

## **Elite Incorporation in Multi-Ethnic Societies**

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Comments Welcome

### **Abstract**

Under what conditions are political parties, ethnic, non-ethnic or multi-ethnic, able to incorporate elites from rising ethnic categories and retain their allegiance? General theories of party politics in multi-ethnic societies propose a sociological answer to this question, according to which success or failure in elite incorporation is determined by the pattern of conflict or harmony between ethnic categories in society. I propose here an institutionalist model, according to which success or failure in elite incorporation depends, not upon the social relations between ethnic categories, but upon the internal organizational structure of political parties. Given an equal probability of winning elections, political parties with competitive rules for intra-party advancement, I argue, are likely to incorporate new elites successfully, while political parties with centralized rules are likely to fail. And competitive party organizations with even a low probability of winning elections are likely to be more able to incorporate new elites than centralized party organizations with a higher probability. The model builds upon Myron Weiner's classic 1967 study of the Congress party, which was the first to identify the link between intra-party competition and elite incorporation. I develop the model by re-examining Weiner's and other studies in the light of new data from a study of the variation in the ability of the Congress Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party to incorporate Scheduled Caste elites across Indian states. Apart from the literature on ethnic politics, the model has implications for two distinct theoretical literatures. It offers a foundation for explanations of India's democratic "exceptionalism", which is one of the main preoccupations of the literature on democratic stability; and it offers an explanation for India's "Duvergerian exceptionalism", which is one of the main preoccupations of the literature on party and electoral systems.

## **Elite Incorporation in Multi-Ethnic Societies<sup>1</sup>**

Kanchan Chandra

Under what conditions are political parties in multi-ethnic societies able to incorporate elites from rising ethnic categories and retain their allegiance? General theories of party politics in multi-ethnic societies offer a sociological explanation in response to this question.<sup>2</sup> The composition of political parties in ethnically divided societies, according to these theories, is a straightforward reflection of the pattern of conflict in society. Where ethnic categories are in conflict in society, elites belonging to these categories will not be able to coexist in the same political party. Multi-ethnic parties that attempt to bring these elites together under the same umbrella, according to these theories, are therefore “inherently unstable.”<sup>3</sup> Conversely, elites from the same ethnic category, or from categories in social harmony, are posited to be more capable of co-existing in the same political party. Ethnic parties, therefore, which bring together elites from a single ethnic category, or from several ethnic categories which are not in conflict, are likely to enjoy a more stable existence. This article proposes an institutionalist model of elite incorporation which is explicitly at odds with the sociological explanation proposed above.

I argue here that the successful incorporation of elites by political parties, whether multi-ethnic, non-ethnic or ethnic, depends upon the internal organizational structure of the party. Parties with competitive rules for intra-party advancement are able to continually incorporate new elites, while keeping old ones acquiescent. Such parties are stable parties, better able to retain the allegiance of elites during “lean” periods when they are out of government. Parties with centralized rules of intra-party advancement, however, are “closed” to the entry of new elites. Such parties are unstable, deeply vulnerable to defections by old elites when they are out of power. The effect of the internal organizational structure is stronger than the degree of conflict between ethnic groups in society. Where a competitive structure exists, it promotes coexistence even between elites from warring groups in the same party. Where a centralized organizational structure exists, however, we are likely to see splits and defections by elites from initially harmonious categories or even from the same ethnic category.

The model builds upon Myron Weiner’s classic study of the Congress party, published in 1967, which was among the first to identify the link between intra-party competition and the incorporation of new elites. Other studies of the Congress party have developed this link and demonstrated its applicability in a variety of empirical contexts.<sup>4</sup> I derive the argument here by re-examining this rich literature in light of new data from a comparative study of the variation in the ability of the Congress Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party to incorporate Scheduled Caste elites across Indian states.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the SSRC-MacArthur Program on International Peace and Security and the Harvard Academy for International and Area studies for fellowship support during the research and writing of this article and the dissertation of which it is a part. For their comments on earlier versions, I would like to thank Paul Brass, Samuel Huntington, David Laitin, Richard Sisson, Ashutosh Varshney and the participants at the festschrift in honour of Myron Weiner at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, September 24-26 1999. Discussions with Robert Bates and James Fearon were more important in helping me think about the problem of elite incorporation than they might imagine. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the conclusions presented here.

<sup>2</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle (1972); Horowitz (1985).

<sup>3</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), 82.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, see Brass (1965); Nayar (1966); and Sisson (1972).

The article is organized as follows: Section I defines the key terms used in the article. Section II models the difference in the capacity of competitive and centralized party organizations to incorporate new elites. Section III applies this model to explaining the variation in patterns of incorporation of Scheduled Caste elites by the Congress and the BSP across the three Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Karnataka. Section IV, the conclusion, explores the implications of the argument proposed here for the scholarship on democratic stability and on party and electoral systems.

## I. Definitions

By the term **'ethnic identity'** I mean nominal membership in ascriptive categories including race, language, caste, or religion.<sup>5</sup> Such nominal membership is inherited. However, we are usually born with a choice of membership in several groups. As used here, the term ethnic 'group' does not imply active participation in a common group identity. Wherever possible, therefore, I use the term ethnic 'category' rather than 'group' to emphasize this point.

By an **ethnic party** I mean a party that markets itself to voters as the champion of the interests of one ethnic group or set of groups to the exclusion of another or others, and makes such an appeal central to its mobilizing strategy. As defined here, an ethnic party may champion the interests of more than one category. What then distinguishes an ethnic from a multi-ethnic party? The main distinction does not lie in the number of categories that each attempts to represent. If we look at any ethnic category closely, we will see that it is usually an amalgam of others, and so any party speaking for one category can simultaneously be seen as speaking for several. The key distinction between an ethnic and a multi-ethnic party, therefore, is not the number of category that each includes in its appeal but in whether or not there is a category that each attempts to exclude. An ethnic party, regardless of how many categories it claims to speak for, always identifies clearly the category that is excluded. A **multi-ethnic party**, while also invoking ethnic identities, does not identify a clear outsider group.<sup>6</sup>

By the term **elites** I mean simply "modern men", urbanized, better educated, and economically better off than the rest of the population. I take as my starting point a society characterized by differential modernization between and within ethnic categories. In most multi-ethnic societies, some ethnic categories in these societies modernize earlier than others.<sup>7</sup> Within any single category, furthermore, individuals modernize at different rates. Rather than witnessing the modernization of the entire category at once, therefore, we see the emergence of an upper layer of elites who then act as brokers for the interests of the less modernized members of their ethnic category. The drive for political office is confined mainly to this elite layer within each ethnic category. Political party organizations are initially dominated by elites from the early modernizing category or categories. I term these elites "old elites." Subsequent waves of modernization produce "new elites" from previously passive groups who then demand political offices in their own right.

## II. Elite Incorporation in Competitive v/s Centralized Party Organizations

I assume that new and old elites from any ethnic category are motivated by the desire to obtain political office in the long term and are instrumentally rational. They may desire office for

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<sup>5</sup> This is consistent with the definition proposed in Horowitz (1985).

<sup>6</sup> For a somewhat similar definition, see Horowitz (1985), p. 299. Horowitz too argues that an ethnic party can comprise of more than one ethnic group. A party should be termed multi-ethnic, according to him, "only if it spans the major groups in conflict." (299). The problem with this definition is that conflict between ethnic groups is often not prior to but created during the process of political mobilization.

<sup>7</sup> Bates (1983), Brass (1974)

material resources or psychic satisfaction or both, but will affiliate themselves with that political party which promises them the best chance of obtaining office in the long term. New elites, faced with a choice between political parties, will join that one which gives the best long-term chance of obtaining office. Elites already entrenched in any political party organization, faced with a decision about whether to remain or to defect, will also choose that party which maximizes their chances for obtaining office in the long term.

For any individual elite, the expected probability of obtaining office through any given political party is the product of two independent probabilities: 1) The probability of the party's winning an election in the long term, which affects in turn the number of offices at its disposal and 2) The probability of their obtaining a position in the party organization high enough to guarantee them one of the limited offices. Equation I below represents this calculation:

$$\mathbf{EP(Off)} = \mathbf{P(Win)} * \mathbf{P(Org)}$$

**EP(Off)** represents the expected probability of obtaining office in the long term; **P(Win)** the probability of the party's winning the election in the long term; and **P(Org)** the probability of obtaining a suitable position in the party organization for any individual elite. For new elites, **P(Org)** is a measure of how high they can expect to rise within the party organization. For old elites already in positions of power in the party, **P(Org)** is a measure of how much they can count on recapturing their position if they are displaced. It is clear from the equation above that political parties which have a high value of **P(Org)** can afford to have a low value on **P(Win)**. In other words, political parties which offer new elites a high probability of ascent within the organization and old elites a high probability of return but have a low probability of winning can be as attractive to each set of elites as political parties with a high chance of winning but a low probability of ascent within the ranks or return to old positions.

The intractability of the problem of elite incorporation should be immediately obvious. In order to incorporate new elites while retaining the allegiance of old ones, a political party must promise both a high value on **P(Org)** simultaneously. In other words, it must promise new elites a high probability of ascent within the organization; and old elites a high probability of retaining their positions or advancing to higher ones. This appears on the face of it to be impossible. The number of posts in any political party is limited. Promising new elites access to these posts necessarily threatens their previous occupants with displacement. How is it possible for political parties to simultaneously satisfy both old occupants and new aspirants? This is the essence of the problem of elite incorporation.

The problem above may be restated as a variant of a collective action dilemma. In many multi-ethnic democracies, the success of political parties in attracting the support of voters from any ethnic category depends directly upon their ability to incorporate office-seeking elites from this target category.<sup>8</sup> Most party personnel, furthermore, are typically aware of this link between elite incorporation and electoral success. If it is clear that the electoral success of the party depends upon elite incorporation, then rational office-seekers within each political party should take steps to incorporate these elites. However, what is rational for the party as a whole is not rational for individual office-seekers within the party. The incorporation of new elites usually means the displacement of those who already hold positions of power in the party organization and are therefore first in line for the spoils of victory. And so office-seeking elites already entrenched within the party organization are likely to be free riders, cheering for incorporation of new elites in the party as a whole, but resisting the incorporation of new elites in their own party

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<sup>8</sup> I develop this general hypothesis in Chandra (2000b).

