Votes
and
Violence

ELECTORAL COMPETITION
AND ETHNIC RIOTS IN INDIA

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The Electoral Incentives for Hindu-Muslim Violence

Why do some political leaders in some Indian states impress upon their local officials that communal riots and anti-Muslim pogroms must be prevented at all costs? Why do governments in other states fail to protect their minorities or even incite violence against them? In previous chapters we showed that factors such as declining state capacity or India's changing level of consociational power sharing cannot explain the geographical or historical patterns in the effectiveness of states' response to the threat of communal violence. In this chapter, I argue that we can best explain state-level variation in levels of Hindu-Muslim violence if we understand the electoral incentives facing each state's government. I show that states with higher degrees of party fractionalization, in which minorities are therefore pivotal swing voters, have lower levels of violence than states with lower levels of party competition. This is because minorities in highly competitive party systems can extract promises of greater security from politicians in return for their votes.

The chapter is organized into three parts. First, I develop the theoretical argument about the importance of state-level electoral incentives and outline the conditions under which high levels of multiparty electoral competition will lead to higher levels of state protection for minorities. Second, using data from 1961 to 1995 for 14 major Indian states, I show that greater party fractionalization leads to a statistically significant reduction in states' levels of Hindu-Muslim riots. This is true even when we control for socioeconomic variables, the particular party in power in a state, the previous level of ethnic violence in a state, and fixed effects for states. Third, I turn to qualitative evidence to determine if some of the mechanisms identified in the theoretical section of the chapter seem actually to be responsible for the observed state-level variation in riot prevention. Are politicians behaving

as we would expect in intensely competitive political situations, by offering security in return for the support of pivotal minority voters? How do the politicians in control of states act in situations where Hindus rather than Muslims are perceived to be the key marginal voters?

Electoral Competition and the Supply of State Protection for Minorities

What determines whether a local, state, or national government will order the police and army to prevent ethnic polarization and to stop ethnic violence against ethnic minorities? In democracies, governments will protect minorities when they rely on them directly for electoral support, or if party politics in a state is so competitive that there is a high probability that they will need to rely on minority votes or minority-supported parties in the future. We can think of three different types of party competition that will have different effects on a state's response to antiminority violence, which I have represented as A, B_i, and B_{ii} in Figure 5.1.[1]

My argument is that the best situation for minorities is situation A, where there are high levels of party fractionalization with three or more parties. In this situation, politicians will have a greater incentive to appeal to minority votes directly in order to win elections, especially in a first-past-the-post system such as India's where small shifts in votes can lead to large shifts in seats. If minorities are pivotal to electoral outcomes, politicians will increase the supply of security and prevent riots in order to attract their votes. Even if majority parties do not rely on minorities directly, a highly fractionalized party system will force ruling-party politicians to take actions that maximize their political options in the future, especially in terms of coalitions. In other words, ruling-party politicians must take care not to alienate minority voters who support parties that are likely to be future coalition partners, and this will also lead to ruling parties increasing the supply of security to minorities.[2]

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[1] My theoretical arguments in this chapter – in particular the argument that low levels of electoral fractionalization can lead to high as well as low levels of violence depending on who is pivotal to the party in power – have benefited greatly from several conversations with Herbert Kitschelt.

[2] See Donald L. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 177–85, for a general discussion of the value of majority and minority "vote pooling" in coalitions for increasing party moderation toward minorities.
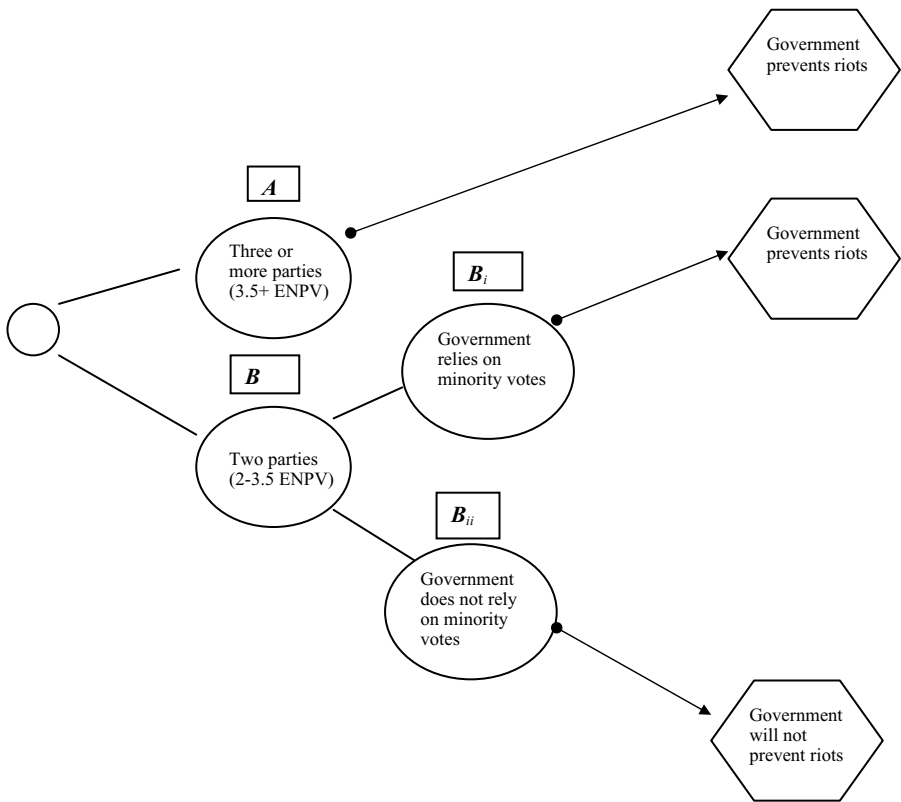
Figure 5.1 The theoretical relationship between party competition and a state's response to antiminority polarization and violence (ENVP = effective number of parties).

A more dangerous situation is when there are bipolar levels of party fractionalization in a state (i.e., less than 3.5 effective parties), represented by *B* in the chart, and one of these majority community parties effectively "owns" the antiminority issue while the other emphasizes some other cleavage, such as economic redistribution. In this case, we would expect the party that has the strongest antiminority identity to foment antiminority violence in order to attract swing voters away from its main competitor. Whether violence will actually result from this polarization, however, will depend on which party controls the state, the antiminority party or its competitor, and whether the party in power relies on minority votes. If the antiminority party with no minority support is in power (situation B_{ii}) we would expect it to allow antiminority mobilization and violence to occur, at least until

such violence begins to result in such large economic and social costs that it begins to lose support from its own voters in the majority community. In situation B_i, however, where the party that "owns" the issue of economic redistribution and relies on minority support is in power, we would expect a different outcome. The party in power, worried that it would lose support from antiminority polarization, has every incentive to prevent violence that threatens its support base. As long as the state has sufficient institutional capacity to prevent violence and the party in power has control over the various police forces in a state, we can expect it to act firmly to prevent riots in this case, and to stop them quickly once they break out.

Why Should Minorities Benefit from High Levels of Party Fractionalization?

There are of course several enabling conditions to this model of the effects of party competition on the prevention of antiminority violence. First, I assume the existence of multiple issue dimensions in politics rather than simply the existence of a single majority-minority polarization. Second, I assume that minorities will be willing to "bid low" in terms of what they demand from majority parties across most issues in order to maximize their security. Third, I assume that the majority community does not regard increasing the minority's security as fundamentally threatening its own dominant position in the state and its own security.

These three conditions are necessary to help us understand why minorities should be the beneficiaries of greater levels of electoral competition and become pivotal voters in a state, rather than extremists from the majority community. We can think of some cases, for instance, where intense competition and high levels of party fractionalization has given more leverage to extremist voters and antiminority parties than to moderates dedicated to improving majority-minority relations. In Israel, for example, the moderate Mapai Party was in a pivotal coalition-forming position in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) from 1949 until 1977. But then increased electoral competition in the Knesset elections of 1977, 1981, and 1988 put more conservative voters and their parties (Agudat Yisrael, Shas, and Degel Ha'Thora) in the pivotal position. These conservative voters and their parties used their pivotal position to draw Israeli politics away from majority compromise with the minorities rather than toward it.[3]

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[3] Abraham Diskin, *Elections and Voters in Israel* (New York: Praeger, 1991), pp. 180–84.

Electoral Incentives

First, where social, ideological, economic, and intraethnic cleavages among the majority community are highly salient, we would expect a greater willingness to reach out to minority voters. These cleavages are certainly not carved in stone and, as we will explore in the next chapter, they can and do change over time in response to state policies and incentives as well as individual actions.[4] In societies where such intragroup cleavages are strong, politicians from the ethnic majority will often prefer to seek minority support rather than the support of segments of their own ethnic group with which they may be in competition for scarce economic and political goods. In the United States, for example, the growth of economic divisions between white industrialists in the North and planters in the South from the 1920s to the 1950s created political incentives (when combined with the migration of blacks to the North) on the part of white northern politicians to appeal to minorities.[5]

The second factor that determines the degree to which parties will compete for minority support is the number of votes minorities can deliver and the cost to majority parties of the demands minority voters and politicians make, relative to the demands made by other groups within the majority community.[6] The number and intensity of the demands minority politicians and voters make will depend on factors such as whether antiminority violence has occurred in the past, whether a minority has a substantial educated mobilized middle class that relies on state employment (e.g., Anglo-Indians in India in the 1940s and 1950s or Sri-Lankan Tamils in the 1970s and 1980s), or whether the minority controls a large section of the economy (e.g., Chinese in Indonesia or Asians and whites in 1960s East Africa).

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[4] For a discussion of the "hierarchy of cleavages," see Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction," in Lipset and Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 6. For an example, see David Laitin's *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), who shows how colonial policies privileged "ancestral city" identities in Yorubaland in Nigeria, a development that helps explain why Yorubaland has escaped the Muslim-Christian clashes that have occurred elsewhere in the country. In general a greater number of cross-cutting ethnic cleavages leads to an increase in party proliferation, but the relationship is certainly not a simple one, as we explore in Chapter 6: although most states in India are highly diverse, only some states have high levels of electoral fractionalization.

[5] Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[6] The electoral system obviously makes a difference to how valuable small shifts in voter preferences will be: in India's plurality single-member system, small swings in votes can lead to dramatic swings in terms of seats.

Relatively poor and populous minorities that place a high value on one issue dimension that costs little for the majority to provide will be more attractive coalition partners than small wealthy, well-educated minorities with many demands that are costly, such as physical protection, government employment for educated members of groups, or the maintenance of a privileged economic status.[7]

Third, security for minorities will be inexpensive to provide as long as the measures taken do not seem to threaten the majority's own sense of physical security. Under what conditions will the majority be threatened? Protection for minorities will be more costly for majorities to provide when the minority is in the demographic majority in some areas of the country (allowing polarizing claims that the minority is taking over to seem more credible) or if the party that minorities support has no majority leaders that can provide reassurance to members of the majority population. Also, supplying greater security for minorities will be more politically costly in situations where minorities have substantial representation in the police, paramilitary forces, and army, because this representation can be used to convince people that supplying greater security is a prelude to minority domination of the majority. Lastly, once antiminority violence crosses a low or medium threshold and becomes widespread, the opposition party might be tempted to take an antiminority stance as well in order to neutralize the threat to its support base.[8]

How Do Indian States Fit the Model?

Most states in India now have very high levels of party fractionalization, especially considering that India has a single-member, district-plurality voting

[7] A similar argument, though put in formal language, has been made in the American politics literature by James M. Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich, "Non-Spatial Candidate Characteristics and Electoral Competition," *Journal of Politics* 44, no. 1 (1982), pp. 115–30. Hinich and Enelow show how the greater intensity of minority preferences can influence majority policies much more than previous models of party competition would predict.

[8] We can think of several such cases where ethnic violence has so polarized majority-minority relations that it has become impossible for members of the majority community to hold their coalition together while simultaneously appealing to minority voters. This happened in the 1890s for white Progressives in the U.S. South, because of racist polarization against African Americans. It has also happened in Israel, where the strength of the Jewish-Arab cleavage within Israel was such that all the mainstream Jewish parties, even on the left, regarded the Arab-supported Communist Party and Arab Democratic Party for decades as politically untouchable.

Table 5.1. *Number of Effective Parties in Major Indian States as of February 2002*

State/Ruling Party[a]	Most Recent State Election	Effective Number of Parties	Vote Share of Two Largest Parties
Andhra Pradesh/TDP	1999	2.78	84.48
Himachal Pradesh/ –	1998	2.85	82.53
Gujarat/BJP	1998	2.97	79.66
Madhya Pradesh/Congress	1998	3.09	79.87
Rajasthan/Congress	1998	3.19	78.18
West Bengal/Left Front	2001	4.14	67.25
Karnataka/Congress	1999	4.19	61.53
Orissa/Biju JD & BJP	2000	4.26	63.18
Punjab/Akali Dal	1997	4.40	64.23
Tamil Nadu/AIADMK	2001	4.84	62.36
Uttar Pradesh/Under Central Rule	1996	4.99	54.32
Haryana/Indian National Lok Dal	2000	5.01	60.83
Maharashtra/Congress & NCP	1999	5.64	49.8
Kerala/UDF	2001	6.16	52.76
Bihar/RJD	2000	7.70	42.98

[a] TDP = Telegu Desam Party, JD = Janata Dal, AIADMK = All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, NCP = National Congress Party, UDF = United Democratic Front, RJD = Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Source: Calculated from Indian Election Commission Reports available at <www.eci.gov.in>. The calculation of effective number of parties excludes independents.

system, which is normally associated with convergence to a two-party system.[9] As of February 2002, as we can see in Table 5.1, there were only five major states where two parties shared 75% or more of the vote (fewer than 3.25 effective parties). In Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh elections are basically a straight fight between the Congress and the BJP, whereas in Andhra Pradesh a regional party, the Telegu Desam Party (TDP), competes with the Congress Party. In all the other major states, there are at least three major parties and often many more competing for power in each state, and the number of effective parties in each state ranges from 4.14 to 7.70.

All three of the necessary conditions for high levels of electoral competition to benefit minorities are also present in India: there are multiple issue

[9] Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman, "Party Aggregation and the Number of Parties in India and the United States," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2 (1998).

dimensions in politics along such issues as economic redistribution rather than simply the existence of a single majority-minority cleavage; minorities place a very high value of security and are willing to "bid low" in terms of what they demand from majority parties across most issues in order to maximize their security; the majority community values other issues much more than the majority-minority cleavage and does not regard increasing the minority's security as threatening its own dominant position in the state and its own security.

First, in recent decades, there has been a dramatic growth of new Hindu-led parties that explicitly claim to represent the "oppressed," especially the middle and lower castes and minorities, groups that collectively represent a majority of the Indian population. Examples would include the Bahujan Samaj Party, which represents Scheduled Castes; the Samajwadi Party, which has a particular base among backward castes; and the Telegu Desam Party, which represents middle and lower castes in Andhra Pradesh. All these parties are keen to expand beyond their core social constituencies and include Muslims in a broader social and political coalition. The rise of these "pro-backward" parties – and hence the size of the overall "market" for Muslim votes – has therefore increased considerably over the past few decades.

Second, Muslim voters in India are in a good position to profit from this increasing state-level electoral competition over distributional issues because they demand less than most Hindu voting blocs. Muslims are a large proportion of the electorate (12% overall, but much more in some states and constituencies), they have intense preferences on one major issue (security), and they make fewer and less intense demands on other political issues than many of the main voting blocks within the majority Hindu electorate, even lower than those made by the middle and lower castes.[10] Muslims make fewer demands in part as a consequence of their community's relative economic backwardness. As we can see in Table 5.2, the Muslim community

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[10] There have been several estimates over the years to determine how important the "Muslim vote" is in national politics. Rudolph and Rudolph, for example, identified 207 constituencies in the Lok Sabha where Muslims accounted for 10% or more of the vote. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 194–95. There have been fewer attempts to do the same for state politics. Ashgar Ali Engineer and several others have estimated that Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, where they are 17% of the state population but 29% in urban areas, are of crucial electoral importance in around 60 of the 403 assembly seats. "Defeat of BJP Is Defeat of Communalism," *Secular Perspective*, March 1–15, 2002, downloaded on June 15, 2002, from <http://ecumene.org/IIS/csss71.htm>.

Table 5.2. *Comparative Educational Levels among Different Religious Groups in India (%)*

	Muslims	Hindus	Christians
Male illiteracy	42.4	25.3	18.8
Male graduates	2.3	7.9	8.1
Female illiteracy	59.5	45.2	22.7
Female graduates	0.8	4.5	5.5

Source: National Sample Survey 43rd Round, 1987–88, cited in *Times of India*, December 10, 1995.

has proportionately fewer educated or wealthy members whose demands have to be met than any other major ethnic group. A National Sample Survey in 1987–88, for instance, found that only 2.3% of Muslim men and 0.8% of women had university degrees, compared with 7.9% of Hindu men and 4.2% of Hindu women. Only 8.0% of Muslim men had completed secondary school, compared with 17.2% of Hindus. In landholdings, too, Muslims are on average much poorer than upper- and middle-caste Hindus, largely because of the effects of the post-Partition land reforms that hit Muslim landlords harder than Hindus.[11]

As a result of anti-Muslim riots in the past, we know that Muslims place a very high priority on one particular issue – that of physical protection or at least nonaggression from the state – compared with other issue dimensions that are more salient for Hindu voters. In a 1991 survey in Delhi, for example, 23% of Muslims named communal violence or the Ayodhya issue as the single most serious problem India's citizens faced compared with only 6.2% of Hindu upper castes, 1.5% of Hindu backward castes, and 7.9% of Hindu Scheduled Castes. Muslims were much less likely than Hindus to identify distributional issues such as price rises and unemployment as the key issues facing the country. Muslims and the minority Sikh community were also the most nervous about the long-term future of Indian democracy: 80.3% of Muslims and 67.2% of Sikhs said the future of democracy was not safe in India compared with 51.3% of upper-caste Hindus, 44.4% of Scheduled

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[11] The most important reasons for Muslims' disadvantaged economic position today are the large-scale land reforms in the 1950s, which Hindus were better able to resist; the loss of minority reservations in government service; and the emigration of much of the commercial and political Muslim elite to Pakistan. For comprehensive data on Muslims' economic backwardness compared with that of Hindus, see Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: Indian Muslims since Independence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Caste Hindus, and 49.3% of the backward castes.[12] That Muslim voters value security so highly and that they have fewer educated, privileged members whose interests have to be satisfied than any other major ethnic group make Muslims a relatively inexpensive voting bloc. In contrast, middle- and upper-caste voters, groups well entrenched in the bureaucracy who are better educated and with larger landholdings, will be a much more "expensive" group of voters for a party to attract.

