CHAPTER 13

INDIA

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Who Gives a Dam?
- Thinking About India
- The Evolution of Indian Politics
- Political Culture
- Political Participation
- The Indian State
- Public Policy
- Feedback
- Conclusion: Democracy in India and the Third World
As Indian citizens, we subsist on a regular diet of caste massacres and nuclear tests, mosque breakings and fashion shows, church burnings and expanding cell phone networks, bonded labor and the digital revolution, female infanticide and the Nasdaq crash, husbands who continue to burn their wives for dowry and our delectable stockpile of Miss Worlds. What’s hard to reconcile oneself to, both personally and politically, is the schizophrenic nature of it.

ARUNDHATI ROY

Who Gives a Dam?

On 18 October 2000 the Indian Supreme Court allowed authorities in the state of Gujarat to continue construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the Narmada River valley (see the map on the preceding page). When completed it will be an impressive structure—almost 137 meters (460 feet tall)—and will irrigate 1.8 million hectares (over 4.3 million acres of land). It is also but one of about thirty large dams planned for that region of India (www.narmada.org/sardarsarovar.html and www.sardarsarovardam.com).

For their supporters, such big dams will bring unprecedented economic growth and prosperity to the world’s second-most-populous country, and also one of its poorest. Half of India’s population lies below one of the most widely used measures of poverty—surviving on less than a dollar a day. According to this same measure, a third of the world’s poor live in India. The water from the dams could be used to irrigate crops and boost agricultural production on the region’s arid land, and the electricity they generate would provide energy for new factories and offices in a country that is developing a modern industrial sector.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam also has many opponents. Criticisms range from the devastating effects such dams will have on the daily lives of poor peasants to broader statements linking them to the corrosive impact of globalization. If the critics are to be believed, more than 30 million people have been displaced by the construction of more than three hundred big dams in the past decade. The Sardar Sarovar Dam alone will force a half million people to move from villages that will be flooded. Despite the legal requirement to do so, no plans had been made to resettle about half of them. Most of those affected will come from the so-called untouchables and people of tribal origin who are outside the caste system but probably even worse off than the untouchables.

The economic growth just mentioned occurred as India opened its economy to international trade and investment, as called for by proponents of structural adjustment (see chapter 12). Tariffs have been slashed and other restrictions on imports eliminated. Dams themselves have become a big business worth $40-45 billion per year, and most of that money comes from multinational corporations. Opponents of the dams, however, question the alleged benefits of this kind of investment and outline scenarios in which large multinational agricultural firms will undercut the livelihood of poor peasants, just as other foreign firms are siphoning off market shares for Indian cars and other manufactured goods.

Thinking About India

The controversy surrounding the Sardar Sarovar Dam is very different from the vignettes used to begin the chapters on individual countries in parts 2 and 3. That’s because India and the other countries discussed in part 4 are very different from those we
explore in the first two thirds of this book. In other words, as chapter 12 implied, studying India in particular and the third world in general means shifting gears once again to consider widespread poverty, ethnic conflict, and weak states, as well as a far greater impact for globalization.

**The Basics**

**A Nation of Contrasts**

As the chapter-opening quote by Arundhati Roy (a leading opponent of the Sardar Sarovar Dam) suggests, India is a land of stark contrasts and contradictions. Depending on your perspective, it is one of the most backward or one of the most promising countries on earth. It is one of the poorest countries, yet it is also the world’s tenth-largest industrial power. Only the United States and Russia have more scientists and engineers. About 60 percent of Indians are illiterate, yet rural India is connected by a network of satellite stations that have brought television to more than 80 percent of its 700,000 villages. At home, its people seem reluctant to work hard and take risks, yet Indians abroad are known for their business acumen.

Politically, India is the land of the world’s most famous and influential pacifist, yet it has one of the largest armies in the world and is one of but nine countries (as far as we know) to have developed nuclear weapons. India was a founder of the nonaligned movement that tried to avoid taking sides during the cold war. Yet it has also fought several wars with neighbor (and now fellow nuclear power) Pakistan, imposed an economic and military blockade on Nepal, and sent 50,000 troops to protect the Tamil minority in neighboring Sri Lanka.

**Size and Diversity**

The other striking thing about India is its size and diversity. Only China has more people. Seven of its states have more inhabitants than Britain or France. Despite its family planning program, India adds the equivalent of Argentina to its population each year, and in 2000 it topped a billion.

India’s population is also among the most diverse in the world, which is most evident to outsiders in the languages its people speak.

Nearly 60 percent of the population speaks one of the Indo-Aryan languages used mostly in northern India. Of them, about half speak Hindi. However, even though all these languages are related, people who speak Hindi, Bengali, or Gujarati do not fully understand each other. The 30 percent of the people who live in the south mostly speak one of the Dravidian languages, which are completely different from those used in the north. About 5 percent of the people (mostly Sikhs) speak Punjabi, an offspring of Persian and Urdu, the dominant language of Pakistan.

The constitution lists fourteen official “principal languages.” (See table 13.1.) In fact, the situation is much more complicated, because there are hundreds of distinct dialects subsumed in these linguistic families, and as many as 100 million people speak languages that do not figure on the list in any form. As in much of South Asia and Africa, the only language educated Indians have in common is English. Thus, the language of the colonizer has become the lingua franca in much of business and government.

The government has drawn the twenty-five state and seven union territory boundaries so that each has a dominant language and culture. Nonetheless, they all have large minorities that have played a significant and often violent role in local as well as national political life.

India also has three main religious groups. Slightly over 80 percent of the population is Hindu, but each major regional/linguistic group practices a different version of the religion. Approximately 10 percent are Muslim, but they run the full range of belief from fundamentalists to highly assimilated and secularized people who have, for all intents and purposes, stopped practicing their religion. Most of the rest are Sikhs. This religion has at its roots an attempt to blend Hindu and Muslim traditions emphasizing peacefulness and other-worldliness even though Sikhs now are known for their ferocious...
TABLE 13.1 India's Principal Language Groups

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION</th>
<th>WHERE SPEAKERS ARE CONCENTRATED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Assam</td>
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<td>Bengali</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
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<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Gujarat, Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kannada</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
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<td>Kashmiri</td>
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<td>Jammu and Kashmir</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malayalam</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
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<td>Marathi</td>
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<td>Maharashtra</td>
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<td>Oriya</td>
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<td>Orissa</td>
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<td>Punjab</td>
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<td>Tamil</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
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<td>Telegu</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Most Hindi-speaking regions</td>
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fighting ability and their dissatisfaction with their status in the Punjab.

Like language, religion has been politically important since the Muslims first arrived before the Mughal conquest more than five hundred years ago. Independent India came into existence amid communal violence as millions of Muslims tried to escape India for Pakistan and millions of Hindus fled in the other direction. In the 1980s the most difficult problem involved Sikhs, who sought their own homeland and who saw the national government attack their holiest shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, and kill thousands of their most militant leaders. In the 1990s violence most often occurred along religious lines, as in the case of the Hindu-Muslim conflict over the temple/mosque site at Ayodhya, which we will examine in more detail later. Here, it is enough to note that the attempt by Hindus to build a new temple there led to riots in which thousands of Hindus and Muslims were killed throughout the northern part of the country.

Finally, India is divided along caste lines. Historians trace the caste system back nearly four thousand years, when in all likelihood the lighter-skinned Aryans established it to minimize “mingling” with the darker-skinned Dravidians. There are four main castes. The Brahmins historically were the priests and the most prestigious caste, the Kshatriyas were rulers and soldiers, and the Vaisyas were merchants. These three upper castes are often referred to as “twice born,” reflecting the belief that they are further along in the Hindu cycle of death and reincarnation. The lowest-caste Sudras were traditionally farmers but did “respectable” enough work to warrant their inclusion in the caste system. Below them are the untouchables, or dalits, who are outside the caste system altogether because their ancestors were sullied by their occupations as scavengers and collectors of “night soil.” Outcasts thus occupied a position at the bottom of the social hierarchy in much the same way and for many of the same reasons as the burakumin in Japan did.

Each caste, in turn, is broken into hundreds of subcastes known as jati. The castes and jati have elaborate rules for most social situations, including such things as what clothes to wear and what food to eat. Until very recently, people rarely broke out of their caste’s restrictions.

The constitution officially abolished the status of outcaste and outlawed discrimination against untouchables and tribes who are outside the caste system. In practice, caste remains a volatile political issue and the most divisive aspect in Indian society. Discrimination against those at the bottom of the hierarchy is still as pervasive as racism is in the United States or western Europe. In summer 1990, for instance, Prime Minister V. P. Singh proposed reserving about a quarter of all new positions in the civil service for members of the lower or “scheduled” castes in an Indian version of American affirmative action. The proposal so incensed upper-caste young people that they staged demonstrations in which some burned themselves alive.

Poverty

The most important fact of life in India is poverty. It is so widespread and has proved so difficult to reduce that we will devote much of the public policy section to it. As the table on the inside front cover shows, India’s average per capita GNP is barely over $300 per year, making it the poorest country covered in this book. Despite recent gains, the gap between India and other countries that started out as poorly as it did, such as China, continues to grow.

The statistics are remarkable. One Indian baby out of ten will die before reaching the age of one, and overall life expectancy is only about fifty. For most people, health care is rudimentary at best. Although the “green revolution” of the 1960s all but eliminated mass starvation, most Indians eat a diet that does not quite meet the minimal caloric intake needed for a healthy life. And in 1998 a doubling in the price of onions took millions of people to the brink of starvation and cost the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) control of three states.

The statistics tell only part of the story of Indian poverty. The cities are crowded and filthy, something that Indo-Caribbean and Nobel Prize–winning writer V. S. Naipaul put powerfully when describing his arrival in Bombay during only his second visit to India in the late 1980s:
Traffic into the city moved slowly because of the crowd. When at certain intersections, the traffic was halted, the pavements sizzled all the more, and such a torrent of people swept across the road, in such a bouncing froth of light-weight clothes, it seemed that some kind of invisible sluiceway had been opened, and that if it wasn't closed again, the flow of road-crossers would spread everywhere, and the beaten-up red buses and yellow-and-black taxis would be quite becalmed, each at the center of a human eddy.

With me in the taxi were fumes and heat and din. Bombay continued to define itself: Bombay flats on either side of the road now, concrete buildings mildewed at their upper levels by the Bombay weather, excessive sun, excessive rain, excessive heat; grimy at the lower levels, as if from the crowds at pavement level, and as if that human grime was working its way up, tidemark by tidemark, to meet the mildew.1

**Key Questions**

Because India is the first country considered in detail in part 4, this section has to do two things—outline general questions to ask of all third world countries, as well as specific ones about India.

- What are its political origins?
- How do people participate politically?
- How is it governed?
- How has it coped with poverty and unemployment?

Like most of the third world, India suffered from centuries of occupation and colonization, first under the Muslim Mughals and later under the British.

India's experience with imperialism was typical in many ways. Foreigners made all the decisions that mattered, which, among other things, served to destroy much of its economic base. However, in other ways, it was unusual. The British never directly ruled the entire country. Moreover, they allowed a massive proindependence movement to develop following the creation of the Indian National Congress political party in 1885. As a result, the Indian regime that gained its independence in 1947 had widespread popular support and experienced leaders who were committed to democracy. That group of leaders, headed by the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave the country a generation of stability that deepened popular support for democracy and that has helped the country survive more serious conflict since the late 1960s.

India has been able to sustain its democracy in large part because its citizens supported it, especially during the country's critical formative years. Although we have to ask why this was the case, it is more important today to probe why there has been so much more protest in recent decades than there was during the heyday of Congress's rule under Nehru.

Then Congress was what political scientists call an inclusive party that found a way to appeal to people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and political beliefs. Once Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, became prime minister two years after her father's death in 1964, the party system began to fragment. National opposition parties, including the predecessors of the BJP, began to gain strength by appealing to segments of the electorate. More importantly, regional parties began scoring impressive victories, often winning control of state governments and electing up to half of the members of the lower house of parliament from "their" state. The fragmentation has not just been electoral. As noted earlier, communal violence has been widespread since the late 1970s. Violent protests and riots occur on a regular basis, and disaffected members of minority ethnic groups assassinated both Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi, who also served as prime minister.

The obvious question to ask in terms of how India is governed is whether or not Indian democracy is cut from the same political cloth as the version we saw in part 2. On paper, the answer is an obvious yes. India's institutions were patterned closely on Britain's parliamentary system and have changed surprisingly little since independence. In practice, however, democracy there has some decidedly Indian characteristics. They start with the dominant role Congress has played, having controlled the government for all but five of India's first fifty years as an independent country. Under Indira Gandhi and her successors, Congress transformed political life by centralizing political power to the point that the Indian state can now be more repressive and certainly is more corrupt than anything we saw in part 2.

