

Ajay Shah's blog

Monday, December 14, 2009

Consequences of exposure to violence

Marginal Revolution pointed me to [a paper](#) by Edward Miguel, Sebastian Saiegh, and Shanker Satyanath (of UCB, UCSD, NYU) titled *Civil war exposure and violence*. Their key result is: Football players from countries which have experienced civil wars are more violent on the field (after controlling for a host of things). This supports the idea that exposure to violence coarsens human sensibilities.

The authors mention the [World Values Survey](#), and I dug out a small table out of this about responses to the proposition: *Using violence for political goals is not justified*. Here is what we see for 1995:

	India	Russia
Strongly agree	59.6%	44.2%
Agree	19.3%	37.3%

I picked Russia because they have suffered terrible violence through the combination of World War II and Communism. We see a difference in "Strongly agree" but not much of a difference in "do not agree" (i.e. the residual category).

I have often wondered about these issues in the context of India's story. In the period after the fall of the Mughal empire, many parts of India experienced extreme violence. But the last big war that was fought in India was 1858. After this, there have only been wars at the border; these wars have not brought violence and barbarism to civilians. We were incredibly lucky to have been the lab for Gandhiji's revolutionary idea, of political change without violence. So we have had 151 years without war. But the roots of India's sustained peace today lie not just in Gandhiji and the nature of the freedom movement, but deeper in history to the peace that has reigned from 1858 onwards. If anything, the puzzle in India is about how badly law and order has fared, given such benign initial conditions.

Going by the argument of Miguel et al, this sustained peace would have

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Posts of note

[Who should start a bank in India?](#)

RBI has 26 applicants. Which should it choose? I have a column in the Economic Times today on

helped shift mores towards reduced violence. I feel that when peace is established, and for many generations the incentives guide young men towards participating in the market economy, this exerts a civilising force.

The great bursts of violence that we have had have been like Partition (1947), Delhi (1984), Punjab (1984-1990) and Gujarat (2002). (I'm curious: What other big episodes would you classify alongside these?) Each of these would scar an entire generation near that location. Time heals, but the clock takes 25 years after one such episode of large-scale violence. Part of what has worked better for South India is that there has been less violence there all the way from 1858 onwards.

This perspective tells us something about places like Iraq or Afghanistan or Pakistan. It is not enough to bring about peace; what is of critical importance is to have sustained decades under conditions of peace. This would yield the incidence of non-violent behaviour and trust capital which might help in graduating to the double helix of capitalism and freedom.

at 12:39 AM

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Labels: [democracy](#), [history](#)

8 comments:



Anonymous Monday, December 14, 2009 at 1:54:00 AM GMT+5:30

what has worked better for South India is that there has been less violence there

Is there any study to back it up or is it just conventional wisdom.

I can only speak for AP. South didn't participate much in 1857, but there have been fair share of local mutinies.

e.g. alluri sitaramaraju in AP. Plenty of violence before and after the fall of hyd. PWG in telengana and tribal regions, plenty of caste based violence against dalit uprising, rayalaseem ha(d/s) factionalism. 60s&70s telengana and jai andhra movements were plenty violent, esp since the movement tried to expel all settlers in hyd.

AP has enjoyed relative peace in only last 15-20 years.

-v

[Reply](#)



Salil Monday, December 14, 2009 at 1:12:00 PM GMT+5:30

To the list of places which have experienced brutal violence in bursts, I'd add Jammu and Kashmir since 1989-90. Also, how would you rate the chronic, low-intensity but frequent violence dalits face in places like Bihar? Or are you looking at outliers, i.e. massacres?

this question.

[The drama of monetary policy](#)

Ben Bernanke's statement Everyone interested in the world economy should watch Bernanke's recent speech and the press conferenc.. .

[The attack on the market for the rupee is a mistake](#)

I have a column in the Economic Times today titled The attack on the market for the rupee is a mistake . You may like to also see: II...

[What value does a university add?](#)

In judging what a university does to a student, a key problem lies in

Salil

[Reply](#)

 **Leftmost** Monday, December 14, 2009 at 1:48:00 PM GMT+5:30

Ajay,

I think you may have forgotten to mention the Mumbai riots followed by the bombing in 1992.

[Reply](#)

 **Punit** Monday, December 14, 2009 at 8:38:00 PM GMT+5:30

Other incidents: Mumbai after Dec 6. Besides, not sure exactly what you mean by great burst of violence. If you mean big news making events, or populations under sustained military and militant oppression then Kashmir and Manipur cannot be left out. In fact most of the north-east lives under the fear of the gun. And then you must not discount the areas under Naxal/State violence. Large areas of Chattisgarh, orissa, jharkhand etc.

