

**Contextualizing Riots: Changing Explanations of Political Violence in India,
1971-2000**

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary research across the social sciences is weak at constructing models and explanatory frameworks that incorporate factors from different paradigms. The tendency to describe theories as "institutional" or "behavioral", for example, suggests that there are natural oppositions between these frameworks that cannot be overcome, even though most scholars agree that the most powerful explanations of social phenomena combine attributes from diverse approaches. Explanations of collective violence have been particularly susceptible to this either-or approach, and few studies have integrated individual preferences and strategies with contextual and structural factors (for recent exceptions to these trends, see Claassen, Christia). Similarly, studies of protest divide into "ethnic" and "non-ethnic" categories, and although scholars in one stream may cite research from the other, the two camps rarely inform each other theoretically and empirically.

India provides a particularly fertile case to understand the intersection of

interests, identity, and violence in politics, since ethnic heterogeneity and the practice of democratic politics have combined to make caste, religious, linguistic, and regional attachments highly salient in the Indian political arena. It provides an equally attractive context in which to develop a theoretical framework that incorporates a more heterogeneous range of identity-based behavior in explaining collective violence.

In this paper, which is part of a larger study, we focus on collective violence that takes the form of riot events. Our reasons for choosing this focus are both practical and substantive. While we are sympathetic to Tilly's argument that the designation of an incident as a "riot" by authorities "embodies a political judgment rather than an analytical distinction" (2003: 18), the data used in this paper are governed by a consistent definition: riots as categorized by the Indian Police using the definition found in the Indian Penal Code. While this definition (and the data that result from it) has its own problematic aspects, it provides important consistency across time and space.

The Case: Collective Violence in India 1970-2000

India provides a promising context in which to explore how repertoires of identity and repertoires of strategy interact to produce violent collective action. First, Indian society is heterogeneous on several cultural dimensions, including religion, social stratification through caste, and regional differentiation through language, dress, and other social practices. These dimensions have been highly salient, although variably so, for centuries, and they continue to be issues around which group identities are defined today. There are, therefore, a range of identities

around which people can form attachments and which have salience in society.

Second, the Indian political system provides considerable opportunity for participants to draw on repertoires of strategy to practice contentious politics. With the exception of the suspension of democratic politics from 1975 to 1977, Indian politics has been characterized by regular and competitive elections and the steady incorporation of new groups into the electoral arena. Even in the heyday of Congress dominance during the 1950s and 1960s, other parties successfully contested state and national elections, and the Congress split which occurred in the late 1960s was galvanized by the losses the party suffered in the 1967 elections.

Since the decline of the Congress Party, beginning in the mid-1980s, electoral competition has become even fiercer and less predictable. After dominating the national political scene through majority party governments for thirty of its first thirty-three years, Congress has failed to form one since 1989. At the same time, the way in which electoral coalitions are constructed has changed, as the strategies of the 1950s, which emphasized mobilization through traditional hierarchies, gave way to direct appeals to middle and low caste groups, and elite dominance of party leadership positions were increasingly challenged by politicians from these social groups.

Third, the electoral salience of identity issues has been a mainstay of Indian politics since the development of indigenous political institutions during colonial rule. In the early stages of mobilization in the 1910s and 1920s, the combination of a diverse, largely illiterate, and politically unsophisticated citizenry with the need for each political parties to command a mass base led parties to use symbols that

had salience for large numbers of supporters. Not surprisingly, the most successful tended to be symbols with regional, religious, or caste significance. After partition and independence, the dominant Congress Party avoided explicit appeals of this type for a variety of reasons, but since the 1970s they have reemerged and become even more powerful as tools for political mobilization and coalition building.

Finally, the social and political context in India has facilitated the use of collective violence in the social and political arenas. Although the motivations of participants are ascribed to a range of identity motivations, the usefulness of collective violence in achieving short- and long-term goals has remained relatively consistent. Those who have benefited included social and political elites, political parties, and civil society organizations. There continues to be debate over the motivations of participants (Brass, Wilkinson, Varshney, Shani); whether collective violence is primarily identity-based or instrumental (Wilkinson, Chandra, Chandra and Wilkinson, Brass); and whether violence is increasing or decreasing (Wilkinson, Brass, Gilley). However, there is general agreement that collective violence, and riots in particular, are a constant in Indian life.

