

The Rise of Majority-Ethnic Nationalism and Social Cohesion among Marginalised Groups

Experimental Evidence from India

Introduction

All around the world, exclusive forms of nationalism are on the rise. Parties and politicians promulgating a vision of society in which national belonging is linked to race and tradition or ‘blood and soil’ challenge more inclusive visions of nationhood. The political rise of ethnonationalism has severe implications for how ethnic minorities are treated, symbolically and materially. Symbolically, the nationalists’ narrative propagates a view of ethnic minorities as ‘less than true’ citizens. For instance, in Russia, the rise of nationalism has fuelled a derogatory view of minorities with other Slavs or non-Slavic minorities being referred to as ‘little brothers’ or ‘foreigners’ (Kaufman 1996). Rising ethnonationalism in Turkey since the 2000s has led to a similar derogation of Kurdish, Armenian and Jewish minorities (Çırakman 2011). In the United States, Trump’s executive orders have clearly identified ‘who belongs in America and who America belongs to’ (Blake, 2017) and in India, Hindu nationalists recurrently refer to Muslims as ‘invaders’ or ‘foreign elements’ (Jaffrelot 1999; Kinnvall 2007). Materially, the ‘othering’ of ethnic minorities can serve as the basis of top-down exclusionary and discriminatory practices, such as challenging group-based rights, reinforcing negative distinctive treatment such as racial profiling or even the withdrawal of citizenship.

Threats to group status are generally thought to unite threatened groups and strengthen social cohesion among group members (Cosser 1956; LeVine and Campbell 1972; Moskalenko et al. 2006). A common threat may enhance group consciousness, solidarity and perceptions that group members share a ‘linked fate’ (Dawson 1995). A common threat may also enhance mutual dependencies, perceptions of common interests and trust (Benard and Doan 2011). In many instances, group dynamics during this recent nationalist wave appear consistent with the ‘threat-cohesion’ hypothesis. In the United States the rise of Donald Trump has been reported to have spurred a ‘Latino moment’ with minorities from many different Latin American countries joining together to campaign against the derogation of Hispanics. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the rise of far-right PVV has led to the formation of an immigrant political party *Denk*, attracting diverse minorities – mainly of Turkish, Moroccan and Afro-Caribbean descent – with the shared goal of fighting increased racism and Islamophobia. However, marginalised groups do not always respond to group threats in concert. On the contrary, a threatening environment sometimes results in fragmentation and intra-group competition. In the United Kingdom, the rise of UKIP appears to have enhanced divisions among ethnic minorities, revealing ‘fissures in ethnic minority communities’ (Andrews 2015). In India, fragmentation characterises the Muslim response to rising Hindu nationalism. For instance, Muslims tend to divide their vote along class or caste lines even where Hindu nationalist candidates are electorally successful (Verma and Gupta 2016). The 2017 state elections in Uttar Pradesh is an example of this. Despite constituting a fifth of the state’s voters, Muslims divided their vote among several parties, Hindu nationalists won a landslide victory

and Muslim representation dropped from 17% to 6% (Hamid 2017). Such fragmentation is puzzling, why would marginalised minorities fail to act cohesively when faced with a common threat?

Under what conditions is rising majority-ethnic nationalism – which questions the status of certain groups as true national members – likely to unite marginalised group members under a common banner, spurring cooperation in recuperating group status? And when, on the other hand, is such a threat more likely to result in incohesion and fragmentation? While previous research has studied how a group threat enhances identification (Moskalenko et al. 2006) and cooperation among threatened groups (Gneezy and Fessler 2011; Weisel and Zultan 2016) we know relatively little regarding when this is less likely to be the case, and whether there are conditions under which a common group threat may actually drive minorities apart. This project aims to understand heterogeneous effects of threats to group status on cooperation among marginalised group members, in particular by examining the role of cross-cutting status divisions in moderating this effect. Through behavioural games in Pune, India, the project explores the conditions under which individuals are more likely to cooperate in social dilemmas. By randomly assigning a prime that devalues the Muslim identity according to the Hindu nationalist narrative, as well as status divisions within groups of Muslim participants, the project sheds light on the mechanisms explaining diverging responses to situations of threatened group status.

Hypotheses

Cooperation in social dilemmas (social cohesion) should increase as a function of strengthened identification and trust. As described, the links between status threat and identification and stakes and trust respectively are not unconditional. Turning first to identification, minorities may respond to a devaluation of group status by either ‘doubling down’ and strengthening group attachment, or by disassociating from the devalued group. Taking into account prior theory, we suggest that high status minorities will be more likely to disassociate than low status minorities because shifting social identity to a high status group is more likely to compensate for a reduced self-image. We are not in the position to make any clear prediction as to whether group threat will enhance or reduce identification overall (it is not clear what proportions of individuals will respond by strengthened attachment vs. disassociation), however, disassociation should be more common among high status minorities than among low status minorities and differences in group attachment between high and low status minorities should therefore increase:

