Friends or Rivals? Elite Peers and Upward Mobility of Non-Elites in Colonial India *

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Abstract

How does exposure to elite peers affect the upward mobility of non-elites in a socially stratified society? Using novel data on high school and university graduates in colonial India between 1894 and 1921, I examine how exposure to elite (upper-caste) peers in high schools affected the likelihood that non-elites progressed through university or entered the legal profession as lower-grade lawyers (mukhtars). Exploiting the plausibly random variation in the share of elite peers across cohorts within the same school, I find that a greater exposure to elite peers reduced the probability that non-elites – particularly merchant-caste students – completed university or appeared for the mukhtarship examination. These effects are driven by elites whose traditional status was linked to white-collar occupations, rather than by landowning elites. Taken together, these results imply that status-preserving elites function as rivals rather than supportive peers to non-elites in competitive educational environments.

Keywords: Elite Peers; Social Mobility; Caste; Colonial India
JEL codes: I24, J24, J62, N35

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1 Introduction

Exposure to peers of high socio-economic status is often seen as a pathway to upward mobility. Elites may shape aspirations, transmit information, and facilitate access to elite education and occupations. Recent work finds that non-elites benefit from exposure to peers from wealthy or college-educated families by expanding their access to elite education and jobs (Cattan et al., 2025; Chetty et al., 2022). However, these positive effects rely on an implicit assumption: that elites are willing to share information and broaden access to non-elites. In many societies, elite status is rooted in hereditary identities such as race, caste, or religion, and elites often monopolize high-status occupations and educational opportunities. Expanding access may threaten their social status and increase competition for scarce positions. In such settings, elites may behave strategically by forming cliques, gatekeeping access to elite colleges, or discouraging non-elites from competing for high-status jobs (Akerlof, 1997). Thus, exposure to elite peers may not always be benign; in competitive environments, elites can act as rivals rather than sources of support, hurting the upward mobility of non-elites.

To examine this possibility, I study the effect of status-preserving elite peers on the upward mobility of non-elites in one of the most unequal societies in the world: colonial India, where elites were defined by their caste. To this day, India is characterized by a rigid caste system, based on ritual rank and associated with traditional occupations. Under this social ranking, the priestly *Brahmin* and the martial and scribal *Kshattriya* castes dominated higher education, government jobs, and landownership, resulting in their elite status. In contrast, non-elites comprise two groups: the mercantile *Vaishya* castes and the lower castes that included both *Shudra* and *Dalit* castes. These caste groups, alongside Muslims and native Christians, came into direct contact with each other in secondary schools, which served as the gateway to university education and entry into the prestigious legal profession. This makes schools a natural setting to study the impact of elite peers. While they offered greater inter-group contact that could potentially reduce prejudice between students of different castes, they also generated competition for scarce places in university and government jobs.

To study this empirically, I construct a novel data set comprising the universe of high school graduates across five provinces between 1894 and 1919. These records are unique since they identify the exact caste

of each of the over 39,000 graduates, allowing me to identify their elite status. I then match them with their outcomes at two stages of university – passing the second-year intermediate examination and the fourth-year undergraduate examination – and administrative records on entry into the legal profession as lower-grade lawyers (*mukhtars*).

Using these records, I first empirically document that the caste and religious identity of students played a significant role in their (lack of) upward mobility during the colonial period. Relative to Brahmins, all caste and religious groups – particularly lower castes – were less likely to progress through university. These patterns persist irrespective of their high school grade, implying that factors outside of academic performance had a significant role in their lack of upward mobility.

Motivated by these findings, I study how exposure to elite peers affected the probability that students from different castes and religions progressed through university or became a lower-grade lawyer. I define a student's exposure to elite peers as the share of (upper-caste) students among those who graduate from the same school-cohort as them. I find that a greater exposure to elite peers reduced the probability that non-elites, particularly merchant castes, passed both stages of university. A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers reduced the likelihood of university progression in the intermediate stage by 2.5 percentage points. For identification, I exploit the within-school, across-cohort variation in the share of elite peers. This strategy relies on the assumption that parents could not systematically sort their children into cohorts based on their share of elite peers, and has been widely used in the peer effects literature ever since (Hoxby, 2000) and more recently by (Cattan et al., 2025). I perform a series of robustness checks to test the validity of the identifying assumption. Most notably, I find similar results when comparing the outcomes of students from within the same subcaste who graduated from the same high school at different points in time.[1]

I also find that a greater exposure to elite peers in high school reduces the probability of the non-elite merchant castes to enter the legal profession as mukhtars. I find that these results are driven by the negative impact on their likelihood of appearing as candidates for the qualifying exam to become mukhtars. Conditional on their candidature, merchant-caste students were as likely as their elite peers to pass the examination. Overall, these results imply that elites were rivals to merchant-caste students, crowding them

[1] A subcaste is a subdivision of a caste and is closely analogous to an extended family.

out from scarce university seats and entry into the legal profession.

In the final section, I explore the underlying mechanisms driving the results. First, I find that the negative impact of elite peers on merchant-castes is driven by being exposed to more elites and not because they were exposed to fewer merchant-caste peers.[2] This implies that merchant-caste students were affected by the relative elite dominance in their cohorts.

Second, I show that these negative effects were entirely driven by exposure to *Brahmin* and *Kayastha* peers – "educated elites" traditionally associated with government jobs. Exposure to other elites such as the landowning *Rajputs* had no impact on the (lack of) upward mobility of merchant-caste students. This suggests that the mechanism operated specifically through competition with elites whose status depended on educational achievement, and not elites whose status was independent of education (such as landownership).

Finally, I study how the school environment shaped these effects. Merchant-caste students exposed to more elite peers were least likely to progress through university if they attended a private school. Schools administered by the colonial government and missionaries substantially mitigated these negative effects. This pattern indicates that elite dominance mattered more in settings where elites had more influence over academic progression.[3]

In contrast, school management played no role in how elite peers negatively affected the likelihood of merchant-caste graduates to appear for the mukhtarship examination. Since entry into the profession only depended on passing the qualifying examination, college and school authorities played no role in filtering who could apply. The persistence of negative effects across all types of schools is consistent with a *discouragement* channel, where elite dominance reduced the incentives of merchant-caste students to compete for elite-coded occupations even though a) they faced no barriers in doing so and b) conditional on appearing, were as likely as their elite peers to pass it.

This paper contributes to four strands of the literature. First, it relates to the literature on intergenerational mobility especially those that study the role of exposure to elite peers. Recent studies show that exposure

[2] Intuitively, the shares of elite and merchant-caste peers within the same cohort mirror each other and have conceptually different interpretations. Negative impact due to more elite peers imply that elite behaviour is the underlying mechanism. In contrast, a negative impact due to exposure to less merchant-caste peers would imply a lower within-caste support network as the underlying mechanism.

[3] College admissions were at the discretion of the college principal. High school graduates also required a "good character" certificate from their school headmaster at the time of application.

to elite peers – defined by parental wealth and education – improved the upward mobility of non-elites by expanding their social capital (Chetty et al., 2022; Cattan et al., 2025). In contrast, Michelman et al. (2022) finds more muted effects: exposure to elites educated in private schools had little spillover effects on non-elites. This paper differs by defining elite status by their caste. Since caste is rigid and tied to hereditary occupations, it contrasts sharply with settings where elite status is more fluid. I find that exposure to such status-preserving elites reduces the upward mobility of non-elites, implying that elites harm non-elites when they have strong incentives to maintain their privileged social rank.

Second, this paper contributes to the literature on the role of elite education in shaping intergenerational mobility (Chetty et al., 2023; Barrios-Fernandez et al., 2024; Jia and Li, 2021; Zimmerman, 2019). Many of these works find non-elites benefited from increased exposure to elite peers in these institutions. In contrast, I find that effects of elite schools were more nuanced. Elite schools could limit university progress of non-elites since college admissions was partly discretionary. However, when access was determined only though a centralized exam, such as the mukhtarship examination, elite schools had no control over who could access this opportunity. This highlights the role of institutional design in shaping the impact of elite education.

Third, this paper contributes to a rich literature on peer effects (see Sacerdote (2011) for a review), particularly studies documenting heterogeneous effects by socioeconomic status (Bertoni et al., 2017; Lavy and Schlosser, 2011; Hoxby and Weingarth, 2005). I add to this literature by studying peer heterogeneity across caste, an underexplored dimension of social status. Focusing on colonial India, where education was neither compulsory nor free, I study peer effects at a formative stage in the development of mass education. In doing so, I provide the first causal estimates of caste-based peers in this historical context.

Finally, this paper contributes to the growing literature on the effects of colonial education (Huillery, 2009; Castelló-Climent et al., 2018; Wantchekon et al., 2015; Dupraz, 2019; Cogneau and Moradi, 2014). In particular, this paper relates to work on the provision and distribution of schooling in colonial India. Previous work attributes the limited expansion of education to dependence on land taxes, caste heterogeneity, and the hesitance of landed elites to finance primary schooling (Chaudhary, 2010, 2015). I extend this line of research by moving from the district level to individual-level evidence, showing that educated elite peers, not

landed elite peers, shaped the university and occupational progression of non-elite students. It also provides the first estimates of how caste and religious identity of an individual affected access to university education in colonial India, drawing on a largely underused administrative source: the government gazettes.

2 Historical and Institutional Background

This section provides an institutional background to the time period under study, describing the system of high school and collegiate education and presenting archival evidence of inter-caste relations in classrooms.

2.1 Secondary Schooling and College Education in Colonial India

During the colonial period, high school and collegiate education came under the ambit of the university. In the 1890s, there were five universities – Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Allahabad, and Punjab. This paper focuses on the University of Allahabad, established in 1887, which exercised jurisdiction over five provinces in northern and central India: the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (henceforth, United Provinces), Central Provinces and Berar, Ajmer-Mewar, the princely states under Central India Agency and those under Rajputana Agency.[4] High schools were managed by the government, missionaries, or local Indian elites. Regardless of management, they taught a standardized curriculum and prepared students to pass a centralized examination.[5] Furthermore, the university set the eligibility conditions for college admissions.

High schools were elite-dominated. Schooling was neither compulsory nor generally free and educational access was socially stratified. Indeed, male literacy in the United Provinces and Central Provinces in 1911 was only 7.8% and 8.7% respectively (Chaudhary, 2015).[6] The main beneficiaries of colonial education were the landowning and administrative classes. However, high schools were always linked to government jobs and came to be dominated by "educated elite" castes traditionally associated with government employment and higher education – Brahmins and Kayasthas.[7] This link only strengthened further after the 1892 civil

[4]The University of Allahabad was bifurcated multiple times with universities established in Benares (1916), Lucknow (1920), Nagpur (1923)

[5]A high school could only send students for the centrally conducted final examination if it was affiliated with the university and later with the provincial government.

[6]Female literacy rates in United Provinces and Central Provinces were 0.6% and 0.4% respectively, while English literacy rates for males in both provinces was around 1%.

[7]Kayasthas made up 8.3% of all school enrollment in 1874–75, but 19.7% of government high school enrollment. *Report on Progress of Education in the North-western Provinces and Oudh* pages 68 and 87.

service reforms that mandated competitive examinations at all levels of the service, for which a high school degree was a prerequisite.

Institutional features of the schooling system also reinforced elite over-representation. Children were instructed in their vernacular in primary schools beginning from ages of 5 or 6 (Fig. 1).[8] Students then chose between a vernacular or English-medium middle school. However, high schools exclusively taught in English. Students from middle vernacular schools had to repeat their middle school course in English in order to progress to high school.[9] Moreover, the supply of middle English schools was significantly lower: in the United Provinces, there were 422 middle vernacular schools compared to 209 secondary English schools.[10]

Upon completing high school, students sat for either the matriculation examination administered by the University of Allahabad or the school-leaving certificate examination conducted by the provincial government of the United Provinces.[11] Successful candidates were eligible for admission to college. Graduates who discontinued their higher education could instead choose to enter the legal profession by appearing for the *mukhtarship* examination which qualified successful candidates to practice law in the subordinate civil courts. Those who continued their education were required to complete a two-year intermediate college course culminating in the intermediate examination, after which successful candidates proceeded to a two-year undergraduate program leading to a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree.

Although the university regulated examinations and determined the eligibility of those who could appear for them, college admissions were left to the discretion of the college principal. The university only recommended the minimum conditions that applicants had to meet. According to its *Inter-College Regulations*, a high school graduate had to submit a certificate of "good conduct" issued by their school headmaster at the time of application, implying a greater discretionary role for the school headmaster even after a student successfully passed the high school examination. Although information on the exact admission procedure

[8] Schools were gender-specific. Among the 274 high schools that produced a graduate between 1894 and 1919, only 6 catered to girls, mostly Indian Christians and Europeans.

[9] In United Provinces, they could enter high school if they attended special English classes in their middle vernacular schools.

[10] Statistics are calculated from the 1912–17 *Quinquennial Report on the Progress of Education in the United Provinces* pg. 27 and 28.

[11] These were formally called the Entrance Examination and School Final Examination, both of which were conducted by the University till 1907. These were then replaced by a university-administered matriculation examination from 1908. The SLCE replaced the school final examination from 1911 and conducted by the provincial government.

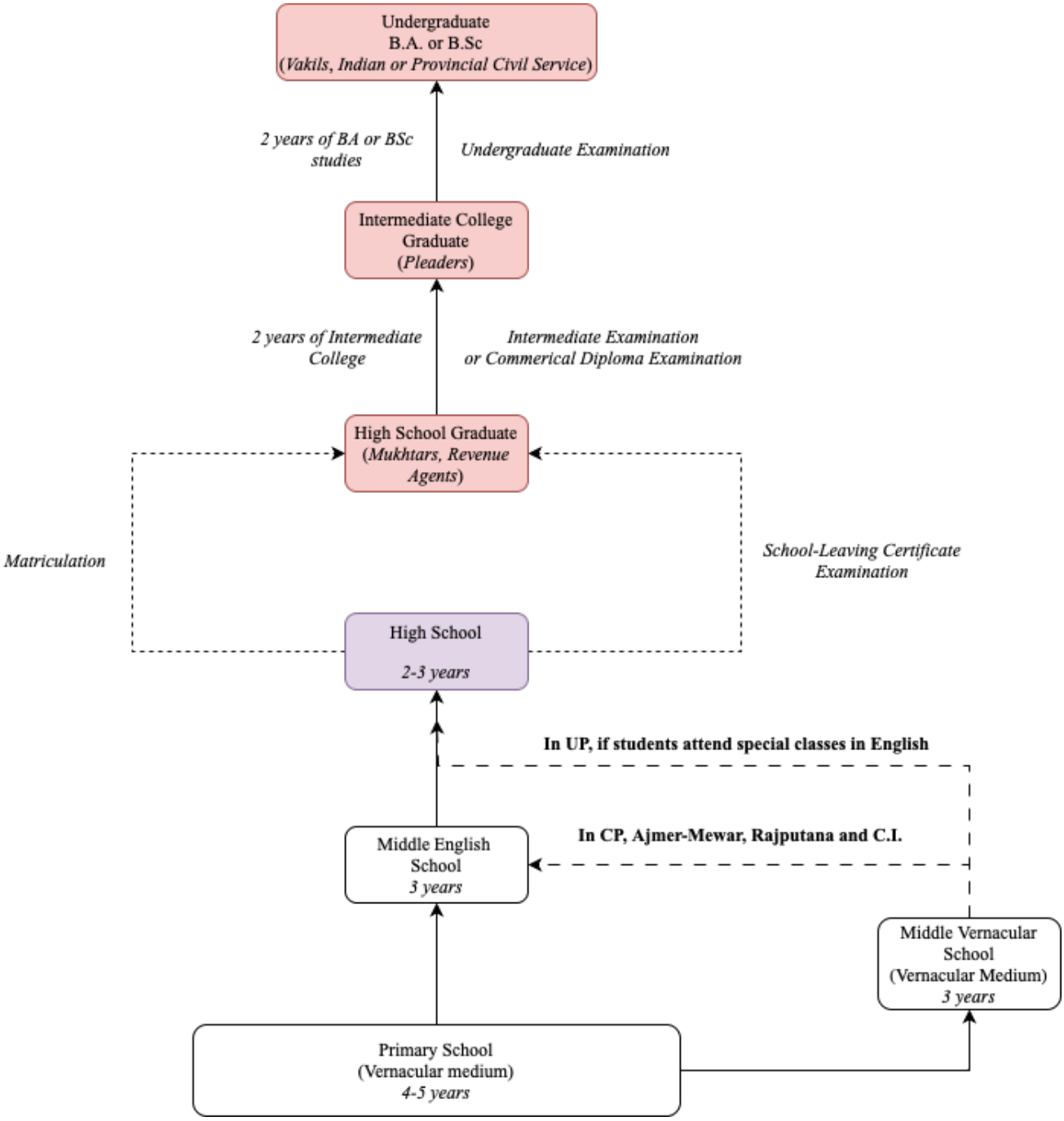


Figure 1: Stages of Schooling from Primary to Undergraduate

Notes: The figure is constructed based on the *Progress of Education 1902-07 Vol 1.* Each box corresponds to a particular stage of education beginning from primary school. The portion in Italics refers to the number of years it takes for a student to complete that particular stage of schooling. The box in purple indicates the final stage of schooling - high school. The boxes in red indicate those who are eligible to enter university either as a student in an intermediate college or in a college offering undergraduate studies. The portion in brackets in these boxes give example of some of the jobs that students with this level of education can obtain. The text beside the arrow connecting these boxes indicate the type of examination it takes to graduate a particular stage. For example, a high school student writes the matriculation or school-leaving certificate examination to become a High School graduate (Matriculate).

in colleges is scarce, government reports and university minutes provide several indications.

Capacity constraints appeared to be the key institutional challenge in obtaining a place in college. Relative to the rapid increase in high schools producing a graduate from 105 in 1894 to 227 in 1919, the number of colleges producing a graduate only rose from 23 to 30 in the same period. The result was overcrowding in intermediate colleges, insufficient staff, and limited accommodation facilities for scholars. In response, the university often recommended limits on classes.[12] These constraints compelled college principals to turn away eligible candidates to maintain the prescribed limit. In 1908–09, the first year batch of admitted students at the Canning College, Lucknow, was 50.[13] For perspective, the total number of high school graduates in the same year only in Lucknow was 72.[14] Given that a college typically served students from multiple surrounding districts, available college capacity was grossly inadequate.

The primary bottleneck in obtaining an undergraduate degree was getting admitted to an intermediate college. Once admitted and having passed the intermediate exam, students could continue their undergraduate studies in the same college as long as they taught up to the undergraduate level. This asymmetry is reflected in the data. Between 1894–1919, 33.5% of high school graduates passed the intermediate examination, while 58.9% of intermediate graduates passed the undergraduate examination.[15] Thus, progression beyond the high school stage was more constrained than in obtaining an undergraduate degree conditional on passing the intermediate exam.

The educational system produced a highly skewed caste composition across white-collar occupations such as teaching, lower-grade lawyers, and the civil service. Fig. C.3 presents the caste distribution of high school graduates who entered these occupations in the United Provinces between 1894–1919. Although elite castes comprised just under 20% of the provincial population in 1901, they accounted for roughly 65% of newly appointed teachers and mukhtars between 1898 and 1922, and 47% of deputy collectors in 1922. Kayasthas were especially dominant in the lower-grade legal professions: despite constituting slightly more than 1% of the population, they formed over 40% of mukhtars. Lower-caste groups were barely represented in any of these occupations. Merchants, however, appeared in significant numbers among mukhtars, comprising just

[12] In one instance, the university recommended a limit of 16 students in an intermediate college class for Biology.
[13] See the 1908–09 *Report of Public Instruction for the United Provinces*
[14] This is based on data used in the paper.
[15] Percentages calculated from the data used in the paper

over 16% in both.

