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"Violent Punjab, Quiescent Bengal, and the Partition of India"

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INTRODUCTION

Partition is back on the global agenda as a solution to ethnic conflicts. South Sudan, the world's newest state was born after the partition of Sudan in 2011. Partition has also been proposed as a solution to the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. However, there is no consensus in the extant literature on partition as a viable solution to avert large-scale violence and displacement of peoples.[1] What can the partition of India contribute to this debate? In attempting to answer this question, this paper seeks to explain why the Punjab bore the brunt of the mass violence and mass migration accompanying India's partition while Bengal remained relatively quiescent as it too was partitioned.

This paper looks at three different theoretical explanations - Synder and Ballentine's argument about democratization, nationalism, and ideas; Fearon's commitment problem; and Posen's ethnic security dilemma - to account for the different outcomes in the Punjab and Bengal in 1946-47.[2] In contrast to traditional social-scientific analyses that choose one explanation from among competing explanations, this paper argues for "analytical eclecticism".[3] It will be shown that each explanation accounts for the migration and violence in the Punjab (and its relative absence in Bengal) during the different stages leading to the end of British colonial rule. The interplay of politics at the provincial and national levels, the competing ideas of post-independence states, and the militarization of Punjabi society (but not Bengali society) resulting from British Indian army recruitment policies explain the differences between the two cases.

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[1] Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20:4 (1996): 136-175 and "When All Else Fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Centuries," *International Security* 23:2 (1998): 120-156; and Nicholas Sambanis, "Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature," *World Politics* 52:4 (2000): 437-483.

[2] Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security* 21:2 (1996): 5-40; James Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," presented at the 1994 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, New York, 30 August-2 September 1994; James Fearon, "Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in David Lake and Donald Rothchild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 107-126; and Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35:1 (1993): 27-47.

[3] Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Analytical Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms across Research Traditions," *Perspectives on Politics* 8:2 (2010): 411-431.

The next section of this paper will explain this work's theoretical approach. This will be followed by brief discussion of the literature on the violence of the partition of India, thus highlighting the dearth of social-scientific research comparing the Punjab and Bengal. The subsequent section will provide an overview of the politics of the partition of India with emphasis on two factors - religion and region. More specifically, it will be shown how demand for creation of an independent Pakistan eventually led to demand for division of the Punjab and Bengal. Next, this paper will demonstrate how the three different explanations for ethnic violence explain the different stages of the violence accompanying the partition of India. A complete understanding of Punjabi violence and mass migration is impossible without comprehending this sequence and its comparison with how these processes unfolded in Bengal.

THEORIES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

Study of ethnic conflict has come a long way since Horowitz's pioneering work.[4] There are three major approaches to the study of ethnic conflict today: constructivist, rationalist, and structuralist.[5] However, there is no consensus on the causes of ethnic conflict. While constructivist arguments have been able to explain the emergence of ethnic identities, they have only had modest success in explaining the onset of ethnic conflicts. Similarly, while rationalists provide explanations in the context of institutional collapse, they have been less successful in explaining how ethnic leaders resolve the collective action problem of mass mobilization. Finally, while structuralists explain how the inter-ethnic security dilemma causes conflict, it remains unclear whether this security dilemma causes anarchy or if it is the emergent anarchy that leads to this security dilemma in the first place.

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[4] Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
[5] Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 274-294. Sometimes "primordialism" is included as a fourth approach, but it is generally believed that it cannot provide an explanation by itself. Stephen Van Evera, "Primordialism Lives!" *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 12:1 (2001): 20-22.

All three approaches have made significant contributions to the literature on ethnic conflict.[6] For example, constructivist scholars have shown how group myths, symbols, and chauvinistic mobilization cause ethnic conflict.[7] Similarly, rationalist scholars have focused on the bargaining processes between ethnic groups and state institutions to explain conditions under which certain groups radicalize their claims.[8] Finally, structuralists have explained that the ethnic security dilemma causes violence because of misperceptions and therefore constitutes a tragedy.[9] Despite this body of scholarship, there is a realization that there may be numerous paths to ethnic conflict for two main reasons. Firstly, "ethnic conflict" is an umbrella term referring to different types of violence from small-scale riots to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Secondly, the actors involved in these conflicts vary. At times the violence involves state actors and at times no state actors are involved at all.

It has been argued therefore that the major cases of "ethnic and nationalist violence are large events" that are "composite and causally heterogeneous, consisting not of an assemblage of causally identical unit instances of ethnic violence but of a number of different types of actions, processes, occurrences, and events."[10] Thus, the way forward is "problem and puzzle driven" research that makes use of "mixed approaches."[11] The aim of such research is not to provide a grand theory of ethnic violence. Indeed, the focus here is on "mid-range theorizing"[12] that emphasizes causal mechanisms by comparing similar cases with differential outcomes. This is the approach that will be followed in this paper.

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[6] Notable recent works include Kanchan Chandra, ed., *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rui de Figueiredo Jr. and Barry Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in Barbara Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 261-302; and Julian Wucherpfennig, "Bargaining, Power, and Ethnic Conflict," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Swiss Political Science Association, Geneva, 7-8 January 2010.

[7] Stuart Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[8] Erin Jenne, *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[9] Paul Roe, "The Intrastate Security Dilemma: Ethnic Conflict as a 'Tragedy'?," *Journal of Peace Research* 36:2 (1999): 183-202;

[10] Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 423-452 (446).

[11] Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 292.

[12] Chaim Kaufmann, "Rational Choice and Progress in the Study of Ethnic Conflict: A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 14:1 (2005): 207 (178-207).

Importantly, the three arguments discussed in this paper do not neatly map onto the three overarching categories - constructivist, rationalist, and structuralist. For example, while Synder/Ballentine draw on aspects of constructivism, they do not self-describe as constructivists and are eclectic and contextual in their approach. Similarly, Fearon's rationalist commitment problem centered on institutional collapse blends into Posen's security dilemma because their arguments of inter-group fear in this context are essintily the same.[13]

While all three explanations have limitations and their shortcomings are subsequently discussed, their central arguments still hold. Together they provide a powerful explanation for the emergence of ethnic conflict. This "analytically eclectic" approach offers "complex" causal mechanisms that fit "real world" situations in the Punjab and Bengal of 1946-47. Instead of arguing that everything mattered - democratization, religious nationalism and mobilization, the absence of a neutral state, and the breakdown of the state apparatus itself - this paper will demonstrate *how* these factors interacted with one another during the different stages in the run-up to the partition of India to explain the differential levels of violence and migration in the Punjab and Bengal.[14]

THE VIOLENCE OF PARTITION IN THE EXTANT LITERATURE

The end of the British Raj in India in August 1947 was accompanied by the partition of the subcontinent into two independent dominions - India and Pakistan. The division of the subcontinent also included the division of two provinces - the Punjab and Bengal. The bulk of the provinces of the erstwhile Raj stayed with India. Pakistan included the Muslim-majority regions of northwestern (the Northwest Frontier Province, Baluchistan, Sindh, and

