

# Bringing Autocracy Home? How Migration to Autocracies Shapes Migrants' Support for Democracy

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## Abstract

Prior scholarship finds that migrants embrace democratic ideals and promote democracy back home. However, this work focuses on migration to high-income Western democracies. How does moving to autocracies shape migrants' democratic attitudes and behavior? Leveraging a field experiment facilitating migration from India to the Persian Gulf, we isolate the causal impact of migration on migrants' political preferences. Migrants exhibited significantly higher trust in Indian democratic institutions and greater political participation—except for voting, which is difficult from abroad. Additionally, they were no more willing to trade democracy for economic growth than control-group subjects. Migrants' political preferences stem from comparing their experiences under democratic and autocratic governments. Our findings suggest that migrants develop intrinsic preferences for democratic institutions, which outweigh any instrumental preferences for economic development. This study sheds light on how migration to autocracies shapes politics in sending regions and clarifies the mechanisms by which migration shapes democratization more generally.

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# 1 Introduction

A large body of scholarship finds that migrants serve as forces for democratic reforms in their home countries (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Barsbai et al., 2017; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010; Lueders, 2024; Pfütze, 2012). Indeed, diasporas in Western democracies have emerged as important bulwarks against democratic backsliding in countries like Poland, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Venezuela, supporting democratic parties and fundraising for political causes (Szulecki, Kotnarowski and Stanley, 2023; Quinsa, 2019). Migrants and their families have been found to become more supportive of democracy, more critical of home country institutions, and more active in politics after stints overseas (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Spilimbergo, 2009; Mercier, 2016), which is particularly important because out-migration is a widespread feature of low-income, developing countries around the world (Zhou, 2018; Alrababa'h et al., 2021; Adida, 2014; Schwartz, 2019; Beber and Scacco, 2022). These findings are based on contexts where individuals from autocratic or less democratic countries migrate to higher-income, liberal democracies—such as the United States, Germany, or Australia—but later return or retain ties to their home communities. However, there are nearly 300 million cross-border migrants globally (United Nations, 2020), whose home and destination countries are much more heterogeneous than the migration flows examined in existing work.

How do migrants' political attitudes and behavior shift when they move from democracies to autocratic host countries? Does living in an autocracy encourage greater appreciation for democratic institutions, or does it alternatively engender skepticism? Migrants plausibly are more willing to sacrifice democratic ideals after experiencing well-functioning, economically developed autocracies that deliver superior economic growth than their home countries. The effects of migration to autocracies matter a great deal on their own. Many of the world's largest hosts of migrants—including the Persian Gulf states, various Middle Eastern nations, Russia, China, and Singapore—are higher-income but non-democratic (World Bank, 2023). Migration to autocracies is particularly common for individuals who migrate across countries in the Global South, which constitutes a growing plurality of migrants around the world (United Nations, 2017).

More importantly, these contexts can help explicate why mobility shapes preferences for democracy (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010) and how democratic

attitudes emerge more generally (Tocqueville, 2016; Inglehart, 2003; Magalhães, 2014). Do migrants privilege democracy because democracies are open and accountable to their citizenry or because democracies deliver stronger economic development? If migrants value democratic institutions intrinsically, then exposure to both democratic and authoritarian regimes should allow migrants to inculcate stronger preferences for democratic institutions—no matter the context. If they instead value the better economic “outputs” associated with particular regimes, then their preferences should be conditional on regimes’ quality of economic development and public services. In cases of migration to high-income, effectively-governed democracies, these two sets of preferences overlap, similarly producing pro-democracy attitudes and behavior. However, in cases where receiving countries deny political freedoms but deliver superior economic growth and well-functioning institutions, migrants who base their attitudes instrumentally on economic benefits should become more skeptical of democratic institutions, less supportive of democracy, and less willing to participate in electoral politics. Studying migration flows to autocracies can thus help disentangle the aspects of governance in host countries that influence migrants’ political preferences and behaviors.

We evaluate these two competing pathways with a randomized controlled trial facilitating employment migration from India to the Persian Gulf region. By experimentally providing prospective migrants with opportunities to move and live overseas, we are able to cleanly isolate the causal effect of migration on migrants’ political attitudes and behaviors. Our study offered randomly-selected Indians the opportunity to obtain hospitality sector employment in countries like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Partnering with local government and non-governmental organizations in the Indian state of Mizoram, we connected prospective migrants with vetted recruiters specializing in overseas migration and employers in these countries. Of those assigned to the treatment group, nearly 25% migrated (versus just 3% in the control group) and the majority of these migrants were still living and working overseas more than two years later. We survey treatment and control group subjects, including both migrants and non-migrants. We measure attitudes toward Indian institutions, probe tradeoffs between democracy and economic stewardship, and collect numerous measures of political participation. We also survey family members and conduct extensive qualitative interviews with both treatment and control group subjects to examine how moving overseas shaped migrants’ views of governance.

On balance, our evidence indicates that migrants value democracies primarily for their political

institutions and freedoms rather than for the economic development they are known to provide. Individuals given the opportunity to migrate to the Gulf held significantly greater trust and faith in Indian government institutions than those who remained in India. Treatment group individuals became no more willing to trade democracy for the economic outputs of good governance. Although migrants in our study were unable to vote in Indian elections while abroad, they became significantly more likely to participate in electoral politics in less formal ways: attending party rallies and joining community meetings during the periods when they were home, and discussing politics with friends and family. Long-form interviews with migrants and similarly “matched” non-migrants in our study reinforce these findings. Most migrants appreciated the quality of governance in Gulf autocracies and reported very positive experiences while living abroad, but they simultaneously gained an appreciation for India’s democratic institutions during their time overseas.

Notably, we find no evidence that migrants’ attitudes and behaviors spread to their family members. Studies of migration to liberal, Western democracies have found mixed effects of migration’s impacts on the democratic preferences and actions of left-behind family members (Barsbai et al., 2017; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010; Pérez-Armendáriz, 2014; Chauvet and Mercier, 2014; Ahmed, 2012; Goodman and Hiskey, 2008; Germano, 2013; Sellars, 2019). In the context of migration to autocracies, our survey of study participants’ family members back home revealed no significant effects of migration on democratic support, institutional trust, or political participation. These null findings are important because they help rule out a key alternative mechanism: that migrants’ improved individual economic standing led to greater support for democracy and political participation. While migrants’ families registered significant economic gains from remittances, they did not show similar shifts in attitudes and behavior. These findings are also salutary insofar that migration to autocracies likely does not spur democratic backsliding in sending regions in the Global South.

Our findings make several contributions to the scholarship on the political effects of migration. First, we extend the study of migration and democracy to contexts in which individuals move to non-democracies. While the effects of migration on democratic attitudes and participation are more nuanced in these contexts, they still generally point in the same direction: migrants to non-democracies return home more supportive of democracy and more willing to participate in politics. This is particularly important because migrants to autocracies tend to not have pathways

to citizenship, and thus are more likely to return home after periods abroad. Such migrants thus can have more influence on the politics of sending countries than on receiving countries—which has been the focus of much of the existing work examining migration to democracies (Hangartner et al., 2019; Choi, Poertner and Sambanis, 2019; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010). Second, by testing migrants attitudes in this new context, our work parses the mechanisms by which migration affects views on democracy more generally. Migrants to liberal, Western democracies encounter a bundled treatment of democracy (i.e., political liberties, free and fair elections, and open media and societies) and many aspects of effective governance—such as law and order, safety, and superior public goods (Dancygier, 2010; Dancygier and Saunders, 2006). Migrants’ well-established preference for democracy, then, might be driven by either or both of these covarying features of host societies. Overall, our results suggest that migrants intrinsically prefer democratic institutions for their political features, not merely due to the higher levels of economic development they can provide.

## 2 Migration Flows to Non-Democracies: Large but Understudied

Migration to authoritarian countries is common and increasing, particularly within the Global South (United Nations, 2017). But are these trends reflected in scholarship on the politics of migration? In order to assess overall patterns, we examined every migration-related article from the last ten years of publications (2014-2023) from five leading journals in political science and international relations.<sup>1</sup> Reviewing each study’s research design and data, we determined migrants’ primary origin and destination countries, and ascertained countries’ prevailing regime types during the period of migration using V-Dem’s binary *Democracy* indicator.<sup>2</sup> The results, presented in Table 1, are striking. Out of 122 migration-related studies, 106 (87%) focused primarily on migration to democracies. Even more notably, just two studies focused primarily on migration from democratic to mixed/non-democratic countries—one centering on migration from Ukraine to Former Soviet states (Tertytchnaya et al., 2018) and the other on migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia (Ahmadov

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<sup>1</sup>We examined *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *International Organization*, and *Comparative Political Studies*.

<sup>2</sup>Aside from a few cases with worldwide samples (which were labeled “mixed”), our regime codings reflected the regime type of the majority of migrants in each study.

and Sasse, 2016). This pattern is partly explained by a second finding of our survey: more than two-thirds of migration-related articles center on the behavior of *native-born* individuals or societies, rather than on migrants or sending communities. Even with increasing diversity in research settings over the past decade, the majority of migration scholars continue to focus on native reactions to migrants in North America and Western Europe.

Table 1: Migration Studies by Setting and Primary Focus

<i>Origin Country</i>	<i>Destination Country</i>	
	Democracy	Mixed or Non-Democracy
Democracy	34 (27%)	2 (2%)
Mixed or Non-Democracy	77 (61%)	14 (11%)

(a) Regime Type of Migrants' Primary Origin and Destination

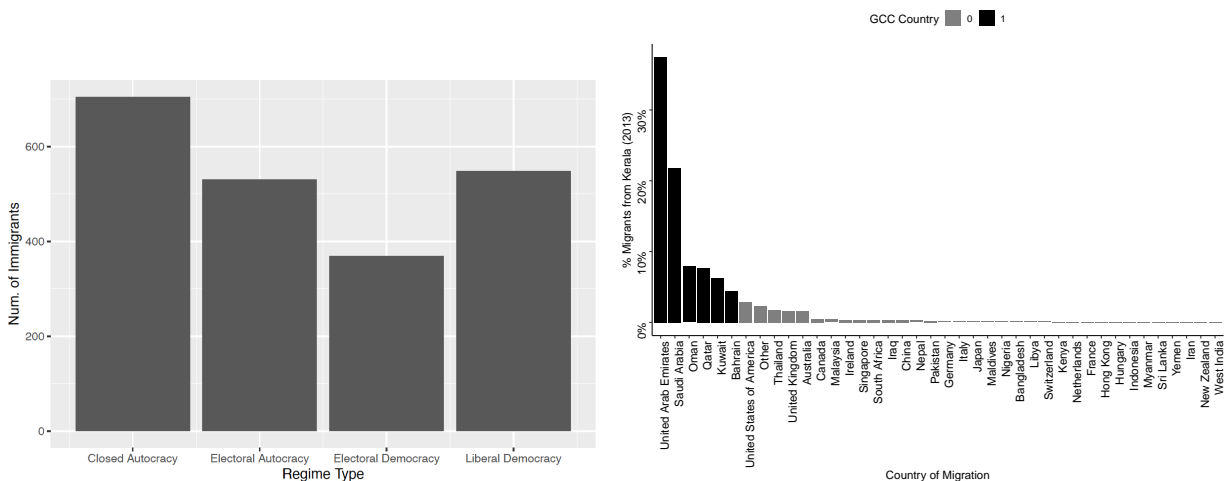
Behavior of Native-Born Population	87 (69%)
Behavior of Migrants	30 (24%)
Behavior of Sending Communities	10 (8%)

(b) Primary Focus of Empirics

This is a troubling imbalance given that a large and growing proportion of international migration involves migrants moving from low-income democracies to high-income autocracies. Of the six countries with the largest migrant populations, three—Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates—have non-democratic governments (United Nations, 2020). Furthermore, 17% of all migrants in the world reside in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, all of which are autocracies (World Bank, 2023). This is remarkable given that less than 1% of the world's population lives in the GCC. In Figure 1a, we use data from the World Values Survey (WVS) to locate migrants from Asia, the world's largest migrant-sending region, and find that more than half are living in non-democracies (Inglehart et al., 2020; United Nations, 2020); these results likely understate the proportion of Asian migrants to non-democracies because the WVS does not survey in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two largest autocratic destination countries. Figure 1b depicts similar patterns when analyzing data from the Kerala Migration Surveys (KMS), a comprehensive survey of migrant-sending households administered in the largest migration-sending region of India,

Kerala. The vast majority of Kerala migrants move to the high-income GCC autocracies.

