

Proposal for Summer Centennial Center Research Grants

Title Mapping Institutional Evolution in the British India Legislature, 1916-1945

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Abstract

Suffrage expansion, the increase in eligible voters for selecting political actors, is an essential step towards democratization. What is the effect of this transition, specifically, introduction of a partially elected legislature, on policy formation? Building on existing research about franchise expansion, legislative institutions, and state development, our project will develop a theory that links changes in electorate to activities in the legislature in a colonial context, where legislative institutions were prevalent by twentieth century. We will do so by creating a new data set from British India legislative debates over four decades (1916-1945). The findings will provide a new perspective on colonial legislatures and their role in policy formation before and after franchise expansion.

Motivation

An extensive literature in historical political economy research has sought to understand the effect of suffrage expansion on government policy (Aidt and Jensen 2009; Harding and Stasavage 2014). However, the institutions in place for creating the policies remain poorly understood beyond individual historical accounts. Particularly, the role that colonial legislative institutions, which initially emerged in North America and then later spread to colonies across Africa and Asia, play in policy formation has only recently received attention (Gailmard 2017; Paine 2019).

In this project, we investigate a key condition that must be met in order for suffrage expansion to result in policy change: elected representatives must be able to coordinate to develop, propose, and ultimately pass legislation that expands goods provision. To do this, we will collect a series of novel data on four key aspects of the British India legislature from 1916 to 1945: (1) legislative behavior from recorded debates; (2) legislative member information (tenure, occupation, partisanship, etc.) from office lists; (3) electoral rules by district from election manuals; and (4) vote results from electoral returns. This will serve as a rich resource to compare and investigate theories of legislative institutions and institutional change beyond non-colonial contexts. In the remainder of this proposal, we describe the historical context, the data we plan to gather, and our plan for the distribution of funding.

Historical Context

We contend that British Colonial India from 1916 to independence in 1945 constitutes an ideal test case for our argument. Most territories of present-day India were brought together as a British crown colony under Government of India Act of 1858, which effectively transferred political administration from the British East India Company to the crown government. Enacted just after a violent rebellion, the law was part of the numerous institutional reforms that followed, one being the establishment of Imperial Legislative Council in 1861. This legislature was mainly composed of nominated members by the governor and elected members from organizations such as Bombay Chamber for Commerce.

Following the First World War, the 1919 Government of India Act introduced two key reforms that fundamentally reshaped the Indian Parliament: the bicameral division of the Indian parliament the Imperial Legislative Assembly and Council of States, and the expansion of the electoral franchise to indigenous peoples of British India. After 1919, then, both houses of the Indian Parliament contained appointed (unelected) and elected members. Notably, many elected members were members of the indigenous peoples who had been granted suffrage. Their seats could either be broadly geographic (such as Madras) or sector-specific (e.g., Muslim landholders). Figure ?? shows that the expansion resulted in a significant increase in legislature size, from roughly 60 members before 1920 to around 200 members by 1921. The growth mainly came from elected members, which increased from around 20 members to around 130 members, now representing roughly two-third of the legislature. A similar Government of India Act in 1935 increased relaxations on voter eligibility across different states, further increasing the electoral representation for indigenous population (Cassan, Iyer, and Mirza 2020; Rashiduzzaman 1964).

The project will also allow us to look at the role of ideology of the legislators who craft the policy. We will focus on how two periods of institutional change shaped the ideological distribution of colonial legislative members: initial suffrage expansion to indigenous adults with first elections in 1920, and further expansion of voter eligibility in 1935. We argue that, with the introduction of a larger electorate with different policy preferences in the legislature, franchise expansion fundamentally reshaped the role of colonial legislative institutions in policy formation. Specifically, in a legislature where some members are elected and others are not, we expect elected members (who are elected with a broad voter base) to differ ideologically from unelected members.

Project Plan

So far, we have made some progress in our data collection on legislative behavior and colonial lawmaking, collecting historical data created from the documents covering British India parliamentary debates from 1916 to 1945; this totals nearly 4,000 sessions from both chambers as compiled by India Parliament Digital Library. Figure 1 shows one page from a 1921 debate from the Legislative Assembly. Each of these documents contain daily

questions and answers as well as debates on various topics in Legislative Assembly and Council of States.

The project consists of two components: an archival research trip and research assistance. We will hire two undergraduate research assistants from the university, and spend 400 hours in research assistance. The hours will be evenly split between quantitative and historical/qualitative data management. The first task involves verifying accuracy of automatically collected data and integrating data from different archival sources. The second task involves conducting qualitative and historical research on legislative development and compiling literature review.

The archival research trip component will run flexibly based on global public health conditions. First priority is a two-week research trip to Delhi, India, where one of the co-authors (Mitchell Bosley) will collect offline documents on legislative member information, and conduct exploratory research at the national archives. This will allow us to access documents such as *Electoral Rules under the Government of India Act* and *the Gazette of Government of India (Legislative Department)*. While we already possess these documents for some years, documents for most publication years are only available offline. If we find the coronavirus outbreak remained serious in Summer 2021 in India, we will have a trip to London at the British Library archives, which hosts less extensive but still useful source for the archival documents. If the same was true for London, then we will only conduct research assistance based on digitally available documents. (928 words)

References

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Cost Breakdown

Total: USD 8,000

Research Assistance (USD 3,000):

- USD 15/hr \times 200 hrs for data management = USD 3,000
- USD 15/hr \times 200 hrs for historical and qualitative research = USD 3,000

Archival Research Trip in Winter 2021 (USD 2,000):

- Return flight ticket to Delhi or London = USD 1,200
- Daily expenses during the trip = USD 800

The Honourable Mr. W. M. Hailey : The collection of this detailed information will necessitate the expenditure of very much time and trouble, and as the question of the adequacy of the pay in Accounts offices is now under consideration I would ask the Honourable Member to be satisfied with the assurance that the points raised by him in this question will be considered at the same time.

INCREASE GRANTED TO SUPERINTENDENTS AND ACCOUNTANTS OF THE INDIAN
AUDIT DEPARTMENT.

111. **Bhai Man Singh :** (a) Will the Government be pleased to lay on the table a statement showing the actual percentage of increase granted to Superintendents and accountants of the Indian Audit Department and to the officers of the same Department in the various grades and posts on account of high cost of living ?

(b) Is it not a fact that the increments, granted to the officers are in the shape of permanent addition to the pay whereas in the case of the accountants and Superintendents the increase is to be absorbed in the future increments and that the maximum of the grade is not to be exceeded ?

(c) Will the Government be pleased to state the reasons why in the case of officers drawing over Rs. 200 per mensem an increase of 33 per cent. was considered necessary whereas to subordinates drawing over Rs. 200 an increase

Figure 1: One Page from the September 30th 1921 debate of the Legislative Assembly.