1 Political Representation and Intergroup Relations

1.1 The Question

On January 23, 2009, three days after Barack Obama's first inauguration, I hopped in a jeep to a relatively remote village of Jaipur district, in the Indian state of Rajasthan. My objective that day was to interview a village council president who had been described to me as being especially dynamic and active. He belonged to the *Bairwa* caste, one of the "Scheduled Castes" formerly referred to as "untouchable" in India, and he had been elected to this position after it had been "reserved" for members of the Scheduled Castes. As a result of this radical form of ethnic quota, he had become the first member of his caste group to be elected as council president in his village. As I later found out, the symbolic value of his election had been heightened even further by the particularly retrograde political context of the village. Not only was he the first member of the Scheduled Castes to serve as council president; he was also the first council president not to be drawn from the historically dominant Rajput family whose medieval fort still stood high on a hill, right at the center of the village.

I was not able to interview him on that day, as the time he had promised to allot me over the phone never materialized. When I arrived in the village council building at 9AM, he was already busy signing and stamping an impressive pile of official documents that the village council secretary kept serving him. Around 11AM, as the pile grew smaller, I started to hope that he would give me his attention. But his cell phone rang. He had been summoned to mediate a minor conflict between two villagers over a pile of branches that was obstructing the path that separated two hamlets. Bidding everyone a hasty farewell, the president hopped on a motorcycle and disappeared, much to my despair. When I reached the courtyard of his house in the afternoon, I soon realized that many villagers had had the same idea as me. The president was sitting on a plastic chair in the midst of a good dozen of his constituents, who were sitting on the floor or on cot-beds, patiently waiting their turn

to get the president's ear. These men and women, who belonged to various communities within the village, had walked all the way to the house of a former "untouchable" in order to seek redress for their problems. The president – now freshly bathed and wearing an immaculately white *kurta* – looked regal as he listened and addressed the villagers' concerns. As the courtyard progressively emptied, I started hoping once again that my time would come. But when his cell phone rang for the umpteenth time that day, I understood that I would have to be patient. This time it was the BDO (Block Development Officer), the highest-ranking state official at the block level, calling and asking to see the council president. In a matter of minutes, the courtyard almost entirely emptied. The president excused himself, jumped into a shiny red SUV that bore a "PRESIDENT"[1] bumper sticker, and left those of us who had stayed to watch the scene in a cloud of dust.

In spite of my relative misfortune, the observations made on that day – the stunning role reversal, the pomp of power, the uncommon forms of inter-caste contact, and the new linkage between a disadvantaged group and the local authorities – left me with many hypotheses about the impact that a disadvantaged group's access to representation might have on the nature of intergroup relations. These are the basis for my explorations in this book. The empirical literature on the impact of descriptive representation has – since the landmark study of Chattopadhyay and Duflo (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004) – mostly focused on the material and redistributive impact of disadvantaged groups' access to political representation. When members of groups that have long been dominated, stigmatized, and excluded finally gain access to political power, it is however suggested that this experience will also change the social meaning of belonging to such a group, and that these psychological changes will have far-reaching behavioral consequences. Yet, these presumed psychological effects so far remain surprisingly unspecific and untested. Do policies enabling a more descriptive form of political representation change the psychology of intergroup relations? If so, in what ways?

My answer to these questions, developed in the rest of this book, is nuanced but carefully optimistic. Drawing on a detailed, multi-method exploration of a single case – local-level electoral quotas for members of the Scheduled Castes in the Indian state of Rajasthan – I show that descriptive representation can impact the psychology of intergroup relations, and that these psychological changes in turn improve the nature of day-to-day interpersonal relations. Significant changes happen to members of the newly represented group as well as to members of dominant

[1] "*Sarpanch*" in Hindi.

groups. As important as this conclusion is, it does not imply that a disadvantaged group's access to political representation will systematically sweep away all negative beliefs and behaviors toward members of that group. Beneficial psychological effects are likely to occur in some contexts, but not others. Most importantly, changes are likely to be slow, incremental, and partial, as access to political representation should be expected to improve some beliefs relevant to members of that group while leaving others untouched.

