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The Electoral Incentives for Ethnic Violence

In the 1960s Richard Nixon, reflecting on race riots in America, tried to define the difference between riots and other types of violent conflict. "Riots," he said, "are spontaneous. Wars require advance planning."[1] My argument in this book, by contrast, is that ethnic riots, far from being relatively spontaneous eruptions of anger, are often planned by politicians for a clear electoral purpose. They are best thought of as a solution to the problem of how to change the salience of ethnic issues and identities among the electorate in order to build a winning political coalition. Unpleasant as this finding may be, political competition can lead to peace as well as violence, and I identify the broad electoral conditions under which politicians will prevent ethnic polarization and ethnic violence rather than incite it. I demonstrate, using systematic data on Hindu-Muslim riots in India, that electoral incentives at two levels – the local constituency level and the level of government that controls the police – interact to determine both where and when ethnic violence against minorities will occur, and, more important, whether the state will choose to intervene to stop it.

Pointing out that there is a relationship between political competition and ethnic violence is not in itself new. Ethnic violence has often been portrayed as the outcome of a rational, if deplorable, strategy used by political elites to win and hold power. Bates, for example, argued two decades ago that in Africa, "electoral competition arouses ethnic conflict."[2]

[1] Richard M. Nixon, "The War in Our Cities," address before the National Association of Manufacturers, New York City, December 8, 1967, quoted in James J. Kilpatrick, *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), December 26, 1967, p. A13.

[2] Robert H. Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa," in Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola, eds., *State versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), p. 161.

And many scholars have since blamed the upsurge of ethnic violence in Eastern Europe in the 1990s on the strategies of ex-Communist politicians like Milošević who used ethnic nationalism to distract attention from their own past sins and their countries' present economic and social problems.[3] The organization Human Rights Watch even concluded, on the basis of a worldwide survey of ethnic violence in the 1990s, that ethnic riots and pogroms are *usually* caused by political elites who "play on existing communal tensions to entrench [their] own power or advance a political agenda."[4]

There are, however, at least three reasons why I find most "instrumental" political explanations for violence to be unsatisfying. First, because scholars who study ethnic violence generally look at political elites who *have* incited ethnic violence, they offer us little insight into why some politicians seem to do exactly the opposite and use their political capital and control of the state to prevent ethnic conflict. Why, for example, did President Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire respond to attacks on traders from the Mauritanian minority in Abidjan in 1981 by sending police to protect Mauritanians and then going on national radio to praise Ivoirians who had guarded the traders' property while they were under police protection?[5] Why more recently in India was Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat so weak in responding to large-scale anti-Muslim violence in his state, whereas other chief ministers such as Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh or Digvijay Singh in Madhya Pradesh were successful in preventing riots in their states?[6] Second, many political explanations for ethnic violence fail to account for

[3] Claus Offe, "Strong Causes, Weak Cures: Some Preliminary Notes on the Intransigence of Ethnic Politics," *East European Constitutional Review* 1, no. 1 (1992), pp. 21–23; Tom Gallagher, *Romania after Ceausescu: The Politics of Intolerance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 3–5. For an examination of the role of elites in preventing compromise and exacerbating the security dilemma, see Stuart Kaufman, "The Irresistible Force and the Imperceptible Object: The Yugoslav Breakup and Western Policy," *Security Studies* 4, no. 2 (1994–95), p. 282.

[4] Human Rights Watch, *Slaughter among Neighbors: The Political Origins of Communal Violence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 2, 7, 65–66 (emphasis added).

[5] *FBIS* (West Africa), April 21–22, 1980, p. T4; *Tanzanian Daily News*, March 12, 1981; *West Africa*, September 30, 1985, p. 2064; *Le Monde*, September 6, 1985; *Economist Information Unit Country Report #1: Côte d'Ivoire 1992* (London: Economist Information Unit, 1992), p. 12.

[6] Steven I. Wilkinson, "Putting Gujarat in Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), April 27, 2002, pp. 1579–83. For details of the Gujarat government response to the riots, see "'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat," *Human Rights Watch* 14, no. 3 (C) (2002).

the variation in patterns of violence within states. In part because elite theories of ethnic violence focus on the strategies and actions of national-level political leaders such as Franjo Tuđman and Slobodan Milošević in former Yugoslavia or Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya, they cannot explain why, within a state, violence breaks out in some towns and regions but not in many others. Why, for example, when the 1969 riots in Malaysia were allegedly about national-level political issues, did riots break out in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere in Selangor state but not in the states of Penang, Johore, and Kedah?[7] Why in India did riots over the "national" issue of the Babri Masjid–Ram Janambhoomi site in 1989–92 take place in some towns and states but not in others? Third, the role of political incentives in fomenting violence is generally "proven" from the simple fact that ethnic violence has broken out and that some politician gained from the outbreak; seldom are political incentives independently shown to exist and to be responsible for the riots.

My aim in this book is to understand why Hindu-Muslim violence takes place in contemporary India, which necessarily involves addressing three general problems in the instrumentalist literature on ethnic violence.[8] First, I want to account for interstate and town-level variation in ethnic violence in India: why do apparently similar towns and states have such different levels of violence? Second, when dealing with the role of the political incentives for ethnic violence, I want to understand the conditions under which the politicians who control the police and army have an incentive both to foment and to prevent ethnic violence. Third, I want to demonstrate that the political incentives I identify as important actually work in the way I suggest, by tracing through individual cases where politicians fomented or restrained violence.

