

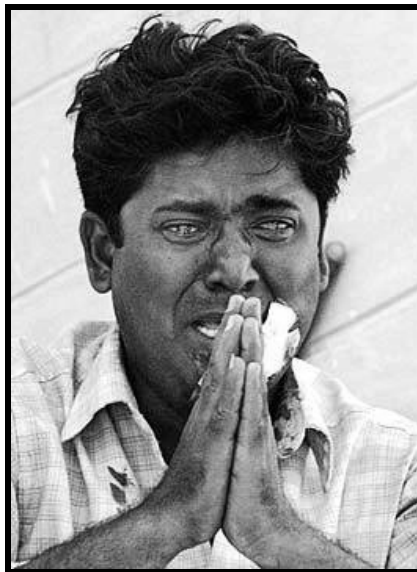
DIVERSITY, RELIGIOSITY & INTER-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
NIKHIL HARISH SESHAN

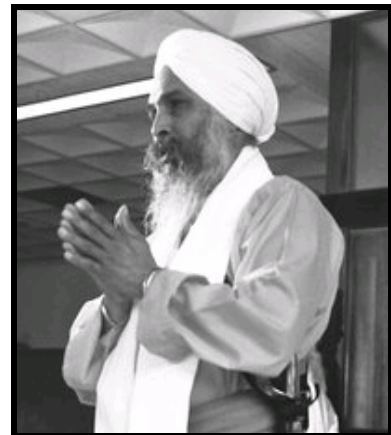
INTS 401, 402



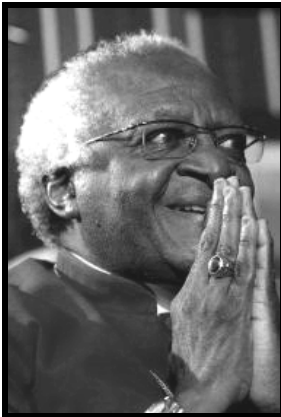
Mata Amritanandamayi,
a Hindu religious leader



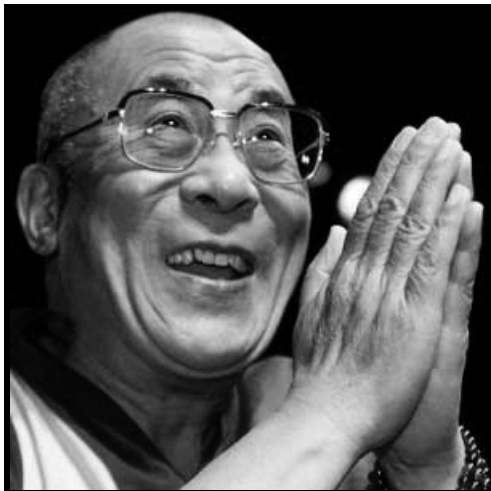
A Muslim man pleading with Hindu
rioters for his life in Gujarat (2002)



A Sikh devotee offering prayers



Archbishop Desmond Tutu



The fourteenth Dalai Lama



Blessed Teresa of Kolkata

27-Apr-2007

Professor James R. Vreeland
INTS 401a & INTS 402b
Senior Essay
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Diversity, Religiosity and Inter-Religious Violence Lessons from an Empirical Study of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India

ABSTRACT

This paper grapples with the increasingly pressing phenomenon of inter-religious violence, seeking to discover the root cause of such violence and simultaneously exploring a means to counter this phenomenon. The paper posits that some of the current scholarship on inter-religious violence has focused primarily on explaining and mitigating the intensity, but not the occurrence of inter-religious violence. Thus, this paper begins by building a theory of the fundamental, basic motivations of inter-religious violence to under-gird some of the existing scholarship on the subject. Using an instrumental understanding of religion as a supernatural source of benefits for an individual, and as a phenomenon whose validity can only be verified by collective belief, the paper proposes that the validity of a religion for an individual is undermined when the individual encounters fellow human beings who hold different religious beliefs as evidenced by their dissimilar, often contradictory ritual practices. This loss of faith in religion reduces the compensatory value of religion for both parties and hence leads to discord or polarization. This paper argues that the discord resulting from the loss of faith is the fundamental discontent which can be exploited by politicians, exacerbated by economic disparity and so on. The paper uses an empirical analysis of Hindu-Muslim violence in India to establish the interaction between religiosity and religious diversity as the fundamental source of inter-religious violence. Finally the paper surveys a few examples of religious co-existence to present ritual syncretism amongst the masses as a means of eliminating inter-religious discord. The proposed solution does not advocate the impracticable policy of introducing inclusive, polytheistic ideals into the world's major religions. Instead, the paper suggests a more plausible strategy of ritual syncretism at the level of lay society, arguing that such syncretism will encourage uniform religious practices, thereby eliminating the fundamental source of inter-religious conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The differences between religions constitute the single most important cause of strife in the world.

– Voltaire

In today's atmosphere of increasing inter-religious violence, religious leaders and politicians across the spectrum often argue that violence in the name of the Gods is perpetrated by bigots, zealots, and even by atheists, but certainly not by truly religious people.¹ This paper suggests otherwise, i.e., it argues that *ceteris paribus*,² those people who depend most on religion are the most likely to engage in inter-religious violence. In addition, this paper suggests that greater religious diversity threatens the religious identity of individuals who benefit from religion and therefore increases the propensity of inter-religious violence.

This paper analyzes both the occurrence and the intensity of inter-religious violence. One of my key contentions is that some of the existing scholarship on inter-religious violence, such as Ashutosh Varshney's theory that institutional inter-ethnic engagement minimizes inter-religious violence, explains variations in the intensity but not the occurrence of inter-religious violence. The same can be said, to a much lesser extent, for Steven Wilkinson's theory that a higher level of electoral competition in a particular region has a negative effect on inter-religious violence. This paper presents the inter-religious discord or polarization that develops from the combination of religiosity and religious diversity as the fundamental breach between religious communities that can then be mitigated or exacerbated by a whole host of societal forces. Hence this paper argues strongly against the potentially destructive mixture of religiosity and religious diversity being encouraged in multi-cultural societies around the world today.

This paper also recognizes the importance of religiosity to millions of people around the world, and acknowledges the role of religion as a source of supernatural compensation for the disappointments and hardships of earthly life. The ideal world suggested by the analysis presented in this paper would allow for religiosity without religious diversity. This, unfortunately, is also impossible because of the multitude of well-established religions co-existing in the world today, and the propensity for humans to continually discover new faiths and divide old ones. In search for a possible answer, this paper looks at historical instances of both discord and harmony, finding that such instances are often marked by the presence and absence of ritual markers, respectively.

The paper finally concludes by offering ritual syncretism among the masses as a possible means of encouraging inter-religious harmony, thereby offering a means of achieving religious harmony in a world of increasing religiosity and religious diversity. This paper, however, only presents lay ritual syncretism as a possible solution to the bleak scenario presented herein and leaves much room for further research on this and other solutions.

Owing to the vast amount of scholarship on inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflict, the first half of the paper is devoted to summarizing the work that has already been done in the field.

¹ I refer to a whole spectrum of people, from conservative spokespersons such as Dinesh D'Souza ("Atheism, not Religion is the Main Force behind the Mass Murders of History") to highly-regarded religious leaders like the Dalai Lama ("Dalai Lama: Religion is not a cause of conflict").

² *Ceteris paribus* is a Latin phrase which is translated to mean "all other things being equal."

The following section looks at general approaches to the problem of inter-religious violence by scholars in the fields of political science and religious studies. The subsequent sections detail my probabilistic mechanism for inter-religious conflict and the key explanatory variables that will be used in my basic regression analysis. I then devote a section to summarizing the existing scholarship on inter-religious violence and incorporating these theories as control variables in my regression analysis.

After describing in some detail the dependent and independent variables to be used in my basic model, I present the results of my regression. Following this, I further refine my empirical analysis in the next section by using Gary King's method to address the problems of ecological inference, specifically the phenomenon of aggregation bias. At this stage, my empirical findings confirm that the propensity of inter-religious violence is positively correlated with religiosity and religious diversity. The empirical findings also reveal that religiosity and religious diversity are significant indicators of both the occurrence and intensity of inter-religious violence, while some of the existing explanatory variables account for the intensity but not necessarily the occurrence of inter-religious violence.

Based on these empirical findings, the paper then explores and analyzes different means to minimize inter-religious violence. Finally and most important, I present a series of key limitations in the empirical, methodological and conceptual underpinnings of this paper that lend themselves to further research and improvement.

UNDERSTANDING INTER-RELIGIOUS & INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT

Science is the knowledge of consequences, the dependence of one fact upon another
— Thomas Hobbes

The vast majority of political scientists study inter-religious violence as a subset of inter-ethnic strife. Like most political science scholarship, the existing literature on ethnic violence can be classified into four broad categories: essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and institutionalism. Essentialism was one of the earliest lenses used by scholars to examine the phenomenon of ethnic conflict. Essentialism, as postulated in the work of Max Weber, traces present-day ethnic identity and violence to its primordial roots by asserting that ethnic groups entertain a "subjective belief in their common descent [... that] differs from kinship precisely by being a presumed identity." (Roth and Wittich 389)

Instrumentalist scholars, on the other hand, argue that ethnic violence is a result of manipulation by elites who mobilize the masses along ethnic lines to further their own ends. Thus, for instrumentalists, ethnic identity is primarily created and shaped by manipulative elites. Good examples of this school of thought are the works Russell Hardin and the early scholarship of Paul R. Brass. (Varshney 322)

Constructivists postulate that ethnic identities are constructed by the instrumentalist elite, but insist that the elite needs to, at least selectively, draw upon existing primordial narratives of identity. Constructivist thought can be broadly divided into two categories based on the weight assigned to primordial and instrumentalist factors. Some constructivists, such as Paul R. Brass argue that "[ethnicity and nationalism] is the study of the process by which elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new

value to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group and to compete with other groups.” (Hutchinson and Smith 87) This pro-instrumentalist constructivist view is challenged by more primordial constructivists like Francis Robinson, who suggests that “the continuing power of certain ideas [such as Islamic brotherhood]” can have a motivating effect on the elites. (Hutchinson and Smith 217)

Still other scholars have explained variations in inter-ethnic conflict using institutional models. Arend Lijphart and Donald Horowitz are two of the more prominent institutional theorists. Their arguments often point to the presence or absence of political institutions as causes for ethnic conflict and violence. Lijphart’s concept of consociationalism is the academic basis and pre-cursor of multiculturalism. In ethnically diverse societies, consociationalism features the granting of cultural rights to minorities, and numerous other measures aimed at including minorities in all aspects of governance.

However, some problems with traditional interpretations of ethnic violence include the “lack of distinction” between ethnic identity and ethnic violence; the conflation of “ethnic mobilization for political action” and “ethnic coordination for economic and social activities;” and the question of “why ethnic identities are mobilized by leaders at all.” (Varshney 29-30) Thus, while essentialists and constructivists define religious boundaries; instrumentalists shed light on elite incentives to use these cleavages; and institutional theorists identify the best systemic structures to minimize the fallout of religious discord, detractors argue that these traditional perspectives are unable to explain exactly when, why, or under what circumstances inter-ethnic conflict occurs.

Recently however, political scientists Steven Wilkinson, Ashutosh Varshney, and Paul Brass have proposed mechanisms and explanations for inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence that explain much of the local variation in such violence. In his book Votes and Violence, Wilkinson maps out the electoral incentives, and lack thereof, for state and local governments to prevent inter-religious violence. Varshney, on the other hand, looks at inter-religious interaction in civic institutions as a means of mitigating inter-religious violence. Finally, Brass encourages us to look beyond general demographics and identify organized structures that precipitate and sustain inter-religious violence. I shall address these three perspectives in more detail in the section dealing with control variables.

