# Demanding Violence, Punishing Peace: Support for Party Violence in India [1]

Ursula Daxecker[2] and Neeraj Prasad[3]

## Abstract

Some studies show that voters punish parties for violence, while others find that violence can benefit politicians. We argue that core and swing voters support rather than punish violence by co-partisans under some conditions. Parties aim to benefit from violence by portraying it as a response to a threat, provocation, or injustice by an out-group or rival party. Once legitimized by politicians, voters support violence by co-partisans and punish them for peaceful responses. We test our argument with preregistered vignette experiments in a representative survey during the 2022 elections in Uttar Pradesh, India. Our findings support expectations; respondents are more likely to support violence and approve of parties involved in it when it is legitimized. These effects are driven by Hindus as the majority group, in particular core supporters of the incumbent party. Our study establishes the micro-foundations of support for violence in democracies.

**Short Title:** Demanding Violence, Punishing Peace

**Keywords:** Party violence; support for violence; legitimization; South Asia

[1] Replication files are available in the JOP Data Archive on Dataverse https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jop. The empirical analysis has been successfully replicated by the JOP replication analyst. The authors acknowledge funding from the European Research Council (ERC) grant #852439. The project received approval from the University of Amsterdam's Ethics Review Board (ERB) #2022-AISSR-14528. The study was preregistered and the pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/mhrdu/. Ahead of data collection, we pre-registered hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, sampling strategy and sample size, experimental designs, and estimation techniques. Supplementary material for this article is available in the appendix in the online edition.

[2] Professor, University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Phone: +31655406453, u.daxecker@uva.nl

[3] Assistant Professor, University of Amsterdam. Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Phone: +31684113491, n.v.prasad@uva.nl

## Introduction

Do citizens in democracies punish politicians for violence, or do voters sometimes support or even demand violent behavior? Drawing on theories of democratic accountability, several studies have established that voters sanction politicians for violence (De Kadt, Johnson-Kanu and Sands, 2024; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Rosenzweig, 2021, 2023; Siddiqui, 2022, 2023). Consistent with punishment effects, public opinion surveys show that super-majorities disapprove of violence in politics.[4] Yet at the same time, other work suggests that parties can use violence against out-groups or rival partisans as a strategy to mobilize supporters and polarize voters (Brass, 2005; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Klaus, 2020; LeBas, 2006). The empirical record confirms that violence can pay off, or at least do little harm; in India, for example, politicians belonging to a variety of parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the All-India Trinamool Congress (TMC), or the Shiv Sena have won elections repeatedly despite being implicated in violence against minorities or the opposition. Theory and evidence thus speak both in favor and against punishment effects. These are not trivial issues. Support for party violence by even a limited segment of the population threatens the normative foundations of democracy, leading us to explore the conditions under which voters approve or disapprove of party-based violence in democratic settings.[5]

Our main argument is that voters do not learn about violence in neutral ways; instead, violence is produced, shared, and processed along politically relevant identities, which can lead voters to support violence and even to sanction parties for peaceful responses. We argue that

[4] In cross-national surveys, 78% of respondents say that the use of violence in politics is never justified (Alcorta et al., 2020).

[5] Party violence is sponsored or incited by politicians, and carried out by party workers or close associates. Violence may revolve around partisan or non-partisan identities; our argument applies to such violence as long as the identities in question are politically relevant.

politicians portray violence against minorities or rival partisans as responding to a threat, provocation, or injustice by an out-group (Brass, 2005; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Wilkinson, 2004). Politicians legitimize violence by linking it to pre-existing grievances in society (Klaus, 2020; Malik and Onguny, 2020). Claims justifying violence are shared with voters through media and at campaign events, with political entrepreneurs anticipating that they will increase support from core and swing voters (Brass, 1997; Fiske and Rai, 2014; Weaver, 2019). We expect that voters are more likely to approve of violence when it is legitimized, that co-partisans approve of parties involved in such violence, and that co-partisans reduce their support of politicians who respond with peace.

We test our expectations empirically with a representative survey of approximately 4,750 registered voters in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a state of more than 200 million people in Northern India. We conduct our survey concurrently with the 2022 legislative assembly elections in UP, which involved the state incumbent BJP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) as the primary competitors. We survey citizens after they have cast their vote yet before results are announced, avoiding that election outcomes shape citizens' attitudes. The empirical context in Uttar Pradesh is suitable for our study; UP frequently experiences low-level religious violence that is politicized, and elections were generally free and fair on election day, allowing voters to evaluate and punish parties for violence. The survey contains preregistered vignette experiments with a 2x2 factorial design that mimics how political parties aim to benefit from violence against out-groups or rival partisans during elections. Violence in UP generally revolves around the Hindu-Muslim cleavage [6] The vignettes randomly vary whether respondents receive information legitimizing violence against an out-group or do not receive

[6] To ensure that all respondents are exposed to information involving out-groups, we construct separate vignettes for Hindu and Muslim respondents. Results for the vignette designed for Muslim respondents can be found in appendix E.

this information, and whether a party is involved in the violence or initiates a peaceful dialogue. We then explore effects on respondents' approval or disapproval of the party's response.

Our main findings are as follows. When violence is legitimized, voters are more likely to approve of it. Moreover, the legitimation of violence leads to higher approval of copartisans involved in violence against out-groups, while a peaceful response to such violence lowers co-partisans approval. These findings are driven by Hindus as the majority group, in particular supporters of the state incumbent party BJP. Incumbent voters approve of the party's actions if it is involved in violence, while disapproving of the party if it supports peace. While our findings come from the largest state in India, our framework applies more broadly. Grievances against minorities, immigrants, or other marginalized groups are common in democracies around the world. Our findings suggest that parties representing majority groups can use violence against out-groups to increase support from key electoral demographics.

Our article makes three contributions. First, building on seminal work by Brass (1997, 2005) and Wilkinson (2004), we provide the micro-foundations of popular support for intrasystemic political violence in democracies.[7] Our study helps explain the persistence of violence that remains part of mainstream politics in many longstanding democracies (Staniland, 2021, pp.21-22, p.128). Second, our article contributes to the empirical literature on political violence through improvements in research design. We provide respondents with information legitimizing violence, which reflects how it is typically portrayed by politicians. Moreover, recognizing that voters trade off violent behavior against other expected benefits from a party (Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Rosenzweig, 2021, 2023; Siddiqui, 2022, 2023), we

[7] We think it is less useful to study voter sanctioning in authoritarian contexts, i.e. elections in which voters may not be able to vote according to their preference. We also exclude support for anti-systemic political violence such as civil war since actors engaging in it are often excluded from electoral politics (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Staniland, 2014).

examine support for party violence rather than compound outcomes such as vote choice. This helps avoid conflating support for a party, violence, or both. Third, we broaden the scope of causal mechanisms linking citizens' attitudes and political violence. Prior work on civil war, repression, and electoral violence has privileged the coercive effects of violence. In contrast, we argue that politicians use violence not only to coerce opponents, but also to increase support from core and persuadable voters. Our article complements recent studies that have established the mobilizing and polarizing effects of various forms of political violence, including ethnic violence (Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Weaver, 2019), party violence (Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023), violent criminality (Vaishnav, 2017), and repression (Lachapelle, 2022).

## The Literature on Voter Sanctioning

Drawing on theories of democratic accountability, existing work suggests that voters punish violent candidates and parties in democracies. The most compelling evidence in favour of voter sanctioning comes from experimental studies that randomly assign politicians' attributes and presumed engagement in violence. Across a variety of empirical contexts, these studies present strong and consistent evidence in favor of voter sanctioning, showing that voters are less likely to support violent candidates (Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Rosenzweig, 2021, 2023; Siddiqui, 2022, 2023). Observational work is broadly consistent with this, establishing that violence reduces support for politicians associated with violence (De Kadt, Johnson-Kanu and Sands, 2024; Susewind and Dhattiwala, 2014), lowers support for rival parties (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019), and depresses turnout (Bratton, 2008; Condra et al., 2018; Siddiqui, 2023; Von Borzyskowski, Daxecker and Kuhn, 2022).

An important question, however, is whether the punishment of violent politicians comes from those targeted with violence, who are typically non-supporters, or those who are core or swing voters. Politicians may anticipate or even benefit from punishment from those who are

unlikely to vote for them, while sanctioning from swing and core voters would harm politicians' electoral goals. Evidence on this question is mixed; while some of the above studies find that core and swing voters of violent parties punish them for violence (De Kadt, Johnson-Kanu and Sands, 2024; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Rosenzweig, 2021, 2023), others show that supporters are indifferent to it (Siddiqui, 2022, 2023).[8]

We believe that assessments of voter support for violence in democracies should be centered on the responses of core and swing voters. In contexts where elections are largely free and fair, politicians cannot demobilize voters *en masse*, and will therefore be concerned with how core and persuadable voters respond to violence.

## Why Voters Support Party Violence

When and why do voters in democratic contexts support parties engaged in violence? We begin with the common assumption that political parties want to win elections. Politicians can rely on non-violent and violent strategies to gain votes, and we expect that politicians will use violent strategies if they anticipate that it will produce electoral benefits. Violence is distinct from other electoral strategies because of its communicative effects (Fiske and Rai, 2014; Kalyvas, 2006). Violence attracts attention; this means it is interpreted not just by victims and perpetrators, but also by a larger audience that finds out about it (Fiske and Rai, 2014;

[8] Inconsistencies could also stem from differences in research design and empirical context. Prior experimental work has explored support for violence in the abstract rather than specifying who was targeted or why. Moreover, experiments were sometimes fielded months or years after elections were held, making voter evaluations of candidates less salient (Michelitch and Utych, 2018). Finally, experimental evidence from Kenya (Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Rosenzweig, 2021) may be difficult to compare to other contexts since large-scale violence following the 2007 elections led to international intervention and major shifts in domestic cleavages, which could have more fundamentally changed voter attitudes toward violence.

Lachapelle, 2022; Weaver, 2019). Perpetrators generally endorse violence, while victims reject it (Fiske and Rai, 2014, pp.7), making the response of the audience — in our case, voters — crucial. Conventional wisdom assumes that voters in democracies are opposed to violence and therefore reject and punish it.[9] This assumption, however, is valid only if voters are informed about violence in neutral ways and process it without biases; neither is likely in the context of party violence. Instead, politicians aim to portray violence as necessary to protect their own supporters, using it to appeal to persuadable and core voters. The primary audience of such violence are not the victims, but rather those who already or potentially support those inciting or perpetrating it. How do politicians legitimize violence, and how do voters respond to it?

***Legitimizing Violence***

We argue that politicians legitimize violence by portraying it as a defensive act to protect supporters, as necessary for protecting the values of co-ethnics, or as a response against provocations by an out-group or rival party (Berenschot, 2011; Brass, 1997, 2005; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Klaus, 2020; LeBas, 2006; Malik and Onguny, 2020). These claims do not require that out-groups have engaged in any wrong-doing or pose an actual threat; in fact, politicians may themselves sponsor the perpetrators, instigate violence through hostile rhetoric, or misconstrue unrelated incidents to fit the party's narrative for violence. The circumstances surrounding violence are often murky and subject to claims and counter-claims, allowing politicians to construct and spread claims about violence that shift or even displace blame (Brass, 1997, 2005; Malik and Onguny, 2020). Politicians insert violent incidents into pre-existing narratives around salient or "master" cleavages (Brass, 2005; Kalyvas, 2003;

[9] This assumption implies that violence is a valence issue, which may be correct in the abstract but not once it is successfully legitimized. As Fiske and Rai (2014, pp.1-2) note, the perpetrators of violence and their audience often consider it to be morally justified or even necessary for regulating social relationships.