[7] William Crego Parker, "Cultures in Stress: The Malaysian Crisis of 1969 and Its Cultural Roots" (Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, 1979), 1:183.

[8] I treat Hindus and Muslims as "ethnic groups" in the sense that Weber defines them, as having a "subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration." Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 389. For others who integrate a discussion of Hindu-Muslim violence into their general theories of ethnic conflict, see Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 50–51; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 206–15; Ashish Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. vi.

The Electoral Incentives for Ethnic Violence

My central argument is that town-level electoral incentives account for where Hindu-Muslim violence breaks out and that state-level electoral incentives account for where and when state governments use their police forces to prevent riots. We can show that these town- and state-level electoral incentives remain important even when we control for socioeconomic factors, local patterns of ethnic diversity, and towns' and states' previous levels of Hindu-Muslim conflict.

At the local level I begin with the constructivist insight that individuals have many ethnic and nonethnic identities with which they might identify politically.[9] The challenge for politicians is to try to ensure that the identity that favors their party is the one that is most salient in the minds of a majority of voters – or a plurality of voters in a single-member district system – in the run-up to an election. I suggest that parties that represent elites within ethnic groups will often – especially in the most competitive seats – use polarizing antiminority events in an effort to encourage members of their wider ethnic category to identify with their party and the "majority" identity rather than a party that is identified with economic redistribution or some ideological agenda. These antiminority events, such as provoking a dispute over an Orange Lodge procession route through a Catholic neighborhood in Ireland, or carrying out a controversial march around a disputed Hindu temple or Muslim mosque site in India, are designed to spark a minority countermobilization (preferably a violent countermobilization that can be portrayed as threatening to the majority) that will polarize the majority ethnic group behind the political party that has the strongest antiminority identity.[10] When mobilized ethnic groups confront each other, each convinced that the other is threatening, ethnic violence is the probable outcome.

Local electoral incentives are very important in predicting where violence will break out, though as I discuss in Chapter 2 they are not the only local-level factor that precipitates or constrains ethnic riots. Ultimately, however, there is a much more important question than that of

[9] For a survey of how "constructivist" research has affected the study of ethnic conflict, see the special issue of the American Political Science Association's comparative politics newsletter devoted to "Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics," *APSA – CP* Newsletter 12, no. 1 (2001), pp. 7–22.

[10] An important enabling condition here is the presence of some preexisting antiminority sentiment among members of the ethnic majority.

the local incentives for violence: the response of the level of government that controls the police or army. In virtually all the empirical cases I have examined, whether violence is bloody or ends quickly depends not on the local factors that caused violence to break out but primarily on the will and capacity of the government that controls the forces of law and order.

Abundant comparative evidence shows that large-scale ethnic rioting does not take place where a state's army or police force is ordered to stop it using all means necessary. The massacres of Chinese in Indonesia in the 1960s, for instance, could not have taken place without the Indonesian army's approval: "In most regions," reports Robert Cribb, "responsibility for the killings was shared between army units and civilian vigilante gangs. In some cases the army took direct part in the killings; often, however, they simply supplied weapons, rudimentary training and strong encouragement to the civilian gangs who carried out the bulk of the killings."[11] Antiminority riots in Jacksonian America were also facilitated by the reluctance of local militias and sheriffs to intervene to protect unpopular minorities.[12] And recent ethnic massacres in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Burundi were likewise possible only because the local police forces and armies refused to intervene against or even directly participated in the violence.[13] Finally, the worst partition massacres in India in 1946–47 took place in those provinces – Bengal, Punjab, and Bihar – in which the elected local governments, each controlled by the majority ethnic group, made it plain at various times that they would not intervene against "their" community to protect the ethnic minority from attack. In Bihar, for example, after anti-Muslim riots broke out in October 1946 the province's Hindu premier refused to allow British troops to fire on Hindu rioters, ignored Congress leaders' complicity in the riots, held no official inquiry, and made only a few token arrests of those who had participated in anti-Muslim pogroms that killed 7,000 to 8,000 people.[14]

[11] Robert Cribb, "Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia," in Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings, 1965–66: Studies from Java and Bali* (Melbourne: Centre for South East Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), p. 3.

[12] Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 28, 111.

[13] See, e.g., René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 96–100.

[14] Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935–1946* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 354–56.

