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Caste and the British Census in Bihar: Using Old Data to Study Contemporary Political Behavior

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To say that politics in Bihar has been strongly rooted in caste over the last 75 years is as much a commonplace in South Asian studies as saying that Bengalis consider themselves more cultured than their neighbors or that in Tamilnadu there has historically been a greater division between Brahmans and non-Brahmans than has been the case in north India. And just as there has been much written on Bengali *bhadralok* and Tamil Brahmans and anti-Brahmanism, so there is a great deal of analysis on the role of caste in Bihar, stretching in its coverage from the efforts of Sachchidanand Sinha and other Kayasthas to get their own province in which they would be dominant (efforts which succeeded with the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal in 1912)¹ to the casteist aspects of the background to the "J.P. Movement" of Jayaprakash Narayan in Bihar just before the emergency decreed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975.²

These analyses of caste in Bihar have relied essentially on

¹For instance, C. James Bishop, "Sachchidananda Sinha and the Making of Modern Bihar: A Study in Constitutional Agitation at the Provincial Level, 1905-1919", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1972.

²Ghanshyam Shah, "Revolution, Reform or Protest? A Study of the Bihar Movement—I", *Economic and Political Weekly*, XII, 15 (April 9, 1977), 605-614.

five sources of information. First there have been the historical studies based on interviews, diaries, letters, autobiographies and memoranda of political and social figures of the past. A second kind of historical research has based itself on archives and collections of official materials dating back into the 19th century. Third, there has been the tradition of political journalism that has long existed in Bihar. A fourth strain of data has come in the studies of politicians, particularly the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) of Bihar. And fifth there have been a few field studies at the constituency or local level.³ The focus of these studies has generally been on prominent individuals, factional struggles (usually those within the Congress Party) or the excesses of caste dominance, whether at state, local or regional level. Exceptions to this elite orientation have been very few indeed.⁴

³As an example of the first approach, see Bishop's dissertation cited in nl. The fruits of archival research are exemplified in Walter Hauser, "The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942: A Study of Indian Peasant Movement", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago 1961. A good instance of political journalism will be found in Arun Sinha's coverage of the 1977 election campaign in Bihar in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, e.g., "Eclipse of Congress", XII, 11 (March 12, 1977), 455-456; and "Vote Banks Break Down", XII, 13 (March 26, 1977), 529-531. For a study of politicians, see Mahendra P. Singh, *Cohesion in a Predominant Party: The Pradesh Congress and Party Politics in Bihar* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1975). Field studies at the micro-level are less common, but see for instance Herbert Heidenreich's two essays, "Caste, Class and Voting Power: A Study of Changing Political Organizations in North Monghyr", in Robert and Mary Jane Beech, eds., *Bengal: Change and Continuity* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, Asian Studies Center, [1971]), South Asia Series Occasional Paper No. 16, pp. 255-262; and "The Anatomy of a Riot: A Case Study from Bihar, 1965," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, VI, 2 (July 1968), 107-124.

⁴At least on such example should be forthcoming from the work of James R. Hagen and Anand A. Yang. See their "Local Sources for the Study of Rural India: The 'Village Notes' of Bihar", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIII, 1 (January-March 1976), 75-84. A study which examines some aspects of caste at the mass level is Anand A. Yang, "Dissidence and Collective Violence in an Agrarian Society: A Study of Riots in Saran District, 1866-1920", a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York, March 1977.

One very important reason for the scarcity of analyses with a mass focus has been an absence of usable data. Most of the historical and contemporary materials naturally have concentrated and continue to concentrate on the behavior and ideas of important people. Ordinary people get included only as they get swept up in rural violence, student agitations and the like, and even here the focus has been on the behavior of the elites precipitating (or containing) the confrontations, not on the masses of people involved in them.

Elections would seem an obvious object of study by scholars interested in caste behavior at the mass level, for people do participate and vote in large numbers, but thus far there has been very little in the way of survey analysis linking caste and political behavior, primarily because of the expense and scale of operation needed to organize and conduct interviews and then analyze data for large samples of voters.⁵

The remaining possibility is ecological analysis, in which demographic data and voting patterns are compared for aggregate units of people, such as districts, thanas or constituencies. This approach has the singular advantage that it utilizes published data (the census or other official figures and the election results), thereby precluding the temporal need to be on hand at the time of the election campaign itself, as well as the difficulties of expense and organization of field interviews. Unfortunately, the ecological approach also has one singular disadvantage, in that the caste data from the census are all from 1931 or earlier, whereas the elections of interest (i.e., those elections with a universal franchise) are all from 1952 or later.⁶

⁵One such study is Ramashray Roy's, *The Uncertain Verdict: A Study of the 1969 Elections in Four Indian States* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973).

⁶There are also some methodological problems involved with ecological analysis, primarily the issue of the "ecological fallacy", as it is called among devotees of this approach. For more on this matter, see Harry W. Blair, "Minority Electoral Politics in a North Indian State: Aggregate Data Analysis and the Muslim Community in Bihar, 1952-1972", *American Political Science Review*, LXVII, 4 (December 1973), 1275-1287. A more thorough analysis will be found in Biplab Dasgupta and W.H. Morris-Jones, *Patterns and Trends in Indian Politics: An Ecological Analysis of Aggregate Data on Society and Elections* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1976), pp. 346-353.

With British autocracy went a consuming interest in ethnography that produced very thorough census of caste during the Raj but as autocracy was replaced with democracy and elections, ethnographic passion was also replaced by an official egalitarianism that refused to countenance the reporting of caste in the government censuses for any groups other than the Scheduled Castes.

