How (and How Not) to Use
Archival Sources in Political Science

Alexander Lee[*]

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Abstract

The use of archival sources is widely understood to be an important tool research tool, but the use of archival material is rare in political science, and the material that is used is often misunderstood and misinterpreted so as to make it useless for hypothesis testing. This paper discusses common problems in archival materials, and shows how they compound traditional research design problems. It then proposes a set of best practices for avoiding these problems, which differ substantially from the types of archival analysis common within the historical profession. These practices are illustrated using a brief discussion of material from the National Archives of India on the 1975 Emergency, which demonstrates how these methods produce different conclusions from a more traditional archival analysis.

Key words: Archives

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[*]Department of Political Science, University of Rochester

1 Introduction

Every part of the world contains archives, which hold millions of pages of unpublished records of a wide variety of institutions and individuals. These records represent a unique resource for inquiry into the functioning of political institutions, since they contain internal material unlikely to be furnished by contemporary political actors, and because they provide insight into historical periods so remote that little other material is available. However, while the potential value of archival sources is widely understood, they remain rarely used in political science: In the thirty four years since 1980, the *American Political Science Review* has published only twentyone papers directly citing an identifiable archival source. Given the rarity of archival work in the discipline, and its absence in graduate teaching, it is no surprise that many political scientists misunderstand what archives are, applying the term to any material on a historical topic, even secondary sources.

The archival work that does exist in political science is hampered by a number of features common to such records: The very large amount of poorly organized material, biases in the production and retention of information, and the considerable diversity of internal opinion within the material. Usually scholars are unable to access the full extent of the material produced by the institution, and the patterns of missingness are not always obvious. Even when the material is perfectly preserved, its shear bulk and diversity make it necessary for scholars to base their analysis on a subset of what is available. These shortcomings present temptations for scholars to make inferences based on a biased subsample of the archive.

All of these problems are familiar to historians, who place solving them at the center of their professional training. Political scientists, however, are not only less familiar with these problems, but embrace a hypothesis-driven research method that makes very heavy demands on source material. Historical techniques, which emphasize an inductive and descriptive approach to archival material, can produce biases when used to test these sorts of hypotheses, most commonly bias towards confirmation of an existing hypothesis. As their worst, these approaches use archival sources as a mine for confirmatory quotes without considering the incompleteness and complexity of the source material. These

failings have led many scholars to conclude that archival materials are useless for serious hypothesis testing.

To address these problems, it is necessary to analyze archival material in a way that integrates its unique features into standard political science methods of hypothesis testing. This paper highlights three methods that are helpful in the analysis and presentation of archival evidence. Firstly, and most importantly, scholars should develop an explicit *a priori* rule for what types of material will and will not be analyzed. This reduces the danger (encouraged by both traditional archival filing systems and modern content management software) that they only analyze material that supports their existing ideas, and enables them to be more aware of underlying patterns of missingness within the archive. Secondly, scholars should become familiar with the internal procedures and personalities of the institution that produced a particular set of sources, so as to be familiar with both the biases inherent in the written material, and what parts of the archive are appropriate for study. Finally, scholars should acquaint their readers with the exact procedures that they used to gather material, enabling readers to critique these procedures and allowing the readers to understand how specific contentions are backed by evidence.

This paper will explain both how archives are often misused in political science and how they might be used better in both qualitative and quantitative work. Section Two will define what archival material is, why it is useful, and how it is used in the social sciences today. Section Three describes several problems with this usage, relating them to well known problems in classic works of research design such as (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). Section Four discusses a set of practices that address these problems, while Section Five uses these suggestions to lay out a detailed blueprint for how to conduct archival research. Section Six provides an illustration of these methods, analyzing a set of archival sources relating to the 1975 Indian Emergency, and showing that the methods advocated here produce sharply different theoretical conclusions than a more inductive approach. Section Seven concludes with a discussion of the place of archival work within the discipline.

2   What Archives Are and Why They Are Useful

2.1   Definitions

Archives are accumulations of unpublished historical records, usually of an institution or individual. The term also refers to the specialized facilities in which these accumulations are held, though some agencies may continue to maintain their archives directly, and many archival facilities contain large amounts of published material. In computing, "archive" has a quite separate meaning, and may refer to any accumulation of data, though it is the first definition that will be referred to in this paper.

By their nature, archives are separate from the files actually in use by the institution at the present time. After a term of years or some change in the institutional environment, these working files are then transferred to the archive and (ideally) opened to scholars. Archival material is thus usually somewhat removed from current events. It compensates for this by being publicly available in a way that contemporary government documents, which are often held to be politically sensitive, will never be.

Social scientists often casually refer to all source material on historical topics as archival, even published secondary work. This usage is both incorrect and misleading, since as part of the process of publication much factual material is inevitably excluded. While published primary source material is often much easier to access, and more clearly presented, than archival material, it is usually far less rich, and far more biased, than unpublished papers. Published secondary source material adds to this selection effect the interpretive biases of its authors, making any attempt to interpret them as historical source material highly suspect (Lustick, 1996).

2.2   Advantages of Archival Material

One of the generic challenges of political science is explaining the behavior of institutions and actors who have strong incentives to hide their real resources and motivations from outsiders. Scholars are forced to choose between intensively scrutinizing the published material that does emerge, questioning those elites who consent to be interviewed (who may or may not be entirely frank) and inferring intentions from behavior. For example, a

scholar interested in why rural schools are cited in particular villages, might consult the annual report of the Education Department, might interview bureaucrats and politicians, or might simply see where schools are sited and infer government policy from village-level covariants. Depending on the nature of the institutions being studied, both the amount of information available from these sources, and their level of honesty, may vary widely. It is often difficult to collect any information at all about authoritarian regimes, or about agencies connected with security and policing.

