DEMOCRACY AND DISCONTENT
INDIA'S GROWING CRISIS OF GOVERNABILITY

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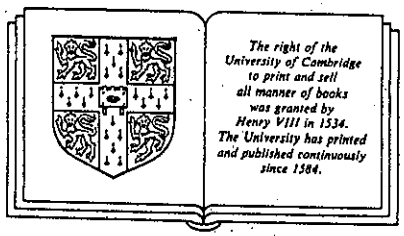

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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An overview of the study

Sooner or later all developing countries become difficult to govern, and over the past two decades India has been moving in that direction. This trend contrasts with the situation during the 1950s and 1960s, when India was widely regarded as one of the few stable democracies in the non-Western world.

India is still, of course, a functioning democracy, but increasingly it is not well governed. The evidence of eroding political order is everywhere. Personal rule has replaced party rule at all levels – national, state, and district. Below the rulers, the entrenched civil and police services have been politicized. Various social groups have pressed new and ever more diverse political demands in demonstrations that often have led to violence. The omnipresent but feeble state, in turn, has vacillated; its responses have varied over a wide range: indifference, sporadic concessions, and repression. Such vacillation has fueled further opposition. The ineffectiveness of repression, moreover, has highlighted the breakdown of the civil machinery intended to enforce the law and maintain order. In order to protect themselves, citizens in some parts of the country have begun organizing private armies. The growing political violence has periodically brought the armed forces into India's political arena, whereas the armed forces once were considered apolitical.

The purpose of this study is to describe how and attempt to explain why India has become difficult to govern. Was this outcome inevitable? India had long been considered something of a political exception. Now, to paraphrase one of that nation's leading political analysts, Rajni Kothari, India is fast catching up with the rest of the developing world. What happened? What went wrong? By focusing on the changing conditions of the state and society, as well as on leadership choices, this study attempts to provide answers to the puzzle of why the "world's largest democracy" has become difficult to govern.

INDIA'S PROBLEMS OF GOVERNABILITY

Viewed over a long historical period, the area that is now identified as India was never easy to govern. Precolonial times were marked by recurring

conflicts between centralizing monarchs and assertive regional overlords. Colonial rulers laid the basis for centralized power – and thus for a modern state – but the writ of their law never carried far; colonial power seldom penetrated the tradition-bound villages of India. Although the nationalist movement in India during the first half of this century created unity and thus the basis for a new system of authority, it also sowed seeds of divisiveness, leading eventually to the bloodletting that accompanied the creation of Pakistan. Also, the early postindependence period was anything but calm politically. State consolidation often involved armed repression of rebellious groups and forced annexation of political units that were unwilling to join the new republic.

In spite of this turbulent past, the postindependence era raised hopes for a stable, democratic India. That was certainly the vision of the "founding fathers." Under the leadership of Nehru and others, that vision took shape in the form of new political institutions. The new Constitution laid the basis for a British-style parliamentary democracy, arrangements were made to keep the armed forces out of politics, and the diversities of the Indian people were carefully considered in designing the new federal system. The Congress party – the key institutional manifestation of India's newly discovered national unity – reached out into village India to incorporate the previously unmobilized masses, and India's first elections were held. Because elections were held periodically, rural leaders slowly joined the anglicized urban leaders of the Congress party as India's new ruling elite. Dominance by a single party thus provided stability, and it did not appear to be an obstacle to the accommodation of new forces in the polity.

The political arrangements in this early phase were clearly dominated by an educated, nationalist elite. The business class was also politically influential, and the landed and caste elites were slowly brought into the ruling coalition. The new rulers enjoyed widely perceived legitimacy, in part because of the nationalist legacy and in part because the traditional patterns of authority in society, such as the caste structure in the villages, were still largely intact. The dominant political elites, moreover, practiced a reconciliatory approach toward the competing elites, while professing the hope that they would be able to bring the poor and the oppressed masses into the mainstream of India's modernizing political economy. The legitimacy formula that the Congress party had designed was clearly expressed in its proposed strategy for economic development: a marriage between nationalism and democratic socialism. The party's five-year plans accordingly stressed a mixed-economy model of development that sought economic growth, self-sufficiency, and a modicum of wealth redistribution.

These were euphoric times in India, as new beginnings often are. Although many difficult problems confronted the new government, both leaders and followers had considerable confidence in the state's capacity to deal with these problems. The Indian state sought to guide development

while standing above the society; it also simultaneously expressed the preferences of important social groups and thus was widely deemed legitimate. Over the past two decades, however, or since about 1967, much has changed. Most important, the state's capacity to govern (i.e., the capacity simultaneously to promote development and to accommodate diverse interests) has declined. Along with this decline, order and authority have been eroding. Since the mid–1960s, the surface manifestation of this process has been widespread activism outside of the established political channels that often has led to violence, a problem compounded by the state's growing incapacity to deal with the pressing problems of law and order, corruption, and poverty. Below the surface lies an important cause of these political problems: disintegration of India's major political institutions, especially the decline of its premier political entity, the Congress party (often referred to simply as Congress).