Malik and Onguny, 2020; Varshney, 1997).[10] Claims are then shared with supporters; either through traditional and social media outlets or at campaign events (Brass, 2005; Malik and Onguny, 2020; Weaver, 2019). This leads to our first pre-registered hypothesis.[11]

H1 *Voters are more likely to support violence when they are provided with information justifying violence.*

***Voter Responses to Legitimization***

How do voters respond to violence that is legitimized? Core and persuadable voters —the primary audience of claims around violence—share a politically relevant identity with politicians sponsoring violence. Work on social psychology and motivated reasoning has shown that threats and violence can help increase in-group unity and deepen the relationship between sponsors of violence and the audience (Fiske and Rai, 2014; Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Weaver, 2019). Voters exposed to narratives share bonds with politicians sponsoring violence; moreover, these same politicians are often influential local actors (Berenschot, 2011; Vaishnav, 2017; Weaver, 2019). Core and persuadable voters may thus find it desirable or even necessary to endorse claims justifying violence, wanting to preserve relationships with co-partisans in their community (Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Fiske and Rai, 2014; Weaver, 2019). Moreover, claims of threat or injustice portray specific individuals —members of out-groups or rival parties— as representatives of this threat, leading to scapegoating and endorsement of violence against these groups (Nussio and Clayton, 2023). Voters belonging to the in-group

[10] The types of violent incidents selected for electoral mobilization depend on context; in India, violence often involves the Hindu-Muslim cleavage and aims to establish, solidify, and exacerbate anti-Muslim prejudice (Pai and Kumar, 2018).

[11] Our pre-analysis plan contains six hypotheses, of which we present two in the main article, while discussing the rest in the appendix. We find support for five of the six hypotheses. We refer to appendix H for a detailed discussion.

then become willing to defend violence as part of prevailing social practice (Fiske and Rai, 2014; Weaver, 2019). These processes lead core and persuadable voters to support violence legitimized by co-partisans.

Moreover, once violence is legitimized, core and persuadable voters may even punish a party for failing to respond to alleged wrong-doing or threats with violence.[12] A party that condemns violence or offers a dialogue with offending out-groups might anger its own supporters for failing to retribute against provocations or threats. When people can attribute blame for violence to a perpetrator, they respond with anger and increased support for harsh punishment and extralegal violence against those responsible (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015; García-Ponce, Young and Zeitzoff, 2023; Milliff, 2023). Claiming that violence is justified yet failing to avenge it, then, poses risks for political parties. While politicians may sometimes prefer to de-escalate a situation because violence can be costly, parties also risk punishment for failing to respond to incidents seen as threatening or provocative by their own voters, especially core supporters. As work on party shifts has shown, politicians who abandon salient or principled issues are punished by voters (Chou et al., 2021; Ferland and Dassonneville, 2021; Tavits, 2007). Hence, we expect that co-partisans lower their approval of parties that fail to respond harshly when violence is legitimized. Our second pre-registered hypothesis summarizes these expectations:

H2 *When parties participate in violence against offending out-groups, their approval among supporters increases and their approval among non-supporters decreases.*

*Alternatively, when parties pursue peace with offending out-groups, their approval among supporters decreases and their approval among non-supporters increases.*

[12] A variety of non-violent responses, including no response, are possible. Our main results explore a response offering a peaceful dialogue; in supplementary analysis shown in Appendix G, we show that voters also prefer violence to no response when it is legitimized.

## Research Design

### *Empirical Context*

Uttar Pradesh (UP) is a state in Northern India with a population of more than 200 million, which would make it the fifth most populous democracy in the world. Elections to the state legislature are of considerable importance and generally seen as decisive for national politics. Moreover, elections are closely contested and largely free and fair, which is a scope condition of our argument.[13] The main parties contesting elections are the right-wing nationalist BJP, which is the current incumbent in both UP and at the national level. Other electorally relevant parties are the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Indian National Congress (INC).[14]

We begin with an overview of electoral demography in UP. We present demographics from the perspective of the BJP as the state incumbent party, depicting UP as a "village" of 100 voters in Figure 1.[15] In UP, approximately 20% of voters belong to the upper castes. They can be considered core supporters of the BJP. At the other end of the spectrum, 20% of voters are

[13] In contexts where fraud and violence are widespread, voters cannot be expected to vote according to their preference and punish violent or corrupt candidates. In India, elections to state legislatures are administered by the independent Election Commission of India (ECI), which is largely seen as capable of conducting free and fair elections on election day.

[14] All four parties have governed the state in the past and have the organizational strength to field a strong campaign. Of the 403 seats in the state legislature, the BSP won 206 in 2007, the SP won 224 in 2012, and the BJP 265 seats in 2017.

[15] Numbers are approximate but consistent with Pai and Kumar (2018, pp. 292). When suggesting that the upper castes as core supporters, we do not imply that all vote for the BJP, but that a lot of them do.

Muslim, who overwhelmingly oppose the BJP; we consider them nonsupporters.[16] Of the remaining voters, Jatavs belong to the scheduled castes (SC) and Yadavs belong to the other backward classes (OBC); they are championed by the BSP and the SP, respectively. They constitute 25% of all voters and are unlikely to vote for the BJP because of their relationship with other parties[17] Finally, non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav SCs can be considered persuadable voters for the BJP; the BJP actively tries to mobilize both groups. Together, they make up about 35% of voters. Our main expectation is that the BJP can use violence to gain the approval of core and persuadable voters; therefore, we are especially interested in how upper-caste, non-Yadav OBCs, and non-Jatav SCs Hindu respondents react to violence perpetrated by the BJP.

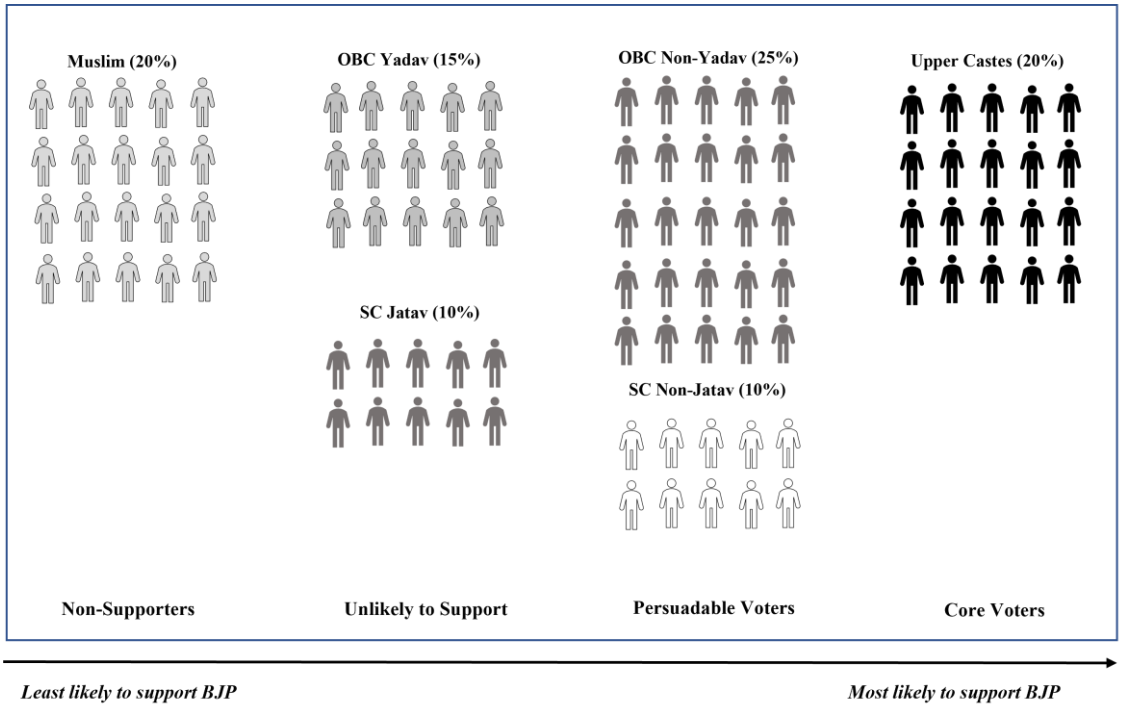
Second, political parties in UP use divisive rhetoric and incidents of violence involving religious or caste minorities to mobilize voters (Pai and Kumar, 2018). Hindu-Muslim tensions—often discussed under the label "*communalism*" in the Indian context—tend to unite Hindus. The BJP and its affiliates have institutionalized a system of "everyday communalism" that targets Muslims, often with violence, and builds a "broad Hindu coalition encompassing the upper castes, the backwards, and the Dalits" (Pai and Kumar, 2018, pp. 19). The BJP generally condones violence, and low-level party workers or BJP affiliates are frequently involved in it. Such rhetoric and violence happens both in the electoral period but also outside

[16] The incumbent Chief Minister of UP and BJP leader, Yogi Adityanath, characterized the 2022 elections in UP as "80% versus 20%"; implying Hindus who constitute 80% of the population would vote for him, while Muslims, constituting the remaining 20%, would not vote for him Verniers (2022). Also, as quoted in Pai and Kumar (2018, pp. 16), BJP Member of Parliament Parvesh Varma said "Muslims have never voted for us and they never will."

[17] Being Hindus, they could in principle fit into the BJP's Hindu majoritarian vision, and we therefore consider them unlikely voters.

of it, and is designed to unify Hindus.[18] In some cases, the BJP may call for restraint or even peaceful dialogue, especially if violence receives national or even international attention.[19] Other parties, including the SP, also aim to benefit from local violence, but do so to a more limited extent.[20]

**Figure 1. Electoral demographics denoting BJP supporters and non-supporters**




Note: Upper castes, designated 'core voters,' are most likely to vote for the BJP. Muslims are the least likely to vote for the BJP. Yadav OBCs and Jatav SCs are more likely to support the SP and the BSP, respectively. Non-Yadav OBCs and Non-Jatav SCs can be considered 'swing' or 'persuadable' voters.

[18] In the immediate run-up to elections and on election day, we anticipate lower levels of violence because of the Model Code of Conduct and the ECI's capacity and willingness to draw attention to violations.

[19] Such as violence against farmers in Lakhimpur, see Singh (2021).

[20] In an analysis of campaign speeches in local news we conducted for this study, we record 78 instances of the BJP describing the opposition as pro-Muslim; in these 78 speeches, the BJP also labeled the SP as anti-national 60 times and anti-Hindu 48 times. We discuss these campaign speeches and our methodology in more detail in Appendix F.1.

### *The Survey and Vignettes*

We implemented the survey between February and March 2022, using a representative random probability sample of 4,750 voters drawn from the voter registry. Elections in UP were held in eight phases between February 10 until March 7, and results were announced on March 10, making it possible to survey citizens after they had cast their vote, but before they knew who had won. This setup offers two main advantages; first, it ensures we do not interfere with the campaign and respondents' vote choice; second, it means that responses are not influenced by the outcome, which could be subject to winner-loser effects. For survey methodology, field notes, and representativeness of the sample vis-á-vis the population, see Appendix B.

