



Deadly Influences: Evaluating the Relationship Between Political Competition and Religious Violence

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Abstract

This study focuses on what is the relationship between religiously motivated violence and political competition? We are interested in understanding how increased levels of political competition can lead to outbreaks of different types of religious violence. We analyze national elections in India, France, and Germany from 2000 to 2015 and utilize a research design that uses natural language processing to examine text sources from English and foreign language media reports to create event-data to test our claims regarding the relationship between political competition and religious violence. Our findings indicate that political competition influences the propensity for religious violence in some of these states but not all and that incorporating foreign language media sources provides significant benefits, especially regarding the occurrence of religious violence that is non-lethal in nature.

Keywords Religious violence · Political competition · Natural language processing · Religion and politics

Introduction

Religiously inspired violence is increasingly an issue that concerns policymakers and the public. Sectarian violence in conflict zones that stretch across places like Syria or Yemen, or more localized violence against religious minorities that is reported in numerous contexts like Myanmar, India, Israel, and the United States

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have made the understanding of the underlying political behavior that leads to religiously motivated violence increasingly important. This study focuses on the research question of what is the relationship (if any) between religiously motivated violence and political competition? We examine whether increased levels of political competition leads to increases in religious violence and the impact of different electoral systems and social contexts in India, Germany, and France when examining this relationship of interest.

The theoretical focus of this study examines both the causal dynamics and conceptual implications of the relationship between religious violence and political competition. First, we are interested in understanding how increased levels of political competition can lead to outbreaks of religiously motivated violence. Many scholars have argued that religious identity is particularly prone to manipulation by political elites to further self-interested political and economic outcomes. Religion can be utilized as a mobilization mechanism when electoral competition stiffens, which can lead to outbreaks of religious violence as religious identities become more salient and polarized in society (Chhibber & Shastri, 2014; Djupe & Grant, 2001; Fox, 2016; Wald et al., 2005; Wilcox & Sigelman, 2001). Specifically, some scholars utilize the term “sectarianization” to describe how political actors under certain circumstance harness religion and religious identity for popular mobilization of potential supporters for their own self-interest from a political, economic, or social standpoint (Hashem & Postel, 2017, p. 4). This study empirically tests some aspects of the “sectarianization” argument by examining the influence of political competition and electoral configuration on reported incidences of religious violence in a cross-sectional context. An important conceptual implication of our analysis is the need to approach religious violence from a multidimensional perspective to better account for variation in intensity regarding violent acts that are religiously motivated. This is because a measure that can differentiate between lethal and non-lethal violence is better positioned to capture different causal dynamics that may influence varying levels of religious violence.

This project also contributes to expanding the research methodologies for religious violence to be analyzed (Beielier et al., 2016; Schrodtt & Parus Analytics, 2016). We use natural language processing (NLP), which harnesses computer-assisted coding of textual documents to identify and inspect reported religious violence in Western Europe (Germany and France) and South Asia (India) from 2000 to 2015. Reports of religious violence came from local and international media sources in both English and non-English to generate indicators of religiously motivated violence. The utilization of NLP allows for us to examine in more detail the impact of different language sources of media and government reporting of religiously motivated violence. One major implication of this approach is that the reporting of religiously motivated violence may be skewed or masked to a degree due to specific reporting dynamics, source material, governmental policies, and/or social context.

Our examination of national elections between 2000 and 2015 in France, Germany, and India yielded evidence that reports of religiously motivated violence increased in areas that experienced more intense political competition in India and

France but not in Germany.¹ Furthermore, our analysis of reports of religious violence generated by English and non-English media sources exhibited significant variation, especially in the reporting associated with sexual violence and discrimination. To explain these findings in more detail, this study first examines the operationalization of religious violence as a concept, and discuss both the literature and the theoretical claims of our argument. Next, we describe how NLP was utilized in the creation of the data observations and our comparison of reported incidences of religious violence generated from English and foreign language sources. This is proceeded by a discussion regarding the research design to test our argument and results of the statistical analyses from different countries within our sample. We conclude the paper by providing a summary of the findings and discuss the implications of our study.

Religious Violence

Important Concepts

In order to better understand the relationships between religious violence and political competition, some discussion of this concept's operationalization is needed. Violence should be viewed as the exertion of force in relation to some sort of conflict or dispute, Brück et al. (2010, pp. 18, 19). Previous research shows that different forms of violence (ethnic, religious, sexual, etc.) have different underlying root causes and outbreak triggers (Brück et al., 2010; Davenport & Stam, 2009; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Verpoorten, 2012). Religious traditions, sectarian identity, and the recognition of religious authority are commonly cited as influential factors of religious violence (Juergensmeyer & Kitts, 2011, pp. 1–3). We define religious violence as the use of coercion or force that is motivated by religious tradition/doctrine, religious identity, and/or religious symbolism. Operationalizing religious violence in this manner is consistent with the literature that examines the measurement of this concept (Svensson, 2007, 2013; Toft, 2007; Vullers et al., 2015). Svensson notes the main benefits in operationalizing religious violence in reference to these factors; (1) it is broadly applicable and generalizable, (2) it is an indicator with high reliability, and (3) it provides useful information of the actors involved (Svensson, 2016). It is also important to recognize that the conceptualization of religious violence needs to account for the local cultural context. Specifically, Barter and Zatzkin–Osburn take the perspective that incorporation of local traditions and social/cultural codes is needed when generating indicators of religious violence (Barter & Zatzkin–Osburn, 2014). As a result, religious violence is viewed from the perspective that violent acts are not a consequence of primordial fault-lines or other inherent social tensions that may exist between different belief systems or religious groups. Rather, we approach this concept from the perspective that violence with an underlying religious motivation is

¹ Replication data for this article (Brathwaite & Park, 2022) can be found in Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/CUQFWR>.

a function of social or/and political manipulation of spiritual belief and religious identity.

The examination of previous studies that focused on measuring religious violence tend to fall into two different typologies; understanding how religion can be an influential factor in outbreaks of communal violence and the role that religion plays in the context of civil wars and armed conflicts. The former focuses on religiously motivated violence, which is communal in nature and not perpetrated by combatant actors, while the latter examines religious violence by organized challengers to the state in the context of armed conflicts or civil wars. Previous studies examining religious violence in the contexts of intrastate violence used existing civil war datasets to measure religious violence and identified religious motivations as an important factor in some types of armed conflicts (Basedau et al., 2016; Henne, 2012; Svensson, 2007, 2013; Svensson & Nilsson, 2018; Toft, 2007).

The literature focused on measuring religious violence highlights three different and important factors; identification of potential actors involved from a perpetrator/victim standpoint, capturing intensity/types of violence, and analysis at the sub-national level. This study examines all three of these elements since previous studies focused their analysis on one or possibly two of these factors but not all of them. For example, De Juan et al. (2015) provides an excellent analysis at the sub-national level of communal violence in Indonesia but one of the trade-offs is less detail with potential actors involved and the type of religious violence that occurs (they utilize a measure for the presence of houses of worship and indicators for mass fighting or violence directed at the state respectively for these issues). Another example of trade-offs can be found in Fox et al. (2018). They provide both detailed information on types of religious violence/discrimination (41 different measures) as well as providing rich information on a variety of different actors (over 700 religious minorities in 183 countries) that may be either victim or perpetrator but relies on a cross-sectional analysis at the state-level. This study's harnessing of NLP attempts to provide detailed information on all three of these aspects of religious violence by providing a measure that captures different types of religious violence, provide more detail regarding the actors involved, and utilize a comparative framework and sub-national level of analysis for different countries. This approach can provide more fine-grained detail on the causal dynamics between political competition and different types of religious violence and explore the impact of different electoral and social contexts on the strength of that relationship.

