

Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability, and Social Choice Theory

KANCHAN CHANDRA

This article makes two arguments: first, it argues that theories connecting ethnic group mobilization with democratic bargaining are based, often unwittingly, on primordialist assumptions that bias them toward overestimating the intractability of ethnic group demands. Second, it proposes a synthesis of constructivist approaches to ethnic identity and social choice theory to show how we who study ethnic mobilization might build theories that rely on the more realistic and more powerful assumption of instability in ethnic group boundaries and preferences. It illustrates the promise of this approach through a study of the language bargain struck in India's constituent assembly between 1947 and 1949.

The starting point of this article is a contradiction in the theoretical literature on ethnic mobilization. Theories in which the primary emphasis is on explaining ethnogenesis, that is, the *origins* of ethnic group mobilization have now by and large dispensed with the view, normally associated with primordialism, that ethnic groups have homogeneous preferences and fixed boundaries. Constructivist approaches to ethnic identity, which emphasize the existence of diverse preferences within ethnic groups, and the fluidity of the boundaries of such groups, have by now become conventional wisdom within the literature on ethnogenesis.¹

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However, almost all of our theories about the *impact* of ethnic mobilization on democratic politics continue, often unwittingly, to assume homogeneity in group preferences and stability in group boundaries. While primordialist assumptions have been exorcised from one part of the literature, in other words, they reign unchallenged in another.

This article makes two arguments. First, it uncovers the primordialist assumptions that underlie our theories connecting ethnic group mobilization with democratic bargaining and it argues that the retention of these assumptions has biased these theories toward overestimating the intractability of ethnic group demands (Section I). Second, it proposes that the translation of constructivist approaches into the seemingly incompatible vocabulary of social choice theory is a promising way in which to build theories of ethnic group bargaining that rely on the more realistic and more powerful assumption of instability in both group boundaries and preferences (Section II). It illustrates the promise of this approach through a case study of the language bargain struck in India's constituent assembly between 1947 and 1949 (Section III). Throughout, I define a successful bargain as one in which all sides acquiesce to the final outcome and a failed bargain as one in which at least one side rejects it, and I use the absence or presence of violence as an approximate indicator for a successful or a failed bargain.²

I. PRIMORDIALIST ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THEORIES ABOUT THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

The consensus in our theories linking ethnic group mobilization with democratic politics is that ethnic demands are more difficult to resolve in a democratic context than demands made by interest groups and therefore more threatening for democratic stability. A sample of this literature includes Dankwart Rustow's 1970 article on "Transitions to Democracy," Robert Dahl's 1971 work *Polyarchy*, Rabushka and Shepsle's 1972 work *Politics in Plural Societies*, Joseph Rothschild's 1981 work *Ethnopolitics*, Donald Horowitz's influential 1985 book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, and more recently, Claus Offe's work on the democratic transitions in Eastern Europe.³ Even those works concerned with prescribing "cures" for the supposed intractability of ethnic group demands typically take the disease for granted: Arend Lijphart's theory of consociationalism, which proposes devices to alleviate the supposed conflict-producing tendency of ethnic demands while accepting wholeheartedly that such a tendency exists, is perhaps the best example.⁴

Below, I cull the main propositions linking ethnic group demands with intractability from the sample of works listed above and show that each depends for its validity on the assumptions, normally associated with primordialism, that ethnic groups have a homogeneous group will and stable boundaries. The five principal propositions that emerge from this body of work are as follows: (1) Demands

made by ethnic groups are indivisible; (2) Demands made by ethnic groups are zero-sum; (3) Demands made by ethnic groups are motivated by a desire for relative rather than absolute gains; (4) Demands made by ethnic groups are about high stakes because they concern resources that affect future bargaining power; and (5) Demands made by ethnic groups are inseparable from a larger conception of self-hood and therefore cannot be treated as discrete issues. Situations that involve any or all of these five conditions are posited to result in failed bargains. Each proposition identifies some inherent aspect in the nature of ethnic groups and the goods that they seek as the critical variable resulting in failure.

Divisibility

Perhaps the most common proposition linking ethnic group demands to unsuccessful bargains is the claim that these demands are “indivisible”; that is, they cannot be satisfied in partial quantities.⁵ As Rustow puts it,

On matters of economic policy and social expenditures you can always split the difference. In an expanding economy, you can even have it both ways. . . . But there is no middle position between Flemish and French as official languages or between Calvinism, Catholicism and Secularism as principles of education.⁶

According to this proposition, material goods (money, jobs, expenditure, subsidies, education) are divisible, symbolic goods (temples, mosques) are indivisible, and ethnic groups seek only the latter. However, ethnic group demands are often precisely about material goods: more civil service jobs for members of group A, larger disbursements of funds from the center for the underdeveloped region inhabited by group B, more places in the university system for members of group C. If the potential for a successful bargain depends upon a demand for material goods, then ethnic group demands for material goods should be as amenable to peaceful resolution as interest group demands.⁷

What about instances where ethnic groups demand symbolic goods, or where material goods are desired for their symbolic value? Among studies of ethnic violence, even those that argue that bargains are possible when ethnic groups demand material resources accept the view that “when ethnic conflicts are over religious laws, places of worship, icons of special historic and cultural importance, they can indeed be deadly.”⁸

If we look closely at symbolic goods, however, it quickly becomes clear that they are far more divisible than we might expect. Consider what appears to be one of the most indivisible of symbolic goods: the dispute over a mosque in the north Indian town of Ayodhya, which Hindu nationalists claimed stood directly over the razed remains of a Hindu temple. Hindu nationalist organizations demanded the construction of a Hindu temple in precisely the same spot in which the mosque stood, while Muslim political leaders saw any attempt to disturb the status quo as a

direct assault on the position of the Muslim minority. The mosque was unlawfully demolished by Hindu nationalists in December 1992. However, the destruction of the mosque was preceded by more than a century of various bargaining arrangements, which “divided” the site between Hindus and Muslims by attaching the dimension of time (Hindus and Muslims were each able to pray at certain times for a certain number of hours), and of space (Hindus were given access to the east side of the site, Muslims to the north side).⁹ If the good itself was successfully divided among Hindus and Muslims for more than a century, then the breakdown of the bargain must lie in factors other than “indivisibility.”

Consider a second example of a seemingly indivisible good: the demand that the language of one group be made the official language of the state. There are several ways in which official recognition might be divided in degrees. For example, the lowest degree of recognition might involve according official status to a language at the local level, followed by recognition at the regional level, followed by recognition at the national level. On another dimension, the degree of recognition might vary according to the number of institutions that employ the language: a language that is the official language only in the courts is accorded a lower degree of recognition than a language recognized as the official language also in the legislature. On a third dimension, degrees of official recognition might vary according to the status accorded to each language, so that we might imagine a “first” official language, ranking higher on the status scale than the “second” official language, which in turn ranks higher than the “third,” and so on. Finally, divisibility might be induced through lottery; that is, promising each language some probability of gaining official recognition in the future.¹⁰ I will return to the question of language later in this article.

