

**COUNTING HEADS:
A THEORY OF VOTING IN PATRONAGE DEMOCRACIES.**

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To LICEP members:

This is a chapter from my dissertation entitled Why Ethnic Parties Succeed. The chapter lays out a theory of voting in "patronage democracies" with the following four propositions: First, that voters in "patronage democracies" use their vote as an instrument through which to obtain patronage benefits. Second, that such voters expect to obtain greatest access to patronage benefits from politicians belonging to their "own" ethnic category. Third, that voters formulate preferences between parties by counting heads belonging to their "own" ethnic categories across parties. Fourth, that instrumental voters are also strategic voters, who vote for their preferred party only if they expect it to win power or influence after the election and not otherwise. Based on these four propositions, I derive a hypothesis predicting ethnic party success and failure. In the dissertation, the propositions, and the hypothesis about ethnic party success based on them, are tested using data from across Indian states. I am in the process now of revising this chapter for a book manuscript, and would like in the revised version to develop the propositions proposed here and test them using cross-national data. I would appreciate feedback from LICEP members both on the plausibility of the logic outlined here and on devising empirical tests for it outside India. It is a lengthy (although I hope quick!) read – but if you are pressed for time, the most important section on which I would appreciate feedback is Section II (pp 8-23 in the current version).

CHAPTER 2

Counting Heads: A Theory of Voting in Patronage Democracies

“In a severely divided society...an election can become an ethnic headcount...the election is a census and the census is an election.”¹

Articulated most clearly in Horowitz’ 1985 study, the suggestion that voters in “severely divided societies” choose between parties by counting heads belonging to their “own” ethnic categories is by now not surprising. However, it has so far raised more questions than it has answered. All democracies are multi-ethnic but ethnicity is the dominant line of political division only in some but not others. What, exactly, makes a democracy “severely divided” along ethnic lines? What are the motivations of voters who choose parties populated by co-ethnics? Finally, in a world where individuals have multiple ethnic identities, which categories are the relevant ones for an ethnic headcount? Without an answer to the questions posed above, we cannot predict how voters in any democracy are likely to vote. And unless we know how voters vote, we can say little about the conditions under which ethnic parties are likely to succeed.

In this chapter, I propose a theory of voting which incorporates answers to each of these questions into four empirically testable propositions. Section I outlines the proposition that voters in “patronage democracies” use their vote as the means through which to obtain patronage benefits. They may desire such benefits for either their material or their psychic value or both. However, regardless of their motivations, they are instrumental rather than expressive actors who secure their desires through the outcome rather than the act of voting. Section II outlines the proposition that voters expect to obtain greatest access to patronage benefits from politicians belonging to their “own” ethnic category. Section III outlines the proposition that voters formulate preferences between parties by counting heads belonging to their “own” ethnic categories across parties. Section IV outlines the proposition that instrumental voters are also strategic voters, who vote for their preferred party only if they expect it to win power or influence after the election and not otherwise. Based on these propositions, I outline in the conclusion the hypothesis that an ethnic party is most likely to succeed when 1) it enjoys a monopoly on the representation of elites from its target ethnic category and 2) when voters from its target ethnic category are numerous enough to affect the electoral outcome through coordinated action. The theory also generates a range of additional hypotheses about elite behaviour, voter behaviour, and party competition in patronage-democracies. These are identified but not tested here, since they are tangential to the main subject of this study.

¹ Horowitz (1985), 196.

I. Votes are Instruments to Secure Benefits in Patronage-Democracies

The term “democracy” as I use it here refers simply to a system where the political leadership is chosen through competitive elections.² By the term “patronage democracy,” I mean a democracy which fulfils the following two conditions: 1) The public sector dwarfs the private sector as a source of jobs and a provider of services, or a large private sector exists but is under state regulation and 2) Elected officials enjoy significant discretion in allocating the jobs and services controlled by the state. This last condition might be fulfilled when the procedures for appointment to state jobs or implementation of state policy are not well codified. It may also be fulfilled under conditions of widespread illiteracy or large-scale immigration, where an inadequate understanding of the letter of the law among citizens gives state officials discretionary power in practice. Finally, it might be fulfilled under conditions of extreme scarcity, where an excess supply of identically qualified applicants for the same service gives state officials the power to select from among them arbitrarily. A democracy is not patronage based if the (unregulated) private sector is larger than the public sector as a source of jobs and provider of services, or if rules of appointment and procedure are well codified and well understood, or if state resources and services are enough to go around, thus eliminating the discretionary power of those who control their distribution.

The term “patronage-democracy” might apply to the political system as a whole or to subsystems within it. Entire political systems which function as “patronage-democracies” abound particularly in Asia and Africa, where colonial rule left behind a legacy of “big” states: examples of “patronage democracies” in these regions include India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nigeria and Zambia (the last three intermittently). “Patronage democracies” are also likely to be found in the post-communist world, because of the sprawling state apparatuses inherited from Communist rule. Post-industrial democracies, because of the relatively larger size of the private sector, typically do not meet the criteria of a patronage democracy at the level of the system as a whole. City politics in post-industrial societies, however, as the examples in this chapter show, often function as “patronage democracies” in microcosm. Table 2.1a at the end of this chapter, which cross-tabulates “state-dominated economies” with “regime types”, provides an incomplete list of the countries to which the arguments in this chapter should apply.

Since Mancur Olson published *The Logic of Collective Action*³, we have presumed that there are few instrumental reasons to vote.⁴ This presumption rests upon two propositions: 1) The benefit from voting is typically in the form of policies implemented by the voter’s preferred candidate, which all individuals would benefit from, regardless of whether or not they vote. 2) Any single vote is not likely to affect the electoral outcome. Since his vote is not likely to affect the outcome, and since he will benefit if his preferred candidate wins whether or not he votes, it always makes sense for a rational individual to abstain from voting. Consequently, we expect that those who vote do so for a range of expressive reasons: perhaps because they think it is what good

² Huntington (1991), 7.

³ Olson (1971)

⁴ See Fiorina (1976) and Aldrich (1993) for attempts to explain the decision to vote within a rational choice framework.

citizens should do; perhaps because their parents did; perhaps because they want to stand up and be counted for what they believe in; perhaps because of the satisfaction of going to the polling booth with friends and companions. In each of these examples, it is the *act* of voting rather than the *outcome* which gives them satisfaction.

In this section, I will try to show that for most voters in patronage democracies, a single motivation overrides the rest: the need to secure some of the vast benefits at the disposal of the state. Such benefits are highly valued, scarce, and most importantly, private: they are distributed either to individuals (jobs, medical care, university admissions, housing loans, land grants) or micro-communities (roads, schools, electricity, water). And the vote is the currency through which individuals and micro-communities obtain such goods. The “expressive benefits” provided by the act of voting are ephemeral. The pleasure of doing the right thing, or performing a traditional act, or registering an opinion, or participating in shared group activity does not last beyond the brief moment of casting the vote. The ephemeral expressive benefits provided by the act of voting are overshadowed by its utility as an instrument through which to secure the protection, services and opportunities at the disposal of the state. While we might certainly find “expressive voters,” in patronage-democracies, they are likely to be composed mainly of those who, within these societies, are relatively independent of the state. For the majority of voters in a patronage-democracy, however, the state looms large. And for those who belong to this majority, the act of voting carries with it substantial, individualized benefits, and the act of not voting substantial, individualized, costs.

In any society where the state has monopolistic or near monopolistic control over valued benefits, demand exceeds supply, and elected officials have discretionary power in the allocation of such benefits, these officials have incentives to market these benefits far above their actual value.⁵ Basic goods, which all citizens should have automatic access to, become commodities on which officials can collect “rents.” Officials who decide which village gets a road, where the houses financed by a government housing scheme get built, which areas get priority in providing drinking water, whose son gets a government job, whose wife gets access to a bed in a government hospital, and who gets a government loan, are in a position to extract rents from beneficiaries for favouring them over other applicants. I have used here examples of the opportunities for rent seeking by elected officials in their dealings with the poor, who seek basic necessities. However, similar opportunities also exist in dealings with the rich. Industrialists, for example, who must obtain land, permits for building, or licenses for marketing their products, are similarly subject to the discretionary power of state officials, and so offer them similar opportunities for rent-seeking.

In patronage-driven states that are not democratic, the rents that state officials seek are likely to take the form of private wealth, in the form of money, assets, and land. In patronage democracies, however, although rents are also sought in these forms, votes are the most lucrative form of rent, since they provide the opportunity for continued

⁵ This section draws on the extensive literature on rent-seeking and corruption, including, particularly, Bates (1981), North (1990), and Scott (1972).

control of the state. Wherever “patronage democracies” exist, therefore, we should also see a black market for state resources where the currency is votes. Incumbent and aspiring candidates in such democracies should court voter support by making selective promises about how they will allot the considerable resources in their control if they win. And voters should choose between alternative candidates based upon the credibility of their promises.

One immediate objection needs to be addressed before describing the features of this black market and its implications for the character of politics in patronage democracies. Does a secret ballot not prevent the operation of such a black market? Under a secret ballot, there is nothing to deter voters from cheating, by promising their votes to one candidate while casting them in favour of another. And knowing that they cannot enforce their contract, why should elected officials sell state resources on the electoral market?

Where the ballot is truly secret, it should prevent the operation of such a black market. However, because candidates in patronage-democracies have strong incentives to exploit loopholes in the design of the electoral system, and because it is exceedingly difficult to design a “fool-proof” secret ballot that eliminates in advance all possibilities of subversion in the future, we should typically see an imperfect secret ballot in patronage democracies. Incumbent politicians seeking to retain control of the state in a patronage-democracy have two channels open to them: 1) either to cancel the process of competitive elections or 2) to subvert the secret ballot in order to obtain continued voter support by manipulating their discretionary control of resources. In many cases, of which Zaire, Kenya, and Nigeria are only some instances, we have seen political leaders resort frequently to the first option. However, where democracy has persisted, for whatever reason, the subversion of the secret ballot is the principal alternative method which allows incumbent officials a reasonable expectation of retaining control.

