ETHNIC PARTIES
AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

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Ethnic divisions, according to the reigning presumption in empirical democratic theory, and in commonsensical understandings of politics more generally, threaten the survival of democratic institutions. One of the principal mechanisms linking ethnic divisions with the breakdown of democracy is the so-called “outbidding effect.” According to theories of ethnic outbidding, ethnic divisions inevitably give rise to one or more ethnic parties. The emergence of even a single ethnic party, in turn, “infects” the political system, leading to a spiral of extreme bids that destroys competitive politics altogether. This article argues that such pessimism about the effect of ethnic parties is unwarranted. It makes the counter-intuitive claim that ethnic parties can sustain a democratic system if they are institutionally encouraged. The institutionalized encouragement of ethnic politics, I suggest, can reverse the outbidding process by replacing the unidimensional ethnic identities assumed by the outbidding models with multi-dimensional ones. The argument originates in a close study of the anomalous case of ethnic party behaviour in India. It implies that the threat to democratic stability, where it exists, comes not from the intrinsic nature of ethnic divisions but from the institutional context within which such politics takes place. Institutions which artificially restrict ethnic politics to a single dimension, other things equal, are likely to threaten democratic stability. Conversely, institutions which attach incentives to the mobilization of multiple dimensions of ethnic identity are likely to sustain rather than endanger a democratic system.
ETHNIC PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

“Is the resolution of intense but conflicting preferences in the plural society manageable in a democratic framework? We think not.”

“If a competitive system is less likely in countries with a considerable measure of subcultural pluralism, it would be going too far to say that it is impossible.”

Ethnic divisions, according to the reigning presumption in empirical democratic theory, and in commonsensical understandings of politics more generally, threaten the survival of democratic institutions. There is debate only over the degree of threat. According to one side in this debate, exemplified by the work of Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle, it is insurmountable. According to the other side, exemplified by the work of Robert Dahl, it can sometimes be mitigated. But both sides share the premise that ethnic diversity is inversely related to the maintenance of democracy. Even those who design democratic institutions to mitigate the threat of ethnic divisions caution that the odds are stacked against their success. As Donald Horowitz puts it: “Things can be done . . . but there are good systemic reasons why it is difficult to produce institutions conducive to the emergence of multi-ethnic democracy.” And Arend Lijphart cautions that institutional engineering offers ethnically divided societies “the best -- that is the least unfavorable -- prospects for peaceful democratic change.”

One of the principal mechanisms linking ethnic divisions with the breakdown of democracy is the so-called “outbidding effect.” According to theories of ethnic outbidding, ethnic divisions inevitably give rise to one or more ethnic parties. In turn, the emergence of even a single ethnic party “infects” the rest of the party system, leading to a spiral of extreme ethnic bids that destroy competitive politics altogether. Ethnic parties now flourish in multi-ethnic democracies across the globe. Canada, Spain, Ireland, Turkey, South Africa, Russia, Macedonia, India, and Sri Lanka are only some of the several examples of old and emerging democracies in which such parties have taken root. Theories of ethnic outbidding suggest that we should be profoundly pessimistic about the health of these and other multi-ethnic democracies.

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1 Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 217.
2 Dahl 1971, 111.
5 Horowitz 1994, 37.
7 Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; Horowitz 1985. I criticize this proposition in Chandra 2004, arguing that successful ethnic parties are not inevitable in ethnically-divided societies but depend upon the fulfillment of stringent institutional and demographic conditions. In this article, however, I put the question of the origin of ethnic parties aside, addressing only the question of how they behave once they emerge.
Such pessimism, I argue here, is unwarranted. This article makes the counterintuitive claim that, far from threatening democratic stability, ethnic parties can sustain a democratic system. Their ability to sustain a democratic system depends on the institutional context within which ethnic divisions are politicized. Institutions which artificially restrict ethnic politics to a single dimension, other things equal, are likely to threaten democratic stability. Conversely, institutions which encourage the politicization of multiple dimensions of ethnic identity are likely to sustain rather than endanger a democratic system.

The claim rests on a revision of the foundational assumptions about ethnic identity employed in the outbidding models. These models are based on the now discredited “primordialist” assumptions that ethnic identities are fixed, unidimensional and exogenous to politics. I discard these assumptions in favour of the “constructivist” position that ethnic identities can be fluid, multi-dimensional and endogenous to politics. I then build a model showing how these new assumptions reveal an unexpected and positive relationship between the institutionalization of ethnic divisions and democratic stability.

The argument originates in a close study of the anomalous case of ethnic party behaviour in India. India meets the classic definition of an ethnically-divided society: it is divided at least on the basis of language, tribe, caste, region, and religion. Parties based on these divisions have been salient in Indian politics at one time or another. While these parties have often engaged in an initial spiral of outbidding, however, this has typically been reversed in favour of a longer stretch of centrist behaviour. The roots of this reverse spiral lie, paradoxically, in the institutional encouragement of ethnic politics by the Indian state. Acting upon the inherent multi-dimensionality of ethnic identities, such encouragement forces initially extremist parties towards the centre and keeps them there. This article identifies the mechanism by which institutionalization produces moderation in ethnic party behaviour, and illustrates it using data from ethnic party behaviour in the north-Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

The argument provides the basis for an alternative set of institutional prescriptions for multi-ethnic democracies. The vast number of such institutional prescriptions share one or both of two basic features: (1) They depoliticize the issues that ethnic groups are most likely to fight over, and/or (2) They constrain the power of ethnic majorities to make unilateral decisions on issues that concern ethnic minorities. In contrast, the argument here suggests that institutions for multi-ethnic democracies should seek to (1) encourage the politicization of ethnic divisions and (2) induce the proliferation of multiple ethnic majorities. A multitude of freely forming ethnic majorities, I argue, may well be a more effective safeguard against the destabilization of democracy than the imposition of constraints on any single one.

The article is organized as follows: Section I defines the key terms employed in the argument; Section II outlines the predictions of theories of ethnic outbidding; Section III shows how the behaviour of ethnic parties in India diverges from the predictions of these theories; Section IV describes the institutional encouragement of ethnic politics by
the Indian state; Section V models the mechanism by which such institutional encouragement leads to centripetal ethnic parties; Section VI illustrates the model through a case study of the state of Uttar Pradesh; Section VII summarizes the argument and suggests avenues for theoretical development and further empirical research; and Section VIII concludes by identifying the implications of this argument for empirical democratic theory with a particular emphasis on institutional designs for multi-ethnic democracies.

I. Definitions

The term ethnic identity refers to nominal membership in an ascriptive category, including race, language, caste, or religion. This is consistent with the broad definition of ethnic identity now becoming standard in the literature on ethnic mobilization. As Horowitz puts it, “ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers ‘tribes,’ ‘races,’ ‘nationalities,’ and castes.”

Membership in an ethnic category is inherited: I might, for example, be born a Sikh from the Mazhabi caste in Punjab, a Yoruba Christian from southern Nigeria, or an African-American Muslim from Chicago. However, as these examples illustrate, we are usually born as members of several ethnic categories, with a choice about which one to identify with.

An ethnic party is a party that appeals to voters as the champion of the interests of one ethnic category or set of categories to the exclusion of others, and makes such an appeal central to its mobilizing strategy. The key aspect of this definition is exclusion. Defined in this way, an ethnic party may champion the interests of more than one ethnic category. However, even when it attempts to mobilize several distinct categories, it does so by identifying the common ethnic enemy to be excluded.

The terms outbidding and centrism refer to the location of party positions on a given dimension. Outbidding describes a process in which parties take up positions towards the endpoints on this dimension. Centrism refers to the assumption of positions closer to the centre.

By institutionalization of a given cleavage, I mean the attachment of routinized, within-system payoffs to political mobilization based on that cleavage.

I use the term democracy in a minimalist sense to mean simply a system in which the political leadership is chosen through competitive elections. The term democratic stability is also defined minimally to mean simply the preservation of a system of competitive elections.

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8 Horowitz 1985, 53; see also Varshney 2002, 5.
9 For a somewhat similar definition see Horowitz 1985, 299. Horowitz too argues that an ethnic party can champion the cause of more than one ethnic group. Horowitz argues that a party should be termed multi-ethnic “only if it spans the major groups in conflict” (299). The problem with this definition is that conflict between ethnic groups is not prior to but often created in the process of political mobilization.
10 Huntington 1991, 7
II. Models of Ethnic Outbidding

The first model of ethnic “outbidding” (hereafter Model 1), based on the axioms of rational choice theory, was proposed by Rabushka and Shepsle in 1972. A second version (hereafter Model 2), based on a social-psychological approach to human motivations, was proposed by Donald Horowitz in 1985. Although the two models make different assumptions about the content of individual preferences, they make identical assumptions about the distribution of these preferences within and across groups, and so generate identical predictions.

Model 1 makes the following assumptions:

1. There are two ethnic groups, A and B, separately organized in all respects.
2. There is a single issue axis, represented by the line AB below:
   
   A___________________B
3. All individuals within an ethnic group have identical preferences over alternatives on this issue axis.
4. All individuals in different ethnic groups have diametrically-opposed preferences over alternatives on this issue axis: all As prefer the endpoint A most and the endpoint B least; all Bs prefer the endpoint B most and the endpoint A least.
5. Individual preferences, and therefore group preferences, on ethnic issues are “intense,” which is formalized as meaning that individuals are risk-acceptant.
6. The outcome is decided by majority rule.

The assumptions driving Model 2 are less explicitly identified. The discussion below first identifies the implicit assumptions that inform the model and then shows that they are consistent with those of Model 1.

