The Origins of Identity Politics:
Caste in Colonial India

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Abstract

Why are some ethnic identities become of focus of activist campaigns, while others are not? I argue that identity mobilization is non-linearly related to group socioeconomic status, since very poor groups do not have an educated elite to participate in activism, while in very rich groups this elite exists but its members are so wealthy that they have no need to use explicit identity rhetoric to gain political influence. This theory is tested using a novel panel dataset of Indian caste groups during the colonial period, with petitions to the colonial census authorities being used as an index of caste organization. The results show petitioning is most common among groups at intermediate levels of literacy. This finding is robust to a wide variety of controls and robustness checks. These findings emphasize the importance of long-term social and economic changes in identity development.

1   Introduction

In many countries, the last century has seen determined efforts to make ascriptive identities politically salient, even when those identities were previously unimportant. In much of the post-colonial world, the decades before independence saw a rapid increase in the political importance of ascriptive identities among nascent political elites, with groups large and small forming organizations, petitioning government bodies and distributing propaganda, all in an attempt to improve the political and social position of the groups they represented. Even more interesting than the general rise in ethnic consciousness was its uneven distribution across groups, with many elite members disdaining narrow ethnic appeals in favor of the broader rhetoric of class, religion or nation.

This uneven pattern of activism is little understood by scholars, who have tended to focus on variation across rather than within identity dimensions. Laitin[1] for instance, examines why Yoruba groups emphasize ancestral city over religion, and Posner discusses how regions or ethnicity becomes the organizing cleavage, but neither explain why the elites of some ancestral cities or regions emphasize these traits more than the elites of other ancestral cities or regions. This ignores the enduring consequences of differences in identity politics, such as the association of ethnic groups with particular political parties or institutions.

To examine why some identities become the focus of elite agitation, I examine the role of group economic and educational position. Many groups are so poor that have no wealthy members at all, and some groups are so rich that their elites can succeed politically without the political advantages conferred by identity politics. Increasing levels of economic resources thus have a non-linear impact on politicization. As poor groups grow richer, their richest members gain the literacy, sophistication and disposable time necessary to become involved in politics, but as middle-status groups grow richer their leaders gain the resources and contacts necessary to be successful in a world dominated by valence and personalistic voting. Put another way, the very poor possess the motivation

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[1]Laitin 1986

to be involved in caste politics but not the ability, while the very rich have the ability but not the motivation.

This theory is tested using a unique panel dataset of caste groups in colonial India. This dataset, the first of its kind, enables us to examine the causes of identity change within groups over time, rather than by comparing groups to each other. This allows the paper, unlike much of the existing literature, to isolate economic changes from the many fixed cultural and social differences between groups. This identification strategy is supplemented by an instrumental variables strategy that takes advantage of international price changes in the crops cultivated by particular groups to identify the effect of group-level social advancement on petitioning.

In the panel dataset, attempted caste mobilization by elites is measured through petitions submitted by caste organizations to the colonial census authorities demanding a change of name, a common strategy of caste activists in this period. These petitions provide evidence about the existence of non-state political activists, whose behavior is usually difficult to study in a comprehensive way. The petition data supports the hypothesis about the non-linear role of socio-economic status. Group-level literacy is positively related to petitioning, but very high levels of literacy are associated with lower levels of petitioning, though these highly literate groups dominate contemporary arenas of non-caste-based political action, like the colonial bureaucracy and the Congress Party.

Besides answering the empirical question, this project is designed to unite three somewhat divergent literatures. A large body of work[2] has focused on variation in identity formation across groups or identity dimensions, but its focus on contemporary and quasi-democratic cases has led it to underestimate the effect of wealth and literacy on group mobilization, relative to group size. The older literature associated with the causes of nationalism[3] or the growth of the nation state more generally[4] is closely attuned to the socio-economic causes of identity change, which its authors link to the broader phenomena of social modernization. However, these accounts fail to explain why the effects of

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[2]Kasfir 1979, Posner 2004, Chandra 2004, 2012
[3]Deutch 1969, Gellner 1983, Anderson 1990
[4]Bendix 1977, Weber 1947

social change are often non-linear, and why the initial stages of modernization are often accompanied by a resurgence of "traditional" or sub-national identities. Finally, the late colonial upsurge in caste identity, often referred to as Sanskritization, has been the focus of a large literature[5] which usually attributes this trend to the policies of the colonial state and the growth of rationalistic forms of knowledge about caste. However, like the more traditional work that they critique,[6] these authors fail to account for variation across groups and across regions, providing little explanation for why the political and intellectual trends that they identify had wildly differing effects across regions and across groups.

Section two develops a socio-economic theory of elite identity formation. Section three will describe the historical background of the colonial period. Section four will describe the structure of the quantitative data, while section five discusses the results of the analysis, including an instrumental variables strategy to account for the possible endogenaity of political activism to caste education.. Section Six concludes with a discussion of the how these processes relate to the larger historical processes that have affected both India and the developing world over the past two centuries. An online appendix includes additional tables, case studies of three well-known castes, and details of the coding of the data. It also addresses the many possible confounding factors, using an extensive set of controls

2   A Theory of Elite Identity Politics

2.1   Identity Mobilization

The dependent variable in this paper is the process by which social identities become politically relevant for elites. A large literature in comparative politics has argued that individuals possess a wide "repertoire" of traits, the exact content of which varies from society to society.[7] Common categories of traits include skin color, occupation, religion,

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[5]Dirks 2002, Srinivas 1966, Gupta 2000, Bayly 1999

[6]Dumont 1980[1966]

[7]Laitin 1985, Posner 2004, Chandra 2012.

language, tribe and region of residence. At any given time only a few of an individual's traits are "relevant" or "activated" for the purposes of political decision making; these are the traits that individuals consider as important when making decisions about who to vote for, whether to engage in political violence, and whether to enter into patron-client relationships. In India, for instance, caste, religion and language identities have all been strongly politicized, while skin color remains politically (though not socially) unimportant.

Individuals, to say the least, receive a great deal of advice from outside political actors about which of these identities they should use in their political decision-making. Elites conduct elaborate campaigns to get them to emphasize particular identities, which may take the form of propaganda, the formation of social organizations, the selective distribution of resources, and even the selective use of political violence.[8] However, it should be noted that not all mobilization efforts by elites are successful, and that some identities widely promoted by elites do not become widely influential.

These elite activist campaigns are particularly important in areas, like in most of the colonial world and the multi-ethnic empires or 19th century Europe, where identities are not in the position to use state institutions or political parties to promote social divisions. In such times and places, a small amount of elite pamphleting could have a large impact on which social traits were thought of as politically important in subsequent decades.

The ethnic politics literature has tended to focus on the choice individuals face between broad categories of traits, either cross-cutting or nested.[9] However, even *within* these categories of traits, however, there is considerable variation in the extent of politicization. In modern India, some caste (*jati*) identities, such as that of the Chamars, are strongly politicized while others, such as that of the Dhobis, are not.[10]This paper will focus on

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[8]Bates 1974, Eifert, Miguel and Posner 2010, Chandra 2004, Horowitz 1985

[9]Posner 2004, Chandra 2012, Dunning 2009.

[10]The English word caste confounds two quite separate local concepts, jati and varna. Jati is the usual sense with which caste is used: Nearly every Indian is conscious of belonging to a jati, of which there are several thousand within India as a whole, several hundred within a given state, and usually one or two dozen within a given village cluster. Jatis

this "within-dimension" variation, developing a theory of why some jati identities are strongly predictive of political behavior while others are not. As such, it argues that all jati identities are potentially politically salient, but that not all are salient in fact.

2.2   Barriers to Political Action

A very consistent finding in the political behavior literature is that socio-economic status is associated with higher levels of political participation. Wealth provides the leisure for individuals to engage in political activities, the connections to enter political circles, and the hard cash necessary to publicize oneself or one's cause to others. For these reasons, studies in a wide variety of social contexts have found that wealthier individuals are more likely to participate in politics at all levels (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Lee 2011, Huntington 1969.) and that ethnic activism is common in the urban sector (Bates 1974). Some groups will have a higher concentration of such individuals than others, giving them a head start in any form of political action. Low levels of wealth, in this view, serve as a barrier to political mobilization, because they mean that the elite that would lead it does not exist.[11]

The logic that causes wealth to limit political participation also applies to education, another element of socio-economic status. The activation of supralocal politicized

are defined by endogamy, common stories of origin, and by (widely varying) restrictions on social contact between groups. Most jatis also possessed a traditional occupation, and the relative status of jatis is often defined by its associated occupation.

Varnas are the categories into which society is organized in the Sanskrit texts that form the sacred books of Hinduism. In order of prestige, they are: the Brahmins (priests,) the Kshatriyas (warriors,) the Vaishyas (traders,) and the Shudras (farmers and craftsmen.) An informal fifth varna is composed of the so-called untouchables. In practice, varnas serve as legitimating super-categories to which jatis seek to attach themselves.

[11]This perspective is similar to some classic modernization accounts of political conflict. (c.f. Huntington 1969). It differs from them in that it relates socio-economic variables to the need to activate specific types of identities, rather than arguing that education increases instability by increasing the number of political players.

identities is closely associated to the rise of literacy.[12] There are two reasons for this association. Firstly, most of the actions required in a campaign– the circulation of petitions, the publication of spurious histories, the founding of newspapers–require literate authors, both for the simple action of writing and because print culture provided the best source of information on what such efforts should look like, given that many mobilization efforts are inspired by hearing about the mobilization efforts of other groups. Secondly, literacy provides not just the materials for such a campaign but vastly extends the audience. Without writing, even the most energetic ideological campaign has little chances of influencing those beyond the immediate social circle of its leaders. However, with writing it can influence people (and coordinate their activities) across large distances, and across subgroups that may previously have had little contact with one another. Groups with poorly educated populations should thus have a much smaller elite capable of discovering ideas about ethnic identity, applying them to their own situation, and publicizing their cause.

This cutoff is not fixed, since the relationship between the social traits of groups overall and the social traits of the individuals within them is imperfect. A poor caste may include a few rich individuals interested in political activism, while a richer caste may have not enough very highly educated individuals with sufficient interest. The general relationship, however, still holds in general. The higher the wealth of a caste in general, the higher its probability of producing a political active elite.

