

# Reservation Policy for Backward Classes

## Extent and Determinants of Support

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This paper examines the extent and determinants of popular support for reservation policy for the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes in India, using an individual-level opinion survey data set. It argues that the reservation policy, as well as its longitudinal extension and expansion into the private sector, is more supported than opposed, even though public opinion is polarised regarding its expansion to the private sector. Aside from the control variable of reservation status, those who are highly educated, female, rich, caste conscious, or have inter-caste friendships are likely to support reservation, whereas upper castes are less likely to support it.

Reservation policy is a characteristically Indian affirmative action programme that has been implemented for several decades. Its target groups are three weaker sections of Indian society, that is, the Scheduled Castes (scs), the Scheduled Tribes (sts) and the Other Backward Classes (obcs). The scs were formerly untouchable groups, and the sts are those backward tribal groups residing largely in mountainous and forest areas. The obcs are a contentious category; they officially include both socially and educationally backward groups. The reservation or Indian quota system applies to three specific arenas of policy: recruitment to public offices; higher education admission; and election of representatives to the Lok Sabha (the lower house), state assemblies, and local self-government bodies, including panchayats. Elected seats in the lower house and state assemblies, however, are reserved for scs and sts, but not for obcs. Further, reservation does not extend to the private sector, unlike the United States (us) affirmative action programmes. This Indian reservation policy is one of the oldest and most comprehensive affirmative action programmes in the world.

Some studies examine in detail the content of the policy and its implementation problems in one of or all the three areas of reservation.<sup>1</sup> It is beyond the scope of our research to discuss the details of the reservation policy. To better understand the policy, it is sufficient to mention two of its notable features here. The first feature is that scs and sts do not have a so-called creamy layer category, whereas obcs do. The creamy layer refers to the relatively rich or powerful upper layer families in the obc community. They are excluded from reservation, even though they belong to the same obc community as others.

This idea of internal division or heterogeneity does not apply to sc or st communities, in which all members are entitled to reservation irrespective of how rich or powerful they are. The other feature of the policy is that reservation quotas are supposed to reflect the overall population ratios in India. Thus, the sc quota is set at 15%, and the st quota at 7.5%. However, this rule of proportional reservation does not apply to obcs. The reason is that the Supreme Court ruled that the reservation quotas shall not exceed 50% in total. This sets the legal quota for obcs at 27%, even though they constitute more than 40% of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

Other studies deal with the historical origins of the reservation policy (Jaffrelot 2003; Thorat and Kumar 2007). Whereas reservation for scs is grounded on caste-based historical discriminations related to untouchability, that for sts originates from their spatial segregation. Finally, reservation for obcs is based on a mixture of the obc community's caste-related discrimination

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and socio-economic backwardness. Consequently, although the official nomenclature is other backward “classes,” OBCs are often understood as other backward “castes.”

Some other studies engage in sophisticated, and sometimes fierce, debates on the advantages and disadvantages of the policy (Galanter 1984; Singh 2009; Kumar 2008; Dhavan 2008). Here, we often observe many of the arguments and counterarguments that are applied to the US affirmative action programme as well. One of the advantages is that the general welfare system, such as a poverty alleviation programme, is not sufficient to tackle the deep-rooted difficulties faced by the Indian backward classes. Meanwhile, the most crucial counterargument is reverse discrimination: “preferences place an unfair handicap on individuals who are deprived of opportunities they deserve on merit” (Galanter 1984: 82).

