Ancient Epics in the Television Age:

Religious Identity and the Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India*

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Abstract

How does strengthened religious identity affect society and politics? We study the impact of "Ramayan," the massively popular televised version of the Hindu epic. We conduct difference-in-differences analyses, measuring Ramayan exposure with TV signal strength in Indian localities at the time of airing in 1987. Localities with higher Ramayan exposure saw persistently strengthened Hindu religious identity, measured by the names given to newborns; increases in Hindu-Muslim communal violence during the Hindu-nationalist mobilization of the early 1990s; and longer-run increases in electoral success for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. A battery of tests indicates these effects reflect exposure to Ramayan specifically, rather than television generally. Areas with greater exposure also saw increased presence of Hindu religious schools, a potential channel behind the long-run persistence of effects.

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1 Introduction

In 1987, India came to a standstill every Sunday morning. Streets emptied, shops closed, and families gathered around television sets, often sharing with neighbors. The cause of this nationwide pause was the broadcast of "Ramayan," a televised adaptation of the ancient Hindu epic (Rajagopal, 2001). With an estimated 80 million viewers tuning in weekly, it became the most-watched program in Indian television history (Mankekar, 1999). It was also unlike anything Indian television had shown before: no television series with a religious theme had ever been broadcast in the country. Viewers often treated the broadcast as a religious event in its own right, adorning their sets with flowers and performing rituals before each episode (Mitra, 1993). Ramayan was not merely a popular program but a cultural phenomenon that brought a centuries-old sacred narrative to life for a modern mass audience (Cusack, 2012).[1]

This paper asks whether such a powerful but temporary cultural event can leave a lasting imprint on religious identity, and whether it also reshaped social relations and politics. We study the broadcast's effects on Indian localities, estimating how exposure to Ramayan affected religious identity, communal conflict, and electoral politics over the two decades that followed.

For causal identification we exploit spatial variation in the strength of the television signal available when Ramayan aired in 1987, which we treat as a continuous measure of exposure. We estimate difference-in-differences regressions using panel data we assembled on cultural, social, and political outcomes for over 4,000 Indian localities from 1979 to 2000.

Because our treatment is continuous, identification rests on a "strong parallel trends" assumption (Callaway, Goodman-Bacon and Sant'Anna, 2025): at any given level of exposure, average potential outcomes would have evolved in parallel across localities of differing signal strength, conditional on our controls and fixed effects – a requirement stronger than standard parallel trends, which restricts only the no-broadcast counterfactual. Two features of the setting make this assumption plausible. First, the timing of local transmitter construction during India's rapid mid-to-late-1980s rollout was arbitrary with respect to local trends. Second, we isolate the component of signal strength driven by irregular terrain between a locality and its transmitters – controlling for straight-line proximity – so that identification does not rest on mere distance to a transmitter. Locality fixed effects absorb time-invariant differences across places, state-year fixed effects absorb shocks common to a state, and a vector of baseline locality characteristics interacted with year fixed effects flexibly controls for differential trends.

Our primary analyses focus on three outcomes observed for national samples of localities. The first is religious identity expressed in one of the most personal of choices: the naming of children. Greater exposure to Ramayan made Hindu parents substantially more likely to give newborn sons one of the most common Hindu names. Because a name is chosen at birth and carried for life, this shift is a direct and durable marker of strengthened Hindu identity in exposed families.

Second, greater exposure raised the incidence of Hindu-Muslim communal violence. This effect is concentrated in 1991–92, coinciding with the peak of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement – the national campaign to build a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, which

[1]The show experienced a resurgence in popularity when it was rebroadcast during the COVID-19 lockdown in India, again setting new viewership records (Verma, 2020).

culminated in the mosque's destruction in December 1992. Exposure to the show thus predicts where communal violence erupted, while national events shaped when. This pattern is consistent with a strengthened sense of religious distinction that was activated as these events made the Hindu-Muslim boundary salient, rather than a permanent elevation in violence.

Third, greater exposure raised the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) probability of winning state assembly elections, with corresponding losses for the Indian National Congress. Unlike the effect on communal violence, the electoral effect is durable, persisting through the end of our study period in 2000.

Our most direct evidence that the show's religious content – not television access in general – is what mattered comes from where its effects are strongest. The effects of 1987 TV signal are systematically larger in localities closer to pilgrimage sites associated with the Ramayana epic, yet show no corresponding gradient with respect to sites associated with the Mahabharata, India's other great Hindu epic. Content unrelated to the Ramayana narrative – news, or other TV programming – cannot explain why effects track proximity to Ramayana-specific sites but not Mahabharata-specific ones. Additional evidence corroborates this: Ramayan was the first and only religious-themed program on Indian television in 1987 and, by a wide margin, the most discussed show of its era; controlling for contemporaneous television signal leaves the 1987 effect essentially unchanged; and FM radio signal in 1987, which carried news but not Ramayan, has no comparable effect, ruling out a news-exposure channel.

Two further outcomes, drawn from much smaller survey samples and so treated as secondary and suggestive, point in the same direction. Greater exposure raised vegetarianism, an orthodox Hindu dietary practice (Atkin, Colson-Sihra and Shayo, 2021). It likewise raised the prevalence of dowry – a marriage practice traditionally tied to upper-caste status (Olivelle et al., 2004; Anderson, 2003, 2007; Chiplunkar and Weaver, 2023; Bau et al., 2026). Both shifts are concentrated among lower-caste households with the most scope to adopt higher-caste norms, and effects are large in magnitude: a one-standard-deviation increase in Ramayan exposure leads lower-caste households to essentially close the gap in vegetarianism and dowry rates with upper-caste households. These effects on vegetarianism and dowry can be seen as instances of "Sanskritization", a process through which lower-caste groups adopt higher-caste practices (Srinivas, 1962).

Taken together, these reduced-form effects are consistent with a common channel: exposure to Ramayan strengthened Hindu religious identity, which manifested in cultural practice, sharpened communal boundaries, and increased the appeal of a party built on a Hindu-nationalist platform. We cannot directly establish identity as the mediating variable, and we are careful not to claim a single mechanical chain running from the show to electoral outcomes. But the pattern of effects is telling: identity-related outcomes respond similarly across localities regardless of local religious composition, whereas the effects on communal conflict and BJP victory are concentrated in localities with substantial Muslim populations – exactly where a strengthened Hindu identity has an out-group against which to be activated. Finally, areas more exposed to Ramayan saw greater subsequent expansion of schools run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu-nationalist organization affiliated with the BJP; this growth emerged through the 1990s as the party consolidated its electoral gains.

This pattern is consistent with increased local demand for Hindu-nationalist education – itself a manifestation of strengthened identity – and could also constitute a channel through which the effects we document persisted.

Our study contributes to interconnected literatures in political economy and the economics of identity and culture. A first related literature is theoretical work linking identity changes with shifts in political equilibria. Recent contributions emphasize how culture and institutions interact to produce social equilibria that can shift in response to external shocks (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2025). Akerlof and Kranton (2000) highlight how identity influences individual behavior and choices, laying the groundwork for understanding the interplay between identity formation and socio-political dynamics. Sambanis and Shayo (2013) develop a theoretical framework in which social identification is endogenous and shifts in response to external factors, potentially affecting conflict and political behavior. Their model predicts that strengthening ethnic or religious identification can increase intergroup tensions and reshape political equilibria. Besley and Persson (2021) similarly predict that strengthened group identities can lead to the emergence of identity-based political movements and electoral success for parties that represent these identities. Bonomi, Gennaioli and Tabellini (2021) model how identity interacts with beliefs to generate political conflict, showing how identity salience can lead to polarization even when groups share common interests. Despite these theoretical predictions, causal evidence on how identity shifts reshape political outcomes remains limited.

Our contribution is causal evidence that a single cultural broadcast reshaped religious identity, intergroup relations, and electoral politics within a single setting. We show that temporary exposure to religiously themed entertainment strengthened Hindu identity, raised intergroup conflict during the years of national religious mobilization, and produced a persistent electoral realignment toward Hindu-nationalist parties. The setting adds to the significance of this evidence: our study period spans the BJP's first national electoral breakthrough, the foundational years of a political transformation that has since reshaped the world's largest democracy. We further provide evidence on one institutional channel – the expansion of RSS schools – through which a temporary identity shock may have lasting cultural and political consequences. In documenting effects across identity, conflict, and politics within a single research design, we provide empirical support for theoretical predictions linking identity shifts to political change.[2]

Among studies on India specifically, Mitra and Ray (2014) develop a theory of Hindu-Muslim conflict, elaborating how economic incentives interact with ethnic divisions to generate violence. Religious and cultural events have been shown to influence political behavior and communal tensions (Blakeslee, 2018; Baral, Nellis and Weaver, 2026; Iyer and Shrivastava, 2018). Atkin, Colson-Sihra and Shayo (2021) establish links between Hindu-Muslim conflict and religious dietary restrictions. Understanding these dynamics is particularly important given the economic consequences of religious divisions in India: Asher et al. (2026) document how residential segregation by religion affects access to public services, while Kalra (2021) shows that communal violence leads to residential segregation that affects educational out-

[2]Related work, Solá (2025), finds that Pentecostal church growth in Brazil (due to Bible translations to local languages, rather than media exposure) raises vote shares of right-wing and evangelical candidates.

comes. Chowdhury et al. (2025) study cultural and political impacts of RSS schools. We build on this body of work by demonstrating causal effects of a religiously themed television broadcast on cultural practices, intergroup conflict, political outcomes, and religious school establishment.

Because the phenomenon we study is set in motion by a broadcast television show, our work also relates to the literature on the impacts of mass media on cultural, social, and political outcomes. We consider our contributions to the literature on the economics of mass media to be secondary, rather than primary. We highlight the Ramayan show as the cause of the initial strengthening of religious identity. But the show was only a temporary phenomenon (lasting for just 1.5 years), so we emphasize more strongly the subsequent consequences of this identity strengthening: inter-group conflict during the years of religious mobilization, longer-run BJP electoral success, and the expansion of religious educational institutions, a potential channel for long-run persistence of identity and political effects. (This is a large literature; our discussion of related work is selective.)

Studies of the impacts of *religious* broadcast media are the most highly related to our work. Wang (2021) shows that exposure to Father Coughlin's explicitly political Catholic radio broadcasts affected voting and anti-Semitic attitudes in the 1930s U.S. In Brazil, Buccione and Mello (2023) examine how Pentecostal television broadcasting aimed at religious conversion caused social changes (fertility and female labor force participation) and increased vote share for Pentecostal candidates. In contrast with these papers that study religious mass media programming with explicit political or religious conversion objectives, we study religiously themed entertainment content that was not intended to affect politics or promote religious conversion. In addition, our work is distinguished by evidence on religious school establishment as a potential channel for long-run persistence of effects.

Other related studies document impacts of media exposure on cultural and social outcomes. The 1915 U.S. film "The Birth of a Nation" has been found to increase racial hate and KKK membership (Ang, 2023), while also increasing patriotism and reconciliation between North and South (Esposito et al., 2023). Armand et al. (2024) show that radio broadcasting of civil rights narratives reduced racial discrimination in the U.S. Blouin and Mukand (2019) examine how Rwandan radio propaganda designed to reduce ethnic salience helped foster national (rather than ethnic) identity. Exposure to TV soap operas has been found in India to raise women's status (Jensen and Oster, 2009), and in Brazil to reduce fertility (La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea, 2012) and raise divorce rates (Chong and La Ferrara, 2009). Grosfeld et al. (2024) find that exposure to secular content on TV reduced religiosity in post-communist Poland.

Another set of related research examines the impact of mass media on political outcomes. Gentzkow (2006) finds that TV access reduces voter turnout in the U.S. Exposure to the conservative channel Fox News has been shown to increase Republican vote share in the U.S. (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017). Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya (2011) find that exposure to an opposition TV channel raises vote shares of opposition parties in Russia. Yanagizawa-Drott (2014) finds that propaganda radio incites killings during the Rwandan genocide. DellaVigna et al. (2014) find that Croatian exposure to Serbian radio raises anti-Serb sentiment and voting for extremist parties. Adena et al. (2015) show that radio access

facilitated the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Durante, Pinotti and Tesei (2019) demonstrate that exposure to Berlusconi's TV channel in Italy raised long-term support for Berlusconi's party; mechanisms at play include reduced cognitive sophistication and civic-mindedness (for those exposed as youth), as well as higher loyalty to the Berlusconi channel (for older adults). Relative to both sets of studies, our work traces a single media event across cultural, social, and political outcomes together – to our knowledge, the first study to do so in India, where the interplay of religious identity and mass politics is of first-order importance.

Methodologically, our study relates to prior research using Irregular Terrain Models (ITM) of electromagnetic signal propagation to generate plausibly exogenous variation in media exposure (Olken, 2009; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014). We combine this approach with panel data methods (Gentzkow, 2006; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2008; Chong and La Ferrara, 2009; Jensen and Oster, 2009; La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea, 2012). This methodological combination of ITM with panel data, while not unique, is unusual and enables us to estimate the impact of the Ramayan broadcast while making weaker identification assumptions than ITM studies that use purely cross-sectional data.

The paper proceeds as follows. Sections 2 and 3 provide background on television in India and on the Ramayan broadcast. Section 4 describes our data and Section 5 our empirical strategy. Section 6 presents our primary results on naming patterns, communal violence, and electoral outcomes. Section 7 marshals the evidence that the Ramayan show itself, rather than television in general, drives these effects. Section 8 presents further robustness analyses, and Section 9 presents secondary, survey-based outcomes. Section 10 examines RSS schools as a potential channel through which effects may have persisted. Section 11 concludes.

2 Television in India

Television broadcasting in India began in 1959 with experimental transmissions in Delhi (Kumar, 1998), with regular broadcasts commencing in 1965. The 1970s saw gradual expansion to major cities (Singhal and Rogers, 1989); TV remained primarily an urban phenomenon during this decade (Johnson, 2000). For the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi, the government invested heavily in TV transmitters (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010), and thereafter followed an ambitious expansion plan. The number of active transmitters increased from 18 in 1981 to 170 in 1985, and the share of the population with at least "weak" TV signal coverage increased from 15.0% to 32.9% (Table I). During this period, the national broadcaster Doordarshan began airing popular entertainment programs.

Television coverage continued to increase during the 1980s, providing 40.6% of the population with weak TV signal or better (186 transmitters) in 1987, rising to 50.1% (483 transmitters) by 1990. This period spans the airing of Ramayan (1987-88) and forms the core of our study. The rapid expansion of TV access in the 1980s occurred in an environment of limited viewing options—Doordarshan maintained a monopoly with a single national channel. This contrasts with the multi-channel environment that developed after economic liberalization in 1991, when the government allowed private and foreign broadcasters to enter the market (Thussu, 2007). Our analysis thus captures the effects of Ramayan during a period when television was a novel and powerful medium in many Indian households, with viewers having essentially no alternative programming options.

3 The Ramayan Television Series

"Ramayan," the televised adaptation of the Hindu epic Ramayana, was a watershed moment in Indian television history (Rajagopal, 2001). Produced by Ramanand Sagar for the state-owned broadcaster Doordarshan, this 78-episode series aired from January 1987 to July 1988 and brought the ancient Hindu epic to life for a modern audience (Mankekar, 1999).[3]

The Ramayana narrates the life of Ram, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Dating back 2,500 years, it is considered one of the two great epics of Hinduism (along with the Mahabharata). The TV adaptation closely followed the original narrative, depicting Ram's exile from his kingdom, the abduction of his wife Sita by the demon king Ravan, and the subsequent war to rescue her (Cusack, 2012). The series portrayed ideal gender roles and family relationships based on traditional Hindu values (Mankekar, 1999), with Ram presented as the perfect son, brother, and king, and Sita embodying the ideal of wifely devotion. This faithfulness to the source material lent the series its quasi-religious status among viewers. The show's production values were groundbreaking for Indian television at the time, using special effects, elaborate costumes, and dramatic music to create a compelling visual spectacle (Mankekar, 1999). For many viewers who had previously encountered these narratives only through oral traditions or text, this was an entirely new medium through which to experience the epic.

The show aired every Sunday morning at 9:30 AM, a time traditionally associated with religious activities in Indian households (Mitra, 1993). This scheduling amplified the series' impact, transforming television watching into a communal religious experience. Many viewers would bathe before watching, dress in clean clothes, and perform small pujas (worship rituals) in front of their TV sets (Rajagopal, 2001).

Prior to Ramayan's airing in 1987, there had never been a broadcast TV show in India with a religious theme. The start of the series therefore represented an abrupt, discontinuous shift in religious TV content in India. To document this quantitatively, we collected data on all 176 television serials broadcast on Indian public networks from 1980 to 2000. Appendix Figure A4 presents these data, highlighting the absence of religious shows prior to 1987.

Ramayan's television viewership was unprecedented in India.[4] The show's popularity was staggering, with estimates suggesting that over 80 million people tuned in to watch each episode (Rajagopal, 2001). According to Ninan (1995), the series regularly achieved a viewership share of over 80% in urban areas, with even higher percentages in rural regions. At its peak, during the episode depicting Ram's coronation, over 100 million viewers were estimated to be watching simultaneously (Mankekar, 1999), remarkable given that only about 30 million television sets existed in India at the time (Singhal and Rogers, 1989). The phenomenon of "community viewing" emerged, with people gathering in large groups around single television sets, often in public spaces or at neighbors' homes. Mitra (1993) reported instances of entire villages assembling to watch the show. During its broadcast, streets in many

[3]Following Hindi transliteration conventions, the final "a" in "Ramayan" and "Ram" is typically not pronounced or written in common usage. In English scholarship on the ancient epic text, the formal Sanskrit transliteration "Ramayana" is conventionally used for the title, and the deity is referred to as "Rama". The television series followed common pronunciation, using "Ramayan" as its official Hindi title and referring to the deity as "Ram".

[4]Lutgendorf (1990) notes, "Never before had such a large percentage of South Asia's population been united in a single activity, never before had a single message instantaneously reached so enormous [an] audience."

cities would become deserted, and even train schedules were adjusted to accommodate the show's timing (Rajagopal, 2001).

Many have argued that the Ramayan series played a crucial role in standardizing and disseminating a particular version of Hindu mythology across a diverse nation (Rajagopal, 2001; Guha, 2007). In a country with numerous regional and linguistic variations of the epic, the TV series provided a unifying narrative that transcended local differences.[5] Datta et al. (1990) say, "For the first time, all Hindus across the country saw and at the same time listened to the same thing: the serial, in fact, introduced a congregational imperative into Hinduism."

The social and political impacts of Ramayan were not intended by the government. At the time of airing, the national government was led by the secular Indian National Congress (INC) party, not the BJP (Rajagopal, 2001). The primary motivation for airing Ramayan was to increase advertising revenue for Doordarshan (Mankekar, 1999) and to expand TV viewership.[6] This distinguishes our study from research on propaganda or explicitly political media: Ramayan was entertainment content whose effects on identity, society, and politics were unintended consequences.

4 Data

Here we briefly describe the data we use to measure exposure to Ramayan, as well as data on outcome and control variables. For further details, see Appendix Section B. Table II displays summary statistics for all our key variables.

4.1 Television Data

Our measure of exposure to Ramayan is estimated TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (just before the show started airing). We also construct a time-varying measure of TV signal strength over the entire time period of our analyses to separately estimate the impact of access to television on the same outcome variables. The measure varies annually, as well as spatially at a very fine-grained level, across 1-kilometer grid cells for the entirety of India. We aggregate grid-cell-level signal strength measures to various locality levels.

We compile comprehensive data on 1,181 TV transmitters operated by Doordarshan, the national broadcaster, between 1965 and 2000. Our data sources include archival records from the Doordarshan Audience Research Unit, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting annual reports and documents, Press Information Bureau press releases, and Right to Information filings. For each transmitter, we collect location coordinates, power, height, frequency, commissioning dates, and upgrade or decommissioning dates. Details on data sources and construction procedures are provided in Data Appendix Section B.2.

To measure TV signal strength, we apply an Irregular Terrain Model (ITM) of signal

[5]Guha (2007) notes, "The televised epic was introducing subtle changes in this pluralistic and decentralized religion."

[6]Ramanand Sagar, the show's creator, faced initial skepticism from officials and had to lobby extensively before the series was approved for broadcast (Lutgendorf, 1990). S.S. Gill, Secretary of Information and Broadcasting at the time, recalled that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi initially hesitated to approve the show, fearing it might cater primarily to a Hindu audience. Gill, who described himself as "a strong leftist," argued that Ramayan is a national epic and part of the majority culture. He emphasized that there was nothing partisan about the project. The intention, he argued, was not to shift the political balance between majority and minority communities but to raise the government's influence by bolstering TV viewership (Rajagopal, 2020).

propagation (Hufford, 1995; Crabtree and Kern, 2018). The ITM models how TV signals propagate considering obstacles in irregular terrain, using digital elevation data at 90-meter resolution. We overlay a 1-kilometer grid over India (approximately 4.5 million grid cells) and calculate two measures of signal strength for each transmitter-grid cell pair: *freespace signal strength*, which captures hypothetical signal assuming unobstructed transmission (varying inversely with squared distance), and *actual signal strength*, which incorporates terrain and interference.

For each grid cell and year, we identify the transmitter providing the strongest actual signal. We then aggregate from grid cells to locality levels using population-weighted averages based on 1980 gridded population data. Weighting accounts for non-uniform distribution of population within localities. Ramayan first aired in January 1987, so we use January 1987 TV signal strength as our measure of exposure to the Ramayan show. Figure I displays actual signal strength and transmitter locations at four-year intervals from 1979 to 1999, illustrating the expansion of TV coverage throughout our analysis period.

In Table I, we show statistics for our measures of actual signal strength at the assembly constituency level and for all of India from 1970 to 2000. Statistics under "Assembly Constituencies" are averages across assembly constituencies (which themselves are population-weighted averages across grid cells within assembly constituencies). Statistics in the "India" columns are population-weighted averages across all grid cells in the country. Under "Signal", we display the population-weighted average actual signal strength in dBm (decibel milliwatts). The threshold for "weak" television reception defined by the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) guidelines is -68 dBm, and so we display under "Weak Coverage" the share of the population with signal above this threshold (ATSC, 2010).

During the 1980s, television coverage expanded rapidly. In 1980, only 15.0% of the population had a television broadcast signal of at least the weak reception level. This increased substantially to 40.6% by 1987, and to 55.6% by 2000 (column 6). In 1982, India hosted the Asian Games and commissioned 20 transmitters in order to broadcast the event to a larger audience, marking the introduction of television to the masses. The largest annual increase in television coverage occurred during 1984, when the government launched a massive TV expansion plan, commissioning new transmitters at a rate approaching one per day at its peak; from 1984 to 1985, the share of the Indian population with at least weak reception increased substantially from 18.2% to 32.9%.

In regression equations, we normalize the TV signal variable by dividing it by its sample standard deviation. Coefficients on TV signal in general ($TVSignal_{it}$ and its lags) as well as of signal in 1987 ($Ramayan_i$) will be interpreted as impacts of one-standard-deviation changes.

Table A1 documents the correlates of 1987 TV signal strength across assembly constituencies.[7] Consistent with the ITM prediction, the 1987 freespace signal is the dominant predictor ($\beta \approx 0.65$–0.78), capturing the line-of-sight component of actual TV signal. Conditional on the freespace signal, terrain slope enters negatively and significantly; flatter areas receive stronger actual signals, while elevation, temperature, and precipitation are largely uncorrelated with

[7]The dependent variable is the effective (actual) signal strength in 1987, normalized by its standard deviation. All covariates are similarly normalized. Column (1) includes only the free-space signal and state fixed effects; subsequent columns add geographic controls, 1980 TV infrastructure, population, and 1981 Census district controls. Standard errors follow Conley (1999) with a 100 km radius.

coverage. The 1980 signal and its freespace counterpart jointly account for additional variation, reflecting persistence in Doordarshan's transmitter infrastructure. Across all specifications, the R^2 ranges from 0.74 to 0.81, consistent with the variation in signal strength being primarily driven by pre-determined geographic and infrastructural factors.

4.2 Radio Data

To conduct a placebo test, we construct measures of FM radio signal strength for India in 1987 using the same methodology as for television data. We obtain data on FM radio transmitters from the 1987 edition of the World Radio TV Handbook (Frost, 1987), which reports the location, power, and frequency of all transmitters operating in that year. We apply the same ITM used for television signal propagation, which is appropriate for FM broadcasting since the model is calibrated for frequencies between 20 and 20,000 MHz. Following the same procedure as for TV data, we calculate actual and freespace FM radio signal strength for each 1-kilometer grid cell, then aggregate to locality levels using population-weighted averages.

The threshold for "weak" FM radio coverage is -68 dBm (ITU Radiocommunication Sector, 1990). This threshold coincidentally equals the value used for "weak" television coverage, facilitating direct comparison. FM radio provides a useful placebo because it offered news coverage during this period but did not broadcast the Ramayan show. If our television signal effects were driven by access to news rather than Ramayan specifically, we would expect similar effects from FM radio signal strength. Details on radio transmitter data, ITM parameters, and signal calculations are provided in Data Appendix Section B.3.

4.3 Names

Naming patterns are important markers of cultural identity. We examine whether exposure to Ramayan led to an increase in the likelihood newborns are given names typically prevalent among Hindus. The outcome of interest is the share of individuals residing in location i and born in year t who have a "common" Hindu name. We define a "common" Hindu name as a name among the top ten Hindu names in state s. Top names are identified for each state s as the ten most popular names among Hindu males residing in state s and born between 1900 and 1970 (up to the decade prior to our period of analysis), similar to Bazzi, Fiszbein and Gebresilasse (2020). Since we are able to access very spatially disaggregated electoral roll data on names, we can conduct the names analysis at very granular locations, down to the PIN code (postal code) level. For consistency across outcome variables, we aggregate data to the level of 3,088 state assembly constituencies across 21 states.[8] In robustness checks, we conduct the names analyses at the more disaggregated PIN code level and find similar results.

Names data are from Sood and Dhingra (2023), which provides electoral roll data for different states with identifiers at the PIN code level. Without data on religious identity, we identify a person as Hindu if their father's full name is classified as Hindu using the multi-religion algorithm of Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2024). We restrict the sample to males because fathers' names are only available for unmarried females. For details, see Data Appendix

[8]These states and union territories, using the pre-2000 boundaries, include Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Section B.4.1. We list the top 10 Hindu names for each Indian state in Appendix Table A2.[9]

4.4 Hindu-Muslim Conflict

For Hindu-Muslim conflict data, we rely on Varshney et al. (2006) and Mitra and Ray (2014). Varshney et al. (2006) provide data on the number of Hindu-Muslim conflicts up to 1995. We use Mitra and Ray (2014), which extends the dataset through 2000. For our analysis, we focus on the period from 1979 to 2000. The dataset includes references to the main source where the conflict is reported. A communal riot is defined as an event characterized by violence involving two or more groups identified along communal lines, such as religious or ethnic affiliations, engaging in direct confrontation with one another. Events involving violence directed solely at the police or involving a single communal group do not qualify as communal riots. To geolocate the conflict events, we manually read all the source newspaper articles and extracted the most disaggregated neighborhood mentioned in each news report. We then geolocated all the conflicts at the neighborhood level using the Google Maps API and manually verified the geolocations.

Using these data, we define "any conflict": an indicator variable equal to 1 if a Hindu-Muslim conflict occurred in the locality, and 0 otherwise. We also construct measures for violent conflicts (those with at least one injury or death) and deadly conflicts (those with at least one death). For details, see Data Appendix Section B.4.2.

4.5 Elections

We examine whether exposure to Ramayan influences political outcomes, focusing on state assembly elections. We use electoral data from the "LokDhaba: Indian Election Dataset" provided by the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (Agarwal et al., 2021). Our data span 1979 to 2000 and cover 4,062 constituencies in 27 states and union territories, including information on votes received by different political parties in each election.