Third, these Muslim demands for security cannot be portrayed as threatening to the core interests of the majority for the following reasons. Muslims have a very low level of representation in the armed forces (less than 1%), so there is clearly no threat to Hindu control of the country there. Muslims are also a minority in almost all districts in the country, with the exception of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and a handful of districts in other states (such as Mallapuram in Kerala and Rampur in Uttar Pradesh), so it is difficult to claim that a greater supply of security will alter the political balance within the country as a whole or within states. Finally, because they are a minority in all but one state and in most constituencies, Muslims generally support Hindu-led parties, whose Hindu leaders can therefore reassure anxious members of the Hindu majority that moves to help Muslims are not threatening to Hindus.[13]

Testing for the Observable Implications of the Model

In the remainder of this chapter I test for the observable implications of my theoretical argument about the relationship between party competition and the prevention of violence. First, is there a statistical relationship between the quantitative indicator of the level of electoral competition, the effective number of parties in a state, and a state's level of Hindu-Muslim violence? Second, when we examine situations when antiminority mobilization is fomented across India, do we find that states in situations A, B_i, and B_{ii} act in the ways predicted by the model? Third, when we examine specific instances where riots did or did not break out can we find evidence that the politically strategic considerations outlined in the model are really the key mechanisms responsible in predicting where violence does or does not break out?

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[12] "The Face of the Delhi Electorate in the Gallup Mirror," *Indian Institute of Public Opinion Monthly Public Opinion Surveys* 36, no. 809 (1991), pp. 10–16.

[13] The notable exception here is in the city of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, where Muslims have supported a Muslim-led party, the MIM.

Party Competition and Riot Prevention

Because detailed state-level opinion poll data on minority support for parties is only available since the mid-1990s in India, it is impossible to test statistically my arguments about the effects of minority support on government actions at low levels of party competition (situations B_i and B_{ii}). However, I can test for my central argument that high levels of party competition lead to lower levels of antiminority violence and that bipolar party competition is generally associated with higher levels of violence. To carry out this test I have compiled a monthly dataset on Hindu-Muslim riots and socioeconomic and electoral variables for 14 major Indian states since 1961: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.[14] As of 1991, the most recent census for which data on religious identification are available, these states accounted for 95% of India's total population and 93% of its Muslim population. The Hindu-Muslim riot data I use here were collected jointly with Ashutosh Varshney in 1994–96. They are derived from daily newspaper reports (every issue of the *Times of India* published between 1950 and 1995) and include information on riot occurrence and deaths, in addition to many other factors. The data we collected are both more complete than publicly available government data on communal violence and more useful in statistical and other types of analysis, because, unlike government data, they are disaggregated by town, district, day, and month.[15] These Hindu-Muslim riot data are correlated at 0.64 with the post-1954 Government of India annual data on communal riots and at 0.7 with the post-1975 data on atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

I use these riot data to create two variables that measure Hindu-Muslim violence: *RIOTS*, the monthly number of reported Hindu-Muslim riots in each state; and *KILLED*, the deaths per month in Hindu-Muslim riots in each state. To control for the possibility that past violence is driving both the level of electoral competition (by increasing polarization) as well as the level of present violence – due to revenge for past events, or perhaps because

[14] I select 1961 as a starting date because state reorganization was largely complete for major states by this date, and because the key demographic data for these new states is only easily available for 1961 onward. Assam is not included here because of decisions made during the collection of the riot data, which make the data for that state less reliable than for the others.

[15] For details of how the Varshney and Wilkinson data were collected, see Appendixes A and B.

past violence is evidence of the continuing existence in a state of what Paul Brass has termed "institutionalized riot networks" that foment violence – I also calculate the variable *PREVIOUS VIOLENCE*, which measures the number of casualties in each state in the previous 5 and 10 years.

To measure the degree of electoral competition in a state, I employ the most widely used indicator of electoral competitiveness, the effective number of parties (ENPV). The formula for this index is $\text{ENPV} = 1/\Sigma v_i^2$, where v_i is the *vote share* of the *i*th party. This measure weights parties with a higher vote share more heavily than those parties with a very low vote share, thus providing a better measure of the "real" level of party competition than if we were to simply count the total number of parties competing in a state. I use Butler, Lahiri, and Roy, *India Decides*, as the source for these Indian state election data.[16]

One reasonable objection to the use of ENPV as an indicator of party competition is that the best indicator of the competitiveness of a system might in reality be competition at the level of party factions (i.e., *below* the party level) or between competing blocs of parties with similar agendas and interests (i.e., *above* the party level).[17] Unfortunately I could obtain no reliable data on the shifting factional alignments that exist *within* the major Indian political parties, but I am able to carry out a test for the effects of alliance-competition at the level above the individual party. I do this by adjusting ENPV for the presence of preelection interparty alliances – if three parties were allied they would be counted as one party in calculating the index – to create the new variable *ADJENPV*. However because of the extreme instability of coalitions in Indian state politics, I believe that *ADJENPV* will be a less reliable indicator of party competition than the underlying number of parties.

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[16] David Butler, Ashok Lahiri, and Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections, 1952–1995* (New Delhi: Books and Things, 1995).

[17] Herbert Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 8–9. The "fit" between factions and parties in India, however, is probably better than in other countries where party control over campaigns and elections makes defection much more costly for the individual legislator and hence a voice through a party faction more likely. In the Indian political system it is relatively easy, even after the passage of several antidefection laws, for dissatisfied factions within parties to go off and form their own parties without having to resign their seats and fight for reelection. Local alignments are also often as important as national party support in winning an election, making defection less costly. Some parties in India are basically the vehicles of only a few politicians, as can be seen from the fact that registered parties are often named after their dominant personality (e.g., "Kerala Congress-Joseph," "ADMK-Janaki Ramachandran").

The Indian national government has the power to impose central rule on a state and suspend its state legislature if it believes that a state is not being governed in accordance with the Indian Constitution, or if no stable state government can be formed. Because this central rule results in a state's governor taking over the administration, it is sometimes called "governor's rule," though more often termed "president's rule," reflecting the fact that the imposition of central rule must be approved by the president of India. To control for these periods when each state was under central administration, I therefore use the dummy variable *PRESRULE* in my statistical analysis.[18]

To see if there are particular party effects on riot control over and above the level of party competition – as is often alleged by both supporters and detractors of Indian political parties – I also collected data on when the BJP, Communists, Congress, or "Others" (which includes the middle- and lower-caste and regional parties) were in power or in coalition in each state each month from 1961 to 1995. To do this, I relied on Butler, Lahiri, and Roy's volume *India Decides*, on published Election Commission of India (ECI) election returns, and on approximately 30 books or articles on state politics, which I list in Appendix A.[19] I code a party as ruling (e.g., the variables *CONGRULE*, *BJPRULE*) where it has a clear majority of the seats in a state's assembly (Vidhan Sabha). In cases where a party does not have a majority of the seats but it is participating in government, either as an official partner or in an arrangement where it supports the government from outside, I code it as participating in a coalition (e.g., *COMMCOAL*, *BJPCOAL*). In those cases where the Congress Party splits – as in Maharashtra in 1978 – I apply the same rule introduced by the 52nd Amendment and used by the Election Commission to determine whether MLAs have "defected" or split the party: the resulting coalition government is still coded as being "Congress" if it contains more than one-third of the previous Congress members.

In addition to these indicators of violence and political competition I control for the same socioeconomic variables I used in the regressions in Chapter 4: a state's total population, its linguistic and religious diversity

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[18] Dates for these periods of "President's Rule" were obtained from Lok Sabha Secretariat, *President's Rule in the States and Union Territories* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1996).

[19] Butler et al., *India Decides: Elections, 1952–1995*. Most ECI reports are now available online at <www.eci.gov.in>. I am currently collecting data that will ultimately allow me to test for the effects of all major parties in the country, as well as the ethnic support base and ethnic appeals made by each party.

(*LANGFRAC* and *RELFRAC*),[20] its Muslim population, and a state's level of urban income inequality.[21] I also control for a state's literacy level, obtained from the Indian census. To analyze these data I use the same negative binomial model discussed in Chapter 2.[22]

Discussion of Regression Results

Table 5.3 reports the results when we examined the relationship between the effective number of parties and the number of riots in each state in each month from 1961 to 1995. The results in these regressions, and in others not displayed here, support the hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between the degree of electoral competition in a state and its level of communal riots. The number of Hindu-Muslim riots goes down as the effective number of parties goes up, with the coefficient for the effective number of parties significant at the 99% level across all models, including, most importantly, those regressions where I control for a state's previous level of violence, the parties in power or coalition in a state, and (through the use of dummy variables for each state) other important state-level effects.[23]

Several of the socioeconomic control variables were significant in almost all models. Urbanization rates and states' total population are both highly significant and positively related to the probability of riots, which is a finding consistent with virtually every other study ever done on urban violence. But two other variables seem to be related to violence in a surprising way: states with greater income inequality in urban areas (at least as measured by *WBUGINI*) actually seem to have lower levels of violence than those with a more equal income distribution. And states with higher levels of literacy

[20] For a discussion of ethnic fractionalization indicators, see Peter C. Ordeshook and Olga V. Shvetsova, "Ethnic Heterogeneity, District Magnitude and the Number of Parties," *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 1 (1994), pp. 100–23, and Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[21] I calculate my measures of state linguistic and religious fractionalization, using Rae's index $(1 - \Sigma g_i^2)$, where g_i is the proportion of the population in linguistic or religious group *i*. For definitions of these variables and information on the data used to calculate them, see the discussion in the previous chapter.

[22] J. Scott Long, *Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent Variables* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997), pp. 217–63.

[23] I also ran these regressions using the coalition-adjusted measure of party competition discussed earlier: this variable had the same negative direction as ENPV but was insignificant in explaining both riot levels and deaths.

Table 5.3. *Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in Major Indian States, 1961–1995*

	Riots			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Effective number of electoral parties	−0.217	−0.267	−0.258	−0.229
	(0.071)***	(0.074)***	(0.073)***	(0.076)***
State population (log)	0.819	2.044	2.225	1.371
	(0.117)***	(1.233)*	(1.244)*	(1.236)
State election within 6 months	0.376	0.432	0.410	0.418
	(0.139)***	(0.136)***	(0.137)***	(0.137)***
National election within 6 months	−0.367	−0.374	−0.351	−0.370
	(0.145)**	(0.142)***	(0.143)**	(0.143)***
President's rule	−0.077	−0.276	−0.322	−0.576
	(0.200)	(0.200)	(0.183)	(0.227)
Literacy percentage	4.828	10.216	9.825	10.691
	(1.092)***	(4.829)**	(4.847)**	(4.799)**
Urbanization percentage	−1.931	−23.110	−23.212	−19.576
	(1.523)	(8.590)***	(8.581)***	(8.635)**
Muslim percentage	10.439	24.344	24.153	18.437
	(1.808)***	(16.446)	(16.476)	(16.315)
Urban Gini coefficient (World Bank)	−0.034	−0.034	−0.033	−0.040
	(0.019)*	(0.020)*	(0.020)	(0.021)*
Religious fractionalization	−10.704	−48.662	−47.393	−49.269
	(2.598)***	(10.283)***	(10.344)***	(10.198)***
Linguistic fractionalization	−6.226	−23.210	−23.161	−23.910
	(2.392)***	(7.293)***	(7.305)***	(7.228)***
Interaction of Relfrac and Langfrac	26.641	77.518	76.273	79.913
	(8.564)***	(26.328)***	(26.403)***	(26.082)***
Communist rule	−1.303	−1.482	−1.576	−1.524
	(0.335)***	(0.457)***	(0.445)***	(0.447)***
Congress rule	0.364	0.043		−0.266
	(0.112)***	(0.115)		(0.156)*
Riots in previous 10 years	0.015	0.008	0.008	0.009
	(0.002)***	(0.002)***	(0.002)***	(0.002)***
Coalition dummy				−0.529
				(0.182)***
State dummies		Included	Included	Included
Constant	−14.742	−23.218	−26.345	−11.829
	(2.122)***	(19.297)	(19.469)	(19.428)
Observations	5472	5472	5472	5472
Number of states	14	14	14	14

Standard errors in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. For state dummy coefficients, see Appendix C.
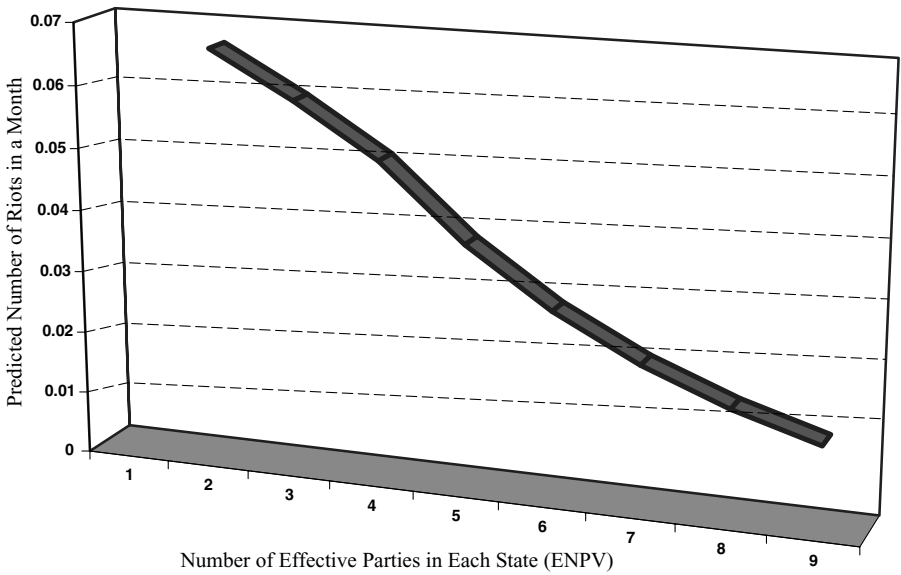
Figure 5.2   Predicted effect of state party fractionalization on communal riots

also seem to have higher levels of violence, despite predictions made by some that riots ought to decline as education rises. It is not the case, as we might think, that the effective number of parties is purely a function of a state's level of ethnic heterogeneity. The measure for party competition (ENPV) is not highly correlated with the measures of ethnic heterogeneity, and the effect of party competition remains robust even when we include measures of ethnic diversity. Interacting party competition variables with ethnic variables to look for their joint effect also had no discernible effect.

How much of a substantive effect does electoral competition have in explaining state levels of communal violence? We can see in Figure 5.2 that the predicted effect of moving from a state in which there were two effective parties to one in which there were eight parties, holding other factors at their mean, would be to reduce the expected number of riots in a state from 0.07 per month to .01 riots per month, a drop of more than 80%.[24] To give an example that is somewhat less abstract, the effect of moving from a state with Gujarat's level of party competition in 1995 (3.08 effective parties) to one with Kerala's level of party competition in that year (5.63 effective

[24] These marginal effects were all calculated using the stata7 command *mfx compute, at(x=value of interest mean)* following regression 3 in the table.

parties), while holding other factors constant at their mean, would have been to reduce the predicted number of riots in a state by half, from 0.05 to 0.025 riots in a month, or from 0.6 riots to 0.3 riots in a year.

Whether the BJP or the Congress had an overall majority in any particular state seems to have had no independent impact on the overall level of riot occurrence from 1961 to 1995.[25] In the case of BJP rule this may in part be a function of the fact that the BJP only began to win outright in state elections in the early 1990s, so there are very few observations, and that president's rule was imposed on four BJP-ruled states immediately after mass rioting broke out in December 1992, so the violence that some would argue resulted from BJP rule is classified under "president's rule" rather than "BJP rule." Congress rule was initially significant when I ran regressions (see column 1 in Table 5.3) but then became insignificant when I introduced dummy variables for states (in columns three and four in Table 5.3) and also when I ran the regression on only some decades from the time series. This makes sense for two reasons: first, Congress was in a dominant position for so many years in so many states that the variable *CONGRULE* is probably serving as a proxy for state- and time-specific factors; second, as we discussed in Chapter 4, despite Congress's official claims to always protect minorities, the party's status as the dominant catchall party for many years and its often weak party discipline has meant that at one time or another Congress politicians have both fomented and prevented communal violence for political advantage. Congress governments have failed, for example, to prevent some of India's worst riots (e.g., the Ahmedabad riots of 1969, the Moradabad riots of 1980, or the Meerut riots of 1987) and in some cases Congress ministers have reportedly instigated riots (Bihar ex-chief minister K. B. Sahay was allegedly involved in the 1967 Ranchi riots) and have blocked riot enforcement.[26] However, there does seem to be a clear party effect when we control for Communist rule. Communist rule is negatively related to the level of riots in a state in all versions of the model, no matter which other variables are included. The predicted effect of moving from a state where the Communists are not in power to one in which they have an overall majority, while holding other factors constant at their mean, would be to reduce the level of riots

[25] Only the coefficients for the regression in which the dummy variables for Congress rule were included are reported in Table 5.4.