Capturing different types of religiously inspired violence is an important dynamic for for operationalization. We view religious violence being multidimensional in nature and focus on identifying distinctive constitutive dimensions. (see Table 1). Utilizing previous studies from the repression and armed conflict literature we create four constitutive dimensions of religious violence: sexual violence, physical harm, property destruction, and discrimination/threats to dignity (Davenport & Stam, 2009; Brathwaite & Park, 2019, pp. 9, 18). Conceptualizing religious violence in this manner is appropriate because it is likely there are varying levels of participation in specific types of violent acts due to the greater risk of social repercussions and/or legal sanctions. This makes a measurement approach that can identify and disaggregate a range of violent actions useful. It is also important to account for

Table 1 Religious violence dimensions

Physical (bodily) harm (threat)	Sexual violence (threat)	Individual property (threat)	Individual dignity (threat)
Disappearances (enforced)	Sexual assault/sexual violence	Banditry/rob/dacoity	Humiliate
Beat/assault	Rape	Destruct property/destroy	Slavery
Torture		Fire/arson/burn	Abuses
Massacre			Strip
Murder/kill			Discriminate

property destruction since violence is sometimes directed at specific religious structures or symbols that adorn them.

Determinants of Religious Violence

We argue that increased political competition influences the intensity of reported incidents of religious violence. This is because political elites manipulate the religiosity and spiritual belief/fervor of potential supporters to further their support and enhance their prospects of gaining political power (Djupe & Grant, 2001, pp. 3–4; Wilcox & Sigelman, 2001). Those wielding political and social authority are well-positioned to exert influence over potential supporters by framing important issues of concern. This allows elites to harness their influence and resources to make overt religious appeals that have the potential to increase the salience of religious identity, which in turn can increase the level of mobilization of potential supporters through the mitigation of cross-cutting cleavages (Chhibber & Shastri, 2014, pp. 3–4). This highlights an important potential consequence of political mobilization based on religious appeals or sectarian identity, and how the dynamics of religious demagoguery are difficult to control. Hashemi and Postel (2017) and others have identified this dynamic as “sectarinization” where elites’ attempts to control political power through identity mobilization has the impact of deepening religious cleavages leading to outbreaks of violence (Hashemi & Postel, 2017, p. 5).

The utilization of religious identity by political elites can have distinctive benefits. This is because religious appeal by political elites has the potential to overcome logistical challenges for the recruitment, mobilization, and retention of supporters (Isaacs, 2016, pp. 214–215). Little (2011) notes that religion is often invoked to legitimize aspects of identity that leads to language, customs, and other socially/culturally important matters to be viewed through a lens of heavy religious overtones (Little, 2011). The benefits of mobilization based on religious identity are not enjoyed only by political elites pursuing political power but can also be harnessed by the state itself. Nasr (2000) notes that state authorities utilization of religion for political mobilization is at times focused on stoking tensions between different segments of society since elites have incentives to manufacture religious cleavage and tensions for political and social benefit. From this perspective, state engagement in the religious sphere is not motivated by the adjudication of pressing social concerns or championing of any one religious community. Rather, the opportunity to entrench religious cleavages provides potential political and social benefits for state authorities by exploiting conflict between competing sectarian communities (Nasr, 2000, p. 173).

Elites also utilize religious identity mobilization through the harnessing of nationalistic appeals to address loyalty concerns regarding specific religious groups within the state. Some have argued that the political system can be harnessed to facilitate violent attacks against religious minorities. From this perspective, religious violence may not be a reflection of religious animosity, but rather a discriminatory mechanism that facilitates communal violence against religious minorities due to incompatible perceptions of national identity (Thakur, 2013). The scapegoating of

religious groups from a nativist/nationalistic lens leads to violence due to perceptions of disloyalty or the inability to assimilate because of perceived cultural and social differences tied to religious identity.

This discussion of our argument highlights the potential violent consequences of appeals based on religious symbolism or identity for political mobilization by elites. The hypothesis connected to the “sectarinization” argument focuses on how political elites understand the potential for achieving electoral success by mobilizing support through the use of religious appeals (Campbell & Monson, 2008). We expect that areas reporting the most incidences of religious violence are also areas where political dynamics lead to a more competitive electoral environment. Hypothesis 1 can be written as:

Hypothesis 1 Religious violence increases in locations where electoral competition is more intense.

We also want to examine the impact increased political mobilization can have on religious violence. A number of scholars have argued that political mobilization based on religious appeals has the potential to increase political participation of possible supporters (Macaluso & Wanat, 1979). If our argument is operating as predicted, we should observe some relationship between the level of political participation and religious violence because efforts to mobilize supporters along religious lines can lead to clashes between different societal groups when political power is being contested. Thus, the second hypothesis can be written as:

Hypothesis 2 Religious violence increases in locations with higher levels of political participation.

We also explore whether different electoral systems (first-past-the-post, party centric, and hybrid/mixed) have a measurable impact on the manner political competition influences religious violence. Accounting for different electoral configuration and rules is important. Norris notes, “[there is an] awareness that electoral rules are not neutral: the way votes translated into seats means that some groups, parties, and representatives are ruled into the policy-making process, and some are ruled out” (Norris, 1997, p. 298). This is especially relevant to our study since some have argued that religion’s impact on voting behavior and political competition varies based on electoral rules either because of religious voters specific preferences on salient issues or because of religion’s impact on existing social cleavages (De La & Rodden, 2008; Mozaffar et al., 2003; Tilley, 2015). Others have also argued that electoral system configuration can exacerbate existing social cleavages that can lead to outbreaks of political violence (Horowitz, 1992; Lijphart, 2007) and identified electoral systems with centripetal elements (first-past-the-post and hybrid/mixed) being especially vulnerable to outbreaks of political violence in divided societies because of increased political instability and fear of ideological opponents gaining control

over a centralized political system (McCulloch, 2013). In short, different electoral rules and system configuration can either intensify or mitigate religion's utility in mobilizing support for electoral advantage, which can either increase or decrease the level of religious violence attributable to political competition. Our third hypothesis to be examined can be stated as:

Hypothesis 3 The relationship between religious violence and political competition should vary based on electoral system.