Archival information can allow a scholar to avoid this pattern of secrecy and obfuscation, and view the same documents that were available to decisionmakers. These may include private sources of data, and documents and memoranda in which policy is announced or debated. Properly used, such archival material thus allows research on topics that would be unreachable with available contemporary data. To give just a few examples, Johnson, Wahlbeck and Spriggs (2006) use the Blackmun papers to study decision-making within the Supreme Court, Lee (2011) uses Indian police files to study individual selection into terrorist violence, and Blaydes (2013) uses the archives of the Iraqi Baath party to determine the levels of opposition to the regime. As these examples show, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are compatible with the use of archival sources. While a quantitative study might use archives as the sources for a data set, a qualitative study might collect evidence to be presented as a set of case studies or examples.

While archival data may be a useful as a way to understand contemporary political institutions, it is often the only useful source about political institutions in the remote past, where both political actors to interview and policy outcomes to measure are long gone. While the backward looking element of archival material is of vital importance to historians, it can also be useful to political scientists interested in the development of modern political forms. Firmin-Sellers (1995), for instance, uses Nigerian tribal archives, to examine land policy and taxation in the colonial period, while Jha and Wilkinson (2012) use archival information on colonial military recruitment, along with publicly available information, to predict civil violence during the partition of India.

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2.3 Contemporary Usage

Despite the potential advantages of using archival sources, they remain something of a rarity in the social sciences. Since 1980, only 47 articles in the American Political Science Review have mentioned archives at all—a little over one a year. The peripheral place of archival work in the discipline becomes even more apparent when these mentions are examined in detail. In ten cases the authors described hypothetical archival work that they hoped to do in the future. In seven cases, they cited the archival work of others, while in three cases they referenced published books as "archival." In six cases, authors claimed to have done archival research (usually as a "confirmation" of larger claims) without explaining in what archive, if any, this research was done. Overall, only 21 papers cite an identifiable archival sources, many of them very briefly.[1] Aspiration and misunderstanding appear to be just as common as genuine archival research in political science.

3 Common Problems in The Use of Archives

3.1 Confirmation Bias and the Library of Babel

One of the most common features of archives is their vast size relative to the interpretive capacities of scholars. The American National Archives contains over 10 billion pages of material, while even the humble Guatemalan Police archives total some 10 million pages. Even if the topic is narrowed, the capacity of institutions to produce paper runs well ahead of the capacity of scholars to understand it. A scholar interested in the foreign policy of India between 1947 and 1955 has 42,654 files to choose from, the majority handwritten. The problem of size is compounded by problems of institutional organization. In most archives, files can only be requested in finite amounts through a time-consuming procedure, browsing of material is forbidden, and indexes and other finding aids are often fragmentary and cryptic. Scholars must thus invest considerable time in obtaining relevant material before they are able to analyze it.

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[1] Of these 21 mentions, five use archival data quantitatively. Three occurred in a 2006 special issue on the history of APSA.

Some selection of what material to view is thus imperative in any type of archival work. This selection is, however, very dangerous from a research design perspective, since any selection of cases may potentially lead to biased findings. While bias resulting from case selection is a well-known danger in all forms of social scientific inquiry, it is particularly insidious in the archival context, due the opacity of archives to both scholars and those accessing their work. A scholar selecting countries for detailed case studies or congressmen for interviews is aware in a general way of the characteristics of the universe of countries and congressmen, and can thus select a representative and theoretically relevant sample, or at least be aware of the potential biases of the sample they do obtain. The selection criteria are ideally explained in the work itself, where they can be assessed by readers. An archival scholar, by contrast, may have little sense of what the "universe" of files may look like, and his reader even less. A scholar may thus fasten upon a particular subsection of material that supports her hypothesis, without having any sense of its wider validity. Given the vast size of archives, most contain material that can be used to support a wide variety of plausible hypotheses.

While historians also face the problem of choosing what archival material to read, they are less troubled with bias from case selection for two reasons. Firstly, historians typically spend long periods of time doing archival work, with the typical dissertation reflecting two years of sustained primary sources research. This more sustained exposure means that they are able to read a wide variety of material, reducing the probability that they will base their conclusions on an unrepresentative portion of the source base. Secondly, political scientists are more likely than historians to begin their archival research with a strong, clearly articulated hypotheses about the findings they will encounter. While such hypotheses are a key part of social scientific inquiry, their existence means that social scientists able to process only a small amount of information will consciously or unconsciously choose information that supports their existing ideas.

To see what such unconscious selection bias might look like, consider again the case of a hypothetical scholar who wishes to understand the effect of colonialism on religious identity. Let us imagine that our scholar has a strong belief that colonial-era policies are a key cause of religious tensions in this area. After searching an index for entries on "religion," she encounters a wide variety of materials showing colonial involvement in

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religious affairs—missionary education, subsidized Muslim ulema, job quotas etc. From this she may conclude that the colonial state was heavily involved in the promotion of religious difference, and return home. While such a perspective may be correct, it may ignore archival material in which the colonial government may promote alternate types of cultural differences, or material in which religions considerations are simply not present. Such archival selection is normally difficult to detect, since readers, especially in the social sciences, have little idea of the universe of files from which scholars are selecting their evidence.

