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The Rationality of Politics in Uttar Pradesh: Towards a Re-evaluation of the Concept of Factionalism

by

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'*Politics in Uttar Pradesh today is somewhat strange*.'[2]

'*…if the activists' behavior seemed strange, it is because one normally assumes that their behavior should make sense*.' (Tsebelis 1990: 237)

ABSTRACT

In this paper, competition between political actors in Uttar Pradesh (UP) is conceptualized as defying the commonly held assumptions on political behaviour in a democratic state. The party system in UP from 1993 onwards is characterized as a highly polarized and fragmented, but at the same time surprisingly stable tri-polar multi-party system, in which no party or alliance of parties is able to establish itself as a dominant political actor, primarily due to the parties' reliance on informal political networks. The argument aims at making a case for a re-evaluation of Brass' concept of factionalism (Brass 1965) with special reference to the changed and changing relationship between caste and state-level politics. It is argued that the behaviour of political actors at the state level is determined to a large extent by the process of alliance formation between communities at the constituency level aimed at establishing a favourable position for that community regarding access to state resources. In this process, community-based homogenous voting behaviour of several politically important social groups is linked to the formation and maintenance of political networks of support designed to maximize benefits for the political actors involved. Under these circumstances, and given the almost complete absence of ideological compulsions, political actors display a significant amount of flexibility in switching their loyalties between factions and parties. The use of caste in politics is conceptualized as primarily strategic and based on its relevant organizational properties.

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[2] Kalyan Singh, cited in Frontline 14 (23), Nov. 15-28, 1997.

INTRODUCTION

Politics in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest and politically most important state, is generally described by foreign and indigenous observers alike as a prime example of the crisis into which the Indian political system has slowly descended from the late 1960s onwards. Images of the often rather unruly behaviour of UP's legislators strengthen this impression as much as the apparent instability of its coalition governments since the breakdown of one party dominance. Meanwhile the state is entering into a fiscal crisis that is bound to reduce the state's economical development even further. At the same time Uttar Pradesh is witnessing what Yadav (2000) calls the 'second democratic upsurge', indicating a significant increase in the political participation and representation of lower social groups and at least the western part of UP still figures prominently on the list of India's prosperous surplus producing agricultural regions. Political scientists generally describe these developments as the result of a process of deinstitutionalization and 'reinstitutionalization' due to the rise of traditionally 'backward' groups in society that effectively challenged established patterns of political hegemony (Frankel/Rao 1990; Kohli 1990; Hasan 1998; Chhibber 1999). These descriptions are based on applications of the cleavage model (Lipset/Rokkan 1967) highlighting the importance of caste and community identities in UP and India, but fail to explain the apparent lack of 'principles' (both in a moral and in an ideological respect) and the high level of flexibility that has become almost a trademark of political leadership in UP.

Politics in Uttar Pradesh since the 1990s has paradoxically been characterized by the coexistence of governmental instability and a highly fragmented and polarized, but at the same time stable party system that defies all attempts at classification using generally accepted concepts of political science. Since the overall situation of UP in comparison to developments in other Indian states can justifiably be regarded as the result of a 'somewhat extreme version of … 'pure politics'' (Hasan 2001: 4008) it is to be expected that an analysis of the political actors, their strategies and the structural constraints that determine them is capable of providing significant insights into the reasons and origins of the present 'crisis' and the functioning of the political system in Uttar Pradesh in general. Using a combination of Brass' concept of factionalism (Brass 1965) and the theory of citizen-elite linkages in party systems (Lawson 1980) I will argue that politics in Uttar Pradesh has to be seen as a rational and stable process that is based primarily on highly flexible networks of patronage-oriented relationships between politicians and social intermediaries, where the principal aim of political actors is to maximize individual gains.[3]

[3] This approach is thus similar in many ways to Mitra's characterization of political actors as *entrepreneurs* (Mitra 1992).

Given the plurality of party systems and political practices in India, comparative studies are in danger of becoming mired in regional sub-contexts. To reduce the level of complexity I will focus exclusively on Uttar Pradesh. While the results of an analysis limited to one Indian state cannot be generalized for the Indian political system as a whole, it can be assumed that, given UP's lack of specifically regional cultural characteristics (Brass 1965: 8) and its relative political importance in comparison to other states, political developments there exemplify trends elsewhere in India to a large degree.

In this study I will first turn to a description of the functioning of political networks based mainly on an evaluation of the importance of caste (*jati*) for politics in UP. The validity of the hypothesis is then tested against the two political developments in Uttar Pradesh that are the most difficult to explain using a cleavage approach: (1) the frequent formation and breakdown of political alliances between political parties, and (2) the inability of the BJP to contain its internal power struggles, even though these were expected to diminish its electoral appeal to a significant degree and led to a breakdown of the social coalition created during the Ayodhya and *Mandal* controversies.[4]

CASTE AND POLITICAL NETWORKS IN UTTAR PRADESH

Several authors argue that caste[5] has become the predominant factor in UP politics after the breakdown of one party dominance, replacing both sectoral and communal issues that are said to have dominated the 1980s and early 1990s (Varshney 1995: 4-5; Chhibber 1999: 157). It is not the political use of *jati* that is seen as a new development, but rather its relative importance compared to other issues (Hasan 2002: 376). On the other hand, Gupta (2000: 148-176) is cautioning political scientists against reducing the complexity of Indian politics to simple caste arithmetic.

Given the primarily local character of caste it should be expected that the importance of caste is highest at this level of the political system. Srinivas (1962) argues that the functioning of caste in politics has to be seen primarily in form of so-called dominant castes, i.e. usually the numerically large and landholding upper and middle castes that use traditional social and economical dependencies to gain control of the political process at the local level. Kothari (1970) argues that numerical majority is not a necessary precondition for political control, given some communities' social and economical status and their tendency to block other castes' access to positions of power. He describes the politically dominant communities as 'entrenched castes', but also recognizes the importance of

[4] The terms Ayodhya and *Mandal* are commonly used to describe the two highly emotive political disputes that dominated the political discourse between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s and accompanied the decline of the Congress party and the rise of the BJP. 'Ayodhya' refers to the *Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid* dispute, i.e. the controversy on the legitimacy built in the early Mughal period at the alleged birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. '*Mandal*' is generally used as a reference to the issue of reservations in public sector employment and higher educational institutions for OBCs.