However, majority of the literature analyses or evaluates the policy’s outcomes in public recruitment and higher education, as well as its various impacts on political and social systems (Lama-Rewal 2005; Sahoo 2009). Although these policy assessments or evaluations are invaluable contributions to literature, many of them are based only on scholarly views and largely lack objective supporting data. Limited data show that the overall representation of SCs and OBCs in central government services has improved in the wake of the reservation policy. The share of SCs in the central government services has increased up to 16%, but that is due to them being represented in high numbers in the lowest grade jobs such as sweepers and peons. Even though the overall share of OBCs remains far lower than 27%, it increased from 4.53% in 2003 to 14.19% in 2009 (MSJE 2013). However, the shares of both backward classes in the higher-ranking services are still lower: 11.60% and 8.40% in the highest tier of government services, Group A, for SCs and OBCs, respectively (MSJE 2013: 163–64).<sup>3</sup>

### New Opinion Survey and Data

Despite the existence of such wide-ranging studies on reservation policy, no single study focuses on the current popular views or understandings of reservation policy.<sup>4</sup> This is surprising, since reservation policy is a redistributive and divisive policy and, thus, is supposed to immediately create a huge mass of beneficiaries and supporters among the general public, on the one hand, and a large number of non-beneficiaries and opponents on the other. This presumed division induces us to examine how strong or weak the popular support for reservation policy is in India today. The status of the public support for reservation policy is a critical issue in a democratic system, where any government policy is viable only with a certain degree of popular support.

To determine the status of public support for reservation policy in India, we conducted a face-to-face survey involving both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. No previous systematic field survey has included reservation issues, except for a brief single question that was included in the National Election Survey of the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. As a result, our survey is the first landmark field survey on the popular perceptions of reservation policy in India. The sample size is 1,000. To make our sample representative of the

entire country as much as possible within a limited budget, we selected six major urban centres and their surrounding rural areas across India: one city was New Delhi, the capital city, and the other cities were Bengaluru in the south, Mumbai in the west, Kolkata in the east, Bhopal in the central region, and Lucknow in the north. The survey areas were divided into rural and urban ones, whose respective sample sizes were decided approximately according to the all-India census results.

The entire sample was also divided into three major categories, that is, the general group without reservation, the OBCs and the SCs. The reservation categories were designed to account together for approximately 50% of our sample. The total population size of OBCs is not known, since no caste-based census data is publicly available in India. In our sample, they account for approximately 33%. This is presumably smaller than their actual population, but greater than their legal quota limit of 27%. The SCs account for 20% of the sample, which is greater than their reservation quota of 15%. Our sample has no STs because we are primarily interested in caste-based reservation. The ethnic identity of STs is very different from that of other Indian communities.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, our respondents are much better educated than the average Indian: they have completed at least middle school education, and 90% have attained senior high school or higher levels of education.<sup>6</sup> This type of sampling was chosen because of two reasons. First, is that reservation for jobs, barring that for some rather low-social-status job positions such as sweepers, requires education. Second, is that it is not easy for poorly educated people to understand reservation issues and answer our survey questions competently. As a result, we ensured that our educated respondents are sufficiently informed about reservation policy.

### Popular Support and Assessment

The key topics of interest of this study are how much the people support or oppose the reservation policy in general, as well as in particular arenas, and how this public support or opposition is related to other variables. We can identify the current level of popular support by asking “How much do you support or oppose reservation policy in general for SCs/OBCs?” As shown in Table 1, the current level of support remains more than 55% for both SCs and OBCs. However, the support for SCs is more intensive than that for the OBCs. Regarding reservation for the SCs, the rate of strong support, 34.7%, is much higher than that of weak support, 21.5%. In contrast, there is no such substantial difference between strong and weak support for OBC-related reservation policy.<sup>7</sup>

To assess popular support for reservation, we ask about not only the current support for the actual policy but also the longitudinal extension of reservation over time and its horizontal expansion into the private sector. Regarding the longitudinal dimension, our question is as follows: “How much longer does

**Table 1: Popular Support for Reservation—The Current Level** (%)

	Reservation Policy for SCs	Reservation Policy for OBCs
Strong support	34.7	29.3
Weak support	21.5	27.5
Neither	13.8	15.7
Weak disapproval	12	10
Strong disapproval	18	17.4
	N=984	N=978

Source: Opinion Survey on Reservation Issues (undertaken by the author Jungug Choi in 2017).

the reservation policy need to be sustained for SCs/OBCs?" Table 2 shows that more than a simple majority of the respondents agree that reservation should not be terminated immediately. It is noted that the support for the extension for SCs is slightly higher than that for OBCs.