A third example of a seemingly indivisible symbolic good frequently demanded by ethnic groups is “sovereignty.” A close look, however, reveals that sovereignty too is not indivisible: it may be conceded in degrees, ranging from administrative autonomy to federal status to confederation all the way to independence.

Consider, finally, the demand for religious instruction in schools, which also appears to be indivisible: either children undergo religious instruction or they do not. However, religious instruction may be incorporated into the curriculum in different degrees, ranging from morning prayer, to a separate class imparting religious instruction, to the teaching of all subjects from within a religious framework. It may also be divided according to the percentage of students who are given religious instruction, ranging from a minority, to a fifty-fifty split, to the majority of students.

While degrees of divisibility no doubt vary, the examples above suggest that all symbolic goods are amenable to some degree of division and partial satisfaction.

I have suggested above that the proposition that the *goods* demanded by ethnic groups are indivisible is hard to sustain. However, while symbolic goods may be divisible in theory, ethnic groups may not settle for partial amounts of the desired good in practice. In every case, would the ethnic group not demand the maximal

amount of each good? Perhaps when Rustow and others argue that there is no middle ground in conflicts over language or religion, they mean not that such a middle ground does not exist but only that it will never be chosen. If so, then the proposition must rely on the assumption that the group as a whole has a collective preference over all alternatives, since if group preferences were internally varied, then some individuals might prefer less of the good and others more. Furthermore, the proposition relies on the second assumption that ethnic groups are stable entities, since if the groups themselves vary, then the good that they seek must also vary.

To summarize, the “indivisibility” proposition depends upon a claim, not about the indivisibility of *goods* but about the indivisibility of *groups*. It holds only in those cases where each group has a collective preference for a single amount of the good in question and where group boundaries are unchangeable.

Zero-Sum Game

The zero-sum proposition stipulates that ethnic politics is a zero-sum game in which making one group better off necessarily implies making another worse off. As Claus Offe puts it, “It is extremely difficult and often plainly impossible to draw a line at which all the rights of the minority are fulfilled but at the same time none of the rights of the majority is violated.”¹¹

However, the logic of this proposition does not apply uniquely to ethnic groups but to demands made by any type of group in distributive conflicts where the size of the pie is fixed. In fact, to the extent that ethnic groups seek symbolic goods, we should expect the opposite to be true. Because the satisfaction of symbolic goods is not limited by some fixed resource base, they should be even easier to concede than material goods. For example, one of the ways in which the demand for “recognition” by multiple religious groups in India has been conceded is by institutionalizing multiple religious holidays in the official calendar. In another example, Ladino elites in Guatemala’s 1996 accords found it easier to concede the cultural demands of indigenous groups, including the right to education in twenty-three indigenous languages, than the demands for a redistribution of land and wealth.¹² With symbolic demands, therefore, it should be easier, not more difficult, to have a positive sum game, where the needs of all groups are simultaneously satisfied. Such arrangements may produce inefficiencies in governance, but they are nevertheless successful bargains, where success is defined as the acquiescence of all sides to the final outcome.

In one subset of cases, however, symbolic demands appear to assume the character of a zero-sum conflict. This is the case where ethnic groups accord equally high symbolic value to the same good. The following example cited by Joseph Rothschild illustrates this point well:

The difficult task of governing New York City is somewhat eased by the convenient fact that its strong ethnic groups do not share, and hence do not compete in, their symbolic

demands on the municipal government. The Irish Catholics expect a green stripe to be painted down Fifth Avenue on St. Patrick's day; the Jews to have parking prohibitions suspended on Passover and so forth. Each group's demand is relatively irrelevant and inoffensive to the other. Imagine the contrast if another ethnic group were sufficiently strong and assertive to demand an orange stripe down Fifth Avenue on March 17!¹³

Examples of exactly such a collision of values can be found in the clash between Serbs and Albanians over Kosovo or between Hindus and Muslims over Ayodhya.

For a zero-sum conflict of the above type to exist, however, there must exist stable groups with a collective preference for a single alternative. For Kosovo to become a zero-sum conflict, both Serbs and Albanians must share collectively in separate symbolic frameworks, each of which ranks Kosovo highest in a hierarchy of symbols. Consider a situation where a collective preference does not exist, so that clusters of Serbs and Albanians ascribe higher values to a range of symbols other than Kosovo. In this case, the possibility exists for making sections of both groups better off through the provision of these alternatively desired symbols. Similarly, consider a situation where the contending groups are themselves unstable. Many individuals who identified strongly with their Hindu religious identity in 1989 identified more strongly with their caste identity in 1990. As Hindus, they ranked the temple at Ayodhya highest in their ordering of preferences. As members of a caste category, however, they ranked caste quotas in the civil services as the most highly desired good.¹⁴ In this case, instability in group boundaries denuded the situation of its zero-sum character.

To summarize, the zero-sum proposition does not hold in all situations where ethnic groups make demands. And in order for a zero-sum conflict to exist in even a subset of cases, a single group will and stable group boundaries must also exist.

Relative Gains Seeking

A third proposition stipulates that ethnic group demands are difficult to bargain over because ethnic groups are concerned more about relative than absolute gains. According to Horowitz,

Symbolic claims are not readily amenable to compromise. In this, they differ from claims deriving wholly from material interests. Whereas material advancement can be measured both relatively and absolutely, the status advancement of one group is entirely relative to the status of others.¹⁵

Where the primary objective of each group is to maximize not its own absolute welfare but the distance between its own position and that of others, the set of mutually acceptable solutions is believed to be limited.

The relative gains proposition depends, as do the previous two, on the existence of stable groups with a collective preference. If preferences within each group are heterogeneous, then there exists a potential for the coalescence of individuals or clusters across groups and so the possibility of a successful bargain

becomes more likely. Alternatively, if groups themselves are unstable, then relative gains seeking becomes less likely. For relative gains seeking to occur, individuals in each group must have a strong sense of distinctiveness. However, if individuals are used to switching between identity dimensions, then they are less likely to be concerned with relative gains seeking since maximizing relative gains on one dimension of identity might mean a loss on another. Finally, if groups are unstable, even if relative gains seeking occurs between groups as they are defined at any one point in time, it is less likely to prevent a bargained outcome. In this case, an outcome that is unacceptable to the bargaining parties as a whole at one point in time might be acceptable at a future point simply because the group that might have challenged it is itself transformed. I will return to this point in the study of language politics in India later in this article.

Future Bargaining Power

A fourth proposition argues that ethnic demands are intractable because they are usually about goods that contribute to future bargaining power.¹⁶ As Horowitz points out, “ethnic groups do not compete in merely one task or one game but in lifelong games.”¹⁷ To lose out in the present, then, decreases one’s chances of winning in the next round. Because existing gains and losses are magnified in the future, the argument goes, the stakes for which ethnic groups play are abnormally high. And because the stakes are so high, groups are unlikely to make even minimal concessions in the present for fear of incurring disproportionately large losses in the future.

