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Introduction

RECASTING THE POOR-VOTER PARADOX

Why do poor people often support political parties that do not champion their material interests? Disadvantaged voters have routinely cast their ballots in favor of parties that represent the policy interests of wealthier citizens. They have done so across a variety of political contexts – in rich and poor countries, in plurality and proportional electoral systems, and in parliamentary and presidential regimes. Such counterintuitive patterns of support have constituted an enduring puzzle for observers of political life. The prevalence of this paradox in advanced, industrial democracies has been particularly well documented. One recent study finds successful parties opposing redistributive economic policies "actually do about as well or better among the poor as among the rich" in several of these countries, including Belgium, France, Israel, Japan, Switzerland, and Portugal.[1] Another analysis finds similarly high support for right-of-center parties in Ireland, Bulgaria, and Canada.[2] In fact, the authors of this latter study note that in a number of the Western democracies they analyze, "large proportions of low-income voters ... support parties that favor lower taxes and redistribution, even though they doubtfully benefit from [these] economic policies."[3]

Scholars of American politics have wrestled with similar electoral puzzles, examining why the Republican Party has consistently won elections, despite advocating economically conservative policies that should not appeal to a majority of voters. Indeed, Bartels argues that an understanding of why so many poor Americans support a party whose policies have had a "startling negative impact" on their economic fortunes is fundamental to any satisfactory

[1] Gelman et al. 2008, p. 102.
[2] Huber and Stanig 2009.
[3] Ibid., p. 15.

account of the country's political economy.[4] This issue was perhaps most compellingly framed by Frank's well-known question, "What's the matter with Kansas?" prompted by the robust support he observed for Republicans among poorer residents of his native state.[5]

These patterns of support are seen as paradoxical because they cut against the expectations of both sociological and instrumental theories of party politics. In sociological accounts of European party formation, the organization of politics around deep social cleavages was understood to produce enduring class-based partisan divides. Lipset and Rokkan's definitive articulation of this perspective held that the economic and cultural shifts associated with the Industrial Revolution created "uniformly divisive" conflicts between employers and workers across Europe.[6] This division was entrenched by a wide range of organizations, most notably socialist parties and their affiliates, which mobilized poor working-class communities into loyal partisans of progressive politics.[7] Such stable class cleavages became, in the words of another influential account, "*the* standardizing element across the variety of Western European party systems."[8]

By contrast, instrumental models of democratic politics argue that underlying social divisions, collective solidarities, and party organizations are all of little importance in shaping electoral ties between parties and voters. Following Downs, this scholarship conceptualizes politicians as office-seeking entrepreneurs who craft policy positions solely to maximize their vote share.[9] Meanwhile, voters are defined as atomized, self-interested individuals who vote for party platforms that maximize their own welfare. Studies using this framework do not see the poor coalescing into a socially produced partisan collective. However, they still expect poor citizens to support progressive, redistributive parties, because the individual preferences of these voters more closely align with the latters' policy positions in any given election.[10]

Despite their obvious disagreements, sociological and instrumental theories of electoral politics both expect poor voters to support parties that advance their

[4] Bartels 2008, p. 3.
[5] Frank 2004.
[6] Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 21.
[7] The classic account on the workings of such mass parties is Duverger 1954. Converse provides a slightly different account of partisan stability. He argues that "the partisan stability of voting behavior tends to accumulate as an adult participates in the electoral process" (Converse 1969, pp. 142–3). Such individual-level processes aggregate over time to produce larger, stable, partisan collectives as a democratic political system matures.
[8] Bartolini and Mair 1990, p. 42, emphasis added. Lipset (1981, p. 230) similarly noted that the principal generalization that can be made of Western party politics is that "parties are primarily based on either the lower classes or the middle and upper classes."
[9] Downs 1957. See also Aldrich 1995.
[10] In an influential analysis in this vein, Meltzer and Richard (1981) show why extending the franchise to include more poor voters, thereby lowering the income of the pivotal median voter, increases overall political support for parties and candidates espousing redistributive agendas.

material interests.[11] The frequency with which this shared expectation is contradicted has understandably attracted a great deal of scholarly and popular attention.[12] After all, the willingness of many poor people to vote against their economic interests has significant political ramifications, enabling conservative parties to win popular majorities and moderating the redistributive pressures produced by economic inequality. Why do poor voters so often fail to improve their lot through their collective power at the ballot box?

