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978-1-107-03296-5 - The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan

Maya Tudor

Excerpt

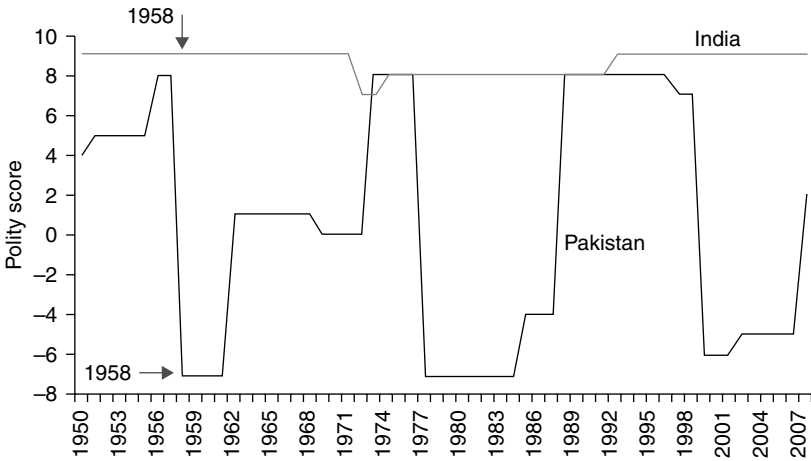
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I

How India institutionalized democracy and Pakistan promoted autocracy

At the stroke of midnight on August 14 and August 15, 1947, the former independence leaders Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru respectively presided over the creation of Pakistan and India, two new countries carved out from British India that should have been equally unlikely to become stable democracies. Both countries emerged from nearly a century of shared colonial rule with broadly similar state institutions, both were governed as infant democracies until their sovereign constituent assemblies wrote new constitutions, and both countries were beset by massive refugee crises, though Pakistan's was larger relative to its population. Both ethnically diverse countries were destabilized by external and sub-national challenges to their territorial integrities and both countries were governed by single dominant parties, supported by multi-class coalitions, which had some experience governing at provincial levels prior to independence.

Yet, despite such striking similarities, these two countries embarked upon markedly different democratic trajectories immediately upon their twin independences. Pakistan's constitution-making process was from the start mired in conflict and national elections were perpetually delayed while eight national administrations cycled through power with increasing rapidity. Pakistan's tentative democratic experiment foundered on the shoals of two extra-legal 'bureaucratic coups' in 1953 and 1954 and formally ended with a military coup in 1958. In contrast, India rapidly ratified the world's longest constitution in early 1950, held free and fair national elections on the basis of universal adult suffrage in 1952, and installed an elected chief executive who subordinated the military and civilian bureaucracy. These democratic differences, as indicated in



Source: Polity IV.

FIGURE 1.1. Divergent regime trajectories in India and Pakistan.

Figure 1.1, can be understood as varying along the dimensions of regime *type* (how democratic each country was, conceptualized as the average of each country's Polity IV score during the post-independence decade) and regime *stability* (how stable its regime was, conceptualized as the variation around the average of each country's Polity IV score during the post-independence decade), though these are not entirely analytically separable. Noticeably, India's democratic stability and Pakistan's autocratic instability emerged immediately after independence and were clearly established by 1958. What explains this puzzling divergence in India's and Pakistan's democratic trajectories?

In answering that question, this book seeks to help shed new light on the causes of democratization in post-colonial countries. How and why have some newly independent states been able to establish durable democracies whereas others frequently oscillate between fragile democracies and unstable autocracies? Understanding the conditions under which post-colonial states were able to create both democratic regimes and stable regimes is of critical importance to political scientists and policy-makers alike.

Like India and Pakistan, many post-colonial countries shared similar features in that they gained independence in the two decades after the end of World War II and in that they did so with relatively under-developed economies and the vestiges of a colonial state. Yet the literature explaining democratization, with few exceptions, has not generalized comparative

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lessons from the democratization experiences of South Asia. Learning from the democratization experiences of countries in the world's most populous region has the potential to contribute to and possibly modify our explanations of post-colonial democratization experiences elsewhere.

