The Politics of Social Assistance in Emerging Market Economies: On the Interplay of Electoral and Contentious Politics



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Authorship Statement

Paper 1 of this is dissertation is jointly written by Ali Bargu and Erdem Yörük. In line with Examination Regulations, both authors hereby certify that the majority of the work (≥ 70 per cent) represents the work of Ali Bargu. Papers 2–4 are solely authored by Ali Bargu.

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Thesis Abstract

This dissertation contributes to the literature on the politics of social assistance in Emerging Market Economies. It builds upon existing theoretical frameworks across several academic fields and offers empirical evidence on the influence of politics in the expansion and distribution of social assistance programs. *Paper 1* provides a novel contribution to existing political explanations of social assistance expansion by theorizing and testing how electoral competition and contentious politics mediate each other's effect on social assistance spending on a global scale. The analysis finds this *election-contention-nexus* to influence social assistance spending in Middle-income countries in particular. *Paper 2* offers a longitudinal analysis of the influence of the interaction of protests and electoral competition on social assistance in Turkey to uncover how the *election-contention-nexus* plays out at the national level. In addition, due to the available micro-data, it assesses the targeting of programs to characterize *who* receives benefits as a response to political factors. The results suggest that this co-occurrence can lead to higher levels of coverage of social assistance benefits among the poor in Turkey. *Paper 3* introduces a framework to examine *differences* in the distributional logic used by governments *across different social assistance types* to provide a systematic understanding of political distribution of benefits that goes beyond aggregate spending or single flagship programs. The results suggest that the main benefit types that are used for political purposes in Turkey are meager cash and in-kind benefits that I classify as poverty mitigating social assistance. Further, the type of challenging party is found to have differential effects on the distribution of social assistance programs. Lastly, *Paper 4* examines the role of federal politics in India to explain stark differences in unmet demand for the world's largest public works program. It finds that state-level party strategy and party alignment across levels of government are important factors that can explain unmet demand in the program. Further, it highlights that one benefit can be utilized by many political actors across levels of governments for different purposes. Surprisingly, district-level economic or political dynamics are not found to influence rationing rates of the public works program.

Introduction

This doctoral thesis contributes to the literature on the politics of social assistance in Emerging Market Economies. It builds upon existing theoretical frameworks and offers nuanced empirical evidence on the influence of politics on the expansion and distribution of social assistance programs. Focusing on the interplay between electoral competition and contentious political action, I highlight the role of domestic political factors in the recent expansion of social assistance programs for the poor and informal working class that has taken place in Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) and Middle-income countries (MICs) more generally. Following the 'standalone paper route', this thesis consists of four individual research articles that explore different dimensions of the overarching question of how political factors have shaped social assistance in EMEs in the last two decades[1] This introduction outlines the motivation for this dissertation, includes a background section that defines this thesis' main concepts and provides the theoretical frame of the overarching research question. This is followed by the aims and objectives of this dissertation, which highlight the gaps in the literature and how this dissertation addresses them. Lastly, the introduction details the methodological setup of the four papers, the justification for the case selection, and a detailed summary of each of the four papers.

I. What motivates this dissertation?

Social assistance programs support over two billion people globally and provide benefits to 650 million people in the poorest income quintile (World Bank, 2014, 2018). A new wave of social assistance programs, mostly in the form of social cash benefits, have flourished starting in the 2000s in Low- and Middle-income countries (Leisering, 2018). Social assistance policies such as *Progresa* in Mexico had immensely positive short and long-run effects on poverty (Caridad Araujo

[1] This project has been conducted as a part of the European Research Council Project on Emerging Welfare (Project Number: 714868).

& Macours, 2021). This new age of programs differs starkly from previous poverty reduction efforts, not only in magnitude, but also based on the legal entitlements most benefits provide to beneficiaries. However, these programs cannot be understood as merely technocratic policies that are designed and implemented with *only* a poverty reduction objective in mind. Politics matters in the expansion and distribution of these policies (Barrientos & Pellissery, 2012; Dorlach, 2020). Understanding how politics shaped social assistance programs provides insights into key policy design and distribution choices made by governments, which in turn directly affects the outcome they have on people's lives. This dissertation aims to highlight political conditions under which governments expand social assistance policies and how distribution of some types of programs and the targeting of groups who receive benefits changes because of political motives. I believe that uncovering instances where this happens is vital to call attention to where reforms of policy design or administrative structures are necessary. Ensuring equitable access and just distribution of these tax-funded benefits is vital as they rely on public trust to continue. If public trust starts eroding because of continued reports of politically motivated distribution, social assistance programs, which provide vital resources to people in poverty, could be in jeopardy. This dissertation highlights different aspects that need to be understood to shield social assistance programs from political influence and make them *more* equitable. The conclusion chapter of this dissertation highlights policy implications and further avenues of research that results of these papers induce.

II. Background

During the last two decades, social assistance policies have become an ever more important pillar of welfare provision in Middle-income countries. Social assistance programs are defined as tax-financed programs (noncontributory) carried out by government agencies that have the objective

of preventing, mitigating, and alleviating poverty (Barrientos, 2007).[2] We have experienced an incredible growth of social assistance programs not just in numbers of beneficiaries, but also in the number of programs, their diversity in policy design, and their relative importance for the income of the poorest quintile in societies in MICs (Barrientos, 2013; Leisering, 2018). Among these recipients constituting one fourth of the world's population, 44 percent receive in-kind transfers, 37 percent receive cash-based transfers (conditional cash transfers and universal cash transfers), and 19 percent receive fee waivers. The five largest social assistance programs are all provided in Middle-income countries and reach over 526 million people (World Bank, 2018).

A subset of nations among Middle-income countries referred to as Emerging Market Economies (EME) are home to the largest and fastest growing social assistance policies in the world. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) classifies countries in this category based on per capita income, export diversification, and degree of integration into the global financial system (Mody, 2004). Although there are a variety of classifications, the group of countries that are included in every classification of EMEs compromises Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South-Africa, and Turkey. Due to their increasing political and economic importance on the world stage in conjunction with the immense increase of social assistance provision in this group of countries, they form the focus of this doctoral project. In these contexts, where labor market informality is widespread, poorer segments in society cannot rely on contributory social insurance mechanisms. Noncontributory social assistance programs constitute the main pathway of providing state support to millions of people in EMEs and beyond. Thus, it is central to understand what has driven the expansion and distribution of these benefits.

[2] Social assistance programs are a subgroup of social protection policies, which also include contributory social insurance programs, as well as active and passive labor market policies (Barrientos, 2007; World Bank ASPIRE, 2020). This slightly differs from the use in European Welfare States, but is the common use for social policies in the Global South and by development agencies.

Various disciplines have brought forward their hypotheses on factors that contribute to the increasing prominence of social assistance policies in welfare states around the globe. Economic modernization theory suggests that economic growth and development will lead to governments increasing social spending and inequality reducing social policies (Myles & Quadagno, 2002; Wilensky, 1975). However, the available empirical evidence from Middle-income countries and EMEs does not confirm this theory as many of these countries have introduced and expanded social assistance during times of austerity and economic strain. The underlying assumption of a linear relationship between economic growth and social policy provision is insufficient to explain how the current social policy landscape developed. Such structuralist arguments are especially unhelpful in explaining the timing, scope, and policy design choices governments make (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Garay, 2007; Yörük, 2012). Economic development, or more precisely, fiscal capacity should be understood as necessary, yet not sufficient conditions of social assistance expansion and distribution.

To understand the expansion and distribution of social assistance in EMEs, this project draws on a more holistic understanding of political factors of social policy change. Existing political explanations usually examine single political factors (e.g. increased left party strength, union strength, electoral competition, protests, business interests etc.) as determinants of social assistance expansion and tend to focus on the national level (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Garay, 2017; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; O'Connor, 1973; Pierson, 1994; Yörük et al., 2019).

The most widely examined political factor to explain social assistance outcomes are elections. Electoral competition, is argued, incentivizes welfare transfers to the poor and informal working class due to the increased need to cater and mobilize the "poor-vote". The simple underlying assumption of these studies is the following: Incumbent governments are more likely to provide transfers to previously politically disenfranchised groups when the marginal importance of their

votes to win the election increases with more competition (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). This follows, in essence, traditional arguments around the core-swing voter debates in the field of distributive politics (Cox, 2009) often connected with logics of clientelism and vote buying as the reason for the recent social assistance expansion (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Hall, 2008; Stokes, 2007).

The predominant focus of the literature on electoral competition to explain the distribution of social assistance overlooks, however, a second path through which the poor and informal working class can assert pressure on incumbent governments: mass protests or "contentious" politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This path of pressure follows a very similar underlying logic that social unrests prior to elections cause instability that may threaten the electoral success of the incumbent, therefore incentivizing transfers to calm unrests and stay in power (an argument more popular among sociologists and social movement scholars). The interplay of both paths of asserting pressure on incumbents that the poor have at their disposal in democracies (voting and protesting) has seldomly been studied together explicitly, and even to a lesser extent as driver of social assistance expansion. This project aims to add to existing explanations for major shifts in social assistance provision in EMEs by adding the *election-contention-nexus* as a further explanatory factor.

III. Aim and approach

Against this background, this thesis provides new perspectives on the role of politics in the expansion and distribution of social assistance in Emerging Market Economies. Although much progress has been made, several overarching questions in the field of politics of social assistance remain unanswered. First, on the theoretical level, the link between electoral and contentious politics and their effects on social assistance remain underexplored. Second, studies either focus on flagship programs (often social pensions or Conditional Cash Transfers) and extrapolate or explain aggregate social assistance spending assuming they are a homogenous set of policies, foregoing potential differences across social assistance types. Third, existing studies tend to

conceptualize changes in spending that are not accounted for by poverty or income measures as discretionary transfers, potentially missing that the same effect could be due to differences in demand and sign-up for the program in question. On the methodological level, longitudinal analyses of the role of political factors in shaping social assistance programs that go beyond distributional analysis or single country case studies are missing. Further, data availability has been problematic to connect macro-level national social assistance spending to meso-level state government spending and to micro-level individual benefit receipt over time to understand differential distributional logics used by governments.

Each paper that forms part of this dissertation project therefore addresses parts of the aforementioned gaps in the literature. *Paper 1* offers a novel contribution to existing political explanations by theorizing and testing how electoral competition and contentious politics mediate each other's effect on social policy on a global scale. Further, it explicitly analyzes expansion of social assistance spending, rather than distribution. *Paper 2* offers a longitudinal analysis on the interaction of protests and electoral competition on policy outcomes such as social assistance to uncover how the *election-contention-nexus* plays out on the national level. In addition, thanks to the available micro-data, it assesses eligibility and targeting of programs to characterize who receives benefits as a response to political factors. *Paper 3* introduces a framework to examine differences in the distributional logic used by governments across different social assistance types to provide a systematic understanding of political distribution of benefits that goes beyond aggregate spending or single flagship programs. Lastly, *Paper 4* examines the role of politics on the state-level to explain stark differences in unmet demand for the largest public works program on Earth.

For each of these papers, I created new datasets on social assistance receipt, political variables (elections, ruling and challenging parties on the district level etc.), and use novel protest event data that comes from the Global Contentious Politics Dataset – GLOCON (in papers 2-4). GLOCON

is the the first comparable protest event database on Emerging Markets using local news sources created by the European Research Council Project Emerging Welfare under Professor Erdem Yörük (Koç University Istanbul). Data collection was carried out in collaboration with the Emerging Welfare project. All new data created for these papers is either already available online or will be made available pending last steps of data preparation for other researchers to use freely. In doing so, each of these papers attempts to fill parts of the research gaps mentioned above and advance research on the politics of social assistance in EMEs by proposing and testing theories and providing new data on this important issue. The four papers of this thesis hence provide a nuanced picture of the political economy of social assistance and combine theoretical insights from distributive politics and political economy with the macro-sociological insights from the social movement literature.

IV. Case selection

While paper 1 relies on a large-N analysis, using data from 43 countries, papers 2-4 focus on two specific cases studies: Turkey and India. These case study countries have been chosen following Yin's (2011) embedded multiple case study methodology. The identification of Turkey and India as sub-units of EMEs constitutes the appropriate means of inquiry to disentangle the effect of the phenomenon of interest (political factors) from the context itself (Yin, 2011, pp. 6–9). To be able to make statements about the validity of the hypothesis and examine the importance of the proposed *election-contention-nexus,* I choose two countries that widely vary on structural, institutional, demographic, and political grounds within the group of EMEs. This design allows to examine different political aspects and how they influence social assistance (e.g. state-level differences due to strong federalist structures in India vs. unitary structures in Turkey). In many respects, ranging from ethnical and linguistic diversity to poverty rates and population size these two countries represent contrasting case studies. It is important to note that I therefore do not follow a comparative approach when analyzing Turkey and India. Rather, each of these cases, with their

complex political culture, illuminate on their own how social assistance growth and distribution is shaped by different political considerations. Turkey and India represent distinct types of Emerging Market Economies and will help us understand the factors of interest at play. Table 1 summarizes the key economic, institutional, and political differences between two of the seven countries in this group of countries.

Table 1: *Country comparison of chosen Emerging Market Economies*

	India	**Turkey**
Population, total (millions)	1.380,6 (2020)	84,33 (2020)
GNI per capita, PPP (Int $)	6440 (2020)	26.900 (2020)
World Bank Income Bracket	Lower-Middle-income Country	Upper-Middle-income Country
Poverty (Share of Population) Headcount Ratio International at $1.9/day National Poverty Line	 22,5 (2011) 21.9 (2011)	 0,4 (2019) 15 (2019)
GINI	35,2 (2011)	41,9 (2016)
Share of Informal Labor Force (non-agricultural)	80.9 percent (2018)	44 percent (2008)
Governance System	Federalism	Unitary
Electoral System	Lower houses (in Parliament and in States): First-past-the-post system	Parliamentary elections: Party-list proportional representation.
Freedom House Index	2,5 Free (2018) Press Freedom Status: Partly Free	5,5 Not Free (2018) Press Freedom Status: Not Free
Ethnic Diversity Index	0.41(99th)	0.32 (121th)
Religious Diversity Index	0.32 (142nd)	0.004 (211th)
Linguistic Diversity Index	0.81 (19th)	0.22 (126th)
Type of ruling party	Indian Nationalist	Islamic movement

Sources: World Bank WID, Polity, Freedom House, TUIK, ILO

V. Thesis overview

Paper 1 *The Politics of Social Assistance Growth*
On the Interplay of Electoral and Contentious Politics

This paper builds upon the long history of scholarship on the causes of welfare state expansion. It combines insights from literatures on electoral competition and social movements and establishes the *election-contention-nexus of social assistance.* By establishing the link of these factors on a cross-country level, it sets the scene for the following papers that delve deeper into national dynamics. In particular, it examines how the interplay between electoral competition and contentious politics shapes social assistance expansion across high- and Middle-income countries.

Providing a comprehensive understanding of domestic political factors, we explain under which conditions incumbent governments expand social assistance policies – a central element of the welfare state. Conducting time-series analysis for 43 countries from 1992-2015 and using two novel datasets on social welfare and electoral competition, we find that i) electoral competition and contentious politics by themselves have inconclusive effects on social assistance spending; ii) the effect of protests on social assistance is significant only when electoral competition is high; iii) the effect of electoral competition on social assistance is significant only when there are large protests iv) this conditional effect is present only in Middle-income, not in High-income countries. We discuss five domestic political mechanisms: class positions of the electorate and protestors, temporal variation in political dynamics of social assistance, functions of social assistance, institutionalized discretion, and populism.

Paper 2 *Protests, electoral competition, and social assistance*
Evidence from Turkey

How do protests, electoral competition, and their interaction shape the distribution of social assistance benefits at the national level? After establishing the existence of the election-contention nexus in the first paper, this paper takes a closer look at Turkey to understand how this functions on the national level. Using micro-data on social assistance programs, a novel protest dataset, and an original measure of electoral competition for Turkey, this study shows that governments favor core-voters in their allocation of benefits when there are no electoral challengers. However, protests during electorally conducive points in time influence governments to allocate social assistance to poor -voters instead of core-voters. This cements the election-contention-nexus of social assistance. The contribution of this paper is novel in two ways: First, it offers a longitudinal analysis of the influence of the interaction of protests and electoral competition on policy outcomes such as social assistance at the national level. Second, thanks to the available micro-data, it can assess eligibility and targeting of programs to characterize who receives benefits as a response to political changes to understand the logic of distribution governments employ.

It speaks to a similar body of literature like the first paper, however, focuses more specifically on distributive politics and debates around core-swing voter theorems. It adds nuance to existing arguments by providing a more detailed understanding about *who* gains and looses due to political factors, going beyond mere measures of overall distribution.

Paper 3 *Not all benefits are created equal: Differential politicization of social assistance in Turkey*

While the number of studies on the politics of social assistance have grown tremendously, differences across social assistance types are under-explored and require attention. In 2008, Hickey stated that the role of politics and political economy was largely absent in debates on social assistance, as many of these debates were conducted by economists[3], who tend to apply a technocratic lens on the matter. Fourteen years later, scholarship on the politics of social assistance has grown tremendously. The literature has gained important insights, among others, on how politics influences social assistance programs in country and program specific contexts (Aytaç, 2014; Das & Maiorano, 2019; Garay, 2017; Zucco, 2013), the way certain program types like social pensions have spread globally (Böger & Leisering, 2020), institutions play an important role in shaping social assistance policy (Pellissery & Barrientos, 2013), and if and how social assistance has effected social citizenship (Leisering & Barrientos, 2013). Most of these studies either examine flagship programs or draw more general conclusions across countries. If fourteen years ago the frontier was research into political factors more generally, the current debate requires further theorizing and empirical solidification on differences in politicization across *types of social assistance*. I argue that the incremental layering of social assistance programs that has taken place has led to a diversity in program types with *differing political objectives* in Emerging Market Economies that we have to be mindful of.

This study attempts to provide one piece in this puzzle by examining Turkey, which provides a good example of this development as it administers roughly 40 social assistance programs. Thus, this study attempts to open the black box of social assistance to make two contributions: First, it offers a conceptual framework of social assistance types and offers a detailed descriptive account

[3] Especially in the Emerging Market Economies context, debates often followed a developmental lens

of who receives which type of social assistance benefit in Turkey. Second, it assesses which types of social assistance programs exhibit signs of political distribution. Due to the availability of micro data and a newly created dataset on political factors, this study can go beyond existing work to provide a more granular characterization of social assistance beneficiaries and their political distribution patterns.

Paper 4 *What explains rationing of a de jure universal social program? Evidence from India's Rural Employment Guarantee*

The final paper of this dissertation project focuses on the universal employment guarantee and the case of India. The largest public works program in the world, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a universal policy (de jure) that provides 100 days of work to anyone willing to complete manual labor. After the previous papers provide analyses on how targeted and means-tested programs are politically distributed, this paper examines how politics can influence a universal program. The self-selection design has garnered a lot of interest from academics studying social programs and serves as a basis for this paper: In theory, there should be no unmet demand in the program due to the universal policy design. The official statistics provided by the Ministry for Rural Development also indicate virtually no unmet demand for the program to exist. However, a series of quantitative and qualitative studies have shown this not to be the case (Dutta et al., 2012; Himanshu et al., 2015). Thus, rationing of the program (unmet demand for work of people who would like to participate in the program) is pervasive and varies greatly across states and districts of India. In this paper, I create a novel dataset to examine four potential theoretical mechanisms that could account for this puzzling finding: i) state resource and capacity, ii) party alignment logic across levels of governments, iii) party strategy and iv) counter-insurgency strategy. After identifying the relevant mechanisms, it tests which part of the program is used for political purposes by whom. It uncovers the two different underlying mechanisms on how these two political factors lead to lower rationing: Differences due to party

strategy logic are rooted in varying party priorities for investments into the material or labor parts of the policy; while political alignment increases general MGNREGA spending, yielding lower rationing rates.

Overall, this paper finds that state-level characteristics shape general logic and resource allocation of MGNREGA. It adds to the literature by showing how politics at the state level serve as a backdrop for local dynamics of MGNREGA that have previously been found and points towards barriers that people face in receiving work. Further, it adds a new aspect to the literature of distributive politics by highlighting different aspects of social assistance programs that can be utilized for political gain.

VI. Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. It provides insights to some aspects of the politics of social assistance in EMEs yet raises new questions in the process. The research design choice of conducting two case-studies on Turkey and India, including subnational analyses, offers important insights into the domestic political processes at play. In particular, it allows for a deliberate examination of how social assistance growth and distribution are shaped by country specific political considerations. The limitations to an explicitly comparative research design lie in the ability to conclusively identify factors that are sufficient or necessary for the expansion or political distribution of social assistance benefits. Further, choosing two countries that are quite dissimilar in institutional structure, population size, or ethnic and linguistic diversity within the category of EMEs, makes it difficult to make overarching, externally valid statements about the exact functioning of the election-contention-nexus. Additional comparative studies are needed to identify when the election-contention-nexus has a *sui generis* effect on social assistance programs and when it does not. The conclusion section of this dissertation provides a more in-depth account of limitations of each paper and identifies avenues for further research.

VII. Summary of Contributions

In sum, this dissertation provides nuance to theoretical debates on the politics of social assistance and distributive politics, by combining the fields of social movements and strategic party competition literature. It offers a more detailed examination of the specific conditions under which governments decide to expand social assistance programs and *what type* of distribution takes place when governments face pressure. First, it suggests that studying social policy outcomes and how they are influenced by electoral competition *(pressure from the top)* should not be done without considering contentious political action *(pressure from below)* – and vice versa. Second, it shows that this co-occurrence can lead to higher levels of coverage of social assistance benefits among the poor in Turkey. Third, it provides a framework that opens the black box of social assistance based on generosity and coverage of different social assistance types. This framework allows for testing if there are differences in the political distributional logics *across* social assistance types. The results suggest that the main benefit type that is used for political purposes in Turkey are meager cash and in-kind benefits that I classify as poverty mitigating social assistance. Fourth, this dissertation contributes to the literature on federalism and the politics of social assistance by examining unmet demand for the Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee, the largest, de jure universal, public works program globally. It introduces state-level party strategy and party alignment across levels of government as important factors that need to be examined in the politics of social assistance.

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The Politics of Social Assistance Expansion:
On the Interplay of Electoral and Contentious Politics across High- and Middle-income Countries

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Abstract

How does the interplay between electoral competition and contentious politics shape social assistance expansion in high- and Middle-income countries? Providing a comprehensive understanding of domestic political factors, we explain under which conditions incumbent governments expand social assistance policies – a central element of the welfare state. Conducting time-series analysis for 43 countries from 1992-2015 and using two novel datasets on social welfare and electoral competition, we find i) electoral competition and contentious politics by themselves have inconclusive effects on social assistance spending; ii) the effect of protests on social assistance is only significant when electoral competition is high; iii) the effect of electoral competition on social assistance is only significant when there are large protests iv) this conditional effect is only present in Middle-income, not in High-income countries. We discuss five domestic political mechanisms: class positions of the electorate and protestors, temporal variation in political dynamics of social assistance, functions of social assistance, institutionalized discretion, and populism.

I. Introduction

Since the 2000s, social assistance provision has become a key pillar of the welfare state. While political accounts of this historical development are growing, they primarily focus on electoral competition and social unrest as two separate and independent factors that shape the expansion of social assistance programs (Dorlach 2020). However, the scholarship on electoral politics and contentious politics has taught us that these two factors are strongly tied to each other: The nature of elections changes in times of social unrest and the nature of social unrest changes under intense electoral competition. Therefore, how does this interaction between electoral and contentious politics shape the expansion of social assistance programs in high- and Middle-income countries? How do governments respond with social assistance when challenged from above and below? In this article, we answer this question and give a comprehensive political explanation for the vast expansion of social assistance programs, which has radically changed the welfare state across the world.

The emergence of major social assistance programs in High-income countries (HICs) has extended social rights of the poor starting in the 1950s. This is to some extent paralleled by the recent expansion in Middle-income countries (MICs), which commenced in the 1990s (Leisering and Barrientos 2013). During the last two decades, many new social assistance programs have been introduced, scaled up, and improved in Middle-income countries. While for the longest time, social assistance policies were predominantly found in countries with long-standing social protection systems in Europe or North America, Middle-income countries are now the home of the largest and fastest-growing social assistance policies in the world (World Bank 2018; Leisering 2018).

This development signifies a shift in government priorities, as social assistance has become a central element of social welfare provision in high- and Middle-income countries (Leisering and Barrientos 2013). Academic work that engages with social assistance describes and analyzes this

development, particularly in MICs, but also in HICs (Bahle, Hubl, and Pfeifer 2011; Gough et al. 1997; Marx and Nelson 2013). Scholars have argued that the expansion of social assistance has even led to the emergence of a new welfare state regime composed of Middle-income countries that is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the welfare state regimes of high- and low-income countries (Yörük, Öker, and Tafoya 2019).

Around the globe, the burgeoning literature on social assistance programs has focused mainly on the success or failure of these programs in fighting poverty, their labor market entry effects, and their developmental outcomes such as mortality rate changes for beneficiaries (IEG 2012). This was evinced by a 2022 systematic review, which revealed that most studies on social assistance programs are descriptive only or measure outcomes and impacts (87%) (Yörük, Kina, and Bargu 2022). In other words, only 13% of studies examine the determinants of social assistance provision. Furthermore, only 2.5% focus specifically on the political determinants of social assistance provision – even though may acknowledge the general assumption that "politics matter". Thus, despite a growing focus on political determinants in recent years, the mechanisms and extents to which politics shape the recent social assistance expansion remain under-researched (Barrientos and Pellissery 2012; Yörük, Kina, and Bargu 2022).

The existing and limited volume of political explanations has so far tended to examine various contentious and electoral political factors as separate determinants of social assistance expansion, without explicitly theorizing or examining the interaction of mass protests and electoral competition. Studying these political rationales as independent explanatory factors for social policy outcomes, suggests direct effects that are not mediated and disregard conditions that strengthen, reverse, or negate these mono-causal effects. While many authors of empirical studies indicate that a holistic view is needed in explaining social assistance outcomes, the interplay between electoral competition and contentious politics has not been systematically examined. A plethora of

theoretical works that suggest that these electoral and contentious politics are, in fact, not independent as they condition and influence one another in myriad ways, inspires our analysis (Goldstone 2003; Bremer, Hutter, and Kriesi 2020; Burstein and Linton 2002).

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, we offer a novel contribution to existing political explanations by theorizing and testing how electoral competition and contentious politics mediate each other's effect on social policy on a global scale. On the one hand, existing political mediation theory approaches that analyze the effects of contentious politics on social welfare, conditioned by electoral processes, focus on (i) case studies and (ii) long-run effects of large and structured social movements (often welfare movements exclusively) (Amenta et al. 2010; Garay 2017). Our political mediation approach conducts a global comparative analysis of social policy outcomes utilizing a broader conceptualization of contentious political events. On the other hand, existing studies on the effect of electoral competition on social assistance policies do not examine how social movements condition such an effect in their theoretical or empirical models. These studies tend to explain the distribution of benefits to certain groups and cannot explain the expansion of benefits over time.

Using original time-series data on global social policies, we illustrate a set of necessary conditions, under which general social unrest and electoral competition have a robust effect on social assistance expansion: We show that protestors gain welfare concessions only during electoral competition. In times of increased competition for votes, the marginal value of a vote increases, in turn enhancing the political bargaining power of marginalized groups that challenge the authorities. Hence, we expect governments to respond to mass protests with increases in social assistance spending only under conditions of electoral competition. We argue incumbents follow two objectives simultaneously: gaining voters (*electoral mobilization motive*) and ensuring stability (*political stability motive*). Further, we show that voters gain welfare concessions only in times with

high levels of protests. For the government, protests can be interpreted as an *electoral threat* when they are large in numbers, display a clear anti-government stance, gain the attention of the media, and have a clear message (Burstein 1999; Vliegenthart et al. 2016) as the opposition may benefit by siding with the protestors. If social unrest further expands, the *threat to political and social stability* needs to be addressed by the incumbent party, as their governing style may be called into question. Thus, when mass protests threaten the foothold of the incumbent, the incentive to provide social assistance is amplified if protesters are perceived to be signaling their intent to defect to another party by continued mass protests. This completes what we term the *election-contention-nexus*.

Second, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first cross-national study that examines the expansion of all social assistance policies exclusively, using an original dataset. This contrasts with existing studies using either general social expenditure, which masks potential differences between contributory and noncontributory policies and studies that inspect single countries or social assistance programs, which masks a general logic of the government and makes comparisons across countries difficult.

Third, this article is the first study to provide an empirical comparison of the drivers of the social assistance expansion between high- and Middle-income countries. In contrast to recent contributions that have argued that the politics of welfare state expansion in high- and Middle-income countries are largely similar (Dorlach 2020), we show that the politics of social assistance in Middle-income countries is particularly responsive to the combination of electoral competition and mass protests.

II. Prevailing Political Explanations for Social Assistance Expansion

How do political factors drive the expansion of social assistance policies? In the following section, we review the prevailing political explanations for the expansion of social assistance programs which highlight electoral competition and social movements. We argue that, while useful, mono-causal explanations leave many aspects of the recent social assistance expansion unexplained.

Electoral Competition

Political scientists have long argued about the distribution of noncontributory benefits for electoral gain using clientelist strategies[1]. A classical body of literature along the lines of coalition theory argues that competition between parties triggers politicians' electoral survival strategies. This, in turn, leads to more spending that targets individuals and certain groups in society to sway parts of the electorate (Dawson and Robinson 1963; Persson and Tabellini 1999). This general approach applies neatly to noncontributory social assistance policies, as these tax-financed policies are often targeted at specific groups of people. Scholars working on social assistance have added more nuance to this argument. They have pointed towards a potential trade-off between strategic particularistic benefits provided in times of competition and public goods/universal benefits provided when electoral security for the incumbent is high (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016; Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007). According to this argument, as the size and heterogeneity of the winning coalition increases, the difficulty of buying political loyalty with irregular and private transfers to voters increases as well (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003).

When incumbents face heightened electoral competition, studies find augmentation of programs such as maternity benefits in South Korea (Kim 2012), particularistic benefits in Argentina (Remmer 2007), in Brazil (Melo and Pereira 2013), across Mexican states (Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros,

[1] See Cox (2010) for a very helpful review of the field.

and Estévez 2007) as well as in Chile and Uruguay (Pribble 2013). Others have focused on particular types of electoral competition: In Turkey, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) payments were found to be higher in municipalities where the incumbent faced an ideologically close challenger? (Aytaç 2014). Weitz-Shapiro (2012) points towards the electoral cost for incumbents of providing discretionary benefits and highlights the importance of trade-offs between poor and non-poor electorates that guide decisions of incumbents. This is echoed in Garay's work in which she argues that strong electoral competition for poorer sections in society during the Argentinian election of 1999 is related to the subsequent expansion of social assistance (Garay 2017). Holland & Schneider (2017) frame electoral competition for outsiders as a broader argument for the recent expansion of noncontributory social assistance in Latin America[2]. The strategic view of party competition "sees parties as resourceful organizations that are partially autonomous from social structures and deploy social policy in a top-down manner to mobilize electoral support" (Häusermann, Picot, and Geering 2013). While the rise of more universalistic social policies (such as education, health, social security) was attributed by scholars to left parties (see Dorlach, 2020), the rise in nominally smaller noncontributory social assistance policies cannot simply be attributed to a rise in left-wing political influence. On the contrary, governments from the political Right and Left have expanded social assistance programs to tackle poverty commencing in the 2000s (Fairfield and Garay 2017). This indicates that electoral competition is more important than partisan ideology in driving the expansion of social assistance programs.

Overall, many of these studies are concerned with explaining the politicized distribution of benefits to certain groups and do not explicitly model the expansion of social assistance policies over time (*distribution vs. expansion)*. Yet, this literature on expansion depicts a direct and positive relationship between electoral competition and the growth of social assistance policies. As such, the conditions

[2] They describe noncontributory social assistance programs (e.g. CCTs, family benefits etc.) as *easy redistribution* in contrast to most contribution based social insurance programs, which they posit are harder to reform.

under which electoral competition has a positive effect on the expansion of social assistance programs, specifically the effect of social movements, is under-researched and not examined empirically.

Social Movements

A large body of literature has brought forward theories of how movements might matter in politics and policy outcomes. Some scholars focus on social welfare movements that have influenced the expansion of South Africa's Child Support Grant (Proudlock 2011), the Renta Dignidad in Bolivia (Anria and Niedzwiecki 2016), non-contributory pensions in Brazil (Garay 2017, 164). Moreover, movements by unemployed and informal workers have been linked to the expansion of more inclusive welfare programs in India, Argentina, and Brazil (Agarwala 2013; Garay 2007). The underlying assumption in these studies is that specific redistributive demands will be addressed by the incumbents when they see a benefit for themselves.

While the majority of scholars analyze outcomes of movements connected to their declared objectives (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995; Della Porta 2009), others have shown that there are a multitude of unintended consequences to *general mass mobilization* (without explicit welfare demands), ranging from a variety of concessions to repression (Rucht 1992; Tarrow 1994). Scholars focus on how social assistance is used by incumbents as a tool to contain social unrest and restore social stability. This theory parallels the findings of Piven & Cloward (1971), who argued that for outsiders and the unemployed in the United States, social assistance programs expand as a means of establishing control over the disorderly in times of social turmoil. In Mexico, evidence suggests that the government directs social assistance programs disproportionately to indigenous people to pacify their insurgency movement (Yörük, Öker, and Şarlak 2019). For Turkey, Yörük (2012) shows that social assistance programs have been used systematically by the government to contain Kurdish unrest.

Building on this literature, we measure the effect of social movements on welfare policies in this paper in the broader sense, in which people receive social assistance benefits as a *by-product* of their mobilization. Much of the literature analyzing the effect of social movements on social assistance falls into the mono-causality trap. They tend to overlook other paths of influence. We contend that governments deliver social assistance benefits not only because of organized movements demanding these benefits, but to contain mass protests that mobilize around other political, ethnic, or religious grounds (Piven and Cloward 1979). Therefore, the political conditions under which social unrests influence social assistance are not sufficiently theorized or specifically modeled.

A key approach to overcome this mono-causality trap is suggested by Political Mediation theory (PMT), formalized by Amenta (1998; 2006). The theory contends that collective action is insufficient for policy changes, yet that under some circumstances it can influence policy makers and bring about change. Empirical evidence substantiates that outcomes of movements are heavily dependent on the structures they challenge, and the mediating political factors movements encounter when they voice their discontent (Amenta et al. 2010). This theoretical framework provides the structure upon which our argument for this article is built. We see social movements as challengers of the incumbent government who have the ability to be a threat to social, political, or economic stability[3]. They require conditions under which the incumbent sees the need to enact policy change. Yet, we depart from the work of Amenta in that the social movements do not need to explicitly demand welfare reform. We examine if the threat to social, political, and economic stability that movements can induce incumbents to respond with increases in social assistance programs as part of a containment strategy. We depart from existing frameworks like that of Garay (2017), who looks and the interaction between movements and elections. Specifically, we examine if *general social unrest,* as opposed to welfare movements exclusively, influence the expansion of

[3] Beyond social assistance, Ciccia and Guzmán-Concha (2018) find that protests, among other factors, play an important role in resisting retrenchment of unemployment schemes in Europe.

social assistance benefits under certain political conditions. In contrast, Garay shows that welfare movements and electoral competition for outsiders incentivize non-discretionary, institutionalized social policy expansion. In this respect, our approach is more akin to the political mediation model of Piven and Cloward, who argued that disruptive collective action by poor people induces public spending especially during times of electoral instability (Piven and Cloward 1979). Hence, we propose to synthesize Amenta, Garay and Piven.

In addition, in parallel to the literature on electoral politics of social assistance, studies examine the distribution of benefits and do not explicitly model their expansion over time. Most existing work also tends to be case studies of specific programs rather than more encompassing examinations of all social assistance programs.

Much of the previously mentioned literature on political determinants of social policy falls into a trap of viewing social movements as exogenous to electoral politics (see Hutter et al., 2018 for an overview of fields that examine these factors seperatly). However, the discussions on the importance of examining both electoral politics and social movements as two avenues of democratic participation revitalized with work by authors like McAdam and Tarrow (2010) and their "contentious politics" approach. Scholars have suggested that movements and parties play vital complementary roles for the representation of people in democracies (Kitschelt 1993). Kriesi and colleagues, have since theorized this connection further and provide a detailed analysis of the interplay between the two for the Great Recession (Bremer, Hutter, and Kriesi 2020). Protests send a clear message of discontent to the incumbents and can be seen to fulfill three functions: *attention* (to certain issues)*, attribution* (of blame to the government)*,* and *spin functions* (strengthening of political allies of protestors) (Bremer, Hutter, and Kriesi 2020, p.864). Meyer and Tarrow (1998) pointed out two decades ago that "participation in protest activity has not come at the expense of other forms of participation […] People who protest are more, not less, likely to vote and engage

in the whole range of conventional citizen politics." Relying on this body of scholarship that examines the interaction between electoral and contentious politics, we propose a systematic examination of the logic of double politicization and propose the *"election-contention nexus"* of social assistance expansion – how and to what extent this interaction generates a *sui generis* effect on social assistance provision.

III. The Election-Contention Nexus across High- and Middle-income Countries – The Argument

This paper seeks to theorize and empirically test how the interaction between mass protests and competition for elections shapes incumbents' decisions on social assistance spending. Merging the two fields of social movements and electoral competitions literature, we test (i) if there is a conditional effect of electoral competition *(pressure from the top)* moderated by mass protests *(pressure from below)* that increases the likelihood of incumbents to augment social assistance spending, (ii) if there is a conditional effect of mass protests *(pressure from below)* on social assistance spending, moderated by electoral competition *(pressure from the top),* and (iii) if these effects are different between high- and Middle-income countries.

We theorize and test if incumbents utilize social assistance expansion as a tool in their repertoire to react to electoral competition and protests in an orchestrated way. Hence, our study explicitly explores the matter from the view of the incumbent government. But why should governments respond to general political pressure with social assistance expansion? Our argument is that social assistance expansion represents a relatively cheap and rapid way for incumbents to respond to protesters, especially when paired with electoral competition. Noncontributory social assistance policies, as opposed to large scale contributory social security programs, account for a significantly smaller share in government budgets, are easier to implement, and can be layered on top of existing welfare state institutions, without threatening existing beneficiaries (Holland and Schneider 2017).

Further, this type of "easy redistribution" is politically easier to pass through legislature due to the conditionalities and the relatively small costs (Holland and Schneider 2017)[4].

In short, we hypothesize that social movements create pressure from below that can threaten social and political stability. When electoral competition is high, we expect a positive effect of mass protests on social assistance spending (H1.2). However, when electoral competition is low, incumbents have no immediate need to react to the demands of the people and we expect to see little change in social assistance spending (H1.1). This is the case because the threat to political and social stability posed by mass protests and riots is an especially undesirable outcome for incumbents around times of close elections. Our argument is an adaption of the *political containment strategy*. Combining this with the *electoral competition* function described above, the mechanism becomes clearer: When electoral competition is high, every additional vote counts more on the path to winning an election and thus makes every protest more likely to gain welfare concessions.

But why would we expect the effect of electoral competition to be mediated by mass protest? For the government, protests can be interpreted as an *electoral threat*, when they are large in numbers, frequent, have a clear anti-government stance, gain the attention of the media, and have a clear message (Burstein 1999; Vliegenthart et al. 2016). Protests increase the salience of certain issues and grievances. Hutter and Vliegenthart (2018) show that parties are more likely to respond to these protestors if their direct competitors have already addressed the demands publically and if they are in the opposition. If governments sense that opposition parties are benefitting from responding to the grievances raised by protesters, pressure on the incumbent mounts, potentially

[4] Governments have a repertoire of instruments at their disposal to restore stability. They can choose to repress protests or decide to make welfare concessions to appease protesters with the aim to ensure electoral victory. The literature suggests that governments use a combination of these strategies, as the use of mere repression may trigger further social unrest in addition to being more costly. In this article, we do not answer the question "how do governments respond to the election-contention nexus?", but the question "how does the government's response to the election-contention nexus shape social assistance provision?"

inducing a reaction. If social unrests expand further, the *threat to social stability* needs to be addressed by the incumbent party, as their governing style may come into question and voters may swing to other parties. Further, recent studies have shown that the core-voter theorem still holds true in many Middle-income countries (Mares and Young 2018; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016). This means that the default social assistance allocation decision of incumbents is to cater to core voters in the medium- to long-term, establishing sometimes clientelist relationships. When electoral competition increases, social assistance programs may be scaled up, but we may also experience what Mares and Young (2018) describe as the "core voters curse": incumbents threatening to withdraw existing benefits. If the incumbent is already providing for their core voter base, they may threaten to cut benefits instead of scaling up existing ones. However, if mass protests further threaten the foothold of the incumbent, the incentive to provide more social assistance is increased, if protesters are perceived to be signaling their intent to defect to another party by continued mass protests.

Lastly, we expect this effect to occur in Middle-income countries (MIC), but not in High-income countries (HIC). The literature has provided some pointers on reasons why we should expect incumbents in MICs and HICs to react differently to the interplay between electoral competition and mass protests. In MICs, where low-income voters constitute the plurality of the electorate, vote-seeking politicians can be expected to "opt for more generous forms of social assistance" following the median voter theorem (Barrientos and Pellissery 2012; Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Lupu and Pontusson 2011). In a similar way, in MICs, the median voter is most likely a poor person and governments respond to the median protestor with social assistance as the least costly way of generating a political containment effect[5]. This, in turn, means that when elections get close

[5] The hypothesis that governments' welfare concessions are targeting the median protestor can be termed the Median Protestors Theorem, following the model of the Median Voter Theorem. Testing and establishing such a bold argument will be the subject matter of a future study.

between parties and there are large protests, increasing spending on social assistance can be seen as a viable strategy for the incumbent to appease protests and mobilize voters. In comparison, in HICs, the group of people eligible for social assistance benefits is smaller and further away from the median voter and protestor (Ansell and Samuels 2014). Therefore, in times of electoral risk to lose the upcoming election and when there are many protests, the incumbent will likely view other areas as a worthwhile endeavor to pursue (e.g. education, social security, immigration reform, and infrastructure). Though basic applications of MVT has received ample criticism directed at stressing the importance of organized actors (Fairfield and Garay 2017), our approach, with the focus on two of these actors (parties and movements), provides a more nuanced approach to the matter.

Hence, our hypotheses can be listed as the following:

H1.1. When electoral competition is low, incumbents have no immediate need to react to the demands of the people (mass protests) and we expect to see little change in social assistance spending.
H1.2. When electoral competition is high, we expect a positive effect of mass protests on social assistance spending.
H2.1. When mass protests are low, incumbents who are already providing social assistance do not respond to electoral competition with social assistance expansion.
H2.2. When mass protests are high, incumbents feel more pressure to respond to electoral competition with social assistance expansion.
H3: In MICs, incumbents react to the combination of electoral competition and mass protests with social assistance expenditure expansion. In HICs, they do not.

IV. Data and Analytical Strategy

We employ a two-step approach for our analysis. First, we carry out an overarching analysis of spending patterns for social assistance across all countries for which data is available, including countries from high- and Middle-income countries. This is made possible by a new cross-national dataset on social welfare indicators created by the authors, which includes harmonized data for social assistance for the largest number of countries to date. The Global Welfare Dataset (GLOW) provides a valuable resource for harmonized data on social assistance and more general social policy indicators to explore communalities and differences of welfare systems around the globe (Yörük et al. 2019). In our analysis, we exclude countries without competitive elections as that is a main explanatory factor[6]. Second, we test if there are different patterns of the election-contention nexus across high- and Middle-income countries. This is made possible by a new district-level electoral competition dataset built by the authors, as well. Third, we formulate possible mechanisms that underlie the political expansion of social assistance programs in countries, where we find statistically significant results. Overall, the data for the analysis includes the period from, in the optimal case, 1990 until 2015 for 43 countries, leading to 718 year/country observations in the model. The average number of years per country in the sample is 16.7 (min:6 max:23). A list of countries included in the analysis can be found in the Appendix (Table A1) together with visualizations of descriptive statistics for main variables in our analysis (Figures A1-A4).

Social Assistance Spending

While analyses using social spending statistics are abundant in the field, studies examining disaggregated figures on social assistance spending remain understudied. Also, whereas across academic fields and regions the terms social assistance or social safety net are used widely, they are operationalized somewhat differently. Social assistance programs are defined in this paper as all

[6] We exclude countries that are classified as "Not Free" by Freedom House for any year included in the analysis. Sensitivity analyses using democracy measures from VDEM and Polity do not reveal any major differences.

noncontributory programs that aim to support the poorest groups in society through government funds. This definition corresponds to the customary definition used in the development literature[7]. Therefore, it deviates slightly from its connotation in the European context as social assistance in this region often refers exclusively to means-tested programs and last resort type programs (Grosh et al. 2008). The demarcation of what constitutes a social assistance program proposes a challenge for compiling comparative data that allows for cross-country analyses. Our recently released GLOW dataset offers the same underlying definition (following World Bank ASPIRE) for all social assistance programs across high- and Middle-income countries. This dataset offers the first comparable dataset of its kind for longitudinal analysis of this sort for noncontributory programs globally. It harmonizes social assistance data across several sources[8]. The programs and social policies classified as social assistance and social insurance can be found in the table below and are standardized across all countries.

Table 1: *Classification of Social Programs by the Government into Assistance and Insurance (following ASPIRE)*

Social Assistance:	Social Insurance:
- Conditional cash transfers - Unconditional cash transfers - Social pensions (noncontributory) - Food and in-kind transfers - School feeding, Public works, workfare and direct job creation - Fee waivers and subsidies - Other social assistance	- Contributory unemployment insurance - Contributory pension schemes insurance - Contributory sickness insurance

[7]ASIPIRE Database definition available here: http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/340871485449612510/ASPIRE-program-classification.pdf - This is largely congruent with the definition by (Barrientos 2007).
[8] A list of the sources can be found in Appendix A2.

Electoral Competition

Our analysis is based on a newly created dataset of electoral competition, which has been compiled for this study. A widely used measure to assess electoral competition is the effective number of parties in each election, which offers some indication on political challengers. This measure is extremely important in evaluating aspects of the potential of a threat for the incumbent to lose an election. The margin on the national level between the first and second party is another measure of electoral competition/closeness. What they fail to account for, however, is the actual amount of competition across districts for each election the incumbent faces.

To capture more precisely, what we are interested in, we have computed our own novel measure[9]. In order to assess the electoral threat faced by the incumbent, we use the Constituency Level Election Archive to calculate district-level competition levels. To do so, we calculate the margin between the first and second party in each election district for each country. If this margin is below a threshold of 5%, a district is classified to have experienced electoral competition during that election[10]. We then compute the percentage of districts as a share of the total number of districts in the election to reach our measure of competition. The main difference compared to aggregated margins between the first and second party is that this measure masks potential competition in certain regions or districts. We therefore propose this district-based measure of electoral competition that allows for a more nuanced understanding of electoral risk that is closer to thinking like an incumbent in the allocation of social policy budgets (e.g. which districts could we lose, which could we win with more efforts). We run robustness checks using the simple national margins between the first and second party, which provide support for our hypotheses, but lack the nuance in the models that we achieve when employing our novel district-based measure.

[9] Interestingly, for some countries this new measure shows very similar trends compared to the two measures, whereas in others it strongly deviates.

[10] In a separate step, the same is done for 10% and 15% to assess if the results change depending on this specification as a sensitivity analysis. The direction remains, though effects are no longer robustly statistically significant.

Contentious Political Action Data

We utilize Tarrow and Tilly's general theoretical denotation of contentious political action as a wide array of disruptive tactics ranging from demonstrations, civil disobedience, to strike action that can be utilized by the people that have governments either as the target or as the initiators of claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). To measure contentious political action in case countries, we use the Cross-National Time-Series (CNTS) data archive (Banks 2016). It documents anti-government demonstrations and riots using newspaper sources. Demonstrations include "any peaceful gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature" (Banks, 2016). Riot events are classified as "any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force" (Banks, 2016). To measure these relevant types of contentious political action, we use the total sum of demonstrations and riots (Demriots) each year. Anti-government demonstrations and riots address the incumbent government (in most cases) and are designed to either pose a threat to their stability or demand policy change. We do not include events encoded as strikes, as they are primarily aimed at industry leaders. We argue that the sensible social policy reform to respond to strikes are changes in contributory, not in noncontributory programs, as people striking are unlikely to benefit from poor relief[11]. This approach and data source has also been used by Zarate Tenorio (2014) in her analysis of mass protests and strikes in Latin America. There are several advantages of using Banks' data. First, it provides the most wide-ranging cross-national comparable data on different types of protest events covering a long period of time. Second, it reports only large-scale events and excludes small occurrences. This is particularly important in this analysis because we can suspect that large scale events are most likely to have an influence on national policy making (Bellinger Jr and Arce 2011; Zarate Tenorio 2014). While the lack of more detailed information on each of the events (e.g.

[11] This is confirmed by the results of our analysis of general strikes on Social Assistance Spending as a percentage of GDP that can be found in the Appendix Figure A11.

participant categorization) poses a limitation, there is currently no better alternative data source, as can also be seen by the wide variety of studies published using this data source (Acemoglu et al. 2019; Ciccia and Guzmán-Concha 2018). In this paper, contentious political action is used synonymously from now on for mass protests, which are the sum of demonstrations and riots.

Control Variables

To be able to dissect the effect of our variables of interest from the other theoretical determinants of social assistance expansion outlined above, we include a wide array of control variables. A collection of structural control variables is included in the models to account for factors that might influence social assistance spending. Demographic factors such as the old-age dependency ratio can play a substantive role in the allocation of spending to social assistance programs. We include this variable that captures the relative population aged 65 years and older, as social spending (e.g. on social pensions) could be largely driven by changes in the demographic structure of the population and the potential difficulty of cutting entitlements to organized groups. Further, we control for general population growth. The effect of globalization on social assistance spending is accounted for by the share of GDP linked to international trade. The literature has not reached a consensus on the effect of globalization on social assistance spending patterns ranging from finding no effects (Huber, Mustillo, and Stephens 2008), to proponents of the efficiency hypothesis (Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo 2001) or supporters of the compensation hypothesis (Rudra and Haggard 2005). We need to account for changes in the economic development of countries as major upward or downward shifts could lead to resources being freed up that may be used for social assistance policies (Haggard and Kaufman 2008). Therefore, we control for two variables: the level of GDP per capita and GDP growth per capita for each year. As social assistance programs include many means-tested benefits, we control for the annual unemployment rate to ensure that the expansion is not merely based on changes in labor market structures. Other political factors that we control for are the number of women in parliaments as a growing research

agenda suggests that more social programs (especially family allowances) are adopted when the number of women in parliaments increase (Ennser-Jedenastik 2017). And finally, we include two dummy variables to control for the political affiliation of incumbents. Left leaning governments have long been argued to be a potential driver of social policy expansion (Dorlach 2020), with current debates also examining the new role of right wing parties in the expansion of social assistance policies in particular (Fairfield and Garay 2017).

Analytical Strategy

There are a variety of time-invariant factors such as political institutions or historical legacies that have been shown to influence social policy and welfare state development. To control for these factors in an attempt to compute unbiased estimates, many scholars opt for Prais–Winsten regression models with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSEs) and correct for first level autocorrelation (Beck and Katz 1995). With the nature of the data at hand consisting of relatively short T and large N, this approach becomes infeasible. Random effects models have been used by some scholars, yet fail to account for the aforementioned factors and will therefore not be used for this analysis, though some scholars have carried out similar analyses using this approach (Huber and Stephens 2014). To circumvent these issues, most researchers resort to fixed-effects models. As we are *interested in what causes variations in social assistance spending within countries over time, rather than explaining differences in spending across countries*, this approach is generally suitable for our analysis. As we are dealing with TSCS data with a low number of time series observations per unit, the "Nickel Bias" may cause a problem (Nickell 1981). To ensure valid results, we run and report all models with fixed effects models in the paper yet provide results of random-effects models in the appendix as a robustness check. We further run a battery of different model specifications as robustness checks, which are reported in the figures below. A detailed description of the time series characteristics of the data such as stationarity or serial correlation can be found in Appendix A.

V. Empirical Results

In this section, we examine the effect of the election-contention-nexus on social assistance spending for 43 countries. Table 2 provides the results for the models used in the subsequent sections of the article. Tables A5-A7 in the Appendix report the results of diverse model specifications to ensure that the results reflect robust statistical analyses. All models include robust standard error clustered on the country level and use fixed effects. Before examining the difference between high- and Middle-income countries, we conduct a global analysis that includes all countries in the sample (see Table A1 in the Appendix). The effects of our main independent variables of interest without the interaction effect show a positive trend for increased electoral competition and a negative one for increases of mass protests. Yet, neither of them fulfills the criteria of statistical significance depending on model specifications (e.g. including time trends or more control variables). This would suggest that mass protests and electoral competition do not have a systematic effect on social assistance spending over time after controlling for relevant covariates. Standard analyses of protests and electoral competition usually end here and miss an important effect when we examine the interaction term of these two variables, as the interaction effect of the global model is significant and positive (Figure A5 Appendix). However, as laid out in detail above, we contend that these effects differ across high- and Middle-income countries. The following section presents the results of the models using three-way interaction effects. To corroborate these findings, we also present models using two separate regressions for the groups in the appendix as robustness checks. Our focus in the presentation of the results lies on marginal effects of the interaction terms between mass protests and electoral competition.

Table 2 reports the results for social assistance spending as a percentage of GDP. Models 1-3 do not include time-period dummies, whereas models 4-8 do. The results suggest a weak negative relationship between GDP per capita growth and social assistance growth. This suggests that when domestic output increases, while also controlling for population changes, social assistance does

not simply increase relative to GDP. Population growth shows the expected positive relationship with social assistance expenditure expansion and reaches conventional levels of statistical significance for models five, seven, and eight. The old-age dependency ratio also shows a negative relationship with social assistance expenditure, which is slightly unexpected, though the results are only statistically significant in models without the interaction effect. More granular data is needed on expenditure of social pensions, the main program expected to increase in response to higher old-age dependency rations, compared to social assistance programs to the working age population to understand this further. We find no clear influence of politically left and right aligned governments on social assistance expansion, confirming that governments on both sides of the political spectrum have expanded them. Lastly, the share of women in parliaments shows a weak positive relationship to expenditure changes in social assistance as it only reaches statistically significant levels in model 3. When using the three-way interaction models, it is important to note that the coefficients for the control variable apply to the entire sample and may mask differences. This is why we provide results running two separate models for country income groups, which yield largely the same outcomes (Appendix A7). Now, we focus on the main explanatory variables of interest, namely mass protests and electoral competition. First, we present the results for H1.1. and H1.2. on the effect of mass protests conditional on electoral competition. Then, we move on to our results to H2.1. and H2.2. on the effect of electoral competition conditional on mass protests to complete the nexus.

