

Ethnic empowering policies and postcolonial political exclusion in the British empire: An analysis of ethnic police recruitment and communal legislative representation

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Abstract

Does ethnic empowerment under colonial rule shape ethnic power even after independence? Existing research offers mixed arguments and rarely differentiates between different types of political empowerment. Drawing on the historical observation that the parliament and the security forces were two of the major sources of political power in newly independent states, this preregistered study tests whether ethnic representation in the colonial constabulary force and the receipt of guaranteed communal representation in the colonial legislature reduces the risk of postcolonial ethnic exclusion in ex-British colonies. It is found that the former has a strong and consistent effect on reducing the odds of postcolonial ethnic exclusion, but the latter, despite its frequent usage as a form of colonial ethnic empowerment, does not prevent political exclusion. The importance of martial vis-à-vis rational-legal power in newly independent states and varying levels of diachronic continuity between the two forms of colonial empowerment may account for the diverging results.

KEYWORDS

British colonialism, colonial policing, communal representation, decolonisation, ethnic exclusion, ethnic politics

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1 | INTRODUCTION: COLONIAL POLICIES AND POSTCOLONIAL ETHNIC POWER

Most decolonised states are composed of multiple ethnic or sectarian groups. Although some decolonised states have adopted a system of inclusive power-sharing among different communal groups, the majority of multiethnic decolonised states contains ethnic groups that are systematically excluded from political power. Among 44 multiethnic decolonised states that were formerly British or French colonies, 35 had at least one politically excluded group in the decade following independence.¹ Given that political exclusion is an exceptionally strong and consistent predictor of ethnic warfare in multiethnic states (Lieberman & Singh, 2012; Ray, 2016; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016), the prevalence of ethnic exclusion is a phenomenon of significant historical importance.

What, then, are the historical antecedents that determine whether an ethnic group is excluded from political power? While there would be a variety of causes, for decolonised states, it is *prima facie* plausible that European colonial rule played an important role. It is now widely accepted that colonial rule importantly—some would even say decisively—shaped a wide range of postcolonial socioeconomic outcomes of newly independent states, including, among others, economic development (Acemoglu et al., 2002; Grier, 1999; Lange et al., 2006), democracy (Bernhard et al., 2004), social security (Schmitt, 2015), and ethnic conflict (Blanton et al., 2001; Verghese, 2016; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016). One major type of mechanism through which colonial rule shaped various aspects of postcolonial societies is path dependence: Social structures or institutions set in place under colonial rule may endure the transition to independence and continue to shape society in similar ways.

On the topic of ethnic power and exclusion, an influential thesis is that the effect of ethnic empowerment (or disempowerment) under colonial rule persists even after the departure of the coloniser and reduces (or increases) ethnic groups' chances of political exclusion in newly independent states. Ethnic empowerments under colonial rule can be classified into those that were specifically based on communal membership and those that were a by-product of investments in industry, mining, agriculture, transportation, and education that were largely driven by nonethnic considerations like geography or natural endowments (Horowitz, 1985, p. 156–157). The postcolonial continuity of empowerments of the latter type has been broadly demonstrated and analysed in the social-scientific literature on colonial investments (Huillery, 2009; Ricart-Huguet, 2021, 2022; Roessler et al., 2022), although such studies are usually limited to Africa and seek to explain modernisation or development rather than political inclusion.

The former type of empowerment, which is the focus of the present study, constitutes policies such as ethnic recruitment of the police, army, and civil service (Horowitz, 1985; Killingray & Anderson, 1992; Ray, 2013), communal representation in the colonial legislature (Jeong, 2023; Lange, Jeong, & Amasyali, 2021), the granting of limited ethnic autonomy (Horowitz, 1985; Robinovich, 1979), and ethnic protectionism from trade and internal migration (Horowitz, 1985, p. 158–160). Such ethnicity-based colonial policies have recently attracted a handful of focused quantitative studies, but their effects on postcolonial ethnic exclusion are not very well attested since most studies of this type seek to explain ethnic warfare rather than exclusion (Jeong, 2023; Lange, Jeong, & Amasyali, 2021; Ray, 2016). One notable exception is Ray (2019), who argued that a higher proportion of coethnics in the officer ranks of the colonial constabulary force weighted by relative population protects against postcolonial ethnic anti-state warfare by reducing the risk of postcolonial ethnic exclusion. Overall, the broader literature on colonial policies and postcolonial ethnic power seems to suggest a strong pattern of continuity, although focused empirical studies of the lasting effects of colonial policies of ethnicity-based empowerment remain scant.

The link between colonial ethnic empowerment and postcolonial political inclusion has also been discussed in studies that compare broad typologies of colonial rule. Here, too, continuity is the norm, whether it is simply assumed or empirically attested. Blanton et al. (2001) influentially argued that former British colonies are more prone to ethnic warfare compared with former French colonies since British rule fostered horizontal or unranked power relations between ethnicities. An underlying assumption is that ethnic power under colonial rule largely carries over to postcolonial society. Under French rule, which the authors broadly characterised as a “strategy of administrative centralization” (p. 475), “the administrative machinery remained largely unchanged during the transition to

independence” (p. 479), and the “‘modernized elite’ that the French had empowered remained in positions of authority, to the exclusion of other groups within the society” (p. 479). On the contrary, British indirect rule dispersed political authority relatively evenly across different ethnicities and discouraged the creation of dominant ethnic groups (p. 481). Just as in French colonies, it is assumed for the British colonies that the landscape of group power under colonial rule significantly carried over to newly independent states.

Wucherpfennig et al. (2016) concurred with the idea that ethnic power under colonial rule strongly carries over to the post-independence period and presented the first piece of quantitative evidence. For nearly all politically relevant ethnic groups in former British and French colonies in Asia and Africa, the authors measured ethnic groups' power under colonial rule using a combination of their geographic proximity to the colonial centre and the identity of the coloniser, such that geographic proximity to the colonial centre in French colonies indicates high ethnic power, geographic peripheralness in French colonies indicates low ethnic power, and being in a British colony indicates medium levels of ethnic power regardless of the distance to the colonial centre (Wucherpfennig et al., 2016, p. 887). The authors reported that this measure of colonial ethnic power is positively and significantly associated with the odds of political inclusion in the year of independence, indicating that ethnic power under colonial rule predicts ethnic power in the year of independence.