Investigating the variance in political development in India and Pakistan is also important because they are two large, politically significant countries whose regime outcomes have seldom been compared systematically.¹ Dismissing the Indian case of democratization as an empirical outlier, as many studies of democratization do, is simply inadequate when that case constitutes over one-sixth of the world's population. An inability to explain or predict India's democracy signifies a central problem with our theoretical understanding of democratization and regime stability in a low-income setting.

Yet if the study of comparative democratization seeks to distill a set of logically consistent causes that explicate a broad range of democratization experiences, any explanation of India's democratic stability ought also to be able to elucidate the failure of the same in Pakistan. While many studies have investigated the success of India's democracy in isolation, very few have simultaneously judged their causal explanations against the experience of Pakistan.² A close historical comparison with a country whose regime trajectory was very different while its major structural features were largely similar enables a compelling causal analysis.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I detail my argument. The second section explains in greater depth how this argument contributes to the existing scholarly literature on democratization. A third section examines the alternative historical and theoretical explanations for regime outcomes in India and Pakistan. And a fourth section briefly describes the further organization of the book.

I. THE ARGUMENT

The core argument advanced in this book is that, first, the kinds of social classes leading each country's independence movement and, second, the

¹ The only in-depth comparison of India and Pakistan's democratic divergence based on a thorough review of both primary and secondary sources is Jalal (1995). Other comparative works, discussed in the alternative explanations, include Chadda (2000), Talbot (2000), Stern (2001), and Oldenberg (2010).

² The most prominent case-specific analyses of regime outcomes are, for India, Rudolph and Rudolph (1967), Kothari (1970), and Kohli (2001) and for Pakistan, Sayeed (1968), Jalal (1990), McGrath (1996), Talbot (1988), and Cohen (2004).

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strength of the dominant political party at independence were the most important causes of India's and Pakistan's divergent democratic trajectories. Specifically, the first of the book's two organizing claims is that the class interests dominating each country's independence movement critically impacted its post-independence regime *type*. All social groups in British India desired material gains and greater social prestige. But which political goals were perceived to promote upward mobility was relative to not just the wealth and social status of other class groupings but existing patterns of colonial patronage, the social identities available for mobilization, and the range of alliance partners. In particular, the fact that a colonially entrenched landed aristocracy formed and dominated the independence movement for Pakistan made it highly unlikely that a country governed by such a movement would become democratic. This is because the landed aristocracy was a politically over-represented and disproportionately powerful social group that stood to lose substantially by adopting a genuinely representative system of government in which it could not guarantee its continued political dominance. A landed aristocracy with a disproportionate share of material resources and political power was quite likely to oppose a regime which would institutionalize opportunities for the redeployment of material resources and political capital to other social groups.

The fact that an urban, educated middle class formed and dominated the Indian independence movement made it possible, though by no means inevitable, that a post-independence India would be democratic. Middle classes strategically forge whatever alliances they can to best promote upward mobility. In the historically specific context of a well-developed state apparatus, an under-developed economy, and a colonial regime that entrenched large landowners and was unwilling to devolve power, the urban, educated middle class of colonial India stood to gain (employment and political power) by advocating for a more representative political regime. While this class initially sought only limited enfranchisement, the strategic pursuit of its interests led to the propagation and institutionalization of universal adult franchise and other democratic institutions in the pre-independence decades. Class interests, historically understood, thus had a powerful impact on the *type* of regime each movement was likely to establish upon independence.

The second organizing claim of this book is that, in the decades before independence, these different social classes created political parties which varied in their strengths and that this strength was the most important explanation for each country's regime *stability* upon independence. I define

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party strength along the three constituent sub-variables of programmatic ideology (programmatic versus vague), coherent distributive alliances (coherent if the distributive interests were relatively aligned), and robust intra-party organization (well-developed versus undeveloped).

