

Subnational Democratization in India:
Colonial Competition and the Challenge to Congress Dominance

Maya Tudor

Adam Ziegfeld

August 2010

A. Introduction & Summary of Argument

Shortly after its independence from Britain in 1947—with the inauguration of a democratic constitution ratified in 1950 and the holding of free and fair national elections in 1951-52—India quickly became the world’s most populous democracy. Given a narrow procedural definition of democracy, both national and subnational democratization in India are characterized by surprisingly little variation.¹ But, if subnational democratization is defined more substantively to require the emergence of a viable competitor to a dominant political party, then subnational variation in democratization certainly existed, with the first stable opposition state governments emerging as early as 1967 in some states but as late as 2003 in others.²

In this paper, we explain variation in the emergence of viable opposition governments through reference to historical patterns of political competition. In particular, the core argument developed throughout the paper is that a successful electoral challenge to the dominant rule of the Indian National Congress (also referred to simply as Congress) tended to emerge earliest in

¹ By subnational democratization, we mean democratization at the state level, a definition applying mainly to federations with multiple layers of government.

² Following Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), we employ a minimalist definition of democracy in the sense that we focus exclusively on elections and the possibility of an opposition party or coalition winning. Our focus on the viability of opposition parties also builds on the pithy definition of democracy as ‘a system in which parties lose elections’ in Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 10.

states where opposition parties could draw on resources from political competition in the pre-independence period. We trace this argument through case studies of three Indian states that vary according to type of colonial rule, geographic location, and size: Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. We also examine a fourth case, Jammu and Kashmir, which is an outlier in India because of its longstanding failure to democratize according to even the most minimal definition of democracy. Through these four case studies, we make three claims.

The first claim is that *post-independence patterns of party competition cannot be understood without referencing historical patterns of political competition, and in particular, the cohesiveness and organizational strength of opposition groups in the pre-independence period.* At independence, Congress' electoral dominance was a consistent feature across almost every major state. India's first-past-the-post electoral system ensured that Congress could maintain its dominant electoral position with relatively modest vote shares so long as it faced a fractious and divided opposition. While Congress dominance was the norm, India's states varied considerably in the shape of their opposition parties and whether the opposition drew on useful resources from the pre-independence period or had to begin from scratch to construct a viable political alternative.

Two cases examined below, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, both experienced elections during the colonial period. In Tamil Nadu, the colonial period saw the rise of cohesive, ideologically-motivated, mass-oriented social movement that would later serve as the basis for a similarly organized, mass-oriented opposition party that was well-equipped to challenge Congress. By contrast, the opposition in Uttar Pradesh had little to draw on from the pre-independence period. The state's major opposition to Congress before independence, which was highly elite and ill-suited to democratic politics, virtually disappeared after independence. The

case studies underscore the importance of historical patterns of political competition in conditioning the timing of an effective opposition state government.

Our second claim is that *in the absence of a cohesive and organized opposition party or movement, a relatively polarized caste structure facilitated the emergence of viable opposition governments*. Neither Uttar Pradesh nor Rajasthan possessed cohesive, mass-oriented opposition parties after independence. But, whereas a fragmented and non-polarized caste structure in Uttar Pradesh for decades frustrated the easy exploitation of caste for electoral purposes by the opposition, a relatively polarized caste rivalry politicized during the colonial era in Rajasthan readily facilitated the emergence of a credible political opposition.

Finally, the third claim is that *central government intervention delayed the onset of viable opposition government in India*. In Tamil Nadu, the central government rarely intervened in state politics after independence, both because it could not easily manipulate the opposition's substantial legislative majority and because this opposition became critical to Congress' maintenance of national power. In Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, regular central government intervention helped Congress remain in power longer than it otherwise would have, thwarting in Rajasthan what might have been a promising opposition government. Central government intervention was at its most extreme in Jammu and Kashmir, where a perceived national security imperative led to excessive central interference in state politics, delaying even the onset of free and fair elections. Had it not been for central intervention, Jammu and Kashmir might have been among India's early democratizers. Table 1 summarizes how our claims play out in the four case study states, and Figure 1 shows where the case study states are located in India.

We develop these three claims in the following seven sections. The first section provides a broad introduction to the history of India's democratization. The second section explains our

rationale for operationalizing subnational democratization through the emergence of viable political oppositions in Indian states. The next four sections trace the various trajectories of opposition governments in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir, respectively. The penultimate section describes the contemporary state of subnational democratization in India, while a final section concludes.

B. Democratization in India: The National Story

The colonial empire of British India stretched across what is today India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In practice, British India was a patchwork of two kinds of governance patterns: direct rule, in which the British directly established colonial institutions of governance, and princely rule, in which semi-sovereign rulers maintained their rights to govern under the ultimate suzerainty of the British. Events during colonial rule had important consequences for the timing of an opposition (i.e. non-Congress) government by determining whether political competition was well-established when India's dominant political party, Congress, came to national power upon independence.

In the late nineteenth century, Congress was an urban and upper caste movement which began to take up the cause of limited self-representation within the colonial government. Over the early half of the twentieth century, this movement transformed itself into a national independence movement that contested colonially-sponsored elections and later governed an independent India for several decades. By the terms of the 1919 colonial reforms, national politics effectively became the sum of politics in British India's eleven provinces, the forerunner to Indian states. Within each of these provinces, the combination of separate electorates for a variety of minority communities (such as Muslims), a rural bias in electoral system, a number of

nominated legislative seats, and an extremely limited franchise enabled the colonial government and its allies to effectively retain control of what the colonial regime euphemistically called representative government.

The British colonial government held two sets of pre-independence elections within direct-rule states, in 1936-37 and in 1945-6.³ Though elections revealed a relatively broad base of support for Congress, these pre-independence provincial elections featured relatively little genuine competition.⁴ In many provinces, Congress faced either token opposition or none at all. In provinces with a substantial Muslim population, separate electorates (whereby a certain number of seats were allocated to the Muslim community and only Muslims were eligible for these seats) ensured that Congress did not actually compete against the main Muslim-dominated parties in many seats. Meanwhile the princely states did not hold any elections before independence.

Upon independence in 1947, formal democratization occurred across India, British direct-ruled and princely alike. The Constituent Assembly of India ratified a constitution that guaranteed universal adult suffrage in 1950, and the country's first national elections took place in late 1951 and early 1952 under universal franchise. For the first 20 years after independence, Congress dominated both state and national elections, winning five consecutive national elections (1951-52, 1957, 1962, 1967, and 1971) and nearly all state level elections prior to 1967. By the late 1960's, Congress electoral dominance had begun to crumble, and the party system in India slowly evolved from a dominant party system to a competitive multi-party system. Some

³ The British colonial regime gambled that a broader extension of the franchise would reveal a narrow base of support for the primarily urban Congress and thus help to keep British allies in power. They were surprised by the extent of Congress support in the countryside. While the British had calculated that smaller landowners would support colonial allies on the basis of the secure tenure and market access British rule had brought, the dominant peasantry and small landowners within Indian villages were won over to the Congress cause by a promise of even more favorable treatment on such issues as land revenue.

⁴ The franchise in these elections collectively amounted to approximately 11% of the adult population.

Indian states experienced a complete alternation of parties in power, or their first full-term opposition government, later than others. It is this variation in the emergence of viable opposition governments that this paper seeks to explain.

In 1975, a brief authoritarian interlude in Indian politics ironically hastened democratic consolidation at the national level. In June 1975, at the behest of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, India's President declared a national Emergency, allowing the central government to suspend an array of civil and political freedoms. The government censored the press, imprisoned a large number of opposition politicians, and failed to hold scheduled state and national elections. This infringement upon democracy, which lasted until March 1977, was India's one and only authoritarian interlude since independence.⁵ Shortly after the Emergency's end, Congress lost national power for the first time.

The 1977 election therefore heralded the end of one-party dominance in India. The Janata Party formed the government from 1977 to 1979. In 1979, the Janata Party split, with one faction of the party exiting the party to form the Janata Party (Secular). The Janata Party (Secular) then formed the government from 1979 to 1980 with the outside support of Congress. While the government was comprised entirely of non-Congress ministers, it survived at the pleasure of Congress. After Congress withdrew its support in late 1979, it then won the new elections held in 1980. Despite the relative brevity of this non-Congress interregnum, by 1980 when Congress returned to power, India had proven itself a consolidated democracy; both an incumbent and opposition party had constitutionally won elections and then peacefully ceded power.

⁵ It is worth mentioning that the Emergency was declared and extended according to provisions set down by the Indian Constitution. In other words, the declaration of Emergency and the temporary suspension of elections during the period of Emergency were constitutionally permitted. The allegations of authoritarianism stem instead from the flimsy pretence on which Emergency was declared and the extent of the government abuses—imprisonment of political opponents and mass sterilizations in particular.

C. Defining Subnational Democratization through Viable Opposition Governments

In this paper, we explore subnational democratization in terms of alternation in power at the state level, which occurs when an opposition (i.e., non-Congress) government first serves a full term in office. This understanding of democratization is consistent with scholars of democratization who do not consider a country to have fully democratized until it experiences at least one and sometimes two alternations in power. In other words, a country is not considered an established democracy until the party initially in power has peacefully conceded power.

This definition of democratization is appropriate in the Indian context for a variety of reasons. First, based on an electoral or minimalist definition of democracy, India has seen very little subnational variation in democratization outcomes. Prior to national independence, some states experienced elections under a highly restricted franchise, while others did not. But the variation between states holding election prior to 1947 and those that did not is explained entirely by that state's history of colonial rule; former British provinces held elections whereas former princely states did not. At independence, free and fair elections were held virtually everywhere. Although this paper discusses one noteworthy case where such democratization did not occur immediately, for the overwhelming majority of Indians—upwards of 95%—independence was accompanied by the advent of free and fair elections at both national and subnational (state) levels. We thus adopt a somewhat thicker, but still procedural, notion of democratization that focuses on the substantive alternation in state-level power, namely the emergence of a full-term opposition government.⁶

⁶ This meets the definition of a consolidated democracy, whereby democracy's "complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has effectively become. . . 'the only game in town,'" Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996), p. 14.

A number of objections might arise to this conceptualization of subnational democratization, since Indian democracy is hardly without imperfections. Foremost among these objections is that our conceptualization of subnational democracy focuses on a narrow set of political organizations and their leaders. Electoral competition between a handful of elites, some might argue, hardly constitutes a substantive democracy. The existence of political elites, however, is almost certainly inevitable in all modern societies relying on mass political organization.⁷ Thus, the relevant question for our purposes is not whether a small elite dominates politics but whether governing elites allow political competitors to organize and potentially access genuine political power. Indeed, as Jaffrelot has argued, the institutionalization of procedural democracy in India was a necessary requisite to the gradual but appreciable socio-economic democratization of India's governing classes.⁸

Conceptualizing subnational democratization as alternation in power is a particularly useful lens through which to view Indian democratization for two reasons. First and foremost, India has experienced considerable variation in this regard. India's first elections quickly established Congress as the dominant force in virtually every state. Though Congress was widely believed to be a party with a strong commitment to democracy, this commitment was not put to a test until well after independence since viable governing alternatives were slow to emerge. Every state in India had opposition parties at independence; however, the states varied in terms of how successful these alternative parties were in challenging Congress rule.

