# Protection rackets and party machines: Comparative ethnographies of "Mafia Raj" in North India

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## Abstract

*Control over means of violence and protection emerge as crucial in much research on corruption in non-South Asian contexts. In the Indian context, however, we still know little about the systems of organised violence that sustain the entanglement of crime, capital and democratic politics. This timely comparative ethnographic piece explores two different manifestations of what our informants identify as "Mafia Raj" ("rule by mafia") across North India (Uttar Pradesh and Punjab). Drawing on analytical concepts developed in the literature on bossism and "mafias", we explore protection and racketeering as central statecraft repertoires of muscular styles of governance in the region. We show how a predatory economy together with structures of inter- and intra-party political competition generate the demand for and the imposition of unofficial and illegal protection and shape different manifestations of Mafia Raj. In doing so, the paper aims to contribute to debates on the relationship between states and illegalities in and beyond South Asia.*

## Introduction

"There is no law and order—we live in chaos—in the '*goonda Raj*' [rule by gangsters]—but crime is very organised! It is the only organised thing in Uttar Pradesh". (A joke currently

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circulating in UP)

"We all want to go abroad because there is no law and order here, everything goes, you can do anything so long as you have the right connections and money, it is *goonda Raj* like Bihar under Laloo Yadav Prasad except that we are more educated than the Biharis." (Quote from a Jat Sikh interviewee)

The state of Uttar Pradesh, located in the Hindi heartland, is one of the most backward in India in terms of socioeconomic conditions. However, since the late 19th Century, the state has been the nerve centre of Indian politics. Uttar Pradesh controls one sixth of the Indian Parliament and, therefore, occupies a central position in the country's politics. Today, more than 200 million people live in the state, a fifth of which are Muslim. The rest are mostly Hindu, and divided broadly between three mutually antagonistic caste groups: the upper-caste Brahmins and Thakurs; the lower-caste Dalits; and the "other backward classes", such as the Yadavs. Western Uttar Pradesh is widely known for its endemic violence and criminality (Brass, 1997), for being culturally shaped by the "macho" ethos of its dominant castes, for being marred by communalism and caste-based conflicts, and finally by poverty and underdevelopment (Jeffrey *et al.*, 2014). Besides its national political importance, Uttar Pradesh is the site where lower castes appear to be most visibly challenging upper-caste political domination.

The Punjab, on the other hand, ranks amongst India's most developed and prosperous states. It was one of the first Indian states where the Green Revolution was implemented, and one of the first in which all villages obtained roads and electrical connections. With a population of around 27 million—roughly divided into urban Hindu trading castes, rural Jat Sikhs, and scheduled castes—the Punjab carries much less weight in Indian national politics than Uttar Pradesh. Nevertheless the state arguably wields influence far beyond its numbers thanks to a prosperous business community spread across India, Europe and North America. In 1992, following a decade of violent insurgency and counter-insurgency in which some militants from within the state's Sikh majority demanded independence from India, Punjab entered a period of relative peace in which communal issues receded into the background. Political agendas came to be dominated by development and growth. In practice, beyond the pro-business rhetoric, this move is widely reported to have coincided with the rise to a tight nexus between business, politics and crime. Despite different political histories and distinct socio-economic and religious makeups, both Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab have been described as being under

the rule of gangsters (*goondas*) and "mafias".[1]

In this article, we seek to shed more light on the systematic links between bosses, party machines and "criminals".[2] Crucially, we illustrate key differences in the way in which protection rackets are organised in these two sites, and argue that these different forms of organisation reflect different patterns of Mafia Raj (rule by mafia). We show that the ways racketeers rule within (or in collaboration with) party machines varies according to local patterns of political competition and according to the cultures of violence and discipline of local party machines. We argue that the consolidation of police power during Punjab's brutal counterinsurgency, combined with a disciplined ruling party machine, have given rise to a more centralised form of racketeering than in Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, in the post-insurgency period, we find that two-party competition in Punjab correlates with more muted levels of communal and caste-based conflict than in Uttar Pradesh, and hence we argue, with less demand for protection on the basis of communal identities. Western Uttar Pradesh has what we call a "competitive Mafia Raj" in which a lively multi-party system combined with the ruling Samajwadi Party's lack of party discipline produce what is locally perceived as disorder. By contrast Punjab has "a monopolistic Mafia Raj" in which a two-party system combined with the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal's tight party discipline produces a sometimes equally violent but more ordered and authoritarian form of "Mafia Raj".

Throughout the text we use the popular terms "Mafia Raj" and "Goonda Raj" (rule by

[2] On party machine and bossism, see Scott (1969), Migdal (1988); on Italy and Russia, see Chubb (1996); on East Asia, see Sidel (1999); on Indonesia, see Wilson (2015); and on India, see Weiner (1963).

gangsters) as descriptive concepts that articulate particular local visions of the relations between state, capital, crime and the individual.[3] "Mafia Raj" is a system of political and economic governance in which politics, money and crime have developed symbiotic relations.[4] These "regimes" echo Tilly's (1985:169) placement of "banditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war-making on the same continuum", defining states as "quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy". Under "Mafia Raj", mafia-like bosses claim for themselves the rights to discipline and punish, protect, tax and represent local populations. More recently, criminologists and sociologists have emphasised how such "mafias" should be studied as modes of politico-economic governance, rather than as *discrete criminal organisations* (see Varese, 2011; Paoli, 2004). According to the Italian sociologist Armao (2015:3), when a structured and permanent group of individuals who use violence to make money through criminal activities meets politics, it gives rise to a third type of system called "mafia". Armao has recently conceptualised such mafia-like systems of governance as "mafia-owned democracies" and placed them within the globalised patterns of "criminal neoliberalism" that have emerged since the 1980s. "Mafia-owned democracies" such as both Italy and Mexico, he argues, are established democracies in which professional gangsters and their organisations are connected to, and partially control, both political and economic power. As gangsters further entrench their position, Mafiosi may increasingly assume both the political leadership and control over the economic and financial resources of the state. Formal democracy often fails to prevent this from happening.

"Mafia-owned-democracies" (and their South Asia manifestations: "Mafia Raj") are thus systems of governance where "(even) the official is illegal" and where nested criminal "official" actors replace the "state" as the privileged partners of capitalism (see Gayer,

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[3]    For explorations of the growing nexus between crime and politics in India, see Brass (1997), Jaffrelot (2002), Hansen (2001, 2005), Manor (2007), Michelutti (2008), Jeffrey (2010), Vaishnav (2011), Berenschot (2011, 2014), Gill (2012), Witsoe (2009), Gooptu (2007) and Sanchez (2015).

[4]    The term and concept of "mafia" has been long debated. It has been studied purely as economic activity and as "enterprise syndicate" (Blok, 1972); "mafia enterprise" (Arlacci, 1993); and mafia as a protection industry (Gambetta, 1988; Varese, 2001). Tilly (1985) has instead highlighted the relation between mafia and political sovereignty by introducing the very interesting notion that organised crime can be compared to both war-making and state-making (see also Volkov, 2002). See, also Santoro (2011) for a discussion of "Mafia" becoming a folk concept.

