

## **Do Muslim voters prefer Muslim candidates? Co-religiosity and voting behaviour in India**

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### **Abstract**

*Does candidate religion influence vote choice? And if so, under what conditions does religion matter? Previous research has found that minority candidates can receive either an electoral advantage from members of their in-group and/or an electoral penalty from members of their out-group. However, the social mechanisms that underpin these candidate effects are not well understood. Some variant of social identity theory or empowerment theory is usually proffered to explain the ethnic advantage; whereas some variant of racial/religious discrimination is usually employed to explain the ethnic penalty. Both mechanisms imply an expressive calculus (identity / prejudice) and more instrumental mechanisms are rarely explored. Moreover, this research has been largely limited to studies of minorities in the advanced industrial democracies of Western Europe and North America. In this contribution we provide the first systematic analysis of the impact of candidate religion on voting behavior in an ethnically divided democracy: Uttar Pradesh, North India. The results from a series of conditional logit models shows that Muslims are indeed more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, but only when those candidates have a realistic chance of winning – there is thus a strong strategic element to their vote calculus. Moreover, there is no evidence that Hindus discriminate against Muslim candidates, or that parties face an electoral penalty for fielding a Muslim candidate.*

**Key words:** Voting behaviour, Muslims, Candidate traits, India

## Introduction

The descriptive representation of ethnic and religious minorities is a major issue in the study of ethnic minority disadvantage in politics (Fieldhouse and Sobelowska 2013). Visible ethnic minorities tend to be notably under-represented in many democratically elected bodies around the world (Kymlicka 1995, Bird 2005). Explanations for this relatively low level of representation have tended to focus on supply and demand side factors (Norris et al. 1992). On the supply side, minorities may be discriminated against in the selection process and face obstacles to becoming candidates in the first place. On the demand side, minorities may be discriminated against by voters, leaving their success limited to just a few areas with large minority populations. These demand side dynamics may in turn influence candidate selection strategy, and if parties think that minority candidates are discriminated against by voters then they may be less likely to offer them tickets, compounding the problem of minority under-representation. The issue of whether majority voters discriminate against minority candidates - or indeed whether minority voters are more likely to vote for minority candidates - is thus of critical importance to the debate surrounding the political representation of ethnic minorities.

In order to explore these demand side dynamics, over the last few years a growing body of research has examined the impact of candidate ethnicity and religion on voters. A number of studies show that visible minorities are more likely to vote for members of their own ethnic or racial group in the US (e.g. Wolfinger 1965, Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Collet 2005, Barreto 2007, Philpot and Walton 2007, McConaughy et al 2010) and in several North European countries (e.g. Teney 2010, Berg and Bjoklund 2011). By contrast, a number of studies have also shown that minority candidates are discriminated against by majority voters in both the US (e.g. Terkildsen 1993) and the UK (Stegmaier et al. 2013, Fisher et al 2014). There is thus growing evidence that candidate ethnicity matters, and that minority candidates can receive either an electoral advantage from members of their in-group and/or an electoral penalty from members of their out-group.

Broadly speaking the extant literature suggests a variety of both expressive and instrumental motivations. Voters may support a candidate from their own religion because they identify with that candidate or because they anticipate some benefit from having that

candidate in office. In order to try and distinguish between these two broad mechanisms we consider the strategic incentives that might *moderate* the strength of any candidate ethnicity effects. If voters support co-ethnic candidates for purely (or mainly) expressive reasons, then simply the presence of a co-ethnic candidate on the ballot should be enough to garner support from co-ethnic voters. However, if voters support a co-ethnic candidate for strategic reasons, then in Downsian terms the decision of whether to support a co-ethnic candidate may be off-set by the voter's calculation of how likely it is that the candidate in question will win. Despite the importance of political competition in many accounts of ethnic voting (Eifert et al 2012) this line of argument has not been explored with reference to studies on candidate ethnicity effects. Moreover, those candidate studies which do exist have largely been based on the United States and Western Europe. To date there has been very little comparative research on the effects of candidate ethnicity or religion on voting behaviour more generally, and none in developing democracies where ethnicity is often a salient political marker.

In this contribution we examine the impact of candidate religion on voting behavior in Uttar Pradesh, North India and whether this relationship is moderated by the structure of political competition and the structure of social demography. Given the bitter communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that have plagued the state, Uttar Pradesh represents an important test case to examine whether candidate's religion is a bar to political representation. Do Hindu voters discriminate against Muslim candidates? Conversely, do Muslims vote for Muslim candidates? To what extent does candidate religion influence voting behavior and how is this moderated by the political and social context?

In answering these questions we not only provide the first direct test of the impact of candidate religion on voters in India, but we also contribute to an emerging literature on the impact of candidate trait on voters more generally, and broaden the scope of inquiry to investigate the impact of candidate ethnicity in a different social context: that of an ethnically divided democracy. In this article we show that candidate religion does matter in the Indian context, and that Muslims behave in a classic Downsian fashion. We show that Muslims are indeed more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, but only when those candidates have a realistic chance of winning – there is thus a strong strategic element to

their vote calculus. Moreover, there is no evidence that Hindus discriminate against Muslim candidates, or that parties do not face an electoral penalty for fielding a Muslim candidate.