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11 Horowitz 1985, 349-64.
12 The discussion of the model here is from Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 67-73.
13 By not making these assumptions explicit, Horowitz runs the risk of inadvertently contradicting himself later in the study from which the model is drawn. But without making these assumptions, the predictions of his outbidding model do not follow. For example, Horowitz makes a puzzling attempt to argue elsewhere in the study that sub-ethnic divisions within an ethnic group create incentives for the proliferation of parties claiming to represent that group, and therefore are likely to fuel more intense outbidding conflict. By sub-ethnic divisions, Horowitz means ascriptive divisions based on differences of caste, clan, language, religion, or region that are “at a level below the principal lines of politically relevant group boundaries” (Horowitz 1985, 350). But the acknowledgment of differences in preferences within ethnic groups is difficult to reconcile with conclusions of the model introduced earlier in the text. If the preferences of subgroups within the ethnic “majority” are different from each other, and cluster at different points on the issue axis, then the logic of the outbidding model is arrested. Suppose, for instance, that clusters of preferences of sub-groups in both group A and B are clustered towards the centre of the issue axis. In this configuration, a
(1) Model 2 also assumes a bipolar ethnic structure with two groups, A and B. It attributes to each a “segmented organizational structure,”\textsuperscript{14} echoing Model 1’s assumption that the groups are separately organized in all respects.

(2) Model 2 stipulates that ethnic issues preempt all other issues in ethnically-divided societies, echoing Model 1’s assumption that there is a single issue axis.\textsuperscript{15}

(3) Individuals belonging to an ethnic group in Model 2 have a shared desire for psychic gratification of two kinds: self-esteem and a sense of belonging.\textsuperscript{16} But, there is no acknowledgment that these individuals might desire other things more, or differ in the degree to which they desire these two forms of gratification. Instead, ethnic groups are treated throughout as solidary groups with common desires. The conclusion that Model 2 treats ethnic group preferences as fixed and homogeneous, therefore, is unavoidable.

(4) At the same time, Model 2 describes conflict between ethnic groups as a zero sum game, where one group’s interests are in direct opposition to the other’s.\textsuperscript{17} Ethnic parties representing distinct ethnic groups, according to Model 2, present voters with an “either-or” choice, and there are no floating votes between parties.\textsuperscript{18} This indicates that Model 2 also takes preferences across groups in conflict to be perfectly incompatible.

(5) Horowitz’s frequent descriptions of the emotional attachment to ethnic identity as “intense” and “out of proportion” indicates agreement with Rabushka and Shepsle’s assumption that ethnic group preferences are intense.\textsuperscript{19}

(6) Finally, Model 2 also assumes that the outcome is decided through simple majority vote.

The predictions of the two models are summarized in the figures below, adapted from Horowitz. The preferences of group A are concentrated at one extreme of the issue axis AB, and the preferences of group B at the other extreme. Faced with a distribution of preferences in which the most preferred outcome of members of each group lies at opposite ends of a single issue axis, a multi-ethnic coalition can only obtain support by playing an ambiguous strategy that simultaneously promises each group some probability

\textsuperscript{14} Horowitz 1985, 8-9, 342
\textsuperscript{15} Horowitz 1985, 19.
\textsuperscript{16} Horowitz 1985, 143.
\textsuperscript{17} Horowitz 1985, 141-228.
\textsuperscript{18} Horowitz 1985, 345.
\textsuperscript{19} Horowitz 1985, 131.
of obtaining its most preferred option (Figure 1). This “lottery” is able to defeat a range of positions distributed around the centre of the issue axis.

[Figure 1 here]

In order to defeat or weaken the multi-ethnic coalition, therefore, a challenger party or parties must take up a position closer to either endpoint A or endpoint B. Sooner or later, therefore, according to both models, a multi-ethnic coalition is undercut by ethnic challengers on either or both flanks which “outbid” it for the support of As and/or Bs (Figure 2).

[Figure 2 here]
Once the first ethnic bid is in place, it can only be defeated by more extreme bids. The polarized preference distribution stipulated by the models inexorably pulls all parties, old and new, towards the extreme ends of the issue axis (Figure 3).

When there is even a slight difference in the numerical strength of groups A and B, the result should be either or both of two equally destabilizing outcomes: either the party bidding for the support of the majority group A should win the election and subvert the democratic process by stripping the minority group B of all rights; or the minority group B should engage in destabilizing violence to preempt such exclusion.

The assumptions that ethnic groups are fixed, internally homogeneous, unidimensional, and exogenous to institutions and political competition, are now commonly associated with “primordialist” approaches to ethnic identity. They have been persuasively undermined by constructivist approaches to ethnicity in anthropology, history, and political science, which show us that ethnic groups can be fluid, internally fragmented, multi-dimensional, and endogenous to institutional structures and political competition. Constructivist approaches began to gain currency in the literature on ethnic mobilization in the 1970s and 1980s, around the same time that the outbidding models were formulated. While these models cannot be reasonably criticized, therefore, for not incorporating insights about ethnic identity that were then not yet established, it is reasonable to ask what the implications are of the use of unrealistic assumptions about ethnic identity in the outbidding models.

Rabushka and Shepsle brush aside objections which criticize the realism of their assumptions, arguing that the model should be judged based on the accuracy of its predictions rather than its assumptions. Horowitz, similarly, justifies his description of ethnic groups as a “conceptual convenience” which, though not always accurate, captures the essential elements of politics in ethnically-divided societies. We do not currently have the cross-national data on the positions taken by ethnic parties which would allow a systematic empirical test of the outbidding models. But, within-country observations of ethnic party behaviour can provide an alternative method of investigating their plausibility. The next section draws on observations from post-colonial Indian politics for this purpose.

III. The Reverse Centrist Spiral Among Ethnic Parties in India

The figure below describes the typical pattern of ethnic party behaviour across space and time in post-colonial India.

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20 Rabushka and Shepsle do not fully explore the continued relevance of an ambiguous strategy. For example, it can be shown that the multi-ethnic coalition might defeat the ethnic bid by offering voters a stacked lottery.
21 For a summary of the debate between primordialism and constructivism, see Chandra 2001.
22 Among the examples of constructivist scholarship that make these claims, see Barth 1969; Kasfir 1979; Brass 1974; Laitin 1986; Pandey 1992; Posner 2004; Waters 1990.
23 Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 25, 4n.
24 Horowitz 1985, 74
In what is widely accepted as the “centrist equilibrium of Indian politics,” aspiring ethnic parties in India typically open with an extreme bid and then adopt progressively more moderate positions until they find their way to the centre.

Consider examples of progressive moderation of ethnic parties at the national level, drawn from the extensive secondary literature on political parties in India and on my own field research on Indian election campaigns between 1996 and 1998. In 1951, in the first election in independent India, the umbrella Congress party was challenged at the national level by four ethnic parties: the Ram Rajya Parishad, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, all vying for the support of the Hindu “majority;” and the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, bidding for the support of the ex-untouchable castes. Three of the four ethnic parties gradually disappeared after being unable to obtain more than a negligible share of the vote, and the fourth, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, attempted to remodel itself into a centrist party in the image of Congress. In the late 1980s, as Congress began to decline, ethnic parties appeared once more on the political arena: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), descended from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, veered back towards an extreme position by attempting to polarize Hindus against Muslims; and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Janata Dal (JD) attempted to mobilize the Scheduled Castes, “backward” castes, and Muslims against the Hindu upper castes. However, each party subsequently moderated its platform. Most notable has been the moderation of the BJP, which, when it assumed power for the first time in 1998, did not include any overtly pro-Hindu issues in its governing agenda.

A similar pattern characterizes party politics at the state level. In the late 1950s, for example, the main opposition to Congress in the state of Tamil Nadu came from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), an ethnic party that fought its first election on the secessionist demand for the separate state of “Dravida Nadu.” By the next election in 1962, the DMK had dropped the demand for secession. Since then, the DMK and its offshoot the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) have become part of a stable, centrist party system in Tamil Nadu. Similar attempts at outbidding by ethnic parties in other states have been reversed or arrested. In Punjab in the 1980s, the Akali Dal intensified its demands for regional autonomy for Sikhs, with some factions claiming solidarity with Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a Sikh revivalist leader associated with a demand for an independent Sikh state. However, by the late 1990s, the Akali Dal had deemphasized the demand for autonomy and sought to reinvent itself as a party of all Punjabis rather than simply of Sikhs. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena came to power in

26 A systematic coding of party positions across space and time based does not currently exist. However, there is general agreement in the secondary sources over the progressive moderation of initially outbidding parties. Wherever possible, I cite multiple sources to emphasise the breadth of this agreement.
29 India Today 1998.
31 Based on fieldwork in the 1997 assembly elections in Punjab.
1995 on the basis of a virulently anti-Muslim platform. However, it did not, as predicted, push the Congress party, its main opposition, towards ethnic outbidding. Moreover, it moderated its anti-Muslim rhetoric after coming to power to the extent of withdrawing its demand for the construction of a Hindu temple in the north-Indian town of Ayodhya which it had once upheld as a symbol of the rights of the Hindu “majority.”

Finally, the state of Uttar Pradesh, which I will discuss in detail subsequently, once dominated by the centrist Congress party, now has a full-blown ethnic party system, with each of the three successor parties appealing to the electorate on the basis of ascriptive categories. However, the process of ethnification of the party system in Uttar Pradesh proceeded in exactly the opposite direction predicted by the outbidding model.