2.2 Caste System and Inter-Caste Relations in Schools

The caste system is a hierarchical form of social stratification comprising four broad classes or *varnas*: *Brahmin*, *Kshattriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*. A significant share of the population – collectively referred to as *Dalits* today – fall outside the varna system and were historically treated as *outcastes*. Within each varna and among *Dalits*, there exist hundreds of castes which is the primary form of social identity. A Caste is hereditary and endogamous, and there is little evidence that it changed much during the colonial period.[16]

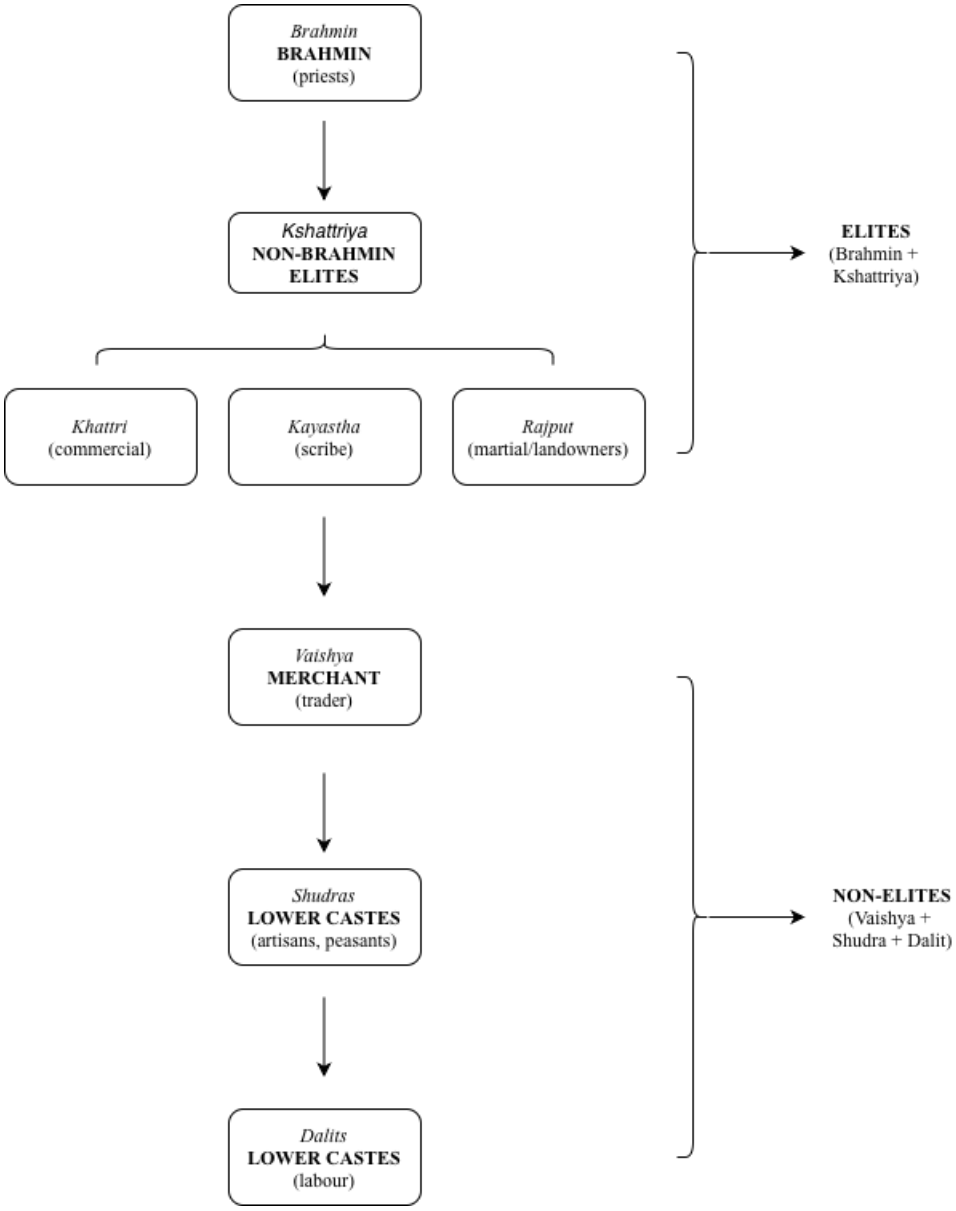
Brahmins were at the apex (Fig 2). Below them were the Kshattriyas that included three prominent castes – Rajputs (soldiers), Kayasthas (scribes), and Khattris (commerce) [17]. Together with Brahmins, these groups formed the elite castes. Among them, Brahmins and Kayasthas were "educated elites" – traditionally associated with higher education and white collar jobs, including law and government services. The landed elites were mostly Rajputs. Throughout the paper, I refer to Vaishyas (henceforth, merchant castes), Shudras and Dalits (henceforth, lower castes) as non-elites for conceptual clarity when defining elite peers. Although grouped together, they were considerably different from each other. The merchants were the lowest of the upper-castes, but were economically upwardly mobile during the colonial period, increasingly enrolling in higher education and acquiring land. In contrast, lower castes had limited access to elite education or occupations due to their low social rank.

Caste norms governed everyday social interactions and these extended to formal institutions such as schools. Colonial educational reports, such as the 1884 Education Report on the North-Western Provinces (NWPER) and the provincial Reports on Public Instruction (RPI), provide accounts of persistent difficulties in inter-caste relations in schools. Upper-castes often opposed the entry of lower castes into schools, threatening not to send their children to government schools to avoid mixing with lower castes (NWPER, 1884, p. 158). Within classrooms, Brahmin and Kshattriya students avoided sitting with students from other castes, limiting interactions between groups even when non-elites could formally access schooling (NWPER, 1884, p. 475).

[16] Genetic studies show that strict endogamy became the norm between 1900 and 4200 years ago (Moorjani et al., 2013), implying that caste identities were persistent and fixed long before the onset of colonial rule. There were some castes such as the Jats whose social position may have improved. The 1901 census classified them below the merchant castes. However, 1911 census classified them as Kshattriyas. In this paper, I follow the 1901 census.

[17] Khattris were not a significant group in the other provinces.

Figure 2: Caste System



Notes: The figure depicts the caste system as it existed in United Provinces. Each box depicts a certain caste group/class. The text in bold indicates how this group will be referred to in the rest of the paper. Curly brackets depicts the elite status of each class.

Government reports also highlight segregation within classrooms, particularly in private schools, where government oversight was weaker. In the Berar region, inspectors noted that while lower-caste students were admitted to government schools, they were often neglected by teachers in favour of upper-castes (Central Provinces RPI, 1910). In private schools, lower-castes were relegated to attend classes from the verandah rather than with their upper-caste peers in the classrooms. Such practices reflect not only the caste composition but also that of the teachers. The teachers in secondary schools were predominantly from Brahmin and Kayastha castes, which likely reinforced social hierarchies within classrooms that only further limited the scope of interactions between elites and non-elites. Put together, these accounts provide evidence that elites and non-elites interacted under conditions of significant social distance between each other.

3 Data and Descriptive Evidence

3.1 High School Graduates

All high school graduate records were drawn from two archival sources: the *Government Gazette of the United Provinces* and the *University of Allahabad Calendar*. The government gazette was a weekly publication of the provincial government that issued notifications from its various departments, including the *Department of Public Instruction*, which oversaw education. The university calendar was an annual publication detailing the administrative working of the university for the year, including rules of conduct of various university examinations and admission into colleges, while also providing a partial academic register that listed students who passed the various examinations each year.

I digitize and extract the records of all graduates from 1894 – the first year for which caste of the student was recorded – to 1919 – the last year for which the student could be matched to their university outcomes given the available records. Until 1908, both the matriculation and the school final examinations were conducted by the university, and the results were recorded in both sources. Beginning from 1911, the school-leaving certificate examination, conducted by the provincial government of United Provinces, replaced the school final examination, and the results were recorded only in the government gazette. In contrast, the matriculation results until 1919 were recorded in both sources.

Between 1894 and 1919, there were 39,208 students who graduated from 277 high schools in the five

provinces that came under the jurisdiction of the University of Allahabad.[18] Among them, 1430 students appeared as private candidates for the exam, unaffiliated with any school, and are excluded since their school of attendance is unknown. Furthermore, 453 students (906 records) passed both the matriculation and school-leaving certificate examinations between 1911 and 1919. Since the main analysis defines peers at the school-cohort level, only the 453 records from the matriculation exam are retained. Finally, 357 students belonged to school-cohorts with a single graduate. Since the main variable of interest, the share of elite peers, cannot be defined for students without peers, these singleton observations are excluded from the analytical sample. The resulting analytical sample comprises 37,057 students from 261 high schools. 74% of them came from the United Provinces (Fig C.6).

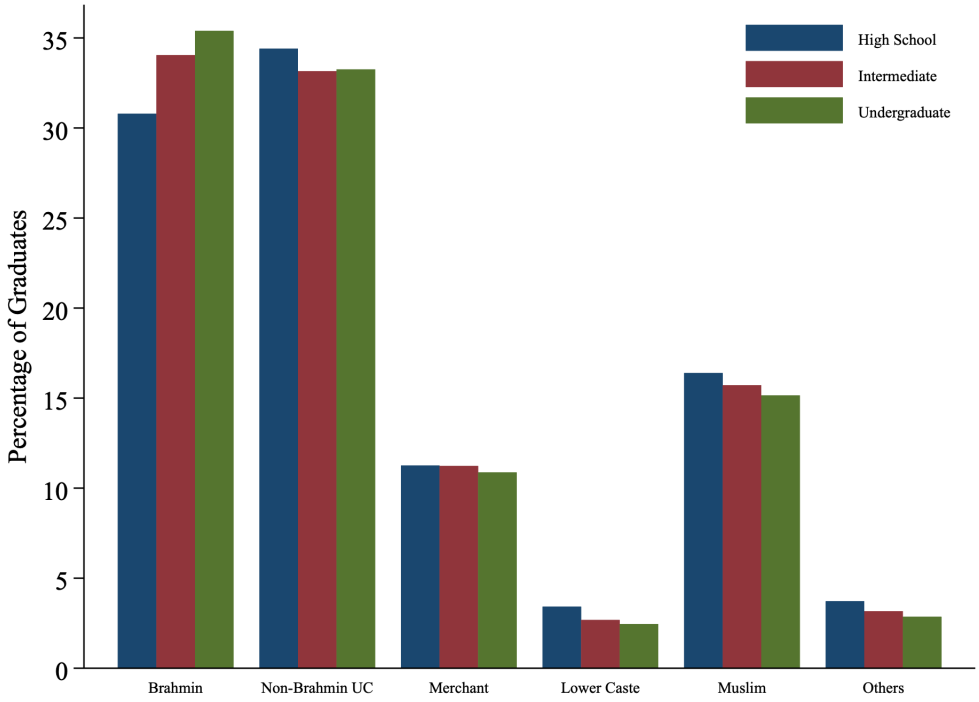
High School records included the name of the student, their age (in years and months), their high school, their caste which was self-reported, and their passing division (first, second, or third class) (see Fig D.1). The year of birth of each student is computed by subtracting their age from the year and month of the examination. The district of each high school is inferred from their names. The type of school management – government, missionary, private (Indian elite-run) – is identified primarily from the district gazetteers of each province and supplemented with the provincial reports on public instruction and the *Imperial Gazetteer* when necessary. Government schools refer to schools in regions directly under British rule that were under the management of the colonial government, either through the district boards or the provincial government. Missionary schools were run by Christian missions including the American Presbyterian Mission, Canadian Mission, and so forth across all provinces. Finally, private schools include i) Indian elite-run schools in United Provinces, Central Provinces, and Ajmer-Mewar and ii) schools run by the *darbar* of the princely states in Rajputana and Central India.[19]. Approximately half of the graduates attended a government school, just over a third attended a private school, and the rest attended a missionary school (Fig C.9).

Using the self-reported caste of the graduates, I classify them into 6 caste/religious groups following the 1901 census reports for each province: Brahmin; Non-Brahmin Upper Castes (henceforth, Non-Brahmin UC); Merchant; Lower Caste; Muslim and Others. The list of castes that make up each group is presented in the Appendix A.5. Brahmins and non-Brahmin UC are classified together as elites since they correspond

[18] These five provinces were the historical equivalent of modern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and some parts of Maharashtra.

[19] *Darbar* refers to the palace of an Indian king.

Figure 3: Share of Graduates across Higher Education Stages by Caste/Religion



Notes: The figure depicts the percentage of graduates across high school, intermediate, and undergraduate by their caste/religious group.

to the *Brahmin* and *Kshattriya* varnas of each province (see Fig 2). Non-Brahmin UC includes both the clerical/scribal Kayastha caste, the martial Rajput castes, and other upper-castes including Khattris. The non-elites comprise two groups i) Merchants, which comprised all *Vaishya* castes, and ii) Lower castes, which comprised all *Shudra* and *Dalit* castes. Though Muslims were internally stratified, their sub-group was not reported, and hence they are classified as neither elite nor non-elite. Finally, the Others group consists of miscellaneous religious groups such as Indian Christians, Jains and Parsis, and Hindus whose caste position is ambiguous in the census reports.

3.2 Outcome Variables

I study the effect of elite peers on subsequent educational and occupational outcomes. Educational outcomes are measured at two stages of university progression: i) passing the intermediate examination, written 2 years after entering university and ii) passing the undergraduate examination which conferred either a B.A. or B.Sc. degree on the candidate and was written 2 years after the intermediate examination. Occupational

outcomes are measured by i) appearing as a candidate for the mukhtarship examination and ii) passing the mukhtarship examination, which qualified candidates to practice as *mukhtars*.

Intermediate Graduates: Intermediate Graduate records were digitized from the aforementioned sources: *Government Gazette of the United Provinces* and the *University of Allahabad Calendar*. When the Queens College and Central Hindu College came under the newly formed University of Benares in 1918, their intermediate graduation records ceased to appear in the university calendar and instead were obtained solely from the government gazette.[20] These records were digitized from 1896 – the first year a high school graduate from 1894 could have completed the 2-year intermediate course after entering university – until 1925 – which is 6 years after the last high school cohort (1919) in the analytical sample enters university. In contrast to high school records, intermediate graduate records only included the name of the candidate, the name of their college, and their passing division in the examination.

I identify a high school graduate as having completed the intermediate stage if they passed the intermediate examination within 2 to 7 years of high school graduation. Although the course was designed for 2 years, there was no age limit or restrictions on the number of attempts; the 2 – 7 window ensures that late passers are captured.[21] 92.5 percent of intermediate graduates passed the examination within 2 – 4 years of high school graduation (Figure C.10).

Matching between high school and intermediate graduate records is based on name similarity via a mixture of fuzzy matching (Levenshtein distance) which ascribes a similarity score to each match, and manual checking. Section D.3 describes the matching procedure in greater detail.

Undergraduates: Records of those who obtained an undergraduate (B.A. or B.Sc.) degree from the University of Allahabad were obtained from the *University of Allahabad Calendar*. These records were digitized from 1898 – the first year a high school graduate could complete their 4-year university course, which included both the 2-intermediate and 2-year undergraduate course – until 1927 – the last year for which these records were available. Similarly, records of undergraduates from the newly formed Benares Hindu University (BHU) between 1918 and 1925 were obtained from the 1925 edition of the *Benares Hindu*

[20] The intermediate graduation records for University of Benares were obtained and digitized from 1918 – 1923.

[21] Due to unavailability of the 1926 government gazette/University of Allahabad calendar, it was not possible to match the 1919 high school graduates with the intermediate graduates from 1926. This does not affect my results; either by limiting the window to 2 – 6 years or by leaving out the 1919 high school cohort.

University Calendar. To complete the records, undergraduates between 1923 – 1927 from the Nagpur University, which was formed in 1923 for students from the Central Provinces, were obtained from the *Nagpur University Calendar*.

Similarly to intermediate records, undergraduate records only included the name of the candidate, the name of their college, and the passing division in the undergraduate examination. I identify a high school graduate as having obtained an undergraduate degree if they passed their undergraduate examination within 2–7 years of passing the intermediate stage. Matching between intermediate and undergraduate records is again based on name similarity via a mixture of fuzzy matching and manual checking.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of graduates by caste and religion in the high school, intermediate, and undergraduate stages. Elites (Brahmins and Non-Brahmin UC) account for approximately 65 % of graduates in each stage. Brahmins are the only group whose representation increases over each stage. In contrast, the representation of all other groups decreases between successive stages, though their magnitude differs for each group. Among non-Brahmin UC, Kayasthas accounted for a substantial share of graduates (Fig. C.4). Although high school graduates were represented by 307 castes and religious categories, more than half of them belonged to Brahmin and Kayastha castes.

Mukhtarship Candidature and Selection: The annual list of candidates who appeared and passed the mukhtarship examination was published each year in the *Government Gazette of the United Provinces*. I digitize all available candidature records from 1898 – which was the first year a high school graduate from the earliest cohort (1894) could plausibly appear for the examination – until 1919.[22] In contrast, pass lists were digitized for every year between 1898 and 1921. Both records report the name of the candidate, the father's name, and the residing district of the candidate. Using this information, I first match each candidate with their examination outcome and then link candidates to their high school records.[23] Section D.4 describes the matching procedure in greater detail.

[22] Candidature lists were not available for 1899, 1907, 1909, and 1918.

[23] The unavailability of candidate lists in 1899, 1907, 1909, and 1918 do not meaningfully affect the universe of all candidates in my data. Since students could appear for the examination multiple times and the pass records are complete for these missing years, the only candidates I cannot identify are those who appeared for the first time in these missing years and never thereafter.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

Summary statistics for high school and intermediate graduates are presented in Table B.1 and Table B.2 respectively. On average, a high school student had around 18 peers in their graduating cohort of which around 65.3% were from an elite caste. Figure C.5 depicts the share of elites within 5 randomly selected high schools across graduating cohorts. Even within the same school, there is considerable fluctuation over time, with the elite share often varying 20-30 percentage points between adjacent cohorts. Exposure to elite peers varied widely on average between the different caste groups. Over 70% of peers of elite caste students were other elites. In contrast, only 58% of peers of merchant caste students were elite. Brahmins were the most likely to graduate from the intermediate and undergraduate stages after high school. They were around 5% more likely than the nearest group to graduate both stages. Both non-Brahmin UC and Merchants had a similar graduating rate for both stages. Lower castes, however, had a substantially lower rate of graduation from both stages; their graduation rates were 8-10% percentage points lower than Brahmins. Exposure of merchant caste students to elite peers remained lower than the other groups in the intermediate college (Table B.2).

4 Caste Differences in Higher Educational Attainment

In this section, I document caste and religious disparities in progression to university education among high school graduates. These estimates provide the benchmark for evaluating the effects of elite peers.

To study the probability of a high school graduate from different caste/religious categories to pass the intermediate and undergraduate examinations, the following regression is estimated at the baseline,

$$Y_{isdt} = \sum_{g \neq \text{Brahmin}} \beta_g \, \mathbb{1}\{c_i = g\} + \mu_s + \kappa_t + \varepsilon_{isdt}. \tag{1}$$

where i indexes students, s refers to high schools, d indexes districts, and t indexes the high school graduating year; c_i is the caste/religious group of student i; μ_s and κ_t are school and year fixed effects respectively. The coefficients β_g measure differences relative to Brahmins. The dependent variable Y_{isdt} is one of two

indicators:

(i) $Y_{isdt} = 1$ if student i passes the Intermediate examination,

(ii) $Y_{isdt} = 1$ if student i passes the Undergraduate examination (B.A. or B.Sc.).

Finally, standard errors are clustered at the high school level. Thus, the baseline specification estimates the probability that a student from group g who graduated in year t from the same school s pass the intermediate and undergraduate examinations, relative to Brahmins.

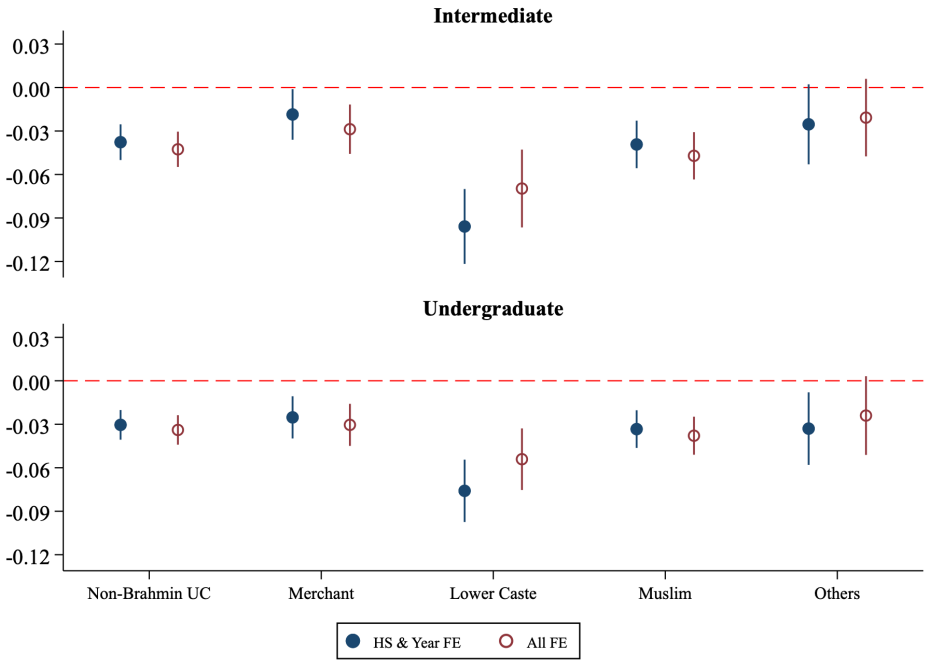
To account for changes in school quality and any district-level shock that may affect the graduation rates of different caste groups, school-specific linear trends $\lambda_s t$ and district-year fixed effects $\delta_d t$ are added to the baseline. Finally, X_{isdt} includes controls for the year of birth of the student to account for older students being less likely to continue to university, and the type of examination the student wrote. Including these terms to the baseline gives the following specification,

$$Y_{isdt} = \sum_{g \neq \text{Brahmin}} \beta_g \, \mathbb{1}\{c_i = g\} + \mu_s + \lambda_s t + \delta_{dt} + \zeta X_{isdt} + \varepsilon_{isdt}. \tag{2}$$

Results are presented in Figure 4. At the baseline, they show a similar pattern for passing both intermediate and undergraduate degrees. Relative to Brahmins, all groups are less likely to obtain either an intermediate or an undergraduate degree. However, there is considerable heterogeneity across groups. Within the same school and year, Brahmins have an average probability of 36.1% to pass intermediate examination and a 22% probability to pass the undergraduate examination. Lower castes face the largest disadvantage, being 9.6 percentage points less likely to pass the intermediate examination and 7.6 percentage points less likely to pass the undergraduate examination than Brahmins. In contrast, the penalty on merchants is relatively small: they are 1.8 percentage points less likely to pass the intermediate and 2.5 percentage points less likely to pass the undergraduate examinations.

