

Intercommunal Engagement and Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India: The 2013 Muzaffarnagar Riots

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1. Introduction

On 27 August 2013, an incident in the district of Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, ostensibly lit the largest outburst of communal violence in India since the 2002 violence in Gujarat. In just a few weeks' time, the communal tensions led to the death of at least 52 people (15 Hindus and 37 Muslims), the displacement of an estimated 50,000 people around the town of Muzaffarnagar, and about 30 children that subsequently froze to death in the refugee camps (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15).

The incident that triggered the Muzaffarnagar riots remains disputed, and therefore has several narratives. Nevertheless, the incident got a communal colour, and led to the death of one Muslim and two Hindu Jat farmers. Despite the long-standing tradition of economic interdependence between Muslims and Hindu Jat farmers in the region, the communal tensions increased further as politicians from both communities started spreading rumours and delivering inflammatory speeches in order to mobilise their communities. Since the state government did not respond adequately to the emerging situation, mass violence erupted, which spread to neighbouring districts as well (Muralidharan, 2014, p. 41; Ahmed, 2013, p. 10; Berenschot, 2014, p. 15).

The media and many scholars (e.g. Brass, 1997 & 2003; Wilkinson, 2004) have ascribed India's communal violence predominantly to instrumentalist explanations. These explanations argue that politicians and their parties derive electoral benefits from either instigating or preventing communal violence in order to change the salience of ethnic identities (e.g. caste, religion, language), depending on a calculation of the potential win or loss of votes. These electoral incentives for communal violence would explain the variation in patterns of violence within states (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4-8). This argument has also become the dominant explanation for the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots (Berenschot, 2011b, p. 26-29).

Despite the obvious relevance of the instrumentalist argument, it falls short in explaining how and why some towns and villages are more prone to polarising strategies of politicians than others. Additional theory is needed to mitigate this weakness, and to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of India's recent Hindu-Muslim violence. This study therefore uses Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society, which argues that there is an integral link between the structure of civic life in a multi-ethnic society and the presence or absence of ethnic violence. Strong intercommunal engagement would seriously constrain politicians in their attempts to polarise people along ethnic lines. Conversely, merely intracommunal engagement and weak or non-existent intercommunal engagement would make civil society more prone to politicians' attempts to instigate communal violence (Varshney, 2001, p. 362-363).

By using Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory to explain the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, this study attempts to gain insight into the link between the structure of civic life and the presence or absence of communal violence in the towns and villages in the Muzaffarnagar district. The 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots arguably make the most significant and deplorable recent case of India's communal violence,

located in an area known for its long-standing tradition of intercommunal economic interdependence, and remains to be underexplored academically. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India, more insights into the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots are needed. The following research question has therefore been formulated:

What effects did intercommunal engagement have on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots?

This study conducts qualitative research on the case of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, using Wilkinson's (2004) instrumentalist theory of electoral incentives as a starting point, and Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society as the main explanation for the within case variation, in order to be able to look beyond the prevailing explanation for India's communal violence.

This thesis is structured as follows. Firstly, a literature review, the main theoretical assumptions, the definitions of core concepts, and the hypothesis are discussed in the theoretical framework. Secondly, the case selection, the method of analysis, the operationalisation of the hypothesis and its variables, and the collection of data are justified in the methodology section. Thirdly, a description of the case, the research results, and its implications for the theory are addressed in the analysis. Lastly, the main findings, weaknesses, alternative explanations, and suggestions for future avenues for research are presented in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

The literature on communal violence and civic engagement is wide, yet it only dates from the last few decades. The main theories on this subject are discussed below in the literature review in order to provide an overview of the available building blocks for this study. Subsequently, several building blocks are combined to formulate the thesis' main theoretical argument as deemed relevant for the explanation of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots.

2.1 Literature review

Studies by Horowitz (1985 & 2001) form the basis of the literature on communal violence. He defines a deadly ethnic riot as 'an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership' (Horowitz, 2001, p. 1). In this definition, ethnicity can be conceived as either 'communal', 'racial', 'religious', 'linguistic', or 'tribal' (Horowitz, 2001, p. 1). This has become the prevailing definition for communal violence in the academic literature.

In *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (2001), several crucial arguments on ethnic violence are put forward by Horowitz. Firstly, ethnic riots tend to occur during times of political uncertainty. Secondly, most ethnic riots have a strong political character, as the vast majority is set up by either political

parties or their supporters. Thirdly, rumours fulfil a crucial role in triggering riots. Fourthly, riot participants often lack remorse (Horowitz, 2001, p. 1-6, 74, 253, 366). In an earlier work of Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985), he already argued that ethnically divided societies tend to create party systems that mirror ethnic divisions and enable to deepen and extend them (Horowitz, 1985, p. 291). In order to reduce ethnic conflicts, Horowitz recommends to reduce the reinforcing cleavages of political and ethnic divisions by encouraging both intraethnic competition and interethnic cooperation (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 240).

Horowitz's arguments on the political character of ethnic riots are extended in Wilkinson's *Votes and Violence* (2004). In this work, Wilkinson shows that riots occur significantly more often in the six months before or after elections (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 42). He argues that politicians use communal violence as an instrument in order to change the salience of ethnic issues (e.g. caste, religion, language) among the electorate in their political interest. Politicians would either instigate or prevent communal violence, depending on the electoral competition and the reliance of the government on minority votes, in order to acquire electoral gains (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4-8).

Wilkinson's instrumentalist argument is supported by Brass (1997 & 2003), who also argues that politicians polarise their electorate in order to solidify communal identities in their political interest. However, Brass argues that this is done through town-level 'institutionalised riot systems'. In *The Theft of an Idol* (1997) and *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (2003), Brass describes such institutionalised riot systems as "networks of actors, groups, and connections involving persons from different social categories whose effect is to keep a town or city in a permanent state of awareness of Hindu-Muslim relationships" (Brass, 1997, p. 284). Since the riot systems uphold this awareness, communal tensions could easily be ignited by politicians when communal mobilisation is of political utility. Cities with well-developed riot systems would therefore be prone to ethnic riots (Brass, 1997, p. 284-286).

