

The Asymmetric Role of Religious Appeals in India*

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Abstract

We show that some identities are easier to cue and mobilize than others using subtle religious appeals. In our survey experiments in India, Muslims have greater confidence in political appeals if they are from leaders using Muslim religious cues. In contrast, Hindus do not report greater confidence in leaders using Hindu religious cues, not even if they reside in areas with high levels of communal strife. In a get-out-the-vote experiment, Muslims, unlike Hindus, are responsive to co-religious appeals in a state where the party system is not divided along communal lines. Large-scale observational data also support our findings: Muslims who attend mosques regularly are more likely to participate politically, but Hindus who attend temples regularly are not. We present qualitative evidence to explore the mechanisms at work.

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1 Introduction

In this paper we show that there is an asymmetry in how Hindus and Muslims respond to religious cues even though religious violence, initiated by both Hindus and Muslims, is all too common in contemporary India (Brass 1991, 2003; Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004). In a series of survey experiments that assess the confidence citizens have in political leaders using religious symbols, we find that Hindus and Muslims respond very differently. The asymmetry also appears in observational survey data we examine and in a Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) experiment we conduct. The experiments show that Hindus do not express greater confidence in politicians using Hindu religious symbols. This is true even for Hindus residing in areas with high levels of communal strife. Muslims, on the other hand, are more likely to express confidence in a leader who uses Muslim religious symbols than one who does not, even in areas with low levels of communal strife. The different reactions that Hindus and Muslims have to co-religious cues is found in all of the different settings we have conducted experiments: in urban and rural areas; in areas where the religious divide is socially and politically intense, and where it is not; and in areas where the party system is organized around the religious divide, and where it is not. We conduct our survey experiments in both representative surveys of households, and outside of temples and mosques as parishioners leave.

Few would be surprised that Hindus and Muslims can be mobilized along religious lines in states such as Uttar Pradesh where the party system is divided by religion and where political entrepreneurs work hard to mobilize people along the religious divide. Such communal mobilization has been amply documented by others (Brass 1991; Hasan 1991, 1998; Nair 1994; Shastri 1999; Sikand 2002; Sitharaman 2010). What is surprising is that Hindus, even in areas with high levels of religious conflict, do not express greater confidence in leaders using co-religious symbols. We show that Muslims, on average, always express greater confidence in politicians using such cues.

This asymmetry can also be found in observational data from the Indian National Election Study. We show that Muslims who attend mosques are more likely to be politically engaged than those who do not. Among Hindus, however, regular attendance at temples is not correlated with

political participation. To supplement the observational data, we conducted a GOTV experiment that show that Muslims, unlike Hindus, can be politically mobilized to vote by co-religious symbols even in Tamil Nadu, a state where the party system is not religiously divided. In this state, Muslims do not have an electoral incentive to vote along communal lines given their small population size (about 5.6%) and the social basis and structure of the party system. Muslims in the state have an economic, social, and political standing comparable to Hindus. Muslim political elites in the state support this strategic judgement by emphasizing their Tamil identity, downplaying the religious divide, and aligning closely with one of the two major political coalitions. This is unsurprising because independent Muslim parties would not be electorally viable in the state. Hindu elites also emphasize their Tamil identity, and make appeals to different non-Brahmin caste groups.¹ Yet, even here Muslims can be mobilized by religious appeals.

We provide qualitative evidence to posit a mechanism for our findings. Our qualitative evidence shows mosques, like temples, play an important cultural and social role, but mosques in contemporary India have also come to be places where politics can be legitimately discussed and mobilized. This is not the case for temples, and there are cultural norms in place that limit the political role of Hindu priests. The social and cultural basis of an identity matter for how and when it can be cued. These findings have implications not just for our understanding of how religion is politically mobilized in India, but also for the literature on how ethnic identities are mobilized more generally.

In the next section, we discuss religious practice in India, and the differing roles of imams and mosques and temples and pandits. We describe our research design in Section 3; present our survey experiments in Section 4; present observational data on the association between religious attendance and political participation in Section 5; present our GOTV experiment in Section 6; and discuss our conclusions in Section 7.

¹Subramaniam (1999, 2002) details why the main political coalitions in Tamil Nadu focus largely on caste. Mayer (1981) offers empirical support for the similarity of political views between Hindus and Muslims.

2 Religious Practice

Most Indians are socialized from birth into religious practices. Rituals, prayers, and ceremonies occupy a prominent place in most households, and families and individuals commonly attend religious festivals, which mark the calendar and the rhythm of the seasons and form an important and publicly visible aspect of social life. The near ubiquity of religious practice is evident in the sheer number of buildings in which religious practice takes place. In 2011, the Census of India reported that more than three million structures were being used as places of worship.² This number, accounting for about one percent of the total number of census houses, exceeds the number of schools, hospitals, and dispensaries combined. Moreover, the proportion of census houses used as places of worship has not changed in more than twenty years. The 1991 economic reforms and the accompanying boom in India's construction industry saw an equally vigorous expansion in the number of places of worship.

Religious practice consists of symbolic activities—solitary or public prayer in addition to chanting, gestures, sacrifices, vows, divination, and the like—through which individuals establish contact with God and, often in public settings, with each other. Formal institutions such as temples, mosques, and gurdwaras are the traditional settings for religious practice.

With few exceptions, almost every type of social group in India—whether its defining characteristic is caste, religion, gender, or class—practices religion quite avidly. For example, almost 75 percent of the respondents to the 2004 National Election Study reported praying either every day or once a week. Given how very many places of worship there are in India, it should come as no surprise that Indian citizens' practice of religion is not limited to prayer. Almost half of the respondents reported visiting religious institutions at least weekly, and sixty percent of the respondents reported frequenting religious gatherings outside of religious institutions. Only four percent of the sample reported that they did not pray, attend a place of worship or attend religious gatherings.

