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The Electoral Consequences of Mass Religious Events*

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The Electoral Consequences of Mass Religious Events

Abstract: Mass ritualized gatherings like pilgrimages are central to religious practice globally. Do they generate votes for religious parties? Theoretically, the events may heighten religiosity, enlarging support for parties seen as "owning" religious policy issues. Such parties might also engage in "platform co-optation," piggybacking on the events to organize and campaign. We evaluate the electoral impact of India's Kumbh Mela, a Hindu festival considered the world's largest human assembly, leveraging its astrologically determined timing combined with districts' proximity by rail to the festival sites. The Kumbh Mela boosts Hindu nationalists' vote share. Tests of mechanisms suggest it does so by fomenting identity change—evidenced by increases in communal violence and the adoption of orthodox dietary practices—and by bolstering party infrastructure. India's main secular-leaning party loses support, but not in regions with denser concentrations of religious minorities. Our study offers a new account of how confessional parties make inroads in multiethnic democracies.

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How do religious parties win votes? In the mid-twentieth century, secular nationalism emerged as the governing ideology of newly independent states in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Emerson 1960; Prakash 2007). Yet its influence has waned in recent decades. Across a swath of countries—including Turkey, Israel, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Morocco—far-right confessional parties representing majority religious groups have surged (Juergensmeyer 2019). Indeed, according to Fukuyama (2018: 66), "One of the striking characteristics of global politics [today] is that the dynamic new forces shaping it are nationalist or religious parties and politicians … rather than the class-based left-wing parties that were so prominent in the politics of the twentieth century." This is particularly true of low- and middle-income settings. Figure 1 documents that the average share of national assembly seats occupied by parties routinely invoking "God, religion or sacred/religious texts" in their public pronouncements rose from 10 percent in the 1980s to 25 percent in the 2010s among non-OECD democracies. These trends have thrown cold water on modernization theorists' claim that secularization and democracy go hand in hand (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Fox 2006; Norris and Inglehart 2011). Ethno-religious nationalism has emboldened violent extremists and placed minorities at risk (e.g. Tambiah 1992). There is a pressing need to understand the roots of support for religious parties at a time when liberal democratic institutions are endangered, perhaps as never before, by the exclusionary principles such parties frequently espouse.[1]

Recent academic research has spotlighted clientelism as a principal tool for religious party expansion—whether the distribution of cooking oil around election time, or the longer-term provision of basic education and healthcare to the rural poor (Brooke 2019; Thachil 2014). Less investigated, by contrast, has been the role played by existing religious practices in fostering

[1] See *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege*, by Freedom House. bit.ly/3ctbokk.

support. Our paper addresses this gap, elucidating the contribution of *mass religious events* to the success of religious parties in young, multiethnic democracies. Large ritualized congregations of adherents are a feature of most major religions globally. The annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam and is considered a sacred duty for all Muslims. Samaritans journey to Mount Gerizim each year in commemoration of the three Jewish *shalosh regalim* festivals. During Holy Week, Catholics from central and northern Mexico convene at the Sanctuary of Atotonilco in Guanajuato to complete a weeklong cycle of prayers and fasting, ending in a procession. These spectacles attract the attention of ethnographers, documentary-makers, and historians. Notably absent so far are detailed studies of their electoral impacts.

We hypothesize two mechanisms by which mass religious gatherings help religious parties at the ballot box. One possibility is that joint participation in large group rituals alters people's sense of their religious selves, increasing religiosity among marginal believers and reorienting the beliefs of the already-devout. If greater piety leads individuals to update their political preferences, parties seen as "owning" religious policy issues stand to benefit (Petrocik 1996). Our second explanation holds that religious parties proactively exploit mass religious gatherings to mobilize votes and build their organizations, a strategy we term platform co-optation. The events have three inherent advantages for religious parties in this regard: (i) they *pre-screen* for ideologically sympathetic attendees; (ii) provide a *safe space* where religious politicking is difficult for hostile state authorities to regulate; and (iii) supply a *focal point* for religious parties to coordinate activities with civil society affiliates. Taken together, these ideational and pragmatic channels point to mass religious gatherings entailing a positive electoral

externality for doctrinally aligned parties—an effect transmissible directly by attendance at the event, and indirectly through spillovers to non-attendees.[2]

To test these propositions, we look to India's Kumbh Mela ("The Festival of the Urn"), a Hindu religious festival thought to be the world's largest human assembly. The Kumbh Mela is held at least once every three years, and rotates between four different locations in northern and western India. The 2013 Mela in Prayag (formerly Allahabad) lasted three months and reportedly hosted 120 million visitors (David and Roy 2016). The gatherings lie at the heart of India's "sacred geography" (Eck 2012). At the festivals, throngs of pilgrims, *sadhus* (Hindu holy men), and tourists encamp in vast tent cities, perform devotional practices, listen to sermons and speeches, and bathe in the salvific rivers. The Haridwar Kumbh Mela gained notoriety in early 2021 when it became a superspreader event for Covid-19.

Our goal is to measure the causal effect of the Kumbh Mela on local electoral backing for Hindu nationalism, a political project centered on the spiritual and cultural "revival" of Hinduism, and its protection against alleged threats emanating from the subcontinent's other religious traditions, notably Islam (Jaffrelot 1999). Since winning power at the national level in 2014, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has dominated India's electoral landscape. It has enacted discriminatory policies targeting the country's Muslim community.[3] Partly as a result, India's Freedom House rating dropped from "free" to "partly free" in 2021; in

[2] For ease of presentation, this paper uses the term "religious party" to refer to parties that explicitly seek to represent the religion of the mass religious event in question.

[3] See *World Report 2021: India*, by Human Rights Watch. bit.ly/3qh4uE1. At present, approximately 80 percent of India's population identify as Hindu and 14 percent as Muslim.

the same year, Varieties of Democracy classed the country as an electoral autocracy for the first time.

Isolating the impact of major religious festivals on political outcomes poses challenges. Gatherings and pilgrimage sites are often located in areas that are unusually religious to begin with, while long time lags between election cycles preclude fine-grained longitudinal studies based on vote-count data. We bring to bear several empirical techniques to overcome these obstacles. To start, we construct a comprehensive dataset that integrates geo-coded, constituency-level returns for all national parliamentary elections held since India's independence in 1947 with a full schedule of Kumbh Melas—39 in total—that we compiled from newspaper reports and secondary sources. Our benchmark analysis is a generalized difference-in-differences, incorporating a treatment variable conceptually derived from market access measures commonly used in the literature on trade and immigration flows. For identification, we exploit exogenous variation in a district's temporal-spatial distance to the Kumbh Mela at a given election period, a function of the idiosyncratic timing of Mela events relative to national elections, and constituencies' proximity via India's railway network to the four Mela sites. In additional tests we examine theoretical channels, employing nationally representative sample surveys of consumer expenditure, census demographics, and panel data on Hindu-Muslim violence.

Our estimates suggest that the Kumbh Melas exert a large, positive impact on the performance of Hindu nationalist parties. Halving a district's time/rail distance to the event increases Hindu nationalist vote share by 7.8 percentage points. The finding is highly robust, persisting across a range of plausible alternative specifications and placebo simulations. The Mela's effects are especially pronounced in the earlier phase of Hindu nationalist-party growth;

capitalizing on existing religious practices, it seems, is less electorally remunerative as religious parties become more entrenched in mainstream politics.

Turning to mediating factors, there is evidence that a reduction in Mela time/rail distance increases the adoption of the upper-caste Hindu practice of vegetarianism. The Melas also intensify communal violence, an often-hypothesized concomitant of hardening ethno-religious boundaries. Further, the event causes India's principal secular-leaning party, the Indian National Congress ("Congress"), to lose support, though not in districts with a higher proportion of Muslims. Together, this collection of results lends credence to the conjecture that social identity change lies behind mass religious gatherings' impact on voting behavior. We also substantiate our second theoretical claim: that mass religious events offer religious parties a readymade platform for organizing and mobilizing. Mela exposure raises the likelihood that Hindu nationalist parties field candidates, including party loyalists, in more Kumbh-exposed constituencies. Qualitatively, there are direct accounts of Hindu nationalists piggybacking on the festivals to attend to internal party business and inflate party visibility.

Scholars have remarked on the relative inattention paid to religion's place in democratic processes, particularly in non-Western contexts (Woodberry 2012). We help remedy this shortcoming by drawing a systematic link between mass religious observance and voting preferences in the world's largest electorate. In doing so, we add to the specific study of pilgrimages' attitudinal and behavioral impacts. Writing about Pakistan, Clingingsmith et al (2009) find that Hajj attendance increases conformity with global Islamic practices, and improves attitudes toward ethnic and religious outgroups. Christia et al (2019) show that religious socialization during the Ashura pilgrimage to Karbala, Iraq produces a convergence in

sectarian norms. Extending these lines of inquiry, we consider the electoral consequences of mass religious events for the first time—capturing the macro-level political shifts they induce.[4]

Second, our research dovetails with scholarship probing religion's social-psychological implications for politics. Speeches laden with religious content influence the nature and extent of participation in ethnically divided democracies (McClendon and Riedl 2019). Catholic clergy have been influential spokespeople for political ideas in Brazil and Hungary (Smith 2019; Tuñón 2017; Wittenberg 2006). Islamist parties appear to enjoy an electoral head start owing to their perceived "sacred" ties (Grewal et al 2019). We show that mass religious gatherings—where sermonizing and religious iconography are everywhere to be found—can remodel social identities, and intensify intergroup tensions in their wake.

A third contribution is to the emergent scholarship on the spatial dimensions of politics, research that has been facilitated by improvements in mapping and geospatial computing (for prominent recent applications, see Shaver and Zhou 2021; Enos et al 2019; Ayoub et al 2021). Our analysis sheds light on how religious nationalist ideology ramifies geographically.

Last, we add to the political science literature on political cleavage activation (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). As noted, there is a near-consensus in recent work on the centrality of pre-election handouts, distributed by grassroots workers, for explaining the success of religious parties (e.g. Berman 2003; Bano 2012). Without discounting these materialist tactics, we demonstrate how religious nationalists can harness long-standing religious practices to reap

[4] Note, our substantive focus on mass pilgrimage gatherings departs from studies of the local impacts of regular religious holidays—annualized events that do not involve the long-distance movement of peoples (e.g. Montero and Yang 2021; Iyer and Shrivastava 2018).

electoral rewards. Political actors can benefit from putatively apolitical social phenomena, which are capable of transfiguring social cleavages into politically resonant ones (Sartori 1976; Zielinski 2002). The repurposing of religious events in service of electoral competition is an arresting instance of what Rudolph and Rudolph (1984) coined the "modernity of tradition."

Theorizing the Political Impacts of Mass Religious Events

How might mass religious gatherings engender electoral support for religious parties? This section develops two main theoretical arguments: one focused on identity change, the other on platform co-optation. It rounds off by discussing the potential for attitudinal spillovers from participants to non-participants. For clarity, we visually summarize the basic causal chain we posit in Figure 2.

Mechanism 1: Identity Change

A foreseeable consequence of mass religious gatherings is a boost in attendees' religiosity. Identity change at the events could arise through both psychological and informational channels. According to "processual models" developed in sociology, ritualistic activities carried out in group settings have the potential to produce depersonalization (Olaveson 2001). Durkheim (2008 [1912]: 162), generalizing insights from ethnographies of totemic religions, saw ritualized group interactions as societal self-worship, marked by "a kind of electricity that quickly transports [participants] to an extraordinary degree of exaltation." In this state of collective effervescence, individualism breaks down, leading participants to bind more strongly with the symbols and value-systems of the community. Turner outlined a similar phenomenon, *communitas*, whereby

collective, rhythmic performance in a sacred, "liminal" setting fuses once-atomistic social structures into "a homogenous, undifferentiated whole" (Turner 1977: 177).

Beyond the psychological changes they effect, collective rituals, which pilgrimages and processions epitomize, are also venues where higher-order beliefs are forged—highlighting a rationalist explanation for identity switching in these contexts. Chwe (2001) presents a formal model in which rituals foster common knowledge by permitting community members to collectively observe one another's behavior. On his account, individuals who inwardly wish to update their professed attitudes, behaviors, or identities refrain from doing so until they become convinced that such a shift will be greeted as socially acceptable. Rituals not only communicate the content of community members' beliefs, therefore; just as importantly, they make clear that other community members know about the *existence* of each others' beliefs: "I know that you know … that I know," and so forth. Gatherings with ritualistic elements thus solve coordination problems, propelling group-level adaptations in practices and norms.

Quantitative evidence supports the idea that community assemblies can alter norms and potentially identities. In laboratory-based tests, Hobson et al (2017) demonstrate that repeated group rituals generate modest increases in intergroup bias. Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) argue that collective rituals promote social cohesion through group identification and identity fusion. Plausibly, mass religious gatherings produce analogous effects on attendees.

Increased religiosity caused by mass religious gatherings may be an important input into political behavior, but it is not sufficient by itself to modify electoral outcomes. For this to occur, two further conditions are necessary. First, more religiously-minded voters must go on to demand a bigger role for religion in state policy-making. This stance may follow automatically from the content of certain belief-systems, or may emerge from the instrumentalization of

religious wedge issues by election-minded elites.[5] Second, there must be at least one party (or candidate) in a position to benefit from religion's enhanced social salience, providing an outlet for devout voters to make their preferences heard.

To the extent that religious festivals help solidify religious political identities, social tensions might also crystallize. A predicate of social identity theory is that individuals derive self-esteem from social-group membership; more than that, their *degree* of self-esteem hinges on their group's perceived superiority over, and distance from, other social groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). In-group members are consequently prone to overestimate their own collective virtues and to stereotype and vilify outgroups. As inter-group trust breaks down, the risk of communal conflict increases (Fearon and Laitin 1996). So too does the likelihood of electoral polarization, as victimized groups adapt their voting behavior to safeguard their interests (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). We later put these two corollaries of the identity-change hypothesis to the test.

Mechanism 2: Platform Co-optation

The foregoing argument depicts confessional parties as mostly passive beneficiaries of large religious events: gatherings mint more religious voters, who then bestow their votes on religious

[5] Of course, such preferences may not congeal in the presence of strong norms discouraging the mixing of religion and politics—for example, the French commitment to *laïcité*. We underscore, too, that while assertions about the imbrication between certain religious belief-systems and politics are commonplace in public discourse, they are invariably based on tendentious readings of religious doctrine and history. All major religions have at some point assumed political forms.

parties. By contrast, our second class of explanations emphasizes the deliberate actions of parties themselves. We propose that religious parties engage in *platform co-optation*; that is, they avail themselves of mass religious gatherings to conduct on-site outreach to potential voters, and to firm up their organization.

Three features of popular religious gatherings make them particularly suitable targets for co-optation. First, the events *screen in* large numbers of individuals and groups likely to be sympathetic to religious parties' cause. Locating pockets of persuadable voters is an uphill battle for most parties; thus, partisan persuasion efforts often fall flat (Kalla and Broockman 2018). Mass religious gatherings mitigate this search problem owing to participant self-selection. To be sure, the events attract not only pious voters but also those marginally inclined toward religion (e.g. the pilgrim-vacationers at the Tabbard Inn in Chaucer's *Tale of Beryn*). Yet there seems little doubt that attendees will be more receptive to religious appeals—and perhaps, therefore, to political messaging couched in religious terms—than the average citizen. By the same token, the events are fertile grounds for recruiting the dedicated rank-and-file cadres needed to staff local party cells.

Second, mass religious gatherings provide a "safe space" where religious party activities are shielded from sometimes hostile state authorities. Democracies and autocracies have, at times, sought to limit the role of religion in politics. But excessively regulating religious spaces invites blowback in deeply religious countries. Full-scale suppression of collective worship has generally proven impossible. Examples of political movements using religious spaces for officially proscribed activism include pre-revolutionary Iran, where mosques "served as centers for dissent, political organization, agitation, and sanctuary" (Esposito 1999: 110). Religious pilgrimages were revived at the end of communist rule in Slovakia, with the Christian

Democratic Movement (KDH) immediately cottoning onto their "political potential" (Doellinger 2002: 226). Well-known, too, is the pivotal role Black Baptist churches played in the civil rights movement in the southern United States. Mass religious events can offer safe-haven to confessional parties trying to sign up voters and volunteers.

