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# **Religious Parties, Minority Voters, and Turncoat Patrons: Evidence from India**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the dynamics of ethnic patronage in electoral systems and the influence of religious-majoritarian parties on the voting preferences of ethnic groups, focusing on the Bhils, an indigenous Scheduled Tribe in Western India. It explores whether Bhil voters, historically marginalized yet supporting the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in recent elections, prioritize religious identity over ethnic and material interests. Employing a mixed-methods approach in the Nandurbar federal constituency, including a visual-conjoint survey experiment with 678 voters from 40 Bhil villages and interviews with a sub-sample of 80 voters, the study reveals that Bhil voters predominantly prefer tribal identity and material interests over Hindu-nationalist party platforms. Subgroup analysis indicates that BJP-leaning Bhil voters exhibit a stronger preference for ethnic and material issues compared to non-BJP voters. Interviews corroborate these findings, showing a continued attachment to tribal identity and reluctance to support Hindu-nationalist mobilization. The study finds enduring clientelist loyalty to local leaders, especially among BJP voters, significantly influencing voting behaviour. The paper's contribution lies in illuminating the complexities of patronage democracies, particularly in the context of the resurgence of majoritarian parties. It underscores the resilience of ethnic and material interests in the face of religious-majoritarian politics and highlights the limitations of majoritarian parties in supplanting these interests among marginalized groups like the Bhils in contexts where the parties have limited historical competitiveness.

## **Résumé**

Cette thèse étudie la dynamique du patronage ethnique dans les systèmes électoraux et l'influence des partis majoritaires religieux sur les préférences de vote des groupes ethniques, en se concentrant sur les Bhils, une tribu autochtone classée parmi les Scheduled Tribes dans l'ouest de l'Inde. Il explore si les électeurs Bhils, historiquement marginalisés mais ayant soutenu le parti nationaliste hindou Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lors des récentes élections, privilégient l'identité religieuse sur les intérêts ethniques et matériels. Adoptant une approche méthodologique mixte dans la circonscription fédérale de Nandurbar, comprenant une enquête expérimentale visuelle conjointe avec 678 électeurs de 40 villages Bhils et des entretiens avec un sous-échantillon de 80 électeurs, l'étude révèle que les électeurs Bhils préfèrent majoritairement l'identité tribale et les intérêts matériels aux plateformes du parti nationaliste hindou. L'analyse de sous-groupes indique que les électeurs Bhils penchent vers le BJP montrent une préférence plus forte pour les questions ethniques et matérielles par rapport aux électeurs non BJP. Les entretiens corroborent ces conclusions, montrant un attachement continu à l'identité tribale et une réticence à soutenir la mobilisation nationaliste hindoue. L'étude constate une loyauté clientéliste durable envers les dirigeants locaux, en particulier parmi les électeurs du BJP, influençant significativement le comportement de vote. La contribution de l'article réside dans la mise en lumière des complexités des démocraties de patronage, particulièrement dans le contexte de la résurgence des partis majoritaires. Il souligne la résilience des intérêts ethniques et matériels face à la politique majoritaire religieuse et met en évidence les limitations des partis majoritaires à supplanter ces intérêts parmi les groupes marginalisés comme les Bhils dans des contextes où les partis ont une compétitivité historique limitée.

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# 1 Overview

In electoral systems marked by ethnic patronage, leaders build client networks by offering individualized material rewards to their constituents in return for their loyalty to the patron, often with appeals to an ethnic in-group (Chandra 2004; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). However, what happens when religious-majoritarian parties capture these ethnic leaders and gain the votes of their client networks? Retained over a duration by such parties and their religious affiliates, do these voters come to prioritize religious identity issues over ethnic and material interests?

This thesis explores this question in the context of the Bhils, a group of indigenous peoples categorized as Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the western region of India. While experiencing historic and ongoing socio-economic marginalization, the Bhils overwhelmingly elected candidates of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 and 2019 federal elections, with numerous turncoat ex-opposition party Bhils politicians joining the BJP. While this shift can be credited to the enduring nature of ethnic patronage networks (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007) and non-state service provision (Thachil 2014) amongst minority groups that allow parties to gain new voters, the implications of a religious-majoritarian party such as the BJP retaining the Bhil vote on the Bhils' vote-choice determinants, especially in historically uncompetitive seats through elite capture, needs evaluation. The BJP's affiliate Hindu nationalist organizations have mobilized STs, including the Bhils, on religious-majoritarian issues. In early 2023 the Janjati Suraksha Manch (JSM) organized Bhils and other tribes in support of revoking the Scheduled Tribe status, and with it the benefits of affirmative action, of Bhils who have converted to religions other than Hinduism, claiming an essential relationship between the Bhils' tribal and Hindu identity. Consequently, the following question needs probing — being retained by a religious-majoritarian party for over a decade since 2014, have Bhil voters come to prioritize Hindu-nationalist issues in the context of vote choice over their tribal identity and material interests? Or do tribal and material interests largely determine the vote, with local Bhil patrons continuing to hold sway over their voters?

In examining these questions, this thesis adopts a case-study approach with a mixed meth-

ods research strategy through original fieldwork in the federal constituency of Nandurbar. First, through a preregistered novel in-person visual-conjoint survey experiment with a stratified sample of 678 voters in 40 Bhil villages, this thesis tests the salience of Hindu-nationalist party platforms against tribal identity and material interests, finding that Bhil voters consistently prefer the latter over the former across three different attributes. Furthermore, exploratory subgroup analysis concludes that Bhil voters leaning toward the BJP show a greater preference for tribal and material issues compared to those leaning towards non-BJP parties, providing preliminary pointers that the Bhils voting for the BJP largely do so due to ethnic and material interests. Second, through subsequent interviews following the visual conjoint with a stratified sub-sample of 80 voters in 10 Bhil villages, this thesis corroborates evidence from the conjoint, further indicating that Bhil voters continue to show greater attachment to tribal identity and disfavour mobilization on Hindu-nationalist grounds. Furthermore, the interviews also provide evidence of an enduring clientelist loyalty to their local leaders largely determining the vote-choice of Bhils, especially amongst those voting for the BJP. In doing so, this thesis does not dismiss the growing salience of Hindu nationalism amongst the Bhils. However, this thesis qualifies its argument that in areas where religious-majoritarian parties bank on turncoat ethnic minority politicians to capture seats in which they have been uncompetitive, these parties can be expected to fail in overtaking the ethnic and material interests of their newly gained voters and remain dependent on the local patrons of these voters to retain them, at least in the near term.

## **2 Bhils for the BJP: The Unlikely Base**

Bhils are a collection of tribes that constituted the Bhil tribal kingdoms in the precolonial and colonial era, but in independent India were split across the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Khan and Thakur 2023). Due to historic displacement from fertile lands to isolated arid and semi-arid hills, the Bhils, with a population of 17 million, face amongst the highest levels of poverty and rank low in health and economic indicators in India (World Bank 2011). The Indian Constitution categorized the numerous Bhil communities as Scheduled Tribes

(ST), granting them affirmative action in public services and employment while reserving political seats for STs at all levels of governance. The Western Tribal Belt of India, where the Bhils are dominant, forms a continuous chain of 12 seats reserved in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament), guaranteeing that only an individual from these tribes can run for political office.

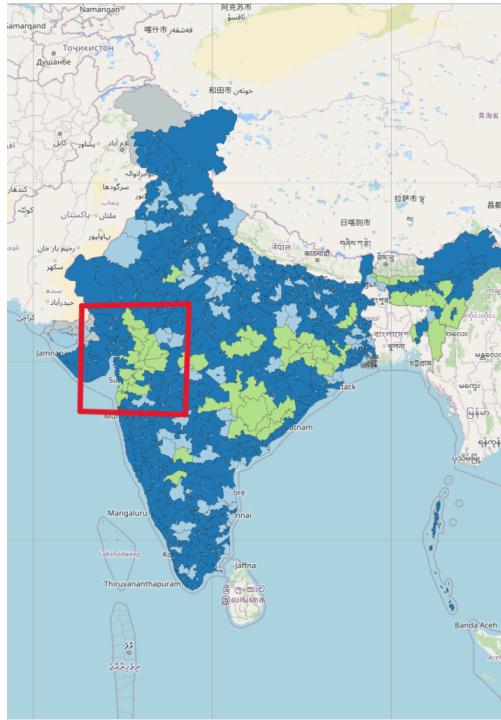


Figure 1: An electoral map of India, with the green seats in the red box indicating the Lok Sabha seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Western Tribal Belt of the Bhils

Post-independence, the Indian National Congress (INC), born as the electoral successor to the leading body of the Indian independence movement of the same name, came to dominate in numerous election cycles amongst the Bhils, with Bhil leaders being incorporated into the INC. The INC's presence was further solidified during the election campaign of the 1980 Lok Sabha, in which the then-former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made it a point to visit these tribal constituencies and appeal to tribal voters on the promises of Garibi Hatao (*Eradicate Poverty*) and recognition of individual tribal land holdings (Guha 2007; Thachil and Herring 2008). This alignment with the INC remained largely stable until the turn of the 21st century when the Hindu-nationalist BJP formed coalition governments in the late 1990s that lasted until 2004. Of note were its rising vote

shares amongst Scheduled Castes (SC) and ST voters (Thachil and Herring 2008). While the BJP was voted out of power in the subsequent 2004 and 2009 elections, and won only 3 out of the 12 federal seats reserved in the Western Tribal Belt, it returned to form an absolute majority in 2014 while sweeping all 12. Further consolidation of this vote was proven when the BJP retained all 12 of these seats in 2019. This was in the background of the BJP increasing its vote share amongst Scheduled Tribes throughout India from 24% in 2009 to 38% in 2014, with an increase of 14 percentage points, and continuing to increase by 6% percentage points further to 44% in 2019 (Agarwal et al. 2021).

The Bhils voting for the BJP can be viewed as an unlikely alliance, particularly for two reasons. First, the BJP's electoral strategy is associated with its parent body, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS' ideological foundation is Hindu Nationalism, which seeks to equate Indian national identity with a homogenous Hindu identity and is particularly popular with upper-caste Hindus (Chandra 2004; Jaffrelot 2021). While a majority of Bhils are classified as Hindus in the Indian census, the hierarchic nature of the caste system and the unique tribal and cultural identity of Bhils continue to be at odds (Thachil 2014). The BJP affiliate organizations use the term *Vanvasi* (forest dwellers) within their organizational structure to refer to STs instead of Adivasi (original inhabitants) (Baviskar 2005; Jaffrelot 2021), a rhetorical denial of the Bhil claim of indigeneity to their tribal lands. Second, the BJP has grown closer to the interests of industrialists in India (Jaffrelot 2021) overseeing large-scale industrial projects at the expense of tribal lands. Of particular note is the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in the Narmada River Valley, a hydroelectricity project that was implemented by the federal government in the 1990s, with the raising of its height sanctioned under the then-Chief Minister Narendra Modi of the BJP in the state of Gujarat in the early 2000s, displacing over 1.2 million ST individuals (Baviskar 2004, 2005). Therefore, socio-culturally and economically, the interests of the Bhils have been misaligned with the BJP and its network of Hindu nationalist organizations. How then has the BJP managed to sweep all 12 of the Lok Sabha seats amongst Bhils?

### **3 Exploring the Puzzle and the Literature**

#### **3.1 From BJP's Non-State Service Provision to A Tale of Turncoat Patrons**

Given the limits of its upper-caste religious strategy amongst poor and marginalized voters of SC and ST communities, research analyzing the BJP gains in the 2004 and 2009 elections has argued that the party attracted poor voters while retaining its elite voter base through its strategy of ‘non-state service provision’ (Thachil 2011, 2014). This account details the role of the civil society wings of the BJP, notably the Sewa Bharati and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKS) amongst Dalit and Tribal voters respectively, who enter these communities by providing localized goods and services and establish a presence as *seva* (service) provisioners. These ‘embedded’ organizations then tap into their networks of support for electoral mobilization in favour of the BJP (Thachil 2011). While providing an important insight, this account gives an undifferentiating account for SC and ST voters combined and relies on voting behaviour up to the 2009 federal elections.

However, the scale of the electoral shift towards the BJP amongst the Bhils within a single election cycle, with the BJP going from 3 Lok Sabha seats in 2009 to sweeping all 12 in the 2014 and 2019 elections, hints at factors in addition to the success of the BJP’s non-state service provision strategy.

An overview of the BJP Members of Parliament (MP) elected from these seats hints at that additional factor—namely the capture of turncoat opposition politicians by the BJP. Table 1 below shows a pattern of the BJP relying on opposition party politicians to win seats in which it had limited history of being electable. Of the 6 seats where the BJP has been elected zero times or once, 5 seats have MPs with ties to opposition parties, while in seats where the BJP had been elected at least twice, none of the MPs had ties to opposition parties.

Vasava from Bardoli and Gavit from Palghar were both elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), or the state legislature, with the INC party before joining the BJP, while Bhuria from Ratlam was himself an ex-MP of the INC. Gavit from Nandurbar and Pawar from Dindori were part of the National Congress Party (NCP), INC’s political ally in Maharashtra, with their

Lok Sabha Constituency in the Bhil tribal belt	Member of Parliament	Seat flipped by BJP in 2014 (as opposed to sitting BJP MP)	Number of pre-2014 elections won by BJP or BJP ally	Member of Parliament/family with past ties to an opposition party
Udaipur	Arjunlal Meena	Yes	4	No
Banswara	Manshankar Ninama	Yes	1	No
Chhota Udaipur	Ramsinh Rathwa	No	2	No
Valsad	KC Patel	Yes	3	No
Dahod	J.S. Bhabhor	Yes	2	No
Bardoli	Parbhubhai Vasava	Yes	0	Yes
Ratlam	Dileep Singh Bhuria	Yes	0	Yes
Dhar	Chhatar Singh Darbar	Yes	5	No
Khargone	Gajendra Patel	No	7	No
Nandurbar	Heena Gavit	Yes	0	Yes
Dindori	Bharati Pawar	No	1	Yes
Palghar	Rajendra Gavit	Yes	0	Yes

Table 1: Summary of BJP Electability and MP ties to opposition parties in the Bhil Tribal belt. Source:: "TCPD Individual Incumbency Dataset 1962-current", Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University.

father and father-in-law respectively having been state cabinet ministers from the NCP.

Thus, faced with an electoral environment where the BJP had largely failed to consolidate itself, the strategy to deploy turncoat opposition party politicians may have allowed the BJP to win support amongst Bhils where it had limited success. However, this leads to a further question—why would Bhil voters follow their leaders and move to a new party?

### 3.2 Literature on Enduring Ethno-Clientelism in Patronage Democracies

To answer the question posed above, an important concept to understand the triangular relationship between leaders, parties, and voters is the practice of clientelism. As per Kitschelt and Wilkinson's account, clientelist ties are defined by a transaction, where there is a direct exchange of access to jobs, material goods, and social services in return for the voter's loyalty. Rather than a 'programmatic preference' where voters voice their interests and candidates respond with policy promises, the relationship remains top-down, wherein leaders provide material and economic benefits in return for the vote. Such ties are found to be resilient in advanced industrial democracies, including

Austria, Japan, Italy, and Belgium, but especially in the developing world where ethnic ties remain salient (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007).

Chandra (2004) views this structure to be particularly dominant in voting environments such as India, terming such electoral systems as ‘patronage democracies.’ In such systems, the state has a monopoly over jobs and services. Once elected, a leader enjoys political power in implementing and allocating government schemes, using them for the benefit of selected and individualized voter bases, helping the leader emerge as a patron by building a clientelist network of voters loyal to their patron (Chandra 2007; Sadanandan 2012). But when are such clientelist networks and patron loyalty particularly strong?

Clientelist transactions rely on compliance monitoring, with the patron needing to ensure that their clients hold up their side of the bargain and cast their vote in the patron’s favour. Such clientelist monitoring relies on dense networks and ties that enforce accountability, which are common in small towns and villages (Stokes 2005) and particularly among ethnic minorities (Chandra 2007). In Russia, regions with titular minorities have a greater presence of clientelist relationships, such as the Bashkiria region where the elites with ties to the federal government enjoy electoral support from the minority Bashkirs by striking deals to provide privileged appointments and services to the community (Hale 2007). White (2015) has also argued that regions with ethnic minority populations had a greater propensity to vote for Putin’s United Russia party due to the ethnic networks allowing for a greater concentration of patronage provision. These networks allow local elites to emerge as patrons that can be coopted by nationalist parties, such as with Kadyrov in Chechnya ensuring control and support for the United Russia party (Russell 2008). In Yemen, tribal leaders have ensured the success of Islamic national parties in the rural parts of the country largely due to the support these leaders enjoy through their clientelist networks (Dresch and Haykel 1995). Such elite cooptation is also common among political parties in Africa, where capturing networks of established local leaders allows dominant parties to fragment the opposition and gain ground amongst new voters (Arriola et al. 2021).

Moreover, clientelist ties co-exist with electoral dynasties, particularly among ethnic minori-

ties. Research on India (Chandra 2016) and Japan (Smith 2018) provide evidence that leaders with a history of electoral success in their family rely on claims to a proven record of delivering patronage and often enjoy a hold over their constituents. Research on Ireland and Sweden (Folke et al. 2021) shows that this is particularly important for female candidates who succeed the male predecessor in their family. A clientelist loyalty to the local dynast remains particularly important for outsider parties to gain ground in new electoral bases. Chhibber (2013) argues that outsider parties have weak organizational infrastructure in areas where they lack historic competitiveness and thus rely on local electoral families to capture and maintain control. That this practice is prevalent amongst Scheduled Tribes is also clear, with the number of dynastic ST MPs increasing from 13% in 2009 to 20% in 2014 (Chauchard 2016).

Clientelist ties affect vote-choice determinants of ethnic minorities in at least three important ways. First, because clientelist linkage building is particularly strong in ethnic networks that provide a base for organizing patron-client ties, ethnic favouritism becomes salient in driving vote choice. Chandra (2007) argues that as poor voters in patronage democracies such as India operate in limited information environments, a shared co-ethnicity with the leader becomes the basis for trust and delivery of patronage, with the same holding true for the patron's trust in the compliance of their coethnic clients, leading to what can be termed an ethno-clientelist structure. Second, voters in patronage democracies primarily use their votes as an instrument for obtaining material benefits from their co-ethnic patrons (Chandra 2007). Research in the Ugandan context (Carlsson 2015) suggests that coethnic leaders are preferred by voters conditional on whether they deliver material benefits and are not known to be shirkers. While voters are drawn to their patron, it is largely so because of the promise of material gain. Third, these ties to the local patron are enduring, with the patrons remaining more prominent amongst voters than their party. Research on Arab countries (Corstange 2018) and Indonesia (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019) suggests that voters place greater importance on ties to local networks and leaders than on their political affiliation or party.