On the first dimension of programmatic ideology, I show below how the strategic pursuit of narrow class interests led to the formulation of nationalist ideologies that, over time, began to differ in their programmatic content. The *presence* of programmatic content within its nationalist ideology substantially affected each country's likelihood of regime *stability* after independence because such content facilitated the party's ability to broker compromises among its diverse membership. This organizational resource, where it existed, could be utilized to resolve new conflicts in the post-independence era. Pakistani nationalism was not programmatic, defined almost wholly by its opposition to Congress rule, and was characterized by neither clear principles nor practices associated with those principles. This weak form of nationalism meant that Pakistan's political party was unable to invoke a programmatic basis for reconciling regime-building political conflicts. Indian nationalism was defined not only in opposition to colonial rule but also by an adherence to a set of economic and social principles and costly actions associated with those principles. The presence of a programmatic nationalism which became valued in and of itself in India meant that, upon independence, India's governing political party was more able to reconcile post-independence state-building conflicts by invoking the substantive goals of nationalism as a basis for political compromise.

At the same time, the *content* of the nationalism that each party espoused in the lead-up to independence substantially affected post-independence regime *type* because such programmatic content, where it existed, provided the organizing ideas for governing in the inevitably chaotic aftermath of independence. If nationalism was centered upon egalitarian norms before independence, as it was in India, then democratic forms of government were more likely to be adopted after independence, both because these norms had become the institutional basis for party organization and because the norms had become symbolically important to party members. Upon Indian independence, there was little benefit and substantial cost to rejecting egalitarian norms. In contrast, Pakistani nationalism was not egalitarian, but this mattered little because that nationalism remained weakly institutionalized. All in all, the presence of a programmatic nationalism made the political party stronger and substantially more able to provide for post-independence

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regime *stability* while the substantive content of that nationalism impacted the *type* of stable regime that was created.

On the second dimension of coherent distributive alliances, I show below how the strategic pursuit of narrow class interests in each country led to the creation of alliances that differed in terms of their distributive coherence and that greater distributive coherence critically supported post-independence regime *stability*. To marshal mass support for colonial independence, Pakistan's nascent nationalist movement created alliances with a landed aristocracy and a peasant movement, two social groups that subsequently formed the core support bases of Pakistan's independence movement. Because the distributive interests of its two core alliance partners were in almost diametric opposition to each other, this alliance rapidly dissolved when post-independence regime-building required power-sharing compromises. By contrast, India's independence movement was, at the time of independence, substantively based on an alliance between the urban and rural middle classes. These social classes shared an interest in marginal redistribution away from the colonial regime and the large landed aristocracy but also in preventing any downwards redistribution toward subordinate socio-economic groups. The representation of relatively coherent distributive interests within India's dominant political party meant the party was better able to broker state-building compromises after independence, thus providing for regime *stability*.

Finally, on the dimension of intra-party organization, I demonstrate that the pursuit of narrow class interests in each country led to the creation of intra-party organizations which varied in their robustness and that this variation critically affected the likelihood of post-independence regime *stability*. At independence, Pakistan's dominant political party was minimally developed and heavily dependent upon its charismatic leadership while India's independence movement resembled a relatively disciplined and centralized party organization. Upon independence, the presence of a more developed intra-party organization meant that India's dominant political party was able to more quickly and decisively broker regime-building compromises after independence, thus providing for regime *stability*.