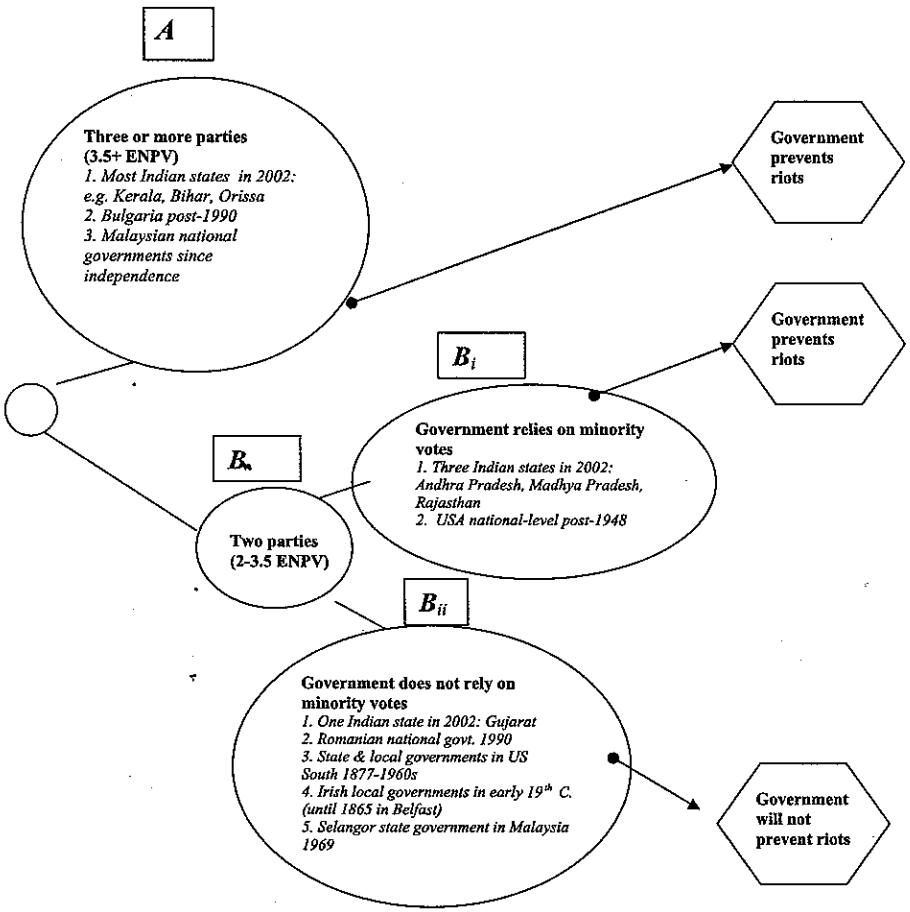

Figure 1.1 The relationship between party competition and a state's response to antiminority polarization and violence: Indian and non-Indian examples (ENVP = effective number of parties)

If the response of the state is the prime factor in determining whether ethnic violence breaks out, then what determines whether the state will protect minorities? My central argument is that democratic states protect minorities when it is in their governments' electoral interest to do so (see Figure 1.1). Specifically, politicians in government will increase the supply of protection to minorities when either of two conditions applies: when minorities are an important part of their party's current support base, or the support base of one of their coalition partners in a coalition government; or when the overall

electoral system in a state is so competitive – in terms of the effective number of parties – that there is therefore a high probability that the governing party will have to negotiate or form coalitions with minority supported parties in the future, despite its own preferences.[15] The necessity to engage in what Horowitz calls "vote-pooling" in order to win elections and maintain coalitions is what forces politicians to moderate their demands and offer protection to minorities. "The prospect of vote pooling with profit," as he points out, "is the key to making parties moderate and producing coalition with compromise in severely divided societies."[16] In India, vote pooling moderates even the behavior of nationalist parties that have no minority support, as long as these parties are forced to form coalitions with parties that *do* rely on minority votes. On the other hand, politicians in government will restrict the supply of security to minorities if they have no minority support and the overall levels of party competition in a state are so low that the likelihood of having to seek the support of minority-supported parties in the future is very low.

In addition to these three competitive situations, Figure 1.1, lists the Indian states in each category (as of February 2002). Most Indian states today fall into category *A*, where the presence of high levels of party competition (3.5–8 effective parties, using the effective number of parties or ENPV measure) forces politicians to provide security to minorities because to do otherwise would be to destroy present-day coalitions as well as future coalitional possibilities.[17] A handful of Indian states falls into category *B*, with bipolar party competition (which amounts to 2–3.5 effective parties using

[15] The formula for the effective number of parties is ENPV = $1/\Sigma v_i^2$, where v_i is the *vote share* of the *i*th party. This widely used 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.

[16] Donald L. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 177–83 (quotation from p. 177).

[17] The effective number of parties (votes) or ENPV is a measure that places higher weight on parties with high vote shares than parties with very low vote shares, thus providing a much better measure of the "true" level of party competition than if we were simply to count the total number of parties competing in a state election. For example if we were simply to count the total number of parties competing in the Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh state elections of 1998 (17 parties and 41 parties, respectively), we would have a misleading impression of the true level of party competition in these states, because both states in 1998 were in fact two horse races between the BJP and the Congress, with the BJP and Congress obtaining 93.4% of the total votes between them in Gujarat and 80% in Madhya Pradesh. The effective number of votes measure (ENPV) of 2.97 parties for Gujarat and 3.09 parties

the ENPV measure). In 2002 there were four large Indian states with such bipolar patterns of party competition: Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Three of these states – Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan – fall into subcategory B_i, in which the party in power in the state relied heavily on a multiethnic supportbase that includes substantial or overwhelming Muslim support. Only in Gujarat in 2002 did we have the worst-case scenario (subcategory B_{ii}) where there were both lowlevels of party competition in the state (2.97 effective parties) and a government in power, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that did not have any minority support base and therefore had no incentive to protect Muslims. The reaction of state governments to violence in 2002 is predicted almost perfectly by their degrees of party competition and minority support, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

The basic electoral incentives model presented here can easily be extended to account for patterns of government riot-prevention in other multiethnic democracies as well (see Chapter 7).[18] In looking at patterns of state riot prevention in the U.S. South, for example, the key explanatory factor that explains greater federal government willingness to intervene to protect African Americans after World War II was the fact that black voters who had emigrated from the South between 1910 and 1950 became a vital constituency for the Democratic Party in several important swing states in the north, such as Michigan and Illinois. This shift (from category B_{ii} to category B_i in Figure 1.1) prompted northern Democratic leaders finally to intervene in the South to protect the civil rights of African Americans.[19]

for Madhya Pradesh represents this true level of competition much better than counting the total number of parties.

