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## When do the poor vote for the right-wing and why: Status inequality and vote choice in the Indian states

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WIDER Working Paper 2017/20

## **When do the poor vote for the right-wing and why**

Status inequality and vote choice in the Indian states

Pavithra Suryanarayan\*

January 2017

**Abstract:** What explains the popularity of right-wing parties amongst the poor? This paper argues that in hierarchical societies with high social-status inequality, poor high-status voters may ally with rich high-status voters if they believe their social-status is under threat. I demonstrate this in the context of the Indian states by exploiting an announcement by the Government of India in 1990 to implement affirmative action for lower castes—an intervention that threatened to weaken the social-status of upper-caste Brahmins. Using unique data from the 1931 census, this paper shows that areas where Brahmins were more dominant in the 1930s experienced a higher surge in right-wing voting after this announcement than other areas. Using survey data, I find that both wealthy and poor Brahmins voted for the right-wing where Brahmins were dominant in 1931. The paper shows how concerns about social-status may make the poor open to appeals by anti-redistribution parties.

**Keywords:** ethnic voting, Indian politics, right-wing voting

**Tables, figures, and maps:** all author's own work.

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# 1 Introduction

Conventional political economy models that underpin a vast literature on voting behavior have emphasized the centrality of economic redistribution in politics (Meltzer and Richard 1981, Romer 1975). Based on the predictions of these models we expect the poor to support pro-redistribution parties and the wealthy to support anti-tax parties. Recent scholarship in both the developed and developing world has focused on right-wing ascendance and the popularity of right-wing parties amongst the poor. The poor's support of right-wing parties is puzzling as it suggests that voters are choosing parties that work against their economic interests.

To explain this phenomenon, research has focused on non-economic factors such as religion, time-horizons, ethnic affiliations, and nationalism that shape individual preferences for redistribution (Scheve and Stasavage 2006a, Scheve and Stasavage 2006b, Benabou and Tirole 2006, Alesina and La Ferrara 2005, Alesina and Glaeser 2004, Lieberman 2003, Singh 2010, Shayo 2009). Scholars have also studied how electoral competition and heterogeneous preferences on non-economic issues constrain vote choice (Roemer 1998). Cross-national studies have focused on the degree to which political institutions and economic factors either exacerbate or attenuate the link between income and voting (De La O and Rodden 2008, Huber and Stanig 2009, Iversen and Soskice 2006).

In multi-ethnic contexts, scholars have argued that the coincidence of ethnicity and class in some places can lead to more resilient ethnic coalitions, differing welfare preferences, and an under provision of public goods (Horowitz 1985, Dunning and Harrison 2010, Baldwin and Huber 2010, Alesina et al. 2015, Huber and Suryanarayan 2016). It is plausible that in such systems, cross-class coalitions may emerge if wealthy co-ethnics find a way to compensate poor co-ethnics for their vote.

This paper argues that appeals by right-wing parties are attractive to voters in contexts of high *status inequality* – defined in this paper as differences in the distribution of ascriptive “social-status” in a society, typically owing to legacies of hierarchical social

orders, and distinct from material or economic endowments. We observe persistent status inequality in a number of countries with a history of slavery, aristocracy, colonialism, and the caste system. Of central importance to “high-status” voters is their rank in the social hierarchy which they preserve and perpetuate through their control of segregated institutions. When “low-status” groups start to compete for access to institutions viewed as instrumental to maintaining group social rank, high-ranked groups face threats to their status. In such an event, poor voters from high-status groups are more susceptible to appeals by right-wing parties.

Poor voters born into “high-status” groups can be wooed by right-wing parties with appeals to group status. The argument builds on recent work by Moses Shayo (2009) that argues that poor voters are willing to make trade-offs between material returns from participating in a class-based coalition for the psychological gains of associating with a “higher-status” national identity, reducing overall support for redistribution. But unlike Shayo, this paper emphasizes that poor high-status voters are likely to consider both the *psychological* benefits and the *material* benefits arising from specific resources the group controls that demarcate high-status group boundaries from low-status groups.

Building on studies of ethnic inequality that focus on income differences between ethnic groups, this paper acknowledges that in many places economic and social dominance coincide. The paper argues however that it is the shared social rank of high-status voters that explains why poor voters from high-status groups are likely to align with wealthy co-members. In particular, the solidarity between poor and wealthy members of high-status groups is more likely to translate into voting preferences when their social dominance is challenged, and less likely to be apparent when social hierarchies are aided and perpetuated by a complicit state and political system.

In order to test these claims, this paper examines the vote for the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian states. India is a useful case to theorize about the effects of ascriptive status versus economic endowments on voting behavior owing to

two distinct features of the caste system – hierarchy and segregation. This paper focuses on the *Brahman* caste – the group that is typically viewed as being on the top of the caste hierarchy owing to its ritual status in the Hindu *varna* system, and whose members were not typically the wealthiest castes in many parts of India.<sup>1</sup> The Brahmans were the “priestly” castes and had historically served as priests, teachers, professional classes, and bureaucrats in both the colonial and post-colonial period. This group controlled access to education and derived much of its status from its near monopoly of educational institutions.

In order to demonstrate how threats to their social-status shaped the right-wing vote, I examine the electoral effects of an announcement by the Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh on August 7th 1990 in both houses of the Indian parliament to implement quotas in central government jobs to socially backward groups. While backward caste parties had long sought to improve their representation in government and education institutions, the timing of the announcement had the effect of consolidating upper-caste Brahman vote in favor of the right-wing BJP.

The paper examines right-wing vote share in state assembly elections held before and after the quota announcement. In order to develop measures of status inequality, it uses newly digitized demographic data on caste and education at the level of the sub-district (or *Taluk*) from the 1931 census – the last caste census conducted in India – in three former directly administered British provinces - Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency and United Provinces. It then merges these sub-districts into 1089 state assembly electoral constituencies across 7 states.<sup>2</sup> Status inequality is measured using a variable called *Brahman Dominance* which is a measure of the over representation of Brahmans amongst the literate population in the electoral district over its actual population

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<sup>1</sup>The *varna* system comprises Brahmans (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishyas (merchant castes) and Shudhras (labor castes).

<sup>2</sup>Previous studies have used caste data from the 1931 census at the level of the district. This is the first study to my knowledge that uses sub-district level data. I thank Francesca Jensenius for providing me with the state-level elections data as well as the merge codes for merging administrative units into electoral boundaries for the 1971 census, which enabled me to then merge the 1931 data.

in 1931. This measure relies on the intuition that places where Brahmins were more dominant in education were places with greater caste-based status distinctions.

The paper finds that places with greater *Brahman Dominance* in education in 1931 were associated with a larger increase in right-wing vote share in state elections held after 1990, a relationship that did not exist in elections held prior to the threat of affirmative action. Subsequent robustness tests also show that the relationship between educational dominance and right-wing voting survive when examining Northern, Southern and Western regions of the country separately as affirmative action has long been the norm in the South and West. The regressions are also robust to competing hypotheses on the rise of the right-wing including the strength of muslim populations in the electoral constituencies as well as the economic strength of backward castes following the green revolution.

Next, in order to demonstrate the link between status and vote choice, the paper uses survey data from the 2004 National Elections to study the BJP vote amongst Brahmins vis á vis other caste groups. These individual-level regressions find that Brahmins who live in constituencies with higher levels of Brahman dominance in 1931 were more likely to vote for the BJP and hold anti-redistribution views compared with both Brahmins who live in areas with low Brahman dominance, and other caste groups. More importantly, the individual-level regressions show that *poor* Brahmins were more likely to vote for the BJP and to hold anti-redistribution views compared to even *wealthy* Brahmins in constituencies with higher levels of Brahman dominance in 1931. These regressions further provide evidence for the claims of this paper that anti-redistributive support emerges amongst poor upper-status voters in places with high status inequality.

The paper contributes to a growing literature on “ranked” ethnic systems that argue that ethnic distinctions in some societies are meaningful only when groups can be categorized as superior and inferior. Unlike unranked ethnic systems where groups’ identity and existence is legitimized by mythologies about themselves, ranked groups

need the existence of a hierarchical system of groups to legitimize themselves (Horowitz 1985, Lee 2015, Suryanarayan 2016). The findings of this paper suggest that ethnic mobilization in ranked systems might be associated with a de-emphasis of within-group class distinctions, and thus explains why within-group cross-class solidarities emerge in some ethnic systems and not others. The arguments of this paper therefore resonate with recent findings by scholars on American politics. Acharya, Blackwell and Sen (2014) find that American counties with higher levels of slave holdings in the period prior to the civil war are associated with higher levels of support for the right-wing Republican party and higher levels of racial animosity amongst whites. The findings of this paper also have implications for recent studies on South Africa that have demonstrated the prevalence of cross-class solidarities amongst whites in favor of greater redistribution during apartheid (Lieberman 2003)

This paper also contributes to the large literature on caste in India. Scholars working on caste and voting have typically examined the mobilization of lower castes into politics and the effects of political quotas and affirmative action on lower caste developmental outcomes (Jaffrelot 2005a, Chandra 2004, Chauchard 2014, Jensenius 2015). This paper offers new insights by focusing on how upper castes responded to challenges to their social dominance. It also builds on recent work on who votes for the Bharatiya Janata Party in India. Thachil (2014) finds that the BJP was able to reach out to lower-caste, dalit voters without alienating its upper-caste constituency by relying on its external service organizations. This paper provides evidence for why poor upper-castes vote for the BJP in the first place, a question similar to Thomas Frank's (2007) "What's the matter with Kansas?" that examined the roots of right-wing voting amongst poor whites in the United States.



## 2 Status inequality and right-wing voting

A key implication of conventional tax-and-transfer models is that the wealthy will support anti-tax parties and the poor will support pro-redistribution parties. In reality, and across a range of contexts, we find cross-class coalitions in support of right-wing parties. Explanations for why this occurs tend to focus on institutional factors that constrain the vote choice of the poor or non-material factors that shape the redistributive preferences of the poor. Parties often attempt to build coalitions of voters by using both second-dimension appeals and economic appeals and voters in turn are forced to choose between their economic and non-economic preferences leading to higher levels of right-wing support amongst the poor. Electoral institutions further exacerbate these tendencies with single-member simple-plurality systems associated with greater right-wing voting amongst the poor (Roemer 1998, Lee and Roemer 2006, De La O and Rodden 2008).

