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## The Origins of National Humiliation Narratives and When They Succeed: the Case of India

This chapter uses evidence from Indian politics during the twentieth century to examine two hypotheses about when political groups disseminate narratives of national humiliation.<sup>1</sup> The first is that political groups strategically propagate narratives of national humiliation when they can avoid responsibility for the event they are framing as humiliating and instead pin the blame on their political opponents (H3a). The second is that political groups will use national humiliation narratives to promote policies that pose short-term costs to the public but can be framed as necessary to defend the nation (H3b). This chapter further assesses how these hypotheses fair against the alternative explanations that humiliating events, legitimacy crises, and/or international bargaining lead political groups to propagate national humiliation narratives. Lastly, this chapter uses observations from this case to help construct an explanation of when narratives of national humiliation resonate with their audience.

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<sup>1</sup>See the previous chapter for a discussion of case selection and how the evidence from the cases should be evaluated. See Chapter 2 for the theory that produces these hypotheses.

# 1 Period Selection

I divide my discussion the strategies adopted by the main political groups competing for power in India into two time periods based on changes in the independent variables (Lind 2010, 21). The first period begins when conceptions of Indian national identity start forming and ends at independence. I start a new period after independence because the strategic incentives to deploy national humiliation narratives change once domestic political groups compete against each other rather than the British Raj for political power.

Table 1 summarizes the main variables for each political-group-period. It includes information about whether the group promoted narratives of national humiliation, whether the group had the opportunity to strategically blame a political opponent with such a narrative, who the humiliator was according to this narrative, and what political opponent they sought to blame with it (Target). Table 2 likewise summarizes the key variables concerned in alternative explanations along with variation in the dependent variable. It conveys whether a war took place during the period, which is significant for alternative explanations that attribute national humiliation narratives to traumatic events and bargaining during international disputes, as well as whether the political group faced a legitimacy crises during each period.

Just as in the previous chapter, strategic blame covaries the most closely with the use of humiliation narratives. Also in common with the previous chapter, the fact that wars take place at the country level rather than at the political-group level limits their ability to explain variation among political groups in the same country. Further, unlike in the previous chapter, the legitimacy crisis explanation's variation at the political-group level does not help it provide a better fit. In fact, every period witnesses national humiliation narratives from groups that do not face legitimacy crises but not from groups that do. This is the opposite of what the legitimacy crisis explanation predicts.

In common with the previous chapter, this analysis abstracts away from significant divides within each of these groups to examine group political strategy as a whole. Further, this

Table 1: India Case Summary

Group	Period	Narrative?	Strategic Blame?	Humiliator	Target
British Raj	1900–1947	No	No	NA	NA
Hindu Nationalists	1900–1947	Yes	Yes	Muslims and Britain	Muslims and Britain
Congress	1900–1947	Yes	Yes	Britain	Britain
Hindu Nationalists	1948–1999	Yes	Yes	Muslims	Congress
Congress	1948–1999	No	No	NA	NA

Table 2: Alternative Explanations Summary

Group	Period	Narrative?	War?	Legitimacy Crisis?
British Raj	1900–1947	No	Yes	Yes
Hindu Nationalists	1900–1947	Yes	Yes	No
Congress	1900–1947	Yes	Yes	No
Hindu Nationalists	1948–1999	Yes	Yes	No
Congress	1948–1999	No	Yes	Yes

analysis covers a vast time span and does not aspire to provide complete account of Indian politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, the goal is to capture the key points of continuity and change in groups’ use of national humiliation narratives as well as in the independent variables.

## 2 National Humiliation Narratives in India

### 2.1 Forging National Identity (India 1900–1947)

This section analyzes political groups in India from 1900–1947. It shows the importance of the formation of national identities to the propagation of national humiliation narratives. National humiliation narratives only arise after national identity formation. Further, whether or not a group’s national identity included certain subgroups of the population, particularly Muslims, determined whether or not that group could frame members of those subgroups as humiliators. Both of the groups that promoted national humiliation narratives during this period, the Hindu nationalists and the Indian National Congress, sought to mobilize individuals to resist British Colonial rule, which required personal sacrifice in the name of protecting the nation from colonizers.

Hindu nationalists are the primary promoters of national humiliation narratives in India. The construction of Hindu nationalist ideology took place from the 1870s to the 1920s (Jaffrelot 1999, 5-6). One of the most important figures in its formulation was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, whose book *Hindutva* is a “basic text” for Hindu nationalists (Jaffrelot 1999, 25). Muslims and Christians are not part of the Hindu nation in this view (Savarkar 1923, 80). Savarkar represents Hindus as victimized by foreign invaders and having fallen from the past greatness of the Vedic eras. He writes, “It was nearly all Asia, quickly to be followed by nearly all Europe[...] Heaven and Hell making a common cause—such were the forces, overwhelmingly furious, that took India by surprise [sic] the day that Mohmad crossed the Indus and invaded her” (Savarkar 1923, 38). However, he argues India can reclaim its past greatness, “If we would we can build on this foundation of Hindutva a future greater than what any other people on earth can yet dream of:—greater even than our own Past” (Savarkar 1923, 124).

