Electoral Violence, Partisan Identity, and Perceptions of Election Quality: A Survey Experiment in West Bengal, India*

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Introduction

Threats, intimidation and coercion is a prevalent feature in around a quarter of all electoral processes worldwide (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014).[1] Even in many electoral democracies, voters are frequently confronted with news of violence and contention, both in relation to the electoral campaign, on election day, or after the announcement of electoral results. How does electoral violence influence citizens' perceptions of the quality of the electoral process? The relationship, at first, seems straight-forward: the presence of threats and coercion in the electoral process violates core aspects of how scholars and practitioners alike conceive of high quality elections (Norris, Elklit, and Reynolds 2013).[2] Much existing work on electoral violence also assumes that voters generally disapprove of violent electoral tactics and that they, when informed, will sanction violent politicians (e.g. Collier and Vicente 2012; Fjelde and Smidt 2021; Gutierrez-Romero and LeBas 2020). As such, we should expect rational voters to recognize electoral violence as a serious infringement on the political freedoms that underpin electoral democracy, and voters to reduce their assessment of election quality (Norris, Frank, and Martinez i Coma 2014).

We argue, however, that citizens' perceptions and interpretation of contentious electoral tactics will depend on their pre-existing social identities. Specifically, we expect partisan affiliations to be associated with legitimizing or even endorsing attitudes towards violent electoral conduct by their own party. Drawing on theories of partisan motivated reasoning, we expect that citizens will perceive violence by co-partisans as less consequential violations of electoral integrity. The reason, we propose, is that partisans are more likely to downplay the seriousness of partisan violence in a cognitive defense of their party, but also likely to interpret partisan violence as legitimate and perhaps even necessary in a contested electoral setting. Co-partisans might thus not only disregard negative information about their own

[1] Following Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund (2020, 4), we define election violence as coercion that "purposefully influences the process and outcome of elections."

[2] High-quality elections are contests that are free, fair, and procedurally sound (e.g. Donno, Morrison, and Savun 2021). We use electoral integrity and election quality interchangeably.

party's involvement in electoral violence, but even counter-argue it and reassert the view that elections were free and fair, compared to those without partisan ties to the alleged perpetrators.

To evaluate this argument we leverage data from a pre-registered survey experiment,[3] conducted as part of a household survey in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal after India's parliamentary elections in 2019. Similar to many other electoral democracies across the world, India is currently experiencing a significant democratic recession with shrinking space for political opposition and increased polarization (Varieties of Democracy Institute 2020). West Bengal is the fourth most populous state in India with more than 90 million people, and elections in the state saw violence through all stages of the electoral process: pitting those supporting the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the state incumbent party, against supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the national incumbent. These elections fit our scope conditions: while retaining important features of democratic politics, elections were conducted within a violent atmosphere, and political identities in West Bengal structure both voting and violence.

In line with our pre-registered survey design, we randomly assign people to one of two treatments, each describing one of the two major parties as allegedly engaging in an incident of electoral violence. The vignettes describe an event modelled after incidents reported from the election campaign.[4] Since both parties were engaged in violence and frequently accused each other of being responsible, we can explore how party identities affect attitudes with minimal changes - varying only party names - in the experimental design. After the treatment, we ask respondents to rate the elections in terms of their quality. Our findings show that state incumbent party supporters engage in directional reasoning: when exposed to information about TMC perpetrators, TMC supporters become more likely to say that elections were free and fair. For supporters of the BJP, we do not find evidence of disconfir-

[3]The anonymized pre-analysis plan is included in the appendix. The study received ethical approval [institution and ID withheld to protect author anonymity].

[4]Providing respondents with information about violence, a very sensitive topic, requires special attention to ethical considerations. The research design section discusses them in detail.

mation bias, instead establishing a null effect. In additional analyses, we explore whether the recent shift of former leftist voters to the BJP, BJP supporters being satisfied with the results as election winners, or the TMC's greater reliance on violence can explain this finding; our evidence is most consistent with the first explanation, which might imply less salient partisan identities among BJP supporters. Finally, our results show that citizens lacking strong partisan identities do not update their perceptions of election quality when exposed to reports of violence, which may reflect non-partisans' disengagement from the democratic process following electoral violence (e.g. Borzyskowski, Daxecker, and Kuhn 2021; Höglund and Piyarathne 2009).

Our study makes three main contributions. First, we shed light on the micro-level consequences of violent electoral contention. Existing research has focused primarily on the effect of electoral fraud on public perceptions, yet electoral violence is conceptually and normatively distinct from other forms of electoral manipulation. Violence is more easily observable and has broader deterrent effects than other forms of electoral manipulation such as vote buying, making it likely that many citizens learn about, and respond to, violent events. And unlike vote buying, violence does not allow those targeted to opt out and thus worsens their status quo (Mares and Young 2016). In spite of this, we have limited knowledge about how citizens interpret electoral violence. Micro-level studies linking election violence to citizens' critical assessments of elections are sparse, rely on observational data, and present surprisingly mixed evidence in favor of such relationships (Kerr 2013, 2018; Shah 2014; Wellman, Hyde, and Hall 2018). Besides the dearth and conflicting nature of the evidence, existing work also struggles to disentangle the effect of violence from other manifestations of electoral malpractices that tend to occur in tandem with violent efforts to manipulate elections, such as fraud or vote-buying (e.g. Mares and Young 2016; Ham and Lindberg 2015). Our study speaks to this important research gap.

Second, we provide novel insights on the micro-level evaluations that underpin popular attitudes to democratic institutions. Citizen perceptions of the electoral process are central

for the legitimacy of democratic governance. Where elections are perceived as high quality, satisfaction with democracy is higher (Mattes and Redlawsk 2014; McAllister and White 2015; Norris, Garnett, and Grömping 2019); citizens display higher trust in political institutions (Norris, Frank, and Martinez i Coma 2014); and become more inclined to vote (Birch 2008, 2010; Carreras and Irepoğlu 2013). These features provide the micro-level foundations for stable democracy, suggesting that citizens' confidence in the electoral process is crucial for the legitimacy and resilience of the democratic system (Birch 2008; Donno, Morrison, and Savun 2021; Elklit and Reynolds 2002). Our findings suggest that interpretations of electoral violence as consequential violations of electoral integrity diverge along partisan lines, even when voters are presented with similar information. Hence, in the aftermath of electoral contention, popular assessment of key features of the electoral process is more influenced by voters' identity than by facts. That co-partisan supporters are ready to disregard and even counter-argue information about violations of electoral integrity is troubling for the exercise of democratic citizenship. It could imply that one citizen's violation of electoral integrity might be another citizen's rightful actions, which will make it challenging to overcome political polarization (Carothers and O'Donohue 2019; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Norris, Garnett, and Grömping 2019).

Finally, our study contributes to work on public opinion by developing and testing arguments regarding partisan motivated reasoning in contexts where they are rarely examined. The vast majority of work on information processing, partisan identities, and attitudes focuses on Western industrialized democracies, the U.S. in particular.[5] Elections in the developing world experience violations of election quality more frequently and are more often held in a tense atmosphere. In such contexts, motivated reasoning requires citizens to counterargue very real and substantial violations of the electoral process, including violence.

[5]For exceptions, see recent work on Tunisia and Russia (Bush and Prather 2017; Robertson 2017).

Existing Literature

Existing research has found that public perceptions of electoral integrity are important for citizens' support for, and trust and participation in, democratic processes (Birch 2008, 2010; Carreras and Irepoğlu 2013; Fortin-Rittberger, Harfst, and Dingler 2017; McAllister and White 2015; Norris, Frank, and Martinez i Coma 2014; Rose and Mishler 2009). Negative evaluations of election quality, on the other hand, have the potential to spark popular protest, mass unrest and even armed conflict (Daxecker 2012; Daxecker, Di Salvatore, and Ruggeri 2019; Donno, Morrison, and Savun 2021; Kuntz and Thompson 2009; Norris, Frank, and Coma 2015). In spite of this, research on what determines how citizens formulate perceptions towards electoral quality – particularly when faced with violations against free and fair processes – is quite limited.[6]

Only a handful of studies have looked at the relationship between election violence and citizens' perceptions of election quality. Focusing on Nigeria, Kerr (2013) finds that citizens who fear intimidation during election campaigns are less likely to evaluate elections as credible. In follow-up work, Kerr (2018) establishes that experience with election-day manipulation (which includes intimidation) also reduces Nigerian citizens' evaluations of electoral quality. Yet in research on Kenya and Ukraine, Shah (2014) and Wellman, Hyde, and Hall (2018) find no link between citizens' experiences with electoral manipulation and their perceptions of election quality.[7]

One possible reason for these divergent effects is that existing studies do not properly account for variables that might condition the relationship between being informed about

[6]Existing research emphasize features related to regularized electoral procedures such as electoral systems (Anderson et al. 2005; Birch 2008), the independence of electoral management bodies (Kerr 2018; Rosas 2010), and public funding of political parties (Birch 2008). Some studies also directly tap into voters local experiences during the electoral process, e.g. their assessment of the performance of poll workers (Atkeson and Saunders 2007), voting technology (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008), or witnessing observers at the polling booth (Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Kerr 2018).

[7]Only Kerr (2013) examines the effects of election violence directly, but measures whether respondents fear becoming the victim of violence. Fear is one of several plausible emotional responses to violence, but not the only one. Kerr (2018), Shah (2014), and Wellman, Hyde, and Hall (2018) rely on experience with manipulation but do not disaggregate violence vis-á-vis other manipulation.

electoral violence (through experience or second-hand sources) and citizens' evaluations of electoral quality. In the words of Robertson (2017, 590) "differences in perceptions of election quality are likely to depend at least as much on the characteristics of citizens as on the characteristics of elections, and a given election is likely to generate quite different perceptions among different parts of the population." Existing research on how citizens see electoral violence is very limited. Much existing work assumes that voters generally disapprove of violent electoral tactics and recognize it as infringement of their democratic rights (e.g. Collier and Vicente 2012; Fjelde et al. 2021; Gutierrez-Romero and LeBas 2020), but recognize that it may not necessarily alienate core partisan supporters (Chaturvedi 2005; Collier and Vicente 2012; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014). Gutierrez-Romero and LeBas (2020) find, based on a conjoint experiment in Kenya, that shared partisan ties is not sufficient to sway electoral support in favor of a violent politician. Yet other studies suggest election violence actually can reinforce group solidarity and lead supporters to rally behind violent actors (e.g. Lynch 2014; Horowitz 2001; Wilkinson 2004).[8]

Below, we build on this latter perspective to discuss how partisanship could condition how citizens interpret information about electoral violence and assess the elections. We draw on theories of partisan motivated reasoning and propose that these might activate grievance frames that legitimize violence, leading partisan supporters to see electoral violence by their own party as less consequential violations of electoral integrity than non-partisans.

Election Violence and Citizen Perceptions of Election Quality

How do citizens form evaluations of electoral processes in the context of contentious elections? Specifically, how does the presence of electoral violence influence their assessment of electoral integrity? We argue that when processing and interpreting information about electoral

[8]Studies on corruption also show that voters endorse candidates engaged in immoral or illegal behavior when shared group ties are present, even in the absence of instrumental benefits (Solaz, De Vries, and Geus 2019).

violence, citizens are likely to draw on their pre-existing political identities–their partisan alignment in particular–and see violations by their own political party as less consequential for electoral integrity.