Today, the Congress party has lost its hegemony over Indian politics. Partly as cause and partly as consequence of its loss of control, Congress has experienced a profound organizational decline. This sprawling party once provided a measure of coherence across this vast and diverse subcontinent. Now, after a number of splits in the party, Congress exists little more than in name. At its apex, the organization has been reduced to Rajiv Gandhi, the heir of India's "first political family," and a few handpicked supporters. Nothing has dramatized this transformation more sharply than Gandhi's broadside criticism in 1985 of what remained of the Congress party. He blasted the "cliques" that enmesh "the living body of the Congress in their net of avarice," chided their "self-aggrandizement, their corrupt ways, their linkages with vested interests – and their sanctimonious posturings." He went on to complain that "millions of ordinary Congress workers are handicapped, for on their backs ride the brokers of power and influence, who dispense patronage to convert a mass movement into a feudal oligarchy – corruption is not only tolerated – but [is] even regarded as a hallmark of leadership."[1] It is ironic that Rajiv Gandhi's scathing criticism of his own party was delivered in a speech to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding.

The institutional decline of the Congress party has not been offset by

1 This speech was reported in all major newspapers after it was delivered in Bombay on December 28, 1985. I owe the first two quotations cited earlier to James Manor, "Parties and the Party System," in Atul Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State–Society Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 92. The long extract is from *Indian Express* (New Delhi), December 29, 1985. It is also worth recalling that during the 1960s, important scholars of the Congress party had attributed much of the "success" of this unique ruling party to its widespread patronage networks or to the crucial role of the "power brokers." See for example, Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress* (University of Chicago Press, 1967), and Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970).

the development of an alternative national party. Thus, there is currently a growing organizational vacuum at the core of India's political space. Until recently, India's first political family, the Gandhis, had occupied some of this space, but their hold on power was personalistic, and the perception of their legitimacy did not run deep. There are very few mechanisms still intact for the resolution of power conflicts in contemporary India. For quite some time the Parliament has not functioned as a significant political body that could help resolve conflicts or make policy. Cabinet members had also come to be selected by Indira and Rajiv Gandhi for their personal loyalty, not for their ability or for their control over an independent power base. Unmediated intraelite conflict has further damaged such institutions as the Constitution, the federal system, and the election process. It has also undermined discipline within the bureaucracy, especially among the police forces.

Below the established state elites, the vertical patterns of fealty in India's civil society have been eroding. Members of higher castes and other "big men" have gradually lost their capacity to influence the political behavior of those below them in the socioeconomic hierarchy. As a result, new social groups have entered the political arena and pressed new demands upon the state. Without a dominant party and other conflict-resolving institutions, democratic accommodation of such demands has been difficult. Without established law-and-order institutions, moreover, the agitation and violence that have resulted from these demands have been difficult to control. The result has been a dramatic increase in political violence in India (Figure 1.1). The state has had to increase its reliance on military and paramilitary forces. Thus, the current political situation features an outpouring of diverse new social demands, ad hoc and vacillating responses by the state, and a growing sense that order and authority – and perhaps even democracy – may be disintegrating in India.

It is important to clarify the thrust of this argument at the outset. This study does not claim that India's democracy is about to fall. An analysis of social and political trends alone cannot be used to predict the future of a distressed political regime. As illustrated by the Emergency of 1975–7, during Indira Gandhi's regime, leadership actions can be as much responsible for a breakdown in democracy as can underlying social trends. For a brief moment in 1985, when Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister, his decision to take advantage of his considerable popularity to pursue a more reconciliatory approach similarly demonstrated how important leadership actions can be. India's direction following V. P. Singh's rise to power in late 1989 has yet to be determined. Because leadership actions are both important and difficult to predict, so is the future of this troubled regime.

Two further qualifications should be noted. First, India's political situation in the 1970s and 1980s had some of the elements of both continuity and change that characterized the pre–1967 situation. This study attempts