The article proceeds as follows. First we review the relevant literature that has addressed issues related to the ethnicity of candidates and elaborate our key hypotheses. Second we discuss the motivation for testing our argument on the Indian case. We then present the results from a series of conditional logit models, using data from an original database on candidates and voters in Uttar Pradesh, India. Finally, we conclude by presenting the implications of our findings and by suggesting avenues for further research.

### **Why candidate's religion matters?**

There is now a growing body of work that shows, at least as far as voters are concerned, descriptive – or social representation matters, and all else being equal, people with a given social characteristic prefer candidates or leaders who share that characteristic: research in other contexts has shown that women are more likely than men to vote for female candidates in the US (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Bendyna and Lake 1994; Cook 1994; Huddy 1994; Plutzer and Zipp 1996; Dolan 1998); working class voters are more likely to vote for working class candidates in the UK (Heath 2013); black people are more likely than white people to vote for black candidates and Latinos are more likely to support Latino candidates in the US (Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz 1995; Tate 1993; Terkildsen 1993).

One explanation for these findings is that the public use the social background of politicians to make judgments about what sort of policies they will pursue if elected to office. According to Popkin (1991: 63) "demographic facts provide a low-information shortcut to estimating a candidate's policy preferences... characteristics such as a candidate's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and local ties are important cues because the voter observes the relationship between these traits and real-life behavior as part of his daily experience". Similarly, Blais, Brady, and Crete (1992: 169) argue that "it is entirely reasonable to ask how much like oneself the potential agent is. The more an agent resembles oneself the more he or she might be expected reflexively to understand and act on one's own interests ... we might reasonably prefer leaders who embody our own

demographic characteristics". More generally, Cutler (2012) argues that sociodemographic dissimilarity with a political figure (e.g., party leader) tends to decrease a voter's expected utility from the election of that person.

With respect to ethnic or racial politics in particular, these ideas have been applied to the study of candidate traits in the US. McConaughy et al (2010) contend that the presence of a Latino on the ballot functions as a cue or informational short-cut that helps Latinos to judge if a candidate will be likely to represent the interests of their ethnic group. "That is, ethnic heritage can communicate a candidate's likely positions and commitments with regard to issues that Latinos believe affect the ethnic group" (ibid: 3). Along similar lines, Bobo and Gilliam (1990) argue that the presence of minority elected officials sends a contextual cue to minority citizens that the benefits of voting outweigh the costs of not voting (see also Bareto, 2007).

This body of work implies that voters tend to attach greater expected utility from socially similar rather than dissimilar candidates. If this candidate utility differential exceeds the party differential then voters may be prepared to compromise on their preferred party if the candidate from another party is socially similar. However, the strategic incentives that may influence this decision have rarely been explored. The implicit assumption is that voters will favour candidate over party. But if voters are prepared to abandon their favoured party for a socially similar candidate that stands no chance of winning, then this suggests that their motivation for doing so may not be quite as instrumental as is often presented. However, if voters behave in a strategic fashion they will not only take into consideration the marginal utility of having a socially similar candidate elected, they will also consider the probability of success for that candidate. Ethnic minorities may therefore discount the ethnicity or religion of uncompetitive candidates and be less inclined to compromise on their preferred party. By contrast, if minorities vote for purely expressive reasons or simply because they have been mobilised by a co-ethnic candidate then they may vote along ethnic lines, regardless of the competitiveness of the candidate. For similar reasons majority voters may be more likely to discriminate against minority candidates when two or more candidates are relatively evenly placed. In this sense candidate religion or ethnicity can act as a tie-break to separate parties that have a realistic chance of winning.

## Hypotheses

In order to explore these strategic incentives we test two main hypotheses. In particular we consider the social and political incentives for different groups to vote for (or against) a Muslim candidate. Firstly, we examine whether the impact of candidate religion on vote varies by Muslim population density. For example, Chandra (2009) emphasises the strategic importance of ethnic demography for structuring voter expectations about likely electoral outcomes. Chandra suggests that voters count heads from each ethnic group in their constituency, from which they can guess the relative position of each party if each ethnic group votes along ethnic lines. Voters will use this information, and only vote along ethnic lines if they think their own party or candidate will win. Muslims may be more likely to vote for Muslim candidates in constituencies with large Muslim populations. Anecdotal evidence supports this claim. For instance, Rudolph and Rudolph argue that, “where Muslims feel themselves a distinct and vulnerable minority, they avoid antagonizing or seek the protection of mainstream parties by voting as the general electorate does; they support the likely winner and governing party to be. In constituencies with high proportions of Muslims, however, Muslims tend to vote for Muslim candidates.” Thus, if Muslims ‘count heads’ then they may be more likely to vote for a Muslim candidate when Muslims represent a large part of the electorate, and they reason a Muslim candidate stands a good chance of winning.