2014:39). The term "mafia-owned democracy" might be applied to a political system as a whole or to sub-systems within it. It may apply to a particular area or to particular populations, and so we can have "pockets" of "mafia-owned democracy". Crucially, such systems of governance should be seen as effectively "comprehensive and efficient manifestation of modernity, and one possible way of interpreting politics in times of globalisation" (Armao, 2015:4) and not as exotic oriental exceptions. India is yet another established democracy in which intense electoral competition combined with predatory forms of capitalism is producing pockets of "mafia-owned democracy" run and controlled by elected "gangster politicians".

Across our two sites (but not only in those locations) politics is increasingly seen as the most effective means to improve business opportunities and prosper.[5] Crucially, the transition from business and crime to official politics has become an obvious career path for many ambitious individuals across India. Political parties select "criminals" because they can self-finance, and because they can offer expertise in voter intimidation and violence (Wilkinson, 2004; Manor, 2007). According to Vaishnav (2011), candidates with criminal indictments are twice as likely to win elections if compared with their law-abiding counterparts. The pioneering work by Barbara Harriss-White (2003:7) illustrates how systems of "Mafia Raj" "increasingly serve private accumulation: a nexus in which politicians, officials, criminals, and businessmen and (their often poor and dependent) 'runners' and fixers are bound together in a mutually protective embrace." Unitary state sovereignty, never complete, is being challenged by the proliferation of private protection services. In a similar fashion, Alpa Shah (2006) has been drawing attention to "markets of protection" exploring the continuities between state and "terrorist" and insurgent groups (in this case, the Maoists in Jharkhand).[6] Building on these comparative insights, we use "mafia-owned democracy" as an analytical concept to compare different manifestations of "Mafia Raj". Our ethnographic focus is on what we argue is the central statecraft tool of such of such regimes' protection/rackets and explores the unexpected complicities and

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[5] We describe further pockets of 'Mafia Raj' across South Asia and the importance of the figure of the boss as a protector/extortionist in Michelutti et al (n.d).

[6] In the context of Africa there is an emerging literature which explores 'market of protection' and mafia-like type of sovereignties in conflict zones, see for example Raeymaekers (2010). For an excellent review of this literature see Hoffman and Kirk (2013).

opportunistic partnerships that it generates. As Tilly (1985:170–171) famously pointed out, "Which image the word 'protection' brings to mind depends mainly on our assessment of the reality and externality of the threat. Someone who produces both the danger and, at a price, the shield against it is a racketeer. Someone who provides a needed shield but has little control over the danger's appearance qualifies as a legitimate protector, especially if his price is no higher than that of his competitors." Thus, in some cases, protection may be perceived "as socially permitted, encouraged or enjoyed as a moral right or duty" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois. 2004:5), while in others it may be perceived as exploitative. The paper shows ethnographically how local party machine bosses rule (or attempt to rule) over the trade, imposition or even gifts of "protection".

### *"Violent protectors" and cultures of enforcement*

In our analysis, we characterise bosses as close to *Mafiosi*, defined, following Blok, Sidel and Volkov, as "entrepreneurs who use private, formally unlicensed violence as a means of social control and economic accumulation".[7] Bosses "protect" (control and run) neighbourhoods, markets, business groups and political parties. They are often the source of violence and the provider of protection from the violence they produce. Crucially, the "Mafia Raj" systems of governance of which they are part, are linked to an increasingly predatory and exploitative economy. Our fieldwork was conducted in from one *tehsil* in the Punjab and another in Western UP.[8] In contemporary India, these are settings where old divides between village and town and rural and urban are increasingly disappearing. The protagonists of this paper operate across the rural–urban divide and live in the urbanising mega regions that have emerged on the North Indian plains. They live in middle India (Harriss-White, 2015), a place of small towns and peri-urban villages, and booming economies.

Both our settings have undergone tremendous economic changes over the past 15 years. Crucially, both settings have witnessed a construction boom and skyrocketing real estate prices, but also the emergence of a variety of new businesses and industries. In both sites, this has led

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[7]     Sidel (1999:71-72). In so far as our protagonists overlap with the states they resemble not so much Hobsbawm's social bandits, but rather what Blok calls *mafia*. Blok (1972); Volkov (2002).

[8]     A *tehsil* is an administration headquarter located in a town or city and often covers a number of smaller adjacent towns and villages.

to an intense scramble for real estate, but also for opportunities to control booming drug, oil, sand, water and quarry businesses. It is in this socio-cultural and economic environment that a number of political bosses—at all levels, from the *panchayat* through to the National Assembly—increasingly gain and maintain their power through their activities as violent protectors. Protection and extortion are particularly attractive avenues to power and riches because, as Paoli (2004) argues, they do not require high initial investments, carry low managing costs, and are relatively low-risk investments, particularly where state protection is unreliable or inadequate. In a world where money increasingly determines success in life and becoming rich and becoming rich quickly is the ethos, industries such as extortion become appealing careers paths for working class youth whose manual and industrial work has been economically and socially devalued by economic liberalisation (Gooptu, 2007). Extortion provides quick and immediate monetary rewards.[9]

In the region, the ideal of a strong, "wild" and dangerous boss shapes criminal political cultures. An old repertoire of tropes of honour, kingly leadership and heroism that valorise "criminal heroes" feed into the value placed on toughness and physical strength. For example, in the area under study enforcement is one of the constitutive elements used to define the identity of particular social groups—such as Rajputs, Yadavs and Jats—who describe themselves as natural protectors and use violence and coercion to maintain caste dominance hierarchies and enduring patriarchal structures. [10] Thakur Dabang and Gurbhachan Singh, the two main protectors (and aggressors) of our story both belong to "martial castes"—the first is a Rajput and the second a Jat Sikh—whose corporate identities are often defined by their willingness and ability to use force. The reputation of members of these castes as protectors and enforcers originates in their traditional role as rulers and landlords—or as the henchmen of landlords—

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[9]    For a detail discussion of the impact of "muscular economics" and criminal enterprises on the production of "Mafia Raj", see Michelutti *et al.* (2016).

[10]    See Michelutti (2014a), who maps out the chains of protection (and violence or threats of violence) that run through family life (by investigating land grabbing within "the family" and murders among relatives), village/*mohalla* life, business and economic activities and "the political".

who needed martial skills in order to protect their land, enforce caste hierarchies, and to subjugate but also "protect" labourers (see Breman, 1974), and in the case of the Sikhs, their historically persecuted religious minority. This led the British to classify Jats, Rajputs and a variety of different castes, including the Yadavs, as martial castes. Rajputs and Yadavs in Western UP, and semi-Rajput castes like Jats in the Punjab, still describe themselves as natural protectors and as the sole founts of legitimate justice ("We have justice in the blood," say the Rajputs in UP). They frequently contrast themselves with members of the trading and lower castes who they view as timid and weak. Many of our informants pointed out that young male Rajputs and Jats are hot-headed and prone to violence. With respect to Rajputs, one informant in UP claimed that, "They do not want to work, even if they don't have enough land to sustain their families … they still think that their occupation is to go to war, to fight, to govern or to do sports. Basically, they think that they can earn money without working—just by mastering force and intimidation" (Sunita Sisodia, 37 years old, police constable). The same was widely held to be true of the rich Jat Sikh cultivators who became involved in politics. Thus, in both settings violent self-driven and profit-driven sovereign acts are embedded in re-casted caste-based traditions and models of authority. Today, the archetype of the brave, semi-divine patron is as widespread as ever (Michelutti, 2014b). However, the rhetoric of virtuous protection often hides a darker reality whereby political and economic allegiances are sustained through the stick, as much as the carrot. In North India, beyond the world of violent political entrepreneurs and enforcers "the protection offered to your own victims" (Vidal *et al.*, 2003:20) is also a well-rehearsed mode of gaining control and maintaining obedience across a variety of sectors of social life. Protection is indeed often a "shadowy contract" (Strathern, 2012:401) in which violence, personal interests and fantasies of power intersect.