Yet another approach to the polarising strategies of politicians is provided by Berenschot in his article *The Spatial Distribution of Riots* (2011a), and in his book *Riot Politics* (2011b). In these studies, Berenschot addresses the link between the dependency of citizens on patronage networks and their susceptibility to political mobilisation for communal violence. He argues that "the dependence of citizens on politicians to deal with state institutions structures the competition and cooperation between political actors, and this dependence shapes the possible strategies that political actors can employ to gain support and win elections" (Berenschot, 2011b, p. 37-38). As citizens' dependence on patronage networks is stronger in poorer neighbourhoods, these neighbourhoods would be more prone to the polarising strategies of politicians (Berenschot, 2011a, p. 221-222, 227-228).

The instrumentalist explanations to India's communal violence have been supported and complemented by several academic works, like *The Political Logic of Ethnic Violence* (2012) by Dhattiwala and Biggs. This article, on the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, shows that communal violence was most likely where the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faced

the greatest electoral competition. Analysis of the subsequent election confirmed this theory, as the votes for the BJP had increased the most in the constituencies where the communal violence had been the worst (Dhattiwala & Biggs, 2012, p. 503-504). In line with Dhattiwala and Biggs' findings, Ticku managed to establish a causal relationship between Hindu-Muslim riots and BJP's electoral performance in his article *Riots Rewards?* (2015), which shows that riots have a positive and significant effect on BJP's vote share (Ticku, 2015, p. 32).

A new dimension to the previous theories is added by Varshney in his article *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society* (2001), and in his book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (2002). In these works, Varshney argues that the extent to which ethnic communities are susceptible to polarising actions of politicians, largely depends on the structure of civic ties between the different communities. Strong networks of intercommunal engagement would be able to control outbreaks of communal violence, whereas its absence or the mere presence of intracommunal engagement would open up space for communal violence (Varshney, 2001, p. 362-364; Varshney, 2002, p. 9-15).

A different perspective on inter- and intracommunal engagement is presented by Fearon and Laitin in *Explaining Interethnic Cooperation* (1996). In this article, two mechanisms are put forward on how interethnic cooperation could contain disputes between individual members of different groups. Firstly, the fear that disputes between individuals would spiral rapidly beyond the two parties would give rise to interethnic cooperation. Secondly, in-group policing would ensure that a group punishes its own member when it misbehaves towards another group. These mechanisms would contribute to interethnic peace, with the latter only requiring minimal interethnic interaction (Fearon & Laitin, 1996, p. 715-716, 730-731). This theory, that interethnic peace can be achieved with minimal interethnic interaction, greatly differs from Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory, which deems strong intercommunal engagement necessary for interethnic peace.

When studying the academic literature on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, support for several of the above described theories on communal violence can be found. Regarding the instrumentalist argument, Susewind and Dhattiwala show how the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots succeeded in strengthening the Hindu-Muslim division on the local level in the 2014 national elections (Susewind & Dhattiwala, 2014, p. 353, 366, 376-379). Furthermore, Berenschot upholds his own theory by arguing that the dependence of citizens on patronage networks helps to explain both the mobilisation of common villagers as well as the success of social polarisation as a profitable political strategy in Muzaffarnagar (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15-16). Lastly, Varshney writes that numerous political actors from both communities had electoral interests in reigniting communal tensions, and argues that three factors would be able to impede the resurgence of mass communal violence: income, Hindu-Muslim ties, and Modi's political strategy (Varshney, 2014, p. 41-43).

2.2 Theoretical argument

In order to answer this study's research question, "What effects did intercommunal engagement have on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots?", all of the above described theories are of relevance. As this study has severe limitations in both time and resources, it uses Wilkinson's (2004) instrumentalist theory of electoral incentives as a starting point, and Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society as the main explanation for the within case variation of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. By explaining how and why some towns and villages were more prone to polarising strategies of politicians than others, this study looks beyond the prevailing explanation for India's communal violence.

Since the instrumentalist theory of electoral incentives is the prevailing explanation for the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, it makes an indispensable starting point. The theory argues that politicians use communal violence as an instrument to change the salience of ethnic issues among the electorate in their political interest (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4-8). The interaction of electoral incentives at two levels would determine whether politicians will either instigate or prevent communal violence. Whereas town-level electoral incentives would explain where communal violence breaks out, state-level electoral incentives would explain whether, when, and where state governments will prevent or bring an end to the violence. Town-level electoral incentives to instigate communal violence would emerge when an ethnic party faces great electoral competition on constituency-level. In order to encourage members of a wider ethnic category to identify with their party, politicians would change the salience of ethnic identities (e.g. caste, religion, language) by polarising the electorate as in their political interest (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4-8). Since the instigation of communal violence is electorally motivated, the riots occur significantly more often the six months before or after elections. During these months political parties attempt to influence voting behaviour as well as the process of coalition formation (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 42). State-level electoral incentives to prevent or stop communal violence would emerge when the incumbent state government relies on minority votes, or when it is likely that the incumbent state government has to rely on the cooperation with minority supported parties in the future (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4-8).

The extent to which ethnic communities are susceptible to the polarising strategies of politicians, would largely depend on the structure of civic ties between the different communities. As Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory acknowledges politicians' use of polarising strategies, it builds on the instrumentalist argument, but with the addition and focus on the element of civil society. A common academic definition of civil society is "the space in a given society that (a) exists between the family level and the state level, (b) makes interconnections between individuals or families possible, and (c) is independent of the state" (Varshney, 2002, p. 39-40). Hence civil society forms a non-state space of collective life that can cover both social and political activities (Varshney, 2002, p. 4).

The concept of civil society has been used in different ways. According to Putnam (1993), the civic networks of civil society produce trust and shared norms among communities, which he calls

social capital. Putnam regards social capital essential to make a democracy work. Varshney (2001 & 2002) however, uses a completely different approach as he links civil society to ethnic conflict. Whereas Putnam studies whether civic engagement exists, Varshney studies whether civic engagement cuts across different communities, as civic engagement that remains within one community is often associated with the escalation of communal tensions (Varshney, 2002, p. 319-320). Thus, Varshney makes a distinction between intercommunal and intracommunal engagement. Strong networks of intercommunal engagement would be able to control rising communal tensions, whereas its absence or the mere presence of intracommunal engagement would open up space for communal tensions. The former would be able to build bridges and manage tensions between communities, whereas the latter fails to do this. The presence or absence of intercommunal engagement would therefore help to explain why communal violence occurs in some towns and villages, but not in others. This theory is represented in Figure 1.1 (Varshney, 2001, p. 362-364, 379-380; Varshney, 2002, p. 9-15).