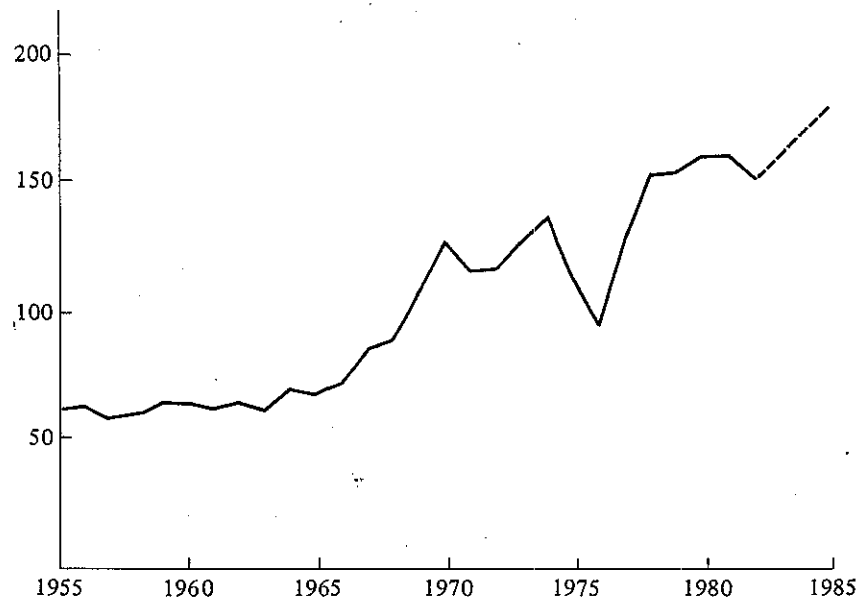

Figure 1.1. Political violence in India, 1955–85 (number of riots per million population). *Source:* Data from 1955 to 1982 are taken from an annual publication: Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Crime in India*. New Delhi: Government Press. Data for 1983 and 1984 are not available. The 1985 figures are rough estimates provided by government officials. For a discussion of what the government data on "riots" include and why they can be used to gauge public protest and political violence, see Baldev Raj Nayar, *Violence and Crime in India: A Quantitative Study*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1975, p. 17.

to focus on all those changes. Other scholars, by contrast, have emphasized such elements of continuity as the electoral dominance of the Congress party well into the late 1980s, or India's success in avoiding class polarization and the related persistence of the politics of "centrism."[2]

Second, there are some elements of political and social change that tend to strengthen, rather than weaken, India's authority structure. Periodic

2 Myron Weiner, while balancing elements of both continuity and change, seems to emphasize that the 1980 elections "restored" the Congress to its pre-1967 position. See his "Congress Restored: Continuities and Discontinuities in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey*, 22:4(April 1983), pp. 339–55. Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph similarly balance elements of change and continuity, but emphasize the continued "centrist" nature of Indian politics. See *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), passim, but especially the Conclusion. A good overview of political change in India that is also, on balance, positive about India's achievements is Jyotirindra Dasgupta, "India: Democratic Becoming and Combined Development," in Larry Diamond et al., eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), pp. 53–104.

national and state elections, for example, can have significant consequences: The longer a system is in place, the deeper grow its roots.[3] Tenure strengthens democracy. The national elections in late 1989 again indicated viability for India's democracy. Political parties on both the left and the right have come to accept parliamentary democracy. Moreover, India's macroeconomic performance in the 1980s was quite satisfactory, and such performance can be an important factor in strengthening the legitimacy of any government. Thus, it must be acknowledged at the outset that there are tendencies within Indian politics – some of them elements of continuity with the past, and some recent changes – that do not fit in with the thrust of the argument presented here, namely, that India's problems of governability are growing.

A situation of political turmoil can always be viewed in different lights, much as a cup can be seen as half full, rather than half empty. Though the focus here is on the problems of India's governability, it is not because of failure to recognize the strengths and achievements of the "world's largest democracy."[4] This focus on problem areas stems in part from a concern about the significant decay seen in India's authority structures over the past two decades. This focus on problems, moreover, stems from an analytical judgment that will be supported with evidence throughout this study: Over time, and on balance, India's problems of governability have worsened.

Over the past two decades, a legitimate and moderately stable state that was confident of its ability to lay out India's agenda for socioeconomic change has evolved into a reactive state. This state is omnipresent, but feeble; it is highly centralized and interventionist, and yet seems powerless. It has the responsibility to foster the "life-chances" of its many diverse social groups, but rather than initiating action, it primarily reacts. Moreover, the state now appears capable neither of dealing with the concerns of diverse interest groups nor of directing planned development. Its dominant institutions are in disarray, and the search for new legitimacy formulas goes on.

The purpose of this book is to describe the political situation that has emerged as the "Congress system" has declined in India.[5] More important, this study attempts to explain how the political process has been involved

3 This conclusion is supported by the results of various public-opinion polls cited by Bashiruddin Ahmed and Samuel J. Eldersveld, *Citizens and Politics: Mass Political Behavior in India* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).

4 Elsewhere, in a broader comparative context, I have highlighted some achievements of India's democratic model of development: Atul Kohli, "Democracy and Development," in John Lewis and Valerianna Kallab, eds., *Development Strategies Reconsidered* (Washington, D.C.: Overseas Development Council, 1986), pp. 153–82.

5 To the best of my knowledge, the term "Congress system" was coined by Rajni Kothari: "The Congress 'System' in India," *Asian Survey*, 4:12(December 1964), pp. 1161–73.

in the erosion of India's established patterns of authority. Was that erosion of established authority inevitable? The decline of the nationalist legacy, the growing tension between the state's representative and developmental functions, and the pressures from new groups that have emerged as a consequence of political and economic developments must be recognized as factors whose detrimental effects have been difficult to counter. On the other hand, many specific patterns of changes have resulted from deliberate political choices. The task of empirical analysis is to determine how "choices" have interacted with "inevitabilities" to produce this specific political outcome.