The easier availability of electronic indexes, digitized archives and content management software all promise to remove much of the drudgery from archival work, but may at the same time compound the problem of selective reading, by making it easier for scholars to isolate files, or even individuals sentences, that support their thesis, and making it less likely that they will encounter alternate perspectives. Neitzel and Welzer (2013), for instance, use text analysis of transcribed POW conversations to assess the involvement of German soldiers in atrocities during the Second World War. While their technique finds a shocking number of incidents in which atrocities were discussed, it is difficult to access their status as evidence, since the authors have not analyzed the much larger number of "ordinary" conversations. [2]

3.2   Missing Data and Source Bias

Not only are scholars unable to read or code every file in an archive, but the files in an archive are inevitably a subset of the files produced by the institution, and represent an even smaller subset of the information available to the institution. In archival contexts, as in other types of social scientific inquiry, missing data can produce bias in both qualitative and quantitative inference. This bias takes three primary forms:

1. "Survival Bias" is a product of the long periods of time, and the occasionally uncertain environments, that intervene between the producers of material and the scholar's

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[2]To the extent that scholars use archives for hypothesis development rather than testing, confirmation bias can be reduced, but never wholly eliminated. Some files must be selected for viewing, and these files will usually reflect some existing ideas about the data. And the use of archives for hypothesis development only postpones the problem of finding evidence, either within the archive or outside of it to confirm or reject the hypothesis.

desk. During this time, there are abundant opportunities for material to be lost, stolen or destroyed. Sometimes these factors are environmental, like the termite infestation at the West Bengal State Archives that has severely eroded our ability to understand early colonial administration in India. Sometimes they are human, as in the USAAF's 1945 air raid on Potsdam, which destroyed the archives of the German Army and severely limited study of the German role in the First World War. On a lower level, archival institutions, especially in the developing world, suffer low level leakage of material: Files are checked out and not returned (and occasionally found a few decades later in a professor's attic), files are returned but misplaced, files stored in the front of boxes become flaky and illegible, and maps are taken for sale to dealers.

While these sources of bias may seem random and ignorable, this is not always the case. At every stage of the preservation process, chances favor the survival of material considered important. The Potsdam Air raid, for instance, did not affect certain classes of papers that had been moved away for safekeeping, while the WBSA staff appears to have kept the termites away from files with obvious relevance to left-wing political activism. Similarly, institutions and regions which remain stable over time tend to produce more complete archival records, since wars, revolutions and reorganizations are obvious opportunities for archives to be destroyed of neglected.

2. "Transfer Bias" is a product of the institutional gap between the individuals or institutions that produce material and the archival institutions that store and disseminate them. Producing institutions may be reluctant to transfer material that they deem embarrassing or sensitive, which they retain in their "active" files." Britain's Security Service, for instance, has released no material since the 1950s (Andrew, 2009), while many US presidential libraries embargo material that they consider sensitive. Even assuming perfect goodwill, the period of transfer often becomes a focal point for the discarding and dispersion of material.

3. "Source Bias" is the most common and problematic of the three types of bias. It stems from the fact that government agencies collect and record certain types of knowledge in preference to others. For obvious reasons, governments tend record information about their own activities rather than presenting a record of society is whole: We know far more, for instance, about taxation in the Middle Ages than we do about gender rela-

tions. While this is frustrating for historians, it has less effect on political scientists, who are interested in precisely the sort of subjects on which archives are most revealing. Even within political subjects, however, there tend to be differences in coverage. Controversial matters, for instance, tend to produce multiple submissions, appeals to higher authority, and thus a much larger paper record than "routine matters." Divorces, classically, are better recorded than happy marriages.

A more worrisome tendency is for archives to record instances in which government power was exercised successfully, rather than areas in which it was ineffective.[3] Not only does nobody wish to be reminded of their failures, but successful power relationships require more communication and documentation than weak ones. A colonial government, for instance, may record in some detail its attempts to tax and control local chiefs, but will have little to say about chiefs who pay it no taxes, or about whom it has little knowledge. Casual readers of archives thus tend to gain a somewhat exaggerated impression of the power and efficacy of the agencies that produce then.

What makes these sources of bias particularly damaging in political science is that the exact extent and direction of the bias is difficult to determine easily. Political scientists tend to be trained in contexts where sources of missing data, such as survey non-response, are known with some precision. They are thus often unprepared to work in contexts where missingness is both very common, and can only be known through intense examination of the material itself. Faced with such a situation, social scientists will often cite whatever information is available as the "archival" truth without considering its place within the larger historical record.

Historians are intensely aware of these problems in the availability of archival sources. In many historical monographs, however, the problem is somewhat muted, since they describe the contents of a single type of (available) primary source material, and avoid generalizations of facts outside this material. Such forbearance is unsuitable for research programs which, like the majority of those in political science, seek to produce broadly relevant statements about causation. To the extent to which scholars wish to make such statements, they must take cognizance of the whole universe of potential data.

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[3]As Foucault acknowledges (Foucault, 1977), the relationship between knowledge and power is complex and endogenous—not only does power create archival knowledge, but archival knowledge creates political power.

4 Best Practices for Archival Social Science

4.1 Understanding How the Data Was Created

Before a scholar begins intensive analysis of archival material, he should make himself familiar with how the material was presented and preserved. Such familiarization is essential in order to collect the most relevant information from the archive, understanding the biases inherent in the availability or non-availability of material, and the internal conflicts within the organization. An understanding of these biases, and the general structure of the archive, is also essential in selecting what material to focus on in the main analysis.

At its most basic, this background research involves identifying, through the finding aids in the archives and secondary sources, what institution or individual created the records and how they were organized. In some cases this is simple: The US Supreme Court, for instance, has maintained a fairly constant organizational profile for over two centuries. The responsibility for enforcing federal alcohol tax laws, by contrast, has been shuffled through a bewildering number of agencies in the same period, and these agencies have been reorganized and expanded in accordance with political convenience and administrative fashion. Generalization such as "Federal Authorities" may conceal considerable variation in institutional cultural and incentive structure.