The events alleviate a third challenge faced by religious parties (and, indeed, parties of all stripes): their need to coordinate activities with regional branches and civil society affiliates. Religious parties at their early stages of development commonly find themselves geographically over-stretched, resource-constrained, and reliant on outside groups for manpower and ideological zeal. Mass religious gatherings offer a natural point of convergence, and a meeting place for dealing with organizational matters.[6]

For these reasons, we should expect mass religious events to be a boon to religious parties, and not to their competitors. These opportunities should not be overstated, however. Extracting electoral mileage out of religious festivals is not risk-free. If religious parties are perceived to be debasing a sacred event by brazenly injecting it with electioneering, then any vote gains could be offset by public anger. Astute party operatives will develop a repertoire for engaging productively with religious attendees that avoids these pitfalls.

[6] A prominent example is the Hajj, where the various national units of the Muslim Brotherhood convene each year to deliberate on strategy and leadership selection; see, "The Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia: From Then to Now." *Fikra Forum*, May 18, 2018. bit.ly/3s8Rlwl.

Spillovers

We anticipate mass religious gatherings to not only shape the political preferences of event attendees; they might also mold the voting behaviors of a wider segment of the voting population, above all in geographically proximate areas. In other words, there is a strong possibility for spillovers to non-attendees. Participants induced to support religious parties by going on pilgrimage may transmit their modified preferences to their families and social networks (cf Bond et al 2012). Organizational improvements brought on by the gatherings should prove a significant multiplier, augmenting religious parties' ability to pick up votes well beyond the confines of the event-space. Further, local media coverage of the event could also profit religious parties, giving them a degree of visibility and credibility—by dint of their association with the event—that they would not otherwise enjoy. The festivals' impacts should thus resemble a ripple pattern, being greatest in the immediate vicinity of the event and in the time period immediately after its conclusion, then decaying as both distance and time from the event grow (Latané 1981).

The Kumbh Mela and Hindu Nationalism in India

We now lay out the religious significance of the mass religious gathering we investigate, and detail relevant features of India's political system.

The Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is a Hindu religious gathering held approximately once every three years across four Indian cities: Haridwar and Prayag in the north of the country, and Ujjain and Nashik in the center-west (see Figure 3). Haridwar and Prayag are the most important festivals; both

sites also host *Ardh* ("Half") Kumbh Melas midway between the full Kumbhs. The timing of the Melas is determined astrologically, based on the positions of Jupiter, the sun, and the moon.[7] During the festival, which generally lasts two to three months, pilgrims seeking spiritual purification bathe in the rivers at the sites. On the most auspicious days, the primary bathing spots are reserved for Hindu *sadhus* who enact the *shahi snan*: ritual submersion at the end of elaborate processions, during which groups of ascetics (*akharas*) brandish ceremonial weapons and parade their leaders on gold and silver palanquins in front of large crowds. The Kumbh itself exemplifies a Durkheimian effervescent environment: "The entire atmosphere is saturated with the religious fervor of chiming bells, incense, flower fragrances, Vedic hymns, mantras, and the beating of drums" (Bhela 2010: 100).

The origins of the Kumbh Mela are unclear.[8] Traditionally, its beginnings are ascribed to Adi Shankaracharya, an eighth-century philosopher who viewed regular meetings of Hindu scholars and priests as a device to fortify Hinduism against Buddhism (Lochtefeld 2004). Violence marred the Melas in the pre-colonial period, as competing *akharas* vied for status and

[7] The intersections of planetary cycles used are different for the four sites. There have been periodic astrological disagreements between the various sects and *akharas* who contribute to the organization of the Kumbh, particularly over the treatment of leap years. This means that the festivals in actuality do not occur according to perfect 12-year cycles as is popularly assumed. The Appendix details years in which these disputes have manifested. Our canvassing of the historical evidence revealed no suggestion that electoral politics has figured in these disputes.

[8] The "urn" in the festival's name references its main origin myth, which holds that a fight between gods over a pot containing the nectar of immortality (*amrita*) led to drops being spilled at four locations, the present-day sites of the Kumbh.

royal patronage. The Melas also became important commercial fairs at that time. The expansion of the railway network during British rule led to ballooning popular attendance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Maclean 2008). Today, regional governments are tasked with organizing the festivals, erecting "pop-up mega-cities" replete with campgrounds, public health facilities, sanitation, and extensive security (Khanna et al 2019). Trains—the principal mode of long-distance transport for poorer Indians—are specially commissioned to convey pilgrims en masse from across the country. The Uttar Pradesh state government reportedly spent 500 million dollars on the 2019 Prayag Kumbh Mela, which is estimated to have employed 300,000 people.[9]

Hindu Nationalism

Politically, the 74 years since India's independence have seen the decline of secular nationalism—embodied in the Congress party—and its replacement by *Hindutva*: a majoritarian worldview that took root in the 1920s and is today represented by a family of organizations known as the *Sangh Parivar*.[10] Several political parties have claimed to speak for the "Hindu nation." Yet only the BJP has made significant electoral strides. After its founding in 1980, the BJP seized on divisive socio-political issues. It accused the then-dominant Congress party of "pseudo-secularism" and pandering to India's Muslim minority. Its pro-market economic policies appealed to India's burgeoning middle class. It has also won the support of upper caste Hindus

[9] "Kumbh Mela 2019 to Generate Revenue of Rs 1.2 Lakh Crore: CII." *Business Today*, January 21, 2019. bit.ly/2PXjCc7.

[10] It should be noted that although the Congress has a reputation for being a broadly secularist party, in practice it has—from time to time and at different levels—played on religious sentiments for political gain.

opposed to affirmative action policies for backward-caste groups. The BJP held India's prime ministership between 1998 and 2004 at the head of coalition governments. Under the charismatic leadership of Narendra Modi, it achieved its own legislative majority in India's lower house for the first time in 2014.

Kumbh Melas as Political Sites

Historians and journalists have long speculated about the Kumbh Mela's political import. The Hindu Mahasabha—a pressure group advocating unity among Hindus—was first convened at the 1915 Kumbh Mela in Haridwar (Bapu 2013). During the anti-colonial struggle, the nationalist movement disseminated its messages of *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, and *satyagraha* at the gatherings, while association with the Mela helped imbue it with "a sense of divine right" (Gould 2004: 85). The festival has remained a political hotbed in the democratic era. Parties set up permanent camps at the Kumbhs, and top politicians make well-publicized appearances to shore up their religious credentials.

Despite the widespread embrace of the Kumbh Meha as a landmark *Indian* cultural event, in recent decades Hindu nationalist organizations have disproportionately conscripted it to advance their political agenda. At the forefront has been the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a militant Hindu nationalist organization tied to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; Van der Veer 1994). It assembled the inaugural World Hindu Conference at the 1966 Kumbh in Prayag.[11] At the 2016 Kumbh in Ujjain, the BJP state government put on a *Vaicharik Kumbh*, or "kumbh

[11] "All Set for the Kumbh Mela: Steps to Regulate Pilgrim Traffic." *Times of India*, January 7, 1966. bit.ly/3wIOoWM.

of thoughts," that brought together Hindu nationalist politicians and religious leaders.[12] In short, hardline groups have repeatedly used the event to elevate the *Hindutva* cause.

Empirical Framework

This section details our empirical strategy for identifying the impact of the mass religious gatherings on electoral outcomes. The core of our approach lies in understanding how politics and society in a locality are affected by (i) ease-of-access to the Kumbh Mela festivals combined with (ii) the recency of festivals at each site.

Data and Coding

Treatment variable: Kumbh time/rail distance. The unit of analysis for the primary tests is the 1961 administrative district/election year. For each unit, we generate a continuous measure of the "time/rail distance" to the Kumbh Mela.[13] The variable relies on several data inputs. First, we use the online archive of the Bombay edition of the *Times of India*, India's newspaper of record, in addition to assorted historical and astrological sources, to produce a complete schedule of the start and end dates of all full and half Kumbh Melas held in Prayag, Ujjain, Haridwar, and Nashik dating back to 1943.[14] The timeline of Kumbh Melas is displayed in Figure 4, and a

[12] "Cong. Alleges Scam in Ujjain." *Hindu*, July 19, 2016. bit.ly/3wRBwxu.

[13] The only districts excluded from the sample are the sparsely populated Andaman Islands and the archipelago of Lakshadweep. As these districts are not on the Indian mainland, they are inaccessible to the Kumbh Mela by rail.

[14] We include the *Ardh* Melas because they have attained near-equal prominence to the full Kumbhs, especially in recent decades.

detailed listing of data sources for each event is given in Appendix A. Second, we append the start-dates of each national election cycle to the analysis dataset; these dates are supplied in the electoral data curated by the Trivedi Centre for Political Data at Ashoka University. Third, we pinpoint the latitude/longitude coordinates of the four Kumbh Mela grounds. Finally, we use data on the Indian rail network as it existed in 1956 (digitized by Donaldson 2018) to create a spatial network linking all 1961 district centroids to all four Kumbh sites by train.[15]

We conceptualize a unit's exposure to the Kumbh Mela—our main independent variable—to be a function of closeness to the festivals in both time and distance by rail. The measurement problem here is twofold: how to integrate the temporal *and* spatial distance to the Kumbh Mela into a single measure, and how to enable a single measure to capture time/rail distances to four Mela sites, and not just one. To solve this pair of conundrums, we borrow from the economics literature on market access (see, e.g., Donaldson and Hornbeck 2016). There, the size of consumer markets in a country in a given year is the same for all firms; yet the costs, and thus the ability to access various markets, varies across firms. In that context, rescaling the size of each market with which a firm might engage by each market's accessibility, and then

[15] More information on the processing of the rail data is given in Appendix B. We employ a map of the network as it existed close to the start of our study period to forestall post-treatment bias, which could arise if rail construction occurred in response to political dynamics induced by the Kumbh Mela. In practice, there has been limited rail expansion since the 1950s; we calculate that the 1956 network stood at 84 percent of its total 2001 length. In Appendix C, we rerun the main analysis from below using the 2001 rail map for the treatment-variable construction and see negligible changes in the results.

summing across markets, generates an overall measure of a firm's market integration. Our operationalization of Kumbh "time/rail distance" takes a similar tack:

$$Kumbh\ time/rail\ distance_{it} = \sum_{k=1}^{4} \frac{Days\ elapsed\ since\ last\ Kumbh_{kt}}{Rail\ distance\ to\ Kumbh\ site_{ik}^{\theta}} \qquad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

Here, *Days elapsed since last Kumbh* records the number of days between the end date of the most recent Kumbh Mela held at site *k* and the start of a given election cycle, with elections indexed by *t*. *Rail distance to Kumbh site* (in kilometers) proxies the "cost" of traveling to each Kumbh site from the center of a given district, *i*. Last, the θ exponent term picks up potential elasticity in Kumbh attendance with respect to travel costs; for parsimony, we set θ to be 1 in the main analyses and show that results are robust to different choices of θ. As the summation sign indicates, for every *i,t* unit we perform the time-over-rail-distance calculation with respect to each of the four Mela sites, then add up the resulting quotients to produce the measure. The final variable is log-transformed. This follows standard practice (e.g. Weaver 2019) and accounts for the long right tail in the distribution of the raw variable (see histograms presented in Appendix D). Appendix Figure A1 offers a step-by-step, worked example of how the computation of "Kumbh time/rail distance" was carried out for one district/election cycle.

Critically, and as we elaborate below, our estimation strategy employs district fixed effects, which serve to hold rail-distances to Kumbh sites fixed. Thus we exploit within-spatial-unit variation in the recency of festivals to generate estimates. This being the case, the central upshot of the measurement-concept shown in Equation 1 is that changes in the time elapsed produce more *variation* in the treatment variable for districts that are geographically close to Kumbh sites, and comparatively less variation in the treatment variable for districts that are far away. By way of illustration, consider two districts: one 100kms (A) and one 1000kms (B) away from a Kumbh site. Under the measure, changing the time elapsed since the last

Kumbh from 200 days to 2000 days leads to the value of the treatment variable moving from 2 to 20 for district A (the nearer district), versus 0.2 to 0.5 for district B (the faraway district). The difference in these two ranges—18 versus 0.3—is clearly large. Because the regression estimator places greater weight on conditioning strata that exhibit more variation, districts that are nearer to the Mela sites, by intention, end up receiving more weight.[16]

Outcomes. We gathered constituency-level electoral returns for all national (Lok Sabha) elections, from the first general election in 1951-2 up to the most recent one in 2019. We then identified the geographic locations of every Lok Sabha constituency that has existed since independence. For constituencies that existed in the pre-1977 period, we pinpointed the latitude and longitude coordinates of the constituency's *titular town* using Google Maps.[17] For elections held from 1977 onward, we use GIS maps to locate each constituency's centroid. Constituency

[16] Note, because in our treatment variable, temporal proximity to the Kumbh is greatest close to zero, a geographically nearer unit will take a larger treatment-variable value in absolute terms than a faraway unit, when holding time fixed. While counterintuitive at first glance, these differences in absolute treatment-variable values *across* spatial units are immaterial, since we leverage only the relative change in time/rail distance to the Kumbh events *within* spatial units.

[17] GIS maps are not available for the pre-1977 constituencies. By convention, Indian constituencies are named after the principal urban center that they bound. Where this was insufficiently specific—for example, in large towns and cities it is common to see such names as "Lucknow East" and "Lucknow West"—we looked to the delimitation reports published by the Election Commission of India to single out neighborhoods known to lay within a constituency, and that can still be identified on Google Maps today.

boundaries are periodically redrawn to correct for malapportionment. To preserve stable geographic units over time for the sake of analysis, we assign every constituency to the 1961 district to which it (would have) belonged, using digitized 1961 district maps and the latitude/longitude coordinates just described. We then average outcomes within those 1961 district boundaries.

Our primary outcome is the vote share received by Hindu nationalist parties in each district/election-year. The case study literature identified six parties as having propounded a Hindu nationalist agenda since independence: the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Ram Rajya Parishad, the Shiv Sena, and the 1977 Janata coalition.[18]

Additional outcome measures, and the steps taken to build them, are detailed in Appendix E.

[18] For the 1977 elections, which came in the aftermath of the Emergency launched by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, we code the Janata party coalition as Hindu nationalist. Hindu nationalist parties opted to stand under the Janata banner that year, as part of a coordinated effort to unseat the Congress. To be sure, this motley constellation of parties encompassed diverse ideological strains. Yet it was repeatedly branded as Hindu nationalist in its fundamental orientation by movement opponents (Jaffrelot 1999: 305). Internal disagreements over the membership policy of the RSS ultimately emerged as the primary factor behind the coalition's demise, paving the way for Congress's resurgence in 1980.

Econometric Strategy

In the abstract, we might expect areas close to large pilgrimage sites to exhibit unusual demographic traits. Some types of mass religious gatherings could also be timed strategically by governments keen to benefit from the spectacles. If true, naive OLS analyses based on either cross-sectional or longitudinal variation will be biased. Our plan to address these hurdles relies on a long panel dataset and the exogenous timing of the Kumbh Mela festivals relative to India's national elections.[19] Accordingly, the core specification is a two-way fixed effects estimator:

$$y_{it} = \beta \times ln(Kumbh\ time/rail\ distance_{it}) + \mu_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

We regress outcomes (y) on the logged independent variable described above, in addition to district (μ) and election-cycle (δ) fixed effects. District fixed effects control for unobservable characteristics of administrative districts that stay constant over time, and that may be jointly correlated with Kumbh time/rail distance and voting patterns. The time dummies control for unobserved shocks affecting all spatial units in a given year. The idiosyncratic error term, ε, is clustered at the 1961 district level—the same level as the location fixed effect—dealing with the potential for serially correlated errors over time. The coefficient of interest is β, identified through the exogenous variation in logged "time/rail distance" to the Kumbh Melas after conditioning on the time and location constants.

[19] As noted in the background section, the timings of the Mela festivals are set by an astrological calendar. Indian election law requires first-past-the-post Lok Sabha elections to be held after a maximum of five years, although they may (and have) been called early. The historical literature turns up no reason to believe that off-cycle national elections have been timed with the Kumbh in mind.