As in the case of relative gains seeking, the logic of this proposition relies on stable groups with collective (and separate) interests. If differentiated interests exist within ethnic groups, then the potential for a successful bargain is increased to the extent that alliances between individuals can be struck across ethnic boundaries. And if group boundaries are themselves unstable, and individuals can remember sharing an identity in the past or imagine shared as well as separate identities in the future, they are less likely to share the perception of distinctiveness that would lead them to resist concessions in the present.

Embeddedness

According to a fifth proposition, demands made by ethnic groups are intractable because they cannot be treated as discrete issues but are embedded in a larger view of identity. Because a conflict over any single issue becomes a conflict over a basic conception of the self, the logic goes, it becomes harder to reach a compromise. As Dahl points out,

Conflicts involving subcultures are likely to be especially intense, and therefore particularly difficult to manage, because they cannot be confined to single, discrete issues. To the

person sharing the perspective of a subculture, conflict over a single issue threatens his “way of life,” the whole future of a subculture.¹⁸

This proposition assumes that the group has a collective self from which the individual self is derived. Furthermore, to the extent that it posits only one collective self, it implies that there is only one possible basis of group identity. For if an individual is simultaneously part of multiple groups, then she has multiple selves. And where an individual has multiple selves, the possibility of a bargain increases to the extent that the choice she faces is no longer between goods that allow her to realize or deny her sense of self but between goods that satisfy alternative selves.

Each of the five propositions independently predicts that instances of democratic bargaining involving ethnic group demands are likely to fail. Not surprisingly, therefore, even those who propose solutions aimed at “conflict management” in multiethnic democracies design such solutions not to resolve ethnic group demands through democratic bargaining but to *remove* ethnic group demands from the arena of contestation. The model of consociationalism, for instance, seeks to depoliticize ethnic demands to the greatest degree possible through the devices of grand coalition, minority veto, proportionality, and cultural autonomy.¹⁹ Decentralization, another commonly proposed institutional “cure,” seeks similarly to contain the supposedly ill effects of ethnic demand making by confining them to regionally and locally insulated pockets. Partition, a third and drastic solution, is aimed at eliminating ethnic demand-making altogether through the creation of ethnically homogeneous political units.²⁰ And some political scientists concerned with democratic stability have gone so far as to recommend not only the reduction or elimination of ethnic cleavages but also their *replacement* with allegedly more benign class, sectoral, or occupational cleavages.²¹

If we take the absence or presence of violence as an approximate indicator measuring the existence of a successful or a failed bargain, however, it is clear that the data do not fit the expectations. Relations between politicized ethnic groups, according to two independent large *n* studies, are characterized far more often by the *absence* of violence than its presence.²² The data sets used in these studies are restricted to describing the patterns of violence between politicized ethnic groups and so do not allow us to compare the incidence of violence between the universe of cases involving ethnic demands and the universe of cases involving class, sector, or occupational identities. However, even in the absence of such data, it is clear that the propositions described above overpredict the number of failed bargains associated with ethnic group demands.

I argue here that the reason for this bias lies in the retention of the by now discredited primordialist assumptions that ethnic groups have homogenous preferences and stable boundaries. In the section that follows, I show that once we replace the primordialist assumptions of these propositions with constructivist assumptions, using the language of social choice theory, the stipulated link between ethnic demand making and intractability breaks down.

II. SYNTHESIZING CONSTRUCTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHOICE THEORY

Constructivist approaches to ethnic identity across the disciplines of political science, sociology, history, anthropology, and literature question the assumption of group homogeneity by pointing out that shared symbolic frameworks associated with any ethnic category are artificially, and often superficially, imposed upon a collection of dissimilar fragments.²³ They question the assumption of group stability by pointing out that the ethnic categories that individuals identify with are constructed and change across time. Proponents of constructivist approaches differ over how rapidly the symbols and categories that individuals identify with change across time. At one end lie those who argue that ethnic identities are constructed and reconstructed mainly through major historical and institutional transformations.²⁴ This argument implies that ethnic group preferences and boundaries should be stable in the short term, in between these transformations, but may be unstable in the long term, across such transformations. At the other end lie those—concentrated mainly in postmodernist approaches to ethnic identity in anthropology, history, and literature—who argue that ethnic groups occupy a “zone of occult instability” even in the short term.²⁵ According to Nelson Kasfir, one of the small number of political scientists who holds this view,

Identifying someone as a member of an ethnic category at a particular time and in a particular place does not mean that, for political purposes, he will continue to hold that identity in other times and at other places and other times . . . if categories are fluid, identity may shift dramatically not only from one ethnic category to another, but from ethnicity to class to religion.²⁶

“Imposing false concreteness on the boundaries of ethnic solidarity,” even in the short term, according to Kasfir, “produces a generous measure of unreality.”²⁷ Regardless of the differences of opinion about exactly how rapidly transformations occur in group preferences and boundaries, however, the view that ethnic groups are unstable to some degree now forms part of the scholarly consensus in the literature on ethnic mobilization across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

However, as I have tried to show above, those who theorize about the relationship between ethnic group mobilization and democratic bargaining have largely ignored this consensus. Part of the explanation for this inattention to the constructivist consensus may lie in the difficulty of modeling group instability. For any study concerned with explaining the impact of ethnic group mobilization on political outcomes, the ethnic group is the basic unit of analysis. If the unit of analysis can itself not be taken as fixed, the task of analysis becomes that much more difficult. But it is a difficulty that needs to be addressed if we are to advance further in theorizing about ethnic politics. In the remainder of this section, I show that one way to solve the problem is to use social choice theory to model ethnic group instability.

According to social choice theory, and I rely here mainly on the work of William Riker, a common group will can be said to exist only under stringent, often unrealizable, conditions. In most cases, however, seemingly stable groups are no more than temporary coalitions of incipient others, poised always on the brink of redefinition. As Riker puts it, “to attribute human coherence to any group is an anthropomorphic delusion.”²⁸ There is a striking complementarity between the insights derived from constructivist approaches to ethnic groups and social choice theory. Even though the two are based on seemingly incompatible epistemologies, Bhabha’s postmodernist world—where culture is “a zone of instability” where symbols “have no primordial unity or fixity”²⁹—is immediately recognizable in Riker’s positivist world, where all group choices are in perpetual disequilibrium. However, this complementarity has not so far been noticed by either side. Constructivist approaches to ethnic politics overlook altogether the advances made in understanding group instability in social choice theory. And those who employ social choice theory as a tool of analysis have left the field of ethnic mobilization largely untouched. As I will attempt to show below, however, a synthesis of the two approaches can be illuminating in understanding ethnic group behavior.

To demonstrate its applicability to the study of ethnic groups, I reproduce below the “paradox of voting,” which is the foundation on which social choice theory builds the notion of group incoherence.³⁰ Suppose that a three-person group, composed of persons 1, 2, and 3, is faced with a choice between three alternatives, a, b, and c. The set of alternatives and the preferences of each person are represented below. The “greater than” sign indicates the order of preference.