²Census "House" was defined as a structure or part of a structure inhabited or vacant, or a dwelling, a shop, a shop-cum-dwelling or a place of business, workshop, school etc.

2.1 Imams and Mosques; Temples and Pandits

This similarity in the extent of religious practice hides the fact that temples and mosques perform very different roles for Hindus and Muslims. For Hindus, temples are a religious place that is visited to pray, often alone, to get sight and behold (*darsana*) the deity, and to perform rituals. Muslims attend mosques to pray, but the mosque is different from the temple as it is also a place for the community to congregate, and on Friday prayers, to listen to an imam deliver a sermon on religion or on social and political issues facing the *ummah* (community).

Hindus visit temples to pray and to *darsana* the divine, usually in the form of an idol. The purpose of prayer at the temple is to pay obeisance to the power of the deity associated with a particular temple. Prayer at a temple is also more efficacious than prayer at home because of the physical space of the temple and the location of the deity therein (Srinivas 2006, 327–328). In addition to prayers, temples house rituals performed by priests. Taking part in these rituals is an essential part of the religious experience for Hindus. These rituals—like prayers—are conducted to appease a deity. In a temple, there is rarely a *parvachan* (sermon), a call to action, or an open discussion of politics. Stroope (2011) summarizes the experience of Hindu religious experience in temples when he observes that “there is a great deal of individualism in Hindu religious practice. Hindus may engage in sacred acts in settings where other lay devotees are present, but significant regular social interaction with fellow lay devotees is usually not a necessary or central component of Hindu religious practice” (Stroope 2011, 677).

Hindu priests have a defined and limited role in temples. The priest stands between the worshipper and the deity. The priest (in smaller temples) or the head priest (in larger temples) is the one who performs daily rituals and says specific prayers, chants *mantras*, or perform rituals that address a worshipper’s needs. The priest is also expected to accept a worshipper’s offering, and if the offering is sweets or eatables, some of those are returned to the worshipper. The returned offerings are distributed to friends and family upon the worshippers return *home*.

A mosque, on the other hand, is an entirely different place: “[f]rom the *hadith* we can understand that the idea of the mosque does not approach that of a monumental building meant for a

single ritual” (Rasdi and Utaberta 2010, 2). In South Asia, mosques “combine within them the role of community space, a place of prayer, religious instruction and political discussion” (Alam 2011, 47). Mosques, in sharp contrast to temples, perform an important social role and are a public space where “in the case of a major crisis, or when the community members were dissatisfied, they flocked to the mosque to discuss the problem and to seek remedy or redress” (Fathi 1981).³

In addition to providing this public space for the community to pray, imams play an important role, especially in Friday prayers that are led by them. Errihani (2011) observes that Muslims go to mosque on Friday “to listen and learn, not to challenge and question. In this public space, the pulpit [where the imam sits] assumes an important symbolic function that translates not only into religious authority but also in political and social influence.” As a result, the relationship between the imam and the congregation is visibly played out in the mosque where the imam is above the rest, literally and symbolically. By ascending the pulpit, the imam assumes the role of religious and political leader, and the congregation is called upon to acknowledge such a leadership role by making an effort to internalize the message (Errihani 2011, 383).

The asymmetry we note can also be found in the different architectures of temples and mosques and the role played by the mosque and the imam for Muslims and the priest and the temple for Hindus. In India, Hindu temples are by and large places that people go to, rather than bases that reach outwards. Muslims do indeed identify mosques primarily as places for prayer but “more of them recognized mosques as also being sources of social teaching and welfare, as well as representing one of the core symbolic aspects of belonging to a community” (White, Devine, and Jha 2012, 658).⁴ The architecture of temples reflects the practice of individualized and priest mediated worship and ritual among Hindus. The image of the deity lies at the center of a temple complex. As a worshipper enters a temple or a temple complex, she may ring a bell and enter the space where the idol is kept. This enclosed space is usually darker (especially in older temples) and the deity is often placed at the same level as the worshipper. In some more modern temples idols are positioned,

³Worship at Muslim *shrines* as opposed to mosques is, however, very different. At these shrines worshippers seek individual spiritual ablution or seek resolution to individual concerns (Kurin 1983).

⁴In India, only churches, with Bible study and social welfare organizations, play a greater role than mosques in the everyday life of a major religious community (White et al. 2012).

as in churches, at a level that is elevated relative to the worshipper.

A mosque, on the other hand, is a center for the community, and the imam is seen as a leader of the community. Mosques have been the center and the scene of numerous political uprisings, revolts and social movements, often led by popular preachers from the *minbar* (pulpit). Many princes and rebels have tried to influence public opinion by controlling the *minbar*. Some contemporary countries, Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, to name a few, have clergy who are appointed by the state and in some cases the imam delivers fatwas that the state desires for its political ends (Nielsen 2012). Bernard Lewis observed almost four decades ago that mosques have retained their political character and that prayer for the ruler during the Friday *khutba* was one of the recognized tokens of political allegiance in Islam (Lewis 1974, 252). The Friday sermon has an especially prominent role in the spiritual lives of Muslims around the world. The Friday sermon is concerned both with the discursive practices in the everyday lives of Muslims and what is at stake in the Muslim community (Errihani 2011, 383). In India, Friday prayers are used to distinguish sects of Muslims from each other (Alam 2008).