2.3   Incentives to Political Action

The discussion of the barriers to identity activism has temporarily ignored the question of why elites would want to engage in such activity in the first place. The existing literature has argued convincingly that the primary goal of the social elites who engage in ethnic activism is to gain political power and the economic resources that political power brings .[13] Depending on the polity, power can be distributed through democratic elections, by

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[12]Weber 1976, Anderson 1990.
[13]Laitin 1985, Posner 2004, Chandra 2012.

informal contacts among the elite, or by some combination of the two. If identity politics play no role, the rewards of office will be distributed based on "objective" criteria, such as an individual's wealth, charisma, intelligence, family position, or the size of their social network. While competition on such criteria advantages some, it disadvantages others. As Ernst Gellner has argued, the disadvantages are particularly acute for the first generation of educated people from traditionally poor groups, who have a far less useful set of skills and contacts than those from more established groups. Such individuals have an obvious incentive to create other criteria on which to base political competition.

Social identities fill this need for an "extra advantage." If elites can successfully convince others that certain identity markers are important, they can gain an advantage in competing for resources, either because individual voters and power brokers will tend to favor others who share identity traits with them or because they will consider some identity traits more desirable than others even if they do not share them themselves. Crucially, an activated identity enables a would-be politician to appeal to individuals with whom he is not personally acquainted, and with whom he may have little in common. It thus provides a way for new elites to short-circuit the appeal of traditional elites.

The potential benefits of caste politics to educated elites in colonial India can be seen through the careers of men like W.P.A Soundrapandian "The uncrowned King of the Nadar community." Soundrapandian co-founded and dominated the central association of his caste, the Nadar Mahajana Sangam, serving for four years as general secretary, seventeen years as vice president. By using his Nadar electoral support, Soundrapandian was able to have a very successful political career, serving for seventeen years on the Madras legislative council representing the Justice Party, and for six years as a district board president. Like many jati-based political entrepreneurs Soundrapandian did not form a separate political party, but used his jati constituency to build a position within a larger political organization.

2.4 The Wealthy

For members of very wealthy groups, the calculus was and is different. Since these elites have high probability of being the best educated and best connected individuals within the polity as a whole, many of them can gain political office based purely on their wealth, education, social position or personal contacts. If this is true, these very wealthy individuals have no incentive to engage in the costly mobilization of ascriptive traits in pursuit of an additional electoral advantage. While ethnic mobilization would help these elite politicians appeal to their own coethnics, they would presumably have the support of these individuals anyway based on their valence advantages or their larger personal networks. At the same time, an ethnic appeal would serve to drive a wedge between these elite politicians and the large number of voters with different identities, whose support they might otherwise gain on personalistic grounds. To give a concrete example, the Brahman lawyers who led the Congress Party during the colonial period gained votes from many different caste categories, including Brahmans, based on their close connections to the landholding elite and their superior skill in the English language political sphere. This potential support was much larger than that which they could have gained as the candidate of Brahmans alone.[14] Such politician will thus prefer very broadbased appeal, such as nation or religion, which can attract a large number of potential supporters.

The concentration of these highly skilled individuals on broad forms of identity politics means that the elites of lower status groups have all the more incentive to focus on narrow ethnic politics, since they are unable to compete on any other basis. They may even suffer discrimination from more entrenched elites. The relationship between wealth and identity politics is thus self-reinforcing: The wealthy pursue broader identities and mainstream institutions, and the emergent elites seek to use narrower forms of identity politics to gain

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[14]A politician from the highest skilled group will always gain more votes by not mobilizing a narrow ascriptive identity. It is possible (cf Posner 2004) that a politician whose group is a majority of the population would prefer an ascriptive appeal in order to diminish the size of her coalition, already a winning in a plurality setting. However, this condition does not apply to any Indian jati in any state.

an opening.

Put another way, politicians attempt to mobilize a category in which they will be the most highly skilled individuals. The most highly skilled politicians in a region as a whole, who would win a contest conducted purely on valance issues, have no need to emphasize their caste or ethnic identities, though they may find it advantageous to emphasize very broad appeals such as the nation, the local language or the Hindu religion. Less skilled elites, such as the first generation of educated individuals from subaltern groups, must emphasize a very narrow identity such as jati. For these reason, we should expect the elites of identity groups with very high levels of wealth and social status to put less emphasis on identity politics than those groups immediately below them. When combined with limits to participation discussed in the last section, this means that the relationship between socioeconomic status and identity politics is non-linear:

H1: Higher group socioeconomic status should be associated with higher levels of identity mobilization, but very high levels of group socio-economic status should be associated with lower levels of identity mobilization.

This does not mean that members of these highly literate groups will not be involved in politics. On the contrary, since their high levels of wealth and education mean that they possess a large number of potential politicians, members of these groups participate at very high levels. As long as there are a large number of other unmobilized caste groups (both very poor and very wealthy,) these politicians will find a sizable audience for their non-caste based appeals. We should thus expect the elites of the most wealthy groups to be heavily involved in politics but to avoid explicit caste mobilization.[15] This additional

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[15]Given that elite activism discussed here is the work a small group, there is no need to secure the involvement of the majority of the group as a whole. However, collective action problems could potentially exist within the elite, as other elite members could potentially free ride on the efforts of a handful of activists, consuming the political benefits of an increase in status or a strongly defined ethnic category without performing the difficult work of propagandization. However, these collective action problems are overcome by the fact that the small group actively involved gains a disproportionate share of the benefits. By their agitation on behalf of a group, they become identified as the leaders of that

observable implication of the theory gives us:

H1a: Very high levels of group socio-economic status should be associated with participation in non-identity-based politics.

3 Historical Background

3.1 Why the Colonial Period?

In precolonial India, levels of literacy and wealth, the key independent variables were generally quite low and slow-changing. In these circumstances, attempts to emphasize or change the relative status of caste identities were evolutionary and concentrated within the elite. In the post-independence period, the rapid growth of literacy even among the very poor and an even more rapid development of mass political awareness has led to a large scale mobilization of caste identities, among even very poor groups. These historical changes have strongly influenced the secondary literature, with the pre-colonial period often being portrayed as a static hierarchy,[16] while the post-independence period has been described as exhibiting high levels of caste mobilization fundamentally similar to the ethnic parties of Africa[17]

The colonial period contained neither of these extremes, but was characterized by substantial shifts in a key indicator of socio-economic status–literacy–though these shifts were unevenly distributed throughout the country. Like many developing societies, colonial India saw a strong secular trend toward increasing literacy rates, and rising material wellbeing more generally, though in both cases from a very low initial level. Some of the causes of this trend included growing economy, the beginnings of a state supported school system, urbanization, missionary activity, the increasing cultivation of cash crops (which led to windfall profits for certain producers,) and the development of a vernacular

group, and thus gain a disproportionate share of any benefits granted to that group. Others elite members anxious to take advantage of these benefits will be frustrated by the strong positions within group organizations held by the more established activists.

[16]Dumont 1980[1966]

[17]Chandra 2004.

language press, which was often associated with a simplification of the written language. Figure A-1 shows the results overall: In the thirty years covered by the dataset, male literacy increased by 28%, from 4.5% to 5.8%.

This bland trend toward increased wealth concealed considerable internal variation, both across jatis and across regions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the causes of this variation in detail, especially given that many of them are closely correlated. In general, gains in education were the product of both a group's traditional position and the degree to which colonization impacted that position. Land cultivating groups tended to do well under the permissive land revenue settlements of the latter raj, even if they had not earlier been educated, or part of the higher aristocracy. Similarly, groups traditionally associated with trading or government did well as those sectors expanded. Other groups, particularly those associated with declining traditional crafts like weaving, saw a little improvement in their economic position. Thanks to meticulous record keeping of the colonial government, we have much better data on the socio-economic status of caste groups in the colonial period than we do for any other period of Indian history.

A final characteristic of the colonial era was that domination of the political system by outsiders made it more difficult to enforce caste norms by force. In the pre-colonial era, and in many parts of rural India even today, lower castes faced severe violent sanctions from upper caste groups for any type of political action, or any action (like those promoted by the caste sabhas) that implied lower caste adoption of upper caste behavior patterns.[18] The arrival of an "objective" colonial bureaucracy with only weak normative commitments to the Sanskritic caste hierarchy and a police under only the indirect control of the landed elite made it possible for lower caste elites, to organize with far less fear of direct reprisal, a key scope condition for the voluntary model of ethnic politics set out in Section Two.

3.2 The Politicization of Caste

One of the most important avenues of identity politics under colonialsim was the formation of caste organizations:— the caste *sabhas* Unlike the traditional local caste panchayats

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[18]Shah et. al 2006.

that they superseded, and which had always existed in most Indian villages, the sabhas were generally urban, supralocal, and had some degree of formal institutionalization. Their constitutions, still preserved in the National Archives of India, record of their often highly elaborated structure, with procedures for the election of officers, the holding of annual sessions, the handling of funds, and the affiliation of local groups. [19]

The leadership of the sabhas was generally composed of the well-off, urban and educated stratum within the caste. The surviving membership list for one organization, the Pradham Bhumihar Sabha, gives us some sense of the profiles of activists in a relatively well-off caste. Of the ten officers, four were zamindars (large landlords) two were lawyers and one was a college president. Of the fifty three ordinary members, ten were zamindars, seven were lawyers, and one was a senior civil servant.[20]

Caste identities and caste institutions were central to politics in colonial India. Caste sabhas, or informal networks of caste elites, formed the principal contestants in local elections (see Gould 1987) and the protagonists of bitterly fought local conflicts over temple entry and lower caste attempts to assert themselves symbolically (Sobhanan 1985.) At a grander level, the ability of the Congress in some areas to bring these mobilized lower caste groups into its coalition was a key factor in its success. However, many activities of the sabhas were cultural and social rather than directly political. Some activities would come under the heading of social service and self-help: raising money for scholarships, trying to discourage expensive weddings, and providing a network to meet prospective spouses.[21] The Rawani [Chandravanshiya Kshatriya] Sabha included a fairly typical list of goals in their constitution:

-Rendering pecuniary assistance to promising young Chandravanshiya Kshatriya students to enable them to prosecute their studies. -Publication of a

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[19]For case study discussions of sabhas see Blunt 1912: 346-7 and Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.