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925 by K. B. Hedgewar whom Savarkar heavily influenced (Jaffrelot 1999, 33), and associated Hindu nationalist groups, together called the *Sangh Parivar*, are the key Hindu nationalist political actors in India. This collective also includes groups formed later, like the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the World Hindu Congress (VHP). Goyal writes that the RSS’ core beliefs are that “Hindus are the nation” and that “the history of India is the history of the struggle of the Hindus for protection and preservation of their religion and culture against the onslaught of these [Muslim and Christian] aliens; the threat continues because the power is in the hands of those who do not believe this nation as a Hindu Nation; those who talk of national unity as the unity of all those who live in this country are motivated by the selfish desire of cornering minority votes and are therefore traitors” (Goyal 2000, 17-18). The bond at the root of both the BJS’ and later the BJP’s ideology is common ancestry for Hindus and “common suffering at the hands of (mostly Muslim) invaders” (Guha 2008, 743). This is the Hindu nationalist national humiliation narrative in

brief.

In contrast with the Hindu nationalists, Congress' vision of the nation of India included Muslims (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 136-37).<sup>2</sup> Because Muslims living in India were considered part of the nation, they could not be branded humiliators of the nation. However, during this period, the British Raj ruled India, allowing Congress to construct British rule as humiliating.

### 2.1.1 Strategic Blame

Those using narratives of national humiliation in India targeted political opponents. Hindu nationalists blamed the Muslim Mughal Empire for weakening India and allowing British conquest. This parallels Chinese nationalist criticism of 'foreign' Manchu rule (discussed in the previous chapter), which was occurring around the same time period. They also blamed India's current British rulers for misrule (Chatterjee 1993, 93). The claim that outsiders living among the nation weakened it and allowed it to be defeated is akin to the "stab-in-the-back legend" propagated by German nationalists in the inter-war period that groups outside their definition of the nation, such as "Jewish left-Liberals," were responsible for Germany's defeat in WWI (Childers 1983, 41). The protection of cows was a strategic issue for Hindu nationalists because it targeted both Muslims and the British who "came to be seen as allied beef-eating barbarians determined to insult the deepest religious sentiments of the Hindus" (Veer 1994, 92).

Congress too used national humiliation during this period. M. Gandhi "declared a 'National Humiliation Day' of mass demonstrations in April 1919 to inspire the Indian nation to fight against British imperialism" (Callahan 2004, 203). Unlike the Hindu nationalists, Congress only labeled Britain and not Muslims as the humiliator. The use of national humil-

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<sup>2</sup>During this period the divide between Hindu nationalists and Congress is less clear than it was after independence. Even though Hindu nationalists had a very different view of the Indian nation than those who ultimately came to dominate Congress, both groups wanted Indian self-governance, and, during this period, Congress was a big tent group that included many who agreed about Indian self-governance but disagreed over other major issues (Jaffrelot 1999, 19). For this reason it is possible to find Hindu nationalists during this period associated with the Congress party.

iation narratives by Congress and Hindu nationalists during this period fit the predictions of H3a because each party can avoid responsibility for the initial colonization of India by Britain, since they were not in power at the time. Further they can blame Britain, which governed India during this period.

### **2.1.2 Motivating Sacrifice**

Both Congress and Hindu nationalists sought to motivate followers to resist British colonization. Resisting British colonization was costly because of the possibility of retaliation from the colonial government. Gandhi's strategy of mobilizing nonviolent resistance required followers to "sacrifice" and accept "the risk of severe consequences" (Mantena 2012, 463). While the RSS fiercely opposed Gandhi's nonviolent approach to independence (Jaffrelot 1999, 46-47), they too demanded sacrifice from their followers. From the Hindu nationalist perspective, Hindus were at war with both the Muslims and the British. To defend the nation in this conflict, the RSS sought to enact "psychosocial reform" in India (Jaffrelot 2010, 206). For the RSS, the "salvation' of their nation" could only be attained with "renunciation" and "sacrifice" (Jaffrelot 2010). That both parties disseminating national humiliation narratives sought to mobilize followers to sacrifice in the name of defending the nation is consistent with H3b.

### **2.1.3 Alternative Explanations**

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are three possible alternative explanations for when political groups disseminate national humiliation narratives. The first category of alternative explanations are events-based explanations that argue humiliating or traumatic events lead to national humiliation narratives. The second are the legitimacy crisis explanations, which argue political groups use narratives of national humiliation during times when they face legitimacy crises. The third claims that national humiliation narratives are a way to signal resolve to adversaries in international bargaining. This period of Indian politics offers some

evidence for both events-based explanations and the bargaining explanation but not the legitimacy explanation.

For events-based explanations, the evidence is mixed. British colonization of India was a violent and traumatic process. Millions of Indians starved under British rule while wheat was exported to Britain (Osborne 2016). Britain also dragged India into its wars, including World War I, in which over a million Indians served, and World War II (Metcalfe and Metcalfe 2012, 163, 204). The Raj extracted Indian wealth for use elsewhere in the British Empire, and India's economy as a percentage of the world's economy shrank from 23% at the beginning of the 1700s to about 3% at the time of independence (Tharoor 2017). Resistance was brutally suppressed, for example, estimates range from hundreds to a thousand peaceful protesters killed by soldiers under British command in the 1919 Amritsar Massacre. Events-based explanations predict that events like these give rise to national humiliation narratives.

Consistent with events based explanations, both Congress and Hindu nationalists pointed to British rule as a source of India's humiliation. Less consistent with events based explanations is the divide between Congress and Hindu nationalists over whether Muslims, both in the form of the Mughal Empire, which ruled India prior to the British Raj, and contemporary Muslims living in India, were humiliators. The Mughal Empire did conquer India by force and used fortified military bases and checkpoints to enforce its rule (Robb 2011, 108). If getting conquered is sufficient to create national humiliation narratives, then these events should speak for themselves, and Indians should generally interpret them as humiliating. That different Indian political groups had different accounts of whether this period constituted a humiliation is evidence that events themselves are not sufficient for humiliation narratives.