Thankur Dabang and Gurbhachan Singh both derive a significant degree of their power from membership in large and cohesive dominant sub-castes that are able to deliver blocks of votes to whatever party they happen to support. However, their political dominance is no longer based on the traditional territorial dominance of the type once described by M. N. Srinavas. In rural areas, dominant landowning castes no longer directly control the livelihoods of lower-caste labourers because of the growing availability of off-farm work (see Jodhka, 2014). Nevertheless traditional dominant castes like the Yadavs and the Jats have managed to reproduce their power through politics and state employment (see Jeffrey, 2001; Breman, 2007). Jats in Punjab became involved in politics through farmer unions, as well as through the Jat-dominated Shiromani Akali Dal, and Yadavs in UP have captured a share of power by uniting under the

banner of the Samajwadi Party (SP). Both groups have also invested in education in order to obtain jobs in the police, as well as in a variety of different state departments.

*"Competitive Mafia Raj", "monopolistic Mafia Raj" and machine politics*

The ethnography that will follow in the next section illustrates how the openness with which violent protectors can operate, and how they are incorporated into political parties, relates to structures of inter- and intra-party competition. In Uttar Pradesh, multi-party competition correlates with higher levels of communal and caste-based conflict (Wilkinson, 2004) and a higher number of criminal political candidates (Aidt *et al.*, 2015) and produces a high demand for protection services. Moreover the need for muscle-power is at its peak in areas with deep community divides where voters desire forceful representatives who can credibly protect their group interests. It has been established that political parties select criminal candidates in those areas where social divisions are the most contested (Vaishnav, 2011). The case study of Uttar Pradesh shows how, in this environment, violent protectors operate in ways that respond to a genuine demand for protection against real threats.

On the other hand, the Punjab witnessed significant communal violence during the Khalistani militant period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, but stringent counter-insurgency measures subsequently rid the state of major communal tensions. Between 1987 and 1992, the Punjab was under president rule and became a quasi-militarised "Police Raj" (Singh, 1996:411). By the mid-1990s Gurharpal Singh (1996:410) wrote that the Punjab provided a model of a government that had "successfully overcome the most difficult confrontations since independence". However, he argues that pacification came at the cost of the emergence of an authoritarian state that brutalised both society and the civil administration.

In the post-insurgency period, we find that two-party competition correlates with more muted levels of communal and caste-based conflict, and hence we argue, with less demand for communal protection. This is because the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal in particular has realised that it needs to attract voters across communal and caste divides if it wishes to obtain a majority in government (Singh, 2014). In the absence of any significant demand for protection, we suggest that in the Punjab protection is imposed and signals a more authoritarian political setup.

Our material also illustrates how intra-party competition, reflected in the unity or disunity of a political party, affects the degree to which "protector/enforcers" can operate autonomously. The manner in which party machines incorporate "criminal elements" affects the capacity of the party to control and discipline. In the SP, there is a fusion between the party

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organisation and its criminal elements; which prevents "the leadership from acting when some of the troops misbehave" (Verniers, 2014). Moreover Western UP's ruling Samajwadi Party is loosely organised and its party workers enjoy far more freedom than do their counterparts in the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Its loose party structure and mercenary ideology characterised by what Mbembe (1992) calls the "politics of expediency", combined with its incorporation of ambitious criminal elements, divides the SP into a number of competing power centres. This, we suggest, partly accounts for the anarchy that has characterised the SP's tenure in government. Following defeat in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the SP's leadership recognised that the party's lack of discipline was costing it votes. To remedy this situation Akhilesh Yadav (the current UP chief minister) set up a school to train party cadres and to improve party discipline.[11] However, party workers in both the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which are the other two main parties in the state, appeared almost envious of the independence and autonomy of their SP counterparts who were given free reign to get rich and abuse their power. By contrast, when the BSP was in power (2007-2012), the "dirty work" was subcontracted to non-party workers. Mayawati (the former UP Chief Minister) didn't formally incorporate "goondas" into her party and produce a regime in which "organised" and "centralised" corruption was visible but controlled. Mayawati's elected strongmen were (and are) not part of the party organisation and are, hence, highly disposable. In addition, under the current SP rule, the police (and the DM) is under control of the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). By contrast, during the BSP's tenure, Mayawati kept full control of the state's administration, in what has been described "a statist" party (Pai, 2007). Such direct tight control cut across local systems of bossism and dis-imbedded the bureaucracy from localised patronage relations.

Similarly, the Punjab's ruling Shiromani Akali Dal has a highly disciplined and centralised power structure, and the chief minister is widely held to control the party with an iron fist. SAD party workers closely monitored each other, sometimes also recording potentially subversive conversations on their mobile phones. Moreover, the SAD deployed CID plainclothes police officers to spy on people to check their political allegiances. Despite recent changes, the party is still united by religious ideology and by the cause of representing Sikh

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[11]See   http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/lucknow/post-rout-akhilesh-plans-training-school-for-party-cadres/ (accessed on 20 April 2016).

interests both within and beyond the Punjab, and as such more closely resembles parties like the Shiv Sena (Hansen, 2001; Eckert, 2003). Finally, the party did not fully integrate "criminal" candidates in its party machine, and while it used henchmen like Gurbhachan Singh (see below), these were easily disciplined and widely believed to be disposable.

**"Competitive Mafia Raj" in a teshil in Western Uttar Pradesh**

In Uttar Pradesh, the term "Mafia Raj" is particularly associated with the Samajwadi Party, a party often described as a party of "goondas" (gangsters). It is built around and draws its support principally from the Yadav community and is led by Mulayam Singh Yadav, a former wrestler. The Samajwadi Party has a reputation for protecting not only the interests of the Yadavs and Muslims—and more recently also of Rajputs—but of protecting "criminals". The extraction of what is locally termed "goonda tax"—paid in money, votes and favours—in exchange for protection forms the backbone of the political careers of many party bosses. If you ask the common man on the street to describe what characterises "Mafia Raj", he gives a simple and telling answer: "When the SP is in charge criminals are on the streets, they are able to operate and flourish—the Samajwadi Party protects 'them' and they get revenues from them—it is all about 'goonda tax'' (protection money)."

In Western Uttar Pradesh the most powerful violent protectors are referred to as *dabang*s, and a number of them began their careers during the previous Samajwadi Party "Mafia Raj"—between 2002 and 2007. However, many of them subsequently shifted allegiances because they needed to be with the party in power in order to obtain the political protection necessary to stay out of jail. Many *dabang*s have pending criminal cases against them, and they need effective contacts in Lucknow (the state capital) to slow down the court procedures in order to buy time. The term *dabang* entered the popular lexicon following the release of two films by that name in 2010 and 2012 and is now commonly used to refer to mafia-type leaders. *Dabang*s, unlike ordinary criminals (*goonda*s), are political leaders and can instill both fear and respect. As an informant explained: "A Goonda is just a hired thug; to be a dabang you need to be charismatic, people need to give you influence, you need to stand out." Crucially *dabang*s, or their close relatives, occupy political seats that afford them both prestige and a degree of state protection. Moreover, a typical *dabang* uses his/her own "crew" as bodyguards, travels in white 4x4s with red beacons and party flags, and flaunts his/her wealth and power with weapons, ostentatious gold jewellery, and large farmhouses on the outskirts of town.

