

Reducing Prejudice and Support for Religious Nationalism Through Conversations on WhatsApp

Rajeshwari Majumdar, Richard Bonneau, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua A. Tucker

Center for Social Media and Politics | New York University

RQ Research Questions

Can **conversations** with an ethnic minority **reduce prejudice** & **support for religious nationalism**?

Does the **topic** of conversation matter?

LR Literature Review

Contact hypothesis

Intergroup contact can reduce prejudice (Allport 1954)

Empirical literature

Mixed findings (Paluck et al 2018)

Contact is often a black box in existing studies; *the content* of interactions likely varies & may moderate effects

This study's contribution

Create a setup to observe **how conversations proceed** in real time & how **different topics** operate

Case: India

Intergroup relations

Hindus: majority religious group
Muslims: largest minority
History of **ethnic conflict**
Considerable **segregation**

Religious nationalism

Rise in **Hindu nationalism** in recent years; major politicians demonize Muslims & equate Indian identity with Hinduism

WhatsApp

Most popular messaging platform (over **2 billion** active users globally; about **500 million** in India); used extensively for **personal**, **professional**, & **political** communications

This study's contribution

Provide exposure to otherwise **unknown perspectives** in a relatively **safe and accessible** environment

T&E Theory and Expectations

Focus: majority ethnic group members

Conversations about non-political issues

Examples: entertainment, leisure

Expectations about conversations:

People can connect over interests

Expectations about attitudes:

Reduced negative affect towards the outgroup

Conversations about political issues

Examples: misinformation, economy

Expectations about conversations:

People can connect over concerns; hear a minority group member's perspectives on politics

Expectations about attitudes:

Reduced negative affect towards the outgroup and reduced support for majoritarian politics

RD Research Design

Experiment

Conditions

- Hindu subjects randomly assigned to **ingroup** or **outgroup** discussion partner
- Each pair randomly assigned to **non-political** or **political** discussion issues

Implementation

- Each pair placed in a WhatsApp group with an NYU profile for **5 consecutive days** of conversation
- Partner religion & topic treatments administered daily

Template of a daily message

Hi, *name1* and *name2*: Good morning and welcome to the second day of our discussions! Today let's chat about *designated issue*.

How does the treatment work?

- First name is a very reliable indicator of religion** in India
- Discussion **prompts are broad and encourage subjects to share** their own thoughts and experiences
- Introductions at the beginning and NYU presence facilitate **informal, friendly, and harassment-free** discussions

Results

Prejudice

Religious Nationalism

Measure:

Overall feelings about Muslims

5-point scale;