The literature on ethno-clientelist ties has the following preliminary implications for explaining

the case of Bhils moving toward the BJP as a result of elite capture. Bhil voters should largely remain loyal to their local patron due to material interests and trust in coethnic leaders. These interests should outweigh prior political party affiliation, and hence as the patrons shift, the voters shift with them. However, as they shift primarily due to loyalty to the patron, the salience of tribal identity and material interests in determining the Bhil vote should remain strong.

### **3.3 The Turn to Religious Nationalism After Elite Capture?**

While research shows that in attracting new voters the BJP moderates its Hindu nationalist appeals, relying on other strategies to expand its vote base (Chhibber and Verma 2019; Mitra 2016; Thachil 2011), having formed the government in two successive federal and numerous state elections, the BJP has more openly practised religious nationalism in electoral and governance contexts. From the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 tying religious identity to Indian citizenship for the first time by excluding Muslims of neighbouring states from claiming Indian citizenship as persecuted refugees (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020), to politically selective demolition of Muslim houses under the claim of encroachment (Liang 2023), and the construction and the upcoming inauguration of the Ram Mandir (Temple) in Ayodhya constructed on a site where a mosque was demolished by Hindu nationalists in the 1990s (Jaffrelot 2021; Mehta 2022), the BJP and its brand of religious nationalism have been emboldened by its electoral victories. Scholars have also noted the emergence of religion-as-ethnicity as an increasingly salient electoral strategy in India (Sircar 2022).

More specifically amongst STs, BJP's affiliate Hindu nationalist organizations such as the RSS and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) have historically made attempts to make Hindu identity more salient amongst tribes such as the Bhils. Baviskar (2005) reports the growing presence of tribal youth fashioning saffron headbands (a Hindu symbol) and being mobilized in riots in Madhya Pradesh. This Hinduization takes the form of introducing mainstream Hindu festivals such as Ramnavmi, Navratri and Ganesh Chaturthi which were largely unfamiliar to these tribes, introducing Hindu priests to perform life rituals (Khan and Thakur 2023), as well as creating the ‘threatening other,’ namely the Christian and Muslim organizations working amongst these tribes

and the tribes who have themselves converted to Christianity and Islam (Froerer 2006). The Hindu nationalist project of tying tribal and Hindu identities as inseparable is particularly threatened by the salience of other religious identities amongst the Bhils.

This last issue of religious conversion has particularly come to the forefront of the Hindu nationalist mobilization of tribes such as the Bhils in early 2023. The Janjati Suraksha Manch (JSM), a Hindu nationalist organization tied to the BJP, has mobilized Bhils and other tribes to hold protests demanding the stripping of Scheduled Tribe status of those tribal individuals who have converted to religions other than Hinduism, with their delisting leading to loss of access to affirmative action in education, employment, and electoral settings (Mishra 2023).

The growing success of Hindu nationalism as an electoral strategy and the increased efforts of the BJP and its civil society affiliates to Hinduize the Bhils and mobilize them on Hindu nationalist issues pose a critical question. While factors other than Hindu nationalism may have initially attracted the Bhils to vote for the BJP, after capturing and subsequently retaining the Bhils as a vote base through elite cooptation, is the BJP successful in moving the Bhils closer to its ideology rooted in Hindu nationalism?

### **3.4 Literature on reshaped identities and religion beyond patronage**

Can nationalist parties and movements like BJP's Hindu nationalism reshape the religious and ethnic identities of minority communities and their material interests? The literature provides mixed evidence to this point.

On the one hand, the power of nationalism in reshaping the religious and ethnic identities of minorities is visible. Pelkmans (2011) highlights the power of nationalist movements in the context of the Republic of Georgia, engaging with Soviet-era Georgian nationalism and its impact on the minority Muslim communities in the border towns of Ajaria. Pelkmans outlines that the Georgian nationalist movement saw Muslim identity as being incompatible with its goals, especially in the 1980s when the movement revived its connection to Christianity. The movement co-opted local Ajarian symbols into its model of Christian nationalism, eventually leading to mass conversions

of Muslim Ajarians to Christianity at the peak of the movement. Work by Jacobson (2008) on the Ainu people in Japan suggests that under the pressure of Japanese nation-building and discrimination, Ainu people have been forced to conform to a Japanese cultural identity to the extent that only 100 individuals were believed to be Ainu speakers as of 2008. Similarly, work by Gaski (2008) on the Sami people in Norway highlights the challenges to reviving Sami self-determination, because historic assimilation in the face of Norwegian nation-building has meant that most Sami individuals do not bear physical or cultural traits of the Sami and thus for most imagining a Sami national identity has not been obvious.

There is also evidence that in patronage democracies, entrenched religious identities can overpower clientelist or material linkages and continue to remain salient in driving vote choice. A recent conjoint analysis in Lebanon (Cammett et al. 2022) suggests that religious coethnicity is a stronger predictor of electoral support than the provision of patronage or programmatic platforms. In Indonesia, religious parties have continued to maintain religious ideological positions salient amongst voters despite the presence of clientelist linkages (Fossati et al. 2020).

On the other hand, research on Chechnya, Malaysia, the United States, and India highlights the limits of such efforts. Work by Iliyasov (2018) highlights that despite Putin's United Russia party dominating electorally in Chechnya, this shift does not signify a growing adoption of a pan-Russian identity over Chechen ethnic identity. Iliyasov finds that Chechen ethnic identity remains largely intact despite what she terms political behaviour that is in favour of Russia and 'non-Chechen.' Similarly, despite being retained by the ethno-nationalist United Malay National Organization (UMNO) party for over six decades, non-Malay ethnic voters such as ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indians voted out the UMNO in favour of the secular opposition parties (Pepinsky 2009). Amongst Latinos in the United States, a growing number have moved from initially conforming to a white racial identity to self-identifying as Hispanic or pan-ethnic in the 2020 census, despite the rise in white nationalism under the Republican and Trump presidency (Martínez and Gonzalez 2021). Research on the Santal tribe in eastern India (Kumar 2018) suggests that the presence of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) political party has ensured that the BJP has not

been able to ‘detribalize’ politics in the state of Jharkhand, despite the BJP winning a majority in the state assembly in 2014.

These latter accounts suggest that while identities are indeed vulnerable to being reshaped, these are more long-term projects and that nationalist and religious parties may be unable to make original ethnic affiliations less salient among voters, especially if the gain is recent and party competition is still intact. Similarly, while entrenched religious identities in the case of Lebanon and Indonesia may remain salient despite clientelist linkages, these patron-client links and material interests may be more resilient in contexts where the project of identity transformation is ongoing and less entrenched.

### **3.5 Testable Implications**

While the theoretical framework on patronage and the role of ethnic elites points to a stable role of material and ethnic issues (Carlsson 2015; Chandra 2004) with an enduring local patron loyalty (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019; Corstange 2018), there is evidence to suggest that even if religious or majoritarian parties come to gain the votes of ethnic minorities through elite capture, this does not lead to a shift in the ethnic and material interests of the voters towards more religious stances (Kumar 2018; Pepinsky 2009). Hence, despite BJP’s growing efforts at mobilizing Bhils on issues such as the delisting of non-Hindu STs after retaining them in two election cycles, the Bhils’ commitment to tribal identity, material interests, and loyalty to local patron should remain more salient as drivers of vote-choice over Hindu nationalism. This thesis tests the following two hypotheses in the case of the Bhils voting for the BJP, particularly in historically uncompetitive seats for the BJP:

**H1:** *Ethnic minority voters continue to prioritize ethnic and material issues over appeals to religious majoritarianism in patronage democracies, despite voting for religious majoritarian parties.* (Tested through survey experiment and qualitative interviews)

**H2:** *Ethnic minority voters of religious majoritarian parties display a stronger loyalty to the local leader over party affiliation in patronage democracies.* (Tested through qualitative interviews).

## 4 Research Design

### 4.1 Overview

Given that the Bhils largely reside in remote and rural India with growing but still limited digital infrastructure and education, this thesis relies on in-person fieldwork. Moreover, Hypothesis 1 explicitly calls for a simulation of a vote choice setting and tests the salience of one type of platform issues against another. To that end, this thesis utilizes a preregistered (available in Appendix B) in-person conjoint analysis. Conjoint analyses are a widely used experimental technique to measure individuals' preferences for different attributes of a political candidate or a party platform (Hainmueller, Hopkins, et al. 2014). In political science research, it has been increasingly employed to understand how voters evaluate political candidates and policy proposals (Hainmueller, Hangartner, et al. 2015). This approach involves presenting respondents with a series of alternatives, each characterized by various attributes, and asking them to indicate their preferences for each option. This enables researchers to estimate the relative importance of each attribute in shaping respondents' preferences and allows for more nuanced insights into the factors that drive political decision-making.

However, given the low level of literacy among Bhils (World Bank 2011), this conjoint analysis takes a visual form, instead of relying on text. Building on the political science literature that has employed visual conjoints in a candidate-choice context (Meyer and Rosenzweig 2016; Ortega and Radojevic 2023; Poertner 2021; Vecchiato and Munger 2021), this thesis introduces the novel use of visual conjoint for party platform preferences (discussion in section 5). Using intentionally designed visual graphics to present complex platform issues in a conjoint survey allows us to administer this to a population with low literacy levels. By testing the preference for Hindu nationalist party platform issues over tribal and material issues, the conjoint analysis captures the essence of Hypothesis 1.

However, this thesis also relies on interviews with Bhil voters for two reasons. First, these interviews allow us to triangulate the results of the conjoint analysis by asking open-ended questions

about the specific issues presented in the platform. If the descriptive answers are consistent with the results of the conjoint, then we would have further evidence in support of or against Hypothesis 1. Second, testing Hypothesis 2, which posits that voters show greater loyalty to local leaders over political parties, is unfeasible in a patronage democracy such as India without avoiding allegations of political partisanship on the part of the researchers, especially given the use of images. Showing images of specific local leaders or political parties in the visual analysis welcomes the misguided view that the researcher is affiliated with one of the leaders or a party, which would plausibly make the response rate amongst Bhil voters extremely low. Instead, the interviews allow Hypothesis 2 to be tested in a more open-ended manner, where voters are not presented with specific leaders or parties to choose from but are brought up in discussion with the interviewees.

Therefore, this research employs an in-person mixed methods design, testing Hypothesis 1 using visual conjoint analysis and using interviews to corroborate evidence from the conjoint as well as test Hypothesis 2.

## 4.2 Case Study Justification

Given the practical constraints of conducting visual conjoint analysis and interviews in person, this thesis takes a representative case study approach. This made the fieldwork feasible, while also allowing for a thick description of a particular context in which the Bhils' shift towards the BJP can be studied.

Four criteria are important in selecting the ideal case for this study:

- i) *A constituency reserved for STs in the Bhil tribal belt with low electability for the BJP pre-2014.*
- ii) *A constituency where the BJP MP was a turncoat opposition party leader or with family ties to an opposition party, but contested the 2014 election with the BJP.*
- iii) *Geographic proximity to multiple states to ensure that the constituency captures linguistic diversity amongst the tribes in western India.*

*iv) Intra-constituency variation to represent areas that vote for BJP and non-BJP parties.*

The case chosen for the analysis that meets all four of the aforementioned criteria is the Nandurbar Lok Sabha constituency in Maharashtra. With an ST voter population of around 1.2 million (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2011), Nandurbar is the northernmost constituency in Maharashtra. As shown in Table 1 in section 3.1, the BJP had never won the Lok Sabha seat of Nandurbar, before 2014. Nandurbar elected a Member of Parliament from the Indian National Congress (INC) for a consecutive sixteen federal election cycles since the first federal elections of independent India in 1952, up until 2009. However, the INC lost this seat in 2014 to BJP, which the BJP further retained in 2019. Moreover, BJP MP Dr. Heena Gavit was affiliated to the opposition party NCP through her father, Dr. Vijaykumar Gavit who was the Tribal Development Minister of Maharashtra under the NCP-INC coalition governments and is himself now with the BJP in the same cabinet seat in the state. Thus, the first two criteria are satisfied.

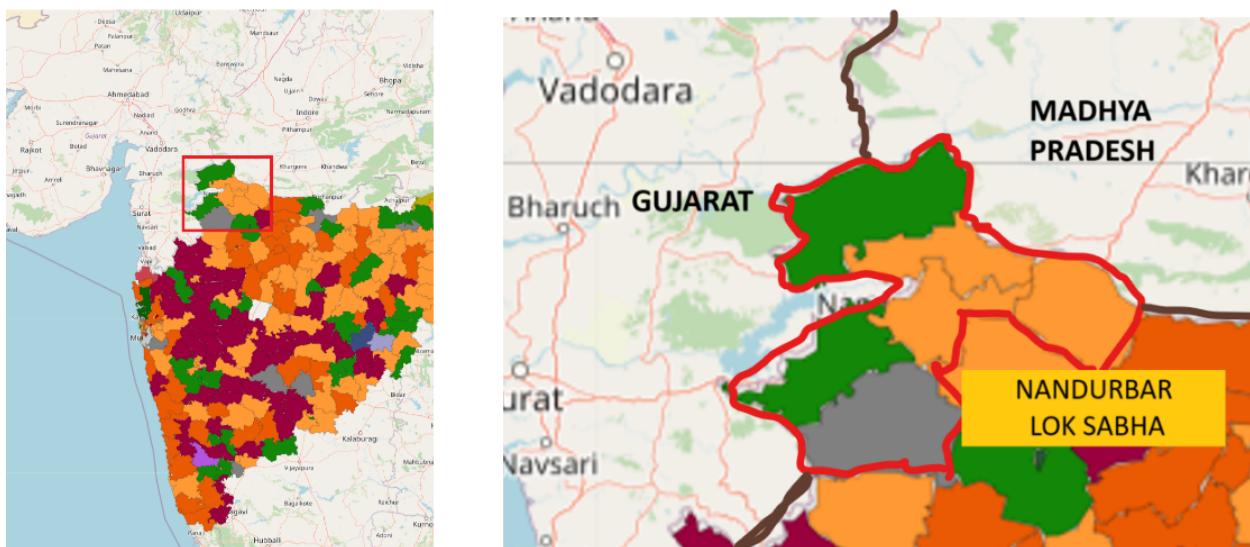


Figure 2: Maps of the Nandurbar Lok Sabha Constituency. The red border indicates the Nandurbar federal constituency, with the provincial assembly constituencies inside coded for the Congress Party (Green) BJP (Saffron) and Independent (Grey). Source: Lok Dhaba Visualization, Ashoka University

Moreover, as shown in Figure 2 above, the Nandurbar constituency lies in Maharashtra but borders both Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. State borders in India were largely drawn on linguistic lines. Marathi in Maharashtra, Gujarati in Gujarat, and Hindi in Madhya Pradesh are the dominant

languages of the government respectively. These languages have a profound influence on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Bhils. Being a border district at the heart of three states with Bhil populations, the Bhils of Nandurbar have great linguistic diversity depending on their proximity to the borders of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Lastly, the Nandurbar Lok Sabha constituency also offers considerable internal variation as it contains six state assembly constituencies, all reserved for Scheduled Tribes. As shown in Table 2 below, the six constituencies are equally split between the BJP and the opposition parties, with three being represented by the BJP, two by the INC, and one by an independent. This variability in the BJP's performance helps identify villages with varying degrees of voter preferences for the BJP amongst Bhils, and to disaggregate survey and interview data into BJP and non-BJP areas.

No	Assembly Constituency Name	District	Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)	Party
1	Akkalkuwa (ST)	Nandurbar	Kagda Chandya Padvi	Indian National Congress
2	Shahada (ST)	Nandurbar	Rajesh Padvi	Bharatiya Janata Party
3	Nandurbar (ST)	Nandurbar	Vijaykumar Gavit	Bharatiya Janata Party
4	Navapur (ST)	Nandurbar	Shirishkumar Naik	Indian National Congress
5	Sakri (ST)	Dhule	Manjula Gavit	Independent
6	Shirpur (ST)	Dhule	Kashiram Vechan Pawara	Bharatiya Janata Party

Table 2: The six State Assembly constituencies inside the Nandurbar Lok Sabha Constituency, by MLA and party, as of the 2019 Maharashtra state elections. Source: Source: "TCPD Individual Incumbency Dataset 1962-current", Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University.

## 5 Conjoint Analysis

### 5.1 Set-Up

The survey component of the fieldwork in the Nandurbar constituency took the form of a survey-based conjoint analysis, which was pre-registered prior to data collection (available in Appendix B). The survey was administered to 678 respondents in 40 villages, with each respondent seeing three tasks for a total of 6 party platforms ( $n= 4068$ ). The conjoint analysis tests Hypothesis 1 in the case of Bhils, with the following confirmatory hypothesis being pre-registered: *Bhil voters prioritize tribal and material issues over appeals to Hindu nationalism while rating party platforms.*

Testing this hypothesis allows us to ascertain whether, after 9 years of retaining the Bhils in previously uncompetitive seats, the BJP and its religious affiliates have been able to make Bhils prioritize Hindu-nationalist issues over the ethnic and material interests that define most ethno-clientelist networks (Chandra 2007). To this end, the conjoint analysis aims to capture preferences for types of party platform issues, rather than specific candidate profiles.

Due to a sample size of 678, the number of attributes in the party platforms is limited to three each. Moreover, the levels of each attribute were binary, with the baseline level indicating a Hindu-nationalist platform issue, and the other level being a tribal/material platform issue. The graphics (design choices explained in Appendix F) for the 3 attributes and their corresponding 2 levels are as follows:

i. Cultural heritage: This baseline level is based on the claims of the BJP and its religious affiliate organizations such as RSS and VKA that Tribal and Hindu identity are necessarily linked, juxtaposed against a platform issue which views Bhil tribal identity and culture as being unique.



Figure 3: a) Bhils belong to the proud Hindu heritage of India, and our Hindu religious identity needs to be protected (Hindu-nationalist issue = 0).

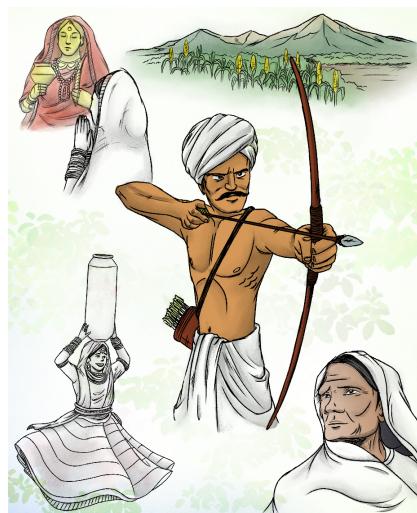


Figure 4: b) Bhils are a proud tribal people, and our unique cultural heritage needs to be protected (Tribal/Material issue = 1).

ii. Threat alleviation: The baseline level in this attribute is based on the claims of the BJP-affiliated RSS and the Janjati Suraksh Manch that Bhil Hindus need to be protected against the threat of religious conversion by non-Hindu religious organizations (Baviskar 2005). Juxtaposed to this religious threat is the material threat of unemployment amongst Bhils, which the party promises to alleviate by providing targeted monetary benefits to Bhil youth in that village.