By contrast, according to the ethnic threat hypothesis Hindus may be more likely to discriminate against Muslims in high density Muslim areas. This hypothesis has received empirical support in the USA, where a number of studies have found that racial diversity leads to interracial competition for scarce resources and political power (Blalock 1967), causing whites to feel threatened by large black populations. Motivated by this threat, whites will then provide greater support for racially conservative candidates and public policies (e.g., Black and Black 1987; Fossett and Kiecolt 1989; Glaser 1994; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989; Radcliff and Saiz 1995; Wright 1977). In addition a number of studies have examined the link between racial composition and black representation in the Senate and Congress and find that having larger black populations negatively affects the representation of black interests (Avery and Fine 2012).

This 'ethnic threat' hypothesis suggests that more diverse areas may lead Hindus to become more hostile to Muslims and so less likely to vote for Muslim candidates. According to this hypothesis larger Muslim populations cause Hindus to feel threatened by potential communal competition over social, economic, and political resources. Subsequently, Hindus will favour Hindu candidates who stand up for their interests. Thus, in constituencies with a high Muslim population Hindus may be more likely to discriminate against Muslim candidates.

Lastly, the political incentives hypothesis contends that Muslims will be more likely to vote for a Muslim candidate when that candidate stands a realistic chance of winning. If Muslims behave in a strategic fashion they will not only take into consideration the marginal utility of having a Muslim candidate elected, they will also consider the probability of success. They may therefore discount the religion of uncompetitive candidates and be less inclined to compromise on their preferred party. By contrast, if Muslims vote for purely expressive reasons or simply because they have been mobilised by a Muslim candidate then they may vote along communal lines, regardless of the competitiveness of the candidate. For similar reasons Hindus may be more likely to discriminate against Muslims when two or more candidates are relatively evenly placed. In this sense candidate religion can act as a tie-break to separate parties that have a realistic chance of winning.

### **The Political Representation of Muslims in India**

Uttar Pradesh represents a particularly instructive case study to test these hypotheses. Muslims constitute 18% of the population in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state, and 13% of the population nationally. Muslims have historically been under-represented in elected office at both the national and the state level in India (Ansari 2006, Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009, Jensenius 2013). For example, Ansari (2006, p. 64) shows between 1952 and 2004 Muslims held about 4% of the seats in the Indian Parliament after the 1952 election, which increased to about 9% in the 1980 elections and then declined somewhat to 5-7% in the elections between the mid-1980s and 2004. Ansari (2006) concludes that Muslims have been consistently under-represented and that parties' unwillingness to nominate Muslim candidates is one of the main reasons for this under-representation (see also Jensenius 2013).



Muslims are also among the most economically disadvantaged groups in India. A recent government report, set up to investigate the social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India identified "deficits and deprivation" in practically all dimensions of development (Sachar, 2006: 237), including literacy, access to education, employment in the government sector, and access to credit and loans. The situation was found to be 'particularly grave' in States with large Muslim populations, such as Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, the report found that in addition to the 'development deficit', the perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against and excluded is widespread, which exacerbates the problem. Uttar Pradesh has a long history of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims (Nandy *et al.* 1995; Van der Veer 1994). According to the Sachar report (2006: 13) Muslims still fear for their safety and security and there is an underlying feeling of injustice towards the compensation to riot victims, with a perception of government discrimination against their claims. These issues raise the question of whether Muslims are also at a disadvantage in the electoral arena and if Muslim candidates face discrimination at the ballot box.

In addition to these factors that may encourage Hindus to discriminate against Muslim candidates, there are also a number of reasons to believe that Muslims may be more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. Muslim conceptions of political representation have often tended to emphasize the communal group as the basic unit of representation and focus of loyalty. According to Shaikh (1986: 541) the abiding Islamic concern with communal solidarity has meant that Muslims tend, more often than not, to evaluate their situation in primarily communal terms. This suggests that the notion of descriptive representation may be particularly salient for Muslim voters. Accordingly, Muslim politicians may be thought to 'better represent' Muslims than Hindus do. Given the context of communal clashes and ethnic violence in India, and the role that political elites have played in orchestrating such violence, Muslims may well feel that it is important for their own security to have Muslim politicians in office. Moreover, they may feel that Muslim representatives are more likely to advance issues of conventional Muslim concern, such as the protection of Urdu and Muslim Personal Law.