Second, unlike many highly centralized federations, Indian states are important political entities. They are responsible for many of the policy domains that impinge most heavily on the

⁷ See, for example, Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (London: Watts, 1964) and John Higley and Michael Burton, *The Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy* (Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London, C. Hurst, 2003).

everyday lives of citizens, including education, health, sanitation, law and order. From a normative perspective, democratization at the state level is crucially important as a way for citizens to hold politicians accountable at this important level of government. In addition, in a developing country like India, where the allocation of public goods is often politicized and the public demand for state services outstrips supply, the distribution of public goods and state services is deeply influenced by who governs. Without a viable governing alternative to the dominant party—that is, without substantive democratization at the state level—access to the state risks becoming restricted to those who support the dominant party. Given the proximity of state government to everyday life, democratization at the state level is arguably just as important for citizens' well being as democratization at the national level.

We therefore conceive of subnational democratization as variation in when opposition state governments serve their first full term in office. This is somewhat different from the familiar indicator dating democratization to the first peaceful transfer of power. While this definition might work at the national level, at the subnational level, it is somewhat problematic. As will become clear below, there is a surprisingly weak correlation between the first time when an opposition government came to power in an Indian state and the first time that an opposition government served a full term in office. In most cases, the latter occurred much later than the former for one of two reasons. First, many opposition governments failed to serve their full terms because the central government intervened, frequently dismissing state level governments. Second, many opposition governments were not credible alternatives; they represented coalitions of literally every non-Congress party in the legislature ranging from secular communists to conservatives and Hindu revivalists. These governments often fell apart thanks to their own internal contradictions and were not truly viable alternatives to Congress. Consequently, the first

transfer of power is often a poor indicator of true democratization, since that date does not always indicate that a viable opposition had emerged.

When operationalized as party alternation, three broad patterns of subnational democratization characterize Indian states. Table 2 presents a timeline of democratization across the Indian states, indicating the years when opposition governments first took power as well as the years when an opposition government first took power that would go on to serve a full term in office. The first pattern is early democratization, where opposition governments came to power relatively early in India's post-independence history and established themselves as viable alternatives capable of remaining in power. We argue that this was most likely where colonial political competition provided later opposition parties with considerable resources, often organization. The early democratizers were Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and arguably Kerala.⁹ The second pattern is late democratization. The late emergence of a credible alternative occurred either because oppositions had few resources on which to draw (Uttar Pradesh) or because their attempts to win power were thwarted by central intervention (Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan). A third, but extremely rare trajectory is that of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir was a late democratizer because the central government for many years prevented free and fair democratic competition from taking place. The next four sections turn to the case studies that illustrate this paper's three major claims about the timing of subnational democratization.

D. Tamil Nadu: An Early Challenge to Congress Rule

⁹ Kerala was actually the first major state to have a non-Congress government, but a non-Congress government did not serve a full term until 1987-1991. Before that, Kerala had a number of non-Congress governments, none of which lasted their full duration. The Communist Party of India (CPI) headed a full-term state government. Since Congress was part of the CPI-led ministry, this was not a truly opposition government.

Tamil Nadu, a state on India's southern tip with well over 60 million people, is one of India's early democratizing states.¹⁰ In 1967, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was the first party in India to inflict a decisive defeat on Congress at the state level.¹¹ It then went on to be the first non-Congress party to serve a full term in office in a major state (1967-71).¹² Tamil Nadu's early democratization occurred thanks to the mass-oriented political activity of the Dravidian movement—a social movement that wove linguistic nationalism together with social and religious reform. The early activities of the Dravidian movement later allowed the DMK to draw on an unusually rich set of organizational resources as it sought to turn itself into a catch-all alternative to Congress. Combined with a fortuitous lack of central intervention in Tamil Nadu's states politics, the DMK's early organizational advantage brought about early democratization in Tamil Nadu.

The DMK's rise to power in Tamil Nadu was meteoric.¹³ Founded in 1949, the DMK sat out the 1952 elections. In 1957, when it first contested elections, the DMK appeared little different from most other opposition parties in India. It won only 15 seats in a legislature of 205

¹⁰ The name Tamil Nadu has been in use since 1968. From 1956 to 1968, contemporary Tamil Nadu was called Madras. Prior to 1956, Madras was much larger than today's Tamil Nadu. It also included a large portion of contemporary Andhra Pradesh and smaller parts of Kerala and Karnataka. Before independence, the state of Madras was known as the Madras Presidency. For simplicity, we refer to the area currently comprising Tamil Nadu as Madras in the colonial period and Tamil Nadu in the post-independence period.

¹¹ The DMK was the first party to win a legislative majority in an election that Congress contested. In or before 1967, three non-Congress parties won legislative majorities, all in elections in which Congress did not participate. These parties were the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir in 1962, Nagaland National Organization in Nagaland in 1964 (though its candidates all officially contested as independents), and Maharashtrawadi Gomantak in Goa in 1967. Additionally, on four occasions—thrice in Kerala (1957, 1965, 1967) and once in Orissa (1967)—Congress failed to win a plurality of seats, coming in second behind another party. However, in all four instances, the winning party also failed to secure a majority of seats.

¹² The DMK's term in office was less than five years because it called early state elections in order that they coincide with national elections. Since the party did not face pressure to call elections or threats to the stability of its government, we count the DMK's spell in office from 1967-71 as a full term.

¹³ Our discussion of the Justice Party, Self Respect Association, and early years of the DMK draws heavily on Narendra Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens, and Democracy in South India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

and about 13% of the vote.¹⁴ That changed in 1962 when it doubled its vote share, winning more than 27% of votes polled and becoming the largest non-Congress party. In 1967, the DMK's vote share jumped to 41%, and it came to power with a single party majority. The party again won elections in 1971 before it experience a split in 1972 that resulted in the formation of the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK). From the next elections in 1977 onwards, the DMK and ADMK constituted the two major poles in Tamil Nadu's competitive party system.¹⁵ Congress has never returned to power.

The DMK owes much of its success in the 1950s and 1960s to its tactics of mass engagement with the electorate and its vibrant party organization. An important example of this mass engagement was the party's repeated mass agitations in 1950, 1952, 1959, 1960, and 1963 against central government plans to impose the use of Hindi in Tamil Nadu.¹⁶ It also launched a major campaign against a craft education scheme seen as reinforcing traditional caste occupations. Perhaps as important as these agitations, the DMK sought to permeate the social fabric of society. It spread its message through the publication of popular literature and journals and the production of films and street theater. The DMK could not have engaged so directly with the public and on such a wide scale without a robust party organization. Indeed, in many parts of Tamil Nadu "the DMK had a stronger party organization than Congress by the late 1950s, maintaining mass contact and running election campaigns more effectively."¹⁷ This same party organization, with its routinized and democratic internal structures, allowed the DMK to

¹⁴ The DMK's candidates officially contested the elections as independents.

¹⁵ The ADMK won three successive elections in 1977, 1980, and 1984. Since then, the ADMK and DMK have alternated in power, the DMK winning elections in 1989, 1996, and 2006 and the ADMK winning in 1991 and 2001.

¹⁶ Subramanian, p. 158.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 145.

incorporate a cadre of leaders from across the state's many caste groups, helping it amass a wide, multi-caste support base.¹⁸

Besides the DMK, Tamil Nadu's main opposition parties were Swatantra and the two communist parties.¹⁹ Neither could match the DMK in terms of organization or contact with the electorate. Swatantra was poorly organized, and its activities outside of elections were limited. The party relied heavily on the appeal of its founder, C. Rajagopalachari, known as Rajaji, a former chief minister of Tamil Nadu. The communist parties were highly organized in certain pockets of the state but lacked a strong state-wide organization. During this period, the communists throughout India pursued a strategy of class-based mobilization of urban workers, failing to recognize the flaws inherent in this strategy in a predominantly rural society.

Caste issues also hampered the DMK's rivals in the opposition. Unlike the DMK and Congress, Swatantra and the communists both had overwhelmingly upper caste leaderships that did not appeal to the non-upper caste majority, particularly since the parties drew heavily on urban upper castes who were not well positioned to mobilize rural voters through patron-client ties. Rajaji was an orthodox Brahmin, and Swatantra was mainly a party of elite upper-caste notables that evinced no strong desire to democratize its leadership.²⁰ Meanwhile, though the communists were committed to the plight of the poor, their ideological opposition to caste precluded them from explicitly taking caste into account as they selected their leadership. Their leaders were predominantly Brahmins, a handicap in a state with a tiny Brahmin population (less

¹⁸ See Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) on how internal party democracy facilitates the recruitment of a multi-ethnic leadership.

¹⁹ The Communist Party of India (CPI) split in 1964 yielding the rump CPI and a new party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM). The CPI's vote in 1957 was 7%; Swatantra had not yet been founded. In the 1962 elections both Swatantra and the CPI won about 8% each. In 1967, the CPI won only 2%, the CPM 4%, and Swatantra 5%. In the 1971 election, all three parties' vote shares had slipped below the 3% mark.

²⁰ Howard L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 110-112.

than 3%) and a decades' long tradition of opposition to the dominance of Brahmins in politics and the state.²¹

The combination of weak organization and upper caste leadership that characterized Tamil Nadu's other (non-DMK) opposition parties could also describe many opposition parties elsewhere in India that, like Swatantra and the communists, provided no more than a modest challenge to Congress dominance. What distinguished the DMK from other opposition parties?

Although the DMK's founding in 1949 made it a new party at the time of independence, unlike most other opposition parties, its political activities did not start from scratch when it was founded. Because the DMK was the heir to earlier political parties and organizations—the Justice Party, Self Respect Association, and Dravidar Kazhagam—it drew on more than 30 years of political and social activity and a base of committed followers. The groundwork laid by these earlier organizations later conferred a distinct advantage on the DMK.

The Justice Party—the earliest organization to which the DMK can trace its roots—was founded over the course of 1916 and 1917 in response to the dominance of the Brahmin caste within the colonial regime.²² By the early twentieth century, Brahmins dominated virtually every corner of the colonial bureaucracy in the Madras Presidency that was not restricted to Europeans. Elite non-Brahmin castes rankled not only at their underrepresentation in the upper reaches of the colonial bureaucracy but also at the British habit of clubbing them into the same category as other Shudra *jatis* of traditionally low status.²³ Because Brahmins also dominated the turn-of-

²¹ Selig S. Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 182-190

²² The Justice Party was founded as the South Indian Liberal Federation. It was popularly known as the Justice Party after the name of the newspaper it published, *Justice*.

²³ Hindu scriptures prescribe that society be organized into five groups: Brahmins (the priestly class), Kshatriyas (the ruling or warrior class), Vaishyas (the trading or merchant class), Shudras (the laboring class), and those whose occupations are so polluting that they stand on the margins of society. The first four groups are *varnas*, while the last group is *avarna* (without *varna*) and constitutes the groups historically treated as untouchable. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas are usually considered upper caste. In practice, Hindu society is actually divided into *jatis*, endogamous social groups with a hereditary occupation. Throughout India, there are hundreds of *jatis*, each of

the-century Congress in Madras, the Justice Party formed in an attempt by non-Brahmin elites to press their case for reservations (i.e., affirmative action) in the bureaucracy.

Although the Justice Party governed the Madras Presidency from 1920 to 1926 and then again from 1930 to 1937, it did not pose a serious threat to Congress. The Justice Party's prolonged spells in power owed much to Congress' ambivalence towards electoral politics under the colonial system of diarchy, under which the British gave only limited powers to the elected provincial legislatures.²⁴ The Justice Party's success also depended on a highly restricted franchise. The Justice Party was an exceedingly elite organization, dominated by landed interests and members of the anglicized urban middle class. Its demand for non-Brahmin reservation, which it won shortly after gaining power, did not aim to systematically level social hierarchies, but rather to displace one group of elites with another. The Justice Party's support for the colonial regime also did little to endear it with the public. Meanwhile, Congress made a conscious attempt to shed its Brahminical image, fielding non-Brahmins in elections and promoting non-Brahmins to positions of authority at the district level.