THE SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

A study of the erosion of authority in India can benefit both Indian studies and studies of comparative development. Observers of Indian politics have recently devoted considerable attention to India's growing problems of governability.[6] Following the election of a minority national government in late 1989, this concern is likely to increase. India's massive developmental problems demand the state's attention, but no problem in India is likely to be more serious than is disintegration of the major problem-solving institution, namely, an effective democratic state.

This study arises in part from the growing concern with India's eroding authority structures. What this volume offers in terms of novelty is detailed empirical analysis based on fieldwork. It will become clear in due course that the argument developed here differs in important respects from a number of existing theories. Suffice it to note at this point that both the descriptive picture and the analysis that emerge in this empirical study are rather complex; there are no easily identifiable heroes and villains in the story told here.

As far as broader issues are concerned, the analysis presented in comparative political studies over the past 10–15 years usually has focused on the issue of "the state." This useful intellectual development has been aimed at reversing a deep-rooted reductionist tendency within political sociology. Moving away from society-centered explanations, the argument

6 The writings here are quite extensive. Many appear in Indian newspapers and weekly magazines and thus are not easily accessible to Western readers. They are even difficult to retrieve within India. An incomplete list of works that are readily available would include the following: Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988); W. H. Morris-Jones, "India – More Questions than Answers," *Asian Survey*, 24:8(August 1984), pp. 809–16; Manor, "Party System"; Robert Hardgrave, *India Under Pressure: Prospects for Political Stability* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984); Bashiruddin Ahmed, "Emerging Indian Political System," *The Administrator* (India), 31:1(January–March 1986), pp. 27–42; Rudolph and Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, chapters 4–6.

has been that state authorities and state structures are significant and autonomous forces that influence both political and socioeconomic changes. This simple but powerful analytical assertion has generated considerable scholarship.[7]

Every intellectual gain, however, poses the danger that issues and approaches that appear not to be in fashion will be ignored. The interest in "the state" poses two such dangers. The first concerns the issues that are likely to be studied: Given the emphasis on the state as a social force, the question of how the state itself evolves may recede into the background. The second danger concerns the causal forces that are likely to be stressed: Social and economic forces are likely to be underemphasized in the new quest to assert the significance of the state.

This study continues to treat the state as a robust social actor. It attempts to develop a state-oriented explanation of the crisis of governability in a developing democratic country, but it also makes a deliberate attempt to correct the distortions often generated by overemphasis on the state. This empirical study is thus aimed at an analysis of the changing nature of the state itself, especially the erosion of the state's capacity to govern. In this limited sense, the concern of this study goes back to the analytical issue of "political instability" raised by Samuel Huntington and others in the 1960s.[8]

The explanation for political instability in the specific case that emerges here, however, varies from those generated by other approaches, both developmental and Marxist. The interaction of state and social forces is emphasized. The primary focus of analysis here is neither "social mobilization," leading up to growing demands by social groups in a "modernizing" society, nor class conflict. Rather, the main concern is with the patterns of politicization that result when the state can influence the life-chances of many social groups and when this state is accessible via dem-

7 The state-oriented literature on developing countries continues to grow. An incomplete list would include the following: Alfred Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Ellen Kay Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transactions Books, 1978); Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton University Press, 1983); Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard Sandbrook (with Judith Barker), *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford University Press, 1988); Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

8 See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

ocratic politics. It will become clear in due course that the causal and normative implications of this "statist" focus vary from those of society-centered analyses of political order.

THE STUDY

India's size and diversity pose considerable difficulties for any study attempting to generalize about the polity as a whole. The country has nearly as many people as all of Africa and Latin America combined, and probably as much ethnic diversity as is seen in all of Western Europe. The issue of generalizing over such a range is especially problematic for a study based on fieldwork. Several organizing principles have been adopted so as to make the task manageable.

It was clear from the beginning that any attempt to describe and explain India's growing problems of governability would have to take into account both national and local trends. The building blocks for national trends are provided by local politics, and the actions of the central authorities often are aimed at winning or manipulating the "hearts and minds" of those on the political periphery. Given India's federal structure, moreover, state-level governments often are significant political forces in their own right. Thus, a satisfactory account of India's changing authority patterns must focus simultaneously on the center, the states, and local politics.

The "district" was chosen as the unit appropriate for study of local politics mainly because other scholars had used this research strategy effectively.[9] Five districts were studied in order to tap some of India's regional diversity at the local level. Although the reasons that these districts were chosen will emerge later, there was no real rationalization for analyzing five rather than four or nine districts. Detailed study of more than five districts would have been desirable, but five seemed to be an optimal choice that would be manageable, given a fieldwork team of only one, as well as sufficient to capture important aspects of political diversity.

An important concern of this study is how authority patterns have changed over time, and background data are available because the five districts investigated here were analyzed by Myron Weiner during the early and middle 1960s.[10] The research for this book involved extensive interviews in each district with participants and observers of local politics. This fieldwork was carried out during 1985–6. When these data are compared with those from the earlier benchmark study by Weiner, they should provide insight into how and why India's periphery has become difficult to govern.