[5] In this study I use the term 'caste' as an equivalent to the term '*jati*.'

so-called ascendant castes that challenge the formers' monopoly as regards control of the political system.

Chhibber (1999: 146-157) argues that in Uttar Pradesh the purely local political character of caste was terminated in the 1990s due to the use the *Mandal* report by political parties, which thus created a new cleavage and divided society politically in three large caste blocks: Dalits, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Upper Castes, represented in parliament by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) respectively. There are some noteworthy difficulties with this approach: While the overall significance of the *Mandal* controversy is generally agreed upon, voting patterns in UP do not correspond to this model of social stratification. Given the altogether rather marginal impact of reservation policies on economic development for large sections of society (Weiner 2001: 205) this approach tends to stress issues of identity politics vis-à-vis material interests that centre on access to the state as an instrument of patronage. Moreover, it has to be noted that identity (especially in rural areas) is defined to a large extent by community membership, i.e. membership in a single *jati*, not by large aggregates.

The heterogeneity of voting patterns in these large caste blocks is best seen in the OBC category in the 1990s, where the BJP and SP gained an almost equal share and a large part of the OBC vote actually went to small parties or independents.

Table 1: Voting Behaviour of OBCs in the 1999 *Lok Sabha*-Elections in UP

	Total	SP	BJP	BSP	Congress
Respondents	442	119	108	42	31
Percentage	100.00	26.92	24.43	9.50	7.01

(Source: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) pre-election survey 1999. Note that the figures in this survey do not correspond to the actual overall election results, where the SP fared better and the Congress worse.)

These figures largely correspond to data provided for most elections throughout the 1990s and for the *Vidhan Sabha*-elections 2002 (Misra 1993; Verma 2002). Only in the 1996 elections did the Samajwadi Party gain a significantly larger share of the OBC vote (India Today, May 31, 1996).

An analysis of the voting behaviour of some politically important communities in Uttar Pradesh shows that the general impression of the three major parties representing the Upper Castes, OBCs and Dalits respectively is primarily a result of these communities' homogenous voting behaviour, but does not necessarily imply similarly homogenous voting patterns on the basis of caste or caste block membership throughout society.

Table 2: Community-wise Voting Behaviour in Uttar Pradesh 1999 (%)

	Brahmins	Thakurs	Banias	Jats
BJP	66.3	53.5	75.6	44.0
SP	5.3	3.9	-	9.8
BSP	2.1	0.8	2.4	16.0
Congress	11.6	16.5	9.8	12.0
Others	16.7	25.3	12.2	18.2
	Yadavs	**Kurmis**	**Lodhs**	**Jatavs**
BJP	7.8	33.3	59.1	2.8
SP	63.7	12.8	4.5	3.4
BSP	2.9	3.8	-	69.9
Congress	2.0	3.8	4.5	12.5
Others	23.6	46.3	31.9	11.4

(Source: CSDS pre-election survey 1999.)

These communities comprise roughly 45-50 % of the population in UP. Muslims, who are seen in this study as a religious community transcending caste identity, show a similarly homogenous voting behaviour favouring either the Samajwadi Party or the Congress.[6] Some numerically relatively insignificant communities also show rather homogenous voting patterns, but for most communities this is not the case. There is no clear relationship between the occurrences of community-wise homogenous voting behaviour and social, educational or economic status attributed generally to certain communities. This indicates that homogenous voting is less a result of policy preferences or identity, but a strategic political decision.

The most important aspect common to all communities listed above is their numerical strength at least on a sub-regional level, which enables them to influence election results in a meaningful way. If communities do not vote homogenously at the state level, it does not necessarily have to be because of a lack of politicization, but might also indicate a lack of numerical strength or regional concentration, which prevents or hinders the development of community-based political strategies apart from association with the locally dominant groups. Since even dominant groups in UP generally do not have sufficient political strength to determine election results on their own, the ability to accommodate politically less organized or less important groups, again, constitutes one of the most important aspects in the process of alliance formation at the local level. Economic, educational or social status are important aspects in so far as they can further a community's ability to build local alliances capable of determining electoral competition.

At the local or district/constituency level the factors leading to community-wise homogenous voting patterns correspond largely to Kothari's characterization of

[6] Due to specific political circumstances at the time it was conducted the CSDS survey indicates a higher proportion of Muslim support for the Congress than the SP. In the overall situation since 1993, it is nonetheless to be expected that the Samajwadi Party gets a higher share of Muslim votes than the Congress.

entrenched and ascendant castes.[7] It is important to stress that this concept is based on the organizational aspects of caste in society and politics under circumstances, where the principal aim of political participation is seen as gaining access to state resources, and which is not based on identity or class-specific interests. If seen from the point of view of competing communities references to *jati* in politics thus constitute a strategic instrument in gaining access to scarce resources by establishing dominant political alliances at the constituency level.

If seen from the point of view of political parties the reliance on caste in a competitive electoral political system, too, has to be regarded as a means to political power. While community identity certainly plays an important role in political mobilisation, it also provides an instrument to prop up the relatively weak organizational wings of parties in Uttar Pradesh, especially given the low level of membership in politically independent secondary associations capable of acting as pressure groups (Chhibber 1999: 69; Kohli 1990: 188-191). Community-wise homogenous voting, moreover, enables politicians to focus the flow of patronage on supportive communities and thus increases the efficiency of an electoral political system based primarily on the reciprocal exchange of votes for patronage.