Results: The Kumbh Mela's Effects on Hindu Nationalist Vote Share

We begin by presenting our empirical findings for the primary outcome. Table 1 reports estimates of the effect of distance to the Kumbh Mela, in both time and space, on the vote share received by Hindu nationalist parties, for all national elections conducted in independent India. We find strong causal evidence that Hindu nationalist parties gain electorally in district/election-years more proximate to the festival. The benchmark specification in Column 1 relies on the rail-distance measure of geographic distance (i.e. as the denominator in Equation 1). Interpreting the coefficient, we observe that halving the time/rail distance to the Kumbh entails an average 7.8 percentage point increase in the fraction of votes secured by Hindu nationalist parties—a highly statistically significant effect ($p < 0.001$).[20]

In Table 1, Columns 2 and 3, we seek to gauge the relative explanatory power of the rail-distance operationalization of the treatment variable compared against a separate conceptualization of the treatment variable built on a "straight-line" distance measure. In Column 2, we see that this geodesic distance measure is strongly negatively related to Hindu nationalist vote share, similar to the findings in Column 1. Yet, after conditioning on the straight-line measure (Column 3), we find that the coefficient on the rail-distance metric preserves its significance and increases in magnitude.[21] This exercise buttresses our prior

[20] Note, with a logged predictor variable and an unlogged outcome, the coefficient interpretation is computed as: $\ln(0.5)*-0.113 = 0.078$.

[21] In the same model, the coefficient on geodesic distance reverses sign and the standard error increases substantially. Because we treat geodesic distance as a *conditioning* variable that causally affects rail distance, we do not interpret this change, given the obvious potential for post-treatment bias.

expectation that the effect of the Kumbh is "carried" by attendees dependent on India's train network to move to and from the events.

The rightmost columns of Table 1 examine temporal heterogeneity. We split the sample around the year 1985, the midpoint of the time series. We observe that the Kumbh Mela leads to an upturn in votes for Hindu nationalist parties in both the pre- and post-1985 eras: the estimated effect of Kumbh time/rail distance is negative and highly significant in each of the subsamples. However, comparing Columns 4 and 5, it is apparent that the size of the estimated effect is substantially larger in the earlier period—almost double what it was later. Mass religious gatherings may do more to facilitate the broadening of religious party support earlier in the party's life-cycle, when the resources available for mobilization are scarcer, and the political opportunity structure is less congenial.

The remainder of this section subjects our headline result to a battery of robustness checks. We first carry out placebo regressions that speak to the credibility of the identification assumptions and variance estimation procedure. On identification, it stands to reason that we should not consistently observe significant effects on the outcome when constructing placebo versions of the treatment variable, ones that imagine the Kumbh Melas to have been held at placebo locations and/or placebo times. From the perspective of variance estimation, these tests are instructive as they allow us to ascertain non-parametrically how "unusual" our main estimate appears compared to distributions of regression estimates based on placebo scenarios.

We plot the distributions of placebo estimates alongside the actual estimate in Figure 5. The histograms are built on four approaches to randomizing and permuting Kumbh times and locations when making the placebo treatment variables: shuffling the "true" schedules between the "true" festival locations—e.g. assigning Prayag's schedule to Haridwar—for each unique

location/schedule combination (Panel A); keeping the "true" festival locations constant but imagining the timings of the events to have been offset by a random number of weeks (Panel B); selecting four random locations (district centroids) from across the country—imagining these to be the four festival sites—and assigning each one a "true" set of Kumbh dates (Panel C); and, finally, selecting four random sites and assigning them a set of Kumbh dates offset by a random number of weeks (Panel D). Visually, the results are striking. In each of Figure 5's four panels, the distribution of placebo values centers roughly around an estimated effect of zero, as we should expect. Moreover, in each panel the estimate based on the *true* locations and dates—that is, the estimate given in Table 1, Column 1—falls on the extreme left tail of the distribution. This fact suggests that the result we uncover is highly unlikely to arise by chance alone, and that the identification assumptions underlying our statistical model are tenable.

Next, given the spatial nature of our treatment variable, there is the potential for spatial autocorrelation in the error terms, which conventional clustered standard errors would not ameliorate. We thus run the Conley (1999) standard error adjustment.[22] Appendix F documents that the null hypothesis of no effect continues to be rejected for cutoff radii through 3000km, which is substantially larger than cutoff sizes standardly used in the applied econometric literature and the maximum geodesic distance between any two districts in the dataset.

Third, in Appendix G, we show that the effect is not driven by any one particular geographic region.

[22] The placebo simulations presented in Figure 5 also address arbitrary spatial autocorrelation. If it were the case that our inference was biased by substantial autocorrelation, we would expect coefficients of similar magnitude to our "true" estimate to appear frequently in the placebo distributions, using the randomly chosen locations. This is not what we see.

For a fourth robustness check, we explore the implications of assuming different elasticities in Kumbh attendance with respect to travel costs, by varying the value of θ in Equation 1. Appendix H reveals that the results are robust to altering this parameter.

Fifth, in Appendix I, we conduct a manipulation check. Using multiwave sample survey data on consumer expenditure (described further below), we show that a reduction in Kumbh time/rail distance causes the likelihood of household expenditures on travel and "Mela/fair/picnic" to increase. This is a convincing validation: the effects on these outcomes provide "telltale" signs that people are in fact spending money on attending the Kumbh Melas as temporal and spatial distance to the events narrows.

We also assess the reasonableness of the linearity assumption: our supposition that a linear functional form best characterizes the relationship between the continuous outcome and treatment measures. Figure 6 shows a binned bivariate scatterplot of Hindu nationalist vote share against logged Kumbh time/rail distance; both variables are residualized, with the spatial and temporal fixed effects partialled out. The relationship portrayed in Figure 6 is unambiguously linear across the full range of the residualized treatment variable, validating the linearity claim while obviating concerns about groups of outliers driving the results.

Mechanisms

Religiosity and Identity Change

Now we describe our findings on theoretical mechanisms. Recall our initial conjecture that the Kumbh Mela lends a filip to religious parties by growing the base of religiously-inclined voters locally. Put simply, the festivals invigorate Hindu beliefs, rendering Hindus in nearby regions,

and in the aftermath of a Kumbh, more likely to "vote their religion." Three observable implications follow from this channel, which we test.

A distinctive feature of Brahminical-Sanskritic Hindu orthodoxy is lacto-vegetarianism: a diet that excludes meat, fish, and eggs (Michaels 2004: 26). This, along with belief in *karma*, *dharma*, the Vedas, and a pantheon of deities, is viewed as constitutive of an "ideal" Hindu identity (Doniger 2010: 28). Importantly for our purposes, vegetarianism is not mandated by India's other major religions (Islam and Christianity). Evaluating whether Kumbh Mela exposure popularizes strict vegetarian diets, therefore, can shed light on the festival's impact on a key private aspect of Hindu religiosity. Seen from another angle, it illuminates how far the Melas stimulate those lower in the caste hierarchy to emulate traditionally upper-caste practices—a process M. N. Srinivas (1995) termed "Sanskritization." Significantly, dietary issues are highly salient in Indian politics. Since coming to power, the BJP has implemented a raft of policies geared toward institutionalizing vegetarianism nationwide.[23]

We leverage individual data on consumption expenditures from the six "thick" rounds of surveys carried out by India's National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). These are the largest surveys of their kind and are the chief instruments used to assess poverty levels in India. The surveys, which we combine to give us a six-period district-level dataset, quizzed representative samples of households from all parts of the country about how much they spent on specific categories of food over the past 30 days. Our first dichotomous outcome variable takes one if a respondent reports that they spent a non-zero amount of money on meat, fish, or eggs in

[23] "Vegetarianism: The Politics of Diet." *Frontline,* July 23, 2018.

that time period, and zero otherwise.[24] The results displayed in Table 2, Column 1, reveal that rates of strict vegetarianism diminish substantially as time/rail distance to the Kumbh Mela grows. The coefficient implies that a halving of Kumbh time/rail distance corresponds to a decline of 1.7 percentage points (ln(0.5)*0.024) in the probability that the household purchased some meat, fish, or eggs. This finding constitutes one piece of evidence that greater Hindu self-identification is part of what animates the Mela's electoral impact.

We code a second stand-in measure for religiosity using the NSSO expenditure data: whether or not households report having spent money on a "priest" within the past month. In Table 2, Column 2, there is no detectable or substantively relevant change in this variable induced by time/rail distance to the Kumbh Mela.[25]

Our next tests evaluate the possibility that an intensification in Hindu self-identification gives rise to social tensions along religious lines. We first examine the Kumbh's impact on the incidence, frequency, and severity of communal riots, a particularly brutal manifestation of ethnic group discord. The statistical evidence in Table 3 relies on a distict/month panel constructed using the Varshney-Wilkinson dataset of Hindu-Muslim violence in India. The Table 3 analysis reveals that the number of Hindu/Muslim riots does indeed rise as time/rail distance to

[24] We calculate the treatment variable based on the time gap between the interview date and the four most recent Melas.

[25] Note, the diet and priest questions are the only ones germane to household religiosity gathered by the NSSO. "Priest" expenditure is a limited measure of religious spending, which does not pick up other subcategories of such spending (e.g. donations to temples). Most families make payments to priests for major life-cycle events (births, weddings, and funerals) whose incidence is relatively rare and unlikely to be impacted by the Kumbh Mela.

the Kumbh Mela decreases (Column 1). Smaller time/rail distance also increases the total duration of riots in a district/month (Column 2) and the number of people killed (Column 3). We do not observe impacts on non-lethal casualties, however (Column 4).[26]

The Kumbh Mela engenders violent social polarization between India's major religious communities. Does it cause parallel polarization in the electoral sphere too? Single-member plurality voting has been theorized to promote two-party competition around the most salient axis of societal division (Cox 1997). If Kumbh Melas elevate the local salience of Hinduism, we might expect electoral knock-on effects beyond only an uptick in votes for Hindu nationalists. Specifically, voters who anticipate losing out under Hindu nationalist rule may opt to consolidate around a single viable challenger party.

To investigate this proposition, Table 4 decomposes the impact of Kumbh time/rail distance on the vote shares for Congress party candidates (Column 1) as well as all *other* candidates (Column 3)—i.e., those affiliated neither with Hindu nationalist parties nor with the Congress. We single out the Congress because of its reputation as the country's main secular nationalist party, and in light of its dominant party status for most of India's post-independence history. Column 5 of Table 4 examines the Kumbh Mela's effects on systemic competition using Laakso and Taagepera's Effective Number of Parties (ENP) metric.

The results paint a stark picture. Both the Congress as well as other parties bleed support when the Kumbh Mela is nearer in time and space (Table 4, Columns 1 and 3). We further

[26] The outcome data are added to an arbitrary constant and then logged, following standard practice for the transformation of zero-inflated count variables for use in OLS regression. In Appendix J, we use poisson and negative binomial regression, plugging in the untransformed data, and observe the same pattern of substantive and statistical significance.

observe a significant reduction in ENP (Column 5). To inspect more closely at whether these changes reflect polarization dynamics, we probe the extent to which these effects vary as a function of the share of Muslims present in the local population (recalling that Muslims are the community most threatened by Hindu nationalism). We take the fraction of the district population that is Muslim, according to district-level statistics provided in the 1961 Census of India, and rank districts on this measure. We then linearly interact Kumbh time/rail distance with the Muslim-share percentile variable (following Hainmueller et al 2019). Table 4, Columns 2, 4, 6, and 7 report estimates of the heterogeneous effects of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance according to this moderator. Figure 7 plots the results, alongside the estimated effects for three subgroups of the data, defined by the low, medium, and high terciles of the district-Muslim share variable.

Muslim population share turns out to be both negatively and linearly associated with the magnitude of the Kumbh Mela time/rail distance effect on Congress support. In areas with the smallest share of Muslims, Congress gains votes as time/rail distance from the Kumbh Mela increases—which is to say, Congress loses votes the nearer the festival gets (Figure 7, Panel A). But as the share of Muslims grows locally, the size of these losses dwindles; indeed, in the top tercile of districts (according to percent Muslim), the Congress suffers no adverse electoral consequences from the Kumbh. Our interpretation of this heterogeneity is that Muslims who fear exclusion under Hindu nationalist rule band behind the Congress—the foremost secular-leaning party—in response to a Kumbh-induced Hindu nationalist surge. The interactive effects of Muslim population share with respect to ENP show a consistent trend, too, with ENP enlarging (i.e. more effective parties) as time/rail distance to the Kumbh grows in high-Muslim population

districts, but showing no evidence of such an effect in low-Muslim population districts (Figure 7, Panel D).

Viewed in tandem, the results up to now gesture strongly toward the contention that the Kumbh Mela increases Hindu religiosity in more exposed regions.[27]

Platform Co-optation and Party Organization

Our second mechanism stipulates that religious parties enjoy an outsized advantage when it comes to appropriating the platform afforded by mass religious gatherings to recruit, organize, and campaign. To take one instance, the 2001 Kumbh Mela in Prayag was "an opportune backdrop for the Vishva Hindu Parishad to organize its ninth meeting of spiritual leaders" and the event even helped "pole-vault [future prime minister] Modi to national prominence" (Sitapati 2020: 258). At the 2019 Kumbh, "the BJP camp in the mela ground had the biggest area and was no less than a temporary luxurious hotel."[28]

To assess this claim's broader veracity, we interrogate the Kumbh Mela's effects on the organizational prowess of Hindu nationalist parties in the domain of candidate selection and

[27] We note that several prior studies have pinpointed a robust association in individual-level survey data between greater Hindu religiosity and increased likelihood of voting for Hindu nationalist parties, principally the BJP (Kumar 2009; Thachil 2014) Indeed, the only disconfirming evidence we have found in this regard is Chhibber (1997), although this study pertains to a single election (1991), and employs controls that might absorb the effect of religiosity on vote choice.

[28] "Kumbh Country Turns into Battleground of Politics Ahead of LS Polls." *NewsClick*, February 7, 2019. bit.ly/2SMHzEj

quality. Data-wise, we return to the elections dataset, using it to code information about Hindu nationalist parties' ability to field candidates locally, and those candidates' career backgrounds.

The analysis comes down in support of the organizational hypothesis. In Table 5, Column 1, we observe that Kumbh proximity significantly lifts the chances of Hindu nationalist parties fielding *any* candidate in a national election race. A halving in time/rail distance increases the share of constituencies within a 1961 district-area fielding a Hindu nationalist candidate by 6.4 percentage points (ln(0.5)*-0.093). These gains comport with the notion that local religious party organizations tasked with drafting candidates and putting them up for election are better able to do so in the aftermath of a Kumbh Mela nearby. Table 5, Column 2 examines candidate type. It asks if a contraction of Kumbh time/rail distance makes Hindu nationalist parties more able to select a "loyalist" candidate, meaning one who has not previously stood for national election under a non-Hindu nationalist party banner. Here, we see that the Kumbh Mela raises religious parties' prospects for putting up dyed-in-the-wool Hindutva candidates—as opposed to "turncoats" who have previously demonstrated fealty to parties representing other ideologies. Conceivably, the Kumbh Melas, as a meeting place for religious parties and more socially embedded Hindu nationalist organizations, allow devoted *Sangh Parivar* cadres to make the leap to politics. Last, Table 5, Column 3 shows no statistical changes wrought by Kumbh time/rail distance on the average stock of experience of Hindu nationalist candidates—quantified by the number of times candidates have stood for a Lok Sabha election in the past. Hindu nationalist parties appear unwilling to sacrifice candidate "quality," in terms of apparent commitment to Hindu nationalism, for a greater electoral know-how.

In closing, we revisit the interpretation of the riots results displayed in Table 3. We earlier chalked up these effects to a reification of socio-religious group boundaries. But it could be

argued that this increase in violence flows from a strengthening of local Hindu nationalist militancy caused by the Kumbh Mela. Paul Brass (2003: 258) diagnosed the existence of an "institutionalized riot system" in Indian towns, which he described as "a perpetually operative network of roles whose functions are to maintain hostilities … mobilize crowds to threaten or intimidate persons from the other community ... and, if the political context is right, to let loose widespread violent action." In Brass's telling, key Hindu nationalist groups like the RSS, the VHP, and the Bajrang Dal have formed the backbone of this system. It is plausible that Kumbh Melas help these groups cement their local organizations.[29]

Conclusion

This paper presents a new explanation for the electoral success of religious parties. We show that mass religious events, which are a cornerstone of religious practice worldwide, substantially enhance the vote shares of religiously-aligned parties. Employing a credible research design and focusing on the case of India's Kumbh Mela, we find that a region's spatial and temporal proximity to this pilgrimage festival produces an increase in votes for Hindu nationalist parties. Our theory posits—and our evidence largely concurs—that the effect transpires via changes in voters' religiosity, and religious parties' exploitation of the gatherings for organization-building. Overall, the findings testify to the transformative implications of large religious events for a nation's society and politics.