Despite the global significance of this question, it has been investigated almost exclusively through the experiences of wealthy Western democracies. The prospect of equivalent puzzles existing outside these cases has scarcely been acknowledged, much less explored. Principally, this neglect stems from conventional views of how politics in the global south is organized. Countries in these regions are home to mostly poor and poorly educated electorates, limited technologies of communication and information, and weak party organizations.[13] Such contexts, we have believed, facilitate a politics that is centered on personalist- or ethnic group–based appeals and is heavily reliant on discretionary flows of patronage to win support. The traditional left-right spectrum of Western politics, premised on programmatic differences in policies of redistribution and regulation, is therefore not seen to order political life for most of the world.[14]

Yet, the reduced salience of such distinctions should not blind us to the possibility of broadly similar political puzzles arising in non-Western electoral arenas. After all, these regions are scarcely devoid of poor voters or of political actors who represent elite interests. However, when examining these cases, it is necessary to replace the restrictive terminology of "left" and "right" with the more flexible concept of *elite parties*. Following Gibson, I define these parties on the basis of the social composition of their core constituencies (the groups most influential in providing their electoral, ideological, and financial support, and in shaping their policy profile).[15] Put most simply, the core constituencies of elite parties are located within the upper strata of society.

Of course, the question of who these elites are has contextually specific answers. As Acemoglu and Robinson note, it is possible to acknowledge the varying ways in which elite identities are formed, without foreclosing opportunities to observe

[11] As Bartels (2008, p. 26) notes, mainstream majoritarian frameworks of political economy have "remarkable difficulty in explaining why the numerous in poor democratic political systems do not expropriate the unnumerous wealthy."

[12] This literature is too vast to review here, but specific strands will be detailed throughout this chapter. Influential analyses of the determinants of political preferences for redistribution have emphasized the importance of economic inequality (Meltzer and Richard 1981, Milanovic 2000, Boix 2003, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006), post-material values (Inglehart 1971, Inglehart and Flanagan 1987), religious values specifically (Roemer 1998, Frank 2004, De La O and Rodden 2008), and electoral institutions (Iverson and Soskice 2006).

[13] See Hagiopan 2007, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007.

[14] Linzer 2010.

[15] See Gibson 1996, p. 7. I prefer the term *elite* parties to Gibson's *conservative* parties, because the latter term still carries the connotations of left-right ideological divides.

general patterns about elite politics.[16] Examples can vary from landowners in nineteenth-century Chile, to crony capitalists in mid-twentieth-century South East Asia, to upper castes in postcolonial India, to educated urbanites in contemporary Egypt. In poorer countries, this privileged strata often includes the so-called middle classes, who are also defined in accordance with Western standards of consumption. The members of this "middle" class are therefore far closer to the top than the middle of their countries' income distribution.

Yet, even if we allow for contextual variation in defining elite communities, how can we then establish if they constitute a party's core base of support? I emphasize three main areas for isolating a party's core constituency: its internal composition, pattern of electoral support, and policy profile. Each of these dimensions is discussed in greater detail in later chapters, but they are worth briefly introducing here.

First, elite parties emerge out of privileged social communities and thus have organizational positions (such as legislative candidacies or internal party executive positions) dominated by members from these groups. Second, elite parties receive disproportionate, although not exclusive, electoral support from these privileged groups. Such disproportionality can be established through a variety of metrics. At a minimum, the percentage of elites who support the party should be consistently higher than the percentage of non-elites. In the cases closely examined in this book, I also focus on the composition of a party's partisan base, not simply those who voted for its candidates. To be successful, elite parties must necessarily win some support from non-elite voters in any given election. However, the composition of their most loyal supporters should still reflect an elite bias. Accordingly, these privileged citizens should constitute at least a plurality of those who identify as partisans of the party.

Third, and finally, elite parties seek to advance the economic and cultural interests of the elite constituencies they emerged to represent. What this means in practice can vary across the global south and need not be limited to the standardized set of tax and transfer issues focused on in advanced industrial settings. Elite parties can take positions that defend the interests of large landowners in limiting the redistribution or nationalization of landholdings (such as the Partido Acción Nacional [PAN] in Mexico in the 1940s or the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista [ARENA] in El Salvador in the 1970s), that support the demands of business communities in advancing particular market reforms (such as the Front Islamique du Salut [FIS] in Algeria, Unión del Centro Democratico in Argentina [UCEDE], Partido Liberal in Brazil, or Movimiento Libertad in Peru), or provide constituency services primarily used by the non-poor (the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt).[17] Elite interests can also be expressed through the language of ethnicity

[16] Acemoglu and Robinson (2006, p. 15).

