

Democratic Dynasties

*State, Party, and Family in Contemporary
Indian Politics*

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3 A sign of backwardness?

Where dynastic leaders are elected in India

Francesca R. Jensenius¹

Early one morning in March 2014, just prior to the national elections in India, a *chai-wallah* (tea vendor) in Jaipur in Western Rajasthan was serving cups of sweet milky tea as usual. For him it was just a normal day – until a lady in a green silk sari arrived and asked for tea. The lady was Vasundhara Raje, born into the erstwhile royal family of the Scindias and married into the royal family of Dholpur in Rajasthan. She has served in India's parliament five times, in the Rajasthan state assembly four times, and was the Chief Minister of Rajasthan at the time of writing this chapter. The *chai-wallah* was overwhelmed by the meeting, saying that the *Maharani* (queen) had left him "stunned" (Singh 2014). Vasundhara Raje's great electoral success in successive elections has been the result of, among other things, the strong support from her party (BJP), her wealth, and her hard work. But as the remarks by the *chai-wallah* suggest, it may also in part be the result of poor voters being impressed by a member of a traditional royal family. Jaffrelot (2011) explains Vasundhara Raje's success in the 2003 elections by emphasizing precisely this electoral appeal: "For a Maharani to solicit their support ended up intriguing and then seducing the voters."²

Dynastic politics in India, especially the presence of members of the royal families in political positions, is often described as a remnant of a pre-modern, feudal past. Subramanya (2012), for instance, asks how political parties have "managed to remain dynastic rather than be truly democratic" [emphasis added],

¹ Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Kanchan Chandra and Romain Carlevan for their extensive and insightful comments on previous versions of this chapter, and Susan Horvik for excellent language editing. All tables and figures, unless otherwise cited, use data from Chandra, Bohlken, and Chauchard (2014).

² India has a long and important history of royal families. Before independence from the British Raj, there were 565 Princely States governed by royal families, of which 21 major ones had their own governments (Corbridge and Harris 2000). At the time of independence, the Princely States acceded to India or Pakistan, but the rulers retained some of their privileges. With the 26th Amendment to the Indian Constitution of 1971 the royal families lost their special privileges, including their "privy purses," but they still enjoyed considerable respect and recognition in their local communities (Rudolph & Rudolph, in this volume). They were also often quite wealthy, which helped them gain political influence and stay in power as democratically elected "Maharajas" (Carlevan 2013).

implying in her use of the term “remain” that dynasticism in India represents the persistence of the non-democratic past. In an article titled “Democracy vs dynasty in India,” Lal (2009) similarly writes about the “feudalistic moorings” of the Congress Party: “ones that permeate Indian society at all levels right from party posts dominated by royal houses to the landed zamindar class.”

Prior to the 2014 parliamentary elections there was considerable focus on dynasties, probably largely because Rahul Gandhi (the grandson of Indira Gandhi) was running as the unofficial prime ministerial candidate for the Congress Party. In discussions of the Nehru-Gandhi “clan,” dynasties have been spoken of as a feudal remnant that has prospered because of poverty, but also as one of the reasons why India has remained poor.³ Similar to how modernization theorists expected that economic growth, better education, urbanization, and democratization would go hand-in-hand, there seems to be an implicit expectation that dynasties will gradually disappear as voters become better educated, wealthier, and more able to make independent electoral choices. For example, in the words of Bajjayant Jay Panda, a prominent Member of Parliament (MP): “as more and more young Indians get connected to the world, there will be a breaking down of established modes of feudalism. That includes dynastic politics” (quoted in Biswas 2014). If this link between “backwardness” and dynasties exists, we should expect those constituencies (political districts) that elect dynastic politicians to be poorer than other ones. While we do not have empirical evidence of such patterns in India, Mendoza et al. (2012) have indeed found that, in the Philippines, areas ruled by dynastic politicians tend to be poorer and with greater income inequality.

However, not everyone assumes dynasties in Indian politics to be something outdated that will disappear as the country develops. India’s dynasties have, in fact, been referred to as “modern political hybrids” (Tully 2012). It has similarly been argued that political dynasties are a *product* of democratic politics in India, resulting from the fact that weak party organizations and high returns to office make it attractive to field family members (see introduction to this volume and Chandra and Umaira 2011). In their work on Punjab, Cheema et al. (2013) hold that dynasties there are not the result of a stagnant pool of elite families, nor are they particularly tied to feudal or landed power. Rather, they find new dynasties emerging in families with all sorts of backgrounds.

Can India’s political dynasties be thought of as remnants of feudal traditions, or not? Are dynastic politicians more likely to be elected in areas with poor and uneducated voters? And can we see a change in these patterns over time? This chapter provides a partial answer to these questions by comparing the socio-economic characteristics of parliamentary constituencies (PCs) that have

elected dynastic politicians – defined as MPs who were preceded by a family member in *democratic* politics – in 2004, 2009, and 2014 (14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha) to other constituencies. In this first effort (to my knowledge) at relating dynastic representation to constituency-level characteristics, I create constituency-level estimates of socio-economic variables by aggregating block-level Indian Census data from 2001 to the PC level using geocoded (GIS) maps. I then explore the relationship between dynasticism and economic backwardness – measured using indicators of urbanization, poverty, and literacy. A positive association between a constituency’s degree of “backwardness” and dynastic representation would support the interpretation of dynasticism in India as a remnant from the past. No relationship, or a negative one, would support an interpretation of dynasticism in India as more of a modern phenomenon.

Two clear patterns emerge from this empirical exercise. First, there is no overall systematic difference between constituencies that elect dynastic and non-dynastic politicians. This supports the argument that dynastic politics in India is actually a modern phenomenon: it is not particular to socio-economically backward constituencies. Second, there is indeed a systematic difference between constituencies that elect dynastic politicians with *royal backgrounds* and those that elect dynastic politicians from non-royal families. MPs from royal families are more likely to be elected from constituencies that are more rural, poorer, and with fewer literate voters, and they are also more likely to be re-elected from exactly the same constituency as their family members.

Dynastic MPs with a royal background represent only a small proportion of parliamentarians in India today: some 3% of all MPs elected in 2004, 2009, and 2014, and about 10% of the dynastic MPs. They may therefore seem to be marginal or unimportant. Yet, as we know that there used to be more royals in elected office in India in previous years, these low figures actually lend support to the argument put forward in this chapter and elsewhere in this volume: as India has been modernizing, the space for “traditional” dynasties seems to be shrinking, making way for their “modern” counterparts – democratically elected dynastic families.

The empirical findings presented in this chapter are correlations and should not be interpreted as causal relationships. Still, they point to a potentially important distinction between royal dynasties and political dynasties worth further exploration. The former may indeed be a remnant of feudal India that will gradually disappear, whereas the latter seems to be an integral part of democracy in India that is here to stay.