Illuminating an overlooked factor underpinning the rise of majoritarian nationalism in a country home to one sixth of the global population is a worthwhile task. Yet it is important to

[29] More generally, we should take cognizance of the potential points of crossover and interconnection between the two mechanisms we parse.

consider general lessons. For one, the theoretical framework we develop has applications to more quotidian forms of collective religious devotion, as well their downstream political consequences. Collectivities such as church services, processions, and prayer groups are equally susceptible to platform co-optation by parties and politicians. Religious arenas, in this sense, are not "pure" spaces insulated from worldly concerns; instead, they are magnets for political actors intent on promoting their interests and programs. Further, we expect the proclivity for public religious spectacles to inform identities and norms to travel beyond the case of the Kumbh Mela. Indeed, in an age of mass media, religious experiences mediated through television or the internet may have comparable impacts.

The findings, while rich, uncover avenues for further research. We note that the Kumbh Mela had more potent effects during the earlier decades of India's independence, at a time when the reigning state ideology was secularist in orientation and national power was monopolized by one party. Do mass religious events forge different political outcomes under alternative political opportunity structures and electoral systems? In a similar spirit, it would be fruitful to examine whether the ritualized gatherings that form part of other non-Abrahamic religions, such as Buddhism and Shintoism, become politicized as they do in contemporary Hinduism. Finally, a question for those wanting to cultivate inter-group harmony in diverse societies is what can be done to contain the polarizing—and even violent—fallout from large religious spectacles. Should multiculturalist states intrude on collective religious observance to curb the spread of exclusionary political worldviews, and if so, how? Proposing a way forward invites a wider discussion between empirical social science and normative political theory.

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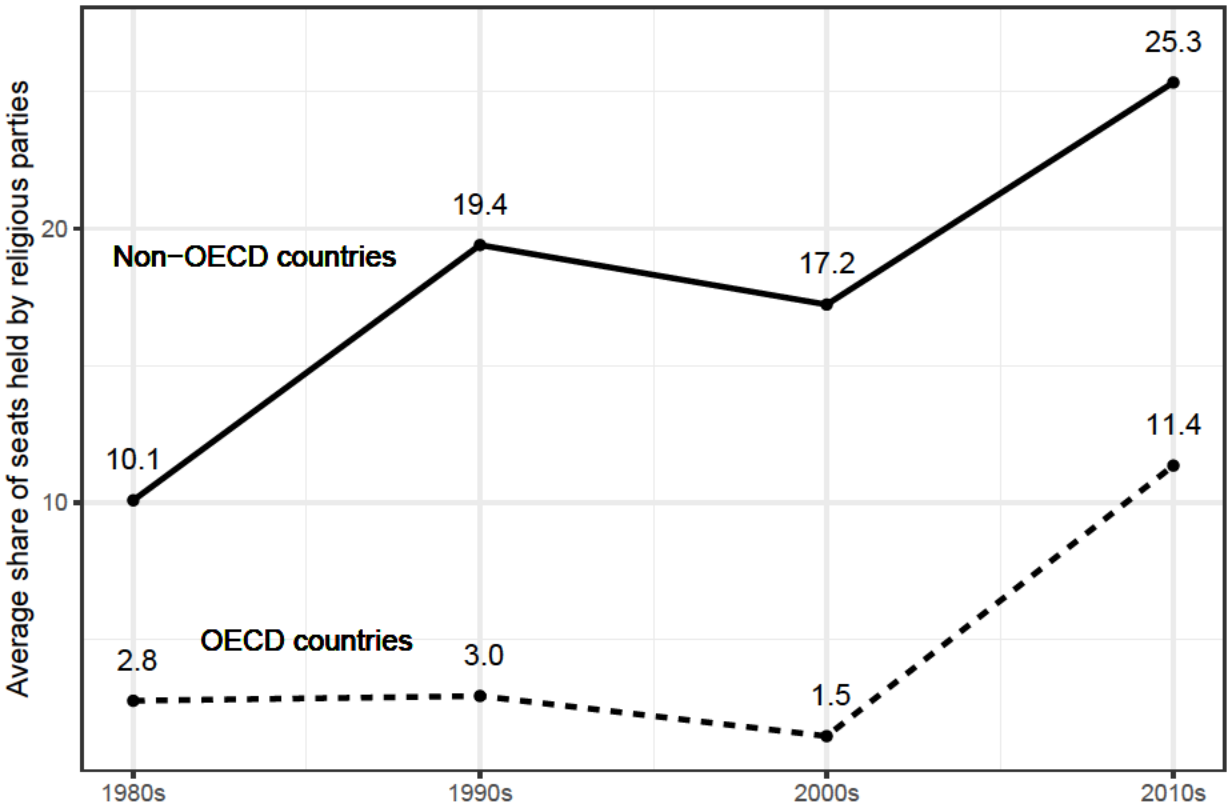

Figure 1: This figure plots the average share of national assembly seats held by religious parties, by decade, from 1980 to 2018, based on the V-Party dataset. The sample only includes countries whose Polity V score exceeds zero for a given year (meaning the country was rated more democratic than autocratic). We consider a religious party to be one for which the aggregated ordinal response of V-Party experts to the question, "To what extent does this party invoke God, religion, or sacred/religious texts to justify its positions?'' is Always or Often. Plotted seat shares are obtained by taking a weighted average of country/decade means, weighting by national population size. The sample includes 138 unique states. Subsetting is based on countries' membership of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for a given decade.

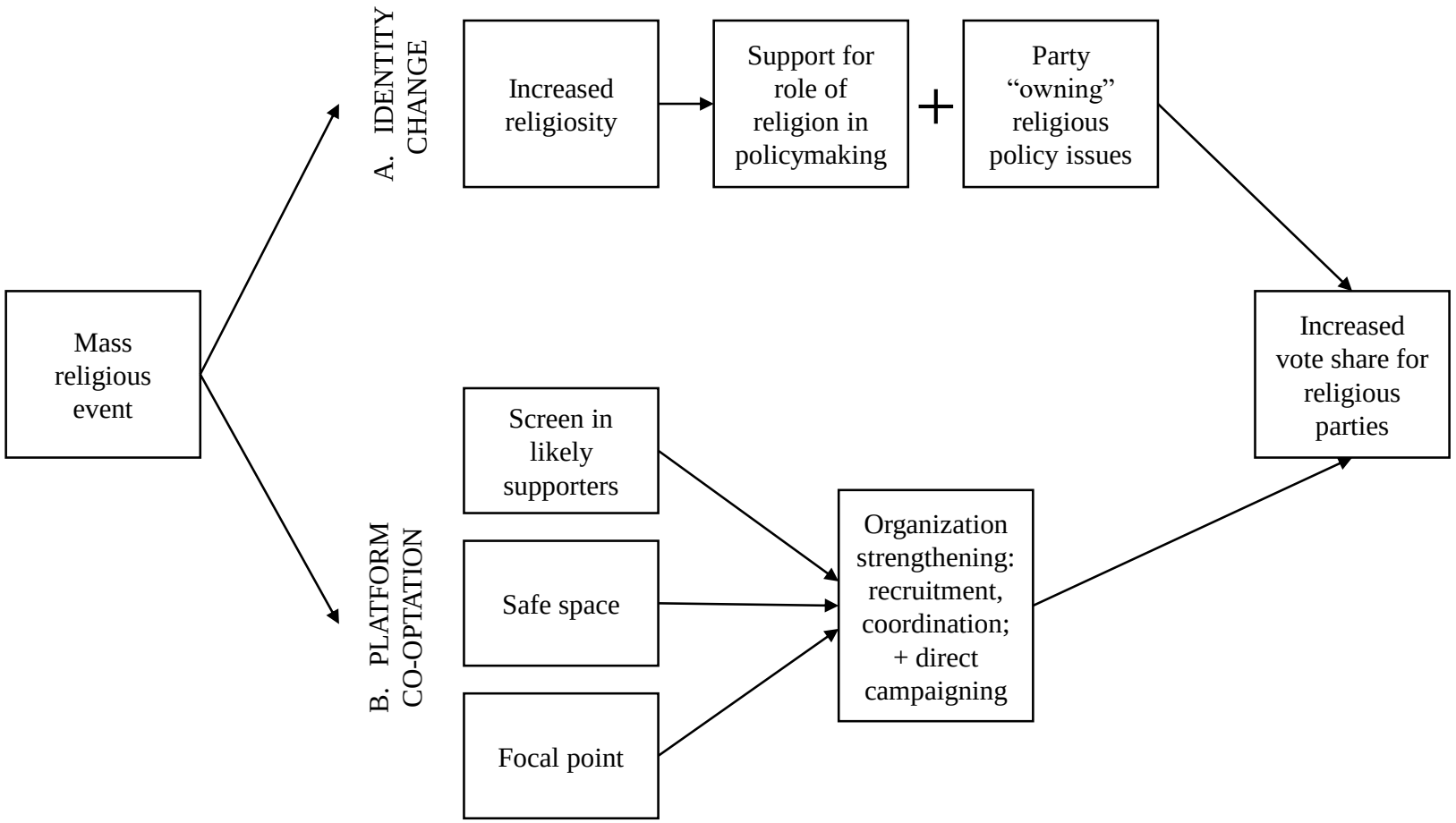

Figure 2: Theoretical argument.

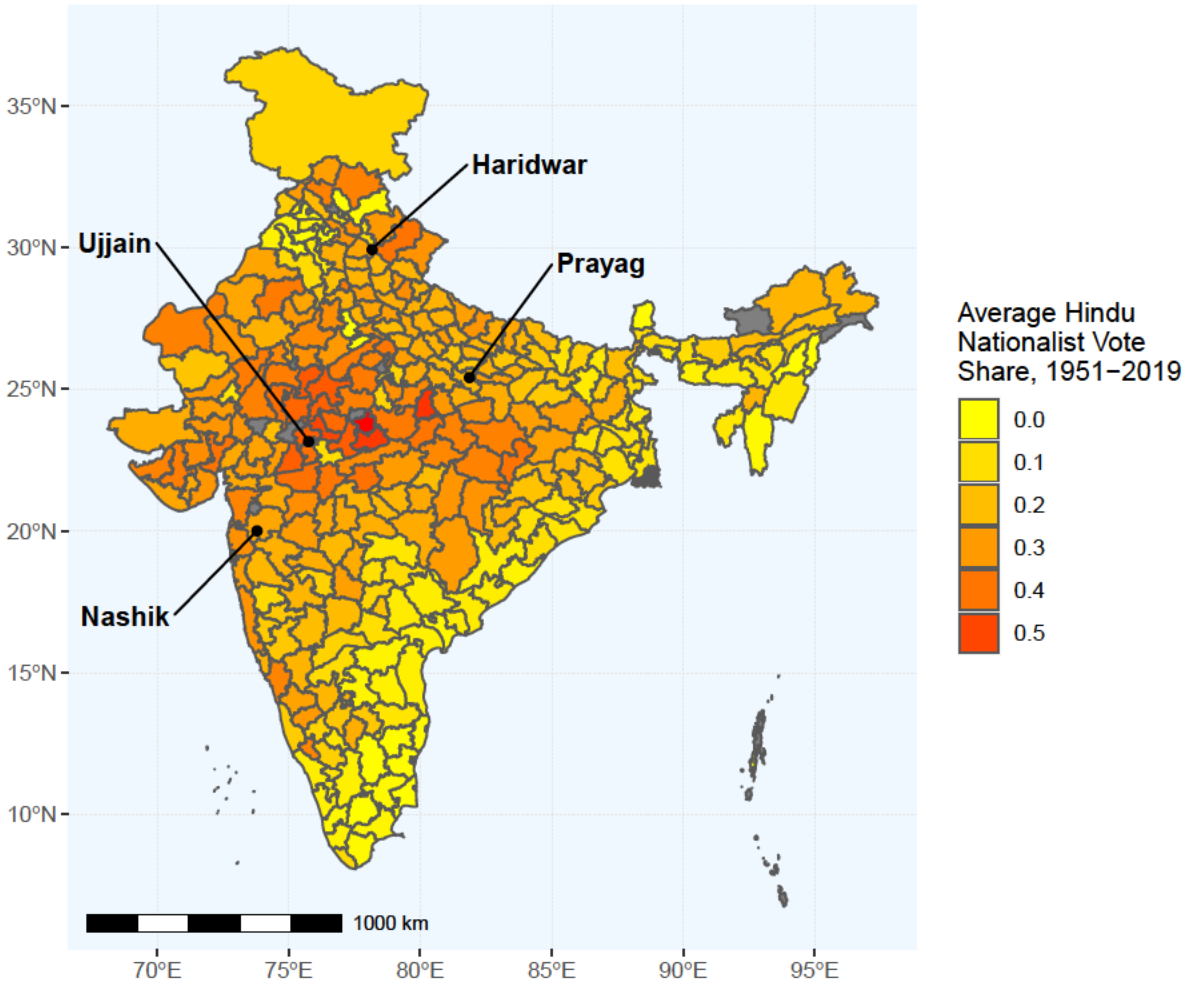

Figure 3: Map of India showing locations of the four Kumbh Mela sites and the average vote share received by Hindu nationalist parties across all Lok Sabha elections, 1951 2019.

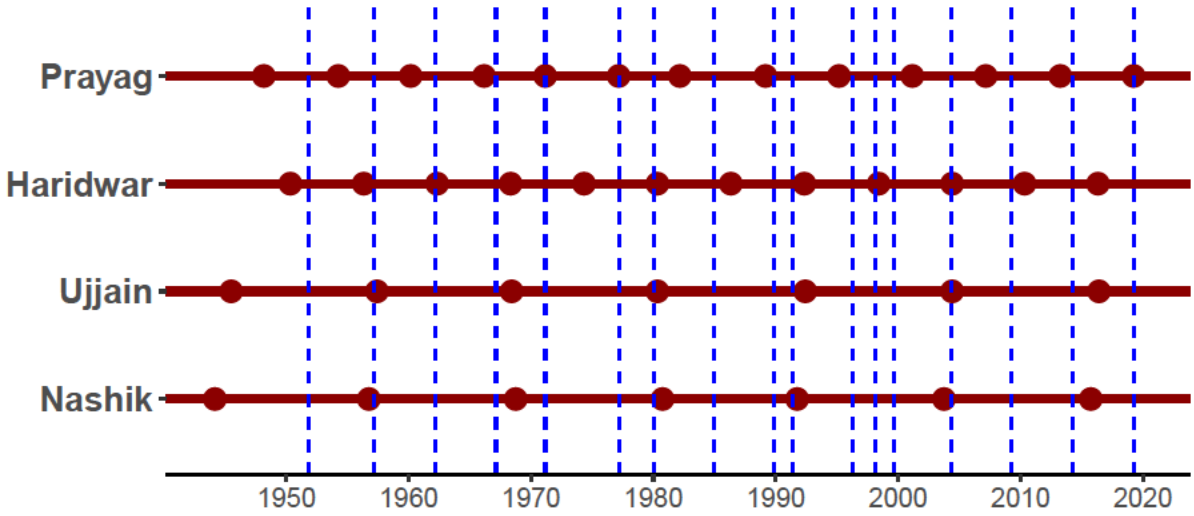

Figure 4: Timing of Kumbh Mela events across the four sites (red circles) relative to India's Lok Sabha elections (vertical blue dashed lines).

Table 1: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/spatial distance on the vote share received by Hindu nationalist parties in India's Lok Sabha elections, 1951 2019. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/election year. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses.