When proposing that partisan identity acts as a powerful prism through which individuals view politics, we build on a large and influential literature on partisan motivated reasoning. Primarily set in the context of U.S. politics, extensive work has demonstrated that citizens perceive politics differently depending on the partisan allegiances (e.g. Redlawsk 2002; Bolsen and Palm 2019; Taber and Lodge 2006; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Contrary to rational models of opinion formation, which suggest that citizens update their beliefs in neutral and unbiased ways, e.g. lowering their evaluations when encountering negative information (Gerber and Green 1999), motivated reasoning entails that individuals seek out and evaluate information in ways that relies on and conforms to preexisting beliefs and identities (Kunda 1990; Bolsen and Palm 2019).[9] As the result of such goal-directed information processing, partisans have been found to display stark differences in their interpretation of central political issues, even when presented with the same facts.

We extend arguments about partisan motivated reasoning to study what bearing information of electoral violence has on citizens' views about the quality of the electoral process. We argue that even when faced with similar information about key electoral events, such as electoral threats and intimidation, partisan motivated reasoning might lead individuals to reach divergent conclusions about the consequences of these violations for the integrity of the electoral process. If information-processing was primarily motivated by accuracy goals (Bolsen and Palm 2019), knowledge about election violence should be associated with lower

[9]Partisan bias in the formation of opinions occurs through at least three mechanisms (see Lebo and Cassino 2007, 723). First, selective exposure to information, whereby individuals actively seek out new evidence that is consistent with their prior views (Lebo and Cassino 2007; Robertson 2017). Second, selective judgement, whereby individuals evaluate attitude-consistent arguments as stronger, and spend considerable energy in denigrating arguments that run counter to existing beliefs ("disconfirmation bias") (see Kruglanski Webster, 1996; Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979). Third, selective perception, where people respond to unfavorable information in agreement with their pre-existing beliefs and reinforce a view this information should otherwise undermine (Taber and Lodge 2006; Lebo and Cassino 2007). The latter two we tie in with below, whereas the first is less important here since our vignette experiment randomly varies the information provided to the respondent.

evaluations of election quality. Electoral violence contradicts key dimensions of free and fair elections: it instills fear among voters, entails coercion to shape vote choice and turnout, and confers advantages for perpetrators at the expense of other parties (e.g. Bratton 2008). If information-processing is motivated by directional goals, however, in which individuals aim to reconcile information with preexisting identities, information about violations about electoral integrity by co-partisans might not lead individuals to downgrade their assessment of election quality in this way. On the contrary, information about co-partisan violence could even lead people to reassert their confidence in the elections and shift their evaluations in a more positive direction.

We propose two, complementary mechanisms that could explain this association. First, we expect that citizens perceive violence by co-partisans as less consequential violations of electoral integrity than those involving rival parties because they downplay the seriousness of these events in a cognitive defense of their preferred party. When information about electoral transgressions challenges people's existing beliefs and identities, selective perception might lead to disconfirmation bias, i.e. downplaying, ignoring or disbelieving of new information (Lebo and Cassino 2007). As such, citizens should not be expected to respond to allegations of electoral misconduct by co-partisans by lowering their confidence in election quality. On the contrary, the concern to protect the in-group from negative rhetoric and stigma, a powerful concern in polarized contexts (Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar 2017), might lead co-partisans to reassert their confidence in elections as free and fair.[10]

A second mechanism that would support this expectation is that citizens interpret co-partisan violence as legitimate and perhaps even necessary in a contentious electoral setting. Violence could be seen as required to protect against transgressions by other actors, or as a just response to an electoral process that partisans assess as being biased against them. Armed presence at polling stations or physical encounters with polling agents, for exam-

[10]Such allegations might even lead to more positive evaluations of elections if the process of counter-arguing information as unimportant or false also leads individuals to recall positive features of the process, e.g. such as a sense of political efficacy. Redlawsk (2002), for example, finds that motivated reasoners *increase* their evaluation of a liked candidate when confronted with negative information.

ple, can be portrayed as efforts to protect the integrity of the polling. Partisan identities might also be tied to broader grievance frames that are activated in a contentious electoral setting. Such frames, centering on for example historical or contemporary injustices to the group, stolen electoral victories, or unfair marginalization, play an important role for the mobilization of popular support for unrest and political violence (e.g. Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Hug 2013; Donno, Morrison, and Savun 2021). As a result, co-partisans might interpret violence by their own party as more justifiable than violence by opponents - perhaps even interpreting it as improving the legitimacy of the process. Consistent with an argument that partisanship conditions the perceived legitimacy of contentious actions, Kalmoe (2019), for example, reports experimental evidence of partisan biases in endorsement of state violence in the U.S. depending on the partisanship of the target (see also Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar (2017)).[11]

Our focus on partisan alignment as a source of heterogeneity for evaluations of electoral integrity extends research that shows that winner and loser status is associated with divergent ratings of an election's quality. Supporters of winning parties are much more likely to rate elections as high quality, whereas losers hold more negative views of the electoral process and outcome (Anderson et al. 2005; Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Flesken and Hartl 2018; Moehler 2009). Our argument is also consistent with studies showing that the same procedural violations of electoral quality give rise to very different evaluations of the electoral contest amongst the population. Beaulieu (2014a) and Wellman, Hyde, and Hall (2018) suggest that citizens ignore reports of election fraud if their party benefits from it. In the U.S., Ansolabehere and Persily (2008), Beaulieu (2014b), and Peterson and Iyengar (2020) show that concerns about voter fraud are subject to partisan gaps. In Russia, Robertson (2017) finds that partisanship leads to divergent assessments about the prevalence of electoral fraud among regime supporters and opponents.

[11] This second mechanism ties in with work on how partisan bias might also be associated with partisan prejudices towards out-groups and more favorable attitudes towards in-groups, in line with theories of group identities in social conflict (e.g. Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Under what conditions are patterns of motivated reasoning likely to play out? Much of the motivation and evidence for partisan motivated reasoning is from the context of U.S. politics, where partisanship has long been recognized as a social identity rather than merely a voting preference (Campbell et al. 1960). In the Global South, both parties and party attachment may on average be weaker and more reflective of ethnic or religious identities, but electoral campaigns across the world involve parties as key actors, relying on party networks as important transmitters of citizens' needs and interests (Auerbach et al. 2021; Chhibber and Verma 2018). Partisanship might also strengthen as a social identity in the context of contentious elections. Existing work suggests that violence transforms social cleavages and makes the specific cleavage along which violence is committed more important for self-identity, attitudes and political behavior (Beber, Roessler, and Scacco 2014; Hadzic, Carlson, and Tavits 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Wood 2008). Hence, when partisanship informs vote choice, but also forms the cleavage around which violence revolves, citizens may be especially vulnerable to motivated reasoning. Existing research also suggests that directional motivations are more likely to take precedence over accuracy motivations in the context of party conflict and political polarization (Bolsen and Palm 2019; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Hence, contentious electoral environments might aggravate biases in how citizens process information and form evaluations of the political environment.

Based on the above argument, we derive the following pre-registered hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *Respondents (not) supporting the party identified as the alleged perpetrator of election violence in the treatment are (less) more likely to describe elections as free and fair than the control group.*

Elections in West Bengal 2019

West Bengal is one of 28 states in India, located in Eastern India. It is the fourth most populous state with more than 91 million people in the 2011 census, which would make it the

17th largest country in the world in terms of population. Local, state, and national elections are held every five years at overlapping intervals, meaning that West Bengal is holding an election in most years. Elections at all levels are conducted in single-seat constituencies using FPTP rules, often producing two-party contests at the village, state, or parliamentary district level. We conduct our household survey after the 2019 elections for the national parliament (Lok Sabha), which took place over six phases between April 11 and May 12 in West Bengal.

The 2018 local elections and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections were the first contests in which the Trinamool Congress (TMC) - the current state incumbent party - and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - the current national incumbent - were seen as primary competitors. The TMC has been active in West Bengal since it split from the Congress in 1998, and has controlled the state since first defeating leftist ruling parties in elections in 2011. The BJP entered West Bengal politics much more recently, for the first time winning two seats in the 2014 national elections.[12] Both elections experienced substantial levels of violence with more than 75 people killed in total.[13] In 2019, the TMC was widely portrayed as the losing party, while the BJP dramatically increased its vote and seat share.

Our choice of West Bengal is deliberate, constituting a case with considerable violence, variation in party identities, while still being reasonably democratic. With regard to the first condition, violence occurred at all stages of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and continued after the polling, making it plausible to expect that such violence affects citizens' perceptions of elections.[14] Violence affected constituencies across the state rather than just one region, taking place in twenty-four of West Bengal's 42 constituencies. Approximately 90% of all violent events involved members or supporters of the TMC and BJP. Violence often took

[12] We provide detailed historical background on elections, partisanship, and violence in West Bengal in appendix A3.

[13] "Explained: How West Bengal has been fertile land for violence during elections," India Today, May 16, 2019.

[14] In addition to threatening internal validity, we also think it would be ethically problematic to expose citizens to information about violence when very little of it happened. Information on the incidence of violence in this paragraph comes from a systematic review of news reports by the Times of India. We describe the procedure and data in appendix A9.

the form of clashes between TMC and BJP party workers and/or their supporters.[15] Both parties and their supporters frequently accused each other of being responsible for violence.[16] Bengali, Hindi, and English-language media reported incidents of violence and information about alleged and actual incidents was shared on social media. The public was thus broadly aware of ongoing violence, and it is reasonable to expect that this tense environment affected people's perceptions of election quality, which we investigate experimentally in this study.

Second, partisan identities form a salient cleavage in West Bengal and political competition, including violence, involves politicians, party workers, and their supporters (Chatterjee 2009). Compared to other parts of India (Kothari 1964; Yadav and Palshikar 2003), caste and religious identities correlate more weakly with political attitudes in West Bengal. The TMC - a regional and largely non-ideological party with populist positions - has controlled the state since defeating the Communist-led coalition in 2011. Yet while weaker than elsewhere in India, observers suggest that the importance of caste and religious identities in West Bengal has grown in recent years. For example, the BJP used the controversial citizenship bill to woo the powerful Namasudra caste group in its 2019 campaign in West Bengal, and Muslim support for the TMC has solidifed in recent years.[17] We expect that our argument extends to contexts in which caste, ethnic, or religious group attachments more directly map onto vote patterns, and discuss these implications in the conclusion.[18]

Third, despite a history of problematic elections, elections in West Bengal still exhibit important features of democratic politics. Elections are held regularly, highly competitive, and media report on the electoral process, albeit not entirely freely.[19] These features matter

[15] For an example, see "TMC and BJP workers clash during polling in Malda," Times of India, April 23, 2019.
[16] See e.g. "Amid BJP-TMC war of words, police stop hearses carrying slain workers' bodies," Times of India, June 9, 2019 or "TMC worker found dead, party blames BJP," Times of India, July 2, 2019.
[17] See "BJP is attempting to use citizenship issue to woo Namasudra community in Bengal," India Express, May 3, 2019 and "Post-poll survey: When the Left moved right in West Bengal," The Hindu, May 29, 2019.
[18] While social identities often correlate with partisanship, they do not align perfectly (Auerbach et al. 2021). Contexts with clear partisan cleavages are therefore particularly well-suited for exploring the consequences of violence on perceptions.
[19] Media reporting in West Bengal - as elsewhere in India - has become more subject to ruling party influence. The state incumbent TMC also actively suppresses the distribution of some reporting. For example, the government banned English-language newspapers in libraries. See "In West Bengal libraries, now read only what Didi's govt wants you to," Times of India, March 29, 2012.

because citizens in highly restrictive authoritarian environments are unlikely to update their perceptions of an election that is a sham. Citizens in authoritarian countries may also be more reluctant to reveal political preferences and attitudes truthfully in surveys (Robertson 2017). Finally, media reporting on violence is important because it provides citizens with access to information about problematic incidents, making our design plausible.