TRENDS IN EXPLANATIONS OF INDIA'S VIOLENCE

In the past two decades, scholars and other observers have focused on communal violence. The emergence of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the major national challenger to Congress, the widespread communal violence that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, and the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric in public discourse, have all fueled concerns about communal conflict.

Moreover, the continued strength of the BJP in Gujarat and the anti-Muslim carnage that followed the Godhra riots in 2002 has demonstrated that economic development and increased prosperity does not necessarily dampen communal tensions.

Many of the prevailing explanations of the increase in Hindu nationalist feeling and the success of the BJP stress non-affective factors rather anti-Muslim sentiments, increased religiosity by Hindus, or high-caste backlash against the ambitions of low-caste groups. The increase in caste and communal violence has been attributed to elite political strategies, much as other types of ethnic conflict (e.g., separatism in the northeast states and Punjab, Assamese violence against Bangladeshis) are explained in terms of politically strategic choices (Weiner 1978, 1989, Ludden 1996, Varshney 1993, Jaffrelot 1993). Micro-studies of violence and political strategies provide support for these hypotheses. Yagnik and Bhatt's excellent analysis of the 1981 riots in Ahmedabad, Gujarat highlights the role of political parties, hired thugs, and political elites in deepening and continuing riots that began for one set of reasons and were sustained with others (1984). Case studies of the 1992 carnage in Surat, Gujarat after the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya illuminate the role of the BJP local government (cites), and the complicity of the BJP's state and local units in the aftermath of Godhra in 2004 has been starkly demonstrated (Wilkinson and Haid 2009).

These arguments are compelling and make intuitive sense. There is widespread agreement that as political parties have had to compete for votes, they have used caste- and community-based policies such as reservations to attract

support (Basu and Kohli 1998, Parikh 1997, Wilkinson 2004, Brass 2003, Chandra 2004,, Jaffrelot 1993). Parties regularly nominate members of locally dominant caste and religious communities for parliamentary seats; even the BJP puts up Muslim and Scheduled Caste candidates in constituencies dominated by those groups (Bose and Singh 1985). The combination of increasingly fierce party competition and an ethnically diverse, politically aware electorate means that cultural and political factors are often so thoroughly intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish the separate effects of each.

Nevertheless, the tendency of so many writers to attribute India's contemporary ethnic conflicts entirely or primarily to political machinations seems to be too sweeping. It is difficult to imagine that even very clever political manipulators could whip up communal frenzy on previously untilled ground. And the emphasis on the role of the BJP and its allied organizations in fomenting violence since the mid-1980s underplays two equally important factors: first, communal violence has a long history in India, one that precedes the dominance of the BJP; and second, communal violence is far from the only type of violence that Indians experience. The acceptance of pro-Hindu, anti-Muslim rhetoric in the political arena by major political parties is a marked departure from the political discourse of the era of Congress dominance. But has this change in rhetoric changed the nature of collective violence, or has it refocused attention to communal violence because political parties appear more willing to tolerate it?

If the answer is the latter, that communal violence is now more acceptable in the political arena, then the social and political ramifications of this change are

important to understand, but not at the expense of studying other types of identity-framed violence or violence that is not clearly related to identity issues. A thorough analysis of the factors that shape collective violence needs to begin by considering all possible factors, which include communal motivations but are not limited to those.

If we look back at studies of collective violence over the past few decades, we can discern certain trends in the literature. While riots of all types (i.e., communal, caste, and non-identity based) have been observed throughout this period, the focus of attention has shifted over time, especially when explaining violence that fits the definition of contentious politics, or politics by other means (Tilly).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, economic grievances were frequently cited as the factors behind social unrest, with communal and caste riots seen as less efficacious politically (cites). From the late 1970s until the 1992 Supreme Court decision in *Indra Sawney v. Union of India*, caste violence became the focus of attention in political conflict studies. And from 1992 until the mid-2000s, communal conflict took over as the most common explanation for political violence. At present, the increase in regional and economic conflict has led to renewed attention, but it has not displaced communal conflict from preeminence.