Meanwhile, the horizontal expansion of reservation to the private sector is a very controversial issue, over which public opinion is presumed to be sharply divided. Our question is as follows: "Do you agree that reservation policy for SCs/OBCs should be expanded to the private sector?" As shown in Table 3, the horizontal expansion of reservation receives much more intensive support for the SCs than for the OBCs. Another interesting point is that, for both SCs and OBCs, the opposition to horizontal expansion is much stronger than the current level of support or longitudinal dimension of support. In other words, regarding the issue of horizontal expansion, the overall opposition rate is higher than that in the other two dimensions, that is, the current level of support and the longitudinal extension, and strong disapproval overwhelms weak disapproval. Thus, our survey confirms that public opinion is significantly more polarised regarding the sectoral expansion of reservation, compared to the two dimensions of the current level of public support for reservation and the longitudinal extension of reservation.

Regarding the three areas of reservation policy, reservation in higher education enjoys more support than that in public offices. Reservation in public offices, in turn, enjoys more support than that in Parliament and/or local councils. This is true for both SCs and OBCs. In other words, among the three areas of reservation, the strongest support is found in higher education—it is noted that 72.7% and 68.6% of the respondents support reservation in higher education for SCs and OBCs, respectively. This leads us to conclude that people in general believe that the two backward class groups deserve reservation, especially in the field of higher education.

This prioritisation of educational reservation is surprising, since only 25.3% of the respondents consider that backwardness basically refers to being uneducated, whereas the remainder opine that backwardness means low caste status (24.8%) or poverty

**Table 2: Popular Support for Reservation—Longitudinal Extension (%)**

	Extension of Reservation for SCs	Extension of Reservation for OBCs
As long as possible	37.2	32.9
For a while	35.9	37.1
No longer	26.9	30
	N=982	N=976

Source: Same as Table 1.

**Table 3: Popular Support for Reservation—Horizontal Expansion (%)**

	Expansion of Reservation for SCs	Expansion of Reservation for OBCs
Strong support	33	27.1
Weak support	18	22.9
Neither	13	14.2
Weak disapproval	8.4	8
Strong disapproval	27.5	27.8
	N=981	N=981

Source: Same as Table 1.

(49.1%).<sup>8</sup> This low rate of perception of backwardness as poor education implies that educational reservation is more popular than all other types of reservations not because it is perceived as the core problem or source of backwardness, but because it is considered to ameliorate backwardness by ensuring social advancement and economic enrichment.

Before we move on to an explanatory model of popular support, we address one more issue, which is the

public assessment of the effectiveness of reservation policy. Among our respondents, 80.4% and 68.4% agree that since its initial adoption, reservation policy has contributed to the overall upliftment of the status of SCs and OBCs, respectively. In addition, 78.9% of the respondents think that reservation has benefited SCs or OBCs more than other general welfare measures over the previous few decades. In summary, an overwhelming majority believes that reservation has benefited the backward classes. However, they also feel that resistance against the policy has been on the increase. It is noted that 77.8% of the respondents opine that reservation has become less acceptable over the previous 20 years.

### Support for Reservation

Having presented the overall picture of the popular support for reservation policy, we now examine the variables responsible for the popular support of or opposition to reservation (Table 4, p 43). In this model, we explain the current rate of support for reservation. It is understood that due to their perceptions of self-interest, the official beneficiaries, SCs and OBCs, will be more supportive than the general category. However, the function of policy support is more complicated than this simple univariable model of self-interest. For instance, a comparative research note observes that "the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar Government Orders of 1977 and 1978 providing for job reservations to the Other Backward Classes provoked a violent and virulent protest and backlash," while "the similar measures in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were generally accepted by the forward castes" (Pasricha 2006: 264).<sup>9</sup> This implies that people of the same castes may respond to reservation differently, depending on their contextual understanding. Hence, it is necessary to put forward additional hypotheses and test them with our survey data, since self-interest alone cannot explain all variations.