Table 2 *Estimated Effects of Interaction of Mass Protests and Electoral Competition on* ***Social Assistance expenditure as a share of GDP***

VARIABLES	(1) Basic Interaction	(2) Structural Controls	(3) Political Controls	(4) Basic Interaction Year	(5) Structural Controls Year	(6) Political Control Year	(7) All Controls Year	(8) No Interaction Effect Year
Electoral Competition	-0.0019	-0.0014	-0.0018	-0.0002	-0.0018	-0.0000	-0.0019	0.0001
	(0.0025)	(0.0018)	(0.0020)	(0.0020)	(0.0024)	(0.0020)	(0.0024)	(0.0013)
Mass Protests	-0.0293	-0.0606	-0.0448	-0.0708	-0.0576	-0.0578	-0.0572	-0.0145
	(0.0560)	(0.0551)	(0.0536)	(0.0526)	(0.0474)	(0.0517)	(0.0490)	(0.0302)
Middle-income*No Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0031	0.0035	0.0031	0.0021	0.0028	0.0018	0.0030	
	(0.0037)	(0.0026)	(0.0033)	(0.0026)	(0.0031)	(0.0027)	(0.0032)	
High-income*1-5 Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0040	0.0030	0.0031	0.0035	0.0015	0.0028	0.0013	
	(0.0026)	(0.0022)	(0.0026)	(0.0021)	(0.0022)	(0.0020)	(0.0022)	
Middle-income*1-5 Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0026	0.0027	0.0027	0.0020	0.0035	0.0016	0.0035	
	(0.0035)	(0.0027)	(0.0031)	(0.0028)	(0.0030)	(0.0028)	(0.0031)	
High-income*> 5Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0100*	0.0083	0.0063	0.0049	0.0030	0.0039	0.0026	
	(0.0052)	(0.0052)	(0.0043)	(0.0047)	(0.0045)	(0.0045)	(0.0046)	
Middle-income*> 5 Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0170***	0.0170***	0.0158***	0.0137***	0.0129***	0.0133***	0.0129***	
	(0.0050)	(0.0050)	(0.0039)	(0.0042)	(0.0046)	(0.0041)	(0.0045)	
GDP per Capita		0.0000			-0.0001**		-0.0001**	-0.0001**
		(0.0000)			(0.0000)		(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP per Capita Growth		-0.0308***			-0.0134		-0.0147*	-0.0140
		(0.0067)			(0.0085)		(0.0087)	(0.0085)
Trade as a share of GDP		0.0007			-0.0037		-0.0037	-0.0038
		(0.0022)			(0.0026)		(0.0025)	(0.0026)

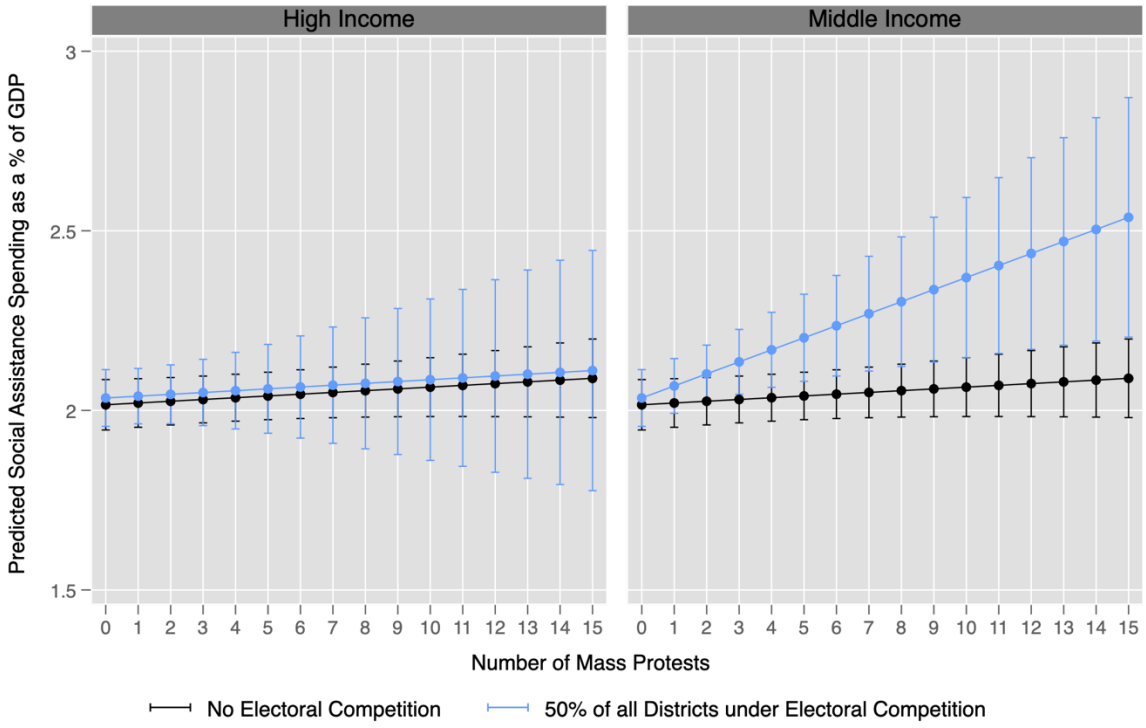
Unemployment Rate		-0.0039			-0.0060		-0.0059	-0.0077
		(0.0127)			(0.0122)		(0.0120)	(0.0123)
Old-age Dependency Ratio		0.0122			-0.0501**		-0.0506*	-0.0520**
		(0.0203)			(0.0241)		(0.0252)	(0.0248)
Population Growth		0.1002			0.1382*		0.1336*	0.1301*
		(0.0861)			(0.0705)		(0.0717)	(0.0718)
Left Government			0.0077			0.0915	-0.0203	-0.0155
			(0.0765)			(0.0683)	(0.0587)	(0.0612)
Right Government			-0.0261			0.0330	-0.0599	-0.0549
			(0.0666)			(0.0586)	(0.0516)	(0.0519)
Share of Women in Parliament			0.0170**			0.0064	0.0030	0.0030
			(0.0063)			(0.0072)	(0.0069)	(0.0072)
Year Dummies	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	713	713	713	713	713	713	713	713
R-squared	0.0460	0.1492	0.1014	0.2781	0.3702	0.2880	0.3738	0.3579
Number of id	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43

Robust standard errors in parentheses - *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 -The models in this table are all using a three-way interaction approach. Further models can be found in the Appendix.

The Effect of Mass Protests Conditional on Electoral Competition

In High-income countries, the effect of mass protests on social assistance spending is not moderated by electoral competition (Figure 1, left). None of the coefficients is significant, which is robust to a variety of model specifications (incl. time dummies, different covariate specifications, and mass protests as a continuous variable). For Middle-income countries we find a contrasting picture. The effect of mass protests on social assistance spending when there is no electoral competition is not statistically significant, mirroring the results above. This changes with increasing levels of protests during electorally conducive times (Table 1). Along a variety of different model specifications, we find the same results: The effect of mass protests on social assistance becomes positive and statistically significant only for medium to high levels of electoral competition. While the coefficient seems small initially, the marginal effects plot below points to not only to a statistical, but also to a substantive association. To illustrate, we show the results of the predictive margins of levels of mass protests for two different scenarios: first, if the incumbent faced no serious challenger (black line) compared to second, a scenario with strong electoral competition (blue line) where around half of all electoral districts were classified to be a close race. Examining the marginal effects plots when mass protests is taken to be continuous (Figure 1, right – results in Table A3) show that protests have no effect when there is no electoral competition, confirming H1.1. However, when half of the districts were under electoral threat, protests show a statistically significant positive association, confirming H1.2. This difference is substantively important, as the change between social assistance spending when there are no protests compared to when there are ten protests is predicted to increase from 2.03 to 2.4 percent of GDP in Middle-income countries.

Figure 1 *Predictive Margins (95% CI): The Effect of Mass Protest Conditional on Electoral Competition*

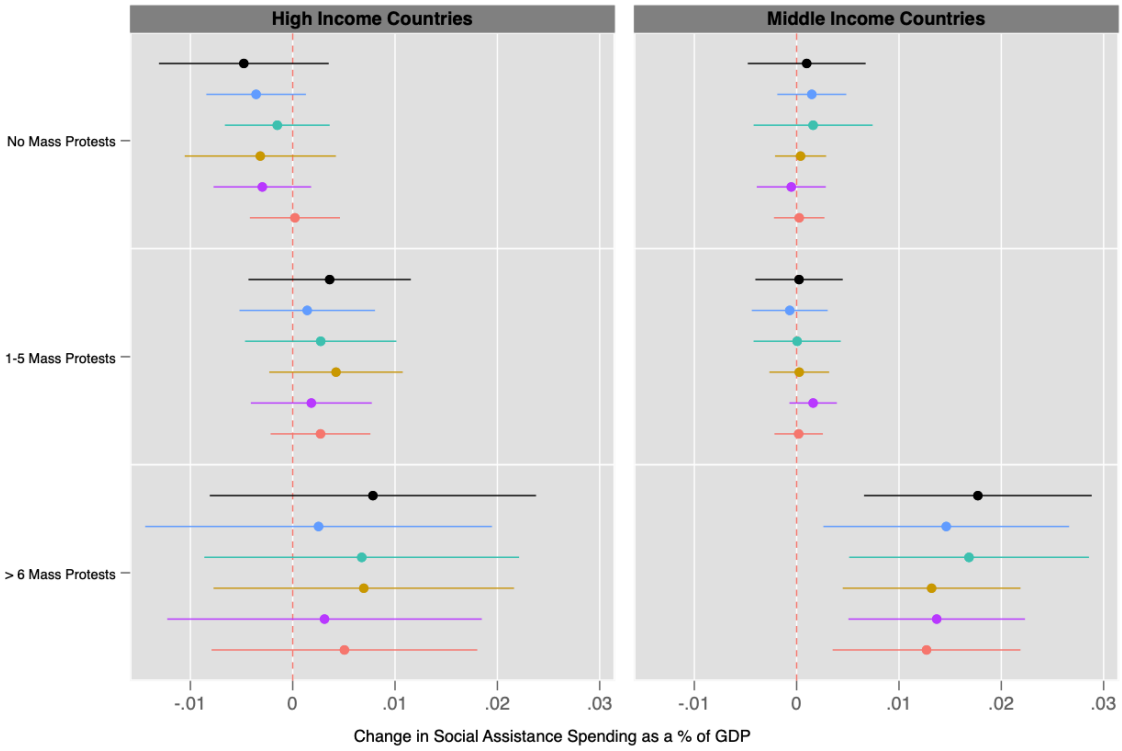


The Effect of Electoral Competition Conditional on Mass Protests

The effect of electoral competition on social assistance spending is not conditional on protests in HICs (Figure 2, left). Figure 2 depicts the interaction coefficients from six different model specifications. None of these specifications yield statistically significant results. The same holds true if we model mass protests as continuous variable (Table A3) or if we examine marginal effects for different levels of electoral competition and mass protests (Figure 4). In contrast, the strongly moderated effect of electoral competition on mass protests is found only in Middle-income countries. When there are no mass protests in MICs, the effect of electoral competition remains null and insignificant (Figure 2, right), confirming H2.1. However, when high numbers of mass protests occur, we see a significant positive effect of electoral competition on social assistance expenditure, confirming H2.2.

To understand the substantive effects, we examine marginal effects of this interaction for the grouped mass protests variable (Figure 3) and the continuous version of the variable (Figure 4). As seen before, the results suggest no effect of this interaction on social assistance expenditure in HIC. In MICs, however, when the incumbent faces competition *and* there are large numbers of mass protests by the people, the interaction effect yields a positive association with social assistance spending (Figure 4). This is the case commencing at roughly 10% of electoral districts experiencing competition, which includes most observations in the sample. The comparison between the grouped (Figure 3) and continuous (Figure 4) version of the mass protest variable substantiates our results as the effect of contentious political action occurs robustly for high levels of politicization. The effect sizes become significant after roughly six mass protest events per year and do not increase proportionally when protest events increase. Different cut-offs further support that after a certain level of protests the moderation effects on electoral competition marginally decreases. While the results show relatively high substantive effects sizes, it is important to note that around 15% of the country year observations showed these high levels of mass protest events and electoral competition, though this may be attributed to the data that only captures very large demonstrations and riots. We can expect that the real number of mass protests in all case countries is much higher than showcased in our dataset.

Figure 2: *Difference between High- and Middle-income Countries using Six Model Specifications(Separate Model)*



Models from the top to the bottom: 1. Basic Interaction Term; 2. Structural Controls; 3. Political Controls; 4. Basic Interaction with Time-dummy; 5. Structural Controls with Time-dummy; 6. Political Controls with Time-dummy

Figure 3: *Predictive Margins (95% CI): The Effect of Electoral Competition Conditional on Mass Protests (Three-Way Interaction Model – from Table 2 (6))*

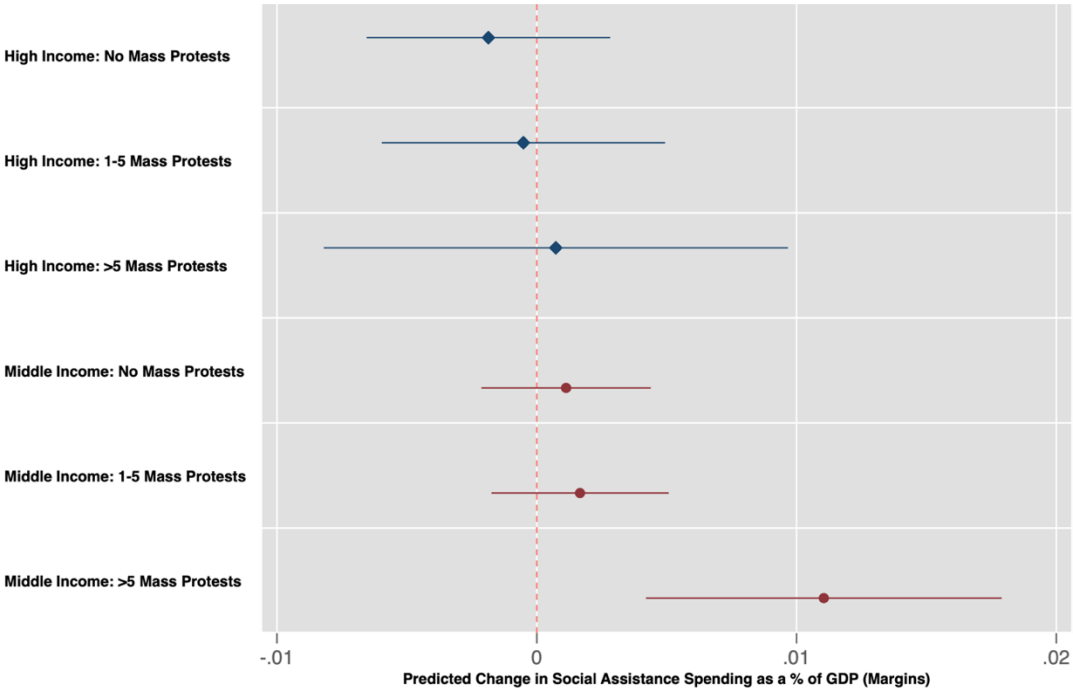
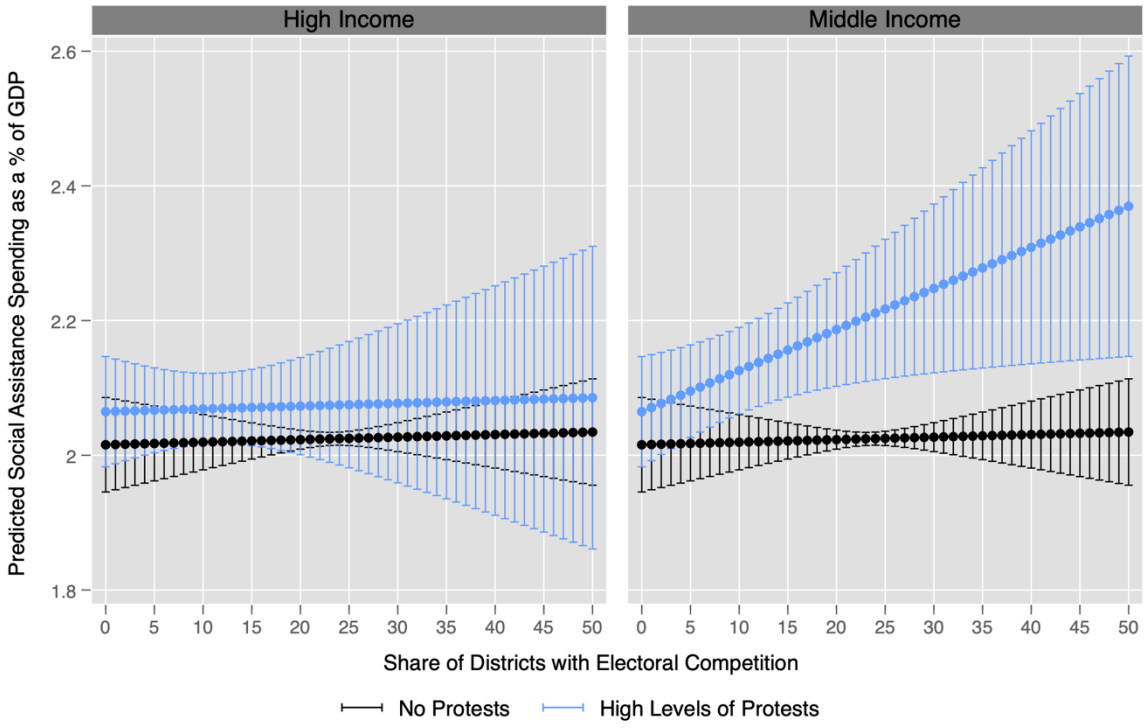


Figure 4: *Predictive Margins (95% CI): The Effect of Electoral Competition Conditional on Mass Protests*



Overall, these results suggest three things. First, when politicians do not face a risk to lose the election, there is no incentive to increase social assistance spending when people are rioting and demonstrating. However, for high levels of mass protests, we see a significant positive interaction effect (H1.1 and H1.2.). Second, electoral competition alone seems not to be a sufficient incentive to expand social assistance expenditure without mass protests. With increasing numbers of mass protests, the incentive to react to electoral competition with social assistance benefits seems to be higher (H2.1. and H2.2.). Third, the election-contention-nexus for social assistance expenditure seems to be a phenomenon found in Middle-income countries, confirming hypothesis 3, as both directions of the interaction show statistically and substantively significant effects for this set of countries. This symbolizes a complex interplay of conditions that lead incumbents to expand noncontributory social assistance policies in Middle-income countries that combine political mobilization with containment motives. In the following section we will propose and discuss some mechanisms that could explain these results.

VI. Discussion

In this section, we discuss mechanisms through which the election-contention-nexus leads to expansion in social assistance spending (H1 & H2). For each of these proposed mechanisms, we provide explanations of why we observe political distribution of social assistance benefits in Middle-income countries and why we do not see the same effect across High-income countries (H3). We focus on the role of domestic political actors in the latest expansion in social assistance policies in Middle-income countries and propose five mechanisms relating to a cross-national pattern of domestic politics that could explain the differences and illuminate how the electoral-contention-nexus (ECN) affects social assistance spending in MICs – but not in HICs.

1. **Class positions of voters and protestors:** The differences in the median voter described in section III suggest that in contexts where low-income voters constitute the plurality of the electorate, incumbents may view more generous social assistance programs as a viable pathway to secure votes (Barrientos and Pellissery 2012). In countries where inequalities persist and comparatively high shares of the populations work in the informal sector, which render them ineligible for contributory social policies, noncontributory social assistance programs bear strong political gains. Similarly, for median protestors we should expect the same logic to apply, where a large share of protesters are likely to be outsiders/part of the informal working class. This makes it sensible for the incumbents, who are challenged by protesters, to react with concessions, which may heavily include noncontributory social assistance benefits, to appease and contain protestors. This follows scholars like Fox-Piven and Cloward, who see the political influence of challengers not only in their success to achieve their stated goals, but particularly view anything granted by governments to challengers as a concession induced by protesting challengers (Piven and Cloward 1979; Yörük 2012). This in turn means that in times when elections become close between parties and large protests are taking place, increasing spending on social assistance

can be seen as a viable strategy for the incumbent to appease low-income protestors and mobilize low-income potential voters. In HICs, Middle-income groups, who are not eligible for social assistance benefits, tend to form the plurality of the electorate and protestors. Therefore, we expect other areas of the welfare state to be more reactive to electoral competition and protests.

2. **Differences in the functions and perceptions of social assistance**: The ways social assistance functions and is perceived differ starkly between HICs and MICs, rendering the political use of transfers more sensible in MICs. In HICs social assistance functions as income maintenance/last resort programs, with largely established and institutionalized programs. People are protected from and do not usually fall below these set minimums (Leisering 2018). In contrast, the recent expansion in social assistance programs in MICs, though average benefits remain low compared to social security, lifted millions out of poverty. Therefore, public perception around these new programs tends to be more positive on average, providing greater space for politicians to expand policies and reap political benefits (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016).

3. **Institutionalized discretion:** There are large differences between MICs and HICs that might enable or disable incumbents to allocate social assistance funding with political motives in mind. Though institutionalization of social assistance programs is improving in many MICs, clientelist and discretionary structures remain, making it easier for incumbent governments to utilize these programs for political gain (Stokes 2007; Weitz-Shapiro 2014)[12]. While HICs' social assistance programs are much more programmatic, the application and decision processes in MICs are usually officially declared objective and

[12] An exception to this seems to be the adoption of noncontributory social pensions in Latin America

programmatic. However, there is still a broad space for discretion, within which "local case workers, bureaucrats, and politicians can navigate within boundaries of official rules, subjectively interpret regulations, and soften or tighten requirements so as to politicize the entire process" (Yörük and Gençer 2021, 16; Gupta 2012; Yoltar 2009). The highly politicized nature of social assistance programs, particularly if perceived as discretionary and in contexts with high incidences of poverty, could also be the reason why participation in these programs tends not to be as stigmatizing as in HICs (Leisering and Barrientos 2013, 61). If program participation is not heavily stigmatized, this further raises the potential for incumbents to use these tools to garner political support.

4. **Temporal variations in the political dynamics of social assistance**: In HICs, social assistance was expanded in the decades following WWII and has plateaued after, with debates often focusing on possible retrenchment and of the widely utilized means-tested benefits (Bahle, Hubl, and Pfeifer 2011). In MICs, the "quiet revolution" commenced in the 1990s, when social assistance programs gained wide popularity (Leisering 2018). Prior, beneficiaries of the welfare state in MICs were largely the formal sector and government workers through contributory social security programs, leaving many without social protection. Our analysis of the recent decades therefore only accounts for a time of minor changes in HICs and major expansionary reforms in MICs, which may inherently exhibit stronger politicization of benefits. Remarkably, in earlier research on the introduction and expansion of social policies in HICs, discussions did include similar motives like containment of workers unrest, political disorder, and the mobilization of popular support (O'Connor, 1973; Olson, 1982; Fox-Piven and Cloward 1971).

5. **Populism:** The last domestic factor relates to a particular type of populism that manifested in some Middle-income countries, that may contribute to the expansion of social

assistance. Yörük et al. (2021) describe a new wave of populism that utilizes the welfare state to advance a developmentalist agenda and gain the favorability of the people. They describe a wave that commenced in the early 2000s, which includes the expansion of noncontributory benefits in a wider paradigm of emphasizing narratives of the people vs. the elites by leaders such as Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina, Erdoğan in Turkey, Orbán in Hungary, as well as Modi in India (Yörük, Öker, and Tafoya 2019). A particular focus on noncontributory social assistance policies as a response to unrest by the people paired with electoral competition fits well into this newfound, or newly framed, focus on groups previously excluded from social policies. By contrast, Piven and Minnite argue that national governments can employ a strategy of blame avoidance by attributing guilt to supranational institutions. They show that European Union member states tend to be less responsive to societal demands voiced through protests as they deflect blame from their national governments to the EU (Fox-Piven and Minnite 2013).

But why would incumbents respond to mass protests and electoral competition with social assistance? Social assistance policies can be seen as a cheap and rapid way to react to political pressures that electoral competition and protests represent. Contributory programs are costly and administratively complex and focus mostly on horizontal redistribution over the life course. In contrast, large scale social assistance programs funded through general taxation can be delivered using a significantly smaller share in government budgets, are easier to implement, and can be layered on top of existing welfare state institution, without threatening existing beneficiaries (Holland and Schneider 2017). Further, conditionalities attached to social assistance programs, which became popular simultaneously to these benefits, render programs easier to pass through the political spectrum, as they signal fiscal conservatism and are endorsed by international organizations like the World Bank (Van Gils and Yörük 2017; Von Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016).

VII. Conclusion

This article investigates the politics of social assistance expansion with a particular focus on the interplay between electoral competition and contentious politics. We propose a more comprehensive understanding of "political factors" that can aid to illuminate under which conditions incumbent governments expand social assistance policies. We find that in Middle-income countries, existing mono-causal approaches in the study of distributive politics are not sufficient to explain the major shift towards increased social assistance provision around the globe. We observe the highest expansionary effects on social assistance expansion when **both** electoral competition and protests are high. We term this interplay the election-contention-nexus of social assistance expansion. This article speaks to several academic disciplines that engage with distributive politics, by combining the fields of social movements and strategic party competition literature. It suggests that studying social policy outcomes and how they are influenced by electoral competition *(pressure from the top)* should not be done without considering contentious political action *(pressure from below)* – and vice versa.

We present social assistance as one viable tool in the repertoire of incumbents to react to political pressures. Other responses, such as repression through increases in police spending, education spending, security policies, immigration reform, infrastructure investments etc. may also occur. However, this article stresses the important and vital position of social assistance as a tool for governments in Middle-income countries to attempt to mobilize electoral support and contain unrest. We go beyond more mono-causal political factors to come closer to the rationale of leaders in Middle-income countries to understand why this "quiet revolution" has occurred in social assistance policies. Our study adds to scholarly understanding of the global social assistance expansion by providing a more nuanced understanding of domestic political circumstances for social assistance reforms.

We propose that further research should examine the complex relationship between electoral competition and protests and their effects on social assistance in two ways. First, detailed annual data on social assistance spending must be improved. Social assistance data collection has picked up speed in the last years with many research projects around the globe starting to create comparable and reliable data that will be necessary to illuminate this relationship further. Second, while our analysis points to the presence of the relationship across these variables, we cannot go beyond merely pondering about what the causal pathway of these occurrences may be. We require in-depth country case studies to illuminate the way in which this could occur and help us understand when, why, and with what particular types of social assistance governments respond to the variety of forms citizens use to make claims. These further studies should focus on specific mechanisms to illuminate the interplay of election-contention-nexus of social assistance. The limited scope of countries included in the analysis poses a strong limitation of our paper, especially regarding external validity. However, the results hold up to a number of robustness checks and specifications (detailed results can be found in the Appendix). This study therefore must be amended by a larger set of countries and a more detailed breakdown of different social assistance types whenever data becomes available.

In the past months, an ad-hoc expansion of these social assistance programs to combat the adverse effects of lockdown measures required to combat COVID-19 has taken place (Gentilini et al. 2020). Understanding the dynamics of previous social assistance expansion and how they are politicized can shed light on the current distributional logics of governments across Middle-income countries. A natural next step is to examine what logic of distribution underlies the latest expansion and its impacts on benefit recipients. Since the particular ways in which governments use social assistance as a response to electoral competition and protests is likely to be highly context dependent, we suggest further research to conduct case studies on the election-contention-nexus to flesh out theoretical nuances.

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Appendix

The Politics of Social Assistance Expansion:

On the Interplay of Electoral and Contentious Politics across High- and Middle-Income Countries

Appendix A

Table A1: *List of Countries used in the Analysis by Income Classification*

High-income countries	**Middle-income countries**
Australia	Argentina
Austria	Bangladesh
Belgium	Brazil
Denmark	Bulgaria
Finland	Chile
France	Colombia
Germany	Czech
Greece	Republic
Iceland	Estonia
Ireland	Hungary
Israel	India
Italy	Indonesia
Japan	Latvia
Luxembourg	Mexico
Netherlands	Pakistan
Norway	Peru
Portugal	Philippines
Slovenia	Poland
Spain	Romania
Sweden	South Africa
Switzerland	Turkey
United Kingdom	Ukraine
United States	

Notes: *Measured using World Bank classification (2008). Using 2000 and 2015 classification yields little changes that make no substantive difference for the analysis. The category of Middle-Income Countries includes Middle- and Upper-Income Countries.*

Table A2: *Data Source Overview by Countries: Total spending as percent of GDP - All Social Assistance*

Source	Countries
CEPAL	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela RB
Eurostat's Social Protection Statistics (ESPROSS)	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
World Bank ASPIRE Database	Bangladesh, China, Egypt Arab Rep., India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam
Asian Development Bank, Social Protection Index	Philippines, Thailand
IMF	Australia, Israel, Ukraine, Japan, USA, New Zealand*
National sources used and harmonized for	Germany, Turkey, South Africa

Notes: *For some countries (shown above), disaggregated figures from the IMF Government Finance Survey were extracted and included as the dependent variable due to missing data constraints from the first dataset. For each country, only one data source (with longest consecutive data points) is used. 84 observations were obtained from the IMF dataset. 25 observations for two countries were obtained using national sources.*

Table A3: *Data Source Overview by Countries: Coverage (%) - All Social Assistance*

Source	Countries
World Bank ASPIRE Database	Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt Arab Rep., Indonesia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russian Federation, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela RB, Vietnam
EU-SILC Own Calculations	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Table A4: *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Year	1155	2002.042	7.788	1989	2015
ID	1155	28.526	17.75	1	59
Unemployment Rate	1071	8.413	4.642	1.47	27.47
Old Age Dependency Ratio	1155	18.512	7.566	5.4	43.32
Population growth	1155	.719	.909	-2.57	6.02
GDP per capita (growth)	1125	1.97	3.65	-22.55	25.56
GDP per capita	1096	24565.976	14772.214	1290.43	65072.4
Trade as a % of GDP	1132	68.844	36.277	13.75	216.24
Left executive	1155	.333	.472	0	1
Right Executive	1155	.351	.477	0	1
Share of Electoral Districts	1061	22.237	17.366	0	100
Social Assistance Spending as a % GDP	727	2.058	1.281	0	5.3
Demonstrations and Riots	1138	2.363	7.273	0	131
Nat. Margins between 1st and 2nd Party	963	9.773	10.128	.1	59.1
World Bank Income Classification	1155	1.488	.5	1	2
Demonstrations and Riots (grouped)	1137	.522	.667	0	2
Share of Women in Parliament	1067	19.381	11.397	1.3	47.3

Figure A1: *Social Assistance Spending as a percentage of GDP across Countries*

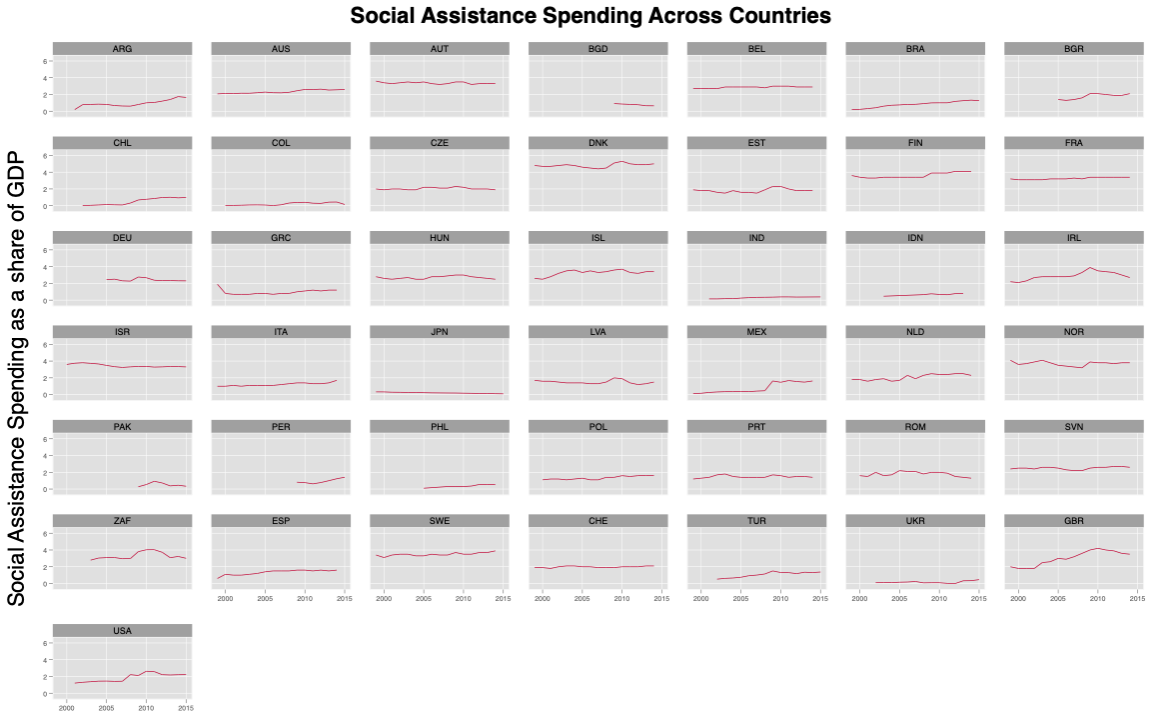


Figure A2: *Demonstrations & Riots (left axis) and Electoral Competition (right axis) across Countries*

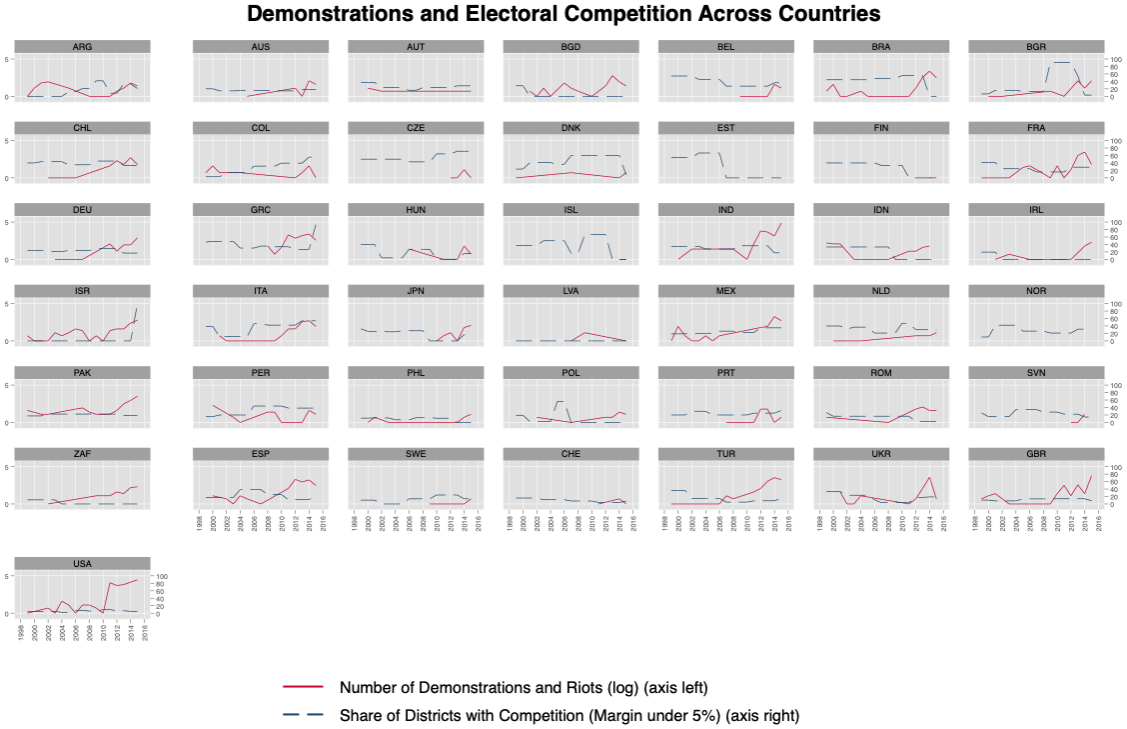


Figure A3: *Demonstrations & Riots (left axis) and Electoral Competition (right axis) across Countries*

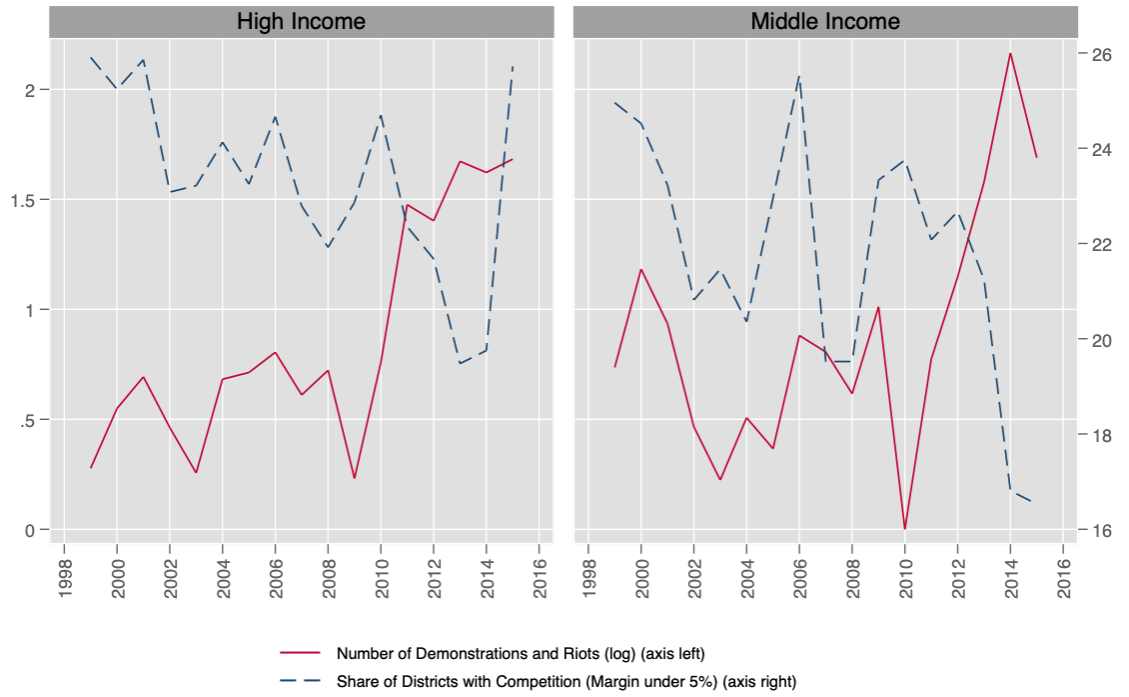


Figure A4: *Social Assistance Spending as a percentage of GDP across Country Income Groups*

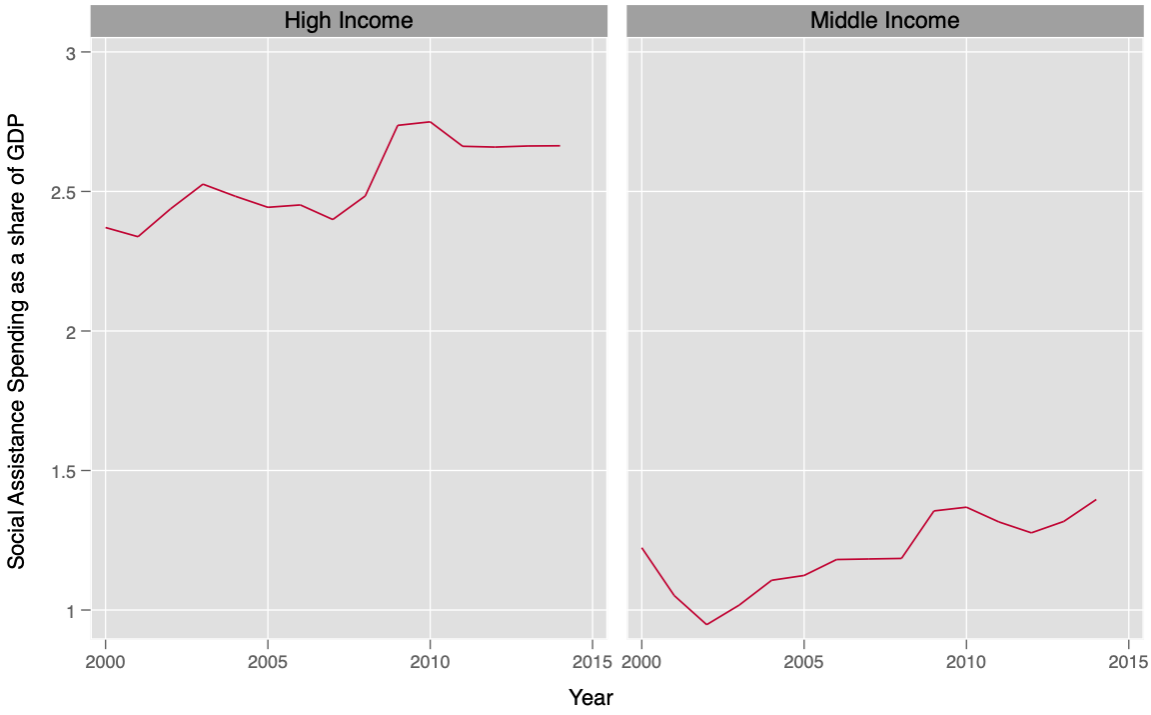


Figure A5: *Global Analysis - Coefficients of Interaction Between Electoral Competition and Mass Protests on Social Assistance (based on Model 6 in A2)*

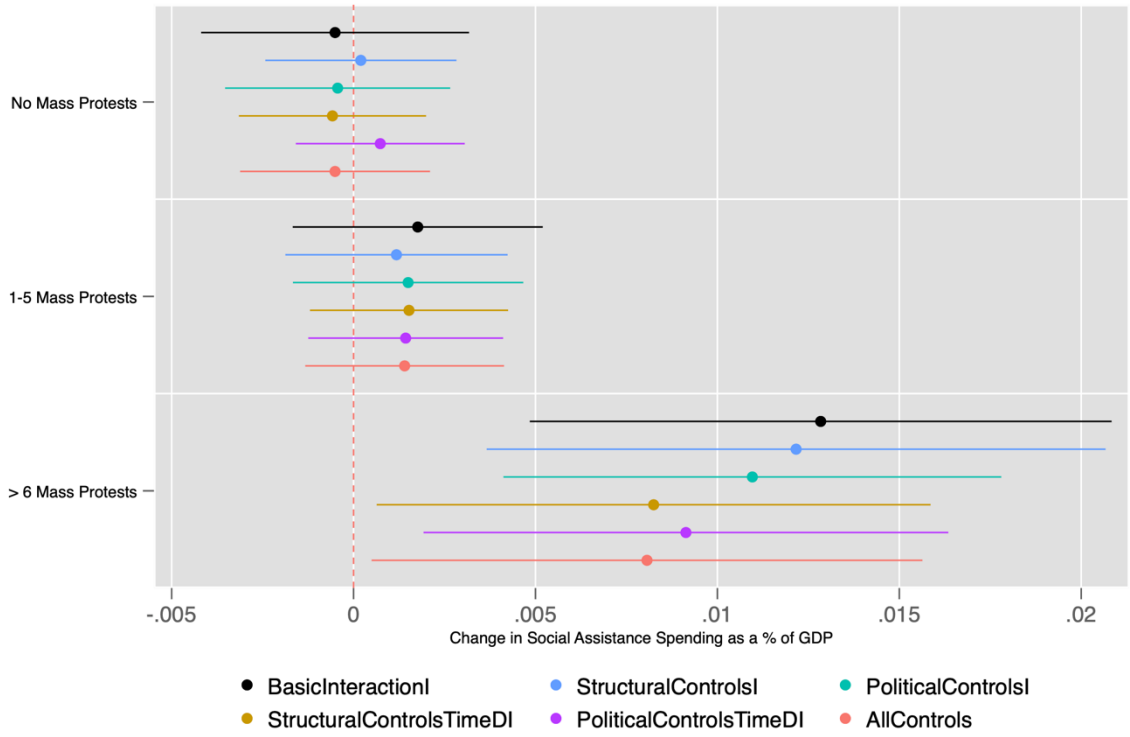
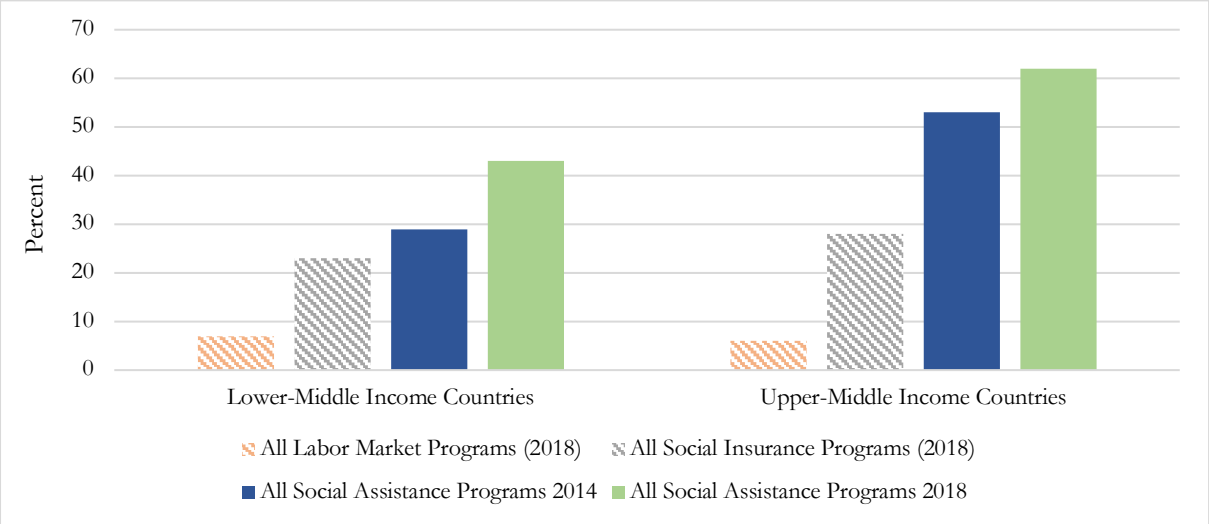


Figure A6: *Share of Poorest Quintile That Receives Any Social Protection by Type in Middle Income Countries Adapted from State of Social Safety Nets 2018, World Bank*



Time Series Characteristics of the Data

Stationarity

An important aspect of modelling time series data is the potential existence of non-stationarity as it risks spurious correlation to be reported as a meaningful relationship. In order to ensure that this is not the case, a variety of unit root tests have been carried out. We use Fisher models that support Phillips-Perron tests with the *pperron* option. The Phillips-Perron test is robust to serial correlation. This test checks for stationarity (mean reversion) and have the null hypothesis test that all panels contain a unit root, meaning it is not stationary. The alternative hypothesis being confirmed means that at least one panel does not have a unit root, meaning it is stationary. For these tests, lags have to be specified. To assess the nature of the relationship of previous values, we used the test the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) to find the correct lag specification (the one that leads to the highest AIC). The model suggests using a one-year lag. This is also confirmed during our visual examination of the time series across the panels. Since they are all smaller than 0.01, we can reject the null hypothesis at the 1% level of significance for the main variables in our model (social assistance, demonstrations and riots, and electoral competition[1]). This means there are no unit roots in your panels under the given test conditions (included time trends). The picture looks different for some of the covariates which can be solved by means of first difference models. These were tested as a second option to ensure that nonstationary is not causing the reporting of a potentially spurious correlation.

Serial Correlation

In some cases, history can have stochastic effects, including serial correlation. As we can be rather certain that past realizations of social assistance spending influence current levels we test for lagged dependent variable effects. To test for serial correlation and assess the nature of how past variables

[1] Electoral competition was tested with filling in the empty cells and then it is not sign, suggesting that we have artificially created a unit root

affect the current values, we follow a two-pronged approach. First, we use a test for serial correlation in the idiosyncratic errors of a linear panel-data model discussed by Wooldridge (2002)[2]. The tests weakly point to the presence of autocorrelation. Second, to better understand the nature of this process, we plot Autocorrelation and Partial Autocorrelation plots for social assistance spending for all countries. The PACF weakly suggests that a one-year lag is sufficient (1 lag is significant in every case but 1, after that only sporadically random lags are significant suggesting that they might be due to chance). We ran robustness checks with dynamic models that include the first lag of the DV as an IV either way. Results for the entire sample mirror the overall results presented in the paper (see figure A7). The interaction for demonstrations and riots and electoral competition is positive and statistically significant. When we examine results across country income classification groups, they reveal an unclear picture, as most models have coefficients that are positive, yet not significant (see figure below). This might be due to the short time series that is shortened further by this model. With longer time series becoming available, these results need to be re-tested for robustness.

[2] Drukker (2003) presents simulation evidence that this test has good size and power properties in reasonable sample sizes.