[20]National Archives of India. Home Department. Census Branch. A Progs. December 1900. Nos. 24-27.

[21]This last function had the indirect effect of defining who was a proper group member (and thus an eligible marriage partner) and who was not.

Patrika (a journal) of their own or any book or pamphlet containing subjects of interest to the community or likely to promote their interests. -Appointment of itinerant Upadeshaks to popularize the work of the Mahasabha[22]

3.3   Caste in the Census

The most conspicuous and well-documented activity of sabhas was their interaction with the colonial census authorities. This connection was the product of the work of H.H. Risley, who became superintendent of the Census of India in 1901. Risley was determined to use the census as an opportunity to prove his own theories on the racial origins of caste. He decreed that the census tables should record castes not by occupation, but by ritual "precedence," which was to be determined by the provincial census superintendents in consultation with specially appointed committees of Indians. At best, this was a controversial and error-ridden procedure. In Bengal, the census report commented that:

> The discussion of the relative rank of the different castes aroused an extraordinary amount of ill-feeling and jealousy between some of the castes whose position was disputed and in more than one instance the committees appointed to report on the subject professed their inability to come to a decision. (Gait 1902: 369)

More annoyingly for the census officials, many sabhas saw the policy as an opportunity to make a political point, and bombarded the provincial superintendents with petitions demanding a new and more honorable name. To avoid this problem, the censuses after 1901 avoided classification by precedence, listed. However, the number of petitions for a name change kept rising, hitting a peak in 1931:

> These claims were pressed with the greatest persistence, sabhas and mahasabhas often being formed for no other purpose, treatises being published, and eminent counsel being briefed.[23]

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[22]National Archives of India. Home Department. Public Branch. F. 45/6/31-Pub.
[23]Edye 1921:151

Even without Risley's efforts, the census's terminology would probably have become politicized eventually, and in fact the peak of petitioning activity came long after 1901. But his work probably made the census more central to caste activism than it would otherwise have been. Risley was certainly blamed by his successors for increasing their workload:

> All subsequent census officers in India must have cursed the day when it occurred to Sir Herbert Risley, no doubt in order to test his admirable theory of the relative nasal index, to attempt to draw up a list of castes according to their rank in society. He failed, but the results of his attempt are almost as troublesome as if he had succeeded, for every census gives rise to a pestiferous deluge of representations, accompanied by highly problematical histories, asking for recognition of some alleged fact or hypothesis of which the census as a department is not legally competent to judge.[24]

The attitude of the census officials toward the petitions and stacks of supporting documentation they received varied widely, though virtually no claims were accepted fully. Some officials, particularly those who had been schooled in traditional Sanskritic Indology, became angry in their rejection of these claims:

> These movements are contrary to the teachings of Manu, who classes falsely asserting oneself to be of too high a caste in the same category with breach of trust and incest, and moreover a caste does not enhance its real position by wearing threading, marrying its children as infants, and giving itself a high sounding name. It can obtain far more honorable distinction by educating its members and elevating their lives.[25]

As time went on, however, opinions became more tolerant, and officials began to evolve a compromise by which a caste would be recorded by its traditional name with their new

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[24]Hutton 1932: 433
[25]Francis 1902: 131.

one in parentheses, or the new one with the old one in parentheses. This eventually became national policy for the 1931 census.

The high rate of rejection should not make us think that petitioning was in any way futile or irrational. Petitioning was a public act, planned in public meetings, made on stamped paper, and presented in occasionally strident public confrontations with district and census officials.[26] Petitioners did gain a small probability of acceptance of their claims to a new name, which would lend legitimacy to their mobilization efforts and ideological claims. However, even having a petition considered by the government gave a group's claims a measure of legitimacy. In a country with only a poorly developed civil society, public interaction with the state was an important means for the assertion of social status and social aspirations.[27]

Petitioning is a useful measure of elite activism in two respects. Firstly, it serves as an index of the need willingness of elites to use caste-based rhetoric in the public sphere. Secondly, petitioning usually indicates that a caste association or network of caste activists existed. The fragmentary data that are available do indeed show that the majority of petitions were submitted by organized groups. In the United Provinces in 1931, a year for which information on petitioners was collected, 62.5% of sample petitions were submitted by caste sabhas already registered as associations, while another 33% were submitted by large informal groups, many of them local caste panchayats.[28] As we have seen in the case studies, such an organized and aggrieved group would almost certainly be conducting activities other than petitioning, many of which are described in the petitions themselves.

3.4 Ranking

Indian caste groups are the canonical example of a ranked identity system (Horowitz 1985) and the mobilization activities of colonial castes often had ranking at their center:

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[26]Mukerjea: 1922:325.

[27]Dirks 2002.

[28]Turner 1932.

Either directly or indirectly, many of these elite aimed to improve the ritual status of the caste. Indian society has traditionally considered certain behaviors associated with Brahminical Hinduism and Sanskrit texts socially prestigious,[29] and in both the colonial and pre-colonial periods castes anxious to improve their social status would emulate these behaviors. Examples included the performance of religious rites, wearing of the sacred thread, discouraging the performance of unclean jobs and the remarriage of widows, and agitating for entry into temples. The trend towards increased religious observance among upwardly mobile castes, usually referred to as "Sanskritization," was a notable feature of Indian social history in this period,[30] and involved the adoption of many of these behaviors by groups that had not practiced them before.

Not all the petitions emphasize ranking—in fact, many disclaim any association with the entire idea, and claim to be autonomous ethnic units. For this reason, caste petitions are found at all levels of the Sanskritic hierarchy, including, in one instance, among Brahmans. In related work, the author examines why some caste groups emphasize ranking in their petitions, while others emphasize other aspects of group identity[31].

4 Data and Variables

4.1 Empirical Strategy

A major obstacle in the empirical study of political identities is the unobserved variation between groups. Some group identities may be better developed than others, or be based on more readily observable traits. Similarly, some groups may benefit from state policies. In the context of caste, a particularly concerning confound is the ascribed status of the caste, since low status castes might have a particularly urgent imperative to attempt to

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[29]As Veblen 1973[1899], has pointed out, some activities may be considered socially prestigious even if they serve little material purpose–in fact this may enhance their prestige value.

[30]Srinivas 1956

[31]Author 2014

challenge existing identity forms.

The solution adopted here is to make comparisons within rather than across ethnic groups. This variation is of two types: Firstly, members of the same groups in different regions may have different levels of socio-economic status, and thus potentially different political outcomes. Secondly, a given group's socio-economic status may change over time. This is particularly true in modernizing societies like colonial India, where education and economic well-being were rising generally. In the appendix, we will see through case studies how such over-time change affected the political behavior of groups. In this section, I will explain the structure of a new panel dataset of Indian castes in the late colonial period, which can be used to examine within-group variation in political identity quantitatively. It takes advantage of both the substantial variation that we observe in the independent variable (literacy) across time, but also the relatively large number of groups, many of which coexist within a given territory. This contrasts with the solution in many other countries, where the number of groups is often very small, and where groups are often closely associated with particular areas.

4.2   The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the quantitative analysis will be the jati-province-year, with separate observations for each census year from 1901 to 1931. Jatis present in multiple provinces thus have separate observations for each province year. One potential problem is that both individuals and groups can move from one jati to another[32] making jati-level social measures endogenous to the political variables we are attempting to measure. However, the effects of individual movement do not seem to be driving the reported results (see section A-4.)

As an economy measure, census officials did not always tabulate occupational and literacy information for all castes, and in the depression year of 1931, a few provinces (notably Madras) did not tabulate the population results for all castes. To minimize this problem, I have confined the analysis to castes with over .5% of a province's Hindu

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[32]Rao and Ban 2007, Casson 2010

population at the 1901 census, among whom these omissions are less severe (these castes also tend to be much more consistently named and classified than small ones.)

Further details on the construction of the dataset can be found in Section A-3 of the Appendix.

4.3   The Dependent Variable

Section Two set out a theory of elite identity mobilization: Whether elites within a particular identity group were working to make that identity more salient to its members. As an indicator of ethnic mobilization, I use the circulation of petitions for a name change in the census. As we have seen, petitioning was not particularly significant in and of itself– most caste members probably never heard of the efforts made on their behalf, and the formation of a caste sabha, or some less formal caste organization, was probably far more important in the long term than the circulation of a petition. However, petitioning serves as a visible indicator that activist efforts of some sort were under way.

The petitioning variable is coded as a binary indicator for each jati-province-year, with a "1" indicating that a petition reached the census authorities. The information was taken from the annual census reports for each province.

In 1931 activists from untouchable groups in Madras, Mysore and Hyderabad demanded that their groups be not counted separately, but combined under a common name (depending on the region, Adi-Hindu, Adi-dravid, Adi-Andhra and Adi-Karnataka.) The Adi prefix emphasized the claim that these groups were in fact the original inhabitants of South India, and had been enslaved and degraded by later invaders. In these cases, I coded all the old untouchable castes in these provinces as having submitted petitions, while ignoring the new castes. Section A-4 will show that the major results are robust to the exclusion of these province-years. [33]

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[33]Madras in 1931 also contains the only two cases of jatis not petitioning because their demands were fully granted in a previous year. They were dropped from the analysis.

4.4 Independent Variables: Literacy and Population

As an index of socio-economic status, I use the male literacy rate of each caste, which the census authorities calculated on the generous basis that anyone capable of writing his name in any language was literate.[34] The *square of the literacy rate* will be used to index very high levels of literacy. This simplifies a complicated empirical concept, as literacy is only one of the large mass of factors that determine an individual's socio-economic standing. It has the merit, however, of being relatively easy to measure, and highly correlated with many of the other aspects of socio-economic status. This last fact was due to the relative expense of education and the small number of literates (which made them scarce.) Literacy thus seems to be a reasonable predictor of the existence of the kind of educated class that the theory posits as necessary for caste politicization. To supplement it, robustness checks will also use another variable that captures some of the economic aspects of socioeconomic status, the *percentage of workers who are owners or managers of industrial firms.* The models that use this measure produce identical results to those that use literacy, indicating that both are measuring the same underlying differences between "advanced" and "backward" castes.