What is missing from even the scholarship of Wilkinson, Varshney and Brass, however, is a general theory of the religious motivations of individuals participating in the violence. As noted in 2006 by Stathis Kalyvas in his comprehensive work titled The Logic of Violence in Civil War:

Individuals are simply absent from the current theories of civil wars. There is a tendency to see violence as being externally imposed on unsuspecting and, therefore, innocent civilians – a perspective reinforced by the discourse of human rights and echoed in instrumentalist theories of ethnic conflict according to which individuals are perpetually manipulated by politicians. Individuals [...] must be explicitly incorporated into theories of civil war in ways that reflect the complexity of their participation. (390)

At the end of the day, it is the individual who perpetrates acts of religious violence. Thus, few theories of ethnic conflict will be complete without insight into what makes an individual susceptible to engagement in inter-religious violence in the first place. To

construct such a theory, the next section shall delve into the annals of religious studies literature to identify the fundamental source of inter-religious discord.

THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

What Lies Beneath.
– Robert Zemeckis

The first systematic, rational-choice theory of religion was proposed by Stark and Bainbridge in their seminal text titled A Theory of Religion. According to Stark and Bainbridge, people prefer real rewards in life, but oftentimes cannot get them. Thus, religion, they suggest, serves as a supernatural general compensator. A supernatural compensator refers to “any postulation of reward according to explanations that cannot be unambiguously evaluated.” (Stark and Bainbridge 326) A generalized compensator is “a compensator that substitutes for a cluster of many rewards of great scope and value.” (Stark and Bainbridge 326) This assertion is supported by Thomas Hobbes, who, per James Vreeland, argues that “religious belief assuages the fear of corporeal death” and that religion “offers people eternal salvation, which is much more powerful than earthly preservation.” (Vreeland 11) Unfortunately, however, because religion promises imaginary rewards, religious individuals must depend upon the similar beliefs of the people around them, rather than on actual evidence, for assessing the validity of their belief.

Thus, most religions induce their respective followers to depend greatly on reassurance from people around them who share the same faith. Stark and Bainbridge go on to prove how “religious beliefs tend to be organized within a cultural system.” (Stark and Bainbridge 231) In addition, they make the point that religious individuals tend to preserve all aspects of their particular religion and culture, because “even the hint of disconfirmation of one part of a belief system announces that other parts will fall as well.” (Stark and Bainbridge 231) Finally, they note that individuals “are often willing to expend costs over time to maintain their compensators.” (Stark and Bainbridge 344) Thus, Stark and Bainbridge provide the basis for a mechanism of individual response to religious diversity, which I shall expand upon further in the next section. The term “religious diversity,” for the purposes of my paper, refers not only to inter-religious but also to intra-religious diversity. However, data-gathering constraints will limit the empirical analysis presented in this paper to the domain of inter-religious conflict.

The gist of my mechanism is that the different, even contradictory, religious practices of a visible minority challenge the validity of the majority religion. This decreased validity of the majority religion subsequently challenges the certainty of the compensation promised to those who follow the tenets of the majority religion. In this manner, the visible presence of the adherents of the minority religion will reduce the compensation that the followers of the majority religion derive from adherence to their beliefs. The idea that a visible religious minority would attract the ire of the majority religious community is complemented by Hobbes’s assertions that societal instability arises from religious diversity. For instance, Hobbes notes in Leviathan that for a religious person, co-religionists are to be considered “God’s subjects, [while] all the rest are to be understood as enemies.” (186-7) This follows from Hobbes’s assertion that the “expression of opinion directly affects other people while its mere formation affects no one but ourselves.” (115) In his analysis of Leviathan, Vreeland

also emphasizes that Hobbes “recognized religion [to be] of utmost importance to most people.” (11)

With religious diversity being an unavoidable characteristic of the modern world, however, Benedict Anderson proffers that the reduction in the truth-value of religion is inextricably intertwined with the subsequent rise of nationalism. In his book Imagined Communities, Anderson suggests that the “fundamental changes in modes of apprehending the world” that led to the fall of increasingly plural and fragmented sacred communities from the 17th century onwards were also responsible for the rise of nationalism. (15, 22) Thus, in some ways, nationalism could be seen as a product of the same forces that minimize people’s dependence on religion as a supernatural general compensator, and must hence be taken into account in the probabilistic mechanism I present below.

THE PROBABILISTIC MECHANISM OF INTER-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

The probable is what usually happens.

– Aristotle

This section provides a description of the probabilistic mechanism that leads to inter-religious violence. The mechanism below begins in a scenario of religiosity and religious diversity, and proceeds to show why inter-religious violence is a probabilistic, not determinate, outcome even in the presence of religiosity and religious diversity.

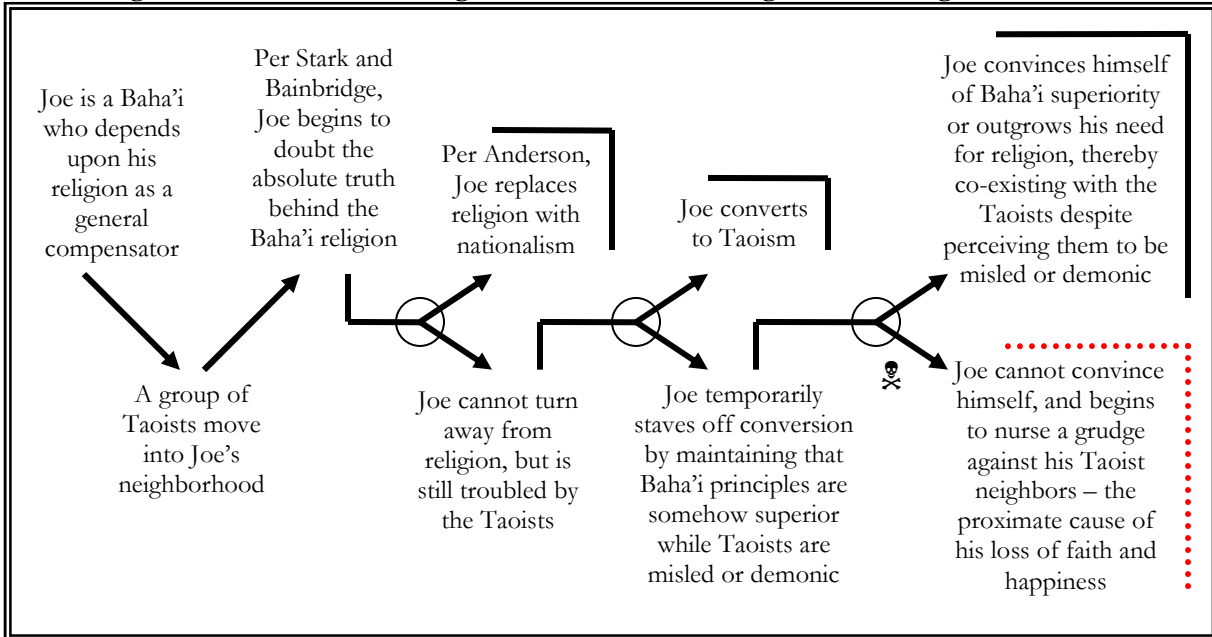
Using Stark and Bainbridge’s theory that religious people must depend upon other people for verifying the validity of their beliefs, I argue that one’s faith in a set of principles is fundamentally shaken when one is exposed to fellow beings who profess faith in another set of ideals and supernatural beings, often in direct contradiction to one’s own beliefs. The very existence of others who profess faith in different, often conflicting sets of principles and who are nevertheless apparently well-served by that faith creates doubt in one’s mind about the infallibility and credibility of one’s own faith. This leads therefore to a weakening of one’s faith in one’s own religion, which in turn adversely affects the lives of one who depends upon religion as a general compensator.

One could simply postulate that this weakening of faith as a result of exposure to another religion is what leads to inter-religious violence. I argue, however, that religious diversity in the midst of religiosity leads to discord, not necessarily to violence, thus only increasing an individual’s propensity to commit acts of violence. Additionally, the propensity to violence depends upon instrumental elites and other contextual societal factors that may take advantage of this discord, leading to drastically higher levels of violence.

However, there are further complications to the simple mechanism presented above. One problem is that it ignores the phenomenon of conversion. If another religion can create enough doubt in people’s minds to shake their faith in their own religion, it may even induce them simply to convert, rather than lead them to perpetrate violence against the adherents of the other religion. When we include conversion, the framework presented above would not lead to any violence whatsoever. Those whose doubts remain unshaken would continue to adhere to their original religion, while those who are very strongly affected by the other religion could simply convert.

Thus I am compelled to present a more nuanced mechanism, which functions as follows:

Figure 1: Mechanism of Religious Interaction Leading to Inter-Religious Violence



The mechanism represented in Figure 1 above is based on the hypothetical case of a Baha'i man named Joe³ who relies upon his faith in the teachings of Bahau'llah to see him through his disappointments and hard times. Joe is exposed to adherents of the Taoist religion and then, per the Stark and Bainbridge model, he begins to doubt the absolute truth of his own Baha'i faith. At this point we must consider Benedict Anderson's assertion about the rise of nationalism as a consequence of the forces that "fragmented, pluralized [...]" and eventually destroyed "sacred communities [...]" and languages." (19) If, however, Joe does not or cannot replace his religiosity with nationalism, he then has two choices – either he converts to Taoism or he reinforces his flagging faith by maintaining that Baha'ism is superior to Taoism.

Joe may be successful in convincing himself of Baha'i superiority, in which case he would remain a peaceful man with patronizing notions toward the Taoists, whom he would consider misled. However, Joe may also be unable to convince himself of the superiority of his religion. In this case, he is left with a deep mistrust and hatred of Taoist teachings as a result of his attempts to stave off conversion by denigrating Taoist principles. This mistrust will not allow him to convert to Taoism. At the same time, Joe's Taoist-induced doubt in Baha'ism, will have led him to lose the benefits of his original ardent faith in Baha'ism. This loss of the benefits of faith, and the loss of faith itself, is a direct consequence of the Taoist exposure, and thus Joe will begin to nurse a grudge against the Taoists.

³ Many friendly critics have tried hard to imagine themselves in Joe's position, and have criticized the mechanism described above for not properly predicting their responses. The real question we must ask before imagining ourselves as Joe is the extent to which we are dependent on religion as a supernatural general compensator. In addition, I stress once again that the mechanism I describe is probabilistic, not determinate.

The vague nature of the term “nurse a grudge” can be clarified by the term “polarization.” Polarization is defined by Eric Nordlinger in his essay “Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies” as the intensity of divisions between groups, when “a large number of conflict group members attach overwhelming importance to issues at stake, or manifest strongly held antagonistic beliefs and emotions toward the opposing segment or both.” (cf. Kalyvas 64) Stathis Kalyvas succinctly explains the use of this concept in civil war theory in the following manner:

In ethnic war, [polarization] refers to members of different ethnic groups. According to this logic, a group is targeted because of its position on the relevant cleavage dimension and, subsequently, individuals are victimized because of their membership in this group. Hence polarization explains simultaneously the onset of a conflict, its content and its violence. (65)

My mechanism, however, does not seek to explain the “content or violence” accompanying a conflict. In fact, all I seek to explain using the mechanism represented in Figure 1 is the propensity that Joe will initiate a conflict or will participate in the initiation of a conflict. Following the actual onset of the conflict, its content and its violence will depend on various exogenous factors such as those discussed in essentialist, instrumentalist and institutionalist literature. However, I argue that Joe’s grudge is the fundamental building block that such exogenous factors can build upon to induce Joe’s participation in an inter-religious conflict.