Apart from the control variable of reservation status, we first hypothesise that support for reservation is closely related to the education variable. To be qualified to obtain reserved seats in public officialdom, applicants must meet some basic academic requirements. For instance, they usually require a bachelor's degree to apply for jobs in Groups A and B of the Indian central government services.<sup>10</sup> This academic qualification is too essential to be waived even for SC and OBC applicants. In addition, college admission tickets are in great demand. This implies that support for reservation is a function of education. The only issue here is to determine an appropriate relationship between the support for reservation and educational levels. Since no previous Indian study has researched this relationship, we refer to non-Indian studies. A US-based study posits that the completion of education is one of the two strongest predictors of support for affirmative action in the US (Oyinlade 2013). It argues that this positive attitude of educated persons is a result of their relatively liberal attitude towards affirmative action. Accordingly, we hypothesise that higher education leads to greater support for reservation.

Second, on considering non-Indian studies, we find that sex or gender is another variable that affects the support for affirmative action. Although there is no solid consensus, some claim that women are more likely to support affirmative action (Hartlep

and Lowinger 2014; Hughes and Tuch 2003; Moscoso et al 2012). In India, women are a socially disadvantaged group, and they are also not likely to behave independently of their male household members. Due to this low social status of women in India, there have been attempts to reserve parliamentary seats for women; however, they were in vain (Kaur and Suri 2009).<sup>11</sup> Now, only local self-government bodies like panchayats reserve seats for women. We may hypothesise that on the basis of empathy and self-interest, women are more likely to support reservation policy for backward classes than men.

Third, we add the variable of age to the list of independent variables. However, it is not easy to theorise the effects of age on the support for reservation. Some people might think that older generations are more likely to oppose reservation due to their traditional or conservative mode of thought. Contrarily, some others might argue that younger people are more likely to do so because they need jobs and are, hence, more vulnerable to reservation than older people. Eboni M Zamani-Gallaher et al (2009) argue that support for affirmative action increases with age, whereas Cox et al (2013) opine that younger people are more likely to support affirmative action than older people.

Fourth, other things being equal, those who hold greater assets will be more lenient and have a more liberal attitude towards reservation. Their economic achievement or wealth enables them to not care much about reservation or, at least, manage without it. Thus, we posit that having greater assets also affects reservation policy in a positive manner.

Fifth, caste-sensitive or caste-conscious people or those who believe that castes are important in their daily life will be more likely to support reservation. Reservation itself is introduced to ameliorate or redress the negative effects of the caste system. Caste-sensitive Hindus tend to believe that reservation may be necessary due to enduring caste practices.

Sixth, the variable of religion is also important in predicting the respondents' attitudes to reservation. Our model makes this variable dichotomous, that is, either Hinduism or non-Hinduism. The category of non-Hinduism includes Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Unlike Hinduism, these universalistic religions theoretically do not advocate any discrimination and declare that every human being is born equal. They oppose any type of ascriptive caste hierarchy and, thus, their practitioners are more likely to support reservation than are orthodox Hindus, whose religion is the historical root of caste-based discrimination.

Seventh, we can add another independent variable: rural-urban difference. However, its effect is not straightforward. On the one hand, urban residents are more likely to be aware of reservation policy, and they are more sensitive to the policy. The job market is more competitive in urban areas than in rural areas. This means that urban residents are more likely to oppose reservation than rural residents. On the other hand, they are more educated and exposed to caste-neutral social interactions. This implies that they are more likely to support reservation.

Eighth, we posit a hypothesis that those who prefer public sector jobs to private sector ones are more likely to oppose the idea of reservation. As noted earlier, only public sector jobs are reserved in India. Those who are interested in private sector

jobs do not have a strong incentive to oppose reservation in the public sector. They do not care much about what will become of public sector job openings. This attitude is particularly true of the people belonging to the general category. However, when scs and oBcs are interested in public sector jobs, they are less likely to oppose reservation. To control for the opposite effect of reservation status, our model adds a variable of interaction between reservation status and the preference for public sector jobs.