The possibility of comparing census data on the geographical distribution of caste with patterns of voting behavior is impeded by this historical separation of our data, but it is not prevented. In fact, by projecting caste data from the earlier period into the 1960s, it is possible to discern a good deal of caste-based pattern in voting behavior. The remainder of this paper deals with this endeavor. First, we will take up the question of reliability: can old figures, primarily from the 1911 census, really give anything like an accurate picture of caste today? Then we move on to methodology: how can we prepare the census data reported by revenue thanas in a usable form so that it can be compared with voting returns? Once that hurdle has been overcome, we will take up the actual comparison: what is the relationship between the geographical distribution of a caste and vote for candidates of that caste? How does this compare with votes for candidates of another caste? The election data employed here will be from the fourth General Elections in 1967. Finally, we will draw some conclusions about the efficacy of using caste data from the British censuses to understand contemporary politics in Bihar.

I. How reliable are the old census data?

Information on caste was published for the district level down through the census of 1931, and was gathered for the 1941 census though not published, owing to wartime exigency. Bihar in 1931 had only 16 districts for its 33 million people,⁷ a number which permits only a rather gross level of generalization, especially considering that the state's population had expanded to 46 million by 1961, an average of 2.7 million per district.

⁷That is, the area which became Bihar after Orissa was split off in 1936.

It is possible to achieve a greater refinement by moving to the level of the revenue thana (of which there are over 180 in the area that now constitutes Bihar), but to get down to this stratum it is necessary to go back before 1931.

Thana level data were published for the census of 1891 for virtually every caste of any size, but sloppiness of recording and a hazy understanding of the caste structure led census officials to suspect that many of their 1891 figures were inaccurate, with the result that much greater care was exercised in collecting and assembling the 1901 data.⁸ The data published for 1901, however, listed only the more prominent castes in each thana. For 1911 the census did not publish figures for castes at thana level at all, only for districts, but a series of handbooks were printed as supplements for the district gazetteers that did give data by thana for the numerically more prominent castes.⁹ In 1921 only district level data were published,¹⁰ and the same was true for the 1931 census, with the interesting exception that caste figures for each thana were published for Brahmans. The overall picture, then, is that for Brahmans there are available data by revenue thana for 1931, and for all other "clean castes" the most recent figures at the thana level are the data from 1911.

What evidence is there that the 1911 data still held good (or at least good enough for our purposes) 56 years later for the general elections of 1967? Fortunately, there is some such evidence, for the 1961 census did publish data on individual Scheduled Castes for the district level, thereby allowing us to compare the recent position with the earlier figures, as is done in Table I,

⁸The census establishment was well pleased with the 1901 results. See Government of India, *Census of India 1901*, Volume VI, *The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories*, Part I, *The Report*, by E.A. Gait (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), p. 347.

⁹For instance, Government of Bihar and Orissa, *Gaya District Gazetteer: Statistics, 1900-01 to 1910-11* (Patna City: Bihar and Orissa Government Press, 1915). A similar series appeared after the 1901 census, but for our purposes this earlier series only duplicates what appeared in the census itself.

¹⁰For Bengal, the series of district statistical publications was continued for the 1921 census data, but not in Bihar, a development which in the eyes of the researcher must be regarded as one of the less favorable effects of the dismemberment of greater Bengal in 1912.

which presents data for Patna District on the larger Scheduled Castes as well as the more prominent "clean castes" over the period 1901-1961. The absence of published data from 1941 to 1951 leave a 30-year gap in our figures, but we can get some idea of stability over time nonetheless. Clearly, for the untouchable communities presented in Table I, there was not much change at all over the 60-year period. Both large castes like the Dusadhs and Chamars, and small ones like the Dhobis and Doms display an almost remarkable consistency over time. For the "clean castes" our data go only to 1931, and so we may only speculate on what has been their growth or decline since then. There are three sources of possible concern here. First, given that the Harijan communities have grown more or less *pari passu* with the rest of the population, can we say the same of the more prominent "clean castes?" To the extent that caste and class coincide, caution is required, for there is some evidence that family size and wealth are positively correlated: the wealthier a family, the larger its size.¹¹ Now it is surely safe to say that Rajputs are considerably wealthier than Chamars on the average, and therefore it is likely that family size is larger among Rajputs. But does this mean that Rajputs are growing in absolute numbers at a faster rate than Chamars, or simply that joint families among Chamars are more likely to split into nuclear units, and that both groups are probably growing in total numbers at about the same rate?¹² Such evidence as we have from Table I indicates that the latter is more probable, for the figures for each caste appear quite constant over time.

¹¹For rural India in general, see National Council on Applied Economic Research, *All-India Rural Household Survey*, Volume II, *Income, Investment and Saving* (New Delhi: NCAER, 1965), pp. 31 and 35. On Bihar in particular, see Kedarnath Prasad, *The Economics of a Backward Region in a Backward Economy (A Case Study of Bihar in Relation to the Other States of India)* (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1967), Volume I, p. 160.

¹²For an analysis of the general issue of the incidence of joint and nuclear families in India, see Paulene M. Kolenda, "Region, Caste and Family Structure: A Comparative Study of the Indian 'Joint' Family, in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds., *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), pp. 339-396. Unfortunately, Kolenda does not address the question posed here.

TABLE I
*Selected Castes as a Percentage of Total
 Population: Patna District*

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Per cent of total population in</i>				
	<i>1901</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1931</i>	<i>1961</i>
Bhumihar	7.0	6.0	6.8	5.9	
Brahman	2.4	2.4	2.6	3.2	
Chamar	3.5	3.8	3.8	4.3	3.9
Dhobi	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6
Dom	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2
Dusadh	5.3	6.6	6.3	6.3	6.2
Kayastha	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.8	
Koiri	4.9	4.5	4.6	3.9	
Kurmi	11.1	10.8	11.9	9.4	
Musahar	2.3	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.7
Pasi	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.0
Rajput	3.9	3.9	4.1	4.4	
Yadav	13.5	14.5	14.8	15.0	