Focusing on second-dimension explanations, scholars find that in ethnically or racially heterogeneous contexts, animosity makes redistribution to the poor, who may disproportionately belong to an ethnic or racial group, unappealing to voters, leading them to support right-wing parties (Alesina and Glaeser 2004). Scheve and Stasavage (2006b) argue that religiosity acts as an alternative to social insurance and lowers demand for social welfare amongst the religious poor. More recent work on ethnically heterogeneous societies emphasizes the coincidence of class and ethnicity. In places where some groups are wealthy and others are poor, we are likely to observe more ethnic voting as between-group divisions in material endowments reinforce ethnic differences and create a policy basis for ethnic voting (Huber and Suryanarayan 2016). If we assume that between-group economic differences override within-group distinctions, this could explain why some poor voters tend to support right-wing parties.

Building on these second-dimension claims, this paper argues that a resilient cross-class coalition can evolve in places where there is an alternative form of hierarchical

ordering of society, distinct from material wealth. Hierarchical social systems or their historical legacies exist in a variety of contexts – slave institutions in North and South America, caste-system in India, apartheid in South Africa, aristocracy in Europe amongst others. Hierarchical social orders are typically characterized by inter-group spatial segregation, prescribed norms of interactions between groups, and limited sharing of public goods. A key difference between this type of hierarchy and class location is that while voters can transcend their economic location, they cannot seek to improve their social location which is endowed by birth. In turn, any challenges to the social location of groups does not result in the “redistribution” of social privilege. Instead it undermines the significance of endowed privilege, and its relevance in organizing social relations. Consequently, when their social location is challenged, voters from high-status groups consider the implications of voting not only along class lines but also along this ascriptive dimension of hierarchy.

In particular, they care about policies that are most likely to challenge group segregation and erase inter-group boundaries. Typically these tend to be policies that target desegregation of schools, shared water sources, public housing and parks, or policies that target laws that protect endogamy and demarcate the group. Under the threat of integration policies, while both wealthy and poor upper-status group members are likely to defend their control of these goods, their significance as a source of status is likely to be greater for poorer, upper-status members. Poor members are more susceptible to in-group psychological sanctions, the promise of access to private resources from their wealthy co-group members, and the maintenance of group social relations through marriage and social relations. In turn, wealthier upper-status group members are able to use both psychological appeals to status as well as material appeals by providing some of the publicly available resources through private exchanges to enable cross-class solidarities.

The argument presented here builds on ethnic inequality arguments and offers two key reasons for why poor co-ethnics in some places might vote along with wealthy

co-ethnics. First, it focuses on both voters' material and psychological calculations based on their social status, rather than simply psychological factors such as animosity or "we-ness" generated by ethnic, racial or religious ties. Typically scholars of ethnic, racial or even status politics (most notably Moses Shayo 2009) emphasize the psychological benefits poor members of groups gain from within-group solidarities. Individuals forego tangible material benefits for the psychological benefits gained from associating themselves with co-ethnics, upper castes, or co-nationals. In addition, scholars also highlight loss-aversion, i.e., the fear poor upper status individuals experience when lower status groups become wealthy (McClendon 2012) which leads them to choose suboptimal redistributive outcomes.

Second, it links voters' material and psychological calculations to their views on redistributive policies. Poor upper-status voters are more likely to be pro-redistribution when their social location is unchallenged. Conversely, when their social location is threatened, poor voters are less likely to support redistributive agendas that disturb inter-group relations and in turn recalibrate their redistributive preferences appropriately, making them more susceptible to appeals by right-wing parties. For instance, poor whites were more broadly supportive of the New Deal in the 1930s and 1940s in the United States when work relief was directed to citizens without disturbing the existing racial order. The same voters, however, were more hostile to redistributive policy when that policy involved desegregating schools, neighborhoods, swimming pools and parks even if that meant forgoing redistribution to other poor whites. In the Indian case, upper caste voters were more sympathetic to the statist and redistributive focus of the Congress Party between 1947 and the 1980s when those policies did not disturb Brahman hegemony in education and the state. When those policies began to target these "status" goods, however, an anti-redistribution coalition was able to take shape in support of the BJP.

One implication of the above is that ethnic inequality arguments might be more salient and cross-class solidarities over "status" more resilient in places with pre-existing

hierarchical social systems. Conversely, when ethnic inequality occurs in non-hierarchical societies, cross-class solidarities within wealthy ethnic groups are less resilient.

In Section 3, I examine the rise of right-wing voting in the Indian states and illustrate how a challenge to the social dominance of upper-status groups was associated with an increase in the vote share for the BJP.

### **3 Right-wing voting in India**

For four decades following Indian independence in 1947, the BJP (and its predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh) was a peripheral player in national Indian politics. The right-wing party, while a significant state-level player (most notably in Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh), had struggled to expand its voter base in other parts of the country. This changed in the national elections held in 1991, when BJP emerged as the second largest party in the national parliament and gained substantial vote share in many states. The rising electoral fortunes of the BJP that began in 1991 culminated in a historic victory in 2014 with the party winning a majority in the parliament, the first party to do so in 30 years.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars who have studied the rise of the BJP highlight several critical factors that played in the party's favor. Research has focused on the BJP leadership's explicit appeal to hindu voters and the stoking of a hindu-muslim communal divide through a famous religious pilgrimage undertaken to build a temple on a disputed site in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1990 (Jaffrelot 2005b, Hanson 1999). To explain variation in the degree to which voters were radicalized, scholars emphasize latent economic tensions between Hindus and Muslims (Rudolph and Rudolph 1993), the electoral dividends from creating ethnic violence (Wilkinson 2004), and the role of civic institutions in attenuating

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<sup>3</sup>Political coalitions of regional and national parties have been the mainstay of Indian politics, with no party winning a majority since 1984. Even that election was viewed as a special election as it followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, resulting in a huge sympathy wave for the Congress party.

religious tensions (Varshney 2003).

Second, those who examine the importance of caste in Indian politics, most notably Chandra (2004), argue that the growing strength of backward caste and scheduled caste parties, within the context of a patronage democracy where elections effectively create a “winner takes all” system regards to state employment and resources, had the effect of creating a resilient caste coalition behind the BJP comprised of upper castes. It is unsurprising from this perspective that an attempt by backward caste interests to gain favorable affirmative action policies should have the effect of also increasing caste salience among Brahmins. The collapsing party organization and subsequent electoral fortunes of the catch-all Congress have increased the migration of upper caste voters from the Congress to BJP.

Third, recent research has found that the BJP also gets votes from lower caste groups such as the scheduled castes (Thachil 2014), and argues that the BJP’s reliance on its external allied religious organizations has enabled it to cater to new constituents without having to change the composition of its primarily upper-caste leadership or diluting its socially conservative and economically right-wing economic policy messaging.

Finally, studies of state party systems suggest that the BJP was able to survive as a reliable third party coalition partner in states where it was in competition with the Congress party or one or more regional parties (Sridharan 2005). These studies downplay the role of social cleavages and instead, attribute the rise of the BJP entirely to competitive dynamics in the Indian states.<sup>4</sup>

This paper departs from these studies to the extent that it emphasizes the key role of a specific caste group – the Brahmins – and inter-caste conditions of status inequality that shape Brahmin perceptions of affirmative action. While the argument presented here does approximate those made by Chandra about caste-based political competition

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<sup>4</sup>BJP is also viewed as benefitting from the shift to a more liberalized economic model of development following the balance of payments crisis in 1991. As the economy has reduced local regulation and opened up to foreign investment, this has created a rightward economic orientation amongst some voters.

and patronage, it also differs in two ways. First, there is no prior reason to believe that variations in status inequality might matter to the extent to which BJP gained vote share as Chandra's argument hinges on the the numerical strength of groups and their ability to translate votes into winnable majorities. Second, lower caste groups had been mobilizing for at least a decade and a half prior to the announcement on caste-based reservations in 1990. In particular, both farmer parties and lower-caste parties had been in alliance with the BJP in the 1989 government under Prime Minister V.P. Singh. It was only when Brahman hegemony in education and government employment were threatened (key markers of social differences between Brahmans and other castes) did the Brahman vote consolidate around the BJP. Put differently, it is the argument of this paper that the growing political and economic strength of lower castes had no salience to upper castes until they infringed on social markers of caste dominance. The claims of this paper at the very least provide a mechanism through which ethnic head-counting in patronage democracies may be creating resilient party loyalties for upper-status ethnic groups.

