

# ETHNIC CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF ETHNIC REPRESENTATION

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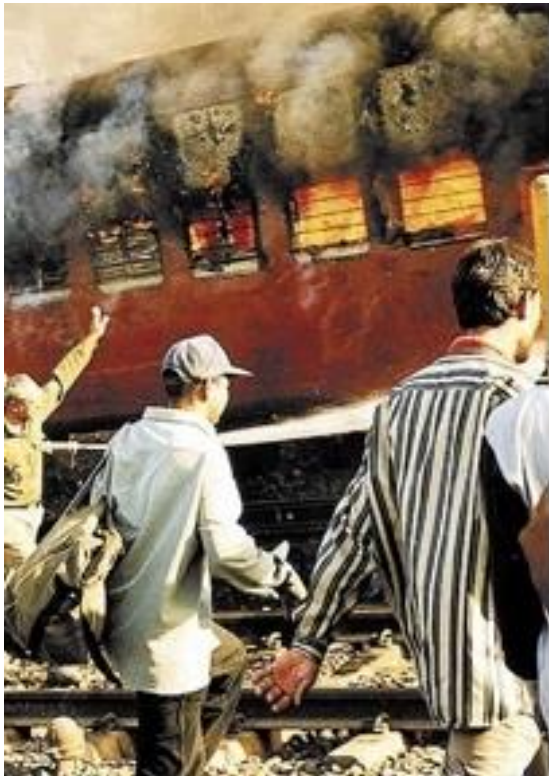
*Work in progress: too early to share, tweet...*

# Relevance

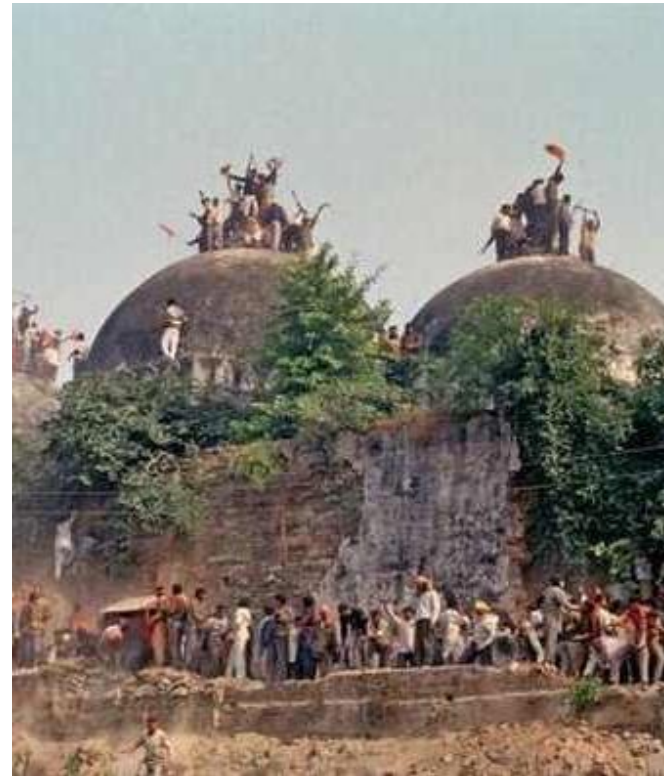
- In 2020, many “communal incidents” took place in India, in which at least 73 persons lost their lives and many others were injured.
  - Typical term used in India for violence between religious groups
  - Incidents in Delhi, Bangalore etc
- Religious/language/ethnic divides are an important component of within-country conflict around the world.
  - Myanmar, Nigeria, Thailand, Middle East etc.
- In India, the majority of such incidents consist of violence between Hindus and Muslims.
  - Hindus are 79% of the population, Muslims are 14%.

# Hindu-Muslim violence in India

**Gujarat 2002: burning of a train in Godhra.**



**Uttar Pradesh 1992: Demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.**



# Research Question

- **Does ethnic political representation affect ethnic conflict?**
  - Does the presence of Muslims in state legislatures change the probability of Hindu-Muslim violence?
- To examine this question, we create two new data sets:
  - On Hindu-Muslim violence (extending an earlier Varshney-Wilkinson database from 1995 to 2010)
  - On the religious identity of state legislators, used in some other papers (Bhalotra et al, 2014; Bhalotra et al, 2021).
- Since the presence of Muslims in state legislatures is likely to be endogenous to conflict, we take advantage of the fact that there were close elections between Muslim and non-Muslim candidates in some constituencies in order to use a **Regression Discontinuity Design**.
  - Today, I will show results with a “fuzzy” RDD, we are still cleaning up the data for the “sharp” RDD.