1 Data

A main challenge in studying elections in India is that the boundaries of the electoral constituencies differ from those of the administrative boundaries. Administratively, India is divided into states, districts, blocks, villages (and

³ For example, see Daniel (2011).

towns with wards) that fit nicely into each other. For each of these units, the government collects large amounts of information – among other things, through the decennial Census. India is also divided into more than 4,000 State Assembly Constituencies (ACs) that fit into administrative districts (but cross block boundaries), and several of these ACs are then aggregated into 543 Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs) that often cross district boundaries.⁴ These constituencies are drawn up by the Delimitation Commission of India, and the most recent delimitation was implemented in 2008.

While all of India's electoral results are reported at the constituency level, the socio-economic characteristics of constituencies must be estimated from other levels of analysis. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007) created PC-level estimates of Indian Census variables by roughly matching districts to PCs. This yields fairly imprecise estimates, although it is a great improvement on having no data at all. The rapid development of geocoded mapping technology (GIS) makes it possible to match both villages and blocks to political constituencies with some precision. In a recent work, Bhavnani and Jensenius (2015) created area-weighted estimates of India's pre-delimitation ACs from block-level census data. Similarly, Jensenius (2013a) created AC-level estimates of census variables based on mapping village-level census data to constituencies – but also reported that inaccuracies in the village-level GIS maps render these estimates somewhat biased.

This chapter examines the characteristics of both pre- and post-delimitation PCs. In this case, area-weighted estimates of census variables at the PC level were created by overlaying GIS maps of India's almost 6,000 administrative blocks (usually called *Tehsils*, *Mandals*, or *Police Circles*) and maps of India's PCs from before and after the 2008 delimitation.⁵ This made it possible to

⁴ The full 2008 delimitation report is available at [URL] eci.nic.in/delim/. See Jensenius (2013b) for a review of the work of the Delimitation Commissions.

⁵ All the maps are from the company MLInfo, accessed through the library of New York University. To overlay the maps, I used the union tool in QGIS. The maps are not perfectly aligned, so some errors will inevitably remain using this method. To try to reduce the errors due to imperfectly aligned maps I excluded overlapping areas that are in different states, and also areas that constituted less than 3% of a PC or less than 3% of a block. Using area weighting rather than population weighting to aggregate the numbers for the PCs may introduce some bias in the estimates, since people are not evenly distributed across blocks. However, this is more a problem with absolute numbers than with the proportions (such as literacy rate) that I use in this chapter. Since constituencies in cities are particularly prone to error using this method of area-weighting the data, because they are geographically small, I manually checked the matches for the major Indian cities and altered the ones that were clearly mismatched, for example several of the constituencies in Mumbai. The manual corrections were based on consulting the Indian delimitation reports from 1976 and 2008. The conclusions in this chapter are also robust to excluding the largest cities altogether, and also to including all the overlapping areas (not excluding the areas constituting less than 3% of a PC or block). The full list of matched areas and the estimated census values for each PC are part of the replication files available at www.francesca.no/publications.

Table 3.1 Categories used in the chapter

		MP from democratic dynasty	
		No	Yes
MP from royal family	No	<i>Non-dynastic</i>	<i>Dynastic</i>
	Yes	<i>Royal non-dynastic</i>	<i>Royal dynastic</i>

identify what proportion of the area of each block overlapped with which PC. These proportions were then used to create area-weighted PC-level estimates of the variables in the Indian Census from 2001.⁶

The resulting dataset has PC-level estimates of the variables included in the Indian 2001 census, including the literacy rate, occupational distribution, and proportion of urban population of each of India's PCs before and after the 2008 delimitation. These data were then merged with the dynasty dataset used in this book (see Chandra, Bohlken, and Chauchard 2014), that includes information about the politicians elected to the Indian parliament in 2004, 2009, and 2014.

2 Categories used in this chapter

The dataset introduced above enables us to examine the socio-economic characteristics of PCs that elect dynastic politicians. The dataset includes information about the 543 MPs who were elected to the Indian parliament in 2004, 2009, and 2014, while the census data are all from 2001. While most of this book focuses on the democratically elected dynasties, in this chapter I operate with a further distinction: whether or not politicians also hail from a royal family. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the four mutually exclusive categories used in this chapter: non-dynastic politicians from non-royal families (*Non-dynastic*), dynastic politicians from non-royal families (*Dynastic*), politicians from royal families without other family members preceding them in democratic politics (*Royal non-dynastic*), and politicians from royal families where family members have preceded them in democratic politics (*Royal dynastic*).

The categories *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* are slightly different from those used elsewhere in this book: I use them to describe those MPs who have or have not been preceded by a family member in democratic politics, but who *do*

⁶ I chose to use block-level maps rather than village-level ones because the block-level data include both the urban and rural data in the census without relying on the exact location of a town or village, and because many of the variables of interest are not available below the block level.

not hail from a royal family. The category *Royal non-dynastic* includes MPs who are from royal families but have not been preceded by a family member in democratic politics. *Royal dynastic* is used of MPs from royal families where a family member preceded them in democratic politics.

The category *Royal non-dynastic* may seem somewhat paradoxical, since descendants of royal families are all “dynastic” in some sense. So, let us consider the contrast between Jyotiradiya Scindia (MP in 2004, 2009, and 2014) and K.C. Singh Baba (MP in 2004 and 2009). Jyotiradiya Scindia is a descendant of the ruler of Gwalior, but was also preceded in democratic politics by several family members – including his father, Madhav Rao Scindia; his grandmother, Vijaye Raje Scindia; and his aunt, Vasundhara Raje Scindia. By contrast, K.C. Singh Baba is a descendant of the ruler of Kumaon, but is the first member of this royal family to obtain a political office in democratic politics. He is therefore an example of a *Royal non-dynastic* politician.

I examine these two types of royal politicians – those who have been preceded by a family member in democratic politics and those who have not – in order to be in line with the coding of dynasties in the rest of the book, while at the same time exploring the characteristics of politicians from the royal families that were the traditional dynastic elite in India.

Several studies of the circumstances under which royals succeed in politics – including Chapter 2 by Rudolph and Rudolph in this book – point to a distinction between royal families that are successful in mastering the art of democratic politics, and those who are not. In his seminal study of the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh, Brass (1965) argued that political parties in India were most successful when they established firm roots in local traditions, and similarly, that traditional rulers succeeded in gaining power only when they played the democratic political game successfully. He told the story of how the Congress Party chose to give tickets to royals in two neighboring districts, but that only one of them succeeded in politics. Of the two, the Raja of Mankapur succeeded in leveraging his economic dominance in the area for political gain. He therefore became the “uncrowned king of Gonda district” (Brass 1965, p. 70) and managed to establish a post-independence political dynasty. Similarly, Jaffrelot (2011) has argued that members of royal families in India have had an advantage in electoral politics because of their access to money, muscle power, and prestige, but that only those who managed to adapt to electoral politics have been politically successful. In his view, the Scindias – Vasundhara Raje’s family and India’s most prominent political royal family – have succeeded by managing to combine rootedness in a territory with political innovativeness.