Such subversion, furthermore, is easily accomplished. Consider, for example, the design of the voting procedure. In municipal elections in the city of New Haven, for example, a voter who voted for the party ticket for all fifteen municipal offices could do so simply by pulling a lever. Those who chose to split their votes between the two parties for individual candidates could do so only through a time consuming procedure. Even though the ballot was officially “secret,” the method of casting the ballot provided a clear signal about how the individual voted. As Wolfinger points out: “To observers in the polling place, the length of time the voter spent in the booth revealed the strength of his devotion to the party ticket, particularly since a bell would ring when either party lever was pulled. This arrangement ... was an important inducement to straight-ticket voting.”⁶ A second example comes from the procedure through which votes are counted. According to Schaffer’s description of the 1993 elections in Senegal, each polling station accommodated an average of about two hundred voters. The ballots were then counted at each station and posted publicly. As Schaffer notes of this procedure: “Where the electoral choice of each individual elector remained secret, the aggregate results for each (larger) village or group of (smaller) villages did not. Consequently, local level political

⁶ Wolfinger (1974), 23.

patrons were still able to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts and the overall compliance of relatively small groups of voters.”⁷ In the Indian case, which I describe in greater detail in Chapter 3, the procedure of counting votes by polling stations revealed voting patterns by locality until it was recently eliminated. In each of these cases, the secret ballot was implemented to the letter. However, in each case, politicians with an incentive to know how voters voted were able to subvert the secrecy of the ballot by exploiting loopholes in its implementation. Newer and more effective methods of secret balloting, furthermore, are likely to be met only with newer and more effective methods of subversion. The introduction of the Ballot Act of 1872 in England, as Schaffer points out, “put an end to the most flagrant forms of vote buying. More subtle forms of bribery were then invented.”⁸ Similarly, electoral reform in Senegal in 1993 “simply forced patrons to devise new methods of surveillance.”⁹

The essence of the black market for votes that I describe above is that it consists of thousands of *individualized* transactions between candidates and voters carried on in what Scott calls the “penumbra” of politics.¹⁰ State resources cannot be effectively black marketed to entire groups at a time. A “wholesale” delivery to an entire bloc of customers collectively can only take place through openly conducted policy legislation – but such legislation is likely to collide with norms, violate legal constraints, and also be vulnerable to sabotage by the opposition. In India, for example, everybody knows that getting a license to run a gas station is highly lucrative, and gas station licenses are often allotted by state officials as a particular favour. However, no party could actually pass a bill promising gas stations to its supporters. In addition to being illegal, such an act would create a public outcry, probably spearheaded by opposition parties whose own supporters would be placed at a disadvantage.¹¹ The exchange of patronage goods for votes, therefore, takes place of necessity through individualized transactions shielded from the “official” political sphere.

The individualized nature of the patronage transaction poses a problem for both voters and candidates: how to maximize the value of their investment and to ensure delivery. Any individual voter knows that his capacity to purchase a job, a housing loan, or a university slot with his solitary vote is negligible. Any individual vote makes no difference to the overall outcome and so gives the candidate little incentive to provide goods and services in return. The voter, therefore, must find a way to magnify the purchasing power of his vote. Secondly, he must find a way to ensure that the goods his votes purchased are delivered. Once the vote is cast, why should the candidate feel compelled to deliver on his promise? Both problems are solved for the voter by voting on a group basis. By deciding to vote collectively, groups of voters can maximize the purchasing power of their vote. Because bloc votes can make a difference to the

⁷ Schaffer (1998), 136.

⁸ Schaffer (1998), 135.

⁹ Schaffer (1998), 136.

¹⁰ Scott (1972).

¹¹ See Scott (1972), p. 25, who points out that ‘the nature of most political demands in transitional nations is such that they are simply not amenable to the legislative process. Family centred demands – e.g. a family’s desire to secure a civil service post for its eldest son – are generally not expressible in legislative terms.’

outcome, their value to the candidate goes up. Further, collective organization makes it easier for voters to ensure delivery. A candidate who does not deliver on his promise can be punished by the defection of the group as a whole, with a corresponding negative effect on his future electoral prospects. Group voting reduces each individual's access to private goods (jobs, medical care, and housing), since the supply of these goods is limited, and only some individuals in the group will obtain them. However, it gives those individuals in the group who are denied these benefits some expectation that their turn will come in the future. Such individuals are still better off than they would have been if they had voted individually. And it also holds out the promise of securing selective goods for the bloc as a whole, including police protection, water, roads, and schools, at the expense of other blocs.

For the candidate, the problem is how to convert his stock of jobs, favours and resources into collective support. No matter how large the supply of jobs, services, resources and influence at his disposal, it will always be far smaller than the number of votes he needs in order to win. A procedure where each favour buys one vote would never produce his desired outcome. The candidate's problem, therefore, is how to magnify the value of his investment, so that each favour brings with it the support of others besides the direct recipient. The candidate, therefore, also has an incentive to target his favours to groups rather than individuals. Dealing with groups has two advantages. First, it converts a zero-sum game into a positive-sum game. If he had been dealing with individuals, a favour given to one individual would be a favour denied to another. It would cost him as much as it would gain. In dealings with groups, however, a favour given to one group member sends a signal to others in the group that they can count on him in the future. As such, it wins him support even from those denied favours in the present. Secondly, dealing with groups makes it easy for the politician to monitor the contract. Obtaining information about individual voting behaviour, which requires personalized knowledge of individual decisions and behaviour, is costly and often impossible. However, groups can also be infiltrated more easily, and group voting behaviour can be monitored through collective institutions.

Electoral politics in patronage democracies, therefore, should take the form of a self-enforcing equilibrium of "bloc voting", maintained by the incentives voters have to organize collectively, and the incentives candidates have to encourage collective voting. In principle, such voting "blocs" might be organized on any basis: neighbourhoods, trade unions, language associations, guilds, churches, and so on. But in the next section, I will show why patronage politics privileges ethnic voting blocs in particular.

Before moving to the next section, however, let me return to the implications of this argument for theories of voting behaviour. If the argument proposed here is correct, then voting in patronage-democracies should not be viewed as a variant of the collective action problem. The following statements, made by an American voter and a Senegalese voter, illustrate well the contrast between the value of the vote in patronage-democracies and elsewhere. For Aldrich, speaking as an American voter:

It is not at all clear that having Dukakis as president would make my life, nor even the country's all that different from having Bush as president. It is far less clear that it makes a great deal of difference who represents my district in Congress. After all, he or she is but one out of 435 to begin with, and it is not that obvious that having a Republican Senate from 1981 to 1987 made much difference from having a Democratic Senate before or since then. There is some difference to be sure, but not that much.¹²

For the Senegalese voter, however, voting means the exchange of political support for basic goods necessary for survival and advancement. According to her: "If you don't belong to the party [the PS] you are nothing. You can't resolve any of your problems. Life is expensive and there is no money."¹³ In patronage-democracies, where the value of the vote is so high, the puzzling question is not explaining why individuals vote, but explaining why some do not.¹⁴

II. Voters in Patronage Democracies Expect To Obtain Greatest Access to Benefits From Politicians From Their "Own" Ethnic Category

How do voters in patronage-democracies formulate expectations about access to patronage benefits? The best source of data they have comes not from what politicians say they will do in the realm of official politics, but from what they actually do in the realm of unofficial politics. As I argued in Section I, the distinguishing aspect of patronage politics is that it consists, not of openly transferred collective benefits, but of thousands of individualized, covert, transactions. Voters trying to discover how politicians allot patronage benefits, therefore, will find little information in the realm of policy debate or in policy legislation. However, those who look in the shadows, at who got rich under which government and who did not, whose sons got jobs and whose did not, whose villages got roads and electricity, and whose did not, will find plenty of information. These data on past patronage transactions enable them to formulate a theory about how parties decided to allot patronage benefits in the past, which is their best guide to how they will allot benefits in the future.

Voters typically have very superficial information about the beneficiaries of patronage transactions. They learn about such beneficiaries by observing hangers-on at party offices, hearing about favours through rumour, or reading the names of job appointees in the newspapers, but they seldom know them intimately. The limited information available to voters, I argue here, biases them towards an ethnic classification of the beneficiaries and therefore towards theories of ethnic favoritism. In interactions with such limited information, as I will show below, observers can immediately code the observed on the basis of their ethnic identities, but do not possess the means to classify them according to their non-ethnic identities. Consequently, watchful voters surveying patronage transactions "see" beneficiaries through an ethnic prism, and conclude that

¹² Aldrich(1993), 263.

¹³ Schaffer (1998), 76.

¹⁴ One hypothesis suggested by the argument here is that there should be a positive relationship between the degree of dependence of voters upon the state and turnout rates. Within patronage-democracies, therefore, we should expect groups dependent upon the state for their livelihood to turn out at higher rates than groups who because of greater education or greater pre-existing wealth are less dependent.

politicians allot favours on the basis of ethnic identity, whether or not ethnic favouritism actually entered into the decision. Politicians, in turn, know that whether or not they consider ethnic identities in allotting patronage benefits, they will be perceived as helping members of one ethnic category or another. Consequently, they will, at a minimum, favour members of their “own” category, variously defined, since this gives them a comparative advantage over their competitors. Voters note, in turn, that politicians always favour at least their “own” ethnic category, whether or not they pass the largesse on to those who belong to other categories. Consequently, in a self-fulfilling cycle, they conclude that their best hope of access to patronage benefits depends upon being from the same ethnic category as the politician. The argument implies that wherever we find patronage politics, we should also find expectations of ethnic favouritism. Because voters belong to multiple ethnic categories, and politicians have an incentive to manipulate their identifications with these categories, the category which they identify with as their “own” ethnic category is likely to vary with the character of political competition. However, the expectation that voters and politicians help their “own” first should be constant.

The observation that patronage politics and expectations of ethnic favouritism tend to go together reflects a well documented consensus among scholars of patronage-democracies. According to Kearney, a student of Sri Lanka: “A common expectation seems to be that a person holding a public office or other position of power will use his position for the near-exclusive benefit of his “own” people, defined by kinship, community or personal loyalty.”¹⁵ According to Haroun Adamu, a student of Nigerian politics: “It is strongly believed in this country that if you do not have one of your own kin in the local, state and/or national decision-making bodies, nobody would care to take your troubles before the decision makers, much less find solutions to them.”¹⁶ Kenneth Post’s description of elections in Nigeria emphasizes much the same point: “It was rare for a man to stand for election in a constituency which did not contain the community in which he was born. It did not matter if he had been educated elsewhere and had his business interests outside the community in which he was born, so long as he regarded it as his home. He would still be a better representative for it than someone who came from outside, who could not even speak in the same tongue.”¹⁷ According to Chabal, speaking of Africa in general: “All politicians, whether elected locally or nationally, are expected to act as the spokespeople and torchbearers of their community.”¹⁸ And Posner’s systematic investigation of voter expectations in Zambia in the 1990s found that the assumption that politicians in power will favour their own ethnic group was practically “an axiom of politics.”¹⁹

However, the argument that the perceptual bias inherent in the patronage transaction is the explanation for self-fulfilling expectations of ethnic favouritism constitutes a significant departure from previous attempts at explaining the link between patronage politics and the political salience of ethnic identifications, and has different

¹⁵ Kearney (1973), 8.

¹⁶ Cited in Joseph (1987), 67.

¹⁷ Post (1963), 391.

¹⁸ Chabal and Daloz (1999), 99.

¹⁹ Posner (1998), 118.

observable implications. I develop this argument further in the paragraphs that follow, before evaluating it against the alternatives.

The argument here is built upon the insight by Frederik Barth that ethnic groups are defined, not by internal homogeneity, but by the possession of a limited set of “cultural differentia” which separate insiders from outsiders.²⁰ Although all individuals possess ethnic and non-ethnic identities, only their ethnic identities are marked by these “cultural differentia.” These “differentia,” I argue here, allow the outside observer to sort individuals into ethnic categories in a relatively superficial interaction. Let me illustrate with a personal example. I am a nominal member of at least the following ethnic categories: Asian, South Asian, Indian, North-Indian, Hindu, Hindi-speaker, and so on. Each of these categories is associated with a set of cultural and physical markers (name, features, skin colour, hair, language, dress, and accent). Obviously, there is considerable heterogeneity among the “insiders” in any of the categories to which I nominally belong. Individuals who would all qualify as “insiders” in the category of “South Asian”, for example, differ considerably in names, skin colour, diet, dress and language. However, the possession of a combination of such markers draws a boundary line between insiders and outsiders, notwithstanding the heterogeneity within.