Our primary political outcome is an indicator equal to one if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wins the state legislative assembly election in the constituency, and 0 otherwise. In analyses in the Appendix, we also examine secondary outcomes: whether the BJP fields a candidate (indicator equal to one if fielded, zero otherwise), and BJP vote share in the constituency. We also construct conditional measures that restrict the sample to only constituencies in which the BJP fielded candidates (these analyses are labeled "conditional" in results tables). We also include analyses for the Indian National Congress (INC) in the Appendix. For details, see Data Appendix Section B.4.3.

[9]While the vast majority of the top names appear clearly Hindu, a handful appear odd, such as "Aabdul" in Assam and "John" in Meghalaya. Our approach identifies Hindus on the basis of father's name, and not the individual's own name (which is of course endogenous), but leads to these odd cases where fathers who the algorithm identifies as Hindu have sons with seemingly non-Hindu names. An alternate approach that classifies individuals as Hindu on the basis of their *own* name eliminates the handful of seemingly non-Hindu names from the list of top names and also allows us to examine names of females (by avoiding the need to have the father's name). Results for both genders are consistent with our primary findings. See Appendix Section C for details.

4.6 Vegetarianism

The vegetarianism data come from the 1982 and 1999 waves of the Additional Rural Incomes Survey (ARIS)/Rural Economic & Demographic Survey (REDS).[10] For 227 villages and 3,656 unique households in a balanced panel, we observe the total annual consumption of meat, fish, and egg products, either home-produced or purchased. We define "vegetarianism" as an indicator variable equal to 1 if the household reports no consumption of meat, fish, and eggs (and 0 otherwise). Our sample consists of 3,226 Hindu households, of which 42% are vegetarian. Vegetarianism is more prevalent among upper-caste households (51%) than among lower-caste households (38%). For details, see Data Appendix Section B.4.4.

4.7 Dowry

The dowry data come from the 1999 wave of the ARIS/REDS. For relatives of the household head and spouse (specifically sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters), we observe their year of marriage and whether a dowry was paid. We use these data to construct a retrospective panel of 20,423 marriages from 1979 to 1998, of which 18,310 are Hindu marriages, which we aggregate to the village-year level. We define "dowry" as the percentage of marriages involving a dowry, which averages 73% across Hindu marriages. Dowries are more prevalent among upper-caste Hindu marriages (77%) than among lower-caste Hindu marriages (71%). For details, see Data Appendix Section B.4.5.

4.8 RSS Schools

We obtain data on the presence of RSS-affiliated schools from a public school directory that reports establishment year and address. Using these data, we define "any RSS school": an indicator variable equal to 1 if the locality contains at least one RSS-affiliated school, and 0 otherwise. For details, see Data Appendix Section B.4.6.

4.9 Control Variables

We include a range of control variables (interacted with time fixed effects) in regressions to account for potential differential time effects across locations. These controls include variables related to population, geography, climate, and agricultural productivity. The control variables are constructed from data from the Indian Census as well as a variety of international gridded datasets. For details, see Data Appendix Section B.5.

5 Empirical Approach

We seek to shed light on the impact of exposure to Ramayan on cultural outcomes, social conflict, and political outcomes. Our units of analysis for most of our analyses are Indian localities (assembly constituencies and villages) observed over 1979 to 2000. We measure a locality's "treatment intensity" (the intensity of its exposure to Ramayan) as its TV signal strength at the start of 1987, just as the show's first episode aired. Our empirical analyses implement a

[10]Several papers study food and culture in India using household consumption data from India's National Sample Surveys (NSS) (Atkin, 2013, 2016; Atkin, Colson-Sihra and Shayo, 2021; Baral, Nellis and Weaver, 2026). We instead use the ARIS/REDS data for two reasons. First, the NSS lacks district identifiers for our periods of interest: the 1987 round is the earliest to contain them, but this coincides with the airing of Ramayan, so no pre-broadcast round carries district identifiers, and the subsequent round (1993–94) lacks district identifiers for urban areas. Second, our treatment – how television signal varies based on irregular terrain – requires finer, georeferenced localities than the earlier rounds of NSS can provide.

difference-in-differences approach to take advantage of the spatial variation in Ramayan treatment intensity combined with variation over time (from before to after the program aired).

5.1 Regression Equation at the Locality Level

We estimate the following difference-in-differences regression equation to estimate the treatment effect of Ramayan for locality-level outcomes in panel data:

$$Y_{it} = \beta Ramayan_i \times Post_t + \delta_i + \theta_{st} + \sum_t \gamma_t' \mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

The unit of observation is a location i in year t. For our main empirical analyses, we primarily use state assembly constituencies as the unit of analysis.[11] Y_{it} is an outcome variable (e.g., the share of newborns given common Hindu names, or an indicator for the BJP winning an election). The variable $Ramayan_i \equiv TVSignal_{i,1987}$ is TV signal strength at the start of 1987 for location i (see Appendix Figure A1 for this variable at the assembly constituency level). All measures of TV signal strength are normalized by dividing each measure by its sample standard deviation. The variable $Post_t$ is an indicator for years 1987 and after, capturing years during and after the Ramayan show's airing.

The regression includes location fixed effects, δ_i, which account for any time-invariant differences across locations. θ_{st} are state-year fixed effects, which account for any changes over time common to all units within the same Indian state.[12] ϵ_{it} is a mean zero error term. For all coefficient estimates, we report Conley (1999) standard errors, accounting for spatial correlation (using a 100 km radius) as well as autocorrelation over time for each location.

$\mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$ is a vector of location-specific baseline and time-invariant controls. This vector is interacted with a full set of year fixed effects (the coefficient vector γ_t is year-specific). Inclusion of this vector interacted with year fixed effects controls flexibly for differential time effects (more flexibly than linear trends) that are correlated with a location's baseline characteristics. The vector contains district-level controls from the 1981 census: total population, percentage of male population, percentage of rural population, percentage of literate population, percentage of scheduled tribes population, percentage of scheduled caste population and percentage of Hindustani (Hindi and Urdu) speaking population. It also includes controls at the assembly constituency level: population (1980), geographic characteristics (area, average elevation, average slope, average temperature from 1971-1980, average precipitation from 1971-1980 and average maximum caloric yield for 1980) and 1980 TV signal strength (actual and freespace).

Among the controls in the vector $\mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$, a particularly crucial one is $FreespaceSignal_{i,1987}$ – TV signal strength if there were no physical obstacles to TV signal propagation. This captures simple proximity to TV transmitters, conditional on the power of the transmitters. TV transmitter locations are endogenous: they are located in cities or district headquarters, and thus the areas closer to TV transmitters likely differ in many characteristics from areas farther

[11] The names, conflict and RSS schools outcomes can be aggregated to different levels, since they are constructed from data that are geographically finer-grained than assembly constituencies. This is not the case for electoral outcomes, which are only available at the assembly constituency level. For consistency, we present results whenever possible at the same unit of analysis. Our results for names, conflict and RSS schools outcomes are robust to conducting them at the more granular PIN code level (see Appendix Table A13).

[12] We use the term "states" to refer to states and union territories in India. There are 4,110 assembly constituencies in 27 Indian states and union territories in our analysis; the electoral data cover 4,062 of these, and we have names data for 21 of the 27 states.

away from TV transmitters. We therefore do not use mere physical proximity to TV transmitters (freespace TV signal strength) as our measure of exposure to Ramayan. Rather, we control for freespace signal strength while using actual signal strength as the measure of exposure to Ramayan. In this way, we use the variation in signal strength due to topographical barriers ($Ramayan_i$) while controlling for the unobservables associated with mere proximity to TV transmitters ($FreespaceSignal_{i,1987}$). With $FreespaceSignal_{i,1987}$ included in the vector $\mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$ (and thus interacted with year fixed effects), our identification of the effect of exposure to Ramayan exploits primarily variation in 1987 TV signal driven by irregular terrain between the locality and TV transmitters, and not mere physical (as-the-crow-flies) proximity to transmitters.

Coefficient of interest. β on $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ is the coefficient of interest. Due to normalization of $Ramayan_i$ by its standard deviation, β is interpreted as the causal impact of a one-standard-deviation increase in actual signal strength on the outcome variable. It is identified from changes in the dependent variable for a locality over time (from before to after 1987) that are associated with the locality's actual TV signal strength at the start of 1987, net of controls (all fixed effects as well as flexible time effects associated with the vector of controls $\mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$).

5.2 Difference-in-Differences with Continuous Treatment

Recent econometrics research has identified that in difference-in-differences research designs with continuous treatments, such as ours, causal identification must invoke a "strong parallel trends" assumption: for any given treatment dose, average potential outcomes would have evolved in parallel across localities at different treatment intensities (after conditioning on observed covariates and fixed effects) (Callaway, Goodman-Bacon and Sant'Anna, 2025). This assumption is stronger than "standard" parallel trends, which restricts only outcome paths in the absence of treatment. The multiple sources of variation in Ramayan exposure make this assumption plausible in our setting. We take advantage of spatial variation in local TV signal in 1987 (driven by topographical interference, controlling for straight-line proximity to transmitters), along with plausible arbitrariness in timing of TV transmitter rollout during the 1980s (so that some places happened to get better signal in time for Ramayan's 1987 airing, while others only got signal improvements slightly later). These multiple sources of variation in Ramayan exposure make it plausible to assume that a locality's treatment intensity is conditionally uncorrelated with trends in outcome variables. It is implausible that the TV signal variation across localities at the start of 1987 resulting from these combined sources of variation reflects intentional planning by policymakers to target greater TV signal improvements to localities with different trends in outcome variables, or that were expected to have distinct treatment effects of Ramayan exposure.

We also follow the suggestion of Callaway, Goodman-Bacon and Sant'Anna (2025) to summarize average level treatment effects by conducting analyses with the Ramayan exposure measure expressed as an indicator (binary) variable. We discuss these results below in Section 8.1 (Appendix Table A8). Substantive conclusions are robust to estimating treatment effects using this binary Ramayan exposure variable.

6 Primary Analyses

In this section we present our primary analyses. We concentrate on three outcomes – the naming of Hindu newborns, Hindu-Muslim conflict, and BJP electoral outcomes – that are observed for national samples of localities. Localities are thousands of assembly constituencies, observed over 1979 to 2000 (naming outcomes for birth cohorts through 1998, and electoral outcomes in each constituency's election years). Because these outcomes are measured for large national samples of localities, they can support the full battery of robustness and heterogeneity analyses developed in the sections that follow, and we therefore treat them as the paper's primary evidence. We first examine newborn naming as a measure of religious identity formation, and then turn to two broader social and political outcomes: Hindu-Muslim conflict and electoral support for the BJP. Two additional identity-related outcomes drawn from much smaller survey samples – vegetarianism and dowry practice – are presented separately, as secondary and suggestive evidence, in Section 9.

6.1 Names

First, we analyze the impact of Ramayan on newborn name choices. We estimate regression equation (1) where the dependent variable is the share of Hindu male newborns given one of the top ten Hindu names for their state. We present regression results in Table III.[13] We show coefficient estimates on Ramayan exposure in regressions that include increasingly inclusive sets of control variables: column 1 includes only location fixed effects, state-year fixed effects, and 1987 freespace signal times year fixed effects; column 2 adds geographic controls times year fixed effects; column 3 adds 1980 TV signal times year fixed effects; column 4 adds population controls times year fixed effects; and column 5 adds census controls times year fixed effects. (All results tables in this section will have this structure.)

Coefficient estimates reveal a positive and robust effect of Ramayan exposure on Hindu families' choices to give newborns common Hindu names. The coefficient is positive and always statistically significantly different from zero at the 1% level, and remains stable with the inclusion of more controls (from the first to the last column). In the last column of the table, with the most-inclusive set of controls, the coefficient indicates that a one-standard-deviation increase in $Ramayan_i$ (TV signal strength in 1987) leads to 0.203 percentage points higher share of newborns given a top-ten Hindu name. This effect is roughly 5% of the dependent variable mean, and 7% of the dependent variable standard deviation.

It is also of interest to understand the dynamics of this effect. In Figure II we show an event-study plot, estimating the impact of Ramayan exposure in different periods (two-year windows) pre- and post-Ramayan (with 1985-86 as the base period).[14] We estimate these event-study coefficients by replacing the $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ interaction term in equation (1) with interaction terms between $Ramayan_i$ and indicators for each two-year time period (excluding 1985-86, which serves as the reference period).

[13] Results are robust to alternative outcomes such as top three or top five Hindu names (see Appendix Table A3).

[14] In this and subsequent event-study graphs, we maintain the presentation of effects in periods defined as two-year windows. Two-year windows will be particularly useful for event studies of state electoral outcomes, because in some years there are few or no states that have elections. Event-study graphs that present year-by-year (annual) coefficients yield the same conclusions, but are noisier.

The first pattern of interest is that there is no evidence of any worrying pre-trend in the pre-Ramayan period. No coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero in the pre-period, and the pre-trend is flat. A positive impact of Ramayan exposure on Hindu naming choices appears immediately in 1987-88, as soon as the show starts airing. Coefficients are positive in all post-treatment periods, statistically significantly different from zero at conventional levels from 1989-90 onward, and increase in magnitude as the years progress.

A potential concern with the names analysis is that the outcome is constructed from electoral rolls published in the 2010s, so two features of the data could, in principle, introduce selection: migration and incomplete voter registration. Appendix Section D discusses both concerns in detail. This selection results in measurement error in the dependent variable (rather than any independent variables), so any bias requires the demanding condition that this measurement error covary with $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ net of all controls. Appendix Table D1 also presents empirical evidence suggesting that neither source of selection meaningfully biases our estimates.

A question that arises is whether this increase in choice of common Hindu names reflects stronger religious identity formation, or simply the increased salience or popularity of the Ramayan TV show and its *characters* and *actors*. We test this by conducting a similar analysis, but where the outcome variable is the percentage of Hindu male newborns given: 1) names associated with primary characters from the show; 2) names associated with other major Hindu deities (those who are not primary characters of the show); and 3) the names of the primary actors from the show (additional details are in Data Appendix Section B.4.1). Since the primary Ramayan characters are Hindu deities, naming a newborn after them is a devotional act, while naming a newborn after the actors who portray them is not.

We show corresponding coefficients for these other names outcomes in Appendix Table A4. Ramayan exposure increases the frequency of naming newborns after the show's primary characters (Panel A): the coefficients are statistically significant in all but the first column. In contrast, there is no robust effect on naming newborns after other major Hindu deities (Panel B) or after the actors in the show (Panel C).[15]

We conclude from this set of analyses that the change in newborn naming reflects a strengthening of Hindu religious identity centered on the deities glorified by the show: naming responds for the show's primary characters, but not for other major Hindu deities and not for the actors who portray them. Beyond ruling out a mundane affinity for the show's stars, this specificity anticipates the logic of the content-specificity tests in Section 7: a response tied to the show's particular religious content is difficult to attribute to television in general, or to a broad-based religiosity revival unconnected to *Ramayan*.

6.2 Hindu-Muslim Conflict

Violent conflict between religious groups would be perhaps the most extreme manifestation of strengthened religious identities and magnified awareness of in-groups and out-groups. We analyze whether a locality's exposure to Ramayan leads to increases in Hindu-Muslim conflict.

We start with an event-study graph, Figure III, that is analogous to Figure II above, but

[15]There is a smattering of statistically significant coefficients in columns with fewer controls (Panel B, columns 1-2; Panel C, column 1), but these are not robust to the inclusion of controls.

where the outcome is an indicator for the assembly constituency having had any Hindu-Muslim conflict. While coefficients in the pre-Ramayan period are slightly negative, none of them are statistically significant, and they show no clear trend. In the post-period, positive coefficients appear only in 1989-92, and the effect is concentrated in 1991-92; coefficients in all subsequent periods are near or below zero. The timing of this spike is informative. In December 1992, the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was demolished at the culmination of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, setting off one of the most severe waves of Hindu-Muslim rioting since Partition (Varshney et al., 2006; Wilkinson, 2006). Our event-study estimates indicate that localities with greater Ramayan exposure experienced disproportionately more of this violence. After 1993, the gap between more- and less-exposed localities closes. Communal violence subsided nationally following the riot wave (Varshney et al., 2006); the closing gap is consistent with violence in high-exposure localities falling back toward the levels of less-exposed localities. That the triggering events were themselves centered on Ram – the show's protagonist – complements the content-specificity evidence of Section 7: exposure to the show shaped where communal violence erupted, while national events shaped when.

We display regression estimates of impacts on Hindu-Muslim violence from estimating assembly-constituency panel regressions following equation (1) in Table IV. Because the effect of Ramayan on conflict in the event-study graph is concentrated in the period through 1992, we estimate regression equation (1) for not only the full analysis period (up to 2000) in Panel A, but also for data up to 1992 only (the "short sample") in Panel B.

Panel A – the effect through 2000 – indicates a small positive effect on conflict that falls just short of statistical significance at conventional levels when all controls are included. In Panel B, which estimates the impact of Ramayan exposure in the period up to 1992, the coefficient is positive and statistically significantly different from zero at conventional levels in all regressions. Coefficient estimates are not highly sensitive to the set of control variables in either panel.

In sum, higher Ramayan exposure causes greater Hindu-Muslim conflict through 1992, concentrated in the years when the Ram Janmabhoomi movement placed Hindu-Muslim relations at the center of national politics; violence does not remain elevated thereafter. Results are similar when we focus on more violent conflicts, such as those involving injuries or deaths (see Appendix Table A5).

6.3 Electoral Results

Having established the Ramayan TV show's influence on religious identity and conflict across religious lines, it is natural to examine whether this strengthened religious identity translated into electoral behavior. We now ask whether exposure to Ramayan influences electoral success of India's major Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). We estimate regression equation (1) for an indicator for the BJP winning in a state assembly election. Results are in Table V.

We find that exposure to Ramayan has a large and positive impact on the probability the BJP wins state assembly elections. The coefficient is stable across columns as controls are included and is statistically significantly different from zero in all specifications (at the 1% level

when all controls are included).[16]

We examine the dynamics of the Ramayan treatment effect on BJP electoral victory in Figure IV. Coefficients in the pre-Ramayan years fluctuate and show no clear trend. In the post-Ramayan years, the impact on BJP victory probability becomes large and positive in 1991-92, and mostly remains so in subsequent periods. Our finding that Ramayan exposure increases BJP electoral success aligns with the analysis of Jaffrelot (1996) on how Hindu nationalist movements have strategically used cultural symbols and narratives to mobilize electoral support.

How might the impact of Ramayan on BJP victories have come about? We investigate further political outcomes in additional regressions in Appendix Table A6. Results in Panel A indicate positive, albeit modest, impacts on BJP vote share that are not statistically significantly different from zero at conventional levels. The coefficients are positive, however, consistent with the increase in BJP electoral wins.

In Panel B, we investigate whether exposure to Ramayan affects whether the BJP fields a candidate. This is relevant to investigate because increased support for the BJP could lead the party to either increase the share of seats it competes in, or lead it to be strategically more focused on a smaller number of seats. Coefficients are negative and statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level in all columns. The negative coefficient may suggest strategic behavior on the part of the BJP in deciding where to field candidates, and may also be the result of formation of alliances with other parties to divide contested seats.

Taken together with the positive effect on BJP victory and the muted effect on overall vote share, this pattern is consistent with the BJP targeting its resources strategically toward winnable seats, flipping marginal contests through more selective candidate fielding and coalition-building, rather than through an across-the-board increase in vote share.

Regressions in Panels C and D of Appendix Table A6 limit the sample to assembly constituencies in which the BJP fields a candidate. In this selected subset of locations, exposure to Ramayan is associated with higher probability of BJP victory (Panel C) and higher BJP vote share (Panel D). Coefficients in all regressions for these outcomes are statistically significant at conventional levels.

In Panel E of the table we show impacts of Ramayan exposure on the probability of a victory by the Indian National Congress (INC, the Congress party). Results for this outcome are consistent with the findings that Ramayan causes more BJP victories: coefficients on Ramayan exposure are negative for INC victory (and statistically significant from column 2 onwards).

To benchmark the magnitude of this electoral effect against other media effects studies, we compute the "persuasion rate" of DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007): the share of the audience receiving the message that changes its behavior, among those not already behaving as the message prescribes (DellaVigna and Gentzkow, 2010). Intuitively, the persuasion rate rescales the

[16] Appendix Table A7 shows similarly sized positive coefficient estimates on $Ramayan_i$ for BJP victories in national parliamentary (*Lok Sabha*) elections. However, the estimate with the full set of controls is not statistically significantly different from zero at conventional levels, consistent with lower power because parliamentary constituencies are larger than assembly constituencies, yielding fewer units and less variation in TV signal exposure. Separately, two members of the show's cast won Lok Sabha seats as BJP candidates in 1991, which could in principle contribute a celebrity-candidate channel to BJP support in parliamentary elections. This channel cannot explain our primary electoral results: BJP victory in *state assembly* elections, which no cast member contested. Newborn naming likewise shows no response to the actors' own names (Appendix Table A4, Panel C).

reduced-form treatment effect to account for the fact that only a fraction of the population was exposed to the broadcast, and only a fraction of those exposed were available to be converted. For BJP electoral victories, *Ramayan* exposure implies a persuasion rate of 17–43 percent, depending on the assumed viewership share ($\pi \in [0.08, 0.20]$). For comparison, persuasion rates in this literature typically range from 3–12 percent (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya, 2011; DellaVigna and Gentzkow, 2010).[17] One reason our estimates exceed this range is the outcome being converted: the benchmark studies measure persuasion into vote shares, whereas ours converts an effect on the probability of winning an election – which modest vote-share movements can flip. We therefore interpret these persuasion rates as a heuristic benchmark rather than as strictly comparable, individual-level rates of voter conversion.

Finally, we examine how the three primary effects vary with local religious composition. Appendix Table A11 estimates our main specifications separately for localities in districts above and below the median Muslim population share in the 1981 Census. The effect on Hindu naming is similar in the two samples (a test of equality of coefficients has a p-value of 0.72): Hindu identity strengthened wherever the show reached, regardless of local religious composition. In contrast, the effects on Hindu-Muslim conflict and on BJP victories are concentrated in the high-Muslim-share sample, with near-zero coefficients in the low-Muslim-share sample (tests of equality reject with p-values of 0.004 and 0.009, respectively). This pattern is consistent with strengthened Hindu identity manifesting in communal conflict and in support for Hindu-nationalist politics where an out-group boundary is locally salient. We cannot directly establish identity as the mediating variable, but the contrast between the uniform identity effect and the out-group-dependent social and political effects is what an identity-based interpretation predicts. The time paths of the three effects fit the same interpretation: the naming response appears immediately and cumulates, as expected for an internalized identity change; the violence response appears when national events make the religious boundary salient, and recedes with them; and the electoral response emerges as national politics turns on that boundary, and then persists.

7 Was it Ramayan, or Something Else on TV in 1987?

Having documented the reduced-form effects of Ramayan exposure on religious identity, social conflict, and politics, we now ask whether these effects reflect the *Ramayan* show itself rather than some other feature of Indian television in 1987. We consider three alternatives in turn: that the effects reflect access to television in general rather than TV signal in 1987 specifically; that they reflect other programming airing in 1987 rather than *Ramayan*; and that they reflect access to television news rather than to the show itself.

We first show that our estimates are essentially unchanged when we control for contemporaneous TV signal, ruling out general television access. We then present data on TV pro-

[17] Following DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007), the persuasion rate is $PR = \beta \,/\, (\pi \cdot (1 - Y_0))$, where $\beta = 0.0324$ is the estimated treatment effect on the probability of a BJP victory and $Y_0 = 0.053$ is the pre-period BJP win rate. We calibrate $\pi \in [0.08, 0.20]$ based on contemporary viewership estimates of 80–100 million viewers per episode (Mankekar, 1999), corresponding to roughly 9–12 percent of India's population at the time; we widen this to 0.08–0.20 to reflect uncertainty in historical viewership estimates. Estimates at $\pi = 0.08, 0.12, 0.16, 0.20$ yield $PR = 0.43, 0.29, 0.21, 0.17$, respectively.

gramming and print-media coverage indicating that *Ramayan* – India's first religious-themed series, the only one during its run, and by a wide margin the most discussed broadcast of its era – is the more plausible driver of the estimated effects than other 1987 programming. Our most direct evidence exploits treatment-effect heterogeneity: the effects of Ramayan exposure are stronger in localities closer to religious sites connected to the Ramayana epic, with no corresponding gradient for sites connected to the Mahabharata epic – a pattern difficult to explain if non-Ramayan content were driving the effects. Finally, a placebo test addresses the news channel: exposure to FM radio, which also provided news but not the Ramayan show, has no similar effect on outcomes.

We focus on regressions with the full set of controls for three main outcomes: (i) top ten Hindu names; (ii) Hindu-Muslim conflict (the short sample up to 1992); and (iii) BJP victory in state elections. (All results tables in Sections 7 and 8 will have this structure.)

7.1 Are Effects Due to TV Signal Strength in General?

It is important to differentiate the effect of Ramayan exposure (measured as TV signal strength in 1987 specifically) from the effect of variation in TV signal strength in general across all years in the analysis. We do this by augmenting equation (1) with controls for contemporaneous TV signal in locality i and year t, $TVSignal_{i,t}$, as well as its first and second lags in addition to the corresponding controls for freespace signal. We estimate the following regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{it} = \beta Ramayan_i \times Post_t + \delta_i + \theta_{st} + \sum_t \gamma_t' \mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}} \\ + \sum_{k=0}^{2} (\tau_k TVSignal_{i,t-k} + \phi_k FreespaceSignal_{i,t-k}) + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Results are in Table VI. (These coefficient estimates should be compared to the estimates collected in Table VIII, Panel A.) Across all these key outcomes, the coefficient on $Ramayan_i$ changes only modestly or becomes even larger in magnitude, compared to corresponding coefficients in prior tables that do not include the controls for contemporaneous TV signal.

The stability of the coefficient on Ramayan to inclusion of controls for contemporaneous TV signal suggests that the effects in prior tables are not due to general variation in TV signal strength (across years), but rather due to TV signal strength specifically in 1987, which determines exposure to the Ramayan TV show.

7.2 Religious Content Analysis

Prior to the introduction of Ramayan in 1987, no TV shows with a religious theme had ever been broadcast in India. We display in Appendix Figure A4 counts of the number of television serials being broadcast in different years from 1980 to 2000. In each year we show the number of non-religious shows (in light gray), and separately those with religious themes (in dark gray). Prior to 1987, there were no shows with religious themes at all. The single religious-themed show that appears in 1987 is Ramayan.

7.3 Mentions in *Times of India*

We assembled data to show that Ramayan's popularity far exceeded that of any other show in India – not just in 1987, but also over the entire time period of analysis. Precise historical viewership data, by show and over time, is not available. Instead, we gauge the popularity of television shows by extracting data from the Times of India (TOI), one of India's oldest and

most widely circulated newspapers.

Using the universe of TOI articles from 1980 to 2000, we compute the number of mentions of various television shows as a measure of their popularity. The rationale is that shows capturing widespread public attention and becoming central to societal discourse would be mentioned more frequently in a major media outlet like the TOI.[18]

Appendix Figure A5 presents the number of TOI mentions of the Ramayan show, compared to the average number of mentions of other television shows broadcast during the 1980s. The horizontal axis tracks time, with year zero marking the initial broadcast of each show, while the vertical axis represents the number of article mentions. The dashed blue line indicates mentions of Ramayan, while the dotted black line shows the average mentions of other shows, with 95% confidence intervals. The figure reveals that Ramayan's cultural footprint, as measured by TOI mentions, surged dramatically following its release, peaking within two years of its initial broadcast. In stark contrast, mentions of other shows remained relatively stable in periods before and after their release.

Are there any other shows with mentions similar in magnitude to Ramayan's, which might be concealed in the average across all other shows? We also show the raw data on number of TOI mentions for all shows over the entire time period (1980-2000) in Appendix Figure A6. No other show has nearly the same number of mentions as Ramayan. Ramayan has 286 TOI mentions, while the next-closest figure is the 156 mentions of Hum Log, a soap opera about a middle-class Indian family that aired in 1984-1985.

Ramayan's substantially higher media coverage is a reflection of the show's unprecedented cultural impact. These data further support the idea that the effects we document are driven by exposure to Ramayan, rather than other TV content.