The organization of the institution is closely related to the background of its members. These backgrounds are informative in estimating the nature of source bias and the ways in which conflicts are resolved within organizations. A reader of 19th century Indian official documents, for instance, might be tempted to lump together the documents' European authors' as "colonial officials." This would minimize differences between numerous families of bureaucrats exercising similar jobs: Elite, college-educated Indian Civil Service Officers, high school educated Indian Police Officers, Army officers on civil duties, survivors of the East India Company's service, and non-covenanted local recruits, to say nothing of differences in family background, province of employment, and facility in local languages. Such differences are often important in understanding the structure of archival holdings, and political conflicts. In the Indian case, for instance, frequent

complaints within the police sources about the force's poor performance, which might be interpreted as low colonial state capacity, but might also be a result of resentment within the IPS towards the privileges of other sectors of the civil service and an attempt to win a larger share of resources.

After understanding the structure of the institution, the scholar should try to understand the internal flow of paper. This means stepping back from viewing archives as masses of sources, and seeing them as their creators saw them—as individual cases flowing from desk to desk, or a pile of letters to be responded to. Some of the important questions in such an analysis are who initiates matters, who receives information, and who makes key decisions. In some organizations, peripheral agents may be focused on implementing central policy dictates, while in others the center contents itself with providing resources for field agents. Understanding this flow is important in choosing which documents to focus on. While it may be tempting to quote an impassioned memorandum on one side of a question (particularly if it agrees with the hypothesis) this memorandum may by misleading is it was produced by someone with little effect on decision-making.

Finally, scholars should consider the history of the archive itself: What areas of the archives have suffered the most from Survival and Transfer bias. The easiest way to do this is to examine the handlist or index of the archive itself, and examine the relationship between the amounts of material: Why the Education Department has 57 boxes of files from the 1900-1920 period but only 4 between 1920 and 1940? Such disproportions often mask differences in preservation that may affect attempt to use archival sources for causal inference. They may also be important in determining what material to focus on in the main analysis.

4.2   Creating a Sampling Frame

The most important step towards unbiased archival work is to make explicit at the beginning of the main analysis what material will be reviewed and what will not. All data within this frame should be reviewed, and become part of the conclusion, either qualitatively or quantitatively. Such planning serves a number of important purposes.

While it does not increase the amount of material that can be read, it guarantees that the scholar make explicit, at least to herself, the criteria by which the material to be read is selected. This reduces the potential for the author to shape the findings by choosing what files to read. Similarly, while an explicit sampling frame cannot recreate the data destroyed by the various types of archival bias, it can make more obvious to the scholar what is missing and why.

In development of sampling frame, scholars should be guided by the structure of the archival material, with which they will be familiar after the exploratory study recommended above. A scholar might choose to read all files from a specific department for a specific period, or all of a specific class of document, or all cases under consideration at a specific time. To take some examples, citetblaydes2013compliance collects all instances of a specific type of document, the school report on political reliability, for a given year, Lee (2011) uses as observations all Indian Nationalists listed as political suspects in a given year, and Hainmueller and Hangartner (2013) use all immigration cases decided by a Swiss Canton in a given time period. While in all these cases some elements of the sampling frame were determined by data availability (the specific year, the specific Canton) the inclusion of individual files in the data frame was determined by the structure of the archive itself.

Such an approach should be contrasted with the more formless search-based approach common in political science and history today, in which scholars review a set of files that appear relevant to the topic or contain relevant search terms. As we have seen, such selection is vulnerable to biases both on the part of the researcher and of the structure of the archive itself.

Depending on the type of material reviewed, the sampling frame may differ from project to project. If the producing institution is efficient in aggregating information, the frame may be as small as a single file. Many reports or policy proposals, for instance, contain large amounts of quantitative information that is otherwise scattered throughout the archival record. When such aggregation does not occur, the scholar has to perform it himself, viewing hundreds of files in search of the limited information relevant to the research question.

Such pre-selection of the material to be examined appears alien to many historians,

who have a more inductive relationship to archival material, and may often change their reading strategy during research. It is made necessary, however, by the need in social scientific applications to test pre-set hypotheses. The testing of specific theories in an unspecified sample magnifies the danger of the sorts of selection bias discussed in Section Three.

After the main analysis, a scholar may still have many questions about the data that might not be answered within a narrow sampling frame. This might include questions about the applicability of the finding to other contexts, or the situation in areas or time periods that are missing in the main data. These questions may become the basis for the construction of additional sampling frames and further analysis. Even if the additional material is not useful for a sustained analysis, a scholar may wish to consider a brief examination of the additional material to see if it is consistent with the findings from the main analysis.

4.3 Providing Context for the Reader

The understanding of bias and the construction of sampling frames are of little use to scholars if they are not communicated to readers. While scholars are habituated to sharing with readers the details of the construction of quantitative datasets, or the organization of anthropological research, they are unwilling to share similar levels of information about their archival research, making their claims often less than fully convincing. Compare two different ways of presenting the same set of hypothetical facts.

> (1) To examine the motivations for this unprecedented expansion of primary education, I examined the files of the educational department. The archival evidence shows that government officials saw the expansion primary education as a method for reinforcing national unity, rather than as a way of enhancing economic development.

> (2) To examine the motivations for this unprecedented expansion of primary education, I examined all files produced by the construction subsection of the education department between 1949 and 1965, a total of 6,000 pages of material. Overwhelmingly, they mention as the motivation for construction the need to tie remote villages into a national community, rather than the economic gains from education.

While both these statements present the same facts, the second is far more convincing, since it gives the reader a basis for judging the solid evidentiary basis on which the

statement rests.