*Mandal announcement and the BJP vote.* Despite disagreements over why the BJP rose to prominence, the contention that the 1991 elections were a deflection point is fairly uncontroversial.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 maps the state electoral constituency-level vote share for the BJP in elections held in 1986-1990 and those held between 1991 and 1995. We observe a dramatic rise in the BJP vote between the two elections in several states, most notably Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The party also grew in traditional strong-holds such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.<sup>6</sup>

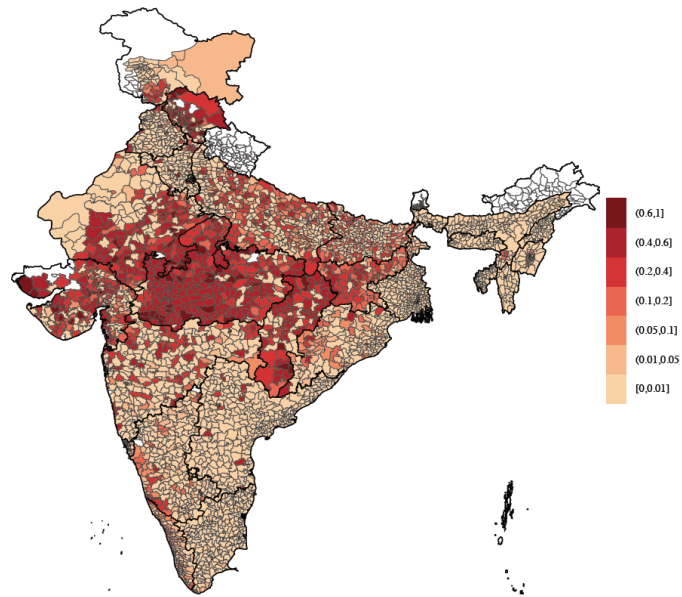
The announcement by Prime Minister V.P. Singh in August 1990 to implement the recommendations of a report by the Mandal Commission in 1979 came as a surprise to many in the country. The Janata Dal led National Front coalition government that came to

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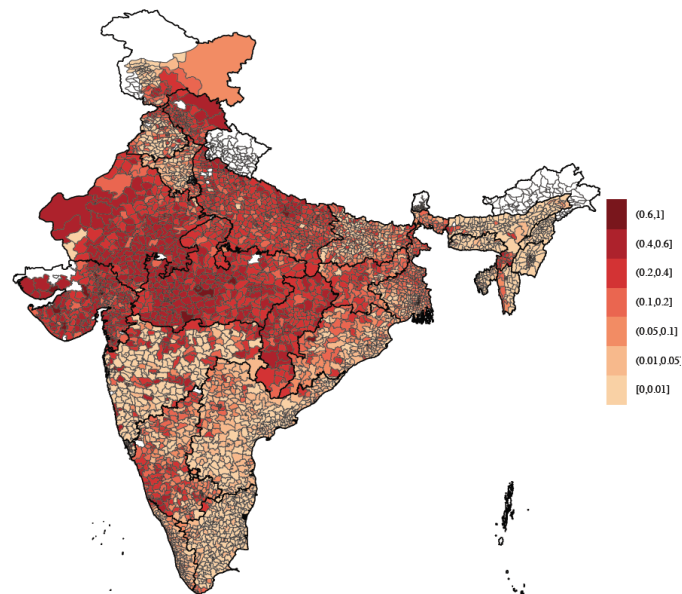
<sup>5</sup>For a comprehensive discussion of the role of Mandal in the realignment of party politics before and after 1990 see Jaffrelot (2000).

<sup>6</sup>This paper does not include the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra as a right-wing party as the nativist appeals and support base of the Shiv Sena are viewed as distinct from the tactics, goals and support base of the BJP. The results discussed in the paper however did not substantively change when I coded Shiva Sena as a right-wing party.

Figure 1: Right-wing vote share – before and after Mandal (All-India)



Election 1986–1990

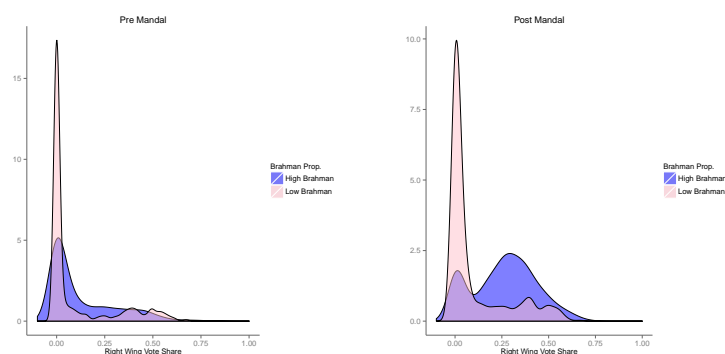


Election 1991–1995

power in 1989 in the national elections had made little reference to the implementation of lower caste reservations in its campaign.<sup>7</sup> The support the party received from the BJP to form the center coalition could be viewed as evidence that the BJP at that point did not consider the possibility of reservations a serious threat. This however changed with the Bihar state elections in 1990, when reservations for backward castes emerged as a key electoral issue. The prime minister campaigned on the reservations issues for his party in Bihar, and subsequently decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal later in the year.

The announcement was followed by massive student demonstrations across the country. It also strained relations between BJP and the Janata Dal government causing the BJP to withdraw support from the coalition in October 1990. The “Mandal announcement” was followed quickly by another major political development – the decision by top BJP leaders to begin a hindu pilgrimage to garner support for the demolition of a mosque and the building of a temple on a disputed site in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Some scholars argue that this initiative could have been an attempt on the part of the BJP to build cross-caste alliances to compensate for the upper-caste backlash that the Mandal announcement had generated.

Figure 2: Right-wing vote share and the Brahman size in constituency



<sup>7</sup>Agrawal and Aggarwal (1991) note that the party manifesto promised substantial reservations in employment, education, and public offices for socially and educationally backward classes and that the recommendations of the Mandal commission would be implemented expeditiously.



Figure 3: Right-wing vote share and the Muslim size in constituency

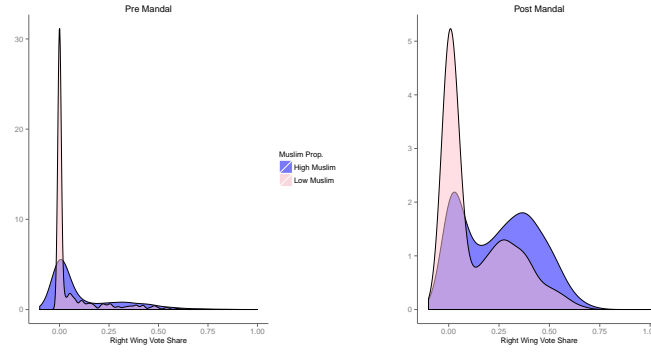
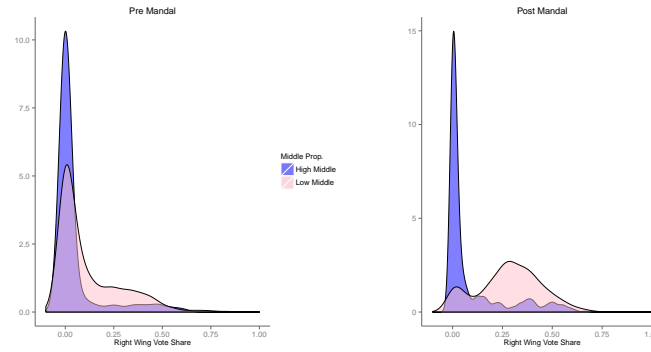


Figure 4: Right-wing vote share and the middle caste size in constituency



While there is evidence that the BJP gained vote share in muslim dominated areas and constituencies which the procession targeted on its way to Ayodhya, the BJP separately gained upper-caste support in Brahman dominated areas suggesting it adopted a two-pronged electoral strategy – caste and religion. Using data from 7 states, the left panels in Figure 2, 3 and 4 plot the density of right-wing share in the 1087 assembly constituencies before and after the Mandal announcement by splitting the data into two groups for each figure – high and low brahman size, high and low muslim size, and high and low backward caste size. In the left panels we observe there is little difference in the right-wing vote share in state assembly constituencies with high and low proportions of Brahmans, Muslims and Middle Castes in elections held between 1985 and 89. After the Mandal announcement, in the right panel of Figure 2, we see an increase in the density

Table 1: States and year of election in dataset

State	Colonial Province	Pre/Post Mandal Election Years	No. Of Constituencies
Andhra Pradesh	Madras	1989 / 1994	180
Kerala	Madras	1987/ 1991	32
Tamil Nadu	Madras	1989/ 1991	213
Karnataka	Bombay/Madras	1989, 1994	69
Gujarat	Bombay	1990 / 1995	73
Maharashtra	Bombay	1990 / 1995	110
Uttar Pradesh	United Provinces	1989 / 1991	416

of constituencies where the BJP managed to secure more than 0.25 of the vote being disproportionately those with high brahman proportions (i.e. constituencies with more than 4.4% Brahmins, this being the median value of the sample). We can contrast this with areas with high muslim populations. In the right panel of Figure 3 we see that both high and low muslim areas saw an increase in right-wing vote share with places with more Muslims seeing a slightly higher increase. In addition, when we examine the relationship between backward caste proportions and BJP vote in Figure 4, we find the reverse pattern to that observed for Brahman size – the greater the size of the backward caste populations, the lower the number of constituencies with high levels of BJP vote share.

In Section 4, I examine more systematically the relationship between Brahman dominance in a an electoral constituency and the rise in the right-wing vote share after Mandal while controlling for a range of alternative explanations in a regression framework.

## 4 Data analysis – state elections

In the first part of this section, I examine the relationship between historic measures of Brahman social dominance and the rise of the right-wing vote in state elections held before and after the Mandal announcement in 1990. The dependent variable for the data analysis in this section is the change in the vote share of the BJP in the state elections held in 1986–1990 and those held in 1991–1995.

*Key predictor variables:* Measures of Brahman social dominance are developed using

data from the 1931 Census of India for three British provinces- the Madras Presidency, the Bombay Presidency and the United Provinces at the level of the *taluk* or sub-district. These three provinces split into multiple states spanning all of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. The *taluk* level data were merged into state-level electoral constituencies using the boundaries set by the 1973 delimitation commission. These boundaries remained unchanged in the elections held for the next three decades.<sup>8</sup> The states, electoral constituencies and the year of elections before and after the Mandal announcement are shown in Table 1.

The 1931 census has information on the size and literacy of nine key groups : Brahmans, Middle Castes, Depressed Classes, Depressed Tribes, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs. In addition to these groups, the census also provides data on the size and literacy of residents who claimed to belong to hindu revivalist movements in this period in the United Provinces. The following measures were created:

*Brahman dominance*: A measure of the extent to which Brahmans are over represented in the literate population in relation to their share of the total population computed as:

$$Brahman\ Dominance = \frac{Total\ Literate\ Brahmans}{Total\ Literates} - \frac{Total\ Brahmans}{Total\ Population}$$

This variable has a minimum value of -0.009 and a maximum value of 0.57 and a median of 0.16.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that Brahmans tended to be over represented in the literate population. The *Brahman Dominance* variable attempts to measure the extent of status inequality in a constituency in 1931. The Brahmans had historically derived their power from advisory roles to kings or as priests, and have long held a monopoly on educational access in the Indian provinces. These castes in local, village-level settings

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<sup>8</sup>I am very grateful to Francesca Jensenius for sharing the merge code for the state electoral boundaries as well as the state elections data. These codes enabled me to merge the 1931 census data with the state assembly data for election years between 1985 and 1995 used in this paper. A more detailed description of the electoral data used and a discussion of electoral and census boundary merging can be found in Jensenius (2015).