7.4 Heterogeneity with Respect to Distance from Religious Sites

We test whether the effects of Ramayan exposure vary with proximity to religious sites associated with the Ramayana epic. If the show itself drives our results, rather than other concurrent TV content, we would expect effects to be larger in areas with prior cultural connections to the Ramayana narrative. Such geographic heterogeneity in treatment effects would be difficult to explain if non-Ramayan content were the primary driver.

Figure A2 displays the locations of sites traditionally associated with the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics in India. These sites represent places of pilgrimage and cultural significance linked to events and characters in the respective narratives.

To test for heterogeneous treatment effects by proximity to Ramayana sites, we augment equation (1) by adding an interaction term between $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ and log distance from location i to the nearest Ramayana site. A negative coefficient on this interaction term would indicate that Ramayan exposure has larger effects in areas closer to Ramayana sites.

Results are in Table VII, Panel A. In all regressions, the interaction term with distance to Ramayana sites is negative and statistically significant at conventional levels. The effects of Ramayan exposure decline with distance from Ramayana sites, supporting the interpreta-

[18]We analyzed over 1.5 million articles published in the Times of India (TOI) using a keyword-based approach to identify articles related to specific TV shows. To minimize false positives, we focused on articles that mentioned the name of the show alongside keywords such as 'TV' or 'television.'

tion that the content of the show itself (rather than other programming) drives the observed impacts.

To rule out that these results simply reflect proximity to any religious site (which might proxy for, say, general religiosity) we conduct a placebo test using sites associated with the Mahabharata, the other major Hindu epic. Panel B of Table VII presents results from regressions that include both the interaction with distance to Ramayana sites and an analogous interaction with distance to Mahabharata sites. If Panel A results merely reflected proximity to important Hindu religious sites in general, we would expect similar attenuation patterns for both epics.

The placebo test reveals a clear contrast. Coefficients on the Mahabharata distance interaction term are far smaller in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero in all regressions. Meanwhile, the coefficients on the Ramayana site distance interaction remain similar in magnitude and significance to those in Panel A. This differential pattern suggests that the geographic heterogeneity reflects cultural affinity specific to the Ramayana narrative, rather than general religiosity or proximity to Hindu pilgrimage sites in general.

In sum: Ramayan exposure has systematically larger effects in localities closer to sites associated with the Ramayana epic. There is no corresponding heterogeneity with respect to distance to Mahabharata sites. This pattern of treatment effect heterogeneity provides evidence that the television show's specific content – its presentation of the Ramayana narrative – drives our estimated impacts, rather than exposure to other television programming airing in 1987. The Mahabharata placebo also speaks to religious programming that followed Ramayan: the most prominent such program, the *Mahabharat* serial broadcast on Doordarshan in 1988-90, would predict a gradient with respect to Mahabharata sites if it, rather than Ramayan, were driving effects in localities with strong TV signal. No such gradient appears.

7.5 Placebo Test: Effects of 1987 Radio Access

A more specific concern is that our findings might be driven by exposure to news on television in 1987, rather than exposure to the Ramayan show. Television provided access not only to entertainment programming but also to current news coverage.[19] If news access were the primary mechanism behind our results, we would expect similar effects from radio, which also provides current news coverage. We test this possibility by examining whether FM radio signal strength in 1987 generates comparable effects on key outcomes.

By 1987, India had virtually universal AM radio coverage (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1988). However, FM radio access varied substantially across localities since it was still new with limited geographic reach. We construct measures of FM radio signal strength using the ITM methodology (see Data Appendix Section B.3 for details).

We estimate regressions that augment our main specification by including a measure of FM radio coverage in 1987 (the share of the population with weak FM radio signal) interacted with a post-1987 indicator, alongside a comparable Ramayan exposure measure (share of population with weak TV signal in 1987).

Results are in Appendix Table A9. This specification serves two purposes. First, and most importantly, it provides a placebo test of whether access to another broadcast medium that delivered news content generates similar effects. Second, it addresses potential omitted

[19] News events that one might worry about include the Ram Janmabhoomi movement (see Section 8.3 below).

variable bias: if radio access is correlated with television access and independently affects outcomes, excluding it could bias our Ramayan coefficient.

The results provide evidence against the news access interpretation. Across all three key outcomes, the coefficient on FM radio coverage is never statistically significantly different from zero. Moreover, the radio coefficients are negative for the names and conflict outcomes, the opposite sign from what we would expect if news access were driving our television results.

In addition, inclusion of the radio access control does not attenuate the Ramayan exposure coefficients. Coefficients on Ramayan in Appendix Table A9 should be compared with coefficients in Panel B of the prior Appendix Table A8, in which the Ramayan exposure measure is share of population with weak signal strength. All three Ramayan coefficients become larger in magnitude with the inclusion of the radio access variable on the right hand side, and all three are statistically significant at conventional levels. This indicates that radio access is not a confounding omitted variable.

The contrast between television and radio effects is telling because both media provided comparable access to news on current events during this period. Yet only television access – specifically, access at the time of the Ramayan broadcast – affects our outcomes. This pattern provides additional support to the interpretation that exposure to the Ramayan show itself, rather than to news or other general broadcast content, drives the effects we document.

8 Additional Analyses

In this section we provide discussion and additional analyses to clarify interpretation of the primary results presented above in Section 6.

8.1 Alternate Specifications of Ramayan Exposure

Our primary analyses use a continuous measure of Ramayan exposure: a locality's population-weighted average TV signal strength in 1987. We examine here robustness of our findings to alternate specifications of Ramayan exposure.

We present coefficient estimates for alternate Ramayan exposure measures in Appendix Table A8. In Panel A, Ramayan exposure is expressed as an indicator variable for the locality's population-weighted average TV signal strength in 1987 being above the "weak" TV reception threshold, -68 dBm (ATSC, 2010). This indicator has a mean of 0.355. In Panel B, we measure Ramayan exposure as the fraction of the locality's population with at least "weak" TV signal in 1987 (mean 0.378, standard deviation 0.417).

All coefficients in the table are positive, and five out of six are statistically significantly different from zero at conventional levels.[20] For both alternate definitions of Ramayan exposure, the substantive findings reflect results from our primary analyses: having stronger TV signal when the show aired leads to strengthened Hindu identity (as expressed in newborn names), more Hindu-Muslim conflict through 1992, and durable BJP electoral success.

The results in Panel A for the "binarized" measure of Ramayan exposure also help address concerns about interpretation of continuous treatment effects in difference-in-differences analyses (Callaway, Goodman-Bacon and Sant'Anna, 2025). Substantive conclusions about the

[20]The exception is the Panel B coefficient in the conflict regression, for which the t-statistic is 1.49.

effects of Ramayan exposure (higher TV signal strength in 1987) do not depend on specifying the Ramayan exposure measure as a continuous variable.

8.2 Restriction to Mid-to-Late 1980s TV Rollout Sample

One potential concern is that places receiving television very early or very late (or never at all) may be on different time trends than places receiving TV around 1987, making them poor counterfactuals for estimating Ramayan's effects. Early adopters – typically major urban centers that received TV in the 1970s – may differ systematically from later adopters in ways that correlate with outcome trends. Similarly, localities that received TV very late (in the 1990s) or never at all may also be on distinct trajectories. Any such differential trends could bias our estimates of the effects of Ramayan.

India's television expansion occurred in distinct phases, with particularly rapid growth during the mid-to-late 1980s. As shown in Table I, the share of India's population with at least weak TV coverage increased dramatically from 18.2% in 1984 to 50.1% by 1990. This concentrated expansion was the result of a deliberate government infrastructure rollout, as the state sought to extend television access nationwide after hosting the 1982 Asian Games.

To address concerns about differential trends, we restrict our sample to localities that enjoyed large improvements in TV access during this 1984-1990 rollout period, three years on either side of when Ramayan was first broadcast. We retain only localities whose population-weighted average TV coverage changed from below to above the "weak" TV signal strength threshold (-68 dBm) between January 1984 and January 1990. In this restricted sample, identification of Ramayan's effects relies on comparisons between places that experienced large increases in TV signal during the same government expansion wave, but whose signal improvement timing happened to fall just before versus just after the Ramayan broadcast. Localities that gained improved TV signal in 1985 could enjoy the signal improvement when Ramayan aired in 1987-88, while those that gained TV signal improvements only in 1989 could not. Because all of these localities received TV signal improvements within a narrow window as part of the same planned expansion, they are plausibly on more similar trajectories than the full sample, which includes both 1970s early-TV localities and 1990s late-TV localities.

We present results in Table VIII. For ease of comparison, Panel A reproduces our main estimates from the full sample (previously shown in Tables III, IV, and V). Panel B presents estimates for the subset of localities that gained TV access during the 1984-1990 rollout. Coefficient estimates in the restricted sample are similar to the full-sample estimates across all three key outcomes: point estimates for names and conflict are nearly identical to their full-sample counterparts, while the BJP estimate is somewhat larger but statistically indistinguishable from the full-sample estimate. This stability of point estimates suggests that our full-sample results are not driven by differential trends among very early or very late TV adopters.

As expected, standard errors are substantially larger in the restricted sample, which contains only about 30% as many localities as the full sample. Consequently, only two of the three Ramayan coefficients in Panel B are statistically significant at conventional levels despite similar point estimates. However, the stability of coefficient magnitudes across panels provides reassurance that our full-sample estimates are not biased by including localities that received TV signal improvements very early or very late.

8.3 Was it Ramayan or the Ram Janmabhoomi movement?

The conflict analysis in Section 6 showed that the *timing* of the conflict effect coincides with the national salience of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement: national events shaped when violence erupted, while Ramayan exposure shaped where. Here we address a distinct concern: whether *local* intensity of the movement, rather than Ramayan exposure, is what drives the cross-sectional variation our estimates exploit.

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement was a Hindu nationalist campaign whose aim was to build a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Ram at a site in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, where the Babri Masjid stood. The movement claimed that the mosque was built on the exact birthplace (*janmabhoomi*) of Ram after destroying a pre-existing temple. The movement gained increasing prominence over the course of the 1980s. A key event in the movement was the Ram Rath Yatra, a traveling political and religious rally organized by L.K. Advani of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in September and October 1990. The procession traveled across northern India in a vehicle modeled after a mythological chariot, aiming to gather support for the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed Babri Masjid site.[21]

Given its prominence, it is important to address whether the Ram Janmabhoomi movement poses a threat to causal identification of the effect of Ramayan exposure. If the intensity of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement at the locality level is correlated with Ramayan exposure (TV signal strength in 1987), it could bias our estimates of the impact of Ramayan exposure. There is partial temporal overlap between the two: the Ram Janmabhoomi movement gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s, overlapping with the period of Ramayan broadcast and its aftermath. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement also may have affected many of the same outcomes we study – Hindu identity, Hindu-Muslim conflict, and BJP electoral success. That said, the intensity of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement likely varied across different regions of India, and it is unclear whether its intensity correlates with Ramayan exposure.

We conduct additional empirical analyses that measure intensity of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement via proximity to the Ram Rath Yatra. Appendix Figure A3 displays a map of the Ram Rath Yatra route (using data from Blakeslee (2018) and Kalra (2021)). The intensity of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement at the locality level is likely to have been higher the closer a locality was to the Ram Rath Yatra. For each location in our analysis, we construct the variable *YatraDistance*, the logarithm of the distance from the location's centroid to the closest point on the Ram Rath Yatra. The Ram Rath Yatra occurred in 1990, so to capture the impact in 1990 and after we interact this term with an indicator variable for years 1990 and after.

Regressions presented in Table IX modify equation (1) by adding the term $YatraDistance \times Post_{1990}$. The coefficient on $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ is remarkably stable when the Yatra distance term is added to the regression; estimates are barely changed, compared to corresponding regressions where the Yatra distance term is not included. We find no evidence that our estimate of

[21] The Ram Janmabhoomi movement culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu activists on December 6, 1992, leading to widespread communal violence across India (van der Veer, 1994). The conflict has remained a contentious issue in Indian politics and society for decades. A 2019 Supreme Court verdict allowed for the construction of a Ram temple at the site while allocating alternative land for a mosque (Rajagopal, 2019). Other papers have studied the impact of the Ram Rath Yatra on Hindu-Muslim conflict, segregation (Kalra, 2021) and BJP electoral support (Blakeslee, 2018).

the Ramayan effect is confounded by proximity to the Ram Rath Yatra.[22]

We also find limited evidence that the Ram Rath Yatra amplified the effect of Ramayan. Appendix Table A10 further includes an interaction term, $Ramayan \times YatraDistance \times Post_{1990}$, whose coefficients are never statistically significant.

All told, there is no evidence supporting concerns that the causal effect of Ramayan exposure on our outcomes of interest is due to a potential confounding factor: proximity to the Ram Rath Yatra, a key measure of exposure to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

9 Secondary and Suggestive Outcomes

The two outcomes examined in this section – vegetarianism and dowry practice – come from the ARIS/REDS surveys. Relative to our primary outcomes, which are measured for several thousand assembly constituencies, these data cover a far smaller and less nationally representative sample: roughly 200 villages, observed in only two survey waves (1982 and 1999). We therefore present these results as secondary and suggestive rather than as primary evidence. They nonetheless add texture to the identity story. We first describe the household-level estimating equation used for the vegetarianism analysis, and then present results for vegetarianism and dowry in turn.

9.1 Regression Equation at the Household Level

We estimate the following difference-in-differences regression equation to estimate the treatment effect of Ramayan on vegetarianism, a household-level outcome:

$$Y_{hvt} = \beta Ramayan_v \times Post_t + \delta_h + \theta_{st} + \sum_t \gamma_t' \mathbf{X}_{v,\text{base}} + \epsilon_{hvt} \tag{3}$$

The unit of observation is a household h in village v in year t. We observe two time periods, 1982 and 1999, and restrict the sample to households present in both waves, yielding a balanced household panel.[23] Households are assigned to their village of residence in 1982 to avoid bias from endogenous household mobility. Equation (3) is estimated using 1982 household survey weights.

Y_{hvt} is an outcome variable. $Ramayan_v$ is 1987 TV signal strength in village v. The variable $Post_t$ is an indicator for years 1987 and after (which in this case is an indicator for the year 1999). Household fixed effects δ_h account for time-invariant differences across households. State-year fixed effects θ_{st} account for changes over time common to all households within the same Indian state. $\mathbf{X}_{v,\text{base}}$ is the village-level counterpart of $\mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$ and it contains the same set of baseline and time-invariant controls as in equation (1), but constructed at the village level. Most importantly, the vector $\mathbf{X}_{v,\text{base}}$ also includes $FreespaceSignal_{v,1987}$ for reasons discussed earlier. This vector is interacted with a full set of year fixed effects. ϵ_{hvt} is a mean zero error

[22]Separately, the coefficient on $YatraDistance \times Post_{1990}$ itself does not show the same patterns as the Ramayan effect. It is positive but not statistically significant in column 1. The negative and statistically significant coefficient in column 2 indicates that lower distance (higher proximity) to the Yatra route raises Hindu-Muslim violence. The coefficient is negative but imprecise (and not statistically significant) in column 3 for BJP victory.

[23]Over the 17-year interval between waves, some households branched into new units (e.g. when children left to establish their own households) so that multiple 1999 household records are linked to a single 1982 household identifier. We address this by recombining these split 1999 households into a single observation corresponding to the original 1982 household.

term. We report Conley (1999) standard errors, accounting for spatial correlation (using a 100 km radius) as well as autocorrelation over time for each household.

Coefficient of interest. β on $Ramayan_v \times Post_t$ is the coefficient of interest, and is interpreted as the causal impact of a one-standard-deviation increase in signal strength on the outcome variable. It is identified from changes in the dependent variable for a household over time that are associated with its residential village's TV signal strength at the start of 1987, net of time effects associated with the vector of controls $\mathbf{X}_{v,\text{base}}$.

9.2 Vegetarianism

Dietary choices can serve as powerful markers of religious and cultural identity. Complementing our findings on naming patterns, we examine whether Ramayan exposure influenced the extent of an orthodox Hindu dietary practice: vegetarianism.

We estimate equation (3) using a balanced panel of 3,226 Hindu households observed in both 1982 and 1999. The results are reported in Table X. Panel A presents estimates for all Hindu households. We find a positive effect of Ramayan exposure on vegetarianism. In the final column, which includes our most comprehensive set of controls, the coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level and indicates that a one-standard-deviation increase in Ramayan exposure is associated with an 8.5 percentage point increase in vegetarianism (relative to the dependent variable mean of 42%).

In Panel B we restrict the sample to lower-caste Hindu households. The estimated effect is substantially larger, stable across specifications, and statistically significant in all columns (at the 1% level from column 2 onward). Panel C shows no evidence of an effect for upper-caste Hindu households, with a precise null estimate in the final column.

These changes in eating habits among lower-caste Hindus may be interpreted as an instance of "Sanskritization", a process through which castes or tribes lower in the social hierarchy adopt upper-caste practices (Srinivas, 1962). The sample mean vegetarianism rate in our data is 37.7% for lower-caste households, and 51.2% for upper-caste households – a 13.5 percentage point gap. A one-standard-deviation increase in $Ramayan_v$ exposure leads to a 14.4 percentage point increase in vegetarianism among lower-caste households – an effect as large as the caste gap itself.

9.3 Dowry

Dowry, a marriage payment long tied to caste and social status in India, has grown more prevalent over the twentieth century (Anderson, 2003, 2007; Bau et al., 2026; Chiplunkar and Weaver, 2023). Ancient Hindu legal texts (*Manusmriti*) record dowry as a practice of the upper castes (Olivelle et al., 2004), one that lower castes have increasingly adopted through a process of "Sanskritization" (Srinivas, 1962; All India Democratic Women's Association, 2003). We examine whether Ramayan exposure influenced the prevalence of dowry, as a further test of this channel.[24]

[24]If anything, Indian television of this era carried *anti*-dowry messaging: Doordarshan's first soap opera, *Hum Log* (1984–85), was explicitly designed to promote social change and campaigned against dowry among other practices (Singhal and Rogers, 1988, 1999; Brown and Cody, 1991). Pauwels (2008, p. 184) notes that Doordarshan serials of the era were working to counter dowry as a "social evil." General television exposure would therefore, if anything, be expected to reduce dowry prevalence – making it difficult to attribute the increase we document to television in general rather than to *Ramayan*.

We estimate the village-level analogue of equation (1) on a retrospective panel of 18,310 Hindu marriages from 1979 to 1998, aggregated to the village-year level; the outcome is the percentage of marriages involving a dowry. As this outcome is defined only for village-years in which at least one marriage is reported, selection along the extensive margin of marriage is a natural concern. However, we find no evidence that Ramayan exposure affected the incidence of marriage (Appendix Table A12).

The dowry results are reported in Table XI. Panel A presents estimates for all Hindu marriages: the coefficients are positive but never statistically significant. In Panel B we restrict the sample to lower-caste Hindu marriages. The estimated effect is larger and statistically significant at the 10% level in all but the first column. In the final column, which includes our most comprehensive set of controls, the coefficient is significant at the 5% level. Panel C shows no evidence of an effect for upper-caste Hindu marriages.

Unlike vegetarianism, which we observe in only two survey waves, the marriage panel is annual, constructed from retrospective reports in the 1999 survey wave. This allows us to evaluate dynamics directly. Figure V presents event-study estimates separately for lower-caste and upper-caste Hindu marriages (Panels A and B). There is no evidence of differential pre-trends. For lower-caste marriages, the effect appears immediately in the 1987–88 window and persists through the end of the panel, while for upper-caste marriages, there is no discernible effect in any period.

The sample mean dowry rate in our data is 71.1% for lower-caste Hindu marriages and 76.9% for upper-caste Hindu marriages – a 5.7 percentage point gap. A one-standard-deviation increase in $Ramayan_v$ exposure leads to a 4.6 percentage point increase for lower-caste Hindu marriages, which closes most of this gap.

Because dowry has well-documented adverse consequences for women, including distortions to household saving (Anukriti, Kwon and Prakash, 2022), intimate partner violence (Bloch and Rao, 2002; Calvi and Keskar, 2026), and female mortality (Bhalotra, Chakravarty and Gulesci, 2020; Borker et al., 2026), this movement of lower-caste households toward an upper-caste practice potentially carries societal costs.

10 RSS Schools as a Potential Feedback Channel

A temporary cultural event may be followed by organizational responses that preserve or amplify its public salience. There are potentially many such channels. We test here for the presence of one specific institutional channel that is amenable to analysis: the establishment of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) schools.

The RSS is the ideological parent organization of the BJP and operates an extensive network of educational institutions across India under the umbrella of Vidya Bharati. These schools explicitly promote Hindu cultural values, Sanskrit language instruction, and nationalist ideology as part of their curriculum. Unlike government schools, RSS institutions actively work to instill a particular vision of Hindu identity in their students. Growth of RSS schools may depend on local demand; the strengthened Hindu identity resulting from exposure to Ramayan is likely to have increased local demand for RSS school establishment. While RSS schools are private institutions rather than government entities, their expansion may also be indirectly facilitated by BJP political power through supportive policies, favorable regulatory

treatment, or access to public resources. Overall, RSS schools may represent an institutional channel through which strengthened religious identity can be transmitted across generations and reinforced over time. Such a feedback process, in which a cultural shock facilitates institutional changes that in turn sustain the cultural change, aligns with the framework of Acemoglu and Robinson (2025), who emphasize how culture interacts dynamically with institutions and political power, with changes in one domain potentially triggering shifts in others.

We test whether areas with higher exposure to Ramayan subsequently experienced greater expansion of RSS schools. Our RSS school data come from the Vidya Bharati Alumni Network, a public directory of schools linked to the RSS. We successfully geolocate approximately 9,100 schools and aggregate these to the assembly constituency level, creating a binary indicator for whether any RSS school is present in a constituency.

We estimate regression equation (1) where the outcome variable is the presence of any RSS school. Results are presented in Table XII. The coefficient on Ramayan exposure is positive and statistically significant at the 5% level across all specifications from column 2 onwards. In the most complete specification (column 5), a one-standard-deviation increase in Ramayan exposure leads to a 2.1 percentage point increase in the probability that a constituency has an RSS school (relative to the dependent variable mean of 24.8%).

The event study in Figure VI reveals the temporal dynamics of this effect. There is no evidence of differential pre-trends: coefficients in the pre-Ramayan period are small and not statistically significantly different from zero. Following the Ramayan broadcast, coefficients become positive and grow over time, consistent with a gradual expansion process. The effect size rises through the mid-1990s and then stabilizes.

The temporal pattern of effects is consistent with a feedback process operating through two complementary channels. First, and most directly, Ramayan exposure strengthened Hindu religious identity in local populations, making them more receptive to educational institutions that promote Hindu cultural values – a channel that need not depend on the accompanying political changes we also document. Second, BJP electoral victories in these same areas may have additionally facilitated RSS school expansion through supportive policies, favorable regulatory treatment, or access to public resources. Together, these channels – population receptivity enhanced by Ramayan exposure and political support enabled by BJP electoral success – create conditions that facilitate the establishment of RSS educational institutions, which in turn continue to reinforce Hindu identity formation among younger cohorts.

This finding is consistent with one potential feedback channel behind long-run persistence of effects (out of potentially many). The Ramayan broadcast did not just affect cultural practices, communal violence, and elections. It also created conditions favorable to institutional changes – here, the establishment of RSS schools – that could have continued to shape religious identity formation long after the broadcast ended.

11 Conclusion

We study how a single religiously themed broadcast reshaped religious identity, intergroup conflict, and long-run political change in India. Our analyses exploit spatial variation in television signal strength determining exposure to the Ramayan TV show in 1987-88. We find effects of exposure to the Ramayan broadcast across cultural, social, and political domains. First, the

show strengthened Hindu religious identity. Hindu parents became significantly more likely to give their newborn sons common Hindu names. In smaller rural survey samples, lower-caste Hindu households substantially increased their adoption of traditionally upper-caste practices of vegetarianism and dowry. Second, Hindu-Muslim communal violence increased during the years of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the destruction of the Babri Masjid, when national events made religious boundaries most salient – consistent with strengthened identity being activated by these events rather than producing a permanently elevated level of violence. Third, the show had durable political consequences. Areas with greater Ramayan exposure saw systematically higher electoral success for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in state assembly elections, with effects persisting throughout our study period to 2000.

We examine one concrete channel through which the effects of temporary media exposure on culture and politics may have persisted: the expansion of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) schools. The RSS, the ideological parent organization of the BJP, operates educational institutions that explicitly promote Hindu cultural values and nationalist ideology. We find that localities with higher Ramayan exposure became more likely to have RSS schools. This institutional expansion is one potential feedback channel through which initial identity shifts – reinforced by subsequent BJP political success – may have persisted over time. By reshaping both the cultural landscape and the distribution of political power, Ramayan may have created conditions for institutional changes that helped perpetuate its effects long after the original broadcast.

Our study makes key contributions to the economics of identity and political economy. First, we provide evidence that a single media event reshaped a society across multiple domains – strengthening religious identity, heightening intergroup conflict, and realigning electoral politics. While theoretical work predicts that identity shifts can reshape political equilibria, empirical evidence documenting effects on identity, conflict, and politics within a single setting and research design has been scarce. Second, we provide evidence on a concrete channel that could explain long-run persistence. The expansion of RSS schools illustrates how temporary shocks to identity could generate lasting change through institutional channels that sustain identity formation across cohorts who never experienced the original media event.

Looking forward, this research opens several avenues for future inquiry. First, while we provide evidence on RSS school expansion as one potential feedback channel, investigation into other institutional channels – such as changes in government hiring practices, shifts in educational curricula, or the establishment of cultural organizations – could reveal additional pathways through which identity shifts become embedded in society. Second, research could examine the conditions under which identity-strengthened populations translate their cultural preferences into sustained political change. What determines whether strengthened identity leads to durable political realignment versus temporary electoral shifts? Third, comparative studies examining how religious or ethnic identity shifts affect political outcomes across different institutional contexts could help establish the generalizability of our findings and identify which political structures are most susceptible to identity-driven realignment. Fourth, investigation into the intergenerational transmission of politically-relevant identities through insti-

tutions like RSS schools could illuminate how initial identity shocks persist even as cohorts who experienced the original shock are replaced by younger generations.

Taken together, our study provides evidence that strengthened group identity can reshape political equilibria, with effects on intergroup relations, electoral behavior, and institutions. The Ramayan case illustrates how a temporary identity shock – in this instance triggered by a television broadcast – may generate lasting political change: in our setting, identity strengthening, electoral realignment, and institutional expansion moved together, consistent with mutual reinforcement. Understanding these dynamics matters for diverse democracies in which identity-based political movements compete for power. As societies worldwide grapple with identity politics, religious nationalism, and political polarization, our findings suggest that identity shifts, once initiated, may be perpetuated through institutional channels that outlast the original catalyst.