In tables 1 and 2 it was shown that there are significant empirical difficulties in characterising political competition in UP as a cleavage system based on caste or larger groups of castes. Instead, it was proposed that caste is politically relevant in Uttar Pradesh mainly because of its organizational properties enabling the formation of political alliances at the constituency level. Gupta (2000: 171-176) argues in his critique of the prominent use of caste by political scientists that the high instability of electoral outcomes especially at this level indicates the relatively low importance of caste vis-à-vis other political issues. The argument is convincing, if an analysis is reduced to simple 'caste arithmetic'. On the other hand, instability of electoral outcomes can be seen as the result of the high flexibility of communities and parties in the process of competitive alliance formation, which is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Held Seats Lost, Newly Won and Retained Seats in the *Vidhan Sabha*-elections 2002

	BJP	SP	BSP	Congress	Others
Held Seats Lost	100	50	33	27	20
Retained Seats	54	59	29	4	27
Newly Won Seats	34	84	69	21	22

(Source: Verma 2002)

The low rate of success of sitting candidates shown in table 3 is generally interpreted as an indication of the relatively low level of institutionalization of the

[7] Given the political strength of socially disadvantaged communities like Jatavs and Yadavs in contemporary Uttar Pradesh a continued distinction between entrenched and ascendant castes seems unnecessary, unless it refers to communities whose political importance is not yet established.

party system in UP. This is at odds with the overall stability of the party system since 1993, which can be measured through the aggregate number of seats and vote shares of the 3 main parties.

Table 4: Aggregate Number of Seats and Vote Share of BJP, SP and BSP since 1993

	1993	1996	2002
Seats	352 (83.4)	351 (82.6)	329 (81.8)
Vote Share (%)	62.4	73.9	68.7

(Source: Election Commission of India 1993; 1996a; 2002. The figures in parentheses indicate the percentages of seats in the *Vidhan Sabha* held by the three main parties.)

If seen as indicators of party system institutionalization and stability, table 3 and table 4 show a paradox situation of a low level of institutionalization at the constituency level coexisting with a highly stable and institutionalized party system at the state level. The situation is compounded even further, since the high flexibility shown by the voters at the constituency level is not the result of increased polarisation between the winning and the second (or even third) candidates. Instead, there is a marked tendency of reduced average vote shares by all main candidates.

Table 5: Average Vote Shares of Candidates (%) 1996-2002

	1st Candidate	2nd Candidate	3rd Candidate	Others
1996	40.56	30.61	20.91	7.92
1998	39.68	31.28	20.03	9.01
1999	36.55	29.26	19.87	14.32
2002	35.01	27.10	18.35	19.54

(Calculations based on Election Commission of India 1996a; 1998; 1999; 2002.)

If politics in UP is seen as based primarily on issues of caste identity, the emergence of a stable, polarised party system, and, given the decreasing average vote shares of the main candidates, the establishment of successful alternative parties should have been expected. This has not been the case. Neither the Congress nor newly founded parties like Apna Dal (AD) or Kalyan Singh's Rashtriya Kranti Party (RKP) have been able to successfully challenge the predominance of the three main parties. The high instability of voting behaviour at the constituency level and the overall loss of the main candidates' vote share have to be seen not as results of caste-based identity politics, but in the light of the organizational properties of caste vis-à-vis political competition.

Chhibber (1999: 60-61) argues that so-called caste associations play an altogether relatively minor role in politics and are not likely to act as effective pressure groups on parties. Apart from formal associations caste is seen to affect

politics rather informally. In compliance with Brass' description of political factions in Uttar Pradesh (Brass 1965), it can be argued that caste allows the establishment of informal networks of relationships between communities and politicians, but (under the prevailing circumstances) not of stable patterns of support that characterize cleavages. The informality of these networks reduces the associational compulsions of electoral politics to a degree that allows both politicians and community leaders a high level of flexibility in alliance formation. The rationality of political behaviour is not focussed on parties, but centred on sub-groups of political actors defined primarily by caste membership. Alliance formation at the constituency level corresponds to Riker's concept of minimal winning coalitions (Riker 1962), but these minimal winning coalitions do not necessarily have to be based on stable party loyalties of either politicians or community leaders. The inability of the major parties (and especially the BJP) to prevent internal leadership conflicts led to a significant increase in party system fragmentation from the late 1990s onwards that can be measured through the effective number of parties at the constituency level.[8]

Table 6: Effective Number of Parties in Uttar Pradesh (Constituency-wise) 1996-2002

1996	1998	1999	2002
3.24	3.27	3.67	4.10

(Calculations based on Election Commission of India 1996a; 1998; 1999; 2002.)

The decrease in winning candidates' vote shares indicates a related decrease in the size of alliances expected to be minimally winning at the constituency level.
Given the patronage-oriented nature of politics in Uttar Pradesh the decreasing size of minimal winning coalitions actually increases the gains expected by political actors, especially community leaders. Under these circumstances, homogenous voting behaviour of some communities forms an effective instrument in establishing political predominance. The strength of the three major parties in Uttar Pradesh rests mainly in their ability to maintain their support from networks consisting of some specific politically important communities. The inability of smaller parties to challenge the three parties' dominance effectively is related to these communities' continued support, which prevents to a large degree the formation of alternative minimal winning coalitions.
At the same time, political competition based on community-wise homogenous voting behaviour and relatively small minimal winning coalitions offers significant incentives for defections from previously established alliances, thus leading to increasing instability at the local or constituency level. At the state level the triangular character of the party system results in a lack of clear parliamentary

[8] The effective number of parties is measured according to Laakso and Taagepera (1979) as $1/\Sigma\ p_i^2$ with p as the decimal vote percentages of all parties i either in the constituencies or in the legislature. It thus provides an indication of the number of relevant political parties.

majorities, unless two of the three main parties cooperate. Incentives for defection of legislators are high, but given the continued predominance of the main parties based on the electoral support of key communities, gains from defections are generally rather short-termed.[9] This explains the ostensibly rather paradoxical situation of a stable party system, but a highly instable process of government formation.