1.2 Theoretical Focus: The *Psychology* of Descriptive Representation

Before I elaborate on this argument, and theorize about the changes that should and should not be expected to occur when members of disadvantaged groups reach elected offices, it is important to clarify the object of my interest and further define the variables which constitute the main focus of this book.

1.2.1 Policies of Descriptive Representation

This book explores changes brought by institutional efforts to enable groups who are excluded from political institutions to enter them. I refer to these institutional efforts as policies of descriptive representation. Although I borrow the idea of "descriptive representation" directly from Pitkin (Pitkin 1967), other authors have discussed the rationale for these policies. They are, for instance, similar to what Phillips refers to as "policies of presence" (Phillips 1995), and more recently, to the "policies of group inclusion" evaluated by Jensenius (forthcoming) in the context of India.

These policies can take several shapes and forms. Quotas on party lists are not equivalent to candidate quotas, which are themselves not equivalent to reserved *seats* for certain groups (Krook 2009, Krook and Zetterberg 2014). Besides, related efforts such as majority-minority districts (Tate 2003) or other types of affirmative action policies also constitute policies of descriptive representation. These methods share one attribute: they require institutional engineering, so that members of a stigmatized group end up being chosen by parties or voters who have so far not favored them. Policies of descriptive representation[2] have been

[2] For ease of language, I mostly use the expression "descriptive representation" throughout this book instead of "policies of descriptive representation." I refer to the consequences of policies of descriptive representation as "group access to political representation" or "a group's access to political representation."

hypothesized to have a wide range of positive and negative effects, and to affect both members of dominant groups and members of disadvantaged groups – that is, members of these newly represented groups. While my investigations lead me to explore many of these effects in the following chapters, this book's primary interest is in the impact of policies of descriptive representation on one of these outcomes: the quality of day-to-day intergroup relations.

1.2.2 Descriptive Representation and Interpersonal Relations

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a group's access to political representation *can* reshape interpersonal relations between members of different groups. Examples from different contexts illustrate the potential effects of descriptive representation:

"Since Obama started campaigning, if I go almost anywhere, it's: 'How are you, sir?' I'm talking about strangers. Calling me 'sir.'"[3]

"Now that my nephew is the sarpanch [Village Council Head], it's like we all started smelling of jasmine! Upper-caste villagers greet us warmly in the street, and even stop by to talk to us. […] We get more respect."[4]

As hinted by these quotes from a variety of contexts, access to political power may have a transformative effect on common behaviors relevant to the quality of day-to-day interpersonal relations between members of the different groups. While these two examples suggest that access to political power can prompt more civil and respectful interpersonal behaviors, a number of *additional* interpersonal behaviors might evolve as a result of a group's access to political representation. As members of a socially disadvantaged group gain access to visible positions of power, members of dominant groups may, for instance, find it increasingly difficult to segregate members of that group or to refuse to partner with them in their economic enterprises. Concurrently, members of socially disadvantaged groups who once silently submitted to the humiliating tasks they were given may be inclined to refuse to do so now that their social status has been suddenly elevated by a fellow group member's accession to a prominent position of power.[5] The chapters that follow are generally

[3] From a *New York Times* article on the social repercussions of the political rise of Barack Obama in 2008 ("Many blacks find joy in unexpected breakthrough," *New York Times*, June 6, 2008).

[4] From a private interview with the author, February 2009. The respondent was a *Bairwa* (SC) villager from Phagi *panchayat samiti* (Jaipur district).

[5] Examples illustrating this are frequent in press reports of inter-caste violence in rural North India. Take, for instance, the following case, as narrated in Bose (2008). The incident occurred in 2007, only a few days after Mayawati, the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party and herself a member of the Scheduled Castes, returned to power as chief minister

interested in these – so far uncharted – repercussions of descriptive representation, and how they broadly affect interpersonal relations between members of different groups.

In exploring the consequences of descriptive representation, it should be emphasized that this book largely focuses on the *psychological mechanisms* that trigger these behaviors. Accordingly, my analyses in this book mostly focus on the effect of descriptive representation on a series of group-related beliefs. Since these beliefs causally precede behaviors relevant to the quality of intergroup relations, the book explores the various pathways through which descriptive representation may lead to substantial changes as much as it explores these behavioral repercussions.