Finally, we have to ask why India's public policy has become so much like that in the rest of the third world despite its unique characteristics, which we will focus on in the first three-quarters of this chapter.

From independence until the late 1980s, India was one of the world's strongest supporters of import substitution and of the autarkic strategy of industrialization it led to. Since then, however, India has adopted the more liberal policies of structural adjustment, although it has done so more gradually and grudgingly than has Mexico, as we will see in chapter 16.

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The Evolution of Indian Politics

The Weight of History

As we have seen throughout this book, we cannot understand politics in any country today without first coming to grips with how it evolved over time. (See table 13.2.) Most third world countries are relatively new as independent states. But the impact of history is, if anything, more extensive in the third world because of the additional factor of colonialism, which touched all areas of life there but did not figure prominently in most countries covered in parts 2 and 3.

In India’s case, this means going back more than three thousand years. As early as 1500 B.C., light-skinned Aryans from the north began developing what became the Sanskrit language, Hindu religion, and caste system. Many of the classics of Indian literature and culture antedate the birth of Christ. During the third century A.D., the Mauryan Empire was able to unite almost the entire subcontinent during the reign of Ashoka, who remains an inspiration to many Hindus today (www.historyofindia.com).

Until A.D. 1000 or so, Indian culture flourished. More literary classics were written, and Buddhism spread through most of Asia.

The last thousand years have been a different story. For all but the past fifty years, most of India was dominated by outsiders—first the Muslim Mughals and then the British.

In the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim armies set out to conquer and convert the world. They got as far west as Spain and were gaining ground in France when they were beaten at the battle of Tours. Their influence extended all the way to the Atlantic coast of Africa. And, most importantly for our purposes here, the Muslims moved east as well, reaching well beyond India to the Philippines.

Beginning in the tenth century, Muslims made inroads into India. Although the Persian-based Mughals were able to gain control of most of India by the middle of the fifteenth century, there was nothing approaching a central government for the subcontinent.

In 1526 some of the regional rulers turned to Babur, a descendant of the great Mongol warrior Chinghiz (Genghis) Khan. Babur took Delhi and was named the first padishah, or Mughal emperor, of India. It was only after the accession of Babur’s grandson Akbar in 1556 that the Mughals consolidated their rule. Through a combination of negotiation and force, Akbar united most of the subcontinent and built an elaborate and efficient bureaucratic system. This system was far superior to anything in Europe at the time and allowed the Mughals to run a country that already had over 100 million inhabitants.

The Mughals never managed to subdue all their opponents and almost always faced violent opposition, either from rival Muslim claimants to the throne or from Hindus and, later, Sikhs seeking to regain control over their own land. More importantly for the long run, the Mughals never tried to change mass values, including religion, outside of their bastions in the north. As a result, Islam remained a minority religion, and the Mughals adapted to local conditions and became every bit as much Indian as they were Muslim. Among other things, they did not seek to eliminate the caste system. In fact, because many jati seem to have converted to Islam en masse in an attempt to improve their social and economic lot in life, there are some castes in the Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani Muslim communities.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the last of the great Mughals, Alamgir, dedicated the last quarter-century of his life to uniting the entire subcontinent. He assembled an army of unprecedented proportions and traveled with it in a “moving capital” that was thirty miles in circumference and had 500,000 “residents.” On average, 100,000 people died each year of the campaign, which did ultimately end with the Mughals’ conquest of the bulk of India in 1707. It proved, however, to be a Pyrrhic victory. Alamgir himself died two years later, leaving an overextended empire that quickly fell prey once again to infighting among the Mughals and opposition from the countryside.

British Colonialism

Ultimately, the greatest threat to Mughal rule came from a new source: Europe. Portuguese traders had established a beachhead in India as early as 1498. By the middle of the eighteenth century, British and French mer-
chant companies, supported by private armies, operated from coastal bases. Gradually, the British emerged as the most powerful of the European forces in India, largely because of their victories in wars fought back in Europe.

From its base in Calcutta, the **British East India Company** began to expand its influence. It should be stressed that this first stage in the British takeover was not carried out by its government, but by a private corporation—albeit one with strong state support—and its architects thus stressed profit rather than political conquest. At that time, the British were more than willing to allow local rulers to remain in power if they helped the company’s commercial operations. Indeed, its policy was to find or, if necessary, create a class of leaders who would be loyal to Britain and who could themselves profit from the trading networks the British established.

By the early nineteenth century, the company had spread itself too thin. There were years when it lost money, leaving it unable to pay its debts to the Crown. Meanwhile, it also lost its monopoly over British trade to a new generation of merchants who undermined the weaving industry of Bengal by sending Indian cotton to the new factories in Manchester.

In so doing, they magnified the anger many Indians already felt, which led the British to take more and more territory under their military “protection.” Tensions boiled over in 1857 when the British introduced the Enfield rifle for use in its army, which already had a large number of Indian soldiers. The rifle used grease from cows and pigs, which offended Hindus and Muslims, respectively. In the first anticolonial mutiny, they killed a number of British soldiers, freed some prisoners, and captured Delhi at the cost of hundreds of British lives, including women and children.

The British fought back with what Stanley Wolpert calls “terrible racial ferocity.” Although the outcome was never in doubt, the British wreaked a savage vengeance on the Indian population, destroying the bridges that had been built between them and the Indian population. The mutiny also proved to be the death knell for the peculiar mix of state and private colonization.

On 2 August 1858 the British Parliament passed the **Government of India Act**, which transferred all the company’s powers directly to the crown. As the map in figure 13.1 shows, the British never took direct control of the entire country, but even in the areas where “princely states” continued to exist, the British called the political shots. The British raj was an elaborate bureaucratic system that relied heavily on the cooperation of the Indian elite. It could hardly have been otherwise, given that the Indian population outnumbered the British by more than ten to one. Indeed, this was a problem colonial rulers faced everywhere, as we will see with colonial rule in South Africa and the puppet monarchy in Iraq.

At the top of the raj system was a secretary of state in the British cabinet in London who was responsible for Indian affairs. He, in turn, appointed a viceroy who(609,573),(929,943)

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was dominated by the Indian Civil Service, which, despite its name, was chosen on the basis of competitive examinations given only in London until 1923.

**The Struggle for Independence**

As was the case throughout the empire, British colonial rule in India planted the seeds of its own destruction. Its oppression of the Indian people and, ironically, its use of Indian elites in business, education, civil administration, and the military created an ever growing body of people who objected to the raj. What makes India unique is the way this opposition to colonial rule came together in a mostly unified and nonviolent movement that achieved independence very early and that endowed the new state with a consensus its first generation of leaders could use to get the country off to a good start.

Opposition to British rule continued after the Enfield mutiny. By the 1880s a group of well-educated, upper-caste Indians began talking about swaraj, or self-rule. Some were merchants who had benefited from British rule. Others were intellectuals who had discovered their Hindu or Muslim roots while receiving a British education.

Their frustrations with colonial rule came to a head in 1883 when the British enacted a new law that actually was designed to aid Indians by allowing some of them to serve on juries that tried Europeans. The 100,000 or so
British then living in India forced the government to back down and remove all Indian control over European legal affairs. As Wolpert, again, put it:

It soon became painfully clear to more and more middle-class Indians, however, that, no matter how well intentioned or powerful individual Englishmen might be, the system they served was fundamentally unresponsive and hostile to many basic Indian needs, aspirations, and desires.³

In December 1885 seventy-three Indians met in Bombay to form the Indian National Congress. The Congress advocated swaraj and demanded that Indian Civil Service exams be given simultaneously in India as well as England so that Indians would have a better chance of gaining admission to the increasingly powerful service. Meanwhile, the British raj became more powerful and, if imaginable, more ruthless and arbitrary. Costly wars were fought to conquer and then retain land on the frontiers of the subcontinent in what is now Myanmar (Burma), Afghanistan, and Tibet. Then, in 1905, the British decided to split Bengal into two.

This action infuriated the nationalists, leading Congress to launch its first widespread protest movement, a boycott of British imports. The polite petitions and requests of Congress’s first twenty years turned into the first steps of what would be a nationwide, nonviolent revolutionary movement. By 1908 imports had been cut by more than a quarter. Indians, instead, started buying the more expensive swadeshi (of our country) cloth woven in new factories in Bombay and in other northern cities.

The British responded by arresting and prosecuting hundreds of Congress leaders, which further incensed younger Congress activists, many of whom now turned to violence against the British. The adoption of what could only be called terrorist tactics split Congress and enabled the British to gain the upper hand.

World War I fueled hopes for independence among Indian leaders. Most agreed to support the British war effort on the assumption that doing so would enhance their chances for freedom. More than a million Indian soldiers served in the British army.

Those hopes were quickly dashed, however. Proposed political reforms died in the British House of Lords. Meanwhile, Indian soldiers were being killed by the thousands in distant lands while the economy suffered from the loss of its huge markets in Germany. To make matters worse, Indian troops, including Muslims, were used in the invasion of parts of the Muslim Otto-

³Wolpert, New History, 56.
Africa, where he served as a lawyer and as the informal political leader for the large Indian community there. In 1914 he returned to India and began pressing for independence. By 1920 he was already a prominent Congress leader, and in the aftermath of the violence of the immediate postwar years, the other leaders made him their de facto leader, in part because he had such a broad appeal based on his commitment to nonviolence.

Gandhi was a remarkable man whose views, power, and impact cannot readily be summarized in a few sentences. He was one of the few truly charismatic leaders of the twentieth century, whose power stemmed not from his personality or oratory but from his conduct, in which every action was based on humility and principle.

Gandhi was a devout Hindu. Despite his worldly success first as a lawyer and then as a political leader, he lived the ascetic life of a Hindu sadhu, or holy man, wearing only plain white robes made of cloth he spun and wove himself. Gandhi and his family lived in rural communities known as ashrams, where they forswore almost all modern (that is, Western) human pleasures.

Personally, Gandhi rejected all forms of violence. Moreover, he realized that, given the British war machine, there was no way India could win its independence through the use of violence.

In its place, Gandhi offered a radically new strategy based on two Hindu concepts—satyagraha (holding fast to truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence toward all forms of life). Instead of violence, Gandhi offered fasts, boycotts, and marches. Instead of consumption of British goods, Gandhi offered self-reliance, especially the use of only homespun cloth.

Because of his spirituality and devotion, he was known as the Mahatma, or holy one.

which expanded the franchise and enabled Congress to take over eight provinces two years later.

The experience of governing frustrated Gandhi, Nehru, and their allies. In particular, they proved unable to maintain any semblance of intercommunal unity as Hindu and Muslim nationalists grew further and further apart.

World War II was to bring an end not only to British rule but also to Gandhi's dream of a united and peaceful India. When the war broke out, most Indians seemed to be either apathetic or vaguely supportive of the Allied cause. Gandhi himself led thousands of satyagrahis in a campaign demanding that the British "quit India." A few of his former rivals in Congress even collaborated with the Nazis, forming an Indian National Army that fought against the British.

The British sent a high-ranking delegation to stabilize the situation on the subcontinent, which everyone now acknowledged would gain independence after the fighting ended. However, negotiations between Congress and the Muslim League broke down, which also made it likely that colonial India would be divided into Hindu and Muslim states.

Talks about how to partition India began in earnest right after the war but got nowhere during 1945 and 1946. In February 1947 Prime Minister Clement Attlee told Parliament that Britain had decided to relinquish power to "responsible Indian hands" by June of the fol-
following year. He dispatched Lord Mountbatten, the dash-
ing commander of British forces in Southeast Asia during
the war and Queen Victoria’s great-grandnephew, to be the last viceroy and to supervise the transition to independence.

Within weeks of his arrival, violence broke out throughout the country. Mountbatten helped convince the key Indian leaders that the creation of a separate Muslim Pakistan was inevitable. Only Gandhi refused to accept partition and roamed the country trying to quell the rioting. But the inevitable came sooner than anyone expected. By the summer of 1947 an agreement was reached making about 80 percent of colonial India part of a new and independent India and turning the rest into Pakistan, itself divided in two parts in the northwestern and northeastern (now Bangladesh) corners of the subcontinent.

Even though the new countries were to be overwhelmingly Hindu and Muslim, respectively, as many as 50 million people were caught within the borders of the “other” country. Within days most of them started to migrate in both directions. The outbursts of communal violence that accompanied the refugee movement continued beyond 15 August 1947, the day India and Pakistan both formally gained their independence.