What explains the variation in the behaviour of ethnic parties across historical periods in India? One possible explanation lies in the existence of a “dispersed” or “multipolar” cleavage structure, i.e., a cleavage structure in which there are several small groups, none of which constitute a majority. Where every ethnic group is in a minority, political parties representing such groups must form coalitions with others. Consequently, we should be less likely to see outbidding behaviour. India, according to Horowitz, is an “outstanding example” of a state with a dispersed cleavage structure. Robert Dahl agrees: “In India, language, caste and region generate a fantastic panoply of subcultures, each of which is a relatively small minority.” Consequently, we should not be surprised that ethnic parties in India do not engage in sustained outbidding.

But the characterization of India’s cleavage structure as “dispersed” or “multipolar” is incorrect. It privileges particular dimensions of ethnic identity and particular ways of categorizing groups on those dimensions while ignoring others. If we focus selectively on the existence of several regional languages in India, we might categorize India’s cleavage structure as “dispersed.” Similarly, if we focus selectively on the existence of several localized caste groups on this dimension, we might also categorize India’s cleavage structure as “dispersed.” But such a categorization overlooks, inexplicably, other ways of categorizing the Indian population which can and have sliced the population into bipolar groups (Upper Caste versus Backward Caste; Hindi-speakers versus non-Hindi speakers; Hindus versus Muslims; North versus South). The reverse centrist spiral of ethnic party behaviour in India, therefore, cannot be attributed to a dispersed cleavage structure. Rather, we need to identify the conditions under which each type of categorization is likely to be activated rather than another.

A second explanation highlights the moderating influence of “cross-cutting” cleavage structures. Cross-cutting cleavages, the classic argument runs, prevent the emergence of permanent majorities, since the mobilization of voters on any one dimension of cleavage is likely to be cancelled by the mobilization of voters on another.

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32 Lele 1995; Hansen 2001
33 Times of India 1998.
34 Horowitz 1971. See also Horowitz, 1985, 37.
37 Dahl 1971, 117.
With multiple cleavages of religion, caste, tribe, region, and language slicing across each other, India is also commonly described as an outstanding example of a society with cross-cutting cleavages. Consequently, ethnic parties in India should be less likely to engage in outbidding behaviour.

The description of India’s cleavage structure as cross-cutting is more accurate than the description of it as “dispersed.” But a controlled comparison between colonial and post-colonial India quickly illustrates that we cannot attribute the reverse centrist spiral of ethnic parties in post-colonial India simply to the fact of cross-cutting social cleavages. In colonial India, competition between the Muslim League, which represented Muslims, and the Indian National Congress, which was dominated mainly by Hindus, was consistent with the expectations of the outbidding model. The Muslim League, initially close to the centre, took up progressively more extreme positions over the issue of territorial autonomy for Muslims that resulted ultimately in the violent partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947. Post-colonial politics, however, have been marked by intermittent outbidding by marginal parties followed by centrist behaviour. India’s cleavage structure could have been characterized as “cross-cutting” in both periods. Why then do we see outbidding in one period but centrism in another?

To the extent that India’s cross-cutting cleavage structure is a constant, it cannot be considered a plausible explanation for the variation in outcomes across time. As will be clear in subsequent sections, the argument here builds on the insight that cross-cutting cleavages are likely to moderate ethnic outbidding. Indeed, it assumes the existence of cross-cutting cleavages. But, I argue, it is the *institutionalization* of such cleavages, rather than the mere fact of their existence, that explains the variation in democratic outcomes in India and elsewhere. There is a significant difference in the cleavages that were institutionally recognized in colonial and post-colonial India. The colonial state privileged religious identity over other types of identities at the national level, particularly by providing separate communal electorates to Hindus and Muslims since 1909. The post-colonial constitution, in contrast, institutionalized multiple and cross-cutting cleavages. This difference in patterns of institutionalization accounts for the striking difference in the pattern of ethnic party behaviour.

The section that follows establishes the proposition that the Indian state institutionalizes the mobilization of ethnic identity along multiple dimensions and discourages non-ethnic forms of mobilization. Subsequent sections link this institutionalization with the behaviour of political parties.

**IV. Institutional Encouragement of Ethnic Politics**

One of the defining features of the Indian political system, is that the state controls the bulk of resources in society, including 69 percent of the jobs in the organized economy.\(^38\) Significantly, the liberalization of the Indian economy begun by the ruling Congress party in 1991 and continued by the coalition governments that have ruled India

\(^{38}\) Simmel 1955; Coser 1956; Dahl 1956; Dahrendorf 1959; Lipset 1960; Rae and Taylor 1970.

since, has not appreciably shrunk the dominance of the state. These resources are distributed mainly through networks of patronage. In such a political system, the way for individuals to get ahead is either to become a part of the state themselves, and so obtain control over the flow of patronage, or become close to someone who controls the state, and become a consumer, if not a distributor, of patronage benefits.

Three sets of policies maximize an individual’s chances for obtaining control of the state: (1) affirmative action policies; (2) language policies; and (3) policies on creating new federal units within the Indian Union. The broad contours of these policies were outlined in India’s constitution, written by a constituent assembly between 1948 and 1950, and adopted the following year. All three policies, by accident rather than design, privilege the politicization of ethnic identities over others.

**Affirmative Action Policies**

Perhaps the most important institutional devices encouraging the politicization of ethnic identity in India are its affirmative action policies. The Indian Constitution promises preferential treatment to three separate categories: “Scheduled Castes” (SCs), “Scheduled Tribes” (STs), and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs). The Constitution does not explicitly lay down the criteria according to which the “backward classes” are to be identified. Paradoxically, however, the term was intended to mean backward castes and has come to be accepted as such. As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee of the constitution, observed: “What are called backward classes are . . . nothing else but a collection of certain castes.”

Those who belong to the “Scheduled Castes” are allotted proportional representation in national, state, and local legislatures; proportional employment in all government services, including the civil services and the police force; and “reserved” seats in all government-funded educational institutions. The “Scheduled Tribes” are eligible for the same benefits as Scheduled Castes. The Constitution also empowers state and central governments to provide unspecified benefits to the “backward classes” (i.e., castes). However, it does not provide a permanent list of which castes and tribes are to be included in each category and which are to be excluded. This is left for the central or state governments to decide through simple majority legislation, and is open for periodic review (Constitution of India Article 341, 342).

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40 While the absolute share of the public and private sector in employment has remained relatively stable, it is worth noting, the relative rates of growth of the two have changed following the economic reforms. The greater opportunities and incentives now provided by the government in the private sector combined with restriction on the expansion of the public sector mean that the private sector is now growing at a faster rate (Economic Survey of India 2000-1). In the longer run, if the government policy continues to encourage the expansion of economic activity in the private sector, we should expect its relative share in employment to increase even in the absence of privatization efforts. In the present and the immediate future, however, the state continues to dominate employment opportunities in the organized economy in India.

41 Basu 1996; Austin 1966.

42 Galanter 1978, 1816.

43 Galanter 1978, 1812.
The ambiguity over which groups are to be included or excluded in the list of beneficiaries, and the ease with which the lists are revised means that individuals have an incentive to mobilize on the basis of caste or tribal identity and demand that their caste or tribe be included in one of the three lists. Politicians have an incentive to engage in the mobilization of individuals on the basis of caste or tribe. Not surprisingly, therefore, these constitutional provisions have resulted in a wave of caste mobilizations at both the state and the central level, as large numbers of caste groups, often exceeding a majority of the population, demand to be classified as “Scheduled Caste,” “Scheduled Tribe,” or, most frequently, “Backward Caste.”

Language Policy

The official language of the state determines access to state employment and, indirectly, to opportunities in the private sector. Since language repertoires are not easily changed in a single generation, a decision on what the official language of the state is to be immediately identifies winners in the race for control of the state (those who are fluent in the language designated as the official language) and losers (those who are not).  

There is a hierarchy of official languages in India, represented in the diagram below:

[Figure 5 here]

At the top are the official languages of the Union, which offer the best career prospects for jobs in the All India Civil Services. At the next level are the official languages of the federal units, the Indian states, which offer access to the All India Civil Services as well as the vast pool of jobs controlled by the states. At the third level are “mother tongues,” which do not offer any access to state jobs. State-level governments may add, subtract, or replace one or more official languages at the state level through simple majority legislation.

The relative positions of individual languages in the language hierarchy are open to renegotiation. At the top of the hierarchy, while Hindi is clearly designated by the Constitution as the official language of the Union, English enjoys supposedly temporary status as an “additional associate official language,” to be withdrawn once non-Hindi speakers, who constitute a majority of the Indian population, acquire proficiency in Hindi (Constitution of India, Article 343). The Constitution instructs the government to periodically review the relative status of English and Hindi and take steps towards the eventual removal of English. The question of which language or languages are to be listed as the official languages of the state is also easily decided through simple majority legislation by the state assembly, or through the directive of the central government (Constitution of India, Article 345).

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44 Laitin 1998.
46 Brass 1994, 164-5, 177
Had the official languages of the state been specified once and for all, individuals who did not speak these languages would have had incentives to individually pursue the strategy of learning the official languages. But since official languages are treated as an open, and easily revised policy issue in India, individuals who lose out have incentives to mobilize as linguistic groups and demand that their own language be upgraded to the status of official, or that the language spoken by another group be downgraded to the status of mother tongue. In practice, linguistic mobilization has been a recurrent issue at the state level in post-colonial Indian politics.47

Recogntion of Statehood

India is a federation in which powers are shared between the Union and the state governments. The governmental machinery in each state has considerable power in determining the “life-chances” of its population: the power to formulate policies on education, land ownership and taxation on land and agricultural income; the power to allocate jobs and distribute other forms of patronage through a sprawling state apparatus; and the use of funds obtained as grants from the central government. Sub-units within states have fewer resources at their disposal. Where the designation of a sub-unit as a state carries with it substantial material benefits, and where the redrawing of state boundaries is relatively easy, sub-units within state boundaries have strong incentives to demand to be recognized as states in their own right.