The second source of concern is the phenomenon of upward caste mobility. In Bihar the best example of caste mobility is offered by the Bhumihars, a high caste community which has at least since the beginning of the 19th century claimed that it was in fact and should be regarded as a Brahman caste. In the early years of the present century the Bhumihars organized a caste association, the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, to press this claim, in particular with the census authorities.¹³ The census officials felt themselves besieged by these efforts and tried, valiantly in their own estimation, to thwart them, but not always successfully. Our figures for Patna District in Table I did not show any great changes in the Bhumihar and Brahman populations, but for other areas of Bihar the changes were considerable in the case of these two castes. In Darbhanga District,

¹³On the Bhumihars' efforts at upward mobility, see Walter Hauser, "Dynamics of Social Ranking and Political Power Among Emerging Caste Groups in Bihar", a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, March 1967. Also, Heidenreich, "Caste, Class and Voting Power".

for instance, the percentage of Bhumihars declined from 5.3 per cent of district population in 1901 to just 1.6 per cent in 1931. At the same time, Brahman population soared from 6.8 to 10.2 per cent of district total. Obviously, substantial numbers of Bhumihars were "passing" for Brahmans to the census takers, a fact which the officials in charge lamented at length.¹⁴ For levels lower than the district, the changes were in some cases quite spectacular. For 1931 thana level data were published only for Brahmans, but it is nonetheless possible to make some comparisons, as we see in Table II. Here we find that in Bihpur Thana, Brahmans, who had amounted to just under 5 per cent of the population in 1901 and 1911, jumped to 11.6 per cent in 1931, a huge increase. We cannot say what happened to the Bhumihar population over this period, but presumably it declined by a more or less comparable amount. In Begusarai Thana of Monghyr District the Brahman figures more than doubled, from less than 3 to 6.5 per cent of population.¹⁵

Can the old data be trusted then? In most cases probably so, for the Bhumihar effort was the only major caste movement in Bihar that had as its goal the promotion of its members to a different higher caste. The other groups, such as the All-India Yadav Mahasabha, sought to improve the status of their

¹⁴See *Census of India, 1901*, Vol. VI, Part I, p. 379; Government of India, *Census of India, 1911*, Volume V, *Bengal Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim*, Part I, *Report*, by L.S.S. O'Malley (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), pp. 441, 444-445; Government of India, *Census of India, 1931*, Volume VII, Bihar and Orissa, Part I, *Report*, by W.G. Lacey (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1933), pp. 274-278. Also W.G. Lacey, *Some Aspects of the Census Operations of 1931 in Bihar and Orissa* (Patna: Patna University, 1933), pp. 89 and 104-107. Even in the area of caste mobility, it seems, it was Bihar's fate to be a backward province. For the 1931 census, there were 63 castes in the United Provinces claiming higher status, 44 in Bengal, 24 in the Central Province and Berar, as against only 17 for Bihar and Orissa. Imtiaz Ahmad gives figures and details for these petitions in his comprehensive review of these movements and the literature on them, "Caste Mobility Movements in North India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, VIII, 2 (June 1971), 164-191.

¹⁵The transformation of Bhumihars into Brahmans in Begusarai, is interesting, because even today the area is considered to be the political preserve of the Bhumihars.

TABLE II

Brahmans and Bhumihars in Selected Thanas of Bihar, 1901-1931

DISTRICT & Thana	Percentage of total population in			1931 figure as a per cent of 1901 figure	
	1901	1911	1931		
BHAGALPUR					
Bihpur:	Brahmans	4.9	4.8	11.6	236.7
	Bhumihars	11.2	9.9		
DARBHANGA					
Dalsinghsarai:	Brahmans	4.2	3.7	7.6	181.0
	Bhumihars	6.8	6.1		
Warisnagar:	Brahmans	4.3	3.9	8.1	188.4
	Bhumihars	10.0	8.8		
MONGHYR					
Begusarai:	Brahmans	2.9	2.7	6.5	240.7
	Bhumihars	12.8	13.1		
Teghra:	Brahmans	4.9	4.9	10.5	214.3
	Bhumihars	18.0	17.2		

members as members of the original group rather than transfer them to another caste group.¹⁶ Our 1931 data on Brahmans may include a goodly number of Bhumihars, then, and our 1911 figures on Bhumihars may include quite a few who subsequently made the census taker think they were Brahman (and maybe even their neighbors as well over time), but the remaining data should be reasonably accurate.

A third source of concern is one that cannot be dismissed so easily, and that is the progress of urbanization. The 1911 or 1931 figure may, when all is said and done, be reasonably representative of the current situation in the countryside, but surely not in the urban areas of the state, which have grown

¹⁶On the Yadav Mahasabha, see M.S.A. Rao, "Political Elite and Caste Association: A Report of a Caste Conference", *Economic and Political Weekly*, III, 20 (May 18, 1968), 779-782. One testament to the Yadav Mahasabha's success is that today members of the caste are generally referred to (in public, anyway) as "Yadavs", a much more elevating appellation than their older names, such as "Goala".

much faster than the *mufassil* over the course of the twentieth century. The problem here is easily solved, however, by simply eliminating the major urban areas from our analysis, a task done with little trouble in a state that despite rapid urban growth was still only 8 per cent urban at the time of the 1961 census.¹⁷

It seemed wise to eliminate several other areas as well. The highly industrialized district of Dhanbad has changed so much over the last 50 years that the 1911 data would have to be regarded as hopelessly inadequate, and the three tribal districts of Ranchi, Singhbhum and Santhal Parganas all have comparatively few members of any of the major Hindu castes, so these areas have all been left out of the present treatment. In addition, the 42 Scheduled Caste and one Scheduled Tribe seat in our target area have been dropped, for while we could measure the "clean caste" population for these seats, it would make no sense to compare this geographical data with the vote for candidates of the "clean castes" in the reserved constituencies, in which candidacy is restricted to members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

The area of analysis, then, is the 139 non-urban revenue thanas of northern and central Bihar, with a focus on Brahman distribution in 1931 and that of the other prominent castes for 1911, which we will employ in seeking to understand the voting patterns of the 1967 election.¹⁸

II. The Distribution of Major Castes in Bihar

For Bihar as a whole, the caste position is as shown in Table III. There are five major groups in the "twice-born"

¹⁷The urban areas dropped were Patna, Gaya and Bhagalpur cities. Jamshedpur and Ranchi would also have been dropped, except that their districts themselves were also eliminated from our analysis.