All this happened over Gandhi’s objections. He began yet another fast to try to get the people to end the communal violence, especially that committed by his fellow Hindus. From almost everyone’s perspective, however, Gandhi and his ideals were a thing of the past. The demands of governing independent India seemed to call for practical leaders such as Nehru. Gandhi accused Congress of corruption and its leaders of engaging in power politics. He even went so far as to demand that the venerable old organization be dissolved.

Meanwhile, because of his support for all Indians, including outcastes, Muslims, and Sikhs, Gandhi had earned the enmity of militant Hindus. At dusk on 30 January 1948 a member of one of those groups assassinated Gandhi while he was on his way to lead a prayer meeting. That evening, Nehru announced during a national radio broadcast that “the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.” Though Nehru was only talking about one man, his words were prophetic, because the assassination also marked the death of Gandhi’s principles. (See table 13.3.)

### The New Republic

The movement for Indian independence was not as unified, principled, or nonviolent as Gandhi would have wanted. However, it did have two legacies that helped the Nehru-led republic maintain its democratic regime and make progress on a number of social and economic fronts in its first twenty years of independence. In fact, no other third world country has started with so much working in its favor.

Because of the tactics Congress followed and because the independence movement lasted so long and developed as it did, there was a strong sense of national identity. This identification with India was a highly positive one, which for most people probably was as important as any religious, ethnic, caste, or linguistic attachment. People had little trouble thinking of themselves as both Indian and, say, a lower-caste Hindu, which was rarely the case in the new countries of Africa and Asia.

The new country had a strong and popular political party in charge. In the early elections, Congress got the lion’s share of the votes and seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). Even more importantly, because of the way the independence movement had developed, Congress also set about forging coalitions with other parties and organizations as part of the consensus building that was at the heart of Nehruvian values. (See table 13.4.)

Congress sought to be an inclusive political party. As we will see later, although the party had opposition, it also included groups representing all the major ideological and social groups in Indian society. Thus, when problems arose, Congress was able to take positions that would appeal to the disaffected groups, if not co-opt them into the party altogether.

### Centralization and Fragmentation

Indian political life has changed dramatically since Nehru died in 1964. This is why the historical section of this chapter included some quite recent events. Indeed,
THE NEHRU CLAN

No democracy has ever had one family exert as much influence as the Nehru-Gandhi clan in India.

The patriarch, Jawaharlal Nehru, was one of the two most important leaders of the independence movement, and he also served as prime minister during the new country’s first, critical years. His daughter, Indira, was as influential (although often less constructively so) from the time she became prime minister in 1966 until her assassination in 1984. At that point, her elder son, Rajiv, became prime minister, but only because his younger brother Sanjay had been killed in an airplane crash.

The Nehru-Gandhi clan has been out of office since Rajiv’s assassination in 1991. However, his Italian-born widow, Sonia, became leader of the Congress Party in 1999 and presided over its third consecutive defeat at the polls. Most observers doubt that she will ever lead the country and look instead either to her teenage sons or to another Nehru grandson, Arun, to carry on the family tradition.

Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, holding his grandson Rajiv Gandhi on his knee. Gandhi eventually succeeded his mother and became the third family member to hold India’s highest office.

Some observers argue that it has changed so much that we can almost think of it having a new regime even though the basic institutions have changed little, if at all.

This starts with the concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands under Indira Gandhi (1917–84) and, to a lesser extent, her successors. Nehru was one of the last preindependence stalwarts, and there was no obvious candidate to succeed him. The Congress party machine leaders—later known as the Syndicate—turned to Lal Bahadur Shastri. However, he never gained more than the grudging support of his fellow Congress leaders and had not left much of a mark on political life when he died suddenly in 1966.

This time, conflict between the party’s left and right wings became public. In the end, the conservative Syndicate chose Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi (no relation to Mohandas), to be prime minister. As a woman with little political experience, they assumed that she would be more manipulable than any of the other contenders.

Perhaps because she had begun her political career at the top, and so had never developed strong ties to average Indians or to local political elites, Gandhi quickly adopted an authoritarian leadership style that alienated many of her colleagues within the party. Within a matter of months, Congress split when the business-oriented Morarji Desai formed a rival faction.

After an election victory in 1971, Gandhi announced a series of bold new economic policies. More land was given to the peasantry, coal mines were nationalized, and harsh new taxes were imposed on the rural and industrial elite. The Fifth Five-Year Plan called for the “removal of poverty” and the “attainment of self-reliance.”

Not everyone was happy with Gandhi’s policies or her heavy-handed rule, which included appointing her son Sanjay as head of the new state automobile enterprise, thereby catapulting him onto political center stage. Protests against inflation and corruption within Congress became more frequent and strident. Desai became the focal point of an increasingly unified opposition.

Then, on 12 June 1975, the Allahabad High Court found Gandhi guilty of two counts of illegal practices during the 1971 election campaign. Technically, Indian law required her to resign, but Gandhi gave no indication that she planned to do so. Politicians around the country urged her to step aside at least temporarily, until her legal predicament was resolved. She did nothing of the sort.

Instead, on 26 June Gandhi invoked the constitution’s provision for Emergency Rule. Civil liberties were...
suspended, and press censorship was imposed. In addition, twenty-six political groups were banned, and all major opposition leaders were arrested. In July the remaining MPs passed a law extending the Emergency indefinitely, enacted constitutional amendments that banned any legal challenges to it, and retroactively cleared Gandhi of any wrongdoing. Parliamentary elections were “postponed” a year until 1977.

Democracy was in jeopardy. Then, on 18 January 1977, Gandhi suddenly ended Emergency Rule, released all political prisoners, and called for national elections in March.

The pre-Emergency Rule opposition was now more united than ever around Desai, the Gandhian socialist Jayaprakash Narayan, and other anti-Indira leaders at both the national and state levels. Their new Janata Party had beaten Congress by 43 percent to 34 percent, winning an overwhelming majority of seats in the Lok Sabha.

But the Janata coalition was a “negative” majority united only in its opposition to what one historian has called the “Indira Raj.” Within two years it collapsed. New elections were held, which Congress won, bringing Indira Gandhi back to power in 1979 after only two years in opposition.

Gandhi’s second term in office was just as tumultuous as her first. Hopes for radical economic reform disappeared. Many states elected legislatures hostile to central rule, and in a number of cases, Gandhi dissolved those governments and replaced them with officials loyal to her.

Her biggest problem, by far, was the increase in ethnic antagonism toward central rule, especially in the Punjab. As we will see in more detail later, there was growing and widespread protest from Sikhs who had begun demanding independence from India and who often used violence in pursuit of their political aims.

In May 1984 Indira Gandhi imposed martial law in the Punjab. The next month Indian troops attacked the Golden Temple in Amritsar, leaving it in ruins and killing hundreds of the most militant Sikh activists. Finally, on 31 October, Sikh members of her own bodyguard assassinated the prime minister, setting off yet another wave of violence, in this case with Hindus taking revenge against Sikhs living outside of the Punjab.

Indira Gandhi’s domination of Indian politics for nearly a generation remains a subject of controversy to this day. There is, however, one point on which her supporters and critics agree. Gandhi and her policies permanently ended Congress’s role as a consensus builder. Instead, she centralized power within the party, driving out factional leaders and other politicians who either rejected her vision of India’s future or who balked at the concentration of power in her hands. And, as a result, for the first time in Indian history, a strong opposition was created that was capable of winning elections.

Indira Gandhi had been grooming her son Sanjay to succeed her, but he was tragically killed in an airplane accident. Therefore, her other, and previously apolitical, son Rajiv (1944–91) became the heir apparent. No one was surprised when he became prime minister and immediately called for new elections while sympathy for his mother remained high. Rajiv proved to be an effective campaigner, building support around his youth and his image as “Mr. Clean” in an otherwise corrupt political system. Congress won an unprecedented 80 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha.

Congress’s victory marked the entry of a new generation of leaders into Indian politics. Rajiv Gandhi and his closest advisers were young, well-educated, westernized, and affluent. They did not share the older generation’s commitment to a planned economy, but instead were highly impressed with the market economies in the Western countries they had studied and worked in. At first, then, they seemed to be ideal candidates to implement an Indian version of structural adjustment.

In his five years in office, Gandhi did introduce the first market-oriented reforms. However, his reputation for honesty was undermined by the Bofors scandal, in which the government and the Congress party machine were implicated in a kickback scheme in their dealings with a Swedish arms manufacturer. Moreover, to keep itself in power, the government had to resort to the same kind of centralizing tactics that had gotten Indira Gandhi’s government into so much trouble.

In 1989 Rajiv Gandhi’s term came to an end. Congress was still the only party with a truly national base, but it could not beat another loose opposition coalition, the Janata Dal. As in 1977, the Janata Dal was a classic “negative coalition,” brought together in common opposition to the incumbent government but with little or no agreement about what it should do when it won.
Coalition Politics

In one key respect, the 1989 election marked the last major turning point in Indian politics. With it, Congress lost its traditional role as a hegemonic party because it lost its ability to build consensus. Since then, India has been governed by broad-based coalitions because no national party has any realistic chance of winning either a majority of the vote or a majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha. Further, the balance of power is held by politicians with regional, ethnic, or caste bases of support, a point we will return to in the section on political parties.

The Janata Dal coalition elected in 1989 lasted only months, and after two more weak governments fell, early elections were scheduled for 1991. The polls again showed that Congress was in trouble, though no single party mounted a serious challenge.

In the middle of the two-week voting period, however, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by Tamil extremists. The elections were postponed, and Congress desperately sought a new leader. Rajiv’s Italian-born wife, Sonia, turned down an offer to head Congress and keep the dynasty alive. Thus, the party had to turn to the seventy-year-old former foreign minister P. V. Narasimha Rao (1921–), a longtime party loyalist.

When the elections were finally over, Congress won, though it fell sixteen seats short of an overall majority. The BJP came in second, well ahead of the Janata Dal and the regional parties. Narasimha Rao proceeded to form a coalition government with a few of the minor parties. No one expected the new government to do very well given the problems it inherited. Surprisingly, however, it lasted its entire five-year term, during which time it accelerated the pace of economic reform. It was not, however, a strong government. It was tainted by corruption (Narasimha Rao ended up in jail after he left office) and internal bickering, and it did little to address the country’s problems other than by opening up its economy. It is thus hardly surprising that Narasimha Rao and Congress went down to such a crushing defeat in 1996.

As had been the case the other two times Congress lost, a divided coalition won in 1996. This time the erstwhile opposition turned to H. D. Deve Gowda (1933–), a little-known politician from the southern state of Karnataka, who was the first prime minister who did not speak Hindi.

Like all of his non-Congress predecessors, Deve Gowda headed an unwieldy coalition consisting of thirteen political parties. Therefore, no one was surprised when it collapsed after less than a year, as did the government of his successor, Inder Gujral.

Democratization in India

INDIA IS one of the few third world countries that has been able to sustain a democratic regime for an extended period of time.

The reasons for this are not clear, largely because we do not understand all that well how democratization works in general. Nonetheless, two main factors stand out. First, India’s independence movement and first governments were able to build a strong sense of national identification and support for the new state. Second, despite the difficulties of recent years, the government has functioned reasonably well and has avoided the kind of serious centrifugal conflict that has disrupted political life in so many other third world countries.

Early elections were held again in 1998, which cemented coalition politics, though with a new and—for some—worrisome twist. This time the BJP came in at first and was able to form a government with twelve other parties under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1924–). Many observers feared that the BJP would stress its fundamentalist Hindu roots and deepen the divisions and intolerance that had marked Indian politics for the preceding generation (also discussed shortly). However, Vajpayee and his colleagues understood that they had to govern from the center both to retain the support of their coalition partners and to have any hope of gaining new voters for the BJP.

Congress was able to convince enough of the BJP’s partners to defect that the BJP lost a vote of confidence by one vote in March 1999. When early elections were held yet again in September, the BJP’s coalition increased its support in the Lok Sabha following a disastrous showing by Congress, now lead by Sonja Gandhi. Vajpayee was able to put together an even broader coalition of twenty-four parties and, as of this writing, seems likely to remain in office until the end of the parliamentary term in 2004.

Political Culture

The historical coverage in this chapter was longer than most, because it was only in the past few years that the basic contours of contemporary Indian politics were set. This means that we have already seen some of the key themes in Indian politics and that the remaining sections can be shorter than their equivalents in most other chapters.
As far as political culture is concerned, this long history combines with the diversity of India in two ways that might seem contradictory at first glance. On the one hand, the growing identification with region, caste, and religion has spawned considerable conflict, some of which has turned extremely violent. On the other hand, ever since independence, there has always been widespread identification with and support for the Indian regime. A decade or so ago, many observers thought that the growing intolerance might tear India apart. Now, however, there is widespread agreement that Indian democracy is secure.