# Muslims in India

- India's constitution confers the fundamental right to freely “profess, practice and propagate religion.”
- India had 172 million Muslims in 2011, the third largest Muslim population in the world; around 14.2% of country population.
- Muslims in India are more likely to live in urban areas (36% compared to 28%) and are poorer than Hindus (31% below the poverty line, compared to 21% for upper-caste Hindus and 35% for SC/ST).
- They have lower literacy rates, but better gender ratios and child health outcomes than the population as a whole.

# Mechanisms

- Muslim legislator presence may lead to lower inter-religious violence.
  - Prior analysis suggests that Muslims are more likely to be the victims of religious violence and Hindus the aggressors (Mitra and Ray, 2014). We can then think of lower civil conflict or security as a public good that Muslim voters have a stronger preference over than Hindu voters.
  - Muslim legislators may share this preference or be more likely to respond to the preferences of the Muslim community.
  - Likely channels of response: mobilize state machinery (e.g. police) to control tensions before violence erupts; use community-based institutions to resolve disputes etc.
- Alternatively, the presence of Muslims in political office might lead to a **backlash effect** from the majority community and potentially greater incidence of religious violence.
- **Little/no previous work on the role of political representation of minority groups on violence involving these groups.**

# Data on Religious Identity of State Legislators

# Religion and Politics in India

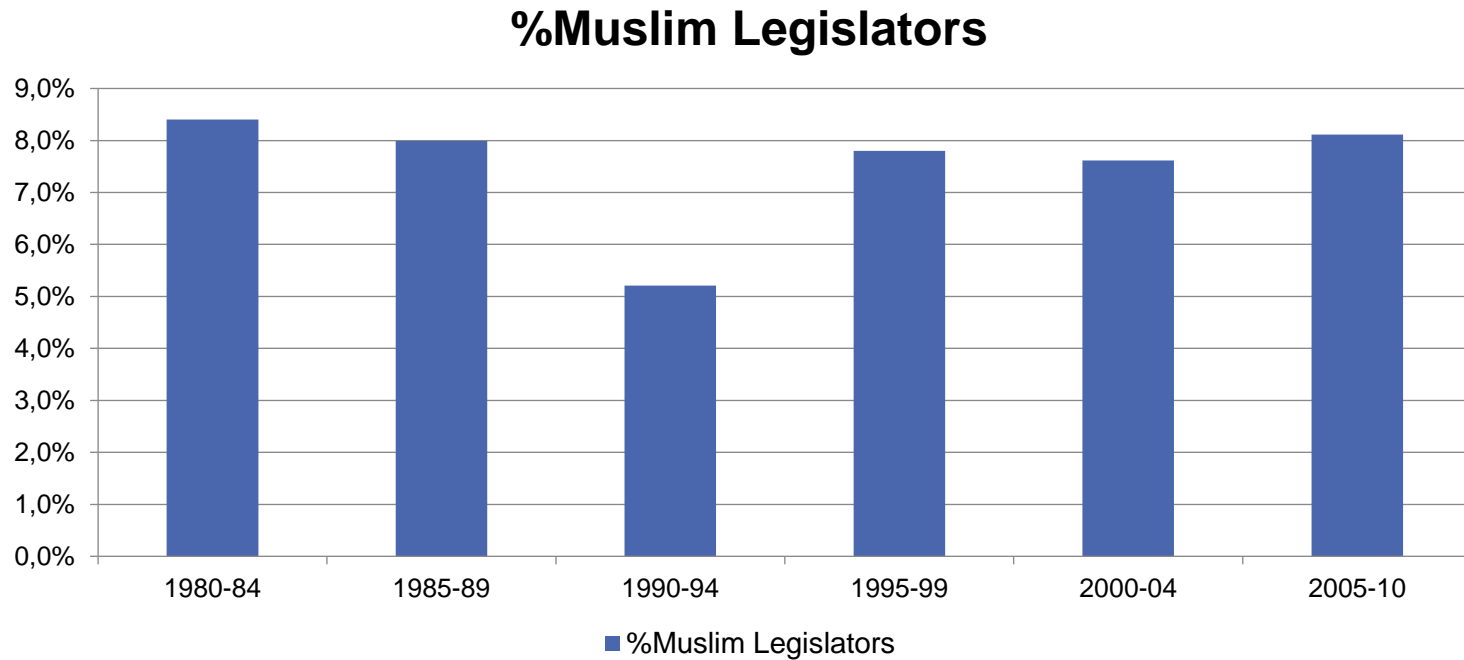
- Parliamentary system of government; first-past-the-post elections; very competitive elections.
- Legislative quotas exist for lower castes and tribes at all levels, for women in local councils, but not for Muslims.
- Only a few Muslim parties (not very powerful), but several parties compete for Muslim voters in many states.



