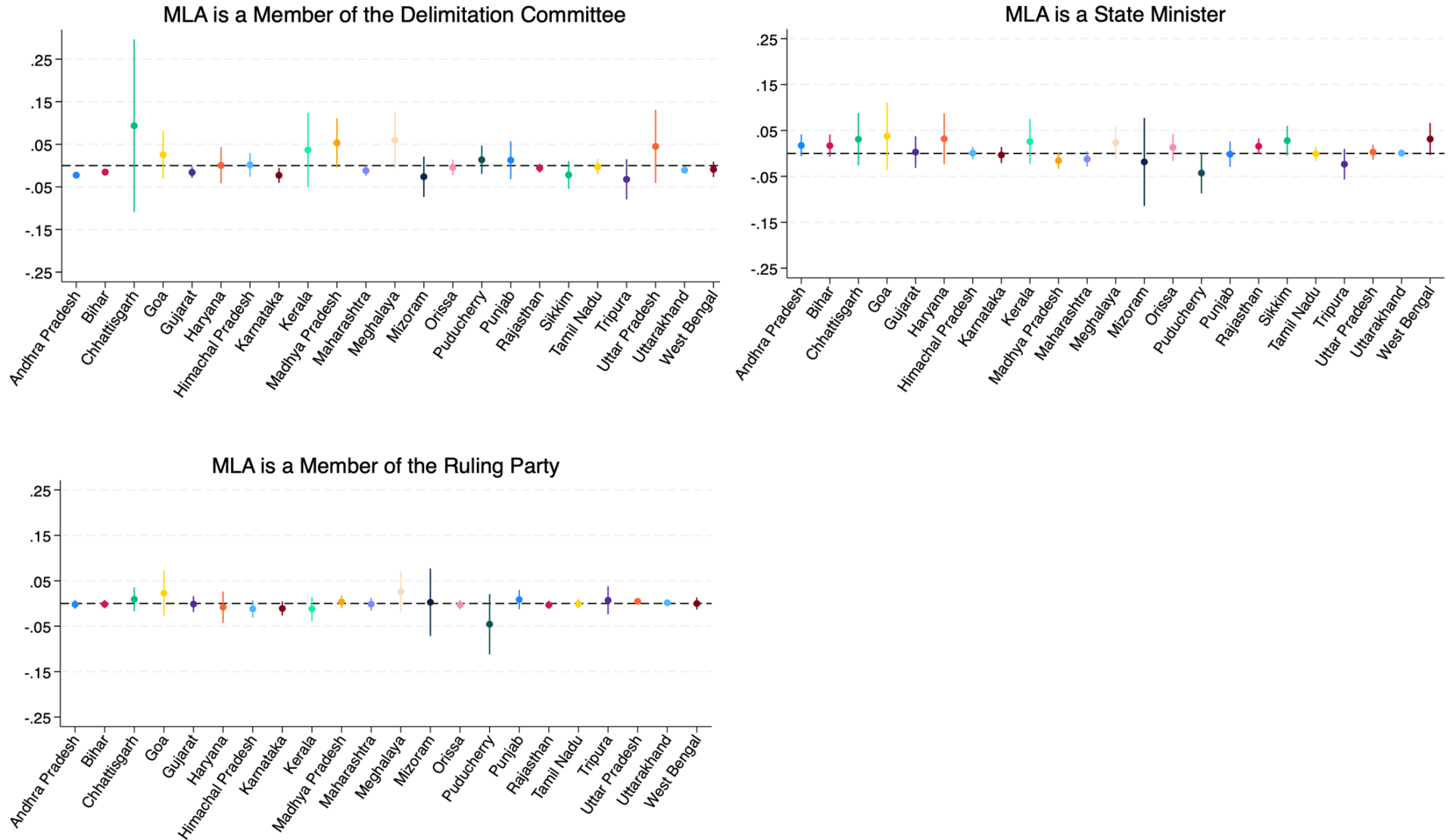


Panel A: Old Assembly Constituency Boundaries