	Dependent variable:				
	Hindu Nationalist Prop.				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.113^{***}		-0.192^{***}	-0.117^{***}	-0.045^{***}
	(0.016)		(0.044)	(0.022)	(0.015)
Ln. Kumbh time/geodesic distance		-0.092^{***}	0.073^{*}		
		(0.014)	(0.038)		
Outcome mean	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.12	0.27
Sample	Full	Full	Full	1951–1984	1985-2019
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Election FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4,890	4,890	4,890	1,934	2,956
Adjusted R^2	0.671	0.671	0.671	0.644	0.743

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

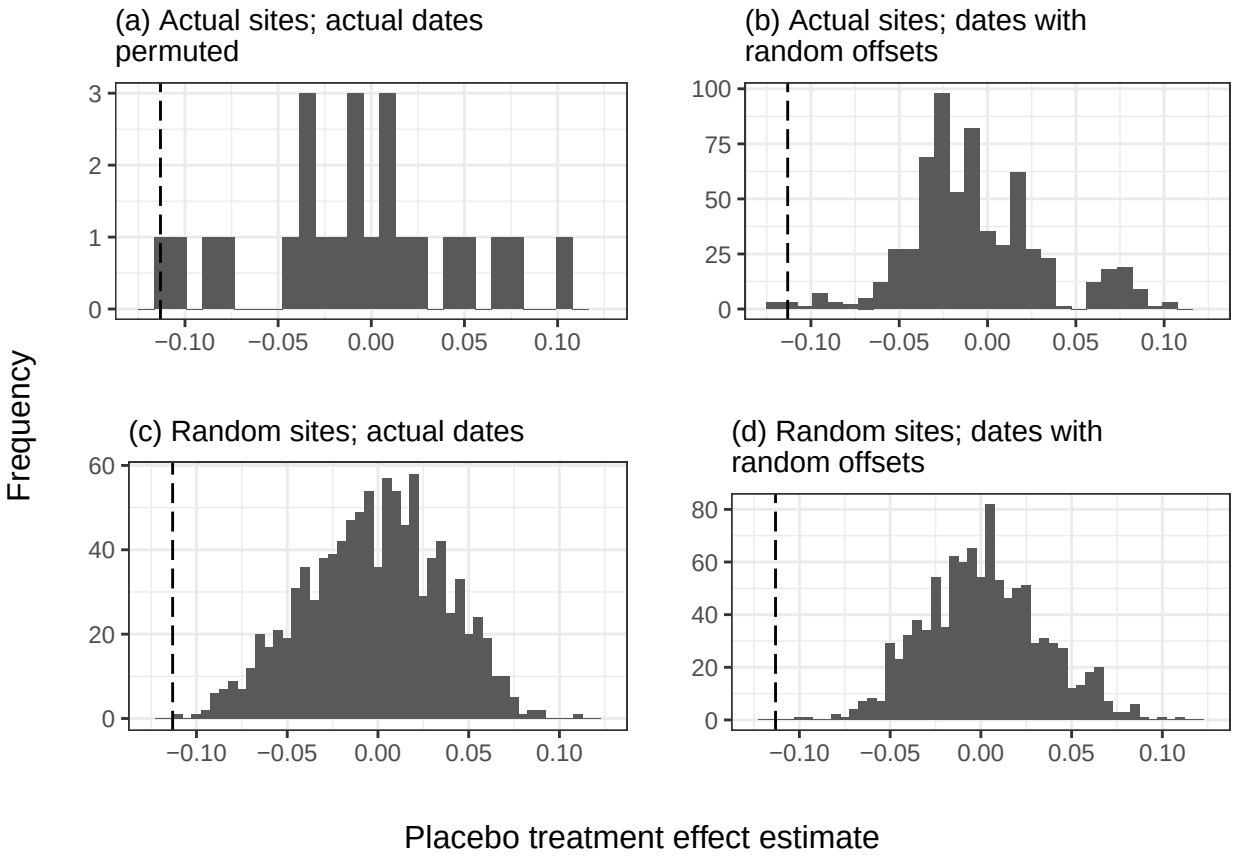

Figure 5: Distributions of estimated effects from OLS regressions. For each model, a placebo treatment variable is computed by permuting/varying at random the timing and locations of hypothetical Kumbh Mela festivals, holding fixed the outcome variable and employing the same specification as that used in Table 1, Column 1. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/election year. The estimate based on the true Kumbh timing and location is depicted by the dashed vertical line in each panel. There are four approaches to recomputing the treatment variable. In Panel (a), the true Kumbh locations and true Kumbh Mela dates are used, but the schedules are assigned to the "wrong'' city, for all possible city/schedule combinations. In Panel (b), the true Kumbh locations are employed but the date schedules are offset by a random number of weeks (in the interval -2207 to +2207 days). In Panel (c), the true dates are employed but four locations are chosen at random to serve as placebo Kumbh sites from the full set of 1961 Indian district centroids. In Panel (d), dates are randomly offset by a randomly chosen number of weeks (in the interval -2207 to +2207 days) and four locations are chosen at random to serve as placebo Kumbh sites from the full set of 1961 Indian district centroids.

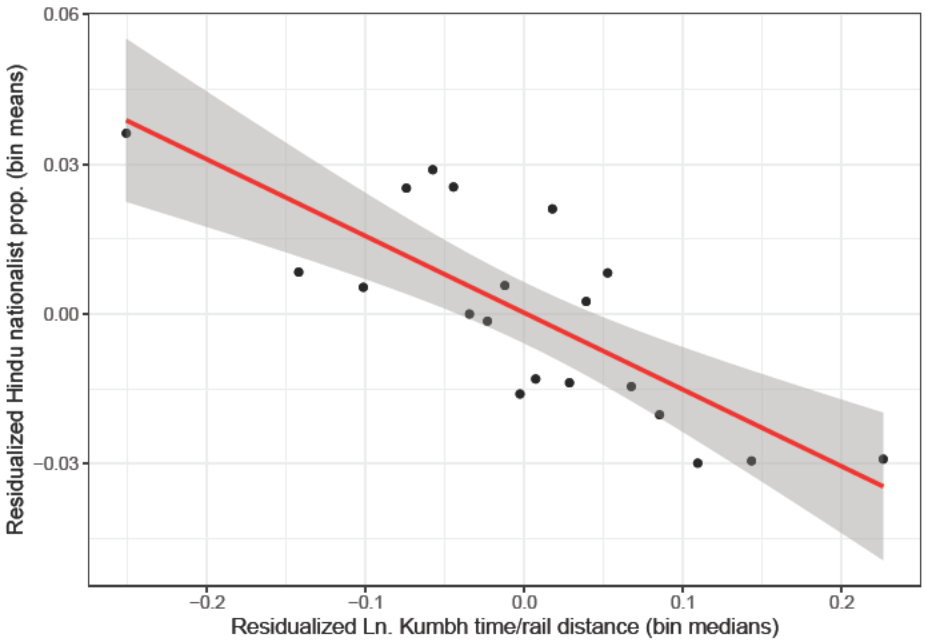

Figure 6: Binned bivariate scatterplot showing the relationship between residualized Kumbh time/rail distance (logged) and residualized Hindu nationalist vote share; 1961 district and election-year fixed effects are partialled out of both variables. Bins contain equal numbers of observations. OLS line of best fit with 95 percent confidence band is shown in red.

Table 2: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on item-level household expenditures. Data are from the thick rounds of the National Sample Survey, 1987 2012. The unit of analysis is the household/NSS round. Outcome variables are indicators denoting non-zero expenditures by households within the past 30 days. Standard errors, clustered by 1991 districts, are in parentheses.

	Any Household Expenditure:	
	Meat, Fish, Eggs	Priest
	(1)	(2)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	0.024***	0.002
	(0.008)	(0.007)
Outcome mean	0.60	0.08
1991 District FEs	Y	Y
NSS Round FEs	Y	Y
Observations	638,332	638,332
Adjusted R^2	0.329	0.145

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on the incidence and severity of Hindu/Muslim riots, 1951 2000. Raw outcomes are count variables. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/month. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses.

	Dependent variable:			
	Ln(Riots + 1)	Ln(Riot Days + 1)	Ln(Killed + 1)	Ln(Injured + 1)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.002^{**}	-0.004^{***}	-0.005^{**}	-0.005
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.004)
Outcome mean	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.12
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Month FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	195,776	195,776	195,776	195,776
Adjusted R^2	0.032	0.036	0.028	0.018

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on vote shares for parties and on party-system fractionalization in India's Lok Sabha elections, 1951 2019, as well as heterogeneous effects according to the percentile-ranked share of Muslims in the district population. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/election year. "Other Prop." is the total vote share for non-Congress and non-Hindu nationalist parties, including independents. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses.

	Dependent variable:						
	Congress Prop.		Other Prop.		Effective Number of Parties		Hindu Nationalist Prop.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	0.036***	0.085***	0.076***	0.017	0.243***	0.094	−0.103***
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.076)	(0.097)	(0.018)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance X local Muslim share percentile		−0.001***		0.001***		0.003***	−0.0002
		(0.0002)		(0.0002)		(0.001)	(0.0001)
Outcome mean	0.37	0.37	0.42	0.42	2.69	2.69	0.21
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Election FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4,890	4,842	4,890	4,842	4,890	4,842	4,842
Adjusted R^2	0.495	0.501	0.516	0.520	0.395	0.398	0.673

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

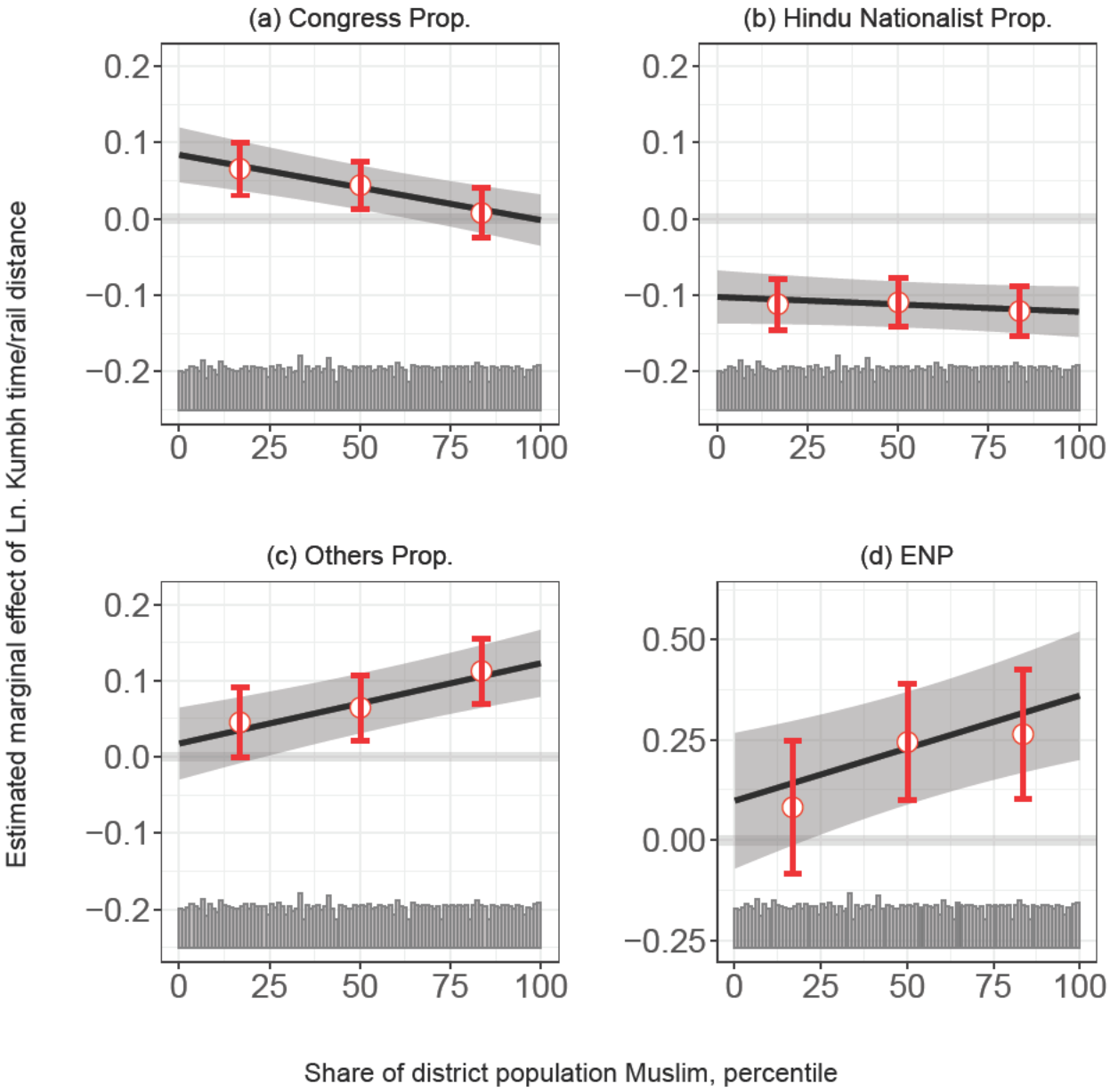

Figure 7: This figure plots the heterogeneous effects of Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance on four difference outcomes according to percentile-ranked share of Muslims in the district population, as recorded in the 1961 Census of India. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/election year. Models include 1961 district and election-year fixed effects. Black lines show linear interactions, with 95 percent confidence bands. Red circles show estimated subgroup effects, with 95 percent confidence intervals; subgroups are defined by low, middle, and high terciles of the moderator variable. Confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered by 1961 districts.

Table 5: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on candidate selection and candidate type among Hindu nationalist parties in Lok Sabha elections. "Loyal Hindu Nationalist Candidate" in Column 2 is defined as one who has not previously run under a non-Hindu nationlist party label. "Experience" in Column 3 is defined as the number of times the candidate has previously run for a Lok Sabha election. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses.

	Dependent variable:		
	Share of District Seats in which Any Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded	Share of District Seats in which Loyal Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded	Average Hindu Nationalist Candidate Experience
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.093^{**}	-0.104^{***}	0.144
	(0.044)	(0.039)	(0.178)
Sample	Full	1967-2019	1967-2019
Outcome mean	0.63	0.60	0.74
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y
Election FEs	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4,890	4,115	4,115
Adjusted R^2	0.530	0.401	0.329

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The Electoral Consequences of Mass Religious Events

ONLINE APPENDIX

Table of Contents

A Kumbh Mela dates and sources

Table A1 lists Kumbh Mela festivals dating back to 1943, with quotations from supporting sources. It includes all Kumbh Melas and Ardh Kumbh Melas that have been held since the first independence-era elections in 1951; it also includes the last Kumbh Mela held at each of the four sites prior to that election. Two areas of uncertainty that we encountered in compiling the list bear highlighting.

- The structure of the Nashik-Trimbakeshwar festival is looser than that of the festivals organized at the other three sites. It has also undergone changes. The Kumbh Mela in Nasik occurs across two locations roughly 20km apart and is folded into the Sinhastha fair (the same name frequently used to refer to the Ujjain Kumbh Mela, too). This fair has sometimes lasted up to 13 months. In certain years, sources pinpoint a subpart of the festival as having been clearly demarcated as the Kumbh Mela; in other years, however, no such clear distinction was drawn. We have hewed to the sources as closely as possible, and detail the case-by-case decisions on start and end dates below.
- Astrologers aligned with the different akharas have occasionally disagreed about the exact year in which the Kumbh Mela should be held essentially owing to disputes about how to deal with the leap year problem. This has affected the Kumbh in Prayag and Ujjain and has led state governments to arrange two Kumbh festivals at the same site in consecutive years, satisfying both sides. We describe these instances below. In all cases when this happened, it appears that one of the "pair" of festivals was substantially larger in size; accordingly, we consider this to have been the "main" Kumbh for that cycle.