Figure A7: *Models with Lagged Dependent Variable – Full Sample*

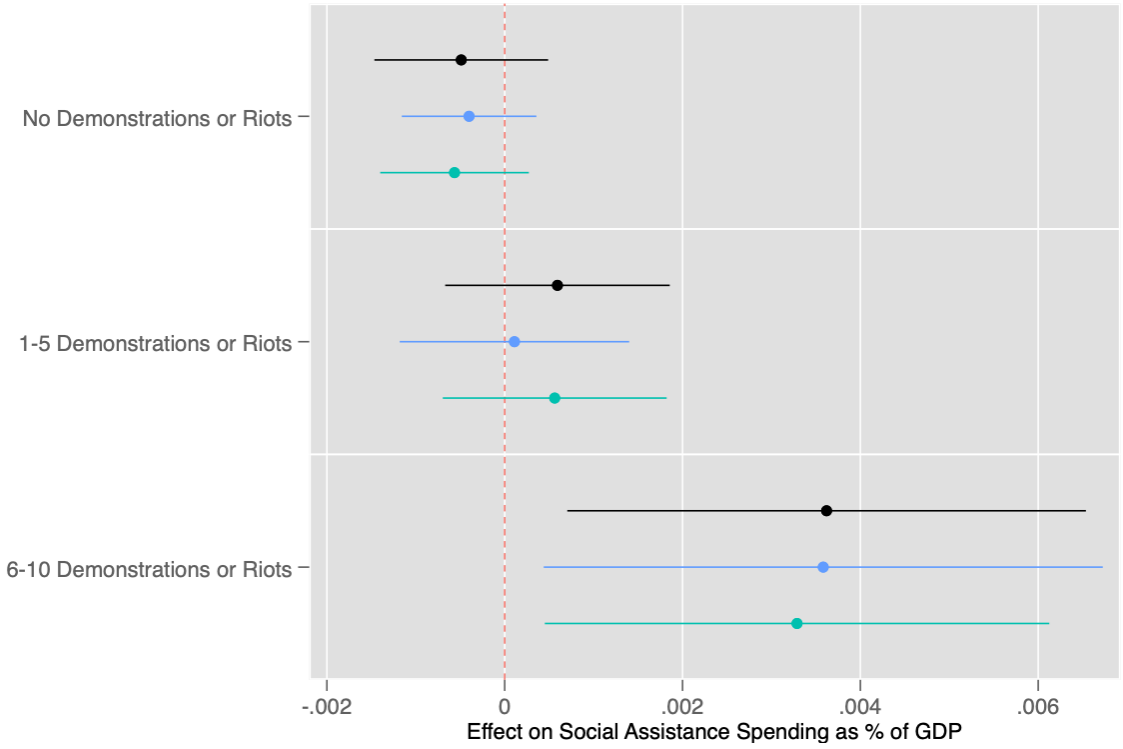


Figure A8: *Models with Lagged Dependent Variable across World Bank country income classification*

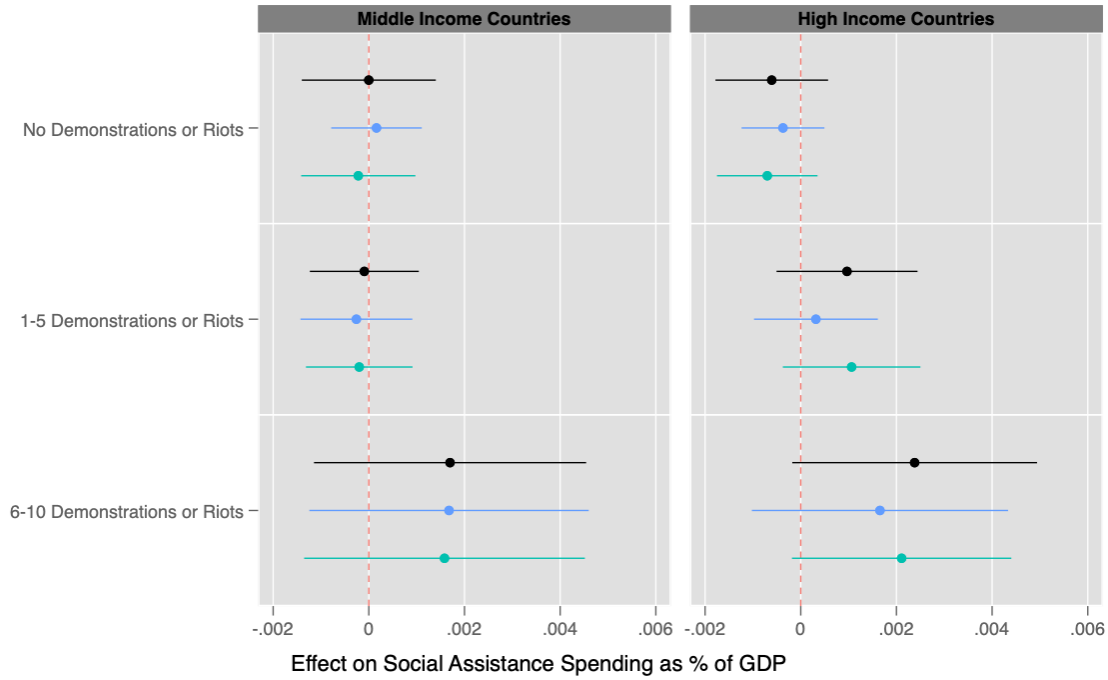
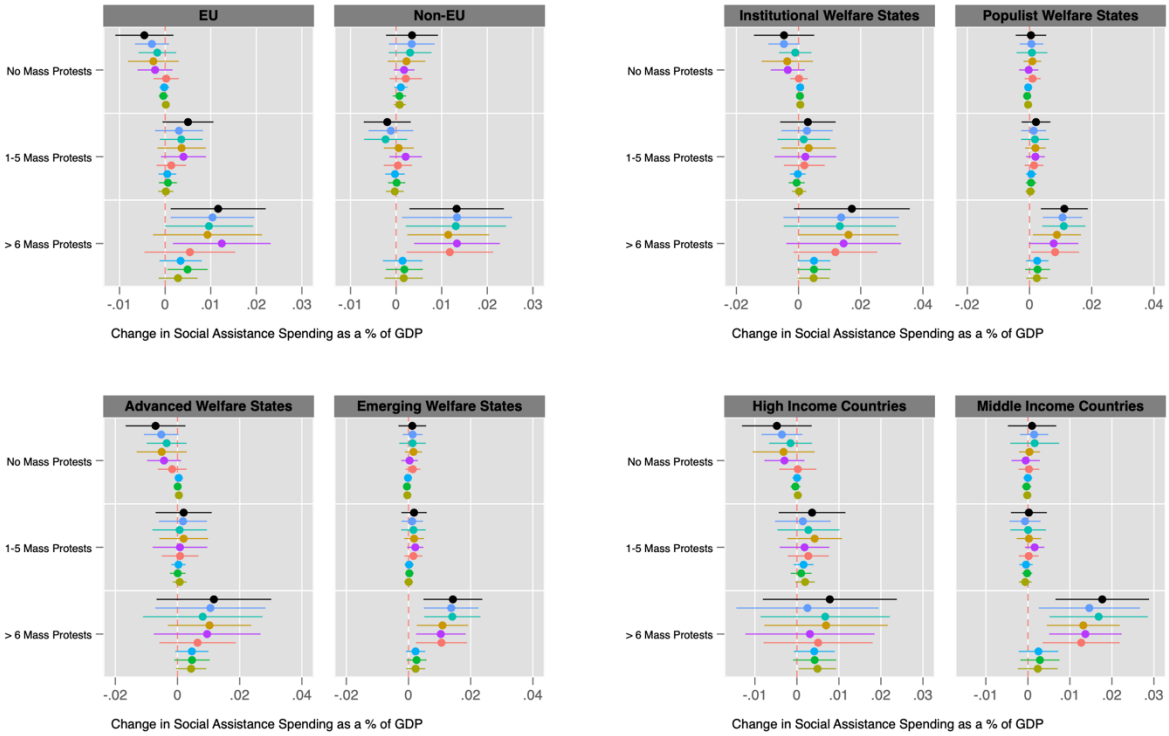


Figure A9: *Robustness Check: Election Contention nexus across different Classification of Countries*



Notes: *This figure checks if the difference found between Middle- and High-income countries is indeed rooted in something else: e.g. maybe the effect is rather driven by membership in the European Union as (Fox-Piven & Minnite, 2013) suggest. We found this not to be the case, as there are slight positive effects for EU member states. Rather, the effect is clearest for the HIC and MIC classification. The results also show a similar trend when examined through the global welfare state classification offered by (Yörük et al., 2021).*

Figure A10: *Descriptive Spending on Social Insurance vs. Assistance for sample countries*

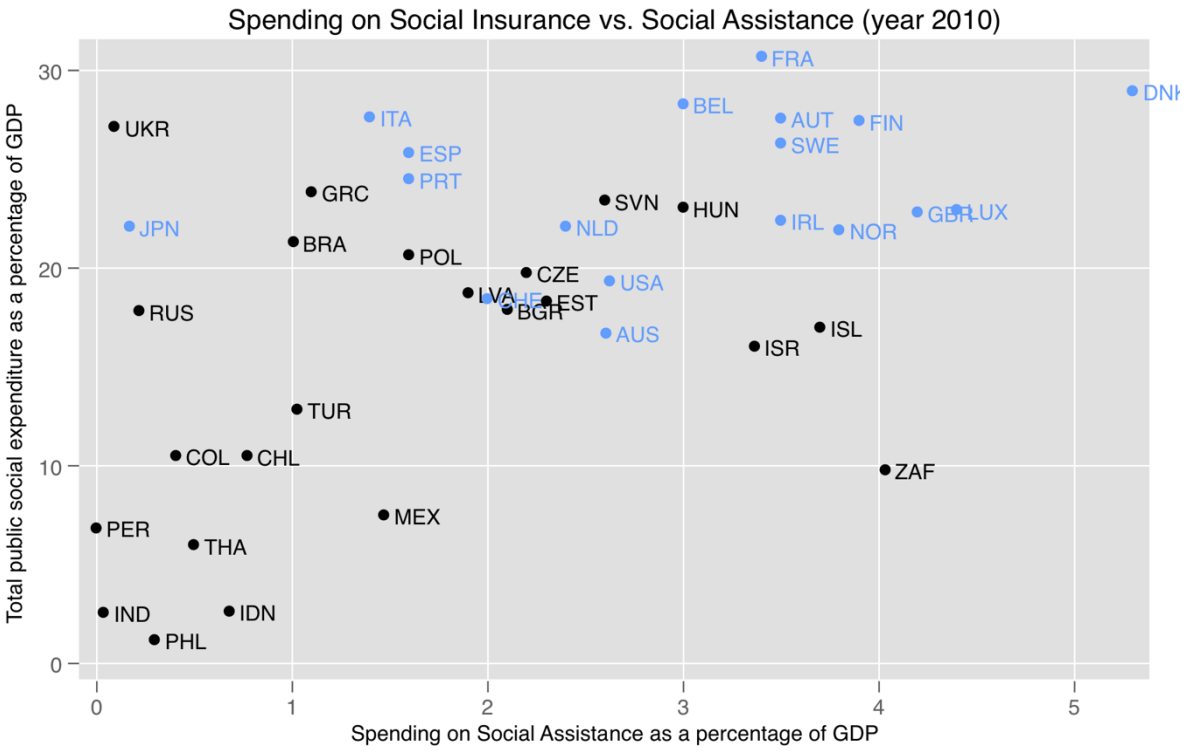


Figure A11: *Results for Interaction of Labor Events (General Strikes) on Social Assistance with different model specifications*

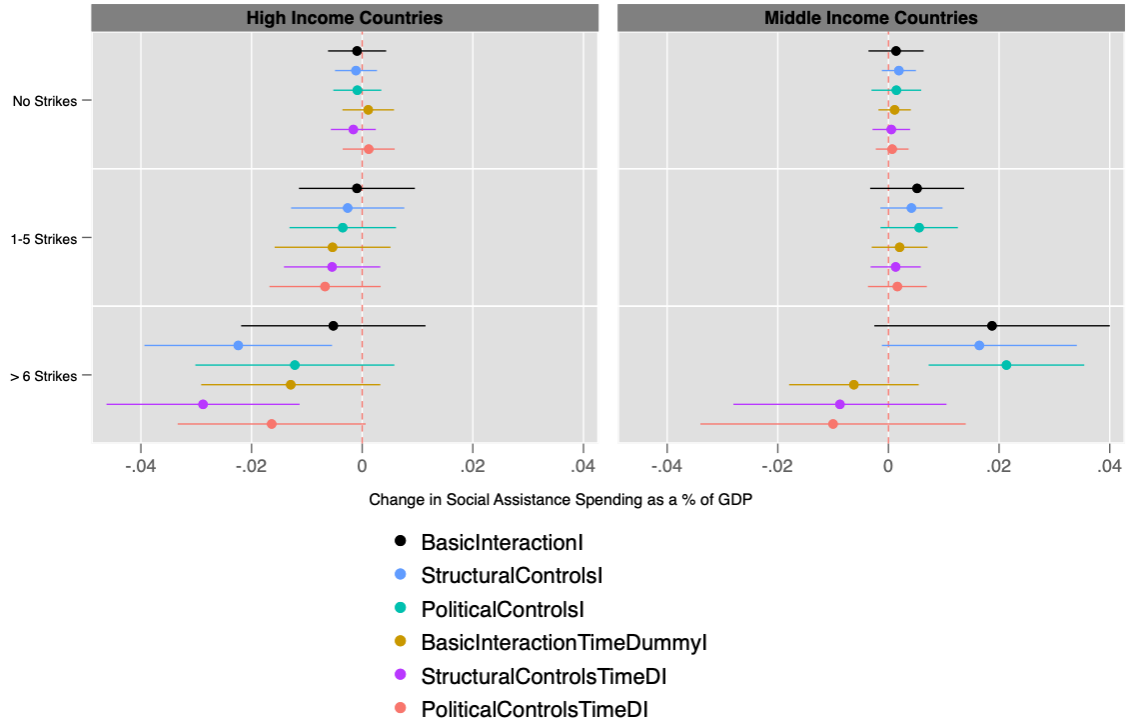


Table A5: *Results of Global Analysis*

VARIABLES	(1) BasicInteractionI	(2) StructuralControlsI	(3) PoliticalControlsI	(4) StructuralControlsTimeDI	(5) PoliticalControlsTimeDI	(6) AllControls
Electoral Competiton	-0.0005	0.0002	-0.0004	-0.0006	0.0007	-0.0005
	(0.0018)	(0.0013)	(0.0015)	(0.0013)	(0.0012)	(0.0013)
Mass Protests	-0.0325	-0.0650	-0.0520	-0.0720	-0.0667	-0.0712
	(0.0542)	(0.0561)	(0.0510)	(0.0472)	(0.0518)	(0.0493)
1-5 Mass Protests * Electoral Competition	0.0018	0.0012	0.0015	0.0015	0.0014	0.0014
	(0.0017)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)	(0.0013)	(0.0013)	(0.0014)
6+ Mass Protests * Electoral Competition	0.0128***	0.0122***	0.0110***	0.0082**	0.0091**	0.0081**
	(0.0040)	(0.0042)	(0.0034)	(0.0038)	(0.0036)	(0.0038)
GDP per Capita		0.0000		-0.0001**		-0.0001**
		(0.0000)		(0.0000)		(0.0000)
GDP per Capita Growth		-0.0307***		-0.0128		-0.0140
		(0.0066)		(0.0083)		(0.0085)
Trade as a share of GDP		0.0006		-0.0037		-0.0037
		(0.0023)		(0.0026)		(0.0025)
Unemployment Rate		-0.0056		-0.0076		-0.0076
		(0.0131)		(0.0125)		(0.0123)
Old Age Dependecy Ratio		0.0119		-0.0512**		-0.0512**
		(0.0202)		(0.0241)		(0.0249)
Population Growth		0.1053		0.1380*		0.1341*
		(0.0864)		(0.0697)		(0.0708)
Left Government			0.0175		0.0996	-0.0094
			(0.0762)		(0.0675)	(0.0571)
Right Government			-0.0191		0.0381	-0.0507
			(0.0663)		(0.0564)	(0.0494)

Share of Women in Parliament			0.0168**		0.0059	0.0023
			(0.0064)		(0.0075)	(0.0071)
Year Dummies	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	713	713	713	713	713	713
R-squared	0.0365	0.1395	0.0915	0.3639	0.2794	0.3669
Number of id	43	43	43	43	43	43

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A6: *Results of Three Way Interaction with Continuous Mass Protests Variable*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	Basic	StructuralControls	PoliticalControls	Allcontrols	Allcontrolsyears	NoIntAllcontrolsyears
Electoral Competiton	-0.0000	0.0007	0.0001	0.0005	0.0000	0.0002
	(0.0018)	(0.0014)	(0.0015)	(0.0012)	(0.0013)	(0.0013)
Mass Protests	0.0046	0.0053	0.0043	0.0054	0.0041	0.0026
	(0.0037)	(0.0042)	(0.0036)	(0.0042)	(0.0047)	(0.0034)
High Income*Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0003	0.0001	0.0001	-0.0001	-0.0003	
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	
Middle Income*Mass Protests*Electoral Competition	0.0006**	0.0005*	0.0006**	0.0005*	0.0004	
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	
GDP per Capita		-0.0000		-0.0000	-0.0001**	-0.0001**
		(0.0000)		(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP per Capita Growth		-0.0301***		-0.0287***	-0.0142	-0.0137
		(0.0066)		(0.0068)	(0.0085)	(0.0085)

Trade as a share of GDP		0.0007		-0.0002	-0.0037	-0.0036
		(0.0023)		(0.0021)	(0.0025)	(0.0025)
Unemployment Rate		-0.0066		-0.0068	-0.0077	-0.0090
		(0.0129)		(0.0128)	(0.0118)	(0.0123)
Old Age Dependency Ratio		0.0125		0.0040	-0.0486*	-0.0513**
		(0.0208)		(0.0188)	(0.0252)	(0.0252)
Left Executive			0.0218	0.0157	-0.0039	-0.0092
			(0.0754)	(0.0842)	(0.0560)	(0.0586)
Right Executive			-0.0096	-0.0380	-0.0456	-0.0493
			(0.0692)	(0.0719)	(0.0513)	(0.0521)
Women in Parliament			0.0170**	0.0157**	0.0031	0.0027
			(0.0064)	(0.0068)	(0.0070)	(0.0071)
Population Grwoth		0.1057		0.0972	0.1349*	0.1319*
		(0.0878)		(0.0875)	(0.0714)	(0.0711)
Year Dummies	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	713	713	713	713	713	713
R-squared		0.1324	0.0877	0.1629	0.3643	0.3585
Number of id	43	43	43	43	43	43

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A7: *Results of Fixed Effect Models two separate Regressions for High and Middle-Income Countries*

	High-Income Countries					Middle-Income Countries				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
VARIABLES	StructuralControls	PoliticalControls	BasicInteractionYearDummies	StructuralControls YearDummies	PoliticalControlsYearDummies	StructuralControls	PoliticalControls	BasicInteractionYearDummies	StructuralControls YearDummies	PoliticalControlsYearDummies
Electoral Competiton	-0.0010	-0.0017	0.0003	-0.0011	0.0001	0.0014	0.0013	0.0006	-0.0003	0.0000
	(0.0019)	(0.0024)	(0.0022)	(0.0020)	(0.0021)	(0.0015)	(0.0026)	(0.0011)	(0.0016)	(0.0013)
Mass Protests	0.0243	0.0259	-0.0292	0.0147	-0.0352	-0.1154	-0.0592	-0.1066	-0.1080	-0.0709
	(0.0831)	(0.0854)	(0.0652)	(0.0706)	(0.0678)	(0.0753)	(0.0790)	(0.0701)	(0.0657)	(0.0608)
1-5 Mass Protests * Electoral Competition	0.0001	0.0028	0.0023	-0.0008	0.0028	0.0002	0.0004	0.0002	0.0015	0.0002
	(0.0026)	(0.0035)	(0.0024)	(0.0027)	(0.0023)	(0.0016)	(0.0019)	(0.0014)	(0.0011)	(0.0011)
6+ Mass Protests * Electoral Competition	-0.0000	0.0069	0.0035	-0.0031	0.0052	0.0145**	0.0155***	0.0114***	0.0115***	0.0104***
	(0.0078)	(0.0074)	(0.0060)	(0.0063)	(0.0062)	(0.0056)	(0.0051)	(0.0037)	(0.0037)	(0.0034)
GDP per Capita	-0.0000			-0.0000		0.0000			-0.0000	-0.0000**
	(0.0000)			(0.0000)		(0.0000)			(0.0000)	(0.0000)
GDP per Capita Growth	-0.0613***			-0.0459**		-0.0156**			-0.0039	-0.0013
	(0.0103)			(0.0199)		(0.0068)			(0.0082)	(0.0060)
Trade as a share of GDP	-0.0001			-0.0038		-0.0008			-0.0042**	
	(0.0040)			(0.0051)		(0.0018)			(0.0020)	
Unemployment Rate	-0.0019			-0.0136		-0.0104			0.0004	
	(0.0170)			(0.0202)		(0.0128)			(0.0125)	
Old Age Dependecy Ratio	-0.0019			-0.0428		0.0060			-0.0771*	
	(0.0163)			(0.0371)		(0.0782)			(0.0415)	
Left Government		-0.0327			0.0218		0.0310			0.0397

		(0.1142)			(0.1002)		(0.0952)			(0.0886)
Right Government		-0.0810			-0.0412		0.0174			0.0409
		(0.0987)			(0.0965)		(0.0878)			(0.0561)
Share of Women in Parliament		0.2183			0.1655		0.4021*			0.1423
		(0.2106)			(0.1715)		(0.2225)			(0.1711)
Year Dummies						No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.9286***	2.3010***	2.9333***	5.2277***	2.6898***	0.7704	0.8366***	0.5809***	2.1594***	0.9915***
	(0.6179)	(0.3853)	(0.3404)	(1.8154)	(0.4839)	(0.8957)	(0.2450)	(0.0493)	(0.4985)	(0.2750)
Observations	433	433	433	433	433	285	285	285	285	285
R-squared	0.1884	0.0330	0.2345	0.3181	0.2449	0.2707	0.1437	0.4747	0.5494	0.5301
Number of id	22	22	22	22	22	21	21	21	21	21

Appendix B

Breaking Up Social Assistance: Program Type Analysis using SALMIC Database

To further understand the type of policies that may be affected by the election-contention-nexus, we make use of the latest version of the Social Assistance in Low- and Middle-Income Countries Database. We calculate the number of people who receive using the program characteristics and social assistance types provided in the data. If there are several that fall under the same category (e.g. means tested benefit) we sum them up to reach the best possible representation of the social assistance system in the countries in the analysis with the current datapoints available.

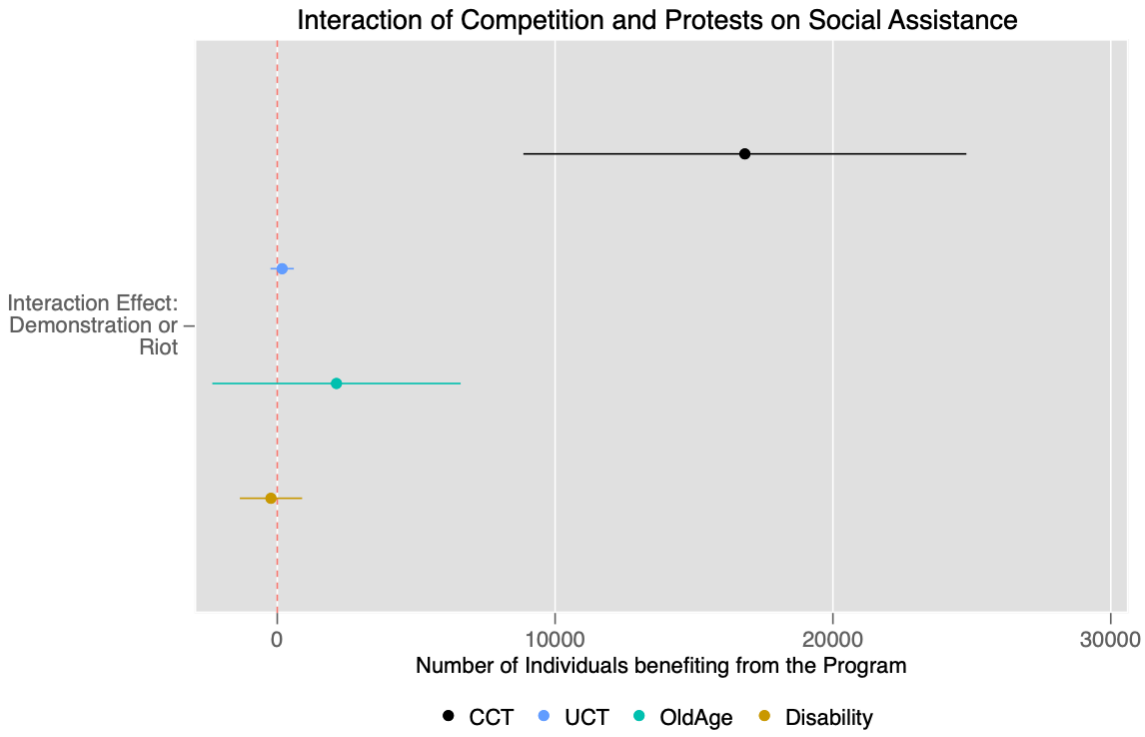
The Social Assistance in Low- and Middle-Income Countries Database (SALMIC) provides a classification largely congruent with the World Bank ASPIRE data used in the previous analysis, enabling us open up the black box of overall social assistance spending a little to gain a deeper understanding of the types of policies for which our hypothesis may hold true. SALMIC classifies programs into the following eight types (with more than one being possible): conditional cash transfer; unconditional cash transfer; old age pension; disability pension; in-kind transfer; employment guarantee; complementary services; other. However, despite being the richest data source to date, it only provides suitable data for the purpose of time series analysis for around 13 countries maximum. The rest *is currently unsuitable as data on program spending, coverage, and average transfers is not suitable for a comparative analysis over time yet*. A reanalysis once this data becomes available from the SALMIC database or any other data source is recommended. We merge this social assistance data with our data on political factors calculated above.

Below, we show results of the election-contention nexus on different social assistance types (number of individuals receiving the benefits). We employ dynamic lagged dependent variable models like above. The interaction effect is positive and significant only for means tested programs.

In terms of program types, Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) show the same result. Remarkably, using completely different data on the number of people who benefit from these programs, the direction of the result parallels the aforementioned results in Middle-income countries.

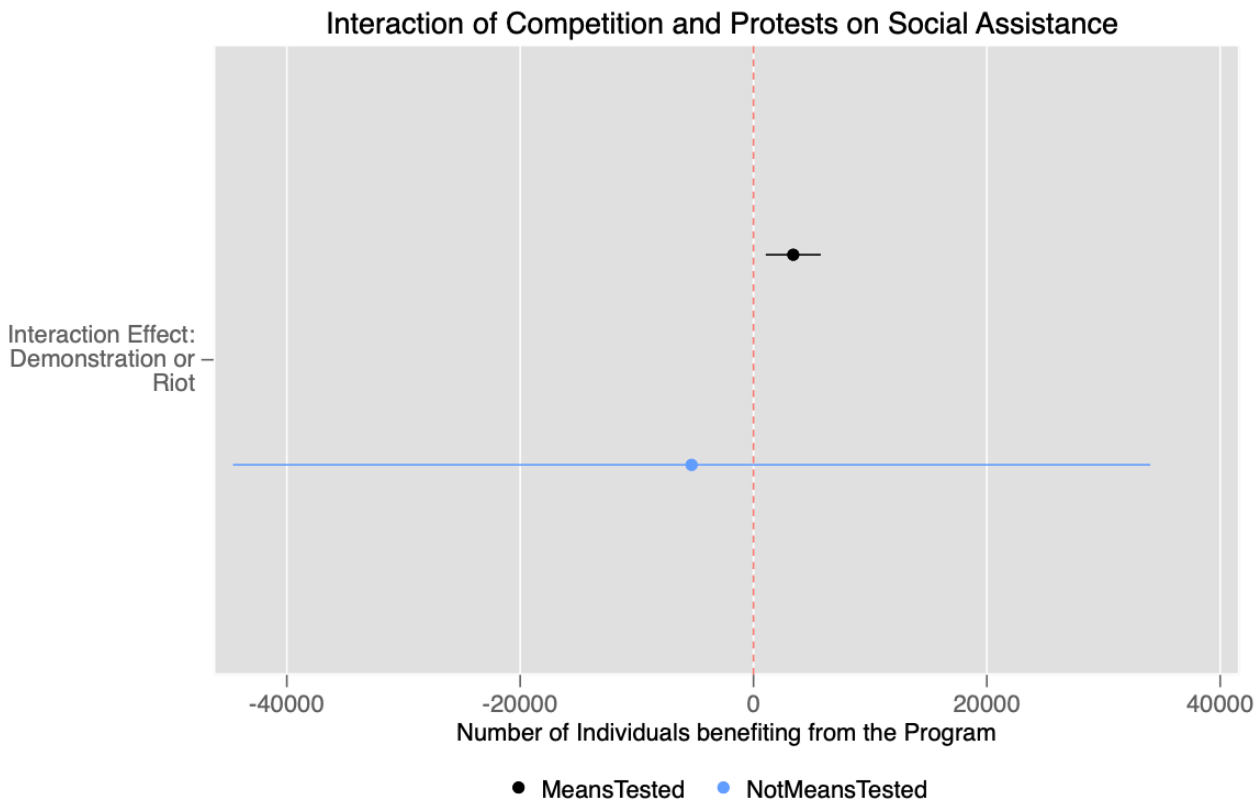
The regressions include fixed effects for country and year, clustered standard errors and all relevant covariates detailed above. The nature of the relationship is robust also for specification with random effects models, an important aspect as the number of countries for these analyses are particularly low and potential dangers around the Nickel bias seem not to bias our results in this case.

Figure B1: *Results of Analysis for Program Type from SALMIC database (Table B1)*



Notes: *These results are not reliable as very few countries made longitudinal data available. The results therefore only serve as circumstantial evidence for differences across program types. A further investigation of differential politicization is needed.*

Figure B2: *Results of Analysis for Program Type from SALMIC database (Table B2)*



Notes: *These results are not reliable as very few countries made longitudinal data available. The results therefore only serve as circumstantial evidence for differences across program types. A further investigation of differential politicization is needed.*

Table B1: *Results of Models using the SALMIC database for different types of Social Assistance – Note: Please mind the very low numbers of countries included*

	(1) CCT	(2) UCT	(3) OldAge	(4) Disability	(5) EmpGuar	(6) Kind
Electoral Competiton	-62,386.76**	-7,281.32**	-13,522.70	2,287.33	-899,540.33	-19,027.58
	(25,561.84)	(3,517.87)	(17,216.93)	(4,241.58)	(1,858,296.27)	(42,222.71)
Demonstrations and Riots	-298,990.88***	-12,332.31*	-48,147.27**	-8,387.29	160,523.21	24.73
	(115,418.62)	(6,476.98)	(22,525.64)	(19,074.54)	(633,032.11)	(13,732.97)
Electoral Comp*DemRiot	16,831.12***	175.75	2,131.93	-226.25	-25,040.79	-640.95***
	(4,067.68)	(214.13)	(2,280.05)	(571.74)	(18,661.46)	(12.39)
GDP per Capita	-36.83	-3.66	-60.76	-41.16	-4,143.24	459.44
	(110.27)	(24.81)	(57.65)	(40.18)	(7,039.72)	(1,296.54)
GDP per Capita Growth	-25,504.53	42,898.08	-44,172.00	-9,595.11	-5590153.00	-63,743.12
	(62,845.48)	(31,487.03)	(38,008.59)	(18,176.67)	(4,622,426.72)	(89,185.42)
Trade as a share of GDP	10,912.55	-5,770.92	29,231.35	-21,464.54	147,779.01	38,240.33
	(22,114.28)	(8,716.69)	(27,326.21)	(18,245.18)	(1,085,794.77)	(66,166.20)
Unemployment Rate	21,555.77	27,395.24	-86,885.10	-18,080.47	-2543413.21	-38,190.38
	(131,214.82)	(20,343.22)	(62,009.43)	(25,426.19)	(2,266,516.57)	(323,370.45)
Old Age Dependecy Ratio	-131,913.37	4,916.63	-42,908.08	-4,954.42	2,716,036.71	-1031784.68
	(124,446.25)	(44,119.83)	(54,783.83)	(36,270.56)	(5,747,811.60)	(2,485,155.95)
Left Government	1,808,384.12**	167,457.11	1,177,693.65	357,991.60	110079664.74***	3,589,690.50***
	(812,652.56)	(248,296.09)	(1,546,015.14)	(642,341.94)	(25431376.88)	(537,030.89)
Right Government	1,878,092.25*	400,307.51	-497,221.30	-721,125.70	95138877.13***	4,980,519.18***
	(1,140,252.06)	(400,517.62)	(402,965.03)	(915,629.54)	(24219306.41)	(1,679,574.44)
Share of Women in Parliament	-83,841.76**	13,600.18	-4,146.39	-28,506.98	-2356611.60	-3,495.55
	(35,477.38)	(21,437.79)	(28,549.09)	(37,571.29)	(2,504,697.90)	(33,451.79)
Lagged included	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	4,434,627.79***	183,076.16	936,405.73	3,193,810.01**	72222891.02	5,597,121.93
	(1,480,578.33)	(242,150.96)	(896,721.65)	(1,327,464.08)	(146111500.22)	(11163990.30)

Observations	124	55	141	74	33	25
Number of Countries	**12**	**7**	**13**	**7**	**5**	**2**

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * 0.1

Table B2: *Results of Models using the SALMIC database for Means-tested of Social Assistance – Note: Please mind the very low numbers of countries included*

VARIABLES	(1) MeansTested	(2) NotMeansTested
Electoral Competiton	-26,119.49	19,057.28
	(27,302.94)	(63,604.00)
Demonstrations and Riots	-35,283.98*	-466,227.24
	(20,120.80)	(284,651.47)
Electoral Comp*DemRiot	3,407.32***	-5,305.55
	(1,201.56)	(20,057.73)
GDP per Capita	-55.15	-266.71
	(63.30)	(165.13)
GDP per Capita Growth	-36,446.12	-98,457.74
	(77,921.06)	(72,726.99)
Trade as a share of GDP	24,081.64	73,812.94
	(27,176.09)	(54,339.20)
Unemployment Rate	-72,334.32	-230,128.87
	(89,141.80)	(224,482.77)
Old Age Dependecy Ratio	-135,638.42	10,693.82
	(98,113.82)	(155,162.98)
Left Government	2,954,803.76	3,230,357.31
	(2,516,604.35)	(3,851,666.47)
Right Government	1,539,792.10	-2218652.75
	(1,587,736.73)	(1,790,043.80)
Share of Women in Parliament	-40,089.23	-31,484.28

	(53,516.31)	(94,538.30)
Lagged included	Yes	Yes
Constant	3,340,066.28**	2,911,907.55
	(1,633,797.01)	(3,618,845.83)
Observations	81	153
Number of countries	**8**	**14**

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Protests, electoral competition, and social assistance: Evidence from Turkey

Ali Bargu

Abstract

How do protests, electoral competition, and their interaction shape the distribution of social assistance benefits, which have expanded globally in recent years? Using micro-data on social assistance programs, a novel protest dataset, and an original measure of electoral competition for Turkey, this study shows that governments favor core-voters in their allocation of benefits when there are no challengers. In contrast, when there are protests during electorally conducive points in time influence governments to allocate social assistance to poor-voters instead of core-voters. I term this framework the election-contention-nexus of social assistance. The contribution of this paper is novel in two ways: first, it offers a longitudinal analysis on the interaction of protests and electoral competition on policy outcomes such as social assistance. Second, because of to the micro-data available, it can assess eligibility and targeting of programs to characterize who receives benefits as a response to political changes to understand the logic of distribution governments employ.

I. Introduction

During the last two decades, a multitude of new social assistance programs have been introduced, scaled up, and improved in the Global South. Globally, over two billion people are estimated to be recipients of at least one social assistance program (World Bank, 2018). From 2014-18 the number of recipients of at least one social assistance program has doubled from one to over two billion people globally (World Bank, 2014). This immense expansion constitutes an important change for the poor and informal working classes, who have traditionally been excluded from social protection. Existing theories that explain how cash benefits are distributed usually stipulate that governments either favor expanding benefits to core or swing voters (Cox, 2009), or propose logics of clientelism and vote buying (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; S. C. Stokes, 2007). The predominant focus of the literature on electoral competition as an explanation for the distribution of social assistance, however, overlooks a second path through which the poor and informal working class can assert pressure on incumbent governments, that is, mass protests or "contentious" politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Studying electoral competition as an independent explanatory factor for social policy outcomes suggests unmediated effects and disregards conditions that strengthen, reverse, or negate these monocausal effects. In this study, I expand on existing theoretical frameworks by showing that core-voter models generally apply, yet the combination of electoral competition and mass protests can induce incumbents to focus benefits on poor voters instead. I aim to flesh out theoretical gaps by connecting the interplay of contentious and electoral politics to social policy outcomes. Further, I contribute novel theoretical insights into the distributive politics literature by showcasing the conditions under which incumbents favor poor voters over core-voters. My analysis provides an empirical case study applying this framework to Turkey and tests under which conditions changes in the distributional logic of governments in the allocation of social assistance programs occur.

Using an original dataset on protests, a novel measure of electoral competition, and micro-level data on social assistance programs I identify the electoral conditions under which demonstrations coincide with increases in the probability of social assistance receipt. My results show that regions with high support for the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* AKP) show higher likelihoods of receiving social cash assistance, confirming the core-voter hypothesis. In addition, I find that demonstrations generally have a negative effect on the likelihood of receiving social assistance. However, when demonstrations are close to an election, I find that in regions with electoral competition, they are associated with statistically and substantively significant increases the likelihood of receiving of social cash assistance programs. This means that it is not the core-voter, but the poor voter that benefits. Centrally, I find that support for the governing party is associated with a higher likelihood of receiving social assistance. At the same time, demonstrations during electorally conducive points in time influence the direction of change. Lastly, a closer look into the groups of beneficiaries reveals that it is not leakage to ineligible beneficiaries that drives this trend, but rather the extension of benefits to the poor. In other words, the combination of electoral competition and demonstrations increases the share of poor among social assistance beneficiaries. When there are infrequent demonstrations and there is no (or little) electoral competition, the share of cash benefits received by non-poor citizens is found to be higher, pointing towards distribution to core-voters. I show that examining the nexus between contentious politics and elections can add value to understand the distributive politics of social assistance programs.

First, I outline the relevant concepts in the literature utilizing existing research to develop the theoretical framework. Subsequently, I provide a brief overview of the social assistance system in Turkey, before outlining the research design strategy and operationalization of key variables used in my analysis. The findings section provides the first analysis that offers a longitudinal analysis on the interaction of demonstrations and electoral competition on social assistance. Due to newly

available micro-data, I can assess eligibility and targeting of programs to characterize who receives benefits as a response to political changes over time and in more detail to understand the logic of distribution employed by the government. This enables us to offer a level of granularity often missing in analyses of distributive politics. Lastly, I provide a discussion that details the process of political distribution of social assistance benefits by looking at administrative structures system in Turkey and situating my findings in the broader literature.

Elections and Social Policy Outcomes

Politicians' distribution of noncontributory benefits for electoral gain using clientelistic strategies is a matter of longstanding debate in political science.[1] The two main approaches posit that incumbents will disproportionally invest in loyal core-voters as proposed by Cox & McCubbins, (1986) or swing voters as proposed by Lindbeck & Weibull (1987). The rationales behind governments' preferences to distribute according to the core-voter hypothesis vary. Diaz-Cayeros et al. (2016) stress that governments favor core-voters, because parties see it necessary to continue prior spending allocation to ensure the long-term stability of the electoral coalition. Cox (2009) outlines two types of targeting governments can engage in: legislative targeting (the distribution of benefits to optimize legislate outcomes) or electoral targeting (the distribution of benefits to win elections). Incumbents make strategic choices in the distribution of benefits for each of these types to allocate to undecided, loyal, or any mix of both groups.

While there are empirical studies that show governments favor allocating benefits to swing-voter prone districts, findings that confirm the core-voter logic to be utilized are in the clear majority. For Argentina's Peronist party, the core-voter logic holds true in the allocation of federal expenditures across provinces (Calvo & Murillo, 2004) and in the allocation of a greater share of

[1] See Cox (2010) for a very helpful review of the field.

public works programs (Giraudy, 2007). Similarly, the core-voter logic seems to apply in the case of allocation of social assistance in Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). Swing-voters were found to be favored by incumbents in the allocation of Social Fund expenditures in Peru (Schady, 2000), municipal funding in Mexico (Magaloni et al., 2007), and unemployment compensation funds in Argentina (Weitz-Shapiro, 2006). More nuanced arguments are increasingly adding clarity to the conditions under which these simplistic models, based on two party systems, operate (Mares & Young, 2018). Aytaç (2014) extended this model to multiparty settings by showing that incumbents channel conditional cash transfers to districts with ideologically close challengers.

Why I should examine Contentious Political Action and their Policy Effects

Studies that examine the politics of social policy have largely focused on electoral mobilization and voting, neglecting the role of social movements (see Zarate Tenorio, 2014; Yörük, 2012 for exceptions). Yet, in turn, these studies mostly neglect a detailed discussion and inclusion of the potential interplay of electoral and contentious politics.[2] However, there are theoretical works that stress the importance of inspecting the interplay of both when examining the effects on polices or governments (see Garay, 2017; Yörük & Gençer, 2021). These have been applied to other outcomes but have mainly been neglected by scholars of social assistance.

Most importantly, political mediation theory (PMT) formalized by Amenta (2008) contends that mobilization and collective action are insufficient for policy changes. Only under specific circumstances, mobilization and collective action can influence policy makers and bring about change. Yet, most strains within PMT examine the influence of movements occurring through slow-moving processes by examining large social movement organizations (Skocpol, 2003). This may neglect more immediate effects that social unrest may have on governments. This study seeks

[2] see Garay, 2016 and Yörük & Gencer 2021 for exceptions

to revitalize an older strain of PMT approaches that follows an action-reaction approach and is interested in the immediate, short-term disruptive power of demonstrations and protests (Amenta et al., 2010) as it changes the incentives of incumbents. This strand stresses the social control function of welfare programs and has shown that collective action can induce public spending (Fording, 2001; Piven & Cloward, 1979). Further, Meyer and Tarrow (1998) argue that people who protest are more, not less, likely to vote and engage in institutional politics. Similarly, Goldstone (2003) maintains that institutional political participation is, contrary to popular arguments in electoral studies, compatible with extra-institutional measures of participation (e.g. protests participation).

This theoretical framework provides the base upon which the argument of this article is built. Demonstrations and protests are seen as direct actions of social movements, challenging the incumbent government (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). They have the ability to be a threat to social, political, or economic stability, therefore they should be included in analyses on social assistance outcomes specifically. Yet, following the PMT approach, social movements require conditions under which the incumbent sees the need to enact policy change. This paper therefore aims to specify and test the electoral conditions under which contentious political action incentivizes increasing social assistance to certain groups, when they see the electoral motive to do so simultaneously.

The Election-Contention Nexus – The Argument

This paper seeks to theorize and empirically test how demonstrations by the people and competition for elections shape incumbents' decisions on social assistance spending. Merging the two fields of strategic party competition and social movement literature, I test how incumbents distribute social assistance as a response to demonstrations *(pressure from below)* conditional on electoral competition *(pressure from the top)*. Much of the previously mentioned literature on

distributive politics fails to view social movements as extra-institutional to institutional electoral politics. Movements and parties play vital (often complementary) roles for representation of "the people" (Kitschelt, 1993). Recently Kriesi and colleagues have theorized this interplay further by examining how protests influenced electoral politics during the Great Recession in Europe (Bremer et al., 2020). They describe three mechanisms through which demonstrations influence incumbents: *attention* (to issues raised by protesters)*, attribution* (of blame to the government)*, and spin functions* (strengthening of political allies of protestors) (ibid.: p. 864). While these mechanisms shed light on the relationship between protests and electoral politics, a theoretical and empirical examination whether and how protests have differential direct effects on social assistance conditional on electoral factors is missing.

This paper starts with the core-voter hypothesis that the incumbent disproportionally invests in loyal core-voters as proposed by Cox & McCubbins (1986) and confirmed by Luca et al. (2019) for public spending and Kemahlıoğlu & Bayer (2020) for the Green Card program in Turkey. However, these approaches do not consider the dimension of contentious political action. As can be seen in Table 1, full support for the incumbent party can be thought of entailing both, no electoral threat to lose the election paired with low levels of demonstrations. Hence, I expect high coverage and generosity rates in these situations of full support (Table 1, A). Voters have options of displaying their discontent by either voting for another party, demonstrating, or doing both. Demonstrations create pressure from below that can threaten social stability. However, where electoral competition is low, incumbents have no immediate need to react to these demands of the people and I expect to see no change or reduction (to reprimand) in social assistance spending (Table 1, C). Conversely, pressure from below through demonstrations when electoral risk to lose the election is present will increase the likelihood of incumbents responding with social assistance benefits (Table 1, D).

This will occur because the threat of demonstrations endangering social stability, particularly shortly before elections is an especially undesirable situation for incumbents (*political containment strategy)*. However, combining this with the *political mobilization* function described above, the mechanism becomes clearer: When electoral competition is high, every additional vote counts more on the path to winning an election. The last remaining combination is the situation where the incumbent faces electoral competition, but there are low levels of protests (Table 1, B). There are two possible explanations for why this will not lead to an increase in spending. Firstly, the conflict line in the election might not be centered around the poor. Instead, middle-class conflicts may dominate the competitive arena.[3] Second, parties in many countries in the Global South (incl. Turkey) have increasingly gained the support of poorer segments in society and managed to sway elections in their favor with these votes (Yörük & Comin, 2020). Thus, mobilizing poorer voters with social assistance benefits has the potential to change the class content of elections creating an incentive to provide these benefits.[4] The poor therefore already constitute the core-voters of the AKP in Turkey. Therefore, in a context where the incumbent already caters to their core constituents, electoral competition alone may not lead to further allocation of benefits to them, but rather the threatening to withdraw existing benefits and allocate them to other groups. Mares and Young (2018) have found a similar mechanism in the allocation of benefits during Hungarian elections and termed it the "core-voters curse".

[3] If middle-class conflicts dominate the electoral arena, spending can be expected to take place in other areas of the welfare state: e.g. contributory pensions and other social security policies.

[4] The only similar work comes from Garay (2016) with a limited small-N case study approach that gives us first hints of what this relationship could look like. This paper aims to contribute to this emerging scholarly debate by offering novel insights using a different methodological approach, different case countries, and a different theoretical motivation.

Table 1: *Hypothesized Mechanism of Contention Election Nexus on Social Assistance Spending*

	ELECTORAL COMPETITION		
CONTENTIOUS POLITICAL ACTION		*Low*	*High*
	Low	A)++ (clientelistic core constituency reward)	B)- (Electoral motive without protests)
	High	C)-- (repression without electoral consequence)	D)+ (attempts to mobilize and contain unrest)

II. Social Assistance in relation to Electoral and Contentious Politics in Turkey

Turkey is a typical case of the recent social assistance expansion and high politization of the distribution of benefits. It possesses a complex and fragmented system of social assistance, which has seen substantive growth in terms of numbers of programs, beneficiaries, and allocated budgets. While Turkey's foundations of social assistance were built in the 1970s, comprehensive reforms re-shaped programs and the institutional structure commencing in the 2000s. Currently, roughly 40 social assistance programs exist and provide cash-transfers, housing, nutrition/food, access to education, and basic health care (Öktem, 2018).

The AKP (Justice and Development Party) rose to power in 2002, in the aftermath of one of the most severe financial crises in Turkey. This financial crisis was accompanied by large job losses, especially in the vital construction and manufacturing sectors and drops in real wages generating immense political pressure (Özdemir, 2020). The AKP placed electoral efforts into catering to those who were excluded from the formal sector and had suffered from the crisis. Specifically, the AKP promised social services and assistance programs to the informal working class, relying on their support to win the election (Bugra & Candas, 2011; Figure Appendix A9). Three main developments describe the AKP government's approach to social policy: First, an enlargement of means-tested, targeted social assistance programs that provide particularistic in-cash and in-kind

transfers and the extension of health care coverage to formally excluded groups, representing an expansion in the welfare efforts. These new and augmented social assistance programs reinforced "traditional clientelistic forms or patronage of the political relationship between the state and the citizens in Turkey" (Bugra & Candas, 2011, p. 523). Second, a simultaneous retrenchment in the generosity of universal social policies and labor market programs to existing beneficiaries of the welfare state. Third, structural changes in the organization of social policies, for example the increased importance of local and municipal governments in the administration of social assistance programs, the unification of three separate institutions into the Social Security Institution (SGK), or reforms of long-standing informal welfare institutions such as forbearance on informal housing settlements and agricultural subsidies (Dorlach, 2019; Özdemir, 2020).

The 2002 election is generally seen as the beginning of drastic changes in the Turkish welfare state: Social insurance programs had previously dominated, yet new noncontributory social assistance programs saw their inception with the turn of the millennium, diversifying the social protection system. Many scholars have interpreted this change to symbolize a larger shift in the Turkish welfare state from employment based to income-based programs (Bugra & Candas, 2011). Today, Turkey's social assistance regime can be described with four general features: complexity, fragmentation, stratified benefits, and unequal social rights (Öktem, 2018).

The administration of social assistance in Turkey follows the unitary state structure and is therefore governed through the Social Assistance Directorate under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. It is implemented by 1,000 locally based Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (World Bank, 2018).[5] Though small compared to contributory programs for the formal sector,

[5] On governance of social assistance in Turkey: "MoFSP was created in 2011 to unify the substantial number of uncoordinated social initiatives and reduce fragmentation in the sector. Concurrently, the SADG was reorganized under MoFSP. The SASFs at the local level and MoFSP at the national level today represent the core institutional framework

programs for informal workers and their families have increased in number and size over the past decade (an overview table of programs can be found in the Appendix A6 and the related years of introduction in A1). This growth in noncontributory programs can clearly be seen as catering to the needs and demands of the informal working class, who have traditionally been excluded from social protection. Social assistance expenditure (see Figure 1) has not just increased nominally, but also in real terms from 0.57 percent of GDP in 2003, to 1.31 percent in 2014 (World Bank, 2018). Over roughly the same time span, the share of the poor in the AKP's electoral base became dominant, increasing up to roughly 70 percent.[6]

As to the factors that determined this change, much of the literature focuses on structural changes in the economy that include labor informalization, unemployment levels, deindustrialization, and the rise of poverty (Buğra & Keyder, 2003; Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2009; Elveren, 2008). Further, arguments of rapid internal rural-to-urban migration patterns, jobless economic growth, and the erosion of the family as a social safety net provider have been brought forward (Grütjen, 2008). Grütjen argues that governments expanded non-contributory social assistance programs to counteract these negative developments for the informal sector. Recently, however, authors stressed the importance of political factors in the distribution of social assistance in Turkey and discussed the role of mobilization from below (Yörük, 2012) or electoral motives (Aytaç, 2014; Bugra & Candas, 2011; Luca et al., 2019). Many other studies have outlined how international financial institutions (like the Social Risk Mitigation Project by the World Bank or the IMF) have shaped the social policy reforms in Turkey (Güleç, 2014).

for social assistance in Turkey. The majority of social assistance programs, including the SADG, are now housed under MoFSP, which proved to be an important initiative for reducing sector fragmentation." (World Bank, 2018)

[6] "The share of votes coming from families with household incomes less than two minimum wages increased from 57 percent to 71 percent for the AKP between 2007 and 2015" (Yörük & Comin, 2020:10) based on pooled KONDA data.

Yet, there are few studies that examine distributive politics of social assistance. They focus on i) electoral competition and single programs (Aytaç, 2014; Dorlach, 2019; Yilmaz, 2017), ii) protests and their effects on single programs (Yörük, 2012), or iii) an overall assessment of the electoral motive and discretion across wider budgetary sectors (Luca et al., 2019). In contrast, my study provides an analysis that goes beyond single programs and examines a more holistic set of political determinants, their interactions, and how they shape political distribution of social assistance programs over time.

Studies focusing on the role of electoral politics as an explanation for the recent social assistance in Turkey have grown with the increasing importance of noncontributory programs in recent years. Specifically, the role of the AKP in promoting social assistance policies and its political motives to do so are well documented (Bugra & Candas, 2011; Dorlach, 2015; Öniş, 2012). Aytaç, (2014) illustrates how multiparty competition shaped actions of the incumbent party to direct Conditional Cash Transfer program spending disproportionately to districts with an ideologically close challenger, showcasing that electoral competition alone does not sufficiently explain social assistance spending. Bozkurt (2013) outlines the use of social assistance in Turkey for vote buying purposes. Further, social assistance policies have been shown to have a positive effect at the ballot box for the governing AKP (Gidengil & Karakoç, 2016; Özel & Yıldırım, 2019). Luca et al. (2019) caveat the influence of electoral competition by demonstrating differential processes across spending sectors. They argue that health spending has become more programmatic while other expenditures reward core strongholds of the incumbent AKP.

Though the literature on distributive politics has continued to thrive, three important gaps in the literature remain. First, studies examine the potential effects of electoral and contentious politics separately, missing a potentially important interplay. Second, studies examining single programs

cannot capture the social assistance system more holistically.[7] Third, they lack micro level data to study which groups are targeted by the incumbent government and how the distributional logic changes under different electoral conditions. This paper aims to fill these gaps.

III. Research Design

Turkeys' increased focus on social assistance policies since the early 2000s represents a typical case among Middle-income countries (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016). This paper aims to explore the sub-national and time variation within one political context to test the proposed conditional effect of demonstrations on the distribution of social assistance. Turkey's unitary governance structure is also reflected in the administration and implementation of social assistance policies.[8] Therefore, understanding the central government's rationale behind the differential political allocation of benefits requires a regional analysis given the centrally devised, but regionally implemented social assistance. Roughly 75 percent of all social assistance is provided centrally through the Social Assistance Directorate and only 5 percent by municipalities (Ministry of Family and Social Polices, 2015).

Using a novel dataset on protest events in Turkey, a new measure of electoral competition, and micro social assistance data, I match political and economic characteristics of twelve NUTS1[9] regions in Turkey to households in those regions. In doing so, I can exploit the variation in social assistance distribution over time to examine if regional political characteristics such as electoral competition and demonstrations influence household-level changes in social assistance receipt and generosity. This model provides the possibility for analyses with considerable statistical power due

[7] Aytac focuses only on one program (CCTs) and Cammett et al. have a measure that includes all contributory and noncontributory programs together.
[8] See discussion section for more details.
[9] NUTS refers to the internationally used nomenclature of territorial units for statistics to classify regions within countries. The higher the number, the smaller the territorial unit.

to the large sample size of the household surveys (roughly 205.000 households between 2005-2016). Regional independent variables (from the year before) are regressed on social assistance receipt controlling for a number of individual-level factors that affect social assistance receipt (e.g. income, assets, number of household members, subjective poverty), as well as regional meso-level characteristics.[10]

The variety of original data sources enable us to carry out, to the best of my knowledge, the first analysis that can systematically draw a connection between detailed protest data, election outcomes, and social assistance benefits in Turkey. However, while the study would benefit from an even more disaggregated approach than regions, Turkish household surveys do not allow identifying households beyond NUTS1 level, rendering it impossible to run this analysis with more granularity.[11] The analysis employs time-series modelling to specifically consider temporality by using a lagged structure between the independent variables and dependent variable of interest. All of my models include fixed-effects on the regional level to account for unobserved regional differences and clustered standard errors. For coverage, a dichotomous measure of social assistance receipt, I use logistic regression models. To assess the level of benefits, I provide linear OLS regressions with household benefit level (generosity) as the dependent variable. Further, I run a battery of robustness checks including a regional analysis on average per capita receipt and coverage, models including region-time-fixed-effects, and different specifications of the independent variables. The results of these robustness checks can be found in the Appendix Table A7 and Figures A10-11).

[10] In an additional step, I supplement my analysis with a regional level analysis for 12 NUTS1 regions of Turkey to examine if electoral competition and protests in the region influence the average per capita transfer levels in said region. See Appendix A7 for the results.

[11] This creates some limitations in terms of statistical power that are discussed in the limitations. For the last three years, NUTS 2 has been added to the Living and Income Conditions Survey administered by the Turkish National Statistical Association, but it does not exist for years predating 2014.

I present the results of my main analysis in two steps. First, I examine whether demonstrations have a positive effect on social cash assistance coverage conditional on electoral competition. In a second step, I examine the recipient groups for whom social cash coverage tends to increase after demonstrations occurred during electorally favorable conditions. This helps to uncover the distributive rationales pursued by the government. I test if leakage (benefit payments to non-eligible citizens) or decrease undercoverage (the share of the theoretically eligible who do not receive benefits) drive the politicized distribution of social assistance benefits.[12]

Dependent Variable: Social Assistance

Social assistance variables are computed using the annual Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) household surveys administered by the Turkish National Statistical Association (TÜIK).[13] Data for all individuals where merged into their respective households, as the unit of analysis of my paper is household-level receipt of social cash assistance programs.[14] The data provides the possibility to measure two relevant variables: household social cash benefit receipt (coverage) and the income received by households (benefit level). These two social policy variables open the black box of "expenditure" that is often used in the social policy literature. They provide the possibility to understand the size and type of benefits different groups are receiving. All income related statistics used to calculate the benefit amounts were harmonized and equalized across years using consumer price indices to make them comparable. The social cash assistance receipt variable is a simple dummy for any household that receives more than 0 Turkish Lira. The benefit level variable is calculated using the modified OECD equivalence scale.[15] This corresponds with the

[12] Though for some programs there are more criteria than income, I can only use the rough income criteria for social cash benefits, as the data does not provide information which type of program the respondents receive rendering the identification of criteria impossible.

[13] Permission has been granted by TÜIK to use this data. The license to use this data is available upon request.

[14] This is especially important because some social assistance benefits use the individual (disability benefits including ghazi and social pensions) and others the household/family (e.g. social cash and in-kind benefits) as the targeting unit.

[15] Modified OECD equivalence scale: first adult 1, 0.5 for every member over 14 years old; 0.3 for every member younger than 14.

approach taken by Tekgüç (2018)[16] to calculate social assistance receipt in Turkey. The data includes several social assistance categories that were asked separately in the survey, which provides the opportunity to construct this nuanced dataset. In this paper, I focus on the most prominent type of social assistance: social cash transfers, which are the programs that have garnered most attention globally (Leisering, 2018). These programs exhibit the largest growth in coverage in Turkey in the first decade of the new millennium (see Appendix Figure A8 for details) and include a wide array of programs. Respondents are asked to indicate if they have received social assistance programs by categories defined by the statistical agency. This renders it hard to identify the exact programs that respondents mean when they indicate they receive "social cash transfers". A list of most likely programs (see Appendix Table A1 of Paper 3) that respondents considered when answering this question ranges from all health-related benefits including the widely discussed CCT program over to a large number of regular and irregular programs such as an electricity bill assistance program (*Elektrik Tüketim Desteği*). The eligibility criteria vary widely, creating a fragmented and complicated net of programs with incoherent income threshold and qualifying criteria.

Independent Variable: Demonstrations

Novel data on protests comes from an original dataset produced by the Emerging Welfare Team under the leadership of Erdem Yörük. The dataset includes over 37,000 events[17] and was created by annotating newspaper articles on contentious politics for Turkey between the 1970s until 2016. Quantitative time-series data on grassroots politics that includes a breadth of events – formal and informal labor, ethnic, religious, students, right-wing, left-wing, feminist etc. – is rare in social movements research. As in many other countries, scholars of labor movements in Turkey have

[16] The authors would like to thank Hasan Tekgüç for sharing his do-files.

[17] These events are categorized with regard to date, location, participants, organizers, and event type creating the most detailed account of contentious action in Turkey to date.

largely used government-collected strike statistics to measure labor unrest (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012). Yet, official strike statistics do not suffice to fully understand labor unrest, because they disregard non-strike forms of unrest (e.g. riots, demonstrations) and exclude political and illegal strikes. This is the first database of this sort on Turkey. To create a reliable empirical source on grassroots politics, the project has collected newspaper articles starting from the microfilm archive of the daily *Cumhuriyet* (the *Republic*). *Cumhuriyet* was chosen because it is one of the major national newspapers in Turkey, which has acquired a social democratic perspective since the 1970s and extensively reported news about grassroots political activities. The dataset does not aim to capture an exhaustive list of all events and incidents, since a newspaper only reports a fraction of political events that occur throughout the country. It is reasonable to assume that during times of social movements, newspapers report social events more than usual (Silver, 2003). Thus, this dataset captures the representation of grassroots politics by the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper.

To understand the differential influences of societal groups, a careful examination of the contentious event categories in the dataset is needed. Therefore, the analysis uses all events classified as *demonstrations*, which include a wide variety of groups. This category explicitly excludes events that are classified as armed militancy, group clashes, as well as aforementioned industrial action.[18] To test this approach, I exploit the fact that both, the protest data and the large household sample has information on location and occupation. I construct probabilities of being poor for each type of event (see detailed description of methods in the Appendix). I find that around only 6percent of the industrial action events had participants that were predicted to be poor. Groups that participated in demonstrations had a 25 percent likelihood to be poor. Thus, while not perfect, it is the most suitable way to capture demonstrations by the poorer segments in Turkey. A look

[18] A clear distinction of formal sector workers can be made as they are demarked as industrial action that were organized by e.g. labor unions, where participants are part of the formal sector. It is much harder to identify events that are definitely and exclusively frequented by the poorest and informal workers who are the main recipients of social assistance programs.

into the participants of these demonstrations reveals that the majority are activists, proletariat/working class, as well as "the masses" (a denotation used for mixed groups of citizens that cannot be coded as one of the other participant categories (GLOCON - Emerging Welfare Project, 2022).

Independent Variable: Electoral Competition

To assess the electoral threat faced by the incumbent in a given region, this paper uses district-level election results of general elections in Turkey between 2002 and 2015. Parliamentary seats are allocated on the district-level. To construct my novel competition variable, the margin between the first and second party in each election district is calculated. If this margin is below a threshold of 10 percent, a district is classified to have experienced electoral competition during that election. I then compute the number of districts (*il*) for each region that experienced competition in the election to compute the measure. This contrasts with the usual analyses that employ simple margins between first and second party at the national level.[19] The difference between a 5 and 15 percent margin of victory for the incumbent is assumed to have very different effects compared to a 35-45 percent margin. In the latter, the threat to lose an election is still non-existent. Despite this difference, linear regressions usually used in the analyses will treat it as being the same for calculating effects. To ensure validity of the results, the same measure is computed using 5 percent and 15 percent as the cut-offs for a district being under electoral competition as a sensitivity analysis.[20] In a second step, the same analysis is carried out with the AKP vote share in each region. The electoral variables represent the results of the most recent general election, either during that year or before, as done by earlier studies (see Luca et al., 2019; Luca & Rodríguez-Pose, 2015).[21]

[19] Results of the analysis is provided will be provided in the appendix and will explain further why the aforementioned analysis is preferred

[20] Additionally, a weighted measure was constructed that weighs the districts by their number of members of parliament. The results of the analysis is broadly similar.

[21] Some more complex measures such as the seat-vote-elasticity in the D'Hondt system are computed using a self-written R package that will be made available.