Thus, *ceteris paribus*, my mechanism predicts that dependence on the benefits of religion and exposure to adherents of different religions will increase an individual’s propensity to perpetrate inter-religious violence. Therefore, the mechanism presented above indicates that the very existence of different religious doctrines alongside each other may incite inter-religious violence.⁴ The variation in levels of inter-religious violence across regions and time can thus be explained at least in part by the levels of mass religiosity, i.e., the people’s dependence on religion as a general compensator and also by an individual’s exposure to adherents of other religions.

Thus Figure 1 indicates that although religiosity and religious diversity make an individual susceptible to committing acts of inter-religious violence, there are numerous checkpoints to be encountered before these two factors culminate in Joe nursing a grudge. Even after Joe begins to nurse a grudge against the minority, some precipitating event will be required to set off a spate of inter-religious violence. One can therefore assert only that religiosity and religious diversity increase the propensity of inter-religious violence, as against a more deterministic argument. Having emphasized the probabilistic nature of the proposed mechanism, I now turn to the basic model that shall be used to analyze empirically the correlation between religiosity, religious diversity and inter-religious violence.

⁴ One very recent such example may be the case of the massacre of thirty-two students and faculty by a student at Virginia Tech on 16-Apr-2007. In a note to his parents before the incident, the perpetrator Sho Seung-Hui purportedly “expressed disappointment in his own religion and made several references to Christianity.” (“Virginia Tech Gunman Writings Raised Concerns.”) Of course, it is too early to come to any conclusion as to what the perpetrator’s real motives were.

BASIC MODEL

It's elementary, my dear Watson!
– Sherlock Holmes

My basic model seeks to explain variations in the occurrence and intensity of inter-religious violence using four sets of variables – Varshney's inter-ethnic civic engagement, Wilkinson's electoral motives, and my concepts of religiosity and religious diversity. Quite often, the number of fatalities, i.e. the number of dead and injured, in inter-religious riots serves as a good proxy for estimating the intensity of strife between religious communities. The occurrence of inter-religious violence can simply be measured by the number of riots originating in a particular region over a period of time.

The number of dead and injured in all Hindu-Muslim riots and the frequency of riot-occurrence in the period between 1950 and 1995 have been recorded in a dataset created by political scientists Ashutosh Varshney and Steven Wilkinson. While this is an extremely convenient measure of inter-religious violence, Varshney and Wilkinson's decision to record all instances of Hindu-Muslim violence overburdens the concept of Hindu-Muslim violence. Therefore, we could encounter systematic error in measuring the dependent variable, because not every crime in which members of different religious sects are involved is motivated by religious intolerance and hatred.⁵ However, such systematic errors in the measurement of the dependent variable should cause neither bias nor inefficiency in our statistical analysis.⁶

Religiosity and religious diversity are the fundamental causes of religious discord identified in this paper. For the purposes of this paper, I define religiosity as the reliance on religion as a supernatural general compensator. I use the term "religiosity" under the assumption that individuals who depend most on religion as a compensator will be most likely to observe and preserve all aspects of their particular religion and culture.

Religiosity is a difficult variable to find a proxy for. Over the past two decades, however, the World Values Survey – a project that documents social and demographic change across the globe – has provided snapshots of per capita religiosity for various regions of the world at regular 5-year intervals. In particular, I focus on the World Values Survey variable "RitualReligiosity" that records an individual's level of activity in religious organizations.

Religious diversity can best be captured by the size of the minority religious communities proportional to the entire population of the region. Thus, if the minority community is insignificant, one would expect minimal inter-religious interaction. However, if adherents of minority religions constitute significant proportions of the population, there will be more inter-religious interaction. Such interaction, this paper argues, increases the propensity of inter-religious violence.

⁵ In asserting that the measurement error is systematic, I assume that all over India, the same proportion of Hindu-Muslim violence will be motivated by inter-religious discord.

⁶ Please note that the last few lines of this paragraph are taken verbatim from a research proposal I wrote up for another class, INTS 300a: Designing International Research, taught by Professor Douglas Woodwell.

This paper, however, is more interested in the interaction between religiosity and religious diversity rather than religious diversity itself. Thus, the variable of interest is the interaction between religiosity and religious diversity. I arbitrarily calculate this variable using the following equation:

Equation 1a: Calculation of Religiosity-Diversity Interaction Variable

$$\text{RelDivInteract} = (\text{RitualReligiosity}) \times (\% \text{ of Muslims})$$

The variable “RelDivInteract” thus generally has a high value for observations that possess high levels of religiosity and/or high religious diversity. On the other hand, a low value for the “RelDivInteract” variable generally implies an observation of low religiosity and/or low religious diversity. The final key explanatory variable I introduce is “RelDivSqInteract,” an interaction of religiosity with the squared value of religious diversity. “RelDivSqInteract” is thus largely an effort to capture any quadratic relationship between “RelDivInteract” and the dependent variable:

Equation 1b: Calculation of Religiosity-(Diversity)² Interaction Variable

$$\text{RelDivSqInteract} = (\text{RitualReligiosity}) \times (\% \text{ of Muslims})^2$$

In 2002, Ashutosh Varshney analyzed inter-religious violence in India in a book titled Ethnic Conflict and Civil Life. Varshney’s analysis uses the paradigm of Hindu-Muslim riots as a reaction to “exogenous shocks” or precipitating events. (47) Based on the exogenous-shock paradigm, Varshney convincingly argues that ethnic violence can be contained by institutionalized inter-ethnic and inter-religious ties that bring people of different backgrounds together. Thus, my model includes a variable “ActivSociety” that controls for an individual’s involvement in professional associations, labor unions, sports clubs, art societies, and environmental groups.

While Varshney focuses on civic institutions, Steven Wilkinson explores political incentives for the government response, or lack thereof, to inter-religious riots. In his book Votes and Violence, Wilkinson points out that democratic states “protect minorities when it is in their governments’ interest to do so.” (6) More specifically, Wilkinson notes that elected governments will protect minorities “when either of two conditions applies: when minorities are an important part of their current support base; or when the overall electoral system in the state is so competitive that there is a high probability that the ruling party will have to form coalitions with minority-supported parties in the future.” (6-7) Thus, one anticipates that higher levels of electoral competition in a particular region should have a negative effect on the level of inter-religious violence in that region.

For the purpose of my model, I measure electoral competition using the Effective Number of Parties Votes (ENPV) model. This model is particularly favored by most political scientists because it takes into account the vote share won by a political party. The ENPV model “places a higher weight on parties with high vote shares than on parties with low vote shares.” (Wilkinson 7) Thus, it provides a better measure of electoral competition than if one were to simply count the number of parties competing in an election.⁷

⁷ In 1998, for example, 41 political parties contested elections in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. However, two parties – the BJP and the Congress – accounted for 80% of the vote share in the state. This irregular

In addition to the explanatory variables noted above, my basic model will include control variables to narrow its scope and enhance its efficiency. Such variables will be drawn from baseline specifications of ethnic violence existing in current literature on the subject. Thus, the dependent variable and the key explanatory variables used in my basic model will be as follows:

Table 1: List of Dependent Variables and Key Explanatory Variables Used in Basic Model

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION (per state, 1950-1995)	POSSIBLE VALUES	MEAN (Std Dev)	HIGH (Low)
FATALITIES	# people killed & injured per 1000 people	0 upwards	0.029 (0.033)	0.120 (0.001)
RIOTS	# Hindu-Muslim riots per 1000 people	0 upwards	(0.001) (0.001)	0.005 (0.000)
RITUALRELIGIOSITY	Per capita involvement in religious organizations	0 (Don't Participate), 1 (Inactive), 2 (Active)	0.341 (0.266)	0.975 (0.000)
RELDIVINTERACT	(RitualReligiosity) * (% of Muslims in state)	0 to 200	7.536 (7.111)	25.154 (0.000)
RELDIVSQINTERACT	(RitualReligiosity) * (% of Muslims in state) ²	0 to 20000	196.099 (273.449)	1071.768 (0.000)
ACTIVSOCIETY	Per capita average of involvement in community associations	0 (Don't Participate), 1 (Inactive), 2 (Active)	0.200 (0.171)	0.550 (0.006)
AVGENPV	Average # competing political parties per year	2 to ∞	3.715 (0.803)	5.872 (2.751)
BASELINE CONTROL	Other causes for inter-religious violence	—	—	—

Please note that the possible values for “RitualReligiosity” and “ActivSociety” apply to an individual. Thus, per capita per state averages may lie in a continuum between the extremes.

ENGAGING WITH THE EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP ON RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not remains a fool forever.
— Ancient Chinese Proverb

Before proceeding with the model description, I shall quickly discuss my theory that religiosity and religious diversity increase the propensity of inter-religious violence in the context of the theories forwarded by political scientists Varshney and Wilkinson. As noted earlier, Ashutosh Varshney argues that “prior and sustained contact between members of different communities allows communication between them to moderate tensions and preempt violence, when such tensions arise owing to an exogenous shock.” (46-7) Varshney supports this line of reasoning by relying upon the relatively peaceful reaction to the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque⁸ in the old city area of Surat.⁹ Although the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque caused widespread rioting across India, Varshney’s fieldwork indicated that the old city area of Surat remained relatively peaceful because of the fact that

distribution of vote share was captured by the ENPV value for these elections, which was a mere 3.09. (Wilkinson 7)

⁸ The Ayodhya mosque, also known as the *Babri Masjid* (mosque of Baber), was destroyed in December 1992 by Hindu rioters who alleged that the mosque had been built on the ruins of a Hindu temple.

⁹ Surat is a city in the Indian state of Gujarat.

“Hindu and Muslim businessmen, who had worked together for years, were able to call on each other’s time, contacts, and goodwill.” (259) Varshney’s book is replete with other such instances where inter-religious ties minimized the intensity of religious riots.

However, Varshney’s theory of inter-religious violence does not address the fundamental source of inter-religious violence. This is because Varshney’s model assumes that riots occur due to “an exogenous shock – a riot in a nearby city or state, distant violence or desecration reported in the press or shown on television [...]” and so on. (47) Such an exogenous shock paradigm simply cannot address the causes of the original riot, distant violence, or desecration that served as the exogenous shock for all subsequent riots.