I also include control variables for the male population for each caste,[35] which I use to calculate their *proportion of the provincial population* and their *absolute male population.*[36] For this purpose I exclude castes that were below .5% of the provincial population, non-Hindu castes and tribal groups.[37] The absolute population is included to control for the possibility that petitioning is stochastic across individuals, and that simply having

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[34]In some province years caste-level literacy was only reported for areas in which the caste was especially prevalent. The reported results are robust to the exclusion of these cases.

[35]Census policy was not to ask women their caste identity, which was recorded as that of their husbands or fathers.

[36]The two population variables are perfectly collinear within province-years.

[37]There are in fact two instances of petitions by tribal groups, though the overall rate is very low. Due to the marginal social and spatial position of these groups, and their complicated relationship with the caste hierarchy, I have excluded them from the main analysis. Including them would slightly strengthen the reported results.

a large number of people (as would even a small caste in a large province) increases the probability of petitioning significantly.

5   Results

5.1   Trends in Petitioning

Before beginning with the quantitative analysis, it is worth examining some of the basic trends in the dependent variable. Table A-2 shows that there is an upward trend over time in petitions, from 16.2% of jatis in 1901 to 31.15% in 1931. Overall, 23.2% of caste-years had some sort of petition for a name change. Figure A-2 shows these trends graphically. There is a rise in the number of petitions over time, starting from fairly low levels and increasing to 33% of castes in 1931. Figure One shows the changing probabilities of petitioning over time relative to the initial (1901) literacy rate. As the theory predicts, the trends for rich and poor castes are different. Castes with low levels of literacy petition with increasing frequency in later decades, consistent with the hypothesis that the higher levels of literacy that some of these castes gain over time give them a sufficiently large elite to initiate the mobilization process. Among groups with high initial levels of literacy and status, the number of petitions stays constant over time, consistent with the hypotheses that some of these groups are merging into the provincial elite and have no need for identity politics.

5.2   Model Selection

The primary identification strategy of this paper is to focus on variation in petitioning within castes, using a set of caste fixed effects. However, several additional categories of bias-inducing unobserved variables may also exist in this case. Most notably, petitioning may vary by province (due to historical and institutional differences) and by year (due to time-related trends.) Observations are also not independent within castes (since jatis would find it easier to organize if their caste-fellows in other provinces had already done so)

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or within province-years (since groups might be more likely to petition if their neighbors were already doing so.)

The choice of a statistical model to analyze this data presents a fairly standard set of tradeoffs between bias and variance. Unfortunately, it is impossible to estimate the "pure" FE model with fixed effects for jati-province and province-year. While such a model would certainly be free of all these sources of bias, the broad and short structure of the panel would mean that this model would use a large number of degrees of freedom. Moreover, this model would have a very small N due to the loss of the large number of observations that do not vary within jati-province.[38]

The basic specifications are thus based on a modified fixed effects model, with fixed effects for jati, province and year. This last model differs from a conventional fixed effects model only in that the within-jati variance is not only across time, but also across province (for jatis located in multiple provinces.) It thus controls for most of the cultural and social unobserved variables associated with individual's caste. The model estimated is:

$$Y_{pjt} = \alpha_p + \beta_j + \gamma_t + \delta Lit_{pjt} + \rho Lit^2_{pjt} + \theta X_{pjt} + \epsilon_{pjt} \qquad (1)$$

Where Y_{pjt} is the log odds of petitioning for a given jati-province-year, α_p, β_j and γ_t are vectors of province, jati and year fixed effects, and δ and ρ are the parameters of interest, , and X is a vector of controls.

While this fixed effects model eliminates a great deal of bias, it is still relatively inefficient due to the very large number of castes. This is especially problematic in some of the specifications that test the robustness of the covariants to the inclusion of controls (many of which are available for only a portion of the data.) Most of these specifications thus use a nested mixed effects logistic regression model with random effects for jati and province-year and fixed effects for province, year and caste ritual status. The random effects adjust the coefficients to take into account the probable non-independence

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[38]Overall, 46 percent of the variance in petitioning is within the 381 jati-provinces, while 65 percent is within the 188 jatis.

of observations within province-year and within jatis. The fixed effects take into account the direct influences of time, geography, and the traditional social status (the fixed point against which castes were trying to appeal.) This model is estimated as:

$$Y_{pjt} = \alpha_p + \beta_s + \gamma_t + \sigma_{pt} + \tau_j + \delta Lit_{pjt} + \rho Lit^2_{pjt} + \theta X_{pjt} + \epsilon_{pjt} \tag{2}$$

Where β_s is a vector of fixed effects for each level of caste status, and where σ_{pt} and τ_j are vectors of IID random effects for each province-year and jati.

5.3   Testing the Hypotheses

The inverted U relationship between literacy and petitioning is fairly obvious even in the raw data. Table A-3 gives the number of petitions in relation to the literacy rate of the caste. Castes at the lowest levels of socio-economic status (below 1% literacy) petition in only 10.85% of jati-province-years, while those immediately above them (between 1% and 5% literacy) petition 24% of the time. The rate of petitioning is highest among castes with between 20% and 30% male literacy–38.8% of these castes seek to change their name in any given year. At the highest levels of literacy (above 40%) the rate diminishes, with only 20.8% of castes submitting petitions. This pattern can be seen graphically in Figure Two, which shows the kernel density functions for petitioning and non-petitioning castes by literacy rate. The non-petitioning castes are concentrated at very high and very low levels of literacy, while the petitioning groups are relatively numerous at intermediate levels of literacy.

The curvilinear relationship between group literacy rate and petitioning is also apparent in the regressions in Table One. Model One tests finds a modest relationship between group population and petitioning. This reproduces some key findings in the existing literature, particularly Posners's finding that relatively large identities will become important politically.[39]

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[39]Posner 2004

Model Two runs the basic fixed effects model, with the key independent variables of interest for the first two hypotheses, the literacy rate and its square. As we have mentioned, the model also includes a set of variables associated with the level of modernization at the province level: the provincial literacy rate, the rate of urbanization, and the percent of male workers employed in public services, and employment in agriculture none of which affect the value of the literacy variables. The literacy rate of a group is a positive predictor of its propensity to petition, but this effect reverses at high levels of literacy. Both results are statistically significant.

Model Three of Table One introduces a set of variables drawn from the occupational data in the census tables, including the percentage of caste members cultivating land and the percentage involved in public administration. Of particular interest is a third variable, the percentage of caste members engaged in the caste's traditional occupation. One common explanation for the caste system is that it represents a system of economic complementarities, with groups providing each other with specialized services through the jajmani system or other similar arrangements.[40] What if this interpretation is correct, and economic specialization is an important motivating factor for individuals choosing to remain within the caste hierarchy? Traditional employment is a reasonable measure of exposure to these complementarities, since a group concentrated in its traditional occupation is more likely to give and receive a large portion of its income through cooperative exchange, if only because it has a less diverse array of buyers and sellers within the group. The effect of this variable on petitioning is substantial and positive: Traditionally employed castes are more likely to petition than non-traditionally employed castes, though whether this represents a challenge to the system or a rebellion against it is unclear. However, this variable does not affect the value of the literacy variables, which retain the same inverted U relationship with petitioning.[41] This relationship is show graphically in

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[40]Dubois 1806, Freitas 2006.

[41]This effect also implies that caste mobilization is not driven by the need to position the group in new economic sectors since petitioning is associated with remaining in the traditional occupation. Similarly, group involvement in trade is not correlated with petitioning, and its inclusion as a control dos not alter the reported results.

Figure A-3.

Model Four uses a mixed effects regression, and reruns the basic model using the mixed effects model discussed in the last section. As we might expect, the more efficient model produces substantially the same coefficients with greatly reduced standard errors. The effect of the literacy variable in these models not only statistically significant but substantial in substantive terms: For an untouchable caste in Baroda in 1901, moving from a literacy rate of 1% to 11% increases the estimated probability of petitioning by seven percentage points (from 16% to 23%) and a further increase from 11% to 21% is associated with an additional 5.6% percentage point increase in the probability of petitioning (to 28.6%.) However, the effect of literacy becomes negative as it goes higher, as a caste with 41% literacy has a predicted probability of petitioning of only 24%, and a caste with 61% literacy will petition only 7% of the time. This result remains strong even when we add controls for group occupation (Model Five) which reproduces the results in Model Three.

Model Six of Table One replaces the literacy variables with the rate of caste employment in industry. This is intended at a check on the validity of using literacy as a measure of the broader concept of socioeconomic status. The industrial ownership variables produce results similar to literacy: The effect of literacy on petitioning is positive, but attenuated at higher levels. This result gives us some confidence that the main regressions are measuring socio-economic status in general, rather than some factor unique to education.

5.4 Participation Among the Highly Educated

If the elites of very highly literate groups aren't engaged in caste politics, what are they doing? Hypothesis 1a proposed that the elites of wealthy that they are spending their time engaging in other forms of political action. Indeed, we should expect them to be overrepresented in the political sphere as a whole, given the advantages conferred on them by their wealth and education. In colonial India the two primary career paths for the politically ambitious led through the colonial bureaucracy and the nationalist

elites gathered around the Indian National Congress, though in fact there was significant interchange between the two groups. Model One of Table Four regresses group literacy and size on caste-specific rates of employment as gazetted (senior) government officials. The squared literacy rate of the group has a statistically significant positive effect on bureaucratic employment, the only significant caste-level predictor. The same result holds true for caste-level attendance at the annual sessions of the Congress (Model Two of Table Four.) As hypothesis 1a predicts, while their slightly less advantaged peers dominate caste mobilization, the literate urban castes seem to suffer from no handicap in the political system as a whole.

5.5   Alternative Hypotheses

Many of the most obvious alternative hypotheses, such as regional differences and differences in a priori caste status are accounted for in the structure of the fixed effects models. This leaves the possibility that the results are driven by some time varying factor not included in the main models. Section A-3 includes controls for a wide variety of such trends, including the growth of Arya Samaj and Christian missionary activity, changing rates of petition granting, different census policies towards caste classification, and population shifts among groups, while also examine the effect different coding policies for different types of petitions. None of these trends has any substantial impact on the main results.