9 See for example, Weiner, *Party Building,* and Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

10 These are analyzed by Weiner, *Party Building.*

Although the changes over time have led to a governability crisis, the intensity of the crisis varies from one region of India to another. Why that occurs is the subject of the second major part of this study. Comparative analysis of three selected states – Bihar, Gujarat, and West Bengal – highlights why these changes have led to considerable breakdown of order in some states but not in others.[11] Bihar and Gujarat were chosen as examples of states at different levels of development that have experienced growing political turmoil. The Bihar–Gujarat comparison allows a distinction between different types of breakdowns and helps to delineate some of the reasons for breakdown, including the significance of "levels of development." The interesting case of West Bengal allows a careful testing of the argument, because it is one of the few Indian states in which authority has been restored after a prolonged period of disorder.

Research in these three states has been based on interviews, newspapers, and published works by other scholars. I have maintained an interest in West Bengal in part because my earlier work had covered this state, albeit concerning a different theme.[12] Recent interviews thus provided new information to buttress my prior knowledge of West Bengal. Interest in Gujarat and Bihar, by contrast, is new for me. I conducted interviews in both of these states in 1986, and I have consulted the works of other scholars, both for background material and for some specific interpretations.

The third major concern of this book is how, and with what success, India's central government (the Center) has dealt with the growing problems of governability. Indira Gandhi's role in the emerging authority crisis is well known to most scholars of India and is not discussed separately in great detail,[13] but rather is woven throughout the study. However, the changing nature of India's central government since Indira Gandhi's death needs to be investigated. In order to do so, this study analyzes how the Indian government under Rajiv Gandhi has managed economic policy and how it has dealt with such troubled political institutions as the Congress party and Center–state relations with Punjab. This focus on the actions of leaders provides a microcosm for interpreting power and authority trends at the national level.

The research on economic policy is based on both interviews and newspaper reports. By contrast, the account of how leaders have managed India's political institutions depends more heavily on newspapers. Direct interviews did not reveal much in this area, as senior leaders often were secretive or reluctant to discuss issues concerning the Congress party and the Punjab accord. Newspapers, by contrast, with their established contacts, seemed to carry so much news on these issues that one wonders if there are any political secrets in India.

11 A shortcoming of this study is its failure to include detailed, firsthand analysis of the political turmoil in Punjab. This is mainly because research access to Punjab was closed to me. I have attempted to compensate for this in Chapter 12 by incorporating an analysis based on press reports.

12 Kohli, *The State and Poverty*.

13 In addition to the references in footnote 6, see the following: Francine Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947–77* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Henry Hart, ed., *Indira Gandhi's India* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980); Mary C. Carras, *Indira Gandhi: In the Crucible of Leadership* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

Data collected on five districts, on three states, and on two crucial sets of policy issues facing the nation constitute the core empirical materials on which this study is based. The three levels of the polity are analyzed with the aim of charting and explaining India's growing problems of governability. Each of the three levels of analysis can help answer one of three interrelated questions: How have authority patterns changed over time? Why do patterns of political turmoil vary across regions? What are the implications of the changed political context for the government's capacity to govern India? The logic of inquiry in each of the three sections is comparative, either over time or across regions and issue areas within India.

THE ARGUMENT

It is tempting to conceptualize the reemergence of political incoherence in India as a continuing aspect of that country's political history. After all, cohesive rule from a Center enjoying widely perceived legitimacy has never been an easy achievement in India. The contemporary turmoil, however, is qualitatively different; it is both more and less intense in some respects than in the past, and therefore both more and less threatening. It is less threatening in the sense that in the current context, the basic existence of India as a viable political unit does not appear to be threatened. Secessionist movements may again arise here and there, and they probably will, but as long as the armed forces are intact, a further division of India is not likely. Political disorder is more threatening now than in the past, however, because political breakdown jeopardizes the predictability on which organized society rests. The rules that govern life, property, and the everyday behavior of common citizens increasingly are not dictated by custom, thus requiring the presence of an effective state and a legal machinery. The state is also deeply involved in the management of economic life, down to the grass roots. The degree to which socioeconomic life once was insulated from national power struggles has been eroded, probably forever.

The qualitative difference between political turmoil today and unstable rule in the past suggests that the political problems of today are, at least in part, the results of the "developmental successes" of the past few decades. India's Congress party was the midwife for the new nation-state. Having performed that crucial role, the party has now withered away. Other institutions came into being during that same time period: a func-

tioning national market, national transportation and communication networks, an emerging but relatively strong indigenous capitalism, and moderately cohesive armed forces. These are the key rudiments of a nation-state that should ensure the existence of India as a viable political unit. Along with these developments, however, came another set of changes: an increased division of labor, the spread of commerce, and diffusion of both national and democratic values. These changes have reduced the isolation of one local community from another. Moreover, because the state has been heavily involved in all of these changes, the growing ineffectiveness of the state is likely to have wide repercussions.