Alternatives = {a, b, c}

Person 1: $a > b > c$

Person 2: $b > c > a$

Person 3: $c > a > b$

Given the three persons and the three alternatives above, what is the “group will”? If faced with a choice between the three alternatives simultaneously, it is clear that no single alternative is preferred by the group as a whole or even by a majority. Each person would choose her most preferred alternative, resulting in three separate choices. In this case, the concept of a single “group will” is meaningless. However, if the choice is restricted to a pair of alternatives, then a group will does emerge (if by group will we mean a majority choice). In the choice {a, b}, the majority, composed of persons 1 and 3, prefers a. In the choice {b, c}, the majority, composed of persons 1 and 2, prefers b. In the choice {a, c}, the majority, composed of persons 2 and 3, prefers c. Note, however, that each of the alternatives a, b, and c can be expressed as the group will depending upon the particular binary choice that faces the group. The paradox of voting illustrates that the group

will is highly unstable, varying with the structure of the choice that the group is faced with.

The distribution of preferences above is a perfectly heterogeneous one, where none of the individuals agree on the ranking of any one of the alternatives. It could be argued that under less extreme circumstances, the distribution of preferences might in fact produce a single group will, invulnerable to changes in the set of alternatives. In the simple case of three persons and three alternatives, for example, there are 216 possible configurations of preferences, but only 12 of these are of the type that produce the group incoherence described above.³¹ However, as the number of alternatives or the number of individuals or both increases, so does the probability of group incoherence.³² Furthermore, the discussion of the paradox of voting above has been restricted to choice on a single dimension. In the multidimensional case, the probability of the instability of group preferences would be “almost certain.”³³

The three principal insights derived from the paradox of voting that are relevant to the study of ethnic groups can be summarized as follows:

1. The greater the number of alternatives, the greater the probability of group instability.
2. The larger the group, the greater the probability of group instability.
3. The greater the number of dimensions, the greater the probability of group instability.

In the remainder of this section, I attempt to apply these insights to the study of ethnic groups by relying on a stylized example based on Sikh politics in the Indian state of Punjab between 1980 and 1995.

Example 1: Instability of the “Group Will”

In the early 1980s, many Sikhs in Punjab demanded a separate Sikh state. A “separate Sikh state,” however, was variously interpreted to mean secession, confederation, or greater administrative autonomy within India’s existing federal structure. Imagine a three-person group of Sikhs with different preferences over these three alternatives. The set of alternatives and the preferences of each individual are summarized below.

Alternatives: {secession, confederation, autonomy}

Sikh 1: secession > confederation > autonomy

Sikh 2: confederation > autonomy > secession

Sikh 3: autonomy > secession > confederation

It is clear that no group will exists for the Sikhs. If faced with the three alternatives simultaneously, no single alternative emerges as the collectively desired choice. And different binary choices would produce different group choices, so that secession or confederation or autonomy might all be expressed as the group will

depending upon the particular set of alternatives faced by the group. The implications for bargaining are obvious. In the propositions in Section I, the group will exist independently of the set of alternatives and limited the set of outcomes to which the group might acquiesce. If the example above is an accurate representation of ethnic group preferences, however, then no group will exist independently of the set of alternatives. The group above might be induced to acquiesce to any one of the three outcomes, depending on the set of alternatives they are offered.

Example 2: Instability of Group Boundaries

It might be argued, however, that although the probability of a problem preference configuration with large numbers of alternatives and large numbers of individuals might exist in theory, such configurations are rare within ethnic groups in practice. According to this view, no matter how many alternatives exist in the example above and no matter how many individuals constitute the group, all individuals in the group are likely to have the same set of preferences. This preference configuration, many would argue, is a fairer representation of the preferences of individuals within an ethnic group than the heterogeneous preference configurations above.³⁴ It might be reasonable, for example, to assume that although a variety of alternatives are possible, all Serbs want Kosovo to be an integral part of the Serbian republic or that all Hindus want a temple at Ayodhya and so on. The example below captures this scenario: in this example, the preferences of all Sikhs are perfectly aligned, and all prefer most to secede.

Alternatives = {secession, confederation, autonomy}

Sikh 1: secession > confederation > autonomy

Sikh 2: secession > confederation > autonomy

Sikh 3: secession > confederation > autonomy

In the perfectly homogeneous world above, regardless of the number of alternatives and individuals, there is a clear group choice, and the notion of group stability appears unassailable.

Given the constructivist insight that any one ethnic group is built out of a collection of fragments, it is unlikely that the assumption of perfectly aligned individual preferences on any one dimension can be sustained. *Even under these maximal conditions, however, the introduction of a new dimension can result in induced instability by transforming group boundaries.* Consider the preferences of the same individuals above on a new dimension. Take, for example, the dimension of caste quotas in the civil services, with three alternatives: no quota, a 50 percent quota, and a 75 percent quota. Suppose, for example, that Sikh 1, 2, and 3 belong to different caste categories: Sikh 1 to a high caste, Sikhs 2 and Sikh 3 to a low caste. On the dimension of sovereignty, each Sikh, regardless of caste identity, prefers to secede. However, the dimension of civil service quotas activates caste-based identities that were previously latent, which produce in turn a differ-

ent configuration: Sikh 1, whose caste dominates the civil services, does not want any quota at all or wants as low a quota as possible. Sikhs 2 and 3, both from low castes, prefer as high a quota as possible. The set of alternatives and preferences on this dimension is summarized below:

Alternatives: { no quota, 50 percent quota, 75 percent quota }

Sikh 1: no quota > 50 percent quota > 75 percent quota

Sikh 2: 75 percent quota > 50 percent quota > no quota

Sikh 3: 75 percent quota > 50 percent quota > no quota

In this configuration of preferences, a choice between all alternatives simultaneously does produce a group will: the majority of Sikhs (two out of three) prefer a 75 percent quota. The introduction of a new identity dimension, therefore, produces a new group by creating a fissure in a previously cohesive group. I will return to this possibility in the case study of the language bargain in India.

Example 1 described a scenario where the dimension of group identity was fixed, yet the group will was unstable. Example 2 illustrated a scenario where a stable group will existed on the first dimension but was destabilized by the introduction of a second. In the real world, however, both an unstable group will and unstable group boundaries are likely to exist simultaneously. Finally, in all three examples, the choice between alternatives was restricted to a single dimension, one at a time. The simple replacement of one dimension by another raised the likelihood of the instability of group preferences. Were the choice facing the Sikhs a two-dimensional one, however, instability would be practically unavoidable.