5.6   Instrumental Variables

Even in the presence of controls, it is possible that there is an endogenous or reverse causal relationship between ethnic mobilization and socio-economic status, with the ethnic mobilization causing a group to gain in wealth rather than the other way around.

To examine if endogenaity is affecting the reported results, I use an instrumental variables model that treats literacy and squared literacy as endogenous. The principal instrumental variable is a vector of changes in global prices for the traditional products

of a caste. The intuition is that a caste, while doing the same occupation it has been associated with for centuries, may receive an economic windfall when this product becomes more desirable in world markets.[42] The global price is calculated as the export price paid at the leading Indian port for that product, with prices being normalized relative to their 1891 levels. Global price changes are uninfluenced by Indian social and political patterns, and thus satisfy the exclusion restriction in that they influence the socio-economic status of castes without being correlated with the unobserved political and social factors affecting activism. (Broader global trends such as the Great Depression might predict caste activism as a whole, but are accounted for in the year fixed effects.) As an additional instrument, to predict squared literacy, I follow Wooldridge (2004:435-7) and use the squared predicted values from a version of the first stage regression for literacy rate.

There are several practical limitations to the price shock instrument, the most obvious being that it is only available for agricultural castes in British provinces, and that it varies relatively little within province-years, given that most provinces contain only a few castes producing specialized cash crops. It is impossible to include province dummy variable in the specification without perfectly predicting the majority of observations and grossly inflating the standard errors. The results presented below should be interpreted as reflecting cross-provincial as well and within-provincial differences in price changes. However, independent of the year and the proportion of the province under cash crops, there is also no reason to think that the price shocks are correlated with unobserved attributes of provinces.

Model One of Table A-4 tests the simple first stage, with literacy rate as the dependent variable. Price shocks do in fact have a modest effect on literacy rates, one that just misses statistical significance. Models Two and Three report the two real first stages for literacy and literacy squared, both of which use as instruments the price shock variable

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[42]The traditional products are jaggary sugar for toddy tapping castes, cotton for weaving castes, linseed oil for oil pressing castes, and a weighted average of all the province's agricultural products for agricultural castes. This last step is similar to that used by Jha and Bhavani (2011.)

and the squared predicted values from model one. Model Four reports the second stage probit regression. The quadratic relationship between literacy holds good, with the effects of both literacy and literacy squared being statistically significant. This gives us some confidence that the reported results are not the result of the endogenaity of socioeconomic status.

6   Conclusion

Caste activism is political phenomenon with social and economic causes. Rising levels of wealth and education make caste mobilization, but higher levels of wealth and education make it unnecessary. This non-linear pattern supports the theory that socio-economic status influences identity not just by empowering political actors but by altering the relative benefits of different forms of political actions. While the results shown here generally support the common theory that population size has a strong effect on identity mobilization, they supplement it with an understanding of the economic conditions that make such mobilization possible and desirable for elites. As such, the result belongs squarely within the tradition of theories discussing the effects of economic modernization, though it modifies these theories by showing that the effect of social change on groups is decidedly non-linear, and does not involve the fading of "primitive" identities like caste.

Just as striking, from both a South Asian and a comparative perspective, is the sizable variation in the extent of mobilization, which serves as a corrective both to theories of a static caste system and to theories that emphasize the role of the colonial state. While some caste identities are politically salient, others, particularly at the extreme ends of the social scale, did not become the basis for political action in the colonial period, a pattern that continues to this day.

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Figure 1: Rate of Petitioning by 1901 Literacy Rate and Years, 1901-1931
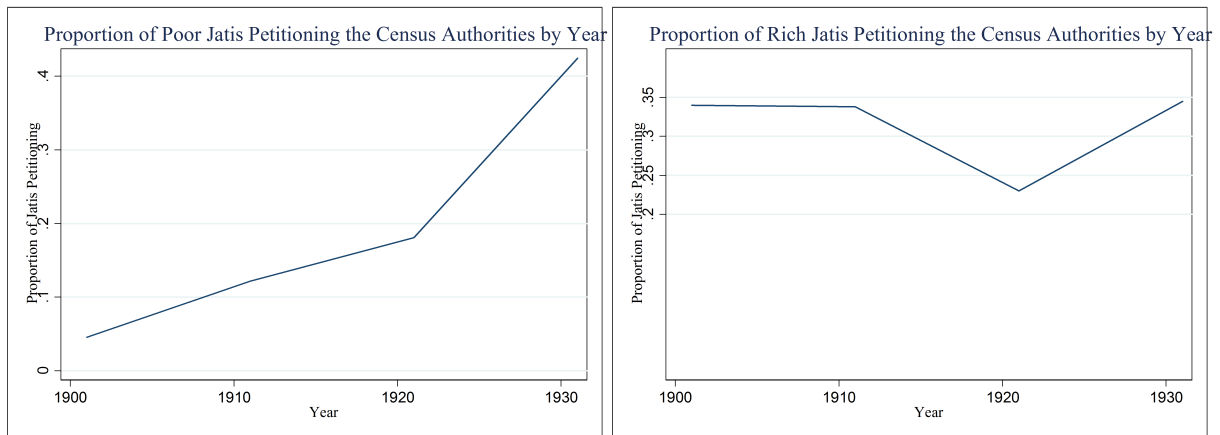
Note: Poor Jatis are those with less than 5 percent male literacy in 1901, rich jatis are those with greater than 5 percent literacy in 1901

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Figure 2: Kernel Density of Petitioning and Non-Petitioning Groups by Literacy Rate
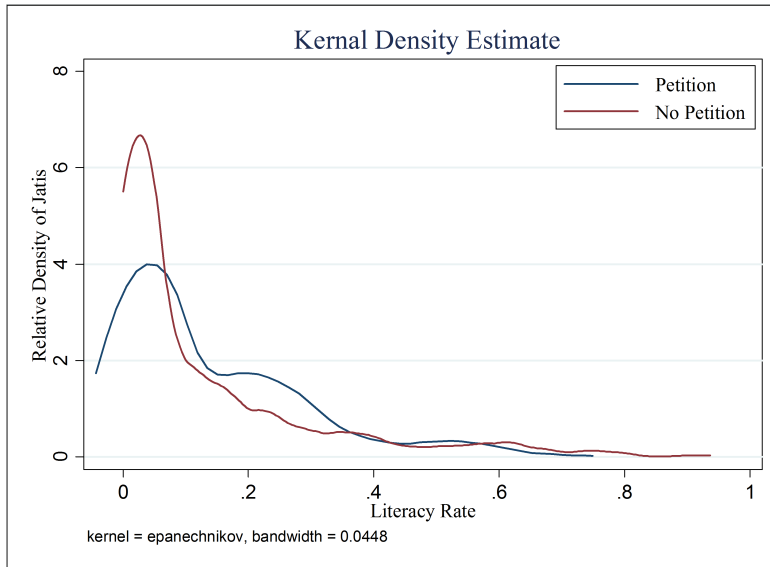
Note: Distribution of pooled literacy rates, 1901-1931, by petitioning status.

Table 1: Main Results: Logistic Regression with Petition as Dependent Variable

VARIABLES	(1) Petitioning	(2) Petitioning	(3) Petitioning	(4) Petitioning	(5) Petitioning	(6) Petitioning
Population as Proportion	11.00**	10.79*	10.67	11.66**	11.73**	10.31*
	(5.327)	(5.597)	(7.065)	(4.912)	(5.823)	(5.558)
Population 00000s	0.0250	0.0181	0.0411	0.0179	0.0270	0.0519
	(0.0541)	(0.0575)	(0.0724)	(0.0439)	(0.0522)	(0.0507
Male Literacy Rate		9.886***	13.82***	6.928**	10.03***	
		(3.001)	(4.295)	(2.757)	(3.464)	
Male Literacy Rate Sq.		-13.74***	-18.07***	-9.576**	-13.57**	
		(4.673)	(6.408)	(4.211)	(5.349)	
Jati Land Cultivation Rate			-0.007		0.256	
			(0.788)		(0.711)	
Jati Public Employment Rate			-11.2		-7.404	
			(9.33)		(8.134)	
Jati Traditional Occupation Rate			2.27***		1.533**	
			(0.82)		(0.645)	
Jati Industry Owners Rate						251.0**
						(117.4)
Jati Industry Owners Rate Sq.						-12,947**
						(6,443)
Constant	0.681	5.470	4.760	4.886	-7.483	12.99*
	(4.308)	(6.241)	(22.86)	(5.954)	(21.67)	(7.849)
Observations	1,096	887	575	887	575	628
Number of casteid	379	364	311	364	311	313
Jati FE	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Caste Status FE	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Province FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year RE	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Jati RE	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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Table 2: Alternative Measures of Participation

VARIABLES	(1) Government Officers	(2) Congress Delegates
Population as Proportion	-0.00238	1.45e-05
	(0.00182)	(0.249)
Population 000s	4.39e-08	.45e-05
	(2.13e-07)	(0.249)
Male Literacy Rate	9.73e-05	-0.109*
	(0.00107)	(1.79e-05)
Male Literacy Rate Sq.	0.00423***	0.407***
	(0.00142)	(0.0612)
Constant	-0.00945*	1.018
	(0.00521)	(1.121)
Observations	674	408
Caste Status FE	YES	YES
Province FE	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES
Province-Year Controls	YES	YES
Province-Year RE	YES	YES
Jati RE	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1

These are mixed effects linear regression models, with fixed effects for caste status, year and province and random effects for Jati and Province-Year. Only the fixed effect constants are reported. The province-year controls, proportion urban, proportion in public employment, provincial population, and the provincial literacy rate, are not reported for reasons of space.