These shifts in emphasis reflect changes in the political efficacy of different motivations for collective conflict. But to what extent do they reflect empirical changes? In order to answer this question, we analyze quantitative data on all types of riots in India, from 1971 to 2000. This period comprises the end of the Congress Party as it existed under Nehru (and then briefly Sastri) and the emergence of direct

mass mobilization of castes, especially low castes and Dalits. It features the high-water era of Indira Gandhi's government followed by the end of Congress majority party government, the rise of the BJP, and the emergence and consolidation of the coalition government regime in Indian electoral politics. Thus the data incorporate variations in political and institutional conditions as well as variations in explanations for collective conflict.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In previous and current research, Parikh has set forth a theory of the individual propensity to riot (Cameron and Parikh 1999, Parikh n.d.). At the most basic level, riots are created by individual participants acting collectively. Their decisions to join the riot are based on factors specific to each individual, but these factors are rooted in and triggered by the social context in which they occur. The influence of context can be as simple as the absence of the police, which directly lowers the costs of participation, or it can be as complex as a combination of social attitudes, political receptivity, and historical experience with collective violence. But whether the event is monocausal or complex, riots are the product of the relationship between individual decisions to join and the social context in which the riots occur.

Riots may have agendas and consequences that are not explicitly political. But if a riot event has a political agenda, then the relationship between individual motivations and social context acquires a third component: collective violence must be seen as acceptable within the political arena for any given incident to achieve a political goal. These factors can be summarized as follows:

- For any type of riot to occur, there must be a sufficient number of individuals who are willing to engage in violent behavior. This willingness can stem from a variety of preferences, motivations, and interests. Riots that meet this basic threshold are frequently small and local, with no significance beyond their immediate time and place.
- For a riot to have an effect beyond its immediate impact, the social context in which it takes place must be receptive to the use of violence as a means to a goal. At a minimum there must exist a social context that is neutral to the use of violence, and more often there exists a receptive or approving context. Riots that meet this threshold can be small, but they are more likely to be large. They may be restricted to a locality or extend beyond the initial territory, depending on the goal.
- For a riot to have a political outcome, there must exist a context of political efficacy, a normative view within society that collective violence is a type of "politics by other means." Riots that meet this threshold are unlikely to be small. Depending on the political outcomes sought, they may remain local or extend beyond the territory.

There are three types of participants: violence-seeking, affective, and instrumental. We describe these in turn.

Almost every violent collective event has a group of *violence-seeking participants* who appear and take part for the pure pleasure of engaging in violent behavior. These actors are often described pejoratively as thugs, ASBOs in British parlance, or by other terms indicating anti-social, aberrant tendencies. While these

types of actors were more frequently taken note of in early studies of mob behavior (Shoemaker 2004, Le Bon), they were paid less attention in theories that emphasized rational and politically strategic actors. Nevertheless, a comprehensive model of riots should include them, not only for the sake of completeness, but because they can have an impact on whether a riot occurs.

The second type of player is the *affective participant*, who joins the riot to express his feelings about the reason for the event. These feelings do not necessarily have to have a political component. The Affective participant may choose to demonstrate on a holy day to emphasize religious commitment; he may protest lower-caste members' use of a community drinking-water well; or he may simply be joining others who are protesting against members of a rival sports team, in an act of solidarity that gives him a sense of pride and enjoyment. This type of benefit is different from the violence-seeker because the mere act of participation is not sufficient--there must be a perceived substantive issue--but Affective participants are not necessarily trying to change a status quo through pressure on political agents.

The third type of player is the *policy-oriented participant*, who joins the riot in order to bring about a political outcome. This outcome can be as specific as a price subsidy or an election result, or a broader range of policies, such as the implementation of sharia law in certain issue areas. Policy-oriented participants only join riot events when they think they have a reasonable chance of bringing about this favored outcome as a result of the event. Participation in the event is a means to an end, not an end in itself (remember the participants in this model are

all pure types). These participants most closely resemble the strategic actors of the political opportunity model and the instrumentalist ethnicity literature. For all three types of participants, there are costs to protesting, which range from personal injury and arrest to the opportunity costs of rioting. For all participants, the overall costs decrease as the number of participants increases. For violence-seeking

participants, benefits accrue as soon as the decision to participate has been acted upon and he joins the riot. Even if the riot is brief and relatively unsuccessful, some benefits from participating will be obtained.