In addition to these general issues of discrimination and representation there are a number of reasons for suspecting that candidate traits may be relatively important in the

Indian context, and in UP in particular. Firstly, although India uses a plurality electoral system which provides less of an incentive to vote specifically for candidates than open-list PR systems, the party system is characterised by very low levels of party cohesion where legislators frequently move between parties. Candidate traits and ideology are thus often thought to be important relative to party labels (Ziegfeld 2014), which may increase the impact of candidate traits - specifically religion - on the vote. Secondly, religion is a major source of electoral support (Heath 1999, Heath and Yadav 2009) and elections are often described as 'ethnic headcounts,' (Chandra 2004) where people vote for parties which contain members of their ethnic community rather than by comparing policy platforms. Thirdly, Uttar Pradesh is characterized by multiparty competition, with three secular parties that compete with each other to gain Muslim votes. The principle competition in the state involves the SP (*Samajwadi Party: Socialist Party*) which gets strong support among Yadavs, traditionally a low- to middle-ranking cluster of agricultural-pastoral castes (Michelutti 2008); the BSP (*Bahujan Samaj Party: Majority People's Party*) which gets strong support among the Jatavs and other Dalit (former untouchable) communities (Chandra 2004); the BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party: Indian People's Party*), a Hindu nationalist party, which gets strong support among the Hindu Upper Castes (Heath 1999), and Congress, which is the only party to lack a distinctive social base (Heath and Yadav 1999). Muslims are the only major ethnic group in the state who do not have a distinct political party to represent their interests – and partly for this reason they may be inclined to switch their support between the three secular parties (SP, BSP, Congress) according to the religion of the candidate.

**Table 1: Religion of party candidates (2012 State Election)**

From Table 1 we can see that the two main parties, the BSP and SP, gave a similar number of tickets to Muslims (about 1 in 5) in the 2012 State election. This is considerably more than the Congress managed (just 1 in 17) and the BJP put forward only a solitary Muslim candidate. On average Muslims comprised 30% of the electorate in seats where at least one of the major parties put forward a Muslim candidate, compared to just 12% of the electorate in seats where no parties put forward a Muslim candidate.<sup>1</sup> This strategy of

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<sup>1</sup> The overall constituency mean for the size of the Muslim population is 18.5% (st. dev 12.5). The constituency mean of the Muslim population in places where a given party put forward a Muslim candidate is 28.4% (st. dev 13.3) for the BSP; 30.3% (st.dev 14.2) for the SP; and 29.6% (14.1) for the INC, respectively. The variation in the

candidate selection is informed at least partly by the assumption that Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. But is this really the case? And is there any adverse effect? Are Hindus less likely to vote for a Muslim? And if so, is this off-set or even overtaken by any potential gains from the increased support of Muslim voters?

## **Data**

To test the hypotheses we link data on candidates religious background and constituency characteristics to cross-sectional survey data on individuals voting behaviour. Information on the religion of candidates has been coded by the name of the candidate on the ballot and cross-checked with online and printed press material, collected through fieldwork conducted in Uttar Pradesh before, during and after the election. Where additional information has been required, interviews have been conducted with local party officers, local political observers and some of the candidates themselves.

The individual-level data on voters come from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election Survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. A total of 7291 persons randomly selected from the latest electoral rolls were interviewed, from the second week of February 2012 till the first week of March (after polling but before counting of votes) in 399 locations in 101 constituencies spread across the state. The Assembly Constituencies and four polling booths within each sampled constituency were selected using Systematic Random Sampling. The social profile of the respondents interviewed largely matched the demographic profile of the state, except for women. The sample of respondents included 21% Dalits, 17% Muslims, 82% rural voters and 40% women respondents. The interviews were conducted by specially trained field investigators. The respondents were interviewed face-to-face at their home, preferably alone. The voting question was asked using a dummy ballot paper and dummy ballot box.

Data for constituency-level characteristics include electoral results from the Election Commission of India, constituency census data, and the reservation status of the seat. All seats reserved for Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe candidates have been dropped from the analysis. To measure the political incentives that may moderate the influence of

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Muslim population variable in constituencies with a Muslim candidate is therefore much the same to the overall variation of the variable.

candidate religion on voting behaviour we compute each party's *Distance from Contention* (for third and lower placed parties this is the difference between the 2012 share of the vote for the party and that for the second placed party, and 0 if the party came first or second in the constituency). This serves as a proxy for the local strength of the different parties, and distinguishes between those parties which voters might reasonably expect to have a realistic chance of winning (those which come first or second) and those parties which are less competitive (see also Fisher et al 2014).<sup>2</sup> Candidates who come third or lower may therefore be strategically abandoned and considered irrelevant. Summary data on the performance of the parties is presented in the Appendix. To measure the social incentives we control for Muslim population density in the constituency, derived from 2001 Census estimates and linked to Assembly Constituencies by the CSDS.