Figure 1: Immigrants, by Political System of Destination Countries



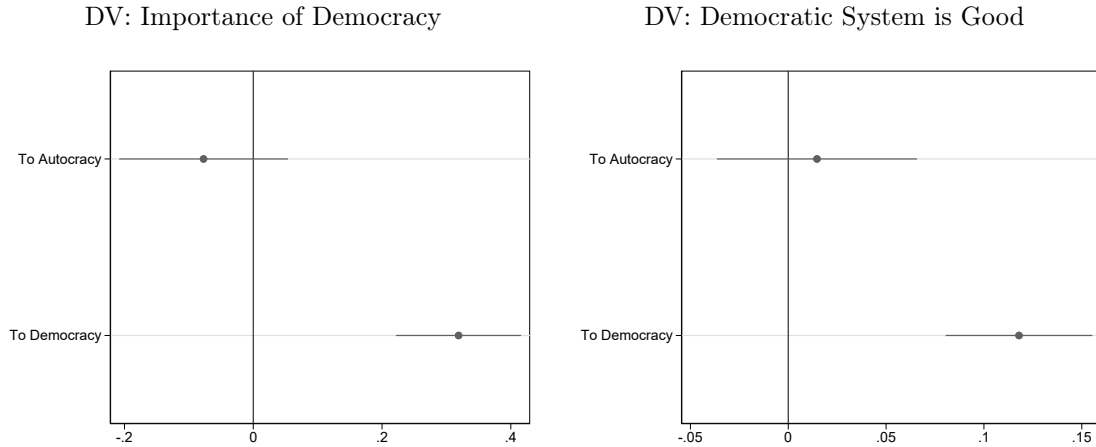
(a) Asian Migrants (World Values Survey)

(b) Kerala Migrants (Kerala Migration Survey)

This large volume of migration to autocracies is important not only for policy, but also for our scholarly understanding of migration’s effects on political attitudes. Given the likely differences in migrants’ experiences in autocratic and democratic host countries, migrations’ impact plausibly differs across these contexts. In Figure 2, we examined cross-national data from the WVS (Round 7), which collected information on the home countries of migrants, to examine whether observational differences exist. The figure compares migrants vs. non-migrants from their home countries on two measures of support for democracy, separating migrants based on the regime type of their destination country (per the V-Dem index). Migrants to democratic countries are much more supportive of democracy than non-migrants from the same origin country—in line with prior work (Barsbai et al., 2017; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps, 2016; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch, 2019). Migrants to authoritarian countries, by contrast, are not significantly more or less supportive of democracy relative to non-migrants.

These comparisons, however, raise more questions than they answer. First, are these observable differences causal? Testing the effects of migration on migrants poses difficult inferential challenges because migrants decide themselves whether to migrate. For example, do migrants to authoritarian countries hold different beliefs about democracy because they migrated or did they migrate in part because they had different beliefs about democracy? Second, how do migrants to authoritarian

Figure 2: Migrants vs. Non-Migrants by Destination



*Difference between mean response of migrants vs. non-migrants from the same country (OLS ATE with origin country FE). Top row compares migrants to autocratic countries vs. non-migrants, Bottom row compares migrants to democratic countries vs. non-migrants.*

regimes shift their views, and what implications does this have for democracy in sending regions? Third, existing data captures only blunt measures of support for democracy, whereas political theory posits that democratic convictions have multiple dimensions, including trust in democratic institutions, support for democracy over and above economic performance, and participation in electoral politics. How does migration to autocracies shift attitudes and behavior along these multi-faceted dimensions?

### 3 Theorizing Migration’s Impact on Support for Democracy

The existing literature’s focus on migration from autocracies to democracies provides only a partial answer to the question of how migration shapes migrants’ political attitudes. Recent studies suggest a complex relationship, with out-migration linked to increased support for democracy (Barsbai et al., 2017; Bastiaens and Tirone, 2019; Beine and Sekkat, 2013; Docquier et al., 2016; Escribà-Folch, Meseguer and Wright, 2015).<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether these findings would generalize

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<sup>3</sup>Some counterarguments focus on remittances undermining demand for political change (Ahmed, 2012; Abdih et al., 2012; Sellars, 2019; Germano, 2013); others see migration as a potential “safety



to the case of migration from democratic to autocratic settings.

Theoretically, the primary way migration shapes migrants' preferences for democracy is through migrants' experiences with institutions, norms, and practices in host countries. Migrants encounter new types of political institutions and cultures in host countries, which they are uniquely positioned to compare to those in their home countries (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Fidrmuc and Doyle, 2004). Through this process of contrast and comparison, migrants come to prefer the democratic institutions they experience in host countries and adopt democratic practices (De la Garza and Yetim, 2003). As a result, returning migrants can act as democratic promoters within their home countries, disseminating and bolstering democratic ideas and practices (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; O'Mahony, 2013).

While the literature has primarily focused on migrants' experiences with political institutions, migrants tend to encounter both different political institutions and higher levels of economic development in host countries. In terms of economic development, migrants often find better economic growth, higher-quality public goods, greater state capacity, and more-effective law and order in destination countries. At the same time, they experience political institutions and practices—including political liberties, minority rights, responsive governance, and electoral participation (or the lack thereof)—that differ from those in their home countries.

Most studies have focused on migration from *less* developed and *less* democratic to *more* developed and *more* democratic countries. As these destination countries embody both democratic political systems and higher levels of development, disentangling the specific mechanisms for migrants' observed preferences for democracy is challenging. Migrants may find the political institutions, norms, and practices of democracies more appealing than those in their home countries. Alternatively, migrants may also value better economic development associated with developed democracies, such as higher income, better public goods provision, and stronger rule of law. This association could lead them to express a preference for democratic institutions more broadly, even without a direct appreciation for their inherent political values.

This bundled treatment can be decoupled in the case of migration to authoritarian countries. When migrating to high-income autocracies, migrants encounter high levels of economic

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valve" (Hirschman, 1970; Kapur, 2010).

development akin to migration to high-income democracies. Many autocracies that have high levels of immigration—e.g., GCC countries, Singapore, Russia—typically have better infrastructure, public goods and services, economic development, and law and order than migrants’ home countries. Even when migrants themselves do not avail of all public services, they are able to observe the better treatment that host-country citizens receive. Focusing on migrants from the Philippines to authoritarian countries, Kessler and Rother (2016, 103) finds that migrants often “experience the efficiency of authoritarian systems” for the first time. Ruget and Usmanalieva (2021, 105) similarly observes that “Russia’s model of authoritarianism is appealing to citizens of its near abroad” because migrants perceive the the Russian government “as more effective than their own.” These ethnographic accounts illustrate how migration to economically developed autocracies frequently leaves migrants impressed with the higher levels of economic development in destination countries, not unlike the impact of migration to developed democracies.

But when it comes to political institutions, migrants likely have very different experiences in authoritarian countries. In contrast to Western democracies, migrants in autocracies observe a largely unaccountable government and few venues for political input. Additionally, most non-democratic states that host large migrant populations have no or only limited paths to citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Without opportunities for participation in their host countries, migrants often direct their political efforts back home. Voting from abroad is often costly and difficult, hence, migrants frequently turn to informal avenues for participation. For example, Chekirova (2022) documents that in moments of political crisis at home, Kyrgyz migrants routinely mobilize on social media with consequences for political fundraising. Taken together, migrants to non-democratic states are likely to experience very few opportunities for formal political engagement in host or home countries, gaining incentives for political engagement outside of voting back home.

This discussion suggests that migration to autocracies is similar to migration to democracies when it comes to migrants’ experiences with higher levels of economic development. However, in case of political institutions, migrants in autocracies are very likely to experience more restrictions, fewer individual freedoms, and limited participation compared to migrants in democracies.

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<sup>4</sup>Indian migrants to the Gulf, for example, return home after an average of just 20 months (Desai and Venneman, 2018).

**Conceptualizing Support for Democracy** An additional challenge in understanding migration’s impact on political attitudes is the different ways in which migration scholars have operationalized democratic support. Some have focused on political participation (Goodman and Hiskey, 2008; Chauvet and Mercier, 2014; Batista, Seither and Vicente, 2019), others on voting for pro-democracy parties (Barsbai et al., 2017; Pfutze, 2012), or trust in democratic institutions (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps, 2016).

We turn to political theorists of democratization, who advocate for a broader understanding of support for democracy. Many view citizens’ endorsement of democracy as the ideal political system as a sign of commitment to democracy above and beyond a preference for the government of the day. Additionally, scholars have argued that membership in civic associations is a key predictor of democratic durability (Tocqueville, 2016; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1994). Citizens’ espousal of post-materialist values such as interpersonal trust, tolerance, civil rights, and political participation tend to reflect a much deeper commitment to democratic culture (Inglehart, 2003, 2020). Existing research on the impact of migration on political attitudes, therefore, has focused on the participatory aspect of democratic support, leaving other areas underexplored.

Drawing on insights from both the migration and democratization scholarship, we propose a broader conceptualization of democracy support that encompasses three key dimensions. First, we argue that genuine democratic support requires citizens to express a fundamental preference for democracy as the preferred system of governance. This goes beyond mere acquiescence or pragmatism; it necessitates a belief in democracy’s inherent value and efficacy, even when confronted with dissatisfaction with the government of the day or economic hardship. Studies have shown that societies where citizens hold this deeper commitment tend to be more resilient democratically (Magalhães, 2014).

Next, we argue that trust in democratic institutions is another crucial pillar of strong democratic support. Research has consistently linked citizens’ trust in governments, legislatures, and judiciaries with positive democratic outcomes (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1994; Levi and Stoker, 2000). When citizens perceive these institutions as legitimate and reliable, they are more likely to engage constructively in the political process and uphold democratic norms.

Finally, we incorporate political participation as a central component of democratic support. Both migration and democratization research highlight the critical role of citizen engagement in

sustaining democratic systems (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1994). This not only includes formal forms of participation like voting—the fundamental democratic act—but also encompasses informal modes of engagement such as civic involvement, community organizing, political advocacy, campaigning, discussing politics with friends and family, and holding leaders accountable. By actively participating in shaping their society, citizens demonstrate their commitment to and investment in the democratic process. This multifaceted conceptualization allows us to capture the full spectrum of citizens’ attitudes and engagement with democracy.

**Theoretical Expectations for Migration to Autocracies** We now develop theoretical predictions focusing on migrants’ experiences with economic development and political institutions in host countries. We term migrants’ preference for democracy because of economic development an *instrumental* preference. In turn, we call migrants’ preference for democracy due to an appreciation for its political institutions an *intrinsic* preference.

In case of migration to Western democracies both of these drivers should increase migrants’ support for democratic institutions. However, we arrive at different expectations when it comes to migration to autocracies. Suppose that migrants prefer regimes instrumentally for their ability to deliver higher levels of economic development. If true, when migrants move to developed autocracies, they should see autocratic institutions as responsible for higher living standards. Hence, we expect that migrants moving from democracies to autocracies should have a lower preference for democracy than those who never migrated, because they view democracies as less able to deliver economic development. Similarly, these migrants should have lower trust in their home country governments. Furthermore, we expect that migration should lower formal political participation as migrants face higher costs for turning out to vote, often having to travel either home or to embassies (for the limited countries that authorize diaspora voting abroad). Disaffection with democracy would further lower their desire to participate politically. In particular, this should result in a diminished desire to participate in other ways as well—such as by attending campaign rallies or persuading community members on political issues. Migrants’ disapproval of democracy, therefore, should be reflected both in their formal and informal political participation.

Now suppose that migrants hold an intrinsic preference for democratic political institutions: accountability, freedoms, or the right to choose representatives. If so, when migrants move to

autocracies, they should compare home country democratic institutions favorably to those in the host country that provide restricted freedoms and limited opportunities for accountability and participation. Anecdotal accounts hint at a few of these mechanisms in the case of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia; Kyrgyz migrants compared to non-migrants were more likely to list civil and political rights when asked to discuss their rights as Kyrgyz citizens (Ruguet and Usmanalieva, 2008). Filipino migrants similarly vastly preferred the democratic institutions of destinations like Hong Kong to the laws and institutions of countries like Saudi Arabia (Rother, 2016, 207-208). If this is the case, migrants moving to autocracies should come to see democratic governments as more preferable and have greater trust in their home country governments.

Predictions on political participation are less straightforward. Given greater approval of democracies, migrants should be active politically. However, given the higher barriers to electoral participation, they may be less able to vote compared to non-migrants. At the very least, migrants should be more inclined to participate in politics informally by talking to friends about politics or volunteering their time to political causes. This tension between formal and informal participation is evident in qualitative studies of migrants’ political engagement. For example, looking at Indonesian migrants, Lestari and Irwansyah (2023, 222-223) finds ample evidence that logistical difficulties prevent migrants from casting ballots overseas; nevertheless, Triwardani (2023, 30-33) underscores how migrants regularly peruse social media and “online news sites to stay abreast of political news”, elections, and “the current political climate in Indonesia,” and “regularly participate in political discussions” with others. Hence, migration to autocracies may lower formal political participation, but improve informal participation.

Table 2: Summary of Predictions

<i>Basis of support</i>	Support for Democracy		
	Democracy Preference	Trust in Govt	Participation
Instrumental / Economic	–	–	–
Intrinsic / Political	+	+	?

Table 2 summarizes our predictions for how migration to economically-superior autocracies should alter migrants’ support for democracy along the three measures theorized above.