*Figure 5: a) Bhil Hindus face the threat of coerced religious conversion by Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian groups. Such groups will be banned and local anti-conversion volunteer groups will be created to protect Bhil Hindus from forced conversion (Hindu-nationalist issue = 0).*



*Figure 6: b) Bhil youths suffer high levels of unemployment, and to alleviate this, each young Bhil in your village will be given money in the form of a cash handout (Tribal/Material issue = 1).*

iii. Transportation Service: The baseline level here takes the form of promises to provide trips to the soon-to-be-inaugurated Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, an achievement celebrated as the culmination of a three-decade-long Hindu-nationalist movement to build the temple over the Babri Mosque (Mehta 2022), juxtaposed to the targeted provision of material benefits in the form of a truck for maximizing communal income under the Forest Rights Act 2005 (Gulzar et al. 2023).

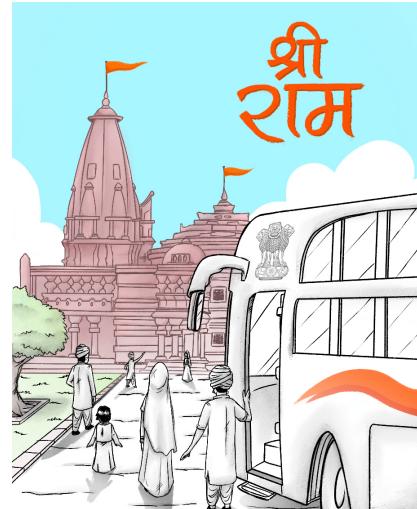


Figure 7: a) Buses will be organized for Bhil Hindus in your village to visit the newly constructed Ram Mandir (Temple) in Ayodhya (Hindu-nationalist issue= 0).

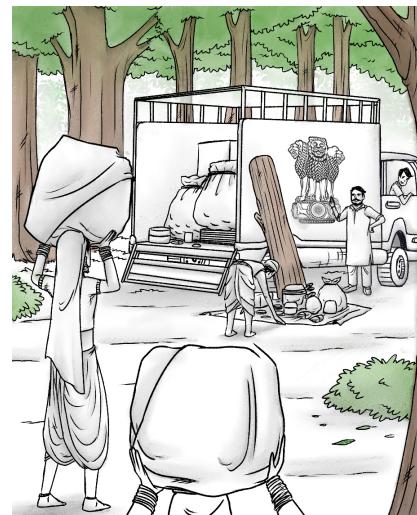


Figure 8: b) To ensure that the communal income generated through forest and timber products is maximized for Bhils, a truck will be provided to your village to transport forest and timber to the district market free of charge (Tribal/Material issue = 1).

Thus, the three attributes with two levels each are represented in the following sample platform pair.



Figure 9: *Example of a party platform combination. On the left is Party Platform 1 with its 3 issues, while on the right is Party Platform 2.*

Parties do not explicitly use rhetoric that admits to the clientelistic provision of material goods. Instead, parties rely on material policies whose implementation on the ground is promised to targeted groups in exchange for votes, as the implementation of these policies remains in the hands of local patrons in control of resources. First, the cash handout to Bhil youth in a specific village, and not to a general category of Scheduled Tribes, relies on elites and brokers' determination and implementation of these policies at the village level. Furthermore, the provision of a truck to specific villages relies on patrons and their capacity to arrange for these forms of transportation. Thus, the aforementioned conjoint set-up is able to capture the ethnic and material benefits framework that underlies ethno-clientelist networks (Chandra 2004, 2007).

## 5.2 Administration

The steps to administer the conjoint are as follows:

1. The survey was administered in the Nandurbar Federal Constituency, with a stratified sample size of 678 voting-age Bhil (ST) individuals with 16 to 17 individuals each from 40 villages inside the Nandurbar Federal Constituency. Half the number of villages (20) and individuals (340) were from the 3 BJP-represented Assembly constituencies and the other half from non-BJP-represented constituencies. This was made possible with the help of 4 local RAs and translators from the College of Social Work Taloda and a local NGO. Two teams with the researcher alternating between them every week allowed the 40 villages to be covered in 50 days. These villages were chosen to ensure geographic spread inside the constituency, but were otherwise randomly selected. Within each village, a list of inhabitants was obtained from the local gram panchayat (village council) office, and a target list of 15 men and 15 women was randomly generated. These respondents were contacted door-to-door until 17 individuals were surveyed. The survey begins by asking demographic questions of age, gender, education and occupation. Furthermore, the pre-treatment variables also included questions seeking to understand their party-leaning and the extent to which Hinduism influences their cultural practices (please view Appendix G).

2. Through A-3-sized printed images, respondents then performed the conjoint tasks, each

featuring two randomly generated party platforms. Each platform had 3 dummy policy attributes. The total number of unique platforms was 8 ( $2^*2^*2$ ), and the total number of unique non-identical pairs of platforms was 28<sup>1</sup>. From these 28, each respondent was randomly assigned to rate 3 unique non-identical pairs of platforms. This randomization was done before the survey, with each respondent number randomly assigned three pairs of party platforms, ensuring uniform distribution of all 28 unique non-identical pairs.

3. The images were first explained by reading the corresponding platform statement out loud by the researcher. Then, during the conjoint tasks, the images were used for recall.

4. Respondents were then asked to rate each of the two platforms' (example in Figure 9) from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating strong dislike and 10 indicating strong preference. Each respondent then evaluates a total of 6 platforms across 3 pairs. The use of a preference scale of 0 to 10, rather than a forced choice conjoint design, addresses potential issues raised by Abramson et al. (2022) and Ganter (2023) related to the limitations of forced choice designs which only ask respondents to choose one platform. The goal of this study is not to force individuals to choose between one type of party platform or another but to understand their preferences on a scale when juxtaposed with a different party platform. By allowing respondents to express their preferences for each platform separately, this approach accommodates the possibility that respondents may jointly prefer both or neither platform to different degrees. By virtue of not being a forced-choice conjoint, we do not eliminate the preferences for Hindu nationalist policies by putting them against a material policy. Voters may equally prefer both but to varying degrees. Furthermore, to make the concept of a preference scale more comprehensible, respondents are given ten marbles, and then asked how many marbles they would give to each party platform respectively.

5. This task was repeated 3 times, for a total of 3 pairs, or 6 party platforms, rated by each respondent. Thus, the number of observations in the survey totalled 4068 ( $678*6$ ).

## 5.3 Expectation and Results

### 5.3.1 Confirmatory Analysis of Hypothesis 1

The main confirmatory hypothesis tested here is the following: *Bhil voters prioritize tribal and material issues over appeals to Hindu nationalism while rating party platforms.*

The estimation tool used is the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE), calculated for each attribute. AMCEs provides estimates of the causal effects of individual attribute levels on the outcome of interest, averaging over the joint distribution of the other attributes. In the context of conjoint analysis, AMCEs are particularly helpful in understanding the relative importance of different attribute levels on respondents' preferences. In this analysis, the AMCE scores are calculated for each electoral platform attribute's presence on the expected rating of that party platform, with the baseline for all platform attributes being the Hindu nationalist platform (indicated as 0).

Before moving to the analysis, we verify the assumptions that the task order and platform order do not bias our results. Appendix I.1 contains the F-tests for both these assumptions, yielding p-values that suggest that indicate a lack of strong evidence to support the claim that the task order and platform order bias these results, validating the assumptions.

The test for the confirmatory hypothesis is the following: *All three attributes should have positive AMCE scores, indicating a higher rating on average for tribal and material issues over Hindu-nationalist issues.*

Figure 10 above plots the AMCEs for all three attributes. The plot shows that for all three attributes the estimated AMCE is greater than zero, with all three estimates being statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. This provides evidence in favour of Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, in Appendix I.2 I perform a joint hypothesis test that further provides evidence in favour of this hypothesis. This result is also significant when including the block fixed effects at the village and constituency-party level by which the sample was stratified (see Appendix I.3)

Looking at each attribute individually, first, the plot shows that on average, a party platform alluding to the tribal cultural heritage of Bhils was rated 0.6138 points higher than a party platform

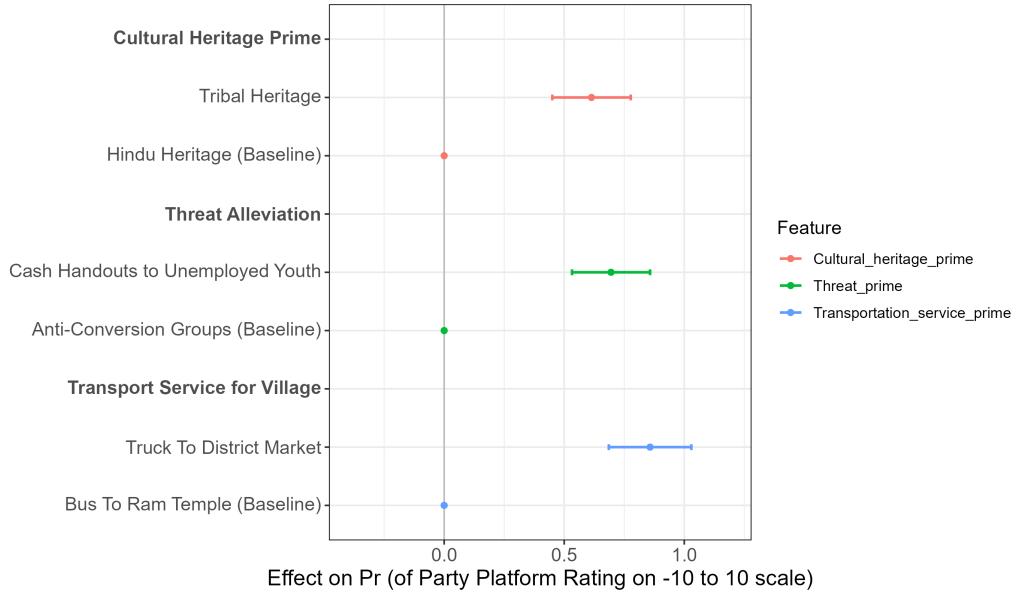


Figure 10: Average Change in Platform Rating by Attribute

claiming that Bhils are connected to the Hindu cultural heritage of India (Please refer to Appendix J). On a scale of 0 to 10, this is an average change of 6.138% in the rating compared to the baseline Hindu-nationalist issue. Next, a party platform promising cash handouts to Bhil youth in the village as an alleviation to the threat of unemployment was rated on average 0.6950 points higher than a party promising to ban non-Hindu religious groups from entering Bhil villages under the alleged threat of forced conversion. This is an average change of 6.95% in the rating of a party platform compared to the baseline Hindu nationalist issue. Finally, a party platform offering a Bhil village trucks to transport communal forest and timber produce to the district market was rated on average 0.8576 points higher than a party platform organizing buses for visiting the soon-to-be-inaugurated Ram Mandir (Temple) in Ayodhya. This is an average change of 8.576% in the rating of a party platform compared to the baseline Hindu-nationalist issue.

Following the work of Leeper et al. (2020), marginal means were calculated for each attribute level, to avoid the bias created by the choice of baseline level (Please refer to Appendix J and K). The marginal means indicate the average rating across all the platforms where the particular attribute level, i.e. the platform issue, is present. While the overall average rating across all plat-

forms was 6.207 out of 10, the marginal mean for all three material/tribal platform issues was above the average, while the Hindu-nationalist issue was below the average. The platform issue with the highest marginal mean and thus the most preferred was the truck to market (6.635), followed by cash handouts in the face of youth unemployment (6.559) and tribal cultural heritage (6.500). On the other hand, the platform issue with the lowest marginal mean and thus the least preferred was the bus to Ram Temple (5.779), followed by banning non-Hindu groups from entering tribal villages (5.853) and Hindu cultural heritage (5.902).

Based on the AMCEs and the marginal means, we indeed have evidence to support the confirmatory hypothesis that Bhils continue to favour tribal and material issues over Hindu-nationalist issues in their preferences for party platforms. Moreover, as indicated by the marginal means we find evidence that while a party priming tribal cultural identity was indeed preferred over parties claiming Hindu cultural heritage amongst Bhil, a greater difference is observed for the material policies such as the money to alleviate effects of unemployment and the truck for goods transportation over Hindu nationalist issues.

While we have evidence in support of the confirmatory hypothesis, next, it becomes important to test if these preferences are different amongst a subgroup of Bhils, particularly those with a Hindu cultural practice or those voting for the BJP.

### **5.3.2 Exploratory Subgroup Analyses**

Here we seek to know if the preference for tribal and material issues over Hindu nationalist issues is greater amongst Bhils based on their religious identity and political affiliation. The subgroup analyses are thus conducted on four variables: respondent party leaning, interaction between respondent party leaning and incumbent party in assembly constituency, respondent cultural-Leaning, and respondent self-declared religious identity. The distribution of these variables across the respondents is presented in H. These analyses are exploratory in nature and thus no hypotheses are registered for them. This is because of the scant literature on Bhil electoral behaviour, with the intention being to explore new patterns instead of confirming existing ones. However, each

analysis begins with a preliminary exploratory expectation and puts it to the test.

The estimation tool used for the subgroup analyses is the difference in marginal means of each attribute level by the subgroup categories.

### **Respondent Party Leaning**

While we find that tribal and material issues were prioritized over Hindu nationalist platforms, it is also important to check if the effect sizes are different based on the respondent's party leaning. Here, respondent party leaning is a binary variable, with the levels being BJP-leaning and non-BJP-leaning. This categorization is based on responses to the survey question asking the respondents their preferred political party (Please refer to Appendix G.3). Of the 678 respondents, 295 were categorized as BJP-leaning and 383 as non-BJP-leaning. While the number of BJP respondents is less than the non-BJP leaning respondents, this is not a major issue in India's multiparty and first-past-the-post electoral system, where parties do not have to receive a majority of votes but rather a plurality is sufficient to be elected. We are particularly interested in testing if those leaning towards the BJP are different from those not leaning towards the BJP.

The exploratory hypothesis in this case is the following: *Non-BJP-leaning Bhil voters exhibit a stronger preference for tribal and material issues and a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist issues, compared to BJP-leaning Bhil voters*

The test for this exploratory hypothesis is that: *The difference in marginal means between non-BJP-leaning and BJP-leaning respondents, i.e. non-BJP-leaning MM minus BJP-leaning MM, is positive for Tribal/Material issues, while being negative for the Hindu nationalist issues*

Figure 11 below indicates that irrespective of whether it is a tribal/material issue or a Hindu-nationalist issue, the difference in marginal means is negative. Moreover, the estimates are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level for all six platform issues. Table 9 in Appendix I.4 shows that these results are all consistent even after a multiple comparisons adjustment.

These exploratory results provide a preliminary finding that while non-BJP-leaning Bhil voters indeed have a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist issues compared to those leaning toward the BJP, BJP-leaning voters have a stronger preference for tribal and material issues compared to non-

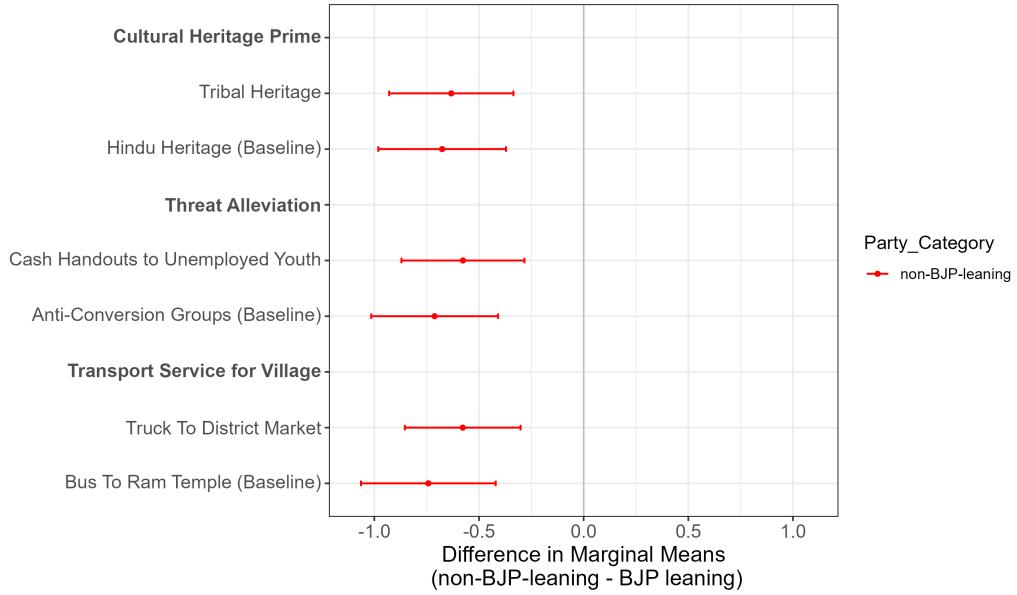


Figure 11: Difference in Marginal Mean Scores by Respondent Party Leaning

BJP-leaning voters. This is consistent with the exploratory finding in previous constituency-level analysis, but is statistically significant for all issues and does not meet the preliminary expectation that non-BJP-leaning voters would have a stronger preference for tribal and material issues. This finding is especially interesting for the Cultural Heritage attribute, in that BJP-leaning voters have a stronger preference for parties that prime both tribal and Hindu cultural heritage compared to non-BJP-leaning voters. However, within the subgroup of BJP-leaning voters, tribal cultural heritage platforms are still preferred over Hindu cultural heritage as evidenced by the marginal means in Appendix K.

The interview finding described in section 6.3.3 helps add context to this exploratory subgroup result. It indicates that non-BJP-leaning Bhil voters shared feelings of being skeptical of parties delivering on their material promises, and gave an overall lower average rating across the platforms compared to non-BJP-leaning voters. This may explain why our exploratory analysis finds non-BJP-leaning Bhils to have a weaker preference for tribal and material platform issues compared to BJP-leaning Bhils.

## **Interaction Effect of Respondent Party-Leaning and Incumbent Party in Assembly Constituency**

To test if the subgroup effects based on respondent party-leaning further differ based on whether the voter is in a constituency where the BJP is dominant and has an incumbent MLA in the state assembly or not, here we test the interaction effect of respondent party-leaning and incumbent party in assembly constituency. Table 5 in Appendix G.3 presents a bivariate distribution of respondents across four categories of BJP and non-BJP leaning respondents and BJP and non-BJP incumbent in state assembly constituency.

Here, we are particularly interested in knowing if BJP voters in constituencies where the BJP is dominant and has greater support is able to weaken the preference for tribal and material issues, compared to areas in which it is not dominant. The logic here is that where the BJP is more dominant, it has a greater capacity for moving its voters away from tribal and material determinants of vote-choice towards Hindu-nationalism.