Steven Wilkinson’s argument, however, attempts to address both the occurrence and intensity of inter-religious violence. Wilkinson explains the variation in the intensity of inter-religious violence by positing that elected governments will protect minorities when “minorities are an important part of their current support base.” (6) Wilkinson explains the occurrence of inter-religious riots by indicating that political parties use “anti-minority mobilization” to “highlight [anti-minority] wedge issues” before important elections with the ultimate aim of rallying “a large proportion of [the majority] voters.” (23) For Wilkinson, such “wedge issues include spreading rumors about “Muslims’ alleged slaughter of cows,¹⁰ taking a Hindu procession route through a Muslim neighborhood,” and so on. (23)

Wilkinson supports his arguments using sound empirical analyses. It is interesting to note, however, that in six of the seven regression models used by Wilkinson to explain the occurrence of inter-religious riots, he finds that religious diversity is positively correlated with the occurrence of inter-religious riots at the 99% confidence level. (Wilkinson 133, 151) Thus, my contention is that the phenomena termed by Wilkinson to be “wedge issues” are in fact those issues that increase inter-religious discord, as described in the mechanism presented in Figure 1. In my mechanism, ritual exclusivity in the form of cow slaughter or public processions is one of the easiest means by which to challenge the validity of another individual’s beliefs.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Stand on the shoulders of giants.
– Google Scholar

Having decided upon and discussed the causal relationship between the dependent variables and the key explanatory variables, I expand the list of explanatory variables by including various controls – partly in order to protect against omitted variable bias, but more importantly to acknowledge the great deal of scholarship on the study of inter-religious violence in India. The first and most crucial control variable is the population of a particular state. *Ceteris paribus*, states with larger populations should record higher levels of inter-religious fatalities. As Paul Brass argues in his book Theft of an Idol, larger populations are susceptible to more riots because they offer “the ability to mass large numbers of people and the opportunity for crowds to move from place to place with some degree of anonymity.”

¹⁰ Despite the apparently trivial nature of cow slaughter, it has been a bone of contention between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent for many decades now. This is largely because many Hindus consider the cow to be a sacred animal.

(20) Because population will affect the measurement of all variables, I calculate all dependent and independent variables on a per capita basis.

In Theft of an Idol, Paul Brass also proposes a theory of institutionalized riot systems. Per Brass, such riot systems are informal groupings that are often responsible for “starting the riot and spreading it, providing noise, cover and additional recruits.” (16) However, the presence of an institutionalized riot system is oftentimes hard to detect, as such systems “are not open and formalized.” (Brass 15) Brass adds that some towns “known to be riot-prone do not necessarily have a full panoply of organized groups.” (17) As there is no comprehensive list of institutionalized riot systems, I am unable to control for the presence of such systems in my model.

In addition to writing about institutionalized riot systems, Brass also notes that the actual reasons for any particular case of inter-religious violence “are open to a multiplicity of interpretations.” (Brass 6) In fact, in The Logic of Violence in Civil War, Kalyvas decries the “tendency to deduce prewar actors, preferences and identities from master narratives of civil war.” (389) In fact, according to Kalyvas, “the observation that a great deal of violence flows from private disputes has been profusely reported and simultaneously marginalized.” (390)

Historians Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal agree wholeheartedly with Brass and Kalyvas when they point out in Modern South Asia that Hindu-Muslim violence often has little to do with any “ancient religious divide between Hindus and Muslims.” (Bose and Jalal 6) One such example is the Hindu-Muslim violence that occurred in Bengal during the early years of the twentieth century. As Jalal notes in her article on South Asia in the Encyclopedia of Nationalism, most Muslims in Bengal during that period were peasants who served under Hindu landlords. Thus the boycott of British goods proposed by the Indian nationalist movement in 1905 meant “financial ruin and greater indebtedness to Hindu landlords” for the Muslims. (Jalal 14)

Hence the causes of Hindu-Moslem violence in early nineteenth-century Bengal cannot simply be attributed to the mechanism of religious conflict presented in this paper. Therefore, I shall control for socio-economic disparity between the majority and minority communities using data on differences in literacy levels and in average outstanding balances per individual bank account per community.¹¹

In addition to overall socio-economic disparity, intense economic competition in certain trades and manufacturing industries has also been identified as a cause of inter-religious violence by many scholars, including Asghar Ali Engineer, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Moin Shakir, Zenab Banu, and Dildar Khan. (Wilkinson 27) In fact, this argument was proposed as early as 1886, when the then British Viceroy to India, Lord Dufferin, described the Delhi riots of that year as a product principally of “the Hindus’ jealousy of Muslims’ effort to improve their economic conditions.” (cf. Malik 9-10)

A more recent example is the 1984 Hindu-Muslim riot in the town of Bhiwandi noted by P.R. Rajgopal in his book titled Communal Violence in India. Even though the riot was seen

¹¹ Both these values are derived from the Justice Rajinder Sachar Report, a High Level Commission Report sanctioned by the Prime Minister of India to empirically study the socio-economic status of the Muslim minority in India. The report is available online at <<http://www.ncaer.org/downloads/lectures/pmohlc.pdf>>.

as an inter-religious clash, Rajgopal’s research revealed that it was simply “an organized attempt by Hindu cloth merchants to burn and loot the properties of their Muslim competitors.” (Rajgopal 81) While it is extremely difficult for a statistical model to capture such nuanced contextual motivations for inter-religious violence, I shall attempt to capture economic competition using the ratio of majority workers to minority workers engaged in self-employed trade.¹² The effects of this variable may be quadratic, and I shall hence introduce the squares of this ratio in order to properly control for this source of inter-religious discord.

While Brass, Jalal and Rajgopal encourage us to look at ordinary everyday reasons behind everyday conflict, another factor to be considered is Benedict Anderson’s argument that the forces of modernity lead to the rise of nationalism, sometimes as a replacement for religion, allowing me to introduce an explanatory control variable called “NationalPride” which measures the nationalist and patriotic tendencies of an individual. Thus, one would expect that the greater the patriotism, the lesser the reliance on religion as a supernatural general compensator.

However, even in the modern world, significant sections of society – particularly the underprivileged – remain dependent on religion as their sole source of happiness and succor. In early 1993, Nobel laureate Amartya Kumar Sen noted in an article for the New York Review of Books that “low levels of elementary education contribute to the gullibility [of the people to extremist politics],” and that the role of low educational levels in “sustaining militant obscurantism [is] very strong indeed.” Varshney acknowledges this argument in page 107 of his book and tests it using the following model:

Equation 2: Varshney’s Model to Test Sen’s Illiteracy Hypothesis
{For a particular Indian state “i” in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{Deaths})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{LiteracyRate})_i + \beta_2 (\text{MuslimPercentage})_i + \beta_3 (\text{TotalPopulation})_i + \epsilon_i$$

Table 2: Results of Regression on Model from Equation 2
{Reproduced from Varshney 315, Model analyzed using 68 Observations}

VARIABLE NAME	COEFFICIENT VALUE	P-VALUE
CONSTANT	−40.902	0.873
LITERACYRATE	+00.082	0.980
MUSLIMPERCENTAGE	+02.927	0.110
TOTALPOPULATION	+00.041	0.000

Adjusted R² = 0.2409

Based on regression results presented above, Varshney dismisses Sen’s illiteracy hypothesis, pointing out that the literacy variable is clearly insignificant. (Varshney 315) However, I interpret Sen’s argument to indicate that religious violence mainly depends upon, and is primarily perpetrated by, the uneducated and therefore gullible masses. Hence, Sen’s argument would imply that highly educated people have little part to play in perpetrating inter-religious violence. Thus, a better way to model Sen’s idea is to focus on the key explanatory variables in the context of uneducated populations alone.

¹² These figures are also derived from the Justice Rajinder Sachar Report.

In his book, Varshney also observes that the “share of rural deaths in overall rioting [in India] is miniscule.” (95) This observation confirms the implications of the mechanism presented above when viewed in the context that villages in rural India are often very homogenous and highly segregated by caste and religion. Thus, if religious interaction is minimal in rural India, this paper would suggest that the effects of rural populations on ethnic violence would, at best, be negligible. Combining this rural homogeneity argument with Sen’s illiteracy hypothesis, I argue that the key explanatory variables should be measured for uneducated urban populations alone. Table 3 below lists all the control variables I shall include in my model:

Table 3: List of All Control Variables
{Focused, as far as possible, on Uneducated Urban Population}

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION (per state, 1950-1995)	POSSIBLE VALUES	MEAN (Std. Dev.)	HIGH (Low)
LITERACYRATIO	Ratio of Muslim literacy to Hindu literacy	0 to ∞	0.189 (0.104)	0.405 (0.021)
BANKACCRATIO	Ratio of average annual bank balances of Muslims to Hindus	0 to ∞	0.362 (0.160)	0.641 (0.096)
TRADECOMPETE	Ratio of self-employed Muslims to Hindus	0 to ∞	0.274 (0.174)	0.628 (0.023)
TRADECOMPETESQ	(Ratio of self-employed Muslims to Hindus) ²	0 to ∞	0.103 (0.125)	0.395 (0.001)
NATIONALPRIDE	Per capita average of responses to query: “Are you proud of India?”	1 (Not at All), 2 (Not Very), 3 (Quite), 4 (Very)	3.496 (0.546)	2.825 (3.623)

Please note that the possible values for “NationalPride” apply to an individual. Thus, per capita per state averages may lie in a continuum between the extremes.

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF INTER-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN INDIA

If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions which well deserve the attention of even those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India.

– Friedrich Max Müller

In this section, I test the model constructed in the preceding two sections using data from various states across India. The primary reason for this choice is not, of course, Herr Müller’s extolment of Indian scholarly tradition, but the fact that there has been a large amount of research already conducted on ethnic violence in the country, some of which has been presented earlier in this paper. Political scientists focusing on ethnic conflict have for long been fascinated by this land of a billion souls, bitterly divided along lines of religion, language, region, race and caste.

The republic of India is comprised of twenty-eight states, all of which boast a different culture and demography. In addition to their cultural and demographic diversity, the states have exhibited varying levels of inter-religious violence over the past six decades. As a result, these states can form the basis for a cross-section or time-series analysis of Indian data. Unfortunately, data for all the explanatory and control variables are available for only

fourteen¹³ of the states.¹⁴ However, the sample shows significant variation in the dependent variable.