We will explore these two points in the rest of this section, and each will appear in one form or another in the rest of the chapter. Keep in mind, however, that because public opinion polling is not very well developed, it is easier to see these points in the way Indians act than in the way they think.

**Challenges to Culture and Country**

As we saw earlier, Indira Gandhi’s eighteen years in and out of office marked a major turning point in Indian politics, as consensus and coalition building gave way to more centralized power and adversarial politics. This new political style has had its echoes in a culture marked by more division and conflict.

By far the most important manifestation of this has been the rise of regional identification and, with it, periodic demands for the creation of new states along ethnic or religious lines and even for secession from India itself. This topic is important enough that we will defer dealing with it until the section on public policy. Here, it is enough to note that in such different regions as Assam, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab the growth in ethnic and regional identification has presented the central state with serious challenges on and off since the 1970s. In the late 1990s, according to one study, as many as 200 of India’s 534 districts (the administrative unit below the state level) were experiencing intense conflict.

Next to the growth of regional identification, the most disruptive force has been the rebirth of religious fundamentalism, especially among Hindus. As remarkable as it may seem, many Hindus think of themselves as an oppressed group, even though they make up over 80 percent of the total population. Politically organized Hindu groups have existed since the formation of the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** early in the twentieth century. The RSS and other organizations, which are sometimes called Hindu fundamentalists, have become an important and troubling force on the Indian political landscape. In some states, Hindu groups are pressing for reforms that would put the secular commitment of the country’s founders into question, including special provisions on divorce and other legal issues for Muslims. Because the growth of Hindu nationalism has been intrinsically intertwined with the meteoric rise of the BJP, we’ll defer dealing with it, too, in more detail until we cover the party system.

Last but by no means least, we cannot ignore the continued importance of caste. Although the constitution and subsequent legislation banned discrimination against **dalits** (formerly the untouchables) and other backward castes and tribes, caste continues to have a major impact on people’s daily lives—from what they do for a living to whom they vote for.

Recall that the 50,000 or so castes and **jati** (subcastes) are social structures that reflect centuries-old social, racial, and economic divisions. For Hindus, caste is not merely a social category one is born into. It has a religious side as well that carries with it duties and devo- tions commensurate with one’s position in the hierarchy. Caste still spark protest if members believe that their interests are in jeopardy. For instance, the creation of the reserved-places scheme (a kind of affirmative action) for untouchables, members of scheduled tribes (low-status, non-Hindu groups), and lower castes touched off massive protests among the upper castes, which included the ritual suicide of hundreds of young Brahmins. More recently, a mere typographical error led to rioting. An official document included “Gond–Gowari” instead of “Gond, Gowari,” which legally meant that there was no Gowari caste eligible for the set-aside jobs. Furious Gowaris protested in the state of Maharashtra where most of them lived. By the time the rioting ended a few weeks later, at least 113 Gowaris had died.

**Support for the Regime**

At the same time, there is compelling evidence that most Indians are actually satisfied with the regime in New Delhi. To see this, note that India has held thirteen national and countless state and local elections since 1947, and only once—during Emergency Rule—did the democratic process fail to hold. In that case, the Indian people repudiated Indira Gandhi and Congress at the first possible opportunity.

The elections are remarkable events. Every time Indians go to the polls, it is the largest event ever organized by humans. Turnout has averaged 57 percent in each national election, which is roughly comparable to that in the United States. But in India over half the electorate cannot read enough to comprehend a ballot and has to rely on a well-established set of pictures to identify
short, nation building occurred along with and, in some ways, even ahead of state building.

This undoubtedly helped India survive the first years after the communal strife of partition, when many observers doubted that an egalitarian democratic political system could be grafted onto a society that was both deeply divided and rigidly hierarchical. Some observers, too, thought that elements of Hindu culture, including its emphasis on harmony, pluralism, and spiritual rather than worldly matters, helped smooth the process. Whatever the exact constellation of causes, there is considerable evidence that by the late 1960s India had developed the kind of political culture that helps sustain democracy in Britain and the United States.

**The Challenge of Modernization**

There is one other cultural question looming on the horizon that is typical of many rapidly changing countries in the third world. How will India’s culture evolve as the country’s economy grows and develops more of a Western-style middle class?

There is some evidence that Indians will adapt quite easily.

The best estimate is that there are about 100 million Indians who can today afford such things as a car or cable/satellite television. Middle-class Indians have become the world’s biggest market for blenders, which they use to grind the chilies and other spices they need to make their traditional dishes. Similarly, it seems to take only about six weeks to train English-speaking Indians to sound as if they are from Birmingham, England, or from Birmingham, Alabama, so that they can work in call centers that handle routine requests for businesses in Europe and North America.

As rural India has become wealthier, more and more consumer goods have become available. Younger people are, of course, the ones most attracted by these new luxuries. This does not mean, however, that traditional values have disappeared. For example, even though the government ruled dowries illegal years ago, many couples who clamor for Western products still submit to arranged marriages with dowries that can top $6,000 and include a television, refrigerator, or motor scooter.

But there are worrisome signs as well. In most parts of India, boy babies still are prized whereas girls are seen as a burden (not only because their parents will have to pay those dowries to get them married). Medical care for girls has always been worse. If there is a food shortage, boys are more likely to be fed and girls more likely to be allowed to starve. The now widespread use of ultrasound tests for pregnant women has added a new twist to the

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A yogi with his head buried in the sand on a busy street in the center of Calcutta’s business district. India is known for its blend of the "traditional" and the "modern."

which party and candidate they prefer. In fact, the poorest Indians vote at a rate three times that of the national average.

Generally, poorly educated Indians are remarkably well informed about what the issues and who the politicians are before they go to the polls. In a survey conducted in the mid-1990s, almost 7 in 10 respondents thought that parties and elections made government function better, as opposed to only a little more than 4 in 10 in 1971. Similarly, 6 in 10 agreed that voting made a difference, and, again, the poorest voters were disproportionately likely to take that point of view.

Indian voters do have a penchant for electing movie stars, former bandits, and politicians who had previously been convicted of corruption. That said, they also have reelected only about half of the incumbents in most recent elections, compared with an average of about 90 percent in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Most political scientists are convinced that this supportive side of Indian political culture exists because of the way Indian democracy was created and has evolved since independence. Dozens of events, from the way independence was forged to India’s ability to build and test nuclear weapons, have added to the pride most Indians feel in their country. Perhaps more than any other mass public in the world today, they have no trouble combining a positive identification with the nation-state and those with their caste, religion, or ethnicity.

Congress’s remarkable leadership in the years before 1947 did a lot to create both this sense of Indian identity and the consensus regarding certain broad public policy goals before independence was achieved. In
discrimination against girls. Thus, there are only about 850 live births of girl babies for every 1,000 boys, because parents are far more likely to choose to abort a fetus if they know it is a girl.

It is too early to tell what the overall impact of economic growth on cultural values will be. There have been some protests against the presence of Western institutions, including, surprisingly as it may seem, Coca-Cola's sponsorship of international sporting events. However, there has been little of the open and visceral rejection of Western culture we see in much of the third world, including among the overwhelming majority of India's 150 million Muslims.

**Political Participation**

The overlap among and tensions between ages-old traditions and modern democratic practices extend beyond the political culture to the day-to-day behavior of India's people and the organizations they form. As in any long-standing democracy, this, in turn, means focusing on political parties and elections. As we explore political participation here, you will see yet again the interplay between the two and the challenges they pose.

**The End of the Congress System**

There are a handful of democracies in which a single party has dominated political life for an extended period of time—the Social Democrats in Sweden since the depression, the Christian Democrats in postwar Italy, and, of course, the LDP in Japan.

Congress was one of them. Although never able to win an outright majority at the polls, it routinely took advantage of India's British-style single-member-district electoral system and the division of its opponents to win overwhelming majorities in the Lok Sabha until the onset of coalition politics in 1989.

Congress was successful then for the same reasons it had been prior to independence. Paradoxically, it both stood by its basic principles and proved to be remarkably flexible in dealing with allies and potential adversaries.

After independence, Nehru committed the party to central planning and social democracy. But he also forged a style of leadership in which the party elite incorporated ideas and even included politicians from the opposition.

Of all the liberal democracies covered in this book, India is the one in which class has played the least important role, even during Indira Gandhi's most radical years. Rather, the Indian party system and politics in general involve many different, overlapping cleavages. As a result, a party that hopes to win enough votes to govern has to be able to balance the interests and demands of enough of the groups spawned by India's many divisions to forge a majority coalition in the Lok Sabha.

Nehru's Congress party did that extremely well. However, the fragile balance that gave the party its hegemonic power was not to survive the leadership struggle after the unexpected death of Prime Minister Shastri in 1966.

As we have seen, Indira Gandhi challenged the Syndicate and won, but her victory had tremendous costs.
TABLE 13.5  Congress's Share of the Vote and Seats in the Lok Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF VOTE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SEATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the 1991 elections, Congress's voter base had shrunk to 36 percent while its seat strength dropped by over 100 seats. For Congress, over the next decade, the Congress system fell apart in three ways. Its share of the vote declined, its organization deteriorated, and it faced new opposition. (See table 13.5.)

The decline began with the 1967 elections in which Congress's majority in the Lok Sabha was reduced to 54 percent. Congress also lost six states, in every case as a result of its inability to respond to local pressures. Those defeats, combined with the first signs of Gandhi's heavy-handed leadership, provoked the first post-independence split within the party. Gandhi was unwilling to become a pawn of the powerful Congress factional leaders. Her relationship with them worsened, and the tensions erupted during the 1969 election for the largely symbolic presidency. Against the wishes of the Syndicate, Gandhi supported the incumbent, V. V. Giri, who was running as an independent. The Syndicate then threw her out of the party. Congress MPs, however, voted overwhelmingly in her favor.

Despite her personal victory, the party split, ironically, during the one-hundredth anniversary of Mohandas Gandhi's birth. Now there were two Congress parties: the Syndicate's Congress (O, for organization) and Indira Gandhi's Congress (I, for Indira). Congress (I) now lacked a working parliamentary majority, and the Gandhi government stayed in power only through the support of former opposition parties, including the Communists and Tamil nationalists.

In 1971 Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for new elections. In the campaign, it became clear that Congress (I) was going to be a very different kind of party in at least two respects. First, it ran on a far more radical platform to appeal to the poor and disadvantaged, especially the scheduled castes, youths, and Muslims. Second, the campaign and the party were personalized around Gandhi's rule in ways never before experienced in Indian politics. Not only did Gandhi centralize her power in the new party, but the opposition made her the focal point of its campaign, with the slogan Indira hatao (Indira out of power) as its centerpiece.

Gandhi confounded the experts by winning 44 percent of the vote and 352 of 518 seats. State legislative elections the following year gave Congress (I) even wider margins of victory. Gandhi and Congress (I) won in large part because the opposition was so divided and ineffective, which is typically the case in other countries in which a single party has dominated for a long period of time.

From that point on, Gandhi's activities as prime minister and as head of the Congress (the other faction soon disappeared, so we can drop the [II]) contributed to the collapse of the system in later years. Perhaps the most damaging of her actions was the imposition of Emergency Rule. Almost as important was the prominence given her younger son, Sanjay, who was widely viewed as little more than a power-hungry young man. Sanjay pushed such controversial policies as family planning and forced sterilization. He also controlled access to his mother, the “household” of personal advisers to the prime minister, the Youth Congress, and much of the government's repressive apparatus.

In 1977 Gandhi made another of the mistakes that typified her final decade. She decided to end the Emergency and hold new elections on the assumption that she would win again.

This time she got it wrong. There was widespread opposition to the Emergency, her policies, and Sanjay's style. More MPs quit Congress, including Jagjivan Ram, a senior cabinet member, Congress leader, and the most prominent untouchable in political life. Meanwhile, Morarji Desai forged the Janata Party, a coalition of four opposition groups.

Congress was routed, dropping to 34.5 percent of the vote. Both Indira and Sanjay Gandhi lost their bids for reelection. Janata and its allies won a clear majority, with 298 seats. In addition, the election revealed a new regional split in the vote. Congress was all but totally shut out in the heavily Hindu north, while Janata made few inroads into the south.

During the last four years of her life, Gandhi did not build a new Congress organization, but it was totally different from anything her father and his generation had envisioned. Gone was the decentralization and inclusiveness that had made Congress one of the world's few dominant parties and one of the keys to India's democratic success. In its place was a new kind of political machine, wholly dependent on its leader, her family, and her close advisers.