Control Variables

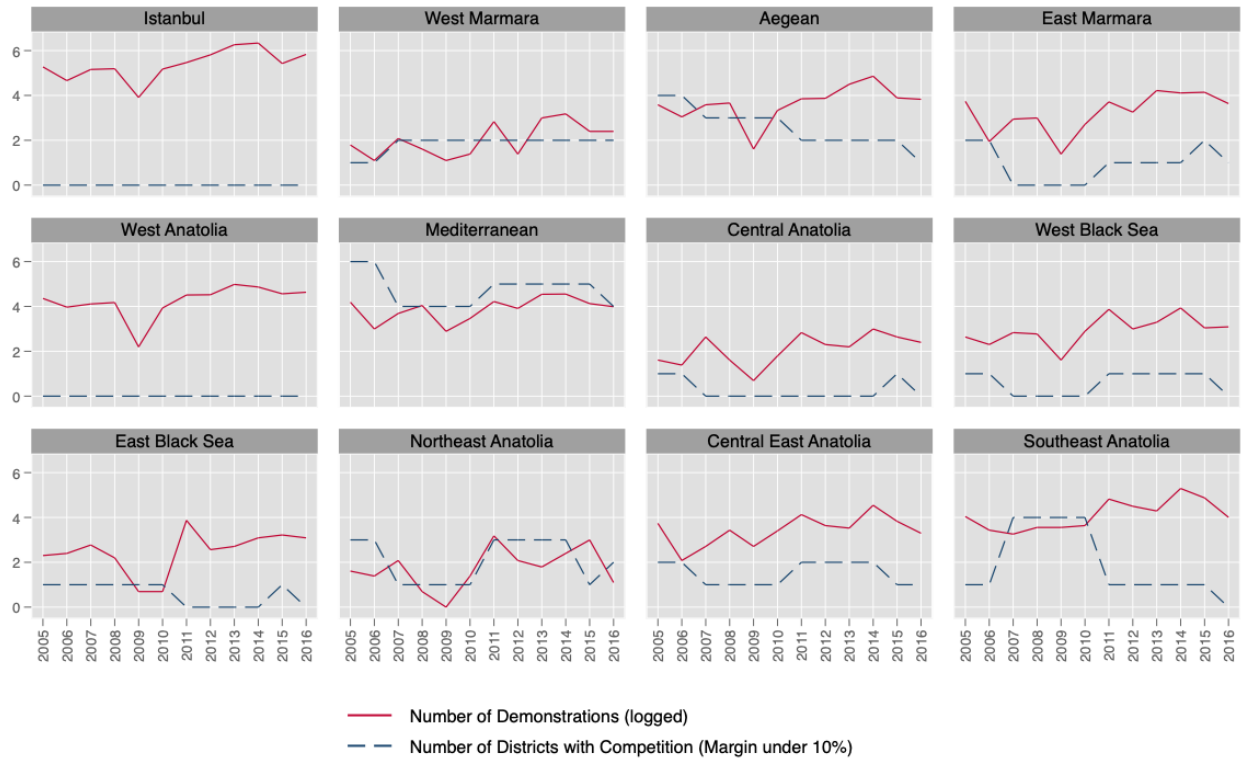
Following existing research on the determinants of social assistance, I include a number of control variables on the regional and household-level. I obtain economic and structural characteristics on the regional level from the Turkish National Statistics Association Database. To account for changes in the overall economic development of the region that may affect the level of resources available to provide social assistance, I include gross regional product (Rudra & Haggard, 2005). As regional shocks to the labor market may severely affect the number of beneficiaries of social assistance, I include regional unemployment rates. Scholars have long debated about the influence of globalization on social assistance spending patterns ranging from finding no effects (Huber et al., 2008), to proponents of the efficiency hypothesis (Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo, 2001) or supporters of the compensation hypothesis (Rudra & Haggard, 2005). Translating this to the sub-national level, I include net trade of regions to account for changing trade patterns across Turkey. Lastly, to ensure that changes are not driven by overall demographic patterns, I include changes in the population (overall and economically active).

On the household-level, I control for several characteristics that may directly affect benefit receipt due to different eligibility criteria. Most importantly, I calculate if a household is living in poverty using 50 percent of the median income of that year and disposable income of the household as most programs in Turkey are means-tested at roughly around threshold. I include this as a dummy variable into the analysis. For the second analysis, this risk of poverty variable serves as the main social assistance eligibility criterion. Further, I control for household characteristics that may influence social assistance receipt such as household size (number of persons) and size of the dwelling (area). Lastly, I attempt to capture subjective poverty by utilizing the question that asks respondents about their perceived "ability to make ends meet with total monthly household income", as this may affect the likelihood of applying and claiming social assistance programs. I apply the same OECD-modified equivalence scale as for the social assistance benefits above.

Table 2: *Summary Statistics for Household Level Analysis*

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Social Cash Assistance Coverage	200,243	0.04	0.19	0.00	1.00
Regional Level					
Demonstrations (logged)	200,231	3.54	1.21	0.00	6.34
Number of Districts below 10 percent Margin	200,243	1.63	1.61	0.00	6.00
AKP Vote share (region)	200,243	45.51	9.08	19.52	63.35
Net Regional Trade Balance	200,243	-4629685	13800000	-65400000	4739593
Regional GDP per capita	200,243	17458.93	9059	3851	65041
Population (Econ Active)	200,243	2497.19	1299.27	633.00	6578.00
Regional Unemployment Rate	200,243	10.17	2.88	2.80	18.70
Household-Level Characteristics					
Poor HH (equivalized)	200,243	0.18	0.39	0.00	1.00
Number of household members	200,219	3.67	1.96	1.00	30.00
Subjective Poverty (ability to make ends meet 1 – great difficulty 6 – very easily)	200,219	2.75	1.21	1.00	6.00
Size of dwelling (in m²)	200,219	103.37	32.82	25.00	750.00

Figure 1: *Overview of Regions by Demonstrations and Electoral Competition*



IV. Results

I present the results of my analysis in two steps. First, I examine if demonstrations have a positive effect on social cash assistance receipt conditional on electoral competition using the whole sample. In a second step, I examine the types of recipients for whom social cash coverage tends to increase when demonstrations occur during electorally favorable conditions to uncover the distributive logic utilized by the government. Table 1 reports the results of the fixed effect models with different specifications. As I am interested in the effect of demonstrations conditional on electoral factors, I focus on the marginal effects of the different interaction terms. Models 2 and 3 report the two-way interactions between demonstrations and electoral competition, whereas models 4 and 5 report three-way interactions that include a dummy for the election year. It should be noted that when analyzing interaction effects, especially three-way interactions, drawing conclusions about marginal effects of one variable when others are included in the model from coefficients is difficult (Zarate Tenorio, 2014). I therefore calculate and display marginal effects of the interaction for meaningful values of covariates to assess whether demonstrations have a conditional effect on social assistance spending conditional on electoral conditions. These figures provide a more intuitive understanding of the results of my models.

Overall Results

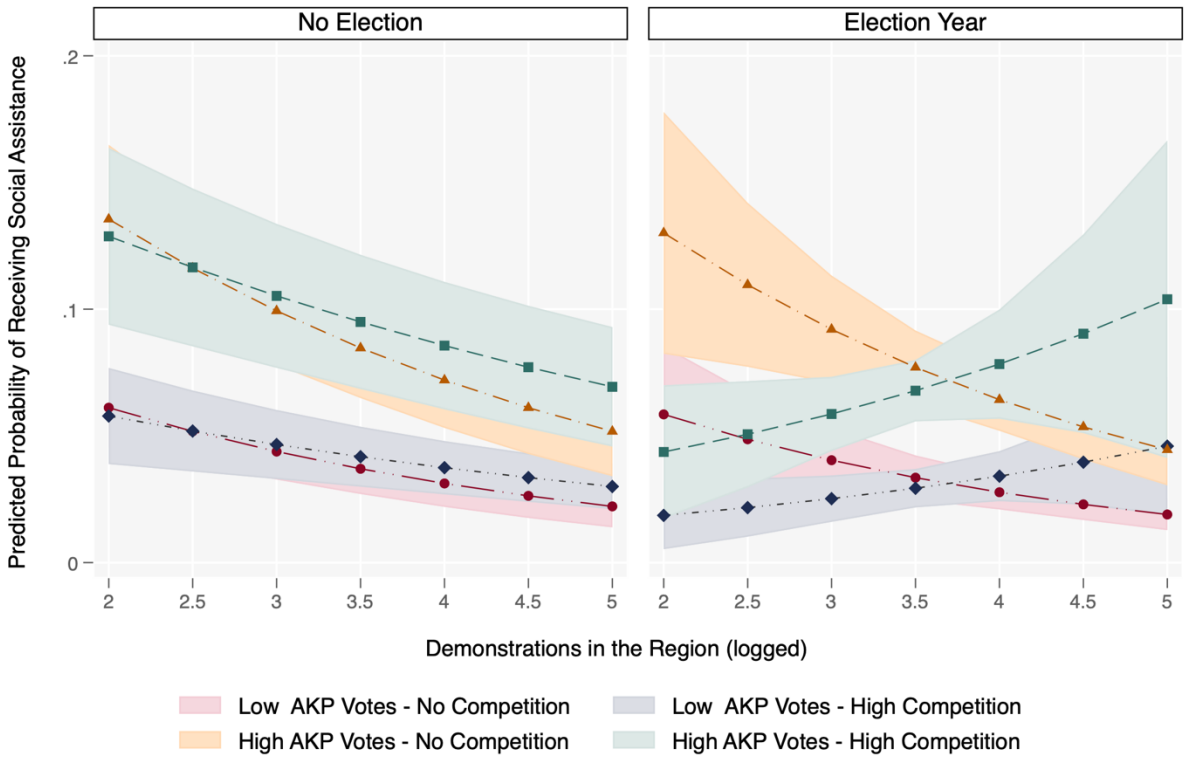
Model 1 (Table 1) reports the results without the interaction effect. When demonstrations are examined without the interaction, I observe a significant negative association on social assistance coverage. On average, demonstrations are associated with lower likelihoods for social assistance coverage. This changes when I examine models 2-5 (Table 1) that include interaction terms with electoral variables. The interaction effect between demonstrations and electoral competition is positive and reaches conventional levels of statistical significance for the models without controls and is significant when covariates are included.

Table 1: *Estimated Effects of Demonstrations Conditional on Electoral Competition on Social Assistance Coverage*

	No Interaction	Two-Way-Interaction		Three-Way-Interaction	
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**
VARIABLES	Social Assistance Coverage	Social Assistance Coverage	Social Assistance Coverage	Social Assistance Coverage	Social Assistance Coverage
Regional Variables					
Demonstrations (logged)	-0.31***	-0.54***	-0.35***	-0.55***	-0.35***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Electoral Competition	0.02	-0.13	-0.14*	-0.11	-0.10
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.09)
Demonstrations*Electoral Competition		0.05	0.05**	0.05	0.04
		(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Election Year (dummy)			-0.21***	0.27	0.03
			(0.06)	(0.38)	(0.34)
Demonstrations*Elec.Competition*Elec.Year				0.11	0.19**
				(0.07)	(0.08)
AKP Vote share (region)	0.03***	0.02***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Net Regional Trade Balance	0.00		-0.00		-0.00
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
GDP per capita (region)	-0.00		-0.00		0.00
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Population (Econ. Active)	0.00		0.00		0.00
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Regional Unemployment Rate	0.09***		0.09***		0.10***
	(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.02)
Household Level Variables					
Poverty (equivalized – 50 percent of Median)	1.50***		1.50***		1.50***
	(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)
Number of household members	0.09***		0.09***		0.09***
	(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.02)
Subjective Poverty (ability to make ends meet)	-0.42***		-0.42***		-0.42***
	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)
Size of dwelling (in m^2)	-0.01***		-0.01***		-0.01***
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Constant	-4.05***	-2.11***	-3.68***	-2.08***	-3.44***
	(0.90)	(0.26)	(0.98)	(0.30)	(0.81)
Regional Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	200,219	200,219	200,219	200,219	200,219

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 Note: The three-way interaction includes combinations in the model and have been taken out here for brevity.

Figure 2: *Predictive Margins of Demonstrations conditional on Electoral Competition (M 5)*



At the household-level, the model confirms all expected trends: I find a significant positive effect of relative poverty, the number of household members, and subjective poverty. Larger households, being in relative poverty, and reporting having difficulty to make ends meet are all associated with higher levels of social assistance coverage. Lastly, living in larger houses and apartments decreases the likelihood of social assistance receipt significantly. On the regional level, AKP support is associated with significantly higher social assistance coverage and unemployment with significantly lower social assistance coverage. The other covariates do not yield statistically significant results.

To understand if the results have substantive meaning, I turn to Figure 2. This margins plot is based on model 5 and fixes AKP votes and competition at one standard deviation above and below the mean to test different conditions under which demonstrations may have an effect on social assistance distribution. I further differentiate if the effect of demonstrations on social assistance is

different by election year to control if the effect is different when the previous year was an election year.[22]

First, high support for the governing AKP shows higher coverage rates of social assistance programs, confirming the core-voter hypothesis theorem that proposes that the largest channeling of resources will target strongholds of incumbents. All yellow and green lines show higher average coverage rates compared to the red and navy lines in Figure 2. Second, demonstrations generally have a negative effect on social assistance coverage. This result echoes the findings from models without the interaction effect (M1), yet this conceals an interesting combination of factors that reverts this trend: Demonstrations close to an election, in regions where the race is competitive, lead to a reversal of the direction of this relationship. Demonstrations before the election in regions with high competition are associated with statistically and substantively significant increases in benefit receipt of social cash assistance programs in Turkey. When electoral competition is high, regions with high demonstrations (e.g. Mediterranean, Southeast Anatolia) show a significantly higher coverage of social cash transfers than regions without them (Northeast Anatolia, Aegen). The overall support for the AKP is not the driving factor of the shift in direction, as both the navy and green line (for high and low AKP support) show this reversal of trends in Figure 2 (right). Substantively, I find that support for the governing party is associated with higher levels of social assistance benefit receipt (coverage), while demonstrations during electorally conducive points in time influence the direction of change.

Results of the analysis of generosity of social cash programs point to a similar direction. This analysis includes all households that receive social cash transfers and is therefore not an indicator of overall spending but benefit generosity levels. Predicted per capita benefits per household for

[22] I conduct robustness checks to test if social assistance coverage changes the same year as the election yields the same outcome, compared to the year before. The results yield a very similar picture. Other specifications do not work.

different levels of demonstrations are not significantly different when no electoral competition exists. However, during election times, the combination of demonstrations and high electoral competitions shows statistically significantly higher levels of generosity. On average, annual per household assistance receipt in regions with demonstrations and competition doubles, from below 500 to just above 1000 TL/year per household. In substantive terms, this means that it is both, coverage and generosity that responds positively to demonstrations during electorally conducive times. Detailed results and figures of this generosity analyses and the results of the regional level analysis that confirm these findings and can be found in the Appendix Figures A10-11 and Table A7.

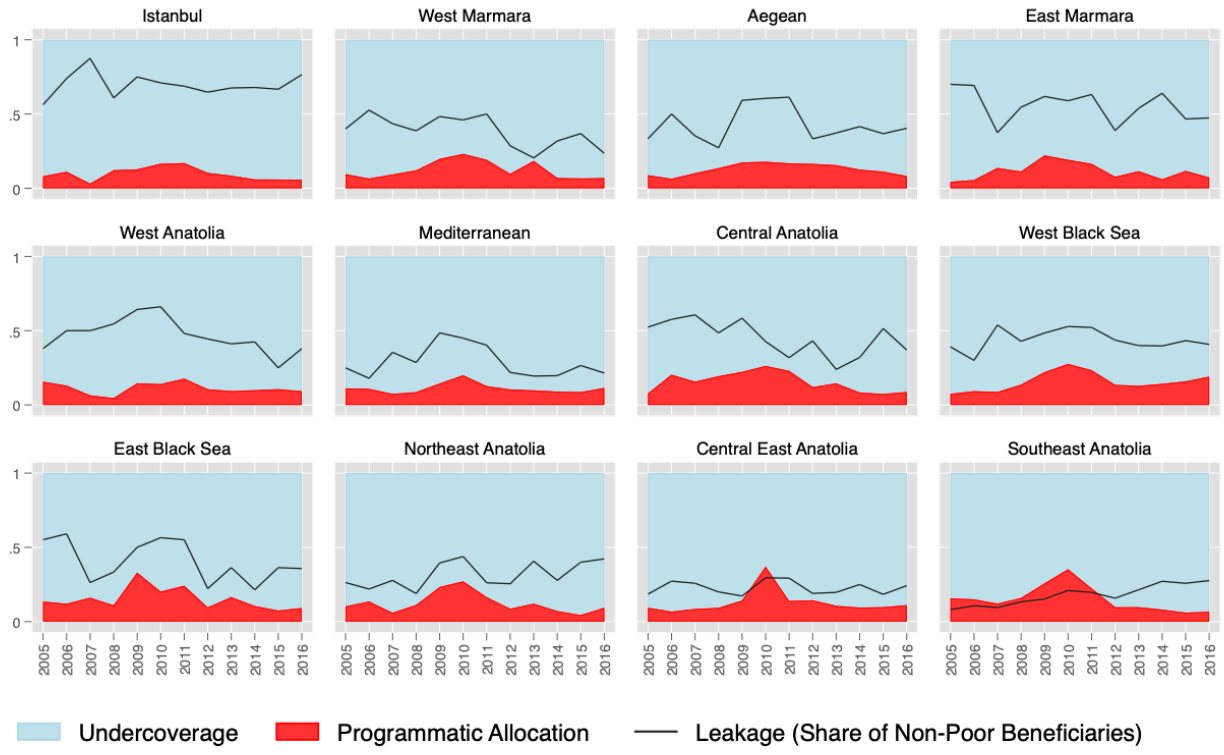
Distributional Logic of Social Assistance

The second step of the analysis focuses on the distributional logic of social assistance. Do social assistance programs reach more poor people with increasing levels of contestation or does leakage to non-poor increase? To understand changes in the makeup of benefit recipients, the "at risk of poverty" definition (being below 50 percent of the median income of that year) by the Turkish Statistical Organization is used. Using this approach, I code respondents in the survey into four groups:

***Table 4**: Classification of Social Cash Benefit Recipients (cross tabs with frequencies in the Appendix Table A5)*

	Not at Risk of Poverty	**At Risk of Poverty**
No Social Assistance Beneficiary	*True Negative* **Correct Exclusion**	*False Negative* **Type I "Exclusion" Error** ***Under-coverage***
Social Assistance Beneficiary	*False Positive* **Type II "Inclusion" Error** ***Leakage***	**Correct Inclusion**

Figure 3: *Share of People in Relative Poverty receiving Social Assistance*



I then apply the same statistical models as above, on two dependent variables coded as dummies: The first one captures undercoverage (poor household that does not receive benefits) vs. programmatic allocation (poor household that receives benefits) while the second captures leakage (benefit payments to non-poor citizens) vs. programmatic allocation. Each time programmatic allocation is coded as 1. Figure 3 provides a descriptive overview of the results by region. The y-axis includes all households in Turkey classified in relative poverty. The orange area shows the share of the poor that receive social assistance, the light blue signifies the share that does not. I also add a line that signifies that share of leakage, the share of non-poor citizens that receive assistance compared to poor who do. While the share of leakage compared to programmatic allocation is higher, the absolute values are much lower than for undercoverage compared to programmatic allocation, meaning more poor people do not receive benefits, compared to potentially non-poor who do. This set-up enables us to understand how the composition of recipients and non-recipients is changing in response to the aforementioned political factors in

regard to their likely eligibility for social assistance (purely based on income). The results of the analysis are provided below, with detailed tables and regression results in the Appendix.

Among recipients of social cash transfers, only around 62 percent are in relative poverty while 38 percent are not. Though this number seems high, it might be due to the fact that there are social assistance benefits in Turkey that go beyond mere income measurements (e.g. birth grants for new mothers etc.) and that benefits often focus on the poorest. However, a majority of the programs either directly means test their beneficiaries or use a proxy. The share of people at risk of poverty who do not receive social cash transfers constitute the large majority at 88 percent (see Appendix for the full table A5). This is a little more puzzling, as I should expect that a larger share of people with poverty risk should be eligible to and receive social assistance benefits. I examine both these number to examine if political factors may help explain this phenomenon.

Figure 4: *Predictive Margins for Programmatic Coverage vs. Undercoverage*

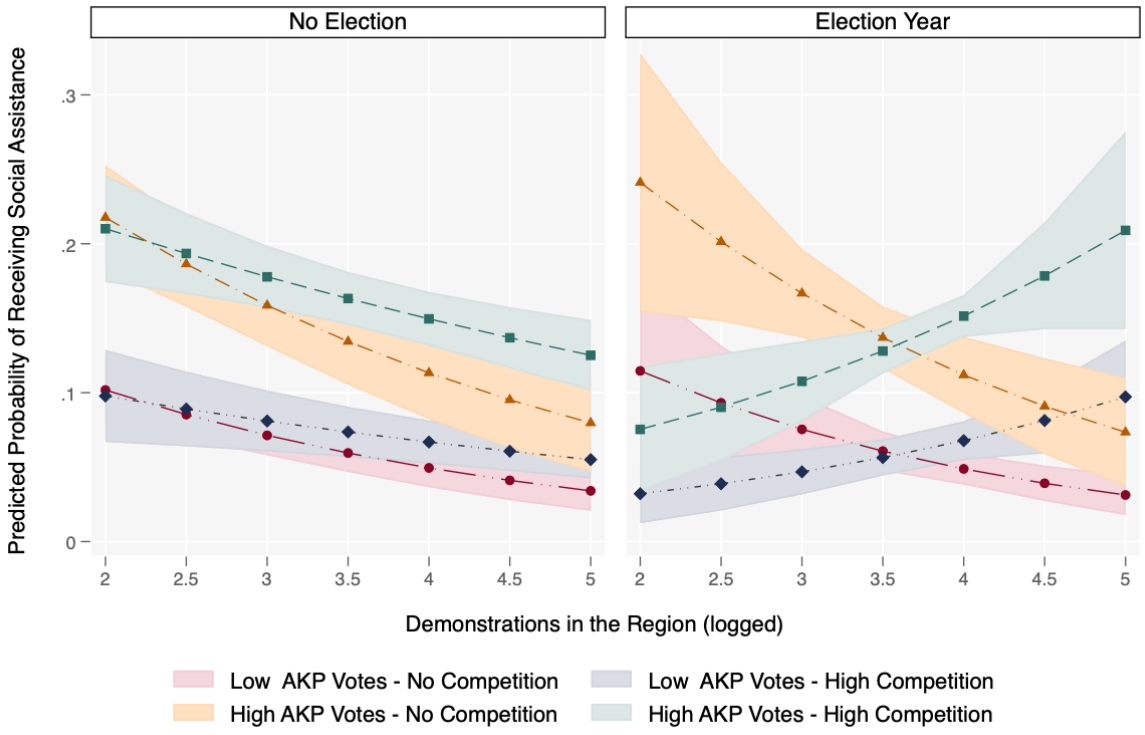
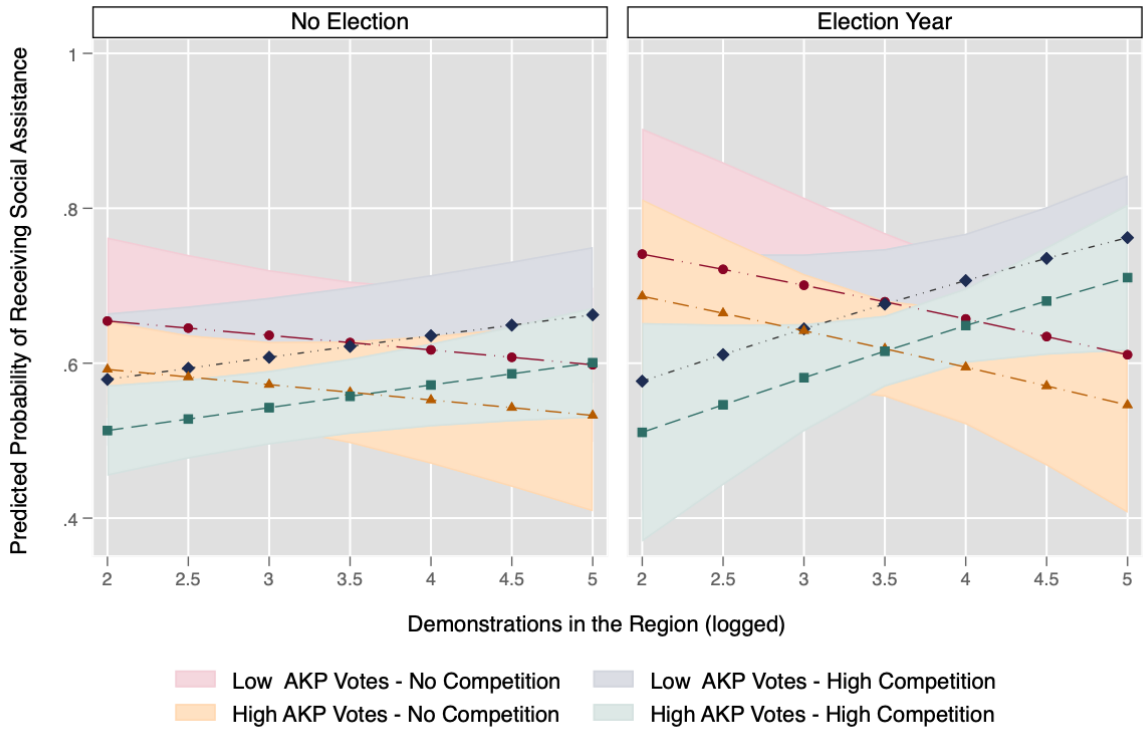


Figure 4 shows the results of the same model specification as model 5 regressed on undercoverage vs. programmatic allocation. These results show a similar picture as above, with even clearer results. Demonstrations generally have a negative effect. During electorally conducive times (competition close to an election), the effect of demonstrations becomes positive. This interplay is associated with a higher number of people in relative poverty receiving social assistance benefits (less undercoverage). The results are insignificant for the analysis of leakage vs. programmatic allocation of benefits (Figure 5).

Figure 5: *Predictive Margins for Programmatic Coverage vs. Leakage*



In summary, a closer look into the groups of beneficiaries reveals that it is not leakage to non-poor parts of the population that drive this trend, but rather the distribution of benefits to the poor, previously not reached by social cash assistance programs. Demonstrations during times of electoral competition are associated with more targeted social cash benefits to the poor. The distributional logic used by governments points towards primary distribution to core-voters of the incumbent AKP, with subsequent distribution to electorally volatile regions, where social unrest occurred. I show that examining the nexus between contentious politics and elections can add value as an explanation of the recent surge in social assistance programs. Further, my findings

provide interesting insights into the distribution of noncontributory benefits in resource strained environments and shed lights on the distributional dynamics that can occur during the expansion of social assistance.

Importantly, protests by the formal working class do not show a significant effect on social assistance benefits in *all* previous analyses above (see table in the Appendix A7). The effect only occurs when examining protest events that were likely frequented by people without formal working relationships and/or the poorer segments in society across the country. Protests organized by labor unions and with participants from the formal sector do not show this significant association with changes in noncontributory social policies. Further research could explore if these industrial action events can be linked to changes in labor market regulations and contributory social policies.

V. Discussion & Mechanism

In this paper, I show the importance of going beyond measures of electoral competition when attempting to understand the distribution of social assistance in Turkey. Specifically, social cash benefit coverage and generosity are positively associated with higher social cash transfers in regions that experienced high levels of demonstrations during electorally conducive times. The co-occurrence of electoral competition and demonstrations is associated with the distribution of social cash benefits to the poor who were not previously covered.

My study adds nuance to the core-swing voter debate by specifying when each of them holds true. It further adds poor-voters as a potential group that can be targeted by governments using social assistance. I suggest that the distribution of social cash benefit coverage and generosity is driven by regions that either fully support the incumbent government **(not protesting AKP strongholds)** or regions were elections are likely to be close and there is a high number of demonstrations **(protesting electoral challengers).** In regions with protesting electoral challengers, I find that

the allocation of social assistance benefits to the poor is higher, signifying a shift in the distributional logic used by the government. Therefore, it seems that a comprehensive understanding of political factors can aid to illuminate under which conditions incumbent governments expand social assistance policies. It suggests that studying social policy outcomes and how they are influenced by electoral competition *(pressure from the top – electoral mobilization motive*) should not be done without considering contentious political action *(pressure from below – social containment motive).*

But how can the incumbent party allocate social assistance benefits in a politically favorable way? To understand the mechanism underlying this political use of benefits, I turn to the institutional structure of the social assistance administration in Turkey. Specifically, I delve deeper into the institutional structure and selection processes of beneficiaries. After assuming power, the AKP government restructured institutions that implement social assistance, with suggestions by the World Bank, including the transformation of the SYDTF into a Directorate of Social Assistance (Sosyal Yardımlar ve Dayanışma Genel Müdürlüğü, SYDGM) to expand social assistance and build capacity (Öktem, 2018). This newly formed government agency reported directly to the Prime Minister, had access to extra-budgetary central government funds and thus enjoyed high degrees of autonomy (Özdemir, 2020). The SYDGM acts as an umbrella organization of the state that supervises roughly 1,000 locally based Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakıfları) that implement programs across all sub-provincal districts. The board of trustees of these foundations are spearheaded by the governor appointed by the central government and consist of centrally appointed local bureaucrats, local mayors, religious leaders, civil society representatives and philanthropists. Though many municipal governments are governed by opposition parties, this structural dominance of the central government in the decision making body of the foundations is a strategic lever that can be used to influence the allocation of benefits across Turkey. Aytaç (2014) has shown that the boards have the power to overrule formal

eligibility criteria, the proxy-means test, and the findings from the house visits, providing the opportunity for discretionary allocation of benefits in favor of the incumbent party on the national level.

VI. Conclusion

In this article, I argued that the literature on distributive politics should go beyond their singular focus on electoral determinants and examine how the interplay between demonstrations and electoral competition affect social policy outcomes. The results show that first, regions with high support for the governing AKP show higher coverage rates of social assistance programs, confirming the core-voter hypothesis. Second, demonstrations in regions where the race is competitive close to an election, I find that the focus shifts to the poor- instead of the core-voter. Centrally, I find that support for the governing party is associated with the level of coverage, while demonstrations during electorally conducive points in time influences the direction of change. Lastly, a closer look into the groups of beneficiaries reveals that it is not leakage to non-poor parts of the population, but rather increased distribution of benefits to the poor. In other words, the combination of electoral competition and demonstrations increases the share of poor among social assistance beneficiaries. When there are infrequent demonstrations and there is no (or little) electoral competition, the share of cash benefits received by non-poor citizens is found to be higher, pointing towards distribution following the core-voter hypothesis. I show that examining the nexus between contentious politics and elections can add value as an explanation of the recent surge in social assistance programs.

The expansion and politization of social assistance programs in Turkey are just one example of this trend among many in the Global South (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; ILO, 2014). *Dibao* in China, *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil, *Prospera* in Mexico, the *Child Support Grant* in South Africa, and the *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* in India are examples of this larger trend that I can observe. In

unison, 2019 has highlighted the importance and continued relevance of global uprisings and protests with people from Chile, Bolivia, Lebanon, Hong Kong to France demanding reforms by their governments and voicing their discontents. While some of them have been struggles for democracy and against corruption (Colombia, Indonesia, and Iraq) others have clearly demanded social change and the enactment of a variety of social reforms to counter income inequality from their governments (Chile, Lebanon, and France) (VOA, 2019).[23] Especially when remembering that the Arab-Spring uprisings had chimed in this decade of protests, it can be argued that the poor are increasingly positioning themselves as political actors capable of demanding change by paralyzing their respective regimes (Chenoweth 2007; Singer 2014; Sridharan 2014; Taydas and Peksen 2012; Yörük and Yüksel 2014). Thus, the political influence of the poor in the distribution of anti-poverty programs ought to be considered, not only with their voting behavior related to these programs (see De La O, 2013; Thachil, 2014), but also their power to use contentious politics to make their voices heard in emerging economies and beyond.

The extension of social policies from programs enjoyed by workers in the formal sector to noncontributory programs that reach the informal and rural sectors in emerging economies were a vital development during the last two decades. This extension needs to be vetted for the influence of the interplay between contentious and electoral politics to understand the distributional logic that underlies them. Similarly, Yörük & Gençer (2021), find that the Child support grant in South Africa is being used as a tool for electoral politics and containment of unrest simultaneously.

This importance of the incentives and political motives for social assistance policies must be understood in its implications for outcomes for the "targeted" population. Outcomes for the poor appear to be different, depending on the intentions of the governments enacting it. I know that

[23] https://www.voanews.com/americas/global-protests-2019-demonstrators-around-world-demand-reform accessed December 2nd, 2019

clientelistic, discretionary transfers fare worse in sustainable poverty alleviation compared to rules and rights based social assistance programs. Yet, rules and rights based public goods provision is a riskier vote-buying strategy as it is harder to monitor and non-excludable compared to clientelistic discretionary transfers. Thus, there is an incentive for incumbents to expand discretionary programs (Magaloni et al., 2007). Diaz-Cayeros (2016) shows that in Mexico, public goods provision yields to "less votes per peso" compared to particularistic transfers. The causes that lead incumbent governments to expand social assistance programs have been shown to have direct effects on their policy design choices as well. How targeted or universal, discretionary or rules based a policy is depends also on the political motives and contexts that governments face (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). A legal basis for social benefits, transparency on how benefits are allocated, expanding coverage to all poor people, and increased generosity to go beyond palliative measures of poverty alleviation would help to improve the financial situation for the poor in Turkey. Further, it seems that the fragmented nature and inconsistent eligibility criteria makes it hard for citizens to understand which programs exist and for academics to evaluate the programmatic nature of benefit allocation.

Understanding inherent logics of distribution of social assistance systems, how they are politicized, who they are reaching, who is barred from access, and how they are disseminated has become ever more important with the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent ad hoc expansion of social assistance programs worldwide to cope with the economic and social effects of the necessary public health measures induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, will likely exacerbate these problems (Gentilini et al., 2020). Further research should pay close attention to these new benefits, how they are allocated and how the pandemic will shape the social assistance system in Turkey and beyond.

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Appendix

When do demonstrations matter for social assistance expansion?

A case study of electoral and contentious dynamics in Turkey

Table A1: *Results of Three-Way-Interaction Models on Undercoverage and Leakage*

VARIABLES	(1) Leakage vs. Programmatic Allocation	(1) Undercoverage vs. Programmatic Allocation
Demonstrations (logged)	-0.08	-0.39***
	(0.10)	(0.08)
Electoral Competition (Number of Districts below 10% Margin)	-0.24***	-0.14
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Demonstrations*Electoral Competition	0.07**	0.06**
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Election Year (dummy)	0.65	0.28
	(0.45)	(0.41)
Demonstrations*Electoral Competition*Election Year	0.10	0.22***
	(0.07)	(0.08)
AKP Vote share (region)	-0.01	0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.00)
Number of household members	0.01	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.01)
Subjective Poverty (ability to make ends meet)	-0.62***	-0.36***
	(0.05)	(0.03)
Size of dwelling (in m^2)	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Net Regional Trade Balance	0.00***	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
GDP per capita (region)	0.00***	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Population (Econ. Active)	-0.00*	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Regional Unemployment Rate	-0.06***	0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.02)
Constant	3.84***	-0.75
	(0.94)	(0.76)
Observations	7,640	36,571

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2: *Descriptive Statistics Regional Analysis*

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
AKP Vote share (region)	156	45	9	22	64
Protests By the People	156	28	45	0	382
Protests by Formal Workers	156	11	18	0	133
Child Allowance Kind Per Capita (real)	139	155	163	0	884
Child Allowance Cash Per Capita (real)	144	484	233	102	1218
Social Benefits Kind Transfers Per Capita (real)	144	322	112	127	541
Social Benefits Cash Transfers Per Capita (real)	144	640	519	24	2628
Education Benefit Transfers Per Capita (real)	144	18	12	0	63
Disability Benefit and Social Pension Transfers Per Capita (real)	144	92	37	24	210
Coverage of Social Assistance	144	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.5
Social Benefits Coverage	144	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Child Allowance Coverage	144	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3
Number of Districts with 5% Margin	156	0	0	0	2
Number of Districts with 10% Margin	156	0.3	0.7	0	4
Number of Districts with 15% Margin	156	0.5	0.9	0	5
Regional GDP per Capita	156	16076	9480	3851	54933
Unemployment Rate	156	9.9	3.2	2.8	18.7
Number of Hospitals per thnds	156	114	47	43	238
Population (Econ.Active)	156	2153	1266	633	6427
Number of People in Poverty (in thnds - below 60 median)	132	5015	2097	1212	10871

Table A3: *Descriptive Statistics Household-Level Analysis*

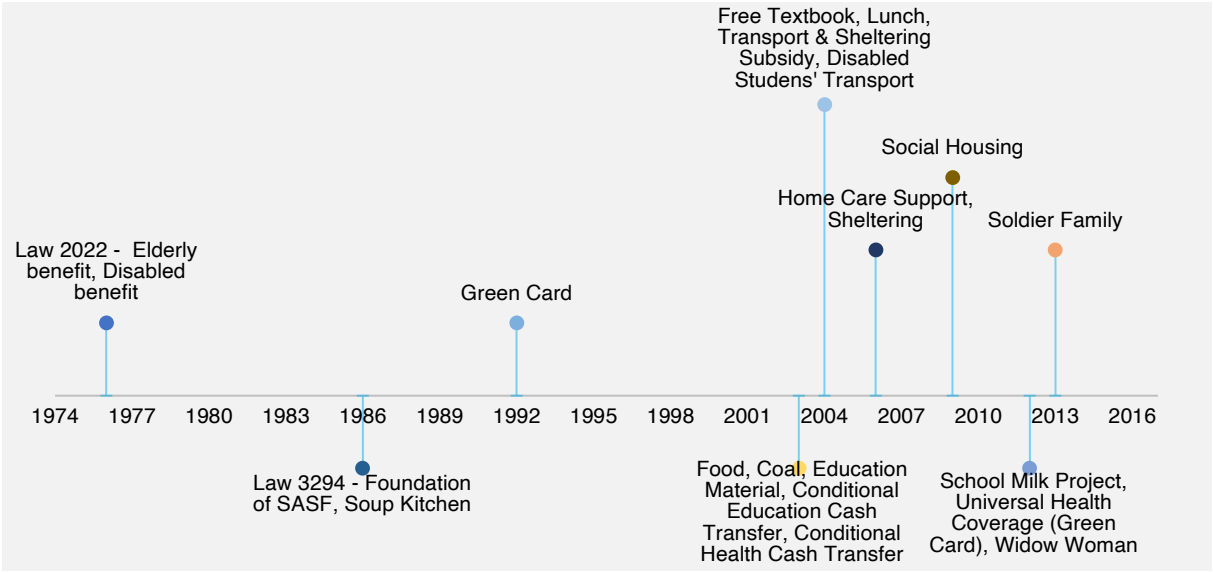
Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Social Cash Assistance Coverage	200,243	0.04	0.19	0.00	1.00
Regional Level					
Protests By the People	200,231	3.54	1.21	0.00	6.34
Number of Districts below 10% Margin	200,243	1.63	1.61	0.00	6.00
AKP Vote share (region)	200,243	45.51	9.08	19.52	63.35
Net Regional Trade Balance	200,243	-4629685	13800000	-65400000	4739593
Regional GDP per capita	200,243	17458.93	9059	3851	65041
Population (Econ Active)	200,243	2497.19	1299.27	633.00	6578.00
Regional Unemployment Rate	200,243	10.17	2.88	2.80	18.70

Household Level Characteristics					
Relative Poverty (equivalized)	200,243	0.18	0.39	0.00	1.00
Number of household members	200,219	3.67	1.96	1.00	30.00
Subjective Poverty (ability to make ends meet)	200,219	2.75	1.21	1.00	6.00
Size of dwelling (in m^2)	200,219	103.37	32.82	25.00	999.00

Table A4: *NUTS1 Region Codes and Full Names*

NUTS 1 REGIONS OF TURKEY	
Istanbul Region (TR1)	Central Anatolia Region (TR7)
West Marmara Region (TR2)	West Black Sea Region (TR8)
Aegean Region (TR3)	East Black Sea Region (TR9)
East Marmara Region (TR4)	Northeast Anatolia Region (TRA)
West Anatolia Region (TR5)	Central East Anatolia Region (TRB)
Mediterranean Region (TR6)	Southeast Anatolia Region (TRC)

Figure A1: *The Timeline of Social Assistance Programs in Turkey*



Information from World Bank Turkey Report

Figure A2: *Descriptive Figures on Average per Capita Transfers National*

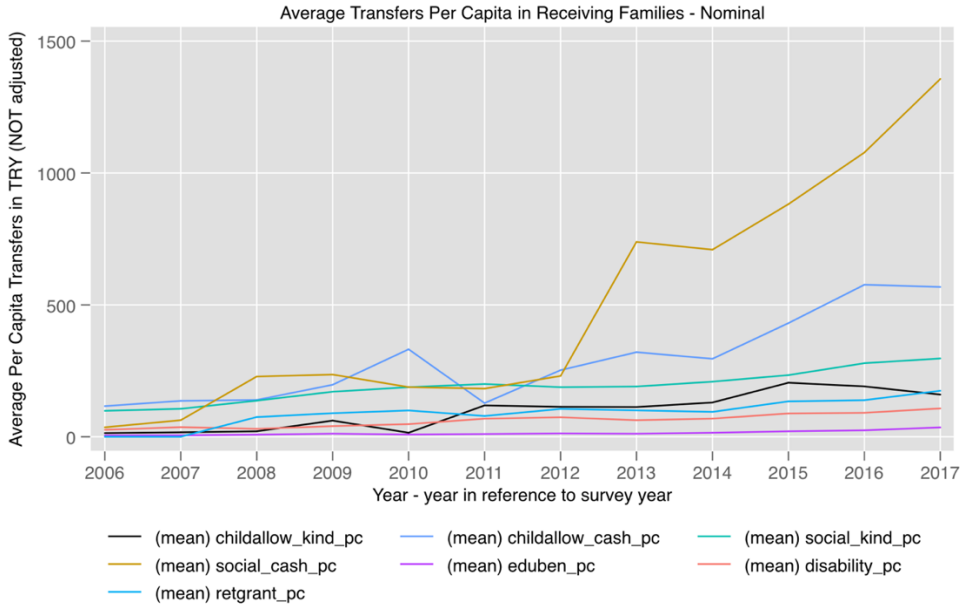


Figure A3: *Descriptive Figures on Average per Capita Transfers Regional*

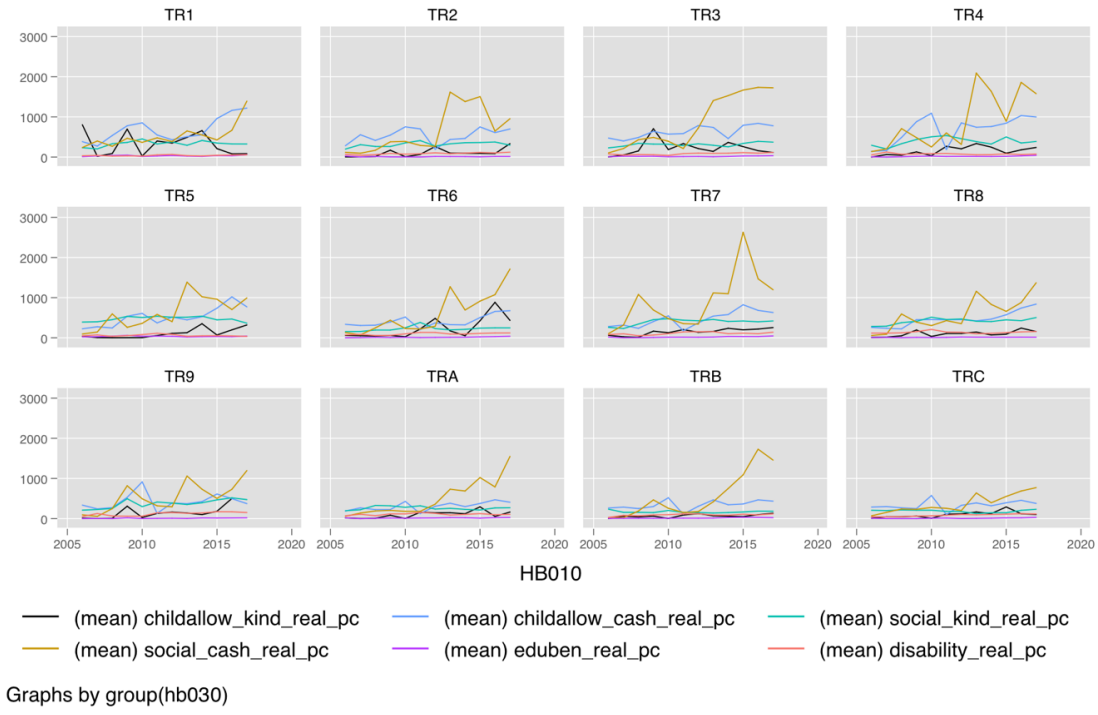


Figure A4: *Descriptive Figures on Coverage National*

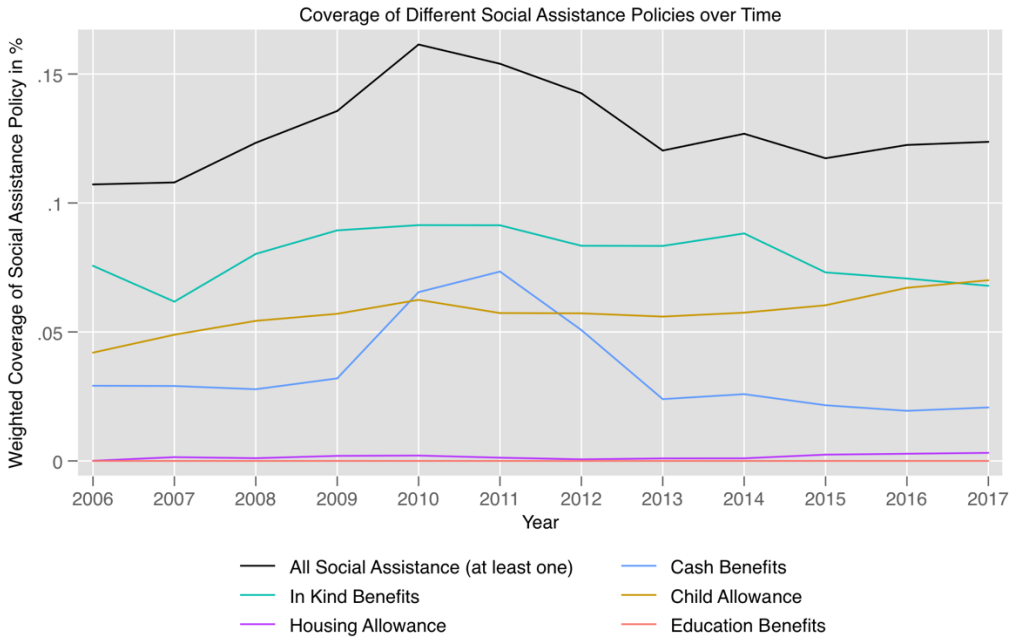


Figure A5: *Descriptive Figures on Coverage Regional*

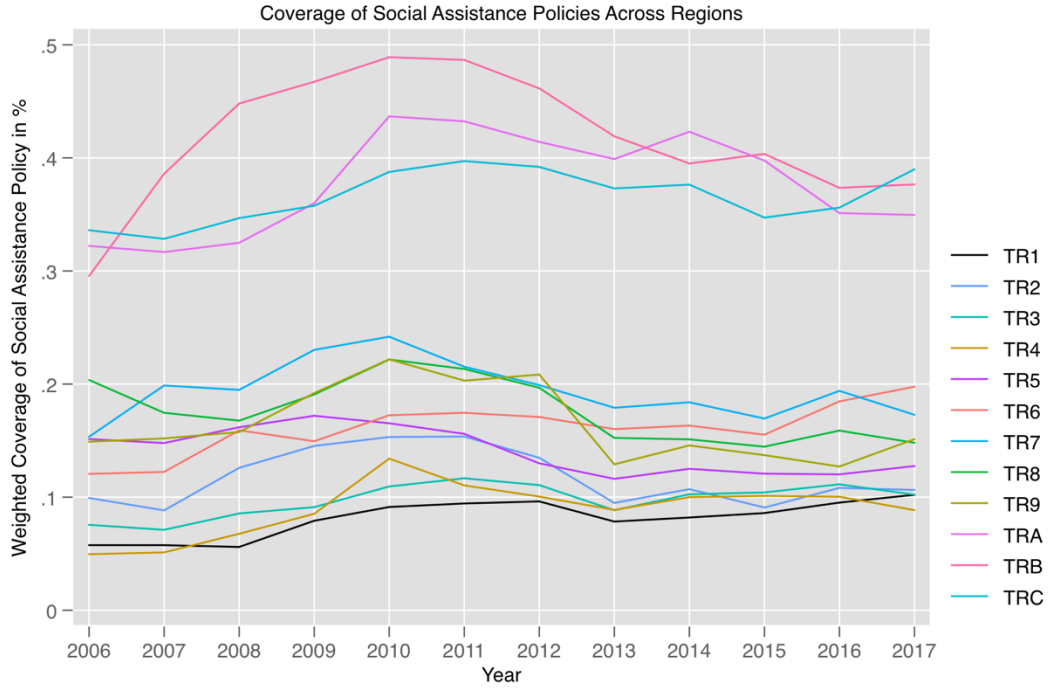


Table A5: *Descriptive Figures on Coverage Regional*

Relative Poverty	Not Receiving Social Assistance	Receiving Social Assistance	Total
Not in Relative Poverty	161,474	3,584	165,058
	83.81	46.91	82.4
Relative Poverty	31,189	4,056	35,245
	16.19	53.09	17.6
Total	192,663	7,640	200,303
	100	100	100

Figure A6: *Margins of the Interaction Effect using AKP Votes (Generosity)*

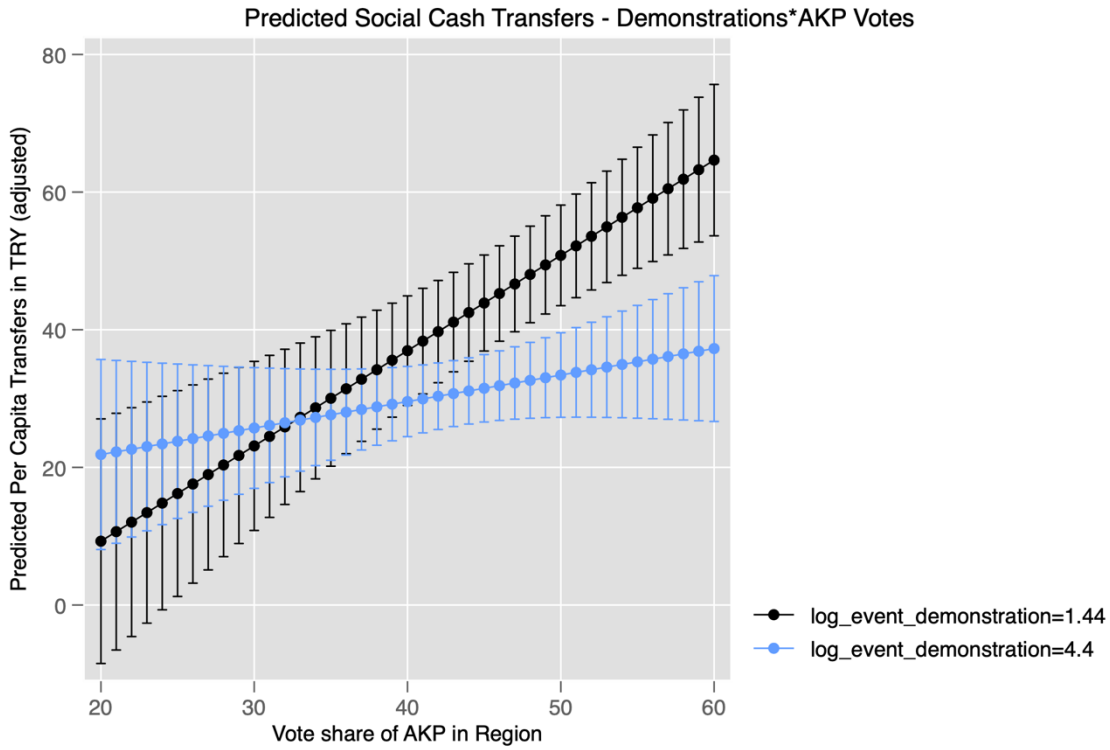
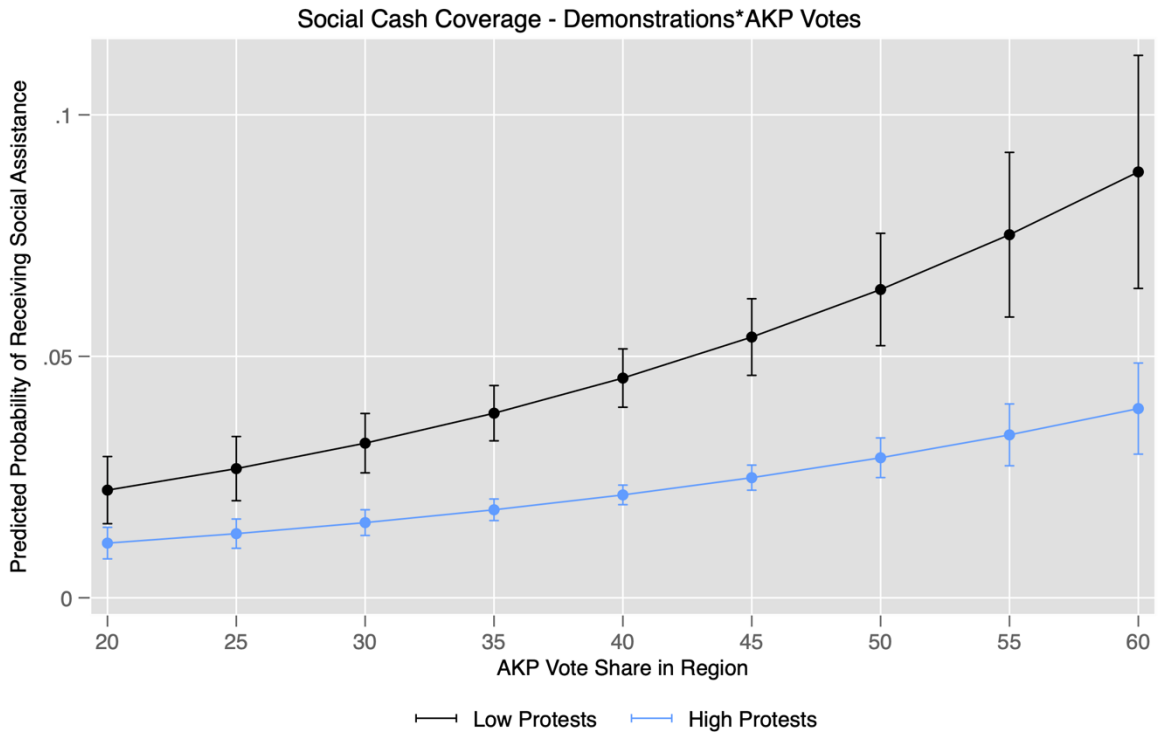


Figure A7: *Margins of the Interaction Effect using AKP Votes (Coverage)*



Demonstrations by the Poor – An approximation using SILC data

We use all available waves of the Turkish Standard of Income, and Living Surveys (*Gelir ve Yaşam Koşulları Araştırması)* conducted and provided by the Turkish National Statistical Organization (TÜIK). The basic idea is to calculate the probability of living in poverty by group characteristics that overlap with the protest dataset. For the TÜIK approach, the two main factors are employment status and location. Employment group categories in the TÜIK SILC that can be matched to the protests are the following using the occupation code of the main job (isco-88) variable in SILC.

