Breaking the Wave:

Explaining the Emergence of Ethnic Peace in a City of Historic Ethnic Violence

By Mark Schneider

Political Science Department
University of Michigan
masst234@yahoo.com

Defended: September 2004

Thesis Adviser: Prof. Ashutosh Varshney

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tables

Breaking the Wave: *Explaining the Emergence of Ethnic Peace in a City of Historic Ethnic Violence*

In the past two decades, Hindu-Muslim riots in India have claimed over 1,000 lives.[1] In 2002, ethnic riots in Gujarat, on India's west coast, resulted in the deaths of over one thousand (predominantly Muslim) people and left more than 100,000 in refugee camps.[2] Along with irreversible human loss and emotional anguish, riots brought economic damage of over one billion dollars to thousands of refugees as their homes, possessions, and businesses were destroyed in looting and arson.[3] The first recorded Hindu-Muslim riot in India occurred in 1730 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, one of the sites of the 2002 riots.[4] Varshney categorizes Ahmedabad as a riot-prone city due to its lack of interethnic associational and everyday civic life.[5] If Varshney is correct, Ahmedabad cannot easily become a peaceful city and it has not.

There are three major competing arguments that try to explain the presence or absence of ethnic violence –Ashutosh Varshney's civic networks argument, Steven Wilkinson's electoral incentives argument, and David Laitin and James Fearon's intra-ethnic self-policing argument. Varshney argues that associational ties between Hindus and Muslims prevent communal riots. Based on his study of six cities - three peaceful and three with histories of recurrent communal riots, Varshney found that cities with strong interethnic associational activity remained peaceful during periods of Hindu-Muslim tension whereas the smallest incidents exploded into major riots in cities lacking inter-ethnic civic life.

Wilkinson holds that electoral incentives are the best predictor of whether or not a riot will occur. As politicians in state governments control the police and security forces, Wilkinson

---

[1] Varshney-Wilkinson Data-Set (based on articles in *The Time of India* 1950-95).
[2] Riot observer Engineer says that the official riot death count was 1,000 although 'reliable sources' claim twice that number. Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "Communal Riots in 2002: A Survey." *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 January 2003).
[3] Wilkinson, Steven. "Putting Gujarat in Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* (27 April 2002).
[4] Sharma, Harish. *Communal Angle in Indian Politics.* (Rawat Publications, Delhi 2000) 52.
[5] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*. (London: Yale University Press, 2002): 261.

posits that police and paramilitary forces prevent riots when state leaders give clear orders to prevent them through the police and civil service hierarchies. He argues that the decision to prevent riots depends on how important the minority vote is for incumbent parties and coalition partners in winning elections, which is compounded in competitive party systems in which three or more major parties make formation of a government without Muslim support difficult. At the time of the 2002 Gujarat riots, the BJP did not court the Muslim vote, had no coalition partners that depended on Muslim votes, and operated in a bi-polar party system. The Dalit and Muslim-supported BSP kept their coalition partner, the BJP, in line in Uttar Pradesh during the 1996 state assembly elections and no communal riots were incited.

The Fearon and Laitin model of intra-ethnic self-policing argues that ethnic violence can be prevented through a mechanism in which community leaders punish community members guilty in inter-ethnic disputes. It holds that interethnic information links are weaker than intra-ethnic ones and that self-policing can prevent a conflict between individuals from turning into a total breakdown in inter-ethnic relations, which may lead to violence. All three of the above theories have been empirically tested in Meerut City, Uttar Pradesh in a longitudinal study that examines how the pattern of communal violence stopped in Meerut City, a city infamous for large-scale Hindu-Muslim riots.

Current research on ethnic riots explains why violent cities remain violent and peaceful cities remain peaceful. No link has been made between cities that *were* violent and *are* now peaceful. This work tries to see which among the three competing arguments holds true in the case of Meerut. Acknowledging that a single case neither proves nor disproves a theory, the principal attempt of this paper is to see which among these factors are responsible for the instances of ethnic riots until 1987; and the absence of major rioting after 1987. Peace studies

scholars began studying war in order to understand how to avoid it in the future. Communal violence research seeks to do the same and understanding how a riot-prone city with negligible interethnic civic links and an ineffective administration, sometimes culpable in communal violence, stopped experiencing riots will contribute to this literature.

Varshney categorizes Meerut City as riot-prone, a site of frequent deadly Hindu-Muslim violence, due to its disturbing record of communal riots from 1968 through 1987, which collectively resulted in 265 reported deaths.[6] The city has all the elements common to riot-prone cities: a high Muslim percentage of the population, a communally divided economy and social geography, a communally segregated civic life, strong communal organizations, and a plentiful supply of petty criminals. With this background, the fact that wide-scale communal riots have not occurred in Meerut City since 1987 is surprising. The 1987 riots and limited clashes in November 1990 were connected to the Hindu nationalist campaign to build a temple at Ayodhya, yet no wide-scale communal riots occurred in Meerut following the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992, when a wave of bloody Hindu-Muslim riots swept across India.[7] Meerut City presents a case representative of the most riot-prone cities in India, yet is no longer violent. This study explains how a formerly communally violent city can become a non-violent case while engaging major hypotheses in the test of change over time.

Research Findings

My research suggests that the electoral incentives hypothesis is most significant in explaining the emergence of communal harmony in Meerut and that the intra-ethnic self-policing model has played some role in keeping the peace but not an independent one. Although civic networks have been correlated positively with ethnic harmony, Meerut does not have enduring

---

[6] Varshney-Wilkinson Data-set
[7] Although approximately 60 people died in communal clashes in 1990-1, these were largely caused by police firings and were geographically limited to the most sensitive and poorest areas.

interethnic civic networks nor did they evolve after 1987. Research reveals that the absence of civic networks does not necessarily correspond to perpetual wide-scale communal riots. In Meerut, the city moved toward communal harmony following 1987 without such networks. I accept that research elsewhere in India has shown the positive influence of peace committees on ethnic harmony, but they played no meaningful role in Meerut City specifically.

The electoral incentives argument is more plausible in explaining the transformation of Meerut from a riot-prone city to one in which riots have been controlled. In the decades prior to the 1990s, Meerut politics operated in a bi-polar party system. The party that did not depend on Muslim votes could incite violence and polarize the electorate forcing the Hindus to vote for them. This was evident from the activities of Jana Sangh politicians in the 1960s and 1970s and BJP politicians in the late 1980s and early 1990s. An exception to this was Charan Singh's Muslim-supported U.P. administration rule in 1970 when there were no large-scale communal riots.

The electoral scene at the state level changed with the emergence of the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party from 1989. Electoral competition became more competitive and no political party could be certain of success by making blatant anti-Muslim appeals for partisan votes. The BJP could not win alone and tried to come to power through alliances with other parties, notably the BSP. It could no longer incite communal hatred as the BSP depended on Muslim votes and restrained the extreme Hindu nationalist elements of the BJP. With elections becoming increasingly competitive, all parties had to move beyond traditional bases to appeal to larger sections of the electorate, in part by moderating their political stances. Such a shift also meant that the administration dealt more sternly and even-handedly with rioters.

Intra-ethnic self-policing in post-1987 Meerut is also visible. Interviews suggest that Muslim leaders have played a positive role in restraining anti-social elements within their community during times of high tensions. Research reveals that public sentiment among Muslims after 1987 and electoral incentives influencing Muslim city politicians have encouraged minority self-policing. This has helped minimize the potential for communal disturbances. Yet, the independent effect self-policing has had on the advent of communal harmony in Meerut could not be assessed, as it was not feasible to measure the effects of intra-ethnic self-policing before 1987. My research points to the state as the fundamental factor in the existence or absence of communal riots. When the state is complicit in communal violence, inter-ethnic civic links and intra-ethnic self-policing would be unlikely to prevent communal riots. I argue in this paper that electoral incentives at the state level forced the state itself to prevent communal riots in Meerut.

Chapter Outline

The second chapter serves as an introduction to society and politics in Uttar Pradesh, the North Indian state in which Meerut is located. In this chapter, I provide an overview of ethnic cleavages and political developments in the state, which find some resonation in Meerut as well. Detailed information and analysis is presented on demographics and political party affiliations, communal mobilizations, and state assembly elections in the state.

The third chapter introduces the demographics, economy, and politics of Meerut City. Additionally, it includes a comprehensive history of communal violence including reference to communal clashes that did not become communal riots as they were reported in Amar Ujala, a local Hindi newspaper. In the riot history, I attempt to familiarize the reader with the general

trajectory of communal violence in Meerut. This chapter provides necessary information to be returned to in succeeding chapters.

The fourth chapter includes a map of civic life in Meerut City and evaluation of the civil society hypothesis as it applies to the emergence of communal peace in Meerut City after 1987. This chapter presents data on every category of civic life including associational and everyday forms. An analysis of the data makes a basis for my argument that civic life holds weak significance in explaining the emergence of relative communal harmony in Meerut.

In the fifth chapter I provide my explanation for the emergence of communal peace in Meerut that combines the electoral incentives and minority self-policing hypotheses. Here, I argue that electoral incentives constrained Hindu politicians from inciting communal riots under the pressure of trader class supporters opposed to further damage to their businesses and the city economy as a whole. On the other hand, I argue that Muslims practice self-policing to preventing community members from participating in communal violence or reacting violently to attacks from Hindu goondas and communalists. In the sixth and concluding chapter, I place the electoral incentives-minority self-policing combined explanation as posited in the previous chapter into comparative context and suggest future research projects to build on my findings.

Review of the Literature

This chapter presents fundamental terms to be employed in my study and lays out the civil society, electoral incentives, and intra-ethnic self-policing arguments. It focuses on the most contemporary figures in the study of communal violence in South Asia.

Horowitz defines a deadly ethnic or communal riot as 'an intense, sudden, though not necessarily unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.'[8] This study is most concerned with the magnitude of communal violence and so codes communal riots as geographically widespread events that envelop a city in widespread violence with casualties numbering above five. I refer to communalism in this paper as an antagonism of hatred between Hindus and Muslims that may or may not lead to communal violence. In Meerut, communalism is intense and frequently has been manipulated by elites to take the form of large-scale communal riots until 1987. In fact, the 1987 communal riots went beyond Horowitz's definition incorporating only civilian actors to that of a pogrom in which state and local security forces attacked Muslims and looted their areas. I define a pogrom as an event of large-scale violence targeting an ethnic group with state (police and administration) complicity and categorize the 1982 and 1987 riots as anti-Muslim pogroms. After 1987, communalism has remained but wide-scale violence and pogroms have not resulted.

A consensus among scholars (Horowitz, Varshney, Brass, et al) demarcates communal riots as primarily urban phenomena.

> Riots are initiated in urban areas because, first of all, the public, threatening character of many precipitants brings with it an urban bias: processions, strikes, protests, demonstrations of strength and of mass are all more likely where population is concentrated.[9]

---

[8] Horowitz, Donald. *Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 1.
[9] *Ibid,* 382.

In fact, a little more than 49 percent of all communal riots in India occurred in eight cities representing 18 percent of India's urban population and five percent of its total population: Ahmedabad, Bombay, Aligarh, Hyderabad, Meerut, Baroda, Calcutta, and Delhi.[10] This suggests that communal riots are not as widespread in India as the media and some activists might suggest, and that riot-proneness includes a relatively small part of urban India. Varshney places the above eight cities into the highest category of riot-proneness because they pass the threshold of at least 50 deaths in at least ten riots over five five-year periods. Among these, Meerut City has suffered the fourth highest number of reported riot casualties between 1950 and 1995.[11]

Several commonalities are shared by riot-prone cities, including high Muslim population density and antagonistic economic relations, but an overwhelming force that keeps them riot-prone is a history of communal riots.[12]

> As rioting becomes more routine, precipitants become more trivial and eventually unnecessary targets, initially chosen highly selectively, broaden out significantly... The violence becomes more organized and less spontaneous. There are tendencies to greater severity and to more casualties over time…The recurrent riot is best conceived in terms of a transition to warfare, with its specialized functionaries, its interplay of strategy and tactics, and its degradation of the security environment.[13]

Deconstructing this assertion, Brass argues that recurrent episodes of communal violence in riot-prone towns operate under 'institutionalized riot systems' where a nexus of communal organizations, hired criminals, and politicians incite riots at the time of their choosing.[14] Following this argument, habitual communal violence does not perpetuate itself simply due to insecurities and animosities that build up in such environments. Instead, Brass argues that a complex network of communalists operate in a system of mutual benefit in which set individuals

---

[10] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 103-5.
[11] *Ibid*, 102-4.
[12] Horowitz, Donald. *Deadly Ethic Riot*, 412.
[13] *Ibid,* 412.
[14] Brass, Paul. *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003) 32.

capitalize on such animosities by maintaining smolders tensions and inciting communal violence

when the time is most advantageous to the managers of this system.

> When one examines the actual dynamics of riots, one discovers that there are active, knowing
> subjects and organizations at work engaged in a continuous tending of the fires of communal
> divisions and animosities, who exercise by a combination of subtle means and confrontational
> tactics a form of control over the incidence and timing of riots.[15]

Based on personal observation, Brass asserts that Meerut City fit the definition of an

institutionalized riot system in the 1980s, the last decade of wide-scale communal violence in the

city.[16] Communal politicians, Hindu nationalist organizations, and criminals were and continue

to be readily available in Meerut. Moreover, politicians and the local administration visibly

protected communalists and rioters in the 1980s and before, although this does not seem the case

today. Varshney points out that, "Without the involvement of organized gangs, tens and

hundreds of killings are most unlikely, and without the protection afforded by politicians, such

criminals cannot escape the clutch of the law."[17] It can be inferred that institutionalized riot

systems were in place in Aligarh, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad (riot-prone cases in Varshney's

study) as well as in Meerut. Communal organizations and criminal networks continue to exist in

Meerut; however, I argue that wide-scale communal riots would be difficult to incite in absence

of the support of politicians who control the police.

> The vast majority of riots occur when aggressors conclude that ethnic politics is dangerously in
> flux, that they are likely to be able to use violence without adverse consequences to themselves,
> and that they are thoroughly warranted in their action.[18]

When politicians don't support riots or protect the culprits of such violence, risk-averse

criminals and communalists would likely not participate in riots. And even if they did, their

efforts would be undermined. Therefore, the fundamental question is what constrains political

---

[15] *Ibid*, 31.
[16] Email correspondence with Paul R. Brass (9/22/2003).
[17] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 11.
[18] Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic* Riot, 326.

elites' attempts at communal mobilization and what leads incumbent politicians who control the police to prevent communal riots with the force of the state? The following section presents and evaluates the civil society, electoral incentives, and intra-ethnic self-policing hypotheses.

The Civil Society Argument

The civil society argument states that inter-communal civic engagement causes communal harmony and constrains the communalizing efforts of politicians to incite riots.[19] Varshney defines civil society as 'the part of life that exists between the state on one hand and families on the other, that allows people to come together for a variety of public activities [including political and social activities], and that is relatively independent of the state.'[20] Within this social space, scholars of civil society (Varshney, Allport, Putnam, et al) find horizontal or equal-status inter-communal associational life the strongest facilitator for inter-communal trust.

> Associations instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness…
> When individuals belong to crosscutting groups with diverse goals and members, their attitudes
> will tend to moderate as a result of group interaction and cross pressures.[21]

Varshney argues that vigorous Hindu-Muslim associational life leads to communal peace because association members, who often hold influence in their localities, do everything in their power to prevent riots. They inform the administration of communal clashes, try to convince the public not to support polarization, and dispel rumors in peace committees. In an environment of such civic engagement, politicians' efforts to foment communal riots foil and may eventually cease.[22]

> When organizations such as trade unions, associations of businessmen, traders, teachers, doctors,
> lawyers and at least some cadre-based political parties (different from the ones that have an
> interest in communal polarization) are communally integrated, countervailing forces are created.
> Associations that would suffer losses from a communal split fight for their turf, making not only
> their members aware of the dangers of communal violence but also the public at large.[23]

---

[19] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 9-13.
[20] *Ibid*, 4.
[21] Putnam, Robert. *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 89-90.
[22] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 11.
[23] *Ibid*, 11.

Evaluating this argument further, Chhibber argues that India lacks an independent civic life because political parties penetrate most organizations within the social space considered civil society.

> Associational life in India is weak as most Indians do not belong to formal associations, and many of the associations that do exist are either tied to political parties or are politically ineffective… In 1991, only 13 percent of all Indians belonged to an organization, the lowest figure for all the democracies on which comparable data is available.[24]

He argues that parties, especially in Uttar Pradesh, embody ethnic cleavages and serve as the only links between the state and society in India.[25] In this environment, political competition can spiral into communal violence.[26] If civic life inspires moderation through cooperation on group objectives, such a social space co-opted by political parties may sanction more divisive objectives. Additionally, Verba argues that, "Trust levels are typically lowest among the segments of the population with low living standards, with little educational attainment, and among minorities."[27] If the bulk of Muslims lack inter-communal trust, what would lead Muslims to join associations that ultimately build inter-communal trust? This is especially problematic in cities of historic communal violence like Meerut where socio-economic status overwhelmingly overlaps religious community and inter-communal trust and contact are especially low.

The cities of robust civic life included in Varshney's study follow the logic that Hindu-Muslim cooperation is advantageous socially and economically. This logic does not apply to communally divided cities where institutionalized riot systems supported by biased administrations make communal polarization and violence easy and risk-free. While these two

---

[24] Chhibber, Pradeep. *Democracy Without Associations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 13-16.
[25] *Ibid*, 192.
[26] *Ibid,* 192.
[27] Verba, S. K. Schlozman and H. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Peace, 1995).

types are distinguished in Varshney's argument, it has difficulty addressing the shift from riot-prone to riot-free, especially following pogroms.[28] First, it assumes that the administration is not communalized and will cooperate evenhandedly with civil society when it offers information. In Meerut and Ahmedebad where the administration has been complicit in communal riots and neglected to punish known culprits, one may wonder how an 'institutionalized peace system' could emerge where an institutionalized riot systems once existed. Brass argues that institutionalized riot systems would override and displace whatever forms of civic engagement and interethnic cooperation exist.[29] No exhaustive study has investigated this matter. One can infer that peaceful cities in Varshney's study do not have institutionalized riot systems. In Meerut, communal organizations and communal politicians like the BJP maintain close relations. Although the institutionalize riot system may or may not persist in Meerut, there has been an absence of wide-scale communal violence for over fifteen years. Arguably, the cessation of state support and protection for criminals and communalists active in communal violence might have dismantled the system.

Electoral Incentives

The electoral incentives argument, most thoroughly empirically developed by Wilkinson, posits that political incentives, primarily of politicians in elected state governments, determine whether or not large-scale communal riots will occur. Scholars (Brass, Wilkinson, Tambiah, Engineer, et al) agree that political considerations determine whether or not and where political elites will incite riots, but Wilkinson argues that incumbent state politicians can foil these attempts if they give explicit orders to district administrations and the civil and police

---

[28] The emergence of civic life in a town of historic communal violence occurred in Bhiwandi through peace committees organized by the police. This is the only case of such transformation that has been recorded to my knowledge.

[29] Brass, Paul. *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 27.

bureaucracies. Especially true in state party systems with three or more effective parties, if politicians in elected state governments depend on Muslim votes, they will prevent riots with the force of the state. If communal polarization improves their ability to win elections, state security forces will be either passive or complicit in communal riots. The Chief Minister (Head of State Government) and his staff command the police and security forces and determine their deployment during communal riots. Therefore, both security actions and state government decisions concerning them are fundamentally political and vary across states according to the political equations of incumbent politicians.[30]

> Whether violence is bloody or ends quickly depends… primarily on the will and capacity of the government that controls the force of law and order… There is abundant comparative evidence to show that large-scale ethnic rioting does not take place where a state's army or police force is ordered to stop it using all means necessary.[31]

Politicians in state governments decide to control communal riots depending on their incentive to protect Muslims, a demographic that views security as a top priority when they go to the polls and that determines 60 state assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh.[32]

> Politicians in government will increase the supply of protection to minorities when either of two conditions applies: (1) when minorities are an important part of their party's current support base, or the support base of one of their coalition partners in a coalition government; or (2) when the overall electoral system in a state is so competitive—in terms of effective number of parties—that there is therefore a high probability that the governing party will have to negotiate to form coalitions with minority supported parties in the future, despite its own preferences.[33]

The BJP had no alliance partners in Uttar Pradesh through the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992. In the first election following the demolition, a coalition between a Dalit party (BSP) and a Muslims and backward caste party (Samajwadi Party) defeated the BJP. Then, the BJP learned that a militant Hindu nationalist line could no longer bring it to power. Caste and caste-based reservations became more important to the U.P. electorate. Thus, the only way to

---

[30] Verma, Arvind. "Politicization of the Police in India: Where Lies the Blame?" *The Indian Police Journal* (October-December 2000) 22.
[31] Wilkinson, Steven. *The Electoral Incentives for Hindu-Muslim Riots in India* (unpublished manuscript) 3.
[32] *Ibid*, 1-5.
[33] *Ibid*, 3.

reach power again in the state was to tone down its Hindu nationalist line and to form alliances with lower caste parties. Following this strategy in 1995, the BJP succeeded when it formed a government in U.P. with the BSP.