The Friday sermon can also be action-oriented in the sense that its aim is to move the congregation to action by moving religious ideology out of the mosque and onto the streets, homes, schools, factories and coffeehouses through the agency of mosque-goers as well as through sermon recordings (Hirschkind 2001). There are numerous instances when demonstrations take place immediately following the Friday prayer in India. For example, on August 2012 in Uttar Pradesh, there were riots following Friday prayers in many cities—Lucknow, Kanpur, and Allahabad. The putative reasons for the violence was the mistreatment of Muslims in the North Eastern Indian state of Assam and Myanmar (Khan 2012).

Imams influence both the political and social life of the community and not simply perform rituals. Engineer (1995) observes that despite some exceptions among Muslims in Bombay “the clergy and the elite. . . join hands and appeal to the members to vote for the party which can best assure them of patronage” (Engineer 1995, 197). In the case of the *bohros*, the religious head: “the Syedna, always asks his community members to vote for the Congress candidates” (Engineer 1995,

198). The imams are influential beyond politics as well. Efforts at cholera and polio vaccinations in India have looked to bring imams on board. Local medical officers stressed that the way for them to gain acceptance from the community for eradicating cholera was to take “into confidence the local imams” (WHO 2010, 165). The success of the Pulse Polio program also necessitated the need to use Friday sermons as a the vehicle to spur the community to action (Jeffery and Jeffery 2011, 122). No such coordination was undertaken with Hindu temples or priests.

We are not making an essentialist claim. The rise of the *ulama* and the centrality of the mosque to Muslim life in India is the result of a series of social changes. Aziz (1970) observes that it was not until after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, which marked the decline of Muslim political power in India, that the *ulama*, or rather one of them, Shah Wali-Allah, assumed not merely religious but also some social and political influence. The removal of state aid for the *ulama* by the British turned the *ulama* towards society for their survival (Robinson 2008, 262) and further embedded religious leaders in the social and political life of the Muslim community (Metcalf 1978). The Congress party in the decades following independence further empowered the Muslim religious elite because it “has invariably relied upon conservative elements among Muslims—mullahs and imams—for ‘delivering’ votes” (Hasan 1991, 77).

3 Research Design

We conducted survey experiments in three different states in India—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh—to measure the confidence respondents express in leaders using religious symbols. These confidence experiments are conducted both outside of temples and mosques and in a representative random sample of households. The temple/mosque survey experiments give us the ability to measure respondents’ opinions as they leave religious services. These services should prompt and frame the respondents’ religious identities, and people attending worship services should be receptive to religious appeals. The door-to-door household surveys are used to obtain estimates in a more natural setting of a less selected sample. We use observational data to

show that there mosque attendance is associated with greater political participation while temple attendance is not. And finally we conduct a GOTV experiment to show that our these cues can be used to influence behavior as well as opinions. The settings of our various experiments are carefully chosen to rule out certain alternative hypotheses.

We hypothesize that Muslims, unlike Hindus, will have greater confidence in political leaders using religious symbols. This should hold regardless of whether the Hindu/Muslim divide has been politicized in a particular state's party system. In the confidence experiments, the key randomized manipulation is that subjects are shown one of two photos before a short survey is administered. All subjects are shown a photograph of a hypothetical politician. In the treatment condition, the politician has marks that identify him to be a religious Hindu or Muslim. In the control condition, he has no religious markings. The pictures are otherwise indistinguishable. Muslims are shown either a picture without religions symbols, or the same person with a Muslim cap and, depending on the state, a beard. And Hindus are shown either the no religious symbol picture, or the same person with clothing and marks denoting that he is an observant Hindu. Along with whatever photo subjects are shown, the following prompt is presented and question asked:

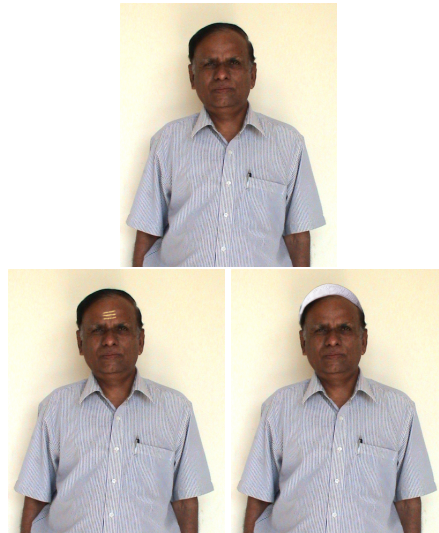
At a recent meeting celebrating India's democracy this leading politician said "Politicians like me from different political parties try hard to represent the interests of the people who support us and vote for us."

Do you have confidence [*Vishwas*] in what this person is saying? [Yes, No, Don't Know]⁵

The subjects in the photos and the clothing, beards, and other markings they have are chosen so that they fit the ethnic and cultural norms of the given area. We tried to ensure that the person (when presented without religious symbols) would not look like a person from another religion or area. For example, Figure 1 displays the Muslim, Hindu, and no religious symbols photos used in Tamil Nadu.

⁵All surveys and GOTV appeals were translated into the local vernacular.

Figure 1: Photos Used in Tamil Nadu



It is important to note that we don't give the same treatment to Muslims and Hindus. This is because we present Hindus with Hindu symbols and Muslims with Muslim symbols. Comparing the treatment effect that Muslim symbols have on Hindus versus Muslims engages a very different question than the one that motivates us. We want to know if Muslim religious cues motivate Muslims differently than how Hindu religious cues motivate Hindus because that is how political and social actors actually try to mobilize Hindus and Muslims.