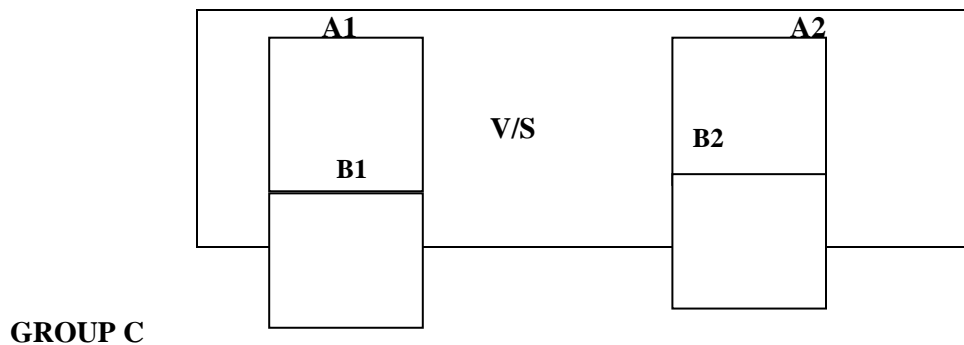


relatively easy for non-members in society to be converted into voting members of the party, creates an incentive for competing faction leaders to recruit new elites from outside the party in order to increase the size of their coalitions of support within. In order to purchase the support of new elites, competing faction leaders are forced to concede a limited amount of power in the form of party posts or election tickets. The acquisition of this limited amount of power, in turn, gives new elites a foothold which they use to pull themselves up the party hierarchy. When cracks open up among factions at the top, these members move up from subordinate levels to replace the old factional leadership, using the same mechanisms which had led to their own recruitment. At the same time, the competitive mechanisms promise displaced elites some predictable probability of return.

Note that the system of elite incorporation I describe depends upon the conjunction of both rules. A system of intra-party elections without open membership would produce internal elite circulation within the party but it would not result in the incorporation of new elites from outside. Similarly, a party that permitted open membership but disallowed intra-party elections would not be able to promise new elites a probability of ascent within the organization. I will return to this point in my discussion of centralized party organizations.

The diagrams below illustrate the working of the incorporative mechanism created by the competitive rules of intra-party advancement. Given the rules of intra-party advancement, there is a coincidence of interests between dominant elites A1 and A2 and rising elites B1 and B2. A1 and A2 seek additional support to bolster their positions relative to each other and offer in return some limited power within the party organization. B1 and B2 are looking for posts of influence within the party and, as the modernizing layer within their category, can offer in return the votes of members of their ethnic category to whichever faction leader bids more highly for their support. The result, at Stage II is the incorporation of B1 and B2 into leadership positions within the party and the entry of their followers into the faction on either side. At this stage, B1 and B2 remain subordinate to A1 and A2, and their followers are concentrated at the bottom of the vertical chain of factional networks. The leadership of the factional networks continues to lie with members of the ethnic category A.

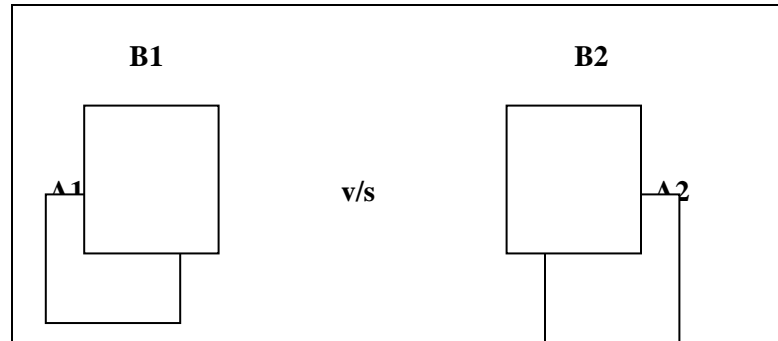
**STAGE II: COMPETITIVE INCORPORATION OF ELITES FROM GROUP B**



At Stage II, competition within the party takes the form of competition between two multi-ethnic factions, composed of As and Bs. There are now two axes of competition: Elites from each faction have an incentive to improve their relative positions *across* factions. But elites from both A and B also have an incentive to bolster their relative positions *within* the faction. Over time, therefore, B1 and B2 use their foothold within the party to improve their position in

the subsequent rounds of intra-party elections. Stage III below illustrates the displacement of A 1 and A 2 and their followers by B1 and B2 and their followers.

### STAGE III: DISPLACEMENT OF AS BY BS



### GROUP C

The displacement of the As by the Bs within the factional networks shown in the diagram above is not an inevitable outcome. The capacity of elites from category B to displace elites from category A depends upon the size of the modernizing pool within each ethnic category. If ethnic category B has a large pool of modernizing elites, it will have the numerical strength to overthrow the As within the party organization. If the pool of modernizing elites from category B is small, however, elites from category B are likely to remain in a subordinate position in the organization. Other scenarios, therefore, are also compatible with the model, depending upon the numerical strength of the modernizing elites in each group: the Bs might be able to replace the As in only one faction; the Bs and As might be equally balanced within factions; or the Bs might continue to be subordinate to the As. Displacement within this model, however, is not permanent. Because their position within a faction depends simply upon the degree of support from below, displaced factional leaders may regain their position to the extent that they are able to mobilize alternative coalitions of support from below. As group C modernizes, the same mechanism should lead to the incorporation of elites from group C.

The model above describes the incorporation of elites from particular ethnic categories, one at a time. At periodic intervals, elites from a new ethnic group entered the party through this mechanism. Why do we see this ethnically specific pattern of incorporation and not the incorporation of ethnically diverse elites, comprising individuals from multiple ethnic groups? Secondly, we see the incorporation mainly of *elites* from these ethnic groups who brought their mass members in with them. Why should competing faction leaders approach elites rather than an undifferentiated electorate of individuals?

The answer to both questions lies in the condition of differential modernization, between and within ethnic categories. Because the onset of modernization takes place at different rates across ethnic groups, the demand for political incorporation takes an ethnically specific form. And because individuals within each group modernize at different rates, it is always a subset of elites from the modernizing ethnic group rather than individuals from the group as a whole, who demand incorporation. For elites from both dominant and rising elites, furthermore, ethnic

networks provide a low cost strategy for building support bases. Both sets of elites, therefore, derive the core of their support from members of their own ethnic category. The attempt to broaden their coalitions of support within the party entails the grafting on of a new ethnic “bloc” onto a core base of supporters composed of the old one. In each case, however, the multi-ethnic faction is a mosaic of such ethnically differentiated blocs, not a mass of ethnically differentiated individuals. In societies where the processes of modernization are not ethnically specific, the same rules of intra-party competition should produce ethnically indifferent patterns of incorporation.

The diagrams above present a highly simplified picture, where the ethnic categories A, B, and C are objectively given, and each category conveniently modernizes one at a time. We know, however, that the real world is much more complex. Because individuals have multiple ethnic identities available to them, multiple ethnic categorizations of the population are possible. Which category then becomes the relevant category for incorporation? At the same time, several categories, however defined, may be undergoing the processes of modernization simultaneously. How do we know which of these categories will be incorporated into the party and which will not? The model of incorporation does not require individuals to identify a priori with a single “master” category. Rising elites demanding entry into the party are thrown up by the objective processes of social mobilization. These elites may define themselves in multiple ways. However, in order to increase their chances for incorporation into the party, they will emphasize that identity which allows them to build the largest coalition and so increase their bargaining power in relation to the dominant elites within the party. I will return to this point in the empirical discussion in Section III.

Note that the process of continuous elite incorporation that I describe above is driven entirely by the internal power-struggles within the party and are therefore independent of electoral incentives. However, even though it is generated by an independent incentive structure, successful elite incorporation serves the party well in the electoral arena. For one thing, it steadily expands the party’s base of support. The more elites the party incorporates, the wider the circles of support it has among the broader population. For another, it pre-empts the emergence of a strong opposition party by absorbing those elites who might otherwise have fed the competition.

Is the party described here stable? There is no mechanism here that halts the process of incorporation at the level where elites from “enough” ethnic categories have been incorporated to guarantee electoral victory. Rather, as long as the competitive rules are in operation, the process of incorporation is likely to continue unchecked, so that the party becomes swollen over time, absorbing more and more new entrants from society. At first glance, we might conclude, therefore, that a competitive party organization is unstable over time to the extent that it generates “oversize coalitions”, far in excess of what is necessary to win.<sup>9</sup> The logic that suggests that such a coalition is unstable runs as follows. We know that for office-seeking elites, the expected probability of obtaining an office at the state level depends upon the joint probability of the party winning and the probability of obtaining a position in the party organization. The number of offices available in the government and in the party organization is limited. We would expect the probability of obtaining a post in the party organization to fall with each new entrant. Even if the party continued to win elections, we should find that as the probability of obtaining a post in the party organization approaches zero, the expected probability of obtaining office for any individual elite goes to zero as well. Consequently, after some turning point, elites should have an incentive to defect to the competition, or to found a new party.

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<sup>9</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), 84; Horowitz (1985), 309.

However, a closer analysis reveals that this process indeed produces a stable party for the following reason: As new elites enter the party, they are integrated into a system of factional competition. Each faction is composed of some subset of the party membership as a whole. What we see then, is not a single “oversize” coalition, but a collection of alternative “minimum winning coalitions” with each faction representing a single coalition aiming for office. With each new entrant, therefore, the probability of obtaining an office is certainly diminished, but not to the same degree as we might expect if we thought of the party membership as a single coalition competing for office.