If the advantage of being part of a dynasty comes from mastering the skills of democratic politics, then MPs from royal families who also have a

Table 3.2 Number of cases in the dataset for each category of parliamentary constituencies

	Non-dynastic	Dynastic	Royal non-dynastic	Royal dynastic
MPs elected in 2004 (N)	428	98	6	11
(Percentage)	(78.8)	(18.0)	(1.1)	(2.0)
MPs elected in 2009 (N)	377	147	3	16
(Percentage)	(69.4)	(27.1)	(0.6)	(2.9)
MPs elected in 2014 (N)	422	107	3	11
(Percentage)	(77.7)	(19.7)	(0.6)	(2.0)

democratic track record should be better positioned than MPs from royal families previously not active in democratic politics. On the other hand, if the advantage of being part of a dynasty is related to name-recognition, local prestige, or a family history of political power, all royals will have those advantages whether or not they happen to have a family member who directly preceded them in politics.

Table 3.2 shows the number and percentages of politicians in each of the four categories of interest for each of the parliaments included in the dataset. We see that most of the MPs in the dataset were *Non-dynastic* (79% in 2004, 69% in 2009, and 78% in 2014), a fairly large share were *Dynastic* (18% in 2004, 27% in 2009, and 20% in 2014), and very few were *Royal non-dynastic* (1.1% in 2004, 0.6% in 2009, and 0.6% in 2014), whereas most of the royals were also dynastic (2% in 2004, 2.9% in 2009, and 2% in 2014).

3 Where are dynastic politicians elected from?

The first pattern to examine is the regional variation in where *Non-dynastic*, *Dynastic*, *Royal non-dynastic* and *Royal dynastic* politicians have been elected. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 show the locations where politicians in each of these categories were elected in 2004, 2009, and 2014.

We see that PCs with dynastic MPs from non-royal families are spread across the country, although the proportions of dynastic politicians are somewhat higher in North-West, North-Central, and North-East India than in South India. Although this is not apparent in the maps, one of the states with the highest proportion of dynastic MPs is the National Capital Territory of Delhi (with 43% dynastic MPs in 2004, 71% in 2009, and 14% in 2014).

Regarding MPs from royal families, there is a clearer geographic clustering: although the number of MPs from royal families is very low in all regions, they are found mostly in the North-Western, North-Central, and Eastern regions. The South and West only had a handful of MPs with royal backgrounds, and there were none from the North-Eastern states.

14th Lok Sabha

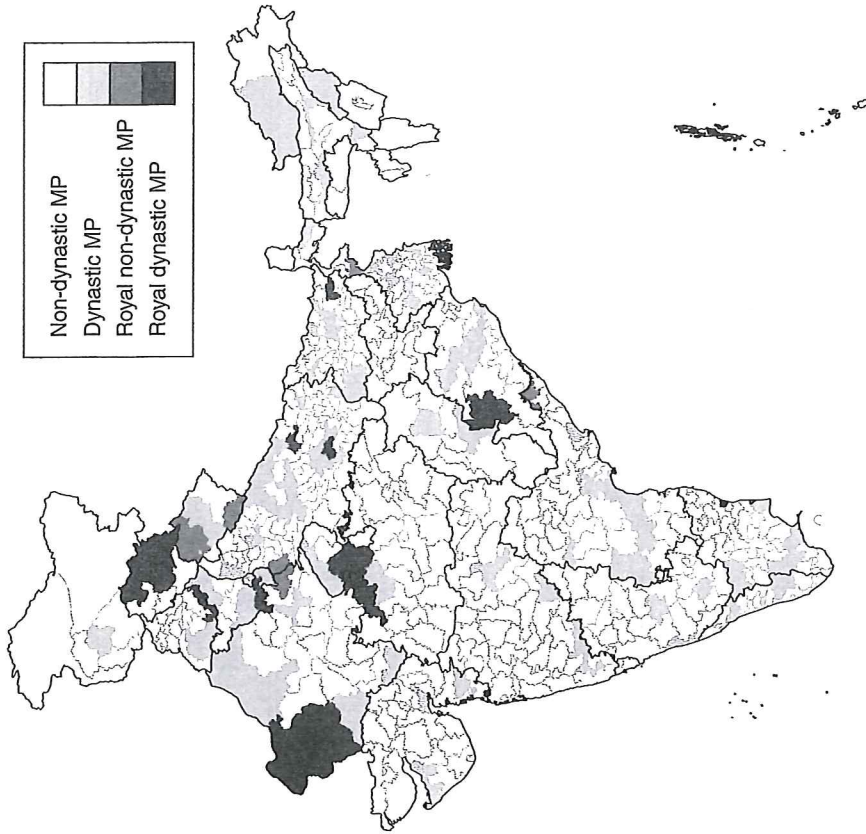


Figure 3.1 Dynastic and royal parliamentarians in the 14th Lok Sabha
Source: Chandra, Bohken, and Chauchard 2014

One obvious explanation for the greater geographic clustering of MPs from royal families is that they tend to run for election in the former princely states, which were concentrated in the north of the country. For example, “Rajasthan” literally means “land of kings” and was formed mainly from 22 former princely states (Rudolph and Rudolph 1968, p. 105).

The map in Figure 3.4 shows the location of princely states in colonial India. Comparing this map with the previous ones allows a rough assessment of the relationship between the location of the constituencies in which present-day MPs from royal families are elected and the location of the erstwhile princely states. We see that the constituencies from which MPs from royal families are elected are,