Table A1: List of Kumbh Mela dates, with description of data sources and coding decisions.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Prayag (Ardh)	01/2019 - 03/2019	· "The mystical Kumbh Mela, the 'world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims' will be organised again from January 15, 2019, till March 4, 2019, in the city of Prayagraj" ("Kumbh Mela 2019 in Prayagraj: From date to other important details, all you need to know about the world's largest religious gathering," Financial Express, 2 January 2019, bit.ly/3we7ZxK).
Ujjain (Full)	04/2016 - 05/2016	· "The fair, which started on 22 April and goes on till 21 May, is also a platform for some homegrown start-ups to showcase their technologies" ("A confluence of divine and digital at the kumbh," Livemint, 10 May 2016, bit.ly/3mbGQai).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Haridwar (Ardh)	01/2016 - 04/2016	· "The Ardh Kumbh Mela opened to a colourful start in Haridwar ... 'There is some confusion this year over the date as some (Hindu) calendars claimed the festival would be observed on January 14, while others said January 15,' said Rohit Tiwari, a Haridwar-based astrologer" ("Ardh Kumbh Mela opens to colourful start in Haridwar," Hindustan Times, 14 January 2016, bit.ly/2Pf0w0V). · "[T]he Ardh Kumbh mela—to be held at Haridwar from January 14 2016 till April-end" ("U'khand braces for Ardh Kumbh 2016," Times of India, 20 March 2015, bit.ly/31DYFFy).
Nasik (Full)	08/2015 - 09/2015	· "In 2015, the first auspicious day of bathing falls on Aug. 26, in the northern city of Nashik. The last holy day of bathing occurs on Sept. 25" ("Kumbh Mela 2015: What you need to know about this sacred Hindu pilgrimage," Huffpost, 27 August 2015, bit.ly/3cCG3Mk).
Prayag (Full)	01/2013 - 03/2013	· "Maha Kumbh Mela 2013 was held from January 14 to March 10 at Allahabad wherein 12 crore pilgrims participated" ("CAG report blames railways for 2013 Kumbh Mela stampede," Deccan Chronicle, 29 November 2014, bit.ly/3dkNXJr).
Haridwar (Full)	01/2010 - 04/2010	· "Recent Kumbh Mela begining [sic] from January 14, 2010 to April 28, 2010 includes 11 bathing dates in between, at Haridwar" (Sultan 2015: 14).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/2007 - 02/2007	· "A city of tents will house an expected 60 million pilgrims over the six-week celebration" ("Hindu Kumbh festivals," BBC News, 15 January 2007, bbc.in/39tD2Me).
Ujjain (Full)	04/2004 - 05/2004	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · Concurs with Maclean 2003 (876). · "During the festival (April 5–May 4), more than one crore people will flow in and out of Ujjain where new toilets, bridges, roads, pipelines and power stations have been constructed" ("Money, marketing, hitech become Ujjain Kumbha Mela's new mantras," India Today, 19 April 2004, bit.ly/3mfyyOv).
Haridwar (Ardh)	01/2004 - 05/2004	· "Ardh Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world and an important event for the Hindus is taking place in Haridwar from January 2004 to May 2004" ("Bid notice: Golden opportunity for advertisers," Times of India, 20 December 2003, bit.ly/3wevtD7).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Nasik (Full)	08/2003 - 09/2003	· Concurs with Maclean 2003 (876). · Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "Many of the pilgrims [were] crushed to death [yesterday] . . . on the most auspicious day of the 43-day event" ("Holy man's gift blamed for 39 dead in stampede," Guardian, 27 August 2003, bit.ly/3fwfvy7). · "With the death of 35 pilgrims in a stampede just six days ago fresh in mind, a tight security ring was put in place as an estimated 1.5 million devotees and 70,000 mahants and sadhus today took holy dip in Godavari for final 'shahi-snan' of Simhastha Kumbh Mela here" ("Final royal bath at Kumbh amid tight security," ZeeNews, 1 September 2003, bit.ly/3vkJ8aq). · "Sadhus prepare for their first Shahi Snan (royal bath) at the Kumbh Mela in Nasik, Tuesday, August 12, 2003" ("Sadhus [collection of archive photographs]" Outlook, 26 April 2021, bit.ly/3dPI48y).
Prayag (Full)	01/2001 - 02/2001	· Concurs with Maclean 2003 (876). · Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "The all-out efforts made by the state, where all machinery at its disposal was pressed into service, made Kumbh mela the centre of global attraction from January 4 to February 20" ("Mahakumbh: A maha success," Times of India, 23 February 2001, bit.ly/2PHJsAo).
Haridwar (Full)	01/1998 - 05/1998	· Concurs with Maclean 2003 (876). · Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "The purna Kumbh bathing, which had begun on January 1, will end when the Digambar, Nirwan and Nirmohi Akhadas take a bath on May 14" ("Hardwar deserted but mela is still on," Times of India, 21 April 1998, bit.ly/3sRxFOs).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/1995 - 02/1995	· "Beginning on January 12, this will be the largest fair anywhere in the world" ("Bid to ensure smooth 'Ardh Kumbh Mela'," Times of India, 9 December 1994, bit.ly/3u9Nnov). · "The true mela is held every 12 years here, in-between is an ardha or 'half' mela—the one this year. It began on January 12th and lasted one and a half months" ("Kumbha Mela: Just a little gathering of 45 million souls," Hinduism Today, [n.d.] April 1995, bit.ly/3u83ZwU).
Haridwar (Ardh)	02/1992 - 04/1992	· "In all, seven main bathing days fall during Ardh kumb mela period which started in February and ends in April" ("Arrangements made for Ardh Kumbh," Times of India, 12 March 1992, bit.ly/3fzpBhx).
Ujjain (Full)	04/1992 - 05/1992	· Concurs with Clark (2006: 294). · "... an elaborate security network [is] being planned by the state government for the forthcoming 'Simhastha' festival to be held at Ujjain from April 17 to [M]ay 16" ("Tight security for festival," Times of India, 26 March 1992, bit.ly/3ud3Fx8).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Nasik (Full)	08/1991 - 09/1991	· "Even as the planet Jupiter moves into the constellation Leo on August 21, after a gap of 12 years, more than three million pilgrims of sadhus will flood into the city of Nashik for a holy dip ... This means that the only alternative for him has been to block all eight major roads into the city on the days of the holy dip. Straddling the months of August and September, these are August 21, September 8 and September 13" ("All set for Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 2 August 1991, bit.ly/3rCmwQh). · "On the back of the 1991 mela, the state government allocated additional funds for the city's development; and Nashik will reportedly get a Rs10-crore development package from ASSOCHAM after the 2015 Kumbh" ("Nashik Kumbh: Of selfies, detergents and power struggles," Hindustan Times, 6 September 2015, bit.ly/3o0aIaq). · Note, there is an error in Clark 2006 (294), who records this as happening in 1992. Reporting is clear that the main 'Kumbh' months of the festival fell in 1991.
Prayag (Full)	01/1989 - 02/1989	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "During the next four weeks, over 2,000 big and small Akhara chiefs are expected to take temporary abode in the Sangam, one of the holiest spots in the Hindu pantheon, for the unique conjunction of stars said to be taking place after 144 years" ("Sadhus swamp Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 15 January 1989, bit.ly/2PemYqZ).
Haridwar (Full)	03/1986 - 04/1986	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "People have begun pouring in from all parts of the country. Sadhus and godmen have started arriving—some on foot, some on rickshaws and yet others in chauffer-driven limousines" ("Hardwar decked up for Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 10 March 1986, bit.ly/3dSyMbV). · "[S]everal hundred thousand pilgrims today had a dip in the holy river on the occasion of Baisakhi even as devotees continued to stream into the sacred city for the final bath of the Kumbh Mela after midnight tonight" ("Massive crowds at Mela," Times of India, 14 April 1986, bit.ly/3rEEbHg).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/1982 - 02/1982	· "A tented township with modern facilities spread over 6,000 acres on the Ganga riverbed is nearing completion for the Ardh Kumbh Mela that begins on January 9 . . . After the Ganga puja today, the sadhus and kalpavasis will start occupying their respective akhras and stay there until the first week of February, when the mela ends" ("New Kumbh Mela township rises," Times of India, 30 November 1981, bit.ly/3rETDD1). · "The incident occurred in Allahabad city where 3 million devout Hindus, holy men and naked ascetics were ending a monthlong ritual of bathing in the sacred Ganges River in a religious festival called the Ardh Kumbh Mela" ("Nine injured in fight at Indian holy rite," UPI Archives, 28 January 1982, bit.ly/3m6bIcb). · Note, this event breaks the cycle. There is no clear discussion that we could find detailing why only five years had elapsed since the last Ardh Kumbh Mela in Prayag (1977) and eleven years since the last full Kumbh there (1971).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Ujjain (Full)	03/1980 - 04/1980	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "More than 50 lakh pilgrims are expected to arrive here for a holy dip in the Kshipra river during the month-long Kumbh Mela, beginning here on Monday [31 March 1980] next" ("50 lakh expected at Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 29 March 1980, bit.ly/2O8ogTF).
Haridwar (Ardh)	03/1980 - 04/1980	· "[T]his sacred town is getting dressed up to play host to millions of pilgrims expected here on April 13—the holy Ardh-Kumbh bathing day ... Other bathing occasions between now and the Ardh Kumbh (April 13) will be Ramanavami on March 25 and Chaitra Poornima on March 31" ("Hardwar getting dressed up for Ardh-kumbh," Times of India, 16 March 1980, bit.ly/3sJqrw3).
Nasik (Full)	08/1979 - 09/1980	· For this event, sources do not point to specific 'Kumbh' months within the Sinhastha fair; thus, we consider the full fair to be the Kumbh. · "About 26,000 sadhus of 54 akhads and over three lakh devotees from all over India took a holy dip in Ramkunda today, the first 'parvani' of the Sinhastha fair here. Sadhus of Nirmotri, Nirvad and Digambar akhads came in a procession with their convoy of elephants, horses and flags" ("3 lakh devotees take holy dip at Ramkund," Times of India, 30 August 1979, bit.ly/2QWaSnj). · "Thousands of mendicants and pilgrims gathered recently on the banks of the Godavari at Nasik for the Sinhasta Kumbh Mela, held every 12 years ... This year, during the last week of August, sadhus, followers of the devas, begin converging on the ancient city of Panchvati, on the outskirts or Nasik. They are gathering for the holy baths during the Sinhasta Kumbh Mela" ("Coral shells, sadhus and surging crowds," Times of India, 16 September 1979, bit.ly/3hgTi83) · Clark 2006 (294) gives the Nasik Kumbh year as 1980. · "Nearly 3000 [? unclear] 'nanga' (naked) sadhus of [? unclear] akhada along with their groups took a 'holy dip' in the early hours of this morning in [? unclear] Trymbakeshwar ... on the occassion of the first 'Sinhasta Parvani' " ("5,000 sadhus take part in Sinhasta fair," Times of India, 10 August 1980, bit.ly/2QVJghD). · "About three laks pimgrims, including about 2,000 nanga (naked) sadhus took a holy dip on Tuesday in the Godavari river, on the occasion of the third Parvani day of the Sanhastha fair at Timbakeshwar ... Laks of devotees from different parts of the country thronged to the banks of the Godavari river to have 'darshan' of the sadhus" ("District news," Times of India, 10 September 1980, bit.ly/33K4UZv).
Prayag (Full)	01/1977 - 02/1977	· Concurs with Clark (2006: 294). · "Allahabad is getting ready to received 1,500,000 pilgrims from different parts of the county and abroad during the Kumbh mela, beginning on January 5, 1977, the Paush Purnima Day" ("Allahabad gets ready for Kumbh mela," Times of India, 30 September 1976, bit.ly/3m6pc7N). · "Spread over 40 winter days, from January 5 to February 16, the festival became the venue for some 10 million pilgrims, saints, mendicants and ascetics, gurus and godmen to congregate for a sacred bath that would assure them a thousand promises in heaven" ("Kumbh mela: Raghu Rai records the intricate fabric of life in Allahabad," India Today, 15 February 1977, bit.ly/31ydlpD).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Haridwar (Full)	02/1974 - 04/1974	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "Sir,—Millions of rupees will be spent on the Kumbh Mela which begins at Hardwar on February 1 next year" ("Kumbh Mela: To the Editor," Times of India, 8 October 1973, bit.ly/3fsnwnP). · "Eleven people were killed and 22 injured yesterday in two accidents connected with the Kumbh Mela" ("11 mela pilgrims killed in mishaps," Times of India, 13 April 1974, bit.ly/2QVznk1). · "The Indian side stated that the remaining Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees in India to be repatriated under the Delhi Agreement, numbering approximately 6,500, would be repatriated at the usual pace of a train on alternate days and the likely short-fall due to the suspension of trains from April 10 to April 19, 1974 on account of Kumbh Mela" ("Bangladesh-India-Pakistan: Agreement on the Repatriation of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees," International Legal Materials 13(3), 1974: 501-5. bit.ly/3d2GU9a).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/1971 - 02/1971	· "The Brahmacari's camp was still going strong at the Ardh Kumbh Mela in 1971, 'busy all the time blaring election propaganda against Indira Gandhi and her Congress' " (Maclean 2008: 213). · "About 20,000 pilgrims ... had a dip ... today marking the beginning of the one-month Ardh Kumba Mela" ("Ardh Kumbh at the Sangham," Times of India, 11 January 1971, bit.ly/3cEKOEY).
Ujjain (Full)	04/1968 - 05/1968	· Concurs with Clark (2006: 294). · "Thousands of pilgrims today had a dip in the sacred waters of the Kashipra here on the occasion of Chaitra Purnima, the first main bathing day of the month-long Kumbh festival. ... This year's Sinhastha will continue till May 12" ("Ujjain rush less than expected," Times of India, 13 April 1968, bit.ly/3ma9Bnr). · "Though the mela authorities spent about Rs. 1 crore to provide amenities for an expected crowd of 2.5 million pilgrims, besides 30,000 sadhus, the rush this year so far has been much less. This was partly because of the controversy over the date of the Sinhastha, which, according to one religious school, would fall next year and also because of the cooncidence of the Ardha Kumbh at Hardwar ("Ujjain rush less than expected," Times of India, 14 April 1968, bit.ly/3twBdVS). · Note, despite this controversy, there are no signs that a Kumbh Mela/Sinhastha of any significant magnitude was held in Ujjain in 1969; as in the previous Ujjain Mela, the second of the two years appears to have been the primary festival.
Haridwar (Ardh)	04/1968 - 04/1968	· "One million pilgrims are estimated to have sought spiritual salvation with a holy dip in the Ganga, the river of faith and hope, here today on the occasion of Ardh Kumbh" ("One million take holy dip in the Ganga," Times of India, 13 April 1968, bit.ly/3u8EuM0).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Nasik (Full)	08/1967 - 09/1968	· "Mr. Baburao Dixit, president of the Sinhastha Samiti of the Nasik Panchavati Purohit Sang, asserted today that the Sinhastha fair did not actually fall on next Wednesday. He said that as Ekadashi fell on Wednesday, some people might take a holy bath on that day. However, the first Sinhastha Parvani begin only on September 3, and the Kumbha Snaan was on the following day. He told a press conference that the Sinhastha fair would go on for 13 months. The mahapuja of the Godavari would be performed on September 17. Some other important dates were September 28, October 27, November 23, January 15, April 27, and May 27" ("Sinhastha fair dates," Times of India, 16 August 1967, bit.ly/2PQdRNa). · The Nashik Gazetteer records the Kumbh Mela has having occurred in 1968 (bit.ly/3f3eITs). · Misra (2019: 44), too, records the Kumbh Mela has having occurred after the Ujjain Kumbh Mela in 1980. · Given these accounts, we consider the full Sinhastha fair to be the Kumbh Mela, lasting 13 months from 1967 to 1968.
Prayag (Full)	01/1966 - 02/1966	· "With the first principal bathing day—Paus Purnima—today, the month-long Kumbh Mela started on the sandy banks of the Ganga and Yamuna Sangham" ("Kumbh Mela begins: Over a lakh take dip," Times of India, 8 January 1966, bit.ly/3cDwQU7). · "There was also a dispute over when one of the Prayag Kumbh Melas should be held, the Sanyasi astrologers believing it should be in 1965, while the Vairagis (Ramanandis) believed it should be in 1966 ... The solution and consequence was the enhanced funding by the government of the annual, month-long Magh Mela, held at the same site, the two sects of sadhus attending in different years. On both occasions many millions of pilgrims attended." (Clark 2006: 294). · A Kumbh Mela was held in 1965 also, but judging by the volume of news reporting, the 1966 event was far larger. Regardless, the exclusion of the 1965 event from the list cannot has a bearing on our results, as the 1966 event occurred closer in time to the subsequent (1967) elections.
Haridwar (Full)	03/1962 - 04/1962	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "For the U.P. administration April 13, 1962 was a proud moment when it saw first accident-free Kumbh of the twentieth century" ("Causes of Kumbh tragedy," Times of India, 2 May 1986 bit.ly/3dlRI16). · "The Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama of Kankhal in Uttar Pradesh has solicited public support for maintaining a relief centre, a mobile relief squad and a boarding and lodging section in the sevashrama for the benefit of the pilgrims attending the forthcoming Kumbha Mela at Hardwar" ("Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 13 January 1962, bit.ly/3rJO5XP). · "Despite both these meetings being failures, the Samaj convinced the government to fund a third vyas sammelan, this time coinciding with the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar between March and April 1962 (Menon 2018: 236).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/1960 - 02/1960	· "...today, Makar Sankranti, the first principal bathing day of the month-long Ardh Kumbh Mela" ("Ardh Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 15 January 1960, bit.ly/2PivLIx).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Ujjain (Full)	04/1957 - 05/1957	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "[A]ll the intending pilgrims to Sinhastha fair, to be held at Ujjain in April and May this year, have been asked to get themselves innoculated against Cholera" ("Sinhastha fair at Ujjain: Innoculations for pilgrims urged," Times of India, 13 February 1957, bit.ly/3tsetGR). · "Nearly 60,000 persons had their holy dip in the River Kshipra today, the first of three important bathing days of the Simhasta Fair" ("Simhastha fair at Ujjain: 60,000 take holy bath," Times of India, 13 April 1957, bit.ly/3szAILf). · "Under a canopy of shimmering stars and bright moon nearly three lakh people, men and women and children, bathed in the sacred waters of Shipra river today, inaugurating the Sinhasta Fair" ("Sinhasta fair inaugurated," Times of India, 13 May 1957, bit.ly/2PQDVHD). · Note, there are references to a break-off fair in 1956: "The next Simhastha was in controversy as sadhus, seers and akhadas were divided over the year of holding the event. 'It was in fact a classical dispute as one faction was banking on the leap year theory while the other opposed it,' recalled Pt Vyas. As a result, the Shankaracharyas and other top acharyas celebrated the fair in 1956 while mahamandleshwars and akhadas in 1957" ("Will Shivraj govt follow tradition of inviting sadhus, akhadas?" Free Press Journal, 6 January 2013, bit.ly/3uyhmqF). However, any 1956 fair appears to have been very small in scale, and receives no mention in the Times of India that year.
Haridwar (Ardh)	04/1956 - 04/1956	· "An estimated 8 lakhs of pilgrims bathed in the waters of the Ganga here amidst the chanting of vedic mantras and singing of devotional songs of the Baisakhi Day, principal day of the Ardh Kumbh Mela, today" ("8 Lakhs Bathe in Ganga: Ardh Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 13 April 1956, bit.ly/3rG1gZO). "An estimated 600,000 to 700,000 thus brought to an end Ardh Kumbh Mela, a week-long religious festival held every six years to commemorate the mythological struggle between the gods and demons" ("Hindu pilgrims purify selves in Ganges," Times of India, 14 April 1956, bit.ly/3f2lN6U).
Nasik (Full)	08/1956 - 09/1956	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "The Sinhasta Fair will began on September 20 this year and continue up to October 16, 1956. The most important period of the fair is the 'Kumbh Mela' in which more than 50,000 sadhus are expected to participate. It will be held from August 17, 1956 to September 16" ("Sinhasta fair plans: High-level talks in Bombay," Times of India, 15 January 1955, bit.ly/3drYDpu).
Prayag (Full)	01/1954 - 03/1954	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "[I]t is estimated that in all approximately 4,500,000 pilgrims have visited the Mela since its inauguration in January" ("Kumbh Mela visit by over 45 lakhs," Times of India, 2 February 1954, bit.ly/3ueyzVH). · "Thousands of pious Hindus observed Shivaratri by having a sacred dip today in the holy waters of the Sangam in Kumbh City" ("Kumbh festivity," Times of India, 3 March 1954, bit.ly/31BcLHF). · "An Ordinance providing for a graded levy of terminal tax from January 7 to March 15 for passengers travelling by rail to certain stations in the Kumbh Mela area has been promulgated by the President." ("Kumbh Mela Tax Graded Levy Ordinance by President," Times of India, 5 January 1954, bit.ly/3sKACAF).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Haridwar (Full)	03/1950 - 04/1950	· Concurs with Clark 2006 (294). · "Asia's greatest bathing fair, the Kumbha Mela on April 13, is the fifth of its kind of the century to take place in Hardwar" ("The Kumbh Mela of Hardwar," Times of India, 2 April 1950, bit.ly/31yxxaV). · "About Rs 8 lakhs is understood to have been sanctioned by the U.P. Government for expenses on public health and medical services during the ensuing Kumbh Mela at Hardwar which will begin shortly" ("Kumbh Mela," Times of India, 19 January 1950, bit.ly/3dqFxA7).
Prayag (Ardh)	01/1948 - 02/1948	· "[The] Ardhkumba Mela, which begins here on January 14" ("'Kumbh Mela' in Allahabad plans upset," Times of India, 8 January 1948, bit.ly/3sDXmlE). · "The epidemic, one of the most virulent on record, broke out towards the end of February during the famous Ganges fair—Ardh Kumbh—in Allahabad, and spread rapidly" ("High death-roll from Cholera," Times of India, 9 July 1948, bit.ly/39QExEH). · "It was stated that the death was due to suffocation caused by the heavy rush of pilgrims for the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad" ("The rest of the news," Times of India, 14 February 1948, bit.ly/3w6zSXV).
Ujjain (Full)	03/1945 - 06/1945	· Concurs with Clark (294). · "In the interest of the intending pilgrims it is hereby announced that considering the shortage of foodstuffs and difficulties of transport due to war time, the Gwalior Government has banned the holding of the Singhasth Fair the second phase of which is to take place from March, 1945, to June, 1945" ("Notice: Ujjain Singhasth Mela banned," Times of India, 13 March 1945, bit.ly/31yARCX). · "Pandit Anand Shankar Vyas of Ujjain said he is witnessing Simhastha since 1945 but there were no attempts earlier on the part of political parties to draw a political mileage from the religious programme as they were doing it now" ("Saffron brigade's agenda has lent a political tinge to Simhastha Kumbh," Hindustan Times, 12 May 2016, bit.ly/2SHjTRH). · Simhastha Fair-1945 was an unforgettable [sic]. The then Mahant of Dutt Akhada Sandyapuri Maharaj announced that despite government's non-cooperation, the event would be hosted successfully in Ujjain in 1945 with the cooperation of civilians, recalled wellknown astrologer Pt Anand Shankar Vyas. The World War-II was a major hindrance to hosting the religious event in 1945 ... Local people extended financial help to the event and the Gujarat- based disciples of Sandyapuri Maharaj also offered 'blank' cheques to meet the expenses ("Will Shivraj govt follow tradition of inviting sadhus, akhadas?" Free Press Journal, 6 January 2013, bit.ly/3uyhmqF).