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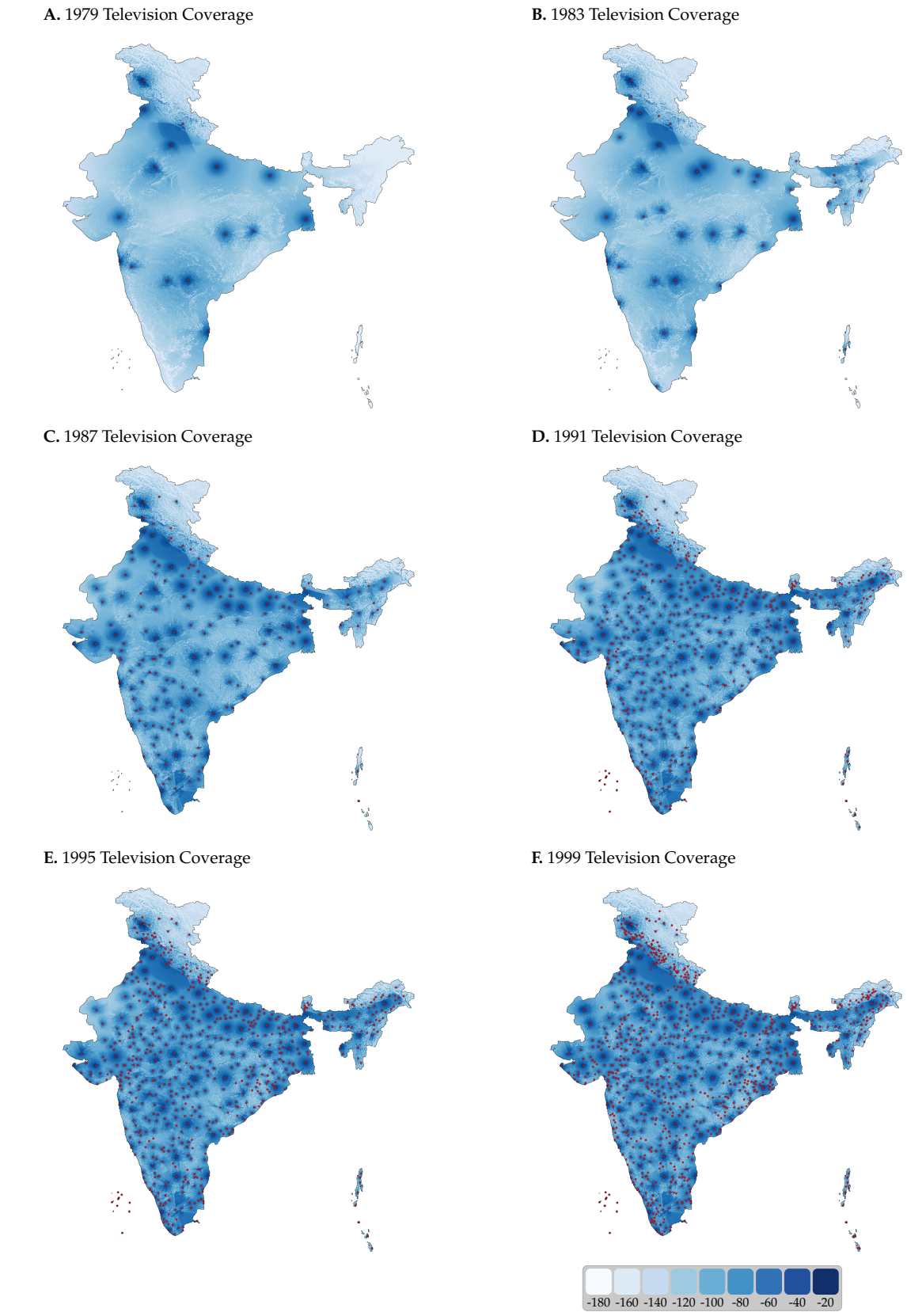
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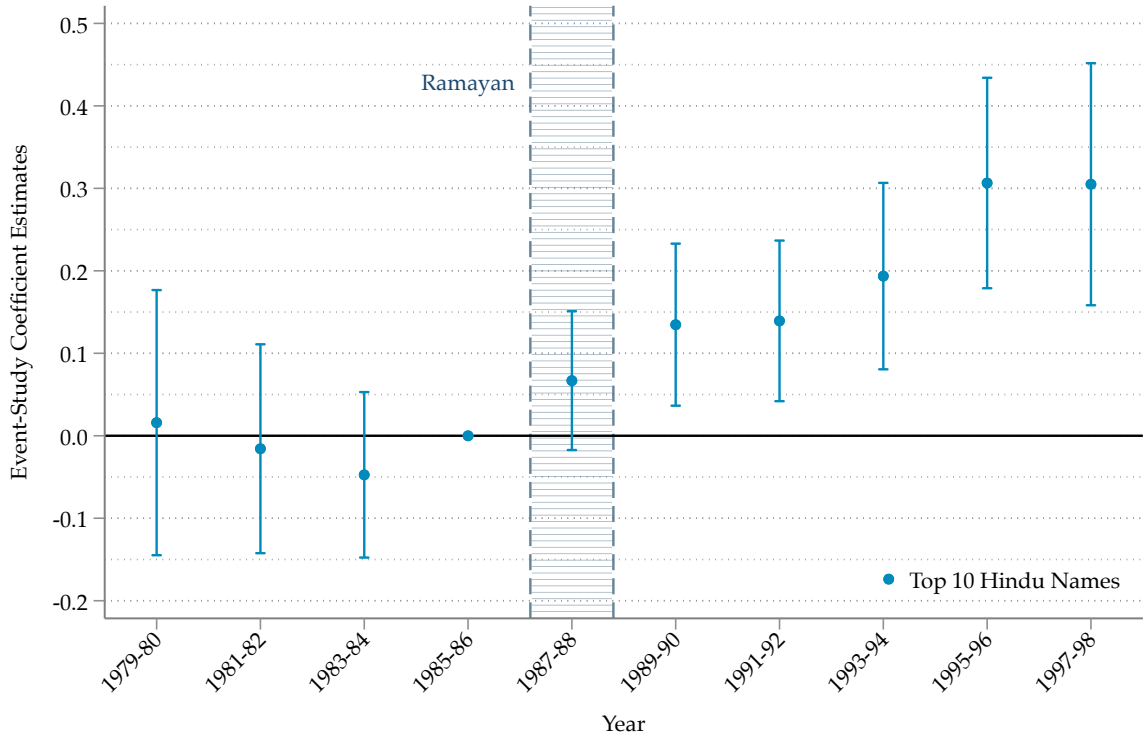
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Figure I - **Television Coverage Expansion: Actual Television Signal Strength in Four-Year Intervals**



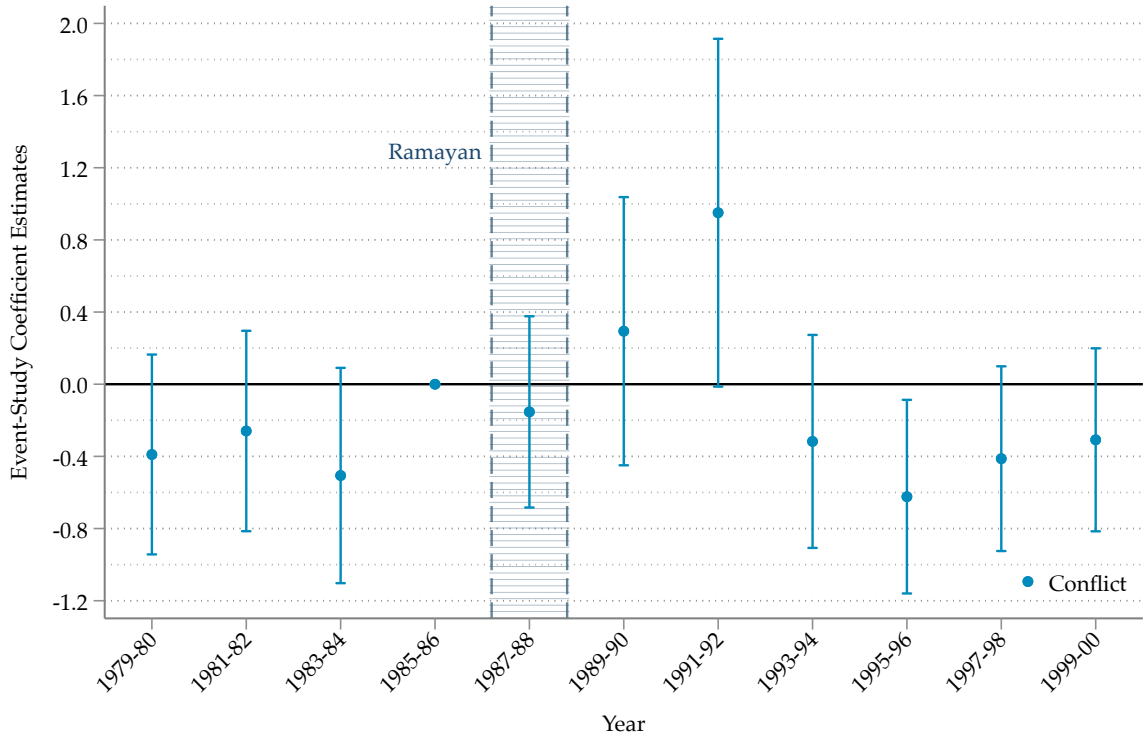
Notes: This figure displays actual television signal strength in dBm at the 1 by 1-kilometer grid for India for the start of 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995 and 1999 for each panel respectively. The actual television signal strength in dBm is estimated using an irregular terrain model. Darker shades of blue represent greater signal strength. Transmitter locations are depicted with red circles.

Figure II - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top Names**



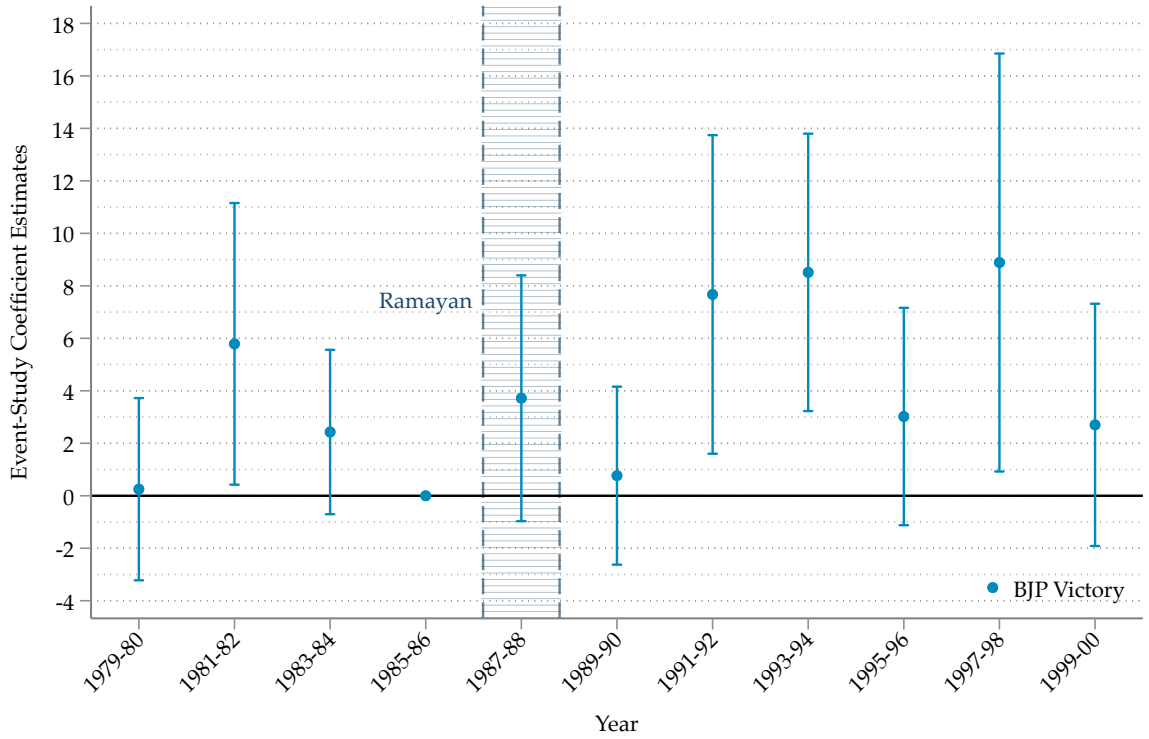
Notes: This figure plots coefficients from an event-study regression at the assembly constituency level. The dependent variable is the percentage of Hindu male newborns given *Top 10 Hindu Names*. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with two-year windows, where the 1985-86 period is omitted. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

Figure III - **Impacts of Ramayan on Hindu-Muslim Conflict**



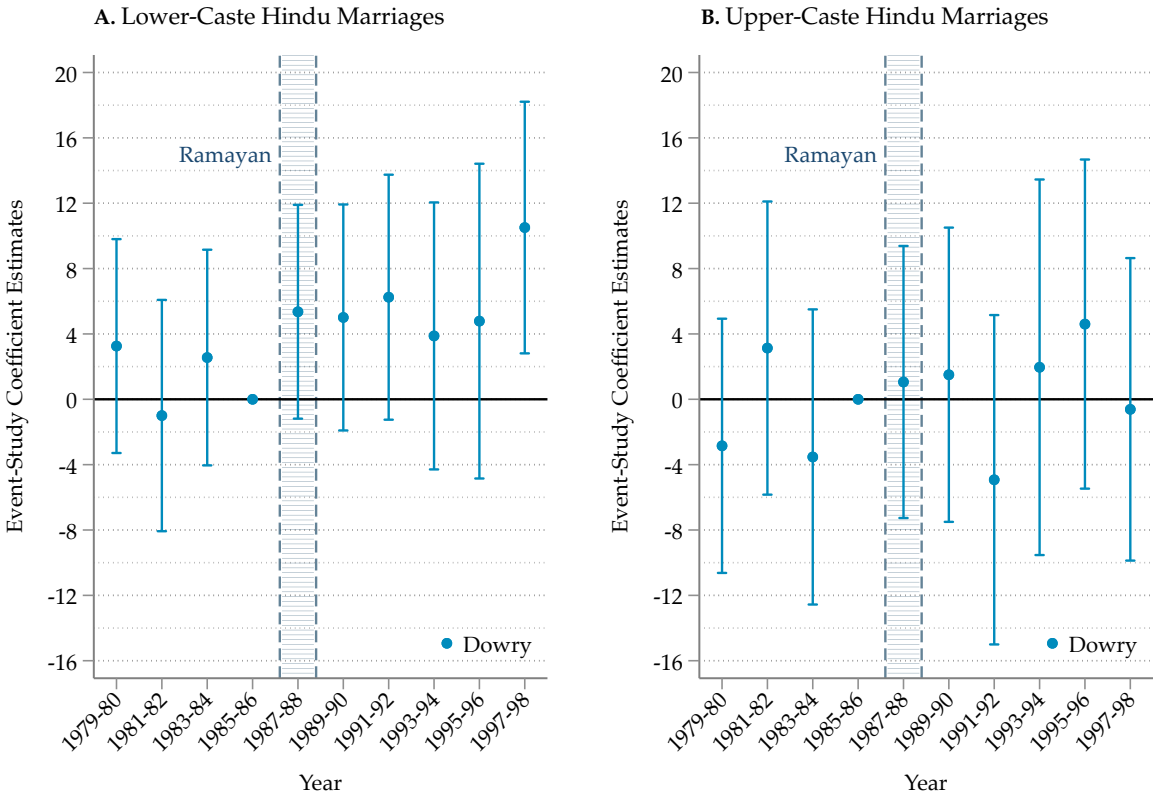
Notes: This figure plots the coefficients from an event-study regression at the assembly constituency level. The dependent variable is *Any Conflict*, a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with indicators for two-year time periods; the 1985-86 period is omitted. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

Figure IV - **Impacts of Ramayan on State Assembly BJP Victory**



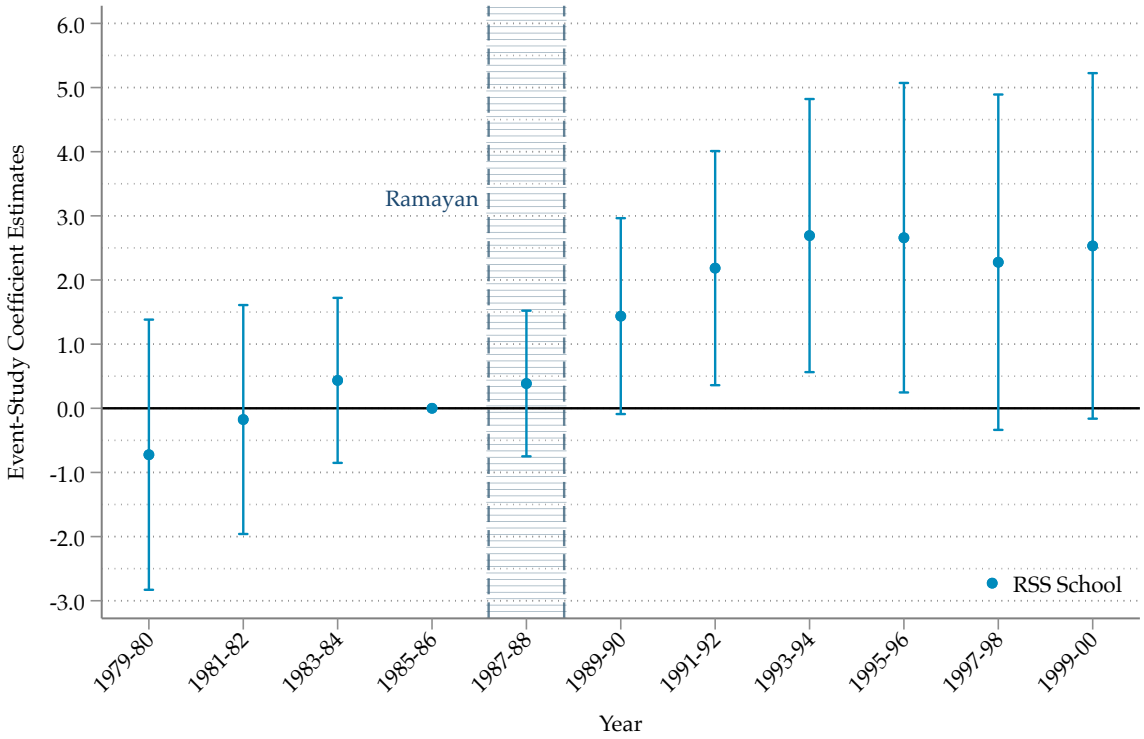
Notes: This figure plots the coefficients from an event-study regression at the assembly constituency level for state assembly elections. The dependent variable is *BJP Victory*, a binary variable equal to 1 if the BJP wins the election and 0 otherwise, including if the party did not field a candidate. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with indicators for two-year time periods; the 1985-86 period is omitted. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

Figure V - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Marriages with a Dowry**



Notes: This figure plots the coefficients from an event-study regression at the village level. The dependent variable is the percentage of marriages with a *Dowry*. Panels A and B show results separately for lower-caste and upper-caste Hindu marriages respectively. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with indicators for two-year time periods; the 1985-86 period is omitted. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

Figure VI - **Impacts of Ramayan on RSS Schools**



Notes: This figure plots the coefficients from an event-study regression at the assembly constituency level. The dependent variable is *Any RSS School*, a binary variable equal to 1 if there is an RSS-affiliated school, and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with two-year windows, where the 1985-86 period is omitted. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

Table I - **Summary Statistics of Television Expansion**

		Assembly Constituencies		India	
Year	Active Transmitters	Signal Strength	Weak Coverage	Signal Strength	Weak Coverage
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1970	1	-172.2	2.4	-167.5	1.8
1971	1	-172.2	2.4	-167.5	1.8
1972	1	-172.2	2.4	-167.5	1.8
1973	2	-154.3	3.3	-148.3	3.4
1974	5	-150.8	4.9	-146.0	4.6
1975	5	-150.8	4.9	-146.0	4.6
1976	9	-117.1	8.7	-113.3	9.2
1977	9	-117.1	8.7	-113.3	9.2
1978	14	-109.8	11.9	-105.6	12.9
1979	16	-107.7	12.4	-102.8	13.6
1980	18	-106.9	13.7	-101.9	15.0
1981	18	-106.9	13.7	-101.9	15.0
1982	19	-105.7	14.2	-100.9	15.3
1983	41	-96.6	17.4	-95.8	17.3
1984	43	-96.0	18.0	-95.0	18.2
1985	170	-81.4	30.9	-78.9	32.9
1986	178	-77.6	35.8	-74.9	38.4
1987	186	-76.2	37.8	-73.6	40.6
1988	229	-74.2	40.3	-72.3	42.5
1989	287	-72.6	42.4	-71.1	44.1
1990	483	-69.3	48.4	-68.0	50.1
1991	522	-68.5	50.1	-67.2	51.9
1992	531	-68.2	50.5	-66.8	52.5
1993	544	-67.7	51.5	-66.2	53.7
1994	559	-67.8	51.6	-66.3	53.8
1995	690	-67.4	52.3	-65.8	54.7
1996	748	-67.4	52.4	-65.8	54.8
1997	840	-67.1	52.9	-65.6	55.3
1998	947	-66.8	53.5	-65.4	55.8
1999	1,048	-66.9	53.5	-65.4	55.7
2000	1,082	-66.9	53.4	-65.5	55.6
Units		4,110		1	

Notes: Each year refers to the beginning of the year (1 January). Column 2 reports the number of active transmitters. The units of observation are 4,110 in the *Assembly Constituencies* columns, and the entire country in the *India* columns. Statistics are averages at the unit of observation. *Signal Strength* measures the population-weighted average actual signal using 1980 gridded population data. *Weak Coverage* measures the percentage of the population with at least weak television signal, -68 dBm (ATSC, 2010).

Table II - **Summary Statistics of Key Variables**

	Mean (1)	Std. Dev. (2)	Percentiles 10th (3)	25th (4)	50th (5)	75th (6)	90th (7)	Obs. (8)
Panel A. Ramayan TV Exposure								
1987 TV signal strength (dBm)	-76.2	24.0	-104.7	-95.1	-77.7	-59.4	-43.7	4,110
1987 TV freespace signal (dBm)	-48.3	10.7	-61.0	-55.8	-49.3	-42.4	-34.0	4,110
Panel B. 1987 FM Radio Exposure								
1987 FM radio signal strength (dBm)	-118.0	29.5	-146.4	-134.8	-123.0	-107.7	-87.8	4,110
1987 FM radio freespace signal (dBm)	-51.2	8.3	-57.6	-56.1	-53.8	-49.6	-42.5	4,110
Panel C. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Certain Names								
Top 10 Hindu names	4.44	3.10	1.06	2.29	3.92	5.97	8.41	61,688
Ramayan primary character names	4.89	3.42	1.22	2.39	4.25	6.74	9.39	61,688
Other major Hindu deities	8.13	5.04	2.61	5.00	7.17	10.28	15.30	61,688
Ramayan primary actor names	0.95	0.98	0.00	0.18	0.61	1.57	2.34	61,688
Panel D. Hindu-Muslim Conflict Outcomes								
Any conflict	0.55	7.42						90,420
Any violent conflict	0.48	6.88						90,420
Any deadly conflict	0.40	6.29						90,420
Panel E. State Assembly Electoral Outcomes								
BJP victory	13.83	34.52						19,506
BJP vote share	13.50	17.75	0.00	0.00	2.91	26.50	42.98	19,506
BJP fields a candidate	58.88	49.21						19,506
INC victory	36.79	48.23						19,506
Panel F. Percentage of Vegetarians								
Hindu households	42.47	49.43						6,452
Lower-Caste Hindu households	37.74	48.47						3,926
Upper-Caste Hindu households	51.23	49.98						2,526
Panel G. Percentage of Marriages with Dowry								
Hindu marriages	73.47	38.29	0.00	50.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	3,878
Lower-Caste Hindu marriages	71.11	40.48	0.00	37.65	100.00	100.00	100.00	3,042
Upper-Caste Hindu marriages	76.86	37.95	0.00	60.94	100.00	100.00	100.00	2,144
Panel H. RSS Schools Outcomes								
Any RSS school	24.83	43.20						90,420
Panel I. Geographic and Population Outcomes								
Geographic area (km^2)	783.0	1608.2	70.1	266.0	537.9	1026.7	1584.5	4,110
Elevation (m)	364.5	506.9	21.2	68.3	214.5	464.1	797.9	4,110
Slope (degrees)	3.7	5.9	0.6	0.7	1.3	3.3	10.3	4,110
Temperature (°C)	24.8	3.6	21.2	24.6	25.5	26.6	27.4	4,110
Precipitation (mm)	111.5	63.5	54.2	70.1	94.8	127.6	205.0	4,110
Maximum caloric yield (000s)	18,960	8,029	8,271	12,136	18,883	25,014	30,826	4,110
1980 population (000s)	166.8	108.6	28.5	101.7	162.0	215.7	279.4	4,110
Panel J. 1981 Census District Outcomes								
Total population (000s)	1,696	1,213	243	850	1,652	2,322	3,048	418
Percentage of males	51.85	1.76	49.92	50.73	51.64	52.99	54.14	418
Percentage of rural	80.98	15.87	63.83	75.53	85.21	91.31	94.02	418
Percentage of literates	33.91	12.79	20.07	24.26	30.92	41.63	50.36	418
Percentage of scheduled tribes	14.23	23.93	0.00	0.12	3.12	13.85	54.59	418
Percentage of scheduled caste	13.90	8.38	1.31	7.02	14.96	19.25	24.60	418
Percentage of Hindustani speakers	44.13	43.98	0.77	3.52	14.68	97.92	99.60	418

Notes: This table includes summary statistics of key variables. The unit of analysis, number of units and sample period (where relevant) for each panel is as follows: A, B and I (4,110 assembly constituencies); C (3,088 assembly constituencies, 1979 to 1998); D and H (4,110 assembly constituencies, 1979 to 2000); E (4,062 assembly constituencies, 1979 to 2000); F (3,226 Hindu families, 1982 and 1999); G (227 villages, 1979 to 1998); and J (418 districts). Statistics for Panel F use survey weights. *Temperature* and *Precipitation* data are monthly averages from 1971 to 1980. *Maximum caloric yield* uses data for 1980. All binary and share variables have been scaled by 100.