In 1935, the system of diarchy ended, bringing with it not only Congress' full participation in elections but also the expansion of the franchise. The subsequent elections in

which is supposed to fall into one of the above five-fold *varna* classifications. On the ground, *jati* is not as straightforward as *varna*. Groups of relatively low ritual status (that is, position in the *varna* system) may actually enjoy considerable prestige and power and vice versa. Traditionally, Tamil Nadu had no indigenous Kshatriyas or Vaishyas. Therefore, all non-Brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu are, by the standards of the *varna* system, lower-caste. However, based on their social prestige and affluence, a number of Shudra *jatis* in Tamil Nadu were effectively upper caste. The arrival of the British, with their emphasis on the hierarchical aspects of the caste system, heightened the distinction between Brahmin and non-Brahmin. On the Brahmin/non-Brahmin divide in Tamil Nadu, see M.S.S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).

²⁴ Congress boycotted the first elections in the Madras Presidency in 1920 and contested only a small number of seats in the 1923 elections. It emerged as the largest party in the Madras legislature following the 1926 election. But, since no party won a majority, a non-partisan ministry was formed. Congress again boycotted the 1930 elections, only to win an absolute majority in the following elections in 1934. However, to protest the system of diarchy, Congress refused to form a government in 1934, thus permitting the Justice Party to remain in power. In elections that were not entirely boycotted, Congress candidates contested under the banner of the Swaraj Party, a faction within Congress.

1937 spelled the demise of the Justice Party, as Congress defeated the party badly.²⁵ Had the early Justice Party remained as it was—an elite party focused mainly on electioneering—it would have bequeathed little to the DMK in terms of organizational resources. However, shortly after the crushing 1937 defeat, the Justice Party absorbed the Self Respect Association into its ranks, reinvigorating the organization.

The Self Respect Association, which was the organizational heart of the early Dravidian movement, was founded in 1926 by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, known more commonly as Periyar. Periyar was a former Congressman disillusioned with Brahmin dominance within Congress. In contrast to the early Justice Party, the Self Respect Association was far more radical in its aims and sought to engage with a far wider public. It aimed for something akin to a societal transformation, advocating atheism and the abandonment of Hindu ritual. The association was rabidly anti-Brahmin, opposing the Hindu social order atop which Brahmins stood. It also demonized North Indians, who were accused of imposing Brahminical Hinduism on South India. In this way, the Self Respect Association fused non-Brahminism—the mantra of the early Justice Party—with Tamil nationalism.

Once the Self Respect Association merged into the Justice Party, the Justice Party withdrew from active electoral politics, attempting to fashion itself into more of a social organization. For example, it pioneered the practice of “self respect” weddings that eschewed traditional Hindu rites and often featured speeches by political figures in the Dravidian movement. Its increasingly social orientation notwithstanding, the Justice Party in the late

²⁵ Exact vote shares are unavailable. British reports only record the winning candidates’ party and number of votes, the number of votes (but not party) of the runner-up, and the total number of votes cast. Since Congress won most seats, an approximation of the Congress vote share is possible. It won at least 90% of the votes cast in the general (i.e., non-reserved) seats in the Madras legislature, for which nearly 85% of all votes were cast. The Justice Party fared somewhat better in the seats reserved for Muslims, Christians, and landholders; however, only about 15% of votes were cast for these seats.

colonial period was not at all an apolitical organization. Periyar campaigned for the Justice Party in 1936 (before the Self Respect Association's merger), and he clearly articulated his support for the colonial regime and opposition to Congress and Gandhi, in particular. Periyar became a figure of wide mass appeal, and his organization enjoyed considerable patronage from affluent members of colonial Madras society.

In the 1940s, a new leader emerged within the Justice Party, C.N. Annadurai. Under Annadurai's influence the Justice Party renamed itself the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). Annadurai also sought to address some of the DK's organizational weaknesses and orient it towards maximizing popular support. He pushed the DK to project a less radical image that would appeal to a wider audience—embracing independence, tilting the blend of Dravidian ideology towards issues of language and culture, and softening the organization's opposition to religion.²⁶

Annadurai also tried to institutionalize formal organizational structures within the DK. Thus, when in the 1940s most of the opposition parties that would vie for power in the 1950s and 1960s had not yet been founded, Annadurai was already modernizing the DK. In 1949, Annadurai formally broke with Periyar and founded the DMK explicitly as a political party aimed at electoral contestation. The new party retained the DK's mass orientation, winning over the majority of the DK's former members. From 1949 onward, the DMK embarked on a fast rise to power, ensuring early democratization in Tamil Nadu.

Elsewhere in India, when opposition governments came to power, the Congress-led central government often invoked Article 356 of the constitution, which permits the central government to impose rule by the central government after having dismissed a state government

²⁶ Subramanian, pp. 124-126 argues that the critical feature of non-Brahminism in Tamil Nadu that allowed it to survive was its link to language. Elsewhere, notably in Maharashtra, Congress easily absorbed non-Brahmin sentiment. However, in Tamil Nadu, because non-Brahminism became tied to Tamil cultural nationalism and a concomitant opposition to North Indian dominance, Congress had a far more difficult time accommodating Tamil non-Brahminism, in light of the party's deep roots in North India.

when “a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.” Invoking Article 356 is also known as declaring President’s Rule. In many states, the central government declared President’s Rule on the flimsiest of pretexts, effectively subverting the results of prior elections that allowed an opposition government to take power. Given the central government’s willingness to dismiss democratically-elected governments in other states, why did it not intervene in Tamil Nadu?

Two factors explain the central government’s restraint in Tamil Nadu. First, the DMK’s spectacular electoral success made destabilizing its government difficult. In many other major states where opposition governments came to power after the 1967 elections, opposition governments consisted of ideologically diverse multi-party governments with razor-thin legislative majorities (e.g., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal). In these states, Congress often had only to pry away a single coalition partner or engineer the defection of a handful of legislators in order to bring down the government. Having brought down the government, the central government could use the ensuing instability as a pretext for President’s Rule.

In Tamil Nadu, bringing down the DMK government was far more difficult. To do so, Congress would have had to first engineer the defection of dozens of DMK legislators. It would have then had to ensure that none of the DMK’s allies, such as Swatantra or the CPM, came to the DMK’s rescue and propped up the government. Whereas many key opposition figures in other states were former Congressmen, most prominent DMK figures had no roots in Congress. Many had been socialized in the Dravidian movement from an early age, making them less likely candidates for defection from the DMK to Congress.

Second, after 1969, Congress frequently relied on its alliances with regional parties in Tamil Nadu to win crucial seats needed to maintain its majority in the national legislature. In 1969, Congress split at the national level into Congress (R), headed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and Congress (O), led by former Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Kamaraj.²⁷ Though Indira Gandhi retained the support of most of Congress' MPs, her faction of the party lost its overall majority in parliament. Since Congress (O) was believed to be the far stronger faction in Tamil Nadu—and therefore the DMK's chief rival—the DMK sided with Indira Gandhi's faction of Congress, lending the party outside support in the national parliament and thereby keeping her government afloat. The DMK and Congress then joined hands in an electoral alliance in 1971 in opposition to Congress (O). Congress agreed to support DMK candidates in state level elections but did not contest any seats itself. In return, the DMK backed Congress candidates in ten parliamentary seats (all of which Congress won).

Then, in the 1970s, a new party emerged in Tamil Nadu, the ADMK, threatening to permanently relegate Congress to third place and potentially stop it from ever winning many seats from Tamil Nadu in national elections. To prevent being wiped out entirely in the state, in most elections Congress allied with either the DMK or ADMK, relying on one of these two parties to help it win much-needed seats in the national legislature. Because the state government in Tamil Nadu was frequently formed by its ally at the time, Congress often had little incentive to undermine state governments in Tamil Nadu. As a result, the central government rarely intervened in Tamil Nadu's state politics allowing the DMK's early organizational advantage to translate into early democratization in Tamil Nadu.

²⁷ Congress (R) was also known as New Congress. It later shed the (R) and became known simply as Congress. In the late 1970s, Congress again split, and the Indira Gandhi-led faction became known as Congress (I). In the 1990s, it again reverted simply to Congress. For simplicity, we refer throughout this paper to the Congress faction led by Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv as Congress. Congress (O) disappeared in 1977, when it merged into the Janata Party.

India's other unequivocal early democratizer, West Bengal, resembles Tamil Nadu in many ways. Although the various communist parties founded in West Bengal during the colonial era were not initially a potent electoral force because of early communist ambivalence towards elections, their robust organizations later helped the communists expand into West Bengal's countryside, where Congress had earlier been very strong. When the communist Left Front government came to power in West Bengal in 1977, it did so with a commanding legislative majority and a disciplined cadre of legislators for whom defection was not an option. The Left Front's majority made central intervention unlikely and permitted the non-Congress government to remain in power.

E. Rajasthan: An Incipient Opposition Thwarted by Central Intervention

Located in northern India along the border with Pakistan, Rajasthan is the largest Indian state in terms of land area and has over 55 million people. It is also one of India's late democratizing states. Its first opposition government came to power in 1977, though an opposition government did not serve a full term until Bhairon Singh Shekhawat's BJP-led government completed its term in 1998. Nevertheless, Rajasthan's incipient opposition in 1950s and 1960s was an extremely promising alternative to Congress, far more so than in many other states. A reasonably robust opposition to Congress emerged early in the state's history, but meddling by the central government quashed any serious opposition attempts to gain and retain power. Unlike Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan's opposition did not draw on organizational or mobilizational resources from colonial political activity. Instead, the state's opposition coalesced around caste, suggesting that highly polarized caste structures can also potentially serve as the basis for a robust opposition party to undermine a dominant party.

Rajasthan is one of India's few states to have had almost no experience with direct British rule. Princely rule in Rajasthan left two important legacies. The first was a legacy of nationalist and anti-princely political activity, which Congress inherited almost in its entirety. Congress' cooptation of nearly all of Rajasthan's organized political activity ensured that an opposition could not arise around a prior political organization as in Tamil Nadu; it would have to emerge *de novo*. Second, the princely period produced a polarized caste structure that pitted the main land-owning caste, the Rajputs, against the Jats, a numerically large caste, many of whose members tilled Rajput-owned land. When Congress enacted land reform after independence, it effectively took sides in this rivalry, alienating the Rajput political class around which a fairly coherent opposition eventually emerged.

No political parties were permitted to organize in princely Rajasthan.²⁸ However, two types of political organizations nevertheless emerged, both making demands of the princely rulers. The first were *praja mandals*, which were urban associations that agitated for greater political freedom and additional investment in public welfare and infrastructure. The *praja mandals* were loosely tied to the wider Indian nationalist movement and favored independence and integration of the princely states into a new India. Most members were either Brahmins or Banias (traders). The second type of organization was the *kisan sabhas*, peasant organizations that demanded land reform and were overwhelmingly populated by Jats.

At independence, Congress absorbed most of the *praja mandals* and *kisan sabhas*, providing Congress with a strong base among Brahmins, Banias, and Jats. Even the *praja mandals* and *kisan sabhas* provided only a modest organization. Both types of organizations

²⁸ Our account of colonial politics in Rajasthan relies heavily on Richard Sisson, *The Congress Party in Rajasthan: Political Integration and Institution-Building in an Indian State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). The discussion of politics in the early decades after independence draws on K.L. Kamal, *Party Politics in an Indian State*, (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1969).

were relatively new, dating back to the 1930s at the earliest. Because these organizations emerged separately in each of Rajasthan's more than twenty princely states, the organization that Congress inherited was highly fragmented. Of course, as unorganized as Congress was, the opposition was in worse shape, since Congress had absorbed nearly all of the prior organizational resources and politically active class from the colonial era. As in many other Indian states, any opposition to Congress would have to arise without the benefit of much prior organization or membership.