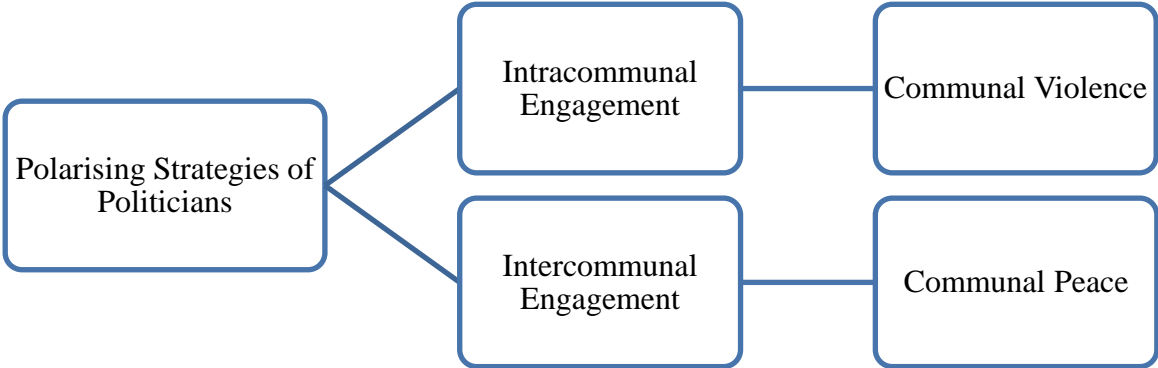


Figure 1.1 Communal Violence and Peace (Varshney, 2002, p. 12)

Inter- and intracommunal engagement can, in turn, be broken down into associational and everyday forms of civic engagement. Examples of associational forms of civic engagement are “business associations, professional organisations, reading clubs, film clubs, sports clubs, festival organisations, trade unions, and cadre-based political parties” (Varshney, 2002, p. 3). Examples of everyday forms of civic engagement are “routine interactions of life as Hindu and Muslim families visiting each other, eating together often enough, jointly participating in festivals, and allowing their children to play together in the neighbourhood” (Varshney, 2002, p. 3). Regarding associational and everyday forms of intercommunal engagement, both promote peace, strengthen the sense of communal harmony, and mutually reinforce each other. Whereas everyday forms of intercommunal engagement allow the formation of temporary organisations in times of communal conflict, the associational forms produce an even stronger fundament to withstand exogenous shocks (e.g. partitions, desecrations of holy places, election results, unconfirmed rumours) and polarising strategies of politicians. As associational networks serve the economic, cultural, and social interests of multiple communities, interdependence emerges. This provides communities with incentives to maintain good intercommunal

relations, which decreases the likelihood of violent ethnic conflict, and constrains politicians' attempts to polarise the electorate along communal lines (Varshney, 2002, p. 3-5, 9-12).

Consequently, the following hypothesis is derived from Varshney's (2002) theory:

The stronger the intercommunal engagement, the greater is the capacity to withstand the polarising strategies of politicians, and the less likely is the occurrence of communal violence.

3. Methodology and data

3.1 Case selection

The 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots make a highly relevant case to be explained by Wilkinson's (2004) theory of electoral incentives, and Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society due to the following reasons. Firstly, the riots have been the largest outburst of communal violence in India since the 2002 violence in Gujarat (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15). This makes the riots one of the most significant cases of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India, especially in the light of the supposed growing Hindu nationalist sentiments across the country (Varshney, 2014, p. 41; Ticku, 2015, p. 2). Secondly, the riots took place in the run up to India's national elections in 2014, which were won with a massive victory by the Hindu nationalist BJP (Varshney, 2014, p. 34; Berenschot, 2014, p. 15). Thirdly, the riots took place in a region that for generations had been characterised by economic interdependence between Hindu Jat farmers and Muslims. Despite these associational networks of civic engagement, the communities have not been able to control the rising communal tensions (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15). Fourthly, neighbours from different communities, in both urban and rural context, have been mobilised to attack each other in the riots (Muralidharan, 2014, p. 41). The spread of communal violence to the rural context is remarkable, as communal violence is associated with the urban context, not with the intimate settings of villages, where strong everyday networks of civic engagement usually prevail (Varshney, 2001, p. 375-376). Fifthly, the riots are characterised by large within case variation, as some localities in the region experienced large outbursts of communal violence, whereas others did not (Rao, Mishra, Singh, Bajpai, 2013, p. 10, 22). Sixthly, the riots are still underexplored academically.

3.2 Method of analysis

This study conducts an explorative qualitative analysis of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, using Wilkinson's (2004) instrumentalist theory of electoral incentives as a starting point, and Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society as the main explanation for the within case variation. By addressing the effects of intercommunal engagement on the riots, this study looks for a deeper understanding of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India.

The 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots are a case with large within case variation. Although all the violent incidents seem to be linked to and influenced by the same events as well as by each other, some towns and villages were more prone to communal violence than others. This variation is explained by the localities' structures of civil society, however adequate comparative case studies are not possible at this point due to the inconsistency of available data. Therefore, a qualitative approach is used to conduct an in-depth analysis of the available data on the effects of intercommunal engagement on the riots.

3.3 Data

In this study, the main sources for analysis of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots are secondary data, as the research is based on information that is derived from fact-finding reports, and from secondary literature. The fact-finding reports that are subjected to an in-depth analysis for this study are obtained from ANHAD (2013), Centre for Policy Analysis (2013a & 2013b), Citizens's Inquiry Team (2013), Joint Citizens' Initiative (2013), Muzaffarnagar Adhikar Jan Mach (MAJMA) (2015), National Commission for Minorities (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2014a, & 2014b), Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai (2013), and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) (2014).

Since Wilkinson's (2004) theory of electoral incentives is used as an essential starting point for this study, supporting evidence for the theory is demonstrated on the basis of existing analyses of the secondary literature on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots (e.g. Ahmed, 2013; Berenschot, 2014; Muralidharan, 2014; Susewind & Dhattiwala, 2014; Varshney, 2014), as well as on the observations of the above mentioned fact-finding reports. Factors that are required to support the theory are (a) strong electoral competition, and (b) the instigation of communal violence by politicians through polarising strategies such as delivering inflammatory speeches, and spreading rumours.

Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society is used as the main explanation for the within case variation of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. An in-depth analysis of the above mentioned fact-finding reports has been conducted to study the effects of intercommunal engagement on the riots. Data has been collected to link the structure of civic life in numerous towns and villages in the riot-affected region to the presence or absence of communal violence. Based on the theory, it is expected that towns and villages which had strong intercommunal engagement are less affected by communal violence than towns and villages which lacked strong intercommunal engagement. However, it is important to note that this expectation is probabilistic, and not law-like. In order to determine whether intercommunal engagement was present, several factors need to be accounted for, with both (a) associational and (b) everyday forms of intercommunal engagement being of importance.

To establish whether everyday forms of intercommunal engagement were present, the everyday interaction between citizens of different communities needs to be assessed. This interaction has an informal and non-organisational character, like 'Hindu and Muslim families regularly visiting each other, eating together in social settings, allowing their children to play together, and jointly

participating in festivals” (Varshney, 2002, p. 3-5; Varshney, 2001, p. 363, 383). An important prerequisite for the presence of everyday intercommunal engagement is that the different communities live close to each other, rather than in segregated sections. Everyday intercommunal engagement is therefore likely to be stronger in the intimate setting of a village (Varshney, 2001, p. 375-376).

To determine whether associational forms of intercommunal engagement were present, the organised interaction between citizens of different communities needs to be assessed. This interaction has a more formal character, and is demonstrated by all kinds of civic associations like “business associations, professional organisations, reading clubs, film clubs, sports clubs, festival organisations, trade unions, and cadre-based political parties” (Varshney, 2002, p. 3-5). These associational networks of intercommunal engagement are usually solid as they create economic, cultural, and social interdependence between different communities (Varshney, 2002, p. 9-12).

4. Analysis

4.1 The sequence of events leading up to the riots

In the run up to the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, a sequence of events took place that increased the communal tensions, and eventually led to the outbursts of communal violence. This sequence started with an incident on 27 August 2013 in Kawal, a Muslim majority village in the district of Muzaffarnagar. Different narratives have circulated on the cause of this incident, and the nature of the dispute remains contested up to present day. According to the dominant narrative, a Hindu Jat girl, from the Jat majority village of Malikpur, was repeatedly harassed by a Muslim boy from Kawal. In order to defend their community’s honour, two brothers of the girl would have killed the Muslim boy. Subsequently, the two Hindu Jat brothers would have been lynched to death by a Muslim mob out of retaliation. However, according to another narrative, which is deemed more credible by several fact-finding reports, the incident had nothing to do with sexual harassment. Instead, the incident would be caused by a minor traffic accident, which had escalated into a violent conflict between the three boys, resulting in their deaths. Nevertheless, although violent incidents are nothing uncommon in this highly crime-prone district of Uttar Pradesh, the incident was given a communal colour (Ahmed, 2013, p. 10; Berenschot, 2014, p. 15; Muralidharan, 2014, p. 41; TISS, 2014, p. 7).

In the days following the Kawal incident, the communal tensions in the Muzaffarnagar district rose as reprisals against the Muslim community were carried out by Hindu Jats, with Muslims reacting hereupon in a similar manner. Despite the imposition of an official ban on public meetings, a Muslim gathering was held on 30 August 2013 in the town of Muzaffarnagar after the Friday prayers. At this meeting the communal tensions were addressed by district and state-level Muslim leaders whom are affiliated with political parties such as Congress, the Samajwadi Party (SP), and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and inflammatory speeches were delivered (Ahmed, 2013, p. 10; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 7-10).

During these days, a fake video that would show the brutal killing of the two Hindu Jats according to several claims, circulated on social media, which pushed the communal tensions even further. As a result, the Hindu Jats called for a *panchayat*, a communal gathering, in Lisarh on 5 September 2016. During this *panchayat* a *mahapanchayat*, a large communal gathering, was announced for 7 September 2016 in Nangla Mandour, and participants were allegedly asked to come armed. The Hindu right-wing party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Hindu nationalist organisation, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), supposedly played a crucial role in organising this *mahapanchayat*. Their local leaders addressed an estimated 40,000 Hindu Jats at the *mahapanchayat*, and delivered inflammatory speeches in which they openly incited communal hatred. As reported, the Hindu Jats, charged with hate subsequently, drove through several Muslim majority villages while shouting highly provocative slogans on return from the gathering, which consequently led to violent confrontations that resulted in deaths for both communities. This marked the start of the communal riots. In the following two days, the violence spread through the district and its adjoining districts, fuelled by rumours, and with organised Hindu Jat mobs attacking the Muslim communities in numerous villages and towns. Eventually, the army brought an end to the violence (Ahmed, 2013, p. 10; Rao, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 7-13; NCM, 2013a, p. 3-4; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 5; ANHAD, 2013, p. 7-8).

The official records on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots show that the attacks against Muslims affected dozens of villages. The actual attacks took place in about nine villages in Muzaffarnagar and about five villages in Shamli, which left at least 52 people dead (15 Hindus and 37 Muslims), 60 people injured, and 80 houses burnt. However, Muslims fled from an additional 74 villages, as they feared outbreaks of communal violence (MAJMA, 2015, p. 8; TISS, 2014, p. 14; Berenschot, 2014, p. 15). This resulted in the displacement of an estimated 50,000 people, of which about 30 children froze to death in the refugee camps (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15).

4.2 Background to the communal tensions

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, some background to the communal tensions is needed. As the violence mainly took place in the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, some details are provided on these districts to give an idea of the context.

Muzaffarnagar is a district and parliamentary constituency within the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Its population was around 2.9 million in 2011, and is characterised by a high proportion of Muslims, Jats, and Dalits. Muslims would constitute about 45 percent of the district's population. Shamli is the adjoining district, and is part of the parliamentary constituency of Kairana. Its population was about 1.3 million in 2011, and has a similar composition of ethnic communities. Muslims would account for approximately 40 percent of the district's population (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 18; NCM, 2013a, p. 5; NCM, 2013b, p. 1).

The districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli are part of an agriculturally rich region that has economically gained from the Green Revolution in the 1970s and the 1980s (MAJMA, 2015, p. 5). Despite the fact that Muslims are present in large numbers, they hardly own land, as the fields are predominantly owned by the Hindu Jats. Most of the Muslims either work on the land of the Jats, or as daily workers at brick kilns, or have petty businesses, or work in other places of the country. As agriculture forms the prime source of income in the area, a feudal and patriarchal system has emerged over time, which provides the Jats with substantial economic power in the region. Furthermore, due to their prosperity and former favourable public policies, Jats also dominate the bureaucracy and police in the districts (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 18; MAJMA, 2015, p. 5; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 2-3).

The economic and political power of the Hindu Jat farmers has traditionally been protected by the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), a political party, and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), a Hindu nationalist farmers' representative organisation. These Hindu associations have been controlling the political space in the region, leaving only limited space for negotiation with the better off non-Jats, including the better off Muslim community, the Muley Jats. This led to a feudal parallel system of governance, where the elites decide for all and govern all aspects of life, with little space for any democratic institutions, equality, justice, and women rights. The economically weak, both Hindus and Muslims, were hence exploited by the elites. Nevertheless, due to their economic interdependence, this did not lead to communal violence. The Jats and the other communities lived peacefully in this region of Uttar Pradesh, with the land owners taking care of their workers' basic needs (MAJMA, 2015, p. 5; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 6; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 2-3).

This unequal but stable relationship between Hindu Jat farmers and Muslims changed when trends of lower-class mobility among Muslims emerged. In the years prior to the riots, Muzaffarnagar's Muslim community seems to have made economic progress due to several reasons. Firstly, the Muslim community's access to state resources improved through the patronage networks of the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP), which relies on the votes of Muslims. Secondly, while the Jat farmers were facing agrarian crises and stagnant productivity, the Muslims started to have more economic successes in trade and commerce, with the ones working in other parts of the country sending their income back home. This decreased the economic dependency of Muslims on their unequal relationship with the Jats, and therefore changed the relationship between the two communities (MAJMA, 2015, p. 6-7; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 35-37; TISS, 2013, p. 12-13).

Another, more underlying reason that had been strengthening the cleavage between Hindu Jats and Muslims, was the exclusion of the Jat community from the affirmative action category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the post-Mandal Commission period. As the Jats had been the leaders of backward caste consolidation, the exclusion made them feel isolated, marginalised, and politically neglected. This exclusion was still felt by the Jat community, especially by the young, low educated,

unemployed Jats, as the Samajwadi Party government reserved posts for OBC's in the state police department. This increased the economic difficulties and discontent that were experienced by the Hindu Jats (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 18-19, 35-37).

These trends, both political and economic, caused large resentment among the Hindu Jats, as they felt it threatened their powerful position, and their control over the region. Whereas the Hindu Jats traditionally had controlled the local institutions, and had exercised large influence on the voting outcomes of elections, their traditional hold over society was now undermined by the new Muslim leaders, and the economic mobility among the Muslim community. This supposedly made the Hindu Jat farmers susceptible to the polarising strategies of politicians in the run up to the 2014 Indian general election (MAJMA, 2015, p. 6-7; TISS, 2013, p. 12-13).

4.3 Electoral incentives for communal violence

The existing analyses of the secondary literature, as well as the observations of the fact-finding reports show that electoral incentives lay at the basis of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. Supporting evidence for the required factors of the theory is abundantly available, as both (a) strong electoral competition and (b) the instigation of communal violence by politicians through polarising strategies were present in the run-up to the riots.

Uttar Pradesh forms an important state for India's general elections, as it accounts for 80 of the total 545 parliamentary seats. The western part of the state, where the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli are located, accounts for 14 parliamentary seats, and is dominated by the Hindu Jats (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 20-21; MAJMA, 2015, p. 5-6). This electoral opportunity has long made the region of electoral interest for the Hindu right-wing party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). However, the existing political structures of the region formed strong electoral competition to the BJP, and needed to be undermined first, before the BJP could consolidate the votes of Hindu Jats (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 20-21; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 2-3).

In the run-up to India's general elections in May 2014, electoral gains were of crucial importance for the BJP, as the opposition party had experienced two electoral debacles since they had returned to their hard-line ideological agenda. The BJP faced great electoral competition, since the Hindu Jat community was politically divided among political parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), and Indian National Congress (Muralidharan, 2014, p. 35; Berenschot, 2014, p. 15; MAJMA, 2015, p. 5-6). As the BJP needed to recover lost ground in Uttar Pradesh, the party increased the communal tensions between the Hindu Jats and Muslims, which would consolidate the votes of the powerful Hindu Jat community (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 20-21; TISS, 2013, p. 9). In order to do so, the BJP has been spreading rumours, circulating fake videos of the Kawal incident on social media, and touring the region intensely. Furthermore, the party has played a crucial role in organising several *panchayats* and the

mahapanchayat on 7 September 2013, where they delivered inflammatory speeches (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15; Ahmed, 2013, p. 10; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013).

As described in the previous section, the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) had traditionally been controlling the political space in the region, and formed a parallel system of governance. Whereas the RLD relies on the votes of both Hindu Jats and Muslims, the BKU formed an alliance between the elites of the Hindu Jats and the Muslim Muley Jats. According to respondents of the fact-finding report of MAJMA, including Jats, the BJP had both the electoral and the ideological incentives to break up this political monopoly (MAJMA, 2015, p. 5; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 2-3). The polarisation of Hindu Jats and Muslims was a successful strategy, since it would undermine the RLD's political stronghold, and electorally benefit the BJP (TISS, 2013, p. 7-8).

In the months preceding the riots, the division between the communities was systematically built up by Hindu nationalist organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), its affiliates, and the BJP. This was done by giving incidents a communal colour in the media, and spreading hate through politicians, rumours, leaflets, and graffiti. In this politics of hate, community honour was one of the recurring themes, which mainly addressed the dignity of women. Within this narrative, Hindu nationalist propaganda about a so-called 'love jihad' was spread, referring to Muslim boys seducing Hindu girls, which created fear among the Hindu Jat community (Muralidharan, 2014, p. 41; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 4-5; MAJMA, 2015, p. 7; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 35-37; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 3-4; ANHAD, 2013, p. 4; TISS, 2014, p. 7). This created an atmosphere in which every interaction between men and women from different faiths was considered to be suspicious, which restrained the mobility of the Jat women. The Kawal incident on 27 August 2013 fitted perfectly within this polarising narrative, and was framed as an intercommunal dispute affecting the community honour (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 4-5).