Category For Predicted Poverty	**Categories included in TÜIK**	**Categories from the Protest Data**
White-Collar Workers	Legislators, senior officials and managers Professionals Technicians and associate professionals Clerks	Professional Servant
Agriculture/Rural Workforce	Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	Peasant
University Student	All full-time students at higher education institutions	Student
Blue Collar Workers	Craft and related trades workers Plant and machine operators, and assemblers Elementary occupations	Worker Petty Bourgeoisie

The regions that overlap in the TÜIK and the protest dataset are the following 12 Turkish Regions: 1"Istanbul", 2"West Marmara", 3"Aegean", 4"East Marmara", 5"West Anatolia", 6"Mediterranean", 7"Central Anatolia", 8"Central Anatolia", 9"Central Anatolia", 10"Northeast Anatolia", 11"Northeast Anatolia", and 12"Southeast Anatolia".
With this information on occupation and income, we create a poverty dummy variable that is defined as all households below 60% of the median income in that survey year accounting for the number of family members. We use it as the dependent variable in logistic regression. The independent variables used are the occupation variable, the region, and the interaction of the two. For each scenario, we calculate predicted probabilities: e.g. a blue-collar worker in Central Anatolia.

$$PoorBelowMedian_i = \alpha + \beta 1(Occupation_i) + \beta_2(Region_i) + \beta_3(Occupation*Region_i) + \Phi X_i + \varepsilon$$

There are then several ways to create a final variable that indicates whether a protest was a "poor people's protest".

1. The number of Protest Events identified as Poor Protests – any protest that had a predicted probability above 50% is classified as a poor protest.
2. Number of Protest Events identified as Poor Protests – standardized predicted probability (lowest value as 0 highest as 100% - above 50% is classified as a poor protest).
3. Taking the mean for each year of the predicted probabilities of a protest being participated by "the poor."

We report the results for each of these options as separate variables in the dataset.

***Figure A8:** 1: The Social Assistance Expansion in Turkey (Data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policies)*

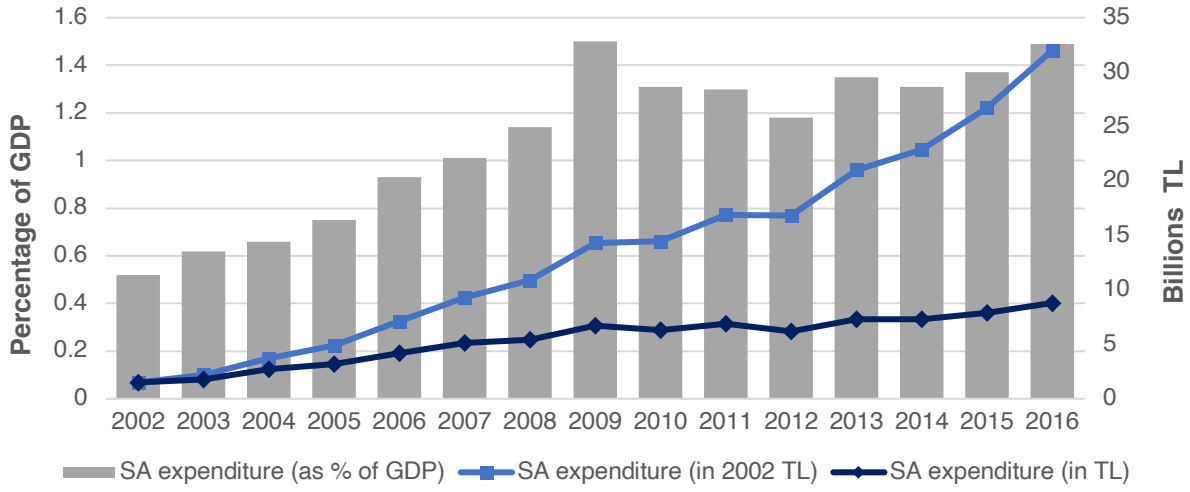


Table A6: *Overview of Social Assistance Programs in Turkey*

Type of Assistance	Program Name	Beneficiary/Applicant	Amount
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Birth assistance	Application priority belongs to the mother. Mother's Turkish citizen / Blue card or right In the absence of the application made by the father, with the same conditions.	TL 300 for first child TL 400 for second child TL 600 for third and subsequent children
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Multiple Birth Help	The mother or father or mother on behalf of her legal representative	150 TL
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	The meat was deceased wife Against Women Regular Cash Assistance Program	Last formally married his wife lost women	TL 325
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Orphans and Orphans Aid	If the parents has died, the father has died, her mother, they both died had been caring for the child if the person	150 TL
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Regular Cash Assistance Program for Military Families in Need	If married, spouse, mother or father is single	TL 400
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Soldier Children in Need of Help	From regular cash assistance program for needy military families army wife As people benefit	150 TL
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Terrorism Loss Aid	Family members over the age of 18	1,200 per month per household
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Disaster-Emergency Aid	Family members over the age of 18	Social Welfare and taking into account the urgent and basic needs Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees is determined according to need.
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Work Orientation Help	social assistance beneficiaries is directed to a job interview by TEO	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees within 1 year; Including a maximum of 3 times the net monthly minimum wage up to a maximum of 10% aid is granted.
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Starting Help	social assistance directed to a job interview by TEO recruited from a social security beneficiaries	The gross minimum wage 1/3 of what money keeps coming. In the same year a time of our Company.
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	Relatives of the Martyrs and Veterans Assistance Towards	Or veterans over the age of 18 martyrs	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation needed by the Board of Trustees It is determined by.
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Food assistance	Family members over the age of 18	It is determined according to need.
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	soup kitchens	Family members over the age of 18 (where the soup kitchen services the province / districts)	Hot meals are provided in the form.

ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Sheltering Assistance	Family members over the age of 18	Subject to the house for fulfilling the established criteria based on need and help repair of 20.000.-TL-TL 30.000. in prefabricated houses, reinforced concrete It supports up to 40,000 TL in homemade given.
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Social Housing Project	New applications are received.	Back pay is given to social housing
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Fuel Assistance	Family members over the age of 18	The quantity of coal to be distributed to households climatic conditions of the region, the past year considering the distribution of the amount and heating value of coal and Treasury Ministry of Finance is determined.
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Electricity Consumption Support	not need to make any reference to an institution, rights holders With ID Card and electric bill go to the Post Office branch is adequate.	1-2 person households to 75 kWh per month, 3-person household to 100 kWh per month, 4-person household to 125 kWh per month, 5 and more person households per month to 150 kWh amount of cash The support is provided.
ACCOMMODATION - FOOD	Social Adjustment Assistance (WATER)	Household members	£ 120
DISABLED - ELDERLY	The old pension	guardian or attorney with these individuals over the age of 65 persons	TL 763.67 for the period 01.01.2021-30.06.2021
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Disability pension	guardian or attorney with these individuals over the age of 18, people with disabilities	for the period 01.01.2021-30.06.2021; 40% to 69% TL 609.61 disability pension, And over 70% disability pension 914.41 TL
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Nearby the pension Disabled	18 years of small disabled relatives (parent, guardian)	TL 609.61 for the period 01.01.2021-30.06.2021
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Elderly and Disabled Care Projects (Wafa Projects)	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations	Policy decisions are determined by the frame for the project.
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Disability Needs Assistance	Family members over the age of 18	It is determined by the Board of Trustees.
HEALTH	Universal Health Insurance (UHI) Bonus Payments	Household members	G0 premiums amounted to £ 143.10
HEALTH	Qualified Health Benefits (Health and Pregnancy)	Family members over the age of 18	45 per month gestation period, 45 per child per month, a one-time $ 100 if done in the hospital's birth, During the first 2 months following the birth

			confinement for conditionally 45 per month,
HEALTH	Participation Fee Payments	Law 5510 60 / c-1 60 / C-3 under the general health persons insured with them as dependents listed on	Scope of hospitals in people, drugs, prescription, they pay the optical ingredient and to the person concerned by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations The total amount of contributions paid up share
HEALTH	Chronic Disease Assistance	Look at the person or persons responsible for patients with tuberculosis or SSPE patients	£ 1658.13
HEALTH	Payments made to silicosis patients	New applications are received.	for the period 01.01.2021-30.06.2021; Light silicosis pension (15% to 34%) 1317.23-TL Central silicosis pension (35% to 54%) per 1.505,41-, Heavy silicosis pension (55% and above) 1677.45 TL
HEALTH	Electricity Consumption in Patients with Chronic Illness Support	Patients itself, grounds to housebound patient's health condition The presence of said patient representative, guardian or by the parents In the absence of such application may be made on behalf of individuals such as patients Patients can also refer to the households by the Foundation staff.	According to the monthly consumption levels of electricity consumption device 200 Support The support is given up to TL. top for Uninterruptible Power Supply Support and Electrical Accumulated Debt Support limit is determined Foundations of financial means can be made.
EDUCATION	Conditional Training Aids	Family members over the age of 18	Primary male students 45 per month, $ 50 per month schoolgirl Secondary male students 55 per month, £ 75 per month schoolgirl
EDUCATION	Conditional Education Assistance for Foreigners (YŞEY)	Household members	Master class for students from the 8th grade; Girl students £ 50 per month Male students 45 per month Classes for students aged 9 to 12; Girl students to 75 per month Male students 55 per month

EDUCATION	Training Material Assistance	Family members over the age of 18	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation needed by the Board of Trustees The foundation may be made by determining the financial facilities.
EDUCATION	Student Housing-Transport-Food Aid	Family members over the age of 18	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation needed by the Board of Trustees It is determined by.
EDUCATION	Dormitory Construction	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees and project decision document is determined according to Bakanlıkc.
EDUCATION	Aids to the Higher Education Students	Students over 18 years of age or family members	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation needed by the Board of Trustees The foundation may be made by determining the financial facilities.
EDUCATION	Various Training Aids	Family members over the age of 18	It is determined according to need.

Figure A9: *Voting preferences by Income brackets in Turkey (original survey data from December 2020)*

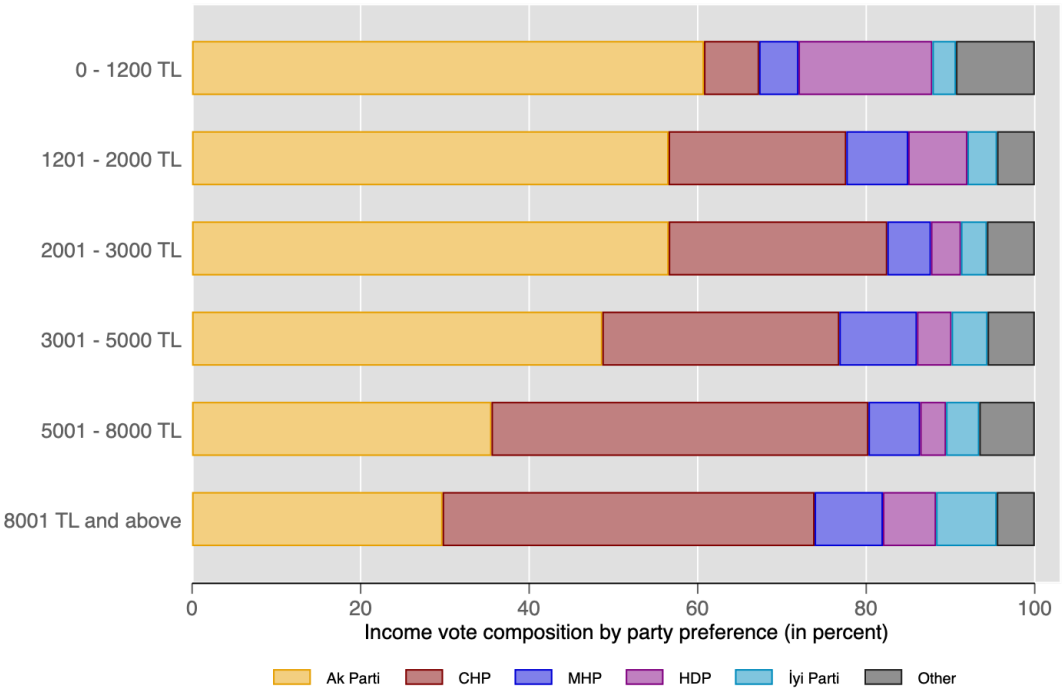


Figure A10: *Results for Generosity on the Regional Level (Marginsplot for Social Cash Transfers)*

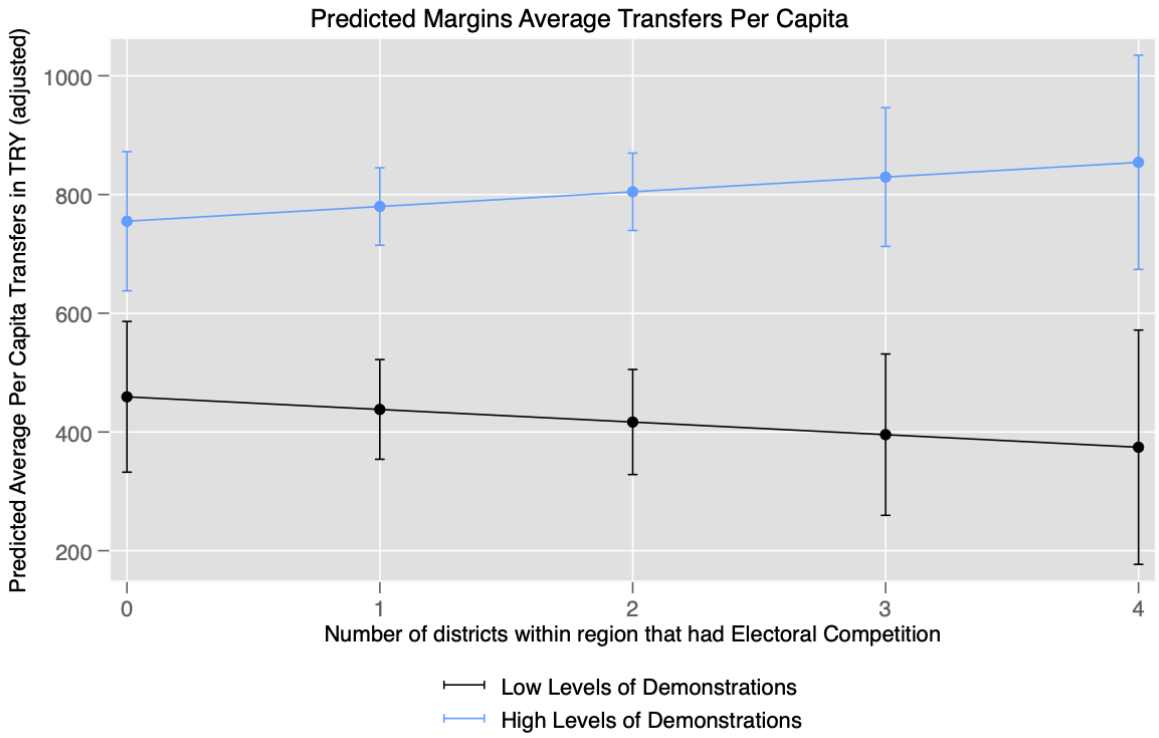
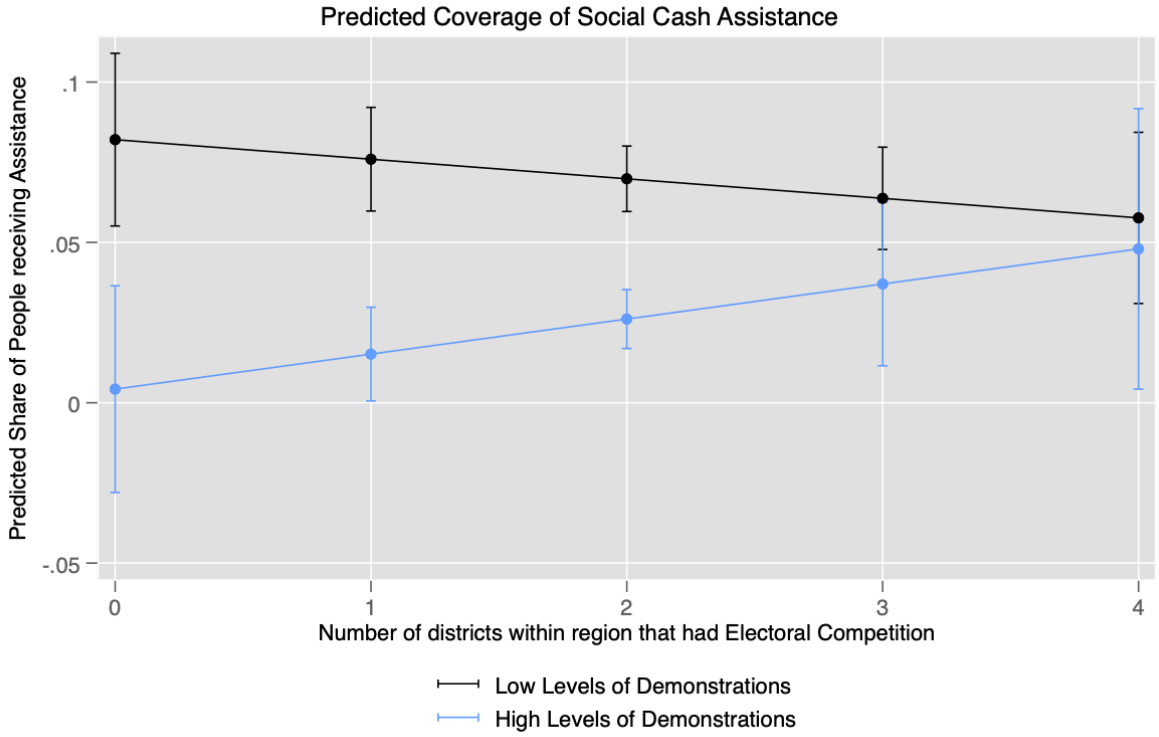


Figure A11: *Results for Coverage (Social Cash Benefits) on the Regional Level (Marginsplot)*



Notes: *The regional analysis points in the same direction as the results in the main analysis above. They show that the interaction does indeed yield substantive and significant results in terms of generosity and coverage. The analysis includes 144 observations – 12 regions over 12 years.*

Table A7: *Regional Outcomes for Industrial Action (1+2) and Demonstrations (3+4)*

	(1) Generosity	(2) Coverage	(3) Generosity	(4) Coverage
Industrial Action Events (logged)	-74.47*	0		
	(36.94)	(.01)		
Electoral Competition	-13.55	0	-42.9	-.01
	(35.01)	(.01)	(49.89)	(.01)
Industrial Action*Electoral Competition	44.92	0		
	(31.67)	(0)		
GDP per capita (region)	.04***	0**	.03***	0
	(.01)	(0)	(.01)	(0)
Hospitals in the Region	6.64	0	2.92	0*
	(3.93)	(0)	(3.75)	(0)
Population (Econ. Active)	-.17	0	.06	0
	(.25)	(0)	(.23)	(0)
Regional Unemployment Rate	-64.85***	.01***	-51.89***	0***
	(12.6)	(0)	(12.22)	(0)
Net Regional Trade Balance		0	0***	0**
		(0)	(0)	(0)
Demonstrations (logged)			96.67***	-.03***
			(29.48)	(.01)
Demonstrations*Electoral Competition			15.05	.01
			(13.51)	(0)
Constant	381.11	-.06**	-6.52	.03
	(341.41)	(.02)	(395.75)	(.04)
Observations	144	144	144	144
R2	.56	.25	.6	.42

Standard errors are in parentheses
**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Not all benefits are created equal –
Differential politicization of social assistance in Turkey

Ali Bargu

Abstract

While the number of studies on the politics of social assistance have grown tremendously, differences across social assistance types are under-explored and require attention. This study attempts to provide one piece in this puzzle by examining Turkey, which provides a good example of this development as it administers roughly 40 social assistance programs. Thus, this study attempts to open the black box of social assistance to make two contributions: First, it offers a conceptual framework of social assistance types and offers a detailed descriptive account of who receives which type of social assistance benefit in Turkey. Second, it assesses which types of social assistance programs exhibit signs of political distribution. Due to the availability of micro data and a newly created dataset on political factors, this study can go beyond existing work to provide a more granular characterization of social assistance beneficiaries and their political distribution patterns. The results suggest that the main benefit type that is used for political purposes in Turkey are meager cash and in-kind benefits that I classify as poverty mitigating social assistance. Further, the study showcases that there are regional differences in the allocation of benefits that can be traced back to electoral challenges to the governing AKP from specific parties.

I. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, social assistance programs have become a pillar of social policy provision, especially in Emerging Market Economies (EMEs). Governments have expanded the number of beneficiaries and created new programs with diverse design elements that often target distinctive population groups. In many EMEs, this generated a complex system of layered social assistance programs that do not all share the same program objectives or underlying program logic. While studies on the politics of social assistance have grown tremendously, I argue that this "black box" of differences across social assistance types is under-explored and requires attention. In 2008, Hickey stated that the role of politics and political economy was largely absent in debates on social assistance, as many of these debates were conducted by economists[1], who tend to apply a technocratic lens on the matter. Fourteen years later, scholarship on the politics of social assistance has grown tremendously. The literature gained important insights on, among others, the influence of politics on social assistance programs in country and program specific contexts (Aytaç, 2014; Das & Maiorano, 2019; Garay, 2017; Zucco, 2013), the way certain program types like social pensions have spread globally (Böger & Leisering, 2020), how institutions play an important role in shaping social assistance policy (Pellissery & Barrientos, 2013), and if and how social assistance has effected social citizenship (Leisering & Barrientos, 2013). Most of these studies either examine flagship programs or draw more general conclusions across countries. If fourteen years ago the frontier was research into political factors more generally, the current debate requires further theorizing and empirical solidification on differences in politicization across *types of social assistance.* I argue that the incremental layering of social assistance programs that has taken place has led to a diversity in program types with *differing political objectives* in EMEs that we have to be mindful of.

[1] Especially in the Emerging Market Economies context, debates often followed a developmental lens (Breitkreuz et al., 2017; Lustig et al., 2013)

This study attempts to provide one piece of the puzzle by examining Turkey, which provides a good example of this development as it administers roughly 40 social assistance programs. In contexts like Turkey, where contribution-based programs leave large shares of the population unprotected against social and economic risks, noncontributory social assistance programs filled an important gap.

Though the roots of charitable foundations and the state providing benefits to the poor trace back to the nineteenth century in Turkey, recent developments signify a clear departure in scope and generosity compared to programs provided in the late-Ottoman and early Republican era (Öktem, 2018; Özbek, 2002). Starting in the early 2000s, the social assistance system in Turkey underwent a major transformation. This included a restructuring of the institutions that oversee and administer social safety nets and the introduction and expansion of different types of social assistance programs. Before these reforms, the welfare system in Turkey provided different benefits depending on the sector of employment. As Powell & Yörük (2017) point out, the Turkish welfare system followed "a corporatist fragmented [model of] social provision, in which employees in the state sector, workers, and the self-employed were members of different institutions with different qualities of service and different benefits." (p.89). This changed with the introduction of a new general health insurance that covers the informal working class through tax expenditure in 2003 and institutional integration into social security institution (*Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu)* in 2006.[2] These reforms, along with the introduction of a large number of other noncontributory social assistance benefits, signify the importance placed on social assistance as a main pillar of welfare provision by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* AKP) and a larger shift away from preexisting inegalitarian corporatism towards a focus on informal urban and rural populations (Buğra & Keyder, 2006; Yörük, 2020). Combining a neoliberal economic system

[2] The newly founded institution now covers all previous employees that were formerly part of the Social Security Institution for formal workers (*Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu*); state employees (*Emekli Sandığı*), and the insurance organ for the self-employed (Bağ-Kur)

focused on growth with elements of redistribution to the poor through social assistance programs enabled the AKP to form an unusual electoral coalition consisting of the urban and rural poor as well as the rising Anatolian bourgeoisie (Öniş, 2012). The rapid social assistance expansion to a diverse set of societal groups, raises questions about potential unstated political intentions of introducing these policies, beyond mere poverty reduction. This study examines if different types of social assistance programs are influenced by political factors, to test if political distribution of benefits for unstated intentions by the ruling party has occurred.

Existing studies in the Turkish context focus on one of two things: either they provide an overview of the social assistance regime in general, with a focus on prominent programs, but do not specifically examine political distribution of social assistance (Metin, 2011; Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2017; Urhan & Urhan, 2015; Yılmaz & Yakut-Çakar, 2008).[3] Or they examine the political distribution of single flagship programs like the Conditional Cash Transfer (Aytaç, 2014) or the Green Card program (Yörük, 2012).[4] This mirrors the state of the literature in other EMEs, that either examine flagship programs (Das & Maiorano, 2019; Zucco, 2013) or provide a broader analysis on the role of social assistance for social citizenship and the politics of implementation (Garay, 2017; Leisering & Barrientos, 2013). These studies fail to explain potential differences in the distributional logic used by governments *across* different social assistance types. This article fills this research gap by providing a systematic understanding of the political distribution of different types of social assistance benefits. To do so, it conceptualizes four types of social assistance (i) poverty prerequisite benefits; (ii) poverty mitigating benefits; (iii) poverty alleviating benefits; and (iv) universal social assistance programs based on generosity and coverage. This paper shows that these

[3] Öktem (2018) provides the most detailed historically grounded analysis of institutional characteristics of the Turkish social assistance system.

[4] There are also studies that examine the allocation of public expenditure in general (agriculture, manufacturing, transport, housing, education, health and other public services) without special attention to social assistance (Luca & Rodríguez-Pose, 2015)

social assistance types follow different logics of distribution with varying underlying political motives using the case of Turkey as an example.

This study attempts to open the black box of social assistance to make two contributions: first, it offers a conceptual framework of social assistance types and offers a detailed descriptive account of who receives which type of social assistance benefit in Turkey. Second, it assesses which types of social assistance programs exhibit signs of political distribution. Due to the availability of microdata and a newly created dataset on political factors, this study goes beyond existing work to provide a more granular characterization of social assistance beneficiaries and their political distribution patterns.

The framework identifies four types of social assistance programs: Poverty Requisite (low coverage, low generosity), Poverty Mitigating (high coverage, low generosity), Poverty Alleviating (low coverage, high generosity), and Universal Social Assistance programs (high coverage, high generosity). It finds that poverty mitigating benefits that cover large shares of people with meager benefits (like in-kind and targeted cash transfers) show the highest level of politicization. This benefit type includes the highest number of different programs, all with relatively low amounts of benefits, which makes them well-suited to be distributed partially to fulfill political motives. This paper also outlines the administrative processes and decision-making processes that make it possible for rules-based transfers to exhibit this type of political distribution. Generous poverty alleviating benefits (social pensions, disability benefits) are used for political purposes less, as the programs have clearer eligibility criteria and different perceptions of deservingness. Poverty requisite social assistance programs do not exhibit political distribution on any dimension. I argue that this is the case as they serve a different, more symbolic function of showcasing government efforts to foster equality of opportunity rather than fight poverty.

Further, the findings suggest that the governments can use different types of social assistance depending on the political party that challenges them. When the electoral challenge comes from Kurdish parties (i.e., Peoples' Democratic Party: HDP) in the Eastern regions of Turkey with whom they compete for votes from lower-income groups, I observe the strongest political distribution of poverty alleviating and mitigating benefits. When the government gets challenged by the Republican Peoples Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi,* CHP), a party whose main support comes from the middle and upper classes, in-kind benefits in particular show higher levels of distribution from the government. I argue that this may be related to efforts to boost turnout of own voters at elections as swinging CHP voters is rather unlikely due to strong ideological divides. Challenges by the ideologically close Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), does not yield any increased allocation of benefits by the government.

Overall, I find that stark indication of unequal political distribution according to regional patterns and electoral calculations by the government for some and not other social assistance types in Turkey. Thus, I argue that not all social assistance benefits are created equal in their motives, rationale, and distribution to the people.

This paper is organized as follows: First, it details the research design and novel data used in this paper. Second, it provides a descriptive account of who receives which types of benefits in Turkey, by examining seven different categories of social assistance by income deciles and regions. Third, it examines the influence of political factors like electoral competition and protests on the distribution of these benefits. Fourth, it provides arguments (i) why different types of social assistance benefits show varying levels of political distribution and (ii) how this type of allocation is possible in the Turkish social assistance administrative framework. The last section concludes and points towards avenues of further research.

II. Classification of Social Assistance Programs into Benefit Types

The first social assistance benefit in Turkey traces back to 1976 and the *Law (no.2022) on the Payment of a Monthly Benefit to Turkish Citizens over 65 years old who are destitute*[5] and was augmented with the establishment of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund in 1986. This fund became the most important provider of benefits to the poor and informal working class, who did not have access to the contributory pension and insurance systems. However, social assistance gained immense popularity with the electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 amounting to a paradigm shift in social provision. Since then, nearly 40 social assistance programs were introduced in Turkey, including one-off benefits for new mothers, access to basic healthcare, home care allowances for family members, or regular transfers as part of conditional cash transfer programs. These programs fundamentally differ from one another in terms of generosity, target group, regularity of payment, and how many people they cover, providing unequal social rights to citizens and focusing on families with children (Öktem, 2018)

While the study of politics of social assistance programs is growing in EMEs and in Turkey, scholarship tends to focus on single flagship programs (Aytaç, 2014; Yörük, 2012; Zucco, 2013). This study attempts to go beyond the program level to provide a meso-level classification of social assistance programs in Turkey using two dimensions: benefit generosity and coverage. Table 1 summarizes the four categories of social assistance. I chose this two-dimensional classification as it captures if the benefit provides the opportunity to exit poverty and if yes, how many people does it fulfill this function for. The classification into these four categories clearly has its limitations, as not all programs fit neatly into one box and thresholds could be changed. They should rather be understood as ideal types that help us understand differences across the vast

[5] Original: *65 Yaşini Doldurmuş Muhtaç, Güçsüz Ve Kimsesiz Türk Vatandaşlarina Aylik Bağlanmasi Hakkinda Kanun*

number of benefits in Turkey and EMEs more generally. In the following, I describe the four types in more detail and argue why I expect some to be politicized more than others.

Poverty requisite benefits are characterized by low levels of generosity of benefits and low levels of coverage. In the Turkish case, the majority of benefits that fit these criteria are education support programs that target poor families.[6] These programs have a long tradition yet remain fragmented across several different directorates and ministries. They cover textbooks and meals for children, and in cases where the school is far away even cover transport costs to schools. There are also programs for tertiary education that provide small cash grants to students. In many contexts, education benefits would not be classified as social assistance programs. However, as in the Turkish case, they target children from families in poverty, with an additional criterion of merit connected to it. To showcase the types of benefits included: in 2016, the schoolchildren grant covered about 15,000 students and provided only 45 Lira per month during school time and additionally limited participation in the program to one child per household. This payment is equal to roughly 3 percent of the minimum wage at the time. There are several similar programs and education grants, that all share the basic notion of targeting children living in poverty, who have proven academic merit. The most important provider for student grants in tertiary education is the Institution for Higher Education Credit and Dormitories (KYK)[7] which provides small cash grants and places in dormitories for its recipients. The AKP solidified the KYK as the main provider of support to students in higher education and explicitly outlined the "twin pillars of merit and need […] crucial for the provision" of the grants (Öktem, 2018, p. 52). While these benefits do mitigate poverty and are means-tested, they use poverty as a requisite condition alongside academic merit and subsequently provide the benefit only to a small number of people

[6] These programs are basically functional equivalents to the education CCT, but are administered by the General Directorate for Foundations (Vakiflar Genel Müdürlüğü) and provide lower benefits to less people. A helpful overview of the history of the VGM can be found in Öktem (2018)

[7] Yüksek Öğrenim Kredi ve Yurtlar Kurumu - Law No. 5102§2. There are two components to this program: loans and non-repayable grants. It is hard to disentangle which one is received in the household survey used. However, in essence, they use the same criteria and application. Thus, they could be argued to serve a similar function.

of the target population (less than 5 percent of university students). The eligibility criteria (income, assets, etc.) are less clearly spelled out and certain political behaviors can disqualify the students (Yüksek Öğrenim Kredi ve Yurtlar Kurumu, 2008).[8] This is different to traditional "categorical" benefits that, for example, target poor people above the age of 65 or attach conditionalities like attending doctors' appointments (CCTs) that follow more of a human development perspective.

I argue that these benefits are not likely to exhibit distribution on the grounds of political factors as they serve a different purpose: showcasing that there are efforts by the government to foster equality of opportunity in contexts where deep-rooted inequalities are still pervasive. The connection of means-tested benefits to students in poverty only if they are academically successful serves as a symbolic gesture of the government in providing opportunities for those "who deserve it most". The notion of deservingness in this instance does have poverty as a requisite, but also includes academic merit and behavioral conditions linked to political behavior. Thus, they serve the purpose of weeding out the "model student" from the perspective of the government to encourage this behavior.

Poverty mitigating benefits encompass the largest number of programs. They are characterized by benefits that provide means-tested support, but only mitigate poverty as benefit amounts are not sufficient to lift people over the poverty line. I separate these into two sub-types: in-kind and cash transfers. Cash transfers include one-off payments like the new-mothers benefit (ranging between 300-600TL depending on the number of children) or aid for children of soldiers (150TL per month), but also recurring benefits like the two conditional cash transfer programs for education and health (up to 75 per child). While they cover a large group of people in Turkey, the education CCT covered more than 2.5 million people in 2016, these benefits constitute below 20

[8] They further include character traits and behaviors that could exclude students from receiving benefits: participating in protests, "shouting slogans" against the government, or participating in events that promote anarchy.

percent of the income needed to exit the risk of poverty[9] (Ministry of Family and Social Policies & World Bank, 2017).

The second category of poverty mitigating social assistance is defined as in-kind benefits.[10] In the Turkish context, they were often referred to as "coal and pasta" benefits. The most important programs encompass the distribution of coal/fuel during winter months, food parcels to the poorest, and aid for electricity bills. Their coverage has decreased in recent years, though they still provide food aid to roughly 600,000 and fuel aid to roughly 2 million people annually (Öktem, 2018). While often neglected, these benefits are an important part of the social assistance infrastructure of Turkey as they mitigate the deepest form of poverty. However, their distribution is often carried out on the local level and can be discretionary and irregular (Bugra et al., 2016).

Both cash and in-kind transfers have complex administrative structures and use differing eligibility criteria. I argue that poverty mitigating benefits showcase politicization in particular, as the high number of programs that are layered on top one another with different eligibility criteria enables room for discretion for the government. The policy approach of providing meager benefits to a large number of people is seen favorably for political purposes, especially when facing an electoral challenge. This is in line with previous findings that assume that these kinds of particularistic benefits yield a higher number of votes per money spent compared to investments into universal programs or public services (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016), though they often perform worse in sustainable poverty reduction.

[9] Due to the nature questions are asked in the survey referring to the last year, I expect the vast majority of benefits reported to be recurring benefits.
[10] The basic notion is often connected to religious practices of food distribution before the two most important Islamic festivities.

Poverty alleviating benefits are classified as programs with relatively high benefit levels, but in the Turkish case, cover a relatively small number of people. Two main policies fall under this category. The benefit provided for home care for the disabled and benefits that fall under the law 2022, target people with disabilities and people in poverty over the age of 65. Though eligibility criteria are strict, once approved, beneficiaries of both programs receive a relatively generous benefit amounting to between 60 and 90 percent of income needed to exit the risk of poverty in Turkey (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2019).

Though many people are covered under the aforementioned programs, these benefits exclude working-age people without children. To date, the only benefit that comes close to fulfilling the criteria of classification for a **Universal Social Assistance**, is the General Health Insurance (GSS), which ensures that all citizens have access to basic health care services, independent of their employment status. All citizens pay mandatory health insurance premiums, with the exemption of people who can prove their poverty status for which premiums payments are foregone, effectively making it a tax-based health insurance program for the poor. There are serious problems with people who cannot produce sufficient proof of their poverty status to the state and thus accrue debt as they are asked to repay the premiums (Yoltar, 2020). However, general health insurance still constitutes the program with the highest coverage and generosity. Due to its universalistic nature, I expect little political distribution after the latest reforms. Since it is not a benefit directly provided, but rather insurance to citizens, the General Health Insurance cannot be easily included in the analysis below.

Table 1: *Dimensions for Social Assistance Type Classification*

	Low Coverage	**High Coverage**
Meager	**<u>Poverty Requisite Benefits</u>** Education benefits	**<u>Poverty Mitigating Benefits</u>** Targeted Cash Benefits In-Kind Benefits
Generous	**<u>Poverty Alleviating Benefits</u>** Disability/Old Age Benefit Home care benefit	**<u>Universal Social Assistance</u>** *General Health Insurance*[11]

To summarize, the classification of benefits in Turkey by levels of coverage and generosity yields to four idealized groups of benefits as can be seen in Table 1. I expect the highest level of politicization in the group of poverty mitigating benefits, followed by lower levels of politicization in poverty alleviating benefits, poverty requisite benefits, and lastly universal social assistance. In the following sections, I describe how I operationalized these assistance types, provide descriptive results, examine which of these benefits exhibit political distribution before I discuss and conclude.

III. Methods & Data

I extract data on characteristics of social assistance beneficiaries for the four benefit types from the annual Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) household surveys administered by the Turkish national statistical association (TÜIK) between 2006-2017.[12] This dataset includes a variety of household characteristics ranging from income to employment type, which are relevant to assess eligibility for social assistance programs. A detailed overview of the program types and characteristics examined can be found in Table 2. The main analysis uses a coverage measure of the four different social assistance types on the household level, indicating if a household receives the benefit or not. Further, I construct a generosity measure, capturing the equivalized levels of benefits that I use as a robustness check.[13]

[11] As the General Health Insurance is a universal waiver of insurance premiums, it cannot be included in the analysis above and assumed to be received by anyone who is eligible. Therefore, no political distribution is assumed.
[12] All paperwork containing the license to use this data is available upon request.
[13] Results of these robustness checks point in the same direction as results with the coverage variable, though they are not as stable. I do not report the results as with the highly volatile currency in Turkey, comparisons over years, even though I equivalized income, are prone to mistakes in capturing the real worth of the income.

Table 2: *Breakdown of which TR-SILC variables are classified as which social assistance type*

	Low Coverage	**High Coverage**
Meager	**<u>Poverty Requisite Benefits</u>** Education benefits	**<u>Poverty Mitigating Benefits</u>** Social Cash Benefit Social In-Kind Benefit Child Cash Allowances Child In-Kind Allowances
Generous	**<u>Poverty Alleviating Benefits</u>** Disability Benefits Old Age Benefits (noncontributory)	**<u>Universal Social Assistance</u>** *Not included in the analysis due to the universal nature of this insurance premium waiver*

Note: *Robustness checks for Poverty Requisite Benefits include housing benefits. These are translated variable names from TÜIKs Annual Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (SILC). All contributory programs are excluded as they do not constitute social assistance.*

To answer the second research question - *are different social assistance types distributed following different political logics?* - I constructed an original dataset that includes political factors aggregated at the twelve NUTS1 regions in Turkey (i.e., protests events, strikes, vote share of the AKP, challenging party in each electoral district, electoral competition)[14] and economic factors (i.e., regional GDP, regional trade balance, regional unemployment rate). These regional characteristics are matched to households in Turkey's twelve regions for which detailed social assistance receipt information is available on the household level. In doing so, I can exploit the variation in social assistance distribution over time to examine if regional political characteristics such as specific configurations of electoral competition and demonstrations influence household-level changes in social assistance receipt. This model provides the possibility for analyses with considerable statistical power due to the large sample size of the SILC household surveys (roughly 205,000 households between 2006-2017). Regional independent variables (from the year before) are regressed on social assistance receipt on the household level controlling for several hh-level factors that affect social assistance receipt (e.g. income, assets, number of household members, subjective poverty) as well as regional meso-level characteristics. I employ a fixed-effects logistic regression with a dichotomous dependent variable (household does not receive this type of social assistance = 0; household receives this social assistance programs =1). This approach enables a thorough understanding of

[14] General election results from 2003-2015 are used in the analysis.

the distributional logic employed by the government in the allocation of different social assistance programs in Turkey.

Table 3: *Variable Definitions and Sources*

Variable Name	**Variable Definition**	**Data Source**
Demonstrations (logged)	Number of demonstrations in the region	GLOCON
Electoral Competition (EC)	Number of districts	Original data (Bargu&Yörük, 2021)
Demonstrations * EC	Interaction between demonstrations and electoral competition in the region	GLOCON/(Bargu&Yörük, 2021)
AKP Vote share (region)	Share of AKP votes in the most recent national election	Original calculations using CLEA
Industrial Action (logged)	Number of industrial action events	GLOCON
Net Regional Trade Balance	Regional exports minus regional imports	Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜIK)
GDP per capita (region)	Gross regional product (annual)	Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜIK)
Population (Econ. Active)	Population	Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜIK)
Reg. Unemployment Rate	Regional unemployment rate	Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜIK)
CHP Challenger	Number of districts that had CHP challenging the winning party (below 10 percent margin to the winner)	Own calculations
MHP Challenger	Number of districts that had MHP challenging the winning party (below 10 percent margin to the winner)	Own calculations
Kurdish Parties (HDP/DEHAP) Challenger	Number of districts that had DEHAP or HDP challenging the winning party (below 10 percent margin to the winner)	Own calculations
Household Level Characteristics		
Poverty (dummy)	Coded as 1 if the household is below 60 percent of the median income Equivalized using the OECD scale and adjusted to 2015 TL	TR-SILC
Household size	Number of people in the household	TR-SILC
Subjective Poverty	Respondents coded as experiencing subjective poverty if the answer to the question: "I have difficulty to make ends meet" is recorded as "strongly agree"	TR-SILC

IV. Descriptive Results

The following section presents the descriptive results of the distribution of social assistance types across income deciles and regions of Turkey. The coverage variable in this section is calculated by taking each category (e.g., all households falling within the first income decile or a specific region) and calculating the share of households within this group that receive this type of social assistance.[15] As the universal social assistance policy in Turkey is a waiver for insurance premiums, they cannot be analyzed in the following sections. I examine the two sub-types of Poverty Mitigating Assistance (Cash and In-Kind) separately to highlight potential differences across them.

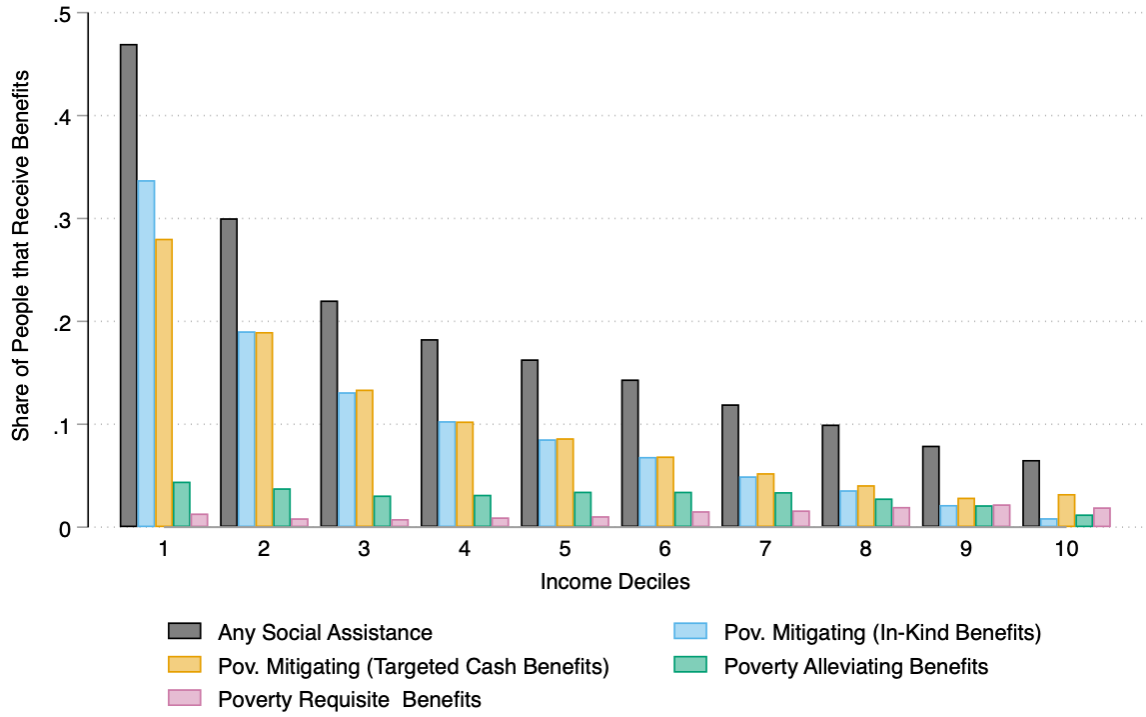
The black bar in Figure 1 denotes beneficiaries of at least one social assistance type. While nearly half of households in the first decile are covered by social assistance programs, it is well below five percent in the richest deciles. The majority of households in Turkey that receive social assistance, receive more than one program simultaneously. Most frequently, in-kind benefits are combined with other programs (commonly with targeted cash benefits), especially for people in poverty (lower deciles). With increasing deciles, receipt of multiple social assistance types decreases gradually.

Turkey's social assistance system is heavily targeted towards the poorest in society and means-tested programs form the core of the social assistance system (Tekgüç, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that targeted poverty alleviating benefits (cash benefits and in-kind programs) are indeed focused on in the poorer deciles (1-3) and steadily decrease in the higher deciles (Figure 1). It is noteworthy, that in the poorest ten percent of Turkish society, the most prevalent programs are by far in-kind benefits (34%) and social cash benefits (16%). Both targeted cash and in-kind benefits show an especially stark focus on the poorest decile, visible from the drastic drop from

[15] The robustness checks using the generosity measure only inspects households that receive the benefit in question and calculates the average of the benefit in Turkish lira (adjusted to 2015 price index and equivalized using modified OECD equivalence scale. Modified OECD equivalence scale: first adult 1, 0.5 for every member over 14 years old; 0.3 for every member younger than 14.

first to second deciles. Generous poverty alleviating benefits show a relatively even distribution across income deciles. Poverty Requisite benefits (operationalized as education benefits) recipiency rates vary little yet show a slight rise with increasing deciles. Richer people benefit more from this program compared to poorer segments in society, though the share of relative income provided by this benefit will be negligible for higher-income groups due to the very low benefit amounts.

Figure 1: *Share of people that receive benefits by income deciles*



Notes: *Black: all programs (receiving at least one), Blue & Yellow: poverty mitigating programs, Green: poverty alleviating programs. Authors calculations using years Statistics on Income and Living Conditions for years 2006-2017. This figure also shows why cash and in-kind benefits are classified into the same category of Poverty Mitigating Benefits, as they are virtually similarly distributed across the income distribution.*

The regional allocation further illustrates differential logics of social assistance distribution. Overall, differences of households covered across the four types of programs loom large. This holds when examined as a share of the population or as a share of people in poverty. Figure 2 shows the overall distribution by benefit type across 26 subregions (NUTS2) using pooled data

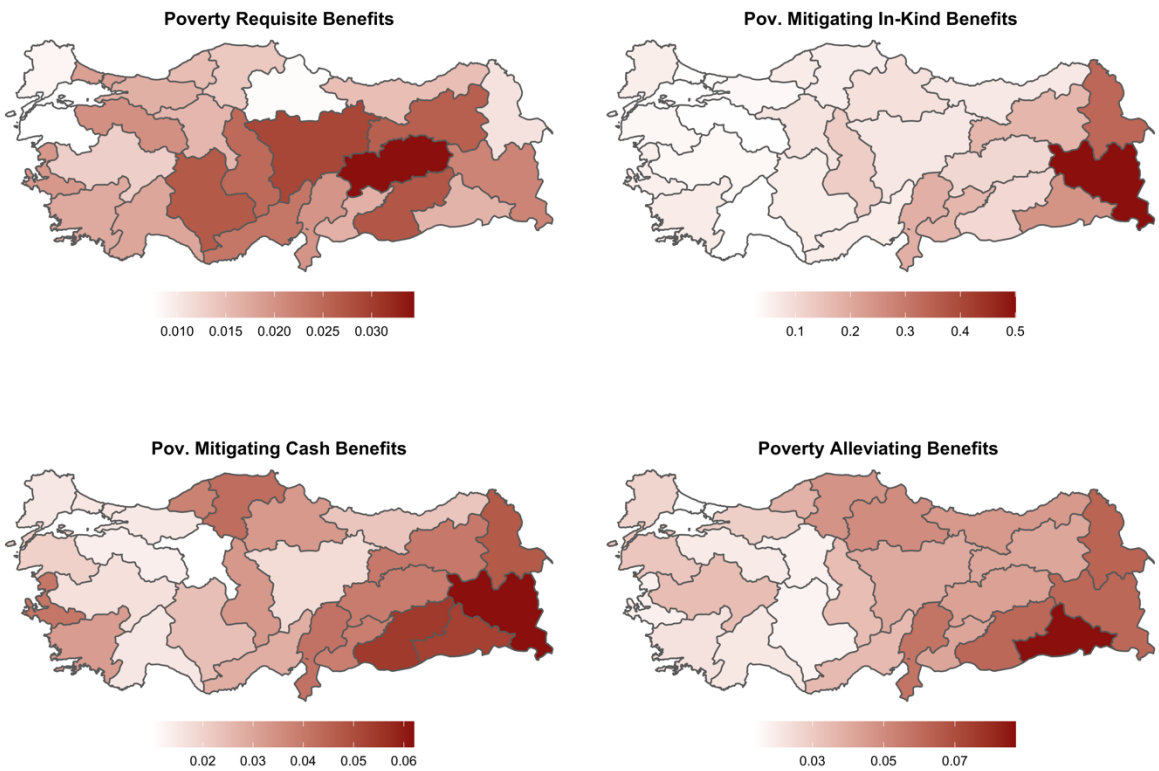
from 2015-17.[16] In-kind benefits cover more people in the Eastern regions, where ethnic Kurds constitute the majority of the population and poverty rates tend to be higher. In-kind benefits show the highest share of people covered in the subregion of Van (TRB2), where over 50 percent of households receive the benefits. Overall, in-kind benefits are also the benefits that cover by far the highest share of people in Turkey, but also show the highest deviation across states (see Table 4). Targeted cash benefits cover the second-highest share and are also more concentrated in Eastern regions of Turkey, but exhibit a slightly more equal distribution compared to in-kind benefits. Generous poverty alleviating benefits cover on average six percent of people with a standard deviation of three percent, showcasing a significantly lower difference across states compared to the other benefits. Though they are more equally distributed in general, they show slightly higher coverage rates for the Eastern regions of Turkey as well as the Black Sea Regions. Lastly, poverty requisite benefits exhibit the lowest average coverage rate of only two percent. The standard variation is also the lowest (1.6 percent), signaling two things: coverage of this benefit is the lowest, but it is as also the most equally distributed benefit in Turkey.

These regional patterns further cement that there may be large differences in the distributional logic across social assistance programs in Turkey. To check if the differences are due to differing poverty rates, the same map is created as a share of people in relative poverty (Appendix Figure A1) and results are reported below in Table 4. The mean and standard deviations across regions taken as a share of people in poverty are even higher. As most benefits in Turkey are strictly means-tested, we should have expected to see the differences lessen when examining them as a share of people living in poverty. Nevertheless, regional patterns emerge.

[16] The same map showing the distribution as a share of people in relative poverty can be found in the Appendix. The years 2015-17 are used as the TR-SILC data starts providing information on the NUTS2 level (26 regions of Turkey) vs. NUTS1 (12 regions) that allow for a more granular understanding of the distribution.

While only 20 percent of people in poverty receive any social assistance program in the Antalya subregion, this share reaches up to 80 percent in the Van subregion. As these numbers use an average over four years, it is unlikely that they merely capture one particular point in time. Where one lives has stark implications for if and which social assistance benefit one is likely to receive in Turkey. The next section investigates if political factors can explain this variation.

Figure 2: *Regional Distribution of Benefits across 26 NUTS2 Subregions of Turkey (as a share of the population)*



Notes: *This figure was assembled using calculations by the author using Statistics on Income and Living Conditions for years 2015-17 on the NUTS2 level for 26 regions of Turkey. The figure shows the share of population who receive each benefit type. The same figure can be found in the Appendix A1 that shows receipt as a share of people in relative poverty. Note that scales for each benefits vary starkly.*

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics Social Assistance Receipt across 26 NUTS2 Regions of Turkey (2015-2017)*

Benefit Type	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Any Social Assistance (share of population)	.16	.11	.05	.56
Any Social Assistance (share of people in poverty)	.39	.14	.15	.8
Pov. Mit. In-Kind Assistance (share of population)	.11	.11	.02	.51
Pov. Mit. In-Kind Assistance (share of people in poverty)	.31	.15	.09	.78
Pov. Mit. Targeted Cash (share of population)	.03	.02	.01	.09
Pov. Mit. Targeted Cash (share of people in poverty)	.12	.06	.02	.34
Poverty Alleviating Benefits (share of population)	.04	.02	.01	.09
Poverty Alleviating Benefits (share of people in poverty)	.06	.03	.01	.14
Poverty Requisite Benefits (share of population)	.02	.01	.00	.04
Poverty Requisite Benefits (share of people in poverty)	.02	.02	.00	.09

Notes: *This figure was assembled using calculations by the author using Statistics on Income and Living Conditions taking the average receipt per region for years 2015-2017. This is due to the more granular regional classification provided in the latest years available. The table includes the share of the total population who receive each benefit type and the share of people in relative poverty (50% of median income).*

V. Which Program Types are Distributed by Political Factors?

After descriptively examining the distribution of benefits in the previous section, this section further analyzes what drives the differential allocation of benefits. I find that the political use of benefits varies strongly across social assistance types and is especially responsive to political competition from certain parties.

There is rich literature from the field of distributive politics that outlines potential factors that may influence the allocation of benefits to citizens. I draw on these factors to construe a dataset that includes electoral competition, the share of votes for the ruling AKP, protests events in the region, and other factors such as a measure of gross regional production (GRP). I apply fixed-effects logistic regressions, as outlined in the methods section above.

The results reveal the distributive logics across the four benefit types that the government utilizes (Table 5). Though I classify both in-kind and social cash transfers as poverty mitigating benefits, I include them separately to ensure that potential differences are not overlooked. Starting with the household level characteristics, the results seem relatively homogenous. The two measures of

poverty (income-based and subjective poverty) significantly correlate with all but poverty requisite benefits (education benefits). The likelihood to receive education benefits is neither higher nor lower for households living in poverty. This is not surprising as the descriptive analysis above shows that there are no differences across income deciles in the receipt of education benefits.

While for all other benefit types receipt is correlated with poverty, the level to which poverty can help explain benefit receipt varies. Being in poverty increases the likelihood of receiving benefits most for in-kind benefits, closely followed by targeted cash benefits. While receipt of poverty alleviating benefits show a positive association with poverty, it is less pronounced compared to the other benefits. This mirrors the descriptive analysis of income deciles above and cements that poverty mitigating social assistance benefits are most targeted at households in poverty compared to the other benefit types. The subjective poverty measure shows the same trend compared to the income-based poverty measure. When households classify themselves as having difficulty making ends meet, their likelihood of receiving all but education benefits increases. Further, household size is positively associated with receiving all, but education benefits. More members in a household increased the predicted probability of receiving social assistance significantly. Examining the household types highlights the strong focus of social assistance programs in Turkey on families with children for targeted cash benefits, as we can observe a strong positive correlation. However, these households with children tend to receive significantly less generous benefits, as these are targeted towards the people with disabilities or social pensions for people over the age of 65.

The regional characteristics show more variation across the benefit types and help us understand the differential rationales that underpin their distribution. First, I test the distribution of benefits

following the core-voter theorem using the AKP vote share variable.[17] Poverty mitigating (cash and in-kind benefits), as well as generous poverty alleviating benefits, show a significant positive association with the AKP vote share in the region, pointing towards favoring of core constituencies of the ruling party in the distribution of these three benefits, controlling for poverty, and other important characteristics. While these benefits show tendencies to be distributed following the core-voter theorem, education benefits do not, showcasing the differential politicization across social assistance benefits in Turkey.

Figure 3 showcases these results by plotting the predicted probabilities of social assistance receipt across three different types of regions: (i) 20 percent AKP share, signifying that the region is ruled by another party, (ii) 40 percent AKP share, which represents the most common case of AKP ruling with a competitor that could threaten them, and (iii) AKP strongholds with 60 percent of the vote. Overall, benefit coverage controlling for a range of factors is predicted to be highest in AKP stronghold regions for targeted cash, in-kind, and poverty alleviating benefits. It is most pronounced for targeted cash benefits where the share of citizens covered by the benefit is two percent higher compared to regions ruled by other parties. The coverage of education benefits shows no difference when tested for the core-voter theorem. While Figure 3 shows the predicted absolute values of benefit coverage, Figure A2 in the Appendix shows the pairwise comparison plot that displays that the differences across groups are statistically and substantially meaningful.