Instead, the other major political legacy of princely rule would ultimately provide Rajasthan with the basis for a reasonably coherent opposition—the state's former princes and landlords, mainly belonging to the Rajput caste. Prior to independence, Rajput landowners opposed Jat-led demands for land reform, creating a caste-based rivalry between those who owned the land (Rajputs) and those who tilled it (Jats). Because Rajputs were, for good reason, sparsely represented in the *praja mandals* and *kisan sabhas* that had agitated against princely rule, they found themselves a marginal presence in the Rajasthan Congress. Then, shortly after independence, Congress' land reforms essentially took sides in the Rajput-Jat rivalry, coming down in favor of the Jats. Though Congress made efforts to woo Rajput leaders into their fold (particularly in the mid-1950s, when it secured the entry of nearly two dozen Rajput state legislators into the party), a large class of Rajput landowners remained hostile to Congress and its heavily Jat support base.²⁹

Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, the Rajput challenge to Congress took three major forms, the Ram Rajya Parishad (RRP) in the 1950s, Swatantra in the 1960s, and uncoordinated independent candidates throughout the period. Together, these groups won around

²⁹ Jats were not Congress' only supporters. Indeed, in the early period Brahmins and Banias occupied a more prominent place in Congress' state-level leadership.

40% of the vote from independence through the late 1960s. Of course, many independent candidates were not anti-Congress Rajputs, and identifying the precise share of the independent vote share that belonged in the Rajput camp is difficult. But, even if a third to a half of the independent vote consisted of votes for anti-Congress Rajputs, when combined with the RRP and Swatantra votes, this still amounts to between 20-30% of the vote.³⁰ A fourth group, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), intermittently fielded Rajput landowners, known as *jagirdars*, drawing substantial popular support from these candidates.³¹

The opposition in Rajasthan was a more promising alternative to Congress than the oppositions in many other states because it was, by comparison, both numerically and ideologically less fragmented. In Rajasthan, the entire opposition consisted mainly of three camps, the Rajput independents, a Rajput dominated party (either RRP or Swatantra), and the BJS. Furthermore, the Rajput independents constituted a somewhat more committed opposition force than independents in other states who were often former Congressmen. The opposition in Rajasthan was also more ideologically coherent than in many other states, populated as it was by upper-caste landed interests. Though the BJS differed somewhat from the Rajput-dominated groupings, it too was predominantly upper-caste and conservative, meaning that the interests of its leaders were not incompatible with those of Rajput princes and *jagirdars*. In contrast, the oppositions in other major states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal, were fragmented across a larger number of more ideologically disparate parties.

³⁰ In the 1952 elections, all of the seats not won by Congress in Jodhpur division were won by “representatives of the landed aristocracy” (Sisson, p. 169), meaning Rajputs. Together, these independent Rajput legislators from Jodhpur division (24 in all) won 9% of the overall vote in Rajasthan. But, Sisson also points out that nearly 60% of the leading opposition candidates in the state were Rajputs, leaving at least 50 additional Rajput candidates (p. 135). Some of these Rajput opposition candidates were members of other parties such as Ram Rajya Parishad, but some were almost certainly also independents. Thus, 9% is the absolute minimum vote won by Rajput independents in 1952. The true figure is certainly higher. Since the total independent vote share was 27%, estimating the Rajput independent vote at one-third to one-half of the total independent vote seems plausible.

³¹ Kamal, p. 159-160.

Because the Rajasthani opposition was somewhat less fragmented than many other state' oppositions, it more successfully translated its votes into seats. In a single member district electoral system such as India's, the largest party gets a sizeable "bonus" in terms of the proportion of seats won as compared to the proportion of votes won. When the largest party faces a highly fragmented opposition that divides the opposition votes, then the largest party's bonus typically increases. In Rajasthan, the bonus that Congress enjoyed was fairly small: 12% in 1952, 22% in 1957, 10% in 1962, and 7% in 1967. In other words, in 1952 Congress won 39% of the popular vote and 51% of the seats for a "bonus" of 12%. In many other states, Congress' bonus was much larger. In part thanks to the relatively consolidated opposition, Congress in Rajasthan turned in some of its worst performances in India.

Although Congress won a razor-thin majority in 1952 (51% of seats), captured exactly half of the legislative seats in 1962, and fell short of a majority (48% of seats) in 1967, the party remained in power continuously until 1977. In 1952 and 1962, there was talk of a possible opposition government, but it never materialized, and Congress managed to win over enough independents to make its majorities more comfortable in both instances. In 1967, the Congress-led central government actively intervened to keep the opposition out of power. The opposition, led by Swatantra, declared that it had a majority in support of a non-Congress government. Congress was the largest party in the Rajasthan legislature and also claimed a majority, with the support of several independents. The central government declared President's Rule, lifting it only when Congress had secured the support of enough independents to ensure that it could form a government.

After the opposition's failure to form a government in 1967, the opposition declined, laying bare some of its inherent weakness. Rajputs only constitute about 6% of Rajasthan's

population. (Jats, one of the largest castes in the state, are only about 9%). The strength of the Rajput opposition never lay in the numerical dominance of its caste base. Instead, it relied on the traditional feudal status of its leaders and their ability to win the support of their former tenants. As time wore on, these feudal ties of deference almost certainly diminished as new cohorts entered the electorate who were socialized after independence and abolition of the princely states. Increasingly as time wore on, major royal houses, such as the Jaipur royal house, began to withdraw from active politics, leaving the opposition bereft of its star candidates. As Swatantra declined in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Rajput vote migrated to the BJS and its successor, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

As in many other states, the Janata Party came to power in 1977 following the Emergency but was then dismissed in 1980. Though the Janata Party was most certainly an opposition government, it owed a crucial portion of its support to a sudden influx of Congress politicians after the Emergency. The opposition came to power again in 1990. In these elections, the BJP and the Janata Dal had successfully won away crucial elements of Congress' support base. The BJP had successfully wooed much of Congress' upper caste support (especially among Brahmins and Banias), while the Janata Dal won substantial support among Jats. The central government dismissed this government, along with other BJP-led governments, in 1992 amidst the religious violence surrounding the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. A BJP-led government then returned to power after the 1993 election, this time serving its full term in office. Today, the BJP is much more of a catch-all party than earlier opposition parties were. Rajputs continue to occupy an important position in the leadership of Rajasthan's BJP, but they are no longer the dominant force that they were in earlier opposition parties such as Swatantra and RRP.

In the end, central intervention thwarted the opposition's best chance to form a non-Congress government in 1967. Afterwards, the conditions that had made a Rajput-dominated opposition possible—feudal ties between landlord and dependent and the active participation of a large class of former rulers—began to fade. The opposition did not resurface until it remade itself into a catch-all party along the lines of Congress. Although Rajasthan was ultimately a case of late democratization, its brushes with democratization highlight an important lesson about subnational democratization.

Even in the absence of well-institutionalized organizations that can anchor a credible opposition force, a politicized social cleavage—in this case the division between Rajput and Jat—can suffice to create the possibility of a robust alternative to the party in power. Similar dynamics are evident in states such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, states where an important caste cleavage—between Kammas and Reddis and between Vokkaligas and Lingayats, respectively—has structured political competition. Like Rajasthan, both states were relatively late democratizers. Nevertheless, in Andhra Pradesh, the communists—which drew disproportionate support from Kammas—were a very real threat to Congress' dominance in the early post-independence decades, and once opposition parties taking up one side of the caste rivalry came to power in both states in the mid-1980s, these states quickly became sites of robust party competition.

F. Uttar Pradesh: A Disappearing Opposition and Diffuse Demographics

Like in Rajasthan, a viable opposition government in Uttar Pradesh did not emerge until relatively late. Uttar Pradesh's political history exemplifies the late emergence of a viable opposition government because of a lack of prior organizational resources from the colonial

period or politicized caste cleavage on which the nascent opposition could draw. These two factors, particularly in the presence of central government intervention, enabled Congress to effectively remain a dominant party in Uttar Pradesh politics throughout much of the 1980s.³² The trajectory of Congress in Uttar Pradesh can be broken down into three distinct phases: first, the Congress-led agitation for power in the pre-independence decades and its continued dominance in the first two post-independence decades; second, clearly declining dominant party legitimacy over a period of nearly two decades between 1967 and 1991; and third, the definitive breakdown of the one dominant party system after 1991, effectively ushering in an unstable but competitive multi-party democracy.

In many ways, the post-independence politics of Uttar Pradesh, commonly referred to by its acronym, UP, mirrors the rise and decline of the dominance of a single party, or the “Congress system,” in India.³³ With a population of nearly 200 million people, Uttar Pradesh is India’s most populous state. Largely because of UP’s sheer size, Congress was the dominant party at the national level because of its success in winning seats in this single state. As India’s nationalist movement morphed into its dominant political party during the pre-independence period, UP was the command centre of the nationalist movement-cum-party.³⁴ Congress’ key anti-colonial agitations were based or organized in UP. Upon independence, about one-sixth of the seats in India’s lower parliamentary house, the Lok Sabha, belonged to Uttar Pradesh. Finally, many of India’s most important political leaders in both the pre-independence and the post-independence period have hailed from this state, including 8 of India’s 14 prime ministers.

³² Congress lost power in 1967 and again in 1977. But unlike in Tamil Nadu, for example, the opposition quickly lost power both times. It was only in the 1990s that an opposition government held power without the threat that it would be brought down and replaced by a Congress government.

³³ Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970).

³⁴ During the colonial period, the state of Uttar Pradesh formed the colonial province called the ‘United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.’ Even then however, it was often designated by the acronym UP.

To understand how and why the UP Congress was relatively successful at preventing an opposition government from taking power in the post-independence period, it is first necessary to understand the nature of Congress' social support in the UP. Congress' social base in UP, as in most parts of British India during the pre-independence era, was firmly among segments of the middle class. Between the turn towards mass mobilization in 1920 and independence in 1947, Congress began to represent not only the urban professional and business classes, but also parts of the rural middle class, composed of petty and middling landowners (*zamindars*) as well as the more prosperous tenantry. Though UP Congress leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, rhetorically centralized peasant movements to Congress success and while close links existed between many peasant movements and Congress, the party formally kept its organization distinct from these peasant movements (*kisan sabhas*) and even sought to subdue peasant movements and channel their discontents into Congress-sanctioned forms of political mobilization.³⁵ Thus, even though the nationalist movement was thoroughly revolutionary in some respects, e.g. it sought the complete overthrow of the colonial state as well as the public rejection of caste recognition, it was also a fundamentally conservative movement in the sense that it sought a quite limited transformation of social relations in other respects.³⁶

The UP Congress represented distinct class and caste groupings and contained diverse ideological viewpoints (ranging from radical socialists to Hindu conservatives). Before independence, these disputes that were successfully contained in the shared imperative to gain

³⁵ Pandey in Donald Anthony Low, ed. *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988). More generally, this description of Congress as a catch-all party is well accepted among historians and political scientists of India.