[26] See, e.g., *Lok Sabha Debates*, May 14, 1970, p. 336, and October 7, 1982. p. 335, for details of alleged Congress interference with local riot prevention activities in Meerut and Jyoti Basu's allegations about Sahay's role in the 1967 Ranchi riots.

by three-quarters, from 0.51 riots per year to 0.12. One can speculate that this strong relationship is the result of two factors: a strong ideology of secularism, and (this would differentiate the party from Congress) a much greater degree of party discipline and ideological coherence over time.

Perhaps most interesting is that coalitions seem to have an independent effect in reducing the level of violence. When there is a coalition in a state, the predicted number of riots drops by more than half, from 0.56 riots per year to 0.33 riots. This effect applies even when coalitions include parties generally thought to foment violence, such as the BJP.

I also ran the same regressions I used on riots on the monthly level of deaths from communal riots in India's states from 1961 to 1995, rather than riot occurrence. The results were very similar to those for riots. The effective number of parties was again highly significant and negatively related to the level of deaths in a state: a rise in the number of effective parties from 2 to 8 in a state would lead, all other factors being equal, to a 50% reduction in the number of deaths. Moving from the number of effective parties in Gujarat in 1995 (3.08) to the number in Kerala (5.63) would have led to a predicted fall in the number of deaths of 25%. The dummy for Communist rule is again highly significant, with Communist rule associated with a reduction in deaths of almost 75% (from 0.92 to 0.24 per annum).

Party Competition, Minority Support, and State Riot Prevention

The fact that election surveys with detailed data on minority voting in state elections have only been collected since the mid-1990s makes it impossible to test systematically my hypothesis about the effects of minority support at low (bipolar) levels of party competition. However, it is possible to make use of the available exit survey data from the late 1990s together with party fractionalization data to provide at least a partial test of my arguments about the importance of levels of party competition and minority support in explaining government response to riots. When we examine situations in which antiminority mobilization is fomented across India, do we find that states in situations A, B_i, and B_{ii} act in the ways predicted by the model?

To examine this issue, I look at state responses to attempts to foment violence throughout India during the Gujarat riots of February–April 2002. The Gujarat riots of 2002 have been extensively examined in the Indian press and by human rights organizations and academics. The BJP's "secular" Muslim-supported coalition partners in New Delhi were unwilling during this period to force the BJP to impose central rule on Gujarat, where

the state government had allowed antiminority riots to continue for weeks after Hindu nationalists and family members were murdered at Godhra on February 27, 2002.

Many observers have argued that the Gujarat riots therefore symbolize the failure of coalitional politics in general to control communal extremism and communal violence in India.[27] I certainly acknowledge that the events in early 2002 showed that regional parties with minority support in their own states were unwilling to bring the central government down in order to protect minorities in Gujarat. However, this does not invalidate my general argument about the actions that politicians and parties will take in order to protect their own political futures in their own states. If we examine the state-level response to attempts to foment riots throughout India in 2002, we can see that state governments responded as predicted by my general model. States with high levels of party fractionalization prevented anti-Muslim mobilization even if the state government concerned (as in Orissa) included a Hindu nationalist party. In states with low levels of party competition, as predicted, the state response depended on whether the ruling coalition relied on Muslim votes. Where Muslims were an important support base for the ruling coalition, as in Madhya Pradesh (where exit polls from the most recent election suggest 97% of Muslims support the ruling party) or Maharashtra (99% Muslim support for the governing coalition), the state governments were highly effective in preventing violence. Where the governing party had no Muslim support, however, as in Gujarat, the government adopted a very weak and biased stance toward the riots.

In Table 5.4 I categorize the major Indian states in terms of whether they had low levels of party competition in which the governing party relies on minority votes (B_i) or does not rely on majority votes (B_{ii}) or in situations where there is high party competition in a state. Only in Gujarat did we have the most dangerous situation B_{ii}, where there was both a low level of party competition (2.97 effective parties, with Congress and BJP having obtained 80% of the vote between them in the previous election) and a party in power, the BJP, that did not rely on minority voters at all: election surveys estimated that the BJP got 0% of the minority vote in 1998. Moreover, by 2002 the BJP, after a string of electoral reverses in by-elections and

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[27] Syed Shahabuddin has long argued that the coalition allies have "compromised their secular ideology to join hands with the BJP and share power. Will they be willing to give up power if the BJP takes steps that are not to their liking? They may well look the other way." "Why Muslims fear the BJP," *Week*, April 12, 1998.

Table 5.4. *Party Competition and Riot Prevention, from February to April 2002*

State/Ruling Party[a]	State Coding	Effective Number of Parties	Vote Share of Two Largest Parties	Percentage of Muslim Voters Estimated to Support Governing Party	State Response to Riots
Andhra Pradesh/TDP	B$_i$	2.78	84.48	30%	Prevented
Himachal Pradesh/	B$_i$	2.85	82.53	NA	
Gujarat/BJP	B$_{ii}$	2.97	79.66	0%	Allowed
Madhya Pradesh/Congress	B$_i$	3.09	79.87	97%	Prevented
Rajasthan/Congress	B$_i$	3.19	78.18	92%	Prevented
West Bengal/Left Front	A	4.14	67.25	49%	Prevented
Karnataka/Congress	A	4.19	61.53	86%	Prevented
Orissa/Biju JD & BJP	A	4.26	63.18	16% (2% + 14%)	Prevented
Punjab/	A	4.40	64.23	NA	Prevented
Tamil Nadu/AIADMK	A	4.84	62.36	39%	Prevented
Uttar Pradesh/Under Central Rule	A	4.99	54.32	NA	Prevented
Haryana/Indian National Lok Dal	A	5.01	60.83	59%	Prevented
Maharashtra/Congress & NCP	A	5.64	49.8	99% (53% + 46%)	Prevented
Kerala/UDF	A	6.16	52.76	71%	Prevented
Bihar/RJD	A	7.70	42.98	61%	Prevented

[a] For acronyms, see Table 5.1.

Sources: CSDS and ORG-Marg opinion polls reported in *India Today* and *Frontline*. In all cases the most recent pre-2002 opinion poll is used as the most reliable indicator of the parties' support base, even if that was for the Lok Sabha national election in 1999. Sources: Madhya Pradesh: *Frontline*, November 19, 1999, pp. 46–48; Bihar: *Frontline*, March 31, 2000; Kerala: *India Today*, May 14, 2001, p. 26; Maharashtra: *Frontline*, November 19, 1999, pp. 44–45; Haryana: *Frontline*, April 14, 2000, pp. 52–53; Tamil Nadu: *India Today*, May 14, 2001, p. 21; Orissa: *Frontline*, April 14, 2000, pp. 52–53; Karnataka: *Frontline*, November 19, 1999, pp. 46–48; West Bengal: *India Today*, May 14, 2001, p. 23; Andhra Pradesh: *Frontline*, November 19, 1999.

important municipal elections over the preceding two years, was anxious to polarize the vote along majority-minority lines to bring Hindu voters back to the party in preparation for state elections that had to be held by mid-2003.

The result, as expected, was that the state performed very poorly in controlling the riots. According to press accounts and human rights investigations, the Narendra Modi regime facilitated the violence in many different ways: by transferring officials who had successfully prevented antiminority riots or who arrested Hindu militants involved in the violence; by delaying calling in the army until the worst of the violence was already over; by taking punitive action against people trying to register cases against the government's political allies; and by instructing state officials not to intervene in some cases to prevent the violence.[28] The link between government action and state response to riots was clear from the fact that the state BJP leaders met in late March, while the violence was still continuing, to discuss the possibility of calling early elections to benefit from the antiminority pro-Hindu wave the Godhra killings and subsequent riots had engendered.[29] As a result, Gujarat burned.

Outside Gujarat however, in states where there was relatively low competition but the party in power relied on Muslim votes or where party fractionalization was high, regardless of which party was in power, India's state governments performed very well in 2002 in preventing Hindu-Muslim violence from spreading as it had done in 1992–93.[30] This success came despite numerous attempts by Hindu nationalists – as well as a handful of attempts by Muslim militants – to foment violence in different states between February 27 and the end of April 2002. Figure 2.2 shows those cases where the press reported Hindu nationalist demonstrations, processions, bands, or attacks against minorities during this period, explicitly linked to the violence in Gujarat. As we discussed in Chapter 2, these are all events that one would have expected to lead in many cases to large-scale

[28] See "Modi Ties Hands of Cops Who Put Their Foot Down," *Indian Express* (New Delhi), March 26, 2002, p. 1; "Gujarat Pot Keeps Boiling as CM Looks the Other Way," *Indian Express*, March 29, 2002; *Indian Express*, March 28, 2002.

[29] See, for example, the reports in *Indian Express*, March 29, 2002, which describe political interference with law enforcement in Gujarat in March as well as BJP officials' discussions a few weeks after the riots began on whether to call early elections in the state to take advantage of the Hindu backlash.

[30] See Steven I. Wilkinson, "Putting Gujarat in Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), April 27, 2002, pp. 1579–83.

violence, as they did in Gujarat. As we can see in Figure 2.2, very few of the precipitating events outside Gujarat led to significant numbers of deaths. The explanation for this lies in determined state law enforcement efforts, which themselves were the result of the electoral variables I have identified.

The map in Figure 5.3 shows data on precipitating events and deaths from February–April 2002 as well as data on the level of party competition in each state during this period. In states with low levels of party competition (75% of the vote or more split between 2 main parties) but in which the state governments relied on minority votes, we can see that the number of precipitating events that turned into large-scale riots was low. This was because the state governments in these states ordered their police forces to prevent violence in order to protect the multiethnic coalitions built around distributive issues on which they had won power.

In Andhra Pradesh (2.78 effective parties), Madhya Pradesh (3.09 effective parties), and Rajasthan (3.19 effective parties) the Congress governments of Ashok Gehlot (Rajasthan) and Digvijay Singh (Madhya Pradesh), determined to preserve their Hindu-Muslim coalitions before 2003 elections, put massive preventive measures into effect to prevent the violence from spreading into their states from adjacent Gujarat. In Madhya Pradesh the government rounded up thousands of militant Hindu nationalists, enforced curfews in dozens of districts, and ordered the police to take strong action against rioters. In Rajasthan too the police were under orders to prevent violence, and local police officers prevented riots from breaking out in Jaipur, Kishangarh, and Ajmer.[31] Chandrababu Naidu's TDP government in Andhra Pradesh was also absolutely determined to prevent violence: even though his party was in a national alliance with the BJP, it was well recognized that his party had been able to win 30% of the Muslim vote in 1999 because Naidu had always been able to prevent antiminority riots in the state and had paid special attention to Muslim voters in the capital, Hyderabad.[32] Naidu's police force arrested militants and was prepared to fire on militants to prevent them from starting a riot in Hyderabad in mid-March 2002.

[31] Though it is difficult to say for sure, it seems likely that early firm state action outside Gujarat – arrests, curfews, bands of movement – prevented some precipitating events from even occurring in the first place. For example, preventive measures stopped any precipitating events from taking place in towns such as Indore and Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh.

[32] *Frontline*, November 19, 1999. The Congress got an estimated 64% of the Muslim vote in Andhra Pradesh in the 1999 national elections.
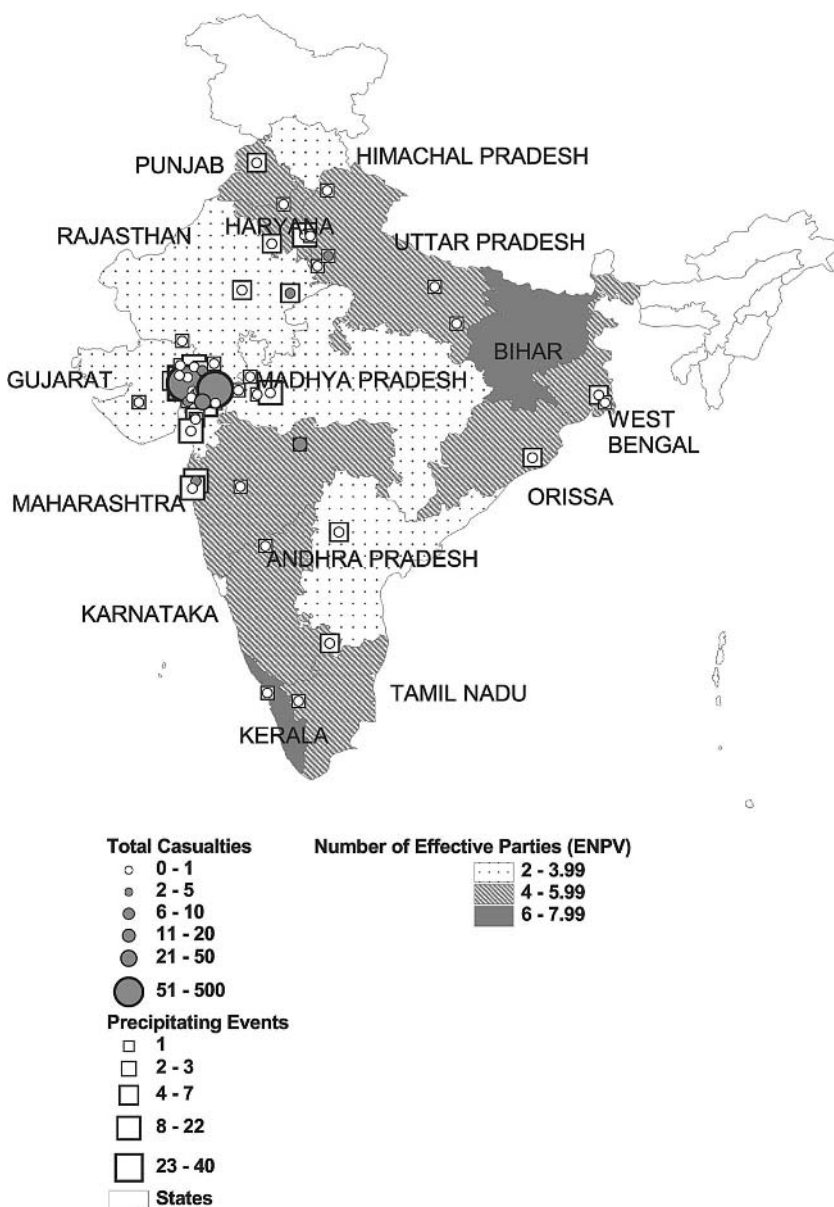
Figure 5.3 Reported precipitating events and deaths during the February–April 2002 communal violence and patterns of party competition (data on violence collected by Wilkinson based on *Indian Express* reports; data on levels of party competition calculated from Election Commission of India reports)

In states with high levels of party competition, governments were forced to take strong action to prevent riots in order to preserve their current coalitions or future political opportunities. This was true even when the governments included Hindu nationalist parties or parties formerly linked to communal movements, as in Orissa and Kerala. In Orissa the BJP–Biju Janata Dal (BJD) coalition government arrested 500 Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal activists to prevent violence during the March 1 strike called in the state.[33] In Bihar, with the highest level of party competition in India (with 7.7 effective parties), the ruling coalition repaid Muslims for their electoral support by massively deploying police in order to avert riots during Holi. Some states, such as West Bengal, benefited from having both an explicitly secular party in office and high levels of political competition (4.14 effective parties) that make the Muslims a crucial part of all the major parties' electoral arithmetic. The Communist Party (Marxist) or CPM took a firm line with attempts to cause trouble, and West Bengal police fired on *karsevaks* at Taldi in March when they refused to disperse, killing 1 and wounding 29.

The few apparent "exceptions" to the generalization that state governments outside Gujarat performed well in preventing violence in fact only go to prove the point. On closer investigation of these incidents – at Ajmer, Kishangarh and Gangapur (Rajasthan), Canning and Calcutta (West Bengal), Ahmadnagar (Maharashtra), and Bhubaneshwar (Orissa) – we find that the deaths that did occur were due largely to police action against rioters rather than the result of militants attacking minorities, as in Gujarat. One hundred percent of the casualties in Gangapur in Rajasthan, for example, were the result of police firing to break up an illegal Hindu militant attempt to block the route of a Muslim religious procession, killing 3 and injuring 15.[34]

How Electoral Competition Affects Riot Prevention

If we turn from the aggregate level to individual cases, can we also find evidence that the mechanisms outlined in this chapter are responsible for government action to allow or prevent actions likely to lead to riots? In this section I examine this question by looking at two cases from Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s where the UP government had to decide whether to

[33] "Partial Response in Orissa," *Hindu*, March 2, 2002.
[34] *Indian Express*, March 27, 2002.

prevent Hindu nationalist mobilizations that it knew were likely to lead to communal violence. In the first case, in Varanasi in 1991, the state government allowed the mobilization to continue, resulting in a riot in which 17 people were murdered. In the second case, at Mathura in 1995, the state government ultimately intervened to prevent the mobilization and averted communal violence. The difference between these two outcomes, I argue, can be explained when we look at three factors: the party in power: the BJP in 1991, a BJP-BSP coalition in 1995; the group of voters that the party in government saw as pivotal for its party's success in the next election (the BJP in 1991 wanted to attract Hindus, the BSP in 1995 wanted to attract Muslims); and the overall level of party competition in the state. Uttar Pradesh moved from a situation in 1991 in which the BJP felt that if it polarized the Hindu electorate it could win power unaided, to a more fluid system in the mid-1990s in which it was becoming clear no one group or party could form a government without the support of others. What happened in the town of Mathura in 1995 demonstrates the good effects of multipolar political competition in reducing violence, even in a situation where one of the two coalition partners in government, the BJP, was explicitly pro-Hindu and antiminority.