Data and Research Design

Survey Design

We test our hypothesis with data from a vignette experiment, which was embedded in a household survey of 1,080 respondents following the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the state of West Bengal. The survey was carried out in collaboration with Lokniti, a leading survey research organization that since 1995 conducts public opinion polls after most state elections and all national elections in India.[20]

We surveyed a representative sample of the West Bengal population, based on information from the 2011 census. In West Bengal we selected 10 districts based on Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling, and within each of these we sampled 9 locations (villages in rural areas, and wards in urban areas) based on PPS. We also blocked on urban/rural location. Within each location, we selected households based on a random walk procedure, and randomly selected individuals within households (with pre-assigned gender to attain 50/50 gender balance across the sample). Respondents were limited to adults, 18 years of age and older. The survey was paper-based and conducted in Bengali (92%) or Hindi (8%), depending on respondent preference. Before presenting the experimental manipulation, we administer pretreatment questions about respondents' degree of trust in political figures or bodies, partisanship, political attitudes and political engagement, as well as demographic

[20]Lokniti is a branch of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and has its main office in Delhi, India. Two local academics coordinated and supervised the training workshop and fieldwork, which took place between July 27th and August 16th, 2019.

characteristics. The figure below presents a map of all districts included in the sample.

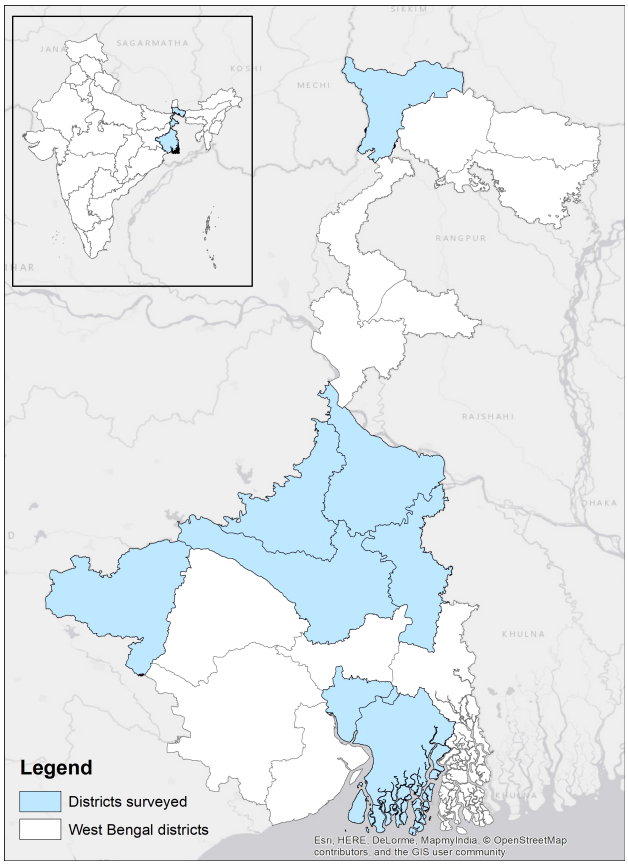


Figure 1: Map of Surveyed Districts

The Survey Experiment

The survey contained an experiment designed to randomly assign respondents to information about electoral violence committed by different political parties. The purpose of the experiment was to address the fact that in the real world, exposure to information about electoral violence is not likely to be randomly distributed across individuals, due to how individuals are exposed to and seek out such information. Individuals are, for example, probably more likely to be exposed to information about other political parties' transgression of electoral procedures.

In our preregistered experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to a control group,

or one of two treatment groups, all of equal size (yielding 360 respondents per group).The assignment to the experimental condition was done at the level of the individual, while maintaining a gender split across the entire sample by blocking on gender at the PSU level.

The control group received a neutral vignette without an experimental prime, simply reminding people about the Lok Sabha election. The two treatment groups, in addition to the neutral vignette, also received an experimental prime describing violent incident taking place during the campaign. Across the two treatment conditions the political party accused of instigating the incident was assigned randomly. The event description was modelled after events described in actual news reporting of violent events in West Bengal during the 2019 elections, both to enhance the credibility of the prime, as well as for ethical considerations, i.e. not to disseminate misinformation in a polarized political environment (see further discussion on ethics and implementation below). We included the TMC and the BJP as treatments because the elections were widely seen as a contest between the two parties, and as discussed, the TMC and BJP were involved as actors in much of the violence reported. In addition, both parties and their supporters frequently accused each other of being responsible for violence.[21] The fact that violence involved the TMC and BJP as primary perpetrators also means that our treatment involves a partisan valence issue for supporters of both parties.

After being presented with the vignette, respondents indicate how they perceive the quality of the electoral process, which is our dependent variable. We include the vignette wording for the control group and the two treatment groups below.

Control group:

As you know, the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections just concluded. In West Bengal, elections involved a race between prime minister Narendra Modi's BJP, the Congress party (INC), the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Communist Party of India (CPI-M).

[21] See e.g. "Amid BJP-TMC war of words, police stop hearses carrying slain workers' bodies," Times of India, June 9, 2019 or "TMC worker found dead, party blames BJP," Times of India, July 2, 2019.

Treatment groups (randomized component in brackets):

As you know, the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections just concluded. In West Bengal, elections saw a race between prime minister Narendra Modi's BJP, the Congress party (INC), the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Communist Party of India (CPI-M). During the elections, violence between parties and their supporters broke out in different parts of West Bengal. In the wake of violence, security force presence in the area doubled and the Election Commission ordered campaigning to be cut short by one day. Nevertheless, polling agents were beaten up and thrown outside polling booths on polling day, allegedly by $[TMC]/[BJP]$ party workers.

Ethics and Implementation

This study received ethical approval on May 6, 2019 [institution and ID withheld to protect author anonymity].[22] An overriding concern when designing and implementing this study was to protect the safety and integrity of the respondents and the research team. The survey was carried out in close collaboration with Lokniti, a leading survey research organization in India. Lokniti and its research arm, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, have extensive experience in conducting surveys on sensitive topics, including in West Bengal. The experimental vignette and all questions were discussed with researchers affiliated with Lokniti with extensive knowledge of the context, to avoid any harmful imprint and ensure respect for local norms and customs.

To protect the integrity of respondents, enumerators were instructed to interview individuals in their homes. Interviews started after respondents' provided verbal consent to participate in the study. The consent process entailed informing respondents that participation was voluntary, could be withdrawn at any point, and that data collected would be treated with confidentiality and respondent identity not disclosed. Respondents were also

[22] We follow the principles of ethical human subjects research adopted by the American Political Science Association (APSA 2020).

informed about the institutional affiliation and contact details of the responsible researchers.

A primary ethical concern was to avoid any potential harmful impact on respondents and enumerators. Elections in West Bengal had been tense, and sharing information about violence could run the risk of either provoking or re-traumatizing people. We took several steps to minimize this risk. First, our survey partner recruited enumerators from sampled districts, which was important both to ensure safety of enumerators and build trust with respondents. Second, we waited with fielding the survey several months after the conclusion of the polls in order to not interfere with the election and to avoid influencing the political process. There were only two violent events reported in the media in the preceding month, and none during the time when the survey was fielded, something that survey field coordinators confirmed. Finally, we opted for an incident of lesser severity for the vignette in order to minimize any negative psychological or social side-effects of describing more violent events, which could be perilous for respondents and enumerators. For the same reason, the vignette also included the word "alleged" rather than conclusively establishing the identity of the perpetrator.

To avoid deception, we designed the vignette to closely mirror real events and did not include fictional information about violence. While we omitted details that were provided for actual events, such as location or precise date, the incident is modelled on reported clashes that occurred with polling agents of the parties involved. Importantly, the survey was conducted in a fairly open political environment with regard to media freedom and diversity in reporting, and thus a setting where information about incidents of electoral violence was available to respondents. We debriefed respondents at the end of the survey.

Measurement

Outcome variable

Our dependent variable is citizens' assessment of the quality of elections. We rely on a conceptualization of high quality elections that has a strong foundation both in the scholarly

literature, as well as popular discourse amongst politicians, journalists or electoral observers (Elklit and Svensson 1997): whether elections were free and fair.[23] We measure this variable with the following question: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the Lok Sabha elections? Do you think they were completely free and fair, free and fair but with minor problems, free and fair but with major problems, or not free and fair?* We construct our outcome variable Perception of election quality as a discrete variable, ranging from 1 to 4, where higher numbers refer to perceptions of higher electoral quality (1=Not free and fair, 2=Free and fair, but with major problems, 3=Free and fair, but with minor problems, 4= Completely free and fair).[24]

Independent variables

The independent variables of interest are based on respondent exposure to information about electoral violence committed by the two primary party competitors. To test Hypothesis 1, we code two dichotomous variables separating between the two alleged party perpetrators. The two variables *TMC violence* and *BJP violence*, are coded as 1 based on assignment to each respective treatment condition, and 0 otherwise.

To measure our conditioning variable, *Partisan Identity*, we rely on a question, administered before the experiment, about respondent's trust in the BJP and the TMC party respectively. Respondents rate their trust in the TMC and BJP (among other parties) along a four point scale from "not at all" to "a lot". We code a dichotomous variable for partisanship with each of the parties based on all respondents that say that they trust the party "a lot". This measure records respondents' partisanship but also the strength of their party attachment, which is desirable for testing arguments on motivated reasoning since they have shown that attitude strength matters (Bolsen and Palm 2019; Robertson 2017).[25] Around

[23] Most cross-national surveys ask respondents for a summary evaluation of the electoral contest, including whether it is free and fair (Norris 2014).

[24] "Dont't know" and "Refused" responses are treated as missing. In total we have 145 respondents coded as missing. If we regress item non-response on treatment condition, none of them are significant, suggesting that these responses are relatively balanced across the control and the two treatment groups.

[25] Some respondents state a lot of trust for both parties. We treat these as having double partisan affiliations.

15% of the respondents are recorded with "Don't know" or "Refused" on this variable. These are coded as missing in our analysis.[26]

Confounding variables

In our statistical analysis we include a set of demographic variables, which are known predictors of political knowledge and attitudes, and thus also could be related to perceptions of electoral quality and/or partisanship. These are age, gender, rural versus urban residency, socio-economic status, education, caste, and religion. In addition, we control for the level of political knowledge, relying on information about how often respondents access news media. News exposure might shape respondents assessment of election quality, independent of our treatment assignment and also be correlated with partisanship. We use these variables both to assess whether our treatment assignment is indeed balanced across important variables as a result of randomization. We also include them in our analysis to adjust our treatment effects for any remaining imbalance and obtain more precise estimates.

These controls are especially important since we condition on partisanship. Partisanship is for obvious reasons not randomized in our study, nor is it independent of these key individual characteristics. Apart from confounders, we include constituency and enumerator fixed effects and robust standard errors in all models. Descriptive statistics by treatment condition, information about the survey items, and balance tests are presented in appendix A1 and A2.