Table III - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top Names**

	Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 10 Names				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ramayan × *Post*	0.183***	0.238***	0.225***	0.225***	0.203***
	(0.052)	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.053)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	4.445	4.445	4.445	4.445
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	3.101	3.101	3.101	3.101
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table presents coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to naming patterns of Hindu male newborns. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. A top Hindu name is determined at the state level by ranking all first names of Hindu males born between 1900 and 1970, prior to our study period. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average within location, normalized by the standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table IV - **Impacts of Ramayan on Hindu-Muslim Conflict**

	Any Hindu-Muslim Conflict				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Full Sample (1979 to 2000)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.250**	0.267*	0.254*	0.247*	0.207
	(0.123)	(0.147)	(0.140)	(0.140)	(0.138)
Dep. var. mean	0.554	0.554	0.554	0.554	0.554
Dep. var. std. dev.	7.423	7.423	7.423	7.423	7.423
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420
Panel B. Short Sample (1979 to 1992)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.756***	0.796***	0.759***	0.737***	0.653***
	(0.179)	(0.213)	(0.212)	(0.212)	(0.212)
Dep. var. mean	0.744	0.744	0.744	0.744	0.744
Dep. var. std. dev.	8.592	8.592	8.592	8.592	8.592
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to Hindu-Muslim conflict outcomes. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Any Conflict* is a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict and 0 otherwise. Panel A includes the full sample of years from 1979 to 2000, while Panel B includes a short sample from 1979 to 1992. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. For list of control variables, see Table III. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table V - **Impacts of Ramayan on State Assembly BJP Victory**

	State Assembly BJP Victory				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ramayan × *Post*	2.451**	3.639***	3.570***	4.046***	3.242***
	(1.033)	(1.124)	(1.106)	(1.111)	(1.105)
Dep. var. mean	13.827	13.827	13.827	13.827	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	34.519	34.519	34.519	34.519	34.519
Units	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062
Observations	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level for state assembly electoral outcomes. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *BJP Victory* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the BJP party wins the election and 0 otherwise, including if the party did not field a candidate. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. For list of control variables, see Table III. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table VI - **Impacts of Ramayan and Television**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
$Ramayan \times Post$	0.218***	0.569**	3.537***
	(0.060)	(0.281)	(1.294)
$TVSignal_t$	0.156***	-0.021	-0.199
	(0.054)	(0.188)	(1.330)
$TVSignal_{t-1}$	-0.030	0.497*	-0.311
	(0.068)	(0.269)	(2.177)
$TVSignal_{t-2}$	-0.107*	-0.308	-1.384
	(0.063)	(0.253)	(1.956)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level augmented with contemporaneous TV signal variables. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. We augment our main specification with contemporaneous, one-year lagged and two-year lagged actual TV signal strength at time t: $TVSignal_{i,t}$, $TVSignal_{i,t-1}$ and $TVSignal_{i,t-2}$ respectively, in addition to the corresponding variables for freespace signal. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table VII - **Impacts of Ramayan and Distance to Ramayana Sites**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Panel A. Impacts by Distance to Ramayana Sites			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.176***	0.597***	2.637**
	(0.054)	(0.216)	(1.096)
Ramayan × *Post*	-0.088***	-0.315*	-1.399**
× *RamayanaSiteDistance*	(0.031)	(0.166)	(0.686)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Panel B. Impacts by Distance to Ramayana and Mahabharata Sites			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.172***	0.604***	2.651**
	(0.054)	(0.217)	(1.107)
Ramayan × *Post*	-0.086***	-0.316*	-1.299*
× *RamayanaSiteDistance*	(0.031)	(0.167)	(0.691)
Ramayan × *Post*	0.003	-0.033	-0.716
× *MahabharataSiteDistance*	(0.031)	(0.124)	(0.685)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level augmented with variables for distances to religious sites. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. Panel A includes distance to *Ramayana* sites, while Panel B includes distance to both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* sites. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. *RamayanaSiteDistance* and *MahabharataSiteDistance* are the standardized log distances from the unit centroid to religious sites associated with the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* respectively. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Distances to sites interacted with year fixed effects are also included as additional controls. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table VIII - **Impacts of Ramayan for the TV Rollout Sample**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Panel A. Full Sample			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.203***	0.653***	3.242***
	(0.053)	(0.212)	(1.105)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Panel B. TV Rollout Sample (TV Signal Below Weak Threshold in 1984 and Above Weak Threshold in 1990)			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.196**	0.662	5.236***
	(0.085)	(0.497)	(1.783)
Dep. var. mean	4.138	1.028	12.653
Dep. var. std. dev.	2.626	10.088	33.248
Units	889	1,188	1,182
Observations	17,767	16,632	5,706

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level for different samples. Panel A uses the full sample. Panel B restricts the sample to units in the mid-to-late 1980s TV rollout window defined as having signal strength below the "weak" threshold in 1984 but above it by 1990. The "weak" threshold is −68 dBm, following Advanced Television Systems Committee guidelines. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table IX - **Impacts of Ramayan and the Ram Rath Yatra Route**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Ramayan × *Post*-1987	0.202***	0.660***	3.297***
	(0.054)	(0.213)	(1.105)
YatraDistance × *Post*-1990	0.048	-0.371*	-1.122
	(0.029)	(0.195)	(0.765)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level augmented with variables related to the Ram Rath Yatra route. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *YatraDistance* is the log distance from the unit centroid to the Ram Rath Yatra route. *Post-1987* and *Post-1990* are binary variables equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later and 1990 or later respectively. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table X - **Impacts of Ramayan on Vegetarianism**

	Vegetarianism				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Hindu Households					
Ramayan × *Post*	1.667	6.370	9.773**	10.085**	8.457**
	(4.719)	(4.649)	(4.323)	(4.425)	(4.280)
Dep. var. mean	42.469	42.469	42.469	42.469	42.469
Dep. var. std. dev.	49.430	49.430	49.430	49.430	49.430
Units	3,226	3,226	3,226	3,226	3,226
Observations	6,452	6,452	6,452	6,452	6,452
Panel B. Lower-Caste Hindu Households					
Ramayan × *Post*	8.460*	14.056***	15.699***	15.835***	14.421***
	(4.754)	(4.836)	(4.662)	(4.751)	(5.372)
Dep. var. mean	37.737	37.737	37.737	37.737	37.737
Dep. var. std. dev.	48.473	48.473	48.473	48.473	48.473
Units	1,963	1,963	1,963	1,963	1,963
Observations	3,926	3,926	3,926	3,926	3,926
Panel C. Upper-Caste Hindu Households					
Ramayan × *Post*	-7.401	-4.337	0.099	0.089	0.514
	(6.252)	(6.098)	(5.442)	(5.382)	(5.251)
Dep. var. mean	51.227	51.227	51.227	51.227	51.227
Dep. var. std. dev.	49.985	49.985	49.985	49.985	49.985
Units	1,263	1,263	1,263	1,263	1,263
Observations	2,526	2,526	2,526	2,526	2,526
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the household level. The dependent variable is an indicator equal to 1 if the household consumed only vegetarian food (no meat, fish, or eggs), based on total annual consumption of home produced or purchased goods, and 0 otherwise. Regressions and summary statistics are weighted using survey weights. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. Panel A reports results for all Hindu households, while Panels B and C report results separately for lower-caste and upper-caste Hindu households, respectively. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. For list of control variables, see Table III. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table XI - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Marriages with a Dowry**

	Percentage of Marriages with a Dowry				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	2.172	1.483	1.717	1.546	1.774
	(1.510)	(1.541)	(1.585)	(1.546)	(1.559)
Dep. var. mean	73.471	73.471	73.471	73.471	73.471
Dep. var. std. dev.	38.294	38.294	38.294	38.294	38.294
Units	223	223	223	223	223
Observations	3,878	3,878	3,878	3,878	3,878
Panel B. Lower-Caste Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	2.988	3.775*	3.766*	3.574*	4.631**
	(1.929)	(2.023)	(2.047)	(1.999)	(1.956)
Dep. var. mean	71.111	71.111	71.111	71.111	71.111
Dep. var. std. dev.	40.481	40.481	40.481	40.481	40.481
Units	214	214	214	214	214
Observations	3,042	3,042	3,042	3,042	3,042
Panel C. Upper-Caste Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	3.063	1.073	1.282	1.123	1.621
	(2.764)	(2.679)	(2.705)	(2.718)	(2.348)
Dep. var. mean	76.857	76.857	76.857	76.857	76.857
Dep. var. std. dev.	37.946	37.946	37.946	37.946	37.946
Units	164	164	164	164	164
Observations	2,144	2,144	2,144	2,144	2,144
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the village level relating to dowry practice. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. Panel A reports results for all Hindu marriages, while Panels B and C report results separately for lower-caste and upper-caste Hindu marriages, respectively. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. For list of control variables, see Table III. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table XII - **Impacts of Ramayan on RSS Schools**

	Any RSS School				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ramayan × *Post*	-0.408	1.855**	2.046**	1.973**	2.140**
	(0.827)	(0.882)	(0.908)	(0.909)	(0.933)
Dep. var. mean	24.833	24.833	24.833	24.833	24.833
Dep. var. std. dev.	43.205	43.205	43.205	43.205	43.205
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to RSS-affiliated school outcomes. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Any RSS School*, a binary variable equal to 1 if there is an RSS-affiliated school, and 0 otherwise. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. For list of control variables, see Table III. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

A Appendix Tables and Figures

Table A1 - **Correlates of 1987 TV Signal Strength**

	1987 TV Signal Strength				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1987 TV Freespace Signal	0.775***	0.717***	0.702***	0.700***	0.652***
	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Geographic Area		-0.077***	-0.067**	-0.070**	-0.070***
		(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.026)
Elevation		0.067	0.052	0.054	0.080
		(0.058)	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.049)
Slope		-0.398***	-0.329***	-0.328***	-0.319***
		(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.039)
Temperature		-0.037	-0.046	-0.050	-0.009
		(0.075)	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.060)
Precipitation		0.026	0.031	0.030	0.009
		(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.035)
Maximum Caloric Yield		0.022	0.021	0.023	0.062
		(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.042)
1980 TV Signal Strength			0.388***	0.385***	0.354***
			(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.058)
1980 TV Freespace Signal			-0.282***	-0.281***	-0.308***
			(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.052)
1980 Population				0.037***	0.036***
				(0.009)	(0.008)
R^2	0.740	0.788	0.800	0.801	0.814
Observations	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table presents coefficient estimates from cross-sectional regressions at the assembly constituency level. The dependent variable is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). All covariates have been normalized by standard deviation. State fixed effects are included. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A2 - **List of State-Level Top Ranked Names of Hindu Males**

	Rank of Name				
	1 and 2 (1)	3 and 4 (2)	5 and 6 (3)	7 and 8 (4)	9 and 10 (5)
Andhra Pradesh	Venkata	Apparao	Satyanarayana	Nagaswararao	Enkateshwarlu
	Sathyanarayan	Subbarao	Chinna	Ramarao	Venkateshwararao
Arunachal Pradesh	Wangsu	Singh	Pansa	Kumar	Wangpan
	Bdr	Wangsa	Das	Tsering	Prasad
Assam	Aabdul	Prodeep	Onil	Babul	Khogen
	Gopal	Dileep	Aah	Xubhax	Xunil
Bihar	Raam	Suresh	Mahendra	Vijay	Krishna
	Rajendra	Shiv	Ashok	Surendra	Shankar
Goa	Prakash	Chandrakant	Ashok	Anand	Jose
	Suresh	Narayan	Krishna	Ramesh	Gurudas
Gujarat	Rameshbhai	Ramanbhai	Bhikhabhai	Kantibhai	Maganbhai
	Babubhai	Mohanbhai	Bharatbhai	Govindbhai	Somabhai
Haryana	Raam	Krishna	Ome	Rajendra	Jagdish
	Ramesh	Raaj	Jaya	Suresh	Subhash
Himachal Pradesh	Raam	Prem	Jagdish	Rotion	Dharm
	Ramesh	Amar	Prakaash	Ome	Krishna
Karnataka	Basappa	Siddappa	Yellappa	Basavaraja	Bhimappa
	Mallappa	Hanamanta	Lakshmana	Maruti	Shivappa
Madhya Pradesh	Raam	Jagdish	Ashok	Mangilal	Mohan
	Ramesh	Babulal	Suresh	Rajendra	Narayan
Maharashtra	Ashoke	Ramesh	Prakash	Shivaji	Pandurang
	Suresh	Lakshman	Shankar	Narayan	Sanjay
Manipur	Tomba	Kumar	Chaoba	Ibohal	Biren
	Ibomcha	Rajen	Haokip	Ibotombi	Yaima
Meghalaya	Ram	Dilip	Gopal	Francis	Philip
	John	Abdul	Krishna	Sunil	Suresh
Mizoram	Malsawma	Lalthlamuana	Lalhmingliana	Laltanpuia	Vanlalruata
	Lalrinawma	Lalhmangaiha	Lalhmachhuana	Lalhmingthanga	Lalnunmawia
Orissa	Bhagabana	Suresh	Gobinda	Sudarshan	Gopala
	Bijay	Ramchandra	Sharat	Narajna	Dujyoudhana
Punjab	Raam	Mahinder	Sukhdev	Joginder	Balveer
	Darshan	Baldev	Balwinder	Sarinder	Avtaar
Rajasthan	Raam	Mohan	Ramesh	Babulal	Kailash
	Jagdish	Shankar	Gopal	Omprakash	Bhanwar
Tamil Nadu	Aarumugam	Subramani	Murugan	Subramanian	Ramasamy
	Rajendran	Ganesan	Murugesan	Manii	Perumaal
Tripura	Narayan	Pradeep	Dileep	Suneel	Ravinder
	Swapan	Ranjit	Onil	Roton	Gopal
Uttar Pradesh	Raam	Suresh	Ashok	Jagdish	Surendra
	Rajendra	Ramesh	Shiv	Vijay	Moe
West Bengal	Swapan	Ashoke	Shankar	Dileep	Biswanath
	Topon	Gopal	Sukumar	Narayan	Subhash

Notes: This table includes the list of top-ranked names of Hindu males born from 1900 to 1970. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. For each state, if names are not recorded with the Latin alphabet, all names are first transliterated into the Latin alphabet. Depending on the naming conventions of each state, we identify each individual's first name. We then rank all of the names in a state for the period of relevance. In total, the names of approximately 100 million Hindu males born between 1900 and 1970 were used to determine these top names. See Data Appendix Section B.4.1 for details.

Table A3 - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 3 and 5 Names**

	Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top Names				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 3 Names					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.053*	0.100***	0.106***	0.108***	0.080***
	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.031)
Dep. var. mean	1.593	1.593	1.593	1.593	1.593
Dep. var. std. dev.	1.526	1.526	1.526	1.526	1.526
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Panel B. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 5 Names					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.143***	0.211***	0.201***	0.206***	0.160***
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.038)
Dep. var. mean	2.442	2.442	2.442	2.442	2.442
Dep. var. std. dev.	1.970	1.970	1.970	1.970	1.970
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to naming patterns of Hindu male newborns. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. A top Hindu name is determined at the state-level (to account for cultural differences across states) by ranking all first names of Hindu males born between 1900 and 1970, prior to our study period. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A4 - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Selected Names**

	Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Selected Names				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names Associated with Primary Characters from Ramayan					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.016	0.181***	0.191***	0.198***	0.079*
	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)
Dep. var. mean	4.889	4.889	4.889	4.889	4.889
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.421	3.421	3.421	3.421	3.421
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Panel B. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names Associated with Other Major Hindu Deities					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.150**	0.127*	0.104	0.101	-0.002
	(0.062)	(0.068)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.070)
Dep. var. mean	8.134	8.134	8.134	8.134	8.134
Dep. var. std. dev.	5.035	5.035	5.035	5.035	5.035
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Panel C. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names of Primary Actors from Ramayan					
Ramayan × *Post*	-0.047**	-0.011	0.006	0.005	0.014
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Dep. var. mean	0.947	0.947	0.947	0.947	0.947
Dep. var. std. dev.	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.980
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688	61,688
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to naming patterns of Hindu male newborns. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. The primary Ramayan characters are *Rama*, *Sita*, *Hanuman* and *Rama*'s family members *Lakshman*, *Dasharath*, *Shatrughan* and ally *Vibhishan*. The other major Hindu deities – major Hindu deities who are not primary characters of the show – are *Ganesha*, *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Krishna*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Durga* and *Subrahmanya*. A name is *associated* with a character or deity if it matches the character or deity's name (across common transliterations), devotional compounds, epithets, or related scriptural attributes. The primary actor names from Ramayan, with spelling variants, include *Arun*, *Arvind*, *Sunil*, *Suneel*, *Suneela* and *Dara*. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A5 - **Impacts of Ramayan on Additional Hindu-Muslim Conflict Outcomes**

	Hindu-Muslim Conflict Outcomes				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Any Deadly Conflict (Full Sample from 1979 to 2000)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.231**	0.229*	0.193	0.186	0.129
	(0.109)	(0.130)	(0.123)	(0.123)	(0.120)
Dep. var. mean	0.397	0.397	0.397	0.397	0.397
Dep. var. std. dev.	6.289	6.289	6.289	6.289	6.289
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420
Panel B. Any Violent Conflict (Full Sample from 1979 to 2000)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.254**	0.272*	0.253*	0.245*	0.176
	(0.118)	(0.141)	(0.133)	(0.134)	(0.132)
Dep. var. mean	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476
Dep. var. std. dev.	6.880	6.880	6.880	6.880	6.880
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420	90,420
Panel C. Any Deadly Conflict (Short Sample from 1979 to 1992)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.622***	0.635***	0.559***	0.542***	0.454**
	(0.162)	(0.190)	(0.186)	(0.185)	(0.186)
Dep. var. mean	0.532	0.532	0.532	0.532	0.532
Dep. var. std. dev.	7.273	7.273	7.273	7.273	7.273
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540
Panel D. Any Violent Conflict (Short Sample from 1979 to 1992)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.707***	0.752***	0.689***	0.668***	0.554***
	(0.174)	(0.205)	(0.201)	(0.201)	(0.202)
Dep. var. mean	0.633	0.633	0.633	0.633	0.633
Dep. var. std. dev.	7.929	7.929	7.929	7.929	7.929
Units	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110	4,110
Observations	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540	57,540
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to Hindu-Muslim conflict outcomes. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Any Violent Conflict* is a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict with at least one registered death or injury and 0 otherwise. *Any Deadly Conflict* is a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict with at least one registered death and 0 otherwise. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A6 - **Impacts of Ramayan on Additional State Assembly Electoral Outcomes**

	State Assembly Electoral Outcomes				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. BJP Vote Share					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.226	0.640	0.518	0.626	0.547
	(0.385)	(0.416)	(0.413)	(0.415)	(0.420)
Dep. var. mean	13.501	13.501	13.501	13.501	13.501
Dep. var. std. dev.	17.751	17.751	17.751	17.751	17.751
Units	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062
Observations	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506
Panel B. BJP Fields a Candidate					
Ramayan × *Post*	-2.781**	-2.978**	-2.720**	-2.610**	-3.072**
	(1.149)	(1.231)	(1.242)	(1.254)	(1.294)
Dep. var. mean	58.884	58.884	58.884	58.884	58.884
Dep. var. std. dev.	49.206	49.206	49.206	49.206	49.206
Units	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062
Observations	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506
Panel C. BJP Conditional Victory					
Ramayan × *Post*	7.161***	8.857***	8.106***	8.631***	7.349***
	(1.926)	(1.991)	(1.972)	(1.987)	(2.065)
Dep. var. mean	23.481	23.481	23.481	23.481	23.481
Dep. var. std. dev.	42.390	42.390	42.390	42.390	42.390
Units	3,622	3,622	3,622	3,622	3,622
Observations	11,486	11,486	11,486	11,486	11,486
Panel D. BJP Conditional Vote Share					
Ramayan × *Post*	1.508**	1.999***	1.298**	1.313**	1.302**
	(0.627)	(0.633)	(0.626)	(0.626)	(0.640)
Dep. var. mean	22.928	22.928	22.928	22.928	22.928
Dep. var. std. dev.	17.860	17.860	17.860	17.860	17.860
Units	3,622	3,622	3,622	3,622	3,622
Observations	11,486	11,486	11,486	11,486	11,486
Panel E. INC Victory					
Ramayan × *Post*	-2.114	-3.467**	-3.242**	-3.185**	-3.374**
	(1.444)	(1.591)	(1.610)	(1.614)	(1.632)
Dep. var. mean	36.794	36.794	36.794	36.794	36.794
Dep. var. std. dev.	48.226	48.226	48.226	48.226	48.226
Units	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062	4,062
Observations	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506	19,506
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Fields a Candidate* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the party fielded a candidate and 0 otherwise. *Victory* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the party wins the election and 0 otherwise. *Vote Share* is the proportion of votes in the constituency that the party received. "Conditional" outcomes exclude constituencies in which the party did not field a candidate. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A7 - **Impacts of Ramayan on National Parliamentary BJP Victory**

	National Parliamentary BJP Victory				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ramayan × *Post*	2.118	4.214	5.762**	5.598*	2.052
	(2.547)	(2.666)	(2.843)	(2.868)	(2.833)
Dep. var. mean	22.677	22.677	22.677	22.677	22.677
Dep. var. std. dev.	41.880	41.880	41.880	41.880	41.880
Units	542	542	542	542	542
Observations	3,228	3,228	3,228	3,228	3,228
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the parliamentary constituency level for national parliamentary electoral outcomes. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *BJP Victory* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the BJP party wins the election and 0 otherwise, including if the party did not field a candidate. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. The sample includes the following years, for which there was a general election: 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A8 - **Impacts of Ramayan Using Binary and Share of Population Exposure Measures**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Panel A. TV Signal Above Weak Threshold (Binary)			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.244***	0.562*	3.409***
	(0.067)	(0.303)	(1.313)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Treated units	1,078	1,461	1,454
Control units	2,010	2,649	2,608
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Panel B. Share of Population with Weak Signal Strength			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.310***	0.586	4.812***
	(0.087)	(0.392)	(1.728)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Census controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level using different measures of *Ramayan*. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. All measures of TV signal strength are population-weighted averages. In Panel A, *Ramayan* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the actual TV signal strength is above the weak threshold of -68 dBm at the beginning of 1987. In Panel B, *Ramayan* is the share of the population with weak TV coverage (having TV signal strength at least -68 dBm) at the beginning of 1987. *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Unit and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A9 - **Impacts of Ramayan and Radio**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
$Ramayan \times Post$	0.370***	0.918***	6.414***
	(0.070)	(0.309)	(1.488)
$FMSignal_{1987} \times Post$	-0.191	-0.775	4.427
	(0.175)	(0.818)	(4.888)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Census controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
FM radio freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level augmented with variables for FM radio coverage. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. All measures of TV and FM radio signal strength are population-weighted averages. *Ramayan* is the share of the population with weak TV coverage (having TV signal strength at least -68 dBm) at the beginning of 1987. $FMSignal_{1987}$ is the share of the population with weak FM radio coverage (having an FM radio signal strength of at least 50 dBμV/m which is equivalent to -68 dBm) at the beginning of 1987. These measures of TV and FM radio signal strength were chosen to facilitate direct comparison. *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Unit and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. *FM radio freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace FM radio signal strength at the beginning of 1987. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A10 - **Impacts of Ramayan by Distance to the Ram Rath Yatra Route**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Ramayan × *Post*-1987	0.213***	0.897***	4.273***
	(0.058)	(0.256)	(1.454)
YatraDistance × *Post*-1990	0.050*	-0.315	-1.057
	(0.030)	(0.199)	(0.762)
Ramayan × *YatraDistance* × *Post*-1990	-0.003	-0.097	-0.240
	(0.009)	(0.083)	(0.218)
Dep. var. mean	4.445	0.744	13.827
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.101	8.592	34.519
Units	3,088	4,110	4,062
Observations	61,688	57,540	19,506
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Census controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level augmented with variables related to the Ram Rath Yatra route. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *YatraDistance* is the log distance from the unit centroid to the Ram Rath Yatra route. *Post-1987* and *Post-1990* are binary variables equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later and 1990 or later respectively. The full set of controls is included (see Table III for the list). Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A11 - **Heterogeneous Impacts of Ramayan by District Muslim Population Share**

	Top 10 Hindu Names (1)	Conflict (Short Sample) (2)	BJP Victory (3)
Panel A. High Muslim Districts			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.193***	1.178***	5.545***
	(0.061)	(0.349)	(1.615)
Dep. var. mean	4.691	1.155	14.994
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.252	10.687	35.703
Units	1,562	2,108	2,091
Observations	31,216	29,512	10,051
Panel B. Low Muslim Districts			
Ramayan × *Post*	0.156*	-0.027	-0.481
	(0.082)	(0.231)	(1.645)
Dep. var. mean	4.192	0.310	12.586
Dep. var. std. dev.	2.917	5.563	33.171
Units	1,526	2,002	1,971
Observations	30,472	28,028	9,455
p-value: test of equality	[0.720]	[0.004]	[0.009]
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Census controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level for different samples. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. We classify localities as High Muslim or Low Muslim based on whether their district's Muslim population share from the 1981 Census is above or below the median across districts. Panel A reports estimates for localities in High Muslim districts while Panel B reports estimates for localities in Low Muslim districts. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Unit and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A12 - **Impacts of Ramayan on Marriage Incidence**

	Any Marriage				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	1.661	1.661	1.379	1.296	1.365
	(1.592)	(1.568)	(1.616)	(1.637)	(1.662)
Dep. var. mean	85.419	85.419	85.419	85.419	85.419
Dep. var. std. dev.	35.296	35.296	35.296	35.296	35.296
Units	227	227	227	227	227
Observations	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540
Panel B. Lower-Caste Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	2.617	2.125	1.977	2.013	1.641
	(1.865)	(1.965)	(1.962)	(1.987)	(1.999)
Dep. var. mean	67.004	67.004	67.004	67.004	67.004
Dep. var. std. dev.	47.025	47.025	47.025	47.025	47.025
Units	227	227	227	227	227
Observations	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540
Panel C. Upper-Caste Hindu Marriages					
Ramayan × *Post*	-2.232	-1.532	-2.071	-1.863	-1.882
	(1.957)	(2.000)	(2.061)	(2.107)	(2.198)
Dep. var. mean	47.225	47.225	47.225	47.225	47.225
Dep. var. std. dev.	49.928	49.928	49.928	49.928	49.928
Units	227	227	227	227	227
Observations	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540	4,540
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the village level relating to marriages. The dependent variable is an indicator equal to 1 if at least one marriage occurred, and 0 otherwise. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. Panel A reports results for all Hindu marriages, while Panels B and C report results separately for lower-caste and upper-caste Hindu marriages, respectively. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Village and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A13 - **Impacts of Ramayan on Outcomes at the PIN Code Level**

	PIN Code Level Outcomes				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 10 Names					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.176***	0.208***	0.187***	0.189***	0.162***
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.034)
Dep. var. mean	4.364	4.364	4.364	4.364	4.364
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.625	3.625	3.625	3.625	3.625
Units	13,780	13,780	13,780	13,780	13,780
Observations	274,113	274,113	274,113	274,113	274,113
Panel B. Any Hindu-Muslim Conflict (Full Sample from 1979 to 2000)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.044*	0.050	0.045	0.040	0.020
	(0.026)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.026)
Dep. var. mean	0.133	0.133	0.133	0.133	0.133
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.639	3.639	3.639	3.639	3.639
Units	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475
Observations	428,450	428,450	428,450	428,450	428,450
Panel C. Any Hindu-Muslim Conflict (Short Sample from 1979 to 1992)					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.150***	0.160***	0.148***	0.133***	0.101**
	(0.039)	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.039)
Dep. var. mean	0.178	0.178	0.178	0.178	0.178
Dep. var. std. dev.	4.214	4.214	4.214	4.214	4.214
Units	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475
Observations	272,650	272,650	272,650	272,650	272,650
Panel D. Any RSS School					
Ramayan × *Post*	-0.365	0.585**	0.566**	0.426	0.578**
	(0.253)	(0.264)	(0.267)	(0.264)	(0.266)
Dep. var. mean	7.726	7.726	7.726	7.726	7.726
Dep. var. std. dev.	26.700	26.700	26.700	26.700	26.700
Units	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475	19,475
Observations	428,450	428,450	428,450	428,450	428,450
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

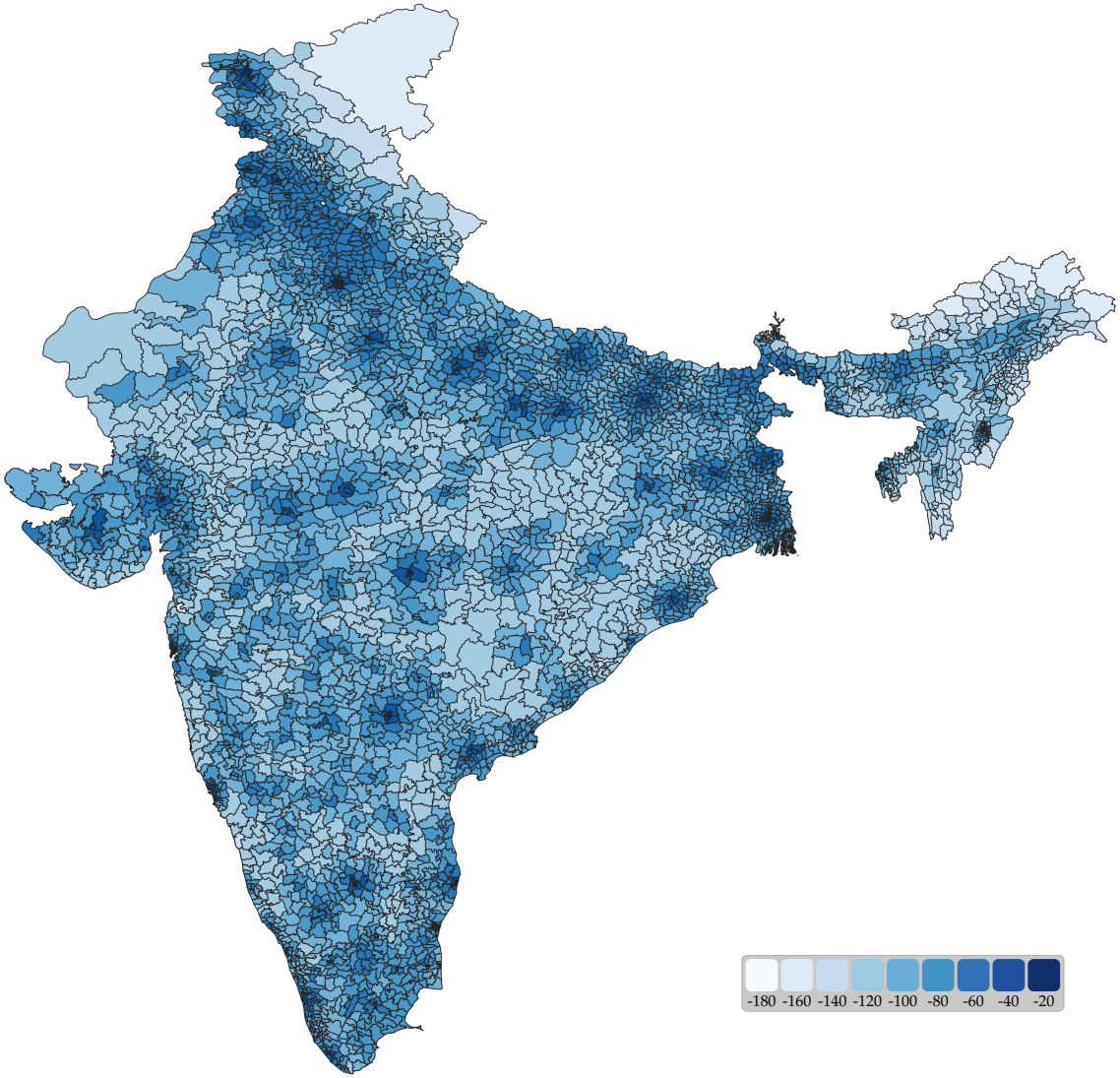
Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the PIN code level. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. A top Hindu name is determined at the state-level (to account for cultural differences across states) by ranking all first names of Hindu males born between 1900 and 1970, prior to our study period. *Any Conflict* is a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict and 0 otherwise. Panel B includes the full sample of years from 1979 to 2000, while Panel C includes a short sample from 1979 to 1992. *Any RSS School*, a binary variable equal to 1 if there is an RSS-affiliated school, and 0 otherwise. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. PIN code and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Table A14 - **Publication Years and Languages/Script in Names Dataset by States and Union Territories**