> Strategically speaking, decommunalizing the political field has become particularly important in Uttar Pradesh where the electoral expression of Muslims consternation at the destruction of Babri Masjid has compromised the party's chances of ever realizing power. In that sense, consensual politics has become a necessity for the BJP, all the more so as divisions inside the Hindu electorate are sharpening.[34]

Now, the BJP depends on alliances with lower caste parties to bring it to power in U.P. Since lower caste parties in U.P. depend on Muslim votes, if the BJP returns to the communal card it will alienate current and potential alliance partners, isolating itself from power in the process. Therefore, the BJP meets both of Wilkinson's criteria for electoral incentives to support Muslim security. First, it must secure its position with current and future allies. Second, the intensity of multi-party political competition in the state will require future negotiations with minority-supported parties in order to form a government. All its major competitors (BSP, SP, Congress) appeal to Hindu voters. The BSP has Dalits or scheduled caste support, the Samajwadi Party has near en block Yadav support and fairs well with many other castes deemed Other Backward Castes, and the Congress Party continues to hold onto some high caste and Dalit support. As a result, it would be almost impossible for the BJP to form a government without partners and each of these partners also needs the Muslim vote for its own political survival. In this environment, according to Wilkinson, politicians in state governments will make clear orders to district administrations that communal riots be prevented with all the force the law provides, which is quite enough to stop communal violence perpetrated by risk-averse criminals.[35]

---

[34] Zerinini- Brotel, Jasmine. "The BJP in Uttar Pradesh: From Hindutva to Consensual Politics." *The BJP and Compulsions of Politics in India*. Eds. Thomas Blom Hansen and Chistophe Jaffrelot (Delhi: X, 1998) 100.
[35] Wilkinson, Steven. *Electoral Incentives of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India*, 35-52.

State Control of the Police

The electoral incentives argument finds politicians in state governments most significant in explaining communal violence because they control police deployment and have the power to punish district-level officials who oversee state and local security forces. "Under the constitution, law and order is the responsibility of elected state governments which pass orders down through their police and civil service hierarchies to the key district-level officials in charge of law enforcement."[36] This section describes the resources available to prevent communal riots and the control that politicians have over the use of such resources during communal riots. In India, politicization of the police force undermines the ability of the police to maintain rule of law because officials often don't act without political clearance in fear for their careers. At the same time, politicization of the police administration suggests that if a clear order to prevent riots by any means necessary were to be given to police managers, riots would be less likely. Thus, as long as politics are competitive and the Muslim vote is valued in a given state, politicization of the police may lead to communal peace.

In statistical analysis, Wilkinson found that even the poorest states in India posses the basic capacity to prevent communal riots when and if politicians order officials to do so.[37] When a communal riot is considered imminent, District Magistrates have the power to control entry into the town, make preventative arrests, ban religious processions, and can deploy the district police force. District Magistrates can also call upon the state paramilitary force or the army if more force is needed to return civic order.[38] Further, each police station maintains a register of local criminals and communalists as well as a festival register that includes details on processions, which have led to communal riots in the past. In sum, information concerning

---

[36] *Ibid*, 36.
[37] *Ibid*, 47.
[38] *Ibid,* 36-8.

events and individuals that may contribute to communal violence is readily available as is the

state power to stop it.[39]

Nonetheless, the politicization of the police and civil service undermines the ability to

control communal violence. The Chief Minister and his staff have the power to transfer,

promote, and recommend for promotion officials in the state police and civil service and also

have limited ability to transfer officials in the all-India police (IPS) and civil services (IAS).

Transfers disrupt family life and usually place officials in positions far below the level of

responsibility that their rank commands or in an undesired location.[40] The threat of transfer by all

levels in the police hierarchy has bent the machine of law enforcement to the will of politicians.

Officials weigh political fallout before making arrests or deploying force against rioters and

often wait for political clearance before taking 'controversial' measures.[41] When there are no

orders to protect Muslims or when politicians demand immunity for their criminal supporters,

riots go unchecked. In states where the opposite happens, riots do not occur. [42]

The electoral incentives argument first and foremost argues that the state is the most

important unit of analysis. Nonetheless, Wilkinson acknowledges that local factors determine

where riots will occur in states that neglect to use decisive force against rioters.

> Especially in those states where the state government is weak in ordering its officials to prevent
> violence, or openly biased, local economic, social and political factors will often be important in
> determining the location and scale of ethnic riots.[43]

Of the empirically testable hypotheses that have been raised to explain why riots occur in certain

places and not in others, proximity to time of elections and close, highly competitive elections

(where the previous election had a 5% margin or less between top parties) have the highest

---

[39] *Ibid*, 37-50.
[40] *Ibid*, 37-40.
[41] Verba, Arvind. "Politicization of the Police in India: Where Lies the Blame." *The Indian Police Journal* () 19.
[42] Wilkinson, Steven. *The Electoral Incentives of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India*, 52.
[43] *Ibid* , 11.

correlations with communal riots.[44] The statistical significance for a communal riot to occur within six months of an election is .0024, twice the likelihood for riots when elections did not fall within six months. Also, "The predicted number of riot deaths went up by around 75% if there was a close race in the previous election (5% margin between top parties).[45]

Wilkinson argues that whether or not political elites decide to incite communal riots in a given city is a function of political incentives. If elections are bi-polar and close and if the political benefits of a communal riot outweigh the political and financial costs, a political elite is likely to incite a riot if he is confident that his efforts will translate into a communal riot, scaring swing voters to vote for him. The benefits of this in Uttar Pradesh have been clear. "Towns affected by Hindu-Muslim riots saw their BJP vote go up by an average of 24 percent, while the average town saw its BJP vote go up only seven percent."[46]

To sum up the electoral incentives argument, communal riots can be prevented or stopped if politicians in elected state governments order the police and security forces to use all necessary force when they expect communal riots. This decision is most likely when the party in power or its current or future collation partners depend on the Muslim votes, and when they operate in competitive party systems including three or more parties. In states where orders to stop communal riots are not given by state politicians, cities with high Muslim populations and close, polarized elections between the BJP and a lower-caste and Muslim-supported party will be the mostly likely sites for communal riots within that particular state.

---

[44] Wilkinson did not test the civil society hypotheses because large-n data is not available. He also did not test the self-policing hypothesis.
[45] *Ibid*, 23-5.
[46] *Ibid*, 26.

Minority Self-Policing

The Fearon-Laitin model of intra-ethnic self-policing posits that ethnic conflict can be avoided through a mechanism in which community leaders and organizations punish members of their own community who cheat or harm member(s) of the other community. They argue that inter-ethnic information networks are poor when it comes to identifying individuals, whereas intra-ethnic information concerning the reputations and actions of individuals within an ethnic group is robust due to constant interaction. Therefore, if a Muslim steals from a Hindu shopkeeper, his community leaders can punish him and return the stolen goods. Since Hindus have little information about most individual Muslims, without self-policing the offense could only be rectified in revenge targeting either all Muslims or a random collection of them, resulting in rising communal tensions.[47]

Fearon and Laitin argue that self-policing would prove most effective in segregated environments and that small groups would be more likely to practice self-policing than large groups because thy have more to lose.

> Small groups will be more likely to evolve in-group policing strategies to try to avoid the costs of group punishment, while the threat of indiscriminate punishment will be more typical of how large groups give members of small groups an incentive to cooperate.[48]

Although they are referring to imbalances in the size of group populations, I frame this in terms of power imbalance. In segregated cities like Meerut, Muslims are subjects to a Hindu-dominated economy and administration. After the 1987 riots, when looters destroyed Meerut's economic capacity and young Muslim men suffered heavy casualties, primarily at the hands of

---

[47] Fearon, James and David Laitin. "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation." *American Political Science Review* Vol. 90, No. 4 (December 1996) 719.
[48] *Ibid,* 726.

the police and state paramilitary forces (PAC), Muslims accepted their inability to confront

Hindus. At this stage, they began to practice self-policing.

A comparable scenario occurs in disputes between states escalating toward war.

Engaging the bargaining model, Fearon argues that if two states in a dispute know the outcome

of a possible war, they should prefer to reach a deal reflecting the hypothetical post-war

situation.[49] Muslims in Meerut know that if they riot, their community will be destroyed as it was

in 1987. Since only extremely limited mechanisms for inter-communal cooperation are available,

intra-communal self-policing constrains the potential for Muslims to take part in riots, and when

there is no one to fight, there is no riot. Here, community leaders persuade Muslims not to

participate in communal violence and hand over the culprits of communal violence or defectors

to the police if they do.

This theory has problems in explaining its application during communal clashes with the

potential to lead to communal riots. Fearon and Laitin do not specify what type of punishment

would be effective in the case of ethnic violence or how it could be enforced and assume that

self-policing is independent of the state and politics. These gaps in the theory are problematic in

explaining communal riots and make the explanation sustainable only as one factor in a larger

explanation of ethnic peace.[50] First, politicians usually are involved directly or indirectly in riot

production. Second, the state is always involved actively or passively in wide-scale communal

riots. Third, it presents a mechanism that constrains individual behavior, largely explained in

context of economic transactions, as an explanation for what Horowitz considers a group

phenomenon.

---

[49] Fearon (1995) referenced in Reiter, Dan. "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War." *Perspectives on Politics* (American Political Science Association: Vol 1 No. 1 (March 2003) 29.
[50] Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 475.

> The vast majority of ethnic riots are precipitated by events with a notably collective *and* political, rather than individual and personal, flavor— events originating at the group-competitive level rather than the level of the individual miscreant.[51]

Further, I argue that self-policing is not necessarily decentralized in segregated cities that have experienced a massive communal riot or pogrom and where Muslim politicians are in power or dominant in an opposition party. Instead, political incentives can directly lead to encouragement of self-policing. In this thesis, I consider self-policing a compliment to electoral incentives at the state and municipal levels as well as a product of electoral incentives, sometimes supported by a centralized, state structure or political party.

Research Design

This thesis tests the civil society, electoral incentives, and intra-ethnic self-policing hypotheses as they apply to an explanation for the absence of communal riots in Meerut City. The period of study spans from1968 to 1987, when communal riots frequently occurred, to the post-1987 period when communal violence became reduced to small isolated clashes of limited geographic spread and longevity. In this timeframe, I focus on the Ramjanmabhoomi mobilization for a Ram Temple at Ayodhya (1984-93) because most communal riots in India at that time were caused by events related to it. The above hypotheses will be evaluated for their ability to explain the shift to communal harmony in the city after the 1987 riots.

I test the civil society hypothesis by evaluating whether inter-communal civic life has developed since 1987, and if it is strong enough to constrain communal polarizations by political elites. The data engaged to answer this question comes from interviews with association leaders, local politicians, and a general distribution of Meerut residents. Additionally, information collected in a survey administered to 100 Hindus and Muslims from diverse socio-economic backgrounds conducted in four neighborhoods of the city has been completed with questions

---

[51] *Ibid*, 475-6.

pertaining to civic life and inter-ethnic peace committee effectiveness. By engaging this data, it is possible to test the density of Hindu-Muslim associational and everyday civic life, which indicates whether or not civic links developed in the past fifteen years explains the shift to communal harmony in Meerut.

I test the electoral incentives hypothesis with data collected in secondary literature and through interviews with officials, politicians, and surveyed members of the general population. If a decisive improvement in communal riot prevention efforts coincides with changes in electoral politics and orders given to the officials in the Meerut District administration, this hypothesis contributes to an explanation for peace in Meerut.

I test the intra-ethnic self-policing hypothesis with data collected in interviews with officials, Muslim political elites and community leaders, and social workers employed in Muslim areas. A consensus among interviewees that supports this hypothesis, most likely as a compliment to another hypothesis, suggests the influence of minority self-policing on peace in Meerut.

Field Research in Meerut City: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

I chose Meerut City as the principal case study for my thesis because it has not been thoroughly studied, fits all the characteristics scholars attribute to riot-prone cities, and is on the top of Varshney's list of the most riot-prone cities in India, yet has become a city of relative communal peace. Despite its being representative as a North Indian riot-prone town, I found certain limitations in conducting research in Meerut City, some of which were specific to Meerut and some specific to myself. First, local economic and educational data was unavailable in district and municipal government offices. Second, my elementary knowledge of Hindi made detailed interviews only possible when a local interpreter was available. Communication was

also problematic with an interpreter because no one available was highly comfortable in English. I made constant use of my Hindi ability, but a significant barrier definitely slowed progress in fieldwork. Third, interviews with state and national politicians elected from Meerut were not granted. These issues may have limited the range and depth of data that could be presented in the following pages; however, extending the duration of my stay in India from one to three months largely compensated for those limitations that could be overcome.

This chapter provides the theoretical groundwork for this study and indicates my approach to testing the three competing arguments. The subsequent two chapters provide background information on Uttar Pradesh and Meerut and set the scene for the later analytic chapters.

Overview of Uttar Pradesh

This chapter explains how ethnic groups and their party affiliations, communal mobilizations, and elections have played out at the state level. It includes demographic information, caste and communal mobilization histories, and an overview of Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections since 1989. This chapter provides a U.P. context to the social and political forces contributing to or diluting communalism and communal violence in Meerut.

Political parties in Uttar Pradesh and other states have sought to gain the support of the electorate and mobilize politically quiescent groups through emotionally charged appeals surrounding caste and religious community. Especially consequential in U.P., nationally and locally launched communal mobilizations engineered by the BJP and Sangh Parivar, a coalition of militant Hindu organizations, led to deadly riots in many U.P. towns. Communal riots in Meerut City often paralleled key communal mobilizations launched across the state and country, which often affected election outcomes. This chapter sets a state-level political context for the current study.

Demographics

Demographics form the building blocks of politics in India where political parties target specific ethnic constituencies and work to translate a targeted demographic into a voting block for their party. Especially in U. P. where a system of ethnic politics has emerged in the past fifteen years, the demographics of caste and community determine political campaigns. This section provides data on major demographic categories and their political affiliations.

U.P. is the most populous state in India, surpassing all but five countries in the world with a population of over 166 million.[52] U.P. demographics can be demarcated into the following

---

[52] "Provisional Population Totals, 2001." *Official Web Site of the Government of Uttar Pradesh.* 3 May 2004 <http://www.upgov.nic.in>.

categories: upper castes, OBCs (Other Backward Castes), MBCs (most backward castes), Scheduled Castes (Dalits), and Muslims. The upper castes include Brahmins, Thakurs, Rajputs and Banias. Combined, the upper castes account for 20 percent of the U.P. population and historically control the most political power and wealth.[53] Banias are a stronghold of the BJP, a Hindu nationalist political party, and comprise a large number of successful traders and businessmen. Brahmins, and Rajputs formed a core Congress support base until lower caste reservations and the drive for Ram Janmabhoomi attracted them to the BJP in large numbers.

An official 2001 estimate places OBCs at 54 percent of the U.P. population.[54] OBCs include agricultural castes that range from the relatively wealthy (Yadavs) down to landless, subservient castes. Upwardly mobile OBCs like the Yadavs have maintained historically poor relations with the Congress Party and supported Charan Singh's OBC- supported Lok Dal from the1960s to the 1980s, and its descendents Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Party since the late 1980s. MBCs, landless service castes from the bottom layer of the OBCs, claim two percent of the population of U.P.[55] They supported Congress until the 1980s, but are now divided between the Dalit-supported BSP and BJP, which gained much of their support with the Ayodhya mobilization. In a survey of villages in Meerut District, Pai found MBCs in conflict with OBCs,

---

[53] Brass. Paul. "The Rise of the BJP and the Future of Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh." *India Votes: Alliance Politics and Minority Governments in the Ninth and Tenth General Elections.* Eds. Harold A. Gould and Sumit Ganguly (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993) 275.

[54] Sharat, Pradhan. "Uttar Pradesh to go for caste census." 25 July 2001. The BC and Muslim estimates of the BJP state government fall well below 1991 census statistics. Muslims are estimated to account for 10 percent of the population, over 7 percent below previous estimates.

[55] Pai, Suddha. "Politicization of Dalits and MBCs: Study of Social Conflict and Political Preferences in Four Villages of Meerut District." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (7 June 1997) 1356.

which exploit them in Western U.P., and the more assertive Chamars.[56] A large segment of

MBCs, unable to identify with the BSP or JD/SP, support the BJP.[57]

The scheduled castes, or Dalits, form 21 percent of the U.P. population and can be

broadly demarcated into Chamar and non-Chamar groupings. The former accounts for 56.6

percent of the U.P. scheduled caste population.[58] Chamars overwhelmingly support and lead the

BSP; non-Chamar Dalits moderately support the BSP but are divided across all major parties.[59]

Dalits continue to suffer from atrocities at the hands of land owning castes (Yadav, Jats and

upper castes) and emerged as politically assertive only in the past ten years with the rise of the

BSP.

Muslims make up 17.3 percent of the total U.P. population and 31 percent of its urban

population.[60] As a demographic, they are economically and educationally disadvantaged and

supported Congress as a secular umbrella party until it pandered to militant Hindus in the middle

1980s. Now, U.P. Muslims overwhelmingly support Samajwadi Party leader Mulyam Singh

Yadav as their protector, but remain divided between SP, BSP and sometimes Congress.[61]

With the rise of ethnic parties in the past decade, a powerful caste dynamic has come to

govern U.P. elections. In the less communally charged political environment following the 6

December 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid, the BJP has found it difficult to form a government

---

[56] Chamars were the main beneficiaries of Congress reservations policies for Scheduled Castes. The leadership of the BSP comes primarily from the generation of Chamars who have benefited from the reservations policies first implemented by Congress in the 1950s.

[57] The Most Backward Castes have trouble identifying with the BSP because they see it as a Chamar party. They do not support the Samajwadi Party because they perceive it as the party of Yadavs and other well-off OBCs, which own much of the land where MBC work and exploit them.
Pai, Suddha. "Politicization of Dalits and MBCs: Study of Social Conflict and Political Preferences in four Villages of Meerut District." *Economic and Political Weekly* (7 June 1997) 1358-60.

[58] Census of India, 1991 for the SC population figure and Census of India 1981 for the percentage of Chamars.

[59] A post-poll survey of SC voters in U.P. and Punjab conducted by Kanchan Chandra found that 80% Chamars and 40% non-Chamar SCs support the BSP.
Chandra, Kanchan. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2004) 208-10.

[60] Census of India, 1991.

[61] **CSDS Survey**

in the U.P. State Assembly and has succeeded only when the Muslim and lower caste vote was especially divided and when the BJP and a lower caste party, namely the BSP, formed an alliance. Nonetheless, at the peak of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign (1989-92), the BJP enjoyed a rapid rise to power without alliances, ultimately riding a wave of Hindu nationalism to state power in 1991.

Rise of Communalism in U.P.

Uttar Pradesh inherits a history of Muslim power that originated with the Mughal Empire (1526-1858) and extended through much of the British period. Urdu in Persian script remained the sole vernacular language of the province until 1900 and Muslims held a highly disproportionate amount of government seats and top positions in the civil administration until independence in 1947 when the majority of educated Muslims moved to Pakistan.[62] In 1883 a controversy to replace Urdu with Hindi as a vernacular and administrative language raised communal tensions although Urdu was not abandoned and it was not until 1900 that Hindi gained parity status with Urdu.[63] Soon afterward, a rising demand posed by Muslim elites for separate electorates, largely organized from the Aligarh Muslim University in Western United Provinces (as U.P. was called under the British), exacerbated communal tensions, creating an environment of communal enmity and violence in the province.

> The Aligarh Muslim University soon became the Muslim center of opposition to the main current of Indian nationalism represented by the Congress. Hindu communalism grew and found its organizational expression in the Hindu Mahasabha… Hindu-Muslim riots, often resulting in many deaths, became a common occurrence in the life of the province.[64]

---

[62] Urdu and English were used in U.P. administration. Hindi could not be used in the administration until 1900.
[63] Brass, Paul. "1982." *Caste Faction and Party in Indian Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) 234.
[64] *Ibid, 234.*

The largest Hindu-Muslim riots in the state and country before Indian independence occurred following the collapse of the Kalifat movement (1923-7),[65] the years surrounding a rising demand for Pakistan in the late 1930s, and, worst of all, the partition riots from 1946-8. Communal riots occurred in Meerut City during each of these periods.

Ram Temple Movement

The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign by the Sangh Parivar to liberate the putative birthplace of Ram from a 16th century Mosque (Babri Masjid) that stood in its place and the wave of riots that surrounded it achieved a level of murder and destruction nearing the horrific partition riots over forty years earlier.[66] The campaign gained official inception at a large congregation in Delhi (April 1984) when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an RSS-affiliated militant Hindu organization of religious workers, first established Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yajna Samiti, an organization created to liberate the site of the purported Ram Temple from Babri Masjid. The VHP led the militant Hindu campaign until the BJP returned to the Hindu nationalist line in 1989 after its brief experiment as a moderate party.[67] Then, the BJP gained full support of the RSS and Party President L.K. Advani assumed chief leadership of the Hindu revival although the VHP continued to aggressively participate in the movement.[68]

The first landmark in the struggle to liberate Ramjanmabhoomi came with the 1 February 1986 Faizabad appeals court ruling to unlock the main gates of Babri Masjid. Muslims protested vehemently throughout the country, and in that same month, formed the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) 'with the sole purpose of mobilizing Muslims to protest against reopening

---

[65] The Kaliphat Movement was a united anti-British campaign by Muslims and Hindus in response to the British humiliation of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

[66] The Sangh Parivar is a coalition of Hindu nationalist organizations including the VHP, BJP, RSS, and Bajrang Dal.

