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# Religious riots and electoral politics in India\*

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## Abstract

We study the effect of Hindu-Muslim riots on election results in India. We combine data on geo-coded riots with data on state elections and on demographics and public goods provision to construct a unique panel data set for 16 large states in India from 1981-2001. A new instrument is used that draws upon the random variation in the day of the week that Hindu festivals fall on, as set by a lunar calendar. The probability of a riot increases if a Hindu festival falls on a Friday, the holy day for Muslims. This allows us to isolate the causal effect of riots on electoral results. The results are also corrected for under-reporting of riots and their effect on nearby districts. We find that riots occurring in the year preceding an election increase the vote share of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party by at least 5 percentage points.

JEL codes: D72, D74, Z12

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