By looking at these markers, an external observer could classify me easily into one or more of the ethnic categories to which I belong without any additional information. The precise categories in which she places me would vary with the context and her own “cultural literacy.” Perhaps the marker most packed with information is the name, which in many cases is sufficient in itself to yield fairly precise information about several of an individual’s ethnic identities. My name, for example, stores the information that I belong to at least the following categories: Asian/South Asian/Indian/North-Indian/Hindu. Observers who come across my name in a newspaper or hear it mentioned by someone else might place me in any of these categories, depending upon the context and their own level of background knowledge. It also stores the information that I do not belong to a range of other categories: Sikh/Muslim/Jewish/Malayali/Black/White. Even those observers who might not be able to place me in any of the categories to which I belong, might at a minimum, be able to eliminate ethnic categories to which I do not belong. Other markers, taken individually, may carry less information. But taken in combination, they transmit similar cues. By looking at my skin colour, hair and features, a relatively unsophisticated observer who encounters me in a Boston subway might guess that I am “Asian” or at any rate, of Asian origin, without a word exchanged. A more sophisticated observer, confronted with the information in the same context, might classify me as South Asian, or of South Asian origin. And the same observer, confronted with the same information in Delhi rather than Boston would probably be able to use it to place me in narrower, more precise categories.

Note, first, that the possession of these markers does not yield any single or objectively correct classification. Different observers would code me differently, depending upon the information they could bring to bear on the interpretation of the

²⁰ Barth (1969), 15-16.

markers. Second, even if all observers used the same information, considerable uncertainty might remain. It is often difficult, for example, for even the most sophisticated observers to distinguish between individuals from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh simply by looking at physical features or names. Third, regardless, or even because of, her level of sophistication, the observer might simply get it wrong. Most Indians, for example, miscode me as Tamil or Bengali, when I am “really” North-Indian. Fourth, the categories in which the observer places me need have no relationship to the categories with which I identify. I might think of myself primarily as a student, rather than as a Hindu or an Indian or a North-Indian, or Asian or whatever. However, the categories in which observers place me need have no relation to the categories in which I place myself. The key point here is that notwithstanding the considerable heterogeneity within any single category, the different perspectives of different observers, the considerable room for ambiguity and error, and the individual’s degree of identification with any of these categories, these physical and cultural markers convey enough information for most observers to classify the individual in some category or another. Just as importantly, observers can also identify the categories in which the individual is not eligible for membership. And depending upon how they categorize themselves, they can make a judgement about whether the individual is one of them or not.

An individual’s non-ethnic identities do not come with these “differentiae” attached. Take class, for example, which we might think is also signaled by similar cues, including accent, dress and manner. “There is an elite look in this country,” notes Paul Fussell. “It requires women to be thin, with a hairstyle dating back eighteen or twenty years or so....They wear superbly fitting dresses and expensive but always understated shoes and handbags, with very little jewelry. They wear scarves – these instantly betoken class, because they are useless except as a caste mark. Men should be thin. No jewelry at all. No cigarette case. Moderate-length hair, never dyed or tinted, which is a middle-class or high-prole sign....”²¹ Fussell’s tongue-in-cheek account underlines the existence of a number of cues that give away class identity. The story of upwardly mobile individuals seeking entry into a higher class stratum, in fact, is precisely the story of an attempt to drop “giveaways” associated with the lower stratum and acquire those of the upper stratum. If we look closely at the cues associated with class identity, however, it quickly becomes clear that they are few, and that the information they convey is sparse. First, and perhaps most important, information about class identity is typically not contained in the name. When class and ethnic distinctions coincide, observers might infer class from name, substituting ethnic for class markers. Where class and ethnic identity do not coincide, however, it is typically impossible to code an individual’s class identity from her name. Prominent exceptions (e.g. Rockefeller) prove the rule. Second, the remaining cues permit the observer to draw distinctions only when the signals are particularly dramatic. A prominently patrician accent, or ostentatiously big hair might send out signals to the observer about the individual’s class identity. However, unless these cues are dramatic, it is difficult to classify individuals. Third, even when dramatically displayed, class cues enable the observer to draw only broad distinctions at the extremes. They might tell the observer whether the observed comes from an upper-class or working-class background. However, they do not convey sufficient information

²¹ Fussel (1983), 54.

to categorize the large amorphous mass in between. More precise class distinctions can be revealed only by obtaining additional information on the personal background of each individual (income, occupation, address, level of education, parents' occupation).

Consider another example. Imagine a society in which all individuals can be objectively classified as either “rich” or “poor.” We could get at this objective reality simply by looking at the income distribution of a population and categorizing those above a given income level as rich and those below as poor. It may even have a subjective reality for those included in these categories. Political mobilization, for example, may have made people aware of the categories in which they have been placed, so that those who are categorized as “rich” perceive themselves as being members of an imagined community of the rich while those who are poor experience themselves as being “poor” and part of an imagined community of the poor. However, how would individuals from either category sort others into insiders and outsiders in impersonal interactions? As in the case of class, it is normally impossible to infer income from the name, unless income and ethnic categories coincide. And as in the case of class, cues of dress and manner make it easy to classify individuals only when they are dramatic and only at the extremes. Someone dressed in rags might be coded as “poor” without difficulty, while someone with ostentatious diamond jewelry might be coded as “rich.” But barring these dramatic signals, the only way to code the “rich” and “poor” would be to procure personalized information on their economic background and lifestyle. In superficial interactions, observers who belong to the “rich” and “poor” categories would simply not be able to “recognize” whether an individual belonged to their category or not. Other non-ethnic categorizations (urban v/s/ rural; landed v/s landless; farmer v/s peasant v/s worker) come with a similar lack of differentiating markers.

The lack of differentiating markers attached to non-ethnic identities means that in any individualized interaction with limited information, observers concerned with classification will of necessity sort individuals based on their ethnic rather than non-ethnic identities. This has critical implications for patronage politics. It means that voters concerned with assessing who benefited under which regime will always code beneficiaries on the basis of one of their many ethnic identities, whether or not these identities were actually relevant in securing benefits. Consider the following two examples:

“When in the middle of the nineteenth century,” writes Wolfinger of politics in New Haven, “the first Irishman was nominated for public office, this was “recognition by the party of the statesmanlike qualities of the Irish, seen and appreciated by many Irishmen.”²² Apart from being Irish, the nominee was presumably many other things. Imagine, for instance, that he was a worker, or possessed particular professional qualifications for the office, or was known to be an influential neighbourhood leader. Those who knew him personally might interpret the nomination as an act that recognized his identity as a worker, or his qualifications, or his influence among his peers, or a variety of other considerations. However, those who did not know him but encountered him in a government office or read his name in the newspaper or heard him speak on the

²² Wolfinger (1974), 36.

radio would have identified him purely on the basis of one of his ethnic identities, helped along by name, accent, manner, or any of the cultural differentiae that he happened to carry. It is not surprising then, that the nomination was widely “seen and appreciated” as an act recognizing the Irish. Even if it had not been intended as such, it would be impossible for most voters to interpret it in any other way.

Consider another example, from Posner’s study of patronage politics in Zambia. A newspaper column, concerned with describing the extent of in-group favouritism in Zambia noted: “There are organizations in this country, even foreign-owned for that matter, where almost every name, from the manager down to the office orderly, belongs to one region. . . . In this country, professionally qualified youngsters never find jobs if they belong to the “wrong” tribes. When you enter certain . . . offices, you get the impression they are tribal establishments”²³ How did the author of this article know that certain tribes were being favoured and others were not? The article identifies two sources of information: names, and superficial observation of the staff in certain offices. Both these cues, as I argued above, provide clues to the ethnic identity of the individuals concerned but say little or nothing about non-ethnic identities. Even had he or she wanted to, the author of this article could not have coded the beneficiaries on a non-ethnic basis based on these sources of information. Imagine that those given jobs in any one office, for example, were only coincidentally from the same ethnic group. Perhaps the real tie that got them their jobs was that they all went to the same school. Although the “true” criterion for distributing benefits in this case would have been membership in an old boy network rather than ethnic affinity, this criterion would be invisible to the outside observer.

In these and other examples, those who are intimately acquainted with the beneficiaries might code them in complex ways. However, most outside observers would only be able to sort them into ethnic categories. Such sorting need not be standardized: as I pointed out earlier, different observers might allot the same beneficiary to different ethnic categories, or misidentify the individual to one category when they really belong to another. Political entrepreneurs, I will argue later, will attempt to manipulate this ambiguity, encouraging voters to code beneficiaries in categories that give them a political advantage. However, the key point here is that information about patronage transactions is processed and transmitted through a process that amplifies signals revealing the ethnic identities of the beneficiary and suppresses his non-ethnic identities.

Consider now what this means for the expectations of politicians and voters in patronage democracies. Political entrepreneurs know that they will obtain voter support only by promising some bloc of voters relatively greater access to these individualized benefits. In principle such a bloc need not be ethnic. A politician might announce an affinity with blocs such as the “poor”, the “farmers”, or the “rural masses,” to cite a few examples. He might even promise to favour this block through open declaration: “I promise to help category X, since it is particularly disadvantaged.” However, as I argued earlier, voters will evaluate the credibility of this promise by observed action on the ground. And their observational space, for the reasons given above, is beset with ethnic

²³ *The Post*, 24 January 1996, cited in Posner (1998), 116.

signals. Even if the politician promises benefits to members of a non-ethnic category, voters who observe his actions will always “see” him as favouring some ethnic category or set of categories in practice. Further, voters will “see” politicians too as belonging to some ethnic category or another. With elementary information about politician and beneficiary, they can perform a matching exercise, to see whether politicians from one ethnic category serve mainly members of their own ethnic categories or others. However, they will not be able to transcend the perceptual grid of ethnic identities.

Because individual voters ‘see’ beneficiaries and politicians only on an ethnic basis, it follows that politicians will only distribute patronage benefits only on an ethnic basis. From the point of view of politicians, there is no payoff to helping individuals from some non-ethnic category, since such an act would simply be discounted. The political entrepreneur knows that the only credible promises he can make are promises to help some ethnic category or another. Consequently, he has no option but to allot favours on an ethnic basis. As long as the politician is forced to favour some ethnic category, he will, at a minimum, help members of his “own” category, since this gives him a comparative advantage over his competitors. However, where his “own” ethnic category is not sufficiently large to produce a favourable outcome, he may also attempt to channel patronage benefits to some broader mosaic of ethnic categories. Watchful voters, in turn, will observe that politicians always favour at least voters from their own ethnic category. Consequently, in a self-fulfilling cycle, they will conclude that their best hope of access to patronage benefits depends upon having their “own” man in power.