Despite the prevalence of studies that report the continuity of ethnic power through decolonisation, one must also remember that decolonisation not only entailed path dependence and continuity but also ruptures from the colonial political order. As amply demonstrated in Horowitz's (1985) seminal study, there is no shortage of cases in which a previously politically privileged ethnic group loses power after independence as another ethnic group seizes power. In Burma, the Karens were given important privileges by the British including a certain degree of autonomy, guaranteed representation in the colonial legislative assembly, a large presence in the colonial police and military, and protection from Burman migration (Horowitz, 1985; Lange, Amasyali, & Jeong, 2021). However, it was the historically and demographically dominant Barmars that took control of the state after independence, and the Karens became engulfed in a decades-long civil war against the Bamar-dominated state. In Ceylon, the Tamils were for a long time a privileged ethnic group both in terms of participation in the colonial administration and socioeconomic capital and, despite the rising power of the Sinhalese in the decades closer to independence, retained a high level of political and economic capital (de Silva et al., 2019; Gunasekara, 2016). The history of political, economic, and educational empowerment under colonial rule notwithstanding, Sri Lankan Tamils became politically marginalised shortly after independence amidst the rapid rise of Sinhalese majoritarian politics in early 1950s (Aruliah & Aruliah, 1993).

Albeit a minority, some quantitative studies of ethnic politics have stressed the discontinuous aspect of ethnic power in the transition to independence. Vogt (2018) argued that in “decolonised states” in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, ethnic power relations in the immediate aftermath of independence were relatively horizontal (compared with European settler or plantation states). The author does acknowledge that “colonial favoritism toward specific groups was quite common” but still argues that “with the retreat of the colonizers the primary hierarchy disappeared” (Vogt, 2018, p. 110). McAlexander (2020) suggested that at least in British colonies, colonial ethnic power relations tend not to carry over to the post-independence period since the coloniser often purposefully empowered peripheral regions in the last years of the colonial period to prevent civil unrest after its departure (McAlexander, 2020, p. 1614). As such, the existing literature on the continuity of ethnic power and the effect of colonial ethnic empowerment on postcolonial political exclusion offers contrasting insights, suggesting the need for a deeper analysis.

2 | LEGAL AND MARTIAL SOURCES OF POLITICAL POWER IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES

In this paper, we propose and test the thesis that ethnic empowerment under colonial rule reduced the risk of political exclusion after independence. Unlike previous studies, which worked with a single aspect or monolithic measurement of political power under colonial rule, the present study aims to analyse the impact of pre-colonial

interventions in different domains of political power. Specifically, we operationalise two widely used empowering policies in the British empire—ethnic police recruitment and communal legislative representation—and examine whether they predict postcolonial ethnic exclusion. The choice of these explanatory variables is motivated by the historical observation that in decolonised states, the armed forces and the parliament were two of the most important sources of political power in the immediate post-independence period (Hansen, 1977, p. 65). The legislative assembly was the supreme decision-making institution in formal politics, which, in addition to legislation, elected the prime minister and determined the composition of the cabinet. Despite formally being under the control of the cabinet, the armed and security forces often acted with a considerable degree of independent agency. Even apart from cases of coups and military rule in which the importance of control over martial power is obvious, the armed forces exerted great influence on civilian politics through threats of interventions and alliances with civilian politicians (Horowitz, 1985, p. 444–461).ⁱⁱ

The main policy instrument wielded by the British empire to control various ethnic groups' participation in the colonial legislative assembly was communal legislative representation, which granted certain ethnic groups guaranteed representation in the form of seat quotas or separate electorates. There were several ways in which this policy was used. Sometimes, representational guarantees were granted to historically dominant ethnic groups in formal recognition of their special position among the indigenous population. Such cases were especially common in Africa, such as in the case of the Baganda in Uganda or the Ashanti in Ghana. Alternatively, communal guarantees were granted to protect the rights of minority ethnicities. In a colonial setting, such a form of institutional protection sometimes reflected colonial favouritism or strategic partnership in colonial governance. The Karens in Myanmar and Muslims in the British Raj are major examples. In other cases, communal representation was distributed across a large portion of ethnic groups, setting in place a formalised system of inclusive power-sharing in the legislative assembly. We will refer to these three categories as hegemonic, minority, and inclusive. The three categories are ideal types of which boundaries are fuzzy. Table 1 shows the 13 (among a total of 23 included in the sample—see Figures 1 and 2 and Table 2) countries among former British colonies that had communal legislative representation together with their proposed typologies.

Apart from communal representation in the legislative assembly, stacking the colonial police and armed forces with recruits from select ethnic groups was another common policy of ethnic empowerment used by the British empire. The police and armed forces were a crucial instrument of governance in multiethnic colonies, and the British often stacked the colonial police and armed forces with select ethnic groups as part of their divide-and-rule strategy (Blanton et al., 2001; Killingray & Anderson, 1992). For example, in Cyprus, the British recruited the police and paramilitary forces disproportionately from Turkish Cypriots in response to Greek nationalism and independence movements (Anderson, 1992). Like communal legislative representation, police and army recruitment was a highly contentious policy in intracolony politics, which often fostered ethnic tension, rivalry, and animosity (Killingray & Anderson, 1992; Soherwordi, 2010; Ray, 2013).

Communal representation and ethnic police recruitment both belong to a type of communalising colonial policy (CCP) that Lange, Jeong, and Amasyali (2021, p. 146) labelled as “discriminating,” which are “CCPs that privilege particular communities more than—and commonly at the expense of—other communities.” While it cannot be said that these two policies were *always* applied in a discriminatory fashion, both were forms of inclusion or representation in a major branch of the colonial state apparatus and were used as a means of ethnic empowerment across a wide range of British colonies. It must be noted, however, that despite their common “discriminatory” character, these two policies frequently did not vary in the same direction and should be seen as distinct dimensions of empowerment, both conceptually and empirically (Adekson, 1979, p. 154; see also Table 3). For example, in the Protectorate of Uganda, the colonial police and armed forces were stacked with the northern tribes such as the Langi, Acholi, and Kakwa (Atkinson, 2009; Ray, 2016), but representational privileges in the colonial legislative assembly were predominantly focused on traditional kingdoms in the south, most notably Buganda (Nuscheler & Ziemer, 1978, p. 2305). The showdown between the Kabaka (king) of Buganda and the prime minister Milton Obote—an ethnic Lango—in the immediate post-independence years was a struggle by both parties to draw support from the parliament and the

TABLE 1 List of ex-British colonies with community-based legislative representation.