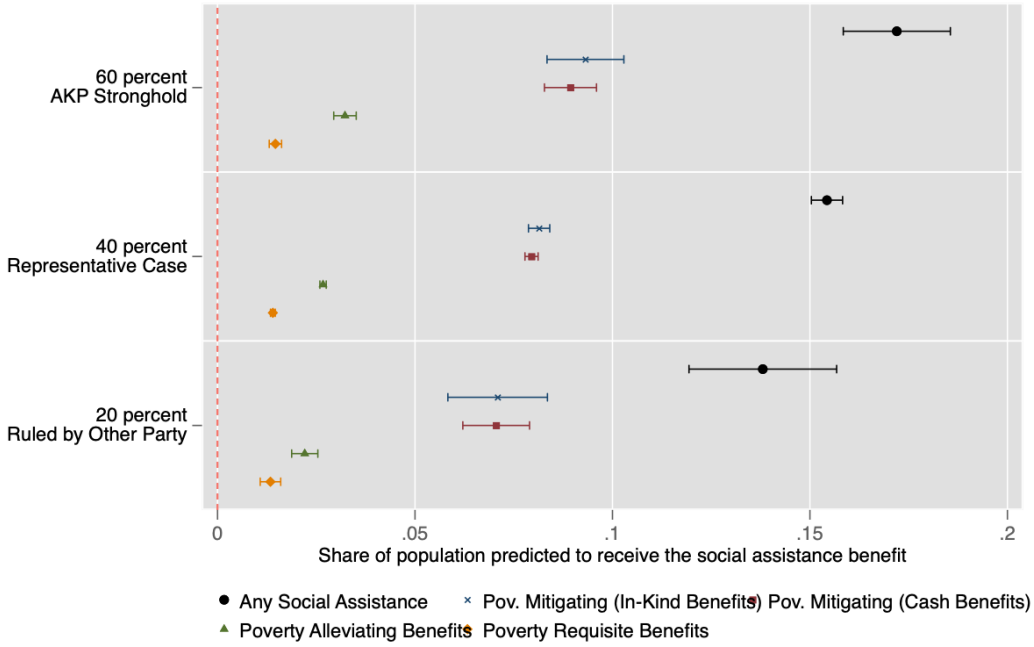
[17] This theory assumes that governments will favor districts that have previously shown high levels of support as an investment to keep the winning electoral coalition intact.

Table 5: *Logistic Regressions: Coverage of Social Assistance across types*

	(1) All Benefits	(2) Poverty Mitigating In-Kind Benefits	(3) Poverty Mitigating Cash Benefits	(4) Poverty Alleviating Benefits	(5) Poverty Requisite Benefits
Regional Variables					
Demonstrations (logged)	-0.09**	-0.08	-0.14***	-0.01	0.07
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.07)
Electoral Competition (EC)	-0.05*	-0.06**	-0.04	-0.06*	-0.18***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)
AKP Vote Share	0.01**	0.01*	0.01**	0.01***	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Net Regional Trade Balance	0.00**	0.00	0.00***	0.00*	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
GDP per capita (region)	0.00***	0.00*	0.00***	0.00	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Population (Econ. Active)	0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00***	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Reg. Unemployment Rate	0.03**	0.00	0.04***	0.03**	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)
CHP Challenger	0.08***	0.15***	0.02	-0.01	0.06
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)
MHP Challenger	-0.20	-0.41*	-0.11	-0.01	0.13
	(0.18)	(0.24)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.18)
Kurdish Parties (HDP/DEHAP) Challenger	0.51***	0.42***	0.43***	0.42***	0.62
	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.39)
Household Level Characteristics					
Poverty (dummy)	1.53***	1.69***	1.65***	0.45***	0.07
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.16)
Household size	0.19***	0.08***	0.20***	0.24***	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Household type: With children	0.14**	0.07	0.83***	-0.97***	0.87***
	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.18)
Household type: With members 65+	0.04	0.14**	0.15	-0.03	-3.32***
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.37)
Subjective Poverty	0.35***	0.51***	0.36***	0.20***	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Constant	-6.29***	-6.69***	-8.03***	-7.90***	-4.86***
	(0.69)	(1.00)	(0.64)	(0.38)	(1.08)
Observations	200,121	200,121	200,121	200,121	200,121

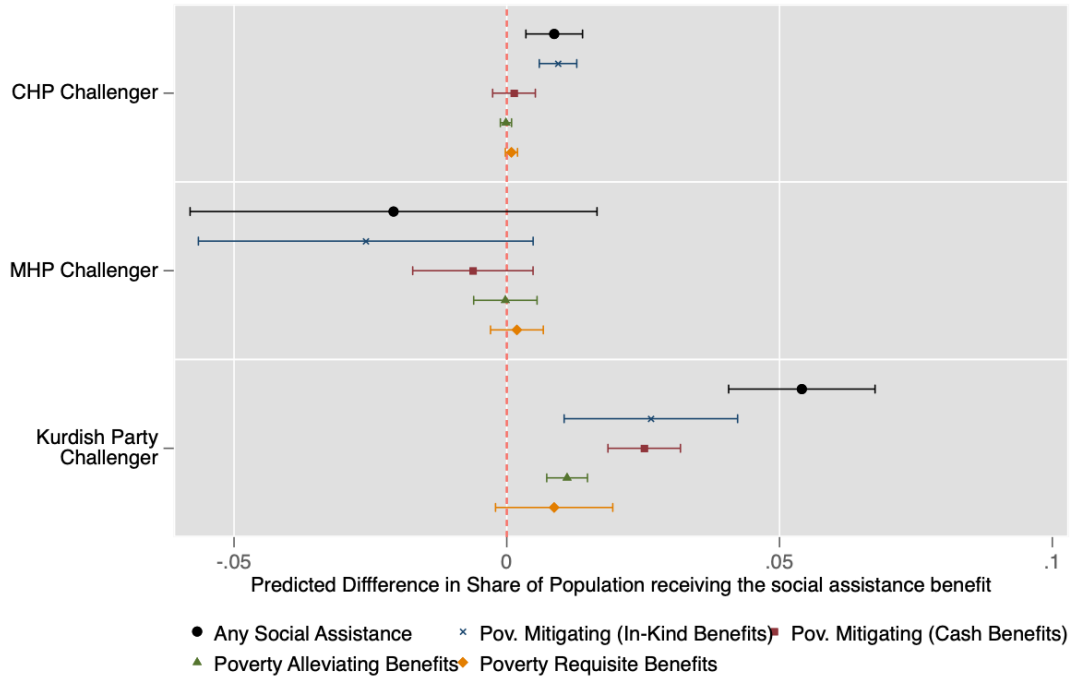
*Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

***Figure 3**: Predicted Probabilities of Receiving Social Assistance Types by Core AKP Constituencies*



***Notes:** This figure displays the predicted probabilities of receiving social assistance split up by types and for different levels of strength of the incumbent party, the AKP. The models are based on models reported in Table 5. Pairwise comparisons can be found in the Appendix Fig.A2. These show that the differences across AKP strength are meaningful and statistically significant.*

***Figure 4:**Distribution of Benefits by Party that challenges the Governing AKP*



***Notes:** This figure displays results of the regression by social assistance types and the pairwise comparisons of the margins by the party that challenges the AKP. Confidence intervals that do not cross zero indicate that results are statistically significantly different. The models are based on models reported in table 5.*

To understand the political dynamics further, I coded if there was electoral competition present in the districts and which party challenged the government (second highest vote share). This reveals that *which* party challenges the AKP matters a great deal in the distribution of benefits. Results are displayed in Figure 4. When the AKP faces competition from Kurdish parties (DEHAP/HDP), the likelihood of people in these regions to receive poverty mitigating targeted cash, in-kind, and poverty alleviating benefits increase significantly. Kurdish party challengers show the strongest statistical and substantial effect, with overall social assistance coverage predicted to be five percent higher in these instances. Education benefits do not exhibit heightened distribution when Kurdish parties challenge the AKP in the electoral arena, cementing their de-politized nature. This is congruent with the finding displayed in the maps that especially in-kind benefits and targeted cash benefits are disproportionally targeted in the Eastern regions of Turkey with large Kurdish populations, even when controlling for poverty and other micro and macro characteristics.

When the AKP faces competition from the CHP, the likelihood of a household to receive in-kind benefits increases significantly. However, the size of this effect is relatively small compared to Kurdish party challengers, with the difference only being predicted to be around one percent. Further, no heightened distribution effect can be found for any other benefit. Lastly, when faced with competition from the ideologically close(r) MHP that has later formed a coalition with the AKP, there are no effects for any of the benefit types. However, there are very few districts (6.2%) where the MHP was the main challenger in an election compared to the CHP being the main challenger (41.8%). This finding is rather surprising as Aytac (2014) found that the AKP facing an electoral challenge by the MHP would lead to an increase in Conditional Cash Transfer payments. This model, however, provides an analysis over time and for more programs and finds this effect not to be generalizable across time, prompting a debate on how different types of benefits may be utilized differently at various points in time. Further research should investigate this divergence in

effects further. The reasons underlying the differential distribution of benefits depending on which party challenges the AKP will be expanded upon in the discussion section below.

Lastly, turning to contentious political factors that might influence the distribution of benefits, I find, when examining all social assistance programs, demonstrations have a negative effect on social assistance receipt. When examining the breakdown by social assistance types, however, it becomes clear that this is purely driven by targeted cash transfers, as no other benefit exhibits a significant effect (Figures Appendix A3 & A4). These effects are congruent with Bargu & Yörük (under review) [the previous dissertation paper] that show that demonstrations only have a positive effect during electorally conducive points in time. This paper adds nuance by showing that it is indeed *only* targeted cash transfers that show a reaction to demonstrations, while other social assistance benefits do not.

In summary, these results showcase that there is widespread heterogeneity within the category of "social assistance" programs when it comes to their political distribution. While some benefits are distributed to cater to core constituents, others are used in times of specific electoral challenges or as a reaction to curb unrest. Benefits also differ in their focus on helping those in poverty or fulfilling other functions that serve the middle and upper classes. Which party challenges the incumbent induces different effects.

VI. Discussion

This section will discuss two aspects of the main findings above. First, it outlines the underlying reasons why different types of social assistance benefits react differently to political factors, especially focusing on competition between specific parties. Second, it provides further explanation on how the political distribution of benefits in Turkey is possible, by delineating administrative structures that allow for discretion at the local level.

Differential Politicization of Social Assistance Programs

After opening the black box of social assistance and examining the differences in distributional logic descriptively and with the regression analysis above, questions about the underlying reasons for this occurrence remain. In the following, I outline four potential reasons why we can observe differences in politicization and why it is important we understand the nuances in this matter.

First, not only do programs fulfill different functions and target different groups in the population, but the eligibility criteria and payment schedules across programs that target similar groups are inconsistent and convoluted. While there are some regular and recurring benefits, they are complemented by many irregular payments (Table A3 in the Appendix). An illustrative example is the difference between birth assistance (*Doğum Yardımı*), which is provided as a one-off payment[18] without a means test, and assistance for multiple births (*Çoklu Doğum Yardımı*), which is a means-tested benefit provided regularly to mothers of twins, triplets etc. on a bimonthly basis until a child turns two.[19] From a social policy perspective these two benefits, though they seemingly serve a similar purpose in supporting families with newborns, follow very different logics: since the birth assistance program is a universal (one-off) benefit, in theory, the only limiting factor for receiving it is information about the existence and the application process. Without the means-test and the increasing values with subsequent children, this program is closer to a fertility promotion benefit. In contrast, the assistance for multiple births benefit has all characteristics of a poverty alleviation policy. The convoluted nature and the sheer number of benefits make it easier for specific programs to be distributed with political motives in mind to reward supporters or punish opponents. This layering of a multitude of social assistance benefits is a phenomenon that is starting to shape many EMEs and needs to be examined further.

[18] First child: 300: TL; second child: 400 TL; third child and thereafter: 600 TL
[19] 150 TL per month, Families with per capita income below 1/3 of the minimum wage are eligible.

Second, incumbents may purposefully spare some programs from political distribution at certain points in time, especially in highly politized social policy arenas (i) to avoid public scrutiny from the public and the media and (ii) as a signal to voters that they have kept their promises (Luca et al., 2019). These findings further support the hypothesis of this paper that it is important to unpack the differences across social assistance programs as they can vary quite significantly. Not only do they serve different policy aims, but their political aims also vary.

Third, there is competition between social assistance program provision between the national level and municipal governments. In recent years, social policy efforts by municipalities have gone beyond the mere implementation of national policies (Urhan & Urhan, 2015). Municipalities have amplified their efforts in designing, financing, and implementing policies, especially in the realm of in-kind benefits, adding further complexity to the distribution of social assistance programs (Kesgin, 2012). Depending on their political affiliation, municipal governments may compete with their social assistance benefits against those programs administered by the national government. AKP led municipalities have, after winning the local elections, set up parallel structures to the national social assistance foundations that distribute similar items, such as food and coal to supporters of the party (Metin, 2011). To illustrate the immense growth that also occurred on the municipal level Ankara serves as a good example. While municipal food/nutrition and fuel aid was provided to 37,000 people in 2001, it increased to 180,000 in 2006 and 365,000 in 2008 (Yıldırım, 2009). These benefits are also highly politized and provide further grounds for political distribution by the government.

Fourth, as a contribution to the literature, the empirical results above show that the government can resort to different types of social assistance programs depending on the party they face competition from. When the government faces an electoral challenge by the HDP (Peoples'

Democratic Party)[20], nearly all benefits show a statistically significant positive effect, signaling towards higher rates of distribution of these benefits. This includes both types of poverty mitigating social assistance benefits (in-kind and targeted cash benefits), but also poverty alleviating benefits. In practice, these types include a wide variety of transfers and goods ranging from regular cash-based programs to irregular, ad-hoc in-kind benefits (e.g. coal aid, food distribution). Underlying reasons for why competition with the HDP drives political distribution are complex: First, examining voters by income and party preference, it becomes clear that the AKP and the HDP are the two parties that compete most for the poorest members of the population (below 1200TL/month).[21] Thus, voters who are unsure between these two parties are likely to be eligible for regular in-cash social assistance programs, making it a worthwhile investment for the incumbent government to ramp up efforts to win an upcoming election. The focus of the AKP to appeal to the poor masses, was one of the main pathways used to win elections and establish their hegemony against the CHP and the Kemalist establishment[22] (Tuğal, 2017). Thus, concentrated efforts that disproportionally target a breadth of social assistance programs towards poorer regions to establish electoral dominance by winning against the HDP is a vital aspect of the story of social assistance expansion in Turkey more generally. Second, it is important to note that competition with the HDP (or predecessor parties) does not merely constitute political competition between parties, but also an ongoing struggle for sovereignty of the Kurdish people. Therefore, winning elections against the HDP can also be viewed as a tool to contain these efforts for sovereignty and prevent social unrest (Yoltar & Yörük, 2021). Just as this conflict is ongoing, the mix of regular social assistance benefits, paired with ad-hoc in-kind benefits can be viewed as a dual strategy to win elections and maintain order.

[20] For earlier elections I coded DEHAP as the Kurdish challenger party
[21] Data is based on an original survey conducted in December 2019 with the help of the survey firm KONDA.
[22] One of the main cleavage lines in Turkish society has been and continues to be to some extent the Kemalist (supporters of ideologies associated with founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) and the neo-Islamic AKP ideology.

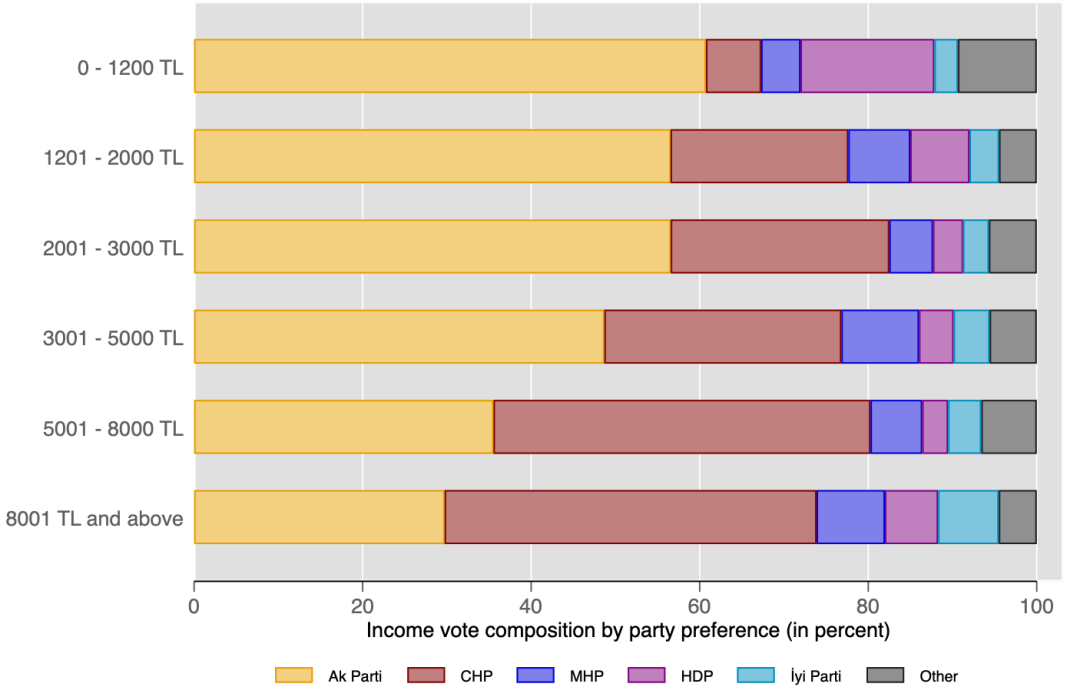
When the AKP faces competition by the CHP (Republican People's Party), only irregular in-kind benefits show signs of increased political distribution. Examining voters by income and party preference shows a very different picture compared to the HDP. The higher the income, the higher the shares of support for the CHP. The fact that it is mostly middle and high-earners that support the CHP is well researched (Tugal, 2009). Thus, it is unlikely that many voters who would face a choice between these two parties would be eligible to receive means-tested, regular social assistance programs. The cleavage line between these two parties lies elsewhere, in views about religion, socio-cultural issues, and the economic model envisioned for Turkey. For example, the neoliberal agenda of economic liberalization of the AKP was used to persuade the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) to favor them over their previous alliance with the CHP (Akçay, 2018). Thus, when the AKP faces competition from the CHP, the likelihood of swaying voters from the center-left to them is low. What becomes important before an election is rather ensuring that turn-out from supporters is high. Especially in-kind benefits can easily be ramped up in competitive districts before elections. These types of benefits (coal, food parcels etc.) may be used in an attempt to buy turnout from ideology close voters (Nichter, 2008). In-kind benefits and targeted cash benefits (are particularly useful for this purpose, as they cover a large share of the people with low levels of income transfers, making them the preferred tool for political distribution. Poverty alleviating benefits, in contrast, provide higher levels of transfers, tend to have "harder" (i.e., age, income, disability status) eligibility criteria that complicate political distribution. Thus, it is not surprising to find more political distribution within the group of poverty mitigating benefits.

When the AKP faces competition by the MHP, this study finds no changes to the distribution of any social assistance program. As the CHP, the electorate of the MHP is not heavily dependent on poorer segments of society. Aytaç (2014) found for conditional cash transfers (classified as

targeted cash benefits in this paper) districts with an ideologically close challenger like the MHP[23] induce higher rates of distribution. In his analysis, he uses electoral data from local elections in 2004 to estimate the distribution of CCT programs between 2005-2008. This analysis finds no such effect for districts with MHP challengers when examining social assistance types on the meso-level. How does this square with previous findings? There are several potential explanations: First, there may be different distributional logics being used during the initial rollout of the benefit (which Aytaç captures in his analysis), compared to later years when programs have saturated (which this analysis includes). Second, the findings on the program level may prove to have external validity when extrapolated to the meso-level. Third, and maybe most importantly, over the sample timeframe, there are very few instances where the MHP is the challenging party of the AKP (6%). Whichever one, or the combination of these factors best captures the reality, will need to be determined with further research. This will be especially important when data post-2018 becomes available, as the two parties joined an electoral coalition to form a government.

[23] To reiterate, the number of districts where the main challenger of the AKP is the MHP is the lowest compared to the other two parties.

Figure 5: *Voting preferences by Income brackets in Turkey (original survey data from December 2020)*



Note: *This questionnaire for this survey was designed by the author together with the EMW ERC Team and carried out by KONDA in December 2020. It is a representative survey including 2759 participants.*

Institutional Structures Enabling Discretion

But how exactly do the institutions allow for this kind of politicized distribution of certain benefits? To understand how this discretionary allocation of some benefits works, a detailed examination of the administration of the Turkish social assistance system is needed. Before the AKP took office, the two main providers of social assistance by the state were the General Directorate of Social Services and Child Protection (Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu) and Fund for Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışmayı Teşvik Fonu, SYDTF), which was eclectically funded by revenues from traffic fines, TV and radio commercials, voluntary donations, and a small share from income taxation (Özdemir, 2020).

A severe earthquake in 1999 and the economic crisis in 2001 elevated the role of the SYDTF, as it was used as the institution to disseminate funds by the World Bank, which introduced two large

scale projects to mitigate the effects of the crisis and subsequently introduced austerity programs on the poor (Bugra & Candas, 2011). The Social Risk Mitigation Project initiated a variety of social programs, including the much-discussed pilot for the conditional cash transfer program in Turkey, which was later expanded to a national scale in 2004 (Aytaç, 2014).

The systems and institutions used to administer social assistance programs in the early 2000s were complex and confusing, with a multitude of ministries, directorates, and levels of government following overlapping goals (Öktem, 2018). After assuming power, the AKP government restructured institutions that implement social assistance, with suggestions by the World Bank, including the transformation of the SYDTF into a General Directorate of Social Assistance (Sosyal Yardımlar ve Dayanışma Genel Müdürlüğü, SYDGM) to expand social assistance and build capacity (Öktem, 2018). This newly formed government agency reported directly to the Prime Minister, had access to extra-budgetary central government funds and thus enjoyed high degrees of autonomy (Özdemir, 2020). The SYDGM acts as an umbrella organization of the state that supervises roughly 1,000 locally based Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakıfları) that implement programs across all sub-provincial districts. The board of trustees of these foundations are spearheaded by the governor appointed by the central government and consist of centrally appointed local bureaucrats, local mayors, religious leaders, civil society representatives, and philanthropists. Though many municipal governments are governed by opposition parties, this structural dominance of the central government in the decision making body of the foundations is a strategic lever that can be used to influence the allocation of benefits across Turkey. Aytaç (2014) has shown that the boards have the power to overrule formal eligibility criteria, the proxy-means test, and the findings from the house visits, providing the opportunity for discretionary allocation of benefits in favor of the incumbent party on the national level.

This resonates with a larger debate on the Turkish welfare state. Groups formally excluded from

social policies who now benefit from noncontributory programs do so in a system that blends two contradicting paradigms of social assistance provision: *The welfare state paradigm* (based on social rights and visible in the Social Pensions Act of 1976) and *the state-organized charity paradigm* (in line with the Islamic tradition of charitable foundations, vakıfs) (Öktem & Erdoğan, 2018). Most new programs that are described in this analysis do not confer legal entitlements to beneficiaries (Buğra, 2016) yet provide "regular cash benefits with clear eligibility criteria, just as the welfare state paradigm envisioned" (Öktem & Erdoğan, 2018: p.3). This system renders incumbents capable of using these discretionary benefits for political motives, as the legal basis and capability of citizens is often lacking. In a context where the welfare state is not providing benefits to all poor, these political motives seem to determine who will receive the scarce resources first. This paper proposes to take a more granular look at the types of social assistance benefits that are distributed following different political logics.

VII. Conclusion

During the last two decades, social assistance has emerged as a major pillar of welfare provision in Middle-income countries and Emerging Market Economies in particular. In many of these countries, numerous new benefits are layered on top of one another. I argue that a meso-level classification is needed to understand patterns of political distribution across different social assistance types. This paper provides a classification of social assistance types into four groups based on generosity and coverage: (i) poverty perquisite benefits; (ii) poverty mitigating benefits; (iii) poverty alleviating benefits; and (iv) universal social assistance programs. I argue that these have different likelihoods and logics to be distributed with political motives and show that this is the case using Turkey as an example.

This article opens the black box of social assistance in Turkey to make two general contributions: First, it offers a detailed descriptive account of who receives which type of social assistance benefit.

Second, it assesses which types of social assistance programs exhibit signs of political distribution and explores why this is the case. Using novel data for Turkey, this study highlights a trade-off between the coverage of beneficiaries and its generosity. It attempts to add nuance to theoretical debates on the distributive politics of social assistance that have thoroughly explored the politics of flagship programs (Aytaç, 2014; Böger & Leisering, 2020; Das & Maiorano, 2019; Zucco, 2013) and overarching analyses on the emerging role of social assistance in welfare provision and the politics of their implementation (Leisering & Barrientos, 2013; Pellissery & Barrientos, 2013). It does so by highlighting the stark variety *across* types of social assistance and provides a framework to carry out meso-level analyses to explore these differences.

The results suggest that the main benefit type that is used for political purposes are meager cash and in-kind benefits that I classify as poverty mitigating. These programs that provide relatively little benefit amounts to a large number of people are well-suited to be distributed by the government for political purposes. This does not answer the question if this strategy works, nor does it say that this is the only way governments attempt to secure votes. Social assistance should be viewed as one tool within many others that governments can utilize to attempt to cater to their citizens. I outline the administrative structures and decision-making processes within the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations that allow for this type of political distribution to occur. In contrast, generous poverty alleviating benefits show less political distribution. These benefit types have clearer eligibility criteria (disability, old-age in combination with no income etc.), they are expensive as they are generous, and recipients are generally viewed as deserving. Thus, they do not lend themselves for political distribution in the same sense. Rather, governments may use them to showcase their efforts to lift deserving people who cannot work any longer out of poverty. Poverty requisite benefits (like education benefits) do not show political distribution at all. They serve symbolic purposes to highlight efforts by the government to overcome stark educational inequalities that persist in Turkey.

Further, I show that beyond classic distribution to core-voter districts, poverty alleviating, and mitigating benefits are distributed particularly to regions where the government faces an electoral challenge by Kurdish parties. In Eastern regions where Kurdish parties tend to be strong and poverty rates are higher than average, social assistance programs are a core issue in the election to compete for votes. In regions where the CHP challenges the AKP, in-kind benefits, which tend to be irregular and often pick up distribution before an election, show increased distribution. I argue that this is more likely to be a phenomenon related to turnout buying of own supporters to win the election instead of attempting to swing voters. As is visible from the results above, while some programs classified as social assistance such as education benefits exhibit no political distribution on any dimension, others, such as poverty mitigating benefits show stark indication of unequal political distribution according to regional patterns and electoral calculations depending on the party challenging the government. Thus, not all social assistance benefits are created equal in their motives, rationale, and distribution to the people.

These findings have larger implications for the literature on social assistance in Turkey and globally. Scholars tend to examine either flagship programs singularly or discuss social assistance as a monolithic policy response. Both approaches neglect important differences in the types of programs that are classified as social assistance and how these different programs can be distributed following varying political logics. This study provides a starting point for further literature that should examine how the political economy differs *across* types of social assistance. In particular, further literature should focus on illuminating (i) temporal changes to political distributive logics of assistance programs over time, (ii) how administrative structures shape the opportunities for political distribution, and (iii) the interplay and competition between governments at the municipal and national level.

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Appendix

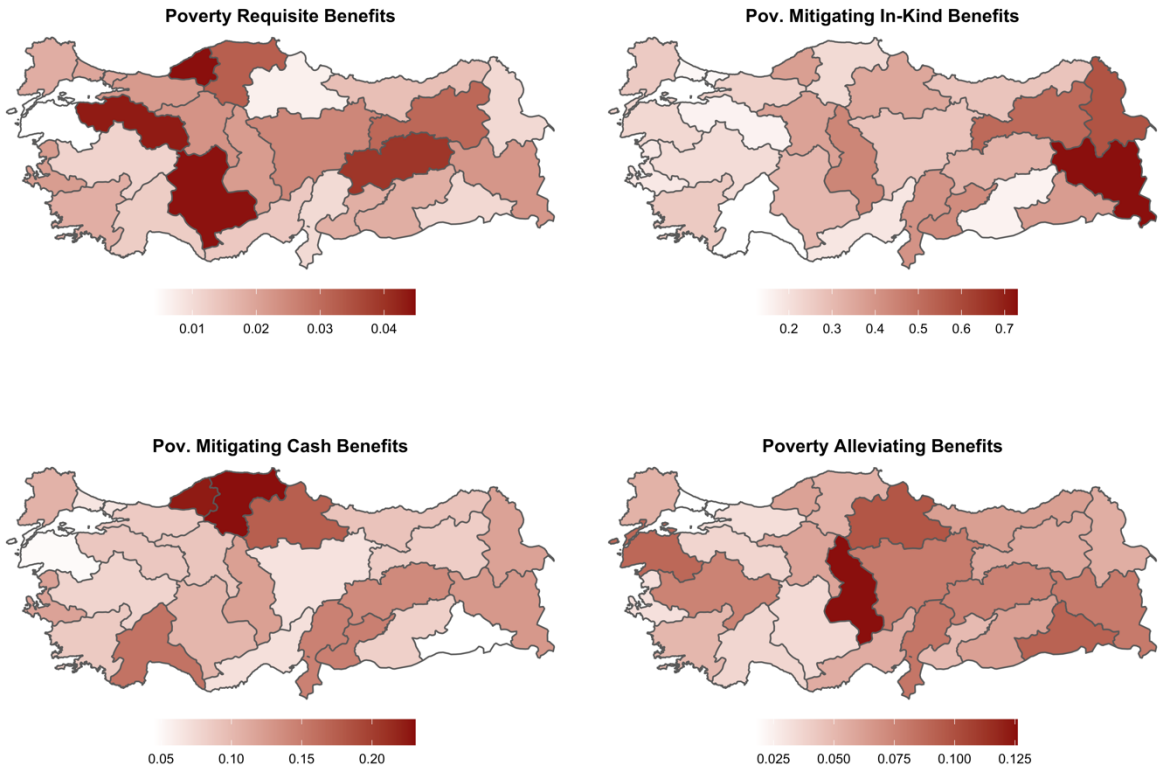
Not all benefits are created equal – Differential politicization of social assistance in Turkey

Table A1: *Social Assistance Types and Corresponding Programs*

TÜIK SILC Benefit Types	**SILC Variable (Original Question posed to participants)**	**KONDA EMW**
Disability Benefits/Social Pension	**fg110 disability** Ferdin 2016 yılı içinde elde ettiği sakatlık, gazilik, malülen emeklilik gelirlerinin değeri (TL)	- Engelli maaşı - Yaşli maaşı - *Yasa 2020*
Education Benefits	**fg120 eduben** Ferdin 2016 yılı içinde eğitim ile ilgili elde ettiği karşılıksız burs, bağış vb. gelirlerin değeri (TL)	- Devlet bursu - Belediye bursu - Vakıf ve/veya derneklerden burs
Child Allowances Kind	**hg030a childallow_kin**	
Child Allowances Cash	**hg030n childallow** 2016 yılı içinde alınan NAKDİ çocuk yardımlarının DEĞERİ (TL)	- Çocuk parası
Social Benefit Cash	**hg050n social_cash** 2016 yılı içinde alınan diğer NAKDİ sosyal yardımların DEĞERİ (TL)	- Dul yardımı (maaşı) - Öksüz veya yetim yardımı - Asker yardımı - Süt ve doğum parası - Yaşlılık maaşı? - Bakım parası?
Social Benefit Kind	**hg050a social_kind** 2016 yılı içinde alınan diğer AYNİ sosyal yardımların DEĞERİ (TL)	- Yeşil Kart? - Devlet tarafından verilen nakit olmayan kömür, yiyecek, vs. gibi yardımlar - Belediye tarafından verilen nakit olmayan kömür, inşaat malzemesi, yiyecek (örneğin; kurban bayramlarında dağıtılan et) vs. gibi yardımlar - Vakıf ve/veya dernekler tarafından verilen nakit olmayan yardımlar

Excluded Benefits		
Housing Benefits	HG040 - 2016 yılı içerisinde alınan konut yardımlarının (kira, vb.) değeri (TL)	- Currently not included, not very many people reported getting the benefit (382/200.000)
Pension (contributions based)	FG080: Ferdin 2016 yılı içinde elde ettiği emeklilik/yaşlılık/isteğe bağlıemeklilik gelirlerinin değeri (TL) FG085: Ferdin 2016 yılı içinde elde ettiği emeklilik ikramiyesi	- Not social assistance

Figure A1: *Regional Distribution of Benefits across 26 NUTS2 Subregions of Turkey – This is the overall share in comparison to Figure 2 in the paper that shows receipt as a percentage of people in poverty)*



Notes: *This figure was assembled using calculations by the author using Statistics on Income and Living Conditions for years 2015-17 on the NUTS2 level for 26 regions of Turkey. The figure shows the share of people in relative poverty who receive each benefit type. Relative poverty is defined as 50% below median income. Figures that show the absolute share of people receiving the can be found in the main Paper.*

Figure A2: *Pairwise comparison of marginal effects comparing AKP strongholds to average regions and regions where other parties rule. The results indicate that core constituencies tend to receive significantly more benefits for all types of social assistance, other than poverty requisite benefits*

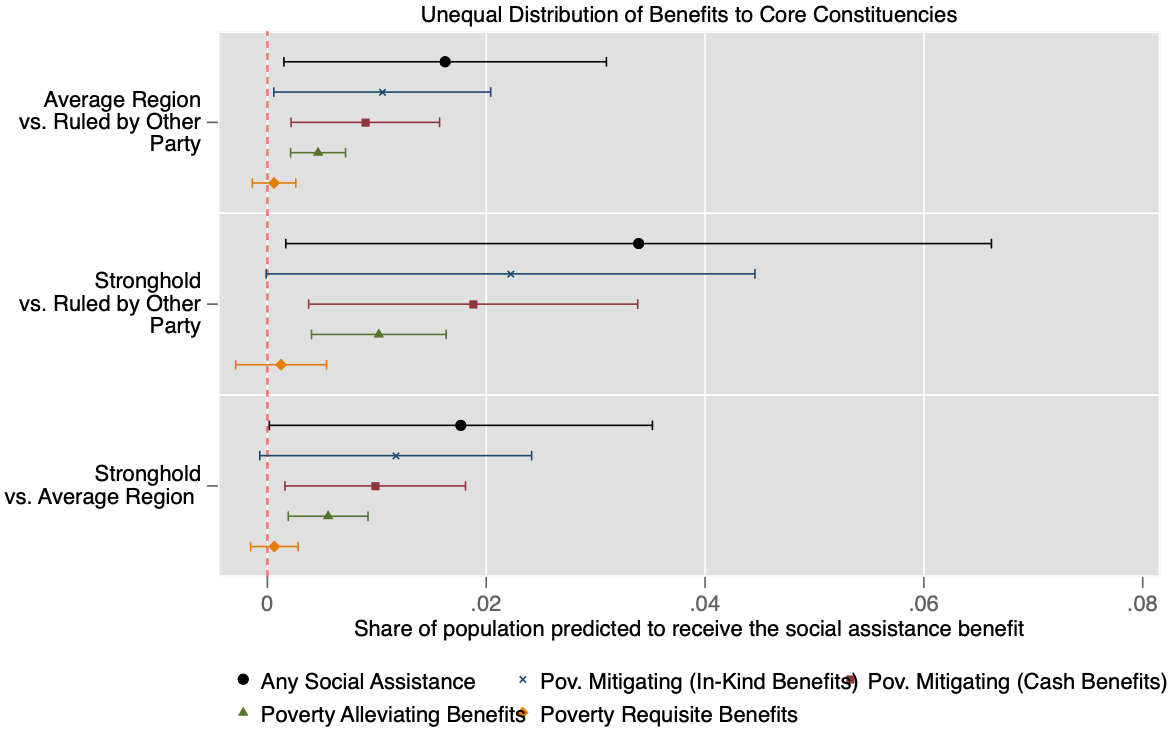


Figure A3: *Predicted effects of demonstrations (high vs. low levels) on social assistance coverage (across types of social assistance)- targeted cash transfers only significant effect*

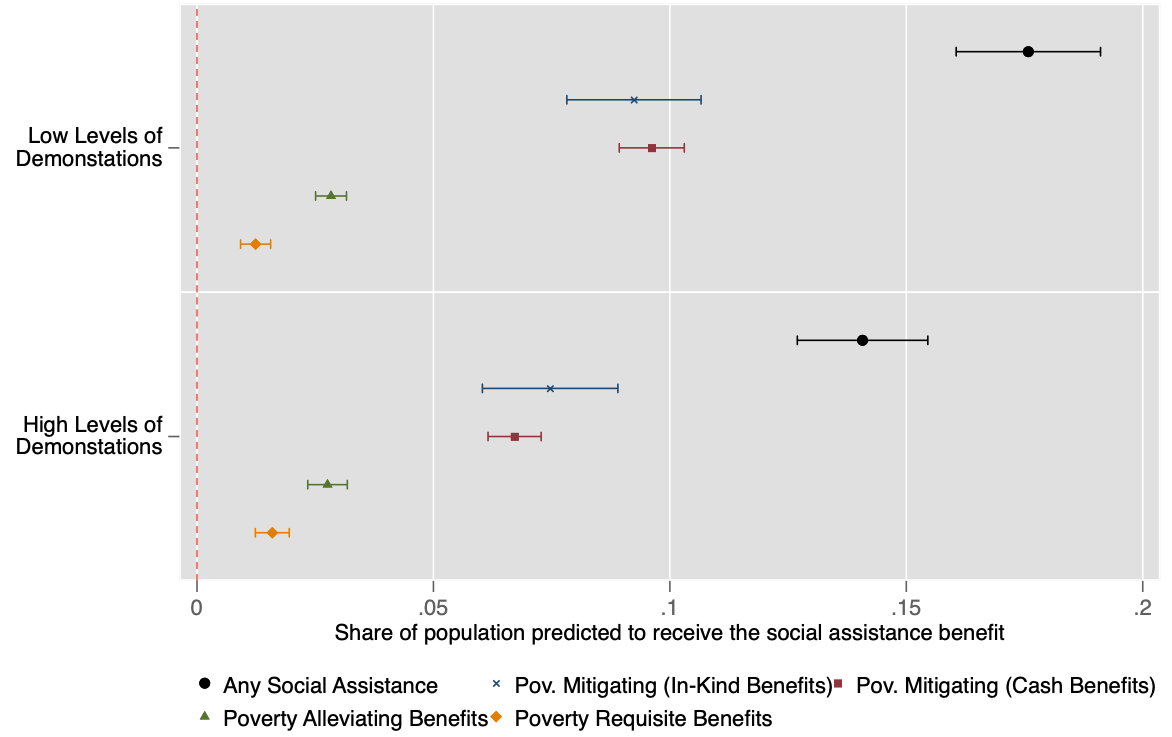


Figure A4: *Pairwise comparisons of predicted effects of demonstrations (high vs. low levels) on social assistance coverage (across types of social assistance) – targeted cash transfers only significant effect*

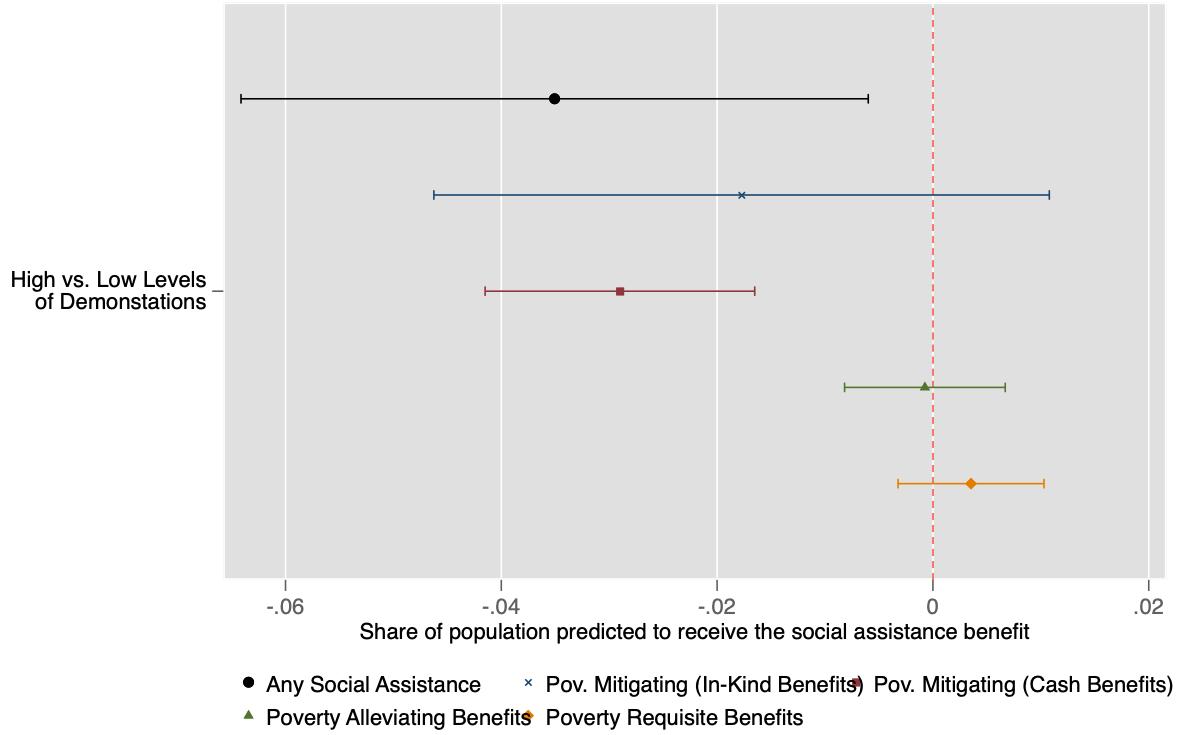


Figure A5: *Distribution of Coverage across Social Assistance Programs over time of examination. Data from TR-SILC*

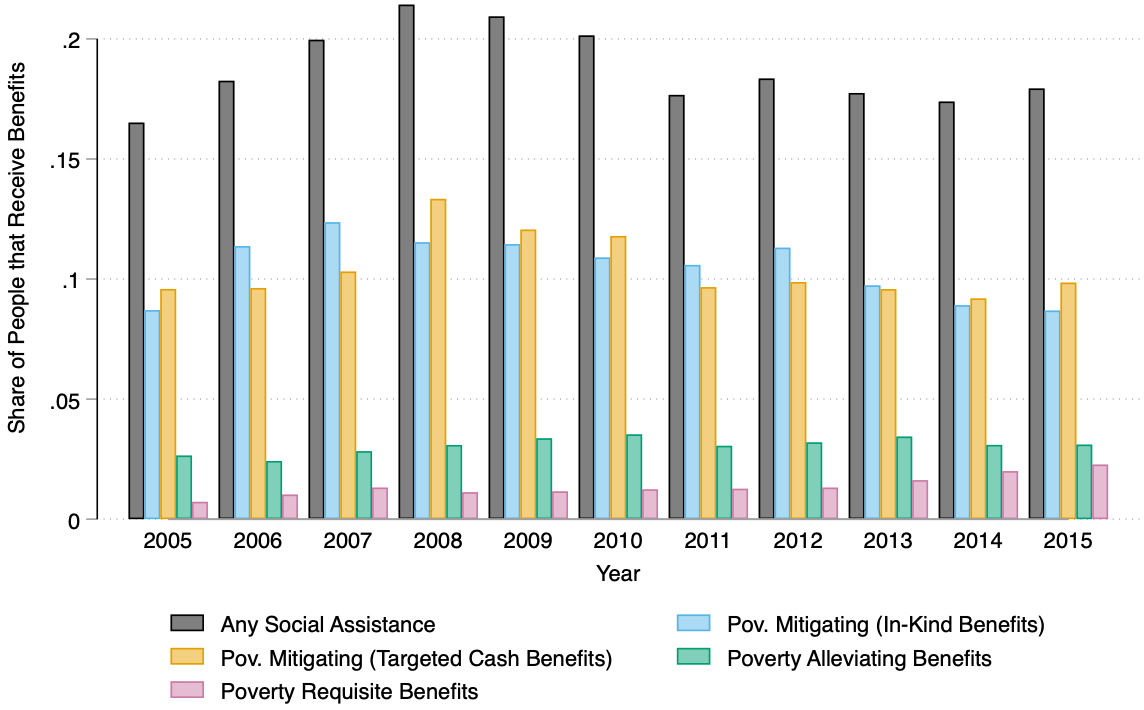


Figure A6: *Regional Distribution of Benefits across 26 NUTS2 Subregions of Turkey for Any Social Assistance program as (a share of relative poverty)*

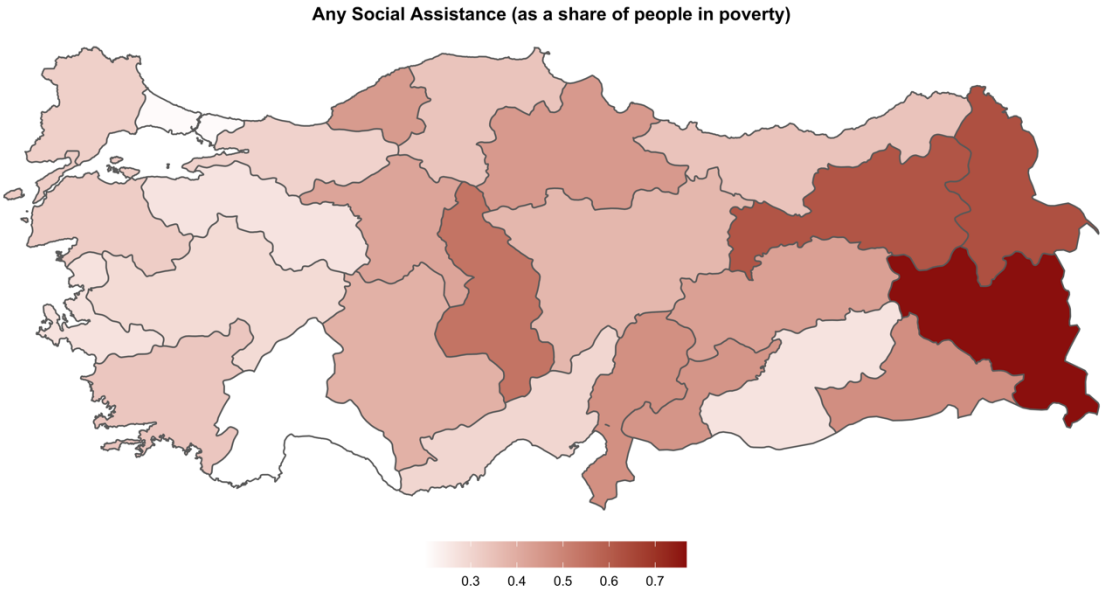


Table A2: *Overview of Social Assistance programs in Turkey with application details (information from Ministry of Family and Social Services)*

Aid Type	Aid Program	Applicants	Who	Document	Amount	Payment Period
FAMILY	Birth Assistance	Application should be done by the new mother. In case the mother is not a Turkish citizen/Blue card holder or alive, the application is made by the father who hast to meet the same conditions.	All Turkish citizens who reside in Turkey. After 15.05.2015 Turkish citizens and Blue Card holders from abroad.	Application Petition for Birth Assistance	300 TL for the first child 400 TL for the second child 600 TL for the third and subsequent children	Payments are for one time only.
FAMILY	Multiple Birth Assistance	Father or legal representative on behalf of mother or mother	Households with a per capita income of less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL)	TR Identity Card	150 TL	Payments are made every 2 months.
FAMILY	Regular Cash Assistance Program for Widowers	Women who lost their husbands	Conditions stipulated in Law No. 3294	TR Identity Card	325 TL	Payments are calculated for each month and are made every 2 months.
FAMILY	Orphans Benefit	Mother, father, or legal representative if both parents have passed away.	Conditions stipulated in Law No. 3294	Identity Cards	150 TL	Payments are calculated for each month every 2 months is done.
FAMILY	Regular Cash Assistance Program for the Families of Soldiers in Need	Spouse if married, mother or father if not	Spouse if the soldier is married, mother or father if the soldier single	TR Identity Card	400 TL	Payments are calculated every month and are made every 2 months.
FAMILY	Aid for children of soldiers	Military families in need	No social security and qualified as needy within the scope of Law 3294	Identity Card	150 per	Payments are calculated once every 2 months made for each month.
FAMILY	Terrorism Damage Aids	Family members over the age of 18	Citizens affected by terrorist attacks at	TR Identity Card	Maximum 1.200 TL per household per month	Determined by the Social Assistance and

			their place of residence and citizens who had to flee due to terrorist incidents			Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees.
FAMILY	Disaster-Emergency Assistance	Family members over 18 years old	Citizens affected by a disaster and/or emergency	TR Identity Card is	Determined by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees.	Determined by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees.
FAMILY	Job Orientation Assistance	Social assistance beneficiaries who are sent to a job interview (ISKUR)	Job seekers registered in the Integrated Social Assistance Information System	TC Identity Card	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees determines: Up to a maximum of 10% of the monthly net minimum wage up to a maximum of 3 times	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.
FAMILY	Employment Assistance	People registered as unemployed who successfully applied to a job through ISKUR	People registered as unemployed who successfully applied to a job through ISKUR	TR Identity Card	Amount corresponding to 1/3 of the gross minimum wage	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.
FAMILY	Aid for Relatives of Martyrs and Veterans	Relatives of martyrs or veterans over the age of 18	Relatives of martyrs or veterans over the age of 18	TR Identity Card is	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.
HOUSING - FOOD	Food Aids	Family members over the age of 18	Households without social security whose income is below 1/3 of the minimum wage	Identity Card	Distribution based on need	Before the month of Ramadan and Eid-al-Adha. If need be aid can be provided throughout the year
HOUSING - FOOD	Soup kitchens	Family members over the age of 18 (in the provinces/districts where the soup kitchens are available)	People who are old, disabled, sick and those who are not in a condition to cook at home (those who do not have the necessary cooking	TR Identity Card	Hot food.	Hot meals are served daily.

			tools, homeless, etc.) within the scope of Law No. 3294			
HOUSING - FOOD	Housing assistance	Family member over the age of 18	Having any of the special conditions: old age, disability, single-parent family, being widowed & having a per capita income in the household of less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 202)	TR Identity Card	Provided that the criteria determined for assistance are met, support is given up to 20.000.-TL in house repairs, up to 30.000.-TL in prefabricated house constructions, up to 40.000.-TL for reinforced concrete house constructions.	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.
HOUSING - FOOD	Social Housing Projects	No new applications are accepted.	Households that meet the application requirements.	Turkish Identity Card	Given social housing to be reimbursed over time	Repayments: 100 TL per month for 1+1 residences; 130 TL for 2+1 residences to be completed in 270 months.
HOUSING - FOOD	Fuel Aid	Family members over 18 years old	Having any of the special conditions: old age, disability, single-parent family, being widowed & having a per capita income in the household of less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 202)	TR Identity Card	The amount of coal to be distributed to the households is determined by the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, taking into account the climatic conditions of the region, the distribution amounts of the previous years and the heating values of the coal.	Before the winter months, deliveries are made according to the shipment schedule determined by the General Directorate of Turkish Coal Enterprises.
HOUSING - FOOD	Electricity Consumption Support	There is no need to apply to any institution, it is sufficient for the beneficiaries to go to	Households in need benefiting from regular social assistance programs	Identity Card Residential Type	1-2 person households: monthly 75 kWh,	Payments are made monthly.

		the PTT branch with their ID Card and electricity bill.	within the scope of Laws No. 3294 and 2022.	Electricity Bills	3-person households: monthly 100 kWh, 4-person household: monthly 125 kWh, 5-people and larger: 150 kWh per month	
HOUSING - FOOD	Social Cohesion Assistance	Households members who qualify for benefit (recent refugees)	Aid program funded by the European Union, implemented in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Turkish Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services.	Identity Card provided (ID numbers starting with 99)	120 TL	Payments are made monthly.
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Elderly Pension	Persons over the age of 65	Aid given to citizens over the age of 65 who do not have social security and whose monthly income per capita is less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 2021), taking into account the person and his spouse.	TR Identity Card	763,67-TL for the period of 01.01.2021-30.06.2021	Payments are made monthly.
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Disability Pension/Benefit	Disabled people over the age of 18 or their guardians	Citizens with a disability report of 40% or and whose monthly income per	TR Identity Card Health Board Report	For the period of 01.01.2021-30.06.2021; 40%-69% disability pension 609.61-TL,	Payments are made monthly.

			capita is less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 2021), taking into account the person and his spouse.		70% and above disability pension 914,41-TL	
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Disabled Caretaker Pension	Relatives of persons with disabilities under the age of 18 (parents, guardians)	Caretakers of people with a disability report of 40% or and whose monthly income per capita is less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 2021), taking into account the person and his spouse.	TR Identity Card Health Board Report (Health board reports after 20.02.2020 can be obtained electronically. Reports issued after this date are not requested.)	For the period of 01.01.2021 - 30.06.2021: 40%-69% disability pension 609.61-TL, 70% and above disability pension 914,41-TL	Payments are made monthly.
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Elderly and Disabled Care Projects (Vefa Projects)	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations	Citizens over 65 - Disabled Citizens	Online Project Document	The scope varies across the framework of the project	Payments are made in a maximum of 4 tranches within a calendar year.
DISABLED - ELDERLY	Disability support benefit	Family members over the age of 18	Disabled citizens	TR Identity Card Health Report	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation.
HEALTH	General Health Insurance (GSS) Premium Payments	All Turkish citizens without health insurance coverage	All Turkish citizens without health insurance coverage	TR Identity Card	G0 Premium amount 143,10 TL Premium is	Paid by the state to SGK every month on behalf of the person/household.
HEALTH	Conditional Health Benefits	Families with children who are not covered by the social security	Families with children aged 0-6,	TR Identity Card	45 TL per month during pregnancy,	Payments are calculated for each

	(Health and Pregnancy)	institution (Law No. 3294)	and pregnant women		45 TL per month per child 100 TL if the delivery is made in the hospital for the first 2 months following the birth	month and are made every 2 months.
HEALTH	Additional Fee Payments (Medication and Medical Services)	People who qualify under 5510 Law No. 60 / C-1 and 60 / C-3 within the scope of universal health insurance	Recipients of general health insurance and their dependents	TR Identity Card	Fees depending on medical needs and procedures	Applications made to the Related Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation
HEALTH	Chronic Illness Assistance	Persons with tuberculosis or SSPE disease or their caregivers.	Persons whose disease information was obtained from the Public Health Management System approved by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees	TR Identity Card	1,658.13 TL	Monthly payments
HEALTH	Payments to Silicosis Patients	No new applications are accepted.	People who have lost at least 15% of their earning power in the profession due to silicosis	TR Identity Card Health Board Report	For the period of 01.01.2021-30.06.2021; Mild Silicosis pension (15%-34%) 1,317,23-TL, Moderate Silicosis pension (35%-54%) 1,505,41- TL, Severe Silicosis pension (55% and above) 1.677.45-TL	Monthly payments
HEALTH	Electricity Consumption Support for Chronic Patients	If the patient himself is unable to leave the house due to health reasons, the patient's representative, guardian or guardian can apply	Persons who do not receive Home Care Assistance and who have to continue their lives dependent on medical devices	Turkish Identity Card Health Report	Within the scope of Electricity Consumption Support, up to 200 TL per month is provided depending on the	Electricity Consumption Support payments are made monthly, Accumulated Electricity Debt

		on behalf of the patient, or in the absence of such persons, an application can be received by the Foundation personnel at the patient's home.	due to their chronic illness within the scope of Law No. 3294		consumption level of the device. No upper limit has been determined for Uninterruptible Power Supply Support and Accumulated Electricity Debt Support, and it can be done depending on the financial means of the Foundation in the local area.	Support and Uninterrupted Power Supply Support are made once
EDUCATION	Conditional Education Aids (CCT)	Families with children who are not covered by the social security institution (Law No. 3294)	Families with children at primary and secondary education age without social security registration	TR Identity Card	Primary school male student 45 TL monthly, female student 50 TL monthly Secondary school male student 55 TL monthly, female student 75 TL monthly	Payments are made every 2 months.
EDUCATION	Conditional Education Assistance for Foreigners (YŞEY)	Any household member can apply for the benefit.	Syrians and all other foreign children residing outside the temporary accommodation centers, in need, not absent more than 4 days (80%) in a month, studying at Ministry of National Education and temporary education centers	Identity Card provided (ID numbers starting with 99)	Students between Kindergarten age and 8th Grade; 50 TL per month for female students 45 TL per month for male students Students between 9th and 12th grades; Monthly 75 TL for female students 55 TL monthly for male students	Payments are made every 2 months.
EDUCATION	Educational Material Assistance	Family members over the age of 18	Per capita income in the household of less than 1/3 of the	Identity Card	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance	Aid is provided at the beginning of each academic year

			net minimum wage (852.53 TL for the year 2021)		and Solidarity Foundation based on needs assessments and financial resources	
EDUCATION	Benefit for Students: Housing-Transportation-Food	Family members over the age of 18	People who are eligible under the law 3294 on social security and households without social security with income less than 1/3 of the minimum wage	Identity Card	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation based on needs assessments and financial resources.	Provided through the academic year
EDUCATION	Aid for Higher Education Students	University students over the age of 18	Households without social security within the scope of Law No. 3294 and households with social security but whose per capita income is less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage	Identity Card	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation based on needs assessments and financial resources.	Determined by the Board of Trustees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation based on needs assessments and financial resources.
EDUCATION	Constructions of Dormitories	In places where there is a need for dormitories for secondary education students, dormitories with a capacity of 100, 200 and 300 are built.	Students who are "needy" are considered to receive rooms in these dormitories	Online application system	The need, construction, and decision on who can make use of these dormitories is determined by the Ministry according to the decision of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees	Depending on projects
EDUCATION	Miscellaneous Education Aid	Any family member over the age of 18	Households without social security within	Identity Card	The need, construction, and decision on who	Assistance is provided usually at

			the scope of Law No. 3294 and households with social security but whose per capita income is less than 1/3 of the net minimum wage		can make use of these dormitories is determined by the Ministry according to the decision of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Board of Trustees. This may vary across programs.	the beginning of each academic year.