<sup>9</sup>Only one assembly constituency in the states of Tamil Nadu, Periyakulam, had a negative value.

often segregated themselves from other groups and maintained exclusive control over educational institutions, water sources, and temples. Brahman attempts to monopolize and segregate educational institutions was a well documented phenomenon in colonial India (Frykenberg 1961, Irschick 1969). Brahman preponderance in education was further strengthened by active British policy for the sake of administrative efficiency in revenue collection. The British in the colonial period were hesitant to upset high caste Hindus and rejected petitions by backward and scheduled castes to be admitted to government schools (Radhkrishnan 1993). A measure that captures the Brahman monopoly over literacy therefore is a compelling measure of historical social-status of this group.

*Brahman size:* A measure of Brahmans in a constituency as a proportion of total population. It is expected that a constituency where Brahmans are more numerically dominant, we would expect to see more support for the BJP after affirmative action politics take shape as these are the constituencies where Brahman social dominance is likely to be greater. The size variable, however, cannot distinguish between an argument about ethnic head-counting versus one focused on social dominance. For this we rely on the dominance measure.

*Historical controls:* The regressions include four covariates from the 1931 census: a variable that controls for the size of the population in 1931 as it is likely that more densely populated constituencies would have less segregation and less likelihood of right-wing ascendance in the future; a control for the level of literacy in the constituency as more literate areas were more likely to be associated with lower-caste economic development, and hence associated with lower levels of inter-caste educational inequality and a smaller base for right-wing parties; a variable called *Caste Fragmentation* which was created using data for all caste and religious groups in the constituency using the standard formula for ethno-linguistic fractionalization measure. This measure controls for the possible alternative explanation that ethnic competition based on group sizes matters to vote choice regardless of the number of Brahmans or levels of social dominance in the constituency.

Finally, a variable called *Muslim Size* to control for historic muslim proportion of the population as it is likely that areas with greater muslim population were more susceptible to pro-hindu right-wing appeals after 1990.

*Contemporary political controls:* In addition to the historic variables, the regressions also control for contemporary political covariates in the electoral constituencies. It is possible that local-level competitive dynamics including the prior mobilization of voters by competitive regional and national parties, the competitiveness of the constituency measured as the margin of victory, the levels of voter turnout, and reserved constituencies for only Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates could each have dampened the rise of the right-wing BJP after 1990. The regressions therefore include lagged political controls *Effective Number of Parties (ENP) Lag*, *Margin of Victory Lag*, *Turnout Lag*, and *Reserved SC/ST*.

In Figure 5, I plot the relationship between *Brahman Dominance* and the vote share for the BJP in state elections held before the Mandal announcement between 1986 and 1990 (correlation=0.08) and in those held after the announcement (correlation=0.26). The two variables are weakly correlated in the period before the Mandal announcement and then strongly correlated in the elections held after.

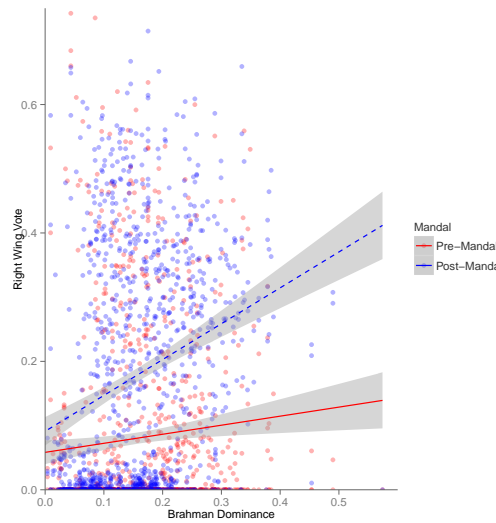
Do these patterns hold in a regression framework? Models 1–5 in Table 2 regress the change in the BJP vote share between the two elections on the key explanatory variables. Model 1 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between *Brahman Dominance* and the change in BJP vote share. A one standard deviation increase in the Brahman proportion of the population in 1931 is associated with a 4.8% increase in right-wing vote share and the single variable explains a substantial amount of variation in the data with an R-square value of 0.11.

Model 2 includes the historical controls – the proportion of Literates in the population, Muslim Size, Log Population and Caste Fragmentation. As predicted, the size of the muslim population in the electoral constituency has a positive and significant

Table 2: OLS regressions of Change in right-wing Vote Share on Brahman Dominance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Brahman Dominance	0.048*** (0.004)	0.036*** (0.005)	0.021*** (0.004)	0.020*** (0.004)	0.021*** (0.004)
Literate Middle				-0.004** (0.002)	
Literate Scheduled Caste/Tribe					-0.008* (0.004)
Literate		-0.027*** (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
Proportion Muslim		0.028*** (0.005)	0.029*** (0.005)	0.028*** (0.005)	0.027*** (0.005)
Log Population		-0.004 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
Ethnic Fragmentation		0.033*** (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.005)
ENP lag			-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Margin of Victory Lag			0.004 (0.004)	0.004 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)
Turnout Lag			-0.024*** (0.005)	-0.024*** (0.005)	-0.024*** (0.005)
right-wing Vote Lag			-0.098*** (0.005)	-0.097*** (0.005)	-0.097*** (0.005)
Reserved SC/ST			0.007 (0.007)	0.007 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)
Constant	0.098*** (0.004)	0.099*** (0.004)	0.160*** (0.009)	0.160*** (0.009)	0.157*** (0.009)
Adj. R-squared	0.111	0.247	0.606	0.606	0.608
N	1089	1083	1083	1083	1083
Fixed Effects			✓	✓	✓
Note: Continuous variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Standard errors in parentheses. * p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01.					

Figure 5: Right-wing vote share 1991–1995 and Brahman dominance in education in 1931



effect and the overall levels of literacy have a negative and significant effect on the BJP vote share. Notably, the *Caste Fragmentation* variable is not significant at conventional thresholds. The inclusion of these variables, however, does not affect the statistical significance of the coefficient of the *Brahman Dominance* variable.

Model 3 includes constituency-level lagged political covariates for the elections as well as state fixed-effects. Amongst the political controls, a lagged control for the right-wing vote share and the level of turnout in the previous election are the only variables significant at conventional thresholds. The inclusion of these variables and state fixed-effects does not affect the significance of the *Brahman Dominance* variable, even though the variable is now substantively smaller in size – a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of Brahmans is associated with a 2.1% increase in the BJP vote. In Models 4 and 5, controls for the literacy of backward castes (referred to as middle castes in the 1931 census) and scheduled castes/tribes are included. The controls for these groups does not affect the size or the statistical significance of the Brahman measure. The coefficients of *Literate Middle* and *Literate Dalit* are negative and significant at conventional thresholds. This suggests that an increase in the literacy levels of these castes is associated with a drop

in the BJP vote, which provides further evidence for the claim that places where historical caste-based segregation in education was lower, the BJP did not benefit to the same extent from a backlash against reservation policy.

Table A1 in the appendix replicates Models 1–5 using the *Brahman Size* predictor with similar results.

## 4.1 Alternative explanations

*Inter-religious competition:* It is possible that Brahman voters were more likely to be swayed by the BJP's pro-hindu rally in 1990 in favor of the demolition of a mosque on a disputed site in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. This is because the Brahmans have historically been the priestly castes and likely associated with greater religious and ritual dogmatism. It is also possible that regardless of caste, all hindu voters in districts with high Brahman concentrations were more swayed by religious appeals in the Ayodhya campaign as such districts were more likely to be associated with religious jingoism. If this is the case, we are likely to observe a greater association between Brahman dominance and size and the right-wing vote share in places with higher muslim populations i.e. places with greater inter-religious competition.

In Table 3, Models 1 and 2 regress the change in BJP vote share on the dominance and size variables in a subsample of constituencies with high proportions of muslims (above the median value of 0.07). In these models, the Brahman dominance variable is significant at the 5% threshold, but is substantively smaller than in previous regressions and Brahman size variable is not significant suggesting that the “muslim threat” did not work through the Brahman mechanism. In Models 3 and 4, however, where the muslim populations were low, the Brahman dominance and size variables are both positive and significant, suggesting an independent effect of caste inequality on the right-wing vote after the Mandal announcement.

*Farmer/backward caste mobilization:* In the 1960s, a green revolution in agriculture



Table 3: Right-wing vote share and Brahman dominance after Mandal: 1991-1995

	<i>High Muslim</i>		<i>Low Muslim</i>		<i>HYV Adoption</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Brahman Dominance	0.009** (0.003)		0.023** (0.007)		0.014** (0.004)	
Brahman Size		0.016 (0.012)		0.036*** (0.007)		0.027*** (0.006)
HYV Adoption					0.011* (0.006)	0.011* (0.005)
Literate	0.006 (0.005)	0.003 (0.004)	0.008 (0.008)	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.005)
Muslim Size	0.033 (0.019)	0.035 (0.021)	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.004 (0.018)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.039*** (0.007)
Constant	0.194*** (0.027)	0.202*** (0.027)	0.078*** (0.016)	0.228*** (0.011)	-0.011 (0.016)	-0.002 (0.017)
Adj. R-squared	0.616	0.617	0.601	0.614	0.605	0.611
N	376	376	707	711	951	955
AC Political Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1931 AC Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

All models include state fixed effects and robust clustered standard errors  
Note: Continuous variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and std. deviation of 1  
Standard errors in parentheses. \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

owing to the adoption of high-yield variety crops, irrigation improvements, and fertilizer use, led to the economic advancement of yeomen farmers, many of whom belonged to the backwards castes. The income growth of farmers was associated with a rise in demand for greater representation in political parties by backward castes. These upwardly mobile economic groups broke ranks with the Congress party and floated their own parties who made steady gains in state elections around the country through the 1970s and 1980s.

An alternative explanation for the rise of support for the BJP could be that the rise of backward caste parties resulted in upper caste voters breaking ranks with the Congress party to assert their own caste's economic and political interests. It is also possible that backward castes were most vocal in their demands for affirmative action in constituencies where they were growing more affluent, creating potential endogeneity concerns about the timing and consequences of the Mandal announcement.