Given the insights of social choice theory, stable groups with a stable collective preference might be presumed to exist only under the following extremely stringent conditions: (1) the choice facing individuals within the group must be permanently restricted to two alternatives and/or (2) individual preferences in an ethnic group must be perfectly aligned on possible dimensions, including alternative dimensions of identity. Neither of these conditions is sustainable. Section I, by pointing out that there usually exist more than two discrete alternatives for all symbolic goods demanded by ethnic groups, suggested that binary alternatives are as rare in cases involving ethnic group demands as among other types of demands. Even where the initial set of alternatives is restricted to two, furthermore, there are usually entrepreneurs who have something to gain from introducing new alternatives. And perfect alignment of individual preferences on all possible dimensions is unlikely not only in a world of differentiated individuals but also in a world with multiple bases of group differentiation. Except under highly unusual conditions, then, *unstable*, rather than *stable*, ethnic groups must be taken as the working assumption in our theories of ethnic politics, and social choice theory gives us the tools with which to incorporate this assumption into testable theoretical propositions.

It is important to note that the application of social choice theory to the study of ethnic groups does not predict that ethnic groups and boundaries will always be unstable in the empirical world. Empirically, we might certainly see stable ethnic groups. *However, the insights of social choice theory suggest that the existence of such stability should be treated as problematic rather than natural, and gives us some clues about the mechanisms that might explain this stability.* Political entrepreneurs who stand to benefit from stable groups, for instance, might deliberately restrict the set of alternatives between which individuals choose in order to induce stability. Where political entrepreneurs are successful in restricting this choice, we might in fact see the emergence of a stable group will. Furthermore, institutions might induce group stability by restricting choices to a single dimension.³⁵ For example, consociational institutions, by privileging a single dimension of identity, might over time destroy the capacity to organize politics along other dimensions. Consociationalism then might be interpreted as an institutional arrangement that approximates condition 2 above by artificially restricting the set of all possible identity dimensions to one and so producing an artificial stability in group boundaries. *However, even in cases where we find stable ethnic groups, the source of intractability lies not in the inherent nature of ethnic groups or their demands but in the mechanisms by which these groups have come to be stabilized and these mechanisms should be incorporated into a theory predicting how ethnic group demands might be resolved.*

III. THE LANGUAGE BARGAIN IN INDIA'S CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (1947-49)

In this part of the article, I illustrate, through a case study of the dispute over India's national language in the Constituent Assembly of India between 1947 and 1949, how the incorporation of the assumption that groups are unstable allows us to explain successful ethnic bargains that seem otherwise anomalous. The purpose of this case study is not to uncover any new data. Rather, it shows how the approach advanced in this article can provide a fresh perspective on old data and allow us to explain outcomes that we could not previously.³⁶

The language bargain in India between 1947-49 is an illuminating case because it is a "crucial case study" that meets each of the conditions that predict a failed bargain. A "most likely" case study according to Eckstein is one that fulfils every condition postulated by the theory, so that it must be extremely difficult to dismiss any contrary finding as deviant. The purpose for which I use this "crucial case study," however, is different from Eckstein's. According to Eckstein, the utility of a "most likely crucial case study" lies in its power to invalidate theories. In his words,

If the curve is not constructed to pass through the point but preconstructed to represent a theory, and if, given the nature of a case subsequently examined, we can predict, according

Table 1

Region	Language	Percentage of Population
North	English	0.05
	Hindi	38.61
	Urdu	30.37
	Punjabi	5.31
	Kashmiri	2.49
East		0.44
		12.82
	Bengali	7.71
West	Oriya	3.57
	Assamese	1.54
		12.19
South	Marathi	7.57
	Gujarati	4.62
South		23.35
	Telugu	8.57
	Tamil	6.95
	Kannada	3.96
	Malyalam	3.87
	Other	12.98

Source: Census of India 1961, cited in Dasgupta, 46.

to the theory, that it must fall on, or very near, the curve at a specified location, that fact that it does so is of the utmost significance and its location far from the predicted point will impeach the theory no less than the tendency of several points to describe a divergent curve.³⁷

The argument, that a single observation, no matter how carefully selected, can “impeach” a theory is too strong a claim, since it relies on the expectation that the deviant case is not an instance of random error, or one outlier among an otherwise clearly defined pattern.³⁸ While a crucial case study design may not be useful for theory *testing*, however, it yields significant pay-offs in theory *building*. The close analysis of a case that fulfils every condition predicted by the theory but does not produce the predicted outcome allows us to identify the mechanism that accounts for failure of the theory. This mechanism, if replicated in other cases, can form the basis for the revision of the theory.

Table 1 describes the numerical strength of each language group in India at independence. It is based on 1961 census categories and figures but is nevertheless the most accurate source available on the linguistic profile of the population in 1947.³⁹ The speakers of each of the languages are concentrated in the regions listed in the first column. The grouping of languages by region here does not capture linguistic “islands” that exist outside the areas in which the language is predominantly spoken. However, it is a broad picture of the regional concentration of linguistic groups that is adequate for the purpose of this article. As the table shows, no single language is spoken by the majority of India’s population. Hindi, the most widely spoken language, accounted for only 30.37 percent of the popula-

tion. Hindi speakers are concentrated mainly in the North. After Hindi, there is a multiplicity of smaller languages, none spoken by more than a tenth of the population.

In 1947, Hindi-speaking delegates, who constituted approximately 40 percent of the constituent assembly,⁴⁰ made a strong bid to establish Hindi as the national language of India. By the term *national* language, they meant the language that would be given symbolic recognition as preeminent among India's multiple languages and also be used for all official business by the Union Government of India. At independence, English was the language of the higher levels of administration. The pro-Hindi delegates demanded that Hindi replace English for official purposes immediately or after a brief transition period. During the transition period, if there was one, they demanded that official business be transacted in Hindi, while English might also be used if necessary. Opponents of the pro-Hindi delegates, mainly from the South, conceded that Hindi should be the national language.⁴¹ However, they made a distinction between "national" and "official" language and demanded that Hindi not be imposed on them as the official language of the Union. As Dasgupta points out,

Many leaders of the non-Hindi groups were not prepared to tolerate the imposition of Hindi on them as the only official language of the Union. Some of them failed to see the reason for having only one language as the official language.⁴²

And even those groups that were prepared to concede the status of Hindi as the official language demanded that the replacement of English by Hindi take place slowly, over a long transition period during which English, not Hindi, should be the principal language employed.

In 1947, the Hindi-speaking delegates formed a relatively cohesive bloc. In addition, they commanded the support as well of a section of non-Hindi speakers, which gave them a majority in the Constituent Assembly. In July 1947, a meeting of the Congress Assembly Party, composed of Congress party members who were also members of the Constituent Assembly, voted with a two-thirds majority to make Hindi India's national language."⁴³ Although no votes on language policy were taken during this period in the Constituent Assembly itself, the vote in the Congress Assembly Party is a strong indicator of the distribution of opinion in the Assembly, since most Assembly members belonged to the Congress.