I have used the relatively neutral term communities, since political networks in Uttar Pradesh do not necessarily have to be based on caste membership alone. Brass (1965) stresses the relevance of factions, i.e. political networks based on personal loyalties rather than issues or identities. The strategic use of religious identities has been well documented (Freitag 1989; Basu 2001; Jaffrelot 1998a; Dyke 1997). Varshney (1995: 118-120) highlights the importance of agrarian identity in the campaigns of the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU) and the various organizations of Charan Singh. It is generally expected that the formation of political networks involves several factors simultaneously, including (most explicitly during the *Mandal* controversy) caste block solidarities.

The role of communities in politics in UP should be differentiated from that of so-called vote banks in the period of one party-dominance. The complexity and flexibility of political networks allow a significant degree of freedom to manoeuvre, which can be used in the process of political bargaining by several communities (or their leaders), irrespective of traditional social hierarchies and economic dependence.

In the following sections the hypothesis that political competition in Uttar Pradesh is based on informal political networks originating from the constituency level is tested against two cases: the regular breakdown of political alliances between major parties and the inability of the BJP to maintain the electoral support gained during the Ayodhya campaigns in the early 1990s.

THE FORMATION AND BREAKDOWN OF COALITIONS IN UTTAR PRADESH

The frequency of so-called hung assemblies in Uttar Pradesh since the breakdown of one party-dominance ensured the formation of several coalitions in the state from 1989 onwards, which varied widely in their degree of formality.[10] In fact, if the support given to the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led governments between 1989 and 1991 is included, alliances have been formed between all important parties, except between the BJP and the Congress. With the exception of the period between 1991 and 1992 all governments were either coalitions or minority governments. No government in Uttar Pradesh lasted its full term. The BJP-led coalition government

[9] This can be seen in the case of the BSP, whose parliamentary wing split in 1995, 1997 and 1998, but which still managed to consolidate or strengthen its position in all succeeding elections.

[10] Since the impact of alliances between political parties on state politics is clearly unrelated to their degree of formality the term coalition is used in this study as referring to all kinds of institutionalized support between parties, including informal seat adjustments or outside support to minority governments.

between late 1997 and early 2002 was the longest-lasting by far, but was headed by three different Chief Ministers and was replaced under dubious circumstances for a few days in early 1998 by a minority government of its smaller coalition partners.

To reduce the level of complexity I will focus in this study on coalitions between the three major parties in Uttar Pradesh. Given India's first-past-the-post electoral system political scientists would generally assume the emergence of a bipolar party system. Sridharan (1997: 10-12; 2002: 490-491) argues that this is, in fact, the case in most Indian states, if party systems are analysed at the constituency level, but expressly cites UP as a case which does not correspond to Duverger's Law. Wyatt (1998) analyses the lack of alliance formation in the 1998 *Lok Sabha* elections using Riker's concept of minimal winning coalitions. According to him the lack of cooperation especially between the two weaker parties (SP and BSP) has to be seen as the result of long-term strategic interests of both parties, aiming towards elimination of the other. Both authors are concerned primarily with pre-electoral alliances, especially since the lack of these defies generally held assumptions of political scientists.

On the other hand, if the lack of pre-electoral alliances is explained as a result of strategic or policy-related incompatibilities between the parties, the frequent formation and short duration of post-electoral alliances poses an equally interesting puzzle. If the parties in any post-electoral situation saw advantages in alliance formation despite incompatibilities that prevented a pre-electoral coalition, why did these alliances generally break up within a short period? If party incompatibilities are issue-based (rather than indicating mere political strategy) and parties did cooperate in spite of these incompatibilities, a decision leading to a highly instable process of government formation and to a state of governance pre-occupied to a large degree with questions of coalition maintenance, why does the party system remain altogether stable showing no signs of an emergence of new alternatives? The argument proposed here is that the puzzle of alliance formation in Uttar Pradesh can be conceived as a rational process, if the primary concern of politics in UP is regarded as one determined by the formation and maintenance of coalitions based on informal networks linking politicians and community leaders.

All political alliances between major political parties since 1993 were formed primarily to prevent one of the contending parties to achieve a dominant position in the party system. In this regard all these alliances proved surprisingly successful in spite of their short durations. The SP-BSP alliance remains the only pre-electoral alliance between the three major parties in any general election since 1993. The alliance successfully prevented the BJP from coming to power once again. What is more, both parties established themselves as powerful political contenders in UP especially vis-à-vis the Congress and the *Janata Dal* (JD). The following post-poll coalition was heralded by many observers as the eclipse of *Mandal* politics, the unification of the lower castes to challenge the traditional upper caste hegemony. At the same time, it seemed to indicate that the BJP's efforts at social engineering through communal mobilization had not succeeded in gaining the support of the socially lower-rated Hindu communities. Within a few months, however, the

coalition entered into an enduring crisis that finally led to its collapse in early June 1995.[11]

It is clear that instead of being an issue-based coalition of the lower castes and minorities the principal interest shared by the two parties was a common desire to establish itself in the party system. In the circumstances of 1993 both parties, moreover, perceived the BJP and the Congress to be their main political enemies. The latter's disintegration and the BJP's stagnation removed this common thread and led to a situation, where both partners aimed at emerging as the only viable alternative to the BJP. From the outset both parties chose to achieve this through confrontation (Jaffrelot 1998b). The definite refusal to cooperate is difficult to explain using a cleavage model, since both parties had proved to be capable of mobilizing their respective supporters and the alliance had proved to be rather successful not only in the 1993 general elections, but also in several by-elections afterwards (Pai 2000: 87).[12]

The coalition can be depicted as a game where at least one player's payoffs resemble a deadlock situation.

Figure 1: Depiction of the SP-BSP Coalition as a 2-Person Game

		SP: C	SP: D
BSP	C	3	1
	D	4	2

The players' preferences (payoffs) are marked in descending order for the row player and in ascending order for the column player, i.e. the most preferred outcome is marked with the highest number for the BSP and the lowest for the SP. The payoffs depicted in this game indicate the following cases:
C/C: The coalition continues with both players cooperating. The alliance is likely to establish itself as the dominant political formation in Uttar Pradesh. The BSP establishes its position within the alliance vis-à-vis the SP.
C/D: The SP emerges as the principal alternative to the BJP. If the alliance continues, the BSP is reduced gradually to the role of a junior partner.
D/C: The BSP gradually increases its strength vis-à-vis the SP. If the alliance continues, the BSP emerges as the principal alternative to the BJP.
D/D: The coalition collapses. Given its previous dominance, the SP expects to be able to establish itself as the principal alternative to the BJP. The BSP has to form an alliance against the SP to secure its position in the party system.
Note that D/D is the only stable case in this game. In all other cases one player gains an incentive to switch strategies, if the game is played repeatedly.