[67] Jaffrelot, Chistophe. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (London: Hurst Publishers, 1996) 363.

[68] *Ibid*, 374.

the Mosque for the Hindus.'[69] This led to a confrontation between Hindus pushing for

construction of the temple in Ayodhya and Muslims demanding the return of the Mosque to their

community. On 30 September 1989, the VHP launched Shila Pujan Samaroh, (brick worship

ceremonies) from 600 villages where it planned to take out sanctified bricks in colorful

processions to Ayodhya where they were to be laid in the foundations for the new Ram

Temple.[70] By late 1989, Hindu-Muslim tensions grew passionately antagonistic and communal

riots ignited across the country.

On 25 September 1990, BJP President L.K. Advani began his 10,000 kilometer yatra

from Somnath on India's west coast to Ayodhya, planning to cross eight states before reaching

the city on 30 October 1990 when he expected to inaugurate *Kar Seva*, an attack on Babri Masjid

by Hindu activists called kar sevaks. Hundreds of thousands heard Advani's Hindu nationalist,

anti-Muslim message along the *Rath Yatra* but his arrest in Bihar prevented arrival to Ayodhya

as anticipated. Communal riots surrounding Ramjanbhoomi occurred in many U.P. cities

following Advani's arrest, but climaxed from 30 October through November 1990, following a

failed attempt on 30 October to destroy the Mosque by the kar sevaks. That day, Chief Minister

Mulayam Singh Yadav ordered security to fire upon the kar sevaks, killing thirteen as 'martyrs.'

This led to communal riots in many towns.[71] "On November 1, riots broke out in a number of

places [in U.P.] and curfew had to be clamped in 30 districts of the state."[72] The following two

years were characterized by explosive Hindu-Muslim tensions and violence. Communal riots

occurred in many towns across India during this time including Aligarh and Bijnor in Western

districts of U.P.

---

[69] Sharma, Harish. *The Communal Angle in Indian* Politics, 105.
[70] *Ibid,* 119-20.
[71] Number of deaths recorded in Brass, Paul. *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Riots in India*, 8.
[72] Sharma, Harish. *The Communal Angle in Indian Politics* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2000) 126.

The watershed event, igniting the most deadly wave of communal riots in six years of unrelenting communal violence surrounding Ramjanmabhoomi, occurred on 6 December 1992. That day, thousands of kar sevaks destroyed the Babri Masjid without interference. "The PAC [U.P. paramilitary force], which was stationed in the immediate vicinity of the Babri Masjid, failed to intervene and the CRPF [national security force] quickly left the scene.[73] The demolition, aired repeatedly on TV news, led to Hindu victory processions, Muslim protests, and a wave of communal riots resulting in the reported deaths of 1,100 people and massive property damage due to arson and looting.[74] The demolition served as the culmination of the BJP's Hindutva strategy. The Party rode the Ayodhya wave to power in U.P. in 1991 and, although its dogma has since changed, owes its current political position to the 'success' of this movement.

Mandal and the Rise of Caste Mobilization in Uttar Pradesh

Caste cleavages undermine the communal cleavage by dividing along caste lines the united Hindu base that the BJP sought to create.[75] In Uttar Pradesh, lower caste political mobilization in a form that challenges upper caste political power is a new phenomenon. While U.P. experienced various lower caste movements since the 19th century, they each became fragmented to the point of insignificance. By the late 1960s and 1970s, many leaders of the Ambedkar-inspired Republican Party (RPI) shifted to Congress, abandoning a party declining into fragmentation along caste lines.[76] Despite the success of Charan Singh's (peasant/OBC-supported) Lok Dal (BLD) in the 1960s and 1970s, BLD avoided confrontation with the upper

---

[73] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu nationalist Movement and Indian Politics,* 455.

[74] Sharma, Harish. *The Communal Angle in Politics*, 137.

[75] In 1990, Janata Dal (JD) Prime Minister V.P. Singh announced that the Mandal Commission recommendations concerning reservations in education and government employment for the lower castes would be implemented. This event rapidly politicized caste differences and the division between upper and lower caste Indians. The BJP joined the Ramjanmabhoomi movement partly to undermine caste divisions, and unite all Hindus around their party and the movement it supported. Thus, Mandal posed a direct threat to the BJP's political future.

[76] The RPI achieved its height of support in U.P. in the late 1950s as the party of the Bahujan Samaj (Dalits, backwards castes, and lower class Muslims). It gained wide support of the Chamars**.**
Pai, Suddha. *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002) 72-112.

castes and limited its appeal to wealthy proprietary castes like Jats and Yadavs, leaving Dalits

and poorer OBCs outside its fold.[77] In 1987, the BLD fragmented along caste lines. Nearly all its

MPs abandoned the Party except the Jats who remained loyal to Charan Singh's son and

successor Ajit Singh.[78] Writing on Uttar Pradesh in the early 1980s, Brass observed,

> Caste identifications in the state remain very largely restricted to local caste groups. State-wide caste
> associations exist only among the low caste groups and these are often paper organizations …The
> potential for a state-wide caste movement exists among the Chamars (a Dalit caste group recorded
> as the largest in the state),[79] but so far the protest of local Chamar castes have not been coordinated
> in such a movement.[80]

Many prominent RPI leaders vocal in the 1950s and 1960s for Dalit assertion were co-

opted by the Congress Party in the 1970s and eventually adopted the party's softer discourse on

scheduled castes.[81] Dalit leaders given Congress tickets were non-militant, had no power in the

local or state Congress organizations, and did not address crucial issues for their castes.[82]

Further, in almost all Congress Governments from 1952 to 1988, only one of eleven top posts

was allotted to a Dalit.[83] Significant Dalit empowerment did not begin until the emergence of the

anti-Congress Bahujan Samaj Party, founded in 1984. The BSP formed its first state government

in coalition with the Samajwadi Party in 1993, occupied the Chief Minister position in 1995 and

1997 in coalition with the BJP, and consolidated the Dalit vote by the late 1990s.[84] As Chief

Minister of U.P., Mayawati (BSP) fought against Dalit atrocities, elevated Dalit symbolic status

---

[77] Jaffrelot. Christophe. *India's Silent Revolution* (New York: Columbia Uiversity Press, 2003) **X**
 Zoya Hasan. *Quest for Power*, 137.
[78] Jaffrelot, Christophe. The Silent Revolution, 333.
[79] Census of India, 1931.
[80] Brass, Paul. "U.P." *Caste Faction and Party in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1984) 237.
[81] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Silent Revolution*, 113-4.
[82] For instance, Dalit Congress MPs exerted no pressure in the Lok Sabha (parliament) accelerating the Prevention
of Atrocities Against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act until 1989.
Brass, Paul. *Factional Politics in an Indian State.* 102-5.
Chandra, Kanchan. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2004) 172-95.
[83]Chandra, Kanchan. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, 180-1.
[84] Pai, Suddha. *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution*, 11.

by building Ambedkar parks throughout U.P., and sharply increased Dalit representation in top

government positions.[85]

> Even as a member of a coalition government, the BSP has acted aggressively to protect Scheduled
> Castes interests, enacting laws giving them greater access to land, implementing existing
> provisions protecting Dalits from discrimination and violence, penalizing bureaucrats for not
> being responsive to SC voters, and earmarking development funds primarily for Scheduled
> Castes.[86]

Unlike Dalits, OBCs were largely alienated from Congress power and its reservations

policies due to the threat they posed to the Party's upper caste base. In the first three

parliamentary elections since independence (1951-67), not more than six percent of Congress

Members of Parliament were from OBCs, and Congress vehemently resisted OBC reservations

until the late 1980s.

> Upper castes opposed even the most remote suggestion for reservations for the OBCs, hence the
> Congress Party government refused even to undertake measures to identify backward classes,
> following its rejection of caste as the basis of measuring backwardness.[87]

In reaction to Congress alienation, OBC mobilizations in U.P. grew as anti-Congress

movements for the sole purpose of wrestling power from the Party. Charan Singh's BLD and its

descendent Janata Dal gave a disproportionate number of party tickets to OBC candidates and

pushed for OBC reservations, attracting the support of those who felt marginalized by Congress.

Janata Dal Prime Minister V.P. Singh's announcement in 1990 to implement the Mandal

Commission's recommendation to grant 27 percent of reservations in federal employment to

OBCs raised lower caste consciousness to its peak. As Singh intended, Mandal solidified Janata

Dal's backward caste political base and paved the way for a shift in political power favoring

backward castes.[88] However, the upper caste reaction against Mandal supported by the BJP

culminated in the collapse of the JD-led coalition government when the BJP withdrew its

---

[85]*Ibid,* 169-75.
[86] Chandra, Kanchan. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, 226.
[87] Hasan, Zoya. *Quest for Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 141.
[88] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Silent Revolution,* 347-50

support. Anti-Mandal sentiments also drove an exodus of upper caste voters from Congress to

the BJP, which co-opted the fervor of the anti-Mandal agitation within their communal

discourse.[89] Among secular parties, caste politics became a conscious attempt to subvert the

BJP's communal strategy. In November 1989, Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav (JD)

implemented a policy granting 27 percent of reservations in state employment to OBCs

(including Muslim OBCs), arguing that 'social mobility was a bulwark against BJP

communalism.'[90]

Caste consciousness is arguably the greatest force against communalism. This proves

especially important when it comes to politics because lower caste parties tend to depend on

Muslim votes. Although caste has taken a backseat to communalism in Meerut, when major

communal mobilizations are absent, caste predominates. Realizing the influence that

communalism and caste consciousness play on U.P. politics and social consciousness provides a

frame for understanding communal violence in India and the elections that sometimes surround

them.

U.P. Assembly Election Results: 1989-2002

This section summarizes key trends in U.P. assembly elections since 1989, the year an

ethnic-based multi-party system began to emerge in U.P. and when reservations for backward

castes and Ramjanmabhoomi became the dominating issues.[91] Hindu-Muslim riots in Uttar

Pradesh peaked in 1989-1991 and were usually incited by politicians close to state or

parliamentary elections. The last two elections (1996, 2002) saw an end to large-scale Hindu-

Muslim riots in U.P. and more targeting of specific caste support, even by the 'all-Hindu' BJP,

---

[89] Hasan, Zoya. *Quest for Power*, 219-20.
[90] Of course Yadav's fight against communalism had to do with ensuring his political base and was not only ideological as was the case at the center in 1990. Hasan, Zoya. *Ibid,* 149-50.
[91] Chhibber, Pradeep. *Democracy Without Association.* (University of Michigan press: Ann Arbor, 1999) 136-40.

dividing both the 'Hindu' and lower caste voting blocks. This section illustrates that the scenario

of electoral competition and political strategies of parties correlates significantly with communal
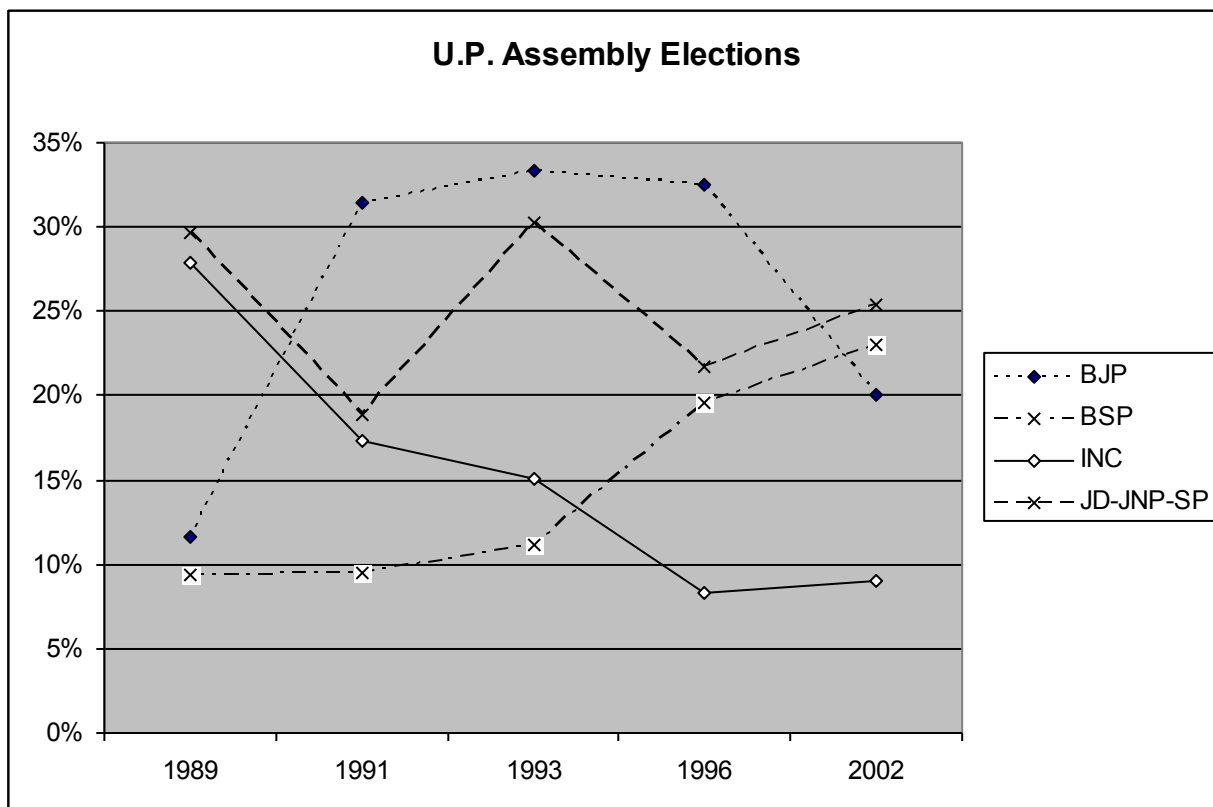
polarization and riots in U.P.

Chart 1: Percent of the vote received by the four largest political parties in Uttar Pradesh during State Assembly elections from 1989-2002.[92]

1989

Ramjanmabhoomi was a key issue in the 1989 U.P. assembly election, which closely

followed the November 9 *shilanyas* (laying of sanctified bricks), where the VHP laid foundation

stones for the Ram Temple on a disputed site in front of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya.[93] This

event, endorsed and ultimately stopped by a Congress Government, benefited the BJP, actively

---

[92] Note that Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party vote shares are combined. The latter party is a descendent of the former and attract votes of similar demographics and both parties have been in alliance since SP's birth.
Electoral Commission of India, Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Elections Statistics.
[93] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, 401-3.

supported by the VHP and RSS, yet badly weakened Congress support, driving away upper caste

Hindu and Muslim voters. "In constituencies where Muslims constituted a significant portion of

the electorate the Congress lost, while Hindus moved to the BJP."[94] Muslims voted almost en

block for Janata Dal, but voted for the BSP where JD was not contesting. Thakurs, Banias, and a

large segment of Brahmins (all upper caste groups) also shifted their support to the BJP.

The BSP emerged in 1989 with nearly 9 percent of the vote, mostly among Chamars and

Muslims. The BJP-VHP Shila Pujan programs brought the lower segment of Dalits to the BJP.

In this election, Muslims and OBCs supported Janata Dal, Dalits voted for BSP, and the elite

castes and some MBCs (poorest OBCs) supported the BJP, leaving Congress without a real

support base.[95] With the fall of Congress and the rise of ethnic parties like SP and BJP, Uttar

Pradesh politics became a polarized, emotionally charged and sometimes violent battle between

JD and the BJP in the elections surrounding the Ayodhya campaign.

1991

"The BJP made the temple-mosque controversy central to its election campaign in 1991,

framing the election as a referendum on the rights of the Hindu majority."[96] The U.P. assembly

election of that year saw a 10 percent drop in Congress vote share (17.4%) and a 20 percent rise

for the BJP (31.5%), making it the largest party in the state. The U.P. Janata Dal split when

former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav left the party to form the Samajwadi Party, which

formed a losing alliance with Janata Dal. The 1991 elections fell in a volatile, emotionally

---

[94] Ficket, Lewis P. "The Janata Dal in the Ninth Indian General Election of 1989 and its Future Prospects." in *India Votes*, Eds. Gould and Gaungley (Westview Press: Oxford, 1993) 88.
[95] Sharma, Harish. *Communal Angle in Indian Politics,* 153.
[96] Chandra, Kanchan. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, 263.

charged atmosphere compounded by the violent reaction of upper castes against Mandal (1990-1) and intensifying VHP-BJP Ramjanmabhoomi mobilizations.[97]

> The Ayodhya issue strongly motivated the vote of the upper castes, especially after the aborted *Kar Seva* of October-November 1990 which created much resentment against Mulayam Singh Yadav, the then Janata Dal Chief Minister. However, a more important factor was the high proportion of upper castes voting for the BJP because of anti-Mandal sentiment.[98]

Election violence between JD and BJP party cadres and communal riots were also rampant, with Meerut City's poll cancelled for voting booth violence.

In an analysis of the parliamentary elections that took place at the same time as the U.P. assembly elections, Brass notes that the BJP won 72.7 percent of the Lok Sabha seats contested in areas of high Muslim concentration by creating an anti-Muslim, Hindu vote bank to counter the Muslim vote bank against it.[99] This tactic proved effective in raising Hindu voter participation for the BJP, lowering participation of the already divided Muslim voting block, and stimulating urban Dalits to vote BJP.[100]

Large segments of several peasant castes (Jats, Kurmis, Lodhs) also shifted their votes to the BJP in 1991.[101] Jats voted for the BJP largely because Janata Dal excluded Jats from Mandal reservation benefits.[102] BJP aggressively courted Kurmis and Lodhs voted almost en block along caste lines for fellow caste member Kalayan Singh. Yadavs, many OBCs, and lower class Muslims continued to support Janata Dal and M.S. Yadav's Janata Samajwadi Party. And the BSP maintained its strong Chamar support base with only one less seat than in 1989.

---

[97] Ramjanmabhoomi was the key issue in these elections. Sharma, Harish. *Communal Angle in Indian Politics*, 157.
[98] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, 443.
[99] Brass. Paul. "The Rise of the BJP and the Future of Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh." *India Votes,* 272.
[100] *Ibid,* 266.
[101] *Ibid*, 268.
[102] Jats were not included on the OBC list that determined which castes are entitled to reservations.

1993

Influenced by Mandal, the predominant campaign issue in 1993 was social

justice; and, the BJP did not focus exclusively on Ramjanmabhoomi because the Ram

wave, effective in 1991, lost much of its power over the U.P. electorate by this

election.[103]

> For the first time in many years [in the 1993 U.P. elections] violence did not contribute to a
> polarization of the electorate along communal lines… [And] with a reduction in communal tension
> came an increased focus on social issues such as the growing political consciousness of the
> OBCs.[104]

The BJP, along with using the Ayodhya issue, campaigned for preservation of upper caste

political power. The SP-BSP coalition, along with an anti-communal, anti-BJP platform,

campaigned to ensure proper implementation of the Mandal Commission and pledged their

support for Muslims, OBCs, and Dalits. [105]

According to a post-poll survey, the SP-BSP alliance gained 33 percent of the OBC vote

and almost en block Yadav and Muslim support. The declining JD gained 16 percent of the OBC

vote and strong Dalit support in Western U.P. whereas the BSP gained strong Dalit support in the

Eastern and Central regions. The BJP received 28 percent of the OBC vote and the upper castes,

urban middle class, and sections of the landed gentry almost completely identified with the

BJP.[106] The 1993 U.P. election, won by the BSP-SP lower caste alliance, demonstrates the

diminishing success of Hindu mobilization following the demolition of Babri Masjid and the

empowerment of the lower castes. The fact that Kalayan Singh, BJP Chief Minister at the time of

the demolition, contested as a Lodh leader as much as a spokesman for Hindutva illustrates the

---

[103] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, 492-3
Amaresh Mishra. "Disillusioned Electorate." *Economic and Politcal Weekly.* (13 November 1993) 2503.
[104] *Ibid*, 493.
[105] However, the BSP-SP divorce in 1995 and following BSP-BJP alliance in 1995 continues to prevent a Dalit-Muslim-OBC alliance to consolidate against the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.
[106] Mishra, Ameresh. "Dalit Assertion : Possibilities and Limits." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (11 December 1993).

ultimate loss for the BJP in the battle between Hindutva and Mandal that initiated Advani's Rath

Yatra in 1990.