The problem faced by the Indian constituent assembly in 1947, therefore, was the following: a language policy that did not adopt Hindi as the national and official language of India risked the noncompliance of the single largest language group in the country. On the other hand, the adoption of Hindi as the national and official language risked the noncompliance of the substantial section of the population in the South, West, and East, who did not speak Hindi. The situation fulfils each five of the conditions identified in Section I that predicts a failed bargain. First, the dispute was over language, which subscribers to the first proposition

describe as the most indivisible of goods. “How,” Horowitz asks, “does a policy maker divide up the glorification of the national language?”⁴⁴ implying in the rhetorical tone of the question the futility of finding an answer. Second, the issue of the national language was proposed by Hindi speakers as a zero-sum game, where the elevation of one language as the national language implied the downgrading of all others. Third, because status as a national language is a “positional good,” where the status of the national language depends upon its relative distance from other languages, the dispute fulfilled the relative-gains condition. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, both Hindi speakers and non-Hindi speakers were bargaining over a policy that was crucial to their relative positions in the future. As Dasgupta points out,

Hindi leaders were convinced that the task of framing a constitution involved a set of long-range interests too fundamental to be settled by ephemeral conciliation and piecemeal compromise. A decision of the Assembly concerning the national or official language of India would, for example, usher in a chain of substantial changes in the educational processes, prospects of comparative mobility of social classes, and relative mobility of regional elites in the country.⁴⁵

Non-Hindi speakers, however, were deeply aware that giving official status to Hindi would damage their own position in the future. As one non-Hindi speaking delegate put it,

Our children will have to learn a language so like the German where they will have to see that they do not make mistakes in their sentences by using wrong verbs. . . . I am not willing to reconcile myself to the position that for the next fifteen, twenty or thirty years the sons of the Hindi-speaking people, whether they belong to UP or to CP, will preponderate in the all-India services.⁴⁶

Finally, the issue of the national language was embedded within a larger narrative of the emancipation of the nation from colonial rule. The debate over language was inseparable from the larger questions of how to define the national self. The fulfillment of all these conditions simultaneously should surely have resulted in failure.

The outcome, however, was a successful bargain to which all sides acquiesced. The terms of the bargain, adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 14 September 1949, were as follows: (1) No single language was named the “national” language of India. (2) Hindi was named the “official” language of the Indian Union. (3) Even as the “official” language, the status of Hindi was in suspension. The Constitution stipulated that English would continue to be used for fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution. Even after fifteen years, the use of Hindi as the official language was not certain, since Parliament could provide for the continued use of English (which in fact it did). The language compromise, as I point out below, represented a rejection of each of the central claims of the Hindi bloc.

Table 2

Demand	Outcome
Hindi to be named the national language	Hindi named the official language
Hindi to replace English as the official language either immediately or after a brief transition period	Hindi to replace English as the official language after a long transition period, which could also be indefinitely prolonged
During the transition period, if there was one, Hindi to be the main language of official use with the provision that English "may" be used	During the transition period, English to be the only language of official use, with the provision that Hindi "may" be used with the assent of the President

Why did they acquiesce to the agreement instead of holding out for a better deal or attempting to impose their views on the rest of the country? Explaining the successful language bargain in the Indian case requires, in effect, explaining the acceptance of the deal by Hindi speakers.

The interpretation of the language compromise as a defeat for the pro-Hindi faction relies not on a normative assessment of the justice of the Hindi bloc's claims but on a comparison of the demands initially made by the Hindi bloc in 1947 and the terms of the final agreement in 1949. This is summarized in Table 2.⁴⁷ As the table indicates, not a single one of the three main demands of the pro-Hindi group was conceded in the final arrangement. On the other hand, two of the three demands of the non-Hindi groups (long transition time for English, English to be the default choice during the transition period) were conceded in toto. While a third, that Hindi not be made the sole official language of India was denied, the suspended status of Hindi as the official language satisfied this demand at least partially.

The interpretation that the language bargain represented a defeat for the pro-Hindi group is a contested one and so requires some justification. Jyotindra Dasgupta, the author of one of the major studies of India language policy, reaches precisely the opposite conclusion: "The acceptance of this provision by the Constituent Assembly of India clearly suggests that in spite of many concessions on details, the Hindi bloc was successful in getting its major demand accepted by the framers of the Constitution."⁴⁸ Dasgupta appears to have arrived at this conclusion based on the fact that Hindi was recognized as the sole official language of the Indian constitution. I argue, however, that the recognition of Hindi as the official language should be seen as a defeat rather than a victory to the extent that it was a deliberate refusal to concede the demand to name Hindi as the "national" language. As Dasgupta points out himself, in another section of his study, "in a multilingual society, the distinction between national and official language is of major significance."⁴⁹ Taken together, the denial of the status of national language to Hindi and the other two major demands made by the Hindi bloc, constitute a defeat rather than a success.

I argue here that the reason for the acquiescence of Hindi speakers lies in the activation of latent identity categories, which in turn produced a fission within the Hindi bloc. The two resultant groups assumed positions on opposite sides of the language bargain, one in support and the other in opposition. The successful language bargain resulted, therefore, because the group that would have resisted it shrank in size and therefore no longer had the power to challenge it. In developing this explanation, I rely on the central insight from Riker that groups exist *in relation to*, not independently of, the alternatives between which they choose and the dimension on which these alternatives are arranged. A change in the alternatives or dimension facing some collection of individuals, thus, can produce a corresponding shift in the composition of groups that result.

Between 1947 and 1948, the choice facing the assembly members was between Hindi and English. Given this choice, Hindi speakers coalesced into a staunch Hindi bloc since the replacement of English by Hindi would clearly put those who spoke Hindi at an advantage relative to other groups. As long as the structure of alternatives remained stable, the groups in favor of each alternative remained relatively stable as well. This situation in 1948, therefore, appears to be a classic case of a standoff between two opposed groups with incompatible objectives and therefore a prelude to a failed bargain.

However, a critical development in 1948 set in motion the process that resulted in the redefinition and therefore defeat of the Hindi bloc by changing the set of alternatives facing assembly members. In the summer of 1948, a committee appointed to translate the draft Constitution into Hindi submitted its completed translation.⁵⁰ The translation raised before the assembly a hitherto invisible question: *Which* version of Hindi was to be the national language? Hindi, like any other language, encompasses a wide range of regional variations. These differences were latent as long as the leaders of the pro-Hindi group were not called upon to specify the precise version of Hindi that they supported. The act of translating the Constitution, however, meant that the issue had to be confronted. Hindi speakers were spread out in five north-Indian states: the United Provinces, Central Provinces and Berar, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Bihar. The translation committee, however, was dominated by Hindi speakers from two states: the United Provinces and the Central Provinces. Not surprisingly, therefore, the translation relied upon a narrow, highly Sanskritized variant of Hindi favored by leaders from these regions, which other Hindi speakers found “incomprehensible.”⁵¹ The debate over the “correct” Hindi translation, therefore, introduced a new alternative. The choice now was not simply between Hindi and English but also between a “narrow” interpretation of Hindi and a “broad” interpretation of Hindi. Those who favored the narrow interpretation were drawn primarily from the Hindi “core” states (UP and CP). Those who favored the broad interpretation were drawn primarily from the Hindi “peripheries” (Rajasthan, Bihar, and Punjab).