We also conduct a second type of confidence experiment with a less ambiguous prompt. Muslims are told that the politician is a Muslim, and Hindus that he is a Hindu. The goal here is to make sure that respondents are explicitly told the religion of the politicians in both the control (no religious symbol) the treatment (religious symbol) conditions. The difference between the two conditions is then just the use of religious symbols. This condition directly tests the use of religious symbols since the information about religion is already communicated. The sentence introducing the picture in this experiment reads:

At a recent meeting celebrating India's democracy this [Muslim] [Hindu] political leader whose religious beliefs are the same as yours said "Politicians like me from different political parties try hard to represent the interests of the people who support

us and vote for us.”

Do you have confidence [*Vishwas*] in what this person is saying? [Yes, No, Don’t Know]

We use the variation across and within the states we study to show that our results hold across a wide variety of settings. There is variance in the proportion of Muslims, the degree of party fragmentation and competition, and in the strategic calculation of political entrepreneurs in how to mobilize voters.

In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims are 18.5 percent of the population, and 22 percent of India’s Muslims reside there. In the state, party politics has always been deeply fragmented with multiple parties winning a significant number of seats.⁶ The vote differential between the top two parties is less than the proportion of Muslims. In Karnataka, Muslims are about 12 percent of the population. Electoral competition is between three parties, and the difference in the vote share of the top two parties is greater than 12 percent. In Tamil Nadu, Muslims are under six percent of the population. Two parties get most of the votes, and the vote differential between the two parties is often in the order of ten percent.

Uttar Pradesh has been the center of Hindu–Muslim conflict for almost a century, and religious tensions have also emerged in Karnataka in the past few decades, whereas in Tamil Nadu, there is virtually no Hindu–Muslim conflict. The status of Muslims in all three states is also different with Muslims less well off and less socially and politically integrated in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka than in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, in Tamil Nadu, the social, economic, and political condition of Muslims is comparable to that of Hindus.

In the 2012 Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections the winning party (Samajwadi Party) received 28 percent of the votes and the second placed party (Bahujan Samaj Party) received 26 percent. The third and fourth placed parties—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress—received 15 and 14 percent of the votes, respectively. In this environment, it would make strategic

⁶Electoral politics in Uttar Pradesh has consistently violated Duverger’s Law with more than three parties competing successfully since the very first elections.

sense for the Muslims to count the heads of co-ethnics and vote as a group and they may, in fact be doing so. In the 2102 elections to urban local councils Muslims won almost a third of the seats and Verma (2012) attributes this to the “growing autonomy of the Muslims communities vis-a-vis political parties” (Verma 2012, 31). Beyond contemporary electoral politics, the history of Uttar Pradesh is marked by Hindu Muslim tension and associated religious politics. The Babri Masjid (a mosque destroyed by Hindu extremists) is located in a town in Uttar Pradesh, and there is significant Hindu–Muslim violence in the state (Brass 1991, 2003; Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004). The BJP—the right wing Hindu party—has had notable political success in the state. The most important Muslim seminary, Darul Uloom, is located in Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, as are the first Muslim universities—e.g., the Aligarh Muslim University. Before independence, Uttar Pradesh was also central to claims for an independent Muslim state. Muslims in Uttar Pradesh are poorer than other citizens of the state: the urban poverty incidence rate is 45 percent compared to a state wide average of 30 percent. Muslims are also less represented in the state, with less than one Muslim in 12 in the high positions in the state bureaucracy despite the fact that almost 1 in 5 residents of Uttar Pradesh are Muslim.

Electoral politics in Karnataka is not as fragmented. The Congress party dominated electoral politics for a very long time by building a coalition of the dominant castes in Northern Karnataka, the Lingayats with the Vokkaligas in the more Southern part of the state. This coalition came apart in the 1990s. The Congress party lost the Lingayat vote for two reasons. First, the national party, rather unceremoniously replaced a popular Lingayat Chief Minister of Karnataka (Veerendra Patil).⁷ Second, the efforts to decentralize power to local governments struck at the core of Lingayat political power. The Lingayats gradually defected from the Congress to the BJP. The rise of the BJP in Lingayat dominated areas led to the other major communities in the Lingayat dominated areas—the Muslims being one—to act strategically in which party they supported, the Congress or a regional party. In these changed political circumstances, it made sense for the Muslims to mobilize as a group as they could now exercise significant political influence in Karnataka.

⁷The Congress lost support in the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh because of similar actions in the early 1980s.

The strategic considerations were spurred by the large and sudden growth of the BJP in the state. Unlike Uttar Pradesh, however, until the later quarter of the 20th century, Hindu–Muslim tension in Karnataka were relatively minor. Historically, sufi influences were very important in Karnataka and Hindus and Muslims prayed at the common shrines. This interfaith alliance has come apart in the last thirty years or so. In Karnataka, as in Uttar Pradesh, the incidence of urban poverty among Muslims is higher than that of other communities and the number of Muslims in top bureaucratic positions is far lower than their proportion of the population. For example, five percent of high level bureaucrats are Muslim whereas the proportion of Muslims in Karnataka is 12 percent.