<div align="center">*1996*</div>

The 1996 U.P. elections saw no caste or communal polarization exercised by any of the

major parties (BJP, SP, BSP). The winning BJP, stuck at one-third of the vote,[107] did not use the

Hindu card and even ignored caste, focusing on development, law and order, and government

transparency. "Conventional wisdom held that voters in U.P., tired of communal violence, would

no longer vote for a party on the basis of a Hindu agenda."[108] The Hindu nationalist line also was

disparaged in an attempt by the BJP to form alliances.[109] The BSP allied with the Brahmin-

dominated Congress and abstained from anti-upper caste language in an effort to attract voters

from all castes. Lastly, the SP campaigned on secularism and reservations (for the Muslim vote),

but did not polarize the electorate along caste lines since they no longer had a lower caste

alliance with the BSP. In an analysis of the 1996 elections, Chandra writes,

> Faced with the stubborn limits that the mobilization of a multiplicity of social groups in U.P. has
> placed on party expansion [of social bases], political parties have strong incentives to tone down
> aggressive rhetoric and build more inclusive social coalitions than before.[110]

Little changed in terms of party support in this election. The BJP maintained its hold over

the upper castes while edging into OBC and MBC support. The BSP consolidated its hold over

scheduled castes with at least two-thirds of their support and attracted 16.8 percent of the non-

---

[107] Brass, Paul. "General Elections, 1996 in Uttar Pradesh." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (20 September 1997).
[108] Chandra, Kanchan and Chadrika Parmar. "Party Strategies in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections, 1996." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (1 February 1997) 215-8.
[109] The BJP became the largest party in India after the (earlier) 1996 general elections but failed to form an alliance because its party line. It chose to moderate its party line in order to avoid such a fate in future elections.
[110] Chandra, Kanchan and Chadrika Parmar. "Party Strategies in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections, 1996." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (1 February 1997) 219.

Yadav OBC vote. The SP-led United Front (UF) received 83 percent of the Muslim vote bank and near en block Yadav support.[111]

<div align="center">*2002*</div>

The BJP returned to a communal strategy in the most recent election, making no mention of poverty, hunger, or corruption in their manifesto.[112] "The campaign got communal wherever there was likelihood of tactical voting by Muslims [in areas of high Muslim concentration] against the BJP. [113] Surrounding the elections, the BJP banned the Student's Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), enacted POTO (a controversial anti-terrorism bill), severed transportation links between India and Pakistan, and raised the Ram Temple issue through the VHP.[114] The SP and BSP relied on secularism and reservations for Hindu and Muslim OBCs and Dalits as issues.

After five years of BJP rule (1997-2002), the Party faced a disaffected electorate, critical of the criminalization of politics, fiscal crisis, and absence of solid development programs under BJP rule. Vote share for the incumbent BJP dropped 25 percent, placing the party last among the three major parties.[115] The SP and BSP both made gains of 22 and 36 seats respectively and the SP became the top party with 143 seats.[116] A CSDS post-poll survey shows that the BJP lost vote share in each broad caste category. The upper castes (64.3%), MBCs (31.6%), and MRBCs (51.5%) supported the BJP. Yadavs (75.2%), Muslims (62.5%) and some MBCs (23.7%)

---

[111] *India Today* (31 may 1996).
 Brass, Paul. "General Elections, 1996 in Uttar Pradesh." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (20 September 1997).
[112] The SP, BJP, and Congress each made no mention of these issues in their campaign manifestos.
Verma, A.K. "U.P. Assembly Elections: Caste Dominates Ideology." *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 May 2002).
[113] The BJP vehemently used 'innuendos about Muslims and issues of cross-border terrorism, SIMI, illegal immigration from Bangledesh, and the threat of Pakistan in Muslim dominated areas to polarize the electorate. Verma, A.K. "U.P. Assembly Elections: Caste Dominates Ideology." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (25 May 2002) 1975.
[114] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "BJP's Defeat in Assembly Elections: Basic Issues Back to the Fore." *Economic and Political Weekly.* (9 March 2002).
[115] This was a loss for the BJP of 100 seats held in 1996 and 69 total seats.
"U.P. State Assembly Elections Statistics." Elections Commission of India.
[116] *Ibid*

supported the SP. And Chamars (84.7%), non-Chamar SCs (57.6%), and some MBCs (25.4%) supported the BSP.[117]

Regarding communal violence, major communal riots have not occurred in U.P. in the past 12 years. Across these election results, we notice a loss in political capital for communal politics, the BJP loss in 2002 being the most resent testament. Personal interviews and ground realities suggest that U.P. politics are dominated by caste with sub-caste divisions also quite rampant. While local politicians may try to communalize elections in constituencies of high Muslim concentration, the U.P. electorate has not responded to such tactics positively in recent years. Further, Muslims determine elections in 60 U.P. constituencies and the fragmented Hindu vote and the reality of party alliances no longer make an anti-Muslim political strategy practical.[118]

This chapter has provided a background of U.P. relevant to understanding politics and communal violence in Meerut City. The political strategies and mobilizations carried out across U.P. were also used in Meerut, perhaps more aggressively; however, Meerut City does not follow all major trends observed at the state level. It is a BJP stronghold in state elections where the BJP was not defeated even in 2002 when it suffered defeat across the state. The lower caste revolution enveloping the state has also not deeply penetrated Meerut's political scene. For these reasons, among others, an overview chapter of Meerut City is necessary to provide a specific picture of the scene of this study.

---

[117]The BJP lost 2.3% of their upper caste vote, 9.04% of their OBC vote, and 13.6% of their SC vote. CSDS 2002 U.P. Assembly Election Post-Poll Survey cited in Verma, A.K. "U.P. Assembly Elections: Caste Dominates Ideology." *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 May 2002).
[118] Wilkinson, Steven. *The Electoral Incentives of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India*, 1-5.

Politics and Violence in Meerut City: An Overview

Meerut City deviates from some major trends observable in Uttar Pradesh as a whole. Its economic and political features are similar to those in the most riot-prone cities in India and communal politicians have succeeded in Meerut where they have declined in the state overall. This chapter presents data on demographics, major sectors of the economy, electoral politics, and communal riots in Meerut City in order to set the scene for this study.

Wilkinson calculates a significant correlation between Hindu-Muslim riots in Western U.P. towns and a composite of: (1) A Muslim population of 20-50%, (2) A Punjabi refugee population above 3.5%, and (3) A large artisan (cottage) industry.[119] Meerut City includes all of these features: A Muslim population above 40% in the municipal corporation and an estimated 52% in Meerut City constituency,[120] a Punjabi refugee population of 10 percent,[121] and an economy dominated by cottage (informal-sector) industries run by Hindus who employ Muslim craftsmen.[122] Wilkinson also finds a high correlation between communal riots and a bi-polar party system, in which 2 parties hold at least 65% of the vote, also a feature of Meerut City politics in most elections since 1967.

Meerut City fits all the main features of a riot-prone city. Its economy and politics create an environment conducive to communal violence and the behavior of the administration in communal riots from 1968 to 1987 demonstrates a clear bias against Muslims and blatant complicity in anti-Muslim violence in the 1980s. The social and economic conditions of Meerut today and the communalization of the police and administration clear in the 1982 and 1987 riots, make the emergence of communal harmony in Meerut especially surprising. This chapter first

---

[119] Wilkinson, Steven. "U.P.'s Riot-Prone Towns." *Seminar* (August 1995) 29-34
[120] Census of India, 1991.
[121] Census of India, 1951.
[122] Wilkinson, Steven. "U.P.'s Riot-Prone Towns." *Seminar* (August 1995) 30-34.

elaborates on the background features of Meerut in order to demonstrate that it is an environment conducive to communal violence. Then, it surveys the increasingly bloody communal riots of 1968 to 1987 and the more limited incidents that followed.

The sources of data presented below include interviews with elites, a survey of 100 Hindu and Muslim residents administered in Meerut City, and a data-set of communal incidents from 1996-2003 as reported in Amar Ujala, a local Hindi Newspaper. Also referenced are communal riot reports published in secondary literature and English-medium newspapers, statistical reports of the elections commission of India, and election analyses. As changes in politics and communal violence coincide with one another, this chapter provides a backbone of information supporting my explanation for the end to the pattern of communal violence in Meerut after 1987.

In 1991, Meerut City had a population over one million (1,074,229), a 70 percent increase from the past decade. In 1991 the city's population comprised 54.8 percent Hindus and 40.02 percent Muslims**.** Among Hindus, Jats and Gujars are most influential. Also, 11.45 percent of Hindus come from scheduled castes, most of whom have little political connection to Hindus.[123] Each of these groups sub-divide into different castes although recent figures are unavailable due to a Congress Government initiative to stop perpetuation of caste divisions undertaken by the British in pre-independence census collection. Muslims in Meerut subdivide into three beradaris (caste-like groupings) most prominent in Meerut: Ansaris, Quereshis, and Saifis. Ansaris' traditionally work as weavers and are the largest Muslim beradari in the city, comprising an estimated 42 percent of the total population in Meerut City U.P. state assembly

---

[123]Only preliminary numbers on Meerut City's population are available in the 2001 census. Meerut's 2001 population was 1,167,000. Since all other figures have not yet been released, 1991 figures are cited for all census figures. Census of India, 1991 and Meerut District Statistical Book, 1991.
Also, Srivastva estimated 52% Muslims and 49% Hindus in Meerut City constituency.
Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and Administration*, 197.

constituency.[124] The higher caste Quereshis dominate the lucrative meat export industry and enjoy moderate political influence among Muslims.

Ethnic Composition of Meerut Industries

Communal tensions often correspond to the relative economic position of major ethnic groups such as the Hindus and Muslims in India. This section offers a brief overview of major businesses in Meerut and their communal compositions. In Meerut, Muslims generally remain in a subservient role to Hindus in most major industries.

Dominant industries in Meerut City include production and trade in sporting goods, textiles, and scissors. Muslim-dominated industries of considerable profit include brass band instrument manufacturing and technical trades such as automotive and motorcycle repair and carpentry. Dependable statistics on labor, profits or total earnings in these trades were unavailable; however, interviews with association leaders and traders in these industries provide a rough although imperfect measure.

The sporting goods industry is among the most profitable in Meerut City. The industry accrues an estimated two billion rupees per year and employs fifteen thousand employees. Muslims perform 60 to 80 percent of the unskilled labor and Hindus account for 80 to 99 percent of wholesalers and traders, about 75 percent of whom descend from Punjabi refugees. Traders in this industry denied any communal rivalry due to the 'nearly non-existent position of Muslims in the trader class of this industry.'[125]

---

[124] Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and Administration*, 192-3.
[125] Interview with Surendra Kumar Sharma and Ashok Kumar, traders of sporting goods (Meerut City 11 Feb 2004). Additional interview with young Hindu Manager of a large production unit who wished to remained anonymous (11 Feb 2004).

Textiles produced by hand looms and power looms employ over 30 thousand workers and about one thousand traders and wholesalers.[126] Turnover was six billion rupees in 1986.[127] And the 1991 census reported this industry the most important in the city in terms of national and international distribution.[128] Workers almost entirely consist of Ansari Muslims and traders and wholesalers are predominantly Hindu, although in the past twenty years a small fraction of Muslim weavers have entered into the wholesaling trade. Khan places the conflict between upper caste Hindus dominant in the industry and emerging Muslim traders a causal factor for the 1987 riots; however, leaders of the Meerut Handloom (trade) Association and Ansari Weavers Association argue that no such conflict currently exists due to the negligible position of Muslim traders.[129] The current reality is unclear although a study conducted by Kahn in the late 1980s suggests a more conflicted relationship between Hindu and Muslim wholesalers.[130]

The scissor and razor industry is completely dominated by Muslim workers (about 10 thousand) and mixed between about a thousand Hindu and Muslim traders and suppliers.[131] Muslims, predominantly from the Saifi beradari, also dominate the brass band instrument, auto repair and carpentry businesses along with other technical trades. Dependable numbers on earnings and labor in these trades were unavailable during my fieldwork. In sum, Muslims are laborers in most Meerut industries and Hindus are the businessmen that sell Muslim-made products. Although Muslim economic position has improved in a variety of industries, the economic structure generally remains the same.

---

[126] Interview with Weavers Society President, Hafiz Yunus Ansari (23 February 2004)
Khan, Dildar. "Meerut Riots: An Analysis." *Towards Understanding Communalism*. (New Literature: Delhi, 1992) 465.
[127] *Ibid*, 465.
[128] Census of India, 1991.
[129] Interviews with Bipan Kumar Rastogi, Joint Secretary, Meerut Handloom Association (19-22 February 2004).
[130] Khan, Dildar. "Meerut Riots." *Towards Understanding Communalism*, 455-70.
[131] Interview with President of the Meerut Scissor and Razor Association. (19 February 2004).

State Assembly Elections in Meerut District

The electorate of Meerut City constituency has supported communal Hindu candidates through elections frequently polarized along communal lines. As reasonably fair elections reflective of public political opinion, election statistics show that a significant proportion of Meerut voters have supported a Hindu nationalist party throughout India's post-independence elections. Since 1967, the Jana Sangh, later to become the BJP, received over 30 percent of the vote in all but one election in 1985 and won the Meerut City MLA seat in six of nine elections it contested since 1967.[132] As stated in the previous chapter, the BJP is most successful in constituencies with high Muslim populations where it uses communal tactics to polarize Hindu voters. Meerut's Muslim population is above its Hindu population by several percent in the Meerut City state assembly constituency. Meerut BJP President Sri Singh Tomar openly stated his strategy to communalize the 2004 parliamentary election, and violence surrounded nearly every state and parliamentary election until 1996.[133] This section provides a brief analysis of state elections in Meerut City constituency since 1989.

---

[132] U.P. Assembly Election Statisitcs. Electoral Commission of India.
[133] Interview with Meerut City BJP President. (2004 February 26).

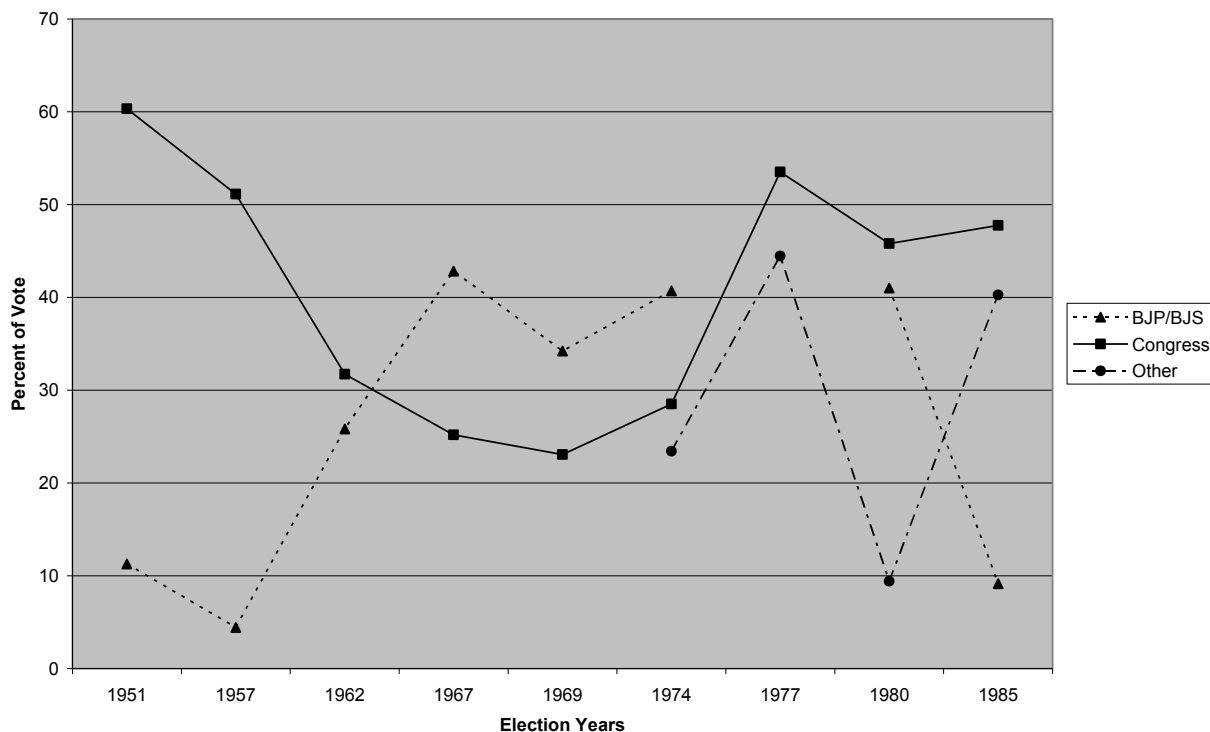**U.P. Assembly Elections, Meerut Constituency 1951-1985**

Chart 2: Percentage of the vote in U.P. Assembly elections in Meerut Constituency (1951-1985). This chart includes data on the BJP and its predecessor Jana Sangh, the Congress Party, and the largest third party in each election year.[134]

In the 1967, 1969, and 1974 elections, Meerut voters expressed anti-Congress sentiment, launching the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) to victory with 42.82%, 34.21%, and 40.71% of the vote respectively, defeating the third place Congress Party by 17%, 11%, and 12% of the vote respectively.[135] In all three elections, passing candidates, one from the socialist SSP, an alliance partner of Charan Singh's BLD in 1967, one independent, and one from the returning Muslim League, defeated Congress, never to show a significant electoral presence again. In 1977, Jana Sangh merged with the Janata Party, which took power in the state and center that year but lost

---

[134] Note that the other category is used because no one party besides Congress and the BJP/BJS took the top third party position until after 1985. Also, BJS did not field its own candidate in 1977 because it had merged with the Janata Party for that election. Elections Statistics for U.P. State Assembly Elections, *Electoral Commission of India*.
[135] The BJS defeated Congress by 17% in 1967 and 11% in 1969. "Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections Statistics." Election Commission of India.

to Congress in Meerut City by three percent. The Janata Party split in 1980 when its president banned RSS affiliation among its members and the rightist faction of former Jana Sangh politicians formed the BJP. In 1980, the Party again lost to Congress with 41.08 percent of the vote against the 45.8 percent received by Congress. In 1985, the BJP abandoned its Hindu nationalist line for one of Gandhian socialism and suffered a crushing defeat (9.4%) to both Lok Dal (40.27%) and the Congress Party (47.75%).

Judging from Jana Sangh and BJP success since 1967 and the Muslim League's strong performance in 1974, it can be inferred that Meerut City constituency has a long history of communally polarized elections and support for Hindu and Muslim communal parties. The BJS towed an uncompromising Hindu nationalist line and the Muslim League filled the same role for Muslims.[136] Moreover, as the BJS made no concerted effort to court backward castes, it is evident that a significant portion of Meerut City upper caste voters have supported Hindu nationalist parties since the early decades of Indian democracy.[137]

From 1989, electoral politics grew increasingly polarized between a Muslim-backed party (JD/SP) and the Hindu nationalist BJP as Congress declined. The Congress Party dropped 33 percentage points between the 1985 and 1989 elections and the Janata Dal (with majority Muslim support) absorbed much of that gap with 25.54 percent of the vote in 1989. Further, the BJP returned to a Hindu nationalist line for the 1989 elections, gaining active campaign support from the Sangh Parivar, propelling its rise from 9 percent of the vote in 1985 to 37 percent in 1989.

---

[136] Brass, Paul. "U.P." *Caste, Faction, and Party in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1984) 257-8
[137] In 1962 at a time when Pundit Nehru held power as a Prime Minister stridently against communalism, the Hindu Mahasaba gained 5.57% of the vote and Jana Sangh received 25.83 percent of the vote in assembly election in Meerut constituency. "Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Elections Statistics." Electoral Commission of India.