The states, however, are not treated as sovereign entities by the Indian Constitution. The Constitution empowers the Union government to carve out new states from old ones simply by passing a law, without even obtaining the assent of the state concerned (Constitution of India, Article 3). The central government has established two precedents for the granting of statehood: First, statehood is only accorded on the basis of ethnic criteria, particularly to three kinds of ethnic groups: linguistic, regional, and tribal. Second, statehood is granted only in response to the popular mobilization of substantial sections of the population.48 These constitutional precedents mean that politicians have incentives to mobilize individuals on an ethnic basis to demand a state of their own, and to do so by getting large numbers of people out on the streets.

The decision to adopt these institutions was made in top-down fashion by political elites influenced by a liberal nationalist ideology. The principal deliberations over the constitution took place largely behind closed doors, confined to the chambers of the Constituent Assembly, and, within the Constituent Assembly, in the still smaller meeting rooms of committees. The members of the Constituent Assembly sought to tap popular opinion by holding consultations with citizens’ groups and associations.49 But their choice of institutions was not driven by pressure from pre-mobilized ethnic groups. Popular mobilization on the basis of religion, which had been the predominant feature of colonial politics, had subsided after the bloody partition of India in 1947. And groups based on caste, language, and region were politically active only in a localized, intermittent, and muted way during 1948-1950, when the constitution was written.

49 For an account of the process by which the constitution was formulated, see Austin 1966.
Once these institutional choices were made, however, their unintended consequence was the activation, over time, of large-scale mass mobilizations along multiple ethnic dimensions. A wave of mobilizations by linguistic and regional groups demanding states of their own broke out in the late 1950s; there was an explosive struggle over the “official” language at the national level in the 1960s, followed by similar struggles in individual states; and demands for caste-based affirmative action percolated upwards from the local to the state level in state after state immediately after the adoption of the constitution, culminating in nation-wide agitations by the late 1980s. At the same time, non-ethnic forms of political self-definition were deactivated. During the same period, mobilization on non-ethnic dimensions such as class, sector, or income, were less visible, less sustained, and limited in scope. They have had some success in lobbying for policy concessions in particular issue areas: for example, farmers’ movements have had considerable success in extracting agricultural subsidies from the government.\(^{50}\) However, non-ethnic politics is at a disadvantage in the struggle for control of the state, and the state in India is where the opportunities lie.

V. Institutionalized Multi-Dimensionality and Centrist Ethnic Party Behaviour

This section models the mechanism by which the institutionalization of multiple and cross-cutting dimensions of identity leads to an initial spiral of extreme bids followed by a stable centrist equilibrium. The importance of institutionalization lies in the fact that politicians who activate institutionalized cleavages can credibly promise voters concrete rewards within the existing rules of the game. However, politicians who seek to activate cleavages which exist at the social level but are not institutionally recognized must first promise to transform the existing rules of the game before they can credibly promise rewards. Consequently, institutionally-recognized cleavages are advantaged as mobilization strategies, while cleavages which are not given institutional recognition are disadvantaged.\(^{51}\)

Although the model does not use the language of the spatial distribution of preferences, its assumptions are consistent with the assumptions of the outbidding model on a single dimension. The key innovation is that it allows for the possibility of choice between group memberships on more than one dimension of identity. Introducing the possibility of even one additional dimension produces the radically different outcome of centripetal rather than outbidding behaviour.

Imagine a political system which offers institutional incentives for the activation of two cross-cutting dimensions, represented in Figure 6.

\(^{50}\) Varshney 1995.

\(^{51}\) For a somewhat different argument about the importance of institutionalization, see Laitin 1986 and Posner 2004, who argue that institutionalization not only gives voters greater incentive to mobilize along those cleavages which are institutionally recognized but also creates a “commonsensical world” in which those cleavages which are not given institutional recognition become progressively less “real” in the political imagination of voters. I do not make this more stringent assumption about the psychological impact of institutionalization here. But the assumption that institutionalization creates a commonsensical world around institutionalized cleavages would produce an equivalent prediction, leading to the privileging of institutionalized over non-institutionalized cleavages in politics.
Dimension 1 divides the population into majority group A and minority group B. Dimension 2 divides the population into majority group D and minority group E. On any dimension, the groups are mutually exclusive, and each cleavage encompasses the totality of the population. The diagrams below illustrate how each of these two institutionalized dimensions of identity slices the population.

[Figure 6 here]

A single individual in this society possesses one of the following four combinations of institutionalized identities:

1. \((A \cap D)\): (i.e., belongs to the majority group on both dimensions).
2. \((A \cap E)\): (i.e., belongs to the majority group on Dimension 1 but the minority group on Dimension 2).
3. \((B \cap D)\): (i.e., belongs to the minority group on Dimension 1 but the majority group on Dimension 2).
4. \((B \cap E)\): (i.e., belongs to the minority group on both dimensions).

**Assumptions**

A1. The model assumes a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system with only two political parties. In a first past the post system with two parties, either must obtain more than 50 percent of the votes in order to win. This assumption is a restatement of the majority rule principle driving the outbidding models, but gives it an explicit institutional form.

A2. Both parties seek to win elections.

A3. Parties can only take up a position on one dimension at a time. On any dimension, they can bid for the exclusive support of the majority, or the minority, or take up a position of equidistance from the two. Bidding for the exclusive support of either group corresponds to the “outbidding” strategy assumed by the earlier models. “Equidistance” from both groups constitutes a centrist political strategy.

A4. Any outbidding strategy carries the cost of inter-group conflict on society. Such a cost is not specific to the party that plays it but is inflicted on society at large. The strategy of equidistance, however, is costless.

A5. Individuals in this society care only about being members of the group that is promised rewards by the winning party. Faced with a choice of party positions on different identity dimensions, voters will choose to activate that dimension of identity which places them in the majority group. If they are in a majority or a minority on both dimensions, they will be indifferent between the two. But if they find themselves in the
majority on one dimension and the minority in other, they will choose to activate their
majority identity.

A6. Positions taken early are more credible than positions taken later. If two parties bid
for the support of the same majority group on the same dimension of identity, therefore,
the first mover is credible while the second is not.

At some initial point, imagine that only one dimension of identity is salient (AB).
Suppose now that one of the two parties declares itself to be the champion of majority
group A and excludes minority group B. This corresponds to an “outbidding” strategy on
a single dimension of identity. This declaration should lead to the clustering of all A
voters behind this first mover. The second party cannot also credibly bid for the support
of the majority group A (by assumption A6). In a political system in which no other
dimension of identity can be activated, the results of political competition would be
decided in this first round. The first mover would always win; the second mover would
always lose; and we should expect the democratic system to be destabilized by the
permanent exclusion of the Bs. This first scenario corresponds exactly to the first stage of
the outbidding model.

But where institutions attach payoffs to more than one dimension of identity, a
party that stands to lose on the first dimension can turn the verdict to its advantage by
activating the second dimension (DE) and bidding for the support of the majority group D
on the second dimension. More generally, the institutionalization of multiple cleavages
means that any party mobilizing voters on the basis of one cleavage provokes a counter-
mobilization by a competing party on another dimension that cuts across the first.

Centrism is a special case of the redefinition of majorities produced by the
institutionalization of multiple dimensions of identity. Centrism arises when the two
institutionalized cleavage configurations are “symmetric.” In other words, if \(x\) is the
proportion of the majority group A and \((1-x)\) the proportion of the minority group B in
the population, then symmetry requires that \(x\) is also the proportion of the majority
group D and \((1-x)\) is also the proportion of minority group E in the population. Under a
symmetric cleavage configuration, even as the proportions of majority \(x\) and minority
\((1-x)\) on each dimension remain constant, the proportions in which members of any one
group on the first dimension are “remixed” into a new group on another dimension may
vary.

As an example, consider a case in which \(x = 60\%\) and \((1-x) = 40\%\) on both
dimensions. Any of the following combinations of identities across dimensions would be
compatible with these proportions:

[Table 1 here]

When the two cleavage structures are symmetric, the result of both parties bidding for the
support of the majority group on the two different dimensions will be a draw. The
reasoning is as follows:
From A5, we know that:

Support for Party 1 = \((A \cap D)/2\) + \((A \cap E)\) \hspace{1cm} (1)

Support for Party 2: \((A \cap D)/2\) + \((B \cap D)\) \hspace{1cm} (2)

When cleavages are symmetric:

\(A \cap E = A - (A \cap D) = x - (A \cap D)\) \hspace{1cm} (3)

\(B \cap D = D - (A \cap D) = x - (A \cap D)\) \hspace{1cm} (4)

Therefore, \(A \cap E = B \cap D\) \hspace{1cm} (5)

It follows that \((A \cap D)/2\) + \((A \cap E)\) = \((A \cap D)/2\) + \((B \cap D)\)

Support for Party 1 in other words, equals support for Party 2. This holds true for any symmetric pair of cleavages, regardless of the relative sizes of the majority and minority groups, and regardless of the way in which members of a group on one dimension are remixed into new groups on another dimension.

Given the institutionalization of symmetric cleavages, then, the model suggests that it is always profitable for initially marginal parties to bid for the support of ethnic majority A or D. The reasons for this initial imbalance may be exogenously determined and various: different historical trajectories, or organizational resources may have given one party an initial advantage over the other in the past. Even anticipating that its competitor will respond by bidding on the cross-cutting dimension, an outbidding strategy still allows a marginal party to orchestrate a draw and so improve its position. The best response of the dominant party is to outbid on a second dimension to prevent further attrition of its vote base. Wherever we see marginal parties, therefore, we should see an initial spiral of outbidding, ending with an electoral verdict in which both parties are deadlocked.

