

Clerical Persuasion and Religious Extremism:

An Experiment Among Sunni and Shia Muslims in Northern India

Kunaal Sharma *

September 8, 2018

Abstract

How do appeals by religious leaders affect extremism? I propose a logic arguing that anti-violence appeals by an in-group cleric work less effectively for members of a perceived victimized group. I tested the argument with an audio recording experiment involving 2,100 Sunni and Shia young adult men in Lucknow, India, where the Shia perceive themselves as victimized. Subjects were randomly assigned to listen to an anti-violence message recorded by either an in-group cleric; out-group cleric; both; or neither. Consistent with expectations, the in-group message significantly reduces extremist behaviors up to 8 hours later for Sunni but not Shia subjects. Qualitative and statistical analyses suggest the plausibility of the victimization explanation. Furthermore, neither the out-group message nor the interaction significantly reduce extremism for either group. The study highlights how and why elite persuasion work asymmetrically in conflict settings, and reports some of the first-ever causal evidence on reducing extremism.

*ETH Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Humanities, Social, and Political Sciences, ETH Zürich, Switzerland.

I thank Chris Blattman, Dan Corstange, Hamid Dabashi, Don Green, Mushirul Hasan, Macartan Humphreys, Justin Jones, Devesh Kapur, Egor Lazarev, Tamar Mitts, Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Jack Snyder, Paul Staniland, Georgiy Syunyaev, Steven Wilkinson, and Lauren Young for their insights throughout this project. Excellent research assistance in Lucknow was provided by local enumerators. This study was approved by the Columbia University IRB (AAAQ7413) and received funding from a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant and the U.S. Institute of Peace on a Jennings Randolph Peace Scholarship.

1. Introduction

Extremists around the world use religious scripture to justify and mobilize violence. To fight back, many clerics use religious appeals of their own. When I.S.I.S. formed, a prominent group of Islamic clergymen published a refutation of the group’s ideology—waging a “theological battle” in the words of the *New York Times* (Goodstein 2016). From Sri Lanka (Bond 1992, 261) to northern Nigeria (Nozell and Hayward 2014), the clergy often uses doctrine to undermine religious violence.

Does religious persuasion work? We have little scientific evidence. Officials in government and at the United Nations explained that the evidence gap poses a major problem. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in the last decade on Countering Violent Extremism (C.V.E.) programming worldwide, and religious messaging is often a central component. Officials want more direct evidence to know what works and why, which in turn helps to better allocate funds to achieve socially desirable outcomes.¹

For political scientists, this topic speaks to a fundamental question: how do ethnic elites affect extremist behavior? Fearon and Laitin (2000, 853) write that “virtually every self-identified constructivist who has written on ethnic violence....has tended to blame elite machinations and politicking.” Scholars have qualitatively shown that elite appeals affect behaviors linked to conflict in Asia (Wilkinson 2006; Varshney 2003; Brass 1997), the Balkans (Kaufman 2006*b*; Woodward 1995), and Africa (Hackett 2011; Prunier 1997). It is particularly difficult to locate causal evidence as to how persuasion shapes extremism at the individual-level.

I report the results of one of the first experimental studies that unpacks how elite persuasion affects extremism. The study took place in the context of extremism among Sunni and Shia Muslims in Lucknow, the capital of India’s largest state. For ethical and security reasons, I focus on persuasion away from extremism. I randomly assigned 2,100 Sunni and Shia young adult men to listen to audio recordings containing anti-violence appeals by either an in-group cleric (5 minutes);

¹ Author interviews with Western, Africa, and Asian officials at the Hedayah Institute, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 2015.

out-group cleric (5 minutes); or both (10 minutes). A pure control group heard no message.

I designed the experiment to study persuasion out of the laboratory. First, the recordings came from real, local Sunni and Shia clerics whom I worked with over time to prepare the treatments. Second, the experiment was implemented to mimic the reverse of the process often used by radicalizers in urban settings. Enumerators sampled and treated subjects on small side streets of the Old City, the epicenter of Lucknow's sectarian conflict. Third, the experiment was timed to start days after the Islamic holy period when most sectarian violence occurs each year.

The results reveal a stark pattern: the anti-violence appeals work significantly different in the Sunni and Shia samples. The in-group appeal significantly reduces behaviors linked to extremism in the Sunni sample, but not in the Shia sample. Among Sunni subjects, the appeal causes a 6.8% increase in buying and wearing an anti-extremism wristband and—8 hours later—a 7.4% increase in the chance of still wearing the band and a 9.4% increase in anti-extremist speech. Second, the out-group cleric message does not change extremism for either sample. The effect of exposure to both messages is indistinguishable from the effect of exposure to the in-group message alone. Lastly, suggestive evidence shows that the in-group appeal worked for Sunni subjects by changing prescriptive religious norms and beliefs about outgroup behavior, as well as via more anticipated sanctioning and prejudice-reduction mechanisms.

The between-sect result meets the study's *ex ante* expectation, which is based on evidence from a pilot experiment I ran in Lucknow and five months of qualitative field research. I suggest that a logic of victimization explains the result: members of a perceived victimized group—here, the Shia—are more likely to retain extremism to protect their group against anticipated attacks. I present qualitative insights and additional statistical analyses that suggest this explanation is plausible relative to others.

I explain the latter results regarding the out-group message and the interaction with a version of the reactive devaluation hypothesis in political psychology. This hypothesis suggests that the out-group cleric's message may not have been effective as it may have raised suspicion or confusion about the intentions of a perceived enemy who issues a friendly gesture.

To interrogate the difference of the in-group message within the Sunni and Shia samples, I took several additional steps. First, I show that the in-group cleric message works significantly less effectively in reducing extremism among the Shia on each of the three outcome measures. I then explored the mechanisms by which the message changed extremist behavior for the Sunni sample. This analysis shows that the in-group message operated not only by increasing concerns of clerical sanctioning for noncompliance, but also by shifting prescriptive norms regarding the permissibility of violence, increasing confidence that the outgroup will punish its own extremists, and reducing personal willingness to punish outgroup extremists.

Lastly, I used additional analyses to examine the plausibility of the proposed victimization logic. It could be the case, for instance, that characteristics other than religious identity might explain the differential effect of the in-group message. To investigate, I regressed a standardized index of the three extremism measures on the treatments interacted with Shia identity. I show that even when including enumerator fixed effects and covariates, the ingroup cleric message works significantly less effectively in reducing extremism for Shia subjects. I then probed whether this pattern remains statistically significant even when accounting for interactions of the treatment with each other covariate. The result is that the in-group message also elicits a differential effect between unemployed and employed subjects but that the difference in effects of the message between sects remains significant ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that there is an economic component to the differential effect of the in-group message but also a religious component. No such pattern obtains for the other covariates.

I highlight three contributions to political science and policy. First, I unpack a process central to ethnic conflict—elite persuasion—at the individual-level and shows how it shapes extremism in a real conflict setting.² I argue that intergroup inequalities matter for understanding if elite appeals affect behaviors linked to extremism. In doing so, the study re-opens theories of elite persuasion, challenging the assumption that elites in both groups persuade with similar success (Kaufman

²See Condra, Isaqzadeh and Linardi (2017) for an experiment on clerical messaging and charity in Afghanistan.

2006*b*; Wilkinson 2006; Varshney 2003). Rather, the results join a pattern in recent work on vote choice and migrant acceptance showing that ethnic appeals are conditioned by between-group differences (Gaikwad and Nellis 2016; Chhibber and Sekhon 2014). I contribute a logic as to why victimization appears to explain this difference.

Second, I illuminate the individual-level influence of religious leaders on political behavior. Micro-empirical research on the effect of religion tends to focus on identity priming or scriptural references (Masoud, Jamal and Nugent 2016; McClendon and Riedl 2015; McCauley 2014). There is little direct study of clerical influence at the individual-level and in the extremism context in particular.³ This paper offers a counterintuitive finding: a even some highly religious publics—here the Lucknavi Shia—are highly resistant to orders from their own clerics. It is especially noteworthy that it is the Shia sample that is not responsive to a clerical appeal: obedience to clerics is often described as a central feature of Shia belief and practice throughout the world (Walbridge 2001). These results revive a point briefly mentioned in (Horowitz 1985, 175), who suggested that members of ‘backward groups’ tend to be resistant to calls by their own elites to adopt a conciliatory approach toward an ethnic rival.

Third, I show some of the first-ever causal evidence of how to reduce extremism in the short-run. Most studies of violent extremism analyze the variables that correlate with extremist rhetoric or actions (Mitts 2017; Rink and Sharma 2016; Blair and Shapiro 2013; Krueger and Malečková 2003). Far less evidence exists, however, on how to reduce extremism, and on whether efforts by clerics to promote peace can succeed. This paper shows that even in trenchant conflicts, anti-violence appeals can promote anti-extremist behaviors for some. This insight is particularly important to inform global policy discussions on how to reduce violent extremism. In interviews I conducted, officials in government and intergovernmental organizations emphasize the lack of scientific evidence to guide programming decisions and expectations.