Varanasi, November 8–11, 1991

Although in retrospect it seems clear that a decisive shift toward multiparty competition took place in the political system in Uttar Pradesh in the early 1990s, this was not how it appeared to BJP leaders at the time. From 1989 to 1991 the party had launched a succession of demonstrations and processions around the Ayodhya mosque issue, and it won considerable sympathy from the state's Hindus when Mulayam Singh Yadav's police force fired at Hindu militants in Ayodhya in November 1989. In May 1991 the BJP won 34.5% of the vote in the state elections and a narrow majority (221 out of 425) in the UP Assembly. It appeared as if promoting Hindu issues was a sufficiently effective strategy so that the BJP would be able to avoid coalition politics in the future, and Kalyan Singh believed that the BJP, like the Congress Party it had replaced, could thrive as the dominant party in a system in which its opponents split the anti-incumbent vote.

   The BJP, however, somewhat moderated its antiminority stance once in office in order to further its longer-term political objectives. Chief Minister Kalyan Singh was anxious to prove that the party could be "responsible" while in state government, in order to win over Congress voters who

associated the party with extremism and to maximize the chances of the BJP winning power in the future, including at the national level. Throughout the 1991 election campaign Singh had tried to reassure moderate voters that the party could guarantee a "riot-free state" in which law and order were paramount.[35] The Singh government even leaked figures to demonstrate that it had been very effective in reducing the number of riots compared with previous regimes.

The BJP interpretation of these figures was, not surprisingly, that "The BJP, which merely proclaims justice for all and appeasement of none . . . turns out to be the real savior of Muslims."[36] The BJP's opponents argued that the figures merely demonstrated that the BJP and its allies caused the riots in the first place in order to win political power by solidifying the "Hindu vote." As one opposition politician remarked, "When the thief is made the caretaker, he cannot steal, he won't steal. They [The Shiv Sena and the BJP] engineered the riots, now they are in charge of law and order. So there will be some peace."[37] The opposition point of view was supported by the fact that the Police Intelligence Department reportedly submitted a confidential report to the BJP government in May 1991 providing evidence that the BJP mobilization campaigns had led directly to communal riots in the state. The BJP government, not surprisingly, suppressed the report.[38]

But one serious riot did occur under the BJP regime, at Varanasi in November 1991. On Friday, November 8, 1991, in a move that went against the Singh government's official policy that there should be no large processions in connection with the temple movement, the Hindu nationalist VHP was allowed to conduct a religious procession and ceremony with only a light police escort in the sensitive city of Varanasi. This procession led directly to a serious Hindu-Muslim riot. At around 9:15 P.M. a VHP procession, carrying a statue of the Hindu goddess Kali, marched through the heavily Muslim Madanpura area of the old city. The Hindu processionists chanted slogans and a few set off fireworks, one of which hit and injured a Muslim. When the processionists refused to stop setting off

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[35] One part of this law-and-order strategy, reported to be very popular among the upper castes, was the Anti Copying Act, which provided harsh penalties for students. The repeal of this act was the first act of the Mulayam Singh's government when in took office in early 1993. See "Good Riddance," *Sunday*, July 9–15, 1995, pp. 62–63.

[36] Source: B. P. Singhal, "Definition of Secularism," *Indian Express*, August 28, 1992.

[37] *Pioneer*, June 27, 1992; "Muslims: Fear and Distrust," *India Today*, May 31, 1996, pp. 42–43.

[38] *Pioneer*, October 1, 1992.

firecrackers, scuffles began and Muslims threw brickbats and then stabbed one of the processionists. Several processionists ran to the nearby predominantly Hindu area of Godaulia and told lurid tales of Muslim attacks. Hindu mobs in Godaulia then attacked and killed Muslims attending a cinema in Godaulia. These attacks sparked off four days of riots, in which 17 people were killed.[39]

After the initial incidents, several attacks were made on the properties of Muslim *kothidars* (merchants) in the Madanpura area of the old city. Many of these silk merchants are relatively recent entrants to the city's important sari trade, which traditionally has been dominated by Hindu middlemen who buy from the Muslim weavers. In Varanasi and in nearby villages an estimated 200,000 Muslims work making saris to supply the city's huge export industry. The *kothidars*' success in moving up from weavers to middlemen has been resented by some of the Hindu merchants. Resentment, according to a social scientist who has worked for fifteen years in the area, is especially strong among the less-established Hindu merchants.[40] Local Hindu politicians have claimed that Muslims, some of whom had been buying up land in the area before the riots, were trying to drive Hindus out of the trade.

How can we explain this riot and the failure of the government to ban the procession? The BJP, after all, was in power in Uttar Pradesh and apparently wanted to present a moderate face to north Indian voters in order to widen its electoral appeal. To understand why the Singh government allowed the procession that led to the riot, it is necessary to understand both the state electoral context and the internal tensions within the party by November 1991. By the autumn of 1991 there was substantial unease among the hard-line Hindu nationalist group within the Uttar Pradesh BJP over the party's pragmatic attempt to rein in Hindu nationalist mobilizations. The hard-liners represented around 15 of the party's 50 MPs in the state and 80 members of the 212-strong BJP contingent in the Vidhan Sabha. Singh's attempt to placate the hard-liners with the transfers of 67 policemen and civil servants (who had taken action against Hindu protesters during the Ayodhya campaign the previous year) was not successful.[41] In early September Vinay Katiyar, the local MP for Ayodhya and the state

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[39] This information comes from interviews with several UP cadre officers in Lucknow, Delhi, Varanasi, and Bareilly, July and August 1995.

[40] For background on the structure of the Varanasi sari industry, see "A Matter of Pride," *Business India*, February 28–March 13, 1994, pp. 260–61.

[41] "Temple Talk," *India Today*, August 15, 1991.

secretary of the Bajrang Dal (the VHP's youth organization) stepped up the hard-line pressure when he demanded the removal of some police barricades at Ayodhya and warned that "I do not care whether the BJP Government stays or goes, but the barricades at the site have to go." The Kalyan Singh government removed the barricades, but it was becoming obvious that to reduce some of the internal party pressure on Ayodhya, which would bring the state government into direct conflict with the center, some temporary concessions might have to be made elsewhere in the state.

These internal ideological pressures were serious but would probably not have been enough on their own to force Singh to allow the procession in Varanasi. The key reason he allowed the anti-Muslim, pro-Hindu, procession to take place in one of the state's most religiously important and sensitive cities was that by-elections to 14 state assembly districts were due in two weeks and the BJP viewed those Hindu voters sympathetic to Hindutva and fearful of the alleged "Muslim threat" as the pivotal constituency his party needed to attract. The BJP leadership was worried that the party would lose its bare majority in the Assembly unless it could use these issues successfully to mobilize Hindu voters behind the party.[42] The BJP had only an eight-seat majority in the state assembly, and several of these constituencies in May 1991 experienced extremely tight races between the BJP and its rivals supported by backward castes and Scheduled Castes, the Samajwadi Party and the BSP. In Nawabganj constituency, for example, five candidates had received more than 10% of the vote in the May election, and the BJP had narrowly lost the contest, getting 21.43% of the vote compared with the Janata/Samajwadi alliance's 24.66%. It seemed possible to many that the BJP's failure to resolve the Ayodhya mosque issue, combined with more general antigovernment sentiment, might lead to a low Hindu turnout, which in turn would lead to BJP losses in at least some of the seats and the consequent fall of the BJP government.

The BJP's worries about losing its majority therefore persuaded it that allowing a planned VHP antiminority procession to take place in the sacred, symbolic city of Varanasi might help the party to mobilize Hindu voters for the forthcoming by-elections. The local district magistrate was against the procession, which would go through sensitive Muslim areas of the city normally off limits to processions. But the state government told the district magistrate unofficially that the procession should be allowed unless it would definitely cause a disturbance. He therefore rescinded the ban and allowed

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[42] *Times of India*, November 16, 1991.

the November 8 procession that led directly to the riots. Once the riots broke out, there was a substantial delay on the part of the administration in intervening to stop the violence, and the local police refused to take any action against BJP and VHP activists murdering Muslims in the central Godaulia area.[43] Evidence of police partiality was clear when Varanasi's MP, Mr. S. C. Dixit of the BJP, an ex-senior policeman himself, stayed in the police control room for three days during the riots, offering advice on how best to keep law and order.[44]

In the short term, the BJP strategy to win over swing Hindu voters worked. The party won 8 of the 14 by-elections and held onto its precarious majority in the UP house.[45] The BJP allowed the 1991 Varanasi procession to go on and then did not intervene once violence broke out because, on the evidence of the 1991 state elections, it felt it could win an absolute majority in the UP Assembly by pursuing an antiminority agenda that appealed mainly to the upper castes and those voters prejudiced against and fearful of Muslims.

Mathura, 1995

The contrast between the riot at Varanasi and the riot that almost broke out in the town of Mathura in August 1995 provides a good example of the way in which the shift to a genuine multiparty system in Uttar Pradesh (a system that now increasingly requires coalition governments) has improved the state's effectiveness in preventing communal riots. Because the BJP's coalition partner in 1995 needed to attract Muslim votes in the next election, it forced the government to stop a mobilization in Mathura that would have probably led to a serious riot.

In the December 1993 elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh suffered what it initially regarded as a temporary setback when it failed to win an outright majority in the state legislature. The Samajwadi Party and the largely Scheduled Caste Bahujan Samaj Party formed an anti-BJP government coalition in January 1994, which then fell apart in May 1995, when the BSP unexpectedly formed a coalition of convenience with the BJP. Both the BSP and the BJP hoped to use their period in office in

[43] Interview with UP IAS cadre no. 5, July 14, 1995.

[44] A. A. Engineer, "Banaras Rocked by Communal Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 7–14, 1992, pp. 509–11.

[45] By-election results taken from *Journal of Parliamentary Information* (1992).

order to build support for the state elections that would follow once the two parties finally parted ways. But the two partners had very different views of the possibilities in the next election. The BSP, with 67 seats in a 425-seat house, and a social base (Scheduled Castes) of only 22% of the population, knew that its future lay in building coalitions with other Hindu castes and with the Muslims. The BJP, on the other hand, believed that by mobilizing a large segment of Hindus around antiminority issues as it had done in 1989–91, it could once again secure an overall majority in the UP assembly.

The BJP's chosen statewide symbol was the western UP town of Mathura. In August 1995 the BJP and its allied Hindu nationalist organization, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), announced their attention to carry out a *Vishnu mahayagna* (religious offering to the Hindu god Vishnu) and a *parikrama* (circumambulation) around what it referred to as the "disputed" complex that houses both the Hindu Keshav Das temple and the Muslim Shahi Masjid Idgah.[46] The VHP timed the *parikrama* to coincide with the religious festival of Janamashthami, which draws thousands of pilgrims to Mathura every year. And it planned the *yagna* for a Friday, when it would coincide with large numbers of Muslim worshipers offering their afternoon prayers at the nearby Idgah.[47]

There was little local support for the *mahayagna* and *parikrama*. Mathura has not been the focus of intense Hindu-Muslim violence in the past nor has it been the focus of intense political competition. The only reported Hindu-Muslim violence near the site was in 1954, when a Krishna idol in the temple was broken by unknown intruders, leading to a brief scuffle during which three people were slightly injured and 25 people were arrested.[48] Local Hindus and Muslims had already come to a legal agreement, signed by the Muslim Trust and the Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sangh (Krishna's birthplace service organization) in 1968, about the boundaries and organization of what was now being claimed by the VHP as a "disputed site."[49] Excluding

[46] An Idgah is an enclosed site where the festival of Id (breaking the fast of Ramadan) is held. The VHP claimed a four and a half acre plot next to the Idgah as a hall for religious and cultural events. *India Today*, June 15, 1993.

[47] On August 4, some Muslim politicians from Aligarh visited Mathura to encourage Muslims there to turn out en masse for prayers at the Idgah on August 18. A proposed "peace march" to coincide with the VHP parikrama, planned by Muslim students from Aligarh Muslim University, was halted by authorities. *Hindu*, August 7, 1995; *Indian Express*, August 14, 1995.

[48] *Times of India*, August 23, 1954.

[49] The text of this agreement is reproduced by former supreme court justice V. R. Krishna Iyer in an article in *Hindu*, August 16, 1995.

the local VHP and BJP leaders in Mathura, the vast majority of the town's inhabitants seemed to oppose the VHP's *parikrama*. Because of the security precautions and worries about violence, the number of pilgrims in August 1995 was down sharply, ruining the town's most important tourist season. Those tourists who did make it through the security cordons found most of the hotel rooms occupied by civil servants and police officers.[50]

There were three reasons why Mathura rather than some other town was selected by the VHP for large-scale Hindu-Muslim mobilization in August 1995. First, Mathura is one of the most important Hindu religious sites in north India. Second, and more important, the Keshav Das temple–Muslim Idgah complex is one of several dozen disputed mosque-temple sites in Uttar Pradesh and, as such, a "natural" site for anti-Muslim mobilization. The third reason, and the one that led to the VHP choosing Mathura rather than one of the other possible sites, was that the VHP leaders knew that the BJP needed substantial backward-caste support if it was to win the upcoming assembly elections. The Keshav Das temple, and the city and district of Mathura are closely associated with the Hindu god Krishna, who is regarded as a Yadav (a backward caste), and the hope was that a campaign built around Krishna would win over large numbers of backward castes suspicious of the BJP's upper-caste image. As one Hindu nationalist leader put it, "As of now, the Yadavas, almost to a man, are with the S.P. [Samajwadi Party] led by Mulayam Singh Yadav. But when the call of a Yadava god comes, can they remain indifferent?"[51]

In backing the Mathura agitation, the BJP leaders knew that they were taking some risk of alienating their coalition partner in the UP government, the lower-caste Bahujan Samaj Party, and the state's chief minister, Ms. Mayawati. Mayawati and the BSP were looking to Muslims for political support in the upcoming elections, and there was a risk that she would disallow the Hindu agitation for this reason. However, the BJP-VHP leaders seemed to have gambled that Mayawati would acquiesce because of her wish to remain in power. Power means patronage, and Mayawati was not only making a great deal of money personally as chief minister but was also winning political supporters by dispensing state funds to important social groups. In addition, the BJP had taken great pains to win over Mayawati and drive a wedge between her and her national party leader, Kanshi Ram. For

[50] *Hindu*, August 16, 1995.
[51] *Frontline*, September 8, 1995, p. 8.

example, at one BJP function in Lucknow, Mayawati was praised effusively while Kanshi Ram was studiously ignored.

In late July, when the *mahayagna* was first mooted, Mayawati apparently did not wish to challenge it openly, and she gave her verbal permission for the *mahayagna*, as long as the festivities were not on too large a scale.[52] But Mayawati, whose party's ethnic support base was even smaller than the BJP's, quickly realized just how serious an electoral threat the Mathura *mahayagna* would be. During her period in office Mayawati had made great efforts to win over at least some of the Muslim vote from the Samajwadi Party.[53] Her government had created a new ministerial position for minority welfare and, at a meeting in Lucknow on July 10, the BSP national leader, Kanshi Ram, announced that the UP government would henceforth reserve 8.44% of government jobs for poor Muslims.[54]

If the BJP's mobilization campaign succeeded, Ms. Mayawati realized that the BSP stood to lose all the ground she had gained with Muslim voters, which could potentially block any hopes of increasing the BSP's share of the vote if state elections were to be called the next year. Mayawati had to weigh the advantages of remaining in government prior to the next year's elections against this likely loss of Muslim voters, and she ultimately decided there was more to be gained from taking a firm stance than for acquiescing in the Mathura mobilization. In early August, therefore, Mayawati took a public stance against the Mathura *mahayagna*. On August 4, in the UP Assembly, Mayawati announced "nobody will be allowed to start any new tradition for paying obeisance in the complex." Shortly afterward she announced that no VHP ceremony would be allowed within three kilometers of the complex.[55]

The hard-liners in the VHP held their ground, hoping that Mayawati would back down. On August 10, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, the joint general

[52] Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Angry in Mathura," *Frontline*, September 8, 1995, pp. 10–16.

[53] Meanwhile, the SP leadership was doing all it could to foment revolt among the BSP's Kurmi (Middle Caste) MLAs, who were unhappy over the allocation of ministries in the state government. Mayawati stemmed the revolt by immediately appointing four Kurmis as district magistrates and promising to appoint two Kurmis as ministers as soon as possible. For details, see *Sunday*, July 30–August 5, 1995, pp. 24–26.

[54] By reserving benefits for "backward Muslims" the BSP got round the constitutional provision that forbids employment discrimination on grounds of religion but allows it to relieve social backwardness. The BJP forced the BSP to withdraw this proposal, but it nonetheless helped establish Mayawati's credibility with Muslims. See "Looking for Support," *Sunday*, July 30–August 5, 1995, pp. 24–26, and "Growing Mandalisation," *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22, 1995.

[55] "VHP's Mathura Plan Strains BJP-BSP Ties," *Indian Express*, August 7, 1995.

secretary of the organization, reiterated the VHP's determination to hold both events. The head of the VHP's national youth wing said on August 11 that the *parikrama* and *mahayagna* would go on as planned.[56] Meanwhile, BJP leaders were getting worried about the possible fall of the BSP-BJP coalition, which might open up the possibility of a more united opposition to the BJP in the forthcoming elections. Several senior leaders tried to broker a compromise in which the *parikrama* would be scrapped and the *mahayagna* held several hundred meters away from the complex.[57] Mayawati was prepared to make a few concessions. On August 12 she transferred Mr. Deen Dutt Sharma, the Mathura district magistrate and a man the VHP disliked for his firm commitment to law and order. But at a meeting on August in Lucknow, Mayawati again made it clear to the VHP leaders that she would not back down on the central issue of the *mahayagna*.