Once the two counter-balancing bids have produced a draw, both parties are deadlocked in a position in which neither can improve its position further. If they continue to outbid, they would inflict the costs of high levels of inter-group tension and possibly violence on society without any expected increase in votes. But, if both parties coordinate on a centrist strategy, then both can expect to maintain their position without inflicting the cost of violence. Further, once both parties are situated at the centre they open up the possibility of obtaining the elusive winning margin by making a localized and selective pitch to some section of the minority groups whom they formerly excluded. In subsequent elections, therefore, we should find parties which began with an initial spiral of outbidding to be locked into a centrist equilibrium by the institutional incentives that allow for the activation of new identity dimensions.

The centrist equilibrium insulates the democratic system from destabilization by preventing the permanent exclusion of minorities in two ways. First, since no party seeking to mobilize an ethnic majority at the expense of the minority crosses the winning threshold, it is simply incapable of obtaining the requisite strength to exclude the minority. Second, precisely because no party has a winning majority, all parties have to seek the support of some section of the minority they formerly excluded in order to
cobble together the missing winning margin. The larger the winning margin that they seek, the more we should see the inclusion of previously excluded minorities.

Over time, this equilibrium might be exogenously destabilized. The key actor driving the initial spiral of outbidding is a marginal party for which a draw is beneficial. A dominant party does not have an incentive to engage in outbidding behaviour unilaterally, since the draw which inevitably results will weaken rather than strengthen its position. The entry of a new political party or an organizational split in one of the old parties, therefore, might provoke a new spiral of outbidding initiated by these newly formed, marginal parties. An environment of uncertainty, in which parties underestimate their actual support base might have the same result. Alternatively, links to other political games at other levels may upset the centrist equilibrium by driving one of the parties towards an extreme bid. A regional party organization for instance, may be forced by a national-level party organization to play an outbidding strategy even against local incentives. By the same logic that led to this initial centrist equilibrium, however, any fresh attempt at ethnic outbidding is likely to generate a counter-mobilization on a new dimension that guides each party back to the centre.

Note that the emergence of the centrist behaviour depends upon the institutionalization of a symmetric cleavage structure. The institutionalization of asymmetric cleavages, under conditions of two party competition, should produce a politics of competitive polarization rather than centrism. An asymmetric cleavage structure should under majority rule produce a victory for one party even on two dimensions. With asymmetric cleavages, \((A \cap E) \neq (B \cap D)\). The result, therefore, will be a majority for one of the two parties rather than a draw. But as long as institutions attach rewards to the mobilization of voters on more than one dimension, the majority obtained under these conditions will not be stable. Instead, it will be vulnerable to destabilization by new majorities manufactured on different dimensions by those who stand to lose, whether or not these dimensions are symmetric. The inherently transient nature of majorities and minorities in this environment renders the politics of ethnicity indistinguishable from “normal” democratic politics. While the institutionalization of asymmetric cleavages should not produce the centrist behaviour that is the main concern of this article, it should nevertheless produce the fluidity which can independently insulate a democratic system from breakdown.

As should now be clear, the model assumes the existence of cross-cutting cleavages, but builds upon the classic insight that cross-cutting cleavages can safeguard democratic stability in three ways. First, it posits that it is the institutionalization of these cleavages that makes them viable candidates for politicization rather than the simple existence of such cleavages at the social level. When cleavages are not institutionalized, it is difficult (although not impossible) to activate them in politics. Second, it identifies the conditions under which political entrepreneurs should resort to the activation of these cleavages. In other words, it attaches the missing argument about agency to a structural argument about cleavages. Third, it develops a precise specification of the particular type of cross-cuttingness that is likely to produce centrisim. Under conditions of two-party competition and a first past the post electoral system, a cross-cutting cleavage structure
must be symmetric in order to produce centripetal party behaviour. Other electoral rules and party systems may well require different types of cross-cuttingness, as yet unidentified, to produce equivalent outcomes. The following section illustrates the model using the case of ethnic party politics in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

**VI. The Ethnification of the Party System in Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), situated in northern India, is the most populous of India’s states. With a population of 139 million in 1991, it almost equaled the size of the Russian Federation. The population of Uttar Pradesh is divided on the basis of four main cleavages: religion, language, caste, and region.

Between 1947 and 1985, Uttar Pradesh politics was dominated by the multi-ethnic Congress party. The Congress party typically won the majority of parliamentary seats from Uttar Pradesh throughout this period, with the single exception of the 1977 elections. It was also the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh for most of this period, with four brief intervals of opposition rule that added up to only four years. Congress appealed to the disparate groups in its electoral base using the ambiguous strategy that Rabushka and Shepsle attribute to a multi-ethnic coalition.

**Step I: The First Ethnic Bid**

Following 1985, we began to witness an unraveling of the multi-ethnic Congress at the centre. In the mid-1980s, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a religious revivalist organization launched a mass agitation calling for the destruction of a mosque, which it alleged had been built by a Mughal invader after destroying a Hindu temple that had stood at the same spot. The VHP framed the issue of the temple as a referendum on the rights of the Hindu “majority” (82 percent of the population of U.P.) relative to the Hindu “minority” (17 percent of the population of U.P.). From 1986 onwards, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party aligned itself with the demand for the temple. The BJP outflanked the Congress party by declaring itself openly as a champion of the Hindu majority and accusing the Congress of pandering to Muslim interests in the name of secularism.

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52 World Bank 1998. The new state of Uttaranchal was carved out of U.P. in 2000, with a population of approximately 8 million according to the 2001 census. All data used in this section, unless otherwise stated, are from the 1991 census.
53 Butler et al. 1995.
54 Upadhyaya 1992; Embree 1987, 58-60.
55 Why the Congress strategy of ambiguity remained a winner for almost four decades is one puzzling question raised by the outbidding model, which argues that such a strategy is “inherently unstable” (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 82). However, it is not the puzzle to which I wish to draw attention here.
56 1991 Census figures, reported in Butler et al. 1995.
57 The BJP traces its lineage to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a Hindu nationalist political party that slowly moderated its position until 1977, when it merged with a collection of opposition parties to form an umbrella Janata Party. The BJP was reborn from Janata in 1980. The BJP in its initial years continued to define itself as an aggregative party, meant for both Hindus and Muslims. Its aggressive championing of Hindu interests can be traced specifically to 1986. In the early part of the 1980s, the BJP was, surprisingly, more centrist than the Congress. For details, see Chandra 1994.
Religion is not among those cleavages promised institutional rewards in the post-colonial Indian Constitution. Consequently, mobilizing voters on the basis of religion in post-colonial India has proved an extraordinarily difficult task. Attempts at overt religious mobilization did not yield political dividends in the several national elections preceding this period.\textsuperscript{59} Political entrepreneurs in post-colonial India seeking to mobilize members of a religious category were typically compelled instead to frame their demands on the basis of one of the institutionally-recognized categories of language or caste. The Akali Dal in Punjab, for instance, demanded regional autonomy for Sikhs (a religious group) by emphasizing their linguistic rather than religious identity.\textsuperscript{60} And Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Sikhs across Indian states have sought affirmative action on the basis of their caste rather than religious identity, demanding inclusion in the categories of “Scheduled Caste” and “Other Backward Caste.” In the 1980s, however, the sustained effort at mass mobilization outside the political arena by the VHP, along with a series of exogenous shocks, including the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1985 and violence in Kashmir, Punjab and the North East, gave religion more potency in post-colonial Indian politics than it had had before.

Once the BJP had overtly assumed a Hindu majoritarian position, the logic of the outbidding model should have resulted in one or more of the following scenarios: (1) An attempt by Congress to remake itself from an umbrella to a pro-Hindu party and therefore “outbid” the BJP; (2) The emergence of a third party even more committed to the championing of Hindu interests than Congress or the BJP; or (3) The assumption of an even more extreme position by the BJP to pre-empt the emergence of an ethnic challenger. And on the side of the minority, we should have witnessed a similar outbidding effect by parties representing the Muslim minority.

**Step II: Introduction of a New Issue Axis**

At this point, however, the predictions of the outbidding model go awry. A third party, the Janata Dal (JD) did in fact make a bid for the support of the Muslim minority by committing itself to the protection of the mosque. However, the major initiative on the part of the Janata Dal was to activate the dimension of caste. In 1990, the Indian Prime Minister, who belonged to the Janata Dal, announced his government’s decision to reserve 27 percent of the jobs in the central government services and slots in central government-funded universities for “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs), explicitly defined as a collection of caste categories. By introducing the issue of affirmative action for the OBCs, the Janata Dal sought to draw a sharp line between Hindu upper castes and other, subordinate groups, thus fragmenting the religious majority that the BJP was attempting to forge.

**Step III: Initial Surge of “Outbidding” Followed by Reverse Spiral of Moderation**

Since 1990, party politics in Uttar Pradesh has revolved around the two issue axes identified above: the issue of the rights of the Hindu “majority versus the Muslim minority; and the issue of the relative representation of the Hindu upper castes versus others in various state institutions. The cleavages of religion and caste (based on the

\textsuperscript{59} For election data on the failure of Hindu nationalist parties, see Butler et al. 1995.  
\textsuperscript{60} Brass 1994.
aggregate categories Scheduled Caste (SC), Upper Caste (UC), and Other Backward Caste (OBC)) in Uttar Pradesh are approximately symmetric. On the dimension of religion, as noted above, the Hindu majority constitutes 82 percent of the population in Uttar Pradesh, and the Muslim minority 17 percent. Precise figures for categories on the dimension of caste are not available, since a comprehensive caste census has not been taken in India since 1931. But, estimates based on the 1931 census put the numerical strength of Hindu upper castes at roughly 20 percent of the population of Uttar Pradesh. The remaining 80 percent is composed of Scheduled Castes (21 percent), Muslims (17 percent), and the Other Backward Castes (estimated to be 42 percent). The rough symmetry between the two cleavages is represented in the diagram below:

[Figure 7 here]

The activation of the roughly symmetric dimensions arrested the initial outbidding behaviour of parties in Uttar Pradesh.