### **The impact of Candidate Religion on voting behaviour**

The first task is simply to examine the association between caste community and support for Muslim candidates in the 2012 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. Table 2 reports the percentage of voters from different ethnic backgrounds who voted for a Muslim candidate. There is some prima facie evidence to suggest that Muslims are somewhat more likely to vote for Muslim candidates than other communities. Overall 25% of Muslims voted for a Muslim candidate (from whatever party), compared to just 18% of Upper castes, 19% of Yadavs and 20% of Jatavs. To a certain extent these differences may reflect existing patterns

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<sup>2</sup> Ideally we would like to include some measure of party weakness prior to the elections, but no such data is available. Given the high level of electoral volatility in Indian elections, lagged data from the previous election is not a valid indicator (further compounded by the redrawing of constituency boundaries). That said, even if our measure is not perfect we still believe that it serves as a valid proxy for a number of reasons. The local constituency campaign is incredibly important in the Indian context and consequently voters at the local level also have a pretty good idea about which parties are most active and which parties are attracting the most support. Data from the 2012 survey shows that 75% of the electorate were contacted face to face by a party worker coming to their house during the campaign. In addition 32% attended an election meeting and 28% participated in a rally. Voters thus have a high degree of exposure to the campaign and this exposure means that they have a reasonable basis from which to evaluate which candidates are competitive and which are not. In a separate survey (from the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, data made available by the CSDS on request) a question asked respondents which party they thought was most likely to win in their parliamentary constituency. The modal response at the constituency level was correct in 75% of the cases. This indicates that the average voter had a reasonably good idea of who would win. However, it should be noted that our measure of DFC treats the top two candidates equally. Whereas voters might struggle to predict the actual winner in a close contest, they should find it much easier to identify who is competitive and who is not. The DFC is thus based on more realistic assumptions about voter expectations than, for example, a measure of marginality.

of party support, since for example, upper castes are more likely than other communities to vote for the BJP, which put forward just one Muslim candidate.

**Table 2: Support for Muslim candidates by Caste**

In order to test the link between candidate religion and voting behavior more systematically we must consider how the choice of candidate is influenced by the alternatives on offer and how this choice is moderated by social and political factors. There are a number of challenges involved in estimating the effect of candidate traits on voting behaviour in multi-candidate elections, which make common econometric choice models, such as multinomial logit, inadvisable (see Alvarez and Nagler 1998). One solution is the conditional logit model, which is “conditional on the characteristics of the choices” (Alvarez and Nagler 1998: 56) and so takes into account measures of candidate characteristics. In order to estimate the effects of candidate religion on voting behaviour we therefore specify a conditional logit model (Long and Freese, 2005). The model uses stacked data, with four rows for each respondent, one for each party. The model allows case specific and alternative specific variables as predictors. This enables a single coefficient for the effects of candidate religion, or co-religion, to be estimated regardless of the candidate’s party. In formal terms the model can be specified:

$$\Pr(y_i = p/x_i, z_i) = \frac{\exp(z_{ip}\gamma + x_i\beta_p)}{\sum_{j=1}^J \exp(z_{ij}\gamma + x_i\beta_j)}$$

Where  $z_{ip}$  contains values of the alternative specific variables for alternative  $p$  and case  $i$ . In our model there are four alternatives for party  $p$ : SP, BSP, Congress and BJP. Then  $\gamma$  is a parameter indicating the effect of the alternative specific variables on the probability of voting for one party over another. In general, for each variable  $z_k$ , there are  $J$  values of the variable for each case, but only the single parameter  $\gamma_k$ . This enables a single coefficient for the effects of candidate religion to be estimated regardless of the candidate’s party. We also tested for evidence of variation in these coefficients across parties. As in a multinomial logit model,  $x_i$  contains case specific independent variables for case  $i$ , and  $\beta_p$  contains coefficients for the effects on alternative  $p$  relative to the base alternative (SP). See Long and Freese (2005) for more details.

To capture political incentives we control for *Distance from Contention* (for third and lower placed parties this is the difference between the 2012 share of the vote for the party and that for the second placed party, and 0 if the party came first or second in the constituency). This is alternative-specific and so the values vary across the party options for a given respondent. To capture social incentives we control for Muslim population density in the constituency. This is case-specific and so three coefficients are estimated (BSP\*Muslim population, BJP\*Muslim population and INC\*Muslim population), for the effects on voting BSP, BJP and INC respectively, each relative to the baseline SP (just as a regular multinomial logit/probit model would have three such coefficients).

Table 3 shows the coefficients from two conditional logit models of vote choice for Hindus and Muslims who voted for the SP, BSP, INC and BJP. Model 1 shows that the effect of Muslim candidature on Hindu voters and Model 2 shows the effect on Muslim voters. The first thing to notice is that for both Hindu and Muslim voters there is a strong strategic element to the vote calculus. The distance from contention term is significant and negative, indicating that voters from both communities are less likely to support a party when that party does not stand a good chance of winning (see also Chandra 2009, Choi 2009). There is also some evidence that party support varies by the size of the Muslim population in the constituency. Hindu voters are somewhat more likely to vote for the BSP than the SP in high density Muslim areas, and Muslim voters are somewhat less likely to vote for the BSP and somewhat more likely to vote for Congress than they are to vote for the SP in high density Muslim areas. For both Hindus and Muslims support for the BJP does not vary by the size of the Muslim population.