These group-related beliefs matter for both obvious and less obvious reasons. They first matter because they play a role in the persistence of regimes of everyday hostility, segregation, and discrimination against some groups. Accordingly, changes in these beliefs can be seen as the first step toward less antagonistic interpersonal relations. Beyond the quality of interpersonal relations, changes in group-related beliefs may also have a long-standing effect on the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities across groups. As Sen (2004) and Appadurai (2004) point out, the way members of different groups think and relate to one another – as a function of their group identity – conditions the ability of members of disadvantaged groups to improve their socioeconomic condition. A range of discriminatory and hostile beliefs on one hand (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; see also Blank 2003) and of internalized barriers on the other[6] can crush the ability of members of disadvantaged groups to reduce the socioeconomic gap between themselves and members of other groups. As argued by Loury (2002) and a number of seminal models of group inequalities (Fryer and Austen-White 2005, Rao and Walton 2004, Ray 2006, Bowles, Loury, and Sethi 2009), persistent discriminatory beliefs

of Uttar Pradesh. Phulpatti Devi, a widow and a member of one of the most exploited and disadvantaged subcastes within the Scheduled Castes, decided to retaliate against an upper-caste local strongman who had duped her and attempted to rape her on several occasions (and had never been punished for it). That morning, Phulpatti Devi tricked the man into undressing and castrated him with a knife. When the magazine *Tehelka* later asked her how she – a woman from the Scheduled Castes, whose complaints and explanations would usually not be recorded – had gathered the courage to do this, she simply answered: "I thought that now that Mayawati is in power, she will save me." This case is an extreme but significant illustration of the potential behavioral consequences that access to power of a member of a disadvantaged group may generate.

[6] See Hoff and Pandey (2004) for an experiment on the effect of perceived discriminations on economic behaviors; See Crocker (1999), Steele (1997), Steele, Spencer, and Aronson (2002) for experiments on the effect of race priming in standardized tests. See Merton (1953), Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) and Ray (2006) for broader conceptual perspectives on how the social group with which individuals identify can restrict their horizons and aspirations, and how this self-limitation can eventually contribute to the "reproduction" of group inequalities.

and low aspirations and poor expectations that derive from them within the stigmatized group can be held responsible for the stickiness of racial or ethnic inequalities.

Given that group-related beliefs impact crucial outcomes in the long run, focusing on changes in the psychology of intergroup relations is arguably as important as focusing on behavioral change. Behavioral change measured *at a given point in time* may not be more valuable than psychological changes whose repercussions have yet to fully unfold.[7]

1.2.3 Cognitive Changes and Discrimination-Inducing Beliefs

While I am interested in psychological change, I am especially interested in the *cognitive* changes that derive from a group's access to representation. In my investigations, I distinguish between the emotional/affective consequences of descriptive representation and its cognitive consequences. This distinction qualifies my work both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, this distinction allows me to differentiate between instinctive reactions to descriptive representation (such as potential "backlash" effects, based on feelings of threat, danger, or resentment, or emotions such as pride or esteem) and changes based on new information acquired over time. Empirically, focusing on cognitive changes (that is, on changes in *beliefs*) allows to me measure the evolution of much more tractable, reliable, and transparent outcomes. As explained in Chapter 5, asking sensitive questions about intergroup relations is no simple matter. It remains easier, however, to measure what individuals *believe* than it is to measure what they *feel*.[8]

While this book's main area of interest is cognitive change, it also focuses on a specific set of beliefs that are best referred to as *discrimination-inducing beliefs*. Discrimination-inducing beliefs are the beliefs on which individuals rely to justify discriminatory, hostile, or unequal social relations between members of a disadvantaged group and members of dominant groups. Members of dominant groups as well as members of disadvantaged groups may harbor such beliefs.

[7] In reverse, an absence of behavioral change in the short run may not entirely imply an absence of behavioral change in the future.

[8] I do not claim to measure these more emotional or instinctive reactions in this book. I do not, for instance, directly capture the effect of a group's access to representation on feelings of pride or esteem. While this is a clear empirical limitation of this project, and one to which I return in Chapter 8, it does not prevent me from discussing and hypothesizing about the effect of representation on these outcomes.