Again, given the exploratory nature of the subgroup analyses, the exploratory hypothesis here is the following: *BJP voting Bhils who are in non-BJP-incumbent constituencies exhibit a stronger preference for tribal and material issues and a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist issues, compared to BJP voting Bhils living in BJP-incumbent constituencies.*

The test for this exploratory hypothesis is the following: *The difference in marginal means between BJP-respondent in non-BJP-constituency and BJP-voter in BJP-constituency, i.e. BJP-respondent in non-BJP-constituency MM minus BJP-voter in BJP-constituency, is positive for Tribal/Material issues while being negative for the Hindu nationalist issues*

Figure 12 below provides evidence that refutes the above-mentioned hypothesis. BJP voters in non-BJP-constituencies have a weaker preference for parties priming tribal cultural heritage and campaigning on material issues, compared to BJP voters in BJP constituencies. In fact, the difference in marginal means is negative across the tribal and material party platforms for all three combinations of voters compared to BJP-voters in BJP-constituency. Thus, we further find preliminary evidence to suggest that even in constituencies where it has an MLA and thus greater

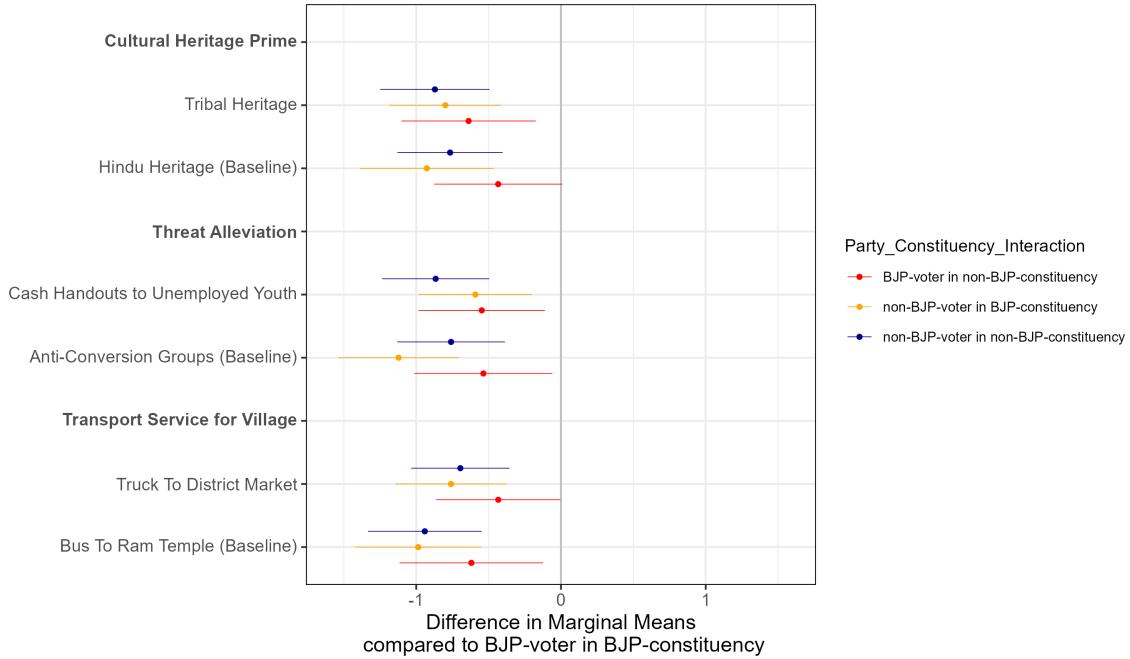


Figure 12: Difference in Marginal Mean Scores by Voter and Constituency Party Interaction

electoral support, the BJP is not able to weaken the preference for tribal and material drivers of vote choice amongst its own voters.

## Religious Culture Leaning

Next, we check if the conjoint results differ based on the religious identity of the respondents. To this end, first, a binary Cultural Leaning variable was created, with the two categories being Tribal cultural leaning and Hindu cultural leaning. This categorization was based on responses to three pre-treatment survey questions on their cultural and religious practices (Please refer to Appendix G.1).

The exploratory hypothesis here is the following: *Bhils with a tribal cultural leaning exhibit a stronger preference for tribal and material issues and a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist issues, compared to Bhils with a Hindu cultural leaning.*

The test for this exploratory hypothesis is the following: *The difference in marginal means between Tribal and Hindu cultural leaning Bhils, i.e. Tribal cultural leaning MM minus Hindu*

*cultural leaning MM, is positive for Tribal/Material issues while being negative for the Hindu nationalist issues*

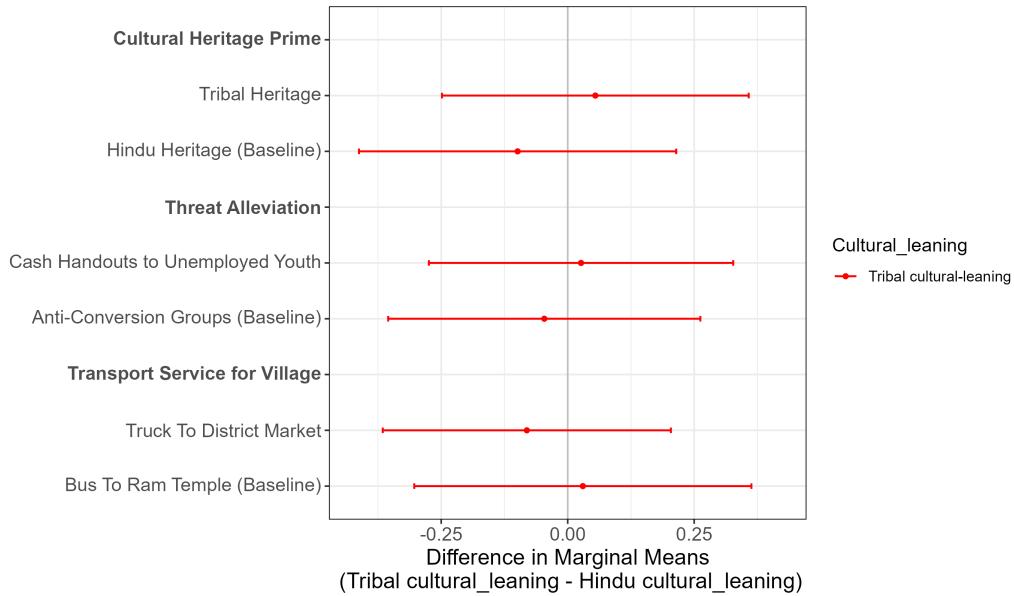


Figure 13: Difference in Marginal Mean Scores by Cultural Leaning

Figure 13 above indicates that irrespective of whether it is a tribal/material issue or a Hindu-nationalist issue, the difference in marginal means is positive, none of these estimates are statistically significant. While these estimates indicate that contrary to our exploratory subgroup hypothesis, those with Tribal cultural leaning have a stronger preference for Hindu nationalist issues over those with a Hindu cultural leaning, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the difference in means between the two groups is 0. Table 8 in Appendix I.4 contains a multiple comparison adjustment of the p-values for the analysis, which further suggests that none of the differences in marginal means are statistically significant.

There are two preliminary implications of these exploratory results. First, they may indicate that the binary model used to estimate the subgroup difference may not be appropriate, and perhaps a different model could be used in a study with a larger sample size of respondents. Second, the lack of clear statistically significant results points to the possibility that there may be a null effect

of one's proximity to Hindu cultural practices on preference toward Hindu nationalist issues such as the ones in the conjoint, which also calls for future empirical testing. A null effect in this context is not an implausible outcome, as evidenced by the descriptive interview analysis in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2. I explore the interview analysis on themes of attachment to tribal identity and religious mobilization, finding that those identifying as Hindu were quick to differentiate their Hinduism from the mainstream Hinduism of the 'city folks'. They were also against mobilization in favour of delisting non-Hindu Bhils irrespective of whether they associated with Hinduism or not. This may explain why the differences in means on the Cultural Leaning variable were mostly not statistically significant, but this of course needs further empirical work.

### **Respondent Self-Identified Religious identity**

Moving beyond an indicator of religious cultural leaning created by the researcher, we now use respondents' self-identified religious identity to test the effect of respondents' religious identity on party platform choices. To this end, a categorical variable was created based on the survey responses where the respondents identified their religious identity. The responses were grouped under four categories: Hindu, Tribal, Hindu-Tribal and Other (see Appendix G.2 for justification). Note here that the Hindu-Tribal category does not refer the respondent declaring both Hindu and Tribal as their religious identity, but rather represents the practice of declaring oneself as "Hindu-Bhil" or "Hindu-Pawara", with the hyphenated form being used by the respondents themselves and is not a creation fo the researcher. For the purposes of this analysis, we focus on the difference between those respondents categorized as Hindu, Tribal, and Hindu-Tribal.

The exploratory hypothesis here is the following: *Bhils who self-identify as being Tribal or Hindu-Tribal exhibit a stronger preference for tribal and material issues and a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist issues, compared to Bhils who self-identify as being Hindu.*

The test for this exploratory hypothesis is the following: *The difference in marginal means between Tribal and Hindu Bhils, and Hindu Tribal and Hindu Bhils, i.e. Tribal MM minus Hindu MM, and Hindu-Tribal MM minus Hindu MM, is positive for Tribal/Material issues while being negative for the Hindu nationalist issues*

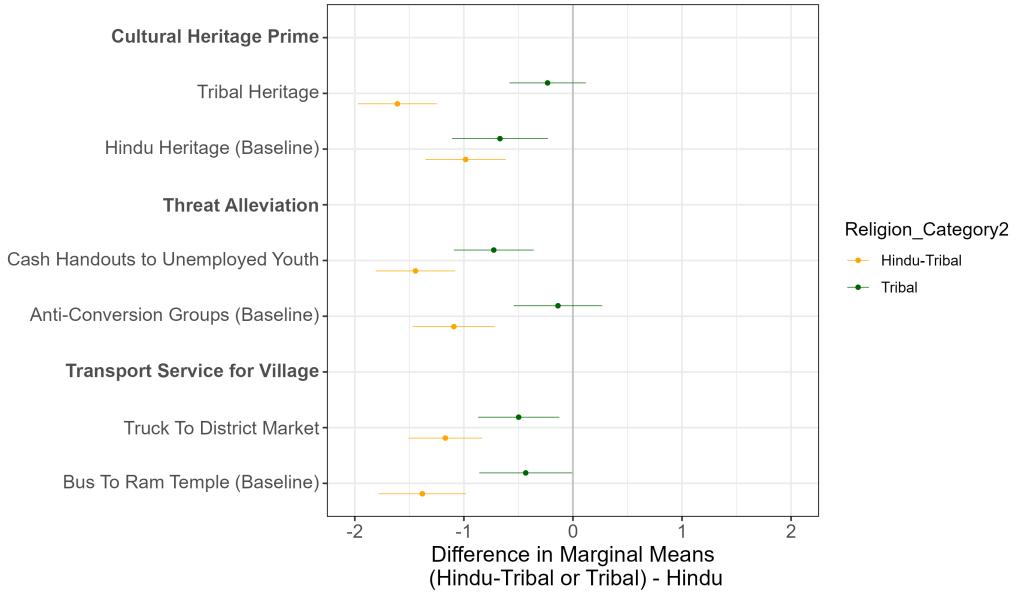


Figure 14: Difference in Marginal Mean Scores by Respondent Self-Identified Religion Category

Figure 14 above indicates a complex pattern of relationship between the respondents' self-identified religious identity and their attribute preference, in a way that is contrary to the expectation outlined above.

First, the estimated difference in MM between Tribal and Hindu respondents for the Tribal Heritage level is negative but not statistically different from zero, where we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between a Tribal and a Hindu respondent's preference for the Tribal Heritage platform issue. Moreover, for the two material platform issues, namely the cash handout for unemployment alleviation and the truck to district market, the estimates for the difference in MM between the groups are negative and statistically significant. Respondents identifying their religion as Hindu were more likely to prefer the two material platform issues compared to those identifying as Tribal. On the other hand, while Tribal respondents were indeed less likely to prefer the Cultural Heritage Hindu issue compared to Hindu respondents, the same results are not statistically significant for the Hindu nationalist platform levels in the other two attributes. Table 10 in Appendix I.4 shows that these results remain consistent even after a multiple comparisons adjustment.

On the other hand, the estimated difference in MM between Hindu-Tribal and Hindu respondents for the Tribal Heritage level is negative but statistically significant across all platform issues. This implies that contrary to expectation the Hindu-Tribal respondents have a weaker preference for tribal and material platform issues compared to those identifying as Hindu, while meeting the expectation that they have a weaker preference for Hindu nationalist platform issues compared to Hindu-identifying respondents. Table 10 in Appendix I.4 again shows that these results are all consistent even after a multiple comparisons adjustment.

There are two preliminary implications of these exploratory results. First, the religious identification of Bhils has a nuanced effect on their preferences of platform issues, which the previous component variable created by the researcher does not capture. There is a lack of evidence to suggest that viewing one's religiosity as being tribal instead of Hindu results in greater affinity to parties that prime tribal cultural heritage. Moreover, a significantly weaker preference for parties campaigning on tribal cultural heritage as well as Hindu nationalist issues amongst those identifying as Hindu-Tribal compared to Hindu may provide preliminary pointers that those identifying as Hindu-Tribal are in a state of liminality, in which one's religious self-identification as Hindu-Tribal results in ambiguity over one's identity and does not lead to a clear preference for one or the other. This issue needs further investigation in future research.

## 5.4 Implication of the Conjoint Results

The results of the conjoint analysis provide evidence in favour of Hypothesis 1. Bhil voters do indeed prefer tribal and material issues over Hindu-nationalist issues in a vote-choice context by 6 to 8 percentage points across the three attributes, indicating that 9 years since moving toward the BJP, Bhils continue to prioritize their ethnic and material interests over appeals to religious majoritarianism. The exploratory subgroup results provide preliminary evidence that may further strengthen the case for Hypothesis 1. BJP-leaning Bhils were more likely to prioritize tribal and material issues compared to non-BJP-leaning Bhils based on self-reported preferred political parties, with those BJP voters in BJP constituency being the most likely to prefer tribal and material

issues. Moreover, Bhils with a greater cultural leaning toward Hinduism were not conclusively shown to be less likely to prefer tribal and material issues compared to Bhils with a tribal cultural leaning, due to the failure to reject the null hypothesis. These subgroup results, statistically insignificant in the case of cultural leaning, and statistically significant but negative in the case of respondent party-leaning, provide preliminary pointers towards the hitherto failure of a religious nationalist party like the BJP and its affiliates to move Bhils away from tribal and material drivers of vote choice. In the following section, I discuss the second part of the research design that further corroborates these findings.

## 6 Interview Analysis

### 6.1 Set-Up and Administration

Bringing interviews into this thesis' research strategy was important for three reasons. First, while the conjoint surveys allow us to simulate a vote-choice scenario, it is imperative to check qualitatively if the tasks and the images were understood. Interviews provide a discussion space between the researcher and the respondent to judge if the research intervention worked (Appendix L contains a discussion of this qualitative robustness check). Second, the interviews allow the respondents to discuss their opinions about the party platforms beyond just rating them on a numeric scale. This allows the researcher to ask the respondents more directed questions about their stances on the questions of Bhil identity and its link to Hindu nationalist positions, as well as the material issues that drive their vote choice. In doing so, the interviews allow one to triangulate the evidence from the conjoint concerning Hypothesis 1. However, the third reason is the most important one concerning the goals of this study, as interviews were deemed necessary to test Hypothesis 2. On the field, the researcher needs to avoid being deemed an affiliated agent of a party or a leader. Using images of specific local leaders or parties in the conjoint analysis to test which retains stronger voter loyalty would make such an allegation difficult to avoid. Interviews allow the researcher to bring up the issue of preferences for leaders and parties through dialogue, instead of priming the

individual to think about specific leaders or parties over others. These three reasons—evaluating conjoint survey comprehension, triangulating evidence for Hypothesis 1, and testing Hypothesis 2—make interviews a powerful and necessary component of this study.

The interviews were conducted among a sub-sample of 80 respondents across 10 villages, from the original sample of 678 respondents in the conjoint analysis. These were not follow-up interviews as no time had elapsed between the conjoint and the interview; instead, they were conducted consecutively, right after the conjoint analysis had been administered. Moreover, while the conjoint analysis was administered with the help of 4 research assistants, all 80 interviews were conducted solely by the principal investigator to avoid multiple-interviewer bias and standardize the interpretation of the interactions across the interviews. As in the case of the conjoint, a stratified sample was pre-determined, with 5 villages (or 40 respondents) from assembly constituencies where the ruling party was BJP the other half being in non-BJP-ruled constituencies. The 10 villages were otherwise randomly sampled from the list of 40 total villages covered in the conjoint analysis. Moreover, at the village level, 8 interviews each were conducted with an approximately equal distribution of men and women but were otherwise randomly selected after sampling the list of 30 potential respondents to approach in the village, until the target of 8 interviews and a gender balance was met.

The interviews were not audio-recorded due to the previously mentioned skepticism of digital devices used by outsiders. Instead, the transcription relied on the researcher's handwritten notes from the interviews. The interviews were unstructured, as they took the form of a one-on-one discussion of thoughts prompted by the visual conjoint and thus questions were not pre-set. However, through the notes of each interview, quotes were categorized under three broad themes: "Conjoint comprehension and related comments," "Opinion on Tribal identity and Hindu nationalist issues," and "Party and/or Leader Choice Determinant." (Please view supplementary materials for the repository of categorized responses per interviewee).

Table 3 below provides a summary of the demographic and political characteristics of the 80 respondents interviewed across the 10 villages.

Interviewee Characteristic	Levels	Observations (and %)
Age	Mean = 39.1	80 (100%)
Gender	1. Female 2. Male	39 (48.8%) 41 (51.2%)
Cultural-leaning	1. Hindu Cultural-leaning 2. Tribal Cultural-leaning	43 (53.8%) 37 (46.2%)
Ruling Party in Assembly Constituency	1. BJP-ruled constituency 2. non-BJP-ruled constituency	40 (50%) 40 (50%)
Respondent Self-declared Party Leanings	1. BJP-leaning 2. non-BJP-leaning	35 (43.8%) 45 (56.2%)
Respondent Self-declared Preferred Leader Type	1. Local BJP-leaning 2. Local non-BJP-leaning 3. Non-local BJP-leaning 4. Non-local non-BJP-leaning 5. None	37 (46.2%) 18 (22.5%) 2 (2.5%) 18 (22.5%) 5 (6.2%)

Table 3: Characteristics of the 80 interviewees across the 10 villages

## 6.2 Triangulating Evidence for Hypothesis 1

In analyzing the interviews for their implications for Hypothesis 1, i.e. that Bhil voters prioritize tribal and material issues over Hindu-nationalist positions, three key themes were identified that support this hypothesis and corroborate the conjoint analysis.