For affective participants, benefits to participation accrue as long as the threshold condition of a riot with the desired issue salience has been met. Issue salience can be achieved in a variety of ways, including a coordinating event that signals a particular issue or the interpretation of the riot as issue-oriented by non-participants.

For policy-oriented participants, benefits occur as a consequence of the riot but not necessarily during the event itself. These participants have a payoff that is conditioned on the probability of the riot bringing about policy outcomes. If the outcomes are a non-divisible good, such as a general policy change or an election result, both participants and non-participants who are Policy-oriented will receive the benefits of the riot event. This type of payoff has two consequences for participation: (1) participation in the riot does not guarantee benefits; and (2) there are incentives to free-ride on the participation of others.

The utility functions of two of the three types of participants allow us to derive several hypotheses (the presence or absence of violence-seeking participants

is difficult to predict without individual-level psychological data), especially in a context such as India, where economic, ethnic, and political factors are thought to be connected to riot events. We cannot directly confirm individual motivations with observational data, but the presence of identity characteristics can help us infer whether there is a sufficient potential population to join riot events. We derive several hypotheses from the individual-level theory, the existing literature, and the our previous discussion about the extent to which scholarly and public narratives about riots change gears across the time period.

First and most basically, affective attachments and policy changes matter in explaining conflict; if they do not, then our assumptions are implausible.

Hypothesis 1: Identity/attachment factors are positively correlated with conflict.

In the Indian context, these salient identities include caste and religion.

Hypothesis 2: Economic factors are positively correlated with conflict.

In our discussion of economic conditions as creating salient identity attachments, these factors include migration patterns, levels of industrialization, and the distribution of landless to landed agricultural workers.

Hypothesis 3: Political issues are positively correlated with conflict.

Given our theory of the role of policy-oriented participants in riot events and the existing literature on the relationship between electoral politics and violent collective action, we should observe that political events, particularly elections, are correlated with heightened levels of violence. We note, however, that scholars have argued for a nuanced view of how competitive elections may suppress communal violence.

RIOTS IN FIVE INDIAN STATES: THE DATA

We gathered data according to the 1971 boundaries for five Indian states: Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and Karnataka (three new states were created in 2000, but this has no effect on our analysis). These states constitute nearly half of India's total population. The data for each state were compiled from three sources: the *Crime in India Reports*, published by the National Crime Records Bureau; *Statistical Reports of General Elections* from the Election Commission of India; and the Census of India's decennial reports. Raw figures were collected at the district level for a range of variables, including number of riots, total number of electors, total votes, top three vote-getting parties, and demographic measures such as levels of literacy, agricultural workers and the like.

Our data comprise neither the full universe nor a random sample of Indian administrative districts. Entering, coding, and cleaning data for all districts was beyond our capacity, and a random sample would have been representative for all of India but not necessarily for particular states. There is reason, however, to expect that our sample is a fairly representative one. First, the five states whose district-level characteristics we analyze are major Indian states from different regions of the country and vary on the independent and dependent variables of interest.

Second, the incidence of riots based on our sample is closely related to the incidence of riots for all of India. The yearly mean number of riots occurring within the districts included in our sample and the yearly mean number of riots occurring throughout all of India exhibit similar patterns over time. In addition, the similarity in the annual mean number of per capita riots based on the districts in our sample

and that based on India as a whole is even more striking. Indeed, the bivariate correlation between these yearly per capita means is roughly .80.

We approach our measure of riots differently than most other quantitative studies of Indian violence. Previous studies have tended to define a riot as an event in which at least one fatality occurs (e.g., Varshney and Wilkinson 1996, Wilkinson 2004, White 1993, Moaddel 1994, Gupta et al. 1993, Thompson 1989, Midlarsky 1988), whereas our measure of riots is inclusive of a range of lethal and non-lethal events that involve collective violence. In this study a riot is given the Indian Penal Code (IPC) definition: an event involving a group of five or more individuals who are illegally assembled and who use violence in pursuit of a common goal. (IPC Section 146).