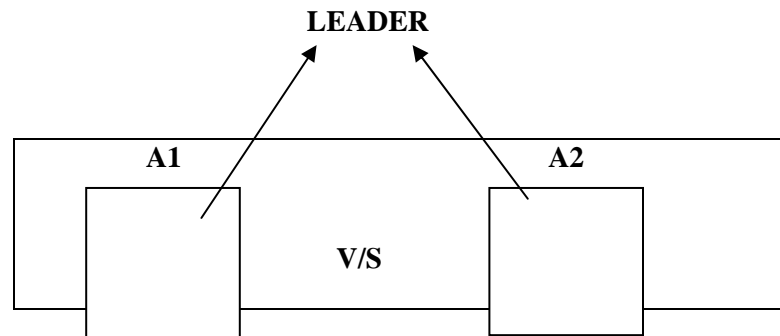
Consider now an elite faced with the choice between joining a faction within this “swollen” party and joining a new political party of identical size and structure as the faction. The choice is not equivalent. As a member of a faction within the swollen party, the individual has a much higher chance of obtaining office than as a member of a new party of the same size as his faction. This is because as a member of a faction, he benefits from the votes mobilized by each of the other factions in the party at election time. Once the party has won the election, this individual then faces competition between the other factions for office. A party of the same size as his faction, however, would not be able to win an election on its own. As a member of this party, therefore, the elite would almost certainly be denied office.

This argument suggests that the competitive party is stable because the threshold at which individuals might begin to defect from factions within the swollen party to an opposition party is extremely high. The opposition party would have to be, at its inception, large enough to win the election on its own. It is highly unlikely that a single opposition party could amass this kind of strength in its first election. The only condition under which an opposition force of this size might form in the first election would be through an alliance of several opposition parties, which presents a difficult coordination problem.

### **Ib Centralized Party Organizations**

So far I have argued that competitive rules of intra-party advancement produce an incorporative and highly stable political party. Let me move now to centralized rules of intra-party advancement, which I define as follows: all posts within the party are allotted through a centralized directive, issued either by a single leader or by some collective. The diagram below illustrates this system at Stage I. As above, competition within the party takes the form of factions within Group A. Outside the party, in the larger society, lie group B and group C. Group B is modernizing at a rate faster than group C and is therefore the primary source of new elites (B1 and B2) looking for an entry into the political system. The difference, however, is that competing faction leaders from group A obtain and maintain their positions by appealing to the leader or some selectorate at the top. The rewards in this scenario come solely from currying favour with the central leadership.

#### **STAGE I: PARTY DOMINATED BY ELITES FROM GROUP A**





**B1    B2**

**GROUP B**

**GROUP C**

At first glance, we might expect a centralized organizational structure to be equally, if not more, capable of solving the collective action problem of elite incorporation. A single leader has a strong incentive to do what it takes to get the party to win, since his own fortune depends upon the fortunes of the party. The same is true of a selectorate. Consequently, we might expect the leader or selectorate, looking out for their own interests, to solve the collective action dilemma through one of two mechanisms: 1) By allotting party positions solely on the basis of demonstrated support from below. This would in effect reproduce the incentive structure of the competitive system outlined earlier in this section. 2). By forcibly inducting new elites inspite of the dissent of old ones. However, neither of these two mechanisms is likely to be effective under a centralized system. Let me explain why, taking each in turn.

Just as the interests of individual elites do not always coincide with the interests of the party as a corporate whole, the interests of the central leader do not always coincide with the interests of the party as a whole. On the one hand, the central leader has an interest in ensuring the electoral victory of the party and therefore an interest in incorporating new elites. On the other hand, he must also ensure his own survival. Actions that ensure the first objective do not always ensure the second. And in a conflict between the two objectives, the second is always paramount. The paramountcy of personal survival makes the systematic replication of the competitive incentive structure by a centralized system difficult. For a leader interested in personal survival, awarding posts solely on the basis of demonstrated support from below carries with it the risk of the emergence of an intra-party challenger. Any self-interested leader, therefore, has an incentive to intervene when such an intra-party challenger emerges and award the posts to a less threatening aspirant independently of the support he enjoys from below. The fear of such a challenger, furthermore, gives the leader an incentive to launch a pre-emptive effort to prevent his emergence by awarding posts to loyalists or at a minimum to weak figures. Finally, a leader seeking to ensure personal survival also incurs debts for services rendered by loyalists which he must pay through the use of party posts in order to retain his own hold on the party. The imperative of personal survival means, therefore, that even the wisest, or especially the wisest, leader has an incentive to substitute the criterion of allotting posts in return for popular support by other, arbitrary criteria. The same logic applies to a selectorate.

How often the leader or the selectorate subverts the competitive mechanism might vary across party organizations. Where the leadership is secure, it is likely to subvert the process sparingly or not at all, recognizing that the interest of the party as a whole lies in allotting posts using competitive criteria. Where the leadership is insecure, we should see frequent subversions. However, the incentive that the leadership has to subvert the competitive process means that it cannot credibly provide the same guarantee to old and new elites of advancement within the party that a competitive system can. Recognizing the incentive to subvert, old elites cannot reliably estimate their probability of return if they are displaced. New elites, similarly, cannot form reasonable expectations of advancement within the party if they join. The fact of a centralized

leadership with an interest in its own survival introduces an element of arbitrariness absent in the impersonal competitive system. And this element of arbitrariness prevents the expectation of return for displaced elites and ascent for rising elites on which the solution to the collective action problem depends.

Let me address now the second mechanism through which a centralized system might solve the dilemma of elite incorporation: coercion. A centralized leadership can easily induct new elites into the party forcibly when the need arises, overriding the resistance of those elites already entrenched within the party. Why would this mechanism not be effective? The answer is that it cannot ensure the compliance of old elites. Displaced elites, in the absence of credible guarantees for reinstatement, have no reason to stay. They are likely to respond to their displacement either by switching allegiance to the competition or forming a new political party. Where the criteria for advancement within the party organization are arbitrary, furthermore, new elites can also not reasonably gauge their chances of advancement once they have accepted an initial post. Consequently, new elites also have less incentive to affiliate themselves with the centralized party.

If the centralized party has a high probability of winning the election, the incentives for old elites to defect, and new elites to avoid the party might be arrested. Recalling Equation I, it is clear that a high probability of winning might offset a low probability of return or ascent within the party hierarchy by producing the same expected probability of obtaining office as a party with a more open organization. In “lean” periods, however, where the centralized party is not a likely winner, we should see a far greater propensity among elites to exit than in competitive party organizations. Centralized parties, therefore, are likely to be far more unstable than competitive ones.

### **III Elite Incorporation in Congress and the BSP**

In this section, I will provide empirical evidence of the difference in the incorporative capacity of competitive v/s centralized organizations by applying the model to explaining the differential ability of the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party to incorporate elites from the Scheduled Castes across three Indian states: Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Karnataka. The “Scheduled Castes (SCs)”<sup>10</sup> are a collection of 450 castes who were traditionally treated as outcastes by caste Hindu society. They currently constitute 16.5% of the Indian population.<sup>11</sup> In 1947, the newly independent Indian government legally abolished untouchability, and listed these castes in a separate Schedule in the Indian Constitution as an especially backward set of groups eligible for affirmative action policies in government jobs, educational and representative institutions. In Uttar Pradesh, the Scheduled Castes constitute 21% of the population; in Punjab, the Scheduled Castes constitute 28.3% of the population; and in Karnataka, Scheduled Castes constitute 16.4% of the population.

The multi-ethnic Congress party, has, since the days of the Indian nationalist movement, been the principal repository of Scheduled Caste votes across India. The BSP is a challenger ethnic party that was founded in 1984 and attempts to mobilize India’s Scheduled Castes and

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term Scheduled Caste here since it is the most widely used form of self-identification among my respondents. However, many of those classified as Scheduled Caste also identify themselves as “Dalits.” A third term used in the past to describe those classified as Scheduled Caste is “Harijan.” The term Harijan, which means “children of God,” was coined by Gandhi to refer to untouchables and is now widely perceived as patronizing. I do not use the term Harijan here except when quoting directly from earlier studies which use the term.

<sup>11</sup> These and all other figures on population percentages are from the Census of India 1991.

other minorities into a cohesive political community against Hindu upper castes.<sup>12</sup> The relative performance of both parties among Scheduled Castes across Indian states depends upon the degree of representation which they are able to offer Scheduled Caste elites.<sup>13</sup>

In the state of Karnataka, Congress successfully incorporated Scheduled Caste elites in positions of power. However, in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab it did not. As a consequence, its electoral base has been eroded by the BSP in both these states. The BSP, meanwhile, has not been able to incorporate elites equally from all caste categories among the Scheduled Castes denied representation by the Congress. In each state, the BSP was dominated initially by elites from the most literate caste category among the Scheduled Castes. Except in Uttar Pradesh, however, it has subsequently been unable to expand to incorporate other elites. Even in Uttar Pradesh, elites from most caste categories among the Scheduled Castes have an unstable presence in the BSP, waning and waxing over time. Consequently, the BSP has attracted voter support only from some Scheduled caste categories and not others.

This section raises and answers four interrelated questions: 1. Why did Congress incorporate Scheduled Caste elites into its organization and governments to a greater degree in Karnataka than in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab 2. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, why did it not incorporate these elites even after the emergence of the BSP as a competitive threat? 3. Why did the BSP, avowedly a Scheduled caste party, not incorporate Scheduled Caste elites from a wider spectrum of caste categories in any of the three states at its point of entry? And why did it not subsequently move to incorporate these elites in order to improve its electoral performance?

I will show here that the variation in elite incorporation in both parties across Indian states is explained by differences in their internal organizational structure. The incorporation of Scheduled Caste elites by the Congress Party in Karnataka took place during a time period when it had a competitive organizational structure. Its switch to a centralized structure following 1972, however, rendered it closed to rising Scheduled Caste elites in other states. The BSP, meanwhile has had a centralized organizational structure since its inception. In each state, therefore, it has found it extraordinarily difficult to offer representation even to elites from among the Scheduled Castes. In Uttar Pradesh, its high probability of winning has allowed it to temporarily house elites from different categories under the same umbrella. In Punjab and Karnataka, however, its low prospects of winning, combined with its centralized organizational structure have rendered it closed to new elites.