Non-Brahmin UC and Muslims occupy an intermediate position, being around 3.8–4.0 percentage points less likely than Brahmins to pass the intermediate and 3–3.5 percentage points less likely to pass the undergraduate examinations. However, there is considerable heterogeneity within the non-Brahmin upper castes (see Fig C.11). Among them, the Rajput castes (landed elites) face the greatest penalty, second only

Figure 4: Effect of Caste on the Probability of Passing Intermediate and Undergraduate Examinations



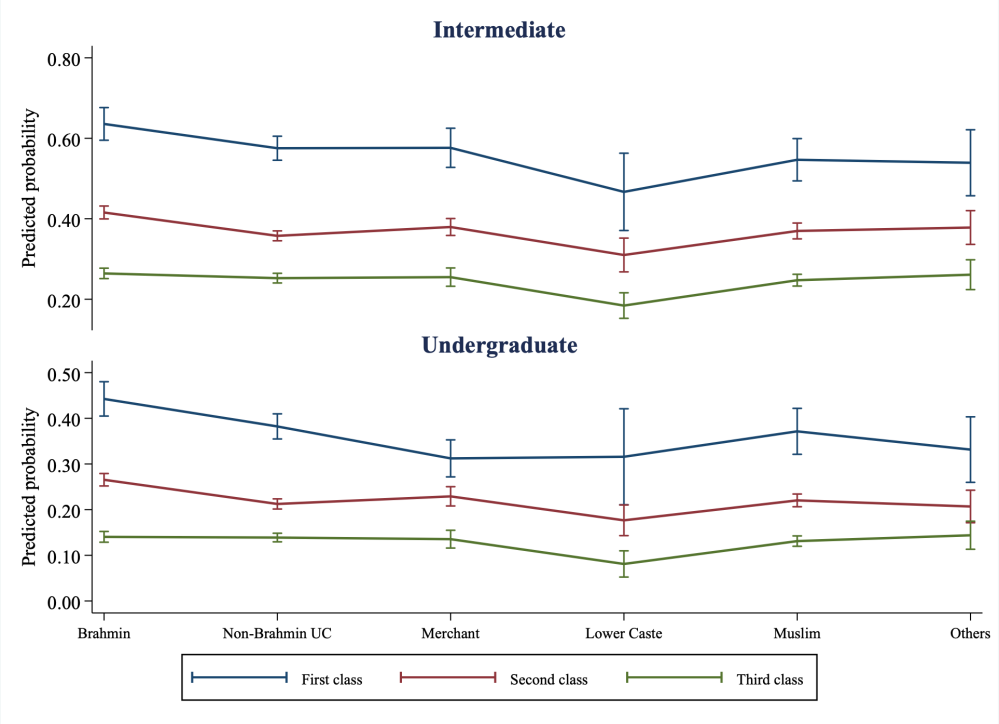
Notes: The figure shows the estimated coefficients for the probability of passing intermediate and undergraduate examinations after graduating from high school, for each caste. Horizontal bars represent 90 percent confidence intervals. The top panel shows the probability of passing the intermediate examination for each caste relative to Brahmins, while the bottom panel shows the probability of passing the undergraduate examination relative to Brahmins. Blue dots indicate coefficients estimated from regressions that include only high school and year fixed effects. Red dots indicate coefficients estimated after including the full set of fixed effects and controls, which comprise high school-year and district-year fixed effects, as well as controls for students' birth year and the type of examination they took to pass high school. In both regressions, standard errors are clustered at the high school level.

to lower castes. This pattern suggests that the nature of elite – whether they are traditionally associated with higher education or land-ownership – may have mattered for how non-elites were affected by exposure to elites.

The results are robust to the inclusion of district-year fixed effects and school-specific linear trends. Both the sign and magnitude remain similar, though the penalty on lower castes are attenuated. This implies that part of the baseline disadvantage faced by lower castes reflects them being sorted into lower quality school-cohorts.

Caste differences in university progression may partly reflect differences in high school performance. If some castes were less likely to obtain higher grades, their progress to university may reflect disparities in learning outcomes rather than barriers to university progression. To examine whether this was the case, I

Figure 5: Effect of Caste on the Probability of Passing Intermediate and Undergraduate Examinations by High School Grade



Notes: The figure plots the predicted probability for students of each caste and religion to pass the intermediate and undergraduate examinations at each high school grade. These estimates are obtained from regressing the indicator for passing the intermediate (or undergraduate) examination on caste and religious group dummies, high school grades, interactions between high school grade and caste/religion dummies, high school and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the high school level. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

estimate a similar regression as above by adding interactions between each caste group and the high school grade. Figure 5 plots the predicted probability of passing the intermediate and undergraduate examinations by caste and grade. Three patterns emerge.

First, across all groups, students with higher grades were more likely to pass both stages, implying that high school grade predicted university progression. Second, caste penalties persisted within each grade. Relative to Brahmins who achieved the same grade, all other castes had lower pass rates, with the largest disadvantage for lower castes. In fact, the observed pattern of caste disparities mirrors that observed when grades are not controlled for, suggesting that higher performance did not eliminate caste-based disparities in educational progression. Third, disparities widened among students who performed the best. Among those who passed high school with a third division, pass probabilities ranged from 24–26 percent at the intermediate and 13–14 percent at the undergraduate stage, except for lower castes, whose rates were roughly

five points lower. In contrast, among students who passed high school with first- and second-division, the range was 46–63 percent and 31–44 percent at the intermediate and undergraduate levels, respectively. Merchants stand out in particular among first-division students. Their undergraduate pass probability was as low as that of lower castes, though they did not exhibit similar disadvantages at lower grades.

In short, while higher performance in the high school exam strongly predicts success at the university stages, caste disparities continue to persist within each grade and school–year. These patterns motivate the question as to whether the composition of the graduating cohort shaped university progression. The next section explores the role of elite (upper-caste) peers in shaping these outcomes.

5 Econometric Specification: Effect of Elite peers on University Progress

Elites are defined as those castes from the first two varnas that are usually associated with government jobs and landownership. These include Brahmins, Kayasthas, Rajputs, and a host of other castes including Khattris. To study the effect of elite peers, an interaction term between each caste and religious group and the share of elite peers is added to equations 1 and 2. The regression to be estimated, inclusive of all fixed effects, then becomes,

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{isdt} &= \alpha\, Share_{gst} + \sum_{g \neq \text{Brahmin}} \beta_g \, \mathbb{1}\{c_i = g\} + \sum_{g \neq \text{Brahmin}} \gamma_g \, \mathbb{1}\{c_i = g\} \times Share_{gst} \\ &\quad + \mu_s + \lambda_s t + \delta_{dt} + \zeta X_{isgt} + \varepsilon_{isdt}. \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where $Share_{gst}$ is the share of upper-caste peers of student i from caste c. Upper caste peers include Brahmin and Non-Brahmin UC caste groups. A peer is defined as everyone in the same school-cohort of i excluding i themselves. In addition to the type of examination written by the student and their year of birth, X_{isgt} includes the total number of peers to account for the share of elite peers being derived from cohorts of different sizes. All other terms carry the same meaning as defined above. Standard errors are clustered at the high school level.

In addition to the two outcomes studied in equation 1, equation 3 also estimates the effects of elite peers on two indicator variables for the sample of students from United Provinces who did not pass intermediate

exam :

(i) $Y_{isdt} = 1$ if student i appears as candidate for the mukhtarship examination,

(ii) $Y_{isdt} = 1$ if student i passes the mukhtarship examination.

The set of parameters γ_g estimates how the effect of elite peers affects the pass probability in intermediate or undergraduate examinations differently for each caste and religious group g, relative to Brahmins. Thus, the overall effect of elite peers on each g is given by $\alpha + \gamma_g$, where α is the effect of elite peers on Brahmins.

The school fixed effects accounts for time-invariant characteristics of high schools (e.g., type of school management, location etc.). The year fixed effects control for any shocks common to all schools for a given graduating cohort (year). In the full specification, school-specific linear trends $\lambda_s t$ are included to control for changes in school or teacher quality assumed to change linearly with time. Additionally, district-year fixed effects δ_{dt} absorbs any shock common to all students in high school within the same district d in year t and thus, subsume the year fixed effects. As robustness, to account for the changes in demand for higher education among the different groups g across t, full interactions between each caste and year are included in the specification.

Finally, to examine whether elite peers had a similar effect on passing undergraduate exam for intermediate graduates, an analogue of Equation 3 is estimated on the sample of intermediate graduates from 1896 to 1921 across the 33 colleges. This includes the sample of all students from these years that could be matched to their high school records. In place of school and year fixed effects, the regression includes college, college-specific linear and intermediate graduation year fixed effects. Additionally, the regression accounts i) for students coming from schools with different underlying quality and management by including school-year fixed effects and ii) for district-level shocks that could affect demand for job opportunities and pull students away from university progression by including district-intermediate graduation year fixed effects. Finally, in contrast to the regression at the high school level, it also proxies for the ability of the student and the average ability of their peers in the same college-cohort by adding controls for high school grade and the share of third-class peers in the college-cohort. Standard errors are clustered at the college-level. With less number of clusters, estimates are less precisely estimated and the confidence intervals are wider. Nevertheless, it avoids the selection into graduation issue from school-level regressions, since the intermediate graduating

cohort makes up the upper bound of the undergraduate class of a college student.

5.1 Identification

To identify causal effects of elite peers, the specification has to account for selection at two margins: (i) parental sorting *across* high schools and (ii) parental sorting *within* a high school into particular cohorts that differ in teacher quality or peer composition. For example, upper-caste parents could choose to send their children to private schools, many of which catered to the needs of particular castes.[24] Even within schools, parents could place their children in cohorts with better-quality teachers or a more favourable composition of elite caste peers, especially if they believe that their children would benefit from exposure to a more supportive kin or caste-based network. In fact, students' peer groups at the time of high school graduation were majorly from the same caste or religion.

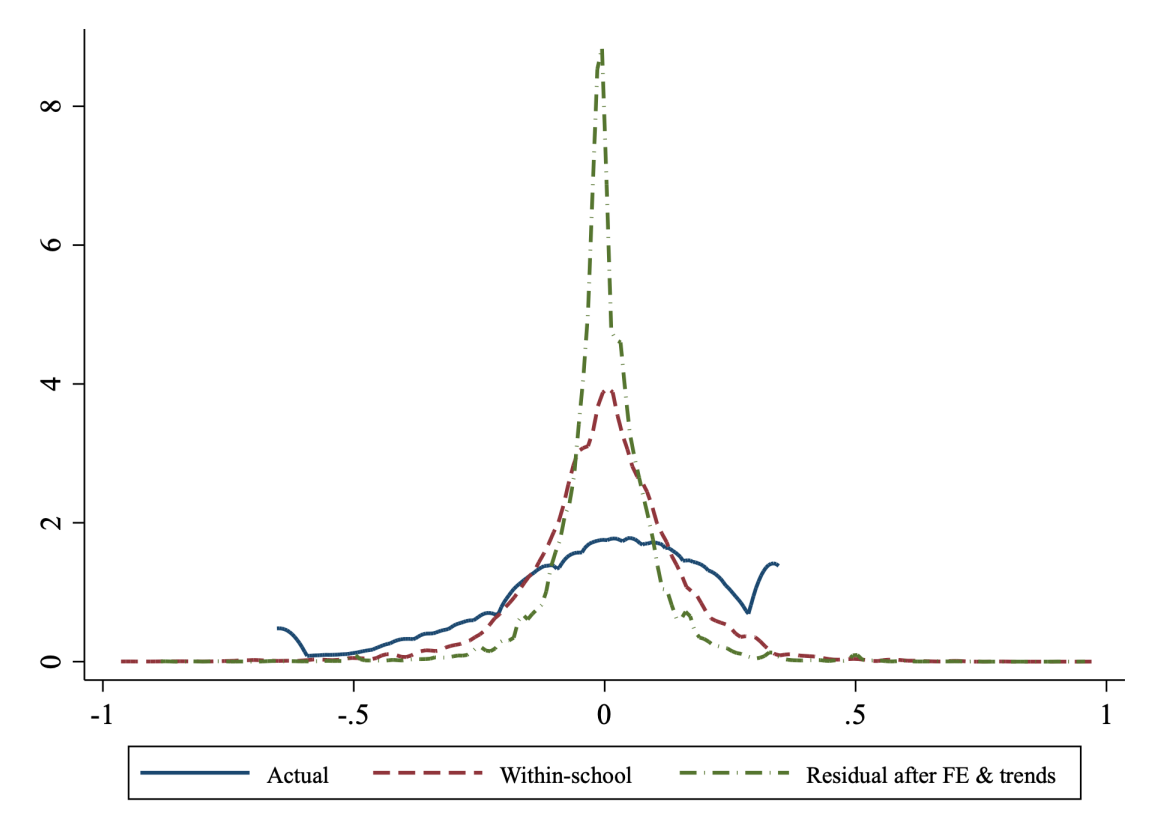
Parental selection across high schools is addressed by including high-school fixed effects, which control for any time-invariant school characteristics (e.g., school management type, baseline facilities, location) [25]. School-specific linear trends mitigate the gradual within-school changes that could correlate with peer composition across time. These school trends account for any linear changes in school quality. Additionally, district-year fixed effects absorb any shock common to all schools within a district in a given year (e.g., district funding for education, location of colleges, labour/ supply shocks). Identification then comes from the non-linear cohort–to–cohort deviations in the share of elite peers within the same school, after netting out school fixed effects, linear trends within each school and district-year shocks. The identifying assumption is that the remaining year-to-year variation in the share of elites within each school-cohort is uncorrelated with unobserved cohort-level shocks (i.e., there is no omitted variable bias). Equivalently, these non-linear deviations act as unexpected shocks to a school's underlying trend in share of elites and are plausibly random (Hoxby, 2000).

One concern with the inclusion of such high-dimensional fixed effects is that the residual variation is too small to capture an effect. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the actual and residual share of elite peers. The

[24] The Balwant Rajput High School in Agra and the Kayastha Pathshala in Allahabad, for example, catered to the requirements of the local Rajput and Kayastha population, even while being open to admitting students from all castes.

[25] During the period, two schools – the government high schools in Agra and Meerut – were handed over to the provincial government by the private board of trustees that originally maintained them. The rest had the same school management throughout the period.

Figure 6: Distribution of the actual share of Elite peers and residual share of elite peers controlling for fixed effects



Notes: The figure depicts the density plots for the actual, within school, and residual share of elite peers controlling for all fixed effects and controls. The actual share is centered around its respective mean for ease of interpretation. It is the raw share of elite peers for each student. Within-school share of elite peers is the residual share of elite peers obtained after regressing the share of elite peers on school fixed effects. Residual share of elite peers is the residual share of elite peers obtained after regressing share of elite peers for each student on school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, district-year fixed effects, caste or religious group of the student, controls for type of examination, total size of peer network and year of birth of the student. Actual share of elite peers is the share of elite peers for each student. Standard Deviation for the actual share of elite peers is 0.24. Standard deviation for the within-school share of elite peers is 0.15. Standard deviation for the residual share of elite peers is 0.10.

residual share captures the variation remaining in the share of elite peers after controlling for high school and year fixed effects, high school-specific linear trends, and other controls. The standard deviation in the actual share of elite peers for all students is 0.24. The standard deviation for the within-school share of elite peers is 0.15. Finally, the standard deviation for the within-school share of elite peers, controlling for all other fixed effects and controls, is 0.10.

A key data limitation is that the sample consists only of students who graduated from high school. This creates a potential selection bias along two margins. First, the effect of elite peers is estimated only among high school graduates. If exposure to elite peers had a negative effect on the probability of non-elites

graduating from high school, the non-elites that survive high school are positively selected on ability. Since the most negatively affected students are not observed in the data, the estimated effect is a lower bound of the true effect. To assess whether elite peers affected academic performance among those who graduated, I use high school grades of the students as the outcome and estimate equation 3. Exposure to elite peers has no significant effect on grades across castes and religious groups, suggesting that elite peers do not adversely impact academic performance (Figure B.3). Thus, differential selection on academic ability among graduates is unlikely to drive the results.

Second, the measure of elite peer composition is constructed using only those who graduated from high school. This is equivalent to the classroom composition of elites only if elites and non-elites have identical graduation rates, which is unlikely. As a result, equation 3 measures the effect of graduating with a higher share of elite peers, rather than exposure to elites among those enrolled in the classroom.

Nevertheless, this measure is economically meaningful for the outcomes that I study. Admission into university and entry into the legal profession were not guaranteed for high school graduates in colonial India. Both decisions were made after high school, where students had to compete with other graduates, making the graduating cohort the relevant peer group. In the case of university progression, capacity constraints in colleges, requirement for positive recommendations from the school headmaster and the discretionary power of college principals to admit students implied that graduating with more elite peers could disadvantage non-elites if there was a preferential bias towards elite students by educational authorities, who were usually upper-caste. Alternatively, non-elites facing competition with more elites to access elite education and jobs may have discouraged from applying to colleges or appearing for the mukhtarship examination, a profession traditionally associated with the Kayastha caste.

Even if the graduating cohort is the relevant peer group to study transitions from high schools to colleges, concerns that the measured peer composition is mechanically affected by differential graduation between elites and non-elites need to be addressed.

I address this in two ways. First, I use middle school graduation records (available till 1902) for United Provinces.[26] These records provide an upper-bound for the caste-composition of students entering high school. In Figure B.4, I show that within a school, the share of elite high school graduates is positively

[26]The middle school examination in the English track was scrapped in 1902 following secondary schooling reforms.

correlated with the share of elite middle school graduates across cohorts.[27] Crucially, the positive correlations are strongest for cohorts that graduate from high school, two years after middle school, exactly the time it takes to complete secondary schooling.[28] This is consistent with middle school caste composition being the key driver of high school peer composition rather than differential graduation rates between elites and non-elites.

Second, I perform a robustness check that controls for cohort-level dropout rates in school. The results of this are presented in Section 6.2.

6 Results

6.1 Main Findings

Effect of Elites on University Progression of High School Graduates: Table 1 reports the estimated effects of exposure to elite peers on university progression across all caste and religious groups. Columns (1) – (2) estimate the effect on passing the intermediate examination, while columns (3) – (4) estimate the effect on passing the undergraduate examination. Columns (5) – (6) estimate the effect on passing the undergraduate examination, conditional on those high school students who passed the intermediate examination.

For Brahmins, the reference group, the effect of elite peers is close to 0 and statistically insignificant across all specifications, indicating no effect of elite peers on the most elite caste. In contrast, the interaction between each group and the share of elite peers is negative across columns (1) – (2), indicating that exposure to more elites reduced the likelihood of passing the intermediate examination for all other groups. This relative negative effect is strongest for the merchant caste students (significant at the 1% level), and is somewhat weaker for the non-Brahmin elites (significant at the 10% level). Coefficients are similar in magnitude across both columns, implying that the results are robust to the inclusion of all fixed effects and controls.

The merchants clearly stand out, experiencing adverse effects from elite peers, both in relative and absolute terms. A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers (0.24 in the estimation sample) leads to a decline in their probability to pass the intermediate examination by 2.5 percentage points, which

[27] Not all Middle English schools had a high school stage. The results hold true if regressing at district-level aggregates.
[28] There is a strong negative correlation five years after middle school, which suggests a mean reversion.

Table 1: Effect of Elite Peers on University Progression

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
= 1 if student passes examination	Intermediate	Intermediate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate
Share of Elite Peers	0.033	0.033	0.029	-0.001	0.016	-0.106
	(0.026)	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.047)	(0.072)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.061*	-0.060*	-0.015	-0.002	0.073	0.113
	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.059)	(0.074)
× Merchant	-0.137***	-0.135***	-0.103***	-0.078**	-0.046	0.038
	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.080)	(0.099)
× Lower castes	-0.051	-0.032	-0.105*	-0.051	-0.252*	-0.154
	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.146)	(0.148)
× Muslim	-0.046	-0.015	0.022	0.055	0.171**	0.224**
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.078)	(0.102)
× Others	-0.063	-0.069	-0.001	0.036	0.145	0.280*
	(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.060)	(0.067)	(0.120)	(0.152)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.104***	-0.102**	-0.074**	-0.079**		
	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.034)	(0.034)		
Sample	All	All	All	All	Intermediate Grads.	Intermediate Grads.
High School FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
District-Year FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
School-specific Linear Trends	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Controls FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Observations	37058	37050	37058	37050	12419	12064
Clusters (High Schools)	262	262	262	261	228	224
R-squared	0.045	0.168	0.034	0.139	0.040	0.172
Mean Dep. Var.	0.336	0.336	0.197	0.197	0.588	0.589

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination written by the graduate, and total number of students in the school cohort. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable that takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Sample refers to the sample on which the regression is estimated. Columns 1, 2, 3, and 4 are estimated on the full sample of students. Columns 5 and 6 are estimated on the sample of those who passed the intermediate examination.

corresponds to a decline of 7.4% relative to the mean probability of passing. In contrast, the negative effect on non-Brahmin elites is marginal and only relative to Brahmins; the overall effect on them is close to 0 and statistically insignificant.

Similar patterns are observed for merchants on passing the undergraduate examination in columns (3) – (4). A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers reduces the likelihood that they pass the undergraduate examination by around 2 percentage points, reflecting a decline of 10% relative to the mean probability of passing. For lower castes, the coefficient reduces by half, compared to the baseline, once all fixed effects and controls are included, indicating that they experience no meaningful overall effect from elite

peers. None of the other groups experience a discernible effect.

However, there is no evidence from columns (5) – (6) that the negative effects from exposure to elite peers in high school persisted beyond the intermediate stage for merchants caste students. This implies that for merchants, exposure to more elite peers during high school primarily influenced completion of the undergraduate degree through its effect on passing the intermediate examination. In contrast, lower castes who had earlier experienced exposure to more elite peers were less likely to pass the undergraduate examination, while Muslims were more likely to do. For both groups, however, the overall effects are imprecisely estimated, and are only marginally significant.