The new Desai government brought Gandhi to trial and sent her to prison for a brief period. Quickly, however, it became clear that nothing held Janata together
USEFUL WEB SITES

As one might expect of a country with such a large high-tech community and such a large diaspora, there are several good portals on Indian affairs, all of which have links to political sites and news feeds. Among the best are:

www.outlookindia.com
www.indiainfo.com
www.india-web.com

Asianinfo.org is also a general site, but it is more focused on making information on Asia (including India) available to the rest of the world.

www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/india/politics.htm

Finally, there are some good sites on Indian politics, including the Virtual Library, Professor Gene Thursby’s collection, and an India-based site that has material on elections, parties, and public opinion polls.

www.india.com.ar
www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/ind/politics.htm
www.indian-elections.com

other than its desire to drive Gandhi from office. By 1979 the coalition had fallen apart, and the following year Prime Minister Charan Singh realized his minority government could not survive and called for new elections.

For the first time, an Indian election had turned into a personalized contest primarily about three candidates for the prime ministry: Singh, Ram, and Gandhi. This time support swung to Congress, which won about 43 percent of the vote and an overwhelming two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha. As in 1972, victory at the national level was followed by even victories at the state level.

But all was not well with Congress. Gandhi had taken the party even further to the left. She also insisted on personal loyalty to herself, her family, and her household as the key to success within the party. Then, on 23 June 1980, Sanjay died. Afterward, to drive home just how personalized politics had become, Gandhi brought in her elder son, Rajiv, who until that point had shown no interest in national affairs.

Rajiv Gandhi quickly took to political life, and by 1982 he had established himself as his mother’s likely successor, a role he took on following her assassination. He hoped to modernize the country by breaking away from many of the traditional political practices and economic policies Congress had followed since independence in favor of a more pragmatic approach emphasizing modern management systems. Indeed, Rajiv used the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Congress in 1885 to launch a broadside attack against what the party had become, at least implicitly criticizing both his mother and the remaining party oligarchs.

As we will see in the policy section, most of those reforms never got off the drawing board. Rajiv Gandhi suffered a series of defeats in state elections. Moreover, the new government faced unprecedented challenges from dissidents in a number of states. Finally, Gandhi’s reputation as Mr. Clean wore off as his government was implicated in scandals much like those that had tarnished his mother’s reputation.

In short, Rajiv Gandhi and his advisers quickly realized that, despite the magnitude of their victory in 1984, their hold on power was tenuous at best. They stopped taking risks, in terms of both policy making and reforming the Congress Party. In fact, by 1989 Rajiv was running Congress in much the same way his mother had done—with an iron fist. Further, the party itself had lost virtually all the enthusiasm for and commitment to social change that had characterized it during his grandfather’s time.

The deterioration of Congress’s fortunes has continued since the death of Rajiv Gandhi, despite the surprisingly effective leadership initially exercised by Narasimha Rao. But, as we saw earlier, he could not stem the public’s dissatisfaction with the party, and it went down to another crushing defeat in 1996.

The defeat and corruption charges he was facing forced Narasimha Rao from the party leadership. He was replaced by seventy-eight-year-old Sitaram Kesri. Kesri was responsible for bringing down the Gujral government, which forced the 1998 elections in which Congress saw its seat total decline once again. It lost despite the fact that Rajiv’s widow, Sonja, finally joined the party and campaigned actively on its behalf.

Sonja Gandhi then became party president and led its 1999 election campaign. But everything went wrong that possibly could have. The fact that she was born and raised in Italy (though she became an Indian citizen in 1983) cost her votes. So, too, did a series of tactical blunders that convinced many voters she would not be as effective a leader as the BJP’s Vajpayee. Finally, the polls suggest that there is a widespread desire—even inside of Congress—to put an end to the Nehru-Gandhi clan’s domination of the party once and for all. (See table 13.6.)

Whether that can happen and whether Congress can become an effective opposition political party both remain to be seen. Few observers are optimistic.
TABLE 13.6 Seats in the Lok Sabha: Major Parties and Their Allies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY GROUP</th>
<th>1996</th>
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The BJP

Ten years ago the BJP would not have featured prominently in a book like this. It had topped 10 percent of the vote in 1989 and won eighty-five seats, but few serious observers thought it could do much better, let alone become India’s largest party (www.bjp.org).

Although the BJP itself is quite new, its roots lie in the revival of organized Hindu fundamentalism that began with the formation of the RSS in 1925. It was a disgruntled RSS member who assassinated Mohandas Gandhi in 1948. In the 1950s and 1960s, the RSS and similar organizations led campaigns opposing the slaughter of cows, the presence of Christian missionaries, and other alleged evils.

It also had a political party, the Jan Sangh, which won more than 7 percent of the vote only one time and was part of the Janata coalition that won in 1977 but lost two years later. The current prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, served as foreign minister in that short-lived coalition government. The party left Janata and ran on its own under the new BJP label in 1984, winning exactly the same percentage of the vote as in 1971.

In fact, the party was already beginning to score major breakthroughs in the northern “cow belt,” where it had won control of four states during the 1970s. There, it did particularly well among younger men from upper castes who felt threatened by affirmative action and other programs they believed would undermine their social status and economic power.

The BJP’s symbolic breakthrough occurred as the result of a clash centered on the disputed Babri mosque/temple in the northern city of Ayodhya. The building that stood there had been a mosque that some Muslims claim had been built by the first Mughal conqueror, Babur, during the sixteenth century. Some devout Hindus disputed that claim, arguing that the site was the birthplace of one of their major gods, Lord Ram, which made it one of the holiest places in that tradition.

Not surprisingly, the building had long been a source of contention between Hindus and Muslims. For most of the past century or so, however, a modus vivendi had been worked out in which Muslims used it on Fridays and Hindus were free to pray there during the rest of the week.

Controversy broke out again in 1986 after a judge’s ruling closed the building to everyone. The rapidly growing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or Worldwide Hindu Brotherhood, which made the freeing of such properties its highest priority, entered the scene. It routinely gathered 100,000 devout Hindus along the banks of the river next to the temple/mosque. Within two years, the VHP had mustered enough support to convince a judge to open the facility to Hindus. This, in turn, led to Muslim counterprotests. In one typical 1989 incident, a riot broke out after the VHP announced that it would add on to the building using specially consecrated bricks. More than 150 people were killed.

Later that year, Congress was defeated at the polls and replaced by a government that convinced the VHP to postpone construction of the new addition. Pressures around Ayodhya then eased until a Hindu mob destroyed the mosque and started building a new temple in December 1992.

The violence soon spread far from Ayodhya. Hindu revivalist movements, such as the Shiv Sena in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), took to the streets, demanding vengeance and attacking individual Muslims who obviously had nothing directly to do with the situation in Ayodhya. At least 1,700 died in Bombay alone.

The BJP and related organizations had thus built a base of support reminiscent of France’s National Front. Its leaders had taken extreme positions and used what can only be described as thinly veiled racist rhetoric.

Most notorious on that score has been the BJP’s ally the Shiv Sena and its leader, Bal Thackeray, cartoonist and former gang leader. Thackeray is now mayor of Mumbai, the most important politician in Maharashtra, and a vital cog in the BJP machine. He rose to power by, among other things, refusing to allow Kentucky Fried Chicken to open restaurants in Maharashtra. There had been some minor health code violations in KFC restaurants elsewhere in the country. It was hard, however, to raise too much of a fuss about a restaurant using excess amounts of MSG or having a dead fly in the batter when street vendors in the same neighborhood were selling cucumbers soaked in water that came from open sewers. Thackeray’s supporters charged (with some degree of accuracy) that the grain needed to raise KFC’s chickens would be better put to use directly in feeding people. Most observers, though, were convinced that his real anger was rooted in the fact that the chain was foreign and that its parent company, PepsiCo, did business in Pakistan.
It is easy to not take such actions seriously. However, Shiv Sena and other groups loosely affiliated with the BJP are responsible for widespread violence against Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other minorities. They maintain paramilitary organizations, some of which are armed and can mobilize tens of thousands of activists for major protests such as those over Ayodhya.

The BJP also has a strong nationalist streak. Some of its more extreme leaders have argued against economic reforms because they will open the country up to foreign economic and cultural influences. And few analysts who were familiar with the BJP were surprised when the Vajpayee government tested nuclear weapons in 1998, given that doing so had long been a part of the party’s platform.

In power, however, the BJP has proved to be far more moderate, in large part because it has to in order to retain the support of its coalition partners. Vajpayee’s government has continued the liberal economic reforms to be detailed later in the chapter. It has not proposed legislation that would make India into a Hindu country or in any significant way undermine the commitment to secularism expressed in the constitution. In fact, it has taken a strong nationalist stance only in regard to relations with Pakistan (including its testing of nuclear weapons) and the related issue of the fate of Kashmir. But even there, the BJP has not acted in dramatically different ways from what a Congress-led government would probably have done. What’s more, although its hostility toward Pakistan is real, this did not keep Vajpayee and his colleagues from supporting the U.S.-led war against terrorism in which Pakistan has played a central role.

**The Other Parties**

It is difficult to cover all the other Indian political parties in an introductory text. Because there are so many of them, it is impossible to present the kind of tables used in earlier chapters to document election results. What’s more, almost all of them operate within a single state or appeal to only a single ethnic, linguistic, or religious group. This is true even of those whose name or ideology might suggest a national appeal.

Things have not always been this way. Under Nehru, several opposition parties enjoyed nationwide appeal, including the Communist Party of India and the Socialists on the left and the Jan Sangh and Swatantra on the more traditionalist right. As noted earlier, however, Congress had factions of its own with similar beliefs. Further, Congress found it fairly easy to adopt at least some of the opposition’s goals, as in the redrawing of the boundaries so that each major linguistic group was predominant in at least one state.

During the 1960s, however, more and more politicians left Congress to form new parties of which only the regional ones ever truly prospered.

More importantly, these politicians went through a radical transformation of their own. Most were arrested
These last three groups formed the United Front that brought Deve Gowda to office in 1996. The fact that they represented parties with such different goals and constituencies helps explain why the coalition collapsed so quickly.

The status of these parties is not likely to change dramatically. Most have strong enough regional bases that they are not likely to disappear. However, they are so different from each other and so hostile to Congress (the feeling is mutual) that it is hard to see them and the old dominant party coming together in an anti-BJP coalition that can actually govern.

**Interest Groups**

Because India has been a functioning democracy for more than fifty years, it has the range of interest groups we saw in the countries covered in part 2—and then some. However, this does not mean that interest groups in India look and act the same as those in the West.

Thus, India has an extensive labor movement that seeks to organize and improve the lot of mostly manual workers. India, in fact, has more than 25,000 unions because the labor law allows any group of seven or more workers to organize one. However, only about 10 million people—a tiny fraction of the labor force of nearly 400 million—are unionized. Moreover, the unions themselves are fragmented. Most major unions are extensions of political parties rather than autonomous organizations such as the American AFL-CIO or French CFDT.
To understand the pressures facing India today, it’s important to recognize that both business and labor are far less important than the religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups that have gained newfound influence over the past quarter-century. To see this, consider a single example—protest in Assam.

Assam is a poor state in the northeastern part of the country. During the 1950s and 1960s, its fortunes improved when the tea it produces became a significant moneymaker in global markets. But its economy was always fragile, and native Assamese never constituted more than a bare majority of the state’s population.

In the 1970s tensions began to mount after significant numbers of Hindus and Muslims fled into the state from war-ravaged and even more impoverished Bangladesh. Not surprisingly, there was widespread concern among the Assamese that they would be a minority in their own state. Not surprisingly as well, the 1970s saw the emergence of a number of organizations that sought to mobilize Assamese worried about the state’s future.

In 1978 eleven organizations came together to form the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), or Popular Movement Front. The AAGSP protested the continued immigration of Bengalis, from both India and Bangladesh. The All Assam Students’ Union even went so far as to demand the expulsion of all foreigners.

The issue was hardly new. Attempts to block the immigration of Muslim Bengalis dated back at least to 1926. But it was a particularly charged issue in the 1970s when the redrawing of Assam’s borders reduced the state in size.

The various groups launched a campaign to remove non-Assamese from the list of registered voters, a figure some estimated to be 7 million. They also organized massive protest movements that all too frequently launched savage attacks on Muslim Bengalis. In February 1983 a crowd of about 12,000 Assamese killed an estimated 1,400 Bengalis in what has come to be known as the Nellie Massacre. In all, well over 10,000 died before an agreement was reached in early 1985 between the Assamese leadership and Rajiv Gandhi’s government. There is less violence now, but a number of farmers and business leaders have raised private armies because neither the central nor the state government can ensure law and order.