Over time, this cycle of expectations assumes a life of its own, structuring the expectations of subsequent entrants. New politicians, faced with a playing field in which all others appear to be helping voters from their “own” ethnic category, are forced to court the support of co-ethnics if they want to remain in the game. And new voters, faced with a playing field in which all other voters appear to be best served by politicians from their “own” category, are forced to throw their support behind co-ethnics, since their chances of obtaining benefits from those not from their own ethnic category are dim. It also generates additional reinforcing mechanisms. Over repeated elections voters acquire a store of fairly precise information about the ethnic identities of political entrepreneurs and those whom they favoured in the past to assist them in predicting the behaviour of these entrepreneurs in the future. Similarly, politicians build a store of information about the relative numerical strength of different ethnic blocs, defined on different dimensions, to assist them in formulating profitable strategies. Neither voter nor politician has any incentive to collect and store comparable information on non-ethnic categories. As a result, ethnic identities become progressively more “real” and non-ethnic identities progressively more invisible, over repeated interactions. Finally, the cycle of expectations built around patronage transactions during elections is likely also to spill over into the broader political arena, turning the notion that politicians favour their own, and voters vote for their own, into a “basic axiom of politics.”²⁴ Patronage politics and ethnic politics are thus locked into a stranglehold, with the one reinforcing the other.

²⁴ Posner (1998)

The proposition that the perceptual biases inherent in the patronage transaction are responsible for generating self-fulfilling expectations of ethnic favouritism among voters and politicians constitutes a departure from the theoretical literature on ethnic mobilization. This literature is not directly concerned with explaining the emergence of such a cycle. The questions it asks are related but different: When and why do ethnic groups form? When does one type of cleavage become politically salient rather than other? When do ethnic groups fight? When does ethnic identity become a basis for political coalition building? However, directly or indirectly, this literature offers different hypotheses for the link between patronage politics and ethnic politics, with different observable implications. For the remainder of this section, I show why these hypotheses are unsatisfying, and why it is important to understand the hitherto unidentified role played by perceptual variables.

One hypothesis explaining this cycle comes from “historical-institutionalist” approaches to ethnic politics, which highlight the role of the colonial state in politicizing certain identities and depoliticizing others.²⁵ The policies followed by the colonial administration, according to this body of literature, imposed a set of categories upon colonized populations which privileged ethnic identities more generally over non-ethnic identities. The precise ethnic categories privileged by the colonial state differed across cases: in Yorubaland, it privileged tribal identities; in Northern Nigeria, it privileged religious identities;²⁶ in India, it also privileged religious identities at the national level, while caste identities were privileged in some provinces;²⁷ and in Zambia, it privileged tribal and linguistic identities.²⁸ Once imposed, however, these administrative categorizations came to dominate the commonsensical framework of both citizens and political entrepreneurs about which identities were politically relevant, and which were not. These commonsensical frameworks then persisted well into the post-colonial period, particularly when the ethnic categories privileged under colonial rule were internalized in the design of post-colonial institutions.

This body of work suggests that there is nothing inherent in the nature of the patronage transaction which produces the cycle of self-fulfilling expectations of ethnic favouritism. Rather, it tells us that the expectations of ethnic favouritism have their roots in the institutional legacy of colonial rule which forces citizens and politicians alike to treat only ethnic identities as politically relevant and blinds them to the political potential of non-ethnic identities. Had the colonial state privileged non-ethnic identities, the reasoning implies, then voters and elites in post-colonial states would have treated non-ethnic identities as politically relevant, and formed expectations of in-group favouritism where the reference group was non-ethnic in nature.

This hypothesis is unsatisfying in part because expectations that all men, voters and politicians, will prefer co-ethnics in their political behaviour, appear also in contexts not characterized by a history of colonial rule. In American cities, for example, which do

²⁵ Laitin (1986), Posner (1998), Cohn (1987), Fox (1985), Pandey (1992)

²⁶ Laitin (1986)

²⁷ Pandey (1992)

²⁸ Posner (1998)

not have a history of colonialism, we still find that voters gauged access to benefits by coding the ethnic identities of their political representatives, and political representatives in turn relied upon voters from their “own” categories for their votes.²⁹ If administrative categorizations imposed by the colonial state are responsible for privileging ethnic identity as a political signal then why should we see the same phenomenon in patronage democracies elsewhere?

In itself, this objection suggests grounds for reformulation of the hypothesis above but does not refute it. Perhaps if we probed the history of American cities, the architects of this hypothesis might argue, we would find institutional structures that played a comparable role in “classifying” their populations as colonial states did in Asia and Africa. If so, then the broad thrust of the argument, which locates the privileging of ethnic identity in institutional legacies would be preserved, although the precise institution that imposed such categories might vary across contexts.

The more important reason that renders this hypothesis unsatisfying is that it is characterized by an endogeneity problem: Did the privileging of ethnic over non-ethnic identities follow from the structures of classification imposed by the colonial state? Or did the structures of classification imposed by the colonial state reflect perceptions on the part of the state and the colonized populations about which identities were already salient? Colonial states appear to have imposed ethnic categorizations across the board, although the type of ethnic identity they privileged in their classificatory schemes has differed. This systematic privileging of ethnic identities cannot have been coincidental. Indeed, if we look at accounts of how the colonial states arrived at their categorizations, we find that the privileging of ethnic classifications appears at least in part to be related to perceptions about which cleavages were salient. In Laitin’s account of northern Nigeria, for example, the menu that the British chose from included only from two options: tribe and religion. There is no reference to their relying upon individuals or groups defined by non-ethnic categories to perpetuate their rule. Once the policy of the colonial administration was in place, it undoubtedly strengthened tribal identity further in relation to religious identity; and it undoubtedly strengthened ethnic identities, taken together, in relation to non-ethnic identities. However, non-ethnic identities do not appear to have even been on the initial menu of options that they initially perceived to be relevant. Similarly, in India, colonial policies classified heterogeneous populations with localized and fragmented identities into religious categories at the national level. However, it would be hard to argue that British colonial policy set out to “erase” non-ethnic categories. Rather, the British were operating within a conceptual framework which “saw” ethnic communities as the principal interest groups in India, and chose religion from a menu of purely ethnic options.

If we accept the colonial state was even in part *reacting* to the *perceived* importance of the cleavages it found at some initial point, then the institutional legacy of colonial rule cannot be treated as an exogenous variable explaining the subsequent dominance of ethnic categorizations in post-colonial politics. Rather, it simply takes us a few decades back, to the question of why it is that ethnic cleavages *appeared* to be more

²⁹ Katznelson (1981), and Wolfinger (1974).

important than non-ethnic cleavages at some initial point. The argument that I have made here offers an explanation for these initial perceptions. It suggests that the cultural diacritica that uniquely accompany ethnic identities render them more visible than non-ethnic identities and so more amenable to classificatory enterprises by external observers. This greater “visibility”, I argue, accounts for the tendency of colonial states to privilege ethnic identities in their initial classificatory systems. Once imposed, these classificatory schemes no doubt reinforce the importance of ethnic identity in structuring expectations of patronage. However, to the extent that the classificatory systems imposed by the colonial state are themselves best described as a response to the greater “visibility” of ethnic identities, they are endogenous to the explanation.

To argue that colonial classifications are endogenous to the explanation is not to deny the enormous historical impact of colonial rule in other respects. Colonial rule, I should point out, has been of critical importance in building many of the sprawling states which later gave way to patronage democracies. And once theories of ethnic group favouritism have been established, colonial institutions had an important role in encouraging political entrepreneurs to activate some ethnic categories rather than others. However, in the production of theories of ethnic group favouritism among voters and politicians in patronage democracies, colonial classifications should be viewed as playing only a reinforcing but not a causal role. The argument that I make here predicts that we should find theories of in-group favouritism across patronage democracies, whether or not these democracies share comparable institutional legacies.

A second hypothesis lays the primary explanatory burden for the cycle on the “dense social networks” presumed to bind members of ethnic groups together. Such dense networks might arise out of the spatial concentration of ethnic groups, in urban neighbourhoods, or village hamlets, or artificially constructed “homelands” created under colonial rule. They might arise, alternatively, out of shared membership in ethnic organizations, including churches, or mosques, or language clubs or tribal and caste associations. Such networks might facilitate a patronage transaction through one of two possible mechanisms: 1) By providing “readymade” channels through which requests can be made and benefits distributed, they might convince voters that the most efficient way to get their voices heard is by approaching co-ethnics, and politicians that the most efficient way to obtain votes is by approaching co-ethnics. We see this mechanism at work, for example, in machine politics in American cities, where the “gangs, firehouses, secret societies and saloons”³⁰ in ethnically homogeneous wards became the principal sites in which voters and politicians interacted and patronage transactions were conducted. 2) By providing both voters and politicians with the means to enforce compliance of patronage contracts, thus leading both to conclude that co-ethnics are the most suitable partners in a patronage transaction.

Dense social networks make it possible to enforce contracts in two ways. They “allow for cheap and rapid transmission of information about individuals and their past histories”³¹ and so make defection costly. And they provide the means to punish

³⁰ Katznelson (1981), 56.

³¹ Fearon and Laitin (1996), 718.

defectors, by withholding prestige, or “excommunicating members” or even denying them valued material goods.³²

This hypothesis suggests that the cycle of self-fulfilling expectations I describe above has an objective basis. Voters are partial to co-ethnics because the social networks that bind them together are objectively the best means through which they can obtain these benefits. Similarly, politicians are partial to co-ethnics because of the demonstrated superiority of ethnic networks over others in enabling them to collect votes. Each side expects the other to favour individuals from their “own” ethnic category not because they do not see any alternative to ethnic favouritism, but because ethnic favouritism is objectively the best of the available alternatives.

This powerful explanation was my initial working hypothesis. However, it is also unsatisfying upon closer analysis. Like the historical institutionalist hypothesis above, it suffers from an endogeneity problem. As I will show in the discussion below, the dense social networks which characterize ethnic groups, whether they are spatial, organizational or extended kinship networks, are an outcome of a process by which individuals privilege their ethnic identifications over others rather than its cause. Once individuals choose to invest in them, these networks undoubtedly facilitate patronage transactions. However, we can in principle imagine some initial point when individuals might equally well have invested in non-ethnic networks but chose not to. If this is the case then we cannot argue that the cycle of self-fulfilling expectations of ethnic favouritism develops out of these networks – rather the cause of this cycle must be traced to the variable which leads individuals to form and maintain these intra-ethnic networks in the first place.