Country	Type of communal legislative representation	Region	Year of independence	Summary
Botswana	Hegemonic	Africa	1966	Native Advisory Council (1920–1940), African Advisory Council (1940–1951), and African Council (1951–) had formal tribal representation from each of the eight major Tswana tribes. The Tswana accounted for slightly over half the population.
Cyprus	Inclusive	MENA	1960	A very old history of the Legislative Council, elected since 1882 with roughly proportional representation for Greeks and Turks. Greek representation was slightly increased in 1924.
Fiji	Inclusive	Pacific	1970	First universal election in 1963. The parliament had a strictly ethnicity-based constitution, with seats distributed to Fijians, Indians, and Europeans, plus “general electors” that were open to smaller groups.
Ghana	Hegemonic	Africa	1957	Legislative Council since 1925. Delegates sent by three provincial councils, two of which were dominated by Akan tribes and one which had separate sections for the Ewe and Ga-Adangme. The Burns Constitution of 1946 institutionalised four Ashanti representatives in the Legislative Council.
India	Minority	South Asia	1947	Separate electorates for the Imperial Legislative Council were granted to Muslims in 1909. In 1919, quotas for other religious minorities were introduced.
Israel	Hegemonic	MENA	1948	The Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine (1920–1948) regularly voted for a legislative body, the Assembly of Representatives. Since 1931, there was special allocation of seats for Jews of Arab origin. No representation was given to non-Jewish Arabs.
Jordan	Inclusive/minority	MENA	1946	The Legislative Council was created in 1928 and based on sectarian representation. Quotas were distributed among non-Bedouin Muslims (the majority), Bedouins, Circassians, and Christians. Minorities were overrepresented. Minority representation was important for securing Hashemite rule both before and after independence.
Malaysia	Inclusive	South Asia	1957	The Federation of Malaya (1948–1956) had a Legislative Council with ethnic quotas among its nonofficial members. Seats were distributed among the Malay, Chinese, Indians, Europeans, Ceylonese, and Eurasians roughly proportional to the population (with the notable exception of the European quota, which was overweight).
Myanmar	Minority	South Asia	1948	Since 1923, Karens and Anglo-Indians were given special representation in the Legislative Assembly. This privilege was retained in the 1935 Burma Act. A key role of Karen representation was to counter Bamar nationalism in the assembly.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Country	Type of communal legislative representation	Region	Year of independence	Summary
Nigeria	Hegemonic	Africa	1960	The 1922 constitution had a detailed allocation of unofficial members of the Legislative Council to various professional and regional groups. The 1946 constitution incorporated northern regions into the colony. This constitution institutionalised regionalism, creating a separate assembly in the North, East, and West. While not formally communal, this regionalism had the effect of solidifying the hegemony of the dominant group in each region, namely, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, respectively.
Sierra Leone	Hegemonic	Africa	1961	Before 1924, Creoles were the only natives to be allowed in the Legislative Council. Since 1924, two Temne and one Mende paramount chiefs were included.
Sri Lanka	Inclusive/minority	South Asia	1948	The Legislative Council was established in 1833. Until 1931, the system operated on a principle of communal representation, which not only included the Sinhalese and Tamils but also Burghers and Muslims. The Tamils tended to be overrepresented relative to the population, and the Sinhalese were underrepresented. The Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 abolished communalism, drastically reducing Tamil representation in the legislature.
Uganda	Hegemonic	Africa	1962	Rules for legislative representation in Uganda were complex and underwent frequent changes since 1945 when the participation of Africans was allowed for the first time. By and large, the “Kabaka” (king) and “Lukiko” (parliament) of the traditionally dominant Buganda retained a special right to appoint members, and quotas tended to favour the traditional Bantu kingdoms in the south.

Note: See Appendix S1 for a more detailed and referenced overview of communal representation in former British colonies.

armed forces, ultimately culminating in the victory of the latter that was more strongly backed by the armed forces (Hansen, 1977, p. 65).

Based on the above theoretical considerations, we propose two hypotheses for former British colonies:

Hypothesis 1. Having received communal legislative representation under colonial rule decreases the risk of political exclusion during the first two decades after independence.

Hypothesis 2. A larger presence of coethnics in the upper ranks of the colonial constabulary force decreases the risk of political exclusion during the first two decades after independence.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 both spell out in more specificity the general thesis that colonial ethnic empowerment meaningfully carries over to the postcolonial period through path-dependent mechanisms and reduces the risk of political exclusion.

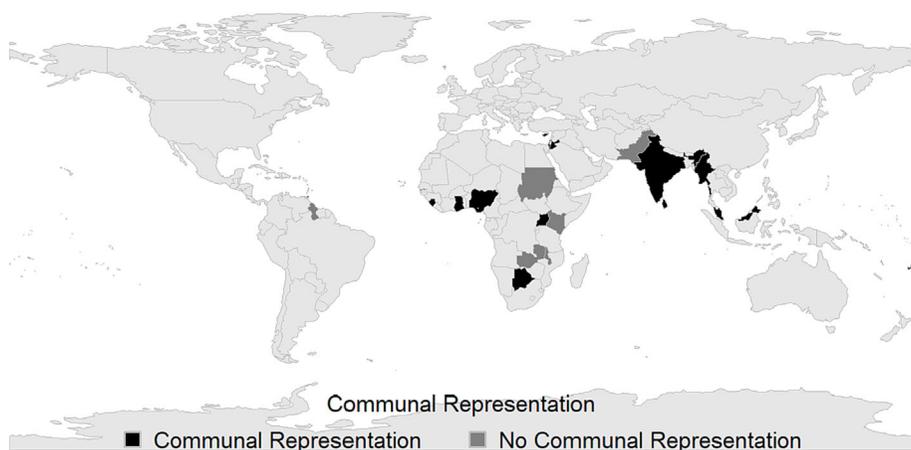


FIGURE 1 Ex-British colonies in the sample by communal representation. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