English-Non-English Sources of Religious Violence Data

Religious Violence Event Data

To empirically test our argument concerning the influence political competition has on religious violence some discussion of the data utilized for empirical analysis is needed. Observations of religious violence analyzed for this paper were generated through NLP (Gerner et al., 2002; King & Lowe, 2003; Norris, 2016; Schrodtt & Yilmaz, 2007). This approach has provided useful inter-disciplinary research designs that harness both computational and social science approaches to generate event-data of interest and we utilize a similar approach to measure reported instances of religious violence. To accurately measure religious violence, information needs to be collected in a specific format that highlights “Who” did “What” to “Whom” (and “Where”). We also utilize documents from foreign language sources and incorporate Stanford CoreNLP with English, German, and French dependency parsers (Manning et al., 2014), and Hindi dependency parser (Reddy, 2014) to handle all documents.²

Data Sources and Case Selection

Case selection of the countries included was driven by theoretical concerns and variation with our explanatory variables. Specifically, since we focus on the impact of political competition on religious violence then accounting for how different types of electoral systems potentially influence the nature of competitive elections is theoretically appropriate. Numerous scholars have noted that the manner in which political systems are configured and the electoral rules that adjudicate their operation can have significant impact on political and social environments (Lijphart, 2012; Linz, 1990; Norris, 2004; Sartori, 2005). The cases selected represent three different electoral systems (first-past the post, hybrid presidential, and parliamentary with transferable vote) that exhibit variation in how political power is apportioned, which influences the nature of political competition in these electoral environments. Accounting for whether the relationship between religious violence and

² For more information on how NLP was utilized to create the religious violence event-data see the parsing process description in Online Appendix.

political competition is sensitive to electoral configuration is important to identify. These cases were also selected because they provided variation in political culture and social context. Some have argued that accounting for the social environment's influence on how political culture develops is an important component to capture when examining different aspects of political development (Almond & Verba, 2015, pp. 222–228; Coppedge, 2012). The countries selected represent political cultures where political competition can be influenced by issues associated with religious (India), secular (France), and ethnic (Germany) identity. Accounting for these dynamics and the potential for them to influence the electoral context is important since the relationship between religious violence and political competition may be contingent on specific levels of social animosity/grievance between religious communities to exist (Brady & Collier, 2010; Geddes, 1990).

The source material used to generate data to measure religiously motivated violence was derived from media sources (primarily newspapers) and included local, national, and international media sources in both English and non-English (Hindi, French, and German). The level of analysis for this study is sub-national in the countries of India, France, and Germany, so we identify the different regions/states used for national elections from 2000 to 2015 to pinpoint potential locations of religious violence (a full list of locations is available in the appendix). Next, we utilized the *LexisNexis Academic* news database to generate media reports that were reflective of reported incidents of religious violence. The reports examined were identified through search terms focused on different variations of the term “religious violence” targeted for each country, (for example, religion and violence, communal violence, sectarian violence, etc.). We should note that we accounted for the correct syntax and cultural phraseology when utilizing these search terms for non-English sources. This search yielded about 36,000 articles for India, 29,000 articles for France, and 2,500 articles for Germany.³

Differences Between English and Non-English Language Sources: India, France, and Germany

Using the NLP procedures previously described, we briefly discuss the impact of utilizing English and foreign language sources for the creation of event-data measuring religious violence. Specifically, we examine our event and victim counts derived from English and foreign language sources to determine if we observe any divergence in the data that impacts the validity of the data and statistical analysis of our argument. Tables in the Appendix provides a comparison of our event counts for reported incidences of religious violence generated from English and foreign language media sources. It should be noted that some previous studies have identified specific issues to account for when employing media sources to create event-data measuring violent conflict (Cook & Weidmann, 2019; Davenport & Ball, 2002; Weidmann, 2016). We address the potential for bias by trying to capture both lethal

³ LexisNexis does not support Hindi language, so we utilized both national and regional Hindi language news sources, see Online Appendix for listing of Hindi language media sources.

and non-lethal acts of violence to account for potential over/under-reporting of specific types of violent events. Also, the use of automated data collection through NLP is consistent with arguments about best practices with the collection of conflict related event-data (Salehyan, 2015).

Examining any variation in event-data counts between English and foreign language media sources also provides a robustness check on the data used for statistical analysis. We compare a measure of religiously motivated killings in India that used data from the religious freedom reports of U.S. State Department for the years 2000–2010 with our measure covering the same time period using NLP (Vullers et al., 2015). We found that they correlated at approximately 0.517 and that specific years (2001, 2002, and 2004) showing the most similarities.⁴ We also compare our indicators concerning religious violence to information that the Indian government has collected for the years 2001–2012. Specifically, we compare our event counts in which scheduled castes (i.e. dalits, untouchables, and/or shudra) were the victim category, which is important since it can account for the possibility of our data being biased when trying to measure religious violence that is influenced by intra-group dynamics. Our comparison to Indian government data on crimes committed against scheduled caste victims exhibited similarities for the total number of events reported correlating at .580 as well as the number of crimes of a sexually violent nature which correlated at 0.714.⁵ We interpret the results from the comparison using two different data sources providing some empirical validity in regards to our event-counts capturing types of religious violence and provides more confidence in the comparison of English and foreign language sources that are later used for our statistical analysis

It is worth noting that our examination of Hindi, French, and German language texts showed substantial variation in the number of incidences of religious violence reported in comparison to English language text sources. For example, the overall number of reported incidents of religious violence increased 49%, which represents an additional 12,171 incidents utilizing Hindi versus English language sources. We also see a similar increase in the categories of threats to physical harm and personal property with increases of 22% and 43% respectively when utilizing Hindi rather than English language sources (this represents an increase of 2877 and 4078 incidents respectively). Reported religious violence that would fit into the categories of threats of sexual violence and discrimination/dignity witnessed the largest increases when utilizing Hindi language sources with an over 200% increase in both of these categories representing an additional 1314 incidences of sexual violence and 3892 incidences of discriminatory behavior.

Our examination of French and German language texts also indicated variation in reported incidences of religious violence in comparison to English language text sources. We were particularly interested in determining whether unique aspects of

⁴ see Brathwaite and Park (2019, p. 24) for more detailed information on both similarities and discrepancies regarding this comparison

⁵ See <https://data.gov.in/catalog/crime-against-schedule-caste> for information collected by the Indian government.

how religious identity is translated in the French and German context influence how religious violence is reported, especially regarding the conflation of religious and ethnic identity. For example, when examining Germany, the difference in incidents of religiously motivated violence when utilizing the victim categories of “Arab” or “Turk” yields a slight increase in the number of incidents reported. There is an approximate increase of 11% for all events, 6% increase in religious killings, 8% increase for violent actions described as threats of physical harm, 35% increase in violent actions classified as threats to property, and no change in the number of reported incidents classified as sexual violence or discrimination/threats to dignity. In France, the use of “Arab” or “Turk” as a victim reporting category had a more pronounced effect. There is an approximate increase of 40% for all events, 30% increase in religious killings, 16% increase for violent actions described as threats of physical harm, 25% increase in violent actions classified as threats to property, 44% increase in the number of reported incidents regarding sexual violence, and a 36% increase for actions classified as threats to dignity.

This discussion highlights potential reporting biases in how certain types of violent events receive coverage or are under-reported when using English and foreign language text sources. It could also reflect how more violent acts receive greater scrutiny and coverage due to their sensationalism and ability to capture public attention. The under reporting could also be an artifact of English-language media being less attuned to accurately report on societies with numerous ethnic and religious identities like India. Finally, more attention needs to be provided to media reporting of religious violence showing indications of the conflation of ethnic and religious identity.