Consider the “fact” of spatial clustering of ethnic categories which in turn leads to the formation of dense social networks among those who share a common space. If we look at “ethnically homogeneous clusters”, however, it soon becomes clear that the homogeneity we perceive is an artifact of the boundaries we draw. Take an example from Correa’s study of neighbourhoods in north-western Queens. Correa found that the “natural” boundaries that demarcated ethnic communities were not dictated by geography but were generated and maintained by perceptions of difference. As he points out of Roosevelt Avenue, which divided “white ethnics” from “new immigrants”: “Why should Roosevelt Avenue [or Junction Boulevard] be considered natural boundaries? Roosevelt has two lanes of traffic, with the number 7 train built overhead – a major transportation route into Manhattan. The street is lined with shops, restaurants, and travel agencies. It is a vibrant and congested street, and an important space for pedestrians.³³ While objectively speaking, Roosevelt Avenue does not constitute a “natural” dividing line, it has nevertheless become one in the minds of those who live on either side: “Roosevelt has become the main thoroughfare for newer immigrants in the area, but most older white ethnic residents avoid it. For them, it has “a completely different lifestyle. Its South American, Hispanic... Completely different.”³⁴ If we, as external observers, treat Roosevelt Avenue as an objective boundary, we would see two ethnically homogeneous

³² For the ability of voters to sanction co-ethnics, see particularly Bates (1983) and Bates (1999)

³³ Jones-Correa (1998), 25

³⁴ Jones-Correa, citing an interview with a white respondent, p. 25

clusters, composed of whites on the one side, and Hispanic immigrants on the other. However, if we drew a different boundary line, we would see ethnically mixed clusters. This example illustrates that the appearance of spatial concentration among ethnic groups and the social networks which rise out of such concentration are themselves a product of some process which compels individuals and observers to organize their world by privileging ethnic identities over others.

Consider now the following additional examples, each of which describes the tendency of individuals in initially mixed populations to sort themselves and others into ethnically homogeneous clusters.

In a “natural experiment” conducted in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) in 1951-1954, the anthropologist J. C. Mitchell attempted to explore whether single men who migrated to industrial centres chose to live with co-ethnics or ethnically proximate individuals or whether they chose to cluster together on the basis of some other criteria. As he notes:

When unattached men migrate to industrial centres, they frequently do so in groups from the same village or district in the rural areas, and therefore seek accommodation together. If they are allocated accommodation with others they usually seek the first opportunity they can to move into rooms where the company is more congenial to them. The administrative officials do not usually raise objections to this procedure since for them it involves a transfer within the same type of accommodation. Over time, therefore, the composition of groups of men occupying single quarters reflects to a large extent their choices of the companions with whom they prefer to live. The composition of single quarters therefore provides one means of examining whether or not behaviour is influenced by ethnic identity.³⁵

Mitchell found that over time, men indeed tended to cluster into living arrangements that included either co-ethnics or members of ethnically proximate categories.

In a field study of Pakistani immigrants in Great Britain, Badr Dahya describes the arrival of “some thirty-odd Asian merchant seamen (among whom were Sikhs and Muslims from undivided India and Yemenis)” who arrived in Birmingham in 1940. When Dahya visited Birmingham in 1956, he found that:

...The immigrants had already “sorted” themselves out on the basis of national origins and ethnicity (that is, on factors such as language/dialect, religion/sect, and area of origin). Pakistanis had moved across to Moseley/Sparkbrook, and to Small Heath and Aston; most of the Jat Sikhs (landowning castes by origin) had moved to places such as Smethwick and Wolverhampton and a few had gone to Sparkbrook, whereas Ramgarhia Sikhs (artisan castes by origin) had settled a little to the south of the primary area and established themselves in two or three streets off Edward Road where they are found to

³⁵ Mitchell (1974), 11.

this day with their Gurdwara on the corner of Mary and Hallam Streets... Similarly most of the Yemenis moved to the area south of Edward Road and to parts of Moseley...³⁶

Robert Ernst's description of the residential choices made by newly arriving, initially mixed immigrant populations in New York reveals a similar drive among individuals to sort themselves and others using ethnic classifications rather than others: "Whether in shanty towns or in the commercial districts, whether along the waterfront or in the Five Points, immigrant settlers drew to their area others having the same nationality, language, religion or race. Once a nucleus was established toward which later arrivals were attracted, the cohesive bond resulting from consciousness of similarity tended to replace the magnetic forces of cheap shelter and ready employment."³⁷

The several examples above all point to the same process: Initially heterogeneous populations, placed in an initially mixed space, quickly sort themselves into ethnically homogeneous clusters. Once these clusters are formed, it is not surprising that individuals interact closely with those who reside within these clusters and intermittently with those who reside outside. And once such dense social networks spring up within ethnically homogeneous clusters, they no doubt facilitate patronage transactions. However, these networks are endogenous to the explanation. If we are to explain why ethnic identity is favoured in patronage transactions, we must explain why individuals favour co-ethnics in their choice of whom to interact with most closely. The hypothesis that I have advanced in this section offers such an explanation. In all the examples above, individuals, motivated by the desire for familiarity in a strange place, sought to associate with others like themselves. Had they possessed extensive information about each others' backgrounds, they may have been able to discover similarities based on occupation, temperament, education, interests, background, or a range of other characteristics. However in each of the examples above, they had limited information about the strangers they found themselves with. In a classificatory enterprise with limited information, as I argued above, ethnic identity is all they have to work with in deciding who is "one of them" and who is not. To the extent that the greater "visibility" of ethnic identities explains the decision by individuals to invest in intra-ethnic networks, it should be viewed as the root cause of the cycle of self-fulfilling expectations described above.

Let me move now from spatial to organizational networks. Although intra-ethnic organizational networks may certainly favour patronage transactions, we will find, by looking far enough, that individuals who invest in ethnic organizational networks have available to them the option of investing equally in non-ethnic networks as well. However, we typically find non-ethnic networks to be less attractive to both voters and politicians than the ethnic alternatives. Take, for example, Foner's description of trade unions in New York:

Quite often, several nationalities united within the same labor organization, as in the Upholsterers Union in New York which had among its membership in 1850 German-American, Irish American, French-Canadian, English, and native American workers.

³⁶ Dahya (1974), 96.

³⁷ Cited in Katznelson (1981), 51.

The Tailors Union of New York was made up of native American and German-American workers. At first they were not on the best of terms, but police brutality, impartial as to a worker's national origin, during a strike made for greater understanding."³⁸

We have no reason to imagine that the ties which bind together co-members in a trade union should be any less strong than ties which bind co-members in a church or a language association or some other ethnic association. Union members spend long hours together throughout the work-week, experience the same working conditions, and often a shared enemy in the management. In fact, those who share membership in a trade union are more likely to know each other intimately, by dint of working together on a daily basis than those who share membership in an ethnic association, which typically meets intermittently. Surprisingly, however, such trade unions do not provide potent channels for patronage transactions. As Katznelson points out, parties concerned with distributing patronage in New York City bypassed the trade union as a channel for distributing patronage and concentrated instead on ethnic networks.³⁹ The greater political salience of ethnic organizational networks in spite of the non-ethnic alternatives is not simply a New York phenomenon. Varshney's study of agricultural politics in India, to cite another example, revealed that farmers unions were crippled in their political struggles by the greater appeal that caste, linguistic and regional identities held for their members.⁴⁰ Given the choice, why do individuals invest more heavily in intra-ethnic rather than cross-ethnic networks? I argue here that it is because ethnic identity provides them with an easy method to distinguish who is like them and who is not.

A third explanation for the cycle of self-fulfilling expectations of ethnic favouritism highlights the "exclusive" quality of ethnic identifications. In a recent article seeking to explain the variation in the political salience of ethnic identities across time and space, Fearon argues that ethnic identity is likely to be particularly salient in competitions over "pork" goods. The logic of his argument is as follows: "For coalitions formed to capture political "pork," there is a strong incentive to limit the size of the winning coalition in order not to dilute each winner's share of the spoils. This means that some criterion is needed to distinguish losers from winners so they can be excluded from entry into the winners' coalition. And for this purpose, the ascriptive mark of ethnicity fits the bill much better than do marks or criteria that can be chosen by anyone who wants access to pork."⁴¹

Fearon's argument suggests also that there is an objective basis to expectations of ethnic favouritism in patronage politics, which as I pointed out earlier, is typically a contest over scarce "pork" goods. It implies that political entrepreneurs choosing between which of their multiple identities to emphasize to voters, will favour those identities which permit them to exclude the maximum possible number of people from the coalition while still winning. And because ethnic identifications permit them to exclude others reliably, it is likely that they will emphasize their ethnic identities more

³⁸ Foner, cited in Katznelson (1981), 55.

³⁹ Katznelson (1981), 58.

⁴⁰ Varshney (1995), 187.

⁴¹ Fearon (1999), 3.

than others. Voters seeking patronage benefits, similarly will be most responsive to signals based on “exclusive” identities, and for the same reason favour ethnic identities over others.

The insight that “exclusive identities” will be favoured over “universalist identities” in any struggle over patronage benefits is an important one. However, the set of exclusive identities is larger than the set of ethnic identities. One example of “exclusive” coalitions which are non-ethnic are coalitions of the “landless” and the “landowners.” The two coalitions are distinguished from each other on the basis of ownership of assets, wealth, and lifestyle. A “landless” individual cannot easily acquire an identity as a “landowner” in the short term, and vice versa. The “rural-urban” divide is another example of an exclusive identity which is not ethnic. There is a clear distinction between “rural folk” and “city folk” based on place of birth, upbringing and manner. A rural identity is not easily acquired by a city-dweller, and an urban identity cannot be easily acquired by a villager. Why then should voters and politicians in patronage democracies favour ethnic identities over these non-ethnic but equally exclusive identities? The argument that ethnic identity is uniquely “visible” in individual interactions with limited information provides an answer to why, among the set of exclusive identities, ethnic identities are privileged in patronage transactions.

Note that the logic above applies specifically to *patronage politics* but not generally to all *pork politics*. While patronage politics also concerns “pork” goods, the delivery of such goods in this case takes place through an individualized and covert transaction. The category of “pork politics,” therefore, encompasses but is larger than the category of “patronage politics.” It includes all transactions over pork goods whether or not these transactions take place openly or covertly, and individually or collectively. Pork politics is likely to activate exclusive identities, for the reasons Fearon specifies, but not necessarily ethnic ones. Take for example, a pork good such as a subsidy on fertilizers. This good can be provided to supporters openly, through policy legislation or executive order. Further, it benefits the entire group simultaneously, rather than selected individuals within it. For both these reasons, this would qualify as a pork but not a patronage transaction. Where the pork goods that voters desire can be openly and collectively distributed, voters seeking to obtain these goods need not be able to code individual beneficiaries. The simple act of policy legislation provides sufficient information about which categories are favoured by which regime. All a voter has to do in this case is determine whether or not he is a member of this favoured category, regardless of who else falls within it or outside. Where there is no need for individual identification of the beneficiaries, there is no reason to expect the unique activation of ethnic identifications.

If, as I hypothesize here, patronage politics automatically activates expectations of ethnic favouritism among voters and politicians, then wherever we see patronage democracies, we should also see politics structured along ethnic lines. The hypothesis would be disproved if we found cases of “patronage-democracies” in which individual politicians at the local level recruited voters mainly on the basis of their class, or

occupational, income, or other non-ethnic identities.⁴² To argue that patronage politics should always be accompanied by ethnic politics, however, is not to argue that all ethnic politics should be accompanied by patronage politics. Ethnic politics may be a multi-causal phenomenon, activated by processes other than patronage politics.