The politics of Tamil Nadu has been dominated by two regional party alliances: the DMK and the AI-ADMK with an overarching linguistic identity defining the politics of Tamil Nadu. For the past forty years these parties have alternated power, with one exception. The two alliances garner the overwhelming majority of the votes in the state. The Muslim community in Tamil Nadu is too small numerically (5.6 percent) to have a large impact on the outcomes of an election. Moreover, because there is no communal environment in Tamil Nadu (i.e. the BJP is absent) and the major parties are secular, Muslims have no reason to count heads and vote as a group outside of the two main alliances. Noting these features, Alam (2007) cites Tamil Nadu as an example of a state where Muslims should not count heads. Further, the history of Tamil Nadu has not been marked by Hindu–Muslim tensions. The influence of Muslim emperors of North India in Tamil Nadu was limited, and Islam emerged in this area not via invasion but through Arab traders who had settled in the 8th or 9th century. Electoral and party politics in Tamil Nadu in the second half of the 20th century was dominated by a powerful anti-Brahmin movement and the need to preserve a Tamil (linguistic) identity. Religious divisions were never at the center of any political debate. In Tamil Nadu, Muslims and Hindus are comparable in education and income. The rates of urban poverty among Muslims in Tamil Nadu is low—i.e, it is the same as the state averages unlike in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh where Muslims, as we observed above, are poorer. Rural Muslims in Tamil Nadu are less poor than the state average. Also, Muslims are better represented in high positions in the bureaucracy than elsewhere, with their proportion in the bureaucracy mirroring their proportion

in the state.

In addition to the survey experiments, we conduct a GOTV experiment in Tamil Nadu to explore if religious cues can mobilize either religion in an electoral system where religion is not a central feature, where both Muslim and Hindu parties downplay the communal divide, and where independent Muslim parties are not viable. Tamil Nadu also plays a key role for us because Muslims there are well integrated into the local community, the political system, and are comparable to Hindus as measured by social and economic indicators.⁸

We also exploit variation in tensions within Uttar Pradesh to show that even where communal tensions are the highest, we still fail to find significant effects for Hindus. We conduct experiments in several areas in Uttar Pradesh including urban Aligarh (where tensions are high) and rural Kanpur (where they are low). Aligarh is especially riot prone: it is a center for Hindu/Muslim conflict, and it has been for a very long time.⁹

4 Survey Experiments

Table 1 presents the results for the confidence experiments conducted outside of mosques and temples in Uttar Pradesh (UP), Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Each estimate reported in Table 1 is the difference in the percentage of respondents who reported confidence in the treatment condition (with religious symbols) minus the control condition (without religious symbols).¹⁰

In all areas, the results for Hindus are insignificant or, as in Karnataka, Hindus have a negative treatment effect—i.e., they express greater confidence in the politician not using religious symbols.

⁸Our use of Tamil Nadu here is similar to that of Senegalese immigrants by Adida, Laitin, and Valfort (2010) in their estimates of anti-Muslim bias in France. Adida et al. (2010) compare Christian and Muslim immigrants to France because they are of the same country of origin and came from similar economic and educational backgrounds but differ in their religion.

⁹See, for example, Murphy (1953). For recent work on riots and Aligarh see Brass (2003), Varshney (2002, 104–105) and Wilkinson (2004).

¹⁰Estimates and variances are from regressions of outcomes on treatment with heteroscedasticity correction, using HC0. The results for UP include dummy variables for the three areas where the experiments were conducted: Aligarh, Kanpur, and Lucknow. Treatment interactions with these dummies were not included, but if they were, as recommended by Lin et al. (2013), the treatment effect for Hindus remains unchanged, but for Muslims grows to 15.1% with a p-value of 0.00.

Table 1: Confidence Experiment Outside of Temples and Mosques

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value
Uttar Pradesh			
Muslim (n=1150)	10.8%	2.80	0.00
Hindu (n=1228)	2.3%	2.66	0.39
Tamil Nadu			
Muslim (n=400)	12.1%	4.95	0.01
Hindu (n=400)	-5.09%	4.28	0.23
Karnataka			
Muslim (n=199)	7.19%	6.34	0.26
Hindu (n=195)	-20.7%	7.08	0.00

The results for Karnataka are surprising because the size of the effect is large: 20% fewer people express confidence the picture with religious symbols than the one without (66% versus 46%).¹¹

In sharp contrast to the results for Hindus, Muslims express greater political confidence in the politician using religious symbols. For example, in UP, Muslims, have a 10% treatment effect (40% versus 30%, *p*-value of 0.00) and in Tamil Nadu a 12% treatment effect (53% versus 41%, *p*-value of 0.01). The smallest estimate is 7.19% in Karnataka.¹² It is, however, important to note that even in Karnataka, Muslims express greater confidence in the politician using religious symbols (76%) significantly more than Hindus have confidence in the politician using religious symbols (46%) (*p*-value=0.00). This holds even though there is no significant difference between how much confidence Muslims and Hindus express in the politician using no religious symbols (68% versus 67%).

¹¹We also obtained a significant negative result when we conducted this experiment using an online convenience sample of Hindus in India recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). In a sample of Muslims recruited the same way, we estimated a significant and large positive effect.

¹²Note that our Karnataka sample of Muslims for this experiment is unusually small.

Table 2: Confidence Experiment Outside of Temples and Mosques, UP

	Estimate	<i>p</i> -value
Uttar Pradesh, urban Aligarh		
Muslim (n=393)	15.1%	0.00
Hindu (n=396)	3.79%	0.39
Uttar Pradesh, rural Kanpur		
Muslim (n=354)	12.6%	0.01
Hindu (n=438)	-1.20%	0.79

Table 3: Confidence Experiment Outside of Temples and Mosques,
Less Ambiguous Prompt

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value
Muslim (n=447)	18.1%	4.50	0.00
Hindu (n=514)	2.31%	4.02	0.57

Our results do not vary significantly whether one is in a rural or urban area. For example, Table 2 presents results for Aligarh and rural Kanpur. In Aligarh, our sample is from an urban area where communal strife is intense. In rural Kanpur, however, there is less communal strife and Muslims and Hindus live side-by-side. Our results, however, are not significantly different between the two areas.