¹⁸There is some precedent for this endeavor. David J. Elkins used 61 districts in South India for a comparison of caste data from the 1911 census with voting returns from the 1950s and 1960s, though his method was very different from that employed here. See his "Social Mobilization, Social Structure and Politics: Evidence and Qualifications", a paper presented at the annual meeting of American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 1971.

category, which together amount to a bit under 14 per cent of the population. We will consider the first four groups, actually only the first three for a few districts, for Kayasthas in several districts and Banias in virtually all of them were too few in number to be reported for the thana level for 1911. We will take up all three of the "upper Shudra" communities, so designated here because of their size and more so because of their success in Bihar politics in the period after independence.¹⁹ In addition we shall look at two other groups, Muslims and the Scheduled Castes, and two demographic variables as well, all based on the 1961 census.

TABLE III

Major Caste Groups of Bihar

<i>Category</i>	<i>Caste Group</i>	<i>Per cent of Total Population</i>	
"Twice-born" castes (1931)	Brahman	4.7	} 13.6
	Bhumihar	2.9	
	Rajput	4.2	
	Kayastha	1.2	
	Bania	0.6	
Upper Shudras (1931)	Yadav	11.0	} 18.7
	Kurmi	3.6	
	Koiri	4.1	
Lower Shudras (1931)	Teli	2.8	} 32.0
	Nine caste groups, (each between 1 and 2 per cent)	13.2	
	Other Shudras (less than 1% each)	16.0	
Muslims (1961)			12.5
Scheduled Castes (Harijans) (1961)			14.1
Scheduled Tribes (1961)			9.1
Total			100.0

Note : The older figures have been adjusted for boundary changes after 1931. The area included for this table is the 17 districts of Bihar as of 1961.

¹⁹For more on the political success of these "upper Shudras", see Harry W. Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics in India: Caste as a Differential Mobilizer in Bihar", *Comparative Politics*, V, 1 (October 1972), 107-127.

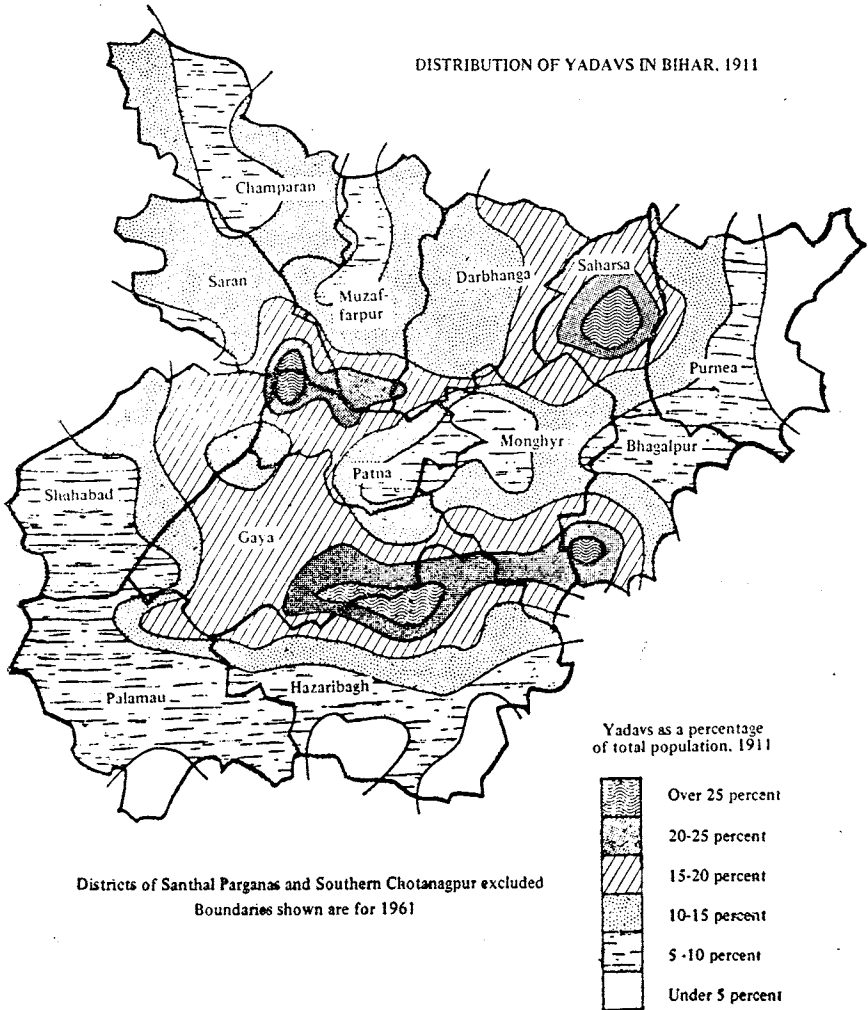


Figure I

The single largest caste group in Bihar are the Yadavs (also known as Goalas, Gopes and Ahirs), who were also the largest community in 10 of the state's 16 districts in 1931.²⁰ They will serve well as an example of our method, illustrated in Figure I, which presents the Yadav distribution for Bihar in 1911, in terms of 5 per cent isoplethic intervals. The technique is a simple one, in which 139 points of concentration are plotted out on a map of the area, each at the center of its respective revenue thana. Each point is assumed to have the same concentration of population as the thana as a whole (e.g., 16 per cent Yadavs), and the distance between any two adjacent points is assumed to be a continuum. Isoplethic lines are then constructed connecting points of equal value (e.g., 20 per cent Yadav), rather like the contours on a topographic map or the isobars on a weather map.²¹