Effect of Elites on Occupational Outcomes: Beyond university progression, elite peers could also influence the occupational choice of their peers. I test this by examining whether exposure to elite peers affected the likelihood that students, across all castes and religions, became *mukhtars*. Since the mukhtarship examination was conducted by the High Court of Judicature in Allahabad, the sample is restricted to students from the United Provinces. To ensure comparability between similar students, I further limit the sample to those who did not pass the intermediate examination and therefore did not pursue university education.

Table 2 reports the estimated effects of exposure to elite peers on outcomes in the mukhtarship examination. Columns (1) – (2) estimate the effect on appearing as a candidate for the examination, capturing whether elite peers shaped students' aspirations to compete. Columns (3) – (4) estimate the effect on passing the examination, reflecting effect of elites on performance or ability of students to succeeds in a competitive setting. Finally, columns (5) – (6) restrict the sample to those who appeared as candidates, allowing me to test whether elite peers affected success in the examination conditional on participation.

Across all specifications, elite peers have no significant impact on the chances of Brahmins to appear as candidates or become mukhtars. In contrast, the interaction between merchants and the share of elite peers in columns (1) – (2) is negative, implying that they were relatively less likely to appear as candidates. Non-Brahmin elites and Muslims, on the other hand, were more likely to appear as candidates, though the overall effects were close to 0 and not statistically significant.

Merchant castes again stand out in absolute terms. A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers reduces their likelihood to appear for the examination by 2.6 – 2.9 percentage points, a decline of about

24% relative to the mean probability of candidature.

Similar patterns are observed in columns (3) – (4). A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers reduces their probability to become mukhtars by 1.2 – 1.4 percentage points, corresponding to a decline of roughly 37% relative to the mean probability of passing. For all other groups, there is no statistically significant effect, in either relative or absolute terms.

Finally, estimates from columns (5) and (6) show that conditional on appearing as candidates, elite peers have no effect on merchant caste students' chances to pass the examination, relative to Brahmins. This suggests that exposure to elite peers reduced the likelihood of merchants to become mukhtars by discouraging them from competing in the first place. Once they appeared for the exam, their performance was indistinguishable from their elite peers.

Effect of Elite peers on Intermediate Graduates: In this section, I explore whether exposure to elite peers in intermediate colleges had a similar effect on university progression as in high schools. Table 3 reports the estimated effects of exposure to elite peers in colleges on the probability that students, across all castes and religions, pass the undergraduate examination. All specifications include proxies for own and peer ability by controlling for the student's high school grade and the share of their peers with the lowest high school grade. The baseline specification in column (1) includes college- and intermediate-year fixed effects. Column (2) adds college-specific linear trends to account for gradual changes within colleges. Column (3) further includes district-intermediate year fixed effects and school-year fixed effects to account for local shocks and non-random sorting of high school students into specific colleges.

Patterns are consistent with previous results. For Brahmins, the effect of elite peers is close to 0 and statistically insignificant across all specifications. In the baseline model, coefficients on the interactions between the share of elite peers and non-Brahmin elites or from other religions are positive, whereas those for merchants, lower castes, and Muslims, are negative. Inclusion of the full set of fixed effects significantly alters the estimated effects across caste groups in columns (2) – (3). The relative effect on merchants, lower castes, and Muslims, becomes more negative, while that on non-Brahmin elites and other religions converge toward 0.

Although the effects on all other groups are not statistically significant, merchants again stand out in both

Table 2: Effect of Elite Peers on Mukhtarship Examination Outcomes

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
= 1, if student is	Mukhtar Candidate	Mukhtar Candidate	Mukhtar Pass	Mukhtar Pass	Mukhtar Pass	Mukhtar Pass
Share of Elite Peers	-0.039	-0.031	-0.003	-0.005	0.005	-0.285
	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.134)	(0.220)
Share of Elite Peers						
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.075**	0.074**	0.008	0.008	-0.045	0.105
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.143)	(0.269)
× Merchant	-0.070*	-0.089*	-0.048*	-0.051**	-0.166	0.006
	(0.040)	(0.047)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.171)	(0.251)
× Lower castes	-0.023	-0.037	-0.020	-0.025	-0.105	0.639
	(0.077)	(0.087)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.275)	(0.443)
× Muslim	0.062*	0.043	0.019	0.029	0.036	0.492*
	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.186)	(0.290)
× Others	0.086**	0.080*	0.054*	0.052	0.493	1.024
	(0.043)	(0.048)	(0.031)	(0.037)	(0.622)	(1.050)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.109***	-0.120***	-0.050	-0.056**		
	(0.037)	(0.042)	(0.031)	(0.024)		
Sample	Non-College Grads.	Non-College Grads.	Non-College Grads.	Non-College Grads.	Mukhtar Candidates	Mukhtar Candidates
High School FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
District-Year FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
School-specific Linear Trends	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Controls FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Observations	18539	18505	18539	18505	1969	1672
Clusters (High Schools)	158	158	158	158	104	99
R-squared	0.067	0.144	0.041	0.112	0.105	0.374
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.107	0.107	0.038	0.038	0.358	0.361

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination written by the graduate, and total number of students in the school cohort. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable that takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Sample refers to the sample on which the regression is estimated. Columns 1, 2, 3, and 4 are estimated on the sample of those students from United Provinces who did not pass the intermediate examination. Columns 5 and 6 are estimated from only the sample of high school students who appeared for the mukhtarship examination.

relative and absolute terms. A 1 standard deviation increase in the share of elite peers (0.21 in the estimation sample) reduces their probability of passing the undergraduate examination by 3.5% percentage points in the baseline. This effect increases to a decline of 5.8 percentage points once controlling for college-specific linear trends, district-intermediate year fixed effects, and school-year fixed effects. Relative to the mean probability of passing, this corresponds to a decline of 9.5% percent. This increase in effect size is reflective of positive selection of merchants into colleges: those who "survived" the intermediate stage were disproportionately those exposed to fewer elites in high school.

Taken together, these results indicate that elite peers negatively affected the educational and occupational mobility of merchant caste students. Elites reduced their likelihood to obtain a bachelors degree by reducing

their chances of passing the intermediate examination, while deterring them from appearing as candidates in the mukhtarship examination. Even among those who progressed to college, elite peers adversely affected their chances to obtain an undergraduate degree. No other groups exhibited comparable negative effects.

The next section examines potential mechanisms underlying these patterns.

6.2 Robustness Checks

In this section, I provide evidence that the results are robust to a range of alternative specifications and sanity checks. For brevity, Table 4 only reports the overall effects of exposure to elite peers on merchant-caste students. The full regression tables with all estimated coefficients are presented in the online appendix.

Inclusion of Dropout Rates: Since the share of elite peers is measured as the composition of elites among the graduating cohort, differential dropout rates between elites and non-elites could bias the results. For example, if non-elites are more likely to dropout, then cohorts with higher dropout rates would mechanically have a higher share of elite graduates.

To account for the possibility that negative impact of exposure of elite peers is not driven by higher dropout rates, I use aggregate records on number of students who appeared for the high school examination and control for school-cohort dropout rate given by,

$$1 - \frac{\text{Number of Graduates in School-cohort}}{\text{Total number of Students in School-cohort}}$$

The denominator is the total number of students who appeared for the high school examination. Additionally, I also include full interactions between each caste/religious group and the dropout rate, to allow for heterogeneous effects by caste. The data for dropout rates are available for the years from 1899-1919, excluding 1911.[29] Column 2 of Table 4 shows that even after controlling for dropout rates and their heterogeneous effects by caste, exposure to a higher share of elite peers continues to have a negative and statistically significant effect on merchant-caste students, with magnitudes higher than the baseline. This indicates that the main results are not driven by selection into graduation. Table B.6 in the Online Appendix provides the

[29]The number of students who wrote the examination is obtained from two sources: the government gazette records the number of students who attempted the examination for the SLCE examination from 1912-1919. For the matriculation (1899–1919) and SFE (1899–1907), I make use of the appendices of the Minutes of the University of Allahabad for each year from 1899–1919. The number of students who wrote the SLCE is missing for the year 1911.

Table 3: Effect of Elite peers on Intermediate college graduates

Dependent Variable *=1 if students passes Undergraduate*	(1) Baseline	(2) + College-specific trends	(3) + Full FE
Share of Elite Peers	-0.000	-0.024	0.016
	(0.090)	(0.072)	(0.091)
Share of Elite Peers			
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.092	0.076	-0.008
	(0.072)	(0.069)	(0.106)
× Merchants	-0.166	-0.203*	-0.292**
	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.137)
× Lower Castes	-0.125	-0.182	-0.314
	(0.236)	(0.213)	(0.302)
× Muslims	-0.015	-0.042	-0.081
	(0.123)	(0.119)	(0.093)
× Others	0.159	0.064	-0.006
	(0.133)	(0.182)	(0.271)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.166	-0.227**	-0.276**
	(0.102)	(0.094)	(0.120)
College FE	Y	Y	Y
Intermediate Year FE	Y	Y	N
College-specific linear trends	N	Y	Y
District-Intermediate Year FE	N	N	Y
Controls for own and peers HS grade	Y	Y	Y
All FE and Controls	N	N	Y
Observations	11484	11484	10276
Clusters	33	33	33
R-squared	0.032	0.049	0.354
Mean. Dep. Var.	0.604	0.604	0.606

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the College level.. Peer and own ability controls include high school rank of the intermediate graduate, share of intermediate graduates who passed in first class and second class in their high school examinations, birth-year of the intermediate graduate and the type of examination they wrote in high school. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable that takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables.

complete regression table.

Inclusion of sub-caste by year FE : The main results could be biased if unobserved parental characteristics influence both school choice and exposure to elite peers. To address this in the absence of parental information, I exploit the fact that castes were further divided into sub-castes that resembled an extended

family or closer kin. For example, a Kayastha caste student with the surname *Srivastava* belongs to the Srivastava sub–caste. In the data, I define sub–caste as the unique combination of a student's surname and caste. For Muslims, I only include those whose surnames are hereditary or denote titles.[30] For other religions, I assign sub–caste as their reported religion.

I then study the impact of elite peers on high school students from the same sub-caste who graduated the same high school at the different points in time.[31] The main results continue to be negative for the merchant-castes with the inclusion of sub-caste by school fixed effects (Table 4 Col. 3). Additionally, the coefficient sizes increase for the effects on passing intermediate and undergraduate examinations relative to the baseline. Table B.5 reports all the estimated coefficients.

Caste-specific demand for university education: To address if the results are robust to time-varying demand for higher education across castes, such as caste-specific demand for government jobs or changes in aspirations, that may correlate with the choice of high school, I include the full set of interactions between a student's exact caste as reported in the graduation lists and the year of high school graduation. The overall effects on merchant-caste students remain negative and statistically significant across all specifications (Table 4 Col. 4), with magnitudes similar to the baseline specification, indicating that the main findings are not driven by the evolving demand for higher education across different castes. Table B.9 presents the complete set of estimated coefficients.

School Entry and Exit: One potential concern is that the estimates could be driven by the entry and exit of schools. The period between 1894 and 1919 saw a rapid expansion in high schools and colleges.[32] If schools that began sending students later are markedly different from older, more established schools, the estimates are potentially biased if the age of schools is correlated with the share of elite peers. To address this, I restrict the sample to students from a balanced panel of schools. Restricting the sample to students from the 55 high schools that produced a graduate continuously from 1894–1919, I continue to find that coefficients remain negative and significant (Col. 5). Additionally, I also restrict the sample to a balanced

[30] Muslim names typically do not include surnames. However, elite Muslims such as Sheikhs or Syeds could indicate these titles in their names. A list of such surnames are included in the Appendix A.6.

[31] The identification strategy is similar to that exploited by works such as (Bertoni et al., 2020), which compares outcomes of siblings who attended the same school but at different points in time, and were hence exposed to a different set of peers.

[32] Schools and colleges from Nagpur were affiliated with the University of Calcutta until 1904. They were brought under the jurisdiction of University of Allahabad from 1905. Moreover, Central Provinces expanded to include the Berar region.

Table 4: Robustness Checks: Effect of Elite Peers on Merchant-castes

	(1) Baseline	(2) Dropout	(3) Subcaste FE	(4) Caste–Year FE	(5) Balanced Panel 1894–1919	(6) Cohort Size > 14 students	(7) High-confidence Matches
Panel A: *Outcome – Pass Intermediate examination*							
Overall effect on merchants	-0.102**	-0.136***	-0.239***	-0.083**	-0.130**	-0.193***	-0.084**
	(0.042)	(0.047)	(0.087)	(0.042)	(0.062)	(0.059)	(0.037)
Observations	37,050	31,733	21,109	36,298	20,305	20,088	37,050
High Schools	262	255	214	262	55	126	262
Mean dep. var.	0.336	0.346	0.350	0.337	0.337	0.348	0.336
Panel B: *Pass Undergraduate Examination*							
Overall effect on merchants	-0.079**	-0.113***	-0.147*	-0.076**	-0.091	-0.114*	-0.057**
	(0.034)	(0.040)	(0.078)	(0.037)	(0.056)	(0.062)	(0.022)
Observations	37,050	31,733	21,109	36,298	20,305	20,088	37,050
High Schools	262	255	214	262	55	126	262
Mean dep. var.	0.197	0.205	0.208	0.198	0.197	0.204	0.197
Panel C: *Mukhtar Candidate*							
Overall effect on merchants	-0.120***	-0.129***	-0.059	-0.112**	-0.132**	-0.128**	-0.079***
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.124)	(0.045)	(0.053)	(0.062)	(0.030)
Observations	18,505	15,592	10,521	18,087	11,339	10,440	18,505
High Schools	158	155	135	158	45	99	158
Mean dep. var.	0.107	0.109	0.119	0.107	0.109	0.099	0.107
High-school FE	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
School-specific linear trend	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
District–Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Subcaste-by-school FE	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Caste-Year FE	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Dropout × caste interactions	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Only the overall effect of exposure to elite peers on merchant-caste students is depicted. Column 1 reports the baseline, column 2 adds controls for dropout rates, and interactions between dropout rates and caste dummy, column 3 adds subcaste-year fixed effects to the baseline, column 4 adds full set of interactions between the caste of the student and high school graduating year, column 5 reports estimates from a restricted sample of students from schools which appeared in the dataset for the whole time period, column 6 reports estimates on a sample which only includes high school cohorts of atleast 15 students, and column 7 reports estimates when redefining the outcomes to only include high confidence matches.

panel of schools with different set of ranges of years and find similar results (see Table B.7).

Small Cohorts: To test whether the results are robust to the exclusion of small cohorts, I re-estimate the main specification after successively dropping cohorts fewer than 5, 10, and 15 students (the average cohort size is 18.9) (see Table B.8 for complete set of estimated coefficients). The overall effects on the merchant-caste students are negative and statistically significant even after excluding cohorts with less than 15 students, suggesting that the main results are robust to exclusion of small and idiosyncratic cohorts (Col. 6).

Validity of Matching Procedure: One potential concern with combining fuzzy matching and manual verification is that the results may depend on specific matching choices. To reiterate, each of the three outcomes are the product of three matching procedures between the high school graduate lists with that of

intermediate graduates, undergraduates, and candidates for the mukhtarship examination. Exact matches of names between two datasets are unlikely because Indian names are transliterated into English in multiple ways. For example, *Sri Krishna Kumar* may also appear as *Sri Krishen Kumar*, *Shri Krishna Kumar*, or *Sri Krisna Kumar*.[33] Figure C.14 in the appendix depicts the density plot for similarity scores between names of high school graduates with each of the three lists. Majority of the matches have a similarity score of over 90%.

To further ensure validity of the procedure, I define a match to be valid only if it has a "high confidence",i.e., the similarity score between the matched names is at least 90%.[34] Column 7 in Table 4 reports the estimates with the new definitions and find the results to remain negative and significant, even though the magnitudes of the coefficients are now slightly lower (see Appendix Figure B.10 for full set of coefficients).

Validity of Mukhtar Candidate Matching: Two potential concerns arise with matching of the sample of mukhtars with that of high school students. First, the matching between both could lead to a significant number of false positives since it relies only on name similarity and includes those who appeared in different districts compared to their school district. Second, not all high school students from later cohorts could be matched to mukhtar candidates as candidates were eligible to appear for the exam between 20 and 30 years of age. Since the mukhtar candidature data end in 1922, students graduating in later years are less likely to appear in the matched sample.

To address these concerns, I perform two robustness checks. First, I only consider matches to be valid if the name and district of the candidate matches with that of the high school graduate. Second, I restrict the sample to only those who were eligible to write the exam before or in 1919. Table B.11 reports the estimates from both robustness checks. The effects on merchants remain negative and statistically significant, suggesting that the benchmark findings are robust to alternative matching criteria and restrictions on exam eligibility.

[33] In this particular example, the match was made between Sri Krishna Kumar and Sri Krishen Kumar where the similar score between the two names was 85%.

[34] For undergraduate outcomes, matching proceeds in two stages. First, high school graduates are matched to intermediate graduates; second, intermediate graduates are matched to undergraduates. A high-confidence undergraduate match therefore requires at least 90% similarity in both stages of the matching procedure.

7 Mechanisms

Having shown that exposure to elite peers reduce the likelihood of merchants to pass the university exams or appear for the mukhtarship examination, I now turn to explain the mechanisms underlying these benchmark findings.

First, I address whether the estimated effects are driven by exposure to more elite peers or the absence of non-elite (merchant caste) peers. Although both channels mechanically mirror each other, they have different conceptual implications. Conditional on keeping the share of merchant caste peers constant, a negative effect from exposure to elite peers points to an elite 'dominance' channel: merchants are disadvantaged because elites restrict their access to elite social capital, crowd them out of scarce university places, or discourage them from applying for elite professions. In contrast, if the outcomes of merchant castes decline substantially when the share of merchant caste peers declines, this would indicate a 'cohesion' channel, where weaker within-cohort support reduces merchants' educational and occupational progress.

To differentiate between these two competing channels, I add the share of merchant caste peers in the school-cohort, and an interaction term between each caste group and the share of merchant caste peers to the baseline specification. The findings reported in Table B.12 support the elite dominance channel. The coefficients are similar or slightly larger than in the benchmark findings. This indicates that exposure to a higher share of elite peers exposes merchants to an elite social capital that they cannot access causing elites to crowd them out or discourage them when applying for collage admissions or appearing as candidates for the mukhtarship examination.

Given that elite dominance is the more relevant channel explaining the main results, I next examine whether all elite castes affected merchants negatively or whether some groups had more pronounced effects than others. The category of elites comprises four main groups: the priestly Brahmins, who alongside Kayasthas, a traditionally clerical caste, dominated higher education; Khattris, a high ranking commercial caste; and Rajputs, the formerly dominant landowning caste. I decompose the effect of elite peers into three – Brahmins, Kayasthas and the rest. The results reported in Table B.13 show that only exposure to Brahmin and Kayastha peers significantly reduces the likelihood of merchant castes to pursue higher education or appear for the mukhtarship examination. The effects of landowning (Rajput) and commercial (Khattri) caste peers

are not statistically significant and close to 0. These findings imply that the negative effect was the result of exposure to elites who historically dominated higher education and government jobs, thus monopolizing the institutional channels of upward mobility. In short, merchants were blocked from accessing the same pathways that preserve the social and occupational status of the educational elite.

Having established the 'educated elite' dominance channel, I now examine *why* exposure to elites affected merchants negatively. Any plausible mechanism must explain both i) how merchants were negatively affected and ii) why they were the only group to be significantly affected. In theory, there are two complementary mechanisms.

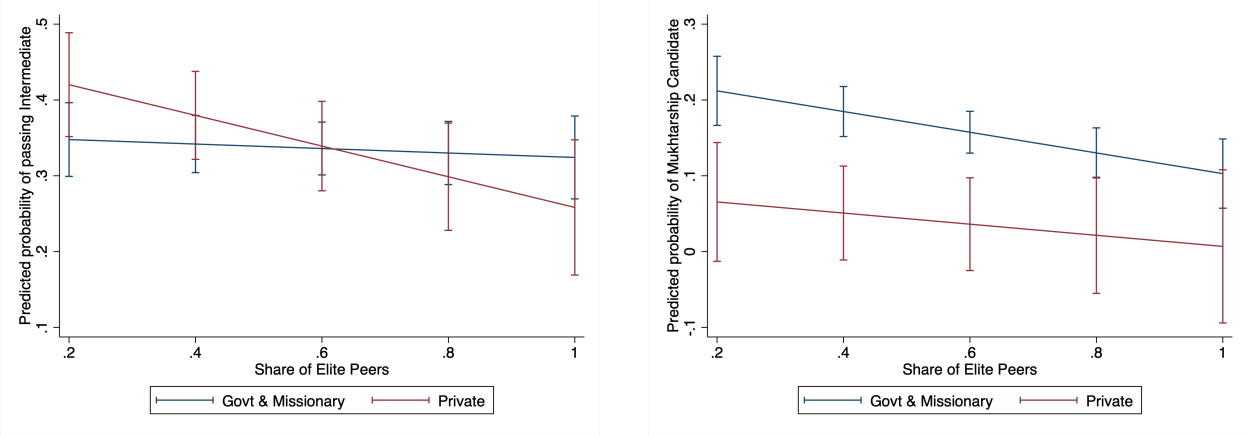
The first is an elite gatekeeping channel. Since Brahmins and Kayasthas were entrenched in the administration of educational institutions and bureaucracy, they were potentially able to influence recommendations, mentorship, and access to college principals or school headmasters. In the absence of comparable networks, merchant-castes may have been indirectly crowded out from higher-quality colleges.