### **IIIa Explaining the Differential Incorporation of Scheduled Caste Elites in Congress**

Founded in 1885, the Indian National Congress exhibits significant temporal variation in the rules for intra-party advancement. (See appendix for a more detailed description of the periodic changes in the rules for intra-party advancement from 1885 until 1920). Between 1885 and 1899, it existed as an amorphous movement rather than as a political party. The first attempt at institutionalization came in 1899, with the first party constitution. The de facto restrictions on membership and the narrow scope of intra-party elections permitted in the 1899 Constitution, however, rendered it only imperfectly competitive. The Constitution of 1908 introduced an open membership policy and broadened the scope of intra-party elections. However, the elective principle was still not fully implemented within the Congress organization in this period. The introduction of the competitive system within the Congress organization can be dated precisely to

<sup>12</sup> Since 1996, however, the BSP has attempted to offer representation also to upper castes in the state of Uttar Pradesh. This is a major departure from its earlier strategy, and still not implemented in other states.

<sup>13</sup> Chandra (2000a), (2000b), (1999)

the 1920 Constitution, which made intra-party elections the sole method of obtaining influential positions within the party. Competitive rules were in effect in the Congress party from 1920 until 1972, when Indira Gandhi cancelled the system of intra-party elections. Following 1972, therefore, Congress was transformed into a centralized organization where all important party posts were allotted through the central leadership. In 1997, Congress reinstated the rule of organizational elections in response to a directive from the Election Commission of India, and in 1998, it announced that it would reserve 53 percent of all party posts for Scheduled Castes, Backward Castes, women and minorities.<sup>14</sup> The extent to which these changes have been implemented, however, is still uncertain.

In 1920, the Hindu upper castes constituted 73% of the All India Congress Committee.<sup>15</sup> The dominance of Hindu upper castes in the national organization was duplicated in the Congress party units at the state level as well. Hindu upper castes, therefore, correspond to ethnic category A in the model above for party units in all states. The category B differed from state to state. In Karnataka, as in most of the south, category B comprised of non “Non-Brahmins.”<sup>16</sup> In Punjab, category B comprised of Sikhs.<sup>17</sup> In Uttar Pradesh, category B comprised a collection of cultivating castes alternately labelled as “kisans” (farmers) or the “Other Backward Castes”.<sup>18</sup> The choice of each of these labels, Non-Brahmin, Sikh and Backward Caste (or kisan), represents, of course, a subjective choice. In each case, the label captured the largest coalition than any other available label and so increased the bargaining power of elites vis a vis faction leaders in the Congress Party. The Non-Brahmin label in Karnataka included, in its broadest interpretation, the majority of Hindu castes, the untouchables, Muslims and Christians. In practice, however, elites mobilizing as non-Brahmins came principally from elite subcastes within the Vokkaliga and Lingayat caste categories, which constituted a much narrower slice of the population. By labeling themselves as non-Brahmins, however, they were able to portray themselves as brokers of the majority of the population. Similarly, Sikhs in Punjab came mainly from the Jat caste. By choosing the label of Sikh rather than Jat, however, they identified themselves as representatives of a broader set of interests. By the same logic, “backward” caste elites in Uttar Pradesh came mainly from the relatively prosperous Jat and Bhumihar castes. These two castes, however, constituted less than 2% of the population. The use of the broader label of “backward castes” allowed them to present themselves as brokers of the interests of more than half the population of Uttar Pradesh.

Between 1920 and 1972, when the competitive rules were in effect, Congress demonstrated a remarkable capacity to absorb elites from rising ethnic groups while keeping dominant elites acquiescent. Throughout this period, the party elections were hotly contested, and evidence of the link between competitive elections and elite incorporation is contained in the fact that each intra-party election was accompanied by a surge in the party membership rolls.<sup>19</sup> In Karnataka, non-Brahmin elites initially organized separately through the Non-Brahmin Federation, a separate political party. By the late 1930s, however, the non-Brahmin federation had merged into the Congress.<sup>20</sup> In Punjab, Sikhs initially organized separately in the Akali Dal. By 1937, however, there was a one-way exodus of Sikhs from the Akali Dal to the Congress

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<sup>14</sup> *Economic Times*, December 19 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Krishna (1966), 422. Estimated with unknowns removed.

<sup>16</sup> Manor (1977a), Irschick (1969), Weiner (1967).

<sup>17</sup> Nayar (1966)

<sup>18</sup> See Jaffrelot (2000) for a description of the use of the two alternative labels by Charan Singh and the Socialist Party in the 1950s.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolph (1955), Brass (1965), Weiner (1967).

<sup>20</sup> Manor, (1977a), 98.

party. In Uttar Pradesh, cultivating castes did not organize separately initially but were incorporated into the Congress party in the early 1920s.<sup>21</sup>

The degree to which the new entrants displaced old factional leaders within the Congress party differed across the three states depending upon the size of the modernizing pool in each of the three categories. In Karnataka, non-Brahmins effectively eclipsed the Brahmin leadership of the Congress within a brief period. As Manor describes it: "Some tensions were bound to develop and a few men on both sides withdrew from the organization. But in the light of past antipathies, it is surprising how few deserters there were. When non-Brahmins took control of most district level units of the Congress and used their power in the district committees to achieve dominance in the Working Committee, most Brahmins accepted this."<sup>22</sup> In Punjab, Jat Sikhs did not displace Hindu leaders entirely, but gained the upper hand over the course of two decades. In Uttar Pradesh, however, the Jat leader Charan Singh could not similarly displace the upper caste leadership of the Congress since individuals from his target category simply not have enough educated elites in the party. Even as late as 1962, according to Ralph Meyer's study of elite profiles in Uttar Pradesh, the cultivating castes constituted only 11% of all Congress candidates and only 9% of Congress assembly members.<sup>23</sup>

Scheduled Castes, however, were last in line to be incorporated through the process of intra-party competition. This is because the movement of any ethnic category into the party and then up the party hierarchy depends on the size of its educated middle class. The larger this middle class, the greater the ability of elites from this category to displace elites from other ethnic categories higher in the party hierarchy. The emergence of such a middle class among Scheduled Castes, however, was guaranteed to be a slow process. Scheduled Castes at independence had the lowest literacy rates of all ethnic categories. In addition, the majority of Scheduled Castes were in labour and service occupations, dependent upon upper castes for a living. A large middle class could be expected to emerge among Scheduled Castes only after the government's affirmative action policies in higher education and government employment, introduced by the Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, had had time to take effect. Assuming that the first wave of beneficiaries of the affirmative action policies would consist of those who entered the educational system after 1950, we should expect the first push for entry into the political system from Scheduled Castes only in the 1970s, when this generation came of age. And the displacement of upper caste elites in the Congress party by a push from Scheduled Caste elites below should have occurred only subsequently, when this first wave of elites had amassed a sufficient following to push their way up the factional ladders.

Consistent with the expectations above, Scheduled Caste elites initially occupied a peripheral position in the party organization in all three states in the first two decades after independence. At independence in 1950, Scheduled Castes were given proportional representation in all state legislatures and in the central government. In all three states, therefore, there was a fixed number of legislators belonging to the Scheduled Castes. However, without a larger Scheduled Caste following to support them, these legislators were relatively unimportant figures within the party organization in all three states.

Data on the degree to which Scheduled Castes were represented in the party organization that permits a study of temporal and spatial variation in across the three states is practically

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<sup>21</sup> Brass (1965). However, backward caste elites exited the party in 1967 with the defection of Charan Singh.

<sup>22</sup> Manor (1977a) 115.

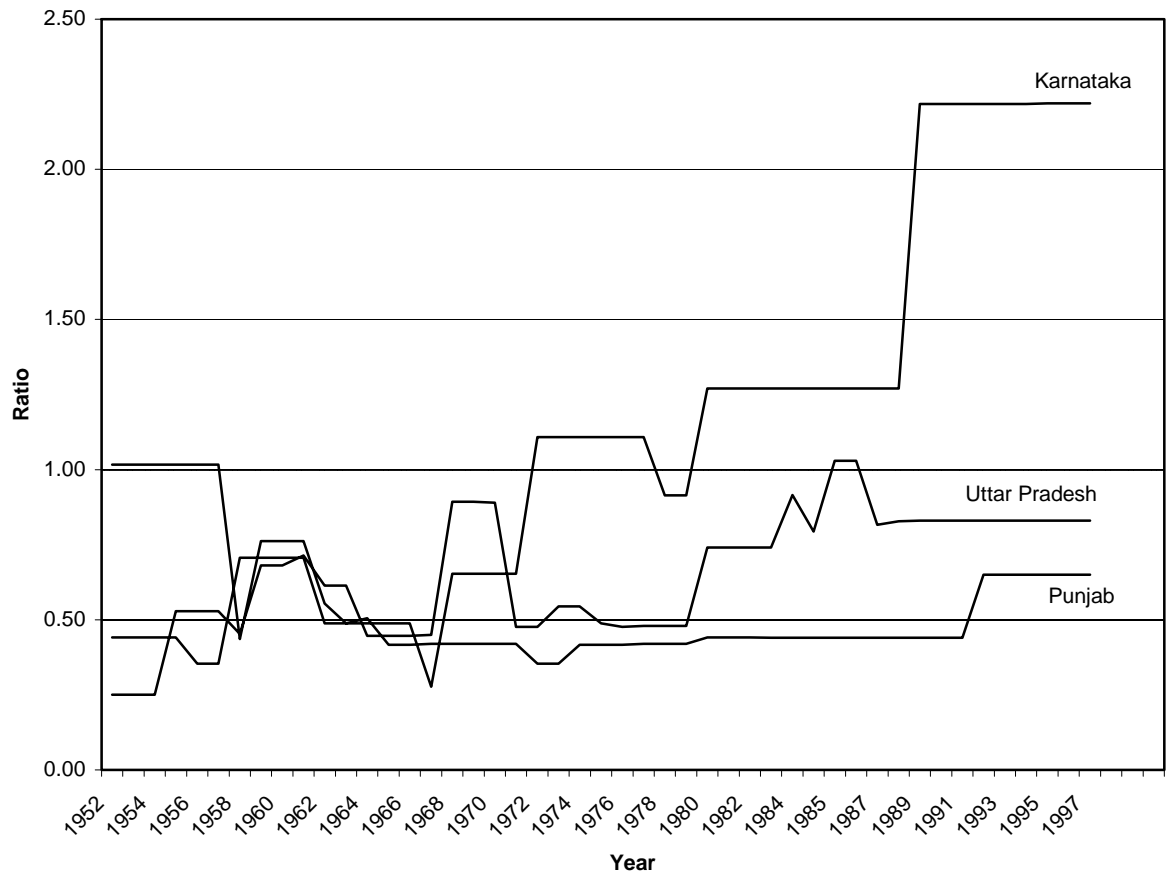
<sup>23</sup> Meyer (1969), Table V-5, p 190.