Turning to the impact of candidate religion, we can see from Model 1 that there is no significant impact on Hindu voters. Hindus are neither more or less likely to vote for a party if that party puts forward a Muslim candidate. This goes against the ethnic penalty hypothesis, and perhaps validates the decision of the SP and BSP to put forward many Muslim candidates. Fears about a Hindu backlash against such a strategy are therefore somewhat misplaced. Unlike Britain, where Muslim candidates are discriminated against at the ballot box or the USA, where black candidates are discriminated against, in India there appears to be little evidence of any ethnic penalty for Muslim candidates. Given the historic communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims this is perhaps surprising. It may be that

the Hindus who are prejudiced against Muslims self-select towards the BJP - or it may be that whatever prejudice exists among the supporters of the three secular parties, it is not enough to put them off voting for their preferred party when it has a realistic chance of winning.

By contrast Model 2 indicates that Muslim voters *are* significantly more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. When we take into account the size of the Muslim population in the constituency and how competitive the party is locally, Muslims are more likely to support that party if it puts forward a Muslim candidate. This supports the social representation hypothesis. Muslims in Uttar Pradesh may lack institutional representation through the reservation system or a party that explicitly stands up for their interests, like the Dalits have with the BSP, but by voting for Muslim candidates they increase the chances of getting Muslim voices in parliament.

### **Table 3          Conditional logit models of party vote choice**

We can get a broad impression of the magnitude of the effect of Muslim candidates on Muslim voters by generating marginal effects on the predicted probabilities from Model 2 in Table 3. Marginal effects (differences in predicted probabilities) from that model are presented for different scenarios in Table 4. The first row shows the predicted probabilities from the model of voting for each party for a Muslim in a constituency with no Muslim candidates, where the other variables are set at their means (i.e. average distance from contention and Muslim population). The bottom three rows of Table 4 show how the baseline probabilities would change if each party were alone in fielding a Muslim candidate (apart from for the BJP where such a simulation would be meaningless). They show that the chances of voting for the party would increase by between 7.4 and 10.5 percentage points. The differences in the effects for the different parties are largely a function of the baseline probabilities and nothing should be inferred from them since the model has just one parameter for the effect of Muslim candidature on the log odds scale, which is the same for all parties. Similarly the estimated effects on the probability scale vary with different values of the control variables, so the figures in Table 4 are intended to be indicative not definitive. Broadly though, this simulation does suggest that the average effect of Muslim candidature is substantial, and in a competitive constituency with a large Muslim population, could be

the difference between winning and losing.

**Table 4            Marginal effects on voting probabilities of Muslims in response to Muslim candidature**

Table 5 considers the strategic incentives that may act as potential moderating factors. First, we do not find any evidence to suggest that the effect of Muslim candidature on Muslim voters depends upon the ethnic composition of the constituency. Unlike Carsey (1995) or Avery and Fine (2012), though in line with Fisher et al (2014) we found no tendency for the effect of minority candidature to depend on the ethnic composition of the constituency, nor for the Muslim candidate effect to be stronger where there is a greater proportion of Muslims. Similarly we do not find any evidence that the effect of Muslim candidature on Hindus varies by ethnic composition. This (null) finding goes against the racial threat hypothesis, and suggests that in the Indian context Hindus do not discriminate against Muslim candidates, even where Muslims constitute a sizeable group.

The relative size of the Muslim population within the electorate may inform party strategy in terms of whether or not to put forward a Muslim candidate, but appears to have little effect on how Hindu or Muslim voters respond to such a candidate. Nonetheless, given the ethnic advantage that Muslim candidates receive from Muslim voters, and the absence of any backlash or ethnic penalty from Hindu voters, putting forward a Muslim candidate in an area with many Muslims would appear to offer a party a competitive advantage.

The second moderating factor tests the hypothesis that the effect of Muslim candidature depends upon the closeness of the race. We do not find any strategic effects on Hindus, but we do find significant effects on Muslims. Model 4 indicates that Muslims *are* significantly more likely to vote for Muslim candidates when the candidate in question has a realistic chance of winning. Importantly, the impact of Muslim candidature varies by the competitiveness of the party at the constituency level. Muslims will not vote for a party simply because it has a Muslim candidate, but rather - when a party has a realistic chance of winning - the candidate's religion can act as an important tie-breaker. However, Muslims will not risk compromising on their preferred party by wasting their vote on a co-ethnic candidate that has little chance of winning. This provides further support to the social



representation hypothesis, and suggests that Muslims behave in quite a Downsian way, taking into account both the marginal utility of having a representative from one community rather than another, and the probability of success of that candidate winning.