# Data on Politician Religious Identity

- We created a new database on the religious identity of state legislators in India: 20 major states, 1960-2010.
- Two independent teams assigned religion on the basis of legislator names.
  - Disagreements (<2% of observations) resolved by authors; remaining doubtful cases (<0.5% of observations) assigned “non-Muslim” classification.
- On average, **7.7%** of state legislators were Muslim over the period 1980-2010.
  - 33% of district-year observations have at least one Muslim legislator.
  - 14% feature a close election between a Muslim and a non-Muslim; Muslims win in 7% of the observations (i.e. half of the close elections).

# Muslim political representation 1980-2010



# Data on religious conflict

# Hindu-Muslim Violence in India

- Definition of Hindu-Muslim violence: an incident involving members of different religious communities (or a clash with police which has some religious precipitating cause) which results in deaths, injuries or property damage.
  - This is different from a general riot: “Whenever force or violence is used by an unlawful assembly”. Government data reported 80456 riots in 2000 compared to our count of 26 instances of Hindu-Muslim violence.
- Original data: Varshney-Wilkinson 1950-1995
  - Based on articles in the *Times of India*, Mumbai edition
  - We extend to 2010 following their methodology.
  - Data on number of deaths/injuries/arrests less reliable than data on occurrence of riots and are most likely underestimates.
- Creating the data set requires a lot of effort and judgement since most newspaper articles do not mention the words “riot” or “Muslim”.
- Our data set does not record instances of religious clashes not involving Muslims (e.g. Hindu-Sikh or Hindu-Christian).

## Asangaon tense as youth fires

By A Staff Reporter

THANE, June 6: Asangaon, a small town on the Kasara section of the Central Railway, was gripped by tension when a youth belonging to the minority community opened fire injuring two persons at about 11.20 this morning.

The DIG Konkan range, Mr Sudhakar Suradakar, and the rural SP, Mr Uttam Kale, rushed to the spot. By this evening senior police officers along with a platoon of the State Reserve Police (SRP) rushed to the spot to check any further flare-up.

Talking to *The Times of India*, a youth from the same town, Vilas Bhare, whose maternal uncle, Ramesh Chande, received a bullet injury said that three youths in the age group of 25 to 30 suddenly surfaced from behind the Dargah near the railway gate.

One of them had a revolver and fired in the air and then targeted Gangubai Mistry (60) who was standing outside her hut.

The injured, Chande, who was coming out of a railway toilet, was caught unawares and was fired upon. He had three bullet injuries on his shoulder and has been admitted to the civil hospital. The incident sparked resentment among the people. Those who were around resorted to ransacking of houses of the minority community in the area.

## Groups clash in T.N. town

NAGAPATTINAM, April 20 (PTI): The police fired in the air to disperse two clashing groups at Muthupet in Nagapattinam Quaid-e-Milleth district on Monday night.

The police said four persons were injured and several shops were set ablaze in the clash, triggered by an attack on a Hindu Munnani activist allegedly by some persons belonging to a religious community.

The police said they resorted to firing when they failed to pacify the two groups.

