RESUF AHMED

PhD candidate in Economics at HEC Lausanne, University of Lausanne
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EDUCATION

Visiting PhD Student, Paris School of Economics   *Jan 2024 - August 2024*
Host: Ekaterina Zhuravskaya

Visiting Student Researcher, Stanford University   *Jan 2023 - June 2023*
Host: Saumitra Jha

PhD in Economics   *2020 - 2025*
HEC Lausanne, University of Lausanne
Title: "Political Economy of minorities in Indian context"
Supervisors: Dominic Rohner and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya

Master in Economics, Public Policy and Development   *2018 - 2020*
Paris School of Economics, Supervisor: Ekaterina Zhuravskaya

Bachelor in Economics (With Honours)   *2014 - 2017*
University of Delhi

RESEARCH

Field: Development Economics, Political Economics, Cultural Economics

Working Papers

From Reservation to Transformation: The Socioeconomic Impact of Political Quotas
(*single-authored work*)
The role of affirmative action policies in promoting socio-economic mobility remains a subject of intense global debate, with countries implementing varying strategies to address historical inequalities. This study leverages India's 2008 delimitation exercise as a natural experiment to assess the impact of political quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs) on local socio-economic outcomes, focusing specifically on SC outcomes within villages rather than solely village-level metrics. We find that SC reservations substantially increase SC student enrollment, particularly in prestigious schools, and foster entrepreneurial activity, as evidenced by growth in both the number and size of SC-owned firms. Additionally, quotas facilitate SCs' entry into higher-status occupations, helping to erode entrenched caste-based occupational barriers. These effects are driven by greater access to formal institutional funding for SC-owned firms and improvements in the quality of politicians elected under the quota system. Improvements at the village level, including infrastructure enhancements and increased economic activity, further support these outcomes. Notably, the observed gains persist even after villages lose reserved status, underscoring the long-term benefits of these policies. Our findings contribute to global discourse on affirmative action, suggesting that targeted, well-implemented quotas can yield sustained social and economic mobility for marginalized groups. With India's next delimitation scheduled post-2026, this research provides critical insights for policymakers worldwide who are seeking effective strategies to address inequality and social stratification.

Ancient Epics in the Television Age: Mass Media, Identity, and the Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India (with Paul Brimble, Alessandro Saia, Akhila Kovvuri and Dean Yang) (*NBER WP 33417*)
The growing prominence of Hindu nationalism, known as "Hindutva," in India has garnered significant attention for its impact on politics and society, particularly its adverse effects on minority communities. However, the Hindu identity was not always a monolithic and political one. This study explores the potential role of a Hindu mythological show, "Ramayana," which aired on the solely available TV channel in India during 1987-88, in shaping the Hindutva identity primarily on the increasing salience of religious identity in people's political, social, and personal lives. We proxy for exposure to this show using location and television transmitters obtained from archival data and use signal propagation modelling based on irregular terrain to measure signal strength. Examining political and social manifestations of identity, we find that exposure to the TV show is associated with increased electoral success for right-wing Hindu nationalist parties, heightened tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and a decrease in the number of schools affiliated with the significant far-right Hindu nationalist organization. Our next steps involve investigating the impact on personal expressions of identity, such as child naming practices and dietary choices influenced by religious taboos.

The Promise and Limits of Leader-Driven Grassroots Mobilization (with Feyaad Allie)
Across contexts, political parties are often intertwined with mass societal movements. While the process by which parties originate from mass movements is extensively stud- ied, less is known about how established parties build mass movements and what their effects are. We argue that one strategy for parties is grassroots campaigns: an explicitly non-electoral effort to engage with the masses and the party organization. While these grassroots campaigns are about mass movement building and not directly linked to an upcoming election, they can end up having an electoral effect. We study this strategy in the context of the Indian National Congress' effort to "return to their roots" and rebuild. We examine the electoral effects of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 150-day grassroots march (the Bharat Jodo Yatra) on electoral politics. We find that the ya- tra improved Congress performance in state and national elections, with effects being higher in areas closest to the yatra route. Our interviews with party affiliates and voters suggest three key channels through which this grassroots effort to build a mass movement influenced electoral outcomes: building the party organization, shifting the discourse on viability, and improving perceptions of party cohesion. An original survey of 3500 voters provides suggestive evidence that one year after the yatra, some of these channels remain unchanged. Overall, the paper demonstrates the promise and limits of mass movement building as a party mobilization strategy.