The second is an aspirational or discouragement channel. In elite-dominated cohorts, merchants may perceive that elite-coded higher education and government jobs, such as mukhtarship, are the preserve of a few elites and they would be unable to compete without strong family backgrounds. In this case, elites affect aspirations directly, leading merchant-caste students to self-select out of high-status tracks even in the absence of explicit institutional barriers.

If the institutional elite gatekeeping channel was important, then the negative effects of exposure to elite peers should be strongest in private schools, as they were managed by local Indian elites. One would expect that there was a greater bias towards recommending elites for college admission in private relative to government/missionary schools. Figure 7 presents the predicted probability that merchant caste students pass the intermediate examination or appear for the mukhtarship examination when exposed to different shares of elite peers in private and government/missionary schools. The estimates are reported in Table B.14. Consistent with an elite gatekeeping interpretation, exposure to elite peers substantially reduces the likelihood of a merchant caste student to pass the intermediate examination if they attended a private school, whereas the effect is small and significant in government and missionary schools.

However, the elite gatekeeping channel alone cannot explain the full set of results. The right panel of

Figure 7: Effect of Elite Peers on Merchants in Private vs. Government and Missionary Schools



(a) Intermediate graduation

(b) Mukhtarship candidate

Notes: The Left panel plots the predicted probability of passing the intermediate examination for merchant caste high school graduates exposed to different share of elites in both private and government/missionary schools. The right panel plots the same but for appearing as candidate for the mukhtarship examination.

Figure 7 shows that merchants are less likely to appear for the mukhtarship examination in both private and government/missionary schools. Although the coefficient is lower in private schools, the difference in the effect of elite peers on merchant-caste students between both types of schools is not statistically significant.[35] Since the examination was centrally administered and passing the exam was the sole criterion to become a mukhtar, school-level recommendations or gatekeeping could not have influenced who appeared for it. Instead, these patterns are consistent with an aspirational or a discouragement channel, where elite peers shape the application behaviour of merchant-caste students to pursue to elite-coded professions.

To conclude the mechanism section, I now turn to explaining why the results were only significant for the merchants. Two factors likely played a role: a) the institutional structure of higher education and b) the social position of merchants in the caste system. First, colleges were predominantly under the control of Indian elites and missionaries. In fact, there were only 2 government colleges that stayed open in United Provinces throughout the time period of the study – Queens College, Benares and the Muir Central College, Allahabad. This was relevant since the merchant castes and lower castes were the only groups that did not have colleges and high schools that specifically catered to them.

The Brahmins were dominant across colleges and particularly in colleges run by princely states and the

[35] Testing the difference between the overall effects of elites peers on merchant-caste students in government/missionary schools relative to that in private schools gives 0.063 (0.095), with t=0.66

Benares Central Hindu College. Kayasthas had preferential access to the Kayastha Pathshala in Allahabad which also had an attached intermediate college. Oudh landowners, both Muslim and Rajput, managed the Colvin Taluqdars School in Lucknow. The Aligarh Muslim University served Muslims from across the province while missionary colleges ensured that Indian Christians had easier access to their colleges. This left the merchants and the lower castes as the two groups without such institutions during the time period under study.

College availability alone cannot explain the results. First, we observe that the negative effects on merchant-caste students hold even in obtaining jobs as mukhtars, where colleges play no role. Second, we only observe the negative effects on the merchant castes and not on the lower caste students.

In addition to the availability of colleges, the rising social position of merchants likely played a key role. In contrast to lower castes, merchant castes had a relatively lower social distance from Brahmins and Kayasthas. They were an upwardly mobile group: they increasingly acquired land (displacing Rajputs) particularly in western United Provinces. After Kayasthas, they formed the largest group of applicants for the mukhtarship examination between 1898 and 1921. Relative to their proportion in the population, they were over-represented among high school graduates in United Provinces (Figure A.1). Their growing presence in these elite-coded spaces placed them in direct competition with educated elites in higher education and professional careers.

8 Conclusion

This paper shows how exposure to elite peers affected university progression and entry into the legal profession for non-elites in colonial India. Using novel data of over 37,000 high school graduates, I find that non-elite merchant caste students graduating with more elite high school graduates were less likely to progress through university or appear for the mukhtarship examination. Further evidence points to the role of domain-specific elites: merchant-caste students were crowded out in cohorts dominated by those elites whose status was linked to higher education and government jobs – Brahmins and Kayasthas – rather than by those whose status was independent of education-based pathways such as the landowning Rajputs.

Finally, I study the role of schools in amplifying (or mitigating) the negative impact from greater

exposure to elite peers. The findings suggest that this depends on whether school authorities had discretion over students' post-school trajectories. College admission was at the discretion of the college principal and students had to provide a "good conduct" certificate from their school headmaster. Merchant caste students were most negatively affected by exposure to elite peers in private schools that were managed by local Indian elites. In contrast, government and missionary schools appeared to mitigate this impact.

In contrast, educational authorities played no role in filtering students to appear for the mukhtarship examination. The same negative effects on merchant-caste students were seen in both private and government schools. These patterns imply that school management can only affect the impact of elite dominance on non-elites when they had gatekeeping authority over elite pathways to high status occupations and elite universities.

These results shed light on the role of elites as rivals rather than sources of support to non-elites. In contrast to recent work in the literature (Chetty et al., 2022; Cattan et al., 2025), these findings imply that elite presence can have a negative impact on non-elites in settings where access to high-status opportunities in college education and law were constrained. Although the introduction of competitive examinations for government jobs introduced new pathways to upward mobility, the number of positions was limited. Furthermore, as (Gupta, 2019) notes, the private sector in colonial India was small and absorbed fewer workers while the government focused on creating a class of English-speaking Indian civil servants. This created a narrow channel for upward mobility heightening competition. Status-preserving Brahmins and Kayasthas acted as rivals to crowd out merchant-caste students from opportunities in domains that they traditionally dominated – education and a legal career. A small private sector may have only further compounded this elite rivalry.

Many societies are characterized by status-preserving elites defined by race or religion such as whites in South Africa or the US. As a solution to increase representation of minorities, countries including India introduced affirmative action policies in the last century. The findings in this paper suggest that increased representation in elite spaces such as colleges may not be enough. If elite jobs are limited, elites would be incentivized to gatekeep access to such jobs through inaccessible cliques and networks. This raises questions on how social networks could benefit intergenerational mobility of non-elite groups. Policies must

not only target achieving increased representation of non-elites but also loosening of elite networks. These findings also have implications for our understanding of the political economy of the anti-colonial movement. Did exposure to elite peers affect the likelihood of political participation among the non-elites? How did landowning elites and Muslims respond to the rise of the merchants? These questions are left for future research.

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Online Appendix

A Further Details on Historical Background

A.1 Educational System in Colonial India

Schooling and collegiate education was provided by both government and private organizations. Each province had its own education department which oversaw both running of schools and aiding private schools with financial assistance. Provincial government was usually responsible for the maintenance of the government high school.[36] Private schools were managed by either Indians or missionaries.[37] The former dominated in most provinces. Missionaries were usually the first to bring education, and English education, in particular. However, their spread was limited by the British, worried by any backlash by the Indian elite that would replicate the events surrounding the mutiny/first war of independence in 1857 (see Bellenoit 2007).[38] Of the 277 high schools that sent graduates between 1894 and 1919, 70 were run by the provincial government and 45 were run by missionaries. The darbars of the princely states managed 39 schools, and the remaining 120 schools were managed by private Indian management. Throughout the paper, private schools refer to both schools managed by the princely states and those managed by other Indians.

A.2 Occupational Mobility under Colonial Rule: Descriptive Evidence

Under the British, elite castes continued to dominate traditionally prestigious occupations such as public administration, white-collar jobs, and land ownership. Although Brahmins and Kayasthas only comprised 11.5 and 1.5 percent of the population of United Provinces in 1911, they accounted for 28.5 and 9.8 percent respectively of the Indian gazetted officers in the colonial civil service. Brahmins alone accounted for a third of all doctors, teachers, and lawyers, with Kayasthas accounting for a further 10 percent. Rajputs

[36] Curzon's mandate to have 1 government high school in each district was also accompanied by a process of provincialization of schools, with high schools being transferred from the district board (usually locally controlled) to the provincial government.

[37] In spirit, private schools came under the public school system since the majority of them were financially aided by the colonial government. There were notable exceptions of such schools that were unaided. However, the day-to-day running of the schools was under the direction of the school headmaster, a central figure during the time period.

[38] Bellenoit (2007) identifies missionaries had a bigger role in the relatively poor United Provinces, compared to the other Indian provinces. However, based on the data used in this paper, among the total number of high schools in the five provinces from which students graduated high school between 1894 and 1919, only 47 (28 in United Provinces) out of 285 (171) high schools were run by missionaries. Overall, 15.4 percent of the graduates were from missionary-run high schools.

remained primarily as a landed group, with around half associated with landownership, while 26.8 percent of all landowners in the province were Brahmins.

With the advent of university education and rising opportunities in government jobs under British rule, educated elites began shifting to occupations that were not associated with their traditional occupations. Only about 8 percent of Brahmins and a third of Kayasthas in 1911 remained as priests and scribes respectively, reflecting significant occupational mobility among these groups. However, the landed elites – Rajputs – does not appear to have fared as well. Both Rajputs and Muslim elites enjoyed herediary land rights under Mughal rule. With declining protection over these rights, the hereditary rights that Rajputs and Muslim elites enjoyed were disrupted, and they were increasingly being displaced by the merchant castes in particular.

Using occupational records and matching them with the high school records I will later use for my analysis, I find that while Rajputs accounted for 9.6 percent of the population in the United Provinces, they constituted only 3.1 percent of new teaching degree holders, 5.7 percent of mukhtars, and 7.3 percent of revenue agents. However, probably owing to their traditionally elite status, 11.2 percent of deputy collectors in United Provinces were Rajputs. Muslims in United Provinces, who made up 19.3 percent of the population, also saw a mixed representation in these spaces. On one hand, 40 percent of the deputy collectors were Muslims while 17.2 percent of teaching degree holders between 1894 and 1919 were also Muslim. However, they only constituted 10.4 percent of mukhtars and 13.4 percent of revenue agents during the same period.

Among the non-elites, the merchant castes were the one group that entered traditionally elite spaces during colonial rule. They increasingly displaced Rajput and Muslim landholders particularly in Western United Provinces. They also increasingly found jobs in teaching, law, and the colonial civil service. Although Agarwals constituted only 0.6 percent of the population, they accounted for 3.3 percent of Indian gazetted officers in the administration. Using the records of high school students who obtained a teaching degree in United Provinces between 1894 and 1919, I find that merchant castes made up around 11 percent of degree holders. They constituted roughly 16.5 percent of newly initiated *mukhtars* and *revenue agents* during the same time period, while 6.6 percent of deputy collectors in United Provinces in 1922 were from the merchant castes.

By contrast, lower castes were not able to access elite spaces in a similar fashion. They only made up

3.7 percent of teaching degree holders, 3.4 percent of mukhtars, and 4.4 percent of revenue agents. Only 2.9 percent of deputy collectors in 1922 were from a lower caste.

Overall, these figures indicate that educated elites were increasingly upwardly mobile. Landed elites, such as Rajputs and Muslims, had a mixed representation in traditionally elite spaces. Merchant castes were a rising upwardly mobile group. Finally, the lower castes continued to struggle to access elite occupations. The new elites created under colonization was increasingly English-speaking given their role in administrations, but were also predominantly comprising Kayasthas, Brahmins, and the upwardly mobile merchant castes.

A.3 Educational Mobility and Persistence in Colonial India

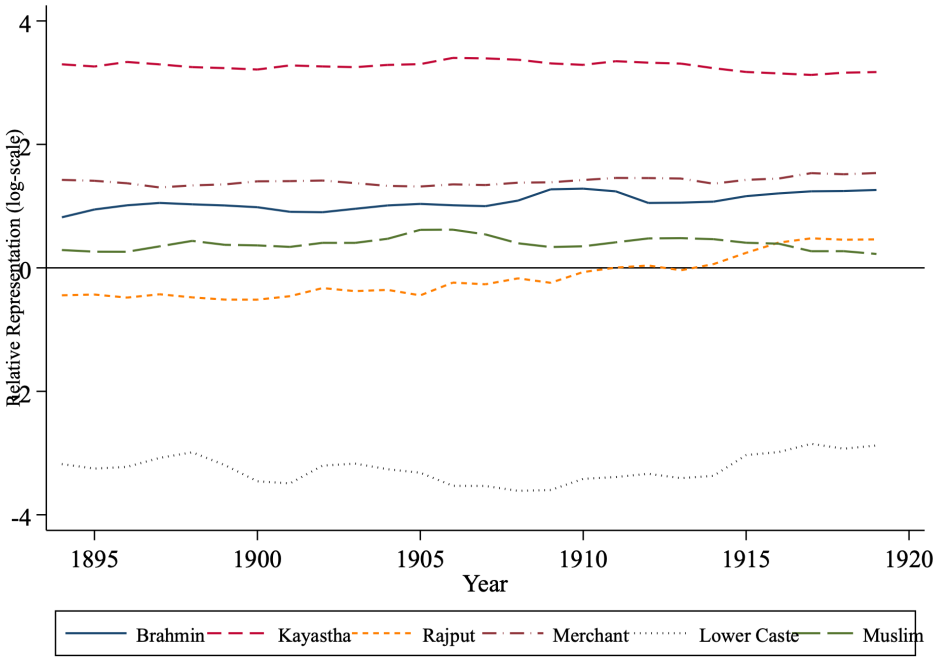
To study educational mobility among the various caste/religious groups, I use the data on high school graduates for each year between 1894 and 1919 from United Provinces. For each district-year, I compute the ratio of a group's share among high school graduates to its share in the district's male population (based on the 1901 Census). This measure captures the extent to which each caste or religious community was over- or under-represented in secondary education relative to its demographic weight. I then average these district-level measures across all districts each year and take the three-year centered moving average for interpretability.

Figure A.1 depicts the trends in relative representation, plotted on a log scale. A value of zero indicates proportional representation; positive values denote over-representation relative to population share, and negative values under-representation.

Kayasthas are the most over-represented group throughout the period, reflecting their traditional association with government jobs. Brahmins are also overrepresented. However, the position of merchant-castes is particularly striking. Across the entire period, they form the second most over-represented group, surpassing Brahmins for much of the timeline. This pattern indicates a substantial and rising presence of merchant-caste students in educational spaces traditionally dominated by Kayasthas and Brahmins – despite their lower ritual status in the caste hierarchy.

In contrast, both Rajputs and Muslims are relatively less represented compared to these groups. Between them, Muslims are consistently over-represented throughout the period. Rajputs, however, are under-

Figure A.1: Relationship Representation of Caste and Religious Groups in United Provinces



Notes: The figure depicts the relative representation for each caste and religious group among high school graduates between 1894 and 1919 in United Provinces. Note that the population of lower castes is calculated as the population of Hindu males remaining after subtracting Brahmin, Kayastha, Rajput, other upper-castes, merchant-castes males. Population for each district is taken from 1901 census records for United Provinces.

represented until roughly 1910, after which they become modestly over-represented. This late rise is consistent with their status as landed elites who were slower to adopt English education, and whose educational participation may have increased as merchant castes expanded into landownership (see below).

Finally, lower-castes are consistently are under-represented. The trend line is relatively flat suggesting no change throughout the time period under study. This reflects the severe barriers they faced in accessing schools, due to discrimination and restricted entry as documented above, alongside financial constraints.

A.4 Caste Relations in Colonial Schools

Colonial schools were based on the principle of secular education and were in theory, open to all castes. In practice, colonial schools had to face the realities of caste relations within the provinces under its control. While specific information on interactions between students, as well as with their teachers in schools, are absent, witness accounts provided by missionaries and government officials – Indian and British – gives some clues into how caste affected student relations in schools.

Firstly, caste affected the accessibility of schools to the general population. In his witness statement to the United Provinces education commission in 1884, a subordinate judge in Agra, noted that *'the sweepers and chamars,..., are practically excluded from primary education. There is no rule prohibiting their admission into Government schools, but if they were, people of the higher orders would object to send their children to schools, where they would have to mix with them'*. Other accounts produced similar statements. In some cases, opposition to the entry of lower caste students was far from benign. When a school in Bombay presidency [39] admitted low-caste students, aggressive action by upper castes led to the closure of 5-6 schools for years and the burning of crops and huts of low-castes in a village.

Additionally, schools were not free. Majority of the agrarian castes, who were peasants, were extremely poor. As one witness noted to the 1884 commission, many agrarian caste members were subsistence farmers whose entire livelihoods could be affected by a single season of drought. Children were expected to help in the cultivation of land. This may explain partially explain why the 1874–75 report on educational progress in the United Provinces found low representation of landowning and cultivating classes in high school and collegiate education, in spite of their high enrollment at the lower levels.

Secondly, students from lower-ranked castes were subjected to discriminatory behaviour within class-rooms, even if they were admitted. A statement given by the President of the Ghazipur Literary Association to the 1884 commission noted how *'on no account will the Brahman and Kshatrya sit on the same platform with the people of inferior castes, and this prevents children of the two classes from mixing together in the same hall'*. Private schools, in particular, appeared to be significantly more guilty of this segregation. In the 1909-10 report on education in the Central Provinces, it was reported that in Berar, *'although wherever there are Government or Board School buildings, Mahars are allowed to study inside the buildings, the masters frequently neglect them in favour of boys of better castes; while in schools held in private buildings, members of the untouchable castes are relegated to the verandahs.'*.

Part of this was exacerbated by the background of teachers. Majority of teachers were Brahmins or Kayasthas. This was a longstanding phenomenon. An 1852 report found that 91 percent of Hindu teachers in indigenous schools at the time were Brahmins and Kayasthas [40]. Although they made up a significant portion

[39] Progress of Education 1897-02 Vol. 1

[40] See H.S. Reid report, page 16.

of the student body, the share of merchant caste teachers was less than 2%. The number of merchant caste students who passed the qualification to become teachers in the 171 high schools across United Provinces between 1902 and 1922 was only 48.[41].

Third, demand for education itself was related to the hereditary occupation. It was highest among Brahmins, Kayasthas, Khattris and Vaishyas who traditionally held roles as priests, scribes and moneylenders or bankers. However, children of shopkeepers, for example, who were usually from merchant castes, did not remain long in schools.[42] Here, the colonial government was partly to blame, as for a long time it did not maintain strict rules on qualifications required for government job employment and preferred upper castes.[43] However, when possibilities to leave their traditional occupations presented itself to non-elites, their demand for education also grew. Among the lower castes, it was those who were employed in government service or in European homes who took interest in English education.[44]

Prospects for occupational mobility may have shaped merchants' interest in higher education. Using land settlement reports available for 27 (out of 48) districts in the United Provinces, I find that districts with a higher share of merchant caste landowners also had a higher share of high school graduates from the same castes (see Figure A.2). Landowners were traditionally upper castes such as Rajputs or the Muslim elites, and the merchants were a new class of landowners, often in absentia. Districts with merchant castes diversifying into new occupations and opportunities saw a greater share of merchant caste high school graduates. Thus, opportunities for occupational mobility affected demand for higher education.

In the case of lower castes, evidence from government reports suggests that obstacles presented by upper castes towards lower castes played a far more important role. The 1909-10 report from Central Provinces says *'The higher castes have not only kept the low-castes out of Government schools, but they have prevented them from going to Mission schools. That the low castes are willing to attend schools is I think, proved by the fact that they flock so readily to the schools opened under the patronage of Brahmin gentlemen.'*. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that lower castes were attracted to governments schools to obtain

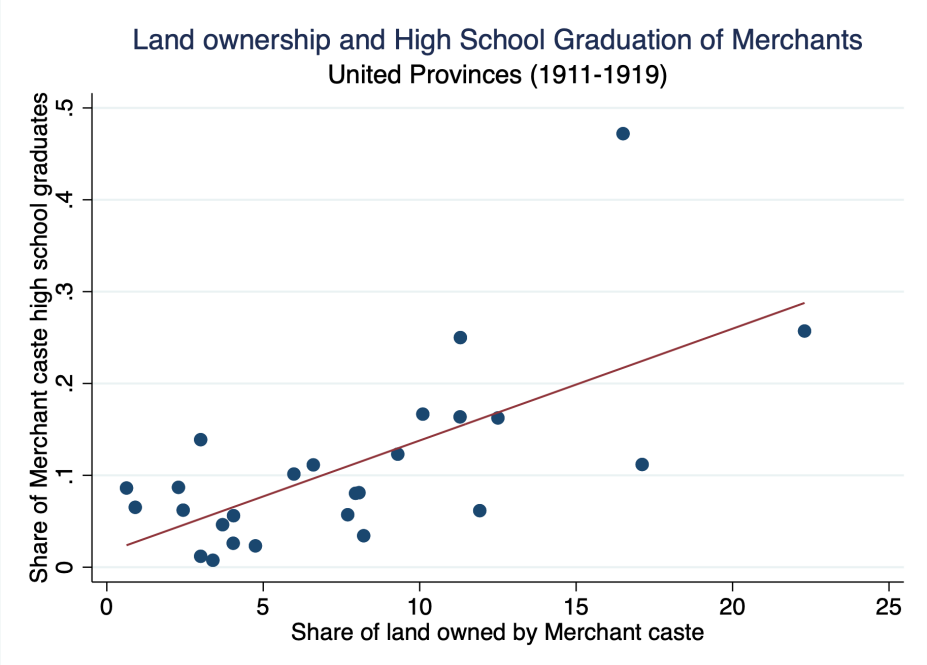
[41] This is based on my calculation from matching the lists of candidates who passed the Anglo-Vernacular Teachers' Certificate Examination from 1902-1922 with the list of high school graduates. In total there 450 high school graduates who passed this examination – 264 of these were Brahmins and Kayasthas, 36 were from the other upper castes. 16 were from lower castes. 77 were Muslims and the rest were Jains and Christian natives.