Today, however, it is not at all clear how far such protest movements can or will go. Thus far, the violence has been contained in the sense that it has not led to serious calls for a new regime or the breakup of India itself. Whether this remains the case is anybody’s guess, especially if the recent pattern of weak coalition governments and sociopolitical fragmentation continues.
The Indian State

India has more than its share of problems, most of which are typical of those in the third world in general. It is unique, however, in that it has kept its democracy alive—if not always flourishing—for more than a half-century. If nothing else, this means that the section on formal state institutions will be longer and more detailed than the comparable ones on Iraq, South Africa, and Mexico, where the personality of individual leaders is often more important than institutions in determining what the state does.

India’s democracy has endured in large part because Indians have adapted to inherited European institutions and practices and have created a political hybrid that in some ways very much resembles and in others markedly differs from British-style parliamentary democracy. (See figure 13.2.)

The Constitution

Like the leaders of most of the new states in Asia and Africa, India’s founders gained independence under a system they inherited from their colonial masters. They confirmed that legacy when they wrote their own constitution, which went into effect in January 1950 (www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/in_index.html).

It is not a carbon copy of the British constitution. For one thing, it is written. Indeed, with nearly four hundred articles and eight schedules, the Indian constitution is one of the longest in the world. And because it can be amended by a simple majority vote in both houses of parliament, it is among the easiest to change.

The constitution defines India as a secular republic, guaranteeing a degree of freedom to the roughly 20 percent of the population that is not Hindu. It also guarantees an extensive list of individual civil liberties and forbids discrimination along religious, caste, racial, and gender lines.

However, the constitution also allows the prime minister to exercise emergency powers during a crisis. These provisions have been used only the one time, in 1975. During the nearly two years of Emergency Rule, the constitution was drastically amended. After the 1977 elections, however, the Desai government repealed most of those amendments and limited the conditions under which emergency powers could be used to an invasion from abroad or an armed rebellion at home.

As with most recently formed states, India has no king or queen. Instead, a president plays the symbolic role of head of state, much as we saw in Germany. Most presidents have readily accepted their secondary role; the exception is Zail Singh, who frequently complained that Rajiv Gandhi failed to keep him informed about government policies and plans. The president has had a substantial political impact only during the brief periods when there was no majority party or coalition. At those times, the president played the role expected of him, helping find a prime ministerial candidate who might forge a majority coalition and, if that proved impossible, paving the way for the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and for new parliamentary elections.

Parliament

As in Britain, the key to power in India lies in the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha. All but 2 of its 545 members represent single-member constituencies (those two are appointed by the president) in which elections follow the same kind of first-past-the-post, or winner-take-all, system used in the United States and Great Britain. It should be noted, though, that, given the size of the Indian population, the average MP represents 1.5 million people (alfa.nic.in).

The upper house, or Rajya Sabha (House of the States), has 250 members. Of those, twelve represent the artistic and intellectual community, and are appointed by the president. The rest are elected by the state legislative assemblies, making the Rajya Sabha much like the Bundesrat in Germany in the way it is chosen, though it is nowhere near as powerful.

Nominally, the president appoints the prime minister, but in reality he has little or no leeway, because the prime minister must be the head of the majority party or coalition in the Lok Sabha. As in Britain, the prime minister appoints the other members of the Council of Min-
isters, all of whom must already be members of parliament or must win election to it in a by-election within six months. Of the council members, the prime minister will invite some twelve to eighteen to join the cabinet. And, because a group even that size can be ungainly, there is normally a smaller group of cabinet members and other informal advisers (for example, the “household” of Indira Gandhi’s years) who wield the most power.

The decision-making process is very similar to that in Britain. The cabinet initiates almost all significant legislation. Other business, including private-member bills, receives less than a day’s attention per week when the Lok Sabha is in session.

Bills receive the same three readings they do in Britain, with the most important being the second, when the Lok Sabha votes on the principles of the legislation after it has been examined by the relevant committee. Voting is almost always along party lines, which all but ensures that the government’s legislative proposals are passed, except during periods when there is no clear majority.

Party discipline in the Lok Sabha has not always been quite as strict as it is in Britain’s House of Commons because the parties themselves are often in flux. Thus, traditionally, it was not uncommon for an individual MP to quit his or her party and join a new one during the middle of a term. These defections caused so much uncertainty at both the federal and state level that recent legislation requires MPs who quit their party to leave parliament as well unless one-third of their delegation joins them. Not surprisingly, these rather draconian rules have led to a sharp reduction in the number of defections and to less uncertainty in the Lok Sabha.

Once passed by the Lok Sabha, a bill is sent to the Rajya Sabha. If the two houses do not agree, a variety of consultative mechanisms are used in an attempt to iron out the differences. If they don’t work, the two houses meet together and vote on the bill—a vote the Lok Sabha invariably wins, given its more than two-to-one size advantage over the upper house.

On balance, though, the Lok Sabha is even weaker than the House of Commons as a legislative body. To begin with, there is far more turnover. In recent elections, as many as half the MPs were elected for the first time, which leaves the Lok Sabha with fewer experienced members than in most liberal democracies. Even more so than in Britain, MPs also lack the staff, offices, and other facilities that would enhance their ability to assume an effective oversight role. Finally, and most importantly, the opposition has been so fragmented that it has been hard for it to effectively utilize question time and other mechanisms that give oppositions elsewhere a modicum of leverage over the majority party and the executive.

The Bureaucracy

Another vital British inheritance that is a cornerstone of the state is the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which sits atop the country’s monstrous bureaucracy. The British established the Indian Civil Service in the nineteenth century, and, after the last half-century of colonial rule, more and more positions in it were filled by Indians.

After independence, the service was renamed, but little else changed. The Union Public Service Commission supervises annual examinations through which about 150 extremely talented young men and women are admitted into the IAS and a few other top civil service corps. In all, this bureaucratic elite has about 4,000 members and thus constitutes but a tiny fraction of a civil service that employs something approaching 15 million people.

The rest of the civil service is a different story. Below the IAS level, the bureaucracy is generally seen as overstaffed and inefficient. Although bureaucrats have job security, their salaries are quite low. Many, therefore, tend not to work very hard; many also take bribes. Informal groups of fixers and brokers act as intermediaries (paid, of course) between average citizens and the bureaucracy. For instance, it is often only through these intermediaries that villagers gain access to development assistance. In short, in contrast to the impersonal, legally structured civil services in the advanced industrialized democracies, power in the Indian civil service—and hence in the effectiveness of policy implementation—revolves around personal connections, which are typically based on family, caste, or religion.

Federalism

The British were never able to bring all of India under a single, centralized government. And their successors never tried. A series of “reorganizations” since the constitution went into effect have left India with twenty-five states and seven union territories, the boundaries of which have been drawn so that the major linguistic groups each predominate in one of them. Some of the states are the size of a major European power.

Each has a government patterned after the national one. A governor appointed by the central government is the official head of state. Real power, however, is supposed to lie with a state legislature (bicameral in some but not
all states) and a council of state ministers responsible to the lower house. The exact names of these bodies vary from state to state and language to language.

What matters here is not how these state governments are structured or what powers they do or do not have. Rather, the states are of interest because they demonstrate the importance of caste and other informal social relationships in political life.

At first, Congress dominated at the state level as well, not losing control anywhere until 1967. Since then, its support has declined even more rapidly in the states than in New Delhi. But even this picture is misleading, because much of state politics is not about ideological issues. Rather, the competition is mostly between factions based on patron-client relations.

Patrons can be party, caste, or religious leaders (they, of course, overlap), who offer their clients jobs, infrastructural projects, or other benefits in exchange for votes. Local patrons tend to be clients of more prominent leaders who weave the networks together into what are all but ideology-free factions. Above all, factional leaders want and need to win in order to obtain the resources and benefits that keep their clients loyal. So, they can seem quite fickle, casting their lot with one party or leader today but shifting to another tomorrow as a result of their constant calculations about how best to maximize their power and influence. Robert Stern has described this process well for Congress, though his analysis also applies to most of the other parties:

Parties or factions, unburdened by ideological commitment, inclined to promote middle-class welfare, purposeful primarily in winning elections and positioned to deliver the goods to its voters, the Congresses have patched together their pluralities and majorities from India’s vast heterogeneity. Here from one village, there from another. Here from one jati or jati subgroup, there from their rivals. From a state coalition here that depends on the support of dominant and twice-born jatis, from another there dependent on the support of other backward classes. The myriad, separate cost-benefit calculations that have held the Congresses together in fragments and factions can, however, undo them in fragments and factions. Factions want to know what’s in it for them.4

The combination of factional politics with growing linguistic, religious, and ethnic tensions has also made most states hard to govern. Few elect clear and disciplined majorities to their lower houses, which means that state governments have often been unstable. Moreover, all-too-many factional leaders have condoned the use of violence, engaged in corruption, and relied on organized criminals (it is worth noting that thug is one of many English words of Indian origin) in seeking power.

In part to maintain their own power, central governments controlled both by Congress and its opposition have been increasingly willing to suspend normal state politics and to impose Presidential Rule, the state-level equivalent of the federal emergency powers. For example, the Narasimha Rao government imposed it in Bihar at the end of March 1995. To some degree, this represented an attempt to restore order in a state that had seen more than its share of violence. Its non-Congress state administration was still in office despite passing the end of its five-year term and still had not appropriated money for civil servants’ salaries and other vital government expenditures. To some degree, though, the move was a rather blatant attempt by the central government to influence the direction of a state in which the local Congress was all but certain to lose the elections that were about to be held. The incumbent chief minister, of course, complained loudly, not on ideological grounds but on the grounds that Congress and the BJP were supporting higher-status castes against the dalits and lower-ranking jati, which were critical components of his government’s coalition.

Each example of Presidential Rule is somewhat different. All, though, combine a legitimate concern with disorder with political opportunism. Whatever the balance between the two in an individual case, each involves practices that are quite different from what we saw in the industrialized democracies.

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Public Policy

The continuity of India's democracy may be unusual by third world standards. The travails it has encountered with its public policies are not.

As is the case in most of the third world, the weakness of India's state is evident in virtually any policy area in which the domestic and global forces summarized in the figure on the inside front cover come into play. Lacking economic and other resources to start with, India faces increasing pressures from "below" in its own society and from the outside, most notably as the global economy impinges ever more closely on it. In India's case, the two sets of pressures are easiest to see in successive governments' attempts to confront ethnic, linguistic, religious, and caste-based conflict and to speed up economic growth.
Confronting Communal Violence

The issue of ethnic conflict crops up in a number of places in this chapter, as it will throughout part 4. What is important to see at this juncture is that the violence and the state's reaction to it created a situation in which such conflict has become an all-but-permanent part of the Indian political landscape and has contributed to the rise of the BJP and the regional parties. Alternatives involving, for instance, strengthening federal institutions, which seemed plausible a generation ago, would now be much harder to implement, given the resentments that have built up over the years. In other words, India will all but surely face serious ethnic tensions for years to come in large part because of the policies pursued by national and, to a lesser degree, state governments since Indira Gandhi's time.

In the first years after independence, Indian governments did fairly well in settling communal conflict short of violence, because they followed two key principles, the second of which is less important today. First, all governments have been committed to maintaining the unity of India. Second, the government tried to work out accommodations with linguistic groups desiring more autonomy. However, given its commitment to India as a secular state, the leadership was unwilling to allow religious groups to stake territorial political claims. Although specific policies have varied from state to state and group to group, it is safe to say that, on balance, the net effect of public policy since the mid-1970s has been to exacerbate—not ease—ethnic, religious, and linguistic tensions.

During the Nehru years, Delhi did redraw some state borders so that each major linguistic group would have a state it could govern. Once those states were created and/or restructured in the mid-1960s, however, the government faced an impasse, because the remaining issues generally involved conflict within individual states, pitting the majority linguistic or religious group against a minority or, as in Assam, minorities. Moreover, these more difficult issues emerged at the same time that the Congress's majority was eroding. Therefore, unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, the party had to pay more attention to holding onto its core electoral constituencies, which included key groups that were hostile to further accommodation with minorities.