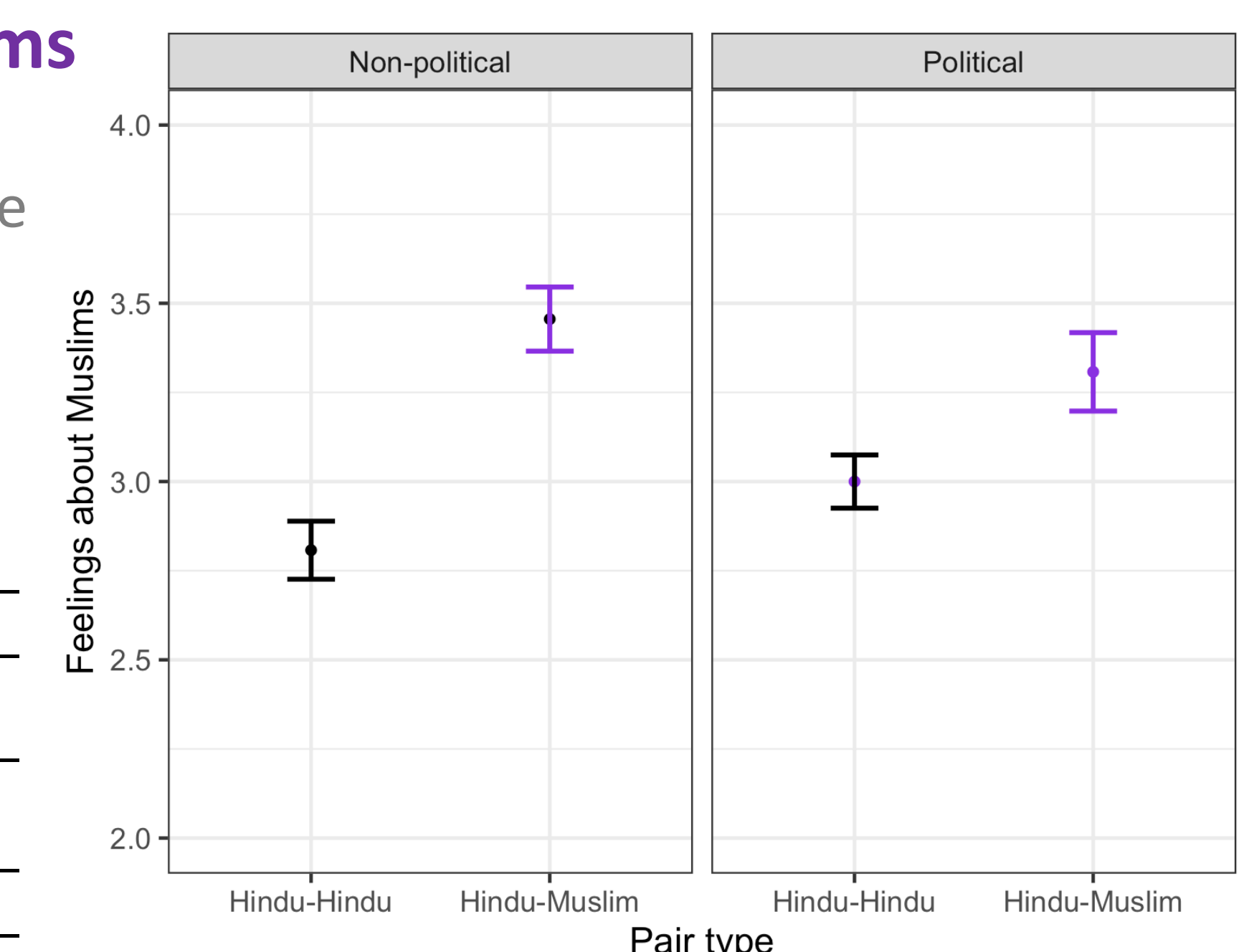
1 = very negative & 5 = very positive

Effect of intergroup conversation:

	Feelings about Muslims	
	One day post-conversation	Two weeks post-conversation
Hindu-Muslim pair	0.415*** (0.077)	0.242*** (0.080)
Observations	795	742

Sample: Hindus only. Baseline condition: Hindu-Hindu pair. Models control for pre-treatment prejudice.

Visualizing effects by topic:



Takeaway: both conversation types are effective at reducing prejudice; non-political more so

Prejudice

Religious Nationalism

Measure:

Average approval for quotes

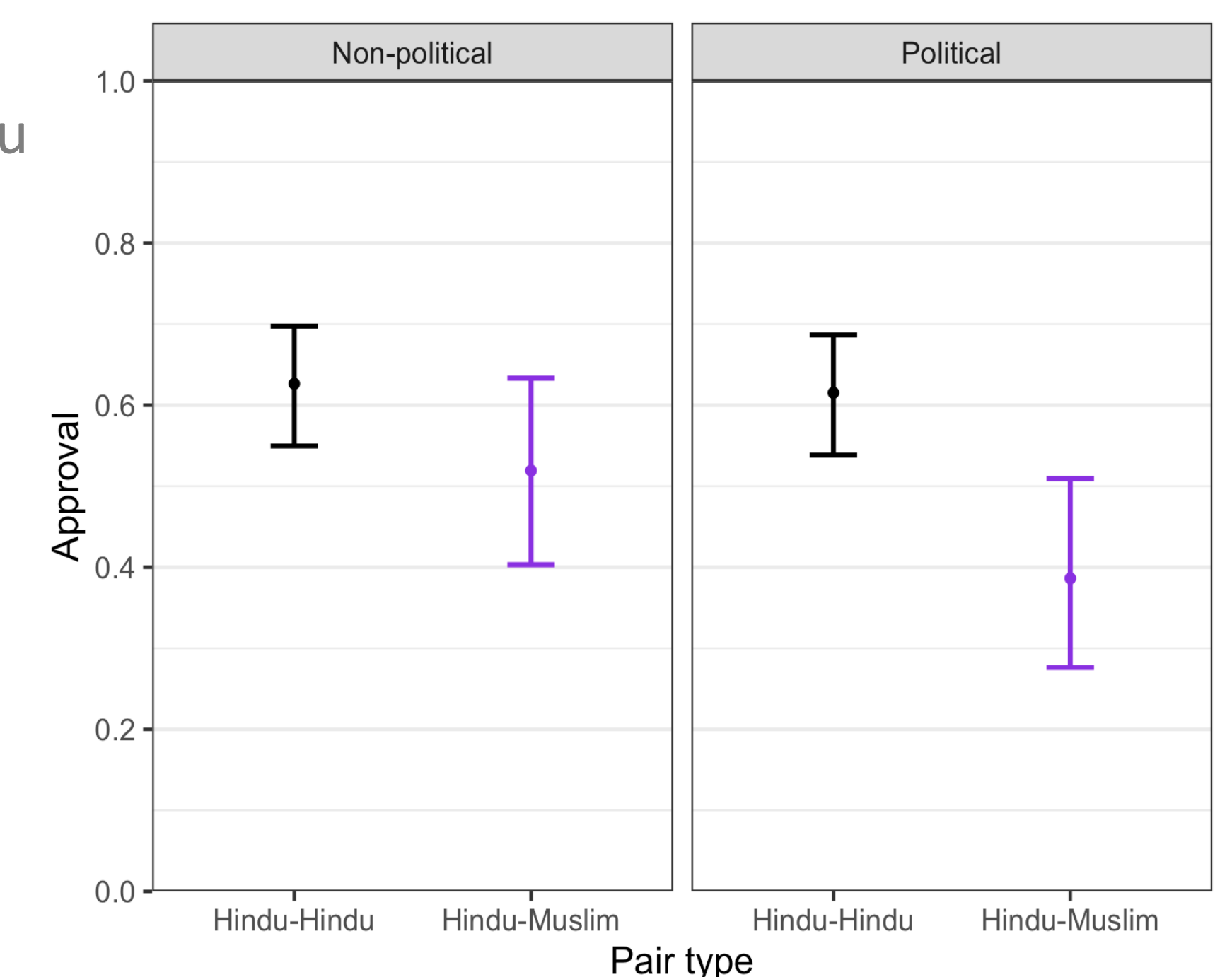
from politicians that promote Hindu nation, hijab bans, violence against minorities, Islam as terrorism; 0 = disapprove & 1 = approve

Effect of intergroup conversation:

	Approval index	
	Last day of conversation	3 weeks post-conversation
Hindu-Muslim pair	-0.145*** (0.029)	-0.097*** (0.028)
Observations	801	722

Sample: Hindus only. Baseline condition: Hindu-Hindu pair. Models control for pre-treatment prejudice.

Visualizing effects by topic:



Takeaway: political conversations are effective at reducing support for religious nationalism

References

Allport, G.W. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, Seth Green & Donald Green. 2018. "The Contact Hypothesis Re-evaluated." *Behavioural Public Policy* 3(2):129–158.

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Corresponding author

✉ majumdar@nyu.edu

Last seen at [r-majumdar.github.io](https://github.com/r-majumdar)