The breakdown of political order in contemporary India puts into question the future capacity of the Indian state to govern. The crucial questions related to the issue of eroding authority are these: How will India be ruled in the future – as a democracy, or by other means? If as a democracy, what type of democracy? Who within the state – which individuals, parties, and socioeconomic groups – will exercise power? And finally, how effective is the state likely to be in solving India's pressing problems? The issue of governability in the contemporary context thus concerns the state's capacity simultaneously to accommodate disparate interests and promote development.

The explanation for India's growing problems of governability developed here stresses multicausality. It is also largely inductive, derived from empirical materials. An analysis that would emphasize one set of variables over others and would allow sharp "differentiation of the intellectual product" simply could not be sustained against the complex empirical findings. A number of related but ultimately independent forces have influenced recent political changes in India.

In order to understand this overall explanation of India's governability crisis, it is important first to summarize the main findings from the three main parts of this study. Political developments in five selected districts are analyzed in Part II, and it is shown that India's political periphery is increasingly difficult to govern. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Congress party had succeeded in penetrating India's countryside by aligning itself with local "bosses." Over the past two decades, however, power struggles in the countryside have increased, sometimes aimed at political goals, and sometimes economic goals. The subjects of contention have been positions of power and status, state-controlled patronage and access to educational institutions, and economic rewards to be derived from land and wages. As a consequence, the traditional authority patterns have been severely challenged.

These power struggles have also been difficult to accommodate within the framework of the Congress party, especially because the party has consistently been weakened from the top during this period. Instead of

allowing such conflicts to evolve to some democratic resolution, Indira Gandhi sought to ensure her control over the party by appointing those loyal to her to positions of power. Organizational decline within the Congress party and the many power disputes have both contributed to the erosion of established patterns of local authority. Barring a few exceptions, new institutional patterns of authority have not emerged. The institutional vacuum in the periphery, in turn, helps explain a number of political trends, including coalitional instability and substantial fluctuations in the "political mood" and thus in electoral outcomes, ineffective local government, and the emergence of personal rule, often with ruffians as de facto local leaders.

The erosion of established authority has led to considerable violence in some states. In other states, by contrast, either such breakdown of order has been forestalled or, in rare cases, political authority has been reestablished. Part III of this study undertakes a detailed comparative analysis of three states: Bihar, Gujarat, and West Bengal. Some other states, such as Karnataka, are discussed briefly. All this analysis is aimed at explaining varying regional outcomes.

The situation of total breakdown of order in Bihar, for example, has resulted from corrosion of the authority vested in the social structure and absence of cohesion in political structures. Increasing power struggles in the society and a highly factionalized elite have provided a combustible political mixture that ignites periodically, and in Bihar even the forces of repression are ineffective. Political violence in Gujarat has had a more purposive quality than in Bihar. It results not primarily from a breakdown of social order but from the calculated mobilization strategies employed by competing elites.

In contrast to the situations of these two states, the case of West Bengal demonstrates how the presence of a cohesive party can bring stability even in a highly mobilized political environment: Strong leaders and disciplined ruling parties – forces that can impart a degree of cohesion to state structures – can help moderate the impact of corrosion of authority in the social structure. The emergence of incoherence in both state and social structures, however, is a sure recipe for a breakdown of order.

Part IV of this study shifts attention to developments at the national level. It is at the center of the Indian polity that the significance of the growing authority crisis is seen most clearly. In a state-dominated society, the state has lost its ability to initiate significant economic and political changes. The developmental capacities of India's "soft state" were never all that great to begin with. Under Nehru, however, numerous political and economic policies were initiated and sustained by the federal government. In recent years, by contrast, the major federal policy initiatives either have floundered or have narrowed the support base of the rulers, contributing further to the problems of governability. This conclusion is supported

empirically, and the reasons for it are developed later with reference to the attempts by Rajiv Gandhi's government to liberalize the economy and to strengthen some of India's major political institutions.

The irony of India's politicoeconomic situation is tragic: The state is highly centralized and omnipresent, but the leverage of its leaders to initiate meaningful change has diminished. The main reason for this development is that authority has seldom run deep, and the authority structures have in recent years fallen into disrepair. As a result, state authorities have little ability to persuade the people to support government initiatives – to build consensus. Coercion as a strategy of policy implementation is not in the cards, at least not at this time. Thus, major initiatives often face a dead end. It has become a vicious cycle: Weakness in the authority structures makes it difficult to solve precisely those problems whose solutions could strengthen authority. The bulk of political energy is spent fighting one bushfire after another, guided by the central concern of how to hang on to power.

The roots of the decay in the national authority structures are to be found in a dilemma that consistently plagued Indira Gandhi: how to maintain her hold on power while either fending off or accommodating the growing demands of power blocs in the polity. Democratic incorporation of such diverse new demands often would have meant a downward transfer of power. Indira Gandhi perceived – not without some justification – that such moves would weaken the Center and thus both national integrity and the state's capacity to steer economic development. As a consequence, she adopted a recalcitrant stance. Instead of accommodating power challengers, which might not have been easy in any case, she sought to block their access to power by undermining democratic institutions. Cancellations of elections within the Congress party, appointment of loyal but weak chief ministers in the states, and personalization of general elections were all part of this ruling strategy.