As for the legitimacy crisis explanation, neither the Hindu nationalists nor Congress ruled India during this period, so the legitimacy of their rule could not come into crisis. If legitimacy crises were sufficient to create national humiliation narratives, then it should have been the British Raj and not indigenous political groups spinning narratives of national humiliation. India's British rulers could not do so both because they did not share a national

identity with the potential audience for this narrative and because they could hardly separate themselves from their rule of India, which was the event being framed as humiliating.

Proponents of the bargaining explanation could argue that both Congress and Hindu nationalists used national humiliation as a way to increase their bargaining power against the British. National humiliation could have been a way for these groups to increase the credibility of the threat of sustained resistance, nonviolent or otherwise, to British rule. Since it was the British that these parties were competing against for power and this competition was the reason both parties required sacrifice from their supporters, it is impossible to separate evidence from this period for the bargaining explanation from evidence that political groups used national humiliation narratives to strategically blame opponents and motivate their audience to sacrifice for the nation. Judging between these explanations requires examining the evidence from Chinese case in the previous chapter and well as evidence from India in the following period.

## **2.2 After Independence (India 1948–1999)**

The period from 1948–1999 in Indian politics shows the importance of being able to avoid being linked with the humiliating event for groups considering propagating national humiliating narratives. Now that the British were out of India, blaming them was less relevant and Congress' cooperation Britain during the transition period meant they were less able to disassociate themselves from Britain. For these reasons, Congress ceased using national humiliation narratives. In contrast, Hindu nationalists were able to continue to spin their narrative framing Muslims as the humiliator and pin the political blame on Congress for policies they claimed favored Muslims. Both parties choices with regards to using national humiliation narratives are consistent with H3a. Further, Hindu nationalist consistently pushed for more costly, aggressive foreign policy responses than the Congress did and used national humiliation narratives to try to mobilize support for these positions. This is consistent with H3b.

This period also shows the continued importance of national identity to the construction of national humiliation narratives. Though it was certainly a traumatic event, neither the Hindu nationalists nor Congress framed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 as a national humiliation. This is likely because the assassin was a Sikh, which both groups included in their conception of national identity. In contrast, Hindu nationalists' exclusion of Muslims from their conception of the nation allow them to continue to frame Muslims as humiliators and blame Congress for its perceived pro-Muslim policies.

Specifically, the Birthplace of Ram (*Ram Janmabhoomi*) movement framed Muslims as humiliators for destroying a Hindu temple marking Ram's birthplace and blamed Congress for not allowing Hindus to reclaim this sacred ground. This pattern of casting blame on a political opponent is consistent with H3a. The Birthplace of Ram movement demanded costly participation in illegal activities from Hindu nationalist followers that resulted in some of them being shot. Hindu nationalists' use of humiliation narratives to mobilize sacrifices to defend a site of importance to Hindu nationalist identity is consistent with H3b.

### **2.2.1 Strategic Blame**

After independence, the alliance between Hindu nationalists and Congress broke down as various groups within India began to compete for political power. It was no longer strategic for Congress to use narratives of national humiliation against the British because the British, including the last viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, cooperated with Congress in getting the princes, who controlled various princely states, to join India (Guha 2008, 56). Congress wanted to present itself as the successor to the British Raj, and Nehru encouraged Mountbatten to remain a year in the position of governor general after the partition of India and Pakistan (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 225). Crucially, this cooperation meant that Congress could not escape blame if it used a narrative of national humiliation against the British. Further, Congress' inclusion of Muslims as part of the nation meant that it could not target Muslims as humiliators.

Unlike Congress, it was easy for Hindu nationalists to frame Muslims and Pakistan as humiliators of the nation. Hindu nationalists did not consider Muslims conationals. Instead, they accused their main rivals for power, Congress, of adopting ‘pseudo-secularist’ policies that favored Muslims (Singh 2013, 98). For them, Congress’ construction of a secular state that included Muslims was an attempt to “colonize the nation” (Veer 1994, 144). This divergence in use of national humiliation narratives between Congress and Hindu nationalists on the basis of who could be blamed supports H3a.

The Hindu nationalists needed a political party to make political gains from targeting Congress with this criticism. They founded the BJS in 1951 with the goal of uniting all Hindus into a voting block (Guha 2008, 145). The RSS was heavily involved in the founding of the BJS, and the BJS “adopted an instrumentalist strategy, manipulating identity symbols for political mobilization” (Jaffrelot 2010, 208-209).

One tactic Hindu nationalists used to mobilize support was cow protection. Cow protection was a strategic issue for Hindu nationalists because it united all Hindus in a way that excluded Muslims, which meant parties that sought Muslim support, such as Congress, could not address it (Veer 1994, 66). This allowed Hindu nationalists to blame Congress for allowing outsiders to slaughter the revered animal. In 1952, Golwalkar, who succeeded Hedgewar as head of the RSS, wrote that cow protection was vital to “wipe out all signs that reminded us of our past slavery and humiliation” (Guha 2008, 634).