The survey uses a 2×2 factorial design, with vignettes offering variation on information legitimizing violence and on parties' role in the violence (see Table I). The vignettes are designed around a (real-life) violent incident that mirrors how narratives are constructed in the real world.[21] We selected an incident involving vandalism against a member of the religious out-group, which is representative of the low-intensity violent incidents that are inserted into narratives. As Pai and Kumar (2018, p.159-160) note, petty, even mundane incidents of violence form the basis of party narratives in UP. While a mild incident is representative of the

[21] In this incident, Hindu nationalists and BJP party workers vandalized the house of Salman Kurshid. Kurshid is a senior politician and Muslim leader who wrote a book about the decline of secularism in India. He was attacked after right-wing Hindu leaders and the BJP alleged that that the book defamed Hindus. The vilification of Kurshid's persona, violence against him, and legitimization of this violence is consistent with our argument. We note that violence against Kurshid happened several months before elections and took place in a neighboring state, making it unlikely that respondents recall the event and were thus pre-treated. However, even if some respondents remember the incident, it will most likely attenuate any effects we establish. For reporting of the incident, see Mishra (2021).

context we study and preferrable for ethical reasons (see also below), the appendix shows that more serious violence does not lead to punishment.[22]

**TABLE I. 2×2 Factorial Design: Vignette Text**

| $E1$ | Information on Violence | |
|---|---|---|
| Party Role | Without Legitimization ($C_1$) | With Legitimization ($T_1$) |
| Peaceful ($C_2$) | Recently, a respected leader, Salman Khurshid's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. Condemning the violence, the BJP initiated a peaceful dialogue with Salman Khurshid. | Recently, a respected leader, Salman Khurshid's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. This incident happened after he had written a book in which he compared some Hindu Sanghthans [meaning groups] to terrorist organizations like ISIS and Taliban. Condemning the violence, the BJP initiated a peaceful dialogue with Salman Khurshid. |
| Violent ($T_2$) | Recently, a respected leader, Salman Khurshid's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. The BJP participated in the violence against Salman Khurshid. | Recently, a respected leader, Salman Khurshid's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. This incident happened after he had written a book in which he compared some Hindu Sanghthans [meaning groups] to terrorist organizations like ISIS and Taliban. The BJP participated in the violence against Salman Khurshid. |

The vignette involves two dimensions, information legitimizing violence and the party's role in violence. First, for information legitimizing violence, one version of the vignette informs respondents of an act of vandalism against an out-group and legitimizes the violence; while the other version merely informs respondents of the vandalism without additional information. Respondents receiving legitimizing information are told that violence happened in response to provocative claims about the in-group. This information captures how politicians present

[22] Our observational evidence in appendix F.3 shows that the BJP increased its vote share in locations where co-partisans were culpable of lethal violence. In appendix G, we establish that co-partisans support parties even when accused of physical violence against out-groups.

information to voters in the real world. We vary legitimizing information to demonstrate its importance for popular evaluations of party violence. Prior experimental work has omitted such information, which poorly reflects how politicians present it to voters.

Second, for parties' role in violence, we randomly vary whether respondents are exposed to a violent or peaceful party response. Both responses are empirically plausible. The first version notes that the party participated in the violence against the out-group; i.e. a violent party response. Participation in violence assigns culpability and implies the involvement of party workers rather than merely inciting or refusing to suppress violence.[23] In UP, BJP party workers are routinely involved in violence and receive support for it from the party (Pai and Kumar, 2018, pp. 86-87, 276-277). The second version states that the party condemns the violence and initiates a peaceful dialogue with the out-group member, capturing a nonviolent party response. We considered a number of other non-violent responses, including calling for an investigation or no response, but believe the current wording is most plausible in the context we study. Condemning the violence clarifies that the party disapproves of vandalism.[24] It is a commonly used phrase by political elites in UP when expressing their opposition to violent acts. The non-violent response also mentions that the party initiated a peaceful dialogue, which is a common strategy to diffuse tensions in UP. There are many examples of the BJP condemning violence

[23] The survey was administered in Hindi, and the Hindi translation for 'participated in the violence'—*BJP ne Salman Khurshid ke khilaf hui hinsa main hissa liya*— is distinct from the word for 'incited the violence'.

[24] The Hindi wording, "*hinsa ki kadi ninda*," translates to strong condemnation of violence.

or calling for peaceful dialogue.[25] In supplementary analyses and Appendix G, we demonstrate that these results are robust to other responses, including no response by a party.[26]

To ensure that all respondents are exposed to an incident of vandalism against an outgroup, the survey includes two versions of the factorial design: *E*1 informs respondents about violence against a Muslim leader and the BJP's role in that violence, while *E*2 informs respondents of violence against a Hindu leader and the SP's response. Our primary analysis pertains to *E*1 and we therefore present *E*2 in appendix E.[27]

***Ethical Considerations***

Conducting surveys with human subjects and on sensitive topics such as violence raises ethical concerns that require reflection. We used the American Political Science Association (APSA)'s guide on professional ethics (APSA, 2022) and its guidelines and principles on human subjects research (APSA, 2020) to develop our ethics assessment and ensure compliance with APSA guidelines. Our ethics assessment established protocols to obtain informed consent and maintain confidentiality, to minimize potential harm for respondents and enumerators, and for debriefing. We discuss each of these in detail in appendix C. Our survey received approval from the University of Amsterdam's Ethics Review Board (#2022-AISSR-14528).

***Outcome Variables***

Our first outcome variable, $Y_v$, measures respondents' approval or disapproval of the violence against an out-group leader. We measure responses using a five point Likert scale ranging from:

[25] For illustrations, see Indian Express (2017); Indian Express (2020); Times of India (2017); Times of India (2022).

[26] Using additional questions in our survey, we find that respondents indicate a preference for violent responses over no response or a peaceful response when violence is legitimized.

[27] Since our vignettes need to be plausible, we allow for minor differences between vignettes provided to Hindu and Muslim respondents.

strongly disapprove, disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, approve, and strongly approve.[28] We convert the scale to numerical points, -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, and 1 respectively.

Our second — and theoretically most important — dependent variable, $Y_p$, measures approval or disapproval of the party's role in the incident of vandalism. For $Y_p$, we examine voter responses to a party's participation in violence or initiation of dialogue. After exposing respondents to one of the four vignettes described in Table I, respondents are asked if they approve of the party's role in the violent incident ($Y_p$). As with the first dependent variable, $Y_p$ asks respondents to express approval or disapproval on a five point Likert scale. Our choice of measuring approval of a party's role in violence — rather than a more aggregate outcome such as party approval or vote choice — is deliberate. We want to give respondents the option of disapproving of the party's role in violence, rather than voters disapproving of violence but still supporting the party for other reasons, such as clientelist benefits. Hence, our dependent variable estimates support for party-based violence directly, which is important for assessing the presence or absence of sanctioning effects.

## Results and Analysis

We first present results for voters' approval of violence, as specified in hypothesis 1. We then proceed to our analyses of voters' approval of the party's role in the incident, as specified in hypothesis 2.

### *Approval of violence*

We show results for voters' approval and disapproval of violence in Table II. Column M1 reports a parsimonious model, whereas M2 includes all identity and demographic controls. In Column M3 we include only Hindu respondents and in M4 only Muslim respondents.

[28] Respondents are first asked if they disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, or approve. We then ask if they strongly approve (strongly disapprove) or approve (disapprove).

**TABLE II. Approval of violence**

| | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | All | Hindus | Muslims |
| DV | Support for violence | | | |
| Legitimization of violence | 0.068** | 0.057** | 0.079*** | -0.049 |
| | (0.021) | (0.021) | (0.022) | (0.050) |
| Response (party participates in violence) | -0.041† | -0.048* | 0.001 | -0.268*** |
| | (0.021) | (0.021) | (0.022) | (0.050) |
| BJP Voter | | 0.049* | 0.024 | 0.412*** |
| | | (0.023) | (0.023) | (0.091) |
| Upper Caste | | -0.070† | -0.059 | |
| | | (0.037) | (0.037) | |
| Yadav OBC | | 0.013 | 0.011 | |
| | | (0.042) | (0.042) | |
| Non-Yadav OBC | | 0.045 | 0.049 | |
| | | (0.033) | (0.033) | |
| Non-Jatav SC | | -0.068 | -0.065 | |
| | | (0.042) | (0.042) | |
| Muslim | | -0.445*** | | |
| | | (0.039) | | |
| Age | | 0.046 | 0.013 | 0.213* |
| | | (0.031) | (0.033) | (0.084) |
| Female | | 0.007 | 0.000 | 0.050 |
| | | (0.021) | (0.022) | (0.050) |
| Constant | 0.297*** | 0.202† | 0.296* | -0.739* |
| | (0.019) | (0.119) | (0.126) | (0.308) |
| R-squared | 0.003 | 0.070 | 0.008 | 0.068 |
| N | 4298 | 4298 | 3528 | 770 |

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. The exact phrasing of the DV is as follows: "We just informed you of vandalism against Salman Khurshid. How much do you approve or disapprove of violence against Salman Khurshid?"

Columns M1 & M2 of Table II show that when respondents are provided with information legitimizing violence, they become more supportive of violence targeting the Muslim leader. This is consistent with Hypothesis 1. From Column M3, we infer that for Hindu respondents, party response does not influence attitudes towards violence; instead, irrespective of party response, on provision of legitimizing information, the net approval for violence increases from 0.35 to 0.43. Column M4 shows that Muslims do not support violence against a Muslim leader.

For additional discussion of divergence in findings for Muslim respondents, we refer to appendix E.

**Approval of the party's role in violence**

We proceed to results for approval of the party's role in the violent incident, our primary theoretical interest. Model M1 of Table III is the base specification.[29] In Model M2 of Table III, we disaggregate by partisan affiliation and religious identity.

**TABLE III. Approval of the party's role in violence**

| | M1 | (M1, se) | M2 | (M2, se) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Approval of party's role in violence | | | |
| Legitimization of violence | -0.106*** | (0.030) | 0.082 | (0.080) |
| Response (party participates in violence) | -0.052† | (0.030) | -0.242*** | (0.071) |
| Legitimization × Response | 0.155*** | (0.042) | -0.157 | (0.105) |
| BJP Voter | -0.101*** | (0.022) | 0.166 | (0.227) |
| Legitimization × BJP Voter | | | 0.088 | (0.304) |
| Response × BJP Voter | | | 0.123 | (0.291) |
| Legitimization × Response × BJP Voter | | | 0.012 | (0.410) |
| Hindu | 0.591*** | (0.031) | 0.483*** | (0.064) |
| Legitimization × Hindu | | | 0.086 | (0.090) |
| Response × Hindu | | | 0.223** | (0.085) |
| Legitimization × Response × Hindu | | | -0.041 | (0.123) |
| BJP Voter × Hindu | | | -0.173 | (0.232) |
| Legitimization × BJP Voter × Hindu | | | -0.749* | (0.310) |
| Response × BJP Voter × Hindu | | | -0.116 | (0.298) |
| Legitimization × Response × BJP Voter × Hindu | | | 0.846* | (0.420) |
| Age | 0.037 | (0.031) | 0.034 | (0.030) |
| Female | 0.005 | (0.021) | 0.000 | (0.020) |
| Constant | -0.311** | (0.118) | -0.248* | (0.124) |
| R-squared | 0.093 | | 0.154 | |
| N | 4303 | | 4303 | |

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. The exact phrasing of the DV is as follows: "We just informed you of BJP's response to vandalism. How much do you approve or disapprove of BJP's response?"