Figure 2a: Riots per 1000 People¹⁵

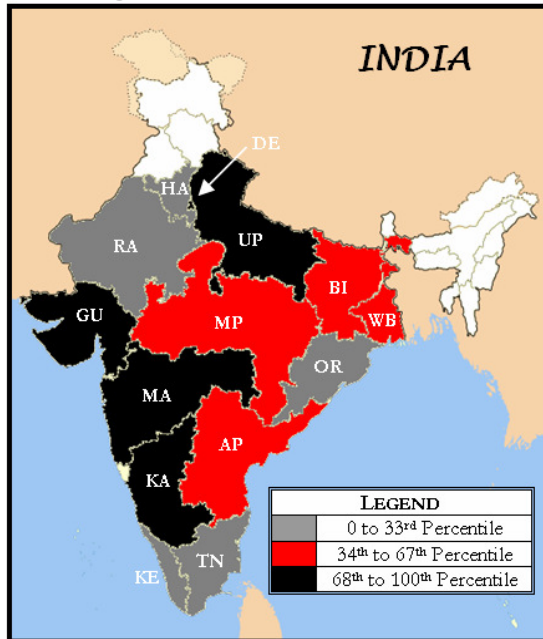


Figure 2b: Fatalities per 1000 People

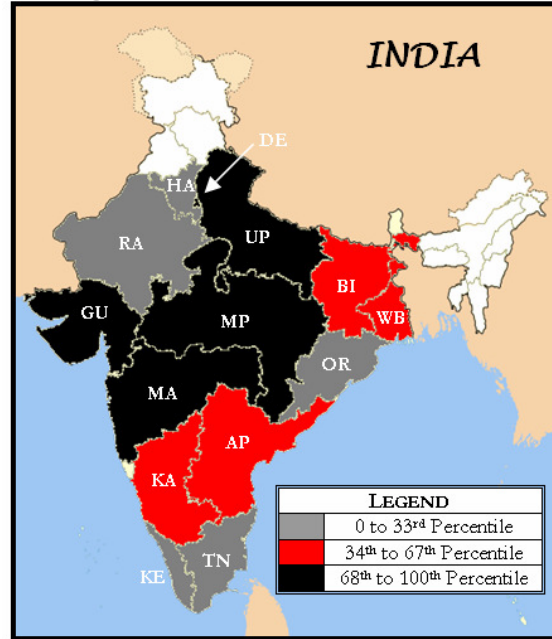
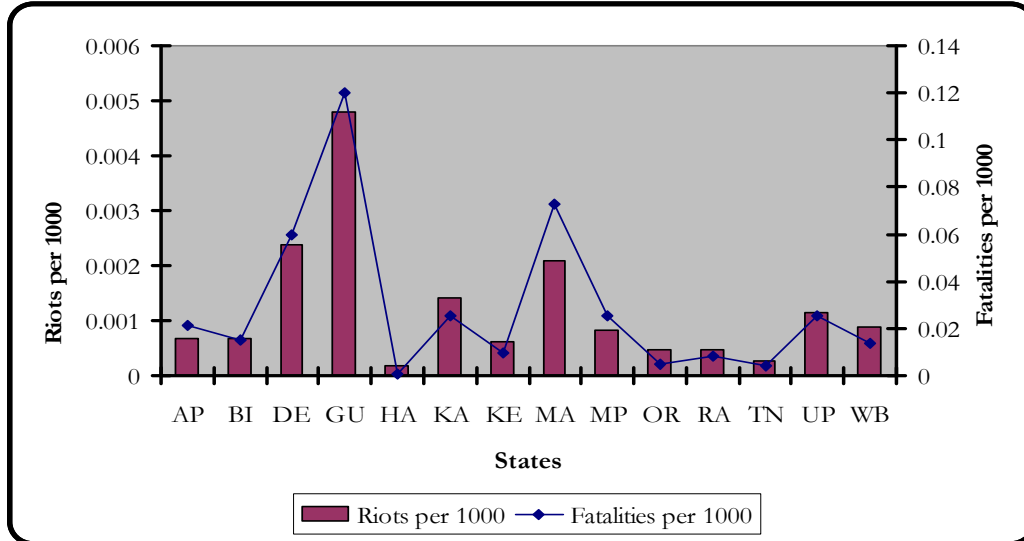


Figure 2c: Number of Hindu-Muslim Riots and Number of Resulting Fatalities per State between 1950 and 1995



¹³ The fourteen states, marked on Figures 2a and 2b are as follows – Andhra Pradesh (AP), Bihar (BI), Delhi (DE), Gujarat (GU), Haryana (HA), Karnataka (KA), Kerala (KE), Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra (MA), Orissa (OR), Rajasthan (RA), Tamil Nadu (TN), Uttar Pradesh (UP), and West Bengal (WB).

¹⁴ Not only does this severely limit the number of observations, it also introduces the risk of selection on the dependent variable. However, there is no pattern of omission that I have been able to discern, and I hence assume that there has been no selection on the dependent variable.

¹⁵ I am extremely thankful to Wikipedia admin “Nichalp” for creating the outlines used by me to build the maps used in Figures 2a and 2b. These are available at: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:India-locator-map-blank.svg>>.

The differences between the two maps in Figures 2a and 2b indicate that the relationship between Hindu-Muslim riots and the deaths resulting from such violence is not perfectly linear. This observation is further confirmed by the graph presented in Figure 2c. The argument I shall present in this section, then, is that religious polarization best explains the occurrence of inter-religious riots while Varshney's inter-ethnic civic associations and Wilkinson's effective party competition better explain the fatalities incurred during such riots.

However, Stathis Kalyvas makes an important point when he notes that the causal link between polarization and the onset of violence is "generally simply assumed rather than empirically confirmed." (65) The reasons for this include the unavailability of an objective basis for measuring pre-violence levels of polarization. The mechanism presented in Figure 1, however, provides us with two measures of pre-violence polarization: religiosity and the interaction between religiosity and religious diversity. In fact, my measure of religious polarization as a result of religious interaction follows Kalyvas's own line of thought when he writes that the "violence of civil wars [...] can grow from dynamics within the community." (377)

Using the explanatory variables discussed in the previous two sections, my proposed model can be described using the following equations, where the dependent variable is either the number of fatalities in a state per thousand people or the number of riots in a state per thousand people. Both variables are measured over a period of forty-five years, from 1950 to 1995.¹⁶

Equation 3: Religiosity Model
{For a particular Indian state "i" in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{DependentVariable})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{RitualReligiosity})_i + \epsilon_i$$

Equation 4: Religiosity and Religious Diversity Interaction Model
{For a particular Indian state "i" in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{DependentVariable})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{RelDivInteract})_i + \beta_2 (\text{RelDivSqInteract})_i + \epsilon_i$$

Equation 5: Varshney & Wilkinson Model with Controls
{For a particular Indian state "i" in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{DependentVariable})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_3 (\text{ActivSociety})_i + \beta_4 (\text{LiteracyRatio})_i + \beta_8 (\text{AvgENPV})_i + \beta_9 (\text{NationalPride})_i + \epsilon_i$$

¹⁶ I test my own model using two different equations (Equations 3 and 4) because of the multi-co-linearity between RitualReligiosity on the one hand and RelDivInteract and RelDivSqInteract on the other.

Table 4: Results of Ordinary Least Squares Regression on Models from Equations 3, 4 and 5
{Model analyzed using 14 observations}

	# RIOTS			# FATALITIES		
	EQ. 3A (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 4A (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 5A (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 3B (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 4B (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 5B (<i>p-value</i>)
CONSTANT	-0.00009 (0.770)	-0.00007 (0.806)	+0.00657 (0.169)	-0.00570 (0.539)	-0.00522 (0.500)	+0.22528* (0.093)
RITUALRELIGIOSITY	+0.00380** (0.000)	–	–	+0.10171** (0.000)	–	–
RELDIVINTERACT	–	+0.00037** (0.000)	–	–	+0.00999** (0.000)	–
RELDIVSqINTERACT	–	-0.00001** (0.000)	–	–	-0.00021** (0.001)	–
ACTIVSOCIETY	–	–	+0.00101 (0.716)	–	–	-0.00853 (0.910)
LITERACYRATIO	–	–	+0.00817 (0.145)	–	–	0.26591* (0.090)
AVGENPV	–	–	-0.00140 (0.147)	–	–	-0.04752* (0.079)
NATIONALPRIDE	–	–	-0.00128 (0.265)	–	–	-0.04544 (0.156)
ADJUSTED R ²	66.55	75.43	21.46	63.13	73.43	22.16

Please note that * indicates significance at 90% while ** indicates significance at 95% C.I.

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that Wilkinson’s “AvgENPV” is a significant factor in explaining the number of fatalities resulting from riots, but is an insignificant predictor of the occurrence of riots. Varshney’s “ActivSociety” appears to be an insignificant variable in predicting both the number of riots and the number of fatalities. However, please keep in mind that I challenge Varshney and Wilkinson based on models that analyze only fourteen observations. In addition, the variables “RitualReligiosity,” “RelDivInteract” and “RelDivSqInteract” are quite possibly endogenous with respect to both dependent variables, a theoretical modeling flaw which I discuss in the section titled “Empirical Limitations.”

Equation 6: Religiosity Model with Controls

{For a particular Indian state “i” in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{DependentVariable})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{RitualReligiosity})_i + \beta_3 (\text{ActivSociety})_i + \beta_4 (\text{LiteracyDisparity})_i \\ + \beta_5 (\text{BankAccDisparity})_i + \beta_6 (\text{TradeCompete})_i \\ + \beta_7 (\text{TradeCompeteSq})_i + \beta_8 (\text{AvgENPV})_i + \beta_9 (\text{NationalPride})_i + \epsilon_i$$

Equation 7: Religiosity and Religious Diversity Interaction Model with Controls

{For a particular Indian state “i” in the period 1950-1995}

$$(\text{DependentVariable})_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{RelDivInteract})_i + \beta_2 (\text{RelDivSqInteract})_i + \beta_3 (\text{ActivSociety})_i \\ + \beta_4 (\text{LiteracyDisparity})_i + \beta_5 (\text{BankAccDisparity})_i + \beta_6 (\text{TradeCompete})_i \\ + \beta_7 (\text{TradeCompeteSq})_i + \beta_8 (\text{AvgENPV})_i + \beta_9 (\text{NationalPride})_i + \epsilon_i$$

Table 5: Results of Ordinary Least Squares Regression on Models from Equations 6 and 7
{Model analyzed using 14 observations}

	# RIOTS		# FATALITIES	
	EQ. 6A (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 7A (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 6B (<i>p-value</i>)	EQ. 7B (<i>p-value</i>)
CONSTANT	+0.0053* (0.087)	+0.0066** (0.027)	+0.1914** (0.004)	+0.2244** (0.000)
RITUALRELIGIOSITY	+0.0058** (0.003)	–	0.1608** (0.000)	–
RELDIVINTERACT	–	+0.0005** (0.002)	–	+0.0138** (0.000)
RELDIVSQINTERACT	–	-0.0001** (0.004)	–	-0.0002** (0.000)
ACTIVSOCIETY	-0.0009 (0.565)	-0.0005 (0.657)	-0.0712** (0.025)	-0.0591** (0.005)
LITERACYRATIO	0.0477** (0.013)	+0.0503** (0.014)	+1.3401** (0.001)	+1.4512** (0.000)
BANKACCRATIO	-0.0003 (0.845)	+0.0019 (0.187)	+0.0031 (0.883)	+0.0611** (0.006)
TRADECOMPETE	-0.0451** (0.027)	-0.0532** (0.017)	-1.1567** (0.003)	-1.4068** (0.000)
TRADECOMPETESQ	+0.0289* (0.055)	+0.0379** (0.019)	0.6780** (0.011)	+0.9194** (0.001)
AVGENPV	-0.0013* (0.072)	-0.0016** (0.021)	-0.0457** (0.003)	-0.0547** (0.000)
NATIONALPRIDE	-0.0004 (0.524)	+0.0005 (0.341)	+0.0272** (0.029)	+0.0291** (0.003)
ADJUSTED R ²	83.55	90.37	95.09	98.82

Please note that * indicates significance at 90% while ** indicates significance at 95% C.I.

The results of the regression analysis of Equations 6 and 7 reveal that religiosity and the interaction of religiosity and diversity are significantly correlated with both inter-religious fatalities and inter-religious riots. In addition, the significant negative correlation of “RelDivSqInteraction” with inter-religious violence indicates that very large minority populations may minimize inter-religious violence.

The results also reveal that less disparity between religious groups significantly increases the propensity for inter-religious violence. This may indicate that inter-religious competition, not Marxist class-struggle, is the primary economic source of inter-religious fatalities. The “TradeCompete” variable, however, seems to suggest otherwise. The negative coefficient signals that a higher ratio of Muslims to Hindus in the self-employed industry may actually decrease the propensity of inter-religious violence. The mitigating impact of improved “TradeCompete” ratios upon inter-religious violence, however, holds true only for small increases in the ratio of Muslims to Hindus. As the “TradeCompeteSq” variable reveals, a significant rise in the ratio of Muslims to Hindus in the self-employed industry is correlated with higher levels of inter-religious violence, thereby conforming to the theory of inter-religious economic competition.

In addition, the regression results confirm Wilkinson’s theory while shedding interesting light upon Anderson’s hypothesis. The results indicate a significant negative correlation

between the effective number of parties and inter-religious violence. At the same time, however, the results also reveal a significant positive correlation between inter-religious fatalities and nationalism as expressed by national pride. This indicates that while the same forces that while nationalism may have been the product of the same forces that led to the fall of religion, nationalism itself cannot be considered a secular substitute to religion – in fact, nationalism appears to be positive correlated with inter-religious fatalities.