[42] See the Report by the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Provincial Committee, page 150.

[43] See the Report by the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Provincial Committee, page 268.

[44] see the Report by the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Provincial Committee, pages 183, 255 and 257.

Figure A.2: Relationship between Land Ownership and High School Graduation of Merchant castes in United Provinces



Notes: The figure depicts the correlation between percentage of district-wise land ownership by merchant castes (data of which were available for the districts from before 1910 and is obtained from the land settlement reports of the various districts) and the district-wise share of merchant caste high school graduates.

government jobs.[45]

The government recognized the issues, in particular that of accessibility of lower castes to schools. In response, it opened primary schools in villages that specifically catered to lower castes (Chaudhary 2015). However, finding teachers and the maintenance of these schools were costly. Although the government provided scholarships, this entailed writing a scholarship examination. It was under the discretion of the respective school headmaster as to whom to send as candidates for this examination. Among the 93 candidates who received scholarship to attend high schools in 1910, 62.2% of the students were upper-caste. Around 20% were from merchant castes but only 0.03% (3 students) of scholarship holders were lower caste.[46] These numbers do imply, however, that merchant caste students were able to avail government scholarship to study in high schools.

[45]see the Report by the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Provincial Committee, page 255. The witness, an inspector of schools in Oudh, actually calls the prospect of obtaining a government appointment an 'illusion' for lower castes.

[46]This is calculated from the results of the High School Scholarship Examination published in the United Provinces Government Gazette for 1910, part 4.

A.5 List of Castes within each Caste/Religious Groups

All self-reported castes and religions recorded in the government gazette are classified into 8 broad groups listed as follows. I clarify a few classification choices below.

- Tagas and Bhuinhars are classified alongside Brahmins, as the 1901 Census of the Northwestern Provinces and Oudh placed them in Group II:allied with the priestly caste below the Brahmins.
- Bhargavas (Dhusar Bhargavas) in the United Provinces are grouped with Khattris due to their shared mercantile traditions.
- The Rajput category includes 280 students from the following castes – Prabhu, Baidya, Charan, Gurao, Jat (from Central India), Jaiswar, and Maratha (from Central India and Berar). These castes are distinct from Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Khattris and do not have a primarily mercantile tradition. Baidyas were a physician caste in Bengal, while Prabhus from the Central Provinces probably had scribal traditions similar to Kayasthas. For analytical clarity when exploring the mechanisms, Brahmins and Kayasthas are treated as self-contained groups representing the dominant educated elites, and these other upper-ranked castes are therefore grouped with Rajputs.
- Marathas from the Central Provinces are classified as lower castes, while Marathas from Central India and Berar are classified with Rajputs, following the respective 1901 census classifications. These students number 99 in total, and the main results are robust to considering the all as elite or non-elite.

Caste names were standardized from self-reported castes to adjust for differences in spelling as much as possible.

- **Brahmin**: Bhat, Bhuinhar, Brahmin, Brahmo, Gautam, Gautam Brahman, Gujrati Brahmin, Kankubja, Karhade Brahmin, Kashmiri Brahmin, Maha Brahmin, Maharashtra Brahmin, Maratha Brahmin, Nagar Brahmin, Paliwal Brahmin, Pandey, Purohit, Sanadh Brahmin, Saraswat, Tailang Brahmin, Tiwari.
- **Kayastha**: Bhatnagar, Kayastha, Mathur, Mehrotra, Saksena, Shrivastava, Srivastav.
- **Khattri**: Arora, Bhargava, Bhatia, Jaiswal, Labana, Narula, Sabarwal, Tandon.

- **Rajput**: Amethia, Baidya, Bijavat, Charan, Chattri, Chaudhury, Chauhan, Gurao, Jadubansi, Jaiswar, Jat, Kshattriya, Maharastra Prabhu, Mair Rajput, Maratha, Panwar, Parihar, Prabhu, Raghubansi, Raghuvanshi Thakur, Raikwar, Rajput, Rathi, Rathor, Thakur, Tomar.

- **Merchants**: Agarwal, Badnore, Bagherwal, Bakkal, Baliji, Baniya, Banker, Banthia, Baranwal, Bhandari, Bhargava, Gahoi, Jaiswal, Jaiswal Vaish, Jaswal, Kandu, Kasarwani, Kasaundhan, Khandelwal, Komti, Lad, Mahajan, Mahesri, Manihar, Marwari, Oswal, Parwar, Rauniar, Rustogi, Saitwal, Saraogi, Sonar, Sood, Srimal, Subarnabanik, Umar, Vaishya, Vaishya Rajbansi, Wani.

- **Lower Castes**: Ahir, Atith, Baghban, Bahelia, Balija, Balji, Barai, Barber, Barhai, Bari, Batham, Bedar, Bhar, Bharbhanja, Bharewa, Bhawsar, Bhoyer, Bhugwa, Bhuj, Bhurji, Bidur, Bishnoi, Blacksmith, Burood, Chhippa, Darji, Daroga, Dhakar, Dhaman, Dhangar, Dhiman, Dhobi, Dhur Gond, Dushad, Gadaria, Garpagari, Ghosi, Goldsmith, Gond, Goriya, Gujar, Gurao, Halwai, Jaiswal Kalwar, Jangam, Jangira, Jat, Jhusia, Jogi, Kachhi, Kahar, Kalal, Kalwar, Kamkar, Kapewar, Karmakar, Kasera, Katia, Khangar, Khati, Khatik, Kisan, Koeri, Komti, Koshti, Kotwar, Krishnapakshi, Kumhar, Kunbi, Kurmi, Kushikashya, Lakhera, Leva, Lewa Patidar, Lodha, Lohar, Lunia, Mahar, Mahisya, Mala, Malakar, Mali, Mall, Mallah, Maratha, Maurya, Mochi, Mudaliar, Murao, Nai, Naidu, Nhavi, Orh, Pasi, Patel, Patvi, Patwa, Rangara, Rangari, Rawat, Sadgope, Sadh, Sainthwar, Sali, Shimpi, Shudra, Sonar, Sonis, Srimal, Sutradhar, Swami, Swarnakar, Tamboli, Tamera, Tanti, Telang, Teli, Vellalan, Vishwakarma, Wanjary, Washerman, Wiswa Brahman.

- **Muslim**: Muslim

- **Others:** Arya, Astar, Baraith, Barnawara, Basak, Bermaiyan, Bhaskar, Bhujwa, Brahmo, Buddhist, Bwal, Caste Not Mentioned, Chand, Chitrakar, Christian, Deshmukh, Dhaon, Digambar, Eurasian, European, Gangrade, Garbiyal, Goanese, Gupta, Gurer, Hindu, Humad, Jagati, Jain, Jangam, Jew, Jolaha, Kamwaroo, Kanswa, Karigar, Khalsa, Korambanshi, Krishna, Krishnapakshi, Krishnapuri, Lingayat, Lunker, Madhesia, Mahatma, Mahawar, Maratha, Marwal, Masyal, Mathu, Munoyeth, Muslim, Nagir Grahota, Native Christian, Negi, Nidur, Nil, Nishad, Palival, Pandey, Paramanik, Paroha, Parsi, Pathare, Pensaree, Pillai, Pushkar, Rahdas, Rai, Ramgariah, Roy, Sahi, Saitwal, Saravak,

Sarawachi, Sethi, Shik, Shivabarae, Shivavak, Shrawak, Sikh, Sindhi, Singhi, Srimal, Suryaduj, Tulur, Udasi, Vaishnav, Verma, Vira Shaiva, Vishnu, Zoroastrian.

A.6 List of Muslim hereditary titles/surnames

Following is the list of Muslim surnames that are hereditary or signifies a title:

Afridi, Agha, Ahsan, Akbar, Alavi, Ansari, Azmi, Abbasi, Abidi, Afandi, Baghdadi, Barelvi, Bukhari, Chishti, Dehlvi, Farooqi, Gilani, Hanafi, Hashmi, Hijazi, Hyder, Hyderabadi, Jafri, Kazmi, Kazalbash, Kazilbash, Kidwai, Khan, Lodhi, Makhdumi, Mir, Mirza, Naqvi, Nizami, Nomani, Pathan, Pirzada, Qadri, Qazi, Qazilbash, Qureshi, Rizvi, Sayyid, Sheikh, Shaikh, Shah, Siddiqi, Syed, Tirmizi, Usmani, Zaidi, Zuberi.

B Additional Tables

Table B.1: Descriptive Statistics: High School Graduates

	(1) All	(2) Elites	(3) Brahmin	(4) Non-Br. Upper Caste	(5) Merchant Caste	(6) Lower Caste	(7) Muslim
Age	17.98	17.97	18.00	17.94	17.82	18.48	18.00
	(1.89)	(1.90)	(1.86)	(1.93)	(1.75)	(2.03)	(1.92)
Matriculation	0.68	0.68	0.75	0.62	0.61	0.69	0.70
	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.44)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.46)	(0.46)
First Class	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.07
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.26)	(0.25)
Second Class	0.45	0.45	0.44	0.46	0.48	0.42	0.46
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.49)	(0.50)
Third Class	0.47	0.47	0.49	0.46	0.42	0.51	0.47
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Size of Grad. Cohort	18.91	19.13	19.53	18.77	20.58	18.46	18.40
	(12.81)	(12.86)	(13.26)	(12.49)	(13.05)	(12.75)	(12.37)
Share of Elite Peers	0.65	0.71	0.73	0.70	0.58	0.67	0.52
	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.28)
Intermediate Graduate	0.34	0.35	0.37	0.32	0.33	0.26	0.32
	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.44)	(0.47)
Undergraduate	0.20	0.21	0.23	0.19	0.19	0.14	0.18
	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.35)	(0.39)
Mukhtar	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.01
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.12)
Observations	37424	24394	11518	12876	4212	1279	6135

Notes: The table presents the mean and standard deviation of all variables for 7 different samples: all high school graduates, elite high school graduates, Brahmins, non-Brahmin upper-castes, merchant-castes, lower-castes, and Muslims. The variables are (in order) age at the time of examination, whether student passed high school with matriculation examination, whether student passed high school in first class, second class, third class, the total size of the graduating cohort, the share of elite peers in the cohort, whether student became an intermediate graduate, an under-graduate, and passed the mukhtarship examination (defined only for students from United Provinces). Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Table B.2: Descriptive Statistics: Intermediate Graduates

	(1) All	(2) Elites	(3) Brahmin	(4) Non-Br. Upper Caste	(5) Merchant Caste	(6) Lower Caste	(7) Muslim
First Class	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.14	0.11	0.10
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.31)	(0.30)
Second Class	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.54	0.51	0.52
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Third Class	0.36	0.37	0.38	0.35	0.31	0.38	0.38
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.49)	(0.48)
Share First Div. in HS	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.12	0.10	0.13
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.12)
Share Second Div. in HS	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.52	0.53	0.51	0.52
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.12)
Share Third Div. in HS	0.36	0.37	0.38	0.35	0.36	0.39	0.35
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.15)
College-cohort size	43.85	42.67	42.37	43.00	45.53	46.38	50.27
	(25.62)	(25.43)	(25.47)	(25.38)	(27.56)	(26.67)	(23.86)
Share of Elite Peers	0.65	0.71	0.73	0.70	0.63	0.70	0.43
	(0.22)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.30)
Undergraduate	0.60	0.61	0.62	0.61	0.60	0.55	0.59
	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.49)
Observations	11506	7745	3968	3777	1252	301	1846

Notes: The table presents the mean and standard deviation of all variables for 7 different samples: all intermediate graduates, elite intermediate graduates, Brahmins, non-Brahmin upper-castes, merchant-castes, lower-castes, and Muslims. The variables are (in order): whether student passed intermediate in first class, second class, third class, the share of peers who received first class in high school, second class in high school, third class in high school, the size of the college-cohort, share of elite peers in the college-cohort, and whether the student passed undergraduate or not. Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Table B.3: Balance Tables: Effect of Elite Peers on HS Grade of Students

Dependent Variable *Grade obtained in HS*	(1) First Div	(2) First Div	(3) Second Div	(4) Second Div	(5) Third Div	(6) Third Div
Share of Elite Peers	-0.014	-0.030*	0.027	0.013	-0.010	0.019
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.036)
Share of Elite Peers						
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.015	0.015	-0.039	-0.023	0.024	0.006
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.036)
× Merchant	-0.005	-0.013	-0.001	0.009	0.008	0.003
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.054)	(0.046)
× Lower castes	0.002	0.019	0.005	-0.010	-0.010	-0.008
	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.059)	(0.065)	(0.059)	(0.064)
× Muslim	0.002	0.011	0.019	0.060	-0.018	-0.071*
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.040)
× Others	0.016	0.029	-0.060	-0.016	0.039	-0.018
	(0.029)	(0.035)	(0.058)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.062)
High School FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
District-Year FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
School-specific Linear Trends	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Controls	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Observations	37058	37050	37058	37050	37058	37050
High Schools	262	262	262	262	262	262
R-squared	0.083	0.181	0.059	0.156	0.108	0.238

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The coefficients in Columns 1, 3, and 5, are the results of regressing high school grade obtained by the student – first division, second division, and third division – on the school and year fixed effects, share of elite peers and the interaction of share of elite peers with the caste/religious group dummy for each students. Columns 2, 4, and 6, additionally controls for district-year fixed effects and school-specific linear trends while also controlling for the type examination written by the student and their birth cohort.

Table B.4: Relationship between Elite Share among Middle School and High School graduates

	Years after MS Comp.							
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
=*Share of Elite Grads. in HS*	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Share of Elite Grads in MS	-0.024	-0.027	0.223***	0.056	-0.018	-0.196***	-0.051	0.038
	(0.069)	(0.064)	(0.060)	(0.044)	(0.060)	(0.053)	(0.059)	(0.059)
High School and Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
School-specific linear trends	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	607	613	624	624	630	638	643	641

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Regressions are at the school-cohort level.

Table B.5: Robustness: Inclusion of School by Sub–caste Fixed Effects

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undegraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	0.021	-0.031	-0.032
	(0.061)	(0.048)	(0.057)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.078	-0.023	0.108
	(0.070)	(0.060)	(0.068)
× Merchant	-0.261***	-0.116	-0.028
	(0.094)	(0.086)	(0.137)
× Lower castes	-0.053	0.297	-0.037
	(0.265)	(0.232)	(0.281)
× Muslim	-0.031	0.025	0.085
	(0.120)	(0.122)	(0.099)
× Others	-0.105	0.034	0.042
	(0.293)	(0.217)	(0.146)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.239***	-0.147*	-0.059
	(0.087)	(0.078)	(0.124)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y
School-subcaste FE	Y	Y	Y
Observations	21109	21109	10521
Clusters (High School)	214	214	135
R-squared	0.397	0.370	0.399
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.350	0.208	0.108

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes school-by-subcaste fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. A student is from the same subcaste id they share the same caste and surname. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.6: Robustness: Inclusion of Dropout Rates

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1, if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	0.016	-0.016	-0.061*
	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.036)
Share of Elite Peers			
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.040	0.011	0.087**
	(0.040)	(0.031)	(0.036)
× Merchant	-0.152***	-0.097**	-0.068
	(0.048)	(0.041)	(0.048)
× Lower castes	-0.016	-0.048	0.056
	(0.080)	(0.061)	(0.096)
× Muslim	0.010	0.058	0.075*
	(0.048)	(0.041)	(0.042)
× Others	-0.120	0.012	0.103*
	(0.081)	(0.075)	(0.059)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.136***	-0.113***	-0.129***
	(0.047)	(0.040)	(0.042)
All FE and controls	Y	Y	Y
Dropout rates	Y	Y	Y
Dropout rates x Caste/Religious Group Dummy	Y	Y	Y
Observations	31733	31733	15592
Clusters (High School)	254	254	154
R-squared	0.163	0.135	0.148
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.344	0.203	0.107

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. Additionally, the regressions control for dropout rates in each school-cohort and interactions between indicator variables for each caste/religious group and dropout rates. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.7: Robustness: Balanced Panel

Balanced Panel of Schools	1894–1919			1900–1919			1905-1919			1910-1919		
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
= 1, if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	-0.019	-0.076*	-0.034	0.005	-0.065	-0.049	0.013	-0.020	-0.040	-0.066	-0.064	-0.032
	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.043)	(0.046)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.012	0.052	0.049	0.003	0.032	0.063	-0.071	-0.009	0.035	-0.023	0.033	0.074
	(0.052)	(0.045)	(0.040)	(0.053)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.051)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.051)	(0.046)	(0.049)
× Merchant	-0.111	-0.015	-0.098	-0.161***	-0.051	-0.095	-0.237***	-0.135**	-0.079	-0.167***	-0.086*	-0.088
	(0.069)	(0.054)	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.052)	(0.059)	(0.062)	(0.052)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.052)	(0.072)
× Lower castes	-0.024	-0.003	-0.167	-0.133	-0.073	-0.078	-0.131	-0.166*	0.024	-0.088	-0.157	0.064
	(0.114)	(0.083)	(0.110)	(0.111)	(0.087)	(0.121)	(0.106)	(0.090)	(0.124)	(0.116)	(0.103)	(0.131)
× Muslim	-0.001	0.094	-0.015	0.020	0.079	0.020	-0.019	0.059	0.029	0.020	0.096	0.012
	(0.064)	(0.058)	(0.041)	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.047)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.048)	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.049)
× Others	-0.014	0.183**	0.103**	-0.049	0.146*	0.119*	-0.075	0.090	0.142	0.018	0.130	0.027
	(0.102)	(0.078)	(0.045)	(0.118)	(0.084)	(0.064)	(0.121)	(0.087)	(0.097)	(0.129)	(0.109)	(0.112)
Sample	All	All	Non-College Grads.	All	All	Non-College Grads.	All	All	Non-College Grads.	All	All	Non-College Grads.
High School FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
District-Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
School-specific linear trends	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.130**	-0.091	-0.132**	-0.156**	-0.116**	-0.145**	-0.224***	-0.155**	-0.119*	-0.232***	-0.150***	-0.120*
	(0.062)	(0.056)	(0.053)	(0.059)	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.064)	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.059)	(0.055)	(0.062)
Observations	20305	20305	11339	19741	19741	5424	19805	19805	5408	17955	17955	4748
Clusters (High Schools)	55	55	45	70	70	52	91	91	67	126	126	84
R-squared	0.159	0.130	0.135	0.155	0.127	0.160	0.155	0.129	0.202	0.155	0.129	0.166
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.337	0.197	0.000	0.357	0.212	0.594	0.363	0.217	0.592	0.374	0.221	0.590

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Columns 1–3 are estimated on students from schools that continuously existed from 1894–1919. Columns 4–6 use schools existing from 1900–1919. Columns 7–9 use schools existing from 1905–1919. Columns 10–12 use schools existing from 1910–1919. Controls include birth year, exam type, and total graduating cohort size. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator equal to 1 if graduate i is from a non-Brahmin elite caste; similarly for Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others. Brahmins is the omitted category.

Table B.8: Robustness: Exclusion of Small Cohorts

Cohort Size	Greater than or equal 5			Greater than or equal 10			Greater than or equal 15		
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergrad	Mukhtar Cand.	Intermediate Grad.	Undergrad	Mukhtar Cand.	Intermediate	Undergrad	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	0.018	-0.043	-0.021	-0.037	-0.064	-0.014	-0.040	-0.038	-0.048
	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.055)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.052	0.008	0.051	-0.038	0.023	0.052	-0.074	-0.007	0.083*
	(0.037)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.047)	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.054)	(0.046)	(0.043)
× Merchant	-0.128***	-0.068*	-0.075	-0.089*	-0.023	-0.086*	-0.153**	-0.077	-0.080
	(0.049)	(0.038)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.041)	(0.047)	(0.067)	(0.049)	(0.059)
× Lower castes	-0.026	-0.039	-0.041	-0.050	-0.104	-0.027	-0.134	-0.190**	-0.050
	(0.085)	(0.069)	(0.088)	(0.097)	(0.076)	(0.115)	(0.113)	(0.086)	(0.129)
× Muslim	-0.005	0.073*	0.027	0.011	0.056	0.051	-0.040	-0.013	0.040
	(0.046)	(0.040)	(0.035)	(0.063)	(0.053)	(0.043)	(0.074)	(0.060)	(0.046)
× Others	-0.067	0.045	0.084	-0.012	0.101	0.023	-0.140	0.012	0.028
	(0.076)	(0.069)	(0.056)	(0.093)	(0.090)	(0.072)	(0.136)	(0.132)	(0.111)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.110**	-0.111***	-0.095**	-0.127***	-0.088*	-0.101**	-0.193***	-0.114*	-0.128**
	(0.046)	(0.037)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.059)	(0.062)	(0.062)
Sample	All	All	Non-College Grads.	All	All	Non-College Grads.	All	All	Non-College Grads.
High School FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
District-Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
School-specific linear trends	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	34357	34357	17492	27053	27053	13870	20088	20088	10440
HS clusters	225	225	145	167	167	117	126	126	99
R-squared	0.159	0.130	0.140	0.153	0.122	0.125	0.145	0.116	0.119
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.338	0.199	0.107	0.344	0.202	0.104	0.348	0.204	0.099

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Columns 1,2 and 3 gives the estimates using cohorts which have atleast 5 students. Columns 4–6 are estimated from cohorts with atleast 10 students. Columns 7–9 are estimated from cohorts with atleast 15 students. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.9: Robustness: Inclusion of Caste-Year Fixed effects

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
=1, if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.	Mukhtar Pass
Share of Elite Peers	0.027	-0.020	-0.043	-0.006
	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.015)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.054	0.009	0.087***	0.013
	(0.037)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.021)
× Merchant	-0.110**	-0.056	-0.069	-0.034
	(0.045)	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.024)
× Lower castes	0.029	0.040	-0.077	-0.085
	(0.098)	(0.076)	(0.121)	(0.061)
× Muslim	-0.009	0.070*	0.053	0.034
	(0.042)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.021)
× Others	-0.065	0.062	0.082	0.037
	(0.076)	(0.067)	(0.056)	(0.036)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.083**	-0.076**	-0.112**	-0.041*
	(0.042)	(0.037)	(0.045)	(0.024)
All FE and controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Caste-Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	36298	36298	18087	18087
Clusters (High Schools)	262	262	158	158
R-squared	0.190	0.160	0.174	0.143
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.337	0.198	0.107	0.038

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. Additionally, the regressions include full set of interactions between a dummy for self-reported caste and the graduating cohort (year) fixed effects. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.10: Robustness: Validity of Matching Procedure

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undegraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	-0.001	0.004	-0.010
	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.018)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.019	0.001	0.002
	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.018)
× Merchant	-0.083**	-0.061**	-0.068**
	(0.041)	(0.025)	(0.031)
× Lower castes	0.071	0.010	0.059
	(0.053)	(0.036)	(0.055)
× Muslim	0.003	0.020	-0.011
	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.021)
× Others	-0.042	-0.012	0.017
	(0.054)	(0.030)	(0.045)
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.084**	-0.057**	-0.079***
	(0.037)	(0.022)	(0.030)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y
Observations	37050	37050	18505
Clusters (High School)	262	262	158
R-squared	0.129	0.102	0.120
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.336	0.197	0.107

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group. Outcomes are defined as high-confidence matches. These are those matches with a similarity score of at least 90% between the high school graduate and the corresponding outcome list. Additionally, for undergraduate outcomes, a 90% similarity threshold is required in both stages of the matching process: first between the high school and Intermediate records, and then between the Intermediate and Undergraduate records.