In order to control for the economic strength of backward castes, Models 5 and 6 in Table 3 include a variable *HYV Adoption* that measures the extent of adoption of high-yield variety crops by 1989 in the administrative district. The variable is a proxy for the extent of agricultural improvements in the district and hence the economic strength of farmers in the district. The data for this is available from Sanghi et al. (1998) who use annual Indian agricultural surveys.<sup>10</sup> The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between *HYV Adoption* and the change in BJP vote share. The inclusion of this variable does not affect the significance of the *Brahman Dominance* and *Brahman Size* variables and both these variables are substantively larger and more precisely estimated than the coefficient on high-yield variety adoption.

*Replication in the pre-Mandal era:* Table 4 replicates the regressions in Table 3 for the election cycle before the announcement (i.e. state elections held between 1986 and 1990). This replication intends to demonstrate that Brahman size and dominance did not have a positive association with the BJP vote prior to the Mandal announcement. Models

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<sup>10</sup>HYV crop adoption is most recently used by Dasgupta (2014) as an instrument for lower caste challenges to Congress party dominance in the Indian states.

Table 4: Right-wing vote share and Brahman dominance before Mandal: 1986-1990

	<i>High Muslim</i>		<i>Low Muslim</i>		<i>HYV Adoption</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Brahman Dominance	-0.002 (0.005)		-0.008* (0.004)		-0.006** (0.002)	
Brahman Size		0.008 (0.013)		-0.003 (0.003)		0.002 (0.002)
HYV Adoption					0.006 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)
Literate	0.009 (0.007)	0.009 (0.008)	0.006 (0.007)	0.009 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)	0.012 (0.009)
Muslim Size	-0.003 (0.005)	0.001 (0.006)	0.008 (0.010)	0.009 (0.010)	-0.000 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)
Constant	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.004 (0.011)	0.108*** (0.007)	0.034** (0.011)	-0.017 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.009)
Adj. R-squared	0.233	0.234	0.138	0.134	0.143	0.141
N	382	382	706	710	956	960
AC Political Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1931 AC Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

All models include state fixed effects and robust clustered standard errors  
Note: Continuous variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and std. deviation of 1  
Standard errors in parentheses. \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

1 and 2 in Table 4 show that the *Brahman Size* and *Braman Dominance* variables are not statistically significant in high muslim dominated areas in the period before Mandal. Models 3 and 4 show that both variables have a negative coefficient with the dominance variable significant at the 10% level in low muslim areas. This suggests that status inequality between castes was associated with *less* incidence of BJP voting in the period before Mandal. Models 5 and 6 we find no significance of the *HYV Adoption* but the *Braman Dominance* is negative and precisely estimated suggesting that status inequality was negatively correlated with the BJP vote before Mandal. These results provide further evidence that the Mandal announcement polarized voters in Brahman dominated areas.

*Regional effects:* The relationship between social dominance of Brahmans and the right-wing vote might be stronger in regions of the country where affirmative action politics were a relatively recent phenomenon. The political mobilization of backward castes and the demand for lower caste access to segregated institutions occurred in

the early part of the twentieth century under colonial rule in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies. In these states, governments after independence had already instituted reservations for lower castes in higher education and government jobs. In contrast, reservations would arrive much later in the northern hindi speaking heartland. Scholars argue that a reason for this is the high numbers of upper castes in the North, compared to the South and West, which lead to the strength and persistence of caste-based discrimination. If this is the case, the results of our analysis are likely to be driven by the constituencies in the former United Provinces rather than those from Madras and Bombay in the sample. Table 5 runs the main regressions by each colonial era province. The results show a robust positive association between Brahman size and dominance in all three provinces, suggesting that even in states with a prior experience of affirmative action politics, the Mandal announcement yielded a vote dividend in areas where Brahmans were dominant. Interestingly, in Madras and Bombay the *Muslim Size* variable is not significant suggesting it is the religious cleavage that disproportionately affected the northern states rather than the caste cleavage.

The analysis of the state-level elections data revealed an association between Brahman strength and dominance and the change in the BJP vote share following the Mandal announcement suggesting that places with greater historical status inequality were more susceptible to right-wing mobilization. However, the analysis does not tell us whether Brahmans in those places were more likely to vote for the BJP, and if they were, whether wealthy and poor Brahmans were equally susceptible to right-wing appeals. In Section 5, I explore how the caste and income of voters are correlated with their propensity to vote for the BJP using survey data from the National Election Study of 2004. More specifically, I probe the likelihood of a Brahman respondent to vote for the BJP in electoral constituencies where Brahmans were historically more dominant in size and education.

Table 5: OLS regressions of right-wing Vote Share 1991-95 by 1931 Province

	<i>Madras</i>		<i>Bombay</i>		<i>United Provinces</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Brahman Dominance	0.020*** (0.006)		0.046*** (0.011)		0.019** (0.008)	
Brahman Size		0.040*** (0.010)		0.053*** (0.014)		0.042*** (0.008)
Literate	0.001 (0.002)	-0.007** (0.003)	0.010 (0.010)	-0.012 (0.011)	0.000 (0.013)	-0.022* (0.012)
Proportion Muslim	0.001 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)	0.009 (0.018)	0.017 (0.019)	0.042*** (0.009)	0.063*** (0.010)
Constant	0.020 (0.015)	0.026* (0.016)	0.185*** (0.027)	0.114*** (0.019)	0.151*** (0.022)	0.147*** (0.021)
Adj. R-squared	0.405	0.435	0.388	0.389	0.502	0.531
N	484	488	251	252	416	416
AC Political Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1931 AC Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

All models include state fixed effects  
Note: Continuous variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and std. deviation of 1  
Standard errors in parentheses. \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

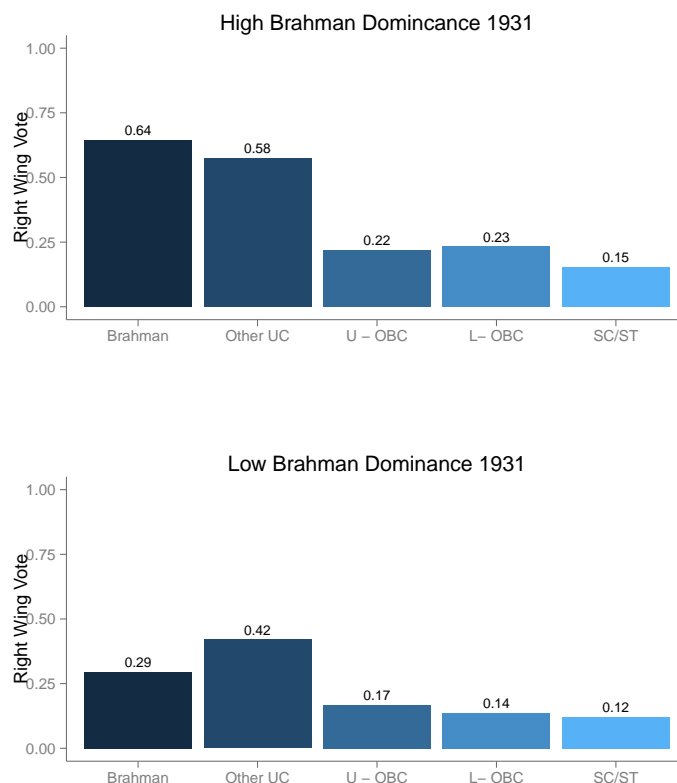
## 5 Data analysis: individual survey data

The survey data for this section come from NES 2004 which were conducted after the national parliamentary elections. NES 2004 was administered in 22 Indian languages and had 27,189 respondents.<sup>11</sup> The survey data was merged with the electoral data for the seven states in the sample. This resulted in a data set of 3709 respondents in these states. I use this data to explore how historical social dominance of Brahmans shapes individual-level propensity to vote for the BJP in the present day.

In top part of Figure 6, I plot the proportion of each major caste group – Brahman, Other Upper Castes (Rajputs, Kayasths, Vaishyas and Bhumihars), Upper Other Backward Castes (this includes peasant castes as well as wealthy backward castes), Lower Other Backward Castes, and Scheduled Castes/Tribes – that voted for the BJP in 2004. The plot shows that the caste with the highest proportion of its vote to the BJP were the Brahmans

<sup>11</sup>For more information on the NES and other surveys by CSDS, please go to <http://lokniti.org>.

Figure 6: Right-wing vote across caste groups by Brahman dominance 1931



themselves – 0.64 proportion of the sub-sample. In the bottom panel, I plot the proportion of each caste group that voted for the BJP in areas with low Brahman dominance in 1931. Every caste group now has a smaller proportion of its vote for the BJP, but the caste with the greatest drop in vote for the BJP are the Brahmans with only 0.29 of the Brahmans in the sample voting for the party.

The data analysis in this section also explores the interactive effect of income and caste on the likelihood of voting for the BJP. It is possible that if all Brahmans are wealthy, the vote for the BJP has a strong class component to it as opposed to the social dominance argument presented here. In order to compute the income of respondents in a developing country like India, I use a strategy commonly adopted in studies of emerging economies that employ various asset indicators to gauge economic well-being (Filmer and Pritchett

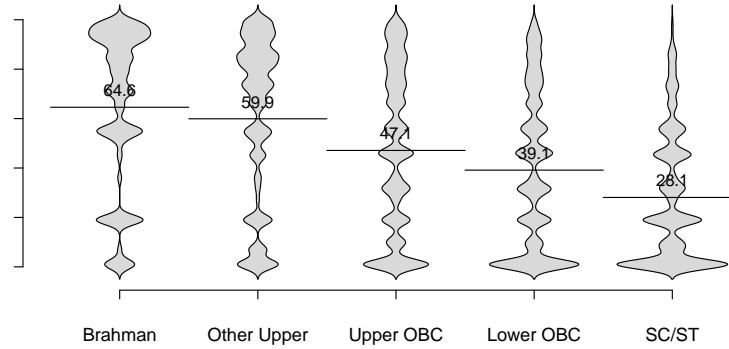
2001, McKenzie 2005). This is because a large proportion of the Indian population is dependent on agriculture and does not have meaningful and consistent source of cash income. The Indian election survey of 2004 asks individuals if they own particular items listed below:

- Car/Jeep/Van
- Tractor
- Television/Color Television/Cable Television
- Scooter/Motorcycle/Moped
- Telephone/Mobile telephone
- Bicycle
- Pumping set

Respondents were given a score of 1 for each asset listed above. To measure a respondent's "income" I conduct a factor analysis on these assets in each state. The resulting factor scores describe the degree to which the various assets distinguish the well-being of citizens, and thus are used to weight the assets which are aggregated (using the factor weights) to determine an individual's "income." Respondents' "income," based on their asset ownership and factor scores, are then rescaled to their percentile rank (thus ranging from 0 and 100), which gives all individuals a non-zero "income".