A variety of such discrimination-inducing beliefs exist. Some of these beliefs, such as *stereotypes*, readily come to mind. An ingrained belief that members of a stigmatized group are dangerous, lazy, or lack intelligence is known to fuel antagonistic behaviors against members of that group among members of dominant groups. Similarly, self-stereotypes – among members of disadvantaged groups – can fuel a form of self-prejudice, and eventually restrict the behaviors of individuals from these groups. But a number of other beliefs – *beyond stereotypes* – also fuel discrimination or hostile behaviors against members of disadvantaged groups. In this book, I argue that *perceived norms of interaction* – that is, beliefs about how other members of dominant groups interact or ought to interact with members of disadvantaged groups – have an important impact on the quality of intergroup interactions. Insofar as individuals look for cues in their social and legal environment when interacting with others, these beliefs play a crucial role in the reproduction of day-to-day discriminations and unequal relations. Simply put, individuals from dominant groups are more likely to discriminate when they perceive that most people in their environment discriminate or when they perceive that laws that forbid discrimination are weakly enforced (Tankard and Paluck 2016). Meanwhile, individuals from disadvantaged groups are more likely to overcome deep-seated mental barriers to behavioral change if they perceive that they live in a less hostile environment. Relying on this theoretical distinction, this book theorizes and tests the impact of descriptive representation on each of these different types of beliefs, and on common interpersonal behaviors across groups.

1.3 The Argument

How, then, does a group's access to political representation affect the beliefs that underpin discriminatory and hostile day-to-day intergroup relations? Relying on a detailed exploration of the case of the Scheduled Castes in rural Rajasthan and on intuitions from a variety of disciplines and contexts, this book proposes a novel and nuanced response to this question. While this argument is developed at length in Chapter 4, a brief summary is presented here.

The argument unfolds in two steps. The first step suggests that beneficial cognitive changes are overall more likely to occur in some contexts than in others. The second step then specifies *which* types of beliefs are likely to evolve as a result of a disadvantaged group's access to political representation, and which are not.

1.3.1 *When Can Descriptive Representation Improve Group-Related Beliefs?*

The existing literature on the impact of descriptive representation on intergroup relations has so far generated seemingly contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, a number of scholars have suggested that the accession of a few members of a disadvantaged group to political office should bring important cognitive changes (Mansbridge 1999, Hajnal 2001, Hajnal 2005, Beaman et al. 2009). These authors have usually reached an optimistic conclusion, as their studies have emphasized the fact that exposure to members of disadvantaged groups elected to powerful positions may contribute to *improving* intergroup relations. The logic implied in these arguments has been relatively simple: minority representation provides citizens with new information regarding politicians from that disadvantaged group. This new information, insofar as it contradicts the common stereotypes against members of a disadvantaged group, can have a revelatory function. As citizens are exposed to a prominent member of a group they are rarely in contact with in their daily lives, they learn about the ways of these politicians, and through these individuals about the ways of members of these groups. Insofar as this new information tends to be reassuring or disconfirming, they update their negative stereotypes about members of these groups and develop more tolerant attitudes. Recent evidence about the effect of Obama's victories supports this optimistic view, even though it also notes that these positive changes were often fleeting (Welch and Sigelman 2011, Goldman and Mutz 2014).

Contrasting with this optimistic view, other works have suggested that descriptive representation should have a more worrying impact. Over the past decades, a flurry of studies in sociology, psychology, and political science has shown that access to political power by members of groups that have historically been excluded from political institutions has often led to strong negative reactions by members of dominant groups. These reactions, often characterized as "backlashes," have been described as stemming from reactions to a perceived threat. Blumer (1958) and Bobo (1983), among others, have suggested that white Americans are likely to respond negatively to black political power if they feel that it endangers the wealth and political power of the white community, or if they feel that black electoral victories may disrupt the traditional balance of racial power. Authors in this literature predict that the election of black Americans to important leadership positions should *heighten* racial tension and result in widespread "white backlash" against black

Americans. Recent evidence suggesting that the first election of Barack Obama in 2008 also generated anxiety and less sympathetic attitudes toward African Americans may, in addition, lend credit to this argument (Valentino and Brader 2011).