Temporary cooperation between the two parties can be explained through the use of Tsebelis' concept of nested games (Tsebelis 1990), indicating that both

[11] The SP-BSP alliance still remains the most successful coalition between two major parties in UP in terms of continuation in office (18 months).
[12] Srivastava (1996) argues in his study of Kanpur constituency that there was only a negligible vote transfer between Dalits and OBCs in favour of the SP-BSP alliance's common candidates. Still, the alliance managed to emerge as the primary choice for Muslim voters and can thus be seen as at least moderately compatible.

players are simultaneously engaged in different games (most notably their competition with the BJP), so that in order to increase their overall gains they may choose a strategy that does not maximize their minimal gains in the above depicted game. Nevertheless, mutual defection constitutes the equilibrium outcome in this game. Both players are expected to opt for defection, as soon as the overall situation allows this. The SP's payoffs correspond to a deadlock situation, while the BSP's correspond to a prisoners' dilemma. The latter's strategy thus aims at minimizing the party's risks, while for the SP defection is preferable to cooperation in any case. In real political competition, where both players are simultaneously engaged in several political conflicts and graded responses are possible, it is to be expected that cooperation between the two parties will be restricted to the smallest possible extent, unless the overall situation is conducive to complete defection. The local elections in 1995, where the SP established itself as the most important party in Uttar Pradesh at the local level, thus enabled the formation of a BJP-BSP alliance to prevent the SP from reaching a dominant position in the overall party system.

The alliances between the BJP and the BSP in 1995 and 1997 followed a similar pattern. Mutual confrontation led to the alliance's collapse as soon as the common aim of preventing the SP's control of the state's administration was realized. Three aspects are especially noteworthy: (1) the influence of the BJP national leadership on the political strategies adopted by the state party unit, (2) the attempts to induce incentives for mutual cooperation into the 1997 coalition agreement and (3) the intensification of factional infighting in the BJP state unit. The third of these aspects will be analysed separately in the following chapter.

The role of the BJP national leadership in Uttar Pradesh politics is related to the issue of factional conflicts within the party at the state as well as the national level. At the same time a clear dividing line between the national leadership and the party section in UP never existed. To reduce complexity the analysis will focus exclusively on specific instances where the national leadership's influence on political strategy in UP was decisive for the process of alliance formation and where it appeared to be relatively unified in its perception of interests. The state unit's view is identified with the faction led by Kalyan Singh, which remained politically decisive until the late 1990s and was also rather consistently opposed to the national leadership's proposals.

The national leadership's position towards alliance formation in Uttar Pradesh can be summed up as follows: While it was aware of the risks involved in any engagement with the BSP, it valued a coalition with the party on the grounds that (a) it might undo the party's upper caste image to some degree and attract *Dalit* votes, possibly even in UP but especially in other Indian states, and (b) that it might enable the party to form a government at the national level either by ensuring a sufficient number of seats from UP through an electoral alliance with the BSP, which is generally seen as being capable of transferring its votes to any alliance partner, or by providing another coalition partner at the national level in case this

was needed.[13] It has to be added that the existence of a 'friendly' state government in Uttar Pradesh is generally seen as an important factor in the formation or maintenance of national governments, even though the actual impact might be exaggerated. The BJP had used the Kalyan Singh-led government in 1991 and 1992 effectively in the later stages of its Ayodhya campaign.

It is important to note that the differences between national and state level political leaders within the BJP are not issue-based, but related exclusively to political strategy. The Kalyan Singh faction in the BJP was not averse to cooperation with the BSP in 1995. Cooperation was perceived as an opportunity to challenge the SP's increasing clout and, at the same time, offered a chance to either split the BSP (similar to the way the SP attempted) or otherwise ensure BJP predominance in a coalition agreement through the party's superior strength in parliament. Political observers noted significant attempts to 'win over' Mayawati and isolate Kanshi Ram within the BSP. Kanshi Ram's reassertion within the BSP's state unit was seen as an important factor leading to the coalition's collapse after just a few months (*Frontline* 12 (21), Oct. 7-20, 1995). Seen against this the BJP national leadership was interested primarily in an electoral agreement with an organizationally intact BSP.

The coalition agreement between BJP and BSP in 1997 included measures appearing to induce cooperation between the alliance partners, most notably the rotation of the Chief Minister's office between Mayawati and Kalyan Singh. The agreement indicates the clearest instance of the BJP national leadership's engagement in UP politics, since consultations were apparently kept secret from state party leaders and the results almost exclusively reflected the perceptions of the party's national leadership, forcing even Kalyan Singh to cooperate with the BSP for the first period of rotation. Despite these steps, cooperation lasted only for the shortest possible period, i.e. until shortly before the end of Mayawati's turn in office. The alliance collapsed after 7 months, with the Kalyan Singh-led faction prevailing over the national leadership's reluctance against attempts to split the BSP.

In the overall analysis the process of coalition formation and maintenance between BJP and BSP in 1995 and 1997 can be depicted as a game that shows significant similarities to the above mentioned description of the SP-BSP coalition. Both the BSP's and the BJP state unit's payoffs correspond to a deadlock situation, while for the BJP national leadership the payoffs correspond to a prisoners' dilemma, thus leading to a sub-optimal equilibrium outcome for the latter. It seems safe to propose on the basis of the cases analysed here that alliance formation between major parties in UP as an abstract process can be depicted as a game, where at least one player's payoffs correspond to a deadlock situation, thus preventing mutual cooperation unless parties are temporarily compelled to

[13] In the 1996 general elections the BJP as the largest party was invited to form the government, but failed in forming one due to the lack of support from smaller parties. If the alliance in UP would have lasted, the BSP's support might have been a crucial factor in the 'numbers game' at the national level.

cooperate through an overall political situation that can be characterized as 'nested', i.e. through games played simultaneously.