impossible to obtain. I rely, therefore, on a second best alternative: Data describing the representation of Scheduled Castes in Congress cabinets between 1951 and 1998. My expectation is that the degree of representation given to Scheduled Castes in Congress Cabinets reflects their strength in the party organization. Where available, I supplement this data from local level studies of political leadership in each of these states. The chart below summarizes the ratio of the percentage of Scheduled Castes in Congress cabinets to the ratio of Scheduled Castes in the population of each state between 1951 and 1997.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The chart is constructed by compiling lists of all Scheduled Caste Legislators from 1951-1998 and matching them with lists of the Cabinets in each state. The lists of Scheduled Caste legislators were compiled from the election results published by the Election Commission of India. The lists of the Cabinets for each state from 1951 to 1976 were found in the reference manual *India*; from 1976 to 1996 from newspaper reports in the *Deccan Herald*, the *Tribune*, and the *Times of India*; and from 1996 onwards by lists obtained from the party offices in each state. The chart above depicts Scheduled Caste representation in Congress cabinets in a continuous line. For those years in which Congress was not in government, I enter the ratio of Scheduled Caste representation to population in the previous cabinet. The chart should not be read, therefore, as a description of Scheduled Caste representation in all cabinets in each state, but simply as a description of Scheduled Caste representation in the Congress. The representation of Scheduled Castes in the opposition cabinets may or may not correspond to Scheduled Caste representation in Congress.

**Ratio of SC Percentage in Congress Cabinets  
to SC Percentage in Population 1952-1997**



As the chart indicates, Scheduled Caste elites were equally underrepresented in relation to their population (ratio < 1) in each of the three states for the first two decades after independence (1950-1970). Karnataka's first cabinet (1953-58), in which the ratio of SCs in the Cabinet to Scheduled Castes in the population was close to one, was an initial exception to this rule. However, following 1958, Karnataka too fell in with the general pattern. Independently conducted studies at both the district and the village level in Karnataka confirm the picture revealed through an analysis of the state level cabinet. In Weiner's study of Belgaum district (in north-western Karnataka), conducted between 1961 and 1963, for example, Scheduled Castes were hardly to be found in the local Congress organization. Weiner's caste profile of 115 party officers in Belgaum, including members of the DCC Executive, MLAs and MLCs, Mandal Presidents and, Taluka Presidents, reveals only four Scheduled Caste officers.<sup>25</sup> The relative absence of Scheduled Castes from political leadership, not only in Congress but also in general, is echoed in anthropological studies of village politics across the state in the 50s.<sup>26</sup> It is confirmed

<sup>25</sup> Weiner (1967), 273.

<sup>26</sup> Beals in Tinker (1959), 428; Harper and Harper in Tinker (1959); McCormack in Tinker (1959).

also in broader assessments of state level politics, which confirm that the factional competition in Congress during this period was dominated by Vokkaligas and Lingayats, with Backward Castes and Scheduled Caste elites occupying positions on the periphery.<sup>27</sup>

In Uttar Pradesh, Scheduled Castes were similarly underrepresented in the Cabinet in relation to their population between 1950 and 1970. One Scheduled Caste elite, Girdhari Lal, held the important Public Works Cabinet portfolio for most of the 1951 to 1971 period. There is no evidence, however, that Girdhari Lal wielded any political influence in the Congress party.<sup>28</sup> Within the party organization, Scheduled Caste elites existed on the outer peripheries of the factional system. The two main factions in the Uttar Pradesh Congress Party unit were dominated mainly by members of the upper castes. In 1960, there was not a single Scheduled Caste elite to be found in the first faction (composed of 13 leaders), while the second faction included only 2 Scheduled Castes among 19 leaders.<sup>29</sup> Finally, in Paul Brass's study of factionalism in five districts across the state in 1965 (Meerut, Aligarh, Gonda, Deoria, Kanpur), Scheduled Caste elites are conspicuous by their absence.

In Punjab, Scheduled Caste elites occupied a similarly subordinate role in Congress party organization and governments, inspite of their numerical strength in Punjab's population and the degree to which Congress depended upon Scheduled Caste votes for victory. Scheduled Castes elites were consistently underrepresented in the Cabinet and occupied relatively unimportant posts (Labour, Stationery, and Animal Husbandry). The most important Cabinet post occupied by a Scheduled Caste Minister was the Agriculture portfolio, in the Kairon and Zail Singh cabinets in 1958, 1962 and 1972. There are few district level studies of the Congress organization in Punjab during this period. However, Baldev Raj Nayar's influential study of Punjab politics, published in 1966, confirms the general picture of underrepresentation of Scheduled Castes in the Punjab Congress. Nayar's detailed description of the men staffing Congress party organization and governments reveals only Hindu upper caste and Jat Sikh leaders. It is telling that he does not mention a single Scheduled Caste leader of consequence in the Punjab Congress.

In 1972, however, the chart indicates a sharp divergence in the patterns of Scheduled Caste incorporation between the three states. The ratio of Scheduled Caste representation in the Cabinet in Karnataka to the percentage of Scheduled Castes in the population rose above 1 in 1972 and continued to rise. By 1989, Scheduled Castes were the single largest category in the Karnataka Cabinet, and the percentage of Scheduled Castes in the Karnataka cabinet was twice as high as their percentage in the population. The increase in representation, furthermore, was reflected not simply in numbers but also in the portfolios which they were awarded. After 1972, Scheduled Caste elites began to be given key portfolios in the state, which carried with them both prestige and patronage, including Revenue, Education, Finance and Home.<sup>30</sup> The surge in Scheduled Caste representation in Karnataka Cabinets following 1972 is reflected also in local level party leadership, where such data is available. Atul Kohli, returning to Belgaum district in 1986, reports a dramatic change in the power-structure at the local level: where Scheduled Castes had been simply absent from the local level leadership of the party organization in 1961, Kohli found that the leader of one of the two main Congress factions in Belgaum was from the Scheduled Castes.<sup>31</sup> Jalali confirms also the beginnings of a shift in local level power structures in favour of the Scheduled Castes also after 1972. Scheduled Castes, who had no representation

<sup>27</sup> Jalali (1990), Manor (1977b), (1980), (1984).

<sup>28</sup> Meyer (1969), 49.

<sup>29</sup> Brass (1965), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Jalali (1990), Manor (1977b), (1980), (1984).

<sup>31</sup> Kohli, (1991) 113.

in Taluka Development Boards in 1960 and 1968, managed to get 4 Taluk board presidents elected in 1978.<sup>32</sup>

In Uttar Pradesh, Scheduled Castes did not experience a similar ascent within the party organization. The ratio of Scheduled Caste representation in Congress cabinets remained relatively constant between 1972 and 1980. From 1980 onwards, we see a gradual increase in Scheduled Caste representation in the Cabinet. Indeed, this increase in representation was paralleled by the ceding of some key posts to Scheduled Caste elites in party and government: From 1980 to 1988, the key revenue portfolio was held by a Scheduled Caste Minister. In addition, a Scheduled Caste elite was appointed to the position of Congress Party President in UP for the first time in 1972, and held the post intermittently between 1972 and 1998.<sup>33</sup> However, the ceding of these key posts to Scheduled Caste elites indicates the singling out of individual Scheduled Castes by Indira Gandhi rather than the ascent of Scheduled Castes as a whole within the party organization. Unlike Karnataka, none of these Scheduled Caste elites had any independent following within the Congress party.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence of any shift in the power balance at the local level, where upper castes continued to dominate the Congress organization. In 1982, when Paul Brass revisited two of the five districts that he had studied in the 1960s, he found the dominant proprietary castes (Brahmins, Bhumihars) still firmly in control of the local bases of power.<sup>35</sup> And in my own fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh in 1996 and 1998, I found Scheduled Castes elites still excluded from the Congress party organization. In 1998, of the 114 presidents of the District and Town Congress committees for which data was available, 61% (70) were from the upper castes, while 3% (3) were from the Scheduled Castes.<sup>36</sup>

In Punjab, Scheduled Caste elites were the least well represented in the party organization and governments of the three states under study. As the chart indicates, Scheduled Caste elites were consistently underrepresented in Punjab cabinets in relation to their population in the state. It is only as late as the Congress cabinet in 1992 –7 that we witness an increase in Scheduled Caste representation. Even in 1992, however, Scheduled Castes continued to be given unimportant posts in the Cabinet. Of the seven posts in the Punjab Council of Ministers in 1997, Scheduled Caste elites shared between them the relatively unimportant posts of Tourism, Food and Supplies and Scheduled Caste welfare. The one important of the portfolios held by a Scheduled Caste Minister, the Public Works Portfolio, was divided between the Scheduled Caste minister and an upper caste Sikh. In addition, Scheduled Caste elites remained almost totally excluded from power in the party organization at the local level. Of the 19 District Congress Committee Presidents in Punjab in 1997, only one belonged to the Scheduled Castes.<sup>37</sup>

For most observers of Indian politics, the first explanation that leaps to mind for the earlier ascent of Scheduled Castes in Karnataka than in the other two states is the history of caste based mobilization in the colonial period. According to this argument, the longer history of caste based mobilization pushed lower caste elites in the South into politics earlier than their counterparts in the north, giving them a head start in the ascent up the Congress party

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<sup>32</sup> Jalali, (1990), 132.