Our results are not sensitive to re-coding these respondents either as non-partisan or missing.

[26]The questionnaire also contained a survey item where we asked people directly about their vote choice in the past election. Such a measure conflates support for a party with stated vote choice, which is not ideal and why we prefer our trust in parties measure. Cross-tabulations of the vote choice and trust in parties variables show that respondents who voted for the TMC or BJP also expressed trust in these parties. 163 of 189 respondents who voted for the TMC indicated trust in the party. For the BJP, 183 of 200 BJP voters expressed trust in the BJP.

Estimation Strategy

To evaluate Hypothesis 1 we regress our outcome variable – *Perception of election quality* – on interaction terms between our party-specific electoral violence treatment conditions – *TMC violence* and *BJP violence* – and respondent partisanship. We estimate our models relying on OLS linear regression for the discrete coding of perception of election quality.

Empirical Analysis

Before we test our hypothesis 1 on partisan effects, we report average treatment effects for our electoral violence prime without considering the modifying effect of respondent partisanship. Scholars of rational choice generally expect that citizens update their beliefs in neutral and unbiased ways, lowering their evaluations when encountering negative information (Gerber and Green 1999). This perspective would imply that citizens exposed to information about violence in elections would be less likely to perceive elections as high quality than those receiving no such information.[27] Results in table 1 show no evidence that respondents exposed to the electoral violence prime display lower perceptions of the quality of the elections. Models 1 and 2 show the effect of violence overall, combining the two treatments. The coefficient is positive, thus in the opposite direction of what rational updating would expect, and not statistically significant. Models 3 and 4 disaggregate the partisan primes. Coefficients for both treatments are positive, and the coefficient for the BJP prime is close to being statistically significant at the 95% level in model 3, but neither supports the rational updating perspective. A caveat with interpreting these direct effects is that our vignette provides respondents with information about violence and partisanship simultaneously, which makes it challenging to disentangle the two.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that partisan identities will influence how citizens assess informa-

[27] Our pre-analysis plan included a hypothesis on the direct effect of information about violence as a test of the rational updating perspective. Because of the challenges of distinguishing the effect of violence versus partisan perpetrators, we omit this hypothesis from the main theoretical discussion.

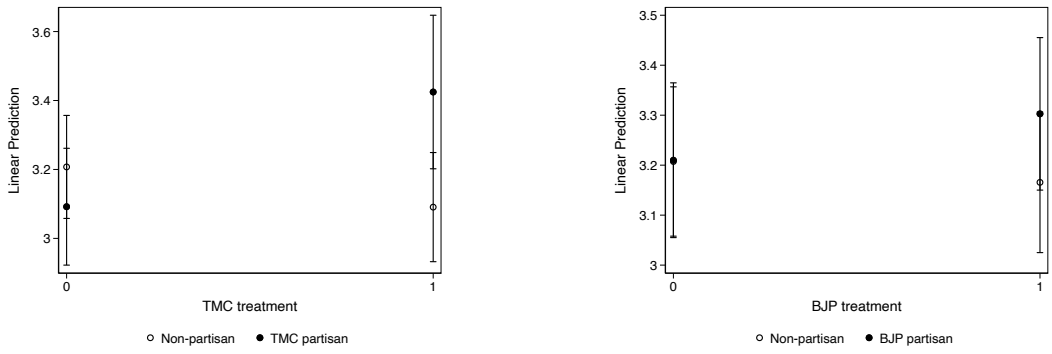
Table 1: Perceptions of election quality

	1	2	3	4	5	6
TMC/BJP violence	0.087	0.087				
	(0.060)	(0.060)				
TMC violence			0.062	0.079		
			(0.072)	(0.072)		
BJP violence			0.111	0.095		
			(0.066)	(0.066)		
TMC violence					-0.108	-0.117
					(0.100)	(0.102)
TMC partisan					-0.111	-0.115
					(0.080)	(0.082)
TMC violence × TMC partisan					0.401*	0.449**
					(0.166)	(0.162)
BJP violence					0.015	-0.042
					(0.092)	(0.094)
BJP partisan					0.011	0.003
					(0.085)	(0.086)
BJP violence × BJP partisan					0.082	0.134
					(0.131)	(0.131)
Urban residency		-0.124		-0.124		-0.111
		(0.086)		(0.086)		(0.101)
Education medium		-0.006		-0.006		-0.022
		(0.079)		(0.079)		(0.096)
Education high		-0.088		-0.088		-0.079
		(0.102)		(0.102)		(0.119)
Muslim		-0.258**		-0.257**		-0.200*
		(0.085)		(0.086)		(0.096)
Christian		-0.038		-0.041		-0.077
		(0.269)		(0.268)		(0.301)
Other religion		0.363		0.360		0.250
		(0.238)		(0.238)		(0.260)
Scheduled tribes		0.101		0.102		0.117
		(0.095)		(0.095)		(0.107)
Other backward classes		0.101		0.102		0.117
		0.096		0.094		0.064
		(0.090)		(0.091)		(0.105)
Other caste		-0.071		-0.071		-0.074
		(0.081)		(0.081)		(0.095)
Socio-econ. status		-0.013		-0.013		-0.018
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.012)
Age		0.004		0.004		0.002
		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.003)
Gender		0.156**		0.156**		0.132
		(0.060)		(0.060)		(0.068)
Political knowledge		-0.081		-0.081		-0.093
		(0.075)		(0.075)		(0.087)
Constant	2.654**	2.605**	2.653**	2.605**	2.896**	2.968**
	(0.217)	(0.284)	(0.217)	(0.284)	(0.237)	(0.336)
Constituency FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	935	886	935	886	740	699
R^2	0.297	0.341	0.297	0.341	0.308	0.357
Adjusted R^2	0.270	0.304	0.269	0.303	0.268	0.304

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

tion about electoral violence. Theories of motivated reasoning expect that individuals are more likely to disregard information that contradicts their beliefs. This leads us to expect that partisan supporters will be more likely to disregard information about electoral violence perpetrated by members of their own party, and evaluate election quality more positively than those who are not exposed to information about violence. We test this hypothesis by including interaction terms between our party-specific electoral violence treatment and partisanship variables. Results are shown in Table 1, Model 5 and 6, and Figure 2.

Overall, we find consistent support for our pre-registered hypothesis for the TMC. In line with the hypothesis, TMC partisans that receive the TMC violence prime rate the quality of elections more positively, compared to non-TMC supporters. This effect is consistent with our expectation since only those with strong partisan commitments are expected to counter-argue information incongruent with their beliefs; i.e. updating their perceptions in the wrong direction. In appendix A5, we show that the effect for TMC partisans is the *opposite* when exposing them to violence by opposite partisans. TMC supporters lower their perceptions of election quality when hearing that the BJP engaged in violence, which is consistent with confirmation bias.



(a) TMC electoral viol. (b) BJP electoral viol.

Figure 2: Effect of electoral violence on perception of electoral quality, by partisanship

Our findings for BJP supporters are more complex. Like TMC supporters, BJP partisans do not rationally update their perceptions of elections. When exposed to information about

co-partisan violence, they do not become more critical of the electoral process. But unlike TMC supporters, BJP partisans do not update in the wrong direction; while the coefficient of the interaction is positive, it remains statistically insignificant. We consider three possible explanations for this weaker finding and summarize them here, while presenting full results in appendix A8. First, BJP supporters may be less committed partisans than TMC supporters. As discussed above, the BJP only recently became competitive in West Bengal elections, for the first time winning two (of 42) seats in the 2014 national elections. In contrast, the TMC has held seats in local, state, and national elections for more than 20 years. Many BJP voters in the 2019 elections thus supported leftist parties or the Congress until very recently (Chatterjee and Basu 2019a, 2019b). Using data from the 2019 National Election Studies survey,[28] we show in table A8.1 that only 45% of voters who had voted for the BJP in 2019 also supported it in 2014. In contrast, 83% of those who voted TMC in 2019 also voted for the party in 2014. A large portion of BJP voters thus made a recent and substantial ideological shift, and BJP supporters may hold weaker partisan beliefs than TMC voters despite expressing a lot of trust in the party.

A second explanation relates to winner-loser dynamics. In the public discussion, the BJP was seen as having won the election while the TMC was widely portrayed as the loser.[29] It may be that BJP supporters, having won the elections, were satisfied with the outcome and are therefore less amenable to shifting their fraud perceptions (Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Esaiasson 2011; Moehler and Lindberg 2009). Conversely, TMC supporters as election losers may feel more strongly about the results and thus be more susceptible to motivated reasoning. Average evaluations among party supporters do not support this claim; the average evaluation of the election on a four-point scale is 3.1 for TMC supporters compared to 3.2 for BJP supporters. In addition, our inferential analysis in appendix table A8.2 fails to show clear support for a winner-loser gap. We neither find TMC supporters as election

[28] See NES 2019

[29] The BJP won the largest number of seats nationally. In West Bengal, the TMC won more seats than the BJP (22 compared to 18), but was seen as the loser since it held 34 seats before the elections. See "Mamata Banerjee congratulates winners but with a rider," Outlook India, May 19, 2019.

losers evaluated elections more critically overall, nor that BJP voters as election winners evaluate election quality more favorably.

Third, it is possible that the TMC as the state incumbent party had an advantage in executing violence.[30] The non-finding for BJP supporters may be a result of the BJP relying on violence to a lesser extent than the TMC. We think that a TMC advantage in violence is unlikely to play out in national elections because national forces were deployed to maintain election security, making it more difficult to instrumentalize the state police while maintaining plausible deniability. Using data on violence we described above, we nevertheless empirically examine if the TMC was more often implicated in violence than the BJP. Our descriptive analysis in appendix table A8.3 shows no support for greater TMC involvement in violence. Overall, we conclude that the strength and consistency of partisan identitities best explain our findings for BJP supporters.

Having discussed our findings for TMC and BJP party supporters, the results in Table 1 also show that respondents who do not support either of the two main parties fail to become more critical of election quality when exposed to information about violence. The coefficients for *TMC Violence* and *BJP Violence* show the effect of the treatment when the *TMC Partisan* and *BJP Partisan* variables are zero, respectively. These coefficients are generally negative but not statistically significant. Nevertheless, the evidence is broadly consistent with work demonstrating that exposure to violence leads people to withdraw from the electoral process and become disillusioned with democratic politics (Borzyskowski, Daxecker, and Kuhn 2021; Höglund and Piyarathne 2009).

Our theory suggests that party supporters update their perceptions of election quality in the wrong direction when co-partisans are accused of engaging in violence. We have argued that co-partisans rally behind their party when being reminded of the party they prefer as a cognitive response. Moreover, we suggested that people with strong party attachments may even rationalize such violence as justified to uphold an electoral process that they see

[30] In India, states are in control of the police force and incumbents have used the police instrumentally during elections (Wilkinson 2004).

as biased by transgressions of opposing partisans. While conclusively testing and establishing these mechanisms is beyond the scope of our paper, our survey instrument included a question in which we asked respondents if violence in elections that are biased can be justifiable. Specifically, respondents were asked to express their (dis-)agreement on the following statement: *"Violence is sometimes justified during elections since the rules are not fair for the weaker parties."* In appendix A9, we present empirical results of a model with a four-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with this statement as the dependent variable. TMC supporters are more likely to agree with the statement, which is consistent with the mechanism we put forward. As with our preceding results, we do not find an effect for BJP partisans.