[18] Although the argument I develop in this book applies to democratic governments, in principle there is no reason why it could not also be extended to explain the conditions under which authoritarian governments will prevent antiminority violence. Authoritarian regimes need not be concerned about voters, but they still have to be concerned about constituencies that can offer financial, political, and military support. If an ethnic minority is well placed to offer such support to an authoritarian regime, then we would expect the regime to protect the minority even if it is very unpopular with the majority of the population. In Indonesia, for example, the Chinese minority did well under Suharto because it offered financial support, but the Chinese have done less well in a democracy.

[19] In India the day-to-day responsibility for law and order rests with the states, not with local or federal governments. Therefore explaining where and when antiminority violence breaks out and whether it is suppressed by the state in India is explicable by looking at electoral incentives at two levels. In cases where, as in the United States, local, county, state, and national authorities all have shared authority over local law enforcement, then the model outlined here can simply be extended to incorporate electoral incentives and power asymmetries across different levels of governments.

To give another example: in Ireland in the 19th century the high levels of Protestant-Catholic violence in Belfast in the early 1860s compared with that in other cities in Ireland can be explained by the fact that the police force in Belfast, unlike elsewhere in the country, was locally controlled by a Protestant-majority town council that did not rely on Catholic votes and therefore had no electoral incentive to intervene to protect Catholics from Protestants (situation B_{ii}). Only once the control of local policing was taken away from the Belfast council in 1865 and transferred to a national administration that was determined to prevent Protestant-Catholic violence do we see a significant increase in the state's degree of riot prevention.

Testing the Electoral Incentives Explanation

One general problem in testing theories of ethnic violence is that in most cases we lack systematic data on ethnic riots or their likely economic, social and political causes.[20] There is, for example, no equivalent for intranational ethnic violence of the massive "Correlates of War" project in international relations, which collects data on all international violence from 1816 to 1980.[21] In the past decade several scholars have tried to collect detailed data on ethnic violence in the former Soviet Union, where Western security interests, and hence foundation research funds, are substantial.[22] But political scientists have not yet matched the efforts of their colleagues in history in collecting basic information about each country's internal pattern

[20] The United States is the obvious exception to this general statement. I have been able to identify only one study on ethnic violence in the developing world that collects systematic intranational data: Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* (New York: Nok Publishers, 1982).

[21] For a review of the research the Correlates of War project inspired, see John A. Vasquez, "The Steps to War: Towards a Scientific Explanation of Correlates of War Findings," *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (1988), pp. 109–45.

[22] Marc Beissinger at the University of Wisconsin has collected information on all reported "nationalist mobilization" and violence in the Former Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991. See Beissinger, "How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention," *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996), pp. 97–146. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras provide a "Chronology of Ethnic Unrest in the USSR, 1985–92," in their edited volume *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 539–49.

of ethnic riots before putting forward theories to explain why they occur in one place and not another.[23]

A few pioneering collaborative projects have collected aggregate statistics on the largest incidents of ethnic violence reported by the Western media.[24] But for my purposes, these surveys underreport small and nondeadly ethnic riots, which account for the majority of incidents in most countries. In India, for example, press data suggest that most Hindu-Muslim riots lead to no deaths and 80% of those riots in which deaths do occur are much smaller in size (1–9 deaths) than would typically prompt a report in the international news media. Moreover, the aggregate data provided by such studies as the Minorities at Risk project, though good for interstate comparisons, do not provide the detailed town-by-town information on violence that would allow us to test many of the leading microtheories of ethnic conflict.

In this book I test my electoral explanation argument for ethnic riots using state- and town-level data on Hindu-Muslim riots in India over the past five decades.[25] To address the lack of good data on town- and state-level ethnic violence in India, I utilize a new dataset on Hindu-Muslim riots in India, jointly collected by myself and Ashutosh Varshney, now at the University of Michigan. The 2,000 riots in the database cover the years 1950–95. When combined with a separate database I collected independently

[23] For historical research in which systematic data collection on riots plays a major role in theory testing, see Manfred Gailus, "Food Riots in Germany in the Late 1840s," *Past and Present* 145 (1994), pp. 157–93; James W. Tong, *Disorder under Heaven: Collective Violence in the Ming Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790–1810," *Past and Present* 120 (1988), pp. 88–122; Frank Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[24] Notably the Minorities at Risk Project at the University of Maryland, which covers c. 300 ethnic groups. See Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994). For details, see the project's web site at <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/indmus.htm>.