The result of this process is shown in Figure I, where we may observe that while Yadav population for Patna District as a whole was 14 per cent in 1911, it varied from less than 10 per cent in the eastern end of the district (where Kurmis were the numerically superior Shudra caste) to well over 25 per cent in the northwestern corner.²² Similarly, in Hazaribagh District, which was reported to be 10 per cent Yadav in 1911, concentrations for this caste ranged from less than 5 per cent in the largely tribal extreme south to over 25 per cent on the northern border. Other substantial densities of Yadavs appeared in

²⁰See Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "Caste Regions of the North Indian Plain", in Singer and Cohn, *Structure and Change*, pp. 81-113, figures 5 and 6. Also the maps in Schwartzberg's "The Distribution of Selected Castes in the North Indian Plain", *Geographical Review*, LV, 4 (October 1965), 477-495. The 16 districts, of course, are those that later became Bihar after the separation of Orissa in 1936.

²¹For an explanation in detail of the isoplethic mapping technique, see F.J. Monkhouse and H.R. Wilkenson, *Maps and Diagrams: Their Compilation and Construction* (London: Methuen, 1971), esp. pp. 276-279. For an Indian application of the technique see Brian J.L. Berry and V.L.S. Praksa Rao, *Urban-Rural Duality in the Regional Structure of Andhra Pradesh: A Challenge to Regional Planning and Development* (Liesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1968).

²²It is an interesting exercise to compare Figure I with Schwartzberg's map of Yadav (Ahir) distribution by district for the whole North Indian plain in "Distribution of Selected Castes".

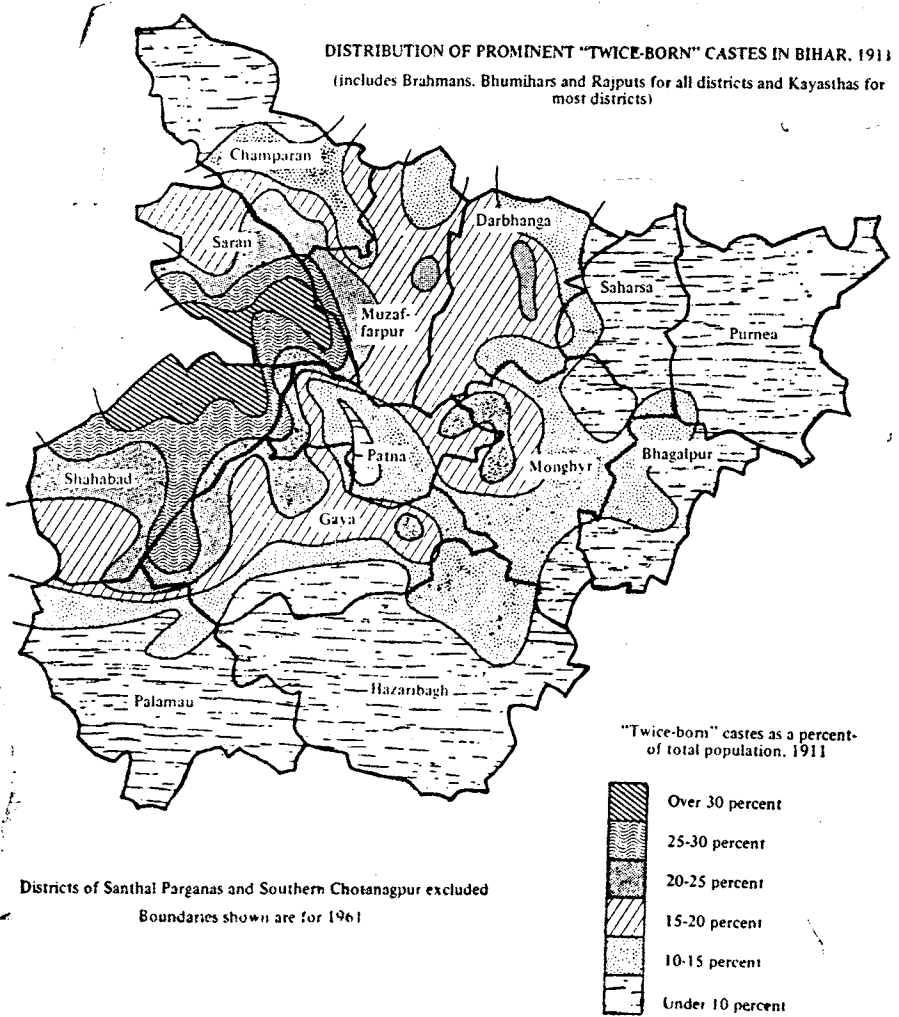


Figure II

Saharsa and Bhagalpur districts.²³

Maps of caste distribution were also prepared for Brahmans (for 1931), Bhumihars, Rajputs and Kurmis²⁴ (all for 1911). In addition, it seemed possible that there might be some pattern of high or low caste solidarity (or fragmentation) that might be relevant for the politics of the 1960s, and so isoplethic maps were prepared for the distribution of the "twice-born" castes taken collectively and for the three upper Shudra communities (Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris) as a group.

Figure II shows distribution for Brahmans, Bhumihars, Rajputs and Kayasthas taken together.²⁵ Here we find the most dense "twice-born" populations in Shahabad (Brahmans and Rajputs) and Saran (mainly Rajputs with some Brahmans) districts, with concentrations of over 20 per cent in Patna (Bhumihars), Gaya (Bhumihars and Rajputs), Muzaffarpur (Bhumihars and Rajputs) and Champaran (all three groups) districts. A similar map for the three leading Shudra castes from Table III was also prepared. Altogether, then, we have five isoplethic maps for individual castes and 2 maps for groups of castes. In addition several maps developed for other studies from the 1961 census were employed, on the thought that it would be interesting to compare the earlier with the latter data for relationships with voting patterns in the 1960s. These later maps showed distribution of Muslims, Harijans, population density and the ratio of male cultivators to agricultural laborers (i.e., landed

²³Actually, Saharsa and Bhagalpur districts were together as one district in 1911, becoming separate entities only in 1954. They are shown separately in the maps here to facilitate identification and comparison with the political situation of the 1960s.