In Figure 7, I use bean plots to show the distribution of income across respondents in each caste group. We find that the average income of Brahmans, shown by the horizontal line, is higher than all other caste groups. However, unlike the distribution of income for the Lower Other Backward Castes and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, where most respondents are poor with a small number with above mean wealth of the caste, the Brahmans and Upper Caste distributions show that these castes have both wealthy and poor members. Around 22% of Brahmans surveyed in the NES have an income below the average wealth of an SC/ST respondent (income=28). In comparison, only 13% of SC/ST

Figure 7: Income across caste groups



respondents have an income above the average Brahman income (income=65). The greater variation in the income of Brahmans allows us to explore whether poor Brahmans have different voting preferences than the rich Brahmans in the sample.

In order to systematically analyze who votes for the right-wing, I regress the variable *BJP Vote*, that takes the value of 1 if the respondent voted for the BJP in 2004 and 0 otherwise, on a set of individual-level and constituency-level controls. The individual controls include – Female, Age, Education, Income and Caste of respondents. The constituency controls include Literacy, Caste-Fragmentation and Brahman Domination in Education in the assembly constituency in 1931.

Table 6 shows results of Generalized Linear Logit Models. All continuous variables in the model are standardized for ease of comparison with the binary variables. All models also include state fixed effects. The results shown are a subset of the variables in the analysis with the full results in Table A2 of the Appendix. In Model 1, I find that the caste of the respondent is a key indicator of the likelihood of voting for the BJP. Compared to the base category of Brahmans, all other castes are less likely to vote for the BJP. The coefficients on the Upper OBC, Lower OBC and SC/ST are negative and significant. The results also show that the interaction between income and caste are not significant for any of the caste groups other than Upper OBCs. The variable Brahman Dominance is significant



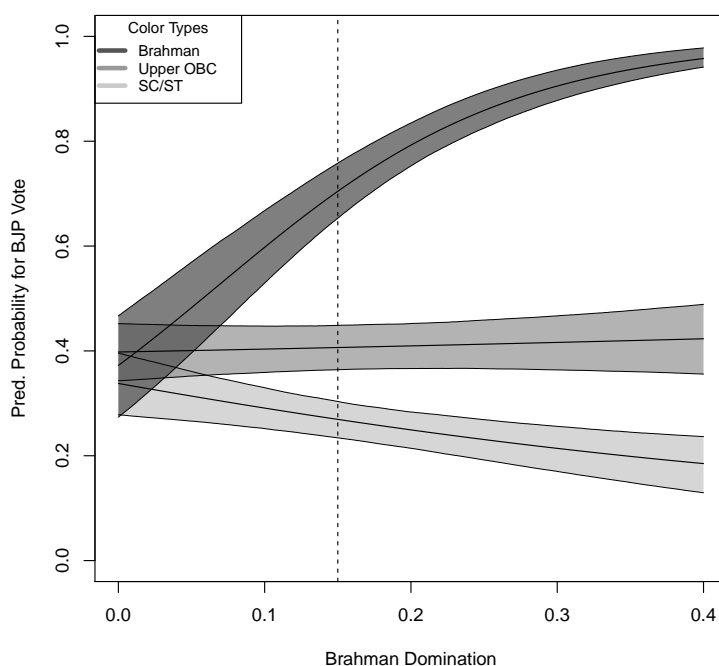
Table 6: Logit regressions on right-wing vote

	<i>All Voters</i>				<i>Poor</i>	<i>Wealthy</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(Intercept)	-2.161*** (0.326)	-2.416*** (0.338)	-2.379*** (0.339)	-2.493*** (0.380)	-2.503*** (0.772)	-3.006*** (0.483)
Other Upper Caste	-0.516** (0.256)	-0.305 (0.272)	-0.230 (0.275)	-0.038 (0.330)	0.308 (0.774)	0.289 (0.342)
Upper OBC	-1.543*** (0.224)	-1.271*** (0.242)	-1.173*** (0.245)	-1.075*** (0.300)	-0.919 (0.715)	-0.749** (0.316)
Lower OBC	-1.364*** (0.235)	-1.093*** (0.253)	-0.999*** (0.256)	-0.904*** (0.309)	-0.439 (0.720)	-0.874** (0.342)
SC/ST	-2.179***	-1.894***	-1.780***	-1.737***	-1.450**	-1.628***
Income	-0.377** (0.181)	-0.454** (0.195)	-0.458** (0.195)	-0.482** (0.202)	-1.322** (0.574)	-0.224 (0.201)
Other Upper Caste x Income	0.661*** (0.229)	0.695*** (0.242)	0.692*** (0.242)	0.734*** (0.248)	1.299** (0.648)	0.459* (0.256)
Upper OBC x Income	0.537*** (0.195)	0.607*** (0.208)	0.594*** (0.208)	0.631*** (0.215)	1.706*** (0.588)	0.389* (0.224)
Lower OBC x Income	0.096 (0.209)	0.167 (0.221)	0.154 (0.222)	0.195 (0.229)	1.109 (0.594)	0.234 (0.256)
SC/ST x Income	0.355* (0.214)	0.446** (0.225)	0.439* (0.225)	0.439* (0.232)	1.413** (0.590)	-0.105 (0.291)
Brahman Dominance	0.103* (0.058)	0.751*** (0.182)	0.730*** (0.186)	0.709*** (0.217)	2.079*** (0.699)	0.447* (0.231)
Other Upper Caste x Brahman Dominance		-0.291 (0.227)	-0.276 (0.228)	-0.337 (0.269)	-1.706** (0.789)	-0.143 (0.292)
Upper OBC x Brahman Dominance		-0.732*** (0.194)	-0.717*** (0.195)	-0.676*** (0.227)	-1.845*** (0.703)	-0.565** (0.249)
Lower OBC x Brahman Dominance		-0.736*** (0.204)	-0.729*** (0.205)	-0.688*** (0.238)	-1.828*** (0.708)	-0.689** (0.283)
SC/ST x Brahman Dominance		-0.919*** (0.210)	-0.901*** (0.211)	-0.883*** (0.243)	-2.178*** (0.704)	-0.673** (0.320)
Religious			0.148*** (0.053)	0.314 (0.223)	1.090 (0.688)	0.259 (0.238)
Muslim Size)			-0.028 (0.065)	-0.069 (0.209)	0.468 (0.712)	-0.184 (0.228)
Other Upper Caste x Religious				-0.310 (0.263)	-0.804 (0.738)	-0.387 (0.291)
Upper OBC x Religious				-0.266 (0.236)	-1.227* (0.697)	-0.058 (0.261)
Lower OBC x Religious				-0.216 (0.249)	-1.247* (0.703)	0.147 (0.293)
SC/ST x Religious				0.098 (0.247)	-0.720 (0.697)	0.246 (0.328)
Other Upper Caste x Muslim Size				-0.040 (0.242)	-0.915 (0.775)	0.077 (0.268)
Upper OBC x Muslim Size				0.148 (0.223)	-0.148 (0.721)	-0.005 (0.255)
Lower OBC x Muslim Size				0.100 (0.240)	-0.214 (0.725)	-0.184 (0.310)
SC/ST x Muslim Size				-0.067 (0.233)	-0.570 (0.721)	-0.016 (0.293)
AIC	3047.156	3025.492	3021.547	3025.029	1421.855	1608.983
BIC	3183.963	3187.174	3195.665	3248.895	1620.564	1808.100
N	3709	3709	3709	3709	1844	1865

and positively correlated with the BJP vote at the 10% significance level.

Model 2 interacts the Brahman Dominance variable with the caste of the respondent. The results show a strong positive interaction between the excluded base category of Brahman with being in a constituency where Brahmans held historical control in education.

Figure 8: Predicted probability of voting for BJP by caste



Notes: Ten thousand simulated values for all the beta coefficients were generated using the model's variance covariance matrix. The values of all the constituency-level variables were held at their mean except for the binary individual variables. The reference individual is a man of average age with a median income and education residing in the state of Gujarat.

In Figure 8, using the coefficients and standard errors in Model 2, I plot the simulated predicted probability of voting for the BJP for three types of respondents – Brahman, Upper OBC, and SC/ST. The figure shows that as the Brahman dominance in education grows, a Brahman voter is more likely to vote for the BJP. At the median value of the variable *Brahman Domination*, the predicted probability of a Brahman voting

for the BJP is 0.70 compared to 0.39 when *Brahman Domination* in the constituency is 0. In comparison, increasing the level of Brahman over-representation in education in the constituency has no effect on the vote of Upper Other Backward Castes, a caste group similar to the wealth levels of Brahmans, and has a negative effect on the SC/ST's likelihood of voting for the BJP.

## 5.1 Alternative explanations

*Religiosity and right-wing voting:* One possible explanation for why Brahmans might be more likely to vote for the BJP, which is a party that makes pro-Hindu appeals to voters, is that Brahmans as the priestly caste are more likely to be religious. As scholars have noted, there might be two related but different ways in which religiosity might increase the tendency to vote for a right-wing party. If a right-wing party makes both economic and religious appeals, then poor religious voters may make a trade-off between their economic and religious preferences and choose a right-wing party even if it is sub-optimal in terms of economic redistribution. Alternatively, some scholars have argued that religious voters tend to care less about redistributive policies because religiosity acts as an alternative form of social insurance hence reducing a poor person's demand for social welfare. In Models 3 and 4, I include two variables that proxy for "religious" voting. The first is a variable called *Religiosity* which is a composite score created using responses to five questions on religious practice. These five questions ask voters about frequency of prayers, attendance at place of worship, participation in religious services, donations to religious institutions and rituals such as fasting. Voters were asked to rate the response as "Never," "On Festivals," "Weekly," or "Daily." These responses were ranked on a scale of 1 to 4. These five variables were then used to create a factor score of "Religiosity".