Generating marginal effects of interaction terms in non-linear models is not straightforward. An alternative, and perhaps more meaningful approach, is to exponentiate the coefficients and interpret the interaction in terms of the natural metric of the model (Buis 2010). For conditional logit models these are the odds ratios. The odds ratio for Muslim candidature is 1.703, which means that the odds of a Muslim voting for a party is 1.703 times greater when the party puts forward a Muslim candidate than when it puts forward a Hindu candidate. Since there is an interaction effect between Muslim candidature and distance from contention, this effect of Muslim candidature refers to candidates who come first or second in the constituency (that is those candidates who scored zero on the DFC term). The magnitude of this effect is quite substantial. Within this category we expect to find five Muslims voting for a party when it puts forward a Muslim candidate for every three Muslims voting for that party when it puts forward a Hindu candidate.

The interaction effect tells us by how much the effect of Muslim candidature on vote choice differs by distance from contention, but does so in multiplicative terms. The results also show that this interaction is significant. The odds ratio for the interaction term is 0.961 which means that the odds of voting for a party if it puts forward a Muslim candidate is 0.961 times lower for every point increase on the distance from contention term. Since positive effects are greater than one and negative effects are between zero and one, we can compare the magnitudes of positive and negative effects by taking the inverse of the negative effect (or vice versa). For example, the positive factor change of 1.70 for competitive Muslim candidates has the same magnitude as a negative factor change of  $0.59=1/1.70$  for uncompetitive Muslim candidates when  $DFC=13$  ( $0.961^{13}=0.596$ ). This indicates that for a candidate who trails the second placed candidate by a noticeable amount (when DFC equals 13 percentage points) the odds of a Muslim voting for the party if it puts forward a Muslim candidate are about the same as when it puts forward a Hindu candidate. Thus whatever gains are made by putting forward a Muslim are lost when the candidate trails the top two by around 13 percentage points. In practical terms, this means that although Muslims may still be more likely to vote for a third placed party when it puts

forward a Muslim candidate, they are probably only likely to do so when it is difficult to distinguish between the second and third placed candidates (and so the DFC terms is small).

We also investigated whether the propensity to vote for a Muslim candidate varied according to the local strength of different political parties. In particular, when the BJP is strong, Muslims may be less likely to compromise on their preferred party by voting for a Muslim candidate and risk letting the BJP win. However, we do not find any evidence of this over and above the strategic incentives already considered.

#### **Table 5      Conditional logit models of party vote choice with moderating variables**

#### **Conclusions**

To summarize, Muslim voters are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, generating an average electoral gain for Muslim candidates in the order of seven to eleven percentage points, and more in close contests. Where the Muslim population is sizeable, this gain could be the difference between winning and losing. Moreover, there is little evidence that fielding a Muslim candidate generates a backlash among Hindu voters (though there may well be differences between different sections of the Hindu community). There is thus little to suggest that Muslim candidates face an electoral penalty, and if anything, they have an electoral advantage in areas with high Muslim populations since they appear to gain votes from Muslim voters without any apparent loss of support among Hindu voters.

These findings have important implications for minority representation. Muslims in India are amongst the most disadvantaged groups in society. They lack formal institutional political representation through the reservation system and do not have a distinctive 'Muslim' party that represents their interests. The only way that Muslims can gain political representation then is by gaining leverage within existing political parties from within. There are thus high stakes attached to descriptive representation. In this sense the elections in 2012 represent something of a watershed. For the first time Muslim MLAs achieved near proportional representation in the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly. We suggest that the reasons for this are three-fold: Firstly, Muslims are strategic in the circumstances under which they will vote for a co-ethnic candidate. The effect of co-religiosity matters much more in tight contests than it does in less competitive contests. There is thus less risk of

wasting or splitting votes on a non-competitive candidate, which could in turn let in a less preferred political party. Secondly, there is no evidence of a backlash among Hindus to Muslim candidates. Even in constituencies with high Muslim populations or in areas where the BJP is strong and the idiom of Hindutva might be thought to be culturally entrenched, Muslim candidates do not appear to suffer any ethnic penalty. These two factors mean that there is little political risk, and potentially a substantial political advantage, for 'secular' parties such as the SP, BSP and Congress to put forward a Muslim candidate, particularly in constituencies where Muslims constitute a substantial size of the electorate. There are thus strong electoral incentives to increase the supply of Muslim candidates, which in turn makes the election of such candidates more likely.

These findings have implications for theories of ethnic voting and support for co-ethnic candidates more generally. Rather than being a purely expressive act, as theories based on social identity imply, the results of our analysis show that Muslims in India behave in quite a Downsian way, taking into account the probability of success that a candidate from their own community will win. The extent to which this leads to tangible outcomes, however, depends in large part on the political context, and Muslim co-ordination may not always be enough to ensure Muslim representation. Indeed, the parliamentary elections of 2014 saw the BJP sweep the polls, winning 71 out of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, and consequently no Muslim MPs were elected to office. Co-ordination does not therefore guarantee representation in the same way as more formal institutional arrangements based on quotas or reservation. But what co-ordination does achieve is to maximize the chances of electoral success for Muslim candidates in an open competition. The ways in which Muslims have achieved this level of co-ordination – and particularly the role that local Mosques and Immans play in mobilising and co-ordinating voters, may then provide important lessons for how to help boost minority representation in other contexts, both across India and beyond.