Consider, first, party positions on the dimension of religion. The BJP initially steadily raised the ante on the issue of minority exclusion. In 1990, it launched the Rath Yatra, a country-wide agitation calling for the construction of the temple and the “relocation” of the mosque. In the 1991 simultaneous parliamentary and assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, it presented the issue of constructing the temple at Ayodhya not only as a symbol of the pre-eminence of the religious majority in a multi-religious nation, but as a national symbol, fusing the Hindu majority with the nation. Such a framing of the issue dissolved the notion of religious minorities altogether, demanding that minorities assimilate in a nation defined by Hindu symbols. In December 1992, BJP supporters unlawfully destroyed the mosque. But soon after, the BJP progressively diluted its pro-Hindu position. It toned down its anti-Muslim rhetoric, and, although it continued to mention its support for a variety of measures traditionally associated with the Hindu majority in its manifestos, it did not make any of these issues part of its election campaign. By 1998, the word “Hindu” had disappeared from its public presentation altogether, leading to several newspaper editorials describing the BJP as a Congress “clone.”

Party positions on the issue of caste representation exhibit a similar centrisim. By 1993, following a series of splinters, the Janata Dal had been succeeded by the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh. In 1993, the BSP and the SP fought the state assembly elections in alliance with each other, reducing the election to a bipolar fight between the BJP on one side and the BSP-SP alliance on the other. Both parties made the displacement of upper castes from their position of dominance a central election issue.

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62 The description of the moderation of all parties in Uttar Pradesh, in addition to the secondary sources cited in the text, is based on my own fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh during the 1991, 1996, and 1998 election campaigns. Where the source is not explicitly cited all figures for the ethnic profile of party candidate lists and governments are based on data gathered during fieldwork.
63 Chandra 1994.
although the SP was less extreme than the BSP. In the several elections that Uttar Pradesh has had since 1993, however, both the SP and the BSP began to progressively induct upper castes into their party organizations and candidate lists; redefine the issue as power-sharing between upper castes and others, rather than the displacement of upper castes from power; and actively seek alliances with parties that they had earlier denounced as being instruments of the upper castes.

If we look at contemporary politics in Uttar Pradesh, no single ethnic category, no matter how defined, is permanently excluded from the political system. Hindu upper castes are being courted by the BJP, the BSP, and the SP. The OBCs also are being courted by all three parties. Scheduled Castes are being courted by the BSP, and to a lesser extent, the BJP and SP. Muslims are being courted by the SP and BSP. The BJP has not yet made any significant effort to incorporate Muslims into its organization and candidate lists. However, it no longer attempts to market itself on an electoral platform threatening the exclusion of Muslims from the national community.

The reverse spiral towards moderation in Uttar Pradesh may certainly be challenged in the future. What I have tried to show above is that competing mobilizations checkmate each other and force parties initially situated on the extremes back to the centre. However, it would be shortsighted to imagine that efforts by political parties to find new ways of building ethnic majorities are likely to disappear. Given the rewards of winning majority control of the state, we can expect marginal political parties to continue to experiment with outbidding strategies in order to forge ethnic majorities. Indeed, this is exactly what happened more recently in the state of Gujarat in 2002, in which an insecure BJP attempted to foment religious violence in an attempt to pre-empt the fragmentation of its vote base by challengers mobilized on caste lines. Given the institutional incentives for ethnic counter-mobilizations, however, no single attempt at mobilizing an ethnic majority should be stable. Rather, such an attempt should sooner or later be undermined by another, initiated by politicians who stand to lose in the first case and gain in the second.

Continuing with the example of Uttar Pradesh, the ambiguity of the state’s affirmative action clauses is already being used to manufacture new political coalitions that might fragment the most recent effort to weld together a majority based on subordinate groups (Scheduled Castes, Backward Castes, and Muslims). The BSP, for instance, has begun to divide the OBCs into two categories: the “Forward among Backward,” comprising of the better off castes in this category, and the “Most Backward,” comprising of those who are worse off. The SP, meanwhile, is seeking to identify the “Backwards among Forwards,” i.e. sections of the upper castes who also deserve to be identified as a “Backward Class.” The relative openness towards

68 The BJP government’s veiled support of communal violence in Gujarat in February 2002 appears to have been one example of a reversion to an outbidding strategy in order to bolster adverse electoral prospects. On the use of communal violence to electoral advantage, see Wilkinson 2004, Brass 1997, and Brass 2003.
69 On the electoral roots of the violence in Gujarat, see especially Wilkinson 2002; Desai 2002; CSDS Team 1999.
renegotiation of state boundaries resulted in a successful agitation for the new state of Uttarakhand, carved out of northern Uttar Pradesh. Uttarakhand’s borders cut across religion, and to a lesser extent, caste. Language politics in Uttar Pradesh has so far coincided with religious politics: 89.7 percent of the population, mainly Hindu, reportedly speaks Hindi while 9.7 percent, mainly Muslim, speaks Urdu. However, the potential for the fragmentation of both religious and caste identities through the activation of other language cleavages should not be overlooked. Brass points, for example, to the existence of Bhojpuri as a “minority mother tongue” in Uttar Pradesh. So far, Bhojpuri has been treated as a dialect of Hindi, and educated Bhojpuri speakers have not sought a separate official status for their language. As long as language policy remains an open question, however, the possibility that such currently dormant cleavages might be activated in the future political arena cannot be ruled out.

VII. Summary and Further Testing

Theories of ethnic outbidding assume that ethnic identities are intrinsically fixed and then show how such fixity is likely to lead to destabilizing party behaviour. While accepting the argument that fixed identities increase the risk of destabilizing party behaviour, I propose that fixity is not an intrinsic quality of ethnic identities but a product of the institutional context in which ethnic groups are politicized: Some institutional contexts impose an artificial fixity on ethnic identities, while others allow their inherent fluidity to flourish. Consequently, some institutional contexts produce benign forms of ethnic politics, while others produce malign forms.

By highlighting the benign effects of institutionalization on the form of ethnic politics, I do not intend to argue that this is the only route to stability in multi-ethnic democracies. Instead, my purpose is simply to “add a new item to our repertoire of ways in which things happen” by identifying a new mechanism sustaining democracy that has so far not been noticed. I have tried to show here that the institutionalization of cross-cutting dimensions of cleavage, when they are symmetric, is sufficient to produce a centrist equilibrium even in maximally polarized societies of the type assumed by the outbidding models. However, nothing in this model suggests that this mechanism is necessary to bring about democratic stability in ethnically-divided societies. A different distribution of preferences between majority and minority groups, a multi-party system that fragments the votes of an ethnic majority, a multipolar configuration of ethnic groups, or institutional and rules that force alliances between extremist parties may also be sufficient to produce democratic stability.

The argument advanced here remains to be developed to take into account a more general set of conditions, and in particular, conditions when there are more than two dimensions of cleavage, more than two groups on each dimension, and more than two
political parties. It requires also to be tested against data outside India. One especially illuminating test might be might come from a controlled comparison between India and Sri Lanka between 1948 and 1972. India and Sri Lanka share a historical legacy of British colonial rule. They also shared a similar electoral and governmental system for this time period: first past the post with single member districts and a parliamentary form of government. Most importantly, in a fact that is often overlooked, Sri Lanka replicates India’s cross-cutting cleavage structure at the social level, although on a smaller scale: it is also divided on the basis of caste, region, religion, and language. Yet, Sri Lanka’s politics has proceeded on a radically different trajectory. Instead of observing centrist ethnic party behaviour and the preservation of democracy as we do in the case of India, Sri Lankan politics was characterized by outbidding behaviour between parties representing a fixed majority (Sinhala) and minority (Tamil) and democratic breakdown in the form of civil war.

Why do two otherwise similar countries exhibit different patterns in ethnic party behaviour? If the argument advanced here is correct, then we should find that the cause of democratic breakdown in Sri Lanka lies in the absence of institutional recognition of the multiple dimensions of identity that existed at the social level. This appears plausible at first glance: Unlike the post-colonial Indian Constitution, the Sri Lankan constitution from 1948-1972 did not attach rewards to the mobilization of identifies based on caste and region that cut within and across the boundaries of the “Sinhala” and “Tamil” groups. Further research on the design and implementation of Sri Lanka’s constitution, however, is required to evaluate the hypothesis that this absence of institutional recognition is the key variable explaining the puzzling difference in the trajectories of democratic regimes in these two otherwise similar countries.

Finally, the model also generates a new hypothesis for cases further afield from South Asia, such as the former Yugoslavia, in which ethnic politics proved to be destabilizing for democracy. The violence that accompanied democratization in Yugoslavia has generally been explained as a consequence of long-standing historical enmities, of a “security dilemma,” or, most recently, of the weak institutional environment in which democratization took place. This model suggests that an explanation may lie instead in the institutionalization of a single ethnic identity in Communist Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia’s 1974 constitution comprehensively privileged “nations” (Serbs, Croat, Slovene, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and, eventually, Muslims) and “nationalities” (Albanians, Hungarians, and, initially, Muslims) at the expense of other potentially cross-cutting identities, according them territorial autonomy, administrative autonomy, and proportional representation in representative and executive bodies in both the Communist Party and the state. Although the intent of this institutional design was to pre-empt ethnic discontent by recognizing it, the result may

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74 Tambiah 1986; Ryan 1993; Roberts 1995; Rajasingham 1999.
75 Kaplan 1994.
76 Posen 1993.
77 Snyder 2000.
have been to accelerate the breakdown of democracy by preventing the fluidity in ethnic self-definitions that, I argue here, sustains competitive politics.