Finally, a disturbing aspect of the results for both regressions is the incredibly high R-squared value. While a high R-squared indicates that the estimated coefficients fit the data values well, an R-squared value above 90%, let alone 98%, is unheard of in the scholarship on inter-religious violence.¹⁷ My high R-squared values may simply be a result of the fact that each of my equations uses only 14 data points.¹⁸ Due to their reliance on state-level data, models 3 through 7 also suffer from aggregation bias, a statistical concern I shall address in the following section.

DEALING WITH ECOLOGICAL INFERENCE: AGGREGATION BIAS

*Plato, despair! We prove by norms,
How numbers bear empiric forms,
How random wrong will average right –
If time be long and error slight.*

– J.V. Cunningham, Meditation on the Statistical Method¹⁹

In political science methodology, ecological inference is the term used to describe the process of “using aggregate data to infer discrete individual-level relationships of interest when individual-level data are not available.” (King xv) The most important problem involved in ecological inference is aggregation bias, which results from the selective loss of information when individual-level data is aggregated. (King 16) King presents a series of mathematical tools to infer individual preferences despite the presence of aggregation bias. These mathematical tools have been programmed into software, which I used to analyze my own data.

For the purposes of this analysis, I needed data on the total number of actively religious people in a state²⁰ and also the number of people in each state who actually committed acts of inter-religious violence. While the former was obtained from the World Values Survey data, the latter was recorded in the Hindu-Muslim riot database compiled by Varshney and Wilkinson, as the number of arrests following an instance of inter-religious violence.

¹⁷ In fact, as Paul Brass notes in Theft of an Idol, even the best regression analyses on inter-religious violence have only “account[ed] for a percentage of the variance [in inter-religious violence] ranging from 25 percent to 50 percent.” (7)

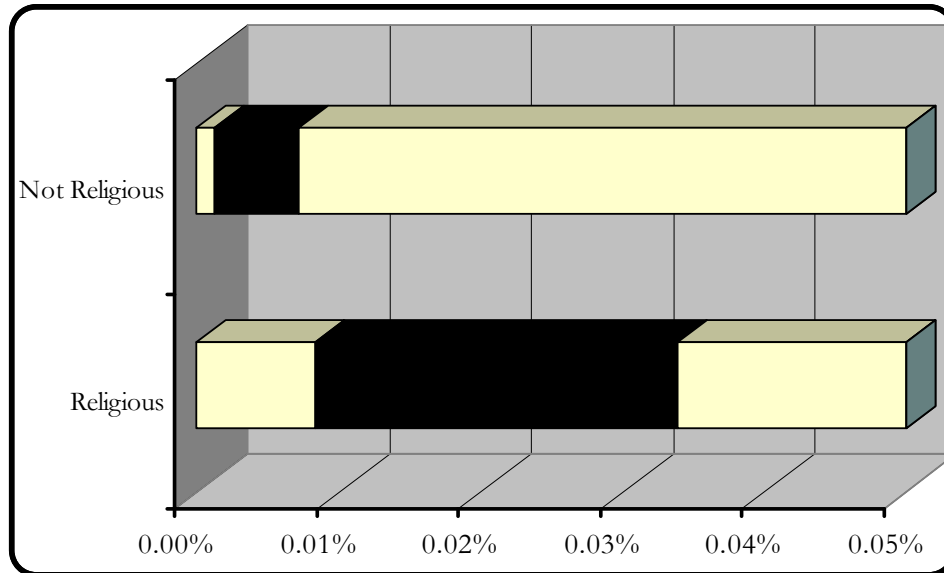
¹⁸ Working with such few data points runs a high risk of obtaining fluke coefficients that have no explanatory value whatsoever. (Fair 52) As Ray Fair points out in his book, the only real test of a model “is to see how well future observations are predicted.” (52) That, unfortunately, I have no way to test.

¹⁹ I first came across this interesting quote in chapter two of Professor Ray C. Fair’s book titled Predicting Presidential Elections and Other Things (2002).

²⁰ I use the term “actively religious” to mean those individuals for whom the World Values Survey variable RitualReligiosity was coded as 3 (refer Table 1).

King's analysis of my data revealed that the probability that a religious, urban, illiterate person would perpetrate inter-religious violence is between 0.0084% and 0.0339% respectively. In addition, the analysis revealed that the probability that a non-religious, urban, illiterate person would perpetrate inter-religious violence is much lower, estimated to be between 0.0012% and 0.0072% respectively. Therefore, according to the results obtained using King's solution to the ecological problem, the probability that a religious, urban, illiterate individual would perpetrate inter-religious violence is almost always higher than the probability that a non-religious, urban, illiterate person would perpetrate inter-religious violence. These results are presented in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Upper and Lower Bounds for the Propensity to Perpetrate Inter-Religious Violence using King's Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem



Kindly note that the dark portions indicate the range between the lower and upper bounds

The primary problem with the analysis presented above is the assumption that numbers of arrests during or after an episode of inter-religious violence correspond to the number of perpetrators of inter-religious violence. As Wilkinson notes in *Votes and Violence*, even the highest authorities of the police force in various Indian states are “not immune to political influence.” (68) Therefore, in some cases, police officers may be unable to apprehend the real perpetrators of the violence, while in other cases they may be forced to arrest innocent civilians. Despite this however, the results presented in Figure 3 allow me to assert with some degree of certainty that for a given individual, higher levels of religiosity are correlated with higher levels of inter-religious violence.

Having established the correlation between inter-religious violence and higher levels of individual religiosity, I look for a means to mitigate the deadly effects of religion-inspired violence. One could infer from the results of the regression analysis on Equations 6b and 7b that an effective way to deal with the problem of inter-religious violence would be simply to follow Ashutosh Varshney's theory of encouraging inter-religious engagement through civic society. However, Figures 4a and 4b reveal clearly that irrespective of the levels of participation in civic society, greater religiosity inspires much greater inter-religious violence.

Thus, the solution to inter-religious violence must deal more directly with the inability of religious individuals to coexist with each other.

Figure 4a: Increased Religiosity Leads to Higher Levels of Inter-Religious Riots irrespective of the Levels of Civic Society Involvement

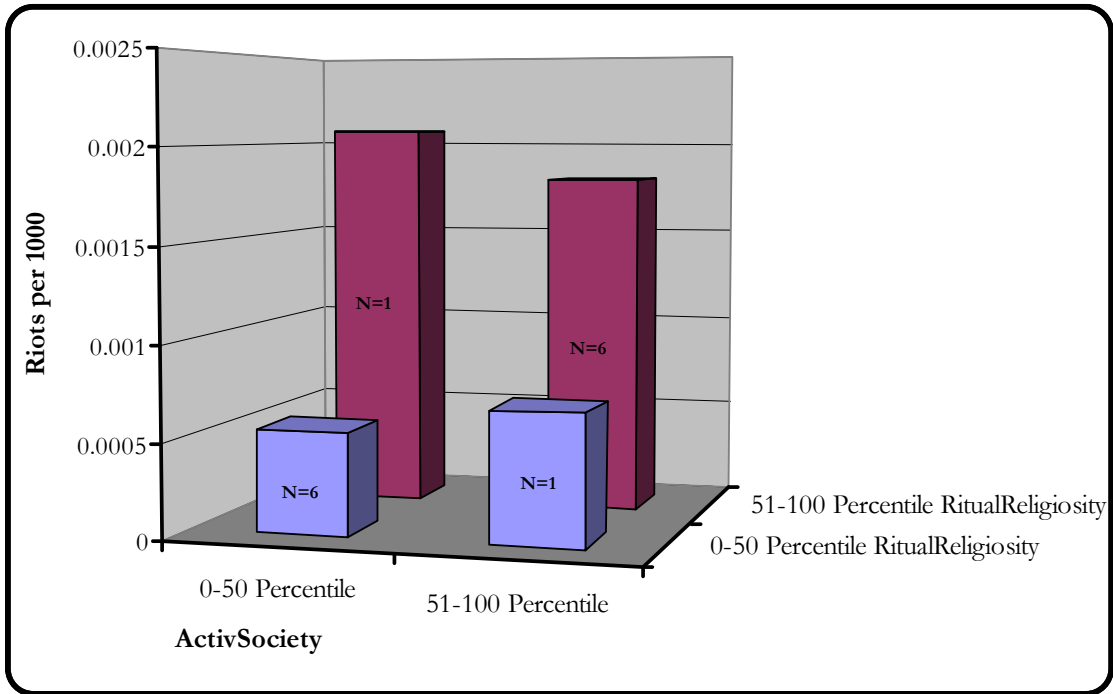


Figure 4b: Increased Religiosity Leads to Higher Levels of Inter-Religious Fatalities irrespective of the Levels of Civic Society Involvement

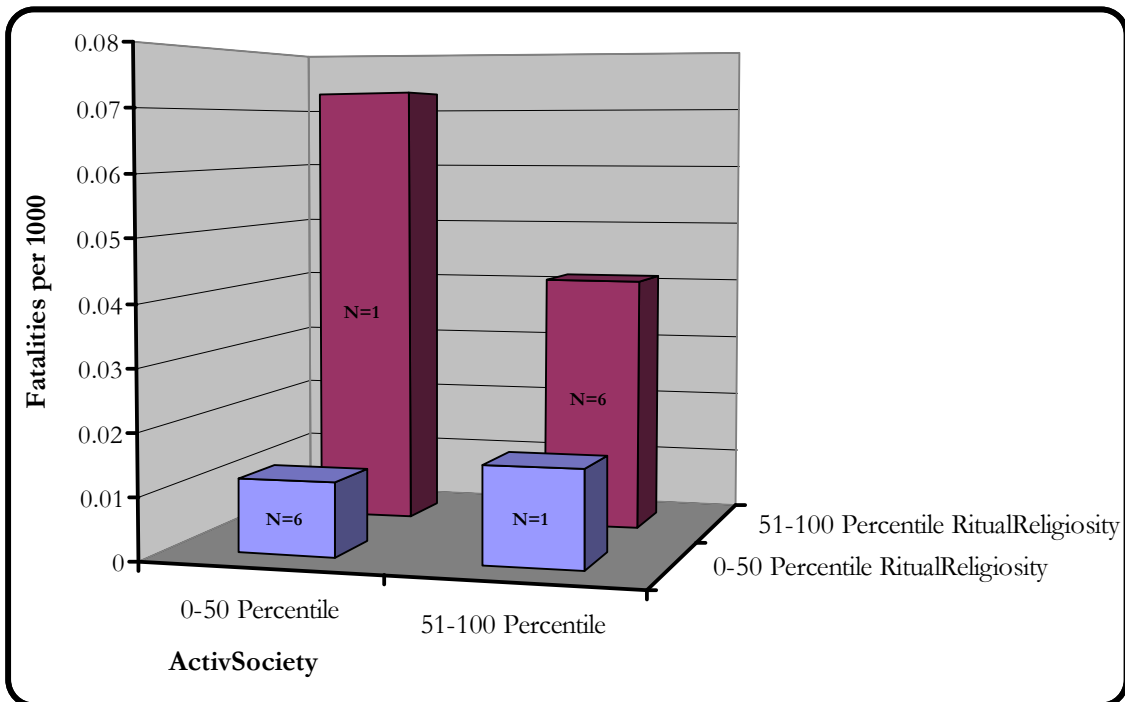


Figure 5a: Increased Religiosity Leads to Higher Levels of Inter-Religious Riots irrespective of the Levels of Electoral Competition