Had the assembly continued to be faced with a binary choice between Hindi and English, the activation of regional identity categories within the Hindi bloc should not have made any difference to the outcome. We might expect that, although the groups differed over which version of Hindi should be adopted as the official language, both would prefer any version of Hindi to English. In 1949, however, the set of alternatives facing the assembly was transformed. On one hand, the leadership of the Hindi bloc, drawn mainly from UP and CP, insisted upon the adoption of the narrow version of Hindi. On the other hand, the leadership of the Congress party replaced the choice of English with a more complex alternative called the "Munshi Ayyangar formula."⁵² Three of the proposals made in the Munshi Ayyangar formula, already summarized before, constituted a rejection of the central claims of the pro-Hindi bloc. These were that (1) Hindi was to be the official language of the country; (2) English was to be used for a fifteen-year period that could be extended by parliament; and (3) during the transition, English rather than Hindi was to be the default option. However, it is not in these proposals but in additional, seemingly minor clauses that the key to the successful compromise lay. The Munshi Ayyangar Provision also stipulated that the Union government should promote the development of Hindi by ensuring that it assimilated the forms, style, and expressions used in Hindustani and other languages of India. It added that the vocabulary of Hindi should draw "primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages." It stipulated further that although Hindi was the official language of the Union, International Numerals would be used. And finally, it provided for the setting up of language commissions in 1955 and 1960 to survey the progress of Hindi.⁵³ Even though the first three provisions of the Munshi Ayyangar formula diminished the status of Hindi relative to English in the immediate present, these latter provisions opened up the possibility for the introduction of a broadly defined version of Hindi at some future date.

In a choice between the narrow version of Hindi favored by the leaders of the pro-Hindi group and the Munshi Ayyangar formula, Hindi speakers from outside the core states of UP and CP faced a choice between preeminent status for a highly Sanskritized version of Hindi on one hand and diminished status for a "broad" version of Hindi on the other. At the same time, however, the Munshi Ayyangar formula also offered them the chance of enhancing the status of the broadly defined version of Hindi in the future. Faced with a choice between a less preferred alternative for certain and a chance of obtaining their most preferred alternative in the future, this group chose the latter and voted in favor of the Munshi Ayyangar formula. With the division in the ranks of the Hindi bloc, even those Hindi speakers who were opposed to the formula were powerless to resist. Although they opposed the formula vociferously in their speeches, they admitted, as one delegate put it, that "the pendulum has gone over to the other side."⁵⁴

The argument that a split among Hindi speakers that I describe above was responsible for the successful language bargain in India is acknowledged by both

major studies of the language bargain between 1947 and 1949 as contributing to the successful language bargain.⁵⁵ The interpretation of the split that I offer here, however, is contested. While I argue that the split occurred as a result of the activation of latent identity categories, separating Hindi speakers from the core regions from the peripheral regions, these studies interpret the split as an ideological one, between “moderates” who espoused an inclusive and multicultural definition of nationhood and “extremists” who attempted to privilege the cultural and religious identity of the Hindi-speaking regions as the national identity. The distinction is important. If the shift is based on ideology rather than identity, then the critical mechanism here is not the construction of new group identities in place of old ones but in the existence of ideology-based preferences independent of group identity.

The interpretation of the split as an ideological one, however, is not compelling for two reasons. First, had it been an ideological split, it should have emerged much earlier. In the critical vote in July 1947 described earlier, the majority of delegates in the Congress Assembly Party voted to replace Hindustani with Hindi as the national language of India. Supporting the elevation of Hindi in place of Hindustani is not compatible with what is generally identified as a moderate position; yet this position commanded the support of most Hindi-speaking delegates. If they were not “moderates” in 1947, what made them “moderates” two years later? Second, every piece of available evidence on the regional background of the delegates who took up the positions coded as “moderate” and “extremist” positions points to the concentration of delegates from different regions in the different ideological camps. Of the fourteen members that Austin identifies as “Hindi extremists,” 11 were from UP and CP, and one each from Bihar, Bombay and East Bengal. On the other hand, of the Hindi-speaking delegates who spoke in favour of a broad interpretation of Hindi in the Constituent Assembly were almost all from outside the core-Hindi states, including Punjab and especially Bihar.⁵⁶ The fact that the “extremists” are exclusively from one region while the moderates from another suggests that the ideological split was derivative of regional identity.

I should point out that the shift from an undifferentiated identity as Hindi speakers to separate regional identities within the broader linguistic category does not imply the invention of new identity categories, or the renunciation of the old one. Rather, latent identity categories were simply activated, not produced anew. And the existing identity categories were temporarily deactivated, not destroyed altogether. Kasfir points to an example of the rapid identity shift of Nigerian workers “who participated in a general strike in June 1964 only to vote along ethnic lines the following December.”⁵⁷ When participating in the general strike, the workers deactivated but did not renounce their ethnic identity, just as when voting in December they de-emphasized but did not give up their class identity. This is precisely the kind of fluidity that operated above, when the same individuals acted as members of a single identity category (Hindi speakers in 1947-48), but as members of differentiated identity categories (Hindi speakers from the United and

Central Provinces vs. Hindi speakers from other states) in 1949. In each case, the choice of any single category was a partial and temporary identification, which drew selectively from a repertoire of identity categories while keeping the repertoire itself intact.

IV. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I have argued in this article that we need to replace the primordialist assumptions of group homogeneity and stability that currently dominate our theories of ethnic politics with the constructivist assumptions of group fragmentation and instability, and that employing the vocabulary of social choice theory is a promising way in which to do this. The study of the language bargain in India illustrated the utility of employing such an approach. In this concluding section, I identify two areas for future research illuminated by this approach.

First, while the argument above demonstrates that instability makes successful bargains *possible*, the conditions that make them more or less *likely* require further specification. To identify these conditions, we would need to model the process by which new alternatives and dimensions are generated. In the study of the language bargain above, for example, the key variable in bringing about a successful bargain was the generation of the new choice between narrow Hindi and broad Hindi. However, the generation of this new alternative was a random event, brought about as a by-product of the process of translating the Constitution. In other cases, new alternatives or new dimensions may be deliberately introduced by political entrepreneurs.⁵⁸ However, political entrepreneurship has not so far lent itself to systematic analysis. Riker himself describes the process by which new alternatives emerge as “more random than the natural selection of species.”⁵⁹ However, institutionalist approaches to the study of ethnicity have made some attempt to identify the alternatives most likely to be generated by political entrepreneurs, or at least, the set of alternatives that might be excluded. This is one direction of research that might prove illuminating.⁶⁰

Furthermore, this article suggests that there are grounds for a reassessment of the relationship between ethnic politics and democratic stability. Interest groups and classes are generally seen as positive influences on democratic politics, while ethnicity, most would argue, “has a bad name and more or less deserves it.”⁶¹ This article suggests that there may be a more benign relationship between ethnic and democratic politics than we have imagined so far. Further research should explicitly compare demands made by ethnic groups to demands made by groups that define themselves in nonethnic terms to assess what unique consequences ethnic demand making has, if any, for democratic politics.