³A recent exception is Condra, Isaqzadeh and Linardi (2017), who focuses on clerical influence regarding charitable behavior rather than attitudes or behaviors regarding violent extremism.

2. Case Study: Lucknow

2.1 Background

Violence between members of the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam is salient in countries across the Muslim world. In India, the highest levels of Sunni-Shia violence occurs in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state (Sinha 1978, 1841). Public expressions of extremism, including violence, often take place in Muharram, the Islamic month that lasts for 68 or 69 days in South Asia. Every year in Muharram, pious Shia worldwide march in highly emotive religious processions to commemorate the death of martyrs in Shia mythology. To many Sunni conservatives, such Shia rituals are proof of apostasy (Jones 2011).

The city's first major act of Sunni-Shia violence broke out in 1905 (Hasan 1998). Since then, nearly all sectarian violence has taken place during Muharram and in the Old City. The district—now the city's poorest—is the former throne of a Shia dynasty (1707-1856) that ruled Lucknow until the Mughal Empire's collapse. Today, is home to many of India's leading Islamic seminaries, and is a center of Muslim life.

I conducted five months of field research in Lucknow. One important insight refers to the role of the clergy in stimulating or attenuating extremist actions. In the riot-hit Old City, Sunni and Shia youth and local politicians detailed how radical clerics propagate normative appeals to violence in Friday prayer services, religious gatherings, and private meetings. Clerics who construct pro-violence appeals play to familiar religious principles, symbols, and figures in their respective mythologies to make a case for the illegitimacy of the other group. As one senior Sunni cleric explained, extremist clerics aim to “keep the crowds on a constant boil so that they are full of hate when a *maulana* wants to cause violence.”⁴

Fighting extremism is a priority for the U.P. state government. According to Lucknow's top-ranking police officer, the city annually convenes a peace committee of clerics to plan processions

⁴Interview with Maulana J., Old City, Lucknow, July 2014.

and restrain provocateurs⁵. During Muharram, the state also increases the number of riot control officers in Lucknow to deter and punish extremists. A cadre of Special Police Officers (Hindi: *Vishesh Police Adhikari*), or unarmed local Sunni, Shia, and Hindu residents, report incidents and diffuse tensions.

Field research suggests that the government has played a plausibly neutral role with respect to both sects. Different state administrations led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress Party, Samajwadi Party (SaPa), and Bahujan Samaaj Party (BSP) have facilitated intergroup negotiations.⁶ Sunni and Shia community elders and journalists widely expressed the view that the police, while Hindu in majority, respond promptly to dispel riots and make arrests of violent extremists with scant signs of sectarian bias.⁷

2.2 Case Justification

I conducted this study in Lucknow for three reasons. First, Lucknow's Old City is a good laboratory to study religious persuasion. Residential segregation along Hindu-Muslim lines implies that Muslims typically live amongst themselves, which facilitates extended interaction with religious clerics and exposure to their appeals. Since the purpose of the experiment is to study clerical persuasion in settings where it actually takes place, the Old City is an appropriate setting.

Second, the focus on intra-Islamic rather than Hindu-Muslim conflict helps to rebalance the study of conflict in South Asia. Political scientists studying elites and ethnic conflict in South Asia have mostly focused on the Hindu-Muslim case. The Muslim community, however, is not monolithic. If we want to understand how elite appeals and extremism work, it is important to look at cases beyond the Hindu-Muslim one. This also seems appropriate to do in India, which is projected to have the world's largest Muslim population by 2030. Moreover, the case may speak

⁵Interview with S.S.P. Praveen Kumar, Lucknow Police Headquarters, Lucknow, August 2014.

⁶Interviews with deputy U.P. superintendent of police and the Superintendent of Police for Lucknow West, July 2014.

⁷Interviews with *Times of India* journalist A., Lucknow, August 2014 and August 2015; and with community elders in Aishbagh, Wazirganj, and Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, August 2015 and January 2016.

to persuasion in Sunni-Shia conflicts from Pakistan to Lebanon. Clerics appeal to similar doctrinal disputes in those settings, among other similarities. The case helps link research on sectarian politics in South Asia and the Middle East (Weidmann and Salehyan 2013; Corstange 2012).

Finally, the Old City offers a relatively safe and feasible environment to conduct my experiment. The city is an otherwise stable one, with sectarian violence and tensions largely limited to certain holy periods. Field research showed that the experiment would pose low risks to subjects and staff.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Expectations: The In-Group Appeal

I begin with a distinction: in dyadic conflicts, one group perceives itself as more victimized than the other. Perceived victimization is often associated with group identities that emphasize a narrative of chronic losses, often violent, at the hands of another group or state (Gries 2004).⁸

The study's *ex ante* expectation is that an anti-violence appeal by an in-group cleric will reduce extremism within a non-victimized group but not within the victimized group. I developed this expectation through a prior pilot experiment with 480 subjects in Lucknow.

The pilot results showed the following: while the in-group cleric's appeal did not significantly reduce extremism within the Sunni or Shia samples, it worked significantly less effectively for Shia subjects. In the study, I attempted to unpack the result by interviewing a subsample of experimental subjects to gauge reactions to the treatments. Shia subjects who disagreed with the message tended to blame the Sunni for starting most attacks. The cleric's appeal was "detached from reality", as one interviewee explained: the Shia needed to retain the right to use violence in order to ensure group security. The most common argument in the responses was some version of "we are the ones

⁸Examples included Armenians relative to Azerbaijanis (Kaufman 2001, 60-70), Palestinians relative to Israelis, and southern Sudanese relative to northern Sudanese.

that are targeted”, referring to the recent and historical attacks on Shia processions in Lucknow, neighboring Pakistan, and the Middle East.

Sunni interviewees, by contrast, did not frame their views of the Sunni cleric’s message in terms of victimization or powerlessness. Among those who admitted disagreement with the message, responses tended to range from a lack of concern about extremism in the Sunni community to a defense of extremism on the grounds that ‘the Shia are *kafir*’ or non-Muslim infidels.

This gives rise to a logic of victimization: relative to non-victimized groups, members of victimized groups are more likely to retain extremism in order to prevent or guard against anticipated attacks. I expect that within the non-victimized group, exposure to anti-violence appeals by an in-group elite will not—on average—reduce extremism.⁹ In the non-victimized group, persuasion is expected to work in the anticipated direction.

3.2 Expectations: The Out-Group Appeal

A second logic relates to the effect of exposure to an anti-violence appeal by an outgroup elite. I apply a logic from social psychology: the reactive devaluation hypothesis (Ross and Stillinger 1991). The hypothesis states that individuals will reduce their perception of the worth of a conciliatory proposal when it comes from a perceived enemy. Experimental research has shown that in settings of high mistrust, friendly appeals from the outgroup raise fears of exploitation or manipulation (Main, Dahl and Darke 2007). Members of the target group worry that the enemy does not truly share their interests, and devalue the message. Research in the Israeli-Palestinian case, for instance, finds that individuals devalue friendly appeals from the outgroup.

Two implications follow. One is that exposure to an anti-violence appeal from an out-group elite will not reduce extremism in either group. Due to the devaluation of the outgroup message, exposure to both messages will not differ from exposure to the in-group message alone. Table 1 summarizes the theoretical framework.

⁹This is also consistent with psychology research linking victimization to higher support for outgroup violence (Wohl and Branscombe 2008).

Table 1: Summary of Expected Effects on Extremist Behavior

	Non-Victimized Group (1)	Victimized Group (2)
(A) Message from Elite in Non-Victimized Group	Reduce	No Effect
(B) Message from Elite in Victimized Group	No Effect	No Effect
(C) Interaction	No Effect	No Effect

3.3 Mechanisms

I propose four mechanisms by which the appeal may affect behavior. First, the clerical appeal could operate via strategic considerations, i.e., by changing beliefs about how members of the other group will behave. The in-group cleric's message could, for instance, prime subjects on the reality that some clerics police extremists within their own group, and therefore make them more confident that the outgroup will do so too. Second, the appeal could work by changing prescriptive religious norms around violence.¹⁰ If an individual is exposed to an anti-violence religious appeal by an in-group cleric, she may strengthen her perception that violence against the outgroup is not permissible according to the religion.

Third, the appeal could work via a sanctioning mechanism. An individual exposed to the appeal may be primed on the likelihood of being punished if he or she engages in outgroup violence in contravention of the cleric's dictate. Finally, the appeal could shift behavior through a prejudice-reduction mechanism. This channel is distinct from strategic considerations, norm change, sanctioning.

¹⁰A prescriptive social norm is defined as attitudes or behavior that are perceived as desirable for in-group members (Paluck et al. 2010).

3.4 Qualitative Evidence on Shia Victimization

Scholars often distinguish Sunni and Shia identity by pointing out that the latter emphasizes resistance and martyrdom. As Dabashi (2011) explains, Shiism is rooted in a sense of perceived injustice: that the Sunni denied the Prophet's cousin—Ali—his right to become caliph. Ali served as caliph but was later murdered, as were his sons, including at the infamous Battle of Karbala (680 C.E.). All twelve of the Imams—Ali's lineage—were also murdered. Writes Dabashi (2011, 81), “a social psychology of defeat awaiting revenge is thus at the very heart of Shiism.” As historians have described, Shia populations have frequently been targeted and repressed throughout history, including throughout the Ottoman Empire (Cole 2002, 18-20) and in northern India (Jones 2011, 186-197).