In sum, this study argues that the strategic pursuit of class interests in a historically specific context led to the alternate promotion of or resistance to representative democracy and the consequent construction of stronger or weaker political parties. Upon independence, the nature of dominant class interests and the content of its nationalist ideology primarily

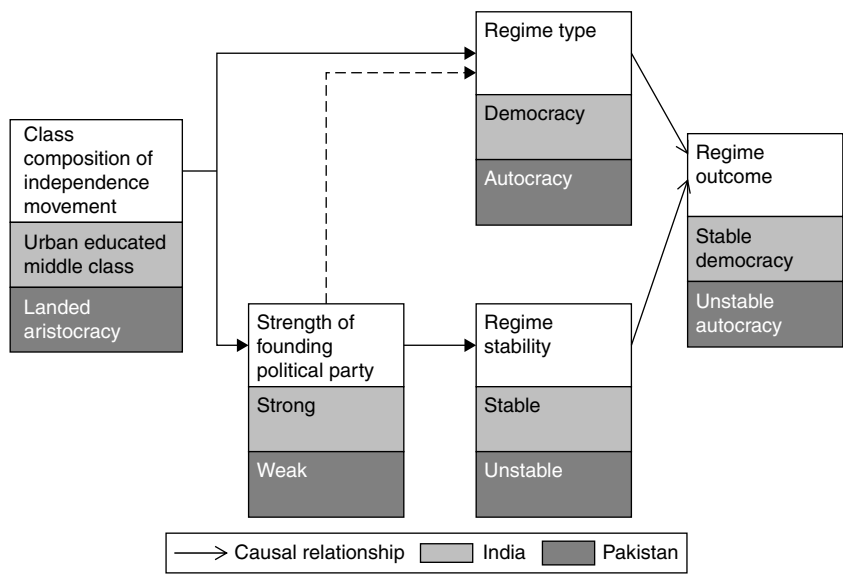


FIGURE 1.2. The argument of the book.

explains each country’s choice of regime type (democracy or autocracy) while the strength of its dominant political party largely explains regime stability. As Figure 1.2 indicates, the divergent democratic trajectories of India and Pakistan thus pivoted upon the nature of their dominant class interests and the strength of their political parties.

Defining democracy

As serious normative and definitional problems arise when democracy is defined either in terms of its sources or its effects, this study adopts a procedural definition in which democracy is defined as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”³ This Schumpeterian definition views a regime as democratic to the extent it enables candidates to freely compete for votes in an election as well as the presence of civil and political liberties that make such competition meaningful. To the extent that military coups, rigged elections, jailing of political opponents, and the censorship of media characterize a regime, it is less democratic. By this definition, for almost

³ Schumpeter (1942: 269).

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all of the years since their twin independences, India has been a democracy and Pakistan has not.

A democracy is also procedurally defined by decision-making according to the majoritarian principle of “one individual, one vote,” given the important qualification that such decision-making respects a basic set of rights. Said differently, so long as majoritarian rule does not substantively impinge on the enumerated or implied rights of protected groups or individuals, the process of decision-making by a popular majority, with one vote accorded to each person, procedurally defines democratic decision-making because it is taken to best operationalize political equality.⁴ Democratic theorists tend to view constitutional or legal protections for discrete cultural practices of minority groups (particularly so in ethnically divided societies) or individual rights (such as freedom of press and association) as entirely consistent with majoritarian rule. Permanently allocating specific groups extra-proportional representation, such that the procedural basis of “one person, one vote” is violated, is generally thought of as procedurally inconsistent with democracy.⁵

Practically speaking, while a movement advocating for the protection of minority rights in specific, restricted domains (e.g. language, the protection of certain cultural and religious practices, or minority veto rights on specifically enumerated issues) can be entirely consistent with the establishment of a democratic regime, permanent decision-making procedures that are *not* based on “one individual, one vote” violate a defining characteristic of democracy. This distinction is germane to the argument developed below because Pakistan’s independence movement ultimately sought not to carve out specific domains for the protection of Muslim rights (e.g. the right of regional languages to be recognized, discrete religious practices, or even proportional representation, all of which would have been entirely consistent with the establishment of a democracy) but instead sought to permanently institutionalize a governing system whereby a Muslim vote would procedurally count as *more than* one non-Muslim vote. By the standard democratic definition of majoritarian rule then, Pakistan’s independence movement could not be termed a proto-democratic movement.

⁴ Sartori (1987: Chapter 6).