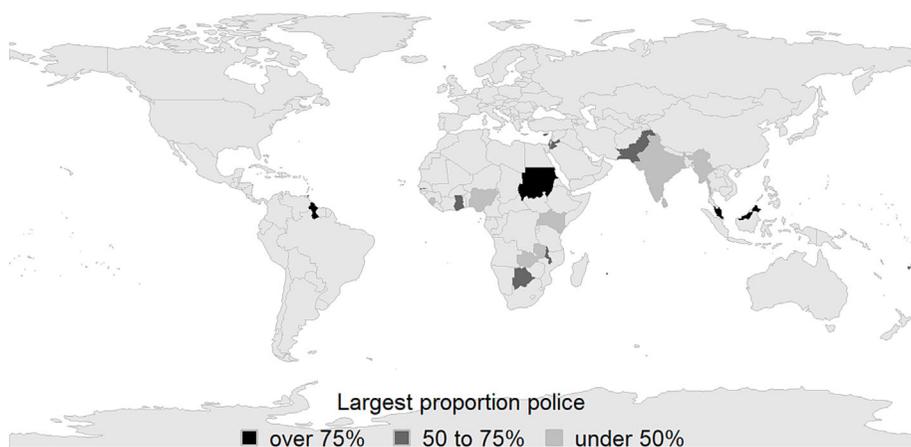


FIGURE 2 Ex-British colonies in the sample by ethnic police dominance. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Control of the police was very consequential for post-independence ethnic power struggles in large part due to their intelligence-gathering capabilities (Anderson, 1992; Eck, 2018; Killingray & Anderson, 1992; Rathbone, 1992). Police representation also closely correlates with representation in the colonial armed forces (Ray, 2016), which, in the word of Horowitz (1985, p. 443), was a “significant symbol of ethnic domination.” The army in newly independent states exerted political influence not only through coups and military rule but also by using their potential for intervention as political leverage and building alliances with civilian politicians (Horowitz, 1985). Cases ranging from Cyprus (Anderson, 1992), Uganda (Hansen, 1977), Pakistan (Soherwordi, 2010), Ghana (Enloe, 1980), and Kenya (Throup, 1992) indicate both the importance of the control of the security and armed forces for ethnic power and the difficulty of a rapid ethnic reshuffling of these highly specialised organs. Perhaps, the most robust evidence for the importance of ethnic control of the police force on postcolonial ethnic power is the quantitative study by Ray (2019), which reported that the log of the proportion of coethnics in the colonial police force predicts political inclusion in the year of independence. While similar in design, the analysis of police representation in this paper works with a different coding of this variable, something we think is conceptually sound and complements Ray’s findings.

TABLE 2 List of countries and ethnic/tribal/sectarian groups included in the sample.

Country	Group
Botswana	Birwa; Herero/Mbanderu; Kalanga; Kgalagadi; Mbukushu; San; Tswana; Tswapong; and Yeyi
Cyprus	Greeks and Turks
Fiji	Fijians and Indians
Gambia	Aku (Creoles); Diola; Fula; Mandinka; and Wolof
Ghana	Asante (Akan); Ewe; Ga-Adangbe; Northern Groups (Mole-Dagbani, Gurma, and Grusi); and Other Akans
Guyana	Afro-Guyanese; Indigenous peoples; and Indo-Guyanese
India	Assamese; Bengali; Gujarati; Hindi; Indigenous Tripuri; Kannada; Kashmiri Muslims; Malayalam; Manipuri; Marathi; Mizo; Naga; Oriya; Other Muslims; Punjabi-Sikhs; Scheduled Castes; Tamil; and Telegu
Israel	Arabs and Jews
Jordan	Christians; Jordanian Arabs; and Palestinian Arabs
Kenya	Kalenjin-Masai-Turkana-Samburu; Kamba; Kikuyu-Meru-Emb; Kisii; Luhya; Luo; Mijikenda; and Somali
Malawi	Central (Chewa); Northerners (Tumbuka, Tonga, and Ngonde); and Southerners (Lomwe, Mang'anja, Nyanja, and Yao)
Malaysia	Chinese; East Indians; and Malays
Mauritius	French-speakers; Hindus; and Muslims
Myanmar	Bamar (Barman); Buddhist Arakanese; Chinese; Indians; Kachins; Karenni (Red Karens); Kayin (Karens); Mons; Muslim Arakanese; Shan; Wa; and Zomis (Chins)
Nigeria	Hausa-Fulani and Muslim Middle Belt; Igbo; Yoruba; Ijaw; Ogoni; and Tiv
Pakistan	Ahmadis; Baluchis; Bengali; Hindus; Mohajirs; Pashtuns; Punjabi; and Sindhi
Sierra Leone	Creole; Kono; Limba; Mende; and Temne
Singapore	Chinese, Eurasians, and Others; Indians; and Malays
Sri Lanka	Indian Tamils; Moors (Muslims); Sinhalese; and Sri Lankan Tamils
Sudan	Azande; Bari; Beja; Dinka; Fur; Latoka; Nuba; Nuer; Other Arab Groups; Other Northern Groups; and Other Southern Groups
Trinidad & Tobago	Blacks; East Indians Baganda; Basoga; Kakwa-Nubian; Langi/Acholi; South-Westerners (Ankole, Banyoro, Toro, and Banyarwanda); and Teso
Uganda	Bemba speakers; Kaonde; Lozi (Barotse); Luanda; Luvale; and Nyanja speakers
Zambia	Easterners and Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerns)

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics and correlation structure of key independent variables.

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	1.	2.	3.
1. Distance to centre (km)	121	0	247.6	-961.8	736.5	1	-.144	-.381
2. Police representation (percentage points)	121	0	19.1	-45.3	92.3		1	.218
3. Communal legislative representation	73	0	0.40	-0.667	0.833			1

Note: The right-hand side of the vertical line is a correlation table. All three variables are within-country centred. Numbers are raw figures before standardisation.

The effect of communal legislative representation on postcolonial political inclusion provided the authors with a less clear theoretical intuition at the outset of the study, but there appeared to be several reasons that it, like police representation, would continue to protect against political exclusion. First, due to institutional inertia, the electoral and representative institutions may also exhibit a certain degree of diachronic continuity. Communal groups that are already representationally privileged would use their influence to hold on to their power, while those that lie outside the pre-existing discriminatory system may face an uphill battle, *ceteris paribus*. In the case of Uganda, which we were well aware of before data collection, it took a military coup to do away with the legislative privileges held by the Baganda, and they most likely would not have been abolished anytime soon had it not been for the disproportionate representation of northerners in the army that helped win the struggle by force. In Myanmar, the communal representation given to the Karens was largely left intact in the Burmese parliament after independence (Crouch, 2015), and it was only due to the ensuing armed conflict with the majority Barmars that they fell into a state of *de facto* political exclusion. Second, the receipt of communal representation may foster ethnic organisational capacity since it, at least in some cases, played a crucial role in developing minority ethnolinguistic groups into coherent political identities capable of mobilising ethnic interests against outgroups (Lange, Jeong, & Amasyali, 2021). While organisational capacity does not necessarily protect against political exclusion (an ethnic group may still be defeated or relegated), it remains possible, if not likely, that it would be an asset amidst the temporary power vacuum. Despite coming from a different context and geography, Jha and Wilkinson's (2012) study that reported a close link between the organisational skill fostered by previous combat experience and the ethnic cleansing of regional minorities points to the possibility that ethnic organisational capacity fostered through parliamentary ethnic politics may protect against political exclusion. A third possible rationale for Hypothesis 1 relates to the issue of "group legitimacy." Horowitz (1985, p. 201) defines group legitimacy as the claim to "one's rightful place in the country" and proposes colonial recognition as an important source thereof. Communal legislative representation can be construed as an act of group legitimation since it institutionalises the participation of an ethnic group into the highest decision-making authority of the colony. Horowitz (1985) stresses the continuity of group legitimacy, observing that "conceptions of primacy recognized by the Europeans were well entrenched and were not discredited by the colonial departure" (p. 207).