In Table 3 we present our results for the less ambiguous prompt. In this experiment, we explicitly note in both the treatment and control conditions that the political leader in question is of the same religion as the respondent. This framing instead of decreasing the estimated treatment effect, is making it larger.

We also conducted our confidence experiments outside of temples and mosques and in two different random samples in Uttar Pradesh. Each of these random samples is taken from the three locations in Uttar Pradesh we are considering: Aligarh, Lucknow, and rural Kanpur. The first

Table 4: Confidence Experiment, Representative Samples UP

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value
Sample 1			
Muslim (n=1341)	7.34%	2.43	0.00
Hindu (n=1773)	1.86%	2.30	0.44
Sample 2			
Muslim (n=660)	9.00%	4.33	0.04
Hindu (n=1337)	2.20%	2.99	0.46

random sample took place in 2011 and the second during the build up for the state legislative assembly elections in 2012. Election campaigning was ongoing during the second survey, but not the first.¹³ The results are presented in Table 4. As expected, these results are still significant for Muslim (7.34% and 9.00%), but of somewhat smaller magnitudes than the results for people surveyed outside of temples and mosques, especially in first sample. The results for Hindus are once again insignificant, although it is possible that larger sample sizes would find small but significant effects for Hindus.

5 Religious Organization and Political Participation

Quantitative observational data on political participation is consistent with our review of the different roles that Mosques and temples play. Although both Muslims and Hindus are extremely religious in India, only for Muslims is religious attendance strongly associated with political activity. Data from the 2009 and 2004 Indian National Election Studies confirms this. Table 5 shows that Muslims who regularly visit Mosques are significantly more likely to attend election meetings, attend election rallies, and engage in election campaigning (such as door-to-door canvassing) than Muslims who attend less regularly. Muslims who go to mosques daily or weekly are 3.1 times

¹³Because of the different settings during which the two random samples were conducted, we don't present combined estimates.

more likely to attend election meetings than those who never go to mosques (p -value ≈ 0),¹⁴ are 3.4 times more likely to attend election rallies (p -value ≈ 0), and are 2.5 times more likely to engage in campaigning (p -value ≈ 0). Only for voting is the relationship not strongly increasing with religious attendance, although even here Muslims who attend at least weekly are 1.05 times more likely to vote than those who never do (p -value=0.06). The differences between Hindus who attend temples regularly versus those who do not are much less pronounced and are often insignificant. Hindus who go to temples daily or weekly are only 1.3 times more likely to attend election meetings than those who never go to temples (p -value ≈ 0), are 1.1 times more likely to attend election rallies (p -value=0.25), are 1.1 times more likely to engage in campaign (p -value=0.48), and are 1.03 times more likely to vote (p -value=0.08). The differences between the Muslim and Hindu ratios reported here are substantively large for all political activities other than voting, and are statistically significant for all outcomes aside from voting (with p -values ≈ 0). The results in Table 5 are based on the 2009 Indian National Election Study.¹⁵ The election study also shows that Hindus who regularly go to temples versus those who do not differ little in their political knowledge and opinions. For Muslims, however, there are large differences in knowledge and opinions depending on rates of mosque attendance.

In contrast to the results for religious attendance, there is only a weak relationship between political activity and the frequency of prayer. Table 6 displays the degree of political activity for different levels of the frequency of prayer. If anything, the relationship between prayer and the political activity of Muslims is the reverse of the trend for religious attendance: Muslims who never pray have higher levels of all four measures of political activity than those who pray daily. However, most of the differences are not statistically significant. Muslims who pray daily or weekly are 0.93 times less likely to attend election meetings than those who never pray (p -value=0.46), are 0.73 times less likely to attend election rallies (p -value=0.05), are 0.78 times less likely to engage in campaigning (p -value=0.16), and are 0.98 times less likely to vote (p -value=0.35).¹⁶

¹⁴Reported hypothesis tests are from the Fisher exact test for proportions.

¹⁵Results from the 2004 National Election Study are consistent with these. Both studies are based on nationally representative random samples.

¹⁶The differences between the prayer results for Hindus and Muslims are much smaller than the differences observed

Table 5: Religious Attendance and Political Activity, 2009 NES

	Attended Religious Activities			
	Daily	Weekly	On Festivals	Never
Attended Election Meetings %				
Muslims	25.9	25.6	20.6	8.4
Hindus	20.0	20.4	19.7	15.8
Attended Election Rallies %				
Muslims	18.6	17.0	13.7	5.2
Hindus	14.0	12.9	14.1	12.4
Campaigning %				
Muslims	14.7	15.1	11.5	6.1
Hindus	13.6	11.9	12.3	11.9
Validated Vote Turnout %				
Muslims	69.3	73.2	70.4	67.7
Hindus	73.3	75.7	75.9	72.1

Note: Muslim $n=4,046$ and Hindu $n=24,756$

Table 6: Prayer and Political Activity, 2009 NES

	Frequency of Prayer			
	Daily	Weekly	On Festivals	Never
Attended Election Meetings %				
Muslims	20.0	23.8	24.0	23.6
Hindus	18.6	20.8	21.0	19.0
Attended Election Rallies %				
Muslims	13.5	15.9	16.2	20.1
Hindus	11.9	14.6	15.6	15.2
Campaigning %				
Muslims	12.0	13.9	11.3	16.7
Hindus	11.9	13.0	12.5	12.9
Validated Vote Turnout %				
Muslims	67.4	77.2	75.1	73.6
Hindus	74.7	75.2	77.0	70.9

Note: Muslim $n=4,046$ and Hindu $n=24,756$

Since both of these table are based on observational data, the results could be driven by selection: the people who attend Mosques frequently may be more politically active for reasons other than Mosque attendance. The observational results do show, however, that given all of the selection that plagues observational studies plus any effect that Mosques or temples may have, Muslims who attend regularly are much more politically active than those who do not. But this pattern does not hold for the frequency of prayer and political activity. There is something associated with religious attendance for Muslims that increases political activity, and it is not simply prayer. To assess directly the influence of religious cues on Hindu and Muslim political mobilization, we conducted a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) experiment.