³⁶ For example, Congress sought a revolutionary transformation of the caste system in the public sphere. For more on this, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home* (Chicago, Oxford University Press, 2006): Chapter 4 and Maya Tudor, "Twin Births, Divergent Democracies: The Social and Institutional Origins of Regime Outcomes in India and Pakistan," (Phd Dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), Chapter 3.

national political power and access the colonial state.³⁷ That Congress was largely successful in its outreach efforts to the rural middle class between 1920 and 1947 is evidenced by its success in the colonially-sponsored elections of the mid-1930s. Not only did Congress overwhelmingly dominate the (national) Central Legislative Assembly elections of 1934, but in the 1936-37 pre-independence provincial elections, Congress won dramatic victories in seven of the eleven British provinces, including the United Provinces.³⁸ By 1940, the UP Congress had become a ‘rich peasants’ party.³⁹

Political and electoral opposition to the UP Congress sprung from mainly two parties—the National Agriculturalist Party (NAP), primarily representing large and colonially entrenched landlords, and the Muslim League, representing a small, colonially entrenched community of Muslims landlords and civil servants—neither of which remained vibrant oppositions in the post-independence period. Neither of these parties was particularly successful in the 1937 elections, with Congress singlehandedly winning a governing majority in UP. Though the 1946 elections indicated an increasingly organized and successful opposition in the form of the Muslim League that doubled its assembly seats, independence and the accompanying migration of many key Muslim League leaders to Pakistan delegitimized and decimated the leadership ranks of both the NAP and the Muslim League. Congress thereby consolidated its position as the unquestioned institutional representative of Indian independence. After independence, opposition parties therefore had to emerge from largely from scratch. Three major opposition parties emerged out

³⁷ In the Indian context, factions are “alternative forms of political organization to interest groups and are based upon conflicting principles. Factions are vertical structures of power oriented towards influence, that is, towards the establishment of links which will provide for the transmission of favors and services. Interest groups are associations oriented towards the promotion of long-term interests of a generalized category in the population. Factions inhibit the organization of interests because they are based upon ties which unite opposed interests. The members of a faction come from different social and economic groups in the society, united by a desire for personal privileges.” Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1965), p. 244.

³⁸ AICC Papers, File P20, 1938, NMML.

³⁹ Pandey, pp. 213-218.

of the first state elections: Socialist Party, Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), and BJS. None was more than a few years old; two had been founded immediately prior to the elections (BJS and KMPP); and two were comprised almost entirely of defectors from Congress (Socialist Party and KMPP).

The opposition in UP was further hampered because state-wide political competition was not structured by a politicized caste cleavage as had occurred in other states. Before independence, religion—and the rivalry between Hindus and Muslims—animated state politics. In order to build a unified anti-colonial movement, particularly in the circumstance of a colonial regime actively trying to divide it, the nationalist movement expediently rejected political or public recognition of caste identities and made its political appeals on the basis of a broadly inclusive and secular anti-colonial nationalism.⁴⁰ As a result, among Hindus, Congress aggregated urban and rural notables from across the state's major castes whose social and economic influence over lower social groups (often lower castes) helped them deliver votes to Congress. UP's caste structure was not necessarily any more fragmented than other states, and caste was important in shaping factional conflict in post-independence state politics⁴¹; however, no single caste rivalry dominated state politics or polarized the party system into government and opposition camps.

These two factors then—the virtual disappearance of its erstwhile electoral competitors at independence and lack of a dominant caste rivalry—helped Congress to maintain a dominant but declining electoral position in UP between independence in 1947 and the elections of 1967. Congress experienced a gradual decline in its vote share in the first three state elections (48% in

⁴⁰ Colonial regime made attempts to divide the Congress among caste lines, as in the Communal Award of 1932, which failed to divide Congress along caste lines. Congress was far less successful at resisting polarization along religious lines and failed to gain the support of the Muslim community. For an excellent review of this, see Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁴¹ Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State*.

1952, 42% in 1957 and 36% in 1962) as factional rivalry became more pronounced and the middling castes who are the main cultivators in rural UP increasingly exited Congress. In the mid-1950s and 1960s, this social group's support for Congress was declining. Yet, this dissatisfaction did not produce serious opposition because the middle-caste cultivators dispersed their votes across independents and small parties.

Congress' electoral opposition in UP suffered severe internal dissension and was unable to mount any serious opposition to Congress for the better part of two decades. The UP opposition was highly fragmented into a diverse ideological array, ranging from conservatives and Hindu nationalists to socialists, communists, and lower-caste activists. While the communists in UP were generally quite weak⁴²; the socialist parties together polled over 20% of the popular vote in the 1962 elections. Due to their internal divisions however, they were unable to form stable electoral alliances. Right-leaning parties proved similarly divided and unsuccessful in cleaving off Congress supporters in the early post-independence decades, with a three separate parties polling a combined vote share of 21% in the 1962 elections. Indeed, Congress' vote share was still twice that of the next most popular party in each of the first three post-independence elections. Moreover, this vote share did not reflect the large number of seats it gained in the state legislative assembly—of the 430 seats in the state legislative assembly, 390, 286, and 249 in the 1952, 1957, 1962 elections, respectively, were captured by Congress. Unlike Rajasthan, Congress in UP enjoyed far larger seat “bonuses” thanks to its position as the largest party, winning much larger seat shares than vote shares. For the two decades after independence then, factionalism was largely contained within the Congress party through intra-party

⁴² Zoya Hasan attributes relative weakness of communists in UP to the relative success of land reforms in UP when compared with neighboring Bihar. See Zoya Hasan, *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements & Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

competition and accommodation within the party—what Rajni Kothari coined the “Congress system.”⁴³

A prolonged crisis in Congress dominance began to emerge during the late 1960s, starting with the hallmark 1967 loss of a Congress majority in the UP legislative elections. During the next two decades, two factors were crucial in driving the gradual exit of erstwhile Congress supporters within UP, namely the weakening of Congress’ national leadership (undermining the national Congress government’s ability to contain factional conflicts within states) and India’s first major economic crisis (which naturally undermined the reigning Congress government). Before 1967, state-level factional conflict certainly existed, but had been contained partly by Congress’ nationalist legitimacy (and the coordination it induced among power-seekers) and partly through the active intervention of the national government.⁴⁴ With the death of its iconic nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964 as well as the death of its subsequent prime minister two years later, the national leadership of Congress effectively passed out of the generation of nationalist leaders and into the hands of powerful more but parochial state leaders. These leaders sought to put Nehru’s relatively inexperienced daughter, Indira Gandhi, at the helm of national politics in order to guarantee easy manipulation.⁴⁵ This not only made state-level factional conflict less likely to be contained, but it also actively exacerbated the level of factional conflict within states, as the importance of state political power in accessing national power was only further enhanced.

In addition to the weakening of Congress’ national leadership, India experienced its first genuine economic crisis since independence in the mid-1960s, the effect of which was invariably

⁴³ Kothari, Chapter 8.

⁴⁴ Stanley Kochanek, *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One-Party Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

detrimental to the governing party at national and state levels. During the mid-1960s, the combination of sharp prices increases, a prolonged drought in a predominantly agricultural economy, and the devaluation of the rupee all combined to create particularly poor economic conditions. All while the electoral participation of lower social groups was steadily increasing.⁴⁶ Those beneath the apex of the Congress pyramid who felt that they were not gaining their fair share of patronage spoils were, particularly in this context of new-found Congress fragility, relatively more susceptible to political entrepreneurs seeking to establish new organizations or build new political coalitions.

These economic developments and the accompanying disaffection combined to create Congress' landmark defeat in the 1967 UP elections. Before those elections, coherent blocs of political opposition were beginning to form. A leading Congress spokesman for peasant interests, Charan Singh, defected to form a new political party, Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD), which represented peasant proprietors whose votes were heretofore dispersed. Moreover, the BJS began to emerge as a more potent electoral force and garnered over 22% of the UP vote in 1967. After the 1967 elections, an opposition coalition took power for the first time in that state's history. It included communists, socialists, conservatives, Hindu nationalists, and defectors from Congress. Given the diverse opposition forces represented in this government, it was quite unstable, giving rise to a series of governments over the next couple of years. President's Rule was declared in 1968 and 1970, both times bringing to an end opposition governments led by Charan Singh. The opposition's task was made all the more difficult by the fact that many of its

⁴⁶ Pradeep Chibber, *Democracy Without Associations* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 85-86 notes that voter turnout rose from 48% in 1957 to 62% in 1967 and that new voters were less likely to vote Congress.

members were former Congressman, who were especially susceptible to inducements to abandon the opposition and join Congress.⁴⁷

Congress' defeat in UP mirrored the party's national fortunes, which in turn impacted the importance of UP politics. Congress lost vote shares and state assembly seats in nearly every state, and lost its electoral majority in eight states. Though it still governed at a national level, it did so with a much reduced parliamentary majority. Since it was the party of independence and had handily won every national election since 1952, Congress defeat was shown to be possible for the first time. Political entrepreneurs thus found it less risky to exit Congress. Indeed, a survey of local elites in UP in 1970 found that local elites supported Congress because it was the party in power and thus in a position to distribute patronage.⁴⁸

For the next decade or two, a severe Congress weakening was clearly in evidence, but opposition forces were also not able to stably challenge Congress' power base. During this time, central government intervention in state politics became more frequent and authoritarian in character across India. Between 1951 and 1966, President's Rule was imposed 10 times. By contrast, between 1967 and 1984, it was imposed 72 times.⁴⁹ These centralizing tendencies only increased in the mid-1970s. By 1973, thanks to the oil crisis and the attendant spike in consumer prices as well as a series of poor monsoons (rainfalls) intense pressure arose on the central government. In 1974, a national railway strike was seen as directly challenging Indira Gandhi's government and the number of national riots rose to 80,000 in 1974 (as compared to 33,000 in

⁴⁷ See Subhash C. Kashyap, "The Politics of Defection: The Changing Contours of the Political Power Structure in State Politics in India," *Asian Survey* 10 (March 1970): 195-208 and Lewis P. Fickett, Jr., *The Major Socialist Parties of India: A Study of Leftist Fragmentation* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1976).

⁴⁸ Nearly three-quarters of local elites said they would be willing to change their party affiliation if another party won control of the state government. Pradeep Chhibber, *Democracy Without Associations*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Chhibber, p.97.

1965).⁵⁰ In 1975, the central government responded to this crisis by declaring Emergency, arrogating extra-constitutional powers for the first and only time in India's history, banning strikes and demonstrations, arresting opposition leaders, clamping down on civil and political liberties, and muzzling the press.

Some of the worst excesses of the Emergency, such as the demolition of squatter housing and forced sterilization drives, hit UP particularly hard. When Indira Gandhi held the 1977 elections, Congress' handy defeat was attributable in part to dissatisfaction with her government. However, this defeat was more of a response to the Emergency's excesses than a sign of a viable national alternative to Congress, with disaffected peasants, Muslims and Scheduled Castes exiting the Congress coalition.⁵¹ Congress did very well in the UP elections of 1980, and national elections in the same year returned Congress to power. During the 1970s, Charan Singh's BKD had evolved into a broader-based party called the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). In 1977, the Janata party was formed out of most of India's major opposition parties, including the BLD. Even though the Janata Party was highly unstable and Congress was returned to power in 1980, Congress opposition was visible, growing, and increasingly unified.

The 1980s were the last decade in which Congress dominated UP politics. Though Congress was largely thought to have won the 1984 elections through a sympathy vote following Indira Gandhi's assassination, the opposition gradually became more coordinated and coherent. The rise of this coordinated opposition was aided by the emergence of a politically savvy middle caste constituency that had defected from Congress. Since Congress' political support in the UP was built upon the organizational dominance of elite castes and the rhetorical centralization of

⁵⁰ Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987): 239.

⁵¹ Paul Brass, "Congress, The Lok Dal and the Middle-Peasant Castes: An Analysis of the 1977 and 1980 Parliamentary Elections in Uttar Pradesh," *Pacific Affairs* 54 (Spring 1981): 13.

the rural poor, Congress support among the middle peasant castes was thought to be brought along by their economic and social dependence on the elite proprietary castes. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s however, political entrepreneurs among the middle castes began to organize and demand the state resources they felt were denied to them by the upper caste dominance of Congress.