I conducted five months of field research in 2014-16 in Lucknow. Here, I summarize insights on Shia victimization that draw on some of the roughly seventy interviews in Hindi and Urdu I conducted with clerics, youth, politicians, and others.

A senior, influential Shia cleric in Lucknow first explained that the Sunni majority exploits its vote bank power to impose limits on Shia rituals.¹¹ Under a 1997 state-brokered agreement, the Shia may only carry out a fraction of the more than 900 processions outlined in their religious calendar. The agreement replaced a full ban on all Sunni and Shia rituals. It was a win for the Husaini Tigers, a Shia activist group that used protests and intimidation to fight against perceived Sunni domination.¹²

Victimization shapes local politics and daily life. One senior Shia politician explained that Lucknavi Shia share the fear of Shia worldwide that the Sunni are trying to eradicate Shiism. Gulf Arab-funded propaganda outlets, he said, produce print and digital propaganda that the West invented Shiism to divide the global Muslim community. Some interviewees blamed particular Sunni clerics notorious for their anti-Shia sermons and social media posts. Sunni youth explained

¹¹Interview conducted by the author with Shia cleric, Old City, Lucknow, June 2015

¹²Interview conducted by the author with Mr. S., Victoria Road, Lucknow, July 2016

that many Sunni children in underdeveloped Old City learn anti-Shia rumors from their parents. One rumor warns that entering a Shia household will lead to conversion to Shiism. Another calls for Sunnis to refuse a cup of tea offered by any Shia because they might have spit in it beforehand.

The narrative of Shia victimization is also shaped by Sunni-Shia violence outside India. Three examples from the field help clarify.

First, I attended a *Shiamajlis*, or religious gathering, in which an extremist Shia cleric primed the audience on victimization by pointing to foreign events.¹³ Before an audience of some 60 Shia adult men and children, the cleric brought the audience to tears by detailing the story of how Ali and his son Husain—revered in Shiism—were murdered. ISIS attacks on Shia in Iraq and Syria, the cleric argued, are just another chapter in anti-Shia terrorism that dates back centuries. “Ya Ali! Ya Husain!”, many listeners fired back, enraged. I observed a second example in 2014. At Lucknow’s most revered Sunni seminary, a senior cleric had issued a *fatwa* calling for all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the head of the Islamic State. In interviews, several Shia clerics condemned the *fatwa*, and blamed other Sunni clerics for not publicly condemning the call. A third example comes from January 2016, when Saudi Arabia publicly executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a dissident Saudi Shia cleric. The sheikh was not particularly important or well-known in northern India. Still, local clerics were able to frame his execution as part of a wider, Saudi-led effort to target Shiism. I witnessed how these clerical arguments mobilized mass protests of Shia youth against Saudi Arabia in the name of defending their faith. Lucknow Shia clerics even organized protests outside the Saudi Embassy in New Delhi.

Although anecdotal, these observations show how perceived victimization distinguishes the two communities. They also suggest that some Shia clerics have exploited and tapped into these perceptions to drive political behavior in Lucknow.

¹³Sermon in July 2015, Shahnajaf Imambarah, Lucknow.

4. The Experiment

4.1 Sampling and Random Assignment

I conducted a survey with an embedded experiment in Lucknow's Old City between December 2016 and February 2017. To examine persuasion when sectarian tensions were salient, the experiment began days after the end of Muharram, the Islamic month when sectarian tensions in Lucknow are highest. Sunni and Shia enumerators recruited a random sample of 2,100 young adult men such that half belonged to each sect. Enumerators recruited subjects from their own sect. Sampling covered all Old City neighborhoods(Urdu: *mohallah*).

I randomly assigned subjects to treatment prior to subject recruitment. Each enumerator received a separate list of subject ID numbers and corresponding experimental group assignment. Using their list, each enumerator then began the process of recruiting subjects who belonged to his sect. Since enumerators were residents of the Old City, they were able to use their local knowledge of sectarian demographics by sampling members of their sect throughout the Old City. From an arbitrary point in each neighborhood, each enumerator approached every third male adult that he encountered. Recruitment took place on small side streets, roadside shops, or tea stalls.

4.2 Survey Structure and Embedded Experiment

Enumerators began the survey upon obtaining informed consent. To encourage participation, enumerators offered respondents a chocolate at the end of the survey.¹⁴ This approach resulted in a recruitment rate of about 85 percent in the Sunni sample and 80 percent in the Shia sample. Enumerators first collected the subject's first name and mobile number.¹⁵ The next questions examined factors sometimes associated with extremism. This includes:[1] employment status; [2] perceived economic marginalization; [3] number of friends in the outgroup; [4] number of in-group

¹⁴Local experts advised that monetary incentives might raise undue suspicions.

¹⁵Enumerators told subjects that they may be contacted again in the future.

friends who have engaged in prior riots; [5] weekly prayer frequency; [6] total years of religious education; and [5] willingness to participate in an extremist religious ritual.

At this point, subjects assigned to treatment were asked to listen to the audio message(s). They did so using the enumerator's cell phone, which contained the pre-loaded audios, and a pair of sterile headphones. Headphones made it possible to privately—and thus safely—deliver the treatment while keeping the subject in the real-life, street setting of the Old City.

After subjects listened to the message(s), enumerators measured the first outcome (*Bought Wristband*). Enumerators offered subjects the chance to buy and wear a 5-rupee (less than 10 U.S. cents) rubber wristband—created for study purposes—that stated “Sunni-Shia Unity” in Urdu. Wristbands with religious messages are uncommon in the Old City. My interviews with NGO workers and street youth emphasized that individuals who paid any cost for such a band and wore it—despite its political content—were not simply “talking cheap”. They were actually taking a somewhat costly, albeit not dangerous, action that indicated their public opposition to extremism.

Afterwards, the survey concluded and the enumerator left. About eight hours later, a different in-group enumerator called the subject and asked to meet for a second interview that day.¹⁶ Once together, the enumerator recorded if the subject was still wearing the wristband. The advantage of this outcome—*Wearing Wristband*—is that it did not involve asking a question, significantly reducing measurement error.

To measure the third outcome, *Anti-Extremist Speech*, enumerators read subjects a hypothetical vignette in which an out-group cleric insults the subject's sect. Subjects were permitted to speak freely as to whether they would join a friend to engage in outgroup violence as a response. Responses were scored a 5-point scale.¹⁷ The survey concluded with questions to study mechanisms of behavior change. They are discussed in Section 5.4.

¹⁶Subjects were recontacted up to five times in an eight hour period.

¹⁷The scale ranges from 1 (Strongly opposes violence) to 5 (Strongly supports).

4.3 Experimental Design

Table 2 shows the basic experimental setup for the pooled sample of 2,100 Sunni and Shia young adult men. The sample is balanced by sectarian identity, with 1,050 Sunni and 1,050 Shia subjects. The first experimental group is the pure control: 420 subjects heard no message. In the second group (*InGroup*), 420 subjects were randomly assigned to listen to a 5-minute anti-violence appeal by an in-group cleric. In the third group (*OutGroup*), 420 subjects heard a 5-minute anti-violence appeal by an out-group cleric. In the fourth group, 840 subjects were randomly assigned to listen to the in-group and out-group messages (10 minutes total). I randomized the order of the messages to account for “recency” and “primacy” effects: half heard the in-group message first. Overall, the experiment takes the form of a $(2 \times 2) \times 2$ factorial design.

Table 2: Basic Experimental Setup: Pooled Sample

	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric
	(1)	(2)
(A) No Outgroup Cleric	420	420
(B) Outgroup Cleric	420	840
$N = 2,100$		

4.4 The Treatments

The experiment involved two original audio messages: one from a Sunni cleric and one from a Shia cleric. I worked with local clerics over time to generate detailed, religious arguments against extremism. Clerics recorded the messages in the Hindi language. Full English transcripts of message content are available in the Appendix.

Three points merit attention. First, both messages were designed to emphasize broadly similar points while permitting sect-specific examples that are normal in such appeals. Content emphasized the shared importance attached to the Quran and its invocation for Muslim unity; parables

from the Prophet Muhammad urging restraint in the face of provocation; and the need to consult elders to resolve tensions peacefully.

Second, the audio messages were recorded by real, local clerics. Both individuals exercise similar, moderate levels of influence and there is no apparent imbalance in economic or political clout between the two. The clerics gave their consent for the messages to be disseminated in the local population. Each speaker began his message by stating his title, name, and location in Lucknow.

Third, the experiment was implemented to simulate—in reverse—the way that radicalizers often target youth. The treatments used 5-minute long messages, rather than a simple sentence or prime, in order to deliver a more realistic dosage of clerical persuasion. Subjects were treated on side streets, and not in a lab setting, to try to study behavior change in more natural settings.