The gains to openness can be made even larger when scholars are willing to acknowledge that their sources are not always unanimous and discuss the extent of the disagreement:

> (3) To examine the motivations for this unprecedented expansion of primary education, I examined all files produced by the construction subsection of the education department between 1949 and 1965, a total of 6,000 pages of material. Overwhelmingly, they mention as the motivation for construction the need to tie remote villages into a national community, rather than the economic gains from education. While national identity value of school construction is mentioned in dozens of instances, on only two occasions are the economic benefits of education mentioned. Both these mentions are toward the end of the period, and concern small villages near the capital.

A necessary part of such openness is discussing the biases present in the sources: Why certain files are present and others aren't, and how the backgrounds of the creators of the archives have influenced the availability of data. Such acknowledgement should ideally be tied to a discussion of how the biases do not overly influence the main results. In certain circumstances, statistical methods like multiple imputation may be used to accomplish this, and counter the "swiss cheese" nature of many archival sources (King et al., 2001). In additional, authors may wish to present their findings from archival material outside the main analysis frame which may provide some insight on the missing material.

5   An Illustration: The Indian Emergency, 1975-1977

5.1   Historical Context

In the summer of 1975, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was facing a severe political crisis, the product of a souring economic situation and an energetic non-violent protest movement against her government. These crises came to a head when a district court ruled Gandhi was ineligible to serve in parliament due to technical election code violations. Her response was to temporarily suspend Indian democracy by declaring a state of emergency. The leaders and activists of rival political parties were detained,

the newspapers censored, and detention without trial introduced. For the next eighteen months, Gandhi and the group of civil servants around her ruled India by decree, using their temporary freedom from democratic oversight to pursue several unpopular policies, including the demolition of large sections of Old Delhi, a crackdown on corruption and absenteeism in the bureaucracy, and the energetic, and at times coercive, implementation of family planning policies.

The Emergency was initially popular, particularly among an urban middle class who saw authoritarianism as the antidote to the instability and policy drift of the previous decade. However, the highhandedness and brutality with which the government implemented its policies soon alienated most people, especially in areas where their enforcement was more energetic. The common experience of imprisonment also served to unite an opposition previously divided between Hindu nationalists, agrarian populists, urban socialists and Congress Party defectors, who combined to form the Janata Party. This united opposition received a golden opportunity in 1977 when Gandhi, convinced of her own popularity, ended the emergency and called a general election, which she lost decisively. The subsequent Janata government attempted to prosecute Indira Gandhi for her behavior during the Emergency, but its degeneration into factional fighting disrupted the process, and she returned to power in a landslide election victory in 1980.

In terms of the population affected, the Emergency is the most significant democratic-to-autocratic regime transition ever to occur. It also occurred in a country widely noted in the social science literature (both before and after 1975) as having strong democratic norms and institutions relative to other developing countries. The Emergency is thus an important case in understanding how democratic states adjust to authoritarianism. Archival sources, which take us inside this process of adaptation, are crucial for answering this question, particularly given the post hoc-reticence that has led few participants to talk about their experiences and the censorship that meant there are relatively few contemporary published sources.

In understanding how the institutions of a democracy adopted so easily to authoritarianism and abuses of human rights, two perspectives have been especially influential. The first, which I will call the *personalistic*, focuses on the role of Indira Gandhi, her son Sanjay, and the small group of courtiers around them. In this account, these in-

dividuals used the over-centralization of the administrative system to pursue their own political (and, in Sanjay's case personal and eccentric) ends (Henderson, 1977; Kalhan, 1977; Dayal and Bose, 1977) The emergency, and its "excesses" in this view, cannot be understood without reference to Mrs. Gandhi's own authoritarian personality.[4]

The second perspective, the *embedded* shifts the focus from the Gandhis to the bureaucracy as a whole. In this view, the Indian bureaucracy, and especially the elite Indian Administrative Service, was a product of colonial rule and the subsequent period of single party dominance, and had a strong cultural predisposition to centralized, non-democratic procedures. The Emergency, in this view, was less an imposition on the bureaucracy than a liberation, allowing them to pursue long-desired priorities.[5] Unlike the personalistic view, which emphasizes the contingent nature of authoritarian transitions, this view emphasizes that these transitions, and the policy changes which follow them have structural causes that should be common to a wide variety of post-colonial countries.

5.2 The Archives

Any attempt to adjudicate these views must confront the flawed and incomplete nature of the archival record available in the National Archives of India today.[6] The main source in terms of bulk is the records of the Shah Commission, the investigative panel set up by the Janata government to investigate emergency abuses. These can be supplemented with the small number of files that have been directly released by government departments, especially the Home Ministry (concerned with internal order and relations with state governments) and the Prime Minister's office. While this material is modest in size relative to that available on other topics, it still comprises some 30,000 pages, presenting a formidable challenge to the analyst. [7]

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[4]Pro-Gandhi accounts have also tended to view the Emergency as political in nature. See Dhar (2000).

[5]This perspective dovetails with Emma Tarlo's excellent account of how rehousing policy was implemented by the bureaucracy at the municipal level (Tarlo, 2003).

[6]While state archives would also provide much useful material on this topic, they have even less relevant information available than the national archives.

[7]The size problem is compounded by the NAI's severe limits on the number of files that can be requested at any one time.

Overall, survival bias appears to have been negligible, in part due to the recent nature of the events, and the lack of interest in these files among historians: Of the files at the NAI, the staff are able to locate over 90%, a very high amount relative to other types of files in South Asian archives. Transfer bias, on the other hand, is extremely high. The files released by the PMO and Home Ministry appear to have been carefully chosen, and their file numbers reveal them to be a tiny subset of a much larger whole. In particular, the PMO files for these years appear to have been shorn of anything remotely controversial, and primarily concern routine economic matters such as the permitting of factories.