# Data collection details

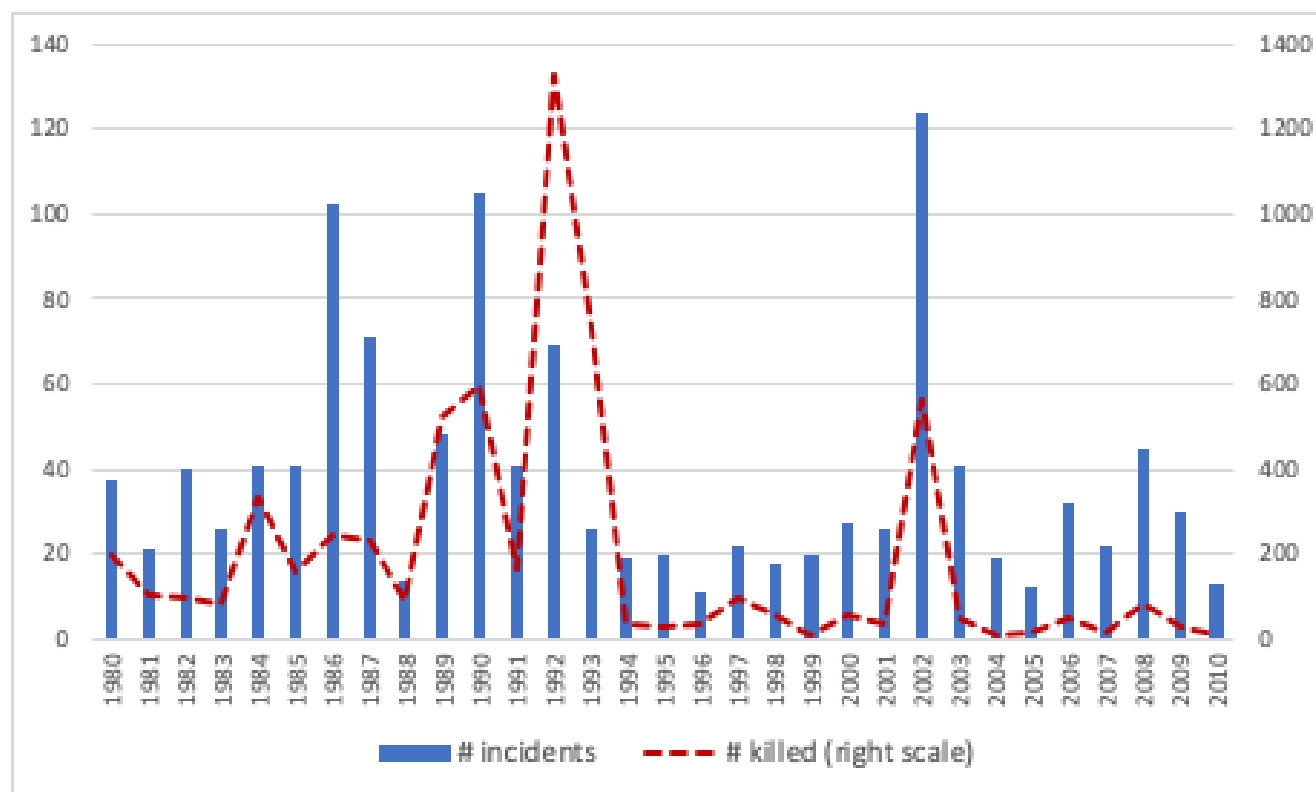
- In most cases, the location (district and/or town) is provided in the newspaper reports.
- Analysis will be based on 1183 incidents recorded over 1980-2010.
  - 12 incidents have multiple locations identified in the report
  - We are unable to assign a district to 3 incidents and unable to assign a specific town/city to 186 incidents (still cleaning...)
- Main outcome: dummy for whether the district experienced any religious violence in that year.
- Additional outcomes: number of incidents; whether the district experienced an incident with at least one injury or one death.

# Building the dataset

- In the newspaper reports the location of the riots is provided (district and most of the times town).
- State politicians in India are elected in electoral constituencies.
- We can have information on the district where the riot took place, and the constituencies located in this district.
- We are in the process of locating the exact constituency where the riot took place, but large cities are problematic.