State	Year(s)	Language(s)
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	2017	English
Andhra Pradesh	2017	Telugu, English
Arunachal Pradesh	2017	English
Assam	2018	Bengali
Bihar	2017	Hindi
Chandigarh	2018	Hindi
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	2017	Gujarati, English
Daman & Diu	2017	Gujarati, English
Goa	2018	English
Gujarat	2017	Gujarati
Haryana	2018	Hindi
Himachal Pradesh	2017	Hindi
Jammu & Kashmir	2018	Hindi, English, and Urdu
Jharkhand	2018	Hindi
Lakshadweep	2017	Malayalam
Karnataka	2018	Kannada
Kerala	2018	Malayalam, English
Madhya Pradesh	2017	Hindi
Maharashtra	2018	Marathi
Manipur	2018	Manipuri, English
Meghalaya	2018	English
Mizoram	2018	English
Nagaland	2018	English
NCT OF Delhi	2018	Hindi, English
Odisha	2018	Odia
Punjab	2018	Punjabi
Puducherry	2018	Tamil, English
Rajasthan	2014	Hindi
Sikkim	2018	English
Tamil Nadu	2018	Tamil
Telangana	2017	Telugu
Tripura	2018	Bengali
Uttar Pradesh	2018	Hindi
Uttarakhand	2017	Hindi
West Bengal	2018	Bengali

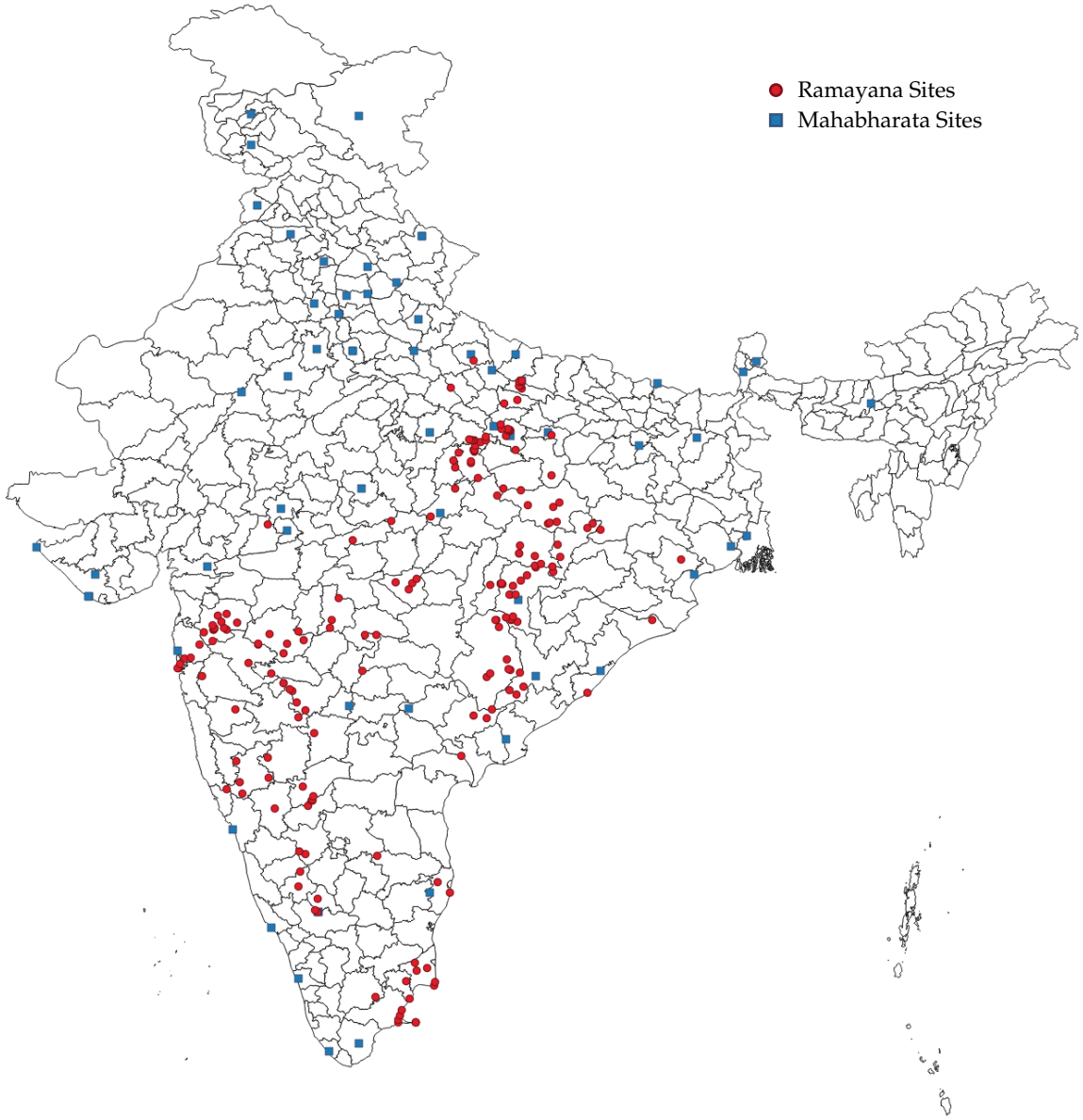
Notes: This table includes information on the years and languages for each state used in the names data.
Source: `https://github.com/in-rolls/electoral_rolls/blob/master/README.md`

Figure A1 - **Actual Television Signal Strength in 1987 at the Assembly Constituency Level**



Notes: This figure displays actual television signal strength in dBm at the assembly constituency level for the start of 1987. The actual television signal strength in dBm is estimated for each 1-kilometer grid cell using an irregular terrain model, which is then aggregated to the assembly constituency level using population-weighted averages. Darker shades of blue represent greater signal strength. The internal borders shown are assembly constituencies using the pre-2008 delimitation.

Figure A2 - **Religious Sites Associated with the Ramayana and Mahabharata**



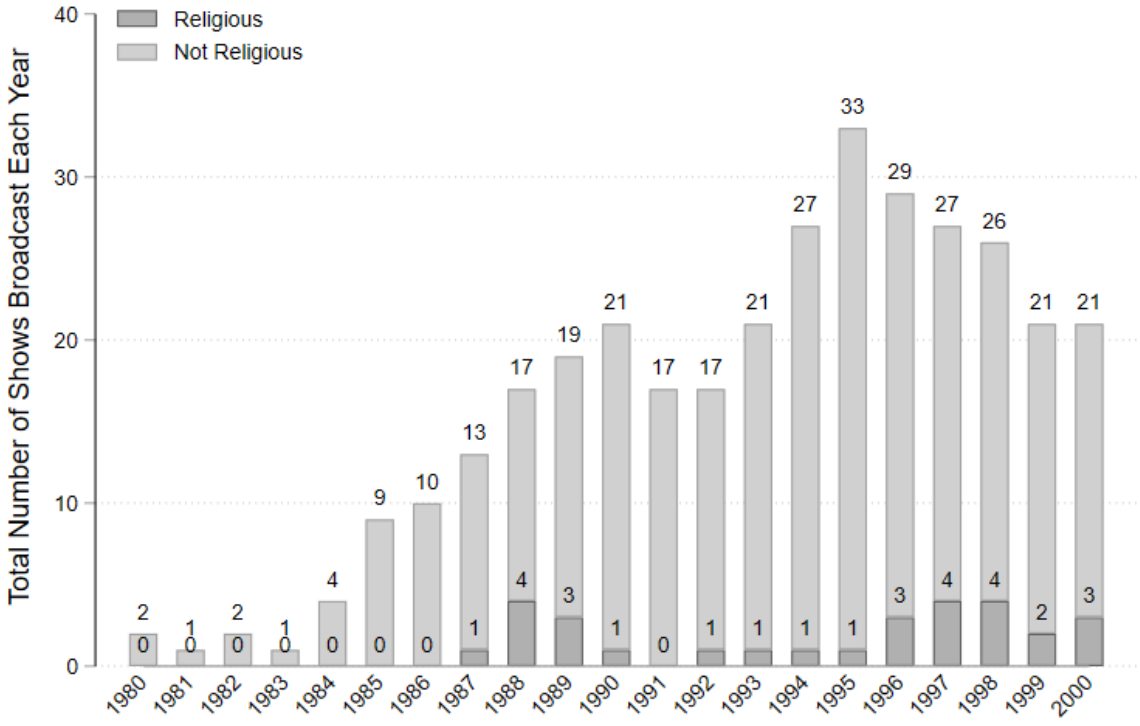
Notes: This figure displays religious sites associated with the Ramayana and Mahabharata in red circles and blue squares respectively. The internal borders shown are districts from the 1981 census.

Figure A3 - **The Route of the Ram Rath Yatra**



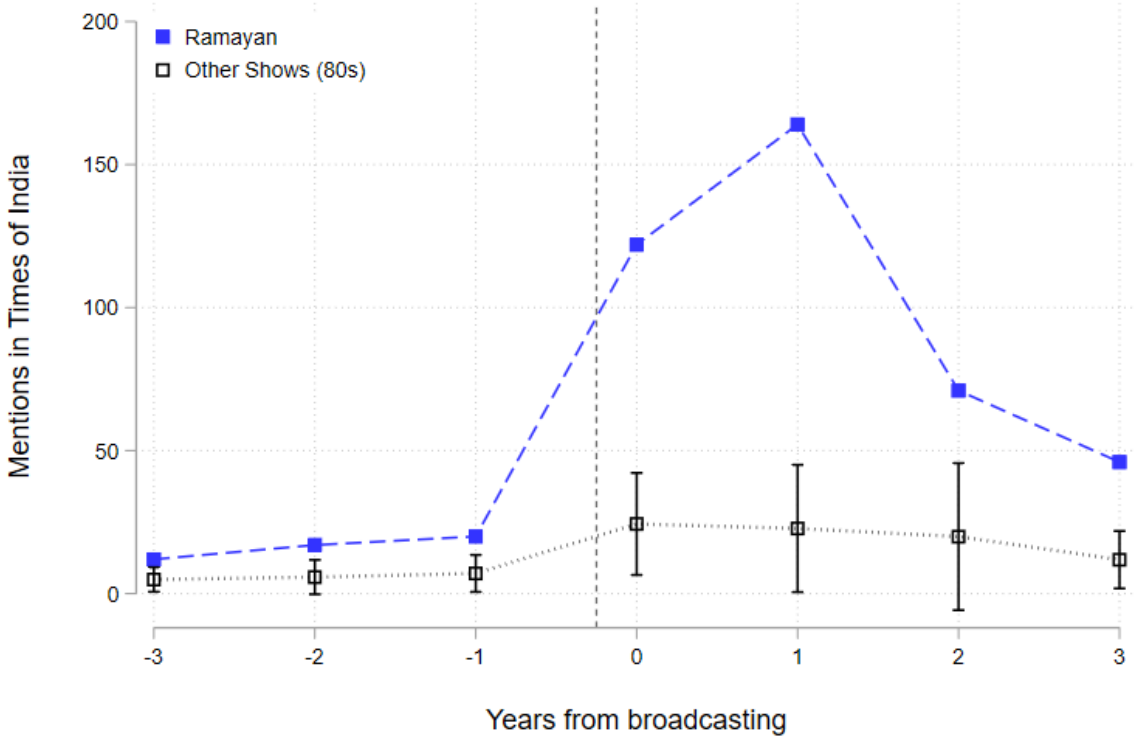
Notes: This figure displays in red the planned route to be covered by the Ram Rath Yatra, a political and religious march that took place in September and October of 1990. The internal borders shown are districts from the 1981 census.
Source: Blakeslee (2018) and Kalra (2021).

Figure A4 - **Television Serials Broadcast on Indian Networks Since the 1980s**



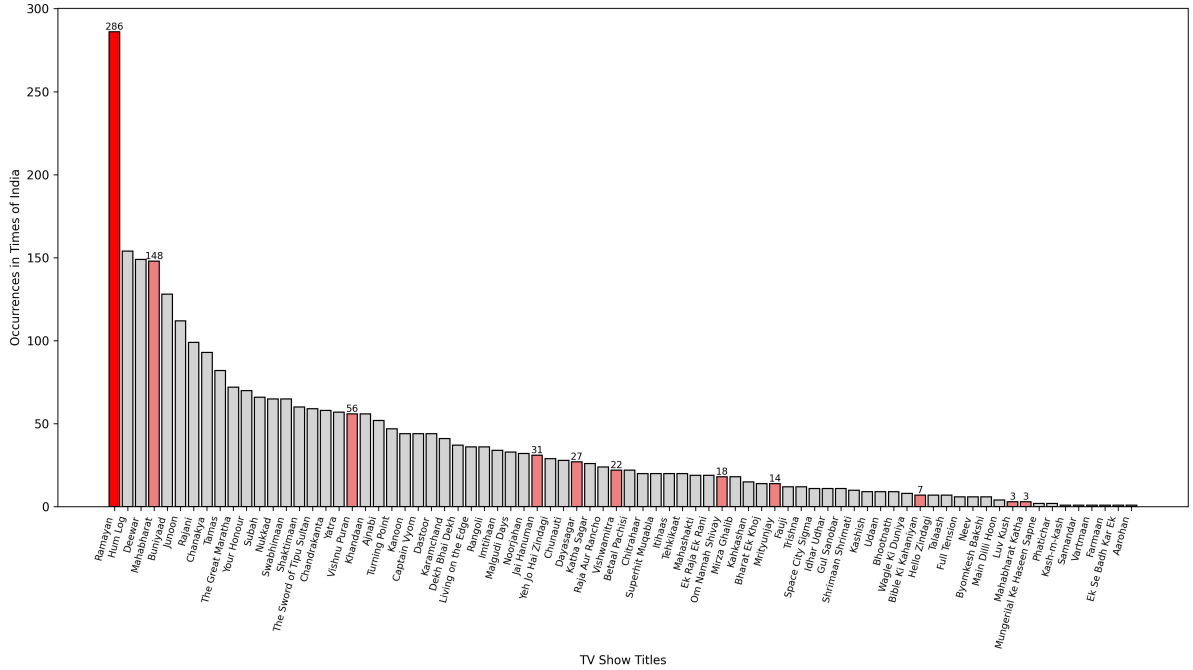
Notes: This figure displays the evolution of television programming in India from 1980 to 2000, illustrating the total number of shows broadcast each year by the public television broadcaster Doordarshan. The underlying data has been retrieved from Wikipedia [1, 2 and 3]. The bars are divided into religious and non-religious categories.

Figure A5 - **Mentions of Ramayan and Other 1980s Television Shows in the Times of India**



Notes: This figure presents the number of mentions of Ramayan (blue line) in the Times of India (TOI) compared to the average mentions of other television shows broadcast during the 1980s (dotted line). The horizontal axis represents the number of years before and after the shows' initial broadcasts, with year zero marking their debut. The vertical axis shows the number of TOI article mentions. The error bars indicate the confidence intervals around the average mentions of other shows.

Figure A6 - **Mentions of Ramayan and All Television Shows in the Times of India**



Notes: The figure shows the number of mentions for all television serials aired on Indian public networks between 1980 and 2000, focusing on the year of release and the subsequent year (further details are provided in Section 7.3). Only TV shows with at least one mention are included. Light-red bars indicate shows with a religious component.

B Data Appendix

B.1 Geographic Coordinates and Boundaries Data

We use geographic boundary data at five hierarchical levels in ascending size order: village, PIN codes, assembly constituencies, parliamentary constituencies and districts. Spatial merges based on the centroid of each geographic boundary are used to aggregate from smaller boundaries to larger boundaries. For villages, only coordinates are included, while larger units are polygons.

- **Villages:** We use data on the coordinates of 227 villages from the Additional Rural Incomes Survey (ARIS)/Rural Economic & Demographic Survey (REDS) data. We manually verify the longitude and latitude coordinates of all villages. Spatial variables are constructed using a 2km buffer around each village centroid.
- **PIN Code Shapefile:** This layer is derived from village boundaries using the postal-to-village mapping provided by the Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications, Government of India. The data is sourced from Postal GIS (`https://postalgis.nic.in`). Introduced in 1972, PIN codes are six-digit postal index numbers used by India Post, with each digit representing a specific geographic location. The dataset includes boundaries for a total of 19,475 PIN codes.
- **Assembly Constituencies Shapefile:** We utilize the map provided by ML InfoMap (2013*c*), focusing on the pre-2008 delimitation to match our timeline. For states that underwent bifurcation after 2000, we align the current constituencies with their corresponding pre-2000 counterparts. This involves matching modern constituencies with their earlier versions in Chhattisgarh-Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand-Bihar, and Uttarakhand-Uttar Pradesh. However, we could not establish matches for 48 constituencies in Uttarakhand with their former boundaries. The dataset includes boundaries for a total of 4,110 assembly constituencies.
- **Parliamentary Constituencies Shapefile:** We utilize the map provided by Sam Asher and Paul Novosad, focusing on the pre-2008 delimitation to match our timeline. The dataset includes boundaries for a total of 542 parliamentary constituencies.
- **Districts**: We use district boundaries that correspond to the 1981 Census of India (ML InfoMap, 2013*b*).

B.2 Television Data

We construct annual measures of television signal strength from 1965 to 2000 for India. Constructing our television data involves four steps. First, we collect extensive details for the universe of television transmitters belonging to Doordarshan, the national broadcaster. Second, we overlay 1-kilometer grid cells for the entirety of India and calculate the signal strength between each transmitter and each grid cell using an Irregular Terrain Model (ITM), a model of broadcast signal propagation which takes topography into account. Third, for each year, we calculate the TV signal strength at each grid cell by identifying all transmitters in operation for the year, and selecting the maximum signal strength. Fourth, using the gridded TV signal data, we aggregate the signal using standard geospatial averaging methods where we weight using 1980 population to obtain a population-weighted measure of TV signal strength for each

year. We provide further detail about each of these four steps below.

B.2.1 Transmitter Data

We construct a comprehensive dataset of the entire universe of TV transmitters commissioned by Doordarshan, the national broadcaster, between 1965 and 2000. Our dataset includes the following characteristics for each transmitter: location, coordinates, type, power, height, band, channel, frequency range, commissioning dates, and decommissioning dates where relevant. We record upgrades as new transmitters, given that transmitter characteristics change substantially after an upgrade. In total we have 1,181 transmitters across 1,007 locations that were in operation at some point up to January 1, 2000.

Our data sources involve a combination of archival records from the Doordarshan Audience Research Unit, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) and Press Information Bureau (PIB), in addition to Right to Information (RTI) filings. Our data sources complement each other, as information is spread out across multiple sources. They also provide additional cross-checks to ensure the accuracy of our data. We also consulted current ministry officials and reviewed technical documents on their transmission systems to better understand key inputs for signal broadcasting, such as the frequency used to air the Doordarshan channel, the average height of transmission towers, and the polarization of TV waves.

We provide additional details for our sources:

- **Doordarshan Audience Research Unit Reports:** The Doordarshan Audience Research Unit released several reports to provide basic information to the public on television broadcasting in India. Published in 1987, the Doordarshan report *Television India* includes details on the location, precise commissioning date and power of all transmitters that were in existence as of March 1987 (Doordarshan Audience Research Unit, 1987). In the 1990s, additional reports were released, including a list of all existing transmitters. We use Doordarshan reports for 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2002.
- **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) Annual Reports and Documents:** The MIB Annual Reports were released annually during the 1990s, but less frequently during the 1980s. These reports include sections about achievements in the most recent fiscal year as well as plans for the upcoming year, both of which often provide specific information on transmitters. There is also a section specifically for Doordarshan, which is usually more detailed. We read through all of these sections and manually compiled any information related to transmitters. There are also occasionally appendix tables that either include information on the existing network of transmitters, commissioned transmitters in the past fiscal year, or planned transmitters. The extent of information on transmitters varies substantially across reports. We use MIB annual reports for the 1980-1981, 1983-1984, 1985-1986, 1987-1988, 1989-1990, 1990-1991, 1991-1992, 1992-1993, 1993-1994, 1994-1995, 1995-1996, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. Additionally, the MIB Estimates Committee Report for 1988-1989 includes specific information for TV transmitters in border areas.
- **Press Information Bureau (PIB) Press Releases:** We search through the entire history of archival PIB press releases, publicly available at `https://archive.pib.gov.in`, to identify hundreds of relevant press releases. Most of these press releases were issued

in the 1980s, when television was still relatively new and the PIB would publish a press release for each commissioned transmitter, often with accompanying characteristics.

- **Right to Information (RTI) Documents:** Through RTI filings with Doordarshan, we received two documents. First, a document with details of all transmitters upgraded to higher power transmitters including the types of transmitters and specific upgrade dates. Second, a document with details on commissioning dates, height, power, channel and frequency ranges for 716 transmitters. This list mainly includes the most recent transmitter in each location, and so the majority of these transmitters were commissioned in the 1990s.

We provide additional details for each characteristic in our dataset:

- **Commissioning Dates:** We have exact commissioning dates for 874 transmitters, and impute dates for the remaining 307 transmitters. We have exact dates for all transmitters commissioned by March 1987 from the Doordarshan Audience Report *Television India* (Doordarshan Audience Research Unit, 1987). Therefore, for 1 January 1987, which we use as our measure of Ramayan exposure, we have complete coverage of exact commissioning dates. Afterwards, we impute commissioning dates for a subset of transmitters for which we are unable to find exact dates. The RTI documents provide exact dates for all transmitters involved in upgrades, and the majority of transmitters commissioned in the 1990s. PIB press releases also contain exact dates which we use to supplement our other data. We have many snapshots of existing transmitters, as well as records of newly commissioned and planned transmitters throughout our resources to narrow down the commissioning window to be as narrow as possible for the 307 transmitters. We impute the commissioning date to be the earliest date in the expected commissioning window.
  From 1993 onward, the Doordarshan Audience Research Unit released several reports and the MIB Annual Reports included appendix tables with lists of existing transmitters. This means that we can often narrow down imputed dates to fiscal year windows, and even specific months. Between 1988 and 1993 however, we have no Doordarshan reports, and the MIB Annual Reports for 1987-1988, 1989-1990, 1990-1991 and 1991-1992 do not include any relevant Appendix tables. The PIB archives are also missing press releases only for the year 1989. While the number of transmitters increased relatively modestly between 1990 and 1993, there were a large number of transmitters commissioned very quickly in 1988 and 1989 as part of a crash TV expansion program. To impute the correct years for these transmitters, we rely on the fact that in the 1993 Doordarshan Audience Research Unit report, existing transmitters are listed chronologically. We are able to therefore work backwards, and given that we have dates for a subset of those transmitters, we are significantly able to narrow down the commissioning window for imputation.
- **Upgrades and Decommissioning Dates:** The RTI document with upgrade information provides us with the most comprehensive source of information on upgrades and decommissioning dates. When a transmitter is upgraded, we record that it has been decommissioned, and that a new transmitter has been commissioned in the same location. Upgrades are relatively rare, but significantly change the characteristics of the transmit-

ter which is why we record it as a new transmitter. On rare occasions, transmitters are decommissioned without being upgraded, and we record this as well. Usually this happens when a more powerful transmitter is commissioned nearby, rendering a transmitter redundant.

- **Locations and Coordinates:** Locations of transmitters are recorded at the city or town level. To obtain the precise latitude and longitude coordinates of the TV transmitters, we use a manual extensive search method to find these transmitters using satellite imagery from Google Maps and Google Earth. For each location, we iteratively search using four steps. First, we searched for the Doordarshan transmitter. Second, we searched for the Doordarshan headquarters in that area as this is where transmitters were often located. Third, we searched for the All India Radio (AIR) transmitter or office as it is likely that the TV transmitter would also be located there. Fourth, we use the centroids of the city/town when all other searches have failed. Across all 1,007 unique locations, we find the TV transmitter for 48 locations, the Doordarshan headquarters for 390 locations, the AIR transmitter or office for 123 locations, and rely on city/town centroids for the remaining 446 locations.
- **Type and Power:** There are five main types of transmitters during this period, which almost always correspond to their power: high powered transmitters (HPTs) with a power of 10 kW; medium powered transmitters (MPTs) with a power of 1 kW; low powered transmitters (LPTs) with a power of 0.1 kW; very low powered transmitters (VLPTs) with a power of 0.02 kW; and transposers (TRANs) with a power of 0.01 kW. We have data on transmitter type for virtually all of our transmitters, but only have exact power for 820 transmitters. Only for 88 of these 820 transmitters do we have a recorded power that is not equal to one of the five listed, with 83 of them being 0.3 and 0.5 kW. We therefore impute the transmitter's power based on its type accordingly for the remaining 361 transmitters. We also account for the fact that the term MPT was only introduced towards the end of our sample, as these transmitters would have previously been classified as an LPT in earlier documents.
- **Height:** The RTI list of transmitters is our primary source for transmitter heights. Occasionally PIB press releases also mention heights. We have heights data recorded for 579 transmitters, and with this data, we find that there is a clear correlation between height and transmitter type. We find that almost all of the transmitters with heights (524 out of the 579) are either 30m, 45m, 100m or 150m tall. Therefore, for the remaining 602 transmitters, we impute height according to the transmitter's type as follows: HPTs (150m), MPTs (100m), LPTs (45m), VLPTs (30m) and TRANs (30m).
- **Band, Channel and Frequency:** Transmitters are assigned a channel, which corresponds to a frequency range for their broadcasting. For example, channel 5 corresponds to a frequency range of 174-181 MHz. The RTI list of transmitters is our primary source for transmitter channels, and also provides us with a mapping from channels to frequency ranges. The PIB press releases provide us with substantial amounts of information on bands and channels for transmitters in the 1980s. We have data on channels for 712 of our transmitters. The vast majority of transmitters (85.7%) use Band III, which is considered

to be the optimal band for TV broadcasting and consists of channels 5 to 12, although we have channels ranging from 2 to 34. The distribution of our transmitters across Band III is relatively uniform and unrelated to power. Therefore, we do not impute using transmitter characteristics. Rather, for the 469 transmitters without channel data, we uniformly impute with the lowest channel in Band III, corresponding to a frequency range of 174-181 MHz.