15th Lok Sabha

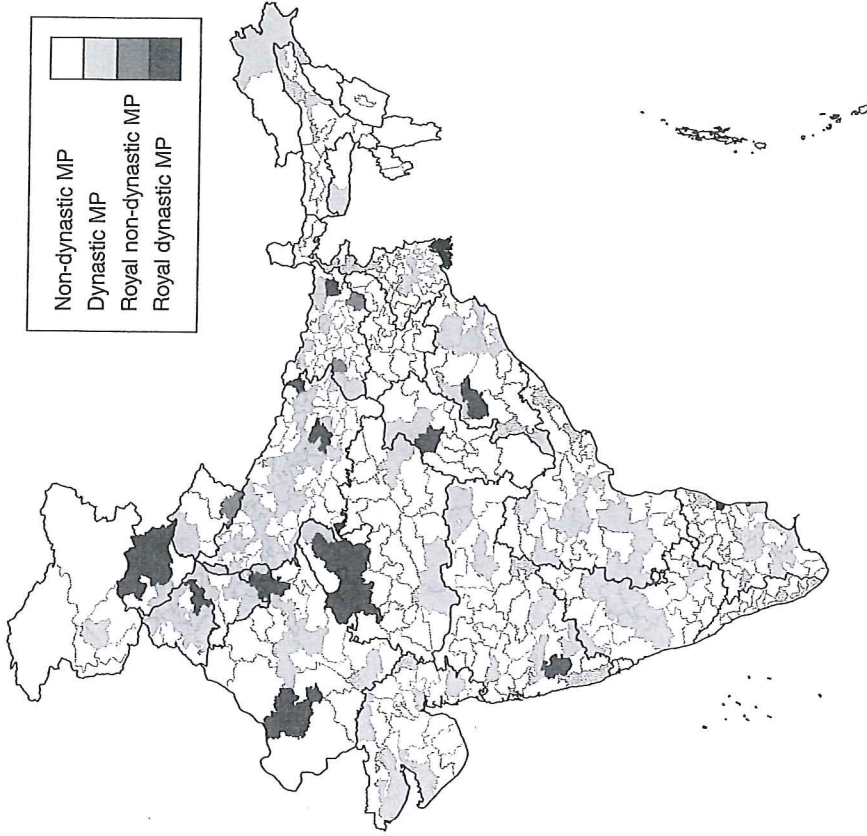


Figure 3.2 Dynastic and royal parliamentarians in the 15th Lok Sabha
Source: Chandra, Bohken, and Chauchard 2014

indeed, typically located within the region of a former princely state.⁷ This is corroborated by one of the few empirical studies on the topic (Carlevan 2013, p. 10), which reports that 93% of the Members of Legislative Assemblies in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh who have come from royal families have been elected from a constituency located within their old princely state.

⁷ It would have been preferable to show more precisely whether PCs with MPs from royal families were located in previous princely states, but unfortunately I do not have access to GIS maps with the borders of princely states that would enable such a comparison. Iyer (2010) manually coded which districts in India overlapped with previous princely states, but since these codes provide only an estimate for the overlap between princely states and districts, and the PCs do not map well onto those districts, this was too rough an approximation to seem useful for my purposes.

16th Lok Sabha

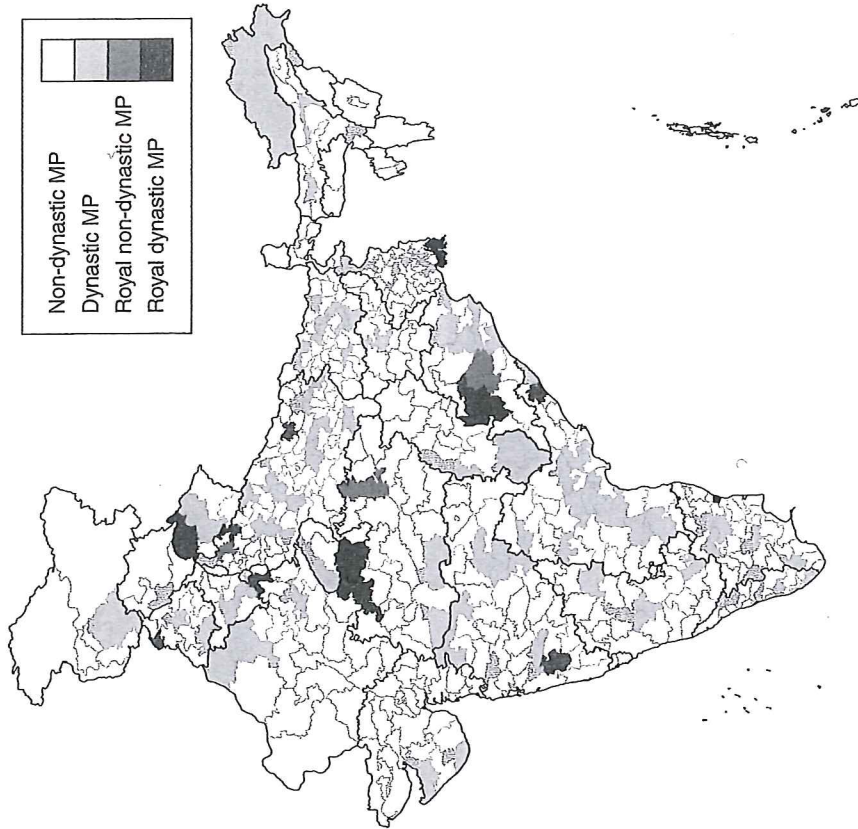


Figure 3.3 Dynastic and royal parliamentarians in the 16th Lok Sabha
Source: Chandra, Bohlken, and Chauchard 2014

But, as the map of princely states shows, there are much fewer MPs from royal families than there were princely states. The princely states were dispersed widely across regions in India, including in the West, South, and North-East. MPs from royal families, however, appear to win disproportionately from constituencies in India's northern half, and not from the West, South, or North-East. In other words, there are many areas that used to be part of princely states but do not have politicians from royal families. The clustering of MPs from royal families, then, may simply be an accentuation of a general tendency towards greater dynasticism in North-West and North-Central India.

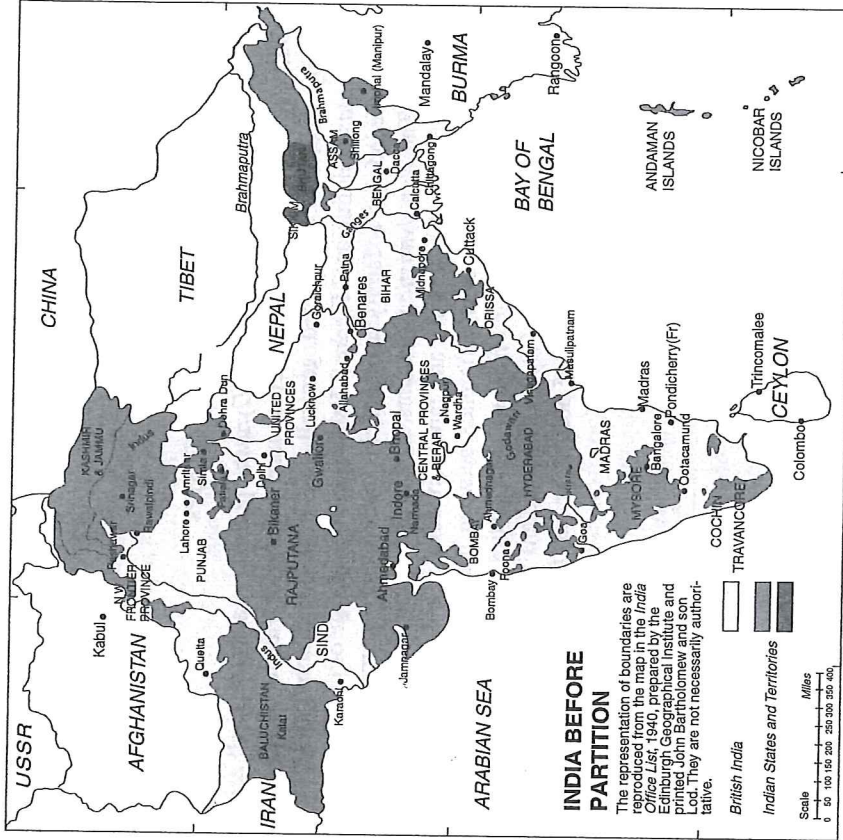


Figure 3.4 Location of princely states in India before independence
Source: The British Library Board. Retrieved from [URL] www.bl.uk/reshelp/_ndhelp/region/asia/india/indianindependence/map1/large14213.html, December 22, 2014.