NOTES

1. The label *constructivist* here groups together views of ethnic identity that have sometimes been categorized separately as “situational” or “instrumentalist” or

“institutionalist” or “postmodernist.” While works categorized as “situational,” “instrumentalist,” “institutionalist,” or “postmodernist” might differ from each other in the mechanisms by which they suggest identities are constructed, their agreement on the prior proposition that identities are constructed warrants the use of a common label to describe them here. For a review of constructivist approaches, see Kanchan Chandra, “Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics: Constructivist Findings and Their Non-Incorporation.” APSA-CP, Winter 2001.

2. The use of violence as an indicator introduces a margin of error. The absence of violence may not indicate a successful bargain, since one party might reject the outcome but choose not to resist through violent means. However, since there are few data to be found on actual agreements between contending ethnic groups and between ethnic groups and the state, it is the best available method of assessing the proportion of ethnic group demands overall that result in failed bargains.

3. Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy,” *Comparative Politics* 12, no. 3 (April 1970): 337-64; Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971); Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies* (Columbus, MO: Charles E. Merrill, 1972); Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Claus Offe, “Strong States, Weak Cures,” *East European Constitutional Review* (Spring 1992); Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

4. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). See, for instance, p. 1, where Lijphart describes the “centrifugal tendencies inherent in a plural society.”

5. Offe, “Strong States,” 22; Rustow, 359-60; Horowitz, 224, 566.

6. Rustow, 359-60.

7. On this point, see also Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming), 22.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Sushil Srivastava, “How the British Saw the Issue,” in Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1990), 45.

10. For a model illustrating how several groups may be satisfied simultaneously through a lottery, see Rabushka and Shepsle. Although Rabushka and Shepsle argue that the lottery is an unstable strategy, the logic of the argument indicates that in fact it constitutes an equilibrium.

11. Offe, *Varieties of Transition*; Rabushka and Shepsle; Horowitz.

12. Even though the agreement was successfully reached between representatives of ethnic groups in conflict over an apparently “intractable” symbolic issue, it was rejected three years later in a popular referendum. The question of why the accords were rejected by a population where indigenous groups are in a majority is independently puzzling. The turnout rate of only 18 percent indicates that it may be related to a lack of participation on the part of the indigenous population.

13. Rothschild, 83.

14. I describe this example in greater detail in Kanchan Chandra, “Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 3-6 September 1998).

15. Horowitz, 223-24.

16. James D. Fear, "Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 107-26; Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 103-24.

17. Horowitz, 147.

18. Robert Dahl, "Some Explanations," in Robert Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 357; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (Basic Books, 1973). Also see Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction," in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 5.

19. Lijphart, 21-52.

20. Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 136-75; Steve Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 5-39.

21. Offe, *Varieties of Transition*, 63, 79.

22. This claim is based on data cited in James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Ethnic Violence" (unpublished paper prepared for presentation at the Juan March Institute, Madrid, 22 May 1997); and the Varshney-Wilkinson data set on Hindu-Muslim violence in India, cited in Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, and Steven Ian Wilkinson, "The Electoral Incentives for Ethnic Violence: Hindu-Muslim Riots in India" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 3-6 September 1998).

23. For instance, Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Romila Thapar, "The Politics of Religious Communities," *Seminar* 365, (January 1990): 27-32.

24. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1970* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Laitin, *Identity in Formation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*.

25. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), quoting Fanon, 35.

26. Nelson Kasfir, "Explaining Ethnic Political Participation," *World Politics* 31, no. 3 (April 1979): 365-88, 373.

27. Kasfir, 385

28. William H Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982), 63.

29. Bhabha, 37.

30. For detailed treatments, see Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*, chap. 1, and Kenneth A. Shepsle and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics* (New York: Norton, 1997).

31. Shepsle and Bonchek, 53-55.

32. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*, 122; Shepsle and Bonchek, 53-55.

33. William H Riker, *Agenda Formation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 2. Based on McKelvey's Chaos Theorem.

34. For a theory of ethnic politics that assumes such perfect alignment of individual preferences, see Rabushka and Shepsle.

35. For the argument that institutions may restrict the choice to a single dimension, see Kenneth Shepsle, "Institutional Arrangements and Equilibrium in Multidimensional Voting Models," *American Journal of Political Science* 23, (February 1979): 27-59.

36. By choosing the years between 1947 and 1949, I have chosen a narrow focus on the critical years when the policy was formulated and the choice initially restricted to the relative status of Hindi and English. A wider frame might capture the emergence and eclipse of other alternatives during the three decades before 1947 and the stabilization of the language bargain in the years following 1949. The narrow focus is preferable for the purpose of this article since it allows me to trace the construction of an agreement in detail. However, the argument made here provides a consistent interpretation of longer term developments in Indian language policy. For the argument that the language bargain constituted an equilibrium, see David Laitin, "Language Policy and Political Strategy in India," *Policy Sciences* 22, (1989): 415-36.

37. Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 117.

38. Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 211.

39. The 1941 census applied to undivided India and is therefore not useful in this case. The 1951 census did not tabulate the percentage of Hindi speakers separately but grouped them together with Urdu and Punjabi speakers under the category "Hindustani" and so is also less illuminating than the 1961 census.

40. Data on the linguistic identity of the Constituent Assembly members are not available. These figures are rough estimates based on the regions from which each delegate to the assembly was elected. The South sent the second largest number of delegates, followed by the East and West (data from the Web site on the Constituent Assembly Debates, <http://alfa.nic.in/debates/ca.htm>).

41. Jyotindra Dasgupta, *Language Conflict and National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 112.

42. Dasgupta, 48.

43. The delegates voted sixty-three to thirty-two.

44. Horowitz, 224. Also see Przeworski, Offe, "Strong States Weak Cures," and *Varieties of Transition*.

45. Dasgupta, 134.

46. B Das, delegate from the Eastern state of Orissa, Constituent Assembly Debates, 12 September 1949.

47. Austin, Granville, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1966), 296-305; *Times of India*, 3 September 1949; *Times of India*, 15 September 1949.

48. Dasgupta, 137. See also Austin, 268.

49. Dasgupta, 131.

50. Austin, 282.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 296

53. Ibid.

54. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 13 September 1949.

55. Austin, Dasgupta. Despite the fact that fragmentation among supposedly cohesive ethnic blocs is common in empirical studies, the theoretical literature on ethnic politics has not yet successfully incorporated the pervasiveness of such incidents of fragmentation into its theoretical formulations.

56. Based on my coding of speakers in the *Constituent Assembly Debates* between 1947-49 and of names associated with the “moderate” and “extremist” factions in Austin, 279, 283-84.

57. Kasfir, 374.

58. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*, 209.

59. *Ibid.*, 211.

60. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*; Daniel N. Posner, “The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Politics in Zambia” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998); Chandra, *Ethnic Parties*.

61. Geertz, 253. Geertz is referring in this sentence to nationalism and religion. However, the statement applies to all forms of ascriptive mobilization. As he points out elsewhere in the book, movements based on religion, race, language, tribe, and social custom are “in some sense of a piece. They form a definable field of investigation” (p. 257).