Ethnic politics, it is important to note, need not imply ethnic parties. Ethnic coalitions at the micro-level may be aggregated into multi-ethnic or non-ethnic coalitions at higher levels of politics. Further, individual politicians from any given ethnic category may be dispersed across different types of parties. In this case, while each individual politician would be likely to have a base among voters who are co-ethnics, voters from this ethnic category as a whole would be dispersed across parties. The hypothesis predicts only that the basic political building block in patronage-democracies should be an ethnic block – in other words, that individual politicians at the local level will build their political following on an ethnic basis. It is agnostic about how such these individual-centred blocks are likely to be combined across parties and across levels of the polity.

III. Voters in Patronage-Democracies Formulate Preferences Across Political Parties By Counting Heads Belonging to Their “Own” Ethnic Category Rather than Assessing Party Issue Positions

If voters are motivated by the desire for patronage benefits, and expect to obtain these benefits from politicians who belong to their “own” ethnic category, then it follows that they will formulate preferences across political parties, not by comparing the positions they assume on issues during the election campaign, but by counting the number of heads belonging to their “own” ethnic category across parties. Because individuals belong to multiple ethnic categories, however, we cannot stipulate a priori which category (or categories) voters will choose to identify with as their “own.” This

⁴² In the empirical portion of this study, I demonstrate the dominance of ethnic building blocks and the relative absence of non-ethnic building blocks across parties and states in India. While the general applicability of this hypothesis to other patronage democracies remains to be investigated, let me address here one set of cases that appear to challenge the generalizability of this hypothesis: cases of patronage-democracies in Latin America. While democracy has rarely had an uninterrupted existence in Latin America, several Latin American states, including Peru, Colombia, and Brazil, have had a combined experience of patronage-based economies and a period of democratic rule. Yet, politics in these states has appeared to be structured, until recently, mainly on class lines (Martz (1997); Stokes (1995); Yashar (1999)). A preliminary look at Latin American cases suggests that they are only “apparently” disconfirming for two reasons: 1) Class and ethnicity in Latin America coincide in many cases. Where class and ethnicity coincide, ethnic markers can easily be used to identify class categories. Consequently, voters and politicians might develop expectations of “in-class” favouritism in the distribution of patronage and the collection of voter support according to the same logic outlined here. If we find this mechanism at work in Latin American cases, it would confirm rather than disprove the hypothesis I outline here. 2) Alternatively, the form of patronage in Latin American democracies may be distinct, and therefore lend itself to coalition building on the basis of non-ethnic categories. I have argued in this chapter that the essence of a patronage-driven black market is that it consists of thousands of individualized and covert transactions. In a study of clientelism in Colombia, however, John Martz, suggests that modern clientelism in Latin America is better interpreted as “corporate clientelism”, where clients consist not of individuals but “corporate groups” and benefits are transferred, not covertly, but through an open process of bargaining between elite representatives of such corporate groups. This second point suggests a basis on which to refine the concept of “patronage-democracy” to which this hypothesis applies. Latin American cases, therefore, would be a particularly fruitful set of cases in which to test the hypothesis that I advance here.

category (or categories) will vary with institutional constraints across political systems, and within institutional constraints will be generated endogenously by political competition. This section elaborates upon this proposition and its implications.

To some extent, we might expect voters everywhere to discount party's issue positions, for two reasons. First, it requires a significant investment of time and resources for voters to familiarize themselves with party platforms. For another, party platforms typically include exaggerated promises that often go unfulfilled. "Citizens," Fiorina reminds us, "are not fools. Having often observed political equivocation, if not outright lying, should they listen carefully to campaign promises?"⁴³ However, voters in patronage-democracies have even more reason to be skeptical of party promises on various issue dimensions. Such promises typically promise some collective good (responsible government, law and order, economic reforms) to be delivered through new policy legislation or better policy enforcement. To patronage-seeking voters, however, such promises are beside the point. A decision to pass new policy legislation or enforce policy at the macro-level is of little value to them unless they have a reasonable expectation that the local government official will favour them in the implementation of that decision. And an unfavourable decision on policy legislation or enforcement at the macro-level is similarly of little relevance if the local government official is willing to bend the rules in their favour. Even if they care deeply about issue dimensions, even if they are well-informed about party positions on these issue dimensions, and even if they believe that such platforms reveal sincere intentions, benefit-seeking voters have little reason to treat these data as relevant. Rather, they will look for guarantees that the benefits that flow from the implementation of the promised policies will be directed towards them.

The ethnic identity of party personnel, for the reasons outlined in Section II, provides exactly such a guarantee. The more that members of their "own" ethnic category are represented at key levels in the party apparatus, the more confident voters can be of obtaining access to patronage benefits from this party. The less elites from their "own" category are represented at the appropriate level in the party, the less confident voters can be of obtaining access to patronage benefits from this party. The non-ethnic identities of party personnel, or personal qualifications such as character, reputation and influence, as I argued earlier, simply do not provide credible guarantees about access to patronage benefits. Patronage-seeking voters in patronage democracies, therefore, will formulate preferences between competing parties in patronage democracies by counting heads belonging to their "own" ethnic category across parties and ignoring their issue positions.

Case studies of patronage-democracies provide ample support for the plausibility of this proposition. Chabal and Daloz note, of voters in Africa: "They do not vote because they support the ideas, even less read the programmes of a particular political party."⁴⁴ Posner, similarly, argues that voters identify with parties based on the ethnic identity of those who lead the party, even if the official platforms of political parties do not emphasize the ethnic identity of their leaders: "The identification of the party with a

⁴³ Fiorina (1981), 5.

⁴⁴ Chabal and Daloz (1999), 89.

particular ethnic group was less an outcome of active self-definition by party organizers than a consequence of an unprompted equation in peoples' minds of the party with the ethnic group of the party's president."⁴⁵ The focus on the ethnic identity of the personnel and the ignorance of issues is so strong, according to Posner, that "not only do Zambian political parties take on the ethnic affiliations of their leaders, but when the party leaders change, so too do the perceived orientations of the parties."⁴⁶ Wolfinger makes much the same point in his description of the "issue-free quality" of elections in New Haven and other cities dominated by machine politics.⁴⁷ He points out that the indifference of voters to issues and policies in patronage-based systems, ironically, creates possibilities for greater policy innovations, since politicians are relatively unhampered by constituents' views on policy positions.

At which level of party organization, however, should we expect benefit-seeking voters to count heads? Party personnel include local candidates, members of local organizational units, state leaders, and national leaders, and the ethnic identity of individuals holding different posts might differ. How do we know which of these posts are most important to voters in conducting their head counts across different contexts? Why, for instance, did Zambian voters take their cue mainly from the President and not from other office-holders in the party? If the tendency to count heads is driven by expectations of access to patronage benefits, then it follows that rational voters will count heads at that level of the party organization where the power to distribute patronage-resources is concentrated. The level at which they count heads will vary with the design of the party organization. In decentralized parties, where the local candidate or party official decides how these resources are distributed, voters will count heads at the local level. In centralized parties, where decision-making power is concentrated at higher levels, voters will count heads at these higher levels. And where the local and central leadership share authority, voters will assign some weight to party personnel at both levels in their assessment. In all cases, they will prefer that party that has the most heads belonging to members of their "own" ethnic category at the appropriate level, regardless of its issue position. If heads from their "own" category are distributed equally across parties, they will be indifferent, equally inclined towards all parties, regardless of the issues they stand on. And if heads from their "own" ethnic category are not found in any party, they will also be indifferent, equally alienated from all parties, regardless of the issues they stand on.

In a world where all individuals belong simultaneously to multiple ethnic categories, and all choose some ethnic category to identify with independently and arbitrarily, the distribution of preferences between parties would be indeterminate. The following highly simplified example illustrates this point: Imagine an election with two competitors: Party X and Party Y. Imagine further that the total set of ethnic categories available to individuals in this society consists of four dichotomous pairs: {a, ~a, b, ~b, c, ~c, d, ~d}. Imagine that each party is composed of individuals with identical repertoires of ethnic categories. The ethnic profile of Party X and Y is summarized below:

⁴⁵ Posner (1998), 129.

⁴⁶ Posner (1998), 129.

⁴⁷ Wolfinger (1974), 121. See also Dahl (1961), 98-99.

Party X $X_1 = \{a, \sim b, c\}$ $X_2 = \{a, \sim b, c\}$ $X_3 = \{a, \sim b, c\}$

.....

 $X_n = \{a, \sim b, c\}$ **Party Y** $Y_1 = \{\sim a, b, c\}$ $Y_2 = \{\sim a, b, c\}$ $Y_3 = \{\sim a, b, c\}$

.....

 $Y_n = \{\sim a, b, c\}$

Imagine a voter with the following repertoire: $\{a, b, d\}$. If this voter arbitrarily identified ethnic category **a** as her own, she would prefer Party X. If she identified the category **b** as her own, she would prefer Party Y. If she identified the category **d** as her own, she would be equally alienated from, and therefore indifferent between, the two parties. In this case, she would be potentially available for mobilization by a challenger party with **ds** well represented in its organization. Imagine now an entire electorate, where each voter has the same repertoire of categories. If each voter decided independently and arbitrarily which ethnic category to identify as her own, the resulting preference distribution would be unpredictable. Imagine, finally, a heterogeneous electorate, with variation in the ethnic repertoires of individual voters. Once we introduce the fact of ethnic heterogeneity, the preference distribution becomes completely indeterminate.

But individuals do not pick arbitrarily and independently from among their entire ethnic repertoire in an election. Only some of the many alternative categories to which they belong are relevant in an electoral choice. Knowing that voter preferences are determined by the ethnic identity of their personnel, political parties in patronage-democracies have an incentive to signal themselves as belonging to some limited set of ethnic categories and not to others. This restricted set of alternatives disciplines the choice. E. E. Schattschneider's observation about the organization of the American electorate by political parties is relevant here:

Anyone watching the crowds move about Grand Central Station might learn something about the nature of party organization. The crowds seem to be completely unorganized. What the spectator observes is not chaos, however, because the multitude is controlled by the timetable and the gates. Each member of the crowd finds his place in the system (is organized by the system) because his alternatives are limited. The parties organize the electorate by reducing their alternatives to the extreme limit of simplification.⁴⁸

Schattschneider's observation is a precursor to a now extensive literature that employs social choice theory to illuminate the role that political parties play in restricting the set of alternatives between which voters choose.⁴⁹ This literature, while it has typically focused on the restriction of the set of policy alternatives, contains important insights for the way in which politicians can restrict the set of ethnic categories that voters identify

⁴⁸ Schattschneider (1960), 59.

⁴⁹ Particularly Riker (1982), (1986), (1993).

with.⁵⁰ If all parties signal themselves as either representing members of category **a** or members of category $\sim\mathbf{a}$, then all voters in the example above who have **a** in their repertoire should prefer Party X, and those who have $\sim\mathbf{a}$ in their repertoire should prefer party Y. The fact that these voters also belong simultaneously to other ethnic categories is not irrelevant in a political arena where the set of alternatives is restricted to **a** and $\sim\mathbf{a}$. The argument in Section II suggests that the *mechanism* through which political entrepreneurs should attempt to send such signals is the manipulation of the interpretation of ethnic markers. Political entrepreneurs, thus, should attempt to provide voters with “standardized” interpretations of ethnic markers so that any given marker is coded either as **a** or $\sim\mathbf{a}$ by all voters, even though it might in principle signal membership in many different categories.