Finally, we include the variable of inter-caste friendship, by which we mean that friendship is not limited to the same caste-rank group so that people become good friends with others whose caste rank is lower or higher than theirs. This type of friendship will promote more favourable attitudes towards reservation policy because people enjoying inter-caste friendships will better understand the difficulties of other caste groups. Inter-caste friendship is also remarkable since it helps to build social capital in which the formation of a wider and modern social network beyond traditional ascriptive caste boundaries is feasible.

### Test Results

Our test results confirm the popular idea that beneficiaries of reservation are more likely to support reservation policy than those who are not entitled to reservation benefits. This is because of the beneficiaries' perception of self-interest. This personal entitlement to reservation is the most critical determinant of whether a person endorses reservation policy or not. When we break down the support and opposition towards the policy according to reservation entitlement, we obtain the following statistics. With respect to the reservation for scs, 36% of the non-beneficiaries endorse it, whereas 74% of the reservation beneficiaries support it.

In reverse, 45% of the non-beneficiaries oppose it, whereas only 17% of the beneficiaries do so. Similarly, regarding the reservation for oBcs, the support rate of non-beneficiaries is 29%, whereas that of beneficiaries significantly increases to 80%. In contrast, the opposition rate of non-beneficiaries is 48% and that of beneficiaries decreases to 10%. This outcome

**Table 4: Variables of Support for Reservation Policy in India—Multivariable Regression Analysis**

Independent Variables	$\beta$	s.e.	p-value
Reserved/non-reserved*	2.351	.305	.000**
Education levels	.248	.065	.000**
Female/male*	.394	.160	.014**
Age	.003	.007	.719
Assets	.257	.066	.000**
Caste-conscious	.152	.050	.002**
Hindu/non-Hindu*	-1.528	.288	.000**
Urban/rural*	-.024	.155	.877
Preference for public/private sector job*	-.386	.244	.114
Inter-caste friendship	.136	.069	.050**
Interaction***	.657	.347	.059
Constant	4.245	.553	.000**

Case number = 836.

Adjusted R square = .361.

d.f. = 11. F = 43.998.

Model p-value = .000.

Source: Same as Table 1.

s.e. refers to standard error, d.f. refers to degree of freedom, and F refers to test statistic.

\* Dichotomous variables, \*\* Significant at 0.05, \*\*\* Interaction refers to interaction between reservation status and preference for private or public sector jobs.

emphasises the explanatory power of self-interest, even though it also demonstrates that self-interest is not the sole reason why some people support or oppose reservation.

Similarly, our analysis shows clear support for the established hypothesis that highly educated persons are more likely to favour reservation than less-educated ones. It is true even though our sample includes no uneducated persons, it contains only graduates of middle schools or higher educational institutions. This leads us to believe that educated persons are more liberal and, consequently, tend to tolerate the idea of positive discrimination.<sup>12</sup> However, this does not mean that people with no formal education or with primary education alone will oppose reservation without exception. They are more likely to support or oppose reservation depending on their other socio-economic circumstances or remain neutral due to their lack of knowledge. We need a separate study on how people with no formal education react to reservation.

**Effect of gender, age and assets:** Regarding the binary variable of gender, we find that female respondents are more supportive of reservation than male respondents. We think this is because the female respondents' lower social position and historical discrimination make them sympathetic towards reservation on behalf of the similarly positioned backward classes. Due to their capacity for empathy, women are more likely to accept the general idea of reservation irrespective of who its beneficiaries are.

Unlike the aforementioned three variables, the age variable is not found to be statistically significant, even though its effect is positive. This result is similar to the result found by Evellyn Elizondo and Faye Crosby (2004) with respect to attitudes towards affirmative action among American Latino college students sometime back. As noted earlier, literature is divided regarding the effect of age on affirmative action. Our analysis does not confirm either the negative or positive effect of affirmative action. Even though some property of age might have a positive effect on the attitude towards reservation, it is not sufficiently strong, or some other property of age seems to counteract the positive effect. Based on our test results, we can only say that although age might affect attitudes towards reservation, its effect is not definitive.