Finally, a brief justification of the geographical and chronological scope of the study is in order. While it may potentially be meaningful to examine all European colonies, or perhaps a combination of British and French colonies as in Blanton et al. (2001) and Wucherpfennig et al. (2016), we focus our analysis on the former British empire. Policies of ethnicity-based empowerment were by far the most common in British colonies than in other empires due to the high level of "pluralism" in Britain's model of colonial rule (Lange et al., 2022) and its frequent adherence to divide-and-rule tactics (Blanton et al., 2001). As discussed further in the following sections, this means that data are often not available for other empires due to conceptual inapplicability or because they were never compiled with ethnic markers by the colonial administrators. The link between colonial empowering institutions and postcolonial ethnic power is therefore a particularly relevant issue for countries that were formerly part of the British empire.

As for the time window, two decades since independence is an arbitrary threshold determined before the statistical analysis to allow sufficient time for the establishment of a new political order while limiting the analysis to the relative short-term aftermath of independence. Many prior studies of colonial power and postcolonial political exclusion analyse ethnic inclusion/exclusion only at the year of independence (McAlexander, 2020; Ray, 2019; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016), but we argue that the year of independence alone may in some cases be too brief to fully reflect the potential dissolution of the existing political settlement and the establishment of a new one. For example, the political marginalisation and exclusion of Tamils in Sri Lanka did not occur immediately in 1946 when Sri Lanka gained formal independence from Britain but gradually with the rise of Sinhala majoritarianism in the years that ensued, most notably in 1953–1956 after the death of the first prime minister D.S. Senanayake (de Silva et al., 2019; DeVotta, 2017). Looking at the first two decades after independence, around 19% of ethnic groups in our sample had their excluded/nonexcluded status reversed at least once. We therefore analyse ethnic exclusion not just in the year of independence but for the first two decades after independence.

3 | DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

3.1 | Data

The data consist of all politically relevant ethnic groups in states that attained independence from Britain after 1945. This list comes from the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) Core dataset (v2021) (Vogt et al., 2015). We only include states that had a population of at least 400,000 in the year of independence to exclude small island and city-states which may be governed by different causal mechanisms. The 1945 cut-off was adopted because data on ethnic power status are available only after this point in the EPR dataset, but it also has the effect of excluding most former settler and plantation colonies that had considerably different sociodemographic and governance structures from non-settler extractive colonies (Vogt, 2018). A small number of ethnic groups that resided in another colony before independence (e.g., the Kadazans and Dayaks in Malaysia, which inhabited Borneo) were dropped from the sample. We also exclude countries that contain only one ethnic group, at least according to the EPR dataset used for the analysis (Lesotho, Swaziland, Jamaica, and Tanzania after discounting Zanzibar tribes) as well as Zimbabwe, which had a white settler political monopoly both before and after independence (Wucherpfennig et al., 2016, p. 888). This leaves a total of 134 ethnic groups in 23 countries as shown in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 2.

3.2 | Variables

The dependent variable is a dummy indicator of ethnic exclusion, coded for each group-year. This variable is taken from the “status” variable in the EPR core dataset: Values equal to “discriminated,” “powerless,” or “self-exclusion” were coded as political exclusion. Around 47% of group-years in the sample are politically excluded. Around 81% of ethnic groups in the sample were always excluded or nonexcluded in the first two decades after independence, and around 19% experienced at least one reversal of excluded status.

The first focal independent variable, colonial communal legislative representation, was taken from the authors' own survey using a variety of primary and secondary sources (Jeong, 2023). For each ethnic group, these data code whether it received or did not receive communal representation in the colonial legislative assembly. We only looked for cases of communal representation among the indigenous population, since in virtually all countries in the sample, it constituted the absolute majority of the national population, and postcolonial ethnic politics primarily involved relationships among indigenous ethnic or tribal groups. Analyses that take communal representation as the focal independent variable were limited to countries that formerly belonged to a colony that implemented at least some degree of community-based representation since the contrast between the receipt and non-receipt of communal representation is meaningful only in such contexts. This leaves 78 groups in 13 countries for the analysis, with around 44% of the groups having received communal representation. This variable was within-country centred by deducting the within-country mean (i.e., the proportion of ethnic groups in a colony that had communal representation) from the 0–1 dummy indicator.ⁱⁱⁱ

The other focal independent variable is ethnic groups' representation in the upper ranks of the colonial police force shortly before independence, taken from Ray (2016). As the French did not keep track of the ethnic composition of the colonial constables, data availability is limited to ethnicities in former British colonies (Ray, 2013). In the quantitative analysis, this variable was within-country centred, that is, it expresses the percentage point deviation from the average proportion of the police force among all politically relevant groups in any given country-year. Compared with using absolute (i.e., not within-country normalised) proportions as in Ray (2019), this coding method is aimed at better capturing relative advantage in police representation among ethnic groups *within* each colony, which we believe may be more pertinent for ethnic power struggles after independence. In the statistical analysis, both focal independent variables were standardised after within-cluster centring such that both are expressed in terms of standard deviations.

The set of control variables used in the statistical analysis is similar to Wucherpfennig et al. (2016) (see Appendix S2 for details on the sources, coding, and transformation of the control variables). One important control variable is “distance to the colonial center.” Despite Wucherpfennig et al. (2016) argued that the geographic distance to the colonial centre is uncorrelated with ethnic power in British colonies, it remains possible, perhaps even plausible, that even in British colonies, geographic proximity to the colonial centre still meaningfully correlates with access to power and resource (Horowitz, 1985, p. 151).

Following disciplinary norms, we control for major country-level socioeconomic or demographic variables such as the extent of democracy (Marshall & Gurr, 2020), GDP per capita (Feenstra et al., 2015), ethnic fractionalisation (Fearon, 2003), and population size that may affect the baseline risk of political exclusion among ethnic groups within its borders. Three sociodemographic variables—group-level precolonial statehood (Ray, 2019), the degree of indirect rule (Lange, 2009), and group proportion of the population—were included as controls. An additional class of possible confounders consists of various topological traits such as land size (both at the group and country levels), relative elevation, and terrain ruggedness at the group level (Earth Resources Observation and Science Center, 1997). Similarly, we control for geographic variables that are closely related to economic productivity and wealth. Soil constraint (Fischer et al., 2002), the presence of diamond mines in production (Lujala et al., 2005), and the presence of known oil and gas fields (Lujala et al., 2007) are collected at the group level and included as controls.

3.3 | Analytical strategy

The statistical analysis consists of two sets of population-averaged group-year panel regressions using generalised estimating equations (GEE). A logit link function was used for all models. The “xtgee” command in Stata17 was used for implementation. The within-panel correlation structure in the GEEs was chosen by comparing different options using “quasilikelihood under the independence criterion” (QIC) proposed by Pan (2001) as an adaptation of the ubiquitous Akaike Information Criterion to GEEs (Cui, 2007). The time variable used is “years since independence,” ranging from 0 to 19. This research was preregistered after data collection but before data analysis. The published article largely follows the preregistered plan but also differs from it in several ways. The changes are declared in Appendix S3 (Lindsay et al. 2016).