Within any given set of alternatives, the argument suggests that the effective strategy of political parties in patronage-democracies should consist of marketing themselves as the best representatives of some ethnic category within this set. And where possible, political strategies should consist of transforming the set of alternative categories. Parties that stand to gain from the current set of alternatives should strive to maintain it, while parties that stand to lose should strive to transform it. Conversely, we should see relatively low investment by political parties to distinguish themselves on issue dimensions in patronage-democracies. Party issue positions in patronage-democracies should be broadly similar, and weakly emphasized in election campaigns. Furthermore, the emphasis on representation of ethnic categories rather than issues should be true of all parties, ethnic, non-ethnic or multi-ethnic. I will provide systematic empirical evidence of this prediction from across Indian states in Chapter 5.

Political parties may be more or less constrained in their ability to define the set of alternatives. These constraints, as institutionalist approaches to the study of ethnic politics suggest, are in all likelihood determined by the institutional context. In Yorubaland, for example, Laitin shows that the actions of the colonial administration restricted the range of politically feasible alternatives to ethnic categories based on an individual’s ancestral city.⁵¹ In Zambia, Posner shows that the institutional context was more permissive, allowing politicians to activate membership in either linguistic or tribal categories.⁵² In India, I have shown elsewhere that the institutional context permits politicians to activate a wider range of categories, including language, tribe, caste and region.⁵³ Where institutions impose narrow constraints on the set of relevant categories, political entrepreneurs will have less room to maneuver, and the category (or categories) that voters identify as their “own” will be stable. Where institutions impose wide constraints, there is significantly greater room for political entrepreneurs to define the set of alternatives in a manner advantageous to them. In this world, we should expect periodic attempts to transform the set of alternatives and therefore greater instability in the choice of categories that voters identify with over time.

⁵⁰ I explore these implications in Chandra (1999).

⁵¹ Laitin (1986)

⁵² Posner (1998)

⁵³ Chandra (1998)

I have suggested that by manipulating the set of alternatives, political parties can induce individuals to identify politically with different ethnic identities in their voting decision. Isn't ethnic identity too deeply held, however, to be manipulated so easily? Do voters simply switch identities as politicians decide? They do not. For three reasons, it would be erroneous to assume that in choosing one ethnic category to identify with as her "own" in deciding how to vote that the voter is discarding any of her other identities:

First, the decision to vote on the basis of one category rather than another does not constitute a total identity shift. It is a phenomenon qualitatively different from other acts that activate ethnic identity. The decision to participate in a civil war or a riot, for example, may require an irrevocable decision about who you are and who you are not. The decision about whether to assimilate with the dominant language category, similarly, requires decisions about educational investments that have binding consequences in the future.⁵⁴ Over the course of even a single generation, this decision privileges some linguistic identities and eliminates others decisively. The act of voting, however, consists of a *partial* activation of some identity category in the electoral arena without necessarily giving up any other categories available in an individual's repertoire, which might continue to be relevant in other arenas and at other times.

Second, the identification with any ethnic category in a voting decision is non-binding. Just because I vote according to one identity category in one election does not mean that I cannot switch to another subsequently in the next election or in some other event that calls for my political participation. Kasfir's example of Nigerian workers "who participated in a general strike in June 1964 only to vote along ethnic lines the following December"⁵⁵ is a case in point. When participating in the general strike, the workers deactivated but did not renounce their ethnic identity, just as when voting in December they de-emphasized but did not give up their class identity. The choice of an ethnic category in the one event was independent of and non-binding upon the other.

Third, as Barth points out, the act of identification with any ethnic category consists only of a change in the boundary within which individuals place themselves rather than the content of their identity. Individuals who place themselves in any single category, therefore, change only the nature of those whom they identify as "outsiders" without effecting any change in their own sense of self.

If voters choose between parties based on a head count, and political entrepreneurs know this, then why do they devote time and resources to staking out irrelevant positions on issue dimensions? The answer, I argue here, lies in strategic considerations. Parties that seek to build differentiated ethnic coalitions, with different in-groups and out-groups in different constituencies have an incentive to stake out universally applicable issue positions at the more visible levels of politics, which they can then guarantee to particular groups at the local level. For such parties, an issue position serves as a "cover" under which to send out targeted messages about party personnel in different local arenas. For parties that seek to build uniform ethnic coalitions, with the

⁵⁴ Laitin (1998).

⁵⁵ Kasfir, (1979), 372, citing Melson and Wolpe.

same in-group and the same out-group in all constituencies, announcing their ethnic identity clearly is a viable strategy. Such parties have less incentive to stake out issue positions.

The proposition that voters in patronage-democracies vote on the basis of headcounts rather than issue dimensions has significant implications for research on party politics and voting behaviour. A prominent strand in this research, influenced by the publication Hotelling's 1929 article on spatial competition and Downs 1957 work on *The Economic Theory of Democracy* in 1957, has attempted to model voter choices by identifying the salient issue dimensions on which parties position themselves, and the preference distributions of voters on these issue dimensions.⁵⁶ Over the course of a half-century, this literature has produced sophisticated spatial models and increasingly refined techniques of data collection that allow researchers to identify salient issue dimensions, and party positions and the distribution of voter preferences on these dimensions.⁵⁷ If the proposition advanced in this section is supported by the data, then research on party politics and voting behaviour in patronage-democracies should turn its attention to developing or adapting techniques of modeling and data collection tailored to the manipulation of alternative dimensions of identity rather than issue dimensions.

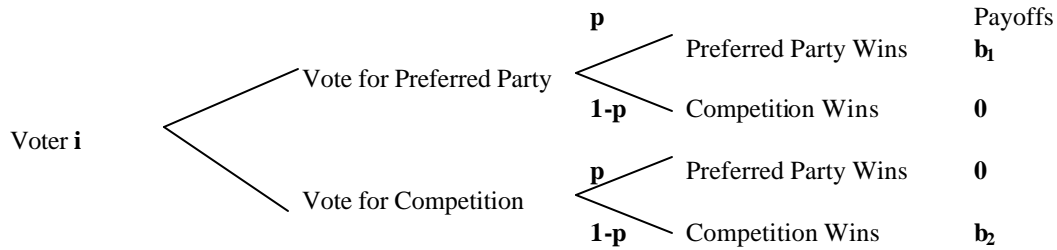
IV. Voters in Patronage-Democracies Are Strategic Actors, Voting for Their Preferred Party Only if it is Likely to Win or Exercise Influence After the Election and not Otherwise.

So far, I have argued that benefit-seeking voters in patronage democracies are rational actors who use the vote as an instrument to secure patronage benefits. I have also argued that they prefer that party which represents members of their own ethnic category to the greatest degree and so promises them the greatest access to patronage benefits. In this section, I argue that the rational benefit-seeking voter is also a strategic voter. He will vote for his preferred party only if he expects his preferred party to win the election or exercise leverage over the electoral outcome. When he has no reasonable expectation that his preferred party will do either, he will vote instead for the competition. Below, I outline the logic underlying this proposition, and then show how voters formulate expectations about the probable electoral outcome.

Imagine a voter faced with the choice of whether to vote for his preferred party or for the competition. The decision tree below captures the decision problem faced by Voter *i*.

⁵⁶ Downs (1957), Hotelling (1929).

⁵⁷ See for instance, Budge, Crewe and Farlie (1976), Budge, Robertson and Hearl (1987), Huber and Inglehart (1995), Castles and Mair (1984); Robertson (1976).



Voter *i* has two courses of action: to vote for his preferred party or for the competition. The preferred party has a probability p of winning the election or exercising leverage over someone else's victory or loss. The competition has a probability $(1-p)$ of winning the election or exercising leverage over someone else's victory or loss.

Voter *i*'s access to patronage benefits depends upon the electoral outcome. A victorious party will have control over state resources and so have the means with which to "pay" him for his vote. A party that does not win, but influences someone else's victory or loss will also indirectly acquire the resources with which to pay him. In this scenario, the winner will have an incentive to protect his winning margin by "buying off" the kingmaking party. Consequently, it will channel patronage resources in its direction, which it can then use to "pay" supporters. But a party that neither wins nor exercises leverage will have nothing to offer its supporters.

The benefit-seeking voter, therefore, has an incentive to end up on the winning side. If his preferred party is victorious or influential after the election, and he votes for his preferred party, he obtains benefit b_1 . This is the best possible scenario for him, since his preferred party is likely to offer him more benefits than the competition, even after we take the cost of defection into account. If the competition is victorious or influential after the election, and he votes for the competition, the voter obtains benefit b_2 . This benefit is likely to be small, since the competition will be responsive primarily to voters from some other ethnic category. However, it is better than nothing. In other words $b_1 > 0$, and $b_2 > 0$, but $b_1 > b_2$.

The worst-case scenario for the voter is to vote for a party that is neither victorious nor influential. If he votes for his preferred party and it emerges neither victorious nor influential after the election, it will have nothing to distribute to its supporters. The voter in this scenario will obtain a payoff of zero, and his vote will have been wasted. And if he votes for the competition and it emerges as neither victorious nor influential, he also obtains no benefits. Politicians from his preferred party will not "pay" him since he did not vote for them, while the competition will have nothing to offer. (In some cases, furthermore, this payoff might even be negative, if there is a threat of retaliation from either the competition or the preferred party).⁵⁸ Note that this model

⁵⁸ In Chapter 6, I describe such a scenario for Scheduled Castes faced with the choice of defecting from Congress to the BSP. The possibility of economic and political retaliation from the upper castes who dominated Congress meant that Scheduled Castes faced negative returns if they voted for the BSP and it did not win.

assumes that there is no deception. The discussion of the subversion of the secret ballot in Section I of this chapter suggests that this is a justifiable assumption.

The expected payoff for voter i for voting for the preferred party is:

$$p(b_1) + (1-p)(0) = pb_1 \quad (1)$$

The expected payoff for voter i for voting for the competition is:

$$p(0) + (1-p)(b_2) = b_2 - pb_2 \quad (2)$$

The voter will vote for his preferred party only when the expected payoff from voting for his preferred party is greater than the expected payoff from voting for the competition. In other words, when:

$$pb_1 > b_2 - pb_2 \quad (3)$$

Rearranging the terms, we get:

$$\frac{p}{(1-p)} > \frac{b_2}{b_1} \quad (4)$$

We know from the preceding discussion, that:

$$0 > \frac{b_2}{b_1} > 1 \quad (5)$$

We can draw the following conclusions from this model:

When $p=0$ (the preferred party has no probability of securing either victory or influence after the election), voter i will never vote for his preferred party. This is because we know from (4) that the only conditions under which voter i will vote for his preferred party when $p=0$ is if $b_2/b_1 < 0$. However, we know from (5) that this will never be the case.

When $p \geq .5$ (the preferred party has a 50% chance or more of securing either victory or influence after the election), voter i will always vote for his preferred party. We know from (4) that the condition under which voter i will vote for his preferred party when $p \geq .5$ is if $b_2/b_1 < 1$. We know from (5) that this is always the case.