In addition to a measure of practice and observance, Model 3 and 4 also include a variable called *Muslim Size* from the 1931 census that measures the proportions of Muslims in the constituencies in 1931. The BJP has made pro-Hindu appeals by highlighting

historical differences between Muslims and Hindus. If hindu–muslim cleavages matter, then places with historically high muslim populations are more likely to be associated with the BJP vote and Brahmins in these places are more likely to vote for the BJP. The results of Model 3 show that there is a positive and significant effect of *Religiosity* on the BJP vote while no such relationship is observed for the *Muslim Size* variable. Model 5 interacts these variable with the caste of the respondents and we find no statistically significant difference between the extent to which religiosity and the size of muslim populations matters to Brahman respondents versus other castes providing evidence that the Brahman propensity to vote for the BJP is not working through a religious mechanism.

*Wealthy versus poor Brahmins:* It is possible that the results are being driven primarily by wealthy voters in the sample, especially as Brahmins tend to be on average wealthier than the other castes in the sample. In Models 5 and 6, I split the data into two groups – respondents below the median income of 45 in the sample and respondents above or equal to the median income of 45. In Model 5, which analyzes the “poorer” respondents in the sample, we see an even stronger effect of historical Brahman dominance on the Brahman vote. In comparison, the coefficient of the Brahman dominance variable for the omitted category of Brahmins is not significant, and has a much smaller value in the sample of wealthy voters.

*Anti-redistribution views:* Next, I explore the extent to which caste and historical status inequality is associated with how voters view redistribution. I focus on two questions in the NES:

*Question 1: Tell me to what degree you agree with this statement – People themselves are responsible for their poverty not the government.*

*Question 2: Tell me to what degree you agree with this statement – There should not be caste-based reservations in jobs.*

These questions have responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Somewhat Agree,” and “Fully Agree” on a scale of 1 to 4. In Table 7, I present

the results of Generalized Linear Models where I treat the responses to these questions as a linear dependent variable. Models 1 to 3 analyze the question on respondents' views on government responsibility for poverty.

Two results are striking in these regressions. Income is a strong statistically significant predictor of responses and all castes, except for Brahmans, are more likely to be hostile to the poor as they become wealthier. Poor Brahmans are likely to be more hostile to the poor than are wealthy Brahmans. Second, Brahmans who live in Brahman dominated districts are more likely to be hostile to the poor. The introduction of the religiosity and muslim size variables and their interactions with caste does not change the main findings on caste and income. This provides evidence that status inequality between castes can enable cross-class solidarities.

In Models 4 to 6, I regress responses to the question on caste reservations in jobs on the same variables. Once again Brahmans in Brahman dominated districts express more hostile views towards reservations than other castes. This variable is significant at the 10% level. The results, however, are weaker than those on poverty and the role of the government.

## 6 Conclusion

The results of this paper provide new insights into the relationship between social hierarchy, status inequality, and right-wing voting in the Indian states. While previous research on the phenomenon of caste-based voting in India has typically focused on patronage, clientelism, or ethnic inequality arguments, this paper argues that inter-group social status difference between castes has been an overlooked factor. Poor voters, born into historically privileged upper-caste groups, often forgo potential redistributive benefits from the state for the material and psychological benefits of voting along with upper-caste members.

Table 7: GLM regressions on anti-redistribution views

	<i>Poverty and Government</i>			<i>Caste Reservations in Jobs</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(Intercept)	2.105*** (0.150)	2.089*** (0.151)	2.205*** (0.178)	2.219*** (0.159)	2.240*** (0.159)	2.224*** (0.185)
Other Upper Caste	0.020 (0.158)	0.023 (0.159)	-0.031 (0.188)	-0.239 (0.169)	-0.186 (0.169)	-0.096 (0.196)
Upper OBC	-0.170 (0.132)	-0.169 (0.134)	-0.284* (0.163)	-0.136 (0.141)	-0.075 (0.142)	-0.063 (0.169)
Lower OBC	-0.330** (0.137)	-0.330** (0.138)	-0.443*** (0.167)	-0.144 (0.146)	-0.088 (0.147)	-0.073 (0.173)
SC/ST	-0.396*** (0.136)	-0.399*** (0.138)	-0.508*** (0.166)	-0.538*** (0.145)	-0.464*** (0.146)	-0.443** (0.172)
Income	-0.353*** (0.102)	-0.350*** (0.102)	-0.332*** (0.104)	0.129 (0.111)	0.126 (0.110)	0.118 (0.111)
Other Upper Caste x Income	0.171 (0.136)	0.170 (0.136)	0.162 (0.138)	0.003 (0.146)	0.000 (0.145)	0.044 (0.147)
Upper OBC x Income	0.335*** (0.108)	0.333*** (0.108)	0.313*** (0.109)	-0.073 (0.116)	-0.073 (0.116)	-0.063 (0.117)
Lower OBC x Income	0.459*** (0.114)	0.456*** (0.114)	0.450*** (0.116)	-0.045 (0.123)	-0.053 (0.123)	-0.036 (0.124)
SC/ST x Income	0.350*** (0.113)	0.348*** (0.113)	0.324*** (0.114)	-0.178 (0.121)	-0.181 (0.121)	-0.173 (0.122)
Brahman Dominance	0.306*** (0.088)	0.288*** (0.090)	0.306*** (0.097)	0.169* (0.092)	0.152 (0.093)	0.181* (0.100)
Other Upper Caste x Brahman Dominance	-0.166 (0.117)	-0.169 (0.118)	-0.237* (0.132)	-0.020 (0.123)	-0.013 (0.123)	-0.176 (0.140)
Upper OBC x Brahman Dominance	-0.242*** (0.093)	-0.238** (0.093)	-0.251** (0.101)	-0.193** (0.097)	-0.181* (0.097)	-0.203* (0.104)
Lower OBC x Brahman Dominance	-0.222** (0.098)	-0.219** (0.098)	-0.222** (0.106)	-0.118 (0.102)	-0.116 (0.102)	-0.105 (0.110)
SC/ST x Brahman Dominance	-0.457*** (0.113)	-0.456*** (0.113)	-0.468*** (0.114)	-0.183* (0.121)	-0.167* (0.121)	-0.198* (0.122)
Religious		-0.015 (0.026)	-0.166 (0.123)		0.099*** (0.028)	0.113 (0.127)
Muslim Size		-0.037 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.106)		-0.025 (0.034)	0.065 (0.111)
Other Upper Caste x Religious			0.067 (0.149)			0.056 (0.155)
Upper OBC x Religious			0.168 (0.129)			0.003 (0.133)
Lower OBC x Religious			0.097 (0.134)			-0.044 (0.139)
SC/ST x Religious			0.215 (0.131)			-0.029 (0.135)
Other Upper Caste x Muslim Size			-0.095 (0.127)			-0.274** (0.136)
Upper OBC x Muslim Size			-0.015 (0.111)			-0.081 (0.116)
Lower OBC x Muslim Size			0.001 (0.116)			0.062 (0.123)
ote SC/ST x Muslim Size			-0.040 (0.112)			-0.114 (0.117)
AIC	9933.469	9935.654	9944.131	9809.686	9800.550	9802.330
BIC	10096.422	10110.677	10167.436	9971.495	9974.345	10024.069
N	3088	3088	3088	2960	2960	2960

The paper demonstrated that an announcement in 1990 that challenged upper caste dominance in government jobs and in education was followed by a rise in the right-wing vote for the BJP and that the increase in vote share was greater in places where upper-caste Brahmans dominated education in 1931. Using individual-level survey data from the 2004 election, the paper further demonstrated that both poor and wealthy Brahmans were more likely to vote for the right-wing BJP in electoral constituencies with greater Brahman dominance in education in 1931. These voters also tended to hold more conservative views on the role of the state in alleviating poverty and on affirmative action for lower castes.

It is possible that the argument presented here could be viewed as specific to India, owing to the peculiar structure of the caste system that has resulted in a specific set of circumstances where voters might be born into status groups that are socially dominant but not economically so. If this is the case then making generalizations on the link between status inequality and vote choice based on findings in India could be limited. In reality, however, we find that status systems exist in a variety of contexts and shape the vote choice of the poor in idiosyncratic ways. Recent work by Acharya et al. (2014) for instance finds that present-day white voters from counties with higher levels of slave-holdings in the 1860s are more likely to support a right-wing party and hold racially hostile views. In future research it is possible to explore the link between historical social distinctions and vote choice in a range of contexts.

While the paper has demonstrated a link between historical caste dominance and present-day vote choice, it cannot separate the mechanisms through which status distinctions are maintained and asserted over time. It could be that historical caste dominance is replicated inter-generationally through segregation in educational institutions, through group practices of endogamy, and ritualism that maintains caste boundaries and status. It is also possible that historical educational dominance might be correlated with present-day income dominance as education becomes a means to economic

mobility. If this is the case then the patterns we observe would suggest that groups are defending their economic livelihoods rather than their status location. In future work, I will explore the mechanisms through which historical factors shape present-day outcomes.

Finally, the role of social status could also be important in shaping coalitions over redistributive policies and redistributive institutions. There is much to be gained from studying the relationship between historical social status distinctions and the development of redistributive institutions.