Additional results

In addition to descriptive statistics (A1), covariate balance (A2), historical context (A3), and geographic patterns of violence (A4), the appendix also presents additional empirical results. In appendix A5, we omit the control group and compare treatment groups to each other, first for co-partisans and then for opposing partisans. These results are consistent with our main findings, showing that TMC suporters *increase* their perceptions of elections as high quality when exposed to violence accusing co-partisans, but *reduce* their perceptions of election quality when opposing partisans are allegedly perpetrating violence. We also compare each treatment group directly to the control group (A6), re-estimate our results using logit (A7), present full results to explain the BJP finding (A8), and explore the mechanism (A9). Finally, we conduct additional explorations of the winner-loser gap (A10), present results for an alternative dependent variable (A11), and include the anonymized pre-analysis plan (A12).

Conclusion

Our survey experiment examines how information about election violence affects people's perception of election quality. Unlike most other research on election quality, random assignment allows us to examine the effect of information about violence on perceptions rather than having to recognize multiple plausible channels linking violence to attitudes all at once. In addition, by randomly exposing respondents to treatment and control conditions rather than respondents seeking out information about violence, we avoid selection effects that affect much research on the consequences of violence.

We conducted our survey after an election with intense competition and substantial violence in the Indian state West Bengal, making the experiment plausible. We find support for motivated reasoning among supporters of the TMC, one of the two main competitors in the elections. TMC supporters become more likely to consider elections free and fair when exposed to information alleging that co-partisans have perpetrated violence. These partisan effects, however, are not entirely symmetrical. BJP supporters do not exhibit disconfirmation bias, a non-finding that may stem from the more recent shift of these voters to the party.

We acknowledge some limitations of the experiment. First, as with all survey experiments, exposing respondents to a hypothetical treatment is not the same thing as actually receiving similar treatments in the real world. We have designed our experiment to be as realistic as possible in terms of internal validity without being ethically objectionable. Second, an experimental design is limited in the possible channels it can explore. Aside from news reports, people also hear about violence through a variety of other channels, including from family members and friends, those in the community, or social media. Information can also vary in veracity, ranging from hearsay and rumors to news reports and statements by election commission officials. These channels are also important and might operate in different ways, which are important avenues for future research.

Our findings are concerning for democratic politics. Despite the fact that violence fundamentally undermines the quality of elections, citizens exposed to information about it do

not necessarily evaluate elections as low quality. In fact, some people improve their perceptions of elections when violence implicates their co-partisans. From the perspective of the perpetrators, violence is thus doubly effective. In addition to reducing turnout and support for democracy - effects that have been established across a variety of institutional contexts - violence convinces party supporters to become more and not less trusting of elections. For democracy, these effects are likely corrosive. Violence leads those with weak partisan identities to become disillusioned and withdraw from politics, while those with strong party attachments become even more polarized in how they evaluate elections.

Our design aims to maximize internal validity, but our findings have important implications beyond West Bengal. Election violence in other Indian states is less common, but was historically common in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. Even today, election-related violence happens sporadically across India; for example, 49 people were killed and more than 200 injured - most of them Muslims - after the 2020 Delhi legislative elections.[31] Such violence is often more closely linked to caste or religious identities, but could similarly result in biased evaluations of electoral processes since these identities also structure voting, mirroring the partisan effects we have established. Beyond India, party-based violence during elections is unfortunately still common in many countries, including India's neighbors Bangladesh and Pakistan, but also Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Côte D'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. The implications of violence for the microfoundations of democracy deserve further research. Our study underlines the importance of expanding the study of political psychology beyond citizens in Western, industrialized countries.

[31]"What Happened in Delhi was a Pogrom," The Atlantic, February 28, 2020.

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A Appendix

Contents

A.1 Descriptives and individual covariates

Table A.1.1 presents descriptive statistics by treatment group. Table A.1.2 provides information on survey items and operationalization.

Table A.1.1: Descriptive statistics by treatment condition

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Control group					
Perception of election quality	3.104	1.03	1	4	307
Age	40.836	14.133	18	93	360
Gender	0.481	0.5	0	1	360
Urban residency	0.4	0.491	0	1	360
Socio-econ. status	3.876	3.754	0	15	356
Education	1.003	0.719	0	2	343
Caste	2.697	1.213	1	4	360
Religion	1.316	0.625	1	4	358
Political knowledge	0.692	0.462	0	1	360
BJP treatment					
Perception of election quality	3.245	0.943	1	4	319
Age	39.183	12.123	18	80	360
Gender	0.5	0.501	0	1	360
Urban residency	0.4	0.491	0	1	360
Socio-econ. status	3.754	3.969	0	19	350
Education	1.018	0.697	0	2	338
Caste	2.772	1.205	1	4	360
Religion	1.351	0.701	1	4	359
Political knowledge	0.694	0.461	0	1	360
TMC treatment					
Perception of election quality	3.133	1.028	1	4	309
Age	39.792	14.334	18	90	360
Gender	0.519	0.5	0	1	360
Urban residency	0.4	0.491	0	1	360
Socio-econ. status	3.655	3.743	0	16	354
Education	1.032	0.694	0	2	347
Caste	2.722	1.24	1	4	360
Religion	1.287	0.573	1	4	359
Political knowledge	0.719	0.45	0	1	360

A.2 Covariate balance

In order to assess whether our treatment assignment is balanced on important individual covariates that could be confounders in our relationship of interest, we conduct a balance test. We do this by regressing the treatment assignment on this set of vari-

Table A.1.2: Survey items and operationalization for individual-level variables

Variable	Survey item	Scale
Age	How old are you?	Continuous
Sex	Gender of respondent (recorded by enumerator)	0=Male 1=Female
Rural/urban residency	Information taken from sampling framework	0=Rural 1=Urban
Socio-economic status	Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: a. Gone without enough food to eat? b. Gone without enough clean water for home use? c. Gone without medicines or medical treatment? d. Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? e. Gone without a cash income?	Additive index, based on item a-e 0=Never 1=Just once or twice 2=Several times 3=Many times 4=Always
Caste group	What is your Caste group?	Categorical: 1=Scheduled Cast 2=Scheduled Tribe 3=Other Backward Classes 4=Other
Religion	What is your Religion?	Categorical: 1=Hindu 2=Muslim 3=Christian 4=Other
Political knowledge	How often do you get news from the following sources? [Radio, television, newspaper]	Categorical: 1= Every day or almost A few times a week 0= all other responses
Education	Up to what level have you studied? 0=Non literate 1=Below Primary 2=Primary pass 3= Middle pass 4=Matric 5= Intermediate/ College, no degree 6=Graduate 7=Post-graduate	Categorical, recoded as: low= 0 to 1 medium= 2 to 4 high= 5–7
Partisanship	How much do you trust [the TMC Party]/[the BJP)]? 0=Not at all 1=Just a little 2=Somewhat 3=A lot	Categorical, recoded as: 0=0–2 1=3

ables using a multinomial regression model (Gerber and Green 2012). These are *age* (continous), *gender* (0=male), *rural/urban residency* (0=rural), *socio-economic status* (continous) *education* (0=low), *cast* (0=Scheduled Cast), *religion* (0=Hindu) and *political knowledge* (0= infrequent/none news consumption). The results are reported in Table A.2.1. None of the covariates are significant predictor of treatment assignment.

A.3 Historical context

For context, we provide a short history of elections, partisanship, and violence in West Bengal. Until the late 1960s, the Congress party (INC) dominated West Bengal's electoral politics. However, the party relied more on personalistic rule and alliances with non-native entrepreneurs than in other parts of India (Kohli 1990, 271-274). Increasingly under pressure from lower castes, but also Bengali upper strata, the Congress lost power to a left-party coalition in 1969. The INC used massive violence to regain control of the government in 1972 and remained in power until 1977 through virtually obliterating democratic politics with repression (Kohli 1990), taking advantage of a national authoritarian period called the Emergency (1975-1977). Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI-M, successfully mobilised the poor and downtrodden, and anti-Congress resentment brought a coalition of Communists and other leftist parties to power in the 1977 state elections. The Left Front (LF) coalition remained dominant for 34 years. The LF instituted regular panchayat (local) elections, shifting public goods provision to the local level in an attempt to dislodge the landlord-moneylender class (Banerjee 2011; Mitra and Bhattacharyya 2018). The LF also initiated land reform, which helped consolidate support especially in rural areas. The CPI-M, clearly the hegemonic party in the coalition, had an exceptionally strong party organisation with a skilled and superior network. During this hegemonic period, the government exercised power without recourse to violence (Chatterjee and Basu

Table A.2.1: Covariate balance.

Treatment Assignment: BJP		
Age	-0.008	(0.007)
Female	0.215	(0.171)
Urban	-0.042	(0.176)
Socio-econ. status	-0.010	(0.024)
Education medium	0.104	(0.227)
Education high	-0.037	(0.271)
Scheduled Tribe	-0.101	(0.308)
Other Backward Classes	0.220	(0.266)
Other Caste	0.096	(0.223)
Muslim	-0.235	(0.234)
Christian	0.376	(0.663)
Other religion	0.519	(0.596)
Political knowledge	-0.027	(0.208)
Constant	0.229	(0.426)
Treatment Assignment: TMC		
Age	-0.002	(0.006)
Female	0.179	(0.171)
Urban	0.010	(0.175)
Socio-econ. status	-0.018	(0.024)
Education medium	0.137	(0.227)
Education high	0.061	(0.270)
Scheduled Tribe	-0.019	(0.300)
Other Backward Classes	-0.228	(0.272)
Other Caste	-0.054	(0.220)
Muslim	0.051	(0.234)
Christian	-0.305	(0.778)
Other religion	-0.257	(0.692)
Political knowledge	-0.080	(0.208)
Constant	0.146	(0.424)
Observations	886	
Log lik.	-967.493	
Chi-squared	11.548	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

2020). However, poverty in the state was extensive and funds for reform programs too limited to benefit all, and gaps between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries along party lines emerged (Banerjee 2011). Facing increasing electoral challenges, the CPI-M did not refrain from using violence against opposition supporters or members of its own coalition, depending on which one was the perceived as the bigger threat (Roy and Banerjee 2006; Dasgupta 2009; Chatterjee and Basu 2020). In 1998, a new party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), broke off from the Congress. Both the CPI-M and the TMC then mobilised the poor against each other, producing long and violent clashes for local control (Banerjee 2011). Anti-LF resentment increased further when the CPI-M used violence against uprisings protesting land acquisitions in Singur in 2006 and Nandigram in 2007. The TMC won its first electoral victory in the 2011 legislative assembly elections. The TMC lacks the deep organisational structures of the CPI-M, is more dependent on local leaders, and pursues a more populist agenda. But the party successfully used welfare schemes to buy and keep the support of rural areas. Party members and activists have also not shied away from using electoral coercion, just like the Congress and the Communists before them. The most recent entrant to West Bengal politics is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP started to replace the CPI-M and Congress as main opposition parties in several districts in the 2014 national and 2016 state elections, scoring 17 and 10% of the vote. Since then, the party has invested heavily in building up local support through its Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) organisations, through alliances with other parties, and by focusing on religious polarization (Roy 2016; Nath 2017).