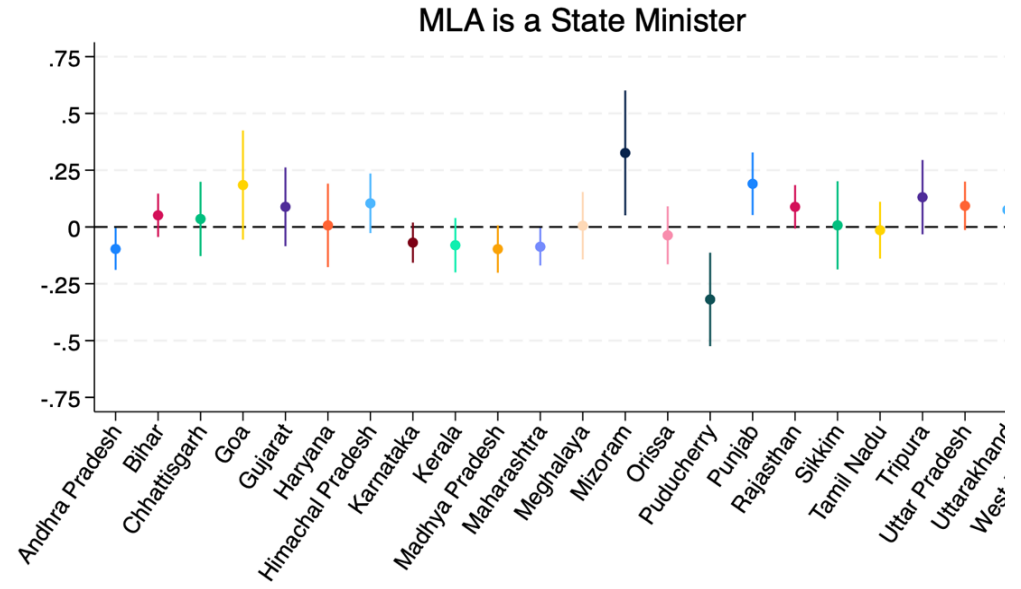
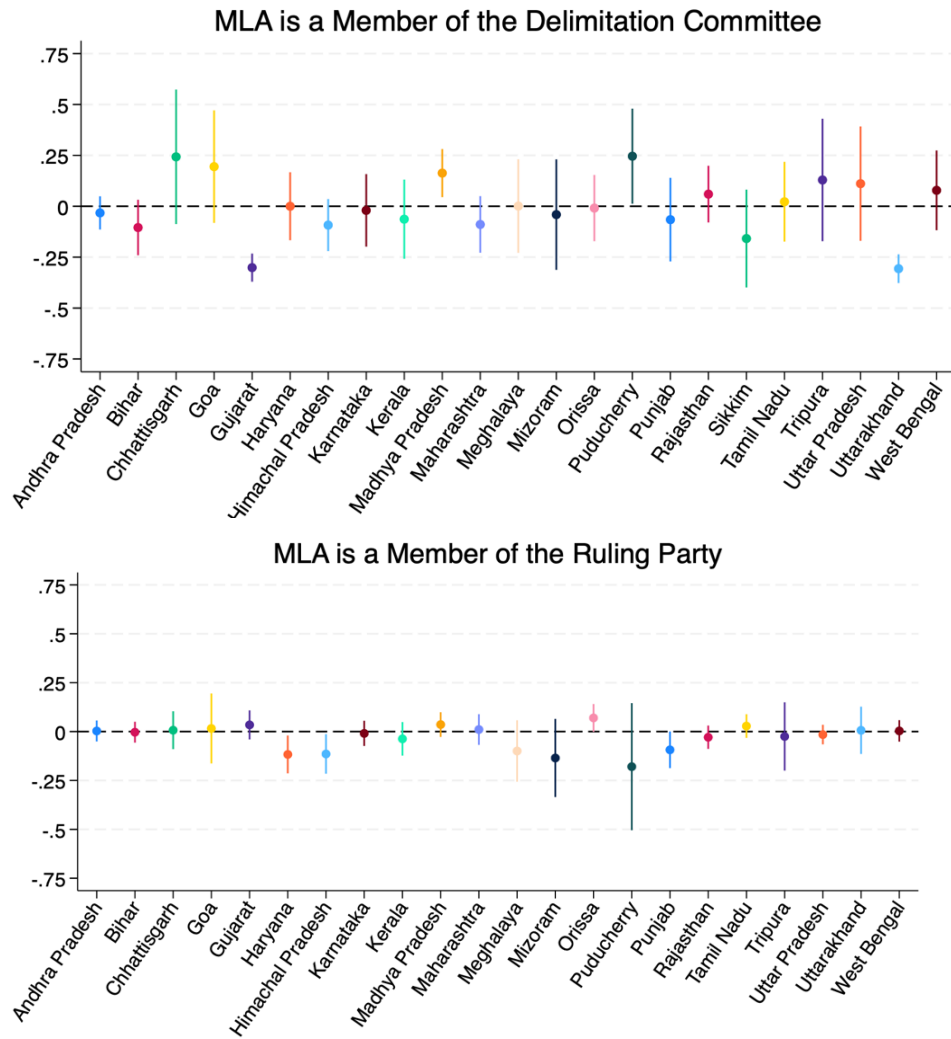
Panel B: New Assembly Constituency Boundaries