Some royals are also fielded in areas far from their royal roots. Jawant Singh, for example, is from a royal family in Rajasthan, but was nominated by BJP and won in Darjeeling parliamentary constituency in 2009.⁸

Interestingly, female royals seem to have an electoral advantage both in the area they were born into and in the area they married into. A good example is Vasundhara Raje, born into the royal family of the Scindias of Madhya Pradesh and married into the royal family of Dholpur in Rajasthan, who succeeded in politics in Rajasthan. Another example is Maharani Chandresh Kumari Katoch,

⁸ However, when BJP refused to give him a ticket in the 2014 election he chose to run as an independent candidate in Rajasthan.

daughter of Maharaja Hanwant Singh of Jodhpur in Rajasthan and married into the royal family of Kangra in Himachal Pradesh, who first served several political terms in Himachal Pradesh, but was later elected as MP from Jodhpur in India's 14th and 15th Lok Sabhas.

4 The local rootedness of dynastic MPs

In the previous section I show how *Dynastic* politicians are elected all across India, while *Royal dynastic* politicians tend to run for election in previous princely states. But how rooted, generally, are *Royal dynastic* politicians and other *Dynastic* politicians? Figure 3.5 shows the percentage of politicians who were preceded by a family member in precisely the same constituency (*Rooted*). The *Non-dynastic* politicians are not included in this analysis, since they per definition did not have any family member in power before them.

Here we see another clear difference between the politicians from demographically elected dynasties and from royal dynasties. In all the three elections under study, a clear majority of *Dynastic* politicians were either preceded by a family member at another level of politics or ran for election in a different

constituency than their family member(s) (*Not rooted*). *Royal dynastic* MPs, on the other hand, were much more likely to run for election in the same constituency as a family member.

Among those that were *Rooted* in a constituency, the *Dynastic* MPs had fairly short family histories in the same constituency (on average 1.8 family terms in 2004, 1.8 family terms in 2009, and 2 family terms in 2014), while the *Royal dynastic* MPs had generally been preceded by several family members in the same constituency (on average 3.9 family terms in 2004, 3.6 family terms in 2009, and 4.5 family terms in 2014).

Both the high propensity of being elected in the same constituency as family members, and the major difference in the number of family members succeeding each other in the same constituency, suggests that the royal politicians are much closer to the notion of "inheriting" their positions than MPs from political dynasties.

5 A rural-urban divide?

The next natural thing to examine when exploring the differences between PCs that elect *Dynastic* and *Non-dynastic* politicians is the extent to which they win in rural or urban constituencies. Although India is often talked of as one of the world's rising economies, approximately 70% of its population still lives in rural areas. In popular debate it is common to distinguish between the rural *Bharat* [India] and the modern and urban *India*.⁹ The rural populations are often referred to as more "backward": more traditional in outlook, more likely to marry within their caste and religion, more likely to be part of "vote banks," and more likely to be involved in semi-feudal clientelistic relationships. Is there, then, an urban-rural divide in the propensity to elect dynastic politicians?

Figure 3.6 shows estimates of the proportion of the population living in urban areas in PCs that elected dynastic MPs in 2004, 2009, and 2014. The data are from the 2001 census, which records people as living in an urban or rural area, and have been aggregated to the PC level from block-level data as described above. The plots presented are bean plots, which illustrate the approximate distribution of the proportion of the population in each PC that is urban, for each of the four categories of constituencies. For example, for the 14th Lok Sabha, the first bean in the figure summarizes the information about the proportion of the population that was urban in each of the 428 PCs that had a *Non-dynastic* MP. The bean has its minimum at 0 and its maximum at 1, indicating that among these constituencies there were constituencies with no

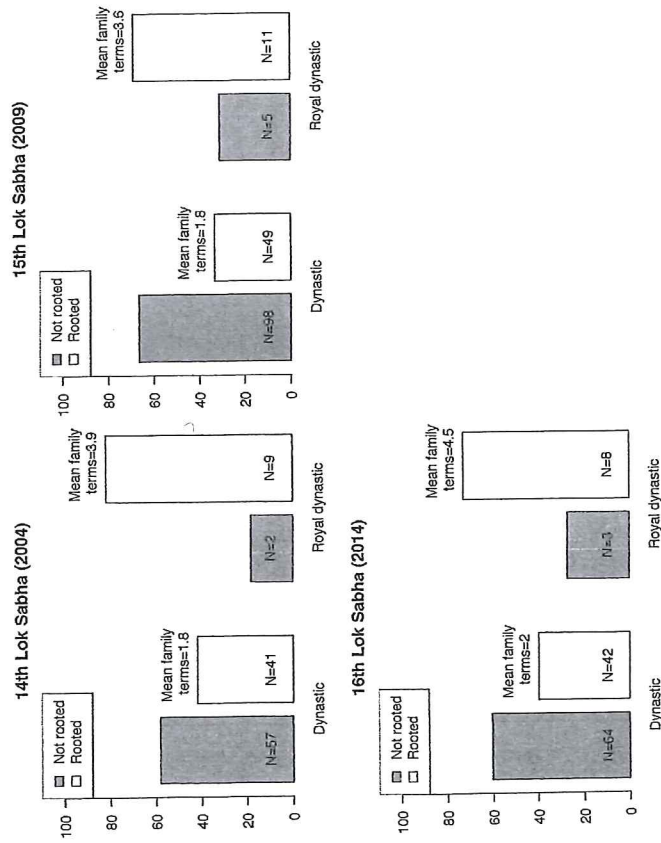


Figure 3.5 Local rootedness of dynastic parliamentarians in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha

⁹ See for example Bamzai (2013).

urban population at all and some with a completely urban population. The fact that the bean is thickest at the bottom suggests that most of the constituencies had a low proportion of urban population. The horizontal line in the middle of the distribution, and the figure written above it, shows the average proportion of urban population among these constituencies.¹⁰

As we can see in Figure 3.6, the constituencies with a *Non-dynastic* MP in 2004 had an average urban population of 28%; constituencies with a *Dynastic* MP had an average of 26%, whereas the constituencies with royal MPs had average urban populations of 23% and 13%. The constituencies with royal MPs were therefore clearly less urban. The same patterns emerge in the data from 2009 and 2014.