[17] On ARENA in El Salvador, see Paige 1996; on the UCEDE, see Gibson 1996; on the FIS, see Chhibber 1996; on the PAN, see Middlebrook 2001; on the Muslim Brothers, see Masoud 2010 (especially pp. 183–4); on the BJP, see Hansen 1996.

rather than of class, especially when economic asymmetries significantly overlap with ascriptive differences (as in the case of Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi, ethnic Chinese and Malays in Malaysia, upper and lower castes in India, or whites and blacks in South Africa and the United States).[18]

Acknowledging such variations across diverse settings should not, however, obscure the common challenges elite parties face. As political vehicles of the advantaged, these actors face electoral challenges comparable to their right-wing counterparts in wealthy democracies. Most parties face the general challenge of winning over new voters while retaining old supporters. Yet, the nature of this task is heavily informed by who is in that loyal base. In this respect, the obstacles facing elite parties are unique. Unlike parties with less privileged cores, the core constituencies of elite parties constitute a small slice of all voters, especially in poor countries. These parties therefore face particularly strong imperatives not only to expand but also to craft coalitions in which their cores comprise a numerical minority.

Yet, these small, privileged cores are also economically powerful and politically well organized. Consequently, elite parties are disproportionately constrained by their cash-rich, vote-poor base from pursuing expansionary strategies that may hurt the latter's interests. How then can elite parties appeal to the numerous poor without alienating their powerful core supporters? For their part, why would disadvantaged communities ever vote for parties that are run by and for more privileged citizens? These are the central questions that motivate this book.

The prior scholarship on political parties suggests three major strategic alternatives available to elite parties: redistributive programmatic shifts, patronage, or "distracting" appeals to a voter's moral values or social identity. I explain why each of these tactics is limited in its ability to explain elite party success, especially outside of wealthy Western democracies. Instead, I detail a novel electoral strategy through which elite parties can win over poor voters while preserving core support. I argue these parties can deploy an organizational division of labor, in which the party outsources the task of mobilizing poor voters to non-electoral affiliate organizations. The latter are tasked with recruiting the poor through the *private* provision of local public goods – mostly basic health and educational services. This arrangement leaves the party itself free to continue to represent the policy interests of the wealthy. A service-based electoral strategy is thus ideal for elite parties seeking to recruit the poor and retain the rich.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH CENTRAL INDIA?

I investigate the broad paradox of poor voters backing elite parties by studying how a particularly unlikely case of such support emerged within the world's

[18] Herring and Agarwala (2006, p. 328) make a similar point. Such asymmetries are especially explicit in what Horowitz (1985, pp. 20–2) terms "ranked" ethnic systems.

largest poor electorate. Specifically, I examine how the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), traditionally identified as the party of India's privileged upper castes, achieved surprising levels of success with some of the country's least advantaged citizens.

This central puzzle has been produced by the collision of two of the most significant developments within Indian democracy in the past three decades. The first was the mercurial rise of Hindu nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s, which propelled the BJP from political marginality to its current status as one of India's two major national parties.[19] However, this "saffron wave" had a limited social profile and was disproportionately driven by surging upper caste support.[20] Hindu nationalism's top-heavy appeal was not surprising, as it represents an elitist interpretation of Hindu sociocultural traditions, and even included a defense of caste practices.[21] Despite its ambitions to be "a party of all Hindus," the BJP quickly became known as a vehicle of "Brahmin-Bania" (two prominent upper caste communities) interests.

The BJP has consistently exhibited all three major markers of elite parties. As later chapters demonstrate, the party's leadership positions and legislative candidacies have continued to be dominated by upper castes. A similar disproportion was evident among BJP partisans, identified by surveys held during national elections. Among these loyal supporters, upper castes were between two and six times as numerous as Dalit (former untouchable castes) and Adivasi (indigenous tribal communities) voters, despite constituting a much smaller share of the overall electorate.[22] Such elite dominance stood in marked contrast to the BJP's major competitors and consolidated the privileged partisan image of Hindu nationalism.[23] Finally, as Chapter 2 argues, this dominance has also

[19] In 1984, the BJP won only 2 seats in the national parliament. In the very next national election in 1989, it won 85 seats; by 1996, it had won 161 seats, more than any other party that year.

[20] The term *saffron wave* is borrowed from Hansen 1999. Saffron has had a long association with Hinduism, as it is seen as the color of ritual fires. In recent times, the color has specifically become identified with Hindu nationalism, after movement activists systematically incorporated it into their clothing and mobilizing symbols.