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[13] We are grateful to Jack Snyder for pointing this out to us.
[14] For recent examples of eclectic approach, see Kanchan Chandra, "Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability, and Social Choice Theory," *Politics & Society* 29:3 (2001): 337-362; and Daniel Posner *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

the western part of the Punjab) and northeastern (eastern part of Bengal and the Sylhet region of Assam) India.[15] While the human tragedy accompanying the partition of the subcontinent is impossible to calculate with exact precision, it is claimed that anywhere between 200,000 and 2,000,000 lives were lost as a result of the bloody 'communal' violence of massacres, arson, rape, and loot, between the Muslims and non-Muslims (the Hindus and the Sikhs) of British India. At the same time, up to 12 million people are believed to have crossed the new borders between India and Pakistan, with many millions of Muslims of the subcontinent crossing over into Pakistan, and the Hindus and the Sikhs moving in the opposite direction into India. This movement led to the largest displacement of populations in world history.[16]

The Punjab bore the brunt of this mass violence and migration. Close to four-and-a-half million Hindus and Sikhs moved from the western regions to east Punjab and approximately five million Muslims moved in the opposite direction. Anywhere between 180,000 and 500,000 Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs perished in the Punjab during this migration and the accompanying atrocities.[17] As a consequence of this violence and exodus, the Hindus and Sikhs virtually disappeared from western Punjab. Similarly, there were almost no Muslims left in eastern Punjab after September 1947. On the other hand, Bengal, which was also administratively and politically divided between India and Pakistan, appeared relatively calm. Only 344,000 Bengali Hindus moved into western Bengal in 1947, followed by a million more in the following two years.[18] On the other hand, it took approximately two decades for a million-and-a-half Muslims to migrate from western Bengal (and other nearby

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[15] Most of the 562 princely states of the subcontinent merged with India.

[16] "The End of the British Empire in India," in Claude Markovits, ed., *A History of Modern India, 1480-1950* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 468-491; and Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, and Political Economy* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004): 135-166.

[17] Swarna Aiyar, "'August Anarchy': The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947," in D. A. Low and Howard Brasted, eds., *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), 15 (15-38).

[18] Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India, 1947-79," in Low and Brasted, *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities*, 107-109 (105-131).

provinces) into eastern Bengal.[19]   Unlike the Punjab, the partition of Bengal left western Bengal with approximately seventeen percent Muslims, while Hindus constituted twenty-seven percent of the total population in eastern Bengal immediately after the partition. The violence perpetrated in Bengal was also on a much smaller scale when compared to the Punjab, and most of the Hindu "refugees" from eastern Bengal moved into India "driven less by massacres as by latent hostility."[20]

Until the 1970s, the historiography of partition focused on "high politics" to explain the events that led to the partition. Though always acknowledged, the human tragedy of mass violence and migration that came along with the partition was never seriously studied. The rise of religious nationalism in the subcontinent from the 1980s onwards brought renewed historiographical attention on the violence of the partition.[21] However, the dominant theme in literature on the violence of the partition has long emphasized that it was the result of "spontaneous" activities of mobs in the grips of the "temporary madness" in August 1947.[22]

While it is now widely recognized that state actors were involved in the violence of the partition as there is clear evidence of political organization and planning for it, historians – not political scientists – have led this research.[23] The most important finding to emerge from this historical literature is that the violence of partition began with the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946 and finally culminated in the August-September 1947 violence in the Punjab, although small-scale hostilities continued until the end of the year.[24] There has been only one attempt by a political scientist, Paul Brass, to explain this violence.[25]

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[19] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105-106.

[20] "The End of the British Empire in India," 488.

[21] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[22] Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma, "Remembering Partition," *Seminar* (January 1998): 71-74.

[23] Ian Talbot, ed., *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[24] Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60-89.

[25] Paul R. Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946-47: Means, Methods, and Purposes," *Journal of Genocide Research* Volume 5, Number 1 (2003): 71-101. An important article by Saumitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson analyzes the impact of combat experience during WWII on ethnic cleansing during the

However, Brass's research focuses exclusively on the Punjab, and in fact, political science literature on the violence of the partition is without any comparative analysis that explains the divergent outcomes in the Punjab and Bengal.

To explain the events in the Punjab, Brass moves across four levels: national, regional, local and individual. At the national level, Brass discusses the "high politics" of the partition. At the regional level, Brass analyzes the activities of the Sikh leaders and gangs to explain the violence and argues that it was "largely but not exclusively" a consequence of "their efforts".[26] At the local level, Brass highlights the activities of the Muslim, Hindu, and the Sikh gangs. Finally, at the individual level, he argues that violence was a result of ethno-religious and "personal" causes.

There are several shortcomings in Brass's analysis. By focusing only on the Punjab, Brass is unable to account for the markedly different outcome in Bengal. Additionally, Brass contradicts himself by blaming the Sikhs at the regional level while claiming that the gangs of all three of Punjab's major communities - the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Sikhs - committed violence at the local level. In his study, Brass emphasizes the activities of the leaders of Akali Dal (the main Sikh political party in the Punjab), and claims that Sikhs were alone among the three communities of the Punjab to plan for an organized campaign of violence. In fact, Brass quotes a personal interview with the Akali leader Tara Singh who claimed that the Sikhs had taken the decision to turn Muslims out of east Punjab so that Sikhs (from west Punjab) could occupy their lands.[27]

While there is no doubt that Sikhs had made such bold claims at the time of the partition, it has been argued that even at the beginning of August 1947, "the eviction of east Punjab Muslims to make room for incoming Sikhs, belonged more to the realm of wishful thinking

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partition. However, this quantitative study focuses on explaining the divergence across the different districts at the all-India level and does not compare the Punjab and Bengal. See "Does Combat Experience Foster Organizational Skill? Evidence from Ethnic Cleansing during the Partition of South Asia," *American Political Science Review* 106:4 (2012): 883-907.

[26] Brass, "The Partition of India," 82.

[27] Brass, "The Partition of India," 77.

than grand strategic design."[28] At the same time, other scholars have shown that the leaders of the other communities were also preparing for a violent showdown. According to Pandey, the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha (the leading Hindu nationalist political party) were calling for a "programme of war" against the Muslims, while the leaders of the Muslim League National Guard (a Muslim paramilitary organization) were also expressing their determination to eliminate all Hindus and Sikhs.[29] Although Sikhs did initiate the major instances of violence in August 1947 in parts of eastern Punjab, large-scale ethnic violence in the Punjab began in March 1947 and was in fact initiated by Muslims. Therefore, Ahmed challenges "Paul Brass' assertion" that Sikhs in the eastern Punjab were the first to initiate violence against the Muslims because it "does not have support in the statements of the leading Muslims who were personally involved in the negotiations on the division of Punjab."[30]

Given these claims and counter-claims, the aim of this research is to theoretically explain how the sequence of events unfolded in the run-up to the partition of India beginning with the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946. It will be argued that all three of Punjab's major communities were equally culpable for their inflammatory rhetoric and equally share the blame for the violence of the partition even as specific actions may have been undertaken by particular communities in the ethno-religiously charged atmosphere that accompanied partition. However, a brief discussion of the "high politics" of the partition at the national and the provincial levels (in the Punjab and Bengal) is in order first.

RELIGION AND REGION IN INDIAN AND PAKISTANI NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

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[28] Robin Jeffrey, "The Punjab Boundary Force and the Problem of Order, August 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 8:4 (1974): 491-520 (519).
[29] Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 34, 35.
[30] Ishtiaq Ahmed, "Forced Migrations and Ethnic Cleansing in Lahore in 1947: Some First Person Accounts," in Ian Talbot and Shinder Thandi, eds., *People on the Move: Punjabi Colonial and Post-Colonial Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 157-158.

