

Supplementary Information and Appendix

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Table S1. Proportion of respondents in each group (unweighted)

	Blame		No-Blame	
	Unmatched	Matched	Unmatched	Matched
Gender				
Male	58.35%	59.56%	60.17%	60.17%
Female	41.65%	40.44%	39.83%	39.83%
Age Group				
< 25	26.54%	27.17%	27.30%	27.30%
25-35	29.29%	29.30%	29.90%	29.90%
35-45	19.45%	19.80%	19.43%	19.43%
45-55	13.65%	13.25%	12.53%	12.53%
55+	11.07%	10.48%	10.84%	10.84%
Religion				
Hindus	85.94%	85.84%	82.99%	82.99%
Muslims	8.67%	8.96%	11.32%	11.32%
Christians	1.87%	1.69%	1.63%	1.63%
Sikhs	1.58%	1.51%	1.63%	1.63%
Others	1.93%	2.00%	2.42%	2.42%
Location				
Rural	39.78%	44.98%	38.56%	46.31%
Semi-Urban	16.40%	15.98%	15.13%	15.13%
Urban	43.82%	39.04%	46.31%	38.56%
Vote 2019				
INC/UPA	12.89%	11.92%	11.26%	11.26%
BJP/NDA	54.30%	52.36%	52.85%	52.85%
Others	26.88%	26.52%	25.90%	25.90%
Did Not Vote	9.26%	9.20%	9.99%	9.99%
Facebook/Instagram				
Do not use	23.91%	23.80%	24.70%	24.70%
Use	76.09%	76.20%	75.30%	75.30%
N	1707	1652	1652	1652

The above data the table are not weighted. Data used in the OLS regression models are weighted. The weight variable was provided by CVoter and is a combination of Gender, Age, Caste, Religion, Urban/Rural, Lok Sabha 2019 vote as well as the state population size in proportion to all the states.

Table S2. Number of respondents in each group

	Blame		No-Blame	
	Unmatched	Matched	Unmatched	Matched
Gender				
Male	996	994	994	984
Female	711	658	658	668
Age Group				
< 25	453	451	451	449
25-35	500	494	494	484
35-45	332	321	321	327
45-55	233	207	207	219
55+	189	179	179	173
Religion				
Hindus	1467	1371	1371	1418
Muslims	148	187	187	148
Christians	32	27	27	28
Sikhs	27	27	27	25
Others	33	40	40	33
Location				
Rural	679	637	637	645
Semi-Urban	280	250	250	264
Urban	748	765	765	743
Vote 2019				
INC/UPA	213	186	186	197
BJP/NDA	897	873	873	865
Others	444	428	428	439
DNV	153	165	165	151
Facebook/Instagram				
Do not use	395	408	408	393
Use	1306	1244	1244	1259
N	1707	1652	1652	1652

Appendix

Two key social welfare policies

Analysis of social welfare policies in party manifestos in India may not reveal the significant differences between parties that in higher-income democracies are often described as ideologically left or right, which may help readers to understand why Congress or United Progressive Alliance (UPA) voters in our model were significantly different from voters for other regional parties (excluding non-BJP National Democratic Alliance (NDA) parties), in their willingness to allay blame for the initial spread of the virus to the Modi government. For example, in the 2014 national election, party manifestos from Congress, the new Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and the BJP each addressed the issue of healthcare. Congress promised “right to health,” AAP promised quality universal healthcare access, and BJP promised “radical reforms” in “healthcare delivery, medical education, and the financing of healthcare” (Chatterjee, 2014: 1-3). The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), colloquially known as “Modicare,” was approved by the Government of India in March 2018. AB-PMJAY is described by healthcare researchers as “an ambitious reform to the Indian health system that seeks to provide financial health protection for 500 million of the most vulnerable Indians and halt the slide of the 50–60 million Indians who fall into poverty annually as a result of medical-related expenditure” (Angell, Prinja, Gupt, Jha, & Jan 2019).

Another example of the lack of ideological distance between competing parties concerns affirmative action measures that were part of India’s founding Constitution. These measures were drafted by lawyer, scholar and activist B.R. Ambedkar, known as the father of India’s Constitution who was born in a Dalit caste, later became Buddhist and launched a social movement for lower caste Hindus to leave the religion as he did (Rodriguez, 2002). According to his grandson,

Ambedkar saw political reservations in the Lok Sabha and state-level Assembly constituencies as necessary only for ten years in order to bring a transformational boost in their engagement in the political process to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), whereas reservations in education and government jobs were to continue (Khapre 2020). Reservations have been extended to this day while those with lower incomes in the General Castes, who receive no affirmative action benefits, have protested to be included. Reservations have resulted in nearly half the seats in higher education and government jobs reserved for individuals from SC, ST and OBC groups. Asher, Novosad and Rafkins (2020) demonstrate the positive economic impact of affirmative action on Scheduled Castes.

In January 2019, three months before the official national election campaign began, the incumbent BJP government promised to add a 10% economic reservation for those in the lowest income groups who have not benefitted from existing affirmative action. Research on intergenerational mobility in education across cohorts in India, using a new “bottom half mobility” measure shows “Muslim disadvantage cannot be explained by occupational patterns, fertility, differential returns to education, or location” and concludes “...the effect of affirmative action on Scheduled Castes may be large enough to explain all of the Muslim–Scheduled Caste gap” (Asher, Novosad and Rafkins 2020: see Figures 6, p. 44. 10 p. 48, 12 p. 50, A6 p.61). The 10% economic reservation would include Muslims who, as a group, have never been accorded the protections of quotas provided for SC, ST and OBCs in the Constitution (Rukmini, 2019).

References

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