The question to be answered is why mutual defection is not only the equilibrium outcome, but in many cases even the collectively optimal solution in coalition formation between major political parties in UP, especially given the paradoxical situation of the state's fractured party system coexisting with a first-past-the-post electoral system, which is expected to lead to bipolarity.

The rationality of stable coalition building in such an electoral system is based on the assumption that the political actors' strengths are relatively fixed, since they are based on issue-related preferences of individual voters and party discipline is enforced by associational compulsions. Under these circumstances defection as a strategy can only be of advantage on a short-term basis. In Uttar Pradesh parties' support bases are highly flexible. The process of coalition building here involves more than a shared interest in government formation, because parties that remain in opposition are risking being denied access to state largesse, which is instrumental in maintaining their support in society. This enables other parties to damage a rival's base through 'poaching', ultimately allowing even strategies aiming towards 'elimination' of competing parties. On the other hand, coalition formation involves a similar risk of 'poaching' for both parties involved at the hands of their respective alliance partner.

If parties are seen to represent specific cleavages in society, their support base has to be rather constant. While they may be kept outside government temporarily, they do not have to fear 'elimination'. This can, on the other hand, be explained, if party support is seen to be based on informal political networks, which are flexible enough to switch their loyalty between parties. 'Casteism', if interpreted as community-wise homogenous voting behaviour, thus represents the main reason for party system stability in Uttar Pradesh. The communities which form the basis of the political networks through homogenous voting ensure a certain amount of stability, since politicians depending on their support are prevented from switching party loyalty unless a large part of the respective community (or their political leadership) at least at the constituency level agrees to this decision.

The flexibility of party support bases in Uttar Pradesh can also be seen in the infighting within the BJP, which accompanied and in many ways precipitated the party's downslide from a position approaching predominance in terms of seats after the 1998 general elections to the apparently weakest link in the ruling coalition in late 2002.

THE DECLINE OF THE BJP IN UTTAR PRADESH

The BJP established itself as the strongest party in Uttar Pradesh in the relatively short period between 1989 and 1991. While the party's growth in this period was obviously linked to its communal agenda and the *Ramjanmabhumi* movement, several authors argue that the accompanying *Mandal* controversy was more instrumental in establishing its base especially among the upper castes (Basu 1996; Hasan 1998; Chhibber 1999). The BJP vote share stagnated between 1992 and

1997 at roughly 32-33 %, but increased significantly in the 1998 *Lok Sabha* elections to slightly above 36 %. Since then, the party has been steadily declining and slid to the position of the third largest party behind the SP and the BSP in the 2002 *Vidhan Sabha* elections.

Table 7: BJP Vote Shares 1989-2002 (%)

Lok Sabha		*Vidhan Sabha*	
1989	7.6	**1989**	11.6
1991	32.8	**1991**	31.5
1996	33.4	**1993**	33.4
1998	36.5	**1996**	32.5
1999	27.6	**2002**	20.1

(Source: Butler/Lahiri/Roy 1995; Election Commission of India 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1998; 1999; 2002)

The party's downslide is generally attributed to internal infighting between the 'pro-OBC' Kalyan Singh-led faction and several other factions led by Kalraj Mishra, Rajnath Singh and Lalji Tandon respectively, which were dominated by upper castes, especially Brahmins and Thakurs (Rangarajan 2000). In late 1999 these conflicts culminated in the expulsion of Kalyan Singh from the BJP and his replacement as Chief Minister with Ram Prakash Gupta. Factional infighting continued unabated even afterwards, attributed mainly to Brahmin-Thakur rivalry.

The downslide of the BJP presents another paradox in UP politics. The extent of damage to the party's electoral prospects caused by the internal power struggles at the state and, given the overall importance of Uttar Pradesh, also at the national level, was rather accurately predicted in the media already in 1999. Thus it was in all probability known to all principal actors. Under these circumstances the BJP leadership's continuing failure to accommodate conflicting interests within the party poses a serious puzzle to any analysis of politics in UP. Before turning toward an examination of the rationality underlying these developments it is necessary to provide a chronological summary of factional conflicts within the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP established itself in UP in the 1989 elections, in which the party had a seat adjustment arrangement with the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led *Janata Dal*. It came to power on its own in the 1991 elections in the wake of the Ayodhya agitations. The state government was dismissed in late 1992 after the demolition of the *Babri Masjid*. With the electoral appeal of its communal mobilisation diminished, the BJP used its public image as a cadre- and ideology-based disciplined organization, drawing its inspiration primarily from the 'apolitical' RSS, to present itself as an alternative to the instability and corruption associated with both the Congress and the various successors to the united *Janata Dal*.

Infighting within the BJP in Uttar Pradesh started already in 1994, when the SP induced the defection of several BJP MLAs during the budget session (Frontline 12 (1), Dec.31, 1994-Jan. 13, 1995). The decision to support a BSP-led government