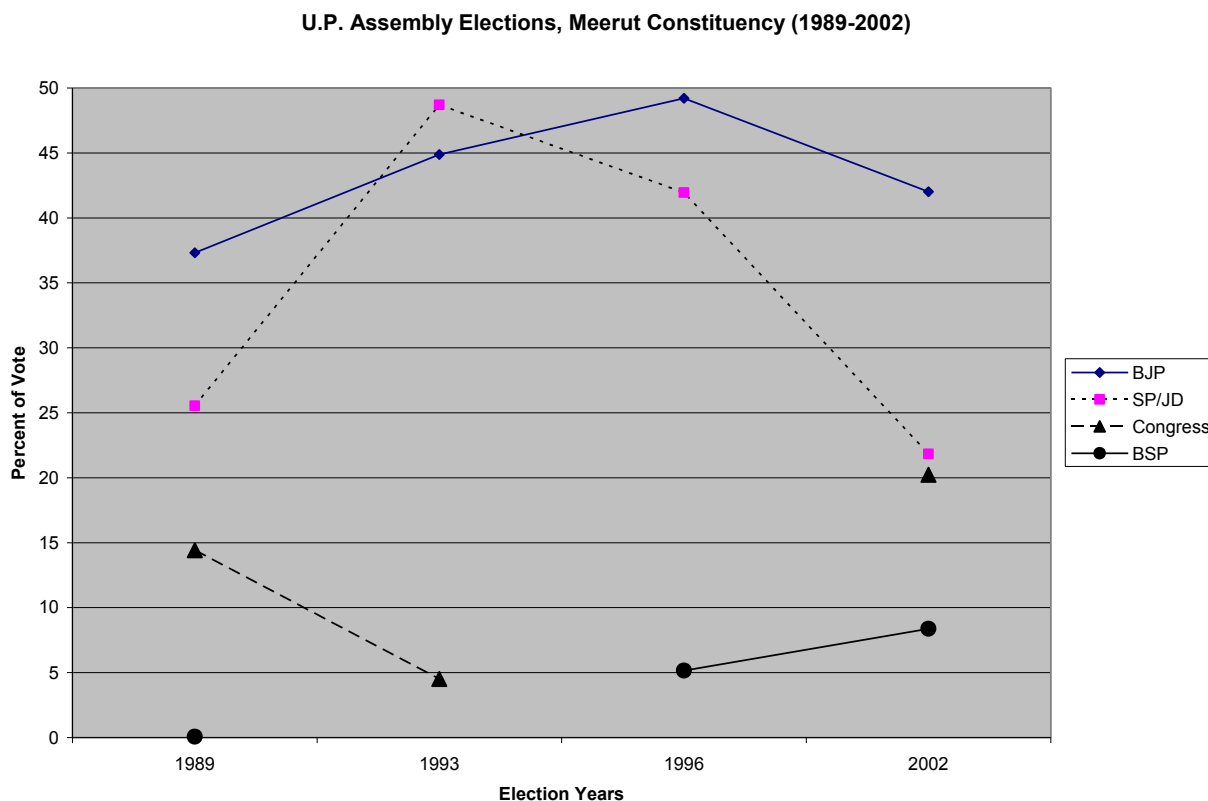**U.P. Assembly Elections, Meerut Constituency (1989-2002)**

Chart 3: Percentage of the vote in state assembly elections in Meerut City Constituency (1989-2002). Gaps in data exist because no candidates were fielded for the BSP in 1993 and for Congress in 1996 due to alliance agreements.[138]

1991 elections results are unavailable because the election commissioner of India countermanded the 1991 poll for all five state assembly seats in Meerut District due to poll-grabbing, looting of ballot papers, and poll violence resulting in an official figure of 31 dead and 63 severely injured on polling day.[139] The BJP adopted a strategy to caste their Hindu votes in the early hours of the poll day and slowed Muslim voting by raising frequent objections to voter identity. Janata Dal used a similar strategy in stronghold areas. One-sided polling continued for hours in areas of candidate or party influence until the local administration imposed curfew and

---

[138] *Ibid*

Note that Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party vote share are combined in this chart as in the U.P. chart in chapter 2.

[139] Gupta, N.L. *Communal Riots.* (Gyan Publishing House : Delhi, 2000) 208.

One of the injured was Manzoor Ahmad, Congress Party Lok Sabha candidate (Meerut District), who was attacked by BJP cadres upon objection to their manipulation of the poll.

Cited in Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and Administration*, 209.

ordered polling to cease.[140] As was the case across U.P., the communalized stand-off between the BJP and Mulayam Singh Yadav's Janata Dal brought an explosive communal atmosphere to the city and Congress Party candidates exacerbated the situation with provocative speeches used in an attempt to pull Muslim votes away from the more popular Janata Dal.

Detailed information on state elections in Meerut City constituency from 1993-2002 is not available; however, Elections Commission results provide the basic picture of the electoral scene. Since 1989, BJP, SP, and Congress have been the major contenders. After the 1989 election, Congress faded from significance until its 2002 resurgence. Janata Dal sharply increased its vote share in the 1993 election from 25 to 48 percent and SP absorbed most of that base in 1996. The fact that Congress dropped below five percent of the vote in 1993 and did not field a candidate in Meerut City constituency due to a BSP alliance suggests that the Muslim vote was not significantly divided in these elections. Conversely, SP vote share dropped below 22 percent in 2002 when Congress climbed above 20 percent. This shows a clear division in the Muslim vote.

Meerut City constituency is a stronghold for the BJP as it was for the Jana Sangh before it. The BJP maintained over 42 percent of the vote in this constituency since 1993 during a period of BJP decline in the state as a whole. As Meerut City constituency is mostly dominated on the one hand by Jats and upper castes that predominantly support the BJP, and Muslims on the other, the BJP has not been seriously debilitated by divisions in the Hindu vote in the constituency. Meerut BJP President Sri Singh Tomar said, "BJP strategies have not been affected by the emergence of parties like SP and BSP. These parties narrow the Congress vote bank; the BJP's vote bank has been maintained and expanded."[141] Conversely, Muslims are divided

---

[140] Gupta, N.L., *Communal Riots*, 208-9.
[141] Interview with Meerut BJP President Nan Singh Tomar (Feb 2004).

between SP, BSP, and Congress, especially because these parties generally run Muslim candidates against each other.[142] Arguably, the BJP avoided a decline in Meerut City through favorable demographics, a less divisive electoral dynamic among Hindu voters, and communal tactics that frame elections as a contest between the BJP and the remaining Muslim and lower caste-supported parties.

Meerut City Communal Riot History: 1927- 1991

This section provides a history of documented Meerut City communal riots from the British period to present with a focus on the period from 1968 to present. Citing Horowitz, "A communal riot is 'an intense, sudden, though not necessarily unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.'[143] Conversely, I define a non-riot as a contained low-magnitude communal clash that has the potential to turn into a full-scale riot but does not. An example of a non-riot would be a fight between a Muslim rickshaw puller and Hindu shopkeeper that amassed crowds from both communities, but was stopped before it could grow into a large riot. Put another way, communal riots are fires and non-riots are sparks.[144]

In Meerut riots until 1987, I observe a trend of increasing levels of violence, planning, and state complicity. I place the 1982 and 1987 riots, the bloodiest in the city's history, in the pogrom category because Muslims were beaten and in many cases killed by the Uttar Pradesh paramilitary force (PAC) and the district police under a complicit Congress-led state administration. After the worst of the pogroms in 1987, wide-scale communal riots ceased.

---

[142] The BSP has increased its strength from 5 percent (1996) to eight percent of the vote (2002), attracting the support of a large share of Meerut City's Dalit voters and some Muslims.
U.P. State Assembly Elections Statistics, *Electoral Commission of India* and interview with Meerut City BSP Party President (7 February 2004).
[143] Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 1.
[144] I first heard this metaphor from Ashutosh Varshney at a lecture at JNU, Delhi. Sparks or isolated clashes will always occur. Existence or absence of wide-scale communal riots is the concern of this thesis (January 19, 2004).

Episodes of communal violence continued surrounding the Ayodhya issue, but they were limited to the most sensitive areas and consisted mostly of isolated incidents. According to Amar Ujala reports, communal violence has also been limited to the non-riot from 1996-2003. Even in the most sensitive areas, incidents rarely last more than several hours. In fact, mob violence has been quite rare despite many precipitants that easily could have turned into riots if they occurred twenty years ago. As I further explain in chapter five, significant changes in administrative behaviors regarding Hindu-Muslim violence and a withdrawal of public support for riots has caused this shift from a riot-prone to a non-riot prone city.

A survey of *the Statesman*, a major Delhi-based newspaper active throughout the 20th century, found no substantive reporting on pre-independence riots; however, a dataset collected by Wilkinson based on several pre-independence newspapers provides basic information that may be contextualized by riot patterns in the state. According to Wilkinson, the first reported Meerut City riot occurred on 16 May 1927 resulting in 16 injuries and no reported deaths.[145] The riot reportedly followed the murder of Swami Shardhanand, prominent member of Arya Samaj (Hindu organization) by a Muslim boy.[146] Placing this riot in wider context, the first wave of communal riots since Gandhi's return to India followed the 1921 collapse of the Hindu-Muslim backed Khalifat non-cooperation movement due to Hindu-Muslim violence in Kerala. "Between 1923 and 1927 there were 88 riots classified as communal in the United Provinces (as U.P. was known during British rule) in which thirty-nine Hindus and forty-two Muslims were killed and one-thousand five hundred and sixty-six Hindus and seven hundred and thirty-five Muslims were

---

[145] Wilkinson, Steven. "Wilkinson dataset on communal riots in India 1900-1949." (2004).
[146] Sharma, Annupam. "Environmental Tensions, Communal Riots, and the role of the Police as Crisis Manager." (Political Science Department Dissertation, Meerut University, 1997) 88.

wounded."[147] The second reported riot (2 October 1939) claimed 8 lives in an atmosphere of

political competition between Congress and the Muslim League over the League's accelerating

demand for a Muslim state. To provide perspective, elections were held in 1937 according to

separate electorates for Hindus (Congress) and Muslims (Muslim League). In March 1938,

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, President of the Muslim League and founder of Pakistan, demanded that

the League gain recognition as the sole organization of Muslims and in 1940 officially called for

a sovereign Muslim state. Militant Hindu organizations including the RSS aggressively reacted

to Muslim demands; Muslim League activists also incited communal violence to demonstrate the

irreconcilable antagonism between Hindus and Muslims as a basis for partition.[148] In 1939, M.S.

Golwalker, Chief of the R.S.S. wrote, "We Hindus are at war at once with the Muslims, on the

one hand, and the British, on the other."[149] Meerut City's two riots during the first half of

November 1946 claimed 29 lives at a time when Northern India was embroiled in communal

violence surrounding partition of the country and migration in and out of Pakistan.

Year	Month/Day	Killed	Injured
1927	16-May	Not reported	16
1939	2-Oct	8	169
1946	7-Nov	15	16
1946	11-Nov	14	19

Table 4: Wilkinson Data-set on Meerut City Communal Riots before Independence[150]

---

[147] Indian Statutory Commission, Volume IX, Memorandum Submitted by the Government and the Indian Statutory Commission (London: HMSO, 1930) 66.
[148] Sharma, Harish, *The Communal Angle in Indian Politics*, 48-51.
[149] *Ibid,* 49-50.
[150] Wilkinson, Steven. "Wilkinson Data-set on Communal Riots in India 1900-49."

Post-Independence Communal Riots in Meerut City

Since independence, communal riots in Meerut City increased in intensity, destruction and frequency. A data-set of riot-prone towns in Uttar Pradesh collected by Wilkinson counts 23 riots between 1960 and 1993.[151] Since 1967, elections were highly competitive between Congress and BJS/BJP.

Communal riots began after anti-Sheikh Abdullah (then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kasmir) demonstrators led by Jana Sangh clashed outside a college where he was scheduled to speak (28 January 1968). Seven people were killed by knife attacks that took place in various parts of Meerut City. Further violence and rioting followed Abdullah's communally inflammatory speech through 1 February 1968.[152] The *Times of India* reported 13 deaths and 60 injured;[153] however, a *Press Trust of India* report counted 68 injured by the first night of rioting including twenty-three police officers.[154]

In December 1973 a minor clash between a Muslim cyclist and Hindu sweets-shop owner in Gudri Bazaar, an area of Hindu shops, turned into a 5 day communal riot resulting in at least 7 deaths.[155] 25 policemen and 15 others suffered injuries from stoning by Muslims on the first day.[156] The 1980 riots were triggered by a dispute over fake voting between BJP and Congress supporters in two voting booths that turned into brick batting along communal lines irrespective of party. That year, the BJP lost both the Meerut City State Assembly seat and Meerut District Lok Sabha seat to Congress Muslims in an election of record low voter turnout. [157]

---

[151] Wilkinson, Steven. "U.P.'s Riot-Prone Towns." *Seminar* (August 1995) 29-35.
[152] Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and* Administration, 188.
And "Seven Dead in Meerut: Curfew Extended." *Statesmen.* (29 January 1968).
[153] Varshney-Wilkinson Data-Set
[154] Cited in "Seven Dead in Meerut: Curfew Extended." *Statesmen* (29 January 1968).
[155] Varshney-Wilkinson Data-Set
[156] Srivastva, Anamika. *Commuanl Violence and Administration*, 188 and Varshney-Wilkinson Data-set.
[157] Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and the Administration*, 189 and *Times of India* (29 May 1980).

Riots of 1982 and 1987

At least 100 people were killed and millions of rupees in property destroyed in the riots

of September 1982, which came as a culmination of events that started six months earlier.[158]

Babasaheb Deoras, then RSS chief, attended a March 1982 rally in his honor at Government

Inter College where the SP-City (second ranking officer in Meerut) and ADM-City saluted

him.[159] Both men personally ordered police firings on Muslims daily from 29 September to 1

October 1982, resulting in 29 deaths.[160] Communal tensions exacerbated in July when volunteers

from a VHP camp held at the nearby town of Hardwar went to Meerut and poisoned its

communal atmosphere.[161] Additionally, Engineer argues that the upcoming municipal election

between BJP and a communally divided Congress served as a major factor in the 1982 Meerut

riots as did the communalized battle for the Congress MLA ticket pitched between Hindu and

Muslim politicians. [162]

These riots were precipitated by a mandir (temple)-mazar (tomb of a Muslim saint)

controversy in Shahghasa, a sensitive locality of Hindu-owned cloth shops and nearby Muslim

residences.[163] The dispute, initially between a Muslim advocate accused of usurping land near

his home and the City Trust, turned communal when Hindu activists claimed that there was a

temple on the property, citing a papal tree as evidence. Then, Superintendent of Police Rawat

personally ordered a Hindu prayer bell installed and evening worship became a regular practice

[158] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "An Analytical Study of Meerut Riots." *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, 280. The official death count was 50 according to: Dildar Khan. "Meerut Riots: An Analysis." *Towards Understanding Communalism* (New Literature: Delhi, 1992)456.
[159] Assistant District Magistrate is abbreviated ADM.
[160] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "An Analytical Study of Meerut Riots." *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India,* 274-5.
[161] Raj Kishore, advocate and Meerut City Secretary of the Communist Party (CPI) accused one of these volunteers for the July murder of Pesh Imam Mahar Ahmad, a well-known Muslim cleric. Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and the Administration*, 189.
[162] *Ibid,* 192.
[163] Mandir (temple); Manzar (fountain for Muslim ritual washing). Shahghasa is a sensitive neighborhood where the shops are Hindu and homes are Muslim. Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "An Analytical Study of Meerut Riots." *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, 274-5.

there. The Muslim advocate followed with the false claim that a mazar was on the property. A judicial inquiry was called in March to investigate both claims for decision in August, but political pressure from RSS-leaning politicians including Meerut Congress Party President Dharam Devakar ultimately suppressed it. The administration sealed off the site for security reasons on 12 August upon which time Hindu communalists called for a *hartal*.[164] On 13 August, BJP former MLA Mohanlal Kapoor and Party President Brahmpal Singh illegally performed *puja* or worship on the disputed property, which resulted in the arrest of 23 activists all quickly released under political pressure.[165] Subsequently, on 20 September 1982, the National Committee of the VHP called for agitation if the supposed temple was not opened.[166] On 22 August the site was reopened by court order immediately followed by a victory procession of Hindus led by Kapoor (BJP).

N.C. Saxena documented the 1982 riots in a report to the Central Minority Commission based on an official investigation. Between late August and early September he found four cases of objectionable meat in four mosques in what he perceived a clear attempt by a section of Hindus to provoke Muslims.[167] Several murders of religious leaders and others from both communities occurred from late August to mid-September, as did Muslim attacks on the police. Surrounding these events, 243 Muslims were arrested by 15 September, many of whom suffered police beatings.[168] Saxena frames the second phase of the riot as a direct confrontation between the PAC/administration and Muslims and states that no casualties were caused by mob violence.

---

[164] A Hartal is a day of protest, when all shops are shut, and no-one goes to work or shops.

[165] The disputed was not to be used for religious purposes by either community until the judgment of the inquiry was release on 20 August 1982. These BJP leaders' 16 August puja was in breech of the law although the Congress President and RSS sympathizer Dharam Devakar protected the Hindu activists from legal consequences. Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "An Analytical Study of Meerut Riots." *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India,* 275-80.

[166] *Ibid, 275.*

[167] Saxena, N.C. Inquiry Report on Meerut Riots, September-October, 1982." *Communal Riots: The State and Law in India.* (Institute of Objective Studies: Delhi, 1997) 356-7.

[168] *Ibid,* 356-8.

Sharma, a reporter of *The Observer*, details one case of a PAC attack on Muslims that killed 45

people in the Firoz Building, a housing unit of poor Muslims.[169]

> Steel-helmeted, rifle-wielding jawans [PAC men] entered the [Muslim] houses, breaking down
> doors that were not opened. They refused to obey the order of the civil officers and commenced
> reckless ransacking of the houses. They overpowered everybody inside and beat them up with rifle
> buts. Then suddenly the jawans opened fire, their weapons aimed at the young males of the family.
> Frightened and taken aback by the jawans, the civil officers fled the scene. The PAC removed more
> than 100 bodies. It is said that 450 houses were ransacked and each house now has at least one
> occupant who will live with a deformity for the rest of his life.[170]

Saxena observed an anti-Muslim stance by the local administration and police

during these riots. An affidavit by the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) failed to

mention 16 officially acknowledged Muslim murders.[171] Saxena writes, "Orders to the

police [and PAC] from the senior officers in Meerut District can be summarized: Muslims

must be taught a lesson."[172] All but two members of a delegation of Members of

Parliament strongly criticized the PAC. These circumstances were repeated in the even

bloodier riots of 1987.

The 1987 riots were by far the most catastrophic in Meerut's history and among the

worst in Indian history. Officially, 174 people were killed; unofficially 350 were killed.[173]

Six-hundred houses and businesses were destroyed by looting and arson. And for the first

time the middle class played a role in rioting along with a heavier role played by the PAC

which massacred Muslims during the second phase (May 1987) of the rioting, similarly

although more severely then it did in 1982. Violence connected with these riots lasted

---

[169] Figure given in Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "Meerut—Shame of the Nation." In *Delhi-Meerut Riots: Analysis Compilation and Documentation.* (Ajanta Publications: Delhi, 1988) 16.
[170] Sharma, Rajat. *Onlooker* (31 October 1982). Cited in N.C. Saxena. "Inquiry Report on Meerut Riots, September-October, 1982." *Communal Riots: The State and Law in India.* (Institute of Objective Studies: Delhi, 1997) 559. This extended quote is meant to give a sense of what happened. Sharma's quotes may be suspect and should not be take as fact.
[171] Affidavit to the Parikh Commission written by SSP J.P. Rai cited in: Saxena, N.C., *ibid,* 358.
[172] *Ibid,* 365.
[173] Having analysed various studies, including that of the Jamait-e-Islami, we can safely assert that the rioting actually left 350 dead and property worth Rs. 100 million destroyed.
S.K. Mittal and K.C. Gupta. "Holocaust in Meerut." *Delhi-Meerut Riots*. Ed. Ashgar Ali Engineer (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988) 155-7.

through July 1987 and a three-month curfew compounded with the destruction of over a

hundred shops and businesses left Meerut a ghost town.

The first phase of rioting followed a Babri Masjid Action Committee rally attended

by thousands of Meerut City Muslims, featuring speeches by Muslim extremist leaders

including Janata Party MP Syed Shahabuddin, who 'warned India of the consequences of

Muslim anger.'[174] Akbar, a *Telegraph* reporter at the scene, argues that Muslims provoked

the riots on 16 April influenced by the explosive tension following the rally, although

Hindu retaliation was disproportionately severe.[175] According to Engineer, violence started

when debris from a firecracker, launched by Muslims during the festival of Shab Bharat,

hit a police officer who immediately shot two Muslims dead on the spot. That same day, a

dispute between Muslims attending a nearby sermon in Hashimpura and a Hindu family

playing film music led to a rampage of local Hindu shops by Muslims resulting in 12

predominantly Hindu deaths.[176]

The second wave of violence began on the evening of 18 May 1987 after

explosions were heard and Muslim miscreants set fire to a sweetmeat shop. The PAC

entered Hashimpura for arrests and killed several Muslims residents. Then, several

Muslims accessed a microphone at the neighboring Imliyan Mosque and called upon their

community to protect themselves from the PAC. Indiscriminant arrests of many Muslims

led to a rampage of looting, burning, and killing Hindus [by Muslims]. The administration

called a citywide curfew on 19 May at which time the PAC and Hindu mobs burned and

looted unchecked until 23 May. During the curfew, Shastri Nagar, a middle class, then

communally mixed neighborhood, and Miyan Mohammed Nagar, a poor Muslim area,

---

[174] Akbar, M.J. *Riot After Riot.* (Penguin Books: Calcutta, 1988) 156.

[175] *Ibid*, 158-9.

[176] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "Meerut—Shame of the Nation." *Delhi-Meerut Riots*, 23.

were laid siege. Engineer reported 250 burnt or looted houses and at least 100 killed in

Miyan Nagar.[177] "Of 228 houses of poor Muslims (rickshaw pullers, fruit sellers, etc), not

one was left standing and many were dead."[178]

Indiscriminate arrests of 324 young Muslim men (official figure) from Hashimpura and

murder of 40-42 on 22 May 1987 accounts for another PAC atrocity on Muslims. A 1994

confidential report states:

> 40-42 persons were taken in PAC truck URU 1493 from Mohalla Hashimpura and carried to Gang
> Nahar, Murad Nagar, and Ghaziabad where they were shot one by one and thrown into a canal.
> When some of the detainees tried to escape they were shot at...The remaining detainees were taken
> in PAC truck URU 1493 to the Hindon canal and PAC Platoon Commander Sri S.P. Singhand and
> his men shot them dead.[179]

The report implicated 66 PAC men for this crime. It took two years for the state

government to permit the prosecution of 19 junior officers, having let off the remainder

with departmental reprimands. These 17 men continue to work for the PAC and live in

government housing.[180]

In three months of rioting, police violence, looting, and arson by all segments of society,

Meerut suffered unprecedented damage. All secular media and government reports implicate the

PAC for participation in rioting, arbitrary Muslim arrests, and unprovoked murder of Muslims.

Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh refused to replace the PAC with the less biased CRPF

(national force) and is said to have encouraged the PAC to 'teach Muslims a lesson,' as was the

message of the administration in 1982.[181] Also, witnesses reported that Congress MLAs (state

assembly representatives) led mobs of Hindu looters through the streets during curfew without

---

[177] The figure of 100 deaths was reported by residents and Engineer claims that it is impossible to corroborate. Engineer, A.A., "Meerut—Shame of the Nation." *Economic and Political Weekly* (20 June 1987) 970.
[178] *Ibid, 971.*
[179] "Government Shields UP's Most Wanted Policemen." *Times of India.* (17 May 2000).
[180] *Ibid*
[181] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "On Returning from Meerut." *Delhi-Meerut Riots*, 13-14.

punishment.[182] In this backdrop, the 1987 riots were much the same as the 1982 riots, but of greater scale and spread. Interviews with Meerut residents over the age of 40, including current President of the Meerut District Chamber of Commerce, said that everyone living in Meerut old enough to remember the 1987 riots was economically or personally affected.[183] It spread to middle class areas with students laying pillage to the homes and shops of their neighbors in Shastri Nagar. Looters completely demolished blocks of Muslim shops, destroying many power looms used by the Ansari weavers of Hashimpura. And ultimately altered the social landscape of the city as Muslims and Hindus fled mixed areas for homogenous ones in fear for their safety.

This survey of riots up to 1987 demonstrates what Brass calls the institutionalized riot system. The administration and state politicians protected criminals and sometimes led mobs of Hindu rioters through Muslim areas. After the destruction of 1987, the administration was discredited and the economy was ravaged. Although communal violence continued in clashes of limited spread, the administration took vigilant efforts to improve its image. The then posted Meerut District Magistrate and Senior Superintendent of Police were transferred, and efforts were made toward even-handedness. After 1987, the people of Meerut could no longer tolerate communal violence and a humiliated administration had no choice but to reform.[184]

Meerut Riots After 1987

After 1987, Meerut City was left economically shattered for both communities, including Hindu traders, the bedrock of the RSS and BJP. Further, Muslims had witnessed their slaughter at the hands of the PAC and became more afraid than ever of the effects of rioting on their community. For these reasons and others to be explained in later chapters, a trend towards isolated violence lacking state complicity rather than large scale rioting with state support has

---

[182] Engineer, Ashgar Ali. "Meerut—Shame of the Nation." *Delhi-Meerut Riots*, 30.
[183] Interviews with Hindu and Muslim elders (15 January 2004 through 1 March 2004).
[184] Interview with *Times of India* Meerut Correspondent D.S. Kanswar (11 January 2004).

become the norm under a less biased administration and society fed up with communal violence.

Episodes of communal violence occurred from 1990 through the post-demolition period of early

1993, but its spread was limited to the poorest and most communally sensitive areas. The

middleclass have not been visibly involved in communal violence since 1987; instead, goondas

have carried out only isolated attacks without the support of the general population or even its

most communal elements. This section describes the shift to non-riots after 1987 based on

interviews, secondary literature and an original dataset of Amar Ujala reports from 1996-2003.

Communal violence broke out on 2 November 1990 when 12 people were murdered by

rioters near a hospital following the stabbing of a Muslim youth. During nearly two months of

violence including many isolated incidents after 2 November, there were 28 killed, 20 seriously

injured, over 900 arrests, and curfew was imposed from 2 November 1990 until 31 December

1990.[185] Communal violence in 1990 reached Meerut following escalation of the Ram Temple

movement. *Shila Pujan* (the BJP-VHP sacred brick collection campaign) began in Meerut in late

August 1990. On 21 September women and children held a procession (Prabhat Pheris) in

support of the Ram Temple. And the BJP's call for a day of protest on 29 October following

Advani's arrest in Bihar along his Rath Yatra engulfed the entire area of Delhi, Muzaffarnagar,

Aligarh, Bijnor and Modinagar in communal violence. Although surrounded by riot-affected

areas, Meerut remained peaceful temporarily.[186] Nonetheless, after kar sevaks returned to

Meerut after the failed 30 October attempt to demolish Babri Masjid where 13 Hindu activists

were killed, the city could not withstand the Hindutva wave once again.

---

[185] District Administration Reports cited in: Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and Administration*, 195.
[186] Gupta, N.L. *Communal Riots*, 205.

On polling day (20 May 1991) violence hit Meerut City in political violence that resulted in 32 deaths surrounding a tense, communalized, and illegally executed political contest.[187] Major violence began after criminals escorted by a BJP supporter killed a polling agent following a dispute with Janata Dal Lok Sabha candidate Harish Pal over the former preventing JD supporters from registering their vote. Then, JD activists burned several shops of BJP supporters, BJP supporters burned down the home of a JD polling agent, and a mob attacked the neighboring Nigar Cinema, burning it to the ground and killing 12 people.[188]

The extended period of communal violence followed the demolition of Babri Masjid and lasted from 7 to 22 December 1992. According to Amar Ujala, rioting and isolated cases of violence flared up in the city as communal tensions boiled across the nation. Nonetheless, the administration took strict measures against the violence, arresting over eight hundred and imposing curfew in all sensitive areas of the city without relaxation for one week. Violence and looting were restricted to Muslim areas and localities bordering Hindu and Muslim localities. Dacoits exploited the situation, but a wide-scale riot did not occur.[189]

December 1992 clashes in Meerut typify non-riots that have occurred in the city since 1996. During this time, communal incidents were frequently reported but quickly controlled by a more alert and better-prepared administration. No reported incidents lasted beyond a day. For example, the July 2003 death of former BSP Mayor Ayub Ansari's son (Muslim), crushed under a bus of Hindu devotees while riding his motorcycle near Imliyan Mosque, was expected to have turned into a large communal riot by police officers and local officials.[190] Muslims in the locality thought the death was intentional although it turned out that the driver and owner of the bus

---

[187] Varshney-Wilkinson Data Set
[188] Srivastva, Anamika. *Communal Violence and Administration*, 195-7.
[189] Information collected from Amar Ujala reports through December 1992 to January 1993).
[190] Interview with Ayub Ansari and Senior Superintendent of Police (9-10 January 2004).

were both Muslims. Four hours of rioting between Hindus and Muslims caused many injuries, but police arrived on the scene at its onset and controlled the situation by evening.[191] According to an *Amar Ujala* report:

> Regional political leaders tried to further arouse the crowd with negative statements, contributing to worsening of the situation. But the incident remained localized and the situation was prevented from further deterioration due to administrative interference and the maturity of the local people.[192]

This incident and many others since 1996 demonstrate that communal violence in Meerut has been reduced to non-riots. Reporters, Meerut University scholars, and administrators are in consensus that the city is highly communally sensitive. But the dynamic of communal violence has changed both since 1987 and since the destruction of Babri Masjid. Since 1987, communal incidents have been confined to the most sensitive localities, which primarily include Muslim and border areas in the inner city. After the demolition of Babri Masjid, communal clashes became more spontaneous and short-lived since they lacked a national movement to carry them. Nearly all respondents interviewed in Meerut said that 1987 was the last 'riot' in Meerut.

To summarize, Meerut has a history of communal violence and polarized communal politics that have set the stage for continuing communal enmity. The dominant position of Hindu traders in the economy adds to this. Still, Meerut shifted from a riot-prone city to a non-riot-prone city after the 1987 riots and communal harmony has emerged and endured in the city. The following chapters test existing theories to explain how this shift occurred.

---

[191] Interview with Ayub Ansari (9 January 2004).
[192] Amar Ujala (22 July 2003).

Social Capital and Communal Peace

Meerut City attained a tenuous peace after 1987. Several theories seek to explain the existence and absence of communal riots. In this chapter, the civil society argument will be tested by answering the question of whether or not the emergence of communal peace in Meerut City can be explained by rapid development of interethnic civic networks since 1987. Varshney argues that vigorous inter-communal associational life constrains the polarizing strategies of political elites, whereas the absence of such civic life makes communal violence more likely."[193] Meerut, Like Aligarh, enjoyed no visible inter-communal associational life during its years as a riot-prone city (1968-1987). Neither citizens nor the state authorities successfully restrained communal politicians nor contained communal violence. Therefore, absence of inter-communal civic networks and existence of communal violence holds consistent with the civil society argument. The question that remains is what changed when formerly riot-prone Meerut became peaceful? Did inter-ethnic civic links suddenly flower in the city after the communal riots of 1987? Referring to data collected during my fieldwork in Meerut (Winter 2004), I argue that this was not the case. While social organizations such as peace committees are not irrelevant to the advent of peace in Meerut, interethnic civic organizations have not substantially developed. Instead, most Muslims and Hindus continue to live in separate social and economic worlds where horizontal inter-communal bonds are few and far between.

As stated in the first chapter, I use Varshney's definition of civil society: a social space independent of the state existing between the state and citizens, covering both social and political activities. Varshney demarcates civil society into two categories: everyday and associational civic life. The former consists of informal interactions like 'Hindu and Muslim families visiting each other, eating together often enough, jointly participating in festivals and allowing their

---

[193] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 3-4.

children to play together.' The latter includes NGOs, business associations, recreational clubs, social movement organizations, and political parties, the last of which I downplay due to the divisive nature of politics in Meerut City. Varshney places greater significance in interethnic associational civic life while accepting the positive although less durable effect of everyday civic life.[194]

Consistent with Varshney, Allport argued earlier that horizontal or equal status relations between ethnic groups decrease the likelihood for communal riots and elevate relations between historically antagonistic ethnic groups to that of equals.[195] Hierarchical associational and everyday contact instead has the tendency to collapse inter-communal civic life into resentment over exploitation. Putnam writes, "A vertical [social] network, no matter how dense and no matter how important to its participants, cannot sustain social trust and cooperation."[196] I argue that Meerut lacks horizontal everyday and associational forms of Hindu-Muslim civic life due to segregation in social geography, occupation and socio-economic position, and business associations. Therefore, communal harmony in Meerut stands without the support of significant interethnic civic networks. I argue in the next chapter that communal harmony emerged instead as a combination of post-1987 public sentiment, electoral incentives and minority self-policing.

All data on Meerut City presented in this chapter was collected in my fieldwork. I interviewed leaders of economic associations representing the largest industries in Meerut City (scissors, textiles, and sporting goods) as well as leaders of market associations (trader associations in market areas) in Hindu and Muslim areas. Presidents of the Meerut chapters of all major political parties active in the city and other community leaders who have served on peace committees were also interviewed. These interviews point to the conclusion that Meerut has no

---

[194] *Ibid,* 3.
[195] Allport, Gordon. *Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1954) 276.
[196] Putnam, Robert. *Making Democracy Work*, 174.

category of robust associational life and that the few associations that do exist have played no significant role in easing communal tensions since 1987.

Segregation in Social Geography

Visitors to Meerut City will struggle to find any neighborhoods where Muslims and Hindus live side by side. Many neighborhoods or mohallas had been communally mixed for decades, but following the 1987 riots, Muslims and Hindus afraid for their lives fled mixed neighborhoods for ones where their religious community dominated. For example, Shastri Nagar, a middleclass mohalla occupied by Hindus and Muslims before 1987 is now exclusively Hindu. Today in Meerut, twenty mohallas are exclusively Muslim and many more are exclusively Hindu.[197] Interviews suggest that these mohallas contain distinct social worlds where Muslims and Hindus rarely interact and where members of other communities rarely visit for shopping or other non-social purposes.[198]

Scholars of race relations in the United States come to the same conclusion. In a classic study of black-white relations in segregated and integrated public housing complexes, Allport found that individuals in segregated housing rarely made meaningful contact with members of the other community, not only in their own residential complexes, but in local stores, schools,

---

[197] Anupam Sharma. *Environmental Tensions, Communal Riots and the Role of the Police as Crisis Manager* (Meerut University Dissertation in Political Science, 1997) 88.

[198] The same situation exists in Bombay.

> Before the 1992-3 riots, Bombay was marked by a relatively high degree of ethnically mixed neighborhoods, with the Muslim population scattered over many smaller areas in the greater Bombay region. [But] the riots changed that decisively. Many Muslims who had lived in the pockets of Hindu majority areas fled to areas where Muslims were in the majority and stayed there even after the riots had subsided.

> Hansen, Thomas Blom. *Wages of Violence*: *Naming and Identity in Post-Colonial Bombay.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 160.

and through community civic projects.[199] Such seemingly impenetrable social barriers between ethnic groups make for more fearful and prejudiced interactions between groups.[200]

This problem often culminates in communal violence most often initiated in areas bordering Hindu and Muslim localities. There, tensions broiling in segregated areas find expression where Hindu and Muslim populations collide. Police officials in Meerut City believe that segregated areas are not communally sensitive because they are communally insulated and isolated. However, the Meerut District Senior Superintendent of Police considers border areas between Hindu and Muslim localities the most susceptible to communal violence.[201] In Meerut the social situation is highly communally tense, lacking congenial or cooperative inter-communal contact.[202]

Segregated Economic Associational Life

Informal inter-communal interaction in Meerut is not significant. Non-economic, associational life is also insignificant to the point that no respondent in my survey of 100 Hindus and Muslims of varying socioeconomic and educational backgrounds thought this group of organizations existed. Respondents among the political, business, and academic elite also felt that interethnic civic organizations held a negligible at best presence in the city.

Business associations account for the only inter-communal civic organizations visible in Meerut. Emphasizing the importance of trade associations, Chandra writes, "All peaceful towns differ from all violent towns [included in Varshney's book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*] in inter-communal membership in trade and business associations (except Lucknow for which data

---

[199] Allport, Gordon. *Nature of Prejudice*, 268.
[200] *Ibid,* 272.
[201] Interview with Senior Superintendent of Police (4 February 2004).
[202] This does not mean that when Meerut was less segregated it was safer. Meerut was more communally mixed before 1987 when communal riots were very frequent. After 1987, the city became highly segregated and Hindu-Muslim violence is exceedingly rare in non-border areas with homogenous populations and large-scale riots have not occurred since then. In Meerut, more contact did not lead to less violence.

is not available).[203] Surveys were conducted with two types of economic associations: market associations exclusively comprised of traders and occupational associations or guilds that represent both traders and manufacturers. As was the case before 1987, Meerut's economic associations are either dominated by Hindus or Muslims or completely comprised of one community or the other. The same is the case with the district-wide umbrella trade association Samyukta Vyapaar Sangh, led by V.K. Agarwal, Kailash Dairy owner and brother to the sitting BJP MLA from Meerut Cantonment.

Meerut City's civic life is segregated between Hindus and Muslims as are the economic roles played by these two communities. "Associations in Meerut have kept themselves communally separate… There are no social, economic, or cultural organizations or initiatives that integrate Hindus and Muslims."[204] Muslims are dominant in the scissors and razors association, which represents laborers and traders in this Muslim-dominated industry.[205] Ansari Muslims completely dominate the weavers association as they account for nearly the entire labor class in this industry. On the other hand, Hindus completely dominate the sporting goods, yarn, and cloth traders associations due to their monopoly in trading and wholesaling in these industries. Market associations in Meerut can be slightly less segregated but the trend holds that Muslims dominate market associations in Muslim areas and Hindus dominate those in their areas. There may be some mixing in market areas in border areas that serve Muslim and Hindu clientele.

---

[203] Chandra, Kanchan. 'Civic Life or Economic Interdependence.' In "*Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India:* A Review Symposium." *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* Vol.39, No.1 (March 2001) 115.
The peaceful towns in Varshney's study were Calicut, Lucknow, and Surat. The violent ones were Hyderabad, Gujarat, and Aligarh.
[204] Interview with Professor Singh, Head of the Department of Geography, Meerut College (23 February 2004).
[205] The trader class is mixed between Hindus and Muslims in the scissors industry and laborers are almost completely Muslim.

Although associations are communally segregated in their membership, parallel associations for Muslims and Hindus serving the same economic functions do not appear to exist. For example, the Meerut Bar Association (2700 members) includes both Hindus (2,340) and Muslims (350) although Hindus are by far dominant.[206] There is no Muslim Bar Association. Therefore, if associations are organized surrounding economic role, one hypothesis may be that inter-communal linkages are established through contact between organizations within the same industries. As the only clear example, such contact occurs in the textile industry through joint meetings with the Muslim Ansari Weavers Association and the Hindu-dominated Yarn and Traders associations. Meerut Ansari Weavers Association President said, "We are working with these Hindu-dominated organizations and have very positive relations with them… Whenever there is a dispute between manufacturers and traders or concerning government policies affecting the whole industry joint meetings are held."[207] Potentially, economic associations could place a check on communal violence through solidarity between Hindu and Muslim associations representing different interdependent segments of an industry; however, contact between associations is inconsistent and too rare to make a substantive difference.[208] Further, the leaders of these three associations along with the remaining associations surveyed express no interest in playing a pacifying role when communal tensions are high and restrict their priorities to business.[209] Some associations did play a role in easing communal tensions although the last of these meetings was 12 to 17 years ago.

---

[206] Interview with the President of the Meerut Bar Association (6 February 2004).
[207] Interview with the President of the Meerut Ansari Weavers Association (17 February 2004).
[208] No meeting was held between these associations in 2003. Interview with Bipan Kumar Rastogi, Joint Secretary of Handloom Traders Association (17 February 2004).
[209] Interviews with Presidents of the Ansari Weavers Association, Yarn Association and Textile Traders Association (February 2004).

Samyukta Vyapaar Sangh, a district-wide trade association with 60 thousand members in Meerut City including five thousand Muslims and 55 thousand Hindus presents the last possibility for substantial Hindu-Muslim associational contact in the city. All associations interviewed were members of this interest group whose mission is to represent the interests of all businessmen in Meerut. To evaluate the depth of inter-communal contact through this organization, one must determine how necessary SVS is to its members in solving problems, how often meetings are held, and how fairly nominations and elections are conducted relative to minorities.

Market associations and occupation-based guilds only bring issues to SVS as a last resort when they cannot be solved independently. A market association leader in a Hindu market area said, "If there's a dispute between members of this association and members of another, we will first try to solve it without SVS. We only go to the executive body [SVS] if a problem cannot be solved without it."[210] As a result, members only attend SVS meetings when called upon which is rarely more than once every year or two during officer elections. Further, only one representative of each association attends meetings and other leaders in surveyed associations exhibit no knowledge or particular interest in what happens. If only one representative attends meetings once or twice a year, it is unlikely that Samyukta Vyapaar Sangh has facilitated durable Hindu-Muslim links.

Scholars of civil society and social capital (Varshney, Putnam, et al) emphasize the importance of horizontal relations between members regardless of ethnic group or religious community. Consistent with lower level civic organizational activity, Hindu-Muslim relations in SVS are vertical at best. No Muslim member has been nominated to contest officer elections in SVS and a Muslim association president stated that he is only notified of meetings once every 18

---

[210] Interview with Ratan Sehgal. Secretary of Begum Bridge Vyapaar Sangh (18 February 2004).

months although they occur every three months. Akram Khan, market association President in a

Muslim area, said,

> Since SVS has been established, no Muslim candidate has been allowed to stand in elections to office positions in the organization… Our constitution says that everyone has the right to vote and stand elections, yet we cannot hold any post… SVS is primarily an economic institution of the BJP although they won't openly say so. If an extreme need should arise, Muslims traders will organize a trade association for themselves but such need is rare.[211]

Evidently, Hindus and Muslims in Meerut lack horizontal civic ties. Everyday Hindu-Muslim

contact is weak due to social and occupational segregation. And associational life plays no

visible role in facilitating inter-communal relations due to a predominantly communal

association membership, insufficient inter-associational activity between Hindus and Muslims,

and a vertical relationship between the two communities in umbrella trade organization

Samyukta Vyapaar Sangh.