Similarly, source bias in these files is extremely high. Under normal circumstances, bureaucrats tend to write what their superiors want to hear. These incentives were reinforced under the emergency, when the power of higher authority to damage individual careers had been enhanced—several files mention official campaigns to dismiss politically unreliable civil servants.[8] Civil servants were thus unwilling to transmit information that reflected poorly on the regime—the figures on arrests for circulating illegal newspapers, for instance, are implausibly low given the size of the country and the wide variety of material recorded as seized [9]. Civil servants also knew that requests for things like detention orders or police firings were far more likely to be believed if they articulated themselves using the regime's language, and framed their work as advancing the regime's priorities.

A wholly opposite set of incentives affected the IAS officers put in charge of compiling material for the Shah Commission. The commission was not intended as a way of gathering comprehensive information about the emergency, but rather of gathering information for the prosecution of its leaders. The commission's report and its files thus display an almost maniacal focus on actions with which Indira and Sanjay Gandhi could be directly associated. Even within the broader categories of dictatorial or embarrassing behavior by the authorities, emphasis was placed on behavior that was technically illegal or "irregular" under the law of the period.

The pressure to focus on the irregular was enhanced by the structure of commission's

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[8]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "Communications received by the Government of Rajasthan Regarding Detentions During the Emergency."

[9]National Archives of India. Ministry of Home Affairs. General IV. 19949/76SS(IS)

inquiry, in which IAS officers were dispatched to state capitals in the monsoon season of 1977 for brief visits to "scrutinize" the files of the state government and select cases for further action. On his visit to Madhya Pradesh, for instance, PS Mehta viewed the files on "about 450" cases of administrative detention out of the 5,620 that had occurred, and submitted notes on 92 irregular ones to his superiors.[10] It is obvious that these cases do not reflect anything resembling a representative sample of the incidence of detention during the period.

An additional source of bias was the concern of the Shah commission staff to avoid embarrassment to other IAS officers, their colleagues and professional peers, to whom they were linked by a host of horizontal and vertical ties (Potter, 1996). This concern is reflected at several points in the Shah Commission papers. Mehta, for instance, recommended that the Commission refrain from interviewing the district magistrates and police superintendents who had actually written illegal detention orders, but rather focus on the state government that had approved them.

5.3 A Personalistic Interpretation

These sources of bias mean that there is considerable support within the NAI material for an interpretation that places the Gandhi's and their political goals at the center of Emergency administration. Notably, the Shah Commission spent nearly a thousand pages (in six parts) gathering information on the brutal suppression of local protest against one of Sanjay's prestige projects (at the Turkoman gate in Delhi) and much additional time running down leads to show that Sanjay had received special favors from administrators on a trip to Lucknow.

The central role of the Gandhi, is also supported by an analysis the communications between state governments and the Home Ministry. The central Home Ministry communicated frequently with the state governments fairly frequently (thirteen times in the first 35 days of the emergency), directing details of detention and censorship. While only one of these documents is signed by Mrs. Gandhi herself, the others are signed by S.L. Khurana, a civil servant closely associated with Mrs. Gandhi, who would subsequently

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[10]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "Use of MISA in Madhya Pradesh during emergency (Note on general pattern)."

receive a series of high promotions under the Congress governments of the 1980s, culminating in the governorship of Tamil Nadu. These documents show a central government that, while it liked to hide behind convoluted conditional phrasing, expressly ordered the detention of specific classes of individuals, notably Members of Parliament (6/26/75), members of the Hindu Nationalist RSS (6/26/75), journalists (6/28/75) and students (7/5/75).[11]

Finally, the available documents heavily stress the use of detention and repression against political opponents of Mrs. Gandhi, notably the RSS and the socialist and communist opposition. The Shah Commission scrutiny of detentions in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, began its discussion with a detailed listing of 72 cases of abusive detention for political beliefs. Such unfortunates as Subedar Singh, a socialist party worker were detained for shouting "Burn the Delhi government" and "Stop buses," and would spend months in prison without access to the court system.[12]. The political bias inherent in this process is underlined by several cases in which individuals had their detention revoked after they were able to produce "certificates from Congressmen and responsible persons about their good conduct and support for Congress policies." [13]. Detention was thus clearly a stick used to repress opposition to the Congress. The perception that the emergency had a strong partisan political orientation is supported in the files of the Home Ministry, which track in exhaustive detail the seizures of specific types of banned literature and their contents.

5.4 An Alternative Interpretation

Choosing a Sampling Frame

While a political or partisan interpretation of the emergency has strong textual support, it obviously accords with the agendas of those who produced and censored the available material—with civil servants during the emergency wishing to stress their cooperation

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[11]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "Communications received by the Government of Madhya Pradesh Regarding Detentions During the Emergency."

[12]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh." P.16.

[13]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh." P.25.

with central policy, and civil servants afterwards seeking to blame the Congress and the Gandhis. To reduce this bias, an analysis could focus on a source which appears to contain few omissions. The most interesting of these are the records of detentions under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Detention under the act was indefinite, subject to confirmation by the state government. Detention under MISA was the centerpiece policy of the emergency, and was used for a wide variety of purposes other than the detention of political opponents, notably the enforcement of various types of criminal laws for which the official legal process was considered too slow and procedurally bound to be functional. Detention was also of central importance to the Shah Commission investigators, who preserved a great deal of information on its incidence.