[25] Donald L. Horowitz defines a "deadly ethnic riot," as "an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership." Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 1. I define "Hindu-Muslim riots" in essentially the same way in this book, dropping only the "lethal" requirement in Horowitz's definition of "deadly riots." Hindu-Muslim riots often lead to deaths and injuries, but sometimes they do not. For alternative definitions, see Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 233–34; Richard D. Lambert, "Hindu-Muslim Riots" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1951), p. 15.

for the years 1900–49, the dataset represents the most comprehensive existing source on Hindu-Muslim violence (for full details, together with a protocol explaining how events were coded, see Appendixes A and B). Collecting these data on Hindu-Muslim riots involved reading through every single issue of India's newspaper of record from 1950 to 1995, as well as (for my 1900–49 data) hundreds of reports in other newspapers, official government reports, and archives in India, England, and the United States. Because the resulting data are town-level as well as state-level, and extend back more than a century (unlike Government of India aggregate figures on communal violence, which have only been published since 1954), they allow me to test theories of Hindu-Muslim violence much more completely than has been done before, which should increase confidence in my conclusions.[26]

In addition to this effort to gather material on Hindu-Muslim riots, I also spent several years gathering town- and state-level data in India and from Indian government documents with which to operationalize and test the main theories of ethnic violence. For example, to test institutional decay theories, which argue that a decline in the state's bureaucratic and coercive capacity leads to ethnic violence, I gathered data on politically motivated transfer rates, the changing ethnic and caste balance of the police and administration, and statistics on corruption. To test economic theories that focus on town-level Hindu-Muslim economic competition, I combined census data on employment with case studies, surveys, and government directories on particular handicrafts to develop a dummy variable that indicates whether, according to the theory, any particular town is likely to suffer from communal violence.[27] And to test ecological theories that argue that the Hindu-Muslim population balance or presence of Hindu refugees causes riots, I used a mix of census data, poverty data, and World Bank data that I collected for all major Indian states.

[26] For examples of the way in which post-1954 government data are used by scholars, see Paul Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 199; Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 7; Lloyd I. Rudolph and Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 226–27.

[27] The main all-India survey I use is S. Vijayagopalan, *Economic Status of Handicraft Artisans* (New Delhi: National Council for Applied Economic Research, 1993). The Uttar Pradesh government also publishes directories that allow us to establish religious breakdowns for wholesalers and self-employed artisans. See, e.g., *Uttara Pradesha Vyapar Protsahan Pradhikaran* (Udhyog Nirdeshalaya: Kanpur, 1994).

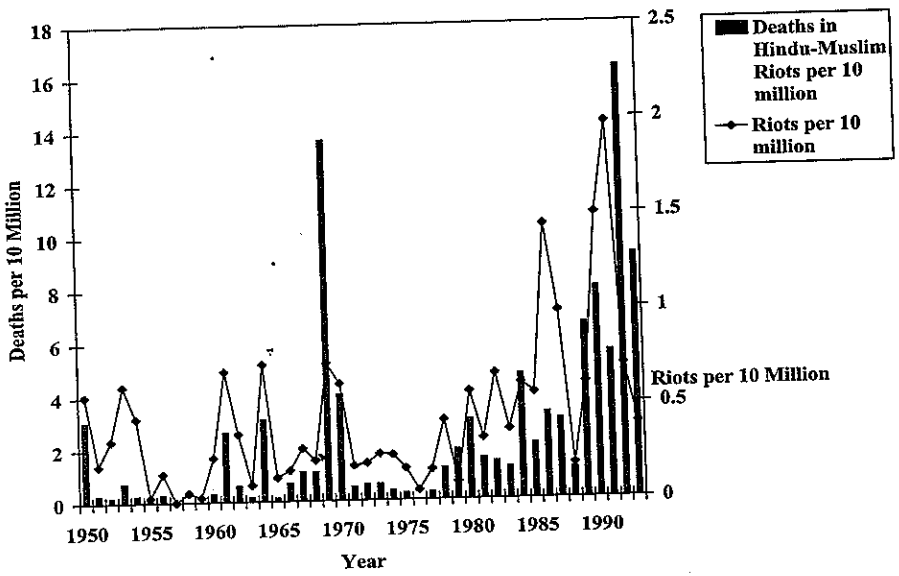

Figure 1.2 Hindu-Muslim riots since independence (data from Varshney and Wilkinson)

The Importance of Understanding Hindu-Muslim Violence

For those concerned about the welfare of the world's most populous democracy, understanding the causes of Hindu-Muslim riots is of more than just theoretical importance. Hindu-Muslim riots threaten the stability of the Indian state, its economic development, and the country's delicate international relations with its Muslim neighbors, especially its nuclear-armed rival Pakistan. Since the 1950s, as we can see in Figure 1.2, the number and gravity of Hindu-Muslim riots in India has grown to alarming proportions, reaching a dangerous peak in 1992–93, when nationwide riots broke out after the destruction by Hindu militants of the Babri mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya. Since 1992 there has also been one further major outbreak of mass rioting, in the western state of Gujarat in 2002, in which an estimated 850 to 2,000 people were murdered.[28]

By some measures the numbers involved may not seem large. The approximately 10,000 deaths and 30,000 injuries that have occurred in reported Hindu-Muslim riots since 1950 are, after all, only a fraction of the

[28] "We Have No Orders to Save You," p. 4.