Online Appendix

1 Additional Tables and Figures

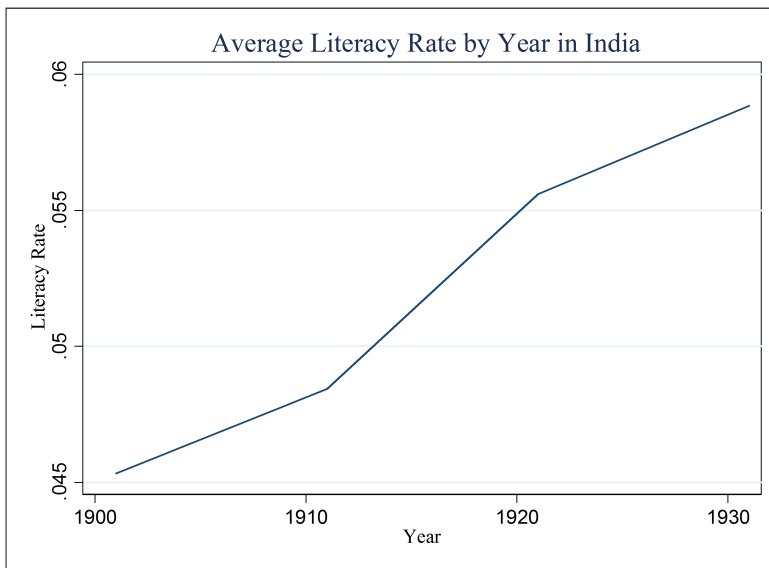Figure A.3: Average Male Literacy Rate by Year in India, 1901-1931

Figure A.4: Proportion of Castes Petitioning for a Name Change by Province, 1901-1931
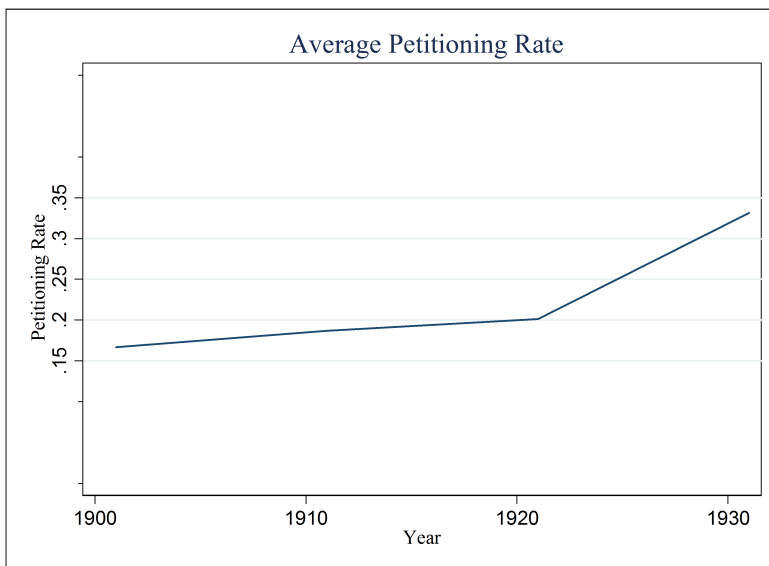
Table A.1: Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max
Varies by Jati-Province-Year					
Male Population Share	1130	0.028	0.033	0	0.277
Male Population 000s	1130	259.99	365.63	1.5	3226.
Literacy Rate	920	0.129	0.166	0	0.936
Litrate Sq.	920	0.044	0.102	0	0.877
Prop of Province with higher Status	1130	0.054	0.112	0	0.476
Proportion Cultivators and Landowers	606	0.390	0.272	0	0.991
Proportion In Public Administration	606	0.019	0.053	0	0.592
Proportion in Traditional Occupation	606	0.452	0.282	0	0.985
Proportion Govt. Officers	732	0.00038	0.0015	0	0.0204
Industry Owners Rate	730	0.001	0.003	0	0.035
Industry Owners Rate Sq.	730	0	0	0	0.001
Prop. of Gazetted Officers	730	0	0.002	0	0.02
Prop. of Congress Delegates	521	0.016	0.08	0	0.728
Absolute change in pop.	1079	0.216	1.090	0	29.88
Varies by Province-Year					
Proportion Urban	1130	0.060	0.026	0.018	0.134
Proportion Literate	1130	0.056	0.033	0.023	0.174
Proportion In Public Administration	969	0.011	0.007	0.001	0.023
Provincial Population	1130	27532	16350	2033	51087
Congress Attendees/Pop. 000s	616	0.007	0.014	0.0002	0.067
Logged Land Revenue per capita	758	22.57	9.187	7.83	40.7
Prop. Brahmans	1130	0.068	0.032	0.022	0.131
Proportion Hindu	1130	0.780	0.170	0.315	0.959
Prop. Arya Samaj	1130	0.001	0.003	0	0.017
Prop. Christians	1130	0.021	0.052	0.001	0.315
Prop of Petitions Granted	1101	0.124	0.271	0	1.
Status Based Census Classif.	1130	0.598	0.490	0	1.
Varies by Jati					
Untouchable Caste	1130	0.218	0.413	0	1.
Lower OBC Caste	1130	0.381	0.486	0	1.
Upper OBC Caste	1130	0.181	0.385	0	1.
Intermediate Caste	1130	0.116	0.320	0	1.
Upper Caste	1130	0.105	0.307	0	1.

Table A.2: Number of Petitions by Year

	1901	1911	1921	1931	Total
No Petition	134	239	267	228	868
Petitions	27	55	67	113	262
Total	161	294	334	341	1130

Table A.3: Number of Petitions by Literacy (Pooled)

Literacy	Castes with No Petition	Castes With Petition	Total	Petition Percent
Less than 1%	115	14	129	10.85
1-5%	254	80	334	23.95
5-10%	73	31	104	29.81
10-20%	99	34	133	25.56
20-30%	60	38	98	38.78
30-40%	36	14	50	28.00
40% +	57	15	72	20.83
Missing	174	36	210	17.14
Total	868	262	1130	

Figure A.5: Predicted Rate of Petitioning by Male Literacy Rate
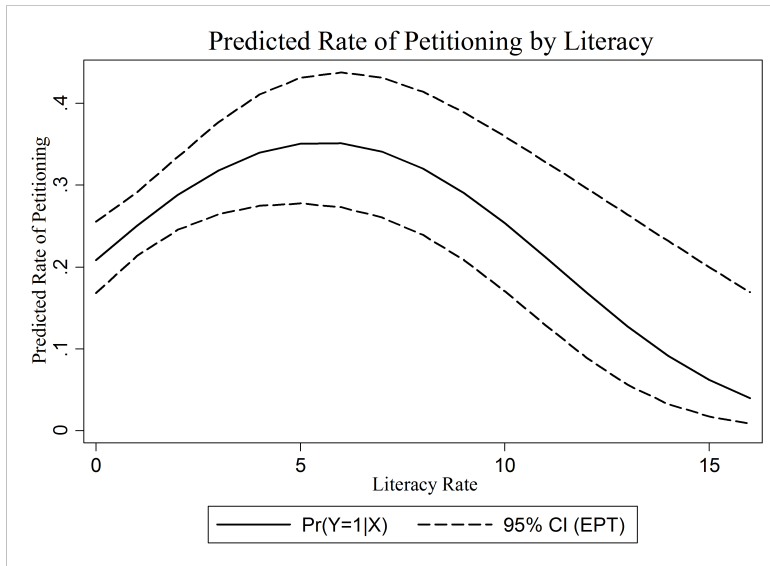
Note: Based on the predicted values from Table Three, Model Two.

Table A.4: Endogenous Socio-Economic Status: Two Stage Least Squares Regression

| VARIABLES	(1) Literacy Rate	(2) Literacy Rate	(3) Literacy Rate Sq.	(4) Petitioning
Squared Predicted Values		3.213***	2.164***	
		(0.760)	(0.397)	
Change in Price	0.0187	-0.000355	-0.00784	
	(0.0139)	(0.0141)	(0.00733)	
Population Share	-0.584**	-0.156	0.121	11.04
	(0.253)	(0.270)	(0.133)	(6.742)
Male Population	2.42e-05	7.16e-06	-1.04e-05	-0.000491
	(2.40e-05)	(2.40e-05)	(1.17e-05)	(0.000581)
Prov. Area under Cash Crops	0.151	0.0519	0.00535	-4.442
	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.0513)	(2.906)
Traditional Oil Pressers	0.0682**	0.0423	-0.000367	-1.443
	(0.0323)	(0.0325)	(0.0156)	(0.924)
Traditional Liquor Sellers	0.125***	0.0606	-0.0163	-3.056*
	(0.0450)	(0.0470)	(0.0227)	(1.656)
Literacy Rate				49.24**
				(20.44)
Lit. Rate Sq.				-95.87**
				(46.95)
Constant	-0.0436	0.000299	0.0102	-2.005**
	(0.0411)	(0.0417)	(0.0204)	(0.972)
Observations	287	287	287	252
Number of casteid	111	111	111	
Caste Status FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

See section 6.2 for a detailed explanation.

2 Case Studies

In this section I will briefly describe the historical experiences of three Indian castes in the colonial period. They were chosen to illustrate different levels of the key independent variable, literacy: One group (the Madigas) with a very low level of literacy and a correspondingly low level of political engagement, one group (Shanans) with intermediate level of literacy and high levels of caste mobilization, and one group (Bihari Kayasths) with very high levels of literacy that produced weak caste mobilization, but very high levels of political involvement overall.