6 Get-Out-The-Vote Experiment

Our GOTV experiment in Tamil Nadu was conducted during the 2011 legislative assembly elections. It consisted of a pre-election randomized intervention and a post-election survey. The experiment was conducted to see if Hindus and Muslims can be mobilized to vote even in a state where the party system is not divided by religion. It is known that both Hindus and Muslims are politically mobilized along communal grounds many other states, such as in Uttar Pradesh (e.g., Brass 1974, 467).

Our GOTV experiment, builds on our survey experiment to determine what effect a similar prompt has on the turnout and voting behavior of respondents. Before the election, randomly selected respondents were contacted at their homes (via door-to-door canvassing) and given a color brochure with the pictures as above and a GOTV appeal. After the election, a post-election survey was conducted to ask subjects if they voted, and if they did vote, for whom did they vote. The GOTV appeal was modified from the confidence experiments to comply with Indian election laws. We could not say that the appeal was being made by a political leader. Instead, we tried to find a

for religious attendance. Hindus who pray daily or weekly are 1.04 times more likely to attend election meetings than those who never pray (p -value=0.78), are 0.87 times less likely to attend election rallies (p -value=0.00), are 0.96 times less likely to engage in campaigning (p -value=0.43), and are 1.06 times more likely to vote (p -value=0.00).

neutral non-political elite, and we settled on scholars. The GOTV appeal reads as follows:

This learned person [religious scholar] has written a book. The book says that **Politics affects whether the government looks after the interests of people like you and the interests of your community. He urged everyone to VOTE!**

He wrote that if you as a citizen want to have your input in making politics and government work for your community, you need to VOTE in order to send a message to those in power. Your interests and the interests of your community will not be attended to if you do not VOTE.

A cluster and sequential randomization scheme was used in order to limit the possibility of interference between units—see the online appendix for details. Respondents were randomized into one of three main conditions: [1] no contact prior to the election (control); [2] to receive our GOTV with a religious picture appeal (religious); [3] to receive our GOTV appeal without religious symbols. We sometimes refer to this last treatment as “secular” in the interest of brevity, although it is more precise to call it the non-explicitly religious treatment. These three conditions were followed by a post-election survey to measure reported turnout and vote. Turnout was checked by noting if respondents had an election commission mark “validating” turnout.¹⁷ Given our theory, the key contrast of interest is the difference between the religious and secular treatments.

Table 7 displays the results.¹⁸ For Muslims, the religious symbols treatment increases turnout by about 8.5% (p -value ≈ 0.00) relative to the no religious symbols treatment. For Hindus, there is no significant treatment effect, and the point estimate is 0.9%. The difference in the treatment effects between Muslims and Hindus is large (7.6%) and significant (p -value ≈ 0.00).

Table 8 presents the results for voting for the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AI-ADMK) versus the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagan (DMK): the two large coalitions that make up Tamil Nadu’s party system. These results are for validated voters. There is a significant and

¹⁷Validated voters are those who were found to have an indelible ink mark, which used by election officials to denote someone who has voted.

¹⁸All GOTV results are presented using regression adjustment for caste and religious attendance. Variance estimates are via Huber-White heteroskedastic standard errors. For technical details of this approach see (Lin et al. 2013).

Table 7: GOTV in Tamil Nadu, Turnout
Religious Symbols versus No Religious Symbols Effect

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value
Muslims	8.47%	1.67	0.00
Hindus	0.92%	1.56	0.55
Difference	7.55%	2.29	0.00

Hindu $n=2123$ and Muslim $n=1868$

Table 8: GOTV in Tamil Nadu, Voting for AI-ADMK
Religious Symbols versus No Religious Symbols Effect

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value
Muslims	8.00%	3.30	0.02
Hindus	-4.52%	2.95	0.12

Hindu $n=2123$ and Muslim $n=1868$

large treatment effect for Muslims, and an insignificant result for Hindus. The significant treatment effect for Muslims is in the expected direction: with the religious prompt increasing support for AI-ADMK. In this election, Muslim groups were aligned with this coalition. This is counter to the historical norm of Muslim groups aligning with the DMK.¹⁹

7 Discussion

Ethnic, cultural, and religious divisions are often thought to cause conflicts (Gurr 2000; Horowitz 1985, 2001; Lake and Rothchild 1998). This claim rests uneasily with the realization that individuals have multiple identities resulting in many cultural differences, only a few of which become socially and politically salient, and even fewer of which become cleavages around which conflicts

¹⁹In this election, the AI-ADMK elected three Muslim assembly members. With an additional two Muslim members as part of the MMK. Contrary to the historical norm, only one elected Muslim was aligned with the DMK party.

arise. This particular circle is squared by scholars in a variety of ways. Some argue that the cultural differences that become politically salient are those that have been given hegemonic power by history (Laitin 1986). Others argue that important identities are the ones that people have the deepest attachment to (Mendelberg 2001). Most common is the belief that ethnic identities become salient when they serve instrumental goals. One mechanism is that political entrepreneurs, responding to political incentives and bound by strategic constraints, convince people that a given identity is important (Bates 1983; Brass 1991; Cohen 1974). For example, Chandra (2004) argues that in the context of low information patronage-democracies, politicians can induce individuals to count heads based on a particular identity. Posner (2004, 2005) argues that the identity people choose to highlight is the one that gives them the greatest share of political power and economic resources.

