

Peace Derailed: The Effects of India's First Nonviolent Struggle on Mass Religious Violence

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Abstract:

In 1922-1923 South Asia experienced one of the first waves of mass civil religious violence in its history, including in many towns that had never before witnessed any religious riots. What led to these first breakdowns of historic inter-ethnic peace? In this paper, we provide evidence that this violence was an unfortunate side-effect of South Asia's first mass movement aimed at *non-violent* civil obedience. We exploit a temporary exogenous shock to the incentives to mobilize non-violent protests in Indian towns due to the pre-planned 8,000 mile whistle-stop tour of Edward, the Prince of Wales in 1921-22. We compare towns that the Prince visited with counterfactual itineraries that he could have visited, and to those that his father had previously visited. We show that the Prince's visit raised the propensity of a town to experience a non-violent protest by 29pp, and a subsequent religious riot by 23pp. Towns that protested because of the visit were 77pp more likely to then have a religious riot. We interpret these results as reflecting how the development of local organizational capacity, when combined with misaligned political incentives, can prove a grave threat to inter-ethnic peace.