Research Design and Data

The discussion of differences in event-counts utilizing different language sources provides a better understanding of the data observations that are being utilized to analyze our argument regarding political competition and religious violence. To empirically test our claims, we examine national elections in India, Germany, and France from 2000 to 2015 with the subnational unit-year as the unit of analysis.⁶ We focus our analysis on the subnational level to better distinguish specific regional dynamics that may experience more intensive contestation for political power/control. One element of our empirical analysis is centered on understanding how political competition influences reported levels of religious violence when using data collected from English and non-English language sources. This is examined by analyzing national elections at the subnational level in our sample for the years 2000–2015 with a OLS (ordinary least squares) estimator with PCSR (panel

⁶ The French sample is a reflection of the electoral configuration prior to the 2016 election reforms and our India sample only included the states as a sub-national unit, special administrative units and union territories were excluded, all of the sub-national units included in the analysis can be found in Online Appendix.

corrected standards errors).⁷ The other element of our analysis is focused on determining whether different dimensions/levels/types of religious violence such as physical harm, property damage, sexual violence, and discrimination are influenced by varying levels of political competition. This is analyzed by running a similar statistical analysis with variables for the different dimensions of religious violence as outcomes of interest in all of the countries in our sample (France, India, and Germany). Our main focus is testing our hypotheses regarding the influence of political competition on different types of religious violence and comparing the results of the countries included to determine if there is significant divergence or consistency in our results with respect to different electoral and social contexts or the inclusion of foreign language data sources.

Key Variables

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable is the count of violent events reported as religious violence in the subnational units of the countries in our sample for 2000–2015.⁸ The coding of this indicator was generated by textual analysis of media reports from local and international news media sources (English and non-English language sources) utilizing the NLP approach discussed earlier. This is coded as a count variable and we constructed a variable for the overall number of events that were reported as religious violence and separate indicators, coded as count variables, that represented the dimensions of religious violence identified earlier and religious killings only.

Independent Variables

Our independent variables are indicators for political participation and competition. The variable for political competition is coded as the difference in vote share between the two political parties that receive the most votes in national elections from 2000 to 2015 for the subnational units countries in our sample. This indicator is coded as a count variable and reflects the differences in party vote share percentages for the winning political parties in the locations examined in the data sample. This indicator is referred to as vote share in our analysis. Election data was provided the Electoral Commission of India and other open sources available.⁹ We also utilize an indicator for political participation, which is coded as the percentage

⁷ This analysis was also run with a negative binomial estimator due to the use of count data. The results from the OLS were similar and are reported since this estimator allowed for better accounting of panel heteroskedasticity and panel specific contemporaneous correlation that may reflect specific regional and election cycle effects (Beck and Katz 1995).

⁸ Summary statistics are listed in Online Appendix.

⁹ See <http://www.ecii.nic.in/eci/ecii.html> [accessed Aug. 25, 2018] and <http://www.electionresources.org/> [accessed Jan. 3, 2018].

of the eligible voting population that cast a ballot in each subnational unit included in our sample for India, France, and Germany. This indicator is referred to as turnout in our analysis.

Control Variables

We also try to control for confounding factors and alternative explanations. We account for the impact of religious demography and include indicators that provide the percentage of the population belonging to the major religious groups residing in the countries examined; Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc. in the subnational units in our sample. Indicators for the percentages of the population that belonged to a minority religion was created (designated as being part of a scheduled castes or tribes was created for India) to account for whether the dispersion of the religious population in the state is influencing the level of religious violence. Accounting for religious demography is important since it can be a rough proxy measure for the level of religious polarization, which can be a motivating factor in the formation of religious cleavages and grievances that can lead to violence.¹⁰

We also needed to control for certain regional effects since some areas have experienced more frequent violent mobilization and/or legacies of communal violence between religious communities, which could bias our results in those election years we examined. To account for this dynamics we create a count variable of the numbers of communal riots in various states in India inspected from 1950 to 1995 (Varshney & Wilkinson, 2004). This information was not available for Germany and France, so we collected information on migration broken down by percentages of the population that was a migrant, percentage of the population that was a recent migrant (arrived less than 5 years ago), and percentages of the population that was a foreign migrant (migrant from outside Europe). We also control for electoral results that reflect the electoral success of independent candidates and regional parties as well as locations where multiple political parties (i.e. more than two parties) were very competitive.

Findings

We argued that we expect increased reporting of religious violence in areas that experienced more political competition. We also test to determine if political competition induces specific types of violent acts that correspond to the different dimensions of religious violence identified earlier. We first examine the results using data on reported religious violence in India with particular focus on determining whether utilizing media reports in English or Hindi yields any significant differences. Then

¹⁰ Religious demographic information was more limited for Germany and France. In Germany this is because state authorities only collect information on legally recognized religious groups, which only yields information on Christian worshipers in Germany. In France this was because of laws restricting the introduction of race or religion in administrative records.

we compare the results we get from India to those from Germany and France to illustrate whether different electoral system and social contexts impact the relationship of interest.

The initial empirical results focused on confirming the impact religious violence has on political competition with attention towards comparing the results from running the analysis utilizing English and Hindi data sources in India. Regression results and the purported substantive effects for the models we ran are contained in Table 2 and Fig. 1.

The results from Fig. 1 provide support for our claims that religious violence increases in those areas that experience higher political competition. Our findings indicate that as the differences in vote share decreases there is an increase in the number of reported incidents of religious violence. This finding shows a statistically significant relationship (negative) at the 5% level. From a substantive perspective this would indicate that as the vote share decreases by 1% between the two leading parties, reported incidents of religious violence of all types increases by 1.15 events. We interpret these findings as providing some support for the claims in Hypothesis 1 that religious violence increases in areas experiencing more political competition. Our results also support claims of Hypothesis 2 that more reported incidents of religiously motivated violence occurs when turnout increases. The results indicate that as turnout increases by 1% than the indicator for all types of religious violence increases by 2.4 events. In Model 2, we examine lethal acts with a religious motivation and determine whether our statistical results showed variation if we only accounted for religiously motivated killings. The findings are unchanged from Model 1 with the indicators for both turnout and vote share exhibiting statistical significance in the expected direction.

When examining Models 3 and 4, we were focused on comparing our earlier results to examine whether our analysis produces similar findings when utilizing Hindi language media sources to generate the dependent variable. The results for Model 3 show very similar results to Model 1. Specifically, as vote share decreases by 1% the number of religious violence incidents increases by 1.9 events. The results for turnout are similar with 1% increase in participation corresponding to an increase of 4.9 events reported as religious violence. We find similar consistency when utilizing an indicator for religious killing as the dependent variable when comparing the results for Models 2 and 4. We interpret these findings from examining national elections in India as providing some evidence for our claims regarding the relationship between political competition and religious violence.