### 6.2.1 Continuing Attachment to Tribal Identity

Those leaning toward parties other than the BJP overwhelmingly voiced the view that Bhils have a unique Adivasi culture different from Hinduism. There were strong statements such as “Do not like these Hindu images at all which says we are Hindu first, with all the saffron<sup>2</sup> colour” (Interview ID: 30301), “[..] the images that emphasize my tribal identity are a lot more important to me,”

(Interview ID: 40103), and, “we celebrate Bira Munda jayanti<sup>3</sup>, worship Devmogra mata, and I don’t see any saffron when I worship her” (Interview ID: 40510). Moreover, the BJP’s use of the word *vansvasi* to refer to tribal people was raised unprompted by the researcher, with vehement opposition to being called forest-dwelling people: “We are not *vanvasi*. My ancestors would be appalled to hear what the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is doing here. We did not always and only live in the forest you know, we were made to become dependent on it over centuries. And now they don’t want to call us Adivasi.” (Interview ID: 10911).

While this result is not surprising, as one expects those not yet voting for the Hindu nationalist BJP to see a shift in their attachment to their tribal heritage, the responses from those who do vote for the BJP revealed important insights. On the one hand, BJP-voting respondents were indeed more likely to identify as Hindu along with being Bhil or Adivasi. However, while acknowledging their Hindu identity, they followed up with remarks that their tribal heritage was of primary importance to them. “I worship Hindu gods but I have more attachment to my tribal culture. I would not give that up” (Interview ID: 40108) and “We are Hindu. But our Umaj mata is our kul devi so she comes before everyone to us Bhils.” (Interview ID: 50206). In the latter statement, the concept of kul devi refers to the allegiance to a particular god or goddess that watches over the clan or a tribe. This idea was often used to point to a differentiation between tribal and mainstream Hinduism. “The way they celebrate Holi in the cities is very different from us. We do not throw colours or worship Lord Krishna. Instead, we have a huge gathering in our village and it is very different from the way the city folks do it.” (Interview ID: 20101) or “Even though we are Hindu, our gods are different. We knew of Lord Ram but the celebrations of Ram Navami<sup>4</sup> are quite new to us here in the city.” (Interview ID: 50101). “What will I do with a visit to the Ram temple in Ayodhya? It is far from here and our *kul devi* Devmogra mata has a temple in our neighbouring village.” (Interview ID: 10903). While not refusing the claim that they were Hindu, these BJP voters were inclined to differentiate their practices from the mainstream Hinduism of the ‘city,’ referring to areas with lower tribal populations and weaker salience of tribal culture.

Of course, the responses were not devoid of exceptions. An older man who was a BJP voter,

adorning a saffron attire which indicated his strong identification with Hinduism, claimed: “I don’t see the difference between a Bhil and a Hindu. We are the same. Of course I would vote for someone with a stronger loyalty to Hindus. I have been a part of RSS myself.” (Interview ID: 30308). Such a response was an outlier and an explicit membership with a Hindu nationalist was not common amongst the respondents, indicating that while it may indeed be the case that stronger affiliations with BJP-affiliated Hindu nationalist organizations may lead to an entrenchment of an essential relationship between Hinduism and Bhils, such an entrenchment has not yet taken place.

Overall, the interviews corroborate the evidence from the conjoint that the Tribal cultural heritage platform was preferred more than the Hindu cultural heritage platform. Furthermore, the fact that Tribal identity held primacy despite associating with Hindu traditions and practices also explains why a statistically significant difference was not found between the subgroup of Tribal and Hindu cultural leaning respondents concerning their preferences for tribal and Hindu nationalist issues.

### **6.2.2 Opposition to Mobilization for Delisting and Other Religious Issues**

The second important theme identified from the interviews was the attitudes towards mobilization on Hindu nationalist issues, such as that of the delisting of Bhil individuals who have converted to Islam or Christianity. Barring a few exceptions in support of such a policy, the overwhelming response was against mobilization on religious grounds.

The first evidence in support of this is the interpretation of the image priming the threat of ‘Forced Conversion’ in the conjoint. Interestingly, the threat picked up from the image took on a different meaning for some Bhils, which was the threat of violence and riots associated with policies deemed to be religiously divisive, the issue also being colloquially referred to as Hindu-Muslim. Comments from BJP voters included: “I fear this Hindu-Muslim issue [entering] our area. It [distracts] and does not address our issues,” (Interview ID: 30302), “I keep away from the riots and everything associated with Hindu-Muslim issues” (Interview ID: 10904) and “it has brought a lot of pain in some places, like Malegaon” (Interview ID: 30304), with the ‘pain’ in Malegaon

referring to the riots of 2006 in the city of Malegaon in North Maharashtra, following bombings at a Muslim cemetery. Furthermore, a BJP voter in Akkalkuwa claimed “I don’t trust these groups that will be formed in our town or village that are supposed to protect us from outsiders. They end up causing unnecessary issues and fights in our community. A fight over a game of cricket or bargaining over the price of tomatoes at the Thursday market will turn into Hindu-Muslim because of some over-eagre groups.” (Interview ID: 10810). That the image calling for the organization of groups to bar Muslim and Christian missionaries from entering the village predominantly evoked the fear of riots and violence coming to their village, instead of the fear of forced conversion itself, is indicative of the lack of support that religious mobilization has amongst the Bhils.

Second, amongst BJP voters with whom the Janjati Suraksha Manch’s protests for delisting was discussed, there was indifference and lack of enthusiasm for joining the movement, with comments such as: “[I] can’t imagine getting involved in a protest with other Hindus about this. We have more important issues to protest about already” [Interview ID: 50213], “I have no business going to the delisting rally... I don’t care about that” [Interview ID: 40103], and “I don’t think I would step out on the streets because they say Hindus are in danger. What’s in danger are my children. What are they going to do about the school being closed for a year?” [Interview ID: 50206]. There was also an appeal to the shared experience of being poor and marginalized as Bhils irrespective of religion: “We are Hindu Bhils. There are other types of Bhils—ultimately we are all poor and that’s what matters” [Interview ID: 40113] and “I don’t think any [Bhil] should lose their reservation. We have it because we are poor, not because we are Hindu.” [Interview ID: 50211]. Even when there were some concerns raised about religious conversion amongst Bhils, there was resistance against revoking their Scheduled Tribe status: “I don’t like that they have converted, but I also don’t want them to lose reservation. It is tough for our children to get into colleges when our schools are so poor, it would be worse if we started losing reservations” [Interview ID: 60515]. While predominantly a lack of enthusiasm prevails towards the protests for delisting converted Bhils even amongst the BJP voters, 6 out of the 80 respondents that explicitly discussed that they would support the delisting protest were from mixed political affiliations, with 4 voting for the BJP

and 2 being non-BJP-voters.

Overall, this discussion concludes that barring exceptions, there is a lack of support for mobilization on Hindu-nationalist grounds, with only 4 out of the 35 BJP-leaning interviewees claiming that they would be in favour of the delisting protests. This further corroborates the result from the conjoint where the Hindu-nationalist issue of forming groups against forced conversion was disfavoured by 6.8 percentage points compared to the money in hand for the unemployed Bhil youth.

### **6.2.3 Material motivators of vote-choice remain dominant**

For the last theme from the interviews that triangulate the conjoint, here I outline the interactions that provide evidence of material issues amongst Bhil voters remaining salient, further corroborating Hypothesis 1.

When examining the voting behaviour of the Bhil community, particularly those supporting the BJP, there is compelling evidence to suggest that material issues are of primary importance. "The issue that matters most to me is that our ration cards are not taken away from us, which I have heard they might" (Interview ID: 40501). The ration card is a crucial tool for accessing subsidized food and essential goods. The impact of housing schemes on voting preferences is also evident, both amongst BJP and non-BJP voters. A community member highlights the role of these schemes in their life, saying, "We built our house thanks to the Indira Awaas Yojana and it still has the roof tiles painted in Indira's name. So I am grateful for that. But there is more to do. Gas cylinders are really expensive right now, I wish they did something" (Interview ID: 60509). This statement not only shows gratitude for the housing assistance received but also indicates that ongoing material needs, such as the affordability of gas cylinders, continue to shape their political views. Further reinforcing this trend is another response that directly ties support for the BJP to the implementation of housing schemes: "We just had our house built through the BJP Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana. It delivered for us and that's why I vote for the BJP. They deliver" (Interview ID: 60515). This endorsement of the BJP's housing policy illustrates a pragmatic approach to

voting. When asked about the reasons why they value their leader, BJP voters were quick to point to specific material benefits received, either at the communal or the individual level: “See that ambulance, that was Amrishbhai. We trust him to deliver” [Interview ID: 30304] referring to the BJP leader from Shirpur, and “We are going to meet with Heena tai to ask [for] funds for sheep husbandry. She has helped us in the past.” [Interview ID: 60502].

The role of material benefits blurring the lines of vote-buying and patronage in influencing votes was also evident. “I always wait until the campaign period of the election starts. The leader standing in the election matters to me. If he can give me something—mutton, alcohol, cash—it matters. Next election, let’s see what they provide and I might vote for BJP again.” (Interview ID: 30303). Moreover, the distribution of material rewards was also highlighted to be a significant part of campaign efforts, especially during the period when BJP leaders switched parties and the clients had to be made aware of this switch: “I remember in 2014 when Gavit saheb switched parties, his workers came to tell us [...] they had a big event. They distributed money that night of course. I was going to vote for the NCP because of the Gavits and when they told me Gavit had changed to the BJP I said that is what I must do. I trust him, I’ve been to his office in the city a couple of times” [Interview ID: 50210], and “His workers are active in our village. Especially around election time, I remember last time I received 2,000 rupees [...] so I came out to vote.” [Interview ID: 50211], both in MP Heena Gavit’s father Vijaykumar Gavit’s assembly constituency. Such a practice was also prevalent amongst INC voters, with one reporting: “I voted for Padmakar bhau. To tell you the truth money plays a big role. Some give 500, some give 2000. Depends on the type of election. [...] Yes the policies are okay but I don’t trust that. Money in hand is money in hand,” referring to the candidate who ultimately lost to a first-time BJP legislator.

Finally, the interviews also provide preliminary insight into the result of the subgroup analysis of the conjoint, where the non-BJP-leaning voters were less likely than BJP-leaning voters to prefer the cash handout and the truck as material platforms. This was largely to do with skepticism amongst non-BJP-leaning voters about such schemes being implemented, perhaps pointing to dissatisfaction and distrust of the patronage promises of non-BJP leaders. “First time I voted for the

Congress in 2014 because my family always has. But we were disappointed with their delivery and empty promises” [Interview ID: 40517] and “[..] their schemes never reached us. Their local politicians ate it up.” [Interview ID: 60503]. Moreover, the INC voters were also likely to notice the unsustainability or unsuitability of these material rewards: “The truck would belong to the village. Sometimes these things sit idly. Look at that ambulance. Yes, it is good but then we need money for diesel and sometimes they ask us [to pay] for it. So we end up not using it” [Interview ID: 30313] pointing to the ambulance provided by Amrishbhai Patel when he was an INC leader, or “the truck image doesn’t do much because we often have bad rain and our crops or forest produce isn’t always reliable anyways” [Interview ID: 30304], with North Maharashtra being particularly prone to droughts.

The interviews thus provide descriptive evidence that material benefits significantly influence Bhil vote choice, aligning with the hypothesis that material issues are salient in their electoral choices, and corroborating the conjoint results in support of Hypothesis 1.

### **6.3 Evidence for Hypothesis 2**

The interviews reveal that local political leaders are overwhelmingly preferred over non-local political leaders amongst BJP-leaning Bhil voters, in a way that supersedes party allegiance (Please refer to Appendix G.4 for how these were categorized). However, the local/non-local preferred politician ratio is more balanced amongst the non-BJP-leaning voters. Here I define a local leader as someone who is from the Nandurbar Lok Sabha constituency. This provides descriptive evidence that the BJP continues to rely on local politicians from the constituency for its support amongst Bhil voters.

#### **6.3.1 Mixed local patron/party loyalty amongst non-BJP voting Bhils**

A first look at the descriptive data of the preferred political leader reveals that 55 out of the 80 interviewees named a local leader as the one they prefer the most. However, amongst non-BJP voters, this relationship was evenly split between local and non-local politicians, with 18 each<sup>5</sup>. The interviews provide insight into this mixed evidence.

On the one hand, a clientelist loyalty to a local leader determined the vote for non-BJP voters, especially those voting for the INC. Such interviews highlight themes of being local, having connections and the presence of local representatives in the constituency. Voters of Shirishkumar Naik of Navapur claim that: “I have never voted for anyone other than Congress. That is because the Naik family has been good to the people here [...], are from here, and we can go to them for our issues because they have the connections to help us” [Interview ID: 10204] and “The family has done a lot for us. They have a big network here in every village and it helps because we can just approach their worker and some help is always there” [Interview ID: 20106], with the Naik family being the dynastic power holder of the Navapur state assembly constituency since 1985. This was also the case for a voter of ex-MLA Padmakar Valvi of Shahada, who described his relationship with Valvi as follows: “He is from here, lives here and I trust him to make the call. If I ever need something I can just go to his office, and his karyakartas (workers) always help. that’s why I trust him” [Interview ID: 40103].

On the other hand, the salience of non-local leaders and loyalty to the party was also present. This was most salient amongst INC voters, who claim that the party and the associated Gandhi family, who have historically been its leaders, influence them to press the panja (INC party symbol) at the electoral booth. Many claimed that Bhils had a historic tie with the Gandhi family due to Indira Gandhi having visited the constituency during her 1980 election campaign. “I had a young family when Indira Mai came here. I remember my husband going on a bus to see her rally. We have long been her supporters and believe that the panja has the interests of Adivasis in mind” [Interview ID: 40101], “My family has always been with the panja. I don’t know too many leaders but my father had a photo of Indira Gandhi in our house when I was young” [Interview ID: 20103], “My father, my husband all vote for the Congress. I remember when I was young Indira Gandhi came to Nandurbar and my father went there” [Interview ID: 20114]. Such loyalty extended to the Gandhi family at large, with voters claiming, “My family has always voted for the Gandhis, I don’t know if I will change” [Interview ID: 20105] and “Sonia Gandhi was here about 10 years ago and I went to Nandurbar [...] they have our support. my husband took me. I do remember they sent

jeeps to our village to take us there” [Interview ID: 10605].

Thus, interviews amongst non-BJP voters suggest that those who vote for parties such as the INC continue to do so for varying loyalties, with some being party and Gandhi family voters, while others voting in line with their clientelist ties to their local patron.

### **6.3.2 Greater loyalty to local patrons amongst BJP voting Bhils**

On the other hand, amongst BJP voting Bhils, the local/non-local preferred politician ratio is overwhelmingly skewed towards the local leaders. 37 voters stated that they preferred a local BJP politician, while only 35 voters were BJP-leaning in the interview sample. 4 non-BJP-leaning voters named local BJP politicians, while 2 BJP-leaning voters out of the 35 referred to a non-local BJP politician<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, the turncoat NCP leader and Tribal Development Minister of Maharashtra who joined the BJP in 2014, Dr. Vijaykumar Gavit, was the preferred leader amongst a plurality of voters in the interview sample (18 out of 80) as well as the overall sample (113 out of 678). BJP MP Dr. Heena Gavit, Minister Gavit’s daughter, was the preferred choice for 7 in the interview sample. In total, the Gavits alone were the preferred choice of 25 out of the 37 interviewees who preferred a local BJP politician in the sample.

Amongst the BJP-leaning respondents, the theme of their vote turning on their local political leader was common, with many claiming that they would vote for any party that their leader joined. This was particularly the case for Minister Gavit, with voters claiming that they switched over from another party to the BJP simply because Minister Gavit did: “I used to be an NCP voter [...] Gavit saheb did a lot for us and when he moved [I] voted for the BJP in 2014” [Interview ID: 40109], “Yes, we voted for the Congress mostly, but when we heard that the tribal minister had changed to the BJP, we had to vote for them.” [Interview ID: 10801], “Why I support the BJP? Because of Gavit saheb now that he is with them” [Interview ID: 10602], and “I used to vote for the NCP and now I vote for the BJP. The Gavits have done a tremendous job.” [Interview ID: 60605]. This support is also characterized by aspects of longevity and stability in their support for Minister Gavit, given that he has been an MLA from Nandurbar since 1995: “Gavit saheb has been our

leader for 28 years now. As tribal minister he changed agriculture here. Better roads, water to our village” [Interview ID: 10815] and “Gavit saheb has my support. I was born in a village outside of Nandurbar and we were poor. Gavit saheb brought taps to our village and my mother didn’t have to fetch water from the well anymore.” [Interview ID: 50101].

Moreover, this loyalty to a local leader had an important clientelist element to it, with respondents claiming that connections and the presence of local representatives influenced them and their whole families to stay with the leader. “[..] I would vote wherever the Gavits go. Why? because then they have more karyakartas in our village and we can get things done.” [Interview ID: 50209], “Gavit saheb is someone I know. We have many karyakartas of his here who often go to Nandurbar and get things done for us. I had my medical bill covered by them.” [Interview ID: 10904], “Gavit saheb has strong connections here and I have myself visited his office.” [Interview ID: 10909] and “I don’t keep up with party politics too much but we have a lot of [Gavit saheb’s] workers here so they tell us any time a scheme is being implemented and my family benefits” [Interview ID: 10910]. Such elements were not confined to Minister Gavit, with a BJP voter in Shirpur constituency claiming: “[Amrish bhai Patel] is with the BJP so I support the BJP. He even sends his representatives here to our village every time an election is close and organizes an event for us” [Interview ID: 30304]. This clientelist relationship translated to the capture of voters as an entire family block, particularly in interviews with female BJP voters. “I voted for Gavit last time. My husband said that is whom I should vote for. He probably got some money but I don’t know.” [Interview ID: 50213], “I am with Gavit saheb because my husband says so. But I know he brought roads and taps to our village, even my parents’ village” [Interview ID: 50103], and “[..] my whole family turned to the BJP when we saw [Gavit’s] rally and they said he was with *kamal* [lotus, BJP’s election symbol] now.” [Interview ID: 50114].

Thus, the interviews provide descriptive evidence for Hypothesis 2 that the salience of loyalty to their local patron is a pivotal factor for Bhils voting for the BJP, with the implication that the BJP continues to rely on the turncoat leaders for retaining the vote of their clientelist network.

## **7 Conclusion**

### **7.1 Argument Summary**

this thesis has set out to investigate a critical question in the landscape of ethnic patronage democracies: Can religious-majoritarian parties, like the BJP in India, sway ethnic minority voters, in this case the Bhils, to prioritize religious majoritarian policies over their ethnic and material interests by co-opting their local leaders? The core of this exploration revolves around the ability of the BJP, a party with a strong Hindu-nationalist ideology, to redirect the loyalties of these voters, initially connected through turncoat leaders, towards its religious-majoritarian agenda.

