

# RESUF AHMED

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PhD candidate in Economics at HEC Lausanne, University of Lausanne

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## EDUCATION

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**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

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**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 Campaigns** (with Feyaad Allie)

Opposition parties across contexts have struggled against populist parties at the ballot box. Populist parties often brand the opposition as elite and out of touch with citizens. Over time, as populists erode democracy, they can further tilt electoral politics in their direction. How can the opposition respond? We examine the opposition’s use of leader-driven grassroots campaigns as an electoral strategy against populists. These campaigns directly address the unique weaknesses that the opposition faces against populists by reaching voters directly and improving the party’s image. We analyze the electoral impact of these efforts by studying the Indian National Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s 150-day grassroots march, the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Using newly collected state and national election data and a difference-in-differences design, we find that the yatra improved Congress’s electoral performance; however, in a spatially and temporally limited way. An original phone survey of 3500 voters reveals that those who directly participated in the grassroots campaign experienced longer-term positive impacts. Taken together, the findings reveal the promise and limitations of leader-driven grassroots campaigns as an opposition strategy against a backsliding populist party.

## ***Work in Progress***

## **Power-sharing, Segregation and Conflict** (with Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, Saumitra Jha, Dominic Rohner, and Alessandro Saia)

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 and Task Optimization: Evidence from E-Courts Reform in Indonesia** (with Sultan Mehmood and Thomas Fujiwara)

This paper examines the transformative impact of technological reform in the Indonesian justice system. Our analysis exploits the timing of the subdistrict-level reform, combined with detailed case-level microdata, to examine how this change reshaped court efficiency, enhanced decision quality, and influenced the functioning of the broader judicial system. The reform introduced e-filing, e-payments, and virtual hearings for civil cases but not for criminal cases. This distinction creates a natural experiment that enables us to implement a triple-difference empirical strategy, leveraging variation across case types, within courts, and over time. Our results show that the reform led to a significant six-day or 10% reduction in case delays without compromising the quality of judicial deliberations. Indicators of decision quality, including the appeals and reversals in higher courts, show significant improvement. A textual analysis of judgments suggests no increase in procedural shortcuts and a 10% increase in factual references per page, indicating a potential improvement in decision-making quality. Efficiency gains extended to untreated higher courts. An analysis of mechanisms suggests how the reform reallocated judicial effort: low-complexity cases involving straightforward documentation changes are now processed more efficiently, freeing judges to dedicate greater attention to more complex disputes, such as marital disputes. Our findings, utilizing the universe of court records from Indonesia, the fourth most populous nation globally, underscore the potential of digital reforms—a lesson relevant to judicial systems worldwide—in reducing systemic case delays and enabling judges to optimize their efforts across cases of varying complexity.

### **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

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\* (*Presentation by co-author*)

* BSE Summer Forum - Political Economy, BSE (Spain)	July 2025
Eleventh ECINEQ Conference, World Bank Group and George Washington University	July 2025
Tokyo Conference on Institutions, Law, and Development, GRIPS, Japan)	June 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

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

## AWARDS & HONOURS

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**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 Fellowship 2017** by the Ashoka University - 700,000 INR (Declined)

## SKILLS

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Python, QGIS, STATA and R

## Field Visits

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