On August 14, VHP leaders met for an hour and a half with Mayawati in Lucknow. She refused to allow the *mahayagna* and threatened to resign if the BJP pushed the issue, unwilling to risk the long-term loss of Muslim votes for the short-term advantages offered by staying in power prior to the elections. Once it became obvious she would not back down, a BJP compromise plan was adopted. The VHP would scrap the *parikrama* and hold the *mahayagna* on August 18, but well outside the three-kilometer security cordon surrounding the temple-mosque complex.[58] This cordon prevented hundreds of Muslim and Hindu activists, who had traveled from throughout northern India, from getting near the site. This plan worked smoothly, and no Hindu-Muslim riot broke out, although many VHP cadres felt betrayed by their leadership and refused to participate in the VHP's face-saving "Vrat Hindu Sammelan," at which only 1,000 people turned up.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how electoral incentives determine whether state governments will prevent communal violence. As party competition increases, especially if the new parties focus on redistribution from forward to backward castes, majority politicians will have greater incentives to appeal to Muslim voters who can provide them with the margin of victory. The

[56] Statement of All-India Bajrang Dal Chief, Jaibhan Singh Pawaiyya. *Indian Express*, August 12, 1995. For Kishore's statement, see *Hindu*, August 11, 1995.

[57] See the statement of BJP spokesman K. L. Sharma on August 11, 1995. *Hindu*, August 12, 1995.

[58] *Indian Express*, August 15, 1995.

effect of the decline of the dominant Congress Party and the resulting party competition in recent years has not, as some have argued, been to increase the level of communal violence. On the contrary, the increasing party competition for minority voters has led to a reduction in Hindu-Muslim violence, as politicians are forced by electoral incentives to take firm action to prevent Hindu-Muslim riots.

Greater political competition in the states leads, I have argued, to a greater degree of security for Muslims, who demand less for their votes than other significant groups of voters. Unfortunately, the growing leverage of Muslim voters has had negative consequences for India's 2% Christian minority. While Muslims are a large enough voting block to swing elections in most Indian states and have in recent years become a sought after support base for many backward-caste and Scheduled Caste parties, Christians, at least outside Kerala and the Northeast, are too small a community to "count" politically in most Indian states. In the late 1990s the Hindu right in many states therefore seems to have switched strategies and began polarizing Hindu voters against Christians rather than Muslims. For example, Dara Singh, the leader of the Bajrang Dal in the state of Orissa, reportedly organized attacks on missionaries in that state in the run-up to the 1999 parliamentary elections. Electorally, this strategy carries many of the benefits of the anti-Muslim strategy (with Christians, like Muslims, often being portrayed as tools of foreign powers bent on converting allegedly defenseless tribals and lower castes) and few of the electoral costs, because Christians are a much smaller proportion of the electorate.

One important question for the long term, however, is whether, as Muslims become more politically mobilized, wealthier, and make more demands for job reservations and economic benefits, they will become more "costly" and thus less attractive voters for majority parties to court, possibly even resulting in a resurgence of anti-Muslim polarization in state politics? One response to this worry is that Muslims in India are, given their poverty, a long way from being too costly to court compared with other groups of voters. But even if they do become wealthier and demand more, evidence from the South of India, where Muslims are already better off than in the North and have long enjoyed political clout, suggests that, after an initial electoral breakthrough is made by minorities, and majority parties all begin to court them as voters, it becomes difficult for majority parties to go back to scapegoating minorities overtly.

One plausible hypothesis is that, after an initial lengthy period in which minorities establish themselves as electorally pivotal, majority politicians

over time try to neutralize the minority issue as a vote loser by accepting the need to protect minorities. In political science terms, supplying security to minorities moves from being a positional issue (with politicians taking different positions) to a valence issue (all politicians in public are for it) as politicians in competitive systems try to neutralize the issue as a vote loser.[59]

This tentative hypothesis seems to have some support from what has actually happened in some states in India, as well as in comparative cases (e.g., in Bulgaria and the United States) that we examine in Chapter 7. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, for example, Muslims are a highly urbanized and relatively well off community (63% live in towns) that has played an important role in politics ever since the 1967 DMK victory over the Congress, when Muslim support was important for the DMK's strong showing in Dindigul district and in electoral victories in the towns of Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Tiruvannamalai, and Tirupathur, a lesson that has not been lost on any of the main parties in the state in the succeeding decades.[60] Other political parties quickly began to court Muslims as well after this electoral breakthrough, and despite the community's relative wealth and political clout, it continues to be courted by all of the major parties in the state, and successive state governments have taken strong actions to prevent anti-Muslim polarization.

In Kerala too the Muslims have been a vital constituency ever since the formation of what became the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the 1960s. Their pivotal role in 14–20 of the 140 seats in the State Assembly has allowed them to make or break the United Democratic Front (UDF) and LDF governments in the state. Muslim political leverage has allowed them to demand and get control of important ministries (such as Education) and force the removal of school textbooks that portrayed Muslims as disloyal Indians.[61] Yet this growing political clout has not led to Hindu voters in the state coalescing along the Hindu-Muslim cleavage or ceasing to appeal to Muslim parties and voters. Instead all the major parties and politicians accept the need to protect minorities in order to remain politically viable in the state.

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[59] For the distinction between "valence" and "positional" issues, see Donald E. Stokes, "Spatial Models of Party Competition," *American Political Science Review* 57, no. 2 (June 1963), pp. 368–77.

[60] Muslims have also been a key swing vote in Madras corporation elections. Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 288.

[61] *India Today*, December 1–15, 1980, pp. 39–40; *Sunday*, February 27–March 6, 1994, p. 45.

6

Party Competition and Hindu-Muslim Violence

THE INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS
OF DIFFERENCES IN ELECTORAL
COMPETITION

Once we establish the existence of a relationship between party competition and levels of ethnic violence, an obvious question follows: if party competition is so important, then what explains states' different levels of party competition? Why do some states have party systems that reflect a greater degree of cohesion around backward-caste identities than others? Why, in particular, did some southern states in India such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu have an effective opposition to Congress by the early 1960s, well before states in the north such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar?

My central argument in this chapter, laid out in Figure 6.1, is that an institutional difference going back to the 1920s – the implementation of job and educational reservations for backward and lower castes in the South but not in the North – is largely responsible for different state patterns of postindependence party competition and fractionalization. In the early 20th century, after the colonial state and several princely states in southern India grouped members of diverse castes together under a backward-caste identity, they provided political and economic incentives for Indians to mobilize around this identity, which has been sustained since then not only by government affirmative action programs but also by social and political organizations that grew up in response to the governments' willingness to reward claims made on the basis of "backwardness."[1]

In exploring the historical development of these caste cleavages, I show that, because the colonial state provided institutional incentives for

[1] The first preferences for "backward classes" were introduced by the government of the princely state of Mysore in 1918, and by the colonial governments in Madras and Bombay in the 1920s. Similar measures began to be adopted in a few northern states only in the 1980s. See Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).
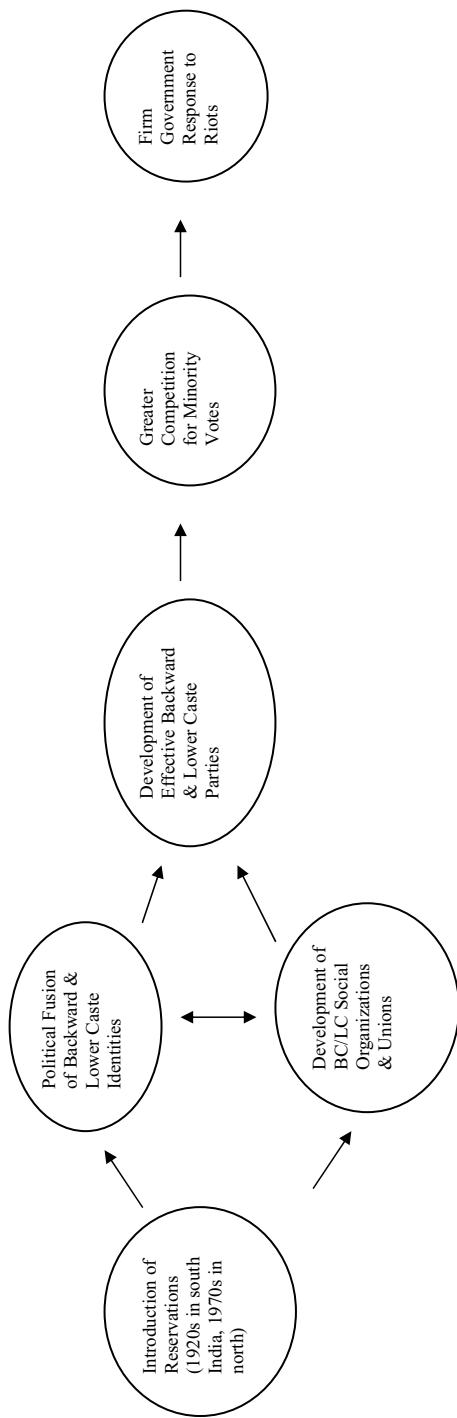
Figure 6.1 The institutional origins of state-level differences in party competition

backward-caste mobilization, substantial intra-Hindu party political competition emerged as early as the 1920s and 1930s in such southern states as Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Even after Congress's political victories in the south in the late 1930s and 1940s, these political movements retained their coherence, and they formed the basis of the Communist Party in Kerala and the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, parties that led the political opposition to Congress after independence. As a result of this strong backward-caste solidarity, political alternatives to Congress existed in the South, in the postindependence period creating a "market" for minority votes. To win Muslim votes away from their political rivals, Hindu parties here have had to offer security guarantees to Muslims and other minorities. Despite attempts to foment Hindu-Muslim conflict in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, governments in both states have effectively prevented or controlled most riots.

In the North, by contrast, large-scale mobilization around a backward-caste identity is a recent phenomenon. In previous decades, because of the weakness of opposition parties, the ruling Congress Party politicians had little incentive to woo Muslim voters at the expense of the Hindu nationalist swing vote (the Jana Sangh) and their core upper-caste constituents. The growing strength of similar lower- and middle-caste parties in northern India since the late 1980s, however, has shifted the balance. After experiencing a short-term increase in violence prompted by a Hindu nationalist countermobilization, the North has witnessed a similar overall decline in Hindu-Muslim violence.

Does Ethnic Fractionalization Explain Party Fractionalization?

Before beginning to analyze the effects of caste reservations on political fractionalization, we should first consider one alternative explanation that is often raised to explain why party fractionalization might be higher in some states than in others – that some states are more ethnically diverse than others and that their higher number of parties reflects a greater number of salient cleavages. Gary Cox, for example, has found that the effects of a first-past-the-post party system on party aggregation are always moderated by ethnic heterogeneity.[2] Pradeep Chhibber likewise argues that ethnic heterogeneity helps explain why there is more state-level party competition

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[2] Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 218–19.

in India than we would expect, given its first-past-the-post, single-member district electoral system.[3]

Although the link seems plausible, there is no clear relationship between a state's level of ethnic diversity (using Indian census data) and its number of parties. The measure for party competition (ENPV) is not highly correlated with the measures of ethnic heterogeneity, and regressions on ENPV using the same socioeconomic and ethnic variables used in Chapter 5 provide no ethnic fractionalization variables that explain the observed variation in states' levels of party competition (see Table 6.1). In fact, no socioeconomic variables whatsoever – including literacy and urbanization – seem to be significant in explaining a state's level of party competition.

One reason for the lack of a statistical finding may be because census data in India only imperfectly represent the underlying ethnic diversity of the country. For example, the Indian census, from which I calculate my indicator of linguistic fractionalization, lists "Hindi" as the dominant language in many states in the North. But since 1975 the census category "Hindi" has in fact aggregated 48 separate answers to the question "What language do you speak?" including such major regional languages as Bhojpuri (23 million speakers in 1971, or 7% of those identified as Hindi speakers), Chattisgarhi (10.6 million), Kumaoni (1.7 million in 1971), Pahari (2.2 million), and Garhwali (1.9 million). This 1975 decision to aggregate many language answers under the heading "Hindi" – presumably to bolster the position of Hindi as the national language – has had the effect of leaving unrecognized many languages that have been important both in politics and in party proliferation. For example, in 2000, after years of political mobilization, the new states of Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal were carved out of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to accommodate political movements that represent people who speak Chhattisgarhi, Kumaoni, Garhwali, and Pahari, all of which are identified as "Hindi" in the census.[4]

Another obvious problem is that since 1931 the Indian census has not collected information on major caste identities, with the exception of the quarter of the population that composes the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In December 1949 the Indian government decided it would no

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[3] Chhibber and Kollman find that party centralization as well as ethnic fractionalization has an effect on party fractionalization at the district level. Pradeep Chhibber and Kenneth Kollman, "Party Aggregation and the Number of Parties in India and the United States," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2 (1998), pp. 329–42.

[4] Personal communications from Dr. M. Vijayanunni, former census commissioner of India, November 3, 2002; March 27, 2003.

Table 6.1. *Do State-Level Differences in Ethnic Heterogeneity Explain Levels of Party Competition?*

	Number of Effective Parties	
	(1)	(2)
Population (log)	−0.144	−0.142
	(1.932)	(1.932)
Upcoming state election	−0.004	
	(0.011)	
Upcoming national election	0.001	
	(0.011)	
President's rule	0.001	
	(0.016)	
Literacy percentage	2.743	2.731
	(6.627)	(6.627)
Urbanization percentage	−5.570	−5.565
	(12.716)	(12.714)
Muslim percentage	2.351	2.385
	(21.286)	(21.285)
Urban Gini coefficient (World Bank)	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Religious fractionalization	−0.462	−0.430
	(11.572)	(11.573)
Linguistic fractionalization	−1.561	−1.534
	(11.921)	(11.921)
Ethnic fractionalization	3.827	3.751
	(33.186)	(33.187)
Riots in previous 10 years	0.000	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	4.243	4.207
	(30.716)	(30.715)
Observations	5,472	5,472
Number of states	14	14

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. For state dummy coefficients, see Appendix C.

longer publish caste data and cross-tabulate them with socioeconomic data because to do so would be to encourage further caste divisions within Indian society.[5] So the ethnic fractionalization data I use in the regression do not

[5] *Times of India*, December 5, 1949. This measure, of course, did not remove the influence of caste as an important social and political factor in Indian society.

reflect caste cleavages that are clearly politically important in explaining party competition and aggregation.[6]

Even if we were able to generate 1931-style caste data for the contemporary period, however, that would still not necessarily answer our problem, because a census-derived measure of the underlying number of castes does not necessarily tell us how castes will aggregate politically. Politicized ethnicity depends on a whole range of factors, such as federal boundaries and government policies, and not just on underlying census categories.[7] We know, for instance, that smaller ethnic groups in Nigeria identified themselves with the "big three" groups of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo during the 1960s, when Nigeria had essentially a three-unit federation, because to do otherwise would have been politically suicidal for the small groups. But as the number of federal units has increased in Nigeria since the 1970s, politicians can now feasibly form political movements around ethnic identities that might include less than a million people, because the new smaller states make these identities potentially large enough to win a majority in state elections.[8]

Kerala: The Institutional Origins of Party Fractionalization

Preindependence Caste Mobilization in Travancore and Cochin

The present-day state of Kerala was created in November 1956 through the merger of the two former princely states of Travancore and Cochin together with the Malayalam-speaking areas of Madras state.[9] The new state, 39,000

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[6] There was a major debate before the 2001 Indian census about whether caste categories should be reintroduced in the census (they were not). The main arguments for and against are outlined in Satish Deshpande and Nandini Sundar, "Caste and the Census: Implications for Society and the Social Sciences," *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 8, 1998, pp. 2157–59.

[7] Ethnofractionalization indices are frequently used in the comparative politics literature without considering the extent to which they are endogenous to the variables they are being used to explain. Gary Cox, for instance, interacts ethnic fractionalization data with a variable that measures the magnitude of the median legislator's district; he does not take account of how district magnitudes and other institutional factors affect underlying ethnic identifications over time.

[8] Donald A. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 215–26. Dan Posner's excellent new study on Zambia explores in depth the whole issue of how the shifting size of the arena of competitive politics affects which ethnic identities become politicized.

[9] Travancore and Cochin became part of India in 1947 and were administered as a single unit after 1949.

square kilometers in area and with the country's highest population density, is one of the most linguistically homogenous in India, with around 94% of the population speaking Malayalam as its first language, and most of the remaining 6% speaking Tamil. Despite the fact that the state's per-capita income is below the national average, Kerala is by many social indicators highly advanced: the literacy rate, at 94.2% in 2001, is by far the country's highest, the proportion below the poverty line (25.4%) is well below the 36% national average, and life expectancy at birth is 70.7 compared with an all-India average of 62.4 years.[10]

Kerala is religiously diverse, and non-Hindu minorities are a larger proportion of the population than in any major state except Kashmir. Hindus, 82% of the overall Indian population, account for only 57% of Kerala's 29 million inhabitants. Muslims, with 23% of the population, are the next largest minority group, and Kerala is also home to a third of India's Christians, who account for 19% of the state population. Kerala is also home to the last 125 members – the rest having emigrated to Israel – of South Asia's oldest Jewish community. In contrast to most Indian states there are no significant religious differences in rates of urbanization; the rate for Hindus is 27%, for Muslims 27%, and Christians 24%.

At the turn of the 20th century the Hindu caste system in Travancore and Cochin, dominated by the 5% Brahmin minority, was harsher toward the middle-caste Nairs and lower-caste Ezhavas and Pulayas than in any other Indian states. While the *touch* of lower castes was regarded throughout India as polluting by high-caste Hindus, southern Indian upper castes practiced the concept of "atmospheric pollution," the idea that a lower caste could taint the upper by his mere presence within a specified distance. An untouchable who appeared on the scene while upper castes were engaged in an especially important religious rite therefore risked serious punishment for having "polluted" the ceremony. Ezhavas, though their situation was better than that of the lowest untouchables, also suffered from restrictions on social distance, and from sanctions that prevented Ezhava men and women from carrying umbrellas, covering their upper bodies, wearing certain kinds of cloth, and using some types of cooking utensils.[11]

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[10] Figures from *Statistical Outline of India, 2000–2001* (Mumbai: Tata Services, 2001) and "Ranking of States and Union Territories by Literacy Rate and Sex: 2001," in *Census of India 2001 Provisional Population Totals: Paper 1 of 2001* (Delhi: Controller of Publications, 2001).