Furthermore, from several fact-finding reports it becomes clear that the BJP was not the only party that was likely to gain politically from communal violence. Both Muslims and Jats argue that the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) state government has also acted out of electoral incentives. Since it was crucial for the SP to maintain the support of the Muslim community, it is argued that the SP also expected to benefit from the rising communal tensions within society, as the sharp polarisation undermined the vote shares of parties that relied on both Hindu Jats and Muslims. However, since the SP government reacted with indecision and inaction to the increasing tensions, large scale violence erupted, and spread through the region (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 16, p. 19-21; MAJMA, 2015, p. 57; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 35-37; TISS, 2014, p. 7-9). The SP government declared that the severity of the violence, which strongly affected the villages, came unexpected to them. The failure to protect the Muslim community against the one-sided violence of the Hindu Jats, took away any possible benefit for the SP from the polarisation of the electorate, and the party lost most of its support of the Muslim community (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 20-21).

After the riots, the Muslim votes were likely to shift from the Samajwadi Party (SP) to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), with some possibilities for Congress to enlarge their vote bank as well. The BJP, which had been proactive in polarising the electorate, was likely to make the biggest political gains through the consolidation of Hindu Jat votes. As the riots had a polarising impact throughout the western part of Uttar Pradesh, the BJP was confident to make large electoral gains beyond the riot-affected region as well (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 19-21; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013b, p. 5). The results of the Indian 2014 general elections reveal that the BJP did win with a massive victory, including all of the parliamentary constituencies in the western part of Uttar Pradesh (Election Results Lok Sabha 2014; Varshney, 2014, p. 34).

Altogether, the secondary literature and the fact-finding reports provide strong support for the theory that electoral incentives have induced the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. In sum, the above analysis shows that strong electoral competition was present, since many parties were likely to gain politically from the communal tensions, and communal violence was instigated through polarising strategies, which changed the salience of ethnic identities among the electorate.

4.4 The structure of civil society

Whereas the previous section showed that polarising strategies of political elites have played a crucial role in the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, this section digs deeper into the dynamics of India's recent Hindu-Muslim violence by addressing the capacity of intercommunal engagement to constraint these polarising strategies. The structure of civil society is used to explain the within case variation of the riots, or in other words, how and why some towns and villages were more prone to the polarising strategies of politicians than others. The degree of the required factors for the theory, namely (a) intercommunal engagement and (b) intracommunal engagement, is therefore analysed and linked to the degree of communal violence, with a further distinction being made between associational and everyday engagement. This is done based on an analysis of the observations of the fact-finding reports. General observations are discussed first, followed by a discussion of specific cases.

In the riot-affected districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, there has been a long-standing tradition of economic interdependence between Hindu Jat farmers and Muslims (Berenschot, 2014, p. 15). This economic interdependence formed a peculiar kind of associational intercommunal engagement, since it was characterised as a feudal and unequal relationship between the two communities. Whereas the lands were predominantly owned by the Hindu Jats, many Muslims had worked for the Jats as labour on their fields, or as domestic helpers. However, despite the fact that this relationship was of an unequal nature, according to many respondents in the fact-finding reports it made the region less communally sensitive, as communal tensions could have disturbed the economic arrangements. Hence the Jats and the other communities peacefully lived together in the region, with the land owners taking care of their labour's basic needs. Before the riots in 2013, the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli had never experienced communal violence (Centre for Policy Analysis,

2013a, p. 18; MAJMA, 2015, p. 5; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 2-3). This indicates that this peculiar kind of associational intercommunal engagement was strong, and kept communal tensions down.

In recent years, the relative socio-economic successes of the Muslim community made the Muslims less dependent on their unequal relationship with the Hindu Jats. Acknowledged by the Hindu Jats, the trend of Muslims asserting economic and political independence caused large discontent among the Hindu Jat community, since they felt it threatened their powerful position in the region. In several fact-finding reports it is argued that the rising resentment among the Hindu Jat community against the Muslim community created fertile grounds for the polarising strategies of politicians (TISS, 2014, p. 12-13; MAJMA, 2015, p. 6-7; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 35-37). This suggests that as the economic arrangements between Hindu Jats and Muslims declined at the expense of the Hindu Jats, the strength of the associational networks of intercommunal engagement decreased, which made the Hindu Jats more susceptible to the polarising strategies of politicians.

The everyday forms of intercommunal engagement in many villages also turned out to be not strong enough to withstand the polarising strategies of the Hindu nationalist forces in the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. A strong cleavage was created between two communities which had lived together in amity and in close proximity to each other for decades (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 3-4, 9). A striking aspect of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots is that the communal violence mainly took place in a rural setting. This is striking as communal violence is normally associated with the relative anonymity of the urban context of a city. The intimate and familiar atmosphere of a village is known to create an everyday form of intercommunal engagement, which would make it less prone to politicians' attempts to instigate communal violence. Since the riots did take place in villages, the sense of betrayal and distrust among the Muslim community aggravated (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 3-4; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013b, p. 2-3).

The adjoining villages of Hussainpur and Mohammadpur Raisingh in the district of Muzaffarnagar make an interesting case within the context of the 2013 riots. The village of Hussainpur has a mixed population consisting of approximately 3,000 Muslims and 2,000 Hindus. However, its Hindu population has no Jats. Furthermore, most households, including the Muslims, own some land. Mohammadpur Raisingh on the other hand, is dominated by the Jat community. The interesting part is that the two villages' agricultural fields are mixed and interspersed (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013b, p. 2; Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 22). As both villages are economically dependent on their fields, a pact between the two villages was formed when the communal tensions in the region had escalated. Whereas the different communities of the villages normally worked between one another during the entire day, they agreed to work on their fields at different times of the day as long as the communal tensions prevailed, in order to avoid communal conflict (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 20, 23, 25). This arrangement did function, but broke down on 30 October 2013, when three Muslim boys from Hussainpur were killed in the fields. The events of this incident remain contested,

as both communities blame each other for attacking each other (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 20, 23). However, the economic interests of the two communities did make a temporary peace arrangement possible to a certain extent.