²⁴The Kurmi Mahatos of southern Bihar are included along with the Kurmis of the Gangetic plain, though they are geographically separate and there has long been a dispute as to whether they really should be counted as *bona fide* Kurmis. The rationale for so including them here was that, in the present political system in India where numbers count, all Kurmis would not be averse to being counted together. On the argument over the status of the Kurmi Mahatos, see *Census of India, 1901*, Volume VI, Part I, p. 393; and *Census of India, 1931*, Volume VII, Part I, pp. 291-294. Also Biman Kumar Das Gupta, "Caste Mobility Among the Mahatos of South Manbhum", *Man in India*. XLII, 3 (July-September 1962), 228-236.

farmers, whether by dint of ownership, tenancy or sharecropping, to landless workers in agriculture).²⁶

III. Caste and Voting

There are two more problems to be contended with before we can get on with our analysis. The first is that the boundaries of the 258 Legislative Assembly constituencies of 1967 do not match those of the 139 revenue thanas in our area of focus.²⁷ This problem is solved with relative ease by superimposing a map of the constituencies over the relevant isoplethic map of caste distribution, then coding each constituency according to the isoplethic interval within which it falls.²⁸ In this way each constituency is given a value for each of our caste and demographic variables.

The second problem is to determine the caste of the MLA candidates, for just as the census today does not gather caste data on the non-Scheduled Castes, so the Election Commission does not assemble data on the caste of candidates. Politicians make it their business to gather this kind of information, however, and are generally willing to share it with interested researchers. Thus the author, who was in India at the time of the 1967 elections, assembled data on the caste identification of almost

²⁵Census returns for Baniyas were reported at the thana level for only 3 districts in 1911 for this very small community, so they could not be included among our "twice-born" castes, though in terms of getting MLAs elected in the 1960s, they were even more over-represented than any of the four major "twice-born" castes. See Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics."

²⁶The Muslim map was made up for Blair, "Minority Electoral Politics", and the other three for Blair, "Political Participation and Demography in Bihar, 1962-1972", a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, San Francisco, March 1975. The population density map was adapted from Ram Prabesh Singh, *Monograph of Bihar: A Geographical Study* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1970), p. 109.

²⁷The 258 seats include 220 general constituencies, 42 reserved for Scheduled Castes and one for Scheduled Tribes. Of the 220 general seats five were excluded as being in urban areas, leaving 215.

²⁸Thus for the Yadav distribution, a constituency would be coded 0 if the population of 1911 was less than 5 per cent, 1 if it fell between 5 and 10 per cent, and so on.

all the MLA candidates.²⁹ Using this information, it becomes possible to add up the vote in each constituency for Brahman candidates, Kurmi candidates, "twice-born" candidates, and so on. In all there were 103 seats in which one or more Brahman candidates contested, 30 that had Kurmi candidates, and 194 that had at least one contestant from the four "twice-born" castes, etc.

Table IV presents zero-order correlations between vote for candidates of different caste and our predictors, both caste distributions and demographic data from the 1961 census. For high caste candidate vote the best correlation was with our "twice-born" caste distribution from Figure II, at $r=.329$. Among individual "twice-born" castes, the best relationship (reading across the row in Table IV) was with Rajput distribution ($r=.248$), much less with Brahmans and not even a significant correlation at all with Bhumihars ($r=.079$, $.05 < p$). For upper Shudra candidates the highest correlation was with our upper Shudra caste distribution of 1911 ($r=.370$). Correlation with the Kurmi component of the upper Shudra distribution is almost as high ($r=.369$). Interesting also here are the significant negative correlations between vote for upper Shudra candidates and Brahman distribution ($r=-.261$), also Muslim ($r=-.274$), both significant at the .001 level. The more Brahmans or Muslims that live in an area, in other words, the less the vote for upper Shudra candidates.

For each column in Table IV, bold-face type is employed to emphasize the correlation that we would expect *ex ante* to be the highest—that is, for "twice born" caste distribution with vote for "twice-born" candidates, Bhumihar distribution with Bhumihar candidates, etc. In each case but that of the Rajputs, this expected correlation is in fact the highest of all those in the column. For the three higher castes, the level

²⁹It proved impossible to determine caste for all candidates, for many were so obscure (gathering in most cases less than 1 or 2 per cent of the vote) that no one outside the constituency (and sometimes no one interviewed in the constituency itself) knew the caste identification. To the extent that some data are missing, however, there should be a downward bias on the correlations that will be taken up presently. If there is any effect of this missing information on our analysis, then, it will be a conservative one.

TABLE IV
Zero-order correlations between predictors and vote for MLA candidates by caste in Bihar, 1967