This definition is the basis for categorizing riots by law enforcement authorities. This strategy allows us to speak more confidently about causal factors for riots generally and not about those for communal riots only. This more inclusive definition means that our measure of riots is not confined to catastrophic events with deaths and is as something experienced on a much wider scale than other measures allow. It should be noted, however, that just as riots measured in terms of deaths are likely to undercount smaller, and often more rural, riots, our data are likely to undercount large, lethal riots. While large riots such as those that took place in December 1992 will be represented by an aggregate count of riot events at the time, there may be an overrepresentation of small, fleeting riot events.

Our measure differs in a second and critical way from previous studies by relying on district level statistics for entire states rather than select city, state, or

country level data. This measure is desirable because it allows us to test for variation in riots within particular states as well as between states within India as a whole. This flexibility is important given the size and diversity of many Indian states: Uttar Pradesh, for example, had a 1991 population of nearly 140 million and includes within its pre-2001 boundaries the Gangetic plains and the Himalayas. Moreover, by capturing differences within states we can avoid generalizations based on state-level data; for instance, Gujarat is regularly described as a prosperous and literate state. But there are districts in Gujarat whose literacy rates are lower than some districts in the state of Bihar, which is generally considered to be backward and poor. The diversity is significant with the number of districts in each state varying between 17 and 54 for a total of 151 districts across the five states.¹

DATA AND VARIABLES

In our analysis, we employ a negative binomial estimation procedure. Two features of the data made this approach the most appropriate. First, the data are measured across time (from 1971–2000) and across space (with 151 districts), and we expected a high degree of correlation across time and/or space, which makes more standard OLS regression inappropriate. Second, our dependent variable "riot," which corresponds to the definition above, is a count of the number of riots in each administrative district for every year between 1971 and 2000. As a straight count variable that is strongly skewed to the right, the appropriate statistical

¹ The districts have been standardized to the 1971 boundaries in order to allow cross-sectional time series regressions in our analyses. In less than five cases, this has involved about a 5% error margin when reaggregating the figures.

technique is binomial regression.

The independent variables can be grouped into social-cultural, political, and economic factors as specified in the hypotheses. The social-cultural variables are intended to capture culturally salient, identity-based influences and are measured by the percentage of a district's population that is MUSLIM and members of a SCHEDULED CASTE. The hypothesis is that both of these factors will contribute to increased likelihood of riots occurring because the more individuals there are with ethnic attachments, the more likely there are to be sufficient people with preferences that are high enough to provide incentives to riot.² In addition, we estimate models that substitute the ratio of Hindus to Muslims in a district (HINDU/MUSLIM RATIO) to explore the possibility that the propensity to riot is contingent on the proportion of Hindus to Muslims.

We include economic variables, which are taken from the Census of India's decennial reports. The values are interpolated for the intervening years.

INDUSTRIAL WORKER is the percentage of adults employed in the organized non-agricultural sector. This category includes industrial workers, artisans, and professional workers. We use this variable as a rough proxy for industrialization and development. While we would like to include literacy as a variable for similar reasons, it is too highly correlated with other variables of interest.

AGCULT is the ratio of the number of individuals who are landless laborers to the number who are cultivators in each district. This variable is a measure of land

² The basis for this hypothesis are derived from Dumont 1980, Beteilled 1983, Ludden 1996, and Srinivas 1962, each of whom argues that individuals who are Muslim or scheduled caste have especially marked preferences for affective attachment.

inequality that rises in districts where relatively few individuals have property rights over the land and dips in districts where most individuals have such property rights. We include it because various studies of domestic political violence have emphasized the effects of inequality in the ownership of land (Wang et al. 1993, Muller and Seligson 1987, Midlarsky 1989, Brockett 1992). The variable also captures an India-specific aspect of socio-economic relations because landless laborers are more likely to be low caste, while cultivators are more likely to belong to the high and middle castes (with the exception of Karnataka, where low castes are frequently cultivators and occupy a dominant socio-economic position). In the absence of reliable caste data, this variable allows us to have a rough proxy for rural caste relationships and their contribution to riot events.