Although we focus on how experiences during migration may shape migrants’ political attitudes,

we conclude by considering another possible mechanism: individual economic resources. Migrants, often seeking economic benefits abroad, typically earn higher wages in host countries, which can foster post-materialist values and democratic resilience (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022; Naidu, Nyarko and Wang, 2023; Mobarak, Sharif and Shreshta, 2021; Gibson and McKenzie, 2014; Inglehart, 2003). Since increased economic resources have been tied to democratic resilience at the macro-level (Inglehart, 2003) and to political participation and democracy preferences at the individual-level (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995; Kasara and Suryanarayan, 2020; Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021), migration could enhance migrants’ democratic inclinations.

Resources also impact support for democracy via remittances to left-behind family, which can reduce reliance on authoritarian regimes and spur protest movements (Pfutze, 2012; Acevedo, 2013). Migrants’ “social” and “political” remittances, which often accompany monetary ones, can also reshape political perceptions among their communities at home (Levitt, 1998; Spilimbergo, 2009; Mercier, 2016; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Batista and Vicente, 2011; Batista, Seither and Vicente, 2019; Chauvet and Mercier, 2014). If resources drive democracy preferences, migration to both democracies and autocracies could similarly influence attitudes, as migrants often accept higher wages in higher-income autocracies, offering a potential channel for upward mobility (Hemmings, 2010). This could lead to greater democracy appreciation among migrants and their families, regardless of the destination country.

## 4 Experimental Design

Our study leverages an original randomized control trial that facilitated international migration from the Northeast Indian state of Mizoram. Our program connected adults seeking overseas employment with high-paying hospitality industry jobs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. This research design also forms the basis of the design in (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022, 2024). All tests and hypotheses were pre-registered in the Experiments in Governance and Politics (EGAP) / Open Science Foundation registry. All main outcomes from this pre-analysis plan are reported in this paper or related papers.

## 4.1 Setting

Mizoram is relatively remote and economically underdeveloped, populated with an ethnic group (the Mizo community) that is a historically marginalized Scheduled Tribe (ST). Because of the stagnant economy in Mizoram and discrimination elsewhere in India, where Mizos are conspicuous religious and ethnic minorities (McDuié-Ra, 2012), Mizos have looked for employment opportunities abroad. Nevertheless, out-migration from Mizoram is relatively rare. Employers rarely recruit in such a small, remote state. However, Mizos have relatively high educational attainment and English proficiency levels, making them potentially very attractive employees. Therefore, local government bodies and NGOs have in recent years sought to connect adults seeking employment to lucrative jobs overseas. For additional information on our study setting, see *Appendix A.1*.

The migration corridor between India and GCC countries, meanwhile, is one of the largest and fastest growing corridors in the world. India is the largest single source of emigrants (16.6 million in 2016) and the majority of these go to GCC countries (United Nations, 2017). Together, GCC countries host more than 1 in 6 migrants, the majority of whom are from South Asia (World Bank, 2023). In particular, GCC countries often have a large demand for foreign workers in service sectors. South Asians, with relatively high literacy and English-language skills, often fill these jobs. Most of these migrants return home after stints of employment abroad, meaning that tens of millions of migrants rotate through these jobs every few years and return to South Asia.

Importantly, unlike the destination countries in most work on the political effects of migration, GCC countries are non-democratic. Political power is held by royal families and political speech is highly regulated. Nevertheless, migrants in our study held positive impressions of government capacity and effectiveness, particularly in managing the economy, as we discuss later.

## 4.2 Political Participation of Overseas Indians

The record of political participation of India’s overseas citizens is mixed. Since 2003, only members of armed forces or paramilitary forces stationed abroad have been permitted to nominate proxies to cast votes on their behalf while overseas (Bhaskar, 2018). In 2018, the Indian Parliament’s lower house passed a bill to allow proxy voting rights to all eligible overseas Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), yet the bill lapsed after it was not brought before the upper house (Raghnath, 2024).

Thus, in order to vote, NRIs must travel to India and cast their votes in the constituencies where they are registered to vote, taking formal electoral participation out of reach for most NRIs.

That said, overseas Indians have many channels to participate informally in politics. For example, in the 2013 Delhi state elections, NRIs in the UAE donated a third of the \$3.2 million of campaign contributions received by the Aam Aadmi Party (Seth, 2014). NRIs were the Bharatiya Janata Party’s largest donors in the 2014 election, supplying INR 1.5 million daily to the party in the run-up to the elections (Vadodara, 2014). NRIs frequently “participate in overseas wings of Indian parties, which are located all over the world; support political movements online through social media; and even organize rallies in their host countries for political candidates”; meanwhile, Indian political candidates frequently campaign overseas, “encouraging NRIs to participate and campaign alongside them” (Malik, 2019).

### 4.3 Sample

In July–August 2018, with assistance from a state government agency, the Mizoram Youth Commission (MYC) and a local NGO (MZP), we recruited prospective applicants interested in overseas employment from Mizoram’s capital, Aizawl, and surrounding areas (see *Appendix A.2* for our recruitment strategy). We selected 392 candidates who met basic requirements, such as English language skills and educational attainment, with assistance from our recruitment partner, Vira International (a Mumbai-based recruitment firm). After selection, subjects were surveyed at baseline by Delhi-based CVoter, Inc. to record basic demographics and pre-treatment outcome measures (see *Appendix A.3* for our survey methodology).

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Subjects

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
N	389	248
Mean Age (Baseline)	22.9	22.9
Pct Male	56	54
Pct Completed Grade 12	72	75
Pct Employed	14	12
Pct Married	2	1
Pct Scheduled Tribe	95	96

Table 3 shows the demographic characteristics of our sample from this baseline survey. Study



subjects were young, highly-educated job-seekers. The average age in our sample was 23, more than 70% of participants had completed higher secondary school (Grade 12), and more than 85% were unemployed at the start of the program. These characteristics are common among other Indian migrants: KMS data shows that emigrants from Kerala are disproportionately young and educated, and belong to underrepresented ethno-religious groups. We randomly selected half of our study subjects (T=196, C=196) to attend our training and recruitment program. To maximize balance and statistical power, we created blocked pairs for randomization based on covariates that might predict political attitudes, specifically gender, education, and English proficiency.

#### 4.4 Treatment

Our treatment involved two parts, designed to facilitate employment in the Gulf hospitality sector. First, selected individuals were able to attend a fully-funded hospitality training program in October–November 2018. The training was a collaboration between two training firms who specialize in hospitality-sector employment: a Bangalore-based firm with connections to recruiters and employers overseas (Free Climb, Inc.) and a local NGO with knowledge of the local context (SJnDI). The program was designed to convey some basic skills to enable candidates to credibly interview for overseas jobs rather than prepare them for any specific job—foreign employers provide in-depth, job-specific training after hiring.

Second and most crucially, treatment individuals were invited for interviews with vetted employers in the Gulf hospitality sector. Employers ranged from quick service restaurants like Pizza Hut and Costa Coffee to luxury hotels such as Mandarin Oriental. Employers conducted interviews in March–July 2019. Every individual in the treatment group was eligible to interview, typically multiple times, and employers offered jobs to the majority of those who interviewed. Employers paid and applied for visas on behalf of recruits, and our recruitment partner and local project manager assisted candidates in obtaining necessary paperwork for emigration. Obtaining this paperwork involved visiting both Indian Foreign Affairs / visa offices and Indian government hospitals. *Appendix A.4* provides additional information regarding the treatment.

The treatment is by necessity a bundle of multiple elements. However, evidence both from administering the program and from the endline results suggests that any treatment effects on political outcomes likely stem from migration itself, not from the training program. Many

individuals in both groups had previously enrolled in hospitality job training programs and generally reported that the experience was similar. Moreover, more than 40 percent of the control group enrolled in an alternative program administered by our local training partners. By contrast, overseas placement opportunities are rare in Mizoram; less than ten percent of respondents reported having any friends or extended family members overseas at baseline. Absent these overseas opportunities, we find little evidence that the job training program drove our main effects; if anything, it may have biased against our turnout results (see *Appendix E*).

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Migration for international employment can provide rare opportunities for economic profit and mobility. Yet migration, particularly labor migration to the Gulf region, also comes with potential risks to program participants. Therefore, we gave considerable thought to the ethics of the intervention and study—far beyond the IRB approval at Columbia University, Stanford University, Dartmouth College, and the US Naval War College. As part of the larger Research & Empirical Analysis of Labor Migration (REALM) research program, the study was intended to build a blueprint for ethical migration.

We selected Mizoram for our program because of interest from both local stakeholders and foreign employers. Mizoram state government agencies and local NGOs were seeking reliable opportunities for unemployed Mizos overseas, and our recruitment partner hoped to build out a new source of recruits. Likewise, we selected the hospitality industry because of relatively low rates of exploitation, especially compared to construction or domestic work industries in the Gulf. Working with both sets of partners, we sought to minimize risks to participants, to ensure that local communities benefited, and to preserve informed consent among participants (Teele, 2014; Humphreys, 2015).

Throughout the program, we and our partners vetted project partners, screened specific employers for fair labor practices, connected prospective migrants with NGOs and government agencies that protected migrant rights, registered contracts with labor rights watchdogs, and gave participants information on risks, rights, and resources. Our team also maintained contact with the migrants for more than two years post-migration to ensure they had any needed support. We provide an extended discussion of these ethical considerations in *Appendix A.5*.

## 4.6 Outcomes and Estimation

Our main endline survey was conducted in January–March 2021, two years after members of the treatment group interviewed and began moving overseas. 248 out of 392 individuals (63%) responded to the survey. This attrition rate is very comparable to similar studies following migrants and employment programs over time,<sup>5</sup> and we find no evidence across a number of tests that any significant biases resulted from this attrition (see *Appendix B*). First, response rates were not significantly different between the treatment and control group on the endline survey. Second, attrition did not lead to any imbalances between the treatment and control groups: omnibus F-tests showed no significant imbalances at any survey stage. Lastly, there was no evidence that attrition was systematic at all: omnibus F-tests found that pre-treatment covariates provided no significant value in predicting attrition. Any treatment effects estimated among respondents, therefore, are likely to be unbiased estimates of treatment effects among the sample overall.

We tested five major outcomes: support for democracy vs. its alternatives, trust in Indian institutions, voting behavior, voting intention, and non-voting political participation. Each of these outcomes was a z-score index of 3-8 survey questions. Wording and response choices for questions are listed in *Appendix C*. Combining responses into indices reduces the number of comparisons (and therefore the chance of false positives) and improves statistical power. All effect sizes are in units of standard deviations of the dependent variable.

The main results show the OLS-estimated average treatment effect (ATE) for each hypothesis, controlling for the baseline measure of each variable (or the nearest proxy). As pre-registered, we provide both parametric p-values and the nearly identical p-values from randomization inference (RI) in *Appendix D*. We use one-tailed p-values reflecting the pre-registered effect directions.

We also included two other major steps in the months following the endline survey to probe causal mechanisms. First, we conducted extended qualitative interviews with approximately 40 individuals: migrants from the treatment group and “likely migrants” from the control group identified by a machine learning algorithm. The goal of the interviews was to provide a thick description of the social and political beliefs of our subjects and explain their emergence. We

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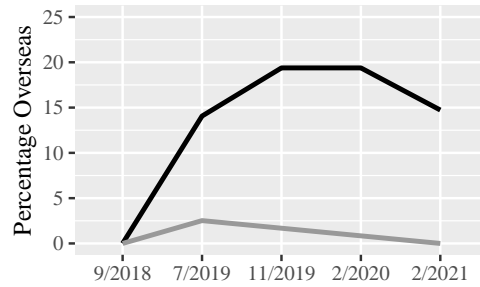
<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Beegle, De Weerd and Dercon (2011); Mobarak, Sharif and Shreshtha (2021); Naidu, Nyarko and Wang (2023); Blattman, Fiala and Martinez (2020).

analyze the qualitative evidence in conjunction with the quantitative evidence in order to provide a thick schema of respondents' daily experiences and their likely contributions to attitudinal change. Second, we also conducted a survey of participants' family members. We used contact information collected at baseline to contact one family member per subject, most of whom were parents or siblings. We asked many of the same questions as we did to the subjects themselves to determine whether migrants' communities were affected by the same causal mechanisms.

## 5 Experimental Results

Our results provide strong evidence that migration to autocracies did not diminish migrants' support for democracy. The treatment spurred a large proportion of job-searching Mizos to migrate and work in the GCC. Figure 3 plots overseas migration in the treatment and control group over the duration of our study (also Table A.7). 23 percent of the treatment group migrated in the two years following the intervention, versus just 3 percent of the control group. Migrants took hospitality jobs in countries such as Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. More than half of these migrants were still overseas when the endline survey was conducted two years later. In two other papers (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022, 2024), we show that migration had large effects on migrants' economic standing and significant effects on migrants' attitudes toward taxation and redistribution, foreign policy, and intercultural tolerance. It is worth noting that many subjects in the control group also moved out of Mizoram, but did so within India—mostly to work in major cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata.