VIII. Implications for Empirical Democratic Theory

The argument has four implications for empirical democratic theory. First, it proposes a basis for reimagining more broadly the relationship between ethnic mobilization and democratic stability. “Outbidding” is only one of the paths by which ethnic divisions are believed to threaten democracy. There are in my reading at least four additional propositions linking ethnic diversity with the destabilization of democracy: First, ethnically-politicized societies are less likely to possess the minimal sense of political community necessary for democracy to function. Second, the politicization of ethnic divisions is more likely to produce a politics of permanent exclusion (independently of outbidding) than other types of divisions. Third, demands made by ethnic groups are more intractable than demands made by non-ethnic groups. Fourth, politicized ethnic groups are more likely to produce incipient nations than groups defined on a non-ethnic basis. Each of these propositions, I suggest elsewhere, turns critically on the same primordialist assumptions that characterize the outbidding models. This article shows that the use of primordialist assumptions has led us to overestimate the negative effects of ethnic diversity at least in its impact on the behaviour of political parties. In doing so, it suggests that it may be worthwhile to reexamine the other propositions linking ethnic politics to democratic breakdown to see if they are robust to the introduction of constructivist assumptions.

Second, the argument proposes an integration of “institutionalist” approaches to cleavage structures into a theory of democratic stability. By “institutionalist” approaches to cleavage structures, I refer to two bodies of literature: (1) work in the subfield of party and electoral politics, spawned by Lipset and Rokkan’s classic article which proposed that institutions are in part responsible for the translation of social cleavages, generally defined, into political cleavages; and (2) work in the subfield of ethnic politics that has identified a range of mechanisms by which institutions structure cleavages, and has constructed hypotheses about which ethnic cleavages in particular should be activated under which conditions. Although not always described as such, institutionalist approaches should be understood as one important variant of constructivism.

If we accept that institutions structure cleavages, then it follows that ethnic cleavages cannot in themselves be taken as more than a proximate variable explaining the stability or instability of democracy regimes. Rather than attributing the destabilization of democracy to the pre-political character of ethnic majorities and minorities, we must explore instead the institutional conditions that induce permanent ethnic majorities and

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80 Horowitz 1985, Dahl 1971
81 For a review of works that make this claim, see Chandra 2001.
83 Chandra 2001; Chandra and Humphreys 2002.
84 Lipset and Rokkan 1967.
the institutional conditions that induce more benign outcomes. Further, and equally important, we also must explore the effect of institutional conditions which induce permanent majorities on dimensions other than ethnicity. Might class cleavages, for instance, also have a destabilizing effect if they are undergirded by an institutional structure that gives them permanence? Similarly, how might the institutional privileging of occupational or ideological cleavages affect democratic stability?

Third, the argument implies that explaining the foundations of democratic stability requires a theory of institutional choice. This point is a variant of the second, but is important enough to require an independent statement. I have proposed here that institutions have an independent effect on which and how many cleavages are politically activated and therefore on democratic stability. Supporting this claim requires me to address the question of institutional choice in a negative way, establishing simply that institutional choices are not themselves endogenous to a pre-existing cleavage structure. And indeed, the within and cross-country comparisons I refer to here indicate that they are not. In India, the cleavage structure can be said to be a constant, but institutional choices varied between colonial and post-colonial India. Similarly, India and Sri Lanka can be said to have similarly cross-cutting cleavage structures. Yet, the institutional choices that elites have made in both countries have varied significantly. This negative case is sufficient for the purpose of this article, which is to re-examine the partial effect of one particular mechanism believed to lead to democratic destabilization. But a general account of the roots of democratic stability requires a theory of where institutions come from and how they change over time.  

Fourth, and most importantly, the argument implies a critique of standard prescriptions for institutional designs for multi-ethnic democracies and proposes an alternative set of prescriptions. The standard prescriptions for institutional design can be divided into three categories: (1) General blueprints for institutional design, principal among which is Arend Lijphart’s theory of “consociationalism.” The handful of other blueprints at a comparable level of generality, such as Eric Nordlinger’s principles for conflict resolution, and Will Kymlicka’s proposals for “group-differentiated citizenship” are largely consistent with consociationalism.  

(2) Specific proposals that isolate some subset of institutions encompassed within the general framework of consociationalism as self-standing solutions to particular problems. Proposals for federalism, electoral systems based on proportional representation (PR), parliamentary governments, and cultural autonomy fall into this category. (3) Proposals that advocate institutions that are not subsets of, but alternatives to, consociationalism. These proposals center mainly on electoral systems based on majority rule rather than proportional representation. I elaborate on and critique each set of prescriptions in turn, before going on to develop an alternative.

Consociationalism is defined by four principles, each compatible with a variety of institutions. According to the first principle, a multi-ethnic democracy should be governed by a grand coalition consisting of representatives from all significant ethnic

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87 For work in progress on this question, see Przeworski 2003; Greif forthcoming.
groups, or “segments.” The grand coalition principle might be realized, to cite some examples, by the equal distribution of cabinet portfolios to representatives of all significant groups, a rotating presidency that guarantees representation to all significant groups over time, or the dispersion across ethnic groups of key executive posts such as prime minister, speaker, or deputy prime minister. According to the second principle, all significant ethnic groups should have a mutual veto over decisions that affect their vital interests. The mutual veto principle might be realized though the creation of a federal or confederal structure for territorially-concentrated ethnic groups, and the use of supermajority or unanimity decision rules, or the introduction of several barriers before a bill is passed, such as approval by an upper house of parliament or by a requisite number of federal units. According to the third principle, key resources of value to all ethnic groups should be distributed according to the principle of proportionality. The principle of proportionality might be achieved through the proportional allocation of budgetary allocations, cabinet portfolios, or military and civil service appointments. And according to the fourth principle, ethnic groups should enjoy autonomy in areas that are their exclusive concern. The principle of autonomy might be realized, to cite only a few examples, through a federal structure for territorially-concentrated groups, or, equivalently, by granting cultural, educational, linguistic, and administrative autonomy to non-territorially concentrated ethnic groups. These principles are intended to work by depoliticizing many of the issues that ethnic groups are most likely to fight over, such as the allocation of political power, bureaucratic and military posts, and financial and cultural resources, and then constraining the power of ethnic majorities to make unilateral decisions on those issues which remain.

The theory of consociationalism is based on the same primordialist assumptions that inform theories linking ethnic diversity with democratic breakdown: it requires a fixed and exogenous landscape of ethnic groups. To see this, we need simply think about how particular consociational institutions might be designed. Consider an institutional engineer charged with designing a grand coalition that provides proportional representation to key ethnic groups. The engineer would first have to choose between alternative ways of realizing the grand coalition principle such as a presidential form of government with a rotating presidency or a parliamentary government with the proportional allocation of cabinet portfolios. Making these choices requires the engineer to know in advance the relevant ethnic groups and their sizes. In a society with many small groups, for instance, a rotating presidency may be prove chaotic, and a parliamentary system more practical. But a society with a small number of large groups may be well served by a wider range of institutions. Once an appropriate institution is chosen, it should have the intended effect of introducing stability only if the groups in question remain fixed. If either the size or the definition of these groups changes, a grand coalition designed to be representative according to an outdated landscape of ethnic identities would be rendered unrepresentative.

90 Lijphart 1977, 36-38.  
91 Lijphart 1977, 38-41.  
92 Lijphart 1977, 41-44.
In recent work, Lijphart freely admits the primordialist basis of consociationalism and attempts to respond to constructivist arguments by allowing for the possibility of “self-determination” rather than “pre-determination” of ethnic groups at the initial point that institutions are designed. Rather than assume that a population is divided according to a pre-determined scheme, he counsels that the institutional engineer should allow the salient cleavages to reveal themselves through party formation or other similar mechanisms.\textsuperscript{93} But this reformulation does not fully incorporate the idea of fluidity. It continues to require the assumption that ethnic groups, regardless of how they are determined at the outset, remain fixed once consociational institutions are put in place.

Primordialist assumptions characterize, not only consociationalism taken as an integrated system, but also the wide range of individual institutions that are consistent with consociationalism. Take the example of federalism, perhaps one of the most widely proposed self-standing institutional cures for the alleged ills of multi-ethnic democracies. The case for federalism is typically that it defuses conflict by giving territorially concentrated groups control over the material, political and cultural resources that are of greatest concern to them. But such a case is upheld only if we assume that the size and territorial distribution of the relevant groups is fixed and exogenous to politics. To see this, consider once again the institutional designer charged with making the decisions about where to draw the boundaries of federal units, and what kind of institutions to assign to each federal unit and to the centre. To make an initial set of decisions, the institutional designer would need to identify some pre-existing set of ethnic groups, with a given size and territorial distribution. And once such a set of groups is identified, it must remain fixed in order for a federal system to have the intended effect. If either the size and territorial distribution of the groups in question changes, then a federal system designed to provide self-government to an earlier set of groups would in all likelihood not serve the same function for the new set of groups.