60,000 people who die on India's chaotic, congested roads each year, and the annual rate of deaths from Hindu-Muslim riots is much lower than that of the number of women murdered in so-called "dowry deaths" (3,000–4,000).[29] India's per-capita death rate from Hindu-Muslim riots is also low when compared with that in some of the world's other well-known ethnic conflicts. For example, deaths in Northern Ireland since 1969 run at 50 times the per-capita rate in India due to Hindu-Muslim violence.[30]

But the importance of the Hindu-Muslim divide lies in more than just the number of people who have died in riots since independence. The divide is also important because the Hindu-Muslim cleavage has split the Indian state apart once already and has the potential to do so again. An estimated 200,000 people were murdered and 13 million forced to migrate from their homes in 1946–48 when India was partitioned into Muslim and Hindu majority states.[31] Because Hindus and Muslims live side by side throughout the length and breadth of India, this cleavage poses a potentially much more serious threat to the country than separatist conflicts in the North and Northeast, which have so far claimed a greater number of lives.[32] This is especially so because Hindu-Muslim violence affects some states at some times so much more than others. As I show in Figures 1.3 and 1.4, which report data on Hindu-Muslim riots after the 1977 emergency, states such as Gujarat and Maharashtra have had, even allowing for population, considerably higher average monthly levels of riots and deaths over the past three decades.[33]

Hindu-Muslim riots also have damaging, though often ignored, effects on India's economic development, and these effects again are concentrated

[29] In 1989, for example, when the Ayodhya agitation was nearing its height, 521 people died in communal riots compared to 3,894 women who were murdered over dowry. Annexure no. 117, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Appendix 155, August 7–September 7, 1990, pp. 558–60. This official rate of dowry deaths is of course widely recognized to be a gross underestimate.

[30] According to 1995 Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) figures, 3,462 people have died in the Northern Ireland conflict out a population of c. 1.5 million. Mervyn T. Love, *Peace Building through Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Avebury: Aldershot, 1995), p. 38.

[31] My estimate of deaths comes from Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 269. Moon gives a clear explanation of how he arrived at this figure. Scholarly and journalistic estimates that claim a million or more deaths are common but unsubstantiated. Keller for instance quotes a figure of "up to 1 million" dead in communal rioting. Stephen L. Keller, *Uprooting and Social Change: The Role of Refugees in Development* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1975), p. 17.

[32] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 37.

[33] Interestingly, as we can see from Figures 1.3 and 1.4, riots seem to be much more evenly spread than casualties across states. We will try to explain in subsequent chapters why, even though riots break out across India, they only seem to lead to large numbers of deaths in some states.

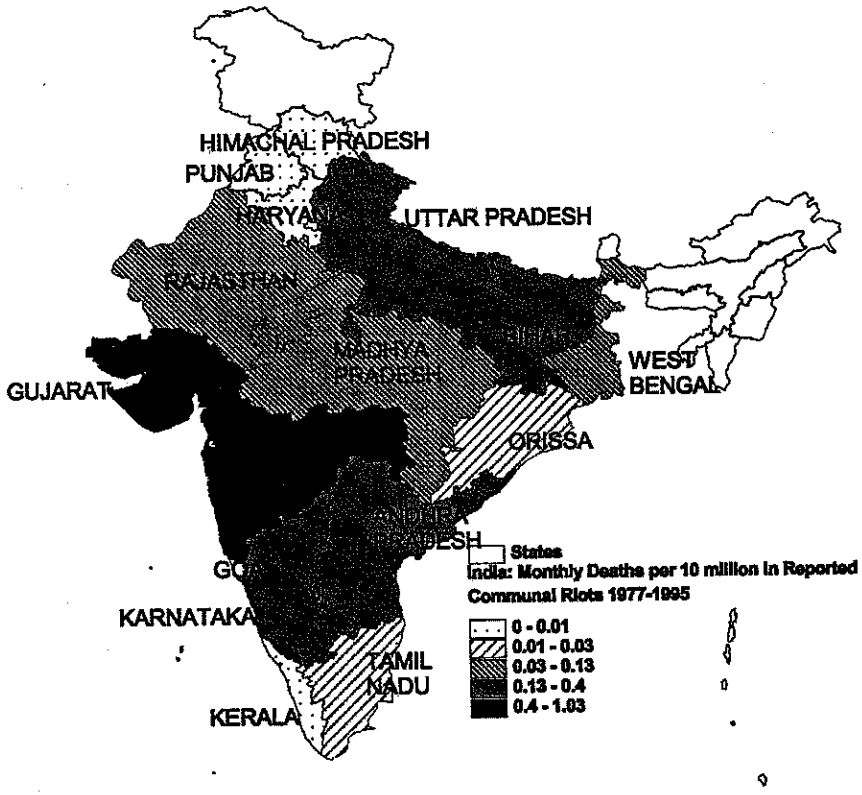

Figure 1.3 State variation in deaths in Hindu-Muslim riots, 1977–1995: Monthly average per 10 million inhabitants (based on data collected by Varshney and Wilkinson from *Times of India* reports)

in certain states.[34] The Hindu-Muslim riots of January 1993, for example, cost the city of Mumbai (Bombay) alone an estimated Rs. 9,000 crores ($3.6 billion) in lost production, sales, tax revenues, property losses, and exports and reportedly forced one industry, synthetic textiles, to at least temporarily abandon Mumbai altogether.[35] Industries in which Muslims account for a disproportionately large share of the work force, such as leather, jewelry,

[34] "Mosque Demolition: Consequences for Reform," *Economic Times* (Bombay), December 10, 1992.