[21] For an account of the upper caste bias in the BJP's leadership, see Graham 1990. For an earlier account, see Baxter 1969. Electoral data on the caste profile of BJP partisans is presented in Chapter 2. For an influential critique of Brahminical Hinduism from a subaltern (specifically Dalit) perspective, see Illiah 1996.

[22] Data from India National Election Study 1996, 1999, and 2004. I employ the terms *Dalit* and *Adivasi* because these are the names that these communities have largely self-identified with in India, rather than using the more administrative labels of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST). These latter labels referred to these populations being identified not by themselves, but by government lists or schedules of caste communities. This distinction has important ramifications. For example, the Indian Constitution currently does not allow Muslims and Christians to be counted as Scheduled Castes, even though many Dalits belong to these faiths. I also found interviewees from these communities generally preferred Dalit and Adivasi to other options. For a concise, but excellent discussion of the politics of this terminology, see Vishwanath 2012.

[23] The equivalent ratio for the other three largest vote-getting parties in 2004 was less than 1:1. In accordance with the rest of the analysis, I count non-elites as those belonging to Dalit (former

ensured that the party's positions on both economic and cultural issues continue to prioritize upper caste concerns.

Yet, as upper castes flocked to the BJP, a second significant trend began emerging among the country's most marginalized constituencies. Members of these communities began "a silent revolution," increasingly asserting themselves within Indian democracy by forming their own parties, electing co-ethnics to public office, and turning out to vote at rates even higher than those among upper castes.[24] The simultaneity of the saffron wave and the silent revolution was not coincidental; indeed, the two were mutually reinforcing. Elite support for the BJP was reinvigorated by the need to create a political bulwark against growing lower caste political influence. The rapid rise of an upper caste party likewise spurred disadvantaged communities to further self-mobilize.

Indeed, non-elite electorates were widely seen as the force limiting the BJP's rise within Indian democracy. Brass, summarizing this view, argues that the "prideful Hindu identity integral to the upper caste Hindu identification" with the BJP will never be replicated among disadvantaged voters, and that the party "cannot integrate upper and backward castes" into a political coalition.[25] The BJP's elite base and elitist ideology are both seen as especially alienating to Dalits and Adivasis. These two subaltern[26] communities collectively comprise a quarter of the country's population and have been the most marginalized by Hinduism's internal hierarchies.

This increased political polarization among caste groups appeared to set the saffron wave on a crash course with the silent revolution. The 2004 national elections were thought to exemplify just such a clash, as returns indicated angry subaltern voters had repudiated the BJP's ambition to consolidate its position as the governing party of India's Hindu majority. That year, the party had completed its first full term at the head of a broad coalition government in New Delhi, an achievement that had provided the capstone to its rapid rise. Buoyed by positive public opinion polls, the BJP had called early elections, confident of being returned to office. This assurance seemed warranted: the party had presided over a period of rapid macroeconomic growth, and its leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was held to be especially popular. Yet, when the final tally

untouchable) and Adivasi (tribal) communities. The phrase "partisan image" is borrowed from Green et al. 2002.

[24] In the 2004 elections, turnout among Dalit voters was 60 percent, among Adivasis 61 percent, and among upper castes 56 percent. Differences in turnout rates between these groups narrowed in the 2009 national elections, but even in this instance, subaltern citizens voted at a higher rate (just over 59 percent) than more privileged castes (58 percent). Data from National Election Study 2004, as cited in Kumar 2009, p. 49.

[25] Brass 1993, p. 258.

[26] *Subaltern* was originally a military term used for officers under the rank of captain and was later used to refer specifically to colonial subjects (see Loomba 2005, pp. 48–9). Throughout this book, I use the term *subaltern* as it is commonly used in contemporary studies of South Asia and beyond, to more generally refer to historically marginalized communities with limited access to institutions of power and authority.

of votes was announced, the BJP was forced to concede defeat to a rival coalition headed by the Indian National Congress (Congress).