Ethnic conflict worsened under Indira Gandhi, with her contradictory desires to control as many states as possible but to do so with as weak leaders as possible. As Paul Brass put it, the

relentless, unprincipled intervention by the center in state politics has been the primary cause of the troubles in the Punjab and elsewhere in India since

Indira Gandhi's rise to power. A structural problem arises from the tensions produced by the centralizing drives of the Indian state in a society where the predominant long-term social, economic, and political tendencies are towards pluralism, regionalism, and decentralization. It needs to be recognized, therefore, that the flourishing of local communal violence has been enhanced since Nehru's death by the political uses to which it has been put in competitive politics at the national and state levels and by the entrenchment of an ideology of the secular state which, in its tolerant face, justifies pluralist practices but can also be used to condemn minority demands as a danger to national unity and the integrity of the Indian state.

To see the general patterns of ethnic conflict and the way public policies contributed to it, we will focus on the Punjab and Kashmir.

The Punjab

The Punjab lies along the Pakistani border to the west of New Delhi. The original state of Punjab was ethnically mixed. In 1951 a bit more than half of its 16 million people were Hindus, but it also had the country's largest concentration of Sikhs. By the 1960s they were the only large ethnic group that did not have its own state.

Negotiations to create a majority Sikh state were complicated by the fact that they are a religious as well as a linguistic group, and granting them a state would call the commitment to a secular India into question. Nonetheless, an agreement was finally reached to split the old Punjab, creating a new state with the same name whose population was about 60 percent Sikh. Some difficulties remained, including the status of Chandigarh, which was to serve as a shared capital for Punjab and one of the other new states. Still, most people expected this to be another of the largely successful settlements that had marked the history of ethnic conflict in India up to that point.

This was not to happen. Observers are still having a hard time disentangling all the reasons protest increased. Most, though, cite two main factors. The first was the social and economic changes that swept the Punjab and left many members of its Sikh

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majority dissatisfied. The Punjab had been one of the poorest regions in the country. However, the state-sponsored “green revolution” (discussed shortly) and the hard work of thousands of Punjabis had turned it into one of the richest.

As this happened, some Sikhs began to fear that traditional Sikh culture and values would be lost, while others remained dissatisfied with the resolution of the issues remaining after the state borders were redrawn. To make a long story short, a new generation of Sikh militants emerged, the most militant and charismatic of whom was a young cleric, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Most Sikhs rejected the extremists’ call for an independent Kalistan or Sikh state. Nonetheless, tensions mounted as more militant Sikhs came to demand a larger slice of the political and economic pie, including, for instance, a greater share of water from the rivers that flowed through the state. Moreover, a Sikh party, the Akali Dal, mounted a serious challenge to what had been Congress domination of state politics. Finally, employing a strategy that has become quite common in the third world, Bhindranwale and other leaders used the mass media to spread their message, including their growing hatred of a central government that they thought was ever more pro-Hindu and anti-Sikh.

Second, after Indira Gandhi took office, the government became far less accommodating. And after the creation of the new Punjab, the government rejected further Sikh demands. Gandhi never dealt gently with people who disagreed with her. She took a particularly hard line toward the Punjab because the Sikhs and the Akali Dal had been among the most effective opponents of Emergency Rule.

As support for the Akali Dal grew in the late 1970s, Congress actually tacitly supported Bhindranwale and other Sikh extremists. But this support backfired on Congress once it returned to power.

During the late 1970s tensions mounted. More and more Sikhs endorsed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973, which apparently called for a dramatic transfer of power away from New Delhi and to the states (“apparently” because the resolution was never actually written down, and the people who were there disagree about exactly what was included in it). More importantly, a growing number of Sikhs launched a series of attacks against Hindus, some of whom assaulted Sikhs as well. Meanwhile, Bhindranwale and other extremists gained more and more influence, especially among young men.

In 1981 Bhindranwale was accused of murder. When, two years later, it seemed as if the government might finally take him into custody, Bhindranwale and his supporters occupied the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs’ holiest shrine.

In a typically opportunistic move, Indira Gandhi overthrew the elected Akali Dal state government, imposed Presidential Rule, and sent one of her most trusted lieutenants to oversee the arrest of the alleged terrorists. Despite Presidential Rule, violence continued. Clashes between Sikhs and Hindus threatened to undermine Congress’s electoral base among Hindus outside of the Punjab, who were frustrated by the government’s inability to protect their coreligionists. Congress also had lost any meaningful contacts and relationships within the Sikh community that it might have used to defuse the increasingly tense situation.

In March 1984 the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF) was abolished. One hundred fifty companies of police troops were stationed in the Punjab, including ninety at the Golden Temple alone. In response, AISFF members occupied more temples and turned them into arms warehouses and terrorist sanctuaries. Meanwhile, in neighboring Haryana, Congress chief minister Bhajan Lal at the very least condoned what could only be described as organized mob violence against Sikhs who lived in his state.

Finally, in June 1984, Gandhi ordered troops to storm the temple. Bhindranwale, at least five hundred of his supporters, and eighty-three soldiers were killed. The surviving Sikh leaders, including most prominent Akali Dal officials, were arrested. Sikh soldiers in other units mutinied and rioted in the most serious breach of army discipline since independence.

Then, in October, the circle was squared when Sikh members of her own security detail assassinated Gandhi. The assassination was followed by nights of rioting in which Hindus killed hundreds of Sikhs in Delhi and other cities—individuals who, of course, had had nothing to do with Gandhi’s murder or, for that matter, Sikh nationalism. Last but not least, Rajiv Gandhi won his landslide victory at the polls in part because he appealed to Hindu chauvinism in ways no Congress politicians ever had before.

In short, Indira Gandhi behaved very differently from her father, who typically took powerful politicians from the states and incorporated them into the national elite. His daughter did everything possible in the Punjab and elsewhere to undercut such powerful local politicians and to replace them with weak chief ministers who were personally and politically beholden to her. When the crisis came and unifying leadership was needed both in New Delhi and in Chandigarh, it was not there.

As was the case in most public policy areas, Rajiv Gandhi did set out to do things differently. Almost immediately upon taking office, he began negotiations with the Akali Dal government. The two sides eventually reached an agreement that, among other things, would
have returned Chandigarh to the Punjab and given the state some control over the vital water resources its farmers claimed they needed.

By 1987, however, Rajiv Gandhi had backed down. He played the Hindu trump card in the 1989 campaign in ways designed to maximize his party’s support among orthodox Hindus, who were expected to be the swing vote and thus the key to victory. On television, the Congress frequently showed footage of Indira Gandhi’s funeral pyre with a sobbing Rajiv standing nearby, the implication being that the Sikhs were to blame. In his own constituency, he was challenged by his brother’s widow, Maneka, herself half Sikh. One of Congress’s most widely used slogans during the campaign was “the daughter of a Sikh, traitor to the nation.” Put simply, his Hindu constituents throughout northern India were not prepared to go along with such sweeping concessions to the Sikhs.

Since then, the violence has continued, albeit at something less than the levels of the early 1980s. The situation in Punjab was so intense following Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination during the 1991 campaign that elections there had to be put off for months. On 1 March 1993, police officers killed Gurbachan Singh Manochabal, head of the significantly named Bhindranwale Tiger Party of Khalistan. Extremist Sikhs are generally held responsible for a 11 September 1993 car bomb attack on Maninder Singh Bitta, president of the ruling Congress Party’s youth wing and himself a Sikh. He escaped with minor injuries, but eight people were killed and at least thirty-five seriously wounded. On 31 August 1995 a bomb killed Punjab’s chief minister, who, despite being a Sikh, had allowed the police to torture and kill militants and their families.

It is difficult to know exactly what Sikhs feel today, because the state is off-limits to academic researchers and foreign journalists. The impressionistic evidence suggests that, given the events of the 1980s and early 1990s, the Sikh community is more divided than, but as angry as, ever. Support for the more extremist wings of the movement probably has declined.

Kashmir

Today, the most serious communal conflict is in Jammu and Kashmir, whose status has been in dispute ever since independence. It was one of the princely states that was not officially a part of British India. The leaders of those states had to choose to join either India or Pakistan. Geography made that choice easy in most cases.

It was anything but easy for what became the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which lies in northwestern India along the Pakistani border (www.jammu-kashmir.com/index.html). Like much of India, it is quite diverse ethnically, but it has a substantial Muslim majority, which would lead us to expect that it would have gone to Pakistan. However, its prince was a Hindu who leaned toward joining India. In the months after independence,
Jammu and Kashmir made the world’s headlines after the attacks of September 11. Pakistan quickly agreed to become a major force in the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism. Tensions with India remained high, however. This led the Vajpayee government to accuse the government of General Pervez Musharraf, who had seized power in a 1999 coup, of hypocrisy. On the one hand, it claimed to oppose the terrorism of al-Qaeda and the Taliban; on the other, it continued to support it in Kashmir.

The worst fighting in more than a year began in October 2001 when India started shelling Pakistani positions. Tensions mounted ever further following an attack on the Indian parliament building in December, for which Vajpayee’s government blamed Pakistan and Kashmiri militants. For the rest of 2001 and the first weeks of 2002, rarely a day went by without at least one violent death. More troops massed along the Line of Control, and yet another war between India and Pakistan seemed possible. Tensions eased a bit when President Musharraf said that he would not allow terrorists to operate from Pakistani soil. Nonetheless, the dispute over Kashmir is far from settled, and it remains a flash point in that troubled part of the world. Indeed, on the day these lines were written in February 2002, some British and Indian newspapers reported that one of the Kashmiri militant groups was harboring Osama bin Laden.

Stimulating the Economy

The Sardar Sarovar Dam raises a lot of questions about Indian politics, including issues of caste, regionalism, and the often distant and insensitive behavior of central government policymakers. But the main reason I chose the dam for the opening vignette in this chapter is that it squarely demonstrates India’s shift toward structural adjustment and the resulting controversy.

Prior to the mid-1980s Indian governments pursued import substitution and central planning of a largely state-owned and -controlled economy to spur growth and reduce poverty. Since then, a combination of outside pressures and domestic frustration with what the Indians themselves often called the “Hindu rate of growth” has led Rajiv Gandhi and his successors to reconsider the social-democratic goals and practices that their predecessors had taken for granted. Though less dramatically than Mexico (see chapter 16), India has opened its economy to the global market. So far, growth has increased, but no major dent has been put in the poverty rate and other social problems.

Indian economic policy from independence through the 1980s was not an abject disaster. There was enough growth to create a new middle class. The green revol
TABLE 13.7  Selected Economic Indicators: India and Comparable Countries Before Structural Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>GNP 1987 ($)</th>
<th>AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH 1965-87 (PERCENTAGE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1,830</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>2,690</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evolution** introduced high-yield crops that all but eliminated famine, if not hunger and malnutrition. In some technological areas, India is a world leader. It has tested nuclear weapons and medium-range ballistic missiles, and its computer software is among the best in the world. Further, India has been among the most successful third world countries in using modern telecommunications technology to reach the residents of its villages, who would otherwise be isolated from the outside world.

On balance, however, the Indian economy has not fared very well, especially when compared with countries like South Korea, which were almost as poor as India at the end of World War II. Table 13.7 presents some comparative data on economic growth for India and some other third world countries in the mid-1980s that had roughly equal economic conditions in the mid-1950s.

Two seemingly contradictory trends emerge from these data. India’s economy grew by an average of nearly 2 percent per capita per year during those years. The growth was concentrated in the industrial sector of the economy, which the import substitution policy made the top priority. But India did not do very well in relative terms. Of the countries included in the table, none had a slower rate of growth, and only China had a lower GNP per capita. India’s economic plight seems all the worse because a number of countries that were as poor as it was in the early 1950s far outperformed it. Average income in South Korea then (and now) was about ten times what it was in India, and in Hong Kong, the figure was more like twenty-five times.

**Poverty**

This relative failure is not simply a statistical artifact. It has had tangible and politically significant costs, most notably the inability of the Indian government to do much to alleviate the wrenching poverty in which so much of its population lives.

Despite its slow but steady growth, the government has been able to accomplish very little if for no other reason than the size and rapid growth of India’s population. Most mainstream scholars today estimate that at least 300 million Indians are poor, a number greater than the total population of every country on earth except for China. Of the 20–30 million Indians born each year, well over half are born into poverty.

One recent study defined poverty Indian-style as not having access to adequate food, clothing, and shelter. By that standard, about a sixth of the population lives in what is called “ultrapoverty,” because their incomes fall more than 25 percent below the level needed to obtain those basics. Many of the poor are homeless; the best-off live in substandard housing, with dozens of families crammed into teeming tenements. Many are malnourished, and those who do get the minimum daily caloric intake needed to sustain a healthy life survive primarily on grains. A missed day or two of work can leave a family without money for food. Health care for the poor is virtually nonexistent, and life expectancy for those in poverty barely tops fifty.