These patterns hold when we examine data for the proportion of farmers living in these constituencies. The distribution of the proportion of farmers is very similar in PCs with *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* MPs (averages of about 10% across the years), while there is a jump to the proportion of farmers in PCs with MPs from royal families (about 14% for *Royal dynastic* MPs and about 11% for *Royal non-dynastic* MPs).

These differences are not enormous, and should not be exaggerated given the small sample sizes, but there are some reasons to expect such differences between constituencies with MPs from royal families and other constituencies. Turning again to the story of the success of the Raja of Mankapur, Brass (1965) emphasized control of land as one of the Raja's main political assets: he had many farmers who leased land from him and were financially dependent on him in various ways. This could indicate that royals are the most politically successful in areas where their families control considerable amounts of land.

6 Poverty

We see a similar pattern in the data for the proportion of "marginal workers" across the different categories of constituencies. Marginal workers are defined in the census as those who had worked less than 6 months during the previous year (but had been engaged in some work during the period).¹¹ These are workers who are typically poor and probably dependent on local land-owners and other local strong-men to get work. As with the rural population discussed above, I would therefore expect them to be more likely to support traditional elites, like politicians from royal families who control large areas of land.

Figure 3.6 Proportion urban and dynasticism in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha

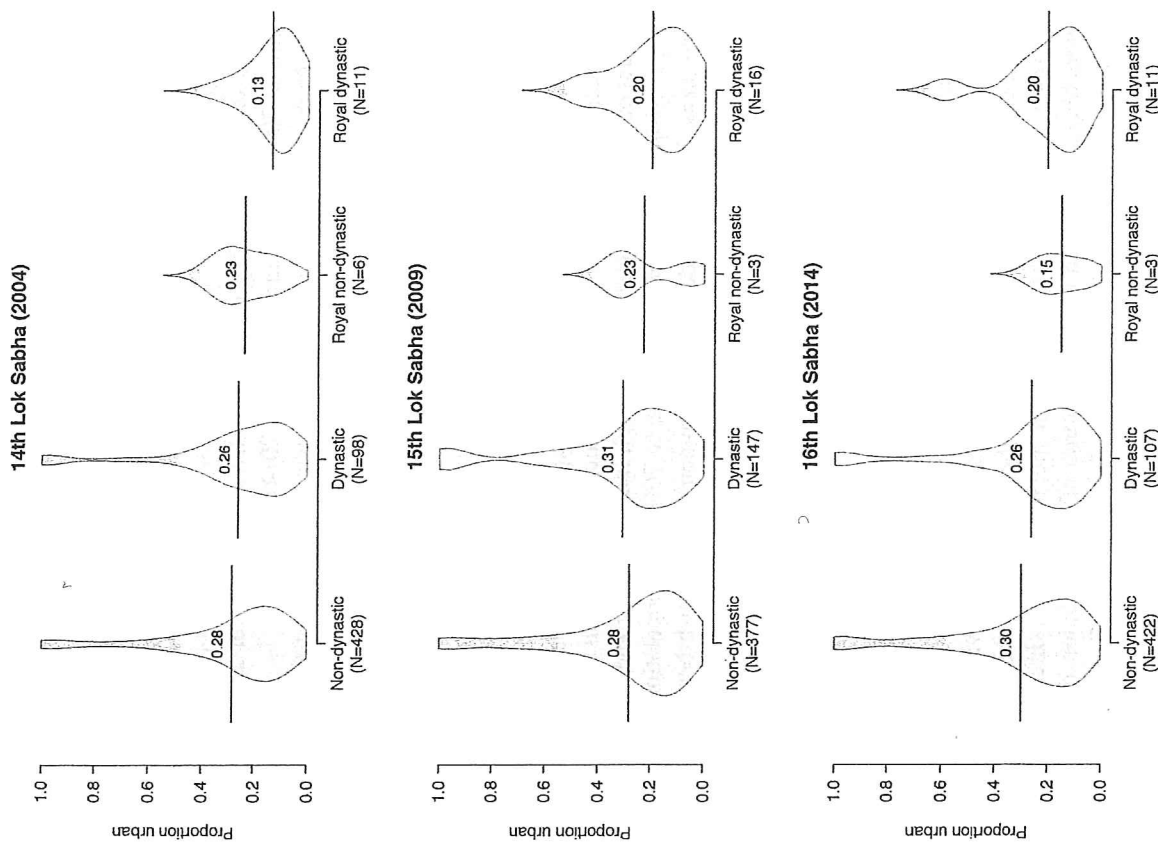


Figure 3.6 Proportion urban and dynasticism in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha

¹⁰ The density shape used is a polygon given by a normal density trace and its mirrored version. This is created by the function `beanplot` in R as described in Kampstra (2008).

¹¹ The Indian Census of 2001 gives the following definition: "Those workers who had not worked for the major part of the reference period (i.e. less than 6 months) are termed as Marginal Workers." [URL] censusindia.gov.in/Metadata/Metada.htm#2m.

Figure 3.7 shows the proportion of marginal workers in the different types of constituencies across the years. The data are again presented with bean plots, illustrating the distribution within each category of PCs. Also here the average in each category is shown with the line in the middle of the distributions, with the average value written above the line. On average there were about 9% marginal workers in the PCs in the sample. There was virtually no difference between the percentage of marginal workers in PCs with *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* MPs (averages of about 9% and 8% respectively), while there were about 11% marginal workers in PCs with royal MPs across the years.

Again, the differences are not dramatic, but provide another piece of evidence in support of the overall pattern: PCs with *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* MPs do not differ systematically from each other, whereas PCs electing members of royal families do differ somewhat from other constituencies.

7 Education

Finally, let us see whether the same pattern – that PCs electing royals differ from other PCs – is reflected in literacy rates. Literacy is another measure of poverty, but illiterate voters may prefer royal politicians for slightly different reasons than marginal workers do. While marginal workers may opt for royal politicians because of their economic dependence on them, illiterate voters may also choose elite politicians because of their “glamour,” as exemplified in the story at the beginning of this chapter. There is probably a strong correlation between the proportion of marginal workers and illiterates in a constituency, but it is still of interest to examine them separately, in case the mechanisms unfold differently.