More generally speaking, both realistic theories of conflict (Bobo 1988, Coser 1956, LeVine and Campbell 1972, Sherif, 1966 are classic examples) and emotion-based theories of conflict (Horowitz 1985, Petersen 2002) have suggested that the implementation of descriptive representation could trigger a "backlash." In this view, antagonistic attitudes are the product of concerns about social status and the maintenance of the existing hierarchy of groups. In that sense, periods of transition in which an established group might have a lot to lose, given the assertiveness of another group, may generate antagonism and violence. According to this hypothesis, we should expect the implementation of descriptive representation to generate heightened antagonism, and even violence, as "threatened" established groups resist any change perceived as having negative consequences for their future welfare.[9]

The argument put forth in this book reconciles these seemingly opposed views. Even if negative "backlash" effects and positive changes in group-related beliefs have sometimes been seen as alternative hypotheses (Hajnal 2001), I do not consider these as radically opposed reactions. I rather treat them as phenomena of a different nature, with "backlash" effects stemming from the *affective* dimensions of prejudice (Petersen 2002, Horowitz 2001), while positive changes in stereotypes stem from the more *cognitive* dimension of intergroup attitudes. The timing of such reactions suggests that these phenomena are not alternatives: while backlash effects are seen as short-term reactions that take place in periods of transition in which information is scarce or uncertain, cognitive effects are described as the result of long-term exposure to minority representation, after citizens have been exposed to members of disadvantaged groups, and after they have had sufficient time to learn about them. Distinguishing between long-term cognitive changes and short-term emotional reactions thus appears necessary. Insofar as they are not mutually exclusive, both types of reactions may in fact happen over time, including within the same individuals. One may, for instance, *feel* threatened, angry, or anxious when they first hear that their town is about to be headed by a member of a particularly disliked group,

[9] Note, in addition, that this hypothesis appears compatible with micro-psychological theories of conflict that suggest that grievances (Gurr 1970, Spilerman 1970) and/or certain emotions (Petersen 2002, Horowitz 2001) are the operating mechanisms in ethnic conflict.

before revising their beliefs after having *experienced* the leadership of that individual.

While these reactions are not opposed, and can happen over time within the same individuals, they are extremely unlikely to be simultaneous. When a disadvantaged group's access to representation generates intergroup tensions and violence, individuals are unlikely to receive and process the kind of information that may potentially lead them to update their hostile or discriminatory beliefs. That is, positive cognitive effects are unlikely to happen in the midst of a strong "backlash-type" reaction. Accordingly, the likelihood of beneficial cognitive effects is *conditional* on the absence of backlash effects.

When, then, should "backlash-type" reactions take place? Building on these theoretical intuitions and on observations developed in Chapter 4 of this book, Figure 1.1 provides a simple response to this question: departing from the aforementioned intuitions, I argue that a group's access to political representation should not systematically lead to a backlash, and that we should observe "backlash effects" only when a disadvantaged group's access to political representation challenges the existing distribution of resources between groups, or when it is *perceived* to. When a group's access to representation, on the other hand, does *not* credibly threaten the status quo (that is, the existing distribution of material resources across groups), backlash effects are unlikely to occur, and citizens from dominant groups are likely to go on with their lives, unfazed by the access of a new group to political representation. This peaceful acceptance of minority representation, I argue, opens the door to subtle but nonetheless beneficial cognitive effects: when conflicts about the legitimacy of the new political representatives are avoided citizens from all groups are provided with new information about members of a disadvantaged group, or about their position in society. This, in turn, enables several types of positive changes in patterns of intergroup relations.

1.3.2 Which Beliefs Does Access to Representation Change?

Where descriptive representation *is able* to change the psychology of intergroup relations, *how*, if at all, does it do it? The aforementioned distinction between *stereotypes* and *perceived norms of interaction* constitutes the centerpiece of this book's argument and the basis for my answer to this question. Each of these two types of beliefs suggests a different avenue through which policies of descriptive representation may improve the quality of intergroup relations. Relying on this distinction, this book argues that there are two types of mechanisms through which access to