[35] The Mumbai-based Noorani family, the owner of Zodiac clothing, temporarily fled the city and has since directed its new investments outside Maharashtra, mainly in Bangalore. Many Indian statistics are given in units of a *crore* (ten million) or a *lakh* (hundred thousand). The figure on total losses is from the business consultancy Tata Services, reported in Ashgar

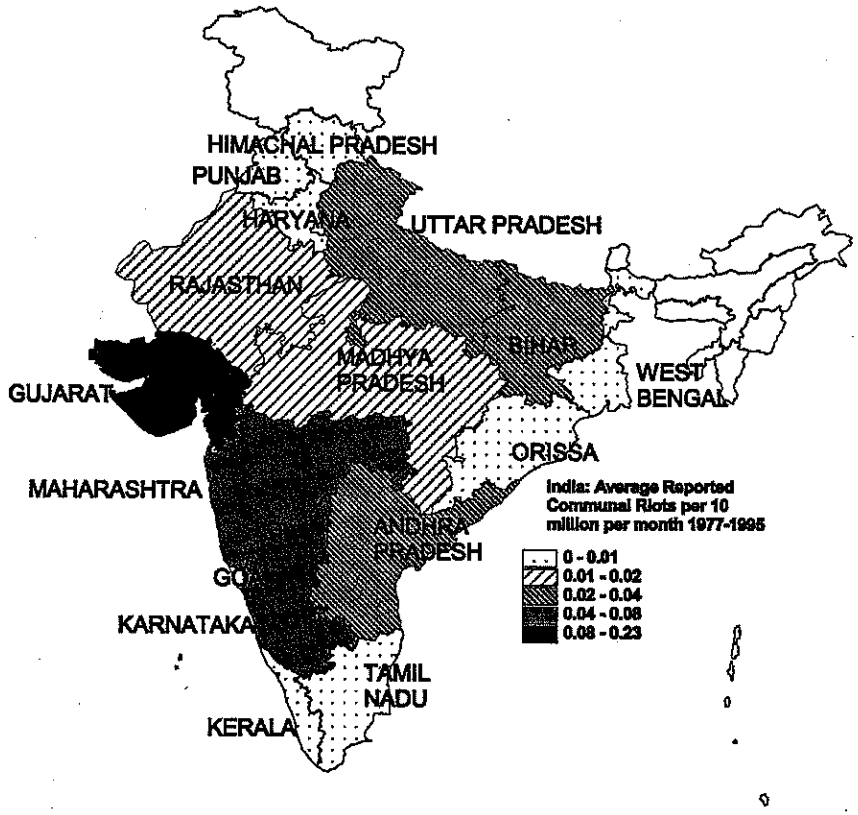

Figure 1.4 State variation in the number of Hindu-Muslim riots, 1977–1995: Monthly average per 10 million inhabitants (based on data collected by Varshney and Wilkinson from *Times of India* reports)

bakeries, and textiles, were particularly hard hit.[36] In Mumbai's ready-made garment industry, for instance, where Muslims from the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are employed in hand and machine embroidery, the 1993 migration of Muslims back to their towns and villages cost manufacturers more than $3 million a day in lost production.[37] The Muslim exodus from Mumbai, by drying up remittances, further impoverished the economies in the migrants' home districts in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal.

Ali Engineer, "Bombay Riots: Second Phase," *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 20–27, 1993, pp. 505–8.

[36] For details, see Raju Kane and Teesta Setalvad's report in *Business India*, January 18–31, 1993, pp. 54–66.

[37] *Times of India*, January 25, 1993.

Hindu-Muslim riots also endanger India's international security and the security of Hindus living outside India. Every Hindu-Muslim riot increases tensions between Pakistan and India, South Asia's two nuclear powers.[38] Since the 1950s large anti-Muslim riots in India have often sparked tit-for-tat violence against Hindu minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In December 1992 and January 1993, for example, anti-Muslim riots in India were swiftly followed by serious anti-Hindu riots in Karachi, Lahore, and Dhaka. The mass migration of South Asians to other countries and the spread of global news media have also increased the likelihood that riots in India will lead to violence against Hindus far from India's borders. The 1992 Hindu-Muslim riots had repercussions as far away as Dubai, Thailand, and Britain (where Muslim mobs in Bradford and other northern English cities attacked Hindu temples).[39]

Plan of the Book

I begin in Chapter 2 by examining the town-level causes of Hindu-Muslim riots and the broader question of intrastate variation in ethnic violence. Using systematic town-level data on riots and socioeconomic variables from India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, I show that the probability of whether a town will have a Hindu-Muslim riot is highly related to its level of electoral competition, even once we hold factors such as a town's demographic balance or its past record of Hindu-Muslim violence constant. Towns with a close electoral race are considerably more likely to have a Hindu-Muslim riot than towns with uncompetitive races. I also address the important question of whether historical and geographical variation in Hindu-Muslim violence is best explained using town- or state-level factors. Ashutosh Varshney, for instance, has made a good case for the primacy of town-level factors, which he argues can constrain the actions of state-level officials when it comes to riot control.[40] Although, of course, both play a role, I show that state-level patterns of law enforcement dominate

[38] Seymour M. Hersh, "On the Nuclear Edge," *New Yorker*, March 29, 1993, pp. 56–73; Devin T. Hagerty, "Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The 1990 Indo-Pakistani Crisis," *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1995–96), pp. 79–114.

[39] *Times of India*, December 8 and 9, 1992; *Hindustan Times*, December 11, 1992. "Damned by Faith," *Newsline* (Lahore), January 1993, pp. 114A–118. For information on the Bangladesh violence, see *Hindustan Times*, December 12, 1992.