**Pooled responses:** Before exploring support for hypothesis 2, we examine results for all voters. From Column M1 of Table III, we observe that in the absence of information legitimizing

[29] For balance tests and descriptive statistics, see appendix A.

violence, respondents are indifferent between BJP pursuing peace or perpetrating violence (see Figure 2A). The average approval for the peaceful response is 0.27 and that for violence is 0.22.[30] The difference in approval for the two responses is not statistically significant. However, when provided with information justifying violence, respondents prefer BJP's participation in violence against the offending out-group (average approval = 0.27) over BJP's initiation of a peaceful dialogue (average approval = 0.17). The difference between approval for violence and approval for peace is statistically significant.

While we find pooled treatment effects, hypothesis 2 — the central argument of this article — pertains not to average population preferences, but to heterogeneity in preferences towards violence. We expect co-partisans and non-co-partisans to have opposite responses to party violence; and argue that this divergent response fuels partisan polarization. Since vignette *E*1 was designed for Hindus, we next explore partisan heterogeneity among Hindu respondents.[31]

**Heterogeneous responses, partisanship:** We proceed to exploring hypothesis 2. Using estimates from Column M2 of Table III, we compare responses by Hindus who are BJP voters to Hindus who do not vote for the BJP. We begin with voter approval of the BJP's participation in violence. Among Hindu BJP supporters, average approval for violence is 0.34 in the absence of legitimizing information. However, when violence is legitimized and the BJP participates in it, approval for the party's response among co-partisans increases from 0.34 to 0.51. For Hindus who do not support the BJP, approval of the BJP's violent response is 0.34 in the absence of

[30] These results show that approval of party violence — even in the absence of legitimization — is positive, and thus high. This seems plausible in an empirical context where low-intensity religious violence occurs routinely (Pai and Kumar, 2018).

[31] Our experimental design consists of two vignettes, with one designed for Hindu respondents, and a second designed for Muslim respondents, which is presented in appendix E.

legitimizing information, and decreases marginally from 0.34 to 0.31 when provided with legitimization. This difference is neither statistically nor substantially meaningful.[32]

We next examine approval of a peaceful BJP response to the violent incident, again distinguishing between Hindu BJP supporters and non-supporters. In the absence of legitimization, BJP supporters' approval of peace is 0.35. But once violence is legitimized and the BJP responds with peace, approval among co-partisans declines from 0.35 to -0.14. Negative approval scores suggest that the difference between support for peace and violence is not merely a matter of marginal preferences. Instead, BJP voters not only demand violence from their party, but also sanction their party for pursuing peace. This effect is substantively larger than the violent party response. However, we caution that a peaceful response to violence that is legitimized is less common in our empirical context than violence. For Hindus who are not BJP supporters, approval of the peaceful response is 0.36 in the absence of legitimization. When receiving information justifying violence, however, a peaceful response by the BJP increases approval among non-copartisan Hindus from 0.36 to 0.53.

Taken together, these results imply divergent responses for co-and rival partisans, which we illustrate in Figures 2B and 2C. When provided with information legitimizing violence, we observe a divergence in approval for the BJP's response among Hindu BJP supporters and non-supporters. BJP supporters indicate greater approval of the party's role in violence than non-supporters. Moreover, BJP supporters disapprove of the party's peaceful response, while non-

[32] We expected that non-supporters would show lower approval of violence when it is legitimized, compared to the no legitimization condition. It may be that non-supporters are inured to legitimization, since it is common yet unpersuasive to them. However, we note a strong effect for Muslims: When provided with legitimizing information, Muslims' approval for the BJP's violent response is -0.44 (CI: -0.54, -0.34), but approval for the BJP's peace response is statistically indistinguishable from 0 (Mean = -0.04; CI: -0.16, 0.07).

supporters approve of it. Thus, legitimization and the BJP's participation in violence jointly produce a divergence in approval among co-and rival partisans, supporting hypothesis 2.

**Figure 2. Approval of the BJP's role in violence.**

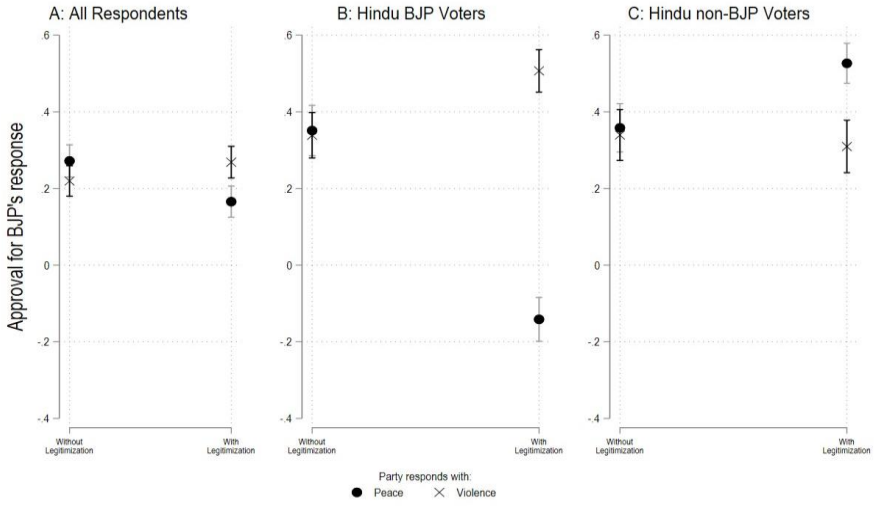


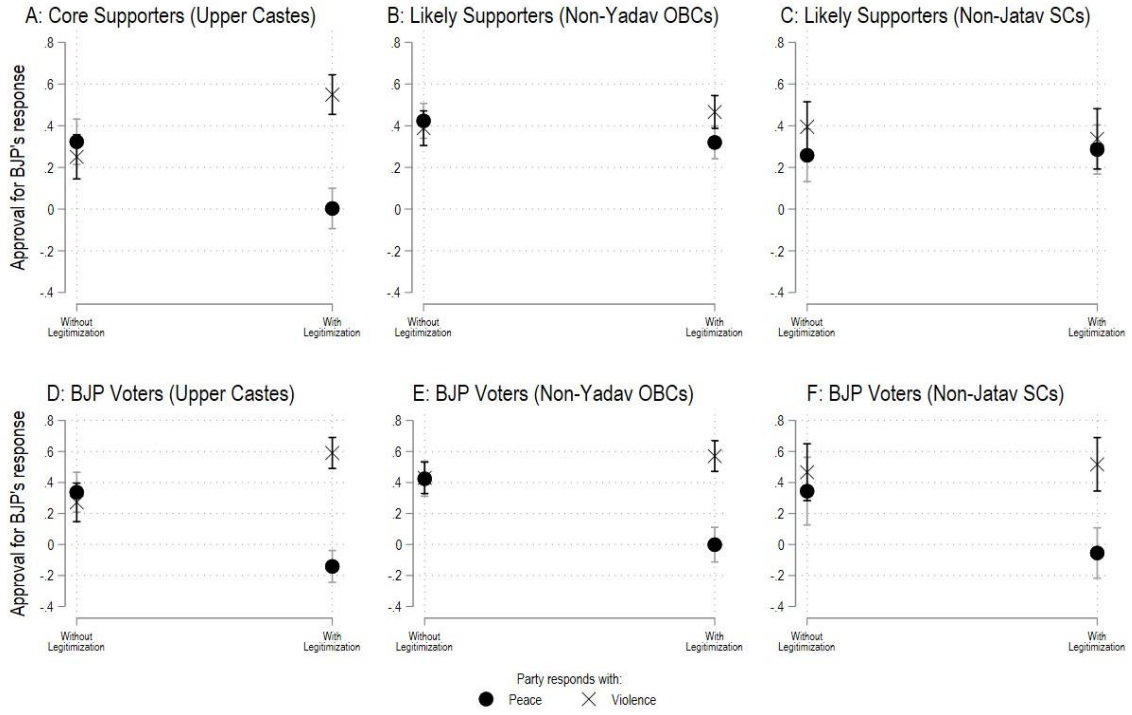

Figure 2A estimated from Column M1 and Figures 2B & 2C estimated from Column M2 of Table III.

One possible alternative explanation for voters' punishment of peace over violence could be that they disapprove of peacefully engaging with someone who insulted their religion. For this to be plausible, however, all Hindus —including those who do not support the BJP— should reject the peaceful dialogue. This is not what we find. Only Hindu BJP voters reject peace; non-copartisan Hindus approve of the BJP's initiation of a peaceful dialogue. Thus, our results show that voters' responses are not motivated by hostile out-group attitudes shared by all Hindus, but hold only for Hindus who support the party actively mobilizing religious tensions for partisan gain. Rather than innate prejudice against minorities, our findings demonstrate the importance of the political mobilization of religious grievances.

**Heterogenous responses, caste identity:** We next explore effects for core and persuadable voters of the BJP, distinguishing between core voters (upper-caste Hindus) and persuadable voters (non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav SCs; for demographics, see Figure 1). We present these

results visually in Figure 3.[33] Core voters, that is upper caste Hindus, approve of the BJP's participation in violence and disapprove of peaceful dialogue (Figure 3A). Here, rejection of peace means that net approval for the BJP's initiation of a dialogue after being exposed to legitimizing information is statistically indistinguishable from 0 (mean approval = 0, confidence interval = -0.09 , 0.10); in contrast, net approval for the BJP's participation in violence after being exposed to legitimizing information is 0.55 (CI = 0.45 , 0.64).

**Figure 3. Approval of the BJP's role in violence, by core and persuadable voters.**




Figures 3A to 3F estimated from Columns M1 to M6 of Table D.1, respectively.

Among persuadable voters, non-Yadav OBCs respond similarly to core voters, preferring violence over peace (see Figure 3B). However, non-Yadav OBCs do not punish the BJP for pursuing a peaceful dialogue. This means net approval is positive for both violence and peace, but approval for violence is greater than that for peace, and approval for violence is statistically distinct from that for peace. The substantive effects established in our survey are small;

[33] For regression results, see Appendix D.

however, in the context of an election campaign, voters will be exposed to these claims repeatedly, implying that violence and its legitimization could be a successful strategy to attract support from persuadable voters.

Non-Jatav SCs, the other demographic group considered persuadable to vote for the BJP, are indifferent between violence or peace (see Figure 3C). There are several plausible explanations for this divergence between non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav SCs: First, our sample size for non-Jatav SC is small (N=407; they constitute roughly 10% of the population). A second explanation could be that in 2022, the BJP mobilized non-Yadav OBCs directly while it mobilized non-Jatav SCs indirectly through a pre-election alliance with the Apna Dal and Nishad Party. Thus, for non-Jatav SCs, their primary partisan affiliation might be with a BJP ally and not BJP directly.

Finally, among respondents who actually voted for the BJP, there is no difference across caste groups, indicating the BJP's grasp of their voters' preferences (compare Figures 3E and 3F to Figure 3D).