As hypothesised, the assets variable is statistically significant. This means that when people possess larger assets, they are more likely to endorse reservation or, at least, less likely to oppose it. In other words, the haves are more tolerant of reservation than the have-nots. In our model, we measured the amount of assets through a simple addition of the ownership of various personal properties that are supposed to be owned by the Indian middle or upper classes: house, land, rental property, personal cars, and motorcycles. When they have all these items, they are considered to have large assets. On the contrary, when they have none of these items, they are assumed to be poor in assets. Other statistical tests often use income to measure wealth. However, our model did not use the variable of personal income, since we have numerous missing cases in this variable. A large number of respondents would rather not reveal their personal income.<sup>13</sup>

**Religion and caste consciousness:** Our data also show that the variable of caste consciousness or neutrality is important in determining a positive attitude towards reservation. When people are more conscious of their caste status or think that caste membership still influences their lifestyles, they believe that reservation is necessary. On the other hand, when they feel less sensitive to caste identities and do not care much about their or other people's caste status, they are less likely to endorse the reservation policy, which is mainly based on caste. We find a similarity between this case and the US debate on race-neutral versus race-conscious government policies, in which the opponents of affirmative action mainly espouse the idea of race neutrality.<sup>14</sup>

With respect to the religion variable, our model confirms that the followers of Hinduism are certainly less supportive of reservation than those of other religions. In other words, non-Hindus such as Christians, Buddhists and Muslims are more likely to endorse reservation. This is remarkable since only some of the non-Hindu communities are included in the list of SCs or OBCs, and many non-Hindus are not entitled to reservation. Non-Hindus strongly support reservation, which is probably due to the ethical teachings of their universalistic religions that preach the virtues of equality and do not espouse caste-based division. In contrast, Hinduism does not teach that all human beings are created equal. It stipulates that human beings are created in four different categories, with each category having a different role. This has been the basis of historical discrimination, as well as the functional division of labour. Certainly, this does not mean that all Hindus practise caste-based discrimination nowadays; it simply means that Hinduism does not provide a religious basis for equal treatment of human beings.

**Other variables:** Among the remaining three variables, two, that is, residential areas and preferred job spheres, have negative coefficients. In other words, when people live in urban areas or prefer public to private sector jobs, they tend to disapprove of reservation. However, these coefficients are not found to be statistically significant. Since both variables had p-values greater than 10%, we could not reach any definitive conclusion. In addition, the term of interaction between reservation status and the preference for public sector job sphere is not statistically significant at the level of 0.05. This means that the variable of job type preferred by people does not meaningfully influence the support for reservation either individually or jointly with the interaction term.

Our model confirms that the final variable of inter-caste friendship has a positive effect on the support for reservation. This means that those with more upper- or lower-caste friends will be more likely to endorse reservation policy than others with friends among same-level caste communities alone. Such inter-caste friendship provides a wider social network than that provided by same-caste friendship and helps to build social capital. Consequently, they are conducive to the weakening of narrow-minded communalism. However, this is not as clear as the effects of the aforementioned positive variables. The p-value is exactly equal to the cut-off point of significance, 0.05.

## Analysis and Discussion

This study examined the extent and socio-economic determinants of popular support and opposition to reservation policy for two backward classes, scs and oBCs, in India. It relied on the first-ever face-to-face individual-level survey among the public from six major Indian metropolitan cities and their neighbouring rural areas. Our study shows that the current rates of support for reservation are more than 56.20% and 56.80% for scs and oBCs, respectively, whereas the corresponding opposition rates are 30% and 27.4% for scs and oBCs, respectively. These support rates are meaningful, since scs account for only 20% and oBCs for 33% of our sample. In addition, while the overall support rate for scs is nearly the same as that for oBCs, the support of reservation for scs is more intensive in that the strong support overwhelms the weak support.