4 | RESULTS

Table 4 presents the regression results of models that have communal legislative representation as the focal independent variable. Model 1 includes key sociodemographic controls. Model 2 adds to Model 1 various geographic controls. Model 3 adds to Model 2 variables related to economy and industry. Model 1, due to the non-inclusion of variables that pertain to group-specific geographic boundaries, has a slightly larger number of group-years and groups compared with Models 2 and 3. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the coefficients of the focal independent variable are close to zero and come with an elevated p -value. The results do not offer evidence that the receipt of guaranteed legislative representation under colonial rule meaningfully decreases the risk of political exclusion in the short aftermath of independence.

Table 5 presents the regression results of models that have police representation as the focal independent variable. The set of controls remains identical to Table 4, except for Model 4 that also controls for communal legislative representation. Since the sample used for models in Table 4 includes groups located in countries that did not have any communal representation, communal representation is entered as a three-category variable, with possible values “receipt,” “nonreceipt,” “not in a colony with communal representation” (reference category). Throughout the four models, the coefficient of police representation remains significantly negative, with point estimates ranging from -0.93 in the full model to -1.06 in the simplest model. Put differently, an increase of one standard deviation in the

TABLE 4 Regression of postcolonial ethnic exclusion on communal representation.

Link = logit	(1) b (se)	(2) b (se)	(3) b (se)
Communal legislative representation (z-score)	-0.066 (0.279)	0.160 (0.372)	-0.090 (0.395)
Proportion population	-1.019** (0.317)	-0.584* (0.230)	-0.550* (0.216)
Historical statehood	-0.417 (0.257)	-0.330 (0.399)	-0.282 (0.431)
Degree of indirect rule	0.337 (0.433)	0.925 (0.706)	1.071+ (0.627)
Log country population	0.151 (0.323)	1.498+ (0.794)	1.795* (0.793)
Log country GDP	-0.841** (0.265)	-1.450** (0.425)	-1.797** (0.412)
Extent of democracy	-0.624* (0.257)	-0.642* (0.306)	-0.577+ (0.299)
Ethnic fractionalisation	-1.298* (0.533)	-2.570** (0.835)	-2.814** (0.808)
Log group area		-1.259** (0.346)	-1.148** (0.343)
Group average elevation		1.394** (0.525)	2.102** (0.703)
Group terrain ruggedness		-0.564 (0.662)	-1.063 (0.701)
Log country area		-1.756+ (0.972)	-2.105* (0.856)
Distance to colonial centre		-0.237 (0.296)	-0.324 (0.411)
Soil constraint			-0.191 (0.472)
Oil and gas			0.007 (0.694)
Diamond			-2.799+ (1.568)
Constant	-0.244 (0.307)	0.828 (0.541)	1.318** (0.480)
N groups	78	73	73
N group-years	1555	1455	1455

+ $p < .1$.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 5 Regression of postcolonial ethnic exclusion on police ethnic composition.

	(1) b (se)	(2) b (se)	(3) b (se)	(4) b (se)
Proportion police (z-score)	-1.058** (0.335)	-0.966** (0.343)	-0.927** (0.338)	-0.935** (0.360)
Proportion population	-0.402* (0.196)	-0.356 (0.265)	-0.420 (0.257)	-0.413 (0.258)
Historical statehood	-0.220 (0.180)	-0.088 (0.186)	-0.051 (0.192)	-0.065 (0.193)
Degree of indirect rule	-0.051 (0.227)	-0.297 (0.313)	-0.384 (0.326)	-0.402 (0.335)
Log country population	-0.490* (0.230)	-1.265** (0.384)	-1.308** (0.398)	-1.331** (0.437)
Log country GDP	-0.983** (0.222)	-0.663** (0.252)	-0.764** (0.249)	-0.784** (0.273)
Extent of democracy	-0.177 (0.159)	-0.126 (0.168)	-0.122 (0.163)	-0.129 (0.163)
Ethnic fractionalisation	0.085 (0.243)	0.333 (0.298)	0.408 (0.322)	0.422 (0.323)
Log group area		-0.607** (0.221)	-0.450* (0.217)	-0.496* (0.235)
Group average elevation		-0.267 (0.265)	-0.128 (0.274)	-0.148 (0.277)
Group terrain ruggedness		0.367 (0.302)	0.189 (0.314)	0.183 (0.315)
Log country area		0.993* (0.468)	1.014* (0.468)	1.074* (0.545)
Distance to colonial centre		0.050 (0.204)	0.081 (0.208)	0.119 (0.219)
Soil constraint			-0.032 (0.239)	-0.026 (0.232)
Oil and gas			0.684 (0.813)	0.750 (0.819)
Diamond			-1.566* (0.738)	-1.424 ⁺ (0.792)
Granted communal representation				-0.181 (0.529)
Denied communal representation				0.221 (0.641)
Constant	-0.331 ⁺ (0.200)	-0.781* (0.390)	-0.682 ⁺ (0.402)	-0.731 (0.626)
N groups	134	121	121	121
N group-years	2674	2414	2414	2414

⁺p < .1.

*p < .05, **p < .01, and ***p < .001.

proportion of coethnics in the upper ranks of the colonial police force reduces the odds of postcolonial political exclusion by about 60% to 65%. The results strongly support Hypothesis 2.

We supplement the main analysis presented so far with several robustness checks and exploratory analyses. The first is to repeat the analysis of Tables 4 and 5 with cross-sectional models considering the time-invariant nature of the focal independent variables and the slow-moving nature of many of the control variables. In Tables 6 and 7, we regress political exclusion 10 years after independence on the same control variables as in the panel analyses. The coefficients of both focal independent variables were very similar to the results of the corresponding panel analyses, and the coefficient of police representation was statistically significant ($p < .05$) in all models. Appendix S4 contains the full regression tables.

Second, we examine whether the coefficient of police (and by extension, military) representation increases when the sample is limited to group-years with a military regime. Similarly, we also examine whether the coefficient of communal representation changes when the sample is limited to non-military regimes. Intuition suggests that the importance of the parliament and military might increase under civilian and military governments, respectively. Indeed, the importance of ethnic representation in the military under military regimes is logically derived from the widespread ethnicisation of the army in multiethnic decolonised states (Harkness, 2018). Moreover, a recent study by Ricart-Huguet (2021) reports that a career in the colonial parliament, together with that in the civil service, was a major career path of ministers in former British and French colonies in East and West Africa. Ricart-Huguet (2021) also shows that the effect of regional colonial education on the production of postcolonial ministers, which is at least partially mediated by these two state organs, is positive under civilian governments but not military governments. This raises the possibility that the coefficient of communal representation may become negative when the sample is limited to nonmilitary group-years.