The average literacy rate in India, according to the Indian Census of 2001, was 65%.¹² Figure 3.8 shows the breakdown by type of constituency. Here too we see that whereas the distributions of literacy rates in PCs with *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* MPs are very similar (averages of 65% and 64% literacy, respectively), the percentages are slightly lower for PCs with MPs from royal families (the *Royal non-dynastic* MPs were elected from constituencies with literacy rates of 64%, 58%, and 59% across the three election years, whereas the *Royal dynastic* MPs were elected from PCs with literacy rates of 56%, 62%, and 59% across the years). Thus, literacy patterns also support the overall argument that constituencies that elect dynastic politicians do not differ greatly

¹² The Census of India defines literate as: “A person aged 7 years and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language has been taken as literate.” [URL] censusindia.gov.in/Meadata/Meatada.htm#2m. Consistent with the calculations of the Census of India I have calculated literacy rate as the number of literate persons divided by the number of persons aged 7 or older.

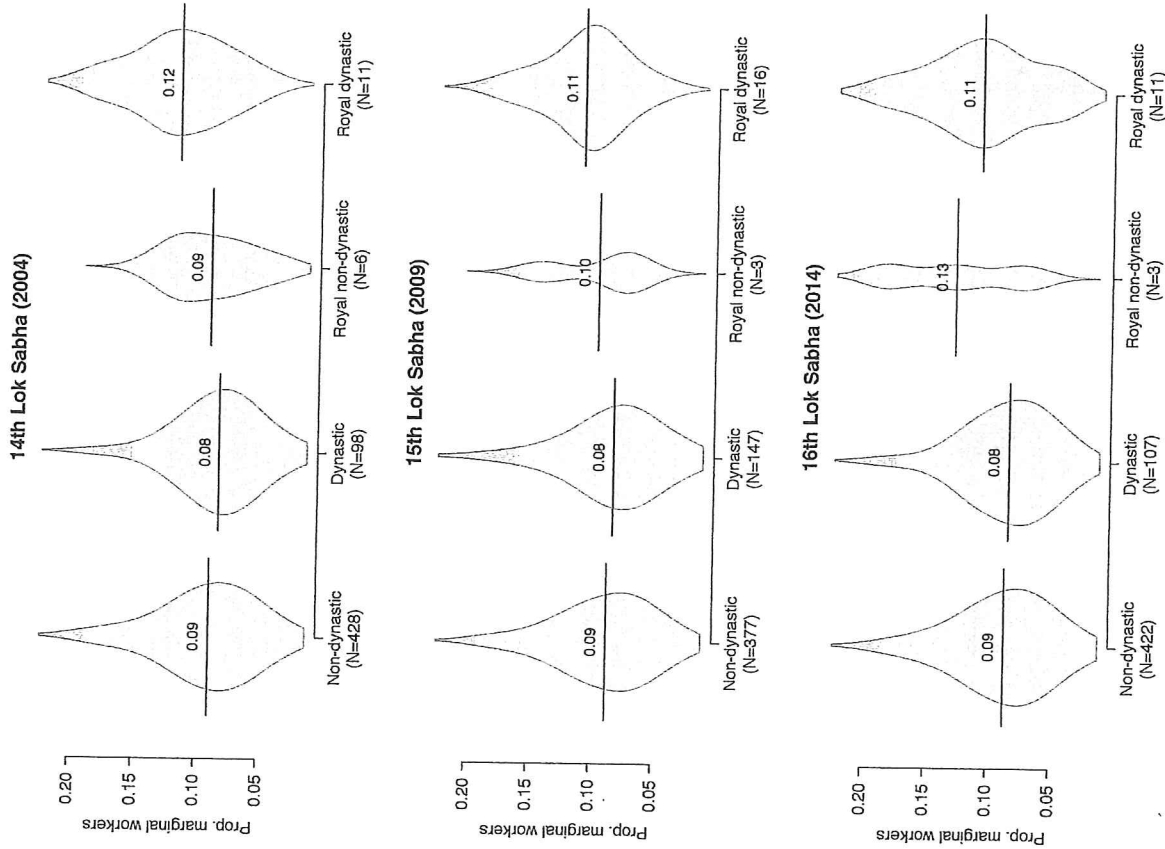


Figure 3.7 Proportion marginal workers and dynasticism in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha

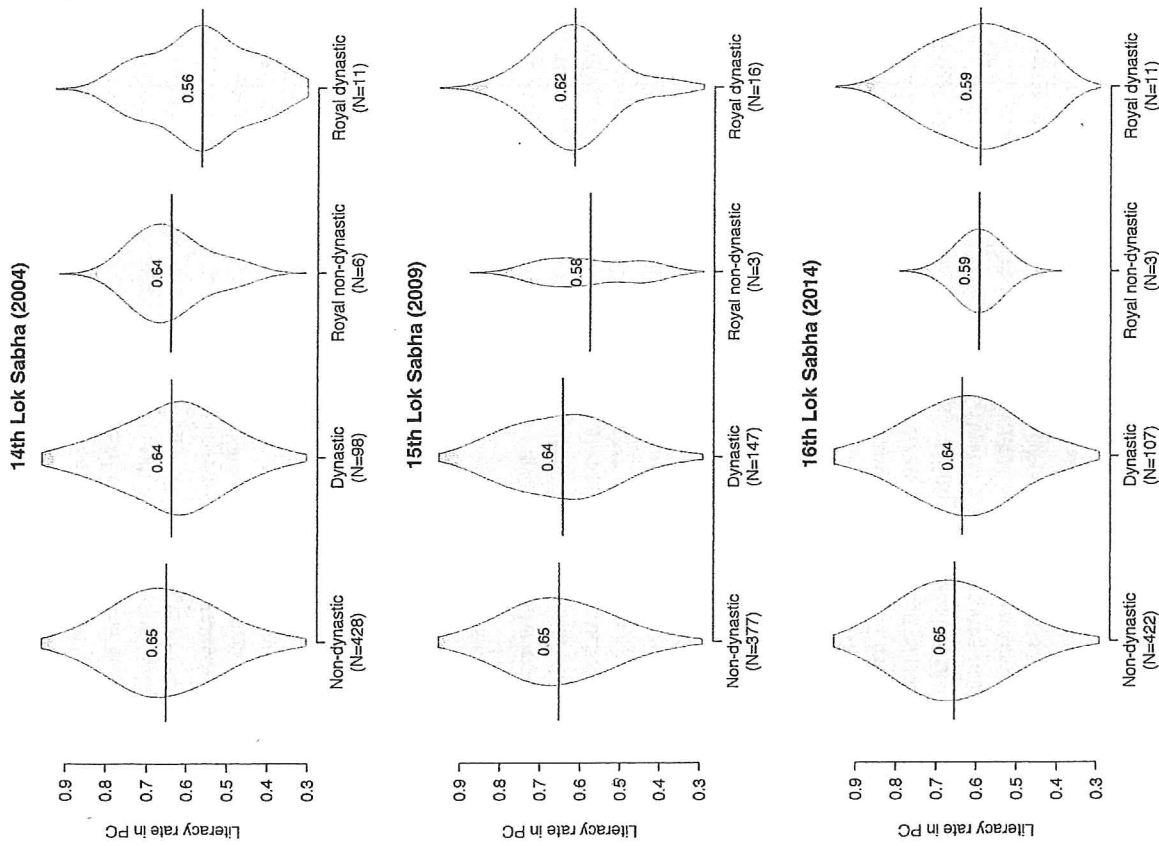


Figure 3.8 Literacy rate and dynasticism in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabha

from places that elect non-dynastic MPs, but that there seems to be something different about places that elect royal MPs.