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**Table 1: Religion of party candidates (2012 State Election)**

	<b>BSP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>BJP</b>
Muslim candidates	88 (21.9)	83 (20.8)	20 (6.4)	1 (0.3)
Muslims elected	15 (18.8)	43 (19.4)	3 (12.0)	0
Muslims runner-up	38 (42.2)	13 (16.7)	3 (11.5)	0

**Source:** Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Legislators' data set.

**Table 2: Support for Muslim candidates by Caste**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Voted for a Muslim candidate (%)</b>	<b>N</b>
Upper caste	18	1436
Yadav	19	769
OBC	17	1191
Jatav	20	738
SC	19	546
Muslim	25	1015
Other	15	102

**Table 3** Conditional logit models of party vote choice

	<b>Model 1: Hindus only</b>	<b>Model 2: Muslims only</b>
<b>Party (baseline=SP)</b>		
<b>BSP</b>	-0.407*** (0.071)	-0.426* (0.173)
<b>BJP</b>	-0.491*** (0.101)	-1.481*** (0.282)
<b>INC</b>	-0.617*** (0.104)	-1.058*** (0.206)
<b>Distance from contention</b>	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.041*** (0.006)
<b>Muslim population*BSP</b>	0.008** (0.003)	-0.020*** (0.006)
<b>Muslim population*BJP</b>	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.011 (0.010)
<b>Muslim population*INC</b>	0.003 (0.004)	0.025*** (0.007)
<b>Muslim candidate</b>	0.016 (0.060)	0.434*** (0.131)
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-4537	-900

**Notes:** \*\*\* p<0.005; \*\* p<0.01; \* p<0.05. Models 1 contains 14090 observations and Model 2 contains 3232 observations.

**Table 4**      **Marginal effects on voting probabilities of Muslims in response to Muslim candidature**

	SP	BSP	BJP	INC
Baseline voting probabilities (no Muslim candidates):	52.2	18.4	6.6	22.7
<i>Change in probability if:</i>				
SP Muslim, other candidates not Muslim	+10.5	-4.1	-1.4	-0.5
BSP Muslim, other candidates not Muslim	-4.7	+7.4	-0.6	-2.1
INC Muslim, other candidates not Muslim	-5.7	-2.0	-0.7	+8.4

Note: Change figures are percentage points. Simulations from Model (2) in Table 3. See text for more details.

**Table 5** Conditional logit models of party vote choice with moderating variables

	<b>Model 1: Hindus</b>	<b>Model 2: Hindus</b>	<b>Model 3: Muslims</b>	<b>Model 4: Muslims</b>
<b>Party (baseline=SP)</b>				
<b>BSP</b>	-0.406*** (0.072)	-0.406*** (0.071)	-0.410* (0.173)	-0.371* (0.174)
<b>BJP</b>	-0.495*** (0.103)	-0.480*** (0.101)	-1.545*** (0.292)	-1.514*** (0.282)
<b>INC</b>	-0.620*** (0.106)	-0.608*** (0.105)	-1.116*** (0.216)	-1.086*** (0.206)
<b>Distance from contention</b>	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.003)	-0.041*** (0.006)	-0.032*** (0.007)
<b>Muslim candidate</b>	-0.009 (0.136)	-0.002 (0.136)	0.133 (0.331)	0.532*** (0.331)
<b>Muslim population*BSP</b>	0.008** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	-0.021*** (0.006)	-0.023*** (0.006)
<b>Muslim population*BJP</b>	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.010)
<b>Muslim population*INC</b>	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.028*** (0.007)	0.023*** (0.007)
<b>Muslim candidate*Muslim population</b>	0.001 (0.004)	-	0.010 (0.010)	-
<b>Muslim candidate*Contention</b>	-	0.008 (0.009)	-	-0.040* (0.016)
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-4537	-4536	-900	-897

**Notes:** \*\*\* p<0.005; \*\* p<0.01; \* p<0.05. Model 1 contains 14090 observations Model 2 contains 3232 observations.

**Appendix A: Performance of parties (2012 State Election)**

	<b>BSP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>BJP</b>
<b>No. of candidates</b>	387	394	347	383
<b>Winners</b>	80	224	28	47
<b>Runners up</b>	205	76	31	54
<b>Mean vote share</b>	25.7	29.3	13.1	15.2
<b>DFC</b>				
<b>Mean</b>	2.06	2.26	13.99	12.49
<b>Std. Dev</b>	4.90	5.85	10.3	11.37
<b>Median</b>	0	0	13.80	11.48
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> quartile</b>	23.25	28.31	34.54	36.6

**Source:** Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Legislators' data set.