In constituencies with minimal historical support for the BJP, the party has strategically recruited ‘turncoat’ leaders from other parties to tap into and commandeer their established client networks. This tactic raises a vital question: Can the BJP, entrenched in its Hindu nationalist ideology, successfully move these acquired voters to prioritize its ideology? Or do the entrenched clientelist relationships and the ethnic and material interests of these voters continue to hold sway, even after a duration of nine years?

To delve into these questions, this thesis has employed a mixed-methods approach. Firstly, through conjoint analysis, Hypothesis 1 was tested. This hypothesis posited that despite the BJP’s efforts, the ethnic and material interests of the Bhil voters would remain predominant over the party’s Hindu-nationalist appeals. The results of the conjoint analysis have provided conclusive evidence in support of this hypothesis, indicating that the BJP’s influence in swaying voter priorities towards religious-nationalist issues has been limited.

Secondly, this thesis has conducted interviews to corroborate Hypothesis 1 and provide descriptive evidence for Hypothesis 2. This second hypothesis suggests that the clientelist loyalty to local leaders, especially among BJP voting Bhils, continues to be a stronger driver of vote-choice than party affiliation. The interviews have reinforced this notion, demonstrating a sustained attachment to tribal identity and general disfavour towards mobilization on Hindu-nationalist grounds. This evidence underlines the enduring influence of local patrons in determining the electoral decisions

of their constituents. Consequently, this thesis concludes that the BJP's success in redirecting the Bhils' voting preferences towards Hindu nationalism has been restricted. The party is expected to continue relying on the influence of turncoat leaders to maintain the votes of ethnic minorities like the Bhils.

This study aligns with existing literature on the reshaping of identities in the short term, but extends the discourse by examining the relationship between religious parties and the dominant local patrons in ethnic minority communities. Additionally, it contributes to the sparse literature on the voting behaviour of Scheduled Tribes such as the Bhils, offering insights into the dynamics of tribal and religious dynamics of electoral politics in India.

## 7.2 Qualifications to the Argument

While the primary argument of this thesis posits the limited ability of religious-majoritarian parties like the BJP to redirect ethnic minority voters' priorities in India, several qualifications are necessary to contextualize these findings accurately.

Firstly, the discussion about the restricted influence of religious parties, specifically in the case of the BJP's engagement with the Bhils, is largely focused on contexts where these parties have historically exhibited low electoral competitiveness. In such scenarios, the parties' reliance on 'turncoat' leaders to access and influence voter networks is a key strategy. This reliance indicates that the party's influence is not inherently persuasive but is mediated through the established trust and clientelist relationships these leaders have with their ethnic communities. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to situations where religious parties have a strong, independent electoral presence.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that preferences for Hindu nationalism were not entirely absent among the Bhil voters. The survey, which was not structured as a forced-choice conjoint, still captured certain preferences for Hindu nationalist platform issues. However, these preferences were relatively disfavored compared to tribal and material issues. This observation suggests that while religious parties like the BJP have made inroads in terms of issue salience, they

have not been able to dislodge the primacy of ethnic and material concerns in the short term. It reflects a complex interplay of political identities where religious nationalism has a presence but does not dominate the electoral calculus of these voters.

Thirdly, the analysis in this thesis is predominantly concerned with short-term dynamics. It is crucial to consider that, as with the examples of the Sami in Scandinavia and the Ainu people in Japan discussed earlier, identity transformation projects, such as those attempted by the BJP with the Bhils, may be long-term endeavours. The historical and ongoing socio-political context of these ethnic groups, coupled with the strategic efforts of religious-majoritarian parties, might lead to more significant shifts in voter priorities over a more extended period. Therefore, while the current findings highlight limited success for the BJP in the short term, the potential for a more profound identity transformation in the long term, aligning ethnic minority voters more closely with Hindu-nationalist agendas, cannot be ruled out.

Thus, while this thesis presents a compelling case for the limited success of religious parties in reorienting the voting preferences of ethnic minorities gained by capturing their local patrons in the short term, these qualifications are important to set the scope of the argument about the interaction between ethnic patronage and religious-majoritarian politics.

### 7.3 Scope for Further Work

The findings and methodologies of this study on the Bhils' voting behaviour for the BJP offer a foundation for several promising areas of further research.

- **Comparative Analysis in Regions with Varying Historical Competitiveness of the Religious Party:** A crucial extension of this research could involve a comparison between areas where the BJP has historically been competitive among the Bhils and areas where it has not. Such a comparative design would enable researchers to assess if voters of turncoat leaders differ significantly from those in regions where the BJP has stronger organizational capacity and an entrenched presence.
- **Expansion of Sample Size for Subgroup Analysis:** Such a comparative study would also

facilitate a larger sample size, which would allow for more detailed subgroup analyses. This expansion is particularly important for examining the cultural and political leanings of the respondents in a more nuanced manner, going beyond the binary categorizations used in this thesis.

- **Confirmatory Research on Subgroup Analyses:** The exploratory results of this study set the stage for confirmatory research in the context of the Bhils and other ethnic minorities who vote for religious parties due to the influence of turncoat leaders. Such research would aim to validate and expand upon the findings, potentially identifying broader trends and factors at play in these complex voting dynamics.
  - **Exploring the Role of Brokers:** Investigating the role of brokers—the intermediaries between elite parties, patrons, and voters—could offer valuable insights. The study could examine whether brokers being religiously affiliated with Hindu-nationalist movements or being more aligned with local leaders has an impact on the resilience of the client network to religious majoritarian issues when captured by religious parties. Understanding the role of brokers can provide clarity on the durability of clientelist networks and their influence in either sustaining patron loyalty or facilitating a shift towards a religious-majoritarian party and its platform.
-

## APPENDICES

# A Research Ethics Board Certificate

McGill University  
Research Ethics Board Office  
[www.mcgill.ca/research/research/compliance/human](http://www.mcgill.ca/research/research/compliance/human)



## CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

**REB File Number:** 23-01-103  
**Project Title:** Fieldwork in India May-July 2023. Mahajan Pratik  
**Student Principal Investigator:** Pratik Mahajan  
**Department:** Political Science  
**Supervisor Name:** Professor Narendra Subramanian  
**Sponsor/Funding Agency (if applicable):** McGill Faculty of Arts Graduate Mobility Award  
**Research Team (if applicable):**  

Name	Affiliation
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**Approval Period:**

**FROM**  
29-Mar-2023

**TO**  
28-Mar-2024

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The *REB-1* reviewed and approved this project by Delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

- \* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
- \* The PI must inform the REB if there is a termination or interruption of their affiliation with the University. The McGill REB approval is no longer valid once the PI is no longer a student or employee.
- \* An **Amendment** form must be used to submit any proposed modifications to the approved research. Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented. Changes to funding or adding new funding to a previously unfunded study must be submitted as an Amendment.
- \* A **Continuing Review** form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.  
A total of 5 renewals are permitted after which time a new application will need to be submitted.
- \* A **Termination** form must be submitted to inform the REB when a project has been completed or terminated.
- \* A **Reportable New Information** form must be submitted to report any unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications or to report any protocol deviations that did not receive prior REB approval.
- \* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
- \* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
- \* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

## B Preregistration



### Bhils (ST), BJP, and Electoral Platform Preferences- A Conjoint Analysis (Final) (#132607)

#### Author(s)

Pratik Mahajan (McGill University, Canada) - pratik.mahajan@mail.mcgill.ca

Created: 05/18/2023 02:22 AM (PT)

Public: 05/18/2023 02:22 AM (PT)

#### 1) Have any data been collected for this study already?

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

#### 2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?

The main hypothesis of this study is that Bhil (Scheduled Tribes in western India) individuals prefer electoral platforms with a focus on Tribal social-development issues over electoral platforms that focus on Hindu-nationalist issues. Prior work (Thachil, 2014) suggests that BJP's use of Hindu nationalism did not explain the support it received from Scheduled Tribes in 2004 and 2009 elections. This study aims to investigate whether this claim holds true in the post-2014 period, during which the BJP has consolidated power in India, increased its vote share amongst Bhils, and increasingly employed Hindu-nationalism as a mainstream electoral strategy.

#### 3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.

The primary dependent variable in this study is the strength of a participant's preference for an electoral platform, measured on a scale of 0 to 10, when presented as part of a pair compared to another platform through 3 similar conjoint tasks.

#### 4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

3 conditions each. As a conjoint experiment, there are 28 unique pairs of platforms, and each individual is assigned to rate 3 pairs of electoral platforms.

#### 5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.

The main analyses conducted in this study is the calculation of Average Marginal Component Effect for attributes in conjoint survey analysis, along with marginal means. The steps are as follows:

1. Administer a survey in the Nandurbar Federal Constituency, which begins by asking respondents demographic information, as well as questions about their religiosity, and the political party and political leader that best represents them.
2. Through printed images, present participants with conjoint tasks, each featuring two randomly generated party platforms. Each platform has 3 dummy policy attributes. The total number of unique platforms is 8 (2\*2\*2), and the total number of unique non-identical pairs is 28. From these 28, each participant is randomly assigned to rate 3 unique non-identical pairs of platforms. This randomization is done prior to the survey, ensuring uniform distribution of all 28 unique non-identical pairs. The three platform attributes are as follows
  - a. Identity protection:
    - i. Bhils Hindu identity to be protected (0).
    - ii. Bhils Tribal identity to be protected (1).
  - b. Threat priming:
    - i. Groups to prevent Bhil Hindus being converted to other religions (0).
    - ii. Bhil Youth Unemployment Aid (1).
  - c. Service provision:
    - i. Trip to Ram Mandir (0).
    - ii. Free transportation of forest and farm produce of Bhils to urban market (1).
3. These platform statements are represented only through images instead of text, to ensure uniformity in lieu of poor literacy rates. The images will first be explained by reading the corresponding platform statement out loud by the researcher. Then, during the conjoint tasks, the images are used for recall.
4. Using marbles, ask respondents to rate each platform profile from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating strong dislike and 10 indicating strong preference. Each participant will evaluate a total of 6 profiles across 3 pairs.
5. Calculate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCE) scores for an electoral platform attribute on the likelihood of a platform being chosen. In this analysis, the baseline for all platform attributes is the Hindu nationalist platform (indicated as 0).
6. Furthermore, Marginal Means will be reported to account for bias generated by the reference category used to measure subgroup differences. The following subgroup differences will be checked for any confounding from the following individual level covariates: Gender (Male or Female), Cultural-leaning (Hindu traditions, Tribal traditions), and Party-leaning (BJP-affiliate, non-BJP affiliate), and Electoral Location (BJP-represented constituency vs non-BJP represented constituency).

#### 6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.

Outliers will not be excluded. As for missing data, I will continue to include those who perform the conjoint task but choose not to answer one of the pre-task demographic variables. Those who choose not to perform the conjoint task will be omitted.

#### 7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.



In addition to 510 individuals already preregistered based on a priori power calculations, 170 more individuals will be added to the sample. An effect size of 0.08 (equivalent to 0.8 on the 0 to 10 scale) was chosen based on the previous use of conjoint analysis on religion and attribute preferences (Bansak et. al., 2016) and a conjoint run in Maharashtra, India, albeit in a non-electoral setting (Auerbach et.al. 2019). At a power of 0.8 (80%) and at a significance level of 0.05, the minimum sample size to detect a statistically significant result was 510. 680 voting-age Bhil (ST) individuals will be sampled to increase the likelihood of a statistically significant result, with 17 individuals each from 40 villages inside the Nandurbar Federal Constituency. There are 6 Provincial Assembly Constituencies inside the Nandurbar Federal Constituency, 3 represented by the BJP, 3 represented by non-BJP parties who oppose the BJP. Half the number of villages (20) and individuals (340) will be from BJP represented constituencies, and the other half from non-BJP represented constituencies. These villages were chosen to ensure geographic spread inside the constituency, but are otherwise randomly selected. Within each village, a list of inhabitants is obtained from the local gram panchayat (village council) office, and a target list of 30 individuals is generated. These participants will be reached out door-to-door until 17 individuals have been surveyed.

**8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

In addition to demographic questions about age, gender, education, religion, and occupation, the survey will also measure the extent to which Hinduism influences the Bhil individual's cultural practices, as well as party-affiliation, using a factor design. This will be done through the inclusion of three survey questions:

1. In your private and communal practice, which gods and deities do you worship?
2. In your private and communal practice, which cultural festivals do you actively celebrate?
3. When there is a wedding in your family, do you call a punjara or brahmin?

Based on the responses to these questions, a binary variable of Cultural-leaning will be generated, with 0 indicating stronger affiliation with Tribal traditions, and 1 indicating stronger affiliation with Hindu traditions.

The binary variable of Party-affiliation is based on answers to two questions:

- 1) Which political party best represents you?
- 2) Which political leader best represents you?

Based on responses to these questions, the participant will either be categorized as being supportive of BJP and affiliated parties or supportive of parties not affiliated with the BJP.

##### BUNDLE #####

This pre-registration is part of a set of similar and/or related pre-registrations sharing at least one author. When one of these pre-registrations was shared by an author, the rest were shared automatically. Links to other pre-registration(s), appear below:

#132304 - <https://aspredicted.org/dw7f8.pdf> - Title: 'Bhils (ST), BJP, and Electoral Platform Preferences- A Conjoint Analysis'

## C Steps to Administer the Conjoint

The survey and the interviews were fielded on May 19, 2023, and completed on July 8, 2023, i.e. 50 days.

### PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTERING THE VISUAL CONJOINT IN-PERSON

1. Before beginning the visual conjoint, the researcher first shows each of the six images and reads out the platform statement associated with it. This ensures that the statement is associated with an image, which can then be recalled during the visual conjoint tasks.
2. Then, for each respondent, the researcher first refers to the excel table indicating the respondent number (out of 680), and notes down the three unique pairs as being assigned to the respondent in the order in which the survey is done. For example, the 470th survey respondent will be assigned to rate unique pairs number 1, 17 and 5 of platforms sampled under the 470th entry in the excel sheet (see attached excel sheet for all 680 combinations).
3. Then, for respondent number 470, the researcher would go on to first show pair number 1 to the respondent. After giving some time to visually inspect and recall, the respondent will be handed 10 marbles in their hand. They will then be asked the following question: “Now we would like you to rate each of these two platforms. First, for the platform on the left, if you completely dislike this platform, you do not give it any marbles. If you completely support it, you may give it up to 10 marbles.” The use of marbles is in lieu of the concept of rating something out of 10, because this is not a readily translatable concept in this context, but valuing something with a physical scale is akin to the use of coins in everyday life. The respondent is then handed back the marbles and is asked to repeat this act of giving the platform on the right 0 to 10 marbles.
4. Step 3 is then repeated two more times, for unique pair number 17 and 5. Their responses are then recorded in the table presented in the survey form.

## D Conjoint Survey Form

### Survey Form

1.	Unique ID (संकेतांक) :	(Six digits, Constituency number, Village number, Person number)		
2.	Name (नाव):			
3.	Age: 18+ (वय 18+):			
4.	Gender (लिंग):			
5.	Religion (धर्म):	(Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Other, None)		
6.	Education Level (शैक्षणिक पात्रता)	None (शिक्षण नाही)	Primary (प्राथमिक)	Secondary (माध्यमिक)
		Post-Secondary (उच्च-माध्यमिक)	University + (महाविद्यालयीन)	
7.	Occupation (व्यवसाय):  (if farmer, mention laborer or owner)(शेतकरी असल्यास मालक किवा मजूर असल्याचा उल्लेख करा.)			
8.	In your private and communal practice, which gods and deities do you worship?  (तुमच्या खाजगी किंवा सांप्रदायिक व्यवहारात तुम्ही कोणकोणत्या देवदेवतांची पूजा करतात?)			
9.	In your private and communal practice, which festivals do you actively celebrate?  (तुमच्या खाजगी किंवा सांप्रदायिक व्यवहारात तुम्ही कोणकोणते सण सक्रियपणे साजरे करतात?)			
10.	When there is a wedding in your family, do they call a punjara or brahmin?			

	(तुमच्या कुटूंबात लग्न असते तेव्हा ते ब्राह्मण लावतात की punjara?)	
<b>12.</b>	Which political party best represents you?  (तुमचा आवडता राजकिय पक्ष कोणता?)	
<b>13.</b>	Which political leader best represents you?  (तुमचा आवडता राजकिय नेता कोणता?)	

Now explain each image, and the rating system.

Then, refer to the excel sheet, and by order number of the participant out of 680, enter the 3 pair labels randomly assigned to that order number

#### Responses to Conjoint Survey

Jodi number.	Pair label in excel sheet	Rating for Party 1 (0 - 10)	Rating for Party 2 (0-10)
1.	(from no. 1 to no. 28)		
2.			
3.			

## E 28 unique combinations of party platforms

These 28 unique pairs of non-identical platforms were then coded as 1 to 28. Taking 0 as the baseline Hindu-nationalist level and 1 as the Tribal/Material level, with three attributes each and two platforms in each pair, these unique codes were as follows:

Unique Platform Pair Code	Party Platform 1			Party Platform 2		
	Attribute 1	Attribute 2	Attribute 3	Attribute 1	Attribute 2	Attribute 3
1.	0	0	0	0	0	1
2.	0	0	0	0	1	0
3.	0	0	0	0	1	1
4.	0	0	0	1	0	0
5.	0	0	0	1	0	1
6.	0	0	0	1	1	0
7.	0	0	0	1	1	1
8.	0	0	1	0	1	0
9.	0	0	1	0	1	1
10.	0	0	1	1	0	0
11.	0	0	1	1	0	1
12.	0	0	1	1	1	0
13.	0	0	1	1	1	1
14.	0	1	0	0	1	1
15.	0	1	0	1	0	0
16.	0	1	0	1	0	1
17.	0	1	0	1	1	0
18.	0	1	0	1	1	1
19.	0	1	1	1	0	0
20.	0	1	1	1	0	1
21.	0	1	1	1	1	0
22.	0	1	1	1	1	1
23.	1	0	0	1	0	1
24.	1	0	0	1	1	0
25.	1	0	0	1	1	1
26.	1	0	1	1	1	0
27.	1	0	1	1	1	1
28.	1	1	0	1	1	1

Table 4: The 28 Unique Platforms Pair Codes and the Attribute level coding for each

## F Graphic Design of Conjoint Platform Issues

The visuals for the conjoint platforms were created by a local graphic designer, with instructions and input from the researcher. The goal was to capture the essence and nuance of the platform statements while being clear to understand. The images were also designed with the expectation that they would not be entirely self-evident, but needed to be explained by the enumerator/researcher first and only then used for recall during the tasks without the enumerator/researcher's influence.

There were two overall design instructions. First, that the Hindu-nationalist platform issues would use warm colours, particularly red and saffron as they are part of the Hindu nationalist imagery, while the Tribal/material platform issues would use cool colours, particularly green to represent the proximity of tribes to nature. Second, that each image should be designed in a way that the combination of 6 images on the same page in each task should not look too crowded and overstimulating. Apart from this, the design instructions were specific to each image to capture the essence of the associated statement.