Nevertheless, no communal violence has occurred in the village of Hussainpur. After the Kawal incident of 27 August, the peace committee of Hussainpur set up mixed teams, comprising all communities, to keep vigil at nights. According to the villagers of Hussainpur, no communal violence ever occurred in their village, despite large exogenous shocks such as India's independence in 1947 and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. The villagers stated that all villages that are not dominated by Jats have peace committees, and declared that "if anyone of their religious leaders took any position on their behalf, without consulting them, they would reject it" (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 22, 24). Although the villagers acknowledged that there are good Jats in the region as well, whom have helped or protected their Muslim neighbours, they argued that somehow all riots took place in the Jat dominated villages. The Hindu Jats of Mohammadpur Raisingh would resent the relative socio-economic successes of the Muslims of Hussainpur (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 24).

The argument of the villagers of Hussainpur that communal violence only took place in Jat dominated villages, suggests that villages' ethnic composition and ratio of communities are of crucial importance for the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. This statement is endorsed by the observations of numerous fact-finding reports, emphasizing that "no communal violence has been reported from any of the Muslim dominated villages in the district" (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, 2013, p. 6). No riots, killings, or damages to temples took place in Muslim majority villages. Also no violence was reported north of Muzaffarnagar, where the Hindu Jat community forms a minority (Rao, Mishra, Singh, & Bajpai, p. 10, 17-18). Additionally, most of the communal violence only took place in Jat majority villages where the Muslims formed a small minority (MAJMA, 2015, p. 8; ANHAD, 2013, p. 10). This suggests the organisational character of the riots, as the team of the Centre of Policy Analysis concluded that Muslims were attacked not with the intent of killing them, but with the purpose of making them flee from the Hindu Jat majority villages in order to end the decades of coexistence (Centre of Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 10). The displacement of Muslims from Hindu Jat majority villages destroyed many familial and community bonds that were built up for generations (TISS, 2014, p. 4). This extremely polarising strategy cuts off all possible forms of intercommunal engagement, and has electorally benefited the BJP. Moreover, the above analysis indicates that the villages' ethnic composition and the ratio of communities strongly influence the likelihood of communal violence. It suggests that an unequal ratio of communities leads to an unequal relationship between the communities, and therefore undermines the likelihood of strong intercommunal engagement.

Since the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots mainly consisted of one-sided violence of Hindu Jats targeted at the Muslim community, the commonly used frame of Hindu-Muslim violence is misleading. Other Hindu castes and communities have stayed out of the conflict, and have maintained their old

relations with the Muslim community. However, it is widely acknowledged that some Dalits were forced by the dominant Jats to take part in the communal strife. Altogether, the Hindu Jats have mainly isolated themselves from the other communities with the breach of communal peace (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013b, p. 6; TISS, 2014, p. 10; MAJMA, 2015, p. 22).

The fact that almost exclusively Hindu Jats attacked the Muslim community during the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, indicates that intracommunal engagement was of crucial importance. Since networks of intracommunal engagement already have a communal character, they are often easily susceptible to polarising strategies of politicians. Intracommunal engagement is therefore associated with the escalation of communal tensions. Based on the observations of the fact-finding reports, the existing forms of intracommunal engagement among Hindu Jats in the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli were strengthened in the run-up to the riots by several factors. The presence or absence of strong intracommunal engagement and its strengthening factors would explain why communal violence did occur in some Jat dominated villages and not in others. These are discussed now.

Firstly, the Hindu Jat community formed the economic and political powerful majority within the region. In order to keep up this dominant position, associational intracommunal engagement was present in the form of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). This Hindu nationalist farmers' representative organisation protected the interests of the Hindu Jats, and only left little space for negotiation with better off non-Jats. Although the BKU was ostensibly an apolitical force, it provided support to the Hindu Jat cause when the communal tensions rose (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 6; Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013b; p. 6; Citizens's Inquiry Team, 2013, p. 3; MAJMA, 2015, p. 5). Secondly, the segregation of communities within villages leads to a higher degree of everyday intracommunal engagement. In the villages where Hindu Jats lived together in one part of the village, their daily interactions were mostly limited to their own community. The degree of everyday intracommunal engagement was therefore higher, and at the expense of everyday intercommunal engagement (MAJMA, 2015, p. 46). Thirdly, the (*maha*)*panchayats* of the Hindu Jats, and the gatherings of the Muslims in the months preceding the riots, seem to have played a crucial role in the polarisation of the two communities. These assemblies had a strong intracommunal nature, where both communities' leaders and prominent politicians addressed their communities with inflammatory speeches, which strongly undermined any form of intercommunal engagement. The areas where *panchayats* were held often experienced communal violence (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2013a, p. 6-7, 11).

In order to further illustrate and support the above observations, the case study research of the team of Muzaffarnagar Adhikar Jan Manch (MAJMA) is discussed and linked to the theory of civil society. In this research, the team studied six villages in total, three in each district. The villages of Kiwana, Ailum, and Simbhalka are located in the district of Shamli. The villages of Nalla, Khera Mastan, and Kharar are located in the district in Muzaffarnagar. All the villages share the characteristics that they are large, have a mixed population profile with a Hindu Jat majority, are

located close to the outbreaks of the violence, and have some survivors that returned (MAJMA, 2015, p. 31).

The first village, Kiwana, was segregated with the communities living apart from each other. The relationship between the Muslims and Jats was unequal as the Muslims depended on the Jats for work. However, the two communities shared a cordial relationship in their economic interdependency. This peculiar kind of associational intercommunal engagement was complemented by a strong degree of everyday intercommunal engagement, since the two communities took part in each other's social events, and were invited to each other's marriages. Furthermore, the communities' women's relations were amicable, as they shared and exchanged household items. Disagreements were solved with discussions. No violence took place during the riots in Kiwana, but because of the violence close by, the Muslims had to be evacuated, with the assistance of the villagers and police (MAJMA, 2015, p. 32-35).