What explains rationing of a de jure universal social program?

Evidence from India's Rural Employment Guarantee

Ali Bargu

Abstract:

The largest public works program in the world, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a universal policy (de jure) that provides 100 days of work to anyone that is willing to complete manual labor. However, rationing of the program (unmet demand for work of people who would like to participate in the program) is widespread and varies greatly across states and districts of India. Using a novel measure for district level rationing and electoral dynamics, this study is the first to accurately capture rationing and test if political dynamics influence the stark variation. To do so, this paper examines four potential explanations and finds that (i) poverty on the state level is a strong determinant of rationing of MGNREGA, while district level poverty is not; (ii) the politics of rationing on the state level encompasses two separate aspects: first, I find political parties ration MGNREGA to different extents and second, party alignment of state and district level politicians decreases rationing. This paper uncovers the two different underlying mechanisms on how these two political factors lead to lower rationing: differences due to party strategy logic are rooted in varying party priorities for investments into the material or labor parts of the policy; while political alignment increases general MGNREGA spending, yielding lower rationing rates. Overall, this paper finds that state level characteristics shape general logic and resource allocation of MGNREGA. It adds to the literatures of distributive politics and social policy in federal systems by showing how politics at the state level serve as a backdrop for local dynamics of MGNREGA and points towards barriers that people face in receiving work.

I. Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest and one of the most ambitious social security and public works program in the world (Ministry of Rural Development Citation). In 2021, it provided employment to 126 million people across India.[1] To illustrate the sheer magnitude of this program: if MNREGA beneficiaries were a country, they would be the 11th most populous country on earth. The job guarantee offers 100 days of paid work in rural areas to anybody who is willing to do unskilled manual labor. This self-selection design has garnered a lot of interest from academics studying social programs and serves as a basis for this paper: In theory, there should be no unmet demand in the program due to the universal policy design. The official statistics provided by the Ministry for Rural Development indicate that no unmet demand exists. However, a series of quantitative and qualitative studies have shown this not to be the case (Dutta et al., 2012; Himanshu et al., 2015). A high share of the rural population across India demanded but did not receive work under the MGNREGA program. This share of people in each district can be understood as the *rationing rate* of the program. What explains differences in rationing rates of MNREGA across districts in India? In this study, I focus on the role of politics as an explanation for these disparities in rationing rates. Specifically, I uncover how state governments shape the implementation of this program. To do so, I create a novel dataset to examine four potential theoretical mechanisms that could account for this finding: (i) state resource and capacity, (ii) party alignment logic across levels of governments, (iii) party strategy and iv) counter-insurgency strategy.

As the largest public works program in the world, a large body of literature about this program emerged ranging from intended and unintended effects of the program to the politics of its distribution. The positive effects of this program on a range of measures are well established. The

[1]Ministry of Rural Development - MGNREGA Data Portal: https://nregarep2.nic.in/netnrega/dynamic2/dynamicreport_new4.aspx

program has been found to alleviate poverty and improve livelihoods, though with important caveats such as insufficient implementation (Breitkreuz et al., 2017; Desai et al., 2015). MGNREGA has increased short-term household consumption expenditure by up to 10 percent in rural areas and up to 12 percent for rural households that belong to marginalized castes (Bose, 2017). Further, it has been found to enable accumulation of nonfinancial assets in the medium term (Deininger & Liu, 2013). Women are guaranteed at least one third of employment created under the program, which empowers women across India, though there are location specific obstacles that dampen the effect (Datta & Singh, 2012). In a more recent study, Chaure and Hicks (2019) find a relative improvement of the labor market for women through the income shock that MNREGA provides. As per larger effects on labor markets, though there was some crowding out of private sector jobs, there are net positive welfare effects for the poor by increasing private sector wages (Imbert & Papp, 2015).

As these studies have shown, the program has led to massive welfare gains in the short and medium run. Thus, understanding the reasons why some districts in India suffer from very high levels of unmet demand (rationing), while others do not, is vital to uncover obstacles in the policy design of universal programs within and outside of India.

The existing literature on distribution of the program falls short in explaining the variation of rationing rates as they focus their attention on one of the following matters. Scholars of the politics of MGNREGA focus on the number of days people have worked under the program to capture dynamics of political distribution (Maiorano et al., 2018). While this variable is useful to understand general distribution, the demand driven design of this policy may yield a misrepresentation of the situation on the ground. Are these studies measuring a mere function of more interest and applications to the program in one district compared to the one with less work provided under the scheme? This study aims to consider demand and distribution together, to understand the

dynamics of unmet demand for the program, enabling us to get a deeper understanding of the political economy of MGNREGA. Studies that have provided insights on rationing tend to focus on comparing village level political variables in one state (Dasgupta, 2016). While these findings are valuable, a larger scale examination of the role of state level politics (federalism) across all of India is missing. This gap should be closed in order to uncover larger logics of distribution. This is especially important as state level governments play a major role in provision of social policies and thus vary starkly across India (Tillin & Pereira, 2017). To the best of my knowledge, the only study that attempts to assess variation in rationing rates for a larger set of states solely examines whether poverty and the share of women can explain the variation and ignore political variables altogether (Dutta et al., 2012).

In this paper I attempt to shed some light on the reasons for variations in rationing using a novel dataset for protests, electoral alignment between levels of government and MGNREGA rationing rates on the district level. There are two main pathways through which targeting in MGNREGA can take place: (i) not receiving work after expressing interest – I term this *access rationing*, and (ii) not receiving the number of days one wanted to work – *workday rationing*. This study focuses on access rationing as the reasons why people get differing number of workdays may have a multitude of reasons related to specific projects or preferences for work by individuals. Figure 1 displays access rationing rates across India I calculated that serve as the dependent variable.

In this study, I go beyond existing studies in four important ways: first, it carries out an analysis with political variables on the state and district level. As parliamentary constituencies and districts of India do not match, this paper provides a novel measure that calculates the geographical overlap as a weight. Second, it is the first study to calculate district level rationing rates instead of merely using expenditure or work provided under the program. Third, it attempts to provide more generalizable findings for the entire Indian nation, going beyond existing studies that focus on a

handful of districts/gram panchayats. Forth, it outlines and tests the mechanisms of how political factors lead to differences in MGNREGA rationing rates. It further contributes to wider debates about clientelistic distribution of benefits by highlighting how in complex, federal systems a multitude of actors can use the same social program yet implement it differently with the ultimate goal of electoral self-preservation.

The next section outlines four main theoretical pathways drawn from the literature that may explain the variation in rationing rates. After doing so, the empirical approach and new data sources and measurements are outlined, before presenting the results. The results section shows how political variables influence rationing. All results point towards the importance of federal level politics in the distribution of MGNREGA. This is followed by some robustness checks that were carried out to ensure validity of the results and to showcase the difference of the proposed rationing measure to regularly used distribution variables. The last section concludes, reflects on limitations of this study, and points out further avenues for research.

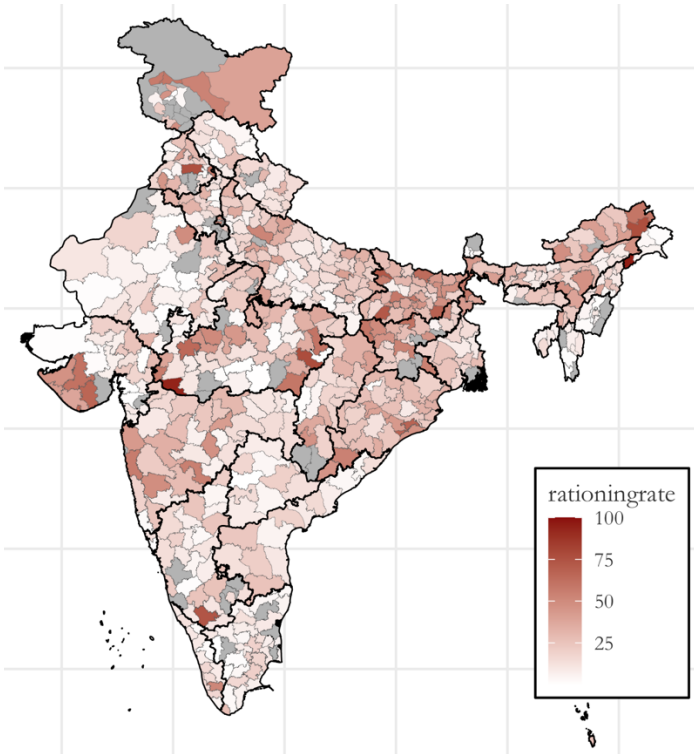
II. The Rationing of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

What explains the variation in MGNREGA rationing across states and districts? Desai et al. (2015) find in their encompassing report that "reasons for rationing MGNREGA work require further analysis" as existing studies did not provide a convincing explanation. This paper offers new data to provide insights into factors associated with the MGNREGA rationing. I outline four possible theoretical mechanisms drawn from the literature and empirical findings that could explain the vast differences in MGNREGA rationing in India to later test them on their merits. I start with a review of the *state resource and capacity logic,* before moving to three possible political explanations (*party alignment, counter-insurgency, and party strategy logic).*

State Resource and Capacity Logic

What do we know about rationing or under-provision of MGNREGA? First, in theory, it should not exist! While MGNREGA is an employment guarantee that stipulates *de jure* covering anybody who applies from a rural household and wants to carry out unskilled manual labor, this is *de facto* not the case. Some scholars have implicitly hinted at under-provision of MGNREGA, but to the best of my knowledge, Dutta et al. (2012) have carried out the only analysis assessing rationing on an all-India basis, covering 20 of 36 States and Union territories. They operationalize rationing as the share of rural households who wanted work but did not get it under the program, which will also serve as the main definition in this paper. Higher rationing rates signify that less people who indicated interest have access to the program. They find widely varying rates of rationing across the 20 states in their analysis with Rajasthan (16 percent) and Tamil Nadu (19 percent) on the lower end and Maharashtra and Punjab (both roughly 80 percent rationing). The analysis reveals that as expected, poor people express more demand for working under the program. A puzzling finding, however, is that the correlation between state poverty rates and rationing, though present, is weak. If poverty is not a sufficient explanation of rationing, what is? Administrative state capacity to successfully implement the program may have an independent effect on rationing, as it may hinder the number of projects that are proposed and approved as well as successfully informing people on how to apply for the program (Deshpande et al., 2017). This paper examines whether state resources and capacity are sufficient factors in explaining differences in rationing or merely a necessary condition together with political factors outlined below.

Figure 1: *The Rationing of MGNREGA across districts of India*



Notes: Rationing describes the share of the rural population who demanded but did not receive work. The calculations are done by the author and use National Sample Survey data from 2009-10.

MGNREGA Politics

Politics and clientelism play an important role in the design, administration, and expansion of MGNREGA. Established findings include that single constituency districts, districts that correspond exactly to one parliamentary constituency, show more resource allocation of the program (Gulzar & Pasquale, 2017), electoral competition shapes public works provision (Chowdhury, 2014; Gupta & Mukhopadhyay, 2016), and how decentralization of program implementation shapes outcomes (Maiorano et al., 2018). This paper explains how three political variables (party alignment, party strategy, and contentious politics) affect rationing and tests these theories on their merit.

In the following I review literature on the distributive politics of MGNREGA that aims to explain differences in provision. It is important to note that none of these studies, while proposing to

measure discretionary changes in MGNREGA, captures demand and supply together. Thus, they are not able to explicitly examine the share of people who do not receive work even though these studies implicitly or explicitly imply they do. Thus, studies that examine the politics of MGNREGA, do not measure rationing, but study only its distribution, which may simply be a function of increases and decreases due to demand for the program.[2] I use existing studies on distributive politics of MGNREGA as a starting point to review all factors that could explain the variation in rationing, since they have been found to affect at least their distribution.

Party Alignment Logic

A prevalent finding in studies that examine the politics of MGNREGA is that party alignment across levels of governments (village, district, state) is associated with increases in MGNREGA projects, working days and households receiving work (U. Das & Maiorano, 2015). Das et al. (2021) have shown that upper government-tiers favor lower-tiers in implementation across 46 villages in West Bengal if they are from the same party or political coalition in order to win close elections and attempt to channel less resources to villages with opposition party leaders (R. Das et al., 2021). Dasgupta (2016) examines administrative channels through which preferential distribution and access to MGNREGA occurs across villages in Rajasthan and proposes that co-partisan village leaders to upper government levels receive more resources for the program. Himanshu et al. find that the sarpanch (elected leader of the village government) plays an important role in the allocation of work and assessment of demand (Himanshu et al., 2015). In their analysis of 279 villages in Rajasthan they find that the sarpanch rations in favor of their own village. Other studies have found similar patterns for investments in the creation of private employment (Asher & Novosad, 2015). These studies, however, cover a small number of villages in one Indian state. While they illuminate in detail how this could take place on a micro level, they cannot detect larger

[2] With the exception of (Himanshu et al., 2015)

patterns that are likely to be different when examining all of India. For example, as stated above, rationing is the lowest in Rajasthan across all Indian states and union territories. Attempting to draw generalizable conclusions about determinants of rationing across the country is likely to be insufficient, especially since none of these studies explicitly models unmet demand. The novel setup of this analysis however, can offer insights into whether this may be a determinant in rationing of MGNREGA. Previous studies were interested in general party alignment but did not theoretically or empirically differentiate between national level parties and purely regional parties. The two largest national level parties (INC and BJP) that compete either by themselves or in an alliance with another party are the only two parties that have had prime ministers since 1999. Since the program is financed mostly on the national level, I argue that the proposed party alignment effect is more likely to exist for national level parties compared to purely regional parties.

Counter-Insurgency Logic

The relationship between social movements and social policy outcomes is a growing field of literature, especially in emerging market economies such as India (Manor & Duckett, 2017; Yörük et al., 2019; Yörük & Gençer, 2021). As for the Indian MGNREGA program in particular, Jenkins and Manor (2017) stress that the program forms a "central component" in the government's counter-insurgency efforts to counteract Maoist uprisings in the so-called red-corridor, where most violent unrests take place. Resembling the party-alignment literature, empirical findings are constrained to case studies in a small number of villages. For instance, Fischer and Ali (2019) find that protests in Jamui Town (in state of Bihar) have led to increases in employment under MGNREGA and even wider investments into soil improvement projects, whereas worksite disruption staged by low caste Mushahar in the same place have initially led to employment but the project was abruptly terminated after 10 days without wages being disbursed (ibid, p. 152). Thus, it is not clear if at all and if so, in which direction, social unrest might affect a public works program like MGNREA when examining it on a larger scale across all Indian states. The reverse

relationship, namely the effect of receiving anti-poverty programs on (successfully) curbing social unrest, is better researched in India and hence it is important to examine if this relationship also exists in the other direction (Dasgupta et al., 2017; Hoelscher et al., 2012). Consequently, I test if social unrest in districts leads to increases in provision and thus, decreases in rationing of MGNREGA or has no effect when examining it across (almost) all districts in India.

Party Strategy Logic

After winning the national election in 2004, the Indian National Congress Party (henceforth: Congress) engaged in wide ranging social protection reforms as part of their political coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Many of these rights-based entitlements focused on workers in the informal economy, indicative of a paradigm shift: The informal working class was not just seen as a byproduct of a development phase towards a prosperous democracy with a capitalistic market, but these people were here to stay and their grievances needed to be addressed by the government (Deshpande et al., 2017). The UPA therefore introduced legislation to tackle the issue of poverty in rural areas, the most daring of which was the employment guarantee scheme analyzed in this paper. This was seen as a break with the previously existing system of patronage, which delivered public goods only selectively for political gain or based on ethno-religious criteria (Harriss, 2013). However, the relationship between levels of governments in the Indian context is complex: while centralized decision-making is predominant in the design of social policies, there is extensive involvement of local level politicians in the implementation of programs (Mooij, 2007). This is also the case for MGRENGA. While the central government covers 100 percent of the wages to unskilled workers and 75 percent of the rest (material cost for construction and skilled workers to supervise/contribute to projects), the implementation and project proposals are carried out by lower levels of governments in Gram Panchayats (GP are a group of villages and form the lowest level of government) (ibid, p. 4). However, state governments, situated in between the central government and GPs also have a constitutionally mandated role in the delivery of social

protection[3]. They not only act as the agency that oversees projects and channels the resources, but also must bear the entire cost of the unemployment insurance in case workers are not assigned to a project within 15 days of the application and pay for the remaining 25 percent of material costs and wages for skilled labor (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008). This design ensures that state governments have an interest in providing everyone who applies with work quickly so central funds can be used, as opposed to the state having to bear the cost for the unemployment compensation. This complicated administrative setup leaves room for all levels of governments to claim credit for the program and attempt to distribute it for their own political gain. As Tillin and Pereira (2017) show, states are at the center of Indian social policy making and are the main implementors of social policies. Interestingly, politicians from all parties have successfully claimed credit for MGNREGA when they rule on the state level, with some Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)[4] chief ministers (elected leader of state governments) even changing the name of the program or adding their faces to the job cards to claim credit and benefit from this centrally funded scheme.

Therefore, it is surprising that there is no, to the best of my knowledge, comprehensive analysis examining differences in rationing rates by party (or political alliance/coalition) rule on the state level across all Indian states and union territories. This paper fills this gap and attempts to see if separate parties have implemented MGNREGA differently in terms of rationing and what the mechanisms for differences in implementation performance could be.

[3] See the List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution which details responsibilities of states and the union government. URL: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/S7.pdf

[4] BJP: the largest opposition party to the INC at the time and would come to power on the national level with Modi after winning the 2014 election in a landslide

III. Empirical Approach and Data

This paper uses Indian districts as a unit of analysis, calculates rationing for MGNREGA on this level and then proceeds to test if political explanations can illuminate the cross-regional variation. The data for rationing is calculated from the National Sample Survey from the wave that was carried out 2010/11, at a time when budgets for the program have peaked. Thus, we can expect rationing to be on the lower end compared to the years that follow, as budgets have been squeezed. (Roy, 2015). If we find effects here, they are likely to be exacerbated in the years that followed this analysis. The analysis utilizes a cross-sectional design that regresses political, economic, and demographic variables from the prior years onto rationing rates of district.

Dependent Variable: The Rationing Rate of MNREGA

The majority of scholars studying the politics of MGNREGA have used data on program participation on the district level, which takes the form of *Person-days* carried out. While publicly available data of this quality is rare and thus very useful, the stark inequalities across and within states in India make it harder to interpret the levels of provision we see as a political choice. This paper exploits the particularity of MGNREGA that every adult who is willing to do manual labor in rural areas can benefit from the program and receive 100 days of work. If local governments cannot provide work, the state must pay a compensation for their unemployment. When we examine the numbers provided by the official statistics on demand vs. supply of job cards and the number of beneficiaries, they range within 99% of each other, suggesting that there is no unmet demand. There are several studies that show that under-provision (often referred to as rationing due to the lack of resources to provide the program to all) and clientelist practices are widespread across Indian states and districts (Dasgupta, 2016; Dutta et al., 2012). Thus, trying to assess this unmet demand requires a measure that goes beyond the assessment of how many people worked under MNREGA. I compose a district level measure of rationing using the 66th round of the **National Sample Survey (2009-10)** adapting the approach used by Dutta et al. (2012) to calculate

rationing rates for MGNREGA. The survey fortunately did not only ask if the household had a job card or how many days the beneficiaries have worked under the program, but also provided the following options for the question on program participation during the last 365 days: (i) got work, (ii) sought but did not get work, and (iii) did not seek work. In combination with the universal, in theory purely demand driven design of the program, this gives us the rare opportunity to understand under-provisioning without usual confounders of willingness to apply for the program or having to apply proxies to assess if households meet eligibility criteria of programs. Thus, the rationing rate for MNREGS is defined as:

$$R_i = \frac{100}{PopRural_i} \; x \; PopRefusedWork_i$$

where R_i is the rationing rate in a given district, $PopRural_i$ is the entire rural population in the district, and $PopRefusedWork_i$ is the population of people who wanted but did not receive any work under MNREGA. This formula is used to calculate State and District level rationing rates of the program.[5] This measure provides a better understanding of the rationing and under-provision which takes place across states and districts in India to capture differential unmet demand and assess the differences in why provision is so different.

Political Variables

Combining political variables with other data in India poses a challenge as the constituency borders do not match district borders used by the census, which serves the basis for almost all other data sources. This might be one of the reasons why we lack studies that attempt an all-India analysis of political variables when examining social programs and rather focus on a handful of states. To overcome this challenge, I match parliamentary constituencies of national elections for the Lok Sabha (Lower House/House of the People) to districts used by the census. Some districts fall into

[5] I compute a second measure that as a robustness check with calculates the share of those people who did not receive work who wanted work from all those who wanted work. This measure yields similar results. Results can be found in the robustness checks.

two (or more) parliamentary constituencies. In these cases, I calculate the areas (km^2) of all parliamentary constituencies that overlap with the district in question to calculate the shares of the district they each represent using geospatial data. This enables me to do two things: I calculate a weighted competition value (margin between first and second party) for each district using the km^2 as a weight to account for the different PCs the district may contain. Second, for all categorical variables (e.g., winning district party or coalition) I use data from the largest parliamentary constituency covering the district. A map can be found in Appendix Figure A8. All novel datasets are available for public use or will be uploaded separately for use beyond this paper.

Table 1: *Simplified Illustration of the Weighted Competition Measure*

District	**Parliamentary Constituency**	**Share of PC Covering the District**	**Margin between the first and second party in the PC**
District X	Parliamentary Constituency A	0.75	0.33
District X	Parliamentary Constituency B	0.25	0.08
Weighted Competition Score for District X			*0.27*

Further, I construct a measure of state level electoral competition. This measure calculates the margin between first and second party for state level elections, to examine if electoral competition plays a role in the rationing of MGNREGA. The most recent state level election on or before the year 2010 is used for this analysis (details in Appendix Table A8).

Poverty Levels

While in theory, demand should be the only factor driving program size, in reality under conditions of scarce resources and not enough capital allocated to meet the immense demand, state and district level poverty could be an important factor shaping rationing rates across states. I calculate the share of people below the poverty line on the state and district level according to the Tendulkar

method on Mixed Reference Period and applying it to the 66th round of the NSS. In essence, this is a consumption-based poverty line, which varies in nominal value according to the income across Indian states and Rural and Urban areas. The results of my state and district level poverty lines calculated with the NSS data can be found in the Appendix (Table A7). The results correspond, with minor differences, to similar calculations carried out to Dutta et al. (2012).

Contentious Political Action in India

Social unrest has been described by a number of studies on having an influence on social policies in India (Fischer & Ali, 2019). This study uses the novel GLOCON dataset by the Emerging Markets Welfare ERC-project team, who have used a large team of annotators to code protests events for major news sources in India, to subsequently use National Language Processing to extract protest events automatically (Emerging Welfare Project & Yörük, 2022). Subsequently several quality checks were carried out to ensure validity, consistency, and completeness of the data. In this paper, I use total protest events and events coded as violent and nonviolent to control for potential differences in event types. I use data extracted from the newspaper *The Hindu* as it has the most protest events and covers the most geographical areas. Further, I carry out robustness checks for protests using *The Times of India.*

Other Control Variables

To account for possible differences, I collected a wide variety of sources across districts that could lead to divergences in the rationing rate. ICRISIAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics) provides detailed data on GDP separated out by different sectors of the economy. Since this is a rural employment guarantee, it is especially interesting to study the effect of the GDP in the primary sector. I further include secondary and tertiary sector GDP to account for potential differences in budgets of district that could lead to varying levels of available funds for social programs and bureaucratic structures. The size of the agricultural population in the

district may influence the demand for the program, which is why it is included in the models. Further, I include total population size of the district, to account for differences that may emerge due to more populous district potentially having more bureaucratic capacity at their disposal to implement the program. Nighttime light data are used as proxies for development levels and differences in government capacity across districts as demonstrated by Singhal et al. (2020). An overview of the variables used, and their summary statistics can be found below. Count variables and variables with immense variance (like total nighttime lights) are included in the models taking their natural logarithm.

Table 2: *Summary Statistics*

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
District Rationing Rate MGNREGA	467	20.81	16.05	.138	77.58
State Poverty	467	.38	.07	.225	.53
District Poverty	467	.39	.14	.04	.74
Electoral Competition	467	-9.25	7.74	-56.797	-.24
Primary Sec GDP (log)	467	9.13	.78	5.796	10.95
Secondary Sec GDP (log)	467	9.29	1.03	6.168	12.79
Tertiary Sec GDP (log)	467	9.99	.92	7.079	13.28
Agricultural Workers (log)	467	5.98	.74	2.468	7.43
Total District Population (log)	467	7.48	.71	3.45	9.31
Winning Alliance State Level	467	3.75	1.35	1	5
Winning Alliance District Level	467	1.13	.76	0	3
Alignment between state and district party *(0: None,1: National Party, 2: Regional Party)*	467	.724	.76	0	2
Violent Protest Events (log)	467	2.31	1.63	0	6.69
Violent Protest Events (log)	467	2.05	1.83	0	7.35
Labor Expenses of MGNREGA (divided by population)	460	3.15	2.71	0	16.86
Material Expenses of MGNREGA (divided by population)	460	1.37	1.40	0	9.29
State Level Electoral Competition	467	5.77	3.08	-.9	14.53
Total Nighttime lights (district – log)	461	10.432	1.123	5.283	12.668

IV. Results

What explains Rationing?

This section shows why differences in rationing of the largest public works program globally need to be understood in relation to state level political factors in India. State level poverty shows a consistent statistically and substantially positive relationship with rationing (Table 4). Rising state poverty levels are associated with more people who demanded work under the program not receiving it. This supports the state capacity logic to explain some of the variation in rationing rates. State resources constrain the ability to provide everyone with this vital program for poverty alleviation. However, surprisingly, district level poverty levels do not to seem affect rationing rates, meaning that while the level of poverty on the state level determines some of the variation, within the state, the varying rates of rationing of MGNREGA programs cannot be explained by district level needs. This cements the important role of the state as the main implementer of the program in terms of resources and strategy. The effect of the poverty rate on the state level is substantially the strongest and determines the highest share of the variation in rationing rates. The predicted rationing rates (based on Model 6) reported in Table 3 show the differences in unmet demand across party and alignment type. BSP are predicted to have a rationing rate of 14 percent, following by UPA/Congress with 18 percent, NDA/BJP with 23 percent and lastly, CPI(M) with 27 percent on average, when controlling for all other variables. But are these differences significant and reliable?

Figure 2 displays the marginal effects of pairwise comparisons for each of the proposed mechanisms to understand which political variables explain rationing. A coefficient different to 0 (confidence intervals not crossing) means that there is a statistically significant difference in rationing rates between the groups. The size of this difference in rationing rate is visible on the x-axis in percent.

***Table 3**: Predicted Rationing Rates by Party Group and Alignment Type - (based on Model 6)*

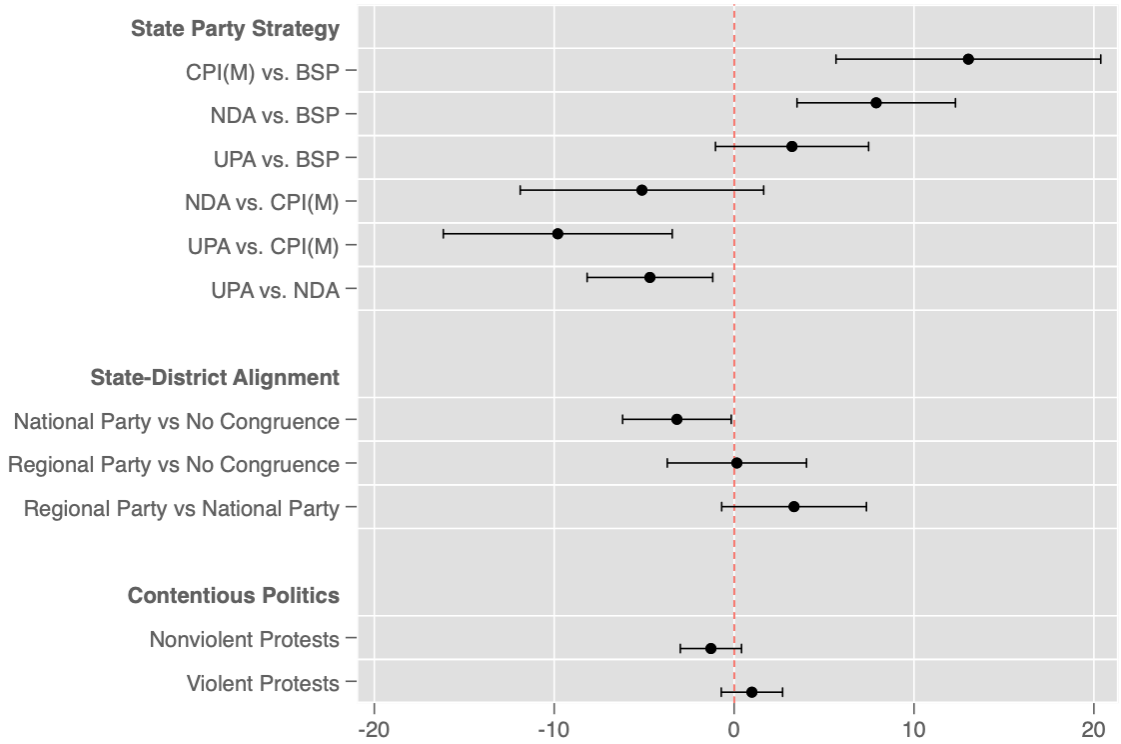
Party Name/Alignment Type	Predicted Rationing	Standard error
BSP	14.15	1.8
CPI(M)	26.76	3.9
NDA	23.46	1.2
UPA	18.81	1.2
No Alignment	22.61	1.3
National Parties	18.16	1.2
Regional Parties	21.09	1.8

First, I examine if state and local (district) level politicians belonging to the same party influence rationing to test the **party alignment logic**. This analysis includes the proposed novel separation of parties into national and regional, to examine potential separate effects driven by national level parties, as MGNREGA is a mostly centrally *funded* but locally *implemented* social program. Models 1,4, and 5 include the party alignment variable, which show consistently lower rationing rates for national parties (UPA, NDA, and CPI(M)) compared to districts where the member of parliament is not from the same party as the party that rules the state (no alignment). There is no difference between regional parties (e.g. NPF, BSP, SDF, DMK, JDU) and no alignment districts, hinting that the "party alignment" effect often discussed in the literature is a) present when examining alignment between state level governments and members of parliament and not just on the village level and b) driven by the three national level parties. The marginal effects pairwise comparison in figure 2 visualize this relationship. Controlling for all other variables, districts with members of parliament that belong to the same party as the state government showcase 4 percent less rationing compared to other districts on average. An overview table for all parties and their main ideologies can be found in Appendix Table A3.

Do rationing rates differ depending on which party rules the state legislature? I find strong evidence that this is the case when examining the **party strategy logic**. Controlling for all alternative factors outlined above, states that are governed by the UPA/Congress government show lower rationing rates (less people with unmet demand) compared to NDA/BJP states.

Rationing rates are predicted to be the lowest for districts in states ruled by the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) a party that set out to represent disadvantaged groups in India (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and religious minorities). The differences across most parties are statistically significant (see Figure 2) and range from 13 percent more rationing in CPI(M) states compared to BSP to 4 percent more rationing in districts ruled by UPA compared to NDA states. Similar to the alignment variable, district level party members, independent of party alignment, do not have a significant effect on rationing rates. This effect is driven by state level politics.

Figure 2: *Marginal Effects for Rationing Rates Pairwise Comparison*



Notes: *The figure shows if the effects are different from 0 with confidence intervals at the 95% level.*

The effect of **contentious political action** does not affect rationing rates across districts in India. Total protests, as well as split up specifications in nonviolent and violent protests, does not show significant effects. Examining coefficients and the standard deviations there does not seem to be an indication of a two-directional relationship that cancels each other out. The reason for this may be that the role of protests and social protection in the Indian context is one of specific Maoist insurrection in the red corridor and not one of general protests across all of India. Khanna and

Zimmermann (2017) discuss the specific relationship of Naxalite and Maoist groups and how the government has used MGNREGA to contain and prevent uprising of these group. It is telling that in the first implementation phase, the poorest districts were chosen according to a formula by the government, but 32 districts strongly affected by Maoist violence were added to this initial rollout phase of MGNREGA (Planning Commission, 2005). The government has been quite clear in its goal to simultaneously use this program for poverty alleviation and as a counter-insurrection strategy (Jenkins & Manor, 2017). I do not have disaggregated data on Maoists protests. Further studies into this matter might uncover a relationship that may be hidden in the results above.

Interestingly, district level **electoral competition** does not seem to have an effect in any specification. This means that the usual explanations of core-swing logics on the district level do not seem to affect rationing rates. The newly composed district measure of electoral competition does not display a relationship with MGNREGA rationing. Results for rationing above uncovered that in the politics of MGNREGA it is *state level* parties that matter, not who won on the *district level*. Thus, I carry out an additional analysis including the margin between first and second party on the state level, to examine if electoral competition plays a role. These results further cement that state level politics is what matters, beyond the party in power. Close elections are found to be associated with a decrease unmet demand (Table 4). These results are statistically and substantively significant and robust to the inclusion of state level parties and all other covariates that may influence this relationship (Table 4). Thus, state level electoral competition in India is associated with lower rates of unmet demand (rationing). I carry out further analysis on this in the robustness checks section below. In summary, the way distributive politics on the state level play out in the allocation of MGNREGA resources seems to be over three state level factors: party alignment across levels of governments, party strategy, and electoral competition in state elections. None of the district level factors is found to have an influence on rationing of MGNREGA.

Table 4: *Models explaining district level variation of rationing rates*

	(1) Rationing Rate	(2) Rationing Rate	(3) Rationing Rate	(4) Rationing Rate	(5) Rationing Rate
No Alignment					
Alignment: National	-3.18**			-4.71***	-5.03**
	(1.54)			(1.81)	(1.96)
Alignment: Regional	.15			-1.51	-3.31
	(1.97)			(2.41)	(2.61)
State Poverty	67.32***	73.35***	65.99***	68.1***	83.44***
	(11.42)	(12.65)	(11.64)	(13.98)	(19.86)
District Poverty	1.68	.81	.19	-.08	2.35
	(5.68)	(5.64)	(5.62)	(5.66)	(6.32)
State Gov: BSP					
State Gov: CPI(M)		13.02***		12.68***	10.66**
		(3.74)		(3.39)	(4.44)
State Gov: NDA		7.9***		8.74***	9.16***
		(2.24)		(2.32)	(3.25)
State Gov: UPA		3.22		5.46**	4.98
		(2.17)		(2.51)	(3.1)
District Winning Coalition: Other					
District Winning Coalition: UPA		-1.33			-.7
		(1.98)			(2.18)
District Winning Coalition: NDA		-2.81			-.8
		(2.3)			(2.77)
District Winning Coalition: COM		-6.88*			-2.35
		(4.16)			(4.4)
Violent Protests (log)			.99	.69	.41
			(.87)	(.85)	(.91)
Nonviolent Protests (log)			-1.29	-1.2	-.79
			(.87)	(.86)	(.89)
District Level Electoral Competition					-.07
					(.1)
State Level Electoral Competition					.65**
					(.27)
Primary Sec GDP (log)					1.69
					(1.48)
Secondary Sec. GDP (log)					-.64
					(1.69)
Tertiary Sector GDP (log)					1.57
					(2.91)
Agricultural Workers (log)					-.62
					(2.54)
Total District Population (log)					-2.2
					(4.43)
Total Nighttime Lights (district – log)					.36
					(1.48)
					(1.48)
Constant	-4.48	-11.44**	-4.08	-9.02	-29.01*
	(3.69)	(4.95)	(4.46)	(5.7)	(15.49)
Observations	467	467	467	467	461
R-squared	.13	.16	.13	.17	.19

*Robust standard errors are in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Notes: *Models 1-3 include each of the political variables of interest by themselves, model 4 includes all of them together, with model 5 adding in all control variables as well. All models include state and district level poverty.*

What are the Mechanisms behind these Findings?

I suggest two different pathways for the party alignment and party strategy effects and test them with administrative data provided on the program by the Rural Development Ministry on MGNREGA expenditure. As stated above, the program has two main expenditure items: labor costs and material costs. I suggest that the UPA and NDA seem to be driven by a fundamentally different strategic decisions on how to use the program for political gain. Das & Maiorano (2019) find that in Andhra Pradesh the ruling party has focused on the material cost aspect of MGNREGA that was channeled to contractors who in turn would fund their political campaigns instead of focusing on disproportionally distributing work to core or swing districts. This is especially pertinent in India, as laws that govern party donations are quite strict, leaving parties rifling for new avenues to fund expensive election campaigns. Using this immense social program that reserves up to 40 percent of its budget on material expenses for the public works projects (paid for by the central government) can be seen as a viable path to garner additional funds. The importance of strategically using the material expense budget of MGNREGA for political gain is highlighted in many interviews Das & Maiorano carry out with contractors and local and state level politicians. First, these interviews reveal that state level politicians deeply care about higher material expenditure as a) construction material such as concrete for more "visible" structures requires a higher share of material spending and b) this can be used to channel resources through contractors.[6] Thus, there seem to be different avenues to use this program for political gain. To uncover the mechanisms why rationing rates may differ, I run the same models again, this time with material expenditure and labor expenditure in the district as my dependent variables. Table A1 reports the results of the regression analysis. Figure 3 below showcases the same results of margins of pairwise comparisons as in the main analysis above.

[6] Quote by senior official in charge of implementing the program in Andhra Pradesh from Das & Maiorano (2019, p. 249)"Politicians are not interested in the wage program since the wages reach the people directly. They are interested in the material intensive works where the contractors would be interested' [. . .] 'In the material component of the works they exercise pressures on districts and mandal level officials to select their own people to execute the works."

For the party strategy logic, findings in Figure 3 illuminate what lies behind the differences between main two national parties of India: INC and BJP: The UPA (alliance led by the INC) uses significantly more labor expenditure compared to districts in states ruled by NDA (alliance led by BJP). On the flipside, NDA ruled states show higher expenditure levels for the material component of MGNREGA program. Taken together, this could explain why districts in states ruled by NDA have higher rationing rates compared to ones ruled by the UPA on the state level. They follow different underlying strategic spending priorities for MGNREGA: Maximizing electoral support by providing employment vs. channeling resources to contractors who in turn fund electoral campaigns of the party.

The mechanism for the party-alignment findings differs from those proposed to explain the state party strategy. In the main results above, we saw that rationing rates are significantly lower when state and district level parties are aligned and controlled by national parties. Meaning that when the same national party holds both, the state and district level government, there is less unmet demand present for MGNREGA. The results of the models with labor and material expenditure show that there is more investment in **both labor and material costs** when district and state are both ruled by the same national party (Figure 3, middle section). This provides an explanation why I find lower rationing rates in these instances of alignment. As MGNREGA is a centrally financed program (on the national level), national parties (like the INC and BJP) may be able to activate more resources for distribution for districts in states that are ruled by them. Regional parties seem to have less resources at their disposal to distribute. This model for alignment is robust to the inclusion of state level party to account for potential specific effects of the party found above. It cements that when examining party alignment as a political determinant, a breakdown is necessary to understand the nuances of this distributive political approach. This suggests that there are different underlying mechanisms for these two political variables on why they reduce rationing on the district level: one rooted in varying party strategies for investment types and the other as a

result of general increases into both spending items of MGNREGA to politically aligned districts of the state government.

Results for the containment argument remain unclear, as violent protests show no effect on labor and material expenditure and nonviolent show a small positive effect on labor expenditure, but not on material expenditure. These effects may be driven either by changes in the payrate that leads to increases in expenditure or by slight increases in distribution of work that are not large enough to change the rationing rate.[7] All these results are robust to the inclusion to control variables and the specification of the dependent variable as expenditure over district population. The discussion on the potential for specific Maoist insurrection being overlooked can be found in the section above.

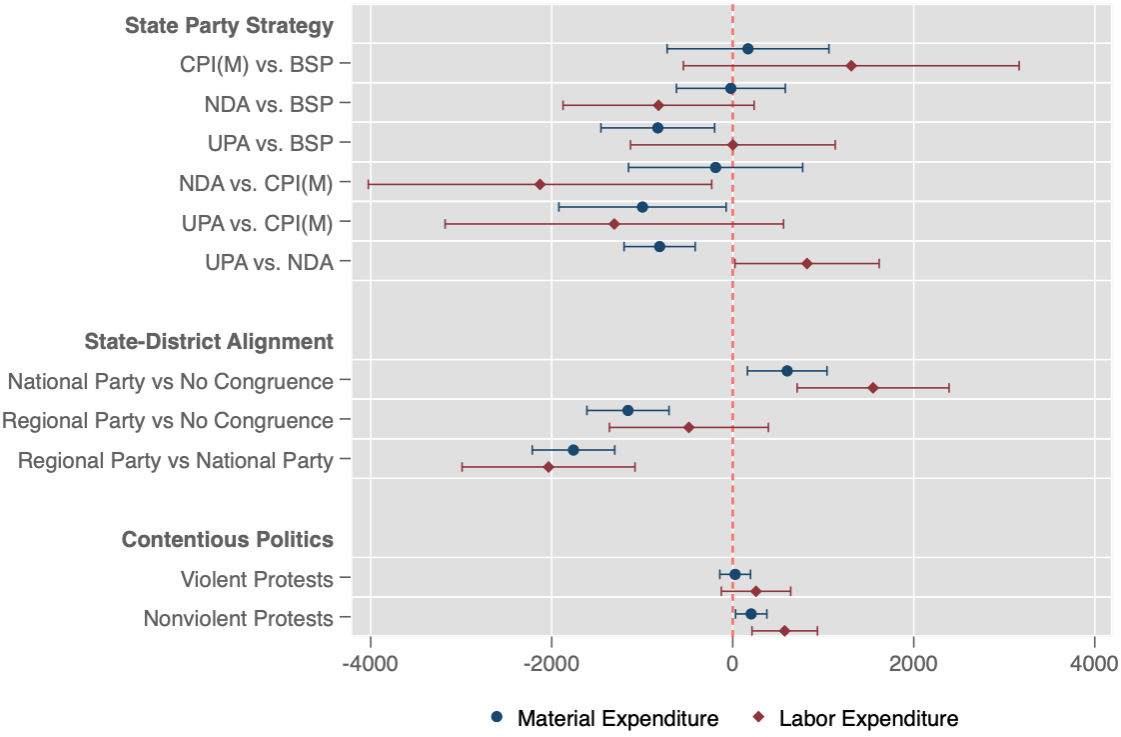
While Das & Maiorano (2019) showed the importance of the material expenditure for state legislators in Andhra Pradesh, this paper highlights that both, the labor and material expenditures are influenced by state level dynamics and parliamentarians on the national level.

This paper tests political determinants for the variation in rationing rates across districts in India and uncovers the different mechanisms that lead to rationing MGNREGA. All main explanatory paths that are found to have an effect are variables on the **state level**. Interestingly, district level political party, protests (violent/nonviolent), electoral competition, and not even the district level poverty rate are found to influence rationing rates in that district. These result cement the important role of state governments in India in the implementation of social protection and the pathways of political distribution. It is important to note that while this study finds state-level political dynamics to greatly influence the distribution of MGNREGA and the outcome of rationing specifically, this does not mean that it negates political distribution on the gram panchayat

[7] It could also point towards distribution towards more people who did not demand the program in the first place but receive it, however a) since MGNGREGA works with self-selection into the program it is unlikely and b) there is no data to corroborate this explanation.

(village) level. These findings serve as an additional layer to the important points made by scholars who showed how local level political dynamics influence MGNREGA distribution (R. Das et al., 2021; U. Das & Maiorano, 2015; Himanshu et al., 2015).

Figure 3: *Marginal Effects for Rationing Rates Pairwise Comparison*



Notes: *The figure shows if the effects are different from 0 with confidence intervals at the 95% level. The blue circles denote results for material expenditure; the red diamond denotes the labor expenditure models.*

I show that states make the main strategic decision on **how much of what kind** (expenditure levels and type of expenditure in material or labor costs) is distributed to districts for the largest public works program globally. State level decisions serve as a large backdrop to local political distribution of benefits. In a highly federalized administrative structure like India, one policy can be used for political gain by many actors through different ways, all with the end goal of garnering electoral support and popularity. Thus, this paper also adds to the literature on federalism and its role on social policy making by stressing how politics on all levels of government need to be looked at when attempting to holistically understand distributive politics of a social protection program. Tillin and Pereira (2017) have pointed towards all levels of government wanting to claim credit for

the program and put their own stamp on it. This paper shows that each of these levels of governments and political parties that govern them can use MGNREGA using different strategies.

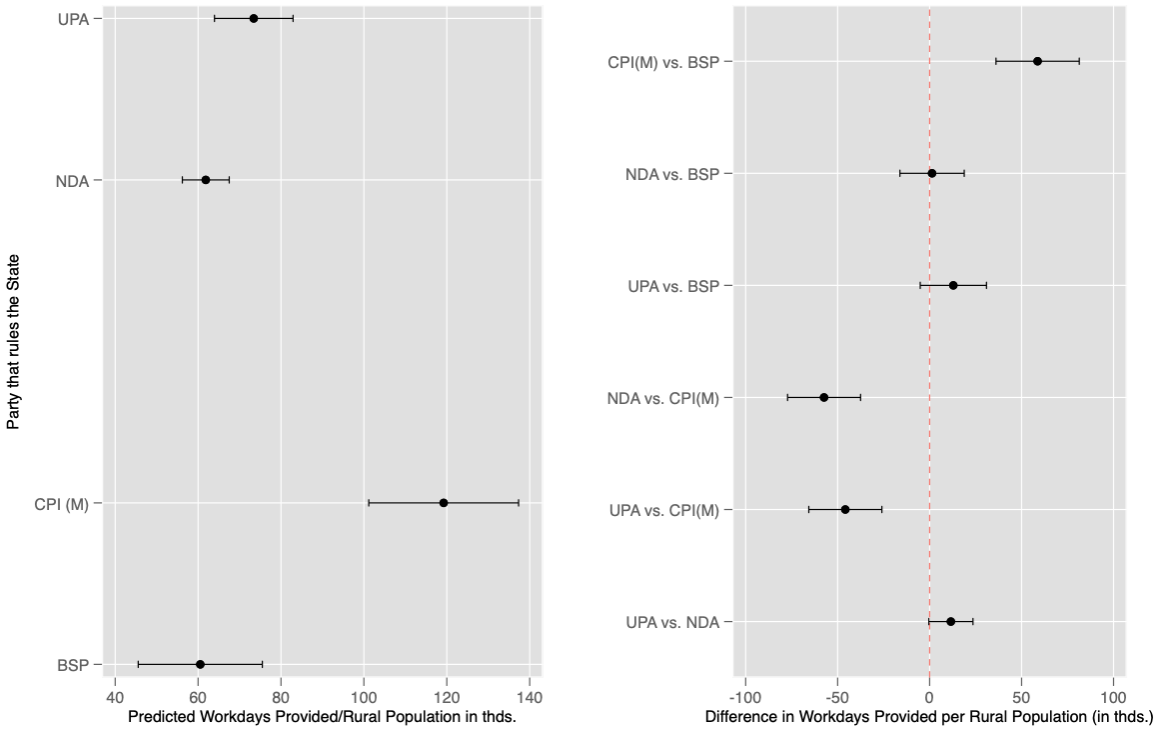
V. Robustness Checks

This paper introduces the measure of rationing to the analysis of the politics of the MGNREGA. It argues that it is a more helpful measure to understand the political distribution of the program and the outcomes for the people, as it captures the demand and supply of the program. This contrasts with previously used measures of mere provision of workdays under the program or expenditure. This section provides additional analyses to showcase the robustness of the results. First, I show that using the widely used measure of "*persondays worked under MGNREGA"* provides misleading results and does not provide the whole story. Second, I show that the results do not differ across groups of interest: rationing to constitutionally protected scheduled tribes (ST), scheduled castes (SC), and other disadvantaged groups in India is largely congruent with rationing towards other groups in society. Lastly, I offer additional analyses for the findings on electoral competition to cement that state level competition decreases rationing, through increasing the number of workdays provided.

The widely used measure of *persondays* (the number of working days carried out under the MGNREGA program) yields very different results compared to the proposed rationing rate measure. The highest number of workdays (per rural population in thousands) is carried out in states governed by the CPI(M) with 120 (Figure 4, left). The difference in workdays compared to states governed by all other parties is statistically and substantively meaningful (Figure 4, right). States governed by the UPA alliance provide twelve more days compared to states governed by the NDA, which is congruent with our findings above. However, this relationship is not statistically significant and relatively low compared to the differences in states governed by the CPI(M). Using this measure thus, would have suggested that states governed by the Communist Party of India

(Marxist) provide the most days and we would automatically assume that these states have the lowest unmet demand. We would find no difference between the two main political parties in India: the INC and BJP which lead the two political alliances (UPA and NDA). When examining demand and supply together by calculating rationing rates, it becomes clear that there are significant differences in unmet demand between UPA and NDA governed states (see Figure 2). Further, even though the number of days provided are the highest in CPI(M) governed states, they also showcase the highest rate of unmet demand. Detailed results can be found in the Appendix Table A4.

Figure 4: *Predicted number of days worked under the program (left) and pairwise comparison across groups (right)*



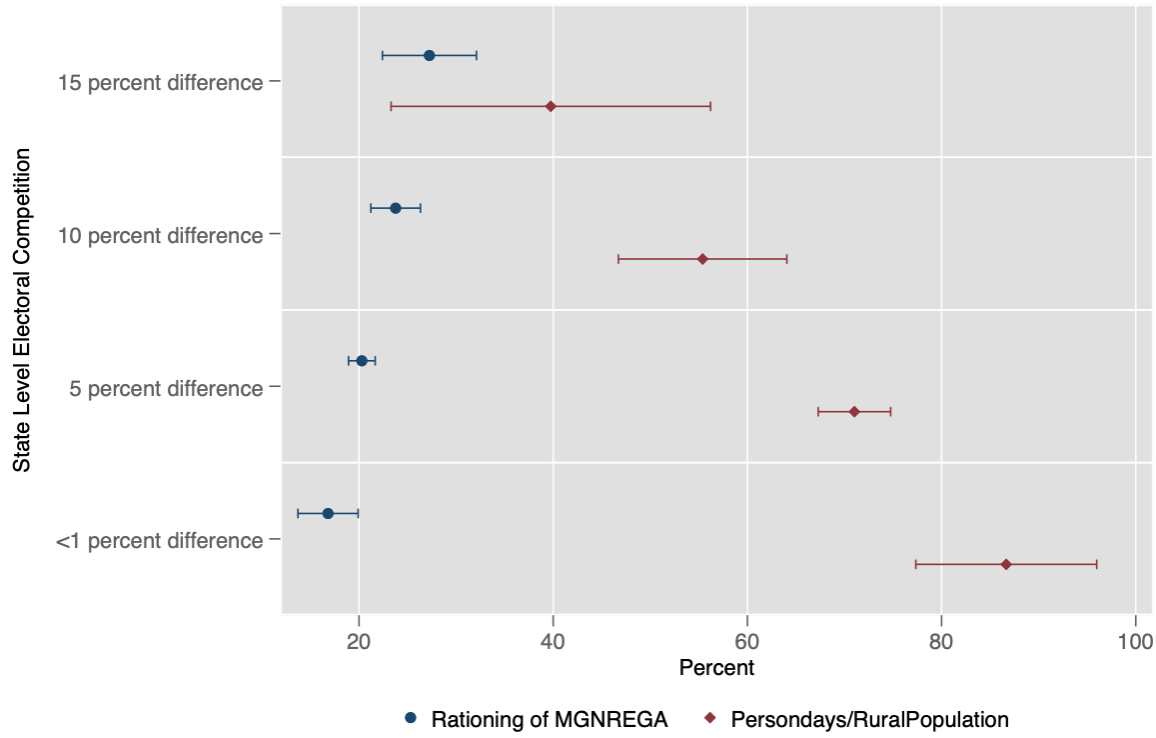
The Indian government has placed special focus on the inclusion of disadvantaged populations in the MGNREGA program. It has stipulated that participation of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes should be fostered with informational campaigns and in monitored in the implementation phases of the program (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008). However, Manjula and Rajasekhar (2015) find discrimination against people who belong to scheduled castes in Karnataka. I calculate

separate rationing rates for people belonging to ST and SC on the one hand, and all other people on the other[8]. Running the analysis separately for these groups reveals no difference in rationing on political grounds across districts and states of India (see Figure A3 and Table A5 in the Appendix). This does not rule out that discrimination towards disadvantaged groups may take place on lower levels of government on the village level, where specific inclusion and exclusion decision of the program are taken.

The newly composed district measure of electoral competition neither displays a relationship with MGNREGA rationing, nor with its distribution. Results for rationing above uncovered that in the politics of MGNREGA it is *state level* parties that matter, not who won on the *district level*. Thus, I carry out an additional analysis including the margin between first and second party on the state level, to examine if electoral competition plays a role, that the previous analysis missed. The most recent state level election on or before the year 2010 is used for this analysis (details in Appendix Table A8). These results further cement that state level politics is what matters in the distribution of MGNREGA: district level competition shows no significant effect for neither rationing, nor the distribution of working days (Figure A4, Table A6). State level results reveal that competition matters, beyond the party in power: the closer the election results (moving downwards on Figure 4) the more working days were distributed (Figure 4, red diamonds). Further, the closer the election became, unmet demand decreased significantly. These results are robust to the inclusion of state level parties and all other covariates that may influence this relationship (Table A6). Thus, state level electoral competition in India is associated with more working days being distributed to people, which yields lower rates of unmet demand (rationing). This is another important finding, which further stresses the role of state level politics in the politics of MGNREGA.