### 1. Cultural Heritage: Hindu (Figure 3)

**Associated Statement:** *Bhils belong to the proud Hindu heritage of India, and our Hindu religious identity needs to be protected (Hindu-nationalist issue = 0).*

This image conveys the sentiment of Hindu cultural heritage using a bright saffron flag, colloquially called the *bhagwa*, with the Om symbol associated with Hinduism, flying over a line of male and female Bhils. A slight furrowing of the eyebrows on the three faces expresses urgency and readiness, in line with the sentiment that the Hindu religious identity needs to be protected. An elaborate temple in the backdrop represents traditional Hindu religious architecture.

### 2. Cultural Heritage: Tribal (Figure 4)

**Associated Statement:** *Bhils are a proud tribal people, and our unique cultural heritage needs to be protected (Tribal/Material issue = 1).*

To allude to the tribal cultural heritage of Bhils, the image in the foreground and centre is that of Birsa Munda, a colonial-era tribal warrior and leader of a revolutionary movement against the

British in India, who is also worshipped as a hero amongst tribes throughout India including in the Bhil belt. In the bottom right is an image of Zilabai, a tribal land and forest rights activist during the Naramada Bachao Andolan (NBA). To the top-left is a depiction of Devmogra Mata, the most prominent Bhil goddess, being worshipped. And in the backdrop is a depiction of the Saptura Mountain Range that cuts through much of Nandurbar.

### **3. Threat-alleviation: Forced Conversion (Figure 5)**

**Associated Statement:** *Bhil Hindus face the threat of coerced religious conversion by Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian groups. Such groups will be banned and local anti-conversion volunteer groups will be created to protect Bhil Hindus from forced conversion (Hindu-nationalist issue = 0).*

This image depicts the idea of banning non-Hindu religious groups from entering the village by highlighting three religious individuals: a Buddhist monk, a Christian pastor, and a Muslim Imam. The red light cast upon them conveys the sentiment of threat. Amongst the individuals with their backs to the viewer, the two individuals hold wooden poles creating a cross to indicate no entry allowed, while a tribal couple stands behind the cross in a protective stance to convey the idea that Bhil Hindus are being protected against the threat of other religious groups.

### **4. Threat-alleviation: Unemployment (Figure 6)**

**Associated Statement:** *Bhil youths suffer high levels of unemployment, and to alleviate this, each young Bhil in your village will be given money in the form of a cash handout (Tribal/Material issue = 1).*

This image conveys the idea that the cash handout will be provided to young Bhils in an individualized and targetted manner, the image shown here depicts a middle-aged politician/broker handing a sack of money highlighted in a cool green colour, with the Indian National Rupee (INR) symbol on it. The young man is shown to be wearing a strapped bag over the shoulder with books to depict a possibly educated individual deserving of financial stability, while the stream of sweat on the forehead on his right indicates a state of desperation due to unemployment.

## **5. Transportation Service: To Ram Temple (Figure 7)**

**Associated Statement:** *Buses will be organized for Bhil Hindus in your village to visit the newly constructed Ram Mandir (Temple) in Ayodhya (Hindu-nationalist issue= 0).*

This image depicts a family getting off of a bus in front of a large temple complex with saffron flags flying on top. The words Shree Ram are written in saffron colour on the top right in *Devanagari* script. However, this text can be viewed as a symbol because it is often painted at temple entrances. The bus itself has a streak of saffron on the side to depict the purpose of the bus. Most importantly, the State Emblem of India, the three lions, is painted on the bus, conveying that this is a bus provided through government funds and organized for Bhil Hindus.

## **6. Transportation Service: To Market (Figure 8)**

**Associated Statement:** *To ensure that the communal income generated through forest and timber products is maximized for Bhils, a truck will be provided to your village to transport forest and timber to the district market free of charge (Tribal/Material issue = 1).*

Finally, the last image is situated in a forest. It depicts Bhils organizing and loading forest and timber produce collected in the communal forest reserved for the village. The truck has the same State Emblem to convey that the truck is provided through government funds and given to the village.

## G Justification of Recoded Categorical Variables

### G.1 Respondent Cultural-leaning

In this study, the "Cultural Leaning" variable was constructed based on the responses to three survey questions:

- **Which festivals do you personally celebrate?** Here I look for mainstream Hindu festivals that are not rooted in Bhil culture and have instead influence of Hindu-nationalist activity over the years (Baviskar 2005). The point here is also to identify the individual level cultural leaning based on whether they *personally* celebrate them, instead of merely their neighbourhood.
- **Which gods/goddesses do you personally worship?** The logic being same as for the festivals, where I look for mainstream Hindu gods/goddesses.
- **In your family, who do you invite to officiate the wedding? A Brahmin (Hindu priest) or a Punjara (Tribal elder)?** This is a binary variable, and based on the idea that Brahmins have been introduced by Hindu nationalist organizations amongst tribes to perform life-rituals, where they previously were performed by a tribal elder (Khan and Thakur 2023).

#### 1. Keyword Lists:

- For festivals: "Mahashivratri", "Diwali", "DIWALI", "Pola", "SANKRANTI", "diwali", "nawratra", "NAVRATRI", "Ganapati", "Dasara", "PADVA", "DASARA", "SANKRANT", "DIWALII", "Rakshabandhan", "Padava", "divali", "diwali ", "navratra", "ganpati", "GUDI-PADVA", "Dusserah", "rakhi", "pola", "diwalii", "GANPATI", "GUDHI Padava", "DASARA", "Dasara", "Dasra", "Navratri", "divali", "DIWALI", "NAVRATRA", "Padava", "Pola,", "Sankrant", "SANKRANTI Mahashivratri", "Shivratra." Here, "Holi" was not included because there is a specific way Bhils celebrate it that is more entrenched in tribal culture.

Moreover, unlike mainstream Diwali, "Gao Diwali" was not included because it is a more locally rooted festival with tribal rituals.

- For gods and goddesses:"durgamata", "ganpati", "33 crore gods", "Bholenath", "BHOLE-NATH", "shankar", "Ganesh", "Saibaba", "Ganpati", "Hanuman", "Mahadev", "MAHADEC", "ganpati", "ganapati", "Ganapati", "Shankar", "Durgamata", "SHANKAR", "hanuman", "durga mata", "bajarangabali", "shankarbhagwan", "shankar bhagwan", "shankar bhagwan", "BHOLE-NATH", "shanakar bhagwan", "Jay Shri Ram", "Lakshmimata", "Mahdev", "Ramsita", "Bholenah", "BAJRANG BALI", "maruti", "shankarbhawan", "shriram", "shankar bhagvan", "ganpati ", "shankar parwati", "ganpati bappa", "durgamata", "ganesh", "shreeram", "shankar bhawan", "shankarbhagawan", "Krishna", "MAHADEV", "MAHALAXMI", "marutiraya", "ram lakshan", "Ram", "sarswati", "shankarji", "shankar".
- For Brahmin or Punjara identification: "Brahmin", "brahman", "bramhan ", "braman", "Both", "BOTH", "Brahmin Pradhan", "Brahmin Pujari", "brahman ", "bramhan, medya", "bramhan/medya", "Pradhan Naik Brahmin".

Please note that this list is based on the survey responses, rather than an exhaustive list of all Hindu festivals and gods.

2. Scoring System: Respondents were given three binary scores based on the presence of these keywords in their responses to the three questions. If any of these words were present, a score of 1 was given for that question; otherwise, a score of 0.

3. Composite Score: The scores from gods and goddesses, festivals, and Brahmin or Punjara identification were combined to form a "Total Religiosity Score" for each respondent, ranging from 0 to 3, with a total score of 0 indicating a tribal cultural influence on all three questions, while a 3 indicating a Hindu cultural influence on all three questions.

4. Binary Classification: Those with a Total Religiosity Score of 0 or 1 were classified as having "Tribal Cultural-Leaning," while those with scores of 2 or 3 were classified as having "Hindu Cultural-Leaning."

This binary classification system was chosen due to the sample size, allowing for a clear and interpretable categorization based on the range of scores.

## G.2 Respondent Self-Identified Religion Category

In this study, the "Religion Category" variable was constructed based on the responses to the "Religion" variable in the survey where respondents identified their own religion, which was noted down as per the response. The recoding was performed using the following logic:

- **Hindu Category:** Respondents who identified their religion as either "Hindu" or "SANATAN" were categorized under "Hindu." This decision was made because "SANATAN" is often considered an upper-caste specification within Hinduism, thus it was reasonable to group it under the broader category of Hinduism.
- **Tribal Category:** Respondents who identified their religion as any of the following: "Adi-vasi", "Bhil", "Pawara", or "Kokani" were categorized under "Tribal." These categories encompass a broad range of tribal identities.
- **Hindu-Tribal Category:** Respondents who identified their religion as a combination of Hinduism and a specific tribal identity ("Hindu-Adivasi," "Hindu-Bhil," "Hindu-Pawra," "Hindu Dhanka," "Hindu Padvi," or "Hindu Valavi.") were categorized under "Hindu-Tribal." The practice of claiming one's religion to be "Hindu hyphen tribal group" is a result of census practices that enumerated Bhils as having that caste, which has been discontinued but continues to shape the self-identification of one's religious category amongst certain Bhil individuals.
- **Other Category:** Respondents who did not fall into any of the above categories were classified as "Other." This includes those that identified their religion to be "Other", "Buddhism", or "Christianity". These totalled 25 of the 678 respondents and were removed from the analysis of difference in marginal means to focus on the differences between Hindu, Hindu-Tribal and Tribal individuals.

### G.3 Respondent Party-leaning

In the study, the "Respondent Party-leaning" variable was created using the following approach:

1. Data Source: This variable was derived from respondents' preferences for political parties, as indicated in the survey form.
2. Classification System: The political parties were classified into two categories based on their political alignment at the time of the survey:
  - I) "BJP-leaning": This category included respondents who preferred the "BJP" or "Shivsena (Shinde)." II) "Non-BJP-leaning": This category was assigned to respondents who preferred any other political party not aligned with the BJP.
3. Contextual Note: The survey was conducted between May and July 2023. Up until this period, Shivsena (Shinde faction) was in alliance with the BJP in the state. This context was crucial in categorizing "Shivsena (Shinde)" under the "BJP-leaning" category, reflecting the political landscape at that time.

Compared to the incumbent party in assembly constituency, we get the following bivariate table:

	Non-BJP Incumbent in State Assembly Constituency	BJP Incumbent in State Assembly Constituency
BJP-leaning respondent	100	195
Non-BJP-party leaning respondent	238	145

Table 5: Bivariate Table for Respondent Party and Assembly Constituency Party

## G.4 Preferred Leader Type

For the "Preferred Leader Type" variable in the study, the following keywords were used for classification, categorized by their political affiliation and level:

Preferred Leader Type	Leader Names
<b>Local non-BJP-leaning</b>	Aamshya Padvi, Jaysingh Mali, KC Padvi, Padmakar Valvi, Shirish Kumar Naik, Bharat Manikrao Gavit, Ganesh Paradake, Jagan Gavit, Jiwa Pandu Gavit, Kishor Dhomale, Manjulatai Gavit, Naik, R T Gavit, Ravindra Paradke
<b>Local BJP-leaning</b>	Amrishbhai Patel, Bhupesh Bhai, Chandrakant Raghuwanshi, Heena Gavit, Rajesh Padvi, Vijaykumar Gavit, Kamaleshdada, Kapildada, Lata Valavi, Segadada, Vijay Paradke, Warsha Pawar
<b>Non-local non-BJP-leaning</b>	Indira Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal, Bachhu Kadu, Nana Patole, Prakash Ambedkar, Raj Thackeray, Rajiv Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray
<b>Non-local BJP-leaning</b>	Narendra Modi, Balasaheb Thackeray, Rajnath Singh, Yogi Adityanath

Table 6: Classification of Preferred Political Leaders Variable

Please note that this list is based on the survey responses, rather than an exhaustive list of all local and non-local leaders in India.

Here, local means a leader from the Nandurbar Lok Sabha constituency. These keywords were used to categorize the political preferences of respondents into distinct groups based on their affinity towards local or national leaders and the leader's affiliation with BJP or non-BJP parties.

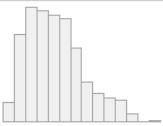
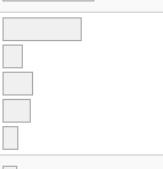
## H Descriptive conjoint data

*Note that these are by the number of platforms rated. As each respondent rated 6 platforms, these data points can be divided by 6 to indicate distribution by respondent*

### Data Frame Summary

**Dimensions:** 4068 x 9

**Duplicates:** 3451

No	Variable	Stats / Values	Freqs (% of Valid)	Graph	Valid	Missing
1	Age [integer]	Mean (sd) : 39.4 (12.8) min ≤ med ≤ max: 18 ≤ 38 ≤ 82 IQR (CV) : 17 (0.3)	54 distinct values		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2	Gender [character]	1. F 2. M	1872 (46.0%) 2196 (54.0%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
3	Education.continuous [integer]	Mean (sd) : 1.3 (1.4) min ≤ med ≤ max: 0 ≤ 1 ≤ 4 IQR (CV) : 2 (1.1)	0: 1878 (46.2%) 1: 456 (11.2%) 2: 720 (17.7%) 3: 666 (16.4%) 4: 348 ( 8.6%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
4	Total_religiosity_score [integer]	Mean (sd) : 1.5 (0.8) min ≤ med ≤ max: 0 ≤ 1 ≤ 3 IQR (CV) : 1 (0.5)	0: 324 ( 8.0%) 1: 1800 (44.2%) 2: 1584 (38.9%) 3: 360 ( 8.8%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
5	Cultural_leaning [character]	1. Hindu cultural-leaning 2. Tribal cultural-leaning	1944 (47.8%) 2124 (52.2%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
6	Religion_Category [character]	1. Hindu 2. Hindu-Tribal 3. Other 4. Tribal	2046 (50.3%) 984 (24.2%) 150 ( 3.7%) 888 (21.8%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
7	Constituency.Party.Code [character]	1. BJP-incumbent 2. non-BJP-incumbent	2040 (50.1%) 2028 (49.9%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
8	Party_Category [character]	1. BJP-leaning 2. non-BJP-leaning	1770 (43.5%) 2298 (56.5%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
9	Favourite_leader_type [character]	1. Local BJP-leaning 2. Local non-BJP-leaning 3. National BJP-leaning 4. National non-BJP-leaning 5. None	1434 (35.3%) 822 (20.2%) 456 (11.2%) 1140 (28.0%) 216 ( 5.3%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Generated by [summarytools](#) 1.0.1 ([R](#) version 4.3.2)  
2024-02-06

Figure 15: Summary of Survey Respondents' Characteristics.

## Data Frame Summary

**Dimensions:** 4068 x 5

**Duplicates:** 3481

No	Variable	Stats / Values	Freqs (% of Valid)	Graph	Valid	Missing
1	Rating [integer]	Mean (sd) : 6.2 (2.6) min ≤ med ≤ max: 0 ≤ 6 ≤ 10 IQR (CV) : 4 (0.4)	11 distinct values		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2	Platform_pair_id [integer]	Mean (sd) : 14.7 (8) min ≤ med ≤ max: 1 ≤ 15 ≤ 28 IQR (CV) : 14 (0.5)	28 distinct values		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
3	Cultural_heritage_prime [factor]	1. Hindu 2. Tribal	1995 (49.0%) 2073 (51.0%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
4	Transportation_service_prime [factor]	1. Temple 2. Market	2036 (50.0%) 2032 (50.0%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
5	Threat_prime [factor]	1. Forced_Conversion 2. Unemployment	2028 (49.9%) 2040 (50.1%)		4068 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

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2023-11-20

Figure 16: Summary of Platform Assignment across respondents

- Here 'Rating' is the outcome variable, with a mean score of 6.2 representing the average rating of platforms.
- Platform pair id represents the unique id of the pair of platforms being shown out of the 28 unique combinations.
- Cultural heritage, Threat alleviation and Transport Service are the three attributes.

# I Diagnostics

## I.1 Task and Platform Order Diagnostics

- **Task Order Analysis** The F-test for task order yields a p-value of 0.5875. This result fails to reject the null hypothesis that the order of the tasks does not significantly impact the measures being studied. The F-value is relatively low (0.7063), indicating a lack of strong evidence against the null hypothesis.
- **Profile (or in this case Platform) Order Analysis.** Similarly, the F-test conducted for Platform order results in a p-value of 0.2121. This indicates that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the order of Platforms does not have a significant effect on the outcomes. The F-value is relatively low (1.4587), indicating a lack of strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

## I.2 Testing Joint-Hypothesis for Positive Effect Across Attributes

### Approach:

- Examination of Potential Negative Effects: Initial individual t-tests are conducted to explore if effects could be negative for each attribute. The failure to reject the null hypothesis for negative effects, based on individual t-tests, suggests there is no significant evidence that the effects of the attributes are negative.
- Joint Hypothesis Test for Effect Being Non-Zero: A joint hypothesis test is then performed to assess if the attributes have no effect (i.e., coefficients equal to zero).

### Individual t-test Results:

- Cultural heritage Tribal: With a p-value greater than 0.999, there is a failure to reject the null hypothesis of the effect being negative, indicating no evidence of a negative effect.
- Threat Alleviation Unemployment: A p-value of 1 leads to failing to reject the null hypothesis of a negative effect, showing no evidence of it being negative.
- Transportation service Truck to Market: Similarly, a p-value of 1 indicates a failure to reject the null hypothesis of a negative effect, showing no evidence of a negative impact.

**Joint Hypothesis Test Result:** Rejection of Null Hypothesis of No Effect: The joint hypothesis test that each of the Attributes has a non-zero coefficient yields an F-statistic of 87.796 with a p-value of less than 2.2e-16. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis that all of the coefficients are equal to 0, indicating significant effects from the variables.

**Conclusion:** Having established a lack of evidence for negative effects individually and then rejecting the null hypothesis of no effect through the joint hypothesis test, the analysis logically supports rejecting the hypothesis that the effects of Cultural heritage Tribal, Threat Alleviation Unemployment, and Transportation service Truck to Market are not positive. This structured approach, by first showing that negative effects are unlikely and then demonstrating significant effects exist, effectively argues that each Tribal/Material level across the three attributes positively influences the Rating of the Party Platforms, compared to the baseline Hindu-nationalist levels.

### I.3 Block-Fixed Effects for Overall AMCE scores

As the respondent sampling was stratified with equal number of respondents in BJP-incumbent and non-BJP-incumbent assembly constituencies (339 each) and with 15-17 respondents in each village, here we verify the AMCE estimates with both block fixed effects. The table indicates that the estaimtes remain positive and significant across attributes even in the model with block fixed effects.