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## 7 Appendix

Figure 9: Correlation Between Brahman and Muslim Size in 1931

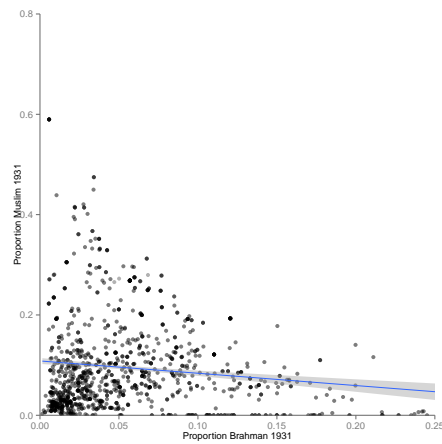


Table A2: Logit Regressions on Right-Wing Vote

	<i>All Voters</i>				<i>Poor</i>	<i>Wealthy</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(Intercept)	-2.161*** (0.326)	-2.416*** (0.338)	-2.379*** (0.339)	-2.493*** (0.380)	-2.503*** (0.772)	-3.006*** (0.483)
Other Upper Caste	-0.516** (0.256)	-0.305 (0.272)	-0.230 (0.275)	-0.038 (0.330)	0.308 (0.774)	0.289 (0.342)
Upper OBC	-1.543*** (0.224)	-1.271*** (0.242)	-1.173*** (0.245)	-1.075*** (0.300)	-0.919 (0.715)	-0.749** (0.316)
Lower OBC	-1.364*** (0.235)	-1.093*** (0.253)	-0.999*** (0.256)	-0.904*** (0.309)	-0.439 (0.720)	-0.874** (0.342)
SC/ST	-2.179*** (0.241)	-1.894*** (0.257)	-1.780*** (0.260)	-1.737*** (0.313)	-1.450** (0.714)	-1.628*** (0.384)
Income	-0.377** (0.181)	-0.454** (0.195)	-0.458** (0.195)	-0.482** (0.202)	-1.322** (0.574)	-0.224 (0.201)
Female	0.061 (0.096)	0.065 (0.097)	0.030 (0.098)	0.042 (0.098)	0.133 (0.149)	-0.041 (0.136)
Age	0.020 (0.036)	0.019 (0.036)	0.014 (0.036)	0.014 (0.037)	-0.083 (0.055)	0.082 (0.052)
Education	0.102* (0.056)	0.090 (0.057)	0.074 (0.057)	0.073 (0.057)	-0.051 (0.079)	0.151* (0.078)
Caste Fragmentation	-0.187** (0.083)	-0.170** (0.083)	-0.151 (0.094)	-0.147 (0.094)	-0.349** (0.146)	0.052 (0.134)
Literacy 1931	0.166** (0.070)	0.165** (0.068)	0.154** (0.069)	0.144** (0.069)	0.265*** (0.095)	0.015 (0.109)
Other Upper Caste x Income	0.661*** (0.229)	0.695*** (0.242)	0.692*** (0.242)	0.734*** (0.248)	1.299** (0.648)	0.459* (0.256)
Upper OBC x Income	0.537*** (0.195)	0.607*** (0.208)	0.594*** (0.208)	0.631*** (0.215)	1.706*** (0.588)	0.389* (0.224)
Lower OBC x Income	0.096 (0.209)	0.167 (0.221)	0.154 (0.222)	0.195 (0.229)	1.109 (0.594)	0.234 (0.256)
SC/ST x Income	0.355* (0.214)	0.446** (0.225)	0.439* (0.225)	0.439* (0.232)	1.413** (0.590)	-0.105 (0.291)
Brahman Dominance	0.103* (0.058)	0.751*** (0.182)	0.730*** (0.186)	0.709*** (0.217)	2.079*** (0.699)	0.447* (0.231)
Other Upper Caste x Brahman Dominance		-0.291 (0.227)	-0.276 (0.228)	-0.337 (0.269)	-1.706** (0.789)	-0.143 (0.292)
Upper OBC x Brahman Dominance		-0.732*** (0.194)	-0.717*** (0.195)	-0.676*** (0.227)	-1.845*** (0.703)	-0.565** (0.249)
Lower OBC x Brahman Dominance		-0.736*** (0.204)	-0.729*** (0.205)	-0.688*** (0.238)	-1.828*** (0.708)	-0.689** (0.283)
SC/ST x Brahman Dominance		-0.919*** (0.210)	-0.901*** (0.211)	-0.883*** (0.243)	-2.178*** (0.704)	-0.673** (0.320)
Religious			0.148*** (0.053)	0.314 (0.223)	1.090 (0.688)	0.259 (0.238)
Muslim Size)			-0.028 (0.065)	-0.069 (0.209)	0.468 (0.712)	-0.184 (0.228)
Other Upper Caste x Religious				-0.310 (0.263)	-0.804 (0.738)	-0.387 (0.291)
Upper OBC x Religious				-0.266 (0.236)	-1.227* (0.697)	-0.058 (0.261)
Lower OBC x Religious				-0.216 (0.249)	-1.247* (0.703)	0.147 (0.293)
SC/ST x Religious				0.098 (0.247)	-0.720 (0.697)	0.246 (0.328)
Other Upper Caste x Muslim Size				-0.040 (0.242)	-0.915 (0.775)	0.077 (0.268)
Upper OBC x Muslim Size				0.148 (0.223)	-0.148 (0.721)	-0.005 (0.255)
Lower OBC x Muslim Size				0.100 (0.240)	-0.214 (0.725)	-0.184 (0.310)
SC/ST x Muslim Size				-0.067 (0.233)	-0.570 (0.721)	-0.016 (0.293)
AIC	3047.156	3025.492	3021.547	3025.029	1421.855	1608.983
BIC	3183.963	3187.174	3195.665	3248.895	1620.564	1808.100
N	3709	3709	3709	3709	1844	1865

Table A3: GLM Regressions on Anti-Redistribution Views

	Poverty and Government			Caste Reservations in Jobs		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(Intercept)	2.105*** (0.150)	2.089*** (0.151)	2.205*** (0.178)	2.219*** (0.159)	2.240*** (0.159)	2.224*** (0.185)
Other Upper Caste	0.020 (0.158)	0.023 (0.159)	-0.031 (0.188)	-0.239 (0.169)	-0.186 (0.169)	-0.096 (0.196)
Upper OBC	-0.170 (0.132)	-0.169 (0.134)	-0.284* (0.163)	-0.136 (0.141)	-0.075 (0.142)	-0.063 (0.169)
Lower OBC	-0.330** (0.137)	-0.330** (0.138)	-0.443*** (0.167)	-0.144 (0.146)	-0.088 (0.147)	-0.073 (0.173)
SC/ST	-0.396*** (0.136)	-0.399*** (0.138)	-0.508*** (0.166)	-0.538*** (0.145)	-0.464*** (0.146)	-0.443*** (0.172)
Income	-0.353*** (0.102)	-0.350*** (0.102)	-0.332*** (0.104)	0.129 (0.111)	0.126 (0.110)	0.118 (0.111)
Female	-0.102** (0.046)	-0.098** (0.046)	-0.095** (0.046)	0.050 (0.049)	0.030 (0.049)	0.031 (0.049)
Age	-0.020 (0.018)	-0.019 (0.018)	-0.017 (0.018)	0.030 (0.019)	0.026 (0.019)	0.026 (0.019)
Education	0.050 (0.028)	0.052* (0.028)	0.053* (0.028)	0.059** (0.030)	0.054* (0.030)	0.054* (0.030)
Brahman Dominance	0.306*** (0.088)	0.288*** (0.090)	0.306*** (0.097)	0.169 * (0.092)	0.152 (0.093)	0.181* (0.100)
Caste Fragmentation	-0.070* (0.037)	-0.049 (0.041)	-0.047 (0.041)	0.024 (0.040)	0.031 (0.044)	0.030 (0.044)
Literacy 1931	0.044 (0.032)	0.041 (0.032)	0.038 (0.033)	0.027 (0.034)	0.023 (0.035)	0.019 (0.035)
Other Upper Caste x Income	0.171 (0.136)	0.170 (0.136)	0.162 (0.138)	0.003 (0.146)	0.000 (0.145)	0.044 (0.147)
Upper OBC x Income	0.335*** (0.108)	0.333*** (0.108)	0.313*** (0.109)	-0.073 (0.116)	-0.073 (0.116)	-0.063 (0.117)
Lower OBC x Income	0.459*** (0.114)	0.456*** (0.114)	0.450*** (0.116)	-0.045 (0.123)	-0.053 (0.123)	-0.036 (0.124)
SC/ST x Income	0.350*** (0.113)	0.348*** (0.113)	0.324*** (0.114)	-0.178 (0.121)	-0.181 (0.121)	-0.173 (0.122)
Other Upper Caste x Brahman Dominance	-0.166 (0.117)	-0.169 (0.118)	-0.237* (0.132)	-0.020 (0.123)	-0.013 (0.123)	-0.176 (0.140)
Upper OBC x Brahman Dominance	-0.242*** (0.093)	-0.238** (0.093)	-0.251** (0.101)	-0.193** (0.097)	-0.181* (0.097)	-0.203* (0.104)
Lower OBC x Brahman Dominance	-0.222** (0.098)	-0.219** (0.098)	-0.222** (0.106)	-0.118 (0.102)	-0.116 (0.102)	-0.105 (0.110)
SC/ST x Brahman Dominance	-0.457*** (0.098)	-0.456*** (0.098)	-0.468*** (0.105)	-0.183* (0.102)	-0.167* (0.101)	-0.198* (0.109)
Religious		-0.015 (0.026)	-0.166 (0.123)		0.099*** (0.028)	0.113 (0.127)
Muslim Size		-0.037 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.106)		-0.025 (0.034)	0.065 (0.111)
Other Upper Caste x Religious			0.067 (0.149)			0.056 (0.155)
Upper OBC x Religious			0.168 (0.129)			0.003 (0.133)
Lower OBC x Religious			0.097 (0.134)			-0.044 (0.139)
SC/ST x Religious			0.215 (0.131)			-0.029 (0.135)
Other Upper Caste x Muslim Size			-0.095 (0.127)			-0.274** (0.136)
Upper OBC x Muslim Size			-0.015 (0.111)			-0.081 (0.116)
Lower OBC x Muslim Size			0.001 (0.116)			0.062 (0.123)
SC/ST x Muslim Size			-0.040 (0.112)			-0.114 (0.117)
AIC	9933.469	9935.654	9944.131	9809.686	9800.550	9802.330
BIC	10096.422	10110.677	10167.436	9971.495	9974.345	10024.069
N	3088	3088	3088	2960	2960	2960