However, the principal characteristic of a *dabang* is that he/she specialises in racketeering. After land prices skyrocketed over the last 15 years, local violent political entrepreneurs extended their activities from mainly protecting traditional illicit activities, such as alcohol production/distribution, drug smuggling and contract killing, to dealing in property—increasingly subject to illegal encroachment by *kabza* groups—and to real estate development.

To illustrate this, let us take the case of Thakur Dabang, a Rajput who is an unelected representative of the SP in a Western UP constituency where the SP possesses neither an MP (Member of Parliament), nor an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) seat. His residence is both the Samajwadi Party office and the headquarters of his own private "Dabang Thakur Company". Local people use the terms "company", "lobby", "firm" or "mafia racket/cartel" (in Hindi English) and "parivar" (family) to refer to "organised criminal/political families" involved in the so-called sand, land, construction, hotel and oil "mafias".

These are structured and permanent group of individuals who use violence to make profit through criminal activities and when they meet politics they become "mafias" (Armao, 2015:3). Thakur Dabang's Company is effectively the local representative of an alleged larger, state-wide, Yadav "family firm", as the Samajwadi Party is often locally referred to. The terms "firm" and "company" are revealing because they clearly illustrate how public office and private profit have become entwined.

In Western UP, different segments within the ruling party—in this case the SP—outsource their business and political operations to companies such as Thakur Dabang's, which are often composed of single clans and operate in a particular territory for varying spans of time. Thakurji possesses the local franchise of the SP, collecting "protection rents" and sending a cut to the centre. Crucially, his job as protector is to ensure that the police and the civil administration do not crack down on illegal businesses and that they facilitate the operations of legal ones by helping them obtain licences and contracts. Officials in the civil administration and the police are compelled to cooperate because, if they do not, they risk being transferred to undesirable posts or even being suspended. In short, Thakur Dabang sells immunity.

Thakur Dabang is a Rajput and he also belongs to a circuit of protection linked to Raja Bhaia, the famous Samajwadi Rajput don from central UP—popularly known for feeding his enemies to crocodiles. "D.G." is the second key character in the company and is related to the Yadav clan by kinship ties. The third key member of the party—who is the current SP district president—is not from the district, but Delhi. He is a property developer with friendship and kinship ties to the ruling Yadav clan. "The Company" is widely accused of making land grabs,

and a number of cases involving it have been brought to the attention of the local press and police. However, the police have taken no action against members of the company.

Take, for example, the case of Mr. S. Sharma—a retired teacher—whose house was forcibly occupied by a notorious local SP party aide. Mr. Sharma managed to file an FIR against the SP leader, but the police failed to take action and track down the accused. In the meantime, Mr. Sharma's family received numerous threats from SP workers and lived, in his own words, "in absolute terror" for over two months. His ordeal only ended when he dropped the charges after SP workers threatened to kidnap his child. However, he lost his property.

> It is also an open secret that a number of SP municipality ward representatives are grabbing municipal land. The town mayor told us several times that she can do nothing about it because she does not have the support of the police and administration. As an old SP party worker said, "Akhilesh Yadav took charge as chief minister on the 15 March 2012 in the afternoon, and by dinner time local SP party workers were already grabbing land and properties…" (P. Yadav, SP party worker)

While the SP cannot win a Lok Sabha seat in the constituency, its solid majority at state level means that its "contractors" in town are nevertheless in charge and have the power to protect illegal activities and collect protection rents. Regarding the "bhumi mafia", a member of the Thukar Dabang company had the following to say: "You know how it is done, Luciaji. It's very easy. You muscle up or pay a couple of people at the Nagar Palika office, beat up or kill the local Bhaia who thinks he deserves a share of the profits … then the land is all yours, it isn't municipal land anymore, very easy. The most important thing for us (Indians) is land. People die for Land."

The party also allegedly collects rents by helping supporters with disputes, police and court cases, and arranging bureaucratic transfers. As in the Punjab—see below—influence over the police is crucial in these everyday mediations in which people want police cases against them withdrawn, or in which they want to frame fake criminal charges against enemies. To secure its local influence over the police, the SP transferred all uncooperative superintendents of police out of the district. Over the past three years, eight superintendents of police have been transferred from the district. Equally revealing of SP control over the police is the fact that most SHOs at local police stations are members of the Yadav caste. To sum up, therefore, Thakur Dabang works not only with the direct protection and involvement of "the Yadav Company", but it also works with the support of the police and of an equally politicised district

administration.[12] In short, state officials sell protection just as much as criminals do.

However, Thakur Dabang Company does not have the monopoly over protection in the tehsil. He faces competition from other companies whose leaders have the backing of other SP patrons, as well as from emerging patrons in the BJP camp. One of the problems at the heart of the present "Uttar Pradesh Mafia Raj" is its instability due to the availability of multiple and often competing centres of protection within the SP. As one informant pointed out when commenting on the difference between the previous BSP regime under the chief minister Mayawati (a now famous Dalit leader) and the current SP regime: "You see … Mayawati was alone—she has no family, no sons or daughters, no uncles! And she just took the money for herself and to build statues, but there are at least 20 relatives in Mulayam's family who occupy elected state and national assembly seats—and hundreds of them at the local level, all of whom feel entitled to loot the state for as long as the SP stays in power" (Rattan Singh, 35 years old, milk seller). In fact, popular belief has it that UP is run by four-and-a-half chief ministers: Mulayam Singh Yadav (Akhilesh's father), Ram Gopal Yadav and Shivpal Singh Yadav (Akhilesh's uncles), Azam Khan, and Akhilesh is the half.

There are at least four factions in the party in the district. There are six vice presidents and we counted at least ten city presidents (or former city presidents) in the month of April 2014. It is, in fact, very difficult to figure out who yields influence locally within the SP organisation as internal fights lead to frequent reconfigurations of power. There are few people in the town/district who can claim to be the "real" representatives of the "Yadav parivar".

Information about who has the leadership's favour is carefully distributed, or completely lacking. There are, for example, a number of local leaders who only came to know that they had been expelled from the SP through Facebook rumours. They never received confirmation of this from any member of Mulayam's family and were kept in the dark about their fate for indefinite periods of time. These rumours, however, had the effect of discrediting them as leaders and protectors. Given that information has the potential to undermine a leader's effectiveness, control over it is a prerequisite for power. Overall competing power centres and a

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[12]     A parallel story of transfers and promotions is also present at the DM (District Magistrate Office) level. There have been seven DMs in the tehsil over the past two years. The *patwari* is also a key figure that "the company" needs to have on board for registering grabbed land. He is a Yadav, too.

lack of information create a great deal of insecurity and an absence of trust among the members of the public who often do not know where to go for protection. As Gambetta (1993) argues, lack of trust in a context where the state is unable to provide basic security generates the popular demand for Mafia-like protection.