[11] Prema Kurien, "Colonialism and Ethnogenesis: A Study of Kerala, India," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), pp. 393–94. A more detailed description of intrareligious differences

Lower-caste mobilization in Travancore and Cochin began much earlier than in states in the North, a development that had two main causes. First, Travancore and Cochin states were strongly influenced by politics and caste categorizations in the nearby Madras presidency (discussed later in this chapter), and therefore took a relatively benign attitude to lower-caste political mobilization compared with other princely states. Second, educated elites among the lower castes in Kerala arose much earlier than in the North, in part because a few Ezhavas were well placed to take advantage of growing economic opportunities in trade and agriculture in the 19th century. By the 1880s these Ezhava entrepreneurs wanted social recognition to go with their new wealth and began to press the government to admit their sons in elite educational institutions.[12]

In 1892, 10,000 Ezhavas, Christians, and Muslims in Travancore petitioned the Raja to protest against discrimination in access to education and government employment. This was followed in 1896 by a separate larger Ezhava petition complaining about discrimination against their caste. In 1903, in the most important single act of lower-caste mobilization, the Ezhava social reformer Sree Narayana Guru founded an Ezhava caste association, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP). By 1928 the SNDP, whose stated goal was to promote the "religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Elava [Ezhava] community," had over 50,000 members and hundreds of local branches throughout Travancore.[13] During the 1920s and 1930s the organization was active in fighting for Ezhava and untouchable access to Hindu temples, and held important nonviolent protests at Vaikom in 1924 and the Guruvayoor temple in 1931–32.[14] The regime responded favorably to many of these efforts. Frightened that the Ezhavas might convert to Christianity if their demands were not met, the government passed a path-breaking temple entry bill

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among Kerala's religious communities is provided in V. K. S. Nayar, "Communal Interest Groups in Kerala," in Donald E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 176–90. For a fuller description of caste among Kerala's Muslims, see Victor S. D'Souza, "Status Groups among the Moplahs on the South-West Coast of India," in Imtiaz Ahmed, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 41–56.

[12] T. J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 30.

[13] Ibid., pp. 30–32.

[14] P. M. Mammen, *Communalism vs. Communism: A Study of the Socio-Religious Communities and Political Parties in Kerala, 1892–1970* (Calcutta: Minerva, 1981), p. 53.

in 1937 that guaranteed lower-caste access to all government-controlled religious sites.[15]

The Ezhava mobilization on behalf of lower castes and untouchables was matched by a process of middle-caste mobilization around a Nair caste identity. In 1914 several prominent Nairs, determined to reform their own community's personal laws, and worried about growing Christian and Brahmin dominance in education and government, followed the SNDP's lead and formed their own broad caste organization, the Nair Service Society (NSS), to press their community's interests. The NSS grew rapidly, and by independence in 1947 it had set up a network of local branches, hospitals, and educational institutions throughout Travancore and Cochin.

The Nairs' success as a lobbying group acted as a further spur to Ezhava mobilization in the state. The Ezhavas and several other castes feared that proposals in the early 1930s to introduce limited democratic government in Travancore would lead to the replacement of Brahmin rule by Nair rule, because the wealthier Nairs would dominate the proposed property franchise. The Ezhavas therefore joined together with Muslims and Christians and in 1932 successfully petitioned the Raja to moderate the plan so that each community had its own share of reserved seats. Spurred on by this success, the Muslim, Ezhava, and Christian "Joint Political Congress" then pushed for reservations in government employment for each religious and caste community, a demand that was conceded in 1936.

The Ezhava mobilization over political rights was matched by a corresponding agitation over the rights of the many Ezhava landless laborers, who worked on plantations owned by Brahmans, Nairs, and Christians. This labor movement forged a link between the Communists and the Ezhava community, because Communist members helped organize labor agitations and, in order to avoid detection and punishment by the Travancore and Cochin governments, concealed their Communist links by becoming active in Ezhava caste organizations.[16]

Postindependence Ethnic Politics in Kerala

The strong preindependence caste mobilization in Kerala and the political struggles between Nairs and Ezhavas led to the emergence of an effective backward-caste opposition party to Congress in the postindependence

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[15] Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 80.

[16] Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 175–83.

period much earlier than in north India. The Nair- and Christian-dominated Congress's harsh suppression of a Communist-organized labor strike on plantations between 1948 and 1952 helped cement the social and political division between the Nairs and Christians on the one side and the Ezhavas on the other.[17] According to one estimate, 1.2 million Ezhavas voted for the Communists in the 1957 elections, with only 200,000 voting for the Congress, whereas the Congress secured 1.25 million Christian votes compared to only 170,000 for the Communists.[18] In the 1950s the Ezhava's SNDP secretary estimated that his organization supplied the Communists with as many as 60,000 active party members.[19] The only polling data we possess on patterns of religious voting show that, just before Kerala's first election in 1957, the Hindu vote was split 27% to 42% between the Nair- and Christian-dominated Congress and the Ezhava-dominated Communist Party, with 28% of Hindus not expressing a preference. By comparison, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, 50% of Hindus expressed a preference for Congress before the 1957 elections, with those Hindus who opposed Congress dividing their votes among several smaller, weaker, caste-based parties.[20]

Kerala's state politics from 1957 to 1967 revolved around attempts by the Congress and Communists to win political power, either outright or through short-term coalitions with smaller parties. One major difficulty that both the Communists and Congress faced in trying to build coalitions was that their official stances against "communalism" made it politically very difficult to reach out to the Muslim League, which enjoyed solid support in Muslim majority areas in the north of the state. In the 1960 state elections, the Congress leadership became worried enough about its electoral prospects to make an informal electoral understanding with the Muslim League. After Congress did unexpectedly well in the 1960 elections, however, the Congress unceremoniously abandoned the league to form a government with a more acceptable "noncommunal" party.

In the mid-1960s the leaders of the Ezhava-dominated Communist Party finally realized that to win power they would need to form more lasting coalitions with explicitly ethnic parties. In September 1966 the Communist

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Jitendra Singh, quoted in Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics*, p. 186.

[19] Mammen, *Communalism vs. Communism*, p. 103.

[20] Indian Institute of Public Opinion, *Monthly Public Opinion Survey* 16–19 (January–April, 1957).

leaders therefore met in Ernakulam with the leaders of six other parties, including the Muslim League, to discuss the possibility of a "United Front" alliance to contest the 1967 state elections. These negotiations were successful and the resulting alliance transformed Kerala politics: the United Front swept to power in the 1967 elections, gaining 117 of 133 seats. In response to their dramatic electoral defeat, the Nair- and Christian-dominated Congress Party quickly organized its own, multiethnic coalition. Congress made a particular effort to win over the Muslim League from the United Front. Mrs. Gandhi publicly moderated her earlier criticisms of the league and announced that the league was "not out and out communal" and was therefore an acceptable coalition partner.[21] Local Congress leaders assured the league that if it supported them in the future, there would be no repeat of Congress's 1960 postelection betrayal.

In the 1990s, though the names of the coalitions have changed, the two main competitors for political power in Kerala are still a Communist (Ezhava-led) coalition, now called the Left Democratic Front (LDF), and a Congress (Nair- and Christian-led) alliance, now called the United Democratic Front (UDF). Over the years, as party splits have occurred among all Kerala's ethnic parties, both coalitions have become genuinely multiethnic, although the majority of any one ethnic group usually votes with one coalition or the other. For example, from 1974 to 1986 a breakaway faction of the Muslim league supported the Ezhavas (Communists), while most Muslim representatives continued to vote with the Nairs and Christians in the Congress. The LDF and UDF coalitions in Kerala are so finely balanced and electoral margins so narrow that governments usually have a majority of only a few seats in what is now a 140-seat assembly. This outcome, of course, gives individual MLAs and minority parties a great deal of political leverage, which they can use if their group's interests are not being effectively addressed.[22]

The electoral demography of Kerala is especially favorable toward the Muslims, who are concentrated in the north of the state. Since the

[21] E. J. Thomas, *Coalition Game Politics in Kerala* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1985), p. 69.

[22] For example, in 1982, shortly before a crucial vote of confidence the house's only independent member demanded, and got, a new district (with the MLA's hometown of Patanamthitta as district headquarters) as the price for his support. "Kerala: Tightrope Act," *India Today*, February 28, 1982, pp. 33–34; "Rocking the Boat," *India Today*, November 30, 1982.

1960s this geographical concentration, combined with bloc voting on the part of the Muslims, has allowed the Muslim League to control 14 to 20 seats in the 140-seat Kerala Assembly. Given the continued strength of caste cleavages between the Nairs and Ezhavas, this puts the league in a very powerful position. Muslim politicians are not shy about broadcasting their importance as kingmakers. State Industries Minister E. Ahmad claimed in 1983 that "Without Muslim League support no one can rule Kerala for a day."[23] More recently C. H. Mohammed Koya, the longtime leader of the Kerala Muslim League, openly boasted that "We [the league] will decide who – the Congress or the Communists – should rule the state."[24]

These claims are only a slight exaggeration, and what Horowitz terms "multi-polar fluidity" – a situation where three or more ethnic parties exist, with shifting coalitions among them – has existed in Kerala since the 1960s.[25] On two occasions the league has brought governments down when it felt the Muslims were not being fairly treated: in the late 1960s, over the issue of Communist favoritism to Ezhavas, and then again in 1987, over what it saw as UDF (i.e., Nair-Christian) threats to Muslim employment preferences.[26] To avoid such defections, the prudent Congress or Communist coalition leader takes great care to appoint Muslims to important ministries such as Education (which Muslims held from 1967 to 1980) and to address all widely held Muslim concerns. In contrast to the North, for instance, Muslims in Kerala have been able to have textbooks that portray Muslims as disloyal Indians removed from the school system.[27] One indicator of Muslims' substantial political clout in Kerala is their control over government expenditure: at one point during the 1990s, Muslim ministers were reported to head departments responsible for 60% of the state budget.[28]

[23] *India Today*, January 15, 1983, p. 59.

[24] E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "Coming Full Circle," *Frontline*, November 3, 1995, pp. 93–94.

[25] Donald A. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[26] Nairs and Christians resent the fact that the richer sections of the Ezhavas and Muslims are eligible for state affirmative action programs, and have consistently tried to introduce economic criteria into these programs to exclude well-off Ezhavas and Muslims and include poorer Nairs and Christians. "Polarisation of Forces in Kerala," *Hindu*, February 23, 1991.

[27] *India Today*, December 1–15, 1980, pp. 39–40.

[28] *Sunday*, February 27–March 5, 1994, p. 45.

Hindu nationalist movements based in northern India have over the years tried to replace Kerala's caste cleavages with an overarching Hindu identity that would help them displace the Congress and Communists. In the early 1980s the BJP/RSS organized several events designed to bring Nairs and Ezhavas together around Hindu themes, including a mass ceremony in the port city of Cochin that attracted 500,000 participants.[29] The BJP also launched a campaign in 1992 to try to persuade Hindus in the UDF to throw out their Muslim cabinet members, who, it alleged – no doubt, tongue in cheek – were "religious fundamentalists."[30]

These Hindu nationalist mobilization efforts have failed. Even before independence Hindu nationalists found it extremely difficult to gain a foothold in Kerala, and Dilip Menon reports that Ezhavas, who "continued to see themselves as a community apart, rather than as Hindus," jeered the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha when he came south to address an SNDP meeting in 1930.[31] Since independence the caste cleavage has been sustained in Kerala by both state employment preferences for backward castes (extended in 1957) and the activities of strong social and political organizations that grew up in the preindependence era. The backward caste associations have dramatically expanded their scope and influence since independence. In the early 1980s, for example, the Nair Service Society had 4,000 branches throughout the state, large financial reserves, 1,125 schools, 23 colleges, and various hospitals and hostels. Access to these benefits was available to those who invested in a Nair identity.[32] Keralan voters, guaranteed access to numerous practical benefits on the basis of their caste affiliations, including large-scale affirmative action programs and access to credit unions and educational and health benefits, have unsurprisingly been unwilling to abandon these for membership in some ill-defined Hindu community. Keralan Hindus' generally low level of enthusiasm for a Hindu political identity is demonstrated both by their voting preferences (the Hindu nationalist BJP's share of the vote in Kerala has consistently been less than 1%) and by their tendency to tune out of national Hindu events such as the

[29] *India Today*, April 30, 1982, p. 49.

[30] *Malayala Manorama*, May 1, 1992, translated in *India Speaks through Its Regional Press*, May 27, 1992, p. 10.

[31] Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 107.

[32] *India Today*, January 15, 1983, p. 59.

televising of the Hindu epic Ramayana in Kerala (ratings were among the lowest in India).[33]

The Effects of Party Fractionalization in Kerala

The level of Hindu-Muslim violence in postindependence Kerala has been very low. From 1950 to 1995, according to the data I collected with Ashutosh Varshney, there were 19 reported Hindu-Muslim riots in Kerala in which 16 people died and 290 were injured. Controlling for population, Kerala has a moderate level of riots (0.65 riots per million) and an extremely low level of casualties (0.55 deaths per million in Hindu-Muslim violence since 1950), a rate far lower than that in states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh

This development cannot be explained, as is sometimes argued, by a long state tradition of religious syncretism or by the region's supposed culture of nonviolence.[34] The 1921 Mappila rebellion in Malabar was one of the worst outbreaks of communal violence ever in British India, with Muslim peasants attacking and murdering Hindu merchants and landlords. Recent research by Theodore Gabriel on ethnic conflict in North Malabar has also uncovered a considerable number of Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1920s and early 1930s: in 1932 Hindus attacked Muslims for not voting for their candidates in local board elections in Mattanur, and in March and November 1934 serious riots broke out near Cannonore.[35] Postindependence levels of general political violence in Kerala have also been high, with political party workers often attacking and murdering their rivals. In the early 1980s, for example, 138 people were killed in over 1,000 violent clashes between party workers.[36]

Nor can Kerala's low level of violence be explained by the absence of issues likely to precipitate violence. In states such as Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, for example, Hindu-Muslim riots are often blamed on the recent influx of "Gulf Money," brought back by Muslims who work in the

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[33] *India Today*, March 31, 1993, p. 45.

[34] C. Gouridasan Nair, for example, refers to "the Malayalee's cosmopolitan nature and religious tolerance . . . dating back to the millennium preceding the Christian era." *Frontline*, July 17, 1992.

[35] Theodore Gabriel, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in North Malabar, 1498–1947* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen, 1996), p. 293.

[36] *India Today*, August 31, 1983, pp. 30–31.

Persian Gulf, and who are then alleged to use their newfound wealth to try to dominate politics and build ostentatious mosques, which threaten the local Hindus. Yet no state has been so affected by this influx of money from the Gulf as Kerala. From 1975 to 1987, 1,100 new mosques were built in the state, and many of these were substantial *pucca* buildings that replaced small unobtrusive *niskara pallis* – prayer huts built in crowded market areas.[37]

Hindu nationalist organizations have also made many attempts to unify Kerala's Hindus against religious minorities, using exactly the same techniques that have led to riots elsewhere in India. In the past three decades, the RSS has organized major demonstrations against the creation of the Muslim-majority Malappuram district in 1969, attempted to use force to take control of the disputed Thali Temple/Mosque in 1968, and agitated against state expenditure during the visit of the pope to Kerala in 1986.[38] In 1992, during the height of the agitation over the Ayodhya mosque, both Hindu and Muslim extremist organizations from outside Kerala organized provocative marches throughout the state.[39]

The reason why the level of Hindu-Muslim violence has been so low, despite the existence in Kerala of antiminority mobilizations similar to those that have led to violence elsewhere in the country, is that high levels of party fractionalization have forced successive governments to order the Kerala police force to prevent attacks on minorities in the state at all costs. The Muslim minority's leaders in the state are well aware that they hold the balance of power between the UDF (Nair-Christian) and LDF (Ezhava) coalitions and are quick to demand action whenever they feel their security is in jeopardy. In 1992, as the Ayodhya mosque agitation was reaching dangerous levels throughout India, the Indian Union Muslim League under Sulaiman Sait threatened to bring the Congress-led UDF government down unless there was a speedy overhaul of the police and bureaucracy and strong action against those who sought to incite anti-Muslim riots in Kerala.[40]

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[37] Some of these new mosques have shopping complexes attached, which raises suspicions that they may be built to circumvent zoning restrictions on shops. Since 1957, with the exception of religious buildings put up on government land, there have been virtually no building restrictions on mosques, churches, and temples in Kerala. "Petrodollar Mosques in Kerala," *Muslim India* 5, no. 60 (December 1987), p. 554; *India Today*, August 31, 1983, pp. 30–31.

[38] For details of these various agitations, see K. Jayaprasad, *RSS and Hindu Nationalism: Inroads in a Leftist Stronghold* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1991), pp. 182–202.

[39] "A Flare-up in Kerala," *Frontline*, August 14, 1992, p. 122.

[40] *Frontline*, September 11, 1992, pp. 30–31.