B.2.2 Transmitter Gridded Signal Data

For each transmitter, we create a raster covering India with a spatial resolution of 30 arc-seconds, corresponding to approximately 1-kilometer grid cells, resulting in a total of 4.5 million grid cells. For all 1,181 transmitters in our dataset, this results in approximately 5.3 billion transmitter-cell pairs. Consequently, we create a separate transmitter signal raster dataset for each transmitter. For each transmitter and grid cell pair, we construct three variables:

- **Distance from the Transmitter:** The shortest straight-line distance (as the crow flies) between the transmitter and the centroid of the grid in kilometers.
- **Freespace Signal Strength from the Transmitter:** The theoretical signal strength at the centroid of the grid cell from the transmitter, assuming propagation through unobstructed free space without interference, measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).
- **TV Signal Strength from the Transmitter:** The actual signal strength at the centroid of the grid cell from the transmitter, incorporating real-world factors such as terrain, obstructions, and interference, measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).

Using data on the transmitter's coordinates, distance is calculated using standard geospatial methods. For our measures of freespace and TV signal strength, we use the *itmlogic* package by Oughton et al. (2020), which implements a Longley-Rice Irregular Terrain Model (ITM) of signal propagation, which models the strength of TV signals considering obstacles in irregular terrain pioneered by Longley (1968). For each transmitter and grid cell pair, we use point-to-point prediction, which uses a sample of up to 600 points between the grid and the transmitter, accounting for terrain (Hufford, 1995). We model the terrain using a digital elevation model (DEM) from the CGIAR Consortium for Spatial Information (CGIAR-CSI) which is available with a spatial resolution of approximately 90-meter grid cells at the equator (Jarvis et al., 2008). We adapt the *itmlogic* code to improve efficiency, and make it more flexible for parallel computing.

Our parameters and assumptions for the ITM are as follows:

- **Operating Frequency:** We use the midpoint frequency of the transmitter's frequency range as the operating frequency. For example, a transmitter with channel 5 and a frequency range of 174-181 MHz will be assigned a frequency of 177.5 MHz.
- **Broadcasting Antenna Height:** We use the transmitter's height.
- **Receiving Antenna Height:** We assume that the receiving antenna is 10m high.
- **Confidence Levels for Predictions:** 50.
- **Reliability Levels for Predictions:** 50.
- **Polarization Selection:** Horizontal.
- **Terrain Relative Permittivity:** 15.
- **Climate Selection:** Continental subtropical.

- **Surface Refractivity:** 320.

The outputs that our code produces are actually measures of freespace and TV signal loss, rather than signal strength. To calculate the signal strength in dBm, we first convert the power of the transmitter from kW to dBm using the following formula: $Power_{dBm} = 10 \times \log_{10}\left(Power_{kW} \times 10^6\right)$. This is the signal strength of the transmitter at its source. Therefore, to calculate the freespace and TV signal strengths, we subtract the freespace and TV signal loss from $Power_{dBm}$ respectively.

B.2.3 TV Gridded Signal Data

Using the gridded signal data from individual transmitters, we construct a raster dataset representing TV signal coverage for each year. For each year, we calculate the signal measures for 1 January by first identifying the set of transmitters operating on this date. For each grid cell, we compare all of the transmitters in operation and determine the best transmitter, the one with the highest TV signal strength. Additionally, we classify the TV signal strength for each grid into five TV coverage levels based on various thresholds for television reception recommended by the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) guidelines (ATSC, 2010). The coverage levels, with the lower bound threshold for TV signal strength in parentheses, are: minimum (-83 dBm), weak (-68 dBm), moderate (-53 dBm) and strong (-28 dBm). If the TV signal strength is below -83 dBm, then there is no coverage. Therefore, for each year and grid cell pair, we construct five variables based on the centroid of each grid cell:

- **Best Transmitter Identifier:** An identifier for the transmitter that provides the highest TV signal strength at the grid cell when considering all transmitters in operation.
- **Distance from the Best Transmitter:** The shortest straight-line distance (as the crow flies) from the grid cell to the best transmitter, measured in kilometers.
- **Freespace Signal Strength:** The theoretical signal strength at the grid cell from the best transmitter, assuming unobstructed free space propagation without interference, measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).
- **TV Signal Strength:** The actual signal strength at the grid cell, accounting for real-world factors such as terrain, obstructions, and interference, by considering all transmitters in operation, measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).
- **TV Coverage Level:** A classification of whether the grid has no, minimum, weak, moderate or strong TV coverage, based on the TV signal strength at the grid cell.

B.2.4 TV Aggregated Signal Data

In order to aggregate the gridded TV signal data to our units of analysis (e.g., assembly constituencies or villages), we use gridded data on 1980 population counts to construct weighted averages within geographic boundaries. Our population data comes from the Global Population Count Grid Time Series Estimates (Center for International Earth Science Information Network , CIESIN) with a spatial resolution of 30 arc-seconds, corresponding to approximately 1-kilometer grid cells at the equator. This grid is identical to the 1-kilometer grid cells used in our TV signal calculations. Weighting accounts for the fact that populations are not uniformly dispersed within localities, and allows us to place a higher weight on TV signal strength in areas that are more densely populated when taking the weighted average.

We use standard geospatial averaging methods to obtain population-weighted averages

of freespace and TV signal strengths. We also use standard geospatial summing methods to obtain the population-weighted share of grids with minimum, weak, moderate and strong TV coverage. Due to population weighting, these measures correspond to the share of the population with minimum, weak, moderate and strong TV coverage. Therefore, for each unit and year, we construct six variables:

- **Average Freespace Signal Strength:** The population-weighted average theoretical signal strength for the unit, assuming unobstructed free space propagation without interference. This is measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).
- **Average TV Signal Strength:** The population-weighted average actual signal strength for the unit, accounting for real-world factors such as terrain, obstructions, and interference. This is measured in decibels relative to one milliwatt (dBm).
- **Minimum TV Coverage:** The share of the population in the unit with minimum TV coverage, defined by having TV signal strength at least -83 dBm.
- **Weak TV Coverage:** The share of the population in the unit with weak TV coverage, defined by having TV signal strength at least -68 dBm.
- **Moderate TV Coverage:** The share of the population in the unit with moderate TV coverage, defined by having TV signal strength at least -53 dBm.
- **Strong TV Coverage:** The share of the population in the unit with strong TV coverage, defined by having TV signal strength at least -28 dBm.

B.3 Radio Data

We construct measures of FM radio signal strength for India in 1987. We follow the same four-step procedure used for the television data, since FM radio propagation in the standard broadcast band (88–108 MHz) is well described by the Longley–Rice Irregular Terrain Model (ITM), which is calibrated for frequencies between 20 and 20,000 MHz and is therefore appropriate for FM broadcasting. We obtain data on radio transmitters from the 1987 edition of the World Radio TV Handbook (Frost, 1987), which reports the location, power, and frequency of all transmitters operating in that year. In 1987, all FM transmitters in India operated at 107.1 MHz. We impute the transmitter height to 200 m, based on archival records for typical FM broadcast towers in this period. All other model parameters are identical to those used for the television data. We can therefore compute the average freespace and actual FM radio signal strengths in exactly the same way as for TV.

To make our television and FM radio measures comparable, we define a radio-specific threshold for "weak" signal strength based on engineering standards. For FM radio, the threshold for weak coverage of a portable receiver is -68 dBm, which coincides with the value we use for television, although this equality is coincidental. The field strength recommended by the ITU for stereophonic FM reception with a portable receiver is 50 dBμV/m (ITU Radiocommunication Sector, 1990), which is also the threshold adopted by Yanagizawa-Drott (2014). This recommendation is expressed in terms of field strength, so we convert it to received signal power (in dBm) using $P = E - 20 \times \log_{10}(F) - 77.2$, where P is received power in dBm, E is field strength in dBμV/m, and F is frequency in MHz (Haslett, 2007). Since all FM transmitters in our setting operate at 107.1 MHz, this implies a reception threshold of $P = 50 - 20 \times \log_{10}(107.1) - 77.2 \approx -68$ dBm, assuming zero receiver-antenna gain.

B.4 Outcomes Data

B.4.1 Names Data

The individual names data are obtained from Sood and Dhingra (2023). The dataset contains details on full names, gender, age and location (polling station information, PIN code, constituency, district and state). For all males, father's name is included. For females, either the name of their father or husband is included, depending on their marital status. Birth year is calculated from age. These data were collected by scraping and parsing PDFs of electoral rolls. Appendix Table A14 lists Indian state and union territories included in the names dataset, with year and language of publication. In total, we have 780,359,060 names from this dataset. For Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Delhi, Kerala, Nagaland and Sikkim, data on either the PIN codes or names of fathers are missing, so these states are excluded from the analysis. To maintain consistency with pre-2000 state boundaries, we combine modern-day Bihar and Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

For all states where the names are not recorded in English, we transliterate all names into English using the IndicXlit package by AI4Bharat (Madhani et al., 2022). Using this package, we transliterate from Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu to English.

To classify households by religion, we rely on father's name. As this is not collected for married women, we proceed using only the male sample. Using father's full name, we use the support vector machine (SVM) algorithm for single names with multi-religion classification by Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2024) to classify households as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain or Buddhist.

For each individual, their full name consists of potentially multiple names. Naming patterns differ across states, with three main variants: First-Middle-Last, Last-First-Other and First-Other-Last. To identify an individual's first name, we determine the most common naming patterns for each state through external sources, manual inspection and identifying the most common names for each ordered name. After the naming pattern is identified, we are then able to select the name that is most likely to be an individual's first name.

We identify the popularity of a first name for males of each religion by restricting the sample to only individuals given the relevant group characteristics born between 1900 and 1970, prior to our study period. To account for cultural naming differences across states, we identify the rank of each name at the state level based on the number of individuals with that name. Therefore, for any integer n, we know the n^{th} ranked name for males with a certain religious classification. The list of top ten ranked state-level names for Hindu males is provided in Appendix Table A2. For individuals born during our study period, we are therefore able to assign a rank to their name.

Additionally, we record whether an individual has a name related to the *Ramayan* show and deities. The list of primary actor names from Ramayan, with spelling variants, is: *Arun, Arvind, Sunil, Suneel, Suneela* and *Dara*. The primary character names from Ramayan include *Rama*, *Sita*, *Hanuman* and family members of *Rama* (*Lakshman*, *Dasharath*, *Shatrughan* and *Vibhishan*). The other major Hindu deities – major Hindu deities who are not primary characters of the show – include *Ganesha*, *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Krishna*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Durga* and

Subrahmanya.

For the primary Ramayan characters and other major Hindu deities, we focus on *associated* names. Rather than matching names against a fixed list of canonical spellings, we identify names whose initial characters match a regular expression capturing: (i) the character or deity's own name across common transliterations; (ii) compound forms and devotional variants incorporating the name; (iii) epithets and patronymics; and (iv) related scriptural attributes and family members. Each pattern is constructed by manually inspecting the 108 traditional names (*Ashtottara Sata Namavali*), available at `https://vignanam.org/english`. Some traditional epithets are shared across figures (for example, several of Lakshmi's 108 names derive from *Rama*); each such epithet is included in the pattern set of only one figure, based on its predominant usage, with the show's primary characters taking precedence for epithets shared with them, so the character and deity pattern sets do not overlap. An individual name can nonetheless match patterns from both groups through compound forms (for example, *Ramkrishna*); such names account for only 0.089% of Hindu male newborns in our sample.

At the individual level, we have the following variables:

- **Birth Year:** The year of birth, calculated by subtracting age from the year that the electoral roll was published.
- **Religious Classification:** A variable that classifies each individual based on their father's full name as either Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain or Buddhist.
- **First Name Rank**: The rank of an individual's first name based on the rank of names for individuals of the same sex, religious classification and state born between 1900 and 1970.
- **Name is Associated with Primary Characters from *Ramayan*:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the name is associated with *Rama*, *Sita*, *Hanuman* or family members of *Rama* (*Lakshman*, *Dasharath*, *Shatrughan* and *Vibhishan*), and 0 otherwise.
- **Name is Associated with Other Major Hindu Deities:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the name is associated with the deities *Ganesha*, *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Krishna*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Durga* or *Subrahmanya*, and 0 otherwise.
- **Name is a Primary Actor Name from *Ramayan*:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the name is one of the primary actor names from Ramayan, accounting for spelling variants, and 0 otherwise.

The most consistent disaggregated unit for our names data is the PIN code level. We aggregate our individual data to the PIN code level for each birth cohort. Therefore, for each PIN code and birth cohort, we have the number of Hindu males, and the number of Hindu males with a given naming pattern. We are then able to calculate the percentage of Hindu male newborns given a naming pattern for each PIN code and year. From the PIN code level, we aggregate in the same way to larger units such as the assembly constituency. We have data for 3,088 assembly constituencies and 13,780 PIN codes as we do not have names data for all the states. We have the following aggregated variables for birth cohorts between 1979 and 1998, where n is any integer:

- **Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top n Names:** The percentage of Hindu male newborns whose first name is among the top n first names of Hindu males born

between 1900 and 1970 in the same state.

- **Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names Associated with Primary Characters from *Ramayan*:** The percentage of Hindu male newborns whose name is associated with *Rama*, *Sita*, *Hanuman* or family members of *Rama* (*Lakshman*, *Dasharath*, *Shatrughan* and *Vibhishan*).
- **Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names Associated with Other Major Hindu Deities:** The percentage of Hindu male newborns whose name is associated with the major Hindu deities *Ganesha*, *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Krishna*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Durga* or *Subrahmanya*.
- **Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Names of Primary Actors from *Ramayan*:** The percentage of Hindu male newborns whose name is one of the primary actor names from *Ramayan*, accounting for spelling variants.

B.4.2 Hindu-Muslim Conflict Data

The Hindu-Muslim conflict data is from Varshney et al. (2006) and Mitra and Ray (2014). We use the data from 1979 until 2000. We improve on the existing dataset (Varshney et al., 2006) by manually geolocating events at the neighborhood level. The dataset is extended until 2000 by using 2 million articles in the *Times of India* and training an algorithm to detect articles related to the Hindu-Muslim conflict while cross-validating manually and then re-verifying the articles by reading them manually. A communal Hindu-Muslim riot is an event characterized by violence involving two or more groups identified along communal lines, such as religious or ethnic affiliations, engaging in direct confrontation with one another. It is important to note that events involving violence directed solely at the police or involving a single communal group do not qualify as communal riots. Our analysis only includes riots that have been classified as having the highest reliability for being a communal Hindu-Muslim riot. For each riot, information on reported injuries and deaths is included.

Given that each conflict event is geo-coded with coordinates, we are able to spatially aggregate the data to all 19,475 PIN codes and 4,110 assembly constituencies in our data. We have the following aggregated variables for each year between 1979 and 2000:

- **Any Conflict:** a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict and 0 otherwise.
- **Any Violent Conflict:** a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict with at least one registered death or injury and 0 otherwise.
- **Any Deadly Conflict:** a binary variable equal to 1 if there was any Hindu-Muslim conflict with at least one registered death and 0 otherwise.

B.4.3 Electoral Data

Electoral data are obtained from LokDhaba: Indian Election Dataset provided by the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (Agarwal et al., 2021). Our data span 1979 to 2000. This dataset contains detailed electoral information for each contesting candidate across state-level legislative assembly elections and Lok Sabha elections.

The dataset is rich, providing information on candidate names, political affiliations, vote shares, and election outcomes. This allows us to conduct a granular analysis of electoral dynamics at the constituency and party levels. Due to the 48 assembly constituencies in Ut-

tarakhand that we are unable to match, we only have data for 4,062 assembly constituencies. The dataset includes the following key variables for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC) parties:

- **Victory:** a binary variable equal to 1 if the party wins the election and 0 otherwise. A value of 0 is assigned for elections in which the party did not field a candidate.
- **Vote Share:** the proportion of votes in the constituency that the party received, ranging from 0 to 1. A value of 0 is assigned for elections in which the party did not field a candidate.
- **Fields a Candidate:** a binary variable equal to 1 if the party fielded a candidate in the election and 0 otherwise.
- **Conditional Victory:** a binary variable equal to 1 if the party wins the election and 0 otherwise. Defined only for elections in which the party fielded a candidate.
- **Conditional Vote Share:** the proportion of votes in the constituency that the party received, ranging from 0 to 1. Defined only for elections in which the party fielded a candidate.

B.4.4 Vegetarianism Data

Our vegetarianism data come from the Additional Rural Incomes Survey (ARIS)/Rural Economic & Demographic Survey (REDS) waves of 1982 and 1999. Although designed primarily to collect detailed information on agricultural households, REDS also includes rich data on household consumption over the previous year (types of foods, quantities, and expenditures), as well as household demographics. REDS follows a given household across the survey waves, but also adds new households in each wave.

We define the household unit using the 1982 data, consisting of the 4,979 households surveyed in 1982. Of these households, we successfully match 3,879 to the 1999 wave. Attrition between waves arises mainly because some households were not re-interviewed, with a small additional share likely due to inconsistencies in the identification crosswalk across rounds. Over the 17-year interval between waves, some households branched into new units (e.g. when children left to establish their own households), so that multiple 1999 household records are linked to a single 1982 household identifier. We address this by recombining these split 1999 households into a single observation corresponding to the original 1982 household. We implement this by aggregating outcomes across the resulting 1999 household units. We drop a small number of further households due to village geolocation issues. We assign households to their village of residence in 1982 and we use 1982 survey weights throughout. In total, we have a household panel consisting of 3,656 households across 227 villages. We then construct the following key variables for our analysis:

- **Hindu:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the household reported their religion as being Hinduism in the year 1982, and 0 otherwise. There are 3,226 Hindu households.
- **Lower-Caste Hindu:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the household is reported as being Hindu and belonging to one of the following caste categories in the year 1982: *Scheduled caste*, *Scheduled tribe*, *Backward caste* or *Non-classified Hindu*, and 0 otherwise. There are 1,963 lower-caste Hindu households.
- **Upper-Caste Hindu:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the household is reported as being

Hindu and belonging to one of the following caste categories in the year 1982: *Brahmin* or *Other upper caste*, and 0 otherwise. There are 1,263 upper-caste Hindu households.

- **Vegetarianism:** A binary variable equal to 1 if the household did not consume any meat, fish, or eggs in the year of the survey, and 0 otherwise.

B.4.5 Dowry Data

Our dowry data come from the Additional Rural Incomes Survey (ARIS)/Rural Economic & Demographic Survey (REDS) 1999 wave using the same set of households matched to the 1982 wave as detailed in Data Appendix Sections B.4.4. For relatives of the household head and spouse (specifically sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters), REDS also records their year of marriage and whether a dowry was paid. We use this data to construct a retrospective panel of 20,423 marriages from 1979 to 1998, with marriage and dowry information recalled at the time of the REDS survey in 1999 from 3,310 households. At the marriage level, we have the following variables:

- **Hindu:** See Data Appendix Sections B.4.4. There are 18,310 Hindu marriages.
- **Lower-Caste Hindu:** See Data Appendix Sections B.4.4. There are 11,217 lower-caste Hindu marriages.
- **Upper-Caste Hindu:** See Data Appendix Sections B.4.4. There are 7,093 upper-caste Hindu marriages.
- **Dowry:** A binary variable equal to 1 if a dowry was paid, and 0 otherwise. This captures a dowry received when the household relative is the groom, or a dowry paid when the household relative is the bride.

We aggregate marriages to the village-year level using 1982 survey weights and assigning households to their 1982 village of residence, to construct a village-level panel from 1979 to 1998. At the village-year level, we construct the following variables:

- **Any Hindu Marriage:** A binary variable equal to 1 if at least one Hindu marriage occurred, and 0 otherwise.
- **Any Lower-Caste Hindu Marriage:** A binary variable equal to 1 if at least one lower-caste Hindu marriage occurred, and 0 otherwise.
- **Any Upper-Caste Hindu Marriage:** A binary variable equal to 1 if at least one upper-caste Hindu marriage occurred, and 0 otherwise.
- **Percentage of Hindu Marriages with a Dowry:** The percentage of Hindu marriages involving a dowry which is undefined for village-years with no Hindu marriages.
- **Percentage of Lower-Caste Hindu Marriages with a Dowry:** The percentage of lower-caste Hindu marriages involving a dowry which is undefined for village-years with no lower-caste Hindu marriages.
- **Percentage of Upper-Caste Hindu Marriages with a Dowry:** The percentage of upper-caste Hindu marriages involving a dowry which is undefined for village-years with no upper-caste Hindu marriages.

B.4.6 RSS Schools Data

We construct constituency-level measures of RSS-affiliated school presence using data from the Vidya Bharati Alumni Network (`https://www.vidyabharatialumni.org/find-school`), a public directory of schools linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The raw dataset

contains about 11,500 entries with varying completeness in school names and addresses.

The raw school data underwent standard preprocessing to improve consistency and enable geographic mapping. This included the standardization of names and address fields to reduce variation in formatting and spelling across entries. Geographic coordinates and administrative identifiers—such as postal PIN codes—were obtained through reverse geocoding procedures. Approximately 9,100 out of 11,500 entries could be successfully geolocated. Each school was then linked to a PIN code and so we are able to spatially aggregate the data to all 4,110 assembly constituencies. There are several data limitations worth noting. First, address quality varies across entries, leading to regional differences in geocoding accuracy. Second, the size and enrollment of each school are unobserved, preventing the construction of capacity-weighted measures of organizational presence. We have the following aggregated variables for each year between 1979 and 2000:

- **Any RSS School:** a binary variable equal to 1 if there is an RSS-affiliated school, and 0 otherwise.

B.5 Controls Data

This subsection provides details on the various controls used in our analyses. A unit-level control variable is defined based on the unit of analysis (e.g., assembly constituency or village). The level of disaggregation and year (for time-varying outcomes) are listed in parentheses.

B.5.1 Geographic Area Data

For PIN codes, assembly constituencies and parliamentary constituencies, the geographic area of each unit in square kilometers is calculated using standard geospatial methods with the EPSG:7760 projected coordinate system, while we use survey data on geographic area in 1982 for villages:

- **Geographic Area** (Unit-Level)

B.5.2 Elevation and Slope Data

We use a digital elevation model (DEM) from the CGIAR Consortium for Spatial Information (CGIAR-CSI) which is available with a spatial resolution of approximately 90-meter grid cells at the equator (Jarvis et al., 2008). These raster data are derived from Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) satellite images. Using elevation data in meters, we also calculate the slope for each grid cell in degrees. We spatially aggregate this elevation and slope data using standard geospatial averaging methods to obtain the average elevation and average slope:

- **Average Elevation** (Unit-Level)
- **Average Slope** (Unit-Level)

B.5.3 Temperature and Precipitation Data

Monthly average temperature and total precipitation raster data are from the Climate Research Unit Gridded Time Series (CRU TS) version 4.08 which is available with a spatial resolution of 30 arc-minutes, corresponding to approximately 56-kilometer grid cells at the equator (Harris et al., 2020). Temperature is measured in degrees Celsius while precipitation is measured in millimeters. We temporally average each grid cell for all months from January 1971 to December 1980 so that we have grid-level averages for temperature and monthly precipitation. We spatially aggregate this temperature and precipitation data using standard geospatial aver-

aging methods to obtain the average monthly temperature and average monthly precipitation:

- **Average Monthly Temperature** (Unit-Level, 1971 to 1980)
- **Average Monthly Precipitation** (Unit-Level, 1971 to 1980)

B.5.4 Maximum Caloric Yield Data

The maximum caloric yield per pixel is constructed taking inspiration from Galor and Özak (2016), which estimates the potential yield under levels of inputs and rain-fed agriculture for separate years. The raster data for potential yields are from the Global Agro-Ecological Zones (GAEZ) project of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and is available with a spatial resolution of approximately 5 arc-minutes, corresponding to approximately 9-kilometer grid cells at the equator. The yield per pixel measures estimate potential yield under low levels of inputs and rain-fed agriculture, reflecting the agricultural methods and techniques used in India prior to the Green Revolution. These potential yields are calculated for 31 crops and the maximum caloric yield is calculated by mapping the caloric content of these crops using SR28 reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We calculate the maximum caloric yield using data from 1980. We spatially aggregate this caloric data using standard geospatial averaging methods to obtain the average maximum caloric yield:

- **Average Maximum Caloric Yield** (Unit-Level, 1980)

B.5.5 Population Data

To calculate population at disaggregated levels, we use the Global Population Count Grid Time Series Estimates (Center for International Earth Science Information Network , CIESIN). The raster data has a spatial resolution of 30 arc-seconds, corresponding to approximately 1-kilometer grid cells at the equator. Each grid cell contains an estimate for the population count in 1980. We spatially aggregate this population data to PIN codes, assembly constituencies and parliamentary constituencies using standard geospatial summing methods to obtain the total population count. For village-level population, we proxy the 1980 population by primarily using survey-based counts from 1982, resorting to the 1980 spatial population data only when the survey information is unavailable:

- **Population** (Unit-Level, 1980)

B.5.6 Census Data

We use district-level data from the 1981 Census of India, available as attributes corresponding to 1981 District boundaries (ML InfoMap, 2013*b*). This includes district-level aggregates for the total population and the percentages of the population that are male, rural, literate, or belong to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. District-level percentages of the population that are Hindustani speaking (those that speak Hindi or Urdu) for 1981 are derived from Padmanabha (1987). Due to political and social unrest, Assam was not included in the 1981 Census. As a result, for Assam we instead use data values from the 1971 Census of India (ML InfoMap, 2013*a*) as proxies. Therefore, we have the following census controls:

- **Total Population** (District-Level, 1981)
- **Percentage of Male Population** (District-Level, 1981)
- **Percentage of Rural Population** (District-Level, 1981)
- **Percentage of Literate Population** (District-Level, 1981)
- **Percentage of Scheduled Tribes Population** (District-Level, 1981)

- **Percentage of Scheduled Caste Population** (District-Level, 1981)
- **Percentage of Hindustani Speaking Population** (District-Level, 1981)

B.6 Proximity to Religious Sites and the Ram Rath Yatra Route

We construct unit-level measures of geographic proximity to locations referenced in the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These measures are used to capture the spatial closeness of each observation to symbolic sites mentioned in the two narratives. We also construct unit-level measures of geographic proximity to the route of the Ram Rath Yatra.

B.6.1 Ramayana and Mahabharata Sites

Coordinates for *Ramayana* sites were collected from the Shri Ram Van Gaman Yatra portal (`https://www.ramyatra.com/Yatra-List/11/Shri-Ram-Vanagman-Yatra/1`), which documents locations traditionally associated with Lord Ram's exile. We extract site names and coordinates, retaining only those within modern-day India. The final list includes 195 locations. A similar procedure is followed for *Mahabharata* sites, using data from an annotated map published by the World History Encyclopedia (`https://www.worldhistory.org/image/5484/places-in-the-mahabharata`). After filtering, we retain 63 sites located in India.

For each observation in the dataset, we calculate the shortest surface distance to the nearest site in each set using coordinates (for village data) and centroids (for assembly constituency data). This yields two variables: distance to the closest Ramayana site and distance to the closest Mahabharata site. Both are measured in kilometers, then log-transformed and standardized. These proximity variables are then used in the main analysis and interacted with the continuous Ramayan exposure measure (1987 actual TV signal strength) to assess variation in effects by cultural distance.

There are a few limitations worth noting. The site lists are based on publicly available sources and reflect traditional or popular associations rather than official or archaeological verification. While the geographic precision may vary across entries, these datasets represent the most comprehensive and accessible approximations of epic-linked locations currently available. They provide a consistent framework to explore spatial variation in symbolic proximity, even if the historical accuracy of individual sites cannot be independently validated.

B.6.2 Ram Rath Yatra Route

We obtain the planned route to be covered by the Ram Rath Yatra, a political and religious march that took place in September and October of 1990, from Blakeslee (2018) and Kalra (2021). For each observation in the dataset, we calculate the shortest surface distance to the planned route using coordinates (for village data) and centroids (for assembly constituency data). This yields one variable: distance to the Ram Rath Yatra route, measured in kilometers, which is then log-transformed.