Hindu-Muslim Interdependence in the Economy

Lucknow has not suffered a communal riot since the 1920s due to an environment of trust

between Hindu traders and Muslim producers in the Chikan (cloth embroidery) industry.[212]

Meerut City also has Hindu-Muslim vertical economic interdependence, yet the element of trust

is lacking. Chandra writes,

> Wherever Hindus and Muslims are dependent upon each other in the local economy, local Hindu and Muslim economic actors will cooperate to prevent violence in order not to incur economic losses on both sides… All peaceful cases [in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*] differ from all violent cases in the existence of economic interdependence…[213]

This section describes economic interdependence in Meerut in context of Varshney's case

studies of Aligarh and Lucknow. Aligarh is a riot-prone town with a segregated economy

---

[211] Interview with Akhram Khan, President, Trimuntri Chowk Vyapar Sangh (18 February 2004).
[212] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 171-9.
[213] Chandra, Kanchan. "*Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India:* A Review Symposium." *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* Vol.39, No.1 (March 2001) 115.

whereas Lucknow has an interdependent economy based on mutual trust between Hindu traders and Muslim producers, which Varshney argues impede communal polarization and violence.[214]

As stated in chapter four, Meerut's major industries fall in the informal sector.[215] Muslims are the producers and Hindus are the traders and suppliers. Hindus depend on Muslim craftsmen to build products sold in Hindu shops and Muslims depend on Hindus to purchase finished products. In the textile industry, upper caste Hindus dominate trade in yarn (sold to Muslim weavers) and cloth (bought from the weavers) and control markets, giving Hindu traders great power over Muslim weavers.[216] Traders often delay payment or refuse to purchase goods requested in order to push down the price. Since manufacturers lack access to markets for their goods and need money quickly to survive, they often sell their goods below the market price.[217]

Economic interdependence and peace in Lucknow comes as a product of several factors absent in Meerut City. First, the size of the industry would correspond to debilitating economic loss for both communities in case of communal riots. Second, a large proportion of Muslim workers are women. Third, Hindu traders do not appear to practice overpowering methods of coercion over Muslims. And fourth, a deep intra-Muslim cleavage between the Shia and Sunni sects made cordial Hindu-Muslim associational and economic ties easy to forge since the advent of mass politics in the twentieth century.[218] In Meerut the handloom industry, incorporating a large Ansari Muslim labor force and Hindus in trade and wholesaling, creates the only

---

[214] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 175.

[215] All units not registered under the Factories Act of 1948 are considered to be in the informal sector and the employees of informal units lack benefits of the organized sector such as insurance, workman's compensation, and pension. Wage laws and minimum working conditions are also inapplicable to this sector.
Das, Keshab. "Workers and Earnings in Informal Manufacturing: Evidence and Issues in Estimation." *Informal Sector in India: Perspectives and Policies* (Delhi: Institute for Human Development and Institute of Applied Manpower Research, 2001) 229-30.

[216] Khan, Dildar, "Meerut Riots: An Analysis." *Towards and Understanding of Communalism*, 465-6.

[217] Sharma, Rajeev. "The Form and Structure of the Informal Sector in Urban Economy: An Empirical Study of Meerut City." (Political Science Dissertation, Meerut University, 1993) 168.

[218] Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 176-97.

comparison to Lucknow's Chikan industry although a handful of other cottage industries also exist, among which the sporting goods industry is nearly as profitable. Next, workers in Meerut industries are predominantly single men living near the poverty line, usually indebted to Hindu traders, and vulnerable to their often-exploitative business practices. This group is obviously more aggressive than the women workers of Lucknow who work in their homes. Last, the Hindu-Muslim cleavage is the primary cleavage in Meerut socially, politically, and economically. Lucknow's Shia-Sunni cleavage undermines the potential for Hindu-Muslim polarization. In fact, communal Muslim organizations in Lucknow polarized Shias and Sunnis against each other rather than exacerbating Hindu-Muslim tensions as both Hindu and Muslim organizations have done and continue to do in Meerut.[219]

Aligarh, one of the five most riot-prone cities in India, is a better comparison. Aligarh lacks any large civic organizations that require Hindu-Muslim contact without an intra-ethnic alternative and the economy also provides no avenue to facilitate inter-communal trust. Further, two classes of Muslims, a middleclass emerged in the 1970s upon return from higher paying jobs in Persian Gulf states, and a poor class of Muslims both supported communal politics and Muslim communal organizations.[220] Although less extreme a case, Meerut holds these same characteristics.

I argue that economic interdependence only plays a role in communal peace in Meerut because both sides are now aware of the mutual threat communal violence places on both communities. Thus, Meerut is a city of high tensions where the benefits of civil society have not strengthened enough since 1987 to make an impact. However, concerns of economic and

---

[219] *Ibid,* 195-7.
[220] *Ibid*, 128-30.

physical survival have registered among much of the population and account for the real impetus for peace in Meerut City.

Cadre-Based Political Parties Explanation

Political parties in Meerut failed to unite Hindus and Muslims. In this section I dismiss the role of political parties in building bridges between Hindus and Muslims in Meerut City. The role of ideology and party strategy in Meerut City politics undermines the potential for parties to build networks of Hindu-Muslim trust that transcend their parties into the public consciousness. If elections are usually fought along communal lines, whether riots are employed or not, it is unlikely that Congress, SP, or BSP serve as mediums of inter-communal trust of any significance. Politics in Meerut is highly communal and usually functions as a battle between the BJP and the remaining Muslim-supported parties that may defeat it. Muslims vote for the party most likely to dislodge the Hindu BJP and the Congress, BSP, and SP usually field Muslim candidates. Even the Congress Party, supposedly committed to inter-communal union, has fielded Muslim candidates who have taken a clearly pro-Muslim position expressed in communal terms.

Hindus and Muslims are members of all four political parties active in Meerut City. According to estimations by Meerut political party presidents, Muslims constitute three percent of the BJP and fifty percent of the Congress Party. The BSP and SP Party Presidents could not estimate the percentage of Muslims in their parties although the BSP President states that his party fields the most Muslim candidates and the latter is considered a Muslim party and has a Muslim local president. As mentioned before, the BJP in Meerut has no expectation or initiative to attract Muslim voters and the BJP's small number of predominantly business class Muslims do not represent the interests of Muslims nor contribute to communal harmony in the city. On the

other hand, Muslims are the key voting block that the remaining parties seek due to their numbers in the city. Although the BSP, Congress, and SP may provide an avenue for inter-communal civic life, ethnic politics in Meerut arguably undermines its potential.

Further, I argue that if parties practice communal politics whether on behalf of Muslims or Hindus, they fail to mediate between both communities. Moreover, political party systems closely linked to ethnic cleavages can lead to greater ethnic violence. Chhibber argues that, "As the party system comes to be rooted in social cleavages, political conflict between parties translates into conflict among groups and vice versa."[221] In chapter four, I argued that the party system in Meerut before 1987 was polarized and communal with the Congress Party fighting most visibly for the Muslim vote and the BJP and its predecessor Jana Sangh (pre-1977) courting the Hindu vote with Jats and upper castes. After 1987, more parties came onto the scene, but the real competition remained largely polarized between the BJP and the Muslim-supported party most likely to defeat it. It seems that regardless of the ethnic composition of a political party, if party ideology does not emphasize inter-communal cooperation regardless of political equations, cadres are unlikely to be promote peace.

Do Peace Committees Work in Meerut City?

If associational and everyday civic life does not appear to have made an impact, have peace committees linked to the state made a difference? Although they contribute to communal harmony more than any of the above-mentioned organizations through supporting police efforts, peace committees in Meerut are too weak to make a real impact. In Meerut, peace committees are intra-communal, have memberships mostly restricted to a handful of elite elders, only meet after violence erupts, and have not evolved into vehicles for wider civic cooperation. Peace committees have been more effective in Bombay and Bhiwandi, two formerly riot-prone cities

---

[221] Chhibber, Pradeep. *Democracy Without Associations*, 192.

that have remained peaceful since their last major riots in 1992-3 and 1984 respectively. In this section, I compare and contrast peace committees in Meerut (based on interviews with members and observers) with the more effective ones in Bombay and Bhiwandi.

First, what are the characteristics of effective peace committees capable of preventing communal violence as well as easing tensions after it occurs? Bhiwandi provides the clearest case. Then Police Commissioner Suresh Khopade set up seventy mohallas peace committees in Bhiwandi with the goal to raise trust between Hindus and Muslims and between the local community and police. Bhiwandi peace committees included the following features: (1) they were presided over by officers of the rank of sub-inspector or above. (2) Fifty Muslims and Hindus from two neighboring mohallas (one Hindu-dominated and one Muslim) were appointed as members in each peace committee. (3) All sections of society were represented including power loom workers, rickshaw pullers, vendors, businessmen, housewives, and lawyers. (4) Petty criminals (goondas) and communalists were kept out. (5) Local issues from Dalit atrocities to land disputes were settled in the committees (6) Police were order to ensure no communal squabbles or derogatory remarks would occur and every incident of mutual criticism was to be immediately put down. (7) And nonmembers could attend and did so in increasing numbers as the initiative gained momentum.[222]

These committees ordinarily met (with police officers) weekly and met daily during times of high tensions.

> During 1988-91, the nationwide mobilization sponsored by the Hindu nationalists for the
> destruction of Babri mosque and liberation of Ram's birthplace was at its peak… But when
> passions ran high [in Bhiwandi], members on both sides came together and voluntarily undertook
> the task of patrolling the streets for nights on end. Rumors were suppressed on the spot and rumor-

---

[222] Khopade, Suresh, IPS. "Mohalla Committees: An Extremely Successful Practice for Controlling Communal Riots." *Compendium on Good Practices in Police Volume 1,* 37-41. <http://www.svpnpa.gov.in/bpract/goodpractices.pdf>.

mongers handed over to the police… [As a result], the evildoers preferred to lie low… [and] were totally isolated by the constant vigilance against them by committee members.[223]

To Khopade and his successors' credit, wide-scale communal riots have not occurred in Bhiwandi since 1984. Even when massive communal riots hit Bombay on December and January 1992-3, Bhiwandi stayed quiet.

In 1994, after the city burned in communal riots in December 1992 and January 1993, a possibly deeper attempt at reconciliation through peace committees was undertaken in Bombay at a time when communal enmities could not have been worse and police credibility was at its worst. Mohalla committees first provided an opportunity for Muslims to air complaints against the police. Next, peace committees provided civic programs with goals from education to improvements in amenities to promote inter-communal trust and contact through common interests. For example, health camps were held for slum dwellers, study rooms and libraries were set up, and cricket tournaments between Hindu and Muslim children and the police were organized several times.[224]

Although the mohalla committees grew politicized and ineffective after a couple years, they played a major role in facilitating good will between Hindus and Muslims at their peak in 1994-5 through bringing people together by arranging activities and resources that residents wanted. In Biwandi, local disputes were resolved in mohalla peace committees. This promoted both Hindu-Muslim trust and awareness among community members of the perpetrators of petty offenses. In Bombay, mohalla committees built some degree of inter-communal civic life in localities earlier devastated by riots. It seems that peace committees are most effective when they address everyday concerns and civic needs.

---

[223] Khopade, Suresh. *Bhiwandi Riots and After*, 118.

[224] Thakar, Usha. "Mohalla Committees of Mumbai: Candles in Ominous Darkness." *Economic and Political Weekly* (7 February 2004).

Meerut City peace committees lack most of these characteristics for success. They are intra-ethnic, only active before religious festivals and during the aftermath of communal violence, consist exclusively of businessmen and lawyers rather than workers outside of the educated and business elites, and do not address civic issues or organize social programs.[225] Evidently, these committees do not fill an inter-ethnic civic space and their only mechanism to ease communal tensions is lecture. "Peace committee members visit the people of their mohallas and try to convince them that Hindus and Muslims are the same and that violence is useless."[226]

Although ineffective as a civic organization, peace committees in Meerut are helpful as a medium between the people and as an intelligence resource for the administration. Once communal violence begins to ebb, influential community members work to find suitable solutions to communal disputes and try to dispel rumors. They also identify the culprits of violence and looting to the police. SSP Badri Prasad Singh said, "Peace committees are ineffective, but they give us information and can be useful after incidents to cool tensions."[227] Therefore, peace committees in Meerut merely provide a resource for the police. This suggests that the administration plays the substantive role in ensuring communal harmony.

Evidence presented in this chapter suggests that Meerut lacks inter-ethnic everyday and associational civic life. No civic organization provides a horizontal medium for Hindu-Muslim contact and economic interdependence has not created trust between both communities. Arguably, civil society in Meerut does not work to quell violence in part because there is minimal class overlap between Hindus and Muslims in Meerut. This has bred a hierarchical and divisive civic life. In absence of inter-communal links, communal harmony in Meerut may be

---

[225] District Magistrate: "Peace committees can only be effective if they meet regularly." This is not the case in Meerut City. Interview with District Magistrate (29 February 2004).
[226] Interview with Dukh Haran Sharma, Peace Committee Member and social worker active in communal riots for the past 30 years (8 February 2004).
[227] Interview with Senior Superintendent of Police (4 February 2004).

uncertain. Many interview respondents expect communal violence to return to Meerut in the next several years due to enduring communal tensions in the city. Nonetheless, I posit that communal harmony in Meerut emerged due to the loss of public support for riots even among the bedrock of the RSS and VHP and due to changing electoral incentives at the state and municipal levels which have promoted minority self-policing.

Electoral Incentives of Self-Policing

In this chapter, I argue that electoral incentives at the state and city levels best explain the

absence of wide-scale communal riots in Meerut City since 1987. In Meerut, electoral incentives

encourage peace for both Hindus and Muslims. Among Hindus, Bania businessmen who

continue to support the RSS and VHP no longer support communal violence because it hurts

their businesses. In this case, economic interests shared by the main support-base for the Sangh

Parivar pacified aggressive Hindu nationalist organizations. Further, the people of Meerut City

no longer support riots. Consequently, no politician regardless of party can afford to be blamed

for inciting communal riots. To illustrate this point, BJP MLA Lakshmi Kant Vajpayee, active in

the incitement of communal clashes in the 1990s and before, now participates in peace

committees.[228] On the Muslim side, electoral incentives are even more pronounced because

Muslims have been worst hit in communal riots. Although most surveyed ward leaders do not

think communal harmony is a major issue in elections, Mayor Sayed Aklakh (BSP) rose to

power as Mayor and recently as MP largely on his record for maintaining communal harmony.[229]

He has aggressively campaigned on this issue and moderate Hindu and Muslim respondents give

him significant credit for communal peace in Meerut.[230]

I posit that electoral incentives and an impartial state administration are required for

communal peace. Encouraged by electoral incentives, minority self-policing has also been

helpful in limiting the potential for communal violence in Meerut, although it is not

independently significant. Mayor Aklakh has encouraged Muslim leaders ranging from

---

[228] Interview with Chief Officer, Kotwali Nagar (February 2004).
[229] In his successful bi for the Meerut District Lok Sabha seat, Aklakh campaigned on his ability to maintain communal harmony in Meerut City as Mayor.
[230] All surveyed ward leaders and social workers from Muslim-dominated inner city wards included Mayor Aklakh as highly influential in maintaining communal harmony in the city. Interviews with moderate Hindus say the same. Schneider-Ahuja Survey of Minority Self-Policing in Meerut (July 2004).

businessmen and local politicians to mullahs to speak out for communal peace and to try to restrain known communalists and criminals. Community members have identified culprits in communal clashes for the police and influential Muslims have visited the families of known criminals and extremists in an effort to restrain them. Thus, minority self-policing seems to have been effective after 1987 although it is not possible to determine its effect before 1987 when the state was complicit in communal violence. Therefore, it is not possible to systematically test for this hypothesis across time. Regardless, it can be inferred that this mechanism would collapse if the state were to become complicit in communal riots as it was in Gujarat (2002) and if polarized elections return at the state level. That being said, I understand intra-ethnic self-policing, apparent only within Meerut's Muslim population, as a product of electoral incentives rather than an independent mechanism.

This chapter explains how electoral incentives have prevented wide-scale communal riots in Meerut. The discussion begins at the state level and then moves to the municipal level where reforms in the administration and police have improved the capacity for Meerut City police to prevent communal riots. Lastly, it proceeds to explain how self-policing, encouraged by the Muslim Mayor, has played an added value role in preventing communal riots. Data presented in this chapter was collected in interviews held in Meerut with politicians, ward leaders, social workers, and peace committee members in addition to relevant scholarship. Available evidence suggests that electoral incentive and minority self-policing have been effective in preventing Hindu-Muslim riots. Based on evidence collected in fieldwork and in a subsequent survey testing for self-policing in Meerut, I argue that electoral incentives explain the cessation of communal riots in Meerut and that self-policing is in large part a product of electoral incentives on the Muslim side.

Electoral Incentives at the State Level

Wilkinson argues that electoral incentives to win U.P. state assembly elections and

maintain coalitions in a highly competitive, multiparty system, where Muslim voters determine

contests in 60 state constituencies, has led to a sharp drop in communal riots in the Uttar

Pradesh.[231] This is most clearly illustrated in the fact that no major riots took place in Uttar

Pradesh following the December 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid despite the existence of

several riot-prone cities in the state. These cities suffered limited communal clashes at that time,

but a vigilant administration took strict measures to prevent communal riots in volatile towns

including Aligarh, Moradabad, and Meerut City. The Indian Constitution places the

responsibility for law and order with elected state governments. Wilkinson writes,

> The fact that we see sharp differences in levels of communal violence from one elected [state]
> regime to another suggests that the problem [falls under] the instructions politicians give to state
> officials, telling them whether or not to protect minorities."[232]

Articles written by former officials acknowledge that clear orders delivered from the CM and his

administration to the police and local officials in the civil service bureaucracies decide whether

or not riots will occur. "It is India's state governments rather than the country's national,

municipal or district governments that control the local police and paramilitary and decide how

much force to use to prevent or stop riots at the local level."[233]

In the Meerut riots of 1982 and 1987, the state administration gave no clear orders to

protect Muslims or stop the riots. Chief Minister V.B. Singh (Congress) explicitly blamed

Muslims for the riots and refused to replace the PAC with the more impartial Indian Army.

When police arrested VHP and BJP activists in1982 and 1987, they were promptly released

under political pressure. And rioters in Meerut City looted and murdered with the understanding

---

[231] *Wilkinson, Steven. Electoral Incentives of Communal Violence in India* (manuscript), 1.
[232] *Ibid,* 36.
[233] *Ibid*, 11.

that the administration would not hold them accountable for their actions. Former U.P. official

N.C. Saxena writes, "The abandon with which private property is now destroyed on a massive

scale shows that the miscreants have a sound understanding that the police will not intervene."[234]

An exception to this trend of communal violence occurred in 1970 when a coalition led

by Charan Singh (BLD) governed a riot-free Uttar Pradesh. Saxena, Chief of U.P. Police under

Charan Singh, writes,

> The clear objective of Charan Singh was to maintain excellent law and order regardless of MLA
> opinion… He pushed for accurate crime reporting (leading to an increase in reported crime of two
> to four times over night), made it clear to District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police that
> they should arrest any violators of the law without need of political instructions, and maintained
> transparency with the media."[235]

Evidently, Charan Singh's approach curtailed the ability of the well-established communalists of

Meerut City to incite riots and ensured consequences for such actions.

Charan Singh depended on the support of Muslims during his two brief coalition

governments in Uttar Pradesh. Electoral incentives in the post-Mandal phase of politics are even

more pronounced in a state in which Muslims account for 31 percent of the urban population and

Hindus are increasingly divided. The 1991-2 BJP and 1994-5 SP-BSP Uttar Pradesh coalition

governments directed a similar policy of law and order for two different reasons consistent with

the electoral incentives hypothesis.[236] Wilkinson argues that communal riots will be prevented

when it is in politicians' electoral interests to do so. And both the BJP (1991 state election) and

BSP-SP (1993 state election) campaigned on a promise to maintain law and order, a top priority

for Muslim voters.[237] For the BJP, inciting riots in U.P. was unnecessary once it formed an

administration. If the BJP incited communal riots to win elections by polarizing Hindu voters

and undermining the incumbent administration, costs in resources and BJP credibility would

---

[234] Saxena, N.C. *Communal Riots in India.* (Trishul Publications: Delhi, 1990) 41.
[235] *Ibid*, 109-10.
[236] Wilkinson, Steven, *The Electoral Incentives for Ethnic Violence* (manuscript)*,* 50.
[237] *Ibid,* 1.

deem riot-production nonsensical. In 1991, the BJP did not ally with parties dependent on

Muslim votes; however, it held militant Hindu organizations at bay and aggressively pursued a

policy of riot prevention when its cadres in the opposition of other states did the opposite.

Conversely, the SP-BSP coalition government (1994-5) came to power as a secular

alliance of OBCs, Dalits and Muslims and SP-leader Mulayam Singh Yadav ran as the defender

of the Muslims. The Meerut Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Superintendent of Police

(SP-City), and District Magistrate said that Yadav (elected Chief Minister again in 2002) made

explicit orders to district administrations in U.P. to prevent communal violence at all costs.

Failure to do so would result in transfer to a less favorable position elsewhere in the state.[238] The

fact that recent and current administrations have applied heavy force to quell communal

disturbances and that major communal riots have not occurred in Meerut City or Uttar Pradesh in

over ten years, including periods of communal violence in other states, suggests that electoral

incentives can lead to riot prevention.

Administrative Reform

Local reforms in Meerut District have also helped the police prevent riots in Meerut City

where the police effectively intervened on at least four incidents that had the potential to turn

into communal riots in 2003 alone.[239] In response to pressure from state politicians and in effort

to regain credibility in the aftermath of 1987, the Meerut District administration has changed its

image from a partisan body to a more impartial body and has reformed their tactics in policing

communal clashes. Although similar reforms have not been made in all U.P. towns, it can be

inferred that state electoral incentives for communal harmony encouraged or at least have not

---

[238] Interviews with SSP, SP, and DM (20 February 2004).
[239] Interview with DSP-Kotwali Station (25 February 2004) and SP-City (24 February 2004). Also Amar Ujala reports in 2003.

impeded these reforms, which make riot prevention more effective while increasing goodwill

toward the previously discredited police force.[240]

Interviews with the DM, SSP, and SP-City all demonstrate a priority to show impartiality.