## Discussion: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Violence Parties

Our argument and findings stand in contrast to prior work demonstrating voter punishment. While voters may punish violent politicians in the abstract, our results show that when violence is legitimized —which more closely resembles empirical realities— voters do not exert such punishment. We note some additional points to strengthen and expand on these findings (see also appendix for full discussion). First, to demonstrate the process of how politicians legitimize violence in the empirical context we study, we systematically examined campaign speeches during the 2022 elections (see appendix F.1). In these speeches, parties blame rivals for violence and provide voters with biased information, explaining why voters struggle to punish violent politicians. Both BJP and SP —the two main parties in Uttar Pradesh— accused each other of inciting and participating in communal conflict. Second, we present two illustrative cases of violence to demonstrate politicians' ability to displace blame. One relates

to the inversion of culpability for the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, claims that were revived during the 2022 campaign (see appendix F.2). The other case relates to a lethal incident of violence involving a local BJP leader as the perpetrator, but that nevertheless did not result in electoral punishment for the BJP (see appendix F.3). Third, using additional questions from our survey (following the experiment), we show that voters have trouble attributing violence to parties.[34] Asking respondents about their views on political violence, two-thirds agreed that political parties incite violence, but less than one-fourth attribute the violence to their own party.[35] This shows that even in contexts where violence is common, and where voters attribute this violence to parties, few voters are able or willing to attribute it to their own party. While voter sanctioning by co-partisans would be most important for preventing parties from engaging in violence, co-partisans are least likely to attribute blame to their own party. Hence, we conclude that the legitimization of violence and motivated reasoning hinder citizens' ability to hold violent politicians accountable.

We also interrogate two possible objections to our findings, discussed in more detail in the appendix. One concern is that we exposed respondents to a mild incident of violence. We note once more that low-intensity violence is representative of the events used for narrative construction in our empirical context, and that such violence is preferable for ethical reasons. Nevertheless, based on additional analyses, it seems unlikely that voters in this empirical

[34] We included two questions (after our experiment) to explore this question. First, we asked respondents if they think political parties provoke violence. Next, we asked respondents to name the party which in their opinion provokes violence.

[35] Two thirds of respondents agreed that political parties incite violence in Uttar Pradesh. Among BJP and SP voters, 62% and 71% respectively agreed that parties provoke violence. However, only 21% of BJP and 24% of SP voters said that their own party incites violence, with most voters blaming rival parties for violence.

context punish politicians for more serious violence; in Appendix F.2, we show that the incumbent party was able to displace blame and benefit from violence in the Muzaffarnagar riots, which killed more than 60 people, predominantly Muslims. In Appendix F.3, we analyze lethal violence in Lakhimpur that occurred in the runup to the 2022 elections. Even though the BJP was linked to violence, the party nevertheless succeeded in displacing blame, protecting the perpetrators from prosecution, and seemed to reap electoral benefits rather than punishment in this district. Finally, in Appendix G, we demonstrate inferentially that co-partisans support violent politicians even when accused of physical violence against outgroups. Across these analyses, including for far more serious incidents of violence, we do not find evidence of punishment for violence from core or persuadable voters.[36]

A second concern about our findings is that they might be limited to religious violence. It could be that sacrilege is *sui generis* in triggering a response from citizens (Brubaker, 2015). To adjudicate between the effect of sacrilege and other violence legitimized by politicians, we included additional questions in our survey (for full details, see Appendix G). We randomly exposed three sub-groups (Muslims, scheduled caste Hindus, and other Hindus) to legitimized and non-legitimized frames on routine forms of religious and non-religious violence. These frames test whether sacrilege always induces support for violence, and whether parties can successfully instrumentalize non-religious incidents to vilify the out-group. Results show that

[36] We are not claiming that all violence — regardless of its intensity — can garner the approval of voters. Intense violence is costly, destructive, and brings national and international attention, which politicians prefer to avoid. But changes in media landscapes mean that politicians can use social media to share information about low-intensity violence with voters (Daxecker, Fjelde and Prasad, 2024). Hence, while the decline in the intensity of religious violence in India is a positive development (Ahuja and Kapur, 2023), it need not imply a decline in lower-intensity forms of violence or prejudice.

the legitimization of violence by politicians is important for inducing voter support for violence, even for events involving sacrilege; and that parties can successfully legitimize non-religious events that vilify the out-group.

The appendix provides supplementary materials and analyses. We present summary statistics and balance tests in appendix A, the survey methodology in appendix B, discussion of ethical considerations in appendix C, and supplementary tables in appendix D. We also include full results and discussion for the second vignette designed for Muslim respondents in appendix E. Moreover, we expand on the above discussion of narratives around violence and blame displacement in appendix F, and include full results for the assessment of different forms of violence and responses in appendix G. Finally, we include the pre-analysis plan in appendix H.

## Conclusion

Do voters in democracies punish political parties for engaging in violence? Centering our argument on core and swing voters, we establish that voters frequently not only fail to sanction politicians for using violence, but even reward them for it under some conditions. We argue that political parties can use violent events involving out-groups or rival partisans to increase support from core and persuadable voters through claims around violence that portray it as a response to a threat, injustice, or provocation. In the "fog of war" surrounding violence, powerful politicians insert incidents into master cleavages that blame out-groups or rival parties for violence that they may have helped incite, anticipating that core and persuadable voters process such information along partisan lines. Our theory implies that voters are more likely to condone violence when provided with a narrative, and that copartisans are likely to approve of a party's violent behavior once violence is legitimized. Based on a vignette experiment embedded in a representative survey conducted in Uttar Pradesh, India, we find strong support for these expectations.

Our study focuses on the politicization of religious violence by the incumbent party in India's most populous state, but has implications beyond this context. Parties in other Indian states seem to have used violence to mobilize support on behalf of a presumed majority. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena has profited from violence targeting Muslims and migrants from other states (Banerjee, 2021). In Bihar, the Congress party relied on caste violence to win elections Kumar (2006). In rural West Bengal, Jharkhand, and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) incited class-based violence against landlords to fortify their credentials as the champion of the poor (Bhadra and Mandal, 2013). More recently in West Bengal, the All-India Trinamool Congress (TMC) has benefited from violent class-based mobilization, while the BJP has tried to expand its support with religious polarization (Nath, 2019). What these examples show is that parties in a variety of contexts appear to use religious, ethnic, or class-based violence for electoral gain. Hence, our findings may apply to other states, parties, and forms of violence.

We also see parallels with developments in the Global North. In industrialized democracies, violence will be less intense, less common, and less directly sponsored by politicians. But politicians in wealthy democracies nevertheless instrumentalize violence and extremist rhetoric against out-groups, purportedly on behalf of a majority (Varshney, 2021). In the United States and Europe, right-wing parties claiming to represent the interests of the majority have used divisive rhetoric and violence against minorities and immigrants for electoral benefit (Bartels, 2020; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Dancygier, 2023). Presumably, the purpose of this violence is not to coerce the outgroup, but rather to mobilize a majority group that condones or supports extreme strategies. These similarities require further study.

Overall, our findings raise concerns about democracy as a peaceful method of processing conflict (Przeworski, 2018). While it may protect against large-scale violence, politicians in democracies can seemingly benefit from exclusionary and violent practices targeting minorities, marginalized groups, or non-citizens.

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## Biographical Statements

Ursula Daxecker is Professor of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. She is interested in political violence, electoral politics, and democratic backsliding.

Neeraj Prasad is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. His research interests include voting behavior, political violence, and identity politics.

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# Appendix for "Demanding Violence, Punishing Peace: Support for Party Violence in India"

(A) Descriptive Statistics & Baseline Tests

(B) Survey Methodology & Field Report

(C) Ethical Considerations: Extended Discussion

(D) Supplementary Tables

(E) Vignette for Muslim Respondents: Full Results and Discussion

(F) Supplementary Analysis: Narratives and Blame Displacement

(G) Supplementary Analysis: Variation in Violence and Party Responses

(H) Registered Pre-Analysis Plan

# A Descriptives & Baseline Tests

TABLE A.1. Summary statistics

| Variable | Observations | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Approval for violence | 4298 | .31 | .697 |
| Approval for party response | 4303 | .23 | .718 |
| Legitimization of violence | 4783 | .5 | .5 |
| Response (party participates in violence) | 4783 | .508 | .5 |
| Upper caste | 4783 | .198 | .399 |
| Hindu OBC (Yadav) | 4783 | .116 | .32 |
| Hindu OBC (Non-Yadav) | 4783 | .274 | .446 |
| Hindu SC (Non-Jatav) | 4783 | .091 | .287 |
| Muslim | 4783 | .176 | .381 |
| ln(Age) | 4783 | 3.665 | .333 |
| Female | 4783 | .463 | .499 |

TABLE A.2. Covariate balance

| | Treatment Assignment | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | M2 | M3 | M4 |
| Hindu | 17.340 | 17.314 | 17.338 |
| | (612.852) | (598.435) | (632.103) |
| Muslim | 17.173 | 17.298 | 17.132 |
| | (612.852) | (598.435) | (632.103) |
| BJP Voter | -0.017 | 0.133 | 0.097 |
| | (0.090) | (0.089) | (0.091) |
| Age | -0.067 | -0.227 | -0.126 |
| | (0.125) | (0.124) | (0.127) |
| Female | 0.127 | 0.122 | -0.009 |
| | (0.083) | (0.083) | (0.085) |
| Constant | -17.048 | -16.487 | -16.870 |
| | (612.852) | (598.435) | (632.103) |
| Observations | 1,200 | 1,248 | 1,130 |
| Log lik. | -6504.757 | | |
| Chi-squared | 245.757 | | |

Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}$ $p < 0.05$, $^{**}$ $p < 0.01$, $^{***}$ $p < 0.001$. M1= Peaceful response by party in the absence of legitimization of violence. M2= Peaceful response by party in the presence of legitimization of violence. M3= Violent response by party in the absence of legitimization of violence. M4= Violent response by party in the presence of legitimization of violence. M1 is the base model with 1,205 observations.

# B Survey Methodology & Field Report

The survey was carried out in February and March 2022 by Cicero Associates, an Indian survey organization with extensive experience. A total sample of 4783 respondents was achieved. Interviews covered 240 polling booths across 80 state legislative constituencies of Uttar Pradesh. These 80 constituencies were selected after randomly drawing 5 sets of 80 constituencies out of the total 403 legislative constituencies in Uttar Pradesh. We compared each set for levels of demographic and political representatives using data from the 2011 Census of India and past election results from the Election Commission of India. We selected the most representative set. Within each sampled constituency, we selected three polling booths randomly. Respondents were sampled from the latest electoral rolls for each sampled polling booth. Electoral rolls are publicly available and prepared by the Election Commission of India. For each of the 240 polling booths, we sampled 30 voters. The achieved sample is representative of the social and political demography of Uttar Pradesh (see Table B.1).

| | Census | Survey |
|---|---|---|
| Rural | 68.2% | 77.7% |
| Female | 48.7% | 48.8% |
| SC | 23.0% | 25.3% |
| ST | 5.5% | 6.0% |
| Hindu | 70.5% | 75.3% |
| Muslim | 27.0% | 23.0% |

TABLE B.1. Sample demographic profile

The data collection method employed was CAPI (Computer Assisted Interpersonal Interviewing). All interviews were conducted face-to-face using Cicero's in-house Android application for data collection and transmission. Before starting the questionnaire, each respondent's informed consent was recorded after reading out the 'Statement of Informed Consent'. All voting related questions were asked using a dummy Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in order to maintain confidentiality; meaning that the enumerators were not aware

of the vote recorded by the respondents. The voting trends obtained in the sample closely resemble actual electoral outcomes (see Table B.2).

| | Sample Estimates | Actual Vote Shares |
|---|---|---|
| BJP | 43.00% | 42.32% |
| SP | 36.36% | 35.84% |
| BSP | 12.88% | 13.67% |
| INC | 2.33% | 2.86% |
| Others | 4.65% | 5.54% |

TABLE B.2. Vote Shares: Actual Results Compared to Survey Sample

All survey experiments and treatments were programmed in the application. During fielding, geo-tagging of respondents was used to monitor enumerator movement, and variables such as time stamps helped in identifying systematic errors. A rigorous back check of 15% of the total interviews ensured high standards of data quality. All field investigators were trained in data collection methods and were supervised by a team of experienced surveyors. The data was saved on a secure cloud server. After completion of the interviews, geo-tags were removed from the survey.