The paradox is that the very strategy that enabled Indira Gandhi to hold on to power also undermined the possibility of using that power for constructive ends. Having reduced the significance of important institutions, she found that when she (and, later, her successor, Rajiv Gandhi) needed institutional support to implement desired goals, such support was not available. Personal control over a highly interventionist state has been maintained, but the interventionist arm of that state has gone limp; the trends toward centralization and powerlessness have run in tandem.

This political analysis at the levels of the districts, the states, and the Center is aimed at delineating the forces that have contributed to India's problems of governability. During the first two decades after independence, democratic institutions were introduced into India. With the advantage of hindsight, some have questioned the solidity of those early foundations. The view adopted here is rather that the beginnings of democracy were

well founded and held out considerable promise. Over the past two decades, however, India's institutional capacity to deal with conflict and initiate solutions to pressing problems has declined. The issue now is, What factors can help explain this "dependent variable," namely, the declining capacity to govern?

At a proximate level of causation, four interrelated factors can be identified as independent variables in the empirical analysis: the changing role of the political elite, weak and ineffective political organizations, mobilization of previously passive groups for electoral competition, and growing conflict between contending social groups, including the conflict between the haves and the have-nots. How each of these conditions can influence the problems of governability can now be briefly summarized.

As democratic factionalism and other types of power conflicts have multiplied within India, the leaders often have found their hold on power fiercely challenged. Many of them, including Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, characteristically have reacted in ways that have tended to preserve their power. One important method for preserving power has been populism: to establish direct contact between the leader and the masses and to undermine those impersonal rules and institutions designed to facilitate orderly challenges. Making direct promises that will affect as large a segment of the population as possible can enable a leader to mobilize broad electoral support. The destruction of institutional constraints will leave more matters to the leader's personal discretion, enabling the leader to promote those who are loyal, while shunting aside anyone who is a potential challenger with an independent political base.

This process has undermined the possibility of establishing a system of impersonal authority based on the procedural rationality of democracy. As traditional sources of authority have declined and the development of rational, legal bases of authority has been thwarted, personal rule has come to prevail. Personalization of power can, of course, be either a cause or a consequence of weak institutional rule. What is clear in the case of India over the last two decades is that, on balance, the nation's powerful leaders – especially Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, but also important regional leaders like M. G. Ramachandran and N. T. Rama Rao – have worked more to increase their personal power than to strengthen governmental institutions. Whether or not V. P. Singh will work to reverse that trend has yet to be determined.

In addition to the detrimental role of its leaders, India's economic scarcities and heterogeneous social structure have made it difficult to strengthen political organizations. Whatever the causative factors, which will be discussed in due course, weak political organizations have also contributed significantly to the growing problems of governability. Weak political parties, for example, have ceased functioning as arenas for accommodation and resolution of conflict. In a social situation where most traditional modes

of resolving conflicts are eroding and the political system allows, even encourages, association for the pursuit of group interests, which can lead to conflict, an absence of strong political parties leaves a serious authority vacuum. Unresolved conflicts often are fought out on the streets. Ineffectiveness of other institutions, such as the police force, further contributes to growing civil disorder. That is why the Indian state in recent years has increasingly resorted to its last line of defense – the armed forces.

Electoral competition has mobilized many formerly passive socioeconomic groups and brought them into the political arena. On balance, this is a desirable outcome in a democracy. But given the state's limited capacities for redistribution of wealth and the intensity with which electoral support has been courted, these mobilized and dissatisfied groups have further contributed to the growing political turmoil. A major example of this phenomenon is the growing caste conflict between the "backward" and the "forward" castes. Leaders in state after state have utilized "reservations" – the Indian version of affirmative action – as means to gain the electoral support of numerically significant backward castes. Higher castes, feeling that their interests are threatened, have resisted these moves. Once set in motion, however, those who have been mobilized have been difficult to satisfy or control. Conflict has often been the result.

A similar pattern has unfolded as competing elites have sought to mobilize ethnic groups who share language, religion, or race. The groups vary: the Maharashtrians in Belgaum; the Sikhs in Punjab; Hindus versus Moslems in various parts of the country; the Gurkhas in West Bengal. These mobilizations follow identifiable patterns. Leaders manipulate "primordial" attachments so as to gain access to the state. If they are accommodated, the conflict often recedes. Accommodation, however, is not always possible. Moreover, those in positions to make concessions sometimes have not made timely concessions, in order to protect their own political interests. Such recalcitrance has only further encouraged the leaders of ethnic and religious groups to use violence and agitation as means of accomplishing their political goals.