"Hindu", "Muslim", and "Sikh" identities co-evolved with the growth of nationalism in India. None of these identities is monolithic, and there is considerable socio-cultural overlap amongst them in the subcontinent. The aim of this section is to explain that Hindu-Muslim and Sikh-Muslim identities were not "primordial antagonisms." This section will demonstrate that the co-evolution of religious identities together with Indian and Pakistani nationalist movements, and the simultaneous democratization - however uneven - at the provincial level in British India gave rise to the demand for partition by a large portion of the subcontinent's Muslims, especially elite Muslims, under the leadership of the Muslim League. This demand for a separate state for the Muslims of the subcontinent co-evolved with the demand for the partition of the Punjab and Bengal by the Sikh and Hindu leaders of these provinces who wanted to escape Muslim political dominance at the provincial level.

Religion and Nationalism

The genesis and growth of nationalism(s) in British India was linked with the creation of a bureaucratic state in the subcontinent after the 1857 Indian Uprising.[31] For legal and administrative purposes, the British had classified the population of the subcontinent into religious and caste-based categories in the first census of 1872. This gave rise to a very diffuse sense of "belonging to a pan-Indian Hindu community" among the educated elite from the upper castes of the Hindu society.[32] At the same time, the British (and Christian) criticisms of the putative evils of the Hindu society like child marriage and the practice of *sati* gave rise to various socio-legal religious reform movements. Similar phenomena also started occurring in the subcontinent's Muslim and Sikh communities.[33] These developments gave rise to religious identities in the self-identification of groups at the politico-legal level in British India. Notably, the legal-services were one of the few

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[31] Sumit Sarkar, "Nationalisms in India," in Douglas Peers and Nandini Gooptu, eds., *India and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[32] Markovits, *A History of Modern India*, 354.
[33] Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

professions where the Indians could find employment in the bureaucratic apparatus of the Raj.

An added dimension that brought religion to the fore in the self-identification of the Hindu elite of India was the "recovery" of India's "glorious" past before the start of the Muslim invasions and conquests from the late 10th century onwards. Along with western orientalist scholarship, some of India's emerging Hindu elites began to claim this past for "Hindu India".[34] In turn, this heightened the sense of India's Muslim elites, especially amongst those from the Gangetic plains, of their privileged position as ruler-administrators of different parts of the subcontinent for at least five centuries before British colonialism.[35] This is not to say that religious self-identification led to the creation of mutually hostile and monolithic ethnic groups. Instead, what is being emphasized is that religion and religious self-identification started playing an important role in the self-identification of the subcontinent's Hindu and Muslim elites. These religious identities also began playing an important role during the democratization of British India at the local and provincial-levels.

The religious factor exhibited its divisive potential even before the Indian National Congress (INC) - the umbrella organization that led India's freedom movement - was created in 1885. As early as the 1870s, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the noted Indian Muslim intellectual-jurist began promoting Muslim modernization "to resist the encroachment of Christian missionaries and the larger Hindu community of the subcontinent."[36] When the Indian Association, an elite political organization that was formed by some prominent Hindus in Bengal in 1876, began demanding elections at the local/municipal level, the British anticipated Muslim discontent. Consequently, the British implemented "reforms" in 1882-83 that granted separate electorates to the Hindus and the Muslims at the local level.[37] In

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[34] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23-65.

[35] "Nationalism Without a Nation: Pakistan Searching for its Identity," in Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 7-47 (9).

[36] Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25.

[37] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 138.

1888, Sir Syed called on the Muslims to avoid joining hands with the INC and said, "[I]f we [Muslims] join the political movement of the Bengalis [Hindus], our nation will reap loss, for we [the Muslims] do not want to become the subjects of the Hindus."[38] Implicit in Sir Syed's statements was fear of the loss of Muslim political power were India to democratize as the census showed that the Hindu community was thrice as large as the Muslim community in undivided India.

The INC drew its support primarily from the upper-caste, liberal, and secular Hindu-elite even as it claimed to represent all of India, including the Muslims. Muslim Congressmen accounted for less than 7% of the total number of delegates who took part in the annual sessions of the INC before 1906.[39] Fearing that the Congress was dominated by the Hindus, the Muslim elite created the Muslim League as a counterweight to the INC in 1906. Both parties were dominated by elite groups in these early years when reforms at local and provincial levels (and opportunities for Indians in the colonial state apparatus) dominated their political agenda. In 1909, the British extended the principle of elections to the provincial legislatures (albeit for a limited number of seats), but continued with separate electorates for the Hindus and the Muslims.

These three events - the institutionalization of separate electorates for Hindus and the Muslims of the subcontinent, the creation of the INC as a pan-Indian secular party led by upper-caste Hindus, and the creation of the Muslim League to represent elite Muslim interests - sowed serious political discord between Hindus and the Muslims. The 1919 Government of India Act retained separate electorates for Hindus and the Muslims even as there was a limited increase in provincial autonomy. "[H]aving to only get the votes of their co-religionists, Hindu and Muslim politicians tended to emphasize what divided rather than

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[38] Satinder Kumar, *Educational Philosophy in Modern India* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2000), 60.
[39] Jaffrelot, "Nationalism Without a Nation," 9.

what united the two communities."[40] A new Government of India Act of 1935 increased the autonomy of the provinces even further but continued to maintain separate electorates.[41]

As the nationalist movements gained momentum, differences between the demands of the League whom the British regarded as representing the interests of all of India's Muslims, the INC that was believed by the League to represent only Hindu interests, the monarchs of the princely states, and the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha's resistance in granting any special privileges to the subcontinent's Muslims in an undivided independent India, all frustrated any attempts at a unitary federal power-sharing arrangement. In the 1940 Lahore Resolution of the League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the League's leader opposed independence for India if it resulted in a representative government in the subcontinent. Jinnah famously stated that "Muslim India cannot accept any constitution which must necessarily result in a Hindu majority government."[42]   For Jinnah, a representative government would have meant "Hindu Raj" as the Hindus outnumbered the Muslims by a factor of three.

Region/Province and Nationalism

The transformation of the INC into a mass political movement and the limited base of the League were most dramatically highlighted during the 1937 provincial elections. The INC emerged victorious in six of the provinces - Madras, Bihar, Orissa, the Central Provinces, the United Provinces, and Bombay - and formed the provincial governments there. The INC was also able to form coalition governments, together with provincial parties, in two other provinces - the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Assam. Both the INC and the League lost in the three provinces with Muslim majorities - Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh -

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[40] Markovits, *A History*, 372.

[41] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History*, 123-202.

[42] "Presidential address by Muhammad Ali Jinnah to the Muslim League, Lahore, 1940," available at http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_lahore_1940.html (Accessed on 11 March 2014).

where provincial parties came to power.[43] These elections highlighted the regional dimension of nationalism by showing that there was a difference between the interests of the Muslims of the Gangetic plains (in the provinces where they formed a minority) and the Muslims of the Muslim-majority provinces whose interests were more local, even as both groups favored the transfer of power from the British to the Indians.[44]

The Muslims of the Muslim-majority provinces demanded full provincial autonomy. However, this demand was at odds with Muslims of the Muslim-minority provinces from where the League drew its support as it would have subjected them to "Hindu Raj". In order to circumvent this problem, the League emphasized that India's Muslims were not a minority but a "nation" in its 1940 Lahore Resolution. According to Jinnah, Muslims were "not a minority," but "a nation by any definition" and therefore could not be expected to be governed together with the Hindus by the "unnatural and artificial methods of British Parliamentary statutes."[45]   In 1940, the League specifically asked for Muslim-majority regions of northwestern and northeastern India to be grouped to constitute "independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."[46]

The deliberately vague wording of this statement was a political strategy fraught with consequences. The League had not yet called for a partition although the popular press had dubbed it as the demand for Pakistan. The League was actually calling for an equal power-sharing arrangement with the INC across India. This rationale of *parity* between Hindus and Muslims lay behind the League's demands which could not be fulfilled by a representative government. However, the textual ambiguity of the declaration kept open the option of an all-India federation, as well as that of secession. By calling for the creation of "independent

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[43] Bimal Prasad, "Congress versus the Muslim League, 1935-1937," in Sisson and Wolpert, *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, 305-329.
[44] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 143-144.
[45] "Presidential address by Muhammad Ali Jinnah."
[46] Quoted in Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16.