Table A1: (*continued*) Kumbh Mela dates and sources.

Kumbh site (type)	Start and end months (mm/yyyy)	Sources and notes
Nasik (Full)	10/1943 - 02/1944	· Clark 2006 (294) notes this event as only occurring in 1944. · "A warning is issued to pilgrims considering going to the Sinhasta fair at Nasik from October 9 until February 28, 1944, that no special facilities can be provided by the railways; no special trains will be run, says the Director of Information, Bombay, in a Press Note. Pilgrims are also likely to encounter considerable hardships in regard to food and motor transport" ("Warning To People Going to Sinhasta Fair," Times of India, 24 September 1943, bit.ly/3fspbK1). · "The first period of the fair begins on October 9, 1943 and lasts until February 28, 1944" ("Sinhasta fair at Nasik," Times of India, 15 September 1943, bit.ly/2RB3o92). · We have found no references to an additional part of the fair in 1944.

Additional sources cited in this table:

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B Construction of treatment variable

We calculate the railroad travel distance between each district and each Kumbh site as follows. To begin, we take the rail network of India as it existed in 1956 (as digitized by Donaldson 2018), and convert it into a spatial network of rail links. Second, we add edges to the network, representing the shortest link from each district centroid to any rail line. Third, we do the same for Kumbh cities. This, then, gives a network that connects all district centroids and Kumbh sites via train. Finally, we use Dijkstra's algorithm to compute the shortest railroad distance from each district centroid to each of the four Kumbh sites.

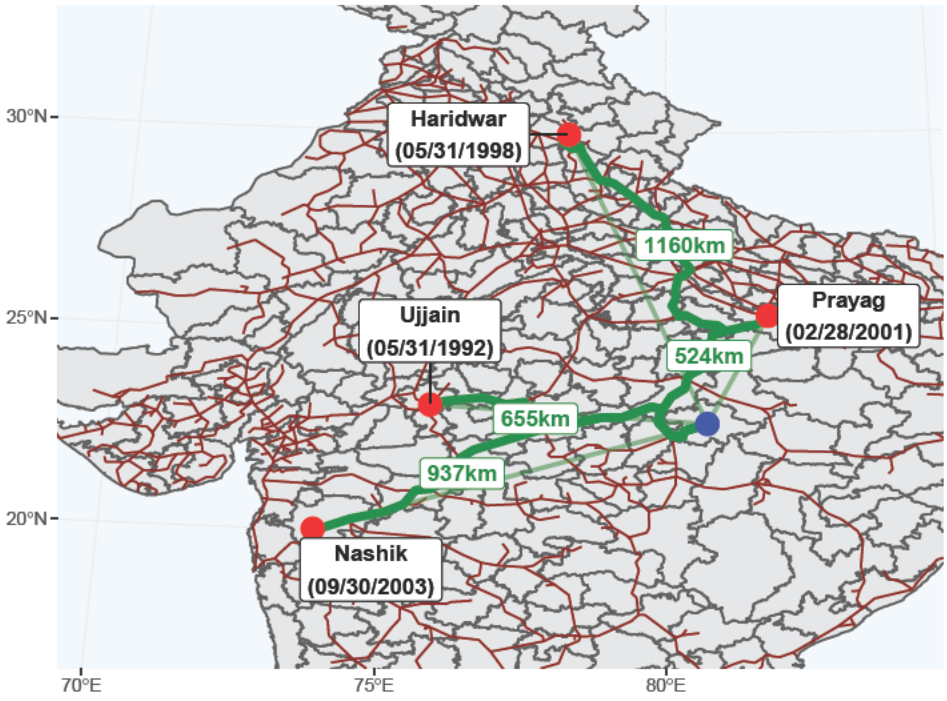

Figure A1: Illustration of how the treatment variable, *Kumbh time/rail distance*, is computed step by step for one district (Mandla, in Madhya Pradesh, present-day Chhattisgarh) at the time of the 2004 Lok Sabha election. Dark lines show the 1961 district boundaries. Red lines show the Indian railway network. Thick green lines depict the shortest rail routes from Mandla to each of the four Kumbh Mela sites.

C Main results using 2001 railway map

Table A2: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on the vote share received by Hindu nationalist parties in India's Lok Sabha elections, 1951 2019. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/election year. The treatment variable is computed using the Indian railway network as it existed in 2001. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses.

	Dependent variable:
	Hindu Nationalist Prop.
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.112^{***}
	(0.016)
Outcome mean	0.21
1961 District FEs	Y
Election FEs	Y
Observations	4,890
Adjusted R^2	0.671

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

D Distribution of treatment variable

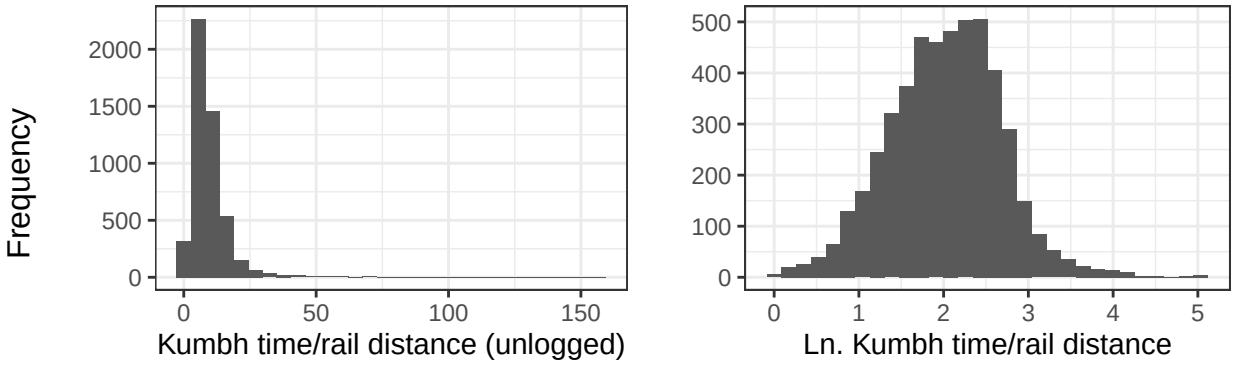

Figure A2: Plots show the distributions of the treatment variable before and after taking its natural log.

E Variable definitions and sources

Table A3: Data definitions for analysis variables, grouped by source.

Variable name	Definition and source
· **Hindu Nationalist Prop.** · **Congress Prop.** · **Others Prop.** · **Effective Number of Parties**	Party-wise vote shares and competition in Lok Sabha elections, 1951–2019. Data are aggregated to the 1961 district/election year. Data for elections prior to 1962 were digitized by Myron Wiener (ICPSR 5904). Data for subsequent election cycles are from the Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka Unviersty. Lok Sabha constituencies are assigned to 1961 district boundaries based on the locations of constituencies' titular towns (for pre-1977 constituencies) and constituency centroids (for 1977 constituencies onward). Analysis variables are generated by taking the simple average of the constituency-level data for constituencies falling within the 1961 district boundaries. "Hindu Nationalist Prop." records average share of votes won by candidates aligned with the BJS, BJP, HM, RRP, SS, and (for 1977 only) the BLD. "Others Prop." records the fraction of votes won by non-Congress and non-Hindu nationalist party candidates, including independents. Effective Number of Parties is the Laakso and Taagepera fractionalization index; for the purposes of its contruction, we consider independent candidates to each represent separate parties.
· **Share of District Seats in which Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded** · **Share of District Seats in which Loyal Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded** ·**Average Hindu Nationalist Candidate Experience**	Characteristics of Hindu nationalist party candidates, 1967–2019. Data are from the Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka Unviersty, and rely on the personal identifiers provided in that dataset. Lok Sabha constituency data are averaged at the 1961 district/election year level using the same method described above. *Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded* represents the share of constituencies in which any candidate from a Hindu nationalist party stood for election. *Loyal Hindu Nationalist Fielded* represents the share of constituencies in which a Hindu nationalist candidate was fielded who had not previously stood for election under a non-Hindu nationalist party label. *Hindu Nationalist Candidate Experience* represents the average number of times fielded Hindu nationalist party candidates had stood for election to the Lok Sabha previously.
· **Riots** · **Riot Days** · **Killed** · **Injured**	Counts of the number of Hindu-Muslim riots (*Riots*), summed duration of riots (*Riot Days*), and intensity of riots (numbers *Killed* and *Injured*) for each district/month, 1951–2000. Data are from the Varshney-Wilkinson Dataset on Hindu-Muslim Violence in India, 1950-1995 (ICPSR 4342), and the update to the year 2000 compiled by Mitra and Ray (2014): "Implications of an Economic Theory of Conflict: Hindu-Muslim Violence in India" (*Journal of Political Economy* 122[4]: 719–65). The data are drawn from reports in the *Times of India*, Bombay edition. Counts are aggregated to form a balanced panel of counts at the level of 1961 district boundaries, using the reweighting scheme developed in Nellis, Weaver, and Rosenzweig (2016): "Do Parties Matter for Ethnic Violence? Evidence from India" (*Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11[3]: 249–77).

Table A3: (*continued*) Data definitions for analysis variables.

Variable name	Definition and source
· **Any Expenditure: Meat, Fish, Eggs** · **Any Expenditure: Priest** · **Any Expenditure: Transportation** · **Any Expenditure: Mela, Fair, Picnic**	Household-level data from the six "thick" rounds of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Household Consumer Expenditure schedule: rounds 43 (1987-1988), 50 (1993-1994), 55 (1999-2000), 61 (2004-2005), 66 (2009-2010), and 68 (2011-2012). Households are geo-located to 1991 district boundaries, based on district codes recorded in the surveys. Dichotomous variables denote households reporting non-zero household expenditures on meat, fish and egg products; transportation; "priests"; and "mela/fair/picnic" within the 30 days prior to survey enumeration.
· **Muslim Pct.**	Data on the share of the district population identifying as Muslim, taken from the 1961 Census of India and digitized by the authors.