The transition away from Congress dominance to a competitive multi-party system definitively occurred in UP in the 1990s. Although a survey of the 1989 UP assembly elections still showed that Congress support was still spread relatively evenly among upper, middle, and lower caste groups, ‘by the time of the [UP] state assembly elections in 1991 the party system was rooted in social cleavages. . .’⁵² The intermediate castes had long constituted an important component of the opposition, first in the various socialist parties, then in the Janata Party and its successors, the Lok Dal, and eventually Janata Dal. The early 1990s saw, however, the migration of both the upper and lower castes away from Congress. The upper castes shifted decisively towards the BJP, while the Scheduled Castes—those who traditionally sit at the bottom of the caste hierarchy—began to support the Bahujan Samaj Party, which burst onto the UP political scene in 1989. By 1991, 58 percent of the backward castes were voting for the Janata Dal while 61 percent of elite castes voted for the BJP. From the early 1990s onward, Congress became an increasingly marginal force, permitting opposition governments to take power.

Although UP governments during the 1990s and early 2000s were notoriously unstable, unlike in the previous period this instability was largely unrelated to Congress. Instead, it stemmed from squabbling among the three major non-Congress parties—BJP, BSP, and Samajwadi Party. Usually, none of these parties was large enough to form a government of its own, but nor were they willing to ally with one another to form a stable government. Instability

⁵² Chhibber, p. 139.

aside, the 1990s marked the democratization of politics in Uttar Pradesh, since the state had fully transitioned away from Congress dominance.

Political scientists have made a variety of different arguments about what caused this shift to cleavage-based party politics in the 1990s. The key factors have included the economic interests accompanying different places in the socio-economic hierarchy, often with respect to accessing state employment. Some have also stressed the larger numerical size of the elite castes in northern India, which enables forward-caste voting to be an important source of power in UP's state elections. Some have instead stressed the rising relative wealth of the tenantry as a result of the green revolution and their desire for political power commensurate with their newfound wealth. And some have stressed the interplay of all these with the politics of affirmative action in state employment, the Mandal Commission, that was introduced in the 1990s by the Janata Dal-led national government.

While it is unclear how precisely these factors combined to transform the party system, what is clear is that the catchall Congress system, based as it was on inclusivist, broad-based political appeals, was poorly suited to withstand polarization along caste lines. Congress had been able to construct an enduring coalition because colonial independence left it without a legitimate political opponent and because a diffuse fragmented caste structure frustrated ready mobilization along caste lines. As a catch-all party mobilizing along vertical chains of patronage, Congress was well equipped to amass broad-based electoral support and contain opposition within Congress ranks. But once state politics fragmented along caste lines, the Congress system opposition broke down and Congress became a marginal political party within the state.

G. Jammu and Kashmir: Authoritarianism and National Security Imperatives

The Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir is perhaps India's most politically controversial state. Lying at the northernmost tip of the country with a population of 10 million people, territorial control over the state has been at the center of three wars with Pakistan, numerous small-scale armed conflicts with Pakistan, and one major war with China. Partly because of this strategic location and partly because of its historical lack of political competition, this state was a notably late democratizer, to the extent that state politics have fully democratized at all. Since Jammu and Kashmir was the center of early and frequent hostilities, subnational democratization, defined by free and fair elections in the context of full civil liberties, only occurred in the late 1970s. Already by the early 1980s however, this brief democratic opening was shut and by 1990, Kashmir had descended into a violent and internationalized insurgency that has lasted well into the 2000s.

As with other princely states, Jammu and Kashmir (often referred to as just Kashmir) had no experience with pre-independence elections. Kashmir's history of political participation was therefore poorly established. Unlike in Rajasthan however, where a politicized caste cleavage provided the basis for post-independence political competition, such potential political divisions in Kashmir were not allowed to play out in state electoral competition because of the central government's preoccupation with how national security ramifications were impacted by political parties in the state. The case of Kashmir illustrates how debilitating manipulative central intervention was to the establishment of a competitive party system.

Despite having Muslim-majority population, Kashmir's political organizations from the colonial period were not integrated into the nationalist movement for the Muslim state of Pakistan, for reasons of class and regional identity. A strong sense of independent Kashmiri

identity long predated the Muslim League, which, given its focus on Muslim solidarity, did not easily accommodate a Kashmiri nationalism that crossed communal lines. Before Kashmir became a princely state ruled by the Hindu Dogra family in 1846, it was ruled by outside conquerors for nearly two and a half centuries. Largely through this experience and through periodic acts of resistance against such foreign rule, a distinct sense of Kashmiri identity developed along non-communal lines.⁵³ Moreover, the class divisions in Kashmir did not correspond well to the class interests of the Muslim League's leadership. Whereas the colonial Muslim League was largely an upper-class organization little inclined to take up the more radical socio-economic causes, Muslims in Kashmir tended to form the cultivating tenantry, while the Kashmiri landlords were Hindus.

Unlike in other princely states, a genuine anti-colonial political movement existed in Kashmir during British rule. The Muslim Conference was started in 1930 to protest both colonial and princely rule. Marked by internal dissension however, the Muslim Conference collapsed in 1939, but was absorbed into a successor organization under the charismatic leadership of Sheikh Abdullah (dubbed the Lion of Kashmir) called the National Conference. This movement was influenced by communists and generally more sympathetic to the Indian nationalist movement than that of the Pakistan nationalist movement.⁵⁴ By the time of independence, because of their opposition to Dogra rule, Abdullah and the other leaders of the National Conference were jailed.

By the legal terms of the colonial transfer of power over British India to the successor states of India and Pakistan in 1947, the rulers of princely states had the right to decide whether to accede to India or Pakistan. Stalling for time just before independence in August 1947, the princely ruler of Kashmir attempted to negotiate a standstill agreement with both India and

⁵³ Balraj Puri in Myron Weiner, ed. *State Politics in India* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 217.

⁵⁴ Sten Widmalm, *The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir, 1975-1989* (London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 34-35.

Pakistan, which would have evaded the need for accession to either state. After Pakistan's and India's independence was declared in August 1947, Abdullah was released from jail and attempted to help negotiate the final status of Kashmir with the Indian and Pakistani central governments. Before this could be resolved, hordes of Pathan tribesmen from Pakistan invaded Kashmir in an attempt to seize its capital and liberate their Muslim brethren from Hindu rule in October 1947.

The Hindu Maharajah of Kashmir appealed to the newly independent Government of India for troops to help repel the invasion. Congress leaders, in consultation with the departing colonial Viceroy, agreed that the princely state needed to accede to India before troops could be made available. Allegedly, an Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union was signed by the Maharajah, though there is substantial historical debate as to when, where, and even if this Instrument was indeed signed. The terms of Instrument of Accession nonetheless provided for substantial regional autonomy for Kashmir, which agreed to Indian national sovereignty only in the realms of defense, foreign affairs and communications. Pursuant to this accession, India sent troops to Kashmir, and Pakistan responded by sending its own troops into Kashmir. The ensuing war between India and Pakistan lasted a year, with a cease-fire negotiated by the UN in 1948. The effective cease-fire line divided Kashmir into two sections, a western third of the state controlled by Pakistan and an eastern two-thirds controlled by India. This "Line of Control" marks the de facto border between India and Pakistan in Kashmir.

Article 370 of the Indian constitution exempted the Indian portion of Kashmir from many of the liberal provisions of the constitution, such as its guarantee of fundamental rights. As such, it was constitutionally consistent that the state government of Kashmir, between 1947 until 1951, was wholly dominated by the National Conference under the leadership of Abdullah.

Effectively, Kashmir's first experience with independence was the under the leadership of an autocratic one-party state which embarked on a revolutionary and Marxist-inspired program of land reform, abolition of landlordism, and the compulsory requisitioning of foodgrains.⁵⁵

While this government had popular support in some regions of Kashmir, it ruled the state government with an iron fist that brooked little popular dissent, inaugurating an autocratic trend in state politics. The population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir was almost evenly divided between two regions, the Muslim-dominated Valley of Kashmir, where the National Conference had firm roots, and Hindu-dominated Jammu, in which the National Conference did not have roots and where an opposition party, the Praja Parishad, was founded.⁵⁶ Abdullah's National Conference used a variety of autocratic means to block members of the Praja Parishad from joining the Constituent Assembly.

By 1953, regional tensions within Kashmir undermined Abdullah's leadership and paved the way from his removal from Kashmir's political life for a decade. Though Abdullah had negotiated a new agreement with New Delhi which made a number of additional accessions to federal jurisdiction, the Hindu-dominated Praja Parishad in Jammu agitated for complete accession to India as a way of minimizing the National Conference's influence in state politics. At the same time, Abdullah's competitors within the Kashmir Valley were advocating for closer relations with Pakistan as a way of protecting Muslim influence within state politics. Abdullah split the difference between the pressures of these two groups, making statements about resisting the domination of New Delhi. In the aftermath of an international war over control of Kashmir with Pakistan, this caused severe misgivings in New Delhi about Abdullah's loyalty. In the context of a U.S. statement on its support for Kashmiri independence and the apparent

⁵⁵ Puri, p. 219.

⁵⁶ There is also a third region in the state, Ladakh. Ladakh, though large in geographical terms, is very sparsely populated.

equivocation of Kashmir's state leadership on the question of loyalty to India, a wary New Delhi engineered Abdullah's dismissal and subsequent jailing.⁵⁷ With the removal of its only prominent independent leader, the National Conference effectively became a state committee of the Congress party.⁵⁸

For the next decade, a new strongman, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, ruled the state, reducing the National Conference to an organization of sycophants. Through national subsidies, considerable economic growth ensued in Kashmir, and the state was slowly integrated into the institutional fabric of the Union of India. Though Kashmir prospered financially, political competition continued to be effectively strangled, since the key to prosperity was loyalty to the state of India, Congress, and its effective representative in Kashmir. Bakshi contained political challenges from within the state—from the Jammu-dominated Praja Parishad by playing up caste divisions within Jammu and from the Socialists through arrests, intimidation and assaults. By 1963, the civil and political excesses of the Bakshi regime prompted increasing protest from around India, and Bakshi was asked to resign by the central government.

Though a brief liberalizing trend was apparent in early 1964, state politics in Kashmir were soon again repressed by the Government of India. In early 1964, a newly released Sheikh Abdullah sought to recreate his erstwhile political following under the new Plebiscite Front, while a charismatic new young religious leader, Maulvi Muhammed Farooq, led a newly created Awami Action Committee. In the short time that political competition between these two leaders was allowed to freely play out, it was ferocious. The central government began again to tighten its grip on state politics, jailing both Abdullah and Farooq, who were not allowed to contest state elections in 1967. This was yet another example of rigged elections. Before the next election in

⁵⁷ Puri, pp. 221-225.

⁵⁸ Widmalm, p. 50.

1977, several key developments combined to allow for a longer, more genuine period of political opening in Kashmir. First, India fought two wars with Pakistan, in 1965 over Pakistan's incursions into Kashmir and in 1971 over India's assistance to East Pakistan in its bid for independence. In the aftermath of these two wars, Sheikh Abdullah reached an accord with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the mid-1970s, which allowed for the first genuinely free state elections to be held in 1977.