Spending time at Thakur Dabang's office provided insights into routine forms of intimidation, and to catch glimpses of how leaders sought to orchestrate riots and planned retaliations and assaults against enemies. The following describes some of the events witnessed at Thakur Dabang Company's office one morning during a routine "Darbar" (public "court" meeting). While we waited in the office a petitioner from the local neighbourhood arrived. He had a problem with property borders. Satish Yadav (Thakur Dabang's aide) gave him the telephone number of a person who could help him. Then he said, "Go kick him badly (*eklat marla*) and then tell him to call me." The man said, "Yes—I shall do it … but can I also have some Samajwadi Party's headed paper?" People often ask for SP headed paper because it is believed to give credibility. If you have SP headed paper it means that you are closer to the "circuit of protection" and your threat of violence gains more credibility.

At this point another wealthy and upper-caste looking "client" arrived and began to talk about his problem immediately and without introduction. He wanted to avoid criminal charges—for a crime whose nature was not specified at the time—and came to complain about how the police officer in charge of the investigation wanted more than the Rs 50,000 he had previously agreed to take in order to get him off the hook. Thakur Dabang said, "How is it possible that that police officer is daring to ask you so for much money?" At that point, a *pujari* who was in the room distributing *Prasad* to people in there said, "If the police officer does not do what you asked, break his bones! (*sarle ka taung tod dena*)." Thakur Dabang responded gravely that there would be no need for violence. He said, "Just mention my name. It will be enough." And then repeated it, "Just give my name."

What we describe above illustrates how politicians routinely undermine the rule of law. Party bosses protected people involved in both legal and illegal activities, a practice interchangeably referred to as "sewa" (social work) or "goondagardi" (criminal work). The SP party name and its "goonda" credentials are consistently used to extort favours. Sometimes merely having a Yadav name or dropping the name of a particular leader lends credibility to an act of intimidation. Importantly, an enforcer can merely issue threats without having to act upon them. As Bola Bhaia (the neighbourhood local dabang) told me, "After all it is not what you do and how criminal and violent you are. What counts is what people believe you are capable

of protecting. It is people who make you a dabang not the other way around." Later that same day in Thakur Dabang's headquarters some party workers came to ask Thakur Dabang whether they should intensify their election campaign in X Tehsil. Oddly enough Thakur Dabang told them not to, and the party workers looked puzzled given that only a few weeks remained until polling. Why Thakur Dabang was not campaigning only became clear to me a couple of weeks later when someone at the company told me it was no use spending money on elections when your party stood no chance of winning. He said, "You keep the money allocated for the election campaign and you make more money by selling votes from your protected areas to the two main contending candidates. This is a business strategy. Since last August after the riots it was clear that BJP was taking over UP."

Others have alleged that Thakur Dabang was already moving his own company under the protection of the BJP (he used to be with the BJP, although actually he has moved across all available parties over the past 20 years). The dabangs' relation with "the Yadav Parivar" is volatile and their loyalty unpredictable, particularly when approaching elections herald a shift in power at the provincial level. At such moments, dabangs will often deliver votes from their protected areas to whatever party they believe might come to power. In order to do this, they both threaten and cajole voters and bribe and intimidate booth-level and police officers in order to try and rig elections. This is particularly true of village council (*panchayat*), block *samiti*[13] and municipal elections during which the highly politicised provincial administration runs elections.

Dabangs keep votes captive through local vote contractors, musclemen who are often village councillors (*sarpanch*) or municipal councillors in town and who have detailed knowledge of voting patterns at their local polling booths. Importantly the "vote contractors" often wield authority in Khap Panchayats—informal bodies that adjudicate caste disputes[14]—and use the threat of ostracism to ensure that people vote according to their dictates. We have

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[13]    The block *samiti* is the level above the village council and below district level, and a block is usually comprised of a number of villages.

[14]    Informal caste *panchayat*s are to be distinguished from formal *panchayat*s, which are a formal part of the Indian state.

been told that this threat is even more effective than that of physical punishment. As in the Punjab (see below), vote contractors can find out who people voted for through rumours and by analysing booth-wise polling results. This leads to what Stokes (2005:315) calls perverse accountability, a phenomenon whereby voters can be held accountable and punished for voting for the "wrong" party.[15]

Moreover, contractors who fail to deliver are themselves often punished. In the previous district council (*Zila Parishad*) elections, we met a contractor who had failed to deliver and was, as a consequence, beaten up so badly that he was hospitalised and had to walk with crutches for months thereafter. On another occasion, while we waited to meet a local *dabang*, we saw party workers planning an attack on a vote contractor who was flirting with two political parties at the same time. Subsequently, the man and three of his aides ended up hospitalised. This shows again how the relation between political bosses and their musclemen is not straightforward (*cf.* Gayer, 2014) in a competitive environment and does not follow conventional, more stable forms of patron–client relations.

**"Monopolistic Mafia Raj" in a tehsil in the Punjab**

The Punjabi context presents some stark contrasts with that of UP. Here, the number of MLAs with criminal records is 17% instead of 35%.[16] Moreover, among those MLAs with criminal records only 4% have serious pending criminal cases, as opposed to 19% in UP. It is only recently, long after the term gained currency in Bihar and UP, that the term "Mafia Raj" has become common in Punjabi media. The "Mafia Raj" in the Punjab bears the mark of the authoritarian police state that emerged from the counter-insurgency period and lacks the more fragmented and dispersed attributes that characterise it in Uttar Pradesh. However, "Mafia Raj" in the Punjab is also closely associated with the Indian real estate boom. Moreover, the term "Mafia Raj" also appears to stick to one party in particular: The SAD, a party that much like the SP is dominated by a 'martial' community, the Jat Sikhs. Jat Sikh nationalists frequently claim that while the party was once ideologically driven and devoted to the cause of Punjabi

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[15]     Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement has been campaigning to eliminate results by polling booth but political parties have opposed it, presumably because it does away with an important mechanism through which they can monitor voters.

[16]     See http://adrindia.org/sites/default/files/Combined%20MLAs.pdf .

nationalism and the defence of the Sikh faith, it has now become a mercenary party whose leaders are mainly concerned with the expansion of their private businesses. Recently, both vernacular and English-language papers have described the "mafianisation" of Punjabi politics, but few scholars—with the notable exception of S. S. Gill (2013)—have paid any systematic attention to the issue.

The 2014 victory of four candidates from the Aam Admi Party (Common Man Party)—a party with a strong anti-corruption agenda—in the Malwa region was widely seen as an indictment of Akali "Mafia Raj", racketeering, high-handedness and general arrogance. The press identified Akali protection of and involvement in the state's flourishing drug trade, the artificially-created shortage of sand by a politically-connected "sand-mafia", and the corruption and politicisation of the police—as well as of the broader administration—as the principal causes of popular discontent. The latter was of particular concern ever since the ruling party placed local police station heads (SHOs) under the direct control of MLAs. Also affecting the party's popularity were the widespread allegations that the party leadership have forcefully acquired shares in a number of businesses in the state, ranging from media outlets to roadside *dhaba*s (restaurants), and bus services to commercial property and industry. Businessmen who refuse to pay tribute to the party leadership and likewise refuse to pledge their political allegiance to it soon face bureaucratic hurdles that cause their businesses to shut down, and the police allegedly harass transporters whose business competes with that of the chief minister's family. Here, too, we find that state officials are using their position to extort "protection" money from people. People who refuse to pay tribute find themselves harassed by the bureaucracy and by the police, and in some cases even physically intimidated by thugs, as in Western UP. A single family dominates the SAD, rather than a large extended clan, as in the case of the SP, and the reigns of power are clearly held in the hands of the chief minister, who runs a disciplined party machine (see Singh, 2013) manned by an army of party workers. While unlike in Uttar Pradesh politicians are not necessarily individuals with criminal records, the party does protect *goonda*s. However, SAD rule in the Punjab resembles the previous rule of the Bahujan Samaj Party and of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh more closely than it does SP's rule in that it firmly controls its *goonda*s and party workers. Moreover the SAD appears to be more cohesive than the SP because it mobilises both party workers and voters on the basis of religious ideology. While Pritam Singh (2014) has recently noted that the SAD has shifted its discourse towards development and away from divisive communal issues in order to lure pre-