The second village, Ailum, was segregated with the Hindu Jats living at either side of the village, and the Muslims in the middle. Everyday intercommunal engagement was present between the richer Muslims and the Hindu Jats as they had an informal and cordial relationship, in which they regularly visited each other, and shared household items. The rest of the Muslims did not enjoy such interactions with the Hindu Jats, but depended on them for their livelihood. No violence took place in Ailum, but the Muslims had to flee, as violent Jat mobs of neighbouring villages were gathering outside the village. After much insistence, the Muslims were saved by the police, with the assistance of some Jat villagers (MAJMA, 2015, p. 37-40).

The third village, Simbhalka, was strongly segregated along lines of caste and faith. Whereas the Hindu Jats live in the centre of the village, the other communities live on the peripheries. Due to the segregation, the communities' interactions were mostly limited to their own community. The village was therefore characterised by strong intracommunal engagement, and everyday forms of intercommunal engagement lacked. However, the Muslims were heavily dependent on the Jats for their livelihood. When the riots started, many rumours were spread, which made many Muslims leave the village. Violence did take place in Simbhalka, which left about eight or nine Muslim houses plundered and destroyed, and about two or three people injured (MAJMA, 2015, p. 43-48).

The fourth village, Nalla, was not segregated, since the different communities were living close to each other. However, due to a deep sense of religious identity and prejudices, the village lacked proper intracommunal engagement. Furthermore, most of the Muslims were independent workers, not depending on the Jats for their livelihood, and gradually improved their economic position in recent years. This caused large discontent among the Jat community. Due to the lack of both intra- and intercommunal engagement, tensions were already present before the riots. Therefore violence did take place in Nalla, but most Muslims had already left the village by then. The violence left several Muslim houses destroyed, most of them belonging to the richer Muslim families (MAJMA, 2015, p. 50-56).

The fifth village, Khera Mastan, was segregated. However, strong everyday intracommunal engagement was present between the Hindu Jats and the Muslims. Although their relationship was unequal, it was cordial and social, with both communities regularly visiting each other's homes, and participating in each other's festivals. When a violent Jat mob from a neighbouring village started attacking Khera Mastan's Muslim community, the headman of the village intervened, and made the mob leave. Subsequently, the Muslims that had not fled yet, were evacuated as a precaution (MAJMA, 2015, p. 57-64).

The sixth village, Kharar, was divided into twelve colonies. There was no segregation along communal lines, since the different communities lived together within the colonies. However, the interactions between the colonies were limited. Whereas the Hindu Jats and the rich Muslim Muley Jats lived near each other and had good personal interactions due to their similar economic standing, this proper everyday intercommunal engagement lacked between the Muslim Muley Jats and the other Muslims in the village. Furthermore, except for the employee-employer relationship, there was no form of civic engagement between the poorer Muslims and the Hindu Jats. Moreover, the Hindu Jats felt threatened by the increase of Muslim politicians. When the mosque got attacked by Jat mobs, many Muslims fled, some with assistance of the army. The violence left the mosque damaged, and some houses, shops, and vehicles were burnt down (MAJMA, 2015, p. 65-71).

The case study research of the team of MAJMA (2015) clearly shows the differences in the individual cases within the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. Although many different factors were at play in these six villages, the relations between the different communities turned out to be of the utmost importance to determine whether communal violence did take place or not. As the analysis reveals, the presence of both everyday and associational forms of intercommunal engagement, especially in villages, increases the likelihood of communal peace.

Hence, the above analysis finds substantial support for this thesis' hypothesis: "The stronger the intercommunal engagement, the greater is the capacity to withstand the polarising strategies of politicians, and the less likely is the occurrence of communal violence", and will therefore be adopted.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has made the effort to answer the research question: "What effects did intercommunal engagement have on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots?" In order to do so, Wilkinson's (2004) theory of electoral incentives is used as a starting point, and Varshney's (2001 & 2002) theory of civil society as the main explanation for the within case variation of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. In this study the structure of civil society has been linked to the presence or absence of communal violence, in order to explain how and why some towns and villages were more prone to polarising strategies of politicians than others. The following hypothesis has been formulated: "The stronger the intercommunal

engagement, the greater is the capacity to withstand the polarising strategies of politicians, and the less likely is the occurrence of communal violence.’’

The main findings to the research question are as follows. Firstly, the decline of associational intercommunal engagement between Hindu Jats and Muslims has made the Hindu Jats more susceptible to the polarising strategies of politicians. Due to the relative socio-economic successes of the Muslim community in recent years, the Muslims became less dependent on their unequal relationship with the dominant Hindu Jats. As the Muslims asserted more economic and political independence, the Hindu Jats felt that this trend threatened their powerful position in the region, and consequently became more susceptible to the polarising strategies of the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the run-up to the 2014 Indian general elections. Secondly, the villages’ ethnic composition and ratio of communities turned out to be of crucial importance. The riots only took place in villages with a Hindu Jat majority and a small Muslim minority. This indicates that an unequal ratio of communities leads to an unequal relationship between the communities, which therefore undermines the likelihood of strong intercommunal engagement. Thirdly, the intracommunal engagement among Hindu Jats has played an important role in explaining the within case variation of the riots. The presence of strong intracommunal engagement in a village through the influence of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), segregation within villages, or close proximity to Hindu Jat *panchayats*, would explain why communal violence did occur in some Hindu Jat dominated villages, and not in others. In sum, the presence of both everyday and associational forms of intercommunal engagement, especially in villages, makes the likelihood of communal peace greater. The thesis’ hypothesis is therefore supported, and hence adopted.

However, it is important to note that this study has several weaknesses and limitations. Firstly, the available sources and data on the subject were limited. The inconsistency of the data therefore complicated the research. Secondly, the reliability and impartiality of the analysed fact-finding reports are questionable. Support for observations therefore had to be derived from multiple sources. In order to mitigate these weaknesses, a research project focused on the theory of civil society needs to be set up, which conducts surveys, interviews, and case studies in the riot-affected areas. This could possibly be complemented with a quantitative analysis of the relation between the degree of inter- and intracommunal engagement and the likelihood of communal violence.

A further suggestion for future research is to look into other alternative explanations for the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, such as the patronage networks of Berenschot (2011), the institutionalised riot systems of Brass (1997 & 2003), and in-group policing of Fearon and Laitin (1996). This will help to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India, which might provide some instruments to reduce conflict in ethnically divided societies.

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