The 1977 state assembly elections were the first free and fair elections Kashmir has yet experienced. In an election which saw the largest turn-out of voters to date, Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference won a landslide victory. Of the 75 state assembly seats, 47 were won by the National Conference, 13 by the Janata Party, 11 by Congress and 1 by the Jamaat-e-Islami, a radical religious party. Though the 1977 elections augured the potential for genuine political opening, the National Conference-led government continued the corrupt governing practices characterizing the state in decades past. No political party in power had yet functioned without resort to such practices. This all too brief democratic opening already began to close in 1982, after the National Conference's charismatic leader, Sheikh Abdullah, passed away. He bequeathed the leadership of the National Conference to his son, Farooq Abdullah, who also won a massive majority in the state assembly elections of 1983, winning 46 of 75 seats, with Congress gaining 26 seats. Farooq Abdullah fell out with Indira Gandhi over those 1983 elections, with Gandhi wanting a greater share of power in state politics. In 1984, Gandhi engineered Farooq Abdullah's dismissal, followed by Farooq's rival and brother-in-law, Ghulam Mohammed Shah, being sworn in. The Shah government governed with New Delhi's support, but with little legitimacy within Kashmir.

Why had the central government intervened again in Kashmir, this time during a relatively low threat level? By most accounts, this had more to do with New Delhi's centralizing tendencies at the time than it did with the particular politics of Kashmir. After losing power in 1977, Indira Gandhi was back in power in 1980. Farooq Abdullah had led the National Conference into an alliance of regional parties called the Opposition Conclave, which opposed Congress. Because Indira Gandhi similarly intervened to dismiss governments in other states governed by parties that had signed onto this opposition alliance, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, this was likely part of a larger centralized scheme to punish governments that were not with the party in power at the national level.

Already after 1984, levels of violent political activity were growing with Kashmir, foreshadowing what was to come.⁵⁹ In 1986, Governor's Rule (the Kashmiri equivalent of President's Rule) was invoked by New Delhi, and Shah was also removed from power, with Abdullah and Congress sharing power until the next elections in 1987. Ironically, the reason given for Farooq Abdullah's dismissal from power in 1984 was his insufficient ability to snuff out Pakistani terrorist activity in the state. There was relatively little of this terrorist activity at the time, and comparatively little in light of the decades-long rebellion that was to follow.⁶⁰

The flawed state assembly elections in 1987 marked, for most observers of Kashmiri politics, the descent in violent chaos that has rocked the state for the better part of the last three decades. When Farooq Abdullah, the opposition National Conference leader who was summarily dismissed by Congress in 1984, agreed to an electoral alliance with Congress, many of his erstwhile supporters became disillusioned and left the party. With the more radical religious Jamaat-e-Islami as its leader, an opposition umbrella organization, the Muslim United Front, was

⁵⁹ See Widmalm.

⁶⁰ Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy* (Roxford Books, 1991): 329.

launched to unite the opposition to the National Conference and Congress. The organization of political opposition primarily along religious lines helped to exacerbate communal feelings.

The state assembly elections of 1987 were widely believed to be rigged to over-represent the National Conference, with 40 seats going to the National Conference, 26 to Congress, 2 to the BJP and the remaining 8 to independents, 4 of whom were aligned with the Muslim United Front. After the success of the Congress-NC alliance, violence broke out in protest over the elections, at first sporadically and then more regularly. In a telling example, a leading member of the separatist movement, Abdul Ghani Lone, who had participated in the state political system for most of his career, turned to armed struggle against the state in the aftermath of the 1987 election.⁶¹

When large-scale violence broke out in 1989, no party or coalition was able to put a stop to it. Not only were there few legal channels left to express political opposition, but Indian army excesses in putting down incidences of armed revolt almost certainly contributed to the growing sense of alienation of the Kashmiri population against the state government.⁶² Moreover, the state's experience with the functioning of democracy was extremely limited. To the extent that state governments had been allowed to function without interference from the central government, these governments had often employed autocratic means to stem their own political opposition.

During the 1990s, many argue that a proxy war was effectively being fought in Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan.⁶³ During this decade, tens of thousands of people died, many of whom simply disappeared.⁶⁴ The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an alliance

⁶¹ Widmalm, p. 80.

⁶² Widmalm, Chapter 4.

⁶³ M. Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion* (New York, Penguin Books, 1999).

⁶⁴ Prabhu Ghate, "Kashmir: The Dirty War," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37 (Jan. 26 - Feb. 1, 2002): 313-322.

of secessionist parties and leaders, was formed in 1993 as a political front to further the cause of Kashmiri separatism, with some of its members promoting armed violence against the state. In the context of this armed struggle, both India and Pakistan publicly became nuclear-armed states in 1998. When an incursion into Indian-occupied Kashmir in 1999 led to escalating confrontation in the state, several observers of the state, including former U.S. President Bill Clinton, called the state the “most dangerous place on earth.”

State assembly elections in 2002, held amidst considerable tension and military presence, generated hope that state politics were on a genuine liberalizing trend for the first time since the 1987 elections sparked off the prolonged Kashmiri militancy. Elections were reasonably free, and the People’s Democratic Party-Congress coalition government that won the elections represented the state’s first non-National Conference government. In November and December 2008, Jammu and Kashmir held elections once again, marking the second consecutive elections judged to be free and fair. As a democratic exercise, the 2008 elections improved upon those in 2002. Turnout increased across the board to about 60%, which is normal in contemporary Indian state elections. Turnout varied across the state, with high rates of nearly 70% in Jammu and Ladakh. With the exception of Srinagar District, which has been the heart of the Kashmiri insurgency, turnout levels in the rest of Kashmir were around 57%, a more than respectable turnout. In Srinagar, turnout was only slightly above 20%, but still an improvement over 2002. Despite calls for boycott by separatist groups, most candidates were able to campaign, though the risks that politicians in the Valley of Kashmir faced were no doubt more pronounced than in most other places in India. In short, though the shadow of insurgency may still linger, a semblance of normal democratic politics has returned.

The case of Kashmir underscores the crucial importance of central intervention in enabling the emergence of viable political opposition at the subnational level. Though political opposition with popular roots in one part of the state actually existed, nearly every governing administration was the target of some kind of political manipulation by the central government. Moreover, each governing administration employed heavy-handed tactics to repress political opposition. So long as the National Conference remained friendly to the government New Delhi, it had the central government's tacit consent to behave in an authoritarian manner. Though the proximity to Pakistan and Pakistan's support for the Kashmiri insurgency should not be underestimated, nor should the crucial role of the central government in inhibiting subnational democratization. If the absence of central intervention was important in allowing political opposition to flourish in Tamil Nadu, central intervention in state politics has been the single most defining dynamic of subnational electoral competition in Kashmir.

H. Contemporary Variation

After decades in which India's states traversed very different paths toward democratization, today India exhibits relatively little subnational variation in levels of democracy or authoritarianism. In this paper, we have taken a procedural view of subnational democratization, linking it to peaceful alternation in power at the state level. By the early 2000s, such alternation had occurred in every state in India; non-Congress governments had not only won power, but they had also held onto it.

Even in states where non-Congress rule has been infrequent, Congress' position is qualitatively different than it was in early post-independence decades. Consider Maharashtra, where a non-Congress government has only served a single full term in office and Congress has

governed since 1999, winning three consecutive elections. Unlike in the earlier period of Congress dominance, Congress in Maharashtra now rules in coalition with another party, the Nationalist Congress Party. Though the two parties have remained partners in government for more than a decade, the alliance has not always been an easy one, and Congress' hold on power is hardly guaranteed.

Because Congress was the dominant party in the post-independence period, this paper has focused exclusively on the subnational formation of alternatives to Congress. In principle, however, the electoral dominance of non-Congress parties could also undermine the democratization process and even lead to a creeping de-democratization. The Left Front in West Bengal represents a source of concern on this count. Having won seven successive elections, the Left Front has governed West Bengal continuously from 1977 to the present. Critics have accused the Left Front of engaging in a wide range of undemocratic tactics to enhance its chances of electoral victory. These range from making party membership a de facto criterion for acquiring a public sector job to out and out harassment of opposition supporters, voter intimidation, and election-day fraud.

Undoubtedly, the party system in West Bengal is highly polarized, featuring unusually high levels of political violence. To date, however, none of the allegations against the Left Front government have been convincingly documented. Furthermore, recent events suggest limits to the extent of potential "de-democratization." Responding at least in part to opposition claims of voter intimidation and fraud, the Election Commission of India went to great lengths in the most recent state level elections in West Bengal in 2006 to ensure the fair conduct of elections. Although the Left Front easily won those elections, it subsequently lost the 2009 parliamentary elections and 2010 local elections, suggesting the possibility of a change of state government in

2011. Interestingly, fraud allegations notwithstanding, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Congress persistently won very high vote shares in West Bengal (between 36% and 42% of the vote), as high as in many states where it repeatedly won elections. In West Bengal, Congress' problem was not an ability to win a sizeable vote share but the Left Front's ability to consistently win even higher vote shares.

More than anything, perhaps the case of West Bengal points to the blurry distinction between legitimate electoral dominance and the kind of electoral hegemony that signals a lack of genuine democracy. One way to distinguish between these two is to consider the attendant rights and freedoms that ensure the genuine fairness of electoral competition. Few would dispute that Indian political parties use the promise of government jobs to reward or attract supporters. However, in most states, the now frequent alternation of parties in power ensures that no single party can entirely colonize the bureaucracy and therefore use it to undermine its opponents.

At the national-level, judicial independence appears robust in India. Anecdotally, examples of corruption in the judiciary are widespread, but this comes more in the guise of bribery and intimidation of judges by individual citizens rather than the judiciary's unwillingness to rule against the government. Indeed, the Supreme Court's 1975 ruling that Indira Gandhi had violated election law, thereby nullifying her election to parliament and banning her from contesting elections for six years, was the immediate impetus for her imposition of Emergency powers. Though the judiciary at the national-level appears relatively independent from influence by the ruling party at the national level, we are aware of little systematic data at the state-level which might shed light on subnational variation in judicial independence and the extent to which the judiciary might abet ruling parties in undermining their adversaries.

So too with media freedom. Systems of both print and television media differ considerably across states, but we know of no studies that consider subnational variation in media freedom. At the national level, Freedom House rates India's media freedom as "partly free," a rating shared by countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Mexico, and Italy. Despite classifying India as only "partly free," Freedom House reports that "Most print outlets, particularly in the national and English-language press, are privately owned, provide diverse coverage, and frequently scrutinize the government."⁶⁵ Although the Indian state owns a television station, privately owned news channels have proliferated over the last decade. Freedom House notes that the pressure that most journalists face to slant or doctor coverage comes from management rather than the state. This assessment comports with other critiques of the Indian media that suggest declining standards in the quality and objectivity of reporting.⁶⁶ While these critiques of the media are troubling for many normative reasons, they suggest little reason to worry about democratization and democratic consolidation. Though journalists seem, according to these assessments, susceptible to influence, the government does not exercise a monopoly on such influence. While a competitive market for influence over journalists is hardly desirable, it could perversely preserve democracy (if not a high quality news media) by ensuring that incumbent governments are not the sole beneficiaries of media capture.

Given the dearth of subnational data on the subject, the comparative study of media freedom across India's states represents a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

⁶⁵ See Freedom House, "Map of Press Freedom 2009: India," accessed 10 June 2010, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>. Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess, "The Political Economy of Government Responsiveness: Theory and Evidence from India," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 (November 2002), 1415-1452 also find that the overwhelming majority of media in India are privately owned.

⁶⁶ See Prasun Sonwalkar, "'Murdochization' of the Indian press: from by-line to bottom-line," *Media, Culture & Society* 24 (2002), 821-834 and C.S.H.N. Murthy, Challa Ramakrishna, and Srinivas R. Melkote, "Trends in first page priorities of Indian print media reporting-A content analysis of four English Language newspapers," *Journal Media and Communication Studies* 2 (February 2010): 39-53.