A.4 Patterns of electoral violence in the 2019 elections

The manuscript discusses patterns of electoral violence in the 2019 elections in West Bengal based on a search of articles in the Times of India. We here describe the pro-

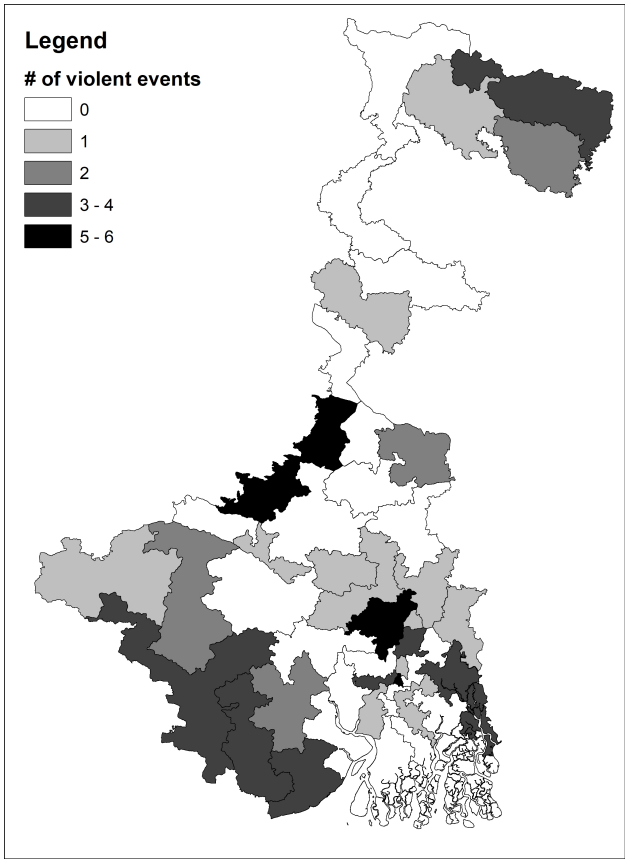


Figure A.4.1: Map of events per constituency

cedure to create the data and empirical patterns in more detail. To collect data on violence, we first accessed the Times of India online portal and used the terms elections, violence, West Bengal, and 2019 to search, which returned approximately 100 articles. We then expanded our search by varying the terms slightly, which produced some additional relevant articles. From these articles, we coded 58 events of violence that clearly related to elections. For each event, we recorded the date, Lok Sabha constituency, the type of violence, the actors involved, a brief description of the incident, and the source.

Violence related to elections was reported as early as January. On January 29, a TMC party office in Kanthi constituency was ransacked and party workers by the TMC

and BJP were injured in clashes that followed.[1] During the campaign, the electoral commission became so concerned about high poll violence that it curtailed campaigning in the last polling phase. Election violence continued after the elections and did not subside until months after. The last incidents were reported in July, with the last incident involving the killing of a BJP party worker in Hooghly constituency.[2]

Violence also affected constituencies across the state rather than just one region, taking place in twenty-four of West Bengal's 42 constituencies. Incidents were reported in Cooch Behar in the North, Kanthi in the South, Purulia in the West, Bangaon in the East, and many other constituencies across the state. The most affected constituencies were Birbhum (6 incidents), Hooghly (5 incidents), and Kolkata North (5 incidents). As mentioned in the main text, almost all of the events involved TMC and BJP workers or their supporters as the actors or targets of events, confirming that party-based violence between the two primary competitors constituted the bulk of the violence.

Figure A.4.1 presents a map of all events at the Lok Sabha constituency level. Constituencies are the units in which electoral contests in this election took place, and were often the smallest available unit for which location information on violence was available.

A.5 Treatment versus treatment

In tables A.5.1 and table A.5.2, we compare the two treatment conditions directly with each other. Rather than examining how local perceptions of election quality is impacted by information that violence occurred, compared to providing no such information, we now examine the effect from simply shifting the partisan affiliation of the perpetrator, conditional on partisanship of the respondents.

1. "BJP to complain to EC over Kanthi violence, 11 arrested," Times of India, January 30, 2019.
2. "BJP worker found dead in Goghat, party blames TMC," Times of India, July 29, 2019.

We first compare the two treatments to each other focusing on co-partisans accused of violence. This is similar to what we do in the main text except that we drop the control group. As in our main results, we find that TMC partisans become more likely to perceive elections as high-quality if exposed to the TMC prime. We again find no effect for BJP partisans.

We next examine interaction terms between partisanship and the treatment when *opposing* partisans are accused of engaging in violence, as also suggested in our hypothesis. Results for opposing partisans are consistent with expectations for TMC supporters. We find that TMC supporters *reduce* their perceptions of election quality when exposed to information that BJP agents were engaged in an incident of electoral violence. This effect is consistent with confirmation bias. As discussed in the main text, TMC and the BJP frequently blamed each other for violence during the elections, which should lead TMC supporters to more readily accept allegations of violence against the BJP and downgrade their perceptions of election quality.

We again fail to find evidence for motivated reasoning for BJP supporters. BJP partisans do not significantly shift their perceptions of election quality, regardless of whether the violence prime implicates the BJP or TMC.

A.6 Treatment versus control

In table A.6.1 we rerun the main analysis with a more strict comparison between the respective treatment condition and the control group, conditioning on the relevant partisanship, while leaving all other partisans in the reference category. The results are, as expected, very similar to those reported in the main analysis where we have pooled the sample. When exposed to information about electoral violence implicating TMC agents, TMC partisans become more likely to change their rating of electoral quality upwards, compared to non-TMC supporters. We do not find a significant difference

Table A.5.1: Treatment vs treatment, co-partisan

	1	2
TMC violence	-0.121	
	(0.098)	
TMC partisan	-0.121	
	(0.112)	
TMC violence × TMC partisan	0.397*	
	(0.172)	
BJP violence		-0.064
		(0.100)
BJP partisan		-0.021
		(0.126)
BJP violence × BJP partisan		0.173
		(0.160)
Urban residency	-0.158	-0.084
	(0.106)	(0.103)
Education medium	-0.093	-0.141
	(0.112)	(0.110)
Education high	-0.109	-0.131
	(0.139)	(0.141)
Muslim	-0.250*	-0.347**
	(0.119)	(0.116)
Christian	0.362	0.363
	(0.371)	(0.354)
Other religion	0.435	0.464
	(0.294)	(0.300)
Scheduled caste	0.050	0.152
	(0.122)	(0.122)
Other backward classes	0.059	0.168
	(0.131)	(0.129)
Other caste	-0.019	0.042
	(0.115)	(0.114)
Socio-econ. status	-0.027	-0.014
	(0.015)	(0.014)
Age	0.002	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	0.231**	0.180*
	(0.080)	(0.077)
Political knowledge	-0.036	-0.040
	(0.103)	(0.104)
Constant	2.900**	2.638**
	(0.389)	(0.352)
Constituency FE	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes
Observations	507	505
R^2	0.355	0.355
Adjusted R^2	0.284	0.284

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.5.2: Treatment vs treatment, opposite partisan

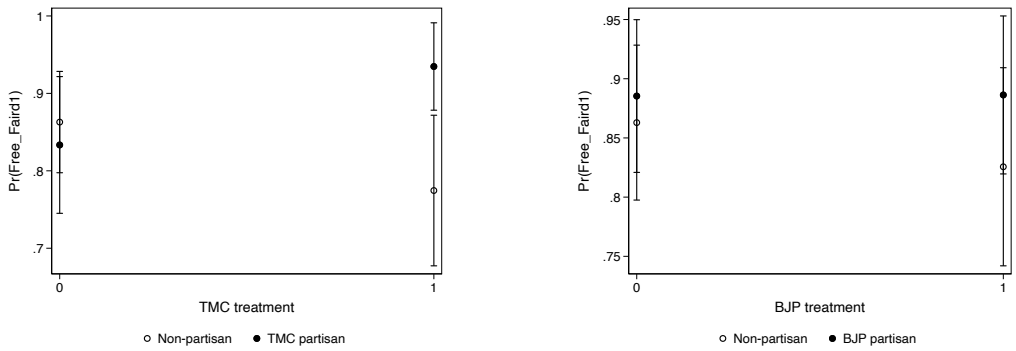
	1	2
TMC violence	0.064	
	(0.100)	
BJP partisan	0.152	
	(0.099)	
TMC violence × BJP partisan	-0.173	
	(0.160)	
BJP violence		0.121
		(0.098)
TMC partisan		0.276*
		(0.130)
BJP violence × TMC partisan		-0.397*
		(0.172)
Urban residency	-0.084	-0.158
	(0.103)	(0.106)
Education medium	-0.141	-0.093
	(0.110)	(0.112)
Education high	-0.131	-0.109
	(0.141)	(0.139)
Muslim	-0.347**	-0.250*
	(0.116)	(0.119)
Christian	0.363	0.362
	(0.354)	(0.371)
Other religion	0.464	0.435
	(0.300)	(0.294)
Scheduled tribes	0.152	0.050
	(0.122)	(0.122)
Other backward classes	0.168	0.059
	(0.129)	(0.131)
Other caste	0.042	-0.019
	(0.114)	(0.115)
Socio-econ. status	-0.014	-0.027
	(0.014)	(0.015)
Age	0.002	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	0.180*	0.231**
	(0.077)	(0.080)
Political knowledge	-0.040	-0.036
	(0.104)	(0.103)
Constant	2.575**	2.779**
	(0.360)	(0.383)
Constituency FE	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes
Observations	505	507
R^2	0.355	0.355
Adjusted R^2	0.284	0.284

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

for BJP supporters exposed to information about BJP perpetrated violence.

A.7 Dichotomous dependent variable

The election quality variable is skewed in favor of more positive evaluations of the quality of elections. Out of the 935 non-missing responses, close to half of the sample (454 respondents) rate the elections as "Completely free and fair". This is perhaps surprising in light of quite widespread reports of electoral irregularities and might indicate that there is some social desirability bias in how respondents answer this question. In an alternative specification we dichotomize the dependent variable, making a distinction between those that rate the elections as "completely free and fair" or "or mostly fair", and the rest. The results are shown in Table A.7.1 and graphed in Figure A.7.1. The finding suggesting that TMC partisans enhance their evaluation of electoral quality when subject to information about TMC violence becomes somewhat stronger in terms of the substantive effect, but the non-significant result for BJP partisans remains.



(a) TMC electoral viol. (b) BJP electoral viol.