The primordialist basis of consociationalism and its subsets, I have suggested, can render them ineffective when the underlying map of identities changes. But worse, it can also make them counter-productive.\textsuperscript{94} To see why, consider the following scenario: suppose, as in the example above, that there are two dimensions of identity in society: Dimension 1 divides society into groups A and B, while Dimension 2 divides society into groups D and E. Suppose now that Dimension 1 is the only activated dimension, and groups A and B are in conflict with each other. In designing consociational institutions for this society, a consociational engineer might propose for instance, a cabinet with proportional representation for members of both groups, and introduce other laws institutionalizing the group identities A and B such as a federal structure, separate cultural and educational laws, and so on. Once such an institutional structure is in place, individuals currently activated as As and Bs have no easy way to mobilize as members of the groups D and E. Even if these alternative group identities are socially meaningful, mobilizing politically on the basis of these identities brings with it no routine rewards. Such induced fixity in identities is likely to create a dangerous situation. On the one hand, political accommodation between As and Bs depends upon the maintenance of an

\textsuperscript{93} Lijphart 2001. Also see Lijphart 1995.
\textsuperscript{94} On this point, see also Sisk 1995, 35.
intricately balanced structure that is vulnerable to perturbation by even a minor shift in the relative sizes and territorial distributions of the groups concerned. And, on the other hand, the institutional obliteration of alternative identities D and E robs those who lose out from this arrangement of the resources to better their position routine self-redefinition. We should expect these losers, therefore, to be more likely to resort to extra-institutional means of redress such as violence or force.

Institutional prescriptions in the third category, which propose electoral systems based on majority principles, do not aim to depoliticize ethnic identity, but they do aim to constrain ethnic majoritarianism. The authors of these proposals assume at the outset that voters vote along ethnic lines, and are predisposed to vote for candidates from their own ethnic groups. But they attempt to foster inter-ethnic compromise by making the electoral victory for candidates from one ethnic group dependent upon the support of voters from another. One such proposal is for a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system with single member districts. As Guy Lardeyret puts it, the best way to counteract the propensities of ethnic groups to engage in political conflict is to “oblige members of each group to run against one another on (transethnic) political and ideological grounds in single member districts.”95 A second such system is an alternative vote system (AV). In an AV system, voters cast votes for competing candidates in order of preference. If no candidate obtains a majority of first preference votes, the second and subsequent preferences of those voters whose first preference is not one of the top two candidates are reallocated until some candidate attains a majority. According to Donald Horowitz, the AV system is especially likely to produce inter-ethnic compromise, especially when constituencies are ethnically heterogeneous and there are multiple parties representing each group.96

This third set of proposals requires the assumption that the structure of ethnic divisions is “dispersed” or “multipolar.” Take first the case of proposal for an FPTP system. In order to create incentives for candidates in single member electoral districts to run on tranethnic, or non-ethnic platforms, the districts in question must initially be multipolar. If they have clear ethnic majorities, then candidates might just as easily win by appealing to the ethnic majority. And they must stay multipolar over the long term: if ethnic identities were redefined to produce a bipolar rather than a multipolar configuration, then the FPTP system would not have the effect of producing inter-ethnic compromise. Consider now the AV system. An AV system is likely to encourage vote-pooling across ethnic lines only if no ethnic group is in a majority. Bipolar configurations should produce majoritarian rather than cross-ethnic appeals regardless of the number of parties representing each group. To see this, suppose there is only one party per ethnic group. As long as voters vote along ethnic lines, voters from the ethnic majority group should give their first preference vote to the party from their ethnic group. And if a party can win without having to appeal to the votes of the ethnic minority, then it has no incentive to engage in cross-ethnic appeals. Suppose now that there are multiple parties representing both the ethnic majority and the ethnic minority. While this might produce vote pooling across party lines, it should not produce vote pooling across group lines:

95 Lardeyret 1996, 180.
ethnically-divided voters should be more likely to distribute their second preference votes to parties within their group than outside it. As a result, AV should not prevent ethnic majoritarian appeals. Indeed, it might even abet them, as parties from the majority group compete for the second preference votes of members of the ethnic majority.

The drawback of these proposals is not, as in the case of consociationalism and its subsets, the use of primordialist assumptions. The proposals for an FPTP or an AV system do not require that identities remain fixed -- only that they remain multipolar. Changes in the set and size of ethnic groups in the population should affect the predictions of these proposals only when it is so extreme as to transform a multipolar ethnic configuration into a bipolar one. But the problem with these proposals is that given multipolarity, there is no reason to believe that they have no independent effect on the stability of democratic systems. A multipolar configuration of groups, if it is stable, should in itself safeguard multi-ethnic democracy by eliminating the very existence of a dominating ethnic majority. Given multipolarity, the type of electoral system is rendered redundant.

I suggest here that a hitherto unnoticed solution to the problem of institutional design for multi-ethnic democracies might lie, not in depoliticizing the issues that ethnic groups fight over, or in constraining ethnic majorities on any single dimension, but in encouraging the politicization of ethnic majorities on multiple dimensions. Such an outcome might be induced by adopting institutions which (1) institutionalize the principle of group representation but include mechanisms for the redefinition of the groups that are to be represented; and (2) are very highly differentiated in the ethnic categories that they recognize. Below are some speculative guidelines for the design of institutions that might meet these criteria:

• Enshrine the principle of group representation, but, as in the case of the Indian Constitution, also introduce rules that allow for easy redefinition of the groups to be given representation through open-ended affirmative action programmes, open-ended language laws, and open-ended federal systems. Such an institutional guideline permits not only the initial self-determination of ethnic groups, but also provides a means for their continued re-definition.

• Ensure variation in the categories of ethnic identification across public policy contexts. A system in which the categories which individuals use to identify themselves across policy contexts (e.g., education, employment, health) vary should be more likely to produce fluidity in political self-identifications overall than a system in which the categories are uniform across policy contexts.

• Ensure variation in the categories of ethnic identification across levels of government. A system in which individuals employ different categories in which to classify themselves at local, regional, and national levels of

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97 I owe this point to a discussion with Andy Sabl, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, UCLA.
government should be more likely to produce fluidity in political self-identifications than a system in which the categories are uniform across levels.

- Adopt electoral rules which permit fluidity in ethnic self-definitions, or at a minimum, do not impose fixity. Both AV and FPTP electoral systems, while they may not have an independent effect on inter-ethnic compromise, have this desirable quality. Proportional representation (PR) electoral systems also may be designed to serve the same purpose. These electoral systems have been evaluated against each other on criteria such as their ability to promote inter-ethnic compromise, or provide representation or accountability. But, I suggest here, an important yardstick on which to rate them is their capacity to permit fluidity in ethnic identification.

- Design state statistical procedures that collect and disseminate information on multiple forms of self-identification. The role of the census is especially important here, but also that of the media. The census and the media are responsible to a very large extent for presenting individuals with the range of categories of self-identification which they believe are “real.” Political systems in which the census and or the media ask individuals to profess multiple ethnic identifications, and publicizes these several answers, therefore, should be more likely to produce fluidity in political identifications than systems which collect and report information on single categories. From this perspective, the introduction of a multi-racial category in the US census, which enables individuals to define themselves according to a large number of combinations of ethnic identities, may be an innovation especially worth considering.

These institutional proposals are designed to recognize ethnic identities as a legitimate basis for political mobilization without reifying them. Given their highly differentiated nature, they are almost certainly likely to be a bureaucrat’s nightmare, introducing difficulties in implementation, recordkeeping, and consistency across areas of government and over time. But they may simultaneously be a democrat’s joy, creating a self-sustaining multi-ethnic democracy by letting multiple majorities spontaneously constrain each other.

It is worth underlining, however, that the institutionalized encouragement of multiple dimensions of cleavage promises to ensure only the survival of democracy, minimally defined as a competitive system. What consequences that these institutions have for democratic governance remains an open question. On the one hand, institutions that encourage the continuous mobilization of new ethnic majorities might create high levels of routinized conflict. Further, they might obstruct effective policy-making and implementation. On the other hand, they may produce responsive governments by
producing ethnic inclusion. In addition, the highly differentiated nature of institutions that are necessary to sustain such fluidity might promote a more humane government, more attuned to human diversity than institutions which classify citizens according to single and uniform categories.\textsuperscript{98} The burden of this article has been to establish simply that ethnic politics is compatible with the survival of a democratic system under the institutional conditions identified above. In this, it is responding to a literature on ethnic diversity and democratic stability that has been so overwhelmingly pessimistic about the stability of multi-ethnic democracies, that the question of governance has not been raised at all. Once the question of survival is resolved, we can, and should, turn to subsequent, open questions about the relationship between ethnic politics and democratic governance.

\textsuperscript{98} On the use of uniform schemes of categorization and its consequences for governance, see Scott 1999.
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Figure 1

Step I: The Centrist Position of the Multi-Ethnic Coalition
Figure 2

Step II: The Undermining of the Multi-Ethnic Coalition

By Challengers That Take More Extreme Positions
Figure 3

Step III: Old and New Parties Attempt to Outbid Each Other
Figure 4

Reverse Centrist Spiral Among Ethnic Parties in India
Figure 5: India’s Language Hierarchy

Official Languages of the Union

Official Languages of the States

“Mother Tongues”
Figure 6

Two Institutionalized Dimensions of Identity

Identity Dimension 1

Identity Dimension 2
Table 1: Examples of “Symmetric” Cleavage Structures

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<td>((A \cap E))</td>
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Figure 7

Rough Symmetry Between Activated Cleavages in Uttar Pradesh

Religion

(A) (Hindus 82%)

(B) (Muslims 17%)

Caste

D (SC+OBC+Muslim) 80%

E (Hindu Upper Castes) 20%