B.7 Data Processing

Calculations involving nearly a billion names and gridded data are computationally intensive. To handle this, we perform all calculations of Data Appendix Sections B.4.1 and B.2.2 to B.2.4 on the University of Michigan's Great Lakes High-Performance Computing (HPC) cluster. We optimize our code for parallel computing to fully leverage the 36 cores available per node. For name-related tasks, transliteration is the most computationally demanding, while religious

classification is comparatively faster. For the transmitter gridded signal data, processing a single transmitter on a 36-core node takes approximately one hour from start to finish. In total, processing the names data requires around 10 computing days, while the transmitter data takes around 50 computing days to complete.

C Alternative Names Analysis Appendix

In our main analysis, we determine a person as Hindu – specifically as having a Hindu parent – if their father's full name is classified as Hindu using the multi-religion algorithm by Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2024). We adopt this approach because our objective is to study naming choices made by Hindu parents for their newborn children. As a robustness check, we implement an alternative classification that uses the newborn's *own* full name (rather than the father's) to determine whether the newborn is Hindu, again using the same multi-religion algorithm. For expositional clarity, we refer to this alternative analysis as studying newborns with Hindu (full) names.

This robustness exercise introduces two mechanical changes. First, the set of "top" Hindu first names is re-defined: we rank names using individuals whose *own* full name is classified as Hindu and who were born between 1900 and 1970, rather than individuals whose *father's* full name is classified as Hindu. Second, the analysis sample is re-defined: we restrict attention to newborns whose *own* full name is classified as Hindu, instead of newborns whose father's full name is classified as Hindu. A further advantage of this approach is that it allows us to analyze female newborns as well, since it does not require fathers' names (which are unavailable for married women in our data).

We report the state-level top ten Hindu names under this alternative classification for males and females in Appendix Tables C1 and C2. As expected, the male list in Appendix Table C1 overlaps substantially with the main list reported in Appendix Table A2.

Regression results using this alternative classification are reported in Appendix Table C3. Panel A presents estimates for male newborns and Panel B presents estimates for female newborns. In both panels, the coefficient on *Ramayan* is positive, stable across specifications, and always statistically significant, at the 1% level in Panel A and at least the 5% level in Panel B. Appendix Figure C1 presents corresponding event-study estimates for male and female newborns in Panels A and B respectively. We document dynamics that closely mirror those in Figure II: effects emerge immediately during the Ramayan broadcast period (1987-88) and increase in magnitude in all subsequent post-treatment periods.

Table C1 - **List of State-Level Top Ranked Names of Males with Hindu Names**

	Rank of Name				
	1 and 2 (1)	3 and 4 (2)	5 and 6 (3)	7 and 8 (4)	9 and 10 (5)
Andhra Pradesh	Venkata	Apparao	Satyanarayana	Nagaswararao	Enkateshwarlu
	Sathyanarayan	Subbarao	Chinna	Ramarao	Venkateshwararao
Arunachal Pradesh	Wangsu	Singh	Pansa	Kumar	Wangpan
	Bdr	Wangsa	Das	Tsering	Prasad
Assam	Gopal	Onil	Aah	Xunil	Chondro
	Prodeep	Dileep	Xubhax	Khogen	Babul
Bihar	Raam	Suresh	Mahendra	Moe	Surendra
	Rajendra	Shiv	Ashok	Vijay	Krishna
Goa	Prakash	Chandrakant	Ashok	Anand	Gurudas
	Suresh	Narayan	Krishna	Ramesh	Santosh
Gujarat	Rameshbhai	Ramanbhai	Bhikhabhai	Kantibhai	Somabhai
	Babubhai	Mohanbhai	Bharatbhai	Govindbhai	Maganbhai
Haryana	Raam	Krishna	Ome	Rajendra	Jagdish
	Ramesh	Raaj	Jaya	Suresh	Subhash
Himachal Pradesh	Raam	Prem	Jagdish	Rotion	Krishna
	Ramesh	Amar	Prakaash	Dharm	Ome
Karnataka	Basappa	Siddappa	Yellappa	Basavaraja	Maruti
	Mallappa	Hanamanta	Lakshmana	Bhimappa	Shivappa
Madhya Pradesh	Raam	Jagdish	Ashok	Suresh	Narayan
	Ramesh	Babulal	Mangilal	Mohan	Rajendra
Maharashtra	Ashoke	Ramesh	Prakash	Shivaji	Pandurang
	Suresh	Lakshman	Shankar	Narayan	Sanjay
Manipur	Tomba	Kumar	Chaoba	Ibotombi	Biren
	Ibomcha	Rajen	Haokip	Ibohal	Mani
Meghalaya	Ram	Gopal	Sunil	Anil	Suresh
	Dilip	Krishna	John	Ranjit	Pradip
Mizoram	Malsawma	Lalthlamuana	Lalhmingliana	Laltanpuia	Lalnunmawia
	Lalrinawma	Lalhmangaiha	Lalhmachhuana	Lalhmingthanga	Vanlalruata
Orissa	Bhagabana	Ramchandra	Gobinda	Sudarshan	Gopala
	Bijay	Suresh	Sharat	Narajna	Dujyoudhana
Punjab	Raam	Mahinder	Sukhdev	Balveer	Gurdev
	Darshan	Baldev	Sarinder	Avtaar	Jarnail
Rajasthan	Raam	Mohan	Ramesh	Babulal	Kailash
	Jagdish	Shankar	Gopal	Omprakash	Bhanwar
Tamil Nadu	Aarumugam	Subramani	Murugan	Murugesan	Ramasamy
	Rajendran	Ganesan	Subramanian	Manii	Perumaal
Tripura	Narayan	Ranjit	Dileep	Gopal	Ravinder
	Swapan	Pradeep	Onil	Suneel	Subhash
Uttar Pradesh	Raam	Suresh	Ashok	Jagdish	Moe
	Rajendra	Ramesh	Shiv	Vijay	Surendra
West Bengal	Swapan	Gopal	Topon	Dileep	Biswanath
	Ashoke	Shankar	Sukumar	Narayan	Subhash

Notes: This table includes the list of top-ranked names of males with Hindu names born from 1900 to 1970. An individual is determined to have a Hindu name if their own full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. For each state, if names are not recorded with the Latin alphabet, all names are first transliterated into the Latin alphabet. Depending on the naming conventions of each state, we identify each individual's first name. We then rank all of the names in a state for the period of relevance.

Table C2 - **List of State-Level Top Ranked Names of Females with Hindu Names**

	Rank of Name				
	1 and 2 (1)	3 and 4 (2)	5 and 6 (3)	7 and 8 (4)	9 and 10 (5)
Andhra Pradesh	Lakshmi	Lakshmamma	Ramanamma	Subbamma	Venkatamma
	Satyavathi	Venkata	Narayanamma	Nagamma	Ramulamma
Arunachal Pradesh	Devi	Wangsa	Maya	Wangpan	Pertin
	Wangsu	Pansa	Drema	Deori	Tayeng
Assam	Beena	Xabitri	Onima	Lokhyi	Onjoli
	Baxonti	Benu	Komola	Bimola	Hajera
Bihar	Meena	Urmila	Sumitra	Manju	Maalati
	Shaanti	Geetaa	Seetaa	Sushila	Savitri
Goa	Laxmi	Rukmini	Sunita	Anita	Savitri
	Maria	Parvati	Laximi	Anandi	Geeta
Gujarat	Savitaben	Manjulaben	Kantaben	Lilaben	Hansaben
	Shantaben	Shardaben	Maniben	Champaben	Lakshmiben
Haryana	Krishna	Bimla	Raaj	Raam	Roshni
	Kamala	Kamlesh	Tosh	Savitri	Shaanti
Himachal Pradesh	Kamala	Satyaa	Kaanta	Leela	Sheela
	Vimla	Nirmala	Krishna	Kaushalya	Savitri
Karnataka	Gangavva	Lakshmibai	Shantavva	Mallavva	Shantabai
	Yellavva	Mahadevi	Parvati	Basavva	Nilavva
Madhya Pradesh	Kamala	Sushila	Geetaa	Munni	Gitabai
	Kamlabai	Ramkali	Raam	Savitri	Lilabai
Maharashtra	Shantabai	Lakshmi	Shobha	Kamal	Sunita
	Suman	Lakshmibai	Vimal	Sushila	Parvati
Manipur	Memcha	Tombi	Ibemhal	Thoibi	Bimola
	Memma	Devi	Ongbi	Sanahanbi	Maya
Meghalaya	Maya	Mary	Regina	Anita	Sumitra
	Bina	Rita	Mina	Kristina	Rina
Mizoram	Lalnunmawii	Malsawmi	Lalrinpuii	Lalthlamuani	Vanlalruati
	Laltanpuii	Lalhmangaihi	Lalnuntluangi	Lalrinmawii	Lalhmingliani
Orissa	Basanti	Shantilata	Sulochana	Laxmi	Nishamani
	Pramila	Malati	Satyabhama	Kuntala	Kumudini
Punjab	Surjit	Mahinder	Charanjit	Ranjit	Balveer
	Amarjit	Baljit	Kulwant	Sarinder	Raaj
Rajasthan	Kamala	Prem	Vimla	Seetaa	Pushpa
	Geetaa	Shaanti	Bhanwari	Sushila	Shanti
Tamil Nadu	Latsumi	Saanthi	Saroja	Sellammaal	Vasantha
	Saraswati	Palaniyammaal	Mallika	Raani	Muniyammaal
Tripura	Geeta	Lakkhi	Aroti	Shefali	Mayarani
	Kalpana	Sobita	Anjali	Sandhya	Malati
Uttar Pradesh	Kalawati	Kamala	Nee	Shaanti	Geetaa
	Savitri	Raam	Sushila	Vimla	Shakuntala
West Bengal	Sandhya	Geeta	Lakkhi	Malati	Anjali
	Kalpana	Saraswati	Sobita	Shefali	Komla

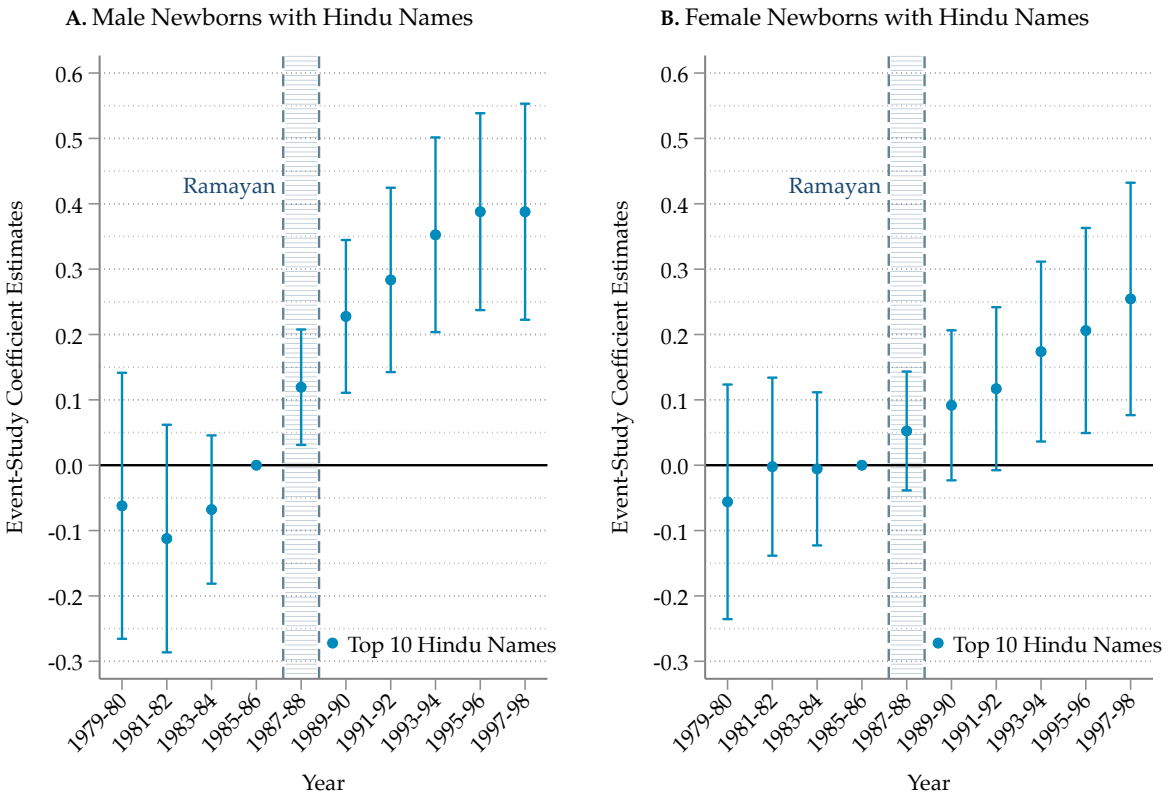
Notes: This table includes the list of top-ranked names of females with Hindu names born from 1900 to 1970. An individual is determined to have a Hindu name if their own full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. For each state, if names are not recorded with the Latin alphabet, all names are first transliterated into the Latin alphabet. Depending on the naming conventions of each state, we identify each individual's first name. We then rank all of the names in a state for the period of relevance.

Table C3 - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Newborns with Hindu Names Given Top Names**

	Percentage of Newborns with Hindu Names Given Top 10 Names				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A. Percentage of Male Newborns with Hindu Names Given Top 10 Names					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.342***	0.379***	0.362***	0.360***	0.354***
	(0.065)	(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.066)
Dep. var. mean	4.704	4.704	4.704	4.704	4.704
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.380	3.380	3.380	3.380	3.380
Units	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088	3,088
Observations	61,697	61,697	61,697	61,697	61,697
Panel B. Percentage of Female Newborns with Hindu Names Given Top 10 Names					
Ramayan × *Post*	0.206***	0.207***	0.182***	0.177***	0.165**
	(0.058)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.065)
Dep. var. mean	4.246	4.246	4.246	4.246	4.246
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.112	3.112	3.112	3.112	3.112
Units	3,084	3,084	3,084	3,084	3,084
Observations	61,644	61,644	61,644	61,644	61,644
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Census controls	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: This table includes coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions at the assembly constituency level related to naming patterns of male and female newborns with Hindu names. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. An individual is determined to have a Hindu name if their own full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. A top Hindu name is determined at the state level by ranking all first names of newborns with Hindu names born between 1900 and 1970 separately for males and females, prior to our study period. All measures of TV signal strength are population-weighted averages and standardized by the standard deviation. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.

Figure C1 - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Newborns with Hindu Names Given Top Names**



Notes: This figure plots the coefficients from an event-study regression at the assembly constituency level. The dependent variable is the percentage of male and female newborns with Hindu names given *Top 10 Hindu Names* in Panels A and B respectively. The dependent variable has been scaled by 100. The treatment variable is *Ramayan*, the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average, normalized by standard deviation). The treatment variable is interacted with two-year windows, where the 1985-86 period is omitted. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. Confidence intervals are presented at the 95% level.

D Potential Selection Bias for the Names Analysis Appendix

The names analysis relies on electoral rolls published in the 2010s (typically 2017 or 2018) to construct a birth-year cohort panel (indexed by locality and year of birth) for our study period. In this Appendix Section, we first describe the econometric setting and then discuss two sources of potential selection bias: (i) migration and (ii) voter registration. We present empirical evidence in Appendix Table D1 suggesting that neither migration nor voter registration introduces meaningful selection bias. We focus on our primary names outcome: the percentage of Hindu male newborns given top 10 names.

D.1 Setup

Each record on the electoral rolls lists the voter's name, locality of registration, and age (which we use to construct the year of birth). Index all persons by p and birth years by t. Each person p is registered on the electoral roll in locality $r(p) \in \mathcal{L} \cup \{\varnothing\}$, where $\mathcal{L}$ is the set of localities and $r(p) = \varnothing$ if p is not registered (and thus not observed in the data). Let $t(p)$ denote person p's birth year, and let $H_{pt} \in \{0, 1\}$ indicate whether person p, born in birth year $t = t(p)$, has a top Hindu name. The name is a parental choice made at birth, so H_{pt} captures the *parents'* religious identity at the time of naming. Our primary outcome Y_{it} aggregates registered persons by registration locality i and birth year t:

$$Y_{it} = \frac{1}{N_{it}} \sum_{p:\, r(p)=i,\, t(p)=t} H_{pt}, \tag{D1}$$

where N_{it} is the number of Hindu males registered in locality i born in birth year t.

When estimating our main regression specification in Equation (1), the pre/post variation is cohort age: someone born before the 1987 airing of Ramayan is 31 or older in 2017, whereas someone born after Ramayan is 30 or younger (taking rolls published in 2017; for rolls published in 2014–2018 the corresponding ages shift with publication year, with adjacent cohorts remaining one year apart). The narrowest identifying comparison is therefore between 30- and 31-year-olds registered in the same locality in the same year.

Two features of this data structure could, in theory, introduce bias. First, **migration**: person p's birth locality may differ from their registration locality. Second, **voter registration**: not all eligible adults register to vote, so our outcome is computed over a selected subsample. Since the unit of analysis is the locality-cohort (i, t) and the outcome Y_{it} is constructed from person-level data, both migration and voter registration introduce measurement error to the *dependent variable*. No right-hand-side variable in Equation (1) is constructed from the electoral roll, so the measurement error is confined to the left-hand side.

Estimating Equation (1) with measurement error v_{it} in the dependent variable yields:

$$\operatorname{plim} \hat{\beta} = \beta + \frac{\operatorname{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it},\, v_{it})}{\operatorname{Var}(\widetilde{W}_{it})}, \tag{D2}$$

where $\widetilde{W}_{it}$ is $Ramayan_i \times Post_t$ residualized on δ_i, θ_{st}, and $\sum_t \boldsymbol{\gamma}_t' \mathbf{X}_{i,\text{base}}$. If there is classical measurement error in the dependent variable, then $\operatorname{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it}, v_{it}) = 0$ and v_{it} adds noise to Y_{it} but does not bias $\hat{\beta}$. The bias is entirely determined by $\operatorname{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it}, v_{it})$: whether the measurement error v_{it} covaries with the treatment, after partialling out locality fixed effects, state-year fixed ef-

fects, and baseline covariates interacted with year fixed effects. Since $\widetilde{W}_{it}$ is orthogonal to anything constant within location (absorbed by δ_i) or common across locations within a state-year (absorbed by θ_{st}), this covariance is nonzero only if v_{it} varies across localities within the same state-year in a pattern correlated with $Ramayan_i$, and differently so for the pre-1987 and post-1987 cohorts. To match our empirical results, we focus our discussion on the case of a spurious positive $\hat{\beta} > 0$ when there is no true effect ($\beta = 0$), which requires that $\text{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it}, v_{it}) > 0$.

D.2 Migration

In addition to the registration locality $r(p)$, each person p has a birth locality $b(p) \in \mathcal{L}$ where their parents were living when p was born and named. For a person p registered in i but born in j, the exposure to Ramayan of their parents is $Ramayan_j$ rather than $Ramayan_i$. To be more precise, $b(p)$ should be defined as the locality where the parents were living when Ramayan was aired in 1987, however we use as shorthand the birth locality to simplify our discussion. Thus, the outcome we would *like* to construct aggregates persons *born* in locality i:

$$\widetilde{Y}^B_{it} = \frac{1}{\widetilde{N}^B_{it}} \sum_{p:\, b(p)=i,\, t(p)=t} H_{pt}, \tag{D3}$$

where $\widetilde{N}^B_{it}$ is the number of Hindu males *born* in locality i in birth year t (regardless of where they later register), and $\widetilde{Y}^B_{it}$ is the share with top Hindu names.

The problem is that we do not observe $b(p)$ and instead construct Y_{it} which aggregates persons *registered* in i, rather than $\widetilde{Y}^B_{it}$ which aggregates persons *born* in i. These are different objects whenever some persons have $r(p) \neq b(p)$, where the discrepancy v^B_{it} is the difference between two averages of H_{pt} over different sets of people:

$$v^B_{it} \equiv Y_{it} - \widetilde{Y}^B_{it} \tag{D4}$$

These two sets overlap (stayers appear in both) but differ by in-migrants (in the first but not the second) and out-migrants (in the second but not the first). When $v^B_{it} > 0$, the share of top Hindu names among those registered in i exceeds the share among those born in i, which implies that on net, migration has brought in persons with more top Hindu names than those it has sent out, relative to stayers.

Under what conditions is $\text{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it}, v^B_{it}) > 0$? This requires migration to produce a systematically higher v^B_{it} in high-$Ramayan_i$ localities than in low-$Ramayan_i$ localities, and more so for post-1987 cohorts than for pre-1987 cohorts. Concretely, migration must cross signal levels, select on name type, and go in the right direction: if the dominant flow is from low-signal to high-signal localities, it must be those with top Hindu names who are more likely to move; if the dominant flow is the reverse, it must be those without top Hindu names who are more likely to leave. Crucially, this pattern must also differ across adjacent birth cohorts. A 30-year-old and a 31-year-old registered in the same locality in 2017 have had nearly identical lifetimes over which to migrate, so any name-type-selected migration pattern that affected the 30-year-old almost certainly also affected the 31-year-old. If the pattern is stable across cohorts, δ_i absorbs it and $\hat{\beta}$ is unaffected. The combination of signal-correlated, name-type-selected and cohort-differential migration is theoretically possible but difficult to motivate: it requires that a Hindu male's probability of migration depends on the specific name his parents chose decades

earlier and that this indirect link changed at the exact 1987 boundary within the same locality.

We present empirical evidence suggesting that migration does not bias our names result. Between birth and registration, individuals are more likely to cross the boundaries of finer geographic units than coarser ones. Therefore, if migration-induced selection were biasing our results, the coefficient would vary systematically and monotonically with the level of geographic aggregation. We estimate effects on top names at units substantially more granular (13,780 PIN codes) and more aggregated (451 parliamentary constituencies) than our main specification (3,088 assembly constituencies). These units span three orders of magnitude. The point estimates are relatively stable across these three levels of aggregation and most importantly, they show no monotonic gradient: 0.162, 0.203, and 0.127 (Appendix Table D1, columns 6, 5 and 7 respectively). These results suggest limited bias from migration.

D.3 Voter Registration

In addition to the registration locality $r(p)$, each person p has a living locality $l(p) \in \mathcal{L}$ where they currently live. Not all eligible persons register to vote (those with $r(p) = \varnothing$) so that in each locality i, we only observe a selected subset of the population: $\{p : r(p) = i\} \subseteq \{p : l(p) = i\}$. Thus, the outcome we would *like* to construct aggregates all persons *living* in locality i:

$$\widetilde{Y}_{it}^{L} = \frac{1}{\widetilde{N}_{it}^{L}} \sum_{p:\, l(p)=i} H_{pt}, \tag{D5}$$

where $\widetilde{N}_{it}^{L}$ is the number of Hindu males *living* in locality i in birth year t (regardless of whether they register), and $\widetilde{Y}_{it}^{L}$ is the share with top Hindu names.

The problem is that we do not observe non-registered persons and instead construct Y_{it} which aggregates persons *registered* in i, rather than $\widetilde{Y}_{it}^{L}$ which aggregates persons *living* in i. These are different objects whenever some persons do not register, $r(p) = \varnothing$, where the discrepancy v_{it}^{L} is the difference between two averages of H_{pt} over different sets of people:

$$v_{it}^{L} \equiv Y_{it} - \widetilde{Y}_{it}^{L} \tag{D6}$$

These two sets overlap, with the first being a subset of the second. When $v_{it}^{L} > 0$, the share of top Hindu names among those registered in i exceeds the share among those living in i, which implies that on average, registered persons are more likely to have top Hindu names.

Under what conditions is $\text{Cov}(\widetilde{W}_{it}, v_{it}^{L}) > 0$? This requires registration rates to produce a systematically higher v_{it}^{L} in high-$Ramayan_i$ localities than in low-$Ramayan_i$ localities, and more so for post-1987 cohorts than for pre-1987 cohorts. Concretely, voter registration must differ across signal levels, select on name type and go in the right direction: if voter registration is more complete in high-signal localities, it must be those with top Hindu names who are more likely to register; if voter registration is more complete in low-signal localities, it must be those with top Hindu names who are less likely to register. Crucially, even if registration is name-type-selected in this way, the pattern must differ across adjacent birth cohorts. As with migration, adjacent birth cohorts in 2017 have had nearly identical lifetimes over which civic environments could differentially affect registration, so any name-type-by-signal registration differential that is stable across cohorts is absorbed by δ_i. The combination of signal-correlated, name-type-selected and cohort-differential registration is theoretically possible but difficult

to motivate: it requires that a Hindu male's probability of voter registration depends on the specific name his parents chose decades earlier and that this indirect link changed at the exact 1987 boundary within the same locality.

We present empirical evidence suggesting that voter registration does not bias our names result. Bias from voter registration should be greater in constituencies with lower rates of registration, and non-existent when registration is nearly universal. For each assembly constituency, we use electoral and gridded population data to calculate the median elector-population ratio across all state assembly elections from 1979 to 2000, which we use as a proxy for voter-registration completeness. There is substantial variation across constituencies, with an interquartile range of 29 percentage points (47% to 76%). We then classify assembly constituencies into four quartile subsamples, with quartiles computed within state based on elector-population ratios, and estimate effects separately for each. The point estimates are relatively stable across all quartiles and most importantly, they show no monotonic gradient: 0.206, 0.165, 0.178 and 0.216 (Appendix Table D1, columns 1-4). These results suggest limited bias from voter registration.

Table D1 - **Impacts of Ramayan on the Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top Names by Geographic Unit and Elector-Population Quartile**

	Percentage of Hindu Male Newborns Given Top 10 Names						
	Assembly Constituency					PIN Code	Parliamentary Constituency
	Elector-Population Ratio Quartile						
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	All	All	All
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Ramayan × *Post*	0.206**	0.165*	0.178*	0.216**	0.203***	0.162***	0.127
	(0.098)	(0.096)	(0.102)	(0.102)	(0.053)	(0.034)	(0.108)
Dep. var. mean	4.418	4.557	4.449	4.204	4.445	4.364	4.515
Dep. var. std. dev.	3.160	3.175	3.045	2.979	3.101	3.625	2.786
Units	798	796	779	668	3,088	13,780	451
Observations	15,950	15,886	15,563	13,349	61,688	274,113	9,020
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Freespace controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1980 TV controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Census controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents coefficient estimates from difference-in-differences regressions related to naming patterns of Hindu male newborns. Columns (1)-(5) are at the assembly constituency level; column (6) is at the PIN code level; and column (7) is at the parliamentary constituency level. All dependent variables have been scaled by 100, so coefficient estimates can be interpreted in percentage points. Columns (1)-(4) report estimates for the four quartile subsamples, with quartiles computed within state based on elector-population ratios. For each state assembly election from 1979 to 2000, the elector-population ratio is computed by dividing the size of the electorate by gridded population data, available decadally for 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 with linear imputations for inter-decade years. We then assign each assembly constituency its median elector-population ratio across all elections in this period. An individual is determined to be Hindu if their father's full name is classified to be most likely a Hindu name. A top Hindu name is determined at the state level by ranking all first names of Hindu males born between 1900 and 1970, prior to our study period. *Ramayan* is the actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987 (population-weighted average within location, normalized by the standard deviation). *Post* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the year is 1987 or later. Constituency and state-year fixed effects are included. All controls are interacted with year fixed effects. *Freespace controls* include the unit-level freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1987. *Geographic controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) geographic area; (ii) average elevation; (iii) average slope; (iv) average temperature from 1971-1980; (v) average precipitation from 1971-1980; and (vi) average maximum caloric yield for 1980. *1980 TV controls* include unit-level controls for: (i) actual TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980; and (ii) freespace TV signal strength at the beginning of 1980. *Population controls* include the unit-level population in 1980. *Census controls* include district-level controls from the 1981 census for: (i) total population; (ii) percentage of male population; (iii) percentage of rural population; (iv) percentage of literate population; (v) percentage of scheduled tribes population; (vi) percentage of scheduled caste population; and (vii) percentage of Hindustani speaking population. Conley (1999) standard errors in parentheses are calculated using a 100 km radius and accounting for autocorrelation over time for each unit. 1%, 5% and 10% statistical significance are indicated with ***, **, and * respectively.