Figure A.7.1: Effect of electoral violence on perception of electoral quality (dichotomized), by partisanship

Table A.6.1: Treatment versus control

	1	2
TMC violence	-0.081	
	(0.109)	
TMC partisan	-0.132	
	(0.120)	
TMC violence × TMC partisan	0.422*	
	(0.181)	
BJP violence		-0.002
		(0.100)
BJP partisan		-0.024
		(0.107)
BJP violence × BJP partisan		0.160
		(0.143)
Urban residency	-0.056	-0.152
	(0.131)	(0.118)
Education medium	0.029	0.029
	(0.121)	(0.105)
Education high	-0.088	-0.084
	(0.146)	(0.131)
Muslim	-0.137	-0.211
	(0.109)	(0.111)
Christian	-0.254	-0.226
	(0.398)	(0.324)
Other religion	0.544	0.021
	(0.478)	(0.251)
Scheduled tribes	0.150	0.019
	(0.139)	(0.127)
Other backward classes	0.057	0.065
	(0.135)	(0.113)
Other caste	-0.055	-0.169
	(0.116)	(0.103)
Socio-econ. status	-0.021	-0.000
	(0.015)	(0.012)
Age	0.003	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	0.112	0.105
	(0.088)	(0.081)
Political knowledge	-0.143	-0.046
	(0.103)	(0.100)
Constant	2.586**	3.119**
	(0.423)	(0.343)
Constituency FE	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes
Observations	483	501
R^2	0.362	0.400
Adjusted R^2	0.288	0.333

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.7.1: Logit regressions

	1	2
TMC violence	-0.427	-0.606
	(0.309)	(0.355)
TMC partisan	-0.190	-0.230
	(0.276)	(0.323)
TMC violence × TMC partisan	1.325*	1.657**
	(0.593)	(0.639)
BJP violence	-0.017	-0.285
	(0.311)	(0.360)
BJP partisan	0.158	0.204
	(0.289)	(0.326)
BJP violence × BJP partisan	0.181	0.294
	(0.467)	(0.519)
Urban residency		-0.096
		(0.435)
Educaton medium		-0.334
		(0.375)
Education high		-0.745
		(0.461)
Muslim		-0.560
		(0.378)
Christian		0.050
		(0.908)
Other religion		-0.089
		(0.734)
Scheduled tribes		1.294*
		(0.589)
Other backward classes		-0.035
		(0.443)
Other caste		-0.236
		(0.336)
Socio-econ. status		-0.111**
		(0.041)
Age		0.000
		(0.011)
Gender		0.488
		(0.255)
Political knowledge		-0.420
		(0.370)
Constant	1.106	2.370*
	(0.583)	(1.078)
Constituency FE	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes
Observations	636	591
R^2		
Adjusted R^2		

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

A.8 Assessing explanations for the BJP finding

As discussed in the manuscript, we present full results for three possible explanations for the weaker BJP finding below. These explanations involve weaker partisan commitments among BJP voters, a winner-loser gap among BJP and TMC voters, and the TMC having an advantage in the use of violence.

BJP partisan commitments

In A.8.1 we compare citizens vote choice in 2019 to how they voted in 2014. As discussed in the manuscript, we find that 83% of TMC voters also voted for the TMC in 2014. Compared to all other parties, the TMC has the highest percentage of voters consistently supporting it. For the BJP, only 45% of voters had previously voted for the party, which is the lowest among all major parties in West Bengal. While not definitive, these voting patterns are consistent with the idea that BJP voters are less consistently partisan than TMC supporters.

Table A.8.1: Vote choice in 2014 and 2019

	Vote choice in 2014				
Vote choice in 2019	Congress	BJP	TMC	Left	Others
Congress	68.2	11.4	13.6	6.8	0
BJP	4.3	44.9	39.5	11.0	0.3
TMC	7.7	4.0	83.0	4.6	0.7
Left	14.5	10.1	11.6	62.3	1.5
Others	25.0	0	50.0	0	25.0

Note: All figures in %. Data are from the National Election Study 2019 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS.

Winner-loser gap

Table A.8.2 examines the direct effect of partisanship on perceptions of election quality to determine if BJP voters as election winners were more satisfied with the outcome,

while TMC voters were more critical, having lost the elections. The table fails to show clear support for a winner-loser gap among citizens. TMC supporters as election losers do not evaluate elections more negatively, nor do BJP voters as election winners evaluate them more favorably.

Incumbent advantage in violence

We now explore whether the TMC committed more violence in the 2019 elections compared to the BJP. An incumbent advantage in violence might explain why TMC voters are more willing to counterargue violence by co-partisans. We draw on our dataset of election violence events discussed above for examining these patterns. We first distinguish between events in which perpetrators and targets of violence could not be established, such as clashes between party supporters. As described earlier, we collected data on 58 events. Of all events, 19 involved clashes or other violence that did not allow us to establish who was responsible or "started" an event. Sixteen of these events involved either the TMC (14 events) or the BJP (15) on either side, again highlighting that the violence overwhelmingly occurred between the two parties or their supporters. There is clearly no difference in party involvement in these incidents.

We proceed to events in which a perpetrator and a target could be distinguished, such as killings, intimidation, injuries, or property damage. There were 39 events in this category. We then compare party involvement among perpetrators and targets. Table A.8.3 shows that the BJP was the perpetrator 28% of the time, compared to 10.3% for the TMC.[3] Among targets, the TMC was the target in 36% of events compared to 33% events for the BJP. These patterns again show no clear partisan differences in violent engagement.

3. We note that the identity of the perpetrator can often not be established, but this is a common issue in event data on violence.

Table A.8.2: Winner-loser gap

	1
TMC violence	0.023
	(0.086)
TMC partisan	0.021
	(0.070)
BJP violence	0.021
	(0.073)
BJP partisan	0.058
	(0.068)
Urban residency	-0.095
	(0.101)
Education medium	-0.011
	(0.096)
Education high	-0.072
	(0.120)
Muslim	-0.215*
	(0.095)
Christian	-0.044
	(0.303)
Other religion	0.291
	(0.266)
Schedule tribe	0.123
	(0.108)
Other backward classes	0.066
	(0.104)
Other caste	-0.069
	(0.095)
Socio-econ. status 2	-0.016
	(0.012)
Age	0.003
	(0.003)
Gender	0.137*
	(0.068)
Political knowledge	-0.096
	(0.087)
Constant	2.869**
	(0.332)
Observations	699
R^2	0.347
Adjusted R^2	0.296

Robust standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.8.3: Perpetrators and targets of violence

Actor name	Perpetrator	Target
Unknown	23 (59%)	2 (5%)
BJP	11 (28%)	13 (33%)
TMC	4 (10%)	13 (36%)
Voters	6 (15%)	-
Election officials	-	3 (8%)
State	1 (3%)	-
RSS	-	1 (3%)
Total	39 (100%)	39 (100%)

Note: All figures are frequencies, % in parentheses. Data come from newspaper reporting in the Times of India.

A.9 Exploring the causal mechanism

One possible mechanism behind disconfirmation bias is that people with strong partisan commitments rationalize violence as justified to uphold an electoral process that they see as biased. To examine this further, we use a question from our survey in which respondents were asked to express their (dis-)agreement on the following statement: *"Violence is sometimes justified during elections since the rules are not fair for the weaker parties."* This question was asked immediately after we surveyed respondents on the outcome variable, hence shortly after they were read the experimental vignette. In table A.9.1, we show results of a model with a four-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with this statement as the dependent variable. TMC supporters are statistically more likely to agree with the statement (though only at the 90% confidence level), which is consistent with the mechanism we put forward. As with our other results, we do not find an effect for BJP partisans.

A.10 Partisanship versus winner-loser gap

The pre-analysis plan for this study included a discussion about the role of partisanship as related to winner/loser status.[4] There, we hypothesized that those exposed to

4. The anonymized pre-analysis plan is available below

Table A.9.1: DV=Violence justified

	1
TMC partisan	0.147^{+}
	(0.081)
BJP partisan	0.058
	(0.079)
Urban residency	0.072
	(0.106)
Medium education	-0.004
	(0.113)
High education	-0.156
	(0.133)
Muslim	-0.115
	(0.114)
Christian	0.212
	(0.319)
Other religion	-0.165
	(0.313)
Scheduled tribe	0.231^{+}
	(0.134)
Other backward classes	0.195
	(0.119)
Other caste	0.150
	(0.095)
Socio-econ. status	0.009
	(0.012)
Age	0.004
	(0.003)
Gender	-0.048
	(0.072)
Political knowledge	0.019
	(0.105)
Constant	1.571^{**}
	(0.315)
Observations	547
R^2	0.393
Adjusted R^2	0.333

Standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

violence committed by the losing party would view violence as instigated by sore losers and therefore reduce their perceptions of election quality. Our main results already present the direct effect of the partisan treatments, which show that those exposed to the TMC treatment as election losers did not lower their perceptions of election quality. Similarly, as the above section shows, we also do not find that supporters of winning and losing parties differ in their assessment of elections.

However, the federal nature of Indian politics makes the interpretation of winners and losers in the context of this election is more complex than we had anticipated and a thorough analysis would go beyond what is feasible in this manuscript. While the BJP won the election at the national level, and was largely seen as having won in West Bengal because it increased its seat share from 2 to 18, the TMC held on to the majority of seats in the state (22 of 42 seats). But in addition to national-and state-level evaluations, citizens may also or instead respond to winners and losers at the district-level. To examine the possibility that respondents evaluate winners and losers at the district level, we show results below in which we interact the perpetator party treatments with a variable coded 1 if the TMC or BJP respectively lost election in the relevant electoral district. The results in Table A.10.1 show no clear evidence of district-level effects. The coefficient for the TMC prime and district loser interaction is negative but not significant. Those exposed to the TMC prime in constituencies in which the TMC candidate lost are no less likely to evaluate elections as high-quality. For respondents exposed to the BJP treatment, we see that the interaction effects is negative and close to statistically significant at the 95% level (t=-1.75). This provides some indication that citizens in districts in which the BJP candidate lost evaluate elections somewhat more critically. Considering the complexities of evaluating winner-loser assessments in a federalist system, we have chosen to omit this empirical investigation from the main text, but still include it here.

Table A.10.1: District losers

	1	2	3	4
TMC violence	0.034	0.050		
	(0.097)	(0.098)		
District loser	0.010	-0.001	0.086	0.102
	(0.092)	(0.094)	(0.099)	(0.099)
TMC violence × District loser	-0.070	-0.045		
	(0.180)	(0.182)		
BJP violence			0.220*	0.197*
			(0.090)	(0.086)
BJP violence × District loser			-0.312	-0.325
			(0.188)	(0.186)
Urban residency		-0.126		-0.126
		(0.086)		(0.086)
Education medium		-0.005		0.000
		(0.079)		(0.079)
Education high		-0.090		-0.080
		(0.103)		(0.102)
Muslim		-0.261**		-0.255**
		(0.085)		(0.086)
Christian		-0.033		-0.063
		(0.272)		(0.266)
Other religion		0.367		0.339
		(0.239)		(0.240)
Scheduled tribes		0.098		0.106
		(0.096)		(0.096)
Other backward classes		0.096		0.092
		(0.091)		(0.091)
Other caste		-0.071		-0.072
		(0.081)		(0.081)
Socio-econ. status		-0.013		-0.014
		(0.010)		(0.010)
Age		0.004		0.004
		(0.002)		(0.002)
Gender		0.161**		0.154*
		(0.060)		(0.060)
Political knowledge		-0.081		-0.081
		(0.074)		(0.074)
Constant	2.730**	2.672**	2.601**	2.565**
	(0.212)	(0.281)	(0.220)	(0.287)
Constituency FE	yes	yes	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	935	886	935	886
R^2	0.296	0.340	0.299	0.343
Adjusted R^2	0.266	0.301	0.270	0.304

Robust standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

A.11 Alternative dependent variable

The pre-analysis plan mentions citizens' evaluations of the legitimacy of election results as a potential alternate dependent variable. Consistent with our preregistered hypotheses, we present results for citizens perceptions of elections as "free and fair" in the manuscript. This measure of election quality is also most often used in the literature. In table A.11.1, we show results using the alternative dependent variable.

We asked respondents whether violations of electoral quality were so significant that they challenged the legitimacy of the electoral result in terms of reflecting the will of the people in this state. This measure has some disadvantages, including asking respondents to make state-level evaluations in what was a national election, having a higher non-response rate (19% instead of 13% for our main DV), and being asked *after* the question on freeness and fairness. Results in table A.11.1 are much weaker than our main results.