5. Results

5.1 Pooled Sample

Table 3 presents the results for the pooled sample. Each of the three outcome measures are coded such that lower values indicate a more extremist position. The first outcome measure is *Purchased Band at T_1* , a binary variable scored as 1 if the subject purchased and wore the pro-peace wristband at the first endline. The second measure is *Wearing Band 8 Hours Later at T_2* , also a binary variable scored as 1 if the subject was still wearing the wristband at the second endline. The third measure

Table 3: **Pooled Sample:** Group Means, Conditional Average Treatment Effects, and Average Treatment Effects

<i>Purchased Anti-Extremism Band at T₁ (N = 2,086)</i>				
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(A) No Outgroup Cleric	0.306 (0.022)	0.354 (0.023)	0.330 (0.016)	0.047 (0.032)
(B) Outgroup Cleric	0.335 (0.023)	0.336 (0.016)	0.335 (0.013)	0.002 (0.028)
(C) All	0.320 (0.016)	0.342 (0.013)	0.334 (0.010)	0.020 (0.021)
(D) Change	0.028 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.028)	0.000 (0.021)	-0.046 (0.043)
<i>Wearing Anti-Extremism Band 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N = 2,071)</i>				
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(E) No Outgroup Cleric	0.235 (0.020)	0.289 (0.022)	0.262 (0.015)	0.054* (0.030)
(F) Outgroup Cleric	0.238 (0.020)	0.255 (0.015)	0.250 (0.012)	0.017 (0.026)
(G) All	0.237 (0.014)	0.266 (0.012)	0.254 (0.009)	0.031 (0.019)
(H) Change	0.003 (0.029)	-0.033 (0.026)	-0.019 (0.019)	-0.036 (0.040)
<i>Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N = 2,074)</i>				
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(I) No Outgroup Cleric	-0.058 (0.044)	-0.002 (0.047)	-0.030 (0.032)	0.055 (0.065)
(J) Outgroup Cleric	-0.035 (0.049)	0.048 (0.036)	0.020 (0.029)	0.084 (0.062)
(K) All	-0.047 (0.033)	0.031 (0.029)	0.000 (0.021)	0.072 (0.045)
(L) Change	0.022 (0.066)	0.051 (0.062)	0.039 (0.045)	0.028 (0.091)

1. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2. Standard errors in parentheses.

3. *Extremist Speech* ranges from -3.090 to 6.143

is *Anti-Extremist Speech at T_2* , a standardized transformation of the original variable from a 5-point, Likert-type scale.

The results show that neither *InGroup*, *OutGroup*, nor *InGroup* \times *OutGroup* significantly affects wristband purchases (C4, D3, and D4). Second, *InGroup* leads to an average increase of 3.2 % ($p < 0.10$) in the chance of wearing the band 8 hours later. This rises to 5.4 % ($p < 0.10$) when only the in-group message is heard. Neither *OutGroup* nor *InGroup* \times *OutGroup* significantly affects the second outcome (H3 and H4). Third, anti-extremist speech is not affected by the treatments (K4, L3, and L4).

5.2 By Subgroup

In Table 4, a striking pattern emerges in the Sunni sample. *InGroup* significantly reduces extremist behavior on all three measures (C4, G4, and K4). *InGroup* also increases the chance of purchasing the wristband by 7.1% ($p < 0.05$) and of wearing it eight hours later by 7.8% ($p < 0.05$). It also increases anti-extremist speech by 0.239σ ($p < 0.01$). By contrast, neither the out-group cleric message (D3, H3, or L3) nor the interaction (D4, H4, and L4) significantly affect any of the three outcomes.

Moreover, *InGroup* exerts larger effects when the subject is not exposed to *OutGroup*. In this case, *InGroup* increases the chance of purchasing the anti-extremism band by 12.6% and wearing the band 8 hours later by 12.0%, as well as increasing anti-extremist speech by 0.281σ (A4, E4, I4).

Table 4: **Sunni Sample:** Group Means, Conditional Average Treatment Effects, and Average Treatment Effects

	<i>Purchase Anti-Extremism Band at T₁ (N=1,048)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(A) No Outgroup Cleric	0.416 (0.034)	0.542 (0.034)	0.479 (0.024)	0.126*** (0.048)
(B) Outgroup Cleric	0.471 (0.034)	0.501 (0.024)	0.491 (0.019)	0.029 (0.042)
(C) All	0.443 (0.024)	0.515 (0.019)	0.486 (0.015)	0.068** (0.031)
(D) Change	0.055 (0.048)	-0.041 (0.042)	-0.002 (0.031)	-0.096 (0.064)
	<i>Wearing Anti-Extremism Band 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N=1,042)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(E) No Outgroup Cleric	0.338 (0.032)	0.458 (0.034)	0.398 (0.023)	0.120** (0.047)
(F) Outgroup Cleric	0.371 (0.033)	0.418 (0.024)	0.403 (0.019)	0.046 (0.041)
(G) All	0.354 (0.023)	0.432 (0.019)	0.401 (0.015)	0.076** (0.031)
(H) Change	0.033 (0.046)	-0.040 (0.042)	-0.010 (0.031)	-0.074 (0.063)
	<i>Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N=1,043)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(I) No Outgroup Cleric	-0.080 (0.052)	0.200 (0.060)	0.059 (0.040)	0.281*** (0.080)
(J) Outgroup Cleric	0.006 (0.062)	0.214 (0.046)	0.145 (0.037)	0.207*** (0.079)
(K) All	-0.036 (0.041)	0.210 (0.036)	0.111 (0.027)	0.237*** (0.057)
(L) Change	0.087 (0.082)	0.013 (0.078)	0.043 (0.057)	-0.073 (0.115)

1. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2. Standard errors in parentheses.

3. *Anti-Extremist Speech* for this sample ranges from -1.122 to 2.269

Table 5: **Shia Sample:** Group Means, Conditional Average Treatment Effects, and Average Treatment Effects

	<i>Purchased Anti-Extremism Band at T₁ (N=1,038)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(A) No Outgroup Cleric	0.196 (0.027)	0.160 (0.025)	0.178 (0.018)	-0.035 (0.037)
(B) Outgroup Cleric	0.197 (0.027)	0.170 (0.018)	0.179 (0.015)	-0.026 (0.032)
(C) All	0.196 (0.019)	0.167 (0.014)	0.179 (0.011)	-0.030 (0.024)
(D) Change	0.001 (0.039)	0.009 (0.031)	0.005 (0.024)	0.008 (0.049)
	<i>Wearing Band 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N=1,029)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(E) No Outgroup Cleric	0.131 (0.023)	0.117 (0.022)	0.124 (0.016)	-0.013 (0.032)
(F) Outgroup Cleric	0.105 (0.021)	0.090 (0.013)	0.095 (0.011)	-0.015 (0.025)
(G) All	0.118 (0.015)	0.099 (0.012)	0.106 (0.009)	-0.014 (0.019)
(H) Change	-0.025 (0.031)	-0.027 (0.025)	-0.026 (0.019)	-0.002 (0.040)
	<i>Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T₂ (N=1,031)</i>			
	No Ingroup Cleric	Ingroup Cleric	All	Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(I) No Outgroup Cleric	-0.035 (0.071)	-0.208 (0.070)	-0.121 (0.051)	-0.172* (0.101)
(J) Outgroup Cleric	-0.078 (0.075)	-0.120 (0.054)	-0.106 (0.044)	-0.041 (0.093)
(K) All	-0.057 (0.052)	-0.149 (0.043)	-0.112 (0.033)	-0.094 (0.069)
(L) Change	-0.043 (0.105)	0.088 (0.092)	0.035 (0.069)	0.131 (0.140)

1. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2. Standard errors in parentheses.

3. Anti-Extremist Speech ranges from -1.122 to 2.269

When *OutGroup* is present, *InGroup* continues to significantly increase anti-extremist speech (J4) but not the first two outcomes (B4 and F4).

Together, the results support the expectation that *InGroup* reduces extremism for the Sunni sample but not the Shia sample.

Table 5 turns to the Shia sample. Neither *InGroup*, *OutGroup*, $InGroup \times OutGroup$ affect the three outcomes. In fact, the table shows that *InGroup* exerts a backfiring effect on Shia subjects who were not exposed to *OutGroup*: anti-extremist speech significantly reduces by 0.172σ . While fragile ($p < 0.10$), this effect is consistent with the expectation that Shia subjects will retain extremism even when ordered not to do so.

5.3 Difference in Effects Between Sects

Table 6 further provides a direct test of the difference in effects of the treatments between the Sunni and Shia samples. It presents the results of OLS regressions to estimate the difference in effects between sects of *InGroup*, *OutGroup*, and $InGroup \times OutGroup$ on extremism.

$$Y_i = \tau_1 \times InGroup_i \times SHIA_i + \tau_2 \times OutGroup_i \times SHIA_i + \tau_3 \times InGroup_i \times OutGroup_i \times SHIA_i + SHIA_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where τ_1 refers to the difference in the average treatment effect of *InGroup* between sects; τ_2 refers to difference in average treatment effect of *Outgroup* between sects; τ_3 is the difference in average effects of $InGroup \times OutGroup$ between sects; $SHIA_i$ is a fixed effect denoting if the i -th subject is Shia or Sunni; and ϵ_i is a disturbance term. Note that the tables only report the three coefficients of interest.