Another such tactic regarded history textbooks. In 1977, in a move that resonates with later moves in China to condemn textbooks seen as making light of Japan’s invasion, the BJS campaigned against textbooks that did not sufficiently condemn what they saw as Muslim invaders during the Medieval period (Jaffrelot 1999, 287-88). While historic Muslims were the humiliator, Hindu nationalists tied this narrative to Congress’ current policies, which they labeled “excessively secularist and progressive formulations” (Rudolph and Rudolph 1983, 16). This pattern of blame attribution is consistent with H3a.

The key symbol of national humiliation towards the end of this period stemmed from the

Birthplace of Ram movement. This movement had never previously had national significance but was revived by the VHP in 1984 (Veer 1994, 7, 161). The VHP claimed that a Hindu temple marking the birthplace of Ram previously stood on the site of the Mosque of Babur (*Babri Masjid*) in Ayodhya (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 275-76). Hindu nationalists said that restoration of the temple was a matter of “national honor” (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 276). The “main objective” of the RSS, operating through the VHP in this campaign “was to accumulate a substantial Hindu vote by the use of Hindu nationalist appeals” (Jaffrelot 1999, 366-67).

The BJP, having won only 2 seats in the 1984 elections, joined the Ram Janmabhoomi movement (Jaffrelot 1999, 374). Hindu nationalists were able to successfully frame the issue as the oppression of majority Hindus and a “continuation of a colonial legacy of suppressing indigenous culture” (Rajagopal 2001, 147). This frame allowed the BJP to attack Congress for leading India down the “wrong path” that was tied to both the British and Muslims who had humiliated India as well as promise a return of “cultural pride” and the “redemption of an unrealized dream, of a strong and prosperous India” (Rajagopal 2001, 233-34). Further, the BJP claimed that building the temple would unite India and “reestablish the greatness of a now-humiliated people” (Rajagopal 2001, 273). Hindu nationalists used the mosque as a symbol of the “humiliating domination” of Muslims to create an “emotional wave” among the public (Jaffrelot 1999, 457).

In October 1990 LK Advani, the President of the BJP, rode in a chariot tour to Ayodhya (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 275). This chariot tour reached hundreds of thousands of people and is a clear example of BJP attempts to use Ram Janmabhoomi to promote Hindu solidarity and mobilization (Jaffrelot 1999, 416-17). Advani was arrested before arriving, but his supporters made it and faced gunfire from police in clashes that killed at least 20 (Guha 2008, 627). The Sangh Parivar coordinated on the use of symbols, including bricks to be used in the construction of the temple and the ashes of martyrs that were circulated around the country

(Rajagopal 2001, 215-16).<sup>3</sup> Ram Janmabhoomi was “invested with the theme of martyrdom as indicated by its constant reference to the 77 battles fought in Ayodhya throughout history” (Jaffrelot 1999, 423). In a marked similarity with the Chinese Communist Party’s slogan ‘never forget national humiliation’, the VHP adopted the slogan “Do not forget the martyrs of Ayodhya!” (Jaffrelot 1999, 423).

The Birthplace of Ram Movement intensified in 1986 when the Rajiv Gandhi-led government gave in to demands to open the Mosque of Babur (Rajagopal 2001, 160).<sup>4</sup> The Mosque of Babur was in Uttar Pradesh (UP), India’s most populous province. Hindu nationalists were able to demonize the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Yadav, as “Mullah Mulayam” for opposing the movement, despite the fact he was Hindu (Rajagopal 2001, 196). The BJP took control of the UP state government in the 1990 elections and refused to cooperate with requests from the central government to curb the movement (Rajagopal 2001, 200).<sup>5</sup> On December 5, 1992, about 150,000 Hindu nationalist volunteers gathered outside the mosque and, on the 6<sup>th</sup>, stormed and destroyed it (Jaffrelot 1999, 545-55). Despite BJP and RSS leaders’ claims that this was an unplanned event, there is evidence, including the fact that many volunteers brought tools that this was preplanned (Jaffrelot 1999, 455-56).<sup>6</sup> The destruction of the Mosque of Babur set off riots across Northern India that killed about 2,000 people (Guha 2008, 632).

Ram Janmabhoomi succeeded where the cow protection movement in the 1950s and 1960s had failed. Many Hindus began to see the contention over the Mosque of Babur as involving “national honour” and as a reminder of “humiliation” (Guha 2008, 625). Hindu nationalists continued propagating national humiliation narratives in the 1990s. “In every case, a religious minority—Muslim or Christian—was targeted, and accused of having hurt Hindu sentiment or of being in the pay of a foreign power” (Guha 2008, 640). The targeting

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<sup>3</sup>See also Guha 2008, 627 and Jaffrelot 2010, 211.

<sup>4</sup>See also Jaffrelot 1999, 92.

<sup>5</sup>see also Guha 2008, 628.

<sup>6</sup>The Citizens Tribunal on Ayodhya found that the destruction of the Mosque was preplanned in a Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> meeting attended by LK Advani, M. Joshi (who succeeded Advani as president of the BJP in 1991), and others (Jaffrelot 1999, 456-57).

of religious minorities allowed Hindu nationalists to use narratives of national humiliation to politically attack Congress, which was both the party associated with secularism and tolerance as well as the main political rival of Hindu nationalists. This strategic targeting is consistent with H3a.