The current support rate is high; moreover, more than 50% think that reservation policy requires further extension over time. Only 26.9% think that scs no longer need reservation, whereas 30% believe that no longitudinal extension of reservation policy is required for oBCs. This implies that a large number of people believe that reservation should be retained for both scs and oBCs either for a while or as long as possible. In other words, many people who express neither support nor opposition towards the current reservation policy still agree that it requires further extension in the future. However, regarding the horizontal expansion of reservation to the private sector, the overall support rate is much lower for scs and oBCs, and the opposition rate is higher compared to the aforementioned longitudinal dimension of support. In other words, the number of people who hold a middle position decreases sharply, and the general public is much more polarised over the expansion of the reservation arena.

In addition, we found that among the three different arenas of reservation, reservation in higher education enjoys more support than that in public offices, which, in turn, enjoys more support than reservation in Parliament and local councils. According to our survey results, a large majority of people agree that reservation policy has contributed to the upliftment of backward classes over the previous few decades. However, they believe that it has become less acceptable over the previous 20 years.

Regarding the determinants of support and opposition to reservation policy, our multivariable regression model tested several hypotheses. This statistical testing assumed that the attitude towards reservation is not determined solely by whether a person is entitled to reservation. This simple self-interest model would obviate further research on why some support reservation and others oppose it. This study handled the question of what socio-economic variables other than reservation entitlement (or self-interest) account for the popular support for and opposition to reservation. We are particularly interested in the effects of education levels, gender, age, assets, caste consciousness, religion, urban residence, preferred job spheres and inter-caste friendship, based on the control variable of reservation status.

The results of statistical analysis show that the independent variables of education, being female, assets, caste consciousness, Hinduism, and inter-caste friendship are statistically significant,

in addition to the control variable of reservation status. Among these, Hindus are more likely than non-Hindus to oppose reservation policy. Meanwhile, all the other significant variables positively influence the support for reservation policy: people who are educated, female, rich, or caste conscious or have inter-caste friendships are more likely to support reservation. Among these, the positive effect of strong friendships across different caste levels is remarkable. It implies that when India becomes richer in social capital or supersedes traditional intra-caste connections and develops new modern social networks, it will be more tolerant of reservation policy as a solution to caste-based discrimination.

Meanwhile, our test did not confirm the statistical significance of the effects of urban residence, preferred job spheres, and age. Thus, we cannot confirm that urban residents are more likely to oppose reservation or affirmative action, as some might believe. Certainly, this does not mean that they tend to support reservation instead; it simply implies that we cannot verify its negative effect on the support for reservation using our given sample. Similarly, those who prefer public to private sector jobs might oppose reservation due to their conflicted interests; however, this negative effect cannot be confirmed using our data. The inconclusive effect of public sector job preference is true even when we jointly consider its interaction with reservation status. The interaction term itself did not turn out to be significant, either.

Like these two independent variables, the age variable is not statistically significant, even though its effect is positive. Its p-value is very high, 0.719. This is in line with the divided literature on the effect of age on affirmative action. This study is very important in that it is virtually the first systematic test on the popular support of or opposition to reservation policy in India and uses a unique individual-level survey data set. Nonetheless, it has some limitations. One limitation is that the sample size is not sufficiently large to cover the entire country. Moreover, further data collection is necessary to verify the effects of the insignificant variables in our model.

## Conclusions

This study has some implications for policymaking in India. The complete lack of data on public opinion regarding reservation in India demonstrates that the democratic Indian government should conduct regular opinion polls regarding reservation in the future. This is particularly true in the case of periodic renewal. Although the Constitution has set the time limit of 10 years only for political reservation in the Lok Sabha, and no time limit for other types of reservation, nobody believes that reservation policy will be extended for an unlimited period. The important issue is deciding on when it would be best to withdraw the policy or replace it with some other policy. This issue cannot be entrusted to the personal discretion of top policymakers alone. It is noted that public opinion is important as well.