Variation in systems of media across India is substantial. For instance, in terms of print media, in West Bengal the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) owns a widely circulating newspaper, *Ganashakti*. But, the newspaper market in West Bengal is highly competitive, more so than in some states where no major newspapers are owned by a political party. With respect to broadcast media, many states in North India are dominated by non-state-specific privately owned Hindi language stations with few obvious political biases. By contrast, in Tamil Nadu the state's two main political parties, DMK and ADMK, own the two major Tamil-language stations, Sun TV and Jaya TV, respectively. The implications for media freedom of these varying patterns of ownership and partisanship are, as yet, unclear.

Today, the greatest exceptions to the otherwise fairly uniform pattern of subnational democratization are states facing pressing internal security concerns. In the past, the most obvious examples of states whose security situations undermined democracy were Assam, Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir, where insurgent violence prompted the periodic suspension of elections. Today, India's sparsely populated northeast, with its many long-running low-intensity insurgencies, represents the most glaring enclave of authoritarianism in India. Looking to the future, the prospects for de-democratization are perhaps most likely in those areas of India presently afflicted by the Maoist insurgency.

Zones of insurgent conflict have been the only places in India in the last 30 years where even the procedural definition of democracy has not been met. Violence disrupted national elections in Assam in 1980 and forced their cancellation in 1989. State-level elections in 1983 were of dubious fairness, and the 1990 state elections were postponed for a year due to insurgent activity. In Punjab, state elections that ought to have been held in 1990 were initially postponed until 1991. Amidst high levels of violence, both state and parliamentary elections were then

postponed to 1992.⁶⁷ In 1992, a massive deployment of security forces eventually ensured a relatively peaceful polling process. However, the major Sikh-dominated parties—that is, most factions of the Akali Dal—boycotted the elections, leading to exceedingly low turnout.

Violence has had the greatest effect on elections in Jammu and Kashmir. After state elections in 1987 and national elections in 1989, the eruption of insurgency led to the cancellation of elections until 1996. When elections finally took place in 1996, observers roundly dismissed them as neither free nor fair. Subsequently, turnout in the 1999 parliamentary polls was less than 20% in two of the parliamentary seats in the Kashmir Valley. A semblance of electoral normalcy returned to the state in the early 2000s after more than a decade of suspended democracy. While concerns about voter intimidation and threats to candidates marred the 2002 elections, polling itself was generally considered fair, marking the first time in 15 years that a fair election had been held at the state-level.

Given the ferocity of the insurgency and its relevance for broader Indian-Pakistani foreign relations, violence in Kashmir has attracted considerable attention. But, with the return of reasonably open political competition, particularly after the 2008 state elections, Jammu and Kashmir is increasingly less of an outlier in India. Rather, the most persistent pockets of authoritarianism remain the oft-forgotten states of India's northeast, which have been referred to as a series of "local autocracies" supported by the central government.⁶⁸ Since the northeastern states (apart from Assam) together comprise little more than 1% of the Indian population, their situation—dire as it is—truly constitutes an exception within India.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Gurharpal Singh, "The Punjab Elections 1992: Breakthrough or Breakdown?," *Asian Survey* 32 (November 1992), 988-999.

⁶⁸ Bethany Lacina, "The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India: Local Ethnic Autocracy and the Rule of Law," *Asian Survey* 49 (November/December 2009), 998-1010.

⁶⁹ Assam is about 2.6% of the Indian population. Including Assam in the northeast, the region still accounts for less than 5% of the country's population.

For the most part, elections have proceeded on schedule in the northeast. However, in states such as Nagaland and Manipur, violence mars elections and threatens candidates. In Mizoram and Assam, major political players such as the Mizo National Front (MNF) and Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) are ex-militants. More generally, successive national governments appear to have tacitly allowed many political parties and state governments to engage in authoritarian practices in return for militants' renunciation of insurgency. Furthermore, the massive military presences and fear of violence from the many militant organizations that operate in the region preclude the possibility of "normal" electoral politics in much of the region. Currently, democratization remains incomplete in India's northeast, since insurgency has afflicted much of the region since independence. In some states, democracy has perhaps never prevailed to the same extent that it has in most of the rest of the country.

Looking forward to other potential challenges, perhaps the greatest threat to democracy comes from another security concern in the heart of India: the Naxalites. The Naxalites are a loosely organized group of Maoist insurgents active throughout a large swathe of central India. So far, their low-level insurgency has done little to interrupt the democratic process. Both national and state elections have been held throughout Naxalite-affected areas. The Indian state has thrown the full weight of its resources behind election efforts, staggering elections across multiple polling days to ensure adequate security at election time. Turnout in Naxal affected areas has also been moderate to high, though polling days are not without sporadic incidents of violence. Furthermore, candidates from mainstream parties perform well in elections, suggesting that the Naxal threat has not fundamentally altered the nature of competition. However, Naxalite activity has increased in recent years. If the insurgency continues to grow, then the Naxalites

may successfully disrupt elections or the Indian state may respond to the threat with increasingly authoritarian tactics.

I. Conclusion

The Indian case highlights three important lessons for the comparative study of subnational democratization. The first lesson is that the transition to democracy does not guarantee the creation of genuine party-based competition that lies at the heart of a consolidated democracy. The consolidation of democracy requires a credible alternative to the party initially in power at the moment of democratization. Unfortunately, viable oppositions do not emerge out of thin air. Many post-colonial countries won independence after long struggles during which most of the political class united into a single nationalist platform—Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in Zimbabwe, and, of course, the Indian National Congress. At independence, many of these nationalist movements assumed power and immediately enjoyed tremendous advantages over potential rivals: the allegiance of a broad section of the political class, an organizational infrastructure, and control of the state's patronage resources. In such circumstances, would-be opposition parties often have few resources with which to build a viable alternative to the ruling party.

In some countries, dominant party systems gave way to overtly authoritarian regimes. While India did not suffer such a fate, the variation in the emergence of party-based competition among its states demonstrates how historical patterns of party-building shape democratization trajectories. Where oppositions had something on which to build—a pre-existing political organization or party (as in Tamil Nadu) or a polarized caste cleavage (as in Rajasthan)—credible alternatives to the dominant Congress quickly emerged. Where the opposition had no

such resources (as in Uttar Pradesh), it floundered. If formal democratization is to result in genuine democratic competition, then some basis for a cohesive opposition must exist. So long as the opposition is fragmented, fluid, and disorganized, it will pose little threat to the kinds of incumbent parties that often come to power during moments of democratization, even if the opposition enjoys substantial levels of popular support,

The second important lesson, particularly in the comparative context, is the potentially nefarious role of central governments in thwarting democratization processes at the sub-national level. In some countries, central governments can exert a strong democratizing influence by eradicating pockets of authoritarianism, often on a country's periphery. In India, until relatively recently, the central government frequently destabilized state-level opposition governments. Often, when opposition governments were on the cusp of consolidating power, their governments were deliberately destabilized through central government intervention. As a result, the organizational threshold for establishing a viable governing alternative increased. To be credible, opposition governments not only had to come to power, but they had to come to power and form very stable governments, lest any hint of instability invite President's Rule. They also needed to govern with large majorities that could withstand defections or attempts to win away coalition partners.

Since the advent of coalition government and the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* in the 1990s, the interventionist tendencies of the central government have become limited. Since erstwhile "opposition" parties for Congress (or any other party hoping to govern at the national level) are now prospective allies, central governments have reason to be wary of intervening in state-level affairs lest they alienate a potential coalition partner. Moreover, the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Bommai* case made dismissing state

governments more difficult, prescribing that state governments have the opportunity to prove their majority in the legislature before President's Rule is invoked.

The third and final implication of the Indian case is the relevance of security concerns for understanding subnational variation in democratization (or de-democratization as the case may be). In times of threat or war, states often abridge their citizens' freedoms in ways that undermine free and open democratic competition. As the Indian case amply demonstrates, such security threats—and the authoritarian responses that they sometimes provoke—can be regionally concentrated. In countries that otherwise evince a strong commitment to democracy, enclaves of authoritarianism may persist in pockets where security concerns loom large.

Table 1. Application of the Argument to Case Study States

	Tamil Nadu	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	Jammu & Kashmir
Organized, consolidated opposition with colonial roots	X			
Polarized caste structure		X		
Absence of central intervention	X			
Date of first full term opposition government	Early (1967)	Late (1993)	Late (1997)	—*

*The first full-term opposition government in Jammu and Kashmir was the National Conference government from 1977-82. The dates that this government served would make Jammu and Kashmir a case of early democratization. But, a prolonged period of authoritarianism from the late 1980s to early 2000s indicates that the state had not actually democratized. Democratically elected governments took office after elections in 2002 and 2008. Although two parties apart from Congress have headed the state government since 2002, both have been in coalition with Congress, meaning that they are not truly opposition governments.

LEGEND

- International Boundary
- State Boundary
- Country Capital
- State Capital

INDIA

States and Union Territories:

- JAMMU AND KASHMIR
- HIMACHAL PRADESH
- PUNJAB
- HARYANA
- UTTAR PRADESH
- RAJASTHAN
- GUJARAT
- MADHYA PRADESH
- CHHATTISGARH
- JHARKHAND
- WEST BENGAL
- ASSAM
- NAGALAND
- MEGHALAYA
- TRIPURA
- MANIPUR
- MIZORAM
- ARUNACHAL PRADESH
- SIKKIM
- ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR IS (INDIA)
- MAHARASHTRA
- GOA
- KARNATAKA
- ANDHRA PRADESH
- TAMIL NADU
- KERALA
- CHENNAI
- BANGALORE
- HYDERABAD
- RAIPUR
- BHUBANESHWAR
- KOLKATA
- SHILLONG
- DISPUR
- AGARTALA
- IMPHAL
- KOMIMA
- ITANAGAR
- GAZIDUR
- DEHRA DUN
- CHANDIGARH
- NEW DELHI
- JAIPUR
- LUCKNOW
- PATNA
- RAJSHAH
- SHIMLA
- SRINAGAR
- GUANAGAR
- DAMAN
- SILVASSA
- DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI
- MUMBAI
- GOA
- KAVERATTI
- THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
- PONDICHERRY
- KARAKORAM
- YANAM (PONDICHERRY)
- NEW MOORE I. (INDIA)
- PORT BLAIR
- INDRA POINT

Surrounding Bodies of Water:

- Arabian Sea
- Bay of Bengal
- INDIAN OCEAN

Table 2. Timeline of Subnational Democratization in India

<i>Year</i>	<i>1st full-term opposition government</i>	<i>1st opposition government</i>
1957		Kerala (1959)*
1967	Tamil Nadu (1971)	Bihar (1968), Haryana (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1969), Orissa (1971), Punjab (1968)*, Tamil Nadu (1971), Uttar Pradesh (1968), West Bengal (1968)
1970		
1975		Gujarat (1976), Jammu & Kashmir (1980)
1977	West Bengal (1982), Jammu & Kashmir (1982)	Rajasthan (1980)
1978		Assam (1979), Maharashtra (1980)
1983		Andhra Pradesh (1984), Karnataka (1985)
1985	Andhra Pradesh (1989), Karnataka (1989)	
1987	Haryana (1991), Kerala (1991)	
1990	Bihar (1995), Orissa (1995)	
1993	Rajasthan (1998)	
1995	Maharashtra (1999)	
1996	Assam (2001)	
1997	Punjab (2002), Uttar Pradesh (2002)	
1998	Gujarat (2002)	
2003	Madhya Pradesh (2008)	

Note: Years in parentheses are when the governments completed their terms in office. In some cases, the period indicated represents more than one successive opposition government.

*Travancore-Cochin and Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) were both states before the 1956 states reorganization and later became part of Kerala and Punjab, respectively. Both had non-Congress governments, Kerala from 1954-55 and PEPSU from 1952-53. The dates in the table refer to the dates for the reorganized states of Kerala and Punjab.