Appendix Figure A.3: Demographic Change Measure - State-By-State Variation



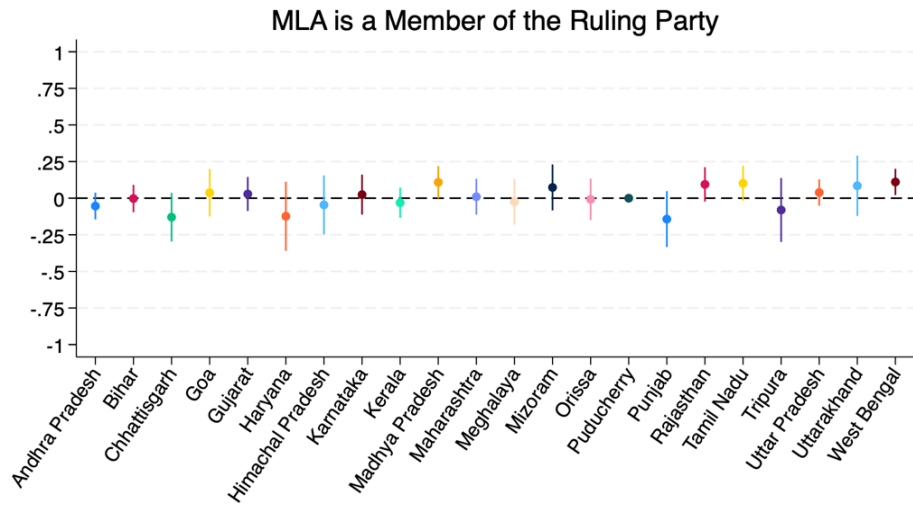
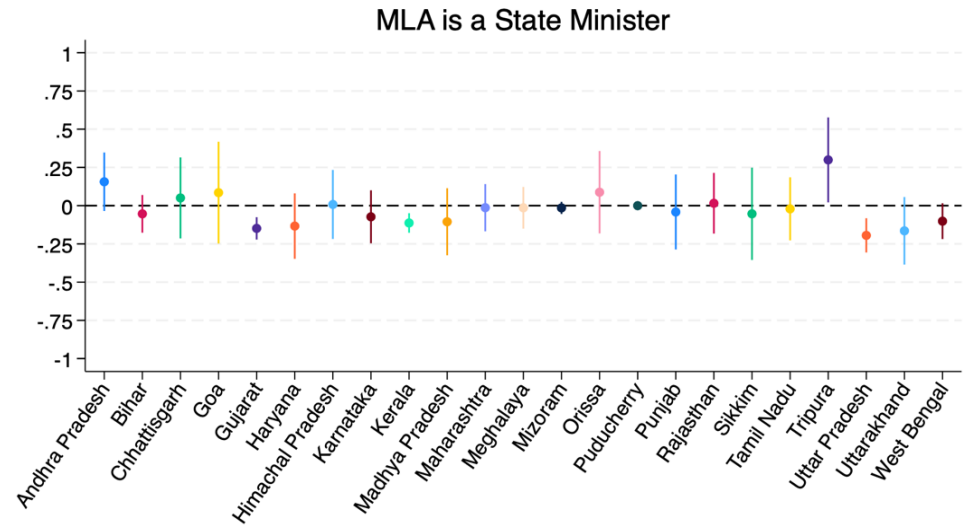
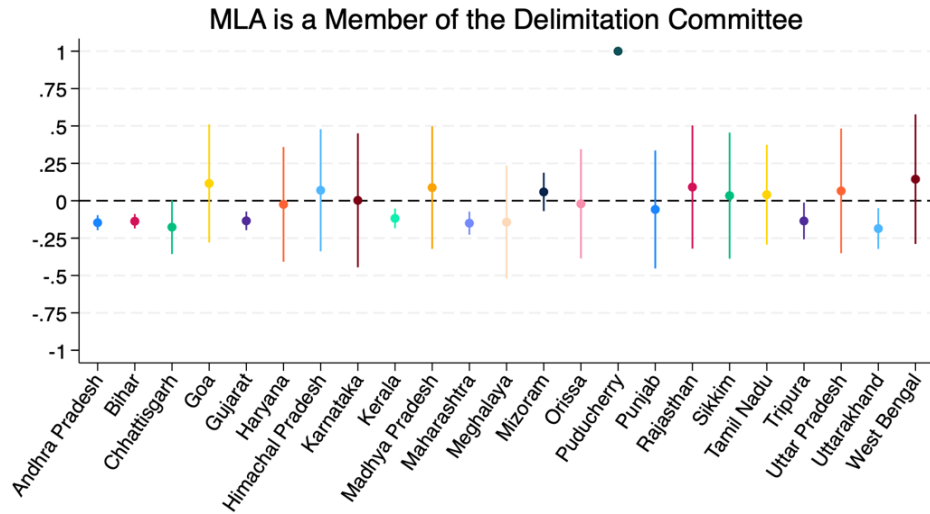
Note: Each dot represents the impact of a specific influence measure on the measure of demographic change, estimated using observations from a specific state. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Appendix Figure A.4: Fraction of New Voters in New Constituency - State-By-State Variation