Theories about the instrumental selection of identities seek to explain when ethnic conflicts arises. These theories leave largely unexplained exactly how given identities are politicized. We argue that the social basis of identities influences how they are deployed in politics. This may be easiest to see with religions as their social structures are easier to observe and have been well studied. We argue that Hindu and Muslim identities behave differently because of the contrasting ways these religions are organized and practiced, at least in contemporary India.

Many concerns could be raised about our interpretation of the results. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these objections do not challenge our finding that there is an asymmetry in how Muslims and Hindus respond to religious cues. That is the heart of our paper, and there are many open questions about exactly why and how this asymmetry arises.

One concern is that Muslim identity is more salient because Muslims are a minority. In India, the Hindu–Muslim divide is a master narrative for the organization of political life. To fully engage this concern further work will be required on other religious minorities in India, for example Sikhs, and on the attitudes and behavior of Muslims and Hindus in Muslim majority countries, such as Bangladesh. It is worth noting, however, that the power and role of Muslim religious leaders and mosques has changed notably over time. As we discussed in Section 2.1, the separation between Hindu and Muslim religious practices increased with the collapse of Mughal authority, and that the

Congress party has further empowered Muslim religious elites in recent years.

A second concern, echoing Olson, is that smaller groups can overcome collective action more easily. Although there are fewer Muslims than Hindus, there are still about 160 million Muslims in India. It is difficult to see how a group of that size faces an easier collective action problem than one larger than it. A related argument is that since Hindus are a supra-majority, they cannot maintain a coalition as Hindus. Therefore, the role of religion for Hindus is more limited than it is for Muslims. Like the more general concern about Muslims being the minority, it is difficult to evaluate the importance of this factor without studying another country where Hindus are a minority and Muslims the majority.

Finally, it could be claimed *pace* Kalyvas (1996) that when a religious identity becomes partisan, as the Hindu identity has become through the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and now the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindu priests should lose influence. That argument assumes that Hindu temple priests once influenced the mobilization of Hindus in electoral politics and with the rise of the BJS in 1951 their influence waned. There is no historical evidence to suggest that Hindu priests were important politically in the elections held in British India or the first mass elections held in independent India in 1952 when the Jana Sangh won only 3 seats to the lower house of the Parliament.

It is important to keep in mind that although our experiments show that Muslims responded more to the religious prompts than Hindus, this does not mean that Hindus never respond to subtle religious appeals when it comes to political mobilization, or unfortunately when it comes to violent action. Such violence has been well documented (Brass 1991, 2003; Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004). But this joint history of communal violence hides an asymmetry in how Hindus and Muslims respond to religious political cues.

We argue that the social basis of an identity shapes how it can and will be politically mobilized. There are other social cleavages, aside from religion, where this phenomena is at work. Take, for example, the role of caste in Indian politics. By all accounts, caste is a salient cultural distinction (most Indians still marry within their caste) and political identity in India. If a politician travels

to an archetypical village, she cannot avoid the question of caste, even if she wanted to. Where she sits or eats sends important signals to the castes in the village. Because members of castes have a self conscious awareness of themselves as a meaningful social group, subtle signals are often sufficient to for these particular castes to respond to political entrepreneurs signaling caste. The same cannot be said, however, of the larger caste agglomerations like Scheduled Castes/Dalit and Other Backward Classes. People do report possessing these larger caste identities when they are expressly asked to do so in surveys. However, when you ask respondents to self identify their caste they rarely use the words Scheduled Caste/Dalit or Other Backward Classes. This is not surprising since the latter do not have the same social reality as measured by social segregation or marriage behavior. The incentives to form larger caste groups for electoral purposes are clear given that each sub-caste is usually too small numerically to have an impact on the outcome of an election. Therefore, policies such as reservations and quotas have been enacted along larger caste groups in an attempt to concatenate various castes into larger identity groups that can be directly mobilized. The social reality on the ground, however, is still fractured, and this has implications for how different caste groups are politically mobilized.²⁰

For example, take the case of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, which is widely reported to represent Scheduled Castes. The bedrock of the party is the Jatav sub-caste, and the party has little difficulty directly mobilizing this identity and most Jatavs vote for the BSP (Chandra 2004). The same cannot be said for the larger Dalit community because the other 65 sub-castes that comprise the Scheduled Castes have distinct marriage behavior. This asymmetry has political consequences. The support of the non Jatav Scheduled castes has to earned by the BSP. The party despite continuously stressing its Dalit roots, needs a very different political strategy to gain the support of the entire Scheduled Caste community than it does to get the Jatavs to vote for it.

Our argument has implications for different types of identities, such as ethnicity, caste, and

²⁰Caste is a linguistically homogeneous endogamous group (Karve 1957). The size of a caste is very small proportional to the electorate in a national election. The larger caste concatenations, Scheduled Castes/Dalits and Other Backward Classes, carry electoral salience but these are alliances of multiple caste groups stitched together by politicians and reinforced by state policy.

class. Some identities may have social organizations that are easier for political entrepreneurs to work with while others may not have any. To take an example that has been much studied, economic class may be more or less difficult to mobilize in a given country depending on what kind of social and organizational structure class has. Politicians, if they are deciding whether to focus on class identities or religion, are likely to consider which is easier to mobilize for organizational, cultural, and logistical reasons in addition to the usual considerations about head counts.

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