States" for Muslims, the League also indicated its willingness to have more than one Muslim state in the subcontinent.

The Run-Up to Independence

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 was the exogenous shock that changed the fortunes of the Muslim League. The INC was upset that the British had committed India to the war without consulting the Indian leadership. They demanded complete independence immediately as their condition to support the allied war effort. The Quit India Movement of August 1942 launched by the INC received a decisive blow from the British as the entire senior INC leadership was arrested and remained incarcerated during the war.[47]

In the meanwhile, while claiming to speak for all of India's Muslims, the League contested the INC's claim to speak for all of India, and decided to support the war effort in order to curry favor with the British. Under the League's orders, India's Muslims did not participate in the Quit India Movement.[48] The League not only benefitted from the fact the INC ministers had resigned in 1939 and were now incarcerated, but it also electrified the Muslims of the subcontinent with the idea of Pakistan. The League used the war years to champion the cause of Pakistan - whose exact meaning and geographical boundaries were still uncertain - and argued that the "Hindu Congress" was putting "Islam in danger."[49]

This strategy worked and the League witnessed a dramatic reversal of fortune in the 1945-46 elections - the last set of elections in British India. The League won 86.6% of all Muslim votes for the central assembly and 75% of the Muslim votes at the provincial assembly elections.[50] The INC performed as it had in previous elections but failed to make inroads in

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[47] Francis Hutchins, *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[48] D. A. Low, "Introduction: Provincial Histories and the History of Pakistan," in D. A. Low, ed., *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991): 1-28 (10).

[49] Jaffrelot, "Nationalism Without a Nation," 13.

[50] Markovits, *A History*, 475; and Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 148.

the Muslim-majority provinces with the exception of the NWFP where it won a slight majority. In spite of the League's overall success, it was only able to form provincial governments in two Muslim-majority provinces - Bengal and Sindh.[51] Meanwhile, the British Cabinet Mission arrived in India in 1946 to discuss the structure of the government of independent India and that of the interim government during the transition period. However, the INC and the League could not come to an agreement and the Cabinet Mission failed.

Independence, Partition, and the Provinces

Unhappy that the League's demands had not been met by the British, Jinnah called for "direct action to achieve Pakistan". In July 1946, he called on the League to say "good-bye to constitutional methods," stating that the League had "forged a pistol," and was "in a position to use it."[52] Jinnah may not have intended to use violence despite his inflammatory remarks, as argued by Jalal.[53]   Khan, however, has argued that what direct action meant "was wide open to speculation and distortion."[54] Matters spun out of control on Direct Action Day, 16 August 1946, in Calcutta where Muslim gangs first attacked Hindus, and violence spiraled out-of-control in an action-reaction cycle that claimed anywhere between 5,000 and 10,000 lives. Soon violence also broke out in eastern Bengal where Muslim peasants attacked their Hindu landlords.[55] In retaliation, Hindu mobs initiated attacks on the Muslim minority in Bihar in October 1946 and the following months saw close to 20,000 dead in communal violence across Gangetic India.[56] Tens of thousands of Hindus and

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[51] Sho Kuwajima, *Muslims, Nationalism and the Partition: 1946 Provisional Elections in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998).

[52] "Moslem League Withdraws," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 July 1946.

[53] Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 216.

[54] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 64.

[55] Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 97-111.

[56] Markovits, *A History*.

Muslims were displaced as a consequence of this violence, and many trickled into the Punjab with their tales of mob attacks.

Meanwhile, tensions rose in the NWFP where the INC had formed a government with the *Khudai Khidmatgar*, a provincial political party. In December 1946, Muslim tribesmen in the Hazara district of this province attacked Hindu and Sikh minorities in retaliation for Hindu atrocities in the Gangetic plains that led to bloodshed and a large exodus of these communities to Rawalpindi in the Punjab. At the same time, the League launched a "direct action" in the NWFP as it was unhappy at its inability to form the government in this Muslim-majority province as independence approached. While these campaigns were directed under the leadership of the provincial League (as opposed to the all-India League), no reassurances were provided to the minority communities.[57] The resort to civic disorder and communal violence by the League in an attempt to capture power at the provincial level in NWFP did not portend well for the Punjab where a similar campaign was also launched at more or less the same time (again by the provincial League).

The situation in the Punjab, without which no idea of Pakistan was viable, proved to be the trickiest and culminated in mass violence and mass migration. Even though the League had won the largest number of votes in the Punjab, it missed winning a simple majority. The Unionist Party - a predominantly Muslim party representing the interests of the agriculturalists of that province - formed a coalition government with the INC and the Akali Dal under the leadership of the Khizar Hayat Khan. Islam and Pakistan had been the rallying cry for the League during the 1946 elections in the Punjab,[58] and consequently, the Hindus and the Sikhs were determined not to the let the League form the government. The steady trickle of Hindu and Sikh refugees from the NWFP and of Muslim refugees from Bihar and the United Provinces were already creating local tensions in the Punjab.

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[57] Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22-23.

[58] David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 189-224.

To show that they were still in-charge, the coalition government of the Unionists banned both the Hindu and Muslim paramilitary organizations - the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and the Muslim League National Guards (MLNG) - in January 1947. These organizations had begun arming themselves several months prior in the increasingly communal atmosphere of 1946. Consequently, the League's protest and "direct action" became so intense that this ban was withdrawn in just four days.[59] However, the League's "direct action" continued and led to the collapse of the provincial government after Khizar resigned in March 1947. The Hindus and Sikhs staged counter-demonstrations soon thereafter. The radical leader of the Sikhs, Tara Singh, called on the Sikhs to "[f]inish the Muslim League" in explicitly militant language.[60] Meanwhile, the Punjab passed under the rule of the British Governor of that province, and the League was unable to form the government.

In March 1947, the British announced the complete transfer of power by June 1948 (a date chosen hastily and arbitrarily). The Hindu Mahasabha in the Punjab immediately demanded the partition of the province (into Muslim and non-Muslim-majority regions).[61] Meanwhile, agitated by the bellicosity of the Tara Singh, many Muslim gangs (led by the provincial League), organized a vicious campaign of slaughter of Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore and other parts of the Punjab.[62] This led to demand for partition of the province by the Sikhs. Nehru echoed this demand on 8 March 1947 and added that Bengal might also have to be partitioned.[63]

By this time, the INC had become convinced that reconciliation with the League on a federal structure for a unified India was impossible. The British were also keen to transfer power to avoid the responsibility for further violence. The League, the INC, and the British ultimately

[59] Raghuvendra Tanwar, *Reporting the Partition of Punjab, 1947: Press, Public, and Other Opinions* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 104-108.

[60] However, this bellicose rhetoric was not yet matched by material or organizational preparation by the Sikhs.