After some clashes in Trivandrum in which the Muslim League felt the UDF government had not intervened firmly enough, the league invited leaders of the rival LDF coalition to a party dinner and warned that "We are taking stock of the situation. We may take a definite stand very soon."[41]

Given the importance of the Muslim swing vote in Kerala since the mid-1960s, such threats work. In Kerala, unlike in states in the North of India, police and local officials are left in no doubt that riots must be prevented if at all possible and quickly stopped if they do break out. On the very rare occasions where individual officers have not taken action to protect Muslims, they have been suspended or given punitive transfers. From 1967 to 1973, during which time 131 Hindu-Muslim riots (which led to 1,142 deaths) occurred throughout India, the only senior police official to be severely punished for negligence in connection with a communal riot was in Kerala. While police officials in states such as Gujarat were let off with written warnings for allowing hundreds to die, the Kerala government sharply criticized, then suspended a deputy superintendent of police for his negligence in the 1971 Tellicherry riots, in which no one was killed.[42]

Most Hindu mobilization efforts in Kerala do not turn into riots because they are met with a massive deployment of police, backed up where necessary by the Kerala Armed Police and Central Paramilitary forces. In Kerala, unlike most states (where riot-prevention instructions are issued only to district-level officers), detailed riot-prevention plans are given out to every station officer.[43] A book written by an author sympathetic to Hindu nationalists, reviewing the failure of the movement in Kerala, complains that the heavy-handedness of the police has prevented the RSS and Bharatiya Janata Party from effectively organizing in the state. During the Thali temple agitation in 1968, for example, district magistrates announced preventive curfews and restrictions on movement to prevent activists reaching the site, and during the following year the police arrested 1,500 RSS volunteers who were demonstrating against the creation of the Muslim Mallapuram district.[44]

On the rare occasions when Hindu-Muslim riots have broken out since Muslims became pivotal in Keralan politics, they have been met with swift

[41] *India Today*, August 15, 1992, pp. 29–30.

[42] *Lok Sabha Debates*, November 21, 1973, pp. 7–18; *Times of India*, December 11, 1973.

[43] *Ninth Annual Report of the Minorities Commission, 1-4-1986 to 31-3-1987* (New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1989), p. 96.

[44] Jayaprasad, *RSS and Hindu Nationalism*, pp. 186–89.

and determined police action. In sharp contrast to states in the North, I have been able to identify no occasion where the Kerala police hesitated to break up anti-Muslim violence or intervened on the side of Hindus against Muslims. Most riots last only as long as it takes for the police to rush reinforcements to stop the violence. After riots broke out in Tellicherry in 1971 the police quickly cordoned off the town and then rushed in armed reinforcements.[45] In Trivandrum in 1985 the police opened fire to disperse large mobs that seemed to be on the brink of a riot.[46] News reports indicate that 80% of Hindu-Muslim riots in the state since the mid-1960s have been stopped within a single day, 95% within two days. In contrast to some riots in other states such as Bihar in the 1960s, or Gujarat, almost all the deaths in riots in Kerala occurred due to police firing rather than as a result of anti-Muslim pogroms. And almost all the deaths (88% of deaths in Hindu-Muslim riots) occurred on the first day of the riot, signaling that the police acted quickly and firmly rather than letting violence drag on for several days.

If anything, successive LDF and UDF governments have at times been accused of doing too much in order to retain Muslim political support, and we can point to several instances where Muslim attacks on Hindus have met with only a weak administrative response. In 1983 UDF Chief Minister K. Karunakaran ordered the police to withdraw from the capital city of Trivandrum just before Muslim organizations launched a demonstration that led to large-scale looting. Reports indicated that Karunakaran was worried because his Muslim League coalition partners were in discussions with the LDF, and so he overruled local police officers who argued that a strong police presence was necessary.[47] Another example of Muslim League influence over law enforcement came in 1991, when Ramesh Chandrabhanu, the deputy inspector general of police for northern Kerala, was transferred after only two months in the job for reprimanding some Muslim League activists involved in a clash in Kasargod.[48] And when in 1992 a commission of inquiry into incidents earlier that year at Palakkad (when Muslims attacked a BJP sponsored *ekta yatra*, or unity procession) indicted some politically connected Muslims, the ruling United Democratic Front, heavily reliant upon Muslim political support, quickly shelved the first report and

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[45] *Times of India*, December 30, 1971.
[46] *Times of India*, December 23, 1986.
[47] *India Today*, January 31, 1983, p. 43.
[48] *India Today*, February 29, 1992, pp. 37–38.

announced a fresh "judicial probe" that was no doubt expected to come up with politically more acceptable answers.[49]

Tamil Nadu: Caste Polarization and Hindu-Muslim Peace

Caste Mobilization in Preindependence Madras

The southern state of Tamil Nadu, 130,000 square kilometers in area and with a 1991 population of 56 million, was created in 1956 after a lengthy and sometimes violent agitation by Telegu and Tamil speakers who wanted their own states to be carved out of the multilingual colonial-era boundaries of Madras state. Eighty-five percent of Tamil Nadu's population speaks Tamil as its mother tongue, with a further 9% speaking Telegu at home and Tamil outside. In 1991, 89% of the state's population was Hindu, with 5.5% Muslim and 3% Christian. Hindus are divided into several broad caste groups: the Brahmins (3%); the advanced backward castes and lower backward castes (51–67% depending on which figures one believes); and the Scheduled Castes (20%). The Muslim minority is concentrated in a few districts and highly urbanized, with 63% of Muslims living in towns compared with 32% of Hindus and 39% of Christians. Tamil Nadu's literacy rate of 73.7% in the 2001 census is better than the Indian average of 65.4%, while the proportion living in poverty (35%) in the state is around the Indian average.[50]

In Madras, as in Kerala, powerful backward-caste movements emerged in the first few decades of the 20th century. Their leaders complained about the existing Brahmin dominance of government employment and higher education. The Brahmins, 3% of the Madras population, held from 60% to 79% of the jobs in four major departments of the Madras government and accounted for around 70% of the graduates from the University of Madras.[51] Backward-caste leaders urged the government to guarantee political representation for the "non-Brahmins" in new provincial

[49] "Communalism Infects Kerala Too," *Hindustan Times*, May 25, 1992.

[50] Figures from *Statistical Outline of India, 2000–2001*, and Statement 32, "Ranking of States and Union Territories by Literacy Rate and Sex: 2001," in *Census of India 2001 Provisional Population Totals: Paper 1 of 2001*.

[51] S. Saraswati, *Minorities in Madras State* (Delhi: Impex, 1974), pp. 48–49. In 1912, according to figures provided by Irschick, Brahmins held 55% of deputy collector positions, and 82% and 73% of subjudge and Munsif positions. Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916–1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 13.

assemblies lest the Brahmins discriminate against them in politics as well as administration. Although there is today some doubt about the degree of government discrimination against non-Brahmins, given that few other communities were literate in English at the time, few question the skill of non-Brahmin leaders in adopting existing British administrative labels and using them to ask sympathetic senior officials for a larger share of the state's resources.

The concept of "non-Brahmin" was introduced by British administrators in Madras in the 1870s, as a way of lumping together a large number of Hindu castes against whom the Brahmins religiously discriminated, and which were believed at the time to be racially distinct in origin. In 1881, J. H. Nelson, in his influential book *The Madura Country* argued that it was "necessary to legislate separately for the non-Brahman castes, as being in all essential respects separate and distinct from, and incapable of association with, the Brahman." Nelson believed that the British had unwittingly supported the Brahmin version of caste relations when they had first arrived in Madras and recommended redressing the imbalance between the two categories by uncovering the "real" Hindu laws and customs. By 1900, Irschick argues, two beliefs had become entrenched in Madras government circles: the separateness of the majority "non-Brahmins" from Brahmins, and the unfair treatment of the non-Brahmins at the hands of the Brahmins, unfair treatment in which the colonial state had at times been an accomplice.[52]

When limited self-government for British India was discussed during the First World War, educated members of the Tamil-speaking Vellala caste and the Telegu-speaking Reddy and Kamma castes, together with Nairs from what would become northern Kerala, pressed for "fair treatment for the non-Brahmin majority," lest Home Rule mean Brahmin Rule. Since 1912 an association of non-Brahmin elites in Madras city had petitioned the government to provide jobs and scholarships for non-Brahmins. Now elite non-Brahmins formed the "Justice Party," skillfully playing on the British colonial government's desire to use the non-Brahmins as a political counterweight to the growing power of the Brahmin-dominated independence movement.[53] The colonial government in Madras met most of the

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[52] This section draws on Eugene F. Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s* (Madras: Cre-A, 1986), chap. 1. J. H. Nelson, *A Prospectus of the Scientific Study of the Hindu Law* (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1881), p. 148, cited in Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism*, p. 23.

[53] On this issue, see Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, chap. 3.

Justice Party's demands and reserved 28 seats for non-Brahmins out of the 98 elected seats provided under the 1919 constitution. After the 1920 elections the government named the Justice Party the winner and invited it to form Madras's first elected provincial government.

Once in office, the Justice Party succeeded in passing or persuading the colonial government to pass a large number measures that gave government jobs, seats in the provincial Assembly, and places in educational institutions to non-Brahmins.[54] The 1922 employment rules it introduced, for instance, limited Brahmins to 2 positions in every 12 appointments, with non-Brahmins guaranteed 5 positions, Muslims 2, Anglo-Indians and Europeans 2, and others 1.[55] Although the rules allowed Brahmins to fill other communities' places if no qualified candidate from the other community was available, a system of checks ensured that Brahmins could not block the quotas completely, and their percentage of government employment therefore dropped substantially over the next two decades. By 1947 Brahmins occupied only 40.5% of the 2,876 senior government positions in the state and 27.7% of the 68,886 junior civil service jobs.[56]

The introduction of educational grants and preferences in government employment for non-Brahmins in the 1920s set off a process of caste fusion in politics, as many caste leaders petitioned for their castes to be recognized as part of the now advantageous "non-Brahmin" category. In some cases these were the same castes that had after 1901 fought to avoid the label of "backward." As a result of the success of these petitions the number of castes who received formal government recognition as "non-Brahmin" rose to 245 by the mid-1920s, compared with 45 castes before the reforms.[57] Non-Brahmin associations were also founded in Madras to fight for more concessions for the group. The most important of these was the Self Respect Association, founded in 1926 by E. V. Ramaswami Naicker (EVR). The association's Tamil-language newspaper *Kudi Arasu* (People's government)

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[54] These measures included recommending the appointment of special "protectors of non-Brahmin subordinates in public services," whose job it was to protect the non-Brahmins from Brahmin discrimination. Andre Beteille, "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamil Nadu," in Rajni Kothari, ed., *Caste in Indian Politics* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Reprint, 1995), pp. 245–82.

[55] Scheduled Castes received a one-twelfth quota in 1927, at the expense of the "other" category. *Report of the Backward Classes Commission Tamil Nadu*, vol. 1, *1970* (Madras: Government of Tamil Nadu, 1974) [Chairman S. Sattanathan], p. 27.

[56] Ibid., p. 90.

[57] Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 36–37.

provided much of the ideological underpinning for the increasingly influential non-Brahmin movement.[58]

Postindependence Politics in Tamil Nadu

Politically the backward-caste movements were temporarily eclipsed in the 1930s. After the successes in the early 1920s, conflict began to sharpen between Telegu and Tamil speakers within the non-Brahmin movement over the ministerial appointments and patronage.[59] The Justice Party's opposition to the "Brahmin" Congress Party ultimately led to the party becoming too closely aligned with British colonialism.[60] As a result the Congress Party had a convincing victory in the 1937 Madras provincial elections. Crucially for the later development of politics in Tamil Nadu, however, the two key achievements of the non-Brahmin movement – government preferences for the backward castes and the aggregation of many small castes in strong backward-caste social organizations such as the Self Respect Association – remained intact into the postindependence period. As Atul Kohli puts it, this preindependence "development of a cleavage between the Brahman and anti-Brahman forces opened up the political space for later anti-Congress developments."[61]

Although Congress had originally condemned preferences for the backward castes as a colonial plot to "divide and rule," it found that the constituency for "backward castes" had become so well entrenched by 1947 as a result of two decades of preferences that it had to retain and then even extend the system.[62] In Tamil Nadu, 69% of government jobs and places in higher education are now set aside for members of disadvantaged castes, and the number of castes included under the "backward" label continues to rise.[63] And in 1944 the remnants of the Justice Party joined with the Self

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[58] See also Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, chap. 8, "The Intellectual Background of Tamil Separatism."

[59] Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, pp. 257–58.

[60] Narendra Subramaniam, "Ethnicity, Populism and Pluralist Democracy: Mobilization and Representation in South India" (Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, 1993), p. 115.

[61] Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*, p. 158.

[62] Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 68–70; P. Radhakrishnan, "Backward Class Movements in Tamil Nadu," in M. N. Srinivas, ed., *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (New Delhi: Viking 1996), pp. 110–34. See my discussion in Chapter 4 for more details on the failure of the attempts to abolish reservations in postindependence Madras.

[63] Subramaniam, "Ethnicity, Populism and Pluralist Democracy," p. 67. According to press reports, the number of backward communities eligible for reservation in Tamil Nadu

Respect League to form the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), under the leadership of E. V. Ramaswami Naicker. Originally the DK operated very much like the SNDP or NSS in Kerala, as a social organization and political pressure group rather than as an organized political party. It railed against the influence of "Brahmanism" and the "North," forces it tended to conflate. After a major split within the organization in 1949, however, Naicker's heir apparent A. N. Annadurai took three-quarters of the party's members with him and founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhigam (DMK), or "Progressive Dravidian Federation," which rapidly turned itself into a political party.

The DMK won 50 out of 234 seats in the 1962 state elections, a respectable second to Congress, which had 138 seats, but party leaders were frustrated that they had lost many close contests in constituencies where smaller parties such as the Swatantra Party and the Muslim League split the anti-Congress vote. In 1967, therefore, just before the election the DMK reached an agreement on seat adjustments with the Muslim League and a few other small parties.[64] The agreement with the Muslim League was possible because, from the very beginning of the Dravida Kazhagam in the 1940s, the organization had made an effort to seek Muslims as an ally in the greater battle against the Brahmins and northern domination. One of Annadurai's earliest political decisions, for example, was to distance his organization from Congress Party members who attacked Muslims in Tiruvannamalai town and a neighboring village in 1948. Muslims were welcomed into the reading rooms and local clubs organized in the 1950s by the DMK as part of the overall strategy to bring all Tamil-speaking non-Brahmins together into the same political movement.[65]

In the event the 1967 seat adjustments were unnecessary. The DMK, bolstered by a 1965 mass movement in Tamil Nadu against the imposition of Hindi as the only national language, won 40% of the vote and 138 seats, compared with Congress's 47 seats, and formed its first government. Since the 1967 elections, Tamil Nadu has been dominated by the DMK and

increased from 150 prior to 1970 to 310 in 1994. "Racketeering in Quotas," *India Today*, November 15, 1994, pp. 36–42.

[64] Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 136.

[65] Narendra Subramaniam points out that "EVR used the term 'Tamil' to exclude only Brahmins explicitly and the Schedule Castes implicitly. Such a notion of the Tamil community could be used to appeal to Muslims and Christians on the grounds that only the DK, not the Brahmin Congress party, would be truly tolerant of them." Subramaniam, "Ethnicity, Populism and Pluralist Democracy," p. 126.

(after the DMK split in 1972) its rival the AIDMK (All India AnnaDravida Munnetra Kazhagam). These parties tend to be divided between more advanced and less advanced backward castes, the DMK having excluded the lowest backward castes during its early years.

The DMK's short-term worries about losing three-way electoral battles during the 1967 elections led to what has ultimately become a more permanent interethnic alliance with the Muslims. From 1962 to 1974 the DMK was in a formal electoral alliance with the Muslim League, and, according to Subramaniam, "the two parties were so closely allied that their organizations became virtually indistinguishable."[66] Since that date there has been no formal alliance, but each of the two major parties in Tamil Nadu seeks Muslim votes and each has several Muslim Assembly members. Because Muslims are concentrated in a few towns and districts, Muslim support was the critical factor in the DMK's strong showing in Dindigul district and electoral victories in the towns of Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Tiruvannamalai, and Tirupathur. Muslims have also been a key swing vote in Madras corporation elections.[67] Subramaniam also argues convincingly that part of the DMK's success among Muslims lay in the fact that Tamil nationalism was not a religious ideology and thus, unlike Hindu nationalism in the North, allowed Muslims to retain their religious identity while integrating themselves politically with the dominant group.[68]

Hindu-Muslim Violence in Tamil Nadu

As in Kerala, the postindependence level of Hindu-Muslim violence in Tamil Nadu has been very low, despite a substantial number of Hindu-Muslim riots before independence, including the 1882 riots in Salem district, 1889 riots in Madras, an 1891 riot at Palakod, 1910 riots at Uthamapalayam, and a series of riots in the 1930s.[69] There have also been periodic attempts by Hindu nationalist organizations in recent years to mobilize Hindus around anti-Muslim issues. In the early 1980s, RSS activists, many from outside Tamil Nadu, launched a major anti-Muslim agitation after several hundred ex-untouchables, seeking to escape the economic and social

[66] Ibid., pp. 269–71.
[67] Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South Korea*, p. 288.
[68] Subramaniam, "Ethnicity, Populism and Pluralist Democracy," pp. 269–71.
[69] See J. B. P. More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930–1947* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1997), pp. 90–102, and "Formation of Conciliation Boards," UPSA GAD 413/1914.

constraints of their traditional Hindu status, converted to Islam in the village of Meenakshipuram. In 1989, 1991, 1993, and 1995 there were also organized attempts by both Hindu and Muslim militants to incite violence in the town of Nagore, the site of a famous Muslim shrine that attracts a large number of Muslim and Hindu worshipers. And in 1996 Hindu nationalists tried to take a Vinayaka Chaturthi procession past a sensitive mosque in Triplicane.