<sup>33</sup> Coded through interviews at the Congress Party office in Lucknow in December 1997, on the basis of a list of Party Presidents also provided by the party office.

<sup>34</sup> Based on interviews with Congressmen in Uttar Pradesh from both Scheduled Castes and upper castes in November-December 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Brass (1984).

<sup>36</sup> Coded through interviews at the Congress Party office in Lucknow in December 1997, on the basis of a list of District Presidents also provided by the party office.

<sup>37</sup> Coded through interviews at the Congress Party office in Chandigarh in December 1997, on the basis of a list of District Presidents also provided by the party office.

organization and governments. I found this view to be commonly held not just among scholars but among lower caste politicians themselves.<sup>38</sup> Although this was my own working hypothesis, the *timing* of Scheduled Caste ascent within the Congress party organization in Karnataka revealed it to be a mistaken one. If caste mobilization in the colonial period had been the driving force between the greater representation given to Scheduled Caste elites in Karnataka, we should have seen the patterns of representation between the three states diverge from the beginning of the post-colonial period. However, as the chart indicates, the surge in representation of Scheduled Castes in Karnataka begins only in 1972. The explanation for this surge, therefore, cannot be located in the distant colonial past, but must be found in post-colonial developments specific to the period.

I argue here that the headstart enjoyed by Scheduled Caste elites in Karnataka is a consequence of the Congress Party split in 1969 into the Congress I, led by Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress O, led by the “Syndicate” (a coalition of regional bosses).<sup>39</sup> The split manifested itself differently across the three states. The leader of the Syndicate, P. Nijalingappa, was from Karnataka, and obtained the support of the majority of party MLAs, MPs and party office bearers in the state.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the split resulted in the en bloc defection of the entire front line of the Congress party leadership in Karnataka to the Congress (O). In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, however, the state party units were firm backers of Mrs. Gandhi.<sup>41</sup> A minority faction in Uttar Pradesh, led by Chandra Bhanu Gupta, left the Congress I after the split. However, in both Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, the split left the party units in these states relatively intact.

The differential impact of the split had a critical impact on patterns of representation of Scheduled Castes in the state Congress units in each of the states. In Karnataka, the en bloc defection of the Congress leadership to the Congress (O) left a yawning leadership vacuum in the Congress I which sucked Scheduled Caste elites upwards before they had acquired the strength to mount an effective leadership challenge themselves. When elections were held in Karnataka in 1972, they were in position to capture some of the plum portfolios. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, however, the split left no such leadership vacuum, and Scheduled Caste elites, not yet strong enough to displace dominant elites from within, remained in a subordinate position. Even in Karnataka, it is important to note, the Scheduled Castes were not the main beneficiaries of the Congress split. Rather, it was sections of the backward castes, placed higher in the Congress hierarchy at the time of the split, who benefited most. However, Scheduled Caste elites were able to capture for themselves a second place in the organization, which they then used to pull themselves and their followers up further.

Significantly, the split resulted in the ascent of Scheduled Caste elites in the organization only because it took place in a competitive organization. The competitive organizational structure in the period pre-dating the split had raised Scheduled Caste elites to second and third rungs of leadership within the Congress party organization and so placed them in a position to benefit from the split once it took place. In a centralized system, they would not have risen up the leadership ladder and so would not have been in a position to benefit from the split. Splits within a centralized party, in general, should reproduce the existing leadership profile. The frequent

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<sup>38</sup> Interviews in Karnataka, March-April 1997.

<sup>39</sup> For reporting on the split, see *Times of India*, November 12 1969 and November 23 1969. Also see Zaidi (1972)

<sup>40</sup> For multiple assessments of the strength of “Syndicate” support in Karnataka (then known as Mysore), see *Times of India*, October 10, 11, 16, 25 and November 23 and 28, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> For assessments of the strength of support for Mrs. Gandhi in these states, see also *Times of India*, October 10, 11, 16, 25 and November 23 and 28, 1969.

splits in the centralized Lok Dal in Uttar Pradesh are a case in point. A centralized party led initially by a charismatic leader (Charan Singh) the Lok Dal lacked the mechanism to raise new elites within the ranks of the party organization. As a consequence, the ethnic composition of the leadership layer in the political parties that have emerged from the Lok Dal has been relatively stagnant. Although the party has repeatedly split, recombined and split again since 1980, the intermediate and backward castes have continued to dominate the leadership layer in each new party fragment. We simply do not see the rise of Scheduled Caste elites in either the Janata Dal or the Samajwadi Party, the two significant parties in Uttar Pradesh that trace their parentage to the Lok Dal.

The 1969 split gave Scheduled Caste elites in Karnataka only a headstart in the race for power within the Congress organization over those in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, inspite of low literacy rates and political power. Had the process of intra-party competition within Congress continued, we should have expected Scheduled Caste elites in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab to catch up with those in Karnataka over time. In particular, we should have expected Scheduled Castes in Punjab, with the largest numbers and the fastest rising literacy rates among Scheduled Castes in the country, to soon have produced elites capable of mounting a challenge to the factional leadership from within.

In 1972, however, Mrs. Gandhi suspended the system of intra-party elections indefinitely. The suspension of the intra-party elections arrested the process of continuous elite incorporation and froze the leadership layer in each of the three states. At the point at which the elections were suspended, Scheduled Caste elites in Karnataka, pulled up during the Congress party split, had already come to occupy important positions in the Congress government and organization. This presented the BSP with a high threshold to cross when it emerged a decade later. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, by the time a Scheduled Caste middle class large enough to challenge the ethnic categories in control of the Congress Party emerged, the gates of the Congress Party leadership had been closed. Consequently, the Scheduled Caste middle class in these states turned to the BSP instead.

So far, I have explained why Congress had incorporated Scheduled Caste elites to a greater degree in Karnataka than in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh prior to the emergence of the BSP. Why, however, did it not react to the competitive threat posed by the BSP by incorporating Scheduled Caste elites subsequently? The answer becomes clear given the framework proposed so far. As I argued earlier, the incorporation of new elites into the party poses a collective action problem which Congress was able to solve only through the introduction of the competitive rules described in Section II. These rules worked to bring about elite incorporation into the Congress independently of electoral incentives. As long as they were in existence, Congress absorbed new elites regardless of whether or not such absorption was electorally profitable. By the same coin, elite incorporation did not take place in the absence of these rules, notwithstanding the electoral incentives. While individual Congressmen in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh all saw the advantage of incorporating Scheduled Caste elites into the organization as a whole, each had an incentive to individually resist the entry of these elites into his own party unit in the hope that some other elite would pay the price of such incorporation. Had the Congress been in a winning position, it is conceivable that a centralized leadership could have solved the collective action problem at any one point in time by offering selective benefits to Congressmen who were most threatened by the incorporation of new elites. As a losing party at both the state and the central level, however, Congress did not possess the resources to offer these benefits. It was, thus, embroiled in a catch-22 situation: it needed to incorporate Scheduled Caste elites in order to win the election, but unless it won the election, it did not have the capacity to incorporate these elites.

Furthermore, it was not only old elites who were resistant. New Scheduled Caste elites were also reluctant to enter the Congress party. Recalling Equation I, it is clear that once the Congress organization became centralized, the expected probability of obtaining office through the Congress party was close to zero for these elites. As a result, they remained indifferent towards politics as long as there was no alternative to the Congress party; and once a rival party emerged in the form of the BSP, the threshold that it needed to cross in order to attract these elites was extremely low. Even with a negligible chance of winning, it could promise these elites a higher expected probability of winning office by opening the doors of its organization wide.

In the remainder of this section, I explain why the BSP was itself constrained in its ability to incorporate all those elites excluded by the Congress. Before moving to the BSP, however, one important objection to the argument above remains to be addressed. The argument here has laid the entire explanatory burden on the organizational structure of the Congress Party. In a recent study of India's party system, however, Pradeep Chibber argues that "contrary to most perceptions, there is little evidence that the Congress Party had a well developed organization, especially beyond the state level."<sup>42</sup> Chibber's argument challenges the reigning consensus in the scholarship on the Congress party: every major study on Congress party describes a well-established party organization before 1972 and an organization in decline thereafter.<sup>43</sup> If he is right, then the explanation for successful elite incorporation obviously cannot be explained by organizational variables of the party and must lie elsewhere.

The weight of the evidence, however, is insufficient to displace the consensus which he challenges. Chibber bases his counter-argument upon two separate pieces of evidence: 1) survey data on the views of party activists between 1967 and 1993, where Congress elites at both time periods described their organization as "weak," cited a lack of communication between various levels of the organization; and exhibited lower levels of party identification. 2) Quotations from Congress intra-party documents, which indicate that the Congress was not well established in princely India in 1936, and even in the provinces of British India, many districts were without a Congress organization in 1955.

The survey data on which Chibber bases his argument provides at best a measure of elite perceptions of effectiveness of the Congress organization in performing unnamed functions. It provides no information about the extent to which the organization existed across Indian states. Secondly, the evidence from intra-party documents about the weakness of the Congress organization in princely India in the 30s is compatible with the conventional wisdom. This does not preclude, however, the spread of the Congress organization in princely India in subsequent years. Much of the organizational expansion of Congress in princely India began precisely in this period. Manor's study of Mysore state, for example, describes the setting up of a Congress organization in Mysore state in 1937.<sup>44</sup> Third, even in British India, studies of the Congress organization all accept that the Congress party organization absent or weak in some districts. They argue simply that the majority of districts across India had functioning Congress organizations, an argument that Chibber's evidence does not contradict. A significant body of evidence documents the precise extent of the Congress party organization from the 1920s onwards. Macro-level evidence comes from aggregate data collected by Gopal Krishna in 1921-22, showing that District Congress Committees existed in 213 of the 220 districts of British India (Krishna makes no such claims about princely India).<sup>45</sup> Micro-level evidence comes

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<sup>42</sup> Chibber (1999), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Rudolph (1955), Weiner (1967), Kothari (1964), Manor (1988), Brass (1965)

<sup>44</sup> Manor (1977)

<sup>45</sup> Krishna (1966), 415-417.