[61] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 150.

[62] Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned, and Cleansed* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127-164.

[63] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 150.

agreed to partition of the subcontinent into two sovereign states and to the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. This proposal was announced on 3 June 1947. On the same day, it was decided that the British Indian Army would also be partitioned. The partition proposal was translated into the India Independence Act of the British parliament on 18 July 1947, and the date for the transfer of power was set for midnight on 14-15 August 1947. However, the boundaries of the two new states (in the Punjab and Bengal) were not announced until two days later on 17 August. The speed with which this series of events unfolded led to panic in the Punjab, especially in the central districts, where people did not know whether they were now in India or Pakistan.

THEORIES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT AND THE PARTITION OF INDIA

It is argued that ethno-religious mobilization in the context of incipient democratization at the provincial level was a necessary but not a sufficient pre-condition for violence. Democratization was underway in the Punjab as well as Bengal. However, ethno-religious violence occurred in August 1946 in Bengal but not in the Punjab. It was the commitment problem due to the complicity of the League-led state government of Bengal that explains the difference at this juncture. Similarly, it was the absence of a neutral state that explains the violence in the Punjab (but not in Bengal) in March 1947. The collapse of the Unionists' coalition government in March 1947 in the Punjab created an ethnic security dilemma for Muslims and non-Muslims of that state until after the partition of India. On the other hand, the League-led provincial government in Bengal remained intact right until the partition of India. In other words, none of these three explanations alone can account for the violence and the migration of the partition. In fact, all three explanations account for the violence at different stages (Table 1). The aim of this section is to explain how various causal factors and mechanisms emphasized by these explanations interacted with one another in the Punjab and Bengal.

Table 1: Punjab, Bengal, and the Violence of Partition

		Democratization, Nationalism, Ideas	Commitment Problem	Security Dilemma	**OUTCOME**
August 1946	Bengal	X	X		Violence
	Punjab	X			(Uneasy) calm
March 1947	Bengal	X			(Uneasy) calm
	Punjab	X	X		Violence
August-September 1947	Bengal	X			(Uneasy) calm
	Punjab	X	X	X	Violence

Democratization, Nationalism, and Ideas

Synder and Ballentine claim that "a major stimulus to belligerent nationalism is the state's manipulation of mass media and mass education to infuse the nation with a sense of in-group patriotism and out-group rivalry."[64] They further argue that this situation is worsened when democratizing societies are granted freedom of press without the institutionalization of legal mechanisms and social norms to check its misuse. This rings true for the situation in India at a broad level. British India was certainly a democratizing state. Even as late as the 1945-46 elections, no more than 10% of the subcontinent's population was enfranchised.

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[64] Snyder and Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," 5.

Furthermore, manipulation of the mass media by ethno-religious groups was an issue in both Bengal and the Punjab. Ethno-religious stereotypes and biases against other communities were prevalent across India. Muslim propaganda tended to portray the Hindu-Brahmin as a "perfidious character" who could not be trusted and depicted the Hindu merchants as cruel moneylenders. Hindu propaganda focused on how "unclean" Muslims had destroyed India's glorious ancient past, and how they subjugated India's Hindu population and carried out forced conversions. Finally, Sikh propaganda centered on how the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb committed atrocities against Gobind Singh, the last Sikh guru, while emphasizing that Sikhs could rule over Muslims just like Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839) had on the eve of colonialism. Such stereotypes were boosted in 1946-47 when the "communal" press and ethno-religious leaders (through their speeches and pamphlets) tried to arouse their co-ethnics against the "others".

For example, on the Direct Action Day in Calcutta, *Dawn*, the pro-League newspaper aroused the Muslims in an advertisement that called for "freedom" by noting that only "might" could help them achieve their goals as their offers for "peace" had been "spurned".[65] By this time, the Hindu press had already blamed Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who formed the government of the League in Bengal in 1946 for the 1943 Bengal famine, and the Hindu Mahasabha (and other Hindu groups) matched the militant belligerence of their Muslim counterparts.[66] It is therefore not surprising that it was only in the aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing that the Bengal government ordered the banning of provocative news and comments on communal riots.[67]

Inflammatory religious rhetoric was also common in the Punjab in early 1947. For example, after the launch of "direct action" in the Punjab, the *Free Press Journal* reported a speech of Ghazanfar Ali Khan, a high-ranking member of the League who was close to Jinnah:

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[65] Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam*, 98.

[66] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 230, 238.

[67] "Calcutta Hindu Papers to Suspend Publication," *Times of India*, 1 October 1946.

Mohammed Bin Kassim [711 CE] and Mahommed of Ghazni [971-1030 CE] invaded India with armies composed of only a few thousands and yet were able to overpower lakhs of Hindus; God willing, a few lakhs of Muslims will yet overwhelm crores of Hindus.[68]

The Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab were no less bellicose in their own propaganda. A day after the resignation of the coalition government of the Unionists, Tara Singh, unsheathed his *kirpan* [Sikh ceremonial dagger] and shouted "Death to Pakistan". On the following day, he called on the Sikhs and the Hindus to "trample Pakistan" just as they had "crushed" the Mughals.[69] In spite of the voluntary press code for reporting on communal violence, it was observed only in breach during 1946-47.[70]

If inflammatory rhetoric and the consequent mobilization of ethno-religious groups were common to the Punjab as well as Bengal in the context of the democratization of British India, then why did Bengal witness violence in August 1946 but not the Punjab? Similarly, why did the Punjab witness violence in March 1947 while Bengal did not? Synder and Ballentine's argument cannot explain this variance for it ignores the larger political context. In fact, the authors themselves note that the argument that the media can create national myths and lead to violence is "not intended to compete with" other explanations like socio-economic inequality, security threats, or the rise of the modern state, "but to complement them."[71] In other words, Synder and Ballentine are implicitly calling for analytical eclecticism. It will now be shown that the difference between Bengal and the Punjab in August 1946 and March 1947 was due to the so-called commitment problem. Crucially, the violence in Bengal in August 1946 was the result of "direct action" in response to national-level politics as the provincial League responded to the all-India League's demand for

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[68] A *lakh* is 100,000 while a *crore* is 10,000,000. Quoted in Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, *The Transfer of Power, 1942-1947* Volume IX (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980), 711.

[69] Tara Singh quoted in Ishtiaq Ahmed, "The 1947 Partition of Punjab: Arguments put Forth before the Punjab Boundary Commission by the Parties Involved," in Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, eds., *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab, and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116-167 (142).

[70] See Tanwar, *Reporting the Partition of Punjab* for other examples.

[71] Snyder and Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," 11.

Muslim state(s) in the subcontinent. However, the March 1947 violence in the Punjab was the result of provincial politics as the province-level League launched "direct action" there since it was unable to form the provincial government.

The Commitment Problem

According to Fearon, ethnic conflict can result in a plural society where different ethnic groups live side-by-side and where a neutral third-party is unavailable to guarantee the power sharing arrangements between the groups. Ethnic conflict is the result of a trust deficit or a commitment problem that breaks out as a consequence of the emergent anarchy.[72] At first glance, this model seems applicable to Bengal in August 1946. The marketplace of nationalist ideas was already brimming with ethno-religious ideas as noted above. Furthermore, when Jinnah called for a Direct Action Day in protest against the Cabinet Mission and as a boycott of the constituent assembly, Bengal began making preparations for it.