When $0 < p < .5$, the voting decision of the voter depends upon the degree to which b_1 is greater than b_2 . The more substantial the difference, the lower the value of p must be for the voter to vote for his preferred party. The smaller the difference between b_1 and b_2 , the higher the value of p must be for the voter to vote for his preferred party. For example, when $p=.25$, the voter will vote for his preferred party only if b_1 is more than three times as large as b_2 (i.e. $b_2/b_1 < .33$) and so on. In other words, if the competition offers only negligible benefits to voters from ethnic categories not well represented in its party organization, these voters will defect to the party which represents their co-ethnics

even when it has a very low threshold of winning or leverage. However, the more it offers such underrepresented voters, the higher that the threshold of winning or leverage for their preferred party has to be before they are likely to defect. In this situation, even though such voters do worse under the competition than they would have under a party which represents members of their ethnic category, a sizable “payment” in benefits can prevent them from defecting.

It is not necessary to describe voting behaviour under all possible scenarios. The main point that I wish to make here is that the rational benefit-seeking voter is also a strategic voter. His voting decision, in other words, depends upon an assessment of the probability that his preferred party has of obtaining victory or leverage after the election. When this probability is high enough, he will vote consistently with his preferences. When this probability is low, however, he will vote contrary to his preferences in order to secure at some access to benefits.

How in turn do voters in patronage-democracies formulate expectations about the likely electoral outcome? How, in other words, do they estimate the value of p in the model above? Studies of strategic voting suggest that voters formulate expectations about the competitive position of “their” party based on opinion polls.⁵⁹ Opinion polls, the argument runs, provide information about the preferences of other voters. And based on this revealed information, individual voters formulate expectations about how others will vote and so adjust their own behaviour accordingly. Where such polls do not exist, or where voters do not have access to these polls, the argument implies that voters cannot formulate these expectations. If, as I argued in Section I, voters formulate preferences across parties by counting heads belonging to their ethnic category across parties, then sufficient information is available about other voters’ preferences and likely voting behaviour independently of opinion polls and election surveys. Voters from any one ethnic category know that just as they prefer that party which represents members of their own ethnic category to the greatest degree, so will voters from other ethnic categories prefer those parties which represent members from their own categories. By counting heads from each ethnic category in the population and imputing to them preferences across parties, they can assess the relative position of each party if all voters voted according to their preferences. They can then estimate whether, if all voters from their “own” ethnic category coordinated on voting for their preferred party, they would be sufficient to make their party a possible winner or kingmaker.⁶⁰ They can also estimate whether even en masse coordination on their part would not take their preferred party past the threshold of either winning or leverage.

Formulating expectations by counting heads, it should be obvious, is a process that carries with it a great deal of uncertainty. Ethnic demography is not always known. Secondly, even where ethnic demography is known according to one set of categorizations, it is not clear which categorizations are the most salient. Thirdly, even where the categories are agreed upon and the ethnic demography clear, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about turnout rates between different ethnic categories. Fourth,

⁵⁹ Cox (1997), 79.

⁶⁰ The idea of ethnic collective action as a coordination game is from Laitin (1998)

while the preferences of those who are best represented in each of the parties can be inferred with confidence, the preferences of voters from ethnic categories which are universally underrepresented are highly uncertain. Fifth, where there is more than one party representing members of one ethnic category, it is not clear which way members of that ethnic category might lean. However, the main point is that counting heads provides voters with the information to make *some* prediction about the electoral outcome (whether or not this prediction is uncertain or even wrong), and adjust their voting decision accordingly.

If benefit-seeking voters vote strategically, then we should expect an en masse vote by voters from any given ethnic category in favour of their preferred party if they believe it to be a likely winner or kingmaker. Conversely, where even an en masse vote by all co-members of an ethnic category is not likely to result in victory or influence for their preferred party, we should not expect to see many vote for their preferred party. As a result, the voting behaviour of particular ethnic categories is likely to change with the competitive configuration. Where the competitive position of the preferred party is stable across elections, the voting behaviour of voters should also be stable. But where the preferred party's competitive situation fluctuates, we should also see considerable volatility in voting behaviour. In this latter scenario, we should see a pattern of "forward cascades" when voters believe that coordinated action on their part might take the preferred party from a losing position to victory and influence, and "reverse cascades" when voters believe that continued coordinated action on their part will not preserve their preferred party's winning or kingmaking position.

V Conclusion: Why Ethnic Parties Succeed and When Might They Fail?

A hypothesis about the conditions under which ethnic parties succeed and fail can now be derived from Propositions I-IV. If voters from any ethnic category seek patronage benefits, believe that patronage benefits will be best provided by their "own" men, prefer those parties which represent their "own" men to the greatest degree, and vote for these preferred parties only when they believe they are numerous enough to affect the outcome through coordinated action, then it follows that an ethnic party is likely to succeed when 1) it enjoys a monopoly on the representation of elites from its target ethnic category and 2) when voters from its target ethnic category are numerous enough to affect the electoral outcome through coordinated action. It is likely to fail under two conditions: 1) If elites from its target ethnic category are also well-represented in the competition. 2) If its target ethnic category is not numerous enough to affect the outcome through coordinated action (Even where it retains a monopoly on representation). The remainder of this study tests the hypothesis outlined here against the BSP and other political parties across Indian states.

This hypothesis is not unique to explaining the success of *ethnic parties* but applies generally to all parties in patronage democracies, ethnic, non-ethnic or multi-ethnic. The theory of voting I have outlined in this chapter suggests that all parties in patronage-democracies succeed based on a headcount. All parties in patronage democracies, therefore, regardless of their ostensible ideology or platform, should play the ethnic game at the local level. The only difference between these three types of

parties is in how local level ethnic coalitions are aggregated at higher levels of politics. Multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties in patronage-democracies seek to build differentiated ethnic coalitions, with a diverse set of insiders and outsiders in different local environments, held together by the “cover” of an ostensibly non-ethnic ideology or multi-ethnic ideology. Ethnic parties, however, seek to build uniform ethnic coalitions, with identical insiders and outsiders across local environments.

By arguing that electoral outcomes in patronage democracies are determined entirely by ethnic demography, this chapter concurs with Horowitz that “an election is a census and the census is an election.” The same starting point, however, leads to an opposite conclusion. According to Horowitz, “census” like elections are likely to produce “pre-ordained” results, where “absent some dramatic change in group demography...the result of this election is likely to hold for the next election and for every election hereafter.”⁶¹ The meaning of democracy, as a system of “institutionalized uncertainty”⁶² appears to have subverted in this context. Horowitz’s argument ignores the fact that the census is composed of artificially constructed categories which classify individuals according to multiple labels, and are themselves reconstructed over time. It is precisely because of their census like quality, therefore, that we should expect elections in patronage-democracies to produce uncertain results. Where voter preferences can be manipulated by the manipulation of categories, where voter expectations about the electoral outcome depend upon the perceived preferences of others, and where voter behaviour depends upon their expectations of the electoral outcome, we should expect politicians to invest heavily in the creation and recreation of new systems of categorization. And to the extent that the categories themselves are subject to redefinition by the competitive context, the electoral outcome in such democracies is likely to be uncertain.

⁶¹ Horowitz (1985), 83-89.

⁶² Przeworski (1991).

Table 2.1a: State-Dominated Societies and Regime Types

The table below classifies a political system as state-dominated if the state is the principal non-agricultural employer (i.e. controls more than one-third of the jobs in the non-agricultural economy). The data on public employment is taken from a World Bank survey of about 100 countries and refers to the early 90s.⁶³ The term “Public Sector Employment” includes all jobs in three categories: civilian government administration; state owned enterprises; and armed forces. Data for all three categories is not available for several important cases, including South Africa, Russia, Mexico, Israel, and Indonesia, which have therefore been left out of the table.

For regime type, I rely upon the Freedom House classification of “electoral democracies.” The Freedom House classifies a country as an electoral democracy if it meets the criterion of “universal suffrage for competitive multiparty elections.”⁶⁴ This classification adequately represents the minimal definition of democracy that I have employed in this chapter.

Some subset of “state-dominated democracies” (i.e. the cases in Cell 1) falls into the category of “patronage-democracies.” A state-dominated economy is the minimal criterion that must be satisfied in order for a state to classify as “patronage-based.” However, the list of patronage democracies is likely to be smaller than the list of “state-dominated democracies” once we exclude cases where state officials do not have discretionary power in the allocation of state jobs and services. I have not attempted to eliminate these cases here, since cross-national data on the degree of discretion across patronage democracies is unavailable.

The theory of voting developed here should tell us not only about that subset of states in Cell 1 which would qualify as “patronage-democracies,” but also about historical patterns in political systems with previously large states which have subsequently been “downsized” (a subset of cases in Cell 2); about one-party elections in non-democratic regimes with patronage economies (a subset of cases in Cell 3); and about the expected pattern of democratization in such regimes.

Table 2.1a: State-Dominated Societies and Regime Types

	Electoral Democracies	Public Sector Employment as % of Non-Agricultural Employment	Non Electoral-Democracies	Public Sector Employment as % of Non-Agricultural Employment
State Principal Non-	I		III	

⁶³ Schiavo-Campo, Tommaso and Mukherjee (1997).

⁶⁴The classification of “electoral democracies” is from <http://www.freedomhouse.org>, and the criteria for classification is described in “Democracy’s Century: A Survey of Global Political Change” from the same website. The classification of regime types by Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi and Przeworski (1994) is more transparent, but not used here since it does not extend beyond 1990 and so excludes most of the new democracies from the post-communist states and others.

Agricultural Employer	Georgia	78.78	Jordan	78.46
	India	76.04	Egypt	79.07
	Madagascar	71.9	Turkmenistan	65.19
	Croatia	63.97	Kenya	60.85
	Kyrgyz Republic	60.37	China	54.54
	Turkey	52.59	Zambia	53.42
	Phillippines	53.63	Burundi	52.63
	El Salvador	51.23	Armenia	49.14
	Poland	50.52	Gambia	45.83
	Trinidad	49.09	Azerbaijan	42.2
	Uruguay	46.94	Algeria	40.46
	Botswana	47.03	Tajikistan	37.63
	Sweden	45.37	Cote d'Ivoire	37.05
	Malawi	44.3	Tunisia	36.49
	Nicaragua	44.09	Uzbekistan	36.34
	Finland	42.59		
	Namibia	40.07		
	Australia	39.30		
	Moldova	36.62		
	Albania	34.21		
State Not Principal Non-Agricultural Employer	II		IV	
	Denmark	30.68		
	Estonia	28.44		
	France	26.88		
	Belgium	25.53		
	Ireland	25.39		
	Lithuania	24.77		
	United Kingdom	24.01		
	Bolivia	22.07		
	Italy	21.61		
	Greece	20.06		
	Germany	19.43		
	Argentina	17.74		
	United States	16.32		
	Canada	15.41		
	Japan	8.48		
	Bangladesh	7.15		

Source: Freedom House For Regime Classifications; Schiavo-Campo et al (1997) for public sector employment figures.