These various efforts at religious mobilization attempts have been unsuccessful because the continuing depth of cleavages around castes has lead to highly competitive party politics in which Muslims are a key swing vote. As a result, the parties in government ordered their state police forces to prevent Hindu-Muslim violence that might threaten their political coalitions. In 1982, for instance, when RSS supporters and Muslims and Scheduled Castes confronted each other near Meenakshipuram, large-scale violence was averted because of a massive deployment of police patrols through the affected villages and by the state government's threat to use the National Security Act to arrest those suspected of involvement in the clashes.[70] In the 1996 Triplicane mobilization, the police refused to allow the procession to go by the Ice House mosque and insisted on an alternate route. The police also banned a planned public meeting after the idol immersion ceremony on the grounds that it might lead to communal disturbances. When the Madras High Court turned down the Hindu Munnani's appeal against the alternate route and ban on the public meeting, the Munnani canceled the procession in protest.[71] In Nagore, the police managed to stop violence during attempts in 1989, 1991, and 1993 to cause violence in the town of Nagore and only failed in 1995 because many officers had been temporarily sent to Madurai in connection with the visit of the Chief Minister. The immediate spark for the violence was the assault by some Hindus upon an elderly Muslim man and a young Muslim woman outside the home of Thanga Muthukrishan, a prominent local Hindu activist. Muthukrishan later denied all responsibility and claimed he had only been trying to alert the Hindus about the dangers of "violent activities of Muslims with foreign help." As soon as the riot broke out, police officers were rushed into the town and quickly managed to stop the violence.[72]

[70] "Conversion Backlash," *India Today*, July 15, 1982, pp. 34–35.
[71] *Hindu*, September 20, 1996. The Hindu Munnani means "Hindu Front," and was founded in 1982 in Tamil Nadu to "defend Hinduism" by the RSS after conversions of low-caste Hindus to Islam.
[72] "Trouble at Nagore," *Frontline*, August 25, 1995, pp. 94–97.

Fifteen out of sixteen Hindu-Muslim riots (94%) in Tamil Nadu since the electoral breakthrough of the DK in the 1960s have been stopped within a single day, with all the casualties taking place on the first day of rioting, largely due to police firing. One example from 1979 illustrates the state's firm response to communal violence. In the early morning of June 4, 1979, a Hindu-Muslim dispute in the small town of Palacode led to the burning of 14 shops and 27 huts. By 10:00 A.M. the same morning, the local police had used rifles and tear gas four times, imposed a curfew, blocked outsiders' entrance to the town, and was rushing in units of both the Tamil Nadu Police and the Central Reserve Police. The violence stopped.[73]

Bihar: Delayed Lower-Caste Mobilization

Caste Mobilization before Independence

By almost any indicator, Bihar, with an area of 174,000 square kilometers and a population of 83 million (2001), is one of the most socially and economically backward states in India: its literacy rate is the lowest of any major state (47.5% compared with the national average of 65.4%); its percentage of the population below the poverty line (55%) in 2001 was the highest in India.[74] The proportion of Hindus in Bihar is exactly the same as India's, 82 percent. The state has long been dominated by powerful Brahmin, Bhumihar, Kshatriya, and Kayasth upper castes, who today account for around 16% of the population and as recently as 1951 owned 78% of the land. Numerically the largest group is the backward castes (c. 50%), dozens of castes whose traditional occupations were as cultivators and herders. The ex-untouchables or Scheduled Castes account for 14% of the population, around the same size as the state's substantial Muslim minority (15%). The state also has a large Hindu Tribal population (9%), almost all of which lives in the mineral-rich South.[75]

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[73] "Report of Shri T. S. Venkataraman, Assistant Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, Madras, on Communal Disturbances in Palacode, Dharmapuri District," in *Second Annual Report of the Minorities Commission (For the year ending 31st December, 1979)* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1980), pp. 62–69.

[74] Figures from *Statistical Outline of India 2000–2001*, and "Ranking of States and Union Territories by Literacy Rate and Sex: 2001," in *Census of India 2001 Provisional Population Totals: Paper 1 of 2001.*

[75] Ramashray Roy, "Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar," in Rajni Kothari, ed., *Caste in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Orient Longman Reprint, 1995), pp. 215–41. While this book

Prior to independence, in sharp contrast to Tamil Nadu and Kerala, caste conflict in Bihar was largely a contest among the elite Kayasths, Rajputs, and Brahmins, rather than between upper and lower castes. There were several reasons for this. First, and most important, the colonial government in Bihar instituted no political reservations, employment preferences, or educational reservations for the backward castes. Politics therefore reflected the interests of the Hindu and Muslim upper castes that dominated the narrow property-based franchise (c. 5% of adults could vote before 1935 and c. 14% thereafter). The narrowness of the franchise meant that caste issues were overshadowed in the early part of the century by a quite different conflict: the fierce competition among Bihari and Bengali Hindus and Bihari Muslims for jobs in the administration. For a century before 1911 Bihar had been ruled from the state of Bengal, and well into the 20th century Bengali Hindus occupied many of highest positions open to Indians in the Bihar civil service and police, to the annoyance of the increasing number of English-educated Bihari Hindus. While governments in the 1930s in Madras, Travancore, and Cochin were concentrating on the division of jobs, political power, and educational scholarships between "non-Brahmins" and "Brahmins," politicians in Bihar were instead preoccupied with the relative gains and losses of "Bihari Hindus," "Bihari Muslims," and "Bengali Hindus." In the 1930s and 1940s, compared with perhaps 100 questions asked in the Bihar Legislative Assembly about these three groups, only a handful were concerned with the relative status of middle- and lower-caste Hindus.[76]

Postindependence Politics

The paradox of Bihar politics after independence, Paul Brass pointed out in the mid-1970s, was that although caste was the chief principle of political mobilization, "caste solidarity has not been pronounced at the state level and has not taken organized form." Some backward castes were mobilized within the Congress Party, but only as junior partners in what were essentially upper-caste faction fights. In the late 1960s for example the Congress Party in Bihar was divided between Kayasthas, Rajputs, and Bhumihars (all upper castes) on one side of Congress and a Brahmin–backward-caste

was being written, the southern part of the state was carved off to form the new state of Jharkhand.

[76] See, e.g., *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report*, no. 1, March 5, 1938, pp. 220–22.

faction on the other.[77] The Congress Party, itself led by factions of upper-caste Brahmins, Kayasths, and Rajputs, dominated Bihar politics well into the 1980s not so much because it was strong as because the degree of middle- and lower-caste cohesion was so low that the opposition parties were weak. Parties such as the Communists, Janata Dal, and Praja Socialist Party disliked each other as much as they did the Congress. The anti-Congress vote in Bihar fluctuated between 65% and 70% of the total votes cast in elections to the state assembly held after 1967, but the fact that the opposition was divided along caste lines meant that Congress was still able to form almost all of Bihar's governments.[78]

Only on two occasions before the late 1980s was the Congress Party's dominance truly threatened. In 1967–68 and 1977–80 smaller parties put aside their disagreements to form coalition governments dominated by backward castes. Although these governments both collapsed under the weight of ethnic factionalism, they were nonetheless important because, especially in the case of the 1977–80 government of Karpoori Thakur, they helped to polarize Bihar around *backward*- and *forward*-caste identities. In 1979 Karpoori Thakur made a lasting impact on Bihar politics by introducing large-scale reservations for the backward castes, based on the southern model. The upper-caste backlash to Thakur's proposals and the countermobilization efforts by new backward-caste organizations in Bihar helped for the first time to bring some political cohesion to Bihar's backward castes. The government preferences that were instituted for backward castes in Bihar in the 1980s helped to encourage backward-caste political mobilization and a wider sense that "backwards" were a distinct social category.

In the late 1980s, many of the young backward-caste politicians who had been active in the 1979–80 agitations over the government preferences for the first time successfully forged a new Janata Party coalition in Bihar that combined the most important backward and Scheduled Castes. These castes, amounting to 25–30% of the electorate, allowed Janata to challenge the Congress, but the ethnic base of the party was still too small to

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[77] Paul R. Brass, "Radical Parties of the Left in Bihar: A Comparison of the SSP and the CPI," in Paul Brass and Marcus F. Franda, eds. *Radical Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), pp. 326–27. Shree Nagesh Jha, "Caste in Bihar Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 14, 1970, pp. 341–44.

[78] The Congress share of the vote was 41.4% in 1962, 33.1% in 1967, 30.5% in 1979, 23.6% in 1977 (when the Janata Party won election after the emergency), and 34.2% in 1980.

guarantee electoral victory. Laloo Prasad Yadav, the Janata Dal's charismatic state leader, therefore made ultimately successful efforts to woo the Muslims from Congress. Muslims, disgusted with Congress after its weakness in protecting Muslims during the 1989 Bhagalpur riots, defected en masse to the Janata Dal in the 1989 elections. The Muslim votes were sufficient to give Yadav a stable majority in the Bihar Assembly. His Janata government was the first in 34 years to complete its full 5-year term; in 1995, again with Muslim support, it easily won reelection.[79]

Hindu-Muslim Violence in Bihar

Bihar has been one of the most violent states in India since independence, both in terms of the absolute and per-capita number of Hindu-Muslim riots and deaths. In several particularly large riots many hundreds of people have died in violence lasting perhaps a week or more. The common element in all these large riots, according to the independent inquiries that have been set up to investigate them, has been hesitation or outright negligence on the part of the police, especially an unwillingness to use firearms to shoot at Hindu rioters attacking Muslims. The inquiry into the 1979 Jamshedpur riots (in which 120 people were killed) found that in one incident, "Not a single Hindu could be identified as having been injured or killed as a result of the 108 rounds of firing by the Bihar Military Police in a Muslim *basti* [slum]."[80] The Balasubrahmaniam inquiry into the 1981 Biharsharif violence (48 dead) likewise concluded that "while goondas had a free time, burning and killing, only a single police bullet found a target, and that one was not aimed at anyone in particular but hit a wholly innocent person." Balasubrahmaniam found that the police had been negligent in posting police pickets, stopping traffic coming into the affected area, and in not firing against rioters.[81] He concluded that the senior police officers in the town had given no clear direction to their men during the first two days of the riot and that documents they produced that claimed to prove otherwise were fabricated.[82]

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[79] "Laloo's Magic," *India Today*, April 30, 1995, pp. 26–35.

[80] *Times of India*, September 14, 1981, pp. 1, 9.

[81] Leaked extracts from the report, published in *Muslim India* 2, no. 21 (September 1984), pp. 425–26.

[82] Leaked extracts from the report, published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 18, 1984, pp. 266–67; *Muslim India* 2, no. 21 (September 1984), pp. 425–26.

What accounts for this hesitation and unwillingness to use force on the part of the police? The police delay action because it believes, often with good reason, that the rioters enjoy government protection. Behind all three of the largest riots in Bihar – Ranchi, Jamshedpur, and Biharsharif – there is evidence that the party in power interfered either directly – for example, by ordering a procession to go ahead when the local police pleaded for cancellation – or indirectly, by failing to give clear orders to the state police and local magistrates that violence had to be stopped as soon as it broke out.

This interference was because, prior to the mid-1980s, the depth of the division among Bihar's backward castes meant that it was often the upper-caste, Hindu nationalist Jana Sangh Party that was the swing vote in Bihar politics. In 1967, for example, the Jana Sangh was part of the United Front coalition in Bihar when Congress, intent on highlighting divisions within the coalition between the pro-Urdu Communists and the anti-Urdu Jana Sangh, introduced a bill that would have made Urdu the state's second official language. This bill provoked widespread and inflammatory anti-Muslim protests and demonstrations on the part of the Jana Sangh's main organizational backer, the Hindu nationalist RSS. The Jana Sangh refused to agree to tough action against these demonstrations, and the coalition government faced the prospect of losing political power to the Congress if it pushed the issue and the Jana Sangh left the government. Given the strong political backing enjoyed by the RSS, it is hardly surprising that when a Hindu-Muslim riot broke out after an RSS-led anti-Urdu procession in the town of Ranchi in August 1967, the local police hesitated. The commission of inquiry found that the local police delayed firing at the RSS and Jana Sangh rioters, and delayed calling in the army, because they were on the phone to Patna trying to get the Sinha ministry's permission to take action. In the meantime, dozens of Muslims were massacred.[83]

In Jamshedpur in 1979 the link between a Hindu swing vote and a weak state response to Hindu-Muslim violence was even more direct. The local district magistrate wanted to ban a Hindu nationalist procession planned through the town. But he was overruled – and only backed down after receiving written instructions from the chief minister's office – because the Janata government of Karpoori Thakur needed to retain the votes of

[83] *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Communal Disturbances, Ranchi-Hatia (August 22–29, 1967)* (1968). See also Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 260–69.

the Hindu nationalist Jana Sangh members of the Bihar Assembly in an upcoming vote of confidence.[84] Once violence broke out, the police reportedly did nothing because a Jana Sangh MLA from the ruling Janata coalition party, Dinanath Pandey, was alleged to be helping to organize the riot.[85]

Riot inquiries in Bihar, although often criticized for being cover-ups, have in fact made it abundantly clear that political backing for those doing the rioting is the main reason Hindu-Muslim riots continue. After the 1967 Ranchi-Hatia riots in Bihar, for example, the Dayal commission of inquiry recommended that, in order to avoid future riots the "State government should warn local officials of expected trouble, should not undermine local officers or attempt to interfere with them."[86] Because Bihar police officials and district magistrates know that many rioters enjoy political protection, they dither by comparison with their colleagues in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In Bihar, riots in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s dragged on for five or six days or even longer, and the longer the riot, the higher the death toll. Half of all deaths in Hindu-Muslim violence since 1950 have taken place in a few large riots that lasted a week or more.

Only in the mid-1980s, as middle-caste parties began to provide real competition for Congress in Bihar, turning Muslims for the first time into a key swing vote, did the state's attitude to riot prevention begin to change. Laloo Yadav's government repaid Muslims for their votes in 1989 when it arrested the BJP leader Ram Krishna Advani the moment he set foot in the state on his "Rathyatra" procession to reclaim the Ayodhya mosque.[87] In 1992, when riots broke out throughout India after the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque, Bihar's Janata Dal government ensured that the state remained peaceful. Laloo Yadav, when asked why Bihar had had been so quiet despite its woeful record of past riots, explained how his government had arrested returning militants from Uttar Pradesh (the site of Ayodhya) before they could reach their towns and villages, and how he had threatened all district magistrates and station house officers with the loss of their jobs if they allowed any riots to break out in their towns. "The political will of the state government" he said, "was clear."[88]

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[84] "Meddling Politicos, Inept Officials," *Times of India*, April 22, 1979.

[85] *India Today*, May 1–15, 1979, pp. 12–13.

[86] *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Communal Disturbances, Ranchi-Hatia (August 22–29, 1967)*, pp. 102–3.

[87] "Laloo's Magic," *India Today*, April 30, 1995, pp. 26–35.

[88] Laloo Prasad Yadav, *Business India*, January 18–31, 1993, p. 44.

Yadav has also expressed his determination to stop riots in more personal ways. In 1992 he slapped a police officer he felt was negligent in not stopping anti-Muslim violence in the town of Sitamarhi and spent several days going round the town and neighboring villages reassuring local Muslims, disbursing relief, and reviewing security arrangements.[89] As soon as clashes broke out in the sensitive town of Biharsharif in July 1993, Yadav deployed two companies of central paramilitary forces and 32 fixed and 6 mobile police response teams to prevent further violence.[90] The chief minister has also brought a new openness to the discussion in the state parliament over the failings of the Bihar police and administration. He accepted the findings of an inquiry into the 1989 Bhagalpur riots (which took place before Yadav became chief minister) despite the fact it criticized a number of senior police officers and administrators, including the district superintendent of police and an inspector general of police.

Conclusion

In his fascinating study of why religious conflict between Muslims and Christians did not break out in the Yoruba region of Nigeria, though it did elsewhere in the country, David Laitin found the answer in the policies the colonial state followed in Yorubaland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The colonial government in Yorubaland – but not elsewhere in Nigeria – allocated political power and material resources to leaders from "ancestral cities." Local elites used these city identities to secure concessions from the colonial government, and in turn these leaders gave protection and access to land to those Yorubas who identified themselves with an "ancestral city" identity. The ancestral city identity, given new life because it served the interest of both the colonial state and Yoruba elites, came over time to have both practical value as well as what Laitin, borrowing from Gramsci, terms "ideological hegemony" over Yorubas.[91] The continuing strength of ancestral city identities in Yorubaland has inhibited the development of Muslim-Christian cleavages that have broken out with increasing frequency elsewhere in Nigeria.

[89] *Telegraph*, October 12, 1992.
[90] *Sunday Times of India*, July 4, 1993, p. 13.
[91] David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), especially pp. 150–60. Even as Muslim-Christian conflict has worsened in most of Nigeria the late 1990s and early 2000s, peaceful ethnic relations in the Yoruba region have continued.

Party Competition

In south India, as in Yorubaland, the colonial government's promotion of an identity ("non-Brahmin") that cut across religious boundaries has also had profound effects on postindependence ethnic politics and ethnic conflict. In south India the early strength of the backward movements helped reduce anti-Muslim violence in two ways. First, as I have explored in some depth in Chapter 4, the "non Brahmin" political movement (usually called backward caste today) has explicitly identified and mobilized many Muslim castes – such as Labbai Muslims in Tamil Nadu – as part of a larger "backward" community fighting for justice against the upper castes. Second, the colonial government's promotion of political, economic, and educational reservations for backwards in the 1920s was to have important effects on the postindependence pattern of party competition in the South. By instituting political, employment, and educational preferences for backward castes in the 1920s and 1930s, a full half century before these policies were introduced in the North, the colonial government encouraged the growth of social and political organizations around these identities. These organizations – the SNDP and Nair Service Society in Kerala, and the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu – were crucial in explaining the early emergence of strong opposition parties to Congress after independence.

The fact that strong middle- and lower-caste parties have long existed in the southern states with the lowest levels of Hindu-Muslim conflict is not, as I have shown in this chapter, accidental. High levels of party competition combined with strong backward-caste movements that regard Muslims as acceptable and valuable coalition partners puts Muslims in an extremely good position to demand security as the price of their votes. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Communists and the DMK were only able to win power by actively wooing Muslim voters. Similarly, in recent years, parties such as the Janata Dal in Bihar and the Samajwadi party in Uttar Pradesh have only been able to win power by building coalitions that include Muslims. Because these parties rely so heavily on Muslim votes, they have in turn taken strong action to protect Muslims from communal violence.