Figure 3: International Migration Over Time

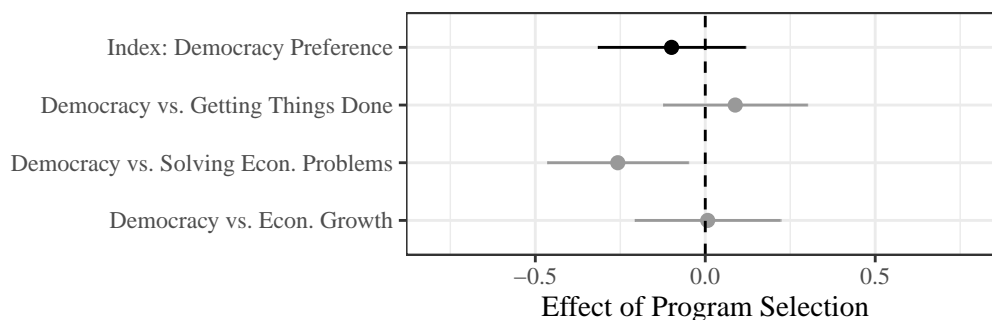


*The percentage of the treatment (black) and control (grey) groups that migrated overseas throughout the study period.*

## 5.1 Democracy Preferences

We begin by analyzing whether the treatment affected subjects' stated preference for democracy. Overall, we find little to no treatment effect. When asked to prioritize between democratic institutions and other positive qualities of government—effective governance, economic problem solving, or economic growth—individuals in the treatment group held similar views overall to those in control (Figure 4). Our index of democracy preference was just .10 standard deviations lower among the treatment group than among the control group, and this effect was not statistically significant. The opportunity to migrate to the Gulf, in other words, had not meaningfully reduced respondents' preference for democracy.

Figure 4: Results: Views of Democracy



*Coefficient plot of OLS treatment effects, scaled in standard deviations of outcome variable, controlling for baseline measures of outcome. 90% confidence intervals are shown, which translates to  $p < .05$  on one-directional tests.*

While migrants to high-income, liberal democracies encounter both effective governance and democratic institutions, migrants to high-income autocracies are forced to evaluate potential tradeoffs between democracy and economic development. The overall null effect documented in Figure 4 suggests that migrants in our study did not change their views on this tradeoff after living in an effectively-governed, authoritarian state. There is some suggestive evidence of effects on one measure of democratic support: individuals were more likely to say that an authoritarian government that solves economic problems was preferable to a democracy that did not. Notably, however, this is the only measure that was phrased in general terms rather than about India specifically; plausibly, some migrants became more open to trading off democracy in the abstract even if they were not willing to do so in their own home country. Overall, however, there is no significant evidence that migrants lowered their support for democracy. Instead, migrants still valued democracy in India even if it meant living under less effectively-run institutions.

Our long-form qualitative interviews disentangle these experimental results. On one hand, migrants viewed many aspects of governance in Gulf autocracies as superior to those in India and wished India were more like the Gulf. Nearly every migrant interviewee noted the superior economic development and infrastructure. For example, one respondent highlighted how the government of Kuwait was able to provide steady and high-quality water and electricity to its residents; “they have

good roads for transportation and even their malls are better than the ones in India.”<sup>6</sup> Another respondent attributed their preference for the Gulf to the fact that “wherever we go, even if it is outside the city everything was so developed.”<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, interview subjects generally felt that Gulf autocracies do a better job of taking care of people. One migrant stated: “The government in Qatar does a better job because they give lots of benefits to their citizens and lots of free food and rations.”<sup>8</sup> In particular, subjects praised governments’ superior responses to the Covid pandemic. One interviewee noted that Abu Dhabi gave free Covid vaccines to non-citizens.<sup>9</sup> Another interviewee argued that Saudi citizens and residents cooperated well with Covid restrictions, whereas “in India there is no proper enforcement of law and citizens don’t follow the Covid guidelines properly.”<sup>10</sup> More broadly, many migrants praised Gulf governments’ provisioning of law and order. One subject commented, “I like it generally because it is safe, wherever we go it is safe, and maybe it is because alcohol is banned and we don’t find any drunkards on the street;” this respondent stated that “I prefer the system in Saudi because they enforce the law much more effectively.”<sup>11</sup> Several interviewees noted that it was much safer for women on the street, especially at night.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, most migrant interviewees still said they would prefer living in a democracy, even if it meant sacrificing some level of economic development or governance.<sup>13</sup> They gave various reasons for this preference, but most surrounded rights of free expression and democratic accountability. One migrant described their most important reason as, “I believe as a citizen we have the right to choose our leaders.”<sup>14</sup> Another relayed a narrative about self-expression: “When I was there [abroad] one of their leaders died and all shops were closed for many days and we

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<sup>6</sup>Respondent 44.

<sup>7</sup>Respondent 80.

<sup>8</sup>Respondent 80.

<sup>9</sup>Respondent 261.

<sup>10</sup>Respondent 40.

<sup>11</sup>Respondent 40.

<sup>12</sup>Respondents 59, 239, 360

<sup>13</sup>Respondent 40, 44, 88, 295, 320, 336

<sup>14</sup>Respondent 295.

were not even allowed to smile; I know it is a sign of paying respect and mourning but I think somehow it was a form of taking away our freedom.”<sup>15</sup> Although most migrants respondents viewed their host societies as being economically superior than their home societies, they also believed in democracy’s inherent value and efficacy, and were unwilling to trade it away. Potentially because migrants experience these countervailing effects, we do not observe any significant shifts in their democracy preferences.

## 5.2 Trust in India’s Democratic Institutions

We next turn to analyzing the effect of migration on the second dimension of democratic support conceptualized in Section 3: trust in democratic institutions back home. How did migrants’ exposure to authoritarian governments abroad influence their views of the democratic governments in their home country? We first examine whether migrants interacted with government entities both at home and abroad. Individuals in the treatment group were significantly more likely than those in the control group to say they had visited various types of Indian and foreign government facilities (Figure 5). In India, migrants typically must visit an Indian Foreign Affairs Office for a visa and be approved by a state hospital. Overseas, many of the migrants visited state institutions such as government agencies, hospitals, police stations, and foreign affairs offices. Generally, these experiences were not particularly unflattering to Indian government institutions. Of those who moved overseas and visited one of these offices, the vast majority said they were very satisfied (35%) or somewhat satisfied (52%) with their experience. This is very nearly identical to the share of those visiting foreign government offices who said they were very (33%) or somewhat (57%) satisfied. While qualitative interviews suggest that migrants thought that society and the economy worked better in the Gulf than in India, they did not feel similarly about government institutions.

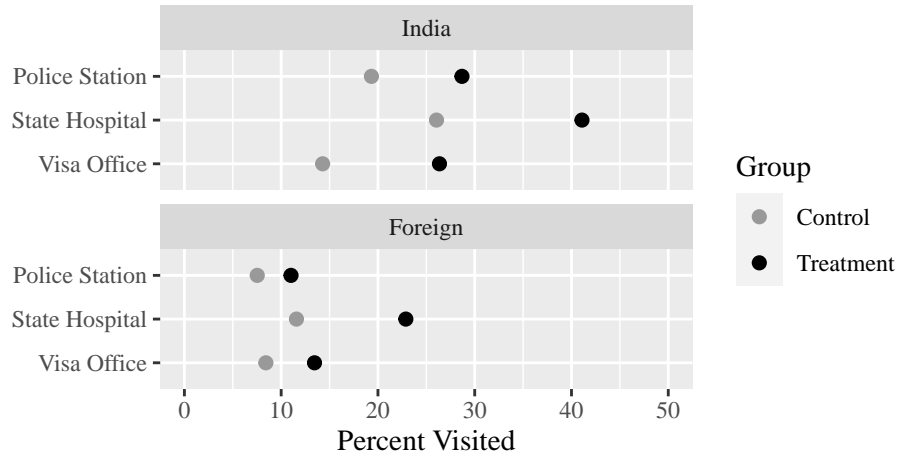
We next examine to what extent subjects trusted the Indian government and saw it as capable—our key pre-registered test. Migrants began to view Indian institutions more positively than subjects in the control group. Individuals in the treatment group were significantly more likely than those in the control group to report that all three levels of government—the Indian national government, the Mizoram state government, and their local government—were both trustworthy

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<sup>15</sup>Respondent 228.

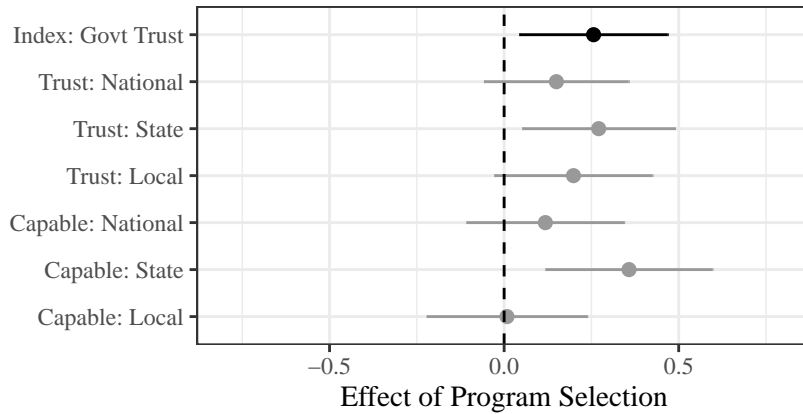


Figure 5: Exposure to Government Institutions



and capable (Figure 6). Overall, our index of faith in government was more than .25 standard deviations higher in the treatment group than it was in the control group. Although the effect was greatest on attitudes regarding state government institutions—the state level is viewed as the most relevant to individuals’ lives in Northeast India—the effects were not significantly different from one another.

Figure 6: Results: Trust in Indian Institutions



*Coefficient plot of OLS treatment effects, scaled in standard deviations of outcome variable, controlling for baseline measures of outcome. 90% confidence intervals are shown, which translates to  $p < .05$  on one-directional tests.*

This is particularly notable because the Gulf governments were widely seen to be handling the COVID pandemic more effectively than the Indian government at the time. The survey was conducted at the height of India’s COVID lockdowns in early 2021. While migrants in the Gulf continued to receive their contracted wages (which Gulf governments generally enforce well), many in India did not have similar protections. If anything, this contrast should have decreased migrants’ faith in Indian institutions relative to those who had not experienced the reactions of Gulf governments.

These results run contrary to our expectation prior to the experiment based on work on migrants in democracies in the Global North.<sup>16</sup> The migrants in our study generally had quite positive impressions of economic development in the Gulf region. If migrants valued democracy in part because they believe it brings good governance, we should expect that they will become less trusting and supportive of Indian institutions. Yet the result was just the opposite: migrants viewed Indian institutions much more positively than non-migrants. This suggests that individuals who get the opportunity to live in—and thus compare through personal experience—both democracies and autocracies come to trust and cherish formal democratic institutions more.

### 5.3 Political Participation

Finally, we turn to analyzing the effect of the treatment on measures of formal and informal political participation, our third component of democratic support. As discussed in Section 3, our predictions on political participation are less straightforward. If migrants gain economically from opportunities abroad or if they find the political benefits of democracies to be more appealing, they should participate more. However, given the bureaucratic barriers to formal political participation from abroad, they may be less able to vote than non-migrants. Alternately, migrants may be more willing to participate in politics through other non-voting channels.

We find that moving overseas appears to have had countervailing effects on political participation, as Figure 7 shows. On one hand, it appears to have decreased participants’ ability

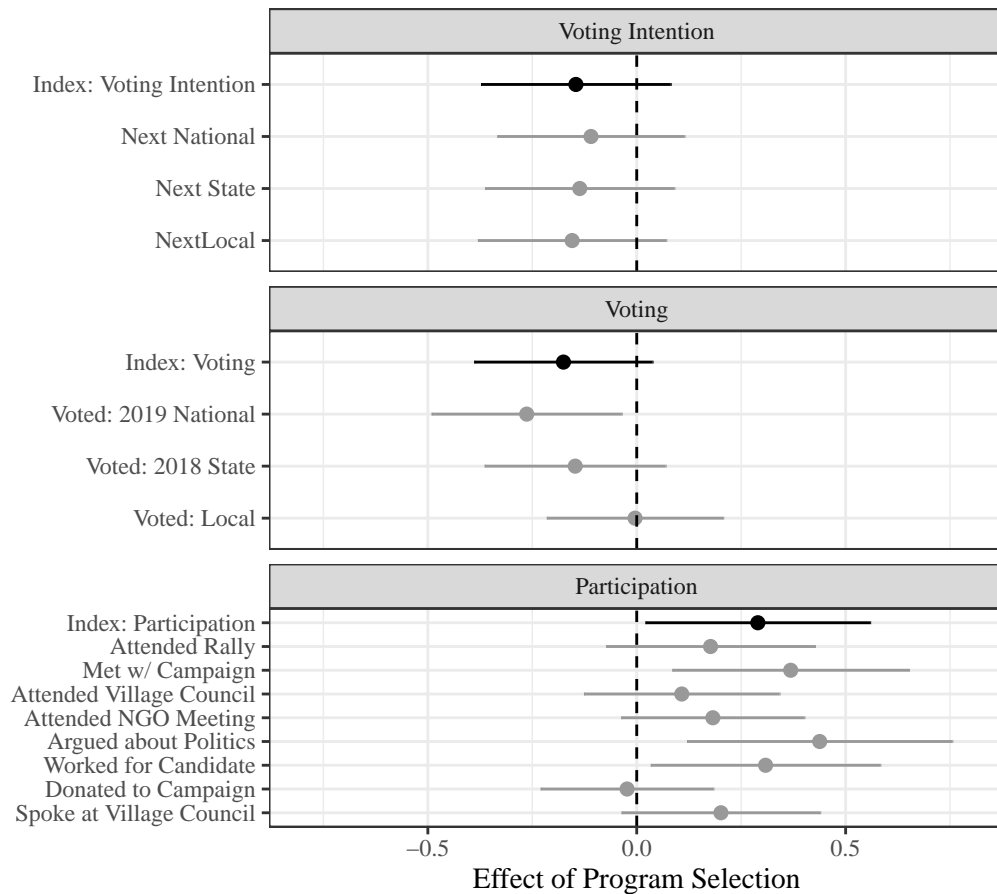
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<sup>16</sup>Our pre-registered one-tailed hypothesis ran in the opposite direction (that the treatment would decrease trust in institutions), which would imply a one-tailed p-value of  $p = .978$ . If our hypothesis was two-sided, this would be significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

to vote in some elections. The treatment group voted at a significantly lower rate than the control group in the April 2019 Indian parliamentary elections (68% vs. 79%), which took place after many members of the treatment group had moved abroad. That said, there is no significant movement in the overall voting index. Scrutinizing the results on vote intentions, we see that individuals in the treatment group were somewhat less likely to say they intended to vote in national, state, and local elections. However, this effect is not statistically significant. Therefore, overall, we see no difference between the treatment and control groups on voting and vote intentions after subjects migrated.