Next, we determine if different types of religious violence are influenced by increased levels of political competition. We use our indicators for those specific dimension of religious violence presented in Table 1 as dependent variables. Table 3 and Fig. 2 below contains the regression results and a plot of the substantive effects of our analysis utilizing English language sources exclusively. The indicator for physical harm shows a statistically significant relationship with our indicator for political competition, which would be an indication that religiously inspired torture, murders, assaults, etc. increase when political competition increases. These findings are consistent with our argument that predicts turnout

Table 2 Hindi-English regression results

	(Model 1) Overall	(Model 2) Religious Killings	(Model 3) Overall (Hindi)	(Model 4) Religious Killings (Hindi)
Vote Share	– 1.145** [0.579]	– 0.906* [0.463]	– 1.941* [1.044]	– 0.607* [0.329]
Regional Party	– 35.236* [20.882]	– 24.771 [18.453]	– 59.057 [48.972]	– 17.923 [14.869]
Multiple Parties	– 36.942** [16.290]	– 35.868** [17.463]	– 64.356 [40.489]	– 16.533 [11.836]
Independent	– 37.896** [18.325]	– 52.075* [27.231]	– 39.844 [42.047]	– 12.4 [11.903]
Turnout	2.398*** [0.699]	2.005*** [0.675]	4.933** [1.922]	1.415** [0.575]
Population	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Caste-Tribe	– 0.509 [0.449]	– 0.605 [0.459]	– 1.271* [0.689]	– 0.344* [0.203]
Hindu	0.000* [0.000]	0.000*** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Muslim	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Christian	0.000 [0.000]	– 0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Sikhh	0.000 [0.000]	– 0.000* [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Buddhist	0.000** [0.000]	0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Jain	– 0.000** [0.000]	– 0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Minority Religion	66.196 [42.950]	92.077 [57.376]	135.651* [80.830]	38.497 [23.961]
Riots	0.185*** [0.062]	0.113 [0.073]	0.431* [0.237]	0.119*** [0.042]
_cons	– 74.341** [31.952]	– 73.043** [30.035]	– 172.329* [93.340]	– 48.816* [27.510]
R2	0.239	0.201	0.196	0.188
N	109	109	109	109

* = 10% level; ** = 5% level; *** = 1% level

and political competition impacting the level of religious violence and the results from our previous analysis.

There was no evidence that our indicators for discrimination/dignity, property damage, and sexual violence were statistically significant. These results could be

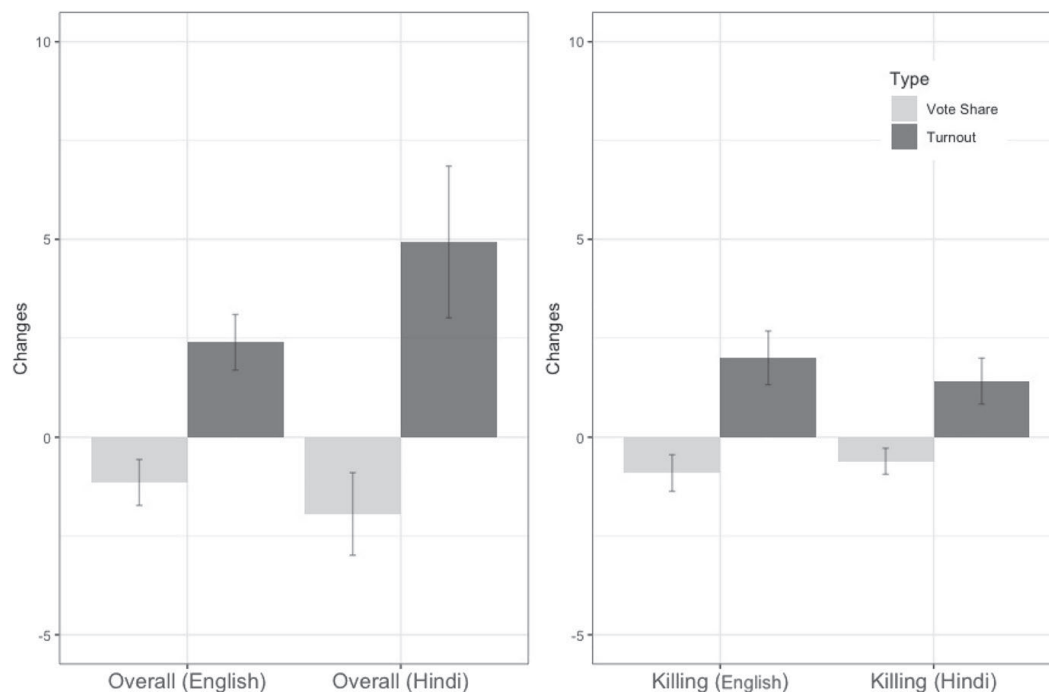


Fig. 1 Substantive changes (India): English and Hindi

a function of under-reporting these types of actions by English language sources, which may be a result of foreign language sources providing more detailed reporting of localized events, especially pertaining to events of a non-lethal character.

We next want to examine whether we get similar results using Hindi language data sources exclusively. Table 4 and Fig. 3 contains the regression table and substantive effects plot from our analysis using Hindi data sources only. We find similar results for the threats to physical harm indicator where these events increase with respect to the influence that political competition and turnout have. However, unlike the English language sources, we also found the indicator for sexual violence and property damage are also statistically significant at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. This might be evidence that Hindi language media may better capture events that do not reach a lethal level with the implications that over-reliance on English language media sources may introduce systemic bias with some events being under/over reported.

These results show that both our English and Hindi data sources provide plausible support for our argument concerning the relationship between violent acts motivated by religion and politically competitive environments. They also provide a cautionary tale for those harnessing NLP to create conflict event-data when not incorporating native languages for data collection.

Our attention now turns towards comparing the results that we found for India to both Germany and France.¹¹ We examine whether there is any support for our argument regarding the influence of different configuration of electoral systems on the

¹¹ The results for English and non-English sources for these countries was similar, so only the foreign language sources are reported.

Table 3 Regression results for English dimensions

	(Model 1) Physical	(Model 2) Sexual	(Model 3) Property	(Model 4) Dignity
Vote Share	– 0.893* [0.466]	0.033 [0.022]	– 0.205 [0.165]	– 0.081 [0.066]
Regional Party	– 25.86 [18.955]	– 1.761 [1.177]	– 10.726** [4.765]	3.111 [2.929]
Multiple Parties	– 35.331** [17.109]	1.841 [1.654]	– 5.1 [4.325]	1.649 [3.309]
Independent	– 52.496* [27.060]	– 0.236 [0.431]	10.874 [13.176]	3.963 [3.860]
Turnout	2.035*** [0.676]	0.063* [0.035]	0.063 [0.197]	0.237*** [0.092]
Population	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Caste-Tribe	– 0.624 [0.466]	– 0.007 [0.013]	0.005 [0.085]	0.117 [0.077]
Hindu	0.000*** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Muslim	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000*** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Christian	– 0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000*** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Sikkh	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Buddhist	0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Jain	– 0.000** [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Minority Religion	93.272 [57.492]	1.675 [1.675]	– 15.287 [13.351]	– 13.464 [9.313]
Riots	0.131* [0.068]	0.015** [0.006]	0.011 [0.008]	0.027 [0.021]
_cons	– 74.507** [30.631]	– 4.898** [2.364]	18.697 [16.537]	– 13.634** [6.392]
R2	0.201	0.212	0.289	0.295
N	109	109	109	109

* = 10% level; ** = 5% level; *** = 1% level

relationship between religious violence and political competition. This comparison is useful because if the relationship between political competition and religious violence is sensitive to regional or other contextual effects then there are broad implications both for identifying the causal dynamics related with religious violence and for the creation of a generalizable measure of religious violence that is appropriate for application in a cross-sectional context. Table 5 and Fig. 4 contain the substantive