### 2.2.2 Motivating Sacrifice

Consistent with H3b, Hindu nationalists used national humiliation narratives to call for sacrifice to defend the nation during this period. Examples include their positions on the cow protection campaign, the Kashmir dispute, and the Sino-India war. In each foreign policy crisis during this period, Hindu nationalists supported more aggressive responses than Congress, which would have been more costly had they been carried out. In 1952, Golwalkar urged Indians to take part in the cow protection campaign, writing that “There cannot be a higher call of national unity than to be readily prepared to sacrifice our all for the honour and glory of the motherland that is the highest form of patriotism” (Guha 2008, 634).

Hindu nationalists pushed to regain Kashmir at all costs. After a lackluster election in 1952, the President of the BJS, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in a letter to Nehru about Kashmir, wrote that “It will be nothing short of national disgrace and humiliation if we fail to regain this lost portion of our own territory” (Guha 2008, 258, 796). This letter was later publicly released by the BJS, indicating they believed it would benefit them politically. In 1953, Mukherjee was jailed by the India government for entering Kashmir to protest and died in prison shortly afterwards (Jaffrelot 1999, 129).

In another foreign policy crises that gained attention after a white paper made the Sino-Indian border dispute public in 1959, the president of the BJS pushed for a more aggressive response, saying that it was a matter of the “nation’s self-interests and honour” and criticized the government’s “helplessness” (Guha 2008, 319). Another BJS leader warned Nehru not to harm the “sentiments” of the Indian nation in his handling of the issue (Guha 2008, 320). The accusation of hurting Hindu sentiment is similar to the way the Chinese Communist

Party often criticizes foreign powers for “hurting the feelings of the Chinese people” (Callahan 2010, x). India’s defeat in the war against China was Nehru’s biggest failure and the BJS tried to capitalize on Congress’ apparent weakness in international affairs by opposing talks with Pakistan over Kashmir in 1962 and 1963 (Guha 2008, 342, 350-55). That the BJS advocated more costly, hostile policies than Congress during each foreign policy juncture and used national humiliation narratives in attempt to mobilize support for these policies is consistent with H3b.

In terms of the sacrifices that Hindu nationalists directly required from supporters, the above analysis shows Ram Janmabhoomi required the mobilization of Hindu nationalists to break laws, commit acts of violence, and face the risk of death. The VHP framed the movement in terms of a long history of Hindu sacrifice, struggle, and suffering and used this frame to mobilize support for costly action, consistent with H3b. VHP leaders said it was a “disgrace” that Hindus did not have access to their places of worship and that “god is in a Muslim jail” (Veer 1987, 293). A 1988 RSS newspaper article illustrates these themes of moral outrage and national redemption, “Yes for too long I have suffered affronts in silence. [...] My number have dwindled as a result, my adored motherland has been torn asunder. I have been deprived of my age-old rights over my own hearths and homes [...] My gods are crying. They are demanding of me for reinstatement in all their original glory” (Jaffrelot 1999, 391). The press coverage exaggerated the Hindu deaths at the hands of police and portrayed the activists as heroes who sacrificed themselves for the cause in the face of an unjust government (Rajagopal 2001, 182). This use of national humiliation narratives to mobilize the costly defense of a national symbol is consistent with H3b.

### **2.2.3 Alternative Explanations**

Events-based explanations do not fit the behavior of either Congress or Hindu nationalists well for this period. Firstly, if events create narratives of national humiliation by themselves, then Indian political groups should not differ in their interpretation of whether an event is

humiliating. Yet, Hindu nationalists spread narratives of national humiliation during this period, and Congress did not. Further, the biggest mobilization over national humiliation during this period was Ram Janmabhoomi. There is debate over whether there really was a temple of Ram destroyed to make way for the Mosque of Babur (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 275–76). If these events did take place, then they would have occurred in the early 1500s. However, Ram Janmabhoomi reached its height in 1992. This appears to indicate that it was not the destruction of the temple itself that triggered the narrative. Explaining the narrative instead requires examining the changing political conditions in India that created the incentives for Hindu nationalists to propagate it.

Neither do legitimacy crisis explanations well account for this period. Congress was the long ruling party that increasingly faced a legitimacy crisis as Indians lost faith in its ability to rule for a variety of reasons including, the loss of trusted leaders like Nehru, the authoritarian interlude under Indira Gandhi, and corruption (Guha 2008, 672–676). Yet, Hindu nationalists rather than Congress disseminated national humiliation narratives, which is the opposite of what the legitimacy crisis theory would predict. This behavior can only be accounted for by considering the importance of political strategy. Congress' reliance on Muslims for support meant it would not be strategic for them to propagate a national humiliation narrative that framed Muslims as the humiliator. Similarly, Congress' cooperation with the British during the handover of control meant that continuing to disseminate national humiliation narratives about the British could risk backfiring. In contrast, Hindu nationalists faced neither of these restraints and had the advantage of being able to link their main political opponent, Congress, to the events they were framing as humiliating.

The evidence for the bargaining explanation from this period is mixed at best. On the one hand, India fought three wars with Pakistan. A bargaining explanation proponent could make the case that Hindu national humiliation narratives about Muslims were intended to signal India's resolve to Pakistan in its ongoing disputes. However, the fact that Hindu nationalist parties were only in power during one of these conflicts, the 1999 Kargil War, sits

less well with this explanation. If national humiliation narratives were a way of communicating resolve, then the Congress Party, which was in power during the 1965 and 1971 wars, should have made use of these narratives.