By contrast, more informal forms of political participation were significantly higher in the treatment group than in the control group. Individuals in the treatment group were more likely to have attended political rallies, campaigns, village council meetings, and NGO meetings; they were also more likely to have worked for a campaign, argued with others about politics, and spoken up at political meetings. Even after controlling for rates of participation at baseline, the treatment group scored nearly .3 standard deviations higher on our index of political participation than those in the control group.

Figure 7: Results: Political Participation



*Coefficient plot of OLS treatment effects, scaled in standard deviations of outcome variable, controlling for baseline measures of outcome. 90% confidence intervals are shown, which translates to  $p < .05$  on one-directional tests.*

This pattern appears to be the consequence of two countervailing effects. On one hand, the treatment has increased individuals' interest in participating in politics. Migrants were significantly more likely to express interest in local, state, and national political issues. Likewise, measures of voting intention and political participation were significantly higher at our midline survey in early 2019. For both results, see *Appendix E*. When migrants and prospective migrants had the opportunity to participate in politics, then, they were generally more active than non-migrants. In the 2018 Mizoram State elections, held after program selection but prior to migration, individuals

in the treatment group were more likely to be active in the cycle. This explains the positive effect in non-voting participation: in Mizoram, these more intensive forms of political participation tend to cluster around state elections, so most of these activities would likely be during the December 2018 state election cycle. The treatment and control groups voted at very similar rates in the state elections held after program selection but before migration.

When migrants moved overseas, however, they became much less likely to participate in politics, likely due to the challenges of voting overseas (see Section 4.2). Unsurprisingly, the decrease in voting among the treatment group is nearly entirely driven by the individuals who moved overseas. Individuals who eventually migrated overseas voted at nearly identical rates as non-migrants in elections before they migrated, including in the December 2018 Mizoram state elections (70% vs. 72%). However, in the April 2019 Indian national elections, after many in the treatment group had migrated, these migrants voted at a much lower rate (41% vs. 78%).

In qualitative interviews, individuals who moved overseas generally described their experiences as increasing their willingness to participate in politics. One migrant said, “As compared to earlier, I am now more aware of what is happening politically and if my family allows, I would like to involve [myself] in any organization if its going to benefit the people.”<sup>17</sup> Another viewed participation in community organizations as a way to spread their good fortune: “If I get a chance I will be active in the Church groups [...] and spread awareness as much as I can on the advantage of working in a foreign country.”<sup>18</sup> Even those who viewed Gulf governments as more effective and were uninterested in electoral politics often saw non-electoral politics as a way to make a difference. One subject stated: “I don’t think I will get involved in any political party but if there is any program which will give me a platform to share my experience and give advice to my fellow youth I will gladly do it.”<sup>19</sup> Several noted that they regularly discussed political issues with their family and friends.<sup>20</sup> These responses among migrants stood out because of the widespread political apathy among youth in Mizoram, which was notable among interviewees in the control group who had stayed in India. For

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<sup>17</sup>Respondent 156.

<sup>18</sup>Respondent 80.

<sup>19</sup>Respondent 295.

<sup>20</sup>Respondents 60, 88, and 179.

instance, one respondent said: “I don’t think I will join any, I’m not really interested.”<sup>21</sup> Another agreed, stating that “I won’t involve myself in any politics related organizations.”<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, the qualitative interviews underscored how subjects in our study began to deconstruct their understanding of democracy after migrating overseas: they conceptually drew distinctions between (a) effective governance (e.g., the provision of public services, law and order, safety, and economic development), (b) core democratic freedoms such as the right to elect leaders, and (c) citizen-side responsibilities such as political participation. Migrants appreciated democratic freedoms, but also evinced a deep appreciation of effective governance, even within autocracies. When asked to adjudicate tradeoffs between democratic freedoms and effective governance, migrants appeared torn, effectively split between these two goals. Similarly, migrants appreciated democratic freedoms but were not necessarily more interested in increasing their electoral participation while abroad. These interviews therefore shed light on the experimental findings reported earlier: migrants increased their trust in Indian democratic institutions, but when asked to make tradeoffs between democracy and effective governance, migrants were not statistically different from non-migrants.

Overall, our experimental and qualitative results illustrate the complex ways in which migration can reshape the political behaviors of migrants. On the one hand, migration can stimulate political interest and political participation when migrants have an opportunity to participate. On the other hand, the act of migration itself appears to dampen migrants’ voting behaviors and future vote intentions because migration introduces bureaucratic obstacles to political participation.

To conclude, our findings are broadly consistent with two of our stated mechanisms: intrinsic preference for democracy for its political benefits and increased individual economic resources. The evidence, by contrast, does not support the claim that migrants develop government preferences based on instrumental reasons related to the economic outputs of democracy. The next section tests the potential role of resources and other plausible alternative explanations.

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<sup>21</sup>Respondent 303

<sup>22</sup>Respondent 336

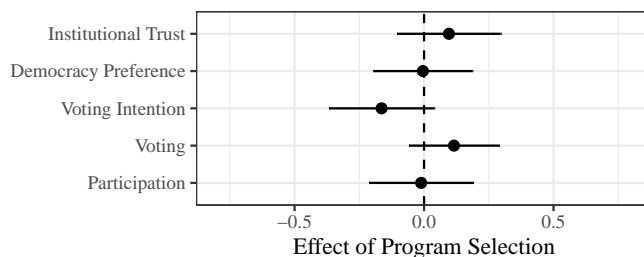
## 5.4 Alternative Explanations

The evidence indicates that the effects observed above are primarily driven by migrants comparing home and host country institutions—in this case, Indian democracy and Gulf autocracies. Here, we examine two alternative mechanisms by which migration could influence attitudes and behaviors.

**Economic gains.** First, we study whether the economic gains from migration, rather than experiences overseas, drove migrants to support democratic norms and practices. A vast literature links economic gains to shifts in political participation and support for democracy (Kasara and Suryanarayan, 2015; Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021). If that is the case, we should expect both migrants and their families to experience similar effects. In our study, migrants’ families shared in many of the economic benefits: migrants in the treatment group sent home to their families about 14,000 INR (200 USD) per month, or about half of their wages (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022). Therefore, we should expect family members surveyed in our accompanying household survey to move in similar directions, politically.

We find little evidence that migrants’ immediate family members experienced any significant shifts in democratic attitudes and behavior. Figure 8 shows the estimated treatment effect on the five main outcomes tested in this paper. None of these effects is significantly different from zero, and they bear little relation to the effects on the migrants themselves. Despite the large economic gains experienced by family members, there were no accompanying effects on various measures of support for democracy.

Figure 8: Household Results



This lack of effects suggest that, in contrast to prior studies, economic remittances may not have

had significant effects on the attitudes of migrants' families. Prior work suggests that remittances may make migrants' family members less reliant on state redistribution and less engaged with politics as a result (Germano, 2013; Adida and Girod, 2011; Ahmed, 2012). In our study, migrants' family members experienced substantial economic effects. These economic effects, however, did not appear to significantly change family members' relationship with the state or state institutions.

These results also contribute to the literature on "political remittances:" migrants have been shown to influence the preferences and behaviors of left-behind family members in sending regions. According to conventional wisdom, migrants to liberal democracies export democratic norms to their social networks back home, spurring family members to become agents of change in promoting democracy efforts in home countries (Barsbai et al., 2017). In our context, however, we find no evidence of political remittances being transmitted by migrants to their families. Likely this is because in our context migrants only grow more appreciative of the existing democratic regime instead of offering an alternative to household members. This highlights another way migration to autocracies differs from migration to democracies.

**Poor migration experiences.** Another potential explanation for migrants' preference for democracy vis-à-vis autocracy is that migrants had difficult or negative experiences in Gulf countries, which soured them on autocracy. This could be experience with discrimination or dislike for economic or social inequality found in host countries. Since such concerns have previously been raised about the Gulf, we investigated them in surveys and interviews. First, we do not find evidence that migrants had bad migration experiences: migrants in our study by and large report a positive migration experience (Table A.12).

Second, migrants also spoke positively about the lack of racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination in the Gulf. One respondent answered this way when asked about discrimination: "There were many Indian workers, so, of course, if we are Indians we favour each other a bit more because somehow there is a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, but that doesn't mean other people from different races are treated differently."<sup>23</sup> Another respondent linked diversity in the Gulf to the lack of discrimination: "Here at the Gulf we are a mix of different races so no one really cares where we

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<sup>23</sup>Respondent #44



are from.”<sup>24</sup> Lastly, we investigate whether migrants reacted negatively to economic inequality in the Gulf. If migrants disliked the Gulf because they were put off by its higher levels of inequality compared to Mizoram, we may expect that migrants would desire more state-led redistribution to address inequality. However, migrants opposed redistribution and state intervention to reduce inequality (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022). Together, this suggests that migrants are unlikely to have a greater preference for democracy simply because they disliked their migration experiences.

## 6 External Validity

Our study focuses on a specific sample and migration corridor. How generalizable are the results to other migrants in the global economy? We probe this question from two angles.

First, in *Appendix F.1*, we explore the generalizability of results based on our sample to migrants with different demographic profiles, a concept referred to as “X-validity” by Egami and Hartman (2022). For instance, would the same effects hold true for individuals from less marginalized groups or with less experience with political participation? Heterogeneous effects within our sample suggest that the results likely extend beyond our specific context. We found no consistent interactions between treatment effects and markers of marginalization (age, gender, education, religion, tribal identity) or prior political participation (*Appendix Table A.14*). Additionally, using machine-learning estimators, we investigated treatment effect heterogeneity based on pre-treatment covariates, as described by Devaux and Egami (2022). The results (*Appendix Figure A.2*) show minimal systematic heterogeneity, implying similar effects across different demographic profiles.

Second, we address the challenge of “C-validity,” which pertains to generalizing results from our specific context to other migration contexts (Egami and Hartman, 2022). Our study was one of the first field experiments of its kind. Logistical complexities combined with resource constraints prevented replication in alternate sites. However, migration from democracies to autocracies is common in the Global South. In *Appendix F.2*, we identify key contextual factors that may moderate the effects of overseas migration on migrants’ support for democracy and electoral participation.

For example, tradeoffs between perceived political benefits and economic downsides of democracy likely depend on how perceptible these differences are to migrants. Migrants’ increased support for

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<sup>24</sup>Respondent #40

democracy might be stronger if the receiving country were less wealthy and effective at providing public services. Presumably, migrants are more likely to be impressed by the wealth and public services of Gulf States than those of Jordan or Egypt, especially given high levels of economic growth in India. On the other hand, migration may not increase (and may decrease) support for democracy if migrants' home countries have less stable and effective democratic institutions. Speculatively, Indian citizens are more likely predisposed to compare India's democracy favorably with non-democratic systems than are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, for instance. This discussion suggests that the effects of migration on support for democracy may be more positive or more negative depending on the context.