8 What is different about the royals?

Two clear patterns emerge from the empirical work. First, that there are no systematic differences in the characteristics of PCs that elect *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* MPs. And second, there are some differences between PCs with MPs from royal families and the rest.

The first pattern is fascinating in its own right, as it goes counter to the expectation that dynastic politics is somehow feudal and associated with poverty and “backwardness.” Having other family members in politics might be a political asset, but in a network society like India it may be just one out of several possible assets. Those politicians who do not have family members in politics are likely to have other strong networks that enable them to achieve positions of power, such as connections in important businesses or religious organizations. According to this line of reasoning, dynasties are but one expression of a network-oriented society. They should not be seen as traditional, but rather as an integral part of modern democracy in India. In fact, the whole idea of juxtaposing the modern and the traditional is difficult in India, as noted by Brass (1965, p. 2): “In India, modernization is not a one-way process; political institutions modernize the society while the society traditionalizes institutions.”

On the other hand, the pattern whereby PCs that elect royal politicians are somewhat poorer and more rural than other PCs does support the idea of royal dynasties being associated with more traditional and perhaps more “backward” values. The numbers of MPs from royal families are small, and the patterns are not very strong, so their importance should not be exaggerated. Yet, it does seem that India’s royal families tend to be more successful in democratic elections in poorer and more rural areas, and also that they are more rooted in one particular area.

There may be several reasons for this. As mentioned, it could be the result of voters being tied to land owned by traditional elites, and therefore financially dependent on former landholders and royal families. Thachil (2014) describes how the service-oriented relationships between political parties and voters in India today are no longer clientelistic, as there are no expectations of reciprocity; however, it may be that the relationships between voters and some former royal families still resemble the traditional patron–client relationships that once dominated Indian politics and that make people feel either coerced or induced to support traditional elites.

Another reason could also be, as mentioned, that voters are dazzled by the glamour of politicians who come from royal families. That voters in India fall for glamour is not unheard of, as shown by the many celebrities-turned-politicians

in India. In fact, as reported in Jensenius (2013a, p. 117), in interviews with voters and politicians the glamour of politicians is often brought up as an explanation for both vote choice and electoral turnout.

Once again, it should be emphasized that the patterns I have shown are not very strong: Although the average PC that elects a member of a royal family is poorer and more rural, some of the PCs that elect royals are wealthy and urban. Take, for instance, Gurgaon constituency, on the city border of Delhi, a constituency that has become a wealthy suburb to the city. Here the scion of the Rewari dynasty, Rao Inderjit Singh, has long been a political force. It is also important to bear in mind that the patterns noted in this chapter are *correlations*. Although there seems to be something different about the places that elect royals, the relationship might in fact be spurious: Historically, there were more princely states in North India – and royals tend to run for election in the states they come from. The pattern we see may therefore be driven by the fact that North India is poorer.

However, there is one further argument that supports the patterns I have presented in this chapter – that royal politicians seem to be a remnant from the past, while political dynasties are the name of the game of democracy in India. Here I am referring to the circumstance that the number of royal politicians seems to be dwindling, while the number of dynastic politicians is stable or even increasing. In the 1957 election in Madhya Pradesh, 20 out of the 23 dynastic politicians elected to the state assembly were from royal families (Carlevan 2013): while the figures are much lower now.

9 Conclusions

This chapter has probed into the descriptive characteristics of what distinguishes Indian parliamentary constituencies (PCs) that elect dynastic and royal Members of Parliament (MPs) from other PCs. Two clear patterns emerged. First, there is no systematic overall difference between PCs that elect *Non-dynastic* and *Dynastic* politicians from non-royal families. This suggests that, contrary to the expectations of many, electing candidates from *political families* is not associated with poor education or lack of knowledge, but is simply an integral part of Indian politics. However, places that elect MPs from *royal families* are somewhat different, as they tend to be elected from the same constituency as their family members. These PCs are also generally somewhat more rural, have more farmers and marginal workers, and have lower educational levels. Thus, the evidence presented here does not indicate that the *political* dynasties in India are a remnant of a feudal past that will gradually disappear as India grows wealthier. However, it does suggest that *royal* dynasties are more associated with poverty and traditional values and may be dwindling in numbers as Indian voters become wealthier and better educated.

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4 Dynasticism across Indian political parties

Adam Ziegfeld

Although dynasticism is pervasive across parties in India (see Figure 1.1 and Table 1.2), political parties nevertheless vary in the degree to which they are dynastic. The Indian National Congress (or Congress) is a dynastic party *par excellence*. Its party president, Sonia Gandhi, the widow of the former party president and prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, is the fifth member of the Nehru-Gandhi family to have held this position. And, in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 Lok Sabha elections combined, Congress elected 396 MPs, of which 145 (or nearly 37 percent) had family members precede them in politics. But, not all Indian parties are as dynastic as Congress.

In the 2004, 2009, and 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) – a small Marxist-Leninist party enjoying considerable support in three of India's states – elected a total of sixty-eight MPs, of which ten (or 15 percent) were members of political dynasties. During the same period, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), elected eighteen MPs, of which only two (or 11 percent) had family members precede them in politics. The CPM and TRS are very different from Congress. For one, neither the CPM nor the TRS has a leader who is dynastic in the sense of having been preceded by a family member in politics, though the TRS's founder and leader, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, has not hesitated to have his children follow him (Reddy 2014).¹ Furthermore, unlike Congress, the CPM is a highly organized party. Advancement within the CPM requires demonstrated ideological commitment to the party's communist principles and sustained activity in one of the party's frontal organizations, such as its labor unions, newspapers, or women's wings. No single leader can thwart party norms and single-handedly nominate the relatives of other party members. Though the TRS is, unlike the CPM, far more autocratic in its functioning, it differs from Congress in another respect. The TRS is a very young party, having been founded only in 2001.

¹ In 2014, K. Chandrasekhar Rao's son and nephew won seats in the Telangana legislative assembly, and his daughter won a seat in the Lok Sabha.