We code military regime using data from Geddes et al. (2014), and around 15% of all group-years in our sample fall under a military regime. Figure 3 displays the coefficients of the two focal independent variables depending on regime type. For communal representation, there is no noticeable difference between civilian and military regimes. For police representation, the point estimate of the coefficient does become more negative under military regimes, but due to the small number of military group-years, the estimate comes with a fairly large confidence interval that

TABLE 6 Regression of postcolonial ethnic exclusion on communal representation, cross-sectional models.

Link = logit	(1) b (se)	(2) b (se)	(3) b (se)
Communal legislative representation	-0.004 (0.298)	0.121 (0.392)	0.048 (0.521)
N groups	78	73	73

Note: Controls and intercept are omitted.

⁺ $p < .1$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 7 Regression of postcolonial ethnic exclusion on communal representation, cross-sectional models.

Link = logit	(1) b (se)	(2) b (se)	(3) b (se)	(4) b (se)
Proportion police	-1.019** (0.344)	-0.786* (0.334)	-0.809* (0.327)	-0.828* (0.394)
N groups	134	121	121	121

Note: Controls and intercept are omitted.

⁺ $p < .1$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

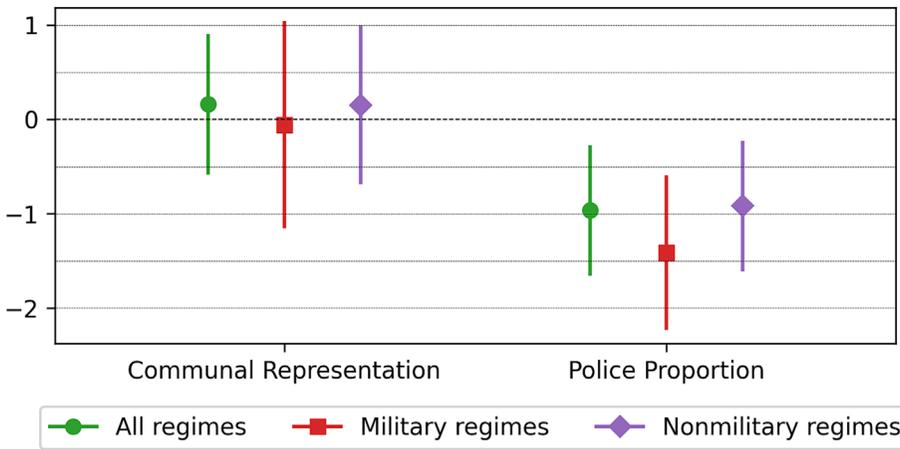


FIGURE 3 Regression coefficient of communal representation and police proportion for different regime types. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. All coefficients come from models that have the same controls as Model 2 of Table 4. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

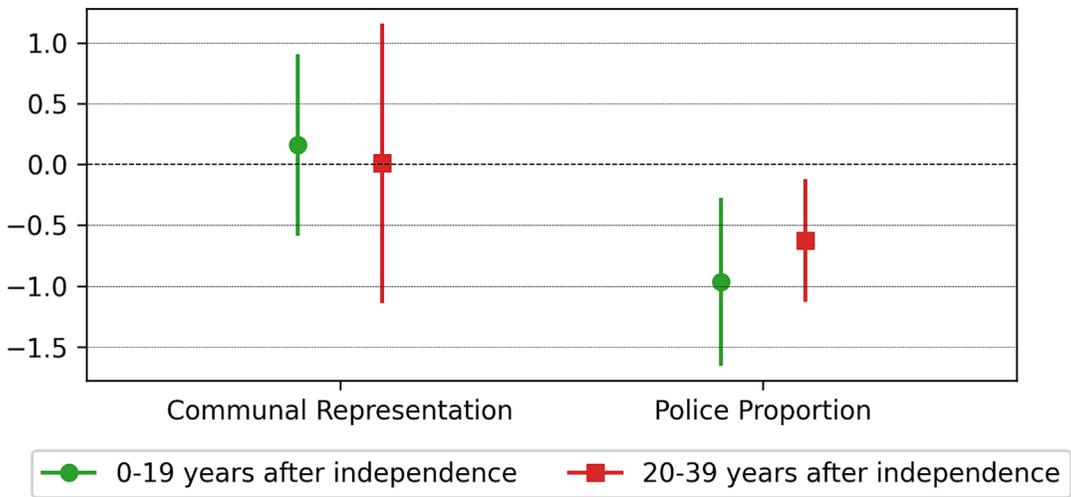


FIGURE 4 Regression coefficient of communal representation and police proportion for different periods of time. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. All coefficients come from models that have the same controls as Model 2 of Table 4. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

considerably overlaps with the confidence interval for nonmilitary regimes. Noteworthy is the coefficient of police representation under nonmilitary regimes, which, albeit having a smaller point estimate, is still significantly negative. This corroborates arguments in influential qualitative studies that the relevance of the armed and security forces for ethnic power is not limited to situations of military rule (Horowitz, 1985).

Third, although our original interest was to examine the continuity of colonial empowering policies in the short aftermath of independence, we try extending our analysis further forward in time. For this, we repeat the analysis of Tables 4 and 5 using the period between 20 and 40 years after independence. The goal of the analysis is to explore whether the positive and null results obtained for the first two decades persist. As shown in Figure 4, there is no evidence that changing the time window alters any of the substantive conclusions drawn above. The point estimate of

the coefficient of police proportion decreases slightly, but the substantial overlap in the confidence intervals precludes any firm conclusions about chronological trends except that the negative effect appears to remain in force even three to four decades after independence.

5 | DISCUSSION

The immediate post-independence years are often marked by social turmoil, tribal/ethnic cleavages, and weak political institutions, all of which increase the relative importance of martial force vis-à-vis rational-legal authority. As such, the ethnic composition of the state's security and armed forces was a sensitive topic of negotiation in many colonies in the transition to independence (Killingray & Anderson, 1992, p. 13). In some cases—Cyprus, for example—the ethnic imbalance in the police force and gendarmerie was partially (but not fully) restored in the political settlements leading up to independence (Anderson, 1992, p. 212). However, more commonly, it exhibited a significant degree of continuity, as it was often not possible—politically or logistically—to radically restructure these highly specialised organs in a short amount of time. This, in turn, reinforced the political power of the ethnic groups that had a significant presence in the security and armed forces. For example, following the partition from India, Pakistan inherited a segment of the British Indian Army that had been stacked with Punjabis since the 1857 Bengal Uprising (Singh & Singh, 2018). Further reinforced by the security threat from India, the army became a very powerful organisation within newly independent Pakistan, giving both civil and military leadership to Punjab (Soherwordi, 2010, p. 30).