Disassociation (H1): *The devaluation of the common group identity increases differences in cooperative behaviour between high- and low-status group members, with low-status members behaving more cooperatively than high-status members.*

Although threats to group status are likely to enhance cooperation among low-status members, concerns regarding within-group inequality may counteract cooperation with high-status group members:

Differentiation (H2): *The devaluation of the common group identity leads low-status group members to differentiate more strongly between low and high-status group members in their cooperative behaviour, with low-status group members behaving more cooperatively towards other low-status group members.*

We also expect that higher stakes will increase cooperation when group members are both highly and equally dependent on each other:

High Stakes (H3): *Group members with higher stakes in the conflict will cooperate more than group members with lower stakes when stakes are distributed symmetrically within the group.*

However, stakes in a conflict are rarely distributed uniformly within marginalised groups and some individuals may have much less to lose than others. While minorities who have less at stake may not wish to spend costly effort in order to obtain positive outcomes for the group, minorities with more at stake may have negative expectations about reciprocity from group members with less at stake and consequently reduce their own cooperative behaviour:

Asymmetric stakes (H4a): *An increase in stakes has a smaller positive effect on cooperation when stakes are distributed asymmetrically within the group than when stakes are distributed symmetrically (for both members with high and low stakes).*

Deficiencies in trust may also counteract any potential positive effect of devaluation on identification:

Asymmetric stakes (H4b): *The devaluation of group status has a smaller positive effect on cooperation when stakes are distributed asymmetrically within the group than when stakes are distributed symmetrically (for both members with high and low stakes).*

Status divisions and asymmetric stakes are often observationally equivalent in the real world; low status minorities generally have higher stakes in the conflict. Conceptually, however, these mechanisms are distinct. It is also possible that identities and stakes interact in a way which could only be studied if these two are disentangled. For instance, asymmetric stakes may not curb cooperation where minorities are not internally divided according to status – identification may allow individuals to overcome deficiencies in trust – but yes where they are divided. Assuming that high (low) status group members identify more strongly with other high (low) status group members, asymmetries in stakes may curb cooperation more decisively where minorities are divided across a status division:

Interaction (H5): *Asymmetric stakes are more likely to curb cooperation when group members are divided across a status division.*

Research Design: Cooperation Games among Indian Muslims

We aim to evaluate the proposed hypotheses through studying behaviour in cooperation games among a sample of Muslim participants in India. The controlled, experimental environment permits us to separate and distinguish between different implications of cross-cutting social

cleavages; by assigning the status of participants and their experimental counterparts, as well as the payoffs in the game we distinguish the conditioning role of exit options (identities) on the one hand and asymmetries in stakes on the other. While cross-cutting identities and asymmetries in stakes are generally observationally equivalent in the real world, the laboratory setting allows us to disentangle the two – allowing us to study both channels separately, as well as their interaction. The games also allow us to study cooperation through actual, costly, behavioural choices, thus going beyond other potential measures such as stated pro-social behaviour. In the games we make use of actual ethnic identities. We do this because we want to add enhanced realism to the project (Chowdhury et al. 2016), because we believe devaluing a real identity is more likely to trigger the proposed mechanisms and finally, because we want to speak more directly to the Indian politics literature studying cohesion among Muslims in contexts of rising Hindu nationalism (Verma and Gupta 2016).

The treatment variables of interest in our study are (1) the devaluation of group identity (2) the intra-minority status divide and (3) the (asymmetry of) stakes in the conflict. The outcome variable of interest is cooperative behaviour in social dilemmas. By randomizing these variables within a controlled experimental environment, we wish to understand whether disassociation, differentiation and/or differential stakes in the outcome are plausible mechanisms explaining the conditional effect of threats to group status on cooperation.

Sample

Our sample is composed 300 Muslim college students from Pune, Maharashtra.

The Status Division

In order to achieve a within-group status division we use a real identity division. Our choice of a real status division is *socio-economic class*. Although Muslims in India are divided across other status divisions such as caste, our preliminary qualitative research suggests that class is an important status division of which the target population are aware and from which they derive self-esteem. Since we are unable to target and sample very high and low income participants respectively, we plan to construct something in between a real and an induced identity division using the actual income distribution among participants.¹ Before playing the games, participants fill out a pre-survey questionnaire in which we ask them for some demographic information including their household income. We also plan to include some questions regarding the type of property the family owns and perceived social class in order to validate the measure. Using the information from this item we create two groups, one high income group and one low income group representing the top and bottom 50th percentiles. Participants are informed of which group they belong to before receiving the prime and playing the games.

¹A main issue with the design is that we are interested in heterogeneity within marginalised groups, but are required to rely on a sample which is relatively homogeneous. We attempt to find solutions by categorizing participants and making these divisions salient.