Our data show that reservation policy still has strong public support, and majority of the people believe that it should be extended for a while. However, this public opinion seems likely to change in the future as a large majority of our respondents says that reservation policy has become less acceptable over the last 20 years.<sup>15</sup> Hence, India requires public opinion surveys to be

conducted on a regular basis to measure the level of support for and opposition to reservation and to determine the origins of this support or opposition. Concerned policymakers cannot accept the hollow argument that some people support reservations

because they are entitled to it and others oppose it because they are not entitled. This policy advice presumes the existence of reservation, which is not a helpful guide to the policymakers who decide on whether the policy should be renewed or not.

## NOTES

- 1 A good introduction to the content of reservation in recruitment to public offices and its implementation issues is found in Sandeep Mukherjee (2006). Regarding educational reservation, see Sushil Kumar Sinha (2009). For information on political reservation, see Alistair MacMillan (2005).
- 2 The specific percentage of the OBC population is not known since India does not have a caste-based census data set. The last caste census in India was conducted during the British colonial period. However, a recent government survey estimated that OBCs account for 41.7% of the national population (MSJE 2013: 20). India has a federal system, and Indian state governments have their own state-level reservation policies. Consequently, reservation quotas for state-controlled jobs and admission tickets may vary from one state to another.
- 3 The data on the representation of both backward classes in central public sector enterprises are more encouraging. In 2010, the share of SCs in the total employment of this sector was 18.1%, whereas that of OBCs was 21.56%. These figures are remarkable, since the SCs and OBCs accounted for 14.60% and 16.6% respectively, in 2003 (MSJE 2013: 165).
- 4 The dearth of public opinion surveys is also true with respect to affirmative action issues in the US, where public opinion data on other issues are abundant (Bowman and O'Neil 2016).
- 5 The survey costs also constitute another factor for the exclusion of STs. STs usually live in remote areas and a face-to-face survey with them would have been quite costly.
- 6 For actual data on the education levels of the population, see the results of 2011 Census (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner 2011). In India, illiterate people account for 36.9%, and those who have attained primary or lower level of education account for 27.3% of the population.
- 7 As seen in Table 3, a similar tendency is found for the issue of expansion of reservation into the private sector.
- 8 The addition is not 100% because 0.7% opine "all of the three."
- 9 Seema Pasricha's (2006) appendix is a rare systematic attempt to explain different reactions to reservation in India and presents some interesting group-theory-based hypotheses. However, its key research interest significantly differs from ours and there is no objective verification of the hypotheses. It focuses on why some upper castes reacted violently to state-level reservation policies, while others did not. Our study examines the casual public support for or opposition to reservation today, using individual-level survey data.
- 10 There are four tiers of positions, Groups A, B, C and D. The two higher tiers are A and B.
- 11 A brief introduction to the various issues of implementing reservation for women is found in Harpreet Kaur and R K Suri (2009). In India, apart from women, communities such as Muslims demand reservation (see Rehman 2013).
- 12 One may suspect that some highly educated people might oppose reservation if they belong to the upper castes and are concerned about reverse discrimination. However, in this case, their negative attitude towards reservation

would be more likely due to their ineligibility for reservation and would not be attributable to their educational status.

- 13 There are some additional reasons why we used the assets variable, rather than the income variable. Our sample includes many students and homemakers. They do not have any personal income, even though this does not mean that they are poor. In addition, there are so many informal sector workers in India, whose monthly income is not fixed.
- 14 There is a notable exception to this general statement. Texas, for instance, adopts an apparently race-neutral policy in college admission, that is, the Top 10 Percent rule, to circumvent the unconstitutionality of a race-based admission quota system. This rule provides all top 10% high school graduates with automatic admission to any public universities in Texas that they apply to, even though it does not guarantee admission to their preferred major programmes. However, this seemingly race-neutral admission policy substantially favours African Americans and Latinos, who form the same target groups of race-based affirmative action. For more details on this Top 10 Percent rule, see Marta Tienda (2010).
- 15 It would be more interesting to know the opinion now after 10% reservations have been introduced by the Indian government recently for the economically weaker sections of the general category.

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