Quite independent of such mobilization aimed at influencing political competition, the general process of economic and social change has shaken people out of their traditional social niches. Changing roles have created a growing awareness of the individual's position in society. Long-established inequalities and beliefs about the legitimacy of these inequalities are thus increasingly under challenge. Members of lower socioeconomic classes have begun associating themselves so as to challenge what they perceive to be unjust domination and exploitation. Privileged groups have also begun to counterorganize. Conflicts along traditional cleavages of caste and community have been around for quite some time, but what is new is the changing character and intensity of such conflicts. In states like Bihar, for example, one barely has to scratch the surface to discover

that such group conflicts – often fought out by private armies – increasingly involve economic issues. Traditional conflict is thus evolving into new types of conflicts, and increasingly the theme is class conflict.

These four related variables – the changing role of the political elite, weak political organizations, the mobilization of new groups for electoral reasons, and growing social unrest, including class conflict – direct attention to the interactions between the state and social forces that help explain India's growing problems of governability. These variables are treated here as independent variables only insofar as one is not fully reducible to another. It will be clear to readers that these variables are fairly proximate to the phenomena being explained. Moreover, they "feed into" each other in cause-and-effect relationships. In order to avoid circular reasoning, therefore, one must carefully analyze how, over time, they influence one another and how they affect the dependent variable of interest: India's growing problems of governability.

The overall picture of political change in India that these four variables help delineate is one in which ruling institutions have weakened and power challenges have multiplied. If we "collapse" these four causal variables into broader analytical categories and move one step farther to a "deeper" level of causation, it is eminently clear that in the general explanation developed here, political variables play roles as significant as those of socioeconomic forces, if not more significant. Both the dislocative impact of economic development and growing class conflict have contributed to India's problems of governability. Neither of these socioeconomic variables, however, has been decisive. The forces that also have been significant are best thought of collectively as political forces: the roles of leaders, the impact of weak political institutions, and, most important, mobilization of new groups for purposes of winning power and securing access to the state's resources. None of these political forces is fully reducible to explanation by the underlying socioeconomic conditions. The explanation of the state's declining capacity to govern developed here is thus distinguished from both "developmental" and "Marxist" positions. While taking those positions into account, the explanation proposed here emphasizes the "autonomous" significance of political structures and processes.

Numerous nuances and details of how political variables contribute to problems of governability will emerge in due course. So will the distinctive normative implications of this state–society focus. Suffice it to note at the outset that the additional emphasis on "political causes" of "political change" in a case like that of India should not be surprising. Only a part of this emphasis results from an analytical recasting of the available evidence. For the rest, the empirical materials are simply distinctive. In comparison with earlier historical cases of Western European "modernization," from which both developmental and Marxist arguments originate, the role of the state looms much larger in India's development. Thus, the signifi-

cance of political forces often can be traced back to this dominant role of the state in socioeconomic change.

In a situation like that of India, the state not only is the agent of political order but also is responsible for socioeconomic development. India's highly interventionist state controls many of the "free-floating" economic resources in a very poor society. Access to the power of the state is bitterly contested, not only for the political ends of exercising power and influencing policy but also as a source of livelihood and rapid upward mobility. The struggle for state power in these circumstances becomes simultaneously a struggle to influence people's life-chances. Thus, the conventional distinctions between the state and the market, or between the public and private spheres of activity, are not clear-cut in the case of India.

Moreover, because the state has been organized as an electoral democracy for nearly four decades, the belief that the state is controllable has spread wide and deep. Competing political elites are willing to utilize any sets of appealing symbols and available means – including violent means – for political mobilization aimed at bolstering their electoral chances. Even before the arrival of democracy, the character of premodern Indian society had been highly fragmented, and an interventionist democratic state has facilitated rapid political mobilization of various castes, classes, and religious and language groups. Add to this the roles of powerful economic actors such as business groups and the landowning peasantry, who depend heavily on state resources and thus wish to block access by others, and a picture emerges of a state that is both centralized and interventionist but that finds it increasingly difficult to accommodate conflicting demands and thus to govern.

One unsettling conclusion of this study is that India's democracy has itself contributed to overpoliticization of the Indian polity. The prescription that follows this argument, however, definitely is not that democracy should be curtailed in India. This study is primarily analytical, aimed at exploring the causes of India's increasing political turmoil. To the extent that it has any clear normative and prescriptive implications, they are, to repeat what I wrote in my preface, fairly general: strengthening party organizations and bringing the state's capacities in line with its commitments are two crucial long-term actions needed for improving the quality of India's democratic government.

THE ORGANIZATION

The study is organized into five parts. The introductory part consists of two chapters. Following this overview, Chapter 2 discusses a number of conceptual and theoretical issues that help orient the empirical materials of this study.

The three major empirical parts that follow constitute the core of the study. The fact that district-level political matters are discussed first represents a judgment that an understanding of trends in the political periphery is necessary for an understanding of politics at higher levels. After the analysis of five districts, the state-level materials are discussed. How the Center copes with the growing authority crisis is the subject of the last empirical part.

An overview of political changes in India is provided in the concluding chapter. What has changed and the how and why of those changes are discussed in summary form. The final chapter also discusses the analytical and normative significance of the Indian materials and of the emphasis on political variables as causal variables for the more general study of problems of governability in developing countries.