

# Politician Identity, Policy Implementation and Human Development Outcomes



## In brief

- This study updates a database originally assembled by Varshney and Wilkinson for 1950-1995, which examines Hindu-Muslim violence in India.
- The original Varshney-Wilkinson database has generated a large body of research on the factors that may influence the occurrence of Hindu-Muslim violence in India: electoral competition, the strength of inter-religious civil society organizations, economic growth, economic complementarities and the changing inequality between Hindus and Muslims.
- However, most of the aforementioned factors have changed dramatically as economic growth has accelerated, electoral competition has increased, and regional parties have gained prominence.
- The authors update this database to 2010 using the Mumbai edition of the Times of India, selecting articles referring to Hindu-Muslim violence, and the information was coded so as to be consistent with the Varshney-Wilkinson database.
- Key findings:
  - While Hindu-Muslim violence was rising in the fifteen years previous to 1995, it has declined significantly between 1995-2010.
  - There is a persistence in the distribution of Hindu-Muslim riots across Indian states over time, suggesting that conflict may be a function of demographics and deep-rooted institutions.
  - Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that raising the political representation of Muslims lowers the incidence of religious violence.

## Policy Motivation

*“This updated data set can be used to answer a number of important policy questions, including the impact of economic growth, political competition and legislator identity on the incidence of religious violence”*

The IGC funding on this project is to update an existing data set on the incidence and severity of Hindu-Muslim riots in India. While this enables future research, the current funding does not include a research component. The original data base was assembled by Ashutosh Varshney and Steve Wilkinson for 1950 to 1995. Using IGC funding we have updated this to 2010. We used the Mumbai edition of the Times of India, reading over each day’s newspaper and selecting articles which referred to Hindu-Muslim violence. These were photographed in libraries and the information in them was subsequently coded so as to be consistent with the Varshney-Wilkinson database.

## Policy Impact

This updated data set can be used to answer a number of important policy questions, including the impact of economic growth, political competition and legislator identity on the incidence of religious violence.

## Audience

The data base is likely to be of great interest to researchers in economics, political science and sociology. Research based on this data set will be of interest to international policy makers, and politicians and bureaucrats in national governments.

## Implications

*“While Hindu-Muslim violence was rising in the fifteen years previous to 1995, it has declined significantly in the fifteen years since.”*

The updated data set provides unique information on trends in religious conflict in India after 1995; there are no official statistics. Analysis of the data yields these insights:

- While Hindu-Muslim violence was rising in the fifteen years previous to 1995, it has declined significantly in the fifteen years since.
- There is persistence in the distribution of Hindu-Muslim riots across the Indian states over time, suggesting that conflict may be a function of demographics and deep-rooted institutions
- Very preliminary analysis of the data suggests that raising the political representation of Muslims lowers the incidence of religious violence. In future work, we will test these results. If they prove robust, they provide a rationale for encouraging the participation of religious minorities in political institutions.

## Brief Summary of Research

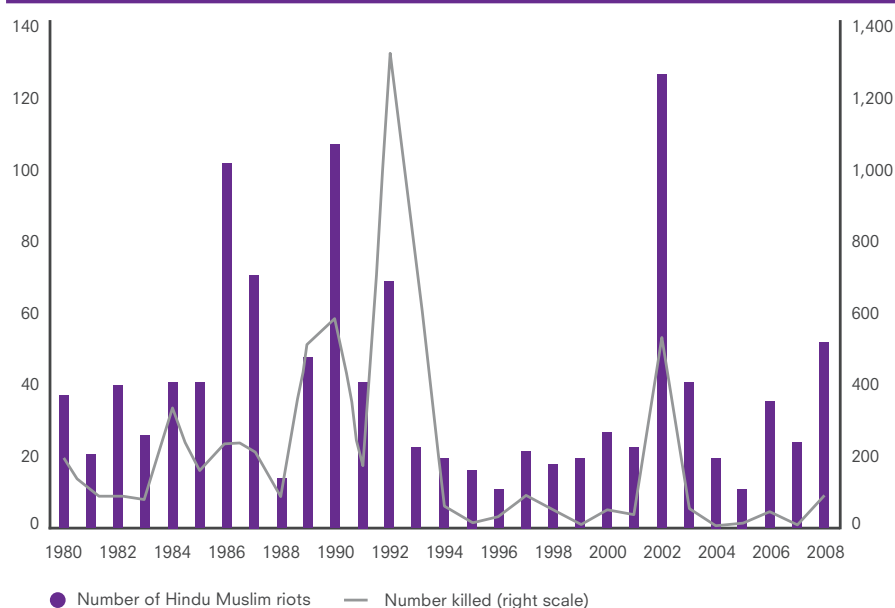
The Varshney-Wilkinson data set has generated a large body of research. This identifies electoral competition (Wilkinson, 2004), the strength of inter-religious civil society organizations (Varshney, 2002), economic growth (Bohlken and

Sergenti, 2010), economic complementarities (Jha, 2008) and changing inequality between Hindus and Muslims (Mitra and Ray, 2010) among determinants of the occurrence of Hindu-Muslim riots in India. All of these factors have changed quite dramatically in the period since 1995. Economic growth has accelerated, inequality is on the rise, electoral competition has increased, regional parties have gained prominence and coalitions increasingly form state governments. While changes in these factors are well documented, and violent crimes (such as murders) are on the decline, we do not know how Hindu-Muslim violence has evolved in the period after 1995. Our data set fills this important gap.