The training workshop for the survey was conducted in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh on $20^{th}$ February, 2022. This workshop was led by a trainer from Cicero Ltd and one of the coauthors of this article. The fieldwork for the survey was concluded on $9^{th}$ March, 2022. Election results were declared on $10^{th}$ March, 2022.

# C Ethical Considerations

This section elaborates measures taken to address ethical considerations, including protocols to obtain informed consent and maintain confidentiality, to minimize potential harm for respondents and enumerators, and for debriefing, which we discuss in detail below. Our survey received approval from the University of Amsterdam's Ethics Review Board #2022-AISSR-14528.

To protect the integrity of respondents, enumerators were instructed to interview individuals in their homes. Interviews started after respondents provided verbal consent to participate in the study. The consent process entailed informing respondents that participation is voluntary, that consent can be withdrawn at any point, that data collected will be treated with confidentiality, and that the respondent's identity will not be disclosed. Respondents were also informed about the institutional affiliation and contact details of the responsible researchers. We did not record or share the precise location information for respondents.[34]

Information about violence against identity or partisan out-groups can pose risks to respondents and enumerators. We take several steps to reduce the risk of harm. First, our experimental designs are drawn from violent events that have actually happened. The incident in our vignette –vandalism of Salman Kurshid's house – was drawn from a widely circulated Hindi newspaper. The description of the event, legitimization of the vandalism, and BJP's role in it correspond to what had actually transpired. We acknowledge that that treatment conditions for the peaceful response (C1, C2, and T1, C2) deviate from the actual event. Since a peaceful response is normatively desirable, we consider this deviation as an acceptable tradeoff for maintaining the internal validity of the experimental design. Second, we omit some information, such as precise location information or dates, which

[34]The survey organization used GPS tracking of enumerators as a quality control measure. However, the organization did not share this information with the authors and was required to delete location information after completion of the interviews.

could potentially mobilize people. Third, we choose a fairly mild incident involving an act of vandalism rather than violence against people. A mild incident is less likely to upset respondents while still representative of the context. Fourth, an in-person survey provides us with greater control over how respondents interact with the information. Enumerators are instructed to terminate the survey if respondents seem uncomfortable with the information we share with them. We are also not using any visuals, which could more easily upset people.

As a final safeguard, we debrief respondents at the end. After completing the survey, we informed respondents that we have shared information with them for academic purposes only, and that some of the information shared with them was not based on actual news. We also reiterated that respondents' answers are completely anonymous and that no information about them will be stored. Finally, we provided respondents with contact information of the researchers involved.

# D Supplementary Tables

TABLE D.1. Approval for party participating in violence (For Figure 3A, 3B, and 3C)

| For reference see Figure 3 | M1<br>5A | M2<br>5B | M3<br>5C |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Approval for party response | | |
| Legitimization of violence | -0.087* | -0.165*** | -0.168*** |
| | (0.035) | (0.039) | (0.034) |
| Response (party participates in violence) | 0.005 | -0.003 | -0.034 |
| | (0.036) | (0.040) | (0.035) |
| Legitimization × Response | 0.080 | 0.232*** | 0.256*** |
| | (0.051) | (0.056) | (0.048) |
| Upper caste | -0.042 | -0.064$^{\dagger}$ | -0.063$^{\dagger}$ |
| | (0.063) | (0.038) | (0.038) |
| Yadav OBC | 0.077$^{\dagger}$ | 0.078$^{\dagger}$ | 0.077$^{\dagger}$ |
| | (0.041) | (0.042) | (0.042) |
| Non-Yadav OBC | 0.106** | 0.104$^{\dagger}$ | 0.106** |
| | (0.034) | (0.054) | (0.034) |
| Non-Jatav SC | -0.007 | -0.005 | -0.109 |
| | (0.041) | (0.042) | (0.070) |
| Legitimization × [Caste$^{A}$] | -0.233** | 0.062 | 0.196* |
| | (0.077) | (0.066) | (0.089) |
| Response × [Caste$^{A}$] | -0.077 | -0.032 | 0.171$^{\dagger}$ |
| | (0.081) | (0.068) | (0.090) |
| Legitimization × Response × [Caste$^{A}$] | 0.539*** | -0.051 | -0.341** |
| | (0.108) | (0.094) | (0.131) |
| BJP Voter | -0.100*** | -0.098*** | -0.100*** |
| | (0.024) | (0.024) | (0.024) |
| Age | 0.028 | 0.023 | 0.023 |
| | (0.033) | (0.033) | (0.033) |
| Female | 0.004 | 0.005 | 0.006 |
| | (0.023) | (0.023) | (0.023) |
| Constant | 0.263* | 0.287* | 0.298* |
| | (0.125) | (0.126) | (0.126) |
| R-squared | 0.041 | 0.031 | 0.032 |
| N | 3540 | 3540 | 3540 |

$^{\dagger}$ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. $^{A}$ [Caste] in Column M1 denotes 'Upper caste', in Column M2 denotes 'Non-Yadav OBC', and in Column M3 denotes 'Non-Jatav SC'.

| For reference see Figure 3 | M4<br>3D | M5<br>3E | M6<br>3F |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Approval for party response | | |
| Legitimization of violence | -0.456*** | -0.484*** | -0.471*** |
| | (0.053) | (0.055) | (0.047) |
| Response (party participates in violence) | -0.001 | -0.036 | -0.034 |
| | (0.051) | (0.058) | (0.047) |
| Legitimization × Response | 0.553*** | 0.684*** | 0.663*** |
| | (0.072) | (0.076) | (0.064) |
| Upper caste | -0.004 | 0.012 | 0.012 |
| | (0.081) | (0.048) | (0.048) |
| Yadav OBC | 0.161* | 0.162* | 0.162* |
| | (0.070) | (0.070) | (0.070) |
| Non-Yadav OBC | 0.150** | 0.127† | 0.149** |
| | (0.047) | (0.076) | (0.047) |
| Non-Jatav SC | 0.072 | 0.070 | 0.005 |
| | (0.059) | (0.059) | (0.118) |
| Legitimization × [Caste$^A$] | -0.022 | 0.059 | 0.072 |
| | (0.094) | (0.092) | (0.138) |
| Response × [Caste$^A$] | -0.064 | 0.042 | 0.156 |
| | (0.100) | (0.090) | (0.145) |
| Legitimization × Response × [Caste$^A$] | 0.244† | -0.119 | -0.213 |
| | (0.130) | (0.124) | (0.188) |
| Age | 0.026 | 0.024 | 0.025 |
| | (0.045) | (0.045) | (0.045) |
| Female | -0.012 | -0.012 | -0.011 |
| | (0.030) | (0.030) | (0.030) |
| Constant | 0.186 | 0.193 | 0.188 |
| | (0.174) | (0.174) | (0.173) |
| R-squared | 0.130 | 0.127 | 0.127 |
| N | 1808 | 1808 | 1808 |

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. $^A$ [Caste] in Column M1 denotes 'Upper caste', in Column M2 denotes 'Non-Yadav OBC', and in Column M3 denotes 'Non-Jatav SC'.

# E Vignette for Muslim Respondents: Full Results and Discussion

In addition to the vignette described in Table I, the survey included a second vignette ($E_2$) designed for Muslim respondents (note that Hindu and Muslim respondents were shown both vignettes; what differed was the order). The vignette describes the Samajwadi Party's response to violence against a Hindu leader closely aligned with the BJP.

| $E2$ | Information on Violence | |
|---|---|---|
| Party Response | Without Legitimization ($C_1$) | With Legitimization ($T_1$) |
| Peaceful ($C_2$) | Recently, Sant Yati Narsinghanand's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. Condemning the violence, SP initiated a peaceful dialogue with Yati Narsinghanand. | Recently, Sant Yati Narsinghanand's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. This incident happened after Yati gave a speech calling for Hindus to arm themselves and be prepared to kill Muslims. Condemning the violence, SP initiated a peaceful dialogue with Yati Narsinghanand. |
| Violent ($T_2$) | Recently, Sant Yati Narsinghanand's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. SP participated in the violence against Yati Narsinghanand. | Recently, Sant Yati Narsinghanand's residence in Uttarakhand was vandalized. This incident happened after Yati gave a speech calling for Hindus to arm themselves and be prepared to kill Muslims. SP participated in the violence against Yati Narsinghanand. |

TABLE E.1. 2×2 Factorial Design: Vignette Text

Table E.2 replicates Table III for vignette ($E_2$). Across specifications, we observe that co-partisans have a higher net approval for their party's response. However, we do not find any statistically significant differences between approval for violence or peace, even after provision of information legitimizing violence, and even among Muslims as a group. Muslims are often the victims of violence; therefore, their responses may be subject to distinct mechanisms. We suggest three explanations for this divergence in findings between Muslim and Hindu respondents. First, there are important differences in party strategies when it comes to the

TABLE E.2. Approval of party's role

| DV | M1 | (M1, se) | M2 | (M2, se) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Approval for party response | | | |
| Legitimization of violence | 0.050† | (0.030) | 0.047 | (0.040) |
| Response (party participates in violence) | 0.017 | (0.031) | 0.047 | (0.041) |
| Legitimization × Response | -0.021 | (0.043) | -0.040 | (0.056) |
| SP Voter | 0.104*** | (0.023) | 0.177*** | (0.053) |
| Legitimization × SP Voter | | | 0.048 | (0.069) |
| Response × SP Voter | | | -0.050 | (0.074) |
| Legitimization × Response × SP Voter | | | -0.034 | (0.099) |
| Muslim | -0.058† | (0.030) | 0.198* | (0.085) |
| Legitimization × Muslim | | | -0.135 | (0.118) |
| Response × Muslim | | | -0.166 | (0.120) |
| Legitimization × Response × Muslim | | | 0.242 | (0.167) |
| SP Voter × Muslim | | | -0.417*** | (0.121) |
| Legitimization × SP Voter × Muslim | | | 0.105 | (0.165) |
| Response × SP Voter × Muslim | | | 0.167 | (0.167) |
| Legitimization × Response × SP Voter × Muslim | | | -0.121 | (0.233) |
| Age | 0.048 | (0.032) | 0.048 | (0.032) |
| Female | 0.035† | (0.021) | 0.036† | (0.021) |
| Constant | 0.131 | (0.121) | 0.107 | (0.122) |
| R-squared | 0.007 | | 0.015 | |
| N | 4286 | | 4286 | |

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. The exact phrasing of the DV is as follows: "We just informed you of SP's response to vandalism. How much do you approve or disapprove of SP's response?"

interpretation of violence. While the BJP legitimizes Hindu violence against Muslims, the SP — drawing on Hindus and Muslims as voters — generally downplays communal violence rather than drawing attention to it. Second, responses may reflect strategic behavior on the part of Muslim voters. As members of the minority, Muslims may understand that endorsing violence against the majority is not a viable strategy in a democracy. Third, Muslims are the minority group often targeted with extreme rhetoric or violence in this context, which would imply that they have good reasons to abhor dialogue and punish peace with Sant Yati, an inflammatory figure with a record of anti-Muslim bigotry. Yet our findings show the opposite, namely that Hindu BJP voters punish peace while Muslims do not. It could be that Muslims dislike the idea of a dialogue but cannot express their disdain, considering the prominence of Hindu nationalism in UP and widespread tolerance of violence against Muslims. We note, however, that Muslim voters do approve of violence in the aggregate. Moreover, supplementary findings in Appendix G show that Muslim respondents express

a preference for violent retribution over peaceful dialogue or no response when presented with an injustice frame (an incident involving Muslims being framed in false charges of cow trading). Since our sample size for Muslim respondents is limited, we leave more systematic exploration of these findings for future research.