<i>Dependent variable: Party Platform Rating (0-10)</i>		
	Base	With Block Fixed Effects
Cultural heritage Tribal	0.614*** (0.078)	0.628*** (0.070)
Threat Alleviation Unemployment	0.695*** (0.078)	0.676*** (0.070)
Transportation service Truck to Market	0.858*** (0.078)	0.795*** (0.070)
Constant	5.117*** (0.078)	6.822*** (0.221)
BJP/non-BJP Incumbent in Assembly Constituency Fixed Effect	No	Yes
Village Fixed Effect	No	Yes
N (Party Platforms)	4,068	4,068

*Note:*

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 7: OLS Regression Estimates with and without block fixed effects

## I.4 Multiple Comparison Adjustment for Subgroup Analysis

The **Holm-Bonferroni method** was used to adjust the p-values for each subgroup analysis.

Feature	<i>P-values for Respondent Cultural Leaning Subgroup Analysis</i>	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Culture Heritage Hindu	0.5358904	1
Culture Heritage Tribal	0.7239351	1
Threat Alleviation Forced Conversion	0.7687723	1
Threat Alleviation Unemployment	0.8634598	1
Transport Service Bus to Ram Temple	0.8602175	1
Transport Service Truck to District Market	0.5782291	1

*Note:*

Adjusted p-values capped at 1

Table 8: Multiple Comparison Adjustment for Respondent Cultural Leaning Subgroup Analysis

Feature	<i>P-values for Respondent Party Leaning Subgroup Analysis</i>	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Culture Heritage Hindu	0.0000139713	0.0000558852
Culture Heritage Tribal	0.0000297791	0.0000893373
Threat Alleviation Forced Conversion	0.0000041010	0.0000246060
Threat Alleviation Unemployment	0.0001198131	0.0001198131
Transport Service Bus to Ram Temple	0.0000061623	0.0000308113
Transport Service Truck to District Market	0.0000421560	0.0000893373

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 9: Multiple Comparison Adjustment for Respondent Party Leaning Subgroup Analysis

Feature	Unadjusted_P	Adjusted_P
<b>Comparison: Hindu-Tribal - Hindu</b>		
Culture Heritage Hindu	0.0000001757	0.0000012296
Culture Heritage Tribal	0.0000000000	0.0000000000
Threat Alleviation Forced Conversion	0.0000000140	0.0000001122
Threat Alleviation Unemployment	0.0000000000	0.0000000000
Transport Service Bus to Ram Temple	0.0000000000	0.0000000001
Transport Service Truck to District Market	0.0000000000	0.0000000001
<b>Comparison: Tribal - Hindu</b>		
Culture Heritage Hindu	0.0028419913	0.0142099565
Culture Heritage Tribal	0.1930733209	0.3861466417
Threat Alleviation Forced Conversion	0.5077445874	0.5077445874
Threat Alleviation Unemployment	0.0001009786	0.0006058715
Transport Service Bus to Ram Temple	0.0459491806	0.1378475419
Transport Service Truck to District Market	0.0089448476	0.0357793904

Table 10: Multiple Comparison Adjustment for Self-identified Religion Subgroup Analysis

Feature	Unadjusted_P	Adjusted_P
<b>Transport Service Truck to District Market</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0484160741	0.0968321482
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0001016778	0.0008134222
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000614944	0.0006764382
<b>Transport Service Bus to Ram Temple</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0144092671	0.0707787586
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000081298	0.0001138166
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000026130	0.0000444209
<b>Threat Alleviation Unemployment</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0141557517	0.0707787586
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0031027990	0.0217195927
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000045176	0.0000722818
<b>Threat Alleviation Forced Conversion</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0276726399	0.0830179196
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000001530	0.0000027535
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000632195	0.0006764382
<b>Culture Heritage Tribal</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0070544756	0.0423268535
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000454452	0.0005453422
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000061659	0.0000924880
<b>Culture Heritage Hindu</b>		
BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0553032767	0.0968321482
non-BJP-voter in BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000888619	0.0007997569
non-BJP-voter in non-BJP-constituency - BJP-voter in BJP-constituency	0.0000364430	0.0004737592

Table 11: Multiple Comparison Adjustment for Respondent/Assembly Constituency Party Interaction Subgroup Analysis

## J Overall AMCE and Marginal Mean tables

	outcome	statistic	feature	level	estimate	std.error	z	p	lower	upper
1	Rating	amce	Cultural_heritage_prime	Hindu	0.000000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2	Rating	amce	Cultural_heritage_prime	Tribal	0.6137750	0.08328440	7.369627	1.711061e-13	0.4505406	0.7770094
3	Rating	amce	Threat_prime	Forced_Conversion	0.000000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
4	Rating	amce	Threat_prime	Unemployment	0.6950268	0.08289982	8.383937	5.118610e-17	0.5325462	0.8575075
5	Rating	amce	Transportation_service_prime	Temple	0.000000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
6	Rating	amce	Transportation_service_prime	Market	0.8576401	0.08767474	9.782066	1.344379e-22	0.6858008	1.0294794

Figure 17: Overall AMCEs Tabular Output

	outcome	statistic	feature	level	estimate	std.error	z	p	lower	upper
1	Rating	mm	Cultural_heritage_prime	Hindu	5.901754	0.08117705	-3.760245	1.697468e-04	5.742650	6.060858
2	Rating	mm	Cultural_heritage_prime	Tribal	6.500241	0.07642174	3.837144	1.244736e-04	6.350457	6.650025
3	Rating	mm	Threat_prime	Forced_Conversion	5.852564	0.07841153	-4.520201	6.178090e-06	5.698880	6.006248
4	Rating	mm	Threat_prime	Unemployment	6.558824	0.07730068	4.551364	5.329924e-06	6.407317	6.710330
5	Rating	mm	Transportation_service_prime	Temple	5.779470	0.08594823	-4.974279	6.549097e-07	5.611014	5.947925
6	Rating	mm	Transportation_service_prime	Market	6.634843	0.07198753	5.943286	2.793638e-09	6.493750	6.775935

Figure 18: Overall Marginal Means Tabular Output

## K Marginal Mean Plots

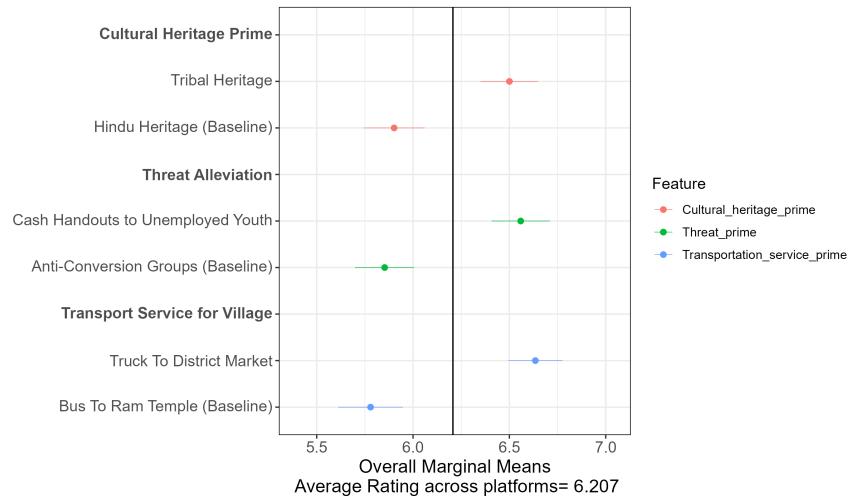


Figure 19: Overall Marginal Means

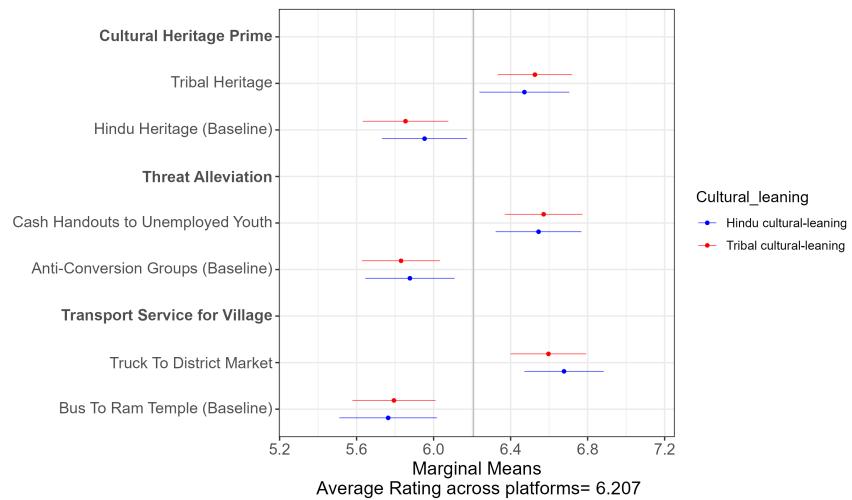


Figure 20: Marginal Means by Cultural-leaning

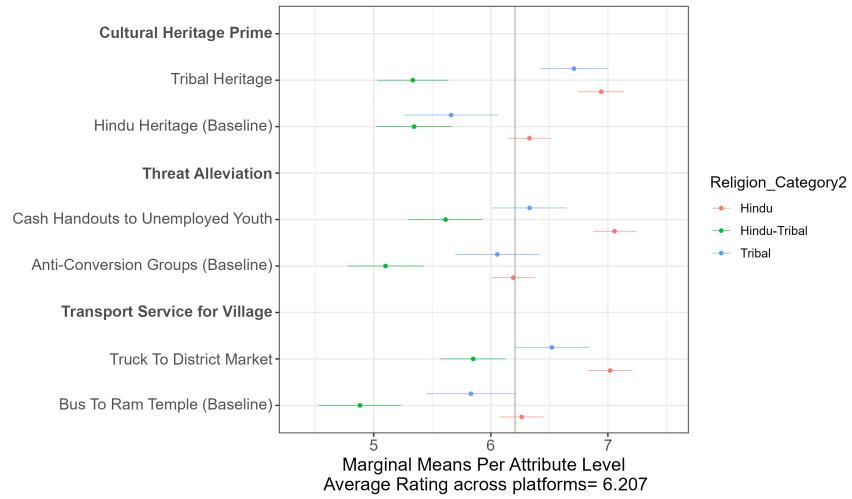


Figure 21: Marginal Means by Respondent Self-Identified Religious Group

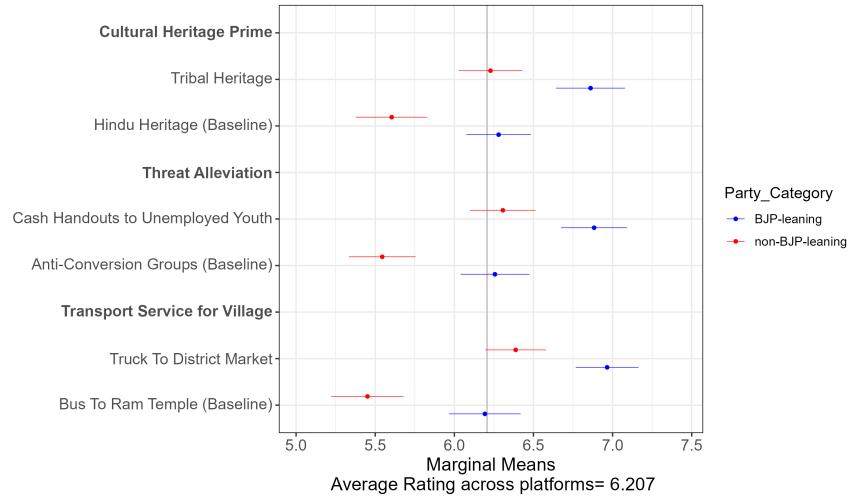


Figure 22: Marginal Means by Respondent Party-leaning

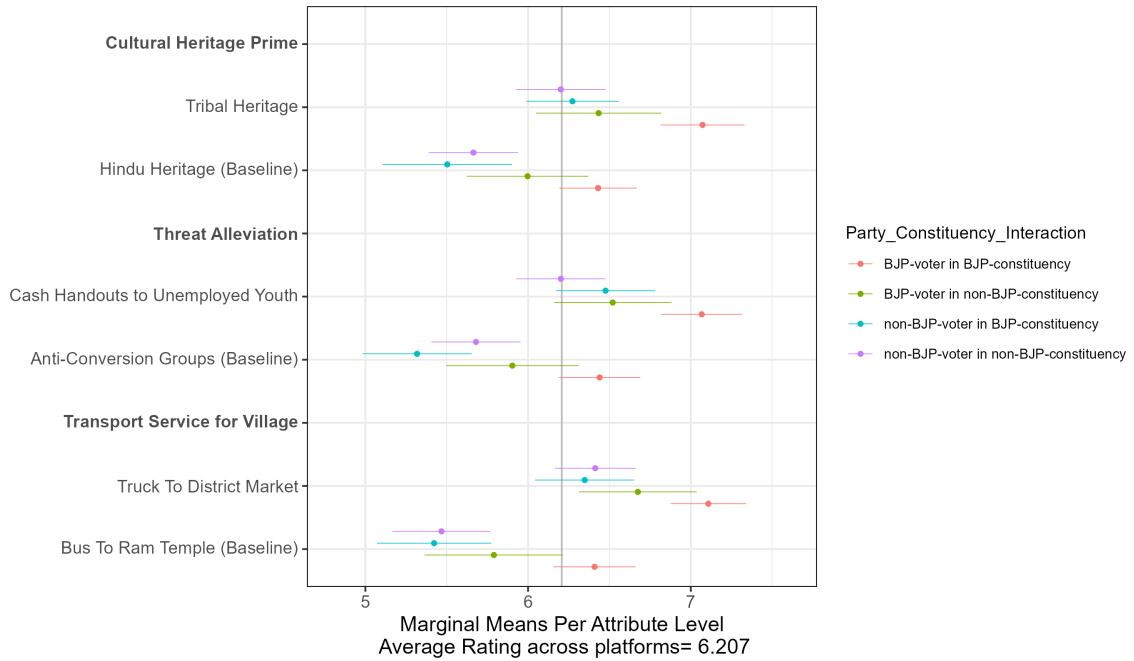


Figure 23: Marginal Mean Scores by Voter and Constituency Party Interaction

## L Interviews To Check Conjoint Analysis Comprehension

First, the interviews provide valuable insight in judging whether the conjoint intervention worked. Of the 80 respondents interviewed, 59 indicated that they had no trouble following the task after being explained the steps and the images beforehand. 18 respondents were able to follow the task but with some reservations. 1 respondent voiced issues with understanding the task but rated the platforms, and 2 respondents reached the stage of being explained the task but were overwhelmed and ended up rating every platform a 0.

Of the 59 that did not voice any concerns, many claimed that the images helped their comprehension of the issues, with comments such as the “images helped as I can barely read” (Interview ID: 30303) and “I have answered many surveys like this, though not with images, so they helped remember the issues as there were a lot of tasks” (Interview ID: 10605). The use of marbles to declare a rating for each platform was also noted to be successful. Here, age was also not a restrictive factor, with two respondents aged 70 and 74 also reporting that the marbles made it easy for them to count and rate the images, “as if [we] were counting coins.” (Interview ID: 40107).

Amongst the 18 who followed the tasks but had some reservations, the biggest issue was the number of tasks and images. For some, concentration waned by the third task for reasons at two extremes. On the one hand, interviewees reported that “Every task was intense and involved a lot of information at once, and I had to take a lot of time.” (Interview ID: 20113) and “By Task 3 I was tired and forgot what the truck image was exactly” (Interview ID: 10901). On the other hand, interviewees reported that the range of issues, namely the 6 images, was too limited especially given that the task was repeated 3 times even though the platforms were randomly assigned, with one interviewee reporting: “I was confused at the end. It felt like all of them were similar. And I gave lower scores in the third task because the parties offered the same policies over and over.” (Interview ID: 50207). Despite the extreme cases, there needed to be a balance, and while the attributes (3) and the levels (2 each) are indeed lower than most conjoint surveys in the political science literature, this was necessary to manage the visual component of the conjoint. Some complained that they gave low scores to platforms having two policies they favoured but had one specific image that they “strongly hated” to the extent that this outweighed their preference for the others. However, this is not an unexpected occurrence in conjoint analyses, and the fact that this conjoint analysis did not force a choice between the two but instead allowed the platforms to be rated on a scale, such conflicts were mitigated. Overall, these

19 respondents who had reservations stated that while they took longer to complete the conjoint, the fact that the images were explained patiently and repeatedly by the research team allowed them to complete the three tasks. Most importantly, the interviewees' concerns did not extend to any fears that they were being recorded in any way, as this conjoint was not done on a digital device but on paper. Nor were there any allegations that the researcher was affiliated with a specific leader or a party, which can be credited to not using such images as part of the conjoint and instead presenting general platform issues.

There were general issues amongst certain female respondents, particularly in villages closer to the Madhya Pradesh border, as exemplified by the case of Interview ID: 30312 which rated every platform a 0. While the respondent was receptive to the instructions of the task, when it came to actually rating these, she said "I would just ask my husband whom to vote for" and thus said that she was not ready to cast her vote. Such comments were common amongst the overall pool of female respondents and are consistent with the literature suggesting that Scheduled Tribe voters, especially 41% of tribal females, defer to someone else in making their vote-choice decision (Sardesai and Attri 2017). However, only one other respondent (though not interviewed) in the larger pool of 678 respondents chose to give 0 points to all platforms. Such cases were thus extreme. In general, the presence of either a female translator or a female research assistant administering the survey mitigated potential issues raised by the social norm around not discussing political issues with males that may have been raised by the principal investigator's male identity.

Overall, the interviews provide evidence that the conjoint analysis was successfully administered, ensuring that images and the rating system were comprehended by the respondents. This was important in this thesis's aim at getting at the preferences of these voters for particular issues, to test Hypothesis 1. The following subsection outlines the implications of the interviews in favour of Hypothesis 1.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This is done using the combination formula  $C(n, r) = \frac{r!}{(n-r)! \times n!}$ . In our case, as there are 8 unique platforms of the three attributes, with 2 platforms in each pair, we have  $C(8, 2) = \frac{2!}{(8-2)! \times 8!} = 28$  unique combinations.

<sup>2</sup>Saffron being the dominant colour in Hinduism, and was intentionally used in the Hindu-nationalist images.

<sup>3</sup>Here the respondent refers to the anniversary of colonial era tribal revolutionary Birsa Munda, who led a rebellion against the British in Eastern India. He is front and centre in the Tribal cultural heritage image.

<sup>4</sup>Ram Navmi is a Hindu festival celebrating the birth of Lord Ram. The VKA wing of the BJP has introduced the practice of holding celebratory gatherings on Ram Navmi, organizing Bhils.

<sup>5</sup>In the overall survey sample this relationship is skewed towards non-local non-BJP leaders. 20% of the total 678 respondents preferred a local non-BJP politician, while 28% preferred non-local non-BJP politicians. Please refer to the Figure 15 in Appendix H

<sup>6</sup>In the overall survey sample of 678, 35% preferred local BJP politicians, compared to 11% preferring non-local BJP politicians. Please refer to Figure 15 in Appendix H for the overall survey sample.

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