Table B.11: Robustness: Validity of Mukhtar Sample Matching

	Same District Matches		Eligibility Year ≤ 1919	
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
= 1 if student is	Mukhtar Cand.	Mukhtar Pass	Mukhtar Cand.	Mukhtar Pass
Share of Elite Peers	-0.011	-0.005	-0.021	0.019
	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.045)	(0.021)
Share of Elite Peers				
× Non-Brahmin Elites	0.021	0.002	0.067	0.001
	(0.025)	(0.016)	(0.042)	(0.027)
× Merchant	-0.083***	-0.037**	-0.120	-0.041
	(0.031)	(0.017)	(0.079)	(0.045)
× Lower castes	-0.030	-0.015	-0.284**	-0.072
	(0.061)	(0.033)	(0.128)	(0.068)
× Muslim	0.007	0.020	0.016	0.009
	(0.026)	(0.014)	(0.060)	(0.031)
× Others	0.026	0.012	0.058	0.031
	(0.035)	(0.029)	(0.077)	(0.043)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.095***	-0.042**	-0.141*	-0.022
	(0.032)	(0.019)	(0.075)	(0.043)
Observations	18505	18505	7486	7486
Clusters (High School)	158	158	104	104
R-squared	0.146	0.109	0.152	0.144
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.057	0.022	0.110	0.039

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. In columns 1 and 2, a student is identified as a mukhtar candidate or a mukhtar pass if and only if their district of high school is the same as the district recorded in the mukhtarship examination records. In columns 3 and 4, the sample is restricted to only those students who are eligible to write the exam before or in 1919. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.12: Mechanism: Effect of Elite vs Merchant-caste Peers

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	0.055	0.014	0.029
	(0.038)	(0.031)	(0.031)
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.052	-0.007	0.021
	(0.043)	(0.035)	(0.035)
× Merchant	-0.160**	-0.124**	-0.214***
	(0.064)	(0.049)	(0.056)
× Lower castes	-0.024	-0.015	-0.149
	(0.081)	(0.060)	(0.103)
× Muslim	-0.027	0.055	-0.034
	(0.047)	(0.040)	(0.042)
× Others	-0.115	-0.002	0.058
	(0.081)	(0.071)	(0.046)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y
Share of Merchant Peers	Y	Y	Y
Caste × Share of Merchant Peers	Y	Y	Y
Overall Effect on Merchants	-0.105*	-0.110**	-0.185***
	(0.054)	(0.044)	(0.054)
Observations	37050	37050	18505
Cluster (High Schools)	262	262	158
R-squared	0.168	0.139	0.145
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.336	0.197	0.108

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. Additionally, all regressions control for the share of merchant caste peers and interactions between the indicator variables for caste/religious group with the share of merchant caste peers. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

Table B.13: Mechanism: Effect of Educated Elites vs Land-owning/Commercial Elites

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Brahmin Peers	0.043	0.000	-0.006
	(0.036)	(0.030)	(0.033)
Share of Brahmin Peers			
× Merchant	-0.129***	-0.070	-0.137**
	(0.049)	(0.044)	(0.057)
Share of Kayastha Peers	0.047	-0.008	-0.092**
	(0.039)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Share of Kayastha Peers			
× Merchant	-0.174***	-0.112**	-0.063
	(0.059)	(0.046)	(0.058)
Share of Rajput/Khattri Peers	-0.045	-0.007	0.042
	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.051)
Share of Rajput/Khattri Peers			
× Merchant	-0.027	0.004	-0.014
	(0.086)	(0.080)	(0.124)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y
Overall effect: Brahmin peers on merchants	-0.086*	-0.069	-0.143***
	(0.049)	(0.042)	(0.054)
Overall effect: Kayastha peers on merchants	-0.127**	-0.120***	-0.155***
	(0.055)	(0.043)	(0.051)
Overall effect: Rajput/Khattri peers on merchants	-0.073	-0.004	0.028
	(0.081)	(0.069)	(0.109)
Observations	37050	37050	18505
Clusters (High School)	262	262	158
R-squared	0.168	0.139	0.145
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.336	0.197	0.107

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. For brevity, the table shows only the coefficients for the share of each elite group (Brahmins, Kayastha, Rajput and Khattri peers, and the interactions of these shares with an indicator variable for merchant caste.

Table B.14: Mechanism: Effect of Elites Peers in Private vs Government/Missionary Schools

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
=1 if student is	Intermediate Grad.	Undergraduate	Mukhtar Cand.
Share of Elite Peers	0.032	0.001	0.013
	(0.041)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Share of Elite Peers			
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.049	-0.003	0.028
	(0.040)	(0.034)	(0.039)
× Merchant	-0.061	-0.037	-0.149***
	(0.058)	(0.045)	(0.055)
× Lower castes	-0.022	-0.046	-0.133
	(0.091)	(0.069)	(0.108)
× Muslim	-0.009	0.065	0.002
	(0.054)	(0.048)	(0.040)
× Others	-0.114	-0.010	0.048
	(0.081)	(0.076)	(0.052)
Private School x Share of Elite Peers	0.012	0.002	-0.144**
	(0.062)	(0.049)	(0.061)
Private School x Share of Elite Peers			
× Non-Brahmin Elites	-0.049	-0.003	0.171***
	(0.071)	(0.058)	(0.058)
× Merchant	-0.185**	-0.101	0.207**
	(0.087)	(0.074)	(0.101)
× Lower castes	-0.002	-0.005	0.290*
	(0.164)	(0.137)	(0.159)
× Muslim	-0.020	-0.026	0.130**
	(0.080)	(0.069)	(0.063)
× Others	0.223	0.304**	-0.265
	(0.159)	(0.153)	(0.270)
All FE and Controls	Y	Y	Y
Overall effect: Elite Peers on Merchants in Government/Missionary Scls.	-0.028	-0.036	-0.136***
	(0.049)	(0.041)	(0.046)
Overall effect: Elite Peers on Merchants in Private Scls.	-0.201***	-0.134**	-0.073
	(0.068)	(0.060)	(0.085)
Observations	37050	37050	18505
HS clusters	262	262	158
R-squared	0.168	0.139	0.145
Avg. Dep. Var.	0.336	0.197	0.108

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard Errors are clustered at the High School level. Controls include birth year of the student, type of high school examination, and total number of students in the graduating cohort. FE includes high school fixed effects, school-specific linear trends, and district-year fixed effects. Private School refers to a school managed by local Indian elites and princely states. Government/Missionary schools refers to schools managed by the provincial government and missionaries. Non-Brahmin Elites is an indicator variable takes the value 1, if graduate i, is from a non-Brahmin elite caste. Similarly, Merchant, Lower Castes, Muslims, and Others, are indicator variables. Brahmins is the reference group.

C Additional Figures

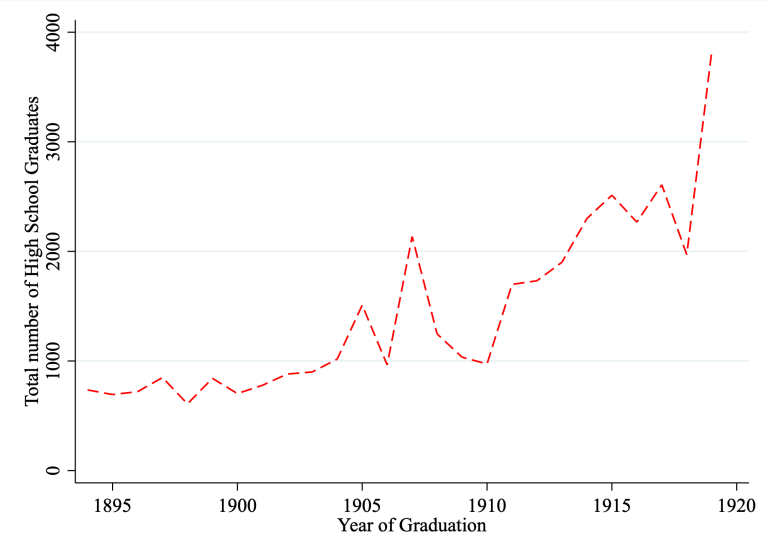


Figure C.1: Total number of High School Graduates (1894-1919)

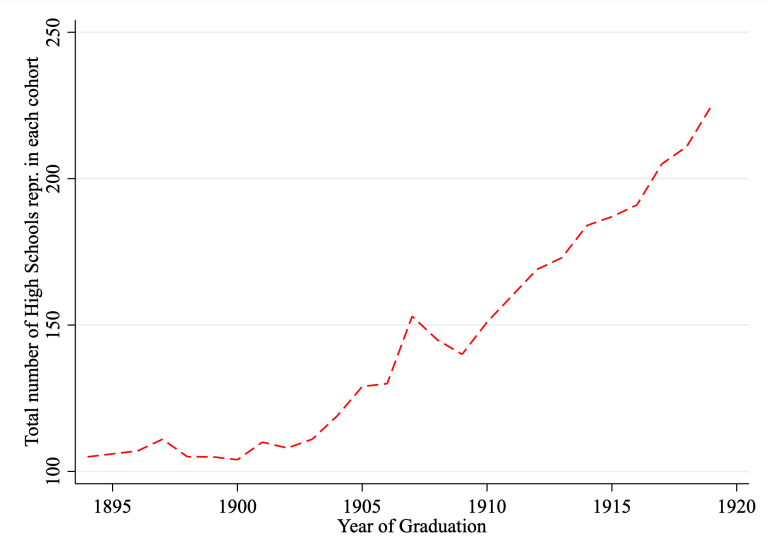
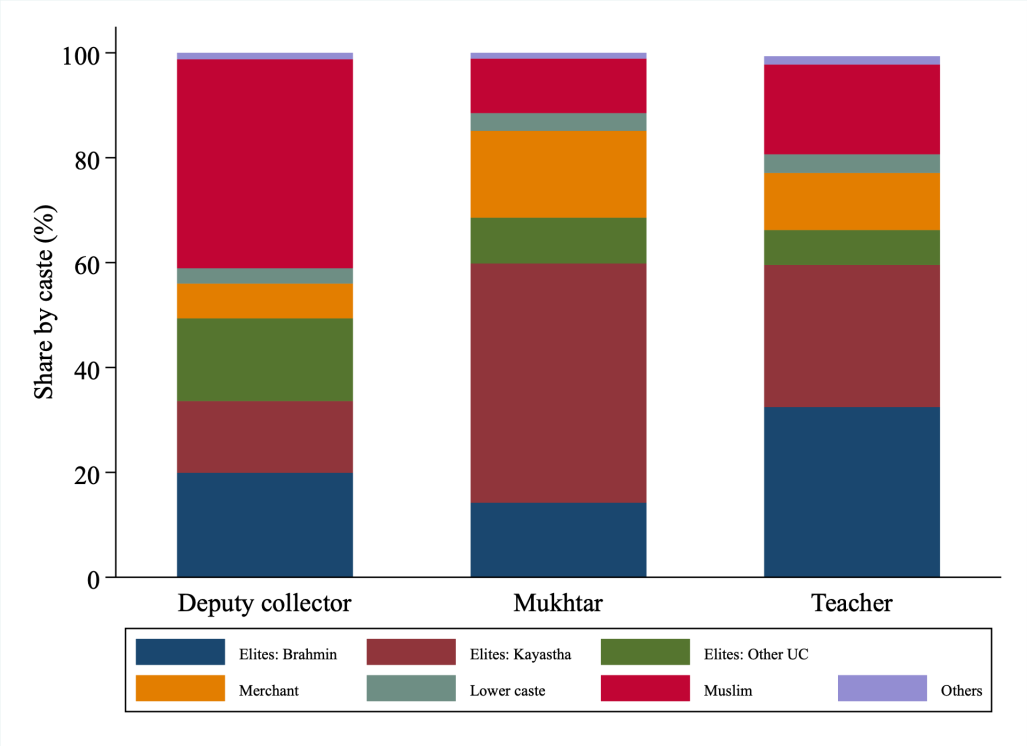


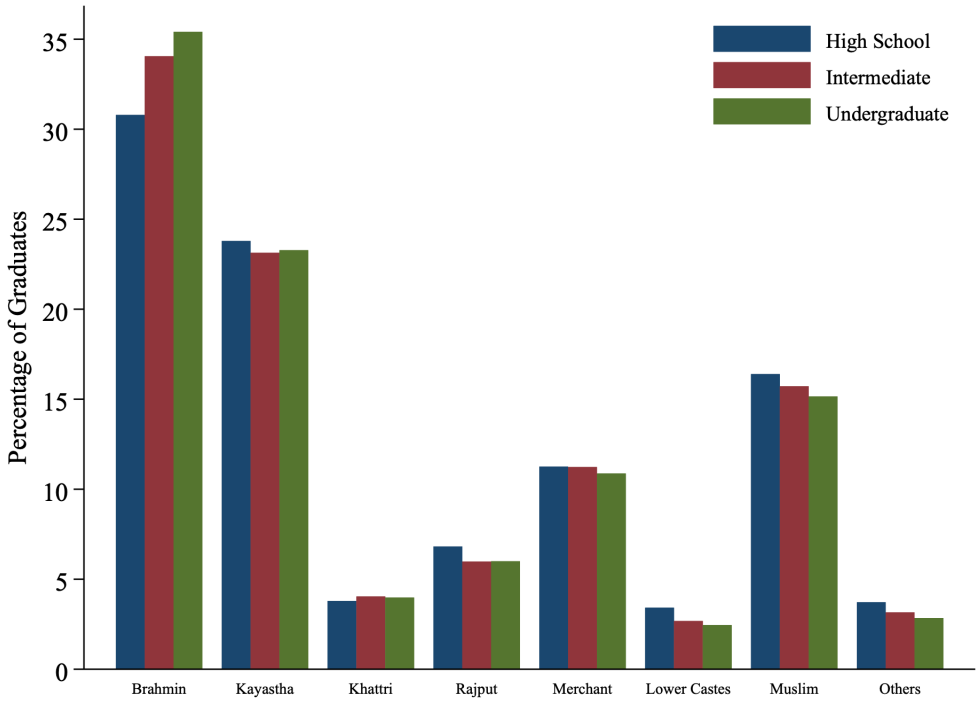
Figure C.2: Total number of High Schools sending graduates (1894-1919)

Figure C.3: Caste/Religion-wise Composition of High School Graduates in Selected Occupations



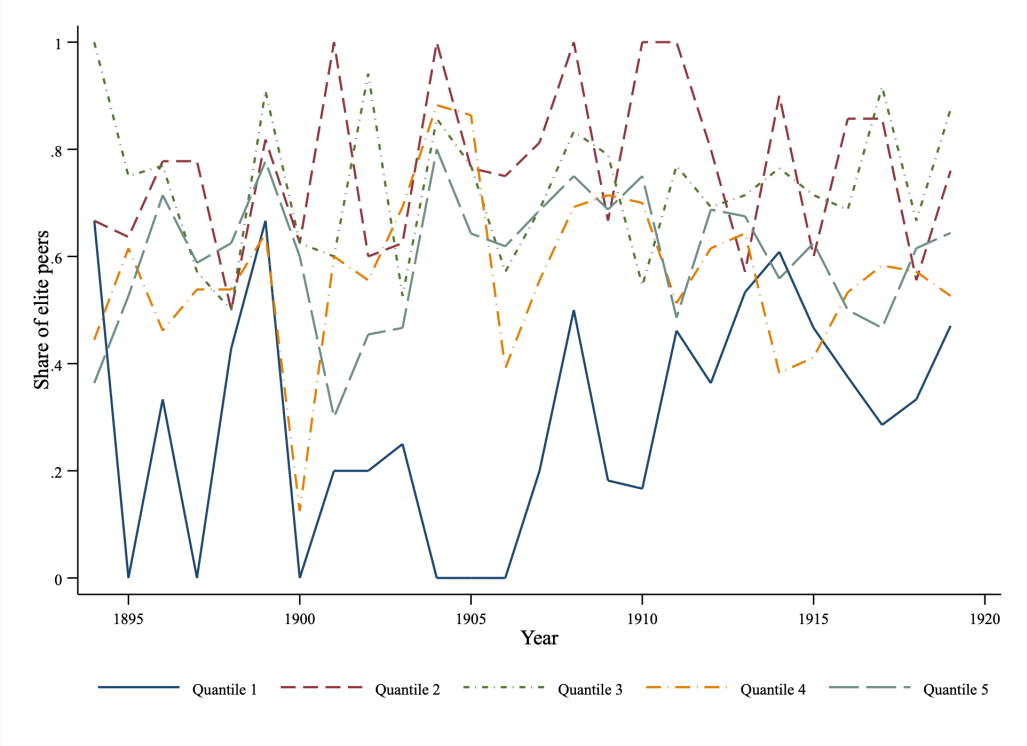
Notes: The figure depicts the percentage of high school graduates across selected occupations by caste. High school graduates were matched with occupational records available from various sources. Data on Mukhtars and Revenue Agents are obtained from the list of candidates who passed the mukhtarship and revenue agent examinations from annual publications of the United Provinces government gazette from 1898–1922. Data on Teachers are obtained from the list of candidates who passed the Anglo-Vernacular Teachers' examination from the annual publications of the United Provinces government gazette from 1902–1922. Data on Deputy Collectors are obtained from United Provinces Civil List 1922 and are limited to those born between 1876–1903.

Figure C.4: Share of Graduates across Higher Education Stages by Caste/Religion



Notes: The figure depicts the percentage of graduates across high school, intermediate, and undergraduate by their caste/religious group.

Figure C.5: Cohort-level Variation of Elite Peers across 5 High Schools



Notes: The figure depicts the share of elites within each graduating cohort across 5 schools. Schools were divided into 5 quantiles based on their average size of graduating cohort across all years. One school was picked at random.