# F Supplementary Analysis: Narratives and Blame Displacement

## F.1 Campaign Speeches from the 2022 Elections in UP

In this section, we present evidence from the 2022 election campaign to illustrate the partisan production of contested claims about violence. Competing party narratives will make it challenging for voters to attribute violence. For this analysis, we coded excerpts of campaign speeches published in the Times of India[35] and the Dainik Jagaran[36] between $1^{st}$ December, 2021 and $7^{th}$ January, 2022.[37] We identified 148 unique events involving a campaign speech. We coded each speech identifying all the labels that BJP and SP use to characterize each other.[38] The third most frequently used label by BJP for SP was 'communal'. In India, communal is used to describe actors who sow divisions and violence between Hindus and Muslims. Hence, by attaching this label to the SP, the BJP implies that the SP incites Hindu-Muslim divisions and violence, and that its tenure coincided with an increase in the number of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh.[39] Likewise, 'communal' was the fourth most frequently used label by SP when describing BJP.[40] During the 2022 campaign, the incumbent and its main rival accused each other of provoking communal violence. Importantly, the BJP, despite being more frequently directly involved in violence, successfully created a narrative blaming other parties for communal violence.

[35]English newspaper; Lucknow Edition

[36]Hindi newspaper; Lucknow, Varanasi, Aligarh, Meerut, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Moradabad, Agra and Bareilly Nagar editions

[37]The model code of conduct was implemented on $7^{th}$ January, 2022. After this date, all campaign events came under regulation of campaign laws and direct monitoring by the Election Commission of India.

[38]For each speech, we identify the subject (e.g., BJP), the object (e.g., SP), and the descriptive or the adjectives (e.g., Corrupt) used by the Subject in describing the Object.

[39]The top five labels by BJP for SP were i) Mis-governance and lack of development, ii) Criminal and mafia, iii) Communal, iv) Corrupt, and v) Nepotistic.

[40]The top five labels by SP for BJP were i) Unemployment, ii) Anti-farmer, iii) Lack of respect for the rule of law, iv) Communal, and v) Anti-poor.

## F.2 Muzaffarnagar Riots

Our theory higlights the importance of diverting and displacing blame; here, we provide a qualititative example of how parties can benefit from serious violence they themselves instigated. A prominent case of blame displacement is the Hindu-Muslim riot of Muzaffarnagar in 2013. The BJP's role in inciting the riot is well documented by academics, civil society, and the media (Berenschot, 2015; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Malik, 2021; *Muzaffarnagar 2013: Violence by Political Design*, 2013; *Muzaffarnagar: Post Riot Assessment*, 2013; Rao et al., 2014).[41] Despite this, in 2022, the BJP used the Muzaffarnagar riot to label SP as anti-Hindu, and even falsely accused them of inciting the riot. The Union Home Minister and the State Chief Minister organised door-to-door campaigns in a riot affected area (Kairana) to build-up a narrative of Hindu victimization under the SP rule.[42] The Prime Minister alleged an (invented) exodus of Hindus who faced loot, plunder, and harassment from Muslims.[43] The incumbent's ability to campaign on the perpetrators' behalf, claiming that they in fact had been victims, shows politicians' ability to falsify what happened in violent events (Brass, 1997).

[41] While the riots happened while the SP was in power in 2013, extensive evidence documents the BJP's responsibility.

[42] *Amit Shah meets 'exodus-affected' families in Kairana as he begins door-to-door campaign in western U.P.* (2022); Ramachandran (2022)

[43] *Fake-xodus? Reports dispute BJP's claims on 'Kairana exodus' after probe-Politics News , Firstpost* (2016): "Amit Shah [Union Home Minister], in his address to the National Executive on Monday, had said, "The migration happening in Kairana due to violence is a matter of serious concern. There is an atmosphere of violence...But according to an *Indian Express* investigation, which tracked down 22 people who figure in Singh's list, five had died, four had moved out of Kairana looking for better opportunities, 10 left more than 10 years ago, three had moved fearing "local criminals". Out of 118 names submitted by the UP police and the Shamli district administration, who are checking on names in Singh's list, found similar patterns: five dead, 12 still present, 46 moved out since 2011, 55 moved out at least 6-11 years ago, according to The Indian Express report". See also Venkataramakrishnan (2016)

## F.3 Violence in Lakhimpur Kheri

A severe incident of violence occurred in Lakhimpur Kheri on $3^{rd}$ October, 2021. Protesting farmers attempted to prevent the senior BJP leader and the incumbent Deputy Chief Minister, Keshav Prasad Maurya, from reaching a campaign event by blocking his route. A local BJP leader, Ashish Teni drove his vehicle over the protesting farmers. Four farmers died on the spot. Riots after this incident claimed another four lives. Since the event was captured on camera, there was no denying the link between BJP and the violence. Furthermore, the culprit's father is a senior BJP leader and a Union Minister in charge of internal security, which includes police and paramilitary forces. The BJP sided with the perpetrator and openly protected him from police and judicial investigation. If voters sanction severe violence, this incident should have hurt the BJP, since the BJP's culpability and involvement in protecting the perpetrator were apparent. But there appeared to be no negative impact on the outcome of the assembly elections. The Lakhimpur Kheri Parliamentary constituency which is represented by the culprit's father has eight state assembly seats. The BJP made a clean sweep of all eight seats and its vote-share remained stable compared to the previous election. There were numerous events of violence targeting Muslim preceding the elections, consistent with routine violence against Muslims in Uttar Pradesh (Pai and Kumar, 2018). The incumbent party is often directly or indirectly involved, either through participating in, inciting, or condoning violence. The incumbent also fails to use the security apparatus to suppress violence or punish the perpetrators (Malik, 2021). Despite that, voters did not punish the BJP at the polls in the 2022 elections.

# G Supplementary analysis: Variation in violence and party response

In this section, we examine whether voters are particularly sensitive to sacrilege, and whether the political legitimization of violence matters for voter responses across different types of violence. Since politicians are strategic with regard to the frames they legitimize for different subsets of voters, we divide our sample into three mutually exclusive groups: i) scheduled castes (SC), ii) non-SC Hindus, i.e. upper castes and other backward classes (OBC), and iii) Muslims. For each group, we construct two frames around potentially offensive violence, one of which is frequently legitimized, while the other is not. Furthermore, the frames relate to religious and non-religious issues. We derive these scenarios from newspaper reports, meaning that they replicate routinely occurring real-world incidents. We randomly expose respondents in each group to one of two offending frames (for the full text of scenarios, see Table G.1). After the frame, we expose respondents in each sub-group to three party responses to the incident: (a) a party seeking revenge through physical violence against the culprits, (b) a party initiating peaceful dialogue, and (c) a party doing nothing.[44] We ask respondents to indicate their approval for each of these three responses. To avoid order effects, we randomize the order in which respondents see the three responses. We report the mean approval for the three different responses by a political party. We also report two relative approval scores: one measuring difference in approval for the violent and the peaceful outcome and the other measuring the difference in approval for the violent and the no response outcome.

We begin with Hindu respondents belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC); SCs ranks low on the traditional caste hierarchy among Hindus. We randomly expose 50% of the group to a frame involving religious sacrilege by upper caste Hindus and the other 50% to the same

[44] *Response 1*: Workers from a political party caught and beat up the culprits. *Response 2*: Workers from a political party held a peaceful dialogue with the culprits. *Response 3*: No need to take any action.

TABLE G.1. Approval for Violent Response to Offending Out-groups

| Scenario | Absolute Approval | | | Relative Approval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Violence | Peace | No Response | Violent−Peaceful | Violent−No Response |
| Scheduled Castes | | | | | |
| **Sacrilege**: There has been a report of some Upper castes desecrating a temple dedicated to Sant Ravidas | 0.27 | 0.31 | 0.25 | -0.03 | 0.03 |
| **Sacrilege**: There has been a report of some Muslims desecrating a Hindu temple | 0.26 | 0.14 | 0.22 | 0.12** | 0.04 |
| Upper, middle, and OBC Castes | | | | | |
| **Sacrilege**: There has been a report of some Muslims merchants trading cows for cow meat | 0.41 | 0.25 | 0.33 | 0.16*** | 0.08** |
| **Uppityness**: There has been a report of some Dalit boys found together with girls belonging to the upper castes | 0.38 | 0.46 | 0.35 | -0.08*** | 0.03 |
| Muslims | | | | | |
| **Sacrilege**: There has been a report of some Hindus desecrating and vandalizing a Masjid | 0.20 | 0.40 | 0.18 | -0.20*** | 0.02 |
| **Injustice**: There has been a report of some Muslims being attacked on false charges of trading cows | 0.21 | 0.03 | -0.20 | 0.18*** | 0.41*** |

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Relative approval for violence over peace = Approval for violence − Approval for peace. A positive score implies a relative preference for violence over peace and a negative score implies a preference for peace over violence. Relative approval for violence over no response = Approval for violence − Approval for no response.

frame but the perpetrators of sacrilege are Muslims. If sacrilege causes support for violence, it should not matter whether vandalism is perpetrated by upper caste Hindus or Muslims. Moreover, if material grievances motivate support for violence, SC respondents should support revenge against upper caste Hindus, who have a history of desecrating or disrespecting lower caste places of worship. Yet we find that net approval among SC respondents for sacrilege by upper caste Hindus is 0.27 for the violent response, 0.31 for the peaceful response, and 0.24 for no response. These numerical differences are not statistically significant. In contrast, when sacrilege is committed by Muslims, net approval is 0.25 for the violent response, 0.14 for the peaceful response, and 0.21 for no response. The difference between approval for violent and approval for peaceful response is statistically significant. Thus, when upper caste Hindus commit religious sacrilege, SC respondents are indifferent between pursuing peace or violence; yet when the same sacrilege is committed by Muslims, SC respondents indicate a relative preference for party violence over peaceful dialogue. These results support the importance of political legitimization; in the absence of partisan instrumentalization of violence targeting Muslims, it is unlikely that SCs would support violence against Muslims.