## 7 Conclusion

We use a field experiment to adjudicate whether migrants support democracy for intrinsic political or instrumental economic reasons. If a preference for economic prosperity is the primary driver of pro-democracy attitudes, then migrants to wealthy autocracies should exhibit a decline in their support for democracy. Conversely, if support hinges on democracies' political structures, experiencing economically successful autocracies should not diminish migrants' democratic leanings. We find that migrants to higher-income autocracies do not become less supportive of democracy in their home countries. First, migrants are not more likely to reject democratic institutions in favor of higher levels of economic development. This result points to a persistence in democratic preferences, indicating that migrants are unwilling to compromise support for democracy even when autocracies perform better economically. Second, migrants' trust and perceived effectiveness of democratic governments in their home countries rises. This lends credence to the claim that a political channel underpins migrants' democratic preferences. Third, migrants increase informal political participation but shy away from formal channels such as elections. This nuanced finding is in line with our expectation that migrants face higher costs of formal participation abroad, but are more willing to participate in informal ways if they become more supportive of the political aspects of democratic institutions. Overall, these results suggest that migrants' support for democratic institutions strengthens after migrating to economically developed autocracies, indicating a preference for democracy driven by intrinsic rather than instrumental considerations.

Our findings have implications both for theory and policy. These results contribute to debates on why citizens support democratic institutions. Existing scholarship emphasizes the importance of widespread and intrinsic support for democracy's survival (Inglehart, 2003). If citizens only endorse democracy during periods of prosperity, democracies might struggle to weather economic downturns and instability (Przeworski, 1991; Elster, 1990). Our results suggest that when citizens have firsthand experience with both autocratic and democratic systems, they develop a preference for democracy, even when autocracies offer superior economic opportunities. It is important to note that our sample originates from the world's largest democracy with a strong democratic tradition. Further research is needed to explore citizens' willingness to trade off democratic practices for economic growth in younger or less established democracies.

This study also opens up a new avenue for research on how migration to autocracies shapes migrants' political attitudes. While immigration to high-income democracies has been a vibrant area of study, most of this research has focused on the attitudes of the native-born. Furthermore, studies on migrants in autocracies have been rare, despite the volume of migration to stable autocracies like the GCC countries, Singapore, and Russia rivalling those to democracies in the Global North. Prior work on migration to democracies has documented a robust relationship between migration and support for democracy. Despite far better economic opportunities in the Gulf, we find that migration to autocracies from democracies at the very least does not diminish support for democracy. In line with prior work, we find that trust in democratic home country institutions as well as migrants' willingness to participate informally in politics increases post-migration. Although it is important to consider who leaves, at least within circular labor migration, our findings offer new evidence that migrants can be a crucial pillar of support for democratic institutions back home.

These results also highlight the barriers that migrant communities face in participating in democratic politics from overseas. While we find migrants were significantly more supportive of democracy and more active in informal aspects of democratic politics, they were also significantly less likely to vote in Indian elections. Although these negative effects might diminish once migrants return home, they emphasize that migrant communities offer a relatively untapped pool of voters. Governments and non-governmental organizations dedicated to promoting democracy could facilitate easier voting from abroad, such as through embassies or postal voting, along with outreach initiatives to educate migrants about their voting rights.

Prior work on migration to democracies offers mixed findings on whether migration promotes greater political engagement and democratization in high out-migration regions. Some studies find that migrants to democracies transmit “political remittances,” increasing support for democratic institutions (Spilimbergo, 2009; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Barsbai et al., 2017; Chauvet and Mercier, 2014; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps, 2016; Pfutze, 2012). Others, however, argue that migration and monetary remittances promote disengagement from the state and politics amongst those left-behind (Ahmed, 2012; Germano, 2013; Adida and Girod, 2011). Focusing on migration to autocracies, we find that migrants’ household members back home benefited greatly from increased economic remittances. However, they neither came to value autocracies nor turned away from political participation. Thus, we do not find evidence that monetary remittances from autocracies spur political disengagement in sending communities. At the same time, the uptick in migrants’ support for democratic institutions in our study does not translate into increased support for democracy among left-behind members, suggesting that there are limits to political remittances in the case of migration to autocracies. Overall, we view these findings in a cautiously optimistic light, as they suggest that waves of migration to autocracies are unlikely to spur democratic backsliding back home.

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# Supporting Information for “Bringing Autocracy Home? How Migration to Autocracies Shapes Migrants’ Support for Democracy”

*Note: Some of the material in this appendix is the same as the appendix to (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth, 2022, 2024), which examines different outcomes from the same field experiment.*

## A Additional Information about the Project

### A.1 Intervention Location and Study Context

Mizoram is situated in northeastern India, bordering Bangladesh from the east and Myanmar from the west. The state is sparsely populated, with around one million residents. Mizoram has a highly educated population: the literacy rate is 91.33 percent according to the 2011 Census. While most people in Mizoram speak the local language, Mizo, English is also widely spoken and used as the other official language of the state. The vast majority of the state’s population belong to various tribes that are collectively known as Mizos. The majority of Mizos identify as Christians and only a small minority identifies as Hindus or Buddhists. Despite its high human capital, Mizoram lacks employment opportunities. The relative geographic isolation and mountainous topography have constrained industrial growth and produced high unemployment rates. Mizoram’s GDP per capita is around US\$1,600, which puts it at 19<sup>th</sup> amongst 27 Indian states (Institute for Human Development, 2013).

Why focus on the India - GCC migration corridor? Much of prior research on migration has analyzed population flows from the Global South to the North, but migration across countries in the Global South has increased exponentially in the past twenty years (World Bank, 2023). The Gulf region, meanwhile, is an important destination for migrant workers. Around 60 percent of Asian migrants, for instance, migrate to another Asian country, and only a much smaller subset, 16 and 19 percent migrate to Europe and North America, respectively. Saudi Arabia has the second largest migrant population in the world, the United Arab Emirates the eighth and Kuwait the twentieth. When looking at migration flows between countries, Indian migration to the UAE is second only to the Mexico-US migration corridor. However, migration between India and the Gulf is growing much more rapidly. Migration between India and the UAE registered almost a three-fold increase and migration from India to Saudi Arabia doubled in the past twenty years.

An important difference between South-South migration and South-North migration is that many Western industrialized countries offer a route to citizenship, although they restrict labor migration flows tightly and often privilege educated and skilled migrants in the case of employment-based immigration (Peters, 2017). By contrast, countries in the Global South usually welcome labor migrants of varying skill levels, but make it very difficult for newcomers to obtain citizenship and permanent residency status.

### A.2 Recruitment Strategy

We identified and recruited a group of prospective candidates interested in migrating to GCC countries for employment, but lacking the know-how and connections to do so. We relied on a variety of different media to advertise the job training and placement opportunity. We posted advertisements in leading Mizo newspapers as well as on local Mizo television networks (specifically, Zonet and LPS). We sent recruitment materials and application forms to regional offices of local skills training organizations and visited job fairs organized by the government. One of the job fairs took place in a suburb of Aizawl, while the other one in a neighboring district’s headquarter.

Additionally, we placed banners around Aizawl advertising the program. Finally, we reached out to the largest Mizo community organization, Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) to advertise on their social media platforms. Advertisement materials were translated to Mizo to reach a wide audience. The advertisement period lasted for two months over the summer of 2018. While we targeted the entire state of Mizoram with our advertising strategy, the majority of applicants came from Aizawl, which was unsurprising given the higher educational attainment and English skills in the capital city.

All our advertising materials asked applicants to be above the age of 18 and have at least Grade 10 standard education. We also required English competency. Once registration for the program took place, our team in Aizawl called back all registered applicants and screened them for their English skills over the phone.

We randomly assigned treatment status using the final list of applicants who passed the English language screening. We matched these applicants into blocked pairs based on age, gender, education level, and English proficiency (judged in the English screening). We then randomized between each pair, assigning one to treatment and the other to control.

### **A.3 Survey Methodology**

Our surveys were administered by a New Delhi-based survey company (CVoter Inc.), that hired twenty local, Mizo-speaking enumerators of both genders to conduct the surveys. This ensured that participants had access to enumerators of the same gender. Both surveys were written in English and then translated and back translated by CVoter’s team into Mizo. We offered subjects the choice of Mizo and English versions of the survey.

The baseline survey was a face-to-face survey that took place in Aizawl. Survey subjects were invited to the research team’s offices in central Aizawl, where they were asked to fill out a survey by enumerators using handheld tablets. In order to facilitate re-contacting, we collected the phone numbers and addresses of each respondent as well as a back-up family member.

Approximately two and a half years later (January-March 2021), we fielded our endline survey round. The survey was administered as a 30-minute computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) by CVoter enumerators. To boost participation, we offered phone credits worth a month of free calls, text messages, and 1 GB data to participants for taking the survey. Depending on the telephone operator, this cost around INR 169-199 (USD 2.36-2.78). We used the same protocol for two other surveys. First, in early 2021 we contacted the family member listed by the candidates to investigate the within-family spillover effects of the treatment. Second, in early 2019 we conducted a midline survey with the program participants, but this survey does not play a significant role in this paper.

### **A.4 Treatment: Job Training and Placement**

In this section, we provide further details regarding the treatment component related to the training program geared toward employment opportunities abroad. The training program was designed to equip individuals with the skills required to access employment opportunities overseas and overcome logistical barriers to migration. During the first 2.5 weeks of the program, participants attended classroom training sessions administered by a Bangalore-based training firm, Free Climb. This component of the program included modules on restaurant food service, beverage and counter service, and housekeeping. In the next two weeks, participants conducted on-the-job training in hotels, restaurants, and fast food chains in Aizawl. Overall, this part of the intervention was designed to upgrade candidates’ skills, equipping them with basic knowledge required to demonstrate eligibility for hospitality-sector job opportunities in international destinations at the interview stage. Concurrently, instructors also helped participants prepare resumes and practice interview skills.

Resume formats and interview preparations were designed with the input of our Mumbai-based recruitment firm to ensure that participants' job application materials were consistent with GCC hiring standards.

In the recruitment stage of the intervention, program participants were invited for interviews with several employers. These interviews were organized by our recruitment partner, Vira International. Every program participant was invited to interview, and most were offered multiple opportunities to do so. The vast majority of those who chose to attend interviews received job offers. Following job offers, Vira and our project manager assisted program participants in obtaining passports and medical certifications. The employers were responsible for providing everything else: work visas, airline tickets, and room and board.

## A.5 Ethical Considerations

Researchers have both moral and professional obligations to minimize harm and maximize potential benefits for research participants. This section details the steps we took to protect research participants from potential harm in this project. We organize our discussion following the "Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research" of the American Political Science Association.

**Principle 1: Political science researchers should respect autonomy, consider the wellbeing of participants and other people affected by their research, and be open about the ethical issues they face and the decisions they make when conducting their research.**

While international employment offers otherwise unattainable economic opportunities for many immigrants, it potentially poses certain costs and risks to their physical or psychological wellbeing. Relocating for work, especially overseas, requires navigating a complex, often uncertain set of costs and benefits. Specifically, in the context of the GCC, there have been documented instances of migrants facing extortion by recruitment agencies that charge illegal recruitment fees (Sasikumar and Timothy, 2015). Furthermore, Gulf countries have also faced criticism for overlooking employer exploitation, such as the withholding of workers' passports or employers' renegeing on promised salaries (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Reports of labor code violations have been concentrated in the construction sector; domestic household workers have also experienced exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

This study was conceptualized and embedded within Research & Empirical Analysis of Labor Migration Program (REALM). REALM was founded in order to generate scientific knowledge regarding labor migration as a way to remedy labor recruitment practices in the Persian Gulf that are often private, unsupervised, and opaque, and to help develop and promote fairer migrant labor processes that can lead to better outcomes for migrants and their communities. Within REALM, the goal of our project was to design and evaluate a blueprint for ethical and safe cross-border labor migration, to be used by governments and NGOs in the future. While designing our project, we paid significant consideration to the ethics of the study. We were mindful of the general obligation of researchers "to anticipate and protect participants from trauma stemming from participation in research" (APSA Committee on Human Subjects Research, 2019). We worked closely with our partners to minimize the potential risks and costs that participants might face, to ensure that the benefits of this program flow to participants and their communities, and to protect participants' informed consent (Humphreys, 2015; Teele, 2014).

We situated the study in Mizoram because of the demand for international employment opportunities, both from individuals and from the state government, in this region. The Government of Mizoram's earlier attempts at training and recruitment had drawn large numbers of youth looking for lucrative international work, given the scarcity of employment opportunities within

Mizoram. The Government's Mizoram Youth Commission (MYC), the Chief Minister of Mizoram, and several leading Mizo community organizations sought to create recruitment opportunities for Mizo workers in GCC countries, and called upon researchers to assist in scientifically evaluating processes of skills training and overseas placement that were already underway. By helping connect government and community organizations with reputable partners both inside and outside of India, the program enabled local stakeholders to better screen potential employers, protect citizens during their employment tenures abroad, and facilitate migrant integration. Although we (and the government) could not possibly facilitate supervised employment opportunities for *all* individuals seeking employment abroad, our goal was to help the government and NGOs build an ethical template for future skills development and employment placement programs in the region.

**Principle 2: Political science researchers have an individual responsibility to consider the ethics of their research-related activities and cannot outsource ethical reflection to review boards, other institutional bodies, or regulatory agencies.** This research project has received IRB approval from Columbia University, Stanford University, Dartmouth College, and the US Naval War College. The project proposal was also reviewed by the grant selection committee of REALM and an advisory committee of five social science faculty unaffiliated with the research team. Apart from the formal IRB reviews, we strove to ensure that our involvement minimized risk to participants and that the benefits of the program flowed directly to participants (Teele, 2014; Humphreys, 2015). In particular, we worked closely with New York University–Abu Dhabi Office for Compliance & Risk Management to select an employment sector (hospitality) that is relatively reputable compared to sectors where labor violations had previously been reported (e.g. construction), and to choose a recruitment partner with a long and tested history for fair recruitment practices in the hospitality sector in the Persian Gulf.