Poverty, of course, is not randomly distributed. The lower castes and dalits are most likely to be poor. There are still about 600,000 families of outcaste origin who make a living, such as it is, emptying latrines and chamber pots. Poverty is worse in rural areas (41 percent poor, 20 percent ultrapoor) than in urban areas (34 percent and 16 percent, respectively). There are thousands of villages without potable drinking water.

Women bear the heaviest costs of poverty. In poor families, they are responsible for all household tasks, which in rural areas can include the time-consuming and physically draining search for firewood. In urban areas, women are much less likely to receive health care or an education than are men. In the states of Bihar and Rajasthan, for instance, about 38 percent of the overall population is literate. Overall, only about 20 percent of women are literate, and in the poorest, rural areas, only about 2 percent of all women can read and write, thus depriving them of one of the skills they could use to pull themselves out of poverty.

The government has enjoyed some success in reducing poverty. Between 1970 and 1990, the poverty rate was cut by about one-fourth. Still, as a result of continued population growth, the number of poor people actually increased during those same years.

The government also devised a number of successful and innovative approaches to help people improve their lives. The Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) was created to give villagers low-level technology and new skills. For instance, in a number of villages, "night soil" gatherers were taught how to harness the
methane contained in human waste to generate electricity to fuel small-scale industrial facilities. In all, the IRDP reached about 27 million rural families, spending an average of about $500 on each. But this gave no more than 10 percent of the rural poor the ability to escape poverty—assuming the program worked perfectly, which, of course, it did not.

Finally, although the government has had some success in reducing poverty, its record pales in comparison with most of its contemporaries. India has been able to reduce the size of the population below the poverty line by about 1 percent per year, which is better than Colombia, Morocco, and Sri Lanka have done. But most other countries that started at similar rates of development have done far better, including Indonesia, which is reducing its poor population by about 2.5 percent per year. On another indicator of poverty—reducing the mortality rate for children under five—India ranks last in this same sample of countries. It has been able to reduce the number of children who die before reaching the age of five by almost 2 percent per year, but Morocco and Colombia both top 5 percent.

The Nehruvrian Model and India's Economic Woes

India's continued poverty obviously has many causes, the most important of which is the broader economic policy of import substitution pursued from 1947 until the mid-1980s. Nehru and his colleagues had been deeply influenced by the British Fabian movement and its moderate version of socialism. This led them to focus on a strong public sector to steer development and to generate a more just and egalitarian society.

The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 called for a mixed economy, with government ownership of all munitions, atomic energy, and railroad enterprises. The resolution also gave the government the sole right to start new ventures in such key sectors as iron and steel, telecommunications, aircraft, and shipbuilding. Eighteen other industries were to remain in private hands, but subject to government control and regulation.

Under the leadership of one of Nehru's closest advisers, P. C. Mahalanobis, these "commanding heights" of the economy were to be managed using five-year plans that were more controlling than the French but less so than the Soviets' before Gorbachev. At the heart of the system was what the Indians call the permit raj, an elaborate system of tariffs, licenses, and other regulations that kept most imports out and made the ones that did get in so expensive that next to no one could afford them. In so doing, it protected publicly and privately owned firms alike, which continued making the same old products in the same old way and earning the same all-but-guaranteed rate of profit year after year.

Over time, most Indian business leaders came to accept the planning system because it guaranteed reasonable profits and an advanced standard of living for those working in the modern sector of the economy. Wages in the protected sector averaged about 70 percent higher than those in the rest of the country.

High tariffs and other regulations also protected domestic industry. In 1985 rates ranged from 107 percent on capital goods to 140 percent on most manufactured products. In addition, most industrial goods could be imported only by what the government called "actual users." But even that was not always possible, because, for instance, automobile, truck, and bus manufacturers were not allowed to import tires.

There is little question that these economic policies met their initial goals, as India did become reasonably self-sufficient. In 1984 the import of finished goods accounted for only 8 percent of its GDP, compared with an average of over 19 percent in other third world countries. India developed a substantial industrial base with limited interference from or obligations to other countries.

But the isolation also had its costs. Imports totaled less than 10 percent of GDP in the late 1980s, by far the lowest figure in noncommunist Asia. The absence of internal competition was one of many causes of high rates of corruption and inefficiency. More importantly, the economy did not benefit from the capital, technology, and other resources more trade could have provided—admittedly, at the cost of considerable domestic control. Most importantly of all, the Indian economy was falling ever further behind those of many other third world countries.

Liberalization

Most economists supported India's desire to maintain its economic independence. But by the early 1980s there was a growing consensus that import substitution and related policies were retarding overall growth by depriving the economy of the stimuli a more open market could provide.

Since then, India has gradually opened its economy and adopted other promarket policies supported by international financial institutions and multinational corporations. It has not done so as quickly as Mexico (see chapter 16), nor has international pressure on it to change been as direct. Nonetheless, India's policies in the new century are a far cry from what they were when Rajiv Gandhi took office in 1984.
There are many reasons Gandhi began to tilt the balance away from state ownership, planning, and control. In part, the new policies reflected his own background, which included university study in the West and a career that began in business, working for Air India. In part, they grew out of forces in the global economy that inflicted a heavy price on countries which tried to resist the trend toward more open markets and relatively unrestricted international trade.

In contrast, countries like South Korea were growing far more rapidly because they took advantage of some niches in the emerging global marketplace. This is not to say that their economies were trouble free, but following international economic trends seemed to bring them significant economic payoffs. Rajiv Gandhi and his youthful colleagues wanted to take India in that same direction. During his five years in office, reforms were implemented incrementally. The forces behind liberalization gained even more support after 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Reform efforts peaked early in the Rao government, in which reformers like Manohar Singh and P. Chambaram (with his Harvard MBA) were given the key economic ministries.

Recently, barriers to outside investment have been cut on the assumption that capital and competition from abroad will give a much needed boost to domestic industries that stagnated under the protection of import substitution. Overall, an average of about $4 billion a year in direct foreign investment poured into India during the 1990s. By contrast, there was only $13 million worth of it in 1981 and $121 million in 1989. The government has sold parts of many state-owned industries, including the automobile manufacturer, Maruti Udjog, which is partially owned by Suzuki. And both Air India and Indian Airlines are scheduled for privatization. Much of the foreign investment comes from Indians living abroad.

The most visible change has come in information technology. Because its economic borders historically were so closed, India had not developed a competitive domestic computer industry even though it had long been a world leader in software development. With the newly open economy, it offered outside investors a pool of skilled and low-paid labor, and it held out the promise of a massive new market at some point in the future. "Silicon valleys" have developed around Bangalore in the south and Hyderabad in the north. From 1994 to 1999, the information technology sector grew at the rate of 25 percent per year, and the government created its own web site to help promote it (itformasses.nic.in).

The government has also encouraged more exports so that India can earn hard currency to buy the goods it has to import. Throughout the 1990s exports grew at the rate of 20 percent per year.

India has not gone as far in terms of economic reform as some of the other third world countries because of domestic political pressures. Recall that the Gandhi and Narasimha Rao governments were not terribly popular and were beholden to traditional politicians and conservative social groups within Congress. As a result, as the costs of economic reform mounted for everyone from the poor to the economically powerful, their governments backed down. Further, the two coalition governments that succeeded them were far weaker and were all but paralyzed as far as economic reform is concerned. Finally, the BJP has continued the process of reform, but it has not been willing to speed it up, especially when it comes to eliminating the permit raj.

According to the most optimistic predictions, India is in the first stages of the kind of economic turnaround we saw with China in chapter 11. Growth rates are at an all-time high. The middle classes, which had done relatively well before structural adjustment, are doing even better now, creating an internal market for some of the consumer goods being manufactured in India.

Overall, economic reform has become widely accepted in Indian politics. It was initially inspired by global challenges that left India in a weakened position economically. In the decade or so since they began, the reform efforts have also created a powerful domestic constituency in the westernized middle class, which held the balance of political power early in the Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao governments. The reforms have also built another constituency of poor people, such as those who opposed the Sandar Sarovar Dam, that had a lot to do with Congress's downfall. Although India is not likely to return to the permit raj system or to a Hindu rate of growth, the way the balance between these two constituencies evolves will go a long way toward determining the fate of economic reform and all that goes with it.

Feedback

As befits its tumultuous and divided political system, India has a lively mass media. Even though barely half of the population is literate, India has over two thousand daily newspapers, which are also the cheapest in the world. The papers, of course, are published in dozens of languages, and 12 million out of each day's circulation of 68 million are in English. The papers cover the entire political spectrum, and many of
the best papers have well respected reputations for their investigative journalism. Although political news dominates the printed press, the fastest growing newspapers are the ones that concentrate on financial news; their circulations have tripled since the introduction of economic liberalization.

Until recently, television and radio were completely state owned. Since the mid-1990s, however, cable and satellite television have been introduced, and one journalist estimates that more than 300 million people have access to one or the other. These people can now watch both the BBC World News and Rupert Murdoch’s Star service, and thus get differing perspectives on political events.

**Conclusion: Democracy in India and the Third World**

However serious its difficulties, India is not likely to suffer the fate of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, or even see its democracy succumb. It is risky to predict anything during these times of such rapid and unanticipated political change. Nonetheless, this conclusion seems warranted if we place India in a broader comparative and theoretical perspective.

Over the past decade, political scientists have spent a lot of time investigating why some democracies succeed and others collapse. Although these studies are controversial, two themes appear time and time again in the research. First, the more legitimate the regime is, the less likely it is to collapse. Second, the more effective the government is, the more likely it is to retain that legitimacy and, more generally, to survive. These may not seem like particularly profound conclusions, but if we shift from abstract theory to two comparisons, the reasons we can be reasonably optimistic about India’s political future become clearer.

In examining the Soviet Union and the broader collapse of communism in Europe, we saw the dramatic interplay between policy failure and the loss of legitimacy. We may lack systematic evidence that would allow us to directly compare their experiences with India’s, but the impressionistic evidence available to us reveals a very different situation in the latter. The Indian government has been more successful in at least some policy areas (for example, liberalization) than any European communist regime was. And, although its population is increasingly angry and polarized, most Indians still view the regime as legitimate. Perhaps most importantly, there is not the kind of repressed rage ready to erupt when politi-

cal straitjackets are removed, as happened when glasnost was instituted in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

The other comparison is between India and the rest of the third world. No matter how dire India’s situation might have seemed in this chapter, it is in relatively good shape on two levels. First, India’s economic performance and, more importantly, its economic potential are both superior to most of what we will see in Mexico, Iraq, and South Africa. Second, its regime has been more effective and retains more legitimacy than most others, some of which are wracked with basic divisions over whether the country itself should even exist.

Whether India is a relative success or a failure in comparative terms should not obscure the most important points for American or European students to learn about this or most other third world countries. First, these are incredibly poor countries that lack some of the basic resources and amenities we take for granted, such as primary education, rudimentary health care, safe drinking water, and shelter. Second, poverty is but one of many factors that make these countries much harder to govern, whatever the strengths or weaknesses of the people who end up trying to lead them.

**Critical Thinking Exercises**

1. Much has changed since this book was finished in early 2002. Does the analysis of India presented here still make sense? Why (not)?
2. Public opinion pollsters routinely ask questions about whether people think their country is heading in the “right direction” or is on the “wrong track.” If you were asked such

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**InfoTrac College Edition Sources**

Bouton, Marshall M. “India’s Problem Is Not Politics.”
Chibber, Pradeep. “Who Voted for the BJP?”
Cohen, Stephen P. “India Rising.”
Raman, A. S. “Politics in India.”
Sarkar, Tanika. “Women in South Asia.”
Schaffer, Teresita. “Indian Democracy after 52 Years.”
a question about India, how would you answer? Why did you reach this conclusion?

3. India is one of the very few third world countries to have sustained a democracy for an extended period of time. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think India is likely to survive well into the twenty-first century?

4. The independence movement in India was one of the largest and most unified in what became the third world. How did that help the new Indian government to get off to a successful start?

5. India is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries in the world. How has that affected its political life since independence?

6. The Indian political system has long revolved around the Congress Party. The party has slipped badly at the polls in recent years. How has that changed Indian politics?

7. India used to follow import substitution as strictly as any country in the third world. Over the past ten to fifteen years, however, it has moved toward structural adjustment and the open market. Why did this change occur? How has it altered Indian political and economic life?

Further Reading


Das, Gundcharan. India Unbound. New York: Knopf, 2000. A personal and analytical account of India’s economic and political transformations by one of the country’s leading entrepreneurs.

Gupta, Bhabani Sen. Rajiv Gandhi: A Political Study. New Delhi: Konark, 1989. A highly critical but also highly insightful biography that takes Gandhi up to the end of his term as prime minister.