then led to a significant intensification of factional conflicts. Dissatisfaction among party leaders was as instrumental in ensuring the withdrawal of support to the Mayawati government as the latter's own assertion vis-à-vis the BJP. After the 1996 *Vidhan Sabha* elections, which resulted in a 'hung parliament', the Kalyan Singh-led faction stalled any attempts to form another coalition with the BSP for almost 6 months. In early 1997 the BJP national leadership bypassed opposition within the state unit through secret negotiations with the BSP. As already mentioned above, the terms of the coalition agreement prevented Kalyan Singh from sabotaging the alliance prior to the end of the first rotational period. After replacing Mayawati as Chief Minister in autumn 1997, Kalyan Singh proceeded to heighten tensions within the coalition and, with the help of Rajnath Singh, managed to split the BSP and other parties. The perceived 'pro-OBC-policies' of the government led to increased power struggles between various state level leaders, most notably Kalyan Singh, Kalraj Mishra, Lalji Tandon and Rajnath Singh. After the latter switched sides to form an upper caste factional block together with Mishra and Tandon, the pressure on the national leadership to replace Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister grew. At the same time, tensions between the upper caste leaders prevented the emergence of a consensus candidate. Nevertheless, Kalyan Singh was increasingly marginalized in the candidate selection process for the 1999 general elections, and retaliated by encouraging dissidents and campaigning only for candidates belonging to his faction. The significant losses of the BJP in UP between 1998 and 1999 and the emergence of A. B. Vajpayee as the party's main public face resulted in a consolidation of the national leadership's position vis-à-vis Kalyan Singh, who was regarded both as an Advani loyalist and the party's most charismatic leader in UP. In late 1999 Kalyan Singh was replaced as Chief Minister by Ram Prakash Gupta, a previously rather unknown 'consensus candidate', and expelled from the party.

Apart from the question of alliance formation different approaches toward 'social engineering' are generally regarded to form the main issue in the internal power struggles. Given the party's strong support base of upper castes and its unwillingness to accommodate Muslim interests the strategic options of the BJP to broaden its social base included continued efforts to mobilize the religious majority as an electoral block, accommodation of *Dalit* interests through supporting the BSP, and inclusion of selected OBC communities in a social coalition with the upper castes. The infighting within the BJP was thus projected as the result of significant differences between various factions vis-à-vis the latter two options.

This interpretation of events is, once more, based primarily on identity politics. Given the importance of upper caste opposition towards the implementation of reservation policies for the consolidation of the BJP vote base in the early 1990s, which was mainly aimed at preventing the loss of their traditional dominance over politics and administration, upper caste resistance to a BJP Chief Minister favouring OBCs (most notably Lodhs), neatly fitted into explanatory models highlighting the significance of the *Mandal* controversy. This position neglects both organizational and strategic issues related to the infighting within the BJP and fails to explain several political developments, especially the party's agreement to

the formation of a coalition as a junior partner of the BSP after the 2002 elections. Using a Rational Choice approach, the decision to abandon the relatively successful strategy of including selected OBC communities into an upper caste-dominated support base (responsible to a significant degree for the electoral success in 1996 and 1998) in favour of a high risk strategy centring on cooperation with a party perceived as projecting *Dalit* interests poses serious analytical difficulties. Moreover, even in 2002 the BJP continued to attract voters from OBC communities.

Table 8: BJP Support by Community/Community Block 2002 (%)

Upper Castes	Yadav	More Backward	Most Backward
64.3	7.6	51.5	31.6
Jatav	**Other SCs**	**Muslim**	**Other**
1.7	11.6	9.6	15.0

(Source: Verma 2002. The data includes votes won by BJP allies. Kurmis and Lodhs form the 'More Backward' category, while the remaining OBC communities excluding Yadavs fall under the 'Most Backward' category.)

Table 7 shows that even after the exit of Kalyan Singh the BJP relied heavily on support of selected OBC communities. The puzzle of factional conflicts within the BJP thus cannot be reduced to animosities based on social identities.

Instead, the developments within the BJP from the mid-1990s onwards can be explained as the result of rational processes, if political competition is seen to be based on highly flexible political networks, which aim towards reaching and maintaining access to state patronage, without being significantly constricted by ideological and/or associational compulsions. Keeping in mind Riker's concept of minimal winning coalitions, under these circumstances rational political actors are expected to form coalitions that strive towards an optimal ratio between votes or influence and rewards for political participation. Given the lack of issue-based constraints on alliance formation between informal networks representing social coalitions at the constituency level, political competition both between and within parties is high. At the same time, incentives for cooperation both between and within parties are small, since political actors can easily shift their allegiances either to place themselves in a more favourable position or to prevent a rival or competing group from achieving one.

Political competition within the BJP from the mid-1990s until 1999 was marked by efforts of the Kalyan Singh-led faction to reach and maintain a predominant position vis-à-vis rivalling factions. Kalyan Singh was chosen in 1991 as the party's first Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh in order to present an OBC leader to the public, thus helping the party to sidestep on its less than supportive attitude towards reservation policies and gain acceptance among OBC communities that perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of reservations (Zérinini-Brotel 1998: 78-81). Perceived to be a loyalist of the then BJP president L. K. Advani and ideologically seen as a hardliner due to his role in the Ayodhya

campaign, his position was first challenged seriously after the reassertion of A. B. Vajpayee in the mid-1990s, which also marked the beginning of a period of moderation within the party,[14] at first mainly by political leaders representing Brahmin-dominated factions. The break-up of the SP/BSP coalition and the BJP's later failure to prevent the latter from establishing itself as the third major party in UP significantly altered the power equations within the party, since the possibility of coalition formation with the BSP removed Kalyan Singh's indispensability as the party's only credible lower caste leader by offering the chance of an upper caste-*Dalit* (or rather Brahmin-Thakur-Jatav) alliance excluding OBCs. Thus, by late 1996 his position had been reduced to that of one faction leader among several.

To the above mentioned description of the BJP/BSP alliances as a game where at least one player's preferences correspond to a deadlock situation can thus be added a further dimension of power struggles within the BJP. For the Kalyan Singh-led group, any cooperation with the BSP or any other party with a significant presence among lower castes in UP would have led to a situation, where the group's position within the party is diminished vis-à-vis upper caste-dominated groups that constituted the bulk of the party's support base in Uttar Pradesh throughout the 1990s. At the same time, acceptance of the status quo within the BJP state unit by these latter factions would have led to reduced rewards for these politicians' support, which would have threatened the continuing maintenance of their political networks. Under these circumstances, cooperation with the BSP constitutes both a sub-optimal preference for the party as an entity and the optimal preference for the upper caste-dominated factions within the BJP state unit, unless the situation is seen as a 'nested' game including rivalry among the latter groups as well.