Work in Progress

Power-sharing, Segregation and Conflict
The Hindu-Muslim conflict in India has longstanding historical foundations, shaped significantly by colonial-era policies of division and later by political narratives throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. While previous literature has established the influence of Muslim political representation and entrepreneurial presence on Hindu-Muslim tensions, the role of residential segregation remains underexplored. This paper seeks to fill that gap by examining how spatial segregation impacts the frequency and intensity of Hindu-Muslim conflict. We employ a unique dataset that includes (i) novel dataset on Hindu-Muslim riots and (ii) high-resolution religious demographic data covering over 900 million individuals across India. Our analysis reveals that areas with greater residential segregation tend to experience a higher incidence of communal conflicts, suggesting that physical separation between religious communities exacerbates intergroup tensions. These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the structural factors underlying communal violence and provide critical insights for policymakers aiming to promote social cohesion in pluralistic societies.

Digitizing Justice: Trickle-up effects of Indonesian E-Courts Reform (with Sultan Mehmood and Thomas Fujiwara)
The growing adoption of digital justice reforms worldwide represents a significant shift in how judicial systems operate. By streamlining processes, enhancing transparency, and improving access, these reforms promise to address longstanding inefficiencies within court systems. However, the impacts of digitalization are not uniform, and questions remain regarding disparities in access, the adaptability of legal practitioners, and the broader implications for case management and judicial independence. Exploring how digital justice reforms shape court efficiency and procedural fairness is essential to understanding their transformative potential. To answer these questions, we investigate the impact of Indonesia's E-Court Reform, a digitization initiative aimed at enhancing judicial efficiency by implementing electronic filing, summons, and trial processes in civil courts. Using a triple difference empirical strategy, we analyze the universe of Indonesian court cases to measure effects on case processing times, quality of judicial decisions, and broader systemic impacts on untreated courts. Our findings reveal a significant reduction in case delays by approximately 7.3 days, with no decline in decision quality; metrics like legal reasoning per page have improved, so do fewer cases proceed to appeal or are overturned at higher court. These efficiency gains are concentrated in straightforward cases, thereby freeing judicial resources for more complex cases. We also document positive spillovers to higher courts, where delays have also decreased, indicating a "trickle-up" effect of digital reform across the judiciary. This study contributes novel causal evidence on digital reform efficacy in judicial systems, demonstrating that digitization can reduce procedural bottlenecks and improve overall case management quality in large, developing country contexts.

Dubunking Ancestral Narratives: Roots, Ethnic Identity and Social Cohesion (with Riccardo Ghidoni, Mariapia Mendola, Stefano Piasenti and Alessandro Saia)
This study investigates the role of religious and ancestral identities in shaping intergroup cooperation in India, focusing on Hindu and Muslim populations. Amidst rising populist and nativist sentiments that often frame Hindu and Muslim identities in oppositional terms, understanding the deep-rooted factors influencing intergroup perceptions is critical for fostering social cohesion. While existing research on diversity primarily emphasizes ethnic and communal identities, less attention has been given to how individuals' perceptions of their own ancestry impact their behavior toward other groups. We employ a lab-in-the-field experiment to examine how perceived ancestral roots influence preferences for cooperation or conflict between Hindu and Muslim participants. The study integrates an innovative experimental survey, socio-demographic data, and a series of incentivized games designed to measure pro-social attitudes. A key feature of this research is the use of Genetic Ancestry Tests to provide participants with information about their ancestral origins, thereby allowing us to test whether correcting misperceptions about heritage can bridge the gap between perceived and actual backgrounds and encourage cooperation. This study aims to contribute to policy discussions on cultural integration by exploring if a greater understanding of shared ancestry could mitigate communal divides in India.