For each state, the commission collected a "scrutiny" file of the MISA detentions, which give basic statistics on MISA, a synopsis of major trends, and descriptions of cases the investigators found troubling. As we have seen, the Shah Commission tended to focus on cases which were politically controversial or legally irregular. Fortunately however, they preserved figures on the total number and breakdown of detentions. Their detailed cases studies also include many cases which violated the technical terms of the MISA statute, meaning that cases involving a wide variety of motivations of detention are described in some detail. Focusing the analysis on the detention files of the Shah commission thus allows us to concentrate on a type of authoritarian behavior where documentation is voluminous, the terms of reference are constant across India, and where transfer and source bias, while not absent, are at least known and quantifiable.

Analysis

The main analysis examined the Shah commission's "scrutiny" files for every state. The raw figures show that political detention tended to vary with the population of the state and the strength of the opposition to the Congress. However, not all detentions were political. In the states where detention was most common, political offenders where only a small minority of those detained under MISA. In Uttar Pradesh, only 19.5% of detentions were for political reasons (1405/7185), and 25.4% in Bihar (593/2333).[14]. In

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[14]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh." and "Report of the Scrutiny of the MISA files of Biha."

other states, especially in the south, political detentions tended to dominate—321 of 477 in Karnataka, 709 of 1017 in Tamil Nadu (Government of India, 1978).

The non-political detentions cited a wide variety of crimes, most of which enjoyed popular opprobrium well before 1947. A few were detained for agitating against family planning, a "non-political" act with obvious political implications in the circumstances of the time. Given the scarcity of examples of this, however, this seems to have been rare relative to more general types of criminal and anti-social behavior, or any behavior that would bring individuals into conflict with the district magistrate. In many cases, these were ordinary crimes for which prosecution was difficult or impossible within the dysfunctional Indian judicial system, including armed robbery, burglary, murder and corruption. Typically, in these cases the District Police cited old criminal complaints as evidence, even if the accused had not been convicted.[15] In other cases, the offenses were moral in nature, as in the substantial number of detentions of bootleggers and keepers of gambling dens. Still others had conducted actions that had a negative effect on the government's economic plans , such as workplace indiscipline, the misspending of official loans, or the obstruction of the government wheat purchasing program.[16]

In other cases, however, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the district officials were detaining people simply for making their job more difficult. Shri Mohan Lal, of Pratapgarh District, for instance, was a government contractor detained for providing low quality bricks rather than the high quality ones specified in his contract. [17] Sajjad Khan of Farrukhabad was detained for occupation of land intended the construction of a government office building and contesting their rights in the courts. Johri Lal Are of Farrukhabad was the editor of a local paper who had criticized local officials. In other cases, detention was used to encourage adherence to regulations, as with Narendra Kumar Goel, whose bus had crashed into a river and was detained "that bus owners may keep their vehicles in order in the future." [18]

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[15]National Archives of India. Shah Commision Papers. "Report of the Scrutiny of the MISA files of Bihar."

[16]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh."

[17]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh." P.44.

[18]Ibid.

In a few cases, there is clear evidence that the district government detained individuals for purely self-interested reasons. Ashok Kumar "at the instance of some persons" was falsely accused by the police of associating with criminals. In one extraordinary case in Bihar, Radhe Shyam Pandey was detained by his own corrupt colleagues in the Tubewell division, who resented his attempts to expose their corruption and persuaded the DM to sign the order. [19]

The casual grounds for many detentions are not surprising when we consider the process by which detentions were issued. The District Superintendent of Police, in cooperation with the District Magistrate, issued a list of proposed detainees, though there are indications that some DMs, like that at Lucknow, were "very casual in perusing the material placed before him by the police authority."[20] These grounds were in turn reviewed by officials the State Government, usually the Chief Minister, with advice from the Home Secretary and Inspector General of Police. District officials thus had almost total discretion over detentions, subject to state review. This echoed procedures during the colonial period, especially those used against nationalists during the Second World War.

Further Context

Other files in the NAI provide context on the high level of non-political or idiosyncratic detentions found in the main analysis. The central government was well aware that many officials were using MISA for reasons that had nothing to do with the goals of the Emergency. Khurana sternly lectured the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan:

> There are other states where detentions are still being made at the behest of subordinate police officers...MISA is being used to remedy all kinds of situations although they may be totally unrelated to the emergency. One could understand the detention of a few top anti-socials elements to create an impact but the detention of bootleggers, gamblers and goondas [thugs] in hundreds under MISA is certainly not in consonance with the objections of the act.[21]

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[19]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. 'Report of the Scrutiny of the MISA files of Bihar." P.33

[20]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh." P.53.

[21]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "Communications received by the Government of Rajasthan Regarding Detentions During the Emergency." P.30.

The available circulars and memoranda issued by the state and central governments also show that the focus on non-political offenses came from the initiative of local officials, rather than some central policy. While the Shah Commission emphasized a state circular in Uttar Pradesh that called for the detention of criminals, this appears both exceptional in terms of official communication and to have had a limited impact, since many "criminals" were detained before the circular's appearance.'[22] The record of circulars to from the Inspector general to DSPs in Madhya Pradesh, which appears fairly complete, shows that 87 directives were sent out during the emergency, the vast majority concerning detention. Of these 87, only 5 concern non-political activity, while 50 concern the campaign against the RSS, the most powerful opposition organization in MP. '[23] Similarly, the available central directives to the government of MP strongly emphasize political repression, though they are less valuable for having been edited by the Shah commission staff.

Discussion

The principled analysis of the material supports the supposition that during the Emergency, the political agendas of the central government were often secondary to the personal and institutional agendas of local policemen, who used the opportunities provided by the removal of democratic checks and balances enforce their own vision of an ordered society. Given that both the vision and the legal tools they employed have deep roots within Indian government, it is not unfair to say that the emergency allowed preexisting authoritarian tendencies within the Indian bureaucracy to express themselves.