DENSITY is the population density of each district for every year. It is the ratio of a district's population to its total geographical area (measured in square kilometers). We include this variable because there has been considerable interest expressed in whether Indian riots are disproportionately likely to occur in either urban or rural areas. Communal riots in particular are considered to be primarily urban phenomena (Varshney and Wilkinson 1995, Engineer 1984, Aiyar 1967). If the Varshney and Wilkinson (1995) and Wilkinson (2004) results hold for this dataset, we expect higher levels of DENSITY to contribute to higher rates of riots.

Finally, MIGRATION is the percentage of the male population of a district for each year that was born outside that district, a factor that is considered to be a reasonably good measure of migration for employment (Sinha 1988). The existing literature indicates that increased in-migration should increase the prospect of riots.

Qualitative studies have pointed to the role of migrants in fomenting riots and migrant neighborhoods are frequently riot epicenters (*Times of India* 1992), and interviews with victims of riot violence have reiterated the role of recent migrants as key participants in that violence (Parikh Interviews: Surat, Gujarat, 1995).

We include a number of political variables. NATIONAL ELECTION is a dichotomous variable that indicates the years in which national parliamentary elections were held. The election years, for which a national election occurred are coded as '1' and all others are '0,' are 1971, 1977, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999. STATE ELECTION is a similar dichotomous variable that indicates years in which state elections were held and those years vary by state. TURNOUT is the number of voters divided by the total number of electors for each parliamentary election. MARGIN is the percentage of votes cast for the winning candidate minus the percentage of votes cast for the second-place candidate in parliamentary elections. INCUMBENT PARTY is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether the party in power was reelected in the year of a national election. We expect this variable to be correlated with riots, but we do not have a predicted direction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present the results of our analysis in Table 1. The first model presents the full 1971-2000 dataset, with and without a lagged dependent variable. While there is debate over the desirability of including an LDV in panel data analysis, in this case there is a theoretical reason to include it: arguments in the literature point to the importance of riot entrepreneurs or “riot tenders,” in Brass’s phrase (Brass 2004).

Moreover, decisions to join riot events can be shaped by information about prior events.

In this specification, the variables for Scheduled Caste is positive and significant, as predicted, both with and without the LDV. The political variables that are positive and reach significance are BJP, Turnout, and National Election, but they are not significant when the LDV is included. Hindu/Muslim ratio is negative and significant, which indicates that the greater the number of Muslims in a district relative to Hindus, the lower the likelihood of riots. This result is consistent with Wilkinson's results, which find that competition for Muslim votes reduces communal riots, if we assume that larger numbers of Muslims become attractive as vote blocs. Density is negative and significant, which runs counter to Varshney and Wilkinson (1995) as well as Wilkinson (2004), which find that communal riots are more likely to occur in urban settings. But this divergence could be due either to the data's likely overinclusion of small riots or its inclusion of all riots, not just those that are communal in origin. Margin and State Election fail to reach significance.

The next three models present the results of decade-specific panel analyses, with and without the LDV. The most striking aspects of these results are the differences across the panels. Our assessment that the narrative of explaining riots changes across decades offers a potential reason, but examination of the results indicates that all three do not conform to the three narratives we outlined.

The 1970s conform in part to the political and scholarly narratives: they were described as economic in nature (i.e., bread riots), and the results reflect this. Agcult is positive and significant, as is Density, and accounts of riots emphasize that

economic riots occurred in both urban and rural settings. A higher Agcult ratio also reflects a larger low-caste population, which could indicate either economic or affective dissatisfaction. Similarly, Scheduled Caste is positive and significant, which clearly represents an affective identity category but cannot be ruled out as being motivated by economic issues. The significance and direction of these two variables, Agcult and Scheduled Caste, lend credence to our theory that economic conditions can have affective valence, but we cannot be positive using only this type of observational data.

Several of the political variables reach significance, but they are not all in the same direction. Incumbency and National Election are negative and significant, indicating that districts in which incumbents were retained and years in which national elections occurred were less riotous. But Turnout is positive and significant, indicating that districts with more engaged voters had higher levels of riot events. No other variables reach significance. In every case, variables are consistently significant (or lack significance) both with and without the LDV.