The results show that exposure to an anti-violence appeal by an in-group cleric works significantly less effectively in reducing extremism for Shia rather than Sunni subjects. This pattern is consistent across all three dependent variables ($p < 0.05$ for *Purchased Anti-Extremism Band at T_1* and *Wearing Band 8 Hours Later at T_2* ; $p < 0.01$ for *Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T_2*). Consistent with study expectations, the results also highlight that the pattern is unique to

Table 6: Difference of Average Treatment Effects Between Sects on Extremism

	Purchased Band at T_1	Wearing Band at T_2	Anti-Extremist Speech at T_2
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>InGroup</i> \times <i>SHIA</i>	-0.049** (0.020)	-0.046** (0.019)	-0.166*** (0.045)
<i>OutGroup</i> \times <i>SHIA</i>	0.005 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.019)	-0.004 (0.045)
<i>InGroup</i> \times <i>OutGroup</i> \times <i>SHIA</i>	0.053 (0.041)	0.036 (0.038)	0.103 (0.091)
Constant	0.335*** (0.010)	0.256*** (0.009)	-0.002 (0.022)
Obs	2,086	2,071	2,074
Adj.- R^2	0.108	0.116	0.019
F Stat.	***	***	***

1. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

2. Standard errors in parentheses.

3. *Anti-Extremist Speech* ranges from -1.122 to 2.269.

the in-group cleric's message: *Outgroup* and *Ingroup* \times *Outgroup* are not significantly more effective for either sect. Additional robustness checks show that these patterns remain when including enumerator fixed effects and adjusting for covariates (Appendix A2).

5.4 Mechanisms

I examine the pre-specified mechanisms using survey questions administered after all outcomes were measured. To measure strategic considerations, all subjects were primed on a hypothetical situation in which an outgroup member attacked an in-group member. Each subject was then asked to state: (1) their personal willingness to punish an outgroup extremist (*I Punish*) and (2) their confidence that the outgroup will itself punish outgroup extremists (*Out Punish*). Each variable is coded on a 5-point scale. Higher values of *I Punish* indicate higher willingness to personally punish an outgroup extremist, while higher values of *Out Punish* indicate higher confidence in outgroup policing.

To examine the prescriptive norm change mechanism, subjects were read a hypothetical vignette in which an in-group member attacks an out-group member who had insulted his sect. They were asked to state the extent to which Islamic norms justify a violent response. Higher values of *Norms* indicate a strengthened perception that outgroup violence is an undesirable behavior for ingroup members. Third, to consider the sanctioning mechanism, subjects were told to imagine that an in-group cleric ordered them to not use violence against an outgroup member even if he had insulted them. *Sanction* increases in higher concern of being sanctioned for disobeying the cleric's order. Lastly, to examine the prejudice-reduction route, subjects were asked to indicate how warm they felt toward the outgroup on a 100-point scale (*Warmth*).

Tables 7 and 8 report the analysis of potential mechanisms for the Sunni and Shia sample respectively. I ran OLS regressions of the standardized mechanism variables on the demeaned treatments and their interaction. Since this analysis is not causal in nature, point estimates should be interpreted as suggestive evidence of mechanisms.

For the Sunni sample, *InGroup* appears to work via all four mechanisms. The evidence suggests that persuasion worked via the more anticipated routes of sanctioning ($\hat{\beta} = 0.168, p < 0.01$) and prejudice-reduction ($\hat{\beta} = 0.200, p < 0.01$). Notably, the appeal also appeared to affect behavior by shifting strategic considerations and prescriptive norms. *InGroup* made Sunni subjects significantly more confident that the Shia will punish Shia extremists ($\hat{\beta} = 0.271, p < 0.01$) and—in a logically consistent manner—also made them significantly less willing to personally punish a Shia extremist ($\hat{\beta} = -0.233, p < 0.01$). Regarding norm change, *InGroup* also made Sunni subjects more likely to believe that outgroup violence is not desirable behavior for Sunni Muslims ($\hat{\beta}=0.183, p < 0.01$).

Table 7 also shows that *OutGroup* and *InGroup*×*OutGroup* did not operate via these mechanisms in a similar manner. Although *OutGroup* reduced prejudice, it did not appear to affect strategic considerations, prescriptive norms, or sanctioning concerns. The results regarding *InGroup*×*OutGroup* also do not show systematic patterns.

Turning to the Shia sample, Table 8 shows that there is no evidence that *Ingroup* affected

Table 7: Analysis of Mechanisms: Sunni Sample

	<i>Dep. Var.: Standardized Variables</i>				
	Out Punish	I Punish	Norms	Sanction	Warmth
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>InGroup</i>	0.271*** (0.062)	-0.233*** (0.055)	0.183*** (0.056)	0.168*** (0.055)	0.200*** (0.047)
<i>OutGroup</i>	0.114* (0.062)	-0.049 (0.055)	0.069 (0.056)	0.076 (0.055)	0.117** (0.047)
<i>In × Out</i>	-0.219* (0.125)	0.124 (0.110)	-0.048 (0.113)	-0.235** (0.112)	-0.180* (0.095)
Constant	0.271*** (0.030)	-0.083*** (0.027)	-0.574*** (0.027)	-0.004 (0.027)	-0.452*** (0.023)
Obs	1,043	1,043	1,043	1,043	1,043
Adj.-R ²	0.026	0.019	0.011	0.015	0.029
F Stat.	***	***	***	***	***

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

any of the pre-specified mechanisms. A largely similar pattern results characterizes *Outgroup* and *In × Out*. Among the Shia sample, exposure to the outgroup cleric's message significantly increases warmth toward the Sunni ($\hat{\beta} = 0.158$, $p < 0.05$) but does not affect other mechanisms. Lastly, the interaction of the treatments increases confidence that the outgroup will punish an outgroup extremist ($\hat{\beta} = 0.260$, $p < 0.05$) but does not affect other mechanisms.

Table 8: Analysis of Mechanisms: Shia Sample

	<i>Dep. Var.: Standardized Variables</i>				
	Out Punish	I Punish	Norms	Sanction	Warmth
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>InGroup</i>	0.010 (0.062)	0.023 (0.067)	0.052 (0.048)	0.005 (0.072)	-0.005 (0.065)
<i>OutGroup</i>	-0.030 (0.062)	-0.017 (0.067)	-0.011 (0.048)	-0.014 (0.072)	0.158** (0.065)
<i>In×Out</i>	0.260** (0.124)	-0.154 (0.135)	0.073 (0.098)	0.017 (0.146)	0.112 (0.131)
Constant	-0.275*** (0.030)	0.078** (0.033)	0.580*** (0.024)	0.014 (0.035)	0.461*** (0.032)
Obs	1,031	1,031	1,031	1,027	1,031
Adj.-R ²	0.002	-0.001	-0.001	-0.003	0.003
F Stat.	1.589	0.494	0.545	0.019	2.158*

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6. Unpacking the Effect of Religious Identity

Why does the in-group message work less effectively for Shia subjects? As explained earlier, the prior theoretical logic argues that the difference is due to an element of Shia identity: perceived victimization. The experimental results fall in line with the logic's expectations. Yet those results alone, however, do not make it possible to attribute the difference in effects to the victimization explanation. The problem is clear: religious identity is not randomly assigned, which means that other individual-level characteristics might be confounding what appears to be a difference due to religious identity.

I ran two additional tests to further interrogate whether the victimization explanation is plausible relative to other explanations. I treat perceived victimization as a group-level characteristic.¹⁸

The first test is basic: I investigate whether the *InGroup*×*SHIA* point estimate weakens in size or significance when adjusting for other individual-level covariates. To do so, I constructed

¹⁸The qualitative evidence presented earlier argues that perceived victimization is a far more salient feature of Shia group identity rather than Sunni group identity in Lucknow.

a general index of extremism by taking a simple average of the standardized transformations of the *Purchased Anti-Extremism Band* and *Wearing Band 8 Hours Later* variables combined with the *Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later* variable, which was already standardized. This index was then re-standardized, generating the *Extremism Index*. As with the earlier outcome variables, *Extremism Index* is coded so that a higher value indicates a more pro-peace behavior.

Table 9 presents the results for three models estimated by OLS.¹⁹ Model 1 shows that *InGroup* × *SHIA* is negative and statistically significant on the standardized index ($\hat{\beta} = -0.160$, $p < 0.01$). The same result obtains with the inclusion of enumerator fixed effects ($\hat{\beta} = -0.160$, $p < 0.01$). Model 3 shows that the difference in effects between sects of *InGroup* remains negative and statistically significant at the 1 % level, with a slightly lower point estimate ($\hat{\beta} = -0.135$). These results show that the in-group cleric's message has a differential effect by sect that is robust to the inclusion of enumerator fixed effects and covariate adjustment.