[40] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 10. My own view, however, developed in more detail in Chapter 2, is that state-level incentives in India are clearly dominant over local factors.

local factors: state law enforcement can prevent violence even in so-called riot-prone towns and facilitate it even in towns with no previous history of riots.

If the law-and-order policies of India's state governments are more important than local-level factors in determining where Hindu-Muslim violence takes place, the key question is obviously, What explains these state-level policies? In Chapters 3 and 4 I examine and test two of the major explanations that are usually provided to explain why some states have lower levels of ethnic violence than others: state capacity and governance arguments, and consociational arguments.[41] I find that neither differences in state capacity nor in the degree of consociational powersharing can explain the variation we observe in states' levels of Hindu-Muslim violence or in their performance in preventing riots.

Chapter 5 tests the main argument of the book, by examining the importance of state-level electoral incentives in explaining Hindu-Muslim violence. I show that from 1961 to 1995, higher levels of party competition in the 15 major Indian states are statistically associated with lower levels of Hindu-Muslim violence. I also provide qualitative evidence to show that politicians do act in the way in which my model predicts and that the level of political competition for Muslim voters does have a direct effect on whether a riot breaks out. An additional question this chapter examines is why Muslims should increasingly be the pivotal voters in Indian state politics? Why has increased political competition not placed Hindu nationalist voters, rather than Muslim voters, in the pivotal position in state politics? I argue that Muslims are especially desirable voters for Hindu politicians to court because of the relatively large size of their community and the relatively few economic and employment demands they make compared with middle- and lower-caste blocs of Hindu voters.

If, as I argue in Chapter 5, the degree of party competition is crucial in explaining the level of Hindu-Muslim violence in various Indian states, then it raises the question, What explains states' different levels of party competition? I address this question in Chapter 6 through three case studies, tracing the history of Hindu-Muslim conflicts and party politics in the states of Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Kerala. I describe how, in large part because

[41] For the former, see Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for the latter, see Arend Lijphart, "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996), pp. 258–68.

of institutional incentives for "backward-caste" mobilization provided by the colonial state, intra-Hindu party political competition emerged much earlier (1920s–1930s) in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala than in northern India. I show that strong postindependence intra-Hindu competition for the Muslim vote led to governments in Kerala and Tamil Nadu that were serious about preventing and stopping Hindu-Muslim riots. The growing strength of similar lower- and middle-caste parties in northern India since the late 1980s, I predict, although it led to a short-term increase in violence, will eventually lead to a similar decline in Hindu-Muslim violence in the North.

In Chapter 7, I demonstrate that the electoral incentives we see at work in India also help account for the pattern of ethnic violence in other countries. I select one case from each of the three great waves of democratization identified by Samuel Huntington, during which multiethnic societies moved from uncompetitive party systems to competitive systems in a relatively short space of time: the "first wave," from 1828 to 1926, when the franchise was extended to 50% or more of adult males in many countries in Europe, the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand; the "second wave," after World War II, when former colonies and many formerly authoritarian countries in Latin America became democratic; and the "third wave," which began with the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 and continued with democratic liberalization in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Africa. In each of these three cases I examine (19th-century Ireland, postindependence Malaysia, and postcommunist Romania), I argue that the pattern of ethnic violence in these countries as well as in other states such as the United States has been consistent with my general explanation: ethnic riots took place where political competition was fiercest, and the state's reaction to this violence was determined by its own support base and the overall degree of party competition in the state.

The broader question this book inevitably raises is whether democratic competition inflames or reduces ethnic violence? Does the fact that electoral incentives often lead to ethnic violence mean that I agree with John Stuart Mill and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom at various times argued that free institutions are next to impossible in multiethnic states? No. In Chapter 8 I argue that, although electoral competition can foment violence, there are many ways in which political competition as well as cleavage structures can also be altered so that politicians have incentives to be moderate toward minorities.

2

Explaining Town-Level Variation in Hindu-Muslim Violence

Most explanations for Hindu-Muslim violence focus on the importance of town-level socioeconomic factors similar to those identified in the broader comparative literature on ethnic riots.[1] The town-level explanations focus on such factors as the relative size of a town's minority and majority populations, a town's total population, the divisive effects caused by the presence of refugees from previous ethnic conflicts in a town, or the degree of Hindu-Muslim economic competition in an ethnically divided labor market.[2] In the past few years, several major studies of communal violence in India have also highlighted the importance of such variables as a town's level of interethnic "civic engagement" or the presence or absence of "institutionalized riot systems" to explain why some towns are violent while others are not.[3]

This book is focused, in contrast, squarely on the state level and on political incentives. While town-level factors need to be taken into account, I argue that it is even more important to understand why India's states sometimes use force to prevent riots and at other times allow or even seem to encourage violence. Force matters because studies of riots have found that rioters are generally unwilling, whatever the strength of the town-level

[1] Data collected by myself and Ashutosh Varshney found that 93% of deaths from 1950 to 1995 took place in towns. This figure probably exaggerates the urban-rural discrepancy somewhat because riots in villages in rural areas are less likely to be reported.

[2] For a review of these theories in the context of the U.S. literature on race riots, see Manus I. Midlarsky, "Analyzing Diffusion and Contagion Effects: The Urban Disorders of the 1960s," *American Political Science Review* 72, no. 3 (1978), p. 996, and Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[3] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Strife: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Study of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).