The 1980s results are weaker and do not support the prevailing narrative. Despite the emphasis on caste conflict in this decade, none of the affective variables that incorporate caste reach significance. The only variables that reach significance are Margin, which is negative (i.e., closer contests are positively correlated with riots), and State Election, which is positive.

Finally, the 1990s results run somewhat counter to the prevailing narrative that communal riots dominated the Indian landscape. Most strikingly, the BJP variable is negative and significant, indicating that the greater the BJP vote, the

lower the incidence of riots. This may reflect the BJP's desire in the 1990s to win elections by appealing beyond their base, but it does not support the conventional wisdom that BJP strongholds were more likely to be riot-prone. In addition, Migration, which has also been linked with increased riot propensity in political and scholarly discussions, is negative and significant, i.e., increased migration is correlated with lower numbers of riots. The National Elections variable is negative and significant, i.e., years in which national elections take place (there were three in the 1990s) are correlated with lower riot totals. Turnout is negative but significant only without the inclusion of the LDV. Finally, the Hindu-Muslim ratio is positive and significant, indicating that the greater the proportion of Hindus over Muslims, the greater the number of riots.

CONCLUSION

These results are tentative and preliminary. We intend to extend our analysis to include multi-level models that can give us more detailed results about state-level differences, and we will continue to perform robustness checks. But there are some intriguing findings. The consistently negative results for hypothesized and widely accepted relationships between BJP political success and increased violence suggests that at least some of the conventional wisdom might need to be reconsidered. The strength of caste and economic variables, particularly the relationships between scheduled castes, landless laborers, and increased riots, point to the salience of economic conditions and caste identity. And finally, while the political and scholarly narratives seem to be on point during the 1970s, they are less

reflective of on the ground conditions in the following two decades, at least for these states. Given that the sample includes many of the communal and political flashpoints of the last 30 years, however, this disconnect should give us pause.

Table 8: Neg. Binomial Regressions with District Fixed Effects

	Full Model	Full Model w/ LDV	1970's	1970's w/ LDV	1980's	1980's w/ LDV	1990's	1990's w/ LDV
(Intercept)	5.63* (0.20)	4.81* (0.19)	-8.95 (5.27)	-10.03 (5.40)	7.75* (0.54)	7.39* (0.54)	8.36* (0.60)	7.08* (0.58)
Margin	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
BJP	0.13* (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	-0.21 (0.39)	-0.43 (0.39)	-0.18 (0.17)	-0.19 (0.17)	-0.28* (0.09)	-0.26* (0.08)
Agcult	0.55* (0.09)	0.45* (0.08)	2.30* (0.67)	2.19* (0.70)	-0.00 (0.33)	-0.04 (0.33)	-0.23 (0.13)	-0.08 (0.12)
Incumbent Party	-0.07* (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.15* (0.05)	-0.16* (0.05)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)
Turnout	0.26* (0.11)	0.19 (0.10)	1.00* (0.36)	0.87* (0.37)	0.10 (0.32)	0.07 (0.32)	-0.33* (0.14)	-0.15 (0.13)
Density	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
State Election	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.06* (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Nat'l Election	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.21* (0.03)	-0.21* (0.05)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)
Hindu/Muslim Ratio	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.10 (0.08)	0.13 (0.08)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)
% Indus. Worker	-0.09 (0.21)	-0.13 (0.19)	31.85 (28.05)	44.50 (28.74)	-2.61 (2.03)	-2.49 (2.00)	0.13 (0.20)	-0.02 (0.19)
% Sched. Caste	7.92* (0.71)	4.40* (0.68)	30.48* (12.35)	33.75* (12.63)	-0.08 (2.74)	0.11 (2.70)	-4.35 (3.31)	-4.74 (3.16)
% Migrants	1.67 (0.88) (0.11)	1.46 (0.84) (0.13)	-99.70 (72.16) (0.27)	-129.08 (73.88) (0.31)	-0.82 (3.12) (0.30)	-1.22 (3.10) (0.31)	-2.93* (1.13) (0.42)	-2.77* (1.09) (0.47)
LDV		0.00* (0.00)		0.00* (0.00)		0.00* (0.00)		0.00* (0.00)

Standard errors in parentheses

Models do not include literacy variable.

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$