The importance of the security and armed forces for ethnic power in newly independent states is additionally highlighted by the large prevalence of coups. Among the 22 former British colonies analysed in Table 3, seven experienced at least one successful military coup within two decades after independence.^{iv} State power in decolonised multiethnic states typically takes ethnic hues (Horowitz, 1985), and even politically or demographically dominant ethnic groups are at risk of being relegated to low status after being overthrown by force if the army is staffed with other ethnic groups. For example, in Uganda, the historically and demographically dominant Buganda clashed with the prime minister allied with the army in 1966, suffered a decisive defeat in a brief armed conflict, and faced continued political oppression and discrimination under military rule (Hansen, 1977). This was despite the fact that Buganda was the most dominant kingdom before colonisation and received a disproportionate amount of political and economic privileges under British rule, including, among others, a large and continued reservation of seats in the Legislative Council—a privilege that the northern tribes did not have (Lancaster, 2012; Nuscheler & Ziemer, 1978, p. 2305).

The strong and consistent results for police representation contrast starkly with communal legislative representation, for which there is no evidence of a meaningful negative association with postcolonial political exclusion. Apart from the just-mentioned fragility of rational-legal institutions in the aftermath of independence, a review of the legislative histories of the former British empire reveals that the institution of communal legislative representation tended not to persist after independence (Jeong, 2023). Among the 13 countries that had communal legislative representation under colonial rule, only five retained this institution after independence (Cyprus, Fiji, India, Jordan, and Myanmar). British colonies increasingly tended to adopt a Westminster-style plurality voting system towards the latter decades of colonial rule and especially after the Second World War (Nuscheler & Ziemer, 1978, chap. 3), which was not entirely consistent with the practice of allocating a prespecified number of seats to some ethnic groups. In addition, communalism in the electoral system was often seen by nationalist leaders (or sometimes even by colonial governors) as an obstacle to the urgent task of overcoming ethnic or tribal divisions (Ong, 1990, p. 79; Ponnambalam, 1983, p. 40) and was in many cases abolished shortly before or after independence. While counterfactual, it seems likely that at least some instances of postcolonial ethnic exclusion could have been prevented had pre-independence representational guarantees not been abolished. For example, one commentator attributed the rapid process of Tamil exclusion in Sri Lanka after D.S. Senanayake's death to the dearth of “institutional safeguards to protect against anti-pluralist forms of political discourses and identities,” calling it a “major error” in the country's post-independence constitution (DeVotta, 2017, p. 3).

Even in the few countries where communal representation was retained, there was often a considerable change in its recipients (as in India, where all sectarian quotas were removed) or the system itself became dysfunctional due to civil war (Myanmar and Cyprus). Among the countries in the sample, only in Fiji and Jordan did communal representation persist past independence with a high degree of continuity of its recipients. By and large, the countries that retained this system were the ones that had relatively thoroughgoing communalism incorporating all or most politically relevant communal groups in the colony or country. Biased forms of communal representation granted only to some ethnic or sectarian groups were almost always discontinued, undoing whatever protective or empowering effects this institution may have had had it been allowed to persist more widely across the former British empire.

Finally, we should mention the methodological limitations of this study and their possible implications for the null results obtained for communal legislative representation. A binary coding of communal representation is a coarse measurement of the level of ethnic empowerment in the legislature that overlooks elements such as the duration of the institution, the proportion of seats granted, and various political circumstances that determine the degree of practical relevance of this ethnic empowering policy. This study was based on the historical observation that the granting of reserved seats typically did not occur for purely symbolic reasons and tended to reflect an intentional colonial policy of group empowerment and legitimation, but we cannot deny the loss of information that entails our coding scheme.⁵ The historical and situational complexities of each country and group pose difficulties for building a robust and fine-grained measurement of colonial empowerment in the legislative domain, but should this task be done successfully in future research, it is possible that the results turn out differently. Alternatively, the result might have been different if we had collected and used the proportion of coethnics in the colonial legislative assembly regardless of whether they were elected by popular vote or communal quotas, although such an approach would no longer be about communal representation or colonial policies of ethnic empowerment. For now, we suggest interpreting the null results for Hypothesis 1 as provisional, although the low degree of continuity of communal representation though decolonisation suggests that its protective effect after independence is unlikely to be very large.

6 | CONCLUSION

European colonial rule had important implications on almost every aspect of the development of decolonised states, especially in the short aftermath of independence. Such influences are typically transmitted through a process of path dependence, or a “sticky” continuation of the structures and institutions put in place by the coloniser. Still, no analysis of decolonisation would be complete without serious attention to the potential ruptures that may happen at this major type of historical juncture. Concerning ethnic power, one could find cases of strong path dependence as well as abrupt discontinuities in the transition to independence. The handful of the existing social-scientific literature on this topic also exhibits conflicting views, with some focusing on continuity and some on discontinuity of ethnic power relations.

Colonial governance generally did not affect all ethnic and sectarian groups equally, often due to the selective and even discriminatory empowering policies implemented by the coloniser. For nearly all politically relevant ethnic groups in formal ex-British colonies that achieved independence after 1945, this paper examined whether colonial empowerment has a lasting effect on ethnic power relations even after decolonisation. Two specific types of empowering policies were analysed: representation of coethnics in the officer ranks of the colonial constabulary force and receipt of communal representation in the colonial legislative assembly.

The analysis showed that increased representation in the police (and by extension, armed forces) strongly decreased the odds of postcolonial ethnic exclusion, revealing the importance of martial power for ethnic power relations in newly independent states. On the other hand, legislative privileges, indicated by the receipt of guaranteed representation in the colonial legislature, did not lead to a significant reduction in the odds of political exclusion, possibly due, at least in part, to the low rate at which this institution survived the transition to independence and postcolonial backlash from other communal groups whose power had been held in check by this institution.

Link to research preregistration

<https://osf.io/jb9z7>.

Link to replication package (third-party data repository)

<https://www.openicpsr.org/openicpsr/project/192803/version/V1/view>.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Selected among ethnically non-homogenous countries that had a population of at least 400,000 at the year of independence. Ethnic groupings and ethnic power are based on EPR Core dataset v2021 (Vogt et al., 2015).
- ⁱⁱ The focus on empowering policies in political and administrative organs is not to downplay the historical relevance of empowering policies in other domains such as trade and economic protectionism. While our analysis does not include ethnic favouritism in the trade and economic domain, we do control for a number of resource- and geography-related variables that at least partly account for group economic advantage.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Enders and Tofighi (2007) for a discussion of within-cluster centring of dummy variables.
- ^{iv} The seven countries are Ghana, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda according to the list of coups in Wikipedia (2022).
- ^v We should also mention that the binary coding of postcolonial ethnic power (as either excluded or not) is also a coarse measurement of postcolonial political power despite its popular usage in the existing quantitative literature (McAlexander, 2020; Ray, 2019; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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