Note: Each dot represents the impact of a specific influence measure on the fraction of new voters, estimated using observations from a specific state. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Appendix Figure A.5: Reservation Status Change - State-By-State Variation



Note: Each dot represents the impact of a specific influence measure on the reservation status change, estimated using observations from a specific state. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Appendix Table A.1: Correlation

Panel A: Correlation between measures of political influence

	Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	Incumbent is a state minister	Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	1		
Incumbent is a state minister	0.036**	1	
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	0.015	0.181***	1

Panel B: Correlation between measures of redistricting

	Demographic Change	Fraction of New Voters	Reservation Status Change
Demographic Change	1		
Fraction of New Voters	0.3522***	1	
Reservation Status Change	0.0431**	0.0825***	1

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Appendix Table A.2: Do Incumbent Politicians Influence Redistricting? (All Coefficients)

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.005 (0.006)	0.008 (0.024)	-0.009 (0.038)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010 (0.014)	-0.027 (0.021)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.008)	0.023 (0.014)
Bihar Fixed Effect	-0.016*** (0.003)	0.053*** (0.018)	-0.027 (0.031)
Chhattisgarh Fixed Effect	0.014* (0.008)	0.100*** (0.027)	-0.005 (0.045)
Goa Fixed Effect	0.042*** (0.011)	0.143*** (0.043)	-0.071 (0.053)
Gujarat Fixed Effect	0.010** (0.005)	0.089*** (0.022)	-0.034 (0.035)
Haryana Fixed Effect	0.018*** (0.007)	0.123*** (0.026)	0.073 (0.051)
Himachal Pradesh Fixed Effect	-0.013*** (0.005)	0.005 (0.027)	-0.027 (0.047)
Karnataka Fixed Effect	0.004 (0.004)	0.046** (0.021)	0.078** (0.038)
Kerala Fixed Effect	0.019*** (0.007)	0.133*** (0.025)	-0.062* (0.035)
Madhya Pradesh Fixed Effect	0.008* (0.004)	0.001 (0.020)	0.018 (0.035)
Maharashtra Fixed Effect	0.007 (0.004)	0.065*** (0.020)	-0.002 (0.033)
Meghalaya Fixed Effect	0.027*** (0.009)	0.140*** (0.037)	0.772*** (0.044)
Mizoram Fixed Effect	0.028** (0.014)	-0.004 (0.046)	0.808*** (0.041)
Orissa Fixed Effect	-0.005 (0.004)	0.047** (0.022)	0.070* (0.042)
Puducherry Fixed Effect	0.012 (0.018)	0.083 (0.071)	0.001 (0.086)
Punjab Fixed Effect	0.005 (0.006)	0.107*** (0.026)	0.124** (0.050)
Rajasthan Fixed Effect	-0.008** (0.003)	0.046** (0.020)	0.011 (0.036)
Sikkim Fixed Effect	0.005 (0.007)	0.116** (0.045)	0.030 (0.075)
Tamil Nadu Fixed Effect	0.005 (0.003)	0.078*** (0.019)	-0.000 (0.034)
Tripura Fixed Effect	0.038*** (0.008)	0.201*** (0.039)	0.048 (0.058)
Uttar Pradesh Fixed Effect	-0.008*** (0.003)	0.094*** (0.018)	0.069** (0.031)
Uttarakhand Fixed Effect	-0.019*** (0.003)	0.065** (0.031)	0.041 (0.053)
West Bengal Fixed Effect	0.002 (0.004)	0.037* (0.019)	-0.008 (0.032)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.073	0.039	0.108

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Demographic change" is an index of the difference in demographic characteristics of the old and the new constituency.