A.12 Pre-Analysis Plan

The anonymized version of the pre-analysis plan is included below. We submitted the pre-analysis plan on September 20, 2019 and received the data from the survey organization on October 7, 2019.

How Electoral Violence and Partisanship Affect Perceptions of Electoral Integrity: A Post-Election Survey Experiment in West Bengal

Pre-Analysis Plan

Background

There is an emerging literature on the consequences of electoral violence for electoral outcomes (Hafner-Burton et al. 2018), participation (Bratton 2008; Burchard 2015; Collier and Vicente 2012; Höglund and Piyaranthne 2009; Trelles and Carreras 2012), and political attitudes (Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 2012; Höglund and Piyaranthne 2009; Söderström 2018). Results diverge, but most studies suggest that electoral violence is associated with negative legacies for the attitudes and behavior that provide micro-level underpinnings of democratic governance, including voter turnout (Bratton 2008, Höglund and Piyaranthne 2009, von Borzykowski, Kuhn, and Daxecker 2019), political knowledge (Söderström 2018), trust in state institutions (Linke 2013), support for democracy (Burchard 2015, von Borzykowski, Kuhn, and Daxecker 2019), and increased support for authoritarianism (von Borzykowski, Kuhn, and Daxecker 2019).

Prior work helps us understand aggregate effects of election violence on attitudes and behavior, but has not done so experimentally, and has paid relatively little attention to the role of political parties and partisanship. Our study explores whether partisanship structures heterogeneity in responses. The omission of parties and partisanship is surprising because parties function as crucial links between political elites and citizens. We argue that partisanship may be central to explain why citizens' responses to violence may not be uniform across individuals. Rather, the effect of violence may be shaped by partisan identities, as for example arguments on sore losers or motivated reasoning (e.g. Redlawsk 2002, Lodge and Taber 2013) would imply.

We design an experiment to empirically test expectations on how election violence and partisanship shapes perceptions of electoral integrity. Theories of public-opinion updating have rarely been tested outside industrialized, advanced democracies, making it important to examine whether they apply more broadly. The study also speaks to the broader debate about the political consequences of electoral violence. The experiment will be embedded in a post-election survey in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal, taking place after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The case is chosen strategically. Elections in West Bengal were marred by violence through all stages of the electoral process and continued for weeks after the voting. Violence involved clashes between party supporters, attacks organized by parties against opposing party workers and candidates, vandalism, and preventing people from voting.

The survey received ethics approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, Dnr: 2019-02283, 2019-05-06. The study is pre-registered prior to researcher access to outcome data.

Hypotheses

We examine the effects of election violence and partisanship on perceptions of electoral integrity. We design a survey experiment to empirically examine several hypotheses. We first assess whether respondents exposed to information about a violent event have lower perceptions of electoral integrity than those receiving neutral information about the election. Others have established that election violence has detrimental effects for turnout and wide range of political attitudes (Burchard 2015; von Borzyskowski, Kuhn, and Daxecker 2019;

Söderström 2018). Unlike prior work, we are able to randomly assign respondents to control and treatment groups exposed to information about violence during elections.

Hypothesis 1: Respondents exposed to information about election violence are less likely to describe elections as free and fair than the control group.

We next assess whether and how the partisan identity of the alleged perpetrator of election violence influences citizens' responses to information about electoral violence. We examine how the win/loss status of the perpetrator influences citizens' responses to information about electoral violence. Our rationale is that respondents will see losing candidates as "sore losers" who may be instigating violence to protest election outcomes. We thus expect that respondents exposed to information implicating the losing party in election violence have lower perceptions of electoral integrity than those receiving information implicating the winning party or those receiving neutral information about the election. The hypotheses is stated below:

Hypothesis 2: Respondents exposed to information identifying the losing party as the alleged perpetrator of election violence in the treatment are less likely to describe elections as free and fair than respondents in other treatment groups or the control group.

We then examine how respondents' partisanship and vote choice conditions their perceptions of the electoral process. Understanding perceptions is important for interpreting the effects of violence on attitudes, particularly if such perceptions are shaped not just by objective information about violence, but also by biases or misinformation. The literature on political violence generally assumes that citizens update their perceptions of events in objective and unbiased ways, implying that perceptions are factual interpretations of events corresponding to the rational updating model (Gerber and Green 1999). However, recent research demonstrates that citizens' beliefs about what happens in conflict often diverge wildly from the "facts on the ground" and are subject to partisan biases (Silverman 2018). Building on work on motivated reasoning (e.g. Redlawsk 2002, Lodge and Taber 2013), we argue that partisanship structures how individuals interpret violent events, predicting that citizens disregard information that contradicts their beliefs, while accepting information confirming them.

Hypothesis 3: Respondents (not) supporting the party identified as the alleged perpetrator of election violence in the treatment are (less) more likely to describe elections as free and fair than the control group.

Experimental design

The hypotheses will be tested in a survey experiment embedded in a survey of 1080 respondents following the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal. In the experiment, the respondents were randomly assigned to a control group, or one of two treatment groups, all of equal size (yielding 360 respondents per group). The assignment to the experimental condition was done at the level of the individual, while maintaining a gender split across the entire sample by blocking on gender at the PSU level.

The control group received a neutral vignette without an experimental prime, simply reminding people about the past election. The two control groups, in addition to the neutral vignette, also received an experimental prime describing an incidence of electoral violence taking place during the campaign. Across the two treatment conditions the alleged political party instigating the incidence differed. The event description was fictional, but closely resembled events described in actual newspaper reporting of violent events in West Bengal before the 2019

elections, both to enhance the credibility of the prime, as well as for ethical considerations.[1] Specifically, the vignette describes an attack against a polling agent, but randomly varies the partisan identity of the perpetrator. Similar events involving both treatments can be found in news articles. After being presented with the vignette, citizens indicate how they perceive the integrity and legitimacy of the electoral process, which is our dependent variable. We include the vignette wording for the control group and the two treatment groups below.

Control group:
As you know, the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections just concluded. In West Bengal, elections involved a race between prime minister Narendra Modi's BJP, the Congress party (INC), the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Communist Party of India (CPI(M)).

Treatment A:
As you know, the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections just concluded. In West Bengal, elections saw a race between prime minister Narendra Modi's BJP, the Congress party (INC), the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Communist Party of India (CPI(M)).

During the elections, violence between parties and their supporters broke out in different parts of West Bengal. In the wake of violence, security force presence in the area doubled and the Election Commission ordered campaigning to be cut short by one day. Nevertheless, polling agents were beaten up and thrown outside polling booths on polling day, allegedly by **TMC** party workers.

Treatment B:
As you know, the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections just concluded. In West Bengal, elections involved a race between prime minister Narendra Modi's BJP, the Congress party (INC), the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Communist Party of India (CPI(M)).

During the elections, violence between parties and their supporters broke out in different parts of West Bengal. In the wake of violence, security force presence in the area doubled and the Election Commission ordered campaigning to be cut short by one day. Nevertheless, polling agents were beaten up and thrown outside polling booths on polling day, allegedly by **BJP** party workers.

Sampling
The survey is carried out in collaboration with Lokniti, a survey research organization of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) located in Delhi, India.[2] We survey a representative sample of the West Bengal population, based on information from the 2011 census. In West Bengal we select 10 districts based on PPS sampling, and within each of these we sample 9 locations (villages in rural areas, and wards in urban areas) based on PPS and blocking on urban/ rural location. Within each location, we select households based on a random walk procedure, and randomly select individuals within households (with pre-assigned gender to attain 50/50 gender balance across the sample). Respondents are limited to adults, 18 years of age and older. Before presenting the experimental manipulation, we ask respondents about their degree of trust in authority figures, their political attitudes and political engagement,

[1] All respondents were debriefed about the fictional character of the report at the end of the survey.
[2] The West-Bengal study is part of a larger survey project fielded across 3 states in Eastern India, where we examine how political violence influence political attitudes. The survey in West Bengal is designed separate from the other parts, although several background questions overlap.

as well as demographic characteristics. The survey is paper-based and conducted in Hindi or the local language preferred by the respondent.

Analysis

The dependent variable in this experiment is citizens' assessment of electoral integrity, while the randomized treatment conditions - the independent variables – are exposure to the vignette (H1) and variation in the alleged partisan identity of the perpetrators of electoral violence &H2&H3). To examine H3 about heterogenous treatment effects based on respondent partisanship, we interact our treatment condition with a variable measuring partisanship.

To assess respondents' perceptions of electoral integrity (our dependent variable) we rely on the following questions:

1) How would you rate the legitimacy of the 2019 Lok Sabha electoral outcome in West Bengal in terms of reflecting the will of the people in this state? The response options provided were: Not at all legitimate. Not too legitimate. Somewhat legitimate. Completely legitimate. In addition, the questionnaire also contained a "Do not know" and a "Refused" option, which the enumerator does not read out.

2) On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the Lok Sabha elections? Do you think they were completely free and fair, free and fair but with minor problems, free and fair but with major problems, or not free and fair?

As a manipulation check, we ask respondents which party allegedly engaged in violence in the report they just heard.

In addition to the experiment, the survey included a battery of pretreatment questions about respondents' political attitudes for use as moderators of the treatment effects. The pretreatment political questions are fairly generic in nature so as not to artificially elicit views toward the parties and thus constrain reactions to the treatment vignette via a consistency bias mechanism.

To measure our conditioning variable, partisanship, we include specific questions on partisan affiliation and vote choice in the past Lok Sabha election. To indicate partisanship and vote choice, respondents were handed a paper listing all parties with symbols, marked their choice, and deposited the paper in a small box provided by the enumerator.

We will test our hypotheses empirically within a regression framework, regressing our outcome variable (electoral integrity) on our binary treatment variable (electoral violence) for H1. We interact the treatment variable with partisanship (alongside the constituent terms) to test H2. We will analyze each question for the outcome variable separately, as alternative operationalizations of our dependent variable. Also the two different measures of partisanships (affiliation and vote choice) will be explored as alternative measures. To ensure that treatment assignment is indeed random, we will conduct balance tests on a set of key demographic covariates, including age, gender, education and socio-economic status. We will test all hypotheses both with, and without these covariates as controls. We will also explore other heterogenous treatment effects, besides partisanship, in this study.

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Table A.11.1: Perceptions of legitimacy

	1 OLS	2 OLS
TMC violence	0.075 (0.098)	0.080 (0.100)
TMC partisan	-0.072 (0.091)	-0.064 (0.090)
TMC violence × TMC partisan	0.041 (0.163)	0.032 (0.161)
BJP violence	0.087 (0.103)	-0.004 (0.102)
BJP partisan	0.078 (0.089)	0.076 (0.092)
BJP violence × BJP partisan	-0.095 (0.145)	0.035 (0.144)
Urban residency		-0.273** (0.100)
Education medium		0.045 (0.092)
Education high		0.040 (0.122)
Muslim		-0.227* (0.108)
Christian		-0.228 (0.235)
Other religion		-0.211 (0.217)
Scheduled tribes		0.033 (0.114)
Other backward classes		0.155 (0.115)
Other caste		-0.009 (0.102)
Socio-econ. status		0.015 (0.013)
Age		-0.001 (0.003)
Gender		0.115 (0.071)
Political knowledge		-0.128 (0.091)
Constant	2.614** (0.239)	2.860** (0.327)
Constituency FE	yes	yes
Enumerator FE	yes	yes
Observations	694	650
R^2	0.262	0.301
Adjusted R^2	0.216	0.239

Robust standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

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