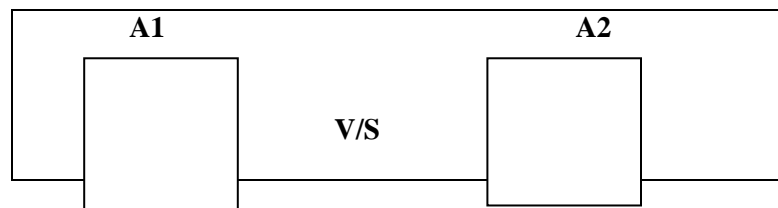
from district level studies conducted by Weiner and Brass, among others, in Gujarat, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, all of which describe functioning Congress units in each of the districts studied.<sup>46</sup> In the absence of convincing evidence to the contrary, therefore, there is no reason to reject the consensus that a functioning Congress Party organization existed since the 1920s, although the organization may certainly have been established more slowly in some provinces than others.

### IIIb Explaining the Differential Incorporation of Scheduled Caste Elites in the BSP

As a political party that targets Scheduled Castes, we would have expected that the doors of the BSP's organization would be wide open to Scheduled Caste elites. Furthermore, because the BSP leadership deliberately attempts to mobilize voters by promising representation to each caste from among Scheduled Castes, we would have expected the BSP's own leadership profile to be representative of elites from across the spectrum of Scheduled Castes. Contrary to expectations, however, the organizational structure of the BSP renders it deeply resistant to the incorporation of new entrants. The BSP has a centralized organization, in which the channels for advancement make elite incorporation a zero sum game. The induction of new entrants takes place only through the displacement of old ones. Displacement within the BSP's organizational structure, furthermore, carries with it the high risk of being permanent. The incentive structure for elites within the party, therefore, runs directly counter to the electoral incentives facing the party as a whole. Even though the BSP would benefit from incorporating new elites, any individual elite within the BSP sees the induction of new entrants as a life and death struggle and has a strong incentive to resist such entry.

The initial core of the BSP in every state came from Scheduled Caste government employees. BSP leader Kanshi Ram himself was a government employee before embarking on his political career. Because government employment was typically captured by the most literate castes among Scheduled Castes, this meant that the BSP, like the Congress, was also dominated initially by the early modernizers among its target ethnic categories. The following diagram describes the composition of the BSP at this initial stage. At this stage, it is dominated by category A and competition within the party takes place between factions from category A. In the state of Karnataka, category A corresponds to the Holeyas; in Punjab category A corresponds to the "Chamars" where the label Chamar includes Adharmis and Ramdassias; and in Uttar Pradesh, category A also corresponds to Chamars, where the label "Chamar" includes the Jatav, Kureel, Dhusia, Jhusia and Kori caste categories.<sup>47</sup>

#### STAGE I: PARTY DOMINATED BY ELITES FROM GROUP A



**Group B**

**Group C**

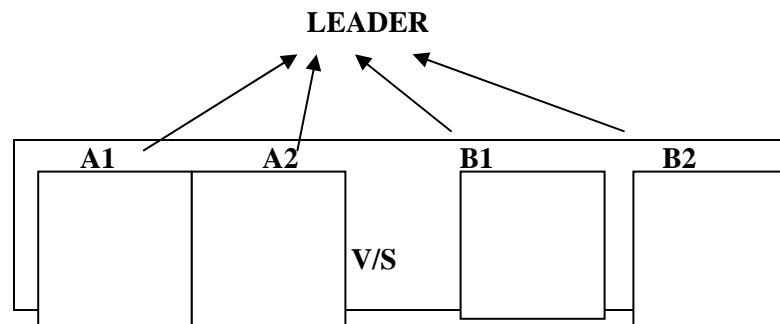
<sup>46</sup> Weiner (1967), Brass (1965).

<sup>47</sup> The census groups all these categories, except, Kori, together under the same label.

Since its inception in 1984, all party posts in the BSP have been allotted by Kanshi Ram and his close associates.<sup>48</sup> Kanshi Ram allots party posts and tickets through a combination of predictable and arbitrary criteria. The predictable criterion (I will return to the arbitrary criteria later in this section) consists of allotting posts on the basis of a system of proportional representation: Kanshi Ram awards posts to “representatives” of each caste category, paying special attention to those from numerically weak castes who might not otherwise obtain representation.<sup>49</sup> In choosing between aspirants from the same category, he allots posts to individuals based on the degree of support they can mobilize within their own ethnic category. The experience of Ram Prakash,<sup>50</sup> one aspirant for a ticket from the BSP is typical. Ram Prakash’s first step was to obtain access to Kanshi Ram. Kanshi Ram asked Prakash to contact him again after “building his base” : i.e. demonstrating support among members of his own caste category, the Dhobi caste among Scheduled Castes. Prakash consequently began attempting to activate long dormant caste networks, visiting settlements where members of the Dhobi caste lived, contacting representatives of caste associations, and calling public meetings for his castemen. At the same time, however, Kanshi Ram gives no incentives to aspirants for posts to mobilize cross-ethnic support. He allots posts to elites from each ethnic category as representatives of their “ethnic block” and encourages them to mobilize only others of their own kind. Ram Prakash therefore had no incentive to seek out Scheduled Caste other than Dhobis.

Whereas Congress incorporated new elites through the expanding vertical linkages within existing factions, the BSP relies on lateral expansion through the multiplication of mono-ethnic factions. This is represented in the diagram below.

**STAGE II: INCORPORATION OF NEW ELITES THROUGH THE MULTIPLICATION OF MONO-ETHNIC FACTIONS**



**Group C**

The Congress’ system of integrating new elites through vertical linkages in the existing factional system effectively assigns each new elite a place in a queue for leadership within each faction, and produces a system of alternation between competing factions. In this system, new

<sup>48</sup> In 1997, a directive from the Indian Election Commission has forced the BSP to introduce intra-party elections. This has so far not been implemented effectively. If implemented, as in the case of the Congress, this directive should have the effect of making the party organization more incorporative.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with BSP activist, New Delhi, December 1996.

<sup>50</sup> The name and caste of the respondent have been changed. Based on repeated interviews with the respondent, as well as attendance at events organized to activate these networks, between 1996 and 1998.

elites were accommodated by distributing and subdividing probabilities of obtaining posts, rather than expanding the number of posts itself. The BSP organization, however, has no means of assigning probabilities to new elites through a queue system or through alternation. New elites are either brought in through the actual provision of new posts or not at all.

At first glance, the system of representation to each ethnic category seems an appropriate strategy for ensuring an incorporative organization. Upon closer analysis, the limitations of this strategy beyond the early stages of party building quickly become apparent. In the early stages of party building, new elites can be brought in without displacing old ones by the creation of new posts within the emerging party. In one district, for example, the district and block presidents of the BSP came mostly from the Chamar caste. Kanshi Ram inducted a new entrant, from the Saini (Backward) caste not by displacing his Chamar partymen from their positions but by creating a new post: “Youth President of the BSP” for the new entrant. Older elites in the party comforted themselves by pointing out that the post of “Youth President” existed only on paper and did not carry any real power within the party. The new entrant, however, saw his post as a sign of recognition from the party president and a foundation on which to build a following. Kanshi Ram employed similar devices at the state level, through the creation of multiple posts -- “State President”, “State Convenor” and “State Coordinator” – which avoided a power struggle by giving roughly equivalent positions to a number of elites simultaneously. Because the number of offices within a party organization cannot expand infinitely, however, sooner or later this method of incorporation runs into a zero sum situation, where the induction of any new elites into positions of influence within the party organization necessarily entails the displacement of old ones.

A second mechanism exacerbates the problem of elite incorporation in the BSP even further. Because Kanshi Ram promises representation to elites on the basis of demonstrated support among their “own” ethnic category, each of these elites has an incentive to beat the competition by further subdividing the category itself. Take for example competing elites from group A: A 1, who commands the support of 60% of the As and A 2, who commands the support of 40%. As the leader of 40% of the As, A 2 would lose out to A 1. However, if he is able to successfully redefine his 40% as an ethnic category in itself, he then redefines himself as the leader of his own ethnic category rather than a faction within a larger category, and therefore a viable candidate for induction into the party leadership. The pressure for posts within the BSP, therefore, comes not only from the induction of new mono-ethnic factions, but from the incentives for the repeated “involution “ of existing factions through the activation of sub-ethnic differences by losing elites.

The system of centralized allotment of at least one post for each category, even if consistently applied, would result in a closed party organization once the space for new posts was exhausted. However, an additional difficulty is introduced by the fact that it is mixed in with a set of unpredictable criteria. Kanshi Ram allots posts based on considerations of personal loyalty, of undercutting rivals, and to reward individuals for services rendered in other areas. Had caste support been the only criteria for obtaining a post within the party, threatened elites might have been able to attach some probability to their chances of reinstatement. Had the probability of reinstatement been high enough, it is conceivable that they would have relinquished their posts in the short term. However, the mixing of this criterion with arbitrary elements means that dominant elites in the BSP face a high degree of uncertainty in relinquishing their posts. As a result, they are likely to cling to their positions and resist the incorporation of new elites with even greater tenacity.