dominantly urban Hindu voters, it is still common to hear lower-ranking party workers reminding their Jat Sikh constituents of the sacrilege committed against the Golden Temple by the Congress Party under Indira Gandhi. This emotive issue gains the support of a number of Jat Sikhs, particularly among an older generation who often claim that they will vote for the SAD regardless of its performance for the sake of the Sikh faith and to oppose the Congress party. Further, while Akali party workers also sometimes shift their political allegiances, they seem less likely to do so than their Samajwadi Party counterparts because the Akalis are believed to punish defectors by harassing them and embroiling them in fake police charges.

Overall, our material indicates that political loyalties are clearer than in Western Uttar Pradesh. In Tehsil X, unlike in Western UP, everyone knows where the power really lies. The local MLA and cabinet minister, a man of immense wealth with family and business ties in North America and a family friend of the chief minister, is clearly in charge. People flock to his palatial home—stocked with a retinue of Mercedes cars and 4x4s—in order to attend daily court sessions over which he presides like a deity with the power to miraculously resolve seemingly intractable problems with a single phone call. Surrounded by two personal assistants and several heavily armed policemen, he calls land record officers, policemen, electricity board officers and government doctors. Among other things, people obtain jobs, cripples obtain wheelchairs, school fees are waived, and police investigations are influenced in their favour. The minister works indefatigably to resolve people's minutest problems. Whatever its failures, the local Akali leadership cannot be accused of being absent and not working for its supporters. In fact, the local minister appears omnipresent, an appearance clearly reinforced by the fact that framed pictures of him adorn the walls of all his party workers.

The party can, however, be accused of extreme partiality towards its supporters and of victimising its opponents. Anyone who needs administrative or police help is expected to support the SAD and to do so publicly by swearing their allegiance in Sikh temples (*Gurudwara*) and Hindu temples. While, unlike in the case of the SP workers described above, the MLA does not threaten his own supporters and the atmosphere at his headquarters is generally convivial, he does threaten opponents and even commands party workers to thrash them. While we never saw this in person, people showed us videos of him issuing such commands on their mobile phones, and several Congressmen told us that he had ordered party workers to attack them.

He forced several Hindu brick-kiln owners in the tehsil headquarters of X to join the Akalis by threatening them with police and bureaucratic harassment for illegally using tractors

to transport their bricks. Akali brick-kiln owners who transported their bricks just as illegally had nothing to worry about; they were protected, just as a number of party workers involved in the lucrative illegal trade in opiates were. We were also told that having been forced to join the party, they were subsequently expected to provide it with funds in the form of donations to the local MLA. In rural areas, where Akalis dominated, wealthy Congressite Jats who controlled vote banks and who owned shellers (for husking and cleaning paddy) risked having their licences revoked, or, as we observed in one instance, not being allotted their due share of paddy for processing. These were all clear-cut cases of racketeering in which protection was granted in exchange for political loyalty and money.

The fact that the Akali government had given local politicians control over the local SHO made it easier than ever for party workers to intimidate voters and to file spurious FIRs against rivals and those who supported them. Throughout the countryside, Akali village councillors used their power to victimise opponents, filing fabricated or specious charges against village rivals; charges included illegally encroaching on village common spaces and lands, binding labourers through debt, committing an offence under the India Atrocities Act against a member of the Scheduled Castes, and even rape. Most frequently *sarpanche*s used their power to secure control over grant money and village common lands and deny their opponents access to these. In a number of cases, they were also instrumental in rigging *panchayat* and block *samiti* elections with the collusion of the police.

As elsewhere throughout the Punjab, it was a Youth Akal Dal leader who led the party's shock troops in Tehsil X. The local minister used him to organise rallies, rig local elections, and thrash rivals and, in exchange, shielded him from the police and allowed him to forcefully grab disputed properties, run gambling dens, traffic drugs, and forcefully settle personal scores. While Gurbachan himself was protected, he too sold protection services to people whose properties were disputed, but he was known to have turned against some of those who had hired him. One widow hired him to protect her against family members who were trying to get control over her property. Gurbachan managed to scare off the relatives, but subsequently turned on the widow and threatened her into signing her most valuable residential property over to him.

Lawyers in the divisional courts told us that despite his crimes, Gurbachan Singh had no pending cases against him. However, they also indicated that he was only able to act thanks to the support of the local MLA, and that the day the MLA decided that he was too much of a liability he would probably land in jail as other Youth Akali Dal toughs had in the past. Since

he depended on the MLA's support, Gurbachan could not do whatever he pleased and had already been significantly reigned in by 2013. Prior to this, he was known to have randomly beaten up people in the streets for the mere fact of daring to look at him. However, the MLA only reined him in after Hindu traders came to complain about how Gurbachan had threatened one of them at gunpoint because of a relatively minor argument.

In our Punjab tehsil then, *goonda*s were more clearly controlled than their counterparts in Western UP. Moreover, unlike in UP where it was not clear which *goonda* had party support, people knew exactly who had party support and who did not. It was well known that Gurbachan was the main *goonda* in Tehsil X. Unlike the *dabang*s in Uttar Pradesh, however, no-one thought it likely that he would ever become an MLA or an MP. Media attention on crime and corruption meant that Akali politicians needed to appear clean and a tainted record was a liability. Further, perhaps the predominance of wealthy established Jats with family ties and business interests abroad within the party meant that, unlike in Uttar Pradesh, where members of lower and intermediate castes had risen to power, more genteel forms of respectability held sway.

The brother of the local MLA was, for example, repeatedly refused a party ticket because of his bad reputation as the patron of local toughs. While the party clearly needed him and allowed him to wield power unofficially, they did not want him in the limelight. For the most part, the party sought to keep its criminal activities hidden and used people without official positions—like the local MLA's younger brother—or lower-ranking workers like Gurbachan to do its dirty work.

Gurbachan Singh was a Jat Sikh from a village a couple of miles from X and had caught the local MLA's attention because he belonged to a large and politically active extended kinship group of Akali "refugees"—Jat Sikhs who migrated from West Punjab at Partition—and because of his forceful reputation and willingness to do the party's dirty work. The extended kinship group, united through ties of descent and affinity, included block *samiti* members and ex-chairmen, market committee members, co-operative society presidents, *sarpanche*s, Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandak Committee (SGPC)[17] members, and, crucially, the personal assistant of the local MLA. The latter was the son of a powerful party worker who was widely known for protecting drug traffickers and distillers from the police in exchange for votes, and

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[17]     The SGPC manages Sikh Gurudwaras and its their significant revenues.

occasionally for money. United, this large group was able to deliver a large number of votes to the local MLA and received significant political patronage in exchange.