Caste of Candidates	Predictors										Density 1961	n
	"Twice-born" Castes 1911	Upper Brahmins 1931	Bhumihars 1911	Rajputs 1911	Yadavs 1911	Kurmis 1911	Muslims 1961	Harijans 1961	MCL* 1961	1961		
"Twice-born"	.329 ^a	-.015 ^d	.159 ^c	.079 ^d	.248 ^a	-.064 ^d	-.084 ^d	-.147 ^c	-.020 ^d	.140 ^c	.108 ^d	194
Upper Shudra	-.131 ^d	.370 ^a	-.261 ^a	.116 ^d	-.059 ^d	.230 ^b	.369 ^a	-.274 ^a	-.179 ^b	-.077 ^d	.008 ^d	142
Brahman	.006 ^d	.042 ^d	.225 ^b	-.056 ^d	-.170 ^c	.009 ^d	-.054 ^d	-.099 ^d	-.055 ^d	-.076 ^d	.058	103
Bhumihar	.116 ^d	-.276 ^b	-.059 ^d	.277 ^b	-.208 ^c	-.228 ^b	.030 ^d	-.023 ^d	-.025 ^d	-.172 ^d	.071 ^d	88
Rajput	.121 ^q	-.137 ^d	.000 ^d	-.083 ^d	.212 ^b	-.061 ^d	-.076 ^d	-.225 ^b	.063 ^d	.033 ^d	-.164 ^d	116
Yadav	.000 ^d	.274 ^b	-.173 ^c	.025 ^d	.080 ^d	.356 ^a	-.019 ^d	-.181 ^c	.102 ^d	.011 ^d	.055 ^c	108
Kurmi	-.452 ^b	.300 ^d	-.357 ^c	.351 ^c	-.355 ^c	-.204 ^d	.577 ^a	-.334 ^c	.551 ^a	-.346 ^c	-.047 ^d	30
Muslim	-.256 ^b	-.274 ^b	-.168 ^d	-.176 ^d	-.188 ^c	-.313 ^b	-.014 ^c	.564 ^a	-.298 ^b	.006 ^d	-.107 ^d	87
Turnout	.099 ^d	.107 ^d	.147 ^c	.219 ^a	-.037 ^d	.214 ^a	-.121 ^c	-.250 ^a	-.123 ^c	-.409 ^a	.379 ^{ad}	215

* MCL = Ratio of cultivators to agricultural laborers among males.

Significance of correlation coefficients

a = $p < .0001$

b = $.001 < p < .01$

c = $.01 < p < .05$

d = $.05 < p$

of correlation is significant at the .01 level, but not particularly high. For example, the correlation between Bhumihar distribution and vote for Bhumihar candidates is .277, meaning a statistical "explanation" of only 7.7 per cent ($r^2 = .077$). For the two Shudra castes, the level of explanation is rather higher, almost 13 per cent for Yadavs ($r^2 = .127$) and over 33 per cent for Kurmis ($r^2 = .335$). In the latter case we find a level of explanation about the same as that for the Muslims ($r^2 = .318$), for whom the distributional measure is 50 years more recent.³⁰ Perhaps there is more group solidarity among the lower castes and Muslims, who have been more recently mobilized into the political arena than among the upper castes, who have been involved in politics much longer and who have lost through factionalism any solidarity that they may once have had.³¹

The last row of Table IV shows correlations for each of the predictor variables with election turnout³² for all 215 general seats in our area of focus. Here we see that the cultivators/laborers ratio has the highest relationship to turnout ($r = -.409$), with density and Muslims next, but the distributions of Brahmans, Bhumihars, Yadavs and Kurmis each are also significantly (at least at the .01 level) related to turnout. Curiously, the relationship of the Kurmi distribution is negative, while that of all the other castes is positive.

It is now appropriate to ask how good our predictors are altogether in accounting for the vote for MLA candidates of various castes. That is, by using our old caste variables and our newer demographic measures, how much of the vote for candidates of different castes can we "explain" statistically? The best way to approach this problem is with multiple regres-

³⁰The relationship between Muslim population and vote for Muslim candidates is explored at some length in Blair, "Minority Electoral Politics".

³¹On fragmentation of caste solidarity as a recurrent pattern, see Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 89ff. ; also Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics".

³²Turnout is simply the number of total votes cast divided by the number of registered voters.

sion, and the following stepwise regressions will be attempted.³³

<i>Regression Group</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>	<i>Predictor Variables</i>
A	Vote for "twice-born" and for upper Shudra candidates separately	"Twice-born" and upper Shudra distributions plus 1961 predictors
B	Vote for each caste group of candidates taken separately, plus vote for Muslims and turnout	All the individual caste distributions, plus the 1961 predictors

Table V shows regression equations for our two cluster groups of caste candidates, and Table VI does the same for our five groupings of candidates by individual caste, as well as for Muslim candidates and for turnout in the 1967 election. In each regression the stepwise method was used, the process being halted at the maximum level of statistical explanation.³⁴ Accordingly not all the predictors are used in each of the equations, for some of them provided too small a contribution to the total multiple correlation (\bar{R}^2) to be included. For both Table V and VI the regression equations are presented in terms of standardized coefficients, meaning that within each equation, the coefficients can be compared with one another.

In Table V we find that for the "twice-born" candidates altogether 4 predictors are included, accounting for a little less than

³³A check for multicollinearity showed that among the predictor for the A group of regressions, the only correlation over .500 was that between Muslim and upper Shudra distributions ($r=.569$). For the B group the highest correlation among the predictors was only .388. Too much correlation between the predictor variables makes the interpretation of the regression equation difficult. On this issue see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., "Correlated Independent Variables: The Problem of Multicollinearity", *Social Forces*, LXII (December 1963), 233-238.

³⁴That is, at this point where \bar{R}^2 , or "adjusted R^2 " was the highest. On the use of \bar{R}^2 and \bar{R}^2 , see Harry W. Blair, "Primary and Secondary Characteristics in Peasant Politics at the Micro-level in an Indian Constituency: A Statistical Odyssey," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (NS) IV, 1 (January-June 1975), 55-87; also Norman H. Nie *et al.*, *SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 358.

TABLE V
*Regression Equations for Vote for MLA Candidates from
 "Twice-born" Castes and Leading Shudra Castes in Bihar, 1967
 (Standardized Coefficients)*

Caste of Candidates	"Twice-born" Castes 1911	Upper Shudras 1911	Muslims 1961	Harijans 1961	MCL* 1961	Density 1961	R ²	\bar{R}^2	n	p**
"Twice-born"	= .329 ^a	-.209 ^c	-.106 ^d		+.127 ^a		.144	.126	194	.001
Upper Shudra	= -.248 ^b	+.395 ^a	-.159 ^d		-.166 ^c		.235	.212	142	.001

*MCL = Ratio of cultivators to agricultural laborers among males.