That said, there is a veneer of peace that exists only for the middle/privileged class. There is an extreme amount of violence in the hinterland, especially against the landless, tribals, dalits etc. Its not just violence by the landlords, but state sponsored one as well. IMO these individual acts of violence and brutality are much more insidious and eat away at the fabric of the society.

[Reply](#)

 **Nachiket Mor** Wednesday, December 16, 2009 at 2:06:00 PM
GMT+5:30

As we work with communities are there any concrete but subtle steps that we could take on the ground as a part of our financial services or health care work or CSR work? Ashutosh Varshney for example, as I recall, recommends identifying geographical fault lines and developing activities there which are in the nature of a bridge -- such as schools where children of all the communities go. Would that work? Any other ideas?

[Reply](#)

 **Manu Bhat** Wednesday, December 16, 2009 at 5:18:00 PM GMT+5:30

Sewing up faultlines in any random place where catastrophe strikes, maximises benefit of delivery, often hastening feeling of success in post-facto action. But it only serves to partially offset the negative setback towards past normalcy while scarring and scaring realites that allowed

distinguishing differences in raw material vs. differences in trainin...

College and knowledge continued

In continuation to Let's not confuse college with knowledge : See the comments on that post. Is the labour market return to highe...

[Let's not confuse college with knowledge](#)

The cost-benefit analysis of a college education in the US I was fascinated by this interview in the New York Times with Laszlo Block ...

accident to happen remain deeply entrenched, to repeat elsewhere.

We can't have random shift of action area focus based on imminent accidents due to omnipresent yet intrinsic deficiencies.

Growth disparities, civic response lag, economic destitute concentration leading to development disasters spawning maoism and ilk.

The best intervention of true intent and pure content would be for enzymatic action in social milieu for auto creation of self-help group something like kibbutz from Israel. I marvel their intense institutionalised intent to the fullest extent for topics of national importance.

India has suffered degeneration of national spirit and degradation of social fibre due to dual disease of communalism and corruption. There is no political solution unless bottom up action is supported since top down approach is hindered by well-established self-interest.

It is an onerous task which socio-economic-political analysts can't absolve themselves from or resolve issues that devolve on everybody at large.

Sense of national discipline through twin objective of community building and defence training for a year, made mandatory for youth could be supported by true grassroot action by foundations.

Do we have a national/state/city level actionable national disaster strategy with contingency plans for personal loss and business risk due to floods, riots, terrorist attacks, water crises, power breakdown, internet outages, etc ?

We, Indians have always been reactive and not proactive. Being unprepared in an unrepaired stitution, means we are takin it in our stride while being passively tolerant of passing reality through continuum of time.

Handling too many discursive topics disallows exclusive focus and inclusive participation.

May I request Mr. Mor to start the seed thread on his blog
?

Best,
Manu Bhat

[Reply](#)



Anonymous Sunday, December 27, 2009 at 12:52:00 AM GMT+5:30

Incredible you've not mentioned Kashmir, North East and Naxalism while talking about violence in India

[Reply](#)



Nandkumar Saravade Sunday, December 27, 2009 at 5:40:00 PM

GMT+5:30

This is an interesting post. While there has been no violence caused by external aggression, there is no dearth of internal violence in India. **Domestic violence seems rampant.** So is the tendency to be lawless (just watch the traffic behaviour in all metros/cities/towns, with or without traffic lights and the traffic cop) and Left Wing Extremism has only grown, accounting for half the country's districts now. This latent violence feeds upon itself. The wherewithal of the law enforcement to extend and maintain the writ of law (which includes the ability to enforce traffic rules uniformly and consistently, investigate cases against the high and mighty fearlessly and deter the marginalised and the desperate from articulating their grievances through the barrel of the gun) has consistently dwindled due to increasing politicisation and shrinking resources. Unfortunately, this is not a topic which catches attention of the intelligentsia, the media or the ruling class. The other day, there was a new report about the **large losses caused by the 26/11 attack.** On reading the news article, one senior police officer bitterly recounted to me how his proposal for equipping the Anti Terrorist Squad of Maharashtra involving an outlay of Rs 20 crore was laughed away a couple of years ago by the mandarins of Home Department as a fanciful plan.

<http://saravade.livejournal.com/39211.html>

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