Who Watches the Watchmen? Exploring Bias in Policing in India (with Varun KR, P. Amar)
Starting with Max Weber, scholars have long highlighted the state's role in protecting citizenry from personal violence and expropriation. However, policing in developing countries is often perceived as flouting legal norms, engaging in expropriation, and being lax on certain types of crime. Analyses on bias have either been anecdotal or based on a small number of cases. To overcome these challenges, we collected a novel dataset comprising more than 2 million crime records across the entire crime funnel - from reporting to prosecution - in a large Indian state. Our preliminary findings suggest that police procedures can disproportionately penalize minorities and other underprivileged caste groups.

Voting by the Vedas: The Influence of Hindu Sects on Political Choices and Gender Dynamics

Hinduism, representing 15% of the global population with 1.2 billion followers, is often viewed as a monolithic identity in social science research, with most studies limited to broad caste-based analyses. This paper provides new insights into Hindu diversity by examining theological subgroups within Hinduism, specifically the Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions. Using extensive archival data, we classify Hindus into these major theological groupings and investigate how these distinctions influence gender norms and shape political structures within Hindu communities. Our findings reveal significant variation in gender-related attitudes and political dynamics rooted in theological differences, offering a more nuanced understanding of Hindu identity and its implications for social and political behavior.

Press

Decoding Bharat Jodo Yatra's impact on Karnataka Elections, May 2023, *Hindustan Times*

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

Eleventh ECINEQ Conference, World Bank Group and George Washington University	July 2025
European Meeting on the Political Economy of South Asia, Naples	June 2025
BREAD Conference on Development, Princeton University	May 2025
19th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development, ISI-Delhi	December 2024
Lewis Lab Graduate Student Workshop, University of Manchester	November 2024
Paris School of Economics	November 2024
ASREC Europe 2024	September 2024
ACES Summer School, Hong Kong	August 2024
IRES Graduate Workshop, LA (USA)	June 2024
Paris School of Economics	May 2024
ASREC 2024, Chapman University	March 2024
Delhi School of Economics	December 2023
18th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development, ISI-Delhi	December 2023
ASREC 2023 Workshop, Harvard University	March 2023
Graduate Student Seminar, Brown University	March 2023
17th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development, ISI-Delhi	December 2022
DSE Winter School 2022, Delhi School of Economics	December 2022
Zurich Political Economy Seminar Series (Z-PESS), ETH Zurich	November 2022
ISI Seminar, Indian Statistical Institute - Delhi	August 2022
Society for Economics Research in India Workshop, ISB Hyderabad	July 2022
Applied Economics Lunch Seminar, Paris School of Economics	April 2022
ASREC 2022 workshop (Online), Chapman University	April 2022
Public Economics and Policy Seminar, University of Lausanne	March 2022
ECON GSW Seminar, University of Zurich	October 2021

TEACHING

Development Economics	Fall 2024, 2023, 2022
MSc Economics, University of Lausanne	
Economic Analysis and Communication	Fall 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021
MSc Economics, University of Lausanne	
Statistics and Econometrics I	Fall 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021
BSc Economics, University of Lausanne	

AWARDS & HONOURS

Virginia Gray Graduate Student Research Award 2024 by the American Political Science Association
Doctoral Mobility Fellowship by the University of Lausanne - 30,000 USD
PhD Scholarship by the University of Lausanne for the year 2020 - 2025
PPD Grant 2019 by the Paris School of Economics
Charpak BCS Scholarship (Bourse de Couverture Sociale) by the Government of France. 2018-2020
Young India Fellowiship 2017 by the Ashoka University - 700,000 INR (Declined)

SKILLS

Python, QGIS, STATA and R

Field Visits

Karnataka, India (January 2024)
(*Planned*) Uttar Pradesh & Tamil Nadu, India (January 2025)