One of the interesting features of the findings is that the extent of this lower-bureaucratic autonomy varied considerably from state to state. However, this question is difficult to answer with the archival material at our disposal. The differences do not appear to come from the bureaucratic personnel, since the Indian Police and Administrative Services are recruited nationally. Similarly, they do not seem to stem from differences in the bureaucratic procedure for reviewing detentions, which seem to have

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[22]National Archives of India. Shah Commission Papers. "A Report on MISA detentions in Uttar Pradesh."

[23]National Archives of India. Shah Commision Papers. "List of Instructions Issued by I.G. police, M.P. during Emergency."

been uniformly cursory, with few or no cases being overturned by the state government. Even in Karnataka, where state government review was the most aggressive in India, orders were usually confirmed "to uphold the authority of the District Magistrate." (Government of India, 1978, p. 75)

This raises the obvious question of why the bureaucracy was given wide autonomy to use detention in some states, while in some states they confined themselves to interning a small number of political prisoners. While a full discussion of this question is outside the scope of a methodological paper, relating archival and extra-archival data can show that differences in the ability of lower officials to exploit the emergency are associated with the origins and incentives of state Chief Ministers, the only real political check in the MISA system. Within the Congress system, certain chief ministers possessed an electoral base independent of the national party, and had more autonomy from the national party, subject to the payment of large sums in campaign funds to New Delhi. Other chief ministers were imposed on the state party by the Gandhi family as a reward for their loyalty (Manor, 1978). Jaganath Mishra, the Chief Minister of Bihar, was widely reputed to have been chosen for his loyalty to the Gandhis, while his counterpart in Karnataka, Devraj Urs, was a scion of the local royal family with a somewhat antagonistic relationship to Delhi government (which would later lead to his leaving the party) (Kohli, 1990). The more dependent CMs had both less incentive to avoid local unpopularity, less experience in dealing with the bureaucracy, a weaker set of connections to the local political elite, and more incentive to demonstrate loyalty to the center.

Figure 1 shows the levels of non-political MISA detention during the emergency, five states stand out as having very high levels of detention: Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. These are also the five states in which the chief minister during the bulk of the emergency had only recently been appointed to office in 1975, either immediately before the Emergency or in its first few months.[24] In the other states, by contrast, the chief minister had been in office for a substantial period of time, usually since the 1971 elections. While these results can only be sug-

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[24]The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, had been in office since 1973, but was suspected of disloyalty and was deposed in November 1975 in favor of the more pliable N.D. Tiwari.

Figure 1: Non-Political MISA Detentions by State, 1975-77

Misa Detentions Per Capita by State 1975–77
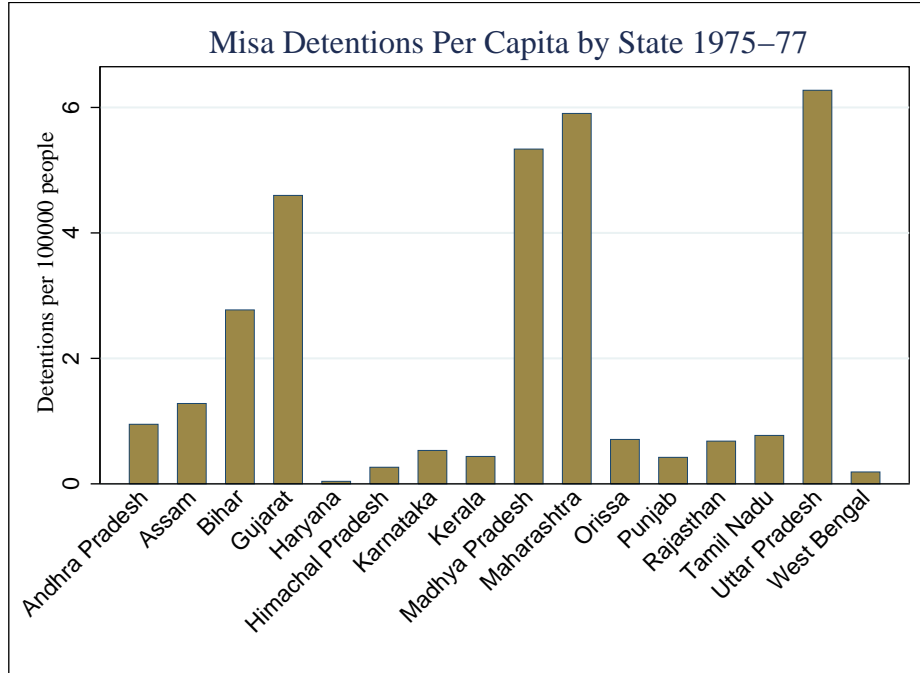
Each bar shows the average number of non-political MISA detentions in each state during the Emergency. Taken from Government of India (1978)

gestive, they indicate a counterintuitive finding. The appointment of non-autonomous regional governments thus appears to be associated with increased autonomy, and increased authoritarian behavior, on the part of bureaucrats. Even under the Emergency, Democracy, and the information flow and legitimacy that it brings, appears to be an important tool in controlling the bureaucracy.

6 Conclusion

Archival material can potentially be a valuable source for political scientists, allowing them to examine aspects of institutional behavior and information gathering that are inscrutable in a contemporary setting. However, the size, disorganization, and non-comprehensiveness of most archives create problems for causal inference, especially selection and missing data. This paper proposes a set of simple suggestions for dealing with these problems: An understanding of the biases inherent in the sources, the devel-

opment of an explicit frame for reading and analyzing the material, and sharing these methods and findings with readers. As the analysis of the NAI Emergency files shows, such principled methods can produce dramatically different results than an undirected dig through the material. Such techniques enable causal claims to be made more credibly, improving the standing of archival evidence within political science, and improving our understanding of the inner workings of political institutions.

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