In attempting to comprehend these unforeseen results, several commentators agreed that poor, lower caste voters were at the root of the BJP's unexpected defeat. This argument made intuitive sense, as subaltern alienation from the upper caste BJP was not only the product of economic inequality but also of generations of social and cultural discrimination.[27] The BJP did not appear to help its cause by choosing a triumphalist 2004 campaign slogan: "India Shining." This platform was built around a celebration of the country's anomalously high economic growth rates and was seen to further put off poorer citizens who had not equally shared in these recent spoils. Drawing on this interpretation, respected observers of Indian elections somewhat extravagantly read the election's tea leaves as "a vote for secular politics"[28] and a "radical shift in the social basis for power,"[29] which offered a chance for a "retrieval of the idea of India" itself.[30]

Yet, these striking headlines misinterpreted the nature of subaltern voting patterns in two fundamental respects. First, in suggesting poor electorates united to oust the BJP from power, popular accounts incorrectly depicted these communities cohering into an electoral bloc. In reality, the 2004 polls saw no such cohesion among Dalits and Adivasis. Although most members of both communities live in conditions of socioeconomic marginality, this shared suffering cannot be assumed to produce a unified national vote bank. Instead, the primary support of these two constituencies went to highly dissimilar parties across

[27] I disagree with the view that the BJP has now diluted its communal positions to a point where it no longer qualifies as an ideological party distinct from its secular rivals. Whereas the BJP has certainly modified parts of its program (such as its initial opposition to market reforms), it remained highly distinguishable from more secular formations on issues pertaining to religion. Even in its 2004 campaign, when the BJP was seen to have transitioned to a platform of "good governance" headed by the popular moderate Vajpayee, the party's manifesto retained many distinct positions on key social issues that do not appear in the manifestos of its major national rivals (see Bharatiya Janata Party 2004). In its opening "Highlights" section, the party explicitly states its support for constructing a temple to Ram at the site of a sixteenth-century mosque razed by Hindus in 1992 (pt. 14), its support for banning religious conversions (which targets Christian missionary efforts in India, pt. 17), and an emphasis on returning Kashmiri Hindus to their places of residence (pt. 18). The party's 2004 charter also openly refers to its ties to avowedly Hindu nationalist non-electoral organizations within the movement's Sangh Parivar (organizational family) and refers to Hindu nationalist ideology as a "synonym" for "Indianness." See section labeled "Our Basic Mission and Commitment" in Bharatiya Janata Party 2004. These commitments are not simply words on paper but have remained visible in the symbols, rituals, and language used by the party in its campaign efforts.

[28] Datar 2004.

[29] Yadav 2004a. See also Wallace 2007 and Roy 2007.

[30] Khilnani 2004. In fact, the party's ouster was not due to dramatic swings in its own performance but was largely the result of shifts in coalitional compositions. The BJP lost only 1.5 percent of the vote between its successful campaign in 1999 and its unsuccessful one in 2004, and it was still the second-largest party in 2004 by some margin. Further, only 7 seats separated the Congress (145 seats) and BJP in 2004 (138 seats) out of the 543 seats contested.

different states, ranging from leftist communist parties, to ethnolinguistic regional parties, to the more centrist Congress, to the BJP itself.[31]

Such divergences in subaltern preferences were evident not only across states but also within them, manifesting even between co-ethnic residents of the same village. Yet, these local variations have often been ignored, and even obscured by assumptions of uniformity reflected in popular adages such as "when you cast your vote, you vote your caste." Rather than homogenize disadvantaged groups into vote banks, we need to devote more effort to explaining why members of similarly situated communities make dissimilar electoral choices.[32] Explanations of such divergences are important not only to our knowledge of Indian politics but also for our broader understanding of how disadvantaged voters in developing democracies evaluate and make their political choices.

In addition to understanding variations in subaltern electoral choices, it is imperative to understand why this choice would ever be an elite party such as the BJP. A second misconception with postmortems of the 2004 election was that the BJP was a particular victim of subaltern anger. The idea that the party performed especially poorly with disadvantaged voters was also simply incorrect, as electoral survey data revealed that many non-elite communities supported it at surprisingly high rates. According to a major post-poll survey, more than 30 percent of ballots cast by Dalit and Adivasi voters in 2004 went to the BJP in seven of the country's seventeen largest states (see Figure 1.1). This proportion represents a significant achievement in India's fragmented, multiparty system, in which no party won more than a quarter of all votes cast. Moreover, the gains were recent: just eight years earlier, the BJP had achieved this level of success with Dalit and Adivasi voters in only a single state (Gujarat).

Such recent inroads mark a consequential, yet curiously unnoticed electoral trend within Indian politics: why were so many of Hinduism's most marginalized citizens turning to the party of its most privileged? Such support was even more inexplicable given that the antipathy of non-elite voters toward the BJP was not simply a function of class-based divides. After all, caste hierarchies not only enabled the economic exploitation of subaltern voters but also sought to justify centuries of their intimate social denigration. The close correspondence of caste and class in India, especially at their extremes, meant Dalit and Adivasi communities were separated from the BJP's core across both economic and social divides.[33]

[31] In many states, smaller regional or caste-based parties were the most successful with both communities in the 2004 election. Examples include the Telegu Desam Party (Party for Telugu Land and People, TDP) in Andhra Pradesh or the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (All India Dravidian Progress Federation, AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (People of the Majority's Party, BSP) in Uttar Pradesh.