As in Western Uttar Pradesh kinship was clearly central to political mobilisation and organisation. However, unlike in Western Uttar Pradesh where the term "company" showed how public and private interests were openly merged, the refugees merely referred to themselves as a "group" and described themselves as public servants (*sevadar*s). This indicates that corruption and crime could not be flaunted as openly as they were in Western Uttar Pradesh. Displays of force were also somewhat more muted than in Uttar Pradesh, and when party workers like Gurbachan overdid things they were reigned in. On the other hand, party workers did flaunt their influence, contacts and wealth as these allowed them to be perceived as effective politicians and thereby garner votes. Poor politicians lacking these assets were widely perceived as unable to do people's work (*logon ka kaam*).

Gurbachan Singh started his political career during his college days when he was a *kabaddi* player. During those days he proved his worth in several fights against rival student groups and eventually defeated rival contenders to student union leadership. People who knew him from his college days told me he was always getting into fights. However, the feat that permanently established him as the biggest *goonda* in X was his capture and subsequent sale of the abovementioned widow's urban property. Like the *dabang*s in Western UP, Gurbachan was involved in property dealing and specialised not only in selling protection to people whose properties were disputed, but also in the sale and purchase of disputed properties. Most commonly disputes arise when a tenant who has possession over a property refuses to pay rent and/or vacate it. Because of laws protecting tenants, it is difficult—and in some cases even impossible—to evict them. People like Gurbachan help people evict and threaten wayward tenants for a fee, but also help prevent the illegal encroachment of people's property. Additionally, property speculators like Gurbachan also buy disputed properties for a third of their value, sort out the dispute with money and/or force, and then sell them off for their full value.

While Gurbachan's notorious feats were widely discussed, other Akali party workers, including close relatives of his, also used their influence to take control of communal property both in town and in the villages. Upon gaining office the mayor of X sold significant amounts

of urban property to associates in the SAD,[18] and allowed some of Gurbachan's relatives to grab some shops in the centre of town where they set up fertiliser and commission agent businesses. In villages, where most of the fieldwork was conducted, the most common land grab was of village commons (*shamlaat zameen*), which like all other land had become a coveted asset.

Gurbachan's ties with the authorities and his role as a "vote contractor" became clear when we saw him and several young men—mostly relatives from his own village and neighbouring ones—capturing the polling station in his home village of Mial Khurd during the block *samiti* elections of 2013. The event and what happened subsequently clearly illustrate how the Akalis could forcefully extract tribute in the form of votes and how they unleashed the full force of the state against those who refused to pay it. On that day Gurbachan and his men had denied the opposition Congressites entry into the polling station, and when I reached the village the latter were amassed a hundred or so metres away from it shouting "Death to the Akali Dal!" (*Akali Dal Murdabad*). Inside the polling station, Gurbachan and his brothers were feeding the polling officers large plates of rich food—flat-breads soaked in clarified butter, an assortment of curried vegetables and lentils, pickles and large metal tumblers filled with cool yoghurt drink (*lassi*). The previous night I had seen members of Gurbachan's extended family offering polling officers and policemen bottles of whisky at three polling stations. The officers had accepted, although some had at first weakly refused in order not to look greedy.

Just after the officers had eaten, the Congressites decided to take on the Akalis. The latter, who were more numerous and had swords and metal rods ready at hand, got the upper hand and beat the Congressites so badly that they sent two of them to hospital. The ten or so police officers present at the polling station did nothing to stop them. That night PTC news channel—owned by the chief minister's family—broadcast Gurbachan's version of events and claimed that the Congressites had tried to disrupt otherwise peaceful elections. The local Congress leader, Sukhvinder Singh, claimed to have called several reporters but that none had wanted to report on actual events because they were scared of retribution by the ruling party.

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[18]     Opposition Congress town councillors told me that by doing this the mayor had effectively deprived the town of an important source of income. Prior to this, the municipal council had an income of some 70 lakhs, whereas it currently has an income of only 40 lakhs, which is not enough to cover the 65 lakhs required annually to even meet the costs of running the municipality.

He claimed that in most cases people did not even bother to contact reporters because they were either ignorant, or too scared to antagonise the Akalis, or simply because they had no faith in reporters who were believed to be in the pay of politicians or, in the best of cases, took money to write stories.[19]

Worse still, the Akalis placed charges for attempted murder against him and 11 Congressites, including those who had been hospitalised. Gurbachan used these to force the Congress leaders to step down in the forthcoming *panchayat* elections and allow him to become village *sarpanch* unopposed, without having to actually contest the elections. Sukhvinder Singh—who had close ties with the Punjab Congress leadership and was well informed about his party's standing—lamented how so many members of his party were stepping down and allowing Akalis to take over because they were afraid.

What happened to him and his close associates illustrates the fate of those who did not step down. When the Akalis had come to power for a second consecutive term, Gurbachan Singh had decided to teach Sukhvinder and his family a lesson. Gurbachan and his family were irked by Sukhvinder's political influence, and by the fact that it had made him Block Samiti Chairman during the last Congress government. They were also jealous about the fact that he had greatly prospered over the years by transforming 40 acres of jungle into fertile irrigated land. Sukhvinder's son told me they hated the fact that his father had been the first to build a large new house, and that he had been sent to an exclusive, elite school in Nabha. He claimed that Gurbachan's family—which he described as a bunch of illiterates (*unparh log*)—were constantly using black magic against him, and he alleged that Gurbachan had tried to destroy his family by getting his younger brother addicted to heroin. While not wanting to show that Gurbachan had in any way been successful, he admitted that the younger brother's drug addiction was a constant source of tension in the family. The brother did not work, spent lots of money on his addiction, and constantly fought with him and his parents.

Animosities reached a peak after the Akalis returned to power in 2012. One day, while the chairman's son was out in the fields supervising his labourers, 12 young men armed with iron rods and rifles assaulted him. His father, who was at home, saw what was happening, took

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[19]     While both the Punjabi- and English-language press underreported the extent of rigging, they did nevertheless report several cases.

out his rifle, and fired several shots into the air. Upon hearing the shots the attackers all ran away and subsequently went on to the police station to file charges for attempted murder against him and his father. Because the case against them was registered in the evening they were unable to obtain bail and had to spend one night in jail. Moreover the police, serving the interests of the Akalis, refused to register the chairman's case against the attackers. Fortunately, the sub-divisional judge rejected the Akali case and all charges were dropped. The chairman told us that while the judiciary was corrupt and inefficient it remained a largely independent institution, unlike the police.

Sukhvinder boasted that most other Congress party workers were not as fearless as he was. In another nearby village, Gurbachan had threatened an SC Congress candidate for the block *samiti* elections, telling him that if he did any campaigning he would beat him up. Like other Congress candidates throughout the Punjab, he had bowed down to the pressure although he had not shifted his allegiance over to the Akalis, unlike his associates who had been asked to pledge their allegiance to the party in the village Gurudwara. Like in other villages we visited, they had shifted over because they feared having fake police charges placed against them if they did not. Their fear was well founded, since one Congressman in their village had been falsely implicated in a rape case, and in another village a Ramdasia SC told me that he had been falsely implicated in a village brawl where he was not even present because he had refused to pledge his allegiance to the Akalis in the village the Gurudwara. In this latter village, the Akalis had made SC access to housing plots contingent upon them swearing allegiance to the party, and to the *sarpanch* who represented it locally. Those who did not do this were denied housing plots, and those who led them—like the above SC—were implicated in fake police charges.