Not only was 16 August 1946 declared a public holiday in Bengal, but the League government, led by Suhrawardy himself, also began making preparations for a showdown with the Hindus. "What most clearly distinguishes the 1946 violence from earlier outbreaks was its highly organized nature and direct links with institutional politics."[73] Suhrawardy's personal involvement on behalf of the Muslim League and in restraining the police (which fell under the purview of the provincial government in British India) is well-attested in the literature. The violence in Calcutta which left up to 10,000 dead and thousands more injured was not spontaneous. Muslim gangs, including the Muslim League National Guards, had prepared in advance for it.

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[72] Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," 3.
[73] Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 176.

But Hindu leaders and gangs of Bengal were hardly caught unawares.[74] Various Hindu volunteer groups (many under the direct and indirect leadership of the Mahasabha and some even in cahoots with local INC leaders) had been receiving military training for some time. The demobilization of the British Indian Army after World War II and the disbandment of the Indian National Army (that are subsequently discussed) and the relatively easy availability of weapons (including those obtained directly or indirectly as a consequence of the presence of American troops in this province during the War)[75] meant that the Hindu-Muslim violence in Bengal was particularly brutal. Law and order were restored only after the British Indian Army was called. Under the 1935 Government of India Act, the British Governor of Bengal could not call the army until requested by the provincial government, and Suhrawardy made this request only 24 hours after the violence began.

The complicity of the provincial government in Bengal means that there was a commitment problem in that province. However, it is unclear if the causal mechanism through which the events unfolded in Calcutta seem to be as hypothesized by Fearon. According to Fearon, ethnic conflict is a "preventive war" in which the ethnic minority takes the initiative and resorts to violence. The Muslims were indeed a minority in Calcutta (and in western Bengal). But the Muslims formed the majority in the province as a whole. However, Fearon's model is unclear on the unit of analysis so it remains unclear how the majority and minority communities can be empirically ascertained in this case. Furthermore, both the communities had prepared for and committed atrocities in Bengal as noted above.

On the other hand, how can we explain the difference between Bengal and the Punjab in August 1946? There was no commitment problem in the Punjab at this time since it was under the Unionists' coalition government. This point is not trivial. That the League government of Bengal was indeed partisan and complicit can be gleaned from the fact that the League government of Sindh - the only other province of British India that had a League

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[74] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 233-240.
[75] Das, *Communal Riots*, 162.

government at this time - did not observe a public holiday on 16 August 1946 and did not experience any disturbances at all.[76] But what about the Punjab after March 1947? It can be argued that the absence of a provincial government there after March meant that there was now a commitment problem in the Punjab. However, the March violence in the Punjab began after the Muslims attacked the Hindus and the Sikhs. Unlike the Hindus of Bengal in August 1946, the Sikhs were caught unaware in the Punjab in March 1947. According to the British governor of the Punjab, only the MLNG and the RSS constituted "active communal private armies" at this time because neither the Congress volunteers nor the Akali Fauj/Sikh *jathas* (gangs) were active yet.[77] In any case, the Muslims formed the majority in those cities where most violence occurred (Lahore and Rawalpindi) and throughout the province.

Fearon's model suffers from two major limitations. Firstly, it always puts the onus for initiation of violence on the minority community. However, this is not how the process of violence unfolded in the Punjab after March 1947.[78] More importantly, Fearon undermines his argument by claiming that "a complete or satisfactory understanding of the problem" of ethnic violence cannot be based "solely on rationalist grounds" and that "strategic considerations are fundamental in ethnic conflict."[79] However, Fearon's treatment of "strategic considerations" is inadequate as it primarily deals with cost-benefit analysis from the viewpoint of the minority community that is contemplating the violence.

The larger strategic context within which the events unfolded in Bengal in August 1946 revolved around the demand for Pakistan, but events in the Punjab after March 1947 happened in the context of a demand for the partition of this province into Muslim and non-Muslim regions if Pakistan were to be carved out of British India. At the same time, Bengal was also to be partitioned according to this logic even though it remained uneasily calm in

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[76] Das, *Communal Riots*, 187.

[77] Mansergh and Moon, *The Transfer of Power,* IX, 570.

[78] Rationalist arguments have been criticized for being empirically weak. For their critique in explaining ethnic violence, see Kaufmann, "Rational Choice and Progress in the Study of Ethnic Conflict."

[79] Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," 5.

the crucial months of August-September 1947 when the Punjab witnessed violence and migration on an unprecedented scale. The subsequent section will argue that the commitment problem - the absence of a provincial government in the Punjab but not in Bengal - alone cannot explain this variance. The collapse of the Unionist government in the Punjab actually created an ethnic "security dilemma" in the Punjab. While Fearon's model is dismissive of the security dilemma,[80] it was this very issue and the structural conditions accompanying it that provide a complete explanation for the violence and migration in the Punjab.

An Ethnic Security Dilemma

According to Posen, as the old political order collapses in a multiethnic state, the constituent ethnic groups compete for power to enhance their security. As one group enhances its own security, it causes fears in the other. In turn, the other group tries to enhance its own security, making the first group less secure. The emerging security dilemma in an anarchic environment makes "offensive and defensive capabilities indistinguishable" and also makes "offense superior to the defence" as each group assumes the worst.[81] For Posen, the following factors increase the likelihood of ethnic conflict as a consequence of the security dilemma:

1. Offensive potential of rival groups gauged by group cohesion and past military record
2. Belligerent/negative propaganda
3. The region's ethnic distribution/geography
4. The relative rate of state formation, which is also affected by the presence/absence of external allies and past conscription

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[80] Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," 5-6.
[81] Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," 29; and William Rose, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses," *Security Studies* 9:4 (2000): 1-51.

As a result of the combination of the above factors, one group is likely to perceive itself to be in a position of advantage. This group will believe that offense is superior to defense and will have the incentive to initiate preventive war against. It will now be shown that these structural factors fill the aforementioned gaps and are able to explain the mass violence and mass migration in the Punjab. While most of these structural factors were absent in Bengal, they cannot explain the relative quiescence in Bengal by themselves. The relative calm in Bengal was also bolstered because of the presence of an ideational factor - another nationalist idea here that called for a Unified Bengal distinct from both India and Pakistan. However, its Punjabi counterpart was conspicuously absent at this time.

Punjab, 1947

The League's "direct action" in the Punjab was making the political situation conflict-prone. The League was upset that it was not allowed to form a government in this crucial province even as it had won the largest number of votes in the 1946 provincial elections (but was unable to get a simple majority). In early February 1947, soon after the short-lived ban on the MLNG and the RSS was lifted, the Sikh leader Baldev Singh complained to Field Marshall Wavell, the then viceroy of British India about the League's use of non-constitutional methods and "terrorist tactics" in an attempt to usurp power at the provincial level.[82]

The Hindus and Sikhs of Hazara who were trickling into Rawalpindi in the Punjab were already concerned about the League's "direct action" in NWFP. However, with the resignation of the government of Khizar on 3 March 1947, the situation in the Punjab was becoming tense. Sir Evan Meredith Jenkins, the British governor of the Punjab, did not let the League form a government and the province came under his direct rule (and remained so until independence and partition). On 19-20 March 1947, Jenkins enacted a number of "extraordinary" acts to control the situation. These acts gave the police unprecedented

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[82] Mansergh and Moon, *The Transfer of Power* IX, 627.

powers to detain suspects without trials and imprison them for extended terms, close public areas, to use fire or force without warning, and to protect government servants from prosecution.[83]