Second, we expose upper and middle caste Hindus to two frames, one in which Muslims are the offending outgroup and the other in which SCs (specifically, *Dalits*) are the offending outgroup. The incident involving Muslims as alleged perpetrators is similar to our main vignette, capturing violence that is often legitimized by the BJP. In contrast, the second incident involves the Scheduled Castes as presumed offenders, a group whose support the BJP is trying to mobilize. Upper caste and OBC respondents indicate a marginal preference for dialogue with SC Hindus, but violence with Muslims. We also note that this group has the highest net approval of violence compared to other groups in the sample. These findings demonstrate the importance of political legitimization.

Finally, we expose 50% of Muslim respondents to a sacrilege frame involving desecration of a Muslim place of worship and the other 50% to an injustice frame involving Muslims being attacked on false charges of cow trading. We find that after exposure to the sacrilege

frame, net approval among Muslim respondents is 0.20 for the violent response, 0.40 for the peaceful response, and 0.18 for no response. This means that Muslims prefer dialogue to violence as response to sacrilege. Yet, when exposed to the injustice frame, net approval among Muslim respondents is 0.21 for the violent response, 0.03 for the peaceful response, and -0.20 for no response. Thus, Muslim reject the no response or the peaceful response options, and endorse violence (although net approval for violence is lowest among Muslims) when exposed to injustice framing. These results indicate that rather than sacrilege, everyday experiences with (usually) false allegations of cow smuggling motivate support for violence among Muslims.

By testing different frames, we are able to demonstrate that legitimization of violence by politicians is important for inducing voter support for violence, even for events involving sacrilege; and that parties can successfully legitimize non-religious events that vilify the out-group.

# H Registered Pre-Analysis Plan

## Preface

We describe minor modifications of the PAP in this section. Rather than discussing partisan polarization as specified in our hypothesis in the pre-analysis plan, we discuss our results as a divergence in responses by co-partisans and non-supporters, and have omitted polarization as an outcome from the hypothesis. We made this change since reviewers correctly noted that our conceptualization of polarization deviated from common practice; we note that expectations, results, and substantive interpretation remain the same.

We pre-registered four additional hypotheses not presented in the main text. Three of these are supported by our results, but omitted to preserve space. One hypothesis relates to co-partisans response to a violent and peaceful party response.[45] This hypothesis is similar to H2 presented in the manuscript, and omitted to preserve space. A second hypothesis pertains to unconditional sanctioning of violence (that is, voters sanctioning violence regardless of who is the target or perpetrator).[46] We examine support for this hypothesis in the supplementary analysis of the article. Respondents' answer to questions about violence show that citizens do not always sanction violence, but instead say that it can sometimes be necessary. A third hypothesis is discussed in the manuscript and relates to sanctioning of violence against co-ethnics and co-partisans [47] While we can test this hypotheses based on responses to the secondary vignette presented in our survey,[48] space constraints limit a proper engagement, which we plan to conduct in a future study. A fourth hypothesis ex-

[45]Demand for violence: Voters support co-partisans targeting offending out-groups with violence and disapprove of co-partisans pursuing peace with offending out-groups.

[46]Unconditional Sanctioning of Violence: Voters disapprove of violence and sanction parties that incite or participate in violence.

[47]Conditional Sanctioning of Violence: Voters disapprove of violence aimed at co-partisans or co-ethnics and sanction parties that incite violence against co-partisans or co-ethnics.

[48]Recall that we showed both vignettes to Hindu and Muslim respondents, but we presented the vignette with violence against the out-group first.

amines conditional support for violence.[49] This hypothesis assesses whether out-group and rival partisan dynamics rather than context condition sanctioning or even lead to support for violence against out-groups. As discussed in the main text, hypotheses on conditional support are not supported; we find that neither Hindus nor Muslims support violence against the out-group in the absence of contextual information legitimizing violence.

Beyond these modifications, our study follows the pre-analysis plan exactly as below.

## Copy of Pre-Analysis Plan

## H.1 Study Description

Existing studies show that voters not only dislike violence but also sanction parties and candidates for using it. But how do we reconcile these findings with the fairly frequent incidence of political violence in democracies? Why do voters in contexts with free and fair elections, mature parties, and high electoral competition vote for violent politicians? We argue that the scope for sanctioning effects is more constrained than commonly assumed, being limited to non-supporters of the violent party. Core and swing voters, on the other hand, can be mobilized through violence rather than being put off by it, leading sanctioning to fail. We expect that voters are less likely to sanction violence when it is presented as a response to a threat or injustice. Moreover, when presented with a narrative justifying violence, we anticipate that voters not only support violence, but may even sanction peaceful responses by the violent party. Empirically, the paper relies on vignette experiments embedded in a representative survey of registered voters. We field our survey during elections in Uttar Pradesh, a state of more than 200 million in India, and a context that fits our scope conditions of free and fair elections while also experiencing persistent low-intensity violence against religious minorities.

[49]Conditional support for violence: Voters support violence against non-co-partisans or non-co-ethnics.

## H.2 Hypotheses

**Unconditional sanctioning of violence**

H1a: Voters disapprove of violence.

H1b: Voters sanction parties that incite or participate in violence.

**Conditional sanctioning of violence**

H2a: Voters disapprove of violence aimed at co-partisans or co-ethnics voters are indifferent to violence aimed at non-co-partisans and non-co-ethnics.

H2b: Voters sanction parties that incite violence against co-partisans or co-ethnics.

**Conditional support for violence**

H3a: Voters support violence against non-co-partisans or non-co-ethnics.

H3b: Voters support parties that use violence against non-co-partisans or non-co-ethnics.

**Support for contextual violence**

H4: Voters are more likely to support violence when they are provided with contextual information justifying violence. Some examples of contextual information include retaliation against insults or provocations by an out-group, necessity to protect cultural values of co-ethnics, or as a check against uppityness of marginalized groups.[50]

**Demand for violence**

H5: Voters support co-partisans targeting offending out-groups with violence and disapprove of co-partisans pursuing peace with offending out-groups.[51]

**Partisan polarization due to violence**

H6: When parties participate in violence against offending out-groups, their approval among supporters increases and their approval among non-supporters decreases; the centrifugal movement of partisan groups leads to an increase in partisan polarization.[52]

Alternatively, when parties pursue peace with offending out-groups, their approval among supporters decreases and their approval among non-supporters increases; the centripetal

[50] Corresponds to H3 of the manuscript
[51] Corresponds to H1 of the manuscript
[52] Corresponds to H2 of the manuscript

movement of partisan groups leads to a reduction in partisan polarization.

## H.3 Design Plan

A researcher randomly assigns treatments to study subjects, this includes field or lab experiments. This is also known as an intervention experiment and includes randomized controlled trials.

**The Vignettes** The survey uses a 2×2 factorial design, with vignettes offering variation on contextual information for violence and on party response to violence . On contextual information, one version of the vignette merely provides information on violence, while the other version also explains the motivation behind the violence. On party response to violence, parties may either pursue peace or participate in violence.

We have two variants of the factorial design: E1 pertains to violence against a Muslim leader and BJP's response, while E2 relates to violence against a Hindu leader and SP's response. Respondents are exposed to both E1 and E2. However, the order varies; each respondent is first exposed to violence against the religious out-groups and then violence against ingroups. Thus, Hindus see E1 and then E2, while the opposite for Muslims, E2 followed by E1.

**Direct Questions** We also use direct questions to examine support for violence. We divide respondents into three mutually exclusive groups: Muslims, marginalized Hindus, and all other Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs. For each group, we use newspaper reports to frame two potentially offensive.

**Randomization** When administering the experiment consisting of the vignettes, we will randomize on two fronts: First, we will randomize contextual information into two groups, one receiving news of violence without contextual information (C1) and the other receiving news of violence with contextual information (T1). Second, we will randomize party response

in to two groups, peaceful (C2) and violent (T2). Thus, we will have four groups: i) violence without context  peaceful response by party (C1, C2), ii) violence with context  peaceful response by party (T1, C2), iii) violence without context  violent response by party (C1, T2), iv) violence with context  violent response by party (T1, T2).

For direct questions, which offers three reactions to incidents of sacrilege, we will randomize the order in which the reactions appear.

## H.4 Sampling Plan

**Explanation of existing data** The survey is being implemented by a third-party survey company specializing in conducting exit polls. The surveys are not yet complete. We have not seen any raw and processed data.

**Data collection procedures** The survey will be implemented by Cicero Associates, which specializes in exit polling, surveys, and psephology. The survey includes a pretreatment section in which we ask questions on demographics, political attitudes, and media consumption, which are important as controls when examining hypotheses on respondent heterogeneity. In each booth, we will select 40 voters randomly from the voter list. Typically, each booth has between 500 to 1500 registered voters. Voters are listed by neighbourhood, and therefore the names of those living in the same neighbourhood appear proximate to each other as compared to those living in different neighbourhoods. To obtain a representative sample we will draw names from a cross-section of the voter list; because people tend to live in demographically clustered neighbourhoods and picking proximate names may result in an unbalanced sample. Each surveyor will be expected to interview 20 respondents starting serially from the first name on the list and continuing till she/he has completed 20 interviews.

**Sample size** 4800.

**Sample size rationale** To obtain a representative sample of Uttar Pradesh. Sample size determined from demographic data and past electoral results.

**Manipulated variables** We ask two questions after the vignette experiment. The first, Yv, measures approval or disapproval for the use of violence. The second, Yp, measures approval or disapproval of the party's response. Both questions use a five point likert scale spanning: strongly disapprove, disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, approve, and strongly approve. We map the strongly disapprove to strongly approve spectrum to numerical points, -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, and 1 respectively.

To estimate polarization, we will use one of two specifications developed in Lauka, McCoy and Firat (2018): MAP = Mass Affective Polarization and MAPS = Mass Affective Polarization Spread. In addition to these, we will also estimate polarization at the group level and at the individual level using indicators developed and/or used in Dalton (2008) and Bischof and Wagner (2019).

**Measured variables** We ask two questions after the vignette experiment. The first, Yv, measures approval or disapproval for the use of violence. The second, Yp, measures approval or disapproval of the party's response. Both questions use a five point likert scale spanning: strongly disapprove, disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, approve, and strongly approve. We map the strongly disapprove to strongly approve spectrum to numerical points, -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, and 1 respectively.

**Indices** We will estimate the spread in approval/disapproval rating for violence against ingroups (co-partisans or co-ethnics) and violence against out-groups (co-partisans or co-ethnics).

## H.5 Analysis Plan

**Statistical models** We will estimate the average treatment effect (ATE) of our independent variables on our outcome variable indicators with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Our baseline regression models will include pre-treatment covariates, but we will also report unadjusted models.

Additionally, we are also interested in the estimation of Heterogeneous Treatment Effects. Specifically, We expect treatment effects to differ by the identity of the perpetrator and the identity of the respondent. identity includes partisan attachment and religious affiliation.

**Transformations** We will map strongly disapprove, disapprove, neither approve nor disapprove, disapprove, and strongly disapprove to numerical scores of -1, -0.5, 0. 0.5, 1.

**Inference criteria** $p<0.05$

**Data exclusion** We may have to exclude those who did not participate in 2022 UP elections.