

How to De-reserve Reserves: Admissions to Technical Colleges in India

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Abstract. We study the *joint* implementation of *reservation* and *de-reservation* policies in India that has been enforcing comprehensive affirmative action since 1950. The landmark judgment of the Supreme Court of India in 2008 mandated that whenever the OBC category (with 27 percent reservation) has unfilled positions, they must be reverted to general category applicants in admissions to public schools *without specifying how to implement it*.

We disclose the drawbacks of the recently reformed allocation procedure in admissions to technical colleges (multi-run deferred acceptance mechanism) and offer a solution through "*de-reservation via choice rules*." We propose a novel priority design—*Backward Transfers (BT) choice rule*—for institutions and the deferred acceptance mechanism under these choice rules (DA-BT) for centralized clearinghouses. We show that DA-BT corrects the shortcomings of existing mechanisms.

By formulating India's legal requirements and policy goals as formal axioms, we show that the DA-BT mechanism is unique for the concurrent implementation of reservation and de-reservation policies.