"Fraction new voters" is the share of voters in the new constituency who were not in the incumbent's old constituency. "Change in reservation status" equals one if an unreserved constituency (pre-2008) becomes reserved for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (post-2008), or vice versa. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly.

Appendix Table A.3: Robustness to inclusion of additional controls

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.005 (0.006)	0.009 (0.024)	-0.005 (0.036)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.008** (0.003)	0.014 (0.013)	-0.022 (0.021)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.006 (0.008)	0.014 (0.014)
Absolute Value of Population Deviation from District	0.005*** (0.002)	-0.009** (0.004)	0.007 (0.006)
Fraction of Population that is Literate - Old AC	0.016 (0.013)	0.204*** (0.057)	0.036 (0.083)
Fraction of Population that is SC - Old AC	0.041* (0.022)	0.039 (0.069)	1.189*** (0.114)
Fraction of Population that is ST - Old AC	0.021*** (0.008)	-0.091*** (0.032)	0.158*** (0.048)
Fraction of Population that is Rural - Old AC	-0.026*** (0.007)	0.250*** (0.026)	0.027 (0.035)
Fraction of Women in Population - Old AC	-0.191*** (0.064)	1.152*** (0.341)	-0.374 (0.541)
Vote Margin is less than 5 percentage points	0.000 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.010)	0.002 (0.017)
Vote Margin 5-10 percentage points	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.010 (0.012)	0.000 (0.021)
Vote Margin is 10-15 percentage points	0.003 (0.003)	0.011 (0.012)	0.004 (0.021)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.120	0.109	0.150

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Demographic change" is an index of the difference in demographic characteristics of the old and the new constituency. "Fraction new voters" is the share of voters in the new constituency who were not in the incumbent's old constituency. "Change in reservation status" equals one if an unreserved constituency (pre-2008) becomes reserved for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (post-2008), or vice versa. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly.

Appendix Table A.4: Robustness to excluding state fixed effects or including state random effects

	No State Fixed Effects			With State Random Effects		
	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status	(4) Demographic change	(5) Fraction new voters	(6) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.011 (0.007)	0.023 (0.025)	0.039 (0.044)	0.006 (0.006)	0.011 (0.023)	-0.005 (0.036)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.013*** (0.004)	0.025* (0.014)	0.043* (0.024)	0.011*** (0.004)	0.014 (0.018)	-0.023 (0.026)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	0.000 (0.002)	-0.012 (0.008)	0.005 (0.014)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.005 (0.007)	0.021 (0.017)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.010	0.002	0.002	0.009	0.002	0.000

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Demographic change" is an index of the difference in demographic characteristics of the old and the new constituency. "Fraction new voters" is the share of voters in the new constituency who were not in the incumbent's old constituency. "Change in reservation status" equals one if an unreserved constituency (pre-2008) becomes reserved for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (post-2008), or vice versa. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly.

Appendix Table A.5: Robustness Check - Dropping Extreme Values

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.009 (0.020)
Incumbent is a state minister	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.012)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling party	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.010 (0.007)
Observations	2,925	2,925
R-squared	0.069	0.027

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Demographic change" is an index of the difference in demographic characteristics of the old and the new constituency. "Fraction new voters" is the share of voters in the new constituency who were not in the incumbent's old constituency. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly. Column 1 drops constituencies in the top 10 percent of values of the demographic change measure. Column 2 drops constituencies in the top 10 percent of the fraction of new voters variable.

Appendix Table A.6: Robustness Check - Replacing Ruling Party with Ruling Coalition

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	0.005 (0.006)	0.008 (0.024)	-0.008 (0.038)
Incumbent is a state minister	0.010*** (0.004)	0.010 (0.014)	-0.022 (0.021)
Incumbent is a member of the state ruling coalition	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.008)	0.003 (0.014)
Observations	3,251	3,251	3,251
R-squared	0.073	0.039	0.107

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the state legislative assembly from that constituency. Regressions include state fixed effects.

Appendix Table A.7: Robustness Check - Analysis of Parliamentary Constituencies

	(1) Demographic change	(2) Fraction new voters	(3) Change in reservation status
Incumbent is on delimitation advisory committee	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.011 (0.029)	-0.003 (0.054)
Incumbent is a cabinet minister	-0.005 (0.006)	0.031 (0.046)	-0.081 (0.081)
Incumbent is a member of the national ruling party	0.002 (0.005)	-0.017 (0.025)	-0.023 (0.052)
Observations	477	477	477
R-squared	0.117	0.183	0.060

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Incumbent" refers to the incumbent member of the Lok Sabha from that constituency. Regressions include state fixed effects.