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Residential Segregation by Caste in the Indian States of Gujarat and Karnataka

Alicia Terrero

Providence College

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Residential Segregation by Caste in the Indian States of Gujarat and Karnataka

Context

This project sought to calculate and compare the level of residential segregation by caste in cities across two Indian states. We compare caste-based segregation across 30 cities in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka—two states with similar levels of development as measured by GDP/ per capita and literacy rates.

Research Questions

- What are the differences in the levels of residential segregation by caste across cities in the Indian states of Karnataka and Gujarat?
- What might explain the observed differences in level of residential segregation by caste in cities in Karnataka and Gujarat?

Methods

- Calculated the level of residential segregation by caste (i.e., the index of dissimilarity, D-index) for cities in Gujarat and Karnataka using 2011 block-level census data; compared the spatial distribution of Scheduled Castes and all others.
- Analyzed the political, economic, and social histories and compiled secondary data on both states to try and explain observed differences in levels of urban residential segregation by caste.

Findings

The D-indexes for 15 cities in Karnataka ranged from 0.44 to 0.65, with a mean of 0.56. The D-indexes for 16 cities in Gujarat, however, ranged from 0.51 to 0.94 with a mean of 0.83. Cities in Gujarat, on average, have a much higher level of residential segregation by caste than cities in Karnataka, although residential segregation is high in both states.

Mean Residential Segregation by Caste (D-index)

| State | Mean D- Index |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Karnataka (15 cities) | 0.56 |
| Gujarat (16 cities) | 0.83 |

A combination of factors are likely to contribute to higher levels of residential segregation by caste in urban Gujarat. Research to date emphasizes how discriminatory practices by real estate agents and landlords, the role of caste networks in finding employment and housing, differential access to credit, housing societies, and state-sanctioned violence lead to more segregated cities. Our preliminary analysis also suggests that comparatively higher levels of *subnationalism*, which Singh (2015: 507) defines as “the strength of solidarity at the subnational level”, may correspond with less residential segregation by caste. Looking at state policies in support of the “common good”, Karnataka has, for example, consistently spent more per capital on human development. By spending more on social services, education, and healthcare, Karnataka seems to have a higher degree of subnationalism, which may serve as a partial counterweight to extremely highly levels of casteism in housing.

Conclusion

Our findings showed that there is a significantly higher degree of residential segregation by caste across cities in Gujarat than cities in Karnataka. We found that on average cities in Gujarat tend to be about 50% more segregated by caste than cities in Karnataka. Preliminary analysis suggests this could be due to Gujarat having comparatively lower levels of solidarity across social groups. Caste elites may be even less likely to live near, and rent out housing units to, Dalits and other ostracized social groups; and fear of violence and discrimination may cause Dalits to be less likely to seek housing in areas dominated by other social groups in cities in Gujarat.

References

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