*“Using district level averages and controlling for a linear time trend, we find that the probability of a religious riot is 5 percentage points lower after 1995”*

We highlight two major findings from our updated data set, showing comparisons between 1980-1995 and 1995-2008 to form roughly equal-length periods (data from 2009 and 2010 are being cleaned and checked). First, the incidence of Hindu-Muslim riots is significantly lower post-1995 than in 1980-1995, except for the upsurge in violence in 2002, concentrated in the state of Gujarat (Figure 1). Using district level averages and controlling for a linear time trend, we find that the probability of a religious riot is 5 percentage points lower after 1995. A similar trend is visible for the number of people killed in riots. This is in line with observed declines in other violent crimes like murder: data from the National Crime Records Bureau show that the murder rate in India declined from 4.6 per 100,000 population in 1991 to 2.8 in 2007.

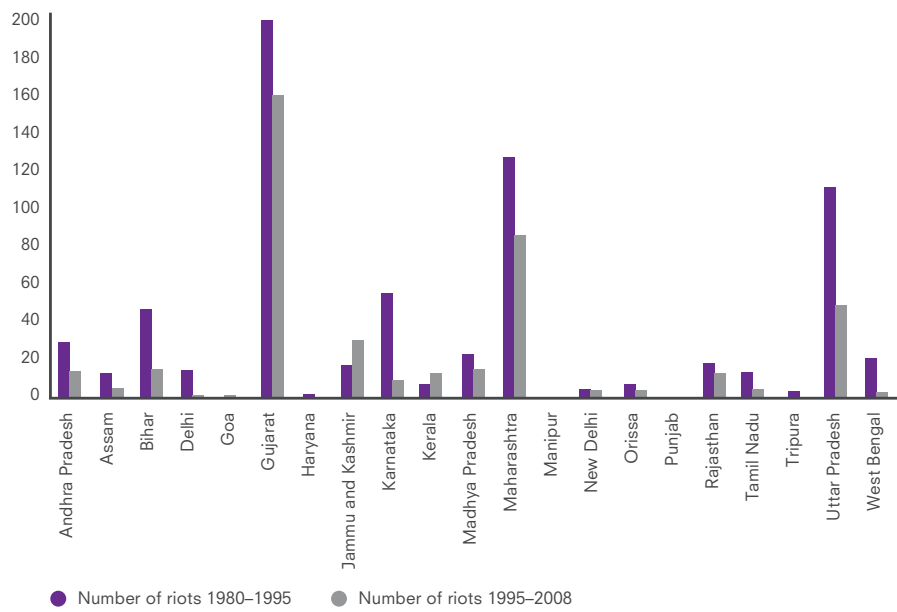
Figure 1: Number of Hindu-Muslim riots and riot deaths in India, 1980-2008



A second finding is that a decline in the incidence of Hindu-Muslim violence in the post-1995 period is observed in almost every state (Figure 2). However, there is a strong correlation of the incidence of riots in the two periods.

Figure 2: Number of Hindu-Muslim riots across Indian states 1980-2008

*“Our methods and results provide a benchmark for analysis of religious or ethnic conflict in other countries. However, any further analysis would need to take account of history and of political and social institutions”*



Preliminary analysis of the data indicates a result of considerable importance, which is that the presence of Muslim legislators tends to lower religious violence. This is consistent with models of political identity given that recent research suggests that Muslims are more often the victims in Hindu-Muslim riots (Mitra and Ray, 2010). We have constructed unique data on the religion of politicians at the constituency-year level for every election in 1980-2007. We matched this to the updated riots data base at the district level and focused on areas where a Muslim candidate narrowly won an election against a non-Muslim candidate, generating plausibly exogenous variation in the religious identity of the legislator.

## Implementation

Religion is a persistent and, in many cases, increasing source of civil conflict. Our data base collects information from all over India, so that it is representative of the country as a whole. Our methods and results provide a benchmark for analysis of religious or ethnic conflict in other countries. However, any further analysis would need to take account of history and of political and social institutions.

## Further Readings

Banerjee, A., L. Iyer and R. Somanathan (2005). “History, Social Divisions and Public Goods in Rural India.” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 3 (2-3), pp. 639- 647.

Bolhken, Anjali and Ernest Sergenti. 2010. “Economic growth and ethnic violence: An empirical investigation of Hindu–Muslim riots in India.” *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5): 589-600.

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Mitra, Anirban and Debraj Ray. 2010. “Implications of an economic theory of conflict: Hindu-Muslim Violence in India.” NYU Working Paper, <https://files.nyu.edu/am2840/public/hm.pdf>, accessed January 2012.

Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Wilkinson, S. I. (2004). *Votes and violence: electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*. Cambridge studies in comparative politics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

## About the authors

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