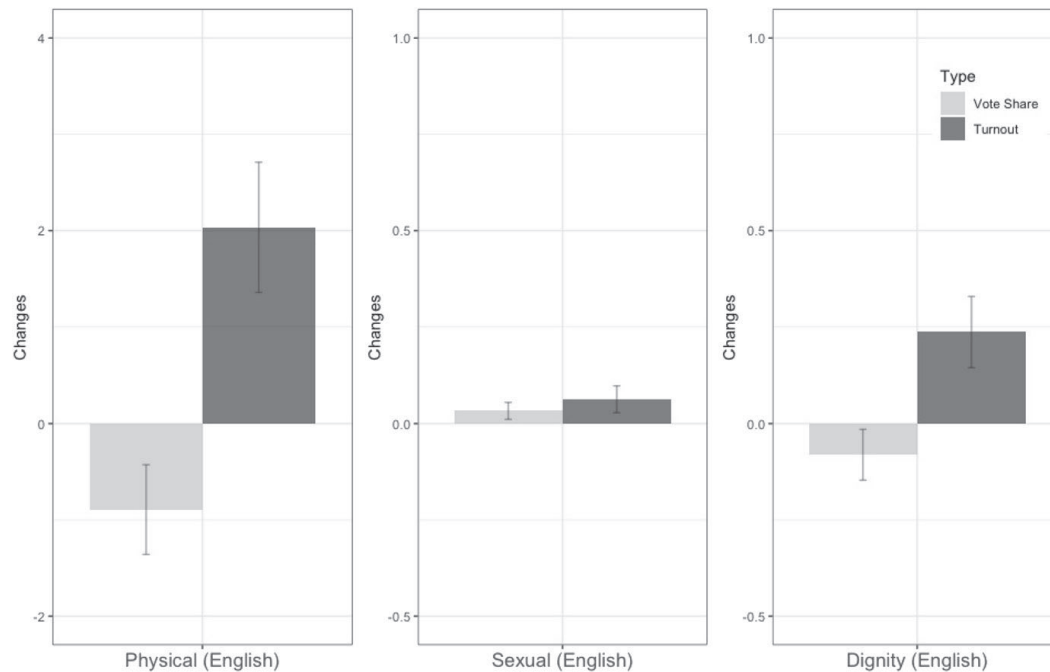


Fig. 2 Substantive changes (India): English—dimensions of violence

effects for our models focused on Germany. The German electoral system provides for a direct vote for a candidate and list vote for the party, so we run the analysis utilizing vote share difference for both the 1st vote and 2nd vote (directly for a candidate and party list respectively). We utilize the same tests that we did for India to determine whether we find similar results regarding the relationship between political competition and religious violence.

Our findings indicate that, all things being equal, political competition does not seem to exhibit a statistically significant relationship in any of the models we run when examining the 1st vote in German national elections. Only the indicators for turnout and the percentage of the population that is foreign-born migrant show statistical significance in the models where the dependent variable was the total number of reported incidents of religious violence and religious killings. When the dependent variable was the indicators of the various dimensions of religiously motivated violence only actions regarding physical harm exhibited statistical significance with our indicator for turnout.

The results for Germany would indicate that when examining 1st Round voting that areas where turnout increases and/or a higher proportion of foreign born migrants reported higher incidences of religious violence that are classified as either threats to physical harm or religiously motivated killing. This would indicate that while in India we found support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, in comparison in Germany we only find some support for Hypothesis 2. When examining the results for the 2nd vote (party list vote) we find almost identical results from the 1st vote analysis (Regression results for the German 2nd vote are contained in Online Appendix).

Table 4 Regression results for Hindi dimensions

	(Model 5) Physi- cal (Hindi)	(Model 6) Sex- ual (Hindi)	(Model 7) Prop- erty (Hindi)	(Model 8) Dig- nity (Hindi)
Vote Share	– 0.788* [0.446]	– 0.089* [0.054]	– 0.863** [0.428]	– 0.201 [0.126]
Regional Party	– 23.209 [20.343]	– 1.368 [2.960]	– 26.539 [19.427]	– 7.941 [6.625]
Multiple Parties	– 28.408 [17.926]	– 3.877* [2.169]	– 23.434 [15.192]	– 8.638 [5.761]
Independent	– 15.73 [18.698]	– 1.338 [2.080]	– 20.108 [16.521]	– 2.668 [5.153]
Turnout	2.056** [0.838]	0.235** [0.092]	2.017*** [0.761]	0.625*** [0.242]
Population	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Caste-Tribe	– 0.600** [0.305]	– 0.065* [0.038]	– 0.399 [0.262]	– 0.207* [0.106]
Hindu	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Muslim	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Christian	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Sikkh	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Buddhist	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Jain	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]	0.000 [0.000]
Minority Reli- gions	56.509 [36.060]	5.719 [5.528]	55.143* [30.563]	18.279* [10.832]
Riots	0.192** [0.086]	0.022* [0.011]	0.178 [0.128]	0.039*** [0.015]
_cons	– 70.577* [39.247]	– 8.788** [4.465]	– 72.749* [38.720]	– 20.214* [12.134]
R2	0.193	0.166	0.202	0.181
N	109	109	109	109

* = 10% level; ** = 5% level; *** = 1% level

Our attention now turns to the data collected from France and repeating the analysis to compare with the results from India and Germany.¹² The French electoral system has separate votes for presidential and legislative elections, so we run

¹² Our models for France did not include any control variables for religious demography due to legal restrictions on the collection of racial and religious data in France.

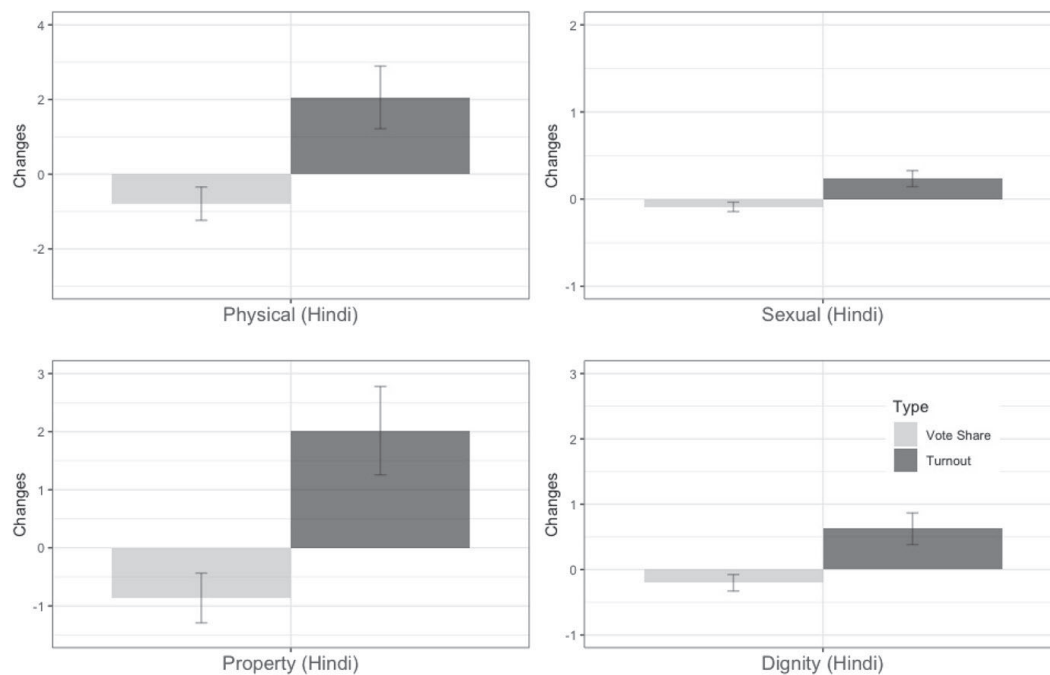


Fig. 3 Substantive changes (India): Hindi—dimensions of violence

the analysis utilizing vote share difference and turnout for both the 1st Round and 2nd Round Voting for both national presidential and legislative elections conducted between 2000 and 2015.