**Principle 4: When designing and conducting research, political scientists should be aware of power differentials between researcher and researched, and the ways in which such power differentials can affect the voluntariness of consent and the evaluation of risk and benefit.** Given the economic opportunities presented by our program and the potential power imbalances between the research team and the individuals in our study, we took two major steps to protect the sanctity of the informed consent process. First, we decided that PIs would not interact directly with any of the research subjects. We made this decision so as to not put pressure on potential research participants to take part in the program. The main point of contact for subjects was our project manager in Aizawl, who was of a similar age and background as the subjects. Most of these interactions happened in person or by phone/WhatsApp, in the Mizo language. Similarly, all surveys and interviews were also conducted by Mizos, by either our project manager or local enumerators hired by the survey firm.

Second, the recruitment for the program and the three survey waves created distinct decision points for individuals in which they were informed that they could withdraw from the study without any negative impact. In addition to the formal consent processes, we specifically trained our project manager to be honest and clear about the potential costs and benefits in any informal interactions with the participants. Our recruitment partner also conducted extensive information sessions with subjects, in which they were provided information about various aspects related to the risks and benefits of working abroad and in the Persian Gulf in particular.

**Principle 5: Political science researchers should generally seek informed consent from individuals who are directly engaged by the research process, especially if research**

**involves more than minimal risk of harm or if it is plausible to expect that engaged individuals would withhold consent if consent were sought.** As noted above, subjects were required to provide informed consent prior to participating in the study and had the right to withdraw from the project at any point. Additionally, participants had distinct decision points (from participating in surveys and attending the training program, to sitting for placement interviews and deciding to accept employment contracts) where they were able to reaffirm or withdraw consent.

**Principle 7: Political science researchers should consider the harms associated with their research.** In addition to efforts described above, we worked closely with New York University–Abu Dhabi Office for Compliance & Risk Management to carefully vet project partners and employers. We scrutinized our recruitment partner closely and worked alongside them to screen and assess specific employers that entered the placement program for fair recruitment practices, working conditions, and migrant worker treatment. Employers agreed to charge no recruitment fees, sponsor and guide prospective employees through the work visa authorization process for the receiving country, cover expenses for round-trip flights, visas, and other immigration costs, help recruited workers relocate and find housing abroad, provide competitive salaries and benefits, and enter into labor contracts that permitted workers to switch employers or leave their jobs at any time. All labor contracts were registered with governmental agencies in both home and host countries. To minimize participants’ financial obligations, training (including tuition, course materials, and on-the-job training) was provided free of charge. While not all participants may eventually obtain employment in the GCC, their training was deemed broadly useful for jobs in the hospitality sector.

Cognizant of potential power differentials between employees and employers, we strove to empower participants by informing them of their rights and resources in destination countries. The GCC states have passed several decrees in recent years that require employers to cover recruitment expenses (including visas and costs of travel), provide competitive salaries and benefits, and furnish housing and health fees for foreign workers. New reforms allow workers to leave their jobs at any time (subject to contractual obligations) and make it easier for workers to switch employers. Under the new policies in the U.A.E., for instance, prospective migrants sign a standard employment offer in their home country that is registered at the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) before a work permit is issued. Once the worker arrives in the country, the agreement becomes registered as the contract and no changes are allowed unless the employer extends further benefits to the worker. Our project provided subjects with detailed information regarding the locations and helpline numbers of MoHRE offices. Additionally, the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India has established Indian Workers Resource Centres in GCC countries that provide helplines and conduct awareness classes and counseling programs on legal, financial, and social issues.

**Principle 8: Political science researchers should anticipate and protect individual participants from trauma stemming from participation in research.** In addition to the efforts described under Principles 1 and 7, we took two additional steps. First, in order to assist with integration and reintegration, our project provided participants with access to comprehensive information regarding legal and counseling services both in the GCC states and in Mizoram. They were made aware of the option of availing counseling services free of cost (with the cost of these services covered by the project).

Our project manager also checked in with participants regularly through the process of migration and integration. After the endline survey, we also conducted long-form, semi-structured interviews with individual subjects who had migrated abroad in order to better understand the migration

experience and to provide access to counselling, if needed. Within these interviews, we specifically asked respondents if they had experienced any discrimination in the workplace and none of the respondents indicated any such experience.

**Principle 9: Political science researchers should generally keep the identities of research participants confidential; when circumstances require, researchers should adopt the higher standard of ensuring anonymity.** We took steps to keep our participants' identities confidential in this project. Enumerators collected the names and contact information of respondents, but that information was immediately encrypted and uploaded to a secure central server. Only the project investigators and the survey team's project manager were able to access the file linking the encrypted identifying information to the anonymous numerical ID associated with each respondent.

**Principle 10: Political science researchers conducting studies on political processes should consider the broader social impacts of the research process as well as the impact on the experience of individuals directly engaged by the research. In general, political science researchers should not compromise the integrity of political processes for research purposes without the consent of individuals that are directly engaged by the research process.** Besides the research subjects, one other group of individuals directly impacted by our study was the subjects' family members. Therefore, it was important that families were aware of the process, costs, and benefits of the program. During the registration process, the project manager encouraged subjects to take information home to their families and discuss the opportunity before signing up. We also held public information sessions open to the community, particularly to interested individuals and their families. At these sessions, the project manager, the head of our local NGO training partner, and one of our co-PIs answered any questions, attempting to be as honest as possible about the purpose, costs, and benefits of the program. Additionally, our study was conducted in conjunction with the Government of Mizoram's Mizoram Youth Commission, with the permission of the Chief Minister of Mizoram, and prominent local community organizations such as the MZP. Receiving government and community buy-in for the study helped ensure that the broader social impacts of the research were understood by relevant stakeholders apart from the research subjects themselves.

**Principle 11: Political science researchers should be aware of relevant laws and regulations governing their research related activities.** A principal reason for working with partners was to ensure that our project followed relevant laws and regulations, both in Mizoram and in the Gulf Region. In Mizoram, we partnered with a state government office (Mizoram Youth Commission) and a local non-governmental organization (SJnDI), who helped us navigate local laws and regulations. In the Gulf Region, our recruitment partner assisted our research subjects in navigating immigration laws and provided legal recourse for any workplace issues.

**Principle 12: The responsibility to promote ethical research goes beyond the individual researcher or research team.** Throughout the project, we workshopped the research design and solicited feedback on research ethics with numerous scholars of migration and experimental research.



## B Balance and Attrition

### B.1 Balance Table

The following regressions attempt to predict treatment status by pre-treatment covariates, among each of the three sample stages (the job candidates both pre-treatment and post-treatment, and the household members post-treatment). The covariates include both demographic characteristics and pre-treatment measures of key outcome variables. We find little evidence of significant differences between treatment and control group in any of the three survey stages, even after attrition. In fact, the treatment groups were remarkably balanced. Just one of the ten pre-treatment covariates predicted treatment status, and only on the endline survey. This 2/33 is in line with the expected false-positive rate of .05, and any pre-treatment imbalances should be accounted for in the statistical analysis in Section 5 anyway. Overall, the omnibus F-test (p-values at the bottom) shows that even the combination of all ten variables provides no predictive value on treatment group on any of the three surveys.

Table A.1: Treatment-Control Balance at Survey Stages

	<i>Dependent variable: Treatment</i>		
	Baseline	Endline	Household
Age	-0.012 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.012 (0.010)
Male	-0.018 (0.053)	-0.073 (0.067)	-0.062 (0.060)
Education	0.019 (0.032)	0.055 (0.041)	0.008 (0.036)
Employed	-0.021 (0.076)	-0.050 (0.102)	-0.055 (0.091)
Scheduled Tribe	-0.057	-0.100	-0.063
Married	0.104 (0.202)	0.225 (0.318)	0.118 (0.267)
English Ability	0.003 (0.025)	0.003 (0.032)	0.001 (0.029)
Income	0.0003 (0.014)	0.014 (0.018)	0.011 (0.016)
Inst Trust	0.030 (0.026)	0.011 (0.033)	0.006 (0.031)
Democracy	-0.005 (0.026)	-0.019 (0.034)	-0.011 (0.031)
Participation	0.055** (0.024)	0.062** (0.030)	0.041 (0.027)
Observations	388	247	302
F-Stat P-Value (Par)	.669	.614	.911
F-Stat P-Value (RI)	.376	.458	.819

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## B.2 Tests for Attrition Bias

First, we tested whether attrition was greatly affected by treatment assignment itself – i.e. whether the differences in response rates between the treatment and control groups are larger than what might be expected based purely on chance. There is no significant evidence that treatment is affecting response rate in the main survey, but there is evidence that the treatment may have decreased response rates in the household survey.

Table A.2: Response Rates: Treatment vs. Control Group

	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Household</i>
Response Rate: Treatment Group	65.8 %	70.4%
Response Rate: Control Group	60.7 %	84.2%
Difference in Response Rate	5.1 %	13.8%
P-Value: Two-Sample T-Test	.296	.001
P-Value: RI-based Test	.268	.002

We also tested whether response rates for the endline and household surveys were affected by any pre-treatment covariates. For each survey, we ran three regressions predicting survey response based on pre-treatment covariates. Here, again, there is no evidence that attrition in the endline survey was systematic.

Table A.3: Predictors of Attrition

	<i>Dependent variable: Response</i>			
	Endline		Household	
Age	0.001 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.009)	0.010 (0.007)	0.010 (0.007)
Education	0.018 (0.031)	0.011 (0.031)	0.023 (0.026)	0.021 (0.027)
Scheduled Tribe	0.123 (0.116)	0.100 (0.116)	-0.057 (0.100)	-0.056 (0.101)
Employed	-0.098 (0.072)	-0.074 (0.072)	-0.128** (0.062)	-0.121* (0.063)
Married	-0.137 (0.190)	-0.066 (0.191)	-0.191 (0.163)	-0.159 (0.166)
Male	-0.031 (0.050)	-0.033 (0.050)	-0.019 (0.043)	-0.017 (0.043)
English Ability	0.043* (0.024)	0.039 (0.024)	0.031 (0.021)	0.027 (0.021)
Income		0.014 (0.014)		0.014 (0.012)
Inst Trust		0.069*** (0.025)		0.017 (0.022)
Democracy		0.040 (0.025)		0.011 (0.022)
Participation		0.022 (0.022)		-0.013 (0.019)
Observations	389	388	389	388

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## C Key Outcome Questions

Table A.4: Questions: Institutional Trust

Question	Options
I am going to name several different governments. On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “not at all,” and 4 is “completely,” could you please tell me how much you TRUST each government? - National Government of India - State government of Mizoram - Local government in your town or village	Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely
On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “not at all” and 4 is “completely,” could you tell me how much you think each government is capable of solving problems in Mizoram? - National Government of India - State government of Mizoram - Local government in your town or village	Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Table A.5: Questions: Support for Democracy

Question	Options
Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Even if you agree with both statements, please select the one that you agree with most. Please choose statement 1 or statement 2. Statement 1: In India, it is more important to have a government that can get more things done, even if citizens have no influence over what it does. Statement 2: In India, it is more important for citizens to have influence over what the government does, even if that means it does not get as much done.	Agree more with Statement 1 Agree more with Statement 2
Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Even if you agree with both statements, please select the one that you agree with most. Please choose statement 1 or statement 2. Statement 1: An authoritarian government that resolves social and economic problems but does not allow citizens to participate is better than a democracy that allows citizens to participate but doesn’t resolve problems. Statement 2: A democracy that allows citizens to participate but does not resolve social and economic problems is better than an authoritarian government that resolves problems but does not allow citizens to participate.	Agree more with Statement 1 Agree more with Statement 2
If you had to choose between democracy and economic development in Mizoram, which would you say is more important?	Economic development is definitely more important Economic development is somewhat more important Democracy is somewhat more important Democracy is definitely more important

Table A.6: Questions: Political Participation

Question	Options
<b>Vote Intention:</b>	Very likely
- How likely do you think it is that you would vote in the next Indian national elections?	Somewhat likely
	Somewhat unlikely
- How likely do you think it is that you would vote in the next Mizoram state assembly elections?	Very unlikely
- How likely do you think it is that you would vote in the next local body elections?	
<b>Past Voting:</b>	Yes
- Did you vote in the most recent (2019) Indian parliamentary elections?	No
- Did you vote in the most recent (2018) state assembly elections?	
- Did you vote in the most recent local body elections?	
<b>Political Participation:</b> Here is a list of things that people sometimes do as citizens. Please tell me if you have personally done each of these things during the past two years.	Yes
	No
- Attended a campaign rally?	
- Attended a meeting with a candidate or campaign staff?	
- Attended a village council meeting?	
- Attended a different type of community meeting (e.g., union or NGO)?	
- Try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or political party?	
- Work for a candidate or party?	
- Given money to a political party or to a political cause?	
- Voted in an internal political party election or a local election?	
- Speak at a community council meeting?	