Given that the British had already announced their decision to leave India by June 1948 at this time, police and the civil services of the Punjab became increasingly communal. The demand for the partition of the Punjab by Hindus, Sikhs, and even the Congress in early March 1947 led to more confusion. Given the impending departure of the colonial power, and the uncertainty regarding the future of the province, the political environment in the Punjab began to look "anarchical". It was in this context that ethnic violence broke out across several parts of western Punjab (where the Muslims were in a majority). The worst-affected areas were Lahore and especially Rawalpindi where Muslims attacked their non-Muslim neighbors. Violence in Rawalpindi and its surrounding regions led to a loss of 8,000 lives and displaced more than 80,000 people, mostly Sikhs. One of the biggest grievances of the Sikhs (and the Hindus) was the high proportion of the Muslims in the Punjab police who either took part in this violence or stood-by as their co-ethnics slaughtered and looted the non-Muslims.[84]

The March 1947 violence in the Punjab has been described as the "Sikh Pearl Harbor" as it took the unprepared community by surprise.[85] Subsequently, all three of Punjab's major communities began to arm themselves for their own security as an impartial state did not exist there. In spite of the deteriorating situation, martial law was not imposed on the Punjab even as Nehru and other top leaders requested the British to do so.

The Punjab proved to be an easy ground for the emergence of armed gangs. Even though the British had not introduced conscription in India, Punjabi society had become highly militarized. The Punjabis of all three of that province's major religious communities

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[83] Taylor Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (London: Routledge, 2010), 137-138.
[84] Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47* Volume X (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981), 320.
[85] Jeffrey, "The Punjab Boundary Force and the Problem of Order," 506.

dominated this coercive arm of the Raj. During the Second World War, the British Indian army rose to a size of 2.5 million men, the largest volunteer force in history, a third of whom were recruited from the Punjab. Around the time of the departure of the British in mid-1947, one in three Punjabi men between the ages of 18 and 30 had served in the British Indian Army.[86]

This also meant that military expertise, including easy access to weapons, was in surplus in this province.[87] In fact, the March 1947 violence in the Punjab was conducted with military precision (and many campaigns were even led or supervised by some ex-soldiers). Not surprisingly, highly decentralized private armies of different religious groups emerged all over the Punjab. By June 1947, the RSS had over 58,000 members, the MLNG over 39,000 members, and the Akali (Sikh) Fauj over 8,000 members. In addition to this smaller Sikh *jathas* (gangs) existed throughout the Punjab.[88]

Heightened religious identities and political propaganda was already rampant in the Punjab by this time. However, the political geography of the Punjab was also crucial. The Sikhs were spread throughout the Punjab and did not form a majority in any single district. The Muslims formed the majority in the western regions, while the Hindus and the Sikhs combined formed the majority in the east.[89] The Sikhs believed that the Muslims (or at least the League) wanted them out of the province (or at least out of western Punjab).[90] Consequently, the Sikhs attacked the Muslims in Amritsar in August 1947 as an act of

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[86] Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 52.

[87] Daniel Marston, "The Indian Army, Partition, and the Punjab Boundary Force, 1945-1947," *War in History* 16:4 (2009): 469-505.

[88] Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), 233; and Khuswant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume 2: 1839-1988* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 272-273.

[89] K. Hill *et. al.*, "A Demographic Case Study of Forced Migration: The 1947 Partition of India," Unpublished manuscript available at http://paa2004.princeton.edu/papers/41274 (Accessed on 8 March 2014).

[90] This is the assessment of Jenkins and S. Shahid Hamid who was the private secretary to Field Marshall Sir Claude Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army. See Lionel Carter, ed., *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), 46; and S. Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight: A Personal Record of the Partition of India* (London: Leo Cooper, 1986).

revenge, which were promptly followed-up by Muslim attacks on the non-Muslims in Lahore.[91]

As the security dilemma worsened, Muslims attacked Hindus and Sikhs in their midst in the west in order to drive them to the east, while Hindus and Sikhs attacked Muslims in the east in order to drive them to the west. In an atmosphere full of rumors and religious propaganda, radical leaders mobilized their co-ethnics to commit violence against members of rival communities. The military training of the religious militia enabled them to carry out particularly brutal acts supported by an extensive intelligence network.[92] Importantly, on the eastern side, Sikhs found ready allies in the Sikh princely states who allowed the use of their territories for military training purposes and also supplied Sikhs with arms and ammunition from the armories of their small militaries.[93] On the western side, Muslims of the Punjab received arms and ammunition from their co-religionists from the princely state of Bahawalpur, and from the lawless regions along the Afghan border where weaponry was easily available and where British authority was at best symbolic.[94]

All these factors combined to make the offensive, and by extension, preventive war, the dominant form of violence in the eastern and western halves of the Punjab against the minority communities. Although the British Indian Army deployed some 15,000-23,000 soldiers as a part of the Punjab Boundary Force (PBF) drawn from all three communities from 1 August 1947 to 1 September 1947 to ensure peace and stability during the partition process, it was woefully inadequate. Not only was it deployed too late, it was also too small. In an atmosphere with tens of thousands of religious militia, the PBF, with only 7,500 effective rifles was hardly up to the task of restoring order over an area of 37,500 square miles with a population of 14.5 million people in which the civilian administration and the

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[91] See the relevant sections in Ahmed, *The Punjab*.
[92] Aiyar, "August Anarchy"; and Marston, "The Indian Army".
[93] Ian Copland, "The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 36:3 (2002): 657-704.
[94] Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 278-279.

police were split along religious lines and where martial law was not imposed.[95] The steady flow of refugees (and propaganda) across the boundary on either side further intensified this violence which peaked in August-September 1947.

Bengal, 1947

The relative tranquility in Bengal in August 1947 is widely attributed to Gandhi's presence in that province at the time in a view that was made famous by Mountbatten when he stated that Gandhi's "one-man boundary force" kept the peace in Bengal while Punjab's "50,000 strong force was swamped by riots."[96] This is a specious argument as the structural conditions in Bengal were fundamentally different from the Punjab. Less than a week before launching "direct action" in Bengal, Suhrawardy had declared his intention "of complete independence of Bengal … as a separate state having no connection with the Centre."[97] This demand for a separate Muslim-majority state in northeastern India was consistent with Jinnah's 1940 Lahore Declaration calling for creation of "independent States" in the subcontinent for Muslims.

The violence of August 1946 in Bengal differed from the violence of March 1947 in the Punjab in that it occurred in the context of the demand for Muslim states in the subcontinent and not in the context of the partition of the province itself. Therefore, when the Muslims initiated the attacks on the Hindus in Calcutta on Direct Action Day, the Hindus (unlike the Sikhs of the Punjab of March 1947) did not interpret this as a Muslim attempt to ethnically cleanse the Hindus from Calcutta. Unlike the March 1947 violence in the Punjab which was initiated by the Muslims in Muslim-majority regions, the August 1946 violence was initiated by Muslims in a city where they formed a minority. Furthermore, as noted

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[95] Jeffrey, "The Punjab Boundary Force," 500; and Marston, "The Indian Army," 489-503.
[96] Quoted in Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 69.
[97] Quoted in Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 231-232.

above, Hindus were not caught unawares in Bengal while the Sikhs of the Punjab thought of it as their "Pearl Harbour". Therefore, the only exodus witnessed in Bengal after mid-1946 was displacement caused by violence, whereas communities moved en masse in the Punjab in advance of the province's partition.