Another factor that is awkward for bargaining accounts is that the audience for Hindu national humiliation narratives was overwhelmingly domestic rather than international. The Hindu nationalist groups that make up the Sangh Parivar, with the exception of the VHP, are all solely domestic groups that focus on spreading their message within India. While the VHP does organize events outside of India, these are focused on Hindus living abroad rather than India's potential adversaries. Further, the main issues Hindu national humiliation narratives focused on during this period, cow protection, the supposed preferential treatment of Muslims within India, and Ram Janmabhoomi, seem poorly chosen if the goal was to send a message of resolve to Pakistan. While Hindu nationalists did discuss issues that appear more relevant to international resolve, like the dispute over Kashmir, in context of humiliation, this was part of a broader and ongoing narrative of national humiliation that was primarily focused on issues within India. This coincides with the finding in the previous chapter that while bargaining over international disputes does not seem to determine when parties adopt the strategy of national humiliation narratives, parties that have already made the decision to use these narratives apply them to international crises that arise.

## 2.3 Discussion

The use of humiliation narratives by each political group in each period is consistent with my theory's hypotheses that political groups use these narratives strategically. Specifically, groups use these narratives when they can blame their political opponent for the event they construct as humiliating and when they wish to motivate their audience to engage in sacrifices for the nation. Further, this theory appears to provide a better account of the propagation of national humiliation narratives in India than alternative explanations.

While events-based explanations point to the trauma of the experience of British colonial-

ism to explain national humiliation narratives, these explanations cannot account for why Congress ceased disseminating these narratives after independence but Hindu nationalists did not. Further, events-based explanations cannot account for why different political groups in India had different accounts of whether the same events, the Mughal Empire and the status of contemporary Muslims in India, were humiliating. The ability of Hindu nationalist groups to successfully mobilize supporters with a humiliation narrative surrounding the destruction of a temple of Ram, an event that may not have even taken place and that, if it did take place, took place approximately 500 years ago, raises serious doubts about whether events themselves are the primary drivers of humiliation narratives. If events are the main source of national humiliation narratives, then the construction of narratives should be much more temporally proximate to the humiliating events. If parties can make use of events from far in the past or events that may even be fabricated, then the extent to which events constrain and, therefore, can be used to predict the construction of national humiliation narratives is quite limited.

As for the legitimacy crisis explanation, unlike in the Chinese case where it fares nearly as well as strategic blame in predicting the propagation of humiliation narratives, this theory incorrectly predicts the behavior of each group in India during both periods. While the ability of each of these explanations to generalize to further cases beyond India and China remains to be explored, based on the evidence accumulated so far, the theory of strategic blame appears to perform the best both cross-nationally and over time.

As with the Chinese case, the Indian case shows some evidence that national humiliation narratives may have been used in international bargaining, but the disputes over which bargaining took place do not appear to be the main drivers of parties' decisions to construct such narratives. While the evidence for this explanation is difficult to separate from evidence for strategic blame in the first period, analysis of the second period shows that strategic blame provides a better account because both the issues and audiences humiliation narratives focused on tended to be domestic rather than international. Further, the

fact that Congress did not use humiliation narratives to bargain with adversaries during the second period despite presiding over two wars with Pakistan shows the importance of looking beyond international bargaining to domestic politics to explain parties' use of such narratives. Still, Hindu nationalist parties did appeal to the idea of national humiliation when discussing disputes, such as Kashmir, which could indicate that once groups decide to propagate national humiliation narratives for domestic political reasons, they may also make use of them in international bargaining.

### **3 When Do Narratives of National Humiliation Resonate?**

The three factors that appeared to affect to the resonance of national humiliation narratives in China, repression, institutional and media networks, and audience economic welfare also seem important in India. When the Hindu nationalists gained power at the end of the second period, the repression of national humiliation narratives was relatively low, the reach of Hindu nationalist groups through both institutions, such as the BJP and the RSS, as well as the media was higher than ever before and so was the economic welfare of the average India. Further, during both periods, more economically successful Indians were more likely to support parties propagating national humiliation narratives. However, the success of the Indian independence movement during the first period raises questions about the extent to which economic development constrains the success of parties disseminating national humiliation narratives. It seems likely that the conditions that determine the success of national independence movements differ from the conditions that determine the success of parties competing among each other domestically. As with the Chinese case, my examination of the factors that promote the resonance of national humiliation narratives with their audience plays a theory generating rather than a theory evaluating, let alone testing, role, so my account of the case in this section is intended to summarize the aspects that lead to my

inductions.

### 3.1 Evidence of Narrative Success

Repression during the first period under British rule was generally high. British authorities did not want to make martyrs of Indian resistance leaders but at the same time could not accept any political movement that threatened their control. The British adopted a cycle of waiting for popular passions to die down, then swooping in to arrest resistance leaders (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 182-83). However, national humiliation narratives, as opposed to other nationalist or anti-colonial narratives, were not particularly targeted, so repression cannot explain the performance of national humiliation narratives relative to other domestic political ideas in India during the first period. The role of repression in the success of national humiliation narratives becomes more apparent when comparing the success of Hindu nationalist groups in the second period before and after Indira Gandhi's intense crackdown on opposition groups ended.

In terms of network connections during the first period, Hindu nationalists' ability to use media to get their message out was limited. While the RSS had a press agency, it lacked means, and the RSS only had limited radio access (Jaffrelot 2010, 209). Television was not available for use by Hindu nationalists during this period (Rajagopal 2001, 77). They even had difficulty reaching people through print. During India's first election in 1952, most of the electorate was illiterate, and at the time of independence, three-fourths of the workforce was in agriculture (Guha 2008, 158, 209). The combination of Hindu nationalists' limited access to media to spread its message and its struggle to reach groups suggests that these factors may be linked.