[8] This information is included in the NSS data used for the analysis above. With subsampling like this, the cases in each category are reduced further, especially on the district level. Running analyses excluding districts with small samples yields roughly the same results.

Figure 5: *State level competition effects on predicted number of days worked under the program (red, diamond) and rationing of MGNREGA (blue, circle)*



VI. Conclusion

This study examines the role of politics to explain stark differences in unmet demand for the largest public works program globally, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India. Instead of using measures of overall distribution (workdays completed in each district) or only expenditure figures on labor costs, it proposes and calculates a district measure of unmet demand for program access. This *rationingrate* shows stark variance across India. Its underlying reasons for differences, beyond mere administrative capacity require expenditure. This study finds that state level political factors like (i) party strategy, (ii) partisan alignment across levels of government, and (iii) state level electoral competition effect rationing rates substantively. Concretely, it finds that states governed by electoral alliances led by the INC show lower rationing rates (less unmet demand) compared to states governed by BJP coalitions. It further shows that INC governed states have significantly higher labor expenditure and significantly lower material expenditure compared to BJP led states. This is used to highlight that parties follow different

strategies in the implementation of this social assistance program. The party that won the district does not influence rationing. Further, partisan alignment of state level and district level politicians is associated with less rationing. This provides external validity to some previous studies that have found this to be the case. It shows that this partisan alignment effect only occurs when national parties are in power and can be explained with higher overall expenditure (material and labor) in these districts. Lastly, state level electoral competition has a significant and substantive effect on rationing. The closer the state level election results, the less unmet demand was found. The effects for the newly calculated district level electoral competition measure for national elections does not yield any results, further stressing the importance of the state level in the implementation of social assistance programs.

In general, this study highlights the multitude of actors in complex, federal systems that can benefit from social programs for their own agendas simultaneously. It uncovers that parties follow different overarching strategies to extract political gain from MGNREGA, which includes differential investments into material and labor costs of the program. This in turn yields differing levels of unmet demand on the ground and therefore has a direct effect on the welfare of people. It illustrates the importance of using rationing rates versus mere distribution of expenses, particularly when dealing with de jure universal programs as it shows that the latter can mask political distribution. District level political and economic factors do not seem to influence rationing rates. Overall, this paper shows how sub-national governments play a vital role in the design and implementation of social assistance programs.

This study is not without its limitations. The internal validity of these findings may be muddied by the discouraged worker effect and the influence of local level politicians. Continued administrative problems and rationing may lead to what Narayanan et al. (2017) term the 'discouraged worker effect" due to poor implementation of MGNREGA in some regions. Continuously demanding

work and receiving neither work, nor the state compensation may lead people to stop demanding work as they do not anticipate a possibility of program participation. This may affect rationing rates in this analysis, as respondents may stop indicating that they demanded work when asked. As this analysis is carried out relatively early in the implementation of MGNREGA, I expect this effect to exist, but not be large enough to alter the robustness of the overall results.

Local level political distribution on the village level where workers interest is registered is not measured in this paper. Village leaders play an important role in the selection of program participants on the ground (R. Das et al., 2021; U. Das & Maiorano, 2015; Himanshu et al., 2015). This study does not aim to negate these findings, but rather add the backdrop in front of which local level politics play out. The state controls the resources villages receive and thus sets the overarching strategy. This paper uncovers what happens on the higher levels of governments and should therefore be understood as one part of the story on the politics of MGNREGA. Moreover, as stated in the introduction, this paper examines *access rationing* and not rationing of the number of workdays received by the beneficiary. As administrative data on the program shows, many beneficiaries do not complete the 100 days of work they are entitled to. Further studies should investigate reasons for differing outcomes of *workday rationing* of MGNREGA.

In terms of external validity, this study needs to be understood as essentially space and time specific. I base the analysis on a survey carried out in 2010, as this is the only available data granular enough to capture unmet demand on the district level. Unfortunately, the National Sample Survey has not repeated this module to date. This means that this paper merely provides a static story about the politics of the program at one point in time. Yet we know that the politics of social assistance programs need to be understood as dynamic processes. For instance, a change of the party in power on the national level like the electoral victory of BJP and Narendra Modi in 2014 may alter how programs are implemented. As this is a national level program, changes to the

politics of rationing past 2014 need to be examined if data for this period become available. Further research should carry out new representative surveys that include a number of questions to assess potential unmet demands and uncover the reasons why legal entitlements were not provided to ensure equitable access to social assistance programs for everyone. Additionally, while universal programs are not rare in the Global South, they mostly consist of child related transfers or programs to foster access to health care, not public works programs open to the general population. These factors need to be kept in mind when interpreting the results of this analysis.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about important changes to social assistance programs globally. Noncontributory programs have been extended rapidly as a response to the containment measures governments put in place (Gentilini et al., 2020). This was also the case in India: In mid-2020, India recorded the highest number of employment days recorded since the program was launched in 2005 (Mohapatra & Hussain, 2021). Shortly after, MGNREGA projects, alongside with all economic activity, were briefly suspended. However, subsequently the demand for MGNREGA job cards and work rose dramatically as many people had lost their jobs. The role of the MGNREGA as a tool of social policy makers to mitigate crises like the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an important avenue of further research.

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Appendix

What explains rationing of a de jure universal social program?

Evidence from India's Rural Employment Guarantee

Table A1: *Results for the Regression with Expenditure on Material and Labor as the dependent variables*

	(1) ExpMaterial	(2) ExpMaterial	(3) ExpLabour	(4) ExpLabour
No Alignment				
Alignment: National	477.36**	601.98***	1607.48***	1934.79***
	(225.97)	(223.58)	(533.74)	(505.88)
Alignment: Regional	-1264.1***	-1157.43***	-505.55	-171.51
	(235.44)	(230.77)	(580.42)	(541.23)
State Gov: BSP				
State Gov: CPI(M)	-695.24	168.99	-657.28	1523.62
	(488.26)	(454.66)	(1033.66)	(952.2)
State Gov: NDA	-543.05**	-20.29	-2087.99***	-756.15
	(255.11)	(305.94)	(497.27)	(653.53)
State Gov: UPA	-867.86***	-828.04***	-629.03	-446.54
	(316.43)	(319.54)	(650.54)	(705.41)
Violent Protests (log)	63.23	26.99	371.94	257.41
	(96.87)	(86.28)	(229.67)	(194.94)
Nonviolent Protests (log)	178.62*	204.08**	471.96**	574.34***
	(97.44)	(87.83)	(210.86)	(183.9)
State Poverty	4944.68***	-2817.12	1018.85	-18542.68***
	(1297.4)	(1754.5)	(3059.29)	(3990.32)
District Poverty	2343.61***	11.37	5572.75***	-306.87
	(609.77)	(592.41)	(1513.16)	(1340.1)
Electoral Competition		-8.86		.93
		(9.25)		(19.64)
Primary Sec GDP (log)		-365.53**		-852.96**
		(156.61)		(335.99)
Secondary Sec. GDP (log)		71.79		355.08
		(152.36)		(333.02)
Tertiary Sec. GDP (log)		-1052.34***		-3126.19***
		(284.26)		(710.05)
Agricultural Workers (log)		1362.59***		3253.62***
		(210.18)		(478.9)
Total Population District (log)		859.45**		2596.34***
		(414.3)		(969.02)
District Winning Coalition: UPA		-6.59		153.06
		(179.19)		(469.36)
District Winning Coalition: NDA		-314.92		-793.15
		(241.01)		(512.46)
District Winning Coalition: COM		-433.27		-760.15
		(595.81)		(1301.74)
_cons	-770.35	366.07	909.72	6817.03*
	(605.21)	(1441.61)	(1177.79)	(3544.49)
Observations	460	460	460	460
R-squared	.16	.39	.17	.44

Robust standard errors are in parentheses

**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Table A2: *Variables and Sources*

Variable	**Source**
Rationing	Own calculations using National Sample Survey 10th Wave
Persondays	NREGA Database
Expenditure on Labour	NREGA Database
Electoral Competition	Original Measure
Demonstration (The Hindu)	Original Variable (ERC)
Primary sector GDP	ICRSIAT
Secondary sector GDP	ICRSIAT
Tertiarysector GDP	ICRSIAT
Agricultural workers	ICRSIAT
Total Population (district)	ICRSIAT
Banks (number)	SHRUG
Total Lights	SHRUG
BJP_dummy	CLEA (own calculations)
COM_dummy	CLEA (own calculations)
INC_dummy	CLEA (own calculations)
District and State Level Poverty	NSS (own calculations)

Figure A1: *Rationing Rates by States (authors own calculations using NSS)*

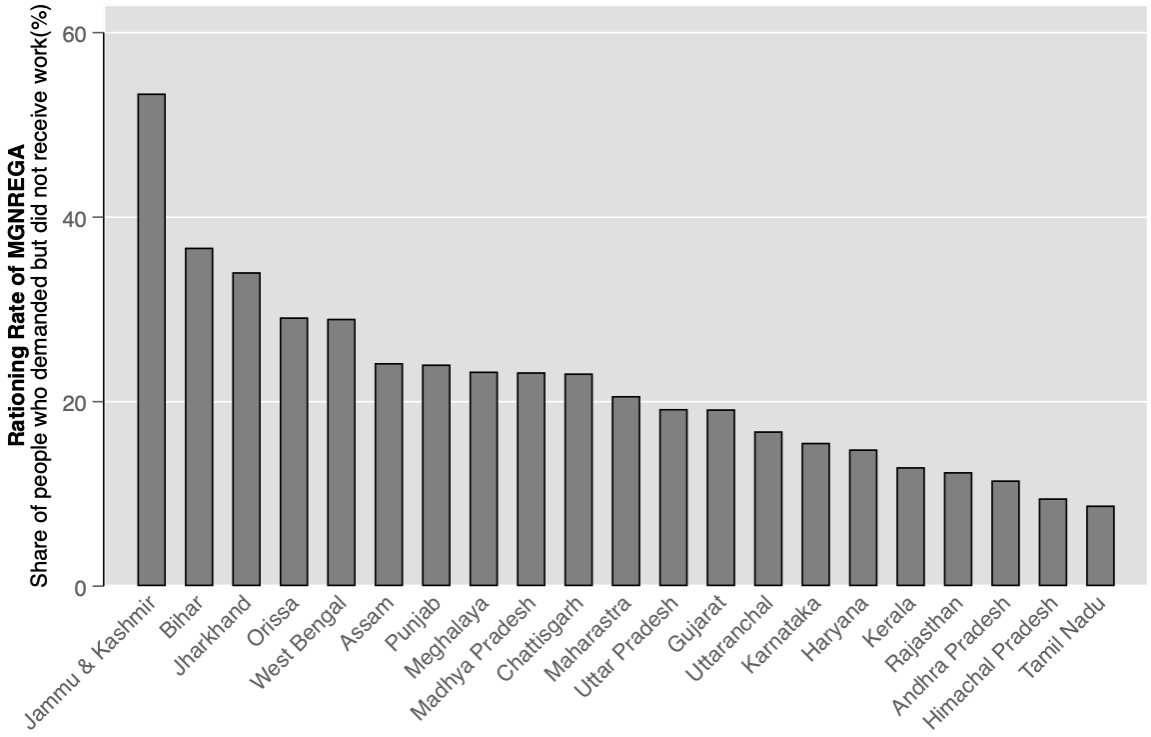
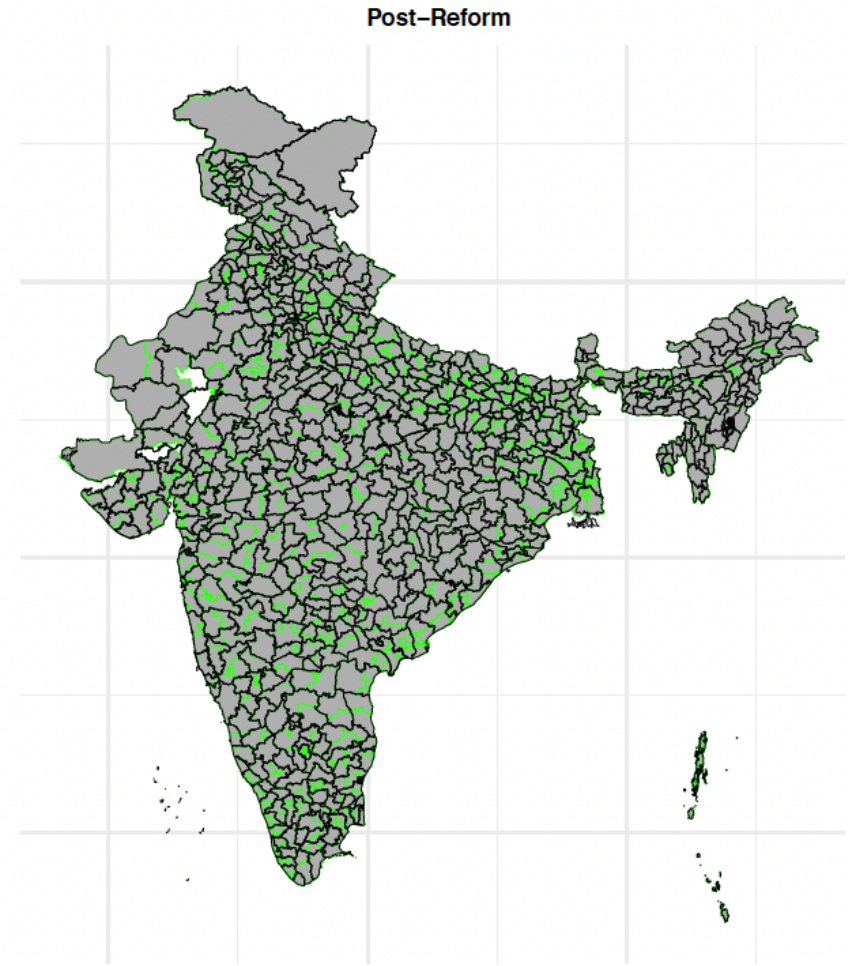


Figure A2: *Comparison Parliamentary districts (black) vs. districts (green borders)*



Notes: This map overlays district borders of India with parliamentary constituencies. It very visibly shows the stark differences between the two, which cause problems for scholars attempting to carry out analyses combining election results with district level factors such as GDP, population, but also for social policy programs like MNREGA, as these are all recorded on the district level. I offer a new dataset on electoral competition on the district level that uses the overlap between parliamentary district and districts as recorded in the census that calculates weighted averages according to the size of the overlap between the two.

Table A3: *Overview of Parties and their characteristics*

Party Name	Political Position	Ideology	Regional/National	Alliance
BJP Bharatiya Janata Party	Right-wing	Hindutva Integral humanism Conservatism Neoliberalism Right-wing populism	National	NDA
INC Indian National Congress	Centre Centre-left	Big tent Social liberalism Secularism Civic nationalism	National	UPA
CPI (M) Communist Party of India (Marxist)	Left-wing	Communism	National	
BSP Bahujan Samaj Party	Centre-left	Social justice Secularism Representing Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBC), along with religious minorities	Regional (1984-2013) National (since 2013)	
AITC All India Trinamool Congress (All India Grassroots Congress)	Centre-left	Secularism Populism Progressivism	National (since 2016)	
NCP Nationalist Congress Party	Centre-left	Liberalism Gandhism	National	
NPF Naga People's Front	Regional tent/right	Regionalism (Coalition partners of BJP)	Regional States: Nagaland, Manipur and, Arunachal Pradesh	NDA
SDF Sikkim Democratic Front	Left	Democratic-socialism	Regional States: Sikkim	NDA
DMK	Left	Social democracy Dravidianism	Regional States:	UPA/ NDA/

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam		Social justice	Tamil Nadu, Union territory of Puducherry	None (over time)
JDU Janata Dal (United)	Centre-left	Socialism Secularism Integral Humanism	Regional States: Eastern and north-eastern India	UPA

Table A4: *Results of the analysis with Persondays (per rural population in thds.) measure*

	(1) Persondays/ Rural Population	(2) Persondays SC/ Rural Population	(3) Persondays ST/ Rural Population	(4) Persondays Women/ Rural Population
State Poverty	47.14	-.05***	.05***	-.03*
	(48.19)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
Electoral Competition	.21	0**	0	0
	(.29)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Primary Sec GDP (log)	-20.14***	0***	0**	-.01***
	(4.4)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Secondary Sec. GDP (log)	5.85	0*	0***	0**
	(3.75)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Agricultural Workers (log)	44.21***	.01***	.01***	.02***
	(5.71)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Total Poplulation (log)	-56.18***	-.01***	-.02***	-.02***
	(9.95)	(0)	(0)	(0)
State Gov: BSP				
State Gov: CPI(M)	48.62***	-.01***	.02***	.01***
	(10.34)	(0)	(0)	(0)
State Gov: NDA	-5.32	-.02***	.01*	0
	(9.58)	(0)	(0)	(0)
State Gov: UPA	9.04	-.01***	.01***	.01**
	(9.49)	(0)	(0)	(0)
District Winning Coalition: UPA	5.23	0	0	0
	(5.3)	(0)	(0)	(0)
District Winning Coalition: NDA	-2.71	0*	-.01***	0
	(7.2)	(0)	(0)	(0)
District Winning Coalition: COM	-12.38	0	0	-.01
	(14.15)	(0)	(0)	(0)
No Alignment				
Alignment: National	13.98**	0	0**	.01***
	(6.29)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Alignment: Regional	-2.65	.01***	-.01***	.01**
	(7.5)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Violent Protests (log)	1.81	0	0	0
	(2.51)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Nonviolent Protests	6.52***	0**	0	0***

(log) Total Nighttime Lights (log)				0.0
	(2.03)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Constant	310.8***	.06***	.05***	.08***
	(46.19)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
Observations	460	460	460	456
R-squared	.29	.34	.23	.32

Robust standard errors are in parentheses
**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Figure A3: *Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes vs. all others*

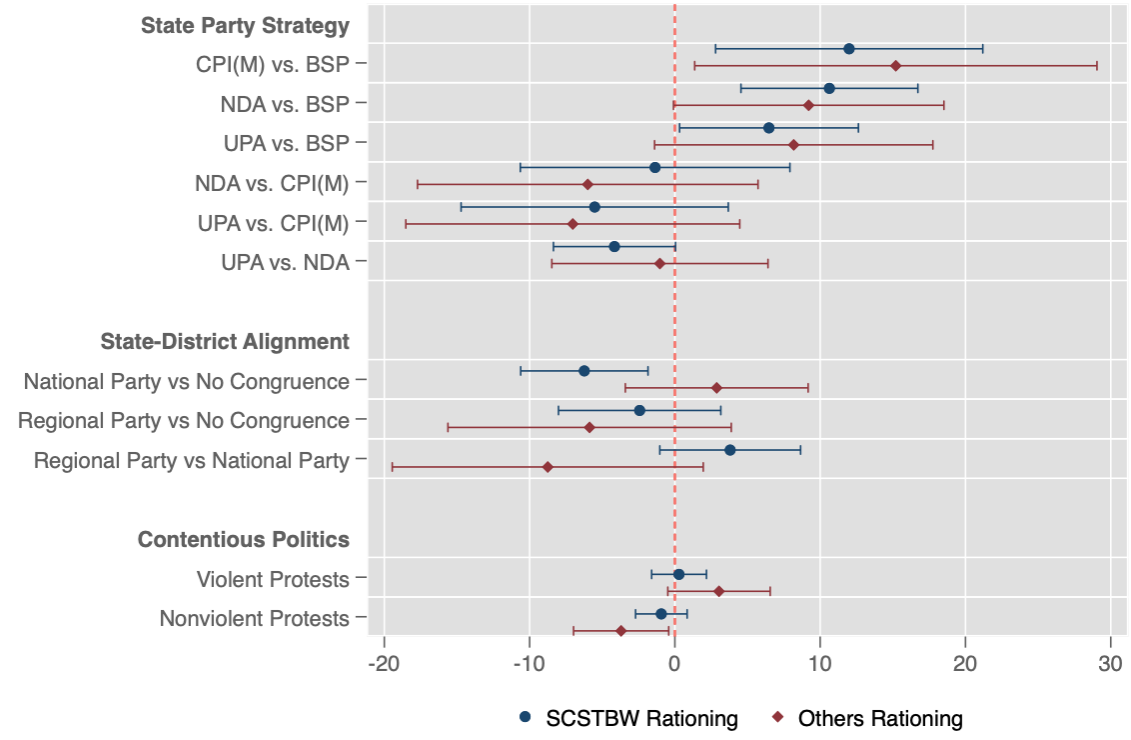


Table A5: *Results of the analysis with Rationing rate for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes compared to other groups in society*

	(1) Rationing Rate Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Protected Groups	(2) Rationing Rate All Others
State Poverty	86.28***	132.65***
	(23.94)	(34.7)
District Poverty	-.07	14.61
	(6.98)	(12.99)
Electoral Competition	-.03	-.39*
	(.1)	(.2)
Primary Sec GDP (log)	3.07*	1.68
	(1.85)	(2.54)
Secondary Sec. GDP (log)	-.58	-.02
	(1.66)	(2.92)
Tertiary Sec. GDP (log)	2.13	6.07
	(3.03)	(5.04)
Agricultural Workers (log)	-1.84	2.55
	(2.73)	(4.06)
Total Population Dis. (log)	-2.38	-12.77
	(4.87)	(7.81)
State Gov: BSP		
State Gov: CPI(M)	10.94**	17.43**
	(4.6)	(7.16)
State Gov: NDA	9.5***	13.34**
	(3.23)	(6.49)
State Gov: UPA	5.56*	8.42
	(3.15)	(5.81)
District Winning Coalition: UPA	.16	-6.32
	(2.16)	(4.41)
District Winning Coalition: NDA	-.8	-6.14
	(2.67)	(4.76)
District Winning Coalition: COM	-.28	-12.63*
	(5.32)	(7.45)
No Alignment		
Alignment: National	-5.92***	2.57
	(2.21)	(3.72)
Alignment: Regional	-1.7	-14.3**
	(2.82)	(6.96)
Violent Protests (log)	.34	3.26*
	(.96)	(1.75)
Nonviolent Protests (log)	-.96	-3.81**
	(.91)	(1.64)
Constant	-29.6*	-32.9
	(17.33)	(25.64)
Observations	452	323
R-squared	.16	.17

Robust standard errors are in parentheses
**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Table A6: *Results of the comparison between State and District Level Electoral Competition*

	(1) Rationing Rate	(2) Rationing Rate	(3) Persondays/ Rural Population	(4) Persondays/ Rural Population
State Poverty	74.54***	84.91***	-78.59***	-67.8
	(10.88)	(19.77)	(29.47)	(50.02)
District Poverty	2.45	1.25	55.9***	-2.21
	(5.65)	(6.19)	(17.6)	(18.76)
State Level Electoral Competition	.73***	.71***	-2.6***	-3.1***
	(.22)	(.25)	(.9)	(.87)
District Level Electoral Competition	.02	.07	-.09	-.18
	(.1)	(.1)	(.3)	(.27)
Agricultural Workers (log)	-1.02	-.39	-3.18	30.59***
	(.97)	(2.52)	(4.49)	(6.83)
Primary Sec GDP (log)		1.92		-15.72***
		(1.58)		(4.21)
Secondary Sec. GDP (log)		-.54		15.96***
		(1.53)		(4.68)
Tertiary Sec. GDP (log)		1.04		-25.08***
		(2.85)		(9.57)
Total Population Dis. (log)		-1.96		-24.98*
		(4.43)		(14.38)
State Gov: BSP				
State Gov: CPI(M)		10.15**		72.78***
		(4.35)		(10.4)
State Gov: NDA		9.27***		2.5
		(2.99)		(10.26)
State Gov: UPA		5.12*		23.45**
		(2.84)		(10.22)
District Winning Coalition: UPA		-.31		-1.16
		(2.11)		(5.32)
District Winning Coalition: NDA		-.54		-11.3
		(2.6)		(7.29)
District Winning Coalition: COM		-2.22		-17.92
		(4.42)		(15.5)
No Alignment				
Alignment: National		-5.12***		16.77***
		(1.93)		(6.14)
Alignment: Regional		-3.97*		17.82**
		(2.38)		(7.49)
Constant	-6.88	-26.38*	111.11***	346.22***
	(6.41)	(14.54)	(23.84)	(51.58)
Observations	467	460	478	460
R-squared	.14	.19	.05	.29

Robust standard errors are in parentheses
**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Figure A4: *Electoral Competition on the district level and its effects on MGNREGA rationing (blue, circle) and persondays per rural population (red, diamond)*

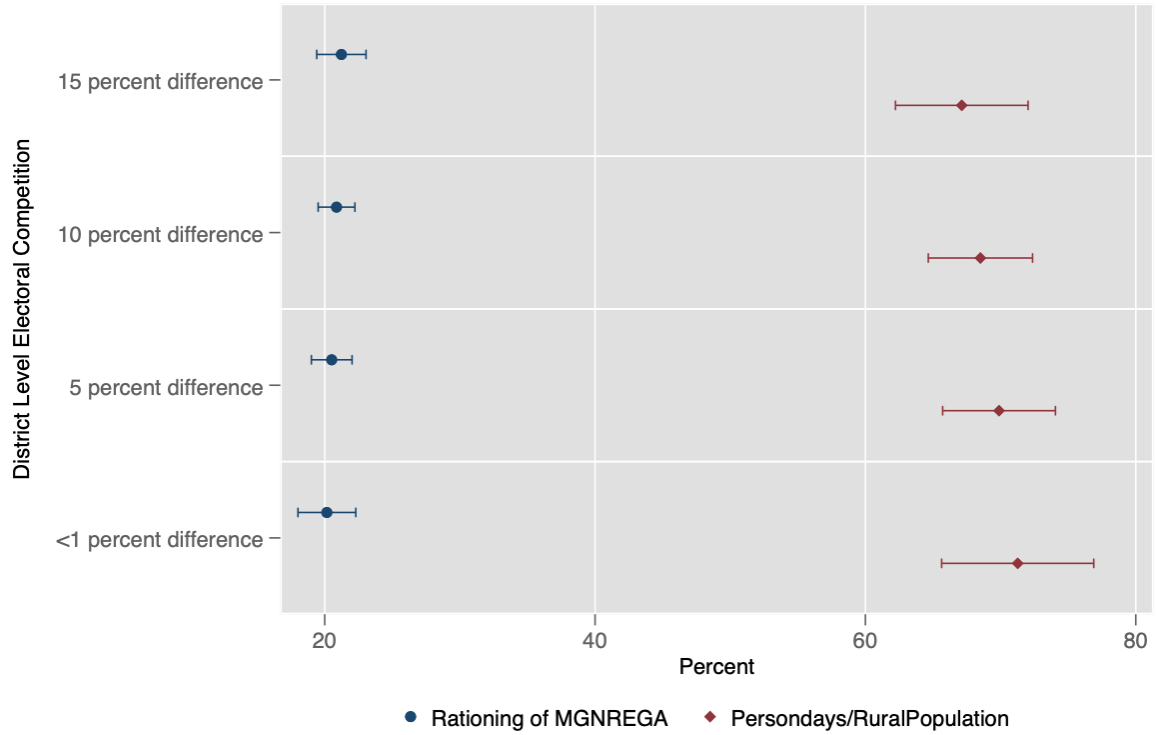


Table A7: *State poverty rates calculated using NSS data with state specific poverty lines – District level results will be made available online due to space limitations*

State and Union Territories	Share of Poverty (state specific poverty line)
Delhi	0.1243469
Goa	0.1588367
Tripura	0.2219828
Himachal Pradesh	0.2246696
Kerala	0.2487093
Sikkim	0.2695313
Punjab	0.2726981
Andhra Pradesh	0.2740601
Mizoram	0.2794503
Haryana	0.279771
Pondicherry	0.2829861
Jammu & Kashmir	0.2861335
Uttaranchal	0.2988764
Gujarat	0.3226277
Meghalaya	0.3349057
Tamil Nadu	0.3361952
Rajasthan	0.3438859

West Bengal	0.3494624
Maharastra	0.3524047
Nagaland	0.3730469
Arunachal Pradesh	0.3922046
Karnataka	0.3932253
Uttar Pradesh	0.4211053
Orissa	0.4259489
Madhya Pradesh	0.4340064
Assam	0.4350348
Chattisgarh	0.4511211
Jharkhand	0.4703744
Bihar	0.5343695
Manipur	0.6845192

Table A8: *State election results used in the analysis*

State name	Districts In Sample	Earlier Election (2006-2008)	Election in Sample (2008-2010)	State Winner	State Alliance Winner	State Winner %	State Second %	State Second Name
Tamil Nadu	30	2006	2006	DMK	UPA	44.8	39.9	AIADMK
Uttar Pradesh	71	2012	2007	BSP	BSP	30.4	25.4	SP
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	2		2009	CentralRule	CentralRule			
Chandigarh	1		2009	CentralRule	CentralRule			
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	1		2009	CentralRule	CentralRule			
Daman & Diu	2		2009	CentralRule	CentralRule			
Lakshadweep	1		2009	CentralRule	CentralRule			
Jharkhand	18	2005	2009	BJP	NDA	20.2	16.2	INC
Tripura	4	2003	2008	CPI (M)	CPI (M)	48.0	36.4	INC
Bihar	37	2005	2010	JDU	NDA	22.6	16.5	JDU
Chhatisgarh	16	2003	2008	BJP	NDA	40.3	38.6	INC
Gujarat	25	2002	2007	BJP	NDA	49.1	38.0	INC
Himachal Pradesh	12	2003	2007	BJP	NDA	43.8	38.9	INC
Karnataka	27	2004	2008	BJP	NDA	33.9	34.8	INC
Madhya Pradesh	45	2003	2008	BJP	NDA	37.6	32.4	INC
Nagaland	8	2003	2008	NPF	NDA	32.6	35.2	INC
Punjab	17	2002	2007	SAD	NDA	45.4	40.9	INC
Uttarakhand	14	2002	2007	BJP	NDA	31.9	29.6	INC
Puducherry	4	2001	2006	INC	UPA	33.0	23.0	DMK
Orissa	30	2004	2009	BJD	NDA	38.9	29.1	INC
Andhra Pradesh	23	2004	2009	INC	UPA	36.6	28.1	TFP
Arunachal Pradesh	13	2004	2009	INC	UPA	50.4	19.3	NCP
Assam	23	2006	2006	INC	UPA	31.1	20.4	AGP
Goa	2	2002	2007	INC	UPA	40.1	36.9	BJP

Haryana	19	2005	2009	INC	UPA	35.1	25.8	Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)
Jammu & Kashmir	14	2002	2008	JKNC	UPA	23.1	17.7	INC
Kerala	14	2001	2006	CPI (M)	CPI (M)	48.6	43.0	INC
Maharashtra	35	2004	2009	INC	UPA	21.0	16.4	Nationalist Congress Party
Manipur	9	2007	2007	INC	UPA	50.0	16.6	Independents
Meghalaya	7	2003	2008	INC	UPA	32.9	18.4	UDP
Mizoram	8	2003	2008	INC	UPA	38.9	30.6	INC
Nct Of Delhi	9	2003	2008	INC	UPA	40.3	36.3	BJP
Rajasthan	32	2003	2008	INC	UPA	36.8	34.3	BJP
Sikkim	4	2004	2009	SDF	UPA	65.9	27.6	INC
West Bengal	19	2001	2006	CPI (M)	CPI (M)	37.1	26.6	AITC

Conclusion

After the immense expansion of social assistance programs across Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) and Middle-income countries (MICs) starting in the 2000s, scholarship on the matter followed suit. Noncontributory social assistance programs have become a central pillar of social policies in these countries and improve the welfare of millions of beneficiaries across EMEs. While these programs generally tend to consist of rules-based and regular transfers in cash or kind, parts of the expansion and distribution of social assistance programs are influenced and shaped by political considerations of governments. This doctoral thesis contributes to debates on how domestic political factors have shaped the expansion and distribution of social assistance in EMEs, with a particular focus on the interplay between electoral competition and contentious political action.

The fact that this dissertation, like many other studies, observes distribution of social benefits on political grounds should not make us weary of social assistance programs in general. To the contrary: These programs have started weaving a governmental social safety net for groups that were previously not covered by any program, as often only bureaucrats and workers in the formal sector benefited from formal social policies in EMEs. My findings suggest that the growth and distribution of these benefits have, on average, benefited lower income groups that were also the intended target group. However, adding to existing research, these findings further aim to illuminate the political conditions that make it favorable for politicians to expand social assistance programs in EMEs. Throwing a spotlight on these political conditions is critical to inform efforts towards a *more* equitable distribution of these programs.

To achieve this goal, I conducted four pieces of quantitative empirical research that emphasize different aspects that need to be understood to shield social assistance programs from political

influence. The following sections summarize the main findings, address policy implications, before discussing promising areas for further research.

I. Main Findings and Contribution

This dissertation makes four overarching contributions. It i) links electoral and contentious politics and their effects on social assistance theoretically and empirically; ii) offers a framework for differentiating the politics across social assistance types; iii) highlights and unpacks the role of sub-national governments in social assistance programs; and iv) suggests improved measurements and data on social assistance distribution and expansion. Each of these contributions is based on the accumulated findings across the four papers of this dissertation, which provide insights and nuance to different theoretical debates highlighted below.

i. Linking Electoral and Contentious Politics and their Effects on Social Assistance

Studying the effect of electoral competition and contentious political action together is key to understand how they shape social assistance expansion and distribution. Papers 1 and 2 show that these effects condition one another and need to be understood as two ways that people can pressure governments to cater to their needs. The results in Paper 1 show that when politicians do not face risk to lose an election, there is no incentive to increase social assistance spending when people are demonstrating. There is, however, a substantial expansionary effect on social assistance when *both* electoral competition and protests are high. We[1] term this interplay the *election-contention-nexus* of social assistance expansion. As we only see a stark positive effect for starting with high levels of protests, the results point towards a threshold model of influence, where a certain level of stability needs to be in jeopardy for governments to see the need to react. Further, paper 1 shows that the *election-contention-nexus* for social assistance expenditure seems to be a phenomenon

[1] Paper 1 was written as a co-authored paper together with Prof. Dr. Erdem Yörük

found only in Middle-income countries, compared to High-income countries where this is not the case. Although the analysis does not allow for causal claims to be tested, we propose five viable domestic political mechanisms on why the effect of elections and contentious political action is present in MICs and not in HICs: They include the class position of the electorate and protestors, the temporal variation in political dynamics of social assistance, differing functions that social assistance fulfills as income maintenance vs. poverty reduction programs, the existence of institutionalized discretion in some MICs, and lastly, newly developing forms of populism that have placed importance on social assistance programs.[2] Paper 1 establishes the existence of an interplay of conditions that lead incumbents to expand noncontributory social assistance policies in Middle-income countries. It adds nuance to the field of distributive politics, by combining theoretical insights provided by the social movements and strategic party competition literatures.

What paper 1 lacks, however, is the answer on how the election-contention-nexus of social assistance benefits functions in a particular country. Under which conditions does this hypothesized relationship hold true? Are all benefits equally responsive? To address this query, paper 2 provides an in-depth case study on Turkey. The results in paper 2 benefit from original calculations on micro-data that assess eligibility and targeting of programs to characterize who receives benefits as a response to political factors. While the literature is often dominated by studies that stress that political factors are linked to clientelist distribution of benefits, this study shows that the co-occurrence of electoral competition and demonstrations is associated with the distribution of social cash benefits to *the poor who were not previously covered*. It provides new insights to the core-swing voter debate by specifying when each of them holds true and adds poor-voters as a potential group that can be targeted by governments with a political motive in mind using

[2] As an example, the class positions of median voters and protestors vary starkly in Middle- compared to High-income countries. In contexts where low-income voters and protesters constitute the plurality of the population, incumbent governments may view more generous social assistance programs as a viable pathway to secure votes. Further, there are considerable differences in the functions and perceptions of social assistance.

social assistance. I still find that the Turkish government follows the core-voter hypothesis by allocating more (in terms of coverage and generosity) social assistance benefits to regions that fully support the incumbent government (i.e. not protesting AKP strongholds). However, this ceases to be the case in regions where elections are close and a high number of demonstrations take place (protesting electoral challengers). In regions where protesting electoral challengers are present, the distributional logic employed by the government shifts away from a simple core-voter allocation strategy as a higher share of the poor are covered compared to other regions. Therefore, it seems that a more comprehensive understanding of political factors can help to illuminate under which conditions incumbent governments expand social assistance policies to people who are eligible and were previously not covered.

Overall, both studies highlight i) the importance of studying social policy outcomes and how they are influenced by electoral competition *(pressure from the top – electoral mobilization motive*) jointly with contentious political action *(pressure from below – social containment motive)* and ii) that this co-occurrence can lead to higher levels of coverage of social assistance benefits among the poor. This refutes findings that expansion associated with electoral motives and containment motives in mind automatically imply clientelist benefit distribution.

ii. Differentiating the Politics across Social Assistance Types

The growth of social assistance in Emerging Economies has led to the introduction of a variety of new programs that were often layered onto similar existing programs. I argue that this layering of social assistance programs can create space for political distribution as the complicated structure of eligibility criteria and target groups is hard to audit for opposition forces and beneficiaries whose applications are unsuccessful. Paper 3 provides a framework that opens the black box of social assistance based on generosity and coverage of different social assistance types. This framework allows us to test if there are differences in the political distributional logics employed by

governments. First, using novel data for Turkey, this paper highlights a trade-off between the coverage of beneficiaries and benefit generosity. While this is not a surprising finding, it still highlights the importance of examining the policy design and distribution of benefits to understand how people are supported by social assistance programs. The two main findings are that i) there are indeed differences in the types of social assistance that are used for political purposes and ii) that the party (and the voter base of that party) that challenges the government matters as only some induce the government to resort to social assistance expansion.

The results suggest that the main benefit type that is used for political purposes in Turkey are meager cash and in-kind benefits that I classify as poverty mitigating social assistance. These programs that provide relatively little benefit amounts to many people are well-suited to be distributed by the government for political purposes, as they are cost-effective. The sheer number of different benefits provides ample room for political calculations. Poverty alleviating benefits (social pensions, disability benefits etc.) that offer generous transfers tend to be politized less. Their allocation does not systematically deviate from the eligibility criteria based on political motives, apart from the slightly higher allocation of benefits in majority Kurdish areas during times of electoral competition. Expanding these benefits would be very costly and likely exceed available funding. Further, extending poverty alleviating benefits raises less political opposition from fiscally conservative oppositional forces, as it is hard to argue that the meager amounts provided would lead to lower labor force participation rates of beneficiaries. I also conceptualize poverty requisite benefits (like education benefits) that use poverty as one of the selection criteria, but do not show political distribution at all. I argue that they serve symbolic purposes to highlight efforts by the government to overcome stark educational inequalities that persist in Turkey.

Lastly, paper 3 also highlights that the political party that challenges the government influences whether social assistance benefits will be expanded or not. When the government faces competition from Kurdish parties in the Eastern regions of Turkey, where poverty rates are the

highest, the main competition line becomes social assistance benefits, as a large share of the people could benefit from these programs. All types, apart from poverty requisite programs, show increased allocation of benefits when a competition is mounted by a Kurdish party. This is not the case for regions where the government is challenged by the Republic People's Party (CHP), a party that has its core voter groups in higher income groups. In these cases, only in-kind benefits show small effects of higher distribution, likely for reasons of promoting turn-out of government supporters, as the Justice and Development Party (AKP) heavily relies on votes of poorer segments in society. No changes to benefit allocation are found when the party challenging the government is the ideologically close Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), that tends to garner votes in higher income groups. This underlines that the politics of social assistance is complex and must be understood within national contexts. Which political party relies on the votes of people who are likely going to benefit from social assistance policies? Which exact programs have characteristics that make it more likely for the government to use them partly as a political tool to garner votes? These will vary across nations. This dissertation highlights that general findings on the influence of elections or contentious political action can hide more nuanced political calculations that happen at national and sub-national level.

These insights on the importance of examining differences across types and challenger parties add to theoretical debates on the distributive politics of social assistance that have looked at the politics of flagship programs (Aytaç, 2014; Böger & Leisering, 2020; Das & Maiorano, 2019; Zucco, 2013) and social assistance spending in general (paper 1 of this dissertation). Robustness checks and further analysis in Paper 1 using the Social Assistance in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (SALMIC) database also revealed that the election-contention-nexus positively effects means-tested benefits and has no effect on universal benefits in Middle-income countries (see Appendix Paper 1). This hints that results found in Turkey may lend themselves to extrapolation beyond the single case. However, further research is required to assess the external validity of these findings.

iii. The Role of Sub-National Governments in Social Assistance Programs

Sub-national governments play a vital role in the design and implementation of social assistance benefits. Studies that examine the differences across federal states are growing and provided important insights, especially in systems that have strong subnational governments and heavily expanded social assistance programs in the last two decades like India and Brazil (Deshpande et al., 2017; Tillin & Pereira, 2017). Paper 4 adds to the literature on federalism and the politics of social assistance by examining unmet demand for the national rural employment guarantee, the largest, de jure universal public works program in the world. This paper shows the importance of using rationing rates vs. mere distribution, particularly when dealing with de jure universal programs.

The first finding is that rationing rates, the share of people who demanded but did not receive work under the program, varies significantly across states with different parties in government. States that are governed by alliances led by the Indian National Congress (INC) party show lower rationing rates (less people with unmet demand) compared to coalitions led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) states. Rationing rates are predicted to be the lowest for districts in states ruled by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party that set out to represent disadvantaged groups in India (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious minorities, and others). Further, I find that when state and district-level parties are aligned, there is less rationing (less unmet demand), regardless of the party in charge. Researchers had previously carried out single state case studies, in which they find that when village leaders and upper government officials are co-partisan, these villages tend to receive more MGNREGA resources (Dasgupta, 2016; Himanshu et al., 2015). Paper 4 carries these findings further to national elections and across all of India and finds party alignment between levels of government to be associated with more resources of MGNREGA.

Paper 4 also provides the underlying mechanism why there are differences in rationing rates across parties ruling on the state-level: Differences due to party strategy logic are rooted in varying party priorities for investments into the material or labor parts of the policy. While states with BJP-rule used significantly more of the MGNREGA budget on material costs, the INC used more on labor costs. This could explain why districts in states ruled by the BJP have higher rationing rates compared to the ones ruled by the UPA, as there is a different underlying strategic spending priority for MGNREGA. For political alignment across state and district-level political parties, the lower rationing rates can be explained with increases in general MGNREGA spending (both labor and material), yielding lower rationing rates. Overall, while state-level poverty and state-level political factors play an important role in explaining the rationing of MGREGA, all district-level variables do not seem to have an effect, cementing earlier findings that the main political backdrop of MGNREGA and many other social policies in India occur on the state-level.

Furthermore, paper 4 adds insights to the role of state governments in the provision of social assistance by highlighting that a *multitude* of actors can use the same program for their benefit. It further stresses that measuring all aspects of a benefit (material costs, labor costs) is important to have a full picture of the potential politicization of social assistance benefits. Existing theories on distributive politics disregard this second pathway of utilizing social assistance programs for political gain: focusing on contractors and materials to garner support in elections campaigns by firms rather than provision of benefits to individuals.

iv. Improving Measurements and Data on Social Assistance Distribution and Expansion

With the growth of the literature attempting to capture and describe the immense expansion of social assistance, came challenges in accurately measuring coverage, generosity, and adequacy over time and across benefits. Considerable progress has been made in the last five years with the

emergence of new datasets that provide important insights on program design, coverage or reach of transfers, institutionalization, and spending on social assistance. The two most important resources for Social Assistance beyond High-income countries are the Social Assistance in Low and Middle Income Countries (SALMIC) led by Barrientos (2018) and the Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity (World Bank ASPIRE, 2020).

This dissertation project was part of a larger research effort within the European Research Council Project *Emerging Welfare* led by Assistant Professor Erdem Yörük (Koç University Istanbul). As the work package leader for the collection and harmonization of a global dataset on social assistance, I led efforts to create a comparable dataset on social assistance across High- and Middle-income countries. This novel GLOW (Global Welfare Dataset is used in paper 1 of this dissertation and is now available online for researchers to use (Yörük et al., 2019). It provides a valuable resource for harmonized data on social assistance and more general social policy indicators to explore communalities and differences of welfare systems around the globe. This data encompasses 10-20 years for most countries, which allows for longitudinal analyses to be carried out that permit characterization of the expansion of social assistance. This significantly improves existing studies that used preferential distribution to groups as a proxy for expansion (Dorlach, 2020; Yörük, 2012).

Paper 2 provides a detailed breakdown of who receives social assistance benefits in Turkey. I utilized large scale representative household surveys to assess if the recipients of social cash transfers are at the risk of poverty or not. This serves as a proxy to assess and characterize the politicization of social cash benefits in Turkey by measuring not only the overall distribution, but also changes to inclusion and exclusion errors of beneficiary selection (framework adapted from Barrientos (2013, p. 133)). As this paper shows, using these measures offers new perspectives and insights into the political distribution of benefits. While using this type of household data comes

with its limitations[3], it provides a valuable resource to uncover previously hidden dynamics of distributive politics. Due to the longitudinal, large-scale, representative data used, it allows to make internally and externally valid claims about instances that lead to changes in the distribution of social assistance.

Paper 3 uses the same data source to construct a longitudinal dataset of different types of benefits. Average expansion and distribution patterns on the regional level for the years 2006-2017 will be published online. On the conceptual level, this paper offers a meso-level classification that explains why measuring and examining different types of social assistance programs is vital. They have fundamentally different purposes, target and reach different groups of people, and vary starkly in benefit amounts provided. Thus, this paper offers a helpful framework based on generosity and coverage to uncover potential differences in politicization and beyond. The exact classification of which benefits belong in which categorization must be adopted for any country for it to reflect a sensible simplification of the complex reality.

Lastly, paper 4 stresses that for a de jure universal social assistance program like MGNREGA in India, existing studies have been using the wrong measure in their examination of the distribution of the benefit. Scholars of the politics of MGNREGA focus on the number of days people have worked under the program or spending on the program to capture dynamics of political distribution (Maiorano et al., 2018). These indicators are important and vital but come with a strong limitation: The demand driven design of this policy may lead to grave misrepresentations of the situation on the ground by these nominal measures of spending and days worked under the program. They are unable to differentiate if higher distribution to certain districts or regions is

[3] Some limitations include: i) people misreporting social assistance receipt in the last year; ii) these surveys use classifications that group benefits together, which may not be understood equally among respondents of surveys. This may lead to a misclassification of benefits; iii) some household members may not remember/report social assistance programs received by another who was not asked.

simply explained by more interest and applications to the program. This paper provides a district-level measure of unmet demand within MGNREGA that aids in accurately capturing rationing of the program (measure adopted from Dutta et al., 2012). I propose this as a more suitable indicator to measure political distribution. Going beyond this, I also believe that this measure is useful to assess the overall performance of the program as it pertains to the main objective of the policy: the universal and guaranteed provision of work to *anyone willing to do unskilled manual labor* by law.

II. Policy implications

Social assistance programs have lifted millions out of poverty, provided access to essential health care, and improved educational outcomes of children in the long run (Araujo & Macours, 2021). In most countries, they are the main tool available to policy makers to mitigate or alleviate poverty and lessen vulnerability. As stated above, most of these programs have been successful in fulfilling this goal, though to varying degrees depending on policy design and contexts. This thesis uncovered parts of the expansion of social assistance benefits in Emerging Market Economies that can be traced back to domestic political pressures faced by incumbents, namely the combination of electoral competition and contentious political action. Further, a share of these benefits is unequally distributed to some regions and groups for political motives. What are the policy implications of these findings?

First, the direct implication for policy makers is to examine if they can collect evidence of unequal distribution[4], especially for targeted social cash and in-kind programs. These programs exhibit the highest degree of political distribution.[5] While general recommendations on reforming specific programs are beyond the scope of this dissertation project, the detailed case studies on Turkey

[4] By unequal distribution, I refer to the preferential distribution of benefits to certain groups over others on political grounds.
[5] Based on paper 1 and 3: In Middle-income countries and Turkey specifically.

serve as the basis for more specific recommendations: i) clearer and more transparent funding structures by the central government for the local Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations, which implement the majority of social assistance policies. This needs to happen in unison with a more transparent and equitable way of handling private donations to these foundations. This could improve the equal distribution of benefits based on need; ii) a reform of the subjective assessments carried out by case workers during the application phase. Although a social registry with all information on income and assets on all individuals residing in Turkey is used to determine initial eligibility for benefits, this is then complemented with a subjective assessment by case workers. These include further interviews with the applicant and in some cases house visits (Yoltar, 2009, 2020). While the general approach of case workers assessing applicants can be useful, structural issues may dampen the just distribution of benefits to certain groups in society. Reforms that aim at eliminating structures that allow for this to occur need to be taken, as otherwise public trust in the just functioning of these benefits could erode. Without support from the public, benefits, which provide vital resources to people in poverty, could be in jeopardy.

Second, the expansion in the number of social assistance programs in Turkey has provided support to a variety of vulnerable groups in society. In some rare cases, benefits could even be considered "truly" universal, like General Health Insurance scheme, which provides access to all citizens, is relatively generous, and of good quality compared to other groups (see Franzoni & Sánchez-Ancochea, 2016 for a discussion on criteria of universalism). However, in many other aspects, it has remained a fragmented system that provides highly unequal benefits and services. Previously, the main distinction in the Turkish welfare state was between i) bureaucrats, ii) workers in the formal sector, who were part of relatively generous contributory policies, and iii) workers in the informal sector, inactive and long-term unemployed, who were largely unprotected. This new system has created another distinction between people in poverty, working informally or with irregular employment trajectories: i) those who are old or have a disability, receive relatively

generous benefits, if they qualify ii) the working age population with children, of whom many receive assistance, but the benefits are meager, and lastly iii) the working age population without children, who remain uncovered. While the recent expansion of social assistance programs represents a move forward in providing rights and resources to vulnerable people, many remain under- or uncovered by social protection programs like social assistance. A move towards more universal policies could help ease the politicization of benefits and provide fairer distributional outcomes, though there are clear challenges of attaining the required public support to fund such endeavors.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically amplified the role of social assistance programs around the globe. As governments started to implement confinement measures to curb transmission of the novel virus, social assistance programs were expanded at historic speed to support vulnerable groups, especially for those not covered by contributory social programs (OECD, 2020). To date, 186 countries have implemented 734 conditional or unconditional cash transfer programs, constituting a global record for cash transfers and making it the most utilized social protection response during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gentilini et al., 2020). While the size of people in non-standard employment varies greatly across countries, social assistance policies became the main tool utilized to provide to people in the informal economy, the self-employed, or for those on short-term contracts (e.g. employees in the gig economy). This expansion of social assistance policies included the introduction of new temporary benefits, scale-up of existing benefits in coverage and generosity, and changing eligibility criteria to make them less restrictive. This thesis uncovered a certain share of distribution of social assistance benefits that were dispersed with political motives in mind. This new rapid expansion using pre-existing administrative structures could have amplified these patterns of political distribution I uncovered in my dissertation. A thorough audit of these policies is needed to ensure that programs reach those most in need, during this time of heightened crisis. It remains to be seen, which of these

new and scaled-up social assistance programs will remain intact after the pandemic is over, but the ripple effect for these policies will have to be analyzed for years to come.

Lastly, there are implications for social movements seeking to influence social policies. My findings cement that governments can respond with social assistance to citizens voicing their discontent through large scale demonstrations. However, they only do so when citizens can also organize a credible electoral threat to the government. This adds to insights in the realms of social movements. Political mediation theories have long argued that protests have differential effects depending on the political circumstances they take place in (Amenta et al., 1992, 2010). This dissertation extends and empirically tests these theories by examining social assistance, general social unrest, and specifying who benefits when this interplay occurs.

III. Avenues for further research

This dissertation is a long way from supplying comprehensive and conclusive evidence on the politics of social assistance in Emerging Market Economies. In answering questions about some aspects of the expansion and distribution of social assistance, it raises questions about others.

First, findings on the interplay between electoral and contentious politics and their effects on social assistance require further attention. It remains unclear which type of contentious political action influences social assistance policies. Due to data limitations on global protest events, a pressing question that could not be addressed in this dissertation is if it is contentious political action by certain groups (informal workers, specific social movements etc.) or rather general social instability that is linked to social assistance expansion. Considering potentially heterogenous effects of social movements and protest types promises to advance knowledge on the relationship between social movements, elections, and social assistance outcomes. Further, possible interactions between the

interplay between the election-contention-nexus and the political ideology (left-wing, populist etc.) merit further investigation. This study has merely provided a first look into the existence of a relationship between electoral competition, contentious political action, and social assistance. To cement these effects, further studies into the mechanisms and dynamics are required.

Second, the differential politicization across social assistance types requires more scrutiny. Is this classification using generosity and coverage useful and applicable beyond the confinements of the Turkish social assistance system? Are benefits like social pensions more politized in some places compared to others, challenging the external validity of my framework and findings? The literature would benefit from further investigation into the differences across social assistance types, the continuously fragmented social assistance systems in Emerging Market Economies, and how these can lead to structures that allow for political use of these important benefits.

Third, the role of sub-national governments in social assistance programs is important and requires even more attention than it has started to receive. While in countries with strong federal structures like Brazil and India, scholarship has provided useful insights into differences across states and the reasons for these variances in social assistance policies. However, compared to national level studies, they are still relatively underrepresented and require further attention to uncover mechanisms that yield to starkly different welfare outcomes across states. The literature would further benefit greatly from investigation into the role of sub-national governments in countries with strong unitary structures, like Turkey and others. Studies have highlighted the important role of city and municipal governments in the provision of new policies and services (Kesgin, 2012; Urhan & Urhan, 2015). Yet these points have not been theorized and tested in their interdependence with national level politics sufficiently and require more research.

Fourth, fostering advances in measurements and data social assistance distribution and expansion will open new possibilities to uncover more nuanced accounts of the influence of politics on social assistance. Specifically, in the realm of social assistance there has been a lack of longitudinal trends that go beyond mere spending measures. With every passing year and added novel database, possibilities for further research will improve. For universal social assistance programs, this dissertation highlights the importance of examining unmet demand. Unfortunately, the data available only allows for a snapshot in time and this survey module has not been repeated since 2011. It is of utmost importance to carry out representative surveys that include a battery of questions to assess potential unmet demands and uncover the reasons why legal entitlements were not provided to ensure equitable access to social assistance programs for everyone.

Lastly, the reforms that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted have to be examined. Social assistance has formed an integral part of larger social protection efforts during the pandemic and will continue to do so to as governments aim to deal with economic and social repercussions. Yet, the extent to which new social assistance policies will persist in Middle- and Low-income countries is uncertain. Will the newly introduced policies change public perceptions on redistribution, and will this create political opportunity structures to expand social assistance programs further? Or are these reforms merely temporal and will be remembered as emergency assistance rather than regular social assistance benefits? These questions remain to be answered. Beyond new and expanded programs, the pandemic has led to some important policy innovations, for example, in the delivery of social assistance in urban areas through mobile payment systems and through the expansion of more dynamic social registries using a novel data sources[6] (UN DESA, 2022). New

[6] In countries such as Kenya, Lebanon, Turkey, Ecuador, Chile, and Thailand different types of mobile payments have been set up to deliver cash assistance directly into recipients' bank accounts or mobile wallets. In Chile, for example, bank accounts that are linked to national IDs (*CuentaRut*) were utilized to quickly transfer cash assistance to over 2 million vulnerable people. These e-payment options have clear advantages over manual transfers in realms of speed, targeting and accuracy. However, they require careful considerations from governments to ensure to

administrative structures need to be examined thoroughly to assess possibly unequal access, new distributional outcomes, and their effects on the politics of social assistance more generally.

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