Figure A.6: Average Male Literacy Rates of Selected Castes by year, 1891-1931
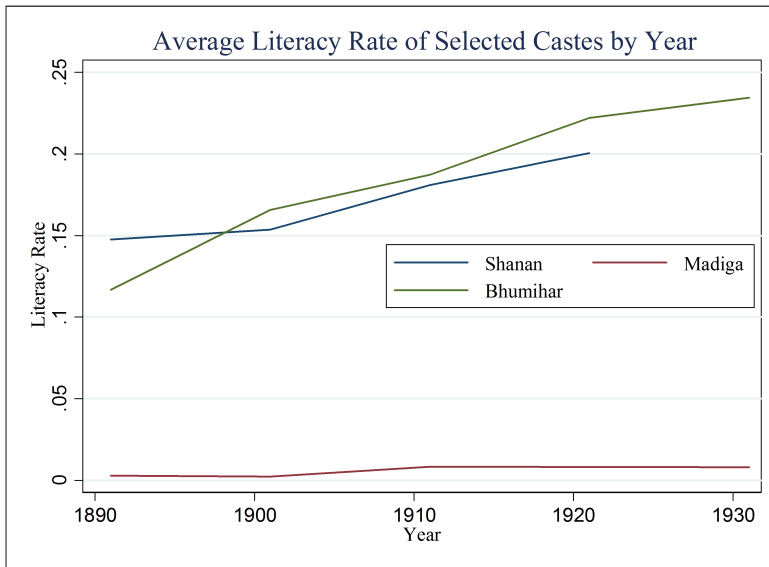
2.1 Intermediate Literacy leads to Ethnic Mobilization: The Shanan/Nadars

The Shanans of Tamil Nadu were a large caste traditionally associated with the harvesting of coconuts and the production of toddy liquor, though in practice the majority of Shanans

worked as ordinary tenant farmers. The caste was not considered a prestigious one in Tamil society, and Shanans shared with other lower castes a set of humiliating markers of their low ritual status, most notably a ban on Shanan women to cover their upper body. Despite the general poverty of the community, there existed a literate Shanan elite associated with tax collection and small trade. There even existed a wealthy subcaste, the Nadans, who owned whole villages and adopted the manners of local aristocrats (Templeman 1996: 18-29.) This elite grew in size in the 19th century, as the growth of the South Indian economy improved the position of tenants and Christian missionaries expanded access to education among traditionally poor groups (Hardgrave 1969: 43-55.) While some escaped the most hated aspects of the group's low ritual status by conversion to Christianity, on the whole the social aspirations of the Nadar elite were channeled into attempts to gain a more prestigious position within the caste system through traditional means. This process was opposed by upper caste groups and often turned violent, most notably in the Upper Cloth Controversy of 1857-58, when Shanan women in the state of Travancore won the right to cover their upper bodies, and the Sivakasi riots of 1899, where the demands of wealthy Nadars to be admitted to temples led to violence between them and members of the Maravan caste (Sobhanan 1985.)

These mobilization demands only became more strident in the late colonial period, and the Shanan elite began to pursue its goals through formalized political organizations, most notably the Nadar Mahajana Sangam. The Sangam led efforts to improve the social status of the Nadar community through the adoption of normatively desirable Hindu practices such as the wearing of the sacred thread, the abandonment of toddy tapping, and the feeding of Brahmans. This was coupled, especially in the 20th century, by the development of a massive private social service network, which included not only scholarships and aid to the needy but a well-capitalized bank and one of India's first private universities. The Sangam repeatedly petitioned the colonial census to help it avoid the name Shanan, which it considered derogatory, and replace it either Kshatriya or Nadar. The Nadar elite also became a key player in Tamil politics, becoming closely identified with the anti-Congress (and anti-Brahman) Justice Party before switching their allegiance en masse to

the Congress after independence (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.)

2.2   No Elite, No mobilization: The Madigas

The Madigas, the traditional leatherworking caste of the Andhra coast, suffered even more extreme forms of discrimination in early colonial India than the Nadars. Considered untouchable, they were forced to perform degrading village chores like the preparation of latrines and the burial of the dead, while earning their living as the dependent laborers of upper caste landlords. The social changes of the 19th century were also less kind to the Madigas than they had been to the Nadars. The Andhra region was less heavily influenced by Christian missionaries than the Tamil areas, its agricultural sector substantially less advanced, and its cities smaller and poorer. The result was that an elite group never emerged among the Madiga as it had among the Shanans. At the 1911 census, only .8% of Madiga men were capable of writing their name, and a caste of 808,000 people recorded exactly 24 lawyers, doctors and teachers. With no educated group to speak on their behalf, the Madiga remained politically quiescent during the colonial period, neither forming a sabha, petitioning the census authorities, nor adopting Sanskritic behaviors. Only in the 1970s and 1980s, when a class of literate Madiga had finally emerged, did Madiga identity become politically important.

2.3   Too Rich to Mobilize: The Bihari Kayasths

The Kayasths are a North Indian caste traditionally connected with writing and scribal services. The Kayasths occupied a slightly ambiguous position in North Indian society, being well regarded but usually considered to be shudras rather than members of the three upper varnas. However, their bureaucratic tradition meant that the Kayasths were the first caste in Bihar to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by the spread of English education and the colonial civil service. This head start enabled the Kayasth elite to dominate Bihari politics in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1911, the Kayasths had 1.2% of the Bihari population but 32.5% of the gazetted civil service officers and

47.9% of the local delegates to the Indian National Congress.

Unlike The Kayasths of Bengal and UP (who faced a more competitive political environment,) the Kayasths of Bihar never emphasized their caste identity, instead claiming to represent the interests of all Biharis or all Indians, either within the idiom of bureaucratic service or Gandhian nationalism. Similarly, in electoral politics they did not function as a homogenous caste block, but rather as a set of personalist factions (Jaffrelot 2003.) As the group with the best access to western education in an extremely poor society, the Kayasth elite did not need caste sabhas or petitions to reinforce their power.

3   Data

Colonial India was divided into areas ruled by the British government, and areas in which sovereignty was delegated to native princes, usually descendants of early British allies. The directly ruled areas were divided into fairly large provinces, of which the most important were: The United Provinces, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Bombay, Madras, Punjab, the Central Provinces and Berar, and Assam. Four very small provinces (two of which are overwhelmingly Muslim border areas) have been ignored.

The indirectly ruled areas were divided into three main groups: Four large states (Jammu and Kashmir, Hyderabad, Mysore and Baroda) that enjoyed a direct relationship with the central government, two large groups of states (the Rajputana Agency and the Central Indian Agency) that reported to a political agent appointed by the central government, and a large number of states who reported to the political department of the local British province. The policy followed here has been to report the large states and agencies separately, as the equivalent of British provinces, and include the other states with the province that controlled them. The only exception to this was the large princely state of Travancore, which has been treated as separate from Madras.

There were several changes to provincial boundaries during this period, so I have consolidated and divided provinces to keep the unit of analysis consistent. For the 1891 and 1901 census years Berar has been treated as part of the Central Provinces even though it

was in fact independent, and for the same years, Bihar has been treated separately even though it was in fact part of Bengal. In 1931 the recently created Western Indian States Agency is treated as part of Bombay, and for 1911, 1921 and 1931 Gwalior state is treated as part of the Central Indian

Subcastes (on which we have very limited information) will be treated as part of their parent jati. This choice is largely pragmatic: There is a large amount of ethnographic and case study evidence that jati was and is the primary identity on which castes are mobilized politically, and the primary focus of individuals identification in a local context.

Two major challenges in the collection of the data was the multiplicity of small castes in India and the large number of alternative names (and alternative spellings) for castes in different areas. The census superintendents generally tried to keep jatis separate, but at times they differed as to what constituted an independent jati. The most usual cross-year difference is that in the later census years, officials sometimes clubbed together castes practicing the same occupation but using different names and speaking different languages. The practice I have followed is to use the caste classifications used in 1891 (when nearly all the jatis were listed separately) and to divide aggregated groups using their relative proportions in the most recent year in which they were listed separately. Hyderabad in 1901, and Kashmir and Assam in all years, used highly aggregated and rapidly changing groupings of castes, making it difficult to trace any continuity from year to year. These province-years have been excluded from the analysis.

There were five province-years in which the census superintendent either did not mention petitioning at all or noted receiving petitions but neglected to list them; all jatis in these province years have been coded as missing. Coding all these province years as having no petitions would slightly strengthen the reported results.

The caste hierarchy dummies are coded using the infamous "tables of precedenc" compiled for the 1901 census, supplemented with information from the Castes and Tribes series for each province that were published in the same period. In all but a few cases the classifications agree with those made by the post-independence government for the purpose of affirmative action. The status variable is constructed as an ordinal variable

four to nine, with each jati being assigned to a category. From highest to lowest, the categories are Brahmans, other clean twice-born castes ("upper castes,") high status cultivating castes ("Intermediate castes," "middle castes," "dominant caste"), low status cultivating castes ("Upper OBCs," "unclean shudras"), low status occupational castes, ("lower OBCs," "artisan castes") and former untouchables ("dalits," "harijans.") While the terminology varies, this six-fold classification is familiar to India scholars, as it lies at the heart of most previous work on caste politics (Jaffrelot 2003, Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009, Frankel and Rao 1989) and is the format used in most contemporary surveys. While there is much blurring at the edges, particularly among the shudra categories, this scheme seems to capture certain important aspects of status hierarchy in India.

4 Robustness Checks and Alternative Tests

The theoretical mechanisms we have discussed are obviously not the only ones which may affect caste mobilization. This section discusses several alternative mechanisms that may be driving caste petitioning and examines whether they affect the primary results reported in section five.

4.1 Caste Status

One of the most basic alternative hypotheses is that petitioning is driven by pre-existing levels of social status ascribed to groups. Groups with a high level of status within the traditional caste hierarchy might have a lesser incentive to change their caste name, or to take other steps for their political advancement. All the reported models thus include either fixed effects for the jati, or a set of dummy variables indicating the various level of the caste hierarchy. The reported result should thus be seen as showing the effects of divergence in literacy among groups of similar ritual status.

In fact, there is considerable variance in petitioning, even among groups with a similar social status. Table A-5 shows the number of petitions by caste status level. The major empirical pattern is the virtual absence of petitioning among Brahmans, the groups at the

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Table A.5: Number of Petitions by Caste Status

Caste Status	Castes with No Petition	Castes With Petition	Total	Petition Percent
Untouchable/Dalit	200	45	245	18.37
Lower OBC/Shudra	322	108	430	25.12
Upper OBC/Shudra	143	61	204	29.90
Intermediate/Dominant	101	30	131	22.90
Upper/"Twice Born"	62	17	79	21.52
Brahman	39	1	40	2.50
Total	868	262	1130	

top of the hierarchy, who cannot envisage improvement in their traditional social status. Otherwise, the differences among the various levels of status are relatively minor.

4.2 Caste Hierarchy

One obvious potential hypothesis is that the variation we see in petitioning is not the product of variation in the spread of literacy, but rather variation in preexisting cultural conditions. Many have argued that caste norms are stronger in North India, the area first occupied by the Aryan invaders thought to have created the caste system and the area most influenced by Sanskritic culture. In particular, many observers have pointed to the small and "incomplete" position of the upper varnas in south Indian society, with the far south having only a few Brahmans and no groups universally acknowledged as Kshatriyas or Vaisyas (Frankel and Rao 1989, Kothari 1970.)