The second test goes beyond covariate adjustment and seek to unpack the *InGroup* × *SHIA* result. I ran seven distinct OLS models. In each model, the extremism index is regressed not only on *InGroup* × *SHIA* but also *InGroup* × *Characteristic*, where *Characteristic* refers to one of the seven covariates. Within each column (or model), it is possible to see if *InGroup* continues to work significantly less effectively for the Shia even after accounting for whether it exerts a differential effect along another covariate profile. If we observe a change in the size or significance of the $\hat{\beta}$ on *InGroup* × *SHIA*, in tandem with a statistically significant point estimate on *InGroup* × *Characteristic*, it shows that the other characteristic is responsible for driving part of the difference of effects of the in-group message across sects.

¹⁹All models use demeaned treatment dummies so that the point estimates on terms interacted with the treatment denote the effect of a particular treatment averaged over all other treatments.

Table 9: Robustness: Difference in Effects Between Sects on Extremism Index

	<i>Dep. Var: Extremism Index (Standardized):</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>InGroup</i> × <i>SHIA</i>	−0.160*** (0.043)	−0.160*** (0.041)	−0.135*** (0.039)
<i>OutGroup</i> × <i>SHIA</i>	−0.005 (0.043)	−0.007 (0.041)	−0.018 (0.039)
Unemp			−0.023 (0.054)
Econ. Marg.			0.147*** (0.025)
Outgroup Friends			0.042*** (0.010)
Violent Peers			0.072*** (0.010)
Prayer Attendance			−0.010*** (0.002)
Extrem. Ritual Part.			−0.141*** (0.017)
Yrs. Relig. Educ.			0.018* (0.011)
ENUM FE?	<i>N</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>
Constant	0.001 (0.021)	0.282*** (0.044)	0.337*** (0.106)
Obs	2,067	2,067	2,060
Adj.-R ²	0.115	0.211	0.285
F Stat	39.388***	37.846***	38.361***
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 Standard errors in parentheses.			

Table 10: Interactions of Treatments with Covariates

	<i>Dep. Var.: Extremism Index (Std.)</i>						
	Unemp.	Marg.	OutGroup Friends	Viol. Peers	Pray Freq.	Ritual Part.	Rel. Educ.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>In × SHIA</i>	-0.101* (0.052)	-0.149*** (0.050)	-0.158*** (0.052)	-0.219*** (0.056)	-0.154*** (0.044)	-0.155*** (0.042)	-0.155*** (0.049)
<i>Out × SHIA</i>	-0.047 (0.053)	0.005 (0.049)	-0.026 (0.052)	-0.031 (0.057)	-0.002 (0.044)	-0.020 (0.042)	-0.017 (0.049)
<i>In × Char.</i>	-0.214** (0.107)	-0.019 (0.048)	0.0001 (0.019)	0.020 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.073** (0.032)	-0.002 (0.013)
<i>Out × Char.</i>	0.152 (0.109)	-0.017 (0.048)	0.006 (0.019)	0.007 (0.014)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.021 (0.032)	0.011 (0.013)
Constant	-0.001 (0.021)	0.002 (0.021)	0.001 (0.021)	0.001 (0.021)	0.002 (0.021)	-0.002 (0.021)	0.001 (0.021)
Obs	2,067	2,061	2,066	2,067	2,067	2,067	2,067
Adj.-R ²	0.116	0.113	0.133	0.121	0.116	0.156	0.146

Note: *p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Results show that $InGroup \times SHIA$ remains statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ when interacting the demeaned treatment dummies with six of the covariates. In the the model including $InGroup \times Unemp.$, however, $InGroup \times SHIA$ reduces slightly in magnitude and falls just shy of conventional significance ($p=0.056$). This suggests that there is an economic component to the differential effect of $InGroup$. Unemployment is not necessarily rival to the victimization explanation; it could be a component of the victimization itself.

7. Discussion

This study unpacks the process of elite persuasion by using an experiment aiming to reduce extremist behavior. I highlight four main findings and then discuss implications for political science and policy.

First, the results show some of the first causal evidence that persuasion can be an effective tool to combat extremism. For Sunni subjects, exposure to an anti-violence appeal by an in-group cleric reduced extremist behaviors up to 8 hours later. The treatment increased: [1] the chance of buying and wearing an anti-extremism wristband by 6.8 % ($p < 0.05$) immediately after treatment; [2] the chance that the subject wore the band 8 hours later by 7.6 % ($p < 0.05$); and [3] expressions of anti-extremist speech by 9.37 % ($p < 0.01$).

Second, in line with theoretical expectations on the role of perceived victimization, the results show that the in-group cleric's appeal works differently across groups: it is effective in changing behavior for the Sunni sample but is ineffective in doing so in the Shia sample. I discuss the evidence for this explanation below and consider plausible alternatives.

Third, the results highlight the inefficacy of persuasion by an out-group elite. Exposure to that appeal does not affect extremist behaviors for either sample. Furthermore, when both messages are present, the effect is not significantly different from when the in-group message is alone present. This results are consistent with the hypothesis that when a perceived enemy makes a friendly appeal in a high conflict setting, it will likely elicit suspicions and fall flat (Maoz et al. 2002; Ross

and Stilling 1991).

Finally, the results provide suggestive evidence on how the in-group appeal reduced extremism in the Sunni sample. Beyond sanctioning and prejudice-reduction pathways, which are more anticipated, the results also show that the appeal worked by shifting strategic considerations as well as prescriptive religious norms. It made Sunni subjects more confident that the Shia will police Shia extremists, and strengthened their belief that outgroup violence is not desirable behavior under Islam.

7.1 Elite Persuasion and Conflict

Elite persuasion is at the heart of ethnic conflict (Wilkinson 2006; Kaufman 2001; Brass 1997). This study offers several important insights on whether and how persuasion works at the individual level.

First, elite appeals—even brief ones—can significantly change followers’ behavior in the short-run. This matters for a classic debate in the study of ethnic conflict over whether elites can be blamed (or rewarded) for the actions of their followers Fearon and Laitin (2000). The results show that, at least with regard to anti-violence appeals and within some groups, elites do matter.

The second lesson introduces the role of asymmetry: the effectiveness of anti-violence elite appeals may vary between groups due to intergroup inequalities. The qualitative evidence and experimental results support a novel logic: anti-violence appeals are less effective in groups that perceive themselves as victimized. This finding revives the relevance of a related claim that Horowitz (1985, 175) makes but that received little scrutiny since then. In ethnic conflicts, he observed, ‘backward’ groups tend to resist conciliatory calls by their own elites.

The theoretical logic differs from most other explanations of why persuasion sometimes fails—approaches that tend to focus on speaker/recipient attributes or message strength (Chong and Druckman 2007). It also contrasts with recent experimental work emphasizing that majority-minority differences matter. Gaikwad and Nellis (2016) and Chhibber and Sekhon (2014), for instance, find that ethnic appeals are more effective within the minority group, whereas I find the

opposite pattern.

This result matters for how we think about persuasion and conflict in general. First, the study challenges to theories that assume that symbolic persuasion will be effective in reducing extremism in ethnic conflicts regardless of group differences (Kaufman 2006a). Second, it raises an important question: if anti-violence appeals are least effective for victimized groups, then is persuasion most powerless where it is most needed? This matters for how we understand the limitations of elite influence within victimized groups, whether in the context of racial conflict in U.S. cities or between Muslim migrants and natives in Europe.

What might the victimization logic imply about the effectiveness of elite persuasion that promotes extremism? There are two possibilities. If one assumes that that pro-violence appeals work the same way as anti-violence appeals, then the expectation is that pro-violence appeals will be more effective for members of the non-victimized group. This appears to match the conventional constructivist models of violence, in which elites in the non-victimized—often majority—group motivate their followers toward violence. The other possibility is that members of perceived victimized groups might be more resistant to peace appeals, but more receptive to violence appeals. New research can help weigh the validity of these contrasting possibilities.

Still, caution is warranted regarding the victimization logic. Other explanations may be plausible. First, it could be that one religious group is more receptive to clerical pronouncements. One problem with this explanation is that Shia—not Sunni—theology particularly values clerical obedience (Dabashi 2011), but the results show the opposite pattern. Second, the difference could stem from the minority status of the Shia in Lucknow. It may be the case that minority status triggers a refusal to comply with the anti-violence appeal. While historical and qualitative evidence points to victimization, future research can help interrogate if minority status may instead be at work. Beyond the Indian case, new experiments can examine if anti-violence appeals are less effective for ethnic majorities in conflict settings where they—and not the minority group—more strongly perceive themselves as victimized.

Third, it may be that Sunni and Shia message differences were due to real or perceived differ-

ences in content or speakers. As explained earlier (section 4.4), both messages were highly similar in content. Although the Sunni and Shia messages made different scriptural references, they did so in order to mimic the actual differences in how the two sects make appeals.

To examine perceptions of the speakers, I ran an additional survey with a different sample of 60 subjects in the study area. Results show that Sunni subjects rated the Sunni cleric as more influential than Shia clerics rated the Shia cleric, though the difference is not large ($\mu_{Sunni} = 2.2$, $\mu_{Shia} = 1.7$).²⁰ This small difference in influence ratings challenges the possibility that such perceptions drove treatment differences. Furthermore, to the extent that Shia subjects perceived their cleric as less influential, they may do so because they feel their group is victimized and their clerics less powerful than their Sunni counterparts.