Figure C.6: Total number of High School Graduates (1894-1919) in United Provinces vs other provinces

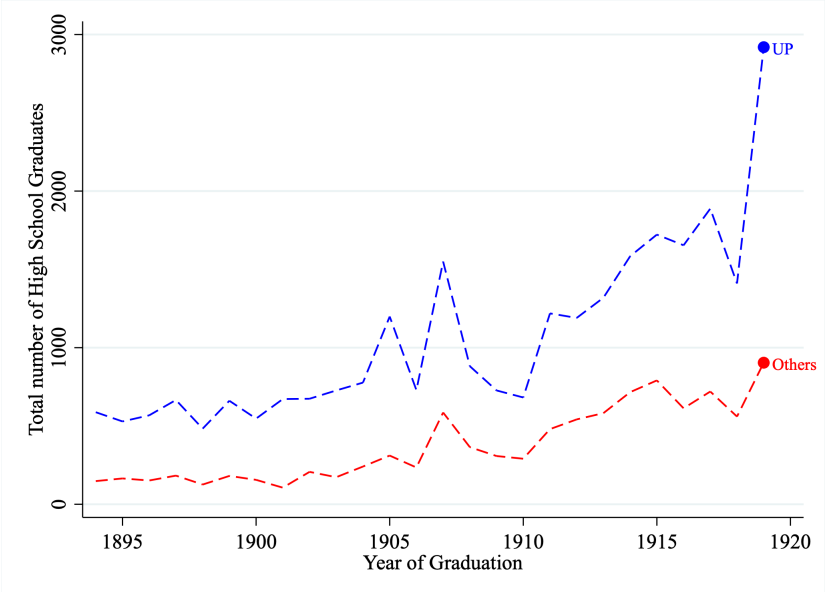


Figure C.7: Total number of High School Graduates (1894-1919) in Other provinces

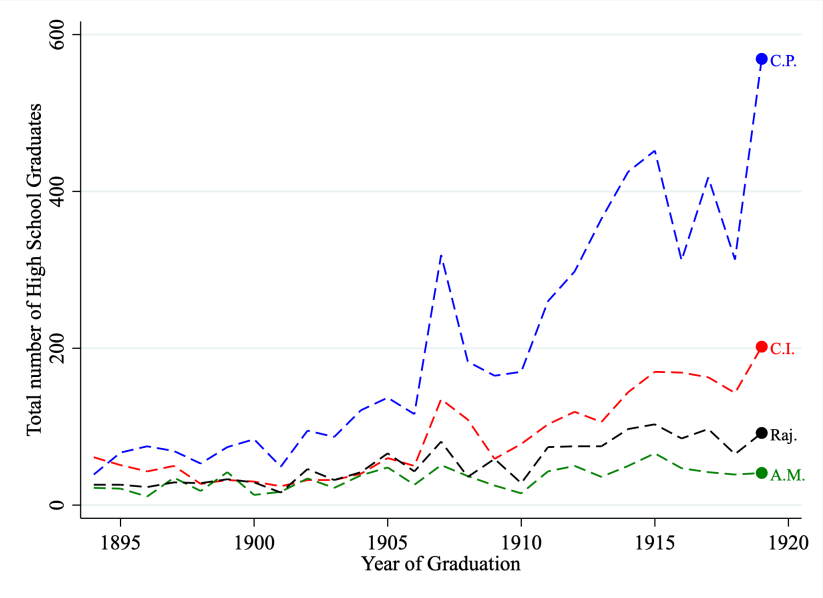


Figure C.8: Total number of High Schools (1894-1919) by province

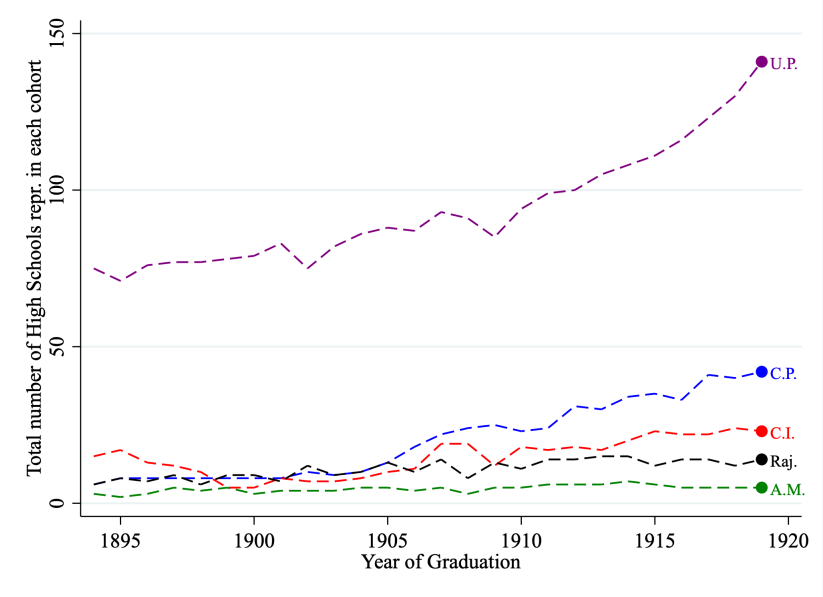
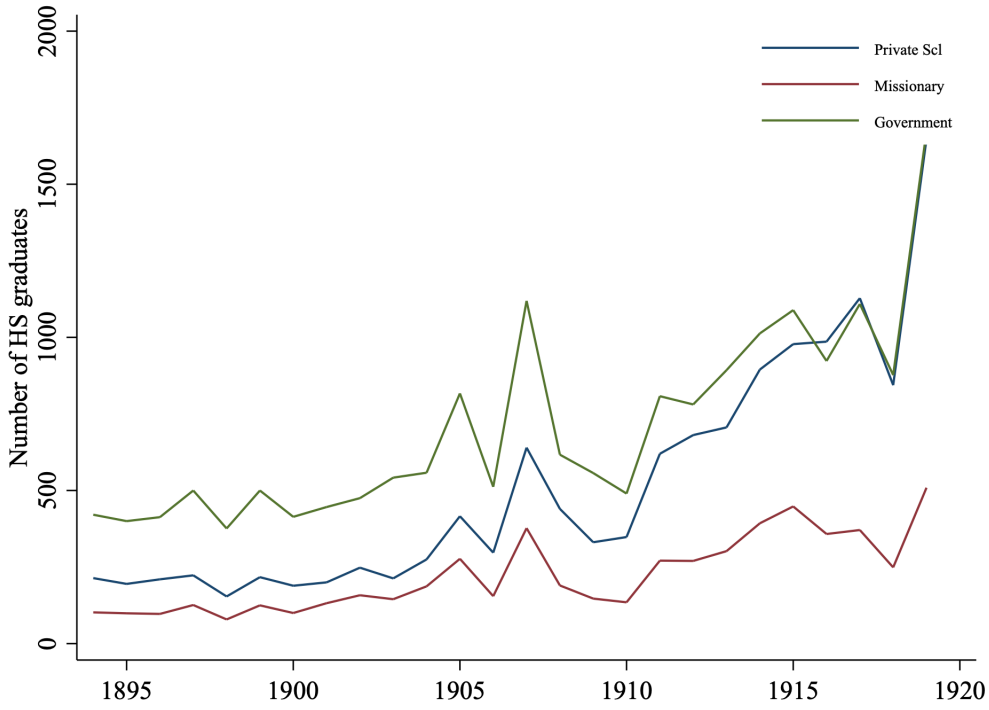
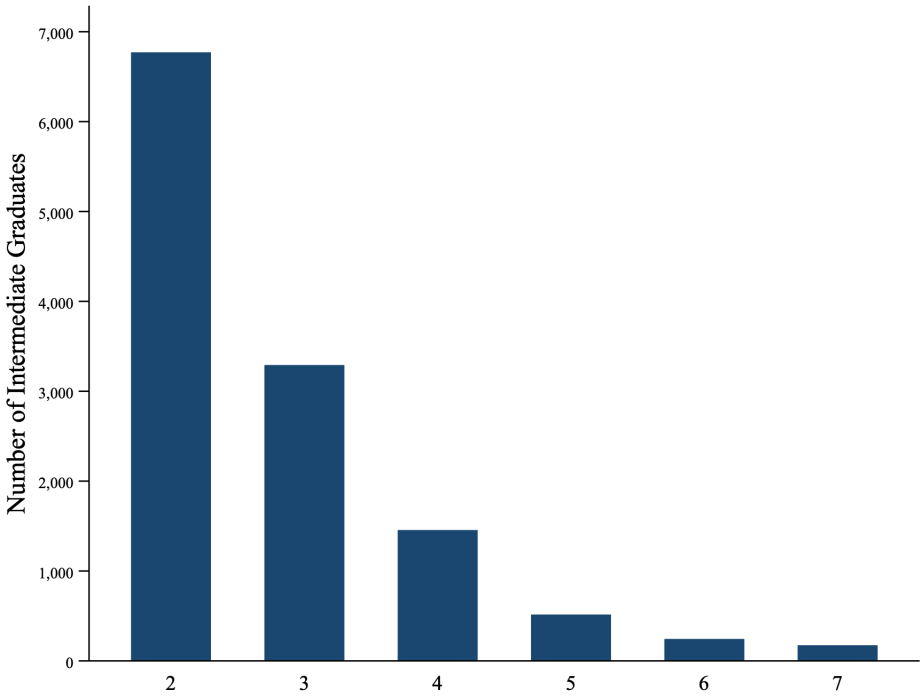


Figure C.9: Number of High School Graduates by School Management Type



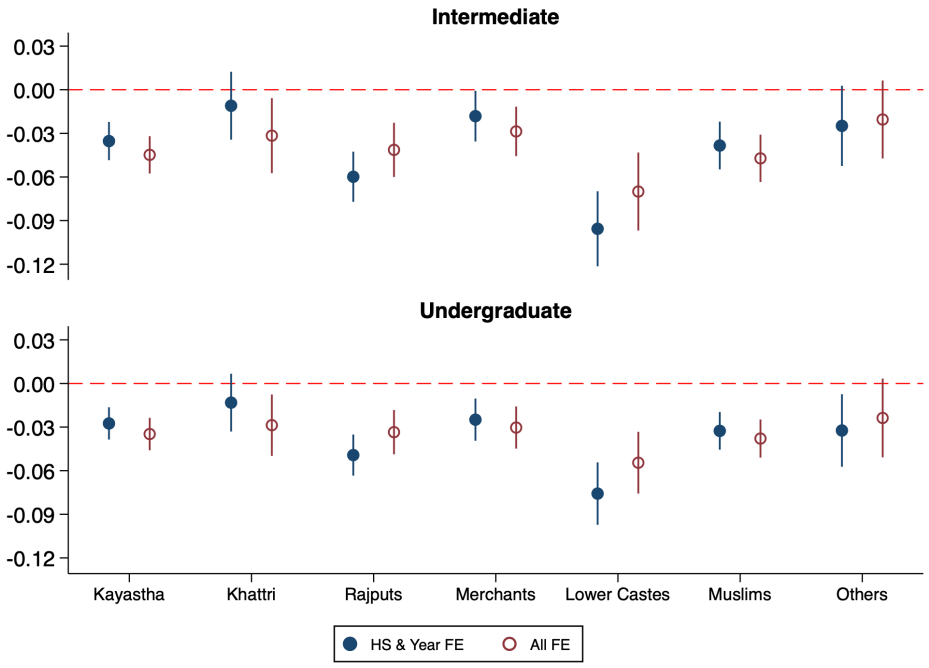
Notes: The figure depicts the number of high school graduates across private, government, and missionary schools from 1894 and 1919. Private schools refer to both schools under Indian elite control in United Provinces, Central Provinces, and Ajmer-Mewar; as well as those under the control of princely state darbars.

Figure C.10: Time to Intermediate Completion



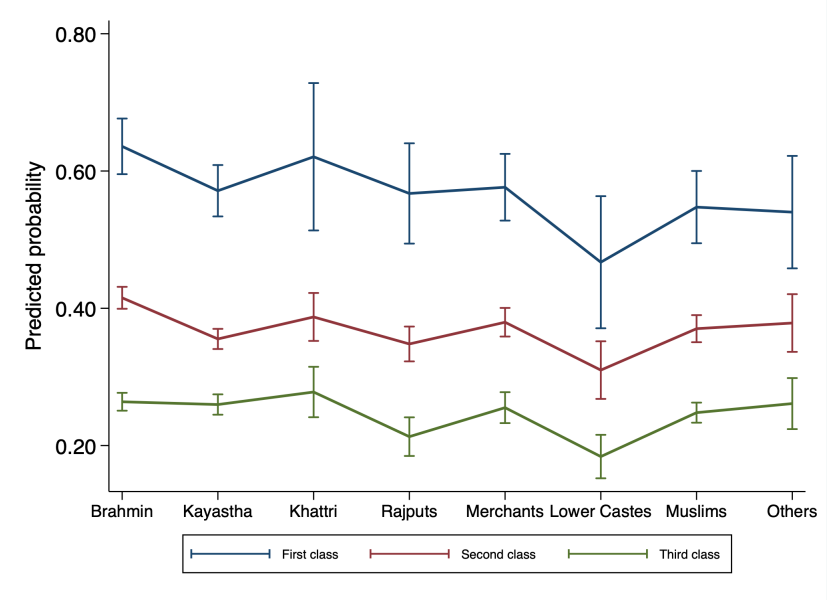
Notes: The figure depicts the percentage of high school graduates across private, government, and missionary school.

Figure C.11: Effect of Caste on the Probability of Passing Intermediate and Undergraduate Examinations



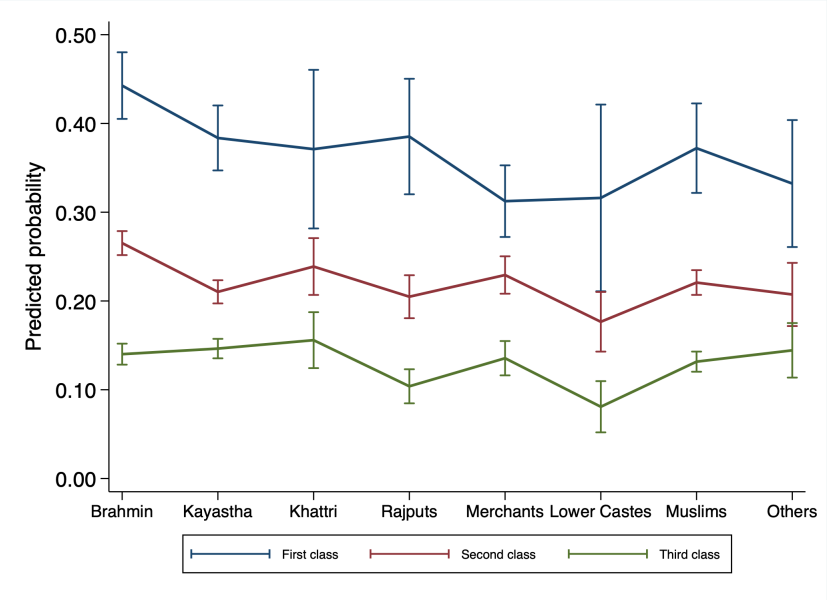
Notes: The figure shows the estimated coefficients for the probability of passing intermediate and undergraduate examinations after graduating from high school, for each caste. Horizontal bars represent 90 percent confidence intervals. The top panel shows the probability of passing the intermediate examination for each caste relative to Brahmins, while the bottom panel shows the probability of passing the undergraduate examination relative to Brahmins. Blue dots indicate coefficients estimated from regressions that include only high school and year fixed effects. Red dots indicate coefficients estimated after including the full set of fixed effects and controls, which comprise high school-year and district-year fixed effects, as well as controls for students' birth year and the type of examination they took to pass high school. In both regressions, standard errors are clustered at the high school level.

Figure C.12: Predicted Probability of Passing Intermediate by Caste and Grade



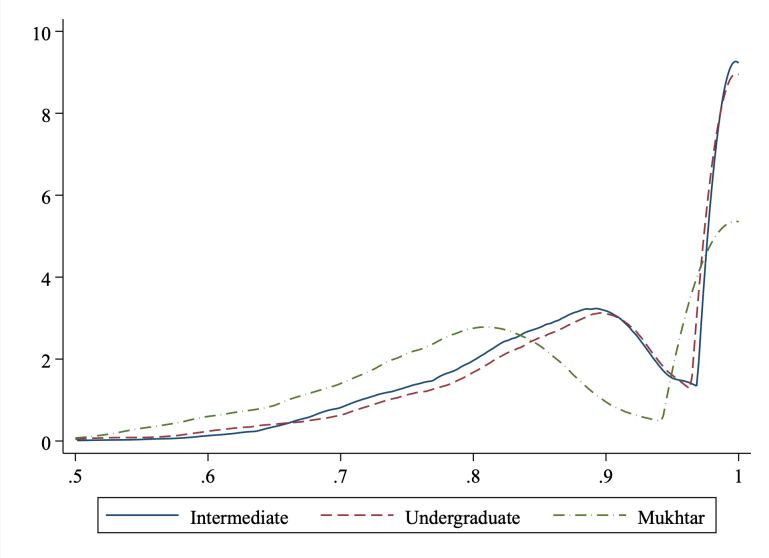
Notes: The figure plots the predicted probability of each caste and religion to pass the intermediate examination. These estimates are obtained from regressing the indicator variable for passing intermediate examination on caste and religious group dummies, alongside high school and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the high school level. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure C.13: Predicted Probability of Passing Undergraduate by Caste and Grade



Notes: The figure plots the predicted probability of each caste and religion to pass the undergraduate examination. These estimates are obtained from regressing the indicator variable for passing undergraduate examination on caste and religious group dummies, alongside high school and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the high school level. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure C.14: Validity of Matching Procedure



Notes: The figure plots kernel density estimates of the similarity scores used in the fuzzy matching procedure (based on Levenshtein distance) for three separate linkages: (a) high school graduates matched to Intermediate graduates, (b) high school graduates matched to Undergraduates, and (c) high school graduates matched to Mukhtar candidates. Higher similarity scores correspond to greater string similarity between names, indicating more reliable matches. Note that these matches exclude false positives identified manually.

D Data Matching and Classification of Castes

D.1 Example of data on High School Graduates

LIST OF CANDIDATES WHO HAVE PASSED THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION HELD IN MARCH 1912.

	Roll no.	Name of candidate.	Age.	Caste.	Name of school.	Passed in Division
			Y.M.			
Agra, Government High School, 1—46.	6	Dal Chand	17–5	Vaish ...	Agra, Government High School.	II
	10	Jai Deva Sharma ...	19–3	Brahman ...	Ditto ...	II
	15	Khawaja Rahat Husen ...	16–9	Mahomedan ...	Ditto ...	II
	32	Raja Ram Chaturvedi ...	20–7	Brahman ..	Ditto	III
	43	Syed Mohammad Raza Ahmad Rizvi.	18–2	Mahomedan ...	Ditto ...	II
	44	Saieed Ahmad Jafri ...	19–8	Do. ..	Ditto ...	III
	45	Trilock Singh ...	16–7	Jat ...	Ditto	III
	49	Anand Behari Mathur ...	16–2	Kayastha ...	Agra, St. John's Collegiate School.	II
School, 47—89.	52	Bateshwar Dayal Shivhal ...	16–8	Vaish ...	Ditto ...	III
	53	Bhagwati Prasad ...	17–7	Kayastha ...	Ditto ...	II
	55	Birj Mohan Singh ...	19–2	Jat ...	Ditto ..	II
	56	Debi Dayal ...	21–7	Kayastha ...	Ditto	III
	57	Dwarka Prasad ...	17–10	Vaish ...	Ditto ...	II
	62	Jagmohan Narayan Choudhry	16–8	Kshattria ...	Ditto ...	II
	63	Jai Narain Raizada ...	16–3	Kayastha ...	Ditto ..	II

Figure D.1: Snapshot of Primary raw data of High School Graduates

D.2 Example of classifying castes into varnas based on the 1901 census

I illustrate the classification of caste with the example of United Provinces. In the 1901 census, castes were divided into 14 groups, ranked by descending order of their 'ritual' rank of purity. Ranks were based largely on traditional occupations, but also local rules of diet (whether the person ate meat or beef), and rules of social interactions and untouchability (for ex., castes from whom Brahmins could take water were placed higher compared to those from whom Brahmins could not). Brahmins were in group 1. I place these castes in the Brahmin group. Group 2 consists of castes that were allied with Brahmins, such as *Bhumihars* and *Tagas*. Groups 3 and 4 comprised of Kshattriya castes such as *Rajput*, a martial caste and scribal castes such as *Kayastha*. I place castes from these 3 groups in the Non-Brahmin Upper Caste group. Groups 5 and 6 comprised of Vaishya (merchant) castes and those castes allied to them. Castes from these groups are placed together in the Merchant caste group. Group 7 comprises of castes that were not backward but the British civil service officers were unsure whether they were to be included under Upper Castes. These include Jats and Halwais – the former would be placed at a higher rank in the later censuses. For consistency, I use the ranking in the 1901 census. Finally, groups 8-10 comprised of all shudra castes, while groups 11-14

comprised of all Dalit castes. I place them all under the Lower Castes group. Similar tables were constructed for all the other provinces, and I assign each caste to the 4 groups in the same manner.

D.3 Rules followed in case of non-unique matches between lists of High School and Intermediate Graduates

I make use of fuzzy matching methods (Levenshtein distance) to generate a similarity score between names from the two records. Thus, for each name in the high school graduate records, there is a set of possible matches in the intermediate records with different similarity scores. The match with the most confidence is most likely the match with the highest similarity scores (there are some exceptions where the surname of the student in the intermediate records appears first). I then manually check through each potential and confident match, and remove those that are false positives.

In case of non-unique matches (where two high school graduates is matched to 1 intermediate graduate with high confidence), I use the following rules –

- If 2 high school students are matched with the same name in the intermediate graduates list, but one of them is from a different province compared to the other, then the unique match is made for the student with the same name and same province.
- If 2 high school students are matched with the same name, but both are from the same province as the matched name, then I compare the district of their high school and that of the college. If they match, then a unique match is made for that student.
- If the districts don't match for both, then no unique matches are made, and both are considered to not have passed the intermediate examination.

I then follow the same procedure to match intermediate graduates with undergraduates. The only difference here is that in case of non-unique matches, the rule is resolved in favour of intermediate graduates who passed their undergraduate examination in the same college.

D.4 Rules followed in matching Mukhtars with their High School Graduation records

I first match the list of candidates who appeared for the mukhtarship examination with those who passed each year. This is a straightforward exercise since we have the names, name of father, and district. I then make use of the same approach as before to generate a similarity score between each name in the high school graduate records and that in the list of mukhtar candidates. I manually check within each potential and confident matches, and remove any false positives.

Assuming then that the district corresponds with the district of birth/ location of their high school, I link the list of lawyers with the high school graduates data using the following rules -

- For matching with the lists of mukhtars, high schools students are matched with names in these lists by their name and district where their high school is located. Only those who are at most 32 [47] at the time they wrote the exam is considered as a prospective match.
- For the unmatched names, I next match the lists by name and division (an administrative unit that consists of 3 or more districts).
- For the remaining list of unmatched names, I look for a unique match by name from any district outside the division that contains the district of their high school.

[47] A candidate was qualified to write the mukhtarship examination till he reached 30 years of age.