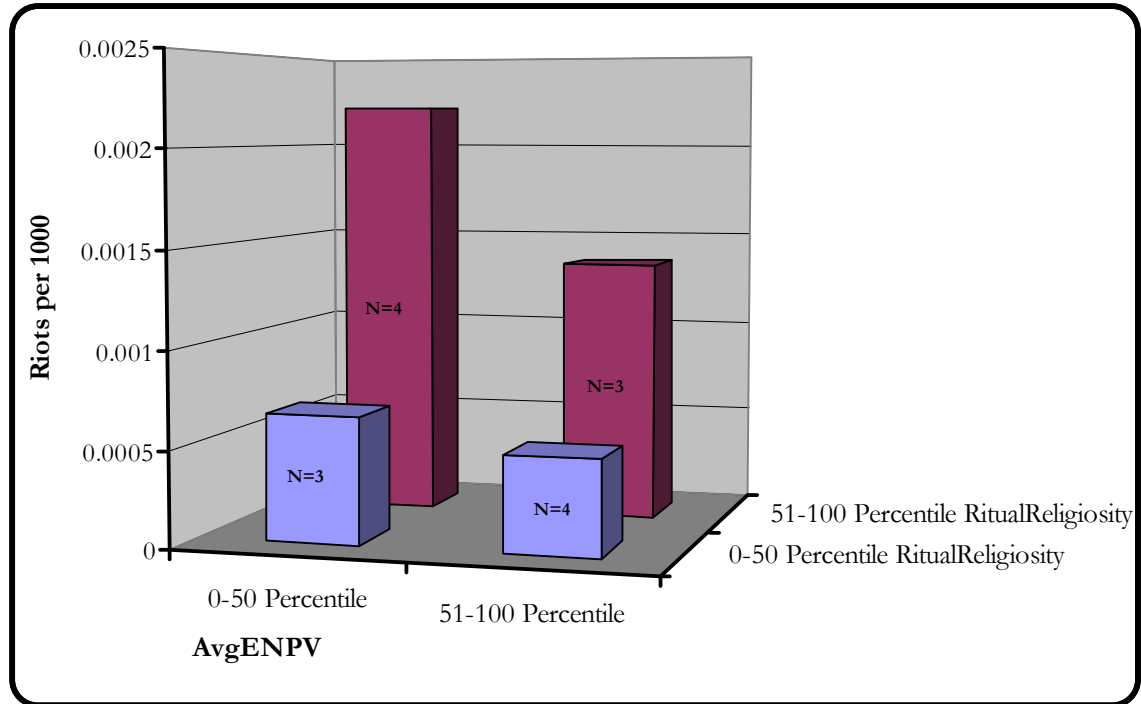
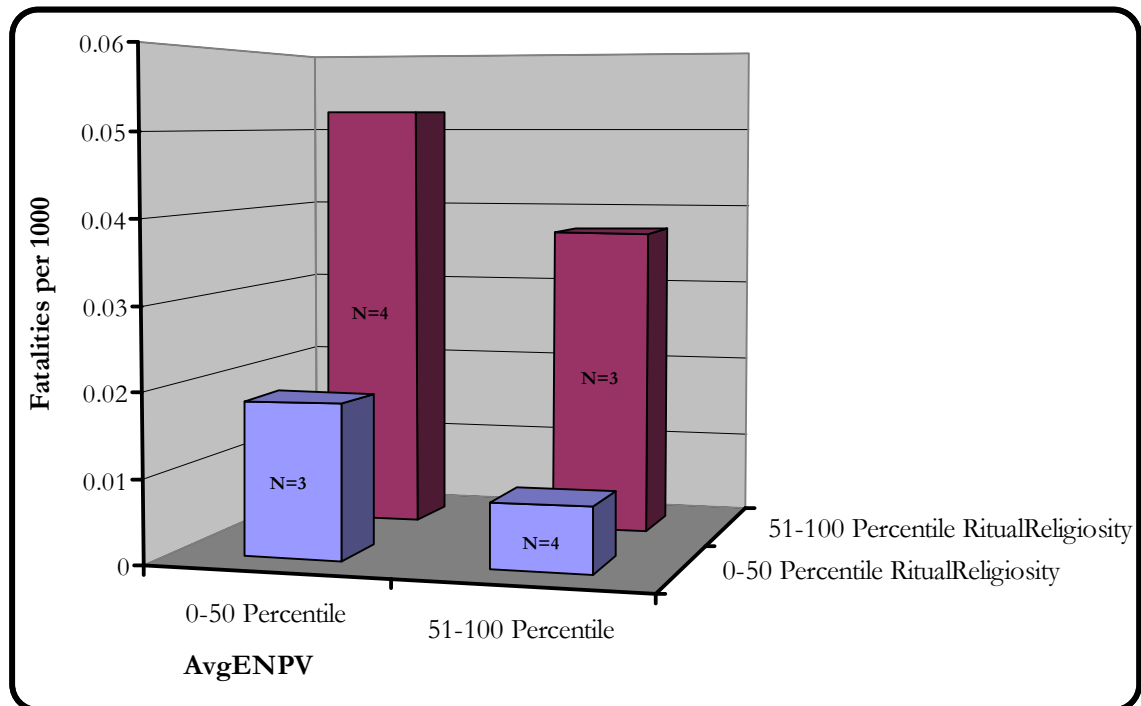


Figure 5b: Increased Religiosity Leads to Higher Levels of Inter-Religious Fatalities irrespective of the Levels of Electoral Competition



The graphs above indicate that as of now, the two most effective means of solving inter-religious violence fail to succeed completely when faced with high levels of religiosity. Thus,

in the following section I take a cursory look at History to identify other ways to mitigate both the occurrence and the intensity of inter-religious violence.

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS RITUAL SYNCRETISM

The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.

– Mark Twain

A perfunctory analysis of historical religious discord reveals that in addition to other important factors, ritual exclusivity and differentiation play a crucial role in delineating religious communities and therefore leads to inter- and intra-religious antagonism. For example, Vali Nasr points out in his book The Shia Revival that the public Shia display of mourning rituals during the Shia ceremony of Ashoora “proclaims the uniqueness of Shia Islam” and “underscores Shia distinctiveness.” (31-2) “No observer,” Nasr notes, “will remain unaffected by the display of Shias’ display of fealty to their faith.” (31)

If one were to trust the conclusions of this paper, it should come as no surprise that Nasr notes in his following paragraph that Ashoora draws a great deal of “Sunni opprobrium and objection.” (32) Nasr points out that every year at Ashoora, British governors of colonial India would “brace themselves for fights and riots” between Sunnis and Shias, and also Hindus and Shias. (45) This is identical, as Nasr notes on page 46, to the preparation before groups such as the Protestant Orange Lodge march through Catholic neighborhoods.

Ritual exclusivity also played a significant role in the Spanish Inquisition, arguably one of the worst instances of religious persecution in medieval Europe. In one of the first trials of the Spanish Inquisition in 1484, a resident of Castile by the name of Isabel is declared a heretic largely on the basis of evidence that she “followed the Laws of Moses and practiced its ceremonies.” (Homza 15) Thus, the primary evidence against the defendant was ritualistic in nature. The judgment focused on testimony that Isabel “lit new candles on Friday evenings, [...] prayed on Saturdays, [...] observed the Jewish ceremony of the Lamb [i.e. Passover], [...] she kneaded and ate leavened bread, [...] she did not make the sign of the Cross upon herself,” and so on. (Homza 15)

The ritual exclusivity prevalent during the Spanish Inquisition can be contrasted with the medieval intra-Christian debate between the Eucharistic doctrines of consubstantiation and transubstantiation, in which both rival groups were united by their reverence for the rite of the Eucharist. The consubstantiation and transubstantiation debate involves disagreement over the interpretation of Jesus Christ’s words when he declared at the Last Supper that the bread was His body, and the wine His blood. The debate is alive even in the modern era as evidenced by the fact that in 1965, Pope Paul VI called for “the retention of the dogma of transubstantiation together with the terminology in which it has been expressed.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica “Transubstantiation”) Surprisingly, however, this particular theological disagreement is largely limited to the Christian clergy and inspired hardly any violence among the masses. One reason may be that the Eucharist itself, as noted above, “has formed a central rite of Christian worship.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica “Eucharist”) Thus, one observes that the common rites of worship mitigated violence at the level of the masses; a concept I shall explore further in the following section.

HOW RITUAL SYNCRETISM CAN MITIGATE INTER-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Can I, as a Jew, hear echoes of God's voice in that of a Hindu or Sikh or Christian or Muslim?

Can I do so and feel not diminished but enlarged?

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (cf. McTernan 140)

While a religion's ideals and theology are often immutable pivots of the faith, rituals are less central to a religion. However, rituals are also the most observable aspects of religion, therefore serving – as described in the sections above – as markers of religious difference. Thus my solution to inter-religious violence focuses on ritual syncretism across world religions as a means of promoting religious harmony. This is consistent with the mechanism described in Figure 1, because if individuals do not observe religious differences that contradict their own beliefs, then their own religion is not challenged despite the presence of any number of religious traditions in their midst.

Please note that my proposed solution does not require all the world's great monotheistic traditions to morph into some form of eclectic pantheism. What I suggest, instead, is a conscious effort by religious leaders to meld the ritual practices of their diverse religions, consequently preserving both religious diversity and religiosity while simultaneously minimizing the propensity of inter-religious violence.

As Philip Converse observes in his essay titled "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," there is "a systematic difference between [the religious beliefs of] leaders and followers." (cf. Kalyvas 43) Converse also shows that "the true motivations and comprehensions of the supporters may have little or nothing to do with the distinctive beliefs of the endorsed elite." (cf. Kalyvas 43) My proposed solution simply harnesses this pre-existing divide between theology and ritual with a view to minimize the occurrence and intensity of inter-religious violence.

As noted earlier, Hobbes's writings also indicate an understanding of the effects of public display of religious sentiment when he noted that the "expression of opinion directly affects other people while its mere formation affects no one but ourselves." (115) Thus it was that even Voltaire, champion of tolerance and civil rights, argued that "Protestants should be less demonstrative in their display of religious fervor in public" so as to "promote a greater sense of civic harmony." (cf. McTernan 131)

Thus, I hypothesize that ritual syncretism is one of the few ways in which the diverse religions of the world can coexist in harmony. One step toward such ritual syncretism was the attempt two years ago by leaders of the Catholic Indian community to encourage "the study of Sanskrit, the adoption of Indic monastic life and the use of the Hindu rituals of worship" while retaining "Catholicity in the best sense of the word." ("Church to adopt Ashram, Aarti, Sanskrit," *Times of India*)

One potential problem that enforcers of such religious syncretism will run into is the choice of rituals that the masses should be encouraged to follow. In the case described above, the Catholic Church voluntarily decided to incorporate Hindu rituals. However, most other cases may pose a much more serious problem. Thus, the process of evolving a syncretistic

set of rituals must proceed carefully in order to avoid being regarded as simply a drive to assimilate minority rituals into the ritual structure of the majority religion.