⁵ For example, Rawls (1971: 356) writes that “Some form of majority rule is justified as the best available way of insuring just and effective legislation. It is compatible with equal liberty and possesses a certain naturalness; for if minority rule is allowed, there is no obvious criterion to select which one is to decide and equality is violated.”

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In addition to seeking to understand why India and Pakistan quickly established different regime *types*, this book also seeks to understand why post-independence India and Pakistan established regimes which varied tremendously with respect to their *stability*, given that regime stability is defined by the adherence to a set of regular, constitutionally defined procedures for organizing, checking, and transferring power. To the extent that the executive power of a country is irregularly seized or such a seizure attempted, its regime is less stable. As evidenced by Figure 1.1, a difference in regime stability was already marked in 1950, when the Polity IV dataset began. The comparative historical analysis shows that these differences in regime stability were in fact already noticeable upon independence in 1947. The question taken up below is: what explains the initial emergence of such differences?

Defining social classes

Social classes are not necessarily conscious or organized actors with cogent or distinctive worldviews. Particularly because the popular conceptualizations of class are overlaid with multiple ideological and political connotations, it is necessary to carefully define the meaning of social classes in the context of this book. This study employs a Weberian definition of class which defines classes not as objective communities but as “merely represent(ing) possible, and frequent, bases for communal action.” Individuals who own comparable objects of exchange and who, as a result of similar positions in the marketplace, “share in common a specific causal component of their life-chances” are objectively defined as members of the same class. However, an objective definition of class categories is analytically distinct from both the consciousness of a shared class position and from organized action on the basis of class interests.⁶

This Weberian class definition is not strictly structural-functional, assuming as it does that class situations are determined by economic markets *as well as* by markers of status and that these markers are to some extent socially constructed. This is a particularly important distinction in the context of developing countries, where, typically, markets are poorly developed and social relations are regulated by traditional hierarchies. Theoretically, I take seriously Weber’s ideal-type distinction between “class” and “status” (whereby class position is determined by production and acquisition of goods in the marketplace and status grouping is

⁶ Weber (1991 [1947]: 181).

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determined by the principles of group consumption and by special “styles of life”). The argument developed below thus makes reference to both shared life-chances as well as shared markers of status in ascribing class positions. While theoretically distinct, however, empirical observations of class and status groupings frequently overlap.

The study also adopts a Weberian understanding of class because it does not presume a relationship between a given class situation and either the consciousness of that situation or subsequent political organization on the basis of class interests. In the cases discussed below, action on the basis of shared class and status positions depended on first perceiving a causal basis for class positions. The argument developed below does not presume a relationship between a given class situation or status grouping and the subsequent formation of a political organization to pursue class interests. Instead, it investigates the extent to which objective class groups did in fact translate into the perception of a shared class position and into the consequent formation of social or political organizations.

Adapting from Maddison (1971), the indigenous social structure of British India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be broken down into four ideal-type class groupings at the most extreme level of generalization. For conceptual clarity, the *upper class* refers in rural areas to the pre-capitalist landed aristocracy that owned large tracts of land (over 50 acres) but did not engage in its direct cultivation and who typically possessed a titled or hereditary right to such land. This class predominantly existed in swaths of northern India. In urban areas, upper classes refers to a small but growing and increasingly powerful social group in colonial India which owned large-scale capital or large-scale trading enterprises. I refer to this group as large capitalists. *Lower classes* refers, in rural areas, to those individuals earning a subsistence or just above subsistence income from pre-capitalist agricultural activity and, in urban areas, to those individuals earning a subsistence or just above subsistence income from selling labor to industrial or commercial enterprises.

Middle classes refers to professional individuals in urban and upwardly mobile areas who are neither landed aristocracy, the large capitalists, or members of the lower classes. In urban areas, this typically consisted of the principal professions such as lawyers, doctors, and professors, the salaried executives and technical staff of trading and manufacturing firms, civil servants, well-to-do shopkeepers, small-scale shopkeepers, traders,