[32] Some recent examples of analyses that look to explain poor voter behavior in India beyond the lens of caste include Krishna 2003 and Ahuja and Chhibber 2012.

[33] In the 2004 National Election Study conducted by Lokniti that my research was partially based on, 41 percent of Dalit respondents and 40.02 percent of Adivasi respondents came from

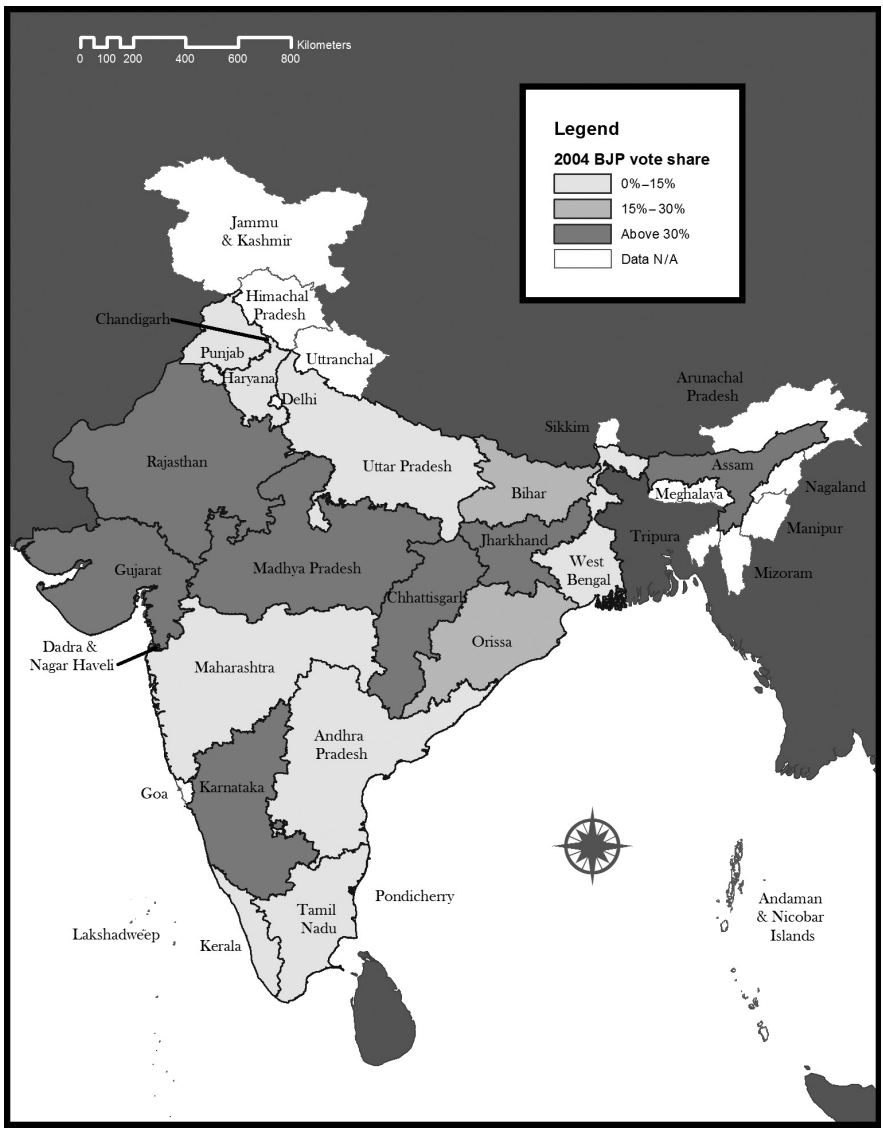

FIGURE 1.1. Map of BJP performance with Dalit and Adivasi voters (2004)
Source: Data from 2004 Lokniti National Election Study; map drawn by Abraham Kaleo Parrish, Yale Map Department, 2012.

households earning less than $1 a day, compared to only 18.12 percent of all other castes. According to a national survey conducted in 2000 by the United Nations Development Programme, Dalits and Adivasis are also less than half as likely as all other castes to live in houses with electricity or to be literate (see UNDP 2000).