The Prime

The purpose of the prime is to devalue the common group identity (the Muslim identity) in line with Hindu nationalist discourse. The source of devaluation should therefore be *exclusion* from national identity. The exposure to the prime should affect respondents' self-esteem and trigger the proposed coping mechanisms in terms of either strengthened or weakened group identification. The prime reads as following:

We would like to ask you a few more questions. First, we would like to hear your opinion on a contested policy. Please read the following newspaper extracts carefully:

A city in one of India's most populated states is having its Muslim name changed to a Hindu one. The change removes allusions to the city's historical Mughal-era rule, with the area named Allahabad by the Muslim emperor, Akbar, in 1583.

The city has been given the new name of Prayagraj, the elongated version of its original name of Prayag before Mughal-era rulers changed it to the Islamic appellation. The state government has said the decision was taken to restore the city's ancient identity as a major Hindu pilgrimage centre.

Many other cities and roads with Urdu/Muslim names have been changed as well. This includes Aurangzeb Road in New Dehli named after the sixth Mughal emperor. The supporters of the renaming of the Aurangzeb Road in New Delhi argued that the Mughal emperor was an invader and a cruel ruler, who does not deserve to be commemorated in modern India.

Place names are an important element of a country's cultural landscape, as they naturally document and reflect a locality's heritage and identity.

The Organization of the Games

1. Participants fill out the pre-survey questionnaire in which we collect general demographics (age, religion, year of study) and information about their household income.
2. Subjects receive the information that based on the income distribution, he or she has been assigned to either the group: financial status 'high' or 'low'.
3. We inform the participants we want to ask them about a contested policy. The treatment group receives the prime regarding the renaming of Muslim named cities. The control group receives a placebo text regarding tigers in the Zoo.
4. As a manipulation check, participants answer some questions aimed at capturing self-image.
5. Participants are informed that they will have to make some decisions in different scenarios. They are told that they will not know the outcomes of the games until after having finished all rounds (no learning) and are informed that their final payoff will be determined by a random draw of three of the game outcomes.

6. Participants play twelve rounds of the prisoner's dilemma . Participants receive information about their counterpart's status and other 'filler' information with the aim to reduce the demand-effect of social class. They play each round with a different partner. Participants play without information (simultaneously, without knowing the choices of their counterparts). In each of these rounds we also vary the stakes (payoffs in the game in the case of mutual defection. See the next section).
7. Participants play the dictator game in which they are asked how much of a fixed endowment they wish to share with their counterpart. Participants alternate between being matched in groups that are not divided across a status division (in-group members) or who are divided across the status division (out-group members). 9 rounds are played.
8. Participants fill in the post-survey questionnaire where we ask them about (1) perceived national exclusion, (2) identification (with their class, religion and nation) and (3) political engagement.

(Asymmetric) Stakes:

In order to manipulate the stakes in cooperation we change the payoffs in the game. In the prisoner's dilemma, the monetary payoff associated with mutual defection changes. Figure XX illustrates how the stakes could change. The first scenario reflects a situation where stakes are low. If both group members fail to cooperate, the outcome is suboptimal, but the loss is not too high. The second scenario reflects a situation where stakes are higher. If both counterparts fail to cooperate, the outcome is considerably worse. In the final setting, there is an increase in stakes, however stakes are asymmetrically distributed. The group as a whole has more to lose, but one group member has less to lose than the other. We do not expect cooperation to increase as much as when stakes are distributed symmetrically (among both participants with high and low stakes).

		Player 2	
		<i>Cooperate</i>	<i>Defect</i>
2*Player 1	<i>Cooperate</i>	100, 100	10, 120
	<i>Defect</i>	120, 10	80, 80

		<i>Cooperate</i>	<i>Defect</i>
		2*Player 1	<i>Cooperate</i>
<i>Defect</i>	120, 10		20, 20

		<i>Cooperate</i>	<i>Defect</i>
		2*Player 1	<i>Cooperate</i>
<i>Defect</i>	120, 10		60, 20

We have not been able to think of a good way to manipulate the stakes within a trust game and may therefore only study the stakes-based mechanisms through the prisoner’s dilemma.

Analysis

We will predict the probability of cooperation/levels of contributions among primed/non-primed participants of high and low status to in and out-group members and report results from linear (probability) models as well as predicted probabilities and levels of contributions.

	Full Sample	High Status	Low Status	Hypothesis
Prime	+	0	+	H1
High Status	-			H1
Prime*High Status	-			H1
Outgroup	-		-	H2
Prime*Outgroup	-		-	H2

Table 1: Analysis H1 and H3

	Full Sample	Hypothesis
Ingroup	+	H5
Low Stakes	-	H3
Asymmetric low	-	H4
Asymmetric high	-	H4
Asymmetric low*Ingroup	0	H5
Asymmetric high*Ingroup	0	H5

Table 2: Analysis H3, H4 and H5

	Full Sample	Hypothesis
Prime	+	H4b
Low Stakes	-	H4b
Asymmetric (all)	-	H4b
Prime*asymmetric	-	H4b

Table 3: Analysis H4b

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