**p = Significance for the regression equation.

Significance of regression coefficients

a = p < .001

b = .001 < p < .01

c = .01 < p < .05

d = .05 < p

TABLE VI
 Regression Equations for Vote for MLA Candidates of Leading Castes in Bihar, 1967
 (Standardized Coefficients)

Caste of Candidates	Brahmans		Bhumihars		Rajputs		Yadavs		Kurmis		Muslims		Harijans		MCL* Density 1961	R ²	n	p**
	1931	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911	1911				
Brahman	.220 ^c	-.113 ^d	-.258 ^c													.120	103	.05
Bhumihar	-.086 ^d	+.228 ^c	-.092 ^d	-.232 ^c												.140	88	.05
Rajput			.260 ^b													.137	116	.01
Yadav	-.124 ^d		+.077 ^d	+.364 ^a												.156	108	.01
Kurmi	-.252 ^d															.587	30	.001
Muslim																.339	87	.001
Turnout																.342	215	.001

*MCL= Ratio of cultivators to agricultural laborers among males.

**p = Significance for the regression equation.

Significance of regression coefficients

a= p < .001

b= .001 < p < .01

c= .01 < p < .05

d= .05 < p

13 per cent the variance ($\bar{R}^2=.126$), with the distribution of "twice-born" castes being the most important contributor (coefficient=.329). For the upper Shudra candidates the upper Shudra population is not surprisingly the highest contributor, and overall explanation is a bit over 21 per cent. In both cases the Muslim and cultivator-laborer distributions make a marginal (though for the most part statistically insignificant) contribution, and in neither regression are the Harijan population or density included.

Table VI represents the culmination of our efforts. For the Brahmans, Bhumihars and Rajputs regressions, the results are basically similar, with only a couple of significant coefficients in each equation. In none of these three cases does the distribution of the relevant caste have the highest coefficient (e.g., for Brahman candidates, the coefficient for Rajput distribution is $-.258$, that for Brahmans only $.220$), but in each case it is statistically significant, at least at the .05 level. As we might expect in view of the history of intercaste political rivalry in Bihar, coefficients for Bhumihar and Rajput distributions are negative in the equation for Brahman candidates, and *mutatis mutandis* the same is true for Bhumihar candidates.

For Yadav candidates, only the Yadav distribution is a significant contributor to the regression equation—none of the other predictors has much impact. For Kurmi candidates Kurmi distribution is the most important factor by far, though the cultivator/laborer ratio plays a significant role here and an interesting one: the higher the number of landless laborers in the work force relative to cultivators, the greater the vote for Kurmi candidates. The overall explanatory power of the regression is most impressive, with over 50 per cent of variance accounted for ($\bar{R}^2=.521$). For Muslim candidates and turnout the \bar{R}^2 values are also impressive, with over 30 per cent of variance accounted for in each instance. Vote for Muslims seemed relatively independent of the distribution of the Hindu castes, as did turnout with the exception of the Yadav distribution (coefficient=.126).

IV. Conclusion

The census of 1911 is a long way both temporally and con-

stitutionally from the elections of the 1960s. The caste data gathered for the imperial census are nonetheless of substantial relevance in analyzing voting patterns of contemporary elections. The vote for Rajput candidates is significantly correlated with the geographical distribution of Rajputs recorded in 1911 for the rural areas of Bihar. The same is true for Bhumihars, Kurmis, Yadavs, the higher, "twice-born" castes taken together, the three major Shudra castes taken as a group, and for Brahmans (as of 1931) and Muslims (as of 1961).

We may go further than simply pointing out the existence of the correlations, and draw some tentative inferences from our study concerning the development of caste mobilization and fragmentation in Bihar politics. Correlations for candidates of the Yadav and Kurmi castes and the Muslim community with their respective geographical distributions came out appreciably higher than the correlations for the higher castes between candidates and distributions. How to account for this?

The difference here may mean that there has been more geographical movement among high castes than low ones over the decades between census and election and thus the old data are now less applicable for the higher castes, or it may simply mean that the census for high castes was less accurate (perhaps in part because of various caste mobility efforts) in the first place than for the lower castes. Another and probably more reasonable possibility is that candidates from lower castes and the Muslim community are more dependent for their vote upon members of their *biradri* than are high caste men who rely more on the patron-client system and "vote banks" to secure their electoral support. There is some evidence for such an idea in the fact that "twice-born" castes were far more overrepresented in relation to their share of state population in the Bihar Legislative Assembly during the 1960s than were the three upper Shudra castes or the Muslims.³⁵ Hence it would follow that correlations between vote for caste candidates and caste

³⁵See Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics." There may also be other differences in the political economy of control and influence in the areas dominated by high castes as opposed to lower ones. For a tentative exploration in this direction, see Harry W. Blair, "Dominant Caste and Socio-Economic Structure in the Villages of Central Bihar", unpublished manuscript, Bucknell University, June 1977.

distribution would be higher for lower castes and Muslims than for the higher castes.

A fourth explanation might focus on the time of entry of the lower castes and the Muslims into the Bihar political arena. The higher castes, who mobilized themselves for political activity a number of decades back do not now act in terms of caste solidarity vis-a-vis other castes so much as in terms of competition among themselves for political advancement. They have, in other words, fragmented whatever caste solidarity they may once have had. The lower castes and Muslims, on the other hand, are relative newcomers to politics and so do maintain a higher degree of solidarity in their voting patterns, a behavior reflected in the correlations in Table IV. If this is so, such correlations should diminish over time for the lower castes as well as the upper ones, perhaps to be over-shadowed in explanatory power by variables measuring economic (or class) differences rather than caste ones.

Clearly, more work along these lines should be taken up, and it is very much to be hoped that scholars interested in other areas of the subcontinent will look into some of the census data from the British period in their endeavors to understand contemporary voting patterns. Pending such further analysis, we may close here with some sense of achievement at having shown the existence of a definite relationship between the caste data published in the imperial censuses of the early 20th century and present day electoral behavior.