In any case, the League in Bengal continued with its demand for a "Unified Bengal" that transcended Hindu-Muslim divisions, even as it had facilitated Hindu-Muslim violence in August 1946 to create Muslim-majority states in the subcontinent. Notably, the League was joined by prominent Hindu Bengali leaders such as Sarat Chandra Bose (who had resigned from the INC in 1946) in their demand for a "Unified Bengal".[98] An independent Bengal was acceptable to both Jinnah and Liaquat even as late as the last week of April 1947.[99] However, Nehru was against the Balkanization of India or for independence to be granted to the provinces and the British also worried about defense needs of an independent Bengal and did not favor this idea. The Hindu Mahasabha and the INC at the provincial level in Bengal prevailed and on June 20 June 1947 it was decided that Bengal too would be partitioned along religious lines.

Why then did Bengal not descend into violence in August 1947? As noted earlier, the provisional government of Bengal remained intact unlike in the Punjab which went under Governor's rule in March 1947. This prevented the polarization of the police and civil administration along religious lines to the levels witnessed in the Punjab. Moreover, Bengal was not militarized to the extent of the Punjab because of the recruitment policies of the British Indian Army. In fact, only 2.4% of troops raised by British India during the Second World War hailed from this province in contrast to almost a third who came from the Punjab.[100] Even as the Indian National Army was led by Subhas Chandra Bose, a Bengali Hindu, most of its members hailed from the Punjab too. Furthermore, unlike the membership of the religious militia in the Punjab which was in the tens of thousands, the

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[98] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 259.
[99] Mansergh and Moon, *The Transfer of Power* X, 452, 479.
[100] Stephen Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43.

Muslim and Hindu paramilitary organizations had far fewer members in the less militarized Bengal.

The main Muslim extremist gangs included the MLNG with 14,000 members and Ghulam Sarwar's private militia numbered around 1,000.[101] According to Chatterji, there was only one Hindu organization, the Hindu Sakti Sangha (HSS), with a sound financial position that posed a threat to public order in Bengal. However, the HSS had only 300-500 volunteers at best. The RSS also posed a threat since its members had been trained in the use of firearms. However, it had a membership of only 100 volunteers.[102] Furthermore, unlike the princely states of the Punjab or its surrounding tribal regions from where that province's ethnic groups drew external support, the Bengali Hindus and Muslims did not have ready co-ethnic allies.

This combination of factors meant that the violence that erupted with the partition of India in Bengal was less bloody than the corresponding situation in the Punjab. The Bengali Hindu refugees who moved to India fled not because of violence, but due to actual or perceived "persecution and intolerance,"[103] and for economic reasons (because the economic viability of eastern Bengal without Calcutta was doubtful). Bengal witnessed no pogrom of the sort as seen in the Punjab. However, it would be a mistake to attribute all the differences between the Punjab and Bengal to structural factors. The marketplace of nationalist ideas had a powerful idea of a "Unified Bengal" that did not have a Punjabi counterpart. While the "Unified Bengal" scheme was never realized, it did play a role in preventing violence. Notably, a segment of the provincial Hindu Mahasabha planned to raise 100,000 volunteers "to frustrate the Partition plan."[104] Partition left about 5 million Muslims in western Bengal in India (or about 15% of India's total Muslim population after

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[101] Das, *Communal Riots*, 203; Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam*, 102-103.
[102] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 235-237.
[103] Kudaisya, "Divided Landscapes," 109.
[104] Das, *Communal Riots*, 203.

independence),[105] while Bangladesh's population still includes approximately 10% Hindus.[106] However, the Hindus and the Sikhs virtually disappeared from Pakistani Punjab, just as the Muslims disappeared from Indian Punjab.

CONCLUSION

This paper has used an analytically eclectic approach to explain the different stages of the mass violence and mass migration that accompanied the partition of India and the consequent differences between the Punjab and Bengal. While ethnic mobilization along religious lines was a necessary factor in the context of the uneven democratization in British India, it was not a sufficient condition for interethnic violence between Muslims and non-Muslims of the subcontinent. Religious mobilization resulted in mass violence only in the absence of a neutral third-party because of the commitment problem as happened in Calcutta in August 1946 and in the Punjab in March 1947. It was only the complete breakdown of the provincial government in the Punjab that contributed to an ethnic security dilemma after the March 1947 violence that explains the excessive violence in that province which peaked in August-September 1947. The Hindus and Muslims of Bengal did not experience a similar ethnic security dilemma for a number of reasons including the fact that the Bengali provincial government remained intact until the partition of India (and Bengal).

The region of these provinces where the violence began (Muslim-majority or non-Muslim-majority) and the groups that initiated this violence (the majority or the minority groups) were factors of causal significance. The August 1946 violence was initiated by Muslims against Hindus in the Hindu-majority city of Calcutta. The fact that Hindu groups were prepared to face the Muslim mobs in Bengal meant that this violence was not interpreted by the Hindu groups as acts of ethnic cleansing by the Muslims from this region of Bengal,

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[105] Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, 159.
[106] The CIA World Factbook. Available at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html (Accessed on 8 March 2014).

which was after all in the Hindu-majority western region. However, in March 1947, Hindus and Sikhs were caught unprepared in western Punjab (where they formed a minority) when they were attacked by Muslim mobs. After interpreting these attacks as acts of ethnic cleansing (in the context of the partition of the province itself), the Hindus and the Sikhs retaliated against Muslims in some parts of eastern Punjab in August 1947 (where they formed a majority together) to rid these areas of the Muslims. This resulted in a spiral that has been termed as "retributive genocide" in which each side believed that it was responding to avenge the acts of violence of the "other" group in the regions where they formed the majority.[107] The recruitment policies of the British Indian army were also significant since they affected the militarization of the Punjabi and Bengali societies.

However, structural factors alone cannot explain the uneasy calm that existed in Bengal in August-September 1947. The interethnic security dilemma in Bengal was not as intense as that emerging in the Punjab because of the presence of the idea of a Unified Bengal (distinct from both India and Pakistan). The national "high politics" of partition meant that it had no chance of succeeding. However, this scheme remained alive until June 1947 and was supported by prominent Muslim and Hindu provincial leaders. The presence of another nationalist idea in Bengal that transcended Hindu-Muslim divisions as it was centered on a shared Bengali cultural identity (with its own real and imagined political history) was of causal significance. More importantly, its Punjabi counterpart was absent at this time.

Looking ahead, research on ethnic conflict must focus on the micro-foundations of ethnic violence. While structural factors helped maintain the relative quiescence witnessed in Bengal in August-September 1947, the impact of ideas - in the form of a unified Bengali identity and its acceptance by large sections of Bengal's Hindus and Muslims - cannot be ruled out. Why did an equivalent idea of a unified Punjabi cultural identity not emerge at that point in time even as the intellectual resources to create such an identity were certainly

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[107] Brass, "The Partition of India".

present?[108] Future research will also need to address why a Hindu-Sikh schism did not appear at this point in the Punjab although differences existed and emerged soon after independence. It is likely that research on the micro-foundations of ethnic conflict will have to engage with psychological theories to explain why certain ideas became salient under given structural conditions (such as the idea of a Unified Bengal transcending Hindu-Muslim identities or the formation of a Hindu-Sikh interethnic alliance in the Punjab) which in turn create conditions that foster conflict or promote peace. No easy lessons can be drawn from the relatively peaceful nature of partition as a strategy in Bengal when compared to the Punjab because both structures and ideas were at play.

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[108] Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).