# Trends in Ethnic Violence

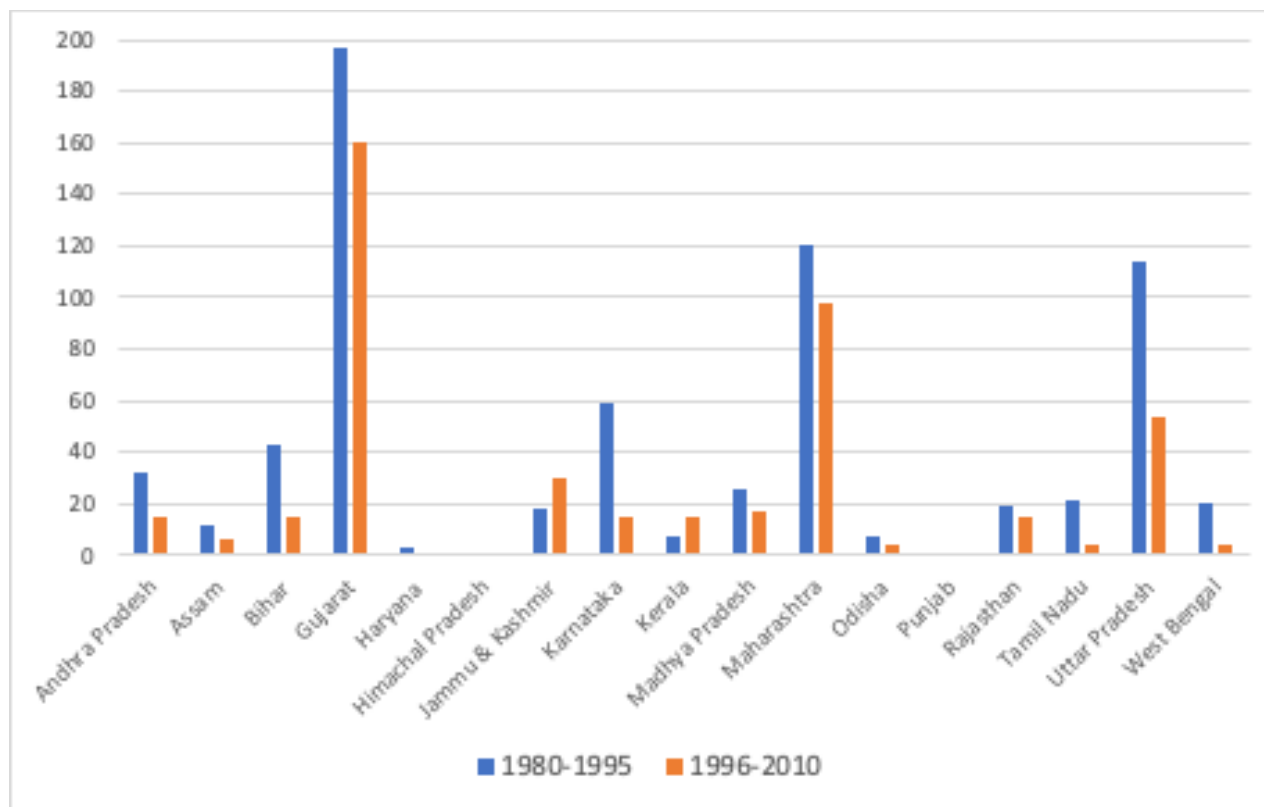
- There are fewer incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence in the post-1995 period compared to pre-1995.





# Ethnic Violence Across States

- Considerable persistence in which states experience religious violence.



Does Political Representation  
Affect Religious Violence?

# Regression Discontinuity

- Given that Muslims and non-Muslims are elected in areas that may not be comparable:
  - We take advantage of the fact that some Muslim candidates won in close elections against non-Muslim candidates.
  - These areas will be comparable to those where non-Muslim candidates won against Muslim candidates.
- Implement it as a 2SLS

**Table 2: Muslim Politicians and Religious Violence: 2SLS**

	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Monthly data			
	# incidents	Any incident	Any injuries	Any deaths
Fraction of Muslim legislators (ML)	-0.152** (0.0758)	-0.107* (0.0600)	-0.0582 (0.0480)	-0.0784 (0.0485)
Fraction of close inter-religious elections in the district (TC)	0.00222 (0.0103)	0.00407 (0.00818)	0.00850 (0.00627)	0.00703 (0.00622)
Mean of dep var	0.0087	0.0068	0.0042	0.0037
District and year FE				
District and month FE	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	126,296	126,296	126,296	126,296

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10. Standard errors in parentheses, clustered at district-election cycle level. Coefficients are from 2SLS regressions, controlling for quadratic polynomials in the vote margins, party identity of politicians. Regressions exclude the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Monthly data excludes the month of election.

# Conclusion

- Muslim political representation reduces the number of incidents and the probability that an incident takes place at the district level.
- Robust to many checks and specifications
- We need to understand the mechanisms at play.
- We also need town-level evidence.

**Thank You!**