When examining French presidential elections we do not find much support for the predicted relationship between religious violence and political competition (regression results for French presidential elections is located in Online Appendix). For 1st Round voting neither the indicator for vote share or turnout were statistically significant in any of the models we ran. Looking at the 2nd Round of French presidential elections only the indicator for turnout is statistically significant when the outcome of interest is either all reported incidents of religious violence and those that would fall into the dimension of threat to sexual violence. These results indicate that we cannot support the predicted relationship between political competition and turnout when examining French presidential elections. Next, we determine whether we find similar results when examining French national legislative elections during the same time period. Table 6 and Fig. 5 contain the substantive effects for the 1st round of legislative elections in France from 2000 to 2015. The results for legislative elections shows marked divergence from the previous models run for French presidential elections. Specifically, both our vote share and turnout indicators were statistically significant when the outcomes of interest was religious killings and threats to physical harm, and vote share alone for the outcomes of all reported incidents of religious violence, threats of sexual violence, and threats to dignity.

These results indicate that during the 1st round of French legislative elections conducted between 2000 and 2015 that when the differences in vote share shrinks between the most competitive political parties that these areas experience more reported incidents of religious violence. Similar results are found when analyzing the 2nd round

Table 5 German first vote

	(Model 1) Overall	(Model 2) Religious Kill- ings	(Model 3) Physical	(Model 4) Property	(Model 5) Dignity
Vote Share	− 0.935 (2.130)	− 0.193 (0.366)	− 0.188 (1.623)	− 0.631 (0.745)	− 0.116 (0.250)
Turnout	5.342* (2.820)	1.122* (0.610)	2.869* (1.674)	1.75 (1.495)	0.723 (0.482)
Multiple Parties	0.455 (0.281)	0.087 (0.057)	0.343 (0.215)	0.085 (0.111)	0.027 (0.035)
Independent	0.13 (0.393)	0.059 (0.090)	− 0.156 (0.275)	0.24 (0.313)	0.046 (0.090)
Population	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Christian	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Recent Migrant	10.286 (8.274)	2.734 (1.707)	2.089 (6.433)	6.425 (4.258)	1.772 (1.422)
Foreign	12.873* (7.398)	2.896*** (0.935)	2.144 (1.496)	8.62 (5.424)	2.109 (1.899)
Cons	− 6.556** (3.187)	− 1.501** (0.687)	− 2.544 (1.859)	− 3.021 (1.930)	− 0.991 (0.651)
R-sq	0.168	0.254	0.055	0.191	0.126
N	64	64	64	64	64

* = 10% level; ** = 5% level; *** = 1% level

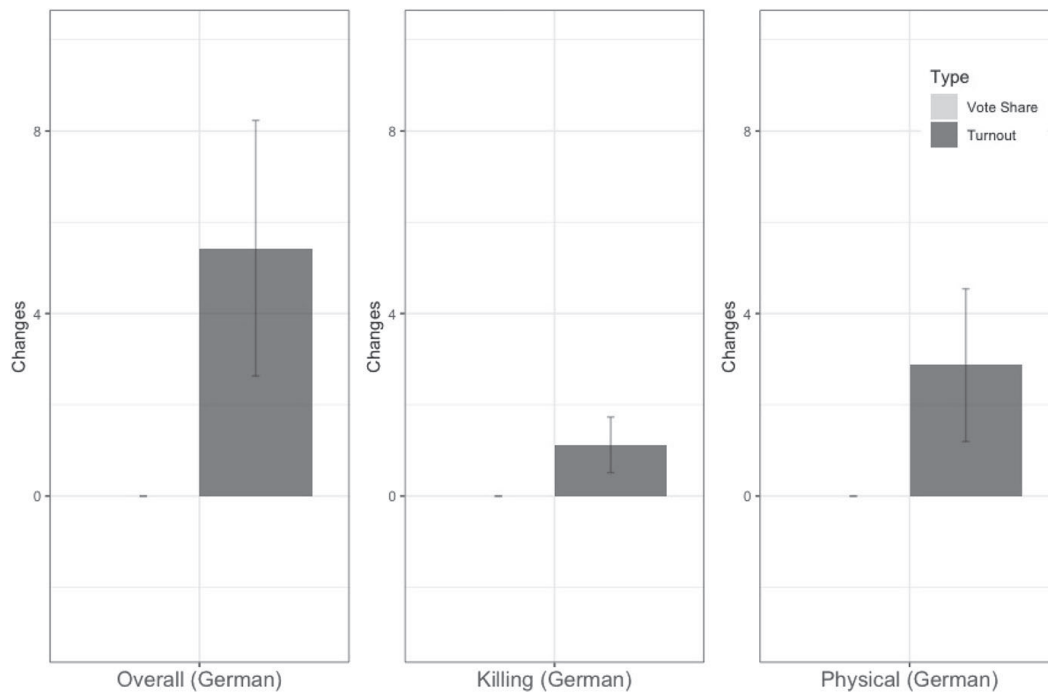
**Fig. 4** Substantive changes: German 1st vote

Table 6 French legislative first round vote

	(Model 1) Overall	(Model 2) Religious Killings	(Model 3) Physical	(Model 4) Sexual	(Model 5) Property	(Model 6) Dignity
Vote Share	– 13.833*** (3.060)	– 0.395** (0.185)	– 1.180** (0.549)	– 12.056*** (2.910)	– 0.207 (0.579)	– 0.390*** (0.139)
Turnout	0.895 (3.492)	– 0.290** (0.140)	– 0.910** (0.429)	2.064 (3.062)	– 0.184 (0.269)	– 0.074 (0.217)
Multiple Parties	– 0.437 (1.518)	– 0.014 (0.051)	– 0.022 (0.115)	– 0.573 (1.344)	0.144 (0.126)	0.015 (0.042)
Independent	– 2.391** (1.055)	– 0.104* (0.061)	– 0.221** (0.103)	– 1.969** (0.944)	– 0.165 (0.103)	– 0.036* (0.020)
Population	– 0.000 (0.000)	– 0.000 (0.000)	– 0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	– 0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Overseas	– 1.119* (0.672)	0.005 (0.034)	– 0.146 (0.094)	– 0.740 (0.626)	– 0.159 (0.099)	– 0.074* (0.039)
cons	4.400* (2.388)	0.266** (0.119)	0.859** (0.384)	3.053 (1.984)	0.328* (0.175)	0.160 (0.126)
R-sq	0.032	0.033	0.036	0.031	0.025	0.027
N	93	93	93	93	93	93

* = 10% level; ** = 5% level; *** = 1% level

voting of French national legislative elections during the same time period. The indicator for vote share is statistically significant in all our models except when acts of religiously motivated violence classified as threats to dignity is the dependent variable. The discussion of our findings would seem to indicate that French legislative elections show a statistically meaningful relationship between religious violence and political competition, which is absent when examining French national presidential elections. More importantly, these results for both Germany and France provides some support for the claims of Hypothesis 3 and may indicate that the influence political competition has on religious violence is sensitive to the dynamics of electoral configuration.