Regarding economic welfare in the first period, the appeal of national humiliation narratives was concentrated among the elites and had little resonance among poor farmers. Members of Congress tended to come from the elite (Kaviraj 2010, 324). Likewise, supporters of Hindu nationalism tended to be high-caste and upper middle class (Jaffrelot 1999,

7). However, the role of refugees from Pakistan in providing support to Hindu nationalists following independence is an exception to this trend (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 229). The role of refugees may suggest that economic factors do not provide the entire picture and that individuals who have been personally aggrieved by the humiliator may be more susceptible to humiliation narratives. Despite this, the concentration of Hindu nationalist support among relatively well off urban dwellers suggests that these groups may be more receptive than other groups to national humiliation narratives when development is unevenly distributed (Jaffrelot 1999, 111, 147).

The second period witnessed great change in each of the three variables highlighted in this account. These variables took vastly different values during the first as compared with the second half of this period. In terms of the level of repression during the first part of the second period, 1948–77, it was relatively high. The 1948 assassination of Mahatma Gandhi triggered a precipitous decline in tolerance for narratives of Hindu national humiliation and the groups promoting them. The RSS was banned, and Golwalkar was arrested along with over 20,000 RSS volunteers (*swayamsevaks*) (Jaffrelot 1999, 88; Singh 2013, 88). While the government lifted the ban a year later, the RSS was required to restrict its activity to the “cultural sphere” and not engage in politics (Guha 2008, 111).

Both Nehru and Indira Gandhi conducted anti-RSS campaigns that included banning some of its local branches or *shakhas* (Jaffrelot 2010, 209). The Representation of the People Act banned campaigns from using religious symbols (Jaffrelot 1999, 104). In 1956, Nehru announced a law banning the promotion of communalism through the printed word (Jaffrelot 1999, 156). The Representation of the People Act was extended in 1962 to outlaw dividing the public over religion during elections (Jaffrelot 1999, 168). These actions forced Hindu nationalists to limit their activities for fear of being banned again (Jaffrelot 1999, 168). Repression also limited success of Hindu nationalists campaigns, such as the cow protection campaign in the 1960s (Jaffrelot 1999, 212).

In 1975, Indira Gandhi declared emergency rule and cracked down on all opposition

groups including the RSS. The RSS was banned and over 105,000 members were imprisoned (Jaffrelot 1999, 272-275). The failure of Hindu nationalists to take control of the government until after this repression passed may suggest that repression limits the ability of political groups to capitalize on national humiliation narratives. However, the experience of emergency rule from 1975–77 eroded popular support for and the willingness of future governments to crackdown on opposition groups, setting the stage for later Hindu nationalist successes.

After the end of emergency rule, the political environment was much more open to national humiliation narratives. The Indian central government did little to limit Ram Janmabhoomi until after the mosque’s destruction. When the VHP launched a bricklaying movement in 1989, Congress advised against it, but took no action (Guha 2008, 589). The only major repressive action taken before the destruction of the mosque was Advani’s 1990 arrest (Guha 2008, 626-27). This arrest was not made by the national government, which feared a popular backlash, but the Chief Minister of Bihar (Guha 2008, 626-27). Advani’s arrest was too late to prevent the consolidation of Hindu nationalist networks and contrasts with the preventative arrests in 1949, the last time Hindu nationalists tried to mobilize over the mosque (Jaffrelot 1999, 94-95, 212). These arrests helped prevent successful exploitation of the issue in 1949 (Jaffrelot 1999, 96). This difference in repression and success over two attempts by Hindu nationalist groups to deploy Ram Janmabhoomi suggests repression plays a role in determining narrative success.

The repressive measures taken against Hindu nationalists after the destruction of the mosque were laxly enforced and quickly lifted. In contrast with past crackdowns, the government arrested a “relatively small number of people” (Jaffrelot 1999, 465). While leaders were arrested and the RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal were banned, the leaders were released a month later and the ban was lifted in June (Rajagopal 2001, 206).<sup>7</sup> “Narasimha Rao’s response to the demolition of the disputed structure therefore, cannot be compared to that

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<sup>7</sup>The exception was the VHP, which remained banned until 1995 (Jaffrelot 1999, 466).

of Nehru's after Gandhi's assassination. Nor does it compare with the steps which Mrs. Gandhi took to ban communal organizations at the onset of the Emergency" (Jaffrelot 1999, 468).

The networks available to Hindu nationalists to promote their message of national humiliation greatly expanded towards the latter half of the second period. Significantly increased literacy and India's newspaper revolution, which began in 1977, added to the reach of networks through which groups could propagate national humiliation narratives (Guha 2008, 693; Jeffrey 2000). Moreover, groups promoting narratives of national humiliation took advantage of new forms of media to further spread their message. For example, Hindu nationalists could now reach the public through television (Rajagopal 2001, 8, 16, 273). This set Hindu nationalists campaigns in the 80s and 90s apart from the previous cow protection campaigns (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, Chapter 8). The number of TVs rapidly increased in the 1980s from 2 million to 30 million (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, Chapter 6).