Given the national BJP leadership's preferences as depicted above regarding alliance formation with the BSP, attempts to induce cooperation are to be expected in order to avoid a prisoners' dilemma situation of sub-optimal equilibriums, but these led to an increasing confrontation with the Kalyan Singh-led group. Moreover, the party's focus on Vajpayee, whose position within the party reached a climax in the late 1990s, as its prime ministerial candidate in the national elections 1998 and 1999, endangered the perception of Kalyan Singh as the party's primary vote-catcher in UP, further diminishing the latter's stature vis-à-vis his rivals. While establishing Kalyan Singh's superior electoral appeal in regard to other political leaders in the state, his decision to 'sabotage' the party's electoral appeal and the huge losses in terms of votes and seats between 1998 and 1999 nevertheless compelled the national BJP leadership to reassert its authority and led to his expulsion from the party shortly after the elections.

The continuation of internal power struggles after the exit of Kalyan Singh shows that the developments described above cannot be reduced to mere upper caste-OBC rivalry. In fact, competition between upper caste-dominated factions was seen as one of the main factors enabling Kalyan Singh to continue as Chief

[14] Basu (2001) argues that the BJP, as a party that combines features of a radical mass movement with those of a moderate political party, alternates between periods of radicalization and moderation.

Minister until late 1999. Inter-factional rivalry was instrumental in the replacement of Ram Prakash Gupta by Rajnath Singh, continued throughout the latter's term as Chief Minister and compelled Kalraj Mishra to step down as the BJP state unit president after the 2002 *Vidhan Sabha* elections (The Hindu, 2 June 2002). In late 2002 dissidence among second rung leaders belonging mainly to the Thakur community severely threatened the state unit's cohesion and stability and may yet lead to the collapse of the present BSP/BJP government (Frontline 19 (23), Nov. 9-22, 2002).

These developments cannot be reduced to animosities based on caste identities or issues like reservation policies. Thakurs have been wooed both as voters and legislators by the SP from the mid-1990s onwards with rather mixed responses ranging from the defection of Amar Singh and the moderate electoral support gained in the local elections in 2000 to almost complete consolidation of the community in support of the BJP (Pai 2000: 69). Kalyan Singh became Chief Minister at a time when the upper caste-dominated BJP had its own majority in the Legislative Assembly and the *Mandal* controversy was at its climax and was expelled from the party at a time when animosities between upper castes and OBCs and within the OBC category were clearly decreasing.

Rather, the BJP's downslide, resulting from a failure to accommodate factional interests, can be described as a rational process, if it is accepted that (1) political actors' allegiances are primarily based on rewards gained through association with political networks (or factions) rather than parties, (2) that these networks are linked to specific social communities through the latter's strategic use of homogenous voting, which enables both access to and dispersion of state-controlled resources, and (3) that these networks possess a significant degree of flexibility in alliance formation even outside party organizations. Actions of politicians that damage their own party's prospects can thus be explained through benefits of the politicians' networks of support without the need to take recourse to analyses based on personal animosities between political leaders related to either their social backgrounds or their previous conduct and misconduct, which may be strategically used but can also be shelved in order to further political interests. The campaign to remove Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister and his retaliation in 1999 and the factional tussles between Rajnath Singh and Kalraj Mishra before the 2002 elections severely damaged the electoral performances of the BJP, but in both cases the factional conflicts succeeded in sabotaging a competing faction's standing, which, if unchecked, would have threatened the continued maintenance of the political leader's networks of support.

From the mid-1990s onwards, the BJP appeared to be more prone to severe factional infighting than the other two main parties in Uttar Pradesh. One factor already mentioned above contributing to this is the coexistence of a national and a state level leadership, whose interests might be at odds. A similar dichotomy is negligible in case of the BSP and completely absent in case of the SP. A second factor consists of the level of electoral support achieved by the BJP between 1996 and 1998, which necessitated the accommodation of several political networks based on homogenous voting behaviour of specific communities such as Brahmins,

Thakurs, Lodhs, Kurmis and Banias, which provided more room for shifting political allegiances within the party. Under these circumstances, it is debatable whether parties in Uttar Pradesh are capable to maintain sufficient electoral support allowing simple majorities in the Legislative Assembly except over a short period.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of factional conflicts within the BJP state unit and the process of coalition formation (and breakdown) in Uttar Pradesh show that political competition in this state is characterized mainly by the strategic flexibility of the political actors. Leaving aside the temptation to attribute this either to a (somewhat prolonged) transitional character of the present phase of political development, or to the continuing presence of social and/or economical backwardness, that prevents the transformation towards a stable and progressive party system corresponding to Western examples, this virtual lack of associational and ideological constraints on political competition can only be explained by reconsidering the assumptions underlying the rationality of political actors.

It has been argued here, that the rationality of political competition both between and within parties in Uttar Pradesh is based on the strategic use of caste as a political tool by some communities. Community-based homogenous voting behaviour by some politically important communities provides a measure of stability in an otherwise rather chaotic political system based on the reciprocal exchange of votes for state largesse. Because of the fractured nature of UP's society, electoral success rests on a politician's ability to create and maintain electoral coalitions of social groups at the constituency level. These coalitions are linked through informal political networks to state level politics.

The maintenance of the political networks depends to a large degree on the ability of political leaders to ensure the flow of rewards to second-rung politicians for their continued allegiance, while at the same time the informality of the networks offers significant incentives for defection, which allows 'poaching' and possibly even elimination of a rival's support base. A linkage by reward can thus be seen especially at the sub-party level of politics.

There are striking similarities between on the one hand the proposal of informal political networks, and a broad interpretation of Brass' concept of factionalism on the other, if factions are not seen to be restricted to networks made up through personal allegiance. The argument for a re-evaluation of Brass' concept here is mainly based on an analysis of the rationality of political competition in Uttar Pradesh. Fresh empirical evidence about the functioning of political networks and their state-level interaction, especially taking into consideration the strategic uses and organizational properties of castes as political entities and the role of rewards in creating and maintaining coalitions at the constituency level, is needed to provide sufficient information about the rationality of political competition in Uttar Pradesh.

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