In its basic form, much of this cultural heterogeneity is already accounted for by including provincial and jati-level fixed effects. If norms about caste are stronger In Bihar than in Tamil Nadu, or among Brahmans than among Marathas, this should be accounted for in the fixed and random effect coefficients already included in the models.

Local variations in social status, however, might vary within jati. Model One of Table A-6 adds a variable for the percentage of the province who have a higher social status than the caste in question. This is intended to account for the uneven "spread" of the caste system across regions of the country: Due to the smaller number of high castes in

the south, some peasant castes in that region occupy a higher local social status than would otherwise be the case in the north. This variable has a small positive effect on petitioning–Groups at the bottom of the local status ordering are more likely to petition than those above them–but does not affect of the value of the literacy variables.

4.3   The Arya Samaj and Christianity

Closely related to this concern is the possibility that ideological efforts by outsiders could influence the willingness of groups to embrace or reject the caste system. One group in early twentieth century India, the Arya Samaj, was especially notable in such efforts. The Samaj was a social service organization strongest in North India, whose ideas have at various times been described as Hindu Protestantism, Hindu fundamentalism and Hindu reformism. The group's leadership set itself against the caste system, at least in its existing form, favoring instead some sort of purified varna division (Bakshi 1991.)In general, we should expect the rapid growth of Arya Samaj to have a negative effect on petitioning, which represented that kind of jati-centered division of Hindu society that the Samaj was at pains to avoid. Model Two of Table A-6 includes variables for the percentage of Arya Samajists in each province in a given year. The growth of the Samaj does seem to have a marginal negative effect on petitioning, though does not change the values of the reported results.

Another over-time change that might affect the level of petitioning is the growth of Christianity. The Christian missionaries who arrived in India in 19th century were also opposed to caste distinctions and the caste hierarchy in a more comprehensive way, though they never succeeded in eradicating caste consciousness among Indian Christians. More notable was the missionaries' role in promoting primary education, particularly among their primary converts, lower caste groups in Southern India. While I have noted the effect of missionaries on literacy, it is possible that Christianity influenced caste mobilization more directly, for instance if this exposure to non-Hindu ideals led to greater self-assertion of lower caste groups (Jaffrelot 2003.) Variables for the percentage of Christians in the province, along with its interaction with caste status, are included in Model Three of

Table A-6. While Christianity has a negative effect on hierarchical petitioning in some models, this effect does not substantially reduce the effect the literacy variables.

4.4 Region

The contrast between the north and south of the subcontinent is at the center of much social scientific and historical work on South Asia, with the south often being portrayed as less "caste ridden" than the north, though in general it seems that traditional strictures on ritual pollution were stronger in the south. Despite the presence of province fixed effects in all reported models, it is possible that these results are driven by one region. To test this possibility, Models Four and Five of Table A-6 report results with certain regions of the country excluded: Model Four reports the results excluding the non-Hindi-speaking provinces, and Model Five for the non-Dravidian-speaking provinces. Despite the smaller sample, the non-linear effect of literacy remains a robust and statistically significant predictor of caste petitioning.

4.5 Petition Granting

The interpretation of petitioning advanced here is that approaching the census authorities was a primarily rhetorical act, a piece of public claim-staking that was part of a wide-ranging set of strategies for identity formation and mobilization. While a successful claim would give a caste's mobilization efforts an added level of legitimacy, the chance of success was not the primary goal of the petitioning process. What if this was not the case, and petitions were motivated by the desire for official recognition? In this situation, the dynamics of petitioning could be influenced by the dynamics of the census itself, as spurts of petitioning a caused purely by changes in the official attitude. To test this hypothesis, Model One of Table A-7 includes a variable for the rate of petition granting for that census year. The inclusion of this variable does not affect the reported results.

4.6   Census Classification Schemes

The secondary literature on the census of India has often promoted the view that caste petitions are the products of the ideas of the census takers, and of official support for a reified and Sanskritized caste system (Dirks 2002, Cohn 1987.) In general this explanation seems to account for little of the variance, since the census was one of the most nationally unified of Raj institutions, with strong national rules even in the princely states. However, there was one important area which varied both from province to province and from year to year: the arrangement of castes within the census table. The most common alternatives were alphabetical classification and occupational classification though in 1901 most provinces followed national policy and attempted to rank castes based on their ritual status. For the purposes of analysis, I simplified these differences into a binary variable, with a "1" indicating occupational and "precedence"-based classifications. Model Two of Table A-7 includes this hierarchical classification variable and its interaction with caste status. Neither of these variables has a statistically significant effect on caste mobilization, and the inclusion of these variables does not affect the values of the coefficients for the independent variables of interest.

4.7   The Coding of Jatis

The main models assume that the petition made a claim on behalf of the whole group (even if it was only submitted by a handful of individuals) and that only one petition was submitted on the group's behalf (or, if multiple petitions were submitted, that they were substantially similar in content.) In fact, neither of these conditions is always the case. In some cases, a petition was submitted on behalf of a subcaste of a jati claiming to be either a separate caste or the members of a different jati entirely. In Bengal, for instance, a subcaste of the Kayasth caste claimed to be Kshatriyas while fully admitting the shudra status of the remainder of Kayasths. More rarely, two groups made differing claims on behalf of the whole caste. Model Three of Table A-7 drops these split cases from the analysis, which have no effect on the results.

In section four we discussed the problems presented for the coding for the caste merger movement among Dalits in south India. Not only does it mean that some groups are exiting the dataset (into the artificial "merged castes,") but the broad anti-Brahman or pre-Hindu identity advanced by the campaigners made it difficult to know whether castes were actually active in a political movement or were merely "annexed" by activists from other castes. In addition, the broad environment of the non-Brahman movement in interwar South India could be seen to be an ideological confound affecting all groups. To test this hypothesis, Model Four of Table A-7 excludes the province-years affected by the non-Brahman movement (Madras, Mysore and Hyderabad in 1931 and Mysore in 1921.) This exclusion does not substantively affect the reported results.

4.8   Population Shifts

While the units of observation in this study, jatis, are constant over time, their compositions are not, as individuals could easily shift jati for census purposes. Despite the efforts of census officials, there are frequent references to such shifts in the census records, and such shifts are also detectable in quantitative analysis (e.g. Casson 2010.) A major concern here is that such ground-level status shifts may serve as a substitute for large-scale collective action like petitioning. Any jati that sees a major gain or loss might also see changes in its other covariants do to the influx of outsiders. To test this hypothesis, Model Five of Table A-7 includes a variable for the absolute percentage of gain or loss that a caste had in male population over the previous census year. However, this variable appears to have no significant effect on petitioning or the size of the literacy coefficients.

Additional Works Cited

Sobhanan, B. *Temple Entry Movement and the Sivakasi Riots.* Madurai: Raj, 1985.

Templeman, Dennis. *The Northern Nadars of Tamil Nadu : an Indian Caste In the Process of Change.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Table A.6: Province Level Robustness Checks: Logistic Mixed Effects Regression with Petition as Dependent Variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
VARIABLES	Petitioning	Petitioning	Petitioning	No Hindi Belt	No South
Population as Proportion	11.31**	11.64**	12.08**	11.51*	12.87
	(4.966)	(4.908)	(5.362)	(5.896)	(7.935)
Population 000s	0.000203	0.000167	0.000163	0.000560	0.000208
	(0.000442)	(0.000438)	(0.000453)	(0.000959)	(0.000549)
Male Literacy Rate	6.878**	6.971**	6.380**	8.218***	7.704**
	(2.726)	(2.740)	(2.741)	(3.173)	(3.280)
Male Literacy Rate Sq.	-9.260**	-9.774**	-8.349**	-10.82**	-11.01**
	(4.164)	(4.196)	(4.203)	(4.777)	(5.010)
Local Social Status	6.092*				
	(3.372)				
Prov. Prop. Arya Samaj		-133.3*			
		(78.12)			
Prov. Prop. Christian			43.29**		
			(16.82)		
Prov. Prop. Christian *Caste Status			-8.205**		
			(3.484)		
Constant	2.574	1.995	3.510	-4.801	6.632
	(3.954)	(4.006)	(4.017)	(6.149)	(4.927)
Observations	887	887	887	497	680
Number of groups	1	1	1	1	1
Caste Status FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year RE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Jati RE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1

These are mixed effects logistic models, with fixed effects for caste status, year and province and random effects for Jati and Province-Year. Only the fixed effect constants are reported. The province-year controls, proportion urban, proportion in public employment, provincial population, provincial employment in agriculture, and the provincial literacy rate, are not reported for reasons of space.

Table A.7: Caste Level Robustness Checks: Logistic Mixed Effects Regression with Petition as Dependent Variable

VARIABLES	(1) Petitioning	(2) Petitioning	(3) No Splits	(4) No Combinations	(5) Petitioning
Population as Proportion	11.26**	11.27**	11.29**	9.242	11.18**
	(4.933)	(4.918)	(5.282)	(6.030)	(4.930)
Population 000s	0.000228	0.000228	0.000334	0.000276	0.000181
	(0.000439)	(0.000443)	(0.000457)	(0.000588)	(0.000441)
Male Literacy Rate	7.168***	7.117***	8.961***	7.804**	6.551**
	(2.765)	(2.737)	(3.057)	(3.246)	(2.731)
Male Literacy Rate Sq.	-10.07**	-9.709**	-12.93***	-12.28**	-9.003**
	(4.240)	(4.141)	(4.757)	(5.175)	(4.146)
Petition Grant Rate	1.902**				
	(0.846)				
Hierarchical Census Classification		-1.169			
		(1.094)			
Hierarchical Census Classification * Caste Status		0.201			
		(0.181)			
Change in Population 000s					0.0973
					(0.0836)
Constant	5.376	3.927	6.668	5.455	4.279
	(4.311)	(4.048)	(4.205)	(4.404)	(3.962)
Observations	858	887	820	832	861
Caste Status FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province-Year RE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Jati RE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1

These are mixed effects logistic models, with fixed effects for caste status, year and province and random effects for Jati and Province-Year. Only the fixed effect constants are reported. The province-year controls, proportion urban, proportion in public employment, provincial population, provincial employment in agriculture, and the provincial literacy rate, are not reported for reasons of space.