The airing of the Hindu epic Ramayana on India state television from 1987-89, which became the most popular television program ever in India, increased the salience of Ram Janmabhoomi (Rajagopal 2001, 30). The Ramayana broadcast "has done more than anything else to make a standard version of the epic known and popular among the Indian middle class" and helped make the issues raised by Ram Janmabhoomi "loaded with affect" (Veer 1994, 9). Viewers increased from 40 to 80 million in the first few months and people planned their schedule so they could crowd around a nearby television for the show's Sunday episodes (Rajagopal 2001, 84). On average, 91% of TV owners watched the weekly broadcast (Jaffrelot 1999, 389).

Further showing the value of media networks, Hindu nationalists took advantage of access to new media technologies beyond just television and distributed audio cassettes with their message in addition to using traditional means like pamphlets and newspapers (Rajagopal 2001, 235).<sup>8</sup> The importance of institutional networks can be seen in the role of Hindu

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<sup>8</sup>See also Jaffrelot 2010, 212-13.

nationalist groups such as the RSS, BJP, and VHP in creating the content propagated through these media networks as well as facilitating its dissemination. Broadcasting cassettes publicly with loud-speakers gave VHP propaganda a new reach (Jaffrelot 1999, 396). The importance of mass media coverage is also seen in fact that people living close to the temple of Ayodhya were often cynical about the Ram Janmabhoomi but people living far away whose only exposure to the movement was through the mass media were often the most passionate (Rajagopal 2001, 220-24).

Economic welfare also changed drastically over the second period, growing from relatively low levels at the beginning to previously unreached highs at the end. During the first part of this the second period (the 1950s and 1960s), famine was a serious problem in India. Even after the Green Revolution alleviated the food crisis, India still had a high rate of poverty with about 223 million out of 530 million Indians in poverty, spending about 80% of their income on food and 10% on fuel (Guha 2008, 442-43, 467). In these conditions, Congress' promises of economic improvements had more appeal to voters than the BJS' Hindu nationalists ideology (Jaffrelot 1999, 156). Hindu nationalists largely failed to expand their support base beyond the urban middle class during these years. This suggests that national humiliation narratives may be unlikely to resonate with those living below economic subsistence.

However, in the latter two decades of the second period (the 1980s and 1990s), economic growth increased the size of India's middle class. This set these decades apart from the past when India was characterized by a small elite with the remainder of the country in poverty (Guha 2008, 689). However, development in India remained uneven, and the poorest remained relatively unreceptive to Hindu nationalist narratives. This can be seen in that Hindu nationalists promoted Ram Janmabhoomi in "suitable areas" while among poor farmers they focused on "a national movement to improve the lot of the peasants" (Jaffrelot 1999, 378). The RSS' system of local branches struggled in villages because of its "relative lack of adaptability in the village world where work completely dominates men's lives" (Jaffrelot 1999, 386). This distribution of support across class is consistent with the

idea that national humiliation narratives are more likely to resonate with those living above the subsistence level.

In the 1989 elections, the BJP gained a resounding 83 seats, bringing its total to 85 (Election Commission of India 1990). Ram Janmabhoomi was a major factor in this success (Jaffrelot 2010, 211). By 1996, the BJP was the largest party in parliament, and, while it failed to put together a majority government, it performed well in the 1998 elections, maintaining its status as the party with the most seats (Guha 2008, 634). This allowed the BJP to put together a coalition government in 1999 that lasted five years (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012, 279). This marked a huge change for the Hindu nationalist movement, which had failed so often that its end as a significant political force had often been proclaimed (Guha 2008, 634-35).

However, not all observers attribute the BJP's political success to Hindu nationalism (Gould 1993, 298; Brass 1993, 266), and I do not mean to suggest that other factors, such as economic policy, played no role. However, it would be wrong to discount the importance of Hindu nationalism in the BJP's success (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, Chapter 6), which owed much to its alliance with the VHP and the RSS (Veer 1994, 1). The fact that both Congress and the BJP tended to support market economic reforms while in power and oppose them while out of power in the 1990s and early 2000s suggests that economic policies do not tell the entire story (Guha 2008, 701). Further raising doubts about the ability of economic explanations to fully account for party success, some scholars have even argued that "the divisions within the parties over economic issues tend to be bigger than the divisions between parties" (Mukherji 2005, 59).

## 4 Conclusion

As with the evidence from the Chinese case in the previous chapter, the case of India supports the theory that a combination of national identity and domestic political incentives

lead groups to construct national humiliation narratives. Specifically, political groups that share a national identity with their audience use narratives of national humiliation when they can associate their rivals while disassociating themselves from the event constructed as humiliating. Groups further use these narratives to gain support for costly policies that can be framed in terms of national defense. The extent to which these findings generalize to cases beyond India and China remains to be examined, but this explanation does seem to fit the behavior of political groups in these countries better than the available alternative explanations.

The evidence from this case also echos the suggestions from the Chinese case about the kinds of factors associated with the resonance of national humiliation narratives with their audience. Namely, I find that these narratives are more likely to help political groups gain or maintain political power when they are not repressed out of existence, when groups promoting them have strong institutional and media network links to their audience, and when their audience is living above the level of economic subsistence. As the theory accounting for political group success mobilizing their audience with national humiliation narratives is generated based on these two cases, it remains for future research to evaluate how this theory fairs against potential alternatives on out-of-sample cases.

While the case studies in this chapter terminate in 1999, national humiliation narratives still shape politics in India. Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, has placed Muslims in the role of the humiliator to gain support (Guha 2008, 647). This suggests the continued importance of understanding national humiliation narratives to Indian politics today. The following chapter further elaborates on the significance of these findings for both international relations theory and policy responses to the potential security challenges that narratives of national humiliation pose.

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