Gurbachan and his allies also appear to have managed to get the police to rig *panchayat* elections for them in Mial Kalan Khurd (a twin village next to Mial Khurd). The Congress chairman told me that in this case the police did the rigging, rather than Gurbachan and his toughs, because his faction in the village was the more numerous one and would have been difficult to overcome. In fact, members of the chairman's faction all claim that their candidate obtained 309 votes, while the Akali candidate only obtained 70. However, the MLA's younger brother had promised to hand the village council over to the latter by hook or by crook, so he sent in the police and ensured his win. The Congressites' claim that their party had a strong lead is vindicated by the fact that four out of five council members (*panches*) elected in the village were from their party; this vindicates their claim because no-one votes for *panche*s from

one party and for a *sarpanch* from another. In other words the Congress' four *panche*s are evidence that the Congress candidate for *sarpanch* did, in fact, have the lead. Subsequently, while the Akali candidate did not obtain the quorum necessary to run the *panchayat*, it nevertheless appears that the local MLA gave him grants for village development. The chairman is nevertheless confident that as a result of the blatant rigging that took place in the village even loyal Akalis would reconsider their allegiance to the party.

**Conclusions**

While close ties between the political, business and criminal spheres are by no means new to India—nor to the rest of the world—our informants across the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh agree that these spheres are becoming increasingly intertwined and forming "Mafia Raj". Scholarly work on Indian politics likewise indicates that this is the case. In the Punjabi context, S. S. Gill (2014) has recently argued that business and politics are now more closely tied than they ever have been, while Jaffrelot and Kumar's (2009) longitudinal study of MLA profiles has demonstrated similar trends in the context of Uttar Pradesh. Both government officials and strongmen are providing illegal protection services and are doing so in response to a growing demand for protection produced by a violent scramble for valued economic assets.

In theory at least, the illegal market for protection is the preserve of groups operating on the margins or outside the state, while the legal market for protection is meant to be the preserve and monopoly of sovereign states. This paper shows how in two sites across North India this distinction collapsed, and illustrates how formal state agents, including elected and non-elected political leaders and the police, are increasingly involved, either directly or indirectly, in protecting illegal activities. At first glance the distinction appears to be more blurred in Western Uttar Pradesh where the Samajwadi Party openly admits bosses with "criminal" backgrounds than in the Punjab where the Shiromani Akali Dal subcontracts "*goondagardi*" (criminal work) to lower ranking party workers. However, a focus on "protection/extortion" makes it clear that both the SAD and the SP developed symbiotic relations with the state in order to run their economic and political activities (both the legal and the illegal ones). The nature of the party machines in question, and their capacity to monopolise violence shape "various types of interaction between political actors and violent entrepreneurs as well as various

modes of penetration of organised criminal violence within the political arena…."[20] Indeed, they produced different configurations of "mafia-owned democracy": a "competitive Mafia Raj" in Western Uttar Pradesh and "monopolistic Mafia Raj" in Punjab.[21]

The difference is that in the Punjab leaders can somewhat more credibly distance themselves from the henchmen within their parties' ranks. This is a useful reminder that illegal and para-legal activities in India are not the sole preserve of local vernacular forces, and also allows us to move away from narratives according to which criminal politics is the preserve of India's more overtly lawless and backwards districts, or of the vernacular forces of political society (Chatterjee, 2004).

We have also suggested that structures of inter- and intra-party competition can help explain how the demand and the imposition for protection are structured. We saw how, in Western Uttar Pradesh, multi-party competition—coinciding with communal and caste-based divides—contributed to produce highly violent forms of bossism and volatile environments. Intra-party competition arising from the SP's loose party structure and its integration of muscular bosses within the party's ranks further generated popular demand for protection by giving rise to insecurity. Furthermore, competing strongmen, both across parties and within the SP, vying for control over protection mean that people in Western UP are not only subject to the predatory activities of various contending bosses, but are also unable to determine who they need to approach if they need mediation with the authorities. As one informant said, "Nowadays people don't know whom they have to pay or whom they have to beat up in order to get things done: this is the Junglee Raj" (Rakesh, 35 years old, Jat, businessman). Revealingly, people do not criticise *dabang*s for being criminal and violent, but for the fact that they are unable to effectively provide the basic security that rulers are expected to. It is perhaps worth remembering here that a key duty of traditional kings is to maintain order (*dharma*) through the threat of violence and punishment (*danditi*). The king should inspire terror in order to deter

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[20]    Briquet and Fararel-Garrigues (2010:2).

[21]    In a similar fashion Armao characterises Italy as a *consociational "mafia-owned democracy"*: a regime based on cooperation between *mafiosi*, politicians and entrepreneurs. By contrast Mexican democracy is conceptualised as *centrifugal "mafia-owned democracy"* and characterised by strongly competitive behaviours between the various leaders involved and a much greater degree of violence compared to the Italian situation.

disruptive forces and thereby allow his subjects to live peacefully and to practice *ahimsa*. However, as is often repeated in Western UP, "People have no fear." This is what we choose to call a "competitive Mafia Raj".

On the other hand, in the Punjabi tehsil of X, the sense of insecurity is less pronounced because communal tensions within the Punjab have subsided, and electoral competition is largely restricted to two dominant parties that are increasingly reaching across communal and caste divides. It is also less pronounced because the SAD leadership is firmly in control of its operatives, and for the most part the only *goonda*s allowed to operate are the ones that clearly serve its interests. Additionally, the activities of these *goonda*s are set within strict limits and when they overstep these they are reigned in—as Gurbachan was following the incident in which he threatened a goldsmith at gunpoint. Furthermore, people know exactly where to go if they need assistance for police or bureaucratic matters. Here, the main victims of insecurity are members of the opposition and—like everywhere else in the world—the poor who lack political contacts and influence. Thus, in the Punjab, the only significant threat to citizens is the one produced by the ruling party, which happens to also provide the shield against this threat to those who pledge their loyalty and provide it with funds. Here, people do not complain so much about disorder as they do about dictatorship and frequently state that there is no democracy in the Punjab. We choose to call this a "monopolistic Mafia Raj".

We suggest that a "competitive Mafia Raj" allows for a transition from "criminal broker"/"goon" to "criminal politician" (the *dabang*) and thus potentially to greater levels of social mobility. By contrast, a "monopolistic Mafia Raj" generates less insecurity but is less amenable to newcomers entering the political fray and rising up the political hierarchy. This is apparent from the fact that most high-ranking politicians in the Punjab belong to very wealthy and upper-caste families and that the Scheduled Castes, despite forming a larger percentage of the population than any other group, have played only a marginal role in the state's politics. On the other hand, while UP's "competitive Mafia Raj" generates considerable insecurity, it allows forceful political entrepreneurs who do not belong to the traditional establishment to become MLAs and MPs and to, therefore, destabilise established power structures and patron–client ties. Overall, we hope to have shown that a grounded ethnographic description of pockets of "mafia-owned democracies" can help to construct systematic comparisons of different areas and generate a productive framework through which to refine empirically the concept of "mafia-owned democracy" within South Asia and beyond.

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