Conclusion

To summarize, our findings generally support our argument regarding the impact political competition has on religious violence. Our results showed that reports of religious violence increased in areas where political competition intensified. These results were consistent with both English and foreign language data sources with the most significant variation being that the analysis of India using Hindi data also yielded results that showed sexual violence and attacks against personal property increased when political competition and turnout increased. Our findings also provided some insight on the potential impact electoral configuration and social contexts may have regarding the influence that political competition

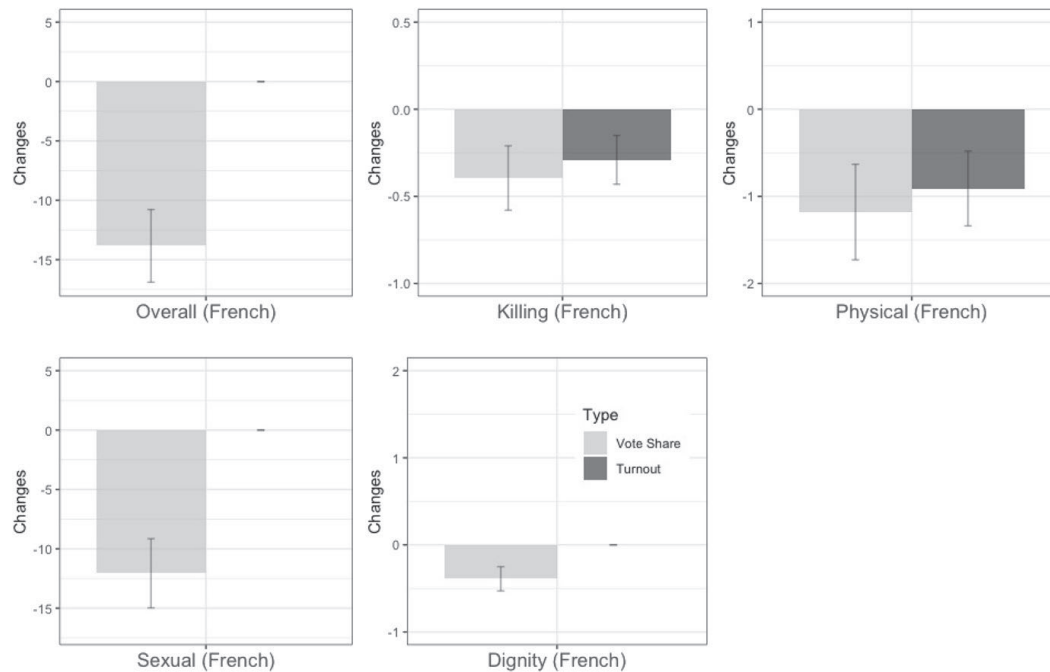


Fig. 5 Substantive changes: French Legislative Round 1

has on the potential for religious violence to happen. Our analysis of France and Germany highlights the impact that differences in electoral systems have with respect to religious violence since we did not find consistent results for our argument. It should be noted that we do not consider these results to be interpreted as definitive, but they do provide empirical support for further investigation of how electoral configuration impacts the relationship between religious violence and political competition. Our analysis also illustrates the potential benefits and challenges when utilizing NLP to produce data measuring religious violence. One of the benefits is the ability to incorporate foreign language sources for data collection. The examination of both event and victim counts in India showed a marked increase in the number of events and victims recorded when utilizing Hindi data sources in comparison to English language media reports. This finding opens productive avenues for future research regarding the triggering mechanisms of different types of religious violence (physical, sexual, and property damage). A closer examination of the role that different legal systems and state support for religion have on specific types of religious violence would increase our understanding of how political systems and state institutions facilitate or mitigate its occurrence.

An important conceptual implication of our findings is the need to account for violent acts that are less-than lethal in character when examining the causal dynamics of religious violence. A measure that can account for different types of violence is better calibrated to analyze factors that influence the intensity of religious violence. The results from our Western European countries may point

to the need to account for specific social/cultural dynamics when operationalizing the concept of religious violence. This is because some countries may have historic legacies of state involvement or opposition to the public practice of religion, which could have significant impact on how religious violence is reported. One specific issue we highlighted was the possibility of conflating religious and ethnic identity with the consequence being the potential to over/under count reported incidents of religious violence. Future research needs to examine the causal mechanism for political competition in more detail with specific attention given to the susceptibility of different audiences to religious mobilization and the rhetoric that political elites utilize to mobilize support based on religious identity.

The results of this study also have some methodological implications for the harnessing of computational approaches, like NLP. The ability to examine media and other print sources in large volumes to generate useful data observations of violent events with an underlying religious motivation may prove beneficial, especially when incorporating foreign language sources. Future research related to this study should look to enlarge the scope of the analyses both from a longitudinal/cross section perspective and incorporate the examination of types of media sources and their potential ideological biases. This approach can have important implications for other forms of political violence, especially in regards to human rights data collection. Datasets that analyze and identify human rights violations; Political Terror Scale (PTS) (Gibney et al., 2015) and the CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli et al., 2014) identify and analyze human rights abuses around the world but they are based on aggregated national level data and typically only give a more general indication of which actors engage in human rights violations. The use of a NLP-based approach may allow for improved examination of human rights abuses at the sub-national level (see the Sub-National Analysis of Repression Project—SNARP¹³) or provide more detailed information regarding specific crimes and actions to utilize for naming and shaming of human rights violators (Murdie et al., 2019). In short, using approaches like NLP may allow for more fine grained analysis that can capture regional effects within countries when it comes to outbreaks of political violence and human rights violations, which may allow for more effective public attention to be drawn to violators of human rights and identifying the specific violent atrocities they engage in.

The findings from this study have highlighted the importance of increasing our understanding of religious violence, both from a measurement perspective and identification of causal factors that influence how politically competitive environments facilitate outbreaks of religious violence. In numerous countries around the world increased incidences of violence with underlying religious motivations leads to both loss of life and numerous policy challenges. Whether it be violence between different sectarian communities in places like Iraq or the organized repression of minority communities based on perceptions of religious identity by state authorities in places like Myanmar and China it is clear that the need to understand the dynamics related with religious violence is not only timely but also relevant. As

¹³ <http://snarpdata.org/>.

the international system increasingly sees bouts of religious persecution or sectarian conflict our ability to measure, predict, and ultimately prevent the calamities that accompany outbreaks of religious violence will also increase, so the sooner we understand the processes engendering religious violence, the closer we are to potential solutions to avert its most adverse effects.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. The authors have no financial or proprietary interests in any material discussed in this article.

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