## D Main Results

Table A.7: Full Results: Migration

	Diff-in-Means			OLS			<i>N</i>
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>ATE</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>P(OLS)</i>	
Moved Overseas	.03	.23	.000	+ .20	.000	.000	248
Training Program	.43	.58	.011	+ .14	.009	.012	245
Job Offer	.08	.34	.000	+ .26	.000	.000	231
Moved in India	.32	.13	.000	- .19	.000	.000	247

Table A.8: Full Results: Institutional Trust

	Diff-in-Means			OLS			2SLS		<i>N</i>
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>ATE</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>CACE</i>	<i>P</i>	
Index: Govt Trust	0	.258	.044	+.256	.046	.048	+1.258	.069	240
Trust: National	3.07	3.17	.239	+.10	.247	.234	+.50	.259	229
Trust: State	2.91	3.09	.037	+.19	.031	.042	+.92	.066	224
Trust: Local	3.39	3.58	.092	+.18	.116	.149	+.94	.181	217
Capable: National	3.11	3.19	.410	+.08	.411	.389	+.41	.393	234
Capable: State	2.96	3.20	.014	+.24	.014	.014	+1.21	.027	222
Capable: Local	3.48	3.49	.924	+.01	.951	.954	+.04	.954	214

Table A.9: Full Results: Views of Democracy

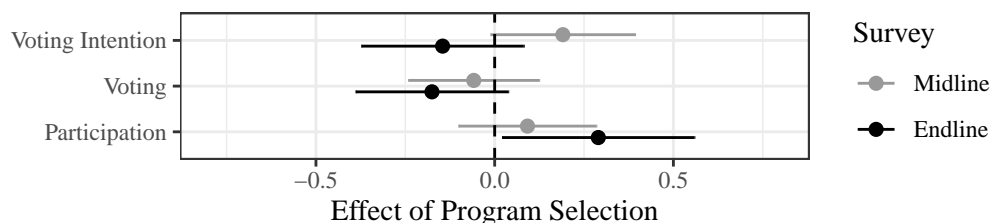
	Diff-in-Means			OLS			2SLS		<i>N</i>
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>ATE</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>CACE</i>	<i>P</i>	
Index: Democracy	0	-.102	.418	-.099	.427	.451	-.500	.463	248
vs. Efficiency	1.45	1.49	.521	+.04	.474	.492	+.21	.489	247
vs. Solving Problems	1.50	1.37	.038	-.13	.038	.041	-.64	.066	247
vs. Econ. Growth	1.73	1.71	.894	+.01	.958	.957	+.03	.957	247

Table A.10: Full Results: Political Participation

	Diff-in-Means			OLS			2SLS		<i>N</i>
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>ATE</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>CACE</i>	<i>P</i>	
Index: Voting Intention	0	-.133	.310	-.146	.267	.291	-.730	.280	248
Next National	3.40	3.33	.452	-.07	.401	.421	-.34	.409	248
Next State	3.44	3.36	.341	-.09	.312	.322	-.42	.314	248
Next Local	3.37	3.28	.299	-.10	.237	.259	-.51	.253	248
Index: Voting	0	-.162	.191	-.175	.160	.176	-.880	.168	248
Voted: 2019 National	.79	.68	.060	-.11	.055	.057	-.54	.051	247
Voted: 2018 State	.73	.67	.307	-.07	.230	.263	-.33	.279	248
Voted: Local	.49	.49	.966	-.00	.966	.975	-.01	.975	248
Index: Participation	0	.465	.007	+.290	.050	.076	+1.493	.104	248
Attended Rally	.05	.09	.194	+.04	.224	.244	+.20	.268	248
Met w/ Campaign	.03	.11	.010	+.07	.010	.033	+.35	.058	248
Attended Village Council	.04	.06	.537	+.02	.484	.448	+.11	.457	248
Attended NGO Meeting	.26	.36	.094	+.08	.159	.171	+.43	.198	248
Argued about Politics	.03	.14	.002	+.08	.017	.024	+.41	.038	248
Worked for Candidate	.03	.09	.051	+.06	.050	.065	+.29	.075	248
Donated to Campaign	.03	.03	.792	-.00	.763	.854	-.02	.854	247
Spoke at Village Council	.08	.12	.214	+.05	.165	.163	+.28	.199	248

## E Mechanism and Household Tests

Figure A.1: Comparing Midline vs. Endline Effects



The pre-analysis plan for our midline survey combined all participation outcomes above into a single index, which showed a significant positive treatment effect at midline.

Table A.11: Results: Political Interest

	Diff-in-Means			OLS				<i>N</i>
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>ATE</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P(RI)</i>	<i>P(OLS)</i>	
Index: Political Interest	0	.304	.029	+.303	.134	.027	.025	248
National	1.53	1.71	.015	+.17	.07	.016	.014	248
State	1.66	1.84	.020	+.18	.07	.015	.014	248
Local	1.66	1.74	.231	+.09	.07	.240	.233	248

Table A.12: Experiences of Migrants

<b>Endline Survey (Migrants):</b>	
<b>In general, how happy were you with the experience of living and working abroad?</b>	
Very happy	8
Mostly happy	4
Somewhat happy	15
Mostly unhappy	1
Very unhappy	0
<b>Endline Survey (Migrants):</b>	
<b>While you have been living abroad, how much discrimination did you face based on your ethnicity, race or religion?</b>	
Little or no discrimination	12
Not much discrimination	13
Some discrimination	3
A lot of discrimination	0
<b>Midline survey (All Respondents):</b>	
<b>In which of these places will Mizos face less employment discrimination?</b>	
Gulf Region	55%
Mainland India	8%
Don't Know / Can't Say	37%

Table A.13: Effects of Job Training Attendance on Key Outcomes, Within Control Group

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Democracy	Trust	Voting	Vote Intention	Participation
Attendance	-0.273 (0.189)	0.151 (0.188)	0.425** (0.188)	-0.070 (0.184)	0.052 (0.181)
Age	-0.038 (0.032)	0.049 (0.031)	0.0002 (0.032)	0.066** (0.031)	-0.012 (0.031)
Male	0.128 (0.190)	0.184 (0.194)	0.246 (0.195)	0.391** (0.191)	0.259 (0.196)
Employed	-0.119 (0.282)	0.329 (0.288)	0.098 (0.286)	-0.219 (0.280)	0.139 (0.275)
Married	0.330 (1.113)	-2.198* (1.127)	1.058 (1.128)	0.431 (1.106)	-0.138 (1.083)
Education	-0.148 (0.118)	0.039 (0.115)	0.044 (0.116)	0.158 (0.114)	0.248** (0.111)
Scheduled Tribe	-1.078* (0.572)	-0.653 (0.510)	-0.068 (0.513)	0.046 (0.502)	0.164 (0.491)
Baseline Outcome	0.235** (0.099)	0.009 (0.100)	0.132 (0.107)	0.029 (0.105)	0.301*** (0.109)
Observations	113	118	118	118	118

*Note:*

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

## F External Validity

### F.1 Generalizability of Sample (X-Validity)

“X-validity” concerns relate to the idea that the composition of subjects in experimental samples often varies from those in target populations (Egami and Hartman, 2022). The subjects in our study were relatively young and educated, and largely hailed from minority backgrounds. How might the findings from this sample generalize to other population groups? It is plausible, for example, that minorities’ prior engagement with democratic institutions might moderate the effect of overseas migration on contact and tolerance. Education and age might similarly moderate the effect of migration on attitudinal change.

We investigated X-validity concerns empirically by testing for heterogeneous effects within the sample to assess potential effects outside of the sample. First, looking at pairwise interactions, we found just three significant interactions (out of 50 possible interactions) between treatment effects and demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents: age, gender, tribe, religion, education level, employment status, and baseline income (see Appendix Table A.14). By definition, we should expect 2-3 results significant at the  $p < .05$  level simply by chance. Therefore, there is no significant evidence that members of underrepresented or politically connected groups were more (or less) affected by the treatment than others.

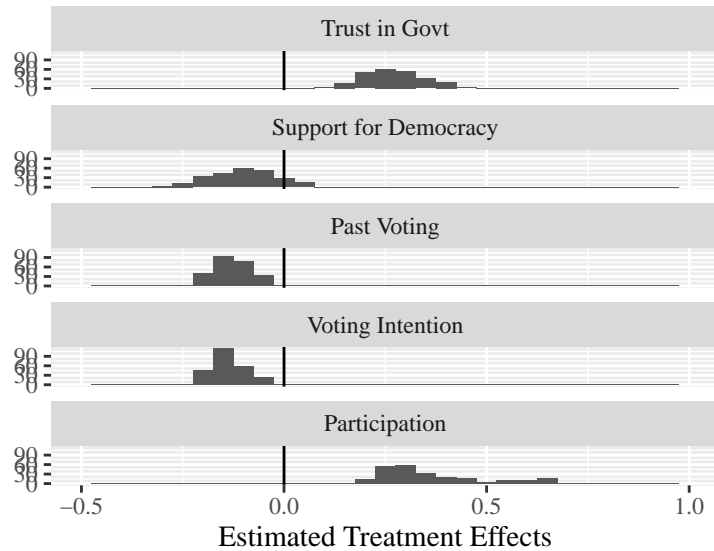
Table A.14: Pairwise Heterogeneous Effects

	Trust	Democracy	Voting	Intention	Participation
Age	-0.41	-1.50	0.56	-0.87	0.01
Gender	-0.98	0.87	-0.01	-0.11	0.72
Education	0.23	-0.43	0.92	-0.61	0.04
Employed	1.08	-0.81	-0.15	0.62	0.21
Scheduled Tribe	0.22	0.31	-0.12	-0.47	0.42
Christian	1.67	-1.99	-0.71	-0.91	0.48
Voting	0.49	-1.96	-0.52	0.55	0.80
Trust in Govt	-1.13	-0.06	-0.12	-0.10	-0.11
Participation	-0.45	-0.11	-0.45	0.53	2.51
Support for Democracy	-0.47	0.25	0.35	-0.88	-1.09

Trust: Index of trust in government. Democracy: Index of support for democracy. Voting: Index of past voting. Intention: Index of voting intention. Participation: Index of non-voting participation. T-Statistics of pairwise interaction effects between treatment and pre-treatment covariate of interest for each outcome variable.

Second, we used machine-learning estimators to investigate heterogeneity agnostically, following Devaux and Egami (2022), which proposes estimating individual-level treatment effects for all individuals in the sample based on estimates of the heterogeneous effects of the treatment using all pre-treatment covariates. The results, presented in Appendix Figure A.2, generally show very little systematic heterogeneity in the treatment effects—particularly with effects on tolerance—which suggests that the treatment would not have different effects for individuals with different socio-economic profiles.

Figure A.2: Estimated Treatment Effects for Each Subject



Predicted treatment effects for each individual in our sample, estimated using *exr* package (CRAN). Machine-learning algorithm estimates heterogeneity of treatment effect using all pre-treatment covariates, then predicts treatment effect for each unit.



## F.2 Generalizability of Setting (C-Validity)

Table A.15: Key Contextual Factors, Predicted Effects, and Suggested Designs

Context	Hypothesized Effect on Tolerance	Suggested Study Sites and/or Research Designs
Migration to lower-income autocracies	Stronger positive effect on support for democracy because economic comparisons are less flattering to autocracy	Research Design: Compare migrants from the same locations to higher and lower-income autocracies. For example, migration from India to the Gulf vs. Thailand.
Migration from weaker-institutionalized democracies	Weaker positive effect on support for democracy because political comparisons are more flattering to autocracy.	Research Design: Compare migrants from better and worse-institutionalized democracies to an autocracy. For example, migrants from India vs. Philippines to the Gulf Region.
Migration to autocracies with greater repression of dissent	Stronger positive effect on support for democracy because political comparisons are less flattering to autocracy.	Research Design: Compare migrants from the same locations to more and less repressive autocracies. For example, migration from India to the UAE vs. Saudi Arabia.
Migration in lower-wage or more exploitative sectors	Stronger positive effects on support for democracy because both political and economic comparisons are less flattering to autocracy.	Research Design: Compare migrants from higher and lower-wage sectors – for example, Indian workers in hospitality vs. construction industry in Gulf Region.
Longer-term migration, or migration pathway to citizenship	Weaker positive effects on support for democracy because migrants become more invested in host country (autocratic) politics.	Research Design in autocracies: Comparing migrants with and without citizenship in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which both now offer citizenship to some categories of high-skilled migrants.
Nativism or prejudice in host society	Stronger positive effect on support for democracy because political comparisons are less flattering to autocracy.	Research Design: Comparing migrants from a democracy to an autocracy before vs. after a key nativist political event.
Majority ethnic group migrants	Stronger positive effect on support for democracy because members of a majority ethnic group face less discrimination in the home country and enjoy higher benefits from democracy	Research design: Comparing majority and minority ethnic group migrants who move from a democracy to an autocracy.

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