For example, one ritual common to almost all religious traditions in India is the singing of hymns. These hymns, however, are somewhat divided along linguistic lines, with Muslim hymns²¹ being composed in Urdu, Persian and Arabic; Christian hymns in Latin and English; and Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu hymns²² in Sanskrit and various vernaculars. One way to encourage lay religious syncretism would be to compose hymns for all religions in every language. This is the case currently in the southernmost Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where Hindu, Muslim and Christian hymns are all composed in either Malayalam or Tamil, respectively. This may be one reason why Kerala and Tamil Nadu figure amongst the states with the least amount of both inter-religious riots and fatalities in Figures 2a and 2b.²³

As indicated in my introduction, the proposed solution of ritual syncretism must be further addressed. This section presents it only as a possible solution and leaves much room for further research. I conclude this section by postulating, however, that as the customs and practices of different religions intermingle in a world of ritual syncretism, the lay adherents of these diverse religions may finally begin to coexist in harmony – their differences out of sight and therefore out of mind; their ignorance of these differences a source of universal bliss.

EMPIRICAL LIMITATIONS

Numbers do not lie, but they have a great propensity to tell the truth with intent to deceive.

– Eric Temple Bell

Before we conclude, I must make a quick note of the limitations of the analysis presented in this paper. The empirical models presented in Equations 3 through 7 of this paper use anachronistic data.²⁴ The Varshney-Wilkinson dataset records the cumulative figures for inter-religious fatalities from 1950-1995. The World Values Survey, on the other hand, was conducted in 1995 and therefore only captures the levels of religiosity and nationalism prevalent at that point in time. Religious diversity is measured using the 2001 Religious Census of India and is thus, once again, anachronistic with most of the other data. The Justice Rajinder Sachar Report was compiled in 2005-6 and thus the control variables accounting for the socio-economic disparity and trade competition derived from the Report reflect 2005-6 figures.

The unavailability of contemporaneous data is the underlying factor for the most important flaw in the empirical analysis presented in this paper – the endogenous relationship between religiosity and inter-religious violence. In other words, Equations 3 through 7 in my paper use religiosity data from 1995 to predict inter-religious violence that occurred between 1950

²¹ Muslim hymns are known as *qawwalis* and are often associated with various strands of Sufi Islam.

²² Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu hymns are known as *bhajans* or *kirtans*.

²³ I would have loved to include a variable that measured the levels of ritual syncretism in the models presented in Equations 3 through 7, but unfortunately I know of no such empirical measure of religious syncretism.

²⁴ While I would have very much preferred to use more time-aligned data, such data were difficult to procure. I have synchronized the data in cases where I had access to primary data sources. For example, I used archival data from the Election Commission of India to calculate the average number of effective political parties in a state in the period between 1950 and 1995. However, significant field research would be required to synchronize any of the other variables.

and 1995. The only theoretical justification for such an analysis would be that religion and culture do not change overnight and can thus be relied upon to remain somewhat static over the years. However, as Stathis Kalyvas points out only too clearly:

Civil wars are highly endogenous processes. Collective and individual preferences, strategies, values and identities are constantly shaped and re-shaped in the course of a war. Hence theories that assume actors and preferences to be frozen in their prewar manifestations, and rely on this assumption to explain various aspects of civil wars, such as their onset, duration or termination, will be biased. (389)

Thus, there is almost no way for me to argue that levels of religiosity would have remained constant over five decades of intermittent religious violence.

In addition to being anachronistic, my data may also be affected by selection bias. The Varshney-Wilkinson dataset which I use to measure inter-religious violence is primarily based on “a reading of the daily Times of India newspaper.” (Varshney, “Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society” 395) Although Varshney points out that this is a newspaper that has a truly national coverage of Hindu-Muslim violence, the Times of India is, for the most part, an urban English-language newspaper. Despite its impressive circulation of 1.7 million, it only caters to 1.3% of India’s 133.1 million readers. (Registrar of Newspapers) Thus, the content of the Times of India may primarily cater to an urban, English-speaking readership. This may constitute a potentially severe selection bias leading us to record only urban instances of inter-religious violence.

Therefore, Varshney’s observation that the “share of rural deaths in overall rioting [in India] is miniscule” may be a reflection of selection bias rather than an indication of ethnic peace in rural India. (95) I control for this selection bias by focusing my explanatory variables on the uneducated urban population. However, the scope of my study is then limited to urban inter-religious violence, as opposed to inter-religious violence in general. Finally, the extremely small size of the dataset raises doubts about the validity of the regression. This could be addressed by adding a time-series component to the cross-sectional models presented in Equations 3 through 7.

One must also challenge the extent to which any survey, however methodologically sound, can capture the religiosity of an individual. Not only is the World Values Survey attempting the difficult task of enumerating the levels of individual religiosity, it is doing so on a global scale. This is problematic because different religions have very different central tenets along which one can measure religiosity. Some of the most important tenets of Indic religions, for example, are the concepts of karma and rebirth. For the Buddhists, Jains, and some Hindu sects, in fact, the Gods too are subject to the supreme laws of karma and rebirth. Thus, Hindus’ responses to the World Values Survey questions about their belief in God and about the comfort they draw from God may not correspond at all to their levels of religiosity.

I have tried to minimize such measurement error by focusing on the World Values Survey question that measures an individual’s involvement in religious activities and organizations. However, the extent of correlation between involvement in religious organizations and religiosity is also debatable, but this is the best measure I could use. Finally, in addition to these empirical concerns, this paper can also be critiqued at a conceptual level.

A CONCEPTUAL CRITIQUE

Sometimes a concept is baffling not because it is profound but because it is wrong.

– Edward O. Wilson

In Theft of an Idol, Paul Brass presents a comprehensive critique of statistical analysis, especially when applied to incredibly contextual and nuanced issues such as the reasons for inter-religious violence. In his book, Brass asserts that regression models such as those presented in this paper “eliminate agency and responsibility from their explanations.” According to Brass, these models “objectify a demographic situation and fail to identify specific groups, persons, organizations and state agents who actually inaugurate and sustain riotous events and commit the arson, property destruction and murder.” (8) Brass goes on to note that even the best regression analyses can only “account for a percentage of the variance [in inter-religious violence] ranging from 25 percent to 50 percent.” (7) Brass thus makes the important point that “a substantial amount of the variance always remains unexplained.” (7) My only defense against such a cogent critique of statistical analysis is that this paper attempts to take a small step closer to explaining more of the variance in inter-religious violence by introducing one more significant explanatory variable.

Brass also notes that examining violence through the lens of religion and community provides “categorical explanations for particular events that disguise and certainly always simplify, covering a variety of personal and political behaviors.” (25) This line of argument casts doubt on the instances of inter-religious fatalities recorded by Varshney and Wilkinson used in my regression analyses, by suggesting that such fatalities may well have non-religious origins and causes. As noted earlier, Varshney and Wilkinson’s decision to record all instances of Hindu-Muslim violence overburdens the concept of Hindu-Muslim violence. We will thus encounter systematic error in measuring the dependent variable, because not every crime in which members of different religious sects are involved will be motivated by religious intolerance and hatred. However, such systematic errors in the measurement of the dependent variable will cause neither bias nor inefficiency in our statistical analysis.²⁵

Finally, Brass critiques the tendency of models such as the one I present in this paper to “disrespect the beliefs of the people,” to “blame the people for incidents [of inter-religious violence],” and to “implicate the people’s values in them,” when in fact such incidents may be “creations out of the material of everyday existence” or out of the “politically manipulated movements of crowds who have been persuaded to believe that their problems are due to the other [community] and will be solved by the other’s elimination.” (26)

However, my aim throughout this paper has been to address exactly the manner in which inter-religious discord is created out of the material of everyday existence, namely, the mere interaction between different religious communities. I have subsequently attempted to show that is this very discord that political manipulators can take advantage of. Thus, the concept of politically-motivated inter-religious violence is not mutually exclusive with the mechanism I present in Figure 1. In fact, politicians will find it much easier to persuade Hindus to believe that their problems will be solved by the elimination of the Muslims if the Hindus

²⁵ Please note again that this response to Brass’s critique is taken verbatim from a research proposal I wrote up for another class, INTS 300a: Designing International Research, taught by Professor Douglas Woodwell.

already believe that the Muslims are the proximate cause of the Hindus' loss of faith and happiness. In addition, because my mechanism is based on an instrumentalist theory of religion, it implicates neither the beliefs nor the values of any particular individual or religious tradition.

However, most religious people would be incredibly wary of the instrumentalist framework of religion I rely upon in this paper and also of my proposed solution of evolving syncretistic rituals, which may be perceived as a manipulation of their religious beliefs. This paper, therefore, has not addressed a means of ensuring the active support and participation of religious leaders and their lay followers in the proposed solution of evolving a more syncretistic set of rituals for the world's major religions.

CONCLUSION

This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

– The Rt. Hon. Sir Winston Churchill

This paper provides somewhat flawed but nevertheless significant empirical evidence that the interaction between religiosity and religious diversity must be considered an important cause of inter-religious violence. In addition, I have tried to show that some of the existing scholarship on inter-religious violence is better suited to understand the intensity of inter-religious violence as opposed to its occurrence. Therefore, more work is needed on the source of inter-religious discord and violence.

As the two sections above indicate, however, there is significant scope for improving the analysis presented in this paper. My aim in this paper was only that it would open the door for more methodologically and conceptually sound analyses of this important aspect of inter-religious violence and for an equally sound theoretical and empirical exploration of ritual syncretism as a solution to the problem of inter-religious conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You!

– Nikhil Harish Seshan

The single most important individual behind this paper is, for better or worse, not me. That position rightfully belongs to Professor James Raymond Vreeland of the Political Science Department here at Yale University. The broad theoretical and methodological approaches for this paper were conceived by Professor Vreeland and executed largely per his express instructions.

This paper also presents the cumulative effort of my fellow students in the “International Cooperation” senior seminar – Andrew Beaty SM '07, Betsey Boutelle SM '07, Elizabeth Debevoise PC '07, Ivan Dremov PC '07, Monique Marez JE '07, Natasha Rampa MC '07, Caroline Savello CC '09 and Stephanie Speirs SM '07. The content and style of this paper owe a great deal to the little that I could gather from conversations with each of these individuals and from their exemplary essays.

Other scholars who have incurred tremendous opportunity cost by expending their valuable time and energy critiquing this paper are Professor Phyllis Granoff and Marko Geslani '11 of the Religious Studies department, Professor Mridu Rai of the History department, Uday Chandra '12 of the Political Science department, Scott Caplan SY '06 HLS '09, Gaurav Sajjanhar SY '06, Arvind Bhaskar TD '07 and Kunal Patel BR '08.

My writing, prosaic as it is, would have been atrocious if it were not for the sincere and invaluable advice of three of the most wonderful writing tutors at Yale – Ms. Susan Froetschel,²⁶ Ms. Jan Hortas and Ms. Deborah Tenney.

In addition, much of the empirical analysis presented in this paper would have been impossible without the timely assistance of Dr. Abu Saleh Shariff and Dr. Girish Chander Khulbe of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (India), Professor T.N. Srinivasan of the Economics department, Professor Santanu Gupta of the XLRI School of Business and Human Resources (India), Dr. Vandana Sipahimalani-Rao of the World Bank (New Delhi) and Mrs. Kalyani Harish Seshan.

Finally I would like to conclude by thanking the numerous scholars whose work I have engaged with in this paper, for it was their work that inspired me to make an inquiry into the incredibly pressing yet simultaneously fascinating phenomenon of inter-religious violence.



²⁶ Ms. Froetschel is currently an Assistant Editor for Yale Global Online.

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FRONT PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS

"A Muslim man pleading with Hindu rioters for his life in Gujarat (2002)"

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"A Sikh devotee offering prayers"

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"Archbishop Desmond Tutu"

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