In order for the BSP to incorporate new elites, therefore, it needs to promise an abnormally high probability of winning the election. A high probability of winning enables it to induct new entrants in two ways: First, it increases the expected probability of obtaining office through the BSP by offsetting the low probability of ascent up the party ranks for new elites. Secondly, it enables the BSP leadership to convert a zero sum game into a positive sum one, by incorporating new elites through the creation of new positions without displacing old elites from theirs. The BSP, therefore, has since its inception been in the Catch 22 position faced by Congress after 1972: It must incorporate new Scheduled Caste elites in order to win, but it cannot incorporate these elites unless it wins.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, the BSP was able to break out of this catch-22 situation through a series of alliances, which allowed it to “magnify” its support base and obtain control of government. In 1984, the majority of positions in the BSP party organization and candidate lists were occupied by Chamars. The support of Chamars is not sufficient to win the party an election in any constituency in Uttar Pradesh. However, unless it won elections, it could not incorporate elites from other categories. In 1993, the BSP broke out of the catch-22 situation by forming an alliance with the Samajwadi Party. The alliance, taking advantage of the winner take all electoral system, “magnified” the support bases of each of the two parties, catapulting them into control of government. Once in control of government, the party had an expanded pool of offices to distribute and so attract new elites while keeping older ones acquiescent. Between 1993 and 1997, the BSP leveraged itself into a governing position three times in spite of its limited support base (as a coalition partner in the 1993 government with the Samajwadi Party; as a minority government supported from the outside by the BJP in 1995; and as a coalition government with the BJP in 1997). Each term in government gave it new resources with which to maintain the allegiance of elites in fierce competition for offices.

Even with control of government, however, the BSP’s hold on these elites is tenuous. In the absence of an organizational structure that permits elites from different ethnic categories to coexist and alternate, the BSP is in imminent danger of disintegration even when it wins and especially when it loses. Even as a party in government, the BSP was ridden with frequent defections in Uttar Pradesh, as mono-ethnic factions were periodically elbowed out of the party. Between 1993 and 1996, when it was in government, we witnessed the exit of at least four significant factions: a Muslim faction, a Kurmi faction, a Pasi faction, and even a Chamar faction. The 1996 assembly elections produced a highly uncertain verdict, where all parties were attempting, by orchestrating alliances or inducing defections, to cobble together the numbers to form a government. During the period of uncertainty, the threat of defections of its elites to other parties was so high that the BSP locked up its elites and placed them under armed guard for the duration of coalition negotiations. (It subsequently formed a short-lived government for six months in 1997).

In Punjab and Karnataka, meanwhile, the competitive configuration has not afforded the BSP an opportunity to build alliances and so break out of its catch-22 position. As a consequence, it has not been able to incorporate new elites into the party even temporarily as in Uttar Pradesh. Given that the BSP targets Scheduled Castes specifically, and itself draws a link between elite incorporation and electoral success, its inability to incorporate elites from across the spectrum of Scheduled Castes is a deeply paradoxical result.

#### IV Conclusion: Implications for Further Research

Although it is primarily addressed to the scholarship on ethnic mobilization, the model has implications for two related theoretical literatures: the literature on democratic stability; and the literature on party and electoral systems.

The scholarship on democratic stability has long been concerned with explaining India's democratic "exceptionalism." One of the principal explanations offered for India's democratic exceptionalism, proposed by Myron Weiner in a study published in 1989, has been the channeling of conflict between early and late modernizing ethnic categories within a single multi-ethnic party.<sup>51</sup> If stable multi-ethnic coalitions lead to democratic stability in multi-ethnic societies, then those interested in questions of democratic stability must understand the conditions under which stable multi-ethnic coalitions are successfully maintained. These conditions have not so far been theorized. Rather, the very existence of multi-ethnic coalitions is taken to be a temporary fact. The institutionalist model of elite incorporation in this article outlines precisely these conditions.

The scholarship on party and electoral systems in turn has long been concerned with explaining exceptions to Duverger's Law in India and elsewhere. According to Duverger's law, "the simple-majority single ballot system favours the two-party system."<sup>52</sup> The law is driven by a "demand side" mechanism and a "supply side" mechanism.<sup>53</sup> The demand side mechanism suggests that voters, not wanting to waste their vote, desert the losing party over time. As a consequence, even if the third party remains in the market, there are no longer any buyers left. The supply side mechanism suggests that because third parties are systematically underrepresented in a first past the post system, politicians from third parties are likely to abandon such parties in favour of the more viable alternatives. Over time, therefore, the third party simply disappears from the political marketplace through a process of fusion with one of the two viable winners.

There is a theory of elite behaviour implicit in Duverger's law. In Duverger's world, the behaviour of elites from the losing party is driven solely by the relative probability that their own party and the alternatives have of winning the election. The internal structure of each party is irrelevant to this argument. The argument of this article indicates, however, that the behaviour of such elites is affected by a second independent variable that Duverger's law omits: the rules of advancement within the party organization. We should expect Duverger's law to be limited, therefore, only to those conditions where the party organizations of the winners permit the ascent of new elites. If the organizational structures of the likely winners do not afford opportunities for the ascent of the new entrants from the third party, then we should see these elites remain with the third party and the logic of Duverger's law arrested. Rather than witnessing the Darwinian extinction of the loser, therefore, we should see persistence instead.

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<sup>51</sup> Weiner (1989), 39.

<sup>52</sup> Duverger (1951), 223

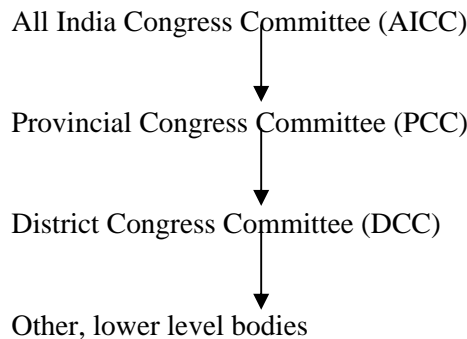
<sup>53</sup> See Duverger (1951), 217 and Riker (1982), 761.

### Appendix: The Introduction of Competitive Rules in the Congress Organization

The two defining rules of competitive party organizations (open membership, and intra-party elections through majority rule) were introduced into Congress with the Nagpur constitution in 1920. This section describes the gradual institutionalization of each of these three rules through changes in the party constitution between 1899 and 1920.

Between 1899 and 1907, de facto restrictions on membership and the narrow scope of intra-party elections gave Congress the character of a “closed” rather than an incorporative organization. Although two permanent bodies were set up by the 1899 Constitution (The National Committee and the Provincial Congress Committees (PCCs)), the Congress existed less as a permanent organization during this period and more as an annual meeting composed of delegates from around the country. Congress “membership” during this period, therefore, consisted of the delegates to the annual sessions. These delegates were to be indirectly elected by “political associations or other bodies and by public meetings.”<sup>54</sup> The principle of indirect election of delegates effectively restricted membership to the wealthy, educated, and high caste, since it is only individuals with these attributes who were active in associational life during this period or enjoyed public prominence. Limited intra-party elections were introduced in the party during this period, so that the delegates at the annual Congress Sessions elected members of the Indian National Congress Committee. However, the number of elected positions were limited only to 40 of the 45 members of the National Committee, and no attempt was made to extend the principle of intra-party elections to the composition of the newly established Provincial Congress Committees. Except for the forty positions at the apex of the party organization, therefore, success in intra-elite competition at higher levels within the party did not in most cases require the building of coalitions of support from those at lower levels. And even in cases where faction leaders attempted to build support from below, the de facto restrictions on membership, furthermore, meant that while they enlist lower level functionaries within the party in their cause, there was no incentive to recruit new elites from outside the party.

The Constitution of 1908 introduced an open membership policy and broadened the scope of intra-party elections. However, the continued restrictions on intra-party elections meant that the Congress was not fully competitive during this period. The Constitution of 1908 introduced a permanent organizational structure, with a 97-member All India Congress Committee at the apex, followed by the Provincial Congress Committees, followed by District Congress Committees and then other lower level bodies. This structure is illustrated in the diagram below:



<sup>54</sup> Constitution of 1899, in Rajkumar, (1949), 6-10.

“Membership” in Congress following 1908, therefore, consisted of membership in one or more of these permanent bodies. The membership criteria laid out in the 1908 constitution were open: an individual had only to be 21 years of age and accept the rules and constitution of the Congress in writing in order to be made a member. The principle of intra-party elections was also broadened. With the 1908 Constitution, the Provincial Congress Committees were now elected in part by the District Congress Committees. In turn, members of the PCCs elected representatives to the AICC from among their members. The provision for election of members of an expanded AICC and the PCC meant that the principle of intra-party elections had been significantly broadened as compared to 1899. In an important departure from the principle of elections for all party posts, however, the membership of the PCCs consisted, not only of those elected by the DCCs, but also of as many delegates to the Congress sessions and as many representatives of Congress-recognized public associations or political bodies as “each Provincial Committee may think to determine.”<sup>55</sup> This meant, in effect, that faction leaders within the PCCs could bolster their own position simply by nominating new members from these additional bodies, without having to recruit support from below. As a result, although the open membership rule was introduced, the departure from the principle of intra-party elections meant that the incentive structure that linked factional competition within the party to the incorporation of new elites from the outside was still missing.

The 1920 Constitution established this incentive structure by making intra-party elections the sole method of obtaining influential positions within the party. According to this Constitution: “Each Provincial Congress Committee shall consist of representatives elected annually by the members of the District and other Committees in accordance with the rules made by the Provincial Congress Committee.”<sup>56</sup> The size of the AICC, furthermore, was expanded now to 350 members, each of whom were also elected. All references to additional members drawn from public associations or political bodies or delegates were conspicuous by their absence. The sole channel to obtain and maintain a seat in the PCC, and to the AICC, was through election by the lower levels in the party. The principle of open membership had already been established in 1908. By making intra-party elections the sole channel of advancement within the organization, the 1920 Constitution transformed the Congress organization from a closed to an incorporative body. The 1920 constitution has been widely acknowledged as a major turning point in the history of the Congress party, because it introduced measures which significantly affected the subsequent course of the nationalist movement and post independence politics: the introduction of the “four anna” membership rule which allowed the Congress to raise funds through nominal contributions by members; the institution of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), which became the nucleus of power within the organization; and the principle of the linguistic organization of Congress units, which culminated in the linguistic reorganization of the Indian states. The extension of the principle of intra-party elections in 1920, however, has been given less attention than it deserves among this plethora of changes, considering the major impact that it had on the incorporative capacity of Congress and therefore on the character of party competition in India.

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<sup>55</sup> Article VII, 1908 Constitution in Rajkumar (1949), 36-46.

<sup>56</sup> Rajkumar (1949); Article VI (c)

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