SP-City Arvind said,

> Impartiality of the administration is important for establishing communal harmony. Lawbreakers must
> know they will be punished harshly and even-handedly. If one community feels exploited, riots are more
> likely.[241]

Deputy Superintendent of Police corroborates that, "Police officers and administrative officials

have changed mentality. If communal tension takes place, it is the business of these officers to be

impartial or communal tensions will increase."[242] Further, seventy percent of Muslims surveyed

in February 2004 and all ward leaders and social workers interviewed in a subsequent survey

reported that they felt more secure now than ten years ago and that the police have become

significantly less communally biased since then. These respondents generally expressed a

qualitative although not complete improvement. Hakim Saifudin, a Muslim peace worker active

in the aftermath of most riots in Meerut since partition, said, "The administration is not as one-

sided as it once was but Muslims still do not think that the administration tries to protect

them."[243] Moreover, the majority of surveyed Muslim ward leaders and social workers believe

that the police remain somewhat communally biased and that they would not protect Muslims if

a major Hindu-Muslim riot should occur in the future.[244]

Twelve police officers and high-ranking police officials working in Meerut credit

'community policing' for the drop in communal violence. Professor Chautervedi, Head of the

Political Science Department (Meerut University) and scholar of Indian police, observes that the

---

[240] Email correspondence with Omar Khalidi (X August 2004).
[241] Interview with SP-City D. Arvind (25 February 2004).
[242] Interview with Central Officer, Kotwali Station (20 February 2004).
[243] Interview with Hakim Mohammed Saifuddin (6 January 2004).
[244] Mark Schneider and Amit Ahuja. Schneider-Ahuja Survey for Self-Policing in Meerut (July 2004).

Meerut police did not form links with community leaders and local people in the 1980s, and instead operated in opposition to them. This is no longer the case.[245] In the past ten years, police inspectors have cultivated links with local people for intelligence purposes including local political and religious leaders. As discussed in the previous chapter, peace committee members inform the police of communal disturbances and other criminal activity and work with the police to dispel rumors, which have escalated insignificant disputes into major communal riots in the past. This people-oriented approach has improved intelligence, and with it, the capability to control disturbances before they get out of hand. In a communally sensitive city where densely populated localities in the inner city are inaccessible to police cars, community policing has helped police gain the upper hand on communal violence.

Meerut City After the 1987 Riots: Electoral Incentives at the City Level

Beyond the state, I argue that local political incentives and a loss of social support for riots proved influential in the cessation of wide-scale communal violence in Meerut City after 1987. Following the catastrophic riots of 1987, the economy officially suffered upwards of 100 million rupees in property damage, greatly compounded by an economic downturn that took many years for the economy to reach pre-riot levels.[246] According to a survey of 100 respondents in four neighborhoods equally divided between Hindus and Muslims of various economic backgrounds, the families of all individuals report economic losses for their families. Several respondents continue to suffer the economic consequences of rioting as former owners of homes or businesses burned down by looters. And more than half the respondents recalled that it took at least five years for the economy to recover from damage suffered in 1987.

---

[245] Interview with Professor Chautervedi (24 February 2004). Political Science Department, Meerut University, Meerut.

[246] Gian Prakash Report on the Meerut 1987 Riots, Lok Sabha Inquiry (confidential) published in installments in *The Telegraph* (Calcutta).

In these riots, Muslim economic position was destroyed. Daily wage laborers could not work or support their families for three months of curfew. Muslim workers from the surrounding villages were unable to commute to work for three months and many were too scared to come to work for some time after that. Muslim manufacturers from the city could not come to work and many Hindu-owned factories and cottage industry units located in Muslim areas were nonproductive and damaged by looters. Hindu traders also suffered severe economic setbacks due to looting and lack of business. Meerut Chamber of Commerce President Sri Mittal said that the economy took ten years to recover after 1987 and that riots from the 1980s and early 1990s destroyed 25 years of economic progress.[247]

> After the 1987 riots, people were leaving Meerut, taking their shops and businesses with them…
> People were not ready to invest, expand their businesses, or put up new businesses and outside
> investors withdrew from the city.[248]

Under these conditions, Muslims and Hindus, including supporters of the VHP and RSS, saw their businesses collapse or decline for years and social support for communal rioting quickly faded.[249] Now, business leaders and workers from both communities stress the need for economic development in a riot-free, secure environment. Thus, strong electoral and economic incentives push for peace in the city. Resonating with politicians, Meerut presidents of the BJP, BSP, SP, and Congress each emphasize the importance of communal harmony and law and order for elections. Hindus want to protect their economic interests and Muslim want to survive economically and physically.[250]

---

[247] Interview with President of Meerut Chamber of Commerce (23 February 2004).
[248] *Ibid*
[249] Interviews with traders, association leaders, and the President of the Chamber of Commerce (January-February 2004).
[250] Interview with Meerut Party Presidents for BSP, BJP, SP, and Congress (February 2004)

Electoral Incentives of Minority Self-Policing

Muslims experienced perilous fear following the 1987 riots. Most knew someone killed or injured and lost faith in the intentions of the police and administration to protect them. Instead of depending of the state for their safety, Muslims sought the protection of their community members as they fled mixed areas for homogenous ones. Field research suggests that the human and economic destruction of the 1987 riots triggered minority self-policing within the Muslim community. All surveyed ward leaders and social workers from Muslim areas reported that businessmen, local leaders, and Muslim politicians have played a role in convincing community members not to participate in communal violence and arrive at the scene of clashes to quell tensions when they occur. Police officials attribute this to an emerging Muslim leadership of successful businessmen who seek to protect their business interests from the destruction of communal riots.[251] Muslim survey respondents from all socioeconomic categories cite the memory of the 1987 riots as enough impetus to prevent a recurrence in anyway possible through any mechanisms available.[252] I find both true. A rising leadership of moderate Muslim businessmen responding to their community's (and their own) economic interests and working to meet voters' expectation for communal peace encourage minority self-policing, strengthening both potential economic and political success.

I argue that self-policing came as a mechanism of fear triggered by a minority (in terms of power rather than population in the case of Meerut City) increasingly aware of its vulnerability relative to the majority group. In the past, some Muslims attacked or retaliated against Hindus or the PAC, ultimately resulting in disproportionate and debilitating costs for the

---

[251] In a survey of five Muslim ward leaders representing inner city wards, each one owned a business. Schneider-Ahuja survey of self-policing in Meerut, 2004.
Interviews with SP-City D. Arvind (25 February 2004) and SP-City D. Arvind (25 February 2004).
[252] Schneider, Mark. Neighborhood Survey, 2004.

whole Muslim community, largely at the hands of the administration and police. After 1987, Muslims realized that Hindu communalists and rioters endorsed by an anti-Muslim administration could easily crush them. Intra-ethnic policing falls within what I call 'coerced peace,' in which communal enmity and polarization are similar to what they were before, but communal harmony must be maintained by the segment of the population that suffers most in communal violence. In effect, coerced peace is a peace brought by fear on part of the weaker community rather than one brought by the inter-communal trust Varshney found apparent in Calicut.

Minority self-policing under coerced peace can serve the dual function of limiting social support for communal violence through the influence of local notables and preventing precipitants from turning into riots. In research that compiles extensive accounts of riots throughout the world, Horowitz observes a lull between precipitant events and wide-scale rioting.

> The lull occurs mainly in cases where the last precipitant comes on suddenly and the question is what to make of it…Whether violence emerges seems to be a function of the evaluation of the precipitant in light of the distribution of social support, the behavior of the potential target group and the response of the authorities.[253]

Therefore, there is a short-lived opportunity to prevent wide-scale communal violence between a communal clash and its elevation to a riot based on the combination of administrative response determined by politicians in the state government; social support, which declined following economic and human devastation in 1987; and minority self-policing which can avert minority destruction by preventing majority provocation through influential community leaders.

Muslim survey respondents and police and administrative officials (all Hindu) state that Mayor Sayed Aklakh is the most effective voice for peace in the city. He is notified of all major

---

[253] Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot,* 89-91.

communal incidents, comes to the scene of all serious communal disturbances and is in contact

with the District Magistrate and top police officials on a daily basis.[254] Additionally, he

maintains constant communication with Muslim notables including ward leaders, clerics, and

businessmen and has gained their cooperation in convincing Muslims in their neighborhoods and

congregations to remain quiescent during disturbances.[255]

Mayor Aklakh came to power on the platform that he was the only one capable of

maintaining communal harmony in the city. He constantly pressures the administration to

respond to communal incidents and protect Muslims while pressuring Muslims to maintain

communal harmony in their own community.

> I was elected on the issues of communal harmony and development, and have tried to convince
> clerics not to use communal rhetoric, as it will only hurt the Muslim people.[256]

The Mayor's electoral success depends largely on his ability to maintain peace in the city and

protect his own community.[257] In this case, I argue that electoral incentives encourage the Mayor

to practice minority self-policing in combination with increasing pressure on the police and

administration. Laitin and Fearon explain self-policing as a de-centralized mechanism operating

below the threshold necessary for state intervention.[258] In Meerut City, self-policing operates

symbiotically with the state because the slightest incident has the potential to spiral into a

communal riot if the police and Muslim leaders do not take proper and expedient measures.

Moreover, Muslim leaders punish defectors (goondas) by turning them into the police. Fearon

and Laitin's model neglects to realize that intra-ethnic ostracism by one's community may not be

---

[254] Interviews with the Mayor, DSP, Hakim Saifuddin, and SP-City (February 2004).
[255] Interview with Mayor Sayed Aklakh (5 February 2004).
[256] *Ibid*.
[257] 70% of Aklakh's electoral support came from Muslims.
Interview with Meerut President of the BSP (February 2004).
[258] We argue that decentralized, non-state institutional mechanisms may often arise to mitigate problems of
opportunism in interactions between individuals from different ethnic groups
Laitin, David and James Fearon. "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation." *American Political Science Review.* Vol. 90,
No. 4 (December 1996) 715.

enough to prevent criminals from capitalizing on smoldering communal tensions. As a last resort, the state must take responsibility for the punishment while community leaders provide needed intelligence.

Another emerging social trend in Meerut's Muslim community operates out of economic incentives rather than political incentives, although these individuals generally support the Mayor and the Mayor caters to their interests. A small, though not enumerated Muslim business class has emerged in Meerut City whose members have risen to positions of influence. All Muslim mayors and MLAs in the past 15 years were successful businessmen and all Muslim ward leaders interviewed also own their own businesses.[259] Additioanlly, many influential Muslims who have served on Meerut City peace committees are either in business or in other lucrative professions. Evidence suggests that Muslim business interests have a strong position in the community and that the younger generation's aspirations are to join this seemingly profitable mainstream.[260] Nassir Uddin, a Muslim banker, said, "Thirty percent of Muslim children are in English-medium private schools and even Muslim artisans are trying to save so they cans send their children to private schools."[261]

As a product of economic and political incentives for communal peace, the Muslim population no longer looks to still-active communal organizations for leadership.[262] Instead, an emerging moderate Muslim leadership with business interests has grown influential.

---

[259] Interviews with former Mayor Ayub Ansari, Current Mayor Sayed Aklakh, and the Secretary to the Mayor's Office (January to February 2004).

[260] Approximately every Muslim under the age of 30 that I met expected to move to America and join the high-tech or science sectors. Muslim attendance in secular (public schools) is also increasing according to all Muslim respondents although figures do not exist. Madrasas (Muslim religious schools) are increasingly attended by children from rural U.P. or other states.
Interview with Madrasa Teacher (28 February)

[261] Interview with Nassir Uddin (7 January 2004).

[262] 9 of 10 social workers and ward leaders surveyed reported that Muslims in Meerut overwhelmingly ignore Muslim communal organizations.

The most influential of this class is Mayor Sayed Aklakh, a wealthy meat exporter. He has encouraged minority self-policing among the more traditional members of the community while ensuring fair and effective policing to ensure communal harmony and with it his political survival.

In conclusion, electoral incentives functioning at the state and municipal levels have led to communal harmony in Meerut. At the state level, a highly competitive party system undermines the ability of one party to win by polarizing the Hindu majority. As a result, incumbents place law and order among their top priorities because they can no longer afford to alienate the minority community. This is also true of the BJP, which does not depend on Muslim votes at the state level and does not court Muslim votes in Meerut City constituency. Regardless, current and potential coalition partners competing in U.P. depend on Muslim votes for their political survival and have constrained BJP activities since the middle 1990s.

In Meerut City, electoral incentives in the aftermath of the 1987 riots have ensured the absence of wide-scale communal riots. On the Hindu side, the upper caste business class no longer supports communal violence although it continues to support the RSS and other Hindu nationalist organizations in the city. Additionally, public sentiment has formed against communal violence. Therefore, although elections in Meerut City are often communally polarized, it is in politicians' best interest to support communal harmony. Muslim politicians including former Mayor Sayed Aklakh also follow electoral incentives for peace. They pressure the police and civil administration to protect the Muslim community evenhandedly and with quick response.[263] Muslim politicians including Mayor Aklakh have also encouraged minority self-policing through direct contact with their constituents and through requesting influential

---

[263] Muslim ward leaders and social workers report that the police have come to the scene of communal disputes more quickly than before while acting even-handedly. They have also worked with local Muslim notables to calm tensions following the episode of violence.

Muslims to speak for peace. I have found that electoral incentives and self-policing are both effective in maintaining communal harmony in still communally sensitive Meerut, although the latter has not been deemed independently significant.

Conclusion

I have argued that the electoral incentives hypothesis best explains the emergence of communal peace in Meerut City since the 1987 riots. Evidence suggests that political calculations at the state and municipal levels caused a shift away from communal riot incitement as an electoral strategy. This does not mean that communal riots cannot recur in Meerut City as these calculations may change. Nonetheless, following Wilkinson, I hold that as long as elections are complex and highly competitive at the state level, wide-scale communal riots are unlikely to occur. Moreover, local electoral incentives, economic interests, and public sentiment inhibit the ability of communal forces to insight riots in Meerut City. Local forces may make Meerut City an unlikely site for riots even if state politics should change; however, whether municipal politics and local incentives for peace would be able to maintain communal harmony in absence of state support is unlikely.

Another issue presented in my research is that electoral incentives at the local and state levels may lead to local mechanisms for peace, most of which would probably not survive a loss of state support. In Meerut, minority self-policing is evident and seems to have contributed to a drop in potential precipitants for communal violence. Still, without state and police cooperation, self-policing may have a negligible effect on controlling communal violence. Additionally, Meerut City police tactics have changed toward a more people-friendly approach with a higher capacity for intelligence gathering. If the state were to support communal riots as it did in 1987, it may interfere with Meerut's more effective riot prevention approach. Instead, electoral incentives in U.P. may have encouraged innovation for better results due to local officials' understanding that they must prevent riots or face job transfer.

Although this study requires empirical testing in cities other than Meerut within and outside India, I do not attempt to generalize my findings beyond India here because my thesis is a case-specific empirical test on existing theories. This study presents observations specific to Meerut likely to apply to other Indian cities and possibly to cities outside India; however, these observations are Meerut specific. This means that my explanation may be limited in scope to the cultural, economic, and political factors evident in Meerut City. It also means that my assertion that civic life has not played a role in the emergence of communal peace in Meerut and that electoral incentives has should not be understood as an assertion that civic life cannot play such a role in other longitudinal studies. I suggest that civic life is unlikely to play a major role in the emergence of communal peace in riot-prone towns like Meerut, but I do not posit that one case study proves any generalizeable theory right or wrong. With this caveat in mind, this chapter addresses limitations in this study and suggests three potential research projects that may build on my findings in Meerut.

Data for this study was collected primarily through in-depth interviews, surveys, and newspaper reports. No alternative approach was feasible or logical due to the general lack of available information on Meerut City; however, although I attempted to control for this, it may be argued that interviewee and newspaper reporter bias influenced my findings. Discussing communal violence caused anxiety among some respondents. In several cases officials asked me if the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had sent me to Meerut. In several other cases Muslim respondents feared commenting on police or government behavior. After respondents were assured of my innocent and independent objectives, conversations became more open. Interviews with those that seemed to remain guarded and insincere were generally discarded. Additionally, newspaper reports were only used for general data on episodes of communal

violence and were confirmed through interviews with reporters, witnesses, and key players in the events from both religious communities.

An additional source of potential bias regards statements on state governments. No police official from the Senior Superintendent of Police on down would dare tell a reporter or scholar that his bosses in the state government do not place a priority in communal riot prevention. Local officials did not comment on questions evaluating the current Chief Minister's approach toward communal riot prevention in fear for their careers. Likewise, when officials said that state authorities gave strict orders to maintain communal harmony, the opposite response may have been outside the realm of possibility. This suggests the power that state authorities have over district and municipal officials; nevertheless, such comments are well supported beyond personal observation. Omar Khalidi and Steven Wilkinson, scholars who have conducted copious interviews with police, IAS officials and politicians in Uttar Pradesh, found that orders from incumbent state politicians deeply influence police behavior at the local level as well as the activities of the PAC regardless of communal elements within the relevant bodies. Khalidi asserts that no police official has survived the wrath of a chief minister, and that they generally do not question decisions at the state political level.[264]

Lastly, it may be expected that politicians would never diminish the importance of communal harmony in a city like Meerut even if it was not a significant electoral issue. Regardless, Mayor Sayed Aklakh's campaign rhetoric in emphasizing his role in maintaining communal harmony since the late 1990s and the rather extreme changes in behavior among BJP politicians in the past 15 years suggests otherwise. More importantly, the absence of communal violence and the change in the behavior of local and state politicians strongly supports this claim.

---

[264] Omar Khalidi, email correspondence (29 July 2004).

Therefore, although a methodology consisting of qualitative interviews may have inherent flaws, I argue that this paper controls for all sources of potential bias to the highest degree possible.

The reader may also question whether Meerut is an appropriate site to test Varshney's civil society hypothesis. It is quite evident that Meerut lacks meaningful inter-communal civic links; however, some may argue that the reason that Meerut's associational life has not flowered since 1987 is that it is constrained by the overlap of community and economic status. Therefore, a riot-prone city may develop inter-communal ties over time, but Meerut is an outlier because of its socio-economic landscape. Clearly, further empirical testing in other riot-prone cities in India and elsewhere can resolve this issue. As stated above, this study does not insinuate that one case study accounts for enough data to prove or disprove a theory. Moreover, Meerut, like most cities in India, has very specific features beyond the existence or absence of communal violence. As an individual case study, I attempted to choose a city representative of communal riot-prone cities in India. I did not intend to compare Meerut across other cases of change over time. Therefore, generalizeability requires further empirical testing on cases of change over time.

Beyond replication of this study in different cities, three possible research agendas may be worth pursuing to build on the current study. First, an empirical study that tests for the effect of intra-ethnic self-policing on communal violence and peace across time would be useful. I was unable to access objective data on self-policing before 1987. It is possible that minority self-policing followed the very bloody and costly 1982 riots and that it collapsed in the period leading up to the 1987 riots. It is also possible that intra-ethnic self-policing did not start until 1987 and has a more significant influence on the emergence and maintenance of communal harmony in Meerut City than believed. A multi-city longitudinal study that addresses this issue will contribute to the literature on communal violence.

Second, a study that looks more deeply into the incentives and motivations of local mechanism for communal peace may be useful. How do state electoral incentives influence specific mechanisms to maintain communal harmony at the state and society levels? How does the state influence local initiatives or do they? These questions follow Wilkinson's state-level argument to the local level via state power and will benefit the literature on ethnic violence.

Lastly, a study on the shift from communal to caste-based communal riots would be beneficial. In 2003, at least two ethnic riots broke out in Meerut between Saifis and Ansaris. As a segregated city with increasingly minimal inter-communal contact in residential areas, the shift in the targets and antagonisms in ethnic riots may suggest an important and minimally studied issue in ethnic violence. Similar to Pakistan, where heavy sectarian violence has occurred in the recent past, highly segregated Muslim areas in Meerut fragment into sectarian clashes with disparities in economic and political power between Muslim groups resembling the Hindu-Muslim cleavage. Although my study exclusively examines Hindu-Muslim riots in Meerut, these two religious groups are not monolithic entities. Certain neighborhoods in Meerut are dominated by Muslim beradaris and antagonisms between these groups are acute. The effect that intra-communal cleavages play on Meerut and other cities with large segregated Muslim populations may address the rising wave of intra-communal ethnic violence.

In conclusion, Hindu-Muslim riots are in decline in much of India due to changing electoral incentives. This paper has begun to fill the void in information on Meerut City while presenting a longitudinal case study examining the phenomenon of change over time in the occurrence of communal riots in a formerly riot-prone town. In doing so, key hypotheses explaining the existence or absence of communal violence were tested across time through newspaper reports, Indian and American scholarly sources, and in-depth fieldwork. Scholars

(Brass, Horowitz, Wilkinson, et al) have argued that communal riots are essentially political acts.

While many underlying factors are also at play during and leading up to communal riots,

findings in this study hold consistent with this assertion.