F Spatially corrected standard errors

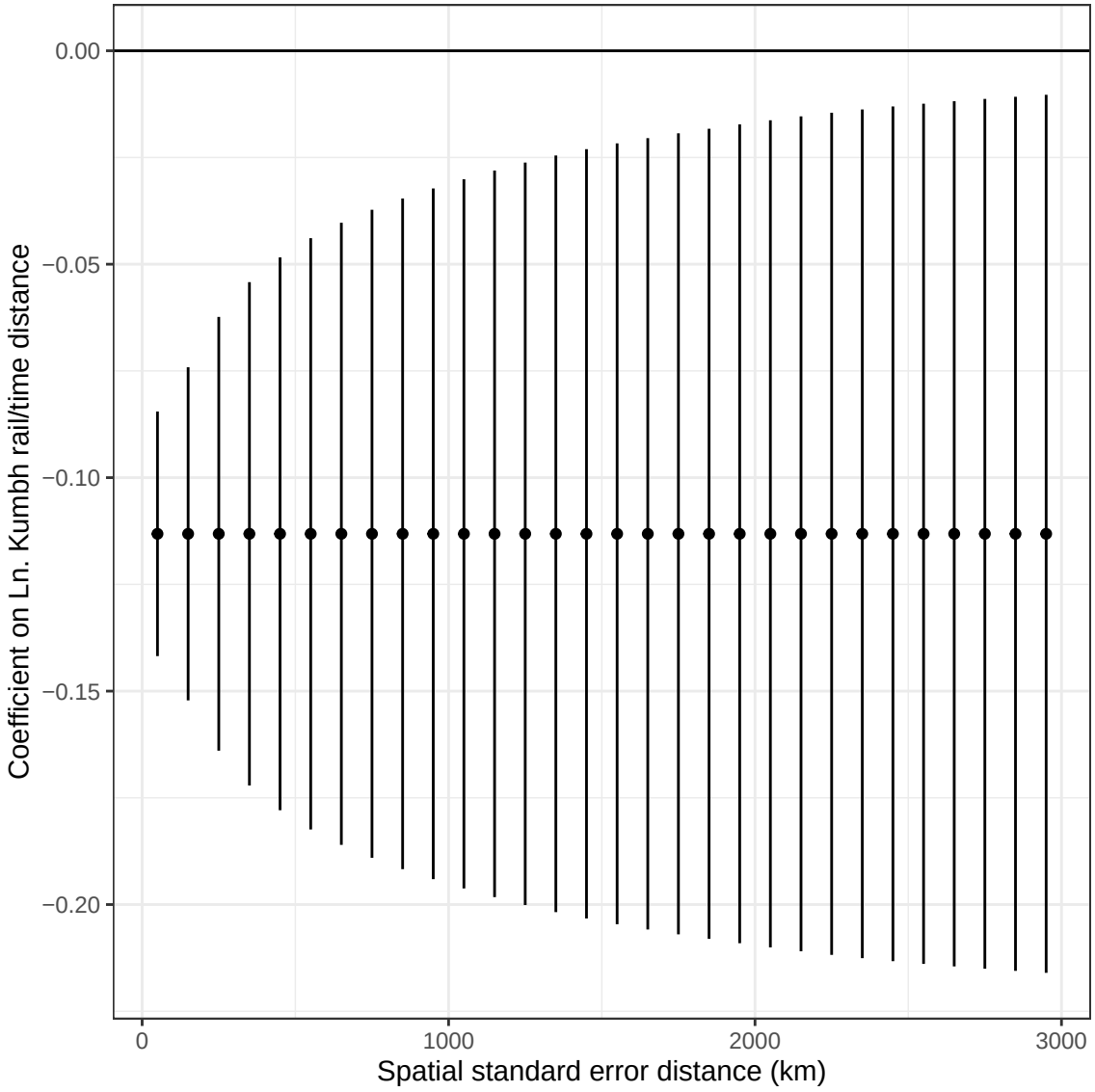

Figure A3: Plot presents coefficient estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals for the benchmark statistical model in Table 1, Column 1. Confidence intervals derive from Conley standard errors that correct for spatial autocorrelation at varying cut-off windows, shown on the horizontal axis.

G Leave-one-out analysis

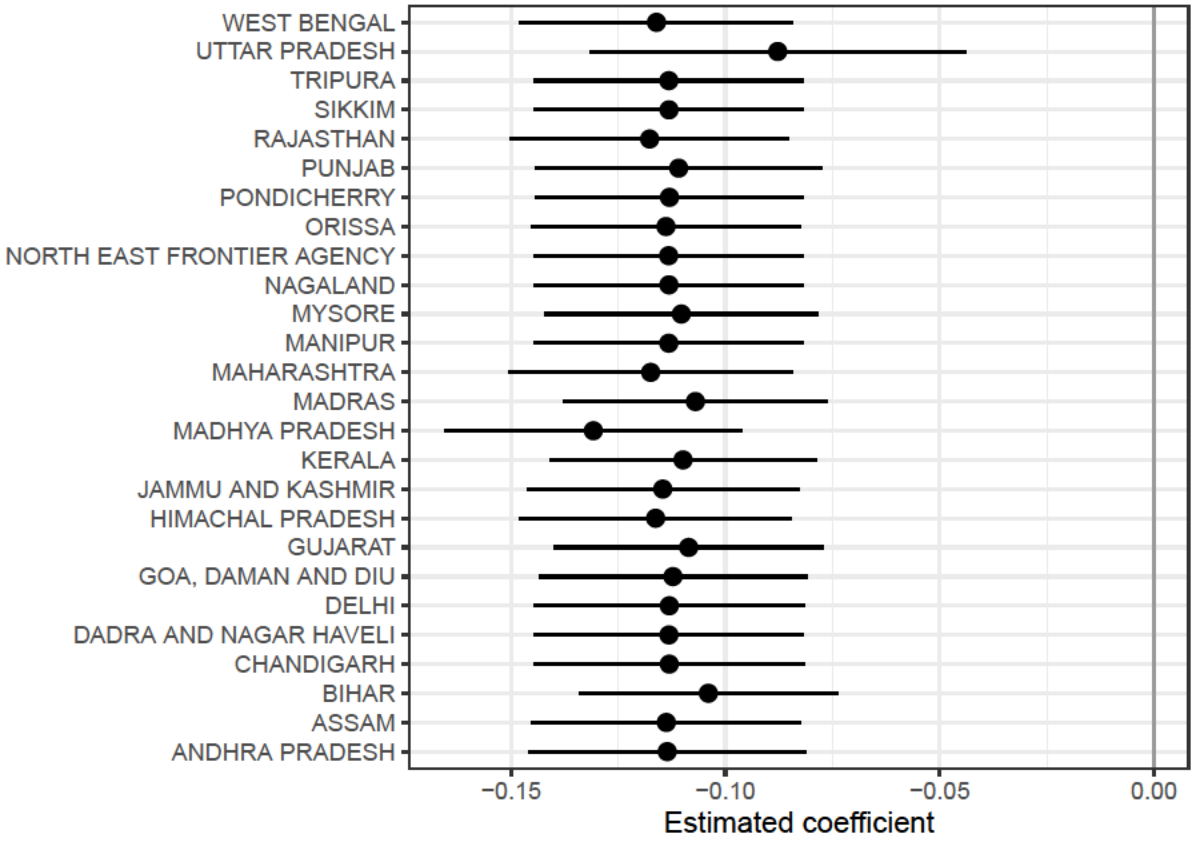

Figure A4: Plot presents coefficient estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals on Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance from the benchmark statistical model in Table 1, Column 1, but omitting district-observations that fall withing one 1961-era state at a time. The state dropped from each model is shown on the vertical axis.

H Varying the value of θ

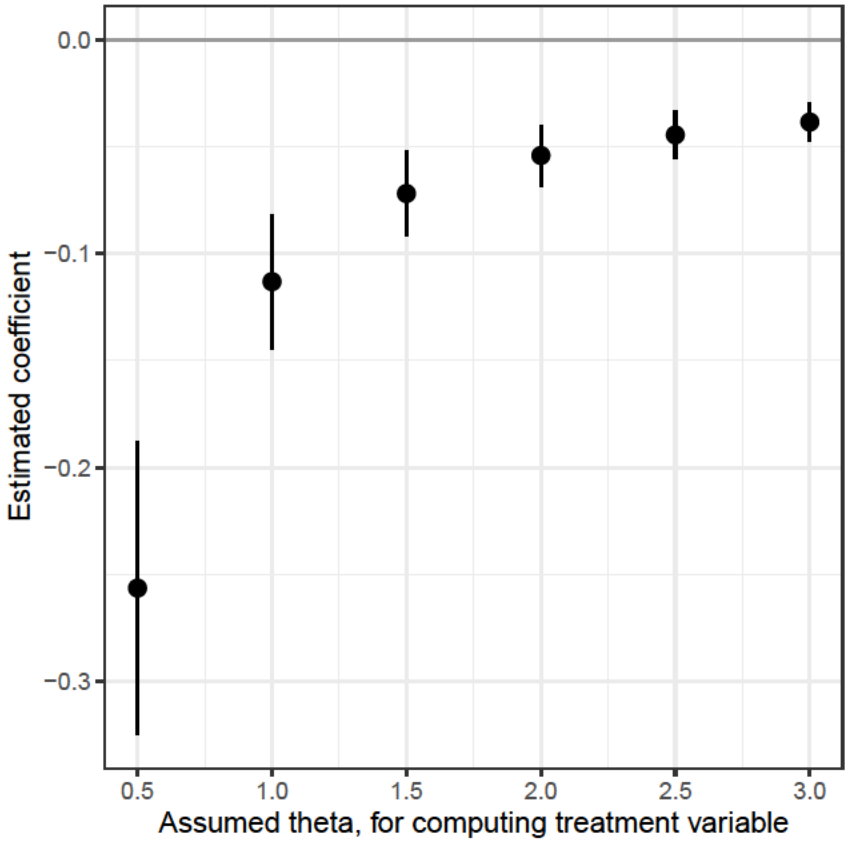

Figure A5: Plot presents coefficient estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals on Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance from the benchmark statistical model in Table 1, Column 1, but recomputing the treatment variable per Equation 1 employing different values of theta.

I Manipulation check

Table A4: OLS estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on item-level household expenditures. Data are from the thick rounds of the National Sample Survey, 1987 2012. The unit of analysis is the household/NSS round. Outcome variables are indicators for non-zero expenditures. Standard errors, clustered by 1991 districts, are in parentheses.

	Any Household Expenditure:	
	Transportation	Fair, Mela, Picnic
	(1)	(2)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.029^{***}	-0.014^{***}
	(0.010)	(0.004)
Outcome mean	0.74	0.02
1991 District FEs	Y	Y
NSS Round FEs	Y	Y
Observations	638,332	638,332
Adjusted R^2	0.196	0.024

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

J Riots results using Maximum Likelihood Estimation

Table A5: Poisson regression estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on the incidence and severity of Hindu/Muslim riots, 1951 2000. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/month. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses. Note that the number of observations varies across models because the estimator drops strata in which the outcome only takes the value zero. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

	Riots	Riot Days	Killed	Injured
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.411**	-0.753***	-2.448***	-1.532***
	(0.182)	(0.212)	(0.750)	(0.484)
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Month FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	68,378	68,378	37,548	44,148
Squared Correlation	0.084	0.179	0.413	0.326
Pseudo R^2	0.214	0.320	0.588	0.435
BIC	14,871.939	20,495.413	41,283.815	148,589.198

Table A6: Negative binomial regression estimates of the effect of Kumbh Mela time/rail distance on the incidence and severity of Hindu/Muslim riots, 1951 2000. The unit of analysis is the 1961 district/month. Standard errors, clustered by 1961 districts, are in parentheses. Note that the number of observations varies across models because the estimator drops strata in which the outcome only takes the value zero. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

	Riots	Riot Days	Killed	Injured
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ln. Kumbh time/rail distance	-0.441**	-0.639***	-0.960**	-0.117
	(0.182)	(0.209)	(0.441)	(0.854)
1961 District FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Month FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	68,378	68,378	37,548	44,148
Squared Correlation	0.067	0.097	0.014	0.000
Pseudo R^2	0.187	0.159	0.124	0.075
BIC	14,750.264	16,778.647	12,098.557	15,883.994
Over-dispersion	0.519	0.051	0.013	0.006

K Summary statistics

Table A7: Summary statistics for analysis variables.

Variable name	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Median	Max.
Elections dataset (1951–2019)						
Hindu Nationalist Prop.	4890	0.21	0.21	0.00	0.14	0.81
Congress Prop.	4890	0.37	0.17	0.00	0.39	0.87
Others Prop.	4890	0.42	0.24	0.00	0.46	1.00
Effective Number of Parties	4890	2.69	0.70	1.05	2.52	9.25
Muslim Prop.	4858	0.10	0.12	0.00	0.08	0.97
Any Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded	4890	0.63	0.45	0.00	1.00	1.00
Loyal Hindu Nationalist Candidate Fielded	4115	0.60	0.45	0.00	1.00	1.00
Hindu Nationalist Candidate Experience	4115	0.74	1.34	0.00	0.00	10.00
Kumbh Time/Rail Distance	4907	9.62	9.17	1.03	7.73	157.81
Kumbh Time/Geodesic Distance	4907	13.25	13.28	1.54	10.42	227.10
Riots dataset (1950–2000)						
Riot	197064	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.00	6.00
Riot Days	197064	0.01	0.22	0.00	0.00	25.00
Killed	197064	0.04	3.33	0.00	0.00	1120.00
Injuries	197064	0.12	6.61	0.00	0.00	2010.00
Kumbh Time/Rail distance	195776	9.15	8.57	0.53	7.22	162.38
National Sample Survey dataset (1987–2012)						
Any Expenditure: Meat, Fish, Eggs	638332	0.60	0.49	0.00	1.00	1.00
Any Expenditure: Priest	638332	0.08	0.27	0.00	0.00	1.00
Any Expenditure: Transportation	638332	0.74	0.44	0.00	1.00	1.00
Any Expenditure: Mela, Fair, Picnic	638332	0.02	0.15	0.00	0.00	1.00
Kumbh Time/Rail distance	638332	7.70	8.33	0.68	5.93	118.71

L Election/Kumbh Mela pairings

Table A8: This table shows the pairings of each Indian Lok Sabha election with the most recently completed Kumbh Mela held at each of the four Mela sites. The number of days elapsed between these pairs of dates is central to the construction of the treatment variable. Dates are in yyyy-mm-dd format. Election dates represent the first day of each election cycle; Kumbh dates represent the final day of the month in which the Kumbh Mela ended. Note, the Lok Sabha elections held in 1985 were for the state of Assam only, and the elections held in 1992 were for the state of Punjab only.

Election	Prayag	Haridwar	Ujjain	Nashik
1951-10-25	1948-02-29	1950-04-30	1945-06-30	1944-02-29
1957-02-24	1954-03-31	1956-04-30	1945-06-30	1956-09-30
1962-02-19	1960-02-29	1956-04-30	1957-05-31	1956-09-30
1967-02-17	1966-02-28	1962-04-30	1957-05-31	1956-09-30
1971-03-01	1971-02-28	1968-04-30	1968-05-31	1968-09-30
1977-03-16	1977-02-28	1974-04-30	1968-05-31	1968-09-30
1980-01-03	1977-02-28	1974-04-30	1968-05-31	1968-09-30
1984-12-24	1982-02-28	1980-04-30	1980-04-30	1980-09-30
1985-12-01	1982-02-28	1980-04-30	1980-04-30	1980-09-30
1989-11-22	1989-02-28	1986-04-30	1980-04-30	1980-09-30
1991-05-20	1989-02-28	1986-04-30	1980-04-30	1980-09-30
1992-02-01	1989-02-28	1986-04-30	1980-04-30	1991-09-30
1996-04-27	1995-02-28	1992-04-30	1992-05-31	1991-09-30
1998-02-16	1995-02-28	1992-04-30	1992-05-31	1991-09-30
1999-09-05	1995-02-28	1998-05-31	1992-05-31	1991-09-30
2004-04-20	2001-02-28	1998-05-31	1992-05-31	2003-09-30
2009-04-16	2007-02-28	2004-05-31	2004-05-31	2003-09-30
2014-04-07	2013-03-31	2010-04-30	2004-05-31	2003-09-30
2019-04-11	2019-03-31	2016-04-30	2016-05-31	2015-09-30