Although the victimization logic appears plausible relative to others, further studies in different settings can help shape a broader theory of when and how it may matter for persuasion in conflict settings.

7.2 Religion and Conflict

A second set of lessons relates to the study of religion and conflict. First, I show that even in trenchant religious conflicts, exposure to a relatively brief anti-violence appeal by a religious cleric can reduce behaviors linked to extremism. This insight helps expand the literature on extremism beyond its predominant focus on the correlates of religious and political extremism (Mitts 2017; Blair and Shapiro 2013; Krueger and Malečková 2003) to potential methods to counter these phenomena. Moreover, the evidence here helps to grow what has been documented to be a surprisingly low level of experimental evidence on how to build tolerance in conflict settings (Paluck 2016).

Next, the results demonstrate that when religious persuasion works, it does so via exposure to an in-group elite rather than by an out-group elite. Furthermore, joint exposure to messaging by elites from both groups is indistinguishable from exposure to an in-group elite. This finding is

²⁰The scale is: 1: “no influence”; 2: “influence, but very little”; 3: “a lot”.

consistent with the reactive devaluation hypothesis, which suggests that support to the reactive devaluation hypothesis challenges one line of argumentation in the conflict literature, which implies that joint exposure to elites from both groups will be more effective in reducing behaviors linked to conflict (Sisk 2011; Rouhana and Kelman 1994). Rather, the results here suggest the plausibility of working within groups to defuse tensions. Scholars can help carry this research agenda further by probing the conditions under which joint exposure is more effective than exposure to an elite from one's own group in reducing behaviors linked to conflict.

Lastly, the results offer suggestive evidence that the religious content of the anti-violence appeals affected behavior by shifting perceived religious norms. In particular, for the Sunni sample, the in-group cleric's message strengthened the perception that Islam prohibits the use of violence against outgroup members. The insight that the religious appeal shifted a religious consideration—prescriptive religious norms around violence—offers an important insight as to how religion might affect political behavior. In doing so, the study helps to meet calls for greater scrutiny of how religion shapes political behaviors (Grzymala-Busse 2012). To extend this line of work, future research should consider examining if religious anti-violence appeals work more effectively than secular appeals delivered by a cleric. Such work would help establish whether prior experimental research showing no difference in the two appeals in eliciting prosocial behavior (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007) also travel to the dimension of conflict-related behaviors.

7.3 Generalizability and Policy

These results offer some of the first-ever experimental evidence that religious persuasion—an important feature of Countering Violent Extremism programming—can be an effective intervention. For policymakers, such evidence shows that so-called “soft” approaches to countering extremism—such as those that involve clerical persuasion—can be effective. In doing so, the study challenges a view held by many policy officials across the globe who strongly favor “harder” methods to

counter extremism and cast doubt on whether persuasion can work.²¹

Although this study focuses on intra-Muslim conflict in India, there are elements of the intervention, theory, and results that apply to other cases. First, the treatments are smaller-scale dosages of persuasion interventions that are funded by governments and organizations around the world. The results can help us think about how pro-peace radio programs, educational interventions, or weekly religious sermons might be shaping attitudes and behaviors regarding extremism. Second, the intervention and results may be relevant to reducing extremism in other cases of Sunni-Shia conflict. The message content used arguments that are commonly used by Sunni and Shia clerics around the world, and are not specific to the South Asian versions of the faith.

Second, the argument regarding victimization is not specific to South Asia, Islam, or even religious identity. The design here can be replicated in other settings in order to establish if similar patterns obtain in victimized racial, tribal, or linguistic groups in conflict settings.

One particular consideration relates to the role of the state. In this study, qualitative research showed that the mostly-Hindu government behaved in a plausibly neutral manner vis-a-vis the Sunni and Shia groups. In cases where the government takes a side, what might the victimization logic suggest about how persuasion works? One possibility is that (i) as the government's assistance to the non-victimized group, G_{nv} increases, (ii) security concerns members of the victimized group G_v increase, thereby (iii) reducing the effectiveness of pro-peace elite messaging within G_v . Another possibility is that (i) as the government's assistance to members of G_v increases, (ii) security concerns among the members of that group decrease, thereby (iii) increasing the effectiveness of pro-peace messaging within the victimized group. Future experiments in cases that vary in state bias can help probe this important question.

²¹ Author interviews with Western, African, and Asian officials and NGO staff, Hedayah Institute, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., December 2015 and Doha, State of Qatar, June 2015.

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Appendix

A1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 11: Full Sample: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Unemployed	2,090	0.379	0.485	0	1
Yrs. Quran Lessons	2,089	4.604	3.631	0	21
Outgroup Friends	2,088	1.964	2.756	0	10
Violent Peers	2,089	3.508	4.080	0	10
Weekly Prayer Attendance	2,089	11.685	10.341	0	35
Extr. Ritual Part.	2,089	3.493	1.332	0	5
Econ Marg	2,084	2.907	1.041	1	4
Prioritize Sect	2,100	0.601	0.490	0	1

Table 12: Sunni Sample: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Unemployed	1,050	0.102	0.303	0	1
Yrs. Quran Lessons	1,050	2.822	1.046	0	5
Outgroup Friends	1,050	0.379	0.860	0	5
Violent Peers	1,050	0.877	1.318	0	6
Weekly Prayer Part.	1,050	9.248	7.874	0	35
Extr. Ritual Part.	1,050	3.449	1.109	0	5
Econ. Marg.	1,050	2.398	0.931	1	4
Prioritize Sect	1,050	0.582	0.493	0	1

A2. Robustness: Difference in Effects Between Sects

The following tables use regression via OLS to estimate the difference in the average treatment effects of an in-group cleric, out-group cleric, and their interaction between sects on the three dependent variables. In these tables, note that the treatment dummy variables, *InCler* and *OutCler*,

Table 13: Shia Sample: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Unemployed	1,040	0.659	0.474	0	1
Yrs. Quran Lessons	1,039	6.405	4.353	0	21
Outgroup Friends	1,038	3.567	3.069	0	10
Violent Peers	1,039	6.167	4.203	0	10
Weekly Prayer Part.	1,039	14.149	11.849	0	35
Extr. Ritual Part.	1,039	3.538	1.524	1	5
Econ Marg.	1,034	3.425	0.880	1	4
Prioritize Sect	1,050	0.620	0.486	0	1

as well as the Shia dummy, *SHIA*, are demeaned.

In the first table, the fully saturated model in column 4 is as follows:

$$Y_i = \tau_1 * IN * SHIA + \tau_2 * OUT * SHIA + B_i * X_i + IN * X_i + OUT * X_i + Enum_j + SHIA_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where τ_1 refers to the difference in average effects of *IN* between sects; τ_2 refers to the difference in average effects of *OUT* between sects; X_i refer to the i covariates, $Enum_j$ are the fixed effects for the j enumerators, and ϵ_i is a disturbance term. Models in columns 1-3 are respectively modified as described in the bottom part of the table. Lastly, for each model, the observations, adjusted- R^2 , and F-statistics are provided below the outcome variable.

In the second table, the fully saturated model in column 4 is as follows:

$$Y_i = IN * SHIA + OUT * SHIA + \tau_3 * IN * OUT * SHIA + B_i * X_i + IN * OUT * X_i + Enum_j + SHIA_i + \epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where τ_3 refers to the difference in the average effect of $IN * OUT$; X_i refer to the i covariates, $Enum_j$ are the fixed effects for the j enumerators, and ϵ_i is a disturbance term. Models in columns 1-3 are respectively modified as described in the bottom part of the table. Lastly, for each model, the observations, adjusted- R^2 , and F-statistics are provided below the outcome variable.

Table 14: Robustness: Difference in ATE of *InGroup* and *OutGroup* Between Sects

<i>Purchase Band at T₁</i> (Binary)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>InGroup*SHIA</i>	-0.051** (0.020)	-0.050*** (0.019)	-0.037** (0.019)	-0.030 (0.032)
<i>OutGroup*SHIA</i>	0.003 (0.020)	0.002 (0.019)	-0.001 (0.019)	-0.010 (0.032)
Observations	2,086	2,086	2,079	2,079
Adjusted R ²	0.107	0.189	0.251	0.252
F Stat.	51.160***	38.485***	35.909***	21.552***
<i>Wearing Band 8 Hours Later at T₂</i> (Binary)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Incleric*SHIA</i>	-0.047** (0.019)	0.047** (0.018)	-0.036** (0.018)	-0.054* (0.030)
<i>Outcleric*SHIA</i>	-0.009 (0.019)	-0.009 (0.018)	-0.012 (0.018)	-0.018 (0.030)
Observations	2,071	2,071	2,064	2,064
Adjusted R ²	0.116	0.150	0.203	0.205
F Stat.	55.486***	29.062***	27.294***	16.602***
<i>Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T₂</i> (Standardized)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Incleric*SHIA</i>	-0.168*** (0.045)	-0.165*** (0.043)	-0.154*** (0.041)	-0.050 (0.070)
<i>Outcleric*SHIA</i>	-0.008 (0.045)	-0.008 (0.043)	-0.012 (0.041)	-0.123* (0.070)
Observations	2,074	2,074	2,067	2,067
Adjusted R ²	0.019	0.114	0.186	0.204
F Stat.	8.97***	26.042***	24.634***	16.596***
SHIA FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Enum FE?	N	Y	Y	Y
Cov?	N	N	Y	Y
Cov* <i>Incleric</i> ?	N	N	N	Y
Cov* <i>Outcleric</i> ?	N	N	N	Y

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 15: Robustness: Difference in ATE of $InGroup \times OutGroup$ Between Sects

<i>Purchase Band at T_1</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>In*Out*SHIA</i>	0.052 (0.040)	0.051 (0.039)	0.017 (0.038)	0.123* (0.064)
Constant	0.334*** (0.010)	0.487*** (0.021)	0.584*** (0.051)	0.580*** (0.052)
Observations	2,086	2,086	2,079	2,079
Adj. R^2	0.108	0.190	0.251	0.255
F Stat.	36.965***	33.580***	32.715***	17.500***
<i>Wearing Band 8 Hours Later at T_2</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>In*Out*SHIA</i>	0.036 (0.038)	0.035 (0.037)	0.004 (0.036)	0.034 (0.062)
Constant	0.255*** (0.009)	0.356*** (0.020)	0.250*** (0.049)	0.266*** (0.050)
Observations	2,071	2,071	2,064	2,064
Adj.- R^2	0.116	0.150	0.203	0.204
F Stat.	39.910***	25.323***	24.846***	13.305***
<i>Anti-Extremist Speech 8 Hours Later at T_2</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>In*Out*SHIA</i>	0.102 (0.091)	0.100 (0.087)	0.055 (0.083)	-0.012 (0.142)
Constant	-0.001 (0.022)	0.107** (0.047)	0.943*** (0.113)	0.964*** (0.115)
Observations	2,074	2,074	2,067	2,067
Adj.- R^2	0.017	0.109	0.186	0.194
F Stat.	6.050***	17.908***	22.437***	12.536***
SHIA FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Enum FE?	N	Y	Y	Y
Cov?	N	N	Y	Y
Cov* <i>In*Outcleric?</i>	N	N	N	Y

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

A3. Audio Recording Transcripts in English

A3.1: Sunni Cleric Message (Audio Duration: 5 min)

In the name of Allah, the most beneficent and the most merciful. All praises for Allah and prayers for the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny. I, Maulana Muhammad Sufyan Nizami, from Luckhnow am speaking to you.

These days, around the world, we have been facing such conditions where followers of one religion are having doubts about the belief systems and other things related to the other religions. In such a situation, it is a very commendable effort through which we can try to understand each others' religion and the similarities that Sunnis and Shias share amongst themselves, so that we can take them up in order to move forward in our lives. These efforts will also help remove the disagreements between different religion which are often manifested in the form of violence across the world.

All the Muslims, regardless of whatever sect they belong to, believe in the holy book of Islam called the Quran. Every Muslim believes that this holy book was revealed on the last prophet of God, Hazrat Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The purpose of this revelation was to eliminate the prejudices and differences that people had regarding each others' religions and beliefs. Instead it encouraged the spirit of humanity in the society.

It is said that the Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Ali (May God be pleased with him) was once in a war where he over powered an infidel/disbeliever of Islam. Hazrat Ali (R.A.) wanted to kill him and the conditions were very favorable whereby he could easily put the disbeliever to death. Meanwhile, the disbeliever spat on the face of Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Ali's ego dictated him to let that disbeliever go free. People inquired him about this incident curiously as to why he did that. Hazrat Ali (R.A.) replied that if he did anything to the disbeliever after he spat on him, it would have been a personal revenge and Islam does not allow for such kinds of personal revenge. In Islam, only the battles/wars fought in the name of Allah and His Prophet are appreciated. If anyone starts taking revenge for his own being, belongings and ego and starts using the name of

the religion Islam politically, such situations generate violence of whose greatest example is in front of the world these days.

For the same reason, the brotherhood that the Prophet Muhammad preached to his companions has been quoted by several followers and companions. At one instance, during a war, an injured companion of the Prophet was asking for water in his feeble voice, someone brought him water and before he could drink it, another injured companion also asked for water and the cup, untouched by the first companion, was instead forwarded to the second companion. Before the second companion could drink it, a third injured companion asked for water and the second companion passed the water onto the third one without drinking. Eventually, all the three injured companions embraced martyrdom. We have gotten a lesson of such amazing brotherhood, sacrifice and humanity from the companions and followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Even the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is replete with such instances of humanity. One day, when the lady that used to throw trash on the Prophet everyday while he passed through her street was not there and he heard that she was ill, he went to inquire for her health. In another instance, when the Prophet of the God was circumnavigating the Kaaba in Mecca, Allah sent him a revelation that a man named Fuzala was carrying a spear under his arm to harm him. The Prophet went on to him and confronted. He admitted his crime and the Prophet forgave him. Such instances from the religion of Islam presents a lesson to all of us that we should never take revenges for the sake of ourselves. These examples teach us that it is our responsibility to take up all the similarities that the different sects of Islam represent with each other, follow those, be sympathetic to each other and create an environment of brotherhood in the society. If we happen to come across specific deeds pertaining to any particular sect of religion that we think might create tensions between two or more sects of Islam, we must take it up with our elders and scholars and seek their guidance on this matter. Whatever they suggest, should be followed instead of taking any step by ourselves individually.

A3.2: Shia Cleric Message (Audio Recording Duration: 5 min)

In the name of Allah, the most beneficent and the most merciful. All praise for God Almighty who is the creator of all the universes. My name is Maulana Syed Raza Hussain and I am from Lucknow. It is commendable that an important topic regarding unity is being highlighted today. First of all, I would like to say that Quran has stressed its importance as well in the following words: ... “And hold fast by the rope of Allah (divine injunctions) all together and be not disunited.” This is one of the basic teachings of the Quran and an instruction from God that all of us, as Muslims, should follow whole heartedly. We should focus on the fact that this is what Quran is teaching us. If there is no unity within a nation, it is seen as a divided (weak) one. Therefore, Quran in its teachings and the other actions like congregation during prayers teach us to stay united. We do not have any differences between Shias and our Sunni brothers on this point i.e. offering prayers. It is obligatory for all the Muslims to offer prayers and this in itself is a lesson of unity especially when offered in congregation.

The very basis of the Shia sect of religion is against any violence – in fact, it is rather entirely opposite to violence. Violence is considered forbidden in our sect. Shias are usually those people who after the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) consider Hazrat Ali (May God be pleased with him) a Caliph of his, Khalifa bil fazal, and his true successor. The sayings of Hazrat Ali (R.A.) can be seen in the compilation of Nahj-ul-Balaagha. It can also be observed that he always condemned violence during his life and remained a preacher of love and cooperation to the humanity. It can also be observed that a lot of sects stood against him when he was in power but he never used any form of violence. Instead he tried to tell them with love in order to bring them towards unity. For example, you can see that Hazrat Ali (R.A.) himself, the successor of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), was targeted, terrorized and hurt. After the injury, he was brought home. You can hardly find any instance around the world where any international leader was a victim of violence and he/she did not take any revenge. However, Hazrat Ali (R.A) set a contrary example in his lifetime in this regard. Even when Ibne Muljim al Muradi, the accused, was brought to him, Hazrat Ali (R.A.) ordered to untie the ropes around his hands and asked his companions to offer

him some milk to drink. Hence, through Hazrat Ali's life we can learn that violence does not have to be reciprocated by violence and instead we should practice patience in such circumstances as has been taught by Maula Ali (R.A.).

Another instance of violence was observed at the funeral of Hazrat Ali's son, Hazrat Imam Hassan, when Bani Hashim wanted to bury his body inside the premises of the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Arrow shootings were used as a form of violence and it could have potentially led to a fight between the two groups. However, Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Imam Hussain from Bani Hashim did not retaliate with violence. Hazrat Imam Hassan, in fact, once said that if he was not allowed to be buried near his grand father, the Prophet of Islam, he should be taken to Jannat ul Bakee and buried near his mother instead. Therefore, it can be seen that no violence was triggered, no one was hurt, injured or killed by Bani Hashim in such a situation and Hazrat Imam Hassan was taken to be buried in Jannat ul Bakee.

You can see that Hazrat Imam Hussain (R.A.) used to ask until his last moments of life that why the enemies were planning on killing him and whether if, at any point, he misinterpreted the things which were allowed or not allowed in Islam. Hazrat Imam Hussain (R.A.) sacrificed his own life and preached the entire world that violence is never a preferred way of conduct and in order to avoid violence, it is okay to sacrifice one's own life to achieve the greater aims as a society. The important aim and mission that Hazrat Imam Hussain was following in his life was to tell the people that terrorism is wrong and has to be discouraged and humanity has to flourish forever.

Blessings be unto you.

A4